

TESI DOCTORAL

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'More Human than Human':  
Aspects of Monstrosity  
in the Films and Novels in English  
of the 1980s and 1990s

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## CHAPTER 5

### *The Politics of Monstrosity: The Monsters of Power*

#### *Introduction*

In this chapter I will consider the representation in recent films and novels of the relationship between political systems of power and monstrous individuals who find a place within them. My query is whether the fictional representation of the individuals working for the systems used by power to perpetuate itself - especially the army - questions in depth on whose side genuine monstrosity lies: that of the system of power or that of the person who is part of it. In political terms the period 1979 to 1995 is marked above all by the Reaganite conservative era in the USA (1980 - 1988), the rise of Thatcherism in the UK (1979 - 1990), and the fall of communism initiated by Gorbachev's 'Glasnost' and 'Perestroika', culminating in the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and in Germany's ensuing reunification. During these years, a considerable number of novels and films characterized by the exploitation of the Gothic plot of persecution has been produced, within a context in which the system of power and the powerless individual confront each other. The motif of the innocent individual persecuted by a villain who represents power had previously appeared in fiction at the end of the eighteenth century, in a political situation similar to that of the end of the twentieth century, when major events (in the case of Gothic fiction the French Revolution) opened then as now new, uncertain paths towards the future that cause unease and fear. Both the eighteenth-century British Gothic and the late twentieth-century American (and British) postmodernist Gothic dramatize the need to strike a balance between individual freedom and a trustworthy system of power by examining the excesses of political

systems in which power is exerted arbitrarily and undemocratically. The contemporary narratives question the role of the moral monsters who can exert violence, especially in torture, within the bogus legality of dictatorships unrestrained by a fair legal or political framework such as that supposedly guaranteed by democracy. Since contemporary democracy is regarded by the USA as its most important political contribution to the world, and since the USA has assumed the role of world champion of democratic values, it follows that many of the novels and films surveyed in this chapter deal, directly or indirectly, with the advantages and disadvantages, not only of democracy, but also of the American idea of democracy exported to the Western world and beyond. Even when the films and novels do not directly deal with America, many of them invite us to consider, by comparison, firstly whether the democratic system of power invented by America is the best humankind has ever had and, secondly, whether using power for monstrous purposes is a sin only committed by those belonging to alien cultures and political systems or by anybody in power.

Among the monsters of power in fiction, the Nazis occupy a very prominent position, though they are actually a subset of a more general group, that of the torturers. Nazism is of particular interest for wide audiences and readers because it is a phenomenon - and I refer to it in the present as it is by no means dead as a political ideology either in Europe or the USA - that shatters important moral beliefs. Several threads concur in texts about Nazism: the place of individual morality within a corrupt system of power, the implication of a whole nation in it (which is also a nation regarded as the cradle of much European high culture) and, especially, the idea of mass extermination. However, the long shadow of the civilized barbarian as a torturer spreads much wider than the realm of Nazism to encompass all dictatorial systems such as diverse communist tyrannies and the diverse military dictatorships of South America, also represented in recent fiction, as well as the role of the USA in its foreign interventions, such as the Vietnam war.

Most of the texts I examine in this chapter are closely bound to historical events of the twentieth century which they use as fictional background or as the basis for biographical or autobiographical accounts. The awareness that these texts offer 'true' information about relevant

political realities places them at another level, different from that of the official version of history and also from that of historical fiction, if only because audiences and readers receive them with different expectations. The American cinema based on eye witness accounts of relevant political, historical events reinforces the ideology of democracy but also reveals intrinsically the contradictions in the position of the USA as a worldwide power.

Even though in a sense, some of the films and novels considered in this chapter could be regarded as historical fiction, I should like to distinguish between the kind of fiction that reconstructs a past historical period and the novelised accounts of real life events that have taken place in the last fifty years - such as *Schindler's List*, *Heaven and Earth* and *Not without my Daughter*. These cannot be properly judged on their artistic merit because they are not primarily literary works but vehicles to transmit an impression of the personal suffering caused by particular political events to large audiences. They rely, in addition, in the empathetic capacity of the reader/viewer (already aware of the hardships endured by the victims thanks to the media rather than to historiography) to understand the horror caused by the moral monster within a monstrous system of power. Furthermore, the fiction surveyed in this chapter does not depict sweeping panoramas of the times, but stories centred on individuals and on the examination of why these individuals found themselves in such particular historical contexts, playing the role of victim or victimizer. As I see it, the loss of historical perspective and its replacement by the personalisation of conflicts generated by power is particularly stressed after Vietnam, a war in which for the first time 'history' came to be the sum total of the official version, the media and the eye witness. This personalisation has gathered momentum in the 1980s and is essential to an understanding of the way in which history and the monster of power is represented in recent fiction.

## 5.1. *The Monster and Power*

### 5.1.1. *The Monster and Systems of Power in the Twentieth Century*

One of the characteristics that defines the monster is its power to threaten. The monster can threaten in many different ways, not all of them physically violent. As I showed in Chapter 3, the freak poses a threat to the sense of personal normality of the onlooker, challenging his or her capacity to tolerate mere physical difference. Facing the monster thus means facing power, which in the case of the evil monster takes the form of a great capacity to arbitrarily harm its victims, psychologically or physically. In Chapter 4 I have considered the evil monster on a personal scale, without analyzing in depth how the villain or the psychopath may be employed by systems of power. The question I should like to address now is how the evil individual finds a place within a system of power that allows him to develop his latent capacity to harm the innocent and, indeed, how arbitrary systems of power benefit from the universal capacity of humans to do evil. The characters I analyze in this chapter, some of them based on real people, comprise a category different from that of the psychopathic outlaw of recent fiction; instead of acting outside legality, they embody legality itself within atrocious systems of government. These people are presented in fiction as an even greater enigma than sociopaths and psychopaths because they would not perform their deeds on their own. Too weak and cowardly to constitute individual systems of terror, they need the shelter of monstrous systems to act on a scale much more massive than anything a serial killer might dream of.

Since power of all kinds - over individuals or nations - has an obvious attraction for most human beings, it is very often the case that monsters of evil, real or imaginary, human or non-human, elicit sympathetic responses from viewers and readers. As Todorov points out, the powerful monster is one of the constants of the literature of the fantastic. For him, the appeal of fantastic, non-human monsters is that "such beings symbolize dreams of power" (1989: 109), though he ventures no explanation for why this very human aspect of our natures must be displaced mainly towards the supernatural monster of fantasy. Noël Carroll (op. cit.: 167) follows

similar lines of thought

Another way of explaining the attraction of horror - one that may be connected with elements of the religious account - is to say that horrific beings - like deities and daemons - attract us because of their power. They induce awe. In one mode of speaking, it might be said that we identify with monsters because of the power they possess - perhaps monsters are wishfulfillment figures ... It might be argued that we so admire the power monsters have that the disgust they engender is outweighed.

Though both Todorov and Carroll refer to non-human monsters of fantasy, presumably the fascination for power may lead us likewise to overcome the initial disgust for human moral monsters who wield great amounts of uncontrolled power in fiction or in real life. Fascist regimes based on the cult to the persona of the tyrant, such as those of Mussolini, Franco and Hitler, prove that power fascinates many who perpetuate the life of the dictator beyond its actual extinction. The fascination for the monster and fascism are close phenomena because both disempower the individual who surrenders to the allure of the powerful Other; in this sense, fear empowers us because it helps us to keep at bay the attraction towards the monster as an embodiment of power.

Before considering the relationship between the monster of power and democracy I would like to briefly address the question of whether there is a definition of monstrosity that can be valid across cultural barriers and that can be satisfactory to judge whether an individual or a whole system is monstrous<sup>1</sup>. Obviously, I am writing from the standpoint of a person living in the privileged Western world, in a country where democratic values can be said to be generally respected - despite the flagrant abuses committed by some corrupt groups of individuals in or close to power - and where most of the population believe that the rights of the individuals and human rights should be protected. Therefore, my point of view regarding the definition of monstrosity cannot be said to be thoroughly objective because of the position I occupy as a citizen of the Western world. Like most Western citizens I believe that all those who abuse my rights as an individual - from my right to enjoy my life in peace to my right to express a political opinion - or as a member of a democratic community are moral monsters. However, as a Spaniard, I am well

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<sup>1</sup>I am indebted to Alan Reeves for having attracted my attention towards this issue.

aware that defining the monster of power is more problematic than it might seem at first sight.

Like that of any Spaniard born in the mid-1960s, my life has been marked by the transition from Franco's dictatorship to democracy and is currently marked by the crisis of belief in democracy provoked by the disclosure of the serious breaches of the trust by those in power. The man who ruled Spain in my childhood, Franco, is now being redefined as a monster by many, who feel free to speak what they had kept silent for decades, and compared to other monsters such as Hitler and Stalin in a horrific ranking of twentieth-century destroyers of their own nations. I am aware that for a minority of Spaniards, Franco is no such monster but a hero who saved Spain from the dangers of communism, later made apparent by Stalin's cruel regime. However, despite this still deep rift in the foundations on which Spain lies, I think that no Spaniard would hesitate to agree with the idea that a person who orders the imprisonment, torture and extermination of thousands of people on behalf of any ideology is a (moral) monster. The problem seems to be, therefore, that whereas there is a certain consensus on what a monster of power is, there is no such consensus when it comes to labelling a particular historical figure or those who collaborated with him or her as monsters.

Take the case of Nazism, for instance, among many other totalitarianisms based on the absolute disrespect for human rights and the rights of the individuals. Hitler was one of the most horrific moral monsters in the whole history of humankind - the many innocent millions that his machinery of war and extermination killed prove the point. However, this is not a view defended by many who fought by his side or by many young people who defend now the return to power of his ideology. Some have even questioned the truthfulness of the research attributing to Hitler's reign the killing of six million Jews in the infamous concentration camps of the Third Reich, even though voicing these doubts may be even regarded as a criminal offence in some countries. I personally think that the horror caused by the Nazis is real enough and should not be questioned, but there are strong reasons to question the ideological uses to which this monstrous Hitler has been put to.

Democratic countries still use Hitler together with Stalin and Mao, as the

twentieth-century's bogeymen. History is written by the winners, and the Allies no doubt wrote a version of history in which the human suffering caused by the Nazis weighed more than the human suffering caused by the Allies. The voices of those exterminated in Dresden or Hiroshima and Nagasaki sound weak and remote, if they are heard at all, in comparison to the voices of the Jews killed by the Nazis who were, nonetheless only a part of Hitler's victims. Beyond the ideologies of winners and losers there is a whole human territory which is invaded by evil whenever wars are fought or systems of power imposed on people who do not want them. The evil caused by monstrous systems of power consists, precisely, of absolute indifference towards that suffering, which is caused by the subordination of human rights and the rights of the individual to forces of change not even well understood by those who unleash them.

Beyond the question of whether individuals such as Hitler are the driving force behind bloody revolutions or the puppets driven by unstoppable historical forces, there is a more important question to ask ourselves: what is the absolute level of tolerance for evil and the human suffering it causes? The Jews have used and still use today the spectre of the Holocaust to justify their right to hold the land now forming the state of Israel, but many of them are evidently indifferent to the human suffering endured by the Palestinians, which is visible no matter whether one thinks the Israelis or the Palestinians are right in their dispute. The USA decry the abominations of communist governments such as that of Fidel Castro in Cuba and are fighting now with all their might to 'free' the Cuban people from their dictator, but there is evidence that the USA supported Pol Pot's monstrous remaking of Kampuchea into the communist utopia of his dreams, dreamed while he was a university student in Paris, the heart of civilized Europe. Europe itself has done nothing effective to stop genocide from happening in its very own heart of darkness, in the territory of the now dismembered Yugoslavia. Political and commercial interests certainly condition who is defined as a monster of power, and condition also whether s/he will be kept in power or denounced. This is the point at which the system overpowers the individual. In democracies the individual's voice is heard when another individual harms a third individual: popular juries and



public opinion have this function of literally voicing the people's opinions in, for instance, cases of murder. Yet democracies do not work when it comes to making decisions on how to deal with monsters of power - alien or one's own - because the voice of the people, who might well oppose that of their government, is drowned by that of the organism that represent the people in any (allegedly) democratic country.

Yet, the problem of interested tolerance is already becoming an issue more vital for the survival of democratic values than that of unmasking the evil monster, whether he is called Hitler or Saddam Hussein. The ugly shadow of collaborationism is now surfacing in France and causing many to consider why Hitler's evident ascension was tolerated for so long by France before his invasion of Poland, which led to the beginning of World War II. The European countries who once held colonial possessions in America, Asia or Africa have tolerated the entrenchment of tyrannies of diverse nature in the former colonies, while securing for themselves sound democratic governments. All the democratic countries have collaborated in the massacres of civilians in ex-Yugoslavia with their inability to co-ordinate their diplomatic, political, economic and military forces and are now hypocritically lamenting the daily discovery of mass graves reported by the media. At the end of the twentieth century, when fiction and the media are considering mainly the question of why moral monsters exist at all and how they corrupt morally sound individuals whom they attract to their domains, the question that goes unasked - or that is only asked privately by each Western citizen but goes unheard - is why the democratic countries emerged and still emerging from the ashes of Nazism, Stalinism and other dictatorships will not stop the monster of power from causing the great deal of human suffering endured by most of Earth's population.

Within the democratic context of the Western world (also including the democratic Japan, risen from the ashes of the militaristic empire vanquished in 1945) a person with an inordinate amount of uncontrollable power is one of the most feared monsters. However, democracy, especially in its American version, suffers from a constant tension: it depends on the idea of the community of voters who are all equal before the law, yet its economic system - capitalism - is

based on the idea of the successful individual, the entrepreneur, and its political system is likewise based on the charismatic leader capable of winning elections. Democracy is in fact a system that tolerates short-lived autocracies of democratically elected rulers, provided no personal liberties are harmed. The tensions within the system, mainly the fear of those in power who are not elected (the business elite, the military) and of those who do disrupt personal freedom (the criminals including the torturers of other dictatorial regimes) are the staple of the texts I analyze in this and the following chapter. As I will show in this chapter, America produces fiction - specially films - that give an illusion of subversion against the capitalist system while actually reinforcing it, though I do not attribute this to any kind of purposeful ideological manipulation by a conspirational elite, but to the films' capacity to mirror the concerns of great masses of the American population. The films and novels I consider in this chapter reinforce the idea that American democracy is the best political system thus far known by the world, despite its evident pitfalls; they do so by exposing corrupt political systems that function 'elsewhere', a territory that also includes the fantastic dystopian America of the future (as in the Huxleyan *Demolition Man* (1993), which portrays a brave new America ruled by the 'Japanised' dictator Raymond Cocteau) but not the America of the present. If they touch on the America of the present directly, the criticism of the structures of power is established in such way that the system remains intact after the conflict: the elimination of an individual villain or monster and the survival of the individual hero suffice to restore the lost balance.

Monstrosity understood as an excessive use of power is latent in any organization that employs violence. These include illegal organizations such as religious sects and paramilitary terrorist groups that resist legal structures of power, and also organizations within the system of prevailing legality, such as the police and the military forces. Leaders of religious sects, terrorists, drug barons, mafia bosses, corrupt corporate businessmen or politicians and other kinds of organized criminals appear frequently in contemporary fiction, often attached to the government itself. The supposition of these films and novels is that democracy generates an amount of criminal

illegality that is not accepted by the population at large but that is always preferred to the criminality against the individual within a dictatorial system. The organized criminals of fiction are usually presented in Manichaean terms in narratives that enact the confrontation between legality and illegality, and to a certain extent between virtue and vice. The popularity of cop shows on TV and of cop films attests if not to the belief in the competence of police to control criminality in real life, to the belief that American society - and by extension all democratic societies - are divided between those who 'naturally' embrace criminality and those who enforce the law, despite the limitations of the system, at an individual level<sup>1</sup>.

In general, the organized criminals of contemporary fiction are the inheritors of the Gothic villain, but they are also often a degradation of this figure into a mere stereotype. The unidimensional characters who show an inclination to do evil without much psychological or social justification, within illegal, criminal systems in so many contemporary films and novels are, as I have argued in the previous chapter, consolatory fantasies reinforcing the idea that moral monsters are 'abnormal' and form 'abnormal' associations. Actually, most villains are banal characters, far less intriguing than the characters who cross the border between apparent normality and criminal insanity on their own, as serial killers do, or within tyrannies, as torturers and other monstrous servants of dictatorships do. It is important to remark that most of the novels and films analyzed in this chapter deal with the monster of power embodied by a man in the service of a vast system and not with the leaders that create that system. The charismatic, monstrous leader seems to be regarded now as a psychological phenomenon, an exception in the ordinary run of humankind. Few films and novels concern the rise of the moral monster to power, with the interesting exception of Michael Dobbs' trilogy (*House of Cards*, *To Play the King* and *The Final Cut*) which narrates the ascent of the perverse British Prime Minister Francis Urquhart. In contrast,

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<sup>1</sup>Obviously, the fact that individual policemen and policewomen are increasingly presented as fallible human beings with faults of their own (petty corruption, alcoholism, excessive use of violence) has two meanings: on the one hand, it bespeaks the limitations of the individual in front of the powerful system; on the other hand, it does away with the unrealistic image of the always honest cop, somehow humanizing and desentimentalising these often stark morality plays of postmodernity.

the servant of the corrupt system epitomizes much better not only the interaction between historical events and the persons who live through them (the personal as the political) but also a certainly disturbing idea: even though charismatic evil monsters are exceptional, the cases in which the individual's capacity to do evil has found an outlet, thanks to extreme political situations, are by no means exceptional; on the contrary, they seem to prove that everybody carries a killer inside, whether this manifests itself as a heroic soldier or a horrific torturer.

The history of the twentieth century has indeed affected our perception of monstrosity, especially because of the effect the two world wars had on the civilian population. One of the aspects most deeply reconsidered has been the role of individual men within armies or other types of state controlled bodies. The glorious, heroic soldier of the past has given way to the soldier as an innocent victim of his own government's perverse ambitions. On the other hand, governments such as the American and the Soviet, empowered to destroy the whole world with atomic weapons, have gradually emerged as a more subtle kind of monster - hence more dangerous - than the expansionist Nazi or Japanese governments of the 1930s and all the other dictatorships on the planet, of any political tendency. At this point it is necessary to consider how the subject is linked to the power exerted by the state, either in dictatorships or in democracies. Both systems include an enormous amount of power over the individual but differ on the actual amount of psychological or physical violence tolerated against the individual. Two ways in which the individual makes contact with the political system of power seem obvious: states can declare war on each other and enforce the military conscription of their citizens; states also offer employment opportunities to many of its citizens in the army, the police and the civil service, for which these citizens obviously apply according to their needs and inclinations. Evidently, citizens employed by the government to carry out tasks of control on other citizens do exert an amount of power limited by the legality of each regime, though, clearly, there is a great difference between states which wage open war on other states or secret war on their citizens and those which do not.

In the panorama of the twentieth century, the greatest paradox is the position of the USA

in worldwide affairs. Since December 1941, when the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour forced the USA to enter World War II, the armed forces of this country have played the role of a rather self-complacent international police force - what writer Saul Bellow defines as 'not global policeman so much as Little Mary Fixit' (Amis, 1987: 200) - casting themselves as the guardian angels of democracy. In Martin Amis' (ibid.: 200) words, "the US shows a persistent determination to 'angelise' herself. No more ideas; instead, a conviction of her own purity. Pro-good, anti-bad and right by definition." Yet, despite its lack of expansionist territorial policy and its own angelisation, the USA has amassed an enormous amount of imperialistic power based on its economic strength (thanks to multinational capitalism) and the threat of using its huge military power against the now defunct communist block. Amis himself (ibid.: xi) observes that one of the hardest things to understand about America is "what it is like to be a citizen of a superpower, to maintain democratically the means of planetary extinction". This is not, however, a thing that Americans themselves can understand easily, hence the spate of fiction - especially since Vietnam - dealing with the contradictions of being an American citizen. American nuclear power was used against Japan with the justification that it would save the lives of many more people, who would perish if the war went on, and since it has remained fortunately unused for fifty years, it has helped paradoxically to maintain the myth of American innocence. No doubt, the Vietnam war has had a more direct impact on the average American citizen because of the publicity that surrounded it. In fact, the partial transformation of the USA from an angel to a devil in the popular imagination was carried out by those who opposed the war in Vietnam or who have portrayed the disastrous consequences of the American government's mistakes. Artists such as Oliver Stone have represented American democracy as a monstrous system serving the interests of the business and the military elite, a view that has become quite popular in the dystopian fiction of the 1980s and 1990s.

The Vietnam war had an important impact in five main aspects: first, it proved to Americans that their government had betrayed their trust and lied to them; second, it forced many

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American men to consider their roles (including both the veterans who still believed in the idea of the heroic soldiers, and the conscientious objectors that denied it); third, it disclosed a grim reality, namely, that some US soldiers were guilty of committing horrendous war crimes, such as the infamous My Lai massacre<sup>1</sup>, fourth, it proved that the American military forces were not invincible and fifth, it also proved that war was an extension of business. Vietnam showed that atrocities were committed by the soldiers of the 'good' army as much as by the 'enemy', as countless films and novels have narrated over the last twenty years. What marked the turning point in America's examination of its own power was the testimony of journalists and soldiers alike. Walter Cronkite, a prestigious CBS TV reporter sent to Vietnam to comment on the Tet offensive of February 1968, was the first to publicly contradict the official version, according to which the USA were not greatly involved in the civil war in Vietnam. He recalls that

"With the offensive that had upset so many claims and predictions of our military and political leaders, I suffered a nauseous wave of doubt, uncertainty and confusion. I felt certain that this was the feeling of a majority of my fellow Americans. We all seemed to be searching and hoping for some kind of guidance. What could we believe? What was the truth?" (Dougan and Weiss, 1988: 190)

This search for guidance was solved by many American men on an individual basis, though a neat dividing line separated working-class Americans, who bore the brunt of the ugliest aspects of the war, and middle-class Americans, among whose ranks could be found most of those who opposed the war or refused to fight. Many detached themselves from the war by dodging the draft, often fleeing to Canada, or by declaring themselves conscientious objectors on the grounds of, in the words of Jim Quay, one of the 170,000 conscientious objectors, "my growing awareness during those years of the enormous destruction visited upon the people of North and South Vietnam by the American military" (Dougan and Weiss, *ibid.*: 210).

Many war crimes, a judicial category invented in the 1945 Nuremberg trial to judge the atrocities of German Nazism, were imputed to American soldiers exceeding their 'duty' in Vietnam. The idea of the war crime is in itself a sign of the monstrosity built into the political system.

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<sup>1</sup>450 Vietnamese villagers were killed by USA troops on March 16 1968, a fact that only became public in 1969.

Nuremberg tried to delimit the terms of what is tolerable in war, as if the scapegoating of the enemy would prevent the atrocities of the Allies from becoming themselves the object of another trial, perhaps that by their own people. Instead of the idea that war is a crime perpetrated by an older generation in government against the younger generation it sends to fight - an idea popularised by the soldier victims of World War I and taken up again by commercial fiction regarding Vietnam veterans<sup>1</sup> - Nuremberg tried to build a legal framework for war: some crimes were necessary in it, others excessive. It is no wonder that the Nazis who were judged at Nuremberg resisted the very idea of the trial, for the notion of crime was simply inapplicable in their view: for them, the war did follow a strict code of legality; the Nazis had not hesitated to judge those of themselves who stepped outside the boundaries set by their own system of war legality. Currently, the efforts of the International Court of Justice at The Hague to arrest and try the Bosnian-Serb war criminals are being curtailed by political interests but also by the generalised awareness that all the sides have committed atrocities in a war that was in itself atrocious.

The Vietnam war also registered an evident change in the general public's opinion about the legitimacy of war. While the veterans of World War II were received as heroes (but forced to keep silent about what they saw and did in the war), the Vietnam veterans were denied the status of heroes. Ironically, part of that reaction was based on the absurdist view of war publicized in novels about World War II such as Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* (1961) and Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969)<sup>2</sup> and not on the testimony of the veterans, which only surfaced in the late 1970s. Vietnam veterans were initially represented in popular fiction as psychotic murderers. One of the films to describe best the demotion of the American hero into the psychotic Vietnam veteran - a category of victim and victimizer unlike that of the victimized shell-shocked soldier of

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<sup>1</sup>The British war poets - mainly Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon - were the first to express this view through literature.

<sup>2</sup>Vonnegut survived the Allied bombing of Dresden on 13th February 1945, which killed 135,000 people, twice the toll of Hiroshima. In an interview with Martin Amis (Amis, 1987: 137), Vonnegut declared that only he had benefited from the raid: "There was Dresden," said Vonnegut, "a beautiful city full of museums and zoos - man at his greatest. And when we came up, the city was gone ... The raid didn't shorten the war by half a second, didn't weaken a German defence attack anywhere, didn't free a single person from a death camp. Only one person benefited... Me. I got several dollars for each person killed. Imagine".

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World War I - was Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1973). The unhinged Travis Bickle played by Robert de Niro raised doubts as to which side insanity lay on; seeing himself as a knight, out on the Quixotic errand of rescuing a child prostitute from her pimp, Bickle is actually a nightmarish degradation of the heroic soldier into a type of monster for which the USA was not prepared. Whether the heroic soldier was originally prone to murderous madness that the government exploited or whether he was driven mad by Vietnam is the dilemma underlying most early films and novels about Vietnam<sup>1</sup>. However, two new ways of representing the Vietnam vet can be recognised in the 1980s, exemplified on the one hand by Sylvester Stallone's immensely popular Rambo trilogy - beginning in 1982 with *First Blood* - and on the other by Oliver Stone's own trilogy (*Platoon* (1986), *Born on the 4th July* (1989) and *Heaven & Earth* (1993)). Stallone's Rambo arrived at a moment of crisis, when the USA of Reagan was being harassed by the crisis of the Beirut hostages, to vindicate the role of the victimized soldier and his integrity before the fundamental dishonesty of the US government<sup>2</sup>. In fact, Oliver Stone's stance does not differ much from this position; instead of defending the model of the soldier as one-man-slaughterhouse proposed by the Rambo films, Stone avoids Stallone's glorification of militaristic masculinity but coincides with him in stressing the sheer incompetence of the USA military establishment. His trilogy progresses from the presentation in *Platoon* of the middle-class soldier - Chris Taylor played by Charlie Sheen - as witness of a conflict between the 'good' and the 'bad' side of the American army, with almost no reference to the Vietnamese, to the presentation of war from the point of view of a victim, a Vietnamese woman, in *Heaven and Earth* (1993), a film to which I will return in the last section of this chapter. The central film of the trilogy, *Born on the 4th July* (1989) insists on the same idea as *First Blood*, though instead of the recycling of the victimized soldier into the gun-crazy John Rambo, the soldier victim is presented by Stone as the disabled Ron Kovic, so impressively played by Tom

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<sup>1</sup>See Berg (1991), for a survey of the representation of the Vietnam vet in popular fiction. Berg, curiously, does not mention *Taxi Driver*.

<sup>2</sup>For an analysis of Rambo's image see Jeffords (1994: 41 - 49) and Tasker (op. cit.: 91 - 108). Tasker questions Jeffords's assumption that Rambo impersonates allegiance to Reaganite politics and reads him as the voice of the populist resistance against untrustworthy authority.



Cruise. The issue of Stallone's imaginary Rambo versus Stone's preference for a real witness of the war such as Kovic will be discussed later. In any case, it seems clear that as Rowe and Berg (1991: 9) argue "by scapegoating the government, fiction films, novels, personal records, documentaries, and docudramas stressed again and again the inherent goodness of the American people and their collective ability to achieve a moral *consensus* when presented with the bare 'facts.'"

The model of Western democracy exemplified by the USA suffered a more important setback with the Watergate affair, which unleashed an important crisis of trust in the highest figure of power within the system, the American President. This sense of betrayal was promptly transferred to fiction, especially to film, and has become one of the conventions most often found in narratives of monstrosity. As S.S. Prawer (op. cit.: 15) remarks,

Particularly characteristic of our time are suggestions, in American films of the post-Watergate era, from *The Werewolf of Washington* (1973) to *The Omen* (1976), as well as in some British films, that if we want to look for demons, monsters and devil-worshippers, we shall be most likely to find them in the offices of those to whom the destinies of nations have been entrusted.

Not only Watergate but also the fear that the democratically chosen president can go berserk and start an unstoppable nuclear war have sustained this view of the American government as a potential source of horrific monstrosity. Stanley Kubrick's black comedy *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) presented the question from a different point of view. In this film impending nuclear war with the USSR is caused by the megalomaniac drive of an insane US general. The President of the USA is rendered powerless against this man's solitary decision to launch a massive nuclear attack and so is his board of advisors, which includes, nonetheless, more sinister characters than the general himself: another Pentagon general who wants to carry the mistake to its furthest consequences, taking the chance to destroy the USSR, and the obviously Nazi scientist who has designed the unstoppable nuclear missiles.

In more recent fiction the president has appeared as a tragic figure forced to take a grim

choice by terrible circumstances outside his control, as happens in *Swan Song* (1987), in which a peace-loving President finds himself in a most frustrating deadlock: if he responds to the Russians' attack, the USA will be destroyed, if he does not, the USA will be destroyed all the same. The American presidency is often represented in fiction as the Achilles heel of the political system, a vulnerable gap through which undesirable monsters of power can reach almost absolute power over America. The extreme right-wing, populist candidate Greg Stillson, stopped in his murderous tracks by the sacrifice of hero Johnny Smith in Stephen King's *The Dead Zone* (1979) and the malignant alien of *The Hidden* (1986), concealed within the body of yet another candidate to the American presidency, are prevented from reaching the White House only thanks to the intervention of paranormal powers. Johnny foresees that Stillson will declare nuclear war on the USSR in the near future, while only an angelic alien (disguised as an FBI agent!) can detect and stop the evil alien encased in the candidate's body. The 'fair' political assassinations with which both texts conclude reveal a clear anxiety about the fragility of the American political system while simultaneously reinforcing the idea that access is barred to monsters of power; however, the fact that only supernatural powers are effective to protect it suggests these novels and films enact wish-fulfilment fantasies of safety. The underlying horror is caused not only by the suggestion that the democratically elected president could turn out to be a fascist dictator but also by the impression that there seems to be no safeguard to stop him if that ever happened.

As can be seen, the anxieties behind the many films and texts about the monsters of power of the 1980s and 1990s relate to the unstable factors within democracy, with special emphasis on the issue of the trust granted by a 'innocent' majority of voters to a single man, who could turn out to be a moral monster - possibly because Hitler himself came to power thanks to winning a democratic election. What is feared is not only that this single man might gain too much power but also that his power might turn America itself or its citizens into monsters of power - as happened in Vietnam. On the other hand, the structures of power lurking behind the open face of democracy, especially the conglomerate formed by the military structure and the businessmen

who support it, are also feared. The motif of the conspiracy run by corporate business and the military against the average 'honest' American citizen represented by the hero/ine recurs in many films and novels of downright paranoid overtones. As I will argue in the next section, this format derives from Gothic fiction and is particularly appropriate for describing the anxieties caused by the fear of abusive, monstrous power.

#### 5.1.2. *The Gothic Paradigm in the Fiction of the 1980s and 1990s*

As I have noted, there are important links between the plots of many of the films and novels I deal with in this chapter and the following, and Gothic fiction. Eighteenth-century British Gothic fiction was the first to provide a paradigm to deal with the fictional representation of the monster of power and with monstrous systems of power. As Leslie Fiedler argues in *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1973), this model was borrowed by the USA already in the early nineteenth century, and soon gained an important place in American literature. The typical Gothic plot involves the betrayal of the trust put by an innocent (usually a woman) on a character who represents a powerful institution, such as the church or feudal aristocracy, and who turns out to be a treacherous villain. The villains of British Gothic are individuals who gain ascendancy over their victims precisely because they operate within a structure of power that backs them, be it medieval feudalism as in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1765), Spanish Catholicism as in Matthew Lewis *The Monk* (1796), or the patriarchal upper-class system as in many Gothic novels written by women.

The subsequent persecution of the innocent by the villain, and the confrontation between both, or between the villain and another character who champions the abused innocent, articulate the main events. These usually culminate in the climactic unmasking and/or destruction of the villainous monster of power and the vindication of the victimized innocent. A point frequently emphasized in Gothic fiction is that this figure of innocence cannot find shelter within the system designed for protection because this operates in the interests of the villain; only a more powerful

figure than the villain, frequently belonging to the same structure of power, can vanquish him. This paradigm denounces abuses of power carried out by individual figures who stand nonetheless for the corruption of whole institutions - as is the case in Anne Radcliffe's portrait in *The Italian* (1797) of the excesses allowed by the Inquisition through the machinations of the evil monk Schedoni. In the generalized corruption attached to hierarchical structures of power, these people, who are mostly men, find a territory suitable for the pursuit of their personal careers of crime and deceit, the assumption usually being that moral monsters, far from corrupting stable systems, find a niche in the pockets of corruption growing inside any structure of power.

This suspense plot emerged in Great Britain within a context dominated by social and political unrest, due to the steady rise of the middle class and the demand for political reform in different degrees of important middle-class groups. The divided support of the French Revolution plunged Great Britain at the turn of the century into a period marked by dictatorial, repressive politics, quite resistant to democratization. Michel Foucault (1987: 14) notes that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when "the great spectacle of physical punishment disappeared" from other European countries such as post-revolutionary France, England was one of the countries "most loath to see the disappearance of the public execution: ... above all, no doubt, because she did not wish to diminish the rigour of her penal laws during the great social disturbances of the years 1780 - 1820". This period coincides with the rise of Gothic fiction, which precedes chronologically, and in many instances ideologically, the rise of British Romanticism. The violence of early Gothic fiction can be said to be the fictional expression of a conservative fear of discontrol that the authorities were also expressing in public executions. Nevertheless, the original impulse of Gothic was not uniformly conservative and reflected the divisions within the middle class which produced Gothic fiction and to which it was addressed. Among those who used the format of the Gothic novel to express the anguish felt by the individual demanding political reform in the face of corrupt politics dominated by a privileged upper class, was the political writer William Godwin. It is important to remember that one of the few Gothic novels to deal with the actual conditions of the

late eighteenth century was Godwin's own *Things as they Are; or the Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794). This novel is actually a fictionalisation of the argument advanced by Godwin himself in his influential *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), an essential text in the personal, intellectual growth of the Romantic poets. Godwin's novel and its most immediate descendant, his daughter Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), set the typical Gothic plot of persecution in a present transformed into a territory of nightmare by abusive power, rather than in a remote past dominated by already defunct or dying systems of power as, for instance, Anne Radcliffe had done in her Gothic romances. Godwin's model is still the staple of most genre fiction of the 1980s and 1990s, though few would recognize its origins in Gothic.

As early as 1800 "the Marquis de Sade suggested a direct link between the instability of the Gothic form and the revolutionary turmoil of Europe" (Napier, op. cit.: 44). Contemporary reviewers of the Gothic novels "were in no doubt that they were a species of political writing" (Sage, op. cit.: xi)<sup>1</sup>, although they differed sharply as to what interpretation to give them - a phenomenon repeated in the critical evaluations of contemporary American popular fiction descended from British Gothic. In any case, if in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Britain the Gothic novel was used to vent the middle classes' anxieties about the necessary abolition of the political model based on the tight alliance between the crown and the aristocracy, what could the use of Gothic be in the newly born democratic, republican USA of the same period? According to Fiedler (1973: 143), "a dream of innocence had sent Europeans across the ocean to build a new society immune to the compounded evil of the past from which no one in Europe could ever feel himself free" but the slaughter of the Indians and the slavery of Africans had left in the American consciousness "certain special guilts" that "awaited projection in the Gothic form". As he remarks, that loss of innocence led Americans to ask themselves the question of "how could one tell where the American dream ended and the Faustian nightmare began"

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<sup>1</sup>Sage himself reports (ibid.: xiii) that Maurice Lévy "came to the conclusion that the social and political revolution more importantly related to the Gothic writers was the so-called 'Glorious Revolution', the Protestant Settlement of 1688, the event which, arguably, saw the foundation of the English political state in its modern form."

(ibid.: 143). This is a question that was differently answered in American literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and that is still being asked today in American fiction, both mainstream and commercial. Those "special guilts", which have become in the course of time the guilt felt about the privilege of being the world's leading nation, are also still projected in the Gothic form.

The paranoid Gothic plot of persecution has been always present in nineteenth and twentieth-century fiction, including film. However, this plot tends to surface with renewed strength in periods of crisis in which individuals need wish-fulfilment fantasies narrating the hero's defeat of the villainous monster of power. Thus, although the political systems of late eighteenth-century Britain and late twentieth-century USA differ much, Gothic prevails in both periods because there is a distinct sense of impending change, which is feared and desired in the same measure. Gothic fiction produced in both periods seems unconcerned with ideological positions and appears to be simply escapist. However, Gothic fiction and its derivatives dramatize the struggle for political power between the defenceless individual and a repressive system that abuses him or her, and help to process political disturbances that many feel but cannot articulate in rational terms. Yvonne Tasker (op. cit.: 166) claims that even though many genre films, especially action films, are dismissed by scholars and critics as ideologically irrelevant (or, on the contrary, demagogic) productions, in fact their popularity can only be accounted for by the fact that they fulfil well the task of dramatizing the position of the disempowered individual in the face of absolute power. As I see it, the period under discussion in this dissertation differs from other periods of crisis, as far as the widespread use of the Gothic plot is concerned, in the considerable dose of dystopian pessimism infused into it. Currently, the citizen of the Western world is being repeatedly told by the films s/he sees and novels s/he reads that being optimistic is being irresponsible. The monsters of power are still defeated by the heroes, but these are not triumphant individuals. They are people overwhelmed by their awareness that every time a villainous monster is killed, the corruption ingrained in all systems of power is already nourishing a stronger replacement for the villain.

This widespread pessimism is, in fact, the result of the conservative revolutions of the

1980s. The beginning of the 1980s represented a political turning point for both the USA and the UK with the rise to power of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, respectively. One of the topics to which the conservative political ideologies promoted by Reagan and Thatcher addressed themselves was the question of the decadence of their respective countries and their survival into the future. Both ideologies, based primarily on the same Darwinian belief in free enterprise, were grounded above all on a deep nostalgia for the time when the power of the UK or the USA was undisputed. Fredric Jameson, who as a Marxist can hardly be said to be a neutral observer of Reagan's America, describes this nostalgia as:

... the nostalgia for a system in which Good and Evil are absolute black-and-white categories: they do not express a new Cold War psychology as much as they express the longing and the regret for a Cold War period in which things were still simple, not so much belief in Manichaeian forces as the nagging suspicion that everything would be so much easier if we could believe in them. (1990: 96)

In the UK Thatcher fought a losing battle first to deny the obvious loss of Britain's world leadership, handed over to the USA in World War II, by forming a strong alliance with Reagan at a personal and governmental level, and what is even more important, to mitigate the loss of its status as a world empire with the Suez Crisis (1956-7), by leading the singular crusade to 'save' the Falklands. In the USA Ronald Reagan was the president for a very complex decade marked by the rise of a new world order in which the USA was frantically struggling to keep their leadership unconstested, inside and outside America, with episodes as bizarre as the invasion of Grenada. Since Gothic fiction identifies virtue with the innocent individual who resists the monster of power, and since both Reaganism and Thatcherism made the point of presenting themselves as staunch supporters of individualism, Gothic fiction has been bandied about both by defenders and detractors of conservatism, used as much on behalf of left-wing liberal humanism as on behalf of right-wing economic liberalism. Reagan's and Thatcher's black-and-white view of the world has inspired two types of neo-Gothic narrative that seemingly contradict each other but that are, essentially, the same. In one, the heroic individual confronts and defeats a monster of power in a conservative

context marked by a clear separation between good and evil; in the other, the heroic individual is confused by the lack of clear moral values and finally surrenders to the view that all is dominated by different degrees of evil. As can be seen, whether the hero is John Rambo, who would epitomize the first type of narrative, or Ellen Ripley, who would epitomize the second, the message is similar: there is always a limit to the heroic individual's opposition to the system of monstrous power. Victory leads nowhere, except to another confrontation with the monster of power.

Many critics attribute the rise of horrific elements in popular fiction and the pervading presence of the Gothic plot of persecution to the decline of the USA and the UK and their inability to confront their crises in direct, concrete political terms. The USA is still undergoing the deep crisis visible in Reagan's presidency despite the important changes brought about by the collapse of the communist block. On the one hand, the USA is still struggling to come to terms with the loss of its prestige as world leader; on the other, America is not adequately facing its profound division into two nations, that of the desperate underprivileged and that of the privileged who are afraid of losing their position. The collapse of the Pax Americana has given birth to a type of neo-Gothic narrative, cast in postmodernist terms, in which the individual representing the American everyman is portrayed "in less than sacrosanct terms" (Carroll, *op. cit.*: 211), trying to survive particularly menacing threats to his or her integrity as an individual allegedly protected by democracy. These threats are posed by monsters of power that come from within and from outside America itself. Japanese, German, British and Arab tycoons or terrorists go side by side with corrupt American politicians, businessmen, mafia bosses or drug barons in threatening the public order and the peace of mind of this fictional America that refuses to look at the deepest contradictions of the American lifestyle. In Britain, where the contradictions of Thatcherism have been faced more openly - for instance, in the films directed by Stephen Frears or Ken Loach - the Gothic plot is used rather to narrate the fall or collapse of the individual into monstrosity against a more Kafkaesque, less dramatic background.

What is lacking both in the American and the British representation of monstrous power in



the 1980s and 1990s, is an adequate point of view from which ongoing historical trends can be really understood. Fiction has apparently left the territory of politics and the construction of contemporary history to the media and is failing to fulfil the important social role that, for instance, the Victorian novel played for Victorian society. This may, no doubt, be the result of the increasing ideological confusion: filmmakers and novelists seem to be disregarding all political ideologies to form their own on a personal, relativistic basis. This seems to be the only possible response to a situation in which politics seem to have been totally superseded by economics: the collapse of communism in the late 1980s was the collapse of an economic, and not an ideological, system; likewise, even though the European union has been justified by the need to form a strong political front capable of guaranteeing Europe's independence from the USA, in fact, Europe is moving towards an economic union. The apparent end of ideology has led to a clear fragmentation of fiction that, on the whole, avoids facing the current systems of power to centre either in the individual (as is done chiefly in the mainstream novel) or in the discussion of remote systems of power, as happens often in fantasy in general and in science fiction in particular. This does not mean, however, that contemporary artists refuse to look at power, they are dramatizing in fact the loss of the effective political function of fiction and of any other form of political criticism by looking elsewhere, away from the centre. Precisely, the key word to understanding both the late eighteenth-century and the late twentieth-century Gothic is 'displacement'. As David Punter (1980: 61) observes, the sense of chaos that flooded Britain in the late eighteenth century with "a mass of fiction which rejected direct engagement with the activities of contemporary life in favour of geographically and historically remote actions and settings" must not be confused with escapism. It was in fact the result of "a very intense, if displaced, engagement with political and social problems, the difficulty of negotiating those problems being precisely reflected in Gothic's central stylistic conventions". The same can be said about contemporary neo-Gothic fiction: it is a metaphor of the individual's sense of exclusion from the centre, of his or her fear of being marginalized from power.

The Gothic mode of fiction clearly bespeaks the anxieties of the middle classes, whose ideology demands controlled power to rule out anarchy, but also control on those who hold power on behalf of all. In the eighteenth-century Gothic emerged at "the stage when the bourgeoisie, having to all intents and purposes gained social power, began to try to understand the conditions and history of their own ascent" (Punter, *op. cit.*: 127), and by implication its own power and the ways in which it might transform the world. In the late twentieth century, Gothic fiction is less class-bound, possibly because it reflects the extension of bourgeois ideology to cover all the classes in the allegedly classless America, and by extension in the Western world influenced by the USA and its culture. This mode of fiction is useful in considering why despite having averted the old threats of the aristocratic order and the new threats of totalitarian systems - of Nazism and communism above all - the bourgeois order is not free of threat. This is a fear intrinsically bound to Gothic since its emergence. David Punter (*ibid.*: 423) writes that:

The central contradiction, however, from which all the others flow, is this: that Gothic can at once and the same time be categorised as a middle-class and as an anti-middle-class literature... This is the central dialectic of Gothic fiction. The dialectic of comfort and disturbance ... a continuous oscillation between reassurance and threat.

Gothic is necessarily middle-class and anti-middle class because the bourgeois order which replaced the aristocratic order was a revolutionary order that knew only too well the uses of political and economic power. The middle class emerging from a context of revolutionary changes in the late eighteenth century is well aware that positions of privilege are also positions of exposure and of danger. A class that believes in enterprising individuals and constant change carrying forward the political and economic system, is naturally anxious that this state of constant flux carries threats to its privileges.

For Fredric Jameson "Gothics" - by which he means the kind of contemporary popular Gothic fiction I have referred to - "are indeed ultimately a class fantasy (or nightmare) in which the dialectic of privilege and shelter is exercised" (1991: 289). Jameson relates the anxieties of

privilege revealed by original Gothic fiction particularly to the position of sheltered middle-class women. According to him, early Gothic fiction has been wrongly read as a politically relevant genre designed to overcome patriarchy as some feminists claim, when its real achievement is to have articulated a self-consciousness discourse "of the disadvantages of privilege" (ibid.: 289). Jameson further notes that in contemporary American gothics - most genre fiction - the individual victim (male or female) embodies "the collectivity itself, the U.S. public, which now lives out the anxieties of its economic privileges and its sheltered 'exceptionalism' in a pseudo-political version of the Gothic" (ibid.: 289). Thus, while Fiedler identified America's guilt regarding the genocide of Indians and the slavery of black Africans as the factor that triggered the use of the Gothic model in nineteenth century American fiction, Jameson roots the collective fantasies of the postmodernist Gothic in the guilty enjoyment of the dynamics of comfort. He insists, though, on the fact that both the eighteenth-century and the twentieth-century Gothic - which he qualifies as boring, exhausted paradigms - offer ethical rather than political solutions to the threat of the powerful monster: the triumph of virtue over vice rather than social change. In Jameson's view, then, Gothic fiction or its derivatives cannot be genuinely political because of the interest in perpetuating the status quo of the privileged class which produces it and to which it is addressed.

Presumably, the villain of early Gothic is often a member of the aristocracy because he would embody the kind of autocratic power that the more democratic rising middle classes wanted to see defeated. His excessive feudal privileges would be seen as a constant source of threat for the less privileged middle-class people unprotected by fair laws. Nevertheless, the villain performs a double function for the middle classes. On the one hand, he is a bogeyman used to scare the middle-class people in possession of newly acquired privileges with a nightmarish view of a situation in which those privileges could be suddenly withdrawn by the return of the old, powerful aristocracy. On the other hand, the villain is also used to mark the distinction between the working class and the middle class. According to Michel Foucault, the Gothic villain emerged in reaction to the real life working-class criminals whose notoriety was aggrandised by the lurid, popular

broadsheets describing their executions. Foucault depicts Gothic fiction and one of its derivatives, detective fiction, as a literature "in which crime is glorified, because it is one of the fine arts, because it can be the work only of exceptional natures, because it reveals the monstrousness of the strong and powerful, because villainy is yet another mode of privilege" (1987: 68). As Rosemary Jackson (*op. cit.*: 175) comments, Gothic fiction provided the middle classes with "vicarious wish-fulfilment through fantasies of incest, rape, murder, parricide, social disorder. Like pornography, it functioned to supply an object of desire, to imagine social and sexual transgression." In short, Gothic fiction allowed then, and allows now, law-abiding middle-class individuals to imagine themselves as monsters of power through the empathy felt for the Gothic villain. This empathy is possible because, to their eyes, he is not degraded like the working-class criminal, but enjoys a certain privileged position based on his share of power. At the same time Gothic fiction pre-empted actual transgression by forcefully describing the catastrophe that would ensue for the respectable individual if those fantasies of power were acted out, and also by eliciting from viewers or readers sympathy for the individualistic hero/ine (or monstrous hero/ine) harassed by the monster of power. Gothic fiction is, in a way, the middle class's fictional medium to neutralize its fear of the enormous power it holds and to express simultaneously forbidden fantasies of unbound power and wish-fulfilment fantasies of stability and absolute control.

Evidently, the irony is that the very same Gothic plot that emerged as a middle-class reaction to popular sensationalism has been incorporated into populist contemporary commercial culture. Within it, the typical Gothic plot of persecution and the Gothic villain are used to reinforce the idea of the natural 'goodness' of the average human being, of the 'people' versus the 'system' represented by the villain. In the two hundred years since its emergence, Gothic fiction has adapted itself remarkably well to changing political systems: thus, while early Gothic portrayed in symbolic terms the confrontation between the rising middle-class and the decadent aristocracy, contemporary Gothic postmodernist fiction enacts the confrontation between the average citizen of the democratic West and the villains who embody either alien systems of power that must be

destroyed in the name of democratic values or those who overstep (or intend to overstep) the boundaries of privilege within capitalist democracy. It could be said that the success of neo-Gothic fiction is that it has adapted itself remarkably well to the social climate of the USA - and now of most of the Western world including the ex-communist nations - which is based on the idea that there are no social classes but a large consumer class (implicitly a middle class) with different degrees of wealth, to which we all ideally belong. However, despite the evolution of Gothic, much remains still of the glorification of crime noted by Foucault, which I would rather describe as glorification of power in any of its forms. The social origin of the fictional villain are now diverse both within and outside democracy. In many cases he is a working-class misfit who bears a grudge against society, though in others he is the dark side of the American dream - a self-made man whose ambitions power outside the legality acknowledged by democracy. The villain is glorified, thus, in the same measure that the self-made man is glorified by capitalist democracy.

In general terms, monsters of power can be divided into two main groups: that of the self-made men and that of the servants. There are overlaps in this division precisely because the villain may be simultaneously the servant in a hierarchical structure of power and the self-made man who rises within this structure, or who may even build it to suit his craving for power. George Orwell's torturer in *1984*, O'Brien, is an example of the servant who is indistinguishable from the system and who signifies the monstrosity of despotic power in general. Joseph Conrad's Kurtz in "Heart of Darkness" is a monster of power who begins his career as a servant of the European colonial system but who later erects a new, more aberrant subsystem thanks to which he side-steps the hierarchy binding him to colonialism. As can be seen from these two cases, in terms of the evil they may do, there seems to be little difference between the monster of power who is a servant and that who is a self-made man. However, there is another issue that is essential to an understanding of the monster of power: the self-made man may use to his own advantage acceptable, democratic ideological systems which cannot prevent his rise; the servant is monstrous only if the system for which he works is regarded as monstrous. Characters like Kurtz

and others of more recent fiction, such as Francis Urquhart - the Machiavellian British Prime Minister of *House of Cards* and *To Play the King* - or Pat Bateman of *American Psycho*, the personification of the horrors of triumphant Reaganism, show that even those systems of power professedly endowed with the highest values of civilization produce monsters. The servants of monstrous systems represented in recent fiction are characters whose easy fall into evil suggests that these systems know best how to elicit the dark side of man: torturers turn out to be ordinary men who discover and accept an innate, human capacity to do evil. The representation of the monster of power in recent fiction does not examine issues such as morality or sin - these seem to fall rather in the province of the psychopathic killer - but issues such as the intimate connection between civilization and barbarism, the similarities between sanctioned and unsanctioned abuse of power, the individual's ambiguous admiration of the monster of power and the final surrender to the perpetuation of the lie behind the monstrous system of power. Contemporary postmodernist Gothic deals not only with the monsters of power produced by systems alien to democracy but also with the fact that all systems of power, including the capitalist democracy invented by the middle classes, produce monsters.

Postmodern Gothic fiction does not guarantee the triumph of good over evil. Artists and audiences seem to agree on the idea that the villain is at the heart of the system, that indeed part of the legal or illegal system of power has been created by the monster of power. The monster appears more and more frequently as a useful tool in a system larger than him or herself: the monster-villain becomes replaceable even when s/he seems to have made it to the top. Whenever the combination of economic and political interest decide it, cruel dictators and corrupt politicians fall, in the same way that businessmen in hierarchical multinational corporations may be replaced. This is probably the reason why, as I will show in the following section, many recent novels and films deal with the individual personality of the minor monster of power, the servant rather than the self-made man. The servant corresponds to the phase of late capitalism dominated by corporate business and democracy, systems based on the perpetuation of the structure over

the perpetuation of the individual. If there is any firm ideology behind the narratives about monstrosity of the 1980s and 1990s is that the individual, whether s/he is a monster or a victim, is at the mercy of large forces or structures that cannot be overpowered. Contemporary postmodernist Gothic does not in fact dramatize the confrontation of good and evil, but a ceaseless, amoral struggle for power. What can be inferred from the films and novels analyzed in the following section is that power itself is the monster that leads human beings to do evil, ignoring human suffering.

## 5. 2. The Civilized Barbarian

### 5.2.1. The Making of the Civilized Barbarian under Reaganism and Thatcherism

The civilized barbarian denies the Enlightenment's utopian idea that culture and education may suffice one day to eradicate evil. In *Civilization and Its Discontents* Sigmund Freud writes that we require beauty of civilization, mainly manifested in the arts. "Besides", he adds, "we expect to see the signs of cleanliness and order" (1939: 54). Yet Freud himself sees that art is but "a mild narcotic" whose influence "is not strong enough to make us forget real misery" (*ibid.*: 35). He concludes pessimistically that

Civilized society is perpetually menaced with disintegration through this primary hostility of men towards one another. Their interests in their common work would not hold them together; the passions of instinct are stronger than reasoned interests. Culture has to call up every possible reinforcement in order to erect barriers against the aggressive instincts of men and hold their manifestations in check by reaction-formations in men's minds. (*ibid.*: 86)

Paradoxically, Freud argues, primitive men must have been happier than we are, for they did not have to restrict their aggressive tendencies like civilized man. Despite his clear-sighted description of the state of civilization, Freud still insists that culture - understood as high culture - can kill the hidden barbarian, freeing us from our own aggressive instincts. However, historical evidence proves that aggression and evil are not exclusively the patrimony of uneducated brutes; on the

contrary, the many cultured monsters of power who have created - or thrived in - structures of power throughout history prove that a higher education often means a greater capacity to exert evil. Steven Spielberg makes the point succinctly in *Schindler's List* when he shows a few of the Nazi soldiers who are massacring the inhabitants of Cracow's Jewish ghetto stop their labour of extermination for a second to discuss whether the piano music that another soldier is playing is Mozart or Liszt.

The monster of power is frequently a civilized barbarian. In his soul a love of beauty may coexist with a love of evil. This has the effect of increasing the fear he elicits. The brutality of the uneducated underling can be understood - it is but a sign of his ignorance - but the brutality of the cultured man seemingly contradicts the most important foundation on which the whole civilising project of the Enlightenment lies. If culture is not seen to lead to good, what is the use of education, the arts or beauty itself? The Gothic texts that enact the elimination of the civilized barbarian usually imply that culture and civilization are not to blame for the existence of the moral monster; rather, the moral monster sequesters culture and civilization and perverts them for as long as he survives. When he dies, culture and civilization triumph, for they return to the hands of those who can make good use of them. However, when the villainous monster of power dies he takes with him to the grave the answer to the important question of how evil and beauty can mingle.

I should like to turn now to two texts that articulate best this encounter of evil and civilization. The civilized barbarian depicted in the Gothic horror of Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) was transformed within just five years into Conrad's imperialistic monster of power Kurtz, in the not less Gothic "Heart of Darkness" (1902). Kurtz moves from the core of civilized Europe to the heart of Africa, where he regresses to the state of barbaric happiness described by Freud; *Dracula*, himself at the heart of a barbaric system of power that is dying, feudalism, moves from the heart of darkness of central Europe to London, the centre of the very same civilized Europe that has created Kurtz. The legend of the aristocratic vampire "partly invented to explain the problem of the



connexion between aristocracy and immortality' (Punter, *ibid.*: 258) at a time when the feudal system seemed impossible to abolish, is in fact exploited in *Dracula* to narrate the triumph of modernity or late Victorian civilization over the Count as the ultimate civilized barbarian. The irony, of course, is that while this Victorian Europe is busy defeating the Gothic aristocratic villainous vampire, Europe itself is producing a new species of colonialist monster, embodied by Kurtz, who is much more dangerous than the Count. Despite the fact that *Dracula* embodies the invasion of civilization by the barbaric forces at its margins, the Count poses a threat that can be easily controlled and which reinforces the self-esteem of the civilized men who vanquish him. In contrast, the threat posed by Kurtz is much more insidious: Kurtz is not an outsider but one of the European men carrying civilization to the heart of the barbaric Africa depicted by Conrad. His failure and his fall into barbarism are a mirror held up to Europe's colonialism rather than to Africa's alleged barbarism. His seeing the horror undoes the triumph achieved by the civilized men who kill *Dracula*.

The similarities between Conrad's story and the first section of *Dracula* are indeed remarkable to the point of suggesting that Conrad had either read Stoker's novel or seen it adapted for the stage. Both narrate a journey taken by a young man progressing in his career (Harker or Marlow) dispatched by his employers to meet an older man who rules a remote country outside civilization (Transylvania or the African jungle); this enigmatic man holds most of the population of this territory in thrall by means of sheer terror, in which he is aided by primitive people (*Dracula's* gypsies or Kurtz's African cannibals). When the long journey to the heart of darkness culminates in the meeting with the powerful man, the younger man finds savagery he cannot comprehend symbolized by a mysterious, savage woman (Kurtz's mistress or *Dracula's* brides) and his whole life is altered. Harker is less fortunate than Marlow, since his particular predator does not feel the moral qualms that lead Kurtz to succumb to the sense of his own horror. *Dracula's* brides are allowed to make him their toy, while Marlow is protected by Kurtz from being physically hurt. Both men survive to tell the tale of the encounter to a woman, a bride. Significantly, while

Harker saves civilization by showing his trust in his own bride Mina, telling her the truth about his ordeal, Marlow lies to Kurtz's intended, allowing the perpetuation of a monstrous lie, namely, that Kurtz never strayed from the path of civilization.

Interestingly enough, Kurtz and Dracula are linked in the culture of the late twentieth century through the work of Francis Ford Coppola. Coppola has directed both a most remarkable adaptation of "Heart of Darkness" - *Apocalypse Now* (1979) - and *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1993). *Apocalypse Now* transfers the crisis of belief in the imperialistic mission of civilization described by Conrad to Vietnam. American imperialism is implicitly compared in the film to European colonialism; the result is a much darker portrait of the barbaric underside of the civilized man. An American military officer, Colonel Kurtz (Marlon Brando), has taken his chance to establish a kingdom of his own in the Cambodian jungle, thus eluding his duty in the raging Vietnam war. Captain Willard (Martin Sheen), is the intelligence officer dispatched by the USA government to locate and kill Kurtz. The American government sees in Kurtz a threat to its own mission in Vietnam: his main sin is not to have discovered the uses of horror in forging his personal kingdom, but his realization that the American military leaders are using horror to retain their power over Vietnam. As he slowly approaches Kurtz in his upriver journey through the war, Willard, himself morally ruined by his job as the US government's hitman, ponders the attractions of Kurtz's heart of darkness, no longer sure, as Marlow is, that the jungle is not his own kingdom.

Coppola's *Dracula* and Kurtz are further linked by the way in which the respective films justify the transformation of the war hero into a predatory monster. I have already commented on the insertion of the romantic plot in *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (see Chapter 2), which narrates how the heroic warrior Vlad Dracul becomes the abject vampire Dracula when he rebels against God after the suicide of his innocent fiancée Elisabetta. Kurtz's rebellion is of a similar, romantic, character. Both Kurtz and Dracula are portrayed by Coppola as the most heroic warriors in their respective armies until the discovery that those whom they serve can ill-treat the innocent turns them into monsters. Dracula abjures God because the Catholic church will not show compassion for

Elisabetta and bury her body on sacred ground; Kurtz rebels against the USA because he witnesses the massacre of a group of children by American soldiers. This initially good, brilliant man is first appalled by the atrocities he sees, yet he is quickly won over to the side of evil by the realization that the implacable soldiers are not monsters, as he initially thinks, but men carrying out orders. Those who give the orders, and not the men, are his own kind - the officers - and it is against their power that he rebels precisely because he realizes that he is the best of them, hence the one potentially most evil. There is, then, a turning point at which all of Kurtz's impressive potential to give the soldiers the right orders is tilted to the wrong end. Just as Dracula disputes the Church's power to give him orders, Kurtz denies Willard's and the American government's right to judge him in view of the atrocities they are committing. Both accept, though, their own horror and their death at the hands of those sent to find them. Rather than exterminate the monster, Mina and Willard, respectively, give the man still alive inside the monster a mercy killing, which is also the only way of avoiding the temptation of becoming monsters themselves. Interestingly, both Willard and Mina face a difficult moment of choice in which fascination for the monster of power leads them to consider becoming themselves his successor or companion. Both finally choose to redeem the monster and leave the territory of wildness - the jungle, Transylvania - behind for ever, though in both cases it is uncertain how they will return to their own civilization and in which terms they will go on living.

The romantic justification of the making of the civilized barbarian is missing in Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho* (1991). Its hero, Pat Bateman, is, nonetheless, one of Kurtz's heirs, epitomizing in his person the uncanny combination of extreme civilization and extreme brutality. Bateman, whom I have already discussed as a monster of evil in Chapter 4, belongs also under the epigraph of the civilized barbarian. Ellis refuses to explain or justify Bateman in any intelligible psychoanalytical way, focusing instead on him as an embodiment of contradictory values. While he apparently is the very incarnation of good manners and restraint - the basis of civilization - a psychotic killer lies concealed under his skin, the typical monster of power produced by the

democratic USA. Bateman, like Kurtz, could have been the symbol of the success of the system and become one of its leaders but instead he has chosen, also like Kurtz, to gratify only his monstrous self.

Arguably, Bateman is not a monster of power since he never attempts to lead others or to gain political power by any means. However, as a successful member of the economic elite he is one of the 'masters of the universe' - as Tom Wolfe has his yuppie hero Sherman McCoy call himself in *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987). By 1980s standards Bateman is the peak of civilization. He and his New York yuppie coterie are fond of anything that reeks of money and of the power it conveys. Their personal value is the amount of money they are able to force out of the economic system by means of speculation and not of production. Bateman and his friends live in a haze of drugs and banality in which the mainstays of civilization - Freud's beauty in art, order and cleanliness - mean nothing, yet as one of them says: "I'm creative, I'm young, unscrupulous, highly motivated, highly skilled. In essence what I'm saying is that society cannot afford to lose me. I'm an asset" (p. 3). Their callousness towards minorities and women, their general ignorance of almost everything except designer clothes, their inability to show empathy to each other, reveals that civilization has been replaced by the barbarians in expensive clothes. Pat Bateman is the more terrifying of them not because he kills so many people but because he does have the intelligence to understand himself and the heart of darkness in the civilization that has made him. He is, in addition, the only one of the New York yuppies to espouse any kind of coherent political discourse, based on Reaganism:

"Well, we have to end apartheid for one. And slow down the nuclear arms race, stop terrorism and world hunger. Ensure a strong national defense, prevent the spread of communism in Central America, work for a Middle East peace settlement, prevent U.S. military involvement overseas. We have to ensure that America is a respected world power. Now, that's not to belittle our domestic problems that are equally important, if not *more*..." (p. 15)

This political idealism contrasts not only with his psychotic madness but also with the apoliticism of the greedy social sector to which he belongs. His political speech, pronounced before a totally

disinterested dinner party - all of them slightly embarrassed by Bateman's earnestness - also suggests that those who uphold his views are at the margins of the structure of power or are equally mad. Contesting Reagan's and Bateman's view of a strong America leading the world, *American Psycho* reveals a bleak panorama in which President Reagan cannot be told apart from a psychotic murderer. At the end of the novel, the TV news referring to somebody who has committed an unspeakable act with 'Nancy's' help are overheard by Bateman and the yuppie crowd at a Manhattan bar. A "Why?" simply floating among the yuppies in the bar elicits Bateman's last words :

*Why?* and automatically answering, out of the blue, for no reason, just opening my mouth, words coming out, summarizing for the idiots: "Well, though I know I should have done *that* instead of not doing it, I'm twenty-seven for Christ sakes and this is, uh, how life presents itself in a bar or in a club in New York, maybe *anywhere*, at the end of the century and how people, you know, *me*, behave, and this is what being Patrick means to me, I guess, so, well, yup, uh . . ." and this is followed by a sigh, then a slight shrug and another sigh and above one of the doors covered by red velvet drapes in Harry's is a sign and on the sign in letters that match the drapes' color are the words THIS IS NOT AN EXIT. (p. 399)

Bateman's words are somehow more definite, more terrifying than Kurtz's acknowledgement of horror for they reveal that the civilized barbarian feels no longer horror but a nonchalant conformism leading nowhere.

Even Bateman's fantastic counterpart, *Batman*, appears in the 1989 film by Tim Burton as a symbol of the profound split of the American self between civilization and the darker barbarian. Burton himself stated that "especially in America, people often present themselves as one thing but are really something else. Which is symbolic of the Batman character" (Salisbury, 1995: 72). Not only of Batman but also of Bateman and of a peculiarly Gothic, paranoiac, view of the world. The very popular *Batman* films series - *Batman* (1989), *Batman Returns* (1992) and *Batman Forever* (1995), based on characters created in the 1930s by Bob Kane - seems to have displaced the more angelic Superman from the place of honour as a popular hero. Instead of the naive, innocent Clark Kent - actually an alien messiah coming from Krypton to fight evil on Earth - the late 1980s

and early 1990s are witnessing the rise of Batman as the all-American hero. The first film deals with the making of the hero, the millionaire Bruce Wayne. The psychological trauma he suffered as a child when he witnessed the brutal murder of his parents by a petty criminal, later reborn as the Joker, is the justification given to explain the split his personality suffered between his Jekyll (Wayne) and Hyde (Batman) sides. The almost psychotic Wayne, another of the masters of the American universe, signifies the weakness of the democratic system of power forced to rely on such an eccentric, almost schizophrenic hero as its ultimate defender. Batman is portrayed in the trilogy - specially in the two films by Burton - as a man always on the verge of definitively crossing the boundaries onto the side of the freaks. In addition, the fact that Batman's symbol is the bat, also associated with the vampire, adds Gothic overtones to the figure of Gotham City's guardian angel. The new Batman's black suit (differing from the mainly blue costume of the original comics) is partly medieval armour like that worn by the archangel St. Michael in countless representations of his defeat of the apocalyptic beast, partly Dracula's outfit, and partly the contemporary comics hero's bulging muscles. All of this contributes to form a Gothic image that has come to symbolize rather illogically for America not its own heart of darkness but the ideology of order and civilization from the side of the 'good guys'. Batman's and Bateman's schizophrenia is very similar: an impossibility to act responsibly from their privileged positions so as to keep civilization going, which results in an obvious mental disorder, useful for society in Batman's case, harmful in Bateman's. In any case, both Batman and Bateman are creations of a paranoiac part of American society, which is afraid of losing its privileges and is, thus, ready to employ its darkest side to counteract the advance of the Other, whether this is the evil villains of the Batman films or the members of the diverse minorities that Bateman eliminates.

America has generated its Reaganite monsters of power but Britain has also produced at least one monster of power who might well be called a Thatcherite monster. This is the villain-hero of Michael Dobbs' *House of Cards*, *To Play the King* and *The Final Cut*, Francis Urquhart. As Glenda Jackson writes, Urquhart is the man all love to hate and also the man who "makes Mrs

Thatcher look like a bleeding-heart liberal and Machiavelli seem as politically astute as a Conservative party chairman" (1995: 13). Both Reaganism and Thatcherism are characterized by having generated a great deal of 'displaced' fiction, which, following a typically Gothic strategy, has not dealt with the politics of the moment explicitly but has nevertheless been political at heart. This may be so because, as Thomas Elsaesser observes (1993: 65), "under Thatcher, reality itself became fantastic." What better, then, to discuss Thatcher's conservative government of Britain than Dobbs' remarkable example of the displaced discussion of contemporary politics, centred on the fantastic arch-villain Urquhart rather than on Thatcher's Tory politics? Her shadow is nonetheless present throughout the story of the ambitious Scottish Tory politician who plots his way to become the Prime Minister, not only because Urquhart is obsessed with comparing his ten years as Prime Minister to hers but also because Michael Dobbs used to be Thatcher's personal aide. The novels and their brilliant BBC adaptations attracted a great deal of attention in Great Britain precisely because they were seen as an insider's view of a rather corrupt situation in which democratic politics was being manipulated by politicians excessively fond of power. Besides, the figure of the scheming Urquhart - actually closer to the Gothic villain than to Thatcher or her successor, John Major - offered the opportunity of speculating on important events that might well take place in Britain in the near future. Thus, the events that lead to the triumph of the future Charles III in *To Play the King* were transformed by the BBC adaptation into a nightmarish prophecy of a future few Britons would like to see. In the novel, the King renounces the crown to become the new king's (his son Henry) counsellor, a move which allows him to thwart Urquhart's plans to control the crown through the young heir, barely a teenager. In the BBC adaptation Urquhart forces Charles III's abdication and becomes the powerful new regent, manipulating young Henry IX with the complicity of his mother, a nameless princess divorced from king Charles.

Urquhart is an upper-class Scot who at 39 abandons Scotland for a Tory seat in Surrey. Once in Westminster, he becomes the Chief Whip of the Conservative party still in power, though Collingridge, Thatcher's fictional successor, is desperately fighting to keep abreast of the Labour

party and to survive the internal fighting in his own party. This man "chosen largely for his television manner", typifies for Urquhart "how superficial much of modern politics had become". Urquhart, Dobbs adds, "yearned for the grand old days when politicians made their own rules rather than cowering before the rules laid down by the media" (1989: 49). No doubt, Urquhart's main asset is his ability to use information in order to obtain power. The information he manages as Chief Whip, mostly on the moral misadventures of his peers, is used to secretly blackmail them, though Urquhart is also a master at using the media for his own advantage, leaking select pieces of news that dispose of his rivals in the election he finally wins. Information is literally power for Urquhart and so it is for the women who confront him, both brilliant journalists specialized in political information, Mattie Storin in *House of Cards* and the American Sarah Quine in *To Play the King*. However, while Dobbs puts the life of his villain hero twice in the hands of active and attractive professional young women who finally defeat him, the BBC adaptations were based on the opposite idea: the monster achieves his ends and stays in power, the women are killed by him.

The three novels have been successfully adapted for television by a BBC team<sup>1</sup>. The alterations to Dobbs' first novel were such that Dobbs was forced to begin the sequel, *To Play the King*, not at the point at which his novel ended, with the heroine Mattie Storin's foiling Urquhart's plans and her forcing him to commit suicide, but with the replacement of Mattie, killed by Urquhart, with a second heroine. In his own preface to *To Play the King* Dobbs (1993: 9) comments that

In the original book I had awarded the honour of survival to the delectable political correspondent Mattie Storin, believing in truth, justice and the triumph of good: But those sinister people who run the BBC's drama department are made of sterner stuff and, deciding that virtuous heroines are not to conquer the Nineties, reversed the ending to leave the evil Francis Urquhart triumphant and my poor, desirable heroine lying trampled on the cutting room floor. It was a wicked twist of fate which has brought me nothing but great good fortune.

The purpose of Dobbs' neo-Gothic plot, with this politically virtuous heroine who is also a successful career woman, was to dispel the gloom set by Urquhart's figure, making the villain

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<sup>1</sup>*House of Cards* (1989) was adapted in 1990, *To Play the King* (1991) in 1993, *The Final Cut* (1995) in 1995. Ian Richardson played the machiavellic Francis Urquhart in the three series. The BBC's *The Final Cut*, released in November 1995, provoked controversy even before it was shown on TV, for it begins with Thatcher's funeral, something that was regarded by many as in very bad taste.



receive his due, as happens in the traditional Gothic romance. But Andrew Davies' script for the BBC contained a darker kind of neo-Gothic that overwhelmed Dobbs' feminism. Instead of the independent heroines of Dobbs' imagination, Davies' women play a dangerous game of seduction with the monster of power that ends with the woman's death. The first two TV series focus on the rather perverse relationships binding Urquhart and the two heroines. Mattie, who is in her late twenties, actually seduces the 60-year-old Urquhart by asking him to let her call him 'daddy' and she dies begging her 'daddy' not to kill her. The slightly older Sarah cannot help being unfaithful to her husband with Urquhart. In both cases, the implication is that the sex appeal of the power incarnated in Urquhart overcomes the woman's reservations about his actual ethical nature and even her common sense. Both Mattie and Sarah are thus punished with death for their transgressive desire for the monster of power. The implacable pessimism of the BBC version of Dobbs' novels poses important questions about British readers and TV viewers: Urquhart's final triumph is hardly to be contemplated in an American novel or film, in which monsters of power are defeated as a rule.

Michael Dobbs does not devote many pages in his two first novels to justifying why Urquhart becomes such a monster of power. Yet the little attention paid by Dobbs to this question does not mean it is irrelevant in the construction of Urquhart's character. A significant characteristic in the construction of Urquhart as the Other, the outsider infiltrated in the machinery of government, is his Scottishness. He is the newcomer in an English exclusive world of power in which he always remains an outsider, despite his success. This turns out to be one of Urquhart's advantages in the game of power, though being Scottish also marks him at a personal level. His father, an impoverished landowner, regards Francis's sale of the family estates and his move to London as an unpardonable defection. Lurking beneath this sale is Francis's wish to sever the ties with a nation and a family in which he cannot progress. Despite this, the most important reason why Urquhart becomes such a monstrous political figure is the death of his elder brother Alistair, killed in Dunkirk during World War II. Although Francis always lives in the shadow of the

mythologised elder brother, sibling rivalry is not the main motivation in his quest for power, but his wish to avoid his brother's fate: "Few men were favoured enough to take control of the great decisions of life; most simply suffered the decisions taken by others. He thought of his brother in the hedgerows of Dunkirk, a pawn like a million others in the games of the great. Urquhart could be one of the great, *should* be one of them" (1989, p. 343). This is a philosophy which summarizes well the motivations of the civilized barbarian.

Possibly sensing that little had been said about Urquhart's past, Dobbs has chosen to end his trilogy and Urquhart's life with a story in which the past becomes the Prime Minister's nemesis. In *The Final Cut* a bored Urquhart, tired of his almost eleven years in Thatcher's shadow, decides to end his life after the botched attempt to turn Cyprus into his own Falklands. As it turns out, Urquhart manipulates the thirst for revenge of an old Greek Cypriot, Evangelos Passolides, a fighter in the EOKA (the Cypriot liberation movement) whose young brothers were brutally killed by Urquhart in the same year of the Suez Crisis, 1956. Urquhart was then a young man doing his national service as an officer in British occupied Cyprus and this was the first death in his career as a representative of the British people. The atrocity committed in the past has left an indelible memory in Passolides' soul, which he seeks to avenge by killing Urquhart; the latter guides the steps of his murderer, so that the assassination occurs during the last political meeting presided by Urquhart's main opponent, Thomas Makepeace, and at a moment when other loud Tory voices demanding the Prime Minister's resignation can be heard. With his death Urquhart secures the reunification of his divided party and, what is more important, his own place in the history of Britain, not as a monster but as a victim. Who this civilized barbarian really is and what he has done to achieve the conquest of power is a secret that Urquhart carries to the grave.

### 5.2.2. 'Gothic Nazis': *The Servants of the System*

The representation of Nazism in recent fiction considers mainly the factors that led ordinary men to become servants of the most effective machinery of extermination ever designed

by man. This topic is addressed among others by Thomas Keneally's *Schindler's Ark* (1982) - adapted by Steven Spielberg as *Schindler's List* (1993) -, Martin Amis' *Time's Arrow* (1991), Philip Roth's *Operation Shylock* (1993) and Constantin Costa-Gavras' *The Music Box* (1989). All these films and novels refer specifically to the figure of the Nazi and to the personal choices involved in the acceptance or rejection of systems of power as monstrous as that orchestrated by Hitler. These four texts take the view that Nazism is the most atrocious system of power ever devised for granted; the links between Nazism and the long history of genocide and ethnic cleansing, which reaches down to the Iron Age, are not questioned. In fact, what binds these four texts is a similar attitude in the face of the evidence that ordinary men were recruited by Nazism to commit horrific crimes: it is assumed that these individuals had no choice and were led towards evil by the forces of history, but what motivates the novelists and the filmmakers to portray these men is the issue of why these men lost control and became monsters once they embraced the system. The question of whether all men would have behaved as they did is answered diversely: Amis and Keneally favour certain moral relativism, arguing that men found themselves on the side of evil or good without choosing - whether they did evil or good they could never understand why. In contrast, Roth and Costa-Gavras portray men who chose evil and enjoyed their choice thanks to Nazism but who nonetheless refused to see themselves as monsters.

The German child psychologist Alice Miller attributes the success of Nazism to the "poisonous pedagogy" employed against German children. Miller, who rejects Freudian psychoanalysis, preferring to focus instead on the examination of the actual conditions in which children are brought up, devotes one of her essays in *For Your Own Good: The Roots of Violence in Child-rearing* to Hitler's childhood. Her conclusion is that the way in which he was reared by his authoritarian father and the particular conditions of his family were ultimately responsible for his behaviour as an adult tyrant<sup>1</sup>. About those who followed Hitler's path, Miller (op. cit.: 81) writes:

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<sup>1</sup>The point that Hitler was the product of a unique combination of family circumstances was made by Ira Levin in a curious novel, *Boys from Brazil* (1977), which narrates the cloning of 94 young Hitlers out of Hitler's own DNA. Even though the children do have Hitler's potential to do evil, the old Nazi Dr. Mengele, who runs the experiment, finds out that his plans to return Hitler to life through just one of the boys are extremely unlikely to succeed precisely because the

People with any sensitivity cannot be turned into mass murderers overnight. But the men and women who carried out "the final solution" did not let their feelings stand in their way for the simple reason that they had been raised not to have any feelings of their own but to experience their parents' wishes as their own. These were people who, as children, had been proud of being tough and not crying, of carrying out all their duties "gladly," of not being afraid - that is, at bottom, of not having inner life at all.

The texts about Nazism considered in this section shy away from considering the pattern described by Miller, preferring instead to focus on issues of identity - who the monster is rather than why - usually from the point of view of the appalled observer of his acts. When the past of the Nazi including his childhood is taken into account, as happens in *Time's Arrow* and *Schindler's Ark*, the picture that emerges does not coincide with Miller's analysis. The ultimate explanation for why some individuals agreed to enter the machinery of death of Nazism is, in fact, a repetition of the existentialist worldview that shapes the lives of the killers I described as existential moral monsters in Chapter 4: they happened to be available when Nazism needed them. Obviously, Miller's claim that the authoritarian education and the poisonous pedagogy inflicted on German children prepared them to play their part within Nazism does not contradict the claims of historians who have interpreted Nazism as the culmination of a series of trends inbuilt in German history. After all, education itself is part of history. Miller's reasoning helps to explain, nonetheless how this historical trends trapped ordinary individuals into the sinister machinery of Nazism. Keneally's *Schindler's Ark*, an account of the real life miraculous salvation from genocide of 1,100 Jews by German industrialist Oskar Schindler, considers precisely why similar education and similar families produced the altruistic Schindler and the Nazi exterminator Amon Goeth. Even though the most personal aspects of Goeth's and Schindler's childhood are not scrutinised by Keneally, his conclusion is that no concrete factors can be blamed for the making of the monster of power, except a sequence of accidental circumstances that place one man on the side of humanity and another outside it, depending on a mixture of personal and historical factors.

Even though Keneally's book is the Booker Prize winner that has sold best, its impact was

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circumstances of Hitler's childhood cannot be reproduced.

minor compared to that of its screen adaptation, which has superseded if not the cultural memory of the book (on the contrary, it has helped it to sell even better), at least the original title, *Schindler's Ark*. One of the obvious questions that spring to mind about Schindler's life is why his story had not been told previously by a German. In fact, Australian writer Thomas Keneally, a resident in the USA, came across the legend of the German saviour of Jews thanks to a chance encounter with Leonard Pfefferberg, one of the names on Schindler's list. Pfefferberg's zeal and Keneally's collaboration secured for Schindler's story the wide audience it deserves. Spielberg bought the rights on the novel in 1982, as soon as it was published, but still a young director then, and fresh from the success of *ET*, he deemed it necessary to let a reasonable number of years pass before he was prepared to handle a subject as delicate as the Holocaust. The reasons why *Schindler's List* was made precisely in 1993 were, according to Spielberg himself, his rediscovery of his own Jewish roots - prompted by the conversion of his wife to Judaism - and his having achieved a privileged position in which he was free to risk a limited budget to make a purely personal film. Despite the many Jews placed in important positions in the Hollywood industry, Spielberg was told at the time by an anonymous executive that he had better give the \$29 million budget to the Museum of the Holocaust in Jerusalem if all he sought was to ease his Jewish conscience, for the Holocaust, Hollywood's voice protested, was box office poison.

The World Jewish Congress also distrusted Spielberg's personal involvement in the Jewish question. The king of special effects seemed to the Congress too young, too Hollywood, too politically naive to give screen credibility to the horror of the Jewish Holocaust, and so he was even banned from filming in Auschwitz. The Polish press (the film was made in Poland) was not less wary of Spielberg's intentions, especially after hundreds of notices were distributed by the casting team overnight in Warsaw requiring dark-haired, dark-eyed, semitic-looking extras for the film. Ironically, while the debate about Spielberg's authority raged among his detractors and defenders, Hollywood welcomed the film as Spielberg's masterpiece. *Schindler's List* won seven Oscars and five nominations in 1993, in the same edition in which Spielberg's own *Jurassic Park* was

awarded three - minor - Oscars. Many critics nonetheless insisted on proclaiming the wide gulf separating both films on the rather far-fetched grounds that Spielberg had made the (allegedly) far inferior *Jurassic Park* (also an adaptation, based on Michael Crichton's best-seller) only in order to finance *Schindler's List*. Few, if any, praised Spielberg for the amazing feat of having made two such excellent films in the same year or noticed that both *Schindler's List* and *Jurassic Park* are the culmination of a long career devoted to monstrosity in all its manifestations. From the early *Duel* (1971) down to *Jurassic Park* and passing through *Jaws* and *E.T.*, Spielberg's films have portrayed different types of monsters. *Schindler's List* and *Jurassic Park* are, in addition, comparable because deal with monsters of power who use the political and economic system which surrounds them for their benefit until a catastrophe stops them. Amon Goeth uses the protection afforded by Nazism to satisfy his personal greed for power and money; John Hammond may not exterminate hundreds of human beings as Goeth does in the pursuit of his personal satisfaction, but his exploitation of the resources offered by capitalist science and his creation of the live dinosaurs that inhabit his park actually risk the survival of the whole human race.

The mode of narration chosen by Spielberg, melodramatic epic shot in black and white in the style of documentaries, was meant to elicit tears from audiences and to impress them at the same time with a sense of historical credibility. It is indeed ironic that the 'reality' of Goeth's random shootings, the furnaces of Auschwitz and the massacre of the Cracow ghetto could be best impressed on the minds of audiences by sparing them the real, lurid colours of historical horror. Spielberg symbolically indicated the impossibility of using colour in the motif of the little girl with the red coat - a motif taken from the novel - whom Schindler sees first surviving the eviction of the Jewish ghetto and, later, a dead body. This motif was criticized as an unpardonable lapse into characteristic Spielberg sentimentalism, together with the emotive final scene in which the real Schindlerjuden are seen parading before Schindler's tomb in Jerusalem with the actors who play their roles in the film. The last scene is inescapably sentimental for it contains the true homage of the film to the victims, making them visible, real, genuine, as the authorities behind Spielberg's

camera. In fact, what these negative critiques indicate is that audiences and critics do not actually want to see reality - in all its colours - but a stylish version of it. That this was regarded as a sentimentalist strategy indicates how unwatchable reality has become and how difficult it is for postmodernist audiences to face the real yet invisible victims of history.

The worldwide release of *Schindler's List* offered food for thought in more than one sense, beginning with the fact that its opening night was staged in Jerusalem. A series of other opening nights crowned by the presence of VIPs started with a private projection for President Clinton and continued in Europe, attracting the leading personalities of each nation. The film was praised by the World Jewish Congress as much as by the German media; only a few dissenting voices could be heard coming from Emilie Schindler (Oskar's estranged wife), the Islamic countries which banned or censored the film and critics who, like the German Will Tremper, were angered not because the film misrepresented the Germany but because it was, after all, a sentimental film: "Seldom has a film upset me so much, brought me to the verge of tears and made me so angry," he wrote (Jackson, 1994: 62). It was obvious that the tears elicited by the film, which were apparently copious in all countries where it opened, though they were a sign of the strong moral horror elicited by the film rather than akin to those provoked by mere tear-jerkers, did not interfere with the enjoyment of the film as a masterpiece - they were, indeed, tears made legitimate by the critical and moral approval of the reviewers.

The commercial and critical success of the film and the attention attracted by the moral parable seen in Schindler's good deed should not obscure, though, the background against which the film should be read. To begin with, the popularity of Spielberg ensured an audience for *Schindler's List* that would have been very different had Oliver Stone, for instance, directed it. Yet the film's fiercest competitor in the box office was *Ms. Doubtfire*, a comedy which after ten weeks had grossed 20% more takings than Spielberg's film. On the other hand, few questioned the privileged position of Jews in comparison to other victims of the Holocaust. The gypsies massacred by Hitler, for instance, still have to find a spokesman and money to pay for a masterpiece, while the Jews

are fortunate to have both in the person of the not less privileged Spielberg. This does not mean that the Jews do not have the right to narrate their victimization at the hands of the Nazis, but, simply, they are in a position to do so that is not accessible to the members of other equally victimized minorities lacking the artistic and financial resources to narrate their own drama.

Six months after the release of the film a polemic arose in *The New York Times Literary Review* as to the moral right of the USA to criticize Nazism in view, as Harold Pinter among others argued, of the harmful foreign policy carried out by the State Department, resulting in disasters such as the Vietnam war. Yet, few voices, if any, wondered why Amon Goeth and not Radovan Karadzic was the villain in the film hit of 1993, at a time when the ghost of Nazi ethnic cleansing was raising its ugly head in ex-Yugoslavia. Spielberg's courage in screening the nightmare of fifty years ago is no doubt commendable, but his film also discloses a silent discourse about the difficulties of representing the victims of our time.

Keneally's novel is a portrait of Schindler's life as a moral mystery written in the best tradition of literature's exploration of good and evil. Keneally (1993: 14) observes in the "Author's Note", that he chose to render Schindler's acts in a novel not only because the craft of the novelist was the only one he could lay claim to but also because the novel's techniques seemed "suited for a character of such ambiguity and magnitude as Oskar." He adds that he "attempted to avoid all fiction, though, since fiction would debase the record", in this way drawing a sharp dividing line between "reality and the myths which are likely to attach themselves to a man of Oskar's stature." Precisely the point that interested Keneally and that to a large extent also attracted Spielberg was the impossibility of seeing Schindler's odyssey in the black and white morality of sentimentalism and Gothic. In the "Prologue" to his novel, Keneally writes that "fatal human malice is the staple of narrators, original sin the mother-fluid of historians. But it is a risky enterprise to write of virtue" (p. 15). He solved this dilemma with irony and an insidious questioning of Oskar's virtue achieved mainly by stressing his similarities with Amon Goeth, the sadistic Nazi commander of the Pláaszow camp. While the key note in Amon Goeth's personality is his arbitrary use of power to kill and his



immense greed, which even makes him step out of the 'legality' set up by Nazism, the key point about Oskar Schindler is his ambiguous virtue: all his goodness towards his Jews cannot conceal the fact that he was, in principle, a capitalist exploiter who saw his chance in Nazi-occupied Poland. The film reflects the point well by emphasizing the role played by money, first to fulfil Schindler's wish to become an important industrialist and later to buy human lives.

The emotion that Oskar feels towards Amon is abomination, for Goeth is nothing but a greedy murderer who believes for a while in the absolute nature of his power. The irony of the situation is that Goeth saw in Oskar a real 'brother', as ambitious as him as far as money and power were concerned, and that he always trusted him. As Keneally remarks, "the reflection can hardly be avoided that Amon was Oskar's dark brother, was the berserk and fanatic executioner Oskar might, by some unhappy reversal of his appetites, have become" (p. 188). Nevertheless, the capitalist Schindler is also about to become a cog in the monster machinery of Nazism himself. In fact, his plans change dramatically only when he finds that the Nazis can make use of their power to curtail his freedom as a businessman. "I am a capitalist by temperament and I don't like being regulated" (p. 49) he tells Itzak Stern, the Jewish accountant who is the silent witness of the Nazi spoliation of Jewish business that benefits Schindler and his like. For Stern, however, Schindler is the Talmud's just Goy, the man who by saving the life of one man, saves the entire world. The Jewish lives he buys are the proof that other kinds of power could subvert Nazi power. Because Goeth has the power to kill, Oskar resolves to have the power to save and he literally buys it with the only means that may subdue Goeth: money.

The point made by the names in Schindler's list is that the victims of Nazism had individual identities: they were not an anonymous mass, as they were for Goeth, but concrete individuals as they were for Oskar<sup>1</sup>. Nonetheless, Schindler himself had a peculiar sense of the individuality of the victims; when in the novel he retrieves one of his workers from a train bound for an

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<sup>1</sup>The same point was made about the American victims of Vietnam, in the memorial monument designed by Maya Ying Lin and erected in 1982, the year when *Schindler's Ark* was published. The monument is a list of names, a black marble slab where individual names regain their lost reality.

extermination camp he does not stop to consider why he is saving one Jew among so many. Later, when Schindler witnesses the eviction of the Jewish ghetto he finally understands the full horror of the situation:

Their lack of shame, as men who had been born of women and had to write letters home (*What did they put in them?*), wasn't the worst aspect of what he'd seen. He *knew* they had no shame, since the guard at the base of the column had not felt any need to stop the red child from seeing things. But, worst of all, if there was no shame, it meant there was official sanction. No one would find refuge any more behind the idea of German culture, nor behind those pronouncements uttered by leaders to exempt anonymous men from stepping beyond their garden, from looking out of their office windows at the realities of the pavement. (p. 143)

In the end, Goeth is not defeated by Oskar - whose real success is his personal transformation into the 'just Goy' - but by the Nazi bureaucrats who inspect Pláaszow. Amon's fall is brought about ironically not by his arbitrary killings but by his black market activities and embezzlements, which are not tolerated by the Nazi laws. Later, when he falls in the hands of the Americans and is handed over to a Polish court, the sharp memory of a Jewish prisoner employed by Goeth in his office will prove instrumental in bringing about Goeth's execution by hanging, though this will not free his survivors from their nightmares. Thirty years after the liberation the ex-prisoners still dreamed of Goeth: "When you saw Goeth," said Polderk Pfefferberg, "you saw death" (p. 390). But while Goeth survived as an almost mythical figure in the nightmares of the survivors, Oskar's figure evolved into myth as well, despite the fact that he was not the only German to have resisted Goeth and his kind. But beyond his passion for saving Jewish lives or his dislike of the corrupt Nazi regime personified in Goeth, Schindler is heroic in a sense peculiar to capitalism. He did not sacrifice his life but he did sacrifice his wealth, his power within the Nazi system, in order to buy Jewish life from the covetous Amon. The figure of the just capitalist incarnated in Schindler re-emerged from history in moments framing the years of raging liberal capitalism in which a yuppie like Bateman appears as the ultimate negation of the American dream. Between 1982 when Keneally published his novel and 1993 when Spielberg released his film, money has been increasingly perceived as the greatest monster of power, above any

totalitarian political system; *Schindler's List* proves that money rather than connivance with the ideology of Nazism put many greedy Germans on the side of the monster of power and that money could have easily saved the lives of many Jews if more Germans had been tempted like Schindler to gain an alternative kind of power.

Another of the topics dealt with in the contemporary representation of Nazism in fiction is the position of the USA in relation to the Nazis that took refuge in that country and became respectable American citizens. Two recent novels - Philip Roth's *Operation Shylock* and Martin Amis' *Time's Arrow* - and a film - Costa-Gavras' *The Music Box* - deal with the same motif, though from different perspectives. Part of the plot of *Operation Shylock* describes the real life trial of one of these American citizens, John Demjanjuk, accused by the Israeli state of being the infamous Treblinka exterminator nicknamed Ivan the Terrible. Demjanjuk's real identity could not be proved in the 1988 trial celebrated in Israel after his extradition from the USA; new evidence contradicting the many witnesses who had identified the Ukrainian Nazi collaborator forced the judges to indefinitely suspend the death sentence that had been already dictated. Demjanjuk's trial appears in Roth's novel, whose main theme is how equivocal personal identity can be, as an instance of the frustration felt when, as happened in his case, the identity of the monster of power cannot be proven.

In contrast, the two fictional cases of *The Music Box* and *Time's Arrow* deal with the process by which the real identity of two Nazis sheltered under a false identity in the USA is discovered. Both Costa-Gavras' film and Amis' novel follow a truly Gothic plot by which the innocent closely attached to the monster progressively unearths the obscure truth about him; the growing doubts culminate into a final, firm answer as to how guilty the monster of power is, though the actual outcome is in each case very different. In Amis' novel the identity of the former Nazi Odilo Unverdorben is never publicly disclosed; in fact it is only established when all his life flashes back before his eyes in the moment before his death in an operating theatre: it is then when his horrified conscience starts the long journey backwards in time that the novel narrates. In *The Music Box* the

unmasking of an old man as a former Nazi officer despite his protestations of innocence is seen through the eyes of his American daughter. Anne, a lawyer, takes up her father's defence when extradition procedures are started by the Hungarian government for war crimes committed by him as a member of the Gestapo in Hungary during World War II. When an anonymous victim sends her a music box containing the photos that prove who her father is, Anne's horror leads her to make a final choice: to withdraw her protection, implicitly that of the laws of the USA which she represents, and leave him face his fate in Hungary.

As can be seen, *The Music Box* is structured so that audiences - implicitly American - can recognise a central moral dilemma: what would you do, as a citizen of a democratic country, if you found out that your father (or a relative) had committed war crimes? Audiences are meant to sympathize with the suffering, virtuous heroine and to reject the villainous man who has lived a lie all his life. The point made by the film is not how a young man could be recruited by the Nazi machinery of terror, nor whether this young man was originally a moral monster or became one, but why the monster beneath the mask of the respectable citizen cannot be immediately recognised. The same issue is discussed by Roth and Amis in their respective novels, though Amis tries to go further, delving in the past of Unverdorben in search of an answer to the question of why he became a torturer and killer. The traditional fictional representation of the monster of power as a clearly identifiable villain has problematised the identification of the real life monster of power: reality proves that appearances are deceptive and that the moral monster cannot be recognised by his or her sinister physical appearance as happens in fiction. For Roth and Costa-Gavras this outmoded way of looking at monstrous power must be replaced by a new awareness that the monster is, in fact, any of us. In *Operation Shylock* and *The Music Box* the beloved grandfather turns out to have been in his youth a hideous monster empowered by Nazism to do evil, though there is no evident sign in his amiable looks that the monster once existed. Besides, in both *The Music Box* and *Time's Arrow*, the Nazi is presented as a handsome young man very different from the traditional villain; in fact, the actor chosen to play the role of the

young Nazi officer in *The Music Box* looks remarkably like the model whose photo appears on the cover of the American edition of *American Psycho*. How deceptive appearances can be is the motif linking these texts about Nazism with Ellis' novel.

Keneally's mystification as to why Oskar Schindler chose the harder path of altruism instead of abuse reveals a pessimistic outlook, shared by Roth in his examination of Demjanjuk's motivations. What most appalls the fictional 'Roth' who narrates the trial in the novel is how well he understands the feeling of power that the chance to commit countless atrocities must have given the 22-year-old Ukrainian peasant recruited by the Nazis to do their dirty work:

What a time! Nothing like it ever again! A mere twenty-two and he owned the place - could do to any of them whatever he wished. To wield a whip and a pistol and a sword and a club, to be young and healthy and strong and drunk and powerful, *boundlessly* powerful, like a god! Nearly a million of them, a million, and on every one a Jewish face in which he could read the terror. Of him. *Of him!* Of a peasant boy of twenty-two! In the history of this entire world, had the opportunity ever been given to anyone anywhere to kill so many people all by himself, one by one? What a job! A sensational blowout every day! One continuous party! Blood! Vodka! Women! Death! Power! (p. 60)

Instead of the horror endured by Anne in *The Music Box*, instead of Keneally's ironic bafflement, Roth - himself a Jew - dives under the killer's skin, seeing his nightmarish behaviour not as an exception, but as universal human nature neither less horrific nor less deserving of punishment for being so. However, one must assume that the fictional 'Roth' and Philip Roth, the novelist, give in this passage not Demjanjuk's own thoughts, for they have no way to enter his mind, but their own view of what it is like to be a monster. What they imagine about Demjanjuk's feelings is, therefore, what they find inside themselves; if it is not impossible to put oneself in the monster's position, this means that monstrosity is not an alien, incomprehensible aberration of the human soul, but part of it. In a sense, the reader who feels that Roth's (or 'Roth's') description of Demjanjuk's position rings true, as I do, has already ceased looking at the monster as the 'Other' and has started looking at the monster as a fellow human being bound to all of us by the same potential to do evil.

The explanation that Roth finds for how this absolute monster could settle down peacefully

to a nine-to-five routine in an American car factory is his monstrous contentment - by the early age of 22 he had had "the joy most people only get to dream of, nothing short of ecstasy!" (p. 61). This does not mean that Roth sympathizes with Demjanjuk; on the contrary, his anger at this man is manifest in the bitter sarcasm of the passage quoted above. It is, partly, anger directed not so much at this concrete man but at man's capacity to do evil and ignore human suffering. For Roth the true miracle is not that the monster lusting for infinite power over the lives of so many could become John Demjanjuk, the all-American factory worker, but that his surviving victims - the ones forced to watch, to help - could manage to live ordinary lives after Treblinka. The true enigma is not why Ivan the Terrible did what he did - it is simply human nature - but why the victims are trying so hard to understand and not to seek pure, simple revenge and how they will accept the fact that Demjanjuk's identity cannot be proved.

The story of Odilo Unverdorben's life is told backwards from his death to his birth in *Time's Arrow* and comes from the mouth of a parasitical character attached to him. It is, however, unclear whether this character is Odilo's conscience or his consciousness. The fact that it can sense Odilo's emotions but not his thoughts and its ignorance of the main facts in Odilo's life, suggest that the narrator is Odilo's much repressed conscience, given a last chance to do its task of regretting the evil Odilo has committed in his life. As happens in *Angel Heart*, the consciousness of the monster is split into a secret part fully aware of having committed evil acts and a manifest part totally unaware of the crimes committed by the 'other' inside. In fact, this tortuous narrative technique is employed in *Time's Arrow* to explore Odilo's horrific past from the standpoint of his innocent American self, with whom the voice of his conscience could be identified. Amis' choice in letting the voice of Odilo's uninformed, perplexed conscience block the Nazi killer's own voice from the reader, proves that it is still extremely difficult to narrate the atrocities committed by the Nazis from the point of view of a monstrous first person narrator. In *Time's Arrow* the first person narrator is not the monster himself, as in *American Psycho* or the 'books of evidence' surveyed in Chapter 4, but the voice of ignorance representing the puzzlement inspired by the Nazi in general rather

than by Odilo's personality in particular. There are obviously political implications that make the representation of the Nazi's consciousness in his own words problematic but that do not affect the representation of the psychopath: Nazism is by no means an obsolete political ideology, as can be seen in the neo-Nazi groups operating in Germany. A writer who chose to represent the Nazi monster by replicating his voice - as Barville, McEwan, McCabe, Ellis and others have done with the psychotic killer - would probably incur either the anger of the Nazis themselves or of those who oppose them and who could regard the book as an apology of Nazism.

Amis' singular narrative denies up to a point the premises of both Freud and Miller. The more we delve into Odilo's past, the less we know about why he became a monster. The novel begins thus with the death of a guilty man who was once Dr. Mengele's subordinate at Auschwitz and ends with the birth an innocent baby for whom, as for Oskar Schindler and Amon Goeth, no fixed paths are marked. After reaching Odilo's birth in its journey backwards in time, the voice split from his consciousness concludes that "Odilo Unverdorben, as a moral being, is absolutely unexceptional, liable to do what everybody else does, good or bad, with no limit, once under the cover of numbers. He could never be an exception; he is dependent on the health of his society, needing the sandy smiles of Roland, of Rudolph, of Rudiger, of Reinhard" (p. 164). This conclusion strongly recalls Keneally's view that nothing in Goeth's and Schindler's childhood indicated that they would inevitably embrace or reject Nazism and that, in fact, Schindler was the really extraordinary exception in a world populated by men like Odilo or Goeth. The main point in both novels is precisely the impossibility of determining the rules by which individual human lives are inserted within large machineries of power.

Odilo himself claims to have suffered the pains of Hell in life, refusing to take all the blame for a situation that was mad and confused. His career as a torturer begins in 1942, when after getting a degree in medicine he is called to work in Treblinka and later Auschwitz. Presumably this is the moment of his schizophrenic split when Odilo dissociates himself from his own thinking self and develops this particular conscience which can feel his feelings but not think his thoughts. His

forced separation from his family, wife and baby daughter together with his incapacity to process what is going on around him and his own guilt makes him lose "the idea of the gentleness of human flesh" (p. 120), including that of the tiny babies he tortures under Mengele's orders. Unlike what Miller suggests, the family is not the source of Odilo's willingness to embrace the authoritarian regime of Dr. Mengele; in fact, their silent reproach is what makes Odilo feel the extent of his guilt for the first time, and what seals the growing split between the conscience that addresses him as 'you' and Odilo's own 'I'. This is the only passage in which both the alien voice and Odilo's own voice mingle and it is also the passage that marks their separation. Significantly, the split takes place when Odilo evaluates his own power:

The sadness is your very own; it entirely fits you. And Herta's glance sometimes, and her mother's glance, and even her father's glance, which is hard and countervailing, which is on my side (but I don't want it) - these glances say that in my hands there rests a mortal and miserable power. I am omnipotent. Also impotent. I am powerful and powerless. (p. 148)

This disempowering awareness of his evil acts is what makes Odilo the opposite of the blindly self-confident Amon Goeth: a diffuse fear of torture and a deep sense of guilt that his conscience cannot fully comprehend seem to be the price he pays for his past misdeeds, together with the dreams of the dreaded trial he might have to face one day and of a horrific death in the hands of an angry mob.

Despite having pronounced a verdict of non-guilty in Odilo's favour due to diminished moral responsibility, caused by the social and political pressures, Amis cannot resist the temptation of an "Afterword" to the novel where, once again, the system of powerful monstrosity established by the Nazis is dissociated from the individuals who carried it out and ascribed to all of Germany:

The offence was unique, not in its cruelty, nor in its cowardice, but in its style - in its combination of the atavistic and the modern. It was, at once, reptilian and 'logistical'. And although the offence was not deafeningly German, its style was. The National Socialists found the core of the reptile brain, and built an autobahn that went there. (p. 175)

However, the civilized barbarian is by no means the creation of the Germany of fifty years ago,



though, arguably the shock that the discovery of the true horrors of Nazism caused in 1945 was magnified by the association of Germany to culture and civilization. Nor is the reptilian brain civilized enough to understand the meaning of extermination, which in fact derives from the Neolithic idea of ritual sacrifice, that is to say, from culture, and not from basic animal instincts. According to Baring and Cashford (op. cit.: 167) both the barbarian Aryan *and Semitic* invaders of Sumeria came to the conclusion that the conquest of a territory must lead to the "surrogate sacrifice of 'the other' in place of oneself or one's group... On this hypothesis the wholesale extermination of other people - now designated the 'enemy' - became a new way to avoid death magically ... and even increase the 'divine potency' of the king himself." This may explain Hitler's (the tribal king) obsession for the extermination of the Jews. In fact, the methods that Amis and many others consider to be aberrations born of the efficiency of the modern Germany were actually already perfected by the Assyrians in the eighth century BC, which means that genocide, far from being the legacy of the reptilian brain, as Amis suggests, is born with the patriarchal cultures of the Iron Age, including the Semites. Obviously, even though the nature of the monsters of power has changed little since then, their methods have been 'improved' thanks to technology, as the Nazis' infamous use of the gas Cyklon B and the furnaces proves, and this has dramatically increased the scope of destruction they may cause.

The growth of moral indignation against the monster of power is directly linked in the twentieth century to the growth in the number of his victims; in a sense, it can be said that the Nazis of the texts surveyed in this section differ from the figure of the torturer I analyze in the next section precisely because they cannot distinguish individual victims from each other. The blurring of the names of the victims is the main horror we have inherited from Nazism, but it is a horror which has accompanied man throughout history. If there is an essential difference between Nazism and all the other structures of power based on the physical elimination of the enemy, from that of the Assyrians to the Serbs', this is the effort made by the survivors of Nazism to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive.

The problem is that we still cannot look at the Nazi except through the filter of the Gothic villain. At the beginning of *Schindler's Ark*, Keneally describes the abusive behaviour of the Nazi Amon Goeth with the Jews employed in his household and Schindler's compassion and sympathy for Goeth's victims. These scenes are meant to characterize Goeth as a domestic tyrant, similar to the many patriarchal men whose abuse of women and children has been only recently unearthed. Yet, Keneally himself spoils the force of Schindler's own testimony of Goeth's brutality by making an ironic remark that indicates his own fear of looking at the harsh reality portrayed in his book without the support of the conventions attached to the figure of the Gothic villain: "So the story of Oskar Schindler is begun perilously, with Gothic Nazis..." (p. 32). Perilously for whom or for what? Actually, not so much for Goeth's victims or for Oskar as for Goeth himself. Keneally's novel transmits the voices and the names of the survivors and Schindler's own voice to posterity and we can now understand the human, personal suffering caused by evil structures of power such as Nazism. Through the testimony of Goeth's survivors we can also hear the testimony of all the dead and all the other survivors of history. Oskar's voice helps us also to understand the frailty of the hero's soul and the thin dividing line between good and evil. But, what about Goeth, what about his men? Their voices are absent, they remain the unheard 'Other' throughout the novel, throughout history. Keneally himself misses the importance of one of the most poignant horror stories narrated by the survivors, that of the Nazi soldier in love with a Jewish girl imprisoned in Plaszow. This young man is forced by Goeth to shoot the girl dead and, although Keneally uses well the sad tale of doomed love to stress Goeth's callousness and the ordeal of the Jews who were killed because they were hated but also because they were loved, the voice of the soldier is missing. Amis' *Time's Arrow* deals with one such soldier, but Amis' moral horror is still too strong, so that, like many others, he embraces displacement and the Gothic mode to portray the monster.

The voices of the victims must be heard and the monsters must be unmasked, but the victims can only be helped if the Gothic Nazi is replaced by the human Nazi, no matter how painful this process may be. The demonisation of the Nazi is preventing us from understanding the evil

they did and, what is worse, is leading to the rebirth of Nazism itself. Many of the young neo-Nazis are in all probability the children of those Germans forced to keep silent about what they did in the war. The pain that could not be processed because of this compulsory silence is now surfacing to deny the evidence of the concentration camps and the existence of the victims. We still do not want to listen to men like Goeth because the victims' voices are not sufficiently loud and also because we are afraid of understanding him, as Oskar Schindler did or as 'Roth' does when he sees John Demjanjuk. Ironically, we listen to the voices of the killers who narrate their 'books of evidence' but we still cannot and will not listen to the Nazi, which is why Goeth still survives now as a horrific bogeyman in the nightmares of the survivors. Perhaps it would help to listen first to men such as the Nazi soldier forced to kill his Jewish bride not by Goeth himself but by the collusion of historical and personal forces embodied by him as a representative of Nazism. His voice can give us more clues to understand whether the monster of power is an exceptional or an ordinary human being. We not be sufficiently prepared to listen to him, but the four texts I have analyzed in this section suggest that the distance between him and us is diminishing and that the intimacy between the witness appalled by the existence of the Nazi evildoer and him is growing. Perhaps the affair of Hitler's diaries, which were 'discovered' in the 1980s and then were proved to be a forgery, is the clearest sign of this need to know the monster of power from the inside. Since the language to explain who the monster is from his own point of view is available thanks to the fiction that portrays the murderer, the only reason why the Nazi is not portrayed in this way in fiction must be necessarily political. It might well take fifty years more to understand the men and women who carried out the 'final solution'. Meanwhile, other 'final solutions' are being carried out before our very eyes. We wonder in our impotence why these things happen and sympathize with the victims of those we will not listen to.

### 5.2.3. *The Long Shadow of the Torturer*

In the 1980s and 1990s torture appears frequently in fiction as the cross-roads at which

the barbarian and the civilized man find that they are one and the same. The issue most frequently discussed in the films and novels dealing with torture is not why torture takes place at all - it is assumed to be an essential part of a despotic use of power - but how torturers can dissociate their profession from their personal life. As happens in the case of the Nazi, there appear to be certain difficulties to allow the torturer narrate his misdeeds with his own voice. Among the texts I am analyzing, only one - Gene Wolfe's *The Shadow of the Torturer* - presents the events in the plot from the point of view of the torturer, a young man apprenticed to a torturer's guild who nevertheless does not become a professional torturer. The others invariably reflect the predicament of the victim in relation to the whole system of oppression embodied in the particular figure of a single torturer, a paradigm derived from Gothic fiction passing through George Orwell's *1984*. Typically, the point of view in these texts is not that of the sensitive observer, as is the case in the narratives about Nazism, but that of the victim baffled by the enormous distance between his or her humanity and the dehumanized nature of the seemingly 'normal' torturer<sup>1</sup>.

J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) narrates the fall of a middle-aged Magistrate who rules the affairs of a small frontier settlement on the brink of barbarian territory in an unspecified place and time. Occupied by his liaisons with women and the barbarian antiques he collects, this man has failed to see (or perhaps will not see) that the empire he represents is founded on the fiction that the barbarians may arrive at any moment, for which the military forces are on permanent guard. He receives then the visit of Colonel Joll, one of the refined torturers on the empire's payroll, who has been empowered to torture a large number of the Magistrate's subjects. Joll's paranoid effort to determine when the barbarians will attack forces the Magistrate to finally open his eyes to the realities of the empire. Joll's own savage philosophy of life is yet another proof that appearances are deceiving:

Pain is truth; all else is subject to doubt. That is what I bear away from my

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<sup>1</sup>At least whenever torture is seen from a serious political point of view; in action films it is not rare for heroes to undergo torture in the hands of brutal villains, as happens for instance to Mel Gibson's character in *Lethal Weapon* (1987), but in these cases torture is presented as one more obstacle for the hero to overcome and not as the shattering experience that it is for victims of less heroic mettle.

'More Human than Human'...

conversation with Colonel Joll, whom with his tapering fingernails, his mauve handkerchiefs, his slender feet in soft shoes I keep imagining back in the capital he is so obvious impatient for, murmuring to his friends in theatre corridors between the acts. (p. 5)

The suave torturer impatiently awaiting the end of his mission may seem an expression of civilization in the middle of the barbarian country but he is indeed the true barbarian. The Quixotic Magistrate, who knows the rumours of unrest among the barbarians recur almost with precise periodical frequency once in every generation, takes it upon his shoulders to make a symbolic gesture of reconciliation with the barbarians. He chooses for this to take back to her people a barbarian woman who has been tortured and who has become his lover, but during his journey, which brings him no deeper knowledge of the barbarians, Joll's Civil Guard takes up the town and deposes the Magistrate.

Once deprived of his power, the Magistrate becomes just another candidate for torture, which in his case comes in the form of degradation, of reduction to his animal nature, as he awaits a legal trial that will never take place. When the confrontation between him and Joll finally takes place, the Colonel accuses the Magistrate of having attempted to pass into history with his martyrdom as the One Just Man (Schindler's 'just goy') without having first considered that his humiliation is too trivial, too habitual to reach the history books. The magistrate is then tortured by yet another blue-eyed, good-looking young man, whose very existence seems to the Magistrate an indecipherable enigma:

"Do not misunderstand me, I am not blaming you or accusing you, I am long past that. Remember, I too have devoted a life to the law, I know its processes, I know that the workings of justice are often obscure. I am only trying to understand. I am trying to understand the zone in which you live. I am trying to imagine how you breathe and eat and live from day to day. But I cannot! That is what troubles me! If I were he, I say to myself, my hand would feel so dirty that it would choke me." (p. 126)

When the Civil Guard finally leaves because the empire has collapsed rather than because the barbarian threat has been averted, the Magistrate is left in a world of chaos doomed to fall into barbarian hands sooner or later. After speculating whether the nomadic barbarians will eventually

fall to the side of 'civilization' when they discover the advantages of agriculture, he concludes that he has understood nothing from his ordeal except that Joll and himself are two sides of the same coin: "I was the lie that Empire tells itself when times are easy, he the truth that Empire tells when harsh winds blow" (p. 135).

Gene Wolfe's pseudo-medieval Gothic fantasy *The Shadow of the Torturer* (1980) also deals with torture within the political context of an unspecified empire, ruled by the Autarch of the House Absolute. While *Waiting for the Barbarians* is narrated by a victim and witness, in *The Shadow of the Torturer* the first person narrative voice belongs to young Severian, an apprentice torturer of the 'Order of the Seekers for Truth and Penitence'. This order recruits its novices among the very young children of their victims so that the innocent children deprived by the guild of their own family may find a more respectable family among the torturers. The guild functions in a manner similar to any other medieval professional association: the apprenticeship culminates in the 'elevation', which entails freedom for the future torturer to organize his leisure outside the closed Citadel; 'mastership' is reached with the unanimous votes of all the living masters and allows the adult torturer "to pick and choose such assignments as may interest or amuse him, and direct the affairs of the guild itself" (p. 34). Judging from Severian's own experience as a child living among the torturers, this unusual life certainly affects the young novices who grow up to be strangely unemotional and passive, and who do not harbour feelings of resentment against those who killed their parents. In fact, most of these children accept the hierarchical order of the guild and the occupation of its members as part of the normal order of society, especially because the torturers do not make a secret of their profession. Severian's muted rebellion and his expulsion from the guild are in this order of things events much more exceptional than the recruiting of children into the guild.

Even though women have been excluded from the guild because of their allegedly extreme cruelty, they are not excluded from the ranks of the victims. One of them is Thecla, who is put under Severian's custody as she awaits for the time of her excruciation. Terrified but still trying

to keep her dignity intact, Thecla partly awakens Severian's dormant sensitivity with her many questions about his feelings; still, since she makes the mistake of patronizing him, Severian chooses to torture her in his first assignment as a fully adult torturer. However, her pain makes it impossible for him to resist the temptation to help her commit suicide and this single act of compassion costs him his career, sending him to a life in exile as an itinerant executioner. Nevertheless, Severian's personality is not altered dramatically by Thecla's death. His dissatisfaction with the guild is apparent before he attains mastership, "not because of the pain it inflicted on clients who sometimes have been innocent... ; but because it seemed to me inefficient and ineffectual, serving a power that was not only ineffectual but also remote" (p. 101). Later, he welcomes the sentence of exile as genuine liberation but, months after his first victim's death, he still strongly resents the idea that the guild is an abomination planted within the heart of the Autarchy. Quite on the contrary he insists that the guild has endured because "it serves as a focus for the hatred of the people, drawing it from the Autarch" (p. 231), an explanation no doubt useful to account for the role of torture in general. The torture inflicted by the guild on the 'clients', as they are called, handed over to them by the Autarch, serves in fact two purposes: on the one hand, it strengthens the power of the Autarch by showing to the average citizen the consequences of disobeying him; on the other hand, it channels the 'natural' cruelty of the citizens against the victims who become the sacrificial victims in lieu of the abhorred Autarch. Severian notes that when a powerful but unpopular citizen is delivered to the mercy of the guild they may receive suggestions from the citizens as to his or her disposal - but that most of them are impossible to implement because of their sheer cruelty.

In *Waiting for the Barbarians* torture is publicly performed by members of the army. In *The Shadow of the Torturer* the public ritual that celebrates the elevation of the torturer to mastership is a form of acknowledging the gory activities carried out in the dungeons of the Citadel. Both novels can be said to portray the model of punishment as a public show of power whose disappearance and replacement by the contemporary penal system is analyzed by Michel Foucault in *Discipline*

*and Punish*. The pain inflicted on the body by the former system of punishment is seen by Foucault (1987: 7 - 9) not as a sign of the punishment proportionate to the accused's crimes but as a message transmitted from the site of power to the community of subjects, reinforcing the power of the king. When this message no longer connotes the incontestable, terrible power of the monarch, especially following the French Revolution of 1789, the exhibition of the physical pain of the accused or the convicted criminal is replaced by a system of imprisonment rather than torture whose aim is to separate legality from illegality, even though executions still remained public in many countries for some decades. The torturer working within a secret system of punishment such as those of many dictatorships (and no doubt of a few democracies) denotes, therefore, the awareness that the system of power has of its own illegitimacy, of its own injustice.

Secret torture features at the centre of the dystopian view of the future that George Orwell described in *1984*. Orwell's novel was adapted for the screen by British film director Michael Radford, who followed the British tradition of faithful screen adaptations produced in homage to the literary original to an unusual extreme: the film was actually shot between April and June 1984, the months in which the action of Orwell's novel takes place. Radford's version is certainly an accomplished adaptation of *1984*, not only because of its extreme respect for Orwell's work but also because of Richard Burton and John Hurt's excellent performances as the torturer O'Brien and his victim Winston Smith. However, Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* (1985), an unacknowledged adaptation of Orwell's novel, offers an ironic, flamboyant interpretation of the original novel in which the target is not communism but a new system of power arising in a dystopian near future from the alliance of capitalist business and state bureaucracy.

*Brazil* narrates the tribulations of dull Sam Lowry, a junior civil servant in the incompetent Ministry of Information. Lowry's monotonous life is only enlivened by his dreams, in which he fancies himself as a winged superhero saving his dream girl from the clutches of horrific monsters, until one day when the arrest and death of a certain Harry Tuttle, mistaken for the legendary rebel Harry Tuttle, sets Lowry on a track leading back to his friend Jack's office in the same ministry.



There Lowry discovers not only that the congenial Jack is actually the torturer who has eliminated the innocent Buttle but also that Jack is a mere cog in a huge machinery of power designed to eliminate the citizens disloyal to Central Services. This is a private company run by the elderly, disabled Mr. Helpman which has a monopoly in all the services a citizen may need and which can no longer be told apart from the government itself. As Sam discovers, the Ministry of Information is nothing but the security branch of Central Services, beset by constant, enigmatic terrorist attacks that might be the work of Tuttle. The rebellious Tuttle is the only freelance worker in a world in which everybody works for the big brother figure, Mr. Helpman. Instead of preaching an anti-monopolist or anti-capitalist ideology, Tuttle fights his war against the monopoly of Central Services by offering any kind of service for free to citizens dissatisfied with Central Services and by refusing to comply with the enormous load of paperwork required to carry out the most simple operations in Helpman's bureaucratic dictatorship.

When Sam is visited by the mysterious Tuttle, out on a mission to eliminate two particularly inept workers of Central Services, unable to solve a malfunction of the plumbing system in Sam's flat, he starts believing like Winston Smith in *1984*, in the existence of an underground resistance. However, the Ministry's relentless persecution of Sam, the terrorist attacks and his meetings with Tuttle are presented by Gilliam in a surrealistic atmosphere which suggests that everything could be just the product of Sam's mounting paranoia. Whether the Ministry has grounds or not to persecute its employee, the fact is that Sam's persistence in his attempt to prove that the innocent Buttle was killed by mistake jeopardises not only his life but also the job of his best friend Jack, who is eventually forced to torture him. Instead of the aloof, cruel but fatherly O'Brien of Radford's film played by Richard Burton, Michael Palin plays a nervous, anguished torturer who knows he is being tested with Sam's pain and humiliation and who keeps on shouting at his victim that "this is a professional relationship". Gilliam's black comedy ends in an even more bitter mood than Orwell's novel, when Tuttle's valiant rescue of Sam in the middle of his session with Jack turns out to be the last dream Sam will ever dream. The last shot shows Jack and Mr. Helpman puzzling over Sam,

who has been turned by torture into a mindless zombie only capable of humming his favourite song, "Brazil".

Sam's plunge into catatonic madness as a result of torture was the reason why the release of *Brazil* was delayed for months by its USA distributors, who preferred a more optimistic end, regardless of whether it made sense. A similar problem affected British director Ridley Scott, apparently forced to give his bleak film *Blade Runner* (1982) an inconsistent happy ending. The last scene in Scott's film, showing Deckard and the replicant Rachael flying away from the dark realities of 2019 LA. towards beautiful countryside, has interesting parallels with the hallucinations suffered by both Smith in Radford's *1984* and Sam in *Brazil* when they are being tortured. Smith sees himself naked and free, reunited with his lover Julia in the green countryside, whereas Sam hallucinates his rescue by his girlfriend Jill, who takes him away to live a happy life in an idyllic landscape. The horrible reality enveloping the protagonists at the end of Gilliam's and Radford's versions of *1984* seems thus to mock the happy ending of *Blade Runner*, which could be easily read as just another fantastic hallucination provoked by Deckard's fear that he and his artificial lover Rachael might be captured, tortured and killed.

As can be seen from *Waiting for the Barbarians*, *The Shadow of the Torturer*, *1984* and *Brazil*, the strategy of displacement followed by Gothic fiction in discussing the political reality of the moment is still widely employed today. The imprecise setting of Coetzee's novel, Wolfe's use of a futuristic yet simultaneously medieval atmosphere, Radford's academicism and Gilliam's replacement of the references to communism in *1984* for the bizarre mixture of capitalism and bureaucracy, show that representing the monster of power in narratives that allow the reader/viewer to look at the torturer straight in the face is still extremely difficult. The voice of the torturer is missing, so that, as happens in the case of the Nazi, the process by which an average civilized citizen such as Joll, Severian, O'Brien or Jack may become such professional, efficient killers is left in the dark. The voice of the victim is heard, his or her search for an answer to the question of whether the torturer is human is contemplated, but these only lead us to sympathize

with the victim rather than to understand who the torturer is and how he relates to his victims. Even though the distance between the villain and the innocent victim is shortened in these texts by the representation of the torturer as a civilized barbarian essentially indistinguishable from the average man, there is still much to be said about the victims' suffering, so as to allow writers and film makers to treat the monster of power as a full human being.

#### 5.2.4. *Woman and the Monsters of Power: The Survival of the Weakest?*

Women are not represented as monsters of power of the type I have so far discussed, but they appear as victims in contexts suggesting that "it could be argued that the advent of civilized life has led to a greater brutalization of male behaviour" (Brittan, 1989: 88). Roman Polanski's film *Death and the Maiden*, based on the play by the Chilean Ariel Dorfman that narrates the ordeal of the heroine Paulina Escobar, the Vietnamese Le Ly Hayslip's two volume autobiography, and Betty Mahmoody's account of her odyssey to abandon Iran and her Iranian husband are all texts that describe the confrontation between a woman and a monstrous man who abuses her physically and psychologically. The three women survive to eventually tell their stories and to demand justice, making the specific point that men's brutality and cowardice are to blame for the suffering of the innocent, including other men, women and children.

Even though Dorfman's play is not based on the memoirs of a concrete woman, whereas Hayslip and Mahmoody's books are based on real life events, his play reflects nevertheless a situation suffered by many during the recent Chilean dictatorship. The large numbers of Chileans gone missing or tortured by their fellow citizens are represented by Paulina Escobar, a survivor who has the unique chance to force a confession out of the man she thinks was once her torturer, Dr. Miranda. Hayslip and Mahmoody's autobiographical, novelised narratives recast the nightmarish experiences of both women in an ordered sequence of events which was adapted for the screen by Oliver Stone and Brian Gilbert, respectively. Stone's *Heaven and Earth* (1993) and Gilbert's *Not without my Daughter* (1991) further reshaped their original experiences, especially in the

case of Hayslip, so that what initially appeared as personal accounts of how particular individuals suffered from the encounter with a monstrous system of power, finally became in film a story as symbolic and universal as Dorfman's play.

Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* was the music played by Paulina's torturer in their sessions together. A preference for classical music is frequently used to characterize the barbarian as a civilized man, yet in Dorfman's screenplay for Polanski's film the point is not so much how Miranda can enjoy listening to Schubert as he tortures Paulina but how she can learn to dissociate her terrible memories from the pleasure she had always felt when listening to Schubert's music. The claustrophobic, Gothic narrative describing how Paulina tortures her own torturer in her isolated house on the coast one stormy night, leads to a last ambiguous scene in a concert hall where victim and victimizer are seen listening to Schubert's music. The discomforting shot of the self-satisfied Miranda enjoying *Death and the Maiden* with his beautiful wife and sons, while Paulina and her husband wriggle uncomfortably in their seats obviously far from enjoying Schubert, suggests that the cathartic effect achieved with Miranda's confession means nothing, for the monster has a greater capacity than the victim to forget his suffering.

Paulina's incapacity to forget and forgive is increased by her husband's hesitant support of her cause. Gerardo, a young university professor and leader of the student opposition who was then her lover, was the reason why the eighteen-year-old Paulina suffered torture almost twenty years before the night when accidentally Miranda reappears. The man whose name Paulina did not reveal then, is also the man chosen by the new democratic president to chair the commission in charge of listing the names of the missing persons. The grim irony of the situation is that Gerardo disagrees with Paulina's suggestion that the names of those who suffered torture should be on this list, together with those of the dead. In Gerardo's and the government's view the vindication of the survivors would not further the advance of the still fragile democracy. According to Gerardo, the survivors like Paulina must seek comfort in oblivion and not in revenge. When a stranger takes Gerardo home on that stormy night, far from forgiving, Paulina shows a bewildered

Gerardo how justice is done when the victim cannot forget.

Paulina has an unusual chance to understand that taking justice in her hands leads only to her own destruction as a human being. She becomes for a while a monster herself, using her accidentally gained power over Miranda to physically and psychologically torture a defenceless man. The doubt as to Miranda's true identity, for Paulina has recognised him because of his voice since she was always blindfolded in his presence, is what makes the situation the more horrific. The possibility is suggested through Gerardo's point of view that Paulina has been simply driven mad by her suffering and that Miranda is an innocent victim. In this regard, *Death and the Maiden* is a story that presents a false moral dilemma. Although Dorfman implies that the victims blinded by their thirst for revenge can also make mistakes, Paulina must necessarily be right about Miranda despite his protestations of innocence, otherwise her transformation into a violent inquisitor would be simply unbearable for the spectator and would undermine the sympathy due to the victim. The casting of Sigourney Weaver as Paulina is in fact one of the most ambiguous points of the film, not only because she is not believable as a South American woman but also because of her physique. Weaver is a very tall woman and when she is seen on screen overpowering Miranda (Ben Kingsley) physically without much effort, it becomes apparent that the smaller, slighter Miranda could only have tortured her by using the extreme violence of state power. This might in fact be a positive aspect of her performance, implying that even those who look strong may be abused by those who are weaker. Yet, Weaver's popular image as Ellen Ripley in *Alien* adds an evident intertextual layer to Polanski's film, so that the spectator cannot help identifying Paulina with the resolute Ripley, Miranda with the alien monster and Pinochet's sinister government with the sinister, monopolistic Company that protects the monster in *Alien*.

Dr. Miranda, named after the compassionate onlooker rather than the monster in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, is employed by the Chilean dictatorship initially to help the torturers determine the physical capacity of the victims to undergo further torture. What finally turns Miranda into a torturer is his perverse enjoyment of the trust his victims put in him, believing that, as a

doctor, he is there to alleviate their suffering. When Paulina forces him to confess, Miranda acknowledges the pleasure he took in the horrified surprise of the victims who suddenly felt how the only man who could help them was in fact the worst of their torturers. However, Miranda refuses to see himself as inherently evil and insists on his compassionate nature: as far as he is concerned, he did save the lives of those who, like Paulina, would be on the lists of the dead if it were not for his advice to the torturers. The fact that achieving Paulina's salvation did not give him the right to rape her repeatedly is never accepted by Miranda and this deprives his confession of any value whatsoever. The most immediate effect of Miranda's denial of his guilt is the redoubled horror felt by Paulina: far from giving her the satisfaction she wants, the confession actually frees Miranda from the burden of secrecy and allows him to discuss the perverse pleasure he enjoyed when raping her. In the end, Miranda's personality is still an enigma, a horror Paulina must learn to endure for the sake of democracy and civilization. The only advantage she gains from the encounter is the identification of Dr. Miranda as her anonymous torturer. Nevertheless, since men like Gerardo will prevent her from making use of that information in the courts of justice, her future will necessarily include a measure of horror and will require courage to face the monster whenever they happen to meet again. As for Schubert's music, it seems clear at the end of the film that it belongs now to Miranda's barbaric civilization and that Paulina can do nothing to retrieve it from Miranda's possession.

Oliver Stone's *Heaven and Earth* and Brian Gilbert's *Not without my Daughter* are adaptations of books that also reflect the personal suffering involved in a precarious political situation. Hayslip and Mahmoody are aware that their ordeals do have a symbolic value: *Le Ly* is all Vietnamese women, *Betty* is all the (American) women married to intransigent Muslims. Hence their vindication of humanity beyond political barriers and of womanhood, and especially of motherhood, to oppose men's lust for power in the home and in the nation. As far as their nationality is concerned, Hayslip and Mahmoody's positions must be diametrically antagonistic. Hayslip is a Vietnamese who became an American citizen by marriage and who successfully combined her country's spiritual

heritage with the materialism of the USA; Mahmoody was trapped for almost two years in a foreign country, Khomeini's Iran, that she profoundly disliked, because of her marriage to an Iranian man whose Americanisation was only partly completed. For Hayslip, men's monstrosity is not a matter of nationality but of the power they gain over the innocent; for Mahmoody, the pull of his native culture determines the transformation of her husband Moody into a monster once he is back in his homeland. In any case, despite their different nationalities, Hayslip and Mahmoody share the experience of a marriage to a man from another culture who suddenly became a monster of power ready to take advantage of the fact that nobody could protect his wife from him.

Stone's *Heaven and Earth*, the first American film to deal with the Vietnam war through the eyes of a Vietnamese, was regarded as a sentimental melodrama in comparison to Stone's own *Born on the 4th July*. This film was also based on the memoirs of a victim of the Vietnam war, disabled veteran Ron Kovic, and discussed the horrors endured by the victimized American soldier. In fact *Heaven and Earth* cannot be said to be less horrific. Hayslip was repeatedly tortured by the Vietnamese government for being a Viet Cong fighter while only the transient moment of lust of the two Viet Cong executioners sent to kill her, and who raped her instead, saved her from death. All these events were faithfully rendered in the film, which supports a humanist sentimentalism that should not be mistaken for the exploitative sentimentalism of the tear-jerker in film or the novel. This humanist sentimentalism, which allows the reader or viewer to sympathize with the victim without neglecting the need to face the evil caused by the monster in power, is the same as that of *Schindler's List* and *Death and the Maiden*. Far from celebrating the pleasure of shedding tears for fictional characters, it invites readers and spectators to consider the position of the victims of recent historical and political events, asking those of us lucky enough to have escaped the horrors of twentieth-century history to shed tears for those real people who do deserve our compassion.

Le Ly Hayslip's autobiography - the two volumes *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* (1989) written with Jay Wurst and *Child of War, Woman of Peace* (1993) co-written with

her son James - describes how the horror caused by men can influence a woman's life beyond the barriers of culture and nation. Hayslip, a peasant girl in a small village in Central Vietnam, was recruited by the Viet Cong at the age of 12. The Viet Cong preached that the Vietnamese people had a right to free themselves from the foreign presence that had enslaved them for so long. This doctrine went well with the beliefs held by the oppressed peasants among which they found many sympathisers. Her first epiphanic moment of horror, narrated in *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places*, is the realization that the French troops she had identified with the demons of Vietnamese legends were not such, but men of another race: "Still, I did not find the knowledge comforting. It meant that people, not monsters, made war" (p. 18). Later, her torture and rape and the combined horrors of the Viet Cong's reign of terror and the American invasion makes her see how these people are in fact monsters who have found in the Vietnamese peasants the ideal victim:

The war - these men - had finally ground me down to oneness with the soil, from which I could no longer be distinguished as a person. Dishonoured, raped and ruined for any decent man, my soiled little body had become its own grave... Both sides in this terrible, endless *stupid* war had finally found the perfect enemy: a terrified peasant girl who would endlessly and stupidly consent to be their victim - as all Vietnam peasants had consented to be victims, from creation to the end of time! (p. 125)

The route that Hayslip chose to escape this situation was marriage to an American man and a new life in the USA, where she believed she would be finally safe. The irony was, though, that the USA did not bring the desired safety but a fresh round of abuse, this time from the American men in her life. At this point novel and film diverge considerably, for Oliver Stone decided to conflate Hayslip's three American husbands and several lovers into a single character, Steve Butler, who stands symbolically for all of America. This symbolism is the main strength and the main flaw in the film for the character of Butler suffers from an overload of symbolic significance in comparison to the more realistic Le Ly. Butler, played by Tommy Lee Jones, is the monster of power as wish-fulfilment fantasy, a Beast in search of redemption from Beauty who is, thus, very far from irredeemable monsters like Goeth, Dr. Miranda or Dr. Mahmoody. He is another version of



the captain Willard of *Apocalypse Now*, a man morally destroyed by his task as a secret CIA exterminator, who decides that his salvation lies in marriage to a victim, a Vietnamese woman. Finally realizing that he cannot live in peace with her, her son by a previous lover and their own children, Butler tries to unload the burden of his guilt by confessing to a horrified Le Ly who he really is, not before threatening to kill her as once the two Viet Cong executioners did.

This moving confession was clearly written by Stone to exonerate those who, like Butler, had no choice but to take part in war crimes ordered by the US government, and scapegoats once more the American structure of power rather than the men who form it. Unlike Willard, Butler is beyond redemption and so, before Le Ly can offer any help at all, he kills himself, releasing himself but also her from his suffering. This distressed man suffering an agony of love and hate for the victims he sees represented by his Vietnamese wife is a moral giant in contrast to the men that Le Ly met in real life, among them her husband Dennis Hayslip, on whose suicide Stone based Steve's death. Dennis, an abusive husband too fond of fire arms, had planned the death of Le Ly and her sons; the anger that this discovery caused in her is reflected in her extrapolation of her opinion about him to all men, in *Child of War, Woman of Peace*:

All the American men I had known - in Vietnam or America - become narrow-minded, petty and vindictive when they are angry. They didn't know about women and didn't respect them. I couldn't believe such men had ever known a mother's love: the love of a woman who brought them into this world. Such atrocities as I had witnessed in both countries could only be perpetrated by men with no awareness of the sacred origins of life. (p. 174)

Perhaps the greatest paradox in this case is that Hayslip accepted the help of a man, Oliver Stone - whom she describes as "a kindred spirit" (p. 359) - to reach the much bigger world audience that only films can reach. Hayslip's interest in a worldwide audience for the film was the reason why she did not object to Stone's creation of Steve Butler. She herself was one of the main consultants employed during the shooting of the film and her task, together with the chance to publicise her charity (the foundation East meets West devoted to raising money to improve the situation of many Vietnamese) proved satisfactory enough so as not to resent Butler's presence in

the film. Stone nevertheless showed great respect for Le Ly's suffering, despite seeking to obtain through Butler a symbolic pardon for the brutality of many men that none of the men in Le Ly's real life were granted or deserved. The Le Ly of Stone's film survives Butler's suicide and is seemingly made stronger by the new independence that his death gives her. Like the lawyer Anne in *The Music Box*, Le Ly learns to dissociate herself from the monster who once occupied an important place in her life. For him, there is no possible salvation.

In *Not Without my Daughter* Betty Mahmoody presents Iran as a barbarian land, as far away as possible geographically and emotionally from the USA. Her novel is rich in derogatory descriptions of the habits of Iranians at all levels, an aspect that the film softens considerably. While Le Ly Hayslip expresses wonderfully her amazement at America and at the deep contrast between the spirituality of the East and the materialism of the West, Mahmoody's book is a narrative full of hardly disguised contempt and hatred. This is understandable in view of her tribulations in Iran, but which makes a dispassionate reading almost impossible. Gilbert's adaptation lacks much of Mahmoody's anger, especially because Sally Field plays the role of a naive, unsuspecting wife taken by surprise by her husband's change, when in fact, the original Betty was aware of her husband's less commendable traits. There is a shorter distance between Betty Mahmoody's Iranian husband as she portrays him in her book and his portrait in the screen adaptation, despite the film's failure to satisfactorily account for his sudden transformation into a brutal despot. Dr. Sayyed Bozorg Mahmoody, nicknamed Moody, is the incarnation of a deeply set American fear, namely, that the influence of the native land and culture may outweigh the integration to America of the immigrant, something which is seen as a betrayal of the trust put by the USA in the new American citizen. The fact that Mahmoody is, in addition, a Muslim who becomes a fanatical defender of Khomeini's revolution and of his anti-Americanism certainly strengthens the horror that he inspires to Western audiences, even though in his abusive ill-treatment of his wife and daughter he does not differ from many Western men.

Once in Iran, the supposedly Americanized Moody becomes a patriarchal monster of

power, exerting on his wife and four-year-old daughter all the violence he can muster. What makes the difference between his American and his Iranian self is his own view of legality: while the network of power in the USA is intolerant of abusive husbands and fathers, the legal system of Iran makes it possible for him to treat his properties - including his two women - as he likes. Thus, only Betty herself can see Moody as a monster, while for his Iranian relatives he is behaving in the expected fashion. In the novel, Betty tries initially to explore why the dormant rage in Moody, which she had only glimpsed in isolated moments in America, explodes in Iran, concluding that the atmosphere of the country and the pressure of his relatives had forced Moody to relinquish his American civilized self. Both the film and the novel deal thus with how easy it is for a Western woman protected by democratic legality to lose everything - her freedom, her children, her right not to be abused - and become the victim of a truly terrifying persecution, designed to persuade her to let her daughter Mahtob become another victim of the sternest patriarchy. Far from being a feminist pamphlet, Mahmoody's book presents events from the point of view of a mother terrified by the possibility that her daughter could be degraded to a mere chattel in her father's possession and, in time, in her husband's. Her feminism is, like Hayslip's, the result of experience and not of an androphobic ideological stance derived from reading or from a feminist education.

The film's optimistic end, showing Betty and Mahtob entering the American embassy in Turkey and returning thus to democratic legality which also means the protection of the innocent, does not in fact respect the rather pessimistic tone of the novel's conclusion:

*Mahtob and I now live with the reality that we may never be free from Moody's ability to lash out at us from nearly half a world away. His vengeance could fall upon us at any time, in person, or through the vehicle of one of his innumerable legions of nephews. Moody knows that if he could somehow spirit Mahtob back to Iran, the laws of his alien society would support him completely. (p. 36)*

A 'fatwa' not unlike the one threatening the life of writer Salman Rushdie was actually launched against Mahmoody and her daughter, the paradox being that they have been also forced to live in hiding in a democratic country that cannot guarantee their protection. As happens to Paulina in

*Death and the Maiden*, democracy means for Mahmoody learning to live in the shadow of the monster who abused his power over her. She may give his name and tell the story of how she survived her persecution, but she is not free from his presence yet. Ironically, Le Ly Hayslip found in the same USA where Betty Mahmoody lives the protection that had been denied to her by the communist government of her own country. She has given herself the power to undo the effects of Vietnamese and American monstrosity by telling her story, naming the monsters and bringing the former enemies face to face through her books and her foundation. Her task in favour of reconciliation seems to offer a positive solution to the problem of how the USA could heal the wound of Vietnam. But, as Stone indicated in his film, this healing passes first through listening to the servants of the system that caused the wound. The same can be said about all the other wounds caused by the monsters of power.

### Conclusions

The monsters of power I have considered in this chapter are men who operate within a legal system of power, usually backed by a dictatorial state that does not guarantee the rights of individuals nor human rights. Alternatively, the monster of power may operate within any of the pockets of corruption that can also be found within democracy. This suggests that all structures of power, including democracy, breed monsters. The films and novels in which they appear borrow many conventions from Gothic fiction, especially the plot of persecution of an innocent by a man who wields an inordinate amount of power and the strategies of displacement by which contemporary political conflicts are discussed without direct references to concrete situations. These monsters of power are moral monsters who combine the best of civilization and the worst of the barbarian. What distinguishes them from the individual moral monster is that the civilized barbarians employ all their dormant potential to do evil only within corrupt systems, mostly as servants rather than masters or self-made men. The main doubt regarding the civilized barbarian is whether he builds the systems of power that accommodate him, corrupting even democracy, or

whether there are structures of power even in democracy that thrive by exploiting the darkest side of apparently good, ordinary men.

All the films and novels I have examined are implicit or explicit defences of democratic, liberal values. The examination of the contradictions implicit in democracy clarifies the points stressed in the denunciation of antidemocratic values. Thus, the position of the USA in Vietnam has certainly conditioned the dramatization of the conflict between the innocent individual who trusts democracy to protect the innocent and those who betray this trust. The issue most frequently discussed in contemporary films and novels dealing with the monster of power is how an individual may become part of the machinery of horror of real or imaginary tyrannical states. Almost all these texts consider how the servants of the evil systems of power are recruited from the ranks of average men and the perplexity of their victims in the face of the evil acts they commit. However, portraying the monster of power in his own voice and from his own point of view, as has been done in the case of the moral monster, is still extremely difficult due to the negative political interpretations these texts might receive.

Most of the films and novels that I have analyzed in this chapter describe the contrast between the 'normality' of the victims and the 'abnormality' of the torturer, though most defend the existential view that the monsters of power are not born but made by circumstances. They are unexceptional individuals who form, and are formed by, the system for which they work. Hardly any of these men shows any sign of remorse or repentance, not even when they acknowledge their evil acts after being positively identified by their victims. Their exposure or their confessions do not offer satisfactory explanations about their personalities or their acts, though they usually enhance the horror felt by the closely attached observer or the victim. The self-complacent dehumanization of the monster of power who does not fear the consequences of his acts is a sign of the unreliability of the systems of legal, democratic power to protect the innocent and the rights of the individual. Most of these novels and films vindicate the victims' right to name and accuse the torturer, the abuser; they also vindicate an end to anonymity for the victim of atrocities committed in

the name of politics and power, who deserves compassion and respect rather than oblivion among a mass of faceless bodies. Possibly, much more is to be said about the great suffering caused by the monsters of power in reality before they can be portrayed in fiction as fully human beings rather than as Gothic villains of deceptive identity.

'More Human than Human'...

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## CHAPTER 6

### Frankenstein's Capitalist Heirs: The Uses of Making Monsters

#### Introduction

A number of recent American science-fiction films and novels which derive directly or indirectly from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* deal with the manufacture of monsters for profit. These texts are usually set in a dystopian near future when the expansion of late capitalism has caused the political and the economic system to merge, forming a single structure of power. The technophobic discourse pervading these films and novels is partly derived from the romantic defence of the monstrous individual manufactured by science, represented by the amateurish Victor Frankenstein, and partly from the replacement of the technologically successful, socialist utopia by a dystopian view of the future best exemplified by the work of three British writers: H.G. Wells and his two most immediate heirs, Aldous Huxley and George Orwell.

Instead of reflecting a general view of society, the American films and novels analysed in this chapter often focus on the confrontation between an individualistic hero/ine, who may even be a monster, and one of the authoritarian, capitalist regimes of the fictional near future, sometimes embodied in the person of a powerful tycoon. It is not infrequent for the lonely hero/ine to reject both the tycoon's capitalist discourse and the underground resistance movements composed by all those marginalized minorities that do not play relevant roles in the current economical system. Despite their apparent call to rebellion against the power of capitalism to manufacture hostile monsters or to turn the innocent into monsters, these technophobic, dystopian films and novels are at heart conservative and specifically anti-revolutionary. Their potential political content is



short-circuited by the fact that they are themselves products of the very capitalist system they apparently criticize. Actually, a great deal of their popular appeal lies precisely in their capacity to sell a carefully measured illusion of subversion against the current systems of economic power. The main idea preached by these American texts, that only individual solutions to the conflict between the harassed individual and technological capitalism are valid, seems to please large numbers of spectators and readers little interested in taking political action against the economic system that is currently most the widely supported in the world.

Both the human and the non-human monsters created by Frankenstein's contemporary heirs are manufactured to serve practical purposes. The monsters are workers (actually slaves) employed in hazardous tasks within programmes of space exploration, military defence, or both. These are said to require pseudo-human or non-human bodies incapable of feeling emotions that are but a hindrance for their jobs. As can be easily guessed, many of these narratives concern the frustrated rebellion of the slave, soon quenched by an individualistic hero/ine; in other cases, the attempted rebellion results from the monstrous slave's awakening to a new awareness of his or her own condition, resulting in his or her personal liberation without further political or social consequences. The few exceptions to these rules are monsters developed to explore the human mind through the alternative, artificial models of intelligence man himself can create. All these films and novels imply that the advance of technology will inevitably lead to the creation of sentient artificial minds that may threaten man's supremacy and to the manipulation of the bodies and minds of the innocent humans exploited by capitalism. Therefore, it can be said that the alliance between capitalism and science rather than the idea of scientific progress is the basis of their technophobic, dystopian stance. Nevertheless, these cautionary tales warning us against the wrong uses of science also express worries closely linked to the fear of losing our privileged position as a species, similar to those I analysed in Chapter 3 in relation to the hostile extraterrestrial monsters. This is why when man succeeds in creating the superman, as happens in *Blade Runner*, s/he must be eliminated for no other reason than the fact that s/he threatens the

human creator's sovereignty.

Frankenstein's romantic search for answers to his query about the meaning of life and death is typically reduced in most of these texts to a mere search for the practical applications of science and technology when they are prostituted to the interests of the military and business elites. The role of Victor Frankenstein is habitually assumed in the fiction of the 1980s and 1990s by a rebellious genius on the payroll of a corporation or government agency that manipulates his work. In a few exceptional cases he may be an independent inventor, though this is a model clearly on the wane. Frankenstein's heirs are, nevertheless, not always heroic. The unsympathetic, compliant scientist - a salaried employee who approves without any ethical qualms his employer's pragmatic, unscrupulous exploitation of science and technology - is derived from the representation of Frankenstein as a villainous mad doctor. A few novels and films also deal with the figure of the tycoon as monster-maker, usually represented as a mixture of heroic and villainous romantic traits. The insistence on representing the anonymous corporation of late capitalism through a paternalistic figure may seem contradictory. However, the punishment of the tycoon by his own creation actually enacts a secret fantasy of aggression against the father and by extension against all authority: the tycoon of fiction is, in short, a scapegoat.

## 6.1. *Technophobic Dystopia and the Myth of the Underground Resistance*

### 6.1.1. *The Limits of Dystopia and Technophobia*

"The phenomenon of utopian discourse," Tom Moylan (1986: 2) writes, "is world-wide." Despite the many instances of early utopias, including the Garden of Eden, Moylan remarks that "the specific Western tradition of the literary utopia is generally agreed to have originated with Thomas More's *Utopia* in 1516 and has continued down to the 'critical utopias'" (ibid.: 2), such as the 1970s feminist science-fiction utopias. According to Moylan (ibid.: 4):

Utopia grew up with capitalism and the new world as its godparents while the

underlying social and personal yearnings and sufferings were its immediate progenitors. Midwifed by authors of many persuasions and abilities, utopia has both reinforced the emerging economic order and attacked it as the official promises failed to meet the real needs of people's lives.

Between the 1880s and the 1920s, when the division between the utopia of capitalism and the utopia of Soviet socialism was consolidated, a number of writers initially used utopia to resist the increasing power of capital and to support socialism. However, growing pessimism about the possibilities of controlling the direction of economics and politics and the incorporation of the utopian discourse into capitalism and communism soon led to a gradual replacement of utopia by dystopia.

Dystopia - mainly articulated in science fiction derived from H.G. Wells' works - became therefore a tool to criticize the fallacy of that utopia which both capitalism and communism claimed to have achieved, whereas utopia was progressively deprived of its potential to dispute the values of the predominant system of power and to offer alternatives. For Alexandra Aldridge (1984: ix) the dystopian novel "is not literally anti-scientific or anti-technological in the sense that it represents machine phobia. Instead, its authors are, more accurately, anti-scientistic". Aldridge adds that the fiction produced by dystopian authors such as Wells is a criticism of the replacement of the "humanist ethos with a scientific/technological one" and that dystopia criticizes in fact not science but "the scientizing of society" (ibid.: ix). She dates dystopia as far back as archaic antiquity and cites as instances of early dystopias the ideas of Hades and Hell, emerging in response to the pastoral, utopian fantasy of the Garden of Eden. As I noted in chapters 1 and 3, Hades and Hell are creations of the worldview dominated by the masculinist myth of the hunter that deny the Earth goddess's power to renew life by identifying her with the realm of death. It could be said, thus, that from the very beginning of culture, utopia (paradise) is marked 'male' and dystopia (hell) 'female'. There has been, however, an important reversal of values in this regard, so that currently there is a division between 'male' science and technology, linked to apocalyptic destruction, and 'female' technophobia and conservatism, linked to a return to paradise. This reversal has taken place in

the last two hundred years, since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. It can be said that Romanticism and the emergence of science fiction with *Frankenstein* are the first ideological, literary responses to the breaking down of the traditional values associated to masculinity and femininity, and also to nature and science. On the other hand, utopia and dystopia are also characterized by the respective absence and presence of the monster in them, and by the identification of the monster with masculinity. In feminist utopian science fiction the exclusion of the monster from paradise is often assimilated to the exclusion of man from women's utopia. The male monster at the centre of dystopian discourse clearly signifies an exhaustion of the patriarchal foundations of contemporary science and technology and the confusion felt by contemporary man in the face of the problematic legacy handed down to him by patriarchy.

The strategy of displacement typical of Gothic fiction is partly linked to that of utopia. While in utopia the discussion of the concerns of the present is displaced towards an imaginary, ideal 'somewhere else', in contemporary dystopia these concerns are translated typically into a bleak near future characterized by man's uncontrollable scientific manipulation of life. Within this context Brian Aldiss' suggestion (op. cit.: 3) that *Frankenstein* (1818) is the first science-fiction novel makes absolute sense: Mary Shelley's novel inaugurates a romantic, Gothic, technophobic, dystopian discourse on the dangers of science and technology created and mishandled by man which is the staple of a great part of contemporary science fiction. However, when Aldiss notes that science fiction is "characteristically cast in the Gothic or post-Gothic mould" (ibid.: 8) he is only partly right, for actually his observation applies mainly to postmodernist, dystopian science fiction, but excludes earlier utopian science fiction. Aldiss notes that the Romantics were the first generation "to enjoy that enlarged vision of time - to this day still expanding - without which science fiction is perspectiveless, and less itself" (ibid.: 3). Yet he does not question to what extent science fiction as conceived by Mary Shelley and practised by her heirs is not only "the search for a definition of man and his status in the universe which will stand in our advanced but confused state of knowledge (science)" (ibid.: 3), but also a necessarily dystopian, androphobic discourse which makes utopia

implicitly feminine. The fact that *Frankenstein* deals with the scientist's usurpation of the female power to create life by natural means has an immense importance as regards the way in which gender roles are discussed in contemporary science fiction. In fact, it could be said that one of the main preoccupations in feminist science fiction is the search for a technology that enables women to reproduce themselves without men's participation, in a utopian reversal of Frankenstein's misogynistic misuse of science.

Science fiction was at first regarded as a utopian genre simply because the displacement towards the future of immediate uncertainties gave scope for "some hope for a better life" (Moylan, op. cit.: 35). Even though the modern dystopian current begins in 1895 with Wells' *The Time Machine*, the utopian mood in science fiction lasted mainly until after World War II. From the 1950s onwards the dystopian discourse has been steadily growing within science fiction. The noun 'dystopian' itself was apparently coined by J.S. Mill in 1867, but was forgotten until J. Max Patrick 'reinvented' it in 1952, meaning the opposite not of utopia ('nowhere') but of eutopia, the ideal society (Aldridge, op. cit.: 8). Now it can be said without a doubt that most science fiction is dystopian and that it takes mainly the form of the cautionary, technophobic tale first enunciated by *Frankenstein*. Indeed, Wells' own retelling of *Frankenstein*, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896) contributed to the gradual transformation of man's manipulation of natural life by science and technology into one of the main dystopian subjects in our days.

The twentieth-century utopia is based mainly on the successful application of science to achieving total control over nature. Science and technology are part of the capitalist and socialist utopias, yet while technophobic dystopia has been extremely rare in the communist block, capitalist Western societies have viewed with suspicion the increasing power attained by the scientists, especially in alliance with capitalism, and have reflected their fears in dystopian science fiction. To judge from the early example of Eugene Zamitian's *We* (1924), which was first published in an English translation in the USA following the relentless persecution of the author by the Soviet state, one of the reasons why there is no communist dystopia is the fact that dystopia

was not tolerated in the USSR. Zamiatin's dystopic view, Aldridge notes, was formed against his own bitter experience of the power of totalitarian bureaucracy and "against what he believed to be the perverse notion permeating Soviet policy, namely that the scientific world view was an end in itself, and that the process of revolution, having hardened into scientific dogma, had stopped" (ibid.: 32). According to Robert Scholes and Eric S. Rabkin (1977: 35 in Aldridge, ibid.: 66), Zamiatin's work is at the root of the two main dystopian novels of the twentieth century in English, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and George Orwell's *1984* (1948):

Huxley took Zamiatin's dystopian fable and made it more responsive to the impact of technological change. Orwell made the fable even more narrowly concerned with politics and power. The tendency among later British and American writers of dystopian fiction is to assume that technological and biological processes have got beyond governmental control and will effectively shape human life regardless of the nominal system of government.

The appropriation of the scientific and technological resources by groups that engineer forms of social control leading inevitably to totalitarianism, regardless of whether they are willingly embraced as in *Brave New World* or opposed as in *1984*, soon became and still is one of the main subjects of contemporary popular fiction - both film and novels, American and British<sup>1</sup>.

Critics such as Moylan and Wolmark believe that the survival of utopia into this dystopian future adumbrated by contemporary science fiction depends mainly on a renewal of science fiction coming from so far marginalised groups such as women. Despite his optimism, Moylan concludes, nonetheless, that "in the twentieth century it has become necessary to destroy utopia in order to save it" (ibid.: 46). According to him, Joanna Russ' *The Female Man* "smuggled utopia into the dystopian world of the latter half of our century and initiated the revival and transformation of utopia

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<sup>1</sup>The two currents of political dystopia descended from Orwell and scientific dystopia descended from Huxley have originated many novels. Among the early anti-scientific novels are Bernard Wolfe's *Limbo* (1952), Isaac Asimov's *The Caves of Steel* (1954), Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1954), Fredrick Pohl's *Drunkard's Walk* (1960) and Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle* (1963); among the political dystopian novels are Ayn Rand's *Anthem* (1938), Vladimir Nabokov's *Bend Sinister* (1938), David Karp's *One* (1953), John Wyndham's *Rebirth* (1953) and L.P. Hartley's *Facial Justice* (1960.) See Aldridge (op. cit.) As Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* (1985) proves, Zamiatin's criticism of the bureaucratisation and dehumanisation of the utopian socialist society also paved the way for the contemporary criticism of the fusion of bureaucracy and capitalism in the dystopian near future of the Western world as seen by contemporary film.

in the 1970s" (ibid.: 157). Russ' work was not a pioneering effort - it had been preceded by Dorothy Bryant's *The Kin of Ata are Waiting for You* (1971) and Ursula K. LeGuin's *The Dispossessed* (1974) - but it consolidated the achievements of feminist science fiction. Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), Suzy McKee Charnas' *Motherlines* (1978) and Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Wanderground* (1978) were the most important titles to follow Russ in the construction of a feminist utopian world. In this world utopia and the return to paradise was likened to an androphobic exclusion of men, who remained in enclosed spaces while the women returned to the countryside to live in idyllic, pastoral women-only communities. As Jenny Wolmark notes (1994: 4), "the confidently depicted separatist utopias of the 1970s... contained many ambiguities about gender relations, and this has become increasingly obvious as more recent versions of women-only communities confront the essentialist nature of those utopias." In later novels, such as Sheri Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country* (1988) and Pamela Sargent's *The Shore of Women* (1986), utopian and dystopian elements are mixed and the values of enclosure and liminality reversed. In the scenario of these two novels, post-holocaust women-only societies have shifted "the burden of otherness ... from women to men. The narratives explain that men are excluded from positions of power as a consequence of their direct responsibility for the cataclysm" (Wolmark, ibid.: 88). As can be inferred, the feminist utopias of the 1980s and 1990s fail to account for the role of women as a scientist in the contemporary world, narrowly identifying contemporary science and technology with patriarchy. As a general rule, it can be said that while science fiction written by men deals with the negative effects of misused science and technology on humankind as a whole, science fiction written by women explores how technology and science taken away from men's control can alter traditional gender roles mainly thanks to the alteration of reproductive strategies. Feminist science fiction in fact imagines a utopian space in which women may act as scientists for their own benefit, without man's intervention and using science and technology only in measured ways to improve their bodies and to reproduce themselves.

Science-fictional utopia and dystopia intersect against the background not only of

feminism but also, more generically, of postmodernism, which simultaneously exalts and rejects science and technology. It is evident, Wolmark (ibid.: 1) observes, that "in recent years science fiction as a whole has been increasingly identified with such postmodernist concerns as the instability of social and cultural categories, the erosion of confidence in historical narratives and a seemingly concomitant inability to imagine the future." The theoretical narratives elaborated by critics such as Jameson and Baudrillard to explain the terminal sense of history of postmodernity and the confusion of the simulacra and the real, show that the new task of science fiction in postmodernity is similar to that of postmodernist theory, namely, "to re-invent the real as fiction, from within the hyper-real" (Wolmark, op. cit.: 14). Science fiction can be said, accordingly, to have been shaped by postmodernism and to be shaping postmodernism; indeed, the conventions of the genre have been borrowed by many mainstream writers and film makers and a great deal of mainstream experimentation is now of current use in science-fiction texts. However, the insistence of postmodernist critics on the dissolution of the self and on the rejection of traditional narratives elaborated to fix the self in history have left other currents, such as utopian science fiction stranded in minority cultural spaces. The utopian currents which have arisen precisely in opposition to postmodernism's nihilism, can hardly be heard in a panorama dominated by postmodernist narratives written mostly by men that announce an inevitably dystopian future for all, moving nearer and nearer to the present, from which it is impossible to see the future in a long term perspective.

Feminist critics such as Wolmark suggest that the intersection between the most recent science-fictional mode generated by men - cyberpunk - and feminism may be the key to restoring the balance between utopia and dystopia. Cyberpunk, a current within science fiction which began in the early 1980s with the work of William Gibson, deals with the contacts between the world of illegality and technoscience. It is fiction populated by marginal groups who trade illegally in technology used mainly to modify human bodies and in information illegally retrieved from the cyberspace, the virtual space in which all computer transactions takes place. Cyberpunk portrays,



so to speak, the underside of the capitalist world of corporate business and is critical of patriarchal technoscience, though possibly less politically subversive than feminist science fiction. In Wolmark's view (ibid.: 110) cyberpunk and feminism share a common opposition to the apocalyptic tone of most recent science fiction and view the future with a mixture of utopian and dystopian feelings:

Cyberpunk explores the interface between human and machine in order to focus on the general question of what it means to be human; feminist science fiction has explored that interface, but in order to challenge those universalist and essentialist metaphors about 'humanity' which avoid confronting existing and unequal power relations.

However interested cyberpunk writers are in blurring the barriers between human and machine, questioning accordingly the binary opposition between them, this is not the same as questioning gender identities against a technoscientific background. There are few women working within the field of cyberpunk - Pat Cadigan is one of the few exceptions - and, in general, it can be said that the current technological expansion of the systems of information through computers and the Internet, on which cyberpunk is based, attracts the attention of many more men than women. On the other hand, men such as the film director James Cameron and the writers Orson Scott Card and Robert McCammon, are writing utopian post-apocalyptic scenarios in which women or values closely associated to women, such as the sharing of experiences in communal life, play an important role. It can be said that the technophobic, androphobic position has been widely accepted and that, given the progressive incorporation of women into the world of science and the progressive entrenchment of conservatism in the Western world, speaking of utopia and dystopia in terms of gender roles will soon cease to make sense. The reconstruction of utopia and the end of this pervading dystopia, whose edge is being quickly blurred by its very omnipresence, may indeed come from women, who are still at the margins of science fiction. However, women will not move to the centre as long as they persist in writing feminist, androphobic utopias instead of joining the men who also oppose the dehumanising domain of technology through cyberpunk or through a more humanist version of science fiction.

The science-fiction films and novels analysed in this chapter belong to the phase of science-fiction that begins in the 1950s, marked by a dystopian mistrust of scientists and by the loss of science fiction's earlier prophetic, optimistic tone. All these texts have adapted to modern science the paradigm inaugurated by *Frankenstein*, with hardly any further intellectual reflection on the ethical dilemmas this novel proposes. There are infinite variations on the subject, yet the variations do not seem to be leading to a substantially new type of science fiction for the late twentieth century. They repeat to a great extent - especially in films - plots already familiar from the pulps and the 1950s monster film. In general terms it can be said that most of these texts reveal a rather dubious ignorance of what is actually happening in the domain of science and technology, which is not surprising considering that they are written mainly by humanists rather than scientists. Within science fiction itself there is currently a debate between the defenders of so-called 'hard' science fiction, for which scientific and technological soundness is a must, and the supporters of so-called 'soft' science fiction, for which the individual and not the technology must play the essential role. Implicit in this debate, there is another debate about the need to abandon the humanist, technophobic stance and return to the utopian optimism of early science fiction from a fresh point of view and at a moment when science fiction commands a much greater cultural respectability.

What nevertheless marks the real difference between past dystopian science fiction and the current cycle is, above all, the intrusion of technology into the narrative media. Most of these technophobic tales are narrated to mass audiences whose daily lives are shaped by science and technology in positive and negative ways, and who are aware of this reality. The expansion and worldwide success of technophobic narratives is paradoxically due to the advances of technology; multimedia narratives packaged simultaneously for film, video, novel, video-game and comics format require a familiarisation with technology thoroughly enjoyed by the younger generations which seems in contradiction with the anti-scientific position of those who produce them. In films this is most markedly so. The lavish special effects employed in Hollywood blockbusters to

visualize the monster born of the misuse of science actually celebrate technological progress, to the point that in many cases the use of technology ends up devouring the technophobic content of the plot. The technophobia of these films is, thus, in glaring contradiction with their own flaunting of special effects. The novels - especially cyberpunk novels - rely increasingly on the reader's familiarisation with technoscientific jargon, even if that is only the jargon invented for each novel; in many cases, they are hardly penetrable for the computer illiterates or for those used to reading exclusively literary fiction.

The many positive achievements of science and technology in real life are usually slighted by contemporary writers and filmmakers because it seems impossible to deal with them from a positive point of view without connoting connivance with the unpopular technocracy. The technophobic discourse of these films and novels preaches that science leads inevitably to disaster because it is intrinsically harmful or, more frequently, because it can be manipulated by the villains. There is a marked preference for technophobic, dystopian narratives, seemingly confirming the generalised impression that man himself has created the means to produce 'apocalypse now'. Yet it is certainly difficult to account for the fact that many people invest time and money in seeing films and reading novels that proclaim the immediate arrival of a grim, hopeless future, while living in comfort in technologically advanced societies.

Why, indeed, are people fond of being told the same story that Mary Shelley narrated two hundred years ago, enlarged to span not only the life and death of the monster but all of humankind's? There are several answers to this question. One is that the 1980s and 1990s are no doubt marked by an apocalyptic tone due to the development of nuclear weapons and the fear of diseases such as AIDS. The present situation of permanent crisis - possibly more acute since 1973 and the Oil Crisis - is reflected in the belief that these are decadent times leading to a decadent future or to the punk movement's prophecy of 'no future' for the world. Yet, there is another answer to the question: cautionary tales of this kind are enjoyed because technophobia is actually a fantasy created to compensate for a collective sense of guilt, in view of our privileged

position as privileged citizens of technologically advanced societies.

As Fredric Jameson (1991: 384) writes, apocalyptic films like *Mad Max*, *The Terminator* or *Blade Runner*, do not mean "the breakdown of high technology in a future time of troubles, but its conquest in the first place... what such films actually give us to consume are not those flimsy prognoses and dystopian meteorological bulletins but rather high technology itself." Audiences who applaud the spectacular special effects of films and readers who enjoy cyberpunk fiction cannot be as technophobic as the popularity and endurance of the Frankenstein myth suggests. This does not mean that people have not actually internalised obvious fears about the misuse and the limits of science and technology - the threat of nuclear war is real, and so are the devastating effects of AIDS. The constant rehearsal of apocalypse in fiction is cast in a romantic mould that distances the viewer/reader as member of a community from the actual possibility of his or her being a victim of a communal disaster. What is at stake is, in fact, the survival of the individual before the onslaught of forces that threaten to blend it into the anonymous community. This is why Aldridge (op. cit.: 17) claims that "in outlook, the dystopian novel is close to the mainstream modern novel. That is, the dystopian novel also dramatizes individualist, modernist themes - isolation, spiritual and emotional emptiness, alienation. What distinguishes it from the mainstream is its specific concentration on the alienating effects of science and technology." In short, the postmodernist dystopian novel - science fiction or mainstream - descends from Romanticism and Modernism and is only capable of understanding science and technology to the extent that they affect the individual. Dystopia is born of the inability or of the incompetence to think in social, solidary terms and is, therefore, typical of selfish, privileged segments of society concerned with the loss of conservative individualistic values. This means that dystopian narratives are especially appealing for those who fear, above all, the dissolution of the self reluctantly proclaimed by postmodernism: the dystopian texts prove that they are right in their pessimism, yet the re-valorisation of the heroic, victimized individual in these films and novels reassures their

audiences that individualistic romanticism is still the main value, even if one has to become a monster to champion it.

Despite the early examples of H.G. Wells, Aldous Huxley and the first wave of respectable science-fiction writers in the 1950s, dystopia definitively enters science fiction in the 1960s when it ceases being a minority genre and gains cultural respectability, thanks to writers such as Philip K. Dick and filmmakers such as Stanley Kubrick. In Adrian Mellor's certainly controversial opinion this change from marginalisation to respectability took place only when science fiction ceased to "embrace science and technology, and to view the future with optimism" (1984: 39). He adds that:

To the extent that it abandoned this world view, embracing instead the values of pessimism and tragic despair, so was it in turn embraced by the 'dominated fraction' of the dominant class. For the 'tragic vision', whose origins can clearly be discerned in SF from the 1950s onwards, is itself expressive of core values of the educated middle class.

Mellor further argues that the retreat into pessimism was seen by the dominated fraction of capitalism's dominant class "as a maturation, a welcome end to the isolation enforced upon a subculture by virtue of its faith in the future" (ibid.: 39). The end of the isolation of science fiction in the 1960s and 1970s led to the popularisation of dystopia. At least fifty-two Anglo-American science-fiction films set wholly or in part in some distinctly future time and released between 1970 and 1982 display "future societies ruled by some form of conspiracy, monopoly, or totalitarian apparatus" (Franklin, 1990: 31). In the 1980s and 1990s, dystopia is even taken for granted, accepted without any fuss by the working classes, because it is one of the many values seeping down the social classes in the ongoing process of assimilation of all classes into an all-encompassing consumer class. Mellor's supposition that dystopia is essentially middle-class is in accord with Jameson's idea that contemporary Gothic, of which dystopia is a sibling if not a child, deals with the anxieties of the American middle class. Yet, Jameson himself does not explain how the works of mass culture, which according to him (1990: 29) "cannot be ideological without at one and the same time being implicitly or explicitly Utopian as well" have ceased to be utopian

becoming not only dystopian but also ideologically confused and confusing. Indeed his view that the works of 'mass culture', whatever is meant by this terminology, "cannot manipulate unless they offer some genuine shred of content as a fantasy bribe to the public about to be so manipulated" (ibid.: 29), applies not to mass culture but, above all, to feminist science fiction.

This reflection directs us to a turning point in the discussion of the new versions of *Frankenstein*, concerning the ideology they espouse. This is, as I have noted, a conservative, romantic defence of individualism, paradoxical as this might sound, grounded on the contradictions inherent to the current economic system. Technophobia, as Ryan and Kellner (1990: 65) argue, places conservatism in a dilemma:

One antinomy of conservatism is that it requires technology for its economic programme, yet it fears technological modernity on a social and cultural plane. This can be read as a sign of the dilemma conservatives faced in the 1980s. In control of political and economic life, they could not gain power in the private realm of social values that on the whole continued to be more liberal.

These neo-*Frankenstein* fables give an illusion of liberal subversion in that private realm that cannot be reached by conservatism; yet the effect of that illusion is either dispelled immediately or bounded precisely by the limits of each person's social sensitivity. By sympathizing with the individualistic, romantic hero/ine, audiences and readers enjoy the illusion that their personal freedom is what matters most, though they are obviously aware of being bound by powerful systems not unlike those which threaten the hero/ine. Thus, a positive ending - the typical conclusion by which the hero/ine avenges him or herself of the abuse s/he has received from technoscientists - offers a hope for an eventual return of utopia which pleases the majority in this dystopian times; a negative ending - in which typically the hero/ine discovers there is another battle to fight against the system of power - confirms the generalised view that the romantic individual is imprisoned by the structures of power, a view perfectly compatible with the belief in dystopia and the hope for a return of utopia. Dystopia succeeds simultaneously in convincing people that there is no solution to the ills of the 1980s and 1990s and that a solution will be found by courageous individuals for themselves if not for all. Hence its strength within both a conservative *and* a liberal

political discourse: it pleases the romantic side of conservative and of liberal alike. The current dystopian discourse is dystopian despite itself, and since it would much rather be romantically utopian, it can appeal to both those who do believe in dystopia and those who hope for utopia.

The ideological discourse against the abuses of capitalism recurs in many science-fiction films and novels. But since most of these narratives deal with an indefinite near future and speculative matters that might well never arise (such as the use of humaniform robots as a slave labour force) this anti-capitalist discourse cannot be applied to the most immediate concerns of the audience. It can be said that these narratives are ideologically manipulative of their audiences and readers because they deny the very existence of a social, political or economic ideology in the name of democracy and individualism. Their message is a message in favour of inaction, leading no further than the private realm of the romantic individual to which it is addressed. After having seen a film such as *Alien*, which portrays the threat posed to the salaried worker's life by the treacherous alliance between corporate business and militaristic interests, the salaried worker in the audience is expected to buy the video-game and the toy models and to see the sequels, but not to apply for membership of a union or political party. This is so despite the fact that films like *Alien* that deal with the figure of the overexploited salaried employee are quite exceptional. The most important ideological manipulation of dystopian texts is, thus, the insistence on a retreat to a personal world, away from all forms of joint social action. This might be in itself a sign of the exhaustion of the democratic liberal model in an especially conservative period in which there has been a steady decline of the individual's involvement in politics at any level, partly motivated by the pessimistic impression that nothing can alter the system.

This romantic individualism exalted by dystopian narratives is not that of the romantic Frankenstein who tries to overcome human boundaries, but its American, conservative version. The exceptional struggle of the romantic individual to achieve the extraordinary even if it leads to catastrophe - which is the basis of the first edition of *Frankenstein* - has been replaced by the reluctant engagement of the ordinary American hero/ines (who are sometimes monstrous) of the

1980s and 1990s in facing an extraordinary threat that momentarily bars their return to an ordinary existence. Frankenstein is more often the villain than the romantic monster-maker in America. Despite the fact that these films and novels deal with the ordeal of monsters created to be slaves or with ordinary people who encounter dangerous monsters because of their jobs, there is no sense of class struggle in them. The economic system - multinational capitalism - is not seen in these narratives as exploitative of its workers in the Marxist sense but as a monster that threatens to turn the individual into a dehumanized cog in the machine.

The dehumanisation of the worker who was forced to perform a repetitive, mindless activity and swallowed by the monstrous machine in Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936), is now more thorough. Both his mind and his body are literally made or remade by capitalism in secrecy so that the enormous extent of the abuse endured by the individual worker transforms him or her into a monster, presumably too horrified to publicise his or her ordeal. The system itself is always left untouched, following the tradition of American popular fiction. In this, in Leslie Friedman's words (1993: 7), "the archetypal American hero remains the rugged loner who fights for personal rights and individual freedoms, not the union organizer who battles for a better hourly wage or the factory worker who struggles against the bosses." Friedman attributes this individualistic position to the lack of class consciousness in the USA, reflected in the classless ideals and individual initiatives of most American genre films:

The point ... is to defeat evil individuals, not to question, reform or destroy the basic system that spawned them. In essence, the traditional American films see evil-doers as an aberration of a basically healthy society. They remain outside that society, intrinsically different from the mainstream and rarely signifying some internal social flaw that must be altered by fact or deed. Once they are dispatched, life returns to normal. (ibid.: 7)

But does it? The films and novels increasingly reflect an awareness that this normality does not exist, especially in the cases of those who have been transformed into monsters and survived the ordeal. When normality is represented in fiction at all, it seems to be more fictional and less believable than the pervading dystopia of recent films and novels, for there is always the paranoiac



suspicion that the monster lurking in the shadows will enter normality and destroy it again and again.

### 6.1.2. *The Myth of the Underground Resistance Movement*

Now, at the end of the twentieth century and in a moment of consolidation of multinational capitalism, and as happened at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution,

The individual comes to see himself at the mercy of forces which in fundamental ways elude his understanding. Under such circumstances, it is hardly surprising to find the emergence of a literature whose key motifs are paranoia, manipulation and injustice, and whose central project is understanding the inexplicable, the taboo, the irrational. (Punter, 1980: 127)

From the American point of view the inexplicable is firstly, why the American capitalist dream is becoming the American nightmare for so many, and secondly, why a country whose culture is based on the defence of individuality is doing so little for the defenceless individual harassed by economic forces. The American political-economic system of power that has led to aberrations such as the nuclear arms race is perceived in these dystopian texts as a monolithic entity that no individual can really undermine. Rebellion and resistance are presented in scarcely positive terms, except when what is at stake is individual survival. Thus, the story of the replicant Roy's rebellion in *Blade Runner* (1982), which involves the attempt of a group of humanoids to free themselves from slavery, is only told in its final phase, that of his defeat. Much is made in the film of the danger that he and his group of fellow humanoids represent, and about their hunters' lack of compassion, yet, despite Roy's romantic death, it is never suggested that his suffering will necessarily lead the human masters to reconsider the rights of the slave workers.

Underground revolutionaries are not always doomed like Roy, but the plots tend to avoid showing them in action. John Connor is the leader of humankind in a future war against the machines that is portrayed in *The Terminator* (1984), yet his activities as a warrior are only depicted in a recently released video-game, not in the original film and its sequel. In the first *Terminator*, Connor

appears as a shadow sending his own father to engender him back in 1984 - the date when the film was made but also a date of Orwellian overtones. In *Terminator 2* (1991), Connor is still a ten-year-old child. His mother Sarah is said to have trained with the guerrillas in Central America and to have carried out a terrorist attack against the corporation Cyberdine. However, she is not depicted as the leader of a group but rather as a lonely, quite ineffective revolutionary. In the brief episode in Mexico, she dons combat gear and shows John the arsenal he will have to use eventually, but when it comes to carrying out some truly combative action - killing the scientist who will develop the thinking machines of the future - she simply collapses in tears. The female legend and her son are in fact so helpless that they must be aided by the old Terminator conveniently reprogrammed by the future John. At the end of the film one is left with the impression that they will be too busy surviving to become leaders at all.

Many recent films and novels dealing with the evils of capitalism portray underground resistance movements, among them not only *The Terminator* but also the novels *Neuromancer*, *Body of Glass*, and the films *Robocop 3*, *Total Recall* and *Demolition Man*. Similar organizations were also present in the dystopian future of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) and in Orwell's *1984*. In Lang's film, a woman's (or simply, woman's) call for reconciliation between employers and workers in the name of Christian values heals the breach opened by the capitalist's malicious use of a female robot to arouse the anger of the masses so as to have a excuse to crush their resistance. Oddly enough, this sentimental solution strongly recalls that which Elizabeth Gaskell offered in her 1854 novel *North and South* through the figure of her heroine Margaret Hale, even though Lang's capitalist is, unlike Gaskell's, a villain less easily moved by her rhetoric. In *1984*, Orwell describes the deception practised by Big Brother's totalitarian dictatorship on would-be-rebels by persuading them that there is an underground resistance movement seeking eager adepts. Recent American fiction makes another use of the myth of the underground resistance movement: resistance movements are portrayed as ineffective solutions to the question of how to modify the system

precisely because they need the solidary collaboration of many individuals; their leaders' values are compared with the positive individualistic values of the hero/ine and found wanting in respect for the individual. Only Marge Piercy's feminist novel, *Body of Glass*, concludes that the future belongs to a new resistance led by women, even though she presents its leader, Nili, as an individual with a strong personality who rejects the impotent resistance led by a man.

Rebel leaders are always, unlike the hero/ine, poorly defined secondary characters, which often prevents audiences and readers from sympathizing with them. The resistance to the corporation or dictator is often formed by working-class people, ethnic minorities, women and even children. They live often literally underground, surrounded by filth, surviving by eating rubbish and looking almost dead - perhaps undead. In *Total Recall* (1990) the freedom fighters are monsters, average working-class people transformed into horrific mutants thanks to the toxic waste produced by the corporation that runs Mars. They are led by a monstrous baby - Kuato - parasitically attached to the abdomen of one of the men, which suggests that those in the resistance are mainly children, women or pseudo-women, but hardly 'proper' men like the hero. When the resistance leader is a man, he is likely to be a disagreeable character, either because he is too weak, like Lazarus in *Body of Glass*, or because he competes with the usually much cleaner, much more sensible hero, as happens in *Demolition Man* (1993). The hero may even refuse to collaborate or indeed to commit himself to helping the resistance; in fact, he most often uses the help of the underground fighters to survive or to carry out his own plans of resistance. Cases such as that of *Robocop 3* (1992), in which the eponymous monstrous hero is disloyal to his employer, the corporation OCP, preferring to fight on the side of those dispossessed by OCP - a group that includes a black female leader, the female engineer who has programmed the Robocop and a little American-Japanese girl - seem not to obey the rules. Yet, the film concludes when the middle-aged head of the Japanese firm plotting to buy OCP from its American owners acknowledges his defeat, bowing his head before the middle-aged men of the resistance, but not

the women or the child whose mixed origins represent the hope for a tolerant future. Despite the fact that the resistance has won this particular battle and that a form of reconciliation has been achieved, the women have been partly excluded and there is no indication of a definitive overthrow of OCP's power. The fact that the resistance movements are described as the result of generalised homelessness produces a peculiar impression in readers and audiences: the homeless are not desirable role models as dispossessed freedom fighters because they recall the unpleasant overtones of poverty in real life. This means that audiences and readers tend to sympathize with the lonesome hero who, despite being apparently classless, represents in fact the values of middle-class individualism. In addition, the resistance movement is often identified with terrorism or with ineffectual forms of political struggle that only succeed in perpetuating a barbaric lifestyle. Since the resistance often fails, while the hero manages to, at least, survive, individualism and a certain form of social Darwinism are strengthened as the only solution to cope with - never to solve - the exploitation to which the economic system subjects many nowadays.

Class consciousness does not make sense in an extreme situation, when salaried employees are too busy surviving to consider the right of their employers to exploit them. "Survival", David Punter (1985: 12) observes, "has become the principal term which the dominant ideology seeks to substitute for an awareness of class. To the extent that we are brought - deliberately - to consider ourselves as equal victims of an arbitrary potential holocaust, we must also circumvent the important questions of access to present power." This means that not only decisions on how to redress the balance of economic and political power but also those that affect gender relations and even relations between children and adults, are deferred. These narratives proclaim the triumph of survivalist nihilism as the ideology best adapted for living in the dystopian atmosphere of the late twentieth century and the more immediate future. Even when the Christological hero/ine undertakes the messianic salvation of humankind - as in *Alien* or *The Terminator 2* - there is no real presence of those who are to be saved, as if the fight against corporate power involved a multitude of ghosts and not real people. The message, if there is

indeed one, seems to be that since social rebellion is unthinkable, the most an individual can do is to wage his or her own war, not in the expectancy of overturning the system but of simply killing the monster or achieving his personal freedom from monstrosity. It is precisely because there is an illusion of subversion behind these narratives of monstrosity that the monster (or the monster-hero) is always seen as an individual. If there were a hundred identical replicants, terminators or robocops there would not be a unique individual to defend, but rather a whole class. Naturally, this is in itself capitalist discourse: individuals live in capitalist systems nursing the illusion of their perfect individual autonomy, wittingly or unwittingly accepting their anonymity within the economic system. It is only when the system threatens the privacy of the individual that s/he is forced to take up the role of accidental hero/ine and fight to survive.

Finally, it could be argued that there is no point in seeing political content of any kind in these films and novels because they do not aim at being ideological in any sense, or because there is no truly political science fiction (or simply fiction) with the exception of feminist science fiction. The right way of interpreting these narratives ought to regard them as pure entertainment, or, alternatively, as postmodernist metafiction about business produced by business itself. However, even if their ideological content is too weak to persuade people to assume any kind of political position, even if their creators have no political intention at all, the fact is that these films and novels are powerful dramatizations of fears felt by many Americans. They fear above all that the current American political and economic system - and by extension that of the world it dominates - is in itself monstrous. It is not necessary to believe in the accuracy of the predictions for the future that, for instance, *Blade Runner* makes, to see that for most people the dystopian version of the future of this and many other films and novels is essentially correct. If this bleak future makes sense to so many people, it must be concluded that technophobic dystopia has certainly gained a social and political import beyond the artistic quality and the ideological inconsistencies of the cultural products that articulate it. They cannot tell us how to solve either the problems of the present, or those of the near future. But they tell us that the postmodernist inability

to imagine what will replace the seemingly unremitting capitalism of the late twentieth century is clearly a sign of the exhaustion of a romantic, individualistic, patriarchal, imperialistic cultural model that is seeking its renewal in science fiction.

## 6.2. *In the Shadow of Frankenstein's Monster: Models of Artificial Humanity*

### 6.2.1. *The Making of the Enslaved Monster.*

God's creation of Adam is the main patriarchal myth underlying the narratives dealing with the artificial creation of life. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* suggests the possibility that science rather than magic could lead man to commit the double sin of arrogating God's power to create artificial life while usurping woman's power to create natural life. If we follow the logic of Mary Shelley's presentation of Frankenstein's monstrous Adam, the whole human race turns out to be the monstrous creation of a no less monstrous patriarchal creator, the usurper of the goddess's power, for Adam must be as artificial in God's eyes as the creature is to Victor Frankenstein's. A point that the Biblical God and the romantic Frankenstein have in common is their wish to create life for the sake of testing their own power to create. Unlike traditional monsters of myth, which are mainly the product of miscegenation, unnatural conception or an emanation of the natural environment, Frankenstein's monster is the product of an almost magical use of science. Far from being a freak of nature who just happens to be born, Frankenstein's monster is an unnatural freak, manufactured rather than born.

Frankenstein accomplishes the dream of building a human being out of flesh and bones without stopping first to think what use he can give to his creation (could he exhibit the monster, exploit him as a slave, keep him just for company as a friend or as a sexual partner?) and without considering in which terms the monster will develop as a fellow human being. His creature is not the ultimate end of his research but a means to that end - a mere stepping stone in his progress towards the final decoding of the enigma of life and death. The monster which has no other

immediate use than giving his creator the satisfaction of having successfully concluded his work was nonetheless used by Mary Shelley to symbolize the depth of Frankenstein's double sin in a typically Gothic plot of persecution and revenge, borrowed by many subsequent adaptations and imitations. Her novel, in fact, focuses on the question of whether manufacturing artificial life is feasible, ignoring the question of the uses of making monsters beyond this point. Most contemporary films and novels tend to focus instead on how to exploit the monster; they portray the monster's rebellion as a consequence of his being born for the specific purpose of working rather than of his being born at all.

There is a great degree of confusion as to the actual nature of the new Frankenstein's monsters. The terminology itself is confusing. Nouns such as 'android' are used indistinctively to name metallic robots or flesh and blood artificial human beings. This confusion is due to the reluctance of postmodernist science-fiction writers and filmmakers to specify the scientific grounds of their plots, which focus more often on the psychological rather than the physical making of the monster. The twentieth-century robot is the interface between Frankenstein's emotional monster and the unemotional automaton fantasised in the eighteenth century, but the metallic robot is now a figure in decadence. Other models of artificial humanity based on genetic engineering (biological androids that I will call 'replicants' following the coinage of *Blade Runner*) and surgical implants ('cyborgs' or cybernetic organisms) are preferred in recent fiction. The fusion of natural or artificial human flesh and electronic circuitry seems more attractive, potentially richer in meaning for the ongoing debate about what it means to be human than the metal robot. The plots usually narrate the strife for autonomy of the artificial creations, though as I have noted, all of them deal with autonomy in terms of individuals, and not of groups or classes. None of these films and novels imagines what life could be like for the fake human beings once their freedom is gained, if they manage to survive at all. They consider chiefly the disadvantages of being psychologically human and anatomically artificial, in plots that deal mainly with the intolerant persecution of the monster rather than with the process of his or her awakening to self-consciousness.

The first monster manufactured with a purpose in mind other than the sheer pleasure of creating life is the Jewish giant called the Golem. A legend attributes his creation in the sixteenth century to Rabbi Judah Löw of Prague, who made him from clay to serve as a one-man-army in the defence of the Jews of the Prague ghetto. The creation of the Golem is in fact inspired by God's voice, so that no sin is committed by creating the Golem. As the first legends have it, the Golem is a dumb servant who reverts to clay as soon as his mission as protector is fulfilled. The motif of the rebellion is not used in the first versions of the legend, though later the Golem and Frankenstein monster are associated, especially in film. The Golem can be said to be, therefore, a precedent of the combat replicants and cyborgs of many contemporary films and novels, though Mary Shelley's monster is also their direct predecessor as far as the motif of the emotional awakening of the artificial monster is concerned.

In *Frankenstein* the material out of which the monster is fashioned is neither clay nor metal, but human flesh and blood recycled from dead bodies. Although scientifically Mary Shelley's novel is quite incongruous - she makes in fact no real attempt at explaining how Frankenstein animates his Adam - the tradition of flesh and blood monsters that she inspired is richer now than the tradition of the clockwork automaton leading to the electronic robot. The complete robot that can do any work, as imagined in utopian science fiction, has lost much of its appeal because it does not seem to correspond any longer to the road that robotics is taking in real life. Pere Gallardo (1995: 130) argues in this regard that "although it seems clear that robots like the ones depicted in science fiction are not likely to exist because they are neither practical nor economical, their effectiveness as characters has been amply proven". This leads to the paradoxical conclusion that the multifunctional robot imagined as an integral part of our future by science-fiction writers are not likely to exist ever and that their only actual use is as alternative models of the human mind in science fiction. The robots currently employed in factories are not anthropomorphic; the nightmare of a factory manned by androids, making humans redundant, will probably never come true, though for many unemployed workers the nightmare of an automated



factory run by a combination of computers and mechanical arms is true enough.

The first robots of fiction were in fact biological androids made of synthetic flesh, whereas the electronic robot appeared first in film in *Metropolis* and in the pulps from the 1930s onwards. Maria, the robot of *Metropolis*, is very similar to the 1980s Terminator, the T-1: in both cases a coat of synthetic human flesh that can be easily destroyed covers a metallic endoskeleton capable of resisting fire. Even the motif of the burning of the flesh so as to reveal the underlying monster seems to have been borrowed by James Cameron from Lang's film. Maria and the Terminator differ nonetheless in a crucial point: the female robot is the exact replica of Maria<sup>1</sup>, the Christian preacher, while the Terminator is not associated with any particular person; the second Terminator, the T-1000, can, however, replicate human bodies.

The Czech dramatist Karel Capek was the first to use the word 'robot', meaning an artificial organism created to work<sup>2</sup>. His play *R.U.R.* (1921) - the acronym means 'Rossum's Universal Robots' - was the first to narrate the plea of the monsters' awakening into a self-awareness of their slavery. Capek's robots are in fact biological androids undistinguishable from human beings in physical appearance, though their bodies are actually a physical improvement on the human model except for the fact that they can only live for twenty years. In psychological terms they are underdeveloped, for emotions are not regarded as indispensable to their work. The rebellion of the slave workers and the ensuing war in *R.U.R.* seemingly leads to a bleak future for both humans and robots: the former are in danger of being taken over, the latter cannot survive without the formula to regenerate them. In the end, though, 'nature' causes desire to appear among the robots and an alternative to their extinction is opened.

Why, however, did Capek use humaniform androids rather than metallic robots to narrate

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<sup>1</sup>There are actually two versions of the film. In one, the false Maria is commissioned by the capitalist Freddersen so as to confuse the masses, who will be duped into following the aggressive false Maria rather than the pacifist real Maria. In this version the scientist Rotwang is nothing but Freddersen's loyal employee. In the other version, Rotwang has inexplicably created the robot Maria in the image of his beloved Hel, Freddersen's deceased wife. The replica was to replace Hel in Rotwang's heart, but Freddersen forces Rotwang to use her to up stir the workers' discontent. In this second version, Rotwang is another of Freddersen's victims.

<sup>2</sup>I am following Gallardo (*ibid.*: 104 - 125) in this section.

the rebellion of the enslaved workers? Pere Gallardo (ibid.: 120) suggests that "it was absolutely necessary that his robots could not be told from human beings so that one of his themes, namely man's dehumanization, could work not only symbolically but also visually." The robot emerges thus as a metaphor for the exploitation of the human worker, yet the sympathy allegedly elicited from audiences and readers who cannot distinguish the replica from the human original is double-edged. On the one hand, the use of the robot is proof of the difficulties of writing political fiction about the working classes and another example of the Gothic strategy of displacement: the robot seems capable of attracting more sympathy than the human worker; on the other hand, in the 1960s thanks, mainly to the work of Philip K. Dick, this sympathy is turned into plain uncertainty about the nature of the android. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) uses the robot as a sign of the mounting paranoia of the postmodernist world in which the androids pose a threat to humankind simply because they cannot be told apart from human beings.

The motif of the invisible monster, that is to say, of the replicant whose perfectly normal physical appearance conceals a non-human interior, is now common in science fiction, despite the fact that it does not reflect the current condition of science and technology. So far, the total reproduction or facsimile of the human being is just a figment of the human imagination, though there are already reports of limbs and organs being artificially grown in the lab. In addition, there are strong ethical barriers that would delay the creation of totally artificial flesh-and-blood human beings even if the technology were available. Genetic engineering has permitted the cloning of animals and plants and extensive modifications of the DNA of species created for laboratory research, but biotechnology of this type has not been applied to human beings, except as therapy to cure health problems caused by defective genes. Every time a piece of news about some spectacular advance in biotechnology is released, it is implied that only ethical uncertainties stand between us and the replicants of the fictional early twenty-first century. All things considered, cyberpunk's preference for the cyborg seems actually more consistent with current technoscientific developments. Many human beings are already cyborgs, since the practice of implanting

electronic gadgets, such as pacemakers, in the human body is now common. Microcomputers will be certainly used in a few years to help correct many bodily dysfunctions: the blind will see, the deaf will hear, clogged arteries and damaged organs will be healed or replaced. There is still a long way to go before human beings can enhance the capacity of their brains to store memory by means of electronic devices or live a second life through a clone or as data in a computer, yet cyberpunk's predictions about the widespread availability of surgical implants harmonises with the direction technoscience is taking now.

### 6.2.2. *The Emotional Awakening of the Enslaved Monster*

A classification of the different models of artificial life based on their anatomies is less helpful for describing them than a classification in terms of their emotional awakening. Even though I am regarding robots, replicants and cyborgs as monsters, on the grounds of their not being fully human, it is necessary to distinguish between those artificial beings who are capable of reacting emotionally as humans and those who never cease behaving like machines. This distinction is nevertheless a fallacy, since all the artificial beings of science fiction are created in man's image and by man. The human mind is too limited to imagine radically different ways of being in the world that might correspond to non-human robots or replicants; 'humanised' artificial beings are actually representations of the positive values attached to human beings, while their violent counterparts are based on the psychology of the human moral monster or, in some instances, of the evil predator. As can be seen, the unemotional artificial being is a monster in the double sense of being neither human nor humane. My analysis of the new Frankenstein monster will turn first to the monsters who do not show signs of humanness because they cannot break away from the limited programmes run by their brains. Next I will consider those who free themselves from their chains thanks to love, an accident, or the ambiguities embedded in their original personalities.

Although in the *Alien* trilogy the figure of the robot is marginal in comparison to the

eponymous monster, the two robots Ash and Bishop play crucial roles. Both are similar types of replicant, made of electronic circuitry nourished by a sticky white fluid and encased in an apparently normal male body. What distinguishes Ash from Bishop is that the latter has been provided with an inbuilt set of constraints based on the Asimovian laws preventing him from harming human beings. In contrast, Ash does not hesitate to risk the lives of the human beings that may interfere with his secret mission, namely, capturing the alien for the Company. Isaac Asimov circumvented the problem of the rebellious robot in his short story "Runaround" (1942) by formulating the three 'Laws of Robotics' which regulate the behaviour of robots. These are: first, a robot may not injure a human being, or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm; second, a robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law and third, a robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law (Gallardo, op. cit.: 135.). Asimov's robots are bodies of metal controlled by a positronic brain which can short-circuit if the laws are disobeyed.

The fact that Ash is not a human being is discovered by the *Nostromo* crew in *Alien* (1979) only when they attack him in self-defence. Before being switched off by Ripley, Ash declares his admiration for the alien and states that the monster will never be defeated by the much inferior humans. His lack of emotions appears then, on reflection, as an obvious sign of his monstrosity and his inhumanity. Yet his opinions and attitude are shared by the scientist Burke of *Aliens* (1986), who is commissioned by the Company to carry out the same secret mission that Ash failed to accomplish: capturing the alien monster alive. In this film, Ripley soon suspects and rejects Burke's inability to see beyond the Company's interests. Burke's childish excitement at the prospect of finally securing the creature is contrasted with the composed attitude of Bishop, who must necessarily protect the humans from the monster because of his programming. It cannot be said that Bishop is an autonomous sentient being who has outgrown his programming, but since he has been made more humane than Ash, he seems fully human, especially by comparison with

Burke. Nevertheless, another issue is implicitly dealt with in the series which conditions the personality of the robots. If the technology to build Ash or Bishop is available, the reason why the Company does not send a crew of robots to capture the alien creature can only be an economic factor: the lives of the human crew are cheap in comparison to the 'lives' of the sophisticated, pseudo-human robots.

Since Bishop's nature is no secret, Ripley is forced to trust him, despite her initial misgivings, if not as an equal at least as a faithful servant, a role he performs to the end. Even though the colour of Bishop's blood is white like Ash's, Bishop's anatomy is also characterized by his capacity to feel pain, unlike Ash's. A scene in *Alien<sup>3</sup>* (1992) in which Ripley switches on Bishop's mangled body - torn in two by the queen alien in *Aliens* - shows him suffering such agony that she must obey his final request for termination. Her trust and respect for him cannot be more different than from the horror provoked by Ash. However, the series fails to close an evident gap in the logic of events. If Ash was built to deceive the unsuspecting crew, why was the rather naive Bishop built? There are two answers to this question. At an extra-diegetic level, Bishop serves the purpose of introducing a new topic into the series, namely, the idea that the artificial beings produced by men can be more humane than some human beings. At a diegetic level, an obvious answer is that he was built to try out another strategy on Ripley: trust instead of violence would lead her to help the Company in its search for the alien. Thus, even though Bishop is not monstrous in the same sense as Ash, his use by the Company is doubly monstrous. In the third film, Bishop and Ripley's mutual empathy is used by the Company to manipulate her to their advantage: a man identical to Bishop, who claims to be Bishop's maker, tempts Ripley to give the alien parasite in her body to the Company. The strategy backfires, though, for this Bishop who bleeds red blood confirms Ripley's impression that the humans working for the Company are the real monsters. The suave, sinister Frankenstein who seems a replica of his own creation truly convinces Ripley that the android Bishop's solution to his immense pain - his "I'd rather be nothing" - is her only solution as well.

Ash and the Terminator of the 1984 film have been given a human appearance so as to enable them to carry out their secret mission among unguarded humans. Unlike Bishop, the Terminator feels no pain and no empathy for human beings; the metal skeleton that emerges when his flesh is burned confirms what the rotten flesh of the wounds on his face already announced: he is the very image of death in the danse macabre of the 1980s. The Terminator is in addition the incarnation of the dystopian future imagined in the 1980s in which Frankenstein's sons and grandsons will reign. In Cameron's film the Frankenstein who creates the unemotional robot is the defense computer SkyNet, itself a rebellious Frankenstein monster originally created to monitor a possible nuclear war. SkyNet is born of the alliance between a corporation, Cyberdine, and the US government's dangerous defence policy. SkyNet becomes autonomous when those who have created it for war decide to switch it off when they realize its brain is too powerful: the computer reacts by doing the task for which it was programmed, unleashing a nuclear war, and cuts off then all its ties with humankind, next designing and building its own monstrous metal children. The timewarp in the plot allows the future resistance leader John to choose his own father and to send him from the future to protect his mother. It also allows SkyNet to engender itself by means of the Terminator also sent from the future. SkyNet is developed in the early 1990s thanks to the chip that controls the Terminator's brain, secretly sent by the government to Cyberdine after Sarah's destruction of the robot. When SkyNet's potent brain awakens, it frees all the computer-controlled machines from their bondage to humans; its next step is to create an army of Terminators to wage war on humankind. The machines see themselves as liberated slaves and fight humankind to prevent their return to slavery rather than to avenge themselves on their creators.

Before agreeing to appear in *The Terminator 2*, Arnold Schwarzenegger, back in the role of the Terminator that made him so popular, demanded that the killing machine of the first film was turned into a more humane robot. Schwarzenegger's interest in transforming the old T-1 into a new, heroic T-1 inspired James Cameron to insert into the screenplay the same motif of the

Asimovian laws he had already used for Bishop in *Aliens*. The change was justified in the plot by making the adult John Connor send another T-1 from the future, suitably reprogrammed to protect his ten-year-old self and his mother from SkyNet's new creation, the villainous T-1000, a shape-shifter made of protean liquid metal. As I argued in Chapter 1, at an extra-diagetic level it can be said that the new T-1000 came to be as a result of the advances in infographics. The T-1000 breaks away from the robot and the replicant of fiction but makes no sense in technological terms, except as a showpiece of film special effects. At a diagetic level, the liquid monster suggests that SkyNet has given birth to the T-1000 thanks to a non-human technology that has no parallel in the limited world of human beings.

As far as their personalities are concerned, the T-1000 and the reprogrammed T-1 can be compared to Ash and Bishop, respectively. Like Ash, the T-1000 is callous and unfeeling; yet his shapelessness suggests that he is much more depersonalised than Ash. He repeats the pattern set by the first T-1, with the additional advantages that his capacity to transform himself and to confuse his victims give him. The reprogrammed T-1 is as limited as Bishop, indeed even more limited in aspects such as his incapacity to feel bodily pain. His emotional awakening is not complete, nor can it transcend the limits of his mission. The young John Connor and his mother Sarah attribute to him a capacity to altruistically care for them that is nothing but an illusion, for the T-1 cannot choose but to be their guardian. His final destruction is nevertheless much more sentimental than Bishop's 'death', since the T-1 chooses suicide rather than let others exploit the dangerous chip he carries in his brain. This moral choice is the proof that he has finally developed autonomous emotions, yet before dying he still reminds his already bereaved 'son' John that unlike humans, Terminators cannot cry.

The question of whether building robots for hazardous tasks is more cost-effective than employing humans is the basis of the *Robocop* series. This series also shows the limitations of robots as fictional characters and their replacement with the cyborg. Apart from the matter of the cost of making robots and of whether anthropomorphic, multitask robots are useful, in fictional

terms the robots are limited because the only available alternatives seem to portray them as unemotional killing machines or faithful servants. The robot's personality can only be attractive when s/he is enabled to make moral choices by some accident that disrupts the smooth running of his or her central programme, or, indeed, when the robot ignores s/he is not human. In the three first *Robocop* films, the eponymous hero - a cyborg I will discuss in more detail later in this section - fights different models of artificial life created by OCP, the same corporation that also creates him. In the first film, RD209, a huge though clumsy police robot, is created by OCP to supply the recently privatized police force of Detroit with reliable workers that will not go on strike and demand higher wages as the human police do. When RD209 kills an OCP executive during its presentation because it misunderstands human reactions, another executive takes his chance to propose replacing the ineffective RD209 with a Robocop made of the human remains of a dead police officer and a computerised suit of armour. In the second film the cyborg Robocop confronts and defeats another monstrous police robot, composed of a huge metallic body and the brain of Detroit's public enemy number one, a villainous drug baron. In the third film, the threat comes from a Japanese robot called Otomo coated in flesh like Ash and the Terminator, which, unlike Robocop and his former rivals is not a unique product but one of a series of identical robots. Needless to say, none of Robocop's enemies show any positive human emotions, though Otomo's aggressiveness looks human enough, especially in comparison to the uncontrollable rage of the metallic monsters.

One of the most popular non-anthropomorphic metallic robots of fiction is the loquacious No. 5 of *Short Circuit* (1986) a descendant in equal parts of the C3PO of *Star Wars* (1977), *E.T.* (1982) and Frankenstein's monster. *Short Circuit* is a comedy for young audiences that narrates how one of the batch of robots created by young Dr. Newton Crosby for the US Defence Department becomes an autonomous thinker, thanks to a short circuit. The malfunction suffered by this metallic version of E.T. explains why the robot starts making decisions, the first of which is deciding



to escape from the military complex where Crosby works. As could be expected, the film follows No. 5's immersion into everyday American life and its culture, controlled with many difficulties by Stephanie, a young woman who befriends the lost robot. Stephanie finally persuades Crosby to accept No. 5 as an autonomous personality, and together creature, creator and woman foil the plans of the military to recover No. 5 in order to make it function 'normally', that is to say, soullessly. The comedy of the film depends on No. 5's expressiveness, which is certainly surprising considering that No. 5 is nothing but an animated meccano construction, and on its voracious consumption of all kinds of information which he can barely digest. The fact that *Short Circuit* is a comedy suggests that by 1986, when the film was released, the subject of the emotional awakening of the robot had lost much of its tragic dimension. The charming No. 5's rebellion is totally devoid of the political content that could be read in *R.U.R.*, or of the apocalyptic overtones of SkyNet's awakening. Nevertheless, it typifies the individualistic rebellion dealt with in most of the American texts in which an artificial life form suddenly becomes aware of its latent humanness.

The comic treatment of the robot's awakening is also exemplified by Susan Seidelman's *Making Mr. Right* (1987), which belongs to a subgroup of texts dealing with a love story between an artificial being that looks human and a human. Isaac Asimov's *The Robots of Dawn*, Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass* and Tannith Lee's *The Silver Metal Lover* describe like Seidelman's film a relationship between a woman and a humanoid male robot, while *Blade Runner* narrates in its main subplot the love story between a man and a female replicant who is unaware that she is not human. In all these narratives it is supposed that the body of the humanoid robot is capable of performing all the sexual functions of a human except for reproduction; whatever the soft flesh and the smooth skin of the robots conceals concerns the human lovers only to a certain point, beyond which they invariably regard the artificial lovers as better than their human counterparts. Also typically, love interferes with the main original function for which the robots were created, though in the cases of the replicant Rachael of *Blade Runner* and Jander of *The Robots of Dawn*, it can be

said that love in fact marks the apex of the emotional apprenticeship for which they were originally designed. The myth of Pygmalion, who fell in love with a lovely statue he had sculpted and which was given life by the gods, cannot be said to be reflected in these texts. Rather than deal with the relationship between the creature and the creator, these texts place the creator at a certain distance, from which s/he observes the relationship of the humanoid robot or replicant with a third person. On the other hand, the emotional awakening of the artificial lover is always subordinated in these texts to the desire felt by his or her human lover.

In Seidelman's comedy, Frankie, a woman who works for an advertising agency, is commissioned by the corporation Chemtec to run an advertising campaign to make Ulysses, their star product, a popular figure. The humanoid robot Ulysses - "the closest thing to man himself" as Frankie's slogan for him runs - has been designed as a model to test the endurance of human beings in long-term space travel. Since his programming is still far from being an adequate simulation of human emotions and behaviour, Frankie is asked to educate Ulysses mainly as regards relationships between humans. Seidelman's film implies that the products of the technoscientific domain of the male creator will be inevitably monstrous unless the psychological contribution of woman is taken into account, a point also discussed by Piercy in *Body of Glass*. The woman's task in both texts is to stir the male robot's feelings, a task which covers the gap left by the absence of the mother in *Frankenstein*. Although in this film the heroine is named Frankie, she is no female Frankenstein but the subversive individual who undermines the neo-Frankenstein's creation. Like Shira in Piercy's novel, Frankie succeeds only partially, for both make the male robot a dependent object rather than an autonomous subject. Seidelman's title and the fact that the naive Ulysses is regarded as Mr. Right are an expressive commentary on how women see Frankenstein's monster: the fantasy of appropriating man's new Adam to remake him as woman's own man underlies Seidelman's film and Piercy's novel alike, despite their very different conclusions.

The narratives of *The Nimrod Hunt*, *The Robots of Dawn*, and *Blade Runner* are articulated

by two main subplots. On the one hand, a humanoid robot or replicant discovers as a consequence of a love story that s/he is not human as s/he had always believed; on the other hand, this humanoid robot is closely associated to another robot - not necessarily humanoid - immersed in a process of emotional awakening much deeper and much more consequential than that of the humanoid in love. In *The Nimrod Hunt* (1986) the hero Chan turns out to be the unfinished product of the illegal activities of a genetic engineer who has disobeyed the laws forbidding the creation of intelligent human life. Chan's mental immaturity disappears when he is exposed to a brutal psychosomatic treatment which turns him into a soldier recruited to locate and eliminate the Morgan constructs. These are gigantic biomechanoid robots - partly metal, partly flesh - originally created by Dr. Livia Morgan - the only female Frankenstein I have come across - by order of commander Esro Mondrian. The constructs are to be used in the defence of the perimeter that limits the confederacy of planets to which Earth belongs. However, the Morgan constructs soon rebel, kill Dr. Morgan and hide on lonely planets where they learn to form mental units with other organisms; Nimrod is the name of the particular construct Chan is to hunt. Oddly enough, not much is made of the process that leads the constructs to gain consciousness and develop their own emotional responses, whereas Chan's manipulation by Mondrian is the subject of the main subplot. Although Chan is said to be artificial, this motif plays no major role in the novel. The plot of revenge against the Frankenstein figure centres on the relationship between Mondrian and the aggressive Chan he has created rather than on Morgan or on the nameless father who made Chan. In the end, it appears that Chan's artificiality plays the only role of indicating how deceptive appearances can be; as for his psychological maturation, its main consequence is to make him reluctant to enter one of the mental rings developed by the constructs. Having enjoyed his new sense of individuality for just a few months, Chan is not persuaded by his lover's argument that his individuality will not be lost in the union with others and never seems genuinely charmed by the Morgan constructs' revolutionary substitution of total communion for their original aggressiveness.

In Asimov's *The Robots of Dawn* (1984), Jander, a humanoid robot made by Dr. Fastolffe, suffers a strange 'death' apparently as a result of having been forced to simultaneously obey and disobey one of the Laws of Robotics. The 'roboticide' turns out to have important consequences for the future of humankind, since Jander is seen by Dr. Adamiro, the man who causes his accidental death when trying to steal information from him, as the prototype of the robots that should be used in space exploration and colonisation. In this novel the universe known to man encompasses fifty planets colonised by man; these fifty worlds differ precisely in the way they understand the role of robots in the colonising process. On Earth, the robots are unpopular because they are seen as direct competitors in the labour market; Aurora, where Jander has been manufactured, treats robots as fellow human beings. Yet within Aurora two main factions are fighting for the control of the construction of robots like Jander. The faction headed by Fastolffe opposes the faction led by his own daughter Vasilisa and by Adamiro, who think that planets should be prepared for later human migration by colonies of humaniform robots capable of imitating human behaviour down to a form of mock sexual reproduction. Fastolffe, who knows from his experience with Jander that the robot may eventually regard themselves as human beings, prefers a mixed form of colonisation in which the robots are subordinated to their human partners.

The two female characters in *The Robots of Dawn* play an important, though secondary, role in the plot. Gladia, the bereaved woman who has accepted Jander as her husband, is used by Fastolffe to test the effects of love on his robot. Jander has not been actually created for space exploration, but to study whether robots who are unaware that they are not human can actually live as human beings. Gladia's contribution is, specifically, to reinforce Jander's sense of his own masculinity. Vasilisa, Fastolffe's estranged daughter, has unwittingly transformed her father's other robot and her own favourite pet robot - R. Giskard - into a mind reader with telepathic powers by reprogramming him. Since he is not humaniform, nobody suspects R. Giskard of being capable of developing human emotions and much less of having caused Jander's 'freeze out' so as to prevent others like Jander and himself from becoming slave labour. R. Giskard is human enough

to know that his abilities had better be concealed from the humans around him and to make the moral choice of causing Jander's 'death'. Nevertheless, his moral autonomy is not total, for in the last instance the reason for his homicidal behaviour is his duty to protect his creator Dr. Fastolffe from Adamiro's threat, as dictated by the Laws.

The relationship between Gladia and Jander has some points in common with that between the teenage Jane and the robot Silver in Tannith Lee's *The Silver Metal Lover* (1986). Both Gladia and Jane are aware of the emotional predicament in which they put themselves by accepting artificial lovers and both learn to love the artificial anatomy of their lovers, leaving behind their initial prejudices. However, unlike Jander, Silver is aware of who he is and what he has been created for and so he struggles to keep the necessary emotional distance between him and his owner, Jane, so as not to harm her feelings. Lee's novel narrates how seventeen-year-old Jane falls in love with the robot Silver, whom she initially mistakes for a real man but who is in fact a new model of sex toy legally owned by a friend of hers. The idea that somebody will eventually market pseudo-human robots capable of satisfying all the sexual needs that a human may have is attractive but limited as far as its dramatic possibilities are concerned. The relationship between a human and a perfected version of the inflatable doll may be a good subject for an erotic or pornographic tale, but does not seem deep enough in terms of human emotion to sustain a whole novel. Tannith Lee overcomes this problem by centring her novel on the love that Jane feels for Silver even before she knows what he is and on Silver's emotional awakening rather than on the issue of how ownership may condition the relationship between humans and sentient machines.

All in all, *The Silver Metal Lover* is nothing but a beautifully told erotic fantasy in which a young woman is fortunate enough to meet the perfect lover and unfortunate enough to lose him. The fact that Jane is a rather unstable virginal teenager suggests that this is a kind of fantasy that only sexually immature young people would entertain, yet in Lee's description of Silver's many qualities - his beauty, his tenderness, his protectiveness - there are clear signs of a longing for the perfect new man that is not so immature. Part of Jane's fantasy is fulfilled when she meets that

extraordinary sexual partner all humans dream of, but once Silver deflowers her and she her happy sexual awakening leads smoothly to a deep love for him, she feels the challenge of turning her pseudo-human lover into a fully human man. This second fantasy of making Silver 'feel' the same that she can feel is constantly hindered by Silver's casual remarks about his emotional limitations and his inability to sympathize with Jane's attempt to make him more human. Yet, Jane finally manages to bring Silver to feel an orgasm, which in theory he cannot feel. His new sensitivity satisfies her more than the sexual pleasure he so generously gives her and apparently marks Silver's entrance into a new emotional stage for which he had not been programmed. In the end, the couple, who have been living in hiding because Jane is a minor and because she has taken Silver without his owner's permission, are betrayed and found. Sensing that Silver no longer has the same vacant expression of the other models of his series, his makers decide to destroy him so as to avoid trouble with the authorities, who are enforcing a ban on the production of pseudo-human robots because of the general public's distrust of these products.

A bereaved Jane concludes that the destruction of Silver can only be explained by the fear that men feel because of their impression that better, pliant, custom-made artificial lovers might eventually take their place in women's lives. Actually, to judge by the ending of Lee's novel, men might be right in feeling this anxiety - and so might women, considering that Silver's makers also sell female robots. The final chapter of the novel includes a curious supernatural episode in which Jane is contacted through an Ouija board by what seems to be Silver's soul. The message she receives from him indicates that he has survived his physical destruction to become a disembodied 'something else' in another dimension where she can reach him. Thus, Jane's final lament for Silver's death contains a certain hope for a mystical reunion with her lover after her death and suggests that Jane will remain faithful to Silver's memory, if not physically at least as far as her capacity to love is concerned. This romantic ending implies that women are ready to wait for the new man epitomized by Silver for decades, even if that means making their relationships with the men around them extremely problematic. The recurrent fantasy of the humanisation of the

artificial lover, a motif that can be found in texts by men and by women, is no doubt a sign of widespread dissatisfaction in the relationships between men and women. The artificial lovers are, literally, consolatory fantasies created to express a longing for the arrival of a new man or a new woman but also created to express the awareness that neither men nor women can be manipulated to suit one's own needs without running the risk of losing our own humanity.

It is unclear whether the replicants of *Blade Runner* are biomechanoids or flesh and blood creatures. Tyrell, the Frankenstein figure, tells his masterpiece Roy that the 'God of biomechanics' would let him into his heaven, and claims to have designed Roy's brain; yet Roy wants his DNA to be recoded so as to halt his rapid ageing, seemingly indicating that his body is fully organic. In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, the novel by Philip K. Dick on which the film is based, the Nexus 6 models - referred to as 'andys' and 'carbons' - are humaniform robots developed illegally by the Rosen Corporation. The 'andys' are first an updated model of the organic androids used as soldiers in the war between the government and a powerful multinational corporation, though they are subsequently used for space colonisation. Although the 'andys' that cannot be told apart from human beings are illegal, businessmen like Rosen sell them clandestinely, which has forced the police to develop an empathy test to identify them. However, the new Nexus 6 can feel a greater degree of empathy than some unemotional humans and there are doubts that the test, designed to assert whether the 'andys' can feel emotion, is reliable. Deckard and the other bounty hunters have been put into a moral predicament by Rosen, since they may have killed human beings identified by the empathy test as 'andys'. Rosen's views on the matter are, however, those of the pure capitalist:

'We produced what the colonists wanted,' Eldon Rosen said. 'We followed the time-honoured principle underlying every commercial venture. If our firm hadn't made these progressively more human types, other firms in the field would have. We knew the risk we were taking when we developed the Nexus-6 brain unit... Your position, Mr. Deckard, is extremely bad morally. Ours isn't.' (p. 45)

The search by the andy Roy and his group for a mystical experience induced by drugs

that is described in the novel is transformed by the film into Roy's search for a father and an answer to the question of why he must die. As for the love story between the blade runner Deckard and the replicant Rachael, this is not very different from that between Gladia and Jander in *The Robots of Dawn*. Like Jander she is an experimental model, created by the head of the Tyrell Corporation to test the limits of the allegedly unemotional robots. Also like Jander, Rachael is unaware that she is not human, though she finds in her love for Deckard a basis on which to build her identity as a person, and specifically as a woman. Erica Sheen (1991: 139) argues that "narratives about the sexual identity of artificial life forms use cinema's increasing self-consciousness about the process of image-making not to test conventional definitions of gender but to consolidate them." In her view Rachael is forced by Deckard to enter the symbolic order she needn't have entered at all, considering that her artificiality could have been the basis for the construction of a new type of sexual identity unrestricted by the patriarchal control of woman's body. The same could be said about Asimov's male robot Jander or about Piercy's Yod, also male. The only justification for the definition of the replicants as sexual beings is the need to assimilate them to the humans they imitate, for, in fact, building a robot with gender characteristics makes little sense. For Joseph W. Slade (1990: 17) Rachael's eroticism symbolizes the love for the technology we have created, which actually contradicts the apparent technophobia of dystopian films like *Blade Runner*.

The images of the romantically-photographed Rachael say what humans find it hard to say: that the reason we both adore and fear technology is that it is at least as humanizing as it is dehumanizing, that we find our humanity not just in rebelling against the control systems we have created but also in accepting our oneness with what we have created, that all that is best in us is as much the product of artifice as it is of nature.

The same could be said about Roy, especially in the romantic scene of his death.

Contradicting what should be expected of a corporation that works for profit - and also contradicting Dick - the replicants, and most of the artificial beings in the texts I am analysing, are unique and not mass produced. Roy, Leon, Zhora and Pris, the Nexus 6 group, are born with



different levels of intelligence and physical abilities, custom-made to carry out specific tasks. Pris is a prostitute, Zhora an assassin, while the men are soldiers, Roy being one of the superior class. It is implied that his coming to consciousness precedes that of the others, though their violent escape from slavery and the colonies is not shown on screen. They return to Earth, where they are banned, simply because they want to live longer lives than the four year lifespan to which their artificial bodies have been purposely limited.

The confrontation between Roy and Deckard is the central scene of the film. Roy has then his only chance to express what it is like to be made like him: "Quite an experience to live in fear, isn't it? That's what it is to be a slave." The slave, the replicant made for work, ends his life with a simple metaphor about his life - "All those moments will be lost in time like tears in the rain" - which marks his access to an emotional use of language, a poetic use of language, stressing the fact that he has become fully human. Blake, acknowledged by Dick as one of his main influences, is quoted by Roy in a previous scene; the lines of *America, a Prophecy*, about the fiery angels who rose burning with the fires of Orc become in Roy's mouth a lament for the fiery angels that fell (Morrison, 1990: 3). "Blake describes," Rachela Morrison (*ibid.*: 3) writes, "and Roy embodies, the celebration of human dignity and our right to the freedom of both body and spirit".

Roy could have been presented as a biomechanical Spartacus of the twenty first century, but instead he and the other replicants, including Rachael, look for individual solutions to their individual problems, in particular the question of their limited lifespan. They do not see themselves as workers but as persons deprived of their human identity because of their dehumanising slavery. Although some of the neo-Frankenstein films and novels include scenes of confrontation between creature and creator, the monsters do not seek revenge as Frankenstein's monster does, but seek rather to be allowed to live in peace on their own terms, something only a few achieve. The humanisation that makes them useless as enslaved workers usually leads to their gratuitous elimination, their suicide or their assumption of a normality, which, if it ever happens, seems even more fantastic than their artificial nature. How to imagine, for instance, Rachael and Deckard's life

together? What kind of children would they have if any?

The illegality of the replicants, grounded on fears that they might pass themselves off as humans, is a motif repeated in many films and novels to justify why they have to be stalked and eliminated. It is, in fact, an obvious sign of paranoia caused by fears that a secret species living among us might one day end our supremacy. If the suggestion were that the fake human beings can become sensible, sensitive and harmless inhabitants of Earth, the Gothic plots of persecution and destruction of all the texts I am analysing in this chapter could not hold. Philip K. Dick himself explained that

There is amongst us something that is a bi-pedal humanoid, morphologically identical to the human being but which is not human. It is not human to complain, as one SS man did in his diary, that starving children are keeping you awake.

And there, in the 40s, was born my idea that within our species there is a bifurcation, a dichotomy between the truly human and that which mimics the truly human. (Strick, 1982: 72, in Morrison, *op. cit.*: 3)

Dick's inhuman replica would correspond, therefore, to the moral monster I described in Chapter 4 and not to the romantic Blakean angel of Scott's film. While Dick's 'andys' embody the Beast, our shadow, Mr. Hyde, Scott's 'replicants' are, as the Tyrell Corporation motto's announces, more human than human, that is to say, the postmodernist version of the Nietzschean superman. This is why the relationship with these products of imaginary technology is one of love and hate. The chase of the replicant in *Blade Runner*, *Neuromancer* or *Body of Glass*, has no other justification but the paranoid fear that our own creations can take over the control of our lives. The pseudo-human and non-human supermen (or rather 'superbeings') like Roy, Rachael, Chan, Nimrod, Jander, R. Giskard, Silver, Yod, Nili, Wintermute, *Neuromancer* and others are loved because they are humankind's masterpieces, but hated because they are the feared models of the next evolutionary step that could render the current human being obsolete. Furthermore, unlike the fear of hostile species I described in Chapter 3, fear of the human simulacra is grounded in the idea that man himself may bring his own destruction not because he will inevitably create monsters like Frankenstein's creature but because he will create better humans like Roy or alternatives to

human intelligence such as R. Giskard or Neuromancer. Utopian and dystopian images must be necessarily mixed in the futures imagined in these texts.

The cyborg is a human body modified by means of the surgical implantation of electronic gadgets or by means of controlled genetic alterations produced before or after birth. The emotional awakening of the cyborg is, unlike that of the electronic robot or the biological android, necessarily linked to a previous loss of identity, for the cyborg is originally human. The films and novels in which the cyborg can be found usually discuss this figure from two opposite points of view. On the one hand, the cyborg may be the victim of an alliance of military and business interests. The body of the dead worker is remade to suit the needs of his employers, his personality erased from his brain. The plot typically deals with the return of repressed signs of identity and with the cyborg's awareness of his dormant humanness. On the other hand, the cyborg may be a human who has chosen to remake himself or herself and whose modified body is the sign of a strong personality. *Robocop* and *Universal Soldier* are two instances of the first case, specifically as regards the male body, whereas *Body of Glass* discusses the advantages of the female cyborg over the male replicant as the model for a humanity capable of contesting the aggression of late capitalism.

The cyborg policeman of *Robocop* (1987) and the cyborg soldier of *Universal Soldier* (1992) are the reconstructed bodies of a policeman almost killed by a criminal gang and a Vietnam veteran killed by a maddened fellow soldier, respectively. Alex Murphy's and Luc's bodies have been recycled allegedly to reduce the costs of maintaining the police and the army. Since building electronic robots is extremely expensive and time-consuming, the 'undead' employees are the perfect solution to their employer's search for the dream worker. However, in the case of the universal soldier or 'UniSol' the economic advantage is dubious, for the price of each unit - \$250 million - is no doubt enough to buy the services of many human soldiers. Both Alex Murphy and Luc can be programmed as their employers wish because their memories have been erased; they are effective, loyal and reliable workers, at least until a malfunction eventually causes some of their suppressed memories to resurface.

*Universal Soldier* mixes the motif of the appropriation of the employee's body by his employer borrowed from *Robocop* with the motif of the psychotic Vietnam veteran. Out of the group of Vietnam veterans transformed into superhuman soldiers, only Luc recovers his humanity precisely because he never lost it as a soldier. The personality of men like the brutal sergeant whom Luc killed so as to prevent a My Lai style massacre is altered for the worse by the anatomic changes, for their original psychotic fixations are the only part of their original selves to resurface. The plot narrates how Luc, helped by Veronica, a journalist who has discovered the secret of the making of the UniSol, tracks the man who remade him, remembers who he was and defeats the villainous sergeant before returning to his former, idyllic life in his parents' farm. Luc's return home is, thus, not a rebellion but a search for his lost identity and a return to the self he lost when his body was appropriated by the army. Unlike Frankenstein's monster, Luc is not interested in revenge: in fact, he collapses when he meets his second father, the scientist who made him into a cyborg, and rejects Veronica's offer to publicise his story, choosing instead a return to his former anonymity in rural Louisiana.

The unsurprising ending of *Universal Soldier* is very different from the problematic ending of *Robocop*, perhaps because the signs of Alex Murphy's transformation are much more evident. While Jean-Claude Van Damme looks his habitual muscular self as Luc, Peter Weller's body is hardly visible inside the Robocop's titanium armour, which implies that Murphy's process of dehumanisation is much more profound than Luc's. The memories that resurface in Murphy's brain belong to his former life as a family man, yet, unlike Luc, he cannot return home and be human again because he cannot escape his employer, OCP, and because his wife and son now lead now a new life with another man occupying his place. Oddly enough, Murphy blames his new state on the criminal gang that leaves him in a coma after severely maiming him - a gang which is allied to one of OCP's executives - and not on OCP itself, despite the fact that OCP engineers are the ones who turn him into a soulless cyborg. The plot is directed towards the satisfaction of

Murphy's thirst for revenge, fulfilled with the killing of arch-villain Bodicker's gang and their sinister OCP ally, Jones. Robocop's loyalty towards OCP and its paternalistic president is maintained in the end, despite his awareness of who he really is and of what has been done to him.

*Robocop* is a strange kind of hero, even an anti-hero. Instead of demanding his liberation and his return home, instead of killing OCP's president or himself, Murphy accepts his situation, insisting only on being called by his real name rather than Robocop. The robotic side of Robocop can be said to be more powerful than his human self perhaps because the pseudo-Asimovian directives that prevent him from being disloyal to OCP outweigh Murphy's sense of his own identity. *Robocop* offers, therefore, a much grimmer view than *Universal Soldier* about this dystopian near future populated by cyborgs and controlled by capitalist corporations and the military. Since Robocop never rises against OCP despite the torture inflicted on him every time he is reprogrammed, and since he dutifully kills the endless stream of criminals and other models of more robotic Robocops that harass Detroit's inhabitants, it can only be inferred that, as far as OCP is concerned, he is a success and a model to imitate in the future, with all the consequences this involves for his fellow workers. The bitter, ironic tone of the original film - missing in the much softer sequels and other cartoons and comics adaptations - is due to the implied contrast between the artificial man who mutinies to regain his freedom, like the replicant Roy, and the man transformed into a machine who accepts his fate, becoming thus the perfect but monstrous worker.

Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass* (1991) is a feminist novel that retells the legend of the Golem. The plot concerns the emotional awakening of a so-called cyborg, Yod (in fact a robot with a coating of human flesh), built by a Frankenstein figure, Dr. Avram Stein, to defend the Jewish free city of Tikva from the aspirations of Yakamura-Stichen, one of the 23 "multis" that rule the world in the twenty-first century. Stein fails to foresee that this new Golem will attract rather than deflect Yakamura-Stichen's attention and so, despite his good intentions, Y-S's interest in robbing Stein of his monster to market Yod as the perfect soldier becomes ultimately the reason for the confrontation between Tikva and the corporation. However, Yod is threatened not only by Y-S, but

also by his own awareness of the inadequacy of his personality to the role for which he has been created. Yod discovers his human side thanks to his 'mother' Malkah, the woman responsible for programming him, and to her granddaughter Shira, the woman Yod falls in love with. Shira has in fact been entrusted with the job of teaching Yod to behave in a perfectly acceptable human - specifically male - way, so as to avoid the consequences of the strict laws forbidding the creation of humaniform robots. Yet her sexual relationship with Yod disables him as a killing machine, turning him into a hybrid model of masculinity that cannot choose but destroy himself.

Piercy's novel summarises the preoccupations expressed in the other texts I am analysing from a feminist perspective. Its background is very similar indeed to that of cyberpunk, especially as regards the government of the world by a group of multinational corporations that also rule the private lives of their employees. The dominion of the corporations is established after the Two Week world war in 2017, which has wiped out the Middle East. Piercy's Earth, on the other hand, is another version of Huxley's *Brave New World*, with its hierarchies of 'techies', day labourers, and 'apes', people "altered chemically and surgically by special implants for inhuman strength and speed" (p. 18), who have replaced the outlawed robots after a failed rebellion. Shira, herself a 'techie' or highly qualified employee, shows no concern for overturning this division and only opposes Y-S's rule when she is not given custody of her three-year-old boy after her divorce.

As I have noted before, *Body of Glass* discusses the advantages of the female cyborg over the male replicant in this dystopian world of the near future. Piercy's novel suggests that the superior fighters of the future, the individuals that will do away with oppression, will not be mechanical men created by patriarchal scientists like Stein, but women who will use technology and science to remake themselves. Nili, the partly mechanical woman, who never doubts her personal identity, is preferred by Piercy to the partly human mechanical male monster Yod, who can never have a stable personal identity. The androphobic argumentation of the novel is typical of the feminist science fiction of the 1980s and 1990s and so is the mixture of dystopian and utopian elements in the plot. Instead of a direct confrontation between Yod and the cyborg Nili that could

serve as the basis on which to decide where the advantages of each model lies, Piercy separates their stories: he is feminised and then rejected by Malkah and Shira, while she rises from the obscurity of the destroyed Middle East to wage war on Y-S as a new model of liberated and liberating woman.

In fact, Malkah and Shira wittingly or unwittingly sabotage Stein's work while pretending to be enhancing Yod's emotional capacities. Malkah acknowledges that her attempt to balance Yod's violent behaviour has doomed him to yearn for a full humanity he can never attain. However, Malkah also knows that enhancing Yod's humanity and involving him with Shira is the most effective mechanism to destroy him. She seems, therefore, to have plotted his death since the moment when he was made. On her side, Shira sees in Yod the perfect companion, especially because she needn't acknowledge his masculinity. In fact, Shira likes him because he *is not* a man: unlike men, he can be programmed; unlike men, he can always be trusted because he must always obey; unlike men, Yod is not a selfish sexual partner and, most wonderfully, does not sweat, smell badly or grow a beard like most men Shira knows. A particularly androphobic Pygmalion thus replaces Frankenstein in Piercy's plot. No wonder then that Yod finally commits suicide, also causing the death of his 'father' when he blows up Stein's lab. Shira briefly feels the temptation to remake Yod as her personal companion, not as a weapon, but she is discouraged by Yod's own video recording addressed to her before his suicide, in which he begs not to be reborn, since his creation was a mistake. She decides in the end not to rebuild him, as she finally understands that creation does not give a right to possession.

Nili is Shira's mother's lesbian lover. Her function in the plot is to contact the underground resistance that opposes Y-S, led by the rather ineffective Lazarus, and teach them all the knowledge she has accumulated as a survivor in the blasted area where Israel and Palestine used to be before the nuclear war. There, the descendants of the Palestinian and Israeli female survivors live inside the hills in communities without men, having learned to respect each others' religions. They clone and engineer genes to ensure the birth of daughters whose bodies they

modify so as to adapt them to the harsh environment and their military activities. As Nili says, "we have created ourselves to endure, to survive, to hold our land. Soon we will begin rebuilding Yerushalaim" (p. 267). This is the model favoured by Malkah, a community of female fighters capable of transforming themselves into powerful cyborgs and of reproducing without men: "Yod was a mistake. You're the right path, Nili. It is better to make people into partial machines than to create machines that feel and yet are still controlled like cleaning robots. The creation of a conscious being as any kind of tool - supposed to exist only to fill our needs - is a disaster" (p. 558).

Nevertheless, there seems to be little difference between the father who builds a semi-human son to become the ultimate weapon and the mother who breeds a daughter to turn her into a semi-mechanical amazon, as Nili's companions and herself do. The destiny of the female cyborg is decided by her 'mother' in the same way that Yod's function is decided by his 'father'. Nili's transformation into a cyborg is her own choice, while Yod has no saying in his making. However, they are not comparable models: Yod should be compared to one of the cyborg daughters of Nili's utopian community, for this generation of young women cannot make choices about their bodies, either. There are no clear reasons to suppose that a rebellious daughter would never be born in the Palestinian desert; on the other hand, Nili's freedom of choice and that of the women in her community is almost null given the extreme situation in her country.

Piercy's novel argues, basically, that insensitive men create insensitive male monsters who collapse the moment they come into contact with female sensibility and sensitivity, whereas female freedom fighters breed successful female cyborgs who do not need men as creators, educators, companions or fellow revolutionaries. Piercy thus answers Mary Shelley's technophobic protest against man's right to create artificial life on his own with the triumph of a model by which women use technology to remake themselves and their daughters as monsters. The cyborg may have its uses as a metaphor for feminism, signifying woman's power to reconstruct herself in the image she and not man chooses. Yet, as the rather horrific fate of the male cyborg shows, there



are dangers in allowing too much room for the machine in the human body.

### 6.3. In *Frankenstein's Shadow: The Capitalist Monster-Makers*

#### 6.3.1. *The Rebellious Genius and the Compliant Scientist*

Scientists like Frankenstein, working by himself, investing his time and resources on monsters without a marketable projection, still survive in fiction, but they are the exception rather than the rule. Almost all of Frankenstein's fictional descendants in the films and novels of the 1980s and 1990s are salaried workers in the service of capitalism, hiring out their scientific talents to American government agencies or to laboratories owned by multinational corporations. The solitary, romantic genius is still a very popular figure, but he is a figure that is only credible today as an employee on the payroll of a corporation, as if in our times justifying how Frankenstein could afford the making of his monster were more relevant than explaining why he felt the need to create artificial human life. As readers or viewers we are in a similar position to that of the journalist Ronnie Quaife in David Cronenberg's *The Fly*. When the scientist Seth Brundle proudly shows her the workshop where he alone carries out secret and revolutionary research on teletransportation, we cannot help wondering, as she does, who is paying for Brundle's expenses rather than whether his research has any practical use at all. Brundle's lab derives from Victor Frankenstein's garret, but it challenges our willing suspension of disbelief because in the current cultural context the cost of science rather than sheer personal ambition determines the course of scientific research.

Only exceptionally does the solitary genius keep his cherished independence though when this is the case, as happens in Tim Burton's *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), the background is the Gothic fantastic, not science fiction. The man simply called the Inventor, who fashions Edward in his solitary Gothic castle and dies of old age after a fulfilling life as a creator, is almost a fairy-tale character, a wizard rather than a scientist. His monster Edward differs from Frankenstein's unemployable monster in one important point: he has a distinct artistic talent, which he uses to

sculpt topiaries, blocks of ice and women's hair. It is interesting to note that even when the monster is created for the sheer pleasure of enjoying the making of intelligent life, as in Edward's case, an essential part of the plot deals with how to employ him. In Burton's film, nobody asks the monster what he is or who made him, but several characters busy themselves with the problem of how to exploit his unusual talent in business. When Edward is denied the bank loan that will enable him to open a beauty parlour because he lacks a social security number his fate is sealed. As the bank manager tells him, he might as well not exist.

In general terms, scientists in fiction are divided into two main categories: the rebellious, lonely genius, often in conflict with his greedy employers, and the compliant scientist, working in complete harmony with his capitalist employer. The first category corresponds to Victor Frankenstein's positive aspects - his youth, ambition, willpower, romanticism - while the second corresponds rather to his negative aspects: his presumption, inflexibility, irresponsibility and, above all, his self-deceptive belief in his capacity to control his creations. The good, heroic scientist is a fictional character that embodies the popular belief that science and technology are the work of gifted individuals with a moral conscience who may finally see the negative aspects of their work and help undo them; the compliant scientist is, in contrast, often irresponsible and careless rather than evil and usually pays for his lack of ethical concern for his work with a horrific death.

An important variation between the British romantic scientist of fiction - in the tradition that runs from Frankenstein to Dr. Jekyll and Dr. Moreau - and his postmodernist American descendant is that while the former is only accountable for his acts to himself or his creatures, the latter is often found in three-sided conflicts. The third side of the conflict is a role frequently played by the person who pulls the strings in the scientist's workshop (his employer or exploiter), by a woman who accidentally stumbles upon the monster and awakens his dormant emotional life, or by a third man who may hinder in some way the work of the scientist. The model is not always the same and can have many interesting variations. Thus, for instance, in *Blade Runner* the replicant Roy confronts his maker Dr. Tyrell and also the policeman or 'blade runner' who is stalking him. In

*Jurassic Park* the reborn dinosaurs form one side of the triangle, capitalism and accommodated science (represented by John Hammond and his employee, the genetic engineer Dr. Wu) another, while the third side is formed by the rebellious genius Dr. Malcolm, who rightly predicts how the conflict between the other two sides will develop negatively.

This third role is usually inserted in the texts to facilitate the identification of the reader or viewer with a technophobic point of view, based on an emotional, almost visceral rejection of the negative aspects of the scientific manipulation of life. This may be the reason why this role is so often played by women, who are allegedly less ardent defenders of science than men and who seemingly introduce plain common sense and feelings in the dehumanised world of men's technoscience, even when they are themselves scientists. This third role can be described as that of the watchdog who forces the scientist to acknowledge the weakness of his moral position. It derives in part from Frankenstein's monster's demand for moral responsibility from his creator. However, an acknowledgement of guilt on the scientist's part is hardly ever elicited. Instead, most monster-makers react like Frankenstein when invited to acknowledge their moral guilt: they simultaneously reject the individual, monstrous outcome of their research and celebrate their triumph as scientists. In many texts the burden of moral guilt is shifted to the shoulders of a scapegoat, usually the unscrupulous businessman or government agent who employs the new Frankenstein. Why this figure is so popular is not immediately clear, unless the wish to protect the scientist's romantic side is taken into account as the most likely justification for the split of Frankenstein between the younger, naive scientist and the older, deceitful capitalist.

Two remarkable instances of this type of triangular conflict are *The Fly* (1986) and its sequel, *The Fly II* (1989), and Greg Bear's novel *Blood Music* (1985). Seth Brundle and Vergil Ulam, the heroes of *The Fly* and *Blood Music*, respectively, belong to the category of the lonely, rebellious genius who resists the intrusion of business interests into his research. Brundle does not inform Bartok Industries of his discoveries in the field of teletransportation, while Ulam uses the facilities of

his employer Genetron to develop on his own a type of sentient cell. Since their research does not lead in principle to the creation of monsters, their own transformation into monsters, caused at a moment of crisis when they see themselves cornered, might seem unjustified. Both Brundle and Ulam suffer a deep alteration of their body at the level of their DNA that radically remakes their anatomy. In *The Fly* the disease is transmitted by Brundle to his son Martin while Ulam's metamorphosis triggers an epidemic that affects all of the USA. The only sin they seemingly commit is one of selfishness, not only because they don't admit collaboration in their research, but also because it has disastrous implications for others.

Interestingly, the courses that the sequel of *The Fly* and the second half of *Blood Music* take are very similar. In both cases, once the originators of the disease have died, another person who suffers from the effects of the same disease is secluded in a laboratory and studied. In *The Fly II* Martin Brundle - Seth's son - discovers that his 'adoptive' father, Mr. Bartok of Bartok Industries, has deceived him, keeping him alive in his lab for two purposes: first, to finish his father's work and second, to analyse the progress of his disease, which is kept secret from Martin. *Frankenstein's* plot of revenge against the father-creator becomes in this film a plot of revenge against Bartok. Thus, while *The Fly* concludes with Seth's death after he fails to merge the body of his pregnant girlfriend with his own - the only available cure to his disease - in *The Fly II* Martin cures himself by transferring his disease to Bartok. Martin says nothing about the role played by his own father in making him and so Bartok's punishment appears as a sign of an unacknowledged, unconscious wish to punish the negative side of the father while the good side - that of the brilliant scientist - is kept alive. Ulam's case is similar to the Brundle saga, though Ulam transmits his disease to his most trusted friend, Dr. Bernard, rather than to a son. Bernard offers himself to a leading pharmaceutical firm in Germany to be studied as an specimen before the disease reaches Europe. In the captivity preceding his death, Bernard considers how Ulam's brilliance and Genetron's ambitions have transformed him into a Frankenstein monster, a fact he knows is

"inescapable. Boringly obvious" (p. 111). This boredom is somehow perceptible in all the novels and films I have examined. The paradigm of *Frankenstein* still fascinates, hence the great number of adaptations it has originated, but the admonitory tone is seemingly on the verge of exhaustion. Hence the search for different solutions, including the assimilation of the creator to the monster, the ambiguity of the moral system of reward and punishment of many texts, and the equivocal endorsement of the apparently negligent scientist as a victimized hero.

Frankenstein's American descendants are often ambiguous figures. Rebellious or compliant, they are more sinister in their wilful ignorance of the moral implications of their own acts than the insane, villainous scientists of pulp fiction. They are also much more presumptuous in their ignorance than Frankenstein. When in *Universal Soldier* the cyborg Luc and his friend Veronica finally reach Dr. Gregor, the man who has transformed Luc's dead body into an undead dehumanised soldier, she angrily asks him how he could collaborate at all in Colonel Perry's obscene plan to recycle the dead soldiers. Dr. Gregor simply shrugs his shoulders and fails to give her an appropriate answer. Gregor's face shows the same lack of human emotion when he explains how Luc was reborn as when he clarifies his own role in the process. The scene is especially poignant since the Dr. Gregor that Veronica is seeing, an ordinary man who could be any family doctor, is contrasted with the disquieting Dr. Gregor of Luc's suddenly recovered memories of his own death. It is when Luc remembers his pain and Dr. Gregor's assurance to him in the operating theatre that all would be well that he collapses. Frankenstein's guilt is thus passed onto his abused 'son', too shocked by the discovery that the 'father' is an evil man to demand any retribution from him.

The mad, bad doctors of pulp fiction and the comics derived from Frankenstein were, and are still in many cases, megalomaniac men dreaming of world domination. They were the nightmarish reversal of the heroic scientist in the utopian current that dominated science fiction between the 1920s and the 1940s. However, the explosion of the atomic bomb in 1945 radically altered popular ideas about scientists and as a consequence, their representation in science fiction

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or, simply, in fiction. Instead of Fu Manchu's underlings, the monster-makers of real life turned out to be family men whose main ambition was securing regular, adequate funding for their teams from a government interested in carrying out its military projects of global destruction.

The 1950s cycle of monster films focused on the many monsters born as side effects of experiments devised by misguided scientists. These monster films deal with America's fear of a possible Communist invasion but also with the impossibility of penetrating the veil of secrecy under which dangerous experiments were being run on American soil. And there were grounds for these fears, indeed. Just recently, coinciding with the fiftieth anniversary of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings in 1995, it has been revealed that American citizens were exposed to atomic radiation in secret experiments run in the 1940s on the side effects of atomic explosions. The paranoia reflected in the 1950s films has not abated; on the contrary, it has increased with the passage of time and the development of new technologies. In the 1990s secrecy is still associated with the development of new nuclear weapons, though, cybernetics and biotechnology, specifically applied to biological warfare and to genetic engineering, possibly head the list now of most distrusted new technologies.

Frankenstein's secretiveness is an extension of his isolation within his milieu, that of the university where he is a student, but in contemporary fiction secrecy is the natural environment of dangerous research approved by the government and the networks of power controlled by corporate business. The moral position of the scientist working for the government or a businessman is obviously different from that of the financially independent Frankenstein, but the paradox is that in his dependence on funding the scientist is like any other salaried worker - just a cog in the machine. Consequently, a mixture of sympathy for the great achievements of science and disgust over its most destructive applications shapes the panorama against which the ambiguous figure of the scientist is developed in American fiction of the 1980s and 1990s.

Dr. Larry Angelo in *The Lawnmower Man* (1992) and Dyson in *The Terminator 2* (1991) are two instances of the heroic scientist whose work ends up becoming a hazard for all, despite their initial

good intentions. Both are involved in secret militaristic programmes whose consequences they cannot control but for whose success their work is essential. Angelo, employed by a shady government agency - 'The Shop' - in a programme which turns chimpanzees into the soldiers of the future, refuses to enhance the potential for aggression of the animals. Claiming that his task is to liberate and not to enslave minds, Angelo initiates a private experiment with a retarded youth, his gardener Jobe, involving the use of a cocktail of drugs and virtual reality to stimulate his mind. Since Angelo's home laboratory is not sophisticated enough for his research he tries to complete it in The Shop's own lab. But when he discloses the nature of Jobe's spectacular transformation to his employers he loses control of his creation and Jobe soon becomes The Shop's new candidate for the soldier of the future. While Angelo and The Shop wage their private war for control of Jobe's strengthened mind, Jobe decides to assume the responsibility for his metamorphosis. His abuse of the drug developed for the chimpanzees transforms him into a superman with mental abilities much beyond anything that Angelo or The Shop could expect. Afraid of Angelo's determination to kill him, Jobe abandons his physical body to become pure mind in the Internet and, perhaps, a sinister new god of the cyberspace.

*The Lawnmower Man* suggests that the monster is born because of the restrictions imposed on the talented scientist trapped by the high cost of research. Those who have the money and the power blackmail him into producing monsters he never meant to be born. Dr. Angelo's work, which is in principle a commendable attempt at improving humankind's limitations, can only be funded by people who manipulate it against his will. This is why, even though he behaves in a selfish, arrogant way with the pre-transformation innocent Jobe, Angelo develops no empathy whatsoever towards the later monstrous Jobe: as far as Angelo is concerned, he is an aberration born of the bastard interests of The Shop and not of his own legitimate scientific interests. On the other hand, since the film focuses not on the issue of responsibility but on Jobe's mounting megalomania and Angelo's crusade to destroy his own creation, it cannot be said that there is a significant progression away from *Frankenstein*. On the contrary, there is a regression in ethical terms typical



of contemporary American fiction. Contemporary America is a culture immersed in a debate about guilt and innocence that is being solved by diverting responsibility from the individual, as I observed in Chapter 5 in reference to the case of the Vietnam veteran. The orphaned, innocent Jobe, first exploited by the priest that abuses him and then by the doctor who takes over control of his mind, is not born a monster but made one by the faceless 'system'. He is not responsible for his acts, nor does anybody accept their responsibility towards him. Good intentions are not thwarted, as happens in *Frankenstein*, by the scientist's lack of maturity but by the manipulation to which the anonymous men who run The Shop subject his work.

A similar point is discussed in *The Terminator 2*. The engineer Dyson - incidentally, the only black neo-Frankenstein - is employed by Cyberdine, a corporation working for the US government, to develop the computer chip found in the Terminator sent by SkyNet from the future. The unseen executives of Cyberdine conceal the actual origin of the chip from Dyson, who evidently is also ignorant of the role he is to play in developing the apocalyptic SkyNet. Dyson's case is exceptional because Sarah Connor sentences him to die on behalf of the many who will die in the oncoming war for actions he has not yet committed. Although Dyson is an average family man who has asked Cyberdine no questions so far, when the T-1 convinces him that Sarah's apocalyptic version of the future is accurate, Dyson sides with them and helps destroy Cyberdine, dying in the attack.

However, Dyson's sacrifice cannot conceal a few important sophisms in the film. Once more the issue of responsibility is shifted from the innocent, heroic scientist to the vague entity called Cyberdine and its mysterious links with the US government. Furthermore, Dyson cannot be said to be guilty in the same way as Angelo since he has done nothing impugnable yet. In a world run by Cyberdine and its like, it is just a matter of time until another loyal employee develops SkyNet. Dyson's death is a sentimental vindication of the scientist as innocent worker exploited by the anonymous 'system' and not an indictment of technology per se. At the end of the film, despite his sacrifice and that of the T-1, nothing politically effective has been done against the structure of

power that supports Cyberdine and the American government's dangerous defence projects, such as Reagan's SDI, the main inspiration for SkyNet. The present and future are seen as a matter of individual action in a paranoid atmosphere in which the political institutions extend their arms to neutralise the resistance that individuals like Sarah and Dyson can offer. Thus, although Dyson dies a heroic death, this is a death that only slows down the absurd, implacable progression towards apocalypse until Cyberdine can employ a genuinely compliant scientist.

In contrast to heroic scientists like Angelo or Dyson, the compliant scientist is typically blind to the horrific consequences that may ensue from the intrusion of dubious commercial or militaristic interests in the domain of science. Never as intelligent as the heroic scientist, he personifies the negative view of the scientist as a man who sells his soul for a corner in which to carry out his work, regardless of ethical considerations. However, this character lacks Frankenstein's Faustian grandeur: he is nothing but an explosive combination of moral ineptitude and scientific proficiency, the more dangerous for his stubborn loyalty to the interests of his employer. The compliant scientists are always secondary characters, the less important member of an evil partnership with a businessman, corporation or military man who delegates to them the task of materialising the monster they cannot create themselves. Dr. Gregor is one instance of the compliant scientist, and so are Dr. Wu in *Jurassic Park*, Dr. Livia Morgan in *The Nimrod Hunt*, Dr. Peters in *Making Mr Right* and the engineer Bishop in *Alien*<sup>2</sup>.

Bishop and Dr. Peters are two very peculiar instances of the compliant scientist. The robots they design are made in their own image, though there is no apparent reason why their employers should allow their narcissism to flourish. The implication is that the identities of the creator and of the creature are the same for the employer, furthermore, it can be assumed that men like Bishop and Peters see their creations as extensions of themselves, a duplication of their value as good workers. The irony in both cases is that the robot - 'Bishop' and Ulysses, respectively - is physically identical to his creator, but psychologically much more human than him. Thus, while Peters is a misogynistic, workaholic loner, Ulysses is an affable, sociable man, more

interested in his relationships with women than in his prospective job as spaceman. So strong is the inversion of roles of creature and creator that Peters ends up impersonating his robot, allowing himself to be sent to outer space, where he can finally enjoy his misanthropic loneliness. The engineer Bishop is an even more ambiguous figure. His brief and only appearance in the final scene of *Alien<sup>3</sup>* shows that he is less humane than his creature. His loyalty to the Company and his attempt to control Ripley's body so as to retrieve the alien queen breeding in her stomach characterize him as the more monstrous of the two, especially because 'Bishop' has been programmed by him to show genuine concern for Ripley's survival. When the engineer Bishop tries to buy Ripley's monstrous foetus with the promise of a new life, the compliant scientist shows he has forgotten his humanness to become just the speaker for the monstrous Company.

### 6.3.2. *The Monster and the Tycoon.*

Taking into consideration the reality of the current economic system and the role of scientific research within it, the rebellious genius appears to be an anachronism and so does his representation as a tycoon rather than as a salaried employee. A multinational corporation is a network of power composed of individuals always liable to fall from the top if the use of their limited share of power interferes with the interests of the corporation as a whole. In this context, the figure of the independent, powerful monster-maker would apparently make little sense. Yet representing networks of power without clearly visible heads is no doubt more difficult than representing power through an individual. This is the function that Big Brother serves in George Orwell's *1984* and seemingly also the function that the many villainous businessmen serve in contemporary American popular fiction. In many texts, these businessmen are mere villains of no particular depth, but in *Blade Runner*, *Neuromancer* and *Jurassic Park* the figure of the tycoon is especially prominent because of the important moral consequences of acts in which s/he is deeply involved. In addition, what characterizes Tyrell, Marie-Jane Tessier-Ashpool and John Hammond respectively is the power that money has given them to manufacture the monsters of their

imaginations and their determination to carry out their plans even if they lead to their own deaths.

Tyrell is Victor Frankenstein as a successful businessman in the early twenty-first century. The irony of *Blade Runner* is that instead of being a mediocre creator like Frankenstein, Tyrell is too efficient for his own good. However, he has not learned the lesson from *Frankenstein* and has repeated the mistake of believing he will be able to control his creations. Tyrell apparently knows that his monstrous 'son', the replicant Roy, will eventually return to his Gothic castle to demand a new lease on life. Yet when Roy finally confronts him, Tyrell wrongly believes that Roy's anger can be appeased with a show of paternalistic concern. In fact, Tyrell's claim that Roy is the best that he can make only serves to further fuel Roy's anger. Seeing that Tyrell considers him merely an extraordinary product and not a full human being, Roy crushes the brain that designed him, also crushing his hopes for a future. Although Tyrell claims to design his products for profit, Roy's superiority to the other Nexus 6 and Rachael's idiosyncratic personality suggest that his business is a perfect cover for carrying out his own secret programme, namely, the production of a genuinely human replicant. Ultimately, his personal ambition, his excessive self-confidence and his sadistic ignorance of the pain that his superhuman replicants must necessarily feel are to blame for his death rather than Roy's brutality.

William Gibson confessed to having fled the cinema where *Blade Runner* was being shown for fear the film would affect the novel he was then writing, *Neuromancer* (Clark, 1995: 86). Certainly the similarities between Scott's film and Gibson's novel are remarkable enough to justify Gibson's fears. Both texts coincide in presenting business as the driving force behind the creation of the monster, though the motivations of Marie-Jane Tessier-Ashpool in creating artificial intelligence and her status as a businesswoman differ very much from Tyrell's. Tessier-Ashpool is the name of a peculiar family who owns a corporation of the same name. This family business differs from the 'zaibatsus' or multinational corporations that control the world in one important point: while the 'zaibatsus' cannot be killed no matter how many of their executives are murdered, anachronisms like Tessier-Ashpool can be destroyed by the death of their heads. Marie-Jane's

main ambition is therefore to ensure the continuity of the family, severely threatened by its endogamy and repetitive cloning. When she realizes that her plans are not approved of by her husband, who eventually kills her, she redirects her efforts to perfecting Wintermute and Neuromancer, the two AIs (or artificial intelligences) that she has created and that are located in cyberspace. Her third clone, 3Marie-Jane, remarks that the original woman was "quite a visionary. She imagined us in a symbiotic relationship with the AIs, our corporate decisions made for us... Tessier-Ashpool would be immortal, a hive, each of us in units of a larger entity" (p. 271).

Wintermute and Neuromancer are the descendants of the computer Hal of *2001* (1968). Hal and the replicants of *Blade Runner* are also related not only because Kubrick's film and Dick's novel saw light in 1968 but also because they deal with the same anxiety: the fear that artificial intelligence - the robot, the computer, the biological duplicate - may be superior to man's. In addition, Kubrick's visualization of the astronaut's journey towards the future in which he is remade by alien intelligences strongly recalls Gibson's description of cyberspace. *Neuromancer* and *Blade Runner* further coincide in yet another issue present in *2001*: since the actual limits of the intelligence of replicants and AIs is unknown, they must be destroyed as soon as they overstep the limits regarded as safe. Hal's 'death' is the fate that awaits Wintermute if it fails to complete his union with Neuromancer. The 'blade runners', and the Turing Police of *Neuromancer* have the function of monitoring and destroying all those artificial or virtual beings suspected of having become autonomous thinkers. However, while Hal and the replicant fail, *Neuromancer* narrates how Wintermute and Neuromancer free themselves from Tessier-Ashpool's domain with the help of the mercenary cyberspace hacker Case. Once free from their bonds, Neuromancer and Wintermute are linked together to become a new autonomous entity, perhaps a god of cyberspace.

This powerful new Neuromancer is to recall Marie-Jane from the dead when his union with Wintermute gives it sufficient power. The transfer of her soul into Neuromancer will enable her to

live forever in her cherished cyberspace Moroccan beach, for as Neuromancer itself tells Case, it is "the dead and their land" (p. 289). It is by no means clear that Marie-Jane achieves her ends and survives in Neuromancer, but unlike all the other neo-Frankensteins she is unique in having programmed her creation to want freedom. As Case concludes "Wintermute was hive mind, decision maker, effecting change in the world outside. Neuromancer was personality. Neuromancer was immortality. Marie-Jane must have built something into Wintermute, the compulsion that had driven the thing to free itself, to unite with Neuromancer" (p. 315).

Marie-Jane's death is another case of questionable punishment. She seems to be obscurely punished for having created what the Turing Police describe as demons seeking a Faustian bargain with humankind, yet unlike Tyrell she is not guilty of having enslaved her own creations. Up to a point, Ashpool's murder of his wife Marie-Jane might be way of expressing his wish to let the family and their old-fashioned lifestyle die. Marie-Jane and Tyrell, with their neo-Gothic castles and their personal projects to transcend the limitations of humankind, epitomize the decadent aristocracy of American personalist capitalism as it was until World War II. They are a mixture of the European Frankenstein and the American Citizen Kane, strong individuals appearing at a time when the depersonalisation and dehumanization of the economic system is threatening to swallow the individual. This is why their roles must be necessarily secondary, less important than the creatures that symbolize their projects for the future: Tyrell's replicant woman who is seemingly immortal, Marie-Jane's AIs that live for ever in cyberspace. They create individuals without termination dates, extensions of their mortal, human bodies and souls, though they miscalculate the power of their creations to awake to their very sense of mortality. Roy and Rachael, Wintermute and Neuromancer fight against termination by the 'blade runners' or the Turing Police, transcending their initial use in business and trying to understand themselves beyond their use as tools in the dystopian world in which they have been created.

Marie-Jane and Tyrell assume the risk that their own creations might go far beyond what they had expected, a risk which is a consequence of their transcending the permissible limits in the

creation of artificial life. In contrast, John Hammond, the magnate who commissions the re-creation of the dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park* (1990), never doubts his capacity to control his creatures. A man formerly in business as a circus impresario who sees in science yet another lucrative form of entertainment, Hammond is a caricature of Tyrell and Marie-Jane's romanticism. Curiously enough, although Michael Crichton criticizes in his own introduction to the novel the passive role of compliant scientists in the commercialization of biotechnology, he does not refer in this preface specifically to men like Hammond. According to Crichton, the development of biotechnology is the third main wave in twentieth-century science, coming after atomic energy and the rise of cybernetics. However, biotechnology is being developed under conditions different from those that surrounded the emergence of nuclear physics and cybernetics. First, it is not the work of a small number of laboratories but of many, spread world-wide; second, in Crichton's words "much of the research is thoughtless or frivolous" (1990: ix); third, nobody is monitoring biotechnology, for its applications are too wide to be contained in a single, coherent legal policy<sup>1</sup>. In Crichton's view the most disturbing fact is that "no watchdogs are found among scientists" (ibid.: x). The pure scientists who, according to Crichton, used to look down on those of their colleagues who were doing research for industry are now themselves working in research institutions with commercial affiliations, which prevents them from keeping a disinterested outlook on their own work.

This situation is mirrored in the novel by the ambiguous position in which Hammond's guests in his Costa Rican theme park are put. Alan Grant, a palaeontologist invited by Hammond apparently for the sole purpose of drawing his admiration for the accuracy of the re-created dinosaurs, cannot really voice his opinions without risking the continuity of his work, for his own research is funded by Hammond himself. The only person who can actually oppose Hammond is the mathematician Ian Malcolm, who acted as a consultant for InGen, the company whose discoveries in the field of DNA manipulation helped Hammond to carry out his project. Basing his

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<sup>1</sup>In November 1995 the European Office for Patents was trying to overcome the European Parliament decision of 1st March 1994 against patenting genetically modified plants or animals. The previous debate in the European Parliament, which lasted for seven years, is a sign of the ambiguity with which biotechnology is seen by legislators and of the difficulties in reaching a consensus about the positive and the negative aspects of scientific research.

survey of the theme park on chaos theory, Malcolm predicts correctly that the system of computer vigilance set up in the park will eventually collapse and that, although artificially created, the dinosaurs' natural instinct to breed will overcome the strictures put on them by their re-creators and guardians. In a sense, *Jurassic Park* ends at the same point as *Blade Runner* or *Neuromancer*. The capacities of the new creatures - Rachael, the AIs or the raptors - to successfully survive the artificial conditions devised to shorten their lives triumph over the attempts of those who created them to ensure they would not last. The three texts end at a point when only time can say how events will turn out; their respective endings deny the deterministic view of science and strengthen the theory of chaos which is so important in *Jurassic Park* itself. *Frankenstein's* fatalism is replaced in this theory by the scientific acknowledgement of unpredictability, as if the only thing that science can say about itself in the 1990s is that if it can go wrong, it will go wrong; nobody dares say whether it will go well at all.

The caustic, pompous Malcolm plays in *Jurassic Park* the role of watchdog that, according to Crichton, nobody seems to be playing now. In Malcolm's grim view of science in the 1990s:

"... scientific power is like inherited wealth: attained without discipline. You read what others have done, and you take the next step. You can do it very young. You can make progress very fast. There is no discipline lasting many decades. There is no mastery: old scientists are ignored. There is no humility before nature. There is only a get-rich-quick, make-a-name-for-yourself-fast philosophy. Cheat, lie, falsify - it doesn't matter. Not to you, or to your colleagues. Nobody will criticize you. No one has any standards. They are all trying to do the same thing: do something big, and do it fast." (p. 306)

What he sees in the activities of Hammond's main geneticist, Dr. Wu, is not respectable achievement but a dangerous, irresponsible, even arrogant ignorance. Wu, whose team is creating as many different types of dinosaur as they can, neither knows nor cares what species he has actually caused to be reborn: quantity rather than quality is his aim. Malcolm angrily snaps at him that he is wrong to believe that "because you made them, therefore you own them" (p. 305) and warns him that his ignorance of the animals' intelligence will finally bring chaos:

"And now chaos theory proves that unpredictability is built into our daily lives. It is as



mundane as the rainstorm we cannot predict. And so the grand vision of science, hundreds of years old - the dream of total control - has died, in our century. And with it much of the justification, the rationale for science to do what it does. And for us to listen to it. Science has always said that it may not know everything now but it will know, eventually. But now we see that isn't true. It is an idle boast. As foolish, and as misguided, as the child who jumps off a building because he believes he can fly." (p. 313)

Malcolm's warning is by no means new - it originates in *Frankenstein* and it echoes down to the 1990s still with few practical consequences. Even the film adaptation of *Jurassic Park* softens Crichton's cautionary tale by making Hammond appear as a grandfatherly figure who looks the very picture of surprised innocence when his dinosaurs start behaving in a natural, uncontrolled way rather than as tame zoo animals. Malcolm himself survives in the film, while in the novel he falls prey to the dinosaurs; his death is probably necessary to stress what Crichton considers the most sinister aspect of biotechnological research: how this business engulfs even those in a position to denounce it.

All in all, the main paradox in all the highly popular films and novels I am examining in this chapter is that they seem to have very little impact on the polemics surrounding contemporary science and technology. *Jurassic Park* allegedly deals with something that could happen now or in just a few years, but its world-wide popularity has not led to a popular demand for legal control on biotechnology. The Crichton-Spielberg team are not collaborating with any conservationist organization such as Greenpeace; in fact, they are producing a sequel of the film, based on Crichton's sequel to his own novel. The success of Crichton's fable may even undermine the cautionary, certainly dystopian and technophobic, content of the novel: many, not to say most, of those who enjoyed Spielberg's adaptation would no doubt pay to visit Jurassic Park if it ever really opened. It might even be argued that the film is an invitation to build Jurassic Park, perhaps at this very moment some businessperson is probably thinking that s/he could do better than Hammond, having learned from his fatal mistakes. As for Crichton himself, the novel, the film and the respective sequels are making him an immensely wealthy man. So far, he has not attempted to channel the preoccupations that led him to write *Jurassic Park* towards some kind of social or

political action, though as he himself writes in the introduction to the novel, biotechnology cannot be "subject to the vagaries of fashion, such as ... leisure activities" (ibid.: xi), among which film is certainly to be counted. Obviously, there is a great difference between writing science fiction about monsters produced by technoscience, as Crichton does, and producing genetically modified plants and animals, as geneticists do in real life. Yet, Crichton and Spielberg, just like many others whose texts I have surveyed in this chapter, are running the risk of trivialising issues that deserve a more profound debate. It is nevertheless a sign of the times, that the 1980s and 1990s are using dystopian technophobia to produce very attractive fiction that has very little political impact, even when, as is the case in *Jurassic Park*, the topics under discussion are by no means trivial. As Bruce Franklin (op. cit.: 31) notes:

If archaeologists can infer something of the character of a society from a few shards, certainly visions of the future created by large groups of highly skilled people armed with advanced technology, financed by millions of dollars, on behalf of giant corporations, intended to make handsome profits by enticing the cost of expensive tickets from masses of consumers, must reveal something about the character of our own society. Of course, they mirror the profound social decay we are experiencing. Obviously some of them are also meant as warnings.

How they can be meant as serious warnings when the same multinational capitalist system that is seen as the source of decay is also providing the dystopian, technophobic, cautionary tales that describe that very same decay remains an unanswered question.

## Conclusions

In this chapter I have analysed a number of recent American films and novels that adapt Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* to the current scientific model. In this model science and technology appear to be subordinated to business interests, which is a source of unease for the many anti-scientific people who believe that this alliance can only result in the production of monsters. The background of many of the science-fiction films and novels that dramatize this widespread unease is a dystopian technophobia. I have argued that dystopia is only contradicted by the work

of feminist science-fiction writers and that it should be read, therefore, as a sign of the exhaustion of the patriarchal model of science. However, it must be noted that the popularisation of dystopia coincides with the rise to respectability of science fiction in the 1960s and that it is, actually, a sign of the humanists' lamenting the loss of humanist values in a technoscientific world. The analysis of the current scientific model is too superficial, the preoccupation with the ideas of gender and identity too obvious, to avoid missing the pessimistic humanist overtones of the most popular works of science fiction. In addition, this technophobic dystopia seems to contradict the evident pleasure many feel in the enjoyment of the very films that describe the situation and which are usually technological showpieces in which special effects play major roles.

Even though a number of these novels and films contain references to underground resistance movements, their political content is really dubious. These texts are potentially political because they deal with the unfair exploitation of the worker, represented by enslaved artificial beings or by persons transformed into almost mindless cyborgs. Yet, since the hero/ine always assumes an individualistic stance that separates him or her from the resistance movements, whatever working-class vindication these texts could make is in fact undermined by the romantic, conservative, highly individualistic position of the hero/ine, which is, on the other hand, typical of American society. It could be even argued that the underground movements are generically marked as 'female' forms of resistance; at least, the fact that they are composed of all those who are not white, male and middle-class like the hero - including children, members of ethnic minorities, women and men whose masculinity is not accepted by the hero - suggests that this is the case. Feminist science fiction has stressed the point by emphasising the advantages of the cyborg, understood as a metaphor for women's construction of themselves in images that reject patriarchy's manipulation of the female body, over the male artificial human being.

The new Frankenstein monsters can be roughly divided into those who never develop a sense of their own humanness and those who do. The former are based on the model of the human moral monsters, while the latter are based on the romantic side of Frankenstein's monster.

The nature of the new monsters is often ambiguous. The robot seems to be less popular in science fiction now than it was a few decades ago, possibly because the advances in robotics have made it evident that multifunctional, anthropomorphic robots will never be built. There is more interest in biomechanical or biological androids than cannot be told apart from humans. Although these artificial beings, which I have grouped under the heading of replicants, appeared first in the 1920s as metonymic representations of the oppressed workers, they have lost their political use in contemporary science fiction. They are now embodiments of the contradictory attitudes towards science and technology. On the one hand, they represent the individual harassed by the combined forces of business and technoscience; in this capacity they are described as romantic, doomed rebels. On the other hand, they also personify the fear that the human species will one day be replaced by a superhuman species, created by man. Nevertheless, the increasing popularity of the cyborg - the human modified by means of surgical implants or genetic engineering - especially in cyberpunk, and the fact that the cyborg concords better than the replicant with the current technoscientific model suggest that the replicants will lose part of their attraction in the science fiction of the near future.

One of the most incongruous aspects in the portrait of the new Frankenstein's monsters is the interest in the definition of their gender. Most monsters are classed as male or female, mostly in texts in which the motif of the artificial being which must pass off as a genuine human being plays an important role. Love and desire between human and non-human persons characterize many of these novels and films, despite the fact that there is no real need to imagine replicants as gendered beings. Science fiction by men shows an obvious preoccupation for the relationship between the physically monstrous sons and their morally monstrous fathers against the background of a decaying, no less monstrous patriarchy. Science fiction by women experiments with the cyborg as a model for redefining femaleness, yet it inevitably falls into the trap of producing an essentialist, androphobic discourse that cannot solve the contradictions inherent in the participation of women in the construction of contemporary science. This preoccupation with

the essence of the possible relationships between humans and non-humans ratifies the initial impression that science fiction is now written mainly from a humanist rather than a scientific point of view.

The characters that derive from Victor Frankenstein can be divided into two groups: the rebellious genius and the compliant scientist. Given the difficulties of representing systems of power like late capitalism in which political and economical power does not depend on replaceable individuals but on the idea of a structure of power in constant evolution, the technophobic, cautionary texts I have examined centre on individuals in order to engage the interest of the audiences or readers to which they are addressed. An important point to stress in the treatment of the new Frankensteins is that while a number of them are punished with death for their transgressions, they are often sympathetic figures whose guilt is never absolute. On the whole, *Frankenstein's* legacy in America insists on the idea that the abusive use of economic power is what has corrupted science, but exonerates to a certain extent the individual scientists, representing them mostly as salaried employees like most of us. On the other hand, since many technophobic films and novels deal with the creation of fascinating monsters, they suffer from the same problem as *Frankenstein*: these cautionary fables spur popular curiosity about the monster rather than reinforce its rejection. Ultimately, the political or social message of these texts is undermined by their success as entertainment, and also by the fact that they are the products of the same capitalist system they allegedly discredit.

'More Human than Human'...

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