TESI DOCTORAL

Sara Martín Alegre

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

Dirigida per: Dr. Andrew Monnickendam

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Departament de Filologia Anglesa i de Germanística,

Facultat de Lletres,

UNIVERSITAT AUTONOMA DE BARCELONA,

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2.3.2. The Adaptation of Cult Novels and the Angry Reader

So far, I have discussed the cycles of adaptations of the classics of Gothic horror of the nineteenth century until our days and the mechanism by which film series try to develop new paradigmatic monsters. I should like to turn now to the adaptation of contemporary cult novels dealing with monstrosity never transferred before to the screen and that have also failed to satisfy the readers of the original novels, for different reasons. David Lynch's *Dune* (1984), David Cronenberg's *Naked Lunch* (1992) and Neil Jordan's *Interview with the Vampire* (1994), respectively based on cult novels by Frank Herbert (1965), William Burroughs (1959) and Anne Rice (1976), are adaptations that share the particularity of having been scripted by the film director himself and that could also be said to belong to the wave of new Gothic films about monstrosity made by reputable film directors. Unlike *Bram Stoker's Dracula* and *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, which were supposed to attract both the readers of the original novels *and* those familiar with the film versions, the three films by Lynch, Cronenberg and Jordan depended for their success mainly on the readers' familiarity with the novel and even on the approval of the author. *Dune* and *Interview with the Vampire* are directly comparable because both Lynch and Jordan accepted the commission to direct an adaptation aimed at attracting a large audience in which their own personal point of view was a secondary concern, while Cronenberg's film is actually a personal project made without any expectation of making a profit. Needless to say, his is the most idiosyncratic of these three adaptations and the one that responds best to the nature of the original text precisely because of the complete impossibility of being faithful to the complex original text.

"The sheer size of *Dune*'s literary cult," Ed Sikov writes (1995:75), "meant that if the core audience rejected the film it couldn't possibly make its money back." Since Lynch's meticulous but unemotional visualization of *Dune* did displease its core audience (those familiar with the novel) the film became, as Sikov adds, "a gargantuan flop". This could not be redressed by the spectators unfamiliar with the novel, who could not digest the film's rather cryptic summary of

events occupying many pages in the novel. Lynch's film, produced by Dino de Laurentiis as an expensive blockbuster targeting a large audience that could ensure the production of further sequels based on Herbert's series of *Dune* novels (something it failed to do), actually caused the ruin of the producer and is regarded now as a rarity in Lynch's otherwise successful career. In retrospect, it seems apparent that Lynch made the common mistake of relying on spectacular visualization to compensate for the impossibility of making sense of the novel's plot in a two hour film yet, it is also evident now that the failure of the film was due to Lynch's excessive adherence to the literary text. Thus, rather than an adaptation, Lynch's *Dune* can be said to be a good illustration of Herbert's *Dune*.

The Naked Lunch was made mainly because Cronenberg wanted to experiment how far an adaptation could go, especially when the original literary text seemed unfilmable. According to Cronenberg himself, his script counted with Burroughs' blessing, himself an avowed admirer of Cronenberg's work, which allowed the latter to partially disregard the opinion of the film's potential core audience and concentrate on laying siege to Burroughs' immensely complex and challenging work (Rodley, 1992: 157- 172). The adaptation of *The Naked Lunch* was interpreted by Cronenberg with a metaphor taken from one of his most successful films, *The Fly*. Instead of transferring the book intact onto the screen just as Seth Brundle tries to transfer himself from one place to another through teletransportation, Cronenberg imagined his adaptation as the 'monstrous' fusion between Burroughs' literary work and his own. The comparison of his adaptation with *The Fly* in which Seth is fused accidentally with a fly and turned into a monster, suggests that Cronenberg was aware of the risk of begetting a monster - rather than a monster film - and that he approached the film with a certain tongue-in-cheek attitude in complicity with Burroughs himself. The result is a film that can be hardly classified as a successful or a failed adaptation because it is in itself one more of Cronenberg's bizarre discussions of monstrosity rather than an adaptation or even an illustration of Burroughs' text. The question this film begs is why so much effort - especially as far as the

iconography of the monsters in the film is concerned - goes into the production of a film doomed to fail. An appropriate answer could be that Cronenberg has access to the means to satisfy his personal need to visualize a favourite book and transmit his personal view of it, while most readers who would like to do the same simply have no choice in the matter.

The case of *Interview with the Vampire* is different, if only because the screen adaptation has drawn crowds to the cinemas unlike *Dune* or *The Naked Lunch*. Neil Jordan, who had already worked on an adaptation of a literary work in collaboration with the author - *The Company of Wolves*, based on a short story by Angela Carter, who wrote the script with Jordan - found his collaboration with authoress Anne Rice less gratifying. He completely rewrote the script that she had written herself and for that reason or because she felt the natural anxiety felt by an author whose work no longer depends solely on her, she objected to the project on all fronts, especially on the grounds of the alleged miscasting of Tom Cruise as her hero, or rather, anti-hero, the vampire Lestat. After a very active campaign on her side to sink the film before it was even released, she suddenly recanted and published an ad in the Hollywood trade papers, not only accepting the film but commending it and praising, above all, Tom Cruise's performance as Lestat (Retna: 1995). The fact that the ad was later used by the studio that made the film, Warner, suggested to the suspicious-minded that David Geffen, the film producer, had made Rice see the advantages for all of the film becoming a big hit: there were even rumours that Geffen himself had generously funded Rice's expensive ad. *Interview with the Vampire* is the first of a series of four novels - the others are *The Vampire Lestat, The Tale of the Body Thief* and *Queen of the Night* - that had sold millions before Jordan's film but whose sales rocketed after its release. There is then an enormous potential business in the exploitation of the three sequels to the original novel that Rice had jeopardised with her initial negative attitude towards Jordan's film. Presumably, the core audience composed of Rice's admirers would have followed the writer rather than the film director and these were the target of her own ad.

However, there are important traces of the initial disagreement between Rice and Jordan

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in the film, which can be attributed to the latter's attempts to undermine the seriousness of Rice's treatment of the vampire with touches of carnivalesque horror. Lestat's reprimand to the naughty vampire child Claudia, prompted by her bringing 'work' (victims) home, or the easy trick played by Jordan in the final scene when Lestat suddenly appears in the interviewer's car though Lestat was supposed to be dying or already dead, subtly mock the novel. Yet, it is hard to ascribe Jordan's ambiguous treatment of Rice's novel to a single cause without fathoming first the actual reasons why Rice's screenplay was rejected and rewritten. My suggestion is that Jordan missed in Rice's circumspect vampire tale the subversiveness that Angela Carter brought into their collaboration in the much more accomplished *The Company of Wolves*, a much more modest film in financial terms that nevertheless introduced a breath of fresh air into the then stale atmosphere of the werewolf film. The consequences of Rice's argumentation through her character Louis - namely, that once the belief in the damnation of the immortal soul is lost, there's no tragic view of life for those alive or undead - are self-defeating: the vampire appears to live in a world as trivial as ours, what makes him different is, simply, his feeding habits. Only irony and a sick sense of humour can make him or her appealing, hence the divergence between Jordan's wry approach and Rice's earnestness.

Interestingly, Brett Easton Ellis makes the point in "The Secrets of Summer", a short story from his book *The Informers,* which narrates the lives of a group of contemporary vampires living in LA who are indistinguishable from the crowd of vapid New York yuppies portrayed in *American Psycho*. Jamie, the protagonist, is actually very similar to the materialistic, greedy, brutal Lestat. Both Ellis and Jordan insist in the banality of the vampire in secular times when, if the pun may be excused, the salvation of man's immortal soul is not the issue at stake. Yet, neither Jordan nor Ellis introduce into the world of the contemporary vampire the issue of AIDS. Now that Dracula has even appeared in a Japanese ad to counsel audiences on how to prevent AIDS from spreading, the vampire seems to have gone to a domain beyond parody, a yet uncharted mythical territory. As I have noted, with the rise of genetic engineering Frankenstein's monster has been transformed into a new paradigmatic monster, the replicant of *Blade Runner*. I have also argued that,

being a creature born of superstition, the vampire may survive unharmed by changing scientific paradigms in the domain of the supernatural. Even at the risk of contradicting myself, it must be noted that the AIDS epidemic should presumably change the status of the vampire. Yet the AIDS epidemic has not so far affected the figure of the vampire - perhaps because the image of a vampire demanding a blood test would be a cruel joke not on the vampire but on those who suffer from AIDS. However, even though the mention of AIDS is avoided in recent films and books about vampires (Coppola denied that the reference to syphilis in his film had anything to do with AIDS), the situation cannot be sustained for long. Surely, after the anti-AIDS campaigns, most people in the audience and most readers will relate blood to disease and see in the vampire something else - possibly a doomed victim rather than a symbol of plague itself in the style of Nosferatu. How the vampire novel and the vampire film will tackle the new situation still remains to be seen.

2.3.3. Between the BBC and Hollywood: Fay Weldon's *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*

The peculiar case of the adaptation of Fay Weldon's *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* (1983) for British TV and American film can illustrate a point I have not discussed yet whether TV offers any advantage over film regarding the adaptation of novels in general and in particular of novels about monstrosity. The BBC series directed by Philip Saville in 1986 and Susan Seidelman's *She-Devil* (1989) differ enormously, not only because of the nature of the respective narrative medium but also because of the different attitudes towards adaptation in the UK and the USA. An obvious point that is hardly ever discussed is why film producers insist on adapting novels that must be mercilessly compressed by the screen writers when short stories could be better adapted. In the case of Weldon's novel, the six episode series has the obvious advantage of allowing the parodic content of the original novel unfold at more or less the same pace a reader would follow, while Seidelman's film must necessarily compress many points.

The British series respects with almost complete faithfulness Weldon's bitter sarcasm

while the American film tones it down to make it the subject of a gentle comedy rather than of a grotesque satire. Weldon's novel ultimately directs its sarcasm against men: what men want, the novel suggests, is the sexy doll first represented by Mary Fisher and later by Ruth, the ugly wife of Fisher's lover, in her new persona. Men's demands force women to impossible mental and physical transformations to gain power over them, such as the one undergone by Ruth. However, the gap in Weldon's novel's fabric, or the main irony, depending on the perspective, is that if men are pathetic simpletons like Bobo, Ruth's husband, Ruth's re-creation of herself as the "impossible male fantasy made flesh" (p. 224) seems nothing but formidably masochistic self-indulgence. The parody is, then, seemingly directed against women who allow men to classify them as monsters or goddesses according to their bodies, and who transform themselves nonetheless into new monsters in an effort to become men's version of the goddess.

Here is the point at which Susan Seidelman differs from Weldon's original to offer a more feminist reading: Ruth (played by TV comedienne Roseanne) never becomes Mary (played by Meryl Streep) because her transformation is internal and not external. She behaves like the woman she thinks she is and not like the woman her husband Bobo sees in her because of her unattractive body. In Seidelman's version, Ruth frees herself and is later generous enough to free Mary from her stereotyped role as a pretty, young, voraciously sexy romance writer to help her to become a more mature writer. The idea of transformation is keyed to appeal to the very American passion for self-made, personal success: Ruth becomes a successful business woman running a female employment agency and Mary becomes a 'serious writer', abandoning romance fiction for the postmodernist autobiographical novel. In any case, Seidelman's decision not to transform Ruth into Mary is not dependent on the physical appearance of either Roseanne or Meryl Streep, as there are special effect techniques - both make-up and computer morphing - sufficiently developed so as to permit a credible visualization of the transformation. In the BBC series this was achieved with a deft use of make-up.

The paradox is that in Seidelman's version the more feminist reading softens too much

Weldon's mockery of women's efforts to be other than themselves through fashion and the use of cosmetics and plastic surgery. There is nothing in the film as horrifying as the parallel process by which Ruth's enormous will power carries her through the painful process of her physical metamorphosis while her rival suffers a more horrific transformation as her body is destroyed by a cancer that Ruth's magic has provoked. Indeed, not even the BBC series portrayed this parallel process entire, making Mary die in a storm raised by Ruth. Instead, Seidelman offers in the initial scenes set in the beauty parlour a brief reflection on the false promises of cosmetics advertising: Ruth's physical transformation is limited and lasts only for as long as her make-up lasts. In contrast, in Weldon's novel Ruth's transformation is prompted by a mixture of jealousy and rage: by taking Ruth's husband as her lover, Mary indirectly forces the giantess Ruth to face herself and to consider the ways in which she can cease being a powerless freak to become a powerful monster. As Ruth sheds pieces of her body that do not fit into the image she covets, revenge loses its edge and the tale becomes one of how Ruth's new moral monstrosity grows out of her determination to recreate herself and vampirise Mary's body and life. Yet, unlike other women manufactured by men in fiction, Ruth is always in control of her transformation. She chooses her own Frankenstein, Dr. Black, the surgeon who reshapes her body, and makes him the first to fall in love with her new image, which for her, is enough prove of her newly conquered power over men. Obviously, the irony of Weldon's novel, which Seidelman's film misses completely, is that as Ruth's monstrous exterior disappears, the monster inside her grows, so that by the end of the novel the new Ruth, far from being Seidelman's generous rescuer of women like Mary, has become a powerful, dangerous woman.

The bonding of Mary and Ruth through Bobo as imagined by Fay Weldon bears striking parallels to the triangle formed by the actress Madeline, her husband Ernest (a plastic surgeon) and his ex-fiancée the writer Helen in Robert Zemeckis' *Death Becomes Her* (1992). This film is even a much blacker comedy than Weldon's novel. As happens in Weldon's novel, Ernest is the excuse for the two women to engage in an open competition on the understanding that he will finally

choose the one with the most attractive body. The issue of the film is not why a woman would go to the extreme of literally becoming another woman in order to win her husband back - which is the story Weldon narrates tongue-in-cheek - but how far a woman can go out of jealousy for a rival who always looks young and attractive. In fact, Hel's eternal youth is, as Mad discovers for her own benefit, the effect of a magic beverage but it entails a very high price: death. Mad and Hel discover that being undead, far from guaranteeing their everlasting beauty, has an unpleasant side effect, the constant need for maintenance of their crumbling bodies for which they need Ernest's help, who soon wearies of their demands.

Instead of avoiding the detailed visualization of the extreme transformation of woman's body as was done in the film adaptation of Fay Weldon's novel, Zemeckis pioneered in *Death Becomes Her* the use of the sophisticated infographics later used in *The Mask* to represent the human body as a plastic substance that can be reshaped at will. The resilient bodies of Mad and Hel are the farcical, carnivalesque response to the 1980s and 1990s cult of the body, especially to the cult of the eternally young body and the rejection of natural ageing. The very availability of infographics is what has allowed Zemeckis and his screenplay writers Martin Donovan and Martin Koepp to go much further than Weldon in the parodic treatment of the subject of the woman who becomes a monster in an effort to be attractive. In this sense, *Death Becomes Her* can be regarded as the best adaptation (or fractal forgery) of Fay Weldon's *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*, even though it is not in fact directly related to it.

2.3.4. From the Screen to the Page: The Novelization

After having reviewed the ways in which the monster has been transferred from the printed page onto the screen, I should now like to turn to the reverse process: the novelization. The novels based on films can be divided into three types: firstly, new stories based on characters created for films (which technically are not novelizations), novelizations of original screenplays and

novelizations of adapted screenplays. The novels based on the *Alien* trilogy and the two *Predator* films, which are jointly published by 20th Century Fox and the comics publishing house Dark Horse, are a popular instance of the independent novel based on the characters rather than the original films' plot. The novelizations of original screenplays have resulted in novels such as Graham Greene's *The Third Man*, based on his own script for Orson Welles' film, and Arthur C. Clarke's *2001*, based on the screenplay he wrote with Stanley Kubrick, which was in fact an adaptation of Clarke's short story "The Sentinel".

The novelizations of adapted screenplays have resulted in products as singular as the tie-ins of Kenneth Branagh's *Mary Shelley Frankenstein* and Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula*. A film-goer visiting the local book shop is offered the choice of buying Mary Shelley's and Bram Stoker's classic novels in an edition specially published to tie in with the film release or the novelizations, which, despite bearing the name of Shelley and Stoker in their very titles, have been written by others. An uninformed book buyer may no doubt mistake one for the other, especially because both the novelizations and the novels' new editions are illustrated with stills from the films. A better informed book buyer may simply wonder who needs the novelization when the literary original is available. From the point of view of the studios, the sales of the novelizations are more profitable than the sales of the original novel simply because studios can always participate in deals involving the former but not the latter. Yet there are apparently other reasons for publishing novelizations which have to do with the decreasing standards of functional literacy. Joy Chamberlain, editor of Voyager Books, a publishing house specialised in novelizations, argues that the novelizations solve the problems a contemporary reader faces when reading the classic novels. "With the classic novels", Chamberlain notes, "there often seems to be a lack of syntax because it's from an older age" (Westbrook, 1996). According to her, the novelization "takes care" of the problem.

In the cases of Branagh's *Frankenstein* and Coppola's *Dracula* there were obvious economic

advantages in the novelization: firstly, the novels are free of copyright; secondly, being dead, the original authors could not object to the re-writing of their texts. If somebody, say a scholar or a fan, objected on their behalf, they could always be told that the novelization is not actually a re-writing of the original novel but of the film based on it. Quite a different situation is encountered when the original novelist is alive. The novelization can put the author of the original novel in a most embarrassing, bizarre situation to judge by Philip K. Dick's predicament in the case of the adaptation of his novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* as *Blade Runner*. According to Gregg Rickman (1991) Dick, who initially loathed the screenplay by David Peoples and Hampton Fancher based on his novel, refused to grant permission for the novelization and planned, instead, to reissue his novel as the only way to show his disagreement with the yet unfilmed screenplay. To his surprise, the producers offered him another deal: that he himself should write the novelization on the basis of the screenplay and of his own observations as a guest on the film set. Even though this would have grossed him about $400,000, Dick preferred to write the novel that would be his last, *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer*, for which he was only paid $7,500. When Scott's film was released, Dick's novel (apparently never read by Scott) was republished under the title of *Blade Runner* in a paperback edition still in print, which can be easily taken for a novelization since it lacks Dick's original title and is illustrated by an image of the film's main characters.

After Dick's death one of his short stories, "We will Remember It for you Wholesale" was made into a film, *Total Recall* directed by Paul Verhoeven and novelised by Piers Anthony, himself a very popular science-fiction writer. Interestingly, the first page of Anthony's novel contains the credits for the screenplay by Ronald Sushett, Dan O'Bannon and Gary Oldman and specifies that Piers Anthony based the novelization on it, but the name of Philip K. Dick is not even mentioned. Naturally, short stories are too short to be published as tie-ins of the screen adaptation, which could explain the need for the novelization of *Total Recall*. This is in fact the reason why William Gibson granted permission to Terry Bisson to novelize *Johnny Mnemonic*, a film directed by Robert

Longo and based on Gibson's eponymous short story, included in his collection *Burning Chrome*. The cover of Bisson's novelization contains a caption noting that his novel is based on the story and the screenplay by William Gibson. Gibson let another re-write his story - apparently in much inferior literary quality - rather than do it himself, even after having written the screenplay presumably, because he could earn thus more money from the rights of the novelization of "Johnny Mnemonic" without touching his original text.

Novelisations are a very peculiar brand of writing. They are actually adaptations to the printed page of screenplays, often written without the benefit of the novelizer having seen the final version of the film. Novelisations are produced as part of the advertising campaign of the film in question and are issued before its release to whet the appetite of prospective readers. Because they are tied in to the film's screenplay, novelizations are usually perfunctory exercises in padding out what the screenplay's bare dialogue and directions suggest. Since they are not expected to stand on their own as novels, novelizers rarely invest much effort in them, bound as they are to produce a piece of writing alien to their own artistic interests. It can be said, clearly, that novelists of reputation only agree to write them because novelizations are very well paid. However, there are exceptions to the rule in which the novelist commissioned to write the novelization may transform it into something other than a mere retelling of the screenplay. In this regard, Orson Scott Card's novelization of James Cameron's *The Abyss* reveals itself as a highly distinctive case.

Cameron, himself the author of the screenplay for *The Abyss*, chose Orson Scott Card to write the novelization first, because he was deeply dissatisfied with the novelizations of his previous films, and second, because he thought that Card's interest in the human side of the characters rather than in the hardware typical of most science-fiction novels could help produce an artistically valuable novel rather than a mere novelization. For Cameron (1989: 351) "the book illuminates the film and vice versa, symbiotic partners in a single, multi-faceted dramatic work." Indeed, symbiosis is an accurate term to define the unusual method that Card followed to write his

version of *The Abyss*. Instead of working from the screenplay, Card worked from the videotapes of the film as editing progressed, so that the updating of the manuscript was often necessary depending on Cameron's alterations of his own screenplay. Even more unusual is the fact that Card wrote the first three chapters, dealing with the childhood of the three main characters - Bud, Lindsey and Coffey - before filming began. The actors were asked to read them and hence based their performances on the childhood background Card had matured. That Card's was an exceptional job is clearly indicated by Cameron's unconditional praise of the novelization in his "Afterword" to the paperback edition. Actually, Cameron seems to have enjoyed the novel so much that he is at pains to underline the idea of collaboration between him and Card and to recommend Card's readers to see the film, as if he feared that the pleasurable reading of the novel could pre-empt the need to see the film.

Card, who had so far refused to write any novelization, accepted the commission because he was interested in Cameron's films. He was cautious about the novelization as in his opinion screenplays offer enough material for a novelette but not for a full-length novel; also because he had misgivings about the freedom he would be allowed by the studio. However, the idea of collaboration strongly appealed to him and he finally took the challenge when Cameron agreed to let him have access to his research and to the film stage, and ultimately because, in his own words, "I wanted to see if a novelization could be as valid a work of art as the film itself." (Card, 1989: 355). But if contact with Cameron, the producer Gail Anne Hurd and Van Ling (Cameron's researcher) was scant yet useful, contact with the actors seems to have been definitive, which adds another layer to the concept of artistic collaboration. "Every one of the actors", Card notes, "brought details of attitude and interpretation that opened up their characters to me, allowing me to make them more real in the novel than they would ever have been from the script alone" (ibid.: 359) So satisfactory was the collaboration with Cameron and his cast that Card compares their work to that of Arthur C. Clarke and Stanley Kubrick for *2001* to conclude that his novel is "not a novelization as the term is usually understood, but a novel that stands on its own and yet

complements, illuminates and fulfils the movie" (ibid.: 361).

What neither Cameron nor Card discuss is the material that Card transferred from his own novels to the novelization. All the dialogue of the film is there and so are all the scenes, but the angelic alien monsters of the film are much more complete in Card's version because they bear a striking resemblance to his own alien monsters in *Ender's Game*, his most popular novel. The aliens of Card's *The Abyss*, who call themselves 'builders of memory' and are capable of sharing collectively their memories because they have no sense of individuality are almost the same ones that are unwittingly wiped out by the hero Ender in Card's novel and who later save his human soul. Both Card's *The Abyss* and *Ender's Game* end with the aliens' promise - already fulfilled in the former, to be fulfilled in the latter - to teach humankind how to share their memories with the aliens and so to put an end to our isolating individualism. The film and the novel of *The Abyss* are no doubt symbiotic especially as regards the visualization of the monsters, since the film shows the very beautiful angelic aliens in a display of special effects that the novel cannot match; yet the novel makes sense of who they are and, indeed, of the whole plot. It might well be that Cameron and Card had found their work so congenial because they were working on the same mythical material or, alternatively, that an unacknowledged influence was what led Cameron to select Card. In any case, Card's *The Abyss* is a more complete narrative than either Cameron's *The Abyss* or Card's own *Ender's Game*. Novel and film form a symbiotic continuum that cannot be easily dissected and which is actually completed with Steve Johnson's successful design for the alien monsters, an essential element in the film and hence in the visualization of the novel that, oddly enough, neither Cameron nor Card mention in their commentaries on the novelization.

The difference between an exceptional novelization like Card's and an average novelization can be best appreciated if we turn to Alan Dean Foster's novelization of another of James Cameron's films, *Aliens*. Foster's novelization is a correct yet uninspired retelling of the film just like his own novelizations of Ridley Scott's *Alien* and of David Fincher's *Alien³*. The paperback

edition of Card's *The Abyss* runs to 349 pages and takes considerably longer to read than the film, itself an unusually long film, which means that by roughly the same price of the cinema ticket, the pleasure of enjoying the film's plot from a new angle can be prolonged for quite a long time. Foster's version of *Aliens*, which has only 240 pages even though *Aliens* is also a very long film, is far less well written and, since it adds little or nothing in depth of characterization nor in strategies of visualization to the film, can be read very quickly especially if the reader is already familiar with the film. Naturally, if the reader is not familiar with *Aliens*, Foster's novelization serves well the same purpose of the film trailer, namely, anticipating the pleasure of seeing what both can only suggest.

The novelization is necessarily more limited than the film as far as the actual visualization of the scenes is concerned; much more so, if the film is question is a fantasy film such as *Aliens* or *The Abyss* in which special effects play such an important role. This is way the novelization is ultimately like the trailer an announcement of what the film will make you see. If read after seeing the film, Foster's novelization or any average novelization only serves the purpose of refreshing the film-goer's memory of the film by helping to fix the screen's flitting image. In contrast, Card's novelization of *The Abyss* not only fixes the memory of those images but also adds layers of meaning to the original film that are inextricably bound to the reader's memories of Cameron's images. After reading Card's novel it is simply impossible to distinguish the characters of the film from the characters of the novel - they become a new type of fictional construction stranded between two media which can only be analyzed with critical tools different from those so far used to analyze film or the novel.

Conclusions

The many screen adaptations of the three main British classics of Gothic fiction of the nineteenth century - *Frankenstein*, *Dracula* and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* - prove that even though film depends to a large extent on the novel for the construction of

monstrosity in the earliest stages of its history, from the 1930s onwards the main intertexts of films dealing with monstrosity are actually other films rather than contemporary novels. The construction of monstrosity in the novel and in film run along parallel lines because film does influence to a great extent the way in which the monster is visualized in the novel, yet in fact the choice of novels about monstrosity to be adapted for the screen is rather erratic and is based plainly on the estimation of the profits the adaptation can gross. These come not only from the film but also from all its attached merchandising, which may include new novels based on the film and novelizations. Many of the best novels on monstrosity remain unadapted, either because they are unfilmable due to their length, their prolix plot or their graphic representation of violence, and also because either they cannot guarantee a core audience or are too expensive to adapt.

In recent years two main currents criss-cross the representation of the monster in Hollywood: on the one hand, there is a constant search for an emblematic monster that can generate a profitable series of films whether they are original or adaptations. The many film series based on this principle include low or medium budget independent productions - such as the *Nightmare on Elm Street* series - or big budget productions, such as the *Batman* series. The limits of the serialisation are dictated not only by changes in the way films are marketed but also by the limitations of the film industry as a narrative medium: the series that succeed are those that keep the illusion of complicity with their audiences by leaving behind the idea of authorship and focusing on narrating a story constructed on the basis of motifs that have become popular in a way similar to that of folk tales, which they have replaced to a certain extent.

At the other end of the spectrum of the representation of the monster in film we find the new expensive adaptations of the classics of Gothic horror and the adaptation of cult novels by reputed mainstream film directors. As I have shown, the success of these films is conditioned by a number of important factors that affect their construction of the monster. The new films based on the classics of Gothic horror attempt to supersede the memory of previous adaptations by returning to the original text, but are in fact more concerned about the anxiety of influences of their

predecessors than about the faithfulness to the original texts, which is certainly limited. This anxiety derives from the self-consciousness of the film directors - Coppola and Branagh, mainly - who find it very difficult to strike the proper balance between the personal homage to the original text - or to a favourite adaptation of it - and the parody of the popular cult built around it mainly on the basis of the previous films. The adapters of contemporary cult novels about monstrosity never seen previously on the screen suffer another type of anxiety: they face the additional problem of having to please the author and a core audience that may have clear-cut expectations about the films. The effect of the failure of this type of adaptation is, paradoxically, to reinforce the status of the cult novel as the 'better' version, while its success may result in a bitter struggle with the original author for the ownership of the story, if not in legal terms at least in terms of public acknowledgements. This is what happened to Philip K. Dick, asked by the producers who had adapted his own novel, to write a novelization of the screenplay.

Given the tensions between adapters and readers as far as the construction of the monster is concerned, it should be inferred that the ideal relationship between film and the novel seems to be precisely the collaborative novelization, best exemplified by Orson Scott Card's *The Abyss*. Film still has to discover the immense wealth concealed in the short stories about monstrosity published in the old pulps and also those of many contemporary novels, both mainstream and genre fiction. Because of their length, short stories are seemingly more appropriate as source material for screen adaptations, for the issue of the problematic compression of the plots of novels is not raised in the case of films based on short stories, but there are still few outsanding instances of this type of adaptation. Whenever films are adapted from short stories, as in the case of *Total Recall* or *Johnny Mnemonic*, the original literary source usually receives little attention, precisely because short stories are notoriously difficult to market as tie-ins to the films, which explains their habitual replacement by novelizations when the film in question is released. There seems to be, nonetheless, a whole new area of interaction between film and the novel in the novelization - and also in the sequel written with the screen adaptation in mind such as

Crichton's *Lost Eden* - that will require a new approach to the idea of authorship and to the idea of how the strategies of visualization in film and the novel interact. It is important to remember that the contemporary attraction for the monster is at the heart of this breaking down of the barriers between the printed and the aural-visual narrative media.

CHAPTER 3

Nostalgia for the Monster: Mythical Monsters and Freaks

Introduction

This chapter analyses how the imaginary monster of the new myths of destruction is related to collective anxieties about the privileged status of humankind and to the taboo discourse on teratology, that is to say, human physical monstrosity. Teratology is the scientific study of natural or biological 'monsters' in the now discarded medical sense of the word. In principle, teratology and teratogeny study the causes of malformations; yet in this chapter I will deal rather with the ethical discourse on 'terata' especially in reference to the 'terata' more popularly termed 'freaks'. The dialectic between the new mythologies and teratology in the 1980s and 1990s is shaped by the growth in cultural importance of the imaginary monster and the increasing difficulties in dealing with natural or biological human monstrosity, both in fiction and in real life. The abundance of critical discourse on the imaginary monster, so ubiquitous in contemporary culture, seems to indicate the breaking down of all kinds of taboos affecting the definition of 'humanity' and 'normality': the imaginary monster's body emerges as the site of discussion of issues involving sexuality, race, politics, class and even anxieties about nuclear destruction, gathering together all the negative features that human beings refuse to regard as their own. However, this openness of the cultural (and by extension, sociological and even anthropological) discourse built around the figure of the imaginary monster - including the human and the non-human monster - disguises a reluctance to face even more conflictive issues, buried more deeply in taboo territory. One of these major taboos concerns precisely the way in which we deal

with physically monstrous human beings after the gradual loss of the figure of the freak.

The discussion of psychological monstrosity - to which I address myself in Chapter 4 - cannot be said to be a taboo area; on the contrary, it has attracted plenty of controversy with reference to the idea of evil, both in real life and in fiction. In contrast, human physical monstrosity emerges as a particularly difficult topic involving serious ethical conflicts we do not readily face, either in fiction or in real life, and that are very little publicized. Nevertheless, since the way in which we define the abnormality of the adult freak or the severely malformed baby also defines our own normality, an analysis of the meaning of monstrosity in the 1980s and 1990s must necessarily include a survey of the profound rift caused by the erasure of the real life freak from the cultural panorama and its replacement by the imaginary monster, as reflected in the fiction of the last fifteen years. The imaginary monsters of the 1980s and 1990s certainly overlap with the figure of the freak in many instances, though whenever the freak appears in recent fiction it is in a decontextualized background - usually displaced towards fantasy or another time - carefully distanced from the actuality of contemporary teratology. Thus, as cultural discourse on the meaning of, for instance, the vampire increases, that on the legal 'solutions' given to the 'problem' of the natural monster is hushed, although the latter is obviously more significant in understanding how we define humanity and the Other.

The fear of the imaginary monster and of the biological human monster derive nonetheless from similar roots: unease at the privileged position of the 'normal' human being, as a member of a community or species, and as an individual. Transhistorical fears like these are represented in a different way in each historical period, in 'mythologies' (a concept I will clarify in the following section) adapted for the times. The 1980s and 1990s are characterized by centring their representations of monstrosity on the exploration of the threat the monster poses for privilege. Here, I center my analysis on two central privileges and their related fears, which place the imaginary and the natural monster in a single anthropological continuum, despite the differences in the fictional treatment both categories receive. Both the imaginary monster and the natural

monster are feared first, because they threaten the privileged position of humankind as a species without competition in the natural hierarchy of life on Earth and second, because they also materialize fears about the loss of body ownership. Before the imaginary or the natural monster, the 'normal' human being is made aware of his or her privileged position and, at the same time, of the fragility of such a position. As I will show, the fear of the takeover by the 'secret species' - the non-human Other - is at the heart of the new mythologies, which displace towards the imaginary monster the fear that was once felt towards the now absent social category of the freak.

3.1. Nostalgia for the Mythical Monster: Beasts and Messiahs
3.1.1. Nostalgia for Myth

In our secularized era there is a strong nostalgia for belief that is partly satisfied through the short-term indulgence in belief enjoyed when seeing or reading fiction about monstrosity. Although monsters are secondary characters in primitive mythologies whose function is mainly to test the hero's courage and bodily strength, monstrosity occupies the largest territory within contemporary mythmaking. The growing secularisation of the Western[1] world has not pre-empted the need for myth, that is to say, for narratives that explain who we are, from myths of creation to legends about individual heroes. However, what distinguishes contemporary mythmaking from primitive mythologies is that the former is profane while the latter are sacred; furthermore, Western myths arise from individual artists producing original fiction while primitive myths are the work of anonymous creators polished by the passage through generations of stroytellers. Contemporary Western myths are not grounded on religious belief; they try, nonetheless, to supply Western societies with a substitute for the main religious myth - Christianity - at a level that most cultural critics see as a degradation of 'genuine', religious mythmaking. Ursula LeGuin (1989: 64), for

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[1] I am aware that despite the obvious secularisation of large sections of Western society - especially of the artists and intellectuals - religion is still an extremely important cultural force, possibly a majority force, inside and outside the Western world. The rise of the TV preachers in America - now spreading to Europe - is, however, the other side of the rise of fiction with mythologizing content: both phenomena seek to replace an outmoded religiosity with new, emotionally intense exercises in belief.

instance, defines contemporary myths such as that of Superman as 'Submyth', "...those mental images, figures and motifs which have no religious resonance and no intellectual or aesthetic value, but which are vigorously alive and powerful, so cannot be dismissed as mere stereotypes."

The (sub)myth has popular roots, but it cannot be said to be without intellectual and aesthetic values; it does have them even if they are not be those of the high art use of myths, such as, for instance, in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. One of the reasons why there is a resistance to seeing the correspondences between primitive and contemporary mythmaking is the generalised view that new myths are not expressed in highly valuable, highly artistic, texts. There is no 'Homer' - if there was ever one - to give literary shape to postmodernist mythologies. Instead of a coherent network of myths bound by art we seem to have scattered myths that can enter the canon only with difficulties, if at all. Thus, Katherine Hume (op. cit.: 67) argues that while the evil or unpleasant monsters of classical Greek myth put the hero in touch "with something more than an ad hoc obstacle", for her "such transpersonal significance for fantastic monsters is often lacking in contemporary popular literature." But if contemporary monsters and heroes - and the myths they enact - mean nothing, the obvious popular success of many (sub)mythical texts about monstrosity seems practically impossible to explain, especially if what is judged is the artistic quality of their representations rather than their anthropological significance. Before a question such as why so many people have chosen to see the *Alien* trilogy, the two *Predator* or the two *Terminator* films it is necessary to consider the possibility that they do carry transpersonal meaning, specifically related to concerns that can only find expression in texts of a new mythology in the making. They are well tuned to the expectations of readers and viewers, though in fairness, it should be said that because the narratives are so many, only a few fully capture a truly meaningful mythical subtext.

In fact, the (sub)myth lies in a new territory between primitive mythmaking and the literate allusion to classical myths, a territory that is fully postmodernist in its self-consciousness of the 'degradation' of contemporary myth. A tongue-in-cheek attitude, irony and the grotesque are some of the metafictional elements used to acknowledge the shortcomings of this new kind of

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mythmaking. Yet the sheer volume of contemporary narratives with mythologizing content attests to a rather more serious search for some way out of triviality and towards transcendence. The impression is that artists, especially in genre fiction, have ceased trying to produce a literary or cinematic masterpiece, understood as a major artistic achievement, and are trying, instead, to produce a lasting myth, such as *Frankenstein*, or, more recently, *Blade Runner* (obviously not only because of the money a new monster can generate, as I have explained in the previous chapter). This may be, in itself, an attempt at denying the Modernist emphasis on the civilising values of high art: the insistence on the widespread existence of barbarism coming from the new myth makers suggests that art with high intellectual and aesthetic values may not be the most suitable fiction for this barbarian *fin de siècle*, while pseudo-primitive myths may touch more easily on the real anxieties beneath our sophisticated, technological age.

Ideally, the only way to appreciate contemporary mythmaking is to see it from a distance, abandoning cultural criticism in favour of anthropology. There are obvious advantages in treating our own cultural environment in a way similar to that used by anthropologists to study primitive cultures. Sociology and Cultural Studies rather obscure the fact that the primitive substratum of Western societies is very much alive - thus, often what is taken for bad literature or bad cinema is a rather good approximation to that substratum. This is why films and novels that are seen as formulaic and scarcely imaginative find popular acceptance: they strike a chord unrelated to (high) art that has much to do with the position of readers and viewers as members of a tribe, even if the tribe is as large as the whole Western world. They do form a corpus of stories related to each other by means of repeated motifs that rely on the complicity of audiences and readers to recognize them; genres are, then, nothing but mythmaking patterns that carry significance beyond the artistic media that produces them, and not, as it is often said, pure formula. To what extent the persistence of the primitive self is a 'positive' feature of cultural life is, of course, debatable. Yet, I would like to insist on the fact that this resurfacing of the primitive - by no means a return to the primitive, for it has never gone away - is the only strategy valid for coping with a historical period of

a marked dystopian character, in which the Enlightenment project of civilized progress has finally revealed its contradictions. As the history of the twentieth century has proven, the growth of civilization is accompanied by a growth of barbarism that is exposing the shortcomings of the civilizing project of the Enlightenment (Mestrovic, 1993) - the renewal of the mythology of destruction dramatizes this fact.

The reputed mythographer Mircea Eliade has stressed the fact that the persistence of myth in the late twentieth century is an irrefutable fact, though he has not attempted to explain how it can be understood in comparison to archaic myth. In his view (1971: 141), the main obstacle to interpreting myth nowadays is that it is so radically changed and so well camouflaged in the culture of the contemporary Western world that the connections with primitive mythmaking are very hard to see. This may account for the despondency with which cultural critics see contemporary mythmaking and, also, for the difficulties in accounting with precision for the links between primitivism and postmodernity. It is certainly the wrong path to try to find exact equivalencies between archaic or classical mythmaking and contemporary fiction with mythologizing content: the strategies of belief are radically different and so are the cultural uses of mythological material. Contemporary myths are not sacred stories narrating events which happened in 'primordial' times, nor do they explain how a supernatural being created all of reality or an aspect of it - the definition that Eliade (ibid.: 15) gives of myth and the one most widely accepted. What interests me especially about the idea of myth in the 1980s and 1990s is firstly, the idea of corpus, and, secondly, the opposition drawn by Eliade between archaic societies which believe in myth sustained by religion and modern, secular societies which believe in history to explain their own creation. What is taking place nowadays, at a point of inflection in history marked by the idea of the 'end of history' but also by the new expectations opened in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall, is a massive recovery of mythmaking which would open new perspectives on the issue of how we can justify our progression from primitivism to the end of the barbaric twentieth century. The question behind most contemporary fiction, from mainstream to genre fiction, is where

transcendence really lies, once religion and history have failed to provide clues as to our present condition and our future. If genre fiction - especially fantasy as in science fiction and horror - leans more towards the territory of mythology it is because, in a sense, it has taken a more radical position against history and against Modernist individualism: only global myths seem able to make sense of the global anxieties that define the contemporary period.

The mythological corpus need not be articulated as an illustration of beliefs widely held in a particular culture. On the contrary, what can be seen in the 1980s and 1990s is that contemporary mythmaking is very sensitive to historical changes: it works by trial and error, trying to articulate itself by gauging not only the actual changes in the Western world but also those that are expected to happen. Within the panorama of contemporary fiction, science fiction seems to be the genre coping best with the articulation of the mythology that an advanced technological society requires. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty (1989: 31) remarks that "science fiction seems to be the only form of adult literature that can handle mythology with panache", while William Lomax writes that "science fiction ... does not create the myth; rather, it dramatizes the need for mythmaking in a world without a vital totalizing myth" (1989: 253). The advantage of science fiction over other genres, and the mainstream, is that it gathers primitive mythology with futuristic technology in a single stream, projecting towards fiction collective anxieties that refer simultaneously to all the extra-historical time of humankind, from the very primitive past - Eliade's 'primordial' time - to the very far future. This is why science-fiction films and novels often represent the future as a version of the remote past, as happened in the popular *Star Wars* trilogy and, indeed, in Stanley Kubrick's *2001*, perhaps the most illuminating instances of this mythological simultaneity I am referring to.

The atmosphere of many popular science-fiction films and novels is a mixture of Gothic medievalism transplanted to the heart of the near or the remote future, as if the real search were not for our future but for our past. Dan Simmons' diptych *Hyperion* (1989) and *The Fall of Hyperion* (1990) is a very rich, suggestive instance of that simultaneous search for the past, the future, a new mythology and the roots of primitive mythmaking. The seven pilgrims that travel in Hyperion to

locate the mythical Shrike or Lord of Pain - a futuristic barbarian god of destruction - delve into their personal pasts in order to understand the future of humankind. This is threatened by the Shrike, a god for whom time passes backwards and who has, thus, already existed but not existed yet. As Simmons has it, only a new Christological redeemer (by which I mean a secular rather than a Christian messiah), the mythical, cybernetic Johnny Keats reborn from death thanks to genetic engineering can engineer the destruction of the Lord of Pain, thus giving rise to a new mythological time. The network of mythical subtexts, postmodernist literary allusion, and the use of Gothic and cyberpunk in Simmons' novels is typical of this new, still to be explored, mythology in the making.

Turning back to the questions of the mythological corpus and the historical versus the pre-historical need for myths, the stumbling block we next encounter is the relationship between myth and ritual in postmodernist Western societies. According to William Doty (1986: 11), a mythological corpus consists of

(1) a usually complex network of myths that are (2) culturally important (3) imaginal (4) stories, conveying by means of (5) metaphoric and symbolic diction, (6) graphic imagery, and (7) emotional conviction and participation, (8) the primal, foundational accounts (9) of aspects of the real, experienced world and (10) humankind's roles and relative statuses within it. Mythologies may (11) convey the political and moral values of a culture and (12) provide systems of interpreting (13) individual experience within a universal perspective, which may include (14) the intervention of suprahuman entities as well as (15) aspects of the natural and cultural orders.

Taken as a whole, the many films and novels about monstrosity produced in the last fifteen years do form a (sub)mythological corpus that follows remarkably well Doty's definition. Needless to say, the mythological corpus of the contemporary Western world is not organized according to a universally accepted cosmogony neither by a set of rituals, as should be expected in a historical period defined by secular humanism. What gives coherence to this corpus is the relative narrowness of the main circles of myth makers. The same names crop up again and again throughout the main films about monstrosity cast in a mythological mold; likewise, the list of genuinely outstanding fantasy - science fiction, horror, sword and sorcery - writers or myth makers

in my definition is limited, despite the fact that now more people than ever are producing texts that aim at becoming mythical. The texts produced do form a mythological network, with frequent repetitions of motifs perfectly recognisable by those 'initiated' into the 'mysteries' of each submyth. Within this network some authors or texts stand out as 'cult' pieces or heroes, by which it is meant that they transmit a 'meaning' of special significance, seen by the initiates only. All in all, the texts are bound by what Northrop Frye (op. cit.: 9) describes as a "legacy of shared allusion", which must not be confused with the Leavisite idea of tradition or with Harold Bloom's anxiety of influences. On the contrary, the contemporary myth maker combines a primitive relish for 'retelling' a very significative myth with a truly postmodernist self-consciousness, often ironic, about the limits of originality.

The idea behind contemporary mythmaking is to make the old, new and the new, old simultaneously so that the myth is reaffirmed and redrawn at the same time, opening a window on a realm of fantasy that questions the actual importance of historical time. Thus, Clive Barker develops in his novel *Imajica* (1991) a simple mythical topic bound simultaneously to the contemporary debate of patriarchy versus feminism and also to the myths of Christological redemption, though he makes a point of never mentioning Christianity or indeed an alternative matriarchal religion at all in the occult mythological system he portrays. Barker's hero, Gentle, a painter who can only produce forgeries - retellings of mythical paintings - discovers he is actually a hero in the classical sense, born of the god Hepaxamendios and a mortal woman. Out on a quest for this barbarian god, still unaware of who he is, Gentle eventually discovers that his mission of redemption must result in the destruction of the god and the liberation of the powerful goddesses once overruled by the patriarchal Hepaxamendios in a remote past - a point that links the novel with the myth of the goddess I reviewed in Chapter 1. What is most startling in Gentle's long, mythical journey towards his origin in the father and his subsequent subversion of the role of patriarchal messiah is the contrast between the extraterrestrial Domains and the contemporary London in which Gentle lives. In the end, after many transitions backwards and forwards, the

London of the 1980s emerges as a more fantastic realm than the Dominions of myth, an effect typical of the immersion in the mythical worldview of fiction such as *Imajica*.

This leads us back to the question of ritual and its relation to myth. In primitive myth, the ritual is a ceremony during which the myth is told or enacted so that the participants may feel that uncanny binding with the past which explains to primitive man where he stands in relation to the very remote past. The continuity between cosmogonic time and human time is ensured through ritual and myth so that a basic harmony between present and past is achieved and no doubts about the collective memory of the past arises: this memory is fixed by the narrative contained in the myth itself. The English folklorist Lord Raglan suggested in his book *The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth and Drama* that ritual is the origin of myth and not viceversa: according to Raglan (Rank et al, 1990: 96), the tribe's longing for ceremonial that reinforces their of binding with the past is fulfilled by high rank persons who elaborate a narrative to fit in the ritual. Thus, for Raglan, myths are by no means creations emanating spontaneously from the people but narratives created by an elite to fix a certain cosmogony that would be valid to explain the origin of the universe and of the tribe itself.

In contrast, the unreliability of memory - collective or individual - emerges as one of the main motifs in the mythologizing fiction of the 1980s and 1990s. Many films and novels dramatize our inability to recall our origins from the depths of the personal or the collective unconscious. The narratives are, in a sense, a Freudian exploration of our past but they seem to connote a Jungian search for the ultimate origin. The theme of the person who has no memory of his or her origins and who turns out to have been born if not a monster at least from monstrous parents is constant in contemporary films and novels. Accessing the depths of personal memory gives a clue to accessing the depths of the collective past - down to the very gods of creation as in *Imajica* or to primal events, such as the defeat of the predator to which I refer in the next section. This regression to the past, this abandonment of the actual historical time by transcending our immediate individual circumstances through films and novels is the equivalent of ritual for us, while

the content of those films and fictions act as our myths.

It may be argued that all films and all novels - all fiction - are the equivalent of primitive myths, since all fulfil this psychological need for an escape from historical, personal time. This is, in a sense, true. However, the mythological content of the texts about monstrosity I am considering in this section has been regarded as 'escapist' in a derogatory sense. Escaping into Joyce's *Ulysses*, to return to an earlier instance of mythical Modernist text, is regarded as a positive immersion into civilized culture; escaping into *Hyperion*, *Imajica* or *Predator* is seen by many as a different activity, subcultural or paracultural, that implies a rejection of canonical texts (or myths?). I am not going to return to the question of the artificial division between the mainstream and popular culture, but I will insist on the idea that the ubiquitous presence of the monster across that dividing line signals precisely the need to articulate a mythology for the times, that is to say, a myth that serves for everyone. The mainstream is responding with less agility to that need because of the sheer weight of the literary tradition and the academy. Commercial or popular culture is, ironically, better prepared to instil into 'escapism' not ideology, as it is often claimed, but an instinctive sixth sense about what matters to many people for it depends precisely on popularity to subsist. As Eric Rabkin (1976: 73) writes, "if we know the world to which a reader escapes, then we know the world from which he comes", thus, the content of the myth will furnish important clues about what cannot be processed in the context of historical time. Those who escape into the classical myth celebrated in high art escape from the same world of failed civilization that invites others to escape into the neo-barbarian myths celebrated in popular culture. If the levels of escapism seem to be higher and higher now this must be then not because most citizens of the Western world are irresponsible persons with a simplistic, hedonistic approach to life, but because contemporary history and politics and exerting an overwhelming pressure on us.

As I have noted, a large segment of contemporary mythmaking deals with the confrontation between the hero and the monster. While in traditional myths this confrontation is but an episode in the adventurous life of the hero, many contemporary (sub)mythical films and novels

focus exclusively on this confrontation. Up to a point, the mythology of the 1980s and 1990s is best described as a mythology of destruction, opposing the cosmogonic myths of creation. The monster is central in these myths of destruction because it represents at the same time the primal and barbaric chaos that precedes creation and that ends it: the forgotten primordial time and the imagined future times find in the monster a suitable symbol of simultaneous creation and apocalypse through the figure of the Beast of the archaic hunter myths later inherited by Christian iconography. The 1980s and 1990s are not only the last two decades of the twentieth century but also the last twenty years of the second millennium and a certain feeling of exhaustion (especially as refers to the problematic persistence of patriarchy) accompanied by fantasies of regeneration is responsible for the resurfacing of primitive mythmaking in postmodernity. Thus, the main contemporary mythical current oscillates between the myths of total destruction and the myths of salvation, which frequently involve extraterrestrials as either demonic destroyers or angelic messiahs. The many technophobic cautionary myths in imitation of *Frankenstein* and the pervasive presence of the theme of metamorphosis complete a *fin de siècle*, simultaneously dystopian and millenialist, whose mythology reflects the split between the announcement of the apocalyptic triumph of barbarism and the wish-fulfilling fantasies of a second coming of a redeemer. The Beast and the Messiah emerge, thus, as the main mythical figures of postmodernism.

The apocalyptic content of contemporary myth differs from the collective anxieties expressed in the fears of a final judgement that swept the Christian world ten centuries ago in an important point: apocalyptic fantasies about the end of the world are justified now by the existence of nuclear weapons. Technology and not superstition is the basis of the strong destructive pessimism of the 1980s, though this fear of the future may have subsided in the 1990s into a more optimistic belief in compassion as a 'solution' to the crisis of the barbaric civilization of the Western world. In this context, it is necessary to stress the important role played by the USA in shaping the historical reality of the Western world since the end of World War II. The preoccupation of

American culture with the dichotomy of good and evil, innocence and guilt, individualism and community, the right to protection against abuse and the fragile reality of individual or national privilege also form the staple of the mythical thinking of the twentieth century, best expressed in film. The monster as the symbol of all that threatens 'privilege' - from the survival of a nation to the destruction of the individual - originates in British Gothic but has been exported worldwide by the USA through film and popular culture.

Hollywood is, no doubt, the main producer of myths and, despite the confluence of artistic talent recruited worldwide by the attractions of the American film industry, Hollywood appears, correctly or incorrectly, to stand for America. This would lead to the conclusion that contemporary mythmaking *is* American. This is true, for the historical evolution of America can account for the apocalyptic overtones of contemporary myth more than any other factor. Yet, this American mythmaking business exists to a large extent thanks to the acceptance it finds in the international market. My suggestion is that the increasing popularity of films narrating myths of destruction or salvation - from *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) to *Twelve Monkeys* (1995) - stems from a collusion of Hollywood's interests in expanding its international market and the international audiences' pleasure in the erasure of foreignness through myth. This America of myth is not a foreign country but a very familiar domain to which we all can relate, a supranational domain which is in itself a myth created by the networks of distribution of commercial culture. There is a point beyond which it is merely irrelevant for audiences whether the heroes of *Alien*, *Predator*, or *E.T.* are American, especially if these audiences are likely to see the films in a dubbed version, for we are all citizens of Hollywood. Paradoxically, since the portrait of that mythical America of superheroes and monsters sells better than the portrait of the less well known real America, the latter remains a genuinely foreign country even for those used to consuming great amounts of 'genuinely' American cultural products. The same phenomenon is being repeated in the case of Japan: thousands of Western children and teenagers are familiar with the neo-barbarian myths successfully exported by Japan through 'manga' (printed comics) and 'anime' (animated films

based on successful comics). However, the bridges built between Westerners and the Japanese through this type of (sub)mythical narratives, in itself originated from the identification of the Japanese with the neo-barbarian myths of American popular culture, seem, however, so far incapable of conveying a better mutual understanding of the wide cultural differences between the West and Japan.

A point that is hardly ever considered in analysis of myth is why mythmaking crystallises better in particular nations and in particular historical contexts. Myth is usually explained on the basis of the Jungian collective unconscious or of Freudian psychoanalysis, both in themselves 'mythological' systems that try to account for the creation of the individual and the community. Carl Jung's idea of the collective unconscious (op. cit.: 3 - 6), which "is not a personal acquisition but is inborn" and universal, forming a "common psychic substrate of a superpersonal nature which is present in every one of us," has been widely invoked to explain why primitive myths present so many similarities. The archetypes, that is to say, the fixed contents of the collective unconscious which find their expression in myth and fairy tale by being consciously manipulated by the individual and coloured by his or her individuality, offer for many an explanation of the appeal of contemporary mythologizing fiction. Freud himself recurred to the myth of Oedipus for give his own mythological version of the explanation of the origins of the (male) human personality and saw evident affinities between dream and myth. His own disciple, Otto Rank, studied the myth of the birth of the hero in his book of the same title, explaining myths as representations of the life of the Oedipal child. Nevertheless, Jung and Freud's efforts to explain the transhistorical nature of the human psyche, individual or collective, seem to me insufficient to account for the intimate relationship between the historical moment and transhistorical myth: even though both admit that the human psyche is affected by historical changes, their theories cannot account for the actual mechanisms of psychological change. Why the myths of the 'Return of the Beast' and the 'Alien Messiah' surface now in this particular historical context and in this particular fictional incarnation, and whether they can be read from a transhistorical mythical perspective different from that of

Jung's and Freud's systems is the question to which I turn in the next two sections.

3.1. 2. Nostalgia for the Predator

In Chapter 1, following the work of Baring and Cashford, I interpreted the origin and development of the monster in Western culture as a consequence of the replacement of the matriarchal cult of the goddess Earth by the patriarchal cult of the sky god or gods. As I have noted, in the Iron Age the goddess lost the struggle for power won by the patriarchal hunter-warrior and she was incorporated into the already existing myth of the hunter; in this myth she was represented as a monster, replacing the original wild beasts of the most archaic versions. Baring and Cashford base their Jungian analysis of why the once hegemonic feminine archetype was replaced by the hegemonic masculine archetype on the evidence furnished by archaeology and history: invasions, wars and genocide paved the ground for the abandonment of one model for another. I should like to turn now to a neo-Darwinian theory based on palaeontology which might shed light on the question of whether civilization is implicitly barbarian because it began with an act of aggression against a predator that became the prototype for the imaginary monster. Baring and Cashford argue that all the myths about the confrontation of a hero with a serpent or dragon can be traced back to the myth of Tiamat and Marduk narrated in the Babylonian epic *Enuma Elish* (op. cit.: 274). However, this plainly indicates that there was an already available mythical narrative model based on the confrontation of the archaic hunter with a wild beast and that Tiamat's myth actually originates this a much older patriarchal myth involving the killing of a monstrous predator. From this point of view, the current hegemonic 'masculine' archetype would be in a process of transition towards an androgynous model based on the idea of the hero/ine as a survivor using positive aggression contrary to the model of the hero as a barbaric abuser of negative aggression which arises in the Iron Age.

The 1980s and 1990s myth that I call the 'Return of the Beast' is best expounded by Bruce Chatwin in his travel book *The Songlines*, which deals with the myths assembled by the

Australian aboriginals in the primordial time they call the 'Dreamtime'. Chatwin's observations are much in line with those of Mircea Eliade, especially as regards the difficulties of the history man (the secularised Western traveller represented by Chatwin) to understand how and why the Aboriginal wanderers of the primordial times built their myths on the basis of the features of the territories they traversed, including their fauna and flora. The idea of the wanderer or nomad leads Chatwin to consider the role played by the encounter with predators in the construction not only of archaic myth but also of the prehistoric nomadic family, in which the father would have played the role of hunter-protector. This concurs with Baring and Cashford's idea that hunter myths originate from nomadic tribes while the myth of the goddess arises from tribes of agriculturists presumably less harassed by predators. At this point Chatwin considers, on the basis of the theories expounded by the palaeontologist C.K. Brain an even more important factor, how and why we, of all the species, stepped out of the predatory chain to become the hunters and not the hunted.

In the last chapter of *The Hunters or the Hunted?: An Introduction to African Cave Taphonomy*, C.K. Brain (1981: 266 - 274) concludes that the fossils found in the Sterkfontein caves in South Africa hint at a correlation between the appearance of the first men and the extinction of a carnivore which preyed almost exclusively on hominids. This predator, 'Dinofelis', a big feline similar to the sabre-toothed tiger, is supposed to have lived in the deep recesses of dark caves and to have hunted by stealth and at night the asleep, defenceless, unsuspecting hominids living in the upper areas of the same caves. There is no definitive evidence as to why and how 'Dinofelis' disappeared; however, Brain's hypothesis is that its prey learned somehow to repel its attacks, at first possibly with fire until a more aggressive defence brought the first death of the beast. This supposition opens the way for Chatwin's speculations (1988: 252): "Could it be, one is tempted to ask, that *Dinofelis* was Our Beast? A Beast set aside from all the other Avatars of Hell? The Arch-Enemy who stalked us, stealthily and cunningly, wherever we went? But whom, in the end, we got the better of?" Never clearly seen, unstoppable and specially feared by the first hominids still dispossessed of fire or any weapon in the dark night, the image of 'Dinofelis'

suggests to Chatwin that of the Devil. As he remarks, the most crucial event in the history of humankind, the event that made man himself possible, was the defeat of this predator. First kept at bay with fire - and how often this use of fire to ward off the beast is repeated in contemporary film from *The Thing* (1982) to *Alien³* (1992) - a weapon used by a proto-hero may have caused the death of a 'Dinofelis', giving birth to the many myths of combats between heroes and monsters but also to a nostalgia for the lost adversary. An evolutionarily specialised predator would have been in quite an intimate relation with its proto-human prey, becoming for the proto-human hero occupied with the fight for survival not only an object of fear but also of fascination, a mystery. Chatwin notes that the defeat of the Beast was a Pyrrhic victory, that left us somehow yearning for a 'false monster' to replace the one that had been lost. The Devil and the Beasts of postmodernity respond to that nostalgia for the predator.

But why should Chatwin's myth of the lost Beast be relevant now for us as a collectivity in the 1980s and 1990s and not, for instance, Freud's myth of the killing of the violent primal, patriarchal father by his sons as described in *Totem and Taboo*? How, indeed, can both primal myths be reconciled if at all and how are they related to contemporary fiction? To begin with, both Chatwin and Freud try to account for the beginnings of civilization and at the same time for what survives of the primitive man in us. While Chatwin suggests that the Beast survived as the Devil in religion - as I see it, more generally as the Other, the monster - Freud suggests that the patriarchal father survives in the patriarchal God of religion. Both Chatwin and Freud speak of a primal act of aggression that results in guilt and a nostalgia so deep that it is internalized and transmitted through the generations - perhaps through genetic memories encoded in DNA.

The realization that we are as Martin Amis puts it "Einstein's Monsters"[1], that is to say, the only species in the natural world which does not look up to a predator to justify its existence but preys on itself and all the others has spurred many narratives in which we must reconsider our

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[1]Amis' collection of short stories, *Einstein's Monsters*. (1987) takes its title as the "Author's Note" indicates , from Amis' idea that nuclear weapons but also we, who have created them, are monsters: "We are Einstein's monsters, not fully human, not for now..." (p. vii).

position by facing our predator - in a sense, a nostalgic replacement of both God and the Devil. With the development of the intercontinental nuclear missiles that ensure the total wipe-out of the planet in case of war, the 1980s secularised history man comes to an awareness that the whole human species is psychotic - inexcusably aggressive, predatory, and totally incapable of distinguishing the reality of human suffering from the fantasies of total destruction. The constant barbaric aggression against fellow human beings and against nature despite the growth of civilization cannot be cured by regressing to a primal state in a Freudian style: there may be many fossils but there are simply no memories of what our brains contained when we were harassed hominids, proto-humans or more advanced prehistoric men. On the other hand, the loss of the primitive man's trust in myth, ritual and religion plus, certainly, the doubts about another myth, that of the Enlightenment project of civilization, leaves the postmodernist man stranded at a moment when, in addition, the end of history is announced. No wonder then, that the myths of destruction refer to that dark area of the past in which the total destroyer was not us but the mythical Beast and at the same time to that near or remote future in which other predatory species threaten to destroy all of humankind.

The 'Return of the Beast' serves to evaluate our own role as aggressive predators and at the same time to present human aggressiveness as a boon. Chatwin himself suggests in *The Songlines* that instead of the innate aggressive tendencies of mankind supposed by scientists such as Raymond Dart and Konrad Lorenz, we should consider the hypothesis that man became a hunter in self-defence against the predatory beast. The strategies learned to defeat the beast become, according to Chatwin, the basis for hunting. Presumably, malicious aggression of the kind described by Freud in his myth of the killing of the primal father is a displacement towards the fellow human being of the violence used to hunt. Chatwin (ibid.: 248) writes that "all war propaganda ... proceeded on the assumption that you must degrade the enemy into something bestial, infidel, cancerous, and so on. Or, alternatively, your fighters must transform themselves into surrogate beasts - in which case men became their legitimate prey." In this idea that the hero

and the monster face each other within a harsh natural order, using 'positive' aggression, lies the main difference between the films and novels I examine in this chapter and those which deal with evil, which I examine in the next chapter. Evil appears, perhaps as Freud suggests, with the killing of the father by the horde of brothers-hunters who misuse their habitually 'positive' use of aggression against animals in hunting. The death and subsequent cannibalisation of the father, the first totemic meal repeated in rituals including Christian communion, is the symbolic event that marks the entrance of mankind into "social organization, of moral restrictions and of religion" (1975: 41) and also the event that triggers the discovery of guilt. In contrast, the survivalist myth of the Beast ignores guilt: the act of killing the Beast can only be seen in a positive light. In short, evil appears when the strategies of aggression learned to master the predatory beast are used to gain power over the other members of the tribe. The hominid tormented by the predatory beast evolves to become a tormentor of other men and eventually of women: this is how civilization began and has been maintained since then.

While Freud grounds the killing of the primal father in the patriarchal dispute between him and his male children over the ownership of the women in the tribe, Chatwin's survivalist myth ignores the position of woman. According to Freud, negative aggression leading to guilt results from breaking the taboo of disobedience against the patriarchal father and presumably lays the foundations for the rise of the taboo of incest: negative aggression is used by men against men and victimizes women. In Chatwin's scenario, positive aggression is used to defend the whole tribe from the predator; the tribe's champion, he suggests, is male because men are stronger than women. Biology would explain why there are heroes but no heroines until the 1980s when technology in the form of sophisticated weaponry makes the actual gender of the hero/ine a matter dependent on the sexist or feminist ideology of a particular text. In fact, there is no reason to suppose that the first conqueror of the 'Dinofelis' was a male hominid, but there are reasons to suppose that if this proto-hero happened to be a male, males could have used their discovery of positive aggression as an 'excuse' to take power away from the females whose power was based

on their capacity to create life. Of course, another attractive supposition is that in prehistoric matriarchal societies based on a hypothetical biological order women sent the men to hunt because the loss of a man would not greatly affect the survival of the tribe in terms of sexual reproduction. The myth of the hunter and patriarchy itself may have developed as a revolutionary step forward taken by men to undermine the power of the females over them. The discovery of negative aggression would have consolidated the rise of the patriarchal model.

Films such as the *Alien* trilogy (1979, 1986, 1992), *The Thing* (1982), *Predator* (1987), *Predator 2* (1990), *Species* (1995), *Jurassic Park* (1993), *Wolfen* (1981) and to a certain extent *The Terminator* (1984), develop a basic scenario of confrontation with the Beast centred on the heroic use of positive aggression against a predatory monster. A point to stress is the fact that these very popular films deal with a 'return' of the Beast, not only because they are themselves imitations or an updating of 1950s films - or of much older myths - but because the Beasts enter the historic time of humankind from another time, which is usually a barbaric future pointing backwards to prehistoric times. The evolutionary scenario they propose is that evolution does not imply civilization but the perfectibility of the aggressive, predatory instinct. These films complement thus the myth of the 'Alien Messiah', which implies that alternative paths of evolution result in pacifist, angelic, spiritual non-human beings. The position of the hero/ines of these films and novels is, however, different from that of the proto-human hero who drove the Beast away. The predicament of these ordinary people meeting extraordinary monsters is possibly best summarized in this exchange between Ender, the exterminator of the alien race in *Ender's Game* and his sister Valentine:

> "I'm a killer no matter what"
> "What else should you be? Human beings didn't evolve brains in order to lie around on lakes. Killing's the first thing we learned. And a good thing we did, or we'd be dead, and the tigers would own the earth." (p. 265)

This position has its dangers and its attractions (apart from the fact that it casts man in the new role of reluctant hunter and woman as a defender of positive aggression). It may be read as a reflection of the particular historical role chosen by America in the twentieth century: 'heroic'

America is as reluctant as these mythical heroes to play her aggressive role but self-defence and the 'salvation' of humankind force her to assume an unpleasant position. However, all these films and novels coincide in distinguishing the ordinary hero/ine from the American system of corporate business and corrupt government, so that the hero/ine is seen to fight two kinds of aggression, one 'natural', that of the predator, the other 'unnatural', that of human beings. There is no doubt in any case that the 'unnatural' aggression is the worse.

An additional problem is that the role of the hero is usually assumed by a white male who masters the technology to defeat the Beast but lacks the mythological wisdom necessary to understand what the monster he is facing is. This mythological knowledge is often supplied by members of ethnic minorities, supposedly more 'primitive', or by women, supposedly more 'sensitive'. Thus in *Wolfen*, the native Americans employed as construction workers in New York mock the white policeman incapable of unravelling the enigma behind the return of the 'wolfen' to their original hunting ground: the return of the Beast is the return to a mythical time they have not forgotten, the 'wolfen' are not simply wolves but totemic wolves of myth come to tell the white man that all excesses must be paid for. In *Predator*, the Central American female guerrilla taken as a prisoner by a US military platoon working undercover for the CIA is the first to see the Beast and to understand that the extraterrestrial is the 'demon' that appears in the myths of her people. Interestingly, even though she is a soldier, she is not allowed to take part in the fight against the (male) monster. The monster himself, an extraterrestrial hunter whose forays on Earth have the only aim of capturing trophies for his collection, only kills armed men as if his combats were re-enactments of that first encounter between the hunter and the 'Dinofelis'[1].

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[1] *Wolfen* and *Predator* are closely related: the former introduced the concept of 'alienvision', that is to say, the presentation of the action from the point of view of the monster. This was achieved by filming with a steadycam from the point of view of the monster using a special film technique which suggests that the monster can detect heat as in thermographs but not colours. Audiences seemed disappointed when seeing that the savage monster was nothing but a wolf in *Wolfen*, but the gimmick was used to much more effect in *Predator*, in which the monster is a truly horrifying figure. Of course, both films also offer audiences the chance of sadistically enjoying the hunting of a human being from the point of view of the non-human predator. Likewise, an intriguing touch was added in *Predator 2*, where the skull of an 'alien' - as in the *Alien* trilogy - can be spotted among the many trophies gathered by the extraterrestrial hunter decorating the walls of the extraterrestrial spacecraft: this suggests that the hunter is a more advanced form of the predator, though it is interesting to note that films and comics based on the confrontation between the *Alien* and the

Predator 2 stresses the links with the ethnic communities and the Beast in a more problematic way. In the final scene, the second Predator gives the black hero, policeman Mike Harrigan (Danny Glover), an eighteenth-century pistol as a proof that his species have visited Earth before and intend to return. They regard the Earth as a rich hunting ground and they are willing to sacrifice the odd individual killed by a human 'hero' for the pleasure of hunting men. Despite the casting of Glover in the role of humankind's champion, the activities of the Predator are linked throughout the film to those of the gangs of ethnic minorities - Jamaicans, Colombians - whose booming drug-dealing business and in-fighting dominate the urban jungle of 1997 Los Angeles. The Predator makes no exception among the men he kills on race grounds nor depending on whether they respect the law, yet the fact is that Harrigan is enlightened about the real nature of the beast by King Willie, the Jamaican drug baron; King Willie's foreknowledge of the arrival of the Beast is nonetheless useless to prevent him from becoming the Predator's next victim. The links between the Beast and the minorities are also stressed by the dreadlocks that both the Jamaicans and the Predator sport and by the police's initial confusion as to whether the cruel killing methods used by the monster are typical of the Colombian or the Jamaican gangs.

This is in itself racist discourse, but the fact that Harrigan is himself black suggests that culture (understood as integration in American culture) and not race is the real issue. In any case, the America that Harrigan defends from the monster is not that of the white man represented by the methodical, imperturbable FBI senior agent sent to capture the Predator, but that of the union of different genders and different ethnic groups: Harrigan's own team consists of two Hispanics (a man and a woman), a low-class white man and himself, whereas the FBI's team are all white men. Stranded between the pseudo-primitive culture of the Jamaicans and Colombians and the FBI's blind confidence in state-of-the-art technology, the African-American Harrigan survives the return of the Beast because he sees the shortcomings of both. Presumably, this is why even though he has killed a Predator, the remaining members of the extraterrestrial group of hunters allow him to

Predator suppose that they are similar kinds of fighters.

survive. After the revelation received in the underground hideout of the monsters, Harrigan returns to the surface of the city knowing that the monster of the past will inevitably return in the future and that no hero can defeat the Beast for ever. Furthermore, that nobody will acknowledge his heroic acts at all and that other FBI men like the ones who died in the combat with the monster will deny that the Predator ever existed.

The myth of the 'Return of the Beast' goes beyond the concrete historical moment dominated by American culture and beyond the idea of the hostile extraterrestrial. The Beast may return in the form of an extraterrestrial race (what animal could, indeed, be believable as a predator of humans now that animals are seen as the victims?), but it may also take the shape of a disease, a mutated human, autonomous sentient artificial human beings or machines, extinct species reborn thanks to genetic engineering and even the undead vampires or other creatures of legend such as werewolves. The myth is thus, neo-Darwinian as it explores the fears that our privileged position as a species may be radically altered by an evolutionary accident, especially by those brought about by humankind itself. Apart from the threat posed by the existence of a large quantity of nuclear weapons, AIDS - which appeared in the early 1980s - has probably greatly contributed to this dystopian atmosphere of the end of the century, in several senses: first, because the illusion that modern medical science could conquer any disease has been shattered by the failure to produce a vaccine; secondly, the virus has been alternatively seen as a 'product' of Africa, where it originated and as a 'product' of illegal experimentation of colonialist white science in Africa - at a point there were rumours that the virus had passed from a monkey to a human thanks to experiments in trans-species blood transfusion, a myth that points simultaneously to a fear of miscegenation, involution and technology. Thirdly AIDS, in itself a biblical plague for many who thought it only attacked those who 'deserved' it, has not been seen truly as a disease but as a punishment linked to guilt and abnormality - the monstrous virus reaching those monstrous Others but not the privileged white, heterosexual, monogamous, drug-free, middle class. In the view of dangers as absolute and real as nuclear weapons or AIDS,

the myth of the return of the Beast has an immediate psychological, consolatory (and cautionary) use: it reminds human beings that privilege is fragile and that we could lose it as a species or as an individual as the Beast did.

The fear of the loss of privilege and of the alien species takeover is no doubt bound to a paranoiac pessimism about the barbaric state of civilization at the end of the century, though it would be only short-sighted to suggest that the paranoia is unfounded. What is significant is the fact that the myths of destruction apply only symbolically to postmodernist reality, indeed, that myth is preferred over realism to deal with global anxiety and fear, as if the worldwide reality of suffering and death could only be processed through the sensationalism of the media or through myth. On the other hand, since filmmakers and novelists are usually reluctant to rationalize the mythical content of their work - perhaps because it is not explicable by reason but by intuition of what lies hidden in the collective unconscious - there is considerable confusion as to what ideology the neo-barbarian myths actually assert. These difficulties in apprehending reality may be part of the postmodernist confusion between reality and fiction but they may also be signs of a deeper despair: why deal with 'reality' in artistic terms when the constant presence of 'reality' in the media does not result in the better understanding of who we are? Why not leave historicity behind and move towards myth, or alternatively, banality, trivia?

I return thus to my initial question of why the imaginary Beast has a greater presence in our culture than real life 'monstrous' human beings: why is so much effort devoted to producing fiction and cultural studies about, for instance, vampires and not about the contemporary equivalents of John Merrick, the "Elephant Man"? A sign of contemporary myth is that it lives on the edge between transcendence and banality because belief is not a fundamental issue. The myth may carry as much meaning as secondary elaboration ascribes to it - my own reading of Chatwin's myth and the available mythological corpus is in itself an attempt at understanding what exactly is touched when we read or see fiction of the kind I have described - or none at all. That is, after seeing *Predator*, audiences may have either the impression that the monster is but a banal

fantasy or that he represents a most serious invitation to considering how easily all human life can be destroyed.

Predator, which is probably the quintessential text of the mythical type I am describing in this section, may be thus seen simply as a typical Hollywood vehicle for star Arnold Schwarzenegger: just another action film mixing elements derived from the Vietnam film and the science-fiction monster film reinforcing masculinist, racist, imperialistic and militaristic ideologies. For Schwarzenegger's hero, Dutch, both the guerrilla and the monster are the 'enemy'; the rainbow crew he leads, which includes a native American, an African-American and a Hispanic, and the token presence of a woman (the captured guerrilla) are either signs of political correctness or a reinforcement of the idea that only white men of a very muscular kind are fit to play heroic roles - at least in action films. Yet the entrance of woman in the myth of the hunter with Ellen Ripley in *Alien* and of the man other than white with Mike Harrigan in *Predator 2*, suggests that the ideology of this type of narrative is in constant transformation. The entrenchment of the Predator in the popular imagination - the success of the films, the comics, the novels, the attached merchandising - may be a further sign of the banality of the monster. However, the function of this mythologizing fiction is not only providing entertainment for a Saturday afternoon but also ostensibly that of setting the head spinning, as Chatwin describes his reaction when he read C.K. Brain's hypothesis about the Dinofelis. His, 'what if...?' is the same 'what if ..?' awakened by this kind of (sub)mythical fiction. Regardless of logic, probability and even possibility, when seeing the uncanny[1] moment in which Dutch emerges from the mud, covered in dead leaves and looking the very incarnation of the hero of primitive myth to face the alien Predator - a primitive predator equipped with nuclear weapons, certainly postmodernist man's Jungian shadow - what matters is Life and Death beyond the historical moment, beyond the awareness that this is just a film. And that is the essence of myth. Obviously, I am not suggesting that audiences understand that this and other films are

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[1] I am using 'uncanny' hear in the Freudian sense: "... the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" but has been become alienated through the process of repression. See Freud (1986: 220 and 241).

elaborations on the myth described by Chatwin - there is no such awareness of the roots of myth in Hollywood. What I am suggesting is that (sub)myth may appeal to aspects of the collective unconscious for which there is not yet an available discourse; this lack of discourse may make (sub)myth appear to be trivial, when in fact its triviality is a relative value that subverts the idea that real meaning lies in other cultural products that elicit abundant critical discourse.

In other cases, such as that of the vampire, the cultural or critical discourse seems to be obscuring mythical subtexts that have become taboo. Whatever the actual sources of the legends about vampires may have been (photophobic diseases and catatonic pseudo-deaths plus various theories on the decomposition of human bodies have been indicated) the fact is that vampires are related to taboos surrounding death. Freud (op. cit.: 65) inscribes the origins of demons, spirits and vampires based on the return of the dead to the influence of mourning: extreme detachment from the dead body would help dissociate "the survivors' memories and hopes from the dead." However, current critical discourse on vampirism tends to ignore the relationship between vampirism and death and focuses, instead, on sexuality. Richard Dyer (1988) suggests that Stoker's Victorian Dracula and other vampires of fiction - especially Lestat and Louis in *Interview with the Vampire* - can be read as representations of the fear of homosexual men, Roger Dadoun (1989) sees Dracula's stiff body as the very embodiment of male sexuality and he describes the male vampire as a 'phalambulist'. Other critics have insisted in seeing Dracula as the patriarchal man literally sucking women's blood and have pondered the attraction/repulsion dilemma posed to the victims. The application of sexual discourse to vampirism corresponds to that "constant optimization and an increasing valorisation of the discourse on sex" that Michel Foucault (1984: 23) sees as the sign not of censorship but of the Western man's interest during the last three centuries in installing "an apparatus for producing an ever greater quantity of discourse about sex, capable of functioning and taking effect in its very economy." In the case of the vampire my suggestion is that the sexual reading, while appearing to tell the underlying 'truth' about why vampirism is such an active part of the human imagination and of the current Gothic revival, is

actually used to efface another underlying, more problematic and embarrassing truth: that we no longer know how to deal with death.

The vampire is often seen in the 1980s and 1990s as a non-human predator, even as literally an alien species as in Tobe Hooper's _Lifeforce_ (1985). The vampire keeps points of contact with the mythical Beast but is progressively losing the connotations associated with death that have been displaced in the twentieth century towards the zombie, a figure imported from Haitian folklore as recently as the 1930s. It cannot be denied that sexuality is one of the main issues in the current interpretation of vampirism, but novels such as _Interview with the Vampire_ (1976) and _The Vampire Tapestry_ (1980) insist on presenting the vampire mainly as a predator. In _Interview with the Vampire_, the vampires Louis and Lestat's main bone of contention is that while the former cannot reconcile the remains of his human nature with his new nature as a predator, the latter lives happily as a human undead predator. In Suzy McKee Charnas' _The Vampire Tapestry_ Dr. Weyland is seen as a predator devoid of all sexual charm by a woman who tries to hunt him and by a boy who feeds the vampire when he is about to die. Bitten by the monster, the boy wonders how anybody may have seen a connection between vampirism and sexuality at all: the bite in the neck, indeed, is more reminiscent of the hunting methods of felines than of any kind of sexual contact. Weyland, himself a reputed anthropologist specialized in vampire legends, defines vampires as the top rung predators, specialised in human prey - or, as another character ironises, "a sort of left-over saber-tooth tiger, a truly endangered species." (p. 41) In short, a creation of the human imagination based on the memory of Chatwin's 'Dinofelis'. This view of the vampire may incidentally give a clue to why fans of Bram Stoker's _Dracula_ have been angered by Coppola's romantic revision of the vampire: why, they claim, has not Stoker's 'hunter or the hunted' scenario been respected when it is what justifies the lasting attraction of the vampire - and indeed of the myth of the eternal return of the Beast?

3.1. 3. The Human Hero and the Alien Messiah

Regenia Gagnier (1990: 151) has argued that Dracula is defeated when his modern Victorian opponents class him as a 'child-brain' and 'criminaloid': "Once the forces of the information industry assign the Count the label of 'child-brain' (a contemporary term from ethnology) and 'criminaloid' (from criminology) - in late Victorian terms, atavistic, at a lower stage of evolution - he can only instinctively return home to the land of superstitions." *Dracula* must be read, then, as an optimistic assertion in favour of modernity and against the barbarism represented by the Count; his defeat is a triumph of civilization that leaves no nostalgia for the vanquished Beast. Contemporary myths are not so optimistic about the actual possibilities of civilization to defeat barbarism. Hero/ines take up their tasks reluctantly, wondering why they have been chosen and how they, ordinary human beings, can overcome the powerful monster. They are Christological heroes who find in the sacrifice to redeem others the highest justification of their humanity in the face of the inhumanity of the monster - and death.

As Alan Dundes (Rank et al., 1990: 179 - 223) has shown, Jesus stands in the same line as the heroes of primitive myth, though he is exceptional in two senses: first, what is missing in his myth is the killing of the monster and the marriage to the 'princess', second, he is placed within historical time by those who believe in him. For Baring and Cashford (op. cit.: 597) he is not a hero in the Indo-European sense of the hunter-warrior but the first of the prehistoric goddess' son-lovers destined to renew the fertility of the mother Earth with their yearly death

> ... whose voice we hear, or at least whose voice has come down to us. He is the first actually to teach the meaning of sacrifice, and the first to take that sacrifice upon himself willingly. In the tradition that clothed him, the son-lovers of earlier times were not drawn as consenting to their death or understanding it. If that is a valid comparison, then from any perspective this represents a crucial movement of consciousness to a higher level.

I do not intend here to disparage the figure of Jesus or to suggest as John Lennon once did referring to his own 'cult' that the heroes of popular culture are at the same level as the heroes of religion. However, I should like to point out that the persistence of Christological features in many

neo-barbarian myths indicates that the ideal hero of the secularised 1980s and 1990s descends

from the fusion between the myth of the hunter and the myth of the goddess embodied in Christ,

the Messiah. The images are scattered and, on the whole, less evident than the overwhelming

presence of the Beast, yet they form a suggestive network which outlines a type of hero different

from the masculinist hunter-warrior. The list is long: Ripley's final sacrifice and that of the T-1 to

prevent the second coming of the Beast and apocalypse, the replicant Roy's hand penetrated by a

nail before his death directs his enemy Deckard's gaze towards the only glimpse of blue sky seen

in the darkness of *Blade Runner*, Jean-Claude Van Damme's crucifixion in *Cyborg*, the power to save

lives of Oskar Schindler, Alex Murphy's resigned acceptance of his new role as an only

half-human Robocop devoted to protecting the innocent are some of those Christological images

in film. In the novel, the cybrid Johnny Keats who birth announces the reconciliation of humankind

and their intelligent machines is perhaps the most prominent Christological hero together with the

girl Swan, who has the power to regenerate the Earth devastated by nuclear explosions.

The Terminator is the most successful fusion of elements derived from the patriarchal hero

myths analysed by Rank, Raglan and Dundes (ranging from Gilgamesh to the Greek myths) with

the view of the ideal hero as a new, Christological version of the goddess' son-lover. In classical,

patriarchal myth, the hero is conceived in extraordinary, even supernatural circumstances, often by

a woman chosen by a god. He is often placed with foster parents and ignores who he really is

because an interdiction has been put on his parents (usually the mother) to approach him.

Eventually, he is reunited with his real parents and, though not much is known of his childhood, he

becomes as an adult the slayer of a monster and a triumphant leader of his people, though usually

he later loses his position.

The two *Terminator* films follow remarkably well this pattern. Sarah Connor (the woman

'chosen' by fate to be the mother of humankind's saviour) is visited by an 'angel of annunciation',

chosen by the future redeemer of humankind - John Connor - to give her a message (the

etymological meaning of 'angel' is, of course, messenger): she must become Connor's mother and

help him through the 'dark years' until he can rise to the status of leader. Kyle, the 'angel', fathers the child John, who has thus a 'supernatural' origin because his father cannot possibly have been born when he begets the son. Later, Sarah is forced to separate from John and imprisoned in a psychiatric unit so as to prevent her disclosure of the existence of the computer created by patriarchal science that will eventually destroy humankind. The US government play thus the role of the jealous king or god that separates the woman from her hero son in archaic and classic myths. John is, like most traditional heroes, placed in the care of foster parents until eventually a second 'angel', the protective T-1, whom he has himself sent from the future reveals to him who he really is and reunites him with his mother. The second film concludes with the killing of the apocalyptic monster - the T-1000 - and with John's ritual passage from childhood to adulthood achieved thanks to the sacrifice of his 'mentor', the T-1.

The most fascinating points of the story of John Connor's birth and childhood are the transfer of the idea of sacrifice from the Christological hero to the monstrous father, the T-1 of the second film, and the placing of the destiny of humankind in the hands of a dyad formed by the strong mother, Sarah, and her son. The adult John Connor is heroic because he devotes his life to defeating the autonomous, thinking machines that unleash the nuclear war that devastates Earth: he cannot regenerate the land as the goddess-girl Swan does in *Swan Song*, but he uses positive aggression to stop the masculinist, patriarchal negative aggression which permitted the construction of nuclear weapons. However, if John is to succeed and avoid his own sacrifice, he must first seek the help of his mother and transform her from an average woman into a warrior capable of supporting his cause: unlike the passive mothers of the traditional heroes - including the Virgin Mary - Sarah must make choices that involve the whole future of humankind and, what is even more important, must find a way of educating John that avoids the pitfalls of patriarchy and her own androphobia. Hence the need for the sacrifice of the surrogate father, the reconverted T-1, who is simultaneously the monstrous result of masculinist technology and John's own modification of that model on the basis of the education received from Sarah. The pair formed by

the goddess and the son-lover return in this apocalyptic myth to offer, at least, the possibility of a different view of the future.

One of the myths constantly retold against a science-fictional background is that of the 'Alien Messiah', in which sophisticated aliens tutor us in the advantages of superior civilization. This messianic race may well indicate that contemporary film audiences and film writers suffer from "a terminal sense of inadequacy and insecurity and a parallel fatalistic certainty that the problems of our contemporary society are insurmountable", as Alan Ruppersberg (1990: 37) remarks. If this is the case, it follows that the aliens take the place of the gods, bringing to us a superhuman solution in films that serve the same function as "the biblical epics of the 1950s and 1960s" (ibid.: 37). This is the legacy of Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C. Clarke's classic film *2001* (1968), a film that opposes the myth of the hostile predator from outer space by suggesting that our growth as a civilized species is related to the magical intervention of a superior race. Many primitive myths refer to the Promethean gods coming from the sky, gods who taught humankind different skills that gave rise to civilization and, indeed, many benign extraterrestrials of (sub)myth display superior abilities that are very far from human civilization. When these aliens appear as in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Cocoon* (1985), *Starman* (1984), *The Hidden* (1987) or *The Abyss* (1991) they are presented as 'spiritual' beings of luminous bodies - often disguised in a human body - totally different from the bizarre anatomy of the hostile extraterrestrials.

A remarkable point in which the myth of the 'Alien Messiah' and that of the 'Return of the Beast' differ is the fear of the species takeover. The benign aliens do not represent a threat and live in a totally separate sphere from humankind, away from Earth or, as in *The Abyss*, as the unsuspected denizens of the dark areas of the planet. The theme of the stranded alien - also present in *Alien* and in *The Thing* - seems to act, oddly enough, as a guarantee that the benign aliens will not alter the privileged position of humankind. There may be a sexual union between an angelic alien and a human, as happens in *Starman*[1] and *Cocoon*, but the connotations are very

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[1] Although the film ends with the alien's return to his planet just after he makes his human companion, Jenny, pregnant, a TV series with the same title dealt with the return of the alien fifteen years later to meet his human son.

different from the horror of the sexual union between human and alien in, for instance, *Species*. While traditional myth is populated by many heroes born of the union between mortals and gods down to the birth of Jesus from Mary, contemporary mythmaking is strangely constrained in this sense and seems to prefer technology rather than the divine to explain the superhuman nature of the heroes, if they are indeed superhuman.

The angelic alien of *The Abyss* are at a crossroads between the secret species, the stranded alien and the guardian angel. They have much in common with the extraterrestrial Klaatu of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), who arrives on Earth to warn humans that the Earth will be destroyed by a coalition of planets unless peace is given a chance. Klaatu's failure - he is hunted down and killed - may be the pessimistic reason why the more recent alien visitors of fiction are not exactly messiahs with a mission but lost travellers. While the Beasts of myth threaten to conquer Earth, it is certainly ironic that the Alien Messiahs mostly avoid contact with the inhabitants of the Earth and that only accident prompts their strange meetings. What the 'memory builders' of *The Abyss* have apparently learned from Klaatu is that angelic persuasion does not work with humans: a miraculous show of power is needed, which in this film takes the shape of a tidal wave big enough to sweep across the whole Earth - incidentally, the apocalyptic end of the Earth envisioned in the myths of the Australian aboriginals portrayed in Peter Weir's beautiful film *The Last Wave* (1977), another film with a Christological hero. As it turns out, this bullying of the warring humans into peace leaves the aliens powerless to go back home, though the question of the species takeover is eluded by the fact that the aliens live in the sea and can thus share Earth with man.

The 'memory builders' differ from humans, as their name indicates, in their ability to construct collective memories. Unlike humans, each individual can have access in a conscious way to all the collective memories of the species since its very origin and to all the particular memories of each individual since its birth. The alien species of *Ender's Game* is privileged in the same way and so are the 'noocytes' of *Blood Music* (1985) and the new interspecies of *The Nimrod Hunt* (1986). These fantasies about the reification of the collective unconscious, its

exteriorization to a conscious level - as taught by an alien race or on the basis of human intuition or even technological achievement - is a wish-fulfilment fantasy related to the impossibility of wholly recovering the past of the human species and the personal past of each individual. This fantasy is not always positive and may lead to the raising of horrific monsters as in the *Nightmare on Elm Street* series, based on the premise that Freddy Krueger is a new archetype arisen from the collective nightmares of a group of teenagers. Yet, on the whole, mental linking is seen under a positive light and from many perspectives. Thus, in *Mythago Wood* (1984), a primal forest kept intact in England since the end of the Ice Age also preserves a capacity to materialize the fantasies - positive or negative - of all the men that have crossed it. When Steven Huxley enters it in search of his companion Guiwenneth - herself a mythical woman dreamed up by Steven's father - he finds that the forest is the domain of all myths and of all ages and comes across figures of legend and people from other historical times. His father believed that the 'myth imagoes' - the images of myths - carried in the unconscious found in the woods something far more powerful than the individual's imagination, "a sort of creative field that can interact with our unconscious... The form of the idealized myth, the hero figures, alters with cultural changes, assuming the identity and technology of the time." (p. 49)

Cyberspace is the other main domain of the collective unconscious in postmodernist mythmaking, the domain where monstrous gods like Neuromancer in the eponymous cyberpunk novel by William Gibson (1984) or Jobe in *The Lawnmower Man* (1992) are created, assuming the 'ideology and technology of the time'. To a certain extent, the aspiration to a mythical total memory has found its technological embodiment in the Internet, which is nothing but Gibson's cyberspace. Douglas Rushkoff declared following the publication of his novel *Cyberia* that the Internet is "something that if it is not alive, is very life-like" (Didbin, 1994: 12) He added that:

> 'It is also self-spreading because it feeds the natural human desire to connect and reach out, our natural net-like tendencies. I don't see how it can be stopped.'
> '*I think the Internet is going to be a vital extension of human life. The next phase of human evolution is going to see us becoming more of a single total human organism rather than groups of individuals ...*'

Obviously, what matters in this case is not so much the value of Rushkoff's words as prophecy but the way in which they summarize a mythical aspiration that has so far only found its expression in an intuitive form in fiction, but that lacks a deeper analysis from an anthropological point of view. The ambiguity of his use of the word 'evolution' - technological progress or species evolution? - links his comments on the Internet to my suggestion that the myths of the 'Return of the Beast' and the 'Alien Messiah' are fictional explorations of the fear that our species might lose its privileged position and also of the possible directions that evolution may take. Whether the Internet will be represented in fiction as a potentially positive way of developing what Rushkoff describes as 'our natural net-like tendencies' or as a threat to individualism still remains to be seen.

Not all the new myths concern the nostalgia for the predator, the awaiting for a messiah or the mythical (mystical?) union of humankind through the sharing of the mythical collective consciousness. British writer Terry Pratchett has built a very successful literary career with his *Discworld* novel series by exploring with an enormous sense of humour how central belief is to raise monsters - what he calls collectively 'the Things' - from their otherworldly domain. The twenty novels of the series are based on a similar scheme: an individual or a group cause, often unwittingly, a breach in the fabric of the thin wall that separates the grotesque human inhabitants of the Discworld from their non-human, monstrous counterparts; the Things inevitably threaten to take over and only 'magic' can restore the balance between 'order' - if such is the word in the bizarre world of the humans - and the ever impending chaos. Belief is, in any case, the foundation of the clash between humankind and the Things, for only belief can sustain the existence of all kinds of mythical creatures - a topic frequently repeated in contemporary fantasy. Thus, *Small Gods* (1989) narrates the hilarious adventures of a small god - reduced to taking the shape of a humble turtle because he has lost his believers - in search of a single new believer that will restore him to his former glory. In *Guards, Guards!* (1992), a mythical Dragon raised by the alchemists plagues the inhabitants of the capital, Ankh-Morpork, until the pragmatic head of the city guards understands that the physically impossible beast has returned from a domain to which it had been

banished after the community lost its belief in - and its memory of - it

Pratchett's *Moving Pictures* (1990) touches directly on the role of the cinema as the medium that best suits the audience's need for *make-believe* mythical monsters. The novel deals with the 'rediscovery' of the new technique of filmmaking by the Ankh-Morpork alchemists: they have tricked a set of tiny demons to paint on a moving strip as fast as they can what is enacted before their eyes. The business of filmmaking proceeds among a strong feeling of *déjà vu*, until the fateful opening night of the blockbuster *Blown Away* when the audience's belief in the reality of the giant figures projected onto the screen causes them to come to life in a repetition of a long forgotten event that once doomed the ancient city of L.A. Only the efforts of the male star of *Blown Away* - forced to perpetuate the make-believe outside the screen and to play hero against the gigantic Things - and the timely apparition of the knight custodian of the lost city (a gigantic version of the Oscar statuette) ensure that the screen will be never again a gate for the Things to enter Ankh-Morpork.

Pratchett's satiric exposure of the film business and of Hollywood's (sub)mythical nature points, all the same, to an idea that is essential to an understanding of contemporary mythmaking and the position of the monster within it: the unconscious nostalgia that leads the alchemists - the new filmmakers - to (re)-create a means to believe is positive and enjoyable as long as the dividing line between reality and fiction is kept clear. When belief is missing, make-believe (film, novels) takes its place; the monster of make-believe may adequately fulfil this very human need to indulge in belief and to create myths. Yet, a return to real, primitive belief in myth is a step backwards, a regression towards an involutionary, chaotic, barbarian state. Pratchett's humour and the interplay between banality and transcendence of most contemporary myth-making are a way of acknowledging the need for the myth and the impossibility of returning to it except from the self-conscious, ironic stance of postmodernity in which, as I have shown, it thrives.

3.2. Nostalgia for the Freak: The Forbidden Gaze

The make-believe monsters of (sub)mythical fiction have erased the human exhibits of the freak show from popular culture. The pleasure taken in freely gazing at the monstrous human has been displaced towards the artificial body of the monster visualized in film, comic, video-game and towards the imaginary monster of the novel. The memory of the freak show is a memory of shame and embarrassment: further proof of the barbarism existing at the core of civilization. The freak disappeared from public exhibition allegedly for humanitarian reasons. Exhibiting humans for profit came to be regarded as an uncivilised activity and the freak show was pushed out of the public domain by invoking the degradation of the unfortunate human beings involved in it. However, I will argue that far from being an altruistic, humanitarian act of redemption, the pressure to end the freak show was due to concerns that had nothing to do with the freaks but with the onlookers. There came a point, in the 1930s, when the imaginary monsters of film were seen to better fulfil the need for the Other; then the sense of wonder once awakened by real, human monsters became, simply, pity. This pity led to the fall of the freak show but by no means to the integration of the freaks into normality. Instead, they were medicalized, redefined as disabled people, and, in general, hidden away from the public gaze in institutions or their homes. All the same, the gap left by the disappearance of the freak show has resulted, paradoxically, in less tolerance for physical difference so that at the end of the twentieth century the persons being exhibited are fashion models, that is to say, those who are a model of superior anatomy and who sell the illusion that anybody can be perfect. The difference of the freak appears the more threatening now in this illusory panorama of easily attainable perfect beauty than it did when the freak show was alive and when the homogenisation of a standard of human beauty was not so accused as it is now.

A remarkable paradox of the fiction of the twentieth century is that, as Katherine Hume (op. cit.: 20) argues, "the serious quest for novelty has forced writers to examine the grotesque, the acutely abnormal, and the unique" while at the same time the abnormal human is finding less and less tolerance in real life. Hume adds to her remark that this endless search for original subjects in

the novel "contribute marginally at best to our understanding of human nature", and may result, thus, in uninteresting material, irrelevant to the concerns of most readers. However, Hume misses an important point: the abnormal defines normality because it is its inverted image, hence there will always be a need for the human abnormal beyond the current quest for originality. The target of fiction about human monstrosity is not a widening readership or film audience composed of abnormal people but by people who want to be reassured in their normality - or, alternatively, by people who enjoy the subversion of illusory normality offered by fiction about the grotesque and the monstrous.

Monstrosity - in the sense of acute abnormality - and normality are irrelevant in isolation but function as a pillar of communal life. They mark the boundaries of tolerance towards an individual and, consequently, the power held by some to define others as monsters. The individuals or groups that hold that power are in positions of privilege and, so, they tend to elaborate two types of representations of monstrosity: myths of superiority - hostile or benign - and myths of inferiority, horrific or sentimental. The myths I have examined in the first section are myths of superiority in which the 'normal' man finds his privileges either threatened or miraculously maintained by more powerful beings. The myths of inferiority fulfil a similar function but the focus on the monsters' powerlessness stresses the superiority of the 'normal' hero. A certain degree of cruelty and hatred is mixed in the representation of 'abnormal' persons with a fascination for difference and with an increasingly problematic awareness of the fact that by defining monstrosity the 'normal' person defines his shadow, his own monstrous self. Women and children have been the target of that alternance between fascination and degradation (aspects that I analyse respectively in Chapters 7 and 8) though sexuality, race and class, have also been determining factors to establish the abnormal. Those who used to be called 'monsters' and later 'freaks' were also on the receiving end of the average people's power to define abnormality and now under the general label of the 'disabled', are beginning to demand a different, respectful treatment.

Despite the apparent advance of equality and political correctness on all fronts, fiction

treasures its capacity to transgress social needs and to insist on being politically incorrect. Two instances will suffice to show how far ideal political correctness is from actual fiction, and how badly it misunderstands the passion of human beings for prejudice. Disregarding completely the claims of feminism against the misrepresentation of women as monstrous *femme fatales*, the recent film *Species* deals with the creation of a very beautiful woman, Sil, out of the mixed DNA of a human being and an extraterrestrial. Sil's extremely fast growth leads her to seek desperately a man to fulfil her instinctual wishes for motherhood. In the end, sexuality and motherhood reveal that beneath the beautiful woman there is a horrific monster that breeds also horrific men, and the film ends with the destruction of mother and son. Katherine Dunn's novel *Geek Love* (1983) is, likewise, as politically incorrect as possible. It deals with a bizarre family of freaks born to a married couple who breeds their monstrous children with the expectation of exploiting them in the family freak show. The freak show returns with a vengeance in this novel, which is possibly, the perfect illustration of the kind of original fiction described by Katherine Hume. *Species* or *Geek Love*, and many other films and novels, are fiction that can only be understood as carnivalesque. It has its appeal and its dangers, as it is useful to give vent to questions that are being repressed by the idealist expansion of political correctness; on the other hand, they should not pre-empt the need to find a more balanced way to represent those who do not have the power to define their own representations.

This tension between the privilege of defining normality and the right of difference to be respected is particularly problematized by the fact that alternative representations are not yet available. There is a breakdown of power, of social consensus, to construct the Other as monster on the basis of sex, sexual preference, age, race, class, education or disability, but there is also a great confusion as to what image we want to give of ourselves in order to deny the power of others to define us. This confusion has been generalized to those who until now held the power over the 'norm' - white, middle-class, Western men - and who are also in search of a new way of representing themselves. It can be said that the struggle for political correctness is pushing us

towards the imaginary monster - the Beast, the Messiah - across and beyond human categories. This is possibly positive, though there is a certain risk that it may lead to ignoring very serious issues involved in the definition of humanity, such as how we deal with human biological or natural monsters, that are being pushed away from fiction to make room for that less problematic monster of myth.

3.2.1. The Death of the Freak

The last freak show in America, located in New York's Coney Island, closed its doors at the beginning of 1996 to be replaced by a branch of another American popular institution, McDonald's. In spite of the belated survival of the Coney Island attraction, the freak show saw the peak of its popularity between the 1840s and the 1940s and has been in decline since then. Although the exhibition of physically abnormal people for profit began long before the USA existed, the freak show itself is an American creation,[1] and it is indeed in the American imagination that it has left its deepest imprint. The freak and the freak show have lost their place in the American fairground to resurface in fantasy, usually to signify the fear of the loss of body ownership of the new freak, most frequently a victim of some fantastic, fatal destiny. Thus, the hero of *Darkman* (1990), the disfigured scientist Peyton Westlake, is particularly anguished by the idea that he will be forced to become an attraction in a side show, an obvious anachronism in the L.A. of 1990 in which the film is set. In a number of recent films and novels about freaks, the secret laboratory of a corporation or of a government agency becomes the prison where the freak is secluded and exploited, as, for instance in *Firestarter* (1980). Other texts, such as *Memoirs of an Invisible Man* (1992) suggest that the sensationalist media are the true postmodernist heirs of the freak show in their passion for exhibiting the tragedies of the postmodernist everyman.

All in all, the fantastic freak of recent fiction is presented as an individual trapped by his

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[1] The 1989 edition of the *OED* specifies that the term 'freak' as applied to physically monstrous persons has been used from 1847 onwards and that originated in the USA as a clipping of the much older phrase 'freak of nature'. The term 'freak show' appeared as late as 1887, also in the USA.

circumstances and by the exploitative attitude of those around him; unlike the freaks of the freak show, the freak of recent fiction is a victim who cannot find a place in society. S/he is not, then, a representation of those who are marginalized because of their anatomy but of those who fear the marginalization they would face if they were suddenly turned into 'abnormal' humans because of disease, violence or an accident. In general, the fantastic freak is the victim of a generalized cruelty that is identified with something deeply ingrained in America, the tension between the egalitarian spirit that led to the foundation of the country and the actual inability to tolerate difference. Tim Burton's *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), which has been misread as a charming fairy tale when it is a bitter attack on this white, middle-class intolerant America exposes the intolerance towards the freakish body in the brief but significant contact between the monster hero Edward and a disabled neighbour of the American suburb that almost destroys the freak. When Edward is first introduced in the neighbourhood, this man advises Edward not to let anybody call him a cripple because of his hands, which are bunches of shears; yet when Edward's loses the sympathy of the suburb and a mob intent on lynching him starts chasing him, this very same man asks whether the "cripple" has been caught yet. This shows how human the tendency of reinforcing one's own sense of normality by degrading others is, and how essential the freak is to satisfy that need, even for those already at the margins of normality.

The relationship between normality and abnormality is in a constant state of flux. As Robert Bogdan (op. cit.: x) comments, "'freak' is not a quality that belongs to the person on display. It is something that we created; a perspective, a set of practices - a social construction." This begs the question of what social change led to the disappearance of the freak for it is naive to suppose that physically monstrous humans are not born any longer. In fact, the disappearance of the freak follows the same lines as the disappearance of capital punishment as described by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1987): what delineates the process is not the alleged humanization of modern society but the interests of groups seeking to gain power. Up to a point, the public executions of criminals and freak shows followed a similar destiny as they had points in

common. The public executions exposed the body of the criminal - the moral monster - to the gaze of a crowd which could see in his or her punishment a show of power, a certainly ritualistic performance enacted for the benefit of keeping order. Capitalistic exhibitors used the freak, most often with his or her willing collaboration, to ensure their audiences that they were at the centre of society and not at the margins like the exhibits. The witness of a public execution and the spectator of the freak show achieved the same satisfaction, enjoying the idea that they were in a safe, privileged position that would never lead them to the scaffold or the side show.

When executions ceased being public and the freak show disappeared, the fear rose that the individual might be abused, not publicly but secretly, by a sinister system of power - a pharisaic government, a covetous corporation, corrupt science - and turned into a freak, exploited and punished in an undeserved way. Many contemporary films and novels indeed dramatize this fear. At this point, however, public imagination has turned away from the actual criminals and freaks, who are no longer visible, and has ceased to consider in what ways they are also victims. The fact that an eventual broadcasting of executions live on TV is being currently considered in the USA as a benefit for the community in some states stresses the point the return of the public execution, seen through the eyes of the cameras, would serve the same purpose as fiction about freaks, namely, reassuring the average citizen of his or her normality, safety and rights and exonerating him or her from the need to think about why freaks and criminals deserved once or deserve now their loss of privilege and the loss of the ownership of their body.

The crucial factor in the disappearance of the freak show is intimately linked to the question of body ownership and the new power exerted by the medical profession in this sense in the twentieth century. In the mid nineteenth century the freak show and the medical profession entered a symbiotic relationship that brought about mutual benefit doctors gained authority by becoming 'experts' in the conditions of the freaks they visited and they "legitimized the public's interest in curiosities" (Bogdan, op. cit.: 27). However, by the beginning of the twentieth century, the medical profession wanted to attain, above all, respectability and based part of its authority on

defining human difference as 'disease'. The next step in the medicalization of the freak in the USA took place in 1908, when an article titled "Circus and Museum Freaks, Curiosities of Pathology" appeared in the widely read *Scientific America Supplement*. This was the first criticism of the inhumanity of freak shows penned by a doctor and the first to suggest that the proper status of the freaks was as 'patients' and not as exhibits. The idea that sickness explained the freak reached the popular press in the 1920s. By the early 1930s, "the medicalized view of human differences had become so pervasive that Browning's 1932 film *Freaks*, which starred many sideshow attractions, started with the statement that freaks' abnormalities were gradually being eliminated by medical science" (Bogdan, ibid.: 66). The process by which the freaks were progressively deprived of their status as independent performing artists, which is what many of them were, to become diseased patients could be said to be near completion in the 1930s. The increased institutionalization of the disabled, together with the rising popularity of other forms of entertainment such as the cinema contributed to the disappearance of the freak show, though it was by no means true that the medical profession had managed to conquer disability; they only succeeded in creating a climate favourable for the discontinuation of the freak show and this was done so mainly by appealing to pity.

Pity or compassion are however not totally incompatible with exploitation as David Lynch's *The Elephant Man* (1980), a film based on the real life freak John Merrick shows. Merrick was rescued from the greedy clutches of his compassionless exploiter in a freak show by Dr. Treves, an eminent member of the staff of one of Victorian London's most important hospitals. Treves was horrified by the ill-treatment received by Merrick and offered him a home and protection in this hospital. Yet Dr. Treves' right to exhibit Merrick's body in the successful lectures that increase his own prestige as a doctor is questioned only timidly by Lynch's film. Lynch subtly indicates that the crowd of uneducated people enjoying the sight of Merrick's misshapen body in the freak show is moved by the same primal curiosity that moves Dr. Treves' learned colleagues and the upper-class people who become Merrick's frequent visitors while in hospital. However, the contrast

between Merrick's brutal exploiter and the sensitive Dr. Treves is so marked that it is only inevitable to see Treves as Merrick's saviour and not as another type of more insidious exploiter. Questions of class possibly intervened in the decadence of the freak show as Lynch's film suggests: the working classes' enjoyment of the freak show was branded as illegitimate curiosity while the curiosity of those who fêted Merrick in society - his respectable visitors, the men of science and even his patroness, the Princess of Wales - was declared legitimate. When those who, like Dr, Treves, had the power to declare that gazing at the freak was a morbid spectacle it was done so in the name of human decency. In fact, this move was nothing but a step previous to the displacement of the ownership of the freak body to the medical profession and the law.

Although the reputation of the freak show was irredeemably damaged by the circulation of stories concerning the ruthless exploitation of the exhibits, a point on which *The Elephant Man* insists, this was not always the case. On the contrary, many freaks and their exhibitors struck up successful business partnerships, though sad cases, such as that of the unfortunate Siamese twins, the talented Hilton sisters, who fought a bitter legal battle to regain their freedom from their legal guardians and exploiters, surely contributed to the bad reputation of the freak show. Some contemporary texts, such as *Geek Love* and *Nights at the Circus* (1987), consider the right of the freak to choose making a living by exploiting the curiosity of audiences for the freak body, although they do so in such ambiguous terms and using so many outdated clichés that it is hard to take them seriously. The fact is that many people who would a century ago have been independent, popular and even wealthy, as freak show stars are now socially invisible because they have been marginalised as patients. Obviously, it would be only cruel to suggest that people with severe deformities ought to exhibit themselves for a living, but it is only fair to note that first, the invisibility of the formerly called freak in the streets, the work place and the media is a sign that s/he has not been really accepted as part of the normal order of society; second, other forms of bodily exploitation (pornography mainly, but also fashion, advertising and the cinema) have replaced the freak show as entertainment aimed at gratifying our voyeurism and third, the medical profession

has not 'cured' the freak but devised more effective methods to prevent his or her being born or to transform him or her into a showpiece of what science can achieve. Whenever freaks such as Siamese twins are born, the media carries abundant information about the miraculous operations that permit their separation or 'cure'. In this kind of information human suffering is displaced to the background (it is not infrequent for at least one of the separated babies to die) whereas the power of technoscience is foregrounded.

Precisely, a possible reason why the adult freak and the monstrous baby have become socially invisible, lacking hence a clear fictional representation, is that their bodies are conspicuous signs of the limited success of the medical profession. The doctors who claimed in the 1930s that freaks had to become patients certainly gave false expectations that they could not fulfil. It is interesting to note that in Lynch's film, John Merrick chooses to die when, virtually a prisoner for life in the golden cage of Treves' hospital he realizes that medicine cannot cure him and that he has already enjoyed his fifteen minutes of Warholian fame as a 'visible' part of society, a visibility that he achieves in an outing to the theatre as a guest of the respectable Edwardian crowd attending a performance of *Romeo and Juliet*. On the other hand, another sign of that profound hypocrisy towards physical difference is the fact that disabled persons are customarily played on screen by able-bodied actors. The list of actors that have been praised or even awarded an Oscar for roles involving some kind of disability is impressive, especially in recent years, as if Hollywood was trying to impress on audiences the fact that disability is becoming tolerable on the screen[1]. Yet there are hardly any disabled professional actors and the only truly freakish anatomies seen on screen are the product of make-up, animatronics or infographics. Once more, the point is not that severely deformed people *should* make a career out of their physical appearance but that supposing they wanted to as a means to earn a living they could not. What was the privilege of nineteenth-century

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[1]Deaf-mute actress Marlee Matlin is the only disabled person to have been awarded an Oscar as Best Actor, though Matlin's disability does not impair her screen presence: she is an attractive woman whose career has included modelling at some point. Daniel Day-Lewis, Dustin Hoffman, Tom Hanks, Al Pacino has been awarded Oscars in recent years for roles involving some type of disability; John Hurt and Tom Cruise are among the many actors nominated for an Oscar for similar roles.

freaks is now the only privilege of 'abnormally' attractive people.

The freak show begins its decline in the 1930s just when horror films based on literary figures - *Frankenstein, Dracula, The Invisible Man, Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* - hit the screen. The decline of the freak show seems to progress in inverse ratio to the rise of the monster film: the more the fantastic monsters meet popular success, the less tolerant audiences become towards the presence of the real freak. In fact, the freak becomes literally part of the gallery of monsters of the horror film. Even Tod Browning, who in 1931 had directed the very successful *Dracula*, failed to understand when he directed *Freaks* the following year that having developed a taste for make-believe monsters, audiences could no longer endure the real 'monster' on screen. Although it flopped when it was originally released, *Freaks* enjoyed a considerable success in the 1960s as a cult film - coinciding with American photographer Diane Arbus' successful work on 1960s freaks - and is now regarded as a masterpiece of horror cinema. The cast of *Freaks* included many popular freaks of the day such as the Hilton sisters, but far from presenting them from a humane angle, the plot of Browning's film dealt with the freaks' malevolent transformation of a beautiful woman, married for money to a successful midget she had planned to kill, and her lover into horrific freaks. This, rather than the presence of the freaks, may have been the real reason for the failure of the film.

Browning inadvertently hit on the real motivation behind the fear of the freak, the idea that 'they' have the power to transform a 'normal' person into a monster by depriving that person of the ownership of his or her body, as the film shows. The same principle lies behind the fear for the mythical monster - Browning's own *Dracula* is based on that fear - though in the case of the mythical monsters the screen and the book place a barrier of safety between the person indulging in the satisfaction of the curiosity for the monsters and the thrill of the fear it elicits and the monster. The fascination for the mythical monster is exercised from a safe point of view: the likelihood of ever encountering in real life a hostile extraterrestrial monster or a friendly abyssal angel is certainly extremely low compared to that of meeting an actual physically monstrous or freakish person. However, an average citizen of the Western world may meet hundreds of mythical monsters in his

or her lifetime through the arts or entertainment but never come across a natural monster: these are hidden away. At the most, bodily deformity may be the subject of sentimental American TV films preaching the idea that willpower may make up for the shortcomings of modern medicine unable to 'cure' the freak. Yet, since, for reasons too complex to discuss here, these films do not seem to have a great impact on the large audiences that watch them, the freak is still mainly a figure that does not belong to reality.

The popular appeal of the erotic power of the predatory vampire, unearthed with Bela Lugosi's successful incarnation of Dracula on the stage and the screen, is intimately linked to the disappearance of the freak as an erotic object. Leslie Fiedler (1993: 137) writes that

> All Freaks are perceived to one degree or another as erotic. Indeed, abnormality arouses in some "normal" beholders a temptation to go beyond looking to *knowing* in the full carnal sense the ultimate other. That desire is itself felt as freaky, however, since it implies not only a longing for degradation but a dream of breaching the last taboo against miscegenation.

The erotic power that Fiedler attributes to freaks has the effect of forcing the beholder to reconsider the meaning of desire and of perversion: beauty and freakishness are seen to be but two sides of the same coin as whatever surpasses the 'norm' is attractive in the sense of inspiring curiosity and a desire to get to 'know', including the biblical sense of carnal knowledge. Needless to say, feeling attraction towards the alternative beauty of the freak has been stigmatized as perversion, that is to say, the person attracted towards the freak has been classed *with* the freaks. Included in the attack against the freak show carried out on the 1930s there is also an attack against the eroticism of the freak and a clearly eugenic subtext, aimed at preventing the reproduction of the freak, and at impressing on 'normal' people that the freak body is not desirable. Instead of the freak show, the screen offered two new types of desirable body, the glamorous star and the mythical monster. As Angela Carter shows in her novel *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), glamour and the star were fabrications of the show business with only flimsy connections with actual human bodies and personalities. In Carter's novel, the mysterious retired film star Tristessa

turns out to have been a man appealing to the masses on the strength of his/her Garbo-like androgynous beauty. The mythical monster and the glamorous film star are placed on the screen for close scrutiny - in the dark, in loneliness among the fellow spectators - to let audiences indulge in fantasies well understood by filmmakers. The forbidden gaze at the freak is split in film into two kinds of legitimate gaze: at the star representing a model of beauty and at the imaginary monster representing a model of abjection, from the erotic Dracula of Lugosi to the horrific bodies of recent cinema. Much recent discourse on the appeal of stars and monsters stresses the role played by sex in the attraction for horror, arguably because most of the fears vented by horror films are said to be rooted in taboos associated with sexuality, yet little or nothing is written on the erotic attraction of the freak and on how what the individual desires is delimited by what society accepts at any given period.

The taboo against miscegenation that Fielder mentions as the root of the problem of the erotic attraction towards the freak is still very strong, to the point that few contemporary films and novels dare move beyond the sexual relationship between the freak and the 'normal' person. The horror of miscegenation is based on racist prejudices wrongly claiming that the mixture of races results in monstrous individuals, despite the evidence that this is not the case. The erotic appeal of mulatto women, such as top model Naomi Campbell, should be the best argument against racism and the taboo of miscegenation, yet her image belongs to a realm that has nothing to do with the utopian goals of social interaction, but much with secret desires and fantasies. The word 'mulatto' itself furnishes an important clue about the taboo of miscegenation: the 'mule' is better tolerated than the 'mutant' because it is seen as a terminal line of descent, as an individual that will not originate a new species. The freak remains, thus, socially tolerable provided it does not perpetuate his or her difference but behind the tolerance there lurks the fear that the freak might transmit an undesirable genetic legacy that could 'degrade' the human species or even originate another species, an element that returns us back to the anxiety of species takeover related to the hostile mythical Beast. The freak itself has been traditionally seen as a product of miscegenation between

humans and animals - in which it coincides with the monsters of classical myth such as the Minotaur. The Elephant Man, Arturo the Seal Boy in *Geek Love* and the names of many other freaks are a testimony of the interpretation of the freak body as the anatomical fusion of man and animal, hence, a new species, an idea that reinforces the general taboo against miscegenation and that places the desire for the freak at the same level as the perverted desire for an animal.

However, the way in which the eroticism of the freak is still exploited in contemporary fiction indicates there is a nostalgia for the legitimate gaze at the freak coupled with an acknowledgement of the 'normal' human being's wish to transgress the limits of desire sanctioned by a given society and its prevalent moral system. In the 1980s and 1990s the onlooker, who is frequently happier to feel the thrill of the ambiguous authenticity of the freak than to have proofs of his or her stark reality, and not the freak is the true transgressor of the barriers separating normality from abnormality. This is as it should be expected in postmodernity, a period characterized by the interplay of fictitious and real images and by the clash of normality and abnormality. Paradoxically, a late twentieth-century spectator or reader expects fiction to deal with abnormality as a reflection of the chaotic nature of life, though s/he is less tolerant, more negatively affected by the discovery that actual abnormality exists at the margins of real life. This has led to a curious situation: the reality of the life of those who would have been freaks a century ago has fallen into the domain of the documentary or of sentimental fiction, so that it can be said that their representation is marginal and their social presence scarce. The many fantastic freaks that appear in contemporary fiction inhabit a purely fictional territory anchored in an evident nostalgia for that mythical time when terms such as disability and political correctness did not exist and when gazing freely at the freak was allowed.

The eroticism of the freak is most manifest in the figure of Miranda, the tailed beauty born to the albino dwarf Olympia and her brother, Arturo the legless Seal Boy in *Geek Love*. Her name, inherited from Shakespeare's Miranda, does not indicate her contrast with the freakish Caliban but the fact that she is to be looked at for she is also a freak. One of the main subplots of Dunn's novel

concerns Olympia's titanic efforts to prevent her unacknowledged daughter Miranda from becoming normal thanks to surgery paid for by a bizarre benefactress as part of her crusade to make abnormal people happy. Miranda, herself an artistic subject (she is a painter) and object, makes a living as an striptease artist, thus catering for the tastes of those who seek the unique combination of beauty and freakishness in the female body. As Dunn has it, Olympia's killing of her daughter's benefactress and her own death as the ultimate proof of her maternal love, prevents Miranda from becoming normal, but she appears nonetheless not to be bound by the constrictions that would normally operate in real life. The dilemma she is involved in appears to be a false one, as false as the cult started by her father, Arturo, by which hundreds of followers have their limbs amputated in an effort to emulate him. This is, in a word, fantasy of the same kind as Browning's *Freaks*, appealing to the politically incorrect, carnivalesque interest in the freak.

Miranda's aunts, the Siamese twins Elly and Iphy, are also presented in terms that emphasize their erotic appeal. They are as explicit in this question as it is possible to be: "'You know what the norms really want to ask?' said Elly. 'What they want to know, all of them but never do unless they are drunk or simple, is How do we fuck? That and who, or maybe what'" (p. 232). Thus, seeing that the men in their audience do not care for their musical abilities in which they show undeniable artistic talent, the sisters decide to capitalise on their desire and start a lucrative but brief career as prostitutes which is cut short by Arturo's jealous, incestuous intervention. Prostitution also plays an important role in the life of Fevvers the Cockney Venus, the winged heroine of *Nights at the Circus* a novel in which Angela Carter explores the idea of the freakishness of the New Woman rising with the twentieth century. Herself the source of a seismic erotic disturbance, as her biographer Walser puts it, Fevvers claims she was never a prostitute, indeed that she is still a virgin. She claims so despite her having been raised in a brothel and despite having worked for a while for the notorious brothel of Madame Schreck as a living impersonation of a statuesque death accompanying a freak known as the Sleeping Beauty, one of the group offered by Schreck to men of 'special tastes'. Fevvers' escape from this very Gothic

brothel finally starts her successful new career as an *aerialist* in a circus run by an American. She rises to international stardom not so much thanks to her acrobatic abilities - she performs nothing that no other trapeze artist could not match despite her wings - but to her erotic appeal and, above all, to the aura of dishonesty that surrounds her. All question her true nature and few believe she is a born freak and not a made freak, but the illusion that she sells as an impossible winged woman certainly attracts crowds to the circus.

Writing about the androgynous heroine Lulu of Frank Wedekind's plays, *Earth Spirit* and *Pandora Box*, Angela Carter remarks that the lack of an obvious female anatomy in Wedekind's androgynous heroines looks as if to man's eyes "there was an inherent freakishness about breasts and buttocks at the best of times, as if half the human race were not equipped with them. As if they were as surprising and unusual physical appurtenances to find on a woman as fins or wings" (1990: 68). The passage explains the double freakishness of Carter's heroine Fevvers as a female freak, though she is exceptional among freaks in the high degree of control she has on the commercial exploitation of her own body. In contrast, the erotic appeal of the male freak is, in general, dissociated from the erotic appeal of the male body so that many films and novels dealing with male freaks have a triangular set of main characters of which two are male, one the freak, the other the 'normal' man. The woman in between may play the sentimental role of a woman saviour (which I analyse in Chapter 7) or may be shown to be herself a pervert attracted to deviant males, as is the case of Joyce, the oversexed housewife in *Edward Scissorhands*, who brings about Edward's fall into disgrace when he refuses to let himself be seduced by her.

To a certain extent, racism and the taboos against miscegenation are also useful in explaining the double moral in the representation of the erotic appeal of the freak. The erotic attraction towards the freak may imply as, Leslie Fiedler argues, a desire to feel degraded by contact with 'inferior' human beings, but it may also imply mastery over those 'inferior' beings. It is a paradox indeed that while American southern white slave masters raped their black female slaves forcing them to conceive mulatto slave children but seeing no sign of degradation in doing this,

one of the bases of racism was built on the unfounded accusation that black men were raping and degrading white women, whereas nothing at all was said about how white women coped with their desire for black male slaves. It was simply incomprehensible that such desire would arise, for a white woman wishing to conceive a child of mixed race was herself an aberration. Replacing the idea of race for that of freakishness, the same lines can be inferred. When a film or a novel presents a woman in love with a male freak she is given reasons that rationalize desire, making it unrecognizable. The woman may love the freak as Beauty loves the Beast, seeking his redemption, but not as men love the female freaks, for the indulgence of 'special tastes'. This results in an extraordinary narrowing down of actual human experience to a few stereotypes, as harmful to men as to women, which limits the enormous possibilities of the representation of desire in fiction.

The social invisibility of the formerly called freak is partly to blame for that state of matters in this particular case and for the predominance of fictional representations over reality but a deeper inability to process the actual meaning of human difference is still, no doubt, at the core of prejudice. We simply cannot imagine what desire for an abnormal body is without thinking of perversion when what we should really consider is why the social visibility of the abnormal body is so restricted and also why abnormality is expanding to include not only severe malformations but also simply those physical features excluded from the ideal of the tall, slim top-model. When recently watching a BBC documentary on the victims of Thalidomide - now people around thirty years of age - I was sorry to notice that my own ignorance had blinded me to the fact that many of these people were happy spouses and responsible parents of perfectly healthy children. I was particularly touched by the sight of a courageous woman, born legless and with severely malformed arms, who managed the feat of walking up the church aisle as a bride to meet at the altar the perfectly 'normal' man who was to marry her. She was later shown some years later with her healthy children, remarking that her only regret as a parent like those of many other victims of Thalidomide was not having been able to hug her babies. Her image as a 'normal' woman -

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worker, wife, mother - and those of other Thalidomide victims could impress more forcibly than thousands of words what is meant by understanding difference. Yet I could not fail to notice that the BBC documentary kept an absolute silence about how her husband and other spouses of similarly disabled people had coped with the reactions of others towards their companions or, indeed, to their own reactions the first time they met their spouses. In addition, the documentary also touched indirectly on another important taboo related to the rights of persons to reproduce themselves. The Thalidomide children were the living proof that the medical profession that had sought to treat the freak as a 'patient' had ultimately contributed to the creation of new freaks, new victims. Why we are failing to deal with these facts of reality in fiction and why we welcome instead fiction about imaginary freaks and mythical monsters appear to be questions much more essential in our definition of normality and monstrosity, humanity and inhumanity, than it might seem in view of the little public debate they arouse.

3.2.2. The Abnormal Baby: Sentimentalism and Infanticide

'Monster' is no longer the standard medical term for babies born with blatant defects; indeed, doctors are extremely reluctant to use the term and phrases such as "critically ill and congenitally deformed babies" (Duff and Campbell, 1977: 135) crop up often in medical or ethical literature. Yet the disappearance of the term has been accompanied by almost total silence about those babies and about any other form of physical abnormality, rather than in a re-evaluation of the arbitrariness of the actual legal and moral decisions made about them. The legal, ethical and medical literature about human physical monstrosity is the most genuine expression of the thin line dividing civilization and barbarism, beyond anything that the most violent fiction can express, though, for obvious reasons, the attention devoted to it by cultural critics is minimal. Yet, how can a critic understand the roots of the popularity of monstrosity in fiction without understanding first against what social background that fiction is produced? How can fiction about the arbitrary power held by the monster on life and death be understood without understanding first the interaction

between the law, ethics and medicine in the definition of who holds the power to draw the line between euthanasia and extermination? Once more, my argumentation in this section stresses the sheer gulf between the cultural discourses available to discuss monstrosity in fiction and the very serious anxieties they actually mask. The point I should like to stress here is that while films and novels have been dealing with the freak in the 1980s and 1990s with sentimental or grotesque clichés, those same clichés have made it almost impossible to discuss the actual fate of adult or baby freaks in real life, for which no politically correct language is yet available.

The severely malformed babies appear at the margins of fiction in a surreptitious way. My first impression when reading the following passage in Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things* (1992), in which the late nineteenth-century surgeon Godwin Baxter explains how he developed the idea of creating his own Frankenstein's monster - the pretty and eccentric Bella Baxter - was that it was part of the Gothic Victorian atmosphere in which Gray envelops his novel:

"And nature too can be ungenerous. You know how often it produces births we call *unnatural* because they cannot live without artificial help or cannot live at all: anacephalids, bicephalids, cyclops, and some so unique science does not name them. Good doctoring ensures the mothers never see these. Some malformations are less grotesque but equally dreadful - babies without digestive tracts who must starve to death as soon as the umbilical cord is cut if a kind hand does not first smother them. No doctor dare do such a thing, or order a nurse to do it, but the thing gets done, and in modern Glasgow - second city of Britain and foremost for infant mortality - few parents can afford a coffin, a funeral and a grave for every wee body they own. Even Catholics consign their unchristened to limbo. In the Workshop of the World limbo is usually the medical profession. For years I had been planning to take a discarded body and discarded brain from our social midden heap and unite them in a new life. I now did so, hence Bella". (p. 33)

As it turns out, Baxter's words are not out of place in the 1980s and 1990s. The situation he describes is still part of the problematics of medicine. What is intriguing is how the discourse on the malformed babies soon gives way to the discussion of Bella's origin, how the transition between the real and the imaginary freak is effected smoothly, easing the effect caused by the naming of the handicapped babies and putting them in the same imaginary reality as Bella. This is not surprising, since the text that discusses the dilemma faced by a parent with the birth of a

monstrous child with the greatest insight is still Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, despite the enormous

changes registered in medicine since 1818 when the novel was published. Interestingly, the

subject of the existence of those malformed babies surfaces in another novel by a Scottish writer,

lain Banks. Set in the 1980s, *The Wasp Factory* deals in its main subplot with the madness of Eric,

the protagonist's brother. This young man, a promising medical student training at the same

Glasgow hospital where Baxter was trained a hundred years before, collapses mentally at the

sights of the horrors inflicted on a deformed baby by artificially prolonged medical care. Baxter and

Eric's extreme attitudes - the flight into mad creation or into downright madness - are two very

representative examples of the impossibility of addressing this particular question directly in fiction.

Neither Baxter nor Eric can cope with the horror of what nature does to human bodies and they

retreat into their own kind of madness, which, nevertheless, signifies a deeper humanity than can

be found in the grotesque representation of the freak so common in current fiction[1].

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* considers the dilemma faced by the parent of a natural

monster or freak. Granted that the creature can hardly be said to be natural because of his artificial

genesis, still the problem remains the same. Paraphrasing Anne Mellor (1989: 40), *Frankenstein* is

not only a book about a man who tries to give birth to a baby without the help of a woman, but also

a book about the expectations of happy parenthood being shattered by the physical monstrosity of

the innocent baby. Frankenstein is horrified and never considers for a second accepting his

'hideous progeny' as he is: he is shown to be a bad parent who rather wishes the monster had

never been born, for which he no doubt elicits little sympathy from the reader. Nevertheless, the

options that Victor does not want to confront when his baby is born - should he apply euthanasia

to him, knowing he will not be accepted by society, or make an effort to accept and integrate him

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[1] I am at a loss to explain why Glasgow is associated with this theme in both these novels as they differ in all other aspects. My guess is that these two Scottish writers live in a culture which is not afraid of facing monstrosity, unlike the USA. Of course, Scotland gave the world perhaps the most universal monster, Stevenson's Dr Jekyll and his twin Mr Hyde and sustains part of its thriving tourist industry on a mythical monster, that of Loch Ness. Sadly enough, Scotland has also created real monsters such as Thomas Hamilton, who killed on March 13th 1996, sixteen five-year-old children in what is known as the 'Slaughter of the Innocent.' Even though all these forms of monstrosity are different they include the whole range that I am researching in this dissertation: the prehistoric mythical beast, the natural human monster, the evil or moral monster of fantasy and the psychopath.

within his own family? - are the same ones that parents with a similar problem face in the 1980s and the 1990s and there are no narratives offering answers to these questions. Like Victor Frankenstein most writers and filmmakers ignore the real issue by turning the exploration of a crucial moral dilemma - how human a monstrous baby is - into a story of unfair or not so unfair persecution.

In terms of cultural perceptions, the knowledge that some human beings have an abnormal appearance due to the faulty genetic inheritance often transmitted by healthy parents, does not seem to prevent people from discriminating against them. By the time David Lynch's film about the life of the Victorian freak John Merrick, *The Elephant Man,* was released in 1980 the debate about the fate of severely handicapped babies was taking quite another direction. While the film emphasized the positive value of tolerance, presenting Merrick as a victim of disease and as a sensitive man trapped inside a monstrous body, babies not unlike Merrick in many cases were the subject of heated discussion over their right to live. In the late 1970s and early 1980s several legal battles were fought for the right to decide the termination of the life of severely handicapped babies on the grounds of their being unable to ever attain full humanity - thus contradicting the premise of sentimental fiction on the subject such as *The Elephant Man.* Three main dilemmas emerged from a few well-known cases: first, whether doctors were interested in saving these babies mainly as case studies regardless of more humane concerns for the suffering of the babies and their parents; second, whether the parents or the state held the right to decide on the life of a baby (McCormick, 1977; Roberts, 1977), and third, whether long-term survival was preferable to euthanasia. All of these are subjects that contemporary fiction has been unable to deal with except, paradoxically, in the sentimental fiction of TV films based on real stories or in documentaries.

The experts on bioethics are skilled at referring to actual infanticide with euphemisms such as "discontinuance or withdrawal of treatment" (Duff and Campbell, op. cit.: 136) while the leaflets warning about the dangerous side effects of some medicines refer to the "possible teratogenic"

consequences - the possibility that embryos or foetuses may be negatively affected by the medicine in question if pregnant women take them - an obscure term that is practically unintelligible for the average citizen. Monstrosity is a term carefully skirted even at a popular level when discussing what scientists study under the heading of teratology. Gustafson (1977: 162), for instance, refers to a handicapped infant with a phrase as ambiguous as "(nontechnically) a monstrosity", which indicates that not even experts on bioethics have been able to devise the necessary terminology. There is a marked lack of vocabulary to refer to malformed babies and an even more marked lack of ethical and legal clarity to determine the actual malformations that may lead to permit infanticide, a term always used with considerable embarrassment. The way in which Western societies treat these children has even prompted specialists in bioethics to draw comparisons between the civilized Western world and the monstrosities of Nazism. At this point it is necessary to remember that the dubious Nazi policy to 'ameliorate the Aryan race' was not a German invention. The movement in favour of eugenics originated in Britain at the beginning of the twentieth century and only lost its popularity in the 1930s, just when Germany took the chance of applying its doctrine. This movement, formed by middle-class people, had as its aim the limitation of reproduction to healthy parents, ideally preventing those it considered degraded - the not too healthy working classes mainly - from having children even if enforced sterilisation had to be considered (Mazumdar, 1992).

The conclusions reached by eminent writers on ethics, mostly belonging to the utilitarian school, question the bases of Western societies to their very foundations. Helga Kuhse and Peter Singer, for instance, review in their book *Should the Baby Live?* (1987) the legal problems faced in the cases of the death of several congenitally diseased or malformed babies[1] and conclude that a

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[1] Two of these cases took place in the early 1980s, one in the UK and one in the USA and were the object of wide public controversy. John Pearson, a Down syndrome baby born in 1980, was left to starve to death because his parents rejected him. The physician in charge of the baby, Dr Arthur, was prosecuted for murder in 1981 and acquitted on the grounds that the baby's death could have been natural because the baby was abnormal - though Down syndrome does not cause death. In a poll carried out by the BBC 86% of those surveyed defended the doctor, with only 7% openly condemning him. In the USA Baby Doe, a Down syndrome baby born without oesophagus was also left to die with the acquiescence of the state court, a decision that pushed President Reagan to start a campaign against such brands of euthanasia which placed the decision over the baby's life in the hands of parents and doctors and not in those of the

form of infanticide should be regulated by law so as to prevent the arbitrary application of infanticide, as it exists now. "Deliberately letting handicapped infants die", Kuhse and Singer write (ibid.: 8) "is common medical practice, and is endorsed by some of the most respected members of the medical community." Michael Tooley (1986: 83), another utilitarian, states that "a newborn baby does not possess the concept of a continuing self, any more than a newborn kitten possesses such a concept. If so, infanticide during a time interval shortly after birth must be morally acceptable." The bioethics of rationalised cruelty are not generally accepted, in the same measure as abortion is not generally accepted despite its legality in many countries. We seem to have reached a crossroads in the history of the Western world in which what is available according to the law and in terms of medical techniques can be rationalised as convenient but hardly as moral, a point Anne MacLean (1993) emphasizes. According to her, the conclusions of utilitarian bioethics cannot be called moral and should not used to consolidate the power of the medical professional. In the UK Margaret Thatcher's reduction of the budget allocated to philosophy departments throughout the UK forced them to offer so-called practical degrees in bioethics that served to give the medical profession a moral legitimacy in cases of infant euthanasia that MacLean disputes. In view of this confusion between what medicine can achieve and what morality and the law dictate, it is hardly surprising that the fiction of the 1980s and 1990s - itself in a state of confusion as to what is moral - cannot cope with these issues, preferring instead silence or the transposition of similar issues to fantasy, such as horror or science fiction, or to the sentimental mode, especially in narratives set in a time when the technology of modern medicine was not available.

At this point it is necessary to recall that this debate is necessarily linked to the availability of medical techniques to prevent the birth of malformed babies and to the typically postmodernist attitude towards science by which whatever can be done, will be done, regardless of the moral damage it may cause. Teratology, the science that aims at classifying the types of biological

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state. The campaign was eventually abandoned due to the opposition of doctors and families having to account for their actions to the government in this matter.

human monstrosity founded by Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire and his son Isidore Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire who coined the word in 1830, and teratogeny, the scientific study of monstrous embryology, founded by Camille Dareste, are alive and well, still subsisting today in the work of scientists trying to determine which genetic and chromosomal failings cause natural monstrosity or whether chemical substances used in medicine may have teratogenic effects. This is leading to morally untenable situations that are routinely accepted on purely pragmatic grounds. Thus, even though, for instance, Down syndrome babies are not treated as 'terata' so that it is extremely difficult if not impossible to obtain a judicial order for their legal termination - it was not so just two decades ago - even countries with restrictive laws on abortion, such as Spain, authorise the termination of the foetus if the syndrome is detected.

Preventing the birth of abnormal children is becoming easier with the new medical techniques designed to detect genetic anomalies apart from Down syndrome. Currently, the Hammersmith Hospital in London is screening embryos for at least thirteen gene defects before they are implanted into their mother's wombs in those cases where the parents are suspected of carrying defective genes. This very expensive treatment reassures potential parents about the good health - the 'normality' of their baby - but is also offered by the NHS on the grounds that it is cheaper than keeping the babies born with serious malformations or genetic diseases alive (Rogers, 1994). However, the limits of this eugenic, preventive medicine were put into question recently in the UK when it was discovered that the testing of the foetus for genetic defects had lead to actual malformations in babies whose mothers had undergone the tests too early in the pregnancy (Ryan, 1995). These cases and those of the malformed babies born to British veterans of the Gulf War, allegedly affected by some form of chemical or biological weapon, have publicized the existence of abnormalities hardly ever visible in the British media, associating them with science in general and in particular with genetic engineering and technological warfare.

Contemporary fiction has very little to say about these complex issues, and what is said is, in addition, confused and confusing. Science fiction deals with the subject of the manipulation of

human reproduction and the human body by medicine and genetic engineering but the displacement of the discussion towards scenarios set in the future dealing with technological advances still unavailable, seems to be yet another way of avoiding a too problematic present. Freakish mutants like those of Mars brimming with toxic waste of the film *Total Recall* (1990) are a meaningful symbol of the dangers that the alliance between corporate business and technified science entails for our immediate future as a species, but they are hardly valid to discuss the current replacement of morality by utilitarian bioethics.

Recent fiction simply does not discuss the role of the parents of persons born deformed or the role of bioethics in the difficult decisions made every day concerning the survival of born or unborn children. As a general rule, most films and novels avoid the ethical dilemmas posed by the new technologies of reproduction preferring instead to leave parents at the margins of the text or to deal with aspects in the life of the freak that place him or her at the margins of social life or in the domain of fantasy. The interaction between parent and child is, nonetheless, dominated in fiction by gender roles. Mothers are usually represented in relation to freakish male children while fathers (and father figures) play more prominent roles only in the absence of the mother, either because she is dead in which case they are usually the parents of freakish girls (*Firestarter, Swan Song*), or because the freakish child is the result of artificial creation following *Frankenstein's* pattern, in which case it is usually male.

In fact, the explanations furnished to account for the deformities of the fictional freak are none or, if there are any, they recall folklorist beliefs or pseudoscientific misogyny rather than modern genetics. In *The Elephant Man*, for instance, the deformities of John Merrick's body are accounted for on the basis of the popular theory that a strong impression could affect the mother. Only the rise of teratology in the nineteenth century and the unravelling of the mystery of how genes are transmitted demolished the credibility of such theory, though traces of it remain at a popular level. The initial sequence of the film narrates how Merrick's mother was badly scared by an elephant when visiting a circus which resulted in Merrick's deformities, an incident that turns out

to be part of the fictitious biography used by John Merrick's exhibitor to attract customers. No doubt, the fantastic biographies of the freaks, which were an integral part of the freak show, are to blame for the dissemination of fantastic ideas about the origins of born freaks. Merrick's mother, a pretty woman who abandoned her monstrous child, appears further in the film only as an image in a photograph that her son treasures. Her absence and the lack of any explanation as to why she abandoned Merrick, or who his father was, contribute to the sentimentalization of the freak, who has nonetheless forgiven her despite his miserable life, but also serve to avoid discussing the difficult role of the parents in such cases. Instead, the film centers on the struggle for the possession of Merrick's body between his 'bad' father, his exhibitor, and his 'good' father, Dr. Treves.

A more recent film, *Johnny Handsome* (1989), still attributes to the absent mother - a prostitute - the responsibility of the making of the freak on the grounds of her drug abuse, though, again, nothing is said of the unknown father. Her death, which occurred when Johnny was still a child, is partly used in the film to justify why Johnny grew up to become a criminal and, once more, the conflict narrated is one between Johnny's two surrogate fathers: the 'good' surgeon who wants to reconstruct his deformed face and the 'bad' policeman who maintains that Johnny's soul and not his face is the site of his monstrosity. The issue of who is to blame for the criminal behaviour of the freak adult also surfaces in Thomas Harris's *Red Dragon* (1981), in which the neglect by the pretty mother of her malformed boy and his rejection by his mother's new husband and children are used to justify why the enraged Francis Dolarhyde devotes part of his adult life to massacring families.

In contrast to the role of the missing mothers, the role of the mother of the freak family of *Geek Love*, Crystal Lil, is most active: her children are created by her intake of toxic substances which is aimed at producing freaks for her husband's circus business. Every mother's anxieties about the health of their babies are turned upside down by Lil, who prefers to take into her hands the responsibility for the birth of the monsters rather than to let chance decide for her. Fevvers, the

heroine of *Nights at the Circus*, is also a freak abandoned by her parents, though she claims to have been hatched from an egg and not born to woman, a bizarre notion that furthers the distance between the freak of fiction and the 'terata' of real life. Obviously, it could not be otherwise considering that Fevvers' peculiar deformity - her wings - does not fall into any teratological category, and furthermore, that are seemingly part of the fantastic biography she has herself created.

It is rare to see on the screen or read about couples making decisions about their freakish offspring and when they appear at all there is usually either an imbalance between the role of the father and that of the mother, the mother usually preferring the child to survive despite the disadvantages this may suppose for the family, as happens in *The Fifth Child* (1988). In fact the scenario most often retold by these films and novels closely follows the pattern of *Frankenstein*, especially with respect to the mounting rage that leads the monster to destroy his creator and, by extension, society. John Merrick and Fevvers are exceptions rather than the rule in a panorama inhabited by freaks who grow up to be criminals (Johnny, Dolarhyde) or fantastic figures of revenge, such as the Penguin in *Batman Returns* (1992), or Sufiya Zinobia in Rushdie's *Shame* (1983). Shame is the emotion most frequently expressed by the parents of these freaks of recent fiction, while little or no reference is made to ethics precisely because the context is fantasy or because the plot is manipulated in such way that the issue of infanticide cannot arise. In fact, the only scene of (attempted) infanticide I have come across in my survey shows the upper-class parents of the Penguin in *Batman Returns* throwing their freakish baby into the freezing waters of a river, an action prompted by the shame 'they feel. Since the adult Penguin, who survived miraculously thanks to the help of the friendly penguins of the underground frozen waters, cannot avenge himself on his already dead parents, he redirects his hatred against the society that rejects him. Yet, as happens in *Frankenstein*, his grotesque, disgusting appearance seems to justify society's rejection of the freak rather than elicit our sympathy for the victimised freak. Shame and revengeful rage are major issues in Salman Rushdie's *Shame*, though this novel also deals with a

fantastic freak, the retarded Sufiya Zinobia. Born seemingly retarded because her body and mind are the vessels into which all the shame of her world is poured, the neglected, silent Sufiya grows to become first a most violent woman and later a man-eating panther. Her transformation is made possible by all the accumulation of shame and of unspoken rage that literally remakes her body. Interestingly, her revenge is directed against men in general and in particular against her father and her husband, who have disputed the ownership of her body and mind and whose irresponsible use of power within the family and the nation are the direct causes of Sufiya's transformation.

The fact that shame surfaces so often in these texts underlines the fact that the social consensus about the barriers between normality and abnormality still has a great force on the individual and that one of the reasons for the invisibility of the freak is that s/he is seen as a punishment for the faults of the parents and by extension of society. Incest, perhaps the greatest sexual taboo at the level of the individual and the community, has been traditionally blamed for the birth of monsters but when this topic is taken up in recent fiction, it is actually used to explain the tragedy of the innocent offspring as in *Waterland* (1983) and the popular best-selling saga of the beautiful Dollanganger children, which began in *Flowers in the Attic* (1979). Interestingly, the use of techniques of artificial reproduction has recently become the subject of a comedy in which the father becomes literally the freak. In Ivan Reitman's *Junior* (1994), Arnold Schwarzenneger abandons his habitual role as mythical hero to bear a test-tube baby daughter, implanted in his abdomen thanks to a new wonder drug. The usurpation of the maternal role is total since the baby's mother is a female scientist whose eggs have been secretly stolen for the experiment, but the film subverts the androphobic pattern of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* to suggest that equality between the sexes will be reached when men can give birth not to freakish male artificial monsters but to healthy, natural daughters.

3.2.3. Images of Disability: The 'Special People'

Not all the people now labelled as disabled could have been found a hundred years ago in freak shows, but all those people exhibited in freak shows are regarded now as disabled people. One of the new politically correct terms employed to name disabled people in the USA is 'special people', which has lead opponents of political correctness to wonder in what sense disability implies the superior difference implied by the word 'special'. The paradox is that the point most frequently missed is that freak shows did exhibit very special people with special talents, as many freaks were performing artists who did not limit themselves to being the object of a curious gaze. As performing artists - and even as objects of that curious gaze - the freaks had a certain degree of control over their own social image, at least in the same way in which Hollywood stars had control over their own. There is, then, an interaction between artistic performance and freakishness, since both the artist and the freak are, after all, special people who form a class apart. It is precisely from disabled artists that the most interesting proposals to regain control over the artistic representation of the disabled body come, an effort directed towards dissociating freakishness from disability and disability itself from medical control. In this sense, the disabled face a problem similar to women's and other so-called minorities: their image has been controlled by the gaze of the able-bodied (of men in the case of women) and while they are not satisfied with the way they are seen, they have not yet defined an alternative.

A conference held in London a few years ago which aimed specifically at letting disabled people offer new proposals about how they would like to be represented, ended according to Dawn Langley (Hevey, 1992: xv) with the uncomfortable impression that "nobody really knew what a positive or alternative representation was." The disabled see gaining access to controlling the way in which they are represented as a process built on a political agenda concerning the ownership of the body and its representations. Since the eye of the onlooker defines the other as monstrous, those who were once or are still now defined as monsters must learn to represent themselves in order to offer an alternative image which can avoid the dangers of low self-esteem.

This is, of course, an important departure both from the exploitative model of the freak show and from the medical model of the freak as a patient.

David Hevey, a British photographer, has proposed in his book *The Creatures that Time Forgot: Photography and Disability Imagery* that the disabled themselves turn the cameras towards their own bodies. Himself the victim of epileptic attacks, Hevey questions in his book the dubious use to which artistic photography has been put by British charities and reviews how the roots of discrimination are related to the capitalist system, itself the creator of the freak show. According to Hevey, the medical model of disability - the 'cure or care' system - has been now replaced by a social model of disability in which the person is defined by his or her inability to secure a job: instead of offering appropriate occupations for people with disabilities, the late-capitalist society tends to discriminate them on the basis of not being employable in the same terms as an able-bodied person. Following the work of Victor Finkeltein, Hevey (ibid.: 20) argues that the social concept of disability is now in its third phase: phase one took place in pre-industrial times when the disabled were not separated from society, phase two began with the Industrial Revolution when the disabled were alienated from society because they cannot produce and their labour cannot be used fully, phase three is based on the institutionalization and the growth of the cure-or-care programmes. To this view, I would add a fourth phase that will take place in the near future by which medical techniques will be used to reduce to a minimum the possibility that a person with any kind of disability, disease or deformity may be born. Charities appeared precisely to make up for this marginalization in the job market and to run most of the cure-or-care programmes, but they have become one of the main targets of attack coming from the disabled themselves who see them as the main agents in maintaining the negative visualization of the disabled body.

The disabled complain that charities have been accepted as their own voice by the general public, when "within the disability industry, however, disabled people are actually the last in line" (ibid.: 22). In order to raise money that the state was not prepared to give, charities have

exploited a pitiable image of disability which may have been effective in appealing to the (often hypocritical) altruism of donors but has misrepresented the disabled as totally dependent on the charity. The main grudge against charities is that they have shamelessly manipulated the image of the disabled, by denying control of it to the disabled themselves and by "bonding the actual disablement of people with impairments to the psychic fear in non-disabled people of the loss of ownership of their bodies" (ibid.: 24). Charities have subtly used images of the 'freak' renamed 'disabled' to persuade the general public to give money. This money has eased their consciences about the disabled but has also expressed an unconscious wish to make sure that the 'freak' stays in his or her 'place', far from society. What is more worrying is that, as Hevey (ibid.: 30) remarks, "there is no doubt that before the 1980s and early 1990s (when pressure came to be exerted on charities to market competitively) impairment charity advertising unashamedly relied, for its portrayal of disabled people, on notions of eugenics and the eugenic inferiority of disabled people".

Charities have wittingly or unwittingly contributed with their tragic, pitiful imagery of disability to persuading donors that much human suffering could be avoided if the disabled did not exist. On the other hand, the use of sentimental images of disability has coexisted with the artistic exploitation of the image of the disabled as a freak, not only in film but also in photography with, for instance, the work of American photographer Diane Arbus. Hevey speaks of the need to do away with the 'Miranda syndrome' - the able-bodied person pities the object of his or her gaze but cannot overcome his or her prejudices - by turning the camera held by the disabled towards the disabled themselves, as he does in his book. Though he is well aware that the process may entail pain and insurmountable contradictions, it has to carried out as the only means to achieve simultaneously social visibility and the erasure of the sinister mythology attached to images of disability by the freak show, Hollywood, TV and also literature.

Against this background, the success of the screen adaptation of Christy Brown's *My Left Foot* (1989) must have been received ambiguously by the disabled. While Brown's autobiography captures well the spirit of the vindication of the control of his body by the disabled person, the film

focuses instead on Brown's love life, returning in a sense to the question of the eroticism of the freak. The central point of Brown's autobiography is his refusal to conform to the doctors' advice concerning how he should 'normalise' his body by using all his limbs instead of only his left foot and his growth into an autonomous person capable of making decisions about his own body, a point the film does not render well. On the positive side, the film refuses to sentimentalise the disabled person as *The Elephant Man* does by using Brown's sense of humour as the best comment on how victims of cerebral palsy like him should be treated as persons and not as objects of pity. *My Left Foot,* the film, makes Brown's success as a person dependent first, on the courage of his mother who always rejected the doctors' pessimistic opinions about Christy's intelligence, and, second, on his success as an artist, painter and writer, leading to his success as a man. The final scene shows Brown accompanied by the pretty nurse who has been won over by the sensitivity displayed in his autobiography. This scene marks his integration into the literary world, where he faces a promising future, and also marks his 'normalisation' as a man. Naturally, the choice of Daniel Day-Lewis to play Brown's role is also significant: his excellent interpretation, which won him an Oscar for Best Actor, cannot mask the fact that what audiences see on the screen is an attractive actor playing the role of a disabled person, and not a truly disabled person. Although the fact that disabled people are routinely played on the screen by able-bodied actors is taken for granted, this is a subtle form of discrimination not unlike the old custom by which women were played exclusively by men until the revolutionary entrance of women onto the stage during the Restoration.

Significantly, nothing is said about how the freak and the artist merge in the body of Christy Brown or about to what extent he gained a certain reputation as an artist because he *was* disabled and not because he was an artist at all. Christy Brown's ability to paint and write with his left foot would have made him a likely candidate for exhibition in a freak show in the mid nineteenth century but since he grew up a century later in a very different atmosphere he could establish a reputation for himself as an artist, facing instead another battle: that for the control of

his body against the doctors who treated him. Brown made the front page of the local Dublin paper at the age of nine with a photograph that showed him painting with his left foot, illustrating his having won a prize in a drawing contest, precisely the kind of image Hevey would have contested for it emphasizes the freak above the artist. This image begs the question of what makes 'special people' special: would the child and the adult Christy Brown have met with the same public attention if he had been able to paint with his right hand?

Tim Burton's *Edward Scissorhands* makes a similar point in the scene in which Edward is interviewed in a chat shown on TV. Asked what would make him special if his hands were ordinary human hands instead of bunches of shears, Edward is left speechless and though his new friend Peg quickly answers that he would still be a special person under any circumstance, Edward himself adds that he'd much rather be normal. The point is that even when the personality of the 'freak', the 'disabled person' or the 'special person' *is* extraordinary this is not perceived as his or her body acts as a barrier for the others. *Edward Scissorhands* deals with our inability to understand that what is really extraordinary is not on the surface: Edward's hands make him a freak only for those who cannot see that his hands are, above all, the hands of the artist, always a cut above ordinary humankind. Brown's left foot, Fevvers' wings, Edward's hands, Merrick's deformities, cannot be compared to those of actual disabled people for they belong to people who would be special even without their freakish bodies. If they are special, they are so only in the sense that we *all* are but not really because they are 'special people' in the sense of the politically correct term designed to cover disability. This emphasis placed by contemporary fiction on making the disabled person appear as either a fantastic freak or as an extraordinarily sensitive person conceals the actual variety of people who have been labelled as disabled. This is comparable to the way in which women and children are represented: either they are angelic, monstrous or an extraordinary personality despite their ordinary appearance. What is missing, though, is the ordinary woman, the ordinary child, the ordinary lives of the disabled. And also their own voices and their own representation of themselves.

The story of the freak ends in violent death (*Red Dragon*, *The Dead Zone*, *Johnny Handsome*, *Batman Returns*, *Total Recall*) or suicide (*Waterland*, *Geek Love*, *The Elephant Man*) with relative frequency. In a few cases, marriage concludes the plot as in *Nights at the Circus* and *Memoirs of an Invisible Man* - though there are no stories about those marriages or about the offspring derived from them. In many cases, the freak simply drifts away to find a place of his or her own in which s/he is not constantly reminded of the values that define normality and social life. This happens in *Shame*, *The Fifth Child*, *The Nimrod Hunt*, *Edward Scissorhands*, *Darkman* and *The Lawnmower Man*, texts in which the freak often declares that only loneliness can make monstrosity bearable. The insistence on the fictional freak's wish to hide away or to pass him or herself off as a 'normal' person is totally at odds with the demand of marginalized persons to become socially visible and suggests that 'normal' audiences and readers find wishfulfilment solutions in the endings of these contemporary texts - solutions that avoid, in any case, having to think in moral terms about the struggle for the power to define humanity and the monstrous Other.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have contrasted the increasing appeal of the mythical monster of fiction with the lack of a proper fictional representation of persons of abnormal physical appearance, and even of a proper language to discuss them. These two factors seem be directly related: instead of considering problems that concern the need to redefine morality with regard to science and to reconsider the representation in fiction and the visual arts of images of disability, contemporary fiction focuses on more remote anxieties centred on the body of the imaginary monster. This is due to the fact that Western societies find it easier to produce (sub)mythical fiction than fiction dealing with the immediate reality, possibly because it is assumed that this is the territory of journalism, the documentary or the sentimental telefilm, and because there is a generalised wish to avoid issues that have to be dealt with in moral terms.

(Sub)mythical contemporary fiction is at a crossroads between primitive mythmaking,

contemporary popular culture and the postmodernist man's speculations about the end of history. I

have argued that contemporary mythmaking, which abounds in myths of destruction and survival,

is essentially a dystopian subversion of the primitive myths of creation. Two main myths, that of the

'Return of the Beast' and the 'Alien Messiah', articulate much of the (sub)mythical fiction produced

in the 1980s and 1990s. Both are pertinent to a historical situation in which man sees himself as

the potential destroyer of Earth and of the human species thanks to nuclear weaponry. This and

other factors, such as the appearance of AIDS, have led many artists to reconsider why we of all

species evolved into this civilized barbarism - could we have defeated a specialized predator, as

Bruce Chatwin claims, which left a nostalgia for the Beast? - and how we can evolve into a better

form of humanity, perhaps with the help of a secularised Alien Messiah. Both myths also respond

to the need to adapt elements derived from myth and Christianity to postmodernist secularized

Christological values and to defend the idea of 'positive aggression'.

Although (sub)mythical fiction may seem escapist, the fact is that it deals with important

preoccupations about the nature of man, that realistic fiction will not consider. More worrying is the

distorted representation of the physically monstrous human, which is almost negligible in realistic

fiction and certainly stereotyped in fantasy fiction. Even though the 1980s and 1990s have

witnessed the rise of important debates at a bioethical level concerning the rights of severely

malformed babies to survive and of parents to use genetic engineering for the welfare of the child,

contemporary fiction seems unable to deal with these questions except indirectly through genre

fiction or by indulging in the sentimental mode of the telefilm and the reality show. The

disappearance of the freak show and the struggle of the disabled to exert control over the visual

representation of their bodies are episodes of the same ongoing debate about the limits of the

rights of the medical profession, bioethics and the law to affect the individuals' ownership of their

own bodies. My suggestion is that contemporary mythmaking and the misrepresentation of human

natural monstrosity and of disability are rooted in a basic anxiety: the average Western citizens

want to be reassured that their privileged position as 'normal' members of a privileged society will

not be altered by their suffering some form of personal rejection or by their community's loss of control over its own privileges. What is represented in the body of the mythical monster - Beast or Messiah - or the freak is the individual's fear of being put in a position of powerlessness, either as a member of a species whose survival is in jeopardy or as an individual who has lost the privileges associated with normality within a certain community society.