Carmen-Veronica Borbély

Genealogies of Monstrosity

Constructions of Monstrous Corporeal Otherness in Contemporary British Fiction

Presa Universitară Clujeană

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To Blanca

Introduction

This study embarks on a Foucauldian *descent* into the archival traces of contemporary figurations of monstrosity, which permeate postmodernist British fiction at the turn of the millennium. In view of monstrous corporeality constantly marking out the perimeters of proper human embodiment, whether in teratological taxonomies or in travelogues depicting deformed races at the fringes of human civilisation, I rally to my argument Michel Foucault's genealogical survey of the pathologisation and discursive constitution of a domain of marginal otherness serving to delineate the abjected outside of the western liberal subject. The plural from my title, *genealogies*, emphasises the dislocation or diffraction of the monstrous figures outlined by the fictional texts I examine from strict, fixed origins: by admixing mythical, scientific, culturally perspectivist or citational Gothic constructions of monstrosity, the novels I investigate ultimately evince the firm imbrication between teratology, as the discourse of the monstrous, and attempts to construct notions of what counts as normal and normative humanity.

I see monstrosity, therefore, as a historically variable, discursive construction of otherness, arising at the nexus of a wide array of cultural, scientific, religious and ideological discourses. Undergirding any attempt to retrieve historical responses to the monstrous, however, must be the awareness that archival texts encrypt operations of subduing monstrosity, that is, of containing its contagious potential through representational/interpretational schemes. In that sense, Foucault's genealogical method can serve to highlight, on the one hand, how *knowledges* of the monstrous are organised within various historical periods and, on the other, how their legitimacy is queried or challenged in postmodernist fictional works that simultaneously invoke and contest, to follow Linda Hutcheon's argument, the textualised traces of historically legitimated truths.[1] Thus, the narratives of monstrosity under consideration here perform their own genealogical enquiry into the legacy of encrusted meanings from what Dennis Todd calls the *literature of monsters*,[2] or the teratological archive, itself evincing the complex, extensive citational and cross-referencing techniques teratologists resort to.

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1 Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 81.

2 Dennis Todd, *Imagining Monsters. Miscreations of the Self in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 44.

The novels I analyse here open up spaces for what Foucault calls an insurrection of *subjugated knowledges*, by which he understands those historical contents that have undergone concealment and interment in the name of "functionalist coherence or formal systemisation."[3] In light of what analysts have recognised as the persistent enquiry of British postmodernist fiction into its identity and its self-reflexive contestation of consecrated hegemonies, such novels as the ones I have selected for analysis dispute, in *Frankenstein*'s footsteps, the authority of master texts by exhibiting the discursive constitution and circulation of monsters, by allowing monstrified others to recount stories of their own identity, to contest grand narratives of origins and paternity, and to break through molar aggregates of enfreakment.

My study deploys an interdisciplinary approach to monstrosity, combining Foucauldian genealogy, anthropological considerations of liminality, teratological studies, as well as theoretical insights into the culture of postmodernity and postmodernist fiction, as I am fully aware that my research on figurations of monstrous corporeality in contemporary British writing, under the four headings, the "monstrous-feminine," the foreigner, the posthuman other, and the monstrous body politic, lends itself not to a reductive, unilateral approach, but to a programmatically heterogeneous perspective, intent on discarding monolithic verities. The corpus of fictional texts I look at includes novels and short stories by authors who manifest a marked propensity towards exploiting the neo-Gothic sensibility that pervades the millennial turn. I have selected those narratives written by Angela Carter, Salman Rushdie, Marina Warner, A.S. Byatt, Clare Clark, Jeanette Winterson, Alasdair Gray, Lawrence Norfolk, Margaret Atwood and Fay Weldon that substantiate my argument related to a contemporary reassessment of monstrous corporeality in fictional genealogies of the teratological archive. The structure of my study is presented below.

The first chapter, entitled **Towards a Genealogy of Monstrosity**, is divided into three subsections which set the methodological grounds of my research. Thus *Genealogy and the Teratological "Archive"* explores Foucault's notion of genealogy as an alternative history that is not bent on retrieving origins or foraging for an uninterrupted, linear progression of concepts or events but on following their course of descent, tracing the archival mutations, ruptures and discontinuities inevitably accompanying epistemic shifts. It also looks at Foucault's own genealogy of abnormality, grounded, as he shows, in a threesome of normalisation stages that anomalous embodiment registered in the transition from the classical episteme to the modern

[3] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972—1977.* Trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham and Kate Soper (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 81.

episteme (the juridico-biological monster, the moral monster and the founding monster of criminal psychiatry). The first section ends with an overview of Judith Butler's notion of performativity and the role of monstrous corporeality in providing a constitutive exteriority to the norms of proper embodiment dominating the Western normative project. The second section, *Demonstration, Remonstration: Definitional Excursions* proceeds by signalling a semantic undecidability at the heart of monstrosity, whether one considers its Latin or Greek etymons. Thus, "monster" performs the dual function of de-monstration and re-monstration, engaging hermeneutic decipherment yet foreclosing representational or taxonomic containment through its sheer corporeal excess. I extend this demonstration of the monster's aversion to definitional/categorical schemes by discussing Foucault's notion of heterotopology and by examining several taxonomies of monstrosity that reveal the monster's unamenability to epistemic coherence, its imperilment of the limits of representation. The final section, *Epistemic Paradigms of Monstrosity* deploys the genealogical method with a view to highlighting the inadvertency of what cultural theorists have claimed to be a teleological naturalisation of the monster, showing that the main discursive frameworks of monstrosity (prodigy, wonder, abnormality) have in fact registered substantial overlappings, distentions and reversals, many of which lend themselves to a composite, diffracted mapping in fictional accounts of monstrosity.

The second theoretical chapter of this research, **Towards an Anthropology of Monstrosity**, comprises four sections and charts the role monstrosity has in reinforcing, while destabilising the "ontological hygiene" of the human.[4] *The Monster as Pharmakos: Scapegoating Otherness* capitalises on the sacrificial monster's sporadic re-enactment of the originary violence in cosmogenetic myths, and then proceeds to unravel the mechanism of scapegoating others, as described by René Girard. *The Ontological Liminality of Monstrous Others* points out the relationship between monstrosity's concurrent demarcation and invalidation of structural distinctions meant to keep the self and the other apart and the categorical disarray experienced in liminal stages of rites of passage. Rather than assuming monstrosity to correspond to an antagonistic, subversive other against which the anthropomorphic norm gains its structural solidity, the section adopts liminality as a more appropriate theoretical concept for describing the enmeshment of self and other monsters exhibit. *"Matter out of Place": Monstrosity as a Pollution Phenomenon* examines Mary Douglas's concept of pollution in terms of the anomaly that can assist in the

[4] Elaine L. Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human. Monsters, Aliens and Others in Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 33.

affirmation of a cultural system's hygiene, with an emphasis on monstrosity's *positive* character of defilement. Finally, *Monstrosity on Display: The Grotesque in Carnivals and Freak Shows* tackles Bakhtin's aesthetics of the grotesque body, which displays the same areas of morphological deformation as monstrous bodies, and ends with an analysis of the social sites bearing similar symbolic deformations to the grotesque body, that is the carnival and the freak show.

The third chapter, **Monstrosity and the Gothicity of Contemporary British fiction,** proposes an assessment of the Gothicism saturating the postmodern imaginary and of the reinstantiation of the Gothic as a literary mode, with its potential for becoming a subgenre through departure, mutation, and innovation. I take into account Kelly Hurley's premise of the cyclical eruption of the Gothic at moments of cultural distress,[5] and go on to outline the genealogy of monstrous corporeality in contemporary literary works that, while not redeploying the entire apparatus of Gothic aesthetics, resort to a postmodern heterogeneous incorporation of Gothic narrative strategies, mood and motifs. The question whether monstrosity maintains its capacity to incarnate a host of widespread fears, quandaries and anxieties that demand abjection, or whether approaches to monstrosity have significantly altered towards embracing its promises as the future of (post)humanity, is what the following subsections embark upon answering.[6]

The subchapter entitled ***Unsettling Notions of the "Monstrous-Feminine"*** proceeds by examining how traditional constructs of monstrous female corporeality, in terms of a dysmorphic counterpart of male bodily shape, are re-charted in two contemporary novels by British women writers. By programmatically deploying female protagonists with a monstrous genealogy – the fabulous siren in Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984) and the cynocephalic woodwose in Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* (1989) – these narratives emphasise the ruptures and distensions that have impinged on the discursive formation of the "monstrous-feminine" and recodify in celebratory manner its abject "leakiness" and material grotesqueness. I also examine the issue of the teratogenic powers of maternal imagination in Clare Clark's *The Nature of Monsters* (2007) and in A.S. Byatt's short stories and her novel *Possession. A Romance* (1991), the latter text exploring the corporealising function of the imagination within an

[5] Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body. Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[6] To the original structure of my doctoral thesis I have added the analytical sections on the following works: Marina Warner's *The Leto Bundle* (2001); Clare Clark's *The Nature of Monsters* (2007); Alasdair Gray, *Lanark. A Life in Four Books* (1981); Lawrence Norfolk's *In the Shape of a Boar* (2000) and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), since the section on feminist dystopias organically includes the Canadian author's novel.

entire ensemble of culturally-sanctioned discursive frames and recasting the Melusine as a foundational, tutelary figure of female (pro)creativity (biological and artistic generation).

The "Savage Exteriority" of Monstrous Others reviews one of the cultural constants of teratological discourse, namely the monstrification of the foreigner figure, and takes into account several contemporary theoretical interventions aimed at refiguring the self-other antagonistic dyad. Grafted upon Renaissance travelogues depicting encounters with monsters at geographical margins and upon colonial narratives which historically circumscribe Shakespeare's atemporal island within the triangular slave trade, Marina Warner's *Indigo or, Mapping the Waters* (1992) probes the archives *of silence* that encapsulate untold narratives of the witch or the woodwose figure, reconfiguring the agonic duality of identity/alterity (civilisation/savagery, humanity/bestiality) into a polychronic, liminal composite between self and other, which is also the project of her other novel I analyse in this subchapter, *The Leto Bundle* (2001). The next section, *Spectral Encounters: The Fabulous Other in Lawrence Norfolk's The Pope's Rhinoceros* (1996), argues that in this reassessment of the hermeneutic complexes targeted at interpreting monsters, the carnivalesque vision manifestly reverses the centre-margin dichotomy, picturing Europe as the poison container for Dürer's double-horned rhinoceros, as the liminal repository of everything that lends itself to hybridisation, pollution, and ritualistic defilement. After exploring the semantic indeterminacy surrounding Lawrence Norfolk's rendition of evil *In the Shape of a Boar* (2000), the section entitled *"Strange Metamorph": Salman Rushdie's Narratives of "Liquid Modernity"* looks at Rushdie's adoption of the notion of permeable frontiers as the distinguishing phenomenon of our times, the "strange metamorph" opting for the fluidity of metamorphosis rather than the static melange of hybridity as an identitarian pattern, since solid, rigid societal and power structures are being supplanted by flexible, extra-territorial figurations.

De-naturing the Monster: Posthuman Others examines the impact of the current techno-scientific stage on definitions of the human: the much-vaunted advent of the "posthuman condition" has become a shorthand metaphor for the relinquishment of the well-marked divide that once held in place the distinctions between the organic and technological, the natural and the artefactual, the human and the non-human. In the subsection entitled *Dislocated Origins: Bio-Technical Generation in Fay Weldon's The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*, the she-devil's acquisition of "monster/beauty" is seen to concurrently support and deflate the culturally-designated standards of female corporeality. Unlike Shelley's monster – a man-machine hybrid

yearning for acceptance into the human genus – Ruth celebrates the blurring her bodily boundaries and probing the liminal interstices that separate, while connecting, her human identity to that of her technologised other, incarnating thus the "promises of monsters" Donna Haraway's cyborg utopia foretells. *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Monstering the Father in Alasdair Gray's Poor Things* investigates how the trope of monstrous birthing is resumed here with a double twist, as Gray reconceives the Shelleyan original through the prism of contemporary debates on denatured pregnancy and alternative conception schemes. Given the stringency of the posthuman condition, I plan to further expand my research begun in this subchapter by publishing an ampler study on the impact of biotechnology and "cybernetic teratology"[7] in bio-art, cinema and in the fiction written by authors like Margaret Atwood, William Gibson, David Mitchell, Martin Amis, Kazuo Ishiguro, John Hawkes, Octavia Butler, and P.D. James, among others.

Troping the Monstrous Body Politic focuses on several feminist dystopias (Angela Carter's *Heroes and Villains; The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman; The Passion of New Eve* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*) and on Alasdair Gray's *Lanark. A Life in Four Books* (in relation to a *fin-de-siècle* Gothic novel), as post-Gothic narratives that chart dystopian, monstrous avatars of the body politic trope, showing in effect a vacillation between the model of vertical power propounded by Hobbes's theory of sovereignty and the model of horizontally-dispersed power described by Foucault as governing the disciplinary society, as well as sketching the contours of Deleuze and Guattari's utopian projection of a rhizomatic social body entirely divested of "organs," that is, of mechanisms of repression or discipline.

I consider that a genealogical investigation of monstrosity as the *constitutive outside*[8] of normative humanity is essential on at least three accounts. First, to show how the project of de-naturalising monstrous corporeality as a biological given is carried out in postmodern narratives that lay bare the cultural constructedness or enfreakment monsters have been subjected to. Second, to outline the relational reconsideration of selfhood and otherness in the constructions of identity in-forming several British novels that explore the *monstrous imaginary* or, rather, the *teratological imaginary*[9] of contemporaneity. Third, to highlight a transva-

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[7] Rosi Braidotti, "Signs of Wonder and Traces of Doubt: On Teratology and Embodied Difference," in *Feminist Theory and the Body. A Reader,* ed. Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick (New York: Routledge, 1999), 292.

[8] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter. On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 8.

[9] Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses. Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), 181. Although theorists like Rosi Braidotti use the two collocations

luation of monstrous corporeality, from its traditional repudiation as the defective deviation from human embodiment to the promise of posthuman forms of corporeal identity, in which boundary transgression may no longer signal the polluting threat of contamination but, in a paradigmatic reversal, the joy of combinatorial possibilities.

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indiscriminately, I prefer the latter on two accounts. First, because the Greek term *teratologia* evokes, beyond its current meaning of the "study of monstrosities or abnormal formations" in natural organisms, a narrative concerning prodigies, a tale of the marvellous or the discourse of the extraordinary (OED Online. March 2014. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/199333?redirectedFrom=teratology; accessed April 03, 2014); and secondly because it is consistent with the overall Foucauldian outlook I espouse here: monstrous corporeality is not to be understood as inherently teratic but as a discursive construct of bodily difference, resignifiable under diverse power/knowledge regimes.

I. Towards a Genealogy of Monstrosity

I.1. Genealogy and the Teratological "Archive"

In this survey of representations of corporeal monstrosity in contemporary British novels, I start from the premise that a comprehensive archaeology of the monstrous, in all its forms and representations, is a chimerical project, as it is inevitably fraught with an endless recession beyond pithy, authoritative, albeit impermanent, definitions. Instead, I aim to see how the diffuse the *teratological imaginary* of the culture of late modernity gains determinacy in the fictional narratives of authors as diverse as Angela Carter, Marina Warner, Jeanette Winterson, Salman Rushdie, A.S. Byatt, Alasdair Gray, Lawrence Norfolk, Clare Clark, Fay Weldon, and Margaret Atwood, who evince a post-Gothic sensibility that revels in troping monstrous corporeality as the heterotopian site where the normatively human no longer defines itself in contradistinction with the anomalous, abnormal other, but finds the latter to be foundational for self-definition. I base my argument about the discursive construction of monstrous corporeality on Foucault's claim that discourse exceeds mere representational ends and that, in effect, discursive practices systematically produce or generate their objects, even where exclusionary intentions are at work[10] – a particularly important contention since, as I will show, monstrosity tends to be discursively engendered as the contradistinctive other of humanity. Thus, Foucault identifies several discursive structures at work in the production of *legitimate knowledge* through strategies of prohibition and division, deployed towards the exclusion of "discontinuous, disqualified, *illegitimate knowledges*," the latter actually representing the genealogist's field of attention.[11] A genealogical foray into the hinterlands of illegitimacy could account, then, for madness having served, since the Middle Ages, as the

[10] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), Trans. Sheridan Smith, A.M. (London: Tavistock, 1972), 49. The idea of a discursive production of objects is also tackled in "The Order of Discourse," where Foucault dismantles preconceived notions that discourse is straightforwardly expressive of thought, and observes its formation mechanisms under power/knowledge regimes: discourse always translates "struggles or systems of domination," being itself the point of contestation and the nexus of power in strategies of hegemonic validation, in "The Order of Discourse" (1971). Trans. Ian McLeod, in *Modern Literary Theory. A Reader*, ed. Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh (London: Arnold, 2001), 211.

[11] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 83. Genealogy, defined by Foucault as counter-history, provides alternative, contrapuntal versions to the pronouncements of traditional history.

counterdiscourse of reason, or for the annihilation of monsters being invoked as a palliative cure for reason's vulnerability and fallibility, since the *will to truth*, that archaeological project of exhaustively mapping the domain of knowledge, is a "prodigious machinery" that functions by erecting *systems of exclusion*, by "push[ing] back a whole *teratology of knowledge* beyond its margins" and by relegating monstrosity to the realm of a *wild exteriority*.[12]

In light of a much-quoted passage from Michel Foucault's "Fantasia of the Library," the monstrous imaginary, in the sense of a repository of discursive constructions of monstrosity, straddles the interstitial spaces of archival domains.[13] Methodologically, therefore, this is what I intend to do: in the manner of a Foucauldian genealogist, I aim to trace transversal or diagonal lines of inquiry across diverse discursive framings of the monstrous, scouring both the archival domains and the interstices between them. I take into account Deleuze's emphasis that the Foucauldian discursive formations (statements) and non-discursive formations (institutional processes and practices) are historical and inseparable from "temporal reactors of derivation."[14] Thus, with every new epistemic formation of monstrosity, the traces or fissures of its building blocks will always be latently detectable therein. Taking heed to the Foucauldian notion that genealogy is not intent on studying origins, the *arche,* I set about exploring the *archive* of monstrosity, that set of discourses that establish what matters as the legitimate knowledge of the monstrous in a specific period or another, looking for its fissures, its points of seepage, the porous thresholds where *counterknowledges* of teratical others may interrupt, distend and dismantle the coherence of hegemonic constructs. The genealogical analysis that Foucault undertakes in *The History of Madness, The Birth of the Clinic, The Order of Things,* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* serves as the methodological framework for this survey of teratology, charting the epistemic breaks that may account for the emergence or dissipation of certain discursive paradigms of monstrous corporeality.

In "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Michel Foucault describes the operations of genealogy on a palimpsestic "field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times."[15] In Foucauldian acceptation, genealogy is opposed to any quest for origins, since origins are both irretrievable in their inviolable

[12] Foucault, "Order of Discourse," 212-214, 219.

[13] Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. D.F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 91.

[14] Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (1986). Trans. Seán Hand (Minneapolis and London: The University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 21-22.

[15] Foucault, *Language,* 139.

identity and perpetually postponed through the dissension of other things. Genealogy also withstands approaching history in terms of linear development and is bent on recording events in their singularity, in their fractured emergence that discloses the faultlines of complete, overarching or comprehensive archaeological projects. In other words, genealogy seeks to disperse chimerical searches for beginnings and to question, in Nietzschean fashion, a suprahistorical perspective on history as a totality come full circle, as a completed development, by pinning down its events, "its jolts, its surprises, its unsteady victories and unpalatable defeats," by disclosing its discontinuities and dispersions.[16] It attempts to unravel what Foucault calls the *descent* of a concept or idea, its *heritage* as an unstable palimpsest of heterogeneous, fissured layers. Unlike traditional history, which presupposes lodging the eruption of singular, haphazard events in (teleo)logical continuities, genealogy recognises that the forces at work in history (reversals of power relationships, appropriations of language) are not governed by regulatory mechanisms but manifest themselves in aleatory manner. What is at stake is unearthing phenomena of disruption, incoherence and irregularity, the epistemological thresholds that "suspend the continuous accumulation of knowledge, interrupt its slow development, and force it to enter a new time."[17] In emphasising the possibility that ruptures, mutations and distensions may invalidate the premise of a progressive refinement and rationalisation that concepts invariably undergo, Foucault reinforces Georges Canguilhem's assumption that the history of thought unfolds in diverse fields of legitimation, revealing not one but "several pasts, several forms of connexion, several hierarchies of importance, several networks of determination, several teleologies."[18] Furthermore, corroborated with an adamant disbelief in Western essentialist, axiomatic constructs of human identity that dismiss corporeality as irrelevant, the domain of genealogy is the body as a surface that lends itself to the inscription of various events under the disciplinary gaze of power: its "task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history."[19]

Not to be confused, then, with an excavation for origins, genealogy underscores the *descent* of discursive practices, evincing the chance

[16] Foucault, *Language*, 144.
[17] Foucault, *The Archaeology*, 3-4.
[18] Foucault, *The Archaeology*, 4.
[19] Foucault, *Language*, 148. Genealogy does not contemplate "the noblest periods, the highest forms, the most abstract ideas, the purest individualities" from a distanced, lofty vantage point: instead, it "shortens its vision to those things nearest to it – the body, the nervous system, nutrition, digestion, and energies; it unearths the periods of decadence and if it chances upon lofty epochs, suspicion – not vindictive but joyous – of finding a barbarous and shameful confusion" (Foucault, *Language*, 155).

occurrences and disruptions of history rather than their continuity. Through its visceral emphasis on the body as an object of control and discipline, genealogy queries the effects upon it of a diffusive *micro-physics of power,* disseminated through reticular capillaries.[20] The disciplinarian society is associated with a power that is far from homogeneous and defines itself through a new topology; it is a power that no longer issues from a privileged place but diffusively traverses the social space in which it allocates, classifies and normalises polymorphous, deviant marginalities. This decentralised power both constitutes and categorises embodied subjects within a network of normativities which are, as Judith Butler maintains, incorporated rather than merely internalised, in that "bodies are produced which signify that law on and through the body."[21] Not so much a temporal as a spatial economy of power, whose architectural emblem is the Benthamite Panopticon: this ensures an automatic enforcement of power by rendering the subject perpetually visible and, therefore, constantly malleable in a disciplinary "political anatomy," under whose effects, the subject is both subjected to power and constituted as a subject of power, a power which seeks to control and domesticate the monstrously disruptive others,[22] discarding repression in lieu of formulating knowledge about them.

Genealogy can exhume such knowledge and reveal that contrary to a teleological view of monstrosity's progressive rationalisation and "scientification,"[23] the discursive frames within which the monstrous has been docilised have registered significant overlappings or mutations. Such

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[20] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Allen Lane, 1977), 139. Foucault delves upon the radical shift from a societal organisation in which a repressive, violently corporeal power was tightly aligned with the authority embodied by the sovereign, to a society in which biopower, or the power targeted at the bodies of the socii, is decentralised and disseminated through a horizontal network of infinitesimal disciplinary channels. While his genealogy of sexuality dismantles the repression hypothesis by highlighting the Victorian proliferation of perverse sexualities, in *Discipline and Punish,* the genealogy of carcerality captures the disappearance of the body as a punitive target and its docilisation through normalising panoptical practices (surveillance, re-education). Here, a certain transversality of power replaces centralisation and totalisation.

[21] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990, 1999), 171.

[22] Michel Foucault, *Abnormal. Lectures at the College de France, 1974-1975*. Trans. Graham Burchell (London and New York: Verso, 2003), 50-51. Thus, "[w]e pass from a technology of power that drives out, excludes, banishes, marginalises and represses, to a fundamentally positive power that fashions, observes, knows, and multiplies itself on the basis of its own effects" (48).

[23] The monster's "shift from omen and fable to comparative anatomy and embryology," as Laura Lunger Knoppers and Joan B. Landes say, in *Monstrous Bodies / Political Monstrosities in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004), 7.

cracks in the façade of homogeneous grand narratives of identity formation through exclusionary practices, as well as the palimpsest of discursive constructs of monstrosity, are laid bare by the postmodernist novels I analyse here. In a genealogist vein, I shall look at diverse configurations of the monstrous, aiming to isolate their various points of emergence through what Foucault calls "substitutions, displacements, disguised conquests, and systematic reversals."[24] Casting self-conscious relationships with earlier texts, post-Gothic fiction erects its "monstrous *counter-discourse*" as Andrew Gibson says, within the archive, the "privileged locus in which a gesture towards the monstrous is possible,"[25] wilfully eschewing classical values (beauty, naturalness, proportion) in favour of ugliness, artefactuality, or grotesque hybridity.

Discourses of the monstrous body, Thomson opines, embrace a "series of successive reframings within a variety of registers over time,"[26] betraying, nonetheless, a constant impulse to contain, to explain and textualise anomalous corporeal manifestations. From a mode of the marvellous to a mode of the deviant, from wondrous anomalies to patho-logical errors, monsters are consistently instrumentalised as means for consolidating and reinforcing the concept of the standard body. Marked by a decidedly positivist, normative turn, the outbreak of the modern episteme with its emergent norm for the human body simply entails that monstrous difference becomes more regularly defined as deviant or abnormal, and that its supranatural status and symbolic significance, its sense of mystery and awe are stripped away under the standardising gaze of power.[27] In a genealogy of monstrosity, if all corporeality, as Margrit Shildrick says, is leaky and unpredictable, if all bodies present the threat of evading the normative grasp, the transgressive potential and disruptive excess of the monstrous body makes it not the dichotomous opposite of the "normal" body, but rather its magnifying mirror.[28]

Foucault's conception of monstrosity is enlarged upon in *Abnormal* (2003), his genealogy of the deviant and the marginal, which forms the focus of the 1974-75 lectures he delivered at the College de France. What

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[24] Foucault, *Language*, 151.

[25] Andrew Gibson, *Towards a Postmodern Theory of Narrative* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 240.

[26] Rosemarie Garland Thomson, ed., *Freakery. Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1996), 2.

[27] Cf. Thomson, *Freakery*, 3.

[28] See Margrit Shildrick, *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries. Feminism, Postmodernism and (Bio)ethics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997); Margrit Shildrick, "Transgressing the Law with Foucault and Derrida: Some Reflections on Anomalous Embodiment," *Critical Quarterly*, 47/3 (2005): 5.

counts as monstrous is not simply the morphologically abnormal body *per se*, but the uncontainable threats it posits to the legal frameworks and strategies deployed, at various socio-cultural moments, towards the normalisation of anomalous embodiment. In other words, in Foucault's understanding, the transgression implicit in monstrous bodily forms – the privileged signifiers of which are, for this "thoroughly Gothic theorist,"[29] conjoined twins and hermaphrodites – is not only an infringement of the natural order itself. Trapped in a "never wholly mastered interplay between the exception of nature and the breach of the law,"[30] monstrous bodies amount to juridical enigmas. They correspond to forms of embodiment bordering the edge of the naturally or biologically possible, and are primarily offensive because they destabilise the juridical regulations which attempt to set out and maintain the domain of the proper. As Foucault says, the

> frame of reference of the human monster is, of course, law. The notion of the monster is essentially a legal notion, in a broad sense, of course, since what defines the monster is the fact that its existence and form is not only a violation of the laws of society but also a violation of the laws of nature. Its very existence is a breach of the law at both levels.[31]

In the pre-Enlightenment episteme, the "juridico-biological" sphere in which the monster materialises construes monstrosity as a "mixture of two realms": animal and human; as the blending of two species; or as the concorporation of two individuals or of two sexes.[32] Making visible the co-presence of animal and human features in one individual, a monster may causally be related to a transgression of divine and secular prohibitions against human-beast intercourse. Canons of baptism and inheritance customs may be completely confounded by the birth of a human-animal hybrid or of two-headed infants, since a "disorder of nature" also amounts to a judicial quandary, so much so that, well into the nineteenth century,

> the monster appears and functions precisely at the point where nature and law are joined. It brings with it natural transgression, the mixture of species, and the blurring of limits and of characteristics. However, it is a monster only because it is also a legal labyrinth, a violation of and an obstacle to the law, both transgression and undecidability at the level of the law.[33]

As a "juridico-natural complex," the monster, in Foucauldian acceptation, is an offence to natural order, to canon or secular precepts, but it is more important that the monster's highly disturbing bodily hybridity raises

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[29] I am sponging here Terry Eagleton's qualification of Foucault in *Figures of Dissent: Critical Essays on Fish, Spivak, Zizek and Others* (London and New York: Verso, 2003), 22.
[30] Foucault, *Abnormal*, 324.
[31] Foucault, *Abnormal*, 55-56.
[32] Foucault, *Abnormal*, 63.
[33] Foucault, *Abnormal*, 64.

insoluble legal dilemmas which may push the law to the point of rupture in its civil, religious strongholds. Problems surrounding the humanity of the monstrous offspring engendered through human/animal fornication, the rights to baptism and inheritance of bestial progeny, the individual liability of concorporate twins or the marriageability of hermaphrodites reveal that the transgression of nature monstrous corporeality unleashed was first and foremost a transgression of the canons and dictates that were instrumental to defining that nature.

Foucault's argument is that what the nineteenth century regularised as the domain of abnormality was largely derived from an earlier concern with the monstrous. Facing execution for being aberrations of nature in the Middle Ages, by the end of the eighteenth century hermaphrodites would only incur criminal punishment if they failed to "choose" a dominant sex and abide by its sumptuary regulations (that is, if they abused their "additional sex"). The demonstrification hermaphrodites underwent led to the "mix of sexes" being supplanted, in the nineteenth century, by an understanding of monsters as mere eccentricities, deviations or "errors of nature." The dismantling of the juridico-natural complex of monstrosity veers into a juridico-moral complex of somatic anomaly:

> Not a monstrosity of nature but a monstrosity of behaviour, that calls for condemnation. Monstrosity, therefore, is no longer the undue mixture of what should be separated by nature. It is simply an irregularity, a slight deviation, but one that makes possible something that really will be a monstrosity, that is to say, the monstrosity of character.[34]

From a domain of somatic disorder to a domain of criminal transgression, the eighteenth century witnessed the autonomisation of moral monstrosity, a monstrosity of behaviour that supplanted the previous category of the monster. From criminality as a qualifier of monstrosity, to monstrosity as an attribute of criminality. This grafting of a lawful-unlawful dichotomy on a normal-abnormal division became feasible, Foucault explains, through the new mechanisms of permanent control, analysis and surveillance targeted at the social body and enabling the multiplication and intensification of the effects of power on the embodied subject's exterior comportment *and* self-awareness. Moreover, Foucault's analysis of the consolidation of a domain of abnormality in the nineteenth century highlights the monster as a blueprint or magnifying model for every little irregularity or abnormality displayed by nature: "we can say that the monster is the major model of every little deviation."[35] In fact, the nineteenth-century sciences brought about the demise of the "great"

[34] Foucault, *Abnormal*, 73.
[35] Foucault, *Abnormal*, 56.

monster as a radical embodiment of otherness, and a converse drive towards unravelling the monstrosity at the core of its more widely disseminated figures of deviant alterity: the abnormal individual (the sexual deviant, the pervert), that is a "pale," "everyday," "commonplace" monster.[36]

In view of the proper body, as one of the cultural projects advanced by liberal society, with its individualist commitments, circulating a norm that stands for human health and somatic wholeness, monstrous carnality issues a challenge, it raises concerns as to the contingency and impermanence of any bodily standards. Foucault shows how societal responses to the pathological and the abnormal – also functioning as mechanisms of political control – have wavered characteristically between the expiatory and the therapeutic poles. It is the difference, we might say, between the practices of relegating the medieval monstrous races to the margins of an imagined geography of civilisation and of confining differently embodied individuals in the nineteenth-century quasi-carceral heterotopias of deviation, such as freak or side shows.[37] While the former social practice entails a rigorous separation of intramural from extramural space, the latter promotes a territorial partitioning of the community so as to enable a meticulous supervision of individuals. In other words, in contrast with a negative, exclusionary power mechanism operating globally through "exile, rejection, deprivation, refusal" or the "marginalisation" of the impure, the "positive technologies of power" inherent in the inclusionary model inaugurated at the turn of the eighteenth century allowed for the fixation of individuals to place and their transformation through the exertion of a power that was "continuous not only in this pyramidal, hierarchical structure, but also in its exercise, since surveillance had to be exercised."[38]

In the nineteenth-century, the installation of the proper body as the norm of embodiment designed to regulate bodily agencies in the liberal society came through an array of discursive practices, whose performative rather than prescriptive effect meant that its regulatory force arose – to borrow

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[36] As Foucault has also shown, expert psychiatric opinion, as a form of medico-legal scientific knowledge, found its legitimacy in the extension of judicial power to "dangerous" and not merely downright felonious individuals, distributed not in a logic of binary opposition to innocent individuals, but in a wide continuum of gradients, ranging from the normal to the abnormal, and entering the grasp of techniques of normalisation (Foucault, *Abnormal*, 42, 25).

[37] Foucault, *Abnormal*, 46-47. The paradigmatic demonstration – also occurring in *Madness and Civilisation* (1989) – contrasts two major western models of exerting control over pathogenic individuals: the lepers' banishment from the confines of the community in the Middle Ages and the quarantine of plague-infested victims in the late seventeenth century: while leprosy demands distance, the plague requires a close and insistent surveillance of the pathological individual to assess his conformity to the rule, that is, the norm of health. See Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation. A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1961). Trans. Richard Howard (London and New York: Tavistock/Routledge, 1989).

[38] Foucault, *Abnormal*, 43, 45.

Judith Butler's notion of performativity – through performing or materially re-enacting "complex cultural exchanges among bodies in which identity itself is ever-shifting, indeed, where identity itself is constructed, disintegrated and recirculated only within the context of a dynamic field of cultural relations."[39] As Youngquist shows, the normative impact of the proper body is neither absolute nor sealproof, in the sense that it is established at the expense of a domain of abjection whose boundaries are fluidly demarcated, to the extent that what might appear as a neatly demarcated conceptual paradigm is in fact a "loose ensemble of discursive effects."[40] This amounts to, in Foucault's terms, a "political anatomy" of the proper body, a "micro-physics of power" generated through

> a multiplicity of often minor processes, of different origin and scattered location, which overlap, repeat, or imitate one another, support one another, distinguish themselves from one another according to their domain of application, converge and gradually produce a blueprint of a general method.[41]

If docile bodies in the liberal society underpin a corporeal norm that arises at the junction of an array of discourses and practices, anomalous bodies will evidently disrupt the smooth operation of the proper body, challenging that regulatory political anatomy of proper embodiment.[42] The norm, to be understood as a "reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names,"[43] acquires a performative force, producing, through repeatable practices (e.g. dietary, surgical, sumptuary), the bodies it deems acceptable. At the same time, Butler's account of subject formation through "the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces an abjected outside to the subject, which is, after all 'inside' the subject as its own founding repudiation,"[44] is useful for understanding the performative norm as a norm that produces not only "normal" bodies but also "abnormal" bodies through what Youngquist calls the double force of production through exclusion.[45] The human, Butler explains,

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[39] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 161-162.

[40] Paul Youngquist, *Monstrosities. Bodies and British Romanticism* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), xxvi.

[41] Foucault, *Discipline*, 138.

[42] Broadening Judith Butler's theory of the materialisation of sexed bodies "within the productive constraints of certain highly gendered regulatory schemas" in *Bodies That Matter. On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), xi, Youngquist defines the cultural norm of the proper body as "an ensemble of discursive effects, it is a regulatory norm that produces the material bodies it legitimates. In liberal society, the norm of the proper body constrains the cultural (re)production of individual bodies" (Youngquist, *Monstrosities,* xxvii).

[43] Butler, *Bodies*, 2.

[44] Butler, *Bodies*, 3.

[45] Youngquist, *Monstrosities*, xxvii.

> is not only produced over and against the inhuman, but through a set of foreclosures, radical erasures, that are, strictly speaking, refused the possibility of cultural articulation. Hence, it is not enough to claim that human subjects are constructed, for the construction of the human is a differential operation that produces the more and the less "human," the inhuman, the humanly unthinkable. These excluded sites come to bound the "human" as its constitutive outside, and to haunt those boundaries as the persistent possibility of their disruption and rearticulation.[46]

Monstrosities, which materialise this domain of abjection, prove troubling, as Youngquist demonstrates, because bodily difference may "jam" the cultural apparatus which generates the corporeal norm.[47] In the Foucauldian logic of subjectification/"subjectivation" as the effect of power, resistance and counter-discourse may constantly be generated, to the effect that monstrosity's unruly excess always manages to evade the grasp of the law, evincing the leaky and erratic character of all corporeality.[48] Monstrous bodies may sabotage the authority of the physical standard they transgress, but at the same time their role is constitutive, occasioning a radical rearticulation of culturally sanctioned corporeal norms; in Youngquist's words, "monstrosities provide a material occasion not just for observing norms of embodiment in action but also for advancing their disruption and transformation": as the *constitutive outside* of the proper body, monstrosities may assist, resist, or transform regulatory corporeal norms.[49]

The normative project beginning to take effect throughout the spectrum of societal, educational, industrial, medical or political domains in the eighteenth century appears to perpetuate its legacy today. Exeunt from what Foucault calls the Classical (st)Age (the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries) the excludible monster whose frame of reference was variably natural, religious, societal or judicial; enter the abnormal yet correctible individual. Close to, yet confounding the norm, the monstrous individual emerges in the nineteenth century as the strange attractor around whom the entire juridical and medical conundrum of abnormality is spun. Monsters become extra-ordinary but fundamental figures around which corpuses of knowledge and bodies of power are (de)/(re)/structured. What is, then, the space reserved for twentieth-century monsters? One answer is provided by Margrit Shildrick, who, giving credit to Foucault's plain acknowledgment of the law becoming increasingly a norm-setting practice and operating in

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[46] Butler, *Bodies*, 8.

[47] Youngquist, *Monstrosities*, xv.

[48] See Shildrick, *Leaky Bodies*. Elsewhere Shildrick affirms: "it is a question of the haunting undecidability that is never entirely settled or resolved by the technologies of power" (Shildrick, "Transgressing," 35).

[49] Youngquist, *Monstrosities*, xvii.

close alliance with a set of regulatory apparatuses, claims that the standardising project initiated in the Enlightenment continues its homogenising, definitional work at the turn of the millennium, rallying the disciplines of biomedicine, cultural discourse, psychiatry and affirmative action legislation towards delineating monstrosity as a discrete, tabulatable category: normalisation, Shildrick suggests, manages difference ambivalently, effacing it, while at the same time striving to reduce its powers of contagion to conformity and docility under an intensifying "disciplinary grasp of biopower."[50] Thus, even at the turn of the twenty-first century, autonomous selfhood still privileges its locatedness in the oneness of a singular, perfectly delineated human body: as the necessity for people born with a hermaphroditic constitution to select, through corrective surgery, one or the other normative gender shows, normalisation procedures (through body modification) continue to target monstrous corporeality through regulatory technologies. Yet, an alternative drive, towards exceeding the constricting grasp of normativity, may also be germinating, as the section on posthuman forms of embodiment will show, particularly insofar as figures like the clone (as a specific instantiation of postmodern monstrosity, a figure whose ontological difference from the human can no longer be predicated on dysmorphic corporeality), Haraway's celebratory cyborg, Stelarc's symborg, Eduard Kac's bioartistically engendered chimerical creatures (Alba, the glowing rabbit and Edunia, the petunia with human genes) or the differently birthed tehnological doubles in the fiction I will examine hereinafter acknowledge that rather than incorporating the end of all normativity, monstrosity is the new normativity to be.

In a classical, by now, definition, monsters, as Elaine L. Graham astutely remarks, are boundary-crossing anomalies; they concurrently demarcate and confound the limits of normative humanity, exposing the vulnerability, as it were, of the *order of things*. Uncannily straddling the borders between the human and the non-human, monstrous bodies problematise the "naturalness" of identity, as their hybridity lays bare "the redundancy and instability of the ontological hygiene of the humanist subject."[51] Deploying figurations of corporeal monstrosity, the novels I have selected for analysis perform a transversal cross-section of the discursive layers leading to the formation of complex monstrous genealogies and perform a dual unveiling operation: on the one hand, they reveal how what we call monsters, in their particular

[50] Shildrick, "Transgressing," 35-36. Shildrick queries the legitimacy of interfering with the concorporateness of conjoined twins, out of the normative principle that identity should be by definition seated within the locus of *one* fully formed and autonomous body.

[51] Graham, *Representations,* 14 and passim. The guiding premise of my research is strongly indebted to Graham's Foucauldian insights into the "*genealogy* of boundary-creatures," especially as outlined in Chapter Two of her work, entitled "The Gates of Difference."

instantiations (sirens, woodwoses, hermaphrodites, etc.), arise at the intersection of a set of mythical, social, religious and ideological discourses; on the other hand, they enlist monsters as figures displaying a radical indeterminacy of being, aggregating fragments of identity and otherness to the extent that otherness is, more than the *constitutive outside* of identity, its *constitutive foundation*.

I.2. Demonstration, Remonstration: Definitional Excursions

"Monsters," "monstrosity," the "monstrous": rooted in the classical Latin *monstrum,* signalling a divine portent, a prodigy, or an atrocity*,* these English cognates cover a diversified semantic field, owing to semantic mutation, lexemic derivation and equivocal allegiance to yet another Latin etymon, *moneo, monere*, meaning "to remind, advise or presage," besides that of *monstro, monstrare,* which translates as "to point out, to demonstrate, to reveal."[52] In both cases, however, monstrosity is etymologically related to visual display. Whether one considers the Augustinian derivation from *monstrare*, or the one operated by Isidore of Seville, who derived it from *monere*,[53] the legible deformity of monstrous bodies is meant for visual exploration and interpretation, as heralds of ominous/auspicious events, as exhibitions of moral vices, as exquisite artefacts of a playful nature or as the anomalous occurrence against which the norm gains its consistency. Seen as sinister omens of coming events or as indices of defilement for past transgressions, monsters have consistently been seen as highly charged with an abstruse meaning to be deciphered, decoded, interpreted. Read as auguries in the divination tradition, displayed alongside an array of bizarreries in eclectic cabinets of curiosities or exposed in freak shows for profitable monstermongering, corporeal oddities always show, always de-monstrate.

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[52] P. G. W. Glare et al., eds. *Oxford Latin Dictionary.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968. In *Madness and Civilisation,* Foucault advocates the former etymon in claiming that up to the nineteenth century, "madmen remained monsters – that is, etymologically, beings or things to be shown" (1989: 69). The *OED* lists about thirty lexemes derived from the word *monster* and evincing traces of demonstration/ remonstration, ("monster, n., adv., and adj.". OED Online. March 2014. Oxford University Press.http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/121738?rskey=O5wQ4yandresult=1andisAdvanced=false; accessed April 03, 2014).

[53] St. Augustine's positioning of monsters in a continuum with portents and prodigies rests on the assumption that "they are called 'monsters,' because they demonstrate or signify something," in Augustine, *The City of God*. Trans. Marcus Dods (New York: The Modern Library, 1993), XVI: 8, 778. For the twelfth-century encyclopaedist Isidore of Seville, monstrosity imparts a sense of admonition, from *monitus*, since monsters "point out something by signalling, or because they indicate what may immediately appear," in Isidore of Seville, "Etymologiarum Sive Originum Liber XI*,*" Trans. William D. Sharpe, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 54/ 2 (1964): 51.

Monstrous corporeality, as the "inscribed surface of events,"[54] always signifies and invites interpretation and decryption yet, somehow, always eludes hermeneutic exhaustion and re-monstrates against discursive reduction.[55]

The monster, "never simply itself," Rosemarie Garland Thomson points out, always "betokens something else."[56] The entire network of meanings and associations of the term "monster" in the *Oxford English Dictionary*[57] indicates that its semantic spectrum ranges across natural, supernatural or preternatural phenomena and that it may register radical reversals of connotations,[58] from the neutral, constative meaning of physical malformation, through the downright abhorrent evil bordering on the inhuman, to a superlative on the same par with "astonishing" and "extraordinary." The same uncanny mixture of an object of aberration and adoration, at once repugnant and astounding, is also implicit in the Greek root, *teras*.[59] The fundamental ambivalence exuding in the interstice between monsters as deformed, horrible, loathsome and monsters as admirable, wondrous, exceptional, reveals the inevitable definitional and representational excess that cannot bound their corporeal excess.

An interesting point concerning a semantic dissociation between "monstrosity" and "the monstrous" is made by Georges Canguilhem, who contends that the former can be regarded as an effect of the latter, meaning

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[54] Foucault, *Language*, 148.

[55] See, for instance, the "point-by-point hermeneutics" to which monstrously conformed bodies were subjected in Renaissance broadsides or religious pamphlets to unravel an anatomy of sin and an eschatological cartography (cf. Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park. *Wonders and the Order of Nature*. 1150-1750. New York: Zone Books, 1998, 181-182).

[56] Thomson, *Freakery*, 3.

[57] The *OED* lists the following definitions for the entry "monster": "1. Originally: a mythical creature which is part animal and part human, or combines elements of two or more animal forms, and is frequently of great size and ferocious appearance. Later, more generally: any imaginary creature that is large, ugly, and frightening; extended and *fig.* use. Formerly also in collocations like *faultless monster*, *monster of perfection*, indicating an astonishing or unnatural degree of excellence. 2. Something extraordinary or unnatural; an amazing event or occurrence; a prodigy, a marvel. 3. A malformed animal or plant; (*Med.*) a fetus, neonate, or individual with a gross congenital malformation, usually of a degree incompatible with life. 4. A person of repulsively unnatural character, or exhibiting such extreme cruelty or wickedness as to appear inhuman; a monstrous example *of* evil, a vice, etc. 5. A creature of huge size.; Anything of vast or unwieldy proportions; an extraordinarily large example *of* something. 6. An ugly or deformed person, animal, or thing. 7. An extraordinarily good or remarkably successful person or thing."

[58] Brainless monsters, for instance, venerated by the Egyptians, would be framed in fabulous terms in sixteenth or seventeenth-century descriptions, only to be etiologically catalogued as anencephalic in the nineteenth, cf. Jean-Louis Fischer, *Monstres. Histoire du corps et des ses défauts* (Paris: Syros-Alternatives, 1991), 7.

[59] Cf. Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects. Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 77-78.

that monstrous fanciful, mythological hybrids such as sirens or centaurs, as samples of inter-species crossbreeding, or as the results of unions between dissimilar things, infringed the law of endogamy and constituted one step away from monstrosity. This association of the monstrous with the illicit was maintained in the Middle Ages, when it also acquired a diabolical connotation, reinforcing the "bond between teratology and demonology," as Canguilhem says. An infraction, thus, of the order of things, monstrosity represented a physical transgression of boundaries between genera or species, while "the monstrous," a legal concept initially, underwent progressive transformations into a category of the imagination.[60]

Is monstrosity skin deep as Judith Halberstam contends?[61] Are monstrous bodies mere inscriptive surfaces for the materialisation of teratical discourse, a discourse that construes differently morphed corporeality in various, oftentimes conflicting ways? The fact that physical monstrosity is often made manifest through a corruption of the epidermal surface – excess, lack, displacement, contamination – raises serious questions around the solidity of the boundary demarcating what Kristeva calls the "self's clean and proper body."[62] To take the example of the much-debated monster of Ravenna,[63] figuring prominently in early modern accounts of deformed births, its skin breaches and folds traverse the human and animal genera, signalling a profound destabilisation of the corporeal frontiers that might ensure the consistency and boundedness of the embodied self. Couched in a human torso ambivalently displaying male muscularity and female protuberances, the monster's feathered limbs disrupt, coupled with the unwieldy horn breaking the hairy surface of the skull, the smooth encapsulating membrane of human skin. Moreover, the monstrosity ensuing from excess (double genitalia), deficiency (one leg) and a farrago of crossovers (the creature is simultaneously human, avian, ichthyic and

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60 See Georges Canguilhem, "Monstrosity and the Monstrous," *Diogenes* 40 (1962): 31.

61 Judith Halberstam suggests that within the Gothic, either in its literary or cinematic avatars, it is the visible layer of the monster's epidermis that fosters an interpretative process – a veritable "semiotic of monstrosity" – aimed at working out the irresolvable interplay between inside and outside or between surface and depth (*Skin Shows. Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995, 7).

62 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 72

63 Reputedly born in 1512, in one of the northern Italian cities, only a few days prior to the Ravenna's ransacking by a coalition of Spanish and French troops. The monster's body invites multiple readings – in political, religious or scientific keys – and at all times it is discursivised so as to highlight its deviations from a perfect template, from the normal, natural body, with its smooth, closed-up surface. See Alan Bates, *Emblematic Monsters. Unnatural Conceptions and Deformed Births in Early Modern Europe* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 23-24.

reptilian) further disconcert through the mislocation of an eye in the nether scaly area, which, as a supplementary orifice, multiplies the points of exchange between inside and outside and makes its contaminatory potential all the more poignant. The monster's body sutures together incompatible surfaces and in doing that it reveals the fragility of the divisions "normally" deployed to affix boundaries to the stable "autonomous" self.

In light of the above attempt at "reading" the epidermal strangeness of a monstrous body and given the pervasiveness of the skin trope in today's cultural imaginary,[64] the question arises whether in "postconventional" thought on monstrous corporeality, the notion of normative subjectivity as enclosed by the body's boundaries is, as Shildrick asserts, seriously problematised by the epistemological and ontological indeterminacy of "those organic beings whose difference is always/already apparent at the surface": in view of the phantasmatic nature of any ideal standard of normative (rather than normal) "ordered and sealed bodiliness," monstrosity simply makes visible the instability and indeterminacy of any embodiment.[65] Skin, taken to delineate the boundaries between embodied selves, provides defence against encroachments from outside while also foreclosing "the leakiness between one's self and others."[66] Grossly disordered bodies challenge far more than the ontological and epistemological stability of the integral, functional body: what they raise are ethical concerns regarding conventional definitions of the discrete, bounded, ordered sovereign self, safely ensconced with the body boundaries.[67] So what is monstrosity? Is it a question of material, corporeal variegation? Is it a discursive construct aiming to give consistency to an otherwise elusive corporeal instantiation of difference that pulverises the utopia of perfect embodiment?

In his preface to *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault uses an illustriously fabricated taxonomy of the monstrous to develop the notion of heterotopology – originally defined as a surveying of heterotopian counter-sites, which simultaneously serves to contest actual, real space, and to engender new spatial/social/identity figurations.[68] In this bizarre "Chinese encyclopaedia" Foucault encounters, *apud* Borges, a hilarious yet highly disturbing hotchpotch of animals that

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64 Steven Connor, *The Book of Skin* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 9.

65 Margrit Shildrick, "'You are here, like my skin.' Reconfiguring Relational Economies," in *Thinking Through the Skin*, ed. Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 60.

66 Shildrick, *Leaky Bodies*, 178.

67 Shildrick, "'You are here,'" 161-162.

68 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966). London and New York: Routledge, 2002), xiii.

> are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (1) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.[69]

Piglets next to "sirens"? Imperial beasts in the relative proximity of downright ordinary "stray dogs"? The discursive site of this heterotopia is the only "dimension" – the "disorder in which fragments of a large number of possible orders glitter separately" – where commonplace and fantastic creatures, "et cetera," can get lumped together into an alphabetic enumeration which mimics as well as defies the representational strategies that should "enable thought to operate upon the entities of our world, to put them in order."[70] If the *order of things* has, indeed, as Foucault goes on to say, no existence except in the grid, in the table, in the textual "non-place" of the "present classification," if this is a cultural construct rather than an accurate representation of nature, what about the blank spaces in the grid and the interstitial gaps keeping these entities apart?

> The quality of monstrosity here does not affect any real body, nor does it produce modifications of any kind in the bestiary of the imagination; it does not lurk in the depths of any strange power. It would not even be present at all in this classification had it not insinuated itself into the empty space, the interstitial blanks separating all these entities from one another. It is not the "fabulous" animals that are impossible, since they are designated as such, but the narrowness of the distance separating them from (and juxtaposing them to) the stray dogs, or the animals that from a long way off look like flies. What transgresses the boundaries of all imagination, of all possible thought, is simply that alphabetical series (a, b, c, d) which links each of those categories to all the others.[71]

The outlandishness of this classification scheme, with its specious structure and heteroclite categories, processes of selection, suppression and manipulation that constitute any archive does more than simply touch on the otherness of an altogether foreign ("exotic") system of thought. For the Western mind, China, "a vast reservoir of utopias," located at the ends of the earth, is likely to elicit queries as to what grids of identities, analogies and similitudes underlie such a wondrous taxonomy. Because it makes visible the processes that are at work in the "ordering of things" (selection/exclusion, isolation/grouping, syntactical serialisation/hierarchical ranking), the "Chinese" taxonomy also disrupts, Foucault contends, "familiar

[69] Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xiv.
[70] Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xix.
[71] Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xvii.

landmarks" of Western thought: namely, its "will to truth"[72] and its claim to tabulating reality into definitive, universally valid, complete (encyclopaedic!) narratives. It exposes the contingency, inconsistency, and artifice at the heart of any taxonomy and its purported scientific objectiveness, and makes quite explicit the domestication of monstrosity within such discursive spaces. Once they are slotted into specific categories, inserted into discourse, textualised as it were, sirens lose their contagious powers. The dangers they posit are localised and contained:

> No inconceivable amphibious maidens, no clawed wings, no disgusting, squamous epidermis, none of those polymorphous and demoniacal faces, no creatures breathing fire: it is not simply the oddity of unusual juxtapositions that we are faced with here. We are all familiar with the disconcerting effect of the proximity of extremes, or, quite simply, with the sudden vicinity of things that have no relation to each other; the mere act of enumeration that heaps them all together has a power of enchantment all its own.[73]

If the order of classifications aims to domesticate the wild abundance of existing things, it is nevertheless true that monstrosity refuses such taming, pursuing, as Foucault also claims, its drive towards collapsing distinctions between self and other, between high and low, between inside and outside. In fact, as David Williams has noted, monstrosity is by its nature averse to systematisation attempts, whose essentially transient and arbitrary character it reveals. A taxonomy of monstrosity, he says, is "fundamentally arbitrary and absolutely impermanent; it is the paradoxical morphology of nonforms, a system of categories of nothing."[74] Whatever the principles underlying the innumerable classifications targeted at subduing their externally incoherent corporeality, monsters escape incorporation into coherent epistemological frameworks and confound hermeneutic containment. Monstrosities, Terry Eagleton claims, are enigmas resistant to understanding.[75] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen similarly contends that monsters refuse to be lured in the classificatory order of things, since their externally jumbled bodies resist inclusion in systematic constructions: "[i]n the face of the monster, scientific inquiry and its ordered rationality crumble. The monstrous is a genus too large to be encapsulated in any conceptual system; the monster's very existence is a rebuke to boundary and closure."[76] Corporeal aberrations resist "incorporation" into encyclopaedias or taxonomies because although their anomalous

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[72] Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," 214.
[73] Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xvii.
[74] David Williams, *Deformed Discourse. The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 108.
[75] Eagleton, *Figures*, 4.
[76] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (ed.), *Monster Theory. Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 6-7.

features could be assembled or distributed into categories, they could not be forced into any orderly scheme, raising more general issues of unclassifiability.[77] No systemic categorisation could reduce the monster's morphological complexity or elucidate the indeterminacy of its aetiology.

To take the example of a taxonomy of mythical monsters that is put forward by Massimo Izzi, one can detect the same inadvertent reductionism that all structuration assaults at monstrous corporeality betray. Izzi's investigation of the structural constants of the monstrous imaginary suggests the time coordinate as a criterion for distinguishing between "static" and "dynamic" monstrosity. Thus, two distinct "psychic" processes of teratogenesis, insofar as the creation of mythical monsters is concerned, emerge: deformation or "hyper-determination" and hybridisation or "supra-determination."[78] While deformation entails processes of bodily diminution, augmentation, multiplication or elimination, either in part or as a whole,[79] hybridisation resorts to a combinatorial logic, admixing, in diverse proportions, various characteristics from creatures of diverse species or genera.[80] What distinguishes hybridisation from supra-determination is that the latter syntagm connotes more than a mere mosaic of features, and betrays a playful combinatorial interpretation of nature. Hyper-determination entails over-emphasising one dominant characteristic to the extent that all others are effaced. Such is the case of the Sciapod's huge leg, or of Polyphem's single eye, which practically eclipses his gigantic structure. If the criterion of temporal context underlies the taxonomy, polymorphism (a case of metachronic monstrosity) and metamorphism (a case of diachronic monstrosity) ensue. If the criterion rests on the teratogenic process, the resulting categories are those of hyperdetermination *versus* supradetermination. Izzi's distinction between "biological" monsters and "mythological" monsters – laden, in the field of human visibility, he says, with maximum corporeality *v.* maximum incorporeality – holds only insofar as the former category, that of incidental and highly individualised natural monsters, presumes the operation of imagination exclusively at the level of interpreting the cumbersome materiality of their bodies, while the latter category derives entirely from a creative imagination.[81] Further inconsistencies marring Izzi's

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[77] See Barbara Maria Stafford, *Body Criticism. Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 1991), 254.

[78] Massimo Izzi, *I mostri e l'immaginario* (Roma: Manilo Basaia Editore, 1982), 53, 60-63.

[79] Examples range from polycephalic monsters like the Cerberus, to the monocular Cyclops, or to monopodial races like the Sciapods.

[80] For instance, hybridised monsters would include creatures with the body of a human and the head of an animal (the Minotaur); monsters with human heads and animal bodies (the Sphinx or the harpy); monsters with half-human, half-animal bodies (satyrs, medieval sirens); or monsters mingling two or several animal bodies (gryphons, or the chimera).

[81] Izzi, *I mostri*, 19-20.

'structuralist taxonomy are its elision of monstrous aetiologies and its fallacious presumption that mythical monstrous figures, like the Medusa or the Sphinx, permeate the Western cultural imaginary in unchanged, repetitive manner, whereas in fact, as Lascault shows, they undergo perpetual mutation and morphic transformation.[82]

The fact that monsters exist, Georges Canguilhem reminds us, "throws doubt on life's ability to teach us order."[83] Any attempt to capture the fabulous, intricate, fluid contours of monstrous bodies within the boundaries of consistent definitional, morphological or etiological schemes seems fraught with inevitable incompleteness. Ancient systematisation attempts, following Aristotle, conceived of the monstrous in primarily three categories: deficiency, excess, and duplication. The anomalous, aberrant body is seen to diverge from the faultless somatotype (harmonious and balanced), which was codified as early as the fifth century BC in the "Canon of Polyclitus," or in the Hippocratic corpus, which were to serve later as the theoretical backdrop for the classical period. The motivation of ancient Greek and Roman practices of exposure[84] was the adoption of ascribed cultural and social precepts which allowed for crippled infants to be weeded out, since the ideal of the blemish-free body met the functional needs of the state; as Vlahogiannis emphasises, the semiotics of the dysmorphic was predicated on a contrastive conceptual frame as compared to that of the perfect, flawless body.[85]

In a classical source, the *Liber monstrorum de diversis generibus*,[86] the triple categories of monsters (humans, animals, and serpents) credited to dwell in the farthest oceanic, mountainous or desert recesses, exhibit a marked propensity to use chiastic contrasts between the human and the monstrous, between a fabulous past and a disenchanted present, or between a monster-infested remote geography and a mundane geography from which

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[82] Gilbert Lascault, *Le monstre dans l'art occidental: Un problème esthétique* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1973), 24.

[83] Canguilhem, "Monstrosity," 27.

[84] Glenister lists several arguments for ancient infanticidal practices, including the maintenance of the physical character of the race, sacrificial and propitiatory purposes, in T.W. Glenister, "Fantasies, Facts and Foetuses: The Interplay of Fancy and Reason in Teratology," *Medical History* 8 (1964): 16.

[85] Nicholas Vlahogiannis, "Disabling Bodies," in *Changing Bodies, Changing Meanings. Studies on the Human Body in Antiquity, ed. Dominic Montserrat* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 21, 16-18.

[86] Generally assumed to be an Anglo-Latin compilation which provides crucial insights into the Beowulf monsters, *Liber monstrorum* dates back to the ninth or tenth century, and, as Orchard has shown, lavishly ransacks pagan and Christian sources like Pliny, Virgil, Augustine, Isidore's *Etymologiae* or vernacular renditions of *The Wonders of the East and of Alexander's Letter to Aristotle*, serving not only as "a compendium of the bizarre and the outlandish" but as a cogent account of "monsters in nature" (Cf. Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript.* Toronto, Buffalo and London: The University of Toronto Press, 1995, 86-87).

monstrosity has been eradicated.[87] Clasped together within the first class, there are monsters differing in a "trifling" degree from mankind, irrespective of the process or locus of deformation. Individual "monstrous mixtures" as well as entire monstrous races; natural combinations of the "diverse nature of different species" (doubly-sexed people, wood-dwelling fauns, sirens, hippo-centaurs and ass-centaurs), as well as deformed humans (colossi of astounding size, or headless Epifugi); bodily or moral, static or dynamic monstrosity; all these facets of monstrosity are amassed together in the space of a single enumeration. The second section lodges next to "fearsome form[s] of terrible bodily appearance" (lions, leopards, hippopotami) also monstrously hideous mythological beasts (the triple-bodied chimera, or the three-headed Cerberus), while the third is exclusively allocated to marvellous serpents, including the "snake of Lerna" or the fireproof salamander.[88]

Similarly, in Isidore of Seville's seventh-century encyclopaedia, *Etymologiarum Sive Originum (Liber XI)*, there are no less than twelve categories whereby portentous monstrous bodies deviate from the structural coherence and integrity of the standard human body, taken as a paradigm of order and hierarchy.[89] In Isidore's "paradoxical morphology of the amorphous,"[90] bodily stature may suffer deformations that affect its integrity as a whole – such are the cases of hypertrophy (gigantism) or atrophy (dwarfism) – or jumble up its organ/member distribution. Thus, body parts may surfeit (two-headed or multiply-limbed humans), lack (handless or headless monsters), suffer excrescences (polydactylism), or mislocations ("eyes in the chest of the forehead, or ears above the temple"). Not to mention that to these relatively clear categories, Isidore also adds heteromorphic mixtures (lion- or dog-faced, the Minotaur), monstrous races (Cynocephali, Cyclopes), animals engendered by women, hermaphrodites ("who can both sire and bear children"), disproportionate growth (grey-haired or bearded infants), or monstrous (Circean or Ovidian) transformations.[91]

To invoke other examples or futile taxonomic attempts, the French surgeon Ambroise Paré's *On Monsters and Prodigies* from 1573 catalogues marvellous phenomena as diverse as conjoined twins, unicorns of hermaphrodites, conflating medicalised deviance and fabulous wonder in a nascent scientific discourse that maintains traces of customary divine explanations. If aetiology becomes the additional criterion of classification,

87 Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 90-91.
88 "*Liber monstrorum:* Translation," in Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 255-308.
89 See Isidore of Seville, "Etymologiarum," 52-54.
90 Williams, *Deformed Discourse*, 108.
91 Isidore of Seville, "Etymologiarum," 52-54.

the meticulous organisation of the monstrous by teratical causes results in Paré's postulation of three main categories of anomalies: of excess, of default and of duplicity, and in no less than thirteenth causes of anomalous births. Thus, monsters could also be engendered to serve as manifestations of God's glory or ire; they could arise from excessive/insufficient semen quantities or from an improper size of the uterus; from mechanical causes such as the accidental pressure exerted on the womb or the pregnating mother's indecent posture; from hereditary diseases ("rotten or corrupt seed"), from mutilation, or from demoniacal agency and from the mother's imagination. Paré's own acknowledgement of countless "other causes" that exceed probability (of horn-headed humans, for instance, or those born with griffin's feet) and that would extend the list *ad infinitum* reinforces the notion that monstrosity is averse to definitional exhaustion.[92] To take three more examples, Ulysses Aldrovandi's *Avvertimenti* (1581) synthetically render the causes of monstrous generation under the following reason: "nature sometimes produces monsters because it is kept from being able to achieve its end," tabulating, among other factors originating monsters, excessive or deficient matter, interspecies coitus, imagination, and celestial or divine alignments.[93] The twofold destiny of monstrous infants, as terror-inspiring, punitive signs of divine anger and as admirable indices of the divine creative powers, is supplemented in Pierre Boaisteau's *Histoires prodigieuses* (1560) by another cause that would have a substantial impact until the mid-eighteenth century: besides superabundant, defective or corrupted generative matter, and alongside such diverse origins as the astral dispositions or disfigurement inflicted by parents onto their offspring, the female imagination is listed alongside other mechanical or physical factors that interfere with the process of gestation.[94] Fortunio Licetti's *Traité des monsters* (1616) tackles a teratological classification of aberrant morphology into categories he labels as uniform, bi-form, multiform, enormous, and, whereas in Paré's view, numerous types of monsters can be determined by a single cause, in Licetti's treatise several distinct causes may underlie the emergence of a single category of monsters.[95]

And yet again, despite its claim to completeness and universality, Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae* (1735) identifies, besides *homo sapiens* (whose

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92 Ambroise Paré, *On Monsters and Marvels*. Trans. Janis L. Pallister (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 2-3.

93 Discussed in Ottavia Niccoli, "'Menstruum quasi Monstruum': Monstrous Births and Menstrual Taboo in the Sixteenth Century," Trans. Mary M. Gallucci, in *Sex* and *Gender in Historical Perspective*, ed. Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 6-7.

94 Cf. Fischer, *Monstres. Histoire du corps*, 45-47.

95 Cf. Fischer, *Monstres. Histoire du corps*, 61.

subdivisions include the wild man (!), the American, the Asiatic, the African and the European), *homo monstrosus* as another species of both natural and artificial monsters, further subdivided, by climate and manner, into a geography of defective embodiment, as well as troglodytes, satyrs, and pygmies, betraying the discrepancy and incongruity at the very heart of a presumed master code for all living forms.[96]

Formation, deformation: the monster's incarnate compositeness translates as "anamorphic shapelessness,"[97] capable of withstanding any systemic or comprehensive tabulation. Despite the compulsion for categorisation and imposition of order detectable in classificatory schemas, which is supplemented and augmented in the eighteenth century, reaching its pinnacle in the methodological taxonomies of nineteenth-century teratology, the monster's concurrent externality to both biological norms[98] and the discursive practices enlisted to the "will to truth" confirms monstrosity as the "epistemic illegitimacy" or the "savage exteriority"[99] that imperils the limits of representation. The monstrous may attract representational enclosure as that which is radically other, the binary opposite of the human; nonetheless, the monsters' extravagant corporeal disposition – their excessive or defective departure from the standard of human embodiment, or their hybrid coagulation of fractured morphologies (male/female, human/beastly) – accounts for the reaction of mixed horror and fascination, revulsion and confusion they always elicit. In their jumbled assortment of bodily oddity, monsters threaten to subvert all hierarchies, to break down all order and destabilise the congealed structures of encyclopaedias, dictionaries, and taxonomies with their heterotopian, disruptive signification.

I.3. Epistemic Paradigms of Monstrosity

Consistently sidestepped as the troublesome otherness that occludes representation by exceeding its frames, monstrosity has embraced variable, and, at times, reversible discursive forms pending on epistemic shifts; as Gibson maintains, "the idea of the monstrous contains in itself a sense of the contingency of any given definition of the human the fact that it is not an

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96 Cf. Helen Deutsch and Felicity Nussbaum (eds.), *Defects: Engendering the Modern Body* (University of Michigan Press, 2000), 7; Katharine Park and Lorraine J. Daston, "Unnatural Conceptions: The Study of Monsters in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century France and England," In *Past and Present* 92 (1981): 54; Knoppers and Landes (eds.), *Monstrous Bodies,* 4.

97 Stafford*, Body Criticism*, 256.

98 The monster is "'vomited' by nature" (Foucault, *Discipline*, 91).

99 Gibson, *Towards a Postmodern*, 238-239.

ontological given, but an epistemological construct."[100] Each period has privileged, Foucault says, a particular form of monstrosity: the beastly human in the Middle Ages; concorporate twins in the Renaissance, and double-headed or double-bodied individuals in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; and the hermaphrodite which holds the centre stage of judicial and medical debates from the end of the eighteenth century to the nineteenth.[101] For instance, the dissolution of the monstrous into the all-embracing trope of abnormality gradually progressed through three stages: the juridico-biological monster; the moral monster; and the founding monster of criminal psychiatry. Yet this is far from a linear process: the centre of gravity may shift, but more than one prototypal approach to monstrosity may coexist at one and the same time.

"There are monsters on the prowl," Michel Foucault reminds us, "whose form changes with the history of knowledge."[102] Although historical periodisations of monster discourse, like that provided by Jean-Louis Fischer,[103] seem to chart order in an otherwise prolific discursive domain, I prefer to look at paradigmatic constructions of monstrosity that cut across conventional "periods," signalling overlaps between them or unaccountable ruptures. From prodigy to pathology: such is the strange career of monsters across centuries, or at least this is the model espoused by several theorists who have outlined the history of monsters as a teleological progression from astounding portents to reified pathological specimens.[104] In what follows, I look at the chief discursive paradigms bearing witness to the religious, cultural or scientific epistemes within which the monster has been inserted, insisting on the exemplary periods or the interfaces between them that triggered transvaluations of meaning.

A paradigmatic invalidation of the teleological premise is *Wonders and the Order of Nature,* where Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park amend their

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[100] Gibson, *Towards a Postmodern*, 239.

[101] Foucault, *Abnormal*, 66.

[102] Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," 218.

[103] The three major stages identified by Fisher, apud the Saint-Hilaires, the renowned teratologists of the nineteenth-century, are as follows: the first, covering the span from antiquity to the end of the seventeenth century, corresponds to a fabulous regime of the monstrous; invariably reviled or worshipped, monsters also serve here an important social function. In the second, the so-called pre-scientific period, monsters are essentially bereft of their social and cultural significance, increasingly becoming, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, objects of scientific investigation. Eventually, during the third stage, monsters thoroughly shed their marvellous aura in the experimental laboratories and anatomic classifications of a science-dominated episteme (Fischer, *Monstres,* 8).

[104] Ochsner, Beate. "Monster: More than a Word. From Portent to Anomaly, the Extraordinary Career of Monsters," in *Monsters and Philosophy*, ed. Charles T. Wolfe (London: King's College Publications, 2005): 232.

previous scheme,[105] whereby conceptions about monsters have evolved ineluctably towards naturalisation and rationalisation; in fact, they say, "[n]aturalisation – the explanation of marvels by natural causes – had its advocates even among medieval writers, while examples of monsters read as divine signs or enjoyed as *lusus naturae* can be found until the late seventeenth century."[106] Representational frames for monstrosity have constantly shifted their contents and meaning in countless ways, not evolving in unilinear, uninterrupted fashion, not progressing through clearly definable periods and distinct turning points, but in undulatory or cyclical manner. Going counter to Georges Canguilhem's or Jean Céard's canonical views of religious readings of monsters preceding naturalistic ones, the original idea of a tripartite chronological scheme (from prodigy to marvel to abnormality) is discarded in favour of a threesome complex of interpretations, coextant throughout the early modern period, each with their own dynamics of attendant cognitive emotions (horror, pleasure and repugnance as the protean facets of wonder). In the prodigy complex, monsters are deemed to be ciphers in a secretly coded language of divine wrath and elicit horror as an emotional response; in the *lusus naturae* complex, they are the sports of a benevolent nature meant to delight an equally benevolent God; in the third complex, associated with a novel medical, philosophical and theological discourse, emerging in the seventeenth century, monsters are dismissed as repugnant.[107] A similar eschewal of telic narratives of monstrosity is provided by Hanafi, who, corroborating the opinions, among others, of Céard (1977) and Rudolph Wittkower (1942), arrives at the conclusion that monster lore, that is, the body of monster knowledge, involves three major "teratological traditions" founded on an exclusive corpus of canonical texts.[108] These are the scientific tradition, grounded in Aristotle's *On the Generation of Animals*; the divination tradition, articulated in Cicero's *On Divination*; and the "wonders of nature (or God)" tradition, founded on Pliny's *Natural History* and Augustine's *City of God,* which reinforce a cosmographical/anthropological positioning of the monstrous races at the world's farthest edges.

[105] A scheme Park and Daston espouse in their earlier study, "Unnatural Conceptions." The linear model espoused here envisages a progressive transition of monsters from the prodigy canon to that of natural wonders in the sixteenth century and then objects of scientific investigation, only to be safely relegated, during the nineteenth century, to medical domains like physiology and comparative anatomy (Daston and Park, *Wonders,* 176).

[106] Daston and Park, *Wonders*, 176.

[107] Daston and Park, *Wonders*, 176-177.

[108] Zakiya Hanafi, *The Monster in the Machine. Magic, Medicine, and the Marvelous in the Time of the Scientific Revolution* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), 7.

Teratological discourses, Braidotti claims, share two historical constants: by conveying a deeply-entrenched curiosity about the sources of monstrous embodiment, they are essentially epistemophilic, and they are, furthermore, fraught with the impurity entailed by a constant intersection of objective and phantasmatic dimensions, which is quite evident in the divination tradition.[109] *Monstrum*, St. Augustine asserts in *City of God*, is synonymous with *prodigium*, given that it shows (*monstrat*) the will of God.[110] The original meaning of monster in both its Latin and Greek etymons, does not foreground deformity; instead, it indicates, in the ancient tradition of divination,[111] a *sign* co-extensive with other divinatory terms like *portentum, prodigium,* and *ostentum,* an omen "speak[ing] from afar," in the sense of foretelling future events.[112] In fact, aberrant births resulting in freakish deformities simultaneously impart caution and guidance, exhibiting the divine will – either analeptically (as punishments for past transgressions) or proleptically (as presages of future disasters).

The conception of monstrosity as the symbolic deformation capable of assisting, through apophatic rather than cataphatic discourse, a human intimation of the divine is examined by David Williams in *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature* (1996). In his survey of mediaeval teratology, the Neoplatonic concept of the monstrous as a "complementary, sometimes alternative, vehicle for philosophical and spiritual inquiry" finds its antecedent in a pre-Christian tradition which valorises the monstrous and the grotesque as heuristic tools for probing the unrepresentable, inscrutable nature of divinity. Given that "God transcends human knowledge utterly and can be known only by what He is not," re-presentation *via* rational and logical concepts should be supplanted with de-formation (philosophical as well as aesthetic), which basically implies that the misshapen fantasies of mediaeval art (three-headed humans or chimerical hybrids) are likely to transcend the arbitrary

[109] Braidotti, "Signs of Wonder," 290-291.
[110] Augustine, *The City of God*, 8.
[111] For instance, in clay tablets representing the official records of ancient Babylonian astrologers dating back to the seventh century BC disasters were forecast for the nation should a malformed birth occur (cf. C. J. S. Thompson, *The Mystery and Lore of Monsters. With Accounts of Some Giants, Dwarfs and Prodigies*, London: Williams and Norgate Ltd., 1930, 25). 2 Esdras, the biblical passage supporting this view of monsters as heralds of dire events announces the collapse of Babylon thus: "menstruous women shal beare monstres" (cf. Glenister, "Fantasies," 17). For the Greeks, the words *teras* and *teratos* ciphered god-sent, astonishing prodigies heralding calamitous events, in Ochsner, "Monster: More than a Word," 232.
[112] Isidore of Seville, "Etymologiarum," 51.

logic of exclusionary categories and point to the incommensurability between the sign and the signified.[113]

Encompassing erudite Latin treatises and vernacular broadsides, the prodigy literature of the Middle Ages registers a surge at around the time of the Reformation, primarily since monsters become instrumental elements in religious polemic. In the sixteenth century, the prodigy complex still holds its ground,[114] casting monsters as unusual, alarming phenomena, wrought with apocalyptical associations, seemingly occurring contrary to nature and therefore solely attributable to divine intervention.[115] Protean prophetic signs, monstrous births are described in semantic clusters indicative of the horror they arouse: "*orrendi, orrevoli, horribili, spaventevoli*, or *stupendi* in Italian; *espouventable, terribles, horribles* in French; *erschroeckliche, grausame, grewliche* in German; *dreadful, horrible, terrible* in English."[116] They incorporate forewarnings about both collective (political, military and religious) catastrophes and individual disasters, and the composite iconography supplementing reports of monstrous births visually reinforces the association of each defective item in the monster's corporeality with a particular vice.[117] Entrenched in this is the idea of monstrous prodigies representing ruptures in the physical order, just like the sins which they emblematically allure to constitute ruptures in the moral order, in an overall conception that insists on the unity of all creation and regards nature as God's amanuensis in purveying divine messages through the monsters it engenders.[118] As divinations therefore, monsters are regarded either as divine forebodings of the wrath of God or as forms of glorifying God's might.

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[113] Williams, *Deformed Discourse*, 5.

[114] Reworking material extracted from Pierre Boistuau's *Histoire prodigieuses*, but also drawing on Saint Augustine, Aristotle, Empedocles, Pliny and Lycosthenes, the renowned anatomist Ambroise Paré reinforces the connection of monsters with prodigies. In *On Monsters and Marvels*, his definition of monsters is as follows: "monsters are things that appear outside the course of Nature (and are usually signs of some forth-coming misfortune), such as a child who is born with one arm, another who will have two heads, and additional members over and above the ordinary." Marvels, on the other hand, are "things which happen that are completely against Nature as when a woman will give birth to a serpent, or to a dog, or some other thing that is totally against Nature" (Paré, *On Monsters,* 3).

[115] A misconception, since Isidore of Seville stresses the fact that portentous monsters contradict not the laws of nature but the misguided epistemological apprehension of natural laws (Isidore of Seville, "Etymologiarum," 51). Similarly, Augustine distinguishes "common human nature" from monsters, its "peculiar," hence "wonderful" counterpart, which, nonetheless "springs from that one protoplast" (XVI: 8).

[116] Daston and Park, *Wonders*, 181.

[117] Jurgis Baltrušaitis, *Reveils et prodiges. Le gothique fantastique* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1960), 275-293, 305-313.

[118] Daston and Park, *Wonders,* 183; Jean Céard, *La nature et les prodiges. L'insolite au XVIe siècle, en France* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1977), vii; Fischer, *Monstres. Histoire du corps,* 8-9.

Running parallel to the prodigy canon, proto-teratology, such as provided in Aristotle's *On the Generation of Animals*, investigates the causes of monstrous generation. Aristotle's causal explanations of *teras*, aberrant births, work on the notion that nature unfolds towards a *telos* (corporealises the male principle*)* and that any arrestment, deviation or failure to replicate the paternal *eidolon* amounts to a degree of monstrosity on a scale of imperfection.[119] With Aristotelian theories of generation, resumed during the Middle Ages and remaining influential throughout the sixteenth century, monsters are voided of portentous import, being mere breakdowns in nature's "purposive effort"; thus, the infringement of the principle of resemblance in generation ("like produces like") renders female infants as departures from the norm of perfection, a step away from monstrosity on the spectrum of deviation.[120]

An era more "wondrous" than the Middle Ages, the Renaissance records a geographical redistribution of wonders from the world's exotic edges to the European hinterlands. Coeval with this migration inwards is a tendency to supplant interest in monstrous races or fabulous beasts with an interest in individual monsters, who become embedded in a "rhetoric of miracle and marvel."[121] Classical and medieval interpretative practices of monsters resurge, though there is significant overlapping with the "natural wonders" complex, with monsters more insistently being construed as signs of nature's fertility than of divine anger. Mirollo remarks that in the age of the marvellous, with its "taste for the metamorphic in both form and duration," culture is permeated by an unprecedented coexistence of many kinds of wonders expressed through a profusion of literary and visual conceits.[122] Daston and Park's understanding of wonders diverges from anachronistic definitions espoused by researchers like Jacques Le Goff, or Claude Kappler,[123] who view the premodern marvellous through a contemporary grid, as a rather ample category, broadly coextensive with the domain of the fantastic as "that which is excluded by modern views of the rational, the credible, and the tasteful: the products of imagination, the inventions of folklore and fairy tales, fabulous beasts of legend, freaks of sideshows and

[119] Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals* (*De generatione animalium,* II), Trans. D. M. Balme (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), IV.3, 767b.

[120] Hanafi, *The Monster in the Machine*, 8; Niccoli, "'Menstruum quasi Monstruum,'" 2.

[121] Cohen, *Monster Theory*, xi.

[122] James V. Mirollo, "The Aesthetics of the Marvelous: The Wondrous Work of Art in a Wondrous World," in *Wonders, Marvels, and Monsters in Early Modern Culture*, ed. Peter G. Platt (London: Associated University Presses, 1999), 25-26.

[123] Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, Trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988); Claude-Claire Kappler, *Monstres, demons et merveilles à la fin du Moyen Age* (Paris: Payot et Rivages, 1980).

the popular press, and, more recently, the uncanny in all its forms."[124] Wonders, the ontologically discrete class of preternatural objects pending between the categories of the mundane and the miraculous, become recondite items of knowledge for Renaissance philosopher-theologians and incentives for elaborate displays of connoisseurship for Baroque collectors, while the incumbent passion of wonder, the *meraviglia,* the didactic passion by excellence elicited by monsters on display amounts in effect to a cognitive passion of natural inquiry.[125] In wonder books, which catalogue bizarre phenomena or mysterious, curious features of animals, vegetables or minerals, the prodigy canon is pillaged, denuded of its supernatural aura and displayed as surprising, intriguing facts meant to delight the reader. The increased pervasiveness of the natural wonders canon corresponds to a secularisation of interest in monstrosity during the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. The transition between the two complexes is, however, not clearly cut, since treatises like Ambroise Paré's *On Monsters and Marvels* accommodate readings of monsters as portentous events *and* wondrous artefacts of nature.

The "will to know" coeval with the turn of the sixteenth century, Foucault remarks, corresponds to a novel position and gaze adopted by the knowing subject, intent on charting out "schemes of possible, observable, measurable, classifiable objects."[126] Due to projects like Bacon's *The Advancement of Learning* to devise an autonomous history of marvels, wonders become key devices in their campaigns to restructure natural philosophy. In Bacon's tripartite system of natural history, nature appears personified as an ingenious artesan, while monsters, *irregular* or *heteroclite* occurrences, are her "most artful works"; furthermore, an empirical study of monsters ("errors, vagaries and prodigies") may inductively lead towards discerning more regular phenomena and provide an incentive towards human invention (2000).[127] Monsters, as "deviating instances," are deemed instrumental to uncovering and recording the latent processes of nature since they "sustain the world by means of their legible deformity."[128]

Curiosity, Thomson says, "fuses inquisitiveness, acquisitiveness, and novelty to the ancient pursuit of the extraordinary body, shifting the ownership of such body from God to the scientist, whose *Wunderkammern*

[124] Daston and Park, *Wonders*, 15.
[125] See Daston and Park, *Wonders*, 19; Hanafi, *The Monster in the Machine*, 187, 189.
[126] Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," 213.
[127] Francis Bacon, *The New Organon* (1620), ed. Lisa Jardine and Michael Silverstone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
[128] Stephen Pender, "*No Monsters at the Resurrection*: Inside Some Conjoined Twins," in *Monster Theory. Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 147.

or cabinets of curiosities, antedate modern museums."[129] What used to count as ominous prodigies veer into gratuitous oddities and become enlisted into the category of curiosities, to serve as the highlights of the eclectic profusion of exhibits in the lordly, scholarly or private *Wunderkammern* (wonderchambers). In an array of niches, boxes and drawers, next to other curious exotica linked to the discovery of "new worlds," monsters fit in the systemic arrangement of intriguing mineral and natural specimens phantasmatically bridging the frontiers between the "elsewhere" of outer worlds and the neatly tabulated shelves of curiosity rooms. If the accumulation, definition and classification of the *naturalia*, the wonders of nature, represent the primary target of *curios* cabinets, it is nonetheless true that they also serve as special sites where the rare and the unique can be viewed in terms of scale, instilled with layers of meaning that would attempt to pin down the vast networks of correspondences in the universe.

In the seventeenth-century humanistic and scientific discourse, the notion of the monster as a divinely-ordained, prodigious augury gradually becomes entwined with that of *lusus naturae*. Corporeal monstrosity is recast into a freak of nature, as one of "nature's benevolent whimsies, bestowed upon the world to delight man's curiosity and inspire his awe."[130] As *lusus naturae* ("joke," "play," "sport" of nature), monsters are taken as proofs of nature's sportive disposition, together with curiously engrammed shellfish or stones, with hermaphroditical snails or colour-changing chameleons, in a Renaissance definitional paradigm that is strongly indebted to Pliny's assessment of the endless diversity of human physiognomy: "Nature, in her ingenuity, has created all these marvels in the human race, as so many amusements to herself, though they appear miraculous to us."[131] The Plinian perception of *lusus naturae* as nature's recreational, aesthetic diversification, by which she evades her more mundane tasks, is resumed in the notion that nature, the artisan by definition, engenders monsters as artefacts. Distinguished from marvels and prodigies through their greater regularity, nature's corporeal jokes share in the quality of illusory artifice.[132] In the works of naturalists like Ulysses

[129] Thomson, *Freakery*, 4.

[130] The term "freak" records an extension of meaning only in mid-nineteenth century, when it signals corporeal variegation or anomaly (Thomson, *Freakery*, 3-4).

[131] Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History of Pliny*, Trans. John Bostock and H.T. Riley. (London: Henry T. Bohn, 1856), VII 2.

[132] Paula Findlen also discusses the *lusus scientiae* or jokes of knowledge that natural scientists and collectors of the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries revelled in. While in pre-Linnean taxonomy, *lusus naturae* evidenced the subtlety of nature's architecture, *lusus scientiae* attested to man's capacity to match and master nature's complexity through artifice, as anamorphoses show. In a chapter entitled "Animal Physiognomy" from *Aberrations. An Essay on the Legend of Forms* (1989), Batrušaitis traces a history of identi-

Aldrovandi, Conrad Gesner, Girolamo Cardano or Ambroise Paré, nature, though personified as the "chambermaid to our great God," no longer transparently reflects the divine will through monstrous misbirths but "disport[s] herself in her creations," revelling in the display of her jocund, fertile mood.[133] At the same time, however, the category of *lusus* – both natural and scientific – incorporates pre-Linnean taxonomic principles of homology through the parallelisms it detects across the flexible boundaries between the natural and the artificial.

With the demise of the "emblematic world view" (and the notion that nature consists of multi-layered hieroglyphic signs) – a change whose catalyst was not only the Cartesian mechanical philosophy, but also the Scientific Revolution – monsters lose their status of emblems or hieroglyphs that clamour decipherment.[134] All this amounts to what Foucault calls the disappearance of "animal semantics."[135] Given the decontextualisation of the world, or the desymbolisation of nature which occurs at around the middle of the seventeenth century, the Renaissance logic of similitude erodes, just as the monsters' warrant to inspire awesome wonder and divinatory practice dissolves, becoming absorbed into medical disciplines, like embryology and comparative autonomy, which seek to "classify and master rather than revere the extraordinary body": it is through "material practices (anatomy) and discursive knowledges (physiology)," Thomson shows, that "medicine gradually consolidates its mastery over deviant flesh."[136]

Even though by the mid-seventeenth century – commonly characterised as the apex of a scientific revolution – monstrous phenomena come under the close scrutiny of natural philosophers, the fascination exerted by monstrous births betrays the same compost of residual curiosity and awesome fear that marked the reception of deformed or wondrous bodies in the previous centuries. Thus, against Park and Daston's thesis of the progressive naturalisation of the monstrous, early modern accounts of

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fication strategies between human and animal corporeal features: from ancient physiognomical treatises to contemporary caricatural juxtapositions of beastly and human facial as well as bodily configurations, similar deductive analogies seem to have deployed towards deciphering man's moral nature through the physical characteristics it betokens.

[133] Paré, *On Monsters*, 107, 117, 139.

[134] William B., Jr. Ashworth, "Natural History and the Emblematic World View," in *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution,* ed. David C. Lindberg and Robert. S. Westman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 305; Jean-Jacques Courtine, "Le désenchantment des monsters," in Ernest Martin, *Histoire des monsters. Depuis l'antiquité jusqu'à nos jours* (1880) (Grenoble: Éditions Jérôme Millon, 2002), 7-27.

[135] Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things*, 141.

[136] Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies. Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 57.

monstrosity, both popular and elite, attest to the lingering preternatural paradigm in what amounts to a conflictual status allotted to monsters.

From its positioning centre stage in sites of display, monstrosity undergoes, Foucault tells us, an interiorisation process. The eighteenth century has been identified as a transitional age, "marking the necessary passage between the end of a fabulous representation of the monster and the beginnings of a science of anomalies, malformations, and monstrosities."[137] The turn of the eighteenth century marks an epistemic shift in the perception of monsters; increasingly regarded less as collectable curiosities and more as dissectible, classifiable items within scientific taxonomies, monsters embark on a progressive route of disenchantment. Borrowing Adorno and Horkheimer's spatial metaphor of the enlightenment following "a path of disenchantment" towards possessing, integrating, domesticating, establishing order into and overcoming the unknown, Hagner views enlightened monsters (threats to patterns of order) as subsumed to a domain of fear – the outside[138] – which had to be contained and explored to the aim of identifying the regular and the normal beyond exceptional cases of the deviant and the extraordinary.[139] Monstrosity would thus come to play a crucial role in the eighteenth-century theoretical debates surrounding preformationism and epigeneticism or in the development of nineteenth-century embryology. Whereas the baroque culture of the seventeenth century aestheticised monsters into such categories as wonder, or rarity, and relished their ubiquitous display,[140] the Enlightenment seeks to tame the anxieties monsters evoke by systematically charting their position within tabulatory spaces, incorporating them into the discourses of the life sciences and enlarging upon the neoclassical distinction between the beautiful and the ugly, between proportion and deformation. With nature changing from a playful, skilful, ingenious artisan, and being founded on regular, determi-

[137] Jean-Louis Fischer, "Monstre," in *Dictionnaire européen des lumières*, ed. Michel Delon (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997), quoted in Knoppers and Landes, *Monstrous Bodies*, 7.

[138] Knowledge of the monstrous other, consistent with the Enlightenment tenet of delivery from fear, demands that monsters be extracted from the "out there" and integrated into the domain of intelligibility and mastery through various representational practices, aimed at domesticating the deviant, the feral, the uncivilised. See Julia Douthwaite, *The Wild Girl, Natural Man, and the Monster: Dangerous Experiments in the Age of Enlightenment* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).

[139] Michael Hagner, "Enlightened Monsters," in *The Sciences in Enlightened Europe,* ed. William Clark, Jan Golinski and Simon Schaffer (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 179.

[140] By contrast, the incongruity and hybridity of monsters are chastised in neoclassical criticism as "wrongful nonrepresentations: allegorical obscurities, distorted grotesques, and jumbled nonsense" (Stafford, *Body Criticism,* 254).

nistic laws, the representational space of monstrosity ceases to be the cabinet of wonders and becomes the anatomical amphitheatre or the scientist's laboratory instead.

Does the sleep of reason truly produce monsters, as Goya's much-vaunted illustration would appear to suggest? Or does the Enlightenment's relentless celebration of the sovereignty of reason engender, in a sort of backlash effect, the very monsters it appears to suppress? According to Canguilhem, the rationalistic turn monstrosity undertakes at the time of the enlightenment pivots on the question of reproduction, while the misbirthing issue actually means that the sleep of reason liberates rather than generates.[141] The nineteenth-century science of teratology, officially consecrated through the teratogenic experiments and taxonomical studies of the Saint-Hilaires, perpetuates the Enlightenment project of a rationalist approach to the monstrous: the science of monstrosity "eventually tames and rationalises the wondrous freak."[142] Delving into the causal laws that determine anatomical malformations, Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire's *Philosophie anatomique. Des monstruosités humaine* (1822) undertakes a massive classification of morphological anomalies and locates the study of monstrosity at the forefront of natural philosophy; Isidore Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire's *Histoire générale et particulière des anomalies de l'organisation chez l'homme et les animaux* (1832) attempts to legitimate teratology as a foundational discipline of morphological anatomy and continues Étienne's questionable endeavours of inducing teratogenic mutations in the embryos of fertilised chicken eggs, a biotechnological venture that would be carried out more successfully by Camille Dareste, whose *Recherches sur la production artificielle des monstruosités; ou, Essais de tératogénie expérimentale* (1871) declares the aim of teratogeny to be that of artificially replicating the items in extant teratological taxonomies and possibly of arriving at entirely novel monstrous aberrations.[143] Under the anatomist's scientific gaze, monstrosity sheds its supernatural, emblematic significance and is demoted to the status of a biological phenomenon: what used to count as the prodigious, or as a derogation from the laws of the ordinary, is now bluntly the irregular: "monstrousness is no longer random disorder, but another order, equally regular and equally subject to law: it is the mixture of

[141] Canguilhem, "Monstrosity," 35.

[142] Thomson, *Freakery*, 4.

[143] For a concise, yet extremely informative overview of the role nineteenth-century teratology played in the larger context of the life sciences, see Melinda Cooper, "Regenerative medicine: stem cells and the science of monstrosity," in *Medical Humanities* BMJ, 30 (2004): 21, who makes a challenging claim when she places contemporary stem cell research in the lineage of nineteenth-century teratogeny: "The very traits that define teratogenesis as pathological […] are here rediscovered as benign, even regenerative, possibilities."

an old and a new order, the simultaneous presence of two states that ordinarily succeed one another."[144] As the teratologist Etienne Wolff concludes, monstrosity is strictly congenital and stems indubitably from a malfunction in the process of embryonic fabrication.[145] From astounding corporeal extravagance to pathological malformation, germinal mutation, or teratogenic abnormality, the normalisation and demythologisation of monsters has reached a terminus point: "domesticated within the laboratory and the textbook, what was once the prodigious monster, the fanciful freak, the strange and subtle curiosity of nature, has become today the abnormal."[146] Earlier conceptions of the monstrous, admixing medical and fantastic explanations for its compositeness, are replaced with strictly physiological notions of the anomalous, which is definitely placed under a normative regimen of scientific disciplining. No longer seen as a hybrid conjunction of two or several organisms, the monster is trimmed down to the level of an embryonic anomaly that not only can be granted a perfectly reasonable explanation but can also artificially be replicated in the scientist's laboratory.

Amongst the most germane contemporary enquiries into the pathologisation of the monstrous in relation to the normal can be found in Georges Canguilhem's studies in the philosophy of science, which have proved tremendously influential on theorists like Michel Foucault or Gilles Deleuze. Clamouring the necessity of enhancing the scientific knowledge of monstrous formations in living organisms, Canguilhem examines in "Monstrosity and the Monstrous" (1962) and *The Normal and the Pathological* (1989) the paradigmatic shift in conceptions of disease brought about by the nineteenth-century life sciences. Within the context of the positivist, normative turn medical sciences took in the nineteenth century, the earlier polemical, agonistic assumption that the normal and the pathological were divided by an irreconcilable, *a priori* ontological gap (disease as the qualitative opposite of health) was sidelined and, eventually, supplanted by an understanding that both pertained to a continuous spectrum of biological phenomena, were governed by the same physiological laws and could be discretely distinguished by measurable degrees of variations from the norm: disease became a quantitative variation from the normal state, through either lack or excess.

Positing anomaly as a transient or more enduring disequilibrium afflicting the organism's internal mechanisms, which are naturally inclined

[144] Saint-Hilaire 1832, quoted in Margrit Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster. Encounters with the Vulnerable Self* (London and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2002), 21.
[145] Étienne Wolff, *La science des monsters* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948).
[146] Thomson, *Freakery*, 4.

towards homeostasis, this scientific model upholds the normative character of the normal and sees the pathological as an eradicable quantitative difference from the norm. Although etymologically unrelated,[147] anomaly (from the Greek *anomalia,* meaning roughness, unevenness, asperity) and abnormality, a departure from the norm (cf. the Greek *nomos*, Latin *norma*), Canguilhem maintains, are often fallaciously conflated from an etymological standpoint, since what counts as an irregularity goes counter to rules devised by naturalists rather than to the laws of nature itself: "[t]hat which has no rule of internal cohesion, whose form and dimensions have no variations from one end to the other of a spectrum that can be called a measure, mould, or model – that cannot be called monstrous."[148] In other words, for something to be catalogued as monstrous, there is a prerequisite of an *internal* logic or order which is necessarily violated or invalidated by an exception or an anomaly. "A monster is a living being of negative quality,"[149] not in the sense that it is devoid of humanity but in that it constitutes the error or failure normal specimens have successfully avoided. The monstrous then finds itself inexorably reduced, just like the meaning of "anomaly," to the category of norm/normal, or, as Huet says, "a simple variant in the orderly interplay of familiar norms."[150] As Canguilhem pithily describes this logic, once monstrosity reaches the status of a biological concept amenable to classifications according to definitive criteria, once monstrosities are induced experimentally, then process of naturalising the monster has come full circle: "[t]he irregular submits to the rule, the prodigy to the predictable."[151] Deviations from the norm need not signal pathological disarray since abject, morphologically ab-normal bodies do not so much transcend as transform the norm: the normal type, as it were, "is the zero degree of monstrosity":

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[147] "Anomaly," Canguilhem says, "comes from the Greek *anomalia*, which means inequality, asperity; *omalos* denotes in Greek that which is unified, equal, smooth, with the result that 'anomaly' is etymologically *an-omalos* – that which is unequal, rough, irregular, as those terms would apply to a landscape. But the etymology of the word 'anomaly' was often mistakenly derived, not from *omalos*, but from *nomos*, which means 'law,' as in the form *a-nomos*. […] Since the Greek *nomos* and the Latin *norma* have closely related meanings, 'law' and 'rule' tend to become indistinguishable. So in a strict semantic sense, 'anomaly' denotes a fact – it is a descriptive term – while 'abnormal' implies a reference to a standard of value; it is an evaluative, normative term" (Canguilhem, "Monstrosity," 28).

[148] Canguilhem, "Monstrosity," 28.

[149] Canguilhem, "Monstrosity," 28.

[150] Marie-Hélène Huet, "Living Images: Monstrosity and Representation," *Representations*. 4 (1983): 75.

[151] Georges Canguilhem. *La connaissance de la vie* (Paris: Vrin, 1965), 177, quoted in Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, 102.

> The abnormal, as ab-normal, comes after the definition of the normal, it is its logical negation. However, it is the historical anteriority of the future abnormal which gives rise to a normative intention. The normal is in effect obtained by the execution of the normative project, it is the norm exhibited in the fact. In the relationship of the fact there is then a relation of exclusion between the normal and the abnormal. But this negation is subordinated to the operation of negation, to the correction summoned up by the abnormality. Consequently it is not paradoxical to say that the abnormal, while logically second, is existentially first.[152]

Were it not for the threat of contamination, monstrosity would simply translate as difference, as that which is out of the ordinary. Taken by Isidore Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire as the most radical and complex species of the genus "anomaly," monstrosity comprises relatively sparse occurrences of structural eccentricities in biological organisms; the monstrous, on the other hand, is strangely allied with the fantastic and the imaginary, and, as such, it proliferates: "[l]ife is poor in monsters. The fantastic is a whole world."[153] The "radical fear" and "panicked terror" monstrous bodies arouse confirm an innate tendency in humans, Canguilhem maintains, to uphold formal integrity and to abhor morphological deformation. That curiosity and fascination should also mark encounters with monstrous creatures signals the proximity between the monstrous and the marvellous. Since the official advent of positivist teratology, Canguilhem claims,

> monstrosity seems to have revealed the secret of its causes and laws; the anomaly seems to be called upon to explain the formation of the normal. Not because the normal is only an attenuated form of the pathological, but because the pathological is the normal that has been hindered or has deviated. Remove the hindrance and you obtain the norm.[154]

In Canguilhem's assessment, Camille Dareste's establishment of teratogeny, the systematic, deliberate creation of monsters, is the equivalent of a paradigmatic change in conceptions of imagination as the source of monsters. From a purely unpredictable phenomenon, aberrant births are reduced to entirely measurable genetic variations, a mere variety in the order of living beings, a Darwinian structural deviation of modest import for the species, albeit, as "the living example of negative value," the monster's rationale is to provide a dynamic, polemical reinforcement of normality. Conversely, the norm's function is not merely that of exclusion and rejection since, Foucault shows, "it is always linked to a positive technique of intervention and transformation, to a sort of normative project."[155]

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[152] Georges Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological*, with an introduction by Michel Foucault (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 275.
[153] Canguilhem, "Monstrosity," 30.
[154] Canguilhem, "Monstrosity," 38.
[155] Foucault, Michel. *Abnormal*, 50.

If a genealogy of monstrosity necessarily highlights the cultural containment of deviant bodies, one must also stress that the history of monsters is more meandering than a mere telic progression and that deviant flesh perpetually threatens to challenge – somatically as well as psychologically – medical knowledge and its promoting the norm of the proper body. Thus, the coexistence well into the eighteenth century of the marvellous and the scientific paradigms in the reception of the monstrous, long after the monsters' incorporation into "legitimate" scientific discourse, attests to their retaining the fabulous stamp regardless of efforts to domesticate them through knowledge and of monstrosity being pregnant with the potential of auguring unprecedented cultural formations.[156] As Youngquist says, "prodigy cedes to pathology only to raise the possibility of new progeny."[157] That the history of monsters should have led indomitably to their pathologisation risks obliterating the fluid interchange and continuity between the "portentous," "wondrous" or "anomalous" discursive structures within which monstrous corporeality has been constru(ct)ed. The significance of monsters is bound to elude definitive explicitation, attesting to a dynamics of reception that allows monsters to disseminate their threats or powers of contagion from the interstices that separate and join different yet mutually validating discourses.

[156] Pender, "*No Monsters*," 150.
[157] Youngquist, *Monstrosities*, 9.

II. Towards an Anthropology of Monstrosity

II.1. The Monster as *Pharmakos*: Scapegoating Otherness

Orpheus's *sparagmos* at the hands of the Bacchic Maenads, the persecution of the Jews, the recent traumas of holocausts, genocides and wars on terror: most societies resort to monstrifying and ritually scapegoating their maligned others. Ritualised violence, targeting sacrificial victims as reservoirs for society's pent-up aggression, must serve a therapeutic role, since it *mimetically* displaces, as René Girard might say, the monstrosity at the heart of humanity itself, cleansing it in the process. Defined as the reinforcement of communal solidarity through the periodic consumption of the totemic Godhead,[158] as a foundational gesture of segregating the sacred from the profane,[159] as a consecration of the sacrificial agent[160] or, in Lévi-Straussian terms, as an expression of the "savage mind" and its propensity towards carving up the world into dichotomous oppositions,[161] ritual sacrifice is essentially a sporadic re-enactment of the originary violence implicit in a cosmogenetic myth, accounting for the birth of the world, in *illo tempore,* out of the scattered remains of a chaos monster. Such gigantomachic juxtapositions of two paradigmatic figures (monster/heroic god-figure, chthonian/solar, chaos/cosmos) are, however, only partial approximations of what appears to be a complex antinomian entwinement between the monstrous, as the originary fabric of the cosmos, and the godly-heroic, which may share in the antagonist's monstrosity.[162] Either anticos-

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[158] Hence, a temporary sharing in the condition of divinity through its magic ingestion, cf. W. Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 1899, discussed in Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (Routledge: London, 1966), 24.

[159] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. Trans. Willard R. Trask (Orlando: Harcourt, 1957), 30.

[160] Etymologically, sacrifice derives from the Latin *sacrificium* (*sacer* plus *facere*), that is to make sacred, to consecrate. The distinctive element in sacrificial consecration is the function of mediation which oblation performs between the "sacrifier" and divinity. Hubert and Mauss point out that in sacrifice the consecration extends, beyond the object offered to the deity, to the agents performing the ritual. Cf. Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, *Sacrifice. Its Nature and Functions.* Trans. E. E. Evans-Pritchard (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), 9.

[161] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind,* Trans. from the French (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), 224-228.

[162] Such is the case of myths whose central episode recounts a theomachia, that is a god's combat with a monstrous antagonist of equally divine origin, like that of Perseus's slaying

mological or cosmological beings, in Foucault's pithy estimate,[163] sacrificial monsters are paradoxically both awful and *awe*ful, both portents of impurity and indexes of numinous otherness.[164] Timothy Beal argues that the monstrous represents a form of theological expression. Querying the notion that religion is essentially cosmogonic, in the sense of establishing and maintaining a sacred cosmic order against the "formless expanse" of chaos (an opinion espoused by Eliade in *The Sacred and the Profane*), Beal points out that in the Near Eastern religions and in the Biblical sections featuring the Leviathan, the monstrous-chaotic may enter an alliance with the sacred or the divine against cosmic order:

> A *monstrum* is a message that breaks into this world from the realm of the divine. […] The otherness of the monster is considered not only horrifically unnatural but also horrifically supernatural, charged with religious import. Likewise, the experience of horror in relation to the monstrous is often described in terms reminiscent of religious experience.[165]

Ancient mythical narratives, Beal argues, insistently trope the transition from chaos to cosmos through the defeat and dismemberment of a chaos god or a chaos monster. Equivocal avatars of "radical otherness appearing within the order of things, the otherworldly within the worldly, the primordial within the ordial,"[166] monstrous chaos gods patrol the fringes of the cosmological map, exposing the fragility of a cosmos trembling in the

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of Gorgon Medusa, the labours of Hercules against the Lernaean Hydra, or the Erymanthian Boar, Mithras's mounting of the sacrificial bull or the titanomachia in Hesiod. Such is also the case of the goddess Tiamat in *Enuma Elish* – at once chaotic liquidity and primordial mother of the gods: her second birthing spawns forth a cohort of monster-serpents, scorpion-men, fish-men and dragons to stave off the gods now turned into her rivals. Led by Marduk (himself an awesomely hideous god whose bodily monstrosity exceeds comprehension), the latter wage a victorious battle against Tiamat, the archetypal "monstrous-feminine," out of whose divided corpse the world – with its distinct allegiance to order – is definitively created.

[163] Foucault, *Abnormal*, 57.

[164] Richard Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters. Interpreting Otherness* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 34. According to Hubert and Mauss, "theology borrowed its cosmogonies from the sacrificial myths. It explained creation by sacrifice, just as popular imagination explained the yearly life of nature. For this it traced back the sacrifice of the god to the origin of the world" (*Sacrifice*, 85-92).

[165] Timothy K. Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 7. Beal's argument is divided his into two sections: the former examines the monsters of those religious traditions (Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Biblical) which have significantly impacted the emergence in Western culture of "religion as horror"; the latter looks at the religion of monsters or "horror as religion," as outlined in Hobbes' *Leviathan*, in Georges Bataille's and Antonin Artaud's primitivist philosophies, in Gothic fiction and horror movies, and in the contemporary phenomena of the "war against terror" or the Goth counterculture.

[166] Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters*, 15.

balance between creation and increation. Nonetheless, the slayers of chaos monsters may also be monstrous embodiments of disorder rather than order. Ricoeur's view of cosmology as a completion of theogony seems to endorse this idea: as chaos precedes order, he says, the annihilation of cosmogonic monsters by their divine antagonists signals the fact that the origin of evil and the origin of things are coeval in that sacrificial gesture. Moreover, the indeterminateness of the Titan theme reveals how the principle of order gets enmeshed with the resumption of primordial violence: the mutilation of Uranus by Chronos, the latter's defeat by Zeus's "trickery and violence" and the Olympians' vanquishment of the Titans testify to the primordial roots of evil, in that disorder is overcome by disorder still.[167]

Related to the centrality of monster slaying in cosmogonic myths is René Girard's analysis of the rites of sacrifice from *Violence and the Sacred*, where he contends that prior to the irruption of ritualistic violence at moments of sacrificial crisis, firm antagonisms maintain the structural balance of a community. In primitive thought, Girard argues, ritual impurity (such as unleashed by an act of *original violence*) and contagion are closely allied. While Girard's argument rests on the insights of ethnologists like Mary Douglas in outlining that ritual impurity occurs when distinctions (of an individual or institutional nature) are facing the prospect of dissolution, he emphasizes the correlation between the risk of nondifferentiation[168] and the eruption of violence. Sacrificial crises may escalate and taint the entire cultural order, as a "regulated system of distinctions in which the differences among individuals are used to establish their *identity* and their

[167] Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 172. Thus, Tiamat is the origin of both Marduk, the principle of order, and of the "belated representatives of the monstrous"; however, the principle of evil is replicated in that Marduk resorts to the violence of disorder in order to establish order and impose a limit on Tiamat's inexhaustible procreative faculty. Greek theogony, Ricoeur maintains, both in its Homeric and its Hesiodic varieties, similarly promotes "the divine at the expense of the primordial brutality" (177-179, 206). Ricoeur sees in the Titans' rebellion – these "irresistible" monsters, resembling neither immortal deities nor mortal humans – a "subversion posterior to the establishment of order" rather than an avatar of primordial disorder. Nevertheless, the defeat of these chthonian forces betrays an insufficient emancipation from the theogonic matrix, in that Prometheus' guile while carrying out his anthropogonic gesture is merely a "sequel" to the craftiness displayed in theogonic conflicts (208-209).

[168] An example of nondifferentiation triggering a sacrificial crisis would be the misbirth of a monster, whose bodily deformity might be tantamount to an invalidation of standard corporeal categories. A hermaphrodite might thus cancel the distinction (differentiation) between the male and the female sexes. In fact, Girard says that the natural and cultural modes of differentiation are indistinguishable, so primitive religious thought will not discriminate between physical monstrosity and moral monstrosity. In other words, whatever the dissolution of physical distinctiveness (say, through a pair of twins' duplication of one and the same corporeal morphology), the cultural foundations regulating each individual's proper place in the community will face a similar foundering prospect.

mutual relationships."[169] Ritual impurity, then, attracts the suspension of individual and communal divisions: the peril of nondifferentiation and the eruption of violence are inextricably conjoined, because "[w]herever differences are lacking, violence threatens."[170] The maintenance of cultural divisions is essential to preserving the structural coherence of the community so once the equilibrium is invalidated through a merging of all distinctions (a condition that is characteristic of "the baleful aspect of the sacred, perceived as a disparate but formidably unified force"),[171] the community will find itself incapable of bearing such an excess of sacred charge and will, by necessity, resort to sacrificial gestures for reinstating strict demarcations and solid fixity in the cultural order. The necessity of staving off communal collapse through ritualistic sacrifice involves two substitutions: on the one hand, an initial, so-called *generative violence* leads to the election of a single, *surrogate victim*, who will absorb the entropic dissipation of the entire community; on the other hand, a sequential substitution will ritualistically swap the surrogate victim with an *extraneous victim*, that is, drawn from outside the social borders.[172] To safeguard the efficiency of a sacrificial rite, then, the victim cannot simply be either intrinsic or extrinsic to the community: it is rather the case that the victim's simultaneous appurtenance to both inside and outside renders him a *monstrous double*,[173] soaking up all differences and insecurely fluidising the passageway between the community and the sacred.[174]

By way of illustration, monstrous births – of twins, for instance – portend an annulment of categorical distinctions, which is a characteristic of the sacred. The horror inspired by monstrous doubles is largely triggered by their cancellation of the prerequisite of physical and cultural differentiation. The confusion arising between the twins' biological and social lack of

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[169] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (1972), Trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 49.

[170] Girard, *Violence*, 57.

[171] Girard, *Violence*, 58.

[172] Girard, *Violence*, 280.

[173] Examples of the dual nature of mythological deities, admixing beneficent and maleficent features, abound: Zeus, Dionysus, all the characters in the Oedipus myth, including Tiresias or the Sphinx ("a monster, a veritable conglomerate of differences, with its woman's head, lion's body, serpent's tail, and eagle's wings"), to mention those cited by Girard, are doubles, hence monstrous, as they incorporate "differences normally considered irreconcilable" (Girard, *Violence*, 251).

[174] As Girard puts it, society's conflictual drives do not target a "paragon of humanity," but a paradoxical amalgam between a "monstrous double" and a "god": "All sacred creatures partake of monstrosity, whether overtly or covertly; this aspect of their nature can be traced to the monstrous double. The marriage of beneficent and maleficent constitutes, of course, the original and fundamental monstrosity, […] that basic difference that dominates all others" (Girard, *Violence*, 251).

distinctiveness borders on the collapse and erasure of all natural and cultural differences, and raises the prospect of indiscriminate violence propagating prodigiously (as if by scissiparity), as the impurity concorporated by the twins may reverberate in the impurity of other phenomena, like bloodshed, menstruation, or incest. Since violence is contagious ("all forms of violence lead back to violence"), in the logic of primitive thought, monstrous births automatically entail further calamities (deadly epidemics, mysterious illnesses, sterility), by and large, misbirths announcing a "fatal collapse of ritual, the transgression of interdictions – in short, […] instigating a sacrificial crisis."[175] In attempting to replicate, as consistently as possible, a previous, originary crisis, settled through the spontaneous slaying of a monstrous antagonist, ritual sacrifice will seek a restoration of order by rallying social accord against the surrogate victim.

The idea of a close entanglement between monstrosity and divinity in the ritual reconstitution of a primal gesture of sacrifice is also addressed in *The Scapegoat*, where Girard suggests that the mythical equivocation characteristic of the ambiguous primitive deity later degenerates into a split into a "perfectly good hero" and a "perfectly bad monster," to the effect that the latter, primarily in legends and fairy tales, inherits everything that is abominable in the sacrificial episode – the *crisis*, the *crime*, the *criteria* for choosing a victim; the hero, on the other hand, becomes the perpetrator of "murder, the sacrificial decision, which is all the more clearly liberating because fully justified by the evil of violence of the monster."[176] Girard resumes and extends his argument from *Violence and the Sacred* to patterns of collective violence across cultures, identifying several interrelated stereotypes that govern persecution both in the mythological and in the historical representations he examines. First, irrespective of its historical form (medieval witch hunts, or the reign of terror during the French Revolution), persecution is invariably triggered by a critical dissolution of the norms that sanction cultural divisions. While the scapegoat's curative potential eschews real epidemics or natural calamities, its purgatory impact nonetheless extends to the self-propagating "bad reciprocity" of human relations ensuing from a crisis that was originally unleashed by external factors: "plagues, droughts, and other objective calamities."[177] Second comes the stereotypical accusation, which lays the burden of fundamental crimes, transgressive of the strictest taboos and responsible for the collapse of the above-mentioned distinctions,

[175] Girard, *Violence*, 57-58.

[176] René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (1982), Trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 82. Girard acknowledges his indebtedness to Freud's *Totem and Taboo* and James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough* as concerns the idea that sacrificial rites are commemorative of an "original" murder.

[177] Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 44.

upon the shoulders of the persecuted. Third are the transcultural, universal criteria for the selection of victims, which Girard regards as paradoxical markers of a certain "absence of difference": anomalous behaviour or physical deformities, either real or merely projected onto victims from other ethnic, social, or religious groups, are likely to polarise persecutors against them. And fourth, the criterion of violence.[178]

It is mostly the third criterion that is of interest to the present research. Although charged with crimes that incur an abolition of distinctions, persecution victims are, Girard argues, actually hounded because they bear the victimary signs. Like cultural signs, victimary signs appear to be differential. However, their difference is extrinsic, not intrinsic to the system; furthermore, it signals "the potential for the system to differ from its own difference, in other words not to be different at all, to cease to exist as a system."[179] Again, it is physical anomaly that assists Girard in formulating his argument most explicitly: a veritable system of anatomical differences, the human body may be destabilised by any disability, whether inborn or accidentally acquired, since it disturbs both the individual bodies' and the social body's dynamic equilibrium: "[d]ifference that exists outside the system is terrifying because it reveals the truth of the system, its relativity, its fragility, and its mortality."[180] Persecution victims are not, therefore, accused of differing from the cultural system that perpetrates violence against them, but of not differing as expected: it is a question of foreign outsiders being deemed unable to comply with a society's genuine cultural dictates (such as barbarians perverting the speech distinctions in Greek). Eventually, Girard admits, "[i]t is not the other *nomos* that is seen in the other, but anomaly, nor is it another norm but abnormality"; thus, a differently embodied individual is likely to be charged with deformity; just like a foreigner can easily become an *apatride*.[181]

Furthermore, Girard discusses the similarity of the surrogate victim with the Greek rite of the *pharmakos,* performed whenever calamities like epidemics, famine or foreign invasions threatened to undo the differences holding a community in place. Paraded throughout the city so as to absorb all impurities, the *pharmakos* would thereafter undergo expungement – hence its closeness to the Greek *katharma*,[182] or ritually expelled malefic object which ensures the cathartic cleansing of the community from any impurities:

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[178] Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 18-24.
[179] Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 21.
[180] Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 21.
[181] Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 22.
[182] Ambivalently meaning not only the surrogate victim but also the efforts undertaken by mythical heroes in purging (*kathairo*) the earth of monsters (Girard, *Violence*, 288).

> The mutations of meaning from the human *katharma* to the medical *katharsis* are paralleled by those of the human *pharmakos* to the medical *pharmakon*, which signifies at once "poison" and "remedy." In both cases we pass from the surrogate victim – or rather, his representative – to a drug that possesses a simultaneous potential for good and for bad, one that serves as a physical transposition of sacred duality […] The "translation" of this violent process into terms of expulsion, evacuation, and surgical operations is made in the most diverse cultures.[183]

The duality, therefore, surrounding the *pharmakon* – both poison and its antidote, both disease and its cure – is also detectible in its closely related etymon, the *pharmakos* – a butt for violent scorn and an object of quasi-religious worship. Derrida's observations on the unstable ambivalence encrypted by the Greek word *pharmakon*, its supradetermination and saturation of meaning, visible in its equivocal rendition of both poison and its remedy, are suggestive of the shifty, ambiguous function of the monster as a scapegoat who is overloaded with the poisonous detritus of a community but can become the vehicle of cleansing that community of its negativity. As Derrida points out,

> The city's body proper thus reconstitutes its unity, closes around the security of its inner courts, gives back to itself the word that links it with itself within the confines of the agora, by violently excluding from its territory the representative of an external threat or aggression. That representative represents the otherness of the evil that comes to affect or infect the inside by unpredictably breaking into it. Yet the representative of the outside is nonetheless constituted, regularly granted its place by the community, chosen, kept, fed, etc., in the very heart of the inside.[184]

Beneficial for its curative potential, hence revered, yet incarnating the injurious threat of structural collapse, the function of the sacrificial scapegoat is perpetually that of drawing out the boundary between inside and outside, between the *intra-muros* and the *extra-muros* spaces since they embody the undecidability of concurrently "introjected" and "projected" evil. Envisaged as the element that triggered the system's collapse in the first place, the scapegoat functions ambivalently as a mechanism that upsets and reinstates structural stability, that contravenes and restores the order that has been transgressed. From "universal execration" to "universal veneration,"[185] this is the trajectory that monstrified scapegoats tend to follow; whether they be giants that are slain and then proclaimed to be guardians of

[183] Girard, *Violence*, 286-288.
[184] Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," in *Dissemination* (1972), Trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 134.
[185] Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 44.

cities or the lion of Nemea, subdued by Heracles and then turned into a pelt worn by the hero to clothe his nakedness, the slaying of monsters in sacrificial rites points to the foundational role monstrosity has in erecting, while appearing to imperil the cultural system's boundaries. Scapegoat mechanisms are fundamental for recuperating the difference that risks being lost in the crisis of nondifferentiation: subduing and undoing monstrosity ensures, ultimately, the community's very existence.

II.2. The Ontological Liminality of Monstrous Others

Harbingers of the peril of non-differentiation, monsters border the demesnes of what Mary Douglas calls *interstitial formlessness* and what Victor Turner stipulates as the *liminal* chasm gorging up *betwixt-and-between* fixed states.[186] Both of these cultural anthropologists' co-option of monstrous anomaly in the ritual interplay between the articulate and the inarticulate, or between structure and structurelessness, is based on Arnold van Gennep's description, in *Rites of Passage* (1908), of the middle phase in the ceremonial patterns that accompany the transition from one individual, social or cosmic state to another. While Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (1966) posits the repertoire of pollution and purification in a marginal period, separating ritual death from ritual rebirth, Turner's *The Forest of Symbols. Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (1967) locates the performance of rituals designed to restore the smooth functioning of the body politic by relieving societies (structures) from their "modes of affliction" (structural clutter, pressure points, internal conflicts or contradictions) in the so-called liminal or transition stage, a stage of reflection on the past and scrutiny of the future, where the temporary suspension of all categories, hierarchies and distinctions (the Girardean monstrous nondifferentiation) makes it possible for new and unforeseen differentiated structures to emerge. Last but not least, Spariosu's *The Wreath of Wild Olive. Play, Liminality and the Study of Literature* (1997) proceeds from an investigation of the manner in which contemporary theorists have attempted to rethink the relationship between margin and centre in Western culture. Whereas centre and margin are seen to be oppositional, agonistic, locked in an unstable, easily reversible dialectics of power, *liminality*, etymologically related to the Latin *limen*, is a concept that fluidises their dyadic opposition, as it involves a dynamic crossing of boundaries, thresholds or passageways and allows access to alternative

[186] Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols. Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1967), 94. By states, Turner understands any culturally recognised conditions or structures characterised by stability or recurrence.

identitarian formulations.[187] In this sense, as Spariosu implies, given its capability of engendering new possible worlds and identities, the irenic concept of liminality can supplant that of a belligerent, subversive marginality and provide an adequate theoretical frame for analysing monstrosity, traditionally seen as the oxymoronic "measure of man"[188] and highlighted by teratological taxonomies as the "deviant" abnormality that can assist in the reinforcement of the anthropomorphic norm.[189]

Liminality as an anthropological concept is essentially derived from van Gennep's description of the triple-phased rites of passage reflecting both seasonal changes and changes affecting individual or communal life in small-scale societies: such quasi-universal movements from an old to a new status are noticeable in rites surrounding pregnancy and childbirth, initiation, ordination and installation, betrothal, marriage, or funerals. Van Gennep's conception of a spatial arrangement of society, with areas that are strictly delineated by internal and external partitionings, explains his definition of movements from one social condition to the next as "territorial" passages.[190] Hence, the importance of the threshold imagery (limits, borders, frontiers), which serves both as an obstruction and an incentive in the dynamics of social movement.

Characterised by Girard as rites of stasis, whose aim is the perpetuation of the system's cultural stability through collective acts of violence against surrogate victims, sacrificial rites share the liminal disarray of the three-phasic rites of passage described by van Gennep, which also strive to reinforce the immobility of the system through a dynamic retrieval of difference.[191] Aimed at integrating adolescents into the ranks of mature community members, rites of initiation also revolve around the figure of the surrogate victim. The liminal stage presents the same potential for contagious violence as any of the previous nondifferentiative phenomena examined above; it is, Girard claims, comparable to a funnel that might well turn into a chasm threatening to engulf the entire cultural structure.[192] Preventive measures against the propagation of contamination include

[187] Mihai Spariosu, *The Wreath of Wild Olive: Play, Liminality, and the Study of Literature* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), 32.

[188] John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1981), 26.

[189] Williams, *Deformed Discourse*, 113.

[190] Arnold van Gennep, *Rites of Passage* (1908), Trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (London: Routledge, 2004), 26.

[191] This common structural denominator between sacrificial and initiation ceremonies is confirmed by van Gennep himself, when he asserts that "The typical series of rites of passage (separation, transition, and incorporation) furnished the pattern for ceremonies of sacrifice" (van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, 184).

[192] Girard, *Violence*, 281.

isolation or exile to the periphery of the community (forests, deserts), in border areas, situated between civilisation and the wilderness and inhabited by beings with a non-fixed, that is, with a nondifferentiated status.

The centrality of this motif is visible in the middle stage of the rites of passage, which, van Gennep argues, characteristically encompass: "preliminal" rites of *segregation* (comprising symbolic behaviour that denotes a dissolution of the individual's or the group's old status); "liminal" rites of *transition* (characterised by ambiguity, in-betweenness, extreme confusion of identity markers, the loss of status or the loss of all difference, in Girard's terms); and "postliminal" rites of *reaggregation* (involving the acquisition of a new status or the restitution of the ritual subject to a position of relative stability). It is in the second, intermediate stage, defined by van Gennep as a hovering between two worlds,[193] that the initiand experiences a blurring of all generic distinctions: or, as Douglas would say, in this marginal limbo, "powerfully efficacious symbols of impurity and danger" signal the disorder wreaking havoc in the social experience.[194] Undergoing a levelling process, the neophyte is deprived of name, status, or kinship ties, bereft of human speech and left to growl or roar like a beast, or left to straddle the same categorical indeterminacy that monstrosity itself exhibits. Furthermore, the initiand's loss of cultural status is physically rendered through the wearing of monstrous masks or the smearing of his body with dirt, as he experiences a complete merger of all attributes into amorphous anonymity, becoming identified with "such general oppositions as life and death, male and female, food and excrement, simultaneously, since they are at once dying from or dead to their former status and life, and being born and growing into new ones."[195] Denudation or inflation of differences blatantly attests to the initiand's partaking of monstrosity through an indiscriminate melange of corporeal and social features.[196]

For Turner, liminality is definable through its ludic character: it is, as it were, a game of disorder capable of bringing about new orders.[197] In his conception, socio-cultural systems (*structures*) go through a periodic dissolution of their normal and normative configurations, which occasions a reflexive redistribution of their paradigmatic axes. If structures function in the indicative mood, liminal processes (*anti-structures* or *inter-structures*)

[193] Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, 27-31.
[194] Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols. Explorations in Cosmology* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1978), 111.
[195] Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), 26.
[196] As Girard also says, "[t]o be lacking in differences or over-equipped with them comes to the same thing" (*Violence*, 282).
[197] See Spariosu, *The Wreath*, 33.

activate in the subjunctive mood, "the mood of may-be, might-be, as-if, fantasy, hypothesis" and generate ever newer (social) arrangements: the *limen* is, Turner insists, an interval, a cunicular hiatus in which "the past is momentarily negated, suspended or abrogated, and the future has not yet begun, an instant of pure potentiality when everything, as it were, trembles in the balance."[198]

His analysis also extends from the description of genuinely *liminal* phenomena, which are compulsory and highly ritualised in small-scale, primitive communities, to what he calls *liminoid* events in modern, large-scale societies, the secular descendants of the magical-religious tribal rituals. Such occurrences, which are optative, rather than mandatory the modern societies, include various leisure or traumatic manifestations, such as carnivals, festivals, concerts, theatre performances, festivals, processions, pilgrimages, or revolutions. Again, for Turner liminality implies more than a merely negative, intermediary phase between two positive (past *v*. future) conditions: that the liminal corresponds to a dynamic interface is apparent in Turner's preference for the terms *cunicle, cunicular* (a protracted tunnel) over *threshold* (a border). As he asserts, meaningful cultural change is "generated at the interfaces between established cultural subsystems, though meanings are then institutionalised and consolidated at the centres of such systems."[199]

By conjoining incommensurable, incompatible features (human and divine, human and animal, male and female), monsters share the transformative and transgressive potential of the *limen*. The *limen* is a site of pure potentiality, an *anti-structure* (since it brings about the dissolution of the prevalent structural order) mediating between such distinctions as nature *v*. culture, the biological *v*. the social, or the individual *v*. the group, and allowing scope for a perpetual redefinition of identity, in terms of fragmentation or rupture, followed by reintegration or reincorporation. Rites of the threshold deliberately and repeatedly destroy the experience of fixed identity and the illusion of its permanence, though one of their enduring purposes is that of symbolically affirming continuity, despite apparent change and fragmentation. In Turner's words,

> the neophytes are neither living nor dead from one aspect, and both living and dead from another. Their condition is one of ambiguity and paradox, a confusion of all customary categories ... Liminality may perhaps be regarded as the Nay to all positive structural assertions, but as in some sense the source of them all, and, more than that, as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise.[200]

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[198] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 166-167, 44.
[199] Turner, *From Ritual*, 41.
[200] Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, 97.

Liminality, in effect, far more than marginality, can suggest the dynamic fashioning of new orders and identities. A further insistence on the necessity to supplant the notion of subversive marginality, engaged in a ceaseless agonistic opposition with the centre, with that of irenic liminality (from the Gk. *eirēnē*, peace) is voiced by Spariosu, who considers that marginality implies an antagonistic rapport between centre and margins (of structures, systems, or worlds); liminality, on the other hand, is likely to overcome the locked, static polarity between margin and centre, providing access to or initiating new structures or worlds, and offering new avenues for identity construction.[201]

The "entanglement of self and other in monstrosity"[202] opens up possibilities for a reconceptualisation of the self in terms that are non-hierarchical, and inclusive of difference. Monsters are essentially hybrid, liminal creatures, straddling boundaries as diverse as those between the human and the non-human, the biological and the technological, or between male and female:

> The peculiarity of the organic monster is that s/he is both Same and Other. The monster is neither a total stranger nor completely familiar; s/he exists in an in-between zone. I would express this as a paradox: the monstrous other is both liminal and structurally central to our perception of normal human subjectivity.[203]

Monsters exemplify a mechanism of *domestic foreignness* or *extimité*, an uncanny mix of "external intimacy" and "intimate alterity" pendant on psychological processes of working out the opposition between inside and outside, between selfhood and otherness.[204] Through their coincidental similitude and lack of similitude to the human, monsters, Harpham also affirms, are liminal in the sense anthropologists use the word to represent the state of in-betweenness characteristic of primitive initiation rituals.[205] Turner's observations regarding the symbolism associated with the liminal *persona* deserve mentioning insofar as they can contribute to defining monstrosity as analogous to an interstructural condition.[206] Patterned on biological processes which are "isomorphic" with conceptual and cultural processes, the symbolism attached to the initiand (simultaneously corpse

[201] Spariosu, *The Wreath*, 38.
[202] Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 20.
[203] Braidotti, "Signs of Wonder," 292.
[204] See Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), xii.
[205] Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *On the Grotesque. Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (Princeton University Press, 1982), 14.
[206] Initiation rites often include a serpent, a dragon protecting a sacred place (temple, tomb): in the rites of passage, the monster devouring the hero signifies an act of resurrection, regeneration.

and embryo) revolves around extinction *and* parturition, that is around figurative death *and* birth. Thus, the imagery of dissolution, decomposition, katabatic descent, and defilement hangs indeterminately in balance with that of gestation, recomposition, anabatic ascent and purification. "Neither living nor dead from one aspect, and both living and dead from another," the neophyte's status is one of neutrality, ambiguity, and indistinctiveness; Turner cogently expresses this paradoxical ambiguity as a condition of "structural invisibility," a "confusion of all customary categories," which may translate that the liminal person is either "no longer" or "not yet" amenable to classificatory attempts.[207] Like the *threshold people* who slip through or elude the classification networks normally assigning them fixed positions within the cultural space, monsters, with their ambiguous, indeterminate features, also bestride locations of "structural outsiderhood," in the sense that they are *betwixt-and-between* customary, legal or ceremonial positions assigned and arrayed to them.[208]

Furthermore, Turner insists that the ontological transformation effected in the liminal period is grounded in the acquisition of arcane knowledge. At the core of the liminal stage of reflection, monstrosity emerges as the essential ingredient of the *sacra* that are imparted onto the initiand. Given the incongruity of their components, monstrous *sacra* or effigies elicit the neophytes' introspection and reflexive segregation of those effigies' grotesquely exaggerated or intermingled elements, enabling them to become aware of the conceptual schemata underlying cultural organisation:

> [M]uch of the grotesqueness and monstrosity of the liminal sacra may be said to be aimed not so much at terrorising or bemusing neophytes into submission or out of their wits as at making them vividly and rapidly aware of what may be called the "factors" of their culture. […] Elements are withdrawn from their usual settings and combined with one another in a totally unique configuration, the monster or dragon. Monsters startle neophytes into thinking about objects, persons, relationships, and features of their environment they have hitherto taken for granted.[209]

Referring specifically to Turner's analysis of the interstructural melange of human and beastly features from *The Forest of Symbols*, Girard remarks that by incorporating, juxtaposing and rearranging naturally differentiated beings and objects, masks underscore yet "another aspect of the monstrous

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[207] Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, 96-97.

[208] As Beal says, monsters are formed through the stitching together of "various mutually incompatible identities and othernesses into a single body," they are "conglomerations of many different forms of otherness — cosmological, political, psychological and religious otherness" (*Religion and Its Monsters*, 103).

[209] Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, 105.

double,"[210] allowing the neophyte both to distinguish between self and other and to arrive at an understanding that otherness is foundational to self-definition: as Turner insists, liminality "breaks, as it were, the cake of custom and enfranchises speculation."[211] To put things differently, Turner's account of monstrosity eschews notions of antagonistic oppositions between self and other, giving scope to an irenic, integrative relation between these facets of identity through a scrutiny of the elements of difference that separate the individuals from and of the elements of sameness that unite them with others, foregrounding their awareness of the limits of the human and exploring the creative possibilities that overstepping these boundaries may open:

> Put a man's head on a lion's body and you think about the human head in the abstract. Perhaps it becomes for you, as a member of a given culture and with the appropriate guidance, an emblem of chieftainship; or it may be explained as representing the soul as against the body; or intellect as contrasted with brute force, or innumerable other things. There could be less encouragement to reflect on heads and headship if that same head were firmly ensconced on its familiar, its all too familiar, human body. The man-lion monster also encourages the observer to think about lions, their habits, qualities, metaphorical properties, religious significance, and so on. More important than these, the relation between man and lion, empirical and metaphorical, may be speculated upon, and new ideas developed on this topic.[212]

Not only do ritual monsters perform a mediating function in sacred exchanges or ensure symbolic transactions across boundaries;[213] they also become objects of intense reflection and understanding of the constitutive limits of selfhood. This is echoed by Beal's claim that whether one considers the monsters of the biblical tradition or those of today's popular horror counterculture, these interstructural creatures populate the ambiguous margins of the conceptual landscape, marking and blurring, at the same time, the edges of order and chaos, inside and outside, self and other; encounters with the monstrous, Beal says, will prompt mixed – conservative and radical – reactions: on the one hand, one may feel impelled to abstain from challenging the established social and symbolic boundaries; on the other hand, one may adopt the exactly opposite attitude, for boundaries are there to be invalidated, transgressed, violated, the limit experience monsters trigger resembling a being lured towards and repelled by the *monstrum tremendum*:

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[210] Girard, *Violence*, 167.
[211] Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, 106.
[212] Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, 106.
[213] See Pnina Werbner, "The Limits of Cultural Hybridity: On Ritual Monsters, Poetic Licence and Contested Postcolonial Purifications," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 7/1 (2001): 139.

> *Monstrum*: a portent or warning. The monster's warning is distressingly double. On the one hand, as a disciplinary figure, it warns against tampering with the order of things, urging us to pull back from the threshold of the known at which it appears, into the social and symbolic centre, examining ourselves for any traces of its touch, reinvigorating a vigilant reason, letting sleeping leviathans lie. On the other hand, as a sign of unaccountable and unimaginable excess, it warns against the limitedness of our well-constructed cosmologies and against simplistic but widespread understandings of religion as morality or ideological system. The monster lulls reason into a night of unknowing in which sleeping leviathans do not lie.[214]

Liminality, both as an intermediate phase in a rite of passage and as corporeal in-betweenness, such as evident in monstrous hybridity, encourages reflexivity and amounts to a transformative experience in which the juxtaposition of incongruous elements, admixing elements from disparate domains, in magnified and overstated relief, occasions critical thought on the constituent and relational elements of the self, both at an individual and at a social level. The monstrous is not categorically alien to the human and in its sharing of humanity it both secures and confounds the boundaries of self; hence, the incongruous responses of revulsion and fascination, dismissal and identification, desecration and admiration it elicits. Monstrified others represent, as contemporary teratologists agree, *limit* or *borderline experiences* for humans attempting self-identification through the negation or expungement of otherness, reminding us, however, that the self's secure cloistering in itself is a foundational fallacy. The excessiveness monstrous corporeality displays, its bordering on the binary divide culturally assumed to keep "matter" into place, separating inside from outside or self from other, can only signal the fragility of standards of sameness and point ambivalently to otherness as identity's extrinsic foundation.[215] It is the

[214] This is how Beal describes the *monstrum tremendum*: "my sense of vertiginous horror in the face of the monstrous emerges from the feeling that it is both within me and beyond me. It reveals an abominable, monstrous otherness within, without reducing that otherness to sameness, without making it entirely familiar" (*Religion and Its Monsters*, 195-196).

[215] What Shildrick calls "the radical otherness that constitutes an outside and the difference that inhabits identity itself" (Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster*, 11). See also Kearney, who defines monsters as "borderline experiences of uncontainable excess" (*Strangers*, 3). In his study of monsters as literary tropes, Andriano addresses the indeterminacy at the heart of monstrosity in terms of a fantastic hesitation between anthropomorphism and bestialisation. Capitalising upon Tzvetan Todorov's definition of the fantastic as a liminal or frontier genre, situated in between the marvellous and the uncanny, and corresponding to a response of irresolute hesitation between natural and supernatural explanations of an event, Joseph Andriano argues that representations of monsters bridge the gap between self and other by figuring them both as metaphoric renditions and as metonymic displacements of the human, in Joseph D. Andriano, *The Immortal Monster. The Mythological Evolution of the Fantastic Beast in Modern Fiction and Film* (Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1999), xiv-xv.

destabilisation of shibboleths holding monsters beyond the confines of "proper" embodiment that the novels I analyse in this study bring to the fore.

II.3. "Matter out of Place": Monstrosity as a Pollution Phenomenon

Cultural-anthropological research has emphasised the cardinal role of monstrosity, as a pollution phenomenon, in exposing the conceptual mechanisms and organisational schemes underlying the construction of order in a system. An examination of the monsters' motley assortment of corporeal features could quickly reveal their imperilment of all hierarchies, their immunity to all order. Hybrid, deformed or aberrant bodies challenge, through their impure, composite morphology, the structural clarity of the cultural categories they violate. If social ordering, like classificatory tendencies, betrays impulses rooted even in the most archaic communities, as modern anthropology has shown, whatever fails to fit neatly into such classificatory schemes (high-low, male-female, etc.) tends to be experienced as problematic and to be hedged as taboo or as *matter out of place*.[216] Thus cross-over figures like monstrous mythical hybrids, ritual masks or carnival participants correspond, as seen above, to the intractable noncategory of *betwixt-and-between*,[217] of liminal ambivalence, posing threats to hierarchies, structures, order.

Before taking a closer look at Mary Douglas's examination of purity and danger, I shall briefly resume Paul Ricoeur's analysis of defilement in his philosophical anthropology of evil. In *The Symbolism of Evil* (1967), the symbolism of defilement is ineffaceably immersed in cosmic correspondences between the defiled and the sacred.[218] Diagrammed as a triune progression from defilement through sin to guilt, the hierophanic instantiation of the consciousness of self occurs at moments of encounters with the defiled: those *things* which are prohibited to profane experience and which, because of their terrifying contagiousness, because of their simultaneously attractive and repellent impact, must be hedged in through tabooisation.[219] Proceeding analogically from the charge of impurity that the *stain*

[216] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 2.
[217] Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, 93.
[218] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 11.
[219] The cosmic-hierophanic, the oneiric and the poetic are the three dimensions of symbolism concurrently subsumed by any "authentic" symbol. Furthermore, given the "double intentionality" of any symbol, its literal meaning is always already analogically replicated in the "second meaning": thus, defilement is the analogue of "stain," sin is the analogue of deviation, while guilt is the analogue of accusation (Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 10-18, 12).

(understood as physical *uncleanness*) bears, defilement corresponds to a moment in the consciousness of fault: it amounts, Ricoeur says, to a "specific sort of fear that blocks reflection," experienced whenever the sacred incurs a possibility of transgression.[220] While the *stain* is infectious through contact, its objective correlative, defilement, generates an experience of dread. These two archaic facets of defilement – the objective and the subjective – can also be expressed as a *something* that "infects" and as a *consciousness of alteration*: representations of defilement, Ricoeur argues, dwell "in the half-light of a quasi-physical infection that points toward a quasi-moral unworthiness."[221] The ambiguity of defilement surges in the half-physical, half-ethical fear adherent to representations of the impure.

In her seminal anthropological study of pollution, Mary Douglas draws on the Lévi-Straussian analysis of totemic classification and correlates the homologous notions of purity *versus* dirt with the maintenance *versus* the transgression of established cultural categories. Like Lévi-Strauss's suggestion that the contradictions embodied by mythical monsters replicate, while attempting to resolve, the fundamental contradictions and dilemmas arising out of attempts to devise cultural schemata for ordering the natural world,[222] Douglas advocates that the anomalousness of dirt is the prerequisite of order. Even though dirt is universally acknowledged as pathogenic and necessitates eradication (whether through primitive purification or contemporary prophylaxis), Douglas highlights the constitutive role of impurity in clarifying and delineating more firmly the taxonomies it seemingly invalidates. Only by isolating and extrojecting pathogenic contaminants can a system maintain the hygiene of the schemata whereby individuals and societies construct meaning in the world. Through this assumption, Douglas contradicts Paul Ricoeur's understanding of defilement avoidance as an antidote to mind-blocking fear.[223] Reflection on dirt is not intrinsically foreclosed by overwhelming dread, but is an incentive to reconsidering "the relation of order to disorder, being to non-being, form to formlessness, life to death," since dirt is simply an offence to regularity, a discordant anomaly[224] that essential to processes of order-making and its elimination would amount to a positive effort of restoring the structure of a destructured environment: defined as residual *matter out of place*, dirt is, as Douglas says, "the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of

[220] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 25.
[221] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 30-33, 35.
[222] Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," *The Journal of American Folklore* 68/270 (1955): 434.
[223] "With defilement we enter the realm of terror" (Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 25).
[224] "The reaction to dirt is continuous with other reactions to ambiguity or anomaly" (Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 5).

matter, insofar as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements."[225] From this perspective, the monsters' organic deformity and conceptual anomaly reveals their *interstitial* quality, situated as they are both between and against norms of embodiment.[226]

Douglas outlines several ways in which socio-cultural systems deal with the challenge that "anomalous," "aberrant" or "ambiguous" forms pose to their established categories. Consequently, if any given culture inevitably produces anomaly as the by-product of classification patterns, it must also confront such categorical indeterminacy, for it would otherwise jeopardise the structural solidity of the system itself. Elaborating on the process of casting anomaly as "pollution" or "taboo," Douglas foregrounds several strategies through which cultures may slough off anomalous events and reinstate conformity to the standard: these are interpretation, elimination, avoidance regulations, labelling, and incorporation into ritual. Such practices correspond, in broad lines, to cultural framings of monstrosity as an instance of corporeal aberration, which threatens not only to conflate physical borders between genera, genders, etc., but also to break down the cognitive boundaries which provide the cultural foundations of order.

Firstly, by assigning a particular explanation to an anomalous event, its contagious potential can evidently be curtailed. This is where Douglas makes the most explicit reference to deformed infants: though the cultural imperative of bodily perfection is shattered by their "defective" physicality, it nonetheless can also be restored through sheer interpellation: "If a monstrous birth can be labelled an event of a peculiar kind the categories can be restored."[227] Cultural categories of otherness, by and large, may pose similar threats of ambiguity to the social system: corporeal hybridity (hermaphroditism, for example) testifies to the destabilisation of dichotomous classifications (in this particular case, binary notions of sex identity). At the same time, settling for one possible account of such anatomical infractions may bring to light their status as deviations from a norm (such as the Aristotelian notion of a local morphological disorder caused in a foetus by a perfect poise between the male and the female generative material); hence, the norm can retrieve its steadfast authority.

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[225] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 6, 2, 36.

[226] To illustrate the ambiguity of anomaly, Douglas glosses on Sartre's analysis of viscosity from *Being and Nothingness*. Ambiguously stationed between the solid and the liquid, the limpid and the murky, the miscible and the immiscible, the viscous is also anomalous and in that it clarifies the binary set of which it is not a part (Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 39). By extrapolation, the anomalousness of monstrous bodies would be coextensive with the similarly abjectionable qualities of viscosity, viscerality, viscidity, etc.

[227] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 40.

Elimination is the second cultural treatment of anomaly defined by Mary Douglas; historically, monsters have been subjected to a number of exclusionary practices: exposure, infanticide, relegation to the margins, eugenic eradication, or genetic modification with the more recent reproductive technologies.[228] For instance, pointing to the need extant in all human cultures to define the features regarded as "essential to humanity," King has demonstrated how human/beast hybrids (many of which are gendered: sirens, harpies, mermaids, etc.), whose origins were generally accounted for in pre-Christian mythology as the interbreeding between human and animal or between gods and other beings, graphically represented the precarious nature of any separation between the regna. In effect, they "violate[d] the boundaries by sharing in both natures."[229] Consequently, given the infectious defilement, in Ricoeurian terms, which physical compositeness – coupled with sexual, social, and dietary peculiarities – threatens to pass on to a community, ostracisation and removal beyond the margins of the *polis* were oftentimes deemed mandatory.

A third means of neutralising the cultural dissonance that aberrant bodies divulge is avoidance. Douglas's analysis of the Levitical prescriptions calls attention to the relativity of defilement: pollution only makes sense within the frame of "a total structure of thought whose key-stone, boundaries, margins and internal lines are held in relation by rituals of separation."[230] Thus, the dietary prohibitions against *abominable things* in *Leviticus* XI and Deutoronomy, maintained in the Hebrew and Christian Biblical canon, are disciplinary rather than allegorical: the *uncleanness* of certain animal species is an index of their morphological, locomotory and habitational indeterminacy and disqualifies them as an affront to holiness, which ultimately entails keeping the categories of creation distinct. The imperfection or incompletion of a hybrid body is likewise offensive to holiness, which presupposes wholeness, order and purity. Hence, the injunction against the "perversion" of human-animal couplings or the preclusion of blemished, mutilated, or "defective" individuals from sacred precincts in Leviticus XVIII and XXI. Preventive measures against the propagation of contamination include isolation or exile to the periphery of

[228] See Rosemarie Garland's Thomson's analysis of disability and the cultural arsenal of purgation techniques designed to enforce, by contrast, able-bodiedness as the proper form of corporeality (Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, 34-35).

[229] Helen King, "Half-Human Creatures." In *Mythical Beasts*, ed. John Cherry (San Francisco: Pomegranate Books, 1995), 138.

[230] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 42. Making specific reference to the horror of contamination (for instance, visible in the ancient Greeks' cautious disposal of the anathema, any physical contact with whom must be avoided) which malformed children elicit, Girard he discusses practices of exposure and their eschewal of direct uses of violence (Girard, *Violence*, 27).

the community (forests, deserts), where, in Girardean terms, undifferentiated violence rules. Abhorrence of abomination is thus a strategy of affirming and strengthening the definitions which it contravenes, since rules of avoidance hedge off and make publicly visible the boundaries of the system.

Labelling anomalous bodies as dangerous constitutes a fourth cultural response to that which disrupts physical compliance with standards of completeness and order. Scapegoating and the pigeonholing of monstrosity as evil, immoral or pathological are containment strategies targeted at whatever hazards unsettle structural stability. Nonetheless, through their exposure (de-monstration) of the permeability of classificatory boundaries, monsters highlight the vulnerability of culture itself, its artificial completeness and integrity as such.[231]

To conclude, a final provision for dealing with anomalous elements is their incorporation within ritual. Unlike purity, which is averse to change, uncleanness, defilement and ambiguity have an anti-structural, potentially transformative function: normally destructive, dirt may sometimes become creative: "[w]here there is dirt there is system."[232] Monstrous corporeality – literally *matter out of place* clinging to the "half-identity" that impairs the clarity of corporate rules – is that creative formlessness which lies at the crux of mechanisms deployed for shattering and renewing the system. Harnessed through ritual, the bodily pollution that monstrosity displays may spur a process of systemic regeneration. A ritual frame, Douglas explains, guarantees that the categories enforced through dirt avoidance are not endangered in any way. What is more, the ritualistic use of bad mixings, anomalies, or abominations sanctions them as sources of tremendous regenerative potential. Disorder may tarnish pattern, but at the same time it also supplies the material for pattern; order is restrictive, but disorder has an unlimited patterning potential: such are the powers and perils of disorder, which ritual legitimises. This would show forth the "negative character of purity" and the "positive character of defilement,"[233] in a manner similar to Bakhtin's celebration of the replenishing function of grotesqueness in European medieval carnival.

[231] See Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster*, 1-3, and David Gilmore, *Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts, and all Manner of Imaginary Terrors* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 19.
[232] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 160, 36.
[233] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 70.

II.4. Monstrosity on Display: The Grotesque in Carnivals and Freak Shows

The Bakhtinian grotesque generic body of carnival strikes a note of resemblance with monstrosities despite the latter's singularity and *because of* their irreducibility to the norms of the proper body. With the advent of modernity, despite the institutionalisation of museums rather than fairgrounds as places of public amusement, *carnival* – in its various guises (fairs, folk festivities, processions or masquerades featuring grotesque costumes or the display of monsters and freaks) – becomes, as analysts have noted, more than a ritualistic occurrence or symbolical practice: consistent with Foucault's Nietzschean definition of genealogy as an investigation of the *masquerade* of history, the carnivalesque comes to function as an analytical tool for exploring such cultural-political phenomena as the transgression and inversion of official hierarchies.[234]

Like Mary Douglas's notion of pollution, which, as seen above, assumes that where corporeal boundaries are under threat, all other boundaries become precarious as well, Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque emphasises the cultural significance of the body as a complex metamodel of bounded systems at large. Any transgression of bodily thresholds implicit in monstrous deformation can actually incur an infringement of all the other systems it replicates, problematising the principle of order that bodily systemic structure should actually reinforce. The monstrous and the grotesque are inextricably allied, as Marina Warner deftly demonstrates,[235] yet if a practical dissociation were to be made, one would notice that the former belongs to the order of nature, whereas the latter to the order of representation.

In *Rabelais and His World,* Bakhtin employs the bodily trope as a means of charting an aesthetics of the grotesque, in which inverted hierarchies, gaping orifices and ruptured surfaces become prioritised against bodily verticality, closure and intactness, the paradigmatic features of the rigid, static classical body: thus, "the artistic logic of the grotesque image ignores the closed, smooth, and impenetrable surface of the body and retains only its excrescences (sprouts, buds) and orifices, only that which leads beyond the body's limited space or into the body's depths."[236] If the classical body, associated with the elite, official culture of the Renaissance and its valuation

[234] "The new historian, the genealogist will know what to make of this masquerade. He will not be too serious to enjoy it; on the contrary, he will push the masquerade to its limits and prepare the great carnival of time where masks are constantly reappearing. Genealogy is history in the form of concerted carnival" (Foucault, *Language*, 160-1).

[235] Marina Warner, *Monsters of Our Own Making: The Peculiar Pleasures of Fear* (The University Press of Kentucky, 2007) (original title *No Go the Bogeyman. Scaring, Lulling and Making Mock* London: Vintage, 1998), 251.

[236] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, Trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 317-318.

of balance, elegance, fixity, and immutability reinforces, through the prestige allotted its upper regions and its effacement of its lower regions, the frozen hierarchical structure of the social body at large, things are altogether different in the case of the grotesque body, as it erupts in the liminal space of carnival. Emphasising the physical, material aspects of existence to the detriment of their spiritual, abstract counterparts, Bakhtin's analysis of grotesque corporeality accentuates its openness, protrusiveness, irregularity, leakiness, constant overgrowth or diminution, its combination of heterogeneous forms, its multiplicity and incompleteness, casting it in terms of an excessive transgression of the limits that the body upheld by classical aesthetics adheres to.[237] Thus, like the monstrous body, the disproportionate, exorbitant grotesque body savours a disintegration of natural physical wholes and a fantastic, nonsequential redistribution of part. It is averse to all canons, it relishes an aesthetic of "decontextualised conglomerates, juxtaposed or crudely mixed."[238] It refuses staticness and is perpetually in process, *always becoming*, always raising the threat of outgrowing its limits and contaminating its outside:

> The grotesque body ... is a body in the act of becoming. it is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created and builds and creates another body. Moreover, the body swallows the world and is itself swallowed by the world … This is why the essential role belongs to those parts of the grotesque body, in which it conceives a new body: the bowels and the phallus. These two areas play the leading role in the grotesque image and it is precisely for this reason that they are predominantly subject to positive exaggeration, to hyperbolisation; they can even detach themselves from the body and lead an independent life.... Eating, drinking, defecation and other elimination (sweating, blowing of the nose, sneezing), as well as copulation, pregnancy, dismemberment, swallowing up by another body – all these acts are performed on the confines of the body and the outer world, or on the old and new body. In all these events the beginning and end of life are closely linked and interwoven.[239]

[237] Bakhtin speaks of debasement as the "fundamental artistic principle of grotesque realism; all that is sacred and exalted is rethought on the level of the material bodily stratum or else combined and mixed" (*Rabelais*, 370).

[238] Stafford, *Body Criticism*, 273.

[239] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 317. Grotesque bodies, Harpham confirms, both clamour and defy definition because they hover indiscriminately "between the known and the unknown, the perceived and the unperceived, calling into notion the adequacy of our ways of organising the world, of dividing the continuum of experience into knowable particles" (*On the Grotesque*, 3). Similarly, Thomson defines the grotesque as the "unresolved clash of incompatibles," such as exhibited by the ambivalently (ab)normal, in Philip Thomson, *The Grotesque* (London: Methuen, 1972), 27.

The grotesque body becomes a body of resistance and subversion (with the reversal of the prominence accorded to the high and the low anatomical regions, corresponding to the privileged and the underprivileged societal sections), as it facilitates, by virtue of its links to carnival, a disruption of rigid and exclusionary social structures. Carnival, as a liminal social site, reflects the atomisation of the symbolic polarities of high and low, inside and outside that are also violated and transgressed in the grotesque body, and whose counter-hegemonic aversion to hierarchic stability has led Bakhtin to posit the carnivalesque as a catalyst for the destabilisation of all hierarchies in revolutionary movements. The grotesque body's association with the transient social transformation inherent in the carnivalesque rests on a similar process of blurring all sorts of frontiers: between the genders, between animal and human, between the individual and the socius, between high and low, forging a potential connection between this "transgressive corporeal aesthetics" and the politics of hierarchy subversion.[240] During carnival, all categorical distinctions are brought into crisis in this dynamics of corporeal change, with its attendant operations of inversion, exchange, transgression, mutation and hyperbolisation.[241]

Contrary to Wolfgang Kayser's terrific or tragic understanding of the grotesque as a "play with the absurd," or as "an attempt to invoke and subdue the demonic aspects of the world,"[242] Bakhtin understands it as a mode of liberation from all prescriptive norms, those of embodiment included. In *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* (1957), the very same monstrous, jumbled, convoluted aggregates of the organic and the material, of animal and human fragments that for Bakhtin translate as indomitable challenges in the face of authority and structure, are likely to trigger, Kayser asserts, a sense of profound alienation and disorientation in a world that has

[240] Critiquing Bakhtin's notion of the parodically performative function of the carnivalesque grotesque, which allows for a temporary infringement of order, Alice Mills finds the idea of a "compensatory grotesque" contradictory: on the one hand, Bakhtin's celebration of carnival hinges on its association with an irrepressible revolutionary spirit; on the other hand, concessions are made to carnival gradually losing momentum (due to growing secularism and the containment of its centrifugal energies), up until the turn of the twentieth century, when the grotesque shed its communal overtones and "became joylessly solitary," in Alice Mills, "Introduction," in *Seriously Weird. Papers on the Grotesque*, ed. Alice Mills (New York: Peter Lang Publ., 1999), 3.

[241] See Susan Stewart's understanding of the grotesque as "a jumbling of this order, a dismantling and re-presentation of the body according to criteria of production rather than verticality. The free exchange, substitution, and interpenetration of bodily elements during carnival is symptomatic of the exchange of the fair and marketplace which provides its context," in *On Longing. Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 105.

[242] Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), 188.

lost its bearings through the dissolution of its categorical and structural divides. By contrast, for Bakhtin, such visual hybrids can only elicit a communal, mocking, deriding, "triumphant laughter,"[243] the laughter of carnival, capable of relativising and overthrowing grand truths of the hegemonic world view and of installing in their stead the carnivalesque spirit of renewal.[244]

The boundaries that allow for fluid exchanges between inside and outside, self and other, the self and the world in Bakhtin's model of grotesque corporeality[245] also act as loci of transgression in the liminal sites or spaces "naturally" associated with the display of such interstitial bodies. Thus, Stallybrass and White suggest that spaces like fairs or carnivals encode filth, excess and the monstrous bodies put on show there as the shadow subjectivity or even the core of the bourgeois unconscious.[246] In

[243] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 12.

[244] Echoing Bakhtin's critique of neo-classical aesthetics, which rationalises the grotesque as monstrous jumbles of heterogeneous elements, McElroy also suggests that the distinction between the grotesque and the monstrous pends on the prevalent ideological cast of a certain period and believes that both Kayser and Bakhtin fall prey to partiality of vision. McElroy claims that grotesque art actually derives its aesthetic and psychological effect from an uncanny mixture of fascination and revulsion. See Bernard McElroy, *Fiction of the Modern Grotesque* (London: MacMillan, 1989), 203.

[245] Bakhtin's mention of the chimera and the Melusine as traditional grotesque "combination[s] of human and animal forms" (*Rabelais*, 109), incompatible with and therefore misconstrued as monstrous by classical aesthetics is significant here, since both are relevant figures for boundary-crossing aesthetics, completely at odds with the neoclassical mindset, structured around clarity, order, firm borders and finished contours. The question whether in contrast with the standard, male body of classical aesthetics, the grotesque body, with its circulation of fluids across bodily frontiers, with its emissions and ingurgitations, with its morphological variability, can be seen as gendered, that is whether the grotesque body is subliminally coded as female, is addressed by Mary Russo in *The Female Grotesque. Risk, Excess and Modernity* (1994). Thus, she invokes Bakhtin's quintessential figure of grotesque corporality, the senile pregnant hag, which is "typical and very strongly expressed grotesque. It is ambivalent. It is pregnant death, a death that gives birth. There is nothing completed, nothing calm and stable in the bodies of these old hags. They combine senile, decaying and deformed flesh with the flesh of new life, conceived but as yet unformed" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 26). The inherent grotesqueness of this figure relates to her extraordinary reproductive potential, the same reason why female corporeality is also monstrified on account of its unruly excessiveness of the unitary, standard oneness of the bodily frame. An argument brought by Russo to support this idea of the grotesque body being replete with female characteristics is that etymologically, the *grotto*-esque exudes associations of viscerality, darkness, immanence, earthliness, that it is symbolic of the cavernous interior of the female body and its polluting bodily effluvia, the Bakhtinian detritus always threatening to seep and abjectly contaminate the outside. See Russo, *The Female*, 3-6, 53-73.

[246] Peter Stallybrass and Allon White examine the complex cultural logic whereby one and the same hierarchical division, that between the high and the low, articulates each of the following four symbolic domains: psychic, corporeal, geographical and social. Should hierarchy and order be infringed in one domain, interrelated processes of disruption and transgression would affect all the others, in *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986), 124.

effect, Stallybrass and White's prime focus is on hierarchy reversal or on what they call the *world upside down* phenomenon, given that representations of the low-Other (freak shows, popular carnival festivities, symbolically abject animals and grotesque bodies) exert simultaneously fascination and repugnance, abhorrence and desire, playing an instrumental role in constituting the dominant culture's imaginary repertoires of non-normativity.[247]

Historically, Susan Stewart has shown, physical or corporeal aberrations are inseparable from the structure of the spectacle. In anthropological studies, considerable attention has been devoted to the freak show as another socio-symbolic site presenting the world upside down or inside out. While carnival celebrates the (re)productiveness of the social body at large and disrupts order by envisaging its reversal as a potential new order, the freak spectacle and the side show work, however, to prevent the social body from the potential contamination of deformed bodies.[248] Carnivals, freak sideshows and fairs constitute spaces of deviance or countercultural spaces where monstrosities may nonetheless *matter* through their temporary contestation of the normative force of proper embodiment. They represent instances of *heterotopias of deviation*, those "other spaces" that Foucault defines as the repository for "individuals whose behaviour [or body, one might say] is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm."[249] At such carnivalesque sites, monstrosities matter because of their singularity, the lure of their otherness to habitual proprieties and bodily normativity. If, as in Hetherington's assessment of heterotopias,[250] carnivals and fairs, so often featured in Angela Carter's or Salman Rushdie's works, are to be seen as spaces of deferral rather than as spaces of transition, then the grotesque and the freakish, as avatars of monstrosity on display at these in-between spaces, reveal all the more potently their role in the processual dynamics of ordering, that is, of interrogating/transgressing *and* confirming/settling the coordinates of proper embodiment.

Unlike freak shows, which Thomson has highlighted as spaces where dominant, normative identity can be ratified at the expense of depriving anomalous bodies of their humanity, fairs and carnivals recurrently enact a heterotopia of deviance for myriad disorderly forms of embodiment that amount to an entire populace and that convey the impossibility of reducing them to a singular norm of the proper body.[251] Such carnivalesque sites do

[247] Stallybrass and White, *The Politics*, 5.
[248] Stewart, *On Longing*, 103.
[249] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," Trans. Jay Miskowiec. *Diacritics* 16/1 (1986): 25.
[250] Kevin Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity. Heterotopia and Social Ordering* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), ix.
[251] Thomson, *Freakery*, 59.

more than enact dichotomies between the festive and the mundane, or the grotesque and the classical, because their operations inhere in the very dialectics of social hierachisation and classification: the economy of transgression endemic to such spaces fosters change, as Youngquist has shown, since, unlike museums, which aim at containing and ossifying the meanings of monstrosity, fairs and carnivals provide an occasion for monsters to spawn their own alternative routes towards (im)proper embodiment, "an opportunity for play on and with the field of power, for stepping on and through the cracks of a progressively normalised society towards new formations."[252]

In a study entitled *Freaks* (1978), Leslie Fiedler enlarges upon the ambivalent mixture of revulsion and awe underlying responses to the abnormal. Contesting distinctions "naturally" assumed to separate self from other, freaks destabilise the security of norms erected to posit them in the fringes of deviancy.[253] "Freak discourse," as Rosemarie Garland Thomson has shown, easily lends itself to a genealogical scrutiny of the sequential cultural transformations which have triggered shifts in the meanings attached to the monstrous: its modes of representation, the significances imprinted onto such bodies, may also elicit notions of its imbrication in and reflection of larger cultural transformations, entailing the progressive incorporation of monstrosity into increasingly secular and rational explanatory paradigms and ending in a deflation of the contagious powers of what used to count as the awesome or the prodigious, as monsters become enmeshed in the quintessentially normative project of casting the abnormal as the limit of the normal.[254]

Triggering deep disquietude about the limits of the human, unexpected, exceptional or extraordinary bodies are nonetheless foundational areas for interrogating comforting distinctions between self and other in narratives whereby one makes sense of oneself and of the world. Non-typical as it may have always been regarded, monstrous embodiment has been appropriated differently according to the cultural resonances of the various historical

[252] Cf. Youngquist, *Monstrosities*, 50. Foucault also contrasts museums and libraries, as heterotopias of enclosure and containment, favouring ceaseless, indefinite accumulation, to fairgrounds and festivals, as transitory heterotopias of instantaneous loss, allowing for heteroclite elements (monstrous hybrids are invoked here) to be merely fleetingly brought together ("Of Other Spaces," 26).

[253] Leslie Fiedler, *Freaks. Myths and Images of the Secret Self* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 33. Similarly, for Elizabeth Grosz, freaks represent beings who inspire a compulsive fascination and repulsion, enticement and nauseating abhorrence, in Elizabeth Grosz, "Intolerable Ambiguity: Freaks as/at the Limit," in *Freakery. Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Rosemarie Garland Thomson (New York and London: New York University Press, 1996), 56.

[254] Thomson, *Freakery*, 3-4.

epistemes in which it has been immersed, but whether coveted or revered, monstrous bodies provide interpretive opportunities for probing the boundaries of what is "normally" taken to be human:

> The presence of the anomalous human body, at once familiar and alien, has unfolded [….] within the collective cultural consciousness into fanciful hybrids such as centaurs, griffins, satyrs, minotaurs, sphinxes, mermaids, and cyclopses – all figures that are perhaps the mythical explanations for the startling bodies whose curious lineaments gesture towards other modes of being and confuse comforting distinctions between what is human and what is not.[255]

Just like the biomedical gaze that seeks to master monstrosity by reducing it to a category of knowledge, the freak show, despite its volatilisation of the boundaries between spectator selves and monstrous performers, stages a specular/spectacular display meant to "normalise the viewing public" and "sanitise the contaminatory potential of the anomalous other."[256] Notwithstanding objective explanations for their corporeal deformities (genetic, hereditary, embryological, histological, etc.), freaks horrify and enthral primarily on account of their ambiguity, of their straddling the middle ground normally separating one being from another, one sex from the other, the living from the dead.[257] From itinerant monstermongering to the institutionalised freak exhibitions or circus sideshows, an astounding array of bodily wonders may be displayed and interpreted for the edification of the viewers, who are obviously intrigued by such parades of corporeal excess, yet are once more safely ensconced in their standard humanity.[258]

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[255] Thomson, *Freakery*, 1.

[256] Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster*, 24.

[257] Cf. Grosz: "Freaks cross the borders that divide the subject from all ambiguities, interconnections, and reciprocal classifications, outside of or beyond the human. They imperil the very definitions we rely on to classify humans, identities, and sexes – our most fundamental categories of self-definition and boundaries dividing self from otherness" ("Intolerable Ambiguity," 57). Bogdan highlights the social construction of corporeal freaks: following show conventions, the freak is essentially fashioned from the peculiar bodies of non-western others or from disabled individuals through mediating strategies of show conventions, like exoticisation or aggrandisement, in Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit* (Chicago and London: The University Of Chicago Press, 1988), 10-11.

[258] Freak discourse, Thomson suggests, culturally constructed the non-generically embodied individuals who were put on display as biological aberrations. A cultural space of boundless imaginative licence, the Raree Show or the Hall of Human Curiosities enabled the retrieval of classical monstrous avatars (sirens, centaurs or satyrs) as the blueprints for the corporeal anomalies flaunted before spectatorial eyes: the freakdom of Turtle Boys, Camel Girls, Bear Women or Alligator Men, to use some of the examples provided by Thomson, sanctioned the instantiation of the freak show as a space for the simultaneous infringement and reinstatement of the borders which such human-animal hybrids avowedly had destabilised, cf. *Freakery*, 7, 5.

Coupled with narratives mediating the display of bodies uncannily similar and dissimilar to those of their viewers, such sites favoured the instantiation of a discursive construction of monstrosity, which Thomson calls enfreakment[259] and which paradoxically constitutes the freak as a generalised icon of somatic deviance while, at the same time, it reinscribes particular bodily eccentricities as markers of specific – racial, gender, sexual or ethnic – otherness. As Thomson points out, that freak shows should have dispersed at the turn of the twentieth century did not imply a wasting away of freak discourse itself, whose proliferation into an array of representational modes and dissemination in a range of contemporary discrete, elite scientific discourses – genetics, embryology, anthropology, ethnology, teratology or reconstructive surgery – makes all the more obvious their previous close alliance with the display of freakish bodies in the early nineteenth century.[260]

Bakhtin's aesthetics of the grotesque is extremely useful to my analysis of monstrous corporeality because the very bodily thresholds between interiority and exteriority that are splintered apart through the transgression implicit in carnival practices are also "arenas of deformity in monstrous discourse" or main "loci of monstrous deformation."[261] With its insistent challenge of fixed hierarchies, its infringement of boundaries between high-low and its endorsement of deviance and norm reversal, Bakhtin's model of the grotesque body offers a positive framework for understanding the process whereby monstrosity enlists corporeal anomalousness in the promise of aberrant forms, which, on the one hand, serve to clarify more firmly the systems they also confound, and, on the other, show, demonstrate that the stability of norms of proper embodiment may ultimately be little more than a foundational myth.

[259] As Susan Stewart confirms, "Often referred to as a 'freak of nature,' the freak, it must be emphasised, is a freak of culture. His or her anomalous status is articulated by the process of the spectacle as it distances the viewer, and thereby it 'normalises' the viewer as much as it marks the freak as an aberration," in *On Longing*, 109.

[260] Thomson, *Freakery*, 13.

[261] Williams, *Deformed Discourse*, 109.

III. Monstrosity and the Gothicity of Contemporary British Fiction

In her Afterword to *Fireworks*, Angela Carter professes her belief that these are Gothic times.[262] Whence such persistent figurations of Gothicism permeating the culture of late modernity? The prospect of genetically modified organisms triggers dystopian anxieties regarding the nefarious potential of science deployed towards uncontrollable, monstrous results; the artificial sublimity of virtual environments and computer-generated worlds, prosthetic devices, and biotechnological enhancements signal the proximity of the moment when the arrival at a stage of post-human existence will have surpassed nostalgic reveries about the human. And still, while this may well outline the posthuman body as an avatar of "the *bad* body of Gothic – monstrous, mutilated, libidinal,"[263] a contingent, supplementary drive, towards reconsidering the progressively thinner, more fragile opposition between human and monster, seems firmly under way: the "rise of the sympathetic, suffering, curiously humanised monster redefines humanity, not as the support of cold and normative mechanisms of bourgeois modernity, but as its exception, in association with those that are unrecognised, excluded, silenced."[264] Featuring transitional states on a continuum towards a post-human technological dimension, post-Frankensteinian monsters ambivalently connote both the promise and the nightmare of science. Furthermore, while the monsters of traditional Gothic fiction signalled disruptive excess, the gradual elision of the divide between

[262] "We live in Gothic times," in Angela Carter, *Fireworks. Nine Profane Pieces* (London: Quartet, 1974), 122. Cohen substantiates this claim by saying that "We live in a time of monsters" (*Monster Theory*, viii). A distinctly apocalyptic description of the Gothic as the dominant sensibility of contemporaneity is espoused by Patrick McGrath and Bradford Morrow, who notice that we "stand at the end of a century whose history has been stained perhaps like no other by the blacker urges of human nature. The prospect of apocalypse – through human science rather than divine intervention – has redefined the contemporary psyche," in Patrick McGrath and Bradford Morrow (eds.), *The New Gothic: A Collection of Contemporary Gothic Fiction* (London: Random House, 1991), xiv. Similarly, for Timothy Beal, today's is an "ever-expanding culture of horror" (Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters*, 4), while for critics like Allan Lloyd Smith, the New Gothic conspicuously emphasises the horrific side of the Radcliffean terror *versus* horror divide, in "Postmodernism/Gothicism," in *Modern Gothic. A Reader*, ed. Victor Sage and Allan Lloyd Smith (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 6-19.

[263] Cf. Eagleton, *Figures*, 21.

[264] See Fred Botting and Dale Townshend (eds.), *Gothic: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies. Volume IV. Twentieth-Century Gothic: Our Monsters, Our Pets* (London and New York: Routledge 2004), 4.

the monstrous and the human has led to the entrenchment of monstrosity in the quotidian, the dissemination of a technically-grounded uncanny foregrounding an alliance between humans and machines, as a technoscientific epiphenomenon accompanying postmodernity. Within postmodern reappraisals of Gothic monstrosity, the "repressive" gives way to an "expressive" regime in which the monsters of yore, in effect othered and monstrified within systems of power/knowledge, are granted a voice whereby they construct their own narratives of identity, the Gothic having turned from a marginal popular mode to one of the chief coordinates of the popular contemporary imaginary.[265]

Whether the new Gothic can be seen as the resurgence of the Gothic[266] or not, it is perhaps undeniable that contemporary celebrations of the marginal, the subversive and the monstrous are lodged in the same counter-Enlightenment critique as eighteenth-century extravagant indictments in Gothic fiction of malevolent aristocrats or wanton monks, even though, much like the politics of postmodernism, Gothic writing seems bent on a vicarious radicalism which becomes devoid of revolutionary effect.[267] Where traditional Gothic differs from its contemporary variety is through its excessiveness relative to the conventions it seeks to destabilise: the new Gothic, on the other hand, adopts a self-ironical stance to horror itself, which has become downright ubiquitous.[268]

As Kelly Hurley maintains, Gothic is an "instrumental genre, re-emerging cyclically, at periods of cultural stress, to negotiate the anxieties that accompany social and epistemological transformations and crises."[269] In Western modernity, it is argued, turns of the century inevitably create such ominous uncertainties that can best be accommodated and resolved

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[265] The "literary declension of terror is an inevitable response to the atrocity exhibition of the twentieth century, just as it was for the writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as they confronted the social, economic, and political instabilities of a new order, and the mayhem of a revolutionary period," in Victor Sage and Allan Lloyd Smith (eds.), *Modern Gothic. A Reader* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 5. I see post-Gothic as a mode, in view of Alastair Fowler's definition, which argues that modes can foreshadow subgenres through a diachronic process of imitation, variation and innovation, in *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 111.

[266] A claim made by Richard Davenport-Hines, who sees the gothic revival as a phenomenon encompassing as diverse aspects as the late-1980s Goth counterculture, the horror film industry and the turning obsolete of the "liberal humanist assumptions about individual identity, power hierarchies and cognitive boundaries by digital technologies" in the cybercultural paradigm, in *Gothic: Four Hundred Years of Excess, Horror, Evil and Ruin* (New York: North Point Press, 1999), 360 and passim.

[267] See Robert Miles, *Gothic Writing 1750-1820. A Genealogy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

[268] See Eagleton, *Figures*, 19-22.

[269] Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, 5 and passim.

within narratives of monstrosities encrypting fears of decadence, millenarianism, apocalypse, revolution, annihilation. Thus, the most potent expressions of literary Gothicism erupt in cyclical waves: traditional Gothic at the very height of Enlightenment; the *fin-de-siècle* Gothic revival as a reactive symptom to the outburst of a host of scientific discourses querying the limits of the human and the non-human; and the recent revival of post-Gothic in the final decades of the twentieth century.

Against the background of a perceptual change towards Gothic aesthetics in mid-eighteenth century, Gothic fiction gushed forth (notoriously through the publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto,* 1764) as the dark contester of Enlightenment rationality and foregrounded the villain as the monstrous avatar of a barbaric, feudal past and the counterpart of a necessarily victorious bourgeois identity.[270] In such fictions situated on what Robert Miles calls the Gothic cusp, that is, between a waning medieval world and a bourgeoning modern one, the pre-eminent figures giving form to these anxieties were monsters, ghosts, and demons, whose invocation and suppression signalled a dual impulse to make visible and then discard whatever undercut ordered notions of human civilisation humanity and rational progress.[271] The Gothic's simultaneous appropriation and rejection of the past, serving to demarcate a rational, civilised eighteenth-century from its feudal, decrepit ancestry, is seen by Botting to have effected an ambivalent attempt of superseding, on the one hand, a ruinous, barbaric ancestry with a view to evolving towards a more enlightened future, and remaining fraught with anxieties as to the real possibility of overcoming such primitive backwardness.[272] Late-Victorian

[270] Bakhtin considers the "Gothic" or "black" novel as a variety of the proto-Romantic grotesque, a private, individual form of carnivalesque excess arising as a "reaction against the cold rationalism, against official, formalistic, and logical authoritarianism," as a rejection of Enlightenment classicism (*Rabelais*, 37). A slightly different narrative of the origins of the Gothic novel comes from Maggie Kilgour, who claims that like "Romanticism, the gothic expresses a nostalgia for an organic world view in the face of the prevailing mechanistic or atomistic ones, in Maggie Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 11.

[271] Miles, *Gothic Writing*, 29.

[272] Fred Botting defines the Gothic as a "writing of excess" appearing in the haunting shadows of eighteenth-century morality and rationality, in Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 1-2. In Gothic romances like Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1974), M.G. Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) or Charles Robert *Maturin's Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), Gothic monstrosity is stereotypically rendered through stock figures like the Wanderer, the vampire and the seeker, whose socially unappeasable desires attract transgressive gestures of boundary invalidation. See Fred Botting, "Aftergothic: Consumption, Machines, and Black Holes," in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 282; David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day* (London and New York: Longman, 1980), 120.

Gothicism, on the other hand, tended to throw into relief and negotiate, as Hurley has shown, an epistemological crisis of human identity.[273] Highly imbricated with the scientific, conceptual remodellings of the human, Gothic narratives like Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895) or *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) exhibited the prospects of human identity foundering into a "body metamorphic and undifferentiated," that is of a gross corporeality subject to extreme fragmentation, permeability and "morphic variability": in short, of the human under threat of becoming not-human, abject, or "abhuman."[274] In fact, the term abhuman as employed by Hurley is, like Douglas's polluting "abomination" or Kristeva's uncanny mixture of the nausea and *jouissance* elicited by "abjection," suggestive of an ambivalent positioning of the human subject, torn between the dual drives of maintaining, on the one hand, an illusion of discrete, autonomous self-identity, and of savouring, on the other, the relish of nondifferentiation attendant on confrontations breaching the boundaries of the self. The resurgence of the Gothic strand in late Victorian fiction would symptomatically reflect the emergence of new technologies of subjectivity which Foucault assigns to the nineteenth-century disciplinary mechanisms increasingly targeting the soul rather than the body of "deviant" individuals. Thus, the monster of Victorian Gothic narratives – Jekyll/Hyde, Dorian Gray or Dracula – literalised, Halberstam claims, the dissolution of notions of the integral self and the frailty of the boundaries between bourgeois respectability and perversity, normalcy and degeneracy, moral righteousness and pathological criminality.[275] While in the last decades of the nineteenth century Gothic re-emerged potently as a palliative strategy meant to defamiliarise and violently reaggregate the human subject, the Gothic sensibility also seems to permeate the final decades of the twentieth century, the syntagms *postmodern Gothic, Aftergothic, the new Gothic* or *post-Gothic* becoming increasingly used in critical approaches to contemporary fictional works written in a Gothic mode.

Anxieties consistently devolved around the potential destabilisation of the human through *trans-* or *post-*human alliances acquire representational form as monstrous denizens emerging from otherworlds, netherworlds or hinterworlds. The future itself becomes fraught with anxieties of decay, ruin

[273] "As a genre centrally concerned with the horrific re-making of the human subject, within a general anxiety about the nature of human identity […] generated by scientific discourses, biological and sociomedical," the Gothic "articulated new models of the human as abhuman, as bodily ambiguated or otherwise discontinuous in identity," in Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, 5.

[274] Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, 3.

[275] Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 2.

and disintegration, lurking as the site of corporeal dissolution or postindustrial devastation, and the representational strategy innervating the Gothic is one of countercultural inversion, of structural antithesis to the values espoused by mainstream culture.[276] In traditional Gothic romances, representations of monstrosity hovered in between two tendencies: a "spectralising" propensity, for disembodied ghosts, veiled portraits or ghastly revenants obviously served to distance a middle-class readership from the improper physicality of the body in the terror narratives;[277] and a "carnalising" inclination, primarily initiated by Shelley's Frankenstein but also detectible in the horror-Gothic practised by M.G. Lewis, where the body was a surface amenable to the inscription of monstrosity. In post-Gothic, a similar ambivalent pull towards the spectralisation of corporeality and its insistent, carn(iv)al(esque) display makes itself felt. Given, on the one hand, a fading belief in the counterfeit of representation, monstrosity may become understood, in Frankensteinian manner, as a manufacturable, mechanically reproducible simulacrum in an era of sheer simulation, in which hyperreal projections of monstrous images determine actual repositionings of monsters in our social practices. On the other hand, however, it is within postmodernism's self-reflexive debunking of the ideological groundings that underlie processes of monstrifying the abject that its revisionist allegiance to the Gothic resides.[278] If abjection is the fate of monsters, then what post-Gothic citationally exposes are the strategies of representing monstrous others as uncannily abhorrent and alluring, by rendering explicit the irresolvable betwixt-and-betweenness endemic to "abjected" anomalies. Neo-gothic fictions present a departure from the contestatory nature of traditional gothic fictions, which characteristically displayed a fascination with transgression and an anxiety over cultural boundaries. Maintaining the rebellious, provocative mode of Gothicism against restrictive, controlling ideologies, post-Gothic is grafted upon the paradoxically ambivalent politics of postmodernism, highlighting the constructedness of identities, but also of culture itself, of authorial experience ultimately, avoiding the re-enforcement of order and systemic coherence that traditional gothic narratives seem to aim for.[279]

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[276] See Botting, "Aftergothic," 279-280.

[277] See Terry Castle, "The Spectralisation of the Other in The Mysteries of Udolpho," in *The New Eighteenth Century: Theory, Politics, English Literature*, ed. Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown (London: Methuen, 1987), 231-253.

[278] See Jerrold E. Hogle, "The Gothic at our Turn of the Century: Our Culture of Simulation and the Return of the Body," in *The Gothic*, ed. Fred Botting. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001), 157.

[279] Postmodern "feminine gothic" fictions, for instance, such as those produced by Carter, Weldon and Winterson, become sites for exploring and interrogating gender constructions, dynamically challenging established icons of monstrous femininity. See Susanne Becker, *Gothic Forms of Feminine Fictions* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

While the Gothic is a genre aware from its inception of its fabricated, hybrid origins,[280] in its contemporary instantiations, the new Gothic is programmatically multi-generic, insistently resorting to citations of past practices, and recording mutations and permutations of the narrative and thematic Gothic stock. Post-Gothic fiction orbits indeed around an "imperative of eternal return," being marked by a sense that "telling has become compulsorily belated, inextricably bound up with retelling, in all its idioms."[281] Thus, D'haen conceives post-Gothic within the framework of what he calls the "other" postmodernism or "fantastic" postmodernism, which, he claims, works to "counter-write the dominant order's discourse, to (re)(w)ri(gh)t(e) wrongs, to redress the balance of history as unfinished business."[282] Whereas in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic, invoking and then thrashing the countercultural figure of monstrosity allowed for a restoration of the prevalent notions of propriety, sociability and individuality, post-Gothic provides no such release, given the lack of one single framework that might accommodate and stabilise social and individual identities. Thus, the question whether Gothic-inflected narratives retain their radically contestatory nature is bound to remain stranded in the liminal slot of the "complicitous critique" that Linda Hutcheon finds to be idiomatic of postmodern fiction.[283] Still, the most significant transvaluation registered by the Gothic insofar as representations of monstrosity are concerned is that post-Gothic narratives either no longer resort to cleansing rites destined to destroy monsters as the bearers of haunting fears and self-shattering anxieties or question the legitimacy of such purgation practices. Alternative renditions of classical Gothic monsters (Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* scrutinising the discursive constructedness of the monstrous mad woman in the attic from Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, or Emma Tennant's *Two*

[280] See Horace Walpole's Prefaces to the two editions of *The Castle of Otranto*, 1764-1765.

[281] Steven Connor, "Rewriting Wrong: On the Ethics of Literary Reversion," in *Liminal Postmodernism: The Postmodern, the (Post-)Colonial, and the (Post-)Feminist*, ed. Theo D'Haen, and Hans Bertens (Amsterdam: Atlanta, 1994), 79. Post-Gothic resents purity of forms, preferring in its stead generic fragmentation, a multi-layered incorporation of parody, pastiche and quotation in "portmanteau" narratives, permeated by irony, metafictionality or intertextuality: narratives written in the Gothic mode are marked by excessive hybridity, sliding between high and low, bathos and hyperbole, abjection and sublimity (see Hogle, "The Gothic," 154; D'haen, "Postmodern Gothic," 292).

[282] Theo D'haen, "Postmodern Gothic," in *Exhibited by Candlelight. Sources and Developments in the Gothic Tradition*, ed. Valeria Tinkler-Villani and Peter Davidson (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1995), 286. If in eighteenth-century Gothic, malevolent aristocrats were monstrified as the antithetic counterparts to bourgeois values of a consolidating liberal subject, with the supersession of industrial production by postindustrial consumption, in late modernity, excess (formerly coded as an upper-class practice) is divested of its dangerous allure and, through its corollaries of waste, uselessness, becomes axiomatic of the postmodern condition. See Botting, "Aftergothic," 285.

[283] Hutcheon, *The Politics*, 2.

Women of London, 1989, reworking the Jekyll-Hyde conundrum of the duplicitous self) acknowledge a self-reflexive indebtedness to their Gothic precursors, while deliberately compromising the authority of the master text. As Judith Halberstam notes,

> within postmodern Gothic we no longer attempt to identify the monster and fix the terms of his/her deformity, rather postmodern Gothic warns us to be suspicious of monster hunters, monster makers, and above all, discourses invested in purity and innocence.[284]

This ambivalent dynamics of expulsion and assimilation, vilification and celebration, marks the post-Gothic fiction produced at the turn of the millennium, imbricated as it is within a network of discursive, citational practices that resume the Gothic uncanny mixture of fascination and revulsion towards the monstrous, while turning its strategic annihilation on its head. In view of the marked proclivity of the postmodern towards the hybrid, the multi-generic, postmodernist fiction indulges in the "discontinuous" and the "monstrous" at the expense of the "linear" and the "archetypal[ly]" human.[285] For instance, novels such as those written by Salman Rushdie or Angela Carter evince a postmodern fixation on the deviant, the exotic or the grotesque, which springs from the embeddedness in postmodern thought of a rejection of the normative, felt to be intrinsically autocratic and systemically oppressive: hence, the enthralling appeal of anything that, in the manner of aberration, transgresses or violates the norm.[286] McHale's crediting of postmodernist fiction with foregrounding postcognitive questions is detectible in Gothic's destabilisation of secure notions of identity.[287] In her survey of gothic monstrosity across the late nineteenth and late twentieth centuries, for instance, Halberstam argues that the Gothic strikes a marked preoccupation with boundaries and their enforcement or collapse, deploying versatile narrative technologies of producing monstrous corporeality as a "remarkably mobile, permeable, and infinitely interpretable" surface: whereas in the traditional Gothic, the veil was a trope for both the concealment and (mis)recognition of "depth" identity through physiognomic features, postmodern representations of gothic monstrosity may only run "skin deep,"[288] as Halberstam says, yet it is

[284] Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 21.
[285] Curtis White, *Monstrous Possibility. An Invitation to Literary Politics* (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1998), 12.
[286] See Eagleton, *Figures*, 17-18.
[287] Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1987).
[288] Troping on the interplay between soul and body, depth and surface that the "cavernous" monsters of nineteenth-century Gothic fiction dramatised, Halberstam detects a Baudrillardian "obscenity of *immediate visibility*" in the many-layered surfaces of contemporary monstrous figurations (*Skin Shows*, 1, 59, 23). As Cohen confirms, "any kind of alterity can be inscribed across (constructed through) the monstrous body" (*Monster Theory*, 7).

rather the case, as the present study attempts to show, that contemporary figurations of monstrous corporeality are deliberately assembled out of such (multi-layered) surfaces to highlight the heterotropic constructedness of monstrosity at the nexus between selfhood and otherness.

Thus, the monsters of contemporaneity are characterised by their increasing proximity to humans, haunting civilisation as its abject yet constitutive outside, and assisting in the definition and, eventually, the extension of humanity's limits. Post-Gothic disseminates eclectically in popular horror fiction and high-brow metafiction, raising the following questions: does the domestication monstrosity has registered under the disciplinary stronghold of power/knowledge regimes entail a reduction of their fabulous potential of goading the human into exploring/exploding its limits? Have the older taxonomic hierarchies constructing monsters as monstrous collapsed, leading to a parataxic serialisation and incorporation of monstrosity alongside humanity? Is the contamination of the human with monstrous genealogies laden with ambivalent consequences? Does the monstrous signal an imperilment of the human or an enhancement of its potential to enter the posthuman condition? These are the queries that the following sections address by examining several constructions of monstrous corporeal otherness within post-Gothic narratives, which focus on the four tiers of monstrosity that I have chosen to investigate: the "monstrous-feminine," the foreigner, the posthuman other, and the monstrous body politic.

III.1. Unsettling Notions of the "Monstrous-Feminine"

The premise underlying this section[289] is the need for re-charting the topography of female corpor(e)ality – traditionally perceived in terms of a dysmorphic, aberrant, deformed counterpart of male bodily shape – in ways that may enable definitions of female identity beyond the constraints of binary hierarchical divisions. From the Medusa of ancient mythology to Freud's uncanny, arising out of the encounter with the horrific sight of the mother's genitalia, from Aristotle's association between the female and the monstrous to Victor Frankenstein's horrific dismemberment of the monsterette: what all these figures of feminine monstrosity allude to is the female body as a site of abjection, an emblem of lust, of irrepressible sexuality or of uncontrollable fecundity.[290] In particular, this section will

[289] Previously published as Carmen Bujdei (maiden and occasional pen name), "The Body Monstrous: (Fragments) Towards Unsettling Notions of the 'Monstrous Feminine,'" *Clouds Magazine*, New York, 18 (Summer 2004), http://www.cloudsmagazine.com/18/Carmen_Bujdei_The_Body_Monstrous.htm, accessed July 12, 2004).

[290] See Creed, for whom the concept of the "monstrous-feminine" is a patriarchal or phallocentric ideological construct erected to manage the issues of sexual difference and

look at the concept of abject liminality as the *locus communis* of the "monstrous-feminine": what constitutes the strongest association between monstrosity and female corporeality is the notion of a fluid transgression of the boundaries between inside and outside, self and other. Secondly, non-dichotomic figurations of bodily identity – which aim to relinquish the antagonistic dialectics of mind/body, masculine/feminine, human/monstrous, pure/hybrid, centre/margins and to reveal embodiment as a fluid site of potentiality – will be examined.

Cultural clichés linking femininity to monstrosity are deeply engrained in western structures of thought. Woman qua *mater*, matter, mortality has tended to be locked in a binary, hierarchical logic of exclusion and negation, being relegated, through a teratogenic impulse, to the position of the marginalised other of the rational, the spiritual or the transcendent. As regards this monstrifying tendency, the question of a woman's corporeal deformity revolves around the idea of "female, untamed nature which must be leashed, or else will wreak havoc."[291]

Indeed, however evident the biological facts of sexual difference may appear, they are of fairly recent creation, as Thomas Laqueur shows in *Making Sex. Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (1990). While the traditional outlook on the human body in Western culture was monomorphic prior to the eighteenth century, the two sexes sharing a unique anatomy and the same genitals (extruded for males, introjected for females), the modern episteme introduced anatomical specificity, outlining the sexual difference between men and women: it was a new "biology of incommensurability," which, under the anatomists' gaze, incorporated the distinctions between the two sexes in the human flesh. While monomorphism assumed the existence of a hierarchy between the male and the female based on the metaphysical argument of the former being situated higher than the latter on the ladder of being, dimorphism saw sexual difference to be anatomically and physiologically marked. Still, the body, as Laqueur maintains, has both in the one-sex model and in the two-sex model been subjected to gendered inscriptions which are often excessive of the natural, physical frame of the

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castration, that is, "lack," in Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine. Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993). By way of illustration, in Aristotle's *On the Generation of Animals*, both monsters and women represent figures of dissimilarity and deviations from the norm, with the female being regarded as a failed, misconceived male: "For just as the offspring of deformed animals is sometimes deformed and sometimes not, so that of the female is sometimes female and sometimes not – but male. For the female is as it were a male deformed, and the menses are seed but not pure seed; for it lacks one thing only, the source of the soul" (Aristotle, *On the Generation*, 64-65).

[291] Marina Warner, *Managing Monsters. Six Myths of Our Time. The 1994 Reith Lectures* (London: Vintage, 1994), 4.

flesh and amenable to social and cultural readings.[292] Whereas in the unisex framework, sex was a mere epiphenomenon of gender, representations of the female body as an inverted version of the male simply serving to reinforce a "metaphysics of hierarchy," the modern paradigm of "radical dimorphism" or incommensurable biology instated, Laqueur asserts, sex as the foundational, "ontological category."[293] While Laqueur's examination of the difference inherent in female sexuality, as accounted for in "anatomical thinking,"[294] is very relevant, he does not provide explanations for the enduring frameworks of representation in which the strangeness of female corporeality may be construed as monstrous and repudiated as a pollution phenomenon.

In effect, similar to monstrosity, unruly female corporeality – almost always related to its propagative and maternal functions, as Creed intimates[295] – may come to signify the invasion or contamination of identity; hence, female monstrosity pertains to the "idiom of pollution."[296] Echoing Mary Douglas's theory of abjection as that which destabilises system, identity, and order, only to reinforce them in return, Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic account of subjectivity formation from *The Powers of Horror* develops the concept of abject liminality, showing that the monstrous lurks in the ambiguous space between the semiotic and the symbolic, in the simultaneity of repulsion and attraction posed by the maternal body and its catachretic substitutes: food, filth, waste, seepage. The fluidisation of the body boundaries through such exchanges of matter risks collapsing the divide between the self and an otherness that resists both its expurgation and its assimilation. The abject, Kristeva says, is not an object dyadically or symmetrically opposed to the subject, but rather that "in-between, the ambiguous, the composite," perpetually threatening to encroach the precarious demarcations where an "I" is gaining shape.[297] The fact that the corporeal self experiences simultaneous fascination with and horror of the abjected maternal body points to a striking similarity with the uncanny responses triggered by monstrosity's at once familiar and foreign morphological composition:

> There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries,

[292] Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex. Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 12, 16.
[293] Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 6, 154.
[294] A wide array of discourses, ranging from physiological and anatomical tracts to Freud's psychosexual theory of female erotogeny.
[295] Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine*, 83.
[296] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 9.
[297] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4, 11.

> fascinates desire, which, nonetheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects… But simultaneously, just the same, that impetus, that spasm, that leap is drawn toward an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned. Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside himself.[298]

Kristeva acknowledges the foundational role that this "non-assimilable alien, a monster, a tumour, a cancer" has in the process of subject constitution, since it is "an Other who precedes and possesses me, and through such possession causes me to be."[299] Furthermore, the self's extrication from the bodily continuum with the maternal and its entry into the symbolic domain are predicated on two reversible phenomena, the somatic symptom and sublimation, whereby abjection either engulfs the "I," rendering signification impossible, or is provisionally harnessed through naming, that is, through language.

In order to unsettle this reifying specular frame of "patriarchal and phallocentric ideology,"[300] feminist thinkers have outlined several ways in which the female body can exceed the stultifying constraints of binarism. Celebrating the difference of the female body, which is heterogeneous, non-unitary, non-classifiable into codes, Cixous clamours the necessity for women to resist discursive practices which assign them a Medusan identity: "Who surprised and horrified by the fantastic tumult of her drives (for she was made to believe that a well-adjusted normal woman has a … divine composure), hasn't accused herself of being a monster?"[301] Women, therefore, must invent their own rhythmic and unifying "impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes," a feminine language that will explore "a woman's body, with its thousand and one thresholds of ardour."[302] The body, previously on a par with other signifiers of femininity such as silence, absence, weakness and strangeness, should displace reason and the phallogocentric metaphysics of presence, finding expression through a diffusive, schizoid logic of enfleshed textuality.

More recent feminist reconsiderations of the importance of the body in models of female subjectivity include Battersby's study, for instance, which relinquishes universalising accounts of embodiment based on the imagery of containment[303] and promotes the understanding of corporeality as flux, as

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[298] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 1.
[299] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 11, 10.
[300] Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine*, 44.
[301] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," in *Feminisms. An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Robin R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 335.
[302] Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," 342.
[303] The self would be that which is within the body, with skin – the non-transparent boundary between inside and outside – acting as a protecting shield against the gaze of others.

a mechanics of fluids, in particular. The nature of the thresholds which have traditionally demarcated the inside/outside, self/other, body/mind divides is reconsidered, Battersby echoing Irigaray's claim that the "western tradition has left unsymbolised a self that exists as self not by repulsion/exclusion of the not-self but *via* interpenetration of self with otherness,"[304] always privileging sameness over difference. Sheer physiological processes such as birth-giving, would contribute, in Battersby's view, to an invalidation of the fixity of body boundaries and of the "bodily containment" theory at least insofar as the female body is concerned. Furthermore, techniques of bodily modification, which appear to be more readily deployed by women than by men (weight-adjustment, cosmetic surgery) evince a contemporary preference for intensively redefining the body boundaries – perceived to be fluid, volatile, and impermanent rather than fixed, solid, and stable.

Amongst the most challenging feminist models of salvaging corporeality from reductionist, "somatophobic" accounts of disembodied subjectivity is that provided by Elizabeth Grosz, whose major contention is that both dichotomous and monistic paradigms of the mind-body relationship must be discarded in favour of a dynamic mapping of the interfaces, thresholds and borderlines connecting, and not severing, inside and outside, private and public. Bodily surface and psychic depth become inflected and conflated to the extent to which a representation of "embodied subjectivity" or "psychical corporeality" – the body image – acquires the fluctuating quality of a "Möbius strip's two-dimensional torsion in three-dimensional space."[305] Furthermore, Grosz rejects the sex *v.* gender distinction which would also serve to enforce the hiatus reproducing the nature-culture divide: the body itself, in its lived, sexually-differentiated experiences and historically-contingent manifestations, is the volatile, infinitely pliable surface which undergoes endless cultural – and always sexually-specific – inscriptions: "the body, or rather, bodies, cannot be adequately understood as ahistorical, precultural, or natural objects in any simple way; they are not only inscribed, marked, engraved by social pressures external to them but are the products, the direct effects, of the very social constitution of nature itself. /…/ representations and cultural inscriptions quite literally constitute bodies."[306]

Most importantly, insofar as the deconstruction of the cultural stereotype of the polluting, defiling monstrous woman is concerned, Grosz dislocates the body and its liquid discharges from rigid encodings aligning them with the female unruly, uncontainable corporeality and redeploys the "metaphorics of

[304] Christine Battersby, "Her Body/Her Boundaries," in *Feminist Theory and the Body. A Reader*, ed. Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick (New York: Routledge, 1999), 348.
[305] Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies. Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 189.
[306] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, x.

fluids" and the concept of abjection for an understanding of what sexual becoming or maturation presupposes for both men and women. The legitimate questions that Grosz raises are, firstly, why the specificity of male bodies has tended to be concealed under the spectral guise of the human, of the universal, and, secondly, why there should be a total divestment of the male body from associations of anatomical pollutants, including in the iconography of seminal fluids.[307] In other words, why should an understanding of the female body rest on notions of the grotesque befuddling of boundaries between inside and outside, whereas the male body, as it were, is always construed like the classical, self-contained body in the Bakhtinian schema. Such questions also resonate in other feminist interrogations[308] of cultural constructions of the body, which are intent on re-valorising the "cavernous" and "visceral," yet "secreting" and "protruding" female anatomy in terms of a subversive and transformative – because it is excessive of limits, borderlines and rules – destabilisation of the social and cultural *status quo*.

Having highlighted the Western cultural and historical inscription of women's corporeality as a "mode of seepage" rather than lack or absence, "as viscosity, entrapping, secreting; as lacking not so much simply the phallus but self-containment – not a cracked or porous vessel, like a leaking ship, but a formlessness that engulfs all form, a disorder that threatens all order,"[309] Grosz proceeds to explore this semiotics of uncontrollability, with its metonymic series of qualifiers (indeterminacy, disruptiveness, excessiveness, expansiveness) by revisiting the notion of abjection, as deployed by Douglas in the anthropological/sociological register, and by Kristeva in her psychological/subjective account of identity formation through separation from contaminating bodily wastes. Grosz unsettles the firm dissociation between viscosity and limpidity, as contaminating/cleansing, or female/male body discharges, and resorts to Irigaray's distinction between the mechanics of solids and fluids to account for the reason why male seminal emissions should be associated with an establishment of boundaries (the congealment, "phallicisation" of male flows) and not signal the same abject transgression of borders (and anxieties of identity dissolution) that female menses are seen to convey. It is the privileging of form over matter, of the solid over the fluid, in the western cultural frame that dictates the devalorisation of the female body, and not its mute "facticity": the body is, indeed, culturally overlaid. Moreover, consistent with her project of exploring the body as a lived experience, Grosz looks at the onset of sexuality in both males and females and uncovers the cultural dictates of an

[307] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 198.
[308] For instance, in Russo, *The Female Grotesque*.
[309] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 203.

"irreducible specificity of women's bodies, the bodies of *all* women, independent of class, race, and history."[310] The model of sexual difference Grosz propounds does not fixedly posit male and female at the rigid extremes of a linear spectrum, but rather allows for criss-crossing effects in the constitution of specific (i.e. non-universal, or monolithic) bodies, of an array of racial, class, religious, age, and cultural differences. Corporeality, as she maintains, is permeable by alterities, both of an intimate, psychic and of an extimate, somatic kind, embodiment interlocking them, provisionally, in a Deleuzian processual, rhizomatic off-shooting of myriad intensities and surface tensions, opening up "trajectories of becoming."[311] Thus, with the removal of the "essential" categories of man *v.* woman from their idealized (extreme, unattainable) positions of normative embodiment, all the liminal entwinements of male and female characteristics - which, Grosz suggests, are actually the corporeal standard for all humans - are to be divested of connotations of monstrosity.[312]

The notion of "becoming" is essential for Judith Butler's theory of identification, understood as the process of subjectivation through subjection to the "heterosexual imperative." Like Grosz, Butler also looks at sexed/gendered bodies that fall in between the absolute extremities of male/female and masculine/feminine and claims that if the assumption of a "sex" necessarily occurs within the heterosexual matrix, it is attained through an exclusionary process of delimiting the domain of the subject from that of the abject or through dis-identification with what qualifies as the less than human or the inhuman, in other words, catachrestic tropes of the monstrous:

> the fear of homosexual desire in a woman may induce a panic that she is losing her femininity, that she is not a woman, that she is no longer a proper woman, that if she is not quite a man, she is like one, and hence monstrous in some way. Or in a man, the terror of homosexual desire may lead to a terror of being construed as feminine, feminised, of no longer being properly a man, of being a "failed" man, or being in some sense a figure of monstrosity or abjection.[313]

Several interesting claims are at stake here: firstly, the performative, repetitive nature of regulatory norms does not preclude the production of a "constitutive outside" of what qualifies as "bodies that matter": the abjected outside continues to haunt the borders that regulatory ideals set up, threatening with their destabilisation. Secondly, if heterosexuality is

[310] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 207.
[311] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 210.
[312] Elizabeth Grosz, "Freaks," *Social Semiotics* 1, 2 (1991): 22-38.
[313] Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 136.

achieved *via* a foreclosure of (homo)sexual attachments, then what is abjected, repudiated, what exceeds the norm, also resides, uncannily, at the foundations of the gendered subject. Thirdly, if "morphogenesis" is as much an external etching of the body by regulating mechanisms of power, as an internal assumption of corporeal shape, then figures of abjection (the examples Butler gives are the feminised fag and the phallicised dyke) should not experience "teratogenesis," given their phantasmatic deprivation/ acquisition of the Phallus.

An examination of the otherness of female corporeality entails, therefore, a radical questioning of the foundations of Western thought, being related both to critiques of the subject and to the challenges posed by the post-1950s liberation movements of diverse groups of others. With the postmodernist decentring of the subject, the differences between self and other are seen to collapse, as they are no longer polarised or engaged in an agonistic relationship. The boundaries between self and other are fragile, permeable and easily traversed, as the self becomes ontologically destabilised by an other / a mother who, far from being different, turns out to be disconcertingly familiar. Postmodernism's "ontological disruption […] mediates a disintegration of belief in the full humanist subject,"[314] which becomes the focus of cogent criticism from a number of perspectives.[315] One such perspective is voiced by the feminists, who, in the words of Patricia Waugh, contend that:

> Subjectivity, historically constructed and expressed through the phenomenological equation self/other, necessarily rests masculine "selfhood" upon feminine "otherness." The subjective centre of socially dominant discourses […] in terms of power, agency, autonomy has been a "universal" subject which has established its identity through the invisible marginalisation or exclusion of what it has also defined as "femininity" […]. The "feminine" thus becomes that which cannot be expressed because it exists outside the realm of symbolic signification. Constituted through a male gaze and thus endowed with the mysteriousness of one whose *objective* status is seen as absolute and definitive, ideological production of "femininity" as the absolute "other" of patriarchy.[316]

[314] Patricia Waugh, *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 2.

[315] Braidotti sums up the traditional and historically constant categories of otherness: "sexual difference and sexual deviation (especially homosexuality and hermaphroditism); race and ethnicity; the non-human, either on an upward trajectory (the divine, or sacred) or a downward one (the natural environment, the animal, the degenerate, the mutant). A case apart is that of the inorganic other; that is, the machine or technological body-double, the relation of which to the monstrous body is strong" (Braidotti, "Signs of Wonder, 292).

[316] Waugh, *Feminine Fictions*, 9.

The Foucauldian notion of the discursive constitution of bodies within disciplinary networks of power, which may account for the dissemination of "polymorphous" identities (the marginal, the aberrant, the deviant, the deformed, or the abnormal) beyond the borders of the normative matrix,[317] is useful for investigating how monstrous corporeality, paradigmatically coded "female," undergoes resignification in the novels analysed in the following sections. The project of constructing and maintaining gender identity seems to elicit a wide array of responses throughout culture; when gender role boundaries are overstepped, these responses may easily succumb to an "impetus towards teratogenesis," for, as Cohen suggests, women who venture into the realm of a masculinised stylisation of the self, risk "becoming a Scylla, Weird Sister, Lilith ('die erste Eva,' 'la mere obscure'), Bertha Mason or Gorgon."[318] Starting from the premise outlined above, that each cultural epoch needs to define those characteristics which it regards as essential to its humanity, and that only by identifying pollution phenomena, perceived as impure or dangerous, monstrous or abject, can a culture mark out the taxonomies that anomaly violates, the next sections explore feminist interrogations of the exclusionary strategies deployed for keeping the "monstrous-feminine" within the abjectionable outside of the symbolic realm and intend to see whether the cultural clichés surrounding female monstrosity are perpetuated or discarded in the works of several female British novelists.

III.1.1. (De)"Monstrifying" Female Bodies in Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*

Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984) relates the picaresque adventures of a nineteenth-century celebrated trapeze artist who is about to embark on a Grand Imperial Tour scouring the vastness of two continents.[319] Sophie Fevvers, who is called so because of her literal endowment with wings, is referred to as "the pure child of the century that just now is waiting in the wings, the New Age in which no women will be bound to the ground."[320] She is the very incarnation of what Victor Turner calls the "betwixt-and-between": her continuous oscillation between contraries (male-female, avian-terrestrial, celestial-mundane) suggests that she

[317] See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume I: An Introduction*, Trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 12.

[318] Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 9.

[319] My analysis of the "monstrous-feminine" trope in Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* and Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* was published in periodical format as Carmen Bujdei, "Feminine Monstrosity Reconsidered: Sirens, Mermaids and Giant Women in Contemporary English Novels," *Caietele Echinox*, 3 (2002): 185-205.

[320] Angela Carter, *Nights at the Circus* (London: Picador, 1984), 25.

embodies flux, processual instability, that she is the very boundary between such opposites rather than a reification of divergent qualities within a single body. Despite the attempts of the American journalist, Jack Walser, to denounce the birdwoman as a hoax, Fevvers – whom I perceive to have definite associations with the mythical siren figure – has complete control over the production of her own identity, including the construction of her own originary myth.

As he proceeds to interview the winged aerialist, Walser reluctantly gets enthralled by her narrative and appearance, becoming slowly reeled in and rendered captive by the very yarn that he attempts to unweave. Constantly on the lookout for visual and physical clues as to Fevvers's fraudulent monstrosity, he becomes increasingly unsettled by the marvellous giantess's sheer bulkiness, evincing no other flaw "in the classic cast of her features, unless their very size was a fault in itself, the flaw that made her vulgar."[321] Her heterogeneous, metamorphic, irregular body uncannily celebrates the might of physical deformity. Becoming immersed into the atmosphere of specular/spectacular distortion that pervades Fevvers's London dressing room, Walser's discomfiture is augmented not only by her enhancing her narrative to mythic or even fantastic proportions, but also by her literal consumption of the enclosed space of her boudoir: "Fevvers yawned with prodigious energy, opening up a crimson maw the size of that of a basking shark, taking in enough air to lift a Montgolfier, and then she stretched herself suddenly and hugely, extending every muscle as a cat does, until it seemed she intended to fill up all the mirror, all the room with her bulk."[322] Intent on living up to her slogan of identitarian indeterminacy ("Is she fact or is she fiction?"), she allows her self-devised icon to be explored by Walser primarily as it is reflected in the heterotopian space of the mirror and in various artefacts, which allude to the inseparability of fact and specular representation.

Fevvers's constant wavering on the threshold of verifiable reality and illusory contrivance is illustrated by the wall-size poster in her dressing-room which arrests "l'Ange Anglaise" in a simultaneously hovering and upward-shooting flight ("a disconcerting pact with gravity").[323] The "steatopygous perspective" from which her ascent is illustrated ("bums aloft, you might say") and the "tremendous red and purple pinions, pinions large enough, powerful enough to bear up such a big girl as she" are the graphic details of this "preposterous depiction" that at the same time question and confirm the massive creature's ability to take wing.[324]

[321] Carter, *Nights at the Circus*, 20.
[322] Carter, *Nights at the Circus*, 52.
[323] Carter, *Nights at the Circus*, 17.
[324] Carter, *Nights at the Circus*, 7.

Fevvers's advertisements of her polymorphous corporality and her flight in the arena, where the arrestment of her "Rubenesque body" in slow motion is designed to allow the spectators to relish her performance and suspend their disbelief, are exercises of pure simulation: the impact of her self-concocted image overrides the meaning behind it and renders her intriguing physique as subordinated to its mediation through representation. Fevvers turns herself into a spectacle,[325] and her very existence depends upon the gaze of the male spectatorship remaining enthralled with her body, for as long as she can manipulate and remain in control of her self-constructed image.

The "scopic regime"[326] governing Walser's (mis)guided perception of Fevvers's morphology is kaleidoscopically amplified in the "Fevvermania" phenomenon, the mass hysteria triggered by the ubiquitous display of the winged woman's picture, in consumerist fashion, on "garters, stockings, fans, cigars, shaving soap... She even lent it to a brand of baking powder; if you added a spoonful of the stuff, up in the air went your sponge cake, just as she did. Heroine of the hour, object of learned discussion and profane surmise, this Helen launched a thousand quips, mostly on the lewd side."[327] Far from refusing to exhibit herself as alluring surface, as the object of the beholder's gaze, Fevvers's self-fashioning demands that her misshapen body be displayed in plain view:

> Look at me! With a grand, proud, ironic grace, she exhibited herself before the eyes of the audience as if she were a marvellous present too good to be played with. Look, not touch.
>
> She was twice as large as life and as succinctly finite as any object that is intended to be seen, not handled. Look! Hands off!
>
> Look at me![328]

This must read as more than a sheer overstatement of the notion that femininity lacks authenticity and relishes dissemblance, masquerade and impersonation as means of compensating for the absence of depth.[329] Fevvers both complies with and challenges the "traditional exhibitionist role" of women who are "simultaneously looked at and displayed"; her *to-be-looked-at-ness* is not passive acquiescence to but active involvement in the production of her body as sexual fetish.[330] Provided that the constant focus of the gaze is on Fevvers's nonhuman appendages, the authenticity of

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[325] Alison Lee, *Angela Carter* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997), 94.
[326] Lindsay Tucker (ed.), *Critical Essays on Angela Carter* (New York: G K Hall and Co, 1998), 17.
[327] Carter, *Nights at the Circus*, 8.
[328] Carter, *Nights at the Circus*, 15.
[329] Tucker, *Critical Essays*, 18.
[330] See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." In *Literary Theory. An Anthology*, edited by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 389.

which might dictate her inclusion into or exclusion from the ranks of genuine freaks, and that monsters are closely related to performance and spectatorship, it will be interesting to detect the extent to which Fevvers's sirenlike accessories invite or obstruct a construal of meaning. The reference to Fevvers's eyes being Chinese boxes opening "into a world into a world into a world, an infinite plurality of worlds,"[331] is an intimation of the irreducible potential of meaning inscribed across her composite body, much of which she generates and manages herself. Marked as the freakish object of display in the grotesque spectacle of Colonel Kearney's sideshow, Fevvers rejoices in the spectacular framings and reframings of her bodily grotesqueness and seems utterly compliant with her immersion into specular diffractions that not only do not reify her identity but confer it endless opportunities for remorphing herself.[332]

While critics have noticed the multiplicity of interpretations[333] to which Fevvers's body generously lends itself, the possibility of reading the Virgin Whore as a nineteenth-century replica (informed by a twentieth-century perspective) of mythical sirens has not yet been investigated. Classical sirens, as human-beast composites, displayed avian characteristics,[334] predating mermaids in ancient myths and bestiaries. Denizens of earth and water, their hybrid morphology, transgressive of the boundary between animal and human, was also reflected in the liminal space they straddled – rocky outposts in cut-off islands – whence by singing or playing enticingly beautiful music, they lured sailors off their course to death. Their watery habitat – see Ovid's reference to them as *monstra maris* – led to the conflation of winged sirens in medieval representations with fish-tailed mermaids; the deceptively virginal beauty of their upper body was belied by the concealed hideousness (fish-like, scaly, abhorrent) of their nether parts. The seductive weaponry deployed by sirens, variously depicted as devouring monsters, anthropophagi that preyed on living mortals, resided either in their mellifluous voices, or in their promised suprahuman

[331] Carter, *Nights at the Circus*, 30.

[332] Fevvers programmatically thrives on what Sontag describes as the unquenchable pleasure derived from looking at freaks, creatures debarred from the category of the human, a pleasure entrenched in a "sense of superiority over the freak conjoined in varying proportions with the titillation of fear and aversion makes it possible for moral scruples to be lifted, for cruelty to be enjoyed," in Susan Sontag, "The Imagination of Disaster," in *Against Interpretation* (London: Vintage, 2001), 215.

[333] Lee (*Angela Carter*, 94) and Booker, in *Techniques of Subversion in Modern Literature. Transgression, Abjection and the Carnivalesque* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1991), 210 point to the infinite plurality in any act of seeing or reading a compendium of images of transgression across Fevvers's body.

[334] See Malcolm South(ed.), *Mythical and Fabulous Creatures: A Source Book and Research Guide* (New York: Greenwood, 1987), 148-153 and King, "Half-Human Creatures," 143-148).

knowledge: Odysseus, of course, vanquished the sea temptresses by outwitting them.[335]

Fevvers is repeatedly referred to as singing out in a "raucous and metallic" voice, sounding at times rather like the "clanging of contralto or even baritone dustbins."[336] Walser becomes "a prisoner of her voice, her cavernous, sombre voice, a voice made for shouting about the tempest, her voice of a celestial fishwife. Musical as it strangely was, yet not a voice for singing with; it comprised discords, her scale contained twelve tones. Her voice, with its warped, homely, Cockney vowels and random aspirates. Her dark, rusty, dipping, swooping voice, imperious as a siren's."[337] However, in building up the atmosphere of growing enchantment and mesmerising stupor that enthrals Walser to the point of his losing touch with reality, Carter seems to have emphasised the latter aspect of the sirens' arsenal, that is, the exclusive knowledge promised to the inquiring reporter, which she has never revealed to any living man before. The lesson that Fevvers offers the self-assured, sceptical American journalist, who is here to expose her as one of the Great Humbugs of the whole World, is that her identity is sheer fluidity and that it cannot be ossified into a mere tag.

While the protagonist of *Nights at the Circus* is indeed a "fabulous bird-woman," at various points during her interview with Walser she is clearly foregrounded as a sea enchantress. Walser notices the marine aroma which is the core ingredient of the Fevvers's essence, amalgamating into an almost "solid composite of perfume, sweat, greasepaint and raw, leaking gas."[338] The ice on which their champagne is cooled comes from a fishmonger's, given that shiny scales are visible amongst the chunks. Walser's conviction of the Cockney Venus's "fishiness" is gradually substantiated by his sighting in Fevvers's boudoir "a writhing snakes' nest of silk stockings, green, yellow, pink, scarlet, black" and even a corset that looks like "the

[335] Durand highlights the fatal connotations of sirens as feminised avatars of the beastly monsters lurking in polluting, stagnant waters, in Gilbert Durand, *Structurile antropologice ale imaginarului. Introducere in arhetipologia imaginara*. Trans. Aderca M. (Bucharest: Univers, 1977), 128. Sirens are briefly referred to in Pausanias' *Description of Greece* as having lost the singing contest with the muses. On the other hand, it is their melodious alluring voice that prevails in Plato's association of the sirens with the harmonious music of the spheres, as evinced in the myth of Er, which closes his *Republic*. The sirens' music rather than their words posed a fatal threat to the Argonauts as they passed by the delightful island of Anthemoessa, yet their song was drowned out by Orpheus' lyre, setting yet another example of the manner in which the male hero can break their lethal spell of carnal seduction, countering the perils of sexuality which most half-woman, half-animal monsters such as the Echidna or the mermaids seem to embody (cf. King, "Half-Human Creatures," 143-148).

[336] Carter, *Nights at the Circus*, 13.

[337] Carter, *Nights at the Circus*, 43.

[338] Carter, *Nights at the Circus*, 15, 8.

pink husk of a giant prawn emerging from its den"; he becomes so enmeshed in Fevvers's narrative, that his "brain is turning to bubbles" to the point of hallucinating about seeing a "fish, a little one, a herring, a sprat, a minnow, but wriggling, alive-oh, go into the bath when she tipped the jug."[339] Another clue to Fevvers's representation as a siren-mermaid composite is the account of her maiden flight, which poses her at the brink of the borderline of species: its successfulness would imply her commitment to an irretrievable division from humankind, which is not necessarily a morphological transmutation, but an essential, profound inner chasm, gulfing up on account of her singularity.[340]

Nonetheless, the most overt signifiers of Fevvers's transgressive nature are her much publicised feathery appendages. Her assumed anatomical doubleness rests on her allegiance to both the human and the avian species. Her ostensibly displayed swan's wings emerge into the discourse as an occlusive sign (a conundrum Walser feels empowered to demystify), which then circulates excessively in an escalating spiral of signification. The London aerialist's body is an occluding referent around which an entire "Fevvermania" is spun, which refuses commodification into a specific, quantifiable meaning, and which, in a catachrestic volley of self-staged representations, ultimately reveals Fevvers's radical ontological indeterminacy. The paradoxical Fevvers refuses any attempt to have her meaning ossified into a quantifiable equation, for here is a purported freak who, instead of having her body examined by the Royal College of Surgeons, does not even so much as unbutton her bodice, entertaining their curiosity with a three-hour lecture on navigation in birds. Like the figure in the carpet, Fevvers' monstrosity – understood as a transgression of all categorical constraints – is complex and circuitous, refusing even containment in a fetishistic iconography as elaborate and pompous as that of Mr. Rosencreutz:

> Queen of ambiguities, goddess of in-between states, being on the borderline of species.... Lady of the hub of the celestial wheel, creature half of earth and half of air, virgin and whore, reconciler of fundament and firmament, reconciler of opposing states through the mediation of your ambivalent body, reconciler of the grand opposites of death and life.[341]

Based on her purported circumvention of the normal channels of creation (like Helen of Troy, this "Helen of the High Wire" was "hatched *out of a bloody great egg*"), Fevvers claims mythical ancestry by soldering the mystery of her parentage onto the image of Leda's ravishment by the swan god: "I always saw, as through a glass, darkly, what might have been

[339] Carter, *Nights at the Circus*, 9.
[340] Carter, *Nights at the Circus*, 34.
[341] Carter, *Nights at the Circus*, 81.

my own primal scene, my own conception, the heavenly bird in a white majesty of feathers descending with imperious desire upon the half-stunned and yet herself impassioned girl."[342] Through the caked surface of this painting, prior to the narcissistic contemplation of her mirrored surface, Fevvers claims to have experienced an intuitive realisation of her selfhood as hyphenated alterity, or as a composite self that contains its own dynamic contradiction. Her somatic hybridity can therefore no longer be translated merely as the perilous female sexuality that ancient or medieval sirens embodied, for she destabilises a whole array of fundamental boundaries:[343] in addition to her challenging the human-animal distinction, not only does she bestride the boundaries separating the animate from the inanimate (in Ma Nelson's brothel, her initial assignment is to pose as a sculpture of Cupid), but she also conflates the boundaries of gender, deflating stereotypical views of woman as a delicate, ethereal creature: "Her face, in its Brobdingnagian symmetry, might have been hacked from wood and brightly painted up by those artists who build carnival ladies for fairgrounds or figureheads for sailing ships. It flickered through his mind: Is she really a man?"[344]

Moreover, her fluid, anamorphic identity conflates the monster-angel opposition that writers like Gilbert and Gubar (1984) have identified to govern patriarchal representations of womanhood.[345] When posing as the Winged Victory in Ma Nelson's home, her protective role as sword-bearing guardian angel of the brothel is undercut by her provisional incarceration in the traditional image of the castrating woman, yet her inadvertent revenge at this reification is not long awaited, as she brings about the collapse of the business.

Fevvers's materialism and greed ("to her, the music of the spheres was the jingling of cash registers"[346]) approximate at times the harpies' voracity and insatiability. Given the illusion of corporeal beauty[347] as well as the dangerous femininity of monstrous sirens, medieval Christian representations of sin often resorted to them as symbols of lechery and concupiscence, conjoining their morphology with that of the harpies: a shift from beautiful maid above the navel, bird below the waist to rapacious and hideously

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342 Carter, *Nights at the Circus*, 7, 28.

343 See Booker, *Techniques of Subversion*, 223.

344 Carter, *Nights at the Circus*, 35.

345 See Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic. The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

346 Carter, *Nights at the Circus*, 12.

347 The deceitfully alluring surface of the siren's body conceals foul inner substance, suggesting a contrast between the world of sensory perception and the underlying reality, as happens for instance in Dante's ninth Canto of the *Purgatory*, where, under the gaze of Virgil, a misshapen, faltering siren becomes beautiful and articulate, yet when her clothes are tore open her flesh emits a terrible stench. See King, "Half-Human Creatures," 143-148.

clawed monsters; this detail is rendered in the narrative by the reference to Fevvers's oversized, carnivorous teeth, to her being a "mistresspiece of exquisite feminine squalor"[348] and to her scatological boudoir routine. Her gluttony and enormous, unappeasable appetite acquire gargantuan dimensions and her table manners are repugnant:

> [she] gorged, she stuffed herself, she spilled gravy on herself, she sucked up peas from the knife; she had a gullet to match her size and table manners of the Elizabethan variety. /…/ She wiped her lips on her sleeve and belched. She gave him another queer look, as if she half hoped the spectacle of her gluttony would drive him away, but, since he remained, notebook on knee, pencil in hand, sitting on her sofa, she sighed, belched again.[349]

Fevvers's flaunting of any rules for decorous female behaviour has been seen to reflect a Bakhtinian inscription of the potential for subversiveness in the fluid, unfinished and open female body.[350] Carter's carnivalesque rendition of the female body as abject, excessive physicality appears to parodically challenge both the patriarchal and the feminist appropriations of the woman-matter complex. In this sense, Fevvers's liminality translates an opposition to any essentialised idea of the feminine and a deconstruction of representational stereotypes.[351]

Given the dangerous slippage of spectatorial desire into fetishism or voyeurism,[352] as well as the mixture of desire and fear elicited by the female body as a potential "site of dangerous excess,"[353] the possibility of the woman who self-manages the production of her own representation losing control of her spectacular/specular image is always pending. The reification of the female body into the object of the gaze of the beholder is what afflicts not merely Fevvers, in her chilling encounters with prototypal male Gothic antagonists such as Rosencreutz or the Grand Duke, but an entire array of other women characters, whose deformity of the soul or of the body is fully exploited in various horrific stagings of or variations on the motif of the freak show.

As if responding to the feminist statement that womanhood is a body hybrid that amalgamates and integrates difference and heterogeneity ("women") without completely reducing and absorbing its components into a monolithic corpus ("woman"), Carter adduces evidence to the manner in which an ostensibly "misogynistic" period such as the nineteenth century attempted to reify femininity in an inventory of clichéd portrayals. The

[348] Carter, *Nights at the Circus*, 9.
[349] Carter, *Nights at the Circus*, 22.
[350] Russo, *The Female Grotesque*, 238-244; Booker, *Techniques of Subversion*, 226-227.
[351] See also Booker, *Techniques of Subversion*, 230-1.
[352] Tucker, *Critical Essays*, 18.
[353] Russo, *The Female Grotesque*, 67.

accretion of women's bodies that verge on monstrous aberration in Madame Schreck's museum signals how a doubly marginal creature (the female monster), onto whom masculine anxieties concerning women's alleged proclivity towards sexual duplicity have been ingrained, has served to legitimate the establishment of male prerogatives of power. Fevvers's landing in Madame Schreck's subterranean museum of female freaks coincides with her exploration of one of the most horrendous Gothic sites: here, encased in underground niches, can simultaneously be admired and abhorred[354] a startling array of female marvels and quasi-hominid freaks on display as "anatomical performers"[355] who cater for the voyeuristic needs of equally grotesque males. The sense of claustrophobia that translates the arrestment of women within the masculine dictates of bodily representation points to the containment of woman's desire for self-representation.[356] Carter forces here a reassessment of which bodies matter and how they materialise a domain of abjected outsidedness to corporeal normativity.

What is variously referred to as the "lumber room of femininity," or the "rag-and-bone shop of the heart"[357] is a disaffected wine cellar lodged in the bowels of a gloomy abode in Kensington, which exhibits all the ominous ingredients of the stock gothic mansion: a melancholy garden, a soot-blackened façade, tightly barred shutters and even the door knocker swathed in crepe. The male guardian and caretaker of the place is no less a monstrous creature than the women he has in custody. Toussaint eats through a tube up his nose, and Fevvers again provides "scientific verification" for this representative of the monstrous Plinian races[358] (a mouth-insertion surgery). The vault or crypt where the "girls" are displayed in profane altars (stone niches) is dubbed the "Down Below" or "The Abyss." The freakish show routine involves "some gent" selecting the masked outfit of his choice (the most dreaded one being "the executioner's hood") and being ushered in by Madame Schreck, with all the background effects characteristic of gothic horror and Dantesque innuendoes: requiem tunes, chains clanking, candles throwing shadows on the bleak walls.

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354 On the mixture of revulsion and enchantment, horror and desire characterising male constructions of female bodies, see Sally Robinson, *Engendering the Subject. Gender and Self-Representation in Contemporary Women's Fiction* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), 129-130.

355 Russo, *The Female Grotesque*, 228.

356 Robinson, *Engendering*, 69.

357 Carter, *Nights at the Circus*, 69.

358 What Fevvers alludes to is the reversibility of monstrosity and the possibility for deformed others to join the ranks of the same. Toussaint's mouthlessness and his food ingestion through a single orifice that also serves for breathing approximates the figure of *Straw-drinkers* or Astomi, a Plinian race synthetically catalogued by Friedman as follows: "noseless and mouthless, they breathe through a single orifice and eat and drink through a straw," in Friedman, *The Monstrous*, 12.

To the extent that *Nights at the Circus* queries the relationship between "women as spectacle, and women as producers of spectacle"[359] – examples of such female countercultures ranging from Ma Nelson's brothel to Countess P's self-gratifying panopticon – Madame Schreck's manipulation of women into dematerialised images betrays the highest degree of complicity with the patriarchal establishment: she is indeed "the body as performance *in extremis*,"[360] a maleficent marionette pulling her own strings and those of the other *tableaux vivantes* or female prodigies (Fanny Four-Eyes, the Sleeping Beauty, the under three-foot high Wiltshire Wonder, the bipartite Albert/Albertina, who was "half and half and neither of either"[361] and Cobwebs), whose identities become all surface. These congealed images of femininity, "assembled for penetration by the male gaze,"[362] differ from the prostitutes under the care of Ma Nelson: while the latter functioned as a sort of catalyst of desire, Madame Schreck is a "connoisseur of degradation" and a "scarecrow of desire,"[363] whose business is not in the female body trade, since what she has for hire is the "idea" of woman. In this world crammed with bodies transfigured and deformed, its denizens are integrated into an amalgamative female corporeality whose perpetually transgressed borders place the limits of identity under ceaseless interrogation.

For instance, Fanny's corporal deformity is reminiscent of the Plinian races, the Blemmyae, who were once thought to inhabit the marvellous margins of imagined geographies. While Fanny's "mamillary eyes"[364] should account for an augmented power of vision, they nevertheless segregate her from the rest of womanhood, barring her from experiencing maternity. Another female exhibit, the Wonder, is a diminutive dancer who is at the antipodes of not only Fevvers' size, but also her attitude to bodily display: to her, confinement in the Abyss means the protection and camouflage provided by the proximity of self-same creatures: "Amongst the monsters, I am well hidden; who looks for a leaf in a forest?"[365] This desire for similarity in difference, while recalling the desperate plea of Frankenstein's monster for a companion in the likes of himself, corresponds, as Becker remarks,[366] to the emergent construction of a sense of self as other, implying the subject's self-recognition as monstrous, as well as an awareness of the mainstream repudiation of otherness and difference.

[359] Russo, *The Female Grotesque*, 234.
[360] Russo, *The Female Grotesque*, 234.
[361] Carter, *Nights at the Circus*, 59.
[362] Robinson, *Engendering*, 130.
[363] Carter, *Nights at the Circus*, 61, 84.
[364] Carter, *Nights at the Circus*, 69.
[365] Carter, *Nights at the Circus*, 66.
[366] Becker, *Gothic Forms*, 54.

Rather than subscribing to the view that pornography fosters a sexist, male-governed objectification of women, Angela Carter expresses her endorsement of the moral pornographer, an artist whose genuine obscenity is in effect a critique of gender relations aiming to perform a "total demystification of the flesh" and to dislocate the culturally ingrained obliteration of female desire.[367] *The Sadeian Woman*, Carter's cultural study of pornography, Tucker remarks, came out at a time when a heated debate around the issue of pornography emerged in feminist circles, some of its detractors conflating it with the aggressive societal relegation of women in positions of inferiority.[368] Far from sanctioning a reinscription of patriarchy, pornographic fiction and photography, or the "pure forms of sexual fiction, of the fiction of sex," counter the mythic inscription of femininity in such falsely empowering and abstracting figures as that of the goddess, which belie the "actuality of the flesh" and perpetuate women's enslavement.[369] In this sense, Fevvers's construction of her own originary myth, based on the blurred Titianesque portrayal of Leda's rape by the swan god, would testify to an undermining of western representations of subdued female sexuality. In *Nights at the Circus,* the commodification of women in Ma Nelson's brothel allows them to manage the masquerade of "libidinal gratification" as well as to experience a "degree of explicitly sexualised freedom."[370]

Angela Carter's contention in *Nights at the Circus* is that in the midst of marginalised subcultures there germinate the seeds of social transformation and reform. Not only are the prostitutes sheltered by Ma Nelson's establishment contained within the bounds of an all-female universe, to the exclusion of even the male representatives of the canine or feline species, but the brothel, officially inscribed in historiographic discourse as the site for lewd gratification of the flesh is subversively revealed to be an unorthodox academy, refuting the end of the nineteenth-century biased conception of "fallen" women as demonic sirens, whose sole intent is to dispatch a tragic fate to men, and revealing instead the suffragette harlots' political commitment. Relevant in this respect is also the transgressive, carnivalesque potential of the grotesque commingling between brothel and "academy," Ma Nelson's establishment becoming a hotbed for suffragist revolt.

The *fin-de-siècle* association between prostitutes and their mythical counterparts, the sirens, was also prominent in medieval discourse, where their common denominator resided in their lasciviousness and their deadly threat. It is useful, therefore, for a comparative outlook, to consider Carter's

[367] Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography* (New York: Pantheon, 1979), 19-20.
[368] Tucker, *Critical Essays*, 12-14.
[369] Carter, *The Sadeian*, 17.
[370] Tucker, *Critical Essays*, 17.

reassessment of the prostitute identity in the context of the nineteenth-century commodification of female sexuality alongside with medieval representational practices of siren prostitutes. Debra Hassig considers the sirens depicted in medieval bestiaries to be the most frequent icons of moral depravity, serving as caveats against lewdness of behaviour. Moreover, she highlights the identification of siren representations in bestiary texts with the ubiquitous social class of harlotry (sirens as aquatic harlots, or *meretrices*).[371] Whereas it is difficult to claim that female prostitution could be regarded as having represented a subjective, intrinsic identity in the Middle Ages, it is the awakening of a group identity at the turn of the twentieth century – Ma Nelson's employees emerging as a self-conscious and self-assertive occupational category – that Carter's novel appears to emphasise. Prostitution, as an externally demarcated, socially constructed and sexually determined identity, was, Foucault has shown, confined one of those nineteenth-century "spaces of tolerance," besides the asylum, for instance, of the "other Victorians."[372] Karras takes issue with Foucauldian supporters of sexual identities being mainly constructs of nineteenth-century bourgeois society, and, adopting the concept of "minoritising discourses" around sexuality, examines the shaping of the medieval prostitutes' identitarian category.[373] In Carter's novel, this group identity has already emerged, as Fevvers presumptuously confesses to her upbringing in the brothel, where she served as a statuary emblem of the establishment.

Given the impossibility for past marginalised groups such as prostitutes to encode or textualise their experience, one must necessarily look – for a more or less "reliable" and "accurate" reading of historical fact – at the manner in which societal systems of classification and dominant discourses framed an externally imposed identity onto these individuals. What Carter's novel does is exactly to allow such a marginalised minority to voice their own perception of subjectivity, valorising it in the process. For instance, while Hassig contends that the containment of the medieval prostitutes' pollution behaviour could be enforced through prescriptive codes, including sumptuary legislation and clothing regulations which compelled them to display visual signals like the garish striped headgear,[374] for the presumed nineteenth-century star aerialist the wearing of similar stigmatising yet glamorous accessories is a prerequisite endorsing the success of her show:

[371] Debra Hassig, "Sex in the Bestiaries," in *The Mark of the Beast. The Medieval Bestiary in Art, Life, and Literature*, ed. Debra Hassig (New York: Garland, 1999), 79-81.
[372] See Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 4.
[373] Ruth Mazo Karras, "Prostitution and the Question of Sexual Identity in Medieval Europe," *Journal of Women's History* 11.2 (1999): 159.
[374] Hassig, "Sex in the Bestiaries," 79-81.

"[o]n her back she bore an airy burden of furled plumage as gaudy as that of a Brazilian cockatoo."[375]

However, even this negative, outwardly imposed identity appears to be slightly undercut by what Karras outlines as, on the one hand, the medieval prostitutes' incipient sense of a collective identity, and, on the other hand, the compelling imagery of holy harlots, sinners converted into saints, who became potent symbols of repentance and charted the most profound identitarian reorientation and transformation that the Middle Ages could envisage.[376] In Carter's novel, the brothel is pictured as a site of emancipation, while its employees are mouthpieces for various strands of feminism witnessing the demise of old structures of power (along with "the fag-end, the smouldering cigar-butt, of a nineteenth century" being "ground out in the ashtray of history"[377]) and anticipating the divestment of female sexuality from its abject undertones. Thus, even the abused, "monstrified" members of Madame Schreck's extreme version of a brothel recuperate their essential humanity: the Lilliputian Wonder is persuaded to return to her adoptive Brobdingnagian family, casting aside the divergence of size that has so far been seen to segregate otherwise similar humans; Fanny sets up an orphanage; Cobwebs establishes her reputation as a chiaroscuro painter and above all reigns supreme "the common daughter of half-a-dozen mothers," Fevvers, who "has all the *éclat* of a new era about to take off."[378]

III.1.2. "Sewing Us at the Hip": Hybrid Selves in Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry*

Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* (1989), whose title refers to determining the gender of a cherry tree that has been subjected to grafting, revisits notions of culturally-constructed, stable gender identities, and resorts to a grafting of perspectives which renders the traditional opposition masculine-feminine, heroic-monstrous, solar-chthonian ineffectual. The seventeenth-century giantess and her twentieth-century counterpart are, literally, the colossal heroines whose very monstrosity provides the impetus for destabilising social and political hierarchies. Both the Dog Woman, a royalist who helps bring down the Puritans' rule of terror, and her alter ego, an actively engaged environmentalist, are figures that conclusively unsettle the traditional woman-monster dyad.

Whereas for the seventeenth-century natural scientists who perform it – the royal gardener Tradescant and his apprentice – grafting is a legitimate

[375] Carter, *Nights at the Circus*, 15.
[376] Karras, "Prostitution," 159.
[377] Carter, *Nights at the Circus*, 11.
[378] Carter, *Nights at the Circus*, 11.

means of begetting disease-resistant, climate-inured plants by fusing tender and vigorous subspecies, for the Church it is clearly associated with unnatural, monstrous births, "without seed or parent," which circumvent the normal, God-given channels of procreation.[379] The possibility of applying this process to humans is hinted at by both the gargantuan motherly figure of the Dog-Woman, who likens the grafting of two cherry scions to an incestuous suture of cross-human limbs, and by her foundling son, Jordan, who considers applying this art to himself. Jordan's quest for a hardier, more accomplished "heroic" self implies, more than scouring the world's oceans in search of exotic fruits,[380] a sequence of metaphorical fusions with the spirits of the self-poised women he encounters. The male protagonist's journey may be devised like a heroic quest but it is pursued through an exploration of feminine experiences; this is essentially how Winterson shows the disruption of the rigid, culturally-inscribed boundaries that demarcate and objectify identities into unequivocally sexed bodies, opting instead for charting a fluid bodily geography that allows for mergings, crisscrossings and reinscriptions of one's gendered identity. In light of grafting representing art's triumphant mastery over nature, either by forcing it to assume different shapes and arrangements or by sex and species transmutation,[381] Winterson's narrative aims towards unsettling the biologically essentialist assumption that gender identity ensues naturally from one's sex identity and towards highlighting that gender can be a malleable, variable construct, one that is subject to amalgamation, alteration and hybridisation.

On one phantasmatic return to the city of Jordan's mind, he accompanies a female cleaner whose menial service consists in erasing, from a balloon, a thickening canopy of hovering words that amass in violent, life-threatening throngs and acquire a repulsively visual, as well as olfactory, materiality. Far from being ethereal, disembodied carriers of logos and reason, the indelible words that materialise into aggressive, ferocious entities inflicting malicious laceration allow for a concrete visualisation of language as a

[379] Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd, 1989).The Dog Woman's own response to Jordan's grafting two cherry buds pinpoints the unnaturalness, hence monstrosity, of both the procedure and its result (indeterminate sex): "Thou mayest as well try to make a union between thyself and me by sewing us at the hip," […] "Of what sex is that monster you are making?" (Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 78-79). On the other hand, the Dog Woman's sterility is consistent with traditional conceptions whereby prescient nature precludes the infinite replication of deformities and dams the "legitimate issue to a mother's illegitimate desire," in Huet, "Living Images," 84.

[380] He is "identified" as the first sea-faring explorer who fetched the scaly pineapple from outlandish Barbados to England, just in time to be relished by the newly crowned monarch, Charles II.

[381] See Diderot and D'Alembert's definition of grafting from the *Encyclopédie* (quoted in Stafford, *Body Criticism*, 254).

noxious effluvium, which unbalances the traditional dichotomy spirit-matter; in true deconstructive fashion, the rigid demarcation between these polar opposites is seen to slacken and collapse, bringing about an interrogation of other hierarchically structured pairs of opposites, such as high-low, masculine-feminine, normal-abnormal or heroic-monstrous. Most apparent is the erasure of the confines segregating sexed/gendered identities, for while the Dog Woman's horrendous size and virile strength mark her out as a masculinised female, Jordan's ethereal nature and yearning for having some of Tradescant's heroism grafted upon him reveal him as a feminised male.[382]

In the very same city of words, Jordan can enhance his collection of odd life experiences, which contribute to his constantly remoulding his heroic pursuit so as to accommodate his Quixotic quest for Fortunata, an elusive woman. Moving through downward-spiralling "circles of infamy" (read "cafes, casinos and bawdy-houses"[383]), Jordan experiences, in travesty, the gothic version of a harem, a brothel where the female detainees take nightly flights from the "Locked Citadel" *via* underground streams to the nearby Convent of the Holy Mother. The proximity of the lewd and the holy, of the heavy and the light is all too apparent, insofar as the proceeds of one are revealed to have financed the other all along, and as the treasure vault of prostitutes is one day found to have been deserted by the recently converted novitiates at the convent.

Accustomed to the female attire, Jordan explores other heterotopian points of passage on his Tropics-bound journey. These include a fishmongers' community where he is abhorred as well as fascinated to learn about conspiracies concocted by women in order to compensate for their absence of power, or a city whose inhabitants outwit the creditors by regularly tearing down and rebuilding their houses in ever-changing locations so that buildings vanish and re-emerge in a disconcertingly anamorphic array; this subterfuge accounts for the extraordinary longevity of the denizens of this city who have reconciled two discordant desires, fixedness and perpetual motion, eschewing the pathogenic vexation of a

[382] Perhaps the climactic instance in which Jordan's body itself can be read as sexually ambiguous is the episode of his literal cross-dressing, his masquerading in female attire so that he can attend the trial and executions of Charles I. That only Jordan should have attracted "a good few offers of a bed for the night" (Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 68) raises questions regarding his effeminacy or possible androgyny. Williams claims that "the monster par excellence is the being deformed by the possession of both sexes," a phenomenon that is not merely sexual in nature but ontological: "androgyny signifies, not the existence of two sexes in one being, but rather the transcendence of the oppositions and metaphysical limitations that maleness and femaleness signify" (Williams, *Deformed Discourse*, 168, 170).

[383] Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 30.

once nomadic species. It is in this shifting urban geography, architecturally mirroring its dwellers' liminal identity (at once static and dynamic), that Jordan is told the stories of the twelve dancing princesses, who, at night time, used to escape the paternal cage and embark on dancing sprees in the silver city. The novel, which has up to this point grafted the perspectives and alternative narratives of Jordan and his mother, now embeds yet another scion, the multi-headed fabulous tale (in a feminist revisionary grid) of abused, maltreated or deceived women, serving to invalidate, as Judith Butler might say, the hegemony of the exclusionary "heterosexual imperative" or matrix that authorises "certain sexed identifications and forecloses and/or disavows others."[384]

The dismaying tableaux[385] of abortive heterosexual unions Jordan is confronted with are synthetically resumed in mythical frame in the story recounted by Fortunata herself. The tragic end to which many of the husbands come in these tales – slaughter, dismemberment, and evisceration – is largely that of Orion, vengefully slain by Artemis, who becomes an emblematic figure of strong, self-dependent women who reject male companionship and domination. The out-of-timeness of this sacrificial act makes its endless recurrence possible, with history being rewritten ceaselessly into both the eighteenth-century Dog-Woman's massacring of the Roundheads and, even further, into the twentieth-century carnage inflicted by her environmentalist avatar.

Jordan's nonlinear journey ("always back and forth, denying […] the wrinkles and lines of the body")[386] allows for point-by-point instantiations of an identity that, while cutting through the constraints of feminine or masculine dictates, is permanently undergoing gendered inscriptions in between these antipodes.[387] Jordan's gender is indeed citationally

[384] Butler, *Bodies*, 3.

[385] This encompasses a gluttonous mermaid who is now spouse to one of the princesses. Another princess who is a collector of religious items, including "the still-born foetus of the infamous Pope Joan" (Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 49), retaliates at her husband's interference with her hobby and immolation of the wrapped-up body of a saint's relics, mummifying him in return. Another tale is a variation on the Rapunzel story, rendering the cohabitation of the maiden and the hag in the windowless tower a self-willed lesbian union, eventually intruded upon by a reckless, senseless male. Yet another princess resents her husband's excessive greed and gargantuan appetite, feeding him on a poisonous potion that after causing his belly to swell out of proportion, triggers its explosion and release of "a herd of cattle and a fleet of pigs" (Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 55).

[386] "The self is not contained in any moment or any place, but it is only in the intersection of moment and place that the self might, for a moment, be seen vanishing through a door; which disappears at once" (Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 80).

[387] "I thought I might become someone else in time, grafted on to something better and stronger. And then I saw that the running away was a running towards. An effort to catch up with my fleet-footed self, living another life in a different way" (Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 80).

constructed, through discursive and non-discursive practices that, to borrow Judith Butler's notion of performativity, bring into question the possibility of fluidly becoming rather than being gendered, of exploring the liminal chasm widening between the masculine and feminine extremes. Jordan's peripatetic exploration of sexual and gender identifications is not a neatly mapped outward journey carefully following the signposts of a predetermined trajectory, but a performative enactment of alternative routes and impermanent detours, allowing for a wavering in between fixed or knowable destinations or a contestation of the coherence of sexual and gender normativities. To be distinguished from performance, performativity, Judith Butler shows, "cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularised and constrained repetition of norms" within the boundaries set by certain "regulative discourses."[388] In that sense, "sexing the cherry," to invoke the conceit of the title, is not a univocal gesture of determining the "core," "essential" gender of an individual based on the "naturally" bounded materiality of sex; to pursue further the botanical analogy, which is graphically reinforced though the alternative renditions of the pineapple and the banana (both of them fruits of exotic exploits and metonymic effigies of sexual personae), grafting amounts to the ritualised, iterable performance of a stylised act whereby a hybrid specimen traverses the space between undecidability and determinedness of identity. While for Jordan, such grafting implies a monstrous, because unnatural, contestation of pre-established sex and gender constraints, for the Dog Woman the ritualised performance of a female sex and feminine gender is simply excessive of the frames of the Butlerian regulative discourses that compel the production of such normative identities. The most powerful indicator of the Dog Woman's monstrous destabilisation of the matrix of bounded sex and gender identities is, in any case, her corporeal gigantism.

III.1.3. Gargatom Refigured: Giantesses and Shrivelled Crones

Gigantism and its reverse phenomenon, dwarfism, consistently occur as signifiers of monstrosity in teratological taxonomies. As Williams notes, somatic deviances such as violations of the norm of size, through either hypertrophy or atrophy, engender figures of "exorbitance" (giants) or figures of "deprivation" (pygmies, dwarves), which function as "physical and conceptual opposites" policing the extreme edges of the spectrum of body height.[389] While the morphology of grotesquely huge or tiny bodies could be drawn by reference to the normal human body, viewed in its

[388] Butler, *Bodies*, 95.
[389] Williams, *Deformed Discourse*, 111-113.

integrity, it is nevertheless true that this standard is by no means absolute, bigness and smallness existing in varying degrees within a range of relative normality. As phenomena that are transgressive of prescriptive limitations, the extreme diminution and the massive exaggeration of bodily size are useful for a (re)definition of these normative boundaries. David Williams explains:

> It is not in measuring some suspected deviant against an established, absolute norm that the abnormal is derived from the normal; prior to that measurement there must have occurred a comparison of beings of a range of sizes against extremes of large and small, the maximum and the minimum, for the norm to have come into existence. In this way, the abnormal always precedes the normal, making possible the definition of the normal.[390]

Mere external, size augmentation does not suffice to define monstrosity. While both enormousness and monstrosity represent violations of the norm by excess, a distinction must be drawn between them. With the category of the enormous, excessiveness is a question of considerable metrical enlargement, an augmentation of quantity. Nevertheless, if pushed too far, size escalation veers into essential alteration, for "after a certain degree of growth, quality becomes questionable" and enormity turns into monstrosity.[391] More than a physical expansion of the limits that define the human, gigantism therefore constitutes an ontological destabilisation of the norm.

Whereas in teratological taxonomies giants and pygmies bracket the normal at one or the other extremity of the size spectrum, separated as they are by a gapping continuum of normal size constituents, the possibility of juxtaposing the immense and the nugatory in a conjoined figure raises problematic perspectivist aspects concerning the position that the nondeviant should occupy relative to this coupling. While size-entrenched monstrosity is rendered ambiguous by spatial relativity (a human of default size may become a giant in Lilliput and a dwarf in Brobdingnag), the textual and figural conflation of the gigantic and the minuscule in a position of spatial and ontological liminality may serve to dismantle the "abnormality" of "double-bodied grotesques,"[392] revealing them as the distorted projection of an extrinsic gaze rather than as cases of intrinsic deformity.

In both *Sexing the Cherry* and *Nights at the Circus* the female protagonists are allowed to voice their own interrogation of what constitutes monstrosity – and in particular their gigantism – to the effect that they

[390] Williams, *Deformed Discourse*, 113

[391] Canguilhem, "Monstrosity," 28.

[392] Anne Lake Prescott, "The Odd Couple: Gargantua and Tom Thumb," in *Monster Theory. Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 88.

challenge their relegation to peripheral cultural and societal positions and manage to secure stations of purported centrality. Both women posit themselves as tangentially or crucially involved in decisive historical events and as interacting with historically verifiable characters, which serves to challenge the authenticity and reliability of official historical records from which the agency of such portentous female figures may have been effaced.[393] In Winterson's novel, the seventeenth-century Dog Woman is a giantess who modestly avows a focal role in both avenging the death of King Charles, by wreaking mass murder amongst the Puritans, and starting the Great Fire that devastated London in 1666.

Despite her exorbitant size (her skirt is so wide that "would serve as a sail for some war-torn ships" and her shawl is made of "a dozen blankets sewn together"),[394] she dismisses her formidable girth as fitting the paradigm of the monstrous since she cuts a "fine figure" in spite of her handicaps; the very feature that confers the Dog Woman the ex-centric position of a female woodwose becomes, for the self-querying subject, divested of its pejorative associations and even interpreted as a mark of pride, for she is unique amongst women by accommodating a dozen oranges in her cavernous mouth. Thrown beyond the pale of the human community into that "zone of uninhabitability"[395] that serves as the founding outside of the exclusionary matrix of human embodiment, she foregrounds her nonnatural hugeness as an advantage, explicitly linking it with superhuman aspects such as sheer strength and the terror she inspires, as well as her immunity to the all-consuming Plague.

The Dog-Woman's refusal to assume her position as "other" in a society bent on damming up "the abject or demoniacal potential of the feminine"[396] is clearly evinced by her radical reassessment of the female body as a hallowed site, stripped of any connotations of sinful carnality. She acknowledges her interpellative identification as a "gargoyle" and plays on the indeterminacy of the beautiful deformity, or deformed beauty, that such monstrous carvings, typically placed on the confines of holy enclosures, display. At once a repository of sinfulness and the channel of pollution

[393] On *Nights at the Circus* ranking as "historiographic metafiction," with Fevvers "being the object of the peculiar erotic fantasies of the rich and famous," see Lee (*Angela Carter*, 103). Fevvers "advertises" herself as a ubiquitous presence at the nexus of the forces shaping history on the brink of the new century: mass suicides are committed in Paris for her sake, the post-impressionists vie to paint her and in Vienna, and she schizoidally deforms the fantasies on an entire generation that would seek sanity restitution through psychoanalysis.

[394] Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 65.

[395] Butler, *Bodies*, 3.

[396] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 65.

purgation, this gargoyle assumes her in-betweenness of location and raises her Orphic anthems[397] from inside the mountain of her flesh, querying the legitimacy of conflating physical and moral grotesqueness in what clearly emerges as a cultural inscription of morphologically "aberrant" bodies.

As the "only woman in English fiction confident enough to use filth as a fashion accessory,"[398] the Dog-Woman is a blatantly overcoded feminine figure, coalescing the attributes of a chthonian mother goddess (earthliness and protectiveness of vegetation), a Cynocephalic giantess, a vengeful Amazonian warrior or a titanic antagonist for the Leviathan-sized body social, aiming to stave off the Puritan desideratum of regicide. Her singular body, encrusted with all the insignia of a polluting, dangerous femininity that risks overflowing the boundaries, operates culturally both to disturb and to reinforce the norm of proper embodiment through the anxieties it elicits.

In a self-portrayal, which questions the degree to which her unsightliness might amount and her failure to conform to societal standards of attractiveness ("*How* hideous am I?"[399]), the Dog-Woman adopts an extrinsic gaze at herself; however, size, no doubt the most obvious indicator of her departure from the prerequisites of corporeal normality, is not conclusively inserted in the inventory of her repugnant features, which only encompasses the flatness of her nose, the scarcity of teeth in her mouth, or the cave-like holes in her face that are big enough to shelter fleas. Questioning the relevancy of exaggerated size as a monstrous index of deformity related to the body in its integrity, the Dog-Woman suggests that a fallacious perspective can erroneously distort the correlation between physical appearance and essence, external somaticity and identity: her internalisation of the gaze dramatises the normative impact of proper embodiment, since the aesthetic impact of monstrous corporeality may ultimately hinge on the relativity of the visual regime it lends itself for exploration. For instance, the crowd who attend a weight contest between the Dog Woman and an elephant of fabulous magnitude, carried around by an itinerant circus, respond differently to their display: pleasure at the sight of "the huge beast with a wandering nose," massive swooning at glancing the "mountain range" to which the Dog-Woman's prominently displayed genitalia are hyperbolically likened.[400] What becomes a clearly gendered confrontation between beastly masculinity and excessive femininity posits the giantess herself as a heroic slayer of monsters: her turning the beast into

[397] "When I sing the dogs sit quiet and people who pass in the night stop their jabbering and discontent and think of other times, when they were happy" (Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*,14).
[398] Cf. Winterson, <http://www.winterson.net> (The official Jeanette Winterson site).
[399] Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 24.
[400] Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 24.

a celestial constellation amounts to a cosmogonic feat that becomes laden with gender-sensitive connotations.

Like Carter's aerialist giantess, who relishes in perpetuating her self-constructed image of outlandish grotesqueness, the Dog-Woman resists incarceration in specular frames or reification within a cultural gaze. Giants by their nature violate the concept of containment,[401] perpetually struggling against boundary limitations. After her Thumbelina-like infancy, for instance, the Dog Woman experiences such excessive growth that the idea of exhibiting her in a freak show dawns on her father. That her expansive physicality is not amenable to categorical enslotment or enfreakment is visually reinforced by her overgrown body violently bursting out of the confines of the barrel in which she was immured, inadvertently slaying her own father with the slivers flying thereof. The giants' morphic and semiotic slipperiness[402] accounts for the manner in which the Dog Woman violently refuses teratological as well as discursive control, given that the surfeit of meanings inscribed across her gigantic body could not be stably accommodated within the limits of any representational attempt.

Amongst the throng of fractured genealogies the Dog Woman derives her gigantism from is that of the third-century converted Christian and martyr, St. Christopher. Through her immense size, her cohabitation with canine beasts and her devoted allegiance to royalty, both secular and divine, the Dog-Woman bears clear similitudes with St. Christopher, whose life is widely documented in western hagiographical literature, such as the thirteenth-century *Golden Legend* compiled by Jacobus de Voragine. A member of the lineage of the heathen Canaanites, the saint (whose originary name is Reprobus) is of colossal stature (he measures twelve cubits in length), cynocephalic appearance, fierce countenance and cannibalistic appetites. The ambition that he harbours is to serve the mightiest of all masters: Reprobus successively vows obedience to an earthly king, to Satan and ultimately to Christ. Entering the service of the most powerful master implies his acceptance of the task of safely ferrying on his shoulders all those requesting passage across a river in whose turbulent waters they might otherwise perish. Traditional iconography however focuses on the representation of Christopher (i.e. the Christbearer, a name etymologically derived from the Gk. *christos*, Christ and *pherein*, to bear) wading, staff in hand, through the river, with a minuscule child placed onto his shoulder. Paradoxically, as he progresses through the waters, the child is growing increasingly heavier, as if the whole world were pressing on his shoulders, almost crushing and drowning the giant under his weight. The image of the

[401] Williams, *Deformed Discourse*, 113.
[402] See Cohen, *Of Giants*, xiii.

giant carrying an infant on his shoulders is grotesquely echoed in the text: "When Jordan was new I sat him on the palm of my hand the way I would a puppy, and I held him to my face and let him pick the fleas out of my scars."[403] The huge woman is also associated with riverine banks, and she even names her foster son whom she rescues from drowning after the great river of Palestine encountered by the Israelites in their passage to the Promised Land.

While prior to his conversion, Saint Christopher represents a monstrosity that is corporeal (dog-man hybrid), dietary (carnivorousness verging on cannibalism) and linguistic (barking), the Dog Woman's communal residing with the dogs implies a rejection of human companionship to the point of utter estrangement from humanity's biological norms. However, she is allowed to provide her own narrative, running in parallel with that of the male hero, the explorer prototype. Saint Christopher's ranking as a Cynocephalus,[404] based on the episode of his cannibalism, appears to be related not merely to his grotesque canine appearance and inarticulate barking but also to his pre-conversion habit of anthropophagy. The Dog Woman is also fascinated with mouths and what mouths can do. In Tradescant's exotic garden where ponds teem with "fabulous fishes of the kind imagined but never seen," the Dog Woman's favourite spot is a cherry-lined grotto basin at the bottom of which fresh-water shrimp are "feeding on creatures even smaller than themselves" only to fill the beak of a kingfisher that afterwards "ascends like a saint, vertical and glorious."[405] The Dog Woman's enthralment with ingurgitation, with mouths and beaks that feed on and are fed on by others, may denote a desire to explore the precarious limits that discriminate selfhood from otherness: if the boundaries demarcating physical entities collapse in an endless cycle of erasure and redefinement (the food chain), to what extent is otherness literally absorbed and assimilated into selfhood?[406]

According to Cohen, anthropophagy or cannibalism constitutes an exploration of selfhood's limits since, by materially incorporating the flesh of one body into that of another, it "condenses a fear of losing the boundary that circumscribes identity and produces discrete subjects."[407] When the Dog-Woman attends the public display of a banana brought over from the

[403] Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 25.

[404] The Cynocephali constitute one of the monstrous races located by Pliny in the mountains of India.

[405] Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 42.

[406] "The mouth constitutes one of the principal thresholds of the body and thus of the self, a border between the inside and the outside, a portal giving access to the recesses of the living organism or, in the other direction, to the phenomenal, physical world. Through the mouth the self deals with the other" (Williams, *Deformed Di*scourse, 141).

[407] Cohen, *Of Giants*, 2.

Bermuda Island, allegedly located in the proximity of paradise, she interprets its shape in anthropomorphic terms, abhorring the idea of its edibility: given its livid yellowness and length, the banana is likened to the private parts of an Oriental, "either painted or infected."[408] As soon as instructions are offered as to the consumption of this wondrous exotic fruit, the crowds exhibit the same indignation against what they perceive to be a cannibalistic practice. The Dog-Woman appears to express at this stage the typical revulsion medieval travellers experienced when confronted with alien cultures and dietary habits; moreover, the act of consuming a banana is firstly interpreted in a sexually segregated grid, implying sexual perversion if done by a woman and anthropophagy if done by a man, and then resumed in a generalised statement encompassing all Christians for whom ablution in the blood of the sacrificed Jesus makes the reiteration of *spharagmos* inconceivable.[409]

The giant's body, Cohen suggests, is an affront to natural proportion: it may well encode "an excess that places him outside the realm of the human, outside the possibility of desire."[410] The Dog Woman fits the prototype of the castrating woman, whose willingness to experiment drives her to accepting the overtures of a man. The intended fellatio entails, however, his emasculation: her mouth becomes a devouring organ, and the sexuality of the scene is supplanted by connotations of feeding. This mere act of dismemberment[411] is hyperbolically inflated in the Dog Woman's enactment of the Old Testament enjoinment, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth": taking upon herself the loyalist assignment of avenging the death of the King, she wreaks carnage amongst the Puritans, collecting a sack of trophies that amount to "119 eyeballs, one missing on account of a man who had lost one already, and over 2,000 teeth."[412] That she should use the dental waste as drainage for her watercress bed attests to another similarity with the cynocephalus saint, who is a protector of orchards and vegetation: having ferried Christ safely across the river, he plants his staff in the river banks where it blooms and bears fruit.

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[408] Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 12.

[409] "At this there was unanimous retching. There was no good woman could put that to her mouth, and for a man it was the practice of cannibals. We had not gone to church all these years and been washed in the blood of Jesus only to eat ourselves up the way the Heathen do" (Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 13).

[410] Cohen, *Of Giants*, xiii.

[411] While here she merely feeds her dogs on the eyeballs, in another episode of sadistic revenge against the "unrepentant vermin," a brothel becomes the stage for their execution in a grotesque unleashing of orgiastic necrophilia – the "sisters" at the Spitalfields brothel made a fortune by announcing that there were "freshly dismembered bodies to be had" (Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*,105).

[412] Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 85.

Both *Sexing the Cherry* and *Nights at the Circus* feature female couples of blatant disparity in size. In Winterson's novel, the Dog Woman and her neighbouring crone are grotesquely inversed mirror reflections: contrasted with the former's expansive body, the latter's carcass seems in a continuous process of emaciation and diminution. While the Dog Woman is so huge that when she puts on a plumed hat, it sits on her head "as a bird nests in a tree," the next-door hag is withered almost to the point of becoming reified into "a side of salt beef wrapped in muslin"; her head resembles "a piece of leather like a football," her body disseminates into "a fantastical mass of rags" and her hands are "always beckoning and twisting, look like the shrivelled monkeys the organ-grinders carry."[413] Compared with the giant wench's earthen propensity, her ageless neighbour has well-nigh invisible feet, which generates the illusion of her lack of movement. In contrast with the Dog Woman's self-professed civility and decent manners, the virago's hands are constantly engaged in a scatological exploration of her own body, which makes her feeding manners approximate those of troglodyte cave-dwellers: "her hands are never still, scratching her head and her groin and darting out to snatch food and ram it square into her mouth."[414]

Through their physical juxtaposition (the aerialist's body could accommodate several Lizzies, in a reversed image of surrogate pregnancy) and rhetorical coupling (the two women take turns recounting the impossible birth myth to the American journalist), the pairing of gargantuan Fevvers and Thumbelina-Lizzie approximates what Prescott has coined as "Gargatom," "a single anamorphic and unimaginable figure" that frequently featured in seventeenth-century chapbooks.[415] Such juxtapositions operated on confrontational grounds, opposing astuteness to aggressive force, with midgets (Tom Thumb) at times outwitting and therefore vanquishing giants (Gargantuas).

Antagonism in the female couples under discussion, however, is only superficially and transitorily explored, as both Carter and Winterson convey their characters' soldered identities, refashioned in the foster mother-

[413] Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 15, 13.

[414] Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 13.

[415] Prescott's analysis includes early Stuart chapbooks, such as Richard Johnson's *History of Tom Thumb* (1621) and samples of nonsense writing, such as Martin Parker's Legend of Sir Leonard Lack-wit (1633), charting the political overtones of these popular seventeenth-century English narratives. In the former pamphlet, an anonymous, English-born minuscule Tom ensures his victory over the mighty, excessively overgrown Gargantua, whose tumescent bravado makes it even more challenging and entertaining a task for the witty, ironic midget who deflates, shrinks and eventually defeats his gigantic opponent. It is ultimately through rhetorical diminution and subversion, operating on a logic of lack and negation, that this feat is accomplished. In the latter burlesque, carnivalesque figments of the likes of Gargantua and Tom Thumbe are interpreted by Prescott as supporting a persistent, underground royalist, unpuritanical feeling (Prescott, "The Odd Couple," 75).

daughter dyad in the first case, and gradually shaped into a continuum of foster motherhood in the second case. The twentieth-century alter ego of the Dog Woman is a version of Gargatom turned outside in: she is an environmentalist chemist whose gigantomachia is targeted at earth-polluting companies and who contains her own *discordia concors*, reconciling normal surface and giant core, a living shell encasing her colossal predecessor who resists contraction, compression and threatens to burst open the boundaries of her host's body, like a dwarfish outfit stifling its gigantic wearer.

The giant, Susan Stewart comments, "is represented through movement, through being in time […]. In contrast to the still and perfect nature of the miniature, the gigantic represents the order and disorder of historical forces […]. And while our daydream may be to animate the miniature, we admire the fall or the death, the stopping of the giant."[416] Carter's and Winterson's grotesque giantesses deny containment and embrace the abjection naturally assumed to rest at the core of the "monstrous feminine" paradigm. Both *Nights at the Circus* and *Sexing the Cherry* revisit traditional notions of female monstrosity and, while dismantling assumptions of women's necessary relegation to societal and political margins, provide an effective critique of strategies of monstrifying (female) others for erecting and consolidating the domain of proper embodiment. Carter's investment of the siren-prostitute figure with the potential for destabilising nineteenth-century notions of excessive female sexuality and Winterson's outlining of the giantess as the foundational heroic figure whose underground quest allegedly brought about a restoration of the legitimate monarchical rule in the seventeenth century, highlight a radical shift in the paradigm of the monstrous female, which is assumed and abused in a Bakhtinian fashion by the siren-prostitute and the female woodwose, as the representatives of that domain of abnormality (the brothel and the wilderness) whence subjugated knowledges now emerge.

III.1.4. Monstrous Imagination: Reconstru(ct)ing Teratical Females in A.S. Byatt's Fiction

Maternal imagination has for centuries been indicted as a cause of monstrous births, out of a belief that the mother's mind, highly impressionable and susceptible to the impact of external stimuli, could imprint onto the foetus's body various degrees of deformity, ranging from small imperfections to severe congenital disabilities. After briefly indicating the premises of the imagination hypothesis, this section looks at several of A.S. Byatt's narratives that sift through the mechanisms allowing the mother

[416] Stewart, *On Longing*, 86.

figure to be cast in a monstrous mould, not only as regards the grotesque physicality axiom, but also as far as the corporealising powers of the maternal imagination are concerned. Exploring the cultural meanings of the imagination as an agent of teratogenesis, Byatt's *Possession* (1991) surprises the eruption within the modern episteme of an alternative paradigm to gendering monstrous generation as female: what analysts like Dennis Todd or Marie-Hélène Huet have exposed as the dissociation between earlier, pre-nineteenth century anxieties related to the maternal imagination (basically mimetic, reproductive in its impression of corporeal strangeness upon the child) and the reassignment, in Romantic aesthetics, of the role of creative, productive imagination this time, onto the male artist, in relation to a monstrous progeny of a different, cultural essence, this time. In fact, in true genealogical vein, Byatt's overlapping the two axes of monstrous genesis in her post-Shelleyan, post-Frankensteinian Melusine at once affirms her entrenched allegiance to Romantic *poiesis* and dislodges the female imagination from assumptions of its strictly biogenerative potential.

Contrary to the Aristotelian tradition, which credits the mother with being the mere receptacle for the paternal seed, the tradition postulating the maternal teratogenic agency, upheld by ancient authorities like Hippocrates, Galen, or Pliny, yet enjoying far more widespread currency, fundamentally argues that the monstrous infant materialises, as it were, in a sort of public display of corporeality, the mother's illegitimate fancies, her aberrant desires and excessive passions: in procreation, it is alleged, the maternal powers of disruption (affective traumas, desires, wishes, cravings, wild fantasies) can literally shape the infant in defective typecast. Insisting on the criterion of parental resemblance in defining monsters, classical teratology, epitomised by Aristotle's *On the Generation of Animals,* considers that monstrous bodies exhibit accidental deviations from or transgressions of the male generic type, since the former furnishes the ideational shape of the foetus, whereas the female simply provides the brute, amorphous matter that will nourish the embryo.[417] Teratological exegesis emphasises, however, the potent and pervasive appeal, amongst both elite and popular circles, of the conception whereby the sole factor responsible for the misproduction of offspring is the mother's imagination.[418] Although scientifically discredited in the wake of mid-eighteenth century debates between preformationists and epigeneticists,[419] the idea that the prenatal influence of the mother's imagination could be wrought up to marking or even moulding the infant in

[417] Aristotle's *On the Generation*, 767b.
[418] Glenister, "Fantasies," 21; Todd, *Imagining Monsters*, xiii; Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, 16-24; Braidotti, Rosi. "Signs of Wonder," 297; Stewart, *On Longing*, ix.
[419] See Todd, *Imagining Monsters*, 45-48.

the womb may still hold its ground in popular conceptions of procreation today.

Within this deeply-ingrained latter paradigm, however, the mother's desirous imagination is credited with being the guarantor of the species' legitimate descent and with determining the normal or abnormal outcome of the birth process, so much so that the monster "stands as a public rebuke to any violent aberration on the mother's part. In effect, the maternal imagination alone accounts for the reproduction of the species as formal species."[420] Mimetically modelling the infant's shape, horrendously disfiguring or slightly blemishing its epidermis because of various pregnancy experiences, the imagination, as a power of the mind "traffick[ing] specifically in images," could be regarded, Dennis Todd indicates, as the main teratogenic agent on two accounts. First, since it was largely understood to be an image-making faculty and since anomalous births were deemed to render iconically images of things previously imprinted in the mothers' minds, the plasmatic, forming power of the imagination could be extrapolated to encompass corporeal formation as well; and secondly, the imagination was the sole faculty that could govern the psycho-physiological processes involved in the deformed infants supposedly replicating, in their flesh, their mothers' cravings or horrific scares.[421] Furthermore, Todd explains, the faculty of the imagination was seen to function as a "nexus where mind and body continuously were *enter-communicating*,"[422] that is as a threshold mediating the transactions between them; the Cartesian cleavage of body from mind notwithstanding, a more accurate sense of this psycho-physiological dynamic unity would render the human being as composed of diverse powers, humours, fluids or solids, all of these partaking, to a lesser or a greater degree, of the corporeal or the immaterial, comprised in

> a hierarchy that ran with unbroken continuity from the grossly corporeal through the progressively more rarefied and subtle, then gradually fading into the spiritual, first in its lower degrees and then moving to the higher reaches of intellect. And all these stood in instrumental relation to each other, each affecting and being affected by the more corporeal one below it, each affecting and being affected by the more ethereal one above.[423]

From the flesh to reason then, the mind-body continuum meant that the mediation between them could be effected either at the upper threshold of corporeality (the animal spirits) or at the lower threshold of the incorporeal (the imagination). In other words, through the imagination, both conceptual

[420] Huet, "Living Images," 73-74.
[421] Todd, *Imagining Monsters*, 49-52.
[422] Todd, *Imagining Monsters*, 53.
[423] Todd, *Imagining Monsters*, 54.

abstraction (the sublimation of the external world, as perceived by the senses, into images) and corporealisation (the process whereby, through "corporeal Phantasms," or "material Phantasms," thoughts could be translated into concrete, palpable images) were deemed possible, giving scope thus for the imaginative fashioning of the foetus in the womb.[424]

Focusing on the same line of thought, largely though not definitively curbed by its scientific debunking in the Enlightenment, Marie-Hélène Huet's studies address conceptions about misbirths as the consequence of pregnant women's desires, whims, or fancy in terms of generative transgressions that the female imagination lends itself to: hypothesised as a deceitful, dissimulating, counter-productive procreational force, it may sprout forth monstrosities through an obliteration, or erasure, Huet maintains, of the paternity of the father as the legitimate genitor of his offspring.[425] However, with the constitution of the modern episteme, and Romanticism in particular, a paradigmatic shift occurs, radically modifying the perspective upon the genetic process and assigning the powers of spawning aberrant progeny to the father/artist: "[w]hether in the laboratories of Camille Dareste or in some of the most extraordinary pages of the literature of the Uncanny, it reaffirms the seductive power of the monstrous as aberration – departure – and the creative power of the *savant* and artist as absolute father."[426] By highlighting this supersedure, or supplementation, rather, of conceptions ascribing the stamp of monstrosity to the mother's imagination, Huet's argument significantly pins down two divergent developments that the reinstatement of the primacy of paternal agency was allotted in the matter of (monstrous) generation. Huet may be confirming the premise, espoused, amongst others, by Georges Canguilhem,[427] claiming that the teratogenist's parthenogenetic experiments of reproducing monstrous formations in the space of the laboratory correspond to a disciplinary submission of the disorderly, irrational, plasmatic forces of the maternal imagination; however, it is the reappropriation of the imagination as an artistic faculty by excellence that, while marking a departure from the fallacious logic of perfect similarity displayed by the (female) imagination, affirms its anti-mimetic operations, relocating its outcome – deformed scions – from the domain of biological monstrosity to the realm of the fantastic and the monstrous.[428]

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[424] Todd, *Imagining Monsters*, 59.
[425] Huet, "Living Images," 76; Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, 1.
[426] Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, 77.
[427] Canguilhem, "Monstrosity," 32-34.
[428] See Huet's discussion of *eikastiken* versus *phantastiken* art in Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, 130.

Nowhere is this transition more evident than in Mary Shelley's conflictual staging of both types of imagination as the creative principles behind her "hideous progeny," which invites interpretation as both the humanoid creature begotten by Frankenstein and the textual offspring of the author herself. Delving into the same deliberate conflation operated by her Romantic predecessor, A.S. Byatt's fictional deployment of teratical females and her genealogical exposure of the discursive layers that have led to the articulation of the "monstrous-feminine" are most strikingly visible in her rewriting of ophidian femaleness into a trope of the monstrous imagination underlying artistic *and* biological creation. Given Byatt's ongoing concern with the problematic of identity, monstrosity is figured in terms of an otherness that both marks off and confounds the boundaries of the (gendered) self. Transitional creatures, neither human nor beastly (or both), Byatt's monsters cross all sorts of frontiers (organic-inorganic, male-female, saintly-demonic), and are indeed anchored in what Jeffrey Jerome Cohen defines as the "ontological liminality" of monstrous (m)others.[429]

Performing a critique of antinomic representational paradigms, in which woman is either birth-giving *mater* or deadly matter, Byatt posits her monstrous females – themselves interstitial beings – at the very thresholds of self and other. For instance, the opening story in *Little Black Book of Stories* draws on fairy-tale patterns to describe a protracted rite of passage from girlhood to womanhood.[430] Against a background of intense categorical disarray, "The Thing in the Forest" (2003) pictures two evacuee girls, Penny and Primrose, who are extricated from their familial and societal structures and, in an agrestic setting that simultaneously partakes of the symbolism of death and rebirth (repeated mention is made of entombment/enwombment inside a "crocodile"), are confronted with the horrific apparition of "the Thing." It is a "provisional amalgam" of biological and technological features, an unstable aggregate of flayed, fetid flesh and rank vegetation, to which are appended manmade prostheses. It is also described as a crossbreed between "a monstrous washerwoman and a primeval dragon,"[431] a gross befuddling of all categories, most prominent amongst which is that of gender. While its self-propelling, tubular shape is suggestive of maleness, its morphological instability, its abject emission of effluvia and its capacity to sprout forth self-same progeny arguably

[429] Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 6.

[430] This analysis of Byatt's short fiction was previously published as Carmen-Veronica Borbely, "Monstrous Genealogies: Reconstru(ct)ing Teratical Females in A.S. Byatt's Fiction," in *Dark Reflections, Monstrous Reflections: Essays on the Monster in Culture*, ed. Sorcha Ni Fhlainn (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2008).

[431] A.S. Byatt, *Little Black Book of Stories* (Chatto and Windus, London, 2003), 16.

contribute to a grotesque instantiation of a chthonian mother archetype, tinged with a hydra-like capacity for self-regeneration.

Given its scatological nature (its stench of maggoty putrefaction, its theriomorphic appendages), its exorbitant size and its ever-changing contours, "the Thing" actually approximates a Bakhtinian definition of the "body in the act of becoming," which undergoes simultaneous degrading and regrowth.[432] The convoluted, amorphous anatomy of "the Thing," permanently on the verge of self-fragmentation and reincorporation of its abjected fragments, constitutes a threat to the integrity of the embodied subject: if "the Thing" represents indeed a maternal body, its monstrosity touches on suggestions of unnatural reproductibility in that it borders on parthenogenesis or self-replication rather than on sexual fertilisation.

What inoculates the two girls against motherhood is, perhaps more than the monster's somatic compositeness, its half-*human,* blank, miserable face. The reflexive process which should have allowed them to understand the significance of the Thing's human visage is deferred until decades later, when the two women return to the forest, and, through the visual lenses of a cultural artefact – a nineteenth-century mock-medieval illustrated legend of the Loathly Worm – also make legible the deformity of its body. Although identified here as an English version of the European dragon, its most remarkable deviation from the stock iconography is its lack of sharp-sightedness, which, according to Evans, renders dragons exceptional fabulous monsters in that they are not mere objects of "passive visual perception,"[433] but watchful guardians of inaccessible treasures. Instead, the agency of looking falls onto Penny and Primrose: initially united through a sympathetic, non-hierarchical gaze, the two women recognise each other in the invisible, because overshadowed, enemy or victim of a knight refracted in the glass encasing of the mock-Gothic book. It is a reciprocal recognition of the otherness lying at the core of their identities, which eventually enables them to overcome the trauma of their childhood (the encounter with a monstrous instantiation of the mother figure) and embark on parallel destinies of foster motherhood.

For several of Byatt's female characters, monstrification is generated by anxieties related to the body's failure to achieve containment (seepage control) and, in turn, breeds awareness that, despite its contingency, embodiment is constitutive of the self. Byatt's protagonists eventually arrive at an understanding that the otherness of the flesh or of the foreign is profoundly integral to the ontological constitution of selfhood. Included in the same collection, "A Stone Woman," for instance, is a tale of metamor-

[432] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 317.

[433] J.D. Evans, "The Dragon." In *Mythical and Fabulous Creatures: A Source Book and Research Guide*, ed. Malcolm South (New York: Greenwood, 1987), 29.

phosis, recounted from the viewpoint of Ines, a lexicologist, who undergoes a two-phased corporeal change. Its outbreak ensues from the trauma experienced at the sight of her dead mother's epidermis: confronted with the visible index of final transformation, Ines registers an instantaneous transmutation into the old woman. This, coupled with the surgical excision of her entrails, as well as with the grafting on her womb-vacated body of a technologically fashioned, artificial navel, amounts to a symbolic defleshment, soon to be literalised as petrifaction into a geological amalgam of stone, ore and magma. The intensive redefinition of her body boundaries into a dry, numb exoskeletal carapace, aiming towards containment/congealment of internal forces and repulsion/rejection of external forces, signals a self-disciplining gesture under the clinical gaze,[434] which dislodges her female body from associations with maternal, amorphous or leaky matter.

The reverse change, from the inanimate to the animate, results from her immersion into a network of criss-crossing mythical and cultural threads, *via* the narratives recounted by Thorsteinn Hallmundursson, a Norse sculptor. The archival traces of her narrative identity, which dislocates Ines from static, stable sameness into the construction of her temporalised selfhood, include Biblical references to Lot's wife turning into a pillar of salt; the story of Katla, a volcano spirit, whose sole means of materialisation involves putting on garments made of human skin; or an Icelandic version of the earth mother figure, correlating geological formation with Ines's own progressive realisation of the dialectics between her congealed bodily surface and the red-hot lava beginning to stir in her entrails. All in all, Ines comes, during a lengthy liminal stage – mutually beneficial for the sculptor and his muse – to retrieve a sense of selfhood that incorporates the otherness of her own flesh. For the stone woman, this implies the acknowledgment of her corporeality in terms of patterns of flow, causing a realignment of femininity with aquatic fluidity. Her body boundaries become what Christine Battersby calls an "event-horizon, in which one form (myself) meets its potentiality for transforming itself into another form or forms (the not-self)."[435] Ines's renewal comes about through her shedding layers of old skin (the crystals engulfing her body which glisten like dragon-scales), and embracing the monstrosity inherent in her vampiric cravings, as she eventually turns into a troll or an ogress.

While Byatt refuses to detract from the fantastic overweight of the narrative, she does bolster notions that female bodiliness is constru(ct)ed as teratical through representation and specular deflection. Thus, under the gaze of the physician, her "metamorphic folds" and "conchoidal fractures"

[434] See Ann Balsamo, *Technologies of the Gendered Body. Reading Cyborg Women* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), 56.

[435] Battersby, "Her Body / Her Boundaries," 347-348.

would border on the pathological and would be reified into an "an object of horror and fascination, to be shut away and experimented on."[436] The change of perspective is brought about by the Icelandic carver of stone women, in a nineteenth-century graveyard, a heterotopian space by excellence, which for Ines it becomes fraught with terrestrial and celestial connotations. Her body is yet again the object of the eye of the beholder, but Thorsteinn's gaze is non-hierarchical, full of solicitude and esteem: "He stared. She thought, he is a man, and he sees me as I am, a monster. 'Beautiful,' he said. 'Grown, not crafted.'"[437] Metamorphosis, Caroline Walker Bynum says, is fundamentally narrative, integral corporeality representing the start- or the end-point of the morphic transformations entities/identities may undergo;[438] that Thorsteinn should interpellate Ines as a "walking metamorphosis"[439] only serves to emphasise corporeal identity as a process rather than as a fixed essence.

"Medusa's Ankles," included in *The Matisse Stories* (1993), also plays on the notion that the "monstrous feminine" is a result of the discursive constructedness of female bodies within the reifying frame of patriarchy. Again, Byatt fuses several mythical or pictorial practices of representation in setting Susannah, a classicist, in the direct lineage of the Medusa, whose monstrosity entails from her duplicitous nature, or, as Suther maintains, from the "power of beauty and hideousness inextricably combined in the face and specifically in the eyes to exercise fascination on a victim."[440] Besides the graphic association of the protagonist with the image of flowing hair from *La Chevelure,* an etching by Matisse, Susannah is lured inside a hairdressing salon precisely by a Matisse reproduction of a voluptuous rosy nude likely to trigger "reflections on flesh and its fall."[441] Furthermore, her hair stylist is not gratuitously called Lucian, since in Lucian of Samosata's *The Hall* it was the Gorgons' stunning beauty that transfixed beholders.[442]

While indeed acknowledging that the Medusa's anatomical loci of deformity are her ophidian hair and petrifying gaze, Byatt unsettles the Freudian premise of castration anxiety. That the "anatomically odd"[443] relationship between the woman and her hairdresser should unfold within

[436] Byatt, *Little Black*, 139-141.
[437] Byatt, *Little Black*, 157-158.
[438] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York: Zone Books, 2001), 30.
[439] Byatt, *Little Black*, 174.
[440] J.D. Suther, "The Gorgon Medusa," in *Mythical and Fabulous Creatures: A Source Book and Research Guide*, ed. Malcolm South (New York: Greenwood, 1987), 163.
[441] A.S. Byatt, *The Matisse Stories* (Chatto and Windus, London, 1993), 3.
[442] Marjorie Garber and Nancy J. Vickers (eds.), *The Medusa Reader* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 43.
[443] Byatt, *The Matisse Stories*, 4.

the field of vision, with the mirror functioning ambivalently as a protective shield for the male gazer and as an impervious screen for the woman's reprehensible gaze, strikes a note of dissemblance with Perseus's "heroic" deflection of the Gorgon's stare in classical myth. Lucian's handling of the scissors amounts to a symbolic beheading of Susannah, whose body is segmented into a visible, upper part (her head) and a concealed nether part (her swollen ankles, the index of her aging flesh). But the mirror is not merely a surface that acts as a point of convergence for their asymmetrical gaze. It begins to act as a fluid, permeable membrane, allowing for the violent irruption of a "snake-crowned" daimonic mother figure in whom Susannah (mis)recognises her self. The outburst of her pent-up rage, which explodes the mirror into smithereens, comes from her hair being literally moulded into the Medusan cast not by Lucian himself, already symbolically castrated through a self-inflicted finger cut, but by Deirdre, a double of Susannah's younger self, insofar as both detect the "fatality" of the maternal "[s]ausages and snail-shells, grape-clusters and twining coils."[444] The final twist, that only through acquiescence with this externally-imposed Medusa identity can Susannah retrieve the mythic creature's power and terrifying beauty, points to a reversibility of roles which establishes a similitude between the self (Susannah) and the (m)other also as a self. At once excessive of and compliant with representational frames, Byatt's Medusa amounts to a revisionary rewriting, in the manner of Cixous' celebration of teratical beauty,[445] of an enduring propensity towards evicting the other from the ranks of the same.

Consubstantial with Byatt's self-avowed interest in issues of female creativity,[446] her attempt to reconstrue generic female monsters is emblematic of a type of a Coleridgean organic, esemplastic imagination. In works like *Possession* (1991) or "A Lamia in the Cévennes" (from *Elementals. Stories of Fire and Ice,* 1998), the iconographic and discursive compositeness of such hybrids as the Melusine or the lamia plays on the Romantic conception of artistic creation as "teratological disclosure."[447]The latter narrative charts the encounter between Bernard Lycett-Kean, an English expatriate artist seeking inspiration in the Cévenol countryside, and a female-snake hybrid, and reworks a host of textual and visual precedents, including a 1948 Matisse sketch of a fish-tailed woman, one of Ronsard's sonnets, alluding to Ulysses' eschewal of falling prey to the fiercely *human*

[444] Byatt, *The Matisse Stories*, 23.
[445] Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," 355.
[446] Amongst Byatt's prevalent concerns are "problems of female vision, female art and thought," in Byatt, The *Shadow of the Sun*, 1964, xiv, quoted in Kathleen Coyne Kelly, *A.S. Byatt* (New York: Twayne Publ., 1996), 78.
[447] Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, 3.

beauty of the sirens, and Mary Douglas's anthropological considerations on the "mixture of aesthetic frenzy and repulsion"[448] that border creatures elicit.

Their meeting ground is an oval swimming pool, which gradually loses its paradisiacal serenity and becomes an "Infernal Pit." In the grassy-green, viscous and opaque water, Bernard's encounter with the Lamia will enable him to secure an individual, productive rather than reproductive vision, and it is here that Byatt self-consciously redeploys the Coleridgean reference to the serpent as a trope for the Imagination, which she discusses in *Passions of the Mind*.[449] The Lamia is precisely a metaphor, a corporeal trope of the imagination: what it facilitates is the perception of "identity and difference simultaneously […] dependent on each other."[450] For the male artist, this tripartite rite of passage, beginning with his retreat into the Cévennes and ending with his acquisition of a sympathetic, caring vision of the suffering other, involves immersion into the "turquoise milk" of the maternal imaginary, infested by the ambivalently-gendered, two-bodied Lamia.

The Lamia experiences a triple-phased morphological transition. Hers is a case of shape-shifting monstrosity: from the oneness of an ophidian beast (all snake), through the two-ness of a theriomorphic female, to the oneness, that still bears traces of its dual nature, of a woman. While a serpent, the Lamia craved having its otherness suppressed; while a woman, Melanie risks having her herpetic genes detected: the duality of her nature is inescapable. For Bernard, unlike perhaps for the Lycius of Keats's poem, it is precisely the Lamia's indiscriminate duality that is appealing and revolting, yet while refusing to lend a compassionate ear to her narrative, he is doomed to a failure of vision: he cannot commit the fluid colours and shapes to canvas, since the water solves and dissolves the Lamia's body into a continuous Möbius coil of head swallowing tail. This creative sterility will prevail as long as he refuses to free the creature from the position of a passive sufferer of his gaze. What is truly loathsome about her is not her difference but the possibility of her sharing in his humanity (another twist to the Romantic hypotext): he does not recognise in her the other who is a self. It is only after the Lamia's evanescence and his own retreat into the "bliss of solitude"[451] that Bernard can rework the excessively repulsive Keatsian metaphor into a "visual idea," striking the note that his interest has been in "oddity – in its *otherness* – as snakes went."[452] As a result of this exchange

[448] A.S. Byatt, *Elementals. Stories of Fire and Ice* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1998), 101-102.
[449] A.S. Byatt, *Passions of the Mind. Selected Writings* (London: Vintage, 1993), 22.
[450] Byatt, *Passions*, 15.
[451] Byatt, *Elementals*, 108.
[452] Byatt, *Elementals*, 110.

between self-esteem and solicitude for the other, he moves from "cold philosophy," the natural scientist's vision which pierces through and tabulates mystery to a caring, exact study of the *other*, which does not aim at dissecting and tabulating that other but at intensifying its aura.

A.S. Byatt's *Possession* (1991) paradoxically destabilises and re-installs notions of monstrous femininity.[453] As its subtitle (*A Romance)* and one of its epigraphs (Hawthorne's Preface to *The House of the Seven Gables*) attest, the novel is staged as a quest, connecting the archival past with a couple of archivists' present. The quest is undertaken by contemporary scholars in search for documentary and physical clues as to the identity of a colossal Victorian poet, Randolph Henry Ash's mistress. Victorian poetess Christabel LaMotte is deliberately moulded onto the figure of the Melusine, with whom the nineteenth-century artist phantasmatically identifies and on whom she grounds her most accomplished work, an epic entitled "The Fairy Melusine," rearticulating the iconography of Melusina and casting her as the emblematic figure of female creativity.

To this effect, Byatt undertakes an ambitious project – a genealogy of monstrosity – and appears to pay indirect tribute to Mary Shelley's poetics of monstrous imagination.[454] Connections are established between "sexual and textual generation,"[455] combining, in effect, several branches of teratological discourse. First, the discursive practice of explaining monstrous progeny as the result of inter-species miscegenation, or of illicit intercourse between the human and the demonic. Second, the popular Renaissance contention, quite prominent up to the end of the Enlightenment, whereby maternal imagination possessed corporealising powers and was capable of engendering physiological prodigies. Third, the Romantic retrieval of the imagination, long indicted for its teratogenic potential, as the wellspring of

[453] I have previously published my analysis of Byatt's *Possession* as Carmen Borbely, "Theriomorphic Bodies: (En)Gendering Monstrous Corporeality in Contemporary British Fiction," *Caietele Echinox* 10 (2006): 425-431.

[454] Several critical commentaries have been limited to detecting the Victorian sources onto which Randolph Henry Ash (Browning and Tennyson) and Christabel LaMotte (Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti, Emily Dickinson, or Emily Brontë) are grafted: see, for instance, Jackie Buxton, "'What's Love Got to Do with It?' Postmodernism and *Possession*," *English Studies in Canada* 22/2 (1996): 199-219. However, a substantial strand in recent criticism, which I firmly subscribe to, maintains that Byatt challenges a commonplace of Victorian literature (the so-called "critique of Romantic excesses") and regards Christabel LaMotte as the literary descendant of romantic notions of visionary truth, embodied in the sacred logos of the poet; see Deborah Denenholz Morse, "Crossing Boundaries: The Female Artist and the Sacred Word in A.S. Byatt's Possession," in *British Women Writing Fiction*, ed. Abby H.P. Werlock (Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 2000), 150 and passim.

[455] Chris Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-Century Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 32.

artistic creation. If Mary Shelley unwittingly admits that her "hideous progeny" (book *and* monster) pertain to a tradition tying the birth of deformed offspring to their mother's unhinged imagination,[456] *Possession* also pursues this "dynamics of monstrous creation"[457] as a complex trope for literary inspiration.

Byatt notices the fluidity of representations which collapses undines, melusines, sirens, or mermaids into a continuum of female monstrosity, connected as they are by their bipartite structure, a combination of human and serpentine forms. This might attest either to the universality of the Melusine myth or to the belated grafting of this half-woman, half-snake figure on a tremendous array of similarly hybrid legendary or mythical females – including the Echidna of Hesiod's *Theogony*, the elementary spirits of esoteric, Paracelsian tradition, the demoniacal Lilith of the Cabala, or the Irish Banshees.[458] The Melusine's hybrid anatomy (exceptionally beautiful female upper half joined to a lower ophidian bodily half) renders her as a creature in-between genera (human *v.* beastly/demonic) and in-between gender, as suggested by her tail. Byatt exploits this liminal imagery, and has various readers in the novel express competing or complementary versions of its meaning, ranging from Fergus Wolff's fictive reference to Virginia Wolf's notion of the "essential androgyny of the creative mind" to exacerbated feminist contentions – held to ridicule – that it might represent "self-sufficient female sexuality."[459]

Clearly indebted to the Romantic iconography of demoniacal enchantresses (Coleridge's Geraldine or Keats's Lamia), Christabel's Melusine is avowedly in-formed by the medieval legend compiled in the fourteenth century by Jean d'Arras. The *Roman de Mélusine* (1393) frames its two-bodied, metamorphic, eponymous protagonist as a foundational figure for the illustrious House of Lusignan. As recounted by Jacques Le Goff and Brownlee,[460] the key moments in the Jean d'Arras narrative are as follows.[461] Firstly, the encounter, in a forest, between Elinas, the King of Albany, and Presine, an exceedingly comely female; out of this union between a mortal and a fairy, three daughters are born, yet besides this intergeneric transgression, Elinas is also guilty of having flaunted the

[456] "My imagination unbidden possessed me," Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus* (Wordsworth Classics, 1999, 1831 edition), 4.
[457] Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, 156.
[458] Arlette Bouloumié (ed.), *Mélusine Moderne et Contemporaine*. Études réunies par Arlette Bouloumié avec le concours d'Henri Béhar (L'Age d'homme, 2001), 9.
[459] A.S. Byatt, *Possession. A Romance* (London: Vintage, 1991), 34.
[460] Kevin Brownlee, "Melusine's Hybrid Body and the Poetics of Metamorphosis," *Yale French Studies* 86 (1994): 18-38.
[461] Jacques Le Goff, *Pentru un alt ev mediu. Valori umaniste in cultura si civilizatia evului mediu*.Vol. 2. Trans. Maria Carpov (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1986), 127-129.

injunction whereby he should not have witnessed his wife's labour. Secondly, the eldest of the three daughters, Mélusine, is indirectly punished for her father's voyeuristic transgression, and doomed to sporadically assume a serpentine form – a cyclic, oscillatory, duple corporeality – until a mortal might marry and release her from the burden of immortality. Thirdly, another encounter, mirroring the first, occurs by the Fountain of Thirst, this time between Mélusine and Raimondin, much aggrieved by a murder he has committed; Mélusine vows to lend grandeur to his line should he marry her and abstain from gazing at her on Saturdays. The promise is fulfilled; great prosperity and fertility bless the Lusignans, although traces of this replicated unnatural union between a mortal and a supernatural being are visible in the deformities imprinted on Mélusine's progeny. Fourthly, Raimondin's visual and verbal breach of promise – spying on his wife's metamorphosis into a siren and publicly condemning her demonic nature ("Ah, most false serpent") – attracts Mélusine's final transformation into a winged serpent and her (inconclusive) separation from her progeny. To sum up, as Brownlee maintains, a genealogical and morphological crossbreed, Mélusine possesses a polycorporeal hybridity that successively traverses three stages: from a female body to a composite, human-serpentine body, and, finally, to a winged snake's body. The Melusine's twofold metamorphosis, elicited each time by male gestures of transgressive voyeurism, precludes the resolution of her hybridity into unity; this indeterminacy of being is further reinforced at the level of her discursive compositeness: the Mélusine is "a figure constructed out of a set of discourses in unstable contrast with each other: fairy-monstrous, courtly-erotic, maternal, political foundational, Christian."[462]

Byatt's narrative counterpoints convergent and divergent accounts of Melusine's polymorphic body, two of which seem to prevail. The first would demonologise female monstrosity, allying it with spiritual corruption and degeneration. Thus, a letter from Ash, purportedly quoting Paracelsus, renders Melusines as demoniacal spectres which hope to gain a soul through a union with mortals:

> The Melusinas are daughters of kings, desperate through their sins. Satan bore them away and transformed them into spectres, into evil spirits, into horrible revenants and frightful monsters. It is thought they live without rational souls in fantastic bodies, that they are nourished by the mere elements, and at the final Judgment will pass away with these, unless they may be married to a man. In this case, by virtue of this union, they may die a natural death, as they may have lived a natural life, in their marriage.[463]

[462] Brownlee, "Melusine's Hybrid," 19-20, 38 and passim.
[463] Byatt, *Possession*, 172.

Furthermore, in Isidore LaMotte's grandiose encyclopaedic project, rather "fashionably" searching for a universal Key to all Mythologies (references to George Eliot abound in the novel), the Melusine ranks amongst the dames Blanches, the *Fate Bianche*, whiteladies, who are harbingers of death. Similarly, in Sabine de Kercoz's interpolated intimate journal, Christabel LaMotte acquires at one point the definite silhouette of "Aesop's frozen serpent."[464] The second reading accepts a vacillation of meanings, accommodated by what Christabel LaMotte envisages as the reconciliatory *topos* of Romance. Grounded not "in historical truth, but in poetic and imaginative truth," Romance embraces "women's two natures," dissolving the duality of "enchantresses and demons *or* innocent angels."[465] In the epistolary exchange between Christabel and Randolph Henry Ash, largely devoted to unravelling the iconology of Melusina and the poetic principles on which LaMotte's epic is grounded, the "marvellous" ingredient of this myth is Melusina's jointly daemonic and angelic nature, which is, indeed, governed by the logic of "both…and" and not of "either/or": "What is so peculiarly marvellous about the Melusina myth, you seem to be saying, is that she is *both* wild and strange and ghastly and full of the daemonic – *and* it is at the same time solid as earthly tales – the best of them – are solid – depicting the life of households and the planning of societies, the introduction of husbandry and the love of any mother for her children."[466]

Christabel's "true insight," sifting through "palimpsest on palimpsest,"[467] envisions "my Melusina" as "just such a combination of the orderly and humane with the unnatural and the Wild […] the hearth-foundress and the destroying Demon."[468] Byatt gives here a deliberate twist to the thanatic interpretations of the Melusine, detecting in her procreational generativity similarities with a fertility goddess, Ceres or Proserpina. As Le Goff maintains in his study on the *Mélusine Defricheuse* – also cited in one of the scholarly glosses on Christabel's epic – Melusina is released from such destructive associations through a foregrounding of her constructive capacities: this is a figure associated not only with extreme bodily fecundity, but also with the building of cities (a civilising, foundational figure) and with the fertility of crops. All in all, as Le Goff insists, a medieval avatar of

[464] Byatt, *Possession*, 370.
[465] Byatt, *Possession*, 373.
[466] Byatt, *Possession*, 176.
[467] See Ash's definition of poetic vision: "The Truth is – my dear Miss LaMotte – that we live in an *old* world – a tired world – a world that has gone on piling up speculation and observations until truths that might have been graspable in the bright Dayspring of human morning […] are now obscured by palimpsest on palimpsest, by thick horny growths over that clear vision – as moulting serpents, before they burst forth with their new flexible-brilliant skins, are blinded by the crusts of their old one" (Byatt, *Possession*, 164).
[468] Byatt, *Possession*, 164, 178.

the Mother-Goddess.[469] Hence, Byatt's careful inscription of her female protagonists in the representational frames of vegetation or resurrectionary myths. The association of the Melusine with light is etymologically reinforced by her derivation from *Mère Lus* (*Mère Lusine* or *Mère Lumière*), a selenian, transitional rather than solar light.[470] Silvery paleness of hair and skin imagistically conflate Christabel and her heiress, particularly since the latter emerges as a concrete trace of the Victorian photographic archive.[471] The most obvious clue, nevertheless, comes from the sumptuary details of the female protagonists' attire, green becoming the dominant visual index of their potential for birth and replenishment. While the Melusine of Christabel's epic wears a "girdle green / As emerald or wettest meadow grass,"[472] Christabel's body itself exudes the colour of vegetation:

> He studied the pale loops of hair on her temples. Their sleek silver-gold seemed to him to have in it a tinge, a hint of greenness, not the copper-green of decay, but a pale sap-green of vegetable life, streaked into the hair like the silvery bark of young trees, or green shadows in green shadows in green tresses of young hay. And her eyes were green, glass-green, malachite green, the cloudy green of sea-water perturbed and carrying a weight of sand. The lashes over them silver, but thick enough to be visibly present.[473]

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned duality of the Melusine's hybrid nature, she is not restricted to a static aggregate of composite parts. The Romance of Melusine indicates that she is a shape-shifter, a metamorphic creature. As pinpointed in the Proem to Christabel's epic *The Fairy Melusine,* this is the reverse of the Psyche-Cupid pattern, with the injunction against laying bare the secret bodily half of the spouse coming from the woman this time, and with her body actually assuming the shape of a dragon. Monstrosity's double impact upon the viewer – that of alluring and repelling surface – also resounds in the lines of Christabel's poem, *The Drowned City,* which reworks the Breton legend of the City of Is, submerged as a punishment for the sinfulness of its female inhabitants. Here women's bodies are transparent, making visible their entire web of veins and arteries – another indirect reference to *Frankenstein*, since the translucent screen of the monster's epidermis also reveals an intricate

[469] Le Goff, *Pentru un alt ev*, 142-143.
[470] Bouloumié, *Mélusine Moderne*, 254.
[471] When first encountered by Roland Mitchell, Maud Bailey appears to materialise from the photograph of Christabel LaMotte, the real which is engendered by the hyperreal (Byatt, *Possession*, 38-39). In a later sequence, Maud loosens her "captive" hair, whose "plaits were like streaked and polished oval stones, celandine yellow, straw-yellow, silvery yellow, glossy with constricted life" (Byatt, *Possession*, 272).
[472] Byatt, *Possession*, 296.
[473] Byatt, *Possession*, 277.

network of pulsating fibres, muscles and veins. An interesting reference to female corporeality is made by Maud Bailey, Christabel's twentieth-century descendant and a scholar fascinated by the imagery of thresholds that Christabel's poetry transgresses. Maud's mention of the "awkward body" occurs at a point when she accepts the concreteness of her physicality, having relinquished the abstract notion of the self as mere textual palimpsest, divested, that is, of its embodied dimension: "Narcissism, the unstable self, the fractured ego. Maud thought, who am I? A matrix for a sussuration of texts and codes? It was both a pleasant and an unpleasant idea, this requirement that she think of herself as intermittent and partial. There was the question of the awkward body. The skin, the breath, the eyes, the hair, their history, which did seem to exist."[474]

The "awkward body," *corps morcelés* – the body fractured and fragmented so that its constituent parts can be visually (mis)construed into "natural" corporeality – the body which she shrouds under her garments – and other metaphors of containment, of closure and concealment abound in the novel. Hence the imagery of towers offering shelter as well as confinement to female figures (Rapunzel, the Cumaean Sybil, Ash's *Incarcerated Sorceress* or Christabel herself). Whether it be Melusine's or Christabel's, the female body is imaged by the male gaze as unruly, excessive and potentially disruptive of order; in other words, it needs be disciplined or fashioned into a culturally determined signifier.

The "awkward body" is, indeed, the female body inserted in an economy of specular representation, subjected to decryption and inscription by the male gaze. The episode of Raimondin breaking Melusina's prohibition and peering through a keyhole to spot her serpentine body is resumed over and over in Byatt's text. Roland Mitchell, the twentieth-century scholar interested in Ash's work, commits a similar voyeuristic gesture, attempting to peer through the crackling, translucent cover of Christabel's picture, only to discern that "the generic Victorian lady, specific shy poetess"[475] remains mysterious and unknowable. In a letter to Ash, Christabel faces the poet with a riddle centred on the image of an egg; the obvious metaphor is one of incarceration but there are also hints at its germinative power ("this gold cushion is enclosed in its own crystalline casket, a casket translucent and endless in its circularity"), particularly since the riddle is accompanied by a warning against crushing the solid shell, which would leave him with "something slippery and cold and unthinkably disagreeable."[476] Despite this veiled allusion to the slimy viscosity of matter, Ash *does* flaunt this

[474] Byatt, *Possession*, 251.
[475] Byatt, *Possession*, 38.
[476] Byatt, *Possession*, 137.

prohibition, not only in "extending [his] imagining gaze"[477] onto Christabel's imaginary Melusine, but also in his Frankensteinian[478] probing of the secrets of nature. His enthrallment with the inside of matter, matter that uncannily comes to life under the lens of a microscope, is influenced by his scientific interest in anatomy and parthenogenesis, or reproduction by cell fission rather than by sexual fertilisation. An avid collector of molluscs, anemones, or other "slimy creatures from the viscous sea," he also engages in the dissection and gemmation of medusas, hydras, polyps, driven, as he is, by his fascination with generation and the "origin of life":

> He made a particular study of the reproductive system of his chosen life-forms. […] He conducted rigorous experiments himself on various hydras and plumed worms which could be got to bud new heads and segments all from the same tail, in a process known as gemmation. He was greatly interested in the way in which the lovely Medusa or transparent jellyfish were apparently unfertilised buds of certain Polyps. He busily sliced off the tentacles of hydra and lacerated polyps into fragments, each of which became a new creature.[479]

What the aquatic Melusine assists both Christabel and Maud to accomplish is coming to terms with the "awkward body," becoming aware of its immense generative potential. A genealogical hybrid herself (born of a fairy mother and a human father), the legendary Melusine produces a host of monstrous progeny, all bearing disfiguring facial marks, "strange defects – odd ears, giant tusks, a catshead growing out of one cheek, three eyes, that sort of thing,"[480] as Fergus Wolff puts it. To her offspring, Melusina is

[477] Like *Frankenstein*, indeed, which is regarded by many critics as an intriguing case of literary collaboration, given Percy Shelley's massive and extensive assistance in the book's manufacture – his coparenting of the novel. Roland Mitchell, for instance, is convinced that *Melusina* is rather similar to Ash's poems, in terms of style, at least, if not of subject matter. Having retraced Ash's zoological expedition to Yorkshire, Mitchell arrives at the following conclusion: "we [..] found – a lot of textual evidence in both poets that perhaps both were there – Yorkshire phrases and landscapes in Melusina – the same line in both poets" (Byatt, *Possession*, 481). Furthermore, Ash's *The Garden of Proserpina* reveals, as his annotated copy of Vico's *Principj di Scienza Nova*, hosted by the London Library, shows, an interest in resurrectionary and fertility figures whom Melusina quite substantially approximates. The most revealing confession, however, belongs to Ash himself: "I have no right to extend my unfortunate curiosity to your work, your writing. You will accuse me of trying to write your *Melusina*, but it is not so – it is only my unfortunate propensity to try to make concrete in my brain how *you* would do it – and the truly exciting possibilities open up before me" (Byatt, *Possession*, 177).

[478] "It was a kind of Romanticism reborn – gemmated, so to speak, from the old stock of Romanticism – but intertwined with the new mechanistic analysis and the new optimism not about the individual soul, but about the eternal divine harmony of the universe" (Byatt, *Possession*, 250).

[479] Byatt, *Possession*, 249.

[480] Byatt, *Possession*, 33.

extremely attached, but she is forced to abandon them. In Byatt's novel, this maternal aspect registers several permutations. Thus, while the daughter that Christabel gives birth to is physically flawless yet somewhat degenerate, in the sense of devoid of her parents' artistic aspirations, her *Tales for Innocents* – tales of terror derived from Grimm and Tieck – are fraught with references to the teratogenic powers of the female imagination. One should only consider here the story about a woman who, desiring a child, of any kind, even a hedgehog, has her desire fulfilled. Like in the legend of Cupid and Psyche or in the fairy tale about Beauty and the Beast, the "half-hedgehog, half-boy" in this story queries the clear-cut divisions between monstrosity and humanity, and renders bodily contours amenable to metamorphic processes: "In the end it wins a King's daughter who is expected to burn its hedgehog-skin at night, and does so, and finds herself clasping a beautiful Prince, all singed and soot-black."[481]

Besides, it is no gratuitous gesture on Byatt's part that she should sequentially have inserted Christabel's poem immediately after the episode recounting the erotic union between the two Victorian artists, making thus the analogy with Shelley's narrative, "a book constructed like a pregnancy,"[482] stand even firmer in place. This conflation of sexual and textual offspring also resounds in the pastiched, quasi Pre-Raphaelite review of Christabel's epic, which renders it "a quiet, muscular *serpent of a tale*, with more vigour and venom than is at all usual in the efforts of the female pen, but without narrative thrust; rather, as was Coleridge's Serpent who figured the Imagination, with its tail stuffed in its own mouth."[483] Furthermore, Christabel's final confession to Ash, whereby "my life-history" and "my Melusina epic" are firmly intertwined, traverses the borderlines between myth and reality: "I have been Melusina these thirty years. I have so to speak flown about and about the battlements of this stronghold crying to the wind of my need to see and feed and comfort my child, who knew me not."[484]

The novel's insistence on liminality, on crossing thresholds[485] revolves around the possibility of imaginatively re-visioning the figure of the Melusine. If in the medieval legend the male gaze (of Raimondin and story-teller alike) poses the threat of reifying or monstrifying the female body,[486]

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[481] Byatt, *Possession*, 53.

[482] The monster's story is embedded within a concentric Russian-doll series of frames. Cf. Marc A. Rubenstein, "'My Accurs'd Origin': The Search for the Mother in *Frankenstein*," *Studies in Romanticism*, XV (1976): 172, quoted in Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow*, 32.

[483] Byatt, *Possession*, 37.

[484] Byatt, *Possession*, 301.

[485] Denenholz Morse, "Crossing Boundaries," 157.

[486] "Men *saw* women as double beings, enchantresses and demons or innocent angels" (Byatt, *Possession*, 373). Similarly, in the Proem to *The Fairy Melusine*, Medusas, Scyllas, Hydras,

Christabel's intent in writing an epic of the Melusine is to twist the visual angle from which the fabulous woman is looked at. Her aim is to write "from Melusina's – own – vision. Not, as you might, in the First Person – as inhabiting her skin – but seeing her as an unfortunate Creature – of Power and Frailty."[487] This non-intrusive, transitional, and compassionate gaze allows Christabel to reconfigure the Fairy Melusine's morphology, from "flying worm" with gruesome "sinewy tail" to a comforting image of "swaying supple brilliance"[488] encountered by a much aggrieved knight in a womblike cavern by the Fountain of Thirst. Christabel's Melusine retrieves (repossesses) the lost appeal of romance and reemerges as the prototypal mother goddess offering the promise of an illustrious line.

It is not so much that *Possession* disavows its own status as a "self-referring, self-reflexive, inturned postmodernist mirror-game,"[489] or that it eventually abandons its parodic glance at constructed notions of (monstrous) identity. It is rather the case that this recasting of the Melusine as a foundational figure of female (pro)creativity reinforces Byatt's firm advocacy of Romantic conceptions of the poetic imagination. Byatt's *Possession* suggests, in effect, that such theriomorphic bodies as the Melusine's ultimately refuse representational or discursive containment. Gaming with the notion that teratogenesis is related to the maternal imagination, whose impressions may be imprinted on biotic and poetic offspring alike, Byatt destabilises the "natural" assumptions surrounding the "cultural" trope of the monstrous-feminine.

III.1.5. Neo-Gothic Phantasms: Parodies of "Deranged Imagination" in Clare Clark's *The Nature of Monsters*

This section targets a narrative of monstrous births "rewritten" in the Neo-Gothic vein.[490] Like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) or A.S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990), Clare Clark's *The Nature of Monsters* (2007) pursues an ever-shifting referent of Gothic phantasms: the ever deferred, constantly craved-after origin of monstrosity, whether corporeal or psychological, or both. Clark's narrative – a genuine compendium of diverse historically-attested monster theories – revisits thus one of the defining axes of

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Sphinxes, or Echidnas, transgressive of the dictates of Power, are thronged into a continuum of female grotesqueness by what appears to be the monstrifying agency of the male gaze.

[487] Byatt, *Possession*, 175.

[488] Byatt, *Possession*, 289, 296.

[489] Byatt, *Possession*, 421.

[490] Previously published as Carmen Borbely, "Neo-Gothic Phantasms: Parodies of 'Deranged Imagination' in Contemporary Fiction. Clare Clark's *The Nature of Monsters* (2007)," *Caietele Echinox* 21 (2011): 210 - 217.

teratological discourse, namely the maternal imagination, which has traditionally been associated with the pathology and aetiology of deformed births. Clark dislodges this hypothesis from its traditional frame of interpretation, shifting the agency of monstrous genesis from the protagonist-narrator's naturally canny birthing processes onto the Frankensteinian figure of a madly obsessed scientist, driven by an illusory desire to find scientific evidence of the maternal imagination hypothesis.

The syntagm "deranged imagination" from the title of this section limns the issue of the maternal imagination as that image-impressing faculty which – according to folk lore and to pre-Enlightenment quasi-scientific treatises – is actively involved in prenatal development processes, the degree of deformity inflicted on the foetus varying from minor blemishes to massively disfiguring and distorting effects. The body of wisdom concerning the ghostly imprint of the maternal imagination upon the infant's bodily canvas is vast in Clark's fictional re-visitation of eighteenth-century London and its monster lore. Prominent are, for instance, pseudo-Aristotelian references to the close resemblance between the female and the monster. Moreover, amongst the examples avidly gleaned by Clare Clark from the sources she acknowledges in the curt postscript to her book (such as Swammerdam's *Uteri mulieris fabrica,* 1672, Ulise Aldrovandi's *Monstrorum historia*, 1672 or popular reports included in the *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society), are the ill effects of delusional/deluding imagination upon a French woman who delivered a simian baby after watching an ape in a freak show, or upon the infant of a "pregnant woman who took great care to wash herself after being greatly frightened by a Negro […] only to discover her child born black in those place she was unable to reach," or upon "a child born with uncommonly large moles as a result of her mother's affection for currants."[491] And so, the inference goes, the series may go on indefinitely, encompassing also the progeny of Eliza Tally, the protagonist of Clare Clark's fiction, should she allow her own imagination to be moulded in the defective cast prepared for her by the villainous apothecary in whose care she has been confined. Longing for strawberries in mid-October?! Hold that thought! That might imprint a crimson stain upon your baby's face… Such is the jocular stance with which Clare Clark manages to enmesh reader and protagonist alike in the web of dumbfounding deceit and soluble enigmas that the ghostly origins of monstrosity are shrouded in.

Set in the year 1718, at around the time when the historically attested case of Mary Toft, a rabbit-birthing woman, spawned the infamous Turner-Blondel debate,[492] *The Nature of Monsters* enmeshes, on the one hand, Eliza

[491] Clare Clark, *The Nature of Monsters* (London: Penguin, 2007), 35.
[492] See Todd, *Imagining Monsters*, 107.

Tally's first-person account of her incontinent erotic desire and troublesome pregnancy and, on the other hand, Grayson Black's diary, medical notes and epistolary exchanges, lodging these monster-making narratives in an indestructible dyad, while recasting the "deranged" agency of teratogenesis from the natural, unproblematic pregnancy of the female, whose imagination plays no corporealising tricks upon the infant, onto the deformed and atrociously disturbed male protoscientist.

The story traces the birthing tribulations of Eliza Tally, daughter of a village midwife, who, on account of an illicit love affair that tarnishes her local reputation, finds herself shipped to London, where she takes lodgings in the claustrophobically Gothicised workshop of Grayson Black. The sinister apothecary, severely disfigured by a birthmark himself, and marred by an ailing constitution and opium addiction, is determined to make it into the ranks of the day's scientific elite by publishing a tract *Upon the Mother's Imagination*; at his publisher's recommendation, he aims to satisfy the public's epistemophilic craving for monsters, substantiate his foregone conclusions with an illustrated compendium of strange births, and conduct experiments on several child-bearing women. This is how the monster theorist self-aggrandisingly describes his theory of maternal impression:

> I must confess to believing the analysis of the physiological effects of imagination masterly. Of course the raised temperature of a woman's blood when in a violent passion must heat the fluid parts of the body. And, of course, when those passions duly weaken, the salts contained within those fluids must be deposited within the body, precisely as salt marks the interior of a cooling cooking pot. Where else could they then collect but in the unshed blood of the menses? It is inevitable, then, that when the menstrual blood is ingested by the child for nourishment, the salts impress themselves upon the as yet unhardened muscle and bone of the foetus. And so the child bears the imprint of the mother's passions as sealing wax receives the imprint of a stamp.[493]

What Clare Clark's genealogical appraisal of monstrosity shows is that the discursive frames within which the monstrous has been disciplined are, in themselves, volatile, contradictory and always amenable to supplementation and amendment. For instance, in the eighteenth century, the largely speculative teratological discourse was complemented, based on novel insights offered by the proto-science of physiognomy, with explanatory accounts of deformity establishing correspondences between twisted anatomy and intrinsic corruption, which, in Clark's narrative, threaten to conclusively disprove Grayson Black's theory of monsters. Moreover, the premise of the maternal agency in teratogenesis is altogether invalidated by a relapse into a moralistic interpretation of the strange progeny's outer misshapenness as an effect of their own intrinsic potential for depraved

[493] Clark, *The Nature of Monsters*, 16.

demeanour, for occurrences like concorporate twins translate the "depraved and deplorable sexual desires" harboured by the twins themselves, while a "hare lip reveal[s] the loose mouth of one who might not be trusted."[494] Black himself anchors his discursive account of monstrosity in the prodigy complex, whereby monsters are deemed to be ciphers in a secretly coded language of divine wrath. The female imagination, he remarks at one point, is a temptation God sends but only affects sinful women, leaving them physically intact but making their offspring bear the stain of their defilement.[495] Later in his career, Black further amends the scope of his theory, claiming that the imagination does mechanically emboss its deviations upon the infant's body, if not in rational subjects, than in "true savages and idiots," for, he says, "in the idiot may be found the most formidable imagination of all."[496] Since manifold threads of teratological thought compete for supremacy in this chrestomathy of strange corporeality, imperilling its coherence, Grayson Black feels impelled to legitimise his theories of deranged births by speeding up Eliza's misbegetting and deploying an entire arsenal of imaginary terrors meant to "stimulate a heightened state of imagination," and to fuel "the low faculty of imagination that so dominates women"[497] into producing a deformed child.

Consequently, as Eliza's undesired pregnancy advances, the foetal presence starts being charted in terms of a "body horror" type of anxiety, the child growing inside her threatening to quash all distinctions between inside and outside, self and other. The "worm" occupying her increasingly distended belly becomes the ghostly or monstrous signifier of her concupiscence or damnability. The unborn baby is described as "the contemptible maggot in my belly," "the vile worm," or the tenacious "creature," pictured as infesting her or devouring her from within, stretching and squirming, clawing and gripping.[498] Its movements are so brutally vicious that she feels herself invalidated as an autonomous self, and rendered vulnerable to uncanny experiences of bodily distress. In Mary Douglas's terms, Eliza's as-yet unformed baby is matter literally "out of place," polluting the maternal body from within. The morphological aberration implicit in the changeable contours of a pregnant body clearly ranks amongst the cases mentioned by Douglas as an affront to structural clarity.[499] Eliza's psychological account of her body becoming a passive, defenceless container for a violently aggressive and apparently abhuman baby repeatedly highlights the threat that it brings to her identity in terms of an unassimilable, polluting, abject "abomination." Here is an example of the many instances in which Eliza

[494] Clark, *The Nature of Monsters*, 90.
[495] Clark, *The Nature of Monsters*, 111.
[496] Clark, *The Nature of Monsters*, 177.
[497] Clark, *The Nature of Monsters*, 177.
[498] Clark, *The Nature of Monsters*, 56, 58.
[499] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 39.

Tally apprehends her baby as a monstrous occupant of her intimate self, as the inimical presence of a beastly other at the very core of her identity:

> Inside me the child twisted like a worm, its marble eyes peering into my private darkness, its hooked claws clutching and squeezing my stomach as, piece by tiny piece, it devoured me. I would have torn into my own abdomen and ripped it out with my fingernails, there and then […]. But it was too late. The worm had no intention of relinquishing its grip. It would see me dead first. Already it had sucked the animal spirits from me like the juice from a plum so that I shrivelled to nothing, nothing but a stone wrapped in dried-up skin.[500]

Eliza's repeated reference to the infant as an abjectionable, hostile alien invading the privacy of her womb like a parasitic "worm" bears an uncanny resemblance with Julia Kristeva's meditation on pregnancy in "Stabat Mater," in its outlining of the indomitable, uncontrollable colonisation[501] of the mother's body by an other's material presence:

> Cells fuse, split, and proliferate; volumes grow, tissues stretch, and body fluids change rhythm, speeding up or slowing down. Within the body, growing as a graft, indomitable, there is an other. And no one is present within that simultaneously dual and alien space, to signify what is going on. "It happens, but I'm not there." "I cannot realize it, but it goes on."[502]

Kristeva posits here the subjective experience of pregnancy as lodged in a deconstru(ct)ed corporeality where anatomical boundaries, physiological processes and physical sensations undergo substantial alteration, shattering the notion of a properly contained bodily self. Clare Clark's description of Eliza's child monstrously colonising and appropriating the interior of her womb appears to invoke the Kristevan account of the manner in which the amorphous foetal other gradually assumes biological consistency within the body of the mother, which becomes "misshapen, a piece of my body jutting out unnaturally, asymmetrically, but slit […] monstrous graft of life on myself, a living dead."[503] The gestating alien renders Eliza's own body unrecognisable to herself, which makes it imperious for her to expunge it.[504] It is only with the experience of childbirth, with the severing of that liminal connectivity implicit in umbilical cord, that Eliza resumes the separate individuality of her body and also processes the transformation of what used to be "an internal graft and fold" into another/a mother's self that, to use

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[500] Clark, *The Nature of Monsters*, 23.

[501] As Clare Hansen points out, "the mother's identity as a speaking subject is threatened by the splitting of her body and by … processes over which she has no control," in *A Cultural History of Pregnancy. Pregnancy, Medicine and Culture 1750-2000* (London: Palgrave McMillan, 2004), 12.

[502] Julia Kristeva, *The Portable Kristeva*, ed. Kelly Oliver (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1997), 301.

[503] Kristeva, *The Portable*, 314.

[504] "There was nothing of me about it, nothing of conventional human shape. It protruded from me like a wen, a sickness my body was determined to expel," in Clark, *The Nature of Monsters*, 141.

Kristeva's words, "is irremediably an other."[505] With this ecstatic recognition of the other that is also a self, Eliza may embark on motherhood, though not for long, since in her baby's properly morphed body lies its own undoing: it is snatched away from its mother's bosom by a much disappointed teratogenist and replaced with a freakish, limbless suckling, which also flaunts the apothecary's plans by dying an untimely death.

Eliza's gradually shifting the frame within which she reads deformities, such as that of Mary, the idiotic housemaid, corroborates the thesis of a cultural constructedness of freakery. Mary, whose rabbit-like, less-than-human, unfinished facial features – cleft palate, split upper lip, lopsided grin, bulging eyes, and shifty gaze – display, apparently, her intellectual deformity as a halfwit, is initially discursively enfreaked by Eliza, who confirms thus, to herself, her own regularity by contrast with the irregularity of her defective dialectical counterpart. For Eliza, however, the definitive reversal of this dichotomous specular scheme, in which her gaze seeks to cleanse the other of any contagious potential of deformity while reinforcing the normality of her own embodied self, occurs whilst examining the teratological archive. In the anthology of Greek myths that Eliza leafs through in the bookseller's shop, the illustrations of fabulous monsters are not those of the snake-haired Medusa or the maze-maddened Minotaur, but woodcuts of beak-faced, monkey-tailed, siren-footed, horse-torsoed infants, signalling a profound destabilisation of the corporeal frontiers that might ensure the consistency and boundedness of the properly embodied self, including a cynocephalous infant that triggers in Eliza a misrecognition of the monstered, albeit not monstrous child she carried within the intimate space of her body during her own pregnancy:

> A picture of a boy with the head of a dog.
>
> I stared at the picture, and the clot of hair in my chest grew so thick that I could hardly breathe. The boy on the page was no more than an infant. The soft defencelessness of his pale naked body, the plump folded flesh of his wrists and ankles, his tender stub of a penis, contrasted violently with the head upon his shoulders. There was nothing charming about this head, nothing puppyish. It was the head of an adult dog, black as coal and with a murderous constriction to its eyes, which glared up at me with undisguised hostility. The artist had set the dog's jaws open in a snarl, exposing a curl of scarlet tongue between rows of pointed teeth, and it slavered a little, a loop of drool falling from its lips. I could almost hear the growl vibrating in its throat, the bellicose stink of its breath. The fur about its neck was matted and spiked. Its ears pricked forward, intent upon weakness and fear, as it strained from the child's round innocent shoulders.[506]

Whilst Eliza's initial temptation is to reproduce the deranged imagination hypothesis, resting on notions of unruly female sexuality or the

[505] Kristeva, *The Portable Kristeva*, 322-323.
[506] Clark, *The Nature of Monsters*, 248.

vulnerability of a woman's mind to phantasmal terrors,[507] she is eventually forced to contain her domineering gaze and acknowledge the humanity of the monsters whose eyes "seemed to follow me, as though they silently begged me to rescue them from their paper imprisonment."[508] The paper monsters exemplify an anamorphic mechanism of *intimate exteriority* or *extimacy*, whereby the Other may uncannily be perceived as "something [that is] strange to me, although it is at the heart of me."[509] Activating Eliza's profound disquietude about the humanity detectible underneath these contorted corporeal morphologies, the archive of monsters becomes an area interrogating otherwise comforting distinctions between her self and the other. In other words, the monsters' simultaneous incorporation of the human and the non-human, of identity and alterity in their convoluted bodies[510] serves as a mnemic trace of the culturally twisted "nature of monsters." It is with this realisation that Eliza proceeds about thwarting the apothecary's further teratogenic experiments, salvaging Mary's perfectly shaped baby from his evil guardianship and embarking on foster motherhood. With such hindsight, one may see the irony behind Clare Clark's casting the *Prologue* of her narrative at the time of the Great Fire of London, which not only cleansed the city, provisionally, of its dirt, but also drove Grayson Black's pregnant mother into a fit of terror, leaving its indelible birthmark upon the botched teratogenist. Not only does this make Grayson Black the sole living proof of his improbable theory of deranged imagination, but it also serves as a reminder that, like in the Shelleyan master narrative, the spectral, ceaselessly deferred origin of monstrosity pertains to a regime of epistemological undecidability.

III.2. The "Savage Exteriority" of Monstrous Others

One of the dominant trends in teratological discourse is, Braidotti asserts, the "racialisation of monstrous bodies" or the monstrification of other races.[511] In antiquity, populations imagined to reside at the margins of civilisation were thought to punctuate the fringes of an anthropological geography, in which dietary, corporeal or cultural differences were

[507] "There had been talk of things like this, when I was a girl. Of women who indulged their desires with animals and even with fish. Once, at a fair, I had seen a grown woman of only fourteen inches tall. The mother had been seduced by a fairy or perhaps terrified by one, I could not remember which. Either might have as powerful an effect," in Clark, *The Nature of Monsters*, 247-248.

[508] Clark, *The Nature of Monsters*, 248.

[509] See Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* 1959-1960, Trans. Dennis Porter (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1986), 139, 71.

[510] See Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 20.

[511] Braidotti, "Signs of Wonder," 292.

phantasmatically invested with monstrous deformations. In fact, besides the aforementioned prodigy canon and the Aristotelian scientific canon, which address individual teratical occurrences, the anthropological-cosmographical canon, which targets the so-called monstrous races, became entrenched in the Middle Ages as an extremely prolific source[512] of the teratological archive, itself palimpsestically assembling successive layers of Greek mythological accounts, fabulous narratives of ancient explorers and Pliny's *Natural History,* with its catalogue of monstrous populations.[513]

For instance, the medieval conceptions surrounding these fabulous "monstrous" races, also known as the Plinian races,[514] pictured them inhabiting the outskirts of the *mappaemundi*, where the dividing line between human and non-human blurred, where they profoundly destabilised the order of creation either through their peculiar morphological traits or through their dietary and linguistic habits, which seemed to stem from outside civilisation.[515] Largely interpreted within Judeo-Christianity as degenerate humans who had fallen from an earlier state of grace, monstrous peoples raised intriguing questions for medieval travellers, theologians and philosophers, questions that revolved around their being endowed with souls or with rationality, their being descended from the same lineage as

[512] In effect, as Canguilhem shows, the monstrous races of the Middle Ages tropicalise an accumulation of morphological deformities playing at the game of exchanging body parts and organs, in a fantastic teratology that celebrates the monstrous rather than merely amounting to a census or inventory of monstrosities; see Canguilhem, "Monstrosity," 33.

[513] Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, VII 2. See also Claude Lecouteux, *Les monstres dans la Pensée médiévale européenne* (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1993), 15; Rudolf Wittkower, *Allegory and the Migration of Symbols* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977).

[514] Friedman, *The Monstrous*, 5-25.

[515] Thus, Giants and Pygmies exceeded the frames of normative human height, by their hyperbolically augmented or diminished bodily size. Moreover, particular anatomical details could concentrate loci of moral deformity: such were the single-breasted, fierce Amazons, the strap-footed Himantopodes, the one-legged Sciopods, who used their giant foot to shade themselves from the sun, the Panotii with their grossly distended ears, the Blemmyae, whose facial features were imprinted on their headless chests, or the lip-bloated Amyctyrae. Distinguished by their bizarre dietary habits were the human-flesh eating Anthropophagi or the mouthless Astomi, who survived on the scent of apples. The corpus of medical explanations targeted at offering a "plausible," rationalist elucidation of the bizarre deformations recorded in the Plinian races is tremendous. Thus, the high incidence of the so-called "lobster-claw syndrome," explainable through hereditary atavism or gene mutation, is enlisted to "unravel the mystery" of the Hippopodes, a race of horse-hoofed humans. Similarly, alternative justifications may rally anthropological insights into behavioural "anomalies": tribal cannibalism could have engendered the Anthropophagi, bodily tattooing, scarification or mutilation practices could have led to the Blemmyae, etc. See Bates, *Emblematic Monsters*, 40; Friedman, *The Monstrous*, 11-22.

man,[516] their concealment of hidden lessons that God wanted to impart on humans, and their potential of being recuperated and converted to Christianity.[517] If the cascade of historical variations on the monstrification of the peoples dwelling at the extremities of the known world expanded with the exploration of the New World in the Renaissance, with the Orientalist constructions of non-European populaces as the inverted mirror image of western civilisation, up to their strict tabulation by evolutionary anthropology in the nineteenth century, it is perhaps true that beyond the strategies of self-identification by either purging or expunging otherness there lies the awareness that strangers, foreigners, or aliens represent, as Kearney puts it, "experiences of extremity which bring us to the edge."[518]

As such, monstrous denizens thriving beyond the borders of civilisation are essential, anthropological research has shown, for reinforcing the very frontiers they imperil. If a genealogy of the wild man myth, or of the barbarian[519] policing the margins of the *polis*, were to be undertaken, one would uncover the same process of translating cultural and religious difference into the "savage exteriority" (to borrow Andrew Gibson's aforecited syntagm) that monstrous races elicited. In his genealogical investigation of the transition from the wild man myth to the Noble Savage figure of the Enlightenment period, Hayden White remarks on the fact that wildness, barbarity or savagery tend to serve as dialectical counterparts meant to authenticate by contrast civilisation, to enforce its hegemony as their antithetical contrast; this is how he defines this "technique of ostensive self-definition by negation":

> In times of sociocultural stress, when the need for positive self-definition asserts itself but no compelling criterion of self-identification appears, it is always possible to say something like: "I may not know the precise content of my own felt humanity, but I am most certainly *not* like that," and simply point to something in the landscape that is manifestly different from oneself.[520]

However, as limit experiences for individuals or communities attempting to barricade their identity against intruding others, the menaces of strangers somehow permeate the phantasmal borders erected to seclude

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[516] Casting the monstrous races in a moralising frame may well have been the norm for the medieval mind (Braidotti, "Signs of Wonder," 293), but it is highly significant that Augustine traces the pedigree of monstrous races like Cyclops, Antipodes, Hermaphrodites, Amazons, Pygmies, Giants, Sciopods, Blemmyae to the Adamic line (*City of God*, XVI: 8).

[517] Friedman, *The Monstrous*, 2.

[518] Kearney, *Strangers*, 3.

[519] On the Greeks' concern with self-definition attained by "exploring the boundaries between *self* and *other*, *self* being the Greek male subject," i.e. "not-barbarian, not-woman and not-beast," see King, "Half-Human Creatures," 138-141.

[520] Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 151.

them within spaces of *wild exteriority*. In fact, Hayden White also emphasises, a certain demythologisation and progressive despatialisation of notions like wildness/savagery/barbarism have also incurred their psychic interiorisation.[521] This, coupled with a diversification of forms of otherness and a postmodern understanding of the multiplicity, plurality, fragmentation, and indeterminacy of identity itself, has entailed a challenge to the polarisation once deemed crucial for maintaining the us-them divide, for (mis)appropriating or expelling others.

Implicit in this reconsideration of foreigners who, albeit ambivalently, ghost the margins of what delineates *and* defines a community, of their instrumental role in the dialectics of identification and alienation that characteristically unleashes, in Girardean terms, sacrificial rituals of scapegoating monstrous others, is an awareness of strangers representing an alterity that is not inaccessible to selfhood, of a foreignness that uncannily sounds a note of familiarity at the heart of the self. In this register is conducted Julia Kristeva's interrogation of the suspicion and hostility with which foreigners have been met, from the time immemorial when they were regarded as the enemy of primitive societies up to contemporary uncanny recognitions of strangeness at the intimate core of ourselves. Thus, Kristeva's *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991) raises compelling questions about the chasm or alienation gulfing up at the heart of selfhood in the context of experiences of migration, dislocation, ethnic conflict or exile. Conducted in the psycho-analytical register, her argument, playing on the Lacanian notion of extimacy and on the boundaries between inside and outside, evokes a range of responses, from the violent repudiation of the foreigner, charged with the phantasmal baggage of unfamiliarity and the fear of the unknown, to the possibility of welcoming foreignness as the constitutive inside of the self:

> Foreigner: a choked up rage deep down in my throat, a black angel clouding transparency, opaque, unfathomable spur. The image of hatred and of the other, a foreigner is neither the romantic victim of our clannish indolence nor the intruder responsible for all the ills of the polis. […] Strangely, the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder. By recognising him within ourselves, we are spared detesting him in himself.[522]

As an antidote to xenophobia and its related scapegoating strategies is, Kristeva maintains, the recognition of the foreigner within the self, the awareness of the ambiguous cohabitation of the self by "our uncanny

[521] In the sense that modern anthropology recognises the "idea of wildness as the repressed content of *both* civilised *and* primitive humanity," in White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 153.

[522] Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, Trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York, London, Toronto: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 1.

strangeness";[523] this depathologisation of the strange has an alternative curative potential since it can ultimately relieve apprehensions generated by the emergence of others on the threshold of our "proper," "solid" selves. In addition, besides avoiding to perpetuate practices of projecting others into scapegoat victims of choice, one may also forestall one's own reification at the hands of the others. Finally, if it is on the middle ground of this uncanny strangeness that the encounter between self and other occurs, then, Kristeva concludes, the category of foreigner either expands exponentially to include all selves or implodes entropically to render all others as selves.[524]

In Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self, the possibility of pairing "selfhood" and "otherness"[525] is raised, to the extent that the latter category is no longer seen as an agonistic, conflictual opposite of the former (that is, synonymous with other antonyms of "same," such as "contrary," "distinct," "diverse," "unequal," "inverse"), but is outlined as an irenic "otherness" which can be seen as "constitutive of selfhood," in the sense that the boundaries between self and other become effectively undone: "the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other, that instead one passes into the other."[526] Ricoeur's claim in *Oneself as Another* that identity is fundamentally relational and intersubjective and that an ontological hermeneutics need accommodate within the narrative constitution of a self the diversity of culturally and historically variable instantiations of alterity is resumed by Richard Kearney in *Strangers, Gods and Monsters. Interpreting Otherness* (2003). In Kearney's assessment, acknowledging oneself-as-another need not conflate but reshuffle the delicate chiasmus bridging self and other: his diacritical hermeneutics envisages a heterological eschewal of both attempts to appropriate otherness in terms of a "communion of fused horizons" and premises of an "apocalyptic rupture of non-communion,"[527] such as would resound in the Levinasian hypothesis of a radical, infinite otherness or the Derridean appreciation of otherness as sublimely dissymmetrical with the self. Instead, Kearney champions dialogism with and hospitality to strangers

[523] Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 192.

[524] In Kristeva's formulation, "[t]he foreigner is within me, hence we are all foreigners. If I am a foreigner, there are no foreigners," in Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 192.

[525] The dialectic of selfhood and otherness is further outlined as a threefold metacategory, which includes: the otherness of one's own body (the experience of one's own body (flesh) as the "mediator between the self and the world"); the otherness which is inherent in the relation of intersubjectivity (the "relation between the self and the foreign" or the "other (than) self"); and "the most deeply hidden passivity, that of the relation of the self to itself" or conscience, in Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, Trans. K. Blamey (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 318.

[526] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 3.

[527] Kearney, *Strangers*, 17-18.

without succumbing, nevertheless, to a mystique of the other. In that respect, it is vital, as he suggests, to conduct a critique of the other that should supplement contemporary critiques of the self; thus, the otherness of others should be addressed in such a manner as to discriminate "between (a) those aliens and strangers that need our care and hospitality, no matter how monstrous they might first appear, and (b) those others that really do seek to destroy and exterminate (as evidenced in genocidal slaughters)."[528]

A similar gesture of acknowledging the "monstrous arrivant," the one who is "rebellious to rule and foreign to symmetry, heterogeneous and heterotropic,"[529] belongs to Jacques Derrida, a philosopher of Nietzschean extraction in whose work monstrosity figures prominently. Derrida aligns the monstrosity of conception (cultural, scientific, discursive, or biological) at the root of normality, making it stand for the incipient, the as yet unborn, the future as yet unmaterialised, the as yet untamed. The future, he says,

> is necessarily monstrous: the figure of the future, that is, that which can only be surprising, that for which we are not prepared, you see, is heralded by species of monsters. A future that would not be monstrous would not be a future; it would already be a predictable, calculable, and programmable tomorrow. All experience open to the future is prepared or prepares itself to welcome the monstrous arrivant, to welcome it, that is, to accord hospitality to that which is absolutely foreign or strange, but also, one must add, to try to domesticate it, that is, to make it part of the household and have it assume the habits, to make us assume new habits. This is the movement of culture.[530]

For Derrida, monstrosity retains its meaning of a "composite figure of heterogeneous organisms that are grafted onto each other,"[531] yet as the abnormal specimen for which there is no name, which lies outside systems of classification, a monster always already sets the normalisation process into motion. The sublimity erupting with the monstrous (the unrecognisable, the misunderstood, the threatening, the unacceptable), disrupts the regulatory drive of power and triggers an impulse towards domestication, stabilisation, assimilation: monstrosities, as it were, materialise *and* challenge relations of power, they shatter *and* call for a redefinition of norms, they invite both denunciation as anomalousness and recognition as the norm to be. Announced at the closure of his essay "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," the imminent birth of the "as yet unnameable," the "species of the non-species," "the formless, mute,

[528] Kearney, *Strangers*, 10.
[529] Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" in *Acts of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 250.
[530] Jacques Derrida, *Points: Interviews, 1974–1994*, Trans. Peggy Kamuf et al, ed. Elizabeth Weber (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 386-387.
[531] Derrida, *Points: Interviews*, 386.

infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity" is proclaimed as that intimately foreign or strangely familiar borderline moment, a moment subsumed to the law of difference, when the future trembles in the balance and is as yet deferred.[532] Thus, the arrivant is an experience of the threshold: it is, far more than the strange or the foreign, the hospitality itself extended to the intruder or the invader. Since monsters always abide by the borders of normality holding the threat and the promise of their future redefinition, welcoming monsters, Derrida gestures, must be an ethical concern of offering nonprovisional, nonreciprocated hospitality to an other that is incommensurable, either through the transgressiveness of biological normativity implicit in a monstrous body, or through the disruption of socio-cultural normativities, in the case of foreigners, strangers, or migrants. What the following sections explore are narratives that capture the translation of the monsters' "savage exteriority" into a trope of familiar-unfamiliar extimacy, for in these novels written by Marina Warner, Salman Rusdhie and Lawrence Norfolk, welcoming the "monstrous arrivant" amounts to a modality of hospitality that preserves its irreducible otherness, holding it accountable to no instance of self-validating hegemony.

III.2.1. Out of the Orrery: Marina Warner's *Indigo, or Mapping the Waters*

Marina Warner's explicit intent underlying her re-vision[533] of the Shakespearean *Tempest* is that of producing an *alternative story* to its precursor canonical text.[534] *Indigo, or Mapping the Waters* represents what Moraru has designated as (narratively) intensive and (ideologically) extensive rewriting, which, besides engaging in a substantial reworking of textual precedents, also performs a critique of dominant narratives, ideational formations and "cultural mythologies."[535]Anchored, as the title reveals, in the imaginary wellspring of hybridisation (both narrative and corporeal), *Indigo* (ir)reverently traces its fractured lineage to *The Tempest,*

[532] Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *Writing and Difference*, Trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 294.

[533] A term, as Peter Widdowson explains, ambivalently derived from two verbs, namely *to revise* (signifying examination, amendment, improvement, correction) and to *re-envision,* primarily meaning the act of re-casting and re-assessing the original in a different light, in *Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 164, quoted in Christian Moraru, *Rewriting. Postmodern Narrative and Cultural Critique in the Age of Cloning* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 23.

[534] Marina Warner, *Signs and Wonders. Essays on Literature and Culture* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2003), 268. I have previously published my analysis of Warner's *Indigo* as part of the study Carmen Borbely, "Theriomorphic Bodies: (En)Gendering Monstrous Corporeality in Contemporary British Fiction," *Caietele Echinox* 10 (2006): 431-444.

[535] Moraru, *Rewriting*, xii, 26.

and reconsiders monstrosity by filtering West European and Caribbean myth-history through the lenses of a socioculturally revisionist frame.

To this effect, Warner resorts to a mechanism of foregrounding the silenced yet "overarching female presence" from the play, attempting to restore Sycorax, the foul sorceress, to "presence, value and power."[536] As Diane Purkiss maintains, traditional representations of the witch pictured her as an ex-centric, marginal figure, conceptually and discursively removed from centre stage to the liminal topography of doorways, thresholds, or wild spaces, such as forests, caverns, etc. With Renaissance *witch-dramas*, such as Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, spliced as they were on "classical witch-texts" as well as on emergent "discourses of exploration, discovery and colonialism in the New World,"[537] the figure of the witch became crucial, even though she was silenced and expunged from the stage proper, in the sense that she was (mis)appropriated and made to serve ideologically as the reason that invited the colonisation of new topographies.

Warner's restoration of Sycorax to the nub of this narrative of origins and reversions[538] is accomplished by inserting the Shakespearean hag figure in a transformational imagery (pertaining, she says, to alchemy or witchcraft), based on four main metamorphic processes, as highlighted in *Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other Worlds: Ways of Telling the Self* (2002). These are: mutating, hatching, splitting and doubling, all hinting at dynamic principles of creation, bearing strong analogy with various parturition processes, and yet removing attention from the maternal body as a site of uncontainable excess.

Two are the main sources that inform Warner's metamorphic imagery, running counter to notions of integral, unique identity that prevail in the Judeo-Christian tradition. First, the metamorphoses of classical myths, and, in particular, Ovid's incorporation of the Pythagorean doctrine of metempsychosis into an awareness that the universe is protean, "unceasingly progenitive, multiple and fluid."[539] Second, the historical insight, assisted by postcolonial theories of hybridity, that narratives of metamorphosis are likely to be engendered in cross-cultural spaces, situated at the "mercantile and political confluence of heterogeneous peoples, histories, and languages, a shifting, metamorphic, and phantasmal zone, where *le merveilleux Creole* (the Creole marvellous) made its appearance in different languages and different

[536] Warner, *Signs and Wonders*, 266-268.

[537] Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (London: Routledge, 1996), 250.

[538] Cf. Connor, who sees Warner's rewriting as an attempt to lay bare the violence done against myths of origin or of reversion to origins, through suppression, concealment and exclusion, in *The English Novel in History. 1950-1995* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 196-197.

[539] Marina Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other Worlds. Ways of Telling the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 5.

genres."[540] Again, Warner's commentaries in *Signs and Wonders* are illuminating. The impact of such narratives, born at the junction between classical myth and ethnographic surveys of the New World, is dual: on the one hand, they may instil a sense of the dissolution of identity; but on the other, they might open boundless possibilities of self-fashioning and re-fashioning:

> Broadly speaking, the idea of metamorphosis sets a huge tension around the idea of subjectivity, because to find yourself within a world that is in flux, that is metamorphic, that is constantly changing offers two possibilities: one, that you are fragmented and dispersed, that you are scattered, that your identity is actually lost and dismembered across the whole scenery; the other is that you are capable of any form of transformation, that you could or can be anything. […] these two states are often present and in conflict: on the one hand, you are under threat of disappearing, because your identity is subject to outside forces, and on the other you are actually capable of entering the plot of your own life and changing it.[541]

The Caribbean – to which Warner dislodges the Shakespearean plot in *Indigo* – represents such a liminal space of cultural hybridity, or, in Homi Bhabha's terms, a third space of enunciation,[542] where new cultural identities and meanings are produced through a subversion and transgression (*métissage*) of the essentialised categories of coloniser/subject and colonised/object. The Shakespearean uninhabited island is firmly identified as (and split into) the twin isles of Liamuiga/Oualie around the year 1600, which will then register several renamings, according to the power regimes claiming dominion over them: Everhope, or rather, Saint Thomas (under the rule of their first coloniser, Sir Christopher Everard, during the reign of King James); Enfant-Béate (the Blessed Child, after the latest craze at Versailles, the cult of the Christ Child, since, in mid-seventeenth century, the islands fell briefly under French rule). Starkly divided in the heyday of colonisation, Europeans and native islanders have reached, by the time of the fading empire, such levels of cross-culturation and miscegenation that Miranda, the twentieth-century descendant of the first Kit Everard, is herself creolised, albeit of a much lighter shade than the local gradations of skin colour, ranging from musty and metis to quadroon and octaroon.

The first metamorphic process in the series analysed by Warner is that of mutation; this is limned as a result of the *cross-fertilisation* of European and New World mythologies, and consists primarily of shape shifting, hybridisation, or splicing, in a radical eschewal of normal channels of procreation, with the result that the offspring produced are utterly dissimilar to the originating matrix: "the changes that take place involve swelling and opening, bursting and cracking and spilling, more akin to vegetable

[540] Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses*, 21.
[541] Warner, *Signs and Wonders*, 278.
[542] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 38.

propagation and ripening than to human sexual coupling and parturition."[543] Noticing that in the Christian eschatology, such horrific morphological amalgams are consigned to the infernal circles or are purportedly arrived at through diabolical magic, Warner has the "blue-eyed hag" undergo mutation, a deliberate structural alteration, which is the result of the "damn'd witch Sycorax" being grafted onto the figure of *la Diablesse*, the she-devil, a figure of Caribbean lore whose distinctive mark is a cloven hoof. This image of the deformed foot represents for Warner the distinguishing mark of the female storyteller, of the reviled devilish enchantress occupying the ambivalent position of both insider and outsider to her world.[544]

The sixteenth-century figure of the bestial witch[545] mutates thus into her double, the twentieth-century figure of Serafine Killebree, a "*conteuse* in the Caribbean tradition,"[546] who is displaced from her native isle of Liamuiga to the centre of the former empire. Here she voices tales of metamorphosis, of carnivalesque transformation, of origins and becomings. Thus Warner retrieves the muted witch figure from the Shakespearean master narrative, out of a desire to "pay tribute to the oral culture of women, to all preGutenberg female voices, including the storytellers of the Caribbean."[547] Serafine's narratives frame and punctuate the doubly-tiered chronotope of the novel, interweaving past and present, Caribbean wilderness and European civilisation. The opening story-telling frame ("Serafine I") introduces the motif of metamorphosis, for "everything risk[s] changing shape"[548]in the classical myths she recounts (of King Midas, Bacchic sileni and Dionysian cortèges) or in her fairy tales of Enfant-Béate (her native island curving its dragon-like spine into the sea). "Serafine II" neatly divides the novel into two halves and, while recounting a narrative of monstrosity, of the seadragon Manjiku roaming the seas that surround Liamuiga, it nevertheless ends in a twisted version of a western fairy-tale, that of Beauty and the Beast. "Serafine III" concludes the novel by overlapping the West Indian nurse and her Shakespearean precedent as the consciousness that convenes the destinies of individuals scattered across temporal and spatial divides; the prevalent motif is again ceaseless wandering, peripatetic existence, provisional rest and perpetual nomadism, all in all, the incessant pursuit of identity, of roots and destinations.

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[543] Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses*, 66.

[544] As evidenced in Warner's study of fairy tales, *From the Beast to the Blonde. On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1994), 110-128.

[545] Monstrous hags could be symbols of sin incarnate, particularly if their anatomy exacerbated features pertaining to female sexuality; see Fischer, *Monstres. Histoire du corps*, 44.

[546] As Warner states, the figure of Seraphine is also largely indebted to a literary precursor, Jean Rhys's Christophine in *Wide Sargasso Sea*; cf. Warner, *Signs and Wonders*, 266.

[547] Warner, *Signs and Wonders*, 266.

[548] Marina Warner, *Indigo, or Mapping the Waters* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1992), 4.

Unlike disruptive, incongruous mutation, hatching and its correlative, pupation (the second metamorphic subset in the aforementioned series), would pertain to organic developmental transformation and entail the emergence of new beings out of ovum-shaped shells. Such vital processes of generation, forming an important subset in the transformational pursuits of witchcraft and alchemy, bring about "permutations of dissimilarity, not of similarity, into the development of an entity."[549] While hatching implies foreseeable outcomes (like engenders like), progressing through sequential metamorphic stages, such as those inherent to the butterfly cycle, allows for the reconfiguration of identity as resistant to closure and permeable to adventitious modification.

At the core of *Indigo*, not only is the voice of the witch-hag potently heard (she is indeed the source of many of the noises the isle is full of), but femininity and monstrosity are definitely forged together through the motif of pregnancy. Waters host the totemic monster of the islands, Manjiku, an aggregate of Leviathan and Behemoth, gendered as male, yet craving the powers of female reproduction. Hence the strange association of Manjiku with the various women that he swallows and then disgorges so as to deprive them of their birthing capacities.

> Manjiku's got a snout like a crocodile, Manjiku's got pointed teeth arranged in double rows, and a mane of spikes like sea urchins, and a forked tail with razor edges he uses to slice up his food. And cut his enemies to pieces! Anything that gets in his way, slash, slash. He can work up the ocean to scuds of foam when he's cross. Manjiku's pale, pale, he can't bear the light of the sun, it burns his pale skin, his pale flesh, it leaches the life out of him in blisters and wens. You can see his bones through his warty hide, like a jellyfish, like an X-ray. He's lived that long in the sea he glows in the dark. […] What Manjiku wants – more than food, more than drink, more than sweet life itself – is to have a child of his own. Yes! Not just to have it, like a father – no, he wants to be a mother, to bring the child out of its mouth, spit out a little Manjiku, think of that! For Manjiku is a monster, a seadragon, he sets fear in the heart of every man. Yet he wants nothing better than to be a woman.[550]

Several females who drown in these waters (Estelle Desjours or Xanthe) undergo marine transformations.[551] In Warner's retelling of *The Tempest,*

[549] Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses*, 79.
[550] Warner, *Indigo*, 219-220.
[551] Estelle Desjours, who died swimming or, rather, riding aback a dolphin, reportedly "under the sea had a comb of polished oystershell and a mirror of mother-of-pearl mounted on a coral branch" (Warner, *Indigo*, 67). Drowning, Xanthe undergoes a conclusive, definitive metamorphosis at the bottom of the sea, echoing thus the story of King Midas and his daughter being turned into gold: "for Xanthe this was the final transformation: a pearl of rare size and beauty, she had become incapable of further motion in mind or body" (Warner, *Indigo*, 376). Such references echo the sea-changes in Ariel's song from *The Tempest* ("Those are pearls that were his eyes").

Miranda's mother also acquires hybrid morphic features: "half-mermaid, half-stormy petrel, like the woman-faced feathered sirens who blow about on the wind and plummet down to call the sailors to come their way."[552] The body of Sycorax becomes dry, sterile: she does not give birth to Caliban, but rescues the unborn infant from a slave mother's womb, naming him Dulé. Instead, Sycorax acquires a counterfeit fecundity, that of her imagination, extending her preternatural insights and powers into producing indigo and healing the sick islanders. This fertility of the mind rather than of the womb allows Sycorax to unscramble to chorus of voices (the other noises the isle is filled with) resounding from the shipwrecked corpses of the African slaves, washed ashore after the disintegration of their cradle-hearse ship – indeed, disgorged by the sea and laid to rest by the islanders to preclude pollution. The transformation these restless, disembodied spirits are clamouring for is disruptive of the process of natural decay, and envisages the submarine mutations their bodies would undergo as a guarantee of permanence, rather than as a threat to identity:

> Another cried, "Grit for oysters…"
> Then another, "Bonemeal for vines…"
> And yet another, "We'll make rich loam…"
> "From our carcases, the melon and the gourd…"
> "From our flesh, mermaid's purses, dolphin garlands – Haha!"
> and another seemed to laugh too, and said, "Blood roses for the coral, black dust for the sand…."[553]

What is essential is that Sycorax's sterility of womb, her dispossession of birthing capacities and circumvention of "natural" pregnancy are what attract her monstrification in the first place, whereas her status as an outsider to the norms of Western civilisation secures her ostracisation as the monstrous, savage other. Sycorax does indeed deliver Dulé, but by hatching the infant out of his dead mother's swollen abdomen. It is at this particular point that Sycorax's enfreakment begins – her transmogrification into a "monster's dam," as she will be retained in the cultural memory, *apud* Shakespeare. As Bogdan states, freakery is not an intrinsic anatomical condition, but rather the enactment of a social arrangement, a social construction or manufacture, concretised in the "performance of a stylised presentation."[554] Sycorax becomes a scapegoat, experiencing monstrification both endogenously and exogenously and confirming the Girardean assumption that the combination of human and beastly elements is a modality of paramount importance in assignations of monstrosity. Thought to

[552] Warner, *Indigo*, 57-58.
[553] Warner, *Indigo*, 83.
[554] Bogdan, *Freak Show*, 3.

exhibit particular affinities with the goat, "an extremely evil animal,"[555] witches and sorcerers, the medieval scapegoat figures of choice, are marked by this conflation of bodily and moral monstrosity: their bodies are riven with victimary signs, hideous deformities in particular, to the extent that they physically hover on the brink of bestiality (cloven feet, incipient horns, blemished faces, etc.).

First, Sycorax is enfreaked by the islanders themselves, who are repelled by her marked similarity to the seamonster Manjiku and suspect her of intercourse with the beasts or sorcery: "She'd produced the child in her concoctions, some said, by taking the foetus-curled black pit of a certain fruit only she understood; or she'd mated with one of the animals she tamed and this was the progeny."[556] She is officially proclaimed as a wisewoman who is endowed with *sangay*, prodigious powers and preternatural insights and is a worshipper of Adesangé, the god of fire. Then, she is obliquely inscribed as such in the official records of the island's colonisers. Kit Everard, for instance, a Prospero-Ferdinand deprived of any magic propensities – he is everything (a pioneer among planters, a buccaneer, a dreamer, a civiliser, a settler, a hero, a gentleman) but a magician – ingratiates himself with the savage natives and learns from them the secrets of the isle, prior to mutilating and moulding them into docile subjects. As the colonisation process nears its completion, Kit's correspondence with his father scantily references "this benighted creature and her foul magic,"[557] and despite the tremendous apparatus of knowledge deployed to subdue Sycorax's magic, she is nevertheless eventually erased or obscured from official historiography, be it either King James's scroll, the French missionary and Enlightenment scholar Pere Labat's chronicle of the natives' customs, or the illuminated parchment (only a copy of which survives as the Everards' heirloom) in which, waist-deep in waters, a Gulliveresque Kit dominates the native midgets. Significantly enough, it is through interpellation that Sycorax becomes the "damn'd witch" and that her *sangay* turns into foul magic, and it is Marina Warner's insight that she should have made rather explicit the monstrification of Sycorax:

> The description of Sycorax's magic circulated and of course grew in the telling: scarred by fire, she now played with the element, burning circles of flame round creatures […] Adesangé, god of the volcano, was the lord of Sycorax's rites […] the fervour of the woman who had once been so sceptical of others' belief in her powers, who used to insist that all mysteries lay in the processes of nature and need only be observed and analysed and understood.[558]

[555] Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 48.
[556] Warner, *Indigo*, 86.
[557] Warner, *Indigo*, 136.
[558] Warner, *Indigo*, 174.

In fact, Warner reinforces the constructedness of Sycorax's monstrosity even in *Signs and Wonders,* where she takes issue with Kermode's seminal study on *The Tempest* and shows how the distinction neatly operated there between theurgy/good magic and goety/sorcery/maleficium breaks down, since Prospero resorts to both of these forms of supernatural manipulation and usurps Sycorax not only of her island, but also of her magical powers over the elements:

> So his magic does not figure as malign – except to Caliban, of course, who rains down curses on his head. […] Yet in the course of the play Prospero spellbinds the survivors of the storm which he commanded Ariel to raise, he conjures spirits to harass his victims, torments Caliban with phantom pinches and stings and beatings and pursues him with dogs; he performs these magus-like feats through Ariel his airy messenger, and Ariel creates an historical as well as emotional link between Prospero and Sycorax. More particularly, Ariel, who was once bound in a cloven pine by Sycorax, now serves Prospero against his will.[559]

Besides this act of dispossession, whereby Sycorax is deprived of her Circean powers, Prospero's dramatic abjuration of his arts is heavily indebted to Medea's speech from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which leads Warner to conclude that: "Circe and Medea, these two malignant but alluring witches, seem to be standing in the wings of the play and the lights behind them cast their interlaced shadows across the stage, forming the phantom, Sycorax, whispering to Prospero how to command the insubstantial pageant of the action."[560] Spectralizing Prospero and depriving him of magical *sangay*, for Kit's twentieth-century heir, Anthony Everard, possesses merely a secular version of Sycorax's transformative sorcery (namely excellent skills at playing the strategic game of Flinders), Warner performs a restorative gesture of revisioning and enfleshing Sycorax as the repository of local spirituality.

The third metamorphic process, splitting, describes the severance or separation of consciousness from its bodily container, all in all approximated by the African and Caribbean belief in zombification, which was disseminated then into Europe throughout the imperial cultural-political geography. Brought about by the mind-body scission, zombies, whom Warner sees crystallised in the figure of the Creole outsider (Antoinette Cosway in Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, or Miranda in *Indigo,* for instance), are to be distinguished from disembodied spirits, the phantom condition being limned as a living, mortal husk marooning in search for a soul. For these female protagonists, this could be translated as a suspended state of indeterminacy, of wavering between conflicting attachments to diverse

[559] Warner, *Signs and Wonders*, 241.
[560] Warner, *Signs and Wonders*, 242.

cultures, locations, or identities. While in the case of Antoinette, zombification is completed through her metamorphosis into the madwoman in the attic, the Bertha Mason of Jane Eyre's grand narrative, Miranda experiences creolisation as awareness of the various strata, influences and cultures that meld into her multi-layered identity and that, with the help of the cohesive, centripetal stories Seraphine tells her, avert the threat of dispersal by allowing her character to orbit within the Shakespearean orrery.

Transformational processes, as well as the narratives that activate them in *Indigo* point to a fluctuating ontological consistency, to liminality, to a volatile and fluid identity. As Warner says, "Tales of metamorphosis express conflicts and uncertainties, and in doing so, they embody the transformational power of story-telling itself, revealing stories as activators of change."[561] Identity becomes indeed an endless chorographic[562] process of "Mapping the Waters" – an ongoing project of imag(in)ing, mapping and dismantling borders (geographical, as well as cultural), since most characters suffer displacement, dislocation and are in perpetual pursuit of "imaginary homelands."[563] To reinforce this idea of nomadism as the essential condition of mankind, Warner uses two epigraphs for her novel, which convey the idea of displacement, diaspora, dislodgement. There is an unacknowledged tension between the two paratextual frames, in the sense that the extract from Derek Walcott's quasi-Homeric epic *Omeros*, also set in the Caribbean, counterpoints the dis-location of cultures into an organic blend of nature/culture, whereas the quotation from Empson pithily affirms peripatetic restiveness as a universal human condition, making *Indigo* "a novel about migrations, geographical, colonial, imaginary and emotional. It's about crossing barriers, and about erecting them, about being foreign and strange in the eyes of someone else, and about undoing this strangeness in order to find what can be held in common."[564]

Assisted by Serafine's distillation of the Black Atlantic's cultural memory, Miranda herself perpetuates the idea of maroon (from the French *marroner,* meaning to be on the run), as she merges with this "imaginative symbol of the fugitive in our time," who crosses borders, breaks through boundaries and longs to inhabit "a place of elective affinities."[565] Splitting, the divisive process whereby consciousness is separated from the body, afflicts Sycorax herself. Locked in her vertical grave at the foot of the

[561] Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses*, 210.
[562] See Richard Todd, "The Retrieval of Unheard Voices in British Postmodernist Fiction: A.S. Byatt and Marina Warner," in *Liminal Postmodernisms: The Postmodern, the (Post-)Colonial and the (Post-)Feminist*, ed. Theo D'Haen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), 103.
[563] Warner, *Signs and Wonders*, 264.
[564] Warner, *Signs and Wonders*, 264.
[565] Warner, *Signs and Wonders*, 265.

sacred *saman* tree, yet condemned to the fate of a mortal-immortal, the blue-eyed hag continues, across the centuries, to generate and record the noises on the isle. Warner challenges here notions of history as monodirectional flux, for time is likened to a cauldron that alternatively comingles selves and, then, hatches or pupates them – to maintain the Warnerian reference – out of the swirling maelstrom of otherness:

> the indigenous islanders could conceive differently of the time and space they occupied, and see it as a churn or a bowl, in which substances and essences were tumbled and mixed, always returning, now emerging into personal form, now submerged into the mass in the continuous present tense of existence, as in one of the vats in which Sycorax brewed the indigo.[566]

Doubling, the fourth and final way of telling the self in Warner's *Fantastic Metamorphoses*, posits uncanny threats to notions of integral, self-contained identity, and registers several variations, ranging from permutations of outer and inner selves, to monstrous doppelgangers (the self being shadowed by an *other* self). The agrestic cradle, flanking and at the same time defining civilisation, was also inhabited, much prior to the age of European colonial expansion, by the wild man,[567] who has consistently functioned – if we are to credit Hayden White – as a culturally self-authenticating device for the civilised European.[568] Acknowledging that Shakespeare's wild man is partly moulded onto the figure of the European *homo salvaticus*, and partly indebted to descriptions of the exotic savages encountered in the New World, Kermode maintains that Caliban is central to the play, to the extent that he structurally enforces the logic of binary oppositions whereby civility can be ascertained.[569] Nature is thus contrasted with "nurture" (education/cultivation), but also with innate grace or nobility of spirit, with refined morals and virtue, as well as with consummate bodily beauty. Caliban is thus consistently pictured as the counterpart of Prospero, the magus (the "natural" man *v.* the "artist" delving in supernatural craft); of Miranda (subjected to the same process of education, yet with altogether

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[566] Warner, *Indigo*, 122.

[567] From the Greek *agrios*, meaning wild, non-domesticated. Used by Roger Bartra to define the extramural space of the *polis*, that which lies beyond civilised space, in *Wild Men in the Looking Glass. The Mythic Origins of European Otherness*, Trans. Carl T. Berrisford (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 9-13.

[568] White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 151-152.

[569] As Kermode emphasises: "Some thought of the Indian as natural and therefore unspoilt; so Montaigne in the essay 'Of Cannibals' to which Shakespeare probably alludes in Gonzalo's speech on the commonwealth […]. Others, and Shakespeare among them, thought him natural and therefore base, degenerate, lacking in cultivation and 'better nature,'" in *Renaissance Essays* (London and Glasgow: Collins, Fontana Books, 1971), 248.

different results);[570] of the European noblemen (*naturally* inferior to them, hence, *naturally,* a slave to them); of Ferdinand (consistent with the romance pattern, inner deformity is platonically reflected in Caliban's outward deformity, or *viceversa*).

Successively called in *The Tempest*: "a savage and deformed slave" (in the list of *dramatis personae*); "a freckled whelp hag-born – not honoured with / A human shape"; "a thing most brutish"; "a strange fish"; "this puppy-headed monster. A most scurvy monster"; "half a fish and half a monster"; "misshapen knave"; "demi-devil,"[571] Caliban's name is etymologically derived from several possible sources, the most plausible being a corruption of "cannibal"[572] – one umbrella term under which the fabulous races encountered by Renaissance travellers, or imagined to inhabit the margins of the earth, were collapsed together, given their different dietary habits. Although cannibalism does not specifically rank amongst Caliban's nonhuman characteristics in *The Tempest*, Warner's novel outlines the colonists' strategies of monstrifying Dulé. Thus, in a letter addressed to his father, Lord Clovelly, Kit Everard unwittingly reveals how, fearing his witchcraft, the colonists attempt to subdue the rebellious slave and contain his aberrant nature by naming him, by inserting him in a category:

> Some of our men call him "cannibal," seeking to undo the power of his monstrousness by naming it, like to conjuring. 'Tis to my mind a false notion, and I prefer the lisping usage of the children, Caliban. […] I know them to be human creatures made in God's image too, the womenfolk most lovely and most temperate (for the most part), and I would not abet the evil Spaniard in his slanders. Yet some are dangerous to our cause […] The Good Book has taught us their image, they must be outcasts with the mark of Cain upon them, Ishmaels for whom the savage wilderness is home till they come to know the wisdom of the Lord.[573]

The other possible source – "Cauliban," the Romani term for "black" – tends to account for Caliban's abjection *via* similar biases that Jacobean society espoused towards travelling gypsies, their pagan beliefs and practices.[574] Again, while no definite references to Caliban's blackness are made in the play, Warner punctuates this detail into explicitness: Dulé, the

[570] Caliban does learn the language of his master, yet seems to have a marked preference for expletives: "Hers is the good seed which benefits by nurture; he is the 'born devil on whose nature/Nurture will never stick'" (Kermode, *Renaissance*, 251).

[571] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (Stilwell, KS: Digireads.com, 2005), 3, 17, 20, 41, 46, 52, 84.

[572] In its turn, "cannibal" could represent a distortion of "Carib," in whom Columbus seems to have detected the fabulous anthropophagi of the Plinian races (cf. Warner, *Signs and Wonders*, 257, 260).

[573] Warner, *Indigo*, 201.

[574] Warner, *Signs and Wonders*, 261.

child disgorged onto the shores of Liamuiga from the bowels of the slave ship, epitomises the Black Atlantic, or the so-called middle passage of the slave trade, which disseminated black diasporic communities from the coasts of Africa to those of the New World. Colour symbolism is crucial in Warner's novel; far from being limited to a Manichean duality of black against white, colours are disposed into a spectrum of gradients that unite rather than separate diverse shades and nuances. Warner exploits this transitional colour imagery and the novel's title, along with the hyphenated subtitles of its chapters, endorses the crossing of temporal, cultural and identitarian thresholds.[575]

> I called the novel *Indigo,* with a subtitle, "Mapping the Waters," because I wanted to introduce a pattern of many colours, and suggest their mingling. The light I was trying to shed on history was made up as light is from strands of different colours — themes and moods, not races or flesh tones. The book moves through indigo to maroon, the point being that indigo sounds related to "indigenous" (though this isn't so) and is the original colour used in "blueprints." It's the colour of the ink used for the first pattern. I wanted the novel to look for the story or scheme that lay beneath the visible layers. That is not to suggest that an original truth exists which could be retrieved and retraced. But there is always another story beyond the story, there is always as it were another deeper blueprint. I was writing about change from the beginnings, as far as they could be disclosed.[576]

Serafine's palms, just like Sycorax's body, are imprinted with the colour of indigo, "as if she had steeped them in ink to bring out the pattern."[577] Skin discards the markers of ethnicity and becomes a discursive, scriptible surface onto which cultural meaning is enciphered: mapped with dark, crisscrossing, wandering lines, Feeny's palms literally incorporate the elusive narrative structure Miranda eagerly awaits to discern. For this, she must go layer underneath layer, blueprint underneath blueprint, at stake being the very possibility of retrieving "original" shades of identity. In fact, like identity, the indigo produced in Sycorax's cauldron, which is concurrently original and end colour, blueprint and finality, is the result of consecutive transmutations, in the course of which shades successively blend and pupate, covering the entire chromatic spectrum:

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[575] Thus, Part I is titled Lilac/Pink and is largely staged in London, 1948; Part II is Indigo/Blue and retrieves the Liamuiga of the 1600s from the vantage point of the present; Part III, Orange/Red, charts Liamuiga's fretful history of colonisation from 1619 to its remapping as Enfant-Béate in 1700; Part IV, Gold/White is alternatively set in Paris and Enfant-Béate in the 1960s; Part V, Green/Khaki (Enfant-Béate, 1969) and Part VI, Maroon/Black (1980s) trace the revival of independence movements in the Caribbean as well as the restless search for provisional roots by the descendants of the islands' initial colonisers.

[576] Warner, *Signs and Wonders*, 265.

[577] Warner, *Indigo*, 4.

> The blue I used to make, she thought to herself, was the culmination of a sequence. It marked the end of the long process of transformations – starting with the seething leaves of the plant, then the reeking green stage of the first steepings, and the sulphurous yellow stage of the liquor before it was exposed to the air, then binding with the air, it gradually turned to blue.[578]

Serafine's stories similarly echo the grafting, interweaving and splitting of European and West Indian motifs. Insofar as doubling is concerned, not only does Serafine claim a twofold literary parentage (Shakespeare's Sycorax and Jean Rhys's Christophine from *Wide Sargasso Sea*), but most of *The Tempest*'s protagonists register similar duplications. Thus, for instance, contemporary Miranda's counterpart is Xanthe, the golden girl whose agent of metamorphosis is either King Midas or Princess Alicia; conversely, Miranda is abstracted from the quasi-Shakespearean seventeenth-century setting and supplanted by the figure of Ariel, "another stranger's child" (gendered feminine this time), for whom Sycorax can be a foster mother. Warner "undoes the enmity" from the Shakespearean plot and renders Sycorax and Ariel welded together ("cloven") in the "doubled oneness of a woman and her child."[579]

As regards *Indigo,* it is perhaps through its reshuffling of the chutnified Shakespearean characters into patterns that are at once similar and dissimilar to their precedents that Warner orbits most significantly out of the orrery. Serafine/Sycorax and Ariel/Miranda, "old hag and lovely Amazon," offstage vilified witch and compliant daughter, on the one hand, and Shakespeare's monstrous *homo sylvestris* turned conquered other, on the other hand, are redistributed into a continuum of identity-monstrosity, restored to presence and valorised as avatars of humanity.

III.2.2. "Whither Albion?" Chutnified Identities in Marina Warner's *The Leto Bundle*

Like in *Indigo,* a process of fragmentation and redistribution of chutnified identities is at work in Marina Warner's *The Leto Bundle* (2001), which ultimately might be described as the parataxic accommodation of two asymmetrical identitarian projects.[580] First, like a genealogist, the novelist excavates the meanings buried in the artefactual archive that accompanies the "Leto bundle," with a view to isolating the identity of the Greek Titaness. Second, the novel's distribution of Leto's selves through endlessly

[578] Warner, *Indigo*, 147.
[579] Warner, *Indigo*, 110.
[580] Previously published as Carmen-Veronica Borbely, "'Wither Albion?' Chutnificated Identities in Marina Warner's The Leto Bundle," in *Constructions of Identity (V)*, ed. Rares Moldovan and Petronia Petrar (Cluj: Napoca Star, 2009), 47-57.

deferred hyperlinks across reticulated nodes of signification brings about an awareness that in contemporaneity, identity may be represented as a rhizomatic matrix of independent albeit interconnected and cross-referential plateaus, which are "always in the middle, not at the beginning or the end," shaping a "continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities whose development avoids any orientation toward a culminating point or external end."[581] Thus, unwrapping the archival bundle of Leto's identity risks unravelling no core identity and no final, definitive reinstantiation of this mother of the Letoides (Apollo, the sun god, and Artemis, the moon goddess), whose misty origins and violence-ridden pregnancy are enmeshed, in Warner's mythography, with those of another of Zeus' unwitting consorts: Leda, who birthed, by hatching, the twofold pairs of twins (Helen, Clytemnestra; Castor, Pollux), who are further spliced as Phoebus and Phoebe in a book that, to use Deleuze and Guattari's stratoanalysis, is structured like clusters of plateaus intercommunicating through microfissures, like in a brain, or through underground stems, like in a rhizome.[582] Within this reticular frame, Leto's arrival as an asylum seeker at the gates of civilisation is "monstrous" not in the sense that she encapsulates a monolithic otherness that demands banishment because of its polluting potential, but in the Derridean acceptation of the new type of heterotopic/heterotropic identity that ought to be heralded as the identitarian mode to be. Thus, according to the interpretation provided by Kim McQuy (the Rushdiesque ventriloquist of the novel), Leto's fractured, composite identity ultimately epitomises not a threat to the purity of the nation, but a flickering signifier of the mongrelised nation itself, a unifying symbol and deity for all exiles, contemporary and ancient alike, seeking sanctuary within homelands of the imagination. As Marina Warner explains,

> In the context of current metamorphic writings, I also see my own protagonist, Leto, as a woman in flux, belonging to several times and places, a resurrected body subject to a sequence of ordeals […] For me, the impossible journey of Leto in her various guises across time and through different media, messages, and documents operated as a way of giving voice to a woman of our time, a refugee such as we see every day, in the streets of our cities and, above all, on our TV screens, a hate figure, a scapegoat for our ills.[583]

(Dis)embodying the migrants' condition of simultaneous belonging and not-belonging, Warner's title heroine endorses the notion of exile as trauma,

[581] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Trans. and foreword by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 24.
[582] See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand*, 24.
[583] Warner, *Signs and Wonders*, 289.

coterminous with the experience of ravishment that Leto/Leda succumbs to after literally fleeing from her shapeshifting persecutor across the vastness of earth, water and air. Estrangement, after all, hovers between the loss of and the quest for the integrity once extant between a self and a native place: as Leto says, "[u]ntil someone takes me – not for a stranger, not for an intruder, until someone takes me in, takes me home… I'll never rest. That's the curse I bear."[584] Warner underscores the idea of exile as wayfaring between elusive points of departure and evasive points of destination, spatial and temporal alike, outlining nomadism as the sole experience that can accommodate foreignness; nevertheless, she also suggests that, with globalisation and the escalating dialectics of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation, the quandaries surrounding dislocation – otherwise a generic human condition – have spiralled into an unprecedented crisis, posing challenges to the way consecrated notions like culture, history, or the nation itself are to be redefined: "we're none of us the real thing, we're all of us mixed up and we have to take form here there and everywhere, we have to question the past in order to make ourselves a new future."[585] Does the idea of nationhood hold up in the face of today's volatile communications geography, or is it losing ground to more fluid accommodations of communal identities within the ever shifting boundaries of global networks? Is the tension once extant between, on the one hand, the nation, that political community imagined "as both inherently limited and sovereign,"[586] and foreignness, on the other hand, now being supplanted by conflicts between globalism and localism, to the extent that the nation is but a flickering interface between the supra-national and the sub-national spheres?[587] Is it that turn-of-the-millennium patterns of flow (demographic, financial, informational) have entailed the liquefaction of borders (national, socio-cultural, geophysical), or is such deterritorialisation constantly undermined by the reterritorialising resurgence of (fundamentalist, purist, nationalist) agendas threatening to congeal those borders back into place?[588] Wither the nation? Or, as Marina Warner queries the state of nationhood in her narrative, "Wither Albion?"

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[584] Marina Warner, *The Leto Bundle* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2001), 29.

[585] Warner, *The Leto Bundle*, 395, 396.

[586] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1983), 6.

[587] I am referring here to Morley and Robins' analysis of the way in which space and place are being reconfigured into a new geography with permeable, rather than fixed frontiers, which is "characterised by global networks and an international space of information flows; by an increasing crisis of the national sphere; and by new forms of regional and local activity," in David Morley and Kevin Robins, *Spaces of Identity. Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries* (London and New York, 1995), 1.

[588] See Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001).

In *The Leto Bundle*, this question crops up in a debate hosted by a newly created governmental department of Cultural Identities: it addresses the "critical turn" that the issue of nationhood has taken in the age of globalisation, multiculturalism, and mass migration: "What is our national identity? What are our national identities? How do we define today, in a world beset by strife, international and civil, an idea of home and belonging?"[589] Chutnification is the answer advocated by Kim McQuy, a Tirzahner orphan turned schoolteacher in Enoch, Albion, who voices a programmatic Rushdiesque rejection of "the absolutism of the pure"[590] and a celebration of impurity, pollution, and multicultural hybridisation (comingling, confusion, conjoining) in a country whose very history and culture bear the imprint of corrupted pedigrees, of mongrelisation:

> [I]t's our history that is mongrel, our culture is mongrel. […] I like mongrels. I like mongrelisation. Newcomers, the stranger who walks into town, the creatures who inhabit other worlds – these are all fascinating to us, they drive history and stories and films and … curiosity. They put a lift in our step, they stir up energy, they inspire new defences of old ways, and new ways to kick free of the traces of the past we don't want.[591]

Chutnification, or the mongrelisation of the nation, amounts to a cross-cultural merger of identities (implicit in the Leto bundle) and is limned through the Warnerian metamorphic imagery that, as seen above, revolves around mutating, hatching, splitting and doubling. These engender the cross-spatial and cross-temporal facets of a migratory identity that lithely navigates inside and outside provisional frontiers, just like the female figurehead that McQuy finds to be emblematic of the chutnified nation's future as a synoptic sample of the planetary diaspora. Ancient goddess and contemporary migrant, Leto becomes a chronotopian palimpsest of dislocated identities, of the "diasporic denizens of our muddled-up world."[592] In a classical deployment of the body politic metaphor, McQuy, a self-defined "stateless person," scours the archival bundle of the National Museum of Albion's latest acquisition – the bundle of rags, artefacts and papyri presumably accompanying a woman's mummified body (which gives the title metaphor, itself based on an assumption that is erroneous, yet validated to some extent by Leto's shrivelling and aging across the span of millennia) – and spins an entire mythology around Leto's simultaneously unreal and hyperreal presence, pivoting on her his web-based project for HSWU ("History Starts With Us"), a political movement designed to take

[589] Warner, *The Leto Bundle*, 84.
[590] Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands. Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta Books in association with Viking Penguin, 1991), 394.
[591] Warner, *The Leto Bundle*, 93-94.
[592] Warner, *The Leto Bundle*, 92.

stock of the nation's "visible presences" or intimate strangers (foreigners, outsiders, former colonials, etc.).

Kim McQuy's venture amounts indeed to a genealogical reconstitution of Leto's bundle, aiming to trace the descent of those silenced ("the dispersed and the drowned") presences from history: "History's full of hidden memories that have been drowned and drowned it seemed for ever – so what happened to the unstoried, untold, unremembered?"[593] Absent(ed) from the bundle of rags found inside the beautiful cartonnage hosted by the museum, Leto's presence is summoned into existence, although it remains unclear to what extent her metamorphic identity acquires (in)determinacy as the product of McQuy's archival fantasy (to what extent it is a "phenomenon of the library,"[594] as Foucault might say):

> it's not that leto comes back in another shape as…a wolf or a goose or a salmon or a cuttlefish or whatever…the way Buddhists believe this is different *she* is different she's always in time present cutting across ours that's always going by so she's of all time of our time or put it another way she's a story and stories have a life and a time all of their own.[595]

This is exactly what Kim, the genealogist does: he retrieves Leto from the "bundle of old bandages,"[596] reconstructs her imaginatively, shedding layer after layer of papyri, of paper skin, applying similar regenerative techniques to those involved in the reconstructive surgery of Phoebe's skin, whose body was maimed in the Tirzahner bombing. Skin is – both organically and symbolically – an ambivalent sign, insofar as identity is concerned, since it points to both our, say, *ipse* identity, "our transformability, our *alentity*, so to speak, or ability to become other" and to *idem* identity, "our ability to persist and survive in that becoming other."[597] The canvas sheets surrounding Leto's absent body in her casket correspond to the contemporary understanding of identity as flat superfice rather than meaningful depth: they act like skin, providing an interface between the self and the world, and rather than working like a mere membrane, screen or surface, they serve as a place of comingling, not separating inside and outside, self and other, permeable and traversable as they are in two directions (their meaning is constructible in a perpetually ongoing negotiation between chronicler and archivist, between story teller and story interpreter).

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[593] Warner, *The Leto Bundle*, 120, 121.
[594] Foucault, *Language*, 91.
[595] Warner, *The Leto Bundle*, 139.
[596] Warner, *The Leto Bundle*, 4.
[597] Connor, *The Book of Skin*, 32.

Beginning as a Titaness, ravished by Zeus, doomed to wander in the barren wilderness by a vengeful goddess, drifting westwards across the Mediterranean, witnessing horrendous atrocities and, eventually, becoming an asylum seeker in contemporary Albion, Leto has multiple narratives of identity which, as Warner attests, "can't really be pinned to a particular source, and claims of discovering such origins reveal the mythological hunger for stable genealogies – something that can never be appeased."[598] This is quite evident in the title: the "bundle" suggests, firstly, the heterogeneous sheaf of material objects onto which the story is inscribed (buttons, shells, jewels, linen bands); secondly, the bundle is an archival depository of Leto's narrative of identity, charting her progression from the Titaness seduced by the shapeshifting god to the emblematic spirit of homeless wanderers; thirdly, it serves as a trope for the migrant mongrelised, patchwork, mosaic selves of our times, since Leto's identity is unceasingly transformable.[599]

As (provisionally) inventoried by Hereward Meeks, the mid-nineteenth century archivist, the archive includes artefacts, memorabilia, chronicles, petitions, one mummified frog, a woman's leather sandal, a tortoise shell, the upper left canine of a wolf, three infant's milk teeth, one earring, lazuli work c. 1250, a mother-of-pearl button inscribed KIM (*Kalē Iērē Mnemosynē*), various fragments and documents on papyrus, linen, and vellum, maps, drawings, and sketches, Greek, Latin manuscripts and English translations, works of fiction, email correspondence, digitised museum guides, academic lectures and… [Many lacunae]![600] Out of these lacunae, Leto emerges as a contemporary refugee whose pliable identity traverses time and space, evincing both permanence and flux. Her peripatetic identity encompasses a Hellenistic mummy, excavated from a tomb apparently carved a millennium after the fall of Troy, a cuttlefish splashing ink at her seducer, a guest and protégé of a cave-dwelling she-wolf in Lycania, Laetitia Deodata, raised in a convent in Cadenas-la-Jolie, proposed for canonisation, Lettice, aboard a Victorian ship delivering Greek marbles to the heart of the Empire, a masseuse in Italy, Ella, a prostitute during the siege of Tirzah, and Ella Outis, who recites a threnody for her murdered son in contemporary Albion.

Metamorphoses, Warner contends, "deny death and fold time; they bring ancient stories into everyday scenery and populate the landscape with living characters, they overturn destruction and death through miraculous escapes,

[598] Warner, Marina. *Signs and Wonders*, 276.

[599] See Chantal Zabus, "Mingling and Metamorphing: Articulations of Feminism and Postcoloniality in Marina Warner's Fiction," in *The Contemporary British Novel since 1980*, ed. Acheson, James and Sarah C.E. Ros (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 118-128.

[600] Warner, *The Leto Bundle*, 75-77.

through transfigurations."[601] Leto's metamorphoses involve practically all the four processes described by the author in her 2002 study as likely to instil a sense of the dissolution of identity, but also opening endless possibilities of self-fashioning and re-fashioning: mutation (Leto's violent translation between species, her leaping across species boundaries when threatened with rape); hatching (Leda's prodigious maternity, her monstrous engendering of navel-less twins – Apollo and Artemis, Phoebus and Phoebe, Kim McQuy and Phoebe); splitting (her zombification, in the sense that, as an outsider to the cultures she peruses, she appears as a living, mortal husk marooning in search for a soul/home, permanently suspended in a state of indeterminacy, of wavering between conflicting attachments to diverse cultures, locations, identities); and doubling (her spectralisation, her hyperreal instantiation behind a computer screen when addressing McQuy). All these permutations of outer and inner selves, inserted in narratives of transformation that similarly rely on grafting, interweaving and splitting ("[i]f the themes of the stories are metamorphic, so are their effects,"[602] offer significant metaphors for the displacement and dislocation which contemporary figurations of identity as nomadic and fluid involve. As will be seen, like Rushdie with his "strange metamorph," Warner adopts the notion of porous identitarian frontiers as the distinguishing phenomenon of our times.

The "savage exteriority" of others – whether they be the hordes of barbarians flooding the gates of the *polis*, anomalous races pushed to the farthest edges of imagined geographies, or foreigners pushing through the frontiers of familiar territories – is largely invalidated by Warner's attempts at charting the relational economy that, in an age crediting subjectivity to be multiple, decentred, nonfixed and heteroclite, bridges rather than deepens the chasm between self and other. Thus, in an age of increasingly collapsible frontiers, subjective and spatial alike, Kim McQuy's advocacy of chutnification as the identity process of choice is tantamount to a reassessment of "savage exteriority" as the savage interiority which allows for a recognition of foreigners as selves in others and for an understanding of their welcomers as others in selves.

III.2.3. Spectral Encounters: The Fabulous Other in Lawrence Norfolk's *The Pope's Rhinoceros*

In *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, Foucault suggests that the revelation of the library as a dynamic site of representation has redefined the modern fantastic, with its intriguing bestiary of bizarre creatures, as a phantasmal domain that is no longer the exclusive preserve of nature's

[601] Warner, *Signs and Wonders*, 282.
[602] Warner, Marina. *Signs and Wonders*, 278.

incongruous flights of fancy or dormant reason's distorted workings, but a "prodigious reserve" of endlessly generable fabulous beasts, which awaits activation, through wakeful, relentless attention and fervent erudition, out of travelogues, illuminated manuscripts or scientific treatises that are quiescently inter-communicating in the archives: "It may be, as well, that these creatures of unnatural issue escaped from the book, from the gaps between the open pages or the blank spaces between the letters. More fertile than the sleep of reason, the book perhaps engenders an infinite brood of monsters."[603] One such creature of the imagination, seeking release from the textual and graphic interstices of a many-layered archive, is the titular referent of Lawrence Norfolk's second novel, an exotic animal that was misbirthed in its passageway from archive into actuality or from the edges to the core of the *mappaemundi*, as well as misshapen into the iconographic rendition of an altogether *other* beast.[604] Laying bare the mechanisms of misrepresentation, which, in keeping with Foucault's notion of the germinative archive, may supplement the infinite array of monstrous morphologies with an endlessly replenishable brood, *The Pope's Rhinoceros* (1996) appears intent on solving the enigma of the referentially inaccurate subject of a master print designed by Albrecht Dürer in 1515, making it possible for Norfolk's text to be read as an ekphrastic narrative about the Renaissance engraver's famous woodcut of the single-horned Indian rhinoceros and, ultimately, literalising the Foucauldian contention that

> [i]n the thought of the Middle Ages, the legions of animals, named once and for all by Adam, symbolically bear the values of humanity. But at the beginning of the Renaissance, the relations with animality are reversed; the beast is set free; it escapes the world of legend and moral illustration to acquire a fantastic nature of its own."[605]

Purportedly derived from an eye-witness account of the outlandish gift presented to the Portuguese King, Manuel I by a Gujarati Sultan, Dürer's imaginative retrieval of what would become affixed for centuries in the European mind as the quintessential rhinocerotic image evinces a radically composite morphology indebted – as Norfolk's "archival quest"[606] seeks to demonstrate – to a plethora of textual and visual precedents. Ornamental armour notwithstanding (notice the re-*produced* rhino's skin knobs, its prominently arched ribs and its unwieldy breastplate), Dürer's woodcut appeared so naturalistic as to fallaciously assign the animal to the Indian

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603 Foucault, *Language*, 94.

604 Previously published as Carmen Bujdei, "Fabulous Encounters: The Naumachia in Lawrence Norfolk's *The Pope's Rhinoceros*," *Euphorion* 9-10 (2006): 18-19.

605 Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, 21.

606 Suzanne Keen, *Romances of the Archive in Contemporary British Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 154.

rather than the African species; apart, that is, from one excessive detail, the additional spiral hornlet appended to its withers, which, though subject to much speculation, was to be consistently replicated in artistic and scientific illustrations well through the eighteenth century. Norfolk's self-professed focus on the elusiveness of this iconographic detail[607] prompts his re(en)visioning of the period surrounding 1515, a watershed not only in the religious configuration of the Renaissance western world (with the excessive corruption of the Catholic clergy facilitating the impending outbreak of the Reformation), but also as regards the transformations registered by conceptions of the marvellous East[608] and their role in the chorographic imag(in)ing of the world's frontiers.

Proceeding from an acknowledged version of historical records – Pope Leo X's notorious profligacy and his frustrated craving to possess a fabulous Beast – the novel adopts a mock resurrectionary pattern, and undertakes an extravagantly lavish re-constitution, in the manner of a Foucauldian genealogical survey, of the Renaissance enthralment with marvels and monsters, which, though located at the world's extremities, served as central geopolitical loci. Underlying Norfolk's narrative is a quest to secure such a fantastic creature, that is, a worthy opponent for the Pope's pet elephant, which reverberates in a series of gripping contests (*psychomachia, gigantomachia*, *naumachia*), targeted at attaining supremacy over newly discovered territories at the world's edges. Spain's and Portugal's failed attempts to procure the papal Bull – a pun intended to highlight the elusiveness of both beast and official edict – invalidate any notion of the heroic in their agonic confrontation, positioned as they are as "two foolish duellists facing east and west,"[609] striving to arrest the fluctuating contours of their newly drawn maps and to make visible the invisible ghost-lines dividing undetectable seas.

In the preamble to "Vineta," the opening section of *The Pope's Rhinoceros*, Norfolk resorts to a geological trope as an analogy for his genealogical investigation technique. The melting of the glacial waste which engendered the northern watery spreads of the Baltic Sea expounds, in fast-forward motion, the process whereby aeons of terrestrial transformation are compacted into a narrative of the liquefaction of time. From "an age of glacial strain," through the fracturing of solid terrain, to "the youngest sea

[607] As Norfolk confesses, "[t]he novel is about the rhinoceros and what the rhinoceros means, if it has to come down to something, and it's not about the holy grail for example. The rhinoceros is the holy grail of the novel," in Manuel Almagro and Brian Crews. "The Fiction of Lawrence Norfolk: What History Leaves Out. An Interview," *Atlantis* v23 (2001): 191(17).

[608] Rudolf Wittkower, "Marvels of the East: A Study in the History of Monsters," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 5 (1942): 159.

[609] Lawrence Norfolk, *The Pope's Rhinoceros* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1996), 147).

on earth,"[610] this accelerated dissolution of icy terrain serves as a spatial metaphor for Norfolk's own approach to history, which is perceived as a fluid horizontal expanse. The novel starts and ends in the fault lines and crevices of a northern sea of ice. Once a region entirely devoid of life, the Baltic waterspread congeals once again at the closure of the narrative, having fluidised sufficiently long to enable Norfolk's "counterfactual imagination"[611] to provide an alternative, revisionary account of the Dürer hornlet, and, by extension, to subvert the notion of History as grandiose teleological advancement, primarily through the adoption of a Bakhtinian framework of the "world-upside-down," of carnivalesque excess.

Norfolk's jocularly contestatory representation of history sees it as marked not by righteous wars and glorious conquests but rather by whimsical combats and gory slaughters of the innocent. Atrocious massacres are indeed committed by the righteous Pope himself (see the siege of Prato), yet no battle acquires the mock-heroic, mock-apocalyptic overtones of the war waged between the rival rat colonies of sixteenth-century underground Rome. Vivid reports include hyperbolic catalogues of military tactics, and there is an inverted parallelism between the rodents' incessant martial renegotiation of breeding territory and the mobile cartography of the outer world. Ferocious skirmishes, raids, retreats are strategically deployed in superb awareness of "attack-posture, submit-posture, win-posture, lose-posture."[612] Occasional bouts of heroism are exhibited in full view of the giants (read humans); hence the notion of performance, of valour on display for the Romans, who have a definite penchant for the spectacular.

Underscoring this gloomy view of history as an ongoing cycle of atrocities, Norfolk's irreverent treatment of flaunted agonistic contests reaches its parodic height in the penultimate section of his narrative, "Naumachia." Here, attended by the gasping eyes of the Roman multitudes, a pantomime pope presides over an impossible fight between Hanno, the papal elephant, and an embalmed rhinoceros, nicknamed *Rosserus,* which, quite contrary to historical verification, Salvestro and Bernardo, the two "master travellers" (or, rather, master pranksters) appear to have fetched to Rome. Examples of such parodic deflations of the grand narrative of history as an uninterrupted sequence of heroic gests (jests) are rife in the novel, including, for instance, the burlesque account of Henry the Lion's majestic march to Vineta, a phantasmatic city, whose submersion into the Baltic Sea in the wake of a one-night storm utterly deflates Christianity's conquest of this remote outpost of paganism.

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[610] Norfolk, *The Pope's Rhinoceros*, 3-4.
[611] Keen, *Romances of the Archive*, 141.
[612] Norfolk, *The Pope's Rhinoceros*, 155.

Consecrating the flopped invasion are the ruins of the church left stranded on the edge of the Baltic cliffs, with its foundations perpetually sinking in the "island's soft substance."[613] The *Gesta Monachorum Usedomi,* a chronicle commenced in 1273, similarly fractures in its attempt to document the efforts undertaken by generations of monks to give architectural and discursive consistency to a "church built to mark the Saxon triumph,"[614]a church which, nevertheless, betrays a "hasty gesture of permanence, a conclusion stamped on molten ground," endorsing the un-city of Vineta's "failure to remain."[615] The ceaseless project of erecting a monastery with sodden foundations is resumed under the priorship of Father Jörg, whose imagination orbits to the ends of the world, incited by the ancient travel narratives and medieval romances discovered in his monastery's library, before embarking on the real voyage that will dislodge his monks from the foundering shores of Vineta and lead them to Rome.

Once again, historical fact – Rome's spectacular displays of power and symbolic arbitrage over the Spanish-Portuguese rivalry – is a mere catalyst for Norfolk's elaborate reconstruction of the corruption and schatological decay permeating the Renaissance city. The Roman Church's financing its own consumption gives vent, as the author confesses, to "an entropic reality: the tendency is for everything to spread and to break down."[616] It is indeed the "city's taste for the exotica,"[617] fuelled by the Pope's own fondness for *mirabilia*, that occasions the aborted quest, performed by the refuse of normative humanity. Salvestro and Bernardo, a *homo sylvestris* and a giant with gargantuan appetites and miniature brains, have their services enlisted (unwittingly) to the Spaniards, in their desire to overwrite the Portuguese and their recently won favours with the Pope. Complicity between their diplomatic envoys renders their naval contest doomed from the start, since the ship of the two beast experts is a sepulchral cavern: "She was built of oak that two decades on the Tunis-Genoa run had turned into a mush of ratshit, ship-rot, sawdust, and salt held together by a hull-size scab of barnacles. Sagging, bending, creaking, rotting, the *Santa Lucia* looked like the morning after the night before when the night before was the shipworms' annual banquet and the shipworms were the size of eels."[618]*The Santa Lucia* is a "spectral nonship,"[619] whose impending perish in the waters that resent mapping anticipates the conjoined fate of its rival vessel,

[613] Norfolk, *The Pope's Rhinoceros*, 21.
[614] Norfolk, *The Pope's Rhinoceros*, 22.
[615] Norfolk, *The Pope's Rhinoceros*, 25.
[616] Norfolk in Almagro and Crews, "The Fiction."
[617] Norfolk, *The Pope's Rhinoceros*, 233.
[618] Norfolk, *The Pope's Rhinoceros*, 288.
[619] Norfolk, *The Pope's Rhinoceros*, 257.

The Nostra Senora de Ajuda, steered by the Portuguese to the western coasts of India and then around the African continent to the Slave Coast, or Bight of Benin, where it encounters its ghostly double, which has sailed an opposite, westerly route.

The Santa Lucia's arrested voyage reminds of Salvestro's impossible venture to retrieve the lost treasures of the fantastic city of Vineta from the murky waters of the Baltic Sea. Every nautical vessel in the novel, while attempting to chart the waters, which are by definition averse to History,[620] echoes the *stultifera navis*, or the parodic second Ark, on board which Father Jörg's monks are pictured sailing away from Usedom in search of an ecclesiastical authority that might provide their church with solid foundations. At the helm of his rudderless "ship of fools,"[621] Jörg appears simultaneously as a wise man and a jester in cap and bells, whose grotesque inversion of wisdom will be made rather apparent in his impersonating the pantomime Pope in the "Naumachia" section.

In fact, Sebastian Brant's 1494 poem *Das Narrenschiff*, illustrated with woodcuts by the same Albrecht Dürer, functions as a substantial hypotext for Norfolk's fabulous voyages. As Foucault contends, "these ships of fools, which haunted the imagination of the entire early Renaissance, were pilgrimage boats, highly symbolic cargoes of madmen in search of their reason."[622] The prototypal Narragonia, the fool's utopia, becomes, for Jörg's monks, Rome, a city "inured to carnivals and triumphs, to spectacle and pomp."[623] Sebastian Brant's copious assortment of fools (gluttons, blasphemers, pseudo-scholars) is disseminated in the eccentricities of Norfolk's protagonists. Foolishness, with its proximate or more distant synonyms (madness, delusion, foolery) afflicts the Spanish and Portuguese ambassadors with their intrigues and counter-intrigues. Colonel Diego, for instance, is left stranded in an African cavern worshipping the miraculously warm corpse of a long deceased African tribe leader. Teixeira, the Portuguese quester for the rhinoceros similarly falls prey to self-deception on losing his invaluable cargo. Furthermore, whereas *Das Narrenschiff*'s textual and visual elements are essentially locked together (woodcuts illuminate the chapters or their titles), the novel literalises the manifold representational traces issuing forth from Dürer's engraving – solely referenced in Norfolk's narrative as the "Moravian printer travelling to Nuremberg" to whom Salvestro presumably imparts the "outrageous stories of his adventures."[624]

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[620] "Water is something that doesn't record History at all; anything that happens in the water leaves no trace," Norfolk in Almagro and Crews, "The Fiction."
[621] Norfolk, *The Pope's Rhinoceros*, 40.
[622] Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, 9.
[623] Norfolk, *The Pope's Rhinoceros*, 554.
[624] Norfolk, *The Pope's Rhinoceros*, 572.

Salvestro's memory also preserves the material outlines of his native island's pagan pantheon of monstrous deities, whose bodies are translated into cosmogenetic material. Thus, Svantovit, the hundred-eyed, sky-dwelling giant is projected into Vineta's landscape, his claws becoming half-submerged islands. The giant's body is disjointed and "written across the landscape to provide its prehistory, its identity. The world coheres only after the body has been projected across its contours, arranging rivers, valleys, and mountains into a geography that," as Cohen suggests, "gigantises the somatic."[625] The topographical overcharge of the marvellous is revealed not only in the symbolic-allegorical positioning of fabulous creatures at the edges of medieval T-O maps, but also in the new role which the pachydermatous beasts play for the sixteenth-century world powers competing for mastery over the world's ex-orbitant dominions.

As Katharine Park and Lorraine Daston maintain in their *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, the sixteenth century witnessed a continuum, rather than rigid periodical demarcations, between attitudes towards marvels and monsters, which were viewed as "aberrations in the natural order."[626] Norfolk's examination of the centrality of wonders for the age of the Renaissance highlights that the concept of the marvellous was far from monological, and that, in effect, as Platt also suggests, it went through discursive reframings and was deployed for rather diverse ends.[627]

Several strands of teratological thought overlap in Norfolk's survey into the manifold cultural resonances of the marvellous. First, the bestiary practice of casting animal narratives within a moral frame of interpretation, visible in the monks' understanding of monstrous beasts as allegorical contestants in a *psychomachia*, or battle of the souls. Second, a competing tradition which highlights the "passion of wonder"[628] as an essential

[625] See Cohen, *Of Giants*, 10-11. Other examples of monstrous chaogonies – bent on the sacrificial annihilation of gigantic or ophidian monsters, out of whose amorphous bodies the world is hacked out, include Purusha, the Vedic primeval giant, Ymir, from medieval Norse cosmography, Humbaba, the lion-faced demon of the Gilgamesh epic, or Tiamat in the Babylonian *Enuma Elish*, in which primordial chaos takes the form of divine monstrosity.

[626] Park and Daston, "Unnatural Conceptions," 21.

[627] Peter G. Platt (ed.), *Wonders, Marvels, and Monsters in Early Modern Culture* (Newark: University of Delaware Press; London; Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1999), 16.

[628] See Daston and Park's distinction between *wonder*, as the cognitive "passion of natural inquiry," and *wonders*, as the ontologically discrete class of preternatural objects of such inquiry, geographically located, for the early modern naturalists, at the margins of the known world, and categorically hovering between the mundane and the miraculous, in Daston and Park, *Wonders*, 14. Caroline Walker Bynum's analysis of medieval theories of wonder also emphasises it as a precondition of or pleasurable desire for knowledge. As Bynum puts it, "wonder-reaction" entails a "significance-reaction," a passionate desire and an incentive to investigation into the marvellous, the novel or the bizarre, as that which exceeds, yet impels explanation, in Caroline Walker Bynum, "Wonder," *American Historical Review* 102/1 (1997): 23-24.

ingredient of Renaissance speculative intellectual inquiry, such as fostered by Father Jörg's curiosity in *lusus naturae*, nature's corporeal jokes.[629] Third, what Le Goff identifies as the "political marvellous," or the appropriation of wondrous animal species as insignia of political might, given that ownership of such rare specimens could add force to hegemonic hierarchies.[630]

Much of the novel's first section charts Jörg's lecturing the novices on the marvellous creatures of the east (Ethiop, Numidia, and Egypt). The Pope's carnivalesque double makes strenuous attempts to dislocate his brethren from a mechanical mindset, characterised by an obsessive engagement in theological debates, taking fabulous beasts for ciphers, symbols, abstractions, rather than genuine inhabitants of realms beyond the confines of their monastery. To the notion that the tapir might be connoting lust, for instance, Jörg counterpoints a naturalistic understanding of the animal as "a pig with hooves," and to the possibility of Taprobane representing a "false and beguiling paradise" of the legends of the East, he replies with a commonsensical definition of it being "not a point of doctrine, but an island," the very "world wherein we live."[631] To Jörg, the monks' exaggerated desire to find allegorical significance in actual events approximates foolishness; hence the ambivalence of his gesture to ferry them to Rome, which will prove to be the city of their perdition. Not only does he provide the first description of the elephant, literally quoting Pliny's *Natural History*, but it is no gratuitous gesture on Norfolk's part to have the phantasmatic rhinoceros materialise in the first instance in Father Jörg's imagination, which will eventually determine Salvestro and Bernardo (the buffoon-explorers) to travel to the antipodes.

What Stallybrass and White refer to as the obverse cultural categories of high and low[632] are admixed in the Beast's nondescript morphology, which merges its theriomorphic baseness with the iconographic diaphanousness of mystical unicorns. The textual precedent referenced here is the *Physiologus,* which overlays classical animal descriptions with Christian moralising exegesis and introduces the virgin-capture narrative as a staple component of unicorn lore. Norfolk parodically reverses this cynegetic motif, having the virgin, Amalia, entrap not the bloated rhinoceros, but its princely possessor, the Roly-Poly Holiness himself.

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[629] See Douglas Biow, *Mirabile Dictu: Representations of the Marvellous in Medieval and Renaissance Epic* (Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 4-5.

[630] Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, 12, 33. See also Park and Daston, "Unnatural Conceptions," 88.

[631] Norfolk, *The Pope's Rhinoceros*, 40.

[632] Stallybrass and White, *The Politics*, 3.

The novel's title rhinoceros, never named as such, but referred to through periphrastic descriptions, is a misnomer, insofar as it points to a gap between colluding and overlapping readings of its body. That the "much vaunted Beast"[633] should be first represented in terms of the mortal opponent of the Pope's elephant signals its filtering through the classical text of Pliny's *Natural History*, a work which, as Park and Daston have shown, served as a strong incentive for the "embrace of exoticism" in Renaissance travel writing.[634] Pliny's prodigious history is identified as the key textual archive from which the Indian monoceros emerges as a composite creature, commingling an equine body, a staglike head, an elephant's feet, and a boar's tail.[635] The syntagm that the Pope uses to launch the antagonistic pursuit of the missing combatant is also derived from Pliny: the single-horned animal is presented as a categorical displacement: as "another naturalborn enemy of the elephant."[636] In the mock-hunting scene that precedes the *gigantomachia* proper, a wild boar is botchily disguised as a unicorn, which the Pope spears without the aid of virgin Amalia, in a sort of perverse restitution for a murder he himself commanded. The mutations which the boar undergoes at the hands of the Pope's attendants may attest to an unquenchable appetite to increase nature's mirable potential, yet amounts to nothing more than a parodic replication of the diverse sources from which the beast's "bizarre appendages and improbable limbs"[637] are derived. Through its corporeal incongruity, the Pope's mock game beast anticipates the final apparition of the rhinoceros in the *naumachia*. This is the bathetic articulation of the fierce beast assembling its makeshift features not only in the eyes of the Pope, but also for the amazement of a complicitous contemporary readership: "To begin with, it is big. Not cow-big, but certainly bigger than a goat…. Let us call it dangerous and add deceptively dangerous, for it also looks ridiculous and mirth-worthy. […] And – perhaps this should have been mentioned earlier – a horn on the end of its nose. A wild boar, with extras."[638]

To all these scrupulously verified classical and medieval resources, Norfolk adduces a fabricated African mythology – ironically betraying its allegiance to the Plinian lore – whereby Ezodu represents an ancestral hunter figure metamorphosed through human-elephant connivance into yet another manufactured, tusk-bearing, *and* tusk hating, clay-shelled rhinoceros. The Beast of African extraction to whom Salvestro is ironically

[633] Norfolk, *The Pope's Rhinoceros*, 555.
[634] Park and Daston, "Unnatural Conceptions," 34.
[635] Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, VIII. 3.
[636] Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, VIII. 29.20.
[637] Norfolk, *The Pope's Rhinoceros*, 320.
[638] Norfolk, *The Pope's Rhinoceros*, 321.

entrusted, in an inversion of the "symbolic extremities of the exalted and the base,"[639] is expurgated from the Bay of Benin through a rite of lustration, by the Nri tribesmen, in their attempt to restore the normative boundaries of their polluted cultural system. This is an inverse instantiation of Biow's claim, largely informed by Mary Douglas analysis in *Purity and Danger,* that Renaissance marvels are "symbolically impure," in the sense that they are the "by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, insofar as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements."[640] Norfolk overturns the centre-margin dichotomy, revealing the European continent as the poison container for Salvestro's double-horned rhinoceros and as a realm that revels in hybridisation, pollution, and ritualistic defilement.

Nowhere is this more visible than in the *naumachia,* staged as a festive backdrop for the Plinian beastly confrontation. Ambivalently lodged between official ceremonial and popular festivity, the Pope's *naumachia* is conceived as a mock-serious replica to the ancient Roman practice of organising mimic sea battles in deliberately flooded amphitheatres. Preceded by a rhetorical warfare between flotillas of manic poets, the climactic moment nevertheless fails to materialise. Having drowned off the coast of Italy, the rhinoceros is indeed resurrected by Salvestro, and it takes a taxidermist's art to hack the cadaver and then reposition its constituent limbs, raggedly stitching together its lumping, bulging belly, its silly horn and ratty tail, as well as awkwardly stuffing its gutted interior with dried bread. As a result, the exact configuration of the beast is as nebulous as the exorbitant, elusive marvel which stimulates Rome's "ticklish collective cortex" into fabulating about:

> The Rumour-Beast, sporting a pelt of voided velvet with a pomegranate design, seven legs, a single head, and three tails (two more than the average Englishmen)… The Rumour-Beast gallops about, evolving and disintegrating, shedding a pair of udders in Pescheria; growing gills in Ponte; in next-door Parione excreting a bubble of quivering mucus within which movement becomes more laboured, notwithstanding the addition of fifteen virile tentacles.[641]

Even before reaching Rome, the rhinoceros acquires, through the quasi-consumerist proliferation of its mock effigies ("Pig-with-Additions," "Very Big Mouse," "Foreshortened Drayhorse," "Bull with Reshaped Head"),[642] the mobile contours of a Bakhtinian grotesque body. Mishandled during the *naumachia*, Rosserus eventually collapses underwater and continues its

[639] Stallybrass and White, *The Politics*, 3.
[640] Biow, *Mirabile Dictu*, 7.
[641] Norfolk, *The Pope's Rhinoceros*, 232-233.
[642] Norfolk, *The Pope's Rhinoceros*, 529.

corporeal inflation, ballooning to the point that, having reached the size of a ship's hull, it explodes, disseminating into myriads of pelt fragments. Not before, that is, having allowed for the insertion of a small detail, destined to make sense of the tantalising indeterminacy of the Dürer hornlet. Knocked off by accident, the African beast's second horn is relocated on the crosspiece running across its withers to serve as a pommel for Salvestro. Thus, Norfolk's fictional account of Salvestro's aborted quest is an explanatory supplement to the "things that leave no trace" and are therefore excluded from official historical records.[643] "It or them? Specimen or species? The Beast is plural, its components oblivious."[644] Averse to closure and containment, the fabulous Beast can only be summoned into existence through an imagination that interrogates and amends long-established truths: a questioning, however, that programmatically eludes definitive answers and rests on the illusion that the spectralisation of today's culture of simulacra and simulation can still summon fabulous monsters back to life.

III.2.4. Textualised Traces of the Teratological Archive: Lawrence Norfolk's *In the Shape of a Boar*

This section sketches a genealogical survey of the archival sources underlying Lawrence Norfolk's fictional rendition of catastrophe and historical trauma in his 2000 novel, *In the Shape of a Boar*.[645] By collapsing historical time layers (the dawn of human civilisation, the pre-WWII Balkans and Western Europe in the 1970s) into textualised traces of the archival past, Norfolk shows the process of interiorisation monstrosity has registered, from mythical beasts (the Boar of Kalydon) to post-Enlightenment spectral internalisations of abjectionable evil. The imaginary, Foucault claims, "is not formed in opposition to reality as its denial or compensation; it grows among signs, from book to book, in the interstice of repetitions and commentaries; it is born and takes shape in the interval between books."[646] What I wish to highlight is how the teratological imaginary acquires determinacy in Norfolk's narrative, a tissue of archival texts that trope monstrosity as a heterotopian/heterochronic amalgam and weld together mythical and rational representational attempts at granting meaning to evil. The novel starts by suggesting that one such representation of evil might be the Greek mythological figure of the Kalydonian boar, a punitive creature that was

[643] "History […] doesn't include everything and I wanted to write about that," Norfolk in Almagro and Crews, "The Fiction."
[644] Norfolk, *The Pope's Rhinoceros*, 489.
[645] Previously published as Carmen Borbely, "The Archive of Myth: Lawrence Norfolk's *In the Shape of a Boar*," *Caietele Echinox* 17 (2009): 349-356.
[646] Foucault, *Language*, 91.

sent by Artemis to ravage the realm of a disrespectful king and is set in stark contrast with the heroes who embark upon its annihilation, but ends by acknowledging that within an ethical paradigm, evil rests not in the otherness of a repudiable and slayable beast, but is generated by humanity itself: more specifically, atrocious, radical evil is encapsulated by the inconceivable and unrepresentable horror of war, of the Holocaust, and although its source is initially located in the figure of the enemy, of the persecutor, of the other, it is ultimately responsibly acknowledged to also dwell at the core of the self. Moreover, Norfolk's narrative unveils the discursive articulation of monsters through the intricate, palimpsestic cross-references to diverse epistemic frameworks that monster-makers (irrespective of whether we speak of the practitioners of teratology, teratogeny, or teratoscopy) have tended to embrace throughout history.

In the Shape of a Boar, confessedly addressing the agonic relation between the need for authentic representation and unrepresentability in Paul Celan's holocaust poems, explores the monstrosity of evil, by tracing its fractured archival descent. What the title – concurrently appropriate for the mythic boar of Kalydon and the twentieth-century monstrous sublime – suggests is, on the one hand, the desire to contain the excessive unrepresentability of evil, and on the other hand, the elusiveness of any such representational effort. The "epistemophilic or imaginary charge surrounding the monster," Braidotti asserts, accounts for that fact that the monster is a "shifter, a vehicle" generating webs of interconnected, yet possibly contradictory discourses.[647] Indeed, the ancient teratological treatises invoked by Norfolk in the paratextual apparatus (footnotes, appendix) of his narrative, or the poem produced by Sol Memel in the wake of WWII, its filmic adaptation, the critical responses it elicits and its impact upon the collective imaginary, legitimate the conflation between the figure of the monstrous beast and the perpetrators of wartime atrocities.

Part I of the novel, *The Hunt for the Boar of Kalydon*, exhumes, in archival manner, the legend of the monstrous beast sent by Artemis to plunder the Aetolia of King Oeneus. Meleager, the king's son, assembles a group of heroes to hunt down the boar – including Meilanion and his cousin Atalanta, a huntress and the sole female amongst the posse, who manages to wound the boar first. The number of heroes is steadily dwindled by ambush attacks, floods, and Meleager and Atalanta are eventually the sole to enter the cave of the boar. The cavernous encounter between the humans and the beast remains, however, an enigma, until the third section of the novel, when Sol Memel, a survivor of the atrocities of war – or any human, for that matter – succeeds in laying the victimary boar to rest.

[647] Braidotti, "Signs of Wonder," 300.

The chase is recounted in the historical present, yet the narrative progresses trudgingly, with difficulty, supplemented and documented as it is with about 180 carefully and accurately researched footnotes, which gradually take over the graphic disposition of the pages, almost to the point of displacing the retold mythical narrative completely. Ranging from minute, sparse recordings of innumerable textual and pictorial references to pre-Trojan heroes, to recountings of the various narrative kernels contingent to the myth of the boar hunt, the footnotes explore sources as diverse as Homer's *Odyssey*, Pliny's *Natural History*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Pausanias' *Description of Greece*, Euripides' *Hercules Furens,* Aelian's *De natura animalium,* etc., enlisting them apparently for hermeneutic purposes, but acknowledging, eventually, their inescapable fallibility: at the crucial point where the boar is about to be annihilated, the sources fade away into gaps of silence, Norfolk confesses.[648] The reader's experience of meandering, zigzagging through vast discursive references requires a painstaking, laborious effort and, despite attempts to exhaust the archival sources, to congeal time in its transcribed materiality, there is an emerging sense that gaps will never be covered, that myth-history and historiography are not consubstantial, that they do not overlap.

As the archivist who catalogues the boar's "generalised iconography of enmity and rage"[649] also points out, its "representations" dissolve and are reaggregated into a vast array of anamorphic permutations (winged, horned, riverine, stunted, etc.). This provides the narrator, however, with the perfect opportunity to attempt to capture the volatile contours of the monster and grant meaning to its free-floating mutability. By the end of the section, as the quasi-mythic narrative itself subsides into silence, substantiated, as it is, by a footnote of unknown "provenance," the archivist must acknowledge that the sole means of discursively retrieving mythic memory is through an effort of active imagination: the "Agrapha" – "a compendium of stories never recorded elsewhere," whose title comprises "The Unwritten Things" – must be (re)written into existence.[650] The "Agrapha" is, however, a blank discursive space or a faded palimpsest that clamours reinscription, a heterotopian cemetery of "empty graves" – the titles of vanished texts – whose contents can be laid to rest only by imaginatively transferring the ahistorical kernel of the boar myth into concrete time, seizing, thus, at least one possibility of its emplotment. Here is the monster-slaying scene in which Norfolk describes as a Girardean sacrificial process of scapegoating the victimary beast:

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[648] Boyd Maunsell, "Lost in the labyrinth of untold tales," *The Times* (Sept. 20, 2000): 8.
[649] Lawrence Norfolk, *In the Shape of a Boar* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2000), 104.
[650] Norfolk, *In the Shape*, 108.

> Meleager's spear-thrust comes at him, its force snapping off the crosspiece and spitting him along the length of the shaft. Gut, lungs, heart, throat. Cold bronze inside him. […] They will skin him now. They will hack off his head and snap off his tusks. Alive, his fate is to be their justification for killing him. Dead, he becomes their trophies.[651]

Girard's chapter from *Violence and the Sacred* entitled "From Mimetic Desire to the Monstrous Double" examines the monster from the perspective of the collective delirium and terror experienced during the Dionysian vertigo of a sacrificial scene, at the height of which the monstrous double proliferates. At such paroxysmal moments, the monstrous double – equally detectable in possession phenomena and in the ritual uses of masks – frenetically enmeshes men, deities and beasts: at the point of Pentheus's ferocious dismemberment in Euripides' *The Bacchae*, for instance, after being mistaken for a monstrous lion, his paroxystic double vision pictures Dionysus himself bearing the dual stamp of monstrosity and bestiality.[652] At the height of the crisis, the surrogate victim meets its violent retribution in the semblance of the monstrous double. The latter grips self and other in "a constant interchange of differences" to the effect that the former will experience the monster's radical alterity assaulting him from within and without.[653] The boar, bearing the excess of sacred charge that signals the irruption of a sacrificial crisis, is savagely slain by the heroes in a bewildering state of entrancement that causes them to experience monstrosity taking shape within and outside themselves simultaneously. With the annihilation of the beast, there is a sense of a restitution of the differences holding *savage exteriority* and *human interiority* in place, even though, the footsteps, the immaterial traces of the absented monster will be incorporated spectrally, mnemonically, in a cultural geography of civilisation's triumph over the agrestic space:

> His tracks henceforth will be the footprints of men and their scrawled handiwork will be his markings. The boar's bestial mutations – his rages, his appetites, his strangest shapes and outgrowths must all accord with familiar needs, for we are the authors of our monsters.[654]

While the contours of the boar – his "bestial mutations" – will remain indeterminate in its mythical accounts or in the chronicles of its defeat, they

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[651] Norfolk, *In the Shape*, 103-104.

[652] "In the collective experience of the monstrous double the differences are not eliminated, but muddied and confused. All the doubles are interchangeable, although their basic similarity is never formally acknowledged. They thus occupy the equivocal middle ground between difference and unity that is indispensable to the process of sacrificial substitution – to the polarisation of violence onto a single victim who substitutes for all the others" (Girard, *Violence*, 161).

[653] See Girard, *Violence*, 164-165.

[654] Norfolk, *In the Shape*, 103-104.

can be fictionalised or granted – albeit fleeting – determinacy in the following section of the novel, *Paris*, where the savagery of the beast is alternately limned as the inhumanness of Nazi atrocities, the agonistic competitiveness amongst writers concerned with such atrocities, or the evil imagined to be perpetrated by others but ultimately revealed to reside at the core of the self, etc. As evidence for this stands the fact that the narrative acknowledges that this cluster of heroes will not be consigned to posterity in its entirety, for some will be destined to inhabit the archives of silence. Instead, the spatialisation of time is significantly rendered through the "unmelodious music" issuing from the boar's throat, as the ultimate chronicler, its discordant notes evincing not the idea of sequence, of sequentiality, that is, but the simultaneity of an acoustic palimpsest. The monster's bewailing song, his own "fugue of death" consigns to timelessness the heroic or unheroic destinies of its pursuers, for ultimately it is the monster's annihilation that legitimates or not their assumption of a heroic stature:

> Meleager and Atalanta. They were with the beast whose shape was their fate and whose fate was shaped as they were. But their shapes were so various and the boar too seemed to frame himself from moment to moment. His epithets glinted, his attributes jangled in Meilanion's ears. In this song he was the pieces of a beast: all the jumbled hoofprints of his trail, the fragments scattered and buried in the soil of Kalydon, on the slopes of Aracynthus and here. Here was where Atalanta must become 'Atalanta' and Meleager clothe himself in the garb of 'Meleager.' Here was where the boar must be divided as though to make a sacrifice: meat to the men, offal to the gods.[655]

The monster is not the counterpart to the heroic or its stark antithesis; it stands for that Douglasian interstitial fluidity that enables a reflexive acknowledgement of the foundational role monstrosity, as the inhuman, may have in defining the human.

In Part II, *Paris*, Poet, Solomon Memel, "true custodian of our uncertainty,"[656] produces a poem entitled Die *Keilerjagd,* or *La Chasse au Sanglier* (*The Hunt of the Boar*), based partly on the Greek myth, partly on events which befell him during the war, in particular his fleeing southwards to an area of Greece called Agrapha, where "the unwritten things" of the mythical narrative are written or rewritten into a palinodic historical narrative. It was in Agrapha that he supposedly witnessed the annihilation of a German officer (another boar-like embodiment of evil) by yet another Atalanta (a Greek partisan, Anastasia Kosta, known by her *nom de guerre* Thyella). The authenticity of his account is contested, however, by various competing

[655] Norfolk, *In the Shape*, 96.
[656] Norfolk, *In the Shape*, 116.

discursive authorities, and Sol Memel arrives at the realisation that he himself might have perpetrated evil – that he also partakes of the monstrosity of the boar (and identificatory patterns abound, indeed, in the narrative) by moulding an unheroic Thyella into the mythical cast of Atalanta.

The recognition that the Nazi officer was not the sole embodiment of evil, which is diffracted into the presumably valorous but treacherous Thyella, amounts to a twofold gesture of disenchantment. Firstly, Sol Memel's poem may retrieve the Kalydonian boar into the collective imaginary as the representation of evil, yet the realisation is that it is a conventional, rather than a natural objective correlative of evil. Secondly, monstrosity may serve, again conventionally, as the repudiable domain of otherness that functions as a rampart for self-identification attempts, yet the boar's fluctuating shape and Sol Memel's own merging with the beast will go counter to that erroneous assumption. Found in a gorge-like cave by the Greek partisans, Memel will have traced (created, to be exact) his spectral victimary identity by going back to the Kalydonian boar pursued by the Greek heroes.

What Norfolk attempts to do by juxtaposing Greek legendry and the recent historical experience of war and the holocaust is to offer multifaceted insights into the unfathomable/unreasonable experience of evil.[657] In effect, he admixes several discursive genres deployed to make sense of evil, prevalent amongst which, as Richard Kearney maintains in *Strangers, Gods and Monsters. Interpreting Otherness*, are the mythological, the scriptural and the anthropological (2003). Thus, the novel's first section, *The Hunt for the Boar of Kalydon*, adopts myth as a discursive genre that incorporates evil into cosmogenetic narratives, for it is myths that "offer a 'plot' which configures the monstrosity of evil, explaining the source of the obscene and thereby taking some of the shock out of it."[658] The second section, entitled *Paris*, appears to endorse the scriptural or biblical discursive genre, whereby, as Kearney puts it, evil may be differentiated into suffering and wrongdoing, while humans are subjects of evil – blamable culprits – or subjects to evil – lamenting victims.[659] However, this disjunctive logic needs be supplanted by a conjunctive one, since complications arise regarding the agency of evil, in particular those revolving around the legitimacy of Sol Memel's aesthetic transposition of the atrocity of the Holocaust in poetic form, in his "Die Kielerjagd" ("The Boar Hunt").

[657] For Massimo Izzi, monsters correspond to infractions of the cosmic order, anomalies reverberating and disrupting the smooth unfolding of regular events (Izzi, *I mostri*, 17). Monstrosity thus signals the irruption of another universe in the quotidian world – a world whose coherence and homogeneity may nonetheless stand in starker relief by contrast with the eccentricity such sporadic phenomena exude.

[658] Kearney, *Strangers*, 83.

[659] Kearney, *Strangers*, 84.

Ultimately, in the third section, entitled *Agrapha,* Sol Memel's recognition of himself as an agent of evil is consubstantial with an understanding of the contingency of evil and with a demotion of evil from its excessively metaphysical abstractedness. Hence, Memel's relinquishment of the tropological use of darkness and silence as metaphors for the inscrutability and incomprehensibility of radical evil, coupled with his adoption of an ethical stance, whereby the darkness of the cave in which he eventually embraces the dying monster signals, through its quasi-concrete materiality, the awareness that evil is a "phenomenon deeply bound with the anthropological condition."[660] In the ancient Greek myths, the boar of Kalydon responds and corresponds to an infraction of the cosmic order (King Oeneus' failure to propitiate Artemis); hence, it is an anomaly reverberating and disrupting the smooth unfolding of regular, mundane events. In Sol Memel's native Romania, the horrendous acts committed alternately by the Soviets and the Nazis (mass murders, deportations, persecutions) persistently employ the figure of the Jew as the element that is polluting the fabric of the nation and demands expurgation. The boar of Kalydon stands, as Norfolk's narrative suggests, as the middle term between the originary crisis and the resolution of that crisis, as the sacrificial scapegoat whose annihilation may bring about the restitution of order, confirming thus the role monstrosity has in paradoxically validating by assaulting the ontological coherence of the human. Monstrosity concurrently demarcates and invalidates structural distinctions meant to keep the mundane and the divine, the self and the other apart; the fact that monstrosity is a symbiotic enmeshment of self and otherness is evident in the rites of passage experienced by the Greek heroes, in their quest for the boar, or by Sol Memel, in his flight southwards to Agrapha.

By way of conclusion, I would say that *In the Shape of a Boar* partakes of a certain restitutive Gothicity permeating British fiction in the new millennium and reaffirms the need to discard practices of self-identification through the monstrification of others. As the third section in the novel, *Agrapha*, intimates, the final encounter between the human and the monstrous is not carried out in belligerent, agonistic terms: unable to affix the meaning of the boar in any discourse, even the ineffable, non-representational one of poetry, Memel witnesses compassionately the demise of the wounded beast and experiences a poignant realisation that monstrosity is foundational for recuperating a sense of his own humanity. Ultimately, the final section is titled *Agrapha*, "The Unwritten Things," precisely because monstrosity must ultimately remain unrepresentable, unaccountable, silent.

[660] Kearney, *Strangers*, 87.

III.2.5. "Strange Metamorph": Salman Rushdie's Narratives of "Liquid Modernity"

For Salman Rushdie, an Indian-born British writer of Muslim extraction currently living in America, it seems only natural that his ongoing fictional project should have targeted questions of self-definition and self-location (in its various avatars: dis-location, mis-location, re-location).[661] As he confesses, his works record "an attempt to come to terms with the various component parts of myself – countries, memories, histories, families, gods."[662] It therefore comes as little surprise that externally-imposed labels such as "commonwealth" literature should be rejected as chimerical. A chimera is, after all, to cite the modern usage of the term from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "a mere wild fancy; an unfounded conception." A phantasm divorced from reality, an "unreal monstrous creature of the imagination"[663] or, to retrieve its classical definitions from Homer's *Iliad* or Hesiod's *Theogony,* a fabulous fire-breathing monster admixing in its composite body feline, caprine and serpentine features.

Wherefore this phantom, beastly category, reminiscent of the chthonian, chaotic antagonists of Olympian deities?[664] Notwithstanding its improbability or incongruity, the chimera analogy signals that for a writer who has insistently placed himself in the direct lineage of the *mohajirs*, any endeavour to fix his identity in single, static categorical slots amounts to enfreakment. Rushdie is very much aware of this when he resumes the argument against castigations of English-language Indian writing as a "post-colonial anomaly, the bastard child of Empire, sired on India by the departing British."[665] Instead, he legitimises the hybridity of Anglo-Indian works as doubly parented, twice born, in Dionysian fashion, through dismemberment and reassemblage. Consequently, by deploying tropes of identity that point to some irreducible organic substratum while at the same time suggesting its necessary cultural mutations under the aegis of travel, Rushdie commits himself to querying solid, monolithic notions of individual (as well as communal) identity, and adopts translation, migrancy, and nomadism as the fluid, molecular alternatives to inclusion in molar,

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[661] Previously published as Carmen Bujdei, "Narratives of 'Liquid Modernity': Translation, Migrancy and Nomadism in Salman Rushdie's Novels," *Caietele Echinox* 11 (2006): 52-65.

[662] http://www.contemporarywriters.com/authors/?p=auth87

[663] Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, 63.

[664] This mythological being is discussed in David Adams Leeming, "The Chimera," in *Mythical and Fabulous Creatures: A Source Book and Research Guide*, ed. Malcolm South (New York: Greenwood, 1987), 104.

[665] Salman Rushdie, *Step Across This Line. Collected Non-Fiction 1992-2002* (London: Vintage, 2002), 162-163.

massifying structures.[666] In *Step Across This Line,* Rushdie again resorts to the trope of monstrosity to define human nature as that of "frontier-crossing beings": the prototypal "strange metamorph," the "half-and-halfer" inflamed by a desire of "overcoming, of breaking down the boundaries that hold us in and surpassing the limits of our own natures."[667]

Instead of rootedness, "cultural transplantation," rather than procreation, "cross-pollination," and in lieu of clear genealogical traces, a "polyglot family tree," where direct ancestry is repudiated in favour of one's freely choosing, in rhizomatic lines of flight that traverse the east-west divide, one's literary forebears, whether they be Swift, Conrad, Tagore, or Ram Mohan Roy.[668] Diasporic writers in Britain have elaborated the postcolonial migrant as a hybrid figure, and, furthermore, they have aimed to create a "hybrid literary style that draws on Indian subcontinental words, images and tropes and weaves them into the English language in delightfully funny, provocative or disturbing ways."[669] Given his liminal position within the hyphenated space[670] straddling such diverse cultures, Rushdie's work is ambivalently poised between both the western and the eastern literary traditions, and resorts to what Caren Kaplan calls "mythologised narrativisations of displacement" as practices of cultural (self-) identification.[671]

To this effect, particularly in later narratives such as *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999), *Fury* (2001) and *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), Rushdie seems to confirm, as well as amend to some extent, Zygmunt Bauman's diagnosis of the progressive liquefaction of the age of modernity. In Bauman's account, contrasted with the solids' staticness, fixity and spatial containment, the fluids' mobile and transient occupation of space renders them amenable to comparison with travel:

> Fluids travel easily. They "flow," "spill," "run out," "splash," "pour over," "leak," "flood," "spray," "drip," "seep," "ooze"; unlike solids, they are not easily stopped – they pass around some obstacles, dissolve some others and bore or soak their way through others still meeting with solids they emerge unscathed, while the solids they have met, if they stay solid, are changed – get moist or drenched. The extraordinary mobility of fluids is what associates them with the idea of "lightness."[672]

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666 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand*, 283.
667 Rushdie, *Step Across*, 408-410.
668 Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, 20-21.
669 Werbner, "The Limits of Cultural," 144.
670 For excellent insights into migration, translation, and hybridity as Rushdie's postcolonial metaphors, see Jaina C. Sanga, *Salman Rushdie's Postcolonial Metaphors. Migration, Translation, Hybridity, Blasphemy, and Globalisation* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 2001).
671 Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel. Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), 2.
672 Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 2.

Neither fixed in space nor bounded by time, liquids offer Bauman a potent metaphor for characterising post-modernity, "second modernity" or "surmodernity" as an age which no longer endorses the supremacy of sedentarism over nomadism, settlement over free-flowing traffic, or location over migration. Instead, with the advent of electronically propagated information, which has condensed time to instantaneity and has volatilised spatial distance, "the difference between *close by* and *far away* or for that matter between the wilderness and the civilised, orderly space, has been all but cancelled."[673] In fact, one major transformation that distinguishes "light" or "liquefied" modernity from its "heavy" or "solid" counterpart is the breakdown, erosion or melting away of frontiers. Territorial borderlines and their function of dividing, separating, containing and reinforcing systemic order lose both consistency and relevance faced with spontaneous flows along network-like capillaries.[674]

A similar picture of cultural globality as resistant to the *topoi* of separation, division, or partition is that offered by Bhabha, who deems that its new architecture rests not on antagonistic dyads of margin versus centre, but on the fluid interstitial spaces that hover in between "double-frames." Thus, elaborating on Fredric Jameson's notion that a postmodern fragmentation and schizoid decentring of self and world lead to a supplementary "third space" or area of parataxic "interfection" between new and old cultural practices, Bhabha considers that in the new international space what demands mapping is the "problem of signifying the interstitial passages and processes of cultural difference that are inscribed in the *in-between*": that zone of hybrid hyphenation that resists congealment but continually opens up, permanently redrawing, hence volatilising, the boundaries between "One" and the "Other."[675]

Boundaries or, rather, their permeability in-forms Rushdie's liminal figurations of identity as interconnecting native and foreign, self and other, margin and centre, east and west: as he confesses, "I've been crossing frontiers all my life – physical, social, intellectual, artistic borderlines."[676] Similarly, *Step Across This Line* points out the elusiveness of frontiers and their transformative allure, whether for questers in search of chimerical grails or for shapeshifting "Alice the migrant" altering the contours of her new-found Wonderland.[677] Travel, which for cultural anthropologists involves an array of practices for placing (or displacing) the self in space, is first and foremost rendered in Rushdie's works as "translation," understood

[673] Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 11.
[674] Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 25.
[675] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 371-372, 217.
[676] Salman Rushdie, "The Ground Beneath My Feet," *The Nation* 273/2 (2001): 42.
[677] Rushdie, *Step Across*, 411.

in its dual sense as transference across spatial frontiers and conveyance from one language or culture into another. The geographical and linguistic meanings of "translation" merge in the following quasi-identical definitions extracted from Rushdie's non-fictional and fictional prose, which strike a similar note with George Steiner's reference to the "extraterritorial," homeless, unhoused poets of the twentieth century, who are "wanderers across language":[678]

> The word "translation" comes, etymologically, from the Latin for "bearing across." Having been borne across the world, we are translated men. It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained.[679]
>
> I, too, am a translated man. I have been *borne across*. It is generally believed that something is always lost in translation; I cling to the notion […] that something can also be gained.[680]

Both statements occur in the context of attempting to situate Asian writers in Western culture – itself, as Edward Said remarks in *Reflections on Exile,* "in large part the work of exiles, émigrés, refugees."[681] Yet exile, in Said's vision, is a "condition of terminal loss"; it is predicated as one's pathological dis-engagement from one's place of origins, as out-of-placeness. Estrangement, the "unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home"[682] signals a loss of integrity, a fall from some prelapsarian wholeness or Antaean oneness with the ground beneath one's feet, which fractures into unbridgeable chasms between home and away. Rushdie does underscore Said's definition of exile as a postlapsarian "discontinuous state of being."[683] Nevertheless, he also supplements the exiles' *contrapuntal* "plurality of vision" by claiming that given the migrants' condition of simultaneous belonging/not-belonging, geographical distance implodes and simply serves to grant them "stereoscopic" awareness, a dialogic rather than monological perspective upon a past that corresponds to a lost home and a present that accommodates foreignness. Such stereoscopic comprehensiveness is itself resonant of what Fredric Jameson calls "incommensurability-vision," a sort of prosthetic, cyborgian perceptual equipment for encompassing hyperspace:[684]

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[678] George Steiner, *Extraterritorial. Papers on Literature and the Language Revolution* (London: Faber and Faber 1972) 21, quoted in Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta Books, 2000), 174.

[679] Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, 17.

[680] Salman Rushdie, *Shame* (1983) (London: Vintage, 1995), 29.

[681] Said, *Reflections on Exile*, 173.

[682] Said, *Reflections on Exile*, 173.

[683] Said, *Reflections on Exile*, 177.

[684] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 218. James outlines the posthuman reliance on prosthetic

> We are Hindus who have crossed the black water; we are Muslims who eat pork. And as a result – as my use of the Christian notion of the Fall indicates – we are now partly of the West. Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools.[685]

What is to be gained from existing in translation, if dislodgment is a common human predicament ("the past is a country from which we have all emigrated"), experienced all the more intensely by a writer literally displaced into the "elsewhere" implicit in "out-of-country" and "out-of-language"?[686] The answer Rushdie provides highlights memory as the archaeological tool for provisionally reconstru(ct)ing the past from the "broken pots of antiquity" into imaginative at-homeness: "our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind."[687] The plural implicit in the previous statement signals a refusal to succumb to a ghetto mentality, which would circumvent the "homeland" within constricting cultural boundaries, turning physical dislocation into a "form of internal exile."[688] Too strict an enclosure within the borders of familiar territory might easily veer into a carceral experience, whereas the exiles' defining experience is that of crossing barriers.

Novels like *Midnight's Children* (1981) and *Shame* (1983) revolve around the articulation of "imaginary homelands." In contrast with the alleged solidity of the myths legitimating the birth of post-Independence India or of seceded Pakistan, these narratives appear to promote the notion that in order for these countries to be taking stock, they have to be fluidly projected into "hundreds of millions of possible versions."[689] As Bhabha has argued, narratives like that of clownish Saleem's are acts of interruptive enunciation, since they disturb pure, monolithic grand narratives of the nation and foment the eruption of a doubly-framed consciousness, not dissimilar to that fostered by liminal ritual masks, sacrificial goats, or anomalous monsters.[690] Against a historical canvas of intensively re-codified ethnic, religious and national frontiers, anti-heroic questers like

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enhancement devices when he speaks of the "imperative to grow new organs, to expand our sensorium and our body to some new, yet unimaginable, perhaps impossible, dimensions" (*Postmodernism*, 39).

685 Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, 15.
686 Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, 12.
687 Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, 10.
688 Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, 17.
689 Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, 10.
690 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 142.

Saleem Sinai and Omar Khayyam Shakil (only nominally related to the Persian poet) feel uncomfortably anchored in the margins. Saleem – whose facial topography uncannily replicates the geographical contours of his country and whose birth on the cusp of India's liberation triggers his lamentations of being "handcuffed" or "chained" to his country's history – is confined in a pickling factory. From this position of liminal invisibility, of betwixt-and-between, this grotesque is clamouring, nevertheless, a grandiose role as both chronicler and heroic founder of the nation. Fraught with deliberate or fortuitous inconsistencies, his project of writing an epic of the nation derails, in Shandean or Sheherazadian manner, into a "chutnification of history."[691] In effect, his is just another alternative, *petit histoire*, through which he contests monolithic, hegemonic narratives about a homeland "which would never exist except by the efforts of a phenomenal collective will – except in a dream we all agreed to dream."[692] The magical gift boasted by Saleem, that of becoming the All-India Radio and convening inside his head the Conference of the 1001 Children of Midnight, attests to, on the one hand, his desire to transcend spatial limitations through the establishment of a virtual, globalised network of like-minds, and on the other hand, to his falling prey to the totalising impulses that have rendered India "insufficiently imagined."[693]

The marginal *topos* of the frontier – understood either as contact zone where transculturation occurs or as disjunctive breach of space – is also explored in *Shame,* in which the trope of cloistering (with its corollaries of self-willed and induced incarceration) ambivalently offers protection and alternative means of spatial exploration. In this novel, Omar Khayyam Shakil is a "peripheral man," a "creature of the edge" who grows up in captivity, trapped inside a labyrinthine mansion that hovers above the "hell hole" of a dumbbell-shaped, border town, polarised now, in the fourteenth century of the Hegiran calendar, not only between the extreme emotions of honour and shame, but also between the older, indigenous bazaar and the more recent district of the "alien," or British sahibs.[694] The carceral discipline enforced upon him by his threesome maternal custodians hyperbolically inflates his sense of marginality, of "living at the edge of the world, so close that he might fall off at any moment."[695] Designed to thwart any outburst of shame, Omar's entombment/enwombment in this tightly-sealed closed system – which, sooner or later, is bound to lose its labile equilibrium and liquefy into a "sweltering, entropical zone"[696] – emphasises

[691] Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (1981) (London: Vintage, 1995), 459.
[692] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 112.
[693] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 387.
[694] Rushdie, *Shame*, 24, 11-12.
[695] Rushdie, *Shame*, 21.
[696] Rushdie, *Shame*, 30.

the cumbersome "heaviness" of any (territorial) confinement. Examples here abound: the zenana, the triune mothers' self-inter(n)ment in the "unmanageably infinite mansion" of Nishapur, Shakil's vertigo about the great nothingness lying beyond the Impossible Mountains, Rani Harappa's stranding in the "backyard of the universe" or Sufyia Zinobia's virtual imprisonment in her family's Takallouf, the "untranslatable," "opaque," "tongue-tying" shame.[697]

Several possibilities emerge as a result of such forced insulation. Under the gravitational pressure of motion restrictions, the curvature of spacetime turns Shakil's border universe into a "hideously indeterminate," hetero-topian maze haunted by the "minotaur of forbidden light,"[698] a "tropological world," in Brian McHale's terms,[699] where his identity oscillates among a plurality of grossly distended gothic frames of reference. Shakil's vandalism of the ghost-infested mansion (his "massacre" of the place's history) conveys him in the direct lineage of the European wild man and the barbarian "noble savage," restricted as he is to the compensatory, surrogate freedom of a feral child, rampaging wildly about like a "time-traveller" bereft of his magic capsule. The iridescent or opalescent effect[700] is further amplified by Shakil's insertion in the vampiric, transworld genealogy of either "caped crusader or cloaked bloodsucker," Batman or Dracula.[701] What Rushdie foregrounds through Shakil's monstrously outgrown ontological plurality is the unresolved dialectics between the twin fantasies of roots and routes, between enracined allegiances to the mother-country and the compulsion for trans-border flight, for self-deracination. Himself a respectable physician concealing his beastly double within (albeit zombified through his severing all ties with the rooting emotion of shame),[702] Omar Khayyam Shakil confirms Stevenson's prophecy that "man will be ultimately known for a mere polity of multifarious, incongruous and independent denizens."[703] As a counterpart to Omar's shamelessness, Sufyia Zinobia Ryder furthers the Jekyll-Hyde antinomy to its outermost extremes and becomes shame incarnate, literalising the fairy-tale motif of the beast erupting within the beauty, of the "bacilli of humiliation"[704] unleashing a violent inner metamorphosis into "a chimera, the collective fantasy of a

[697] Rushdie, *Shame*, 14, 94, 104.
[698] Rushdie, *Shame*, 30-32.
[699] McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 141.
[700] McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 39.
[701] Rushdie, *Shame*, 22.
[702] Rushdie's exact syntagm here makes reference to Shakil's mutating into "ethical zombie," given his "willed severance from his past" (Rushdie, *Shame*, 127).
[703] Robert Louis Stevenson, (1885) *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, With the Merry Men and Other Tales and Fables* (London: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993), 42.
[704] Rushdie, *Shame*, 141.

stifled people, a dream born of their rage."[705] Sufyia's immurement within the collective phantasm of shame triggers her immunological cataclysm and fosters her corporeal transformation into a roaming panther with a basilisk stare and a pale skin betraying her *mohajir* descent, which refuses consignment to the peripheries by "conventions of disbelief"[706] and cancels, through her savage ransacking of walled-in citadels, the resistance of space and time alike.

Enforced migrancy, on the other hand, tends to engender the longing for immobility, for rootedness. The massive population migrations, triggered by the collective fantasy of constructing Pakistan as the Land of the Pure mean, for Saleem Sinai, abandoning his native Bombay and implanting his umbilical cord in Karachi: a failed project since the pursuit of the new promised land only leads the "dispossessed multitudes" to erect real or imaginary barriers aimed to enforce a sense of at-homeness into unfamiliar territory (such is the case of Jamila Singer's adoption of *purdah* and becoming the star icon of her new nation). For Saleem Sinai, however, this entails a relapse into carceral confinement: his sole means of resisting massification attempts and retrieving his native Bombay is by being teleported or fleeing without permit or passport, in magical realist fashion, aboard Parvati-the-Witch's wicker basket along "the air-lanes of the subcontinent."[707]

One of the most relevant passages regarding cross-cultural translation occurs in *Shame*, a "novel of leavetaking," albeit one in which the exile or the émigré narrator remains sutured by invisible, elastic straps extending across geographical and imaginary frontiers to an interstitial space that conflates, "at a slight angle," a real and a fictional country.[708] Variously constructed as a homeland whose name was born in exile, since it was acronymically coined by Muslim immigrants to the metropolitan core, or as Peccavistan, in the apocryphal narrative recounting the nineteenth-century British governor's purported confession on conquering the province of Sind (*Peccavi,* "I have sinned"), Pakistan represents a palimpsest country, superposing the flaking layers of foundational myths. Transcending boundaries, breaking through the weight of such myths defines the condition of migrants or *mohajirs*: implicit in their gesture of flight, "which all men anciently dream, the thing for which they envy the birds,"[709] is their eschewal of the eschatological consequences, pictured here in terms of the

[705] Rushdie, *Shame*, 263.
[706] Rushdie, *Shame*, 199.
[707] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 381.
[708] Rushdie, *Shame*, 28-29.
[709] Rushdie, *Shame*, 85.

Norse Yggdrasil approaching ignic consummation,[710] of upholding the phantasm of roots. If gravity and belonging constitute conservative, hegemonic narratives designed to arrest movement and anchor people firmly in their birthplaces, their counter narratives, anti-gravity and non-belonging trans-late Rushdie's migrants ("borne-across humans") into the nomadic consciousness that defies "homologation into dominant ways of representing the self."[711]

Rushdie's favouring of transgression is explicit in *Step Across This Line,* where he cites Georges Bataille's belief in taboo-breaking as both contingent and reinscriptive of violated borders: "transgressions suspend taboos without suppressing them."[712] Transgression, Foucault shows, is as much an infringement of laws and taboos as it is a liberation from the rules and conventions binding individuals within strict frameworks of normative identity. The complex interplay between transgression and the limit casts the latter as a heterotopian zone of attraction granting the former its force.[713] Frontiers, in Rushdie's Foucauldian definition, metonymically signal a partitioned "universe of control": "at the edge," Rushdie says, "we submit to scrutiny, to inspection, to judgment. These people, guarding these lines, must tell us who we are. We must be passive, docile."[714] Crossing frontiers is the equivalent of a wake-up call, a denudement of the "comforting layers of the quotidian"[715] and a most severe interrogation of identity; conversely, for those encapsulated within this panoptic universe, frontiers have always signalled the threat, or the promise, of invading barbarians.

"As a migrant myself," Rushdie confesses, "I have always tried to stress the creative aspects of […] cultural commingling."[716] Migrancy implies severance from one's roots and transplantation into new soil: like the "chimeran graft" of transgenetic organisms, the chimeran hybrid of migrancy is a transcultural phenomenon juxtaposed to other postmodern "hybrid tragedies – the uselessness of mermen, the failures of plastic surgery, the Esperanto-like vacuity of much modern art, the Coca-Colonisation of the planet," as Rushdie points out in *The Satanic Verses*.[717] Nowhere is the boundary more severely interrogated or hybridity more starkly foregrounded as the logical outcome of globalisation than in the

[710] Rushdie, *Shame*, 88.
[711] Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 25,
[712] Rushdie, *Step Across*, 441.
[713] Foucault, *Language*, 34. As Botting also emphasises, "in the absence of absolute boundaries, the play of limit and transgression establishes the divisions, differences, and oppositions structuring social and subjective existence" ("Aftergothic," 282).
[714] Rushdie, *Step Across*, 412.
[715] Rushdie, *Step Across*, 416.
[716] Rushdie, *Step Across*, 415.
[717] Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (New York: Viking, 1989), 420.

carnivalesque aesthetics of *The Satanic Verses*, where the birth of newness in the world is predicated on "fusions, translations, conjoinings,"[718] and where unlimited licence is granted to masqueraders and monsters in turning the world topsy-turvy, inside-out, and back-to-front.[719]

A "book about hybridity written in a hybrid mode" aimed to challenge religious and national purity,[720] *The Satanic Verses* is hailed by Bhabha as a transcultural narrative that articulates with great intensity the liminality of diasporic identity.[721] The sacrificial goat clown turned monstrous devil, Saladdin Chamcha, the boundary-crossing figure by excellence, appears ambivalently to combine the attributes of an unclean transgressor of moral norms and of a purifying agent of moral renewal: both victim and victimiser, as Werbner notes,[722] Chamcha metamorphoses from human to devilish goat, corporealising and then turning on its head the violence erupting in the adoptive culture whose boundaries he has transgressed. Chamcha's monstrosity becomes a bodily trope for the liminal, betwixt-and-between cultural *topos* reserved to strangers, foreigners, exiles who, while polluting the purity of the adoptive culture, also renders its authority structures ambivalent. Torn between freakish mutancy and the desire to achieve congruence with the norm, Chamcha incarnates the borderline condition of postcolonial migration, Rushdie's novel articulating, as Bhabha suggests, the issue of diasporic identity in an irresolvable, uncanny "space of the *untranslatable.*"[723] It is in this light that one ought to approach Rushdie's self-definition in *Step Across This Line*:

> The crossing of borders, of language, geography, and culture; the examination of the permeable frontier between the world of things and deeds and the world of the imagination; the lowering of the intolerable frontiers created by the world's many different kinds of thought police: these matters have been at the heart of the literary project that was given to me by the circumstances of my life, rather than chosen by me for intellectual or "artistic" reasons. Born into one language, Urdu, I've made my life and work in another. Anyone who has crossed a language frontier will readily understand that such a journey involves a form of shapeshifting or self-translation.[724]

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[718] Rushdie, *The Satanic*, 8.
[719] See Werbner, "The Limits of Cultural," 148-149.
[720] Werbner, "The Limits of Cultural," 147.
[721] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 225.
[722] Werbner, "The Limits of Cultural," 141.
[723] When Bhabha enlarges upon the irresolution or liminality of translation – that resistance that forecludes an all-inclusive transmissal of subject-matter – he does so as to highlight the "ambivalent process of splitting and hybridity" attendant on the translation of cultural difference. As he says, the "migrant culture of the 'in-between' […] dramatises the activity of culture's untranslatability" (*The Location of Culture*, 225, 224).
[724] Rushdie, *Step Across*, 434.

While inevitably fraught with distortions and slippages, trans-lating, ferrying across language boundaries then defines Rushdie's liquid location in between the eclecticism of his Indian heritage and the transnational, cross-lingual space of English (or, rather, Hinglish), which, due to mutual pollination with the colonised languages of the Asian subcontinent, also lends itself to further "remaking" by Indian writers who are now "carving new territories for themselves within its frontiers."[725] Whether it be through the Angrezi in which he is compelled to write,[726] or *Hug-me*, the Bombayite "garbage argot" freely switching between Hindi, Urdu, Gujarati, Marathi and English in the course of a single sentence,[727] Rushdie's rejection of embeddedness in ethnocentric, monolithic cultural spaces rigidly structured around a "fantasy of purity"[728] and his forging of a malleable rhetorical melange may also explain his reluctance to accept the chimera of a "commonwealth" identity (a static hybrid) and his mobile spanning across linguistic and cultural frontiers.

In the light of Caroline Walker Bynum's distinctions between hybridity and metamorphosis as representational and rhetorical gateways to fundamentally different notions of selfhood,[729] Rushdie's t(r)opological use of translation as a metaphor and a space of fluid location foregrounds his quest for a processual, dynamic mapping of identity. As Walker Bynum explains, hybridity congeals mutability, while metamorphosis endorses process. Hybrids preclude ideas of transformation, making visible the co-existence or "simultaneity of two-ness"; in contrast, the two-ness implicit in metamorphosis unfolds temporally – in narrative or, one might say, peripatetic fashion – between a pole of departure and a pole of arrival, between a "one-ness" that is left behind and a one-ness that is approached (rather than attained):

> Hybrid reveals a world of difference, a world that *is* and is multiple; metamorphosis reveals a world of stories, of things under way. Metamorphosis breaks down categories by breaching them; hybrid forces contradictory or incompatible categories to coexist and serve as commentary each on the other.[730]

Nowhere does Rushdie outline the routes of passage from one hybrid site to another, and address the perils inherent in arresting such lines of flight into the fixity of "entity-ness," more vividly than in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999). Expounding on Rushdie's thesis of the emergence

[725] Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, 69, 64.
[726] Rushdie, *Shame*, 38.
[727] Salman Rushdie, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (New York: Picador, 1999), 5.
[728] Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, 68.
[729] Bynum, *Metamorphosis*, 29.
[730] Bynum, *Metamorphosis*, 31.

of a "new, permeable post-frontier" in an age of mass migration and displacement,[731] this novel carries a step further the "conflict between the fantasy of Home and the fantasy of Away"[732] and features ex-centric travellers who render Europe and America into what James Clifford calls "sites of travel," which are being "traversed from the outside," to the effect of "enacting differently centred worlds."[733] Travel, charting passageways between east and west in terms of aerial translations across real and invisible faultlines, unsettles the horizontal-vertical and the margin-centre dyads. Whereas the boundaries of homelands vacillate between fluidity and fixity and apparently vanish in the endless global territorial reconfigurations, subjected as they are to endless processes of partitioning and secession that afflict the Indian subcontinent,[734] for Ormus Cama, Umeed Merchant and Vina Apsara, westernised *mohajirs* or eastern hipsters "on the road," the imaginary chasms dividing orient from occident are traumatically experienced at the level of the flesh. It is not gratuitous that Rushdie should have appraised corporeal travel by reference to the biological processes implicit in cross-culturation: exiting Bombay/Wombay is a birth process, skin shedding is a sign of rebirth and renewal, developing phantom limbs is like forming new allegiances to the country of adoption, viral infections – see Vina's coming down with Wisdom-of-the-East-itis, or gurushitia – all boil down to a (facetious) "scientific" approach to culture, defined as follows: "[a] group of micro-organisms grown in a nutrient substance under controlled conditions."[735]

The point of transition across cultures fosters these travellers' simultaneous exposure to "worlds in collision," "universes tearing into each other, striving to become one, destroying each other in the effort."[736] While the possibility that Rushdie's diagnosis of a historical crisis currently engulfing the world may be hinting at the highly controversial, Velikovskyan catastrophic outlook on celestial mechanics cannot be ruled out, and while his dystopian forecast, amplified in *Fury* and enacted in *Shalimar the Clown*, envisages the collision between the thought-worlds of Western liberalism and Eastern fundamentalism, it seems more likely that the "close encounters"[737] between different worlds (eastern and western, celestial and

[731] Rushdie, *The Ground*, 425.
[732] Rushdie, *The Ground*, 55.
[733] James Clifford, "Travelling Cultures," in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 103 and passim.
[734] "Everything starts shifting, changing, getting partitioned, separated by frontiers, splitting, re-splitting, coming apart. Centrifugal forces begin to pull harder than their centripetal opposites. Gravity dies. People fly off into space" (Rushdie, *The Ground*, 168).
[735] Rushdie, *The Ground*, 97.
[736] Rushdie, *The Ground*, 401.
[737] McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 60.

infernal, "real" and imaginary) staged in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* foreground the fluidisation of their boundaries into heterotopian zones that allow for a shattering of rigid subject formations. Instead, conveyance across contact zones weakens the ontological consistence of solipsistic worlds and strips bare the process of identity construction.

Transportation across the rift gaping wide between worlds and underworlds or otherworlds engenders somatic modifications variously charted as molecular mutations or grotesque transformations (see Saladdin Chamcha's metamorphosis into a horned, hoofed goat-man hybrid).[738] Invariably described as an aerial passage, travel occasions the crossing of an insubstantial frontier, the piercing through of an epidermal layer that functions simultaneously – to use the figurations in Steven Connor's cultural history of skin – as a screen (a translucent sheath warranting the integrity of the worlds it contains), as a membrane (a porous, permeable surface enabling the exchange between inside and outside) and as a milieu or "a place of minglings, a mingling of places."[739]

In *Midnight's Children,* it is Bombay that represents such a contact zone or "global integral" of melding cultures and identities, but in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* this threshold is crossed in mid-air: Ormus Cama, "musical sorcerer," "golden troubadour," "the age's unholy fool," claiming to be the "secret originator, the prime innovator of music, the secret language of all humanity, our common heritage, whatever mother tongue we speak," begins his katabatic descent in search for his Eurydice at the exact point of thrusting through a translucid celestial membrane, "an ectoplasmic barrier," ghostly guards patrolling it and all.[740] Flying over Bosphorus, Ormus enters this "transit zone," which expands into a protracted liminal phase in his rite of passage and determines a "biochemical quiver," a mutation "at the level of the cell, of the gene, of the particle,"[741] to the effect that from "flesh devotee" he becomes a "preacher of the spirit," unsettling the flimsy distinction between western hedonism and eastern asceticism. In Rushdie's narrative, this deterritorialisation of identity is translated as Sir Darius Xerxes Cama's "fourth function of outsideness" or as the disruptive drive of rootlessness or nomadism, against which

[738] As Mary Douglas puts it, the functional import of ideas like separation, purification, demarcation and punishing transgression is that of restoring systemic coherence on an inherently disorderly experience: a semblance of order is created thus "only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, about and below, male and female, with and against" (Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 4). "Pollution behaviour," on the other hand, is the reactive condemnation of anything that confuses or contradicts "cherished classifications" (37).

[739] Connor, *The Book of Skin*, 26.

[740] Rushdie, *The Ground*, 91, 260.

[741] Rushdie, *The Ground*, 260.

> those who value stability, who fear transience, uncertainty, change, have erected a powerful system of stigmas and taboos […] so that we mostly conform, we pretend to be motivated by loyalties and solidarities we do not really feel, we hide our secret identities beneath the false skins of those identities which bear the belongers' seal of approval. But the truth leaks out in our dreams; alone in our beds […], we soar, we fly, we flee. And in the waking dreams our societies permit, in our myths, our arts, our songs, we celebrate the non-belongers, the different ones, the outlaws, the freaks.[742]

Even after his presumptuous re-discovery of America,[743] Ormus da Cama, *qua* Orpheus *qua* Morpheus *qua* Metamorpheus, remains enthralled in this transitional phase. On board the "Mayflower," his shape-shifting metamorphosis is not tarnished with any anxieties of identity loss; on the contrary, it involves his retrieval of "westernness" as a natural legacy of his Bombay background. Ormus (whose radically composite selves encompass references to not only Orpheus, but also to Hormuz, Vasco da Gama and Gayomart, his still-born, non-identical, dizygotic twin) experiences dis-orientation, loss of geographical bearings, and entry into a heterotopian zone in which historical facts get entangled with fictional constructs to the point that they become indistinguishable. "Spaces of alternate ordering," spaces of deferred transition across gaps that "can never be closed up,"[744] heterotopias allow for the "unreal" to take precedence over and even prompt manifestations of the "real." In mid-flight, the gash in the sky-membrane becomes a junction point, a node at which forking paths collude, creating scope for an "ontological parallax."[745] Examples of this include, to use McHale's comprehensive survey of the landscapes of postmodernist fiction (1987), Chinese-box worlds (the slashes in the screen of Ormus's in-flight movie revealing another movie and so on); intertextual zones hypothesising about the interference of characters from other fictional worlds (Tolkien's demoniacal Sauron causing Vina Apsara's descent into the Underworld); or worlds under erasure, the most memorable example regarding the crossing of the ultimate frontier – the frontier of the skin: "At the frontier of the skin no dogs patrol," which is instantaneously invalidated by "At the frontier of the skin mad dogs patrol."[746]

Ormus's ventures into alternative universes witness the melting of everything that is "rock-hard" into thin air,[747] the off-centring of the world's axes, which causes frontiers to glide across territories and abysmal gaps to

[742] Rushdie, *The Ground*, 74.
[743] "We are the Pilgrim Children, Ormus thinks. Where the first foot falls, let it be Bombay Rock," in Rushdie, *The Ground*, 258.
[744] Hetherington, *The Badlands*, viii-ix.
[745] Brian McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 54.
[746] Rushdie, *The Ground*, 55.
[747] Rushdie, *The Ground*, 361.

fracture the solid ground beneath one's feet. Not only does his route through the looking glass provide him with access to parallel worlds in which England is "ersatz" America, Kennedy escapes assassination attempts in Dallas and the Watergate Affair is a mere fantasy thriller, but the extreme fluidisation of his "double vision," which actuates an excessive permeability of transworld frontiers, brings about apocalyptic visions of the earth imploding in a world-encompassing megaquake:

> The barriers between the world of dreams and the waking world, between the spheres of the actual and the imagines, are breaking down. […] The frontiers are softening. The time may not be far off when they disappear entirely. This notion, which ought to excite him, instead fills him with terrible dread. If the forking paths are coming together, if a point of confluence is ahead, […] if such a decompartmentalisation were to occur, and all verities suddenly failed, could we survive the force of the event?[748]

One answer – supplied, obviously, in the context of the America's counterculture and its Dionysian excesses – is protean metamorphosis. The earthquake songs that Ormus Cama dedicates to the advent of chaos and anarchic mutability trigger the audiences' bestial transformations and their bohemian, centrifugal errantry as the sole alternatives to hyper-institutionalised forms of the oppressive civilisation and their drive towards dehumanisation.

Ormus's horrific blueprint of a "millenarian eschatology"[749] is still pending to unveil the "unsolidity of solid ground"[750] in Rushdie's later novels. *Fury* (2001) and, more recently, *Shalimar the Clown* (2005) document the dis-orientation experienced by nomadic selves in the metropolitan sprawls of America. In particular, although acknowledging a post-historical stage of Western society, by outlining America as the "Promised Land" of liberal democracy, these novels nonetheless undermine the notion of modernity's blueprint utopia come true by, on the one hand, performing a Baudrillardian critique of hyperreality, and on the other, highlighting the resurgence of universalising narratives such as nationalism, religious fundamentalism and global campaigns against terror. England in the 1960s no longer represented the "dream-country" that might centripetally lure these self-outcasts, but a society that expectorated outsiders (for instance, Sir Darius Xerxes Cama), or ghettoised them in contemporary replicas of panoptical structures, reducing them to the condition of "immigrunting," "immigratitude" and "immigrovelling." America, on the other hand, the "Great Attractor,"[751] the space of non-belonging, as well as of voracious consumerism by definition, magnetically attracts and devours them.

[748] Rushdie, *The Ground*, 400.
[749] Rushdie, *The Ground*, 296.
[750] Rushdie, *The Ground*, 55.
[751] Rushdie, *The Ground*, 102.

Whereas England in these narratives increasingly lends itself to Lévi-Strauss's distinction in *Tristes Tropiques* between the anthropoemic strategies of modern societies, which either eject or isolate polluting individuals from the social body and the anthropophagic strategies of primitive societies, which absorb, swallow up or cannibalise upon strangers,[752] America and its consumption practices more neatly fall into the latter category. America, with its omnivorous appetite and tremendous devouring urges,[753] becomes the perfect place for the reinvention of the self, particularly for Professor Solanka, who has come to the promised land out of the professed desire to obliterate his roots, to erase, in computer fashion, the virtual reality of his "back-story," to discard his "useless baggage of blood and tribe" and initiate the process of "automorphosis" or re-programming of the self:

> Give me a name, America /…/ Bathe me in amnesia and clothe me in your powerful unknowing. /…/ No longer a historian but a man without histories let me be. I'll rip my lying mother tongue out of my throat and speak your broken English instead. Scan me, digitise me, beam me up. If the past is the sick old Earth, then, America, be my flying saucer. Fly me to the rim of space. The moon's not far enough.[754]

If non-belonging, nomadism is celebrated in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, *Fury* and *Shalimar the Clown* represent narratives of return, of reversing the routes of previous voyages, eastwards, in an attempt to recover the lost contours of homelands which have to be imaginatively retrieved into existence. Homebound voyages in *Midnight's Children* could still be fraught with the migrants' acquisition of an "altered vision" upon their no longer recognisable native lands. The European sojourn of Saleem Sinai's grandfather, Aadam Aziz, in the first decades of twentieth century, predictably bestowed upon him the imperative of translating the western project of emancipation and progress to Kashmir. For Professor Solanka, the ex-Cambridge academic, and Noman Noman, *alias* Shalimar the Clown in Rushdie's homonymously titled novel of 2006, the actor turned terrorist, however, abandoning their homelands was dictated by personal, rather than historical traumas, in the first place: parental abuse, in the case of the former, and dishonoured manhood, in the case of the latter. The point of departure is this time, America itself, as both novels go further towards exploring what Bauman calls a post-Panoptical society. In contrast with Bentham's Panopticon, considered by Foucault to epitomise the model of

[752] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (1955). Trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (New York: Penguin, 1992), 389-390. A distinction also adopted by Zygmunt Bauman (*Liquid Modernity*, 101).
[753] Salman Rushdie, *Fury* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2001), 69.
[754] Rushdie, *Fury*, 51.

modern power, post-Panoptical strategies of power no longer depend on fixing or immobilising cellular individualities in space; on the contrary, what is at stake nowadays is not spatial confinement but spatial fluidisation, not the erection of boundaries but their demolition so as to allow the flow of increasingly mobile global powers:

> For power to be free to flow, the world must be free of fences, barriers, fortified borders and checkpoints. Any dense and tight network of social bonds, and particularly a territorially rooted tight network, is an obstacle to be cleared out of the way. Global powers are bent on dismantling such networks for the sake of their continuous and growing fluidity, that principal source of their strength and the warrant of their invincibility.[755]

While conceding to this spatial disengagement of power, these two novels also record its provisional re-"territorialisation" and re-"solidification" through the resurgence of conflictual tensions and their legitimating grand narratives in various nodal points of the global network: revolutionary upheavals in *Fury* and global (counter)terrorism in *Shalimar the Clown*. The west is still seen to be generating models for the east, but this is done at the level of the hyperreal engendering the real,[756] as America has become the new centreweight in the global village, the "quicksand metropolis" with "no mysteries, no depths, only surfaces and revelations."[757]

Whereas *The Satanic Verses* orbited around tropes of freakish embodiment, *Fury* scrutinises a society flooded with information (commercial ads, movies, tabloid headlines). The novel starts by recording the dematerialisation or dissipation of materiality into patterns of flow (i.e. virtual reality) experienced at the core of the information society. The Gothic apparatus of ghostly apparitions, walking skeletons and ghastly revenants designed to stir a frisson and an intimation of awe-ful sublimity in traditional Gothic romances is refurbished to include the quasi-mythical apparition of the three Furies who are haunting Solanka. Not only does the novel indulge in the "spectralising habit" of romances and phantasmagoria,[758] but it also addresses the threat of disembodiment facing the posthuman through the automata, uncanny, discarnate doubles, Solanka initially embarks on creating.

Despite his disenchantment with America's terminal crisis and its "mechanisation of the human,"[759] the dolls Solanka is devoted to creating and endowing with their own history (his cyborgian Frankendolls) reach such tremendous rates of popularity that he is unawares caught in a virtual

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[755] Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 14.
[756] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981). Trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 23.
[757] Salman Rushdie, *Shalimar the Clown* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005), 5.
[758] Botting and Townshend, *Gothic*, 2.
[759] Rushdie, *Fury*, 182.

reality project, PlanetGalileo.com, an alternative multidimensional universe of the Puppet Kings, a realm of computer-generated simulacra. These proliferate into a multimedia beast, capable of constant metamorphosis, as Solanka admits, through the looting of ancient mythical narratives. The embodied metaphor Solanka uses to interrogate the "parataxic mode of being"[760] is the automaton. Caught within the heterotopia of virtual images, identity risks either overemphasising or shedding its corporeality in a "phantasmic electronic flickering."[761] Automata, man-machine doubles, mechanical dolls destabilise notions of autonomous subjectivity, signalling the "industrial production of a personality split, an instantaneous cloning of living man, the technological recreation of one of our most ancient myths: the myth of the *double,* of an electroergonomic double whose presence is spectral."[762] Surrogate humans, puppets have traditionally been symbols of man being manipulated by higher forces, given their structural interchangeability with their controller.[763] While duplicating human characteristics, this mimetic function of puppets, automata, mannequins, marionettes and dolls – diminished, artificial human proxies – somewhat elides their innate otherness, taking them as substitutes for the human organism, which is mechanically replicated and manipulated as such.

"Imagination's monsters," Rushdie claims in *Step Across This Line*, mould the real once unleashed to cross frontiers between oneiric and actual worlds. The terrorist acts of 9/11 2001 were "a monstrous act of the imagination, intended to act upon all our imaginations, to shape our own imaginings of the future […]. We all crossed a frontier that day, an invisible boundary between the imaginable and the unimaginable, and it turned out to be the unimaginable that was real."[764] In *Shalimar the Clown*, migration, forced exodus for the Kashmiris, is moulded on the western myth of a lost, unregainable Paradise: hence, Shalimar, the verdant Mughal garden of "Kashmir, in a time before memory" is a fallen Eden,[765] soon to become part and parcel of the "multipolar, multicivilisational" world politics and risk being swept away in the tidal wave of an imminent Huntingtonian "clash of civilisations."

For India Ophuls, whose father's gesture of violent interpellation has doomed to bear the weight of a burdensome, foreign toponym, being forcibly

[760] Katherine N. Hayles, "Postmodern Parataxis: Embodied Texts, Weightless Information," *American Literary History*. 2 (1990): 412.
[761] Botting, "Aftergothic," 280.
[762] Paul Virilio, *Open Sky*. Trans. J. Rose (London: Verso, 1997), 39-40, quoted in Botting and Townshend, *Gothic*, 4.
[763] Michel Feher, Ramona Naddaff and Nadia Tazi (eds.). *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*. Part One (New York: Zone, 1990), 411.
[764] Rushdie, *Step Across*, 436-437.
[765] Rushdie, *Shalimar*, 4.

equated with the exotic province of British colonialism is unacceptable: her own "violent English history" impels her to journey in search of her maternal roots and recuperate an original identity subsumed under the name of Kashmira. Nevertheless, her passage through a "magic portal" does not return her to the Garden of Paradise; postlapsarian Kashmir, like Los Angeles, like wartime Strasbourg, appears apocalyptic, entrenched in executions, police brutality, explosions, riots; what Girard calls a "sacrificial crisis,"[766] that is the erosion of the distinction between a violence that is impure and purifying violence: "Everywhere was now a part of everywhere else. Russia, America, London, Kashmir. Our lives, our stories, flowed into one another's, were no longer our own, individual, discrete. […] there were collisions and explosions. The world was no longer calm."[767]

In *Shalimar the Clown*, heavy modernity and its structural solidity are embodied in Max Ophuls, former American Ambassador to India, legislator, architect and, eventually, witness of the demise registered by the post-WWII international "narrative of emancipation."[768] Having survived the Holocaust, Ophuls nevertheless succumbs to the "utopian fallacy" of man's perfectibility while at the same time upholding a Hobbesian model of power, whereby a sovereign must by necessity and force contain the Leviathan's natural aggressive instincts. This philosopher-prince's homiletic teachings to India – ambivalently indebted to the confrontational strategies in Machiavelli's political thought and Sun Tzu's art of war – include the story of the "palace of power," a Chinese-box, Panoptical structure of windowless rooms, guarded by human-beast monsters, whom one must progressively behead in order to access the control chamber and its ever-elusive "man of true power." Max Opuls's career as "maker of the world" is coeval with the transition from this territorialised, adversarial model of power, relying on the contrast between the subordinates' visible immobilisation in space and the guards' invisible yet assumed locatedness at the centre of the Panopticon, to the extra-territorial power-relations of "liquid modernity," when the chief hegemonic practices (such as "escape, slippage, elision and avoidance") rely on the volatility, inaccessibility and spatial fluidity of the power elites[769] – the very techniques appropriated by Shalimar, whose counterfeit passports and expert tightrope walking enables him to scour the secret lanes of the invisible world.

While Professor Solanka is metaphorically chased out of America by the three Furies that haunt him for his Oresteian sin, his puppets take on a life

[766] "When this difference has been effaced, purification is no longer possible and impure, contagious, reciprocal violence spreads throughout the community" (Girard, *Violence*, 1979: 49).
[767] Rushdie, *Shalimar*, 37.
[768] Rushdie, *Shalimar*, 20.
[769] Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 11.

of their own, in the sense of triggering the revolutionary fervour that escalates across the globe, in the half-real, half tongue-in-cheek republic of Lilliput-Blefuscu. Solanka's difficulty resides in realising that this remote archipelago is more than a stage on which a masque is being played out. That in the "golden age" of technophiliac posthumanism and consumerist ecstasy, fury can still have a literal meaning, that conflicts keep escalating and geopolitical borders still demand redefinition. For Solanka, return home to his "damned Yoknapatawpha"[770] is possible not in the sense of either virtual or corporeal homecoming (flying east, thus simultaneously towards the future and his past, he refuses transit in Bombay, preferring to await take-off on board the plane), but of recovering his familial ground, ending the cycle of parental abandonment that generated his exile in the first place. All in all, albeit acknowledging the complexities of cultural location in post- or neocolonial situations, Rushdie does seem to privilege deterritorialisation as an active pursuit of homelands of the imagination. Travel becomes the figurative translation – across increasingly fluidised barriers – of multiply-localised selves, along routes that fork, intersect, and perpetually defer the (chimerical) recuperation of roots.

III.3. De-naturing the Monster: Posthuman Others

Among the most enduring significances that Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus* has perpetuated in the popular conscience is its association with the technological production of a monstrous double, betraying anxieties about the blurring of distinctions between man and machine.[771] In fact, replicating life by artificial means is a theme that reaches far back into classical antiquity, to mythological artificers such as Prometheus, Daedalus or Pygmalion. The practice of "body modification," through an alliance of art and technology, is, as Sawday maintains, "one of the defining characteristics of human culture,"[772] challenging, in effect, our sense of the body as the defining limit to our own sense of selfhood. This diagnosis of man's uncanny relation with techno-scientific advancement, which constantly de-familiarizes and re-familiarizes us with the mutable boundaries or, say, interfaces between biology and technology, is quite relevant for the cultural anxieties humanity is facing on the cusp of the new

[770] Rushdie, *Fury*, 220.

[771] See the study I published under my maiden name, Carmen Bujdei, "Monstrosity and Self-Censorship in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*," *Caietele Echinox* 4 (2003): 153-173.

[772] Jonathan Sawday, "Forms Such as Never Were in Nature: The Renaissance Cyborg," in *At the Borders of the Human. Beasts, Bodies and Natural Philosophy in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Erica Fudge, Ruth Gilbert and Susan Wiseman (New York: Macmillan, 1999), 172.

millennium, on account of the impact exerted by biotechnology, biorobotics, genetic engineering, reproductive technologies or cybernetics. The *Transhumanist Declaration* adopted by the Oxford-based Humanity+ Organization in 2009 emphasizes, for instance, the necessity to address, in ethically responsible terms, the challenges brought by the technologically-assisted emergence of the "posthuman."[773] The human, it is implied, is but a provisional, intermediate stage in the evolution towards a trans- and, eventually, post-human enhancement of the species' intellectual, physical, and psychological capacities *via* the new technologies.[774] And yet, despite the confidence exhibited by the advocates of transhumanism in maximizing human potential through technology-assisted procedures, their manifesto betrays an undercurrent of fear and wariness directed at the abuses and misuses of science that is fully in tune with Angela Carter's aforementioned verdict that we live in Gothic times.

In *Our Posthuman Future,* Francis Fukuyama assesses the implications of the biotechnological revolution on redefining the nature of the human. The predictions of Huxley's *Brave New World*, it is claimed, particularly the procedures envisioned for the genetic manufacture of human beings (*in vitro* fertilisation, surrogate motherhood, hormone therapy, implants, modified foods), have conclusively altered our understandings of the human, as we have entered a "*posthuman* stage of history."[775] Noting that advances in medical technology (the neuropharmacological moulding of human personality, stem-cell regenerative methods and gene optimisation) risk pushing humanity over the edge, Fukuyama claims that only the establishment of a regulatory framework for discriminating between legitimate and illegitimate uses of biotechnology might issue a "recommencement of history."[776] The erosion of the confines separating the organic from the inorganic, and the articulation of possibilities for different forms of posthuman embodiment have, indeed, given rise to "anxieties about the instability of the subject," particularly given the prospect of "bodies and identities that are differential, hybrid, and potentially

[773] See Hayles's four-tiered definition of the posthuman as: 1. the prevalence of "informational patterns" over "material instantiations" of life; 2. a stage in which consciousness is no longer the sole seat and marker of human identity; 3. the valorization of the body as an extensible, enhancible prosthesis; and 4. a reconfiguration of the human in symbiosis or alliance with the non-biological, with the technological, in Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman. Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 2-3.

[774] http://humanityplus.org/philosophy/transhumanist-declaration/, accessed September 14, 2012.

[775] Francis Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (London: Profile Books, 2002), 7.

[776] Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future*, 12-17.

monstrous."[777] Halberstam and Livingston also define the posthuman condition as a stage in which the coherence of the human body has come under serious pressure since posthuman bodies resist subjection to metadiscourses emerging instead as nodal points of convergence between material bodies, discursive bodies and bodies of discourse.[778] Absorption into entirely simulated life signals a terrific threat of blending virtual and actual life to the point of superseding the human identity, generating what Katherine N. Hayles calls a "parataxic mode of experience," understood as a concurrent experience of "ourselves as embodied creatures, living in specific times and places and limited by the biological, cultural, and historical circumstances that define us" and as capable of transcending "these limitations and living a disembodied, freefloating existence made possible in part by the near-instantaneous transfer of information from one point of the globe to any other."[779] Parataxis would then signal a discontinuity in the "metaphoric coherence" of the posthuman self, with its attendant understanding of the human as a surface "to be inscribed, an amorphous construction with shifting boundaries, a structure of information," a *chimera,* rather than as a self-consistent entity.[780]

If, as Susan Squier suggests, the postmodern is the era in which the link between sexuality and reproduction has come under virtual erasure, with medical-technological breakthroughs pressing insistently the boundaries of the posthuman, the mutations they precipitate in the cultural imaginary ambivalently charge scientific intervention into bodily sites (the so-called

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[777] Jenny Wolmark, "Staying with the Body. Narratives of the Posthuman in Contemporary Science Fiction," in *Edging Into the Future. Science Fiction and Contemporary Cultural Transformation*, ed. Veronica Hollinger and Joan Gordon (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 76.

[778] Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, "Introduction: Posthuman Bodies," in *Posthuman Bodies*, ed. Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 19. As Haraway puts it, posthuman embodiment "is not about fixed location in a reified body, […] but about nodes in fields, inflections in orientations… Embodiment is significant prosthesis," in *Donna Haraway, Simians, Cyborgs and Women. The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), 195.

[779] Hayles, "Postmodern," 394.

[780] Hayles, "Postmodern," 396-398. The results of transgenetic biotechnology, chimeric animals are thus named on account of their mixture of embryo-genetic material from the donor stem cells and a host blastocyst, in Mario R. Capecchi, "Altering the Genome by Homologous Recombination," *Science* (June 16, 1989): 244, 4910: 1289. Transgenic organisms – called chimeras in scientific jargon – parataxically evoke ancient and baroque notions of the fabulous creature, originally a somatic aggregate of heterogeneous parts (lion's head, goat's body and snake tail) and later decrypted as a phantasm; in contemporary scientific terminology, chimeras would denote artefacts (Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs*, 153). As Hayles says, "Like the gene, the chimera has been domesticated. Made flesh and blood by the colonising techniques that earlier ages could scarcely have imagined, it is no longer a xenophobic monster but a designer organism whose natural habitat is the laboratory cage" (Hayles, "Postmodern," 404-407).

"reproductive technologies") with an oppressive or a liberating potential.[781] Reproductive technologies may well have reached the point where the posthuman is (chimerically) being produced, yet ethical questions surrounding the legitimacy of this invasive colonisation of the *natural* by the *technological* remain fraught with insoluble controversy. As Squier maintains,

> The contemporary imagery of posthuman, postsexual, technologically-assisted reproduction features such actual or hypothetical, visually explicit or implicit figurations as cloning, ectogenic gestation (separation of the foetus from its maternal environment), surrogate motherhood (re-situation of the foetus in another mother) and male pregnancy (the would-be re-positioning the foetus in a male "womb"): the common denominator of these representations resides in a "process of de- and recontextualisation, a process whose postmodern implications are rooted in the Romantic and modern history of reproductive representations.[782]

Still, in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women. The Reinvention of Nature*, Haraway deconstructs the truth claims of science as hostile intervention into nature: in this era of techno-biopolitics, it is claimed, bodies no longer stem solely as the end result of biological reproduction: instead, they tend to emerge at the juncture of an endless array of cultural productions, technologies and practices, such as biological research, visualisation technologies, and so on: "Bodies, then, are not born; they are made. Bodies have been as thoroughly denaturalised as sign, context, and time. […] Organisms are made; they are constructs of a world-changing kind."[783] In a celebratory vein that marks her faith in the "promises of monsters," Haraway articulates the cyborg myth on the trope of pollution, i.e. on a deliberate and pleasure-bound confusion of the boundaries between animal and human, organism and machine, solid matter and ethereal quintessence, claiming that this may entail the collapse of similar dichotomies structuring the Western self:

> cyborg politics insist on noise and advocate pollution, rejoicing in the illegitimate fusions of animal and machine. These are the couplings which make Man and Woman so problematic, subverting the structure of desire, the force imagined to generate language and gender, and so subverting the structure and modes of reproduction of "Western" identity, of nature and culture, of mirror and eye, slave and master, body and mind.[784]

There are several perspectives to which such a contention lends itself. First, in advocating the emergence of a post-gender world, Haraway

[781] Susan M. Squier, "Reproducing the Posthuman Body: Ectogenetic Fetus, Surrogate Mother, Pregnant Man," in *Posthuman Bodies*, ed. Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 113.
[782] Squier, "Reproducing the Posthuman," 113-114.
[783] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs*, 208.
[784] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs*, 176.

denounces the ineffectuality of the category of gender, since, in the "technological polis," nature and culture are extricated from any structure of hierarchical polarity. Instead, bodies become agents and surfaces of inscription for "literal technologies – technologies that write the world, biotechnology and microelectronics."[785] Second, in divesting heterosexual reproduction of *jouissance*, and recasting pleasure as the prerogative of interstitial, liminal couplings of bodies and prosthetic devices, Haraway seems to be enlisting Cixous' exhortation to "write [the] body" in the service of the "disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self."[786] In other words, the alliance of biological organism and cybernetic mechanism in the utopian cyborg, on the one hand, and the political coalition between diverse kinds of feminisms, on the other, can generate contestatory force and ecstatic gratification. Third, Haraway projects the cyborg in the genealogical line of other boundary creatures, monsters, who have always policed and disrupted the borders of civilisation and identity, refusing containment and limitation. Like ancient Amazons or hermaphrodites, cyborgs are seen to dislodge "natural" assumptions of gendered behaviour from the "organic holism" of the body. Instead, cyborg imagery can assist in the deconstruction of the "master narrative" of a unified, consistent identity, focusing instead on hybridity, on multiple and cross-over identity. The "monstrous and illegitimate" de-territorialisation of the private body by organic and cybernetic, human and beastly fusions can ultimately spur, as Haraway suggests, the emergence of a similarly hybrid and non-unitary body politic, constantly accommodating and negotiating alterities. In a "post-gender," "posthumanist" world, the politics of the body would programmatically entail a pollution of all boundaries, rendering abjection, as a strategy of self-definition, ineffectual. In Haraway's celebratory cyborg utopia, monstrosity is no longer a parameter of non-species or in-between-species appurtenance, since posthuman embodiment is itself, inevitably, by virtue of its pliability and multiple alliances with other forms of embodiment (technological, viral, biological), already partaking of the "illegitimacy" once thought to mark out the domain of monstrous corporeality. As Youngquist says, "[m]onstrosities may haunt the human, but they hound it too – toward other embodiments."[787]

Posthuman monstrosity and its corporeal forms, Halberstam and Livingston consider, are "recognisable because they occupy the overlap between the now and the then, the here and the always"; no longer part of "the family of man" but of a "zoo of posthumanities."[788] It may well be that

[785] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs*, 175.
[786] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs*, 163.
[787] Youngquist, *Monstrosities*, xxviii.
[788] Halberstam and Livingston, "Introduction: Posthuman Bodies," 3.

the impact of scientific and technological alternative, supplementary routes of reproducing human identity is such that as Squier predicts, "the choice is no longer between the natural body and the culturally constructed body, but between different fields of bodily (re)construction."[789] In "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others," an essay riven with tropes of gestation horizons in "truly monstrous times," Haraway resumes her argument of the cyborg, by describing what she calls the "diffracting apparatus of a monstrous counterfactualism" and reconceptualising the process of denaturalisation (technological decontextualisation) that nature has registered in this technophiliac age:

> in the belly of the local/global monster in which I am gestating, often called the postmodern world, global technology appears to denature everything, to make everything a malleable matter of strategic decisions and mobile production and reproduction processes.[790]

By proposing *artifactualism* as the condition of nature *made* rather than *born*, Haraway opts for a discursive reinscription of nature that would release it from its reifying appropriation as the object or "other" of culture. The sections that follow look at two novels that rework the trope of monstrous birthing in *Frankenstein*,[791] suggesting, in line with Haraway's prediction, that if organisms are to be seen as "natural-technical entities," then diffraction, rather than reflection or refraction, would serve as a pattern for mapping the interfaces where differences between the same and the other become effaced in those "inappropriate/d others" whose dislocated origins preclude their becoming affixed as the sheer difference against which the self acquires its definitional boundaries.[792]

III.3.1. Dislocated Origins: Bio-Technical Generation in Fay Weldon's *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*

Fay Weldon's *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* (1983) traces the monstrification[793] procedures to which Ruth Patchett, an accountant's wife

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[789] Squier, "Reproducing the Posthuman," 119.

[790] Donna Haraway, "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriated Others," in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, Paula A. Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), 202, 297.

[791] Postmodern rewritings of *Frankenstein*, which hover between cultural complicity with and cultural critique of the Shelleyan "master narrative," tend to re-conceive the monstrous birth as an amalgam of in vitro fertilisation, bioengineering, cloning, and surrogacy in a technologised remorphing of the human (see Squier, "Reproducing the Posthuman," 120-121).

[792] See Haraway, "The Promises of Monsters," 299-300.

[793] The concept of "monstrification" is inspired by Christine Braunberger's essay, "Revolting Bodies: The Monster Beauty of Tattooed Women," *NWSA Journal* 12.2 (2000): 1-23. There, following a lead suggested by Mary Russo in *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess, Modernity* (1994), she invests the term "monstrification," which was coined by John

deliberately subjects herself.[794] The reason that impels her to extensive body modification is her desire for vengeance, as the novel commences by redeploying the classical motif of triangular erotic desire entangling Ruth, the hideously deformed housewife/narrator, her unfaithful husband Bobbo and Mary Fisher, an ethereal, successful romance writer. What emerges as sheer antagonism between the monstrous self and the angelic "other woman" implodes into a merger of identities: aided by the modern magic of plastic surgery, the She-Devil will undergo a transformation into the very image of the Mary Fisher she abhors. As if nightmarishly echoing the French feminists' injunction of writing the body, which must be heard, the voiceless Ruth will narrativise her metamorphosis into a she-devil, literally inscribing onto her flesh her new, empowered female identity.

Ruth Pratchett and Mary Fisher, embodiments of monster and angel, occupy the extreme positions that cultural codes have assigned them, both being considered to be "outside the sphere of cultural hegemony, occupying a realm of marginalisation and *otherness*."[795] Whereas one stands for subversive femininity and all its associations of polluting bodily effluvia, witchcraft, castrating motherhood, the other appears to approximate the feminine figure of transcendence (dispenser of salvation for both men and other women caught in the ensnaring romances she writes). Both seem to have been confined to their abodes (whether they be the deceptively "paradisiacal" suburbs of Eden Grove, or the "High Tower, the Old Lighthouse, World's End"), both are relegated to gender-specific roles (whether performing menial domestic chores, or catering for the welfare of Bobbo), and, despite Mary Fisher's financially successful writing venture, both are silenced, lacking an authentic voice of their own.

At the outset of her narrative, Ruth Patchett experiences physical entrapment, incarceration, yet the bodily confines of her epidermis paradoxically contain both the gigantic monstrosity of flesh and the seraphic emaciation of fleshlessness: the self encapsulates the other, as it were, and it will take an excruciating process of shedding layer after layer of flesh (slipping the old skin and slithering off "renewed into the world") to reveal the other within. Even the surgeon who chisels Ruth's body sees "her as a giant parcel to be unwrapped."[796] The result of her emotional and physical

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Ruskin to refer to apotropaic architectural practices of placing gargoyles at the entrance of buildings, with the sense of a deliberate and subversive female body aesthetics, whereby women alter their looks, assuming as well as challenging the social marginality that conventionally perceived grotesqueness (read: tattooed skin) generally conveys.

[794] Previously published as Carmen Bujdei, "Towards 'Post/Human' Embodiment in Fay Weldon's *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*," in *Constructions of Identity (III)*, ed. Adrian Radu (Cluj-Napoca: Napoca Star, 2006), 65-81.

[795] Waugh, *Feminine Fictions*, 193.

[796] Fay Weldon, *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* (New York: Ballantine Publ., 1983), 247.

sloughing will, of course, be the reversal of power relations, consistent with her political agenda of redefining woman as self-assertive, but will also raise questions as to the relativity of the otherness against or through which the self can achieve such a redefinition. Deprived of substantiality, of subjectivity, compelled to consent to a superimposed identity frame, Ruth will seek to "desubstantiate" (disembody, dismember), in a first instance, and then "resubstantiate" (refashion, reaggregate) herself not through a positive valorisation of her own body, but through a moulding of her self/body in the image of her antagonist. Reducing herself solely to her body or, in effect, reducing her body to an image of ethereal and artificial beauty is confirmation of the "violence of cultural demands for female bodies resulting in self-loathing, in anorexia, [self-annihilation] /…/ destroy[ing] both the other and the self."[797]

An "especially vicious normative violation," the monstrous body invites genetic restructuring, surgical correction or sheer relegation to the marginal ranks of pathological deviation.[798] Vlahogiannis points out that body modifications through mutilation, disease or deformity negatively impact the drive towards approximating a particular corporeal aesthetic ideal: whether temporary (clothing, corset-wearing or make-up) or permanent (body sculpting, plastic surgery, tattooing), body alteration techniques may contribute to shaping or reinforcing body image, as well as redefine the normative project of proper embodiment.[799] Ruth's physical body becomes the site for self-definition, as well as the battlefield where a horrendous struggle for transubstantiation into the symbolic ideal of male desire is staged. Her physical dismemberment entails self-destruction more than self-construction, yet one has to concede that the agonising diets and surgery that should assist in rendering hers a "docile body" in Foucauldian acceptation, amount, through their hyperbolic inflation, to an interrogation of cultural dictates whereby women's existence is entirely determined with regimes of the patriarchal gaze. Abjecting the detritus of her body acquires, in the she-devil's self-fashioning, scatological and teratological proportions: she deliberately modifies her body boundaries, excising flesh, bone and sinew, in a process of corporeal fragmentation and reconstitution achieved *via* "modern surgical techniques," "chip technology, microsurgery, [and] lasers."[800] Resorting to this technology-assisted, lengthy process of body

[797] Susan Jaret McKinstry, "Fay Weldon's *Life and Loves of a She-Devil*: The Speaking Body," in *Fay Weldon's Wicked Fictions*, ed. Regina Barreca (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1994), 112.

[798] Arnold I. Davidson, "The Horror of Monsters," in *The Boundaries of Humanity. Humans, Animals, Machines*, ed. James J. Sheehan and Morton Sosna (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1991), 51.

[799] Vlahogiannis, "Disabling Bodies," 13.

[800] Weldon, *The Life and Loves*, 201.

alteration – an extensive liminal stage in which boundaries between inside and outside will waver in a constant pattern of flow – renders Ruth more than simply compliant with the constraints of her culture's feminine beauty myth; though she eventually becomes "an impossible male fantasy made flesh,"[801] though driven to approximate a corporeal aesthetic ideal that presupposes mutilation and disfigurement, she also is a celebrant of female power since she refuses reification into the patriarchal dyad of angel and monster. Excess, exaggeration, surfeit are the prerequisites of the she-devil, in terms of size prior to her rebirth, or in terms of the power she wields (over her body, the others and the world) subsequent to her resurrection. Ruth has gone to the extremes in assuming a male-imposed identity (assigned to her through Bobbo's identificatory interpellation), yet she appropriates this strategy of enfreakment and turns it to her own ends:

> I expect he is right. In fact, since he does so well in the world and I do so badly, I really must assume he is right. I am a she-devil. But this is wonderful! This is exhilarating! If you are a she-devil the mind clears at once. The spirits rise. There is no shame, no guilt, no dreary striving to be good. There is only, in the end, what you *want*. And I can take what I want. I am a she-devil.[802]

However, this is more than the mere internalisation of otherness, more than mere compliance with the constraints of her culture's feminine beauty myth. It is through a paradoxical adoption and eschewal of cultural dictates, through counterpointing the weight of cultural representations with their ironic contextualisation[803] that the she-devil can show both complicity with and contestation of the cultural dominant at issue here: the social construction of bodily beauty, not an ideal beauty in Ruth's case, but "monster/beauty."[804]

Reminiscent of the overstretched, translucent layer of the Frankensteinian monster's sutured skin – which makes visible the network of arteries and muscles beneath and unstably accommodates the community of cadavers he has resurrected into one body – Ruth's oversensitive skin[805] hermetically

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[801] Weldon, *The Life and Loves*, 259.

[802] Weldon, *The Life and Loves*, 48.

[803] Hutcheon, *The Politics*, 102.

[804] The concept of "monster/beauty" is proposed by Joanna Frueh to signal its contrast with "ideal beauty," which "entails the loss of corporeal subjectivity"; the oxymoronic "monster/beauty" is intensely physical, corporeal, revelling in "the awed and touchable, touching and smellable, vocal and mobile body that, by exceeding the merely visual, manifests a highly articulated sensual presence. Ideal beauty attracts, whereas monster/beauty very likely attracts and repulses simultaneously," in *Monster Beauty. Building the Body of Love* (University of California Press, 2001), 1-2.

[805] "I was born, I sometimes think, with nerve endings not inside but outside my skin: they shivered and twanged. I grew lumpish and brutish in the attempt to seal them over" (Weldon, *The Life and Loves*, 8).

fastens and insulates her colossally large flesh against culturally-engrained revulsion towards corporeal excessiveness, detectible in male and female responses alike: while her husband sees her as a "vast, obliging mountain," her mother finds "ugly and discordant things" revolting.[806] What Ruth realises is the signifying potential of the body which encages her: its repulsiveness is triggered by fears of uncontrollability, impending engulfment, and by what Patricia Waugh calls the "boundlessness of the feminine."[807]

The narrative of transformation registers a bi-directional split. Firstly, Ruth chronicles her monster-turned-angel saga, her *self* by exploring a vast array of alternative female identities which bridge the gap to the *other*, in what would amount to an extensive liminal stage, marked by extreme indeterminacy of identity, in her rite of passage. Enacting her social death (relinquishment of motherhood, home abandonment and arson), she assumes different identities, different names (Vesta Rose, Polly Patch, Molly Wishant, Marlene Hunter) and takes on a host of menial jobs (from housekeeper to nurse in an asylum for the elderly and, ultimately, a disembodied telephone voice at an employment agency for women). Her effortless changing from one persona to another renders her identity fluid, metamorphic, bordering, as she does, the fringes of society from whence she can actually manipulate the destinies of her husband, her rival, as well as of hundreds of similarly disempowered women: Bobbo ends up serving time for an embezzlement he has not committed, Mary Fisher learns through suffering the responsibilities of a more authentic existence, and Ruth emerges as an emblematic dispenser of justice, who not only modifies the dictates of law enforcement, but also envisages herself as the female counterpart of the Christian redeemer/tempter[808], who offers deliverance *via* suffering and self-knowledge:

> I wasn't the second coming, this time in female form; what the world has been waiting for. Perhaps as Jesus did in his day for men, so I do now, for women. He offered the stony path to heaven: I offer the motorway to hell. I bring suffering and self-knowledge (the two go together) for others and salvation for myself. Each woman for herself, I cry. If I'm nailed to the cross of my own convenience I'll put up with it. I just want my own way, and by Satan I'll have it. She-devils have many names, and an infinite capacity for interfering in other people's lives.[809]

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[806] Weldon, *The Life and Loves*, 32, 8.

[807] Waugh, *Feminine Fictions*, 192.

[808] Like Carter's heroine, through her various guises, Ruth brings about transformation, positive change in the people she encounters, enhancing their humaneness and self-esteem. For instance, starting the Vesta Rose Employment Agency, she specialises in providing jobs for "women who had good skills, but lacked worldly confidence after years of domesticity" (Weldon, *The Life and Loves*, 138).

[809] Weldon, *The Life and Loves*, 192.

Secondly, however, she tells the more gruesome tale of violent self-hatred and self-destruction undergone by her body. It is at this juncture that the narrative seems to interweave a series of fairy-tale and mythical patterns, all insistent on the motif of metamorphosis. Her body and her narrative become a palimpsest onto which myriad identities are etched, erased and reinscribed. Disguise, concealment, masquerade render her enacting, in Butler's terms, performing her identity at the expense of submissiveness, powerlessness, helplessness, dependence – stereotypical drawbacks of female existence – which are subverted and located as the source of her power.

The genealogies of Ruth's monster/beauty risk collapsing into an irretrievable chasm that points to the futility of any quests for origins, indeterminately located in fairy-tale patterns, Gothic stories of illegitimate paternity, and posthuman utopias celebrating denatured embodiment. The protagonist of a contemporary version of the fairy-tale metamorphosis of the ugly duckling into a swan, Ruth may also be seen as a compound of Cinderella's invidious stepsisters, particularly through the mutilations (torture of diets, surgery, technological bombardments of her body) she willingly undergoes not to make the glass slipper fit but to fit entire into the miniaturised image of Mary Fisher. Trading the status of a hybrid, monstrous creature for conformity to the human codes of appearance signals Ruth's similarity with Andersen's little mermaid who "wanted legs instead of a tail, so that she could be properly loved by her Prince. She was given legs, and by inference the gap where they join at the top, and after that every step she took was like stepping on knives. Well, what did she expect? That was the penalty. And, like her, I welcome it. I don't complain."[810] A mythical model that is simultaneously affirmed and critiqued is that of a woman manufactured in Pygmalionesque fashion, Ruth instantiating, in reverse, a Pygmalion like dominion over the surgeon's corporeal phantasm.[811] Whereas the woman created by Pygmalion corporealises male desire into sheer surface, sealing in her containment, submissiveness, and silence, Ruth's body may apparently signify such containment, but it has become instrumental to her new subjectivity, to her monstrous assertiveness and will-to-power.

Among the myths of origins troping corporeal monstrosity the most prominent is that of Frankenstein's avoidance of natural birthing channels and his misappropriation of maternal procreativity. *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* overtly connects to the narrative of Frankenstein's parturition through the supernatural agency that reanimates Ruth after her ordeal in the

[810] Weldon, *The Life and Loves*, 173.
[811] Weldon, *The Life and Loves*, 249.

clinic. Consistent up to a point with the Shelleyan original – Ruth's surgeon is driven, like Frankenstein, for instance, by same womb envy complex[812] and by the same overarching goal of salvaging mankind by eradicating disease – Ruth's monster narrative dissents, parodically at times, from its master text: the doctor's wife "quite expected to see a female version of Frankenstein's monster appear, with the Plates of her scalp pinned together with iron bolts."[813] Both bodies are the products of modern-day medicine and technology, yet Ruth's transformation mirrors in reverse the Frankensteinian endeavour, in the sense that she is not fashioned out of a multitude of limbs from other (dead) individuals, but through a process of extracting her own live flesh and diminishing her to a mere "lady of six foot two, who had tucks taken in her legs. A comic turn, turned serious."[814] Ruth has her jaw remodelled and her teeth replaced; during this process, the children of the judge who has employed her as a governess explore with revulsion "the dark cave entrance of her mouth":

> They would peer down into the black hole of her mouth and shriek with delight: dragons lived down there, they declared. Dragons and demons. They drew pictures of demons and dragons and Polly [alias Ruth] pinned them to the walls. Lady Bissop worried in case the children got nightmares. They never did.[815]

The visceral, dark, cavernous female body represents in the Bakhtinian conception, the epitome of the grotesque as a bodily metaphor of the unstable dialectics of margin and centre, inside and outside unfolding on the liminal orifices and surfaces (the mouth, the genitals). The detritus of the body, predominantly associated with feminine abjection,[816] acquires, in the she-devil's self-fashioning exploit, scatological and teratological proportions: she deliberately modifies her body boundaries, excising her flesh, bone and sinew, abjecting as it were her very monstrosity. Bone chopping, looping of muscles, arteries, and sinews (removing the "unnecessary stuff"), nose-trimming, leg shortening, jaw adjustment, skin-grafting, and fat removal are just a few of the steps in the process of corporeal fragmentation and reconstitution achieved *via* "modern surgical techniques," chip and laser technologies.[817] Though both Frankenstein and Ruth skirt normal channels of birth, subverting, as Waugh claims, the dominant western myths

[812] "Cosmetic surgery was pure. It made the ugly beautiful. To transform the human body, the shell of the soul, was, Mr. Ghengis felt, the nearest a man could get motherhood: moulding, shaping, bringing forth in pain and anguish" (Weldon, *The Life and Loves*, 247).
[813] Weldon, *The Life and Loves*, 258.
[814] Weldon, *The Life and Loves*, 278.
[815] Weldon, *The Life and Loves*, 169.
[816] Russo, *The Female Grotesque*, 2.
[817] Weldon, *The Life and Loves*, 235.

of origins,[818] the she-devil takes this hubris to the extremes, *creating herself* in her Faustian desire to challenge the dictates of nature and culture alike. She-devils are prone, as Ruth exclaims, to "create themselves out of nothing,"[819] to engender themselves, carrying the rebellious archangel's insurrection one step closer to dislodging the deity from its location at the root of all beings:

> She laughed and said she was taking up arms against God Himself. Lucifer had tried and failed, but he was male. She thought she might do better, being female. […] "We are here in this world to improve upon his [God's] original idea. To create justice, truth and beauty where He so obviously and lamentably failed."[820]

Her story belongs indeed to those origin narratives that, Haraway believes, "reverse and displace the hierarchical dualisms of naturalised identities," in the sense that the enforcement of modern technological processes onto her body anticipates the emergence of the much-celebrated creature of a "post-gender world," the cyborg, with its resistance to "seductions to organic wholeness" and its aversion to the "awful apocalyptic *telos* of the *West's* escalating dominations of abstract individuation, an ultimate self untied at last from all dependency."[821] The biotechnological reinscription of bodies does more than bring the gap between nature and culture to a foundering close; it also entails the collapse of "similar distinctions structuring the Western self,"[822] along with the denaturing of taken-for-granted notions of gender binaries. What Ruth finally achieves is a dispossession of the self, a remaking of the body into another body and, therefore, of the self into another self, all the while going against the grain of biological creation, monstering herself into both mother and father, both Faustian overreacher and progeny in one.

In their survey of nineteenth-century fiction, Gilbert and Gubar have outlined the ubiquitous patriarchal strategy of reifying women into images of the monster – the subversive *other* of the "Angel in the House"; drawing an implicit reference to the monstrosity of Medusa's visage and the shielding mirror that submerges her fatal visibility beneath the surface of a "glass darkly," they insist that in order to secure a voice, women must seek to break the confines of the specular regime in which their flattened images have been fastened. The monstrification of women derives, as Gilbert and Gubar contend, from an explicit drive towards subduing the "sexual nausea"

[818] Waugh, *Feminine Fictions*, 190.
[819] Weldon, *The Life and Loves*, 153. A further departure from Shelley, whose "hideous progeny" (book and monster) are not issued from void, but from chaos.
[820] Weldon, *The Life and Loves*, 131.
[821] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs*, 151.
[822] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs*, 147.

these "monster women" not only exude but also loathe about themselves; the mirror acts as a heterotopian sublimation of monster into angel, testifying "to the efforts women have expended not just trying to be angels but trying *not* to become female monsters."[823] As if responding to the feminist enjoinment to release the female imagination from its incarceration in stereotypical, mimetic moulds, Ruth will attempt to secure a narrative voice by suppressing both the monster within and the angel without. In her quest for self-transformation, her identity will constantly be subject to revision, attesting to the radical undecidability of self. Ruth's voice becomes embodied as the monstrous female literally, physically, grotesquely turns into an angel.

The female body in this novel is a text that has to be reinscribed, yet here it is the woman herself who gears the revisionist writing of herself into the image aesthetic perfection: "by writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display."[824] Ruth has indeed become an "embodied voice," who utters the experience of her transformation through the body:

> A she-devil is supremely happy: she is inoculated against the pain of memory. At the moment of her transfiguration, from woman to non-woman, she performs the act herself. She thrusts the long, sharp needle of recollection through the living flesh into the heart, burning it out. The pain is wild and fierce for a time, but presently there's none.[825]

Feminine behaviour and female flesh become inextricably "tangled," since both the body as a symbolic construct and the physical body define the self. It might appear that Ruth's insistence upon decrementing her body size echoes the contemporary phenomenon of anorexia[826], with its understanding of the body as an object of control and mastery rather than as an intrinsic part of the self: "'I am here to improve my body,' she replied.' There was never anything wrong with my mind.'"[827] Nevertheless, besides underwriting the notion of the liberal humanist subject, Ruth's virtual arrival at a "body without organs" also deconstructs the "master narrative" of a unified, consistent identity, focusing instead on hybridity, cross-over identity.

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[823] Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman*, 34.
[824] Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," 337.
[825] Weldon, *The Life and Loves*, 108, 187.
[826] Hayles claims that "in taking the self-possession implied by liberal humanism to the extreme, the anoretic creates a physical image that, in its skeletal emaciation, serves as material testimony that the locus of the liberal humanist subject lies in the mind, not the body" (*How We Became Posthuman*, 5).
[827] Weldon, *The Life and Loves*, 249.

The simultaneous cohabitation of Ruth's body by angel and monster, by self and other – "He has us both in the one flesh: the one he discarded, the one he never needed after all. Two Mary Fishers"[828] – approximates the motif the uncanny double. This doubling may involve the subject in his/her relation to others as s/he hesitates between identifying with and substituting the other, external self for her or his own: "I am not all she-devil. A she-devil has no memory of the past – she is born afresh every morning. She deals with the feelings of today, not yesterday, and she is free. There is a little bit of me left, still woman."[829] In a chapter entitled "The Hell of the Same" from *The Transparency of Evil*, Baudrillard describes the double as "an imaginary figure, like the soul, the shadow or mirror-image, which haunts the subject as his *other*, causing him to be himself while at the same time never seeming like himself."[830] Baudrillard insists on the imperative that in order for the double to exert its imaginary power, determining the "subject's simultaneous estrangement from himself and intimacy with himself,"[831] it must retain its spectral presence, remaining a *phantasm* and not acquire material being. The sublation of boundaries between self and other may betray anxieties about the stability of one's own self-construction, or, as in the case of the she-devil, may express a revelling in alterity. What emerges here is a paradoxical situation in which woman is "both the boundary / the other against which identity is constructed and that which confuses all boundaries," threatening with a dissolution of selfhood and falling therefore "both inside and outside the boundaries of the human genus, of the self."[832] Ruth has exchanged her monstrous body and her compliant psyche for a "new 'ultra-feminine' corporeal shape and an assertive, sadistic, 'monstrous' psyche."[833] Her identity verges on liminality, hybridity, since she is only partially female, seraphic and submissive and partially superhuman, demonic, assertive. "Summoned out of a dreadful past and called back from an unholy future,"[834] the she-devil is evidence of the fact that monstrosity as dialectical otherness is a foundational device for constructing human identity and that, indeed, in such cyborgian couplings between biology and technology lie the promises of monstrous embodiment.

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[828] Weldon, *The Life and Loves*, 277.
[829] Weldon, *The Life and Loves*, 187.
[830] Jean Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil. Essays on Extreme Phenomena*, Trans. James Benedict (London and New York: Verso, 1993), 113.
[831] Baudrillard, *The Transparency*, 113.
[832] Battersby, "Her Body / Her Boundaries," 348.
[833] Waugh, *Feminine Fictions*, 193.
[834] Weldon, *The Life and Loves*, 225.

III.3.2. In Frankenstein's Footsteps: Monstering the Father in Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things*

Glaswegian artist-novelist Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things* (1992) rewrites the Shelleyan narrative of a monstrous birth with a double twist: this time it is a female progeny who is created by a Pygmalion-Frankenstein scientist and she is also granted the nurture that was denied the Frankensteinian monster by its parent.[835] The novel places the alleged surgical revivification of a nineteenth-century female suicide, Victoria Blessington (reborn as Bella Baxter), at the nexus of competing discourses on bio-technological generation. The narrative parodically accommodates a sundry assortment of verbal and graphic testimonies to the authenticity (or inauthenticity, for that matter) of a monstrous parturition: "in the final week of February 1881, at 18 Park Circus, Glasgow, a surgical genius used human remains to create a twenty-five-year-old woman."[836] While this birthing account forms the mainstay of Archibald Candless' quasi-autobiographical novel (coincidently anchored in "the daringly experimental history of Scottish medicine" and in the tradition of "grotesque fiction," as Alasdair Gray, the self-confessed editor of the manuscript and author of the Introduction and the Chapter Notes, Historical and Critical, tells us), the manufacturing of a human being from the body of a young woman and the brain of her unborn female foetus is severely denounced as a fabrication in the counter-authoritative, post-scripted letter addressed by the Bella McCandless M.D. to her surviving descendants of 1974.

It is at this point in time (coeval with the displacement of the industrial past by an aesthetic-prone present, bent on salvaging memorabilia of historical import and consigning them to the local history museum), that Michael Donnelly illicitly retrieves, from the dustbin of history, a sealed packet. Invoking the prototypal Gothic ruse of a found manuscript, the packet contains a letter and a book from one century before, which are then edited to form the gist of this narrative of misbirths. Gray's own annotations, apparently scrupulously researched into the historiographic archive of time past (complete with public records, newspaper clippings, encyclopaedic references, maps, photographs and drawings) somewhat unsettle both the legitimacy of Bella's rationalistic dismissal of her husband's fantastic account and the latter's claim to the verisimilitude of the testimonial narrative. Of further centrifugal import are the anatomical

[835] Previously published as part of my study, Carmen-Veronica Borbely, "Ex-orbiting the Canon: Neo-Gothic and the Contemporary Reassessment of Monstrosity," *Transylvanian Review* XXII, supplement 1 (2013): 278-286.

[836] Alasdair Gray, *Poor Things. Episodes from the Early Life of Archibald McCandless M.D. Scottish Public Health Officer* (London: Penguin, 1992), ix.

sketches and portraiture etchings fictively attributed to William Strang, an engraver of good repute and attestable historical existence, yet one whose authorship of the sketches illustrating McCandless's narrative is cast into serious doubt by an impersonal authoritarian voice, whose erratum interrupts and obliterates the newspaper reviews, ushering in the narrative itself.[837]

Thus, Archibald McCandless's privately published novel of 1909 – excavated from the refuse of a lawyer's office and severed from its original manuscript by Bella's cleansing gesture of immolation – is innervated by creationist imagery: *poetic* and *corporeal*, the making of the novel and the making of Bella Baxter reverently acknowledge, while undermining, the divine authority of an omnipotent God-author / God-creator figure, as several chapters in the "Table of Contents" bear the word "Making" in their titles. In the realm of biological creation, Bella's Maker is Godwin Baxter, whose experimental mutations with his household pets strike a similar note with Camille Dareste's embryological methods of teratogenic alteration; still, unlike Dareste, who produced laboratory monsters by inducing developmental arrest in small animals, Godwin Baxter's Frankensteinian usurpation of nature's domain is of an altogether different sort: the freakish rabbits Archibald McCandless is asked to examine in Baxter's laboratory – turned curiosity chamber – are artificially engendered through surgical procedures that are uncannily similar to Frankenstein's own suturing of charnel-house human remains:

[837] The conundrum as to the authenticity of McCandless alleged eyewitness testimonial reverberates in the contradictory snippet magazine reviews contesting the representational strategies of Gray the author himself. Thus the *Scotsman* review queries Gray's mind-gaming and his impersonation of a feminist voice in the novel, while at the same time issuing the verdict that the novel will become imprinted in the cultural imaginary of Scotland at the end of the twentieth century. *The Sunday Telegraph* dismisses Gray's efforts at authenticating McCandless's narrative as an inadmissible departure from the norm of the Gothic fantastic consecrated by *Frankenstein* or *Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. *The Times Literary Supplement* takes *Poor Things* as the epitome of the failure of Victorian pastiche as a genre, while *Harpers and Queens* commend its deployment of "that 'Frankenstein method' known as postmodernism" which has allowed for the stitching together of fact and fiction, literature and history. *The Observer* serves the originality argument on a gilded platter claiming that Alasdair Gray's authentic genius makes him a "twentieth-century William Blake who designs and illustrates his own strange fictions." Undercutting this makeshift fabric of the critical paratext, the erratum postpones indefinitely this quest for "true" artistic parentage by signalling the counterfeit attribution of "the etching on page 187" as a portrayal of Professor Charcot: instead, it is claimed that it represents Count Robert de Montesquiou-Fezensac, the French symbolist art collector supposedly serving as the model for Huysmans' portrayal of des Esseintes in *Against the Grain*. In other words, the ontological consistency of both author/parent and book/progeny is set into question. See Gray, *Poor Things*, the counterfeit blurb/erratum pages.

> The most obvious oddity in the first was the colour of the fur: pure black from nose to waist, pure white from waist to tail. Had a thread been tied round the body at the narrowest part all hairs on one side would have been black, all on the other side white. Now, in nature, such straight separations only occur in crystals and basalt – the horizon of the sea on a clear day may look perfectly straight, but is actually curved. Yet by itself I would have assumed this rabbit was what any one else would assume – a natural freak. If so, the other rabbit was a freak of an exactly opposite sort: white to a waistline *as clean and distinct as if cut by the surgeon's knife,* after which it was black to the tail. No process of selective breeding could produce two such exactly equal and opposite colorations.[838]

Godwin Baxter's scalpel-and-needle *ars combinatoria* operates on an oxymoronic logic of conceit, yoking together symmetrical opposites and even forging an unnatural alliance between incompatible anatomical strata. Thus, in the two rabbits Baxter dissects and re-stitches together, forming black-and-white, male-and-female hybrids, the predilect areas of corporeal manipulation are skin surface and the genitalia, traditional loci of monstrous deformity, as David Williams has shown: "[o]ne had male genitals with female nipples, one had female genitals with almost imperceptible nipples."[839] For McCandless, what translates the "little beasts" from works of nature into works of art is, however, the mechanical precision of the surgical cut, the clearly delineated epidermal ridge detectible beneath the line neatly dividing black from white fur. This permutational art, whereby somatic wholes are sectioned into upper and lower halves, and then reassembled through an upside-down reversal technique, counters natural laws of biological evolution also because it can be restaged, overturned, carried on indefinitely. Baxter's first dabble at usurping nature's birthing prerogatives betrays his Faustian damnability, since the artefactual rabbits, Mopsy and Flopsy, appear, in the wake of their reciprocal grafting, to have lost their reproductive instincts. Their sex drive can easily be retrieved *via* Baxter's restitution of their properly formed bodies, through a similar enforcement of his quasi-divine powers of bestowing life after death. Possibilities, therefore, loom large for Baxter. Like Frankenstein, he envisages pursuing his "morbid science" and applying his regenerative techniques to the entire body politic, replacing "the diseased hearts of the rich" with "the healthy hearts of the poorer folk."[840]

Still, nowhere does the theme of illegitimate fatherhood and dislocated origins run deeper than in Godwin Bysshe Baxter's Frankensteinian resurrection of Victoria *qua* Bella. This is the "monstrous doctor" whose vivisec-

[838] Gray, *Poor Things*, 22.
[839] Gray, *Poor Things*, 23. See Williams, *Deformed Discourse*, 161.
[840] Gray, *Poor Things*, 23.

tionist experiments and empirical studies of procreation lead him to perfect the art of prosthetic surgery or the substitution of impaired body parts by artificial fixtures initiated by Colin Baxter, his alleged illustrious predecessor. Prosthesis, David Wills shows, "is necessarily a transfer into otherness, articulated through the radical alterity of ablation as loss of identity."[841] Allowing otherness to move through bodies, Baxter, whose forenames play on Mary Shelley's burden of allegiance to William Godwin, her father, and Percy Bysshe Shelley, her husband, appears himself the grotesque result of his own scientist-father's laboratory experiment in parthenogenesis.

Addicted to a bizarre diet designed to keep his bodily fluids in motion, Godwin Baxter framebreaks the ontological boundaries between Gray's after-Gothic narrative and its Shelleyan predecessor. The cultural history of *Frankenstein*, which merged both monster and its creator under the same titular appellative on account of the latter's transgressive gesture, is now literalised in the assumption that Baxter himself incorporates the same unstable assembly of organs that the Genevan natural scientist had patched and stitched together in his monstrous progeny: a strict tabulation of pulsatile, respiratory and lymphatic rhythms evinces "fluctuations too irregular, sudden and steep for even the strongest and healthiest body to survive."[842] Baxter's body is hideously grotesque not only in its outward appearance but also in its failure to sustain organically the working of its innards and to maintain the cleanness of his body boundaries, admixing his own bodily wastes in the artificially concocted digestive juices he ingests.

Bella Baxter's reconstructed identity through a topsy-turvy confusion of upper and lower, inside and outside (the transference of her womb contents to the cavity of her skull, in a matter over mind seditious upheaval orchestrated by Baxter),[843] permits not only a grotesque instantiation of the body as a site of resistance against and liberation from the "proper" gendered identity prescribed for Victorian upper-class female as March demonstrates.[844] This is a case of what Huet calls the "order of monstrous similitude,"[845] in the sense that Bella's monstrosity derives from the fact

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[841] David Wills, *Prosthesis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 12-13, quoted in Youngquist, *Monstrosities*, 165.

[842] Gray, *Poor Things*, 73.

[843] "One moment, Baxter! That lady you spoke of who drowned herself – how advanced was her pregnancy?"
"At least nine months."
"Could you not have saved the child?"
"Of course I saved it—the thinking part of it. Did I not explain that? Why should I seek elsewhere for a compatible brain when her body already housed one?" (Gray, *Poor Things*, 41-42).

[844] Cristie March, "Bella and the Beast (and a Few Dragons, Too); Alasdair Gray and the Social Resistance of the Grotesque," *Critique* 43/4 (2002): 343.

[845] Huet, "Living Images," 79.

that her likeness to the original is flawless, betraying, nonetheless, a marked disparity between her sumptuous beauty and her mental patchiness, in an instantiation of monstrous heterogeneity, of the compositeness reminiscent of mythological monsters and their disparate anatomies. To invoke Huet's argument surrounding the maternal *v*. the paternal imagination, extensively developed in the aforecited *Monstrous Imagination,* Bella is monstrous in that anatomically she is half-mother, half-daughter: in reproducing the mother's aberrant passion, the daughter abolishes the figure of the legitimate father from her corporeal instantiation. In a sense, her essential duality is redolent of the heterogeneity indelibly concealed beneath her uncanny perfection, pointing to a gaping chasm in her (corporeal) identity: a perverted genesis, which has written off the father's mark, the overall effect of the uncanny resemblance between mother and daughter leading to a firm ensconcement of Bella in the domain of monstrosity.

By having her physiological make-up completely perturbed, Bella will embark on a psychological development where her newly implanted brain will nonetheless preserve traces of her corporeal constitution as a sexed, female individual. It is a reinforcement, *via* an ambivalent Gothic strategy of anxiety inflation and deflation,[846] of not only the *fin-de-siècle* destabilising figure of emancipated womanhood, but of a markedly poststructuralist rethinking of the mind-body relationship, which is currently theorised by philosophers like Elizabeth Grosz as the inflection or torsion of mind into body and body into mind so as to bridge inside and outside into the concept of "body image" – a Möbius Strip-like merger of psychical exteriority and corporeal interiority.[847]

Poor Things may be seen as an example of what Kelly Hurley has defined as Body Horror, a subgenre of horror focalising on shocking corporeal processes (bodily metamorphosis, mutation, fragmentation, dismemberment or modification) takes the presumption of the body's alienness and resistance to incorporation in identitary definitions of the Western liberal self to the extreme.[848] Bella's horrific remaking is recounted

[846] See Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, 5.

[847] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 116-117.

[848] As originally used in a 1986 issue of *Screen* magazine, "body horror" corresponds to a hybrid cinematic genre (SF, horror and suspense) which stages "a spectacle of the human body defamiliarised, rendered other. Body horror seeks to inspire revulsion—and in its own way, pleasure—through representations of quasi-human figures whose effect/affect is produced by their abjection, their ambiguation, their impossible embodiment of multiple, incompatible forms. Such posthuman embodiments are liminal entities, occupying both terms (or rather, existing in the slash between them) of the opposition human/not-human," cf. Kelly Hurley, "Reading like an alien: Posthuman Identity in Ridley Scott's *Alien* and David Cronenberg's *Rabid*," in *Posthuman Bodies*, ed. Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 203.

in a body-horror narrative about the dismantling and demolishment of the human subject, about a human body whose boundaries are violated, hence shattering the corporeal foundations of identity; it is a narrative which, alongside the horrific prospects it engenders, needs to be placed within the cultural discourse of postmodernity, which postulates the "breakdown of human specificity and the erosion of human identity, embodied and otherwise."[849] On the one hand, what Hurley calls the "trope of bodily ambiguation" is resonant with the much-clamoured postmodern fragmentation of human identity as well as with its refiguration of bodily forms in ways that that embrace pluralism, merging and confusion. On the other hand, the monstrosity displayed as spectacle in the body-horror scene where Bella's body is surgically made to accommodate the brain of her unborn foetus is the incentive of a fear-management contrivance, since, as Hurley shows, by generating "posthuman embodiments both horrific and sublime," body-horror narratives largely assist one to "imagine otherwise, outside of the parameters of *the human.*"[850]

In her discussion of technologies of the gendered body, Anne Balsamo highlights the way in which contemporary medical imaging techniques like tomography or laparoscopy have contributed to transforming the body into a visual medium, a body whose internal workings are laid bare before the physician's eye even prior to its surgical incision. Reliant on a surface/depth model of the body, such visualisation devices permit a fracturing and fragmenting of the body into its separate internal constituents under the quasi-disciplinary gaze of the clinician who is centrally positioned at the crux of overlapping mechanisms of cultural control: inscription, surveillance, and confession. This Foucauldian medical gaze, Balsamo contends, immerses the patient's body within a nexus of power/knowledge apparatuses and attempts to discipline it by first sectioning its representation into isolated bodily parts, then assessing their inherent pathological flaws, ending with a technological reconstruction of that fragmented body image and a surgical enforcement of the due normalisation procedures.[851] Balsamo's analysis reveals the fact that the medicalisation of the female body – with the clinician's eye performing the quasi-divinatory function of peering beneath skin surface into anatomical depth – denotes a significant alternative to customary modes of perceiving womanhood.[852]

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[849] Hurley, "Reading like an alien," 205.

[850] See Hurley, "Reading like an alien," 205.

[851] Balsamo, *Technologies*, 56-57.

[852] As Doane also states, "This blurring of the boundaries between the psychical and the somatic is predicated upon a shift in the status of the female body. When it is represented […] as the object of an erotic gaze, signification is spread out over a surface. […] In films of the medical discourse, on the other hand, the female body […] is not spectacular but symptomatic, and the visible becomes fully a signifier, pointing to an invisible signified,"

Baxter's reconstructive surgery of Bella entwines such a technological refashioning of her body and a morphing of her psychological cast under the clinician's gaze. Bella's corporeal identity is dependent upon her internalisation of the image of her fractured and reaggregated body, which is literally reinscribed at the hands of her maker and then immersed in a network of surveillance and confession corresponding to her accelerated psychic growth process under Baxter's guardianship and her confessional letter about the "making of [her] conscience."[853] Lodged in the context of nineteenth-century scientific debates on evolutionism as a series of contiguous, gradual changes or as leaps marked by big catastrophic events, this narrative of displaced maternal origins is a parodic reinstantiation of the Shelleyan myth, coalescing contemporary anxieties related to denatured technologies of reproduction. Like in the master narrative, in Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things*, monstrosity pertains not so much to the misbegotten creature, but to its monstrous begetter.

III.4. Troping the Monstrous Body Politic

III.4.1. Monstrous Bodies Individual, Deformed Bodies Politic

By analogy with anatomo-morphological distortions like hypertrophy, hypotrophy, or hybridity that affect the body individual, deformations in the body politic can also be freighted with symbolic meaning.[854] Mary Douglas has shown the relevance of the symbolism of the individual human body to preserving communal integrity, its boundaries virtually representing societal limitations, and its openings and apertures standing practically for the vulnerable *loci* where a social body might come under the threat of pollution factors. Following Marcel Mauss's argument about the comprehensively social makeup of bodily actions,[855] Douglas insists in *Natural Symbols* on the consonance extant between the social and physiological levels of corporeal experience. Working between the Maussian assumption of bodily action as mediated through cultural practice and the Lévi-Straussian premise of structural universals governing corporeal practices, Mary Douglas dismantles the customary nature-culture divide (with its accompanying body-society dyad) by positing a biunivocal

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Mary Ann Doane, "The Clinical Eye: Medical Discourse in 'The Woman's Film' of the 1940s," in *The Female Body in Western Culture. Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 154.

853 Gray, *Poor Things*, 103.

854 Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster*, 20.

855 Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the Body," in *The Body: Critical Concepts in Sociology,* ed. The Aberdeen Body Group (A Blaikie et all) (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 50.

correlation between "the two bodies": the individual, physical body and the social body. What is universal is not the biological givenness of the physical body in contrast with the cultural variability of the social body, but the continuous interplay of meanings that the two types of bodily experience elicit, so much so that there is a mutual reinforcement of their categories.[856]

That the body should always be experienced through the mediation of cultural categories is evinced, for instance, by preoccupations with bodily apertures (which translate a concern with 'social exits and entrances, escape routes and invasions'), with bodily boundaries (whose maintenance or transgression would signal corresponding social preoccupations) or with patterns of hierarchy (between anatomical *v.* societal upper and lower levels).[857] Bodily control, as Douglas assumes, find its correspondent in social control, since, as a microcosm of society, the physical body is simultaneously subordinated to and polarised conceptually against the social body, while its requirements are subsumed to, as well as contrasted with, social requirements. The body individual and the body social may veer into complete merger, or they may be riveted apart, but it is the tension that arises between them that allows for the elaboration of cultural meaning. At the same time, the body is also a natural symbol given that, irrespective of cross-cultural variations, it establishes synechdocal continuums between the individual part and the societal whole. Morphological aberration or anomalousness clearly falls outside normative prerequisites of bodily perfection, and ranks amongst the extreme cases of abomination mentioned by Douglas as an affront to and a pretext for the reinforcement of structural patterns. How such monstrosity translates at the level of the body politic, where normative precepts (closure, containment, symmetry, hierarchical fixity) may similarly be infringed, is what the following sections aim to find out with reference to the (post-)Gothic narratives under analysis.

III.4.2. Sovereign Power, Disciplinary Biopower, and Schizoid Lines of Fugue

The social body, Foucault shows, is permeated by and constituted through manifold relations of power.[858] Before examining the two paradigms of power from H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* and Alasdair Gray's *Lanark*, a brief overview of the way sovereign power and disciplinary biopower are

[856] Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, 93.
[857] Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, 74.
[858] Such power relations are consolidated through discourse, since while the production of what counts as the truth rests on the specific power regimes that it serves, the exercise of power is, in its turn, inconceivable outside the production of truth meant to reinforce its hegemonic position (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 93).

conceptualised by Thomas Hobbes and, respectively, by Michel Foucault is necessary, particularly since the latter's analysis of power is explicitly deployed in opposition to the Hobbesian model advocated in *The Leviathan* (1651). Thus, the socius defined by Hobbes materialises, as Foucault points out, as the "distillation of a single will"; it is a singular body enlivened by the spirit of sovereignty, which subsumes the individual wills of a large range of subjects. By contrast, rather than exploring sovereign, centrally-located power mechanisms and their continual effects, Foucault tackles power in its capillary manifestations – in its regional and local extremities – where subjects are, as it were, materially instantiated through a multiplicity of forces, energies, desires, thoughts.[859]

In Thomas Hobbes's absolutist philosophy elaborated in *The Leviathan* (1651), the commonwealth state is envisioned as an alternative, cosmotic order to the chaotic, natural state. In a state of nature, given the absence of any hegemonic authority to enforce moral or legal restraints, Hobbes affirms, man is like matter in motion: guided by bodily appetites and aversions, man is in perpetual conflict with and shows constant aggressiveness towards his fellow humans.[860] Contrariwise to the Aristotelian premise of man's basic natural inclination towards political sociability, Hobbes maintains that humans can only congregate on agreement to relinquish their propensity towards mutual destruction. Society is not the teleological fulfilment of man's natural sociability: it is specifically necessitated to counter humanity's intrinsic antisocial savagery.

The passage from a state of nature to a state of civilisation involves humanity's assembling defences against the horror of its own antisocial savagery: in return for the guarantee of stability and the common wealth, the subjects must enter a covenant whereby they abrogate their primal, natural rights and subdue their personal desires to the will of a single figure of absolute sovereignty and unreserved power. Given that states can only acquire consistency through manmade conventions, the artificiality (that is, nonnatural, cultural quality) of the social contract is self-evident.[861] Hobbes offers a redefinition of the state in terms of an artificially articulated, supra-human, gigantic body, dominated by the head of the sovereign and

[859] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 96-97.

[860] Acephalous, monarchless societies, compliant with no stable leadership or authority whatsoever and governed solely by natural laws of instinctual warfare and permanent vulnerability, are prone, therefore, to self-implode, for the state of nature is a state where all wage war against all.

[861] "*Art* goes yet further, imitating that rational and most excellent work of nature, *man*. For by art is created that great LEVIATHAN* called a COMMONWEALTH, or STATE, (in Latin CIVITAS) which is but an artificial man; though of greater stature and strength than the natural, for whose protection and defence it was intended," in Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. J.C.A. Gaskin (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 7.

comprising myriad individuals, whose entering a covenant aims to censor their endless propensity to freedom and anarchy (See the Frontispiece to Hobbes's *Leviathan*). The monstrous sublimity of the Leviathan is ultimately the guarantee of the stability of civilisation, for without it, society would relapse into chaos and factionalism.

Sutured from the individual bodies of anarchy-inclined individuals, this massive body politic staves off its corporeal disintegration (its relapse into anarchy) by carefully deploying a tension between visibility and invisibility, and neatly illustrating the well-known principle of the power of the gaze. The sovereign, the arch-ruler, who majestically casts his overtowering glance, is the sole agent of the gaze, and he literally incorporates his subjects (their faces turned inwards, their gazes averted within) by having them imprinted on his bodily surface and by turning them into his armoured skin. Thus, Hobbes posits the sovereign figure at the heart of the mechanism animating this "artificial" man, even though in the frontispiece etching he actually *is* the entire gigantic body. His crowned head and intent visage dominate country and townscape, while his arms, holding the insignia of regality and clericality (the sword and the bishop's crook, which are further explicitated in the two columns at the bottom of the page), indicate his absolute dominion over both the temporal and the spiritual spheres: an altogether theophanic vision of the "political sublime," as Timothy Beal suggests, which "lords over military as well as religious authority and power."[862] Hobbes' choice of the Leviathan as a corporeal emblem of political order emerging out of chaos is not a reference to the chaos monster of Biblical passages like Isaiah but to the terrifying and awe-inspiring Leviathan of the theodicic Book of Job, a "climactic figure of overwhelming and terrifying *divine power against justice*": "not a chaos monster but the champion of political order against chaos. This god maintains political order by subduing all chaotic forces under its rule."[863]

Contrary to clearcut evidence that in Hobbes' political-theological treatise the Leviathan is demonstrified and invested with awesome sovereignty, being the ultimate guarantee of the stability of civilisation, while it is the unruly populace that is monstrified, post-Hobbesian representations have insistently misconstrued it as a monster of political hegemony, an embodiment of oppressive, totalitarian state power suppressing individual dissent or difference by tremendous force.[864] The Leviathan-type representation of the State, as part of a wider imaginary structure concerning the relation between the State and individual, veers from its Hobbesian conception into the twentieth-century literary and

[862] Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters*, 94.
[863] Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters*, 98-99.
[864] Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters*, 100.

cultural morphology into a complementary image of the oppressive state, confronting the individual as a source of anxiety and alienation. Modern and postmodern dystopias, such as *1984* by George Orwell or Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, share, for instance, the imaginary pattern of the state conceived as an artificial and frightening "monster," opposed to the natural inclination of the individual to happiness and freedom.

Foucault's model of power diverges from that of absolutist sovereignty; the effectiveness of the Hobbesian juridical-political theory was strictly allied with a defence of feudal monarchy in the context of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century debates on power systems. Unlike Hobbes's concept of a vertical, top-to-base or centre-to-periphery flow of authority, Foucauldian analysis traces the way in which in modern systems infinitesimal, micro-mechanisms of power extend horizontally, rhizomatically, being "invested, colonised, utilised, involuted, transformed, displaced, extended etc., by ever more general mechanisms and by forms of global domination."[865] In *Power/Knowledge,* but also in *Discipline and Punish*, the new mechanism of disciplinary power investigated by Foucault posits a deep-seated change from a society which endorsed the enforcement of repressive, violent power and regarded the law as centrally embodied in the sovereign. By way of contrast, decentralised biopower does not stem uniquely from this focal authority figure but is disseminated through manifold channels directed at the bodies of all, whose docilisation depends on their being enmeshed in networks of surveillance and control that ensure their constitution and categorisation as embodied subjects. This is possible through what Foucault calls a "micro-physics of power," with its explicit emphasis on the body as an object of control and discipline.[866] Hence, the multiplicity of apparatuses of knowledge enlisted for the codification of a political power allied with scientific knowledge in the so-called "society of normalisation."[867] The new model is the very antithesis of the model of sovereignty: it does not depend upon the assumption of a central concentration of authority within the artificial body described by Hobbes, exerting instead constant material coercions upon human bodies through permanent, continuous surveillance.[868] For Foucault, the law is always imbricated with mechanisms of power which seek to control and domesticate the disruptive other, yet the "micro-physics of power" within the disciplinary society is not an "essentially negative

[865] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 99.
[866] Foucault, *Discipline*, 139.
[867] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 107.
[868] "This non-sovereign" power, Foucault asserts, "which lies outside the form of sovereignty, is disciplinary power" (*Power/Knowledge*, 105).

mechanism of repression."[869] Disciplinary power is no longer to be assumed as one individual's hegemonic domination of the others; instead power is a fluid phenomenon, constantly circulating and escaping precise localisation or appropriation. The individuals enmeshed in the net-like articulation of this diffuse, dissipative power act as its vehicles rather than as its inert recipients.

Finally, useful for the following analyses will be the spatio-temporal divisions operated by Deleuze and Guattari between the dominant psychosexual modes of structuring a culture, identifying the "primitive territorial machine," the "barbarian despotic machine" and the "civilized capitalist machine." The distinction they make in *Anti-Oedipus* between these three types of socius, with their various degrees of (over)coding desire, is particularly relevant here, given the fact that the dystopian or heterotopian-heterochronic outlines of state machine in the dystopias under discussion often posit a mixture of several such competing orders. Discarding the fixity and static quality of utopian blueprints, Deleuzian schizoanalysis aims at shattering rigid, totalised, unified formations of subject and group identity, and, in a challenge to the systematic disregard for embodiment in the construction of the liberal humanist subject, emphasises the radical immanence, the embodied structure of a dispersed subjectivity disseminated amongst diverse desiring machines forming the Body without Organs.

> The body without organs is an egg: it is crisscrossed with axes and thresholds, with latitudes and longitudes and geodesic lines, traversed by gradients marking the transitions and the becomings, the destinations of the subject developing along these particular vectors. /…/ Nothing but bands of intensity, potentials, thresholds, and gradients.[870]

Sheer intensity, rhizomatic lines of fugue, the Body without Organs offers a pertinent frame of analysis for the manner in which the narratives I analyse bring into question the issue of the constructedness of the social body under the effects of power/knowledge regimes. In this respect, Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "molecular becoming,"[871] signifying the nomadic movement that unfolds on a microphysical plane of productive desire, runs counter to and destabilises "molar" or massifying structurations of identity. More specifically, in the following subchapters, the female protago-

[869] In *Abnormal*, Foucault also considers the "grotesque" or "Ubu-esque" mechanics of power, instantiated in bureaucratic or fascist forms of mechanical power, a form of "infamous" or "arbitrary" sovereignty (Foucault, *Abnormal*, 11-12 and 50-51).

[870] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 19.

[871] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (London: The Athlone Press, 1984), 283.

nists of Atwood's and Carter's fictions delve into a Foucauldian "micropolitics of desire," whereby they seek to overcome repressive, structured, hierarchical forms of identity and embark on a "nomadic politics"[872] of transgressing molar aggregates. This movement towards forming new alliances, along molecular lines that are horizontal, dispersive rather than vertical, integrative, will be examined with a view to these narratives' heterotopian outlining of a postmodern form of embodied subjectivity, the Body without Organs, to be understood not as a body divested of its organs, but as a form of embodied subjectivity which refuses structuration, stratification.[873]

III.4.3. The Monstrous State in Feminist Dystopias: From Molar Identity to Molecular Becomings

While there seems to be relative consensus regarding the emergence of dystopia with the advent of the Post-Enlightenment Age[874], researchers appear to be divided on both the terminological (dystopia, anti-utopia, critical utopia, negative utopia, inverted utopia, regressive utopia, cacotopia) and the definitional consistency of what, etymologically, would represent a counter-model of (e)utopia.[875] Kumar, for instance, contends that anti-utopia constitutes a distorted mirror-image utopia, its parasitical "Doppelganger,"[876] an imperfect copy of its original sibling, while Siebers claims that any attempts to dissociate between utopian and dystopian thinking are doomed to failure, given the fact that "[u]topian desire is the desire to desire differently, which includes the desire to abandon such desire."[877]It is therefore perhaps more accurate to acknowledge both a certain blurring of generic distinctions between utopia and dystopia (since

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[872] I am sponging here Rosi Braidotti's Deleuzian concepts from *Nomadic Subjects*, 35.

[873] Cf. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 19.

[874] Tom Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky. Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2000), xi; Barbara Goodwin, *The Philosophy of Utopia* (London and Portland, Or.: Frank Cass Publ., 2001), 1.

[875] The analysis on Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Carter's *Heroes and Villains* and *The Passion of New Eve* was previously published as Carmen Borbely, "The Monstrous State in Feminist Dystopias: From Molar Identity to Molecular Becomings," *Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai Philologia* 4 (2004): 61-80; the analysis on Carter's *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* initially appeared as Carmen Bujdei, "Heterotopian Thresholds in Angela Carter's *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*," *Caietele Echinox*, 7 (2004): 280-285.

[876] "Anti-utopia draws its material from utopia and reassembles it in a manner that denies the affirmation of utopia," in Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (Basil Blackwell, 1987), 100.

[877] Tony Siebers, *Heterotopia: Postmodern Utopia and the Body Politic* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 3.

both constitute utopian thinking which transcends and challenges the prevalent order of things)[878] and specific differences between them.

If utopianism *is* to be defined in terms of its transgressive, transformative function, then points of divergence – beyond mere dissimilarities of content – between utopia and dystopia come into sight. Whereas the former tends to offer a static blueprint of a perfect social ordering, an "ultimate solution of mankind's predicaments,"[879] dystopia extrapolates from a fragment of actuality, but refuses to crystallise a holistic, completely alternative social framework. Furthermore, dystopia can be seen to negotiate, rather than simply negate, a processual, dynamic mapping of a better (future) alternative *via negativa*, emphasising movement and processes over destinations, "opening up visions of alternatives, rather than closing down on a vision of "a" better society." As Moylan remarks,

> The dystopian text does not guarantee a creative and critical position that is implicitly militant or resigned. As an open form, it always negotiates the continuum between the Party of Utopia and the Party of Anti-Utopia. Iconically immersed in an already oppressive society, the discrete narrative trajectory of a dystopian text plays out on a terrain contested by these historically opposed political tendencies.[880]

This open-endedness of dystopian thought is also a persistent feature of feminist literary dystopias, narratives which "maintain a utopian core at their centre, a locus of hope that contributes to deconstructing tradition and reconstructing alternatives."[881] Moreover, recent feminist dystopias are acknowledged to have a certain performative function, of mobilising their readership to action meant to counter the "depressing images of a brutal reestablishment of capitalist patriarchy."[882] Such narratives, grafting a postmodernist refusal to redeploy substantialist notions of subjectivity onto a feminist desire for empowering women's political agency, can be seen to map the fluctuating boundaries of what Foucault has defined as "heterotopology,"[883] a surveying of counter-sites simultaneously serving to

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[878] Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia. An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1960), 173.

[879] Lesek Kolakowski, *Modernity on Endless Trial* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 132.

[880] Moylan, *Scraps*, xiii.

[881] Raffaella Baccolini, "Gender and Genre in the Feminist Critical Dystopias of Katharine Burdekin, Margaret Atwood, and Octavia Butler," in *Future Females, the Next Generation. New Voices and Velocities in Feminist Science Fiction Criticism*, ed. Marlene S. Lanham Barr (Boulder, New York and Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), 13.

[882] Peter Fitting, "The Turn from Utopia in Recent Feminist Fiction," in *Feminism, Utopia, and Narrative*, ed. Libby Jones Falk & Sarah Webster Goodwin (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 142.

[883] Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 24.

contest the actual, real space and to engender new spatial/social/identity configurations. As defined by Jacques, "heterotopic thought relinquishes the ideal of synoptic perfection and floats in a polydimensional reality, a world where all the pieces do not and, necessarily, *can* not, fit into the same puzzle."[884] Capable of coalescing in a single space several incompatible or incongruous sites,[885] heterotopia – under whose heading it will be useful to include the feminist dystopian projections analysed here – provides points of passage, liminal thresholds towards alternative – though necessarily provisional – spatial/social orders, for, as Hetherington insists, "heterotopia[s] act as obligatory points of passage that allow established modes of social ordering to be challenged in ways that might be seen as utopian."[886] In particular, the novels examined here may be seen either as aiming to produce a myriad of feminist utopias out of dystopia, or as engaging in a critique, a subversive transgression of the stagnant ideal of traditional utopia. This encompasses both a formal transgression - the denial of a sense of narrative closure or the pursuit of a "nomadic" form - and a representational transgression which challenges the idea of a fixed non-transformable content.

In *Heroes and Villains* (1969), a kind of twentieth-century challenge to Enlightenment rationalism and eighteenth-century fictions of sentiment,[887] world-engulfing warfare has led to the emergence of antagonistic, apparently strictly delineated, state machines, which are in fact constantly encroaching one another's territory and vying for supremacy. The pre-apocalyptic state of civilisation (an avatar of the platonic ideal-city) has been extremely refined into a hereditary caste system, with Professors (Philosophers) at the top of the social hierarchy and Soldiers (Guards) safeguarding the peace of their Universities. In the post-traumatic state of affairs, cities, the seats of learning and civilisation, have fallen to ruin and are increasingly coming under the sway of the Soldiers, whose military regime of terror is developing an autonomous power of its own, rigidly codifying the flows of desire, and brutally stamping out anything that exceeds norms, is irregular, or anomalous, whether it qualifies as a crime or

[884] Roy Stager Jacques, "What is a crypto-utopia and why does it matter?," in *Utopia and Organisation*, ed. Martin Parker (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing/The Sociological Review, 2002), 29.

[885] Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 25.

[886] Hetherington, *The Badlands*, 52.

[887] Besides the game going on in the title - Carter has parodically misappropriated Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, in which two apparently opposite modes of behaviour are revealed to be copies of each other – there is much to suggest that the author is toying with the reader's expectations. By naming her protagonist Marianne – a name that Enlightenment rationalists gave to their heroines of sentiment and emotion – Carter subversively debunks such expectations by making Marianne a creature of sheer coldness and calculation.

a sheer manifestation of sentiment. A similar concentration of power, equivalent to a reterritorialisation of the barbarians' rhizomatic drives of desire, is attempted by Donally, who envisages himself as a would-be monarch bringing the "honest savage" back from the Hobbesian state of nature into "some kind of commonwealth."[888] The transition from an extremely lax, permissive regime, to a strictly monitored, despotic one is concomitant with the resurgence of what in Deleuzian schizoanalysis counts as the primitive territorial machine, gangs of nomadic barbarians constantly threatening to break through the walling structures of the Professors' enclave.

In his brief overview of the question of "postmodern savages," Terry Eagleton accounts for the resurgence of the "so-called barbarians"[889] in scholarly research through "postmodernism's enduring love affair with otherness." At the root of the liberal critique of stereotypical polarities lies the assumption that otherness is not intrinsically allied with but consistently represented as alienness, given a disavowed, disquieting recognition that "what we share with the allegedly impenetrable other is just this overlapping of strangenesses; and it is this, rather than some mutual mirror-imaging of egos, which has to become the basis of a genuine encounter."[890] A rebuttal of any simplistic self-other or centre-margin polarities through an unnerving awareness, Eagleton contends, of the volatile mixtures enmeshing such antagonists in the ambiguity of reciprocal attraction and aversion, fascination and revulsion.

Despite the conflictual, *us v. them* nature of the relationship between the two types of socius in Carter's novel (the civilised *v.* the primitive machine), there are many points of convergence between the ways in which identity and embodiment are constru(ct)ed in each of them. Hence the additive conjunction in the title game "heroes *and* villains," which, by refusing a disjunctive segregation or hierarchisation of the two, also pinpoints a certain perspectival shift[891] which may easily make one category turn into the other. Thus, while for Marianne, the protagonist's father, the barbarians are mere "ignoble savages," surprisingly come to life from the Latin tags (*Homo praedatrix, Homo silvestris*) in the taxonomical treatise he is compiling (an archaeology of social theory), the professors themselves represent a vanishing caste altogether, a civilisation in a state of entropic collapse. Insofar as the construction of embodied subjectivity is concerned, both regimes appropriate the female body, codifying its flows of

[888] Angela Carter, *Heroes and Villains* (London: Penguin Books, 1969), 63.

[889] A stereotypical category denounced by Eagleton as condensing an incongruous array of "others": monsters, gypsies, aboriginals, cross-dressers, and the list may go on indefinitely. See Eagleton, *Figures*, 1.

[890] Eagleton, *Figures*, 4.

[891] Marianne's Swiftian comments reinforce this: "The Barbarians are Yahoos but the Professors are Laputans" (Carter, *Heroes and Villains*, 123).

significance to various degrees. Whereas in the disciplinary society of the soldiers, Marianne's behaviour is constantly ascertained and inserted into normalising patterns, the nomadic existence on which she embarks following the flux of her desire – from the fossilised, static city to the viscid, fertile swamp, from the numbing realm of reason to the throbbing plateaus of carnal desire – will allow her to explore the ambivalent, heterotopic terrain of both wilderness and femaleness.

The first social machine in the Deleuzian tripartite scheme is represented by the primitive territorial machine, whose codification of the flows of desire manifests through an appropriation of organs in a regime of collective investments: "it is a founding act that the organs be hewn into the socius, and that the flows run over its surface – through which man ceases to be a biological organism and becomes a full body, an earth, to which his organs become attached, where they are attracted, repelled, miraculated, following the requirements of a socius."[892] This segmentary articulation of the social body, based on scission rather than fusion in its production of filiational units,[893] is concretely materialised through "naked flesh 'writing,'" that is, the marking of individual bodies through such violent operations as "tattooing, excising, incising, carving, scarifying, mutilating, encircling, and initiating."[894] The inscription or suturing of individual bodies into the larger social body has thus a visible, anthropomorphic equivalent, amounting, in effect, to a double movement of forcibly inserting both bodies and their organs into the social machine, and desire back into social production. The transparency of this micro-physics of power fascinates Marianne, from her first encounters with the marauding Barbarians. Besides the beads, furs, braiding and feathers marking the bodies of nomads as pertaining to their family, and by extension, tribal structure (and it may be significant that the sight of the travelling women wearing such adornments first triggers in Marianne the idea of marriage and domestic life), it is the serpentine tattoo on Jewel's body, mirroring the effigy of the phallic cult spawned by the priest-chief Donally, that renders the politics of gender visible in the very materiality of the body:

> He wore the figure of a man on the right side, a woman on the left and, tattooed the length of his spine, a tree with a snake curled round and round the trunk. /…/ The woman offered the man a red apple /…/ The figures were both stiff and lifelike; Eve wore a perfidious smile. The lines of colour were etched with obsessive precision on the shining, close-pored skin which rose and fell with Jewel's breathing, so it seemed the snake's forked tongue darted in and out.[895]

[892] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 144.
[893] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 152.
[894] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 144-145.
[895] Carter, *Heroes and Villains*, 85.

This "grotesque disfigurement" of the relations between the sexes, insistent as it is on the imagery of sinfulness, separateness, antagonism, both reflects and reinforces social overcodings of the female body: incarceration, rape, humiliation and abusive appropriation to the end of procreation. However, insofar as Marianne's experience of sexuality is concerned, her union with Jewel unleashes, paradoxically, the flux of her desire, rendering reductivist symbolism such as that of the phallic emblematic snake as inaccurate: the *ouroboros*, the circular figuration of a snake biting its own tail, is more expressive of the dynamic, circulating, processual becoming of the "erotic beast," the "dual being."[896] This transgression of sexual and, ultimately, gender boundaries – since Marianne will eventually herself aspire to becoming monarch of the nomads – is indeed catalysed by her immersion into a condition of heterotopic liminality, of straddling fluctuating geographical and ontological borders. Whereas in typical three-phased rites of passage, liminality corresponds to the intermediate or transitional stage, following that of *separation* and preceding that of *reintegration*, Marianne's reaggregation is significantly neither into the self-disintegrating socius she abandoned, nor into the barbarian one as inherited from Jewel, but under a newly constituted socius, on the brink of construction.

The second type of socius in Deleuze and Guattari's tripartite scheme is the barbarian despotic machine,[897] insistent on the very strict overcodings of subjected bodies and utter congealment of the flows of desire performed by the despotic state. What a "neo-gothic dystopia"[898] targeted at the totalitarian propensities of a theocratic socius, such as Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), outlines is, however, an ambivalent process of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation of desire; as Deleuze and Guattari claim, "in all things, there are lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories; but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialisation and destratification."[899] To render the reification undergone by the female body, Atwood proceeds with outlining a heterochronic Republic of Gilead, ambivalently suspended between the misogynist backlash against the women's liberation movement and a post-Gileadian, post-historical moment. The protagonist's narrative of her tribulations is countered by the jocular, postmodernist outer frame of an epilogue and thereby subjected to a (con)textual analysis, which, failing to pinpoint the exact referential framework of the handmaid's experience, unravels the telling to its utter dissolution. What the novel amounts to is reminiscent of heterotopic

[896] Carter, *Heroes and Villains*, 88.
[897] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 192.
[898] Becker, *Gothic Forms*, 61.
[899] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand*, 3.

discourse, outlined by Foucault[900] as a textual site coalescing heterogeneous elements, whose uneasy, incongruous cohabitation shatters meaning, through a refusal of the logic of resemblance that might otherwise provide a coherent and orderly unity.

The handmaid's confession, purportedly recorded on thirty tape cassettes and subsequently transcribed in manuscript form, circulates excessively as a signifier whose referent is perpetually adjourned. With a title appended as a Chaucerian homage by an academic whose pun on the "archaic vulgar signification of the word *tail*"[901] reinforces rather than dispels the essentialist biologism implicit in the totalitarian manipulation of women's bodies in the tale proper, the *document* turns out to be a palimpsest, an 'item' subjected to transcription, annotation, publication and, ultimately, to attempts of authentication by the keynote speaker of the Twelfth Symposium on Gileadian Studies in 2195. The handmaid's tale remains poised uncomfortably between its many intertextual frames: the heteroclite epigraphs – the Genesis story of fruitless Rachel and her childbearing maid, Bilhah; the Swiftian *Modest Proposal*, whose anti-utopian solution to an excessive surplus of progeny arises from a weariness of "offering vain, idle, visionary thoughts," running counter to the child-depleted situation of Gilead; and a Sufi proverb parodically echoing in its syntax the seventh Biblical commandment and thus cancelling the logic of Gileadian corporeal politics.

What *The Handmaid's Tale* most closely approximates, however, is a dialogic rewriting of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, with its dystopian projection of totalitarianism and its territorialisation of individual desire. Like its Orwellian hypertext, Atwood's novel depicts the entire state apparatus and its ossified hierarchical structures as clearly designed according to the architectural model of the panopticon,[902] whose structural principle of axial visibility-lateral invisibility is extended to include even sumptuary design (the white wings appended to the handmaids' crimson attire) and thus to ensure the absolute separation of the gaze into surveying power and surveyed powerlessness.

In the Republic of Gilead the police state has managed to entirely ossify women's identities into hierarchical, molar categories: depending on their power of procreation, the female subjects of Gilead have had their bodies objectified into those of either wives or housemaids, with an entire attending apparatus of Marthas, jezebels, and unwomen, forming, if we adopt Butler's terms, a domain of abjection through the repudiation of which the "exclusionary matrix" of subject formation establishes its

[900] Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xvii.
[901] Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1985), 381.
[902] Foucault, *Discipline*, 195-203.

constitutive limits.[903] The flows of desire may have been regimented to the utopian purpose of salvaging Gilead from its entropic demise, yet desire throbs rhythmically,[904] like the reiterated chapter heading "*Night,*" which punctuates the well-defined and regulated routine of shopping, birth attending or salvaging.

Women's identities have been (mis)appropriated in this heterotopic redeployment of the household space, with patronyms (Offred, Ofglen, Ofwarren) displacing individual names and with strictly assigned positions having to be occupied in a quasi-sorority hierarchy. School, family, marketplaces, even collective sites for the celebration of purgation rituals such as "prayvaganza," and "particicution," these are all disciplinary sites. Public executions (oxymoronically called *salvagings*) and torture venues where spectatorial satisfaction is incomplete without the audience's participation in the dismemberment of the culprits are not so much a relapse into the scenic, public display of corporal punishment whose disappearance marks, as Foucault contends, the great epistemic shift inaugurating the age of modernity.[905] It is not so much a question of channelling repressed desire into hatred and vengeance (the punishment for rape is murder, according to Deuteronomy), although scapegoating is an effective outlet valve for such energies and the housemaids/Bacchantes do feel an upsurge of manic freedom in the ritual dismemberment of the effigy of the condemned. Participation in collective executions is meant to serve as performative proof of allegiance to the system, as the confirmation of the "disciplinary distribution, spatial ordering of multiplicities."[906] Aware of their visibility at all times, yet denied the privilege of vision, the womb-bearing denizens of the commanders' households are constituted, in keeping with the Foucauldian specular technique, "as correlative elements of power and knowledge" and made to serve, indeed, a "productive" kind of power.[907] This is, nevertheless, a power that congeals, freezes the materiality of bodies into the codified significance of biological essence:

> Everything except the wings around my face is red: the colour of blood, which defines us. /…/ I never looked good in red, it's not my colour. /…/

[903] Butler, *Bodies*, 3.

[904] "We yearned for the future. How did we learn it, that talent for insatiability?," in Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 4.

[905] Foucault, *Discipline*, 131.

[906] Foucault, *Discipline*, 148-149.

[907] "The individual is no doubt the fictitious atom of an 'ideological' representation of society; but he is also a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power that I have called 'discipline.' We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes,' it 'represses,' it 'censors,' it 'abstracts,' it 'masks,' it 'conceals.' In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth,"[907] in Foucault, *Discipline*, 194.

> There remains a mirror, on the hall wall. If I turn my head so that the white wings framing my face direct my vision towards it, I can see /…/ myself in it like a distorted shadow, a parody of something, some fairy-tale figure in a red cloak, descending towards a moment of carelessness that is the same as danger. A Sister, dipped in blood.[908]

The female body is imbricated in a network of disciplinary mechanisms, and indeed ascertained solely according to its reproductive capacity. Desire is divested of its freely circulating rhythm and reduced to the monthly routine of reenacting the "Scriptural precedent"[909] of Rachel and Jacob. Yet between these practices and *knowledges* of power, the female body, whose flows are inspected and quantified through this "regulation of identificatory practices,"[910] whose organs are segmented and detached from the flow of desire so as to constitute domains of undesirability, nevertheless rhizomatically shoots off its own tendrils of desire, whether in the subjective heterotopia of a memory continuum with her daughter and husband, or in the subversive/complicitous erotic encounters the handmaid engages in. Her subjection may indeed be understood in its dual sense of subject formation and becoming subordinated to power:[911] she is immersed in a network of normative/normalising ideals literally governing the materialisation of her body. It is not simply that the housemaid's body docilely acquiesces to such identificatory interpellations as the aunts' imperatives ("Think of yourselves as seeds"; "The Republic of Gilead, said Aunt Lydia, knows no bounds. Gilead is within you,"), to archaic, formulaic language, reminiscent not only of the Bible but also of Orwellian Newspeak ("Blessed be the fruit" – "May the Lord open,"),[912] or to institutional practices and official discourses intent on accomplishing a regimentation of individual desire. It is rather that resistance against the power structures does acquire consistence not only through the housemaid's subversive unleashing of sexual desire, but also through the very phenomenon of eroticisation – because of its programmatic repression of sexuality – undergone by the disciplinary apparatus.

A society increasingly without children, the Republic of Gilead appears, initially, to be congealed in an ahistorical, scriptural past. To the end of restoring demographic vitality, but also to maintaining the *status quo* of exploiting fertile women, conservative utopian propaganda is disseminated among the housemaids: they are envisioned by the aunties working in complicity with the patriarchal establishment as forming a sorority, an artificial network of alliances which, given its imposition of allegiances from

[908] Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 11.
[909] Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 21.
[910] Butler, *Bodies*, 3.
[911] Butler, *The Psychic Life*, 2.
[912] Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 25, 31.

above, runs counter to spontaneous attachments of friendship that might occur amongst women. Given the fact that such projections are transcendent of the current reality, yet aim at maintaining and not shattering the prevalent order of things, the platitudinous slogans of the aunties ("the torch of the future, the cradle of the race, the task before us")[913] amount to an ideological rather than a utopian frame of mind,[914] and offer no revolutionary possibilities for articulating a genuine camaraderie amongst women.

In this respect, the novel, in true postmodernist fashion, refuses to offer any definitive clues as to the handmaid's final defeat or escape from the hegemonic system of Gilead. Nonetheless, a "utopian horizon"[915] is indeed outlined, through the underground revolutionary, "deterritorialising" resistance movement, which, irrespective of the survival or demise of the protagonist, may have been responsible for the overthrow of the despotic Gileadian regime. Despite the handmaid's resilient resumption of her narrative ("But I keep on going with this sad and hungry and mutilated story, because after all I want you to hear it"),[916] the competing versions of *truth* from the epilogue attest on the one hand to a postmodernist repudiation of grand (utopian) narratives and, on the other, to a refusal to acknowledge any form of the state machine, whether it be despotic or permissive, as the ideal end-state. This deconstruction of static utopian visions, characteristic of feminist postmodernist dystopias, serves both to censor the static idea of a universally acceptable, future form of social ordering, and to suggest that women should maintain political agency aiming towards, rather than comfortably settling in, multiple possible futures-in-process.[917]

Angela Carter's parodic politics of gender representation in *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972) chart several heterotopian thresholds on which identity is provisionally articulated and redefined. In this novel, the siege under which an unnamed city, vaguely located in the South American continent, has fallen threatens to escalate into world-engulfing warfare. The dystopian contours of a Reality War waged between two totalitarian figures, the Minister of Determination and the diabolical Doctor Hoffman, are those of a city falling prey to a host of mirages, ghosts and phantasms and becoming, in effect, a Zone.[918] This preoccupation with

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[913] Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 353.
[914] Cf. Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 173-174.
[915] Moylan, *Scraps*, xiii.
[916] Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 344.
[917] See Erin McKenna, *The Task of Utopia. A Pragmatist and Feminist Perspective* (Lanham, Boulder, New York and Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001).
[918] In Brian McHale's terminology, this is a typically heteroclite or heterotopian site, which simultaneously deconstructs and reconstructs space through the juxtaposition, interpolation, superimposition, or misattribution of "radically discontinuous and inconsistent /…/ worlds of incompatible structure" (McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 44).

the radical indeterminacy, the plurality or the instability of (im)possible selves and worlds foregrounds the "ontological dominant"[919] of Angela Carter's postmodernist fiction. In particular, the novel begins by contrasting two political, cultural or identity paradigms which are vying for supremacy over the city, only to gradually undermine their consistency and, through an exploration of multiple, heterotopian counter-sites, repudiate them as grand (utopian) narratives.

The city, itself a heterogeneous aggregate of Amerindian and European colonisation history, increasingly falls prey to such hyperreal phenomena as: rivers running backwards; pigeons shouting quotations from Hegel, then forgetting the art of flying and dropping down dead onto the pavement; horses from paintings breaking through the frames of canvases and galloping in the streets; or city-dwellers being revisited by the palpable, substantial spectres of their dead relatives. This invasion of oneiric phantasms and fertile metamorphoses is the result of Doctor Hoffman's experiments in liberating imagination and desire from the constraints of reason and order, the very ideals upheld by his opponent, the Minister of Determination, who institutes an Orwellian Determination Police to "quarantine the unreality."[920] This conflict, which may be variously understood as an antagonism between reason and imagination, the reality principle and the pleasure principle,[921] Dionysian "orgiastic panic"[922] and Apollonian serenity, is nevertheless conceived in sheer militaristic terms, revealing both of these polar opposites as the congealed, static projections of their representatives.

Doctor Hoffman, for instance, is "waging a massive campaign against human reason itself,"[923] deploying a "ferocious artillery of unreason" and being assisted by guerrilla forces: "his soldiers in disguise who, though absolutely unreal, nevertheless, were."[924] Far from being liberating, however, unleashed imagination creates deep-seated anxiety, profound melancholy, a sense of entrapment in a "downward-drooping convoluted spiral of unreality from which we could never escape."[925] Similarly, the Minister of Determination, with his "admiration for stasis," intends to "freeze the entire freak show the city had become back into attitudes of

[919] McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 10-11.
[920] Angela Carter, *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (London: Penguin, 1972), 11.
[921] While the Minister "out of desperation, intended to rewrite the Cartesian cogito thus: 'I am in pain, therefore I exist'" (Carter, *The Infernal*, 20), Doctor Hoffman's version of the cogito is "I desire therefore I exist" (Carter, *The Infernal*, 210).
[922] Carter, *The Infernal*, 16.
[923] Carter, *The Infernal*, 10.
[924] Carter, *The Infernal*, 11.
[925] Carter, *The Infernal*, 19.

perfect propriety."[926] He therefore aims to contain the contagious powers of Doctor Hoffman's effect by building a wall of barbed wire around the city and resorting to "primitive and increasingly brutal methods"[927] in suppressing civilian unrest and revolt with tear gas and machine gun fire.

What is staged as a "battle between an encyclopaedist and a poet"[928] is a conflict between two facets of totalitarianism: one is rather occlusive and despotic, while the other only apparently liberates desire, re-territorialising it in an endless consumerist cycle.[929] The Minister of Determination is thus a rational empiricist who wishes to tabulate everything so that the strict correspondence between names and references is restored, but manages to be "only a witch-doctor in the present state of things."[930] His reality-testing laboratory is an incineration room, which instead of salvaging the real, manages only to exterminate the living. Likewise, Doctor Hoffman is a Faustian, "crazed genius,"[931] who nevertheless resorts to scientific means of extracting *eroto*-energy by means of gigantic generators. His "revolutionary" freeing of desire is done literally by incarcerating the bodies of lovers in glass cages, reminiscent of the panopticist surveillance and manipulation of individuals.

Doctor Hoffman's "phantasmagoric redefinition" of the city unfolds through a dissolution and reaggregation of the space and time coordinates. Space loses its rational, architectonic order and registers ceaseless dilation, contraction, realignment and redistribution, to the extent that several fragmentary, non-contiguous worlds are made to coexist in an impossible space: "sometimes the proportions of buildings and townscapes swelled to enormous, ominous sizes or repeated themselves over and over again in a fretting infinity."[932] Similarly, time is subjected to Daliesque fluidisation and de(con)struction: "Past occupied the city for whole days together, sometimes, so that the streets of a hundred years before were superimposed on nowadays streets."[933] Despite Doctor Hoffman's utopian project of liberating desire, he flaunts the grand notion of history as a progressive advancement towards some teleological goal, since he flattens out temporality and collapses the vertical distribution of time layers into "tumultuous and kinetic times, the time of actualised desire."[934] The

[926] Carter, *The Infernal*, 11.
[927] Carter, *The Infernal*, 21.
[928] Carter, *The Infernal*, 22.
[929] See Deleuze and Guattari (*Anti-Oedipus*, 257), for whom desire is the object of ambivalent moves of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation in the civilised capitalist machine.
[930] Carter, *The Infernal*, 22.
[931] Carter, *The Infernal*, 27.
[932] Carter, *The Infernal*, 18.
[933] Carter, *The Infernal*, 20.
[934] Carter, *The Infernal*, 10.

Doctor's "historiographic" venture aims at imploding chronological sequentiality into a synthetic, plural "Nebulous Time," which will make possible a playful discursive reinscription of time past: Trotsky, for instance, could be pictured as having composed the *Eroica* Symphony, Van Gogh could have written *Wuthering Heights*, while Milton might blindly have executed frescos in the Sistine Chapel. As the Doctor's former professor explains, Nebulous Time could be envisaged as "a period of absolute mutability when only reflected rays and broken trajectories of an entirely hypothetical source of light fitfully reveal a continually shifting surface, like the surface of water, yet a water which is only reflective skin and has neither depth nor volume."[935]

Desiderio, the protagonist and narrator of this story, embarks concurrently on an erotic and a thanatic quest (a search for Albertina, the daughter of the malevolent Doctor, and an attempt to assassinate the latter); what Desiderio consequently experiences is a dissolution of identity, eventually straddling the very boundaries that are meant to separate the two worlds, that of reason and that of unreason. His name signifies "desire," yet he is initially enlisted in the Minister of Determination's ranks as an Inspector of Veracity; furthermore, he insistently claims at the beginning of his narrative that he is rather "immune to the Hoffman effect."[936] While, initially, survival in this dystopian regime means not surrendering to the flux of mirages around him, Desiderio will eventually arrive at an understanding that identity is a *topos* under constant construction and resignification on the very borderlines or thresholds that connect, rather than separate, self from other.

Thus, his immersion into a succession of heterochronic and heterotopic "subuniverses" will catalyse his awareness that unreason, imagination, corporeality are as constitutive of identity as the mind, the spirit or any other traditionally privileged categories of Enlightenment rationality. Carter parodically recycles here the picaresque narrative pattern, positing Desiderio as a *picaro* whose primary accomplishment is not necessarily that of having progressed from social anonymity to social recognition – although posterity is bound to grant him a heroic stature, given his slaying of the "diabolical" Doctor Hoffman. Indeed, Desiderio succeeds in denaturalising conventional assumptions of reason and desire as polar opposites and, in effect, problematises and dismantles a host of cultural representations of, particularly gendered, identity. Desiderio explores several socio-cultural systems in which female corporeality is consistently the negative term against which axiomatic, normative identity is defined.

[935] Carter, *The Infernal*, 98.
[936] Carter, *The Infernal*, 12.

A representative of official power at the outset of his journey, Desiderio soon becomes an outcast taking refuge amongst the River People and is forced to give credence to their intricate webs of ritual, whereby cannibalism, the ritual of ingesting the flesh of another, is literally taken to mean also the incorporation of the other's "magic virtue."[937] What Desiderio uncovers is a sense of otherness being essential to explorations of self-identity; he therefore resorts to the donning of masks, literal and symbolical, the major point being that masquerading (self-effacement, self-erasure, multiplication of selves) is not only a game of surfaces or appearances, but also a processual enactment of identity as primarily performative. It is not the case that by peeling off various masks or husks there would be a core identity, a depth to be reached; on the contrary, what is challenged here is the very idea of fixed, non-transformable content, and here is where Carter's critique of the notion of an autonomous, self-contained, identity, which has dominated Western conceptions of the liberal, humanist subject, is most effective.

The volley of successive impersonations continues with Desiderio posing as the peep-show proprietor's nephew and as the very curator of Doctor Hoffman's "museum" – a sack full of models, slides and pictures serving as templates from which real physical objects and real events may be engendered. In this disguise, Desiderio becomes immersed into a realm of abjected liminality – a freak show in which normality itself is marginalised and rendered questionable, since Japanese dwarfs, dancing Albinos, the Alligator Man, Madame la Barbe, Mamie Buckskin, the phallic female "cl[i]ng defensively together to protect and perpetuate [their] difference."[938] The freaks' inherent monstrosity indicates, through its blurring of any clear delineations between humanity and its others, through the chaotic mixing of categories that their hybrid, liminal morphology displays, the fragility of any axiomatic categories traditionally employed to define the standard, "normal" being and the fact that normality itself is a construct, a fiction. This sudden reversal of perspectivism – which continues to occur throughout Desiderio's encounter with the Erotic Traveller, his captivity in the African realm of Amazons, or his Gulliveresque experience in the land of the Centaurs – flips over into the ontological perspectivism that McHale considers to govern postmodernist fiction: the fluctuating ontological planes shattering the consistency or homogeneity of identity.[939]

Perhaps the most horrendous example of the dangers inherent in perpetuating canonical representations of identity is that of the House of

[937] Carter, *The Infernal*, 90.
[938] Carter, *The Infernal*, 97.
[939] See McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism*, 52, 125-126.

Anonymity: in masked, priapic outfits, Desiderio and the Sadeian Count find in this (neo)Gothic edifice, a dozen girls in cages, reduced to

> the undifferentiated essence of the idea of the female. This ideational femaleness took amazingly different shapes though its nature was not that of Woman; when I examined them more closely, I saw that none of them were any longer, or might never have been, woman. All, without exception, passed beyond or did not enter the realm of simple humanity. They were sinister, abominable, inverted mutations, part clockwork, part vegetable and part brute.[940]

This biological reductionism is reminiscent of the peep show and its strategic redefinition of the "seven wonders of the world": the set of samples introducing Desiderio to the dismembered limbs and female anatomical sections of segmented, mutilated women in lascivious poses, featuring a reification of female corporeality under the specular regime. In contrast with such objectification of womanhood, Albertina, indecisively pigeonholed as the object or the product of Desiderio's desires, undergoes perpetual permutations of identity, her somatic and ideational fluctuations attesting to a refusal of any categori(c)al entrapments: the "series of marvellous shapes formed at random in the kaleidoscope of desire"[941] evinces Albertina as a liminal being, collapsing all sorts of boundaries (animal-human, male-female, etc.) in her fluid manifestations as a black swan, as the androgynous ambassador of Doctor Hoffman, as a gipsy girl, as the siren-like madam of the brothel or as the masculinised Generalissimo who introduces Desiderio to the Gothic-villain-turned-Freudian-psycho-analyst's abode. In the heterotopian mirror from Doctor Hoffman's castle, Desiderio also realises that his successive transformations have shattered the boundaries between self and other into an anamorphic being: "I looked at myself in the oval, mahogany mirror. I had been transformed again. Time and travel had changed me almost beyond recognition. Now I was entirely Albertina in the male aspect."[942]

Transgressions of gender dictates are, as Judith Butler has demonstrated, disruptive of cultural prescriptions, since they parody into excess the artifice of predetermined categories of masculinity and femininity. Gender identity, Carter also maintains throughout her work, should be seen as mobile, fluctuating, malleable. This radical rejection of biological essentialism[943] relies on a Foucauldian understanding of the body itself as performative rather than substantive and celebrates the interconnectedness of self and

[940] Carter, *The Infernal*, 131.
[941] Carter, *The Infernal*, 12.
[942] Carter, *The Infernal*, 197.
[943] "Flesh comes to us out of history; so does the repression and taboo that governs our experience of flesh" (Carter, *The Infernal*, 11).

other; hence, the recurrent reference to identity as dissemination, as the pluralisation of being. From the juxtaposition and transposition of limbs through which the Moroccan acrobats of desire juggle with corporeality and construct a "diagrammatic multi-man," to the mirroring effect of eyes reflecting the gaze of another in a "model of eternal regression," the trope of corporeal ambivalence circulates freely in Carter's cultural imaginary.[944]

Having annihilated Doctor Hoffman and his infernal machines, having restored reason as the governing utopia of the Post-Enlightenment Age, Desiderio is left stranded, condemned to unending disillusion, and destined to perpetually desire *desire* itself. However, the provisional constitution and breakdown of boundaries (corporeal, territorial, social, sexual), which have governed Desiderio's encounters with otherness, stem from a programmatic refusal to acknowledge a single, univocal utopian solution to the various forms of socius under which (embodied) identity is appropriated.

Outlining the potential for a utopian Body (politic) without Organs and revolving around the idea of the construction of womanhood,[945] or rather, to maintain the Deleuzian frame of reference, around the notion of becoming woman, Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* (1982) contrasts two geographical locations, without however setting them in stark opposition: the utopian/dystopian city and the heterotopic desert. While the former seems to be caught in a traumatic unfolding of "arborescent multiplicities" – with revolutionary groups of black people, women and proselyters storming the streets and redevising the rat-infested cityscape by erecting ever-shifting barricades, the desert will function for Eve-Evelyn as a site for exploring what Deleuze and Guattari denote through "rhizomatic multiplicities."[946] In an extensive, heterochronic period of transition, the protagonist will undergo a protracted liminal stage of intercategorical gender identity, straddling boundaries of man-woman in-betweenness towards acquiring a "molecular" identity, characterised not by monolithic unity but by intensive multiplicities:

> I would go to the desert, to the waste heart of that vast country, the desert on which they turned their backs for fear it would remind them of emptiness – the desert, the arid zone, there to find, chimera of chimeras, there, in the ocean of sand, among the bleached rocks of the untenanted part of the world, I thought I would find the most elusive of all chimeras, myself.[947]

A geological formation defined by vastness and vacuity, the desert, nevertheless, paradoxically accommodates in its emptiness, a heterogeneous complex of spaces where Eve/Evelyn encounters extreme artificial perfor-

[944] Carter, *The Infernal*, 113, 43.
[945] Lee, *Angela Carter*, 77.
[946] Cf. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand*, 33. Arborescence implies macromultiplicities, which are extensive, molar, unifiable, totalisable, and organisable.
[947] Angela Carter, *The Passion of New Eve* (London: Virago, 1982), 38.

mances of gender impersonation: Beulah, the matriarchal utopian underground labyrinth; Zero's misogynist abode; Tristessa's glass cave; the crisscrossing paths of the children's army expeditions. Evelyn/Eve's quest for identity renders him/her a nomadic subject provisionally exploring not merely geographical territories, but also fluctuating forms of embodiment, whereby sexually-determined morphological shape is merely an extrinsic, molar identity correlative of what constitutes gendered, molecular becoming. While s/he *does* come under the sway of various regimes of power, whether they be matriarchal or patriarchal, with the consequence of his/her body being perceived as a sum aggregate of organs and subjected to massification attempts, it is primarily a question of perpetually refusing a territorialisation of desire and engaging in constantly resumed flights from such codifying propensities that confers Eve's exploration of embodiment the shifting contours of a Body without Organs.

The site where the materiality of Evelyn's body is subjected to modification in what amounts to an anatomical macro-physics is the mythological-technological underground citadel of Beulah, which artificially reproduces in its circular architectural design both the cavernous insides of female anatomy and the convoluted labyrinth of the brain. Beulah, paradoxically a triumph of technology and magic, is a site where contraries uneasily cohabit, in a suspended state of mutual undermining. A "profane place," the realm of matter, carnality, bodily caverns and fluids, Beulah is also the subterranean abode of the gods, as attested by the epitaph engraved on the pediment. Carter's insistence on a hyperbolic inflation of the sovereign figures governing the two antithetical domains – matriarchal Beulah and Zero's patriarchal ranch – conveys the deleterious effects that the overcoding of desire, as enacted by the despotic socius, has upon the individual.

On the one hand, there is the chthonian figure of the castrating Mother, whose self-fashioned gigantic body betrays the imperfection flawing her utopian design: aiming to reverse phallocentric history by making "a start on the feminisation of the Father Time,"[948] Mother, the Great Parricide, the Grand Emasculator, the Castratrix of the Phallocentric Universe, is doomed to fail because behind the very act of grafting excessive insignia of femaleness onto her body lie male-shaped instruments, while her natural physiological attribute, birth-giving, has been culturally deflected into either an overcoding of her own body or the surgical emasculation of the new Eve: "She was her own mythological artefact; she had reconstructed her flesh painfully, with knives and with needles, into a transcendental form as an emblem, as an example, and flung a patchwork quilt stitched from her daughter's breasts over the cathedral of her interior, the cave within the

[948] Carter, *The Passion*, 66-67.

cave."[949] Mother, an incarnated deity, manufactures, surgically transforms Evelyn into Eve, using an obsidian scalpel, giving vent to vengefulness, or to what Deleuze might call fascist libidinal investments of desire. The female body is crucially the focus of both deterritorialising and reterritorialising movements by Mother, whose flesh has territorial machine written all over it. Her "giving birth" to new Eve may seem like an attempt to extricate the female body from the confines that have held women hostage throughout patriarchal history, yet this is a forced manipulation of identity, an artificial freedom that is bestowed upon women, who have been metamorphosed into priestesses of Cybele, mutilated amazons themselves. Evelyn's body is captured, incarcerated, ravished, and appropriated by the matriarchs in the bowels of Beulah; in the warm, red, "humid viscera" of the earth bearing the marks of carceral design, Evelyn is brought into being – metamorphosed into his own ideal of womanhood – through an arsenal of techniques (parthenogenesis, castration, excavation) which characteristically represent a bypassing of the proper reproductive processes: "The plastic surgery that turned me into my own diminutive, Eve, the shortened form of Evelyn, this artificial changeling, the Tiresias of Southern California."[950]

As Evelyn attests, one's gendered identity is not merely a factor of bodily materiality but a question of the psychic experience of that materiality. Eve's psycho-sexual genesis at the centre of the subterrestrial maze, begins with Evelyn feeling as terrified as Ariadne, awaiting the Minotaur, yet his acquiring of the identity of a woman will require more than a mere psychic impregnation with visual clichés of motherhood borrowed from Hollywood movies. Carter's rejection of the notion of the dualism of the sexes and of extremist appropriations of all kinds is evident in her parodic deconstruction of the despotic tendencies of this blueprint of an all-female utopia, whereby universal happiness can be achieved, as evinced by Mother's speech, at the cost of annihilating the male principle. In effect, Carter appears to take issue with the all-encompassing and explanatory psychoanalytical complex of Oedipus, and its accompanying castration motif, which, in Deleuzian acceptance, represents "the basis for the anthropomorphic and molar representation of sexuality"[951] with its foundational ideology of lack. Mother's symbolic and literal castrating of Evelyn leaves him/her in a liminal state of nondescript identity, which will

[949] Carter, *The Passion*, 60.

[950] Carter, *The Passion*, 71. Regarding the *pharmakos* embodied by Tiresias, René Girard talks about the genital organs being the predilect target of aggressive crowds violently stampeding against the scapegoat: the hermaphrodite incarnates a "sexual transgression that signifies the violent abolition of distinctions – the major cause of cultural disintegration" (Girard, *Violence*, 98).

[951] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 295.

be surveyed in a trajectory of molecular, rather than filiational or genealogical, becoming:

> I know nothing. I am a tabula erasa, a blank sheet of paper, an unhatched egg. I have not yet become a woman, although I possess a woman's shape. Not a woman, no; both more and less than a real woman. /…/ the last thing I needed, an elaborate female apparatus, one of exquisite detail and superb charm, constructed around the nascent seed of another person, not Evelyn, whose existence, as yet, Evelyn persisted in denying.[952]

Eve's rhizomatic mapping of her becoming takes her along lines of flight from one carceral location to another. A similar territorialisation of desire marks the patriarchal establishment of Zero, the poet, whose one-eyed semi-Oedipal condition mirrors in reverse Mother's anti-Oedipal, castrating voracity. In contrast with loquacious, sentient and articulate Mother, Zero, the male repository of logos and reason, has grown so "disgusted with words and their ineradicable human content" that he has completely abandoned rational speech and adopted a "bestial locution of grunts and barks."[953] Zero presides over a harem of females, whose objectified womanhood renders them inferior to the herd of pigs fetishised by their master. In his despotic reign and misogynist theology, his seven wives, plainly equated with essentialised femaleness, are inserted into specific slots of identity: worshipping priestesses mirroring in reverse Mother's one-breasted postulants. Eve's experience of unceremonious ravishment at the hands of "Masculinity incarnate"[954] also reiterates in reverse Evelyn's rape by Mother.

Mother's emasculation of Evelyn and Zero's obsessive indictment of a quasi-female, Medusan gaze for sterilising him, betray a similar essentialist, reductionist understanding of embodiment as a molar aggregate of bodily organs, capable of segmenting and blocking rather than unleashing the flows of desire. Convinced that his sterilisation was magically operated, *via* the screen, by the gaze of Tristessa de St Ange, Zero leads his hoard of Bacchantes to her mausoleum, the cathedral-like glass-house of the actress, whose transparent labyrinth of revolving chambers is an architectural equivalent of its owner's shifting identity.

Tristessa's transgression of the male-female binary clearly echoes Butler's notion of "drag" as one possible way out of the maze of binarisms that the ascription of fixed gender in the heterosexual matrix presupposes: insistent on transgression, confusion, ambiguity, permeation and redefinition of bodily contours, the performative potential of drag can "engender," through a "subversion" of dichotomous constraints, an identity that refuses

[952] Carter, *The Passion*, 83.
[953] Carter, *The Passion*, 85.
[954] Carter, *The Passion*, 104.

congealment, a "gendered corporealisation of time."[955] Found among sepulchral, waxwork replicas of corpse simulacra in the Hall of the (Hollywood) Immortals, Tristessa pursues the ideal of femininity as bodily surface ("illusion," "pure mystification") to its utmost: s/he both complies with and challenges the Mulveyan "*to-be-looked-at-ness,*" which ambiguously betrays both passive acquiescence to and active involvement in constructing the body as sexual fetish: "She had been the dream itself made flesh though the flesh I knew her in was not flesh but only a moving picture of the flesh, real but not substantial."[956] As a subversive overstatement of the power of the gaze, Tristessa has internalised the habit of a "visual fallacy" to the point of passing into nonexistence, out of the ontological into the specular regime. Sheer surface masking nothing but passivity and negativity, Tristessa's sleeping beauty awaits eternity, excision from temporality, as "persistence of vision."[957] Whereas Evelyn's metamorphosis into a woman proceeds from somatic modification to psychic feminisation, Tristessa's impersonation of countless female roles and masquerading as the embodiment of the "perfect man's woman" paradoxically engenders and reinforces her essential femaleness: "Once the essence was achieved, the appearance could take care of itself."[958] Tristessa's "becoming woman" is illustrative of Butler's performative theory of gender formation. It is not that the social assumption of gender is causally determined by the natural, "given" reality of sex; rather, following the Foucauldian premise of the discursive construction of bodies through the constitutive effects of power, it is the case, as Butler argues, that the category of sex functions as a normative, regulatory ideal, producing the materiality of bodies "through time," i.e. in a processual, dynamic fashion. Corporeality itself can no longer be taken for granted, as a mute, inert "facticity," but should be understood as a *topos* which undergoes constant construction and resignification, through what Butler refers to as the "reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains."[959] The gap separating the self-engineered woman (Tristessa) and the despotically refashioned Eve appears gradually to close: both of them manage to evolve sensibly towards acquiring this ambivalent, trans- or dual-gender identity, becoming, through the act of love, which utterly deterritorialises desire, a Body without Organs.[960] Out of the social

[955] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 179.
[956] Carter, *The Passion*, 7-8.
[957] Carter, *The Passion*, 147.
[958] Carter, *The Passion*, 141.
[959] Butler, *Bodies*, 1, 2.
[960] "Out of our interpenetrating, undifferentiated sex, we had made the great Platonic hermaphrodite together, the whole and perfect being to which he, with an absurd and touching heroism, had, in his own single self, aspired; we brought into being the being who stops time in the self-created eternity of lovers," in Carter, *The Passion*, 148.

machines which render the body a mere aggregate of organs, the full Body without Organs is sheer potentiality, lines of intensity refusing crystallisation, smooth, slippery surface and uninterrupted flow.

By the end of the narrative, Eve is thrown "back into historicity"[961] yet her voyage of exploring identity is just about to recommence, in true nomadic fashion, on the shores of another heterotopian space, the ocean. The story, told retrospectively by a still ambivalently-gendered narrator, reinforces the premise that "becoming woman" must remain a never-ending enterprise. The trope of corporeal ambiguation circulating freely in the cultural imaginary of this post-historical, post-apocalyptical world points towards the articulation of posthuman embodiment with its excessively fluid, transgressable boundaries that demarcate gender.[962] While this may well be a paradigmatic postmodern utopia, it is nevertheless one that celebrates multiplicity, interconnectedness, embodied becoming rather than a reversion to a static acquiescence to a univocal, monolithic conception of gendered identity.

III.4.4. "Savage Survivals," "Dragon Sublimations": Alasdair Gray's *Lanark. A Life in Four Books*

In examining the tropes of political monstrosity from Alasdair Gray's *Lanark. A Life in Four Books* (1981),[963] I will relate the analysis of its body politic deformations to H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), starting from the premise that these are Gothic and, respectively, post-Gothic narratives that substantiate Foucault's symptomatology of the "grotesque mechanics of power" in *Abnormal*, where "the political monster" is instantiated either as the many-headed monster that ruptures the social covenant from below (the "popular" monster) or as a figure of power abuse (the sovereign).[964]

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[961] Carter, *The Passion*, 167.

[962] As Hayles contends: "If my nightmare is a culture inhabited by posthumans who regard their bodies as fashion accessories rather than the ground of being, my dream is a version of the posthuman that embraces the possibilities of information technologies without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality, that recognises and celebrates finitude as a condition of human being and that understands human life is embedded in a material world of great complexity, one on which we depend for our continuous survival" (Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 5).

[963] Previously published as "Troping the Monstrous Body Politic: H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895) and Alasdair Gray's *Lanark. A Life in Four Books* (1981)," in *Inversions of Power and Paradox*, ed. Jonathan A. Allan and Elizabeth E. Nelson (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2012).

[964] These two facets of moral monstrosity - the incestuous "monster from above" (tyrannical princes, villainous barons and despotic monks) and the cannibalistic "monster from below" (lawless bandits and revolutionary mobs) - appear in the literature of terror suddenly irrupting at around the time the French Revolution and continue to permeate Gothic fiction throughout the following century (see Foucault, *Abnormal*, 74).

Wells's *fin-de-siècle* Gothic novel shows a deflation of gigantesque figures of monstrosity through their dissemination into a field of abnormality and degeneration:[965] the dichotomous body politic – the ethereal Eloi *v.* the hideous Morlocks – explored by traveller can barely preclude its corporeal disintegration. *The Time Machine* is conceived as a dystopian exploration of a rather distant future, in which humanity, having accomplished all its socio-cultural desiderata, having teleologically fulfilled the grand narrative of social Darwinism, having eradicated disease, poverty and inequity, having completed, in effect, the Hobbesian "civilising process that makes life more and more secure," seems to have nonetheless also forfeited its very chance for advancement and survival: "It seemed to me that I had happened upon humanity upon the wane. The ruddy sunset set me thinking of the sunset of mankind."[966] Consistent with the dystopian strategy of exploring dynamically alternative social frameworks, *The Time Machine* captures one snapshot – among several – from mankind's bleak future, suggesting, as it were, that the Hobbesian project of perfecting the social body by suppressing conflict and sealing in all its component elements is essentially flawed. Having embarked on a downward spiral of decay, humanity is either debilitated by its departure from the agonistic framework (the Eloi), or bestialised by its overindulgence in it (the Morlocks).

The year is 802,701 A.D., and the Time Traveller replicates the medieval and Renaissance travellers' convention of reporting about fabulous races presumably residing at the edges of *mappaemundi,* only that, consistent with the space-time curvature notion espoused by the protagonist, it is along the axis of time that such phantasmal populaces are encountered in the recognisably urban, albeit devastated, geography of London. The two possible scenarios envisaged by the traveller characteristically revolve around the completion *v.* the incompletion of the Hobbesian passage from a state of nature to a state of civilisation. If, on the one hand, humans have failed to censor their bestial instinctual nature, their intrinsic propensity towards savagery may have brought about more than their failure to refine their sociability; it may have modified their entire generic anatomical imprint, crossing over the threshold from humanity to inhumanity. If, on the other hand, the civilising process has progressed along its way, the traveller himself might appear to these superior humans as a vestigial link from their primitive past.[967] An intimation of the human species' crepuscular

[965] What Foucault calls the "transition from the monster to the abnormal" or, rather, the atomisation of "great exceptional monstrosity" into "this host of little abnormalities" (*Abnormal*, 110).

[966] H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (1895) (New York: Signet Classic, 2002), 34.

[967] "What if cruelty had grown into a common passion? What if in this interval the race had lost its manliness and had developed into something inhuman, unsympathetic, and overwhelmingly powerful? […] I might seem some old-world savage animal, only the more dreadful and disgusting for our common likeness – a foul creature to be incontinently slain" (Wells, *The Time Machine*, 24).

involution and entropic demise comes from the Time Traveller's initial sighting of the statue of a colossal sphinx, whose derelict aspect and horizontally spread wings suggest, in quasi-oracular fashion, that the prospect of upward movement, of vertical, teleological progress is no longer tenable for mankind. This calamitous portent will be confirmed, at the end of the narrative, by the Traveller's leap into an even remoter future, several millennia further ahead, where the sole life form still inhabiting the oceanic shores seems to be that of monstrous reddish crabs – thoroughly bestialised, insensitive, instinctual creatures, confirming, as Kelly Hurley puts it, the anxieties about "degeneration, devolution, and entropy" looming large in *fin-de-siècle* Gothic fiction.[968] Highly responsive to conceptual remodellings of human identity from the end-of-century scientific discourses, Gothic narratives like H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* exhibit the prospects of human identity foundering into a "body metamorphic and undifferentiated," that is of a gross corporeality subject to extreme fragmentation, permeability and "morphic variability": in short, of the human under threat of becoming not-human, abject, or "abhuman."[969] In fact, the term abhuman as employed by Hurley is, like Douglas's polluting "abomination" or Kristeva's uncanny mixture of the nausea and *jouissance* elicited by "abjection," suggestive of an ambivalent positioning of the human subject, freighted with the dual drives of maintaining, on the one hand, an illusion of discrete, autonomous self-identity, and of savouring, on the other, the relish of nondifferentiation attendant on confrontations breaching the boundaries of the self. As the Time Traveller attests, man's devolution – the post-human "modification of the human type,"[970] charted as abhuman, subhuman or inhuman – is already under way in his own time (yet more blatantly visible in the debilitated elites and the dehumanised Morlocks, approaching completion in the reified crustaceans from the end of time).

A plethora of images suggesting decrepitude and decay is deployed towards highlighting the Eloi and the Morlocks, the dichotomous components of a two-tiered, vertically-arranged social body – as manifestations of a posthuman stage of existence. The Eloi, on the one hand, represent a supra-terrestrial, four-feet high, beautiful populace, whose corporeal exquisiteness seems to have sublimated, over the course of aeons, aesthetic standards of bodily perfection. Their stature has diminished to that

[968] More specifically, as Hurley claims, these are anxieties primarily generated by the Darwinian narrative of species evolution, scenarios about its potential volatility and reversibility, evinced, for instance, by narratives like *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, which exhibits the vulnerability of mankind as a species situated at the apex of natural selection processes and addresses the possibility of its "downward modification" into the most rudimentary and abject organisms, in Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, 80.

[969] Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, 3.

[970] Wells, *The Time Machine*, 57.

of "little people," their graceful bodies are "indescribably frail," betraying a sort of consumptive, "hectic beauty"; coupled with their mental feebleness and their childlike intelligence, "their Dresden-china type of prettiness" makes them resemble miniature automata, diminished, spectral, surrogate humans or less-than-humans.[971] The earth they inhabit is a derelict garden, strewn with the dilapidated remains of a once glorious architecture. The aesthetic index of a civilisation's last bout of creative energy, the rundown palaces bearing wartime scars, where the Eloi take shelter, are spatial correlatives for the notion of a once-powerful elite weakened, in time, by lack of strenuous effort to secure everything that the attainment of progress has provided them with. The Eloi's "physical slightness" and their "lack of intelligence" are clues to the perils inherent in a population's attaining a balanced, secure, comfortable degree of civilisation that stamps out man's intrinsic savagery and rubs out all need for struggle, for the "restless energy" that ensures progress, once there is "no danger of war or solitary violence, no danger from wild beasts, no wasting disease to require strength of constitution, no need of toil."[972]

While the Eloi's dissolution into a weakened social body elicits compassion in the protagonist, the uncanny recognition of a debased humanity in the Morlocks' simultaneously familiar and strange morphological outlook triggers nauseating horror.[973] By contrast with the Eloi, their antagonists, the Morlocks, have colonised vast underground networks of channels and tunnellings, which communicate with the surface through ventilating shafts and wells. Theirs is an exclusively chthonian habitat, yet, as the Time Traveller remarks, the signs that subterranean space can accommodate human activity and life – "the less ornamental purposes of civilisation" – were already visible in his contemporary London in the shape of the reticular networks of electric railways, subways, workrooms, restaurants and factories.[974] Unlike the Upper-world architecture, whose "exquisite beauty […] was the outcome of the last surgings of the now purposeless energy of mankind,"[975] the artificial Underground world has been territorialised with the aid of technology, and it is through this unnatural alliance between organism and machine that the "race" populating

[971] Wells, *The Time Machine*, 25 and 27.
[972] Wells, *The Time Machine*, 36, 37.
[973] "I do not know how long I sat peering down that well. It was not for some time that I could succeed in persuading myself that the thing I had seen was human. But, gradually, the truth dawned on me: that Man had not remained one species, but had differentiated into two distinct animals: that my graceful children of the Upper-world were not the sole descendants of our generation, but that this bleached, obscene, nocturnal Thing, which had flashed before me, was also heir to all the ages" (Wells, *The Time Machine*, 54).
[974] Wells, *The Time Machine*, 56.
[975] Wells, *The Time Machine*, 37.

it has entered a "posthuman" stage of existence. For Wells, the impact of technoscientific advancement on definitions of the human is deleterious, for mechanisation means for the Morlocks dehumanisation and downright monstrification. They are an anthropophagous species, since they feed on the helpless Eloi residing above. Their monstrosity is not only dietary, but also postural and corporeal. As if their inflated size – "big unmeaning shapes" – did not suffice to induce instinctive loathing and fear in the Time Traveller, their crawling locomotion reinforces their association with theriomorphic beasts: "I cannot even say whether it ran on all-fours, or only with its forearms held very low."[976] Their "nauseatingly inhuman" visage ("pale, chinless faces and great, lidless, pinkish-grey eyes") and their hirsute bodies ("there was flaxen hair on its head and down its back") render the Morlocks as closer to the animal than to the human genus, although bestialisation is employed at variance with reification as discursive processes of enfreakment, since the underground people are variously construc(ct)ed as monsters, thing-like creatures or beasts.[977]

The most suggestive trope that the Time Traveller resorts to, however, in mapping the dimorphic social body he observes is an entomological analogy. Whereas the Eloi are likened to drones restricted to a fruit diet in the upperworld garden, the "ant-like" Morlocks have forged a strange parasitic symbiosis whereby they preserve and prey upon their weaker siblings, much like "human spider[s]."[978] If Deleuzian categories were to be applied to this acephalous social body, one might say that the Eloi have succumbed to their fixation in a molar, self-same hegemonic category, a sealed-in system doomed to implode and collapse on itself once its energy has been expended. The energetic, versatile Morlocks, on the other hand, are – as their crustacean future will confirm – engaged in a process of becoming ever more "molecular," re-configuring their corporeality in terms of fragmentations, poly-stratifications, or cross-over alliances with either animal or technological alterities, fluidly de-territorialising and re-territorialising power in the manner of a guerrilla conducting aleatory raids on the once "favoured aristocracy."[979] Deleuzian desire is arrested in the superior stratum, yet it flows rhizomatically in the subterranean realm, which intensively dis-incorporates and re-incorporates the bodies individual above. One witnesses here the collapse of the "civilised capitalist machine"

[976] Wells, *The Time Machine*, 53.

[977] Wells, *The Time Machine*, 63-66. Enfreakment would represent, according to Rosemarie Garland Thomson, a process of discursive formation, whereby, through mediating narratives or cultural representations, the differences of various anomalous bodies are collapsed into a category of corporeal otherness. It is thus that the monster turns thus from a freak of nature into a freak of culture. See Thomson, *Freakery*, xviii, 10.

[978] Wells, *The Time Machine*, 72, 53.

[979] Wells, *The Time Machine*, 67.

and a resurgence of the "primitive territorial machine," or, in Hobbesian terms, a topsy-turvy, headless body politic, maintaining a semblance of the vertical distribution of powers within the state, yet reversing the hierarchy between up and down, high and low. This inverted hierarchy, as well as the gaping orifices and ruptured surfaces that become prioritised against the impenetrability, closure and smoothness of the classical body, make the Eloi-Morlock socius a grotesque instantiation of humanity's failure to move definitively from a state of nature to a state of civilisation. It demonstrates that once civilisation has passed its zenith, it is conflict, discord, *agon*, rather than peace, comfort, *irene*, that ensure "savage survivals" in this "strange new world."[980]

While Wells's *Time Machine* exhibits the violent disaggregation of the body social and the abjectification of the individual body in response to concerns generated by contemporary scientific developments (Darwinian evolutionism, degeneration theory) and the disenchantment with utopian projects of social reform, or with notions of rational, civilised progress, the late Gothic sensibility that permeates Alasdair Gray's *Lanark* sees postindustrial devastation as the site of individual and social corporeal dissolution and dialogically engages in a critique of the primacy of sovereignty as the guarantor of political stability. As the title of Gray's post-Gothic fictional rewriting of the Hobbesian tract emphasises, *Lanark* is structured into four main books, punctuated by a misplaced prologue and epilogue; the median Books (One and Two) follow Duncan Thaw's artistic tribulations in a grim, industrial Glasgow, while the peripheral Books (Three and Four), which form the focus of this analysis, outline the exploration of a post-industrial, heterotopian space by Lanark, Thaw's correlative self. Lanark lands, identity-less, in the midst of Unthank, an otherworld, a shifting, metamorphic, and phantasmal zone, in which devastated metropolitan areas get entangled within a spatial matrix of underworlds and hinterworlds. Whereas the time arrow could be bent to accommodate the Time Traveller's excursions into past and future moments, in Lanark's post-consumerist environment where money has lost its exchange value, time has become the ultimate commodity, subject to incessant advertising[981] albeit controlled and increasingly codified by the concorporate power managing it. This transnational, monstrously augmented power governing Unthank – referred to as the "creature" – is, indeed, the "civilised capitalist machine," which is characterised, as Deleuze and Guattari explain, through its ambivalent moves of massive

[980] Wells, *The Time Machine*, 36 and 39.

[981] "BUY TIME FOR YOUR FAMILY FROM THE QUANTUM CHRONOLOGICAL. (THEY'LL LOVE YOU FOR IT)" in Alasdair Gray, *Lanark. A Life in Four Books* (1981) (London and Glasgow: Paladin Grafton Books, 1987), 432.

decodification of flows (unleashing, unchaining desire from socially restricting forces) and a paradoxical maintenance of the state apparatuses created by the despotic society.[982]

The "creature" Gray highlights in his novel both textually and visually, with its equivocal reterritorialising and reterritorialising flows, is no less a Leviathan-like power formation than Hobbes's state model was. The Leviathan, literalised as a white whale in the frontispieces designed by Gray to the entire novel and to each of the four books, becomes here a refraction of the genuine Hobbesian understanding of the commonwealth state as an artificial soul and body, conceived by the individuals of a given community in order to censor their propensity to freedom and anarchy, to the dominant twentieth-century representations of a complementary image of the repressive state, facing the individual as a source of anxiety and alienation.

On the title page of Gray's novel, for instance, the Leviathan is pictured as an over-feminised, maternal body breastfeeding its human offspring, as the state appears to be nourishing its citizens; the manifold, serpentine coils of its body suggest, however, its monstrous propensity towards turning the humans into prey and becoming consumer rather than consumed.[983] The sovereign from Hobbes's frontispiece has been supplanted here by the Escherian representation of an artist designing, pencil and compasses in hand, himself as a character and it is rather uncertain which of them takes precedence over the other; a similar concern with power is expressed in the metafictional Epilogue where the Author, called Nastler, Lanark, the protagonist, a disembodied editor managing the overwhelming paratextual apparatus (footnotes, index of plagiarisms, running page headlines) and the reader dispute their control over the fictional world(s). On the title page to Book Three, the whale reappears, alongside fabulous beasts like the sphinx or the siren, in classical iconographic rendition, at the margins of one of the *mappaemundi* which an allegorical figure of *Magistra Vitae* carries upon her shoulders. The graphic representation on the title page to Book One augments the repressive connotations of state power by picturing the Sovereign, sword in hand, issuing a lightning bolt from his mouth that endangers the ship at sea in equal measure as the whale approaching it. On the title page to Book Two, the whale is sublimated to a mere fish on the coat-of-arms presiding over a surgical amphitheatre, a clear reference to the medicalised discourse whereby modernity performs its docilisation of subjects within knowledge/power regimes. The frontispiece to Book Four is

[982] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 257.

[983] In Beal's view, while in the Book of Job the deification of monstrosity sets the grounds for the *monstrous-sublime*, the Leviathan and its assorted cohort of other sea monsters pictured in the Genesis are anti-cosmic monstrosities, serving as the prototype for the development of the *monstrous-diabolic* (*Religion*, 118).

the most obvious reference to the post-Hobbesian perpetuation of the cultural pattern of the monstrous State. It brings a Spenglerian critique (such as expressed in *The Decline of the West*) of the State as a decrepit, hyper-inflated, hyper-institutionalised form of oppressive *civilisation*, as opposed to the true and organic *culture* generated by the memories of Lanark, the unmanageable individual who is relentless in his quest for sunlight and freedom. Lanark's experience is that of a clash between civilisation and culture, between centre and marginality, in a manner reminiscent of the counter-cultural novels of the sixties, which also present the State as a horrendous embodiment of the consumer society which alienates life, generating responses of either sharp protest, or of bohemian, centrifugal existence, based on errantry and aimless wandering. As a cultural and behavioural response to the threat imposed by the oppressive state, the whole world appears as "the metaphor of an insane asylum,"[984] run by the "creature," i.e. State itself.

In Alasdair Gray's post-Hobbesian state of affairs, the "commonwealth" has ruptured its tight-knit unity and has atomised into a multitude of factions or "cliques" – political, artistic, religious, sexual, criminal, etc. – which strive for supremacy and are extremely intolerant of each other; their freedom to indulge in individualistic pursuits is illusory, however, since they are under constant surveillance and manipulation in a multi-tiered panopticon. The Elite, a "hellish" café where Lanark first gets acquainted with these antagonistic groups, is just one such example of a cellular distribution of space in the city of Unthank, where the "inmates" – ordinary citizens – are disciplined by being immersed into darkness (sunlight having been confiscated as a natural time-keeping device), by being victimised at the hands of Kafkaesque bureaucracy and by having strange diseases imprint onto their bodies literal translations of the identity distortions the dissenting citizens undergo. The dehumanisation process people undergo within a repressive regime posing as the promoter of liberal consumerism translates as reification (people are stripped of identity and reduced to numbers) or bestialisation (people are slotted into abhuman mass categories and medically tabulated as vertebrates, leeches, sponges or crustaceans). Some, like Lanark himself, develop dragonhide, patches of insensitive, scaly armour gradually engulfing their entire epidermal surface. The dragonish skin, starting as a black spot and spreading into a glossy, cold, "intensely dark green" carapace adorned with "thorny red" knobs,[985] is a symptom and a defence response to sun deprivation – or, metaphorically, to dispossession of human feeling. Others, like Gay, are parasitical leeches or

[984] Cf. W. Embler, "The Metaphor of the World as an Insane Asylum," in *A Review of General Semantics* XXVI (1969): 413-24.
[985] Gray, *Lanark*, 41.

sponges whose bodies are covered in mouths, disembodied bodily apertures scattered across their skin and grotesquely stealing vitality from others. Yet others, like the soldier, who have internalised the disciplinary regime's rigorous norms, tend to develop a disease known as twittering rigour, their bodies gaining tremendous height and vertical poise, yet becoming rather vulnerable to sideways action.

The effects of power within this carceral society are such that bodies become malleable and susceptible to a disciplinary "political anatomy"[986] whereby those subjects who pose the threat of evading the normative frame are made to exhibit their transgressive potential through the disruptive excesses of their monstrified bodies; eventually, they undergo expungement from the socius, but what purports to be a strategy of cleansing the community from polluting impurities is in actual fact a power-orchestrated scheme to retrieve the energy from its dying subjects as well as to nourish itself by cannibalising upon them: the process is called "sublimating dragons." In his desperate search for sunlight, Lanark displaces himself from an Unthank cemetery to the Institute through a symbolic re-birthing channel. Here, a vast army of doctors – most of them recruited from former patients – conduct, under the supervision of Professor Ozenfant, a procedure targeted at normalising pathogenic individuals and recycling/eliminating unruly elements that elude the normative grasp.[987] Like the factory, the army barracks or the school, the Institute is a disciplinary site deploying a technology of "cellular" power, indeed allowing for a panopticist distribution of space wherein the individual is under constant surveillance and manipulation. The totalitarian regime of the "creature" ruthlessly deploys technologies of power not only over the body, but also over the soul, seamlessly articulating an entire corpus of knowledge and practices (educational, cultural, medical) that, while primarily targeting the enactment of a "political anatomy," also extends beyond the mere individual to encompass the entire social body, in effect amounting to a "carceral archipelago."[988] On the other hand, mediatised events like the patients' "turning salamander," are "impressive spectacles" watched by everyone in the Institute.[989] The stage where the sacrificial victim explodes releasing heat and light, the exalted participation of the spectators, the segmented spaces in which each individual is inserted taxonomically and placed under constant supervision, all these seem to be open-stage replicas of the Benthamite "micro-physics of power." In this regime of permanent

[986] Foucault, *Abnormal*, 193.
[987] In the Institute, Lanark finds out that "nobody is ever cured, that the treatment only keeps the bodies fresh until we need fuel or clothes or food" (Gray, *Lanark*, p. 89).
[988] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 221, 298.
[989] Gray, *Lanark*, 65-67.

surveillance, the disciplinary gaze becomes the instrument of continuous, homogeneous power, enlisted in mechanisms of fabricating docile bodies that are thereafter made to participate in a self-regulating regime of power, where "molarisation" *via* consumption of one's fellow human beings becomes not only mandatory but agreeable.

This is how the "creature" – presumed to be a "civilised capitalist machine," reveals itself as just another facet of totalitarianism, displaying the same repressive apparatus as the "barbarian despotic machine." In effect, the Institute promotes a partitioning of underground space so as to meticulously observe any rebellious individuals and to assess their compliance or noncompliance with the norm of health. It is a mixed hegemonic response, though, to pathologised dissidents, combining what Foucault describes as the repressive and the normative mechanisms of political control. Lanark's insurrectional gesture of looking for daylight, which might bring about the surmise of the "creature," amounts to a Deleuzian unleashing of desire, with its nomadic mapping of embodied subjectivities; what he aspires to, on his intercalendrical flight to the general assembly of council states in Provan, is an utter deterritorialisation of the Body without Organs from its socially articulated, disciplined, subjectified state. His effort is bound to remain utopian, however, since the fate of Provan has already been sealed by the creature's decision to destroy it in apocalyptical conflagration. Although Lanark dies the moment the novel comes to an end, Gray seems nevertheless to endorse Deleuze and Guattari's figuration of a Body-without-Organs, given its liminal, fluid, discohesive incorporation, as well as proliferation, of sheer intensities and multiplicities, cutting across inside and outside, upper and lower, layers and strata, breaking the molar aggregate of the concorporate State. Lanark's refusal to be immersed into specular diffractions that reify identity, as well as his aspiration to reform the body politic into an uncodified, unterritorialised BwO, where each individual may embark on endless avenues of becoming without endangering the stability of the socius, remain entrenched as potential alternatives to hyper-institutionalised forms of oppressive power and its drive towards dehumanisation.

Conclusions

My aim in writing this dissertation has been to identify the discursive strategies for representing monstrosity in contemporary British fiction, attempting a cross-disciplinary examination of the cluster of corporeal images used for picturing the monstrous. The key tropes in-forming this argument – monstrosity, hybridity, liminality, and transgression – are deployed towards highlighting how the fictional narratives under discussion here explore the teratological archive, showing that *knowledges* of monstrous alterity break through congealed frames of representation, performing a triple disenchantment gesture: a debunking of essentialist notions that monstrosity is a natural infringement of norms of proper embodiment, whereas in fact what are deemed to be monstrous bodies are consistently inserted into epistemological schemes that founder in the face of monstrosity's corporeal excess; a departure from well-entrenched suppositions that monstrosity is by necessity the extrinsic domain of otherness against which an illusory sense of self-consistent identity can be erected, whereas in fact monstrosity may serve as the foundational factor in attempts at constructing identity; a diffraction from discursive practices aimed at enforcing the immovability of boundaries between the human and the monstrous, the self and the other to a pleasurable transgression and elision of such permeable frontiers, primarily as envisaged by the theoretical prospects and fictional enactments of post-human embodiment I have examined. While the normative project initiated in the Enlightenment may still be under way, several of the texts I have analysed either address monstrous corporeality as by nature averse to reproducing the regulatory constraints of disciplinary regimes, or signal the promise that the abnormal has the potential for transcending, regenerating and transforming the paradigm of the "proper" body, phantasmally haunting and hounding it, as Youngquist says,[990] towards the heterotopian instantiation of polymorphous, transgenic embodiments. In that sense, a significant transvaluation registered by new Gothic deployments of monstrous corporeality is that monstrosity sheds its abject, pathologised backlog and turns what has traditionally been indicted as its aberrant deviations from bodily norms – pollution, boundary transgression, denaturalisation, cross-generic hybridisation – into significant tropes for humanity's posthuman future.

The results of my research are animated by a substantial corpus of teratological, poststructuralist, anthropological, and psychoanalytic studies,

[990] Youngquist, *Monstrosities*, xxviii.

out of a conviction that no unitary theoretical framework could justly account for the particular instantiation of the monstrous imaginary at the turn of the new millennium, which phantasmally scours the interstitial demesnes of the teratological archive, or records novel phenomena of mutation, redistribution and transformation. It could be safely assumed that monstrosity is undergoing (re)valorisation in these Gothic times, to refer back to Angela Carter, whose celebration of monsters has served as a catalyst for my sojourn in the company of monsters. Reaching across disciplinary divides and engaging in a genealogical quest for the mutations undergone by figurations of corporeal monstrosity in the late gothic or what Marina Warner calls the "late, or millennial grotesque,"[991] this study has focused less on monsters as post-Enlightenment spectral internalisations, hallucinations, apparitions or projections of the mind, seeking to explain the ways in which monstrous corporeality, with all its attendant teratological archive, undergoes discursive inscription and reinscription, superposing an entire ensemble of paradigmatic representational frames, ranging from prodigious births to exotic marvels, from nature's sports to offscouring victims of sacrificial rites, from chaogonic to cyborgian monsters.

One of most relevant changes brought about by the new Gothic narratives is that they no longer endorse purgation rites destined to destroy monsters, exposing, instead, the cultural monster-making mechanisms. Conceived under the four categories of monstrous otherness (the female, the foreigner, the posthuman and the body politic), this study has outlined several ways in which the fictional representations of monstrous bodies from the works of Angela Carter, Salman Rushdie, Fay Weldon, Jeanette Winterson, Lawrence Norfolk, A.S. Byatt, Alasdair Gray, Margaret Atwood, Clare Clark and Marina Warner acknowledge both the processes of enfreakment of monstrification otherness lends itself through what Hayden White defines as strategies of self-definition through negation, and a contemporary change of sensibility towards embracing and offering hospitality, within the intimate space of selfhood, to the Derridean "monstrous arrivant." The utmost temptation, Michel Foucault remarks, is "the longing to be another, to be all others."[992] Previous taxonomic attempts at subduing monstrosity's contaminating, contagious threat have given way to an accommodation of teratical abnormality alongside humanity, and this provides ample scope for contemporary post-Frankensteinian figurations of otherness to project monsters as portentous, yet promising tropes for humanity's posthuman future.

[991] Warner, *Monsters of Our Own Making*, 246.
[992] Foucault, *Language*, 101.

Conclusions

The postmodernist narratives analysed here tackle diverse experiences of monstrification and provide a critique of absolutist ideas of sameness and difference, exploring the articulation of a global migrant identity that fluidly traverses frontiers, opting for a metamorphic becoming oneself-as-another rather than a hybrid congealment of otherness in selfhood. As Marina Warner claims, "[r]eason *can* be awake and beget monsters. Extreme, fantastical and insubstantial as they are, they materialise real desires and fears, they embody meaning at a deep, psychic level. We're living in a new age of faith of sorts, of myth-making, of monsters, of chimeras. And these chimeras define human identity."[993] From feminist reappropriations of cultural constructs inscribed onto the pliable, mutable, malleable surfaces of grotesque bodies and their carnivalesque transgression of corporeal norms to the fluid, metamorphic explorations of heterochronic and heterotopian corporeality by Rushdie's "strange metamorphs," monstrous corporeality registers a transvaluation from its marginalisation or rejection as defective infractions of the regular, the integral, the pure or the normative, to utopian forecasts of post-human corporeal identities, which envisage boundary pollution or contamination as the promises that monsters, on the way to humanity's future, hold in store.

[993] Warner, *Managing Monsters*, 20.

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"Ms. Borbely offers a work of deep and impressive scholarship. Not only is this thesis extraordinarily well-read but it is also startlingly original. The thesis uncovers a rich seam within the English novel of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century in the representation of a variety of forms of monstrosity. The core argument is that these texts reveal a willingness to embrace or incorporate the monstrous within the human rather than use it – as in previous generations – to police or mark the borders of the normatively human. This insight is underpinned by extraordinary deep and wide-ranging understanding of the history of such representations from the medieval period to the present day in European discourse. Ms. Borbely has explored the primary archive as well as revealing an extensive, indeed comprehensive, understanding of debate in postmodern cultural theory. She quite rightly refuses to adopt a single theoretical framework just as the representations she analyses demonstrate the refusal of a single or absolute 'meaning' of the monstrous. She judiciously applies key critical concepts – Foucault's heterotopias, Baudrillard's simulacrum, Haraway's cyborg – to a carefully-selected group of novels in order to tease out the variety found in treatments of the monstrous. (…) A remarkable work, written with confidence, style and precision, which makes an important contribution to the evaluation of the modern novel and the interaction of postmodern cultural/critical theory and literary creation in contemporary Britain."

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