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THE "MONSTROUS OTHER" SPEAKS: POSTSUBJECTIVITY

AND THE QUEERING OF THE NORMAL

by

ROGER A. ADKINS

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Roger Adkins

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This dissertation has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in the Department of Comparative Literature by:

Ellen Rees, Chairperson, German and Scandinavian
Daniel Wojcik, Member, English
Jenifer Presto, Member, Comparative Literature
Aletta Biersack, Outside Member, Anthropology

and Richard Linton, Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies/Dean of the Graduate School for the University of Oregon.

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Original approval signatures are on file with the Graduate School and the University of Oregon Libraries.

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Title: THE "MONSTROUS OTHER" SPEAKS: POSTSUBJECTIVITY AND THE QUEERING OF

THE NORMAL

This dissertation investigates the cultural importance of the "monstrous Other" in

postmodern literature, including novels from Sweden, Finland, and the United States. While

the theoretical concept of "the Other" is in wide circulation in the humanities and social

sciences, the concept has only recently been modified with the adjective "monstrous" to

highlight a special case of the Other that plays an important role in the formation of human

subjectivity. In order to better understand the representational legacy of the monstrous

Other, I explore some of the principal venues in which it has appeared in western literature,

philosophy, folklore, and politics. Using a Foucauldian archaeological approach in my

literature survey allows me to trace the tradition of the monstrous Other in such sources as

medieval bestiaries, the wild man motif in folklore and popular culture, and the

medicalization of intersexual embodiment. In all cases, the monstrous Other is a complex

phenomenon with broad implications for the politics of subjectivity and the future of social

and political justice. Moreover, the monstrous Other poses significant challenges for the

ongoing tenability of normative notions of the human, including such primary human traits as

sexuality and a gendered, "natural" embodiment. Given the complexities of the monstrous

Other and the ways in which it both upholds and intervenes in normative human identities,

no single theoretical approach is adequate to the task of examining its functioning. Instead,

the project calls for an approach that blends the methodologies of (post)psychoanalytic and

queer theory while retaining a critical awareness of both the representational nature of

subjectivity and its material effects. By employing both strains of theory, I am able to "read"

the monstrous Other as both a necessary condition of subjectivity and a model of

intersubjectivity that could provide an alternative to the positivism and binarism of

normative subjectivity. The texts that I examine here reveal the ways in which postmodern

reconfigurations of the monstrous Other challenge the (hetero)normativity of human

subjectivity and its hierarchical forms of differentiation. My reading of these texts locates

the possibilities for a hybridized, cyborgian existence beyond the outermost limits of

positivistic, western subjectivity.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Roger A. Adkins

PLACE OF BIRTH: Warren, Ohio

DATE OF BIRTH March 9, 1973

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

> University of Oregon, Eugene
> University of Arizona, Tucson
> Hiram College, Hiram, Ohio

DEGREES AWARDED:

> Doctor of Philosophy, 2010, University of Oregon
> Master of Arts, 2008, University of Oregon
> Master of Arts, 1999, University of Oregon
> Bachelor of Arts, 1995, Hiram College

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

> Cultural Studies
> Gender Studies
> Critical Theory

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

> Instructor, Comparative Literature Program, University of Oregon, Eugene, 2010

> Assistant Director, Study Abroad Programs, University of Oregon, Eugene, 2003-2010

> Instructor, Women's Studies Program, University of Oregon, Eugene, 2001

> Graduate teaching fellow, Women's Studies Program, University of Oregon, Eugene, 1996-1998

PUBLICATIONS:

Adkins, Roger. "Where 'Sex' Is Born(e): Intersexed Births and the Social Urgency of Heterosexuality." *Journal of Medical Humanities* 20.2 (1999): 117-33.

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CHAPTER I

MONSTERS/INK: (RE)PRESENTING THE MONSTROUS OTHER

The monstrous has been getting a lot of attention lately. From television programs to

advertising, and from political rhetoric to literature both popular and 'high,' the monstrous

has been rearing its ugly head everywhere. A number of academic conferences were held

during the first decade of the new millennium, creating a space for an interdisciplinary

discussion of the culturally resurgent monster – and these are not just marginal

conferences held off-season at far-flung universities. The seventh annual Global

Conference on Monsters and the Monstrous, for example, was held at the University of

Oxford in September 2009 (Asma B11). In a relatively short period of time, the monstrous

has moved from its seemingly eternal station at the edges of cultural consciousness back to

centerstage – a site it has occupied during certain other historical periods as well. To

investigate this phenomenon properly, and examine its importance in our particular cultural

'moment' critically, it is necessary to begin with a deceptively simple question: What is a

monster?

Perhaps the concept instantly calls to mind an array of associations, running the

gamut from the most fantastic examples, like those ogres and dragons and forest peoples

found in epic poems and superstitions, to the all-too-real, such as warmongers, torturers

and serial killers. Some of us might think of the simultaneously fearsome and enchanting

personae of children's stories and fairy tales, and that particular association holds the

concept at a distance safely rationalized by the fact that there simply are *not* creatures

living under our grown-up beds. Then there are the classic movie monsters, such as Boris Karloff's emblematic rendition of Mary Shelley's creature in the 1931 James Whale version of *Frankenstein*, and these images, too, are also contained and distilled, in another way. Culturally iconic in their own right, and representative of the halcyon early days of Hollywood, monsters like the Karloff creature have come to connote a complicated matrix of ideological and moral simplicity, seemingly sincere romanticism (quaint, from a postmodern perspective and, therefore, suspect) and a generalized nostalgia for an ahistorical, uncomplicated past. To the extent that the monstrous *should* evoke horror or disgust or a sense of dread, these filmic monsters from the era of James Whale and his immediate successors are now little more perilous than those of children's stories.

Just beneath the surface, though, both the monsters of children's narratives and those of old films are closer to the heart of horror than we might (like to) believe. For all our efforts to sanitize and contain them, monsters seem to be crawling out from under every rock, populating every storyline. The past few decades have seen a veritable explosion of narratives of the monstrous Other, in a staggering variety of genres, cultures, forms, modalities, and theories. The moralistic slasher films of the 1970s and 1980s – post-Vietnam descendents of Whale and his contemporaries – have given way to an unruly and seemingly infinite new generation of silver-screen horror, with vastly productive (and often problematic) new subgenres like the one in which travel to foreign countries results in horrifying outcomes, the Japanese imports (e.g., *The Ring, The Grudge*) and their western remakes, and the combined psychological thriller/horror film in which the villain, who may at first seem supernatural or inhuman, turns out to be one of us, gone so mad that torture and terror have become his or her sole purpose. This 'new horror villain' could be the

person down the street, a newfound lover, or a stepparent; the danger lurks everywhere. Filmic zombie narratives, too, have morphed from supernatural tales of necromancy and evil magic to horrifying spectacles of contagion and postindustrial pollution. 2010's *Zombieland* and the earlier arrival of *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) signaled yet another variation: a half-horror/half-comedy in which the zombie – the risk of contagion and all – is but one more of the terrifying things troubling the postmodern antiheroes as they struggle to discover some semblance of humanity and purpose amidst the chaos of a world that is very nearly completely monstrous.

The small screen is equally agog for the monstrous. Vampires have played a significant part in this televised resurgence of representations of the monstrous Other and, as Hollinger (1997) notes, that fact is probably not accidental given that the vampire, part-human and part-Other, at once living and dead, provides a special case of the monstrous Other that is rather close to home. Vampires skulk through a variety of programs (and feature films, too), and we are also introduced to the throngs of their lovers, enemies, friends, hunters, and human companions. Many characters cross the boundaries between these categories, sometimes occupying two apparently opposed roles (e.g, hunter and lover) at the same time. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and spinoff *Angel* gave us vampires and many other monstrous characters in a tangled web of postmodern existentialism, punctuated with often corny, always wry, generally metafictive humor, while HBO's *True Blood* presents the immediate fallout from the sensational moment that vampires 'came out of the coffin' and assumed their place at the table of identity politics. The parallel to the queer rights movement is, if anything, overly emphasized in these vampire programs, which cast vampiric Otherness as largely an erotic form of difference. Moreover, all three

series greatly complicate the simplistic moral dichotomies that many folkloric accounts of the monstrous uphold. Characters that are human are unreliably 'good,' and a good many monsters are – at the least – ambiguous, while some are downright heroic – at least, sometimes. Indeed, even a good percentage of the apparently human characters are themselves 'monstrous' or 'different' in some significant ways, whether those be magical abilities, a mystical calling to protect humanity from the monstrous, telepathic abilities, superhuman strength, extensive arcane knowledge, or other qualities that trouble the overly simplistic category of 'human.'

Beyond the vampiric, a litany of other monstrous personae appear in television programming as well. In *Charmed*, a trio of witchy sisters employs magical powers (and the power of sisterhood) to resist the ever creeping forces of darkness – sometimes coming from within their own family. In *Supernatural*, a pair of brothers, often armed with little more than a couple guns, a magical knife, and a daunting firsthand knowledge of the mystical, travels across North America to drive back and contain a nonstop effluence of paranormal creatures and events, landing, in the 2009-10 season, in the middle of the ultimate battle between good and evil: the end of days. As is the case in other recent narratives with monstrous characters or elements, though, the angels and demons of *Supernatural* are not always easily read, and there is an ample amount of side-switching. Lucifer is portrayed at least partially sympathetically, and Archangel Michael is terrifying beyond anything that traditional angel imagery could have suggested. Still other televised programs present us with cyborgs, demons, ghost whisperers, and an array of other characters who embody the forbidden, the immoral, and the monstrously hybrid.

So-called reality television also participates in the monster rush. A spate of new programming over the past decade has made the equipment and data used in ghost-hunting and paranormal investigations into household terms (e.g., EVPs, or 'electronic voice phenomena,' ghostly voices recorded on standard or special audio recording equipment that were not audible, in most cases, at the time of recording but are audible during the playback). These programs have inspired a generation of amateur investigators to take up the search themselves. Some of these 'amateurs,' then, have later become the stars of their own televised programs, thus completing the self-perpetuating miasma of reality television.

Still other programs investigate known human anomalies. A Discovery Channel program called "The Real Superhumans" explores the experiences of people with unique abilities that result from genetic mutations, mirroring the fictional television program *Heroes*. In *Heroes*, mutated superhumans struggle to find their appropriate relationship to the general population, taking on a range of unstable identities extending from outcast to outlaw, hero to villain. In "The Real Superhumans," though, the reality-TV drama focuses on people simply trying to understand their unique abilities and how to manage with them in daily life. Existentialism is not absent, but the questions and tentative responses are less epic and more mundane: how to function normally as a synesthete who, due to sensory fusion, tastes all of the sounds she hears; or how best to make use of an ability to maintain core body temperature under conditions of frigidity that would have killed an average person many hours earlier. Such 'reality'-based narratives are no less enthralling than their fictional (and often more grandiose) counterparts. Indeed, in many ways, the two strains of monstrous narratives go hand in hand in our postmodern moment, much as they did in

similar pairings from earlier eras, such as the medieval period's epic poems and sagas, on

the one hand, and bestiaries and hagiographies, on the other. For additional contemporary

examples of 'real' and 'fictional' monsters, see Table 1.1.

Table 1.1. 'Real' and 'fictional' pairings of the monstrous Other (contemporary).[1]

	'Reality'	Fiction
Ghosts/spirits	Most Haunted Ghost Hunters	The Ghost Whisperer The Grudge
Aliens	UFO Files	V The Fourth Kind
Spiritual/demonic possession	Paranormal State	Paranormal Activity The Exorcism of Emily Rose
Infection	H1N1, Hunta, Ebola HIV in many strains	Quarantine Resident Evil
Environmental Destruction	Global warming Supervolcano	2012 The Day After Tomorrow
Terror	Al Qaeda Ecoterrorism	Fringe
Divergent evolution	The Real Superhumans and the Quest for the Future Fantastic	The Hills Have Eyes The Descent

Moreover, while this cacophonic explosion of monster narratives may at first make

it seem that any definition of the monstrous will have to be tentative, provisional, and

open-ended, the sheer volume of sources emerging at this time may in fact facilitate a

particular way of engaging with the monstrous. Given so great a sampling, it might be

possible to think about the monstrous as that which serves a particular cultural function,

rather than trying to pinpoint any structural or generic boundaries for what constitutes a

monster. Indeed, such an approach aligns itself comfortably with our postmodern

obsession with questions of epistemology and our corresponding distrust of ontological

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[1] Bibliographic information for these films and televised programs appears in the Works Cited section of this manuscript. This table includes a simple sampling of possible titles only and is not intended to be an exhaustive list.

approaches – a pair of proclivities that may also aid in explaining why we are seeing a resurgence of interest in monstrousness at this particular time.

One such functional approach appeared in an article written by Stephen Asma and published in *The Chronicle Review* in October 2009. Reaffirming my own observations, Asma notes that "[m]onsters are on the rise," and he then proceeds to propose that the commonest 'liberal' approach to monster narratives – that is, reading them as morality tales about the dangers of intolerance – perhaps misses the mark (B11). Instead, Asma suggests that monsters play an important (and probably irreplaceable) role in what he calls the "moral imagination," which he glosses as "the way people actually do their moral thinking" (B11). What he really seems to mean, however, is that monsters allow us to cope imaginatively with the diverse ways in which we and our loved ones are vulnerable to a vast array of calamities – that is, to process our rational and irrational fears in ways that do not require extreme responses and do not pose 'real' dangers. For "[i]maginging how we will face an unstoppable, powerful, and inhuman threat is an illuminating exercise in hypothetical reasoning and hypothetical feeling" (B12). Such excursions into hypothetical danger are, in Asma's view, one of the key reasons that art remains morally relevant, allowing us to engage with ethical questions in the absence of the full weight of their consequences.

Of course, Asma is also quick to point out that such an exercise is not purely hypothetical, since circumstances in our lives can become suddenly and profoundly similar to the fever-pitched fictional accounts of zombie attacks, alien invasions, and terrifying, late-night encounters with amorphous monsters in out-of-the-way settings. Asma cites, as evidence, an example involving a man entering a Connecticut coffee bar in 1994 and

proceeding to attack innocent and unsuspecting staff and patrons with a knife. For Asma,

such a "horrifying event shares many qualities with the imagined monster attack" since the

people present in the coffee bar were "suddenly presented with a deadly, irrational,

powerful force that sent them reeling for mere survival" (B12). Public responses following

the event were also telling: many people wanted to know why no one had stopped the man

– who turned out to be himself the victim of a mental illness (yet another kind of monster)

– from continuing his rampage before seven people were stabbed and seriously injured.

This line of questioning implies, in Asma's view, precisely the kind of moralistic thinking that

the monstrous occasions. Since none of us likes to see her- or himself as vulnerable to this

sort of attack, we tend to imagine that we would have been equipped to handle such a

situation differently. We all like to envision ourselves as the survivalists and heroes in

narratives of monstrous violence, whether those are zombie invasions or the more

everyday possibility of encountering the worst at the neighborhood coffee bar. For Asma,

this functional role of the monstrous is important even when it ignores the reality that we

cannot always survive a monstrous onslaught.

Furthermore, Asma is highly critical of what he describes as a progressive, post-

Enlightenment tendency to view monsters as the relics of a more superstitious epoch. He

identifies two strands of this thinking, namely, the culturally conservative notion that

rationality will eventually prevail against all things monstrous, revealing them "to be merely

chimeric," and the more progressive variation, which holds that, "when we properly

embrace difference, the monsters [here read as fictional representations of racial and other

forms of difference] will vanish" (B12). For Asma, both of these views are equally flawed,

and the monstrous is destined to be a permanent fixture of our cultural pantheon, playing,

as it were, a unique role that cannot be eradicated with any amount of 'progress.' Rather than viewing the monstrous as the manifestation of particular cultural and historical projects and, therefore, circumscribed by and to historically and culturally delineated epistemologies, Asma reads it as serving a specific cultural function that can never be unseated. Because there will always be something that "has no satisfactory semantic substitute or refinement," there will always be a need for the functionality of the monstrous, in Asma's view (B12). In fact, as far as he is concerned, "[t]he term's imprecision . . . is part of its usefulness" (B12). That is, the monstrous is a catch-all category for amorphous and unnamable threats, real or perceived.

In many respects, Asma has it right. The monstrous is indisputably resurgent, and even a cursory investigation of its myriad manifestations reveals that it serves more ends than the simplistic conservative and progressive purposes that he cites. Moreover, the monstrous does seem to facilitate moral imagining, though even Asma may have oversimplified the complexities of its functionalities. Considering just the example cited earlier of reality-television programming that focuses on people with genetic mutations and their resultant abilities, it is clear that not all representations of the monstrous (which includes the hybridization of the human body) concern themselves with the kind of lifeboat ethics that Asma's argument describes. Never just the embodiment of ethical concerns, the monstrous also encompasses questions of epistemological, metaphysical, and even ontological import. For the monstrous is hybrid not just in its innumerable forms, but also in its very essence, that is, in its various modalities and registers. Indeed, while Asma is right that we will likely always have the category of the monstrous, he is not entirely right about the reason. The monstrous doesn't just serve as the domain of the moral imagination; it

provides an imaginary space in and through which we are continuously able to choose between containing and calcifying our humanity, or reconstituting it in radically new ways.

  To put this idea into Lacanian terms, the monstrous is a symptom of humanity – that is, the human *needs* the monstrous to serve as its foil, as the outside to the boundary of the human. Without the multifarious and unstable category of the monstrous, the human would cease to exist *as such*, since there would no longer be any threat against which to define the normalizing and homogenizing category of 'human.' This is not to say that the boundaries between the human and the monstrous are fixed or even clearly discernible, nor is it to say that there would no longer be a species we know as *Homo Sapiens sapiens* occupying planet Earth if there were no longer a notion of the monstrous. Rather, the notion of the symptom implies a more or less closed epistemological relationship in which the Same (the self) occasions an identity that requires an opposition with its Other: that which is cast out from the identity of the Same and functions as the repository for every notion that the Same rejects. In other words, the Other is the symptom of the Same: the evidence of identity-construction in the Same and, perhaps more importantly, the functional space in which that identity is – negatively – constructed. To the extent that we can label as a 'monster' anything that would challenge the notion of humanness, the monstrous is the symptom of the human.

  In fact, the monstrous Other is a special case of the symptom for several reasons. First, unlike most examples of the Other, the monstrous Other is not the symptom of a particular dominant group of people but, instead, of humanity itself. Thus, while woman may serve as the symptom of man and – within the U.S. at least – black as the symptom of white, the monstrous Other serves as the symptom of the entirety of humanity: our

collective humanity is predicated on the exclusion of all things monstrous. This does not imply that there are not similarities between the monstrous Other and other Others – indeed, this project will exploit these similarities, proceeding via a side-by-side reading of the monstrous and the queer. Nevertheless, the monstrous Other tells us less about specific intergroup politics and more about the politics of the notion of humanity itself. Because of this unique relationship to humanness, the monstrous Other may be employed as a particularly productive concept for the project of critically examining difference itself.

Second, the monstrous Other comes very close to being the 'big Other,' that is, the Other that can be seen to contain and inform all other Others. Because the monstrous Other is the catch-all for anything considered inhuman, abnormal, and threatening, it can encompass and influence such other symptomatic categories as the racially Other, the feminine, and the queer. Indeed, in many ways, the relationship is reciprocal, since the 'monster' may be easily read, in alternate situations, as racially Other, as having a disability, as excessively feminine and/or feminizing, as queer and/or contrary to the heteronormative, and as proletarian. Over the past few decades, scholars have conducted extensive research to investigate this relationship from a variety of perspectives, considering, for example, the queering power of horror film, or the relationship between animalistic monsters and the racial Other.[2] To be sure, there are important differences between the monstrous Other and various other "symptoms" of the human, but the monstrous Other shares a special relationship with these other symptoms and can be used in deconstructive and psychoanalytic scholarship to interrogate such categorical imperatives.

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[2] See, for example: Azzarello (2008); Bernhardt-House (2008); Cassuto (1997); Stephens (2006); and Talia (1994).

Third, the monstrous Other also enjoys a special relationship with symptomaticity itself. Because the monstrous Other encompasses all that is not human, or the not-all of humanity, it is in many respects the symptom *par excellence*. This relationship can be elaborated by means of an analogy to linguistic and structural theory. As theorists such as Ferdinand de Saussure and Jacques Derrida have elaborated, the system of signs that make up a language is entirely arbitrary; there is no predetermined or *a priori* reason that any particular sign should correspond to any given signified.[3] In fact, and contrary to popular understanding, it is neither the sign nor the signifier itself that carries meaning; instead, meaning is located within the entire system of signification and, in particular, in the differences between assorted signifiers. Thus, meaning functions in a negative fashion, with any particular signifier 'working' only because of its differentiation from every other signifier. In several significant respects, the monstrous Other is that very moment of negation that precipitates language. It is everything that is beyond (re)cognition; it is everything that is unnamable and that threatens to unhinge the possibility of naming itself; it is the provision of meaning, for there would be nothing to close in and activate the system of meaning without the horrifying and the abject, the polluted, the dangerously hybrid, and the evil that not only must not, but ultimately cannot, be named.[4] An individual monster, such as the vampire, can be domesticated and rendered familiar in literary and other representations, but there will always be another monster to take its place. The monstrous Other is the condition of and for humanity.

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[3] See: de Saussure (1915) and Derrida (1976).

[4] My discussion here and throughout this work is indebted to Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* (1982), which defines the abject as that which lies outside the symbolic order that has the power to induce horror. In many ways, Kristeva's own argument and, by extension, mine, are also indebted to Mary Douglas, whose *Purity and Danger* (1966) offered visionary new ways to theorize the social and cultural dimensions of what Kristeva calls abjection.

Functions of the Monstrous in the Postmodern Era

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, one of the foremost scholars of the monstrous, has offered seven theses about what he calls "monster culture" as a means of "reading cultures from the monsters they engender" (Cohen, "Monster Culture" 3). His contributions in this area are seminal and merit a brief overview here. The first thesis is that "[t]he monster's body is a cultural body," by which he means that any given monstrous Other may be 'read' as the embodiment of a range of cultural concerns prevalent in its specific historical, cultural and geographic context (4). He literally compares the monstrous to the processes of signification, "like a letter on the page," noting that it always "signifies something other than itself" (4). Similarly, his second thesis holds that "[t]he monster always escapes" since anything as elusive and symptomatic as the monstrous cannot be fully or finally contained (4). One particular monster may meet its end in a film or a work of literature, but the monstrous Other is always in a state of resurrection, always recurring in another text – if not a sequel or a prequel, another text by another author. Likewise, while we may domesticate and make mundane a particular monster, there will always be another monstrous Other to take its place. For, while particular specimens, once captured (both physically and intellectually), can become taxonomized and made a part of the known systemization of 'reality,' there must always be that edge between 'reality' and its Others, like the literal edges of the world on a medieval map, and that contact zone will always be populated by monsters.

The next three of the seven theses are chiefly concerned with the functions of the monstrous Other. The third thesis, for example, concerns one of the chief functions, namely, that the monstrous serves as "the harbinger of category crisis" (6). To this end,

the monster embodies what Cohen identifies as "ontological liminality," straddling the ostensibly absolute boundaries between various categories, and seeming to revel in its recalcitrant hybridity (6). Thus, monsters serve to challenge the outer edges of taxonomies and categories, calling their systematic logics into question and helping point the way in what is, in fact, the always evolving 'order of things.' Along the same lines, the monster also embodies social, cultural and other forms of difference, and this is Cohen's fourth thesis. Historically, many monsters found in various representations correspond to geographic and ideological contact zones between different groups of people, or between different sorts of people within any one culture. (This fact will be elaborated in some detail in the next chapter.) Furthermore, the monstrous allows for an exaggeration of the extent of various differences and therefore serves as the site of ideological work – whether progressive or conservative – related to the relative importance and meaning of various differences. Finally, the monstrous Other is uniquely situated to reveal that "difference is arbitrary and potentially free-floating," thus allowing for the possibility of radical critiques of the politics of difference (12).

Cohen's fifth thesis addresses the main socially conservative function of the monstrous: "polic[ing] the borders of the possible" (12). Although the monstrous itself evades capture and is always in a state of epistemological flux, its haunting presence along the boundaries of the socially acceptable serves as an undeniable (and generally unwavering) warning against violating social prohibitions. There are two primary ways in which this result is achieved: first, monsters patrol the edges of the normal, serving as a horrifying threat of harm to those who would consider violating the norms; and second, the monstrous serves as an example of the possibility of becoming monstrous oneself, should a

person decide to cross social boundaries. In the case of gender norms alone, the examples are palpable: the monsterization of people with such identities as gay, tomboy, sissy, and feminist demonstrates the awesome power of the monstrous Other to regulate and direct lived social experiences, and to provide the means for full or partial control of those who refuse.

Cohen's final two theses are perhaps the most interesting and the least anticipated. The sixth thesis concerns the extent to which "[f]ear of the monster is really a kind of desire" (16). The association of the monstrous with the realm beyond social interdictions makes it undeniably attractive, given the extent to which the same social order that lends our identities and actions meaning also chafes against our desire for complete freedom. Like any kind of Other, the monstrous appears, in one view, to dwell in a state independent of social strictures, in much the same way that many well-meaning heterosexuals may assume that queer-identified persons are free of the strict norms of the heterosexist order. Of course, such observations are categorically one-sided and incomplete, since the Other is also locked into its respective roles because of its indissoluble bond with the Self. This matrix of differentiation and desire is a key component of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory to which I will return in the third chapter of this dissertation.

Finally, Cohen's seventh thesis positions the monstrous on the "threshold . . . of becoming," indicating its inimitable ability to divine the social and cultural changes to come (20). As Cohen notes, while monsters can be banished to the very edges of our maps, and repressed into the "forbidden recesses of our mind," they will always return, like every other repressed aspect of ourselves (20). He goes so far as to call them "our children," drawing a direct parallel to Shelley's account of a creature who keeps returning to haunt its

irresponsible maker, demanding that he explain himself – both in terms of his arrogance in assuming the radical alterity of the creature with respect to the human, and to his need to have created a monster in the first place (20). In this respect, Frankenstein's creature is an excellent avatar for the monstrous Other on the whole, which we make to embody some of our worst qualities (arrogance, obsession, recklessness), and which serves as a palpable reminder of the limits of our humanity.

In this dissertation, I will explore these functions of the monstrous Other by examining: first, the ways in which the monstrous Other has been discursively deployed in sundry historical and cultural settings; second, a theoretical framework for approaching the monstrous Other that mingles both (post-)psychoanalytic and "queer cyborgian" methodologies in an intentionally messy theoretical hybridity (building mainly on the work of theorist Slavoj Žižek and archaeologist Jimmy Strassburg); and finally, three postmodern novels that feature monstrous characters or creatures that live in close contact with human characters. These works include John Gardner's *Grendel* (1971), Kerstin Ekman's *The Forest of Hours* (1998), and Johanna Sinisalo's *Troll: A Love Story* (2000). These novels collectively provide a direct challenge to the very heart of the dualistic and representational projects that the 'monstrous' embodies, since Gardner, Ekman and Sinisalo each, in their own ways, unmask the functionalities of the monstrous Other in all its bloodthirsty insurgence. These postmodern authors show how the return of the repressed – here represented by the monstrous Other reclaiming its agency and intervening in human affairs – can provide a powerful critique of a subjectivity that is (hetero)normative and predicated on hierarchical differentiation. The monstrous events in these novels provide artful models of

intersubjectivity and presage a queer new world: a hybridized, cyborgian existence beyond the outermost limits of positivistic, western subjectivity.

In approaching this project, though, I do not want to lose sight of the pragmatic reasons that such a discussion is useful and warranted. For, while employing a theoretically laden term like the 'monstrous Other' may suggest a largely intellectual exercise, the continual redeployment of the monstrous and the Other in numerous contexts has material effects on the lived realities of everyone, though these effects are differentially distributed and political to their core. Moreover, such effects are not, as Foucault would undoubtedly observe, orchestrated at some higher level, nor are they produced only at some centralized facility of cultural production. Rather, the material effects of the monstrous Other are both created and experienced in so many innumerable moments, in the everyday acts of individuals who call upon the reservoir of imagery in the monstrous for purposes that may seem utterly benign. Indeed, both the monstrous and the Other dwell primarily at the level of microsocial interactions, in gestures, conversations, interactions, and glances. They are folklore: the stories that we tell to and about ourselves and each other. In the next section, I will explore the cultural and political contexts of the monstrous Other, using three stories from my own repertoire to demonstrate just how commonplace monstrous representation can be.

Three Encounters: The Monstrous and Mimesis

To provide concrete examples of this special status of the monstrous Other, I will turn now to three narratives of monstrous encounters involving people I either know or know about through my acquaintances. I include these examples for two primary purposes. The first is

to address the inevitable question of monster scholarship, namely: Are monsters real? The second purpose it to provide experiential data for an examination of the ongoing importance of the monstrous Other in a purportedly enlightened time. As I hope these examples will demonstrate, the monstrous is very real indeed, haunting our every experience and enjoying wide circulation in various kinds of social discourse. Moreover, I also hope that these examples will illustrate how we continue to need the monstrous Other to serve as a shibboleth for experiences that we cannot fully explain or understand and, perhaps more notably, as a way of affirming our common humanity by way of continual contrast with everything that it is not.

(1) I am seven years old. I have traveled, along with the rest of my young family (I am the oldest of three children) to visit my father's parents and other extended family on his side. We live in northwestern Ohio, and the trek to northwestern West Virginia leads into increasingly mountainous, forested, and rural areas. Inevitably, too, the seven-hour journey ends in darkness, my father skillfully maneuvering around the hairpin curves of mountain roads he has known and driven for several years.

The voyage itself gives rise to intense feelings. What starts off as the excitement of travel and a change of scenery slowly evolves into the tedium of a long car journey. In addition, the gradual changes in both the landscape and the population density generate a sense of moving further and further from the everyday and the known. While the experience differs from this formula for my father, who is heading toward his place of origins, the trip is a long and tiring journey-to-nowhere for the rest of us. My grandparents live in a house situated on the exact summit of a mid-sized mountain, and the after-dark

arrival at their somewhat remote home dumps us from a cramped car into the semi-populated wilds of West Virginia, complete with all the noises of a mountainous woodland in the nighttime.

The setting always held a kind of magic for me. Everything seemed larger-than-life in West Virginia. The trees far outranked those of heavily populated northeastern Ohio, and the mountains were phenomenal to me as a child growing up in a nearly flat Midwestern area. The people, too, were epic. They lived lives of immense struggle punctuated by periods of profound bliss. Their stories towered over anything that people in Ohio would say about the human experience, and supernatural and seemingly impossible elements were abundant. I could always count on my relatives – 'hillbillies,' as we called the West Virginian folk – to spin a yarn that would spark my imagination for days to come. And, even much later (into my teens), I often had trouble distinguishing between what the storyteller clearly knew to be embellishment or exaggeration and what they might sincerely believe, in their own tale. It was only as a student of folklore (my first year in graduate school) that I would come to appreciate these folktales on more emic terms, and to stop wondering where the boundary of the real occurred. After all, this boundary was not what was important in these tales. It was their performance and its effects that would interest me in later years.

On this particular trip to West Virginia, though, my father and I were invited by my grandfather to accompany him to the source of a pure mountain spring, where he was accustomed to traveling to bottle up some of the font's wonderfully refreshing water in reused, plastic milk jugs. My grandfather was a sickly man by this time, a retired coal miner struggling against the impossible odds of black lung disease – an illness that would claim his

life just two years later. On this particular day, though, he was in great spirits, and seemed literally to soak up the energy of the mountainous landscape as my dad drove us toward the remote spring.

As we headed into a certain hollow (or 'holler,' as my grandfather and other locals called it), he was suddenly inspired by a memory and turned to look at us. "Have I ever told you what I saw in this here holler?" he asked both of us. My dad seemed as if he'd heard this story before, but he still answered for both of us with "What?" "I saw a Bigfoot," was the answer, and I was instantly hooked. He proceeded to narrate how he was traveling alone, just before dusk, in the same direction we were traveling now, when he suddenly saw movement somewhere between 15 and 20 feet up in the branches from the level of the road. "Imagine my surprise," he said, "when I saw a big hairy hand holding back the branches, and a big hairy face looking out at me from the trees." And then he turned and, as if perfectly timed, added, "right there!" He was pointing at a spot unimaginably high off of the ground, making the story's conclusion send a shiver through my small child's frame. Already somewhat incredulous even at that age, though, I looked at him and my father to see if there were any signs that the story was a put-on. Both of them, though, remained perfectly silent and seemed lost in their own separate trains of thought, deeply reflective. Grandpa believed what he said that day. There was a monster living in those wooded hills.

(2) As an undergraduate student, I attended Hiram College, located in the tiny village of Hiram, Ohio. Hiram is known as one of America's most haunted locations and, as local lore has it, there at least a dozen serious hauntings in this tiny village with around 150 years of collegiate history. If you search for "Hiram Ohio" and "ghost" together, your results will

include information about one or more ghosts of President James Garfield's family (President Garfield was the president of the college before being elected to the highest office in the U.S.); ghosts connected to the Revolutionary War-era cemetery (still used today); and ghosts connected to the village's history with Mormon settlers, who were eventually run out of town and ended up joining the migration to Utah. In addition, there are also a number of stories about Ethel, the ghost of Bowler Hall, one of the oldest residence halls at Hiram.

As Hiram lore has it, Ethel was never even a student at the college. Instead, she was visiting a friend who attended Hiram way back in the early 1900s and was killed in a fire that destroyed a part of the building's interior. Even in today's modernized Bowler Hall, some of the building's original hallways remain, and the architects hired to redesign the building have retained the seemingly random irregularities of these passageways, which often cut off at odd angles and, taken together, create a maze-like feeling. It is not difficult to imagine that a visitor to the college, a young girl caught off guard at night and not yet fully familiar with its winding hallways, might have been overcome by the smoke or heat before finding her way out.

The summer just before I matriculated at Hiram, the building's original chimney collapsed, taking large chunks of the surrounding floorboards down with it. Although a few students remained in residence in the building, no one was injured, and the building was immediately evacuated and closed. As things turned out, it remained closed for the entire time that I was a student at Hiram, while a special committee and the Board of Trustees sought to raise funds to renovate and modernize the building. Of course, a closed building

with a peculiar history was a pretty irresistible destination for college-aged students. I won't say that I ever entered the building illegally, but it was a very appealing idea.

However, a group of women I knew (who shall remain nameless here) did, in fact, break into the building late one night to sit and talk in the dark and try their luck at communicating with Ethel. Now, most of their time there was uneventful, until a series of strange noises spooked them, and they decided to head out. As they came down the building's grand old staircase, the woman bringing up the rear of the procession suddenly cried out as if in excruciating pain. When asked by the others what had happened, she said she had burnt her hand, and that it had felt like the staircase's banister was on fire. None of the others who had used the banister had felt anything out of the ordinary. The women escaped the building without further incident but, sure enough, the woman's hand was burned. It looked like she had grabbed a baking pan from inside the oven without a pot holder. She had to have it treated. I saw it, as did many of my friends. The explanation that was offered was that perhaps they had, in fact, made contact with Ethel, who had made her presence known by sharing one of her own traumatic sensory memories with this young college student. The fact that someone suffered a burn severe enough to require treatment and bandaging seemed monstrous enough to all of us.

(3) One of my colleagues is a Japanese national in the process of obtaining U.S. permanent residency, and she has many friends who are also Japanese nationals. In the middle of a casual lunch with coworkers during the workday, she launched into a story that left all of our hairs on end. It went like this:

One of her friends who lives in California accepted an informal arrangement in which she babysits a wealthy couple's two children in exchange for the opportunity to stay in their home both while watching the children and during breaks in the schedule at the university where she has been working on an undergraduate degree. Sometimes, she even spends long periods watching the children while the couple travel out of the state for business or short vacations. Their large and lavish home is located along a rural stretch of the beautiful mid-California coastline, so the situation definitely has its perks for a cash-strapped international student.

During one particular stint of watching the children and caring for the home, this young woman had a harrowing experience. Late one evening, after the children had retired to their own area of the home to watch some television before heading to bed, this young babysitter went back down to the big kitchen to retrieve some late-night snacks for herself and the children. On her way back to the children's area of the home, she took a little-used route through the formal living room and was surprised to see that the couple had purchased a garish statue of a clown. Although the lighting was poor, she could make out some fairly unattractive features, but she chalked it up to the couple's odd taste in collectibles (they had a number of unusual items). She returned to the children's area, and the rest of the night proceeded uneventfully.

The next morning, when the mother called to check in on the children and babysitter, the young woman mentioned the odd new statue in passing. The mother paused and then asked, quite concerned: "What new statue?" The young woman answered that she was referring to the statue of a clown. The mother paused again and then said, frantically, "Oh my god! Get the children and get out of the house now!" The

young woman, alarmed, did as she was instructed as quickly as she could. Shortly

thereafter, two police officers arrived on the scene, and they initiated a search of the large

property. What they discovered was a homeless man, clearly suffering from some sort of

mental illness, and wearing clown-like garb. He had been occupying the attic, from the

looks of things, for some time without having disturbed the family. In the end, the man

was taken into custody and transported to a jail and, later, to a hospital ward for the

mentally ill. Nothing serious ensued, but the young woman and the family were certainly

on edge for some time afterwards.

Admittedly, these three narratives have a certain undeniable folkloric quality, providing us

with a strange blending of the uncanny, eyewitness accounts, a number of details that

seem to establish a degree of verisimilitude, and a range of highly improbable events and

encounters – not to mention a certain *je ne sais quoi*, a property or characteristic that rings

familiar. However, for the purposes of my argument here, this folksy quality is hardly a

reason to rule such narratives ineffectual or unimportant. On the contrary, the fact that

such tales resonate with a thousand other, easily recalled examples affirms their value as

exemplars of the many ways in which the monstrous Other appears in our lived, everyday

experiences. For that very storytelling quality that might lead some scholars to dismiss

tales like these as unreliable sources actually establishes their place in a pattern of

representation about the monstrous Other – a pattern that is at the heart of our

relationship with the monstrous. To better understand this pattern, we need to

acknowledge the political investments of all monsters, whether folkloric or from more

formalized modes of representation. Moreover, we also need to consider representations of the monstrous within the larger context of representational politics.

An enormous body of scholarly work addresses the politics of representation, including work in such diverse fields as anthropology, literary theory, sociology, gender studies, cultural studies, political science, film studies, and many others.[5] Much of this work informs our understanding of the politics of the Other, too, since representation of the Other is a – if not the – key mode in which power over the Other is both created and enforced. "Representation" should be understood here to include not just formal portrayals, such as mass media or filmic representation, but the entirety of the system of signification, in which, as was noted earlier, there is an arbitrary relationship of signs (representations) to signifiers (concepts being represented), with a second degree of arbitrariness between signifiers and signifieds (the supposedly fixed, material reality behind a concept being represented). Because representation, like signification, proceeds by way of negation and contrast, any given representation inheres only in the context of the entire system of representations.

The history of representation in the western world greatly informs the problematic representational politics that we have inherited.[6] Although this history extends throughout the entire record of western civilization, the early history differs from the representational trends after the epistemic shifts wrought by the tectonic cultural and social changes in Europe during the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. In the ancient and medieval periods

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[5] See, for example: Abu-Lughod (1997); Baudet (1988); Clifford (1986); de Lauretis (1997); del Rio (2000); Foster (1982); Hall (1993); Harbsmeier (1985); Jay (1988); Minh-ha (1989); Mitchell (1986); Petchesky (1993); Shapiro (1988); and Watney (1993).

[6] My discussion in this section is heavily indebted to the work of James Duncan, and particularly his essay "Sites of Representation," published in the collection *Place/Culture/Representation*, edited by Duncan and Ley (1993).

of European history, scholars and lay people alike embraced a self-avowedly subjective

perspective, accompanied by an ethnocentric point-of-view steeped in religious ideology.

The Other was viewed as profoundly different from the European self: barbaric, uncultured,

heathen, and naturally deviant. These ideas applied especially to the non-European Other

but also to internal Others such as, depending on the period and specific location, Germanic

tribes, Celts, Vikings, Picts, Jews, Saracens, and so on. Representations of such peoples

were unabashedly biased, since these groups were conceived of as radically Other, as

nonhuman, as monsters of sorts (Cohen, Hybridity 2-5). While the predominance of this

ideological framework would not disappear overnight, the revolution began – somewhat

more quietly than we might expect – in the realm of two-dimensional art, where the

introduction of three-dimensional perspective in painting promised a new social as well as

aesthetic perception (Duncan 40-3).

However revolutionary they took it to be for the practice of painting, Brunelleschi

and Alberti could little have imagined the full effects of their innovation in three-

dimensional representation. In the fifteenth century, these two masters invented

perspectival painting by innovating in the two-dimensional possibilities for linear

perspective. Artistic representation in Europe immediately began to change from the

flattened worlds of medieval iconography and early portraiture to the apparently mimetic

landscapes and historical subjects of the Renaissance (including its newly three-dimensional

window into both the pagan pasts of Europe and the pagan presents of the world beyond

Europe). "The mathematization of space which underpinned this type of representation

appeared to promise a systematic means of producing a mimetic reproduction of the

material world" (Duncan 41). As with many other movements of the Renaissance, these

changes in artistic representations blended art and science in the hopes of achieving what Alberti called a "transparent window" onto the subjects of artistic rendering (41). From a contemporary perspective, it is quite ironic to consider that the western obsession with precision, reason and objectivity – which has had so little use for the arts in recent history – actually began with a radical new approach in artistic representation.

This ideological revolution was not confined to the arts, however, and its central tenets rapidly appeared in other disciplines as well. In particular, the philosophical work of Descartes was greatly influential, allowing for a radical conception of mind/body separation that would facilitate the stance of the western scholar from his own time onward. This stance, what Husserl calls "the natural attitude," proceeds on the assumption that it is possible to make objective observations, and to represent everything from flora and fauna to ideas to foreign peoples in ways that are increasingly accurate, complete, and unbiased.[7] Along with the advent of such a purportedly objective stance came a shift in focus, replacing the divine order of the ancient and medieval periods with a natural order assumed to describe the relationships between things as they 'really' are (Duncan 40-2). One of the key developments along these lines was the advent of natural history, which set about the project of meticulously categorizing and documenting nearly every living and nonliving material thing on the planet. As I shall discuss further in the next chapter, however, the categorical obsession of natural history, which gives the field its aura of total objectivity, was deeply troubled by the persistence of older ideas about the origins of particular traits, properties, and qualities.

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[7] See: Husserl and Gibson (1931).

Concomitant with the rise of a dualistic, Cartesian understanding of the identity of the western observer, the vast projects of European exploration, expansion and colonization made a million political uses of the ostensibly objective observations of Europeans as they came into contact with vastly expanding numbers of flora and fauna, geological samples, as well as cultures, locations, and practices. Older classificatory systems began to give way in the face of abundant new data, and a vast amount of materials and living creatures – including people – were extracted from their normal environments and carried back to Europe in aid of the vast project of scientific inquiry. The ever accumulating stores of specimens housed in zoos, museums, universities, and private collections of curiosities bolstered the sense of evidentiary support for a growing sense of the total mastery of the entire natural world by a Eurocentric, scientific form of inquiry. Moreover, this massive movement of material examples into Europe was accompanied by rapid expansions in the vocabularies used to describe sundry items, and both this linguistic expansion and the exacting, three-dimensional drawings of natural items enhanced the moral and intellectual authority – not to mention the mimetic mystique – of scientific representation. Over time, the project became increasingly focused on cultural difference, as traders, travelers and early anthropologists created a burgeoning library of information about the Other, with varying degrees of mimetic mystique. Given the complexly intertwined interests (political, economic, religious, etc.) of the western world in its nonwestern Other, even the most scientific of these projects (ethnographies and the like) were called into the service of colonial prerogatives (Duncan 41-3).

In the nineteenth century, another artistic revolution further ensconced the authority of mimetic representation into western epistemologies. The invention of

photography promised the possibility of capturing the most elusive of natural phenomena – moments, experiences, and events – and creating semi-permanent and mimetically perfect representations of them.[8] With even perspectival painting fading into the background as a mere creative practice, and still plagued by the vagaries of subjectivity, photography (and, later, videography) became the representational mode *par excellence*. Its almost magical ability to preserve every detail of a scene made it invaluable in the ongoing (though more culturally relativistic) ethnographic projects of the twentieth century, and it also became the inspiration for writers in diverse genres and movements, from Victorian social realism to the mimetic experimentation of 'high' modernist prose and poetry (Duncan 43-4). Indeed, mimesis became the *raison d'être* of representation itself – at least, until the onset of what many postmodern critics have called the 'crisis of representation.'

Under conditions of postmodernity, westerners have "lost faith in totalizing stories such as capital-H History, capital-S Science, or capital-R religion" (Hollinger 199). This loss of the once-unquestionable metanarratives has made it impossible to continue ignoring the machinations required to achieve narrative coherence, including in the case of representation itself. For, no matter how objective and mimetic a representation may appear to be, the act of representing is, itself, situated and contingent. As geographer James Duncan (1993) has argued, representation has at least two implied sites: the site of that which is being represented, and the site of those doing the representing. The latter

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[8] Not surprisingly, one obsession of those who study the monstrous – for example, cryptozoologists and ghost hunters – has been the promise of 'capturing' the monster on film. 'Getting it on film' holds out the promise of making the monstrous 'real' and, therefore, forcing disbelievers to believe in its existence. Of course, such a hope reaches for what would be, ironically, the end of the monster, per se, since anything that can be documented becomes, at the same time, domesticated and categorized, qualities that are opposite of the monstrous. This dynamic will become important in my discussion of *Troll: A Love Story* in chapter 4.

site was not acknowledged in the age of mimetic representation: Brunelleschi is not 'there,' inside of the perspectival painting, nor were the natural historians 'there' alongside the vast taxonomies they presented. Ethnographers may have often written a quite personal introduction or coda to their works, but the body of the ethnography generally aimed for mimetic accuracy, leading to what Duncan calls an ethnographic "tension between rhetorical modes" (43). But this tension was not limited to ethnography, since "the site from which representation emanates is occulted, but nevertheless remains a phantom space, denied but present" (44). Even though the site of those doing the representing is obscured, along with its historical and cultural contexts, it nevertheless remains a powerful force in shaping how representation ensues. This acknowledgment of the impossibility of 'pure,' mimetic representation has led to the dethroning of the longstanding notion that signs and signifiers bear a special correspondence to 'reality,' and they are now generally recognized as constitutive of any possible notion of 'reality' (Ebert 895).

The case of photography is no exception. Just to consider one example, a collection of essays on images of Native Americans, edited by Lucy Lippard (1992), completely demythologizes the mimetic possibilities of both historic and contemporary photographs depicting Native American people(s), sites, and customs, whether the 'phantom space' of the site of representation (the site of the photographer) is Native American or otherwise. In a series of acutely personal responses to individual photographs, beginning with an introduction by Lippard herself, the anthology interrogates the ostensible objectivity of photography, demonstrating how the 'reality' of any given photograph is shaped by such disparate forces as the identity and political orientation of the photographer, the kind of camera used, the particular relationship(s) or agreement(s)

between photographers and the subjects of any given photo, choices made in setting the

scene before a photo was taken (setting, props, costuming, positioning of subjects, etc.),

subtle acts of resistance in photographic subjects that are outside the control of the

photographer, the framing modality of photography (including the important consideration

of what lies outside the photographic frame), and even a kind of metaphysical force that

results from the ways that the photographer's and subjects' feelings and thoughts about

one another interact with the quantum-level chemistry and physics of the photographic

process itself. In addition to all of that, of course, there is the matter of reception,

encompassing such questions as whether an observer of a particular photo identifies more

with the invisible photographer, the subject(s) of the photo, or neither of these. Lippard,

for example, focuses her introductory essay on a single photograph of a First Nations family

in British Columbia, taken by a lone female traveler in the early 1900's. The photo seems

uncharacteristically modern, lacking the 'staged' quality of most of the extant photos for

native North Americans from its time, and Lippard proceeds to read the photo through

three 'takes': the general context of similar photography of the time, her own personal

response to the photo, and the results of archival research. What she discovers is that the

photo takes on vastly different characteristics depending how its sites of representation

interact with its sites of reception. In other words, representation and reception – both

understood here as complex and multi-sited in their own respective ways – interact in any

given conception of 'reality.' Mimesis may at times be part of that conception, but it can

hardly be recognized as the driving force of representation.

    To return, then, to the three narratives of monstrous encounters given earlier, we

can now see that the knee-jerk response that such narratives are unreliable is, in fact, based

in the Cartesian insistence on keenly mimetic representation, coupled with an assumption

that things not yet taxonomized do not exist. However, if we read the narratives in the

same ways that Lippard and her collaborators in *Partial Recall* 'read' photos of native North

Americans, we can begin to see that this concern is less important than questions of the

construction of meaning and identity in and through such narratives. Just as is the case

with Lippard's reception of that single photo of a First Nations family, our response to

narratives like these three tales of monstrous encounters involves complex relationships

between the sites of representation and the sites of reception. There are numerous

possible interpretations. On the one hand, the narrators of these tales may need to share

with their audiences a deeply seated sense of fear as well as a depiction of an encounter

with the uncanny. On the other hand, reception of this type of narrative in the context of

an academic study is almost certainly bound to run toward disbelief or at least well-founded

doubt, perhaps in part because one of the two main sites of representation, that of the

monsters being represented, is so unbelievable as to be virtually absent from these

representations. It is almost as if the monsters, in fact, do not exist outside these

representations at all; lacking any extranarrative evidence that specimens of Bigfoot roam

the wooded hills of Appalachia, or that ghosts can transfer physical experiences from their

own lived experiences to currently living persons, what we have, in effect, are the

encounter experiences themselves – and only from the 'side' of the encounterer. In effect,

the two sites of representation collapse together, such that the narrators of these tales

occupy both the site of representation and the site of that which is represented. In other

words, it is as if the monstrous Other *is* us.

If this is the case (and I will argue that it is), then the monstrous Other is not so much a category containing all known and unknown monsters as it is a phenomenon concerned primarily with the internal consistency of the notion of the human (once again, the symptom of the human). The observations of Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978) are useful here. Writing about both the myriad representations of the Orient by and for the Occident, and the material effects of these representations in both the west and the areas of the world described by the concept of 'the Orient,' Said argues that Orientalism follows internal rules of logic that ally with western projects as diverse as economic expansion and investments in prescribed gender roles. "Orientalism responded," he notes, "more to the culture that produced it than to its putative object, which was also produced by the West. Thus the history of Orientalism has both an internal consistency and a highly articulated set of relationships to the dominant culture surrounding it" (Said 22). In much the same way, the monstrous Other tells us more about the internal logic of the 'human' than it does about any possible 'real' monsters. Moreover, because there are diverse investments in what 'human' means (e.g., normal in experientiality, embodied in a particular way, etc.), the monstrous Other takes, much like 'the Orient,' a variety of disparate forms, each with its own projects of cultural, historical, political, and material significance. By investigating diverse instantiations of the monstrous, we can come to terms with crucial knowledge about ourselves – in particular, how we employ the monstrous Other to stabilize and justify the self-aggrandizing notion of the human. That is the project to which I turn in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II

AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE MONSTROUS

Discourses surrounding the monstrous are the primary datum of this study. My task in this dissertation consists mainly of a careful analysis of discursive projects operative within the three novels, and in their direct and indirect, textual and contextual sources, as well as a few of their critical responses. Given this focus on discursivity[1], rather than 'criticism' or 'the existing literature,' I have elected in this chapter to provide a review of the discursive record of the monstrous Other (i.e., instead of a 'review of the literature,' per se). In choosing this direction, I am employing Foucauldian methodologies that allow for an exacting focus on the ways that contemporary notions of both 'the monstrous' and 'the Other' build upon – indeed, rely upon – the earlier but still operative remains of earlier notions.

Even in those instances in which postmodern renderings of the monstrous Other seem to provide fundamentally new formulations of 'difference' or 'identity' or 'politics,' the buried strata of discursive formations continue to operate. Postmodern renderings are not innocent of their cultural origins even when – as I will argue is the case for the three

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[1] Foucault employs both the terms 'discourse' and 'discursivity.' In many ways, this distinction mirrors Ferdinand de Saussure's distinction between 'langue' and 'parole.' In Saussure's formulation, 'parole' describes any and all individual speech acts or instances of the use of language, while 'langue' describes the entire language as a finite but evolving system in which speech acts can occur and have meaning. Similarly, Foucault uses 'discourse' to describe all the practices involved in the construction of meaning within a particular field of meaning, and 'discursivity' to describe the mode of thinking that makes a particular discourse possible. In the present study, then, there are multiple examples of discourses of the monstrous (medieval bestiaries, monster movies, etc.), all of which function within the discursivity of monstrousness, the 'field of meaning' in which monstrousness inheres. Foucault first introduces the notion of discursivity in his essay "What Is An Author?" (1979), translated and republished in English in *The Foucault Reader* (Rabinow 1984).

primary authors examined here – those renderings attempt radical interventions in the ways that the monstrous Other is (discursively) deployed. This inescapability of discursive histories and cultural contexts is the *raison d'être* of Foucaudian critical approaches, which facilitate the unearthing of underlying discourses – the diverse, 'polymorphous' discourses that Foucault bequeathed to cultural studies – and the tracing of the lineages between the specific discourses prevalent in different periods or contexts. The present chapter will focus on the former project, the *archaeological* one, while the following two chapters will engage the *genealogical* project – both with respect to discourses regarding the monstrous Other, specifically.

In the sections that follow, I will begin with a brief treatment of Foucault's methodologies, especially the archaeological method, which is the main approach used throughout this chapter. I will also provide a sketch of Foucault's theoretical support for the archaeological method, which includes his own treatment of the monster as an exemplary figure against which discursivities and the 'order of things' are arranged and deployed. Following on this review of the archaeological method, I will apply it to an analysis of representative 'venues' in the development of the postmodern conception of the monstrous Other, including: the monstrous embodiment of hybridity and liminality found in both literary and other cultural sources, such as medieval bestiaries and modern international expositions; the folkloric circulation of the monstrous as the boundaries of normalcy and of the community, as in the wild man motif and in folktales more generally; and the teratological notions of monstrosity that helped delineate and coagulate the notion of biological sex. Finally, I will discuss the role of modern science, the major

discursive field that continues to deploy rationalistic thinking as an antidote to all that is hybrid, wild, and monstrous. For it is precisely the rational thinking of the scientific mind – the kind of thinking that makes monsters inconceivable and 'imaginary' – that postmodern authors seek to undermine in their re-imaginings of the monstrous Other.

Digging Up Fossils: The Archaeological Method

As noted earlier, Foucault is known for two main approaches to scholarly work, what he called the archaeological and genealogical methods. Both methods require that scholars concern themselves with the differential epistemological approaches to a particular subject of study across varying historico-ideological mo(ve)ments and their (cultural) contexts – what Foucault called *epistemes*. Both methods grew out of Foucault's desire to employ approaches that would not privilege but, instead, de-center and destabilize the powerful Subject of the western world that had, since the Enlightenment, served as an absolute condition of both scholarly and lay epistemologies (e.g., historical, cultural, social, political, and psychological). Such a move is necessary in order to uncover the contingent, political, and never innocent ideologies underlying particular practices and to demystify the sense that 'the way things are' is an inevitable outcome of the rationalistic progression of science, law, and philosophy from ancient Greece forward: the mythology of 'western civilization.' In Foucault's view, the mid-twentieth century insistence of most humanistic and social-scientific scholarship on western subjectivity as the grounds for all inquiry, serves only to delimit the discursive possibilities of scholarship to those already most widely accepted at the time – indeed, such approaches cannot help but serve the interests of the Western

subject, while failing to account for or critique its need for the subjection of its many Others.

The archaeological method characterizes Foucault's early work and is most fully elaborated and employed in *The Order of Things* (1966), in which Foucault traces the underlying trajectories of the social sciences. The genealogical method, on the other hand, becomes more prevalent in Foucault's later work and is particularly well developed in the three-volume *History of Sexuality* (1978ff). The former method focuses on uncovering the differential discursive formations operative in different contexts and exposing their underlying political and social trajectories. It is, in short, a type of historical and historiographical scholarship of ideology that proceeds at a metasubjective level, paying particular attention to the polyphonic discursivities that both occasion and condition the possibilities for subjectivity in any given context. The 'archaeological' aspect of the method lies in its insistence on 'digging up' the various discursive formations that are buried beneath the apparent surface of a concept, fact or policy.

The genealogical method, then, builds upon the archaeological method, tracing the lineages within and amongst differential discursivities and demonstrating the multifarious and polymorphous sources implicated in any given discursive formation. For example, a genealogical approach to Surrealist literary practice would track its multiple lineages to such prior discursivities as Dada, Impressionism, Romanticism, psychoanalysis, and Marxist theory (to name a few possibilities), demonstrating how some of the political projects extant in these earlier discursive formations continue to operate within Surrealism itself. Table 2.1 further summarizes the two methodologies.

In this dissertation, both of Foucault's methodologies will be employed, and it is most practicable and elemental to begin with an archaeology of the monstrous in Western discourses. Since we will need, first and foremost, to understand how the monstrous has been defined and situated with/in a complex network of discursivities, an application of the archaeological method to a variety of disparate venues can be instrumental for unearthing the polymorphous 'sources' of our contemporary monsters. Such an examination of what I am calling cultural 'venues' can facilitate the explication of the monstrous in western literary, folkloric, cultural, political, and religious discourses.

Table 2.1. Elaboration of Foucault's archaeological and genealogical methods.

	Archaeological Method	Genealogical Method
Objects of inquiry	Discourses and discursivities	Discursive lineages and transformations
'Natural' habitat of these objects	The order of things: the ways in which we group, categorize, and exclude	The history of sexuality: the ways in which we come to understand ourselves in and only in relation to others
Purpose	Uncover the operative rules – a kind of grammar – by which we organize and understand the world. Much like de Saussure's langue/parole distinction, Foucault employs a discourse/ discursivity distinction. *Langue : discourse :: parole : discursivity*	Place discursivities in historical and cultural contexts, mapping out their complex and multiple lineages, and showing how traces of prior discourses remain operative with/in any given episteme
Traces	Gaps in the 'systems of elements'	Discursive dissonances, survivals
Modality	Exigency	Contingency
Subjective state of the scholar	**Metasubjective:** able to access and critically examine the subjective unconscious, even though still employing it	**Intersubjective:** Operative only in the interfaces between internal and external subjectivities, no longer able simply to function subjectively

The stakes involved in such a project are not as superficial as they may at first appear to be: indeed, while the idea of an intensive, academic study on the monstrous may initially seem a bit indulgent or frivolous, an archaeology of the monstrous is a significant

inroad into the critical task of destabilizing and dethroning the hegemonic power of western discourses. For, without an Other like the monstrous, 'order' ceases to inhere, since it is precisely the monstrous (the 'unnatural,' the dissonant, the chimerical) that order is deployed to exclude, preclude, and negate. Order *enables* the western subject (and subjectivity itself) by sanitizing it of any non-subterranean hints of the monstrous, but myriad traces of the monstrous (i.e., of alterity) lie buried just beneath the surface of the western subject, and Foucault's archaeological method is uniquely well suited as an approach to uncover them.

As Foucault pointed out, however, order's Others are not simply set in direct and perfect opposition to it. Rather, the processes of ordering rely on complex and multifaceted systems, categories, and ways of defining and delineating. In fact, for Foucault, it is not the differences between objects or categories themselves that carry the burden of establishing order; instead, it is what he called a *system of elements*, "a definition of the segments by which the resemblances and differences can be shown, the types of variation by which those segments can be affected, and, lastly, the threshold above which there is a difference and below which there is similitude" (Foucault, *Order* xx). Attention to such systemic and microscopic moments of differentiation is necessary in order to demythologize the binary opposition between order and disorder, the self and the Other, the natural and the monstrous. Moreover, Foucault further elaborates that order is "that which has no existence except in the grid created by a glance, an examination, a language; and it is only in the blank spaces of this grid that order manifests itself in depth as though already there, waiting in silence for the moment of its expression" (Foucault, *Order* xx). In order words, order operates primarily in the 'blank spaces,' the gaps between categories,

identities, and other positively or negatively identifiable entities. Order is not purely the opposite of disorder, but the force of magnetism that holds, at one and the same time, similarities together and differences apart, the invisible push-pull in the fissures and cracks separating one thing from another.

Locating order in this functionally defined 'space' allows Foucault to create a scholarly approach that seeks to uncover these tiny openings, these gaps, between differentiated items and to show the politics involved in that process of differentiation itself. It is this scholarly approach that he calls *archaeology*. "[A]rchaeology, addressing itself to the general space of knowledge, to its configurations, and to the mode of being of the things that appear in it, defines systems of simultaneity, as well as the series of mutations necessary and sufficient to circumscribe the threshold of a new positivity" (Foucault, *Order* xxiii). Significantly, the archaeological method enables a means of critiquing the politics of Cartesian positivity itself (as well as its twin, western subjectivity), thus opening a critical space in which what is usually taken for granted as the very conditions of meaning, language, and scholarship can be called into question and shown to be complicit in various political projects, including the category of the monstrous. Archaeological scholarship, then, functions on a metasubjective level, allowing the scholar to direct a critical awareness toward (even while still acting within) western subjectivity – a subjectivity that always already assumes the existence of the monstrous as the outside of the self, as the not-self. That is, the archaeological method creates a critical space at once a part of and apart from the usual restrictions of our seemingly omnipresent western subjectivity, 'addressing itself to the general space of knowledge' so that the scholar may investigate how scholarship itself (along with many other discourses) contributes to the

ongoing policing of the boundaries of the 'real,' and to the incarceration of that which

defies classification into the heterogeneous, murky and always mythologized category of

the monstrous.

In *The Order of Things* (1966), Foucault is particularly interested in the role of the

monstrous (as well as the fossil record) in facilitating the epistemic shifts required for the

advent of natural history as the successor to a largely religiously or cosmically figured

understanding of both history and nature. In his archaeological treatment of the origins of

classificatory impulses in natural history, Foucault traces the shifting terrain of

'evolutionisms,' noting that the familiar Darwinian understanding of evolution was not the

first form of evolutionism, nor was it of the same ilk as the other evolutionisms that

preceded it. In fact, the particular evolutionism that conditions the rise of natural history is

one concerned less with "the emergences of beings as a process of one giving rise to

another" and more "a way of generalizing the principle of continuity and the law that

requires that all beings form an uninterrupted expanse" (Foucault, *Order* 152).

Nevertheless, it is important to understand these earlier evolutionisms, since their

ideological and discursive apparatuses continue to operate beneath the surface of our

familiar, Darwinian evolutionism, 'haunting' its rationality with prescientific notions that

continue to shape our more visceral and primary responses to the monstrous.

These pre-Darwinian evolutionisms, imbued with the imperatives of the episteme

that immediately precedes the Enlightenment (i.e. the episteme prior to our own),

generally take one of two forms. The first form, heavily steeped in classical philosophy and

medieval Christianity, hinges on an understanding of the continuity of all beings as a

collective march toward divine perfection, with all creatures changing, in successive

generations, to become more and more 'godlike.' Although different creatures may be seen as differentially placed along this continuum of perfection, and although the distance between even the most 'evolved' creature and (the Christian) God remains vast and (im)possibly untraversable, the same impetus carries all creatures -- even the monstrous -- toward perfection. In this evolutionary system, monsters may be seen as occupants of the lower rungs on the 'great chain of being' -- a chain that connects all creatures in the movement toward perfection. From the perspective of a conception of historicity in the processes of evolution within this form of evolutionism, time functions only as the universal movement (back) toward God (Foucault, *Order* 151).

In the second form of evolutionism, time functions as the necessary condition of the specific forms that differential species have taken, the anatomical and physiological formations that arise in a host of various creatures. Moreover, most of these variations may have their roots in particularities and vagaries of the many environments in which living things have found themselves throughout time. Though this second form appears, on the face of it, however, to resemble Darwinian evolutionism closely, this pre-Darwinian model pinpoints the *character* of the species itself, and the power of character to determine responses to the effects of the environment, as the forces propelling evolution. A creature's character may be, for example, courageous or melancholic or even sinister. Furthermore, the changes that may be observed in a species, in the perspective of this form of evolutionism, follow an *a priori* range of possibilities for all life on earth: the evolving species of this particular evolutionism are not so much independently changing in response to environmental stimuli as they are gradually unfolding all the possibilities accorded them by the continuity of the forms of life and their respective characters. In the view of this

form of evolutionism, monsters are simply those creatures whose deformed or insidious

characters have propelled them, in a series of environmental and other responses, to take

on physical forms reflective of their debased essences (Foucault, *Order* 153).

Both of these pre-Enlightenment forms of evolutionism rely on broad principles of

the ordering of things that governed categorization and taxonomy in the earlier episteme.

Foucault identifies *resemblance* as the guiding tenet of the pre-Enlightenment episteme,

and he further specifies four forms of similitude that were prevalent at the end of the

sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries, namely, *convenientia, aemulatio,*

analogy, and *sympathies.* According to Foucault, these four varieties of resemblance largely

dictated contemporaneous understandings of what was natural, what were the possibilities

of life and, by extension, what would be considered monstrous (Foucault, *Order* 17-25).

The first similitude, *convenientia,* describes "resemblance connected with space in

the form of a graduated scale of proximity" (Foucault, *Order* 18). Foucault notes that it had

almost as much to do with adjacency as with similitude, but adjacency and, in particular, the

intermingling of things in the locations where "the extremity of the one also demarcates

the beginning of the other," could complicate the possibility of distinguishing between

proximal convenience and identicalness (Foucault, *Order* 18). In any event, too, proximity

can lead to a certain indistinguishability, and natural examples of this kind of comingling

abound: some organisms live exclusively inside of others, for example, begging the

question of where the one ends and the other begins. Or we may consider the example of

cancer, in which cells produced within the body begin to grow and multiply in a markedly

disorderly fashion, gradually overtaking and displacing the healthy functioning of

surrounding tissues and organs. While we categorically identify cancer as something inside

of and yet somehow separate from the body proper, the proximal 'convenience' of cancerous cells and tissues to other cells and tissues leads to the extreme difficulty of treatment for cancer – an illness treated by approaches that attack both healthy and cancerous cells – and makes it exceedingly difficult to demarcate clearly where the cancer ends and the healthy body begins. It is little wonder, then, that cancer is often portrayed as a monstrous attack of the body upon itself, or that cancer is so feared.

The second form of similitude, *aemulatio*, or emulation, does not require any particular spatial relationship. Instead, emulation is characterized more by a sort of mirror-imaging, as Foucault characterizes it, in which space and time can be 'overcome' by the resemblance of two things at opposite ends of the universe, or distant from each other in other ways. Foucault offers examples such as the human eye as "a reflection of the vast illumination spread across the sky by sun and moon" and the way that human intellect mirrors (without matching) God's immense wisdom (Foucault, *Order* 19). In fact, embedded in the metaphor of emulation is the sense of struggle, as one or the other of an emulative pair is always the stronger, though there are constant struggles for this upper hand. The more the human eye penetrates into the depths of space (via the prosthetic of the telescope, for example), the more its ability to emulate the lights of the firmament draws the two closer together. And human intellect is always striving to displace the superiority – to emulate to the point of overcoming – the wisdom of God. Rather than delineating a great chain of being made up of things ordered by proximity, as in convenience, emulation is a form of resemblance in which mirroring pairs are locked in a kind of concentric dance, with each member of the pair seeking to emulate the other to the

point that it becomes more identical than its twin and competitor with the similitude that

governs them both, while that twin is always already emulating it as well.

The third form of similitude, *analogy*, is unhinged from both spatial proximity and

mirror-imaging and functions in a much more grandiose and sweeping fashion, such that

nearly any two things in the universe may be related one to the other by means of an

analogy. Analogy functions on a cosmographic level, providing explanatory insight into

such relationships as that of human excrement to Hell, or of disease to a natural disaster.

By means of analogy, we can readily understand these relationships, though they cannot be

explained by means of either convenience or emulation, occupying neither the same

proximal space nor the same 'register' in identification. Foucault further indicates that, in

the world of the proto-Enlightenment, it is Man[2] that stands as the indexical key to the

analogical cosmography. Man may be analogized with anything from God to bacteria to

stray particles in space and serves as the lynchpin in even those analogies in which 'he' is

not one of the items held in resemblance. Indeed, Man (or what I have already called the

western subject) is "the great fulcrum of proportions" for all analogies, and this fact makes

the third form of similitude one of the most important for understanding the history of the

Other as that which is excluded from the heart of order and of reason (Foucault, *Order* 23).

The final of the four major forms of similitude in the period just before the

Enlightenment is characterized by what Foucault calls "the play of *sympathies*" (Foucault,

Order 23, emphasis original). Sympathy may be understood as a freely moving, boundary-

crossing flow of similitude that is characterized by motion and, by virtue of its power to

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[2] Although the purportedly generic term "Man" has long been roundly criticized by feminist and other theorists for its now-obvious shortcomings, I follow Foucault here in using the term as the intrinsic conceptualization of humanity in the historical period in question. It is, however, deployed here as a historically specific concept, rather than a collective noun for humanity.

draw things together and intermingle them, its (dangerous) ability to assimilate. Foucault

offers the example of fire which, as it raises away from the earth, becomes increasingly

sympathetic with the air into which it rises, gradually assimilating and becoming smoke and,

thus, like air, gaseous. In fact, to extend the correlation, fire also transforms the objects it

consumes into carbon, a key building block of the Earth and the life it has sustained, as well

as the various gases that rise into the ether. Fire is, therefore, a transformative agent of

sympathetic resemblance, but fire is only one example. Foucault also cites the example of

the flowers from a funeral, which can have the sympathetic power to make mourners of

everyone who encounters them. Indeed, sympathy is so threatening a form of similitude

that it must be countered with antipathy, which functions to limit its effects and hold each

thing in its isomorphic uniqueness. It is the sympathy-antipathy pairing, in fact, that

functions as the push-pull of identification throughout every part of the order of things

(Foucault, *Order* 23-5).

Because of the necessity of the sympathy-antipathy pairing – because, that is,

resemblance alone is not sufficient, at the threshold of the epistemic shift, to explain all the

morphologies that have ever arisen – natural history began to deploy some of the existing

forms, both 'real' and legendary, in the service of containing and delineating the natural.

This (re)deployment relied on both sympathetic resemblance and antipathetic tension to

isolate and ossify the identities of various species, strains, and populations. Although

monstrous creatures had been observed and described throughout the preceding centuries

in all known civilizations, the proto-Enlightenment brought, ironically, a "proliferation of

monsters" that served as a foil for what could be considered 'natural' or thought to have a

'history' and – perhaps more to the point – a future (Foucault, *Order* 156).

Likewise, the fossil became "the privileged locus of a resemblance required by the historian of the continuum" (Foucault, *Order* 156). That is, the fossil could be deployed to demonstrate the history of resemblances across enormous expanses of time. Thus, while the monster served as the 'outside' of natural categories, the chimera that hems in identity by providing evidence of morphological differentiation, the fossil came to serve as the backwards projection of identity through time, such that it "recalls, in the uncertainty of its resemblances, the first buddings of identity" (Foucault, *Order* 157). The fossil, part animal and part mineral, is the calcified remains of various stages in the formation of an identity, while the monster is the embodiment of morphological recalcitrance, a refusal to allow form to serve identity. Taken together, the monster and the fossil provided 'solid' evidence for the mapping of specification in natural history, contributing to the rise of our recognizably modern species and, perhaps most importantly, modern Man.

The Monster With/out: Liminality, Hybridity, and the Edges of Identity

The accretion of textual evidence for the monstrous in the literature, film, and popular culture of the postmodern period owes a great debt to the vast warehouses of information found in the natural-history texts of the Enlightenment and, extending back further still, to the bestiaries of classical and medieval authors (which themselves drew on similar works from other cultures outside of Europe). Indeed, the fascinating collections known as bestiaries provide an array of information about their cultures- and periods-of-origin, encompassing, as they do, both the mundane animals of urban and agrarian life in Europe and the most fabulous varieties of monsters and hybrids. These archaic bestiaries, then,

and the natural history that grew out of them, provide a plausible place to begin an excavation of the monstrous in western cultural traditions.

As Arnold Clayton Henderson observes in his 1982 essay on medieval animal fables and bestiaries, each classical or medieval fable involving an animal, and each entry in a classical or medieval bestiary, ultimately occasions a moral. In classical antiquity, these narratives tended to be simpler and more general, such as the fable of the wolf and the lamb drinking from the same stream. In the antique version, the wolf accuses the lamb of spoiling the water that he is drinking, even though he is upstream from the lamb, and he uses the false accusation as a reason to eat the lamb. As the story is reconceived in medieval fable collections, the straightforward moral gradually turns to social commentary, with the wolf increasingly identified with the rich and powerful, and the lamb representing the poor and disempowered. By the time of the latter Middle Ages, the tale had begun to take on a sharply satirical tone, sometimes with oblique references to particular figures – especially in the guise of the wolf. Likewise, with the bestiary, what appears on the surface as simply a description (however 'flawed,' from a contemporary perspective) of a particular creature may have become, by the time of the rise of natural history, a complex instance of social commentary with political or moralistic 'lessons' coded within the prose (Henderson 40-1). The wolf had, by this time, fully assumed the 'character' that would follow it into natural-historical inquiry as well as modern folklore.

Other creatures remained more exotic. The giraffe, for example, was a creature seldom observed by European chroniclers yet one that nevertheless made its way into bestiaries from late antiquity on. Though it may have appeared somewhat less frequently than some of the other monstrous creatures also seldom seen in daily European life – such

as the tiger, the centaur, or the unicorn – the giraffe was a prize for the kinds of 'collecting'

that bestiaries performed for precisely the same reasons as the other fabulous creatures

who populated their pages: it was a strange kind of creature, composed, from the medieval

European perspective, of some sort of odd amalgamation of the traits of other, better

known creatures. In fact, the giraffe was thought to be a creature that was part camel and

part leopard, and it was known in many medieval bestiaries as the *camelopardalis*, which

either served as its only name or was given as the formal (Latinate) name alongside the

common name giraffe. Like many of the monstrous creatures that enraptured medieval

audiences, the giraffe presented a mixed morphology, bearing the spots associated with

the leopard and the long neck and, in many representations, the hump of the camel (Cuttler

163-5). It was also often depicted with horns – a trait that fit with neither of the two other

animals thought to be its relatives and that therefore increased its mystique as a monstrous

hybrid. Indeed, like other horned, hybrid monsters, such as the faun, the Minotaur, or the

Horned Man or Horned God, the giraffe may have been (sometimes) associated with evil, or

at least worldly, tendencies. Interestingly, both a giraffe and a centaur appear in an

illustration depicting one episode of the life of St. Anthony of Egypt, included in a book of

hours[3] published in Germany by the Limburg brothers around 1410.

     In an essay on the historical and cultural context of the Limburg illustration, Charles

Cuttler (1991) addresses the use of the two medieval monsters in the scene from St.

Anthony's life. Cuttler notes that the medieval bestiary, "a conquest of nature on

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[3] A book of hours is a type of illuminated (illustrated) manuscript common throughout the Middle Ages. Generally, a book of hours collected together short writings, such as prayers, psalms, and cycles of short narratives from the lives of saints (usually grouped in series of twelve – thus, the name 'book of hours'). Though many books of hours were illustrated only with tiny figures, often surrounding the first capital letter of each particular piece, some were elaborately illustrated and could even double as a kind of bestiary. The Limburg collection, *Belles Heures*, is described in Cuttler (1991).

parchment," suffered from "the lack of a methodology based on observation [that] led to some farfetched conclusions about the natural world" (161). In fact, as Cuttler notes, even well-known animals were often misunderstood and misrepresented in the bestiary genre; his examples include bovine corpses serving as the source of bees, and beavers gnawing off their own testicles when pursued by predators (161). No wonder, then, that renderings of the giraffe and the centaur may have been based more on their significance to the spiritual import of the particular text than to any similitude to their 'actual' forms; indeed, as Cuttler himself notes, the obsession with depicting corporeal creatures in bestiaries and related medieval genres was, ironically, more concerned with "the life of the spirit" than any natural history or other corporeal science (161).

In the illustration in question, St. Anthony is depicted wandering through the desert en route to visit the hermitage of St. Paul. The centaur is shown assisting St. Anthony by offering him directions to the hermitage, while the giraffe occupies the middle distance between St. Anthony and his destination. (A third figure, perhaps a lion, stands on the slopes of a distant mountain beyond the hermitage.) For Cuttler, the piece is interesting because the Limburgs appear to have created a rather unique (and possibly original) interpretation of the episode. The piece is unusual both for the inclusion of the figure of the giraffe, which was quite rare in Northern European collections from the period, and for the relative accuracy of the portrayal of the giraffe among all medieval examples: Cuttler speculates that it must have been based on a no-longer extant representation that the Limburgs encountered in Venice (Cuttler 163-7). Indeed, Cuttler demonstrates exhaustively that most contemporaneous representations of the giraffe portrayed the animal as a camel-leopard hybrid, and that this particular kind of depiction persisted well after the

Enlightenment, given that real giraffes were not common in Europe – even in royal or municipal menageries – until the nineteenth-century rise of the more comprehensive zoo (163-73, 176).

Cuttler's treatment of the subject belies his greater interest in the presence of the giraffe in the illustration, and he addresses the figure of the centaur much more briefly, noting that, while the creature once encapsulated for the ancients the notion of the uncivilized man, by the time of the Limburgs "[t]he Centaur is a symbol of both evil and lasciviousness" (175). Indeed, as Cuttler also points out, centaurs appear in Dante's *Inferno* as a type of demon that torments the human souls in one portion of hell (175). In fact, though, both the centaur and the giraffe in the Limburgs' illumination serve much more ambiguous roles. Both creatures populate the desert wilds that St. Anthony must traverse to visit the hermitage of St. Paul and, given this geographical location of the creatures, it is clear that they dwell outside the realm of civilization. Nevertheless, St. Paul, a holy man so devout that he is to serve as a mentor for St. Anthony, also inhabits this same desert, which cannot be read simplistically as the locus of evil or wild moral abandonment. Indeed, the centaur in the illustration is depicted as providing assistance to St. Anthony, with the serene giraffe – known to be docile and harmless, even in the absence of representations with a high degree of similitude – is shown standing peaceably in the distance. While both creatures are clearly hybrids that populate the wilds, even they may be of service to the man of God who is striving for spiritual perfection. They stand, at once, as an object lesson for the godly man who wants to understand the dangers of ambiguous identity and as fellow travelers on the journey toward holiness. While still clearly situated in the

metaphysically steeped evolutionism of the late medieval period, the use of these figures in

the Limburg manuscript gestures toward the revolution in discursivity that natural history

would bring.[4]

Another text that straddles the origins of this revolution, Ambroise Paré's *Des*

Monstres et prodigies (1840) is perhaps the definitive volume in the nascent field of natural

history contemporaneous to the second form of evolutionism described by Foucault.

Writing about the classic volume in 1960, Jurgis Baltrušaitis remarked that "[t]he fantastic

realm of the image-maker is joined here to the awakening of a realistic mind" (quoted in

Pallister xxiii).[5] Indeed, Paré's work represents a catalytic moment in the tectonics of

epistemes, blending, as it does, ancient and medieval legends, late medieval evolutionisms,

and a markedly modern interest in the specifically *natural* history of anomalous and

fantastic anatomical variations (as well as other strange occurrences). Jean Céard, who has

also written about Paré's work, notes that, although Paré's volume quickly pinpoints the

purpose of the existence of monsters as portentous, his more enduring concern

throughout the collection is on causation and the seemingly infinite variety of anomalies

and deformities catalogued in the treatise (Pallister xxvi). Because Paré was writing the

volume as part of a multi-volume series designed for surgeons and barbers (professions

more closely related to each other at the time), he presents a quite practical and, at times,

vulgar natural history that ironically serves as a perfect vehicle for an archaeology of the

monstrous at the precipice of the Enlightenment.

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[4] For additional discussions of medieval bestiaries, see: Clark and McMunn (1989); Gravestock (2000); Hassig ("Marginal," 1997); Hassig ("Sex," 2000); Miyazaki (2000); and Shank (1998).

[5] This quotation comes from Baltrušaitis' 1960 monograph, *Réveils et prodigies*, published in Paris by Armand Collin, pages 330-1. The work is cited in Pallister's introduction to the edition of Paré cited here.

Before Paré proceeds with his cataloguing of various monsters and marvels, he

begins with a brief list of the causes of monsters, which is worth quoting in full:

> There are several things that cause monsters.
> The first is the glory of God.
> The second, his wrath.
> The third, too great a quantity of seed.
> The fourth, too little a quantity.
> The fifth, the imagination.
> The sixth, the narrowness or smallness of the womb.
> The seventh, the indecent posture of the mother, as when, being
> pregnant, she has sat for too long with her legs crossed, or pressed against
> her womb.
> The eighth, through a fall, or blows struck against the womb of the
> mother, being with child.
> The ninth, through hereditary or accidental illness.
> The tenth, through rotten or corrupt seed.
> The eleventh, through mixture or mingling of seed.
> The twelfth, through the artifice of wicked spital beggars.
> The thirteenth, through Demons and Devils. (Paré 3-4)

From the contemporary reader's perspective, Paré's list brings together apparently

disparate and unrelated kinds of causation, from the metaphysical (e.g., the wrath of God,

or Demons and Devils – both ends of the divine spectrum) to the merely physical (e.g., the

posture of the mother, or a fall she suffers while pregnant), from the biological (e.g.,

corrupt seed, that is, tainted semen) to the spiritual, and from the most mundane (such as

illness) to 'the power of the imagination.' The result is a range of causative agents almost

impossible for us to take seriously, but it is precisely what makes this list improbable for the

modern reader that reveals the operative discursivities contemporaneous with the natural

history of Paré.

A similar kind of epistemic dissonance occurs when we encounter lists from other

cultural sources. Discussing the disorientation that western audiences might feel when

reading Jorge Luis Borges' treatment of a 'certain Chinese encyclopedia'[6] in which the

categories for animals range from tame to fabulous to "drawn with a very fine camelhair

brush," Foucault notes that western readers' puzzlement arises not from the categories

themselves, nor from the mere odd juxtaposition of seemingly disparate elements

(Foucault, *Order* xv). Instead, it is "the narrowness of the distance separating" the

categories that produces the dissonant effect in reception of such lists – no different for

the late medieval cataloguing of monsters than it is for Borges' 'Chinese' categories for

animals (Foucault, *Order* xvi). According to Foucault, this effect of encountering a radically

different order of things results, in large part, from the hermeneutic and epistemological

doubt stemming from the shadow such categorical systems cast back on our taken-for-

granted understanding of the world (Foucault, *Order* vv-xxiv).

Paré's typology of the causes of monsters brings into proximal convenience on the

page, categories that, when thus assembled, leave contemporary readers a bit

uncomfortable. It is not just that some of the categories rely on fantastic or divine

explanations; in fact, we expect as much from the thinkers of the period in question.

Moreover, because we are able to relegate such beliefs to a former episteme, the

categories of Paré and his contemporaries neatly contain such cosmological tendencies,

sanitizing the present episteme of any (easily detected) traces of a religiously construed

natural history. And that is precisely why Paré's list of causes is so discordant to the

modern ear: the mix of fantastic and seemingly scientific explanations for monsters is

jarring because it seems to blend the operative assumptions of 'our' own episteme with the

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[6] Argentine writer Borges wrote about this list from the *Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge* in "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins," published in English translation in *Borges, a Reader: A Selection from the Writings of Jorge Luis Borges,* edited by Monegal and Reid (1981).

prescientific ideas that preceded it, thereby calling into question whether the two epistemologies are really as different as common sense would have it. If monsters can result from mundane and biological causes as well as divine or demonic ones, how do we continue to maintain the radical separation of 'irrational' (medieval) and 'rational' (modern) epistemologies? Paré's text seems to introduce secret passageways honeycombing their way between the two epistemes.[7]

The examples provided by Paré only heighten this unnerving sense of epistemic collapse. As an example of the monsters created by the wrath of God, Paré mentions the offspring of men and women who engage in unnatural forms of copulation, "like brutish beasts, in which their appetite guides them" (Paré 5). This example is almost indistinguishable from those given in the next category: too great a quantity of seed. In this latter grouping, we find primarily variations of multiple births and conjoined twins presumably resulting from an excess of 'seed.' In both examples, mishaps or mistakes during copulation lead to monstrous results, but one of the categories mentions God's wrath as the causative agent, while the next presents an etiology that reads, from the modern perspective, as flawed but clearly naturalistic, even (quasi)scientific (Paré 5-9). Of course, the distinction is purely modernist since, for Paré and his contemporaries, all of the thirteen categories of causation listed above represent variations on the single theme of violations of the natural law, which is largely the same, from Paré's perspective, as divine law. True to their epistemic context, these thirteen explanations for the existence of monsters exhibit a remarkable degree of similitude, with resemblances in both the

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[7] Indeed, it is also useful to remember that Paré's text was written in the sixteenth century and therefore stands as an excellent example of the fact that the two epistemes have some 'proximal convenience' of their own. That is, there was no really distinct rupture between the two epistemes but, instead, a gradual blending of one into the other.

operative logic and the outcomes: all of the monsters and marvels described present with morphological and/or other deviations of form. In Paré's view, the unnatural, in all its myriad manifestations, has unmistakable and inevitable consequences. The monster is deviance embodied, leading Paré, in the 1579 edition, to add that "[i]t is not good that monsters should live among us" – a statement that perfectly encapsulates the monster's status as Other (Paré 9).

In fact, most of the morphological deviations presented by the monsters assembled in Paré's collection may be characterized as one or another kind of hybridity. The volume is replete with creatures that are part human and part animal, or that blend together the parts of several animals, often in unexpected and 'unnatural' ways. Examples include a colt born with a man's face; a chicken's egg that contained a monster with a human face and live snakes for hair and beard; a child with a frog's face; a boy with a dog's parts from the waist down; a creature described as seventy-two feet in length, with the head of a sow, a fish's body with fishlike appendages, and three eyes on either side of its massive body (Paré 7-115); and a monster with "a horn on its head, two wings, and a single foot similar to that of a bird of prey, at the knee joint an eye, and participating in the natures [sexual organs] of both male and female" (Paré 6, editorial insertion original). On the other hand, the collection also includes a number of animals well-known to contemporary readers but still quite exotic for Paré and his contemporaries; those listed include the giraffe (again), the elephant, and the rhinoceros. For Paré, these creatures are just as monstrous and marvelous as the other examples in the volume, since they also present apparently hybrid or deviant morphologies, including the extremely long neck of the giraffe; the size, long

nose and great tusks of the elephant; and the "armor" covering the outside of the rhinoceros (168).

As it is with Paré's thirteen types of monsters, however, the juxtaposition of creatures that we now know to be quite real with those that we know to be fabulous creates a discursive dissonance and opens a critical space in which to interrogate the discourses of both our own episteme and that of Paré in relation to what counts as 'monstrous.' In particular, we can observe that Paré's collection of 'monsters' includes any creatures that are themselves, and those that present morphologies that are, outside the normal experience of everyday life in Europe at the time, whether such creatures are known as mundane in the modern world or not. While some of the creatures mentioned in Paré's work may have changed categories over time, however, the guiding principles of what constitutes the 'monstrous' have changed little. In the well-connected and -traveled world of the present, creatures like giraffes are exhaustively documented and easily seen – even outside their natural habitats, given the omnipresence of zoos, print photographs, and videographic resources. They are certainly not considered monstrous. Our contemporary monsters – such as aliens, lake monsters, Sasquatch, and *el chupacabra*, to name a few – still reside, as Paré's monsters did, on the fringes of the known world, helping to define such cultural frontiers as the primeval, the littoral, the terrestrial, the necrotic, and the savage[8] (see Table 2.2).

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[8] "Savage" is inarguably a loaded term, and one that calls to mind centuries of colonial and oppressive aggression toward many peoples by western powers and such other powers as Japan. However, in the context of this discussion, it is precisely this sort of extreme and xenophobic response to various Others that "savage frontier" is intended to invoke. The fear may be (somewhat) rational, as in the case of serial killers, or almost completely irrational, as with Aboriginals or the Roma. (See Table 2.2.)

Table 2.2. Examples of the diverse monsters that help define various cultural boundaries.

	Ancient/Medieval Monsters	'Modern' Cousins
The Primeval Frontier	Behemoth, Cyclops, dragon, dryad, giant, the Green Man, hippogriff, ogre, troll	Kaiju, King Kong, Sasquatch, werewolf (and other were-animals), Yeti
The Littoral Frontier	Giant squid, Leviathan/"the great fish," mermaid or merman (triton), sea serpent, siren	El Niño/La Niña, kaiju, great white shark, lake monsters (including Nessie), lusca
The Terrestrial Frontier	Angel, Djinn ('genie'), daemon, god(dess), portentous celestial event, Ziz	Alien, cosmic rays, the Devil, impact comet, Yaoguai
The Necrotic Frontier	Cerberus, draug/revenant, ghoul, goblin, golem, myling, Samael (the Angel of Death)	Cyborg, doppelgänger, ghost, mummy, shade/shadow person, vampire, zombie
The Savage Frontier	Barbarian, centaur, chimera, Legion (biblical demon that may have represented the Roman presence in Judea), Minotaur, primitive, Saracen/Moor	Aboriginal, chupacabra, (eco)terrorist, hippie/bohemian, pirate, Roma ('gypsy'), Satanist, serial killer

As both the giraffe and centaur of the Limburgs' manuscript and the monsters listed in the table above demonstrate, the monstrous is often hybrid both in its morphology and in its 'natural' habitat: the geological, cultural, and (super/sub/un)natural boundaries surrounding normative human society. Themselves (de)composed of mismatched parts, disproportionate limbs and unexpected contours, monsters then further embody the uncanny by dwelling on the fringes of the known human world – whether the literal spaces adjacent to human settlements, such as the forest primeval or the underwater depths just beneath the surface of the sea, or the metaphorical borderlands located at the edges of human experience, such as the 'spaces' between the living and the dead, human and animal, animal and vegetable, or organism and machine. In fact, the monstrous is at once located within and an embodiment of a special category of experience that folklorists and anthropologists refer to as liminality, a kind of suspended state located on the margins between geographical locations, states of existence, or even times of the day or the year.

Although first articulated by Arnold van Gennep in his sociocultural studies of rituals, the concept of the liminal was definitively elaborated by Victor Turner in *The Forest of Symbols* (1967), largely in relation to the middle phase in a rite of passage. Turner defines liminality as "an interstructural situation" and characterizes it as the period after which an individual has departed from a previous state of existence (e.g., childhood) and before which they have fully joined the next state (e.g., adulthood) (93). In his descriptions of the liminal, Turner follows van Gennep's three phases of a rite of transition: separation, marginal or liminal, and aggregation (Turner, *Forest* 94). Turner then goes on to elaborate several important characteristics of the liminal that bear repeating here, given the fact that the monstrous occupies a permanently liminal sociocultural location.

First, Turner notes that the liminal is structurally invisible (*Forest* 95). Because individuals in the liminal phase do not occupy any of the positively identifiable social categories of their respective societies, they have, in a very important sense, no current place in the social structure. As Turner remarks, "A society's secular definitions do not allow for the existence of not-boy-not-man, which is what a novice in a male puberty rite is (if he can be said to be anything)" (95). Furthermore, Turner observes that, while there are names for groups of persons in the liminal phase (e.g. initiates or neophytes), these names tend to emphasize the transitional period itself, rather than the individuals per se, thus further erasing their identities *as individuals* with any kind of defined place in the social order (96). In many ways, monsters, too, are always structurally invisible, existing permanently outside the clearly delineated categorical schemes of the social order. In fact, this characteristic of the monstrous contributes to the sense of the uncanny that accompanies monsters and motivates the horror that their sudden physical visibility can

elicit: nothing is quite so disarming as the sudden physical presence of those things that the structural order cannot accommodate.

Second, Turner addresses how the liminal is loaded with a rich array of cultural symbolism – including some symbols that have peculiar associations. Turner takes a particular interest in the ways that individuals in the liminal phase are neither clearly associated with the living, nor clearly with the dead. They may be at once associated with metaphors such as dissolution and decomposition, on the one hand, and with gestation and the embryonic, on the other. This ambiguous positioning suits the liminal phase, since individuals in the liminal phase are in the process of becoming some recognizable personage within the social order, while their prior identities are simultaneously dissolving. Moreover, this highly ambiguous nature of the liminal makes it a socially dangerous 'moment' since, belonging to none of the positivistic claims of the structural, the liminal can be "a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise" (Turner, *Forest* 97). This, Turner notes, leads to the excessive amount of social attention to and control of the transitions that occasion the liminal phase (96-8). Here, again, the monstrous may be seen as the liminal in a kind of eternal suspended animation, since monsters, as a rule, either straddle the life/death boundary by their very natures, or threaten that boundary and promise the chaos of death leaking into life, and vice versa. In addition, the monstrous may be read as the very embodiment of the socially dangerous since, as an absolute outside to the social order, its presence and its agency threaten the very social fabric itself:

> Between incumbents of positions in secular politico-jural systems there exist intricate and situationally shifting networks of rights and duties proportioned to their rank, status, and corporate affiliation. There are many different kinds of

privileges and obligations, many degrees of superordination and subordination. In the liminal period such distinctions and gradations tend to be eliminated. (99)

That is, the liminal has a socially leveling effect, reductive to the extreme. In the liminal, there are no longer individual identities, only bodies and matter. The monstrous, too, tends to emphasize the material and the basest notion of embodiment and to erase illusions of caste, family, and other such identifiably human structures.

Finally, Turner presents an interesting 'reading' of the role of monstrous and grotesque imagery in the liminal phase and during its rites and ceremonies. For Turner, the figure of the monster – so often appearing in the masks or other sacra used during rites – serves a didactic purpose, exaggerating certain physical features or amalgamating disparate items (such as humans and animals) in order to facilitate a kind of reflective and self-reflexive activity in the neophyte. Rather than viewing monsters as the bogeymen of primitive peoples, then, Turner sees them as constitutive of the social order, as the very model of social disorder that is needed in order to instruct neophytes about their proper place and – indeed – the entire system of order that gives meaning to social life. As a period in which the monstrous is propagated and called forth, the liminal allows "a promiscuous intermingling and juxtaposing of the categories of event, experience, and knowledge" (*Forest* 106). Yet, much like the carnivalesque of Bakhtin's theorization, the liminal phase is a carefully contained social event and, ultimately, the social order is restored, with all its constituents in their proper places. Contrary to the cogency of its imagery and expression, the liminal, as conceived by Turner, is ultimately a conservative force, contributing to the reproduction of the social order by instructing the participants of that social order about the dangers of its absence.

Likewise, the monsters of the ages have played their parts in deploying and preserving social order. More than just the antagonists of scary stories told to children to keep them from creeping out of their beds at night, monsters and the monstrous in general are the negative backdrop to the entirety of sociocultural life: its Other. From the monsters haunting the pages of medieval literature and histories to the surviving wild men of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, all that is monstrous is the exaggerated reflection of those traits, values, notions, and hybridities that the social order does not tolerate, that which is cast-off, the warped, funhouse reflection of society itself. Wherever there are bogeymen imperiling (or perceived to be imperiling) the social order – enemies ranging from other peoples to death to the vagaries of nature, disease, and even new technologies and knowledges – there arise monsters to serve both as wards against these enemies, and as warnings to members of a social group to remain within its trusty and established boundaries. Indeed, the monstrous encircles the outer rim of the known world, demarcating the edges of known identities from that which does not belong.

The Monstrous Middle Ages

For monster theorist Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (2006), it is precisely this boundary-enforcing property of the monstrous that led to an explosion of monsters in the writings of medieval England, at once the scene of a high degree of social upheaval and the contact zone for a variety of peoples, languages, religions, and identities. For Cohen, this intermixture of cultural and social phenomena gave rise to porous and contested boundaries at the edges of English culture, such that "[b]etween imagined or desired absolutes like 'Angle' and 'Briton,' 'English' and 'Norman,' 'Christian' and 'Jew' flourished recalcitrant impurities"

(Cohen, *Hybridity* 1). Cohen sees these 'impurities' as instances of cultural hybridity, which

he reminds us is not a 'melting pot' but at once "a fusion *and* a disjunction, a conjoining of

differences that cannot simply harmonize" (2, emphasis original). Cohen asserts that such

hybridities had a certain ambiguous but not entirely undefined geography, such that there

existed "medial spaces" that "were difficult in a double sense: difficult to articulate, and

difficult to inhabit" (2).[9] He calls these medial spaces "difficult middles," and notes that, in

the literary and historical writings of the medieval period in English history, these spaces

were the constant haunts of a parade of monstrous Others; his laundry list includes:

"prodigies, transformed persons, sorcerers, bestiality, tempests formed of blood,

monsters, reveries of dismemberment, [and] cadavers possessed of abiding life" (2). From

Cohen's perspective, these monsters and bizarre occurrences belied a cultural obsession

with the 'imagined community'[10] of medieval England and the many ways that contact with

assorted and sundry Others threatened to degrade English cultural identity by way of

endless hybridities. Peoples such as the Irish, the Scots, the Welsh, the Cornish, the Danes,

the Normans, the Jews and the Saracens also populate the pages of medieval English

writings and are often as not as much or more threatening to, and constitutive of, English

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[9] Cohen here follows the formulation of Robert J.C. Young, a postcolonial theorist who noted that the concept of hybridity, popular in postcolonial studies, can have two antithetical meanings, one emphasizing disjunction and the other assimilation. This contradiction is fully operative and unresolved in the theoretical application of the term "hybridity." Cohen cites Young's *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (1995).

[10] This term refers to the work of Benedict Anderson, whose seminal monograph *Imagined Communities* postulated the essentially imaginary character of national identity, the ways in which the sense of belonging to a nation – or, indeed, any community larger than a small village – is produced. Anderson stresses that 'imaginary communities' are not fake or false, but that the "horizontal comradeship" they promise across all their members exists apart from any other real connections between these members (7). That is, nations (and other identities) are 'imagined' because they are produced at the level of ideology, through a variety of means (Anderson is partial to the mass media). To put it into Foucauldian terms, communities such as nations are produced by the very discourses that purport to describe and delineate them.

ethnogenesis[11] as dragons and ogres and hermaphrodites with whom they often share the same pages (3-4).

The ironic nature of the deployment of monsters in medieval English texts is not lost on Cohen, who notes that "[u]ncertainties about the coherence and continuity of identity are allayed by embodying difference in exorbitant forms, in barbarians or monsters who are imagined to imperil community – but who in fact catalyze community by circumscribing its contours" (12). Thus, in much the same way that monsters helped to marshal in the discourses of natural history, they also served as the impetus for nationalistic and ethnic discourses as well. Moreover, as Cohen indicates, this sort of monstrous Other serves as the repository for everything that is discursively removed from the communal identity. Identity, Cohen notes (following Butler and others)[12] is iterative and performative and must be corroborated through repetition and citation. That is, identity is built at the interface of discursivity and embodiment through a continuous process of self-referential (re)iteration – what Cohen calls "bodily praxis" (13). This obsession with embodiment as the proof of performative identity goes a long in explaining why the monstrous (from Grendel to the Saracen of medieval English writings) is depicted as presenting such starkly differential (and polymorphously perverse) physicality.

By way of example, Cohen reports on a case from 1230 involving a young boy whose experiences rattled the delicate and iterative nature of identity in medieval England.

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[11] "Ethnogenesis" refers to the often rapid coalescence of the sense of ethnic or national identity, particularly in situations of intercultural contact. Cohen borrows this term from Walter Pohl, particularly from the collection that Pohl edited, titled *Strategies of Distinction* (1998). See especially his essay "Telling the Difference: Signs of Ethnic Identity."

[12] Judith Butler is perhaps most closely associated with the idea of identity as performative and iterative, particularly in relation to gender and sexual identities (*Gender Trouble*, 1990), though a number of folklorists and anthropologists have also explored the highly performative nature of identity and culture. Some notable examples include: Gregory Bateson (1955), Erving Goffman (1974), Richard Bauman (1975), Victor Turner (1982 and 1986), and Richard Schechner (1998 and 1993).

Found wandering alone by a river in Norwich, East Anglia, the five-year-old tearfully informs

the woman who discovers him that he is a Jew. Some Jewish men came to claim him (they

call him Jurnepin), but the woman will not relinquish him, and the men go to seek a

magistrate. In the mean time, a Christian man who claims to be the boy's father shows up

after another woman finds that she recognizes the boy and summons him. He calls the boy

Odard, and the boy agrees that Benedict, the Christian man, is indeed his father. The case

grows into a legal behemoth, lurching forward and then bouncing back, and moving from

one realm of the law – local, royal, ecclestiastical – to another. As the evidence unfolds,

several allegations come to the fore. On the one hand, Benedict was alleged to be a

converted Jew, and the men who may have abducted and circumcised his son were

accused of trying to steal the boy back from Christianity. On the other hand, a debate

raged about the power of the consanguineous flow of Jewish blood in the boy's veins

versus the power of the blood of Christ to overcome the Jewishness of his father (14-5).

Did the act of circumcision, by its spilling of (Jewish?) blood, undo the conversion? Did the

spilling of blood on the part of the condemned Jews who were hanged as a result of the

investigation restore the Christian hegemony of the community? These questions and their

"potential irresolvability" reveal, as Cohen notes, the complicated relationships between

identity and embodiment in medieval Britain (15). They also reveal the insubstantial and

porous boundaries between the community and its Others, a situation that propels the

terrifying character of both the Other and the monstrous.

    For Cohen, such scenarios represent the "crisis of community" that impelled the

production of diverse monsters in the collective imagination of medieval Britain (41).

Numerous other scholars of medieval European literature and culture concur with at least

the main theoretical orientation of Cohen's study. Bildhauer and Mills (2003) contend that monsters in the medieval period helped to distinguish 'bodies that matter'[13] from those that do not, as well as delineating divisions of physical and other kinds of space, and units of time. In a sense, then, medieval monsters represent "an early colonialist mentality, a blueprint for the systematic creation of distinctions between territories, nations, and peoples" (8). Moreover, the authors maintain that, given the reception of medieval notions of the monstrous in later periods, the Middle Ages *themselves* have become a monstrous Other and have, like the Orient in Said's Orientalism, been deployed in the service of constructing modernity to such an extent that they are now largely understood more as modernity's Other than in their own right.[14]

Other essays in the same volume as the Bildhauer and Mills introduction offer similar observations. Samanatha J.E. Riches, for example, discusses evidence that the dragons and other monsters that inevitably confronted medieval saints "often operated as metaphors of pre-Christian and heterodox beliefs, symbolized lust or other forms of sinfulness, functioned as representatives of generalized evil and also acted as a useful foil to ideas of human civilization" (198). Similarly, Deborah Youngs and Simon Harris discuss the medieval representation of the night as monstrous – both as the harbor of monsters that would dare not show their faces in the light of day, and in its own right, as a

[13] Bildhauer and Mills here reference Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter* (1993), a further elaboration of her theoretical work in *Gender Trouble* that expands on the notion of identity as performative, particularly focused on clearing up misreadings of *Gender Trouble* in which gender identity was viewed as a completely personal choice, with any number of possible performances open to each social actor. Butler stresses, in *Bodies That Matter*, that performance is constrained by iterability (discursive possibility), even though the repetition that performance requires opens a space for the gradual transformation of identity.

[14] In *Orientalism* (1978), Said argues that the Orient, as it is understood in an array of western discourses (e.g., backward, wrapped in mysticism, dominated by an effeminate modality), serves the primary purpose of constructing the Occident as the center of rationalistic, modern values and practices. Thus, Said maintains, 'the Orient' as it appears in western discourses tells us more about the Occident (and its cultural construction) than about any 'real' peoples, cultures, or customs of the geographical areas that the term 'the Orient' purportedly represents.

manifestation of the spiritual battle between the forces of light (God, Heaven, the angelic)

and the forces of darkness (Satan and his minions). However, Youngs and Harris also note

that the nighttime facilitated the possibilities of rebellious and revolutionary acts (mainly on

the part of men) and so was doubly envisioned as a time of evil and a time of possibility and

freedom – a kind of double nature not unlike that of the monstrous Other as deployed in

postmodern literature.

Double natures and hybridism are also the central subjects of Erika Hess' *Literary*

Hybrids (2004), in which the author examines the role of hybridities – particularly cross-

dressing and shapeshifting – in medieval and modern French literature. For Hess, the

monstrous Other is often laden with "portentous symbolic freight," such that "we can

assert generally that hybridism and monstrous deformation draw into question at the most

basic level the philosophical assumptions that underlie the system of categories and

hierarchies through which we order our universe" (155). Echoing Foucault's observations

about the monstrous as that which can undermine order, Hess also clarifies that this role of

the monstrous Other was more dramatic in the medieval period, before the scientific and

rationalistic trajectories of modernity turned monsters into curiosities and cultural relics (or

the proper object of only the Romantic writers). However, Hess also notes that, in recent

decades, a resurgence of interest in the monstrous (i.e., in academia) has reinvoked a

medieval sense of the radical possibilities that the monstrous embodies, especially in its

ability to pose a direct challenge to the metanarratives of progress and determinacy.

For John Block Friedman, whose monograph The *Monstrous Races in Medieval Art*

and Thought (1981) focuses on both written and graphic representations of the monstrous

in the medieval period, it is particularly the metanarratives of normalcy and ethnocentrism

that medieval monsters challenged. Given that the monsters of medieval maps occupied the peripheral areas, devoid of human civilization (at least, from a medieval, western perspective), the monstrous represented geographical marginality and obscurity. More than that, though, the monstrous Other represented marginality as a condition or experiential state, since the monstrous was located not just in the wilds but outside the 'normal' terrain of human experience. Furthermore, the existence of 'monstrous races' created an ethical dilemma for the Christian west, since representations of the Other as monstrous underscored a deep ambivalence about the relationship between deviance from the norm, on the one hand, and the kinds of evolutionism that held open a place for all creatures in God's creation, no matter how 'deformed.'

A number of authors also focus this sort of critical attention on the role of Saracens[15] in medieval thought. Siobhan Bly Calkin (2005), for example, argues that the Orientalist concept of 'Saracens' was instrumental in the construction of late medieval English identity as a national identity. Calkin focuses particularly on the Auchinleck manuscript, a collection of religious tales (hagiographic and otherwise), humorous stories, satire, poetry, and a list of Norman Barons that is housed in the National Library of Scotland. As Calkin demonstrates, the diverse assortment of Saracens included in the manuscript uncovers the various projects of identity-formation that the manuscript advances. In some cases, the Saracens are the residents of the Middle East and North Africa and represent the similitude of national and religious identities in fourteenth-century England, gesturing toward the Crusades. At other times, Saracens appear in narratives that

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[15] "Saracen" is derived from classical Greek and Latin words that meant "Arab," though the term came to serve as a collective noun for Turks, Muslims, and Arabs in the Middle Ages (Calkin 2).

take place on English soil, and the threat is closer to home. In all cases, though, the Saracens included in the manuscript's writings "demonstrate the various ways in which figures of religious alterity offer crucial insights into cultural and political debates in which their audiences are directly engaged," chiefly, the formation of a coherent 'English' identity (211).

In a volume that focuses on medieval artistic representations of Saracens and Jews in relation to representations of demons, Debra Higgs Strickland (2003) notes that the use of exaggerated physical features was prevalent in both types of representation. In particular, the prevalence in both forms of representation of imagery such as dark skin tones, deformed limbs, animalistic hybridities, and garish facial features makes it difficult, in some senses, to distinguish images of Jews and Saracens from images of demons and devils. For Strickland, these resemblances are deliberate, since both forms of imagery served primarily as foils for the western, Christian subject for whom such imagery was created. Again, we see in Strickland's treatment the Orientalist thematic of using a misshapen representation of the Other in order to secure the identity of the 'self.'

This thematic is also prevalent in Jacqueline de Weever's treatment (1998) of the representation of Saracen women – particularly the Saracen princess – in medieval French epics. De Weever is particularly irked by the fact that, in the large number of epics she surveys, the majority of the Saracen princesses are represented as having white skin and other traits associated with beauty in contemporaneous European women. Not surprisingly, these lighter-skinned princesses assume the role of heroine and typically aid the French hero in his quest, while the darker-skinned Saracen princesses typically deceive the hero and remain loyal to their own families and cultures. De Weever is troubled by the

way that the 'whitewashing' of the Saracen princess makes such characters morally ambivalent, at once supportive of the brave, Christian hero and "reprehensible" for their betrayal of their own families (a cardinal sin for an unmarried woman) (9). Nevertheless, de Weever's argument demonstrates how the use of the lighter-skinned Saracen princesses comments on the alterity of the Saracen peoples while also, ultimately, bolstering the values of a Christian and male-dominated French culture.

In his monograph *Deformed Discourse* (1996), David Williams take a more sweeping and rather more philosophical view of the role of the monster in medieval life. Williams focuses on what he calls the 'metalangauge' of the medieval period, a notion of language in medieval Christendom that held the (postmodern-sounding) view that there is always something supplemental to language, something that escapes its confines. Unlike the assumptions of subsequent periods (namely, the early modern and modern periods) that human intellect could master the entirety of existence and comprehend it fully, medieval thinkers, in Williams' view, knew that language was highly symbolic and, therefore, subject to degrees of inaccuracy and slippage. For, "[j]ust as the Word-made-flesh was conceived as a kind of supreme marvel, so language, the science derived from Him, retained something of the same monstrous dimensions in its own double nature, which consisted of immaterial meaning incarnated in sensuous sound" (9). This 'double nature' of language was important in the medieval view since it allowed for an elevation of the faithful beyond the limitations of the physical world:

> Stepping outside language in the direction of metalanguage is made possible through the poetic construction of the paradoxes, ambiguities, grotesqueries, and monstrosities of mediaeval art and legend, which sufficiently transgress the normal process of signification and deform normal representation so as to urge the mind

> beyond its limitations, not by reducing the object of its understanding but . . . by liberating it from its own ascendency. (331)

For Williams, then, the function of the monstrous in medieval thought is revealed in its ability to help the scholar escape the simple signifying assumption of language, applying a surprisingly postmodern (if religiously construed) sensibility to the nature of rhetoric in order to elevate the experience of Man beyond the simple perception of objects in (im)material reality.

As this brief survey of scholarship on the monstrous Other in medieval writings, art, and philosophy demonstrates, medieval monsters provided the counterpoint for the project of creating national and other identities defining the normal, and exalting the general condition of humanity.[16] Often as not, these monsters embodied religious, cultural, and other forms of alterity, helping to produce cultural and ideological coherence by providing an example of the dangers of their absence. Medieval monsters demarcated the normal, encircling the edges of the known world and occupying the gaps in its logic, knowledge, and experiential record. At times, these monstrous Others traveled close to the heart of medieval civilization and threatened the social order with an often tantalizing spatial and cultural hybridity. Ultimately, though, even the Jew or Saracen or dragon found in the very streets of medieval western civilization were enlisted (often violently and without their consent) in the multifarious projects of building western hegemonies, from the nationalistic to the religious.

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[16] For additional examples, see: Borsje (2001); Bovey (2002); Classen (1998); Cohen ("Limits," 1994); Cohen ("Order," 1998); Flood (1998); Gregg (1997); Hubble (2004); Jongen (1997); Minard (2007); Mittman (2006); Riches ("Virtue," 2008); Wilson (1993)

The Monster in Modernity

The mid-nineteenth century, in some ways reflective of Cohen's medieval England, was a time of rapid social change and high levels of intercultural contact and mobility. The forces of industrialization, urbanization and the push/pull of the colony-metropole dynamic brought about unprecedented levels of migration, intercultural exchange, and new challenges to the hegemonies of Western Europe and the europhilic societies in Oceania and the Americas. The first really broad rumblings of anti-colonial revolution were heard from assorted parts of the globe, and the socioeconomic world order predicated on conditions of colonization, slavery, and exploitation of the urban working class was beginning to show some stress faults. At the height of this tumultuous period, British authorities mounted the 1851 Exhibition, a seemingly international exhibition that "actually showcased British technological superiority and British values" (Thomas 898). In a part of the exhibition known as Works and Industry of All Nations, exhibition organizers staged individual exhibits for various cultures – all presented from a highly ethnocentric perspective. Tensions ran high, as Londoners feared that the huge crowds of international visitors to the Exhibition might bring crime, disruption and disease (Thomas 898).

Then, in 1854, the Crystal Palace, which had originally opened in the London suburb of Syndenham as part of the Exhibition, was re-opened to the public with a motley collection of semi-permanent exhibits. Among these was the Ninevah Court, which showcased the work of archaeologist Austin Henry Layard, who had made two 'successful' expeditions to the ancient Assyrian city of Ninevah. The Court consisted of a reconstructed Assyrian palace prepared by a master architect and under the supervision of Layard himself, nestled into the northwest corner of a vast glass greenhouse that provided a significant

recontextualization of the structure, given its desert origins. The Court's presence in the

Crystal Palace served clearly pedagogic purposes, demonstrating, along with other, similar

exhibits, the history of fine architecture as well as the demise of decadent and immoral

civilizations. As Deborah Thomas (2008) notes in an essay on the monstrous in the

Victorian period and the first part of the twentieth century, the giant statues of human-

headed, winged lions that flanked the entrance to the Ninevah Court became celebrated

symbols of both human ingenuity and cultural Otherness. For, while British visitors could

perceive "a kinship between themselves and the ancient Assyrians," the giant sculptures

were also "intrinsically alien and other" (899-900). The exhibit was intended to invoke

both identification and disidentification, making it a representative example of the

monstrous Other under conditions of modernity.

Thomas goes on to note that Layard himself wrote the handbook for the Ninevah

Court exhibit, and that he repeatedly refers to the two statues as 'monsters' throughout

this visitor's pamphlet. This representation, clearly intended for a mass audience and

perhaps thought by Layard to be more in sync with popular reception of the statues, stands

in sharp contrast to Layard's scholarly writings about the statues (and others like them), in

which he never refers to such works as 'monsters' or 'monstrous' (Thomas 899). At first,

the 'monsters' from Ninevah made for an exhibitionary spectacle, bringing the utterly

foreign and monstrously hybrid into ready contact with large numbers of everyday people.

By the 1860's, the figure had worked its way into children's literature, including the

illustrations in an edition of *Alice in Wonderland*, bringing the tremendous monuments

down to the scale of everyday life, and rendering their once-ominous and forboding

qualities harmless – at least, as harmless as child's play. This domestication of the Assyrian

'monsters' did not completely divest them of their didactic qualities, but it did create

enough familiarity with the image to remove its most sinister (foreign) connotations and

place it safely in the vast pantheon of western(ized) folkloric and legendary figures.

A similar domestication may be found in Stith Thompson's multi-volume *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (1955-8), still the definitive volume of its type, which records well over 150

unique motifs that address the monstrous Other across a vast diversity of folktales and

literary traditions. These motifs appear in every volume and in every section of the work,

from "Magic" to "The Dead" to "Reversal of Fortune" and beyond – demonstrating the

immense expanses of the folkloric imagination that are cultivated by monsters and hybrids.

The following is just a brief sampling of the motifs that address the monstrous Other:

A1141.1	Earthquakes from movement of subterranean monster
A1070.1	Birth of monsters as sign at end of world
B15.1.2	Many-headed animal [with 23 submotifs]
C281	Tabu: drinking without presence of dead heads
D55.2.2	Devil (troll) makes self small
D318.1	Transformation: monkey to person
D741	Disenchantment of monster when prince promises to marry the monster's mother
E612.12	Reincarnation as monkey
E652	God reincarnated as monster
F511.0.1.1	Headless person with eyes (eye) and mouth on breast
F721.2.2	Monster guards door of habitable hill
F969.4.2	Fight with monster child causes earth to rock like waves of the sea
G346.3.1	Amphibious tree-destroying monsters
G635.1	Monster's returning head. Joins body after it has been severed
H335.3.7.	Suitor task: to kill other monsters
H516	Test: guessing trolls' names in order to save one's life[17]

As even this abbreviated listing demonstrates, the monstrous Other (and monstrous

events) are prevalent across the full spectrum of folktales and related genres and assume a

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[17] These representative examples come from the first three volumes of Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* (1955-8), which, taken together, cover index sections A through H. The examples chosen are randomly selected from among the many dozens of entries that have to do with monstrous Others and are listed here in order of occurrence in the index.

multiplicity of forms. However, Thompson's attempt at cataloguing the entire record of folk-motifs takes an uncritically synchronic approach, offering us a cross-section of the motifs operative in specific tales available (either in circulation in the 1950s or in existing print collections and, therefore, already frozen-in-time) at the time that he created his index. Such an approach fails to account for what Foucault would call the genealogies of particular motifs, such as the Assyrian 'monster' mentioned above.

Another such example is the ghoul, a monstrous creature that appears in a wide variety of recent and contemporary media, from the novels of fantasy author Laura K. Hamilton[18] and the series of novels on which the popular HBO series *True Blood* is based, to a variety of video games, comic books, and other media. These contemporary portrayals of the ghoul, though, are generally quite removed from the monster's origins in the ancient Arab world. As Ahmed Al-Rawi indicates in his recent article (2009) on the philological tradition of ghoul (from the Arabic verb "ghāl," meaning "to kill"), the folklore of the ghoul has been altered significantly at the hands of western writers (292). Beginning in the early 1700s, when French writer Antoine Galland translated the *Arabian Nights* into a twelve-volume French edition, western storytellers and even scholars have reshaped the tradition of the creature, adding, for example, the notion that the ghoul might dig up a grave in order to feed on the corpse (a conflation of the ghoul with the traditional figure of the goblin). The ghoul of ancient and medieval Arabic antiquity, by way of contrast, has a hybrid physicality, often bearing the feet of an animal species (of one foot each from two different species), and sometimes other bestial traits. These creatures typically were

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[18] In Laura K. Hamilton's novel *The Laughing Corpse* (1994), ghouls take center stage as a witch who practices *santaria* (a syncretic religion of Caribbean and African origins) transforms a ghoul into a sentient super-ghoul who becomes a marauding murderer. Hamilton's running main character and hunter of wayward supernatural beings, Anita Blake, must pursue and dispense with this new threat.

represented as devilish in nature, sometimes a subspecies of Djinn (genie), and sometimes belonging to their own genus. Always 'ugly' in appearance, both by virtue of their black-grey, corpse-like skin and their hybrid forms, ghouls could also take the appearance of beautiful (or familiar) people and were most well-known for luring travelers away from their route (and from civilization), generally leading them to their deaths in the wastelands (292-4).

After entering the western imagination via Galland's translation, the ghoul was further transformed in the writings of a number of English and Irish authors, including Thomas Moore, William Ernest Henley, Charles Dickens, and Elizabeth Gaskell, among others. In these authors' reconfigurations of the ghoul, it becomes the consort of an evil enchantress named Amina – who, incidentally, was also significantly transformed in these narratives, when compared to her origins in the *Arabian Nights*. The focus shifts, to a great extent, from the ghoul itself to the Orientalist *femme fatale* character of Amina, a witch who uses the ghoul to carry out her bidding, and who eats her rice one grain at a time, being so full from the previous night's gorging, together with the ghoul, on the flesh of the dead. These representations pair demonic forms of monstrousness with an evil character whose gender and sexual identities exceed all respectable boundaries, resulting in a shocking alliance between excessive and murderous femininity and bestial, malevolent monsters (Al-Rawi 300-2).

This theme carries through most subsequent representations of the ghoul, including the deformed creature who feasts on the flesh of dead soldiers in the graphic novel (Frank Miller, 1999) and, later, the film version of *300* (directed by Zack Snyder, 2007). In the film version, in particular, the minions of the Persian god-king Xerxes include an array

of monstrous creatures intermingling (and, in some cases, engaging in sexual intercourse with) all manner of effeminate, deviant and queer characters. Indeed, the character of Xerxes himself is presented as a formidable force but also one that is gender-variant, guileful, and monstrous (in size as well as a striking amorality). In many respects, this western usurpation of the figure of the ghoul mirrors the ways that the recontextualization of the Assyrian statues in the Crystal Palace served the projects of asserting western superiority in the face of numerous intercultural challenges. Indeed, the Spartan protagonists of 300 present a stalwart, highly rational, ultramasculine version of western polity and culture that is juxtaposed, in stark contrast, to the polyglot, heterogeneous peoples -- including a postmodern rendering of the Saracens – under the command of Xerxes. While medieval monsters may have helped to construct national, religious and other forms of identity, the polymorphously hybrid monsters of the modern period justify the ongoing hegemony of western cultural norms in the face of a multiplicity of new challenge(r)s.

Similar kinds of re-inscription and redeployment may also be seen in the travels of the wild man motif. Dorothy Yamamoto (2000) discusses the motif's role in the Middle Ages, focusing on the wild man's body and identity. Of the former, she notes that it "is basically a human body which has been overwritten with animal characteristics," most notably, excessive hairiness (145). Yet this particular hybridity served, according to Yamamoto, different purposes from those of the Saracens, the barbarians or the monsters proper. Rather than operating primarily as a counterpoint against which hegemonic identities could be constructed – as was the case for so many other monstrous identities of the time – the wild man was more 'purely' hybrid, a true blending of the familiar and the

foreign. Geographically imagined as inhabiting the literal outskirts of European civilization, the wild man was never too far from the center of everyday experience and, thus, was more internal to hegemonic identities than many other medieval monsters. Likewise, his habitat – the forests, mountains and wildernesses that flanked the edges of the known and settled areas of Europe – were not entirely unknown to the peoples of medieval Europe, though these were areas not yet cultivated, settled and 'tamed.' These observations lead Yamamoto to an interesting and important supposition about the 'wild': the wild is not what is beyond the scope of human activity but merely what populates its most immediate edges. The wild man, then, is the monstrous Other within, the dark side of civilized Europeanness.

Because of this special positioning of the wild man and his habitat, both the figure and his environs are capable of providing a rich and diverse reservoir of connotations, comparisons and minutiae for a range of cultural projects, from buttressing notions of civilized life and behavior to providing a model for unbridled sexual libido (Yamamoto 148-68). Furthermore, the wild man frequently serves, in courtly writings, as a representation of the baser side of humanity (again, this trait is here construed as an aspect of everyday Europeans' character, not as an absolute Other like the Saracens). Indeed, in the numerous literary battles between knights and wild men, the imagery of the coarse, bestial nature of man waging battle against the highest forms of chivalry and self-sacrifice is quite consciously deployed (169-70).

Over time, however, the wild man would take on an assortment of other guises. As Roger Bartra argues in *The Artificial Savage* (1997), the wild man was gradually transformed and enlisted in a variety of other projects. One such project was that of the 'noble savage,'

the idyllic Other who lived in a natural state and was, as Bartra points out, free of original

sin but also ignorant of the moral and spiritual principles believed necessary for salvation of

the soul. This wild man is an innocent sinner, another variation of the embodiment of

liminality (44-45). This particular project was necessitated by the cultural tectonics of the

Enlightenment, which required that the wild man, much like Mary Shelley's creature in

Frankenstein (1817), serve as both a commentary on the vagaries of civilized life

(representing a way of life that was simpler and, therefore, less prone to decadence) and as

a model of humanity in a state of ignorance and amorality. Not coincidentally, this

particular incarnation of the wild man was closely allied with a host of colonial projects,

which deployed similar notions of the noble savage (think of Caliban) in order to justify

European economic and political expansion and cultural domination. Bartra has argued

elsewhere (*Wild Men* 1994) that the structure of a myth tends to remain intact across

epistemic shifts, and that the meanings associated with the substance of a myth exhibit an

astonishing degree of elasticity, such that "certain facets of a myth, often marginal ones,

adapt to the new conditions" and the myth survives, repurposed for the endeavors of a

new age (*Artificial* 46). This 'plastic' nature of the wild man motif accommodated its

transformation from a dangerous, liminal figure haunting the edges of medieval European

settlements to an almost respectable, 'noble savage' figure that was not a participant in the

scientific and commercial projects of the Enlightenment. In fact, Bartra's observation may

also be applied to the monstrous Other in general, since the monstrous has also adapted to

the specific exigencies of numerous cultural moments, including our own.

Both the concept of the wild man, in particular, and that of the monstrous Other in

general have made their contributions to the colonial projects of what we now call the

western (or northern) countries, and both Bartra and Raymond Corbey (2005) point out how the motifs have persisted well into the twentieth century in ethnological and anthropological scholarship and other cultural sites. In fact, Corbey also notes how the idea of the wild man greatly influenced the first scientific inquiries (i.e., in Europe) into the behaviors and social patterns of multiple large primate species, whose members in many ways resemble the wild man (42-3). For Bartra, though, the focus is closer to home. Among other contemporary manifestations of the motif, Bartra mentions the Iron John movement, in which North American men attend gatherings in wilderness areas and attempt to manifest their – we might say – inner wild men. Bartra is quick to point out that the Iron John practices are based on multiple misunderstandings of the wild man tradition, but he also sees in this living example yet another retooling of the wild man motif for particular sociocultural purposes (*Artificial* 19-21). The motif is as alive as ever.

The wild men of the three novels under consideration in this study – Grendel and a mismatched pair of trolls – are exemplars of yet another plastic surgery on the part of the wild man motif. In the postmodern moment, metafictive characters that draw their Otherness from the vast archives of the wild man motif return (again and again) to the village, meadhall or city and stake their claim to a seat at the table of humanity and, when these claims fail to succeed (fully), monstrous events unfold. The variations in these three novels lead to differential treatments of the topic, but the common traffic toward social upheaval is unmistakable. Under conditions of postmodernity, the wild man returns to the heart of civilization, posing an epistemological and ontological challenge for the hegemonic and positivistic self that westerners have inherited from the (European) past. And, unlike their carefully contained and (literally) marginalized medieval and modern counterparts,

these postmodern wild men are the harbingers of a more lasting destabilization of

Cartesian order. Given their audacious insistence on being more-human-than-human, these

wild men turn our critical gaze toward the Other within.[19]

The Monster With/In: Teratology, Intersexuality and the Inward-Facing Demise of Identity

Of course, the wild man is not the only monstrous hybrid that threatens identity from

within. Although such monstrous Others as Saracens, dragons, ghouls and werewolves

have populated the contours of the imagination for centuries, there has been – particularly

since the Enlightenment – a constant disquiet in the consecrated halls of natural history,

biology and embryology. For, despite the apparently expansive and totalizing character of

hegemonic discursivities such as positivism, there has always been a recalcitrant

undercurrent to embodiment itself. There have always been bodies and experiences that

fail to conform to the narrow confines of identity and ideology. Even in the Age of Reason,

the kind of monstrous births discussed by Paré (and generations of his predecessors)

continued to occur. Moreover, as a Foucauldian analysis makes clear, ancient ideas about

the monstrous continue into the contemporary moment, confounding any fully rational

response to these anomalous births – what we now typically call 'birth defects' or

'deformities' or, more politically correctly, 'disabilities' or 'congenital conditions.' Politically

correct or not, though, reactions to the sometimes surprising diversity of life cannot be

completely divested of their discursive genealogies. Indeed, the events themselves seem

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[19] For additional discussions of the wild man motif, see: Barton (1996); Forth (2007); Hutchinson (1997); Kinser (1995); Kulisz (1997); Schwam-Baird (2002); Slavin (2007); and Stróbl (2008).

to threaten rationality and order, providing inexorable evidence that identity is not as firmly grounded in bodily reality as we have been taught to believe.

In the past few hundred years, the study of abnormal births has come to be known as teratology, literally, the study of monsters. Writing about teratology in 1907, Edwin Taylor Shelly lamented the fact that the most ancient and unscientific superstitions still beleaguered even the most scientific investigations of the topic. Positioning himself squarely within the bounds of rationality and a Cartesian positivism that views the body as but one more object to which the scientific mind can turn its presumably objective gaze, Shelly remarks that "[t]o the whims and caprices of gods of its own making has mankind too easily been lead in the past to attribute every misfortune and every unusual natural phenomenon" (418). Shelly proceeds to describe two main strands of irrational belief regarding teratology. The first is the ancient and medieval belief that monstrous births are portentous, that is, that they signify the wrath of deities or otherwise foretell of events to come. In fact, Shelly cites the practice of teratoscopy, practiced in Ninevah in 2000 BCE and involving the divination of future events performed by 'reading' the body and character of the newborn 'monster.' Shelly clearly describes such practices in so great of detail in order to dramatize their absurdity, from a modern (and, therefore, better informed) perspective. However, when he describes the second strand of irrational belief in relation to monstrous births – namely, the impression theory, which holds that a thousand different aspects of the mother's behavior while pregnant can determine the "tastes, disposition, character, physical development, and intellectual endowments of her unborn offspring," he is clearly distressed to report that it is often included as scientific fact in obstetric textbooks (418). Calling his fellow practitioners to action, Shelly admonishes that "no earnest member in our

ranks should hesitate to help with righteous zeal to dissipate this gross anachronism, this hideous specter of a cruel, barbarous, superstitious past" (418). For Shelly and others like him in the early days of professional teratology, there was a moral imperative to continue decontaminating teratological knowledge of the lingering impurities of thought found in ancient myths and medieval bestiaries.

This problem is endemic to scientific discourses, however. As Nelly Oudshoorn (1994) demonstrates in her treatment of the history of the science related to sex hormones, prescientific ideas are always operative within both the theory and practice of science. In the specific case of endocrinology, the chemicals 'discovered' in the twentieth century, which we now know as sex hormones, were not the origin of the notion that essences issued from the gonads shaped gendered experience and behavior; indeed, that notion goes back to classical antiquity at least (16-9). Oudshoorn carefully traces the genealogy of the contemporary understanding of sex hormones and reveals the myriad purposes to which the concept has been subjected. She is particularly interested in the uses of hormonal supplements, an example of scientific understanding that is, in part, imbued with prescientific notions being used to create technologies that are intended to intervene in bodily processes and alter people's experiences. For Oudshoorn – who acknowledges that there are a number of highly desirable uses for hormones – the situation calls for some careful scrutiny, since "we need to understand science and technology with all its [sic] tensions and ambiguities" (151).

Historian and sociologist of science Thomas Kuhn also highlighted the need to understand what scientific exploration is and how it operates. His midcentury monograph *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) provided a theretofore unprecedented

treatment of the *modus operandi* of science. In particular, Kuhn stressed that the popular conception of science as a neverending procession of great discoveries conflicts with the reality of day-to-day scientific practice, what Kuhn calls "normal science" or a "paradigm." He notes that, in order for a radical new discovery to be taken seriously by professional scientists requires a "shift of professional commitments" that is seldom achieved (6). Given the paradigmatic nature of scientific work, in which, as Kuhn notes, theory and practice are never separable (except in elementary science education), the pace of change is much slower than nonscientists might believe. Indeed, Kuhn's "normal science" is a quite conservative discursivity and one that is slow to abandon even those precepts that experience (or experiments) have already disproven.

Teratology is no exception. A little more than a hundred years after Shelly's article appeared, the field is still called 'the study of monsters' and, though the normal science of teratology is much more sophisticated, and the impression theory is now disguised behind the mask of teratogenesis (scientific understandings of how congenital conditions and deformations occur), the central tenets of a medieval worldview remain operative within teratology. Indeed, no amount of scientific understanding can quell how we react to bodies that appear to be far outside the norm, as "[r]eaction is primary" and cannot be filtered through reason (Starr 98). Nevertheless, teratologically focused obstetricians, gynecologists, researchers, clinicians, and medical humanists continue to expound the successes of their field. Harold Kalter, for example, published in 2003 a history of the past one hundred years of teratological research that praises the field's advances and urges scientists to continue unraveling the etiologies of additional forms of monstrous defects (from among the dozens that are known and documented). Kalter reminds readers both

inside and outside the profession of the same moral imperative so vividly exemplified by
Shelly a century earlier: disorder must be studied, explained, and 'treated' (eradicated) in
order to help ensure that everyone has a chance at a normal life. Indeed, it is hard to read
Kalter without seeing his point – even in the midst of writing a project like the present one.
After all, who wants children to suffer, either physically or socially, when both forms of
anguish might be preventable? So persuasive is this line of reasoning that we can almost
lose sight of the fact that not all forms of monstrous 'defect' are life-threatening or
medically emergent, and that, in fact, a good number of the treatments may be more
cosmetic than necessary.

Part of the sleight-of-hand by which biological variation becomes a medical
emergency is due to the degree to which we are all conditioned to trust scientific and
rational explanations and approaches – even to the disparagement of our own embodied
experiences. For, concomitant with the arrival of rationalistic discourses came the
disciplining and atomization of knowledge into an ever-growing range of specializations.
As Carrie Yang Costello argues in a 2006 article on the history of the obstetrical
specialization known as teratology, most of the articles that addressed monstrous births in
the early twentieth century did not address either etiology or treatment. Costello astutely
observes, however, that this dearth of writing on the causes and responses to unusual
births was not due to a lack of effective treatments (i.e., such as those we now have);
indeed, Costello condemns that argument as spurious, since the professionals of the time
did employ treatments that they considered state-of-the-art (regardless how we might
judge them now). Instead, Costello posits, the glut of early twentieth-century publications
on teratology served to help solidify the professionalization of obstetrics as a branch of

modern medicine (in Kuhnian terms, to 'normalize' the specialization). Moreover, this had,

as Costello notes, a lasting negative impact on the perception of and public response to

both unusual births and disability in general, medicalizing (and disembodying) such

experiences and resuscitating the ancient sense of monstrousness that is accorded to

individuals with disabilities (28). Ironically, the rational and medical approach espoused by

both Shelly and Kalter ultimately contributes to, rather than debunking, the most irrational

ways of viewing certain human experiences.

The same can be said for the experiences of individuals who are labeled 'intersex.'

Intersexuality may best be understood as a collection of various conditions in which some

aspect of an individual's anatomy – usually genitals or internal sex organs – is in some way

ambiguous or not aligned with standards of sex definition.[20] (One example is a child born

with both vaginal and penile structures, and a "fused" labia-scrotum.) Because of the

closed nature of the symbolic order (which is predicated on a two-sex system), intersexual

births are difficult to comprehend. Since the binary model of gender so completely

structures our fullest understanding of human subjectivity and the 'natural' world, the

usually simple (in both senses) initiation into the symbolic order contained in the

statements "It's a girl" and "It's a boy" is utterly incapacitated at an intersexual birth.

There are, then, two instances of sex assignment at birth. In the usual instance, sex

assignment takes but a few moments, since the birthing attendant merely examines the

genitals of the newborn to decide which sex predominates, and then quickly pronounces

the new person's role in the symbolic order as an 'obvious' fact. The less common instance,

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[20] My discussion of intersexuality here draws upon my previous treatment of the subject (Adkins, *Sentenced* 1999; Adkins, "Where 'Sex' Is Born(e)" 1999). In addition, my analysis draws upon the work of Suzanne J. Kessler in *Lessons from the Intersexed* (1998) and of Alice Domurat Dreger in *Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex* (1998).

however, of an intersexual birth greatly confounds the fundamental logic of the

heteropatriarchal order, since that order's presumption of two and only two sexes is its

foremost project and the one without which it cannot function. Throughout western

history, a variety of responses to the crisis of intersexuality have been employed to contain

its potential damage to the symbolic order. In the period beginning around the middle of

the twentieth century, 'corrective' surgeries have been the mainstay option for (literally

and figuratively) inscribing intersexuals into that order. This 'reconstructive' process is an

excellent example of what Foucault called "discipline."

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1977) characterizes disciplinarity as an atomizing

force:

> Instead of bending all its subjects into a single uniform mass, it separates, analyzes,
> differentiates, carries its procedures of decomposition to the point of necessary
> and sufficient single units. It "trains" the moving, confused, useless multitudes of
> bodies and forces into a multiplicity of individual elements—small, separate cells,
> organic autonomies, genetic identities and continuities, combinatory segments.
> Discipline "makes" individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards
> individuals both as objects and instruments of its exercise. (170)

Near the end of the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1978) expanded upon

his notion of disciplinarity with specific attention to the disciplining of 'sex':

> the notion of "sex" made it possible to group together, in an artificial unity,
> anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures, and
> it enabled one to make use of this fictitious unity as a causal principle, an
> omnipresent meaning, a secret to be discovered everywhere . . . (154)

'Sex,' then, does not correspond to any prelinguistic or precultural ontological presence,

but instead denotes a specific ordering of an infinite number of actual or potential

experiences, to the specific, political ends of the symbolic order. Foucault thus reverses the

seemingly obvious, received knowledge that sex is the natural identity-category to which

the cultural identity-categories gender and sexual orientation somehow correspond in some secondary or tertiary way. Instead, Foucault indicates that sexuality is primary, though no more 'natural' than any other socially prescribed identity. It is the regulation and disciplining of sexuality, then, that justifies and compels the heteropatriarchal symbolic order and the scientific and medical deployment and normalization of sex as 'natural.'

Compulsory heterosexuality becomes, in this formulation, the organizing principle of the symbolic order, including its prescribed sex and gender identity-categories. Sex, both as identity and experience, recedes into the background as an *effect* of the heteropatriarchal order – the normalizing grid in and through which people create sex – and not its organizing principle. In fact, the notion of the difference between female and male is naturalized precisely so the symbolic order appears to rest upon obvious, extrasocially compelled kinds of differences. Maintaining heterosexual primacy as 'natural,' then, is the *raison d'être* of such identity-categories as sexual orientation, gender, and sex. Fortunately, the hegemony of the heterosexual matrix is incomplete, as the mere existence of intersexuals suggests, and their ongoing, subjective experiences of ambiguous sex, gender, and sexual orientation – even after 'corrective' surgery – confirm.

Of course, the addition of an identity-category like intersexual or hermaphrodite to the possibilities for biological sex is not sufficient to escape the heteropatriarchal logic of the symbolic order. As an intersex individual identified simply as David attests in the online publication *Hermaphrodites with Attitude* (1995):

> I have come only very slowly to an awareness of my intersexuality. . . . Yet once I started to accept this and *identify* with it, it became difficult for me to accept any other reality. My gender identity issue became an all-or-nothing proposition.

> Either I am 100% intersexed (whatever that is!), or I am not intersexed at all. But I now realize that this is just the dilemma that our culture puts us in when we establish the rigid either/or categories of male-or-female . . . (np, emphasis added)

David's first stage of challenging the either/or opposition of the symbolic order is to posit a new, equally exclusive category of "intersexual," but then he realizes that any such subject-position defined as not-Other fails to escape the limiting, lack-imposing logic of heteropatriarchy.[21] Like many other intersexuals (and non-intersexuals), David is not comfortable positioning his subjectivity in only one part of who he is or can be. He has no desire to stop thinking of himself as male and masculine (as subject), yet he wants to embrace his intersexual (ambiguous) and feminine aspects as well: "I am saying 'yes' to intersex, 'yes' to my masculinity, and 'yes' to the fluid and receptive femininity that has enriched my life with its non-linearity and intuition. And this has given me an ease and comfort that did not seem possible when I tried to deny any of these parts" (David np). Indeed, David's resistance to the symbolic order's requirement to present a single, unified subjectivity directly challenges the notion of static individuality, replacing it with a notion of a necessarily partial self not unlike that advanced by feminist scholars since the 1970s.

Marilyn Friedman (1991) calls this notion the "social conception of the self," in which an individual is actually a loose and dynamic collection of assorted "identity-constituents" that correspond to different aspects of the person's social positioning vis-à-vis other people and groups of people. A Black woman, to consider a very simplistic example, is at once Black and a woman and, because both gender and race are figured as inescapable aspects of identity in the symbolic order, she is always both Black and a woman

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[21] I am electing to use the male first-person subjective pronoun 'he' when referring to David, following his main way of identifying himself. This decision is, of course, more expedient than accurate, and somewhat adversative to the point at hand in this section. Nevertheless, David's identity remains problematic for the heteropatriarchal order.

at every moment. She cannot embody her racial identity at one moment to the exclusion of her gender (or sex) identity; thus, she is necessarily partial. In practice, this notion has implications complicated by identity-constituents far more numerous and particular than universals like gender and race. For intersexuals (and, indeed, all of us, to some extent), gender is itself a complex, conflationary grouping of multiple identity-constituents – a mishmash of partialities splitting the self almost infinitely. That our symbolic order continues to demand binarily delineated, gendered individuality from any of us in spite of our inherent partialities is a testament to the power of heteropatriarchy.

David's radical affirmation of his body and his lived experiences despite the countervailing social pressures provides a working model for challenging the symbolic order as it becomes less and less restricted by its heteropatriarchal history. People need to be able to experience their bodies, desires, and emotions in all their complex, contradictory partialities, without the condescending intervention of medicine and social constraints, and without the limitations of gender as we know them. Furthermore, David's stance is also a strong prototype for resistance to the forces that 'monsterize' individuals with unusual anatomy and treat them as Other. To some degree echoing the tortured philosophizing of Grendel in Gardner's novel, David resists the simplistic (and coercive) metanarratives of rationality and positivistic identity and asserts his right to rely on his embodied experience as the source of his gender experiences, rather than selecting one from a handful of prescribed and predetermined identities. His simple refusal to occupy the positionality of the monstrous Other, and his insistence on the legitimacy and inalienability of his experiences, constitute in him the kind of speaking monstrous Other that appears in the

three novels under review here – a kind of speaking that I will argue threatens the ongoing

tenability of the symbolic order as we know it.

CHAPTER III

THE MONSTER IN THE MACHINE

The monstrous Other is a creature of the symbolic order, which describes the entire

sociocultural structure in which we come to be speaking, acting, thinking subjects, enjoying

a degree of agency but only within the finite possibilities of the symbolic order itself. The

order is entirely discursive; nearly all contemporary scholars agree on this point, despite the

apparently untraversable divergences in their specific ideas about how discursivity works,

or in what ways the subject is constituted *as a subject*. Of course, most of the critics also

agree that, just because subjectivity is discursive in nature, does not imply that a subject

can simply employ discourse in any conceivable way, to achieve any imaginable result.

Subjects may be constantly (re)constituting discourses in their everyday uses of speech

acts, written language, and other forms of representation, but the symbolic order is always

already (re)constituting the subject as well. Just as there is no final way to capture and

contain the monstrous, there is no way to escape the symbolic order so long as we are

creatures for whom meaning is discursive.

In the past half-century, a variety of significant (post)structuralist methodologies

have evolved in various sites (geographic locations, particular journals, subdisciplines, etc.)

within the humanistic and social-scientific fields of inquiry, many of them focused on the

complex character of the relationship between the symbolic order and the individual

subject and, therefore, interdisciplinary to their cores. Neomarxist and other structuralist

approaches, for example, continue to employ assorted (somewhat wide-ranging) variations

of the Marxist notions of structure and superstructure. Poststructuralist approaches, and particularly those that follow Derridean notions of the radical arbitrariness of discourse (and of all representation) tend to focus on the gaps in meaning and in subjectivities, the failures of the symbolic order that reveal its fallibilities without signaling its demise. Multiculturalist approaches, including much of the work of critical race theory, feminism, and similar 'schools,' home in on the particular hierarchical, binaristic politics of the symbolic order as it is currently (and was recently) constituted. Performance theory uses the critical lens of performativity to describe both how subjects assume their 'roles' as subjects, and how the processes of the symbolic order are 'staged.' Performance theory focuses critical attention on the ways that performances 'fail' and that the mandatory, reiterative performativity of subjective identities is always slipping – much like the meanings in Derridean discourse analysis. Foucauldian theory takes up the notion that discursivity (the possibility of subjectivity, the symbolic order) precedes the subject, and that subjectivity therefore exists prior to any individual subject – a reversal of the commonsense understanding of social order (a reversal that mirrors Foucault's observations about the relationships between disciplinarity and discipline, and between sexuality and sex). As discussed in the previous chapter, the Foucauldian methodologies of archaeological and genealogical inquiry help scholars investigate the tendencies of various discourses to propagate certain forms of subjectivity, and to trace those tendencies across historical and cultural changes.

Finally, there are the two approaches that will be of central importance in this chapter as well as informing the analysis in the chapter to come. The first of these is psychoanalysis, which describes the primordially bifurcated or split nature of subjectivity,

and the subject's need of an object, an Other, against which to define its subjectivity. Although psychoanalytic theory grew out of the work of Freud, the generally acknowledged founder of its many contemporary strands is the eccentric French critic Jacques Lacan, whose writings – half governed by the strict logical processes of mathematics, and half filtered through the creative and highly subjective lenses of poetic language – are at once numinous and pragmatic.

The second key approach is queer theory, a methodology that grew out of early academic work in LGBT studies, eventually turning a critical gaze on the normalizing tendencies of subjectivity itself, which queer theorists view as both binary and hierarchical and, therefore, inherently heterosexist in its formulation (with a heteromasculinist subject-position and an always feminized and queered Other). For queer theorists, the normative is always suspect, and the ideal of resistance to the norm has been enshrined as a verb: to 'queer' anything – whether a reading of a particular representation, another theoretical approach, a discussion, a conference (or a non-academic event), or even the normative aspects of institutionalized LGBT studies – is to challenge the norms governing those things, interrogating them for their conservative and hegemonic politics, and insinuating into their discourses other possibilities that depart from the norms (much as queer identities depart from heterosexist norms). The counterhegemonic act of queering is the ultimate objective of queer-theoretical scholarship, which seeks to provide new possibilities for subjectivity and subject-positions.

But how do we become subjects in the first place? There are essentially two major premises that address this matter in contemporary theory. The first, interpellation, comes

from Louis Althusser, a French structuralist critic perhaps best known for his notion of

Ideological State Apparatuses.[1] His concept of interpellation is also in wide circulation,

however, including as an underlying principle in the writings of Slavoj Žižek. The classic and

often repeated metaphor for interpellation (provided by Althusser himself) is the moment

in which someone walking down the street hears someone else call, "Hey, you there!" The

person walking along then turns around and, in that moment of turning, becomes a

subject, since she recognizes (or assumes) that the hailing she heard was intended for her

and her alone. This utterance instantaneously calls the person who was, a moment before,

walking along alone, into a certain fully formed relationship with the one who called to

them, and it is a relationship structured by ideological exchange, in short, it is subjectivity.

Moreover, Althusser stresses the ideological nature of this hailing,[2] this interpellation into

subjectivity, noting that "what thus seems to take place outside ideology . . . in reality takes

place in ideology" so that "[w]hat really takes place in ideology seems therefore to take

place outside of it" (Althusser 163). According to Althusser, this is why we all tend to

believe ourselves (falsely) to be outside of ideology – almost always conceived of, in the

subjective conceit of independence, as the trap occupied by some other poor sap. In fact,

there is nothing outside ideology, in Althusser's formulation of subjectivity, which means

that *"individuals are always-already subjects"* (163, emphasis original). While this may seem

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[1] Ideological State Apparatuses (or ISAs) are "a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions" (Althusser1998). Althusser proceeds to name such examples as educational ISAs (system of public and private schools), family ISA, religious ISA (system of different religious institutions), etc. What distinguishes this concept from similar ones (e.g., Foucault's 'discourses') is that ISAs represent the infrastructure of ideology, conceived of as a vast network of power structures that mostly exist within the private domain. In other words, what at first appears to be diverse networks of ISAs, each with its own projects, all ISAs are ultimately united under the single ruling ideology of the current ruling class. ISAs are an excellent example of Althusser's unique blending of theories of capital and of subjectivity, which is pertinent to his notion of interpellation as well.

[2] Althusser takes a post-Marxist view of 'ideology,' understanding it not as 'false consciousness' (which would imply the presence of a 'real consciousness') but as all consciousness, which is inherently false, since any consciousness is subjective and is therefore always already imbued with the interpellating propensities of power.

counterintuitive, given the concept of interpellation, Althusser intends for interpellation to describe not a singular moment of becoming a subject, but the fact of our existence as subjects within ideological apparatuses that have a fully material existence, shaping not just ideas and conceptions but practices and modes of living (155-64). Interpellation is a hailing into subjectivity that has always already occurred (i.e., from the moment we enter the symbolic order), and which we cannot escape.

Interpellation is often confused (and at times used as if interchangeable) with the Foucauldian notion of subjectivation, which describes the process of becoming a subject as understood and used within Foucauldian theory. In particular, Foucault's version of the process of becoming a subject has to do with the ways that subjectivity is conditioned by disciplinary power, that is, by the forces that at once atomize and taxonomize individuated aspects of our experiences, bodies, and worlds, and then group them together to create 'fictitious unities' upon which subjectivity depends. An important aspect of disciplinary power after the Enlightenment is its internalization into the 'inside' of subjectivity, such that any given subject is conditioned to self-disciplining and a kind of internal surveillance by which social norms are enforced in the interior of subjectivity itself (i.e., rather than from some external authority, such as a political or religious authority) (Allen 2-16). In particular, "Foucault's genealogical works of the 1970s aim to show that disciplinary, normalizing relations of power form, for us, the 'without' from which the 'within' of the modern subject is constituted" (Allen 16).

In some ways, then, it is understandable that interpellation and subjectivation could be confused, since both notions of the conditions of the subject involve an understanding of the ways in which 'individual' subjects are constituted entirely within the reach of the

extant power structures in which their subjectivities arise, and by means internal to the

subject itself. Nevertheless, Althusserian interpellation emphasizes the ideological control

over subjectivity, while Foucauldian subjectivation emphasizes the disciplinary forces that

occasion subjectivity – a subtle but meaningful distinction. Still, the two concepts are not

mutually exclusive; in fact, the work of Žižek proceeds from the assumption that both

Althusser's and Foucault's observations are useful innovations in the Lacanian tradition of

subjectivity. For Žižek, subjectivity is a condition fraught with ethical and political

dilemmas, but also one that includes some promise of mitigating the lopsided distributions

of power in normative subject/object (Self/Other) relationships. Before we can fully engage

with Žižek's innovations, though, it is necessary to examine the key aspects of Lacanian

theory upon which his work builds, as well as some of the critical responses to Lacan – in

particular, some of the feminist responses.

Queering Subjectivity: Žižek, Cultural Studies and the End(s) of the Other

Žižek's prolific body of work pushes Lacanian theory toward the possibility of agency or

action that is not entirely overdetermined by the schism-producing propensities of

interpellation and subjectivation, while also keeping alive a sense of the awesome power of

the symbolic order. Žižek's influences are numerous and include such disparate sources as

German idealism, Foucauldian theory, the work of Althusser and of other (neo-)Marxists,

Maoism and, of course, Lacan. In fact, Žižek himself has written that "the core of [his]

entire work is to endeavor to use Lacan as a privileged intellectual tool to reactualize

German Idealism" (Žižek, "Preface" ix). For Žižek, the postmodern obsession with the

displacement of identity and of subjectivity is merely one manifestation of "the tacit

acceptance of global capitalism as 'the only game in town'" (ix). Therefore, Žižek is highly

critical of what he sees as a self-congratulating trend in postmodern scholarship that

assumes a cynical stance toward the 'truth' or the 'real.' While he concurs with the majority

of contemporary critics that there is no way to access whatever might be 'real' or 'true,' he

does not agree that the hermetically sealed character of subjectivity legitimates 'throwing

out the baby with the baby water.' Instead, in his view, such scholarly methodologies as

deconstruction and Habermasian approaches represent an uncritical stance that "rather

exhibits the unreadiness to come to terms with the truly traumatic core of the modern

subject" (ix), trading any hope of a critical examination of the processes of interpellation

and subjectivation for a project that indulges in a circular skepticism, which runs something

like this:

> *This representation claims to be true.*
> *Of course, we know that this claim to truth is false, as all representation is artifice.*
> *Knowing this, we are able to demonstrate how this representation is intended to affect us.*
> *To reveal how this representation intends to affect us is to represent the truth about this representation.*

For Žižek, this line of thinking proceeds as if subjectivity were *merely* a matter of

representation and not, as he avers, both the site of representation *and* the material effects

of its practices. In this way, Žižek (much like Foucault and Althusser[3]) seeks to straddle the

division between the materialism of Marxist and structuralist traditions and the idealism of

poststructuralist approaches – a project for which he relies heavily on the theoretical

contributions of Lacan (viii-x).

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[3] Foucault discusses 'biopower,' the ways in which discursivities shape biological realities by means of their material effects, as well as mechanisms of power in and through which such effects are controlled and disciplined (Foucault, *History* 140). Althusser discusses Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), described earlier.

There are a number of key Lacanian concepts and precepts of importance for Žižek, including: the paradoxical relationship between representation, which is our only means of accessing ourselves as subjects, and the Real[4] (including the 'real' person interpellated as the subject), which can never be fully represented and, thus, never accessed; the discursive nature of subjectivity and of any understanding of the body or other material things; the role of desire and the subjective necessity of the Other; the negative nature of identity (and its corollary, the impossibility of self-identity); and the melancholic attachment of the subject to its lack (that is, to the Other). Lacan's work provides a particularly useful reservoir of conceptual and theoretical grist for Žižek precisely because Žižek is, like Lacan, committed to a critical investigation of the necessarily fractured nature of subjectivity even while proposing ways to move the subject toward greater degrees of freedom from its predicament (i.e., for Lacan, melancholic attachment; for Žižek, political unawareness). In short, Žižek remains committed to the process of psychoanalysis as interpretation and 'treatment,'[5] and not just as a useful theoretical model.

In many ways, Lacan's understanding of subjectivity runs parallel to that of other theorists of representation and the representational nature of subjectivity. Like many of these other theorists, Lacan picks up the strands of linguistic theory from Ferdinand de Saussure and his successors, but Lacan differs from other theorists in two important ways: First, he views language as completely constitutive of all subjective knowledge, such that

[4] Lacan employed a three-category system involving the Real (the 'reality' that cannot be accessed because it exists only outside of language), the Symbolic (the realm of representation in and through which subjectivity is possible) and the Imaginary (the realm that interacts with the Symbolic and that governs the 'mirror stage' of identity development – the stage in which the child begins to create a divided and complex identity, named after the metaphor of self-recognition in a mirror) (Sarup 24-6).

[5] Neither Lacan nor Žižek take a clinical approach to 'treatment,' however, as both scholars are more interested in using psychoanalytic methodologies to treat social issues on a larger scale (Sarup 5-6; Johnson xiii-xvi).

"[t]*here is no subject independent of language*" (Sarup 10, emphasis original). Thus, he

differs from Saussure as well, since, for Lacan, there is no such thing as metalanguage; all

language is representation, including even language used to discuss subjectivity or to

engage in psychoanalysis. Second, Lacan maintains that every signifier always signifies yet

another signifier, such that "no word is free from metaphoricity" (10). This observation

implies that, not only are all the signs in a linguistic system entirely dependent on one

another, and on the differences between them, in order for their meaning to inhere; all the

siginifers are also dependent on one another throughout the system of signification. To the

extent, then, that the identity of any individual subject is itself a kind of complex signifier,

we can see that Lacan's position will include a notion of identity as a metaphor, as always

referring to something other than 'itself' (10-12). This is not to say, however, that identity is

not 'real,' since representations have very definite consequences; indeed, for Žižek, in

particular, these consequences are not only discursive, but material as well. Instead, the

metaphorical nature of identity reveals its negative property: identity, like other signifiers,

can only come to have meaning by way of contrast with and negation from other identities.

Or, to put it differently, the site of identity is not coincidental with subjectivity but arises,

instead, in the spaces between various differing subjectivities.[6] Thus, we *are,* in an

important sense, *not* ourselves. Lacan also made this point in his updating of the Cartesian

cogito from 'I think, therefore I am' to "I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do

not think" (Lacan 166). Moreover, Lacan's refocusing of subjectivity from a purely mental

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[6] Indeed, critics such as Homi Bhabha have elaborated on this observation extensively. In his landmark work *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha deploys the metaphor of the interstitial to describe the location in which cultural differences and, thus, differences in identities, arise. Using the imagery of the stairwell as a location situated between identities, Bhabha notes that "[t]he hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities" (4). Bhabha's theoretical elaboration of subjectivity emphasizes "the overlap and displacement of domains of difference," providing a metonymical model for the complex sites of subjective identification (2).

process to one propelled by interpellation, necessitated a further updating of the cogito's

emphasis on 'I think' to a new emphasis on 'I desire' (Roudinesco 56).

Desire is a structuring feature of Lacanian subjectivity, initiated during the mirror

stage, when the child both desires the mother and imagines itself to be desired by the

mother, to stand in for her lack (i.e., in Lacan, the lack of the phallus, which is the 'Law of

the Father'). Once the Oedipal crisis occurs, however, and the child enters the symbolic

order, desire loses its precise focus on the mother and becomes the desire to resolve one's

own lack, to reverse the irreversible splitting of the subject that is required for participation

in the symbolic order (splitting apart the 'real' self, the imaginary self, and the various

symbolic selves, or self-representations, used by any particular subject). Desire is also the

desire for the Other, since part of what constitutes the Self is negated and externalized in

the Other. Moreover, desire is directed at a need that can never be fulfilled, since the

subject's identity is entirely dependent upon the ongoing differentiation between the Self

and the Other. Ironically, this also means the subject will come to desire desire itself, since

desire will come to serve as a substitute for the thing desired.[7] Thus, the chain of subjective

desire looks something like this:

lack — the phallus — the Other — desire 'itself'

Because desire can never be fully satisfied, too, the subject develops an attachment to the

primordial loss it has suffered, the remains of which are externalized in the Other. Lacan

calls this the melancholic attachment (melancholic because it is an attachment to

something irretrievably lost). This melancholic attachment is often directed toward the

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[7] Indeed, it is precisely the attachment to desire itself that much of psychoanalysis seeks to uncover.

Other as well, since the Other contains all that the subject is not, and it is, therefore, the very site of what the subject lacks (Lacan; Sarup 20-6).

For Žižek, melancholy is not only a kind of faithfulness of the subject to the lost object (as in Lacan), but also "the attachment to the very originary gesture of its loss" (Žižek, "History" 660). Melancholy is the deeply rooted need for a central, foundational loss at the center of subjective identity, for a placeholder to fill the void that is the structuring principle of subjectivity. In this sense, melancholy is intricately interwoven into the fabric of subjective desire: the cause of desire is not the desired object, but the (imaginary) feature or trait on account of which the subject desires the object. Tellingly, one of Žižek's examples of melancholic attachment is homosexuality as a melancholic clinging ('arrested development') to a particular stage of sexual development. But, as Žižek notes, the notion of the homosexual subject's 'nostalgia' for a utopian state of pre- or non-heterosexual identity is not the issue so much as the use of this notion of arrested development for the ongoing maintenance of the fragile borders of heterosexist logic. Of course, for Žižek, this notion is not just an idea or a representation of the queer; it has material consequences in the lived experiences of those who identify as queer.

One of the primary ways in which the symbolic order has material effects is anamorphosis, the misrecognition of an object in such a way that the very material (lived) reality of the object is distorted and the subjective gaze is "inscribed into its objective features" (Žižek, "History" 659). By way of providing an example, Said's discussion of Orientalism and its effects is again useful here. Said notes that the powerful discursivity of Orientalism created, or 'Orientalized' the material realities of the peoples and geographies of what Europeans called the Orient. In this sense, the Orient is the anamorphic object of

Europe, literally embodying European desires and prerogatives. More importantly, though,

for Žižek, is that the void of desire is not only paradoxically emblematized in an

anamophosized object, but that the opposite paradox is also true: "this primordial void or

lack itself functions only insofar as it is embodied in a particular object; it is the object that

keeps the gap of desire open" (663). In other words, the gap of desire, the process of

objectification, requires that the subject come to rest upon (or against) a particular

anamorphosized object in order for the subject's subjectivity to remain closed, complete,

symptomatic. Anamorphosis is at work in the example of the monstrous Other, for

example, since the very body of the monster is, as Cohen indicates, inscribed with and

shaped by the subjective processes of the human subject. By analyzing the ways in which

particular monstrous Others embody the 'gap of desire' in human subjectivity, then, we can

uncover the symptomatic nature of the human and critically examine its non-neutral

boundaries, as well as their effects on lived experiences. In this way, Žižek's formulation of

the concept of anamorphosis provides us with a powerful tool with which to investigate

the coimbrication of discursivity and its material effects; it represents one of Žižek's most

productive elaborations of Lacanian theory.

In addition to Žižek's work, Lacan's theorizations of subjectivity and of desire have

been the ingress for a wide variety of critical applications and responses. Feminist scholars,

for example, have engaged in a longstanding love-hate relationship with Lacan, finding

incredible value, at times, in his description of the unmistakably gendered nature of

identity-formation (that is, the relationships between subjectivity and sexuality) as well as

his commentary on desire, but also lamenting his uncritical maintenance of Freud's

(hetero)sexist notions of the phallus and the Oedipus complex, and the elitism of his style

of writing (Luepnitz 221-2; Sarup 27). Still, as Deborah Luepnitz (2003) has argued, feminism

and Lacanian psychoanalysis 'need' each other, since psychoanalysis helps feminist critics

theorize subjectivity without resorting to a pure materialism, while feminism provides a

way to critique the misogynist underpinnings of psychoanalysis (234-5). Indeed, Luepnitz

summarizes the position of many feminists – both those who love to hate Lacan, and those

who hate to love him – when she states that "[w]e have reason to hope that provocative

contact between them will continue to enhance the powers of feminism and

psychoanalysis both to liberate, and to question" (235). Žižek is also interested in salvaging

the liberatory potential of Lacan's work, though his approach is more like what cultural-

studies scholar Rey Chow calls an 'interventionary tactic.'

In *Writing Diaspora* (1993), Rey Chow formulates a compelling indictment of

cultural-studies scholarship on China, noting in particular its inability to do more than define

and give value to the subjectivity of *scholars* of Chinese culture. At the crux of this

indictment is the (Freudian and Lacanian) notion of the symptom as it was re-worked by

Žižek in his 1990 essay on Roberto Rossellini's films. In Žižek's formulation, the symptom is

"a particular signifying formation which confers on the subject its very ontological

consistency, enabling it to structure its basic, constitutive relationship towards enjoyment

(*jouissance*) . . ." (Žižek, "Rossellini" 21, emphasis original). The symptom is, then, a

particular elaboration of the notion of the Other, with an emphasis on the psychological

dimensions of a subjectivity predicated on the existence of the Other and of that Other's

fundamental, irreconcilable *difference* from the subject. Thus, "'[w]oman is the symptom

of man' means that man himself exists only through woman qua his symptom: his very

ontological consistency depends on, is 'externalized' in, his symptom" (Žižek, "Rossellini" 21).

Chow makes interesting and provocative use of the concept of symptom, transposing it into her discussion of scholarship on China. The relationship is indicative of what Chow calls an "Oedipal structure of thinking" in which subjectivity is theorized as "compensation for a presumed lack" (Chow 31). 'China' is everything that the (western) sinologist can never be, the not-all, and, thus, the subjectivity of 'sinologist' is predicated upon an attempted compensation for that lack. Whatever form that lack is presumed to take, there is a corresponding form of compensation for sinologist-subjectivity: the form of romanticization of the Chinese 'native' or 'culture' (i.e., in contrast with the sinologist's – or her culture's – lack of 'authenticity' or 'nativeness'), or the form of a rescue of the Chinese native or culture from its lack (i.e., as non-western, voiceless object on behalf of which the sinologist can speak). Thus, scholarship on China is a closed symbolic field in which all potential approaches by (western)[8] sinologists must attempt to compensate for some immutable gap between sinologist-as-subject and China-as-object, if the possibility of *being* a sinologist is to persist. 'China,' in short, is the symptom of sinology (and of sinologists).

Chow's interventionary tactic, then, in the 'postcolonial debates' in cultural studies is significant in its insight into the symptomatic condition of cultural studies, namely, the condition in which any cultural-studies scholar must address the lack – the gap – between her subjective position as scholar of a particular culture and the (objectifying) position of that culture-object on which the scholar's subjectivity *as scholar* is predicated. This

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[8] Much of Chow's work in *Writing Diaspora* addresses the conundrums facing the displaced Chinese scholar of China who resides in and works from the west (i.e., and not just the western sinologist). Chow's treatment of the diasporic scholar is important but not of particular interest for me in this discussion, in which the general condition of cultural studies is the central concern.

condition is widely recognized and discussed in cultural-studies (anthropological, comparative-literature, folkloric, etc.) scholarship, conferences, and classrooms, and there are a variety of ways in which compensation is attempted, including: extensive language training in the culture's 'native' language, residence in the country or geographic area in which the culture originates (e.g., participant observation), and gestures of 'inclusiveness' and 'cultural sensitivity' that typically take the form of caveats strewn through the introductory remarks or footnotes of a paper or lecture, though greater collaborations exist.

Merely noting the presence of the lack, however, does not compensate for it. Indeed, as Lisa Freinkel notes, unveiling the symptomatic condition simply serves to perpetuate it by heightening the anxieties and neuroses that already serve to keep it in place.[9] Freinkel's temptation is to conclude that cultural studies is ineffectual, since any attempts to mitigate the (oppressive, colonial, sexist, etc.) functions of the symbolic order simply reinforce the *need* for that order. This is a profoundly pessimistic stance within the metatheory of cultural studies, as it abandons even the spirit of a progressive politics in favor of a less politically engaged scholarship that accepts its impotence to intervene in (the politics of) the symbolic order.

But Freinkel's position is not the only or necessary conclusion about cultural studies that can be drawn from an acknowledgment of its symptomatic condition. Instead, the growing revelation of the full extent of cultural-studies scholarship's symptomatic condition can lead to a quite opposite stance in which the closedness of the symbolic order

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[9] In a presentation to the "Introduction to Graduate Studies in Comparative Literature" course at the University of Oregon, on November 9, 2001, Freinkel discussed her understanding of Žižek's statement that an ideology succeeds when even the ideas that seem to contradict it serve as arguments in its support. It is Freinkel's reading of this statement of Žižek's, and not the statement itself, that interests me here.

is taken precisely as a given condition, that is, as an inherited state that was never the only

way in which scholarship (or knowledge) could exist. In other words, the more often that

notions that seem to contradict an ideology serve to support it, the more possible it

becomes to trace out the full contours of the anxieties that fix that ideology, to analyze and

counter its symptomatic condition.

Žižek does not suggest, however, that we can simply remove ourselves from the

symbolic order in one final moment of ecstatic separation. Instead, near the end of his

article on Rossellini's films (1990), Žižek discusses what he sees as an alternative to the

symptomatic subjectivity of the symbolic order. Specifically, he addresses Lacan's notion of

'subjective destitution,' the withdrawal of the subject from the Other. In Lacan, subjective

destitution is idealized in the act of suicide, in which the subject sacrifices the self in order

to liberate the Other from the constraints of the subject's symptomatic condition. Žižek

calls for a different understanding of the term, however, which "is not an act of sacrifice

(which always implies the Other as its addressee), but an act of abandonment that

sacrifices sacrifice" (Žižek, "Rossellini" 43). In other words, Žižek suggests a 'symbolic

suicide' in which the subject relinquishes its hold on the Other, giving up its stake in the

Other as its symptom, its 'not-all.' Žižek notes that "[t]he freedom attained by the act is

the very opposite of this last [a freedom from censorship, or a complete psychosis]: by

undergoing it, all the burden falls back upon the subject, since he renounces any support in

the Other" (Žižek, "Rossellini" 44).

Thus, subjectivity becomes a more complex process than the mere act of speaking,

of taking up a place in the symbolic order in contradistinction to the symptom, which

cannot speak. With this new tactic, as in Marilyn Friedman's (1991) "social conception of

the self," all subjectivity is tentative and must be drawn out by way of reference to multiple coordinates; there is no Other or foundational opposition, only diverse others and an array of constantly changing, amorphous differences. The subject is responsible for its own multifarious subjectivity without an easy object/ive realm for reference. In short, subjectivity is replaced with intersubjectivity, a process of constant re-negotiation of alliances and points of departure.

Chow, too, suggests a dis-location from the easy geography of the symbolic order in her section on "The Dissolute Woman and the Female Saint." Discussing Xü Xiaodan's refusal to present herself as either one of the two primary feminine genders in China, Chow notes that "[i]nstead of speaking from the position of 'minority,' . . . [Xiaodan] offers a model which by its very impure nature defies the epistemic violence underlying the perpetual dependence of the 'minor' on the center" (Chow 113). Xiaodan's embracing of an intersubjective positionality that encompasses both virtuous and dissolute femininities allows her "a freedom *from* the mutual reinforcement between education and morality," knowledge and the symptomatic condition (Chow 113, emphasis original). Xiaodan's acts do not fail to carry meaning (as the acts of Lacan's psychotic, in his 'subjective destitution' would); rather, their meaning relies upon multiple – even contradictory – referents that, considered interdependently, escape the narrow logic of the binary opposition between 'good' and 'bad' Chinese women.

Based upon this understanding of intersubjectivity as an interventionary tactic in the symbolic order, Chow extrapolates a related tactic for the use of cultural-studies scholars. She notes that the time is past for scholarship that continues to rely on simplistic, symptomatic identifiers like 'women' and 'third world' without careful consideration of the

scholar's own relationship to these notions, as well as some attention to the specific localities of experience with/in these monolithic constructions. Instead, "it remains for . . . intellectuals to face up to their truthful relation to these 'objects of study' behind which they can easily hide – as voyeurs, as 'fellow victims,' and as self-appointed custodians" (Chow 119). In other words, the scholar can no longer write about a culture-object without attention to her own (and her culture's) relationship to that subject-of-study, traced out along multiple axes of interrelated concerns (differences of class, gender, religion, language, race/ethnicity, and culture, to name but a few).

I am proposing, following Žižek, that we can begin to deploy within the symbolic a model of intersubjectivity in which the difference between the scholar-subject and her subject-of-study is not (or less) foundational in their definition. In this new model, it is not a lack or gap that defines subjects (in both senses of the word), but rather the overlaps, moments of contiguity, and a fundamental acceptance of the existence of many quite mutable, transitory, and unknowable differences *between* the two—an acceptance of the necessary ontological *in*consistency of all subject positions. What I am proposing, in short, is an interventionary tactic in the symbolic order that directly counters its foundational heterosexism. This proposal finds ample support in Žižek's work.

Having himself been a student of Lacan's, Žižek defends his teacher's seemingly antifeminist proclamation that "woman is a symptom of man" by drawing a comparison between Lacan's formulation of the symptom and Freud's. Of particular interest for Žižek is the logical if radical conclusion in the writings of Otto Weininger of Freud's theorization of the symptom as compromise-formation. In Freud's symptom, "the subject gets back, in the form of a ciphered message, the truth about his desire, the truth that he was unable to

confront" (Žižek, "Rossellini" 20). In Weininger's amplification of Freud's "symptom," woman becomes nothing more than a materialization of man's sin, an embodiment of his lack and, thus, his desire; Weininger's application of Freud's formulation of the symptom reveals, in grotesque exaggeration, its underlying sexism (20).

By way of contrast, Žižek characterizes Lacan's formulation of the symptom as nearly the opposite of Freud's, for in Lacan's treatment, "man literally *ex-sists*: his entire being lies 'out there,' in woman. Woman, on the other hand, does *not* exist, she *insists*, which is why she does not come to be through man only" (Žižek, "Rossellini" 21, emphases original). Thus, woman's existence lies partially outside the symbolic order, and the order's sole purpose is to ensure the ontological consistency of 'man' as the subject position in and through which it operates. For Žižek, who clearly holds some disdain for the sexist character of the symbolic order, Lacan's allowance for the existence of woman as the 'not-all' – as nothing with/in the symbolic order and, thus, as all that *is* beyond it – is at worst a neutral position on gender politics and, in light of Žižek's view of the symbolic order as suspect, perhaps a somewhat feminist position (20-1).

Feminist or not, however, Lacan's position that woman taken 'in herself,' without reference to her relation to man, embodies the death-drive, follows Freud's formulation completely in one very significant respect: both formulations assume a complete and immutable *difference* between 'woman' and 'man' – object and subject – with/in the symbolic order. From this basic assumption, both Freud's and Lacan's formulations proceed to work within the narrowly circumscribed possibilities of a symbolic order in which subjects and objects are entirely separable, even though the object is implicated in the subject as its Other. This limitation is heterosexism, the theoretical assumption

(ideology) that there are two and only two, 'opposite' sexes, and that the difference between them is singular, absolute, and indicative of their 'natural' relationship to each other. Heterosexism is intrinsic in the symbolic order precisely because that order is the linguistic and cultural encoding of meaning in western cultures; it might just as easily be referred to as the heteropatriarchal order, since its enforcement of subjectivity as the experience of 'man' simultaneously bolsters the experiential superiority of men and the irrefutable difference between women and men -- indeed, the two concepts are entirely interdependent.

As a queer man, I have often been frustrated by the intellectual acrobatics that theorists like Lacan and Žižek (and really all Lacanian theorists) perform in order to work with/in the heteropatriarchal order even while assuming a more or less critical stance about that order's historically poor treatment of women. For me, these leaps of logic are doubly suspect: Lacanian theory first requires me to believe that women, *as women*, can never be subjects in the symbolic order, that is, that their subjectivity is always achieved by way of a denial of their status as women, a kind of filtering of their experience through the chain of knowledge-desire-lack that dominates the subjectivity of 'man'; second, it requires that I overlook completely the differences between heterosexual and queer male experiences, as if all of my own experiences, too, are reducible to a fundamental experience of separation from (the) mother, a loss of the primordial feminine that constitutes the first moment of (male) heterosexual desire. That queer men like myself are often or even usually forced by the heterosexist limitations of the symbolic order to experience our subjectivities as a sub-genre of male heterosexuality does not preclude the possibilities of other ways of experiencing it. Indeed, its very existence poses a problem for the symbolic order about

which Lacanian and Freudian theory have only very implausible elucidations (arrested development, primordial bisexuality, etc.).

The problem that I have identified here as the heterosexist limitations of the symbolic order and the notion of the symptom is closely related to what Chow identifies as the problem of cultural authenticity ('nativeness') and the notion of the nation. For example, Chow discusses "[o]ur fascination with the native, the oppressed, the savage, and all such figures" as "a desire to hold on to an unchanging certainty somewhere outside our own 'fake' experience," "a desire for being 'non-duped,' which is a not-too-innocent desire to seize control" (Chow 53). Sinologists and other cultural-studies scholars need the native in order to be non-duped because we are attempting to counter the native-as-symptom by a simple inversion, by making the native the one with the authentic knowledge and, thus, the real subjectivity. This move is not unlike Žižek's manipulation of Lacanian theory to position woman outside the constraints of the symbolic order, over and apart from (hetero)sexism. We want to save women and natives from the violence done to them by the symbolic order, but our efforts fail because "[d]efilement and sanctification belong to the same symbolic order," because the *saving* of a particular subjectivity requires that it is first endangered – that it is already the symptom of the subject (54). Thus, despite the usefulness of Žižekian approaches to psychoanalytic theory – including its points of contact with and departure from cultural-studies models like those of Chow – this work alone does not provide a sufficient methodological basis for addressing the symptomaticity of heterosexist subjectivity.

And Now, for Something Completely Different:
Strassburg Digs Up Queer, Undead Cyborgs

Over the past few decades, 'queer' has become a much contested, often misunderstood,

and rather frequently volleyed term in loosely related scholarly work that has come to be

known as queer theory. Spanning the humanities and social sciences, queer theory –

though it cannot be categorically sealed – tends to take as its point-of-departure the

assumption that sexual and gender binaries (homosexual/heterosexual, female/male,

feminine/masculine, etc.) are discursive constructions that have little or no basis in biology

and instead exist to serve political ends. Queer theory goes beyond simply affirming the

social and cultural experiences of lesbians, gay men, transgender people, and others whose

gender and/or sexual identities fail to conform to the naturalized norms of sexist and

heterosexist societies; it also seeks to destabilize and reproach those norms and the

processes by which they are naturalized. Over time, the focus of queer theory has shifted

to larger and broader 'registers' of the normative, and the specific epistemological and

political projects of queer theory are applied to social issues that are not directly related to

LGBT communities. Although this work takes on increasingly broad aspects of social and

cultural norms, there is an undeniable trace of what we might call a queer stance in all

queer-theoretical work. Nevertheless, the term's definition has grown increasingly elusive.

One queer theorist who has provided a fairly lucid explanation of the term 'queer' is

Alexander Doty, whose work in *Making Things Perfectly Queer* (1993) highlights the

counterhegemonic projects that many queer theorists undertake in embracing the once

derogatory epithet. Doty is quick to point out that 'queer' is intended to be more than a

new, inclusive 'umbrella term' for such extant identity-markers as 'bisexual,' 'gay,' and

'transsexual.' In fact, this conception of inclusivity, which was deployed without much success by the now-defunct activist group Queer Nation, has been rightly criticized for its failure to be inclusive of people who cannot simply choose to be non-assimilationist in daily life activities, in short, for its racist, classist, ableist, and sexist tendencies.[10]

For Doty, a better understanding of 'queer' proceeds from the works of Teresa de Lauretis, Judith Butler and Sue-Ellen Case and asserts that "queerness is something that is ultimately beyond gender—it is an attitude, a way of responding, that begins in a place not concerned with, or limited by, notions of a binary opposition of male and female or the homo versus hetero paradigm usually articulated as an extension of this gender binarism" (xv). From this perspective, the presence of the queer in literary and other texts (and contexts) does not depend upon the presence of LGBT themes or characters; as a reading style, a positionality, a posture, an outlook, and a sensibility, the queer is potentially present in (response to) a wide array of texts not clearly addressing LGBT concerns. 'Queer' simply does not equate to 'LGBT.'

Doty goes on to elaborate that his purpose in adopting such a working definition of 'queer' is to "recapture and reassert a militant sense of difference" and to view the erotically and sexually marginal as the potential locus of both resistance and "'radical openness and possibility'" (3).[11] Following Case, Doty notes that this notion of 'queer' is less about gender and sexuality than it is about the ontological politics of the symbolic order itself (5). As such, Doty develops queer readings of texts as diverse as *Laverne and*

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[10] In addition, E. J. Rand (2004) has pointed out that the very use of the term 'queer' by the organization Queer Nation exposes the contradictions inherent in that organization's mission, since 'queer' signifies difference and multiplicity, while 'nation' signifies sameness and unity (303-4). In the end, this contradictory attempt to create a unity out of real differences (e.g., the political causes of lesbians versus those of gay men) may have been the key to Queer Nation's demise.

[11] The final phrase in this sentence is from bell hooks (1990), quoted in Doty.

Shirley, Batman Returns, and the media coverage of Paul Reubens' arrest for masturbating in an adult theater in Sarasota, Florida. Doty's retooling of 'queer' at once allows for the application of queer theory in contexts far wider than what might be fairly termed 'LGBT studies' and positions queerness as a fulcrum against which textual and other forms of criticism may be radically opened to possibilities beyond binarism.

Published in the same year as Doty's work, Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1993) provides a thorough, if theoretically dense, critique of heteronormativity, or what she calls the 'heterosexual matrix' (Butler, *Trouble* 35-78). Butler closely follows Lacanian theory, demonstrating how the concurrence of sexuality and subjectivity creates the "literalizing fantasy" by which the body comes to be read as a sign of the naturalness of one's gender and sexual identities (70). In addition, Butler also demonstrates how both the heterosexual incest taboo and the homosexual incest taboo serve in the construction of heterosexual identity, reading the loss of homosexual desire as part of the subjective 'divide' identified by Lacan:

> The loss of the heterosexual object, argues Freud, results in the displacement of that object, but not the heterosexual aim; on the other hand, the loss of the homosexual object requires the loss of the object *and* the aim. In other words, the object is not only lost, but the desire fully denied, such that "I never lost that person and I never loved that person, indeed never felt that kind of love at all." The melancholic preservation of that love is all the more securely safeguarded through the totalizing trajectory of that denial. (69, emphasis original)

Because, then, homosexual desire is preserved within heterosexual identity as a melancholic attachment to an originary loss, homosexuality serves as the symptom of heterosexuality (in much the same way that the monstrous serves as the symptom of the human). Realizing this symptomatic nature of normative heterosexuality, Butler shifts the focus of both feminist and queer-theoretical scholarship to an examination of the politics –

at once representational and material/embodied – of the prohibitions and divisions that guide the heterosexual matrix (72-8).

In terms of a theoretical model for approaching the politics of the heterosexual matrix, Butler is interested in Foucault's work on sexuality, especially in *The History of Sexuality, Volume One: An Introduction* (1976), and particularly his observations about the 'productive' nature of sexual prohibitions and repression. Foucault is critical of what he calls the 'repressive hypothesis,' that is, a commonsense notion that there has been an extreme repression of sexual expression in western cultures since the nineteenth century, peaking in the Victorian era, and necessitating the 'sexual revolutions' of the twentieth century. From Foucault's perspective, this notion is merely one form of the politics of heteronormativity in the twentieth century, and it serves the primary purpose of obfuscating the dynamics of the generation of knowledges about and power over sexualities:

> Rather than the uniform concern to hide sex, rather than the general prudishness of language, what distinguishes these last three centuries is the variety, the wide dispersion of devices that were invented for speaking about it, for having it be spoken about, for inducing it to speak of itself, for listening, recording, transcribing, and redistributing what is said about it. . . . Rather than massive censorship, beginning with the verbal proprieties of the Age of Reason, what was involved was a regulated and polymorphous incitement to discourse. (Foucault, *History* 34).

In Butler's reading, this 'polymorphous incitement to discourse' means that repression (that is, the heterosexual matrix) is actually a productive force that generates the diverse array of sexual and gender identities found in any given culture. The repressive law of subjectivity, then, "produces *both* sanctioned heterosexuality and transgressive homosexuality," which means that "[b]oth are indeed *effects*, temporally and ontologically later than the law itself, and the illusion of a sexuality before the law is itself a creation of

that law" (Butler, *Trouble* 74, emphases original). This latter observation is important to Butler because it demonstrates that effective efforts to subvert the paradigmatic status of the heterosexual matrix cannot rely on notions of an originary character of homosexuality and other forms of queer expression; indeed, there is no such thing as a prelinguistic or presymbolic sexual identity any more than there is any other signifier that pre-exists subjectivity (76-8).

Butler does locate a space for subversive efforts, however, in the nexus between a psychoanalytic understanding of sexual identity and the notion of sexual identity as performative.[12] Peformativity implies a situation in which constant reiteration of gender and sexual cues is compulsory:

> In the place of an original identification which serves as a determining cause, gender identity might be reconceived as a personal/cultural history of received meanings subject to a set of imitative practices which refer laterally to other imitations and which, jointly, construct the illusion of a primary and interior gendered self or parody the mechanism of that construction. (138)

It is in the latter possibility – the way in which imitation can parody the imitated model – that Butler finds a possibility for subversive performances of gender and sexuality. Using drag performance as a metaphor for performance-as-parody, Butler proposes that performances can be subversive when they call too much attention to the machinations required to maintain gender and sexual identities, and pull back the wizard's curtain on the supplement, the excess content left over after gender identities are deployed. (This supplement is, in fact, one way to track the symptomatic nature of identity-formation.)

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[12] Indeed, Butler's work is largely responsible for importing performance theory into gender studies and queer-theoretical discourses. Her early work in Gender Trouble touched off heated intellectual debates about the extent to which gender is, in fact, performative. Some feminist and queer-theoretical critics chastised Butler for entirely reducing gender and sexuality to performance or discourse (see, for examples: Diseger 2008; Hekman 2008). In many ways, Butler has attempted to answer such criticisms in her subsequent work, including *Bodies That Matter* (1993), which appeared shortly after *Gender Trouble*, and the more recent *Undoing Gender* (2004), though the dates of her critics cited here demonstrate that such debates are ongoing.

Nevertheless, Butler does not posit an utter freedom to perform gendered and sexual identities in any conceivable way; instead, she positions subversive agency in "the possibility of a variation on [compulsory] repetition" (145). This reading of the performative nature of sexual identity – much like the work of Žižek – maintains the totality and inescapability of the symbolic order while also holding open a space for interpellated subjects to act in ways that can intervene in the politics of that order, even if only to an incremental extent.

Donna Haraway also addresses the possibilities for subversive intervention into the politics of domination, though her work focuses on the figure of the cyborg. In her "Cyborg Manifesto" (republished in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 1991), Haraway proposes that we adopt the model of the cybernetic organism (or cyborg) and its location in a massive cyborgian network, in place of the discursively configured subject and its place in the symbolic order. Haraway defines a cyborg as "a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (149). She readily acknowledges the monstrous qualities of the cyborg, noting that her proposal will very likely be seen as blasphemous by many contemporaneous critics (149). All the same, Haraway asks that we acknowledge the already fully cybernetic character of life in the contemporary world, in which "we are all chimeras" well represented by the figure of the cyborg because it "is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation" (150). Indeed, there are three specific reasons that Haraway cites for the value of adopting the cyborg as "our ontology" (150): First, the cyborg makes an excellent model for the simultaneous enjoyment of breaking boundaries (e.g., between human and monster) and a means of assuming

responsibility for their ongoing creation. Second, the cyborg is a 'post-gender' creature without the same kind of origin story that western subjectivity provides for gendered subjects. Third, "[t]he cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity" (151) and free of the structuring polarities of normative subjectivity (e.g., public/private, mind/body, male/female) (150-1). Somehow escaping being overdetermined by its troubled origins in capitalism and militarism (after all, it is, as Haraway notes, "illegitimate offspring"), the cyborg is the possible site of a (post)subjectivity that is not structured by the Law of the Father and not symptomatic in its fluid, hybrid, and always unstable identities (151). Moreover, the cyborgian approach to feminist and other progressive work generates a "powerful infidel heteroglossia" that is not (fully) constrained by the limits of discursive representation because it is fully integrated into the cybernetic (i.e., both organic/subjective and technological/material) circuitries of postmodern life (181).

Swedish archaeologist Jimmy Strassburg (2000) adopts Harway's 'cyborgian' writing style and methodological stance but blends it with an application of queer theory that is heavily steeped in Butler and Foucault, though also influenced by the work of Elizabeth Grosz in *Volatile Bodies* (1994).[13] His main objective is to disengage the naturalism and scientism that tend to dominate his field, importing the best aspects of the cultural theory of the humanities and the 'softer' social sciences as a way of breathing new life into what he sees as the dead-on-arrival world of archaeological research and theorizing

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[13] In particular, Strassburg concurs with Grosz that Butler and Foucault ultimately maintain the sex/gender distinction, even while critiquing it, and that, given the equally constructed nature of both categories, there is really no need for the separation; 'sex' should suffice to describe all gendered construction. However, Strassburg disagrees with Grosz that the theoretical path of Butler and Foucault is "fruitless" (Strassburg 42). Instead, he seeks to reinvigorate a materialist applicability of Foucauldian and Butlerian theory by way of a detour through Haraway's cyborgian approach (42-4).

(Strassburg 3-7). To be fair, Strassburg clearly loves his discipline and is not interested in displacing its materialistic methods, fieldwork, documentary styles, etc.; instead, his interests, like those of Foucault and Žižek, lie in the ability of the social critic to examine at once the linguistic or representational nature of subjective experience and the material 'realities' that both shape and are shaped by subjectivity. What he hopes for is a future archaeology that still meticulously examines the material remains of the past, excavated from sites occupied by historic and prehistoric peoples, but that also allows for a 'reading' of such artifacts and their cultural milieu that is informed by what he calls a 'queer cyborgian' approach to scholarship on culture and cultural phenomena (12-5). This practice involves examining objects not just with an eye toward their 'traditions' and their roles within normative instantiations of their cultural contexts, as is typical for archaeological scholarship, but also with an eye toward the extranormative aspects of objects. In other words, this practice is to work "with the assumption that there is a resisting aspect to material culture, a diverse and sporadic anti-tradition at work within every tradition" (66).

For Strassburg, the cyborg is as much an intellectual stance as it is a metaphor for a postsubjective state – or, rather, he seeks to introduce the postsubjective metaphor of the cyborg into the work of the archaeologist. For his purposes, such a move acknowledges the speciousness of the typical scientific stance, which aims for the most infallible, definitive and 'complete' answer to every question of inquiry. By way of contrast, a cyborgian approach embraces the messiness that Haraway describes, authorizing a scholarly position that is multi-sited, un-disciplined, flexible, and dynamic (12). It is also an accountable and intersubjective stance – one that acknowledges and assumes the responsibility of the individual scholar both to her objects-of-study and to her own process

of critical reflexivity. The cyborgian approach, therefore, brings the scholarly site of representation out of the particular closet of material, bodily integrity, rejecting both the kind of disembodied intellectual voice that Cartesian dualism empowers and its equally flawed analogue of fully embodied discourse, which is often postured as antagonistic to Cartesianism even though both approaches assume an organic unity of embodiment.

According to Strassburg, one of the implications of this un-disciplined stance for archaeology is that 'science fictions' – the particular kinds of representation employed in the sciences – are no longer privileged as the one true form of knowledge but are, instead, considered alongside other forms of representation. While the idea of involving extrascientific discourses in archaeological work is not entirely new,[14] Strassburg intends for archaeologists to employ a hybrid (cyborgian) approach that is never completely settled in the methodologies of any single discursive practice (12-3). This dis-location of inquiry, a movement outwards from an intellectual core toward several, disparate discursive positions, unsettles the privileged status of an authoritative discourse reliant on Cartesian dualism, allowing for the consideration of multiple discourses without the promise of a one-sided resolution into any one of them. Moreover, this outwards movement retraces the path of the Lacanian division of the subject, embracing the 'disembodied' aspects of subjectivities ejected by the Law of the Father into the Other. In other words, a multi-sited, cyborgian intellectual approach allows the Other to 'speak' in and through scholarly inquiry, drawing on perspectives normally banned from academic discourses. Such a practice can elevate our knee-jerk fears of subjective dissolution, since we all fear being polluted by the

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[14] See, for example, Spector (1993). Spector's feminist archaeological practice includes a short story that she writes about a young Wahpeton Dakota girl who would have been the sort of person to employ the awl found at the excavation site. However, Spector still separates this story out from the rest of her study, maintaining the boundary between scientific and extrascientific discourses – the very boundary that Strassburg seeks to undermine.

Other, of allowing deviation with/in ourselves – in short, of "becoming half-ghost or half-human" (30). Yet Strassburg proposes that we embrace this possibility of an 'undead' positionality – not in the typical sense of a zombie but, instead, in the sense of embracing the extent to which our lives are not our own – in order to counter the effects of disidentification (the negative end of subjective formation) and recover access to knowledges and experiences normally foreclosed to the interpellated subject (31-47).

Strassburg proceeds to explicate two key traits of this 'undead' intellectual positioning, the first of which is the gender-liminal or queer status it invokes. Because such a stance violates the dictates of normative subjectivity, it fails to comply with gender and sexual norms as well, since subjectivity and sexuality are intimately linked. Strassburg compares the queer character of the cyborgian stance with a variety of subpopulations whose identities also place them outside normative subjectivity, including people with disabilities, "magicians and spiritual specialists," and intersexual people, and he feels that a queer cyborgian approach allies scholars with people whose (failed) subjectivities are employed to maintain (ironically, at times, by crossing) boundaries that are untraversable for those who enjoy normative identities (48).

Similarly, the 'undead' quality of the cyborgian stance also refers to notions of kinship and bloodlines. Strassburg defines kinship as "the sociomoral struggle between benevolent and malevolent undead," noting that both the 'dead' and the 'living' are undead, in various ways (53). Deceased relatives are undead both because they can continue to have benevolent or malevolent effects on the living (for example, during the liminal period after death, or when dishonored by their living ancestors) and because they live on in the literal embodiment (genes) of their living kin. On the other end of these

bloodlines, the living, too, are the ongoing embodiment of the dead, whose genetic

material lives on in them, and this fact complicates their status as living. Therefore, "[t]o be

counted as 'living' is an achieved façade of normativity" (53). Moreover, Strassburg also

notes that kinship, like identity, is a signifier and has the elasticity of all signifiers. It can

encompass both cognates (relatives in the same bloodline) and affines (people selected as

kin), and it can also serve as a metonym for other, equally ideologically loaded signifiers,

such as 'nation.'[15]

Of course, Strassburg's theorization of the undead and of cyborgs could not be

more apropos for a critical investigation of the monstrous Other, particularly in the case of

representations in which the monster is permitted to speak, that is, to participate in the

symbolic order. To the extent that the monstrous Other contains cast-off elements of 'our'

own identities, it is linked with us via the technologies of subjectivity, a cybernetic network

of difficult and convoluted associations and disassociations. In addition, any serious

engagement with the monstrous Other brings us into close proximity with the undead

(ejected) aspects of 'ourselves,' the repression of which does not forestall but incite the

production of multifariously perverse new identities, the queer supplement left over after

normative subjectivity is carved out of the infinite possibilities of human experience. By

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[15] Indeed, Cohen (2006) also comments on the way that bloodlines may stand in for national, religious, ethnic and other identities. He recounts the story of a young boy found wandering along by the river in Norwich, England, in 1230. The boy insisted that he was a Jew, and two Jewish men came to claim him as one of their own. The woman who found him hesitated, and while the two men went to get the sheriff, another woman recognized the boy and summoned his father, Benedict, who claimed the boy. The boy then averred that Benedict was indeed his father, and it also became known that the boy had been circumcised while in the company of the Jewish men. The case ended up making its way through local, royal and ecclesiastical courts and, in the end, a number of local Jews were executed or banished. It turned out that Benedict was a former Jew who had converted to Christianity, and the case touched off a sensational spectacle of confusion that Cohen contends is irresolvable. In particular, the courts had difficulty interpreting the 'real' directions of consanguinity in the case. The father had been baptized and was therefore 'under the blood' of Christ, but the case raised questions about whether Jewish blood could ever be made Christian. Furthermore, the boy's own blood had been spilled in the distinctly Jewish act of circumcision, further diluting the purity of the bloodlines involved. The case is haunted by the undead nature of kinship, with rival claims to consanguinity coming from disparate, even diametrically opposed, directions (13-7).

engaging with postmodern representations of the monstrous from an intellectual stance informed by Žižekian intersubjectivity and Strassburg's 'queer cyborgian' approach, we will be able to overcome our melancholic attachments to the monstrous Other, and to examine its functioning critically, on both subjective and material levels, in a way that is profoundly responsible and asymptomatic.

CHAPTER IV

THE MONSTROUS OTHER AND THE QUEERING OF THE NORMAL

Under conditions of postmodernity, the monstrous Other is being subjected to a variety of new functions. The vampire, for example, has 'come out of the coffin,' and its import is now less about the dangers of forbidden erotic encounters and more about what Hollinger (1997) calls 'fantasies of absence,' that is, the embodiment of a certain postmodern desire for the perpetual suspense of normative subjectivity, the drive toward the state of being undead, neither here nor there. In similar ways, other postmodern texts also reveal the changing dynamics of the monstrous Other – a fact that, as Said would remind us, tells us more about humanity than it does about the monstrous itself. By reading the texts under consideration here in the context of psychoanalytic, queer and cyborgian theory, I hope to demonstrate that the postmodern monstrous Other guides us toward a postsubjective state in which Cartesian dualism and the Self/Other dichotomy are displaced by the queer, the cyborgian and the intersubjective.

The three novels considered here present three different approaches to 'the return of the repressed' in the figure of the monstrous Other. *Grendel* shifts the sites of representation, such that the monstrous Other becomes the sympathetic narrator. As the beneficiaries of Grendel's interior-monologue narration, we travel through the Beowulf tradition on the opposite side of its subjective mirror, re-viewing it from the monster's troubled perspective. This approach effectively positions the audience (the human) alongside the monstrous, drawing attention to the opposition between the two categories

by way of casting the audience in the role of the monstrous. *The Forest of Hours* does the

same thing in reverse, sending the monstrous Other into the heart of the human world.

Skord, the main character, passes (mostly) as human, and his experiences of joining the

symbolic order challenge the human/monstrous distinction from another angle. In this

way, Kerstin Ekman collapses the sites of representation into a single site that is

nevertheless bifurcated, since Skord is never completely divested of his trollish persona.

Finally, *Troll: A Love Story* vastly multiplies and weaves together diverse sites of

representation, including perspectives from multiple first-person narrators and a number of

other 'sources' of information. The effect is one that closely adheres to the spirit of

cyborgian consciousness, never fully positioning the audience in any one narrative 'site,'

and demonstrating the interconnectedness of informational sources, diverse knowledges,

and the experiences of characters that are alternately subjects and Others in an 'integrated

circuitry' that completely forecloses the possibility of normative subjectivity.

  In many ways, my choice of these three novels reflects a genealogical progression

through the theoretical stances that inform this study. *Grendel* is the most traditional and

Lacanian of the three works though, by positioning us inside the consciousness of the

Other, it opens a window into the radical possibilities that the monstrous Other can

instigate. *The Forest of Hours* takes one large leap further into the intersubjective and the

queer, presenting us with a main character whose incredibly extensive life includes

subjective and intersubjective experiences that also trace the contours of the development

of modern, western discursivities, providing a provocative revision of the history of the

monstrous as outlined in the second chapter of this study. And *Troll* plunges headlong into

the most radical possibilities of the monstrous Other as a technology for disengaging

subjectivity from its historical and cultural limits, clearing a path for a 'queer cyborgian'

postsubjectivity that promises to push us past the taken-for-granted limits of subjective

experience. Considered in this way, these three novels give us a glimpse into the state of

subjectivity in the postmodern, offering models for intersubjectivity that promise a (queer

cyborgian) replacement for subjectivity as we know it.

The Monstrous Other Thinks:
Gardner's Grendel and the Monstrous Howling of the Imaginary

John Gardner's metafictive novel *Grendel* (1971) recapitulates the narrative tradition of the

Old English epic poem *Beowulf* (Heaney 2000) by presenting the tale from the perspective

of Grendel, one of the chief monsters in the original epic. Gardner employs a first-person

narrative voice that allows his titular character to relay his perception of events that also

occur in *Beowulf*, as well as a number of events created specifically by Gardner in his

revisionist treatment of the Beowulf tradition. This recasting of our written record of an

oral epic in the mode of a confessional, faux-autobiographical novel modernizes (and

significantly enlarges) the fictional universe of *Beowulf*, while the use of first-person

narration creates an intimacy between a monstrous character and Gardner's audiences.

Such an intimacy runs directly counter to the received notion of the monstrous as the

inaccessible and unnamable; indeed, Gardner exerts considerable effort to ensure that his

readers are 'along for the ride' with Grendel as he alternately engages in his misdeeds and

contemplates their (possible) meaningfulness for himself and/or the human inhabitants of

Hrothgar's domain. This intimacy implicates us alongside Grendel as we cannot help but to

locate some justification for his actions, given the fact that the novel's sympathies run

chiefly in his favor. This reversal of sympathies is the novel's chief derivation from the Beowulf tradition and, given Gardner's almost exclusive focus on Grendel's psychological processes, this novel more closely attends to the contours of Lacanian subjectivity than the other two considered here, though Gardner manages to gesture toward a Žižekian stance.

That Gardner's Grendel[1] embodies the notion of the Other and serves as the symptom of the human (or, at least, of Hrothgar's kingdom as a metonym for the human) is evident throughout the novel. From his very first encounter with a small band of men to his ultimate demise at the hands of the 'heroic' Beowulf, Grendel traces the Lacanian Other's path from primordial differentiation (such as when the band of men he first encounters, while he is stuck hanging from a tree, mistakes him for an outgrowth or spirit of the tree itself, Gardner 23-7) to a fully troubled relationship between the subject and its Other, even including the subject's violent response to the fear of the Other in the interaction between Beowulf and Grendel. Interestingly, too, Grendel as delineated by Gardner is self-aware of his status as the Other, and he reflects on his importance to Hrothgar and his followers throughout the novel. In the very first description of his interaction with Hrothgar's people (that is, the first description given in the novel, not the chronologically first encounter), we find Grendel *in medias re*s, eleven years into his 'war' with Hrothgar's kingdom. His actions are presented as part of a longstanding repetition, with his sudden and violent entrance to the meadhall punctuated by terror, bloodletting, and general confusion. The total state of confusion he induces is indicative of his status as the Other: "In the darkness, I alone see clear as day. While they squeal and screech and bump into each other, I silently sack up my

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[1] From this point in the chapter forward, I will refer to Gardner's character of Grendel as simply 'Grendel' and will only provide distinguishing verbiage when referring to *Beowulf*'s version of Grendel. The same applies to other characters shared between the two works as well.

dead and withdraw to the woods" (12). A bit later, gorged on the blood of the dead,

Grendel admits that he is "filled with gloom again," as his one sole purpose as the Other

has been served, and he recedes into his cursed state of meaninglessness once again (13).

As he begins to sicken from his feast of "their sour meat," he overhears some of the people

characterizing his invasion as a punishment or a manifestation of the anger of the gods (13).

In this way, he is at once the Other as fearsome embodiment of the ejected aspects of

subjectivity, and the Other as the embodied reminder of the Law of the Father.

Perhaps the formative encounter between Grendel and the people at Hart

(Hrothgar's Hall) – at least, in terms of establishing Grendel's role as the Other – occurs

shortly after the arrival of the Shaper (Old English: 'scop'), who plays his harp and sings

about the heroic exploits of Hrothgar and his (undead) ancestors, as well as the terrible

trials exacted by Grendel. At first, the Shaper secures his place in the service of Hrothgar by

focusing on the heroic deeds of Hrothgar and his men, and even Grendel remarks on the

power of the Shaper's representations of Hrothgar and his honor. The episode, which

occurs in the third chapter, comes immediately after Grendel's descriptions of the

sweeping acts of violence necessary for Hrothgar to establish his authority. The

expansionism of Hrothgar's polity exacts a terrible toll on the people of surrounding

villages; the animals employed in the service of war, road-building and agricultural

development; and on the natural environment itself (Gardner 31-40). When the Shaper

arrives and begins to sing his rather different representations of these events, Grendel

remembers what 'really' happened but finds that not only the people of Hart, but he

himself, cannot resist the representational allure of the Shaper's songs. "The man had

changed the world," Grendel laments, "had torn up the past by its thick, gnarled roots and

had transmuted it, and they, who knew the truth, remembered it his way – and so did I"

(43). This episode leaves Grendel in a "queer panic" and "torn apart by poetry," and he

screams and behaves wildly in the forest away from the hall, flailing futilely against the

power of discursive representation to change the actual character of events already past

(44).[2]

When Grendel later hears the Shaper representing his own role in relation to the

settlement at Hart, we are introduced to the idea (carried over from *Beowulf*) that Grendel

is a descendent of Cain (51).[3] This attribution refers to the biblical account of Cain and Abel,

two brothers whose main abilities (horticulture for Cain and animal husbandry for Abel)

drew differential responses from God, leading Cain to murder Abel, in response to which

God marked Cain (the exact meaning of 'marked' is not clear) and cursed him, noting that

the ground would no longer yield its crops for him (Gen. 4.3-24). This ancestry, and the

curse that follows it, would certainly explain why Grendel and his kind are unable to

cultivate vegetables and are left to hunt and forage (like omnivorous wild animals) in order

to sustain themselves. The idea that the cursed descendents of Cain still walk the earth

appears in a variety of cultural sources, including some of the popular-culture sources

mentioned earlier in this text. In *True Blood*, for example, we learn that all vampires are

descended from Cain, and in *Supernatural*, during the fifth season, the main characters (the

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[2] It is worth noting, too, that this episode comments directly on the novel's ancestral text, *Beowulf*. Because *Beowulf*, too, was originally a work of oral tradition, and it also represents the deeds of Beowulf as heroic and praiseworthy, Grendel's resistance to the Shaper's art in Gardner's treatment casts *Beowulf* in a new light. We can infer from this association that Gardner was drawing attention to the discursive politics of *Beowulf* even while setting it on its head by allowing one of its originally extradiscursive characters to speak.

[3] Interestingly, the name Cain comes from the Hebrew קין (Qayin), meaning 'spear,' while the name Hrothgar is the combination (common in Old Norse and Old English names) of two words, 'hroth,' meaning 'honored' or 'renowned,' and 'gar,' which also means 'spear,' making the combination something like 'renowned spearman.' The pairing is difficult to ignore, since it implies both a similarity and an animosity between Hrothgar and the descendents of Cain (a Self/Other dichotomy). Likewise, Beowulf comes from the 'Gar-Dane' people, the 'Spear-Danes.' For additional support of Grendel's association with Cain, see Nelson (2008).

Winchester brothers) learn that their family is descended from Cain, and that is it this

undead aspect of their notorious ancestor, embodied in their own existences, that makes

them possible vessels to host the earthly instantiations of Lucifer and Archangel Michael

during the Apocalypse. Apart from fictional representation, too, the idea of Cain's lineage

has played a significant role in ethnocentric explanations of racial difference. In the period

of colonization, many Europeans believed that the mark of Cain was black skin, and that

living persons with black skin were the cursed descendents of Cain. In the medieval period,

Saracens as well as hybrid creatures like centaurs were attributed to Cain's lineage. Thus,

the idea of Cain's race has enjoyed wide cultural circulation, in both literary and other

discourses, providing a quasi-religious explanation for the Other in many of its guises.[4]

The episode that most clearly defines Grendel's status as the Other, however, is his

encounter with the Dragon in chapter five. In the preceding chapter, Grendel had begun to

notice a kind of phantom presence around him, calling to him and dogging his every move.

Finally, he "make[s his] mind a blank" and falls toward the Dragon, "like a stone through

earth and sea" (56). The imagery of Grendel's passing toward the Dragon suggests the

dissolution of the Real, with the materiality of space-time giving way to allow Grendel's

almost mystical, and nearly instantaneous, movement from the moor beneath the mere

through which he leaves and enters the human world, to the lair of the Dragon. Although

the Dragon's lair itself is overwrought with materiality – indeed, the Dragon sits upon and

guards a massive collection of baubles and trinkets and notes that his greatest ambition "is

to count all this" – the necessity of Grendel's audience with the Dragon seems to create a

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[4] The idea also appears to echo Lacan's description of the divided nature of subjectivity, with the Cain/Abel episode serving as an origin story for the splitting apart of the subject and the Other.

moment in which the Imaginary and the Symbolic exist apart from the Real, letting Grendel move 'like a stone through earth and sea' (73). Something in the Real gives way as the Other moves toward fully embodying its role; anamorphosis inscribes the demands of the subject into the material reality of the Other itself.

The Dragon's reactions toward and tutelage of Grendel, too, serve to inscribe Grendel fully as the Other. When Grendel first arrives, the Dragon already knows him ["'Ah, Grendel!' he said. 'You've come!'" (58)] and tells him that he has been expected, just the next arrival in the long sequence of Others necessitated by the human. The Dragon's comments wax philosophical (epistemological and ontological, with ample quotation of numerous unnamed sources), frequently losing both the attention and interest of Grendel, who seems half imbued with a human-like intellect, and half caught in a more primordial existence. A primary purpose of the exchange is to undermine, once and for all, the authority of the kinds of representation performed by the Shaper (and even by Grendel himself), leaving him with little other than his commitment to serving as Hart's Other. Like any neophyte, Grendel is troubled by the matter of why he should take up such a role, a question the Dragon calls ridiculous. Then, suddenly, the Dragon seems "almost to rise to pity," and he tells Grendel,

> "You improve them, my boy! Can't you see that yourself? You stimulate them! You make them think and scheme. You drive them to poetry, science, religion, all that makes them what they are for as long as they last. You are, so to speak, the brute existent by which they learn to define themselves. The exile, captivity, death they shrink from – the blunt facts of their mortality, their abandonment – that's what you make them recognize, embrace! You *are* mankind, or man's condition: inseparable as the mountain-climber and the mountain. If you withdraw, you'll instantly be replaced. Brute existents, you know, are a dime a dozen." (73, emphasis original)

This passage, which firmly establishes Grendel's role as the Other (at least, once he decides to believe the Dragon), could almost have been written by Lacan himself, so closely does it echo his own characterizations of the Other.

Moreover, the pivotal passage also indicates Grendel's close association with the Imaginary, since his need to see himself (the Other) reflected in humanity (the Self) is the obverse side of the mirror stage. Indeed, the whole novel follows Grendel along this painful process of coming to terms with his individuation from the Self (he wants desperately, at times, to join the people at Hart and become welcomed into the symbolic order of their society) and his role as the Other. As the Other, though, he is never permitted full entry into the Symbolic, even though he makes considerable strides in that direction (e.g., by coming to understand the language of Hrothgar's people, though he is seldom able to make himself understood when trying to use it). Lacking the investiture of subjectivity (that is, remaining caught in the Imaginary), he is unable to allow for the Law of the Father. In successive sequences, we see him rejecting the Law as it is ensconced in political power (chapter eight), religion (chapter nine), and art, or representation itself, which comes in the form of the death of the Shaper in chapter ten. In spite of all of the human discourses to which he is exposed, Grendel remains the howling, libidinous, unbridled sheer terror of the Other to the novel's bitter (and already well-known) ending.

The meaninglessness of Grendel's situation also supports a reading of him as presymbolic, since he is unable, as the Other (the one configured outside the symbolic order) to apply any sort of discourse toward the organization of a meaning for himself. He struggles from one end of the narrative to the other in a vain attempt to find some sense of purpose or value (a fact that makes him, ironically, an excellent postmodern antihero,

adding to his sympathetic reception among contemporary readers). This fruitless struggle

leaves him extremely cynical, as we see even in the novel's opening chapter, where he

describes his recollections of past acts of violence as "the tiresome memories of a shadow-

shooter, earth-rim-roamer, walker of the world's weird wall" (7). In this sequence, he has

little reason to distinguish between normative subjects, like the people in Hrothgar's

kingdom, and the flora, fauna and inanimate objects of the forest. He portrays himself as

the "[d]isfigured son of lunatics" and notes that "[t]he big-boled oaks gaze down at me

yellow with morning, beneath complexity. 'No offense,' I say, with a terrible, sycophantish

smile, and tip an imaginary hat" (7). Later, once he accepts the Dragon's inducements to

his role as the Other and it, as he notes, "became my aura," he finds that "[f]utility, doom,

became a smell in the air, pervasive and acrid as the dead smell after a forest fire" (75). And

later still, when he muses on the need for 'balance' (the Self/Other equilibrium), he

wonders, "What will we call the Hrothgar-Wrecker when Hrothgar has been wrecked?"

(91).[5] What, indeed, would be the purpose of the Other if its monstrousness were to

obliterate the Self? Even Grendel's defeat by Beowulf fails to fix any meaning for the

troubled character. He calls the defeat itself "[b]lind, mindless, mechanical" and "[m]ere

logic of chance," and then he describes his own movement toward oblivion: "'I look down,

down, into the bottomless blackness, feeling the dark power moving in me like an ocean

current, *some monster inside me,* deep sea wonder, dread night monarch astir in his cave,

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[5] Gardner's use here of the kenning 'Hrothgar-Wrecker' imitates one of the main stylistic features of *Beowulf* and of the Germanic epic tradition in which it arose. A kenning is an attribution that relies on the combination of two or more terms, sometimes in a compound construction (as in the present case), and sometimes in a phrase (e.g., 'walker of the world's weird wall'). The device makes use of a metaphorical association that unselfconsciously employs the representational nature of language commented upon by Lacan, Butler, and others. Interestingly, too, the Icelandic scholar (and 'father of Old Norse literature') Snorri Sturluson approved only of kennings that employed straightforward metaphors, calling those that mixed metaphors *nykrat,* which can be interpreted as 'made monstrous' (Faulkes 24). *Nykrat* is precisely the monstrous potential of discourse hijacked by the Other that Grendel and the other monsters in this study embody.

moving me slowly to my voluntary tumble into death" (173, emphasis added). Here we see Grendel experiencing a kind of perverse Lacanian *jouissance* ("I seem to desire this fall"), realizing, in the last moments of his life, that he is Other even to himself (173).

While Grendel's existential struggle may be meaningless to him, however, it is not meaningless to us, the readers of Gardner's novel; indeed, we are positioned, in the end, alongside the less sympathetic characters: Hrothgar, his people, and the visiting Spear-Danes – Beowulf in particular. Our correlation to these characters is not only due to the fact that we, too, are (more or less) normative subjects with investments in the discursive representations of politics, religion, art, and so on, but also because we share with them, as fellow subjects, the human need for the monstrous Other as a foil to hem in the loose components of our identity as human. Ultimately, and in spite of all its innovations in the narrative tradition of *Beowulf*, Gardner's novel ends in much the same way as the episode between Beowulf and Grendel does in the epic poem. We still need Beowulf, our hero, to arrive on the scene and rescue us from the horrifying spectacle and haunting threat of our Other, the likeness of ourselves appearing inside-out, all repressed aspects of our humanity teeming on its surfaces. Even though we know that 'the monster always escapes,' and that there will be another one coming (a warmongering attacker or a dragon, perhaps), we cannot help but to feel a sense of subjective relief in the moment that our lack, the externalization of our subjective incoherence, is slain. Gardner toys with this inevitable subjective response, refusing to allow us to remain in the meadhall with Hrothgar and the others while Grendel meets his end, and placing us instead at the scene of crime, implicated and culpable.

Yet the Beowulf of *Grendel* is not a hero with whom it is easy to identify. Indeed, even the 'original' Beowulf is a boastful, brash, and socially inept visitor whose presence is as unsettling as it is promising. In *Beowulf*, when Unferth, a thane of Hrothgar's (that is, a warrior pledged to his service), challenges the tales told of Beowulf's superhuman feats (e.g., defeating massive sea monsters with his bare hands in the middle of a swim from Sweden to Finland), Beowulf remains unflustered and retorts that, not only are the tales true, but that they have diminished the extent of the feats. In contrast to the prideful heroic ethic of *Beowulf*, though, Gardner's revision of this exchange, and all of his descriptions of Beowulf, cast him as psychotic, creating an unnerving presence that Grendel can sense days before Beowulf's arrival. In the meadhall interchange with Unferth, Beowulf's response is dramatized: "he spoke, soft-voiced, his weird gaze focused nowhere" (161). He proceeds to tell the assembled people in Hart that he actually slew nine different sea monsters, describing the events in some detail. Afterwards, Grendel notes, "the Danes weren't laughing. The stranger said it all so calmly, so softly, that it was impossible to laugh. He believed every word he said. I understood at last the look in his eyes. He was insane" (162).[6]

A number of other attributions similarly mark Beowulf as psychotic. When he speaks on his arrival on Hrothgar's coastline, he does so with the "[v]oice of a dead thing, calm as dry sticks and ice when the wind blows over them" (153-4). (The undead character of Beowulf in this passage is difficult to miss!) His face, too, troubles Grendel, like something "from a dream I had almost forgotten," as if Beowulf embodies something from

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[6] An alternative (or expansion) here is to read Beowulf as a throwback to the tradition of the berserk warrior, a type of fighter who uses no weapons and faces impossible situations with his bare hands. This tradition is described fully by Speidel (2002), who notes that the image of the berserk evokes responses of both wonder and respect – precisely the kinds of responses that Beowulf's performance of heroism seems intended to elicit.

the primordial depths of the Imaginary that even Grendel, poised as he on the boundary between the Imaginary and the Symbolic, cannot recapture (154). Indeed, Lacan commented that psychosis is the result of the failure to enter the symbolic order properly, the state of being able to use discourse without its full or proper effects – a mode of asocial functioning that represents the irruption of the Imaginary into the Symbolic, infusing it with elements that seem otherworldly or 'unreal.' In this sense, Gardner's rendition of Beowulf is another kind of Other, like Grendel but without the 'controls' that the Self/Other dichotomy provides. Thus, Beowulf is "an outsider not only among the Danes but everywhere," the kind of creature that is "holding something back, some magician-power that could blast stone cliffs to ashes as lightning blasts trees" (154). His discourse is impossible to receive in a normative fashion: even Grendel comments that "I found myself not listening, merely looking at his mouth, which moved – or so it seemed to me – independent of the words, as if the body of the stranger were a ruse, a disguise for something infinitely more terrible" (155).

Beowulf's insanity is never more apparent than in his deadly confrontation with Grendel. The event depicts him with an odd combination of cunning trickery and outright madness. On the one hand, he does not partake of mead and remains awake, waiting for Grendel's arrival, while pretending to sleep. Furthermore, once Grendel enters and commences his attacks, Beowulf watches his movements and sizes him up, quickly detecting his weaknesses. He knows almost instantly that Grendel is immune to the sword (a trait that emerged only after Grendel's encounter with the Dragon, in Gardner's version), and he hastily creates his plan to attack Grendel in hand-to-hand combat, which has the only chance of success. Yet, once he has Grendel's arm firmly in his grasp, he begins to

whisper a litany of terrifying phrases into Grendel's ear, some of it seeming to echo the words of the Dragon, and some of it hovering around the edges of discursive practice in that peculiar way that only insanity can induce (*"The world is my bone-cave, I shall not want,"* etc., 170, emphasis original). A bit later, still holding onto Grendel and beginning to threaten the integrity of the sinews and muscles in his shoulder, Beowulf demands that Grendel sing about the hardness of the wall used to crack his head (170-2). Interestingly, too, Beowulf can understand the words used by Grendel in this scene, even though the creature's attempts at language seldom met their mark. It is an odd moment of convergence between two characters differentially distinguished from and outside of the symbolic system they (attempt to) employ, and it leaves Gardner's Beowulf squarely outside the novel's sympathies. The classic epic hero becomes another face of the monstrous, even to those whom his heroism purportedly serves.

Moreover, Beowulf's relatively expedient defeat of Grendel begs the question of why the Danes themselves could never achieve the same during all the years of encountering him. Indeed, this is a question that has occupied scholars of the *Beowulf* manuscript since long before Gardner's novel appeared. In a 1992 essay on this point, Fidel Fajardo-Acosta postulates that Grendel is "a symbolic rather than a literal monster of the epic" (209). While Fajardo-Acosta is right about Grendel's symbolic importance, however, his explanation of why it exceeds Grendel's literal importance relies too closely on a reading of the text as one that arose in the transition from pagan to Christian worldviews. He argues that, from the perspective of the Christian narrator of the epic poem, the Danes 'deserved' the punishment of Grendel's attacks, regular and horrible, because of their own

immoral and heathen practices (206-9). Such a reading leads logically to the conclusion

that

> in the Grendel adventure Beowulf exhibits a degree of self-control and moral virtue
> which make it possible to see the Geatish hero as a sort of spiritual warrior engaged
> in a dangerous psychomachia or internal battle from which he emerges victorious
> as the vanquisher of the monstrous passions and violent tendencies which lurk
> inside his own heart and the hearts of all human beings. (210)

Gardner's Beowulf hardly complies with such a reading, however, and seems to challenge

normative values as much as Grendel himself, if from a somewhat different angle.

Furthermore, Gardner's depiction of Hrothgar and his followers is not as flat as that of the

epic, giving us a more well-rounded portrayal of a society in which there is at once

drunkenness, depravity and fratricide, on the one hand, and poetry, refinement, and

decency, on the other.

In fact, Gardner seems less interested in an extended meditation on the tensions

between pagan and Christian views that serves as a backdrop to the oral epic; for him,

pagan and Christian worldviews are but two among many philosophical inventions of the

western world that are surveyed and – one by one – rejected in the course of *Grendel*. As

Fawcett and Jones (1990) indicate, the novel unfolds through twelve chapters in which

Grendel dispenses with (at least) twelve key philosophical traditions of the Euro-American

inheritance. Grendel muses, "Twelve is, I hope, a holy number. Number of escapes from

traps" (Gardner 92). Fawcett and Jones read these 'traps' as canonical theoretical

approaches, including skepticism, metaphysics, solipsism, and others that they see

presented by Gardner in a careful juxtaposition with the twelve astrological signs and –

most importantly for their work – the 'heroic ideals' of the west, which they describe as

"the saving fictions of pattern-making creatures, who hypocritically proclaim allegiance to

something larger than themselves when they are actually driven by instinct or greed"

(646). Yet, as they also indicate, Grendel, even with all his verve for deconstructing such

ideals, never fully abandons them. Throughout the novel he struggles to reconcile his

nagging, existential observation that all such ideals are fictions with his enduring desire to

locate for himself some semblance of meaning. In the bitter end, defeated by the 'heroism'

of Beowulf and facing certain death, Grendel finds himself surrounded by "evil" animals

who have gathered to witness his demise, and he narrates his own final utterances: "'Poor

Grendel's has an accident,' I whisper. 'So *may you all*'" (174, emphasis original). For Fawcett

and Jones, Grendel's plight is the philosophical struggle of postmodern humanity, a flailing,

individualistic disdain for any 'saving fiction of pattern-making creatures' even though

"[s]omewhere in our cavernous hearts the old heroic ideals continue to haunt and illumine

us" (647). That is why we are so much more tempted to identify with Grendel than with

Beowulf, who can only be read, from such a perspective, as a model for the perpetual

subjective death experienced by the psychotic.

However, Gardner provides us with one additional model that is both closer to the

commonest experiences of postmodern subjectivity and, given his own interactions with

Grendel, a fine example of the ways in which the monstrous Other talks back, refusing to

allow our need for a symptomatic and closed subjectivity to be satisfied in full. This other

model, of course, is Unferth, whose interactions with Grendel in chapter six make for a

perfect inroad for reading the novel's commentary on the nature of the monstrous Other

and our dependence on it. Unferth first faces the creature during a typical attack at the

meadhall, but his self-righteous need to embrace heroism irritates Grendel who, in a

moment of sheer wickedness, begins pelting him with apples. The apple-bashing

completely undermines Unferth's hopes for a glorious face-to-face sword battle and makes

him a laughing-stock, even among the other people in the hall. This is a really odd and

telling moment in the narrative, in which we see other normative subjects enjoying a fellow

subject's humiliation by the monstrous Other; the scene is imbued with a kind of catharsis,

a deep-seated satisfaction that the lack is always there to put us, as it were, in our place. As

the sequence ends, Grendel leaves Unferth unharmed physically but entirely mortified and

dishonored.

Shortly afterwards, Unferth arrives in the cave occupied by Grendel and his mother,

where he has come to face Grendel in a quixotic encounter that underscores the

importance of honor to his identity. At first, Grendel can hardly be bothered to pay

attention to Unferth even though his presence alarms Grendel's mother and the mysterious

others – other descendents of Cain? – who also occupy the cave. Moreover, once Grendel

realizes that Unferth has come to be killed, in order to restore his precious honor, he

immediately decides that he will not humor him. Unferth senses that he may not get what

he has come for, and his speeches shift into a defense of his position, the position of the

subject-on the-whole. "I caught your nasty insinuations," he says. "'I thought heroes were

only in poetry,' you said. Implying that what I've made of myself is merely fairytale stuff"

(87). Such a proposition is unbearable to Unferth as it cuts to the very core of his

subjectivity, revealing it for the artifice (and metaphoricity) that it is. Desperately, he

pleads his case:

> "Go ahead, scoff," he said, petulant. "Except in the life of a hero, the whole world's
> meaningless. The hero sees values beyond what's possible. That's the *nature* of a
> hero. It kills him, of course, ultimately. But it makes the whole struggle of
> humanity worthwhile." (89, emphasis original)

But Grendel will not give him the satisfaction of a hero's death. When Unferth threatens to kill himself instead, Grendel taunts him with "it may seem at least a trifle cowardly to some" (90). In the end, Grendel waits for Unferth to sleep, and then carries him, unharmed, back to the stoop at Hrothgar's hall, noting that he "killed the two guards so I wouldn't be misunderstood" (90).

Because most subjects are not psychotic but fully integrated into the symbolic order, Unferth's experiences demonstrate the more typical encounter with the monstrous Other. While we need the monster as the delimitation of our humanity, we also desire it, welcoming the chance for the dangerous encounter that could end our lack but, in the process, lead to our subjective demise. As much as we might like to believe the contrary, this matrix of repulsion and desire is not the animating tension of heroism. Instead, heroism is, as Gardner's Beowulf makes clear, a state apart from, and itself a troubling problem for, subjectivity. This observation implies as well that our normative relationship to the monstrous Other is one of helplessness in the face of an alterity that is composed of everything we abhor. Yet *Grendel* is not without its commentary on this relationship. Although Grendel never succeeds in joining the symbolic order and is only ever truly understood by other monsters (the Dragon, Beowulf), he does engage in an intensive and running interior monologue that, given the structure of the narrative, forms a kind of dialogue with the audience. And it is in this dialogue that Gardner provides the beginnings of an intersubjective rapport with the monstrous Other, one that allows our sympathies to run toward the monstrous in a narrative in which its atrociousness is never diluted, its evil fully intact. By giving us this window into the extrasubjective positionality of the

monstrous Other, Gardner moves us one significant step toward a Žižekian intersubjectivity that could facilitate interventions in both subjectivity and its Others.

Robert Merrill (1984) presents a very different reading of *Grendel* that runs counter to my own and others like it. In his view, Gardner's project in the novel may include a representation of the troubled state of (post)modern humanity, but he argues that Gardner's intentions in rendering Grendel in this way are not to push us toward, but to pull us back from, the existential precipice. Indeed, he quotes Gardner's own remarks about his intentions and about his views on the nature of humanity and the purposes of art, drawing on several sources. Ultimately, Merrill interprets *Grendel* as a rumination on the power of the human imagination and, specifically, its ability to create meaning in spite of the arbitrariness of life's circumstances. In particular, Grendel, then, serves as a negative model, as a representation of the postmodern subject's failure of (a Blakean?) imagination. Merrill notes that this example is "all too representative" since "we moderns have become monstrous precisely to the extent that our assumptions parallel those of . . . Grendel" (170). For Merrill, too, this misreading of Grendel results from a terminal mismatch between the tendency of (post)modernist writers like Gardner to use first-person narration by an antihero in an ironic mode, and the average reader's inability to dissociate the direction of our sympathies in engaging the text, and its moral valences (171-2). That is, Merrill argues that we miss Gardner's intended meaning – that the sort of reveling in meaninglessness that characterizes both Grendel's trajectory and postmodern sensibilities in general ultimately leads to devastation and ruin – precisely because we perceive a certain verisimilitude in Grendel's experiences of isolation and hopelessness. In other words, we miss the fabular nature of Gardner's work.

Such an observation does not undermine an argument like mine, however, since I am not proposing that we read Grendel as a positive model for subjective volition but, instead, that we consider him as an exceptional portrayal of what we might call the 'crisis of subjectivity' that characterizes postmodern life. Indeed, to consider *Grendel* a fable that depicts the possible outcomes of an unfettered existentialism is not so different from reading the novel as an allegory on the postmodern condition of the subject. Both approaches address the symbolic disposition of the novel, and both include a reading of Grendel as an antihero. The main difference between these two approaches is that Merrill focuses on the generic qualities of the novel and how those qualities affect its reception, while I am proposing that we approach the novel as an early example of the particular role of postmodern representations of the monstrous Other. While I do not argue that Gardner gives us a fully formed prototype for either Žižekian intersubjectivity or a queer cyborgian approach to subjectivity, I assert that his novel is representative of the shift toward a monstrous Other that challenges the (hetero)normative character of subjectivity, moving us closer to such a prototype. Kerstin Ekman comes much closer to creating this prototype, as I will discuss in the section that follows.

The Monstrous Other Speaks:
Ekman's Skord and the Monstrous Power of the Symbolic

Kerstin Ekman's *Rovarna i Skuleskogen* (1998, published in English as *The Forest of Hours*, 1999) presents us with the portrayal of a different monstrous Other, a troll named Skord who is, in the novel's opening pages, living entirely in the forests of northern Sweden, the realm of both the natural and the supernatural. Throughout the course of the novel, though, Skord

gradually assimilates more and more into human society, oscillating between respectable

social positionings and the life of a thief. Interestingly, too, Skord is a troll who attempts not

just to pass as human but – for all intents and purposes – to *become* human. His efforts begin

with simple mimesis as he tries to parrot human speech but, as he becomes ever more adept

at the fully representational use of language and of narrative, he performs his identity as a

human with incrementally increasing acuity, becoming, at times, a more-than-human

simulacrum of a subject. No matter how effectively he passes as human, however, he remains

always hybrid, straddling the boundaries between human and troll, culture and nature,

settlement and forest. Nevertheless, Skord's performance of human subjectivity draws

attention to the ways in which subjectivity is always already performative, and this odd sort of

'drag' queers normative subjectivity by revealing its instability (i.e., its need for continual

reiteration) and its artificiality. In this section, I will first trace how Skord's gradual initiation

into subjectivity functions, from Lacanian and Žižekian perspectives, and then I will discuss

how his experience highlights the performative nature of subjectivity and thereby offers a

queer critique of the heteronormativity of the Self/Other dichotomy.

Skord is not even differentiated as a troll in the first pages of the novel, as he has not

yet, by that point in this largely linear narrative, come into any sort of contact with the

symbolic order of humanity. The opening sequences instead portray this creature being drawn

into interactions with a small family of giants who themselves live deep in the forest.

Interestingly, the giants (also a monstrous Other) already have a basic (or 'primitive') social

existence at the time that Skord meets them. Much like the wild men of European lore,

Ekman's giants inhabit the outer reaches of the known world and enjoy certain features of a

human or 'civilized' existence, including living in a simplistic house, storing and cooking their

food and – most importantly – using a form of language to engage in discursive exchanges. Skord hovers around the edges of their lives, doing little favors for them in exchange for a constant flow of small portions of food. Indeed, this exposure to the symbolic order, ironically generated by contact with Granarv, Groning, and their crone mother, sets Skord on a path that will take him into the center of human life in Sweden and, at times, other parts of Europe as well. Thus, Skord is, ironically, introduced to subjectivity by another monstrous Other.

At the outset of this long narrative, Ekman portrays the troll as a creature more aligned with the rhythms of the natural world (and, thus, the Real) than with either of the two registers of normative subjectivity (the Imaginary and the Symbolic). After the giants disappear from their home and Skord, having waited for a considerable amount of time (some years), dares to go inside, he discovers the corpse of the crone shriveling away in her bed (Ekman 8). In this brief encounter with the undead (she is dead and decaying but her presence lives on in the building itself), he is able to absorb a little information about what a house is and how it can be used, but then additional time passes and he starts to lose most of the memories of the place. "Troll brains do not hold many memories," the narrating voice states, continuing:

> Mostly, their minds flicker and ripple like the glossy water in a forest tarn ruffled by the wind. There are fluttering movements and faint whispering or whirring noises as of wings, and there are thin roots twisting round each other and searching ever downwards, looking for something with their fine, hairy points. But they find so little. So much happens in vain and is drained away, so much drifts down towards a smooth surface, is sucked in and disappears. Pulled down, it sinks into the slime and becomes one with the thick, black darkness. (8-9)

This passage seems to describe the mental processes of wild animals, aligning the troll with the other animal inhabitants of the forest. The seed planted by Skord's contact with the giants, though – and particularly his visceral memory of the joy of eating a prepared

pancake – lead his mind back to the imagery of the experience again and again, such that "thoughts kept clustering around that goodness, because he knew how goodness tasted" (11). Eventually, he connects the memory to the small bands of wandering people (in this case, orphaned children who live as beggars) that he had sometimes seen in the forest, and he decides to try and infiltrate one of the bands to see if he can increase his chances of having a pancake again (11). By this point in the narrative, Skord has rapidly progressed into the Imaginary and has begun to allow its primal drives to push him toward subjectivity.

The next logical step is for Skord to acquire the facility of language, and he begins to watch these bands of children and listen to their chatter, trying to make out the meaning of the sounds. Although Skord is still presymbolic at this point – at least, in the strictly human sense – he is familiar with the idea of language, both from the giants he had encountered earlier and the many animal languages that he is able to understand.[7] Interestingly, though, he has to exert a conscious effort to try and learn human language; this positioning of his character puts the Lacanian cart before its horse, attributing to Skord a drive or perhaps even desire that is determined prior to his entry into the symbolic order. Rather than reading this portrayal as some sort of authorial mistake, however, I think it is useful to remember that Ekman's novel sets about to challenge the boundaries between the human and the non-human, as well as between the human and the animal, and between the magical or supernatural and the 'real.' The entire novel holds open the tensions that arise when such foundational binary oppositions are discarded, so it may be the case that Skord is at once presymbolic, in the case of human language, and yet already

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[7] Ekman presents Skord's exchanges with animals in standard narrative dialogue, suggesting that animal languages may be closer to human languages than we might assume. Nevertheless, she does differentiate them as well, as when the ferret that Skord encounters while imprisoned tells him that he sounds more like a human than an animal (Ekman 277).

cognizant of the conceptual power of language. In other words, Ekman, from early in the novel, directly challenges the notion that subjectivity is strictly confined to the human world.

Skord's efforts to learn the language of the roaming bands of children are slow and painstaking. At first, his attempts are largely mimetic, leaving him sounding "like a starling mimicking human speech, toneless and whirring" (12). However, his trollish facility for mimicry and the mastery of the languages of other creatures prevails, and he eventually gathers enough of a vocabulary to enact his plan, which leads him into the company of a pair of siblings whose life circumstances have left to fend for themselves. In his first encounter, he hides in the forest foliage and does not introduce himself, but the children leave a piece of bread crust for him, and he returns for it after dark. He spends considerable time thinking about the events of the day even though "[i]t was like trying to catch midges in your hands without killing them" (14). By the next day, the children start speaking to him, yet he keeps some distance and only after a while is he coaxed out of the undergrowth to introduce himself. The children – Ecker, the elder and a boy, and Bodel, the young girl – are surprised by his odd name, Skord (15). In fact, his name presents, for Nordic readers, an easily recognizable combination of 'skog,' ('forest') with 'ord' ('word'), so Ecker's remark that the name is odd draws attention to the ways in which Skord will continue to straddle the boundaries between the natural and human worlds, even as he gradually becomes more and more a part of the human world, and this questioning of his name foreshadows events to come.

Some time later, after Skord has settled into a routine with the children and has learned a great deal more of their language and beliefs (mainly from Bodel), an incident

involving a farmer who gives day-work to Ecker further elucidates Skord's liminal status with respect to representation. Over the course of his day working for the farmer, Ecker accidentally damages the man's ax, for which he is repaid with a blow from the blunt end of a spade, and a refusal of the food he was promised for his work. Throughout the time that he had been working, Bodel and Skord had occupied themselves just out of sight, on the edge of the forest above the farm. At one point, Bodel starts using small found objects (stones, sticks, pinecones, etc.) to build a tiny model of the farm and its little village and, though it takes Skord a while to understand what she is doing, he is most impressed when he works it out, realizing the potential of discursive representation by means of Bodel's simplistic form of it: "He got some idea of why they all seemed to enjoy stories and images so much. It was not just the craftiness. It meant power" (Ekman 29-30). Once Ecker has been sent away from the farm without any food, Skord picks up some other stones and drops them onto the tiny model of the village, talking as he does about the destructive power of the Creator. The next morning, the smell of burnt wood attracts their attention but, as they have moved on some distance, the village is no longer visible. Before the children wake up, though, Skord climbs a cliff-face and sees the results of his sympathetic (or representational) magic: the village and farm have been utterly destroyed by fire. Although this is the only time in the novel that we see Skord use this particular variety of magic, the incident reveals the powerful potential of the combination of his growing mastery of human styles of representation with his own trollish abilities. In fact, Skord's magical abilities play a relatively minor role in the novel, which focuses largely on his increasingly humanlike character.

Skord's supernatural abilities mainly include typical trollish talents, such as an ability to convince people of the things he says; a telepathic ability to call objects to himself; and an ability to enter the astral plain, leaving his body lifeless and limp, while occupying the body of an animal. He does not seem to have the ability to shape-shift, which is, in Nordic tradition, "one of the most salient talents of the troll" (Asplund 95). We also do not see him having the ability to regenerate lost body parts, another of the typical abilities of the troll, though Ekman does present him as believing that he can do so, when he cuts off his little finger to impress a crowd of people gathered at a summer market (Asplund 95; Ekman 34-6). Skord is surprised to learn that his finger does not regenerate, perhaps suggesting that he had been able to regenerate lost appendages before he entered the human symbolic order. In fact, his magical abilities, in their interaction with human society, are perhaps best understood by way of what Ariel Glucklich (1997) calls "magical experience," that is, the myriad ways that magic plays out in specific, historically and culturally bound settings and practices. Rather than focusing on a renewal of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century anthropological efforts to define magic and categorize its various objects and aspects, Glucklich argues that a better theoretical tool for scholars interested in magical phenomena is the concept of 'magical experience,' which shifts the focus from the objects and acts themselves to the lived (and performed) sense of interrelationality(-ies) that magic creates (222-5). In Skord's case, his magical abilities are but one of many tools he deploys as he simultaneously joins the symbolic order and retains some of his prehuman experience. Indeed, for Skord, such human practices as writing, religion and medicine all involve elements of a distinctively magical experience.

Skord's gradual imbrication of the presymbolic and the symbolic continues throughout the course of the epic novel. Because Skord lives for at least five hundred years (the period of his life covered by the novel), he has a considerable amount of time to become more and more skilled at passing as a human. Nevertheless, his long life presents some challenges in remaining in one location for very long, since his very slow process of aging, and the fact that he never regenerates his little finger, make him susceptible to the memories of older individuals who might remember a similar-looking fellow, from many years earlier, who was at about the same age and was missing the same finger. In some ways, Skord's missing finger marks him as the Other, frustrating his efforts to be perceived as a man (even if a slightly odd one) and, at times, a woman. Moreover, his lack of the finger functions much like the Lacanian lack, frustrating his attempts to fulfill his desires, and linking his subjective identity to the Other – though, in his case, this Other is himself. That is, to the extent that Skord gradually becomes more and more successful in his human subjectivity, he also becomes his own Other, a paradoxical embodiment of the Self/Other dynamic that complicates and shapes a number of his experiences.

The novel's trajectory moves Skord through a succession of experiences that progress from the late medieval period to the Age of Reason, and through a sequence of events that involve such landmark episodes of European history as the completion of the Christianization of northern Scandinavia in the late medieval period; the end of the reign of alchemy; the succession of continental wars that reshaped the political map of Europe in the seventeenth and 'long' eighteenth centuries; and the beginnings of modernity, complete with its shift to a focus beyond Europe itself, to its many colonies and 'interests.' Throughout these many episodes, Skord's experiences are recounted in the style of

vignettes (corresponding, for the most part, to Ekman's sectioning of the narrative) that each focus on one particular historico-cultural moment; between these vignettes, immense expanses of time pass outside of the purview of the narrative, magnifying the drawn-out effect of Skord's long life. Indeed, by the last few sections of the novel, Skord has begun to forget the specifics of the more distant past, such that his own living memory (and, indeed, his subjectivity) mirrors the forgetful pattern of history, in which the vast majority of particularities such as names, details of events, and even some of the local placenames begin to fade away. In this way, Skord's elongated life reveals another of the limits of subjectivity, namely, its inability to account for its own historicity. The normative subject resides always in a specific time but, in the case of Skord, that 'specific time' becomes so immense that his subjectivity begins to fail to track the entire duration. Nevertheless, there are a few – we might say – 'trends' that run through Skord's experiences and that therefore help give an overarching shape to the narrative.

One of these trends is Skord's alternating experiences as a member of respectable society (though with variable degrees of rank and profession throughout his long life) and as a member of a band of outlaws occupying Skule forest. Living long enough to evade the living memory of human beings, Skord is able to experience long stints on either side of the law-abiding/outlaw opposition and, indeed, he hybridizes both by means of importing characteristics of the one into the other. Just to consider one example, in Skord's third stretch as a forest-dwelling robber, he takes note of the ways that even the society of the thieves has been influenced by the Law, stating that "'[n]ow robbery seems to have become a part of the kingdom of Sweden'" (Ekman 322). The old woman who was ruling the band of thieves at that particular time replies with: "'Inside or outside it' . . . 'we live in

the Kingdom'" (322). Skord's dissatisfaction with these changes leads him to wander off alone for a few days, but he finds himself feeling sick and cold and wonders, "Was it a dream that he used to be indifferent to cold and wet?" (322). This passage highlights the way that the symbolic order and its dictates have taken an ever greater hold not just in Skord's personal experiences, but in the world around him as well. As he moves incrementally closer to the status of a fully interpellated subject, he is less able to return to the forest as a 'free' creature, just as the forest itself begins to give way to the encroaching advances of the social order of humans. This movement in the novel towards an ever more expansive Symbolic characterizes the arc of Skord's character development and leads into the novel's commentary on the Other, including especially its examination of Cartesian positivity.

In a 1998 essay on *The Forest of Hours*, Linda Haverty Rugg discusses the novel's dialogue with Cartesian philosophical thought. Rugg reads Ekman as sympathetic with feminist, ecocritical and similar critiques of Cartesianism as an insistence on rationalism at all costs – a violent ideology that has fanned the flames of oppression for women, animals, 'primitive' peoples, and many other Others. Although Rugg takes a rather too harsh stance on Ekman's work and misses at least one major conceit of the novel – points I will return to below – she rightly marks the importance of challenges to Cartesianism for an understanding of the role of the monstrous Other in postmodern fiction.

The trouble with Descartes, as Rugg herself indicates, is that he was "a stern rationalist, a thinker whose espousal of the mathematical method and mind-body dualism drives a wedge between humans and their bodies and thus between humans and nature, and, some would argue, between male and female" (Rugg np). The separation of mind and

body is the particular 'wedge' for critics of Descartes, who see this dualistic conception as justifying a range of more or less violent forms of control exercised by the rational mind over individual bodies, the body politic, the body of nature, and the bodies of all sorts of Others. This line of criticism holds that Cartesianism, contrary to its precept of detached rationality, is actually a quite political architecture of the social and natural order according to the dictates of a few, very powerful people, and glossed as 'rationalism'. What Rugg indicates that Ekman has done is to find ways to resist the closed-circuit logic of Cartesianism (which tends to pervade all aspects of western thought) by giving voice (and, thus, thought) to the monstrous Other. Indeed, with the multifarious effects that Skord has on both individual lives and the society in which he lives, he serves as a powerful figure of resistance to Cartesian dualism and to the anamorphosistic subjectivity it advances. That is, his insistence on entering the symbolic order in spite of his status as Other represents the return of the anamorphosized body within subjectivity itself.

Ultimately, though, Rugg reads the novel as a partially failed attack on Cartesianism, mainly due to the copious violence that fills every cycle of the narrative. She sees Ekman re-enacting the very kinds of violence that anti-Cartesianism seeks to counter, both in the violent display of Descartes' corpse in Moshe's account of his death in Sweden, and in the multitude of other violent acts in the novel. Moreover, Rugg reads Ekman as sympathetic to a certain strand of anti-Cartesian feminism that actively resists the undead presence of Cartesianist positivity within every major western discourse. For, Descartes 'himself' may be dead, but his undead presence haunts more than just a short scene in Ekman's novel; indeed, his influence lurks in the shadows of western thought in general and is the very specter of dualism that Skord (as well as Grendel and Pessi) resists. However, Rugg is

critical of this feminist stance because of its insistence that knowledge and language and rationality are associated, in western cultures, with masculinity, which she notes continually re-inscribes both 'woman' and 'nature' as Other. Rugg also indicts Ekman (a bit absurdly) for using language – that violent and masculinist medium – to create an anti-Cartesian novel. This criticism implies, though, that resistance to dualistic thinking is impossible as long as we continue to use language – or else Rugg proffers these bizarre comments in order to satirize what she sees as the absurdity of anti-Cartesianist theorizing.

However, Rugg's reading oversimplifies the complexity of the character of Skord, who is not just a foil for Cartesianist dualism, but at once both the subject and the Other of language and rational thought. In addition, Rugg's reading elides the novel's important conceit that magic is real (if somewhat reduced or redirected by Skord's gradual interpellation into the symbolic order), and that Skord, in addition to cleverly talking his way out of difficult situations, also employs a handful of supernatural powers to effect the results he seeks. Skord can project his consciousness into the bodies of nearby animals, leaving his own body for extended periods (a kind of disembodiment that is, in some ways, more complete and more monstrous than that of Cartesian dualism). Magic, as the use of rational thought to create effects that exceed the purview of a rational universe, is itself a monstrous Other that speaks volumes about the troubled nature of Cartesianism and poses a direct threat to the symbolic order.

Taken together, Skord's magic and his other monstrous qualities make him an unlikely candidate for initiation into the symbolic order, but he nevertheless experiences such an initiation, even if it is never fully complete. In one of the novel's final sequences, which depicts his death, Skord wanders as high up into Skule forest as his weak and ailing

body will allow, accompanied all the while by a small creature referred to as a dog-mink (some sort of loosely described hybrid and, thus, another monster). Skord finds, to his surprise, that he has largely become an alien in the wilds of the forest, steeped as he is in human subjectivity. He can no longer understand the many languages of the woodlands, and he is unable to effect a full return to the presymbolic state in which he began his journey into the heart of western civilization. The strange company of the dog-mink suggests a certain ongoing connection with his prehuman experiences, but he is not able to leave his hundreds of years of human experiences behind. In his final moments, he realizes that his name – his identity – will be forgotten, but this realization does not imply any demise of the symbolic order (Ekman 477-82). Instead, Skord's challenge to the status quo lies largely in his unique embodiment of a sort of Žižekian intersubjectivity within his own complex character, as he is at once a participant in the symbolic order (a subject) and an incontestably monstrous Other. Indeed, Skord provides powerful examples of Žižek's conceptions of melancholic attachment as well as the notion of the subjective suicide that clears the way for intersubjectivity.

Throughout the novel, Skord has a deeply melancholic relationship with his former presymbolic experiences as a troll, beginning with his introduction to human life in the company of Ecker and Bodel, and culminating in his strange relationship with Xenia. Shortly after being introduced to human society by the siblings he first encounters, Skord begins to have the first realizations that he has lost something. In one early passage, Ekman even employs the word 'melancholy' to describe his feelings: "Melancholy overcame him, because he realized that he had brought the human world with him into the forest. It was inside his head and kept pushing its way out" (48). Likewise, in his interactions with the

Magister, Skord finds himself drawn to the most nostalgic and far-fetched of the Magister's stories, as if hearing them again and again could reinvoke his own innocence. Encountering the Magister again after several years of separation (during which he was living as a thief), Skord asks him to tell the story of King Magnus' coat, a coat that the Magister had described, in previous renderings of the story, as made from living stoats. The Magister wonders whether Skord is "still a child, with childish desires" (98). He then proceeds to tell Skord that "[t]here is always somebody else standing behind," by which he means that the Other, the very embodiment of the loss that is the source of melancholy, is always present beneath the surface of one's identity. Later still, when Skord (posing as Dr. Saintsday) and fellow thief Birger Birgersson are trying to convince Pastor Ragundius to allow them to help in his quest to uncover Drakenstierna's treasure, Skord himself notes that "however you select . . . whatever is selected for removal will – in one way or another – remain" (336). Although he intends to use this observation as an explanation for Birger's inability to separate proper from improper behavior, Skord's comments here reveal his own predicament: he cannot fully rid himself of his trollish self since it remains in spite of the selection of human behaviors, if in no other way than as melancholic attachment.

The role of Xenia in Skord's experiences presents a particularly compelling example of his Žižekian tendencies. Xenia appears relatively late in Skord's long life and represents an interesting inversion of his own experiences. For, in contrast to Skord, whose experiences have taken him from the forest (the extrasymbolic realm) into the heart of the symbolic order, Xenia's experiences began within the bounds of normative subjectivity but included twelve years during which she had been mysteriously absent from the home of her father (and from the Law). Indeed, she is a victim of *bergtagning*, the traditional Nordic

concept of 'being taken to the mountain,' and she has therefore experienced the same transition as Skord had, but in reverse. Her return presents her with a second need for transition, and it is one with which Skord is uniquely well positioned to assist her. Of course, her return is never fully actualized; as the tradition of *bergtagning* goes, one is never quite the same if one is lucky enough to return at all (Ingemark 98-104). She learns about her twelve initial years as a child, "[b]ut for Xenia there was no predetermined internal order governing the images from the past," just an order that she learned to repeat without conviction (420). Her changed state is so severe that her father doubts whether the person who has returned is, in fact, his daughter, though she bears a physical resemblance (426). Over time, Skord and Xenia grow increasingly fond of one another, and they find in each other missing pieces of themselves, such that they develop what Xenia's brother Abraham calls "their secrets" (468). These secrets, though, are not mere lover's enigmas, but a special kind of experience that comes with the development of an intersubjective relationship. Having always struggled with the burdens of the symbolic order, the two characters find solace in the ways that their mirror-image experiences allow them to perceive images of themselves in each other without requiring a closed, symptomatic relationship between them. The relationship is not a fully-formed Žižekian intersubjectivity, but it is an initial movement in the direction away from a Self/Other dichotomy as the basis for subjective identity.

In addition to introducing a nascent intersubjective relationship, Ekman's novel also provides a powerful queer critique of the heteronormative character of subjectivity, both through Skord's overtly queer experiences and his very need to perform not just his gender identities (which are multiple and contextual), but subjectivity itself. His first queer

experience occurs in "The Moon of Illyria," the section that immediately follows his experiences with Ecker and Bodel. In this section, Skord lives primarily with the Reverend Magister Ragvaldus Ovidi, an educated man who is exiled from the more 'civilized' south of Sweden when his cousin, the Bishop of Linköping, forces him to cede his property under false charges of heresy. The Magister is a man of refinement who finds himself out-of-place in the muddy, damp, 'backward' areas that border Skule forest. He feels utterly alone until he stumbles upon Skord, whom he overhears one day parroting his church Latin for the amusement of Bodel and Ecker. The Magister is immediately taken with Skord and invites him to be his assistant in his duties as the parish priest. Over the course of their time together, the Magister teaches Skord to read and write in a variety of languages (an ability that Skord employs, much to the Magister's dismay, to provide magical runesticks to local people seeking to fulfill particular desires or redress grievances). The two also sleep together in one bed in the Magister's humble cottage, and their sexual interaction begins as an assault in which the Magister suddenly gives in to his burgeoning desire for Skord, whom he (and everyone else) perceives to be a young boy. Although their sexual exchange begins with this assault, and the Magister keeps Skord on a leash throughout much of their time together, the relationship is one that is queer in multiple respects, not all of them unproblematic (e.g., age and power differential, domination/submission, and a kind of prostitution in which Skord exchanges his companionship for linguistic instruction and other tutelage).

This relationship is indicative, though, of Ekman's gritty and all-too-real take on the place of the queer in its cultural settings. For, while she presents the queer as messy and not without its role in various kinds of violence, she presents 'normative' heterosexual

relationships in much the same way, and this treatment has the interesting effect of normalizing the queer alongside the full gamut of human sexual identities and experiences, in all their troubled and untidy formations. In later cycles, Skord is involved with prostitutes, robbers, and with Xenia, whose twelve years in the forest have made her, in some ways, more of an Other than Skord is. In addition, while in Uppsala, Skord dons the attire of a female prostitute and proceeds to develop a relationship with Illuster that endures long after the troll has ceased dressing as a female. This 'messiness' persists through Skord's other queer experiences as well, including even his relationship with Xenia that, while nominatively heterosexual, still challenges the heteronormative standards of their cultural context since both Xenia and Skord have become hybrids across the same boundary, but from opposite starting places. Thus, Ekman's work is a queering of the tradition of the monstrous Other in the broadest possible sense, achieving, as Doty would say, a recapturing and reasserting of a militant (and wide-reaching) sense of difference, and not just a referencing of strictly 'LGBT' experiences.

Moreover, Skord's performance of his various identities also underscores the queer volatilities brimming beneath the surfaces of normative subjectivity. From his starling-like mimicry of childish language, to his female persona in the brothel in Uppsala and his performance of the identity of a wizened medical doctor in both Uppsala and Sånga, Skord's efforts to pass fully as human are always encumbered by both his constant need to perform and the excesses of performativity itself. One interesting example that occurs early on is his performance of the identity of a wandering magician while accompanying Bodel and Ecker. During this period, he frequently tricks people into buying useless items or giving him and the children extra food or other resources. His trickery involves

convincing performances of a person in possession of a charmed item or other such roles, and he is often successful in getting what he wants. Nevertheless, these performances go too far at times, putting him and the children at risk of retaliation. In particular, his employment of trollish abilities in these performances undermines the very identities that he seeks to perform and reveals the tenuousness of his subjectivity. Likewise, when Skord, having taken to performing his identity as a female brothel worker, encounters the king's scholar, Illuster, whom he already knows from the alchemy lab, the performative nature of identity is palpable. Skord has learned, like Butler's drag queens, how to use the markers of feminine identity to alter how he is perceived, and Illuster desires him "or the girl wearing Lissla's dress" immediately upon seeing her (221). Illuster tells Skord that he wants to sleep with her, adding: "'When I look into your eyes and sense who you are, it is as if I were looking at my own soul'" (222). Of course, such a comment is informative, since Skord is, first, a troll passing as human and, second, a male passing as female. That his/her identity at this particular moment 'rings true' for Illuster demonstrates the extreme plasticity and highly performative nature of all identities. By thus unveiling and dramatizing the performative nature of subjective identity, Skord continually queers normative subjectivity, revealing its seemingly fixed and opposed roles of Self/Other and man/woman as constructs (or 'social fictions') without a presymbolic existence. This kind of excess uncovers, as Butler notes, the machinations required to keep normative subjectivity afloat while also providing counterexamples that can help us see the possibilities beyond the norms.

The Monstrous Other Acts:
Sinisalo's Pessi and the Monstrous Return of the Real

Johanna Sinisalo's *Troll: A Love Story* (2000) differs markedly from both *Grendel* and *The Forest of Hours*, both in form and function. The novel is highly metafictive, proceeding through a loose and nonlinear assemblage of two primary kinds of short sections. The first kind are first-person narratives that shift between the novel's five major characters, and the second kind are passages that seem to have been quoted from purportedly authoritative sources (scholarly studies, websites, etc.) but that are part of the fictional universe created by Sinisalo. The sections are headed either with the name of the character in whose perspective they are narrated, or with the title or identifying information of the fictitious cited text. Use of this cacophony of narrative voices and 'external' sources allows Sinisalo to employ multiple first-person perspectives together with textual passages that appear to derive from biological, anthropological, folkloric, and mass media discourses – all in the service of driving a metanarrative arc that begins in a highly recognizable setting of postmodern urbanity and ends in a stunning moment of intersubjective action. The novel's intensive intertextuality also intervenes in the reading practices of its audience, forcing readers into a less receptive role than is generally facilitated by the more traditional narrative style of much novel-length fiction (including the other two works considered here). In addition, *Troll*'s intricately intertextual and thoroughly queer rendering of postmodern life makes it a powerful model of what Strassburg called a queer cyborgian perspective, pointing us toward a postsubjective existence in which identity is thoroughly multi-sited, discordant and, as Foucault would say, polymorphously perverse.

The main character of the novel, whose name is Mikael but who is known to everyone as Angel, is both the initiating and concluding narrator in the novel, and his central role in its narrative trajectory keeps him and his experiences at the center of our attention. The story picks up with Angel returning home one evening, drunk, and just after having been 'dumped' by another man in whom he was very romantically interested. Stumbling into the parking lot of his apartment building, he sees a group of teenage boys who are gathered around what he assumes to be small, domesticated animal, and they are kicking and taunting it, and goading each other on. After scattering the boys, with the help of his nosey neighbor (who claims she has called the police), Angel goes over to the creature and realizes that it is troll cub, very weak and in need of assistance. In a momentary decision that will alter the course of his own life and the lives of several people who know him, he picks up the creature and takes it into his apartment, with the plan to nurse it back to health (and little other forethought at the time) (Sinisalo 3-7).

Once Angel has carried the tiny troll into his apartment and realized that it will need something to eat, he begins conducting online research to see if he can locate any useful information. The information that he does find is included in the first of many 'resource' sections that comprise nearly half of all the contents of the novel, and the fact that he is engaged in research in order to learn more about trolls carries through all such sections. Angel's research also helps to reveal one of the central conceits of the novel: that trolls are a known, taxonomized species of large predator found in areas of Finland, Norway, Sweden, and northwest Russia. In Sinisalo's fictional universe, trolls have been 'discovered' and have been granted their proper place in the system of biological classification. They remain an elusive and seldom encountered species, so specific knowledge of their habitats

and mannerisms is patchy at best. Much of Angel's initial research, while providing him with interesting background reading on the troll and its folkloric history, provides little information of use to someone trying to figure out what to feed (and how to care for) a young troll cub. Nevertheless, Sinisalo's decision to cast the troll as a documented species positions the novel squarely in dialogue with the discursive origins of taxonomic systems identified by Foucault and discussed in the second chapter of this study. For, while Sinisalo places the scientific verification of the troll in 1907, the weight of the genealogical evidence about trolls – particularly that of the folkloric sources – together with the ongoing elusiveness of living trolls allows for Sinisalo's troll to straddle the epistemic break between prescientific and scientific discursivities. A fully hybrid creature, at once animal and anthropomorphic, 'real' and mythological, natural and supernatural, the troll of Sinisalo's fictional account actively resists the neat compartmentalization of dualistic thinking and embodies an anti-Cartesian presence replete with a cacophony of cultural references.

Angel eventually names the troll Pessi (after a trollish character from a children's story), and the novel's narrative arc traces the process of Angel and Pessi gradually bonding and becoming a kind of queer pairing. Although he understands that trolls are wild animals, Angel tends to view Pessi more like a pet (or a companion) than a creature of the forests and mountains. His need for ideas on how to help Pessi return to good health eventually involves many of the novel's other characters, including Dr. Spiderman, Ecke, and Palomita. The novel's multiple trajectories trace along several interconnected and intersecting lines, encompassing an assortment of (mostly) unrequited romantic interests, various forms of manipulation, domination and resistance, the use of the troll in an advertising campaign – all with the backdrop of Finnish nationalism and culture.

Writing about this novel and Sinisalo's work in general in 2008, Andrew Nestingen observes that Sinisalo, in her stylizations, characters, and formal conventions, resists the 'national disclosure' that characterizes most Finnish literature published since the end of the Second World War. Applying with equal efficacy to music, political discourse, popular culture, and literature, 'national disclosure' is a term that describes the tendency of Finnish cultural production to be linked directly with a hegemonic and ethnocentric notion of Finnish national identity. For example, Nestingen describes the example of sports celebrities, who are often represented (and represent themselves) as possessing *sisu*, "the mythologized [Finnish] trait of toughness, guts and determination" (154-5). In February 2001, a scandal involving steroid usage among Olympic-caliber skiers in Finland sent shock waves through this Finnish sense of pride – a situation that Sinisalo revisits in her subsequent novel *Heroes*, which recasts the scandal in the sport of the decathlon and presents its characters with an overlay of folkoric content from the *Kalevala*, the Finnish national epic. In Nestingen's view, Sinisalo's unconventional use of a variety of sources that usually serve national disclosure resituates the audience with respect to such content, destabilizing the sense of a unified national identity and drawing attention to individuated experiences of self-disclosure (154-65).

In order to elucidate this point further, Nestingen also examines one of Sinisalo's short stories, "We Assure You," reading the actions of its characters, who work in advertising, as indicative of Sinisalo's own stylistic approach to seemingly familiar content. In the story, the two main characters are burdened with the task of creating an effective advertising strategy for an insurance company with little name recognition (its name is Anar) in a market saturated with companies the names of which recall mythological

characters and motifs from the Kalevala and Greek mythology. The characters devise a plan

to fabricate a mythological backdrop for Anar, deciding to associate it with Lake Inari in the

Sami territories of northern Finland.[8] They create a spurious journal purportedly kept by a

lone traveler who disappeared while exploring the lake and after having encountered Anar,

the Sami spirit of the lake. They then proceed to send this journal together with an

anonymous letter to a tabloid and then, waiting for the 'news' to break, they start creating

vague advertisements with oblique references to their fakelore (Nestingen 161-2).

Nestingen notes that they need not be too specific and can instead rely on a syntagm, "a

chain of correlated parts . . . which they work to construe in national terms that are both

resilient and have the capacity to absorb the attribution of many parts" (162). Nestingen

argues that Sinisalo uses content in much the same way, particularly in *Troll*, where she

strings together different characters' first-person narrations (interior monologues and

unreliable reports on conversations and events) with brief passages of text that appear to

come from websites, literary works, folkloric scholarship, scientific articles, and more. In

both cases (advertising and the kind of fiction that Sinisalo creates), enough referentiality is

present to signal the general discursivities in which the content resides, but these

references are sparse enough that audiences are left to fill in the gaps with their own

existing understandings of these discursive fields. The effect is a kind of intersubjectivity

between authors and ad designers and their assorted audiences, who must choose (even if

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[8] The Sami are the indigenous peoples of northern reaches of Norway, Sweden, and Finland and the northwestern corner of Russia. Speaking nine or more variations of Sami (sub)languages, these peoples were traditional fishers and reindeerherders but have been facing rapid changes in their cultures and ways of life over the past hundred years, in the context of rapid modernization in the cultures that govern their territories. Interestingly, Sinisalo herself was born in Finnish Lapland, the regions primarily occupied by the Sami peoples (Ekman, back cover).

they are not conscious of it) how to navigate the discursive cues they have been given (162-4).

Sinisalo's specific use of such variegated content is, in Nestingen's view, part of her project to disrupt the processes of national disclosure by representing a multiplicity of perspectives on the seemingly unitary content of national identity. In Troll, for example, she incorporates not just 'authoritative' voices of such sources as the *Kalevala* and scientific studies on the troll, but also the perspectives of queer characters, a Filipina mail-order bride, and others. This approach generates a heterogeneity of subjective experiences and information that cannot be reduced back to a singular or authoritative voice, breaking the binarism of the typical sites of representation (representer/represented) and acknowledging the profound multi-sitedness of postmodern subjective experience. By employing this approach, Sinisalo renders her content, not just her form, as deeply intersubjective. In the specific case of *Troll*, the multi-sitedness of perspectives includes an array of queer perspectives that arise concomitantly with what Nestingen calls the "alternative publics" of postmodern life (160).

Sinisalo's fictional universe, set in the city of Tampere, Finland, presents an environment in which heteronormativity is apparently completely absent. On the one hand, many of the novel's characters are queer, but the queer temperament of the novel goes well beyond that feature, which is common enough. What makes the novel particularly queer is the fact that even its purportedly heterosexual characters have deviant, non-normative sexual and gender identities. The couple who lives downstairs from Angel, Pentti and Palomita, deviate from the norms of mainstream Finnish culture considerably, not because they married in spite of their cultural differences, but because of

the extranormative aspects of their relationship: the relationship of a certain kind of Finnish man with his mail-order bride. In addition, Martes, who is nominally straight, uses a certain performance of queer sexuality to bait Angel into doing inexpensive photographic work for his advertising company. In some ways, this representation of the heterogeneity of ostensibly heterosexual identities is not unlike that of *The Forest of Hours*, since both Ekman and Sinisalo queer heterosexuality – or, to be more precise, heterosexualities in the plural – by exposing the vast array of extranormative experiences and identities that heteronormativity would seek to elide.

Sinisalo ultimately leaves Martes' sexuality ambiguous: it is possible to read the text as indicating that he is simply a straight man who takes advantage of Angel, but it is also possible to read Martes as a man who is wavering between (or amongst) various sexual identities – an experience not that uncommon in postmodern life and indicate of why campus-based organizations like the LGBTQQIAA at the University of Oregon have added the second 'Q,' for 'questioning.' In fact, Martes' ambiguous sexuality may also be read as a metonym for the novel's refusal of normative subjectivity, what Nestingen identifies as its heterogeneity. Moreover, Martes' ambiguous sexuality is thematically linked with his somewhat amoral persona, which makes him, at times, the most monstrous character in the novel. We see this particular representation most commonly in the sections in which he is the first-person narrator. For example, when Angel delivers to him the photographs of Pessi wearing (or rather, trying to rip off of his body) Stalker brand jeans, Martes' interior monologue belies his manipulation of Angel: "God it was worth it, it was worth it" (150). The 'it' that was worth his effort is his use of Angel's attraction toward him as a means of manipulating Angel into creating stunning images with a high market value for a low

stipend. As the encounter continues, Martes becomes worried that Angel will realize "what a treasure-trove this CD is" and begin to inflate his asking price (151). So he adopts a posture of being pleased but not thrilled, saying that the images are "[q]uite okay" and then admitting to himself (and Sinisalo's readers) that "one could no doubt afford, but there's no point if we can get away with less" (152). As they adjourn from Martes' office to get a drink and discuss the payment, bringing the Martes-narrated section to its conclusion, he places his hand on Angel's shoulder and notes that "he almost wobbles trying to walk away without making it leave his shoulder quicker than necessary" (152).

His persistent, conscious manipulation of Angel's feelings is presented in sharp relief with the 'natural,' tender and mutual affection between Angel and Pessi. In another Martes-narrated scene later in the novel, after Martes has forced his way into Angel's home (literally pushing past Angel, who is, of course, hiding Pessi), and Pessi has attacked Martes in order to defend Angel, this contrast grows even stronger. Martes, stunned from the attack and bleeding from his face, notes wryly that "in all this surrealistic show Mikael's staring at me, half kneeling under the coats, hugging a devil" (191). Yet his perspective hardly convinces since, as a character who manipulates the feelings of the vulnerable for his own financial and professional gain, he is much more the 'devil,' in Sinisalo's representation, than Pessi.

Another interesting example of a purportedly heterosexual character whose identity is extranormative is the woman who sits alone in Café Bongo, the queer-friendly bar, either to 'slum' or to look for a way to gain a certain cachet from involving herself in the queer community. Sinisalo presents this "breeder-woman" through the perspective of Ecke, who postulates that she is interested in the queer bar patrons as "noble savages, a

kind of gray area outside the respectable, minutely organized community, an untamed wilderness it takes a lot of guts to step into" (107). In Ecke's view, this woman's visitations to the bar provide her with a kind of freedom from social constraints not without a certain resemblance to Cohen's comments about how fear of the monster is really a form of desire (Sinisalo 107). In a later scene, we see this woman again, this time conversing with Dr. Spiderman (another gay character, and a veterinarian) about the boundaries between humans and other animals. Dr. Spiderman takes an intellectual approach to the discussion (perhaps, in part, as condescension toward her) by challenging her on definitions of normal and abnormal, humanity and whatever humanity is not. Yet the woman is not interested in deconstructing binaristic conceptual pairings and instead turns the discussion toward the ways in which humanity oppresses other species, ending the section with the comment: "we won't recognize the chimpanzee as a person until it rises up against us in rebellion" (225). The comment is highly ironic, given the woman's treatment of a queer-friendly café as a sort of zoo (as Ecke notes earlier), but it is also resonant with many of the novel's themes, including the outsider status of the queer as well as the relationship between Angel and Pessi, and the relationship between Pentti and Palomita.

The queer is also intimately linked with the monstrous in the novel. Not only does the relationship of Angel and Pessi contain a direct queer-monstrous association; a number of other occurrences in the novel connect the two. For example, the novel draws out an association between the pheromonal attraction between males and the scent known as Calvin Klein's Obsession for Men. Of particular interest here is the fact that Angel's clothing begins to reek of Pessi's pungent scent, described variously as including hints of juniper berry, spruce, lemon and spice, and that several of the other men in the novel associate the

smell with cologne, possibly Obsession, and are attracted to Angel on account of it. That a fragrance popular among queer men is so easily associated with the pheromonal scent of a troll cub who loves his alpha male draws an unmistakable parallel between queer desire and the desire of and for the monstrous Other. In addition, the fact that Angel, a queer-identified man, and Pessi, a young troll, are so easily drawn into one another's worlds raises the question of whether those worlds – both of which are located in the space of the Other – were really so far apart to begin with. The novel's final sequence seems to provide a definitive answer to this question – a point I will return to below.

Another relationship of interest is that of Palomita, the Filipina mail-order bride, and Pentti, her Finnish 'husband.' As the novel unfolds, there are numerous brief glances into the lurid and troubled details of their private lives. The first of these occurs when Angel notices a leash in the couple's apartment when he drops in one day to ask for something to feed his 'cat' (when he is trying to revive Pessi). After learning that the couple does not have a cat, Angel thinks, "I ought to have been quicker on the uptake about that pretty, soft, red-leather harness" (26). Later, in a section narrated by Palomita, we learn that Pentti likes to dress her in split hot pants and "stuff [her] with two penises at once", that he counts the change from the shopping money to ensure she has not pocketed any, and that he forces her to remain naked throughout the day after she spills some tea on her blouse (162). The relationship between Pentti and Palomita is indicative of the queer migrations of coupling in the wake of global capitalism. In this context, Pentti represents a particular sort of western man who rejects the possibility of a reciprocal relationship with a western woman (who would be too much his equal) and opts instead for an asymmetrical pairing with a woman who is, for all practical purposes, his slave. To the extent, though,

that heteronormative identities in contemporary Finland are predicated on a mostly equinanimous union, the relationship of Pentti and Palomita fails to conform to normative standards and provides another variation of the queer channels of desire and subjectivity (albeit a very troubled and fraught example).

Palomita's role in the narrative is quite important, too, since she provides, as a disenfranchised immigrant with almost no understanding of the Finnish language, an intercultural counterpoint to the status of the troll. For Palomita is also the Other in this story, though her status as the Other has more to do with her gender, age, and cultural background than anything monstrous or uncanny. Moreover, her inability to use even rudimentary Finnish also positions her, not unlike Pessi, at least partially outside the symbolic order (at least, as far as that order is culturally specific). For, although Palomita can use other languages, her lack of facility in Finnish cements her status as the Other and makes her a perfect target for Pentti's desire for utter control over her and her complete dependence on him.

In addition, the relationship between Palomita and Pentti may be read in juxtaposition with the relationship between Angel and Pessi – a reading that leads to some interesting observations. First, as in *The Forest of Hours*, sexuality and eros are messy in this novel; desire is variously directed and takes forms that are not untroubled by imbalances of power and differences of culture and species. The relationship between Palomita and Pentti is abusive and incredibly lopsided, and Palomita's carefully planned acts of resistance are often so minute as to be barely noticeable to Pentti (their target). In the case of Angel and Pessi, on the other hand, the relationship is generally mutual, once Pessi accepts Angel as his alpha. The interspecific relationship, while intensely loving in the way that only a

bond with a devoted animal can be, is largely asexual, though Angel does find himself,

while holding Pessi in his lap, experiencing an orgasm – as if against his own wishes – on

two different occasions. These incidents leave him filled with shame but also – in an odd

way – more deeply satisfied than his casual encounters with the likes of Ecke and Martes.

Nestingen reads both of these relationships against the story of *Pessi and Illusia* that

is included among Sinisalo's folkloric sources. In the story, Illusia is a fairy who has broken

her wings and falls to the ground, and Pessi is the troll who falls in love with her and cares

for her, nursing her back to health. For Nestingen, the tale of *Pessi and Illusia* is a leitmotif

for the two main relationships in the novel, both of which bear resemblances to the

folktale. In the case of Pentti and Palomita, the relationship between the troll and the fairy

is less a loving one and more an indefinite trapping of the fairy in the troll's world. By way

of contrast, the relationship between Angel and Pessi reverses the folktale's roles, with the

troll being the one needing to be nursed back to health, and the 'fairy' being the one who

keeps the troll in *his* world (Nestingen 167-8, 192). In this way, Sinisalo draws on a

fabricated Finnish folkloric tradition as well as two extranormative relationships in order to

destabilize the closed and symptomatic nature of subjective desire, complicating it with a

multiplicity of perspectives.

Sinisalo's fixation on multiplicity, however, goes beyond the perspectives of the

sundry narrators and the general content of the novel and extends into the very structure

of the novel and its multiple modalities. Nestingen discusses Sinisalo's formalistic

innovations at some length, noting that her use of shifting, multifarious narrative

perspectives, as well as a particular kind of intertextuality, greatly contributes to the ways

in which her work challenges what he calls the national disclosure tradition. Of course,

Nestingen's use of the concept of national disclosure is not far removed from the notion of normative subjectivity that it is the focus of much of the present study. Both of these concepts describe the ways in which particular discursive formations ossify and unite disparate experiences, impulses, and drives under the banner of an apparently singular agency, whether that is construed as a national identity or the normative subject. In either case, Sinisalo's formalistic approach includes strategies that serve as unmistakably interventionary tactics in the practice of fiction-writing. Nestingen highlights a few of these, including Sinisalo's use of information that appears to come from the Internet, a technology of information distribution that both democratizes (among those who can afford a computer and Internet access) and problematizes the flow of information. In particular, information found on the Internet generally lies outside the normative mechanisms for controlling reliability and authorship, and such information is subject to a seemingly endless chain of iterations, citations, editions, and mutations, rendering it, as Nestingen points out, ontologically troubled (169-70). The free-flowing nature of web-based information makes it as multivocal and 'unreliable' a way of propelling the narrative as the multiple first-person narrations that Sinisalo also employs.

Likewise, Sinisalo uses not just Internet-based information, but a bewildering chorus of what Nestingen labels diegetic and metadiegetic discourses. The former category includes discursive passages (re)presented as coming from literature, folkloric scholarship, the national epic, and other similar sources that mainly belong to the 'national disclosure' tradition, though some of them are the 'less reliable' sources, including websites. These diegetic passages generally correspond to the narration of one of the five narrating characters – most frequently, Angel – and relate directly to passages that

precede or succeed them, giving the effect that the character in question is also referencing the source. The latter type, the metadiegetic passages, include miscellaneous snippets of textual and web-based discourses for which there is little or no textual evidence of having been read or encountered by any of the five narrating characters. Instead, these passages serve more as additional sources of information for Sinisalo's readers than for her characters, and they often resonate with the surrounding narrated passages in ways that are more oblique and sometimes serve to presage the monstrous events to unfold. Taken together, as Nestingen points out, the diegetic and metadiegetic discourses "form a heterogeneous construction of the troll," resisting the kind of foreclosed definition of the (monstrous) Other that normative subjectivity requires (167).

The net effect of Sinisalo's stylistic configurations is a markedly and irreducibly heterogeneous, multi-sited and metadiscursive narrative that meets all the major criteria of a cyborgian approach to the conditions of the postmodern subject. Nestingen identifies the novel's chief modality as an 'interface,' not unlike the nonlinear, interconnected and multivocal experientiality of the Internet. "The purpose of this formal strategy," he writes, "is to underscore the way in which language can be used to form multiply mediated, plural identities, which point toward a reformation of notions of national culture" – and, we might add, of subjectivity (178). Nestingen also indicates that this textual interface creates what, following a collection of Danish essays,[9] he calls the 'realism effect.' The concept relies on the general acceptance of the arbitrariness of the sign among postmodern audiences, for which even television commercials comment on the ways in which one sign can refer to other signs. In this context of the interreferentiality of signification, then, the

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[9] The collection is *Virkelighedshunger* (*Reality Hunger*), edited by Knudsen and Thomsen (2002).

sense of realism is achieved not by reference to some external, prelinguistic reality, but by the degree to which the interrelationships between signs situate any particular sign; the more any given sign appears to be interconnected to other signs, the more 'plausible' its signifying seems. As Nestingen notes, it is plausibility, not resemblance, that sustains the sense of realism under conditions of postmodernity (178-82). This movement toward a brave new 'order of things' relies on the negative functioning of discursivity, rather than the classical similitudes identified by Foucault.

This 'interface' modality of Sinisalo's texts fits neatly into Haraway's vision of a cyborgian existence, addressing all three of her reasons for the efficacy of the cyborg as a metaphor for postmodern consciousness and encapsulating, in the relatively minute form of the novel (albeit an altered version of that form), the 'powerful infidel heteroglossia' that can undermine discursive authority. To interact with an interface like *Troll* is to be plunged headlong into the joy of simultaneously breaking boundaries (e.g., of national identity, sexual identity, etc.) and re-establishing new boundaries and relationships that require the participation (and culpability) of the reading audience. The interface also defies conventional gender roles and norms, reconstituting what might be termed 'post-gender' experiences along multiple axes of identification and disidentification. Moreover, the interface modality of *Troll* severs the simplistic circuitries of normative subjectivity by situating readers in relation to multiply and chaotically interconnected circuitries of, as Haraway would say, "partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity" (Haraway 151). As Nestingen notes, this sort of cyborgian approach restages the novel in such a way as to undermine the sovereignty of aesthetic representation, eradicating the usual binary sites of representation and relocating the artistic object in a space of collaborative, multivocal and

heterogeneous meaning-making (Nestingen 182). Importantly, such a move eliminates the notion of the novel as a singular, unified 'work' of art, undermining the possibility of subjectivity in the formal attributes of the object 'itself.'

There are several pertinent examples, including Sinisalo's use of intertextuality, for example, between the narrated passages and the diegetic and metadiegetic passages; her employment of interreferentiality between and among the narrated passages themselves; and her stylization of the text to mimic the effects of the cyborgian technologies she includes in the story itself, namely, the cybernetic interface of the Internet and the mechanical medium of photography.

The examples of intertextuality abound throughout the novel, but we need consider only a few examples to perceive the effect of Sinisalo's formalization of intertextuality (a literary device that need not be expressed in the formal attributes of a text). One interesting example involves one of the first instances in which Angel begins to recognize that there may be more to the troll than the animal qualities ascribed to the species by the scientific discourses that address the creature. In a section narrated by Angel, the character depicts himself busily working on an advertising campaign photo-shoot when he suddenly realizes that Pessi is being too quiet. Getting up to find Pessi, he discovers the troll cub amidst the building blocks used in the photo shoot, "putting one on the summit of an almost faultless pyramid" (111). Turning the page to the next section, we find a passage purportedly from a collection of articles on hunting that reports that large animals require extensive and stable areas of habitat – an observation that recalls several other metadiegetic passages in which we see trolls (or something else rather like them) encroaching on areas occupied by humans (112). Then, we're back to Angel's narration, and

Angel himself recalls a book about the prehistoric stone piles, known as cairns, that punctuate Finnish (and other Nordic) landscapes. A moment later, and Angel recalls another name he has heard ascribed to the somewhat mysterious stone piles, "a devil's stove," which connotes the idea that ancient peoples may have used them as cremation sites (113). Then he reads in his book that archaeologists have found caches of animal bones under some of the cairns (113-14). The next section, coming in quick succession, is a metadiegetic passage supposedly taken from a 1933 story, and it reports that a troll may have "been buried there under the stones of his cave" (115).

This string of loosely associated discourses constitutes what Nestingen identified as a syntagm, providing enough of the connected circuitries to allow for the plausibility of any number of readings, depending what aspects of the various discourses we emphasize. Are the trolls actually humanlike creatures who bury their dead? Are the cairns sacrificial sites in which either earlier humans, or perhaps the trolls themselves, burnt and/or buried other trolls or animals? Do the cairns stand as evidence of a former moment in which trolls and humans came into closer (and dangerous) contact – a situation now being replayed as the ever-growing reaches of human settlement encroach on Finnish wildlands? Ideas and resonances dance off of the excess of material presented through this novel's formal hybridity, making the work itself, and not just one or more of its characters, qualify as monstrous.

A similar effect emerges in the interplay of various characters' first-person narrations. In fact, Sinisalo often uses this interplay in a concentrated manner, swinging back-and-forth between two of the five characters' narrative voices to move the audience between the two (or multiple) perspectives that two characters can hold on the 'same'

sequence of events and dialogue. One of the most dramatic of these sequences occurs when Pessi attacks Martes in the entranceway to Angel's apartment. At the sudden onset of the attack, Martes narrates, and he perceives Pessi as "a snarling demon" that "stands on two legs," and as a "sci-fi movie monster" with a "grotesque face" (188). The creature "walks with a spooky softness, sways closer to [Martes], raises its forelimbs" (188). The next section, one of the shortest in the novel, is narrated by Angel and consists merely of seven words: "No. Not this. / Anything, but not this" (189). Then we're back inside the perspective of Martes, who describes seeing himself – as if from partially outside his own perspective (and thus, even more closely alongside our own perspective as the audience) – using an umbrella to defend himself as best he can. He suddenly becomes aware that Angel is "spitting out words" and is angry with him (191). He reads Angel's response as "surrealistic" just a moment before we come upon another metadiegetic interruption, this one quite long and dealing with the "Satan sects" that may have held the troll as an embodiment of the evil they worshipped (191, 192-7). Then, it's back to Angel's voice, as he expresses surprise over the incredibly petrified state of Pessi after Martes' retaliation and also observes that everything between himself and Martes has changed in an instant (198). And the sequence ends with Martes narrating again, noting both that the award he anticipated for the ad campaign that featured Pessi's photo is now unlikely, and he 'sees' Angel (after the door has been closed) with "his face so hard up against that monstrosity's black mane – breathing it in, breathing in that horrible stiff black tar doll" (199). The sequence is one of the novel's more dramatically heightened and presents us with an emotionally charged, rapidly evolving pair of shifting perspectives, locked for a moment in a dangerous dance around complex and lurid themes. Sinisalo's deployment of these

differently narrated sections, punctuated as they are with diegetic and metadiegetic

passages, forestalls the ability of the reader to settle into a singular reading of the novel's

events. Our sympathies – which Gardner locked onto Grendel throughout his metafictive

but less cyborgian treatment of the monstrous Other – find no lasting respite in Sinisalo's

hands. We have no choice but to consider the multifarious and unstable perspectives she

presents.

This restlessness carries over into Sinisalo's employment of photographic and

Internet-derived formal qualities as well. In *Troll*, as in Sinisalo's other works, postmodern

advertising and its stylized employment of multiply signifying images plays a significant

role. Angel works as a freelance photographer with a particular aptitude in PhotoShop,

largely earning a living by creating photographic images and then consciously manipulating

them for the desired effects or, to put in Nestingen's terms, to deploy the proper

syntagmatic effect. Already known by Martes as "an actual wizard" in the employment of

PhotoShop to alter images, Angel achieves – for a while – the ultimate magical coup by

presenting unaltered images of Pessi in the Stalker brand jeans and letting Martes and the

public at large assume that the images have been altered (150). This sequence is

reminiscent at once of both Lippard's comments about the framing modalities of

photography, and Sinisalo's own 'wizardy' in the employment of similar kinds of alteration

and perceptions of alteration in creating a syntagmatic 'reality effect.' For Sinisalo, like

Angel himself, frames and re-frames the troll in a variety of 'poses' throughout the novel's

collection of narrated and discursive passages, at times altering what we see (for example,

by inserting lines into the *Kalevala* passages she quotes), and at other times presenting

exactly what we expect in a form that is impossible to anticipate. The passages purportedly

from websites also reflect the novel's overall structure, which proceeds, as Nestingen

notes, like a literary interface, providing the same options for 'surfing' and nonlinear

engagement that a Google search can supply.

But to what end do all of these unique innovations in content and form lead us?

The culminating scenes of the novel support a reading in which Sinisalo gestures toward

what we might call a postsubjective stance. While escaping into the forest together after

Pessi has killed Ecke, Angel and Pessi are suddenly face-to-face with an adult male troll who

confronts them with a shotgun. From the actions of this troll (and other adults

encountered shortly thereafter), it is clear to Angel that the trolls are very familiar with

both guns and cigarette lighters; they have used them before. Indeed, the novel's dramatic

closing sequence poses serious challenges for normative subjectivity: Angel experiences an

updated and odd form of *bergtagning* as he led into a troll-cave by Pessi and followed by a

gun-toting adult male troll. The trolls of the end of this novel, while still not versed in

human language, can hardly be said to be presymbolic. At once animals incapable of

engaging with normative discursivities, and subjects pursuing their own desires, these trolls

represent an irruption of the Real into the Symbolic. Angel's status, too, is ambiguous as

the novel ends. One of the last things he mentions is that "[f]ar off somewhere a cuckoo

calls," and this comment refers back to an earlier (diegetic) observation that cuckoo calls

are associated with death (278). Yet it seems unlikely that Angel will be killed by the trolls,

particularly given how he arrives with Pessi, marked by his scent, and returning him to his

forested home. Yet it is entirely possible to read the somewhat abrupt ending as implying a

subjective death for Angel, who may be permanently departing from the known symbolic

order, and joining a very different kind of social order predicated on rather different

precepts. Certainly, the fact that he is wanted for the murder of Ecke suggests that he cannot easily return to his own society – indeed, he made that decision much earlier, perhaps even at the moment that he violated the Law by bringing a 'wild animal' into his home, facilitating the incursion of the Real into the domain of the Symbolic.

Here the arc of the plot merges with the stylistic and content-related innovations of Sinisalo. The book's most continuously sympathetic character, Angel, leaves the symbolic order just as the novel spins out its final first-person narration, weaving together the cyborgian textual and intertextual strands with the Žižekian conclusion of symbolic suicide. This merger creates a new chain of significations, perhaps a metasyntagm, in a finale that is at once masterful and impossible without our participation. Sinisalo's artistry here is not the authorial achievement of a Gardner, or the metadiscursive triumph of Ekman; instead, she is more like the ad writers of her fiction than a fiction-writer in the traditional sense. She gives us multivocal, heterogeneous fictions that are functionally located in the vast constellations of late capitalist culture, divested of their authorial intentions, and desirous of a participatory reader willing to 'link into' the multifarious circuitries they can connect.

Coda

The three novels considered here each address the postmodern functioning of the monstrous Other in unique ways. *Grendel* gives us the monstrous Other at the precipice of entering the symbolic order, challenging its boundaries by way of deeply humanistic consideration, and sequential rejection, of various schools of western philosophizing. *The Forest of Hours* presents the monstrous Other interacting directly with (and serving as a living deconstruction of) the west's transition from medievalism to modernity, and the high

degree of success that Skord enjoys as he expends his energies trying to develop a full-fledged subjectivity poses a serious challenge for a symbolic order that should exclude his kind completely. Finally, *Troll* more or less demolishes the boundaries of normative subjectivity, at once queering the identities of all of the human characters, and casting their status as human into doubt as the novel's narrative and discursive innovations create a fully wired, connective tissue of doubt that leaves us with (the possibility of) a postsubjectivity informed by and from a queer cyborgian stance.

Considered collectively, these works demonstrate the efficacy of adopting an intersubjective, 'queer cyborgian' stance that eschews simplistic notions of the Other to embrace a wider sense of the polymorphously perverse possibilities for interconnectedness and intersubjectivity. Working against such oppositions as human/animal, natural/supernatural, and hero/villain, these three novels 'plug into' a diverse array of circuitries in the cybernetic channels of postmodern identity, pointing the way toward a postsubjectivity that embraces multi-sitedness and a rigorous sense of the need for a radical revision of the Cartesian platform, which would hold apart not only bodies and technologies, but even the mind and the body. Given the 'heterosexist' nature of such dualisms, novels such as these also queer our understandings of both subjectivity and its Others. What we are left with is not a utopian alternative to the symptomatic nature of normative subjectivity, but a muddle of intersubjective stances waxing and waning within and between 'individuals' in an interminable, interconnected, postsymbolic disorder. If we take its instability and indeterminacy seriously, we have no choice but to assume responsibility for our necessarily partial, conflicted, and heterogeneous experiences. No

monsters will save us from normativity; no heroes rescue us from facing our Others. All

such entities are effects of the Symbolic, and the Symbolic offers us solace no longer.

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