

TESI DOCTORAL

Sara Martín Alegre

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

Dirigida per: Dr. Andrew Monnickendam



Departament de Filologia Anglesa i de Germanística,  
Facultat de Lletres,  
UNIVERSITAT AUTONOMA DE BARCELONA,  
Bellaterra, 1996.

## CHAPTER 7

### *Gendered Monstrosity:*

#### *The Monstrous-Feminine and the New Woman Saviour*

#### *Introduction*

In the first section of this chapter I review the problematic definition of the essence of the monstrous-feminine, arguing that the definition of monstrosity depends on power relations established across gender roles and that feminist criticism - in all its varieties - is not the most appropriate critical point of view from which to approach gendered monstrosity. My objection to feminism (or feminisms) is based on several reasons. First, the production of feminist censorious criticism of men's misogynistic representation of woman is not really helping to create a space to establish a dialogue between men and women; as I see it, only dialogue can effectively erase sexist prejudices from men's fiction while feminism seems to be producing the opposite effect, that of further distancing men and women, at least as far as cultural criticism is concerned. My second objection to feminism is that it is very resistant to accepting men's criticism of women's fiction. This is possibly the reason why despite the development of men's studies - devoted to reading men's fiction from a liberal perspective informed by feminism - the certainly androphobic discourse of feminist writing - including essays and fiction - is not habitually criticized, whereas feminist critics devote much of their work to criticizing the allegedly misogynistic representations of women by men. A further objection to feminist criticism is that it is failing to acknowledge two fundamental similarities between men and women: first, each sex produces ideal and horrific fantasies about the other, that is to say, both men and women express their ambivalence towards the opposite sex

through fiction; second, each sex uses power in a similar way, so that even though it is true that women are still disempowered by comparison to men, the power reclaimed for women by feminism has not led to better, more fair or more realistic representation of men by women but to the elaboration of an androphobic discourse comparable to patriarchal men's misogynistic discourse.

Since feminism has focused excessively on how women are represented by men, there is an obvious gap in cultural studies: in the case that concerns us, the cultural construction of monstrosity, there are no studies comparing the monstrous-feminine, a term employed by Barbara Creed, to the monstrous-masculine. In this chapter I will focus on this comparison and I will, therefore, argue that feminists have constructed a quite debatable discourse on the monstrous-feminine that misses important issues in the contemporary representation of monstrosity. One of them is that the growing numbers of male monsters indicate that, above all in the last fifteen years, masculinity and not femininity is the focal point of the concerns that men express through monstrosity. Men are discussing themselves through the representation of the male monster: the monster is used to vent anxieties about what the definition of masculinity is and how it is affected by that of femininity. Despite feminist claims to that effect, it is not true that the presence of woman in texts about monstrosity - especially in horror film - betokens an omnipresent misogyny. In fact, there are many signs of trouble in the patriarchal paradise, manifested by the overwhelming presence of male monsters in comparison to the less prominent presence of female monsters and by the gradual assumption of the role of the hero by women, a role now played in many cases by a character I will call the 'new woman saviour'. The second section of this chapter deals with the new woman saviour, a figure derived from sentimental fiction, that is being progressively strengthened in contemporary fiction and that might eventually become the basis for a more humanist discourse acceptable for both men and women. She is either the failed saviour of an irredeemable male monster or his nemesis, and is a reliable indicator that men's fantasies about woman are leading, arguably only in some important cases, to a model not so distant from

women's representations of themselves as strong heroines.

In any case, it is important to note that the critical interpretation of gendered monstrosity is hampered by the contradictions implied not only in feminist discourse but also in recent fiction. It is frequently almost impossible to determine whether a text is misogynistic or not, androphobic or not, because most texts can be read from widely diverging perspectives. As I noted in Chapter 4 in reference to the difficulties of reading the moral content of contemporary texts, there is nowadays more interest in creating ambiguities in the discourse on gendered monstrosity than in dispelling them. This is, however, as it should be, since monstrosity is precisely the site at which moral ambiguities and the emotional and psychological ambivalence elicited by the still very rigid gender roles are discussed. This is why a much more supple critical point of view than feminism is needed to read, in a really productive way, the texts focusing on the non-human female and the human female monsters. Some mistakes, such as the identification of non-human femaleness with human femaleness and the persistence in seeing particular female monsters or victimized heroines as representations of all women must be avoided. So must the supposition that men ought to produce fair representations of women, since there is not a clear consensus among women about how women should be represented, together with the wrong assumption that there are no essential differences in the ways in which diverse men - patriarchal and non-patriarchal - represent women. My argumentation will show that gendered monstrosity is best approached from a critical position less committed to feminism and more open to contrasting how men and women see each other, as hero/ines or as monsters.

## 7.1. *The Monstrous-Feminine*

### 7.1.1. *Misogyny and Androphobia*

Gender plays a very important role in the construction of the monster. Men and women define the gender of the monsters of fiction they create from different perspectives, depending not only on their own sex but also on the gender ideology they espouse. Men may write from a

masculinist, misogynistic point of view or from a position critical of traditional masculinity, which might even be close to feminism. Women may write from a feminist, androphobic position or defend a stance in which feminism plays no major role. However, apart from the personal conditioning of each author, criticism also governs the construction of the monster's gender. No doubt, feminist criticism is greatly influencing the reception of the contemporary texts about monstrosity written by both men and women. Yet, there is an important point in this regard that should not be missed: those within the academia - both men and women - are likely to pay much more attention to gender issues than those outside it. Hence, issues that have been amply debated within the academia or in the circles of feminist writers may not have reached the general public, nor influenced the fiction addressed to large segments of the population.

Feminism has influenced female producers and consumers of fiction to a much greater extent than male producers and consumers, yet it has not exerted the same influence on all women. Likewise, while some men persist in the traditional sexism of patriarchy others have been certainly receptive to feminism. Men's studies, addressed to reading the texts by men and for men from a perspective that avoids the errors of misogynistic patriarchy, have been inspired by the example of feminist criticism and can be said to be pro-feminist in their approach (Craig, 1992: 2). The undeniable importance of feminism (or of 'feminisms') as a critical field in constant expansion means that much more has been written by women scholars about men's view of monstrosity than by men scholars about women's. Actually, areas of popular culture that have been unnoticed until recently by academic criticism, such as horror film subgenres like the slasher film, have reached the academic presses thanks to the work of feminist critics. What is missing is a response to the feminist critique of those areas of culture, coming from male (and female) scholars assuming a primarily humanist - rather than feminist or masculinist - position.

Feminist cultural critics have devoted a considerable number of works to exposing men's misogynistic representation in recent fiction of woman either as a monster or as a sadistically victimized heroine in the hands of patriarchal male monsters. Feminist scholars such as Molly

Haskell, Carol Clover, Barbara Creed or Vera Dika have described the misogynistic message insinuated by many films (especially by horror films) produced by men and addressed to men. These feminist critics have succeeded in explaining how there seems to be an inverse ratio between the feminist struggle for women's liberation and the rise of sadistic misogyny in horror fiction: the more women have claimed their freedom in real life, the more they have been symbolically punished for their new liberty in fiction. The misogyny in the representation of women as monsters in recent fiction has been interpreted, therefore, as the union of man's inveterate rejection of woman's body with man's misgivings in the face of woman's still relative liberation from patriarchal constraints. Feminist critics have consequently spurned those monstrous images of woman created by men and also the literary and film genres in which they can be found, especially horror fiction. These critics have seen obvious signs of the hand of patriarchy in the representations of women as monster or as woman saviour: the woman as monster is what woman should not be, according to patriarchy; the woman saviour is what woman should be, also in patriarchy's view. This is in many cases an accurate perspective, though it fails to account for the many exceptions, and also for the fact that not all men write as representatives of patriarchy nor do all women dislike these portraits of woman as monster or saviour.

The feminist analysis of monstrosity must be approached with caution. The feminist denunciation of men's alleged misogyny and sexism in the representation of woman as a monster and the defence of woman's feminist utopia cannot be sufficiently contrasted with a reading of feminist texts by men, for the simple reason that there is not a strong critical position allowing men to criticize feminist writing without being immediately labelled as male chauvinists. Nor is it easy for a woman scholar to assume a critical position free - or just relatively separated - from the powerful shadow of feminism. Women tend to centre their discourse on woman herself, paying actually considerably less attention to monstrous men than men themselves pay to monstrous women. Yet, whenever women portray men as monsters they need not concern themselves with men's negative reactions to these male monsters. There is not yet a critical discourse comparable to

feminism, capable of scrutinising women's texts from the point of view of the non-discriminatory man, who may feel as harassed by masculinism as by feminism. Men's studies, which should ideally fulfil the same function for men that feminism is fulfilling for women, deal with how men are represented by men, but not by feminist women.

It can be argued that both men and women represent the members of the opposite sex as monsters because monstrosity serves to discuss the attraction and repulsion elicited by the Other, understood in terms of gender. Men's representation of women as monsters is much more visible than women's representation of men as monsters first because men have a greater share of power in the control of the means of cultural production - especially in Hollywood where women producers and directors do not abound - and second, because the films and novels by women spring from a much more recent tradition, which means they are less known. Men have produced images of woman as monsters for thousands of years, whereas women have only started to generate their own images of men in the last two centuries. In general terms, though, the contribution of men and women to the imagery of the monstrous Other seems to indicate that there are a number of interesting similarities between the sexes. Each sex fantasises about an ideal representative of the other sex characterized by a great capacity for self-denial and love: men have created the woman saviour, always loyal to man no matter how monstrous he can be; women have created the hero of romance, always ready to put love for a woman before any other consideration. Jane Miller (1986: 160) argues that the hero of romance is a female fantasy that performs a function similar to the pliant heroine of pornography for men. "They", she writes, "are both forms of consolation and myth-making, and part of the social realities which constrain and dictate sexual relations between men and women." As I see it, this is only partly true, for the fantasy of the supportive woman, which I have called the woman saviour, also plays a fundamental role in fiction written by men; the woman saviour cares for man's peace of mind in a way no heroine of pornography ever does.

The fantasies of the Other as monster are likewise similar. They can be roughly divided

into fantasies of rejection in which the monster is too abject to be redeemed, and fantasies of seduction in which the monster is dominated or redeemed by the love of the 'normal' person. There are many instances of the rejection of the abject monster. *Fatal Attraction*, *Misery*, and many other texts narrate the destruction of the female monster, *Body of Glass*, *Heart-Beast*, Coppola's *Dracula* and others, that of the male monster. The fantasies of seduction inspired by "Beauty and the Beast" include *Basic Instinct*, in which the role of Beast is played by a woman, and also repetitions of the original pattern such as Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*. The fantasy of seduction is usually accompanied by a fantasy of manipulation possibly originated in the myth of Pygmalion and Galatea. As I remarked in Chapter 6, even though feminist critics have objected to men's modelling of woman in texts such as *Blade Runner*, actually Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass*, Tannith Lee's *The Silver Metal Lover* and Suzy McKee Chamas' *The Vampire Tapestry* deal with diverse women's attempts at modelling their monstrous lovers to their liking. These texts, however, have been welcomed by feminist critics because they challenge traditional ideas of masculinity held by men, regardless of whether men agree or not with the new models of monstrous masculinity proposed by women.

While it is undeniably true that men often portray women as monsters, it is not less true that men represent other men as monsters with greater frequency. The increasing number of male monsters created by men can be read from different perspectives. Some see in the male monster an embodiment of triumphant, powerful patriarchy designed to terrorise women into submission, which would explain why men do not feel insulted by books such as *American Psycho* or films such as *Henry*, *Portrait of a Serial Killer*. The male monster would be in the feminist interpretation a sign of the insidious ways by which the power of patriarchy is surviving the onslaught of feminism: it would tell men that women can still be controlled; it would tell women that men are still in power. However, it is doubtful that most men identify with monsters such as Freddy Krueger, Michael Myers, Pat Bateman or the Terminator, just to name a few, among other things because they also



kill men; the fact that these monsters are in many cases defeated by the women they set out to kill suggests that there is more than meets the eye in the portrait of the male monster. In any case, feminism has raised a protest against the male monsters and their female nemeses, seeing them as men's undisguised attempts at perpetuating patriarchy. On the other hand, even though female essayists such as Susan Jeffords and Yvonne Tasker have produced valuable studies of the contemporary hero in American film written from a perspective relatively separate from feminism, they have missed an important point: the new American hero is too frequently represented as a monster (as in *Robocop*, *The Terminator 2*, *Universal Soldier* and other films) so as to suggest that he personifies an unproblematic view of man or patriarchy's triumphant remaking of itself, as Jeffords and Tasker argue. They and others female critics are making the mistake of considering male monsters mostly as signs of political incorrectness, missing the fact that men do not create these monsters exclusively as a response to feminism. It is probably impossible to read the spectacular, monstrous body of the hero and of the male monster correctly without putting feminism aside and without focusing uniquely on man and masculinity.

The women writers who portray female monsters appropriate men's representation of women as monsters for feminism and subvert the misogynistic traits of the monstrous woman, adapting them to the feminist demand for female power. This is why it is necessary to consider to what extent monstrosity connotes essentially power across gender barriers. The female monsters created by men are signs of men's fears of being overpowered by women but the female monsters created by women are women who *want* to overpower men. Ironically, it seems that men and women agree on the fact that a person needs be an extraordinary monster to wield enough power so as to coerce the others into submission. The fantasy of forcing the others to submit can be found in feminist and in misogynistic texts alike; it would be, therefore, naive to suppose that women are abstaining from using images of aggression to reinforce the feminist message. All in all, the paradox is that while feminists demand less tolerant attitudes to the representation of women as monsters, women enjoy a greater freedom than men to represent

themselves and the members of the opposite sex as monsters. It is as if it had been tacitly agreed that women's representation of men as monsters is justified by the reality of man's behaviour, while female monsters created by men are gross manipulations of women's reality.

In general, women's androphobia is apparently better accepted than men's misogyny and just an instance will suffice to prove this fact. *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1991), based on the novel by Fanny Flagg, narrates how a lesbian rescues a married mother, whom she loves, from the clutches of an abusive husband. The two women finally free themselves from the threat of the monstrous man when he is killed by their black, male employee; subsequently the husband's body is cooked by this man and served by the women for dinner to the male FBI agent who is investigating his disappearance. A film in which a homosexual man ended up cooking his male lover's wife with the help of a black woman, and making a female FBI agent participate in cannibalism would be immediately denounced as homophobic, racist and misogynistic. The case of *Fried Green Tomatoes* indicates, thus, that the texts written by women are no less prejudiced than the texts written by men. Why, despite having the experience of thousands of years of unbounded patriarchy, women cannot be said to be fair judges of men's behaviour is a question as complex as whether African-Americans would behave in a racist way had they the power to rule the USA. My claim is that women writers should by all means avoid the temptation of producing androphobic discourse, for this will only lead to women's assuming the same biased, intolerant attitude towards men that misogynists hold against women. The most effective means to eradicate misogyny, if such thing can be achieved, is not censorious, androphobic feminist criticism or fiction, but humanist criticism and fiction written by women and men and addressed to both sexes.

Other feminist critics, such as Tania Modleski, have analysed the appeal for women of contemporary Gothic romances written by women, among other genres written for a mass readership of women. Modleski concludes that the heroine's persecution by the male villain - incidentally, the model of male monstrosity most frequently dealt with by women writers - far from representing a masochistic indulgence in fear, as other feminist critics have suggested, appeals to

both feminist and non-feminist women. According to Modleski (1982: 83),

... Gothics probe the deepest layers of the feminine unconscious, providing a way for women to work through profound psychic conflicts, especially ambivalence towards the significant people in their lives - mothers, fathers, lovers... the genre is used to explore these conflicts in relation to a society which systematically oppresses women. In other words, the Gothic has been used to drive home the "core truth" in feminine paranoid fears and to connect the social with the psychological, the personal with the political.

In fact, contemporary Gothic romances for women dramatize woman's politically incorrect attraction towards the patriarchal villain and cannot be read as feminist texts. Up to a point, they are a more courageous examination of the female psyche than many feminist texts, for they acknowledge woman's difficulties in overcoming her dependence on the traditional models of masculinity and femininity. Nevertheless, the most important aspect of Modleski's analysis of Gothic romances is that, unlike other feminists, she vindicates their role in the construction of female consciousness; as she says, the gothics help women process their "ambivalence towards people in their lives". Presumably, genres regarded as masculine - such as horror fiction, the action film, and possibly science fiction - perform a similar role for men. They are the sites where men can discuss their own ambivalence towards other men and also towards women.

Critics like Modleski rightly complain that men have overlooked the importance in the construction of female identity of popular fiction addressed to women. However, feminist critics do not hesitate to question the political correctness of the texts assumed to be addressed exclusively by men to men, which seems inconsistent with the defence of the texts addressed to women. Why, indeed, should the texts written by men be scrutinised by female critics in search of possible infractions of political correctness when women are demanding not to be forced to obey patriarchal limitations and when no male critics are checking whether women produce androphobic discourse? A possible answer is that men are not systematically oppressed as women are by society and that when they narrate a man's persecution by a monstrous woman, they are not referring to any recognisable situation of real life, which means that that they are grossly

misrepresenting the existing gender roles. For many feminists, men's Gothic fantasies are not to be considered, therefore, as signs of man's unease with his gender, in view of the enduring dominance of patriarchy, but as signs of men's enduring dominance of women whom they portray unfairly as monsters. This position is simply untenable. If woman's expression of her ambivalence towards man, personified in the monstrous man, is to be taken seriously in gender studies as a sign of women's anxiety in a world dominated by men, so must be man's expression of his anxieties regarding woman, even if they are not expressed in terms palatable for feminist critics.

This demand of political correctness from men puts women in an uncomfortable position that may even be disadvantageous. In order to resist men's representation of women as monsters, women may choose to ignore most texts about monstrosity created by men - perhaps to reject most fiction produced by men. Yet without knowing the monster well, it cannot be defeated, and if women want to resist this misogynistic discourse with their own discourse about female monstrosity, as some seem to be doing, there is an evident advantage in learning about misogyny. The monster of misogyny can only be faced with open eyes. This must inevitably lead to more research on the actual role played by women in the production of commercial culture, especially in Hollywood, and also to more research on the habits of female readers and cinema goers. Men do not go to the cinema on their own to see horror films like *Alien*, *The Silence of the Lambs* or *Seven*, which means there is a female audience that has not been asked why they see such films or what they see in them. Furthermore, from the evidence gathered among my female students, between the ages of 18 and 20, there seems to be a growth of interest among women for horror fiction, both novels and films. Many of these young women and also many of the women who write horror fiction reject the feminist myth that women dislike horror fiction as a matter of principle. They may be a minority group stranded between the feminist detractors of horror and the feminine readers of romances who also abhor horror written by men, yet they may be better prepared to bridge the gaps between men's and women's portraits of gendered monstrosity.

Are the women who enjoy horror duped by patriarchy? According to Bram Dijkstra, this is

indeed the case. What is more, he specifies that those addicted to horror narratives "pronouncing them harmless fun or simply campy entertainment, are still unconsciously responding very directly to an antifeminine sensibility established in its modern form and symbolic structure by the sexist ideologues among the nineteenth-century intelligentsia" (op. cit.: 340). If this is the case, how can women enjoy horror fiction at all, or any other genre that offers portraits of monstrous women or of sadistically victimized women? Feminist criticism has answered this question by arguing that women who enjoy horror can only be regarded as masochistic dupes of patriarchy, thus missing the point that many men claim to enjoy horror fiction precisely because it allows them to assume a masochistic position free from the patriarchal stereotyped image of the fearless man. Basically there are two reasons why women may enjoy horror fiction, reasons which may certainly be just consolatory nonsense but that are nonetheless built into the pattern of the contemporary portraits of gendered monstrosity. First, woman's moral superiority to man either as a victim or as woman saviour is always indirectly stressed by the texts about male monstrosity; in fiction, only a few women commit the moral monstrosities routinely committed by men. Second, the portrait of men as abject monsters that unfairly victimize women confirms many women's impressions that men, unlike women, cannot control their violent instincts. In a horror film or novel, there may be little for women to identify with but, paradoxically, there is much to confirm the idea that women have achieved a greater stability than men. It is then up to each female reader or viewer to try to understand what changes are taking place in men's lives right now, or to feel her feminist thinking strengthened by the display of men's monstrosity.

Misogyny and androphobia are rooted in psychological realities that might seem to go beyond the contemporary debate between the defenders and the detractors of feminism, but that are in fact shaped by their immediate cultural backgrounds. Freud argued that the first experience of the uncanny, that is to say, of the idea of the monstrous and the unfamiliar, derives from the boy's first shocked sight of the female genitals. These are frightful for the little boy in two senses: first, because its sight suggests to the boy that woman is a castrated man - a monstrous man - and

second, because the lack of penis makes the little boy fear that he might be himself castrated by the father and become a woman, that is to say, a monster. The Oedipal scenario was completed by Freud with the well-known theory that the little girl, far from feeling afraid by the male genitals, actually envies the sense of completeness allegedly felt by their possessor. In an essay analysing the essence of the monstrous feminine Barbara Creed (1989: 71) writes that "the horror film's obsession with blood, particularly the bleeding body of woman, where her body is transformed into the 'gaping wound', suggests that castration anxiety is a central concern of the horror film". For Creed, Freud's description of the fears of the Oedipal boy can explain why woman is portrayed as a monster in horror fiction, though in her view, Freud was wrong to believe that the little boy feared the father and not the mother as a potential castrator. In another essay Creed (1993a) suggests that misogyny is also expressed through feminised male monsters associated with blood, the night and the moon, such as the vampire and the werewolf. In contrast, as I have already noted in Chapter 3, Roger Dadoun (op.cit.: 54) describes Dracula's body as a "walking phallus or 'phallambulist'", seeing in the vampire the very essence of masculinity, while Richard Dyer (1988) sees in the vampire an insidious portrait of the homosexual man. These contradictory descriptions of the sexuality underlying the monstrous-masculine imply that the gender of monstrosity is less clearly marked than most cultural critics suggest. They also imply that since fixing the identity of the masculine monster is problematic, there are no reasons to believe that fixing the identity of the female monster is less problematic. There is, in addition, an evident danger in comparing pre-Freudian and post-Freudian fictional monstrosity, and also pre-feminist and post-feminist monstrosity as Creed and Dyer do. Those producing films and novels about monstrosity now, whether they are men or women, are conscious of gender issues that were different or simply ignored just a hundred years ago. Hence, it is not really possible to speak of an archetypal monstrous feminine or of an archetypal monstrous masculine without making specific references to the historico-cultural context.

The feminist analysis of female monstrosity is certainly problematic, as can be inferred

from Barbara Creed's (1993b) own book *The Monstrous-Feminine*, which is devoted to examining the representation of women in film from a feminist point of view that contravenes Freud's and Lacan's theories of sexual differentiation. Creed's main theses are first, that woman is not only the victim in horror film but also the prototype of all definitions of the monstrous, which are based on the female reproductive body; second, that woman as castrator constitutes the most significant face of the monstrous-feminine in horror films and, third, that woman is not terrifying as a castrated person - as Freud suggested - but as a castrating menace to man. According to Creed, there are seven faces of the monster woman: archaic mother, monstrous womb, vampire, witch, possessed body, monstrous mother and castrator. Interestingly enough, Creed keeps silent about whether there are male counterparts for these categories (or whether there is likewise a magical number of seven types of male monster) or about how significant the presence of female monsters in fiction is, compared to that of male monsters. She does not suggest at any point that her study should be completed with one of male monstrosity, nor does she refer to the male monsters in women's fiction. As can be seen, any approach to female monstrosity that fails to take male monstrosity into account must necessarily result in an incomplete, biased approach to the gender of monstrosity.

In a sense, Creed is trapped by a basic contradiction that affects feminist women's approach to monstrosity. The blurbs on the cover of her book indicate that she is challenging the patriarchal view by which woman is conceptualised only as victim in almost all critical writings on the horror film. What her book does, therefore, is to draw attention to the neglected female monsters whom she is then forced to condemn and applaud simultaneously. In her view, the female monsters are signs of patriarchal misogyny; the monstrous-feminine is, furthermore, the counterpart of the woman victim since both are images created by patriarchy to stress women's abjection. Yet, there is a fundamental difference between the victim and the monster: the former is powerless, the latter is powerful. Power is associated with monstrosity in women, for the misogynist's supposition is that power, implicitly male, makes woman unnatural. Female monsters are misogynistic fantasies but they may simultaneously appeal to women as wish-fulfilment

fantasies of power opposing man's definition of the 'natural', powerless woman. Hence the ambivalence of feminists like Creed towards the monstrous-feminine: while she spurns the abject female monster as a sexist image, she nevertheless vindicates the powerful female monster, especially in the figure of the woman as castrator. That is to say, Creed begins by reprobating patriarchy for having created such horrific images of women, but she cannot help being attracted towards them in the end, for they are the only available images of female power.

This is why the powerless mother of Freud's Oedipal vision becomes in Creed's view a monstrous, powerful castrator that she is not so ready to condemn. What feminists like her really seem to regret is that these images of menacing femaleness have not been created by woman, hence women's appropriation of monstrous images created by men to vindicate female power. An instance of this feminist reversal of the monstrous-feminine is Scottish pop singer Annie Lennox's choice of title for her last record, *Medusa*, released in 1995. Instead of indicating Lennox's acceptance of the patriarchal construction of women as monsters, as can be seen in the myth of the Gorgon Medusa, *Medusa* indicates her position as an independent, feminist artist empowered by her popularity to offer an alternative model of womanhood, capable of resisting man's power to manipulate women's images. The Medusa whose petrifying stare has been even identified with men's fear of female genitals becomes thus a symbol of the female artist's power over the gazing male spectator and an invitation to women to exert their power to fascinate - to petrify - the onlooker. Of course, it must be noted that also in 1995, the American pop band R.E.M., composed by four men, released the very successful record *Monster*, a title which presumably also refers to the artist's power to fascinate the onlooker. It must be recalled that, after all, monster is a word also used to name prodigious artists and that, in this sense, both Lennox and R.E.M. are 'monsters' of contemporary pop music.

Leslie Fiedler's less partial view of gendered monstrosity seems to explain much better than Freud's Oedipal scenario the mutual combination of repulsion and attraction for both sexes:

... clearly the primordial model for our notions of the monstrous is each sex's early



perception of the other's genitalia in adult form. A very young man looking at a vulva is likely to feel its possessor a *monstre par défaut*, while a very young woman looking at his penis may find him a *monstre par excès*. Or reflexively, he may feel himself a *monstre par excès*, she herself a *monstre par défaut*. (1993: 32)

Fiedler's position has many advantages over Freud's because it is valid for both men and women, while Freud's so often questioned supposition that women feel penis envy possibly only explains his failure to move beyond misogyny. The paradox is that Fiedler's more balanced theory is not confirmed by women's discourse on male monstrosity. While men have expressed their unease about the female body through the image of the female monster, women have kept a low profile in the discussion of the male body either as an erotic object or as a horrific, monstrous object, and still do so now. The patriarchal insistence on the monstrosity of the female body and the current exploitation of the female body as a sexual object seem to leave little scope for the masculine body in feminism; women seem to be too immersed in retrieving woman's body from patriarchy's control to devote much attention to what man's body means for women. Whenever women direct their attention to the male monster, the narratives focus on the behaviour and the personality of the male monster rather than on his body. It could be said that the castration anxieties allegedly expressed by men through horror fiction correspond to the fear of rape expressed by women's Gothics, but that the body of man concerns woman less than how man may use his body to harm woman. The monstrosity of man is located for woman in his power to do evil through violence rather than in his body alone; the monstrosity of woman is located for man in his own unease about the fragility of his unprotected genitals, especially during sexual intercourse as can be seen from the myth of the vagina dentata, rather than in the idea that woman is a monstrous, castrated man.

Misogyny arises because men have always directly or indirectly acknowledged in whatever culture they have lived, that masculinity is more problematic, more fragile than femininity. Masculinity must be defined by a set of cultural rules (marked by tribal initiation rituals or by their modern equivalents) while femininity is defined rather by the nature of the female body, especially

as regards sexuality and reproduction. The body of woman has provoked an ambivalent reaction from men, as it is something to admire and to be distanced from, for woman is in men's view burdened with motherhood but also privileged with the power to create life. In *Totem and Taboo* Sigmund Freud writes regarding the ambivalence elicited by privileged persons that "we shall realize that alongside of the veneration, and indeed idolization, felt towards them, there is in the unconscious an opposing current of intense hostility; that, in fact, as we expected, we are faced by a situation of emotional ambivalence" (1975: 49). Although Freud refers in this passage to the ambiguous situation of the tribal king, his definition also explains misogyny as a relative rather than an absolute term. Women have appeared as irresistible goddesses exerting unbounded power on men's sexuality, as mysterious yet also as disgusting machines to produce babies, or as threatening figures with the power to deny man's masculinity. Each aspect has been a source of veneration and of fear in men and has given rise to extreme images of female monstrosity and of male victimization. The discourse of misogyny reflects the instability of masculinity in comparison to the stability of femininity: while women have, in men's view, a 'natural' role - no matter how much women dislike the patriarchal exploitation of the idea that woman means mother - men play a role conditioned by culture, which must be constantly redefined. Misogyny arises from this constant process of readjusting masculinity to the definition of femininity; androphobia arises from women's rejection of man's misogynistic use of women to define themselves as men but works similarly, processing women's ambivalence towards men's behaviour though less towards men's bodies.

One of the main differences between men and women is that men are much less conscious of belonging to a group. Feminism has done much to promote a sense of sisterhood among women, paradoxically based on the idea of a generalised alliance among patriarchal men that had to be opposed. In fact, there is no such cohesion among men because men have not started a debate about their own position, yet. They will have to come to a consciousness of how masculinity has changed under the pressure of feminism, though as was seen with the Million Men march organized by the African-American leader Louis Farrakhan in Washington in August 1995,

there are dangers that men may react with renewed misogyny in the process of reaffirming their identity. In any case, women tend to react more homogeneously than men as far as gender issues are concerned, regarding any patriarchal abuse of women as an abuse of all women. Men have been educated in an idea of masculinity which is based on individualism, on concealing whatever abuse is committed against them, avoiding the free expression of their anxieties. They tend, therefore, to mark the distance between the 'normal' man and the monstrous or the victimized man, while women make no such difference, seeing themselves as potential targets of abuse.

This position has its advantages and its disadvantages. Women only reluctantly admit the fact that some men are abused physically or psychologically by monstrous women, because most women seem to believe in the myth of woman as pure victim, never as abuser, on the grounds that statistically, men commit many more acts of violence than women. As a woman under the influence of feminism, I was myself deeply irritated by what I took to be a very sexist remark by Mario Praz (which it might well be, nonetheless), when he writes in *The Romantic Agony* that "there have always existed Fatal Women both in mythology and in literature, since mythology and literature are imaginative reflections of the various aspects of real life, and real life has always provided more or less complete examples of arrogant and cruel female characters" (op. cit.: 189). When the news about Elfriede Blauersteiner, the Austrian black widow, hit the media in January 1996, I was forced to reconsider Praz's remark: there may be many more monstrous men, indeed, but this does not mean there are not 'examples' as Praz says of monstrous women. In fact, there are monstrous *people* of either sex. Quite another matter is the fact that Blauersteiner is a very different woman from the femme fatale constructed by men: far from being a sex goddess, she attracted her victims by offering companionship and loving care, which suggests that the fantasy of the supportive, caring woman is much stronger in man's psyche than the fantasy of the man-eater.

Likewise, feminism has tended to class men under the same label, making little effort to distinguish between the patriarchal man and the non-patriarchal man. For many women, each male serial killer, each rapist of fiction represents all men's aggressiveness rather than that of a

particular man. This attitude is confusing male novelists and filmmakers, for while no men have complained against the many portraits of men as monsters - which, I insist again, are signs of decadent rather than powerful patriarchy - women are constantly complaining against the representation of female monsters as signs of widespread misogyny. Men have not raised their voices against characters who represent the worst side of masculinity and who could certainly satisfy an androphobic woman that she is right in believing that men are monsters. David Cronenberg, who has often been attacked by feminists because of his allegedly misogynist films such as *The Brood* or *Dead Ringers*, has stated that "as a creator of characters, I believe I have the freedom to create a character who is not meant to represent all characters" (Rodley, op. cit.: 99). Cronenberg may have said this tongue-in-cheek to dupe women into seeing his films and enjoy them, but there seems to be something paranoiac in this supposition that a monstrous woman in fiction represents all women. This is a situation as bad for women as for men: women cannot afford the luxury of being seen as potential censors of men's work if they want to claim total freedom as creators. When David Cronenberg says that this is "a no-win situation. Unless all women in your movie are absolutely done by the feminist book - and, of course, it depends which feminist book - you are not going to escape" (Rodley, op. cit.: 56), women should start considering what are the advantages of having this imaginary feminist book and whether this negative attitude contributes to diminishing or to increasing misogyny.

Using criticism for purposes of political correctness regarding gender issues seems to lead to a dead end, barring the way to any attempt at opening a dialogue between men and women. The only suitable response to men's misuse of this imaginary feminist book is women's creation of their own stories to offer alternative models, alternative narratives, challenging men's misogyny hopefully not with women's androphobia but with a more humanist attitude, valid for all. Before this utopian new humanism arrives, if it ever does, it is important not to curtail the freedom of creation of either men or women by means of censorious feminist criticism, for this is not effective in persuading novelists and filmmakers that misogyny must be eradicated. In view of feminist

women's androphobic discourse it is essential to debate whether feminist women are following the same sexist strategies that men followed in the establishment of patriarchy. It might well be that the equality between men and women defended by many feminists turned out to be based on the fact that men and women use power to portray the Other as a monster in the same way. It is also essential to debate why a male artist should assume an unbiased position that would take women's point of view into account, when women themselves necessarily write from a biased point of view which, naturally, privileges their own view of the world and does not try to incorporate men's as well.

### 7.1.2. Varieties of the Monstrous-Feminine

#### 7.1.2.1. The Non-Human Female Monster

One of the categories of the monstrous feminine that Creed discusses is that of the archaic mother, that is to say, the parthenogenetic female who can reproduce herself without male help. The most popular instance of the archaic mother is the alien queen of *Aliens* (1986), discussed by Creed as a characteristically misogynistic male fantasy centred on men's disgust for sexual reproduction and women's fertility. Carol Clover also concurs with Creed's view of *Aliens*. In Clover's opinion "to the extent that the monster is constructed as feminine, the horror film thus expresses female desire, only to show how monstrous it is. The intention is manifest in *Aliens*, in which ... Ripley is pitted in the climatic scene against the most terrifying 'alien' of all: an egg-laying Mother" (1989: 114). But how is the link between woman and desire made apparent in the alien queen, which is female but not human and which is, in addition, oviparous? For both Creed and Clover, the fact that the heroine Ellen Ripley is forced to confront and kill the beastly queen means that woman is forced by patriarchy to destroy a symbol of female fertility.

In a sense, Creed and Clover are right, for the queen descends no doubt from the Earth goddess represented as the monster Tiamat, a dragon of unbounded fertility. Even so, neither Creed nor Clover make much of the fact that Ripley kills the queen for a little girl, Newt, who has

survived alone in the alien infested planet and whom Ripley rescues from a grim destiny: that of serving as a cocoon for another of the queen's descendants. This bond between Ripley and her 'adoptive' daughter Newt is used to strengthen the disparity between the alien queen and the women: they may be all female but Ripley and Newt are, above all, human, and cannot tolerate the abject alienness of the monster. On the contrary, Ripley protects her 'daughter' from a primitive, brutal life form whose survival has been guaranteed precisely by the manipulative, patriarchal corporation that employs her; by killing the monster, Ripley therefore denies the power of the people who have endangered Newt's life, her own and also that of the men and women exterminated by the queen's offspring. In a civilized order, neither the Company nor the queen have a place, and this is something acknowledged not only by Ripley but also by the men whose help she commands in this film and in *Alien<sup>3</sup>* (1992).

While Creed and Clover have criticized the presentation of the monstrous archaic mother as an attack against the female power to engender life, they have neglected what the *Alien* trilogy says about women's fears of rape and unwanted pregnancy. Even though the men with whom I have discussed the trilogy prefer to stress the fact that both men and women are potential rape victims for the aliens, which use human bodies as receptacles to breed their progeny rather than as food, a man, John L. Cobbs, has rightly noted that the first film, *Alien* (1979) is a parable about abortion. According to Cobbs (1990: 201), the film's "pervasive gynaecological imagery" and the moral tension between the heroine and her 'Mother' - the Company's computer that monitors the life of the *Nostromo* astronauts - together with "the final vacuum expulsion" of the monster into outer space show that "the fundamental leitmotif of *Alien* is clearly abortion." The motif is repeated in *Alien<sup>3</sup>* in which Ripley commits suicide given the impossibility of aborting the alien queen growing in her stomach.

The trilogy no doubt exploits fears that have to do with the body's fragile resistance to forceful invasion (especially of disease) and the loss of body ownership, but this does not

contradict the suggestion that its main underlying subject is the fear of unwanted pregnancy. In fact, it could be said that the *Alien* trilogy expresses a still poorly articulated anxiety about sexual reproduction. Now, when fewer children are born because of the widespread use of methods of birth control there is an increasing defamiliarisation with the process of pregnancy, which in the cases of unwanted pregnancies is redoubled. In the film *Species* (1995) Sil, a beautiful woman born of a combination of human and extraterrestrial DNA, is transformed into a monster when she finally succeeds in getting pregnant. Sil is presented as a monstrous woman even before her final transformation, precisely because she understands sex exclusively as a means to reproduce herself. The increasing separation between sex and reproduction is thus leading to a differentiation between the human female, who is capable of feeling desire and controlling her fertility, and the non-human or semi-human female monster, who ignores the meaning of desire and only understands the instinct to reproduce herself. It is, however, a mistake to identify this fear of the blind, instinctual drive embodied in the non-human female monster with woman, rather than with the anxieties felt by both men and women in the face of the process of human sexual reproduction. Whether women will eventually express the same fears that men are already expressing in films like *Alien* is still to be seen, but it is certainly possible that young women will do so as the birth-rate decreases.

The monstrous-feminine may even be but a manifestation of a more complex kind of evil monster. In Stephen King's *It* (1986) the eponymous extraterrestrial, evil shape-shifter can take the form most feared by those who confront him. When the group of six boys and a girl that 'It' has been victimizing face the monster together they see what they fear most: a giant, female spider surrounded by a multitude of eggs she has hatched on her own. Yet, this is not necessarily another instance of the misogynistic fear of the archaic mother. The children, who have encountered 'It' under disguises as different as a werewolf and an abusive father, draw a monstrous image from their collective unconscious that is related to primitive fears we do not

understand well. It can be argued that both *It* and the *Alien* trilogy actually exploit that irrational fear humans feel for arachnids and insects, animals whom the image of both monsters strongly recalls.

The alien queen, which looks like a gigantic mixture of both spider and insect, and 'It' in its arachnid form, appeal to the most profound horrors of the primitive human being in all of us. Their gigantic size is directly related to the role that magnification plays in the construction of the monster. It must be remembered that one of the meanings of the adjective monstrous is huge and that fantasies of gigantic insects and arachnids populated the American screens in the 1950s. In fact, the role played by the gender of the alien queen and the giant spider of 'It' need not be explained in terms of human sexuality at all: what makes females potentially more horrific is their capacity to multiply the threat posed by the monster. As the title of *Aliens* indicates, this film differs from *Alien* mainly because the number of monstrous creatures has multiplied. If having to confront a single monster is difficult enough - especially if the monster is a shape-shifter like 'It' - simple logic suggests that fighting many monsters is much more difficult, hence the horrified reaction of the children coming across 'It's' eggs, and of Ripley when she faces the egg-laying alien queen. It is obvious that in this sense a male monster is more limited, less potentially horrific than a female monster endowed with the capacity to create a myriad of horrific monsters.

A different kind of archaic mother appears in James Cameron's *The Abyss* (1989) and in Orson Scott Card's novel *Ender's Game* (1985), which deal, like *Aliens*, with an alien race organized as a single mentality distributed throughout many individual bodies in imitation of social insects such as bees and ants. In Card's novel, the aliens enter into a war with the humans after having made the mistake of believing that the humans are not intelligent life forms - which they might well not be, to judge from their extremely aggressive reaction against the aliens. The aliens nevertheless pay for that mistake with their own destruction, but it is implied that they accept this expiation of their sin because it will allow them to be reborn thanks to the hero Ender. Ender



himself is manipulated by the aliens, who teach him to love life above all, and to relinquish his status as the military hero who wiped out the alien race. In Cameron's film, the mission of the aliens is also to expose the absurdities of the militaristic male code and the danger that nuclear weapons suppose for the survival of humankind. The two alien races, which are exclusively female, are presented by both Cameron and Card as examples of wisdom, sensibility and controlled use of power, which they use to persuade aggressive men to cease doing evil. It can be concluded, therefore, that not all the representations of the female non-human monster are negative. In a sense, Cameron's and Card's alien guardian angels are also women saviours - or at least female saviours. They are instances of the fantasy of the caring, loving woman ready to forgive the sins of the monstrous men and to teach them the right path even at the cost of losing their own lives. This, again, suggests that there is a certain balance between men's fantasies of the monstrous-feminine as a principle of destruction and their fantasies of the monstrous-feminine as a principle of life and rebirth. Why feminist criticism pays more attention to the former than to the latter is quite another matter.

The dinosaurs of Michael Crichton's *Jurassic Park* (1990) are all female because the men who have created them by means of genetic engineering think this will prevent them from breeding. It is also implied that female dinosaurs are thought to be less aggressive, hence more manageable, than male dinosaurs - the same motif argued in *Species* to justify why Sil and not a male has been created. As should be expected, a mistake made by the scientists enables some of the female dinosaurs to mutate into males: they use the DNA of a species of hermaphrodite frog to complete the dinosaurs DNA sequence. It is soon discovered that the dinosaurs are multiplying and that the scientists can do nothing to regain control on them. Marina Warner has criticized this imagery of horrific female reproductive power, especially in the case of *Jurassic Park*, whose story, according to Warner, can be reduced to a confrontation between "nature coded female with culture coded male" (1994a: 2). Yet, she has misread Crichton's novel and Spielberg's film, for what is horrifying is not that some of these female dinosaurs are fearsome predators or

that they manage to reproduce and, at least in the novel, invade the world. On the contrary, Crichton criticizes patriarchy's presumption that it can control by means of science and technology the natural cycle of life.

What is monstrous is not that the female dinosaurs succeed in reproducing themselves but the way in which they are reborn from genetic material manipulated by men. If culture is coded male in this story, it can only be deduced that culture is in a very problematic state and that so is masculinity. The problem is that feminism is simultaneously assuming the identification of woman with nature as a positive fact - especially in view of the monstrous culture produced by men - and rejecting men's coding of nature as female. Crichton and Spielberg denounce the excesses of patriarchal science, but this is ignored by feminists like Warner, more interested in drawing the parallelism between the female velociraptors and Thelma and Louise, as she does, and in wondering why women are excluded from male-coded culture. While Crichton himself speaks of *life* always finding an outlet to break away from the artificial constraints put on it by man, Warner's attention is drawn towards the sex of the dinosaurs and it is she, in the last instance, who makes a derogatory identification of woman with the non-human female monster. The same can be said of Clover's and Creed's analyses of *Aliens*. All in all, the main objection that can be raised against the feminist interpretation of the non-human female monster is that it is too exclusively focused on the gender of the monster and on the identification of the non-human female with woman. Furthermore, feminists ignore the implicit negative portrait of men's manipulation of life, nor can they justify why sometimes the identification of woman with nature is positive while in other instances it is negative.

#### 7.1.2.2. *The Monstrous Woman*

In the previous section I have referred to non-human monsters whose anatomy bears no relation to women's, except for the fact that they are all female. I have argued that interpreting the sexuality of the female non-human monsters in relation to the sexuality of women is inadequate

precisely because the female monsters of *Aliens*, *The Abyss*, *It*, *Ender's Game* and *Jurassic Park* are not women but rather female animals. In this section I examine human and non-human female monsters whose bodies are unmistakably feminine, regardless of the evident differences between them<sup>1</sup>. The feminine monsters can be roughly divided into two main categories: the imaginary feminine monster and the realistic feminine monster. The first category would correspond to feminine monsters whose body is not human or to women whose human body has been transformed into a monstrosity mostly because of supernatural events. These imaginary feminine monsters behave in extraordinary ways, though it cannot be always said that their behaviour is monstrous. In contrast, the second category would refer to women whose abnormal behaviour marks them as monsters. They are monsters not because their bodies have been manipulated but because they kill in a rational or an irrational way. Within each main category there are obvious overlaps: thus, vampire women may be non-human creatures or women transformed into vampires; likewise, in some cases, such as that of Laura in *Wolf*, it is not clear whether the woman has chosen to be transformed into a monster or has simply happened to be transformed. Most of the feminine monsters whom I have labelled 'realistic' on the grounds that there is no magical element in their making could nevertheless be interpreted as pure fantasies from a feminist point of view. Given the much lower numbers of female killers in real life, in comparison to the numbers of male killers, it could even be argued that the female killers of fiction - the female moral monsters - are not realistic at all, but simply another category of the imaginary feminine monster.

As I have noted, there are relatively few female monsters in comparison to male monsters. The proportion is very similar for both films and novels: approximately three fifths of the texts I am analysing in this dissertation narrate stories centred on a male monster, only one fifth concerns exclusively female monsters (and within that fifth about a third can be said to deal with images of female monstrosity that are not horrific) while another fifth is composed by texts in which male and

---

<sup>1</sup>In this chapter I am considering exclusively the adult feminine monsters; the monstrous girl is considered in section 8.1.3.1 of Chapter 8.

female monsters, which are often of the same type, appear together. This clearly indicates that the monstrous-masculine is much more prominent in contemporary culture than the monstrous-feminine, despite the fact that the great majority of the texts under discussion have been created by men.

In general terms, the feminine monsters created by men are usually beautiful women of abnormal behaviour while the female monsters created by women are figures with a grotesque body and a no less grotesque behaviour. The winged woman Fevvers in Angela Carter's *Night at the Circus*, the gigantic Dog Woman in Jeannette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry*, the albino dwarf Olympia in Katherine Dunn's *Geek Love* and the fat, ugly Ruth in Fay Weldon's *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* are all bizarre images of woman that could only have been produced by a man if he were prepared to risk an accusation of misogyny. The grotesque feminine may also appear in narratives of monstrosity created by men, such as Robert Zemeckis' film *Death Becomes Her* or Stephen King's novel *Misery*, but men seem more interested in the interplay between erotic images of sexual desirability and horrific images of violent death, than in the female grotesque. The attractive or beautiful woman - human or not - who kills men is a figure born of the misogynistic atmosphere of nineteenth-century Decadence and has survived to our days acquiring in the meantime particularly ambiguous overtones. Fatal women like Catherine Trammel in *Basic Instinct* and Bridget in *The Last Seduction* reverse the traditional role of the vamp: instead of being destroyed because of the evil they commit they survive in the end after exposing men's weaknesses rather than women's abjection.

The imaginary feminine monsters can be divided into three main categories: feminine monsters who are not born of human parents, feminine monsters made by men (women transformed into monsters by others using magic or genetic manipulation) and finally, women who take an active part in their own transformation into monsters by using magic, plastic surgery or by reinventing their own biographies. The non-human feminine monsters who are not manufactured

are very different from each other. Thus, the extraterrestrial creature of *Lifeforce* (1985) is a vampire who takes the form of a beautiful woman because this is how the male astronauts who come across her in outer space see her. Her two companions - who take male forms - are apparently shaped by the fantasies of the female astronauts, though they soon disappear from the scene. However, it cannot be said that this simulacrum of woman is simply a misogynistic fantasy acting as a scapegoat for men's hatred of women. In fact, *Lifeforce* is a horrific version of "The Sleeping Beauty" in which the gender roles are reversed: the hero, who has been chasing the space vampire with a view to killing her because she has brought a deadly plague that is decimating Earth, discovers when he is kissed by her that he is one of her monstrous kin, left stranded on Earth. The kiss of the monstrous woman therefore exposes the monstrous nature of man rather than his superiority over her abject self.

In *Cocoon* (1985) there is a similar erotic fantasy of awakening into a different self-consciousness also experienced by the hero, though in this case the extraterrestrial creature who offers to him what can only be described as virtual sex - or sex without touching - is not a horrific vampire but a luminous, angelic being encased in a woman's body. The fantasy of being chosen by an extraordinary woman, angelic or demonic, is also the main motif in *Splash!* (1984) and in *The Stress of her Regard* (1989). In the former, Madison, a mermaid, finds in contemporary New York the boy, now a grown-up man, she once saved from drowning. The media's persecution of Madison finally forces her human lover to make the choice of entering her world, becoming himself one of her kin. In Tim Powers' novel, the plea of the hero Crawford is precisely the opposite: he is the object of the erotic attentions of a lamia, a female vampire, who also holds in thrall the poet Shelley. The novel narrates how Crawford, the romantic poets he meets, and his own girlfriend, must struggle to rid themselves not only of the lamias' presence - females and males alike - but also of their own passion for them. It can be concluded, consequently, that the fantasy of being chosen by an extraordinary member of the opposite sex - evil or angelic -

articulates many of the narratives of monstrosity. Furthermore, this fantasy covers a vast field, as it can be found in texts about monstrosity created by men and by women, and across genres since it is not necessarily embodied by a horrific monster.

There are, however, other cases in which this fantasy plays no major role and in which the feminine monster is particularly ambiguous. Two especially equivocal versions of the feminine monster are Ted Hughes' story for children, *The Iron Woman* (1993) and Jeanette Winterson's feminist novel *Sexing the Cherry* (1989). Both texts deal with a gigantic woman (split in Winterson's novel between a seventeenth-century killer and a twentieth-century radical feminist) who uses radical, violent methods to teach patriarchal men to behave properly, that is to say, as women would like. It is certainly difficult to determine what is the intention behind both texts, for both read as parodies though it is not clear whether they are parodies of the excesses of feminism or of patriarchy. Incidentally, even though Winterson's *Dog Woman* is not a fantastic monster, she is grotesque enough to be regarded within the category of the imaginary feminine monster.

Ted Hughes' text deals with a black, metallic giantess who emerges one day from the filthy river mud to prevent men from further poisoning the waters. She might thus be a contemporary incarnation of the Earth goddess, whose main symbol is water, or a symbol of the current conservationist vogue, associated with feminism and with nature marked female. Initially, the giantess's plans include the total extermination of the polluters, though she later relents and limits herself to transforming all the men in England into man-sized fish condemned to surviving in their bathtubs. All the women and the boys under 18 are left untouched by this sudden metamorphosis because the giantess regards them as innocent of the destruction of the land. The second act of this impressive virago is to fight a monstrous cloud that emanates from the fish-men's bubbling mouths and that represents their greed. Once she destroys the cloud, the men revert to their human form though their white hair will always remind them of the power of the Iron Woman. One is left wondering about the motivations in Hughes' creation of the Iron Woman. The giantess is an inflexible woman, bent on punishment without ever stopping to listen to reason, though, curiously,

nobody tries to contradict her. The horrific punishment that the men of England suffer seems an act of feminist wishful thinking, but the Iron Woman is such an unsympathetic figure that no child can possibly want her to exert her power on its father, brother, or male friend at all. The Iron Woman may thus be either a feminist or an anti-feminist figure, depending on whether the abusive treatment she gives men is seen as a fair punishment of patriarchy or as an unfair punishment of all men. Ted Hughes may have even written his tale as a tongue-in-cheek indictment against Margaret Thatcher, whose nickname - the Iron Lady - recalls that of the giantess, the Iron Woman. Since Thatcher is not a feminist, though it would be difficult to say whether she is more androphobic than misogynistic, interpreting the meaning of Hughes' Iron Woman from this point of view is even more problematic. At any rate, at the end of the story the Iron Woman forms an alliance with her predecessor, the Iron Man, who had managed to eradicate war from Earth in *The Iron Man*, a pacifist story for children written by Hughes in 1968. The couple of giants seem to be a new version of the union of the prehistoric god and goddess embodied in these mysterious gigantic robots nobody seems to have made.

Both the Iron Woman and the Dog Woman - thus nicknamed because she breeds hounds - are monsters because they are gigantic. Their physical size seems to be an indication of the dimensions of the disgust that impels these two women to wage war on men. As the unnamed modern counterpart of the Dog Woman notes, "it seems obvious, doesn't it, that someone who is ignored and overlooked will expand to the point where they have to be noticed, even if the noticing is fear and disgust" (p. 140). What is less obvious is to what extent the Dog Woman is to be taken as a parody of the feminist anger that makes her modern self want to grow as big as possible or as simply a Swiftian figure of fun. The Dog Woman possesses a formidable body capable of eliciting fear and disgust, a big and strong body that she relishes and that enables her to kill men as she pleases. However, it is doubtful whether the reader is supposed to sympathize with her androphobia or to condemn it as the other side of contemporary feminism; it is also disputable whether s/he is supposed to feel amused by the Dog Woman's various sexual

misadventures or horrified by them. As happens in *The Iron Woman*, there is no clear indication either as to the author's attitude towards her monstrous woman, despite the fact that Jeanette Winterson's feminist militancy is well known.

What is to be made, for instance, of the episode in which the Dog Woman bites off the penis of a man who has persuaded her to perform a fellatio for him? She naively claims that she has hurt him because until then she believed that men's genitals could grow again if an accident happened. Later, when she is better informed, she comes to the conclusion that if that is not the case, "this seems a great mistake on the part of nature, since men are so careless with their members and will put them anywhere without thinking" (p. 120). If this is provocative humour of the same kind used by Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho* to describe some of his killings, it must be concluded that Winterson does not dominate the register as proficiently as Brett Easton Ellis. There is, at any rate, little that is humorous or satirical in any way in the Dog Woman's killing of ten Puritan men, justified by her having followed too literally a Royalist preacher's injunction to take revenge on those who murdered the King, or in her hacking into pieces two clients of the brothel where she occasionally works administering masochistic pleasure through pain to men. The particularity of the Dog Woman is that she remains a monster to the end, when she declares: "I do not think of myself as a criminal, and indeed would protest any attempt to confine me in Newgate. My actions are not motivated by thought of gain, only by thought of justice, and I have searched my soul to conclude that there is no person dead at my hand who would be better off alive" (p. 147). One must necessarily wonder why the Dog Woman's words have elicited no protests from men, whereas Brett Easton Ellis had to face the attack of feminists angered by his hero's misogyny.

The attitude of the twentieth-century version of the Dog Woman, seems more sober. "I don't hate men", she says, "I just wish they'd try harder. They all want to be heroes and all we want is for them to stay at home and help with the housework and the kids. That's not the kind of heroism they enjoy" (p. 145). This modern version of the giantess is a rather attractive woman who



believes she carries within herself a monster of enormous proportions that will burst out of her body when her tolerance of men's hypocrisy finally collapses. At a point in the novel she has a long fantasy in which she hallucinates how her own body becomes indeed that of her real gigantic self. In her fantasy, she becomes a virago not unlike Hughes' Iron Woman, trapping in a huge sack all the men who displease her. Unlike the Iron Woman, she is more selective, though, and only chooses men in positions of power, who will become the target of a peculiar kind of re-education. In her wishful thinking incarnation as the giantess she imagines herself imparting justice to men:

I force all the fat ones to go on a diet, and all the men line up for compulsory training in feminism and ecology. Then they start on the food surpluses, packing it with their own hands, distributing it in a great human chain of what used to be power and is now co-operation.

We change the world, and on the seventh day we have a party at the wine lake and make pancakes with the butter mountain and the peoples of the earth keep coming in waves and being fed and being clean and being well. And when the rivers sparkle, it's not with mercury ... (p. 138)

Hughes' and Winterson's imaginary, fairy-tale giantesses manage, thus, to impose their view on men and to guarantee the quality of the sparkling, unpolluted waters. Feminism and ecology replace men's greed apparently because all the men are cowed into submission not with powerful arguments but with powerful magic. Why the 'compulsory training' dreamed by Winterson's heroine or the unsound methods of Hughes' Iron Woman are better than men's unfairness and misogyny is the question that neither text answers. In fact, it is possible to treat both as parodies or as endorsements of feminism, though *The Iron Woman* implies more clearly that these feminist bullying methods are by no means better than those of traditional patriarchy. As can be seen, the same ambiguous figure of powerful female monstrosity can be used for different purposes that even contradict each other. They ultimately reveal that the real issue at stake in the representation of monstrosity is power, or, alternatively, that women's dream of power can only lead to creating monsters, no matter how effective they may be in redressing the wrongs of patriarchy.

As I noted in Chapter 6, Frankenstein's daughters are fewer than Frankenstein's sons.

Rachael, the female replicant of *Blade Runner* (1982) is perhaps the best known of them, together with Zhora and Pris, the other two female replicants of Scott's film. Another indication of how feminist criticism fails to deal adequately with the feminine monsters is Erica Sheen's analysis of this film. Sheen (op. cit.: 153) has argued that "*Blade Runner* is a story of a woman 'made' by a man; of how the woman gains entry to the Symbolic Order through the rejection of a supposed unity with an illusory mother and an acceptance of the defining status of 'the law of the father' via a submission to the demands of male sexuality." However, her argumentation is misleading, for she has completely ignored not only the making of the male replicants and their problematic relationship with the father but also other texts in which men are made by other men. Likewise, Sheen has fixed her attention on Zhora and Pris as misogynistic representations of women, on the grounds that they are given degrading jobs as, respectively, a striptease artist and a prostitute, and also because they seemingly play no role in the search for their 'father', Tyrell. Yet Sheen does not mention that Roy and Leon, the male replicants, are likewise oppressed by a patriarchal system that has designed them to be killing machines. Zhora and Pris are probably the first unfairly victimized women seen on the screen resisting a man's attack. It can be argued that they are killed after prolonged physical confrontations, proving that their notable strength is not naturally feminine but monstrous, yet their victimization is justified (if it is justifiable) in the film because they are not human and not because they are women.

Men's making of women results only exceptionally in horrific monsters like the Sil of *Species* - a film, on the other hand, which was a notorious box-office failure. The fantasy of being chosen by a unique woman also plays a major role in the making of the artificial or the unnatural feminine monster. Curiously enough, in *Blade Runner*, *Mythago Wood* and *Poor Things* the woman created by a fatherly figure as the perfect companion ends up becoming the perfect companion of another man. Because these texts are erotic fantasies written by men, the monstrous women do not question the fact that their making must be completed with their union to a man, which is the point

that feminists like Erica Sheen find difficult to accept. However, it cannot be said that Rachael, Guiwenneth and Bella, the heroines respectively of *Blade Runner*, *Mythago Wood* and *Poor Things*, are derogatory portraits of women: they are intelligent, courageous and sensitive and have much to teach to their men. In any case, the relationship between the human lover and the unnatural woman is not one of dominance and submission but rather a fulfilling companionship not very different from the fantasies women entertain in romances. Thus, in *Blade Runner* Rachael is much more than a perfect replica of woman manufactured by man, as she is also an improvement on the perfect man, Roy, previously made by her creator, Tyrell; at the end of the film it is even suggested that Rachael might be immortal, hence, physically superior to the man who loves her and possibly also emotionally superior, having developed a finer moral sense than him about the meaning of his killings of the replicants.

The case of Guiwenneth, the heroine of *Mythago Wood* (1984) is much more ambiguous. Instead of a manufactured woman, Guiwenneth is literally a mythical image of a woman. She becomes flesh and blood when George Huxley, a middle-aged researcher, imagines that she is real in a primal forest that has the power to materialise mythical images. It can be said that Guiwenneth springs from her maker's head just as Athena sprang from Zeus's head, and that both are men's appropriations of the powerful image of the lost Earth goddess, especially in her incarnation as war goddess. This is confirmed in the novel, when Stephen, Huxley's son, observes that the mythago his father has created is "a manifestation of the Earth Goddess" (p. 52) and also a born fighter. Like Athena, Guiwenneth is a warrior, yet, instead of being an Amazonian virago she is totally devoted first to her maker, and when he dies, to his sons. In fact, Guiwenneth is even killed and remade by the younger son Chris before she is passed onto the elder, Stephen. The appropriation of her body by the Huxley men even prevents Guiwenneth from fulfilling her mission, namely, bringing an end to the constant tribal warfare in the forest, as she ought to do according to the legend that Huxley senior has unearthed in the forest. Thus, even though Guiwenneth has originally arisen from the depths of the collective unconscious as a powerful, semi-divine figure

endowed with a capacity to bring reconciliation and the end of violence, her own story is relegated to a secondary place by the love story between her and Stephen.

In any case, despite the ambivalent sexism that informs her creation, it can be said that Guiwenneth is a fantasy completely different from the monstrous woman made by men, as can be found in classics such as E.T.A. Hoffman's "The Sandman" (1816) or in Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Rapaccini's Daughter" (1838). Instead of the evil woman who destroys men, the new mythical image of woman is the beautiful warrior, quite capable of taking care of herself but also willing to take care of her male companion. It may be argued that this is a fantasy born of men's desires to shape woman's body and mind, but the woman warrior is not a misogynistic fantasy. In fact, she is very close to figures such as the Nili of *Body of Glass* and the many strong heroines of sword and sorcery fantasy written by women, not to mention Maxine Hong Kingston's heroine in her feminist book *The Woman Warrior* (1975). What mainly distinguishes the strong heroines created by men from those created by woman is not whether they are more or less monstrous women but their willingness to love men. Women's heroines are more markedly reluctant to enter into heterosexual, traditional relationships, whereas men's heroines are women who never question their need to love men.

The monstrous yet lovely Bella Baxter of Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things* (1992) is a bizarre mixture of woman as innocent child and woman as nightmarish sex fiend. Gray subverts the dualistic Victorian view of women (the novel is set in the UK in the 1880s) as angels or whores by portraying a woman who is both. Bella, born when the Glaswegian surgeon Godwin Baxter puts together the body of a dead woman who had drowned herself and the brain of the eight-month female foetus she was carrying, is meant to be the perfect companion, but she turns out to be much more independent than Baxter could imagine. The irony of *Poor Things* is that the portrait of the liberated Bella given by Archibald McCandless, the man who eventually marries her and whose memoirs form the core of the novel, is contradicted within the novel itself by another text. This second text is an autobiographical text by McCandless' wife, Victoria, that she has written in

order to desauthorise her husband's unrealistic portrait of herself as Bella after reading his memoirs. In this autobiography, Victoria claims that Bella is nothing but the fantasy of a sad, not too bright man and so, she deligitimises her husband's portrait of herself as Bella.

The eccentric Victoria brings the voice of the feminist New Woman of the turn of the century into the novel, which obviously parodies it. Gray, tongue-in-cheek, defends poor McCandless' right to fantasize about Bella precisely because Victoria is far from being his ideal companion. Furthermore, Gray questions the right of feminists like Victoria to reject men's fantasies of women on the grounds that Bella and other fictional women created by men do not reflect real women's personalities and lives. Even though there is much to criticize in Gray's novel from a feminist point of view, to judge from the reactions of the women I know to have read Gray's novel, Bella is preferred to Victoria as a model of the independent woman. "You, dear reader," Victoria McCandless concludes, "have now two accounts to choose between, and there can be no doubt which is most probable. My second husband's story positively stinks of all that was morbid in that most morbid of centuries, the nineteenth" (p. 272). Yet Bella cannot be interpreted as a derogatory, misogynistic fantasy of woman but as a symbol of men's failure to control not only women but perhaps the far-reaching effects of their own morbid fantasies.

*Poor Things* deals, therefore, with the question of who is empowered to shape woman's image in fiction. It also questions whether those who try to manipulate Bella's life are more monstrous than herself, including perhaps Gray himself. None of the men who feel authorised to force Bella into a particular image of womanhood are acting with normality. All of them are different models of monstrous masculinity: the would-be-Pygmalion Godwin, who makes her because he hopes that unlike other women she will not be put off by his ugliness and will love him; the seducer Duncan Wedderburn, who finds to his own chagrin how Bella's liberated approach to sex exposes his shortcomings as a lover, and her repressive husband, the imperialistic hero General Blessington, who had planned to cure himself of his desire for her by forcing his wife Lady Victoria Blessington (technically Bella's mother but also herself) to undergo an ablation of the clitoris.

Gray's parody of the feminist Victoria is framed, hence, by his parody of the misogynistic men surrounding Bella.

McCandless, whom Bella chooses to marry because, as she claims, she can treat him as she likes, may be the most monstrous of the men in her life or simply the average, sad, not too bright man that Victoria describes. According to Victoria, he is the one to have invented the horrific Frankenstein-style tale of Bella's making and to have claimed that this was Victoria's true origin: for her, McCandless and not Godwin is, consequently, the real monster-maker. Gray stresses the ambiguities of the plot by playfully pretending in genuine Gothic (and postmodernist) fashion that both McCandless' and Victoria's texts have been found by the editor, 'Gray' who is simply passing them on to the reader. It is thus for the reader to decide which of the two texts is real and which is a fantasy. 'Gray' indicates that Victoria McCandless' anger at her husband's memoirs is not justified, for McCandless had planted enough clues in his account to make Victoria understand he did not mean Bella to stand for herself. Victoria's indignation is thus totally misguided: what McCandless and Gray imply is that monstrous women like Bella should not be taken for literal portraits of women - misogynistic or not - but for what they are, namely, fantasies that men entertain about women. *Poor Things* also implies that not all these fantasies arise out of hatred and that the fantasies men entertain about women expose man's true nature rather than woman's, which remains, like Bella, an enigma that only woman can explain. For Gray the way to dispel the enigma is not the feminist denial of man's right to his own fantasies but women's 'editing' of those fantasies, that is to say, a careful reading that will show that not all of them are negative or misogynistic.

Men's manipulation of woman's body is also the main topic of Iain Banks' *The Wasp Factory* (1984). In this black comedy Freud's speculations about the little boy's fear of the castrating father are transformed into the instrument to create a very peculiar male monster. The hero and monster Frank Cauldhame is unaware that he is in fact a woman, Frances, and also that he is one of his father's experiments. Angus, an ex-hippy of anarchist ideas and also a retired

biochemist, has not only secretly manipulated Frances's body with male hormones but has also made her believe that she is actually a boy, castrated at age three by the family dog. Why Angus does this is not obvious at all: it might be simply madness, or his own way of avenging himself on women, especially on Agnes, Frances's mother, who abandoned him and their daughter. The irony of the novel is that the male hormones that Angus is giving Frances are the reason why the teenage Frank behaves in a very violent way, killing animals and children. While Frank boasts of his misogynistic manliness and of his outrageous acts of violence, unaware of who he is until the end of the novel, the reader is invited to consider whether gender is biologically determined and what the role played by the individual's upbringing is in determining gender roles.

Frank claims that he can feel man's superiority in his "uncastrated genes" (p. 118), yet all his acts are determined in fact by the overdose of testosterone Angus is administering to him (or her) and by his own ideas of masculinity. What is less obvious is where these ideas come from or whether they are the product of hormonal reactions. It could well be that they spring from Frank's need to distance himself from his father. Angus's passive acceptance of the decisions made by the women in his life, who invariably abandon him and their children, may have made him an undesirable model of masculinity to his son's eyes. On the other hand, Frank's hatred of women is probably based on resentment of his mother's abandoning him, rather than on actual contact with any women. Yet, Frank's misogyny is ultimately self-defeating, for when he accidentally stumbles upon the truth about his sex, his world simply collapses. His initial disbelief and his fury abate soon, turning into a "stunned acceptance" (p. 180) that leaves him shivering at the thought of sexual intercourse with a man and at the possibility of giving birth. The new Frances's only consolation is that, in her own words, "*I am still me; I am the same person, with the same memories and the same deeds done, the same (small) achievements, the same (appalling) crimes to my name*" (p. 182), though this is obviously not true. Frances's restoration to her original biological womanhood leaves Frank stranded in a no man's land, for he senses he was better off as a castrated man than as a woman burdened with the male, misogynistic personality of a killer.

I was proud; eunuch but unique; a fierce and noble presence in my lands, a crippled warrior, fallen prince ...

Now I find I was the fool all along.

Believing in my great hurt, my literal cutting off from society's mainland, it seems to me that I took life in a sense too seriously, and the lives of others, for the same reason, too lightly. The murders were my own conception; my sex. (p. 183)

The novel ends with the new Frances cradling her brother Eric, whose madness Frank had previously attributed to the dominance of feminine traits in his mind, and speculating on how Eric will receive the news that his brother is in fact his sister. Since the novel ends at this point, we can only guess whether the new androgynous Frances will behave in a less brutal way than Frank. She may build on her own a new gender model based on the reality of her female body and on her knowledge of the male mind from the inside. But it is more likely that she will always be a freakish woman, split in two by the discordance between who she has believed herself to be for seventeen years and who she has always been biologically. This is what makes the novel's contribution to the ongoing debate on gender roles particularly ambiguous. On the one hand, Banks punishes the male misogynist with the loss of his masculinity, seemingly agreeing with Freud on the idea that castration anxieties are uppermost in men's mind and that they are linked to the fear of becoming a woman, that is to say, an inferior person. On the other hand, he suggests that anybody's sexual identity can be manipulated and that the root of male violence is a combination of hormonal and psychological traits. It is, accordingly, difficult to say whether Banks intends his readers to sympathize with Frank or with Frances - whether his loss of masculinity has more weight in the novel than her being robbed of her sexual identity by Angus - or to decide who is more monstrous, the father who manipulates his daughter or the mother who abandons her to such a father.

Frank Cauldham belongs to the category of the woman transformed into a monster by means of magic or genetic manipulation. The magical transformations give power to the women who endure them, though their newly acquired power is often, not to say always, viewed as a source of conflict. This is why their elimination or their control by a man is the most frequent ending



in this type of narrative. The vampire woman and the female werewolf are two of the most common figures under the heading of the metamorphic woman but it is important to note that the number of male vampires and werewolves is much higher. Likewise, in many texts women become monsters because they are manipulated or hurt by men - because they are men's victims - and not because they are presented as monstrous viragos or gynanders from a misogynistic point of view. Thus, the vampire girl Claudia in *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) is the victim of the couple formed by two male vampires, Louis and Lestat; Amanda is also transformed into a vampire in *Fright Night* (1985) by a male vampire whom her boyfriend is trying to destroy. Kate, a TV journalist trapped by a community of werewolves in *The Howling* (1980), is first betrayed by her husband and then transformed into a werewolf. Only in exceptional cases is the transformation caused by a woman, as happens in *The Hunger* (1983). The heroine Sarah becomes in this film a vampire queen only after displacing her bisexual lover, Miriam, from power.

As Robert Tracy (1990: 54) says of the undead, attractive women of nineteenth-century vampire fiction, they "are doubly monstrous because they combine masculine sexual aggression with feminine forms." This is still valid for most feminine monsters of the 1980s and 1990s, though there is a perceptible change in men's attitude towards the combination of aggression and femininity. The woman who is beauty and the beast in one is a recurrent fantasy as likely to be embodied by the strong heroine as by the feminine monster who is finally destroyed. It is therefore necessary to make a distinction between the original figure of the feminine vampire created by the misogynistic Decadent artists that still survives today - Lucy in *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1993) is her latest incarnation, though she is adapted from Stoker's novel - and the more ambivalent contemporary feminine vampire, who may even be an independent woman such as Sarah in *The Hunger*. John Landis' *Innocent Blood* (1992) also rejects the conventional plot in which the vampire woman had to be destroyed, replacing it with a plot in which the vampire Marie becomes man's ideal companion, hence, another instance of a widespread fantasy, that of being chosen by an extraordinary,

unique - even monstrous - sexual partner.

Like most feminine monsters, Marie is an ambivalent figure. She feeds on evil men whom she always kills, thus using her predatory instinct not only to survive but also to impart a peculiar kind of androphobic justice. Although she uses sex to attract her victims, she eventually learns to dissociate desire from predating when she meets Genaro, a policeman who falls in love with her and who accepts her as she is. Marie's control of her animal instinct through love is a total reversal of the figure of the cat woman - a virgin who becomes a panther the first time she has sex - popularised by Jacques Tournier's 1942 film *Cat People*. The fact that the 1982 remake of *Cat People* was a box-office failure while there is currently a project to make a film on the Catwoman of the Batman film series is no coincidence. The contemporary Catwoman played by Michelle Pfeiffer in *Batman Returns* (1992) is not a victim of her own sexuality as the cat woman Irina, but of a powerful man who murders her. As if she were a vampire, she returns from the dead to avenge herself but also to transform herself into an independent woman like Marie, halfway between the villainess and the heroine. The Catwoman and Marie show thus that Irina and the view of sexuality she represents are outdated stereotypes. Marie, seen in the film attacking and devouring men during sexual intercourse but also teaching Genaro to trust her and to love her, is a sign that men's fantasies are now more masochistic than sadistic. Although he is initially appalled by the discovery of her real nature, sex and her collaboration in the hunting of Mafia boss Sal Macelli, an evil man whom Marie has failed to kill and who has become an evil vampire, makes Genaro change his mind about Marie. Once Macelli and his 'family' have been exterminated, Marie decides to kill herself rather than risk spreading evil again, but Genaro proposes a happier end for both. Being a black comedy, the film does not deal with deeper moral questions such as how anybody - man or woman - can tolerate having a monstrous killer for companion. Marie warns Genaro that she is by no means redeemed nor in less need of blood, yet he accepts her because he can no longer see her as an evil monster.

It seems then, that a long distance has been travelled since Lucy's heart was staked in

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* as a punishment for having wished to retain the love of three men: Marie is free to choose and may choose indeed to kill Genaro if she wishes. Yet, despite the differences, the shadow of misogynist prejudice can also be found in *Innocent Blood*. Marie may not be as horrific as Lucy for the average man, but she *is* a monster, as if Hollywood could only represent liberated, independent women either as monsters or as monster killers like Ellen Ripley. Marie lives in a man's world in which she is as exceptional as the female black attorney in charge of Macelli's case; it is indeed significant that rather than trust this woman Marie chooses Genaro, a simple policeman, as a companion to exterminate evil men like Macelli. The new fantasies about the monstrous woman are less misogynistic than the nineteenth-century fantasies of destruction, but they are also fantasies of control in which there is no room for women to communicate among themselves. This suggests that men have transferred their misogynistic fears from woman herself to women's capacity to form relationships or networks of power without men, as feminism teaches women to do.

There is still a need to represent woman as a monster that seems to have been reinforced by feminism rather than dispelled. It could be said that in these wish-fulfillment fantasies the men who accept the extraordinary, monstrous woman deny the power of feminism: the strong woman who is not a feminist and who like Rachael, Bella Baxter, Guiwenneth, or Marie accepts man as a companion no doubt bolsters the ego of the reader or the viewer who identifies with the rather ordinary men that these extraordinary women love. Likewise, each of the heroes of romance who devotes his life to the love of a woman denies the power of misogynistic patriarchy. In fact, it might well be that these contemporary texts about the monstrous woman and the average man are a transposition to man's world of the myth of "Beauty and the Beast". Women's fantasy of transforming the patriarchal monster into the perfect lover narrated by this tale is reciprocated by men's fantasy of transforming the strong, untameable woman into the ideal companion.

Within the category of the women who are transformed into monsters there are two main subgroups. The first corresponds to the women who are transformed by others and which I have

just analysed, while the second corresponds to the women who transform themselves into monsters in order to gain power. In Chapter 2 I analysed the similarities between Fay Weldon's Ruth in *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* (1983) and Robert Zemeckis' Mad and Hel in *Death Becomes Her* (1992), two satires about the extremes to which women may go in order to be attractive for men, which can be read as attacks against the image of woman as a sexy doll. The cyborg Nili of *Body of Glass* (1991) is another version of woman's attempt at taking the reins in the transformation of her own body. I argued in Chapter 6 that feminist science fiction sees in the female cyborg a figure of great metaphorical potential to signify women's transformation of themselves, yet it is important to remember that the female cyborg is a figure created by men. The hitwoman Molly of *Neuromancer* (1984) is an earlier instance of the woman who has remade herself by enhancing her capacity to fight; she is in fact a typical instance of the mixture of femininity and masculine aggression favoured by the fantasies of many men. Of course, there is an important difference in the use to which Nili and Molly put their bodies, for Molly works for money and not for any feminist ideology as Nili does. In any case, the examples of Ruth, Mad, Helen, Nili and Molly suggest that there is more exchange of motifs and characters between the fiction produced by woman and the fiction produced by men than is apparent if we attend only the claims of feminist criticism.

In other cases the reasons why the woman is transformed into a monster are obscured or it is even doubted that she is in fact a monster. What seems obvious, though, is that the monstrous woman is superior to the monstrous man or to the apparently normal men who turn out to be more dangerous monsters than her. In *Wolf* (1994) it is not clear whether Laura has chosen to become a werewolf as Rosalee does in *The Company of Wolves* (1984), yet she keeps a tight control on her dark side whereas the men she transforms behave in a most brutal manner. Likewise, in *Wild Seed* (1980), Anyanwu's sensible use of her power to alter her shape at will is positively contrasted with the evil power of her lover Doro to possess the bodies of those he kills.

Angela Carter's heroine Fewvers in *Nights at the Circus* (1987) may or may not be a genuine winged woman but she comes across many disagreeable men in her life who are more monstrous than her and who threaten her life in a way she never threatens theirs. The same can be said about Salman Rushdie's Sufiya Zinobia in *Shame* (1983), the woman panther who is literally an embodiment of woman's rage in the face of the shameful acts of the men she attacks.

While the imaginary feminine monsters are women of monstrous physical characteristics, the group of feminine monsters I have called realistic exhibit a monstrous, unnatural - unfeminine - behaviour. The realistic (or pseudo-realistic) feminine monsters are moral monsters that can be grouped together according to whether they are irrational or rational evil-doers, that is to say, madwomen or villainesses. I have already referred to the madwoman in Chapter 4, with the examples of Alex in *Fatal Attraction*, Peyton in *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle*, Heddie in *Single White Female* and Annie in *Misery* and to Beverley, the female serial killer of *Serial Mom*. I should like to consider now briefly another serial killer, Elizabeth Cree in Peter Ackroyd's *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* and, also briefly two figures that mix the femme fatale with the serial killer, Catherine Trammell of *Basic Instinct* and Catherine, the black widow of the eponymous film.

In real life women who kill are regarded as monstrous exceptions to the general rule of femininity, while male killers are often treated as if their existence confirmed a secret truth about all men. It is therefore difficult to judge whether the female killers of fiction must also be read as monstrous exceptions or as misogynistic fantasies aimed at distorting the image of women or, alternatively, at masking the fact that most violence is caused by men. A further difficulty is added by the fact that much is said about the violence caused by men in real life, but very little about that caused by women. Thus, the media does not usually cover cases of abuse by women against men, nor is the fact that there are women terrorists remarked. To be consistent with the feminist demand for equality, which incidentally has also led women to the armed forces and the police where they fulfil tasks that involve violence, more research should be done on whether women are

also equally capable of using violence. Cases such as that of Rosemary West, the woman who collaborated with her husband Frederick in the horrific murders of a number of young women, should alter many preconceived ideas about women's abuse of violence.

Peter Ackroyd's *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* (1994) focuses on a fictional Victorian woman who might have been Jack the Ripper. Ackroyd toys in addition with the idea that his monstrous heroine might have remained unsuspected because nobody would have believed that a respectable woman could be capable of killing other women. The irony of the novel is that respectability does not save Cree from the gallows when she is accused of the 'feminine' crime of poisoning her husband, John Cree. Actually, John Cree is his wife's last victim after the series of unladylike crimes he has discovered and that have been attributed to a serial killer known as the Limehouse Golem. This is a role she has added to her many roles as a successful vaudeville actress when her new persona as the respectable Mrs. Cree starts asphyxiating her. To complicate matters further, Cree assumes simultaneously the male persona that allows her to kill - her own version of Mr. Hyde - and her husband's; she intends to blame the crimes on him with a series of diaries she herself writes and in which the John Cree she has invented narrates her own crimes. Despite the fact that Ackroyd justifies Elizabeth's behaviour on the grounds of the constant abuse she received from her repressive mother, Elizabeth is not a very credible character. On the whole, Ackroyd's attempt at creating a female psycho killer is a failure precisely because he cannot imagine a consistent reason why Elizabeth kills, nor why she needs to impersonate a man to kill. The novel is unwittingly androphobic because it suggests that only women with a strong masculine side kill. Elizabeth is a monstrous woman, consequently, not because she is the essence of what misogynists cannot tolerate, but because she behaves as a monstrous man. If she had killed men without abandoning her female identity she could have been regarded as a female monster, but as Ackroyd portrays her, she is more a man in drag than a woman's impersonation of man.

In contrast, Catherine Trammel, the monstrous heroine of *Basic Instinct* (1991) kills men without having to behave like a man. She is yet another instance of the attractive combination of

femininity and male aggressiveness so popular now, mixing traits from the femme fatale and the serial killer. Since she is a villainess and not a madwoman, few clues are furnished as to why Catherine kills men and loves other female killers such as her lesbian lover, except her passion for plotting her novels and her life. As happens in the case of Marie, Catherine is a male fantasy designed to bolster the ego of the average man represented by Nick, the policeman who loves her. His killing of Catherine's lesbian lover and his plans for a rosy future with Catherine are part of the same fantasy of taming the strong woman into submission. Yet, the apparent link between Catherine's bisexuality and her killings raised more protests than her androphobia, which obscured the need to debate why men are attracted towards this type of masochistic erotic fantasy. The final shot of the film is especially ambiguous as it indicates that far from controlling Catherine, Nick has literally put his life in her hands. The ice-pick hidden under their bed means that he is living a particularly dangerous fantasy and that he or any man in the audience are wrong to believe that women like Catherine can be controlled. Quite another issue is why in Hollywood's version a strong woman who dominates the sexual relationship with a man must be necessarily monstrous.

*Black Widow* (1987) offers a more original treatment of the figure of the female serial killer. The film focuses on the ambivalent relationship between a beautiful woman, Catherine, and the Justice Department agent, Alexandra, who suspects her of having killed a number of wealthy men. Unlike Catherine Trammell, who uses a great amount of violence in her killings, Catherine poisons her successive husbands using a method of killing characteristically feminine, which is, incidentally, the same used by Elfriede Blauerstein, the Austrian black widow recently unmasked. The mixture of fear, fascination and envy that Catherine Trammell awakens in Nick is very similar to what Alexandra feels for the woman she is investigating. The incipient love story between the two women is nonetheless aborted when the black widow involves her beloved new friend in a complicated plot to blame her own crimes on Alexandra, ignoring that she is a representative of the law. However, unlike Nick, Alexandra is not so ready to forgive Catherine's manipulation of her life and so the film concludes with the punishment of the fatal woman and the vindication of the

innocent woman whom she has victimized. The film suggests thus that despite the strong sexual attraction between Catherine and Alexandra, the weaker woman's sense of justice is more important than the black widow's emotional hold on her, whereas in *Basic Instinct* the monstrous woman avoids punishment by successfully manipulating her persecutor's feelings. Obviously, this is easier to achieve for Catherine Trammell regarding Nick than for Catherine regarding Alexandra, for the simple reason that Nick is a heterosexual man certainly attracted by his suspect, whereas Alexandra is not homosexual. Therefore, she can shake off the emotional hold that Catherine has got on her more easily than Nick.

The conclusion to be inferred from the many representations of the feminine monster I have analysed in this subsection is that the misogynistic component in the portrait of the feminine monster is more ambiguous than feminist criticism claims. The instability of men's position in a cultural context certainly transformed by feminism has resulted in a new type of masochistic fantasy dominated by the figure of the feminine monster. This mixture of femininity and masculine aggression is not directly related to the reality of women's behaviour but to the fantasies men entertain about women. In general terms, the feminine monster is no longer an abject figure that must be destroyed but a strong woman who challenges man to accept her as she is. Obviously her personality is defined by man and includes traits that may be objected to from a feminist point of view, but there are progressively fewer and fewer differences between the feminine monsters created by men and by woman. Since many of the contemporary feminine monsters are figures who in many cases are not derogatory portraits of women, they have even gained a certain degree of popularity among women, especially because they are strong women who dominate their relationships with men. In any case, since what characterizes the aggressive feminine monster is her masculinisation, it can be concluded that the monstrous-feminine does not really exist. Paradoxically, what men fear in the gynander - the masculinised woman - is the aberrant man in her which reinforces my suggestion that men are discussing masculinity and not femininity through the feminine monster. On the other hand, man's fears of the new independent woman of



the 1980s and 1990s are the foundation on which the abundant fantasies of seduction rest. The feminine monster who is partly villainness and partly ideal bride is the equivalent for men's writing of the repulsive yet fascinating villain of women's romance. This leads to the conclusion that the monster is a mirror of the anxieties felt by each gender in the face of the other and that the changes in gender roles of the 1980s and 1990s have necessarily brought changes in the representation of gendered monstrosity that must still be analysed in depth.

## 7.2. The New Woman Saviour

### 7.2.1. The Woman Saviour and the Monstrous Seducer

In *The Sadeian Woman*, Angela Carter writes that

All the mythic versions of women, from the myth of the redeeming purity of the virgin to that of the healing, reconciling mother, are consolatory nonsenses; and consolatory nonsense seems to me a fair definition of myth, anyway... If a revival of the myths of these cults gives women emotional satisfaction, it does so at the price of obscuring the real conditions of life... Myth deals in false universals, to dull the pain of particular circumstances. (op. cit.: 5)

In this section my aim is to examine the myth of the new woman saviour and to determine whether it falls within the category of consolatory nonsense described by Carter. By 'new woman saviour' I refer to the female character who assumes a heroic role as the male monster's redeemer or nemesis in 1980s and 1990s films and novels about monstrosity. Although the new woman saviour derives from a tradition that goes back to Samuel Richardson's sentimental novel *Clarissa Harlowe* (1747-8), she has also assumed new features that derive from the direct or indirect impact of feminism on men's writing. As such, she has become an ambiguous figure, stranded between feminist criticism, which rejects her as yet another patriarchal attempt at controlling woman's ideals about themselves, and the more habitual representation in fiction produced by men of women, as secondary, unheroic characters. The new woman saviour that has attracted most critical attention is Ellen Ripley, the heroine of the *Alien* trilogy, though, arguably, Clarice Starling, the heroine of *The Silence of the Lambs*, is the most illustrative new woman saviour,

especially as she is presented in the novel by Thomas Harris rather than in the film by Jonathan Demme. Unlike those women saviours who redeem (or fail to redeem) men, Clarice's efforts are aimed at saving a victimized woman held prisoner by a monstrous serial killer whom she kills, and at avenging the women he has already killed rather than at redeeming a monstrous man.

The woman saviour best ingrained in the popular imagination of the Christian world is no doubt the Virgin Mary. Leslie Fiedler argues in *Love and Death in the American Novel* that the woman saviour is a specifically Protestant myth that appears after the rejection of the figure of the Virgin Mary by the Protestant sects in the sixteenth century. The psychological need for a female protector did not disappear with the iconoclasts of the Reformation nor with the Puritans who destroyed venerated images of Mary throughout Northern and Central Europe. While in Catholic countries the Virgin Mary still remains one of the strongest bastions of popular devotion for both men and women, in Protestant countries the female redeemer of the male sinner is a figure that has been transposed to fiction and that has ultimately originated the postmodernist new woman saviour.

Of course, in the Catholic countries where Mary is worshipped her figure has been used to serve the patriarchal interests of the Catholic Church<sup>1</sup>. Many Catholics would probably refuse to acknowledge the fact that the Virgin Mary is a much degraded manifestation of the archaic Earth goddess. Mary emerges in Christianity as the heiress of the cults of Isis, Cybele (or Artemis) and Diana, goddesses who were themselves manifestations of the lost Earth goddess. These goddesses emerged after the patriarchal usurpation of the paleolithic goddess's throne failed to totally suppress her presence from the collective unconscious. The cult of Mary was strengthened

---

<sup>1</sup>In Catholic countries Mary's miraculous pregnancy and her role as the mother of Christ have been most profitably used by the Church to persuade women that the sacred mission of motherhood - sacred, yet subordinated to man's patriarchal control of women - was enough to fulfil their lives. In Protestant countries, in contrast, her pregnancy was seen as a suspicious sign of female autonomy from man, perhaps a reemergence of the idea of the feared parthenogenetic mother. At the time of the Reformation there was also a noticeable growth in the interest in monstrous births and in the centuries old idea that the mother was to blame for the birth of monstrous children. As Marie-Hélène Huet (op. cit.: 30) remarks, "Finally, the idea of the monstrous mother becomes a blasphemous parody of the cult of the Virgin Mary. In erasing all traces of the progeny's legitimate father, the monstrous mother replicates and derides, the Immaculate Conception."

in the fourth and fifth centuries AD, coinciding with the Church's suppression of the cults of diverse Greek, Roman and Eastern goddesses. A council celebrated in Ephesus in 431 AD declared that Mary was 'Theotokos', the mother of god and the bearer of divinity, thus, no longer the simply human woman of the New Testament. It is no coincidence that this council was celebrated in Ephesus, for this is where Artemis, whose cult was suppressed in 380 AD, had her most important sanctuary. The Earth goddess also survives in Christianity in the mysterious third figure of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Ghost, represented by a dove which used to be one of the old goddess's symbols. Baring and Cashford (*op. cit.*: 634 - 638) note that the Gnostic heresy - suppressed also in the fourth century - was persecuted among other things because the Gnostics claimed that there was initially a divine couple of God and Goddess with a son and a daughter and that the Holy Ghost eventually replaced the Goddess while Mary replaced the daughter. Likewise, in the Jewish Kabbalah, developed in the Middle Ages, the Holy Ghost, named Shekhinah, was identified with the feminine aspect of the divinity, also known as Sophia.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century the seeds for the view of woman as a sadistically victimized saviour persecuted by a monstrous man, had already been planted for novelists to gather the fruits. The more positive aspects of the legacy left by the cult of the Earth goddess survived nonetheless in the collective unconscious to resurface in the twentieth century with the progressive emergence of feminism and, what is also important, with men's - or at least, some men's - acceptance of their own feminine side. An important fictional incarnation of the woman saviour is the victim of seduction that redeems her seducer, first appearing in Richardson's *Pamela* (1740-1). This novel narrates the triumph of the sentimental woman saviour, in this case a simple servant who manages to transform her lustful, threatening master into her own civilized husband without having to sacrifice her virtue, that is to say, her virginity. The Virgin Mary's power to mediate between God and the believer who turns to her for help - a power sustained by her bodily and spiritual purity - is degraded thus to the figure of the virtuous woman who sees in her virginity the best weapon to defeat the sinful man.

A similar wish-fulfilment fantasy narrating the metamorphosis of the monstrous man thanks to the effect of virtuous woman underlies the confrontation between Beauty and the Beast in Mme Leprince de Beaumont's popular version, published in 1755 in Britain, where she lived and where she could have presumably read Richardson's novels. Interestingly, while a previous, also very popular French version by Mme de Villeneuve published in 1740 concludes with the enchanted prince's transformation into a man only after the wedding night, in Beaumont's tale the transformation is a precondition for sex. In her version virtue, not sex, redeems the Beast, as happens in *Pamela*, so that the moral of Villeneuve's version and of the more ancient versions of the tale - woman must learn to accept man's sexuality and to discover that far from being brutal it can be rewarding for her - is reversed: man must learn to respect woman's virtue. But while Pamela and Beauty are rewarded with a happy marriage with a man magically transformed from beast to prince for having kept their virtue, Clarissa's fate is quite different. Raped by Lovelace in her drugged sleep, she cannot overcome her sense of shame and dies a martyr to her belief in her own purity, in which she recalls many of the Christian martyrs who would die rather than be raped. Even though her death redeems Lovelace, the fact that Richardson thought it necessary, and the popularity of the novel, among both men and women, established a dangerous pattern for subsequent fiction.

Though Clarissa never bore Lovelace's children, the couple begot nonetheless many literary descendants. Clarissa became the mother of the sentimental heroine in a line that runs from Goethe's Charlotte in *Werther's Sorrows* to Henry James's *Daisy Miller* and that also includes the more resourceful, less passive heroines of Gothic fiction. Lovelace, as Fiedler (1973: 69) writes, suffered a process of degradation into the stock villain of popular fiction and drama to become "the masturbatory fantasy figure of bourgeois ladies" in sentimental novels such as Mrs. Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* and possibly also in fiction derived from Gothic and romantic motifs, such as Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and her sister Charlotte's *Jane Eyre*. However, it is not true that this degradation is a sign of Lovelace's representation of a terminal tradition, as Fiedler

argues. Lovelace is as fundamental as Clarissa in the development of the myth of the monstrous man and the woman saviour, precisely because he survives in the Gothic villain and later in the Byronic hero, among whose descendants all the tragic monsters of postmodernity and their bestial counterparts can be counted. Both Lovelace and Clarissa suffer a process of degradation that is parallel to the fall of sentimentalism and the rise of horror beginning with the Gothic novel, itself a genre derived from the sentimental novel. In Gothic fiction the hero is separated from the villain so that Lovelace's potential for redemption is denied. Later, Dr. Jekyll symbolizes how impossible this redemption has become precisely because the terms have been reversed: while the sentimental heroine could save man's soul, Dr. Jekyll's transformation into Mr. Hyde discloses that man's soul conceals an irredeemable monster.

In any case, the main consequence of the popularity of Richardson's novel, especially among women, was the perpetuation of a type of sentimental plot which was unfavourable to women. As Leslie Fiedler argues, the 'Pure Young Woman' derived from Clarissa became a monster of virtue that proved a universal calamity. In America, especially "with no counter-tradition, cynical or idealizing, to challenge it, the sentimental view came to be accepted as quite literally true, [and] was imposed upon actual woman as a required role and responded to by men as if it were a fact of life rather than of fancy" (op. cit.: 80). What followed was, according to Fiedler, a tacit mutual pact of tolerance by which men and women learned to accept unrealistic, idealized representations of themselves in fiction and to believe they were not fantasies but portraits of reality.

In Britain Clarissa's passivity was viewed with more ambivalence possibly because the heroines of British Gothic fiction already subverted the feminine values represented by Richardson's sentimental heroine. They were more Pamela than Clarissa, though they lacked the former's capacity to manipulate the monstrous man, which is why they invariably needed a hero to rescue them from the hands of the villain. Evident signs of the split between the virtuous Gothic heroine who learns to survive by breaking some of the constraints put on femininity and the

passive victim of sentimental fiction can be read in *Wuthering Heights* (1848). The first Cathy dies because she cannot solve the dilemma of having to choose between the villain (Heathcliff) and the civilized man (Edgar). She belongs to an old-fashioned world which only survives in her and Heathcliff's ghosts. The second Cathy is a new woman saviour who has learned to save herself by resisting and surviving the villain and also by leaving behind the sentimentalism that doomed her aunt Isabella and the asphyxiating romanticism that killed her mother. Once she has saved herself, the second Cathy redeems her cousin Hareton from his appalling state of degradation mainly to suit her own needs for male companionship and not only for his own sake.

The split between the passive and the active heroine is also most visible in another Victorian Gothic novel, Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* (1860), with the figures of the weak heroine Laura, and her courageous sister Marian. Collins gives his hero Walter Hartright a unique chance of enjoying the life-long company of his wife, the childish Laura, whom he rescues from the villain Fosco, and also of Marian who has in fact saved Laura's life and who is Hartright's closest friend. Collins gives Marian a beautiful body but an ugly face, masculine resolution but feminine self-restraint and makes her become the object of count Fosco's attentions much to her dislike. The fact that Collins is himself divided regarding Marian's attractiveness is an early sign of the ambiguities in men's fantasies about the strong heroine. In any case, if we are to judge from Fiedler's description of the negative effects of the worship of the pure young woman in American fiction, and from her victimization in Collins' novel, it could be argued that the victimization of woman in contemporary horror fiction is a sadistic, misogynistic response not against all women but against the passive model of the sentimental woman. The strong heroines who kill monsters and the new women saviours who survive the death of the irredeemable monsters derived from Lovelace are descendants of the Gothic heroine of British fiction and of the strong heroines of nineteenth-century British fiction. They have finally overthrown the long-standing reign of the sentimental heroine whom they have replaced with a mixture of femininity and the same masculine aggressiveness which is as likely to appear in the heroine as in the monster. Thus, the

passive model of femininity exemplified by the Virgin Mary has been replaced, or is in the process of being finally replaced, by the much more active woman saviour. She is a proof of nostalgia for the principle of active femininity once embodied by the Earth goddess and lost because of the Judaeo-Christian, patriarchal manipulation of her image.

The seducer and the virginal young woman of Richardson's sentimental novels still survive in Beryl Bainbridge's *An Awfully Big Adventure* (1989), a novel in which the reversal of their roles leads to his death and to her surviving the loss of her virginity unscathed. Bainbridge's lurid tale deals with a tragic triangle in which the figure of the seduced woman is split into the mother seduced and later abandoned and the little girl - the seducer's daughter - that she herself abandons. The grim irony of the plot is that the seducer, O'Hara, ends deflowering his sixteen-year-old daughter unwittingly, attracted by her physical similarity with her half-forgotten mother. When he finds out who young Stella is, O'Hara realizes that his life as a seducer is at an end and receives his death in an exemplary accident quite clearly procured by Bainbridge herself rather than by the logic of the plot.

O'Hara may be a monstrous, selfish exploiter of women, yet the no less selfish Stella turns out to be truly his father's daughter. Bainbridge's Stella is a great manipulator of people, the more dangerous for masking herself behind the pretence of complete innocence. In contrast, the failed screen adaptation portrays Stella as the innocent of sentimental fiction, thus completely destroying the unnerving effect that her self-centredness produces in the novel. She loses her virginity to O'Hara not quite because he has seduced her but, first, because she wants to get over as soon as possible with a rite of passage she considers a nuisance and second, because she is enacting in his brief affair with him the fantasy of letting herself be seduced like the mother whom she so badly misses. Yet precisely because she is playing the role of the victim - and it is certainly appropriate that O'Hara and her meet in a provincial theatre where she is taking the first steps in her career as an actress - and not really feeling it, O'Hara's seduction leaves no deep marks in her. Instead of uttering "those naive and sweetly foolish declarations of undying love expected of a young girl

whose virginity had just been taken" (p. 164), Stella candidly admits to a scandalised O'Hara that sex was not really enjoyable. O'Hara's obsession with her callousness and his need to find out why she is like that is what ultimately leads to his death. When the other members of the theatrical company where she works discover why he died, Stella's only preoccupation is to establish her innocence on the grounds that she is not old enough to shoulder the blame.

Bainbridge's novel is perhaps best defined as a 'conte cruel' that is partly androphobic and partly misogynistic, and in which the boundaries between the male and the female monster are blurred. On the one hand, the male seducer is punished with death for the fortuitous incest with his daughter, Stella's cold reaction towards him degrades him as a lover but his final degradation is the realization that Stella's callousness is a legacy she has received from him. The daughter is thus closer to her unknown father than to the abandoned mother she identifies with. On the other hand, Stella is nothing but the monstrous child of two monstrously selfish persons, for while her mother was abandoned by O'Hara, she has been in her turn abandoned by her mother. Bainbridge demolishes the figure of the seducer but she also points out that Stella's corrupt innocence is based on a poisonous, sentimental feminine model inherited from an irresponsible mother. If the mother had not herself acted following that model, if she had stayed by her daughter's side and fought to prevent her from making the same mistake, Stella herself would have been redeemed.

### 7.2.2. *From the Final Girl to the New Woman Saviour*

Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) is the first film to focus on the ordeal of a damsel in distress who survives her encounter with the monster - the contemporary psychotic killer evolved from Lovelace and his Gothic descendants - after the death of the men supposed to have protected her. In Hooper's film the screaming heroine of horror fiction becomes the only survivor of a group including two men - one of them disabled - and two women who are attacked by the infamous Leatherface and his family. When she realizes that nobody can help her, this young



woman screams her way out of the family's private slaughterhouse where they butcher not only animals but also their human victims; the last shot of the film shows her covered in blood and laughing hysterically on board the lorry carrying her away from the chainsaw-wielding Leatherface. Many subsequent horror films, which came to be known as slashers, imitated the pattern set by the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. They narrated the deaths of a number of young people, usually of both sexes, caused by a psychotic, almost supernatural killer who invariably failed to kill the heroine and who survived to appear in another sequel. While the killer became less and less human, the heroine became progressively stronger, more courageous, more resourceful and also more controlled. The success of John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978) and the popularity gained by its heroine Laurie in her battle against the psychotic Michael Myers ensured the continuation of her presence on the screen and also paved the way for the appearance of the female monster slayer in *Alien*.

Eventually, this type of heroine attracted the attention of feminist critics who wondered why the horror film was the only genre in which women were the protagonists and also whether these female characters were victims of patriarchy or triumphant feminist heroines. Carol Clover was the first to define the heroine of the slasher film and even to christen her with the name of the Final Girl:

She is the one who encounters the mutilated bodies of her friends and perceives the full extent of the preceding horror and of her own peril; who is chased, cornered, wounded; whom we see scream, stagger, fall, rise, and scream again. She is abject terror personified. If her friends knew they were about to die only seconds before the event, the Final Girl lives with the knowledge for long minutes or hours. She alone looks death in the face, but she alone also finds the strength either to stay the killer long enough to be rescued (ending A) or to kill him herself (ending B). (1989: 35)

Clover further argues that the Final Girl did not appear as a result of the incorporation of feminist traits in film heroines, but, quite on the contrary, as a result of the sadistic wish to see the independent heroine fighting for her life in an extreme situation. This is questionable, first because it is often the case that both men and women are victimized and killed in slashers - or horror films in general - so that the Final Girl survives a situation which allegedly stronger men have failed to

survive. Second, there is always an obvious difference between the women who are sadistically killed - usually too weak, too dependent on men's help - and the woman who is intelligent and courageous enough to survive on her own. Third, having been put in the heroic position formerly occupied only by men has made the Final Girl a respectable, credible figure for many men in film audiences or in film criticism. Will Rockett (op. cit.: 125) finds, for instance that the teenage heroine Nancy of *Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) is "indicative of the new heroines in the better films of the supranatural and supernatural. Today, they are intelligent, sensible women who exceed the old norms of the horror canon to demonstrate the courage and intelligence necessary to defend themselves." The Final Girl would therefore seem to be a positive step towards a fairer representation of women on the screen. She should be regarded not as the perpetuation of the traditional screaming heroine of horror but as the missing link between the strong heroines of Gothic and Victorian fiction and the strong heroines of the 1980s and 1990s.

However, feminist critics like Clover herself have raised many objections against the Final Girl and the female characters derived from her, on the grounds that they are suspect models of what patriarchy wants women to be, namely, honorary men:

The Final Girl is boyish, in a word. Just as the killer is not fully masculine, she is not fully feminine - not, in any case, feminine in the ways of her friends. Her smartness, gravity, competence in mechanical and other practical matters, and sexual reluctance set her apart from other girls and ally her, ironically, with the very boys she fears or rejects, not to speak of the killer himself. Less we miss the point, it is spelled out in her name: Stevie, Marti, Terry, Laurie, Stretch, Will, Joey, Max. (op. cit.: 40)

Clover does not question what exactly is the difference between the Final Girls of androgynous names and the feminine - even ultra-feminine - friends who are dispatched by the killer, nor whether women feel identified with the victims or with the heroine. Instead her work has contributed, together with Linda Williams, to establishing a captious model of textual analysis for the horror film with an excessive fixation for gender roles which in fact make the understanding of who the Final Girl is difficult. If it is assumed that "there is something about the victim function that wants manifestation in a female, and something about the monster and hero functions that wants

expression in a male" (ibid.: 12) as Clover does, without taking into account the actual ratios of male to female victims and hero/ines, the consequence is an important confusion about gender roles in horror film and what is even worse, the undesirable perpetuation of stereotypical definitions of the genders that feminism itself is trying to eliminate.

Referring to the killer as a "feminine male" and to the Final Girl as a "masculine female" or as a "female hero" (Clover, ibid.: 62), and marking the woman with the investigating gaze as unfeminine, despite the fact that audiences automatically assume the gender of characters to be the gender of the actor playing them, is simply misleading. It implies that there are fixed models of femininity and masculinity. In fact, the horror film dramatizes the blurring of these models after feminism, and has indeed further blurred them itself so that it would be preferable to discuss the victim's, the hero/ine's and the monster's functions in relation to power and powerlessness rather than gender. Formulaic films and novels routinely cast women as victims and men as heroes (as well as abject, irredeemable monsters) but this familiarity with clichés certainly does not blind audiences to the actual gender of each role in each particular film or novel. On the contrary, Final Girls like Nancy and Ellen Ripley and women saviours like Sarah Connor and Clarice Starling have become popular precisely because they are perceived as clearly feminine and not as masculine females.

Linda Williams argues in her influential article "When the Woman Looks" that monster and woman share common grounds for mutual sympathy in classic monster films. In them, patriarchy portrays woman and the monster as embodiments of aberrant sexuality by comparison to the heterosexual male, patriarchal model represented by the hero. The monster becomes a double for the woman he victimizes in these films because both monster and woman diverge from the sexual model set by man. The elimination of the monster and the breaking of the relationship between monster and woman ensures the destruction of the male aberrant sexuality represented by the monster and also the return of woman to the patriarchal fold after the excursion to the freakish territory of the monster's sexuality. According to Williams, classic monster films like *King Kong* show

that women's sexuality is monstrous because the heroine's sexual appeal stirs the desire of the monster and is the cause of his attack on the civilized, male order. For Williams, in contemporary horror films, especially in slasher films in which the monster is not visible until the end, the female victim's mutilated body indicates that the monster's desire for her has literally turned her into the only visible monstrous body on screen.

In Williams' view the male audiences of classic horror films, that is, pre-1960s monster films, would sympathize with the girl's rescuer as a fellow enforcer of the patriarchal system. The films would deal mainly not with the threat posed by the monster but with the threat posed by the woman's breaking free of the power of normal male sexuality. In contrast, in contemporary slashers men would sympathize with the sadistic killer of women, who would punish his victims' liberated enjoyment of sex. Williams (1984: 88) claims, thus, that "the monster is thus a particularly insidious form of the many mirrors patriarchal structures of seeing hold up to the woman". Williams' analysis seemingly implies that horror films have the function of intimidating women into submission to the patriarchal order by showing them how little difference there is between them and the monster. This may have been so in the classic monster film - though it is doubtful for monster films were, and are, made by men and for men. From this point of view, it should be assumed that patriarchy is also telling men that it is dangerous to stray from the path of sanctioned male sexuality under penalty of becoming an abject monster like the one who threatens woman and must be eliminated. In any case, Williams' thesis fails to account for why the mirror held up to women by patriarchy now paradoxically reveals that the Final Girl and the woman saviour are more balanced, more 'normal', than the abnormal male monster with whom they allegedly share so much.

A point that must be clarified is that while the Final Girl simply survives her ordeal, the new woman saviour saves herself in order to save others, including perhaps, the monster. Ellen Ripley is the figure who articulates the transition of the Final Girl to the woman saviour. She is also a character granted a quite ambiguous reception by feminism. Carol Clover, who classes Ripley

together with the Final Girls, denies that she is a feminist evolution of the traditional heroine of horror. Clover (1989: 53) argues that Ripley is in fact "a particularly grotesque expression of wishful thinking. She is simply an agreed-upon fiction and the male viewer's use of her as a vehicle for his own sadomasochistic fantasies an act of perhaps timeless dishonesty." On her side, Judith Newton grants that Ripley is a "fine and thrilling hero" - not heroine. Yet Newton sees the main snag in Ripley's femininity and not in her alleged gynandry: "impulsive, nurturing, and sexually desirable," Newton writes, "she is not so threatening to men after all" (1990: 87), as if Ripley's mission were killing men and not extraterrestrial monsters.

In contrast, James Kavanagh (op. cit.: 73), sees in the death of the first alien "the triumphant rebirth of humanism, disguised as powerful, progressive, and justifying feminism." Kavanagh adds that the film mobilizes all the resources of the courageous woman "to resist and ultimately obliterate the voracious phallic monster forced on her by Mother as the representative of the will of the appropriately absent Father (the Company)" (ibid.: 77). In his view, considering the fact that the relations between the men and the women of the *Nostromo's* crew are marked by rank in the Company's hierarchy and not by gender, "the film can be seen as almost postfeminist" (ibid.: 77). Obviously, neither Clover nor Kavanagh are representatives of respectively female and male audiences; many women might agree with Kavanagh's suggestion that Ripley is a credible postfeminist heroine, whereas many men may have felt like Newton that Ripley is too feminine to be actually different from any other heroine of horror fiction. What is significant is that the defense of Ripley as a feminist heroine comes from a man, who has apparently failed to see that Ripley is, in Clover's words, a male surrogate. The confusion of gender roles is extreme in Vivian Sobchack's complaint against the lack of clear marks that identify Ripley as a woman:

Unlike Leia [of *Star Wars*], Ripley is not so much defused in her sexuality as she is confused with her male companions and denied any sexual difference at all. Instead of white robes that mark [Leia] both as a woman and chaste or off-limits sexually, she wears the same fatigues as the community of astronauts of which she is - from the beginning - a part. (1990: 106)

Precisely, Leia's white, virginal dress is the most obvious sign of the limitations to which she is

subjected in the patriarchal fairy-tale universe in which she lives; the dress shows that the active role she plays in the defense of her kingdom is not as significant as it might seem and that she is fundamentally an update to the late 1970s of the fairy-tale princess. Ripley's androgynous working clothes indicate that her being one of the Company's employees is more important in the plot than her being a woman. Yet not even her unfeminine clothes can disguise the fact that she is a woman and not a masculine female. In *Alien*<sup>3</sup>, none of the psychotic male inmates of the penitentiary colony where she crash-lands fails to notice the conspicuous signs of her femininity, despite the fact that she wears the same clothes as them and has shaved her head also like them.

Sigourney Weaver herself, about to play Ripley's role for the fourth time, has recently declared that women needn't kill alien monsters on the screen to prove that they are strong heroines. For her, most women are currently playing the role of the strong heroine in their daily lives, combining their jobs with their family life and the development of their own personalities (Trashorras, 1996: 116). Unfortunately, Ripley and the other strong women I have mentioned are still exceptions in a bleak panorama that confirms Molly Haskell's (1987: 363) view that "the closer women come to claiming their rights and achieving independence in real life, the more loudly and stridently films tells us it's a man's world". The new women saviours are, therefore, men's new fantasies of women rather than a sign of men's acknowledgement of the progress made by women in the last decades. Yet, since these women are incorporating little by little more traits corresponding to Weaver's everyday life heroine they can eventually bridge the gap between men's fantasies about women and women's view of themselves, at least in the domain of fiction in which they fulfil a function similar to women's new romance heroes.

In her study of contemporary romances written and read by women, Carol Thurston argues that the romances of the 1980s have redefined the traditional model of the sentimental heroine, the pure young woman derived from Clarissa, producing a new heroine very similar to the model of independent woman elaborated by feminism. However, while the heroine of horror fiction and the feminist heroine must stand on their own because they are surrounded by ineffective male

companions, the heroine of romance enjoys the company of the new hero, fashioned to suit her needs. He "exhibits many traits traditionally assigned to females - openness, flexibility, sensitivity, softness, and vulnerability" and has been transformed "from invincible superman into fallible human being" (1987: 98). Thurston further argues that "instead of man-as-enemy, heterosexual romantic fiction since 1980 has come a long way toward reconstructing the hero in the image of women, by creating males who reflect female values" (ibid.: 185). This hero, this 'female male' is the authentic response to men's 'male female': both are consolatory fantasies born of the combination in one character of the most desirable features of both sexes from the point of view of the writers and also of the audiences they address their work to. It is true that, like horror films, romances do not enjoy a very high reputation among feminists mainly because these narratives defend the model of the heterosexual couple and not that of the independent woman. However, as Thurston argues (ibid.: 110) "to suggest that heterosexual bonding is in itself inherently conservative and inimical to women, as some feminists have done, is to both deny human needs and turn a blind eye to where grassroots social change has and is taking place." In the same way that "the power arrangement within the bonding relationship" is the focal point of change in most 1980s erotic romances, it can be said that the new power arrangements in horror fiction, with women playing a more prominent part and men a less prominent part, are signs of change in gender roles that cannot be fully appreciated from a feminist perspective.

### 7.2.3. *Beauty and the Beast in the 1980s and 1990s*

Most recent novels and films narrating the confrontation between a male monster and a woman saviour follow the narrative pattern established by the myth of "Beauty and the Beast", which certainly deals with the subversion of power arrangements within the heterosexual couple. This is, nevertheless, an ambiguous myth that can be given a misogynistic reading (woman's desire for the monster proves that her sexuality is monstrous) or an androphobic interpretation (man's sexuality is monstrous and only woman's love can make it 'normal'). The many

contemporary versions display the same ambiguity. Bruno Bettelheim (1978: 283 -285, 306 - 322) gives a psychoanalytical explanation for the proliferation of this myth in so many cultures and times. According to him, this myth has the use of easing the anxieties of the young woman who must transfer the Oedipal love for her father to another male figure in order to avoid the conflicts of an incestuous relationship<sup>1</sup>. The story centres symbolically on the loss of the young woman's virginity (the red rose she asks her father to bring from his journey and that he takes from the Beast's castle) and in her discovery that her desire for the Beast transforms the sexual awakening she so much fears into something pleasant and rewarding. This is symbolized by the metamorphosis of the Beast back into a prince. Thus, Beauty "moves to the happy discovery that seeing these two loves in opposition is an immature view of things" (ibid.: 308). Bettelheim's supposes that the abject image of the Beast in the many versions of this myth derives from the taboo which mothers or nurses telling the story imposed on sex: this is why the Beast is invariably deprived of his human form by a sorceress or a fairy he has failed to please in some way.

Nonetheless, there are a number of tensions in the tale that have emerged in recent films and novels and that have displaced the focal point of the myth from Beauty to the Beast. Most new versions deny the basic sentimental premise of the tale, namely, that women's love can domesticate man's monstrous aggressiveness. Instead, they simultaneously display a nostalgia for the now seemingly unacceptable sentimental solution - signified by the fact that the stronger heroines of the 1980s and 1990s suffer more, try harder but are less effective in saving men - and a considerable pessimism regarding men's redemption, which is very often simply impossible to achieve. This brutalization of the Beast and the redoubled victimization of Beauty symbolize not so much man's resistance to the idea of the strong woman but to the feminist rejection of the hero. This is why in the 1980s and the 1990s the monster and the hero have become almost undistinguishable, for both appear to be negative models of masculinity from the feminist

---

<sup>1</sup>In *Shame* (p. 158) , Salman Rushdie indirectly replies to Bettelheim's Freudian interpretation of the tale, by having one of his characters argue that the tale actually deals with an arranged marriage and with the bride's acceptance of the husband chosen by her father.



perspective. As Arthur Brittan (op. cit.: 179) writes, "to be told that men are both oppressors and a problem is not something that men can easily live with." This new male self-consciousness has led towards an attempt at creating a new model of male hero, less violent, more in touch with his own feminine side who cannot be mistaken for the macho hero so derided by feminism. However, this is still a figure as exceptional as the strong heroine. The deep fracture at the core of masculinity has led more frequently to either stressing the sheer brutality of the male monster in contrast to the average man, or to constructing models of potentially redeemable male monstrosity. In any case, these three male figures - the new hero, the brutal monster and the redeemable monster - are not signs of the weakness of woman's position but of its strength.

As Lynn Segal (1990: 279) writes in *Slow Motion*, "men are not so popular today as once they were. There can be few times in history when being female has been quite so fashionable a preference for men". For David Thomas (op. cit.: 2) "Western society is obsessed with women to the point of mass neurosis", which is why most are blind to the changes that men are undergoing. This does not mean that patriarchy has been dismantled for good, for, unfortunately, this is not the case. While Segal argues that men are adapting too slowly to the changes women have already undergone in the last decades, Thomas argues that the problem is that women have not allowed men to construct a cultural space where they could discuss how to fit in this new world. Obviously, their portrait of contemporary society is no doubt too optimistic, for indeed neither all women are willing to accept the changes brought about by feminism, nor does a great majority of men *want* to find this new space. In any case, what seems evident is that women's criticism of men is now ubiquitous in Western culture and that the figure of the strong woman has gained a considerable importance in fiction produced by men. The problem is that since men cannot really reply to that criticism because they lack a degree of consensus as to how to redefine themselves after decades of feminism, they are responding with other methods. These are as varied as the psychopath's aggressiveness against women - and it must be remembered that psychopaths are usually very weak men who feel anxious about their own masculinity rather than very strong

patriarchal men - and the fiction dealing with the masochistic punishment of male monsters destroyed by women. This does not mean, of course, that women are now powerful enough to indulge in the luxury of pitying men, when men still have a much greater share of power than women. The point is that these new versions of *Beauty and the Beast* clearly indicate that the dialogue between the genders is not taking place; this is why the women in these texts are forced to cope with very extreme situations in which they must understand the monstrous man. The fact that not even their understanding can save the monstrous man from destruction suggests that men must turn now to themselves for salvation just as women turned to themselves with feminism.

Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) is an interesting instance of the problems in discerning whether the subtext underlying the new myth of "Beauty and the Beast" is misogynistic or androphobic. Susan Jeffords (1994:148) argues that Disney turned to this tale because it "helps to forward the image of unloved and unhappy white men who needed kindness and affection, rather than criticism and reform, in order to become their "true" selves again." In her view, Belle is trapped between two very negative images of masculinity - the Beast and her suitor Gaston - so that her choice is not between the good and the bad man, but between the bad and the even worse man. The Beast's monstrosity is blamed on a faulty upbringing (he was a spoilt child never taught the difference between men's selfishness and women's nurture), which makes his redemption possible; Gaston, the very incarnation of the macho man, is simply beyond justification or redemption. Jeffords (*ibid.*: 153) notes that the Beast's story might suggest that "masculinity has been betrayed by its own cultural imagery: what men thought they were supposed to be - strong, protective, powerful, commanding - has somehow backfired and become their own evil curse." However, she adds, if men are in that predicament, only they are to blame, and their appeal for woman's help - for Belle's help in the Beast's case - needn't be heeded.

The point that Jeffords misses is that the screenplay was written by a woman, Linda Wolverton. Her interpretation of the tale as a vindication of fallen masculinity, crying out to woman for help and acceptance in order to regain his lost power, can be easily turned the other way

round. Why not suppose that Wolverton intended to warn Beauty (the feminist, sensitive, educated girl) of the need to help the Beast (the redeemable man) as the only means of averting a new reign of the macho bully, Gaston? The threat of misogynistic backlash would only be prevented with women's acceptance of the man who is willing to change for her; together, they could fight the conservative forces represented by Gaston. Presumably, Beauty and the new Prince will have learned from the mistakes in his education and will be prepared to raise their own children in a very different way, avoiding as much the possibility of a new Beast as that of a new Gaston. Both interpretations are not wholly incompatible, but while Jeffords sees the reduction of masculinity to the two models that she discusses as a punishment on the independent woman represented by Belle, Wolverton seems to stress the point that without woman's help and understanding no new model of masculinity can emerge from the monstrous body of patriarchy.

Beauty succeeds in redeeming the Beast because traces of his humanity can be found beneath his beastly persona. However, very frequently, Beauty fails in her task as a woman saviour not because of her inadequacy but because the male monster is incapable of indicating how she can help. In some cases, he even rejects her, seeing that his irredeemable monstrosity threatens her with death. In all these cases, the women emerge deeply scarred in emotional terms from their encounter with the monster, but they survive nonetheless to witness his destruction. Their failure is in essence not their own, but the male monster's failure to see beyond himself. Presumably, these novels and films indicate that men have to find a solution on their own for their problems but that, so far, they cannot; the woman saviour is seemingly a projection of the humanity that still survives in the male monster but she is not enough to salvage it. Despite their efforts, Donna in *Johnny Handsome*, Reba in *Red Dragon*, Le Ly in *Heaven and Earth*, cannot stop the course of self-destruction on which their respective lovers are bent. Somehow, these men are too engrossed by their own monstrosity to actually consider whether there is a way out of their diseased ego through woman's love.

Very often the woman saviour must witness the transformation of the normal man into a

monster because of his having transgressed a taboo. Frequently, the man is a scientist obsessed by his work, though in other cases, the transformation is related to superstitions or religious beliefs. The underlying subtexts of the cases in which a scientist is involved is that man is desensitised by his obsession for his work, while woman can keep an adequate balance between her professional and her emotional life. In most of these films and novels, women stand loyally by the metamorphosed man and resist with all their might his repeated attempts at separating her from his side. This woman saviour represents common sense, being the only element of normality in the male monster's bizarre life though, interestingly, the cases in which the woman manages to impose her common sense (and her love) on man's obsessions are the exception.

*Altered States* (1980) is one of these exceptions. In this film Eddie and Emilie Jessup's married life is ruined by Eddie's obsession for his scientific work and his selfishness concerning his wife's appeal for a better family life. Emilie, who is herself a reputed anthropologist and a mother of three, stands by her husband even when his experiments with drugs (he is trying to rebuild his body at the level of his DNA in order to create a new model of man) almost kill him. Emilie saves Eddie's life on that occasion, expecting that he will eventually return to her and their family, but far from heeding her warnings, Eddie persists in his childish fixation with his work to the point when his body is actually transformed into that of a horrific monster. Emilie herself is transformed into a monstrosity when she tries to save his life again. Moved by her persistence to help him even at the risk of losing her own life, Eddie suffers a deep shock that releases him from his monstrous body. The film ends when he finally acknowledges his love for Emilie, which restores her to her own normal body and promises a rebirth of their life as a couple. This is, as can be seen, a contemporary version of the sentimental solution with a happy end. It is a sign of the contemporary inclination towards pessimism that the film's ending seems indeed pure wishful thinking, especially in comparison with other versions of "Beauty and the Beast".

Not all the loving women are rewarded with such success for their patience with the male egoist. In *Darkman* (1990) Julie is rejected by Peyton, the scientist badly deformed in a horrific

accident. Peyton's badly burned face recalls Lon Chaney's characterization as Eric, the Phantom of the Opera, but their stories are diametrically opposite. While Eric dreams of possessing a beautiful woman, threatening to rape her if she rejects him, Peyton abandons Julie because, as he says, he could never force her to live with a monster who is beyond salvation. Julie is paradoxically liberated from her role as woman saviour when she is most ready to assume it with all the consequences, including her isolation from society with Peyton. In contrast, in David Cronenberg's *The Fly* (1986), the most horrific version of "Beauty and the Beast", the woman saviour Ronnie must finally give the monstrous man Seth, the mercy killing he begs for, despite her efforts to help him. In this case, Seth becomes a monster partly because of his experiments but also because he fails to trust Ronnie and believe in her faithfulness. The accident that transforms him takes place on an exceptional night when Ronnie, angry with Seth for his selfishness and obsession with his work, and also because of his jealousy and possessiveness, has left him on his own. Seth's monstrosity is the direct result of his belief that he can work and live without Ronnie, a mistake for which he pays with his bodily degradation into a hybrid of fly and man.

Beauty's fate is especially problematic in *The Fly* because she has to make a decision not only about Seth's life but also about his child, the baby she is expecting. In fact, her body rather than her love become the only means to redeem Seth, for he plans to fuse his monstrous body with hers so as to become human again. Since Ronnie's pregnancy occurs after Seth has been horrifically altered by his own hand, she has reasonable doubts as to the baby's normality and so tries to have an abortion. Seth prevents her from aborting the baby because he sees in the embryo's genes a possible cure for himself. Yet, Seth's process of destruction is by then too advanced to allow him time to carry out his plans to fuse Ronnie's body with his own; finally, she puts an end to his misery, though not to her own, by shooting him dead. Precisely, *The Fly II* (1989) begins with Ronnie's death in childbirth and though no specific reason is given to explain why she did not immediately abort her monstrous embryo after her killing the monstrous father, it is implied she has been forced to have the child by the patriarchal Mr. Bartok, Seth's employer. More

surprising than the reluctance to face the issue of abortion in the first film is the total absence of the sacrificial mother in the second. Although Martin, Seth's son, fights Bartok's power over him with the help of another woman saviour - a young woman employed by Bartok - his behaviour is marked by his admiration for his missing father, despite the fact that he was a monster, and not for his missing mother, who was no doubt a victimized heroine.

As can be seen from *Mary Reilly* (1990), Valerie Martin's retelling of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the woman saviour is in some cases a survivor of sentimentalism that does not always fit within the predominantly anti-sentimentalist fiction of the 1980s and 1990s. Rather than a mature woman saviour, Mary is a pathetic shadow of this figure. Her capacity to love and to sacrifice herself to the needs of the monstrous man she loves are totally misdirected, because she can never find a position from which to address him as an equal. Unlike other women saviours, Mary never confronts Jekyll directly, too cowed by her awareness of her inferior social status; on his side, he behaves towards her with a mixture of paternalism and aloofness, never seeing in her the woman saviour that might change his life. Whatever Valerie Martin's intentions may have been, Mary's fierce attachment to Jekyll in *Mary Reilly* encourages the view that women are attracted to the role of the woman saviour because of their masochism and because of their obscure attraction towards the Mr. Hyde in man. While most novels and films with similar plots end with the woman saviour drawing some kind of line between her normality and the man's monstrosity, *Mary Reilly* is exceptional because the heroine tries to erase the difference. Nothing at all is gained by this attitude and although the novel might also be read as a sentimental protest at the way in which women's love goes unnoticed by selfish men, Mary's submission does not seem to indicate that this is the novel's real message. The box-office failure of Frears' adaptation seems to indicate that the woman saviour is now more credible as a monster slayer like Ripley than as a virginal redeemer like Mary. As a redeemer, the woman saviour runs the risk of becoming a parody, equally derided by feminists because of her masochism and by men because of her sugary sentimentalism.

Another instance of the split in the woman saviour between the monster slayer and the redeemer is Suzy McKee Chamas' novel *The Vampire Tapestry* (1980). The vampire of the title, Dr. Weyland, is the stereotypical hero of romance - handsome, intelligent, mysterious - but he is also a hardhearted vampire like Stoker's Dracula. For Katjie de Groot, a hardy woman who is also an experienced hunter, the only adequate approach to such a monster is violence. The uneducated but sensible Katjie is never blinded by Weyland's suavity; she sees in his beauty only the beauty of the big cats she has hunted in Africa. So, when she has her chance, she does not hesitate to shoot him, thus avenging the people he has already attacked. However, Weyland survives her aggression and in another episode he meets a different woman saviour, the psychologist Dr. Floria Landauer. Instead of a predator, Floria sees a man in need of love and so she tries to regain Weyland's lost humanity, responding to his endless, emotionless narrative of atrocities with love. Instead of responding to the lethal threat of the vampire with a gun like Katjie, Floria dares Weyland to have sex with her before killing her. The novelty of sex bound with love does in fact upset Weyland's mental balance and almost tips it in favour of his shedding his habitual callousness but, ultimately, the experience leaves him so scarred - and no doubt scared - that he decides to enter hibernation long before he had planned, and to return to life once his memory of Floria is lost for ever. There can be no doubt as to which woman saviour is more credible, even more coherent with the real nature of the monster. Weyland's hurried retreat underground and Floria's smugness are unwittingly parodic; they imply that a woman saviour like Floria - a direct descendant of the heroines of sentimental fiction that Fiedler describes as monsters of virtue - completely misses the point that a more sensible woman like Katjie can see: she is dealing with a non-human predator and not with a sensitive man. Floria's bullying of Weyland into a "Beauty and the Beast" plot of salvation ultimately scares the monster away not because he is touched by her love or redeemed in any way, but because he is horrified by how she has manipulated him to suit her own erotic and romantic fantasies.

Like Floria, Anyarwu, the monstrous heroine of Olivia Butler's *Wild Seed* (1980), wants to

restore a sense of humanity to the dehumanized male monster she loves, Doro, but unlike Floria, she is aware of the limits of her power to transform the monstrous man. Despite being a powerful, immortal shape-shifter herself, Anyanwu cannot resist the allure of Doro, another immortal spirit, roaming the Earth in search of the 'wild seed', the extraordinary men and women out of whom he will breed a superior race. The whole purpose of Anyanwu and Doro's passion for procreation is to eventually come across another supernatural person like themselves who will finally dispel their gloomy view of their own loneliness. Butler's supernatural tale is a parable about gender relations in everyday life: man and woman cannot live alone but the same natures that make them both unique also separate them in worlds apart.

At first, Anyanwu behaves in a masochistic way, constantly allowing Doro to humiliate her by using her body and mind as he pleases. Despite his abuse of her, Anyanwu persists in believing that Doro will eventually cease doing evil and that her love for him will one day be requited in the terms she deserves. However, this wishful thinking never materialises and Anyanwu abandons her delusion when Doro tries to kill her. This woman saviour finally succeeds in saving herself by renouncing her own power to change him. Instead of imposing the sentimental solution on Doro, Anyanwu makes him see that his dying human part is beyond redemption, perhaps already dead. The fear that his inhuman side might finally take over is what makes Doro finally accept her love but at this point Anyanwu has already decided to go her own way, putting in his hands the responsibility for his own rehabilitation. Having exhausted her role as a woman saviour, Anyanwu decides not to waste her efforts on him. Once she has secured a basic agreement (his promise that he will not kill indiscriminately or destroy his breeders at will; nor wield unlimited power over her) and persuaded Doro that cooperation must replace his use of force, Anyanwu, moves away from him to start her own breed. Finally Beauty claims her own domain, having done as much as she could for the Beast, although the fact that many films and stories still repeat the same pattern means that neither women nor men can solve their fears on their own.

Tim Burton's film *Edward Scissorhands* (1990) also concludes that the reconciliation of the



world of men and women is impossible, though Burton portrays an atypical model of monstrous masculinity at odds with most male monsters because of its androgyny. The film mirrors the triangle of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*. Edward, the artificial man who cannot touch because his unfinished hands are bunches of shears plays the role of the spellbound Beast, the girl he loves, Kim, that of Belle and her boyfriend Jim that of the bully Gaston. Edward's hands represent the distance between his lonely world and the world of human contact for which they are useless. They are not, though, the real impediment for the transformation of his platonic relationship with Kim into a full relationship including sex. The real reason for his final rejection of her love is Edward's refusal to play a stereotyped role as Beauty's companion. Kim has manipulated Edward's essentially pliable nature for her own convenience, casting him in the role of her saviour when the jealous Jim threatens her. Edward's love for her makes him use violence to kill Jim in a way he would never have used on his own and so he resents Kim's having elicited from him a dark side he had so far kept under control. Once both are free of Jim's threat, Edward chooses to be himself, to remain in his ideal artistic world and to renounce Kim as his only means of preserving his integrity. The only thing available for her to do is to lie, pretending that he is dead, so as to secure for him the release from the mob that persecutes him and to live the rest of her life without him.

As I have indicated, Clarice Starling, the heroine of Thomas Harris's novel *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988) is the only woman saviour who sees herself as a saviour of women victimized by male monsters rather than as a saviour of men. In this story the role of the Final Girl traditional in slasher films has been split into two different female characters; one, the surviving victim - Catherine, the woman kidnapped by the killer - has been displaced to a secondary position, while, the other, the heroine Clarice, has assumed the role of deliverer traditionally played by men. Both the novel and the film mix elements derived from the Beauty and the Beast myth - especially in the relationship between Clarice and Hannibal Lecter - with motifs derived from traditional hero myths. Clarice's peculiar emotional bond with Lecter is based, above all, in his admiration for her

determination to overcome the disadvantages of her working-class origins - as Lecter says, she is only a generation away from white trash - through her professional career in the FBI. Lecter also appreciates the way in which she can master her anger and her passionate wish to altruistically save Catherine and other possible victims (the lambs of the title) from their fatal destiny. Nevertheless, the particular relationship that grows between Lecter and Clarice is not love, nor does it lead to Lecter's redemption. At the most, Clarice's courage has the effect of touching the last human fibre left in Lecter's heart, but emotion does not prevent him from indirectly using her to escape from prison in order to continue killing. On her side, Clarice sees in Lecter simply a means to advance in her investigation of the murders committed by the killer nicknamed Buffalo Bill. She is never tempted to try to redeem Lecter, nor does she hesitate to shoot Jame Gumb - the real identity of Buffalo Bill - dead before releasing Catherine.

The doubt that immediately arises regarding Clarice's story is whether she would have been chosen to help in another kind of investigation in which no gender questions were so explicitly involved. Clarice's gender cannot be separated from her professional role as a woman saviour: she herself claims her right to hunt Buffalo Bill down on the grounds that being a woman she can sympathize much better with the victims and, hence, discover clues leading to the killer. Initially, her FBI supervisor, Crawford, uses her to elicit information from Lecter because he thinks that her beauty will attract Lecter, yet, ultimately, Lecter helps her to find Buffalo Bill because he admires her personality and not her body. Even though the film focuses on Clarice's need to find a surrogate father in either Crawford or Lecter who can replace her dead father and who can help her guide her steps in her rite of passage from being a simple trainee to being an FBI agent, in the novel the Oedipal subtext is subordinated to Clarice's social origins. This and not her gender determine the difficult relationship that she establishes with the mother of the woman she is to rescue and with Catherine herself.

In *Silence of the Lambs* the traditional triangle formed by the king, the princess and the monster-slaying hero has been replaced by a triangle formed by a queen (Senator Ruth Martin),

her daughter Catherine and the heroine Clarice. She expects as a reward professional advancement within the FBI rather than the princess's hand as a hero would expect. Buffalo Bill's victims are all working-class girls with whom Clarice easily sympathizes, but the overprotected Catherine and her powerful mother are for Clarice women who do not deserve so much sympathy. The relationship between Clarice and Senator Martin is marked by a mutual distrust and by Crawford's suggestion that Clarice's career depends very much on the senator's reaction to the outcome of her daughter's kidnapping. Class, and the amount of power wielded by the senator, make her to Clarice's eyes a much more intimidating figure than the cannibal Lecter. Since class differences prevent Clarice from feeling empathy for Catherine, she tries to identify instead with her on the basis of their both being fatherless young women. Ironically, when Clarice finally locates Catherine she is greeted by a barrage of verbal abuse and by the threat to use her mother's power to frustrate all her hopes of a career if she is not immediately released - a welcome no male rescuer has ever received from a damsel in distress.

In fact, the lack of empathy between them is stressed not only by the fact that there are no images of either Senator Martin or Catherine thanking Clarice for her efforts, but also by the fact that when Clarice kills Gumb his chest wound is identical to the one he inflicted on his last victim, Kimberly, a working-class girl whom Clarice has come to regard as her sister. Obviously, it could be argued that Thomas Harris has manipulated the plot so as to prevent Clarice from finding an ally in women such as Senator Martin, while her job and her life are conditioned by her relationship with men such as Crawford and Lecter. In fact, this is more true of the film in which class is not discussed at all. In the novel Clarice draws the courage she needs to hunt Gumb from the memories of her dead father, but also from the memories of her dauntless mother and from the rage she feels in the face of Gumb's sadistic treatment of his victims. Indeed, much more important than the absence of links between the women in *Silence of the Lambs* is the presentation of all the male characters as more or less dangerous manipulators of women. Essentially, there is only a difference of degree between Gumb's brutal killings of women and

Crawford's endangering Clarice's life by putting her in touch with Lecter. When she kills Gumb, after having made the decision (in the novel, not in the film) to risk her career in order to save Catherine rather than obey the FBI red tape, Clarice wins a victory not only against the monstrous man but also against the seemingly flawless Crawford.

In Jonathan Demme's film, the reduction of the rather complex personal motivations that lead Clarice to hunt Gumb in Harris' novel, is a clear indication of the limits imposed on the figure of the new woman saviour. The forthcoming production of a second part of the film, based on Harris' sequel to his own novel, shows that there are reasons for a moderate optimism as far as the continuity of the new woman saviour in popular culture is concerned. However, in the film that was awarded the Oscar for Best Picture in 1992 - the year after *The Silence of the Lambs* was awarded the same distinction - the woman saviour was literally dead and buried. Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* narrates the story of William Munny, a retired gunman transformed into a loving father of two children and a peaceful pig farmer by his loving wife Rebecca, a middle-class woman who made of his redemption her life's crowning achievement. Years after her death, Munny is lured out of his retirement by the reward a group of prostitutes are offering to the man that can avenge the vicious attack one of them has suffered at the hands of the local bully. Munny is tempted by the money because he sees in it an escape from the drudgery of his life as a farmer not only for him but also for his children.

Assuming again his old identity as a killer, Munny fights his rivals for the reward and also the stern sheriff who failed to exact a fair retribution for the attack and who will not allow the peace of his domain to be interrupted for the defence of the prostitutes. Eventually, Munny kills the women's offenders and leaves town with the money, not without recriminating the prostitutes for their attitude. Even if it is implied that it is thanks to Rebecca's teachings that Munny assumes the chivalrous task of defending the abused prostitutes and that he is a hero in comparison to the local sheriff, Munny's attitude is not exactly noble. He may be the best among the men surrounding these women, but he is, nonetheless a hired killer. The film concludes with the shot of the sunset,

habitual at the end of westerns, though this time the scene shows Rebecca's abandoned house and grave and not the hero riding towards the setting sun. A text informs that Mrs. Feathers, Rebecca's mother, could not find Munny nor her grandchildren in her first visit to her daughter's grave because Munny had started a new life as a tradesman in San Francisco. Mrs. Feathers, the text concludes, could thus never demand an explanation as to why Rebecca had decided to devote her life to the notorious thief and murderer Munny. At the end of the film, the Beast has therefore completed his undoing of Beauty's redemption of him, leaving her behind in order to assume a new role as a father. By returning to his old life for a brief period Munny rejects the man that his wife created out of the monstrous killer. The man he himself creates is not born out of love but out of the violence and the hatred that harm the prostitute avenged by Munny. It is not clear why this reborn Munny is preferable to Rebecca's husband, nor in which way he has become a better father for his children, but the fact that he is said to be a prosperous tradesman after the episode of the reward indicates that his own redemption of himself was more effective than hers.

Finally, and to round off my review of the ambiguities of gendered monstrosity I should like to turn to David Cronenberg's *Dead Ringers* (1988). In this film the redeeming mission of Beauty, the actress Claire Niveau, is rendered ineffectual by the splitting of the Beast in the figures of Beverly and Elliot Mantle, two identical twin brothers who work as gynaecologists. Claire, one of their clients, is first simply an object of seduction, who passes from Elli to Bev's arms without being aware that they are two different men. Later, humiliated by the deception she has discovered, Claire demands that Bev and Elli put an end to their morbid union. The weaker Bev, whom Claire loves, cannot handle the strain of the separation from his brother and, despite his deep love for Claire, soon starts seeing her as a terrifying figure endowed with the power to sever him from Elli. This is emphasised by a particularly horrifying scene in which Bev dreams that he and Elli are in fact freakish Siamese twins and that Claire is literally biting off the tissue uniting him to Elli by the belly. Floundering in a haze of drugs that result in an unshakeable dependence on Bev, Elli ends by killing his brother and committing suicide, wrongly believing that since Claire is gone from his life

he has to perform the role that she assumed in his nightmares.

Despite the fact that *Dead Ringers* deals with men who are obviously seriously disturbed - hence, not to be taken as models of stable masculinity and less of stable patriarchy - the film has been criticized because of its alleged misogyny. Helen Robbins (1993: 135) has argued that the protagonists of *Dead Ringers* and *The Fly*, another of Cronenberg's films, "suffer from womb envy, a feeling of impotence clearly stemming from their jealousy of female reproductive power" and so exalt "male activities that mimic natural female functions". According to her, *Dead Ringers* is specially misogynistic because Bev and Elli's profession is used as an excuse to allow them to manipulate women's bodies, which they do not respect, and which they treat as the objects in function of their research or, simply, their curiosity. However, Bev and Elli's real complaint is not womb envy but a sick narcissism that literally prevents them from seeing women even when their bodies are displayed before them. The misogyny accompanying that excessive narcissism is portrayed as an evident sign of their deficiencies as men and not as a sign of a balanced masculinity they have never enjoyed.

Likewise, the womb-like shape of Seth's teletransportation 'telepod' in *The Fly* may be an expression of womb envy as Robbins suggests, but Seth's attempt at usurping woman's role in creation by remaking his own body is so disastrous that we have to conclude that his womb envy has been decisively punished. As in Bev and Elli's case, Seth's alleged misogyny backfires on him, and evidences that he and not the woman he mistreats - his girlfriend Ronnie - is the real monster. The nightmarish scene in which Ronnie sees herself giving birth to a baby-sized insect larva shows the horrific effects of Seth's abuse of the powers that technology has granted him, rather than suggest that woman's body generates monsters. In the same way, the nightmare in which Bev sees Claire eating away the tissue that links him to his brother from navel to navel may be partly due to castration anxiety as Robbins notes, but it is more adequate to read it as a proof of how unnatural Bev and Elli's union is. Even though Claire's action is repulsive, nobody can fail to

see that it is as necessary as severing the umbilical chord from the newly born baby's body. What is really disgusting is Bev's sick attachment to Elli and the way in which they manipulate Claire's body and the bodies of their clients.

Seeing Cronenberg as a man primarily occupied with a misogynist view of women misses the point. His true obsession is the monstrosity of men and their twisted views about what it is to be a man or a woman. This obsession is most apparent in *M. Butterfly* (1993), a film based on real life events that narrates a bizarre love story between a French diplomat living in Beijing and a Chinese opera singer - a woman who turns out to be actually a man pretending to be a woman so as to please his lover. In a scene of *M. Butterfly* the French diplomat - played by Jeremy Irons, who had also played Bev and Elli - must face the reality of the male body his lover is displaying before him. As he undresses, the character played by John Lone tells his lover that only a man can know what a perfect woman is, meaning that we all, men and women, see only what we want to see. Furthermore, that we all construct images of the opposite sex, some ideal, others monstrous, depending on our fears and fantasies. If women claim, as Molly Haskell does (op. cit.: 402), that "we want nothing else, on or off the screen, than the wide variety and dazzling diversity of male options", we will have to cope with the reality that men's images of themselves are not as unproblematic as it might seem and that their images of women - from the abject monster to the heroic woman saviour - are reflections of those problematic images of themselves. What is more, the sheer variety of the monstrous-masculine indicates men's preoccupation for the stability of their representations in fiction rather than an untroubled enjoyment of a privileged position.

### Conclusions

A certain degree of misogyny is evident in the representation of women as monsters, though the lack of a better analysis of women's androphobic representation of men in fiction makes it difficult to draw clear conclusions about how relevant misogyny actually is in the representation of gendered monstrosity. In any case, men's fantasies of women as monsters are

self-addressed, in the sense that they discuss fears of woman that have more to do with men's than with women's nature. Therefore, they have to be evaluated from a perspective which takes into account not only man's discourse on women but also women's discourse on men and the changes that feminism has brought about in the definition of gender roles and, especially, of masculinity. At any rate, the most effective way of resisting misogyny is not censorious feminist criticism but the elaboration of alternative fictional discourse by women that avoids androphobia so as not to repeat the mistakes of patriarchy.

Considering the evidence provided by the texts I have analysed, it should be concluded that the monstrous-feminine is actually a prolongation of the monstrous-masculine rather than an independent construction. Most of the female monsters I have analysed are women of monstrous behaviour and correspond to a widespread fantasy, that of the blend of feminine attractiveness and male aggressiveness, as likely to be embodied by the monster as by the strong heroine. There are no doubts that they are characters based on men's ambivalent attitude towards women rather than on plain misogyny, otherwise the progressive rise of the strong heroine could not be justified. However, what is more doubtful is how the feminine monsters have to be interpreted from a feminist point of view. If they are rejected because their behaviour is not feminine but masculine, it should be concluded that they have nothing to do with women and that men are portraying themselves through them: the monstrous-feminine would be simply the monstrous, feminine side of man. The female (non-human) or the feminine (human) monsters would be misogynistic constructions because they would arise from patriarchal man's manipulation and appropriation of woman's body, subsequently misrepresented with characteristics, such as aggressiveness, women simply do not have. This biased position presupposes that men have no grounds to justify their representation of monstrous women since in real life there are no monstrous women. Yet, since some feminist writers - from Barbara Creed to Jeanette Winterson - have been tempted to vindicate the figure of the feminine monster - because she is an exceptional representation of female power - there is an obvious contradiction as to how to read the feminine monster. We are



forced to ask ourselves whether she is an aberrant male or a wish-fulfilment fantasy of female power.

As I have noted, the mixture of male and female traits is as habitual in the feminine monster as in the strong heroine. As I see it, the persistence in using Freudian psychoanalysis to interpret gendered monstrosity had hampered the consideration of the role played by other erotic fantasies that are shaped by the socio-cultural context. Thus, the erotic romances for women of the 1980s prove that women also fantasise about an ideal mixture of male and female traits embodied in the new hero, the counterpart of the attractive, yet monstrous villain, finally rejected by the heroine. In addition, the many instances in which there is no difference whatsoever between the monster and the hero/ine and also the many texts in which sexual relationships are established between a 'normal' person and a monster, lead to the conclusion that the current construction of monstrosity is conditioned by an omnipresent fantasy: that of being chosen by an extraordinary sexual partner - monstrous or not. This is especially clear in the many contemporary versions of "Beauty and the Beast". For both men and women mastering the threat posed by the monster through love poses an attractive challenge that films and novels allow them to live through in safety. This type of fantasy is designed to bolster the ego of the reader or the spectator who identifies with the human chosen by the extraordinary partner - though they possibly also invite readers and viewers to identify with the monster, who is more powerful and who can easily upset the power arrangements within the hybrid, heterosexual couple.

The last point I have considered is why in those new versions of "Beauty and the Beast" the unhappy end is more recurrent than the happy end. My conclusion is that they are indications that the dialogue between men and women has been disrupted by a series of factors, among which feminism is the most important. Of course, it could be argued that what has been disrupted is the monologue that patriarchal man has addressed to woman in order to dominate her. Yet, this is insufficient to explain why in these new versions the monstrous man and not the woman is punished, neither why in the texts in which the roles are reversed - the woman is the monster, the

man the saviour - she is accepted as she is. These fantasies no doubt imply that feminism has increased the fears - if not the misogyny - felt by men towards women. But what is less clear is what the destruction of so many male monsters at the hands of women or at their own hands implies. It is just too simplistic to suppose that men are symbolically punishing themselves for the serious grievances inflicted on women, especially since these texts are not addressed to women. This is a point signified by the fact that the new woman saviour usually survives her encounter with the monster unharmed, as if he could not significantly alter her life. It is possibly more accurate to see male monstrosity as a sign of men's difficulties in creating a model of masculinity capable of mixing male and female traits - as their fantasies of women do - that can still be distinguished from the new model of more androgynous femininity.

'More Human than Human'...