

TESI DOCTORAL

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

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## CHAPTER 8

### *Little Monsters?: Children and Monsters*

#### *Introduction*

The monstrous child and the monstrous woman are two sides of the same coin. These are images that signify the power of others, usually men, to create models of monstrosity representing their own ambivalence towards the object of the representation. The misogynistic representations of women in fiction are being contested by feminism. Children, however, cannot oppose the conspicuous paedophobia of many horror films and novels since, obviously, they cannot articulate a critical discourse to argue their own defence. The awareness of this fact on the part of those who produce fiction for adults about monstrous children has been unsuccessfully pushed to the background of the texts. Clearly, a sense of guilt accompanied by a secret desire to be exculpated from the sin of paedophobia underlies most films and novels for adults of the 1980s and 1990s in which monstrous children appear. There is a generalized awareness among adults that presenting children as monsters contradicts the myth of childhood innocence, but there is also an imperious need to express the adults' secret fears of children through monstrous, fantastic versions of childhood. This situation results in an evident tension within these films and novels and in this sense of guilt, as adults are trapped between their need to express subconscious anxieties and their fear of producing unfair representations of children which may reveal that the adult is the real monster. Naturally, this sense of guilt is enhanced precisely by the adult's awareness that the child cannot even understand the images that misrepresent it and much less reject them.

Expressing these fears is, therefore, not an easy task. Now, when child abuse is a reality

much bandied about by the media, the figure of the fictional monstrous child inevitably suggests that novelists and film directors or writers dealing with it are in a sense in the same position as the child abuser, forcing the innocent to assume an image tinged with corruption. In the 1980s and 1990s the question of child abuse has come to the foreground and horror fiction for adults has reflected not only the anxieties of parents worried about their limitations but also adult men's worries about their role as fathers. The alarming evidence of child abuse and the feminist vindication of the role of the mother have no doubt undermined the traditional model of patriarchal fatherhood and masculinity. Consequently, many recent films and novels deal with either the justification of the monstrous father or with his replacement by an extraordinary paternal figure, a monster of special qualities, who can teach the child another model of masculinity for the future capable of transcending the old-fashioned model now being divested of its authority.

In the first section of this chapter I will review the contradictions between the myth of innocent childhood and the demonisation of the child in many recent films and novels. These contradictions no doubt signify the anxieties of a post-Freudian generation whose awareness of the reality of childhood has made them feel a distinct ambivalence towards parenthood. In the second section, it is my aim to survey, first, the uses of the monster in fiction for children and the ambiguities surrounding the issue of whether its figure is desirable at all in this context. These have led to a rather uneven imposition of restrictions on children's fiction which only denote a worrying lack of clear criteria about what children can tolerate in fiction. Second, this section also deals with films and novels for adults that narrate encounters between children and monsters. I examine, among other aspects, the role of the child as saviour, the subtle differences between the natural and the unnatural child and the role of the monster as a wish-fulfilment figure, that of the perfect father.

## 8.1. The Myth of Innocence: Monstrous Children

### 8.1.1 The Meaning of the Monstrous Child

Although children have been frequently pitted against monsters in folk tales or fairy tales allegedly created for the young, the many narratives for adults in which children are either victimized by a horrific monster or are horrific monsters themselves are no doubt a sign of our times. This new situation has arisen at a time of growing concern for the need to prevent children from being exposed to an excessive degree of violence in fiction, especially in film and on TV. Even more worrying than the child's exposure to fictional violence is the evidence unearthed by many social workers and child psychologists in the USA and the UK proving that many children are routinely abused - sexually, physically or psychologically - by their own parents and other adults. However, it is now, when children appear to be the more than ever the innocent victims of corrupted adults, that monstrous children are most abundant in fiction. In one of the essays of the collection *Managing Monsters*, Marina Warner (op. cit.: 43) observes that "the Child has never been seen as such a menacing enemy as today. Never before have children been so saturated with all the power of projected monstrousness to excite repulsion - and even terror." How the little monsters compare to the victimized children of fiction is the main issue underlying the analysis of the texts I have included in this chapter.

The evil child embodies all the characteristics deemed by adults to be unnatural in a child, that is to say, all the qualities belonging in fact to the adult. As happens in the case of the monstrous woman, who is endowed with masculine traits that mark her as unfeminine, hence unnatural and monstrous, the monstrous child is defined by attributes artificially imposed on it by those who manipulate its image. The destruction of the monstrous woman of fiction, which as I noted in Chapter 7 is not as frequent now as it used to be a few decades ago, was presumably enacted on the screen or the printed page to frighten women out of their desire to imitate the powerful image of femininity personified by the monstrous woman. The destruction of the evil child staged in horror films and novels cannot be explained on similar grounds, for children are not part



of the audience or readership of those texts. It is evident that these are texts adults address to themselves in the same way that, as I have argued in chapter 7, the texts about female monstrosity are addressed by men to men and not primarily to women. The destruction of the evil child is excused in those texts on the grounds that an evil child is not a 'real' child in the same way that the destruction of male and female human monsters is justified with the idea that these are not 'real' human beings but monsters. However, in some circumstances it is hard to turn a blind eye to the fact that in many contemporary horror stories the death of a child, no matter how evil the child might be, is condoned and even relished. Even when death does not take place, the suggestion that the child is associated with the devil by possession or actual incarnation, as happens in, respectively, *The Exorcist* (1973) and *The Omen* (1976), speaks volumes not so much about the nature of the child but about the adults' fear of the child. Since I have been defending the absolute freedom of expression against censorship and man's right to produce fantasies about women, I would like to stress an important point as far as the representation of the child is concerned, so as not to fall into a contradiction. The difference between sexism, racism and other forms of prejudice leading to discrimination against minorities is that those minorities consist of adults who may - must - work to eradicate prejudice. In my view, this task must be carried out from a humanist standpoint which defends the person and not so much the person as member of a minority confronting a hostile majority. Children, as I have noted, cannot articulate an anti-paedophobic discourse; consequently, their defencelessness is what makes the representation of children as monsters a much more problematic issue than the misrepresentation of adults empowered to speak up in their own defence by the conquest of civil liberties in the 1960s.

As S.S. Praver (op. cit.: 71) writes in *Caligari's Children*, "the gusto with which films like *The Omen* make the audience wish for the child's destruction has something deeply suspect about it - might there be a link, perhaps, between the way in which our more cruel instincts are here being directed against a child, and the disturbing use made of child 'actors' in pornographic films?" In

fact, the pornographic or pseudo-pornographic exploitation in contemporary horror fiction of the evil child is but a reversal of the erotic exploitation of the innocent child so in vogue at the end of the nineteenth century. As Bram Dijkstra argues, painters of the period gratified the obscure desires of Victorian men by representing children in idealized versions of innocence with an obvious erotic content. These paintings were meant initially to accompany the mid nineteenth-century image of woman as an innocent, pliable child but as women's demand for more freedom led them to resist their representation as docile children, painters turned increasingly to the child in order to fulfil the fantasy of available, erotic innocence. "It is a sad irony", Dijkstra (op. cit.: 195) writes, "that ... overlooking the erotic content of these paintings, [many women] chose to see instead in these children portrayed as women an idealized version of the innocence many of them still revered as an ideal." Women have no doubt played an important role in perpetuating the image of the innocent child created by nineteenth-century artists. It could be thus argued that the evil child has grown in response to women's sentimental view of the child - certainly contradicted by Freud, Klein and other psychologists - in the same way that, as I argued in Chapter 7, the woman victimized in horror films is very often the same sentimental heroine revered by women. Despite the attention attracted by the sexual abuse of children at home or in pornography, a certain blindness towards the sexual exploitation of the child still persists today. Thus, although many have noticed the exploitation of the child in horror fiction, few have raised their voices against the obvious exploitation of the child in the advertising of products for children. Parents who employ their attractive, innocent offspring for money in advertising or show business cater to the secret erotic fantasies of adults in the same measure as those who write novels or make films about the monstrous child.

As happens in the case of women, there are two sides to the question of whether the figure of the evil child signifies love or hatred for the 'normal' child, whatever that may be. Stephen King, an author who very often touches on the subject of children and monstrosity, deals with this dilemma in his novel *Pet Sematary* (1988), reaching the conclusion that the patriarchal re-creator

of children and women as monsters transforms them out of love rather than out of hatred. In King's view, Louis's shortcomings as a fallible human being and not his incontrovertible patriarchal power are to blame for the pain inflicted on innocent women and children and, indeed, on his own innocent self. *Pet Sematary* narrates the horrific consequences of the death of two-year-old Gage, who is knocked down by one of the gigantic lorries that daily pass before his house. His father, Louis, blames himself for the moment of negligence that the child paid for with his life. Having been warned about the lorries, he had taken into his hands the responsibility of protecting Gage and his five-year-old sister Elli and, so, Gage's death is for Louis, more than an accident, a sign of his failure as a father. Louis's grief for the death of the lovely little boy inevitably leads to an even greater disaster: he gives Gage life for a second time by burying his mangled body in an ancient Indian burial ground where, as local folklore claims, dead bodies are reborn.

The breaking of the taboo that also dooms Victor Frankenstein - no man can give birth as women do, for he can only create monsters made of broken dead bodies and not of living matter - results in the monstrous child, a new Gage, whose rage and perfectly articulated though foul speech reveals that he is no longer a two-year-old babe but a demon. As happens in *Frankenstein*, the monstrous child seeks revenge for his new condition by killing what his father loves most - in this case, his own mother Rachel - rather than by attacking him directly. The crime committed by the monstrous child makes the father condemn him to a second, definitive death. Yet, his horrific experience with Gage does not stop Louis from transgressing the taboo once more in order to resuscitate Rachel's dead body. The novel ends, thus, with the creation of a new, monstrous Rachel, who recalls the images of the monstrous Elizabeth of *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* and *Frankenstein Unbound*.

Implicit in *Pet Sematary* is the idea that the patriarchal father pays with the suffering of bereavement for the sin of believing in his unbounded power over the lives of those he loves and controls. Nevertheless, Louis's insane behaviour springs from an underlying tension in his relationship with his wife and children. Louis cannot be said to behave as a traditional patriarch -

he is portrayed as a caring father and husband - but King's constant references to Louis's patience with the children's whims and to Louis's self-control in the face of the childish Rachel's depressive bouts suggest that things could be easier for this sensible, sensitive man if only the children and Rachel were less difficult to handle. King seems to suggest that Louis's deeply felt grief throws him off balance because he is already too stressed by the daily difficulties of family life. The reader feels compelled to sympathize with Louis in his bereavement and, simultaneously, to condemn him for the horrific manipulation of Gage's and Rachel's bodies. King seems divided between exonerating Louis from his responsibility in the deaths of his son and wife and proving how tainted and destructive his mind is. Who the reader is meant to fear most is never apparent precisely because Louis's monstrosity is less sensational, lacking the physical markers that underline Gage's and Rachel's transformation. Throughout the novel Louis plays the role of the innocent, yet the evil Gage and the zombie Rachel seem to fulfil a secret wish that Louis does not want to face, namely, his wanting the death of the innocent members of his family so as to remake them to his perverse liking. King seems torn between the need to expose Louis's shameful, guilty remaking of innocent children and women as monsters and the need to absolve him, and all men through him, presenting Louis as a victim of extreme circumstances. Whatever King's original intentions may have been, this ambiguous exposure of man's role in the transformation of women and children into monsters expresses important anxieties, present in the building of a self-conscious image of man valid for the 1980s and 1990s. Men like Louis wish to leave patriarchy behind but fail ultimately to repress the patriarch in them as Dr. Jekyll failed to repress Mr. Hyde.

Another explanation for Louis's collapse can be found in the self-consciousness with which he faces his role as a parent. Not only Freud but also child psychologists such as Melanie Klein or Alice Miller have emphasised the role played by the parents not only in securing the immediate welfare of the child but also in securing the prospective happiness of the adult. Neither Louis nor Rachel were happy children; they have found in parenthood a way of redressing the deficiencies of their respective childhoods, yet, their efforts not to repeat the same mistakes their

parents made are ultimately self-defeating. Their inability to discuss death with the children and with each other is what brings tragedy to their lives. Rachel, herself traumatized by the way in which her parents forced her to witness the horrible death of her ill sister, cannot transmit to her children a proper understanding of death. Louis's promise never to lie to his children is soon broken when he finds himself unable to tell his daughter Elli that her beloved cat is dead. His fear of spoiling Elli's innocence pushes him to use the magic of the burial ground for the first time. Elli instinctively notices that the reborn cat is different but despite her misgivings Louis returns to the forbidden ground with Gage's body. When Gage dies, neither Rachel nor Louis can cope with the situation and so their continuous effort to be the perfect parents ends in complete disaster.

It can thus be said that Louis is crushed by the weight of the responsibility of maintaining the innocence of his children intact. His ordeal and that to which he submits his family suggest that the figure of the monstrous child signifies not so much the fear of the child but rather the fear of the adult's imperfections as a parent. The monstrous child is the nightmare that haunts parents afraid of making mistakes in the upbringing of their children. It refutes the capacity of the parent to control all the factors that contribute to protecting the happiness and innocence of the child. But it is important to understand that the evil or monstrous child exists in our fantasies because it is the dark side of the myth of the innocent child, created by adults bent on segregating a segment of human life from the ugliness of daily life. The artificial hell inhabited by the mythical monstrous child is nothing but the counterpart of the no less artificial garden of Eden inhabited by the mythical innocent child. Presumably, the real child is to be found somewhere between both domains.

### *8.1.2 The Myth of the Innocent Child*

The myth of the innocent child is consolidated in the nineteenth century together with the myth of woman as household angel. Yi-fu Tuan (op. cit: 215) remarks that because infant mortality was extremely high, "before the eighteenth century, European parents often showed an apparent lack of devotion to their infants and young children... Why spend time and love on a child

that might soon depart?" Angus McLaren (1992: 169) notes that the more limited size of upper and middle-class families together with the Puritan glorification of domesticity preached by the rising middle class meant first, that the fewer children were better cared for and second, "that the enriched middle classes of the prosperous eighteenth century were, not more loving parents, but better able to afford such indulgences." By the end of the eighteenth century the child had been firmly associated with purity and innocence; William Blake, for instance, reflects this view in his *Songs of Innocence* (1789). Later, the Romantic movement, especially Wordsworth, would exalt the figure of the child and would even acknowledge the envy felt by the adult poet for the child's ability to gaze at the world with unprejudiced eyes. This idealisation of the child was taking place nonetheless in a period when capitalism was exploiting very young children in mines and factories throughout civilized Europe.

Not all children were represented in the same way in Victorian literature. Charlotte Brontë's young Jane Eyre or George Eliot's young Maggie Tulliver are spirited little girls very different not only from Charles Dickens' Oliver Twist or Little Nell but also from Emily Brontë's young Catherine Earnshaw and her companion Heathcliff. Yet the sentimental representation of the child seems to have prevailed over the more realistic, perhaps less gratifying portraits of childhood offered by *Jane Eyre* (1848), *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) or *Wuthering Heights* (1848). By the 1850s the twin figures of the innocent child and woman as a household nun (Dijkstra, op. cit.: 3 - 24) had been firmly integrated into the panorama of Victorian culture. Child and woman were presented as inferior beings, endearing because of their weakness and incapable of autonomous thought; they were totally dependent on the patriarchal man that protected them, were always naturally inclined to do good and made the home a haven of peace to which man could retire after a hard day's work in the corrupt, manly world of business. One does not have to go far to find instances of the idealised woman-child. Dickens' Dora in *David Copperfield* is one. Yet by the 1860s when Wilkie Collins published *The Woman in White*, it appears that the woman-child was becoming an idol with clay feet. The ordeal to which Collins submits his heroine Laura - who loses all her property to

a scheming husband and also her identity after she is confined in an asylum - seems to connote Victorian man's ambivalence towards the angelic woman he had himself created.

The image of children established by Victorian sentimentalism in the UK and the USA - Harriet Beecher Stowe's Little Eva of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) glorified the dying, innocent child in the USA - set the pattern for the image of the innocent child in the twentieth century. This has not been substantially altered despite Freud's revelations about the child's private life. "Children," Marina Warner (1994a: 44) writes, "are perceived as innocent because they are outside society, pre-historical, pre-social, instinctual, creatures of unreason, primitive, kin to unspoiled nature." Nineteenth-century imperialism was in fact sustained by the ideological use of the figure of the child. Curiously enough, the first recorded reference to *Frankenstein* in the domain of public discourse linked together the monster, the child and the slave. In the course of a debate on West Indian slave emancipation, Foreign Secretary George Canning told the House of Commons in 1824 that "we must deal with the Negro as with a person possessing sense, but only the sense of an infant" (quoted in Bahar, 1995: 12). According to Canning, freeing the black slave before he reaches the full maturity of the adult is the equivalent of imitating Victor Frankenstein's mistakes. Canning's racist remark is accompanied, thus, with a paedophobic remark: he is apparently untroubled by the inference that the child and the monster are basically the same.

Jacqueline Rose has explained how the representation of childhood - and the creation of fiction for children - have followed the model set up by colonialism. According to her:

Childhood is seen as the place where an older form of culture is preserved (nature or oral tradition), but the effect of this in turn is that this same form of culture is *infantilised*. At this level, children's fiction has a set of long-established links with the colonialism which identified the new world with the infantile state of man. Along the lines of what is almost a semantic slippage, the child is assumed to have some special relationship to a world which - in our eyes at least - was only born when we found it. (1984: 50)

Before the advent of Freudianism, it can be said that children, women and the inhabitants of the colonised nations were seen as different aspects of the burden supported by the white man's

shoulders. The myth of the innocent, pliant child, woman or colonial subject looking up to the Victorian man's authority obviously expressed a wish-fulfilment fantasy, for in real life there was not such an easy relationship between the white man and his dependents. Children's fiction was elaborated consequently not by taking into account who children really were but rather adults' fantasies of what they should be like. In these fantasies the children were innocent and so was the world around them, the world of childhood lost to the nostalgic writers who created it and to the parents who bought it. The panorama of children's fiction in the nineteenth and the twentieth century is obviously too vast to fit within the limits of this dissertation, but it seems safe to argue that despite early exceptions to the rule such as *Alice in Wonderland*, conventional children's fiction is a version of the pastoral, an idyllic view of childhood very far from the reality of children's lives or their own fantasies.

In any case, the myth of the innocent child, the household angel and the noble savage began a simultaneous - painfully slow - process of dissolution at the end of the nineteenth century, started by texts of very ambiguous interpretation. They all pointed, nonetheless, at the replacement of the innocent by a much more threatening figure. Fear of the New Woman inspired not only the Decadent artists' paintings but also narratives such as *Dracula* (1897), in which woman is split in two: the not so innocent Lucy whom Dracula turns into a vampire and the innocent Mina whose final transformation is prevented by the patriarchal men who surround her. This split of man between the monster (*Dracula*) and the saviour portrayed in *Dracula* is also found in Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" (1902), a narrative that replaced the myth of the childish savage with the figure of the threatening, inscrutable native whose world of barbarism swallows the soul of the European civilised man. In Henry James's "The Turn of the Screw" (1898), the myth of childhood innocence is questioned - still tentatively - with the Governess' account of the bizarre behaviour of Flora and Miles, the two siblings under her care.

While adults writing fiction for children fantasised about their return to Eden through the child, the figure of the child was taking quite different connotations in fiction written for adults.



Arguably, Henry James' Flora and Miles stand for all those children literally destroyed not only by the adults' corruption but also by the adults' distorted view of them. However, Flora and Miles are also personifications of this budding fear that children might not be angels but sexually active persons (obviously not in the Freudian sense) so deeply corrupted that education can have no effect whatsoever on them. James' tale of horror deals in part with the impossibility of educating children and of repressing their sexual nature but also with the inappropriateness of those in whose hands their education lies. Miles's rigid school, his irresponsible guardian and his inexperienced governess fail to protect the child from another kind of ghostly teacher that can only tutor him in corruption. Up to a point, the governess' dilemma is also that of the patriarch: either the children are evil and she has been duped by their impersonation of innocence or she is herself projecting her obscure fears and desires onto them. Either they are monsters or she is. The undecidability on which the plot is built, that moment of hesitation that according to Todorov (op. cit.: 25) constitutes the essence of the fantastic, announces the way in which adults and children will collide in many post-Freudian narratives. The mystery of the child's true nature is never really unveiled by the governess and we may alternatively believe that she is rightly terrified by her suspicion that Miles and Flora have been abused or that she is herself abusing the children with the force of her own delusions and paranoia<sup>1</sup>.

James' is but the first turn of the screw in the process of unearthing the evil, corrupted child. While the taboo transgressed in James's story is the linking of the child with sex, a subject more often discussed now in relation to girls, William Golding's *The Lord of the Flies* (1954) portrays another kind of corruption, that of the male child as a naturally violent prototype of the violent adult man. In Golding's novel the innocent child is left to cope on his own with the horror of the child barbarian - much as the heroine of horror fiction is abandoned to her fate in the hands of the monster - and so the myth of the good savage and the innocent child is reversed in one stroke. Civilization appears to be built on the repressed natural impulses of the child barbarian rather than

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<sup>1</sup>I am aware that this duplicity was detected by Edmund Wilson's Freudian criticism of James' tale and that if he intended it to be there it must have been at a subconscious level.

on the lost Eden of child's fiction; the adults that finally take the survivors of the horror away seem to embody the lie that civilization is telling itself about the true personality of the child. Despite its derogatory portrait of children, *Lord of the Flies* is a very popular text among educators and young readers. This popularity indicates that the premises of Golding's text are, like those of other dystopias, simultaneously accepted and rejected by people who are still optimistic about the civilising effect of education on children. They read the novel from the - perhaps unwarranted - security that such dystopian regression to barbarism is not possible. Golding's novel speaks of an extraordinary accident by which children are isolated from adults and which has no real counterpart in everyday life. His supposition seems to be that successful adult tutelage prevents children (and the adults they later become) from reverting to barbarism in the midst of civilized society, an idea sadly contradicted by the increase of child violence in school, the very site of education and civilization. After *Lord of the Flies* the representation of the child, especially of boys, as perpetrators of violence has been frequent, as I will show later, though the same doubts remain as to whether either the myth of innocence or the newer myth of the child barbarian is a truthful representation of children.

### 8.1.3. *The Little Monsters*

#### 8.1.3.1. *Monstrous Girls*

The monstrous children of recent fiction can be easily divided into two main categories according to their gender. The monstrous girl is a younger version of the misogynistic portrait of woman as a monster of abnormal sexuality while monstrous boys usually appear as budding monsters of patriarchal power engrossed in their passion for violence. The monstrous girl usually surfaces in the process of the little girl's transformation into a woman. This natural process is frequently portrayed as an unnatural, threatening metamorphosis capable of releasing unknown, dangerous forces that the young woman cannot always control. The role of the parents in these cases is to try to repress the girl, so that her newly-acquired powers may be thwarted before she

jeopardises the lives of those around her. In other cases parents are simply the witnesses of the dramatic, enigmatic eruption of the girl's new personality.

Mothers and father do not play exactly the same role in these cases. The relationships between mothers and daughters often involve hatred, while those between fathers and daughters tend to refer, if only indirectly, to an Oedipal, incestuous situation paradoxically much less conflictive. In both cases, though, parents fear the daughter's budding sexuality and her demands for autonomy. Peter Blatty's *The Exorcist* (1971), Stephen King's *Carrie* (1974) and the very popular screen adaptations that these novels inspired set the pattern for the portrait of the monstrous, demonised girl halfway between the innocent child-woman and the monstrous woman. Though they have important differences, both texts imply that the figure of the innocent girl can only be transformed into that of the monster by the intervention of an agent of evil, either the Devil himself or a repressive parent. She is thus simultaneously victimized by this evil and empowered by it to display her rage.

The prepubescent body of Regan, the girl possessed by the Devil in *The Exorcist*, expresses what the 'normal' innocent child cannot express: her sexuality, her violent drives and her profound hatred for her mother (Nicholson, 1993). The exorcism of the demon that allegedly possesses her displaces towards a supernatural context the ritual of psychoanalysis, but aims likewise at protecting the figure of the parent by replacing the child's troubled subconscious (presumably disturbed because of childhood experiences that are not disclosed in the narrative) with the Devil's presence. Since Regan is presented as an innocent child who is suffering from a bodily and mental invasion for which she is not held responsible (not even in a subconscious way), a psychoanalyst is no use in her case. Instead, Regan receives the help of a priest, a spiritual father who assumes the role of the absent biological father and who channels back to the Devil the evil power unleashed by her transition towards womanhood. The priest's exorcism of Regan's body and mind cures her of budding teenage urges for sexual and emotional emancipation, taking her back to her mother's protective arms and prolonging thus the ideal state of her innocence. Natural

teenage rebellion appears thus as an evil invasion of Regan's body so that not only Regan's innocence but also her divorced mother's are maintained intact after the harrowing experience of the possession.

Regan falls within the category of the evil innocent, which Sabine Büssing describes as a typical literary product of the twentieth century. "One may say", Büssing writes (1987: xvii) "that in these cases the child is both a victim and an aggressor and evokes controversial emotions accordingly." This is the case especially when the victimized child engages in behaviour too violent to be pardoned, as happens in Stephen King's *Carrie*. Unlike Regan, Carrie is not possessed by the Devil, though, despite her innocence, her final destination is Hell and damnation. She can be described as an instance of the child who ends up believing that she is truly the monster her parents, in this case her mother, see. A child born out of wedlock, Carrie is regarded by her fanatical, religious mother as the one blot in her immaculate, moral life; she has identified the girl with the shameful act - in her view - that produced her, and so has forced Carrie to bear the burden of her own shame, giving her daughter a bigoted, repressive education that makes the girl the target of the high school's bullies. When Carrie's overdue menstruation finally marks the beginning of her long-delayed emotional adulthood, she also develops telekinetic powers. This evil innocent becomes then a goddess of destruction, killing the school bullies and also her fanatical but nonetheless beloved mother, seemingly confirming the mother's dread of her child's true monstrous nature. Unlike Regan, who can be redeemed, Carrie puts herself beyond salvation, even though there are no doubts about her being the innocent victim of an abusive mother. Carrie's killing of her mother may have acted as a wish-fulfilment fantasy for those abused teenagers that read the novel or saw the film, but her final damnation shows that in the 1970s this fantasy was still punishable even when the child aggressor was a victim.

More than twenty years after *Carrie*, there are evident signs of change in the representation of the evil girl. Peter Jackson's film *Heavenly Creatures* (1994) and its slogan "Not all angels are innocent" is an ironic comment on the entanglement of the myth of innocent childhood

with the myth of female angelhood<sup>1</sup> and also a challenging analysis of the monstrous girl. Jackson's film deals with the real life case of Pauline and Juliette, two teenage schoolgirls who shocked New Zealand in the 1950s when together they killed Pauline's mother, Honora. By keeping the sensationalism of the subject tightly under control, the film offers a sympathetic though by no means condoning portrait of the two girls and the crime they committed. As the film shows them, Pauline and Juliette are not victims of abuse, unless their parents' lack of empathy with them can be called abuse. The girls become aggressors because they regard themselves as the victims of adults who can not and will not understand their very intense friendship, which certainly includes sex but is not tainted with corruption as their parents think. Juliette's middle-class English parents and Pauline's working-class New Zealand parents project their own anxieties about sex, social class differences and education onto the girls and force them to separate, destroying thus a relationship much more fulfilling than their own with their respective daughters. The grief caused by the prospect of their separation leads the girls to kill Pauline's mother, who seemed to them the parent most opposed to their friendship, without further thought about the consequences of their evil act. Honora's death can be said thus to confirm the parents' suspicion that a streak of morbidity runs in the relationship between the girls, yet Pauline and Juliette become monsters because nobody else has really noticed that they exist at all as autonomous persons. The film vividly stresses the responsibility of the two sets of parents and their failure to see the girls as persons in their own right rather than as a fixture of their parents' home lives.

A more problematic portrait of the monstrous girl can be found in James Herbert's novel *The Shrine* (1983), which narrates the events surrounding the possession of an innocent prepubescent child, Alice, by the evil spirit of Elnor, a nun burned at the stake in the sixteenth century. Eleven-year-old Alice was conceived out of wedlock by her deeply religious mother in the very same field where Elnor was executed under the accusation of witchcraft. Seemingly, the tormented soul of this very Gothic nun transmigrates to Alice's embryonic body and surfaces

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<sup>1</sup>Curiously enough, vodka Smirnoff launched an advertising campaign in 1995 in which a young woman was seen holding a bottle of vodka. The slogan read "There are no angels left".

before the girl can become an adolescent woman. Since the first signs of Alice's possession are benign - she recovers from her strange deafness, levitates, heals people, radiates holiness and endlessly draws a female figure perceived as the Virgin Mary - she is regarded as an innocent, even saintly, child whereas, in fact, her innocence is the disguise that the evil Elnor is using to seduce Alice's growing number of followers. Whether the child is naturally evil and has, hence, eased the entrance of Elnor's power in her soul is the most enigmatic point of the novel. Alice herself is always seen from a distance, portrayed as a cipher and not as a real child, so that her transformation into a saint and then into a devil appear to be in tune with her mysterious nature. It can be said that as happens in *The Exorcist*, the identity of the real child is usurped by that of the entity that possesses her. Unlike Regan, though, Alice is not blessed with a protecting surrogate father. The narrator, the atheist provincial journalist Gerry Fenn, turns his attention towards the child only when it is too late for him to act as a saviour. He is too engrossed by his criticism of the gullibility of the Church and the greed of local tradesmen intent on turning Alice's village into a second Lourdes so as to notice that the life of a child is threatened. Fenn actually sees the Church's treatment of Alice as a living saint as a sign of our vulnerability to deceitful evil, especially when it comes in female form. His derogatory opinion of Alice's 'true' nature is endorsed when the girl breaks before Fenn's eyes a fundamental taboo by killing her own father. Alice murders her father for having abused her trust by trying to sell her story to the tabloids, but also for the sinful act of her conception which allowed Elnor to possess her soul and so to turn her into a monster. As happens in *Carrie*, the sins of the parents are visited upon the monstrous child who is destroyed after exacting from her parents the penalty for having passed such an awful legacy onto them.

The woman possessor and the possessed child are the sites where woman's mythical innocence and abjection meet. Elnor's image as an innocent, chaste nun conceals the promiscuous, powerful healer whose abilities to perform miracles are not granted by the Virgin Mary, as it is generally believed by her followers, but by her own powerful female nature. Alice's own miracles are undone because those who believe in her saintliness actually reinforce Elnor's

power to do evil with the strength of their belief. The innocence of the child and of the nun is thus the façade behind which woman's real power lurks. As Herbert's novel implies, woman is as powerful as those who are in awe of her make her, but it is her choice to use or abuse the power she possesses. Alice's body is destroyed by the bullets of a psychopathic young man seeking his own share of power and his fifteen minutes of Warholian glory in becoming the saintly child's killer but Elnor's presence will not be exorcised by a man. Only the appearance of the Virgin Mary - the woman who does not abuse her power and also the mother of the holiest child - can redirect the immense energy drawn by Elnor from the crowds admiring Alice towards a more adequate, less threatening figure than Elnor. Fenn concludes that the power wielded by Elnor is of the same nature as the Virgin Mary's, for both superhuman women draw the sustenance to survive from those who believe in them. Herbert seems to imply, thus, that there is a specifically female type of power but that this is not necessarily in the possession exclusively of evil, monstrous women like Elnor. This power can be in fact used by positive figures such as the Virgin Mary. She obviously incarnates the good side of the Earth goddess while Elnor incarnates the dark side, the side feared by men, that has to be repressed. Her use of Alice is similar to the Devil's use of Regan's in *The Exorcist*: it implies that innocence, far from being free from evil, is the channel evil agents prefer to subvert the belief in absolute good.

Despite the example of *Shrine*, the figure of the monstrous girl gifted with supernatural powers is not always negative - on the contrary, it may actually represent the kind of positive power incarnated in the Virgin Mary or even go beyond it and claim for women the absolute power of the lost goddess Earth erased by patriarchy. Robert McCammon's *Swan Song* (1987) centres on Swan's transition from childhood to adulthood in an America devastated by the patriarchal misuse of nuclear weapons. As bands of monstrous, warring men roam this wasteland, Swan's body grows, accumulating not only beauty but also the power to make the land fertile again. Swan embodies not only primal female fertility but also a definitely female brand of power to make men see their own moral monstrosity. Swan is granted her legendary power as a leader and as a

woman saviour not so much by the magical jewelled crown that she receives as a mark of her kinship with the ancient goddess (or perhaps with the Virgin Mary) but by her innate capacity to forgive abuse. At the age of nine, Swan prevents her mother's brutal boyfriend from further harming her mother and herself simply by declaring that she forgives him. By the time when she is fifteen and already a woman, she is so secure of her power than when she faces the Devil who has caused evil men to destroy the world of her childhood she disarms him again: "So, yes, I do forgive you, because if it wasn't for you, we wouldn't have a second chance" (p. 944).

In *Swan Song* the female child is not represented as a younger version of the demonised woman. She has ceased being 'a problem' while, in contrast, men and the male Devil that tempts them to wage war on all humankind, have become 'the problem'. She is no doubt another version of the woman saviour seeking redemption not for the monstrous men but for her companions in suffering, whom she delivers from the patriarchal Devil and his no less patriarchal followers with the simple, unaggressive use of her serene attitude and her capacity to understand evil. As a wish-fulfilment fantasy, Swan stands at the other end of the spectrum of female monstrosity than Alice and can be said to belong, therefore, to a more humanist view of the world.

Claudia, the little girl of Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) is not transformed into an evil monster by a woman like Elnor but by two monstrous fathers. The bite of the vampire Louis, who takes Claudia's life following the suggestion of his companion Lestat, metamorphoses the orphaned five-year-old Claudia into an immortal vampire child. The monstrous child completes the bizarre, subversive family formed by Louis and Lestat who actually adopt her as their daughter at a moment when their relationship is flagging. Yet the two male vampires grossly miscalculate their own power to control Claudia and she becomes in the end the main enemy of their happiness. Usually, monstrous, evil children are characterized by a high intelligence and a complex use of language that denotes either their possession by a supernatural, adult entity or their possessing an extraordinary mind, developed well beyond their biological age; indeed, what horrifies adults is that when the child acts, it does not act as a child at all. In Claudia's case the



monstrous child is terrifying because she is an old person bound to a body whose growth has been halted by Louis's fatal bite. This disparity between body and mind results in an unendurable sexual frustration for Claudia, aggravated by her realization that her beloved Louis cannot see her as the woman she really is. Her fantasy of incest with the 'father' (Louis) is never realized not because it breaks a taboo in the vampire world but because her small size makes actual intercourse impossible. In Neil Jordan's screen adaptation (1994) the point is lost with the casting of twelve-year-old Kirsten Dunst as Claudia. Excellent as her performance is, Dunst appears as a vampiric Lolita on the verge of becoming an angry young woman like Regan or Carrie. A younger actress could have been chosen to play the part as there are precedents of very young children playing evil monsters: Harvey Stevens, for instance, was only six when he played Damian in *The Omen*. However, Dunst may have been preferred because casting an actress of Claudia's age may have been too problematic, given the obvious eroticism of the vampire child and the problematic question of child abuse.

David Skal (op. cit.: 346) reports that Anne Rice herself has acknowledged Claudia to be based on her own daughter Michele, who died of leukaemia in 1972, aged six. If the shadow of Poe's child-bride Virginia is behind his many Gothic brides it is conceivable that this little girl may have found a literary afterlife in Claudia, no matter how disturbing the thought may be. In a sense, Claudia is an evil image of Harriet Beecher Stowe's Little Eva, a character also born from a mother's deep grief for her dead child. It is certainly common for bereaved parents to idealise the dead child; the innocent, pure child born of Stowe's grief can be interpreted as a manifestation of her need to transform her mourning for the child into a positive feeling. However, Rice's conversion of Michele into Claudia - a child who transcends death not by going to heaven like Eva but by becoming an undead vampire - proves that the monstrous child and the angelic innocent are complementary fantasies.

The similarities between Eva and Claudia are enough to suggest that Rice may have born Stowe's work in mind when writing her novel. Both girls are New Orleans natives and die at

roughly the same age and in the same historical period. Eva has a very close relationship with her father, which is perpetuated beyond her death by his keeping alive her memory, whereas Claudia fascinates her two fathers, especially Louis. Eva's father cherishes the memory of his daughter because he believes she is an angel; Louis and Lestat love her because she fulfils their expectations as the perfect, evil daughter. In Louis's words, "I knew her to be less human than either of us, less human than either of us might have dreamed. Not the faintest conception bound her to the sympathies of human existence. Perhaps this explained why - despite everything I had done or failed to do - she clung to me. I was not her own kind. Merely the closest to it" (p. 150). Louis fails, however, to be more objective about his own participation and Lestat's in Claudia's victimization and in their appropriation of her body and mind. Claudia's capacity to do evil is, like Carrie's, unleashed when she fully realizes that her parent is also the maker of her monstrosity. Unlike Swan, Claudia cannot forgive and so she pours her pent-up anger on Lestat, ultimately committing the same crime that condemns Alice: killing of the father.

Claudia justifies her killing Lestat and her sparing Louis on the grounds that since Lestat had previously killed the vampire who made him into a monster, she is merely copying the pattern of abuse and revenge that he taught her. For her, Louis is like herself another of Lestat's victims, which is why she can exonerate him from the crime of having abused her by killing her and making her into the monster she is now. In the end, both parents prove undeserving of Claudia's respect, for she is deprived of her second life by Lestat when Louis neglects her rather frivolously for a new lover. This monstrous girl never gains enough power to overcome the consequences of her victimization. She is both the innocent abused by the monstrous - though not patriarchal - fathers and a monstrous woman frustrated by the impossibility of enjoying sex with her beloved father Louis. In the end, the combination of Lestat's hatred and Louis's neglect of her crush her. The Oedipal girl is made monstrous and finally killed by a father who hates her and by a father who cannot love her as she wants to be loved.

Another Oedipal conflict surrounds the seven-year-old girl Charlie in Stephen King's novel

*Firestarter* (1980). This budding goddess of destruction is another type of evil innocent, a child "that abuses its superhuman abilities because it does not yet comprehend the consequences of its acts" (Büssing, op. cit.: 106). Charlie's pyrokinetic powers - an ability to light fires simply by thinking - is actually a mutation, the unexpected side effect of a secret experiment with hallucinogenic drugs secretly ran by a government agency, known as The Shop, devoted to researching parapsychological matters. Andy McGee, Charlie's father, and his wife-to-be Victoria, were used as guinea pigs in their student days to test this new wonder drug whose side effects also included their acquisition of mild psychic powers. Unlike Stephen King's other monstrous girl, Carrie, Charlie cannot blame her parents for her monstrous nature: her parents, who were never informed about the composition of the drug are, like herself, the victims of the abuse perpetrated on them by The Shop. The suave Captain Hollister, the man who runs The Shop, assumes in this story the role of the villainous abuser as the representative of patriarchal technoscience and of the untrustworthy government that backs The Shop. His ambition to use Charlie's increasing powers as the ultimate weapon that will secure the USA's world supremacy makes the family becomes the target of a dramatic persecution, which soon claims Victoria's life and puts father and daughter on the run.

To chase the freakish Charlie, Captain Hollister sends another monster, agent John Rainbird, a psychotic madman and a genuinely ogreish fairy-tale figure:

Rainbird was a troll, an orc, a balrog of a man. He stood two inches shy of seven feet tall, and he wore his glossy black hair drawn back and tied in a curt ponytail. Ten years before, a Claymore had blown up in his face during his second tour of Vietnam, and now his countenance was a horrorshow of scar tissue and runneled flesh. His left eye was gone. There was nothing where it had been but a ravine. He would not have plastic surgery or an artificial eye because, he said, when he got to the happy hunting ground beyond, he would be asked to show his battlescars. (p. 110)

Rainbird, Charlie and her father Andy form an unusual Oedipal triangle. The two men pull the little girl, who is in constant need of reassurance about the limits of the use of her powers, in two opposite directions as each claims to love and understand her better than the other. In her arduous apprenticeship in self-control, Charlie is tutored by her father, who fears, above all, that

the onset of her adolescence might turn her into an uncontrollable, powerful monster. As could be expected from a parent afraid of his or her daughter's inability to control herself, Andy teaches Charlie not to use her powers indiscriminately. Rainbird, who becomes a deceptive surrogate father for Charlie when she and Andy are captured, persuades her to learn to use higher and higher levels of her power for the benefit of The Shop. The paradox of the story is that when Andy is fatally wounded by Rainbird, he is reduced to begging his daughter to disobey the taboo he has so firmly set in her mind. He must then ask her to use all her might to destroy The Shop and Rainbird so as to prevent her own death and to revenge his own at Rainbird's hands.

While the relationship between Andy and Charlie is portrayed as one of mutual love and respect, only spoiled by their persecution, the relationship between Charlie and Rainbird is quite another matter. When Charlie is captured by Rainbird himself, something of which she is not aware until her father finally tells her the truth before dying, Rainbird blackmails Hollister into having unlimited access to Charlie's company, threatening to disclose the Shop's obscure operations to the media. Rainbird explains that he wants to know Charlie "intimately" - at one point he even observes that this intimacy "was something pre-erotic, almost mystic" (p. 338). He is fascinated by her power but also feels that a certain kinship binds him to her since both are seen by Hollister as monsters. Like the Devil who faces Swan in *Swan Song*, Rainbird recognizes in Charlie's budding female beauty a kind of divine power that attracts him fatally. So strong is this attraction that instead of killing her immediately after her capture (for he intends to murder the child to mark his possession of her power) Rainbird befriends her, making her see that both are freaks exploited by the system. Lying to her about the origin of the terrible scars on his face, Rainbird manages to awake pity for him in Charlie, in a process that culminates one stormy night when his pretended fear conducts Charlie to reverse roles and offer him protection, as if they were Beauty and the Beast. Yet the horror of the little girl who burns people to death pales in comparison to the horror of Rainbird's ugly manipulation of her feelings. The realization that he has betrayed her and her love for Andy is what ultimately leads Charlie to use all her power against her treacherous father

Rainbird in the same way that Claudia directs her anger against Lestat. Having defeated the ogre, who dies claiming his love for her, nothing prevents Charlie from destroying The Shop. Her burning of The Shop shows that Charlie has finally outgrown her dangerous childhood tantrums. Far from being an uncontrollable monster as her father feared, Charlie has matured into a peculiar strong heroine. Her revenge is presented as a fair act by which the patriarchal Frankensteins who made her receive their due. Not having Swan's inclination to forgive and not being guilty of having transgressed a taboo like Claudia, Charlie remains free and guiltless at the end, waiting for an adolescence that might turn her indeed into an adult goddess of destruction.

In the texts I have analysed in this section the monstrous girl is represented as a powerful figure capable of using her superhuman abilities either to do good or to do evil. She is halfway between the innocent woman and the villainess, for she is generally turned monstrous by the abuse to which she is subjected by her parents or by monstrous, surrogate parents. The monstrous girl may enter into conflicts with her mother or with her father, but in all cases what is most feared about her is whether her maturation into a woman will involve the maturation of supernatural or unnatural powers in her. Parents fear above all the possibility that she might no longer be controllable, which is why in these texts the emphasis is put on the rituals or pseudo-rituals devised to exorcise or control the girl's power. Only when she uses her power in a positive sense - either to create like Swan or to destroy like Charlie - is her autonomy accepted. In general, the evil power of the monstrous girl is attributed to an evil agent, as if the supposition that a girl might be naturally aggressive were out of question. In contrast, in the cases in which her power is positive, it emanates from herself and not from an external source.

#### *8.1.3.2. Monstrous Boys*

Supernatural agents, abusive or negligent parents, exploitative government agencies and even evil corporations have been blamed in fiction for the creation of the child monster. The belief in the innocence of the child - even if it is only relative - is essential for the survival of the very idea

of civilization, but it is suffering blows coming from real life, especially as regards young boys' capacity to kill. Britain suffered a deep shock in November 1993 with the infamous case of the murder of James Bulger, a two-year-old boy killed by two boys, Jon Venables and Robert Thompson, then eleven, in a most vicious manner. The harshness of the public reaction against these unfortunate boys and the considerably adamant attitude of the judges, who regarded the boys as criminals rather than as children in need of help<sup>1</sup>, exposed a profound rift in British society as far as the understanding of the child from an adult perspective is concerned. In general terms, it can be said that many of those who followed the case believed that the young killers knew what they were doing, especially in this time, the late twentieth century, when children are not cocooned in ignorance as they once were. The general public's reaction was of one of distrust towards the claims of child psychologists and social workers who argued that Bulger's killers were in need of help and not of punishment.

Gitta Sereny, writing about a similar case that took place in 1861, and in which the young killers were soon freed from the reformatories where they were secluded after their crime, attacks the old-fashioned laws of Britain, which turn out to be in the 1990s crueller and less effective than the laws applied in Victorian times. In her view,

At the end of the 20th century, we know that violence in children is mostly caused by violence to children, and we therefore believe in treatment ... we do know that if children commit violent crime, it is not only they who must receive treatment, but the environment that damaged them. Anything else is not only pointless but cruel; for it perpetuates both the circumstances which have caused the damage, and the child's uncomprehending feelings of guilt. (1995: 12)

Yet, Sereny's summary of widely accepted views among child psychologists and social workers -

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<sup>1</sup>The children were initially sentenced to eight years of internment in a reforming institution, to which two extra years were added by the main judicial authority in Britain. In an unprecedented decision, the Home Office decided to use its prerogative to lengthen the term of reclusion dictated by the judges another five years. Venables and Thompson were sentenced, thus, to a total of fifteen years of confinement. In May 1996 the Home Office's imposition of the five extra years was overruled, in the same week when a group of girls, aged between 12 and 13 killed one of their classmates, aged 13. The case of Venables and Thompson is now to be transferred to the European Parliament at Strasbourg on the grounds that there may have been a breach of human rights in the fact that these children were treated as adults by the British judges. On her part, Denise Bulger, the mother of the child whom Venables and Thompson killed, is campaigning to achieve the imprisonment for life of her child's murderers. In her view, they committed an adult crime and should pay for it as adults.

and indeed many other people - does not reflect the lack of social consensus as to how to treat a criminal child. Despite the outrage of many child psychologists, the Bulger case and the harsh sentences to which the killers were sentenced brought out the fear of the child's nature. The line running below the obvious popular hatred for the young murderers was the suspicion that monstrous children like these ones are maliciously using to their advantage the leniency and mercy recommended by child psychologists in these cases. Blaming the environment in which the child killers grew up could not satisfy those who demanded an exemplary punishment, possibly because in the end all Western society and not only the families of the children are to blame for atrocities like the one they committed. Much of the hatred these child killers inspired can be explained because the murder touched a deep fibre in the heart of British society: the boys were found guilty of having shattered the myth of childhood innocence by killing an innocent and by proving that reality contradicts the myth - children may kill like adults and still remain children. Indirectly, James Bulger's killers were also condemned as scapegoats by a society that cannot accept that children are a reflection of the adults' world and not another species growing in isolation. No doubt, the public condemnation of the act and the judges' sentences expressed also a value judgement. When put on the scales of justice, society's need to preserve the treasured ideal of the innocent victim represented by James Bulger outweighed society's need to face two facts: first, that children are indeed capable of doing evil and second, that society is at a loss to understand why.

Because no other clear scapegoat could be found, the Bulger case provoked a very negative reaction against films that deal with monstrous children. These allegations were prompted by the rumour that the crime had been committed in imitation of what can be seen in *Child's Play* (1988), notwithstanding the fact that this film, which was not actually seen by James Bulger's killers, does not deal with a monstrous child but with an animated, monstrous doll. The video-rental release of another film, Joseph Reuben's film *The Good Son* (1993), was delayed for a

year by the BBFC, due to alleged similarities in the plot with the Bulger murder (Lees: 1994b). *The Good Son* does not include however any scene that might recall the Bulger case, though its protagonist is a child who has killed a baby brother - in a scene not seen in the film. Yet, other monstrous children, such as the child gangster of *Robocop 2* (1990) (who is seen to deal in drugs, collaborate in torture and kill) have eluded censorship even though they appear in films that are very popular with young audiences. This leads to the conclusion that the BBFC acts mainly on cue at moments of social tension, banning or delaying the release of certain films that deal with evil children. The BBFC's activities can thus be said to be token gestures that satisfy society's thirst for a sign that 'something' is being done to prevent evil but that actually pre-empt the deeper examination of the reasons why some children may kill.

Ironically, the BBFC missed the point that *The Good Son* approaches the figure of the male child killer from a conservative, moralistic perspective. The film implies in fact that young Henry's crimes do not pay and he is punished for them in a horrific way that cannot fail to impress a child. Written by British novelist Ian McEwan, *The Good Son* presents evil in a way that is characteristic of McEwan's fictional world: evil is enigmatic and inexplicable but chillingly rational. However, the premises that may work for other characters in McEwan's novels - such as the figure of the villainous Robert in *The Comfort of Strangers* - seem rather strained in the case of Henry. This nine-year-old, middle-class boy is respected and loved by his parents who are unaware that he drowned a baby brother and has made an attempt on his sister's life. Only a neutral observer, Henry's cousin Mark, a motherless boy of the same age, can persuade Henry's mother that Henry is evil. What ultimately mars the film is not the credibility of Henry's personality, though this duplicitous and cold-blooded child is very different from the feckless, impulsive child killers of real life. The most dubious points of the film are first, the father's flat denial of his responsibility in Henry's crimes, which shifts the burden of the crimes on the mother's shoulders for no apparent reason and second, its rather far-fetched resolution.



In the final scene Henry's mother is seen holding each child with one hand over the edge of a cliff after having warded off Henry's murderous attack on herself. A few harrowing moments of hesitation, spent on trying to decide who to save before her strength is exhausted, end when she lets Henry go. With this act she replaces her evil son with a civilized, good son, Mark, who finds in her a new mother. Yet McEwan seems to disregard the evidence indicating that with hardly any exception mothers will support their children even when these turn out to be moral monsters. Asking a parent to keep an impartial sense of justice in a scene like that forces the plot into the dead end of incredibility. Unless, of course, the end suggests that the only way in which the mother can exculpate herself from the allegation of having created a monster is by killing her own son and choosing the 'right' boy. This reading seems confirmed by the very last shot, which shows the mother and her new son together, sharing the secret of Henry's death without any indication that Henry's father has questioned the new situation or suspected his wife of killing their boy. One wonders what the intention of Reuben's Manichaean film is, especially in view of the casting of the very popular child actor Macaulay Caulkin as the vicious Henry. Reuben's film cannot be read as a fable to terrify 'bad' children with the threat of suffering Henry's awful death because it is not a film for children. For many reviewers Caulkin's performance as Henry evidenced an obvious case of miscasting, though the film seems to be something other than a mistake in Caulkin's now flagging career. Why would an adult viewer familiar with Caulkin's performances in *Home Alone* and other films choose to see a film in which he plays a villain if not to sadistically enjoy the fantasy of replacing him with the prettier, more subdued Elijah Wood, who plays Mark? And why indeed did Caulkin's father and manager accept the role of Henry on behalf of his son if not to pander to those fantasies?

I have dealt with Frank Cauldham, the hero of Iain Banks' novel *The Wasp Factory* (1984), in Chapter 7 from the point of view of how his, or rather her, gender conditions his behaviour. However, Frank also belongs in this chapter for he is a child killer in the double sense of being a killer of children and of having committed his crimes in his childhood. The deaths of

Frank's cousins Blyth and Esmeralda and of his youngest brother Paul, are indeed memories of a childhood already gone. As narrated by the teenage Frank with his own farcical, irreverent voice these deaths appear to be just a few mischievous pranks orchestrated by a very naughty little boy going through a peculiar phase of his mental growth. Blyth, aged five, dies when a poisonous adder planted by Frank - then six - in the boy's wooden leg bites him; Frank's brother, Paul, also aged five, lets himself be persuaded by eight-year-old Frank to hit on the nose a 500 kg. German World War II bomb stranded on the Scottish island where they live; Esmeralda, aged four, is tied to a giant kite by nine-year-old Frank and carried away by the wind and into the sea. While revenge is Frank's motivation for killing the two boys - especially in Paul's case, as the boy was born at the very same time the family dog was allegedly castrating Frank, or so he has been told - the girl is killed "because I felt I owed it to myself and to the world in general. I had, after all, accounted for two male children and thus done womankind something of a statistical favour" (p. 87). Yet the fact is that the teenage Frank bears no grudge against children; on the contrary, he likes them better than adults: "Children aren't real people, in the sense that they are not small males and females but a separate species which will (probably) grow into one or the other in the due time. Younger children, in particular, before the insidious and evil influence of society and their parents have properly got to them, are sexlessly open and hence perfectly likeable" (p. 87).

Killing, however, proves to Frank that he is gifted with the power to control those around him and to secure for himself a greater share of the love his brother Eric and his father Angus already bestow on him. The most disturbing aspect of Frank's behaviour is that he feigns a deep bereavement and even blames himself for the 'accidents' to conceal his guilt. So good is his performance (and so young is the child) that nobody ever suspects him at all of having committed the crimes. On the contrary, he enjoys even more the love of his worried brother Eric and of his father, distressed as they are by the thought that another odd death might take away the youngest member of the family. Under cover of the innocence attributed to all children, this particular child enjoys the power of depriving others of life and gains through it a hold on the hearts of the other

members of his family. As he says, "I am convinced that only my genuinely clear conscience let me convince the adults around me that I was totally innocent" (p. 88).

Not all the monstrous children of recent fiction enjoy Frank's genuinely clear conscience. The lucid Andrew Wiggin, another child killer and the hero of Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* (1985), undergoes a great deal of agonizing mental torture that is spared to Frank by his undoubtedly disturbed personality. Andrew, nicknamed Ender, is selected at the age of six to become the military leader that will save the world in a near future from the threat of the hostile alien species that has attacked Earth already twice. Ender is the youngest in a trio of extraordinary siblings, consisting also of the intellectual, caring Valentine and the bully Peter, who is in the habit of victimizing his brother and sister. These three extremely intelligent children represent the confrontation between two forms of masculinity: Ender's, which will not acknowledge his dark side but will be forced to use it, and Peter's, who will progress in the course of the novel from sheer physical brutality to a pacifistic use of political power. Between both boys stands Valentine, who helps both overcome their destructive drives and who is presented as a stable, well-developed person. There may be a hint of misogyny in the idea that Valentine's function is to nurture the bruised egos of her brothers, but since, unlike them, she represents common sense and sensitivity and since she is later given the important task of keeping alive the memory of the war that ended all wars, it cannot be said that Card portrays her in negative terms, especially in comparison with her monstrous brothers.

*Ender's Game* narrates a paradox: Ender, the innocent child exploited by abusive adults, is turned into a monster despite his resistance to doing evil and only the aliens he kills can really save his soul. Peter, the violent, monstrous child who subverts the adults' rule over children, learns to use his initially evil personality to build up lasting world peace. While Ender is separated from his family and manipulated by the sinister Colonel Graff to become the allegedly hostile aliens' exterminator, Peter takes advantage of the anonymity that the NETS - a system of communication similar to Internet - grant him to cleverly pass himself off as an adult and affect public opinion about

the oncoming war with the aliens. Ender and Peter's parents play no significant role in their story; their true father figure is Graff, a Frankenstein of the soul who rejects Peter on the grounds that he is too violent to be manipulated and who then tears the more pliant Ender's soul to pieces in order to remake him to his taste. The training Ender is given is based on provocation and seeks to elicit from him a very violent response that Graff may use to his advantage when the moment of crisis comes. However, instead of responding with total nonchalance to his own crimes as Frank does in *The Wasp Factory*, Ender struggles against being a killer and a monster, to the point that the battle against his dark side occupies more of his mind than oncoming battle with the aliens.

Ender's Battle School stands for any model of repressive education that requires the young boy to submit his individual will and moral conscience to the will of his educator. In school, Ender puts into practice what Peter taught him with his ceaseless bullying: how to conceal what he really feels. He is humiliated, isolated, starved of affection and trained to kill, while the grown-ups who control him discuss how far they can go before he breaks down. In contrast, the aliens' patient, secret infiltration of Ender's mind through the video-game that symbolically simulates his life, trains him to appreciate the value of life and peace. The sinister, competitive games of simulated destruction that Ender is forced to play in the school are mirrored by this game of simulated construction that invites Ender with its fairy-tale landscapes to return to his real self and to enjoy his real childhood. However, Ender is so utterly trapped by his need to please his superiors that he cannot see how his own behaviour is no longer that of a normal child. Thus, despite the warnings of another embittered child who points out how the real enemies are the teachers with their doctrine of hatred and revenge and not the aliens, Ender still persists in his belief that adults are always right even when they abuse him, an emotional pattern common among abused children.

After two years of military training, when Ender is only eight and while ten-year-old Peter is already working with Valentine for peace, the Battle School computer infiltrated by the aliens makes Ender play a nightmarish video-game in which he symbolically kills Peter. Believing that the

game marks the triumph of his dark side, Ender gives in to a most pessimistic mood about his own chances of controlling his potential to kill. This moment of weakness is used by Graff to trick Ender into playing a last game, the simulation of a battle - so he is told - during which Ender actually wipes out the entire alien civilization, to his utter dismay. Horrified by what he has done and rejected as a monster by all the inhabitants of Earth he has saved, by then pacifists converted to Peter and Valentine's creed, Ender becomes a homeless wanderer, while the Earth's colonisation of other planets begins, once the alien threat has been averted. The morally monstrous, fallen military child hero is ironically rescued from despair by the very species he has destroyed; when he visits their home planet on his pilgrimage, seeking atonement for his sin, he recognizes the fairy-tale landscape of the video-game, finds the last dormant alien queen and sets out to find a new home for them. The aliens, who are all female, seek a natural ally in Valentine. Their history is transmitted through her to Ender, who is pardoned for his monstrosity on condition that he becomes a speaker for the dead, that is to say, that who tells the truth about a person when s/he dies in a new, secular cult that expands with the colonies.

Card's monstrous children - so intelligent, so unchildlike - have indeed little to do with actual children: they are wish-fulfilment figures that enact the fantasies of rebellion against authority nursed by all school children and those who grow up with vivid, unpleasant memories of school. What Card does through the extraordinary Ender, Valentine and Peter is to suggest that a world run by monstrous adults has its last hope in children. Only respect and attention for what the children have to say, which we cannot afford to ignore, can result in a better world for all. Ender and Peter are examples of how the child capable of doing evil can be re-educated, though obviously the fact that the extraordinary alien race and Peter's sudden craving for power to do good account for their transformation makes it very difficult to link the premises of Card's novel with the problems of the real life child. In any case, this is one of the few texts to develop the romantic idea that children could rule the world with better common sense than adults and, thus, to deny the paedophobic content of fantasies such as Stephen King's *Children of Corn*, in which a community

of evil children terrorise the adults that come across them. Ender's prodigious siblings benefit from the possibilities that technology grants them in order to impose their views: since nobody ever thinks that the new gurus of the NETS are children, they feel free to let their voice be heard without the constraints that adults impose on them. The attractive picture of a community of children freely communicating among themselves and with adults on the Internet can be glimpsed in Card's description of the NETS. No matter how fantastic it may seem, it is at least an important exception to the paedophobic representation of children in many texts for adults.

So far I have dealt with instances of the male child killer appearing in texts in which the main conflict surfaces when the child reaches a certain age. I should like to turn now to Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child* (1988), a novel in which the parents and their monstrous male child enter into a conflict even before the monstrous child is born. The tempestuous relationship between the parents and the monstrous boy in Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child* is exceptional because it illustrates a question hardly ever discussed, namely, the pregnant mother's fear of her own child. Anne Mellor (op. cit.: 41) attributes to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* the articulation of the mother's fears of the unborn child for the first time in fiction:

The experience of pregnancy is one that male writers have by necessity avoided; and before Mary Shelley, female writers had considered the experiences of pregnancy and childbirth as improper, even taboo, subjects to be discussed before a male or mixed audience. Mary Shelley's focus on the birth-process illuminates for a male readership hitherto unpublished female anxieties, fears, and concerns about the birth-process and its consequences. At the same time, her story reassures a female audience that such fears are shared by other women.

However, the fact is that *Frankenstein* reinforces the taboo by displacing natural pregnancy towards an artificial method of creation that is controlled by a man and is thus very different from that experienced by women.

The Gothic theme of the appropriation of the natural process of pregnancy by an external, evil agent flourished in the 1960s following the commercialisation of the birth-control pill in 1960 and the crisis of the Thalidomide children in 1962. According to David Skal (op. cit.: 294):

In the post-Pill age, "normal" childbirth ceased to exist, at least in our collective dream-life. Reproduction crossed over into the realm of Gothic science fiction. Women would become pregnant by demons or computers, tinkered with by genetic engineers. Pregnancy was an act of war, a violent invasion by the enemy. These fearful images were rarely part of the debate over reproduction technology and abortion rights, but they provided a persistent subtext worth examination.

The fear caused by the unpredictability of the nature of the child became the core of horror narratives such as Ira Levin's *Rosemary Baby* (1967), filmed for the screen by Roman Polanski a year later, and John Wyndham's *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957) adapted as *Village of the Damned* (1960), a film that has been the inspiration for a recent remake by John Carpenter. While Levin and Wyndham deal with mysterious pregnancies caused by a non-human agent - the Devil and an alien race, respectively - the first horror film to take the monstrous baby as the main focal point is Larry Cohen's *It's Alive*. Released in 1974, the same year as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and only a year after *The Exorcist*, this film eschews altogether the question of what made the baby monstrous, preferring to reduce the idea of the monster child to absurdity. Thus, Cohen's own screenplay focuses on a newborn baby's murder rampage in Los Angeles, while his direction gives an with an obvious tongue-in-cheek treatment to the bizarre plot. Cohen's hideous progeny was followed on the screen by the monstrous babies of David Lynch's *Eraserhead* (1977) and David Cronenberg's *The Brood* (1978). Lynch's almost unwatchable nightmare involves a couple who give birth to something which appears to be a fetal calf; the episodes concerning the baffled parents' attempt at taking care of the baby are a grim travesty of the difficulties any young couple could face with the arrival of a baby. In *The Brood* Nola Carveth's pent-up rage causes foetal sacks to sprout out of her body; the sacks contain monstrous babies who start killing as soon as they are born. The misogynistic discourse is clear in both Lynch's and Cronenberg's texts, though their fantasies obviously indicate not how terrifying the process of birth is but how terrified men are in the face of it. In contrast to its predecessors, Lessing's novel addresses the fears of a young pregnant mother, Harriet, and follows them to the last consequences when they turn out to be, in Harriet's view,

well-founded.

The other central motif in *The Fifth Child* is what Leslie Fiedler calls the myth of devolution, that is to say, the fear that through miscegenation or a freak step backwards in the evolutionary scale "our children or our children's children may create in the future the subhuman we cannot find in the past" (1993: 241). The subhuman missing link is embodied in the monstrous child born to Harriet and David, a middle-class couple who, against the advice of family and friends, persist in their ideal of having as many children as possible. Actually, the third main idea built into the text is the discussion of where the balance lies between responsible and selfish parenthood. As Harriet and David see it, the fashion implanted in the 1960s for smaller families denotes pure selfishness: they'd much rather feel free to form a large family. But, as Harriet's mother reminds them, whereas the aristocracy can afford to have as many children as they wish, and the poor must produce large numbers of children in the expectation that half of them will die, "people like us, in the middle, we have to be careful about the children we have so we can look after them" (p. 23). Harriet and David's fifth child, Ben, is the one too many in their family, ostensibly their punishment for their own biological greediness and selfishness.

Harriet's fifth pregnancy is physically painful and emotionally distressing. She soon starts thinking of the kicking foetus as the "enemy" and having fantasies of its being a composite monster. When the pregnancy has entered its eighth month she demands that the baby is taken out and fantasises about carving it out of her body herself with a big kitchen knife. When the baby is finally born, her worst fears are not confirmed, though she clearly has reasons not to be pleased with the baby or herself: "He was not a pretty baby. He did not look like a baby at all... And her heart contracted with pity for him: poor little beast, his mother disliking him so much ... But she heard herself say nervously, though she tried to laugh, 'He's like a troll, or a goblin, or something'" (p. 60). The baby awakens in its parents a mixture of fascination and repulsion: he is, after all, extraordinary not only in looks but also in behaviour, with his strong compulsion to strive constantly for independence. However, the bond between parents and child fails to develop and, ironically,



this has the effect of putting the couple off conceiving another child, for fear of a second Ben.

Time does not improve matters and while Harriet's feelings of alienation grow - she thinks she is blamed for the child - siblings and relatives clash so badly with the violent, wilful boy that his seclusion in a special institution for severely handicapped children is agreed upon. As his youngest brother concludes, Ben is sent away "because he isn't really one of us" (p. 93). Yet, turning a deaf ear to her family's pleas and moved by a maternal feeling she cannot herself comprehend, Harriet rescues the boy from an appalling, rather Gothic institution where he was certain to have died. Nevertheless, from this point onwards the novel subtly shifts from discussing whether Ben is human at all to discussing whether he is 'one of us' in rather ambiguous terms. When the child grows up and the family disperses rather than endure his presence, Harriet sees that he is happiest in the company of a group of young unemployed people. Later, in school, where he does well, for he is, after all, freakish but not unintelligent, Ben forms his own criminal gang. It is at this point that mother and grandmother discuss Ben's already adolescent nature and their fear of his sexual urges:

After that weekend Dorothy said to Harriet, 'I wonder if Ben ever asks himself why he is so different from us.'

'How do we know? I've never known what he's thinking.'

'Perhaps he thinks there's more of his kind somewhere.'

'Perhaps he does.'

'Provided it's not a female of the species!'

'Ben makes you think - all those different people who lived on the earth once - they must be in us somewhere.'

'All ready to pop up! But perhaps we simply don't notice them when they do,' said Dorothy.

'Because we don't want to.' (p. 136)

The people Harriet and Dorothy do not want to notice are not exactly the goblins of the magical past that Harriet identifies with Ben at the moment of his birth, nor the Neanderthal caveman of the myth of devolution. For these two middle-class women, the invisible people are the criminals, a group they clearly identify with those outside their own class. When Ben's gang achieves a sad notoriety because of its criminal exploits, Harriet never questions herself as to her responsibility as

Ben's mother. Her emotional alienation from her own son reflects the anxieties of the middle class in the face of criminality allegedly caused by 'other' people. For Harriet, Ben belongs to an alien tribe of barbaric criminals that has survived amongst ordinary humanity, that is to say, amongst people like her. "Did his people rape the females of humanity's forebears", she wonders, "thus making new races, which had flourished and departed, but perhaps left their seeds in the human matrix, here and there, to appear again, as Ben had?" (p. 156).

Harriet concludes that her decision to save Ben from dying in the sinister institution where he was confined was a mistake. Thus, when he becomes an adult and leaves his parents' house, they are secretly relieved; the move to a new house without memories of him marks their desire to forget him, a hope mingled with the fear that Ben might eventually find his 'own people' - abroad - and so reinforce his monstrous power to do evil. All in all, the implications of Lessing's novel are certainly questionable. It is unclear whether the reader is meant to sympathize with Harriet and David's ordeal or with Ben's. The novel initially seems to condemn middle-class hypocrisy and selfishness but by the end of the book the punishment inflicted on Harriet and David through Ben seems disproportionate to the fault they have committed, their having brought a child too many into the world. Even more worrying is the association of Ben's barbaric primitivism with his working-class companions and later with his gang. The novel professedly implies that evil may be born in middle-class homes but Lessing's characterization of Ben as an alien intruder seems to point in the opposite direction, suggesting that only freak accidents allow evil to invade middle-class families. Lessing's ambivalence in the face of evil is, additionally, reinforced by her depriving Ben of a personal point of view through which the reader could have access to his personality and by the lack of a scene of confrontation between the parents and their monstrous child which would express their conflict in less dubious terms.

Henry, Frank, Ender and Ben, the monstrous boys whose stories I have analysed in this section, are defined as monsters by their capacity to kill. In the case of the monstrous girl, the focal point of the plot is usually the fear that the girl's transformation into a woman may unleash

unknown forces of destruction, which are clearly a metaphor for the young woman's sexual awakening. In the case of the monstrous boy, the rites of passage into adulthood are not so significant; in fact, in the cases of Frank and Ender, the monstrous child is transformed into a more tolerable adult. Consequently, it can be concluded that the figure of the monstrous boy differs from that of the monstrous girl mainly because the boy shows an innate capacity to do evil, whereas the girl's potential to do evil is the result of manipulation or transformation. She is comparatively less monstrous than the boy.

#### 8.1.3.3. *Ghostly, Gothic Little Monsters*

In this section I consider texts dealing with supernatural monstrous children whose behaviour cannot be judged by the moral standards set for average children. In three of these texts - Thomas Disch's *The Businessman*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Joel Schumacher's *Flatliners* - the supernatural child motivated by a desire for revenge haunts the person who caused its death. In the other two texts - the films *The Addams Family* and *Addams Family's Values* - the monstrous children are not horrific figures but characters of comedy that subvert the conventional image of the child.

Thomas Disch's *The Businessman* (1984) shares with *It's Alive* the premise that the monstrous baby's rage is caused by the father's forcing the mother to abort. In Cohen's film the baby is not finally aborted, though anger transforms the embryo into a vicious baby murderer. In Disch's novel the anger of the aborted embryo - aggravated because its mother is a Catholic - prompts him to return to life as a ghostly, supernatural baby bent on avenging himself for his untimely death. Bob Glandier, the eponymous businessman, is a brutal man who has raped and murdered his wife Giselle some time after the episode of the abortion. Giselle endures a stay in purgatory which includes haunting her husband as a ghost. Her life as a spirit is, however, not less violent than her life as a woman, and when Bob mistakes her ghost for one of his sexual fantasies,

he rapes her a second time, making her pregnant. The child born of the supernatural mother's sense of guilt and her mortal husband's criminal derangement is the fiendish baby who claims to be the ghost of Giselle's murdered embryo.

Despite what the summary of the plot indicates, it would be wrong to interpret *The Businessman* as an anti-abortionist tract. Disch's novel is a grotesque, singular fantasy that pokes fun at issues such as death, crime and religious belief with an eccentric sense of humour only enjoyable if the reader is already familiarised with the black comedy of horror fiction, especially of films. The point of the novel is not even to discuss whether Giselle was right in agreeing to have the abortion, for she eventually acknowledges that her fear that she was carrying not a baby but a non-human monster of evil in her womb determined her decision. Like many horror films, Disch's novel is a tour de force aimed at sustaining the reader's willing suspension of disbelief with a preposterous narrative full of gruesome scenes. The episode of the baby's birth, for instance, which shows him tearing his way out of Giselle's womb - who is, fortunately, insensitive to pain because she is dead - to start killing immediately, is, in term of visual strategies, very similar to the gory scenes of contemporary horror films.

The nameless baby himself is one of the most bizarre monsters - if not *the* most bizarre one - I have come across in my survey of 1980s and 1990s fiction, though he is, at the same time, a compound of characteristics typical of the monsters of these two decades. Like most monstrous children, although he appears to be nothing but an innocent, harmless infant, the linguistic register he uses is that of a callous, street-smart grown-up. Not even his foul-mouthed father can help being appalled by speeches like this:

"See what I mean? You can't even speak the dreaded word. Not to worry. I didn't come over here to seduce you, Pops. To be perfectly frank, sex is not one of my vital interests. Violence is another matter. I love violence. Really, I'm not that different from any eleven-year-old these days. Just a little more open and straightforward." (p. 258)

Unlike other monstrous children but like many of the postmodernist monsters I have examined, the

baby is a body snatcher who possesses human, animals and even inanimate objects throughout his sadistic victimization of his father. At one point, the child describes himself to his harassed father as a supernatural projection of Bob's distorted personality - a mirror image held up to him to show how monstrous Bob is - rather than a devil, a statement in which certainly the shadow of Frankenstein's monster can be perceived. In fact, the baby's declared aim is forcing Glandier to confess to the murder of his wife Giselle, so that the baby can be said to be in fact his mother's champion. In that sense, the nameless baby is one of the series of monstrous infants whose fantastic behaviour is aimed at exposing who the real monster is, usually a man representing patriarchy in different degrees.

The tone of *Beloved* (1987) and *Flatliners* (1990) is completely different from that of *The Businessman*. Toni Morrison's novel and Joel Schumacher's film combine a certain measure of Gothic horror inspired by the monstrous child with a serious reflection on the protagonists' part about their share of guilt in the making of the child monster. In both cases, the roguish humour of Disch's black comedy is simply absent. In Morrison's novel the ghost of Beloved, the dead two-year-old daughter of Sethe, a black woman who ran away from the Southern American plantation where she and her family were held as slaves, has been haunting Sethe's house for years. When Sethe's new boyfriend expels the ghost from Sethe's home, Beloved returns as a beautiful teenager to tantalise her mother with deceitful promises of forgiveness and love. Sethe herself had killed Beloved when, despite having reached her mother-in-law's home in a free state, her master threatened to snatch her children away from her. Preferring her children to be dead rather than slaves, Sethe determines to kill the four of them but she is stopped before she can complete the massacre. Although Sethe believes that Beloved has returned to comfort her and forgive her, the girl's purpose is actually to punish the mother. Sethe is so anguished by the possibility of losing her daughter again that she lets herself be persuaded of Beloved's goodness even when the girl tricks her into attempting to kill the white, elderly man who once saved her and her family.

When the demonic nature of the girl is publicly exposed and she disappears for ever, Sethe is cured of her longing for her lost baby and of her sense of guilt, resuming her life with normality. The enigmatic Beloved is evil but she is also a healer imparting the extreme shock therapy that purges her mother of the guilt endured for years. Yet, the moral of Morrison's novel is strangely ambivalent. The patriarchal, white slave master who persecutes Sethe and her family can be regarded as Beloved's real murderer but the ghost aims her anger at Sethe, who can be said to have killed Beloved out of love. Clearly, the punishment inflicted on Sethe is disproportionate to her crime. Beloved's seduction of her mother's boyfriend and her insidious way of winning her younger sister's love together with her manipulation of Sethe's feeling characterize Beloved as a demonic young woman, but her evil nature is discordant with the implied message that she and her mother are in fact victims of white patriarchy. Thus, Beloved's malevolent attempt at taking Sethe with her to the realm of death where she comes from seems gratuitous, even incoherent, with the novel's denunciation of the horrors endured by Sethe as a slave. The brutal slave master who abused Sethe and indirectly endangered the lives of her children seems indeed a more appropriate target of Beloved's hatred.

In Joel Schumacher's film *Flatliners*, Nelson, one of the group of medicine students who have discovered how to experience death and return to life, encounters in one of his brushes with death a monstrous child. This child, seen throughout the film chasing Nelson, axe in hand, intent on murdering him, turns out to be the angry ghost of a child whom Nelson and his school gang used to bully ruthlessly. The bullying eventually went too far and caused the death of the child, who has now returned to put Nelson in the position of the terrorized victim and to force him to confess his sins. In his last immersion into death Nelson submits to the child's will rather than risk his life. His confession prompts a cathartic moment that transforms the threatening child into a smiling, satisfied, peaceful little boy, ready to forgive Nelson and him return to life for good. Three different solutions are, therefore, proposed in these narratives dealing with the return of the monstrous child seeking an acknowledgement of guilt. In *The Businessman* Glandier is destroyed

by the evil child because he only accepts his guilt under duress; in *Beloved* Sethe is neither fully punished nor fully forgiven by her monstrous daughter but she is in any case cured of her dependence on the memory of Beloved; in *Flatliners*, Nelson is forgiven because he does repent and accept his guilt. In the three cases, the child is clearly a reflection of the adult, born of fear and guilt. The innocence of the child is thus replaced by evil because the child has in a sense absorbed the evil distilled by the person who has victimized him or her.

After so much horror, it is best to conclude this section with a humorous image, that of the three children of the Addams family, Wednesday, Pugsley and baby Pubert, appearing in *The Addams Family* (1991) and its sequel, *Addams Family Values* (1993)<sup>1</sup>. These little monsters who play strange games are children who never smile and who expose the abnormality of adults as much as of other children. The characters of the children, which are just lightly sketched in the first film, are given more protagonism in the sequel beginning with a murderous bout of sibling rivalry in which Wednesday and Pugsley try repeatedly to kill baby Pubert, in the belief that the arrival of a new baby in the family means that the elder children have to be sacrificed. The hilarious episode of the summer camp where Wednesday and Pugsley are sent is used to expose the hypocrisy surrounding childhood. In this all-American camp all the children who do not fit within the stereotype of the 'wasp' child are discriminated against as monsters. It is for Wednesday to lead a revolt against the complacency of the hypocrites who make childhood the site where a very conservative model of intolerance that dictates which child is a monster and which one is normal is implanted.

## 8.2. Childhood Fears: Children and Monsters

### 8.2.1. Protecting the Child from the Monster

Before turning to the fictional confrontation of the child and the monster in recent films and

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<sup>1</sup>The two films are based on cartoon characters created by Charles Addams in the 1930s for *The New Yorker*; they were the object of a very popular TV series than ran from 1964 to 1966 in direct competition with another series focusing on a monstrous family, *The Munsters*.

novels for adults, I should like to review very briefly the uses to which the monster has been put in fairy tales and the controversy about whether fiction for children should also contain a measure of horror. This controversy has developed parallel to the controversy surrounding the need for censorship in horror fiction designed with adults in mind and is based on the same tenet, namely, that the only way of protecting immature readers or viewers is not only by denying them access to problematic material but also by censoring this material for all readers and viewers. However, since there are no clear criteria about what is really harmful for children, it is frequently the case that problematic films or books reach young viewers or readers without any sign of protest from adults. On the other hand, while narrative media such as films and comics attract a great deal of attention from defenders of censorship, virtually nothing is said about the convenience of censoring literature or, at least, of classifying it according to ages in the same way that films are classified so as to prevent young readers from having access to unsuitable literary texts.

There are different opinions on the role of fairy tales in childhood. Thus, for J.R.R. Tolkien (1983b: 131) fairy tales and children have been associated due to an "accident of our domestic history" since, unlike what is usually believed, children "neither like fairy-stories more, nor understand them better than adults do". In contrast, Bruno Bettelheim has argued in his influential book *The Uses of Enchantment* that fairy tales are essential for the psychological development of the child. "Fairy tales", Bettelheim writes, "leave to the child's fantasizing whether and how to apply to himself what the story reveals about life and human nature" (op. cit.: 45). The use of fairy tales, Bettelheim argues, is to let the child sort out the contradictory tendencies found in chaotic disarray in his or her psyche by identifying each feeling - fear, jealousy, destructive wishes and so on - with a fairy-tale figure. Thus, the Oedipal boy may identify with the boy confronting a monster in a fairy tale, and see himself as his mother's saviour (the damsel in captivity) and his father as the evil dragon that wants to keep the damsel to himself and that the boy's surrogate in the tale finally slays. Bettelheim's psychoanalytical view of fairy tales implies that adults have unwittingly (unconsciously) designed a genre that suits perfectly the emotional needs of the young listeners or



readers, who understand the tales better than the adults themselves.

Bettelheim disregards the cautionary use of the horrific elements of fairy tales. Yet in Richard Buxton's opinion the monsters of Greek folk tales - possibly of myth - responded to the adults' need "to control unruly children by conjuring up an image of what might happen if they continued to misbehave" (op. cit.: 18). Marina Warner (1994b: 43) has recently suggested that "the practice of storytelling was adapted to curb the tales children themselves might tell." The suspicion that far from being fit tools to encourage the child's psychological development many fairy tales are in fact part of the poisonous pedagogy and abusive education traditionally inflicted on children has lead many educated parents to reject them and to reject, by extension, any form of fantasy containing horrific elements.

This rejection is, according to Bettelheim, a serious mistake. On the one hand, trying to minimise the impact of the disturbing elements of fairy tales by making the child aware of the psychological connotations attached to each figure deprives the child of a "much-needed outlet" for the sorting out of these contradictory tendencies Bettelheim had previously referred to:

Those who outlawed traditional folk fairy tales decided that if there were monsters in a story told to children, these must all be friendly - but they missed the monster a child knows best and is most concerned with: the monster he feels or fears himself to be, and which also sometimes persecutes him. By keeping this monster within the child unspoken of, hidden in his unconscious, adults prevent the child from spinning fantasies around it in the image of the fairy tales he knows. Without such fantasies, the child fails to get to know his monster better, nor is he given suggestions as to how he may gain mastery over it. (op. cit.: 121)

For him, paradoxically, without fairy tales the child runs the risk of becoming the monster the parents fear it might become due precisely to an excessive exposure to the violence of the fairy tales or of any other fantasy story for children. The tales, therefore, are not only good to process anxieties regarding the child's appreciation of its own monstrous tendencies but also a safeguard - a safety valve, perhaps - for the anxious parents who want the child, above all, to develop into a normal adult. Because of the endurance of the myth of the innocent child, parents still resist the idea that the child also has destructive wishes that must be faced and dispelled. This, Bettelheim

argues, is not to be done by pretending children just do not entertain such thoughts:

Parents who wish to deny that their child has murderous wishes and wants to tear things and even people into pieces believe that their child must be prevented from engaging in such thoughts (as if this were possible). By denying access to stories which implicitly tell the child that others have the same fantasies, he is left to feel that he is the only one who imagines such things. This makes his fantasies really scary. On the other hand, learning that others have the same or similar fantasies makes us feel that we are a part of humanity, and allay our fear that having such destructive ideas has put us beyond the common pale. (ibid.: 122)

He expresses, in addition, his perplexity about why since the 1960s well-educated parents have tabooed fairy tales for their children on the grounds that they could affect them negatively at the time when psychoanalysis "made them aware that, far from being innocent, the mind of the young child is filled with anxious, angry, destructive imaginings" (ibid.: 122). As I see it, the outlawing of fairy tales by educated parents is an unconscious reaction partly against the reality uncovered by psychoanalysis but also against the reality that Freud refused to reveal, namely, that abusive parents were the real monsters in children's lives. Fairy tales often suggest that this is indeed the case or put the child in a position in which it is 'rightly' terrorized by an adult or a non-human monster because it has transgressed a norm set up by adults. It might well be that the horror of fairy tales helps the child cope with the tensions between what it sees and what adults say there is and not necessarily with its emotional growth in Oedipal terms, as Bettelheim argues.

Contemporary literary fiction for children tries to follow a less violent model than fairy tales - though this is obviously not the case in the TV series (cartoons or live action) that children favour most and that for some unknown reason have not been so thoroughly scrutinized for political correctness. My supposition is that books are taken more seriously as educative tools, while TV, films, comics and other forms of entertainment for young children are seen as mere entertainment, more devoid of educational values. In any case, a quick glance at any TV guide anywhere in the Western world and Japan reveals that almost all - not to say all - the programmes for children deal with monsters, and that these monsters may be friendly (the type Bettelheim regarded as ineffective as far as the psychological development of the child is concerned) or extremely

aggressive. The same can be said of comics for children. While many have expressed a concern about the extreme violence of some types of fiction for children, few seem to have wondered why the friendly and the unfriendly monsters play such an important role in the imaginary universe of childhood and why their presence is usually taken for granted. There is no scope in this dissertation to answer this question but it seems obvious to me that since the present study deals with monstrosity in fiction for adults, it would best be complemented by a study of the monster in children's fiction.

Rather than refer to the fulfilment of subconscious needs in the child, cultural critics writing about literature for children refer more often to the adults' conscious purpose of socialising the child through the model offered by written fiction. As John Stephens (1992: 8) remarks "children's fiction belongs firmly within the domain of cultural practices which exist for the purpose of socializing their target audience." Children's fiction, he adds, intends explicitly to foster in the reader a positive appreciation of a given set of moral and ethical values and of a sense of what is valuable in the culture's past, present and future. Nicholas Tucker (1981: 197) describes popular literature for children as a compromise between the adults' expectations that it will reflect sanctioned moral values and the child's expectation that it will include some "reflection of their unsocialised, less acceptable feelings". Tucker observes that the most successful children's literature is that which manages to satisfy the parents and the educators with its appropriate teachings but also that which pleases the child with a seemingly subversive discourse.

The more realistic literature written for children with the purpose of explaining reality to them seems, in principle, unrelated to the ancient oral tradition of fairy tales, yet both are in fact inextricably bound. Realistic fiction for children tried to take a more prominent place at a time when the banning of certain issues in children's fiction, and especially in politically incorrect fairy tales, was controversial:

Censorship in children's books first became an issue with the growth of the 'new realism' of the 1960s, for when the veil of 'protective optimism' was lifted, and writers moved away from the mythological, historical or middle-class settings which had been traditional in children's fiction, then whole areas of life which had never featured

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before in children's fiction became important in the plotting and character of stories.  
(Barry: 1994, 232)

Ursula K. LeGuin, writing about the same issue in the middle 1970s, refers to these new realistic, politically correct stories for children as "problem books", that is to say, books that present conflicts of real life as easy-to-solve puzzles. *That*, she argues, "is escapism, that posing evil as a 'problem', instead of what it is: all the pain and suffering and waste and loss and injustice we will meet all our lives long, and must face and cope with over and over and over, and admit, and live with, in order to live human lives at all" (1989b: 58). Like Bettelheim, she defends the use of fantasy for children, though she does so following Jungian and not Freudian ideas. The situation is now seemingly in transition towards a new model of children's fiction. Although Victor Watson (1992: 18) argues that what has come to the foreground in recent fiction for children are "the embarrassment and taboos of the contemporary western world " among which he lists poverty, inner-city despair, racial violence, conservation, death in various forms, and personal issues associated with sexuality, the fact is that the vast majority of books for children still deal with traditional subjects. It is certainly true that the new stories are more politically correct - although this has also forced many authors to assume a high degree of self-censorship - and that horrific monsters face the competition of friendly monsters, but there is still tension between the defenders and the detractors of absolute political correctness in children's fiction. In a review of books for children, Nicolette Jones (1994a) notes that after the onslaught of the PC brigade, the needs of the child are winning the battle over the needs of the adults and that the best books are those which "blur the distinction between children's and adult's fiction, because they refuse to condescend or compromise". The pendulum seems to be swinging back from the 'safe' stories Bettelheim denounced as actually unsafe in 1975 to a greater acceptance of the pleasure children find in stories many adults would deem unsuitable.

This panorama may nonetheless be too optimistic as doubts are being voiced about the direction that children's literature is to take in the future in a world dominated by aural-visual media

such as TV and film. Nicolette Jones suggests that the problem of the suitability of books to children's needs is aggravated by the fact that parents "buying books for children are always looking back at their own childhood, and most children's books are published in a small time-warp" (1994b: 7) or indeed, following fashions - such as the merchandising attached to films, especially Disney's - that treat the child as potential consumer rather than as the target of an educational message. In Jones' view, it is important to note that the child may easily express his or her preference for products to which s/he has direct access (TV series and cartoons) or indirect access through advertising (films and video-games mainly) but that adults usually act as intermediaries between the child and the book. Consider, for instance, the phenomenon of the unexpected, extraordinary success of the Japanese TV cartoon series *Bola de Drac-Z* in Catalunya, around which children have built a veritable cult that has led to the publication of the Japanese comics based on the series - first circulated as photocopies - and the marketing of endless items of merchandising. Imagining that a similar phenomenon might be built around a book for children would seem, quite simply, impossible. This is why Jacqueline Rose sees children's literature as a body of literature that aims to take the children *in*, as the child always remains an outsider to the process of writing and buying it.

Children's fiction is impossible, not in the sense that it cannot be written (that would be nonsense), but in that it hangs on an impossibility, one which it rarely ventures to speak. This is the impossible relation between adult and child. Children's fiction is clearly about that relation, but it has the remarkable characteristic of being about something which it hardly ever talks of. Children's fiction sets up a world in which the adult comes first (author, maker, giver) and the child comes after (reader, product, receiver), but where neither of them enters the space in between. (op. cit.: 1)

The enormous appeal of films, comics, video-games or television is, thus, partly based on the fact that children can access these narrative media more easily, often much to the dislike of parents and educators. These often feel incapable of controlling the exposure of children to horrific material that is intended for adults and that may harm the children's minds, hence the demand for censorship in fiction for adults and of self-censorship in fiction for children. Yet, the fact is that the

monsters of fairy tales and the monsters of adult horror fiction are basically the same, for the adults producing fiction about monsters for other adults frequently draw their inspiration from childhood fears. Stephen King summarises this point best when he writes in *Danse Macabre* that "the job of the fantasy-horror writer is to make you, for a little while, a child again" (op. cit.: 456).

Cultural critics like Noël Carroll and Sabine Büssing offer more ambiguous explanations of the difference between adult horror and fairy tale. Carroll admits that "virtually the same monster - in terms of its appearance - can figure in both a work of horror and a fairy tale" (op. cit.: 53) but he distinguishes between horror stories in which characters react with fear to the monster, for it violates their conceptual scheme, and fairy tales in which the monster is accepted as an ordinary part of an extraordinary world that elicits wonder rather than fear. Büssing comments on a similar point: horror fiction arouses a deeper emotional reaction in the reader/viewer because "after all, the characters of horror fiction are infinitely closer to real life" (op. cit.: xviii). In contrast, the hero of fairy tale is not astonished by the presence of the monster, as it does not contravene the rules of the marvellous world the hero inhabits. However, either explanation seems to me clearly insufficient. In both fairy tales for children (and other genres of children's fiction) and horror fiction for adults there is an intention to force the reader into a confrontation with fear embodied in the monster. What marks the difference is the author's awareness of the limits of tolerance of his or her audience. An author writing for adults will acknowledge no other limits than those the imagination can dictate (naturally bound by the conventions of the cultural context or by censorship) while an author writing for children will bear a different set of limitations in mind. This is why it is so difficult to decide what is suitable for children and what is not, since this necessarily depends on how mature a particular child is. A different matter is how to control the exposure of young children to material that is not suitable for them. Ideally, this should be a matter of individual needs and levels of tolerance to be supervised by the child's parents on the basis of adequate information provided by boards of classification and not of censorship. The protection of the innocent child has been the excuse traditionally invoked by the defenders of censorship to impose restrictions on films for adults, with

the argument that, since the access of children to films for adults cannot be totally curtailed, it is better to censor those films for everybody.<sup>1</sup> But while a great deal of controversy is periodically stirred up by the censorship imposed on fiction for adults on behalf of the moral protection of children, few people seem to note that fiction for children - especially films for children - contains doses of violence and horror that is hardly ever questioned by censors but that might be potentially more harmful - if that is the word - for children.

I am not defending, in any case, the need to censor children's fiction. What I am questioning is the arbitrariness of the standards used to define whether certain scenes in films can be tolerated by children and the fact that parents are not really well informed about the criteria used to classify films (or, for that matter, books for children). Obviously, children do not form part of the boards of classification which exist in all countries; this means that film examiners are forced to work on assumptions based on the work of child psychologists, parents and educators associations, and not on concrete evidence proving how children react to certain scenes<sup>2</sup>. It might well be that what an adult thinks would be intolerable for a child raises less anxieties than is supposed in the child and that, on the contrary, scenes deemed unproblematic by an adult could be shocking for a child.

Henry Selick and Tim Burton's *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993) and Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* (1993) are two films that should be considered in the discussion of where the limits of the tolerable are for children. Concerned parents have reacted against some of the scenes of Selick and Burton's film, which is a stop-motion film made with animated puppets rather than live action. The film exploits the mixture of delight and horror that children enjoy on Halloween and centres basically on the Gothic Halloweentown, whose inhabitants are an assorted bunch of

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<sup>1</sup>The uses of the 'innocent child' to establish political censorship in comics are analyzed in Barker (1984d) and Sabin (1993). Both offer information especially on the 1950s campaign against comics. In reference to the 1984 campaign against the 'video-nasties' see Barker (1984a, 1984b and 1984c).

<sup>2</sup>The ages taken into account in different countries to mark the dividing line between the adult and the child are most varied: in Spain films are rated U (universal), NRC7 (not recommended for children under 7), NRC13, NRC 18 and R18; Norway distinguishes between films for children under 5, under 10 and under 15; Britain has categories of classification for audiences under 6, 12, 15 and 18.

monsters, including the hero Jake (an animated skeleton), his girlfriend (a rag doll who is constantly splitting her seams) and three mischievous children who collaborate in kidnapping Santa Claus. The genre of the film (it is a musical) and Disney's support - the film was distributed by Disney but it is actually an independent production - guaranteed the success of the film among children proving that, as Burton and Selick correctly intuited, a scary story can also be lovely. Furthermore, like the more recent *Toy Story* (1995), *The Nightmare before Christmas* drew to the cinemas not only children but also an audience of adults, enticed by the elaborate animation techniques and by Burton's reputation. Yet, some parents expressed their concern for the effects of scenes such as the one in which several children open the horrific Christmas presents that Jake Skellington has brought them to find, among other things, a severed head. The film acquired a reputation for being just on the verge of what is tolerable for a child - a reputation possibly enhanced by the use of the word nightmare in the title, which seems to point to a connection between this film and the popular *Nightmare on Elm Street* series - and did not attract the habitually massive crowds drawn by other Disney films<sup>1</sup>.

The case of Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* illustrates the ideological vagaries surrounding the child in its role as spectator. Steven Spielberg has produced or directed a number of films, such as the very famous *E.T.: The Extraterrestrial*, *Pokey* (directed by Tobe Hooper), or *Empire of the Sun*, than can be described as narratives of the encounter between a monster and a child. However, the fact that children often appear in his films does not mean that all his films are apt for children, as is often said. This confusion has worked in his favour in *Jurassic Park*, whose merchandising has appealed, above all, to children's well-known fondness for the figure of the monstrous dinosaur. In fact, it could be said that Spielberg's very successful film has transformed the already popular dinosaurs

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<sup>1</sup>In fact, Disney seems to enjoy a certain immunity against the criticism of its products. Even though I have referred to Susan Jeffords' interpretation of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, outside the academia few voices - if any - are raised against Disney, possibly because its implacable marketing of its products is enough to drown any other voice. Yet, *The Lion King*, the star Disney film of the 1993-94 season, is certainly questionable in many fronts: it reproduces patriarchal, sexist stereotypes and, what is worse, it perpetuates a totally unrealistic vision of animal behaviour - which is, of course, typical of animated cartoons for children - when in fact it has been marketed as a product that helps children love nature.



into the favourite monsters of the 1990s children. Yet the novel by Michael Crichton on which the film is based is by no means a book for children, though it partly focuses on two children, the girl Alex and her brother Tim. What is more, the film contains truly harrowing chase scenes in which the monstrous dinosaurs are clearly intent on devouring Tim and Alex as well as other explicit scenes, including one in which the children witness how an adult is attacked and devoured by a carnivorous dinosaur and which is comparable in its degree of violence to many scenes in slasher films. All children can understand a fantastic story about Halloween while only a few can grasp the meaning of Crichton's cautionary tale. Yet parents seem to have blindly trusted Spielberg, who has a reputation for knowing how to produce family entertainment, whereas Burton's Gothic version of Halloween has been somewhat mistrusted. This proves that audiences do not follow homogeneous patterns of behaviour when deciding whether the content of a film is suitable for children and that potential objections can be pre-empted by the film director's reputation and by good marketing strategies.

As happens in *Jurassic Park*, child actors have been frequently employed in horrific scenes of contemporary films, either as monsters or as victims of their encounter with the monster. The paradox is that child actors appearing in films strictly for adults are not old enough to be allowed to see these films in a cinema. Taking into account the arguments vented in the debate about censorship in the UK, especially as regards the 1984 'video-nasties' campaign, it might be thought that child actors inevitably suffer from an important emotional strain when playing such roles and that their parents should be held responsible for exposing them to such psychological damage. Yet this does not seem to be the case. Harvey Stevens, who played the evil child Damien in *The Omen* when he was just six, corroborates that no harm is done to the child actor. "It didn't really affect me. I wasn't really sure what was going on. The acting wasn't exactly difficult. Usually I just stood there and the director told me what to do. I think it was the green eyes that did it" (Moviestore, 1995a). Carrie Henn, who played the role of the courageous nine-year-old Newt in

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*Aliens*, recalls how "the crew were always trying to scare me, but they couldn't. I never got scared until I saw the movie - even though I knew what was coming" (Moviestore, 1995b). To the question of whether her parents were worried about the violence and the offensive language of the film, Henn replies with a certain irony that she had heard worse at school.

As Henn herself points out, there is an obvious difference between taking part in the film and watching it, yet one cannot help wondering how children are instructed to perform scenes which involve make-up and special effects designed to scare audiences and also whether parents are not somehow exploiting their children by allowing them to perform in horror films. Both Harvey Stephens and Carrie Henn were children without previous acting experience whose parents accepted on their behalf the money offered for their collaboration in the films. Their satisfaction with the experience of having made the film jars badly, however, with the evident displeasure of the child appearing in a scene of the documentary *The Making of Bram Stoker's Dracula*. Francis Ford Coppola, the film's director, is seen patiently calming the little girl - possibly under the age of two - who plays the vampire Lucy's first victim. Impressed by actress Sadie Frost's characterization as Lucy, which involves a formidable set of fangs, the teary-eyed child refuses at first to play the scene until Coppola and her mother persuade her that it is just a game. Watching the little girl in tears striving to please her mother by letting Lucy hold her tight in her arms seemed to me a potentially more horrific scene than the one in which she is involved in the film, since such a young child could by no means understand the meaning of the 'game' she was being asked to play.

Another young actor, Miko Hughes, appears in *Wes Craven's New Nightmare* (1994), a film which deals with the triangle formed by the child, his mother and the monster, Freddy Krueger, in his latest screen appearance. The plot refers to the issue of how parents can best protect their children against the presence of the monster by suggesting that since the exposure of the child to some form of fictional horror is inevitable, parents had better help the child face it and overcome it. Five-year-old Dylan is the son of a special effects technician who works in the new Freddy Krueger

film - the screenplay follows the motif of the film within the film - and of 'Heather Langenkampf', the horror film actress who played the fifteen-year-old heroine Nancy in the first Freddy Krueger film and who appears in the new film as a fictional version of herself. 'Heather' has taken special care to prevent Dylan from seeing any of her films, despite his parents' close relationship with horror films. So concerned is she about the influence they might exert on him that she has decided to reject the role of Nancy in Wes Craven's new film about Freddy. However, this has not prevented her from allowing Dylan to enjoy fairy tales especially since, despite her dislike of their horrific content, the child obviously relishes them. The film implies that a child may perhaps be isolated from horror films for adults but that it is simply not possible to cut him or her off from the rich tradition of the fairy tale and that nothing at all is gained by making the child see how horrific fairy tales maybe.

Eventually Freddy Krueger himself enters Heather's life and starts persecuting the child, first terrorising him with images of the old film suddenly appearing on the TV screen and then seemingly possessing him. Since Dylan lacks the frame of reference provided by horror films he identifies Freddy with the figure he fears most, the witch who threatens Hansel and Gretel in his favourite fairy tale. This means that throughout the episode in which Heather descends to Freddy's hell in search of her child three stories are being narrated simultaneously. First, the story of the harassed mother who agrees to play Nancy once more to save her child. This corresponds to the subplot of the film dealing with the postmodernist tenet that fantasy and reality merge inescapably. Second, a horror story which retakes the subject and the characters of the first *Nightmare on Elm Street*, a film for teenagers; and, third, a horrific version of "Hansel and Gretel". The film deals, in addition, with the defeat of the patriarchal monster who has murdered the husband and father, and who is finally vanquished by the combined efforts of a mother and her son. Their victory over Freddy implies that much is to be gained by considering horror for adults and horror for children as part of the same cultural space rather than as separate territories. Only by avoiding the demonisation of violence and the monster and by understanding that the excessive protection of

the child can be as harmful as its excessive exposure to fictional horror can a proper balance be achieved.

After this brief survey it must be concluded that in the last two decades parents have assumed in the UK, the USA and by extension the Western world and Japan, contradictory positions as far as the relationship between the child and the representation of monstrosity in fiction is concerned. Never before had children lived in a cultural atmosphere where the monster occupied such a conspicuous position; never before had parents debated the consequences of the child's exposure to the monster of fiction. A distinct conclusion can be inferred from the different cases I have examined: the capitalist system rather than educational interests explains why the universe of the child living in the 1980s and 1990s has been invaded by the monster. The discussion of the contents of children's books and the demand for censorship are in fact secondary issues in a cultural context dominated by narrative media in the service of capitalist business. What determines eventually how parents choose the multimedia narratives most children consume - including films, comics, video-games, toys and other items of merchandising - is advertising targeted at children. In a sense, the parents become the accomplices of a system that regards children mainly as consumers and that invalidates all the attempts at setting a homogeneous system of standards to guide the child in its choice. There are presumably few differences in the mechanism used to exploit the monster in children's fiction and in adult fiction: what counts in both cases is that the consumer is attracted by images that fascinate because they are extraordinary; the constant renewal of those images ensures that the market is kept alive, hence their proliferation. Nevertheless, parents are also accomplices of the capitalist system in a much more ambiguous sense. Some parents are struggling to impose political correctness in fiction for children - even in all kinds of fiction with the pretext that children could be harmed by intolerable texts; others living in the same Western societies are allowing their children to appear in fantasy films (horrific or not) either as monsters, that is to say, as objects of paedophobic, sadistic fantasies or as victims persecuted by horrific monsters - for money. Without bearing these facts in

mind it is not possible to understand the contradictions which Western societies - and especially the UK and the USA - are incurring when representing the child and the monster.

### 8.2.2. *The Child and the Monster*

#### 8.2.2.1. *The Child and the Irredeemable Monster*

In this section I examine a number of films and novels for adults in which a child confronts a monster. In most of these texts the child assumes a position independent from that of the parents because they are missing, because they are abusing the child or because the relationship with the monster has replaced to a certain extent the relationship with the parents. The first subsection encompasses the texts in which the child opposes an evil monster that must be destroyed because there is no possible redemption for it, and also texts in which the children increasingly adopt new signs of identity different from those of the ordinary child. The second subsection deals with texts in which the encounter with the monster - often acting as a surrogate father - is presented as a positive step in the emotional development of the child and in which the child's affection redeems to a certain extent the monster from his fallen state.

Stephen King's *It* (1986) is a most thorough portrait of the collision between the child and the evil monster. *It* is based on the idea that children know better than adults how to recognize the monsters of real life due to their familiarity with the monsters of their private fears, a familiarity that adults are eventually forced to lose and can only be regained - only partially - when enjoying horror fiction. Three different lines are welded together in its plot: the story of the confrontation of a group of seven children with the monster 'It' that terrorizes their town Derry, the stories of each of these seven lives and the story of the reunion of those same seven children - now grown-ups - for a second battle with the monster twenty-seven years after the first. The second encounter requires them to regain their lost childhood selves and to retrieve from their lost memories of the events their lost capacity to believe not only in the monster but also in their power to defeat it.

As I have previously noted in Chapter 7, 'It' is a shape-shifter that takes the form the

beholder fears most. Ben, Mike, Stan, George, Eddie, Richie and Beverly are initially drawn together because they share the secret experience of having seen 'It', each in a form particularly suited to their family circumstances, their early childhood traumas or the imaginary horrors they enjoy in fiction. However, when the individual encounter with the monster takes place, four of these children are already enduring the attacks of another kind of monster. Ben, Eddie and Mike are being mercilessly persecuted by the school bully, Henry, himself a badly abused child; Eddie is in addition the victim of an overprotective mother and Beverly the victim of her father's sexual abuse. The cathartic confrontation and final destruction of 'It' is, then, the end of a psychological therapy for all that is not dissimilar to the psychoanalytical therapy undergone by the victims of child abuse: unearthing the memories of the confrontation with the monster means also unearthing the memories of abuse that have conditioned their lives. The call to face 'It' again forces them all out of their particular cocoons: the fantastic monster serves the purpose of giving the children's grown-up selves a new sense of direction in their difficult lives and is also the excuse for a return to a time when intimate, personal problems could be discussed and solved. This is why, once each has solved his or her traumas, they can leave Derry and forget this second meeting with the monster in peace.

'It' is a protean creature that represents well the enormous terrors children often conceal from their elders, including their fear of them. This monster is inextricably bound to the secret fears of each child but it is also bound to Derry. Although the monster is explained by King as an alien entity that arrived in Earth much before the foundation of the town, 'It' has been given life thanks to the emotional nourishment 'It' has taken from the dark sides of Derry's inhabitants. Strange violent incidents like lynchings and massacres take place in the town in regular cycles that coincide with the monster's taking of a number of children, as if the adults were unwittingly paying with their offspring for their 'right' to enjoy the dark pleasures of exerting unbounded violence against other adults. However, like the children, the town has chosen to forget its involvement in such acts and must subconsciously delegate in their terrorized but courageous children the task of unearthing the

demonic fiend. Unlike the adults, the children have a greater experience with fear in their daily lives, for they know it first hand from their terrible encounters with the school bullies and even with their parents. This makes it easier for them to believe in an even greater monster, which is precisely why 'It' chooses them as targets. As one of them, Mike, reflects as a grown-up:

... who is more capable of a total act of faith than a child?

But there's a problem: kids grow up. In the church, power is perpetuated and renewed by periodic ritualistic acts. In Derry, power seems to be perpetuated and renewed by periodic ritualistic acts, too. Can it be that It protects itself by the simple fact that, as the children grow into the adults, they become either incapable of faith or crippled by a sort of spiritual and imaginative arthritis? (p. 879)

This is the central point in the relationship between the child and the monster: the child believes, while the adult does not and is afraid that believing will make him or her seem childish. However, growing up does not mean that the monster disappears: it lies buried under Derry or in the subconscious until it erupts without warning, demanding a radical therapy. As Bettelheim argues and as *It* also argues, children know better than adults may imagine how to cope with fear as they are not yet encumbered with the knowledge that fear may be unendurable and lead to psychosis or downright madness. At the end of *It* the monster has been destroyed, though not before having claimed two victims: Stan who commits suicide rather than face 'It' and Eddie, who succumbs to 'It' because he has not overcome in his own life his childhood ghosts. Yet since the five remaining adults start forgetting what they have done as soon as they leave Derry, this defeat does not guarantee that the monster will not return: there will always be new children ready to believe, there will always be new adults ready to take their pleasure in violence with the help of the hidden monster. Significantly, the only member of the original group who remains in Derry is Mike, who becomes the custodian of his friends' precious memories and, in his capacity as Derry's head librarian, of all the documentary memories that prove how intimate the relationship between 'It' and Derry is.

The same obsession that moves Mike to gather the scraps of memory proving that, like most mythological monsters, 'It' is a monster bound to its environment as much as to the individual

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and the collective consciousness of those who live near it, also guides Jack Torrance, the protagonist of King's *The Shining* (1977). In a sense, *It* retells on a massive scale the story of *The Shining*, which was written almost ten years earlier. Instead of focusing on seven children, the adults of a town and the monster that haunts the town, *The Shining* centers only on the relationship between Jack, his son Danny and a third evil entity that possesses Jack and that is located in the Overlook Hotel where Jack is employed as a caretaker for the winter and where the Torrance family are to remain snowbound for months. Like Beverley in *It*, Danny is split in two regarding his abusive father: both Bev and Danny strive to keep their intense love for their respective fathers despite the evidence of abuse and believe that the desperate, violent father who abuses them is a representative (or himself a victim) of a much more powerful form of evil monstrosity. In both cases the supernatural monster eventually assumes the father's shape and erases him from the child's life, marking the impossibility of redeeming the father.

*The Shining* is the story of a family man desperately trying to control his dark side. Jack lives engrossed in his own frustrations as his alcoholism and his violent temper gradually make his professional, financial and emotional situation almost unbearable. King makes Jack initially responsible for the impending collapse of his family life but the novel turns out to be finally an ambivalent vindication of the innocence of the father. The explanation that Jack was abused as a child by his own father, which King inserts in the novel to justify why Jack ill-treats his wife Wendy and their child Danny, seems nevertheless insufficient for King himself, hence the introduction of the supernatural monster that possesses Jack's soul. Wendy's role is secondary precisely because King discusses through the confrontation between father and son whether the male children of abusive fathers must necessarily become the abusers of their own children. In *The Shining* King had not yet found the more sober, realistic tone of *Dolores Claiborne* (1992), a novel in which child abuse is dealt with from the perspective of the mother who kills her husband in revenge for his having sexually abused their teenage daughter. Since King supposes that Jack's weaknesses make him an easy target for the monstrous entity lurking in the Overlook Hotel, the



plot is ineluctably presented as a fantastic process of exorcism in which Danny's paranormal abilities play a major role. An average child as young as Danny can do nothing to resist the violence of the father, but Danny is no average child, which is the reason why he can successfully confront the evil side of his father and survive the father's destruction without psychological harm. Danny is gifted with the ability to see flashes of the past and with a milder ability to read minds - a combined ability that Dick Halloran, the black cook of the Overlook Hotel who senses it in Danny, calls 'the shining'. Danny counts, in addition, on the help of an imaginary playmate called Tony (actually Danny's future self) that can warn him of the dangers he will find in the Overlook.

The atmospheric film adaptation of King's novel by Stanley Kubrick (1980) does not respect the two basic premises of the novel - first, that Jack is not mad but a typical case of abused child who becomes an abusive husband and father and, second, that he is clearly possessed by the malignant spirit of the place. Instead, Kubrick offers a more confused portrait of Jack as a psychotic madman and eschews altogether the issue of how Jack himself contributes to the destruction of the malignant spirit before dying. Kubrick's Jack, played by Jack Nicholson in a performance notorious for his overacting, is terrifying because he is a relentless monster of destruction, inspired by the eerie atmosphere of the hotel and by the example of Jack's predecessor, Grady, who had killed his wife and children in a bout of madness. In contrast, King's Jack is a pitiable monster, a man whose life moves from his monstrous father to his monstrous self and, ultimately, to the monstrous embrace of the hotel. The horror of his story is that he is well aware of his fall and, above all, of the maddening possibility that his son will eventually become a victim of his own inner monstrosity.

The tragedy of the Torrances is that they are trapped by a place that, as Tony tells Danny, is an inhuman place that makes humans into monsters. So important is the sense of place and history that in his analysis of *The Shining* Fredric Jameson simply ignores all references to the question of abuse to center instead on Kubrick's retelling of King's novel as a narrative about the pull of the historical rather than the personal past. According to Jameson (1990: 90), Jack "is

possessed neither by the devil as such nor by a "devil" or some analogous occult force, but rather simply by History, by the American past as it has left its sedimented traces in the corridors and dismembered suites". Jack's possession by the past - the 1920s in the film, the hotel's whole history in the novel - is read by Jameson as a subversion of democratic, liberal values signified by the "nostalgia for hierarchy and domination allegorized in Jack Nicholson's "possession" by the still Veblenesque social system in the 1920s" (ibid.: 96).

Indeed, the hotel's resident evil spirit chooses to seduce Jack with the hallucination of the splendid 1945 party in which Jack meets Grady and with the scrapbook containing information on the history of the hotel that diverts Jack's attention away from the play he is writing to inspire him with a new subject. Yet personal history surfaces in the novel as a much more important issue than national history: in a sense Danny is contributing to the list of historical events witnessed by the hotel with his lucid understanding of why the American patriarchal father must be forgiven and destroyed so as to allow the survival of the woman and the child that he has victimized. But the main issue at stake is why literature, the channel Jack has chosen to transcend his personal past and to pass onto history, cannot redeem him. Jack's literary ambitions are crucial in the relationship with his child and may have been introduced by King into the text precisely to undermine the idea that the place of man in history - if only in literary history - is more important than his place in his own family. In fact, the incident in which Jack beats Danny takes place when the child - then only two - spoils the manuscript of Jack's first play. Even though Wendy thinks that writing means "slowly closing a huge door on a roomful of monsters" (p. 116), writing is what alienates father and son, for Jack finally sees his responsibility as husband and father as a burden that will not let him soar towards the place in history that he thinks he deserves. Presumably, what King criticizes in the monstrous Jack is his inability to make the personal and the historical compatible and Jack's wrong assumption that he deserves a place in literary history as compensation for having being deprived of his place as a beloved son in his personal story.

*The Shining* shifts the burden of the monstrous man's redemption from the woman

saviour to the child saviour. When the final confrontation between Danny and the possessed Jack takes place, the child must forgive the sins of the father and transfer his blame onto the place, opening a route of escape away from Hell for Jack's soul. "You're it, not my daddy," Danny shouts at the monster possessing his father's body, "... and when you get what you want, you won't give my daddy anything because you're selfish. And my daddy knows that" (p. 398). In his desperate attempt at exculpating Jack, Danny even tells the monster that it was responsible for making Jack an alcoholic, when in fact Jack's alcoholism started years before he entered the hotel. Danny's courageous resistance to the monster lets Jack, the loving father, resurface for a last good-bye, which presumably signifies Jack's redemption: "suddenly his daddy was there, looking at him in mortal agony, and a sorrow so great that Danny's heart flamed within his chest" (p. 399). The death of Jack's body allows Danny to finally face the demon that has possessed his father, "a strange, shifting composite, many faces mixed imperfectly into one" (p. 400) which is similar to 'It' and also to the Devil in *Swan Song*. The novel ends fittingly with the destruction of the hotel, caused by the explosion of a faulty boiler Jack has neglected despite his employer's warning that it might cause a catastrophe, and thus with the exorcism of the Overlook monsters. Wendy and Danny flee to the warm sun of Florida with the cook Halloran, who has come to their rescue and who occupies somehow Jack's place as Danny's surrogate father, everyone having seemingly already forgotten Jack.

Freddy Krueger himself plays the role of the irredeemable, abusive father in the sixth instalment of the series, *Freddy's Dead: The Final Nightmare* (1991), the film that preceded *Wes Craven's New Nightmare* in the series. In this film, the only one of the series directed by a woman, Rachel Talalay, Freddy is provided with a family life and a daughter. His representation as an abusive husband rounds off his image as a criminal child abuser and murderer. Thus the plot concerns the appalling discovery made by Maggie, a psychologist who works in a home for problematic teenagers, that her father is Krueger himself. The motif of the repressed childhood memories recovered by the adult is used to explain how Maggie remembers that she witnessed at a very

young age how Freddy killed her mother for having transgressed his injunction never to enter the secret cellar workshop, where he keeps mementoes of his young victims. Freddy also appears in the film as the father of Tracy, one of the teenagers under Maggie's care, who has run away from home so as to prevent her father from further abusing her sexually. While Freddy easily eliminates the weaker teenage boys that accompany Tracy - and who are also victims of abuse - Talalay presents both Tracy and Maggie as strong women quite capable of facing Freddy. No doubt, the scene in which Tracy beats up Freddy in her father's disguise may fulfil the fantasies of many abused teenagers. Likewise, Maggie's final triumph over Freddy both reinforces the image of the woman saviour and acts as a wish-fulfilment fantasy for those adults once abused or simply neglected by their parents who cannot find in real life such emphatic methods of revenge.

The child victimized by abusive adults is also the focal point of V.C. Andrews's best-selling novel *Flowers in the Attic* (1979), a peculiar neo-Gothic novel that has a few intriguing points in common with Ian McEwan's *The Cement Garden* (1978). Both deal with a group of four siblings - two teenagers, a boy and a girl, and two younger children, also a boy and a girl - who must face a new, bizarre kind of life on their own that leads to incest between the elder boy and girl. Themselves the product of incest between their mother and her uncle, the Dollanganger children of *Flowers in the Attic* start behaving in an abnormal way when they become prisoners under their callous grandmother's care, with the connivance of their mother, who wants to keep them hidden until she becomes her stern, rich father's heiress. This gloomy story about these sweet, pretty, American children neglected by their monstrous yet beautiful mother for the sake of money is, however, not so different from the story of the four working-class British children in McEwan's novel. They are left on their own when they decide not to notify the death of their widowed mother to the authorities so as to avoid their feared separation. Yet, the crucial difference is that while McEwan's children are, if not monstrous, at least unnatural, prolonging into their new freedom the strange, sexual games they already played when the mother was alive, Andrews's children discover sexuality and incest almost naturally in a highly unnatural situation, though they were

initially little less than angelic.

The imprisoned children of *Flowers in the Attic* become monstrous when in their isolation they inevitably commit the sin that their fanatical grandmother had warned them never to commit. They do so, however, within the logic of a situation that is horrific and in which they literally have no freedom at all. In contrast, McEwan's children are monstrous because they are free from all parental constraints, though their freedom leads them to the same situation of incest as Andrews's children. Interestingly, while *Flowers in the Attic* ends with the three remaining siblings finally running away from their Gothic mansion, the elders still thinking of a future together as a couple, *The Cement Garden* concludes with the children's being deprived of their freedom to return to the ordinary world of childhood. Both novels center on the sexuality of children, more specifically of young teenagers, presenting it from an ambiguous point of view: the incestuous relationship between brother and sister seems natural given the circumstances, yet it is nonetheless presented as a sin or an abnormality in absolute terms. The adult novelists use it to shock adults readers into a new awareness of the image of the child and its sexuality but do so by emphasizing the lack of adult tutelage on the children and by offering a portrait of children that while being sympathetic suggests, nonetheless, that all children have a potentially monstrous side inevitably evinced by abuse or neglect. In the texts in which the confrontation with the monster fulfils the child's thirst for revenge, this monstrous side is controlled by the very emotional satisfaction of having destroyed its roots. When children drift away from the rules of adult society they do not repeat the patterns of abuse but become, nonetheless, unnatural.

#### 8.2.2.2. *The Child and the Redeemable Monster.*

The relationship of the child with a monstrous father figure that replaces the dead father is the subject of three idiosyncratic films: Mel Gibson's *The Man without a Face* (1993), Luc Besson's *Léon* (1995) and James Cameron's *The Terminator 2* (1991). The three of them narrate stories in which a prepubescent child gains the sympathy of a monster who is then forced out of his

particular shell in order to protect the child from the threat posed by other adults. The three stories are rites of passage for the child who enters adulthood, somewhat prematurely, after the encounter with the sympathetic monster. The three films end, likewise, with the inescapable sacrifice of the strong bond between child and monster<sup>1</sup>. In addition, both Gibson and Besson discuss - though from rather opposite points of view - aspects of the sexuality of the young teenager evinced by his or her close relationship with the monster. While Gibson's film denounces the paranoiac tarring of all men as potential abusers and vindicates the idea that children and men may enjoy a perfectly innocent friendship, Besson's film presents a paradoxically erotic yet innocent young girl for whom the monster is her first love.

Mel Gibson's screen adaptation of Isabelle Holland's novel *The Man without a Face* (1972) captures very well the characterization and mood of the original novel, set in the 1960s, but is radically different at the same time. The book is the story of young Chuck's acceptance of his budding homosexuality thanks to the friendship that the also homosexual Justin, a man in his mid-thirties, offers to him. Chuck, who is a fatherless boy, finds in Justin - an ex-teacher who tutors him one summer - the father figure who points to him the right way of understanding his own homosexuality and also a masculine presence he sorely needs in his world, harassed as he is by his mother and his two step-sisters. Holland's Justin symbolizes with his badly burnt face and his scarred body the negative effects of prejudice against homosexuals. He was once the innocent victim of an unfounded accusation of having sexually abused a young boy, who died in the car accident that disfigured him. Mel Gibson, well known for his conservative moral views, has kept intact Justin's physical appearance but has transformed him into a heterosexual man who has paid with the loss of his wife, his job and his ability to communicate with other people for a crime he never committed. Holland's story becomes in Gibson's hands not a tale about the happy, fulfilling friendship between two homosexuals of different ages but a tale about how impossible it is for a

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<sup>1</sup>This group is best rounded out with the Mexican film *Cronos* (1992), directed by Guillermo del Toro, in which a little girl - who remains silent throughout the film - calmly comes to term with the fact that her beloved grandfather is still himself despite having been turned into a vampire. When she finally reaches a decision and utters the only word she is heard to say in the film - "Grandfather" - her family life with him and her mother enters into a new, happy phase.

heterosexual man and a child to be friends without arousing everybody's suspicion.

Both the novel and the film emphasize the point that the figure of the father is indispensable for the harmonious growth of boys and for their successful passage into adulthood. Chuck has almost no memories of his father, a military pilot who died in Korea, but so strong is his idolisation of the absent father that he plans to follow in his footsteps, much to his mother's opposition, beginning by entering St. Matthew's, an exclusive, military boarding school. Chuck's dislike of Kitty, his mother, and his exaggerated misogyny are no doubt a sign of how much he misses his dead father but also of his intellectual blockage, for he is a poor achiever in a family of very intelligent women. The plot traces Chuck's discovery of two fundamental truths: first, thanks to Justin - who used to be a teacher in St. Matthew's and thus embodies proper masculinity for Chuck - he discovers that he is not intellectually inferior to his sisters but merely tormented by his own sense of inferiority. Second, his jealous stepsister Gloria, surprised by Chuck in bed with her boyfriend, punishes his transgression on her privacy by forcing Chuck to learn a more bitter truth: far from being a hero, his father was an alcoholic who abandoned the family and committed suicide. The failure of the mother, about to marry for the fifth time, to secure a proper stepfather for Chuck and her having kept the truth about her father a secret from Chuck alienate the boy from the women in his life and make him seek Justin's company.

However, just as Kitty made the mistake of not telling Chuck about his father's suicide, he makes the mistake of concealing his relationship with Justin from her, a mistake he later will have to pay dearly for. Chuck's choice of Justin as his tutor is complicated by two factors. On the one hand, Justin's flawed body, which is the symbol of the damaged status of masculinity, is both fascinating and repulsive to Chuck. The first step is, then, for him to overcome his fear of the monster and to progressively cease to see Justin's scars as their intimacy grows. However, Justin's inner scars run deeper and he is at first reluctant to assume his role as a father figure, afraid as he is of a repetition of his personal tragedy. When he agrees to tutor Chuck, Justin uses his disciplinary, conservative yet effective methods to maintain a certain emotional distance from

Chuck. But when Chuck's initial dislike for Justin's gruelling methods abates the distance between the man and the child collapses.

The turning point in their relationship comes, interestingly, when Justin fails to tell Chuck the whole truth about his secret. Although he reveals the truth about the accident, Justin conceals the fact that he had been accused of child abuse, fearing that Chuck could lose his trust in him and also that this would jeopardise the results of the entrance examination for St. Matthew's. Secrecy, nevertheless, breeds only sorrow. Chuck's anger with his mother when he discovers the truth about his father's death makes him run one night to Justin's house; when the police finds him there, Kitty's anger with Chuck for not having told her about Justin results in Justin's arrest on suspicion of having abused Chuck. Finally, Justin's concealment of his previous stay in prison because of the ugly accusations poured on him shatters the boy's trust in him. The boy has to cope simultaneously with the fact that his father abandoned him because he saw himself as a failure and felt he could not cope with the responsibility of a family, and with the suspicion that his new father is, likewise, a monster - a defaced man. But while the possibility of asking the father why he left Chuck has been impeded by death, Chuck still has a chance to learn the truth from Justin and, despite their forced separation, he feels that asking is the only way to feel respect again for Justin and also for himself as a man.

In the film, Justin asks Chuck to consider in one of his lessons the content of Shylock's speech about the humanity of the Jew in Shakespeare's *The Merchant's of Venice*. The importance of the ideas about deceptive appearances and the humanity of the marginalised man contained in Shylock's speech becomes evident during Justin's interrogation by a panel of experts who are trying to establish his guilt regarding Chuck. Gibson's Justin delivers then a passionate speech about how appearances always conceal the truth, refusing to protest his innocence, even though he knows that the prejudice against him is so strong. His version of Shylock's speech forms an interesting metafictional loop in the fabric of the film as Gibson, who plays himself the role of Justin, is an actor whose fame is based mainly on his attractive physical appearance. His



choosing to appear physically disfigured in his first film as a director can be read, thus, as a call for his audience to see the artist in him beneath the more or less attractive surface.

In the end, trust becomes the crucial concept of the film. Just as he has refused to declare his innocence to the panel of inquisitors, Justin refuses to answer Chuck's question about whether he was guilty of abuse. This scene that takes place when Chuck has already passed the exam and so secured his own place within the model of masculinity that he initially chose. If he trusted the teacher, Justin answers, Chuck must trust the man and overcome on his own the doubts about him. Trust and friendship survive the test but Justin is forced to put an end to their relationship for the sake of the child, despite Chuck's anger at the adults who are corrupting the meaning of their friendship. The film becomes, thus, an indictment of the narrow-mindedness of a system that allegedly protects the child but actually fails to understand his or her needs. It is, as well, a warning against the pervading, poisonous, politically correct attitude by which any man is suspect of abuse until the opposite is proven, if it stands a chance at all of being proven. Gibson's is finally, a film about men and about how many chances are being missed of having better men in the future, a point to which I will return later in my analysis of *The Terminator 2*, a film which sadly enough suggests that the proper father is an artificial man, since caring men like Justin are to be found nowhere.

Luc Besson's unconstrained portrayal of the relationship between twelve-year-old Matilda and her protector Léon, a professional assassin in his mid-thirties, differs much from the moderated tone of Gibson's *The Man without a Face*. Despite the American English spoken in the film and its location in New York, *Léon* is, no doubt, a European film that could only have been conceived within a culture like the French, much more at ease with the erotic potential of the figure of the child than the Anglo-Saxon culture. Both *Léon* and a recent French film, Jeunet and Caro's *The City of Lost Children* (1995), narrate a love story between a young prepubescent girl and an adult man which is certainly erotic without being necessarily perverse. It is certainly difficult to conceive

of an American film showing a scene similar to the one in Jeunet and Caro's film in which the young Miette and her protector - simply called One - are seen together in bed warming each other on a cold night, or to the one in which Matilda, impersonating Madonna in a game, exhibits herself in her underwear before the eyes of the astonished Léon. Obviously, Léon and One live in an imaginary realm in which they are not accountable for their behaviour before any court, while Gibson's Justin lives in a Puritan America obsessed with child abuse. The 1990s New York of *Léon* in which a hotel manager shows no concern for the welfare of Matilda when she claims that Léon is not her father, as she had pretended, but actually her lover, as she fantasises, belongs to a fantastic America made impossible by the work of another European, Vladimir Nabokov.

More than any other story, Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955) has made the image of the pubescent girl as an erotic object problematic. The diaries of the misogynistic, debauched Humbert Humbert suggest that only a monstrous pervert like him would be capable of distorting the image of a child to such extent. Yet, since no authorial voice contradicts Humbert's dubious statements about Lolita's immorality, his portrait of the nymphet Lolita as an experienced seductress has the effect of inevitably tarnishing the image of the (possibly totally) innocent girl. Is perversion, the reader is meant to wonder, the dream of the middle-aged European man exiled in the USA or the reality of the young American girl he seduces? Whatever Nabokov's original intention may have been - whether exposing perversion or indulging in it through fiction - *Lolita*, casts a longer shadow than the myth of Pygmalion on the relationship between young girls and adult men in fiction. It is an irony, thus, that in the new film version of Nabokov's novel, currently in production, young actress Nathalie Portman, who plays the role of Matilda in *Léon*, is cast in the title role.

While in the still shocking *Lolita* both the seducer and his victim are represented as corrupt monsters of selfishness, *Léon* challenges its viewers to accept a story in which corruption is an ingredient threatening the relationship between Matilda and Léon from the outside. Criminal

corruption rather than seduction is the main theme of Besson's film. Despite being a ruthless killer, hence a moral monster, Léon never takes advantage of Matilda's manifest crush on him. Yet the life of the girl is threatened by a much worse enemy than a seducer. Stansford, a corrupt DEA agent who has massacred all the members of Matilda's family during an apparently legal search for drugs in her home. As it turns out, Stansford's actual intention is robbing Matilda's father, a petty drug dealer, of the important amount of cocaine that he keeps at home. While there is no question of child abuse in the film, Stansford's drug abuse and his activities as a drug dealer condition the meeting between Léon and Matilda. The girl literally thrusts herself into her neighbour Léon's arms when she miraculously survives Stansford's attack. In fact, it could be said that it is thanks to Stansford's crime that Matilda has the chance to abandon the corrupted world in which her father lived and get through Léon a second chance in life. The plot subverts thus the habitual confrontation between good and evil in contemporary fiction: Stansford, the representative of the law, becomes Matilda's evil persecutor, while Léon, who makes a living outside legality by doing evil, becomes her angelic protector.

After their first accidental meeting, Matilda and Léon embark on a relationship that breaks all the imaginable taboos. Matilda strikes a rather peculiar bargain with Léon: she teaches her illiterate protector how to read and write in exchange for his teaching her how to use a gun, which will enable her to carry out the act of revenge she dreams of. This is nothing but killing Stansford, the monster who has murdered her family and, especially, her innocent four-year-old brother. Although Léon is, like Justin, reluctant to let the child enter his life, he is soon charmed by the vivacious, bold Matilda and lets himself be trapped into the role of her father figure and tutor, to the point of sacrificing his own life in the explosion that he sets up to kill Stansford and fulfil her dreams of revenge. The story ends with a reformed Matilda - no longer a Lolita in miniskirts and heavy make-up but an average schoolgirl - going back to her very conservative school after having inherited the money that Léon has left to her. This money, won by Léon's killings, is meant to act as a protection against the risk of Matilda's returning to the unstable life that she led with her family.

The ending of Besson's film underlines the ease with which the child may resume normality, as for Matilda, Léon's sacrifice and love, while real, are part of a fantasy that she can safely outgrow. Unlike Chuck, the child of *The Man without a Face*, who is certainly aware of the price paid by Justin for having accepted his friendship, Matilda seems not to have fully grasped the magnitude of her protector's sacrifice. In fact, despite its being set in contemporary America, *Léon* seems more like a fairy tale with a princess, an enchanted monster that she redeems and a horrifying ogre who persecutes both than a realistic story.

Yet, ultimately, both are grounded on the same idea. The father figures Matilda and Chuck find in their way may be flawed - one is a killer, the other has been involved in a death - but what they learn from these monsters in terms of love and respect is much more than anybody else has ever offered or will ever offer to them. By focusing on extraordinary figures like Léon and Justin and on their altruistic devotion to the child's happiness, both films underline the shortcomings of average adults: only the monsters of children's own fantasies really understand them - the average adults reject the monster because they actually reject the child. Yet, this is a message addressed by adults to other adults which ultimately excludes the child. *The Man without a Face* was classified by the BBFC as a film only suitable for persons over 15; ironically this rating would exclude Chuck, its protagonist, from the audience. I have already remarked how paradoxical the situation of the child acting in horror films for adults is, but there seems to be an even greater paradox in the situation of the child not allowed to see a film about how positive the relationship between children and adults can be. The case of *Léon* is more debatable, for Besson's film clearly aims at attracting adults, especially men, with Matilda's naive eroticism. Nonetheless, regardless of the possible reasons why adults should feel attracted to seeing these two films, they border on territory that is common for both child and adult. Actually, Gibson's and Besson's films deal with the child's fantasy about a 'special' adult friend who fulfils the child's need for sympathy better than his or her own parents. The enormous success of another film with the same subject, *The Terminator 2*, proves how well

children tune in to this kind of fantasy.

I have already referred to the plot of *The Terminator 2* in Chapter 3 and in Chapter 6, so here I should like to focus on the relationship between the hero, ten-year-old John Connor, and the 'good' Terminator sent by the forty-five-year-old Connor from the future to protect him and his mother Sarah. In principle, there is little to commend Connor as a role model for the 1990s child. He has a criminal record, uses foul language, disregards the injunctions of his caring foster parents and is seen in the film using his abilities to ransack an automatic teller. Lacking a father - Kyle died in 1984, in the first encounter between the 'bad' Terminator and Sarah Connor - and missing his mother, who is an inmate of a psychiatric hospital, John is presented as a child on the verge of becoming an irredeemable criminal. His salvation is secured in the nick of time by the second Terminator, a T-1 coming from the future, but also a father figure that the adult John himself has programmed to suit the needs of his young, hopeless self. This new relationship between the child and his surrogate father is based on a reversal of roles: the T-1 has been programmed to obey John's orders, which is the excuse for a rather droll episode in which John enjoys the luxury of ordering the monster about. However, the episode also involves an incident which forces John to pass in one instant from being the child in the relationship to assuming the role of the adult. When the T-1 is about to execute a couple of young thugs John intervenes to teach the machine that he must not kill people. Like any child, the T-1 first questions John why he should restrain himself but ends up accepting John's teachings on trust.

The following episodes in the film concern the meeting of Sarah, her child and the T-1. In fact, by the time she is rescued from the institution where she is imprisoned, the bond between the T-1 and John has been consolidated and so the relationship between Sarah and John is relegated to the background. The relationship between mother and son is tense and this makes John seek affection in the machine, where he can find none. Sarah is angry that he had to rescue her and shows no signs of affection for John who obviously craves for a more doting mother. There is indeed something deeply sad about the situation of a child so starved of human love that he turns

to a non-human monster for companionship. Sarah herself acknowledges John's pressing need for a father who can help him to take the first steps on the path to adulthood but her search for the ideal father that can take the child from her hands and initiate him into the rituals of masculinity has seemingly met with many failures. This is why, when she is preparing herself to die in the attempt to prevent the engineer Dyson from developing the computer SkyNet that will build the Terminators in the future, she decides to leave John in the T-1's hands. "In an insane world", she says, "this was the safest choice".

By eulogising the T-1's loyalty to John, Sarah disparages all men. Since John is humankind's best hope for the future, with her acceptance of the T-1 as his surrogate father Sarah actually accuses all men of having failed humankind because of their incapacity to be good, supportive, caring fathers - unlike this machine. Accepting the T-1 as John's new father also means severing the ties between John and a human model of masculinity. Because of the weak men she has met, Sarah forces John to erect a new model of masculinity on his own. This is based on the memory of his dead father Kyle (who seems to be the only exception to Sarah's androphobia, possibly because John himself chose Kyle in the future to be his own father), the example of his courageous mother and, above all, the T-1. The film does not suggest, however, that the T-1 replaces Sarah in giving life to John by saving him from the evil T-1000 or that he is working to be a better mother than Sarah, as Susan Jefford argues (1993: 248). What the film says is that John cannot learn everything from Sarah and that a boy's balanced upbringing requires the presence of a father. Quite a different matter is whether this is a conservative idea - I personally think it is not - and why this film reveals so little about the difficult years Sarah has spent alone with her child, nor about the future they will have to face together. The relationship between Sarah and John reaches a critical point in the episode of her confrontation with Dyson, whom Sarah cannot kill, presumably because she cannot bring herself to murder a man who is a beloved father and husband. Her pent-up anger explodes in a feminist outburst that John simply rejects: saying that all women are creative and that all men are destructive, as she does, may be nothing

but pure realism for Sarah, but it is not an idea a ten-year-old boy can accept from his own mother, for it denies his own status as the future saviour of humankind.

In any case, what does the T-1 do to deserve the title of father of humankind that Sarah and John grant him? Apart from warding off the threat posed by the T-1000 and being John's patient playmate, the T-1 distinguishes himself because he commits suicide. Like *Léon*, *The Terminator 2* ends with the sacrifice of the monstrous father: the T-1 descends into a vat of melted metal rather than risk the chance of letting the chip that controls his brain be found by Cyberdine. A weeping John protests that he is losing a father, but the T-1 reminds him that he was nonetheless a very limited father, for he is not human: "I don't know why you are crying", he tells a disconsolate John, "but it's something I could never do". The sacrifice returns the child to Sarah but when they face the road symbolizing the unknown future together, John is no longer mother's boy but a new man, who has learned the value of altruistic sacrifice. The T-1 has set for him an example of self-denial that presumably enables John to become the leader of the future underground resistance against SkyNet, but it has also told him with his final speech that Sarah can teach him the meaning of human emotion much better than a machine, much better than a man.

The lonely mother has been assisted in her task of channelling the child's impulses from criminal destruction to heroic redemption by a monstrous father who has proved to be better than any human father. Obviously, the arrival of the monstrous father happens because the real father is dead, and this also the case in *Léon* and *Man without a Face*: we never know what kind of father Kyle would have been for John if the original T-1 had not killed him. John's choice to replace Kyle proves successful but, as the T-1 reminds him, it is not totally appropriate. This is a lesson that John must still learn. In any case, the child stands for the future man as well as for the man of the future:

It is thus John Connor and not Sarah Connor or the Terminator who holds the real power of these films, and marks himself as the hero of Hollywood sequels, for it is he who survives the destruction of the 'old' masculinity, witnessing teary-eyed the Terminator's destruction. As he stands above the melting Terminators, audiences are to recognize in John Connor not only the father of his own and the human future, but

the new masculinity as well. (Jeffords, 1993: 260)

The sacrifice of the monstrous father is a necessary measure to let the child progress towards a better future, free from the constraints of patriarchy that bind both women and men. The fact that these surrogate fathers can only show their love for the child by disappearing from the child's life shows that masculinity is suffering a process of reconstruction - the old father is gone, but the new has not yet arrived. Meanwhile these eccentric surrogate fathers point at the new directions masculinity should take or avoid and delegate in woman - Chuck's mother, Sarah, Matilda's teachers - the responsibility for the successful passage of the child into adulthood. The child itself - Chuck, Matilda, John - is a promise of that brighter future, which might or might not arrive, depending on whether the monstrous father can be replaced with a father who will stand by the child.

### *Conclusions*

The monstrous child is defined by a set of anxieties endured by adults, who write the films and novels for adults in which the child monster appears. This is a figure that has little to do with real children and more to do with the adults' difficulties to express fears about their shortcomings as parents, ranging from pregnancy itself to the moment of granting autonomy to the adolescent child. Although very often the destruction of the monstrous child is justified by the fact of its being the result of an unnatural birth or a supernatural transformation which distinguishes it from actual children, the question is that now more than ever children appear as aggressive figures whose death is excusable in adult fantasies that are very far from the myth of innocent childhood. They probably embody a form of unconscious rage against children that is not allowed to take a more manifest form in our times, when child abuse in real life is being denounced at so many levels and when parents, aware of the pressure society puts on them, are at a loss as to how to bring up their children correctly.

The function of the monstrous child is to act as a legitimate object of hatred that helps



adults to deal with their mistrust of the myth of the innocence of the child and that allows them to cope with the aspects of children they dislike most. However, the exaggerated features of the monstrous child and the fact that most monstrous children are in fact miniaturised adult monsters also serves the function of forcing adults to consider the enormous distance between the child monster and normal children and, indeed, their own role in the formation of the image of the monstrous child. Very often, the figure of the monstrous child acts as a mirror in which the real monster-makers are reflected. The monstrous children are, indeed, often manifestations of the abuse they have endured at the hands of the adults and so their function is often to highlight the adults' guilt in the making of the monstrous child.

The criticism of the presence of the monster in fiction for children follows lines similar to the criticism of horror fiction in general. It is assumed that the monster, together with the violence that surrounds its figure, may be harmful for immature readers or viewers. However, defenders of the uses of fantasy, and even of the horrific material it may employ, argue that children can safely process stories that adults might not recommend to them on the grounds that these stories fulfil subconscious needs of the child which are badly understood by adults. Although there is a rather high degree of liberal and conservative censorship - aimed at protecting, respectively, the psychological and the moral development of the child - and even of self-censorship in fiction for children, nevertheless, a few paradoxical cases, such as the generalized acceptance of *Jurassic Park*, prove that there is not a clear criteria as to what is harmful for children. In any case, the most sensible approach is not to isolate children from the monster but to carefully tutor the child's exposure to fiction for children, or even for adults, about monstrosity, violence and horror.

Within fiction for adults the monster often occupies the place of the father in relation to the child. In some narratives the guilty father (usually guilty of abuse) is exonerated of his guilt and forgiven by the child, but destroyed nonetheless by evil forces that have possessed him thanks to his moral weakness. In other narratives, a monster assumes the father's position and builds a relationship with the child based on mutual respect, though this relationship must be often

sacrificed to secure the child's welfare. In those cases, the child must overcome the loss of the monstrous father figure by accepting his or her own new maturity. The child is then prepared to face the future, a future that will hopefully be shaped by likewise open-minded children who have learnt from the monster how to be more tolerant and, hence, better persons.

'More Human than Human'...

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## GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

As long as human beings feel the need to redefine the meaning of humanity, there will be a space for the monster in culture, understood in its amplest sense. The ubiquity of the monster in the British and the American cultural products of the 1980s and 1990s demonstrates that in these years the anxieties concerning the definition of what it is to be human run deep in the collective unconscious: the monsters are the symptoms that reveal the existence of those anxieties. The images of monstrosity are used to mark the limits of the abnormal, the intolerable, the subhuman and the barbaric but since they also connote power, monsters also delimit the extraordinary and the superhuman. The monster is entrenched in the cultural space where the current economic system - international or late capitalism - and the unstable contemporary system of moral values intersect: the extreme fascination caused by the varied iconography of monstrosity goes hand in hand with the extreme moral disgust elicited by the human evil monster.

The monster occupies a prominent place in all the ranges of contemporary culture. In fact, the monster of, roughly, the last fifteen years is a truly postmodernist construct, for it ignores the barriers dividing the popular from the elite, genre fiction from the mainstream - barriers artificially set up by the university and the current systems of book publishing and film distribution. The monster is thus a figure as familiar to the *connoisseur* of contemporary literary fiction as for the avid consumer of low-budget horror films. However, in spite of the monster's carnivalesque, postmodernist breaking down of cultural boundaries, it cannot be really stated that the

contemporary monster is a countercultural construct: on the contrary, it appears to be a figure perfectly integrated within the contemporary cultural panorama. The potential subversiveness of the monster as a countercultural figure is thoroughly negated - counteracted - by the capitalist system, which, being by definition a system rooted on the cult to novelty, makes cultural subversiveness virtually impossible.

As far as the narrative media in which the monster appears are concerned, it must be concluded that the figure of the monster is especially useful to prove that there is a very fluid relationship between film and the novel, not only because of the many screen adaptations of novels but also because of the reverse influence of film on the strategies of visualization of the contemporary novel. The many multimedia texts about monstrosity also indicate that films and novels must be understood as just some of the ingredients in complex narrative texts also encompassing comics, television series, video-games and even advertising. The last technological wave to have swept the Western world, including the development and popularization of computers and video-tape recorders in the 1980s, has brought about fundamental changes in the way that the texts about monstrosity are produced and consumed. Speaking about films and novels as discrete cultural units makes no sense in a world in which consumers are used to enjoying the same story in multiple formats.

Technology is also reshaping the figure of the monster. This is happening at two levels. First, technology is conditioning aesthetics, as I have determined in my analysis of the role of film special effects artists. Infographics is still in the early stages of its development, and so, it is plain common sense to suppose that still unforeseeable developments in this field will radically change the face of the monster in the near future. Moreover, that the process of mutual aesthetic influence between film and fiction will continue. On the other hand, as can be seen with the phenomenon of the American TV series *The X-Files*<sup>1</sup> - which can be described as an episodic narrative about different forms of monstrosity - the Internet is already playing an important role in the construction of the

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<sup>1</sup> *The X-Files*, 1994 - , Fox Broadcasting, created by Chris Carter, with David Duchovny as FBI agent Fox Mulder and Gillian Anderson as FBI agent Dana Scully.

new narratives about monstrosity: the oncoming episodes are being modelled to the tastes and suggestions of the cybernauts (who, it must be noted, needn't be American) that daily discuss the content of the series in any of the many forums about *The XFiles* open on the Internet. Needless to say, since a number of the films I have analysed in this dissertation are also present in the Internet through home pages or forums of debate, it follows that future sequels or even new films (or novels) may be eventually informed by the opinions of their potential audiences. The process of folklorisation may have found, thus, a new channel thanks to technology.

The aesthetics of monstrosity are framed, on the one hand, by the marvellous - that which is extraordinary and fascinating but not horrific - and, on the other hand, by the horrific, which may be likewise fascinating. The monster must be identified with the extraordinary rather than with simply the horrific; the field of the extraordinary is large enough so as to comprehend the grotesque, the terrifying, the disgusting but also the beautiful, as I have shown, and the simply different. Metamorphosis is the key concept in the current aesthetics of monstrosity: constant change and fluid forms are elements attractive not only to filmmakers interested in representing monstrosity with high quality special effects but also for writers interested in exploring the limits of the human body - as cyberpunk writers do - or the limits of human identity, as those who write about gender roles and evil do. As far as the strategies of visualization of the current cycle of Gothic postmodernist fiction are concerned, it must be noted that the process started in the mid 1970s to search for the limits of the absolutely intolerable image (or narrative) representing monstrosity - what Leslie Fiedler called the limits of absolute atrocity - is not over yet. The amount of cruelty inflicted on human bodies in fiction - both films and novels - has been steadily rising since then and shows, so far, no signs of abating, neither in film nor in the novel. Given the perfection attained by special effect techniques and the development of quality prose capable of conveying a most clear impression of evil, it is certainly hard to imagine what more explicit horrors, what more appalling evil monsters can be given birth to in future fiction. Not only the broken body is essential in fiction about monstrosity. The apocalyptic iconography inspired by the possible images of an

impending holocaust - nuclear, or due to chemical or biological warfare - is essential in the 1980s and 1990s: the monster moves in desolate landscapes that belong mainly to a devastated Earth in a near future, though contemporary, everyday settings transformed into an eerie background by the presence of the monster are also common. The future is seemingly a terminal present populated by monsters, while the past seems to have died altogether.

The question of why this expansion of fictional monstrosity is taking place now can only be answered in reference to fundamental aspects of the contemporary world that reach beyond the ambit of culture. There is a widespread feeling that the civilizing project of the Enlightenment - of which the creation of the USA is one of the main achievements - and the ideal of utopia are failing, not because they cannot be fulfilled but because their fulfilment does not guarantee the elimination of evil. Atrocity turns out to be the work of the so-called civilized world rather than the work of an alien, barbarian world populated by monsters. In this sense, we are still living in the aftermath of the events of 1945, including the discovery of the Nazi extermination camps and the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; 1989 might turn out to mark, in due perspective, the beginning of another cycle of monstrosity, somewhat less apocalyptic, less pessimistic, though the tragic war in Bosnia might indicate otherwise.

As I see it, the Western world is living the end of a historical cycle marked by the beginning of the end of patriarchy, the overturning of traditional moral and religious values and the rise of a more humanist discourse based on solidarity. These are aspects that, like Dr. Jekyll, have a positive and a negative side. The attempts at redefining gender roles have inspired many monstrous characters that are hindering the path towards a better communication between men and women. If we take into account the greater number of male monsters, it should be inferred that the redefinition of masculinity rather than the redefinition of femininity is currently one of the most problematic cultural issues in the Western world. An idea that should be considered in depth is whether the Industrial Revolution transformed gender roles to a much greater extent than it is habitually assumed. It is my opinion that an eventual equality between men and women will arrive

sooner than it is expected because capitalism is blind to gender: women will have the same career opportunities as men when it is proven that they are capable of generating profits in the same measure, something which is already happening in many fields. It would be perhaps more accurate to think of gender relations in terms of how masculinity and femininity have been forced to adjust to the market conditions imposed by capitalism, especially by the liberal capitalism of the 1980s and 1990s. Late capitalism might thus be patriarchy's last creation but also its own nemesis.

The replacement of religious morality by the morality determined by the law and social consensus is leaving many gaps in the fabric of contemporary ethics, involving delicate issues that range from how to deal with mass extermination to how to deal with a handicapped baby. The humanist discourse is gaining converts daily but the defence of nature, of human rights and of solidarity between the West and the countries victimized by colonialism is being carried out against the background of man's increasing violence against the Earth and its inhabitants. The average Western citizen is likely to feel simultaneously threatened by the psychopath-next-door, the invisible conspirational networks of power and his or her own reluctance to face the fact that human beings are much more monstrous and even less human than the fantastic monsters they invent.

At this junction, the monster is indispensable in discussing and redefining the limits of what is tolerable in a society whose level of tolerance is being reshaped by the discourse of political correctness and by the insidious invasion of the individual's privacy by capitalist power. The monster represents everything that disturbs the average citizen of the Western world: the uncontrollable patriarch who abuses women, children and the men who reject patriarchy itself, but also the uncontrollable patriarchal system of technoscience that abuses the whole human species; evil on a massive scale embodied by imaginary alien races standing for our own evil side and evil on an individual scale represented by psychopathic serial killers; the sudden blurring of gender roles and the fear of sexual reproduction. Yet the monster also represents a route of escape towards fantastic worlds in which the individual can feel the vicarious satisfaction of having fought



for his or her survival and victory in open confrontation against the systems of power that harass him or her in everyday life; alternatively, the monster may signify a wish-fulfilment fantasy of escape into a world of harmony and order in which the individual's isolation is dispelled by the monster's bringing in peace and emotional communion with all the isolated others.

Another important point that should be inferred from my analysis of contemporary monstrosity is that the role of the monster is essential in the internationalisation of culture. One wonders where the Anglo-Saxon world begins and where it ends, indeed, whether there are still national cultures at all. The boundaries of the Anglo-Saxon or Anglo-American world are fixed obviously by the availability of the cultural products in English exported by the UK and, especially, by the USA. In this sense, it can be said that all the contemporary national cultures in the Western world - and probably in most nations of the world - are the product of the collision between the native, traditional culture and the Anglo-Saxon view of culture as an exportable commodity. It is not an exaggeration to say that, up to a point, we are all Anglo-Saxon and that the British and the American monsters *are* our monsters, even though these are monsters already sharing their cultural space with the monsters of Japanese popular culture favoured by the younger generations of Western citizens.

Monstrosity is also marked in the 1980s and 1990s by the progressive replacement of the religious supernatural for the technified paranormal. We are now at a turning point in which the idea of monstrosity is shedding its religious overtones and acquiring simultaneously primitive, barbaric and futuristic connotations. Our main anxiety is seemingly a quite Freudian need to establish our true prehistoric origins in the dawn of times and to foresee our final destination in the stars, that is to say, the end of our narrative. The basic questions we address to ourselves through the monster are whether we were born evil - morally monstrous - as a species and whether our collective destiny passes through a monstrous evil act of destruction, such as our own extermination, the destruction of the Earth or that of an alien intelligent race that could bring salvation. These are, obviously, questions that have been asked many times before the 1980s

and 1990s and that have been heard with insistence especially since the publication of *Frankenstein* and the subsequent rise of horror fiction and science fiction. What distinguishes the 1980s and 1990s from previous periods is the rotund pessimism of the answers: all these texts about monstrosity proclaim that the human species was born evil and that its history is a narrative about the perfectibility of its power to do evil, culminating not only in the nuclear weapons that can destroy the world but also in the psychotic mass murderer. The problem is that the repetition of these pessimistic answers is blunting their edge: the technophobic, dystopian view of the future and the pessimism about the ceaseless evil done by individuals have become routine and there is a certain impression that, without new narratives offering a gleam of hope, this pervasive gloom cannot be dispelled.

However, these neo-utopian or neo-sentimental narratives seem still far off. As I see it, the pessimistic mood is likely to endure for at least a few more years. No doubt, the almost magical date of the 1st of January of the year 2000 and the events that may have happened by then will greatly condition the future of monstrosity, but, if we take into account that many of the contemporary dystopian texts refer to the first decades of the twenty first century, it could be argued that, so far, the forecast for the immediate future shows no signs that apocalypse has been averted. The discourse of political correctness might no doubt also delimit the future of monstrosity of the next ten years but in my view it will not affect the construction of monstrosity to a very great extent. We may expect many stories about patriarchal, oppressive male monsters fought by women, non-white people and even disabled people but it is unlikely that women, members of ethnic minorities or the handicapped will cease being represented as monsters: being prejudiced is, simply, part of human nature. In order to avoid the onslaught of the defenders of political correctness, writers and filmmakers will have to move onto more radical forms of monstrosity, more alien, less human - moving further and further into outer space and into our inner mental space. Perhaps the most intriguing question is whether the universal presence of the horrific monsters will be eventually balanced by the presence of the marvellous monsters, which

are now clearly outnumbered.

An issue that is definitive in the construction of monstrosity currently and that will still be so in the near future is power. The more power is gained by women and the members of other minorities, the more often will they be represented as monsters, though they will also gain the power to represent themselves or the others as monsters. In fact, it can be said that a clear sign of empowerment is the capacity to represent oneself (or the minority to which one belongs) as a threatening, rather than as an abject, monster. As far as women are concerned, the consolidation of the strong heroine should be accompanied by the search for a specifically feminine view of heroism, but also by the acknowledgement of the role played by women in contemporary patriarchal science and technology and, in general, within the current systems of power. The main question that women will have to face is whether power rather than gender conditions the behaviour of human beings, that is to say, whether women endowed with the same power as men will eventually behave in the same monstrous fashion of monstrous men. Baring and Cashford, whose work has exerted a great influence on this dissertation, conclude their book *The Myth of the Goddess* by stating that "it might be that a rhythmic interchange between archetypal feminine and masculine images (goddesses and gods) is necessary in order to evolve. To remain fixed in either mode may arrest the process of movement" (Baring and Cashford, op. cit.: 608) As I see it, persisting in the idea of this rhythmic interchange may prevent us from founding a necessary, humanist mode beyond gender differences to solve the contradictions of a world that was radically altered with the onset of the Industrial Revolution.

After the box-office failure of *Mary Reilly*, it seems clear that the cycle of screen adaptations of literary classics about monstrosity is over. News about a forthcoming screen adaptation of H.G. Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, suggests that there might be a second wave of neo-Gothic films based on other Gothic classics of the nineteenth century, but, in my opinion, they will not enjoy much popularity, especially among younger audiences. The next wave of screen adaptations dealing with the monster is, in fact, based on comics and video-games, despite the relative failure

of a number of recent films based on well-known comics and video-games. However, there is still a vast untapped territory in the classics of twentieth-century genre fiction that filmmakers have not explored yet and that should be presumably the subject of screen adaptations dealing with the monster in the near future. Paul Verhoeven is currently shooting the screen adaptation of Robert Heinlein's 1950s classic *Spaceship Troopers*, which promises to be a rather orthodox, high-tech version of the monster films populated by hostile aliens of the 1950s. In general terms, it could be said that films are lagging behind novels as far as the use the integration of the plots into the current technoscientific paradigm is concerned, but that the themes that will be presumably developed are the same: the effects of genetic engineering and biomechanics, the fear of disease (especially AIDS) and death, the anxieties about reproduction and about the creation of intelligent artificial life, worries about a possible loss of the privileges associated to the status of the human species in nature because of an alien invasion or the use of dangerous weapons. The monsters are and will presumably continue being what technoscience creates but also what technoscience cannot control.

The directions for the future of fictional monstrosity are certainly being marked now by *The X-Files*, a series with which the world of the abnormal and the paranormal has returned to television after decades of absence. What characterizes the series is the conspirational, paranoiac mood - it supposes that the US government not only conceals evidence about alien life but that it has even run secret programmes to create hybrids of alien and human DNA - the constant hesitation between belief and disbelief, and the not less constant search for absolute truth. Although the main message of the series is that there are enigmatic systems of power capable of controlling even those who represent the law, such as the hero Mulder and the heroine Scully, both FBI agents, the series cannot be said to be political or subversive in any sense. If it has found such immediate and widespread success, this must be attributed to the ability of its creator, Chris Carter, to tap a rich vein in contemporary culture that had not been previously channelled towards the mass audiences of television, though it had been finding nourishment precisely films and novels

like the ones I have analysed in this dissertation.

Mulder and Scully seem to have been unanimously accepted as the new model heroes of the 1990s possibly because they are also victims of the obscure manoeuvres of their superiors, designed to keep them off the truth. They represent thus the average honest, 'normal', citizen who believes that the real monster is not the alien or the freak - if they exist at all - but the powers lurking in the shadows of government. The hero and the heroine (herself inspired by the character of Clarice Starling in *The Silence of the Lambs*) are intelligent, educated, courageous but little inclined to use violence, good at using technological and scientific resources and emotionally controlled, though not to the point of being unable to feel the *frisson* of their encounters with the diverse monsters. These are mainly half-glimpsed aliens, intelligent machines, peculiar freakish mutants, and people with paranormal psychic powers often rooted in psychological traumas, all signifying the dark underside of everyday life. The creators of *The X-Files* are gathering together all the different strands of contemporary monstrosity, covering with their work a very wide range that encompasses the traditional and the futuristic. The series can be said to link the past of monstrosity with its future.

The culture produced in the 1980s and 1990s is still largely ignored by the university, though in comparison to previous periods in the history of scholarship and criticism it can be said that contemporary culture in all its ranges is receiving more attention now than ever. Much theory is written about the meaning of culture and about cultural studies but there is little actual information about individual cultural products and not enough interest in a multidisciplinary approach to contemporary culture which may be adequate to encompass in all their extent complex cultural constructions such as monstrosity. The present dissertation shows that it is possible to do fruitful research on the culture of the most recent years, but that this is only done adequately if the researcher keeps his or her eyes open to the whole reality of the times and not only to fiction, or to the theory currently written on fiction. The study of contemporary culture is usually carried out from a limited and limiting perspective: much more attention is devoted to theory than to the tangible

reality of what is being written and filmed now. By assembling a large amount of information about the novels and films of the period under discussion, I have proved that there is a very large field of study waiting to be explored. The impression that almost everything has been researched, studied and written about turns out to be completely false: with more receptiveness to the world that surrounds us and in which we live, it can be easily seen that the future of cultural studies - in which I would include literary and film studies - passes through the study of the immensely rich field of contemporary culture.

In general, it must be concluded that the average consumer of culture, especially if s/he is not older than thirty, is much better informed about the texts I have discussed in this dissertation than the average scholar-critic. This is due in part to the excessive fragmentation of the cultural reality as seen by the university, a situation that should be corrected by producing work of a more synthetic quality. This dissertation aims, precisely, at indicating new possible paths for this type of synthetic research. I have proved that the excessive fragmentation of literary and film studies is obscuring the very close relationship between the two narrative media - not to mention their relationship with other media. I have proved that film and the novel can be not only compared but also studied together and that the treatment that both narrative media give to some subjects, such as monstrosity, has many points in common despite the evident differences between films and novels. This dissertation also questions the definition of genre, which is too narrow and imprecise: the notion of separate genres cannot account for the fact that most contemporary narratives mix elements from different 'genres' nor for the fact that most audiences are proficient at decoding these mixed narratives. My work proves that it is possible to cross the artificial barriers separating diverse genres, and also genre fiction from the mainstream: this dissertation demonstrates that these barriers are arbitrary and that a whole new, productive range of research opens up if they are questioned. Aspects of contemporary culture that seem isolated can be seen from a unifying perspective that shows their forming a cultural continuum.

The present dissertation establishes, in addition, that the current systems of distribution of

culture, or marketing, and the technological advances applied to the production of contemporary culture play a major role in shaping culture today. Contemporary culture can only be fully understood with regards to the conditions in which culture is marketed; these conditions are as important for an understanding of culture today as the study of the intellectual and ideological currents forging the cultural products consumed today. So far, aspects such as the marketing strategies of publishing houses and film distributors have received little or no attention at all - novels and films are usually studied in a strange void, in which the size of the audiences that they reach or their composition is neglected. This situation must be radically altered: it is necessary to learn more about who causes the cultural products to circulate and who consumes them. This dissertation also suggests that, since the current system of distribution of novels and films is controlled by multinational corporations, the nationality of the products of culture should be questioned. As I have shown, we are all Anglo-Saxons and, partly, Japanese. This breaking down of national cultural barriers also deserves attention.

Within the specific territory of the history of the evolution of culture it seems clear to me that the place occupied by Gothic fiction has been so far totally undervalued. The references to the importance and influence of Gothic are still too timid and explain only inadequately that there are evident links between the eighteenth century genre and much contemporary culture. In fact culture is no longer shaped by the realistic paradigm, if it ever was. Mainstream realism is but one of the contemporary 'modes' of fiction - and not the main one. Contemporary Anglo-Saxon culture is a culture dominated by the rich legacy of Gothic, which passed from nineteenth-century Britain to the USA and hence to so-called popular culture. I am not suggesting simply that the original Gothic romances should be granted a place of honour in the history of literature, or the history of Western culture. My suggestion is that a totally new, alternative view of literature should be seriously considered: instead of a canonical tradition based mainly on realism, for which 'genre' fiction is marginal, literature should be seen as a constant interplay between this tradition and a parallel tradition of the fantastic, whose current cycle begins with eighteenth-century Gothic fiction and

which is, ultimately, more relevant to an understanding of contemporary culture.

Throughout this dissertation I have evidenced the limitations of theoretical discourses that enjoy now a widespread acceptance. I have insisted with special emphasis on the ambivalence of the tenets supported by 'feminism' or 'feminisms'. In Chapter 7 I have proved that gender studies are still too constricted by the attention paid to feminist issues; there is still little fruitful comparison between the cultural products that men and women create and a pressing need to establish a humanist discourse that addresses the person rather than the man or the woman. I have, likewise, relativized the enormous influence exerted by psychoanalysis (Freudian or Lacanian) and by Jung's psychology of the archetypes on the analysis of contemporary fiction. I have done so by bringing into this dissertation other discourses, ranging from sociology to mythography and passing through ethics. In this dissertation I have proposed a new type of multidisciplinary discourse which is not tied to a single theoretical point of view and which allows the researcher more intellectual flexibility. In any case, this dissertation also shows that it is necessary to see the culture produced by the Anglo-Saxon world - our culture, I would insist once more - from a largely anthropological point of view that takes into account everything that shapes a culture: the pre-historical and the historical (even the post-historical), myth and postmodernist fiction, ritual and the systems of distribution of culture, belief and secularized relativism. Because the Anglo-Saxon world is the 'centre' of culture there is possibly an advantage in seeing its products from a position of relative marginalization such as mine: being a Spaniard, I can see this 'other' culture - which is nonetheless also my own - with new eyes, in a way similar to how the anthropologist sees foreign cultures. This position cannot be so easily assumed, I think, when looking at one's own 'tribe'.

As far as the subject of monstrosity itself is concerned, this dissertation proves first, that the monster is not at the margins but at the centre of culture - or, alternatively, that the centre is constantly reshaped by cultural constructs traditionally neglected on the grounds of their being marginal. The monster is a sign of the times, a symptom of the crisis of civilization and a challenge to traditional ideas about aesthetics. By linking different aspects of monstrosity - human and



non-human, aesthetic and moral, mythical and postmodernist - I have proven that the narrow definition of the monster as a horrific creature must be replaced by a new definition that takes into account a new, open, alternative view of aesthetics in which fascination rather than beauty is the key word. My dissertation also establishes that isolating different kinds of monsters by classifying them into different types, or trying to define those types, goes against the grain of the very definition of monstrosity: the monster is protean and cannot be dealt with from a taxonomic point of view, for there will always be exceptions to whatever rules may be established.

The directions for future research are many. Apart from the study of still neglected contemporary films, novels, writers and filmmakers, there is a particularly attractive challenge to be faced: the writing of a comprehensive history of the novel in English of the 1980s and the early 1990s that brings together the mainstream and genre fiction, the novels by men and those by women. This history would also take into account ideally, first, how the novel is related to other narrative media such as film and, second, how the evolution of the novel is conditioned not only by the selective habits of the university but also by the systems of book production and distribution. Obviously, much more work could be done on screen adaptations based on the idea that an adaptation is not simply a film but part of a global narrative composed of the original novel and the film, together with other screen adaptations or film sequels. Also, further research should be done in film studies regarding the role of screen playwrights, either original or adapters, and the connections of film with other narrative media - novels and novelizations, but also comics, video-games and TV series.

Within the very large field I have covered in this dissertation there are a number of issues that I think do deserve further attention. Each chapter may be regarded in fact as the embryo of a prospective book on a different aspect of monstrosity. Yet I would like to refer here to a number of subjects that I have not been able to develop in this dissertation to the extent that they deserve but that have attracted my attention as my research progressed. Originally, this dissertation started as a project on the strategies of visualization we use when we read; it was my initial purpose to relate

the way we see the monster of the novel to the way the monster is visualized for us in films, especially in adaptations. This is a subject that I very much would like to consider in future research as I am especially interested in how written and audio-visual narratives interact. The relationship between technology and aesthetics in the last two decades is another topic I would like to research in the future, together with the question of why the monstrous can be a source of fascination as potent as beauty. The relationship between sentimentalism and horror and between humour and horror in contemporary film and the novel also deserve attention, without forgetting the question of who the audience of horror fiction - film and novel - actually are.

Other topics I would like to consider in the near future are the definition of the Gothic postmodernist fiction, the role of myth in postmodernist capitalism and the role of censorship in popular culture. Since I have been arguing throughout this dissertation that we are at a turning point in the history of the Anglo-Saxon world, informed by the impression that the civilizing project of the Enlightenment is failing, I must point out the need to do further research on the growth of dystopia, and on the extent to which the Anglo-Saxon world can be identified with the Western world in general. Throughout the elaboration of this dissertation I have borne in mind the fact that, even though I am neither British nor American, the Anglo-Saxon culture I have been researching is my own and that of many of my fellow country(wo)men. Hence my interest in studying how and why the fantasies and the anxieties of the Anglo-Saxon world may condition the worldview of a European, Mediterranean person like me. In my view, a parallel book should be written about how Japanese popular culture, itself conditioned by the Anglo-Saxon world, is now conditioning in its turn the Western world through its exports of popular culture - a culture inhabited by countless monsters. Apart from all these topics, there are two that are especially attractive for me: the overdue comparison between the monstrous-feminine and the monstrous-masculine and the role of the monster in cultural products for children.

The long pilgrimage of the monster towards academic respectability has not yet reached its end. It is my hope that this dissertation and the future work that can be derived from it prove that

monstrosity is but the tip of a magnificent cultural iceberg that can only be explored with the multidisciplinary approach to culture afforded by cultural studies. Until now the monster has been dealt with as a figure outside the realm of humanity, but it seems to me that the real use of studying the monster is learning that it is 'one of us', our own creation and hence, our own mysterious double. Monsters are not 'freaks of culture' but images of our deepest selves. The monster delineates, thus, the human and the subhuman in us, but it also defines our still to be fulfilled aspirations to become, one day, more human than we are now - more human than human.

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Lambeth Lizzie is a reputed vaudeville actress in late 19th century London who works for the company of the popular transvestite Dan Leno. Her speciality is impersonating men, which complements Leno's famous impersonations of women. Lizzie eventually gives up acting when she marries John Cree, a moderately rich man. However, her new life as the respectable Mrs. Cree is not as satisfactory as she expected, especially because her own repressions prevent her from having sex with her husband. Meanwhile, a series of gruesome murders attributed to a legendary killer, nicknamed the Golem, take place in the Limehouse district of London. Lizzie suspects that her husband is the real murderer and poisons him, for which she is finally hanged. Yet, the diaries of John Cree, which seemingly confirm Lizzie's suspicions, are never found. As it turns out, Lizzie herself is the notorious Golem: her passion for impersonating men has led her to act out her repressions by usurping her husband's personality. She kills, thus, while impersonating John, her last victim.

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*Hawksmoor* narrates the downfall and mental breakdown of two men: Nick Dyer, an 18th century architect commissioned to build seven churches in London, and Nick Hawksmoor, who is investigating a series of murders taking place in Dyer's churches in the 1980s. Dyer is an irrational, superstitious man. He is the follower of an obscure cult that leads him to sacrifice one person in each of his churches in a ritual of blood. Hawksmoor is, on the contrary, a rational investigator proud of his scientific skills, who is slowly trapped by the web of bizarre coincidences surrounding the crimes. The novel is also partly about the permanence of evil throughout time: the victims are similar in both periods and, since for Dyer his churches are a way of surviving the passage of time, he may well have survived until the 20th century to challenge Hawksmoor's rationality. His past and present evildoing suggest that reason cannot defeat evil and the barbaric cults that celebrate it.

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\*Film based on the novel: Roger Corman, 1990, *Frankenstein Unbound*.

In 2020 the space-time barrier is ruptured by a device to end the ongoing war. A middle-aged deposed presidential advisor, American Joseph Bodenland, disappears in a time warp that takes him to Switzerland in 1816. There he meets Victor Frankenstein and his monster, but also Shelley, his wife Mary and Byron. Bodenland tells Mary about how her novel will become famous one day. They make love while Frankenstein is busy fashioning a female monster out of Justine's dead body. Horrified by the sight of the monstrous couple having sex, Bodenland determines to kill Victor and his creations. When the two monsters run away, Victor decides to create a second male, expecting jealousy to upset the couple, but Bodenland kills him before he can make this third monster. Then he stalks the runaways, exterminating

them both in a near future where another time warp has left the three of them stranded.

- Amis, Martin. *Time's Arrow*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1991.  
The anonymous narrator of *Time's Arrow*, angel or conscience, reviews the life of his host, Tod Friendly, beginning with his death and moving backwards in time towards his birth. Tod's biographer is increasingly disoriented, for he has access to Tod's emotions but not to his thoughts. He is surprised to eventually find out that Tod used to be known by the name of Odilo Unverdorben and that he was a Nazi doctor who found shelter in the USA. While working in Auschwitz Odilo was an assistant of the infamous Dr. Mengele. There Odilo had presumably collaborated in Mengele's horrific experiments with babies, but he was lucky enough to leave his past behind first by escaping to Portugal, abandoning his wife and child, and later to the USA under a false identity. When the narrator reaches Odilo's early years, he discovers that there is nothing in them to mark Odilo as an exceptionally immoral man - the times marked him.
  
- Andrews, Virginia. *Flowers in the Attic* (1979). London: HarperCollins, 1995.  
\*Film based on the novel: Jeffrey Bloom, 1987, *Flowers in the Attic*.  
The four Dollanganger children - Cathy, Chris, and the twins Cory and Carrie - lead a sheltered, happy life until their beloved father dies in a car crash. His death leaves the family in absolute poverty and, so, the mother takes the children to her parents' mansion, where they are locked in the attic under the care of their brutal grandmother. The mother explains that their stern but very wealthy grandfather disinherited her when she married their father - her own uncle - but that his impending death will make them rich, for she intends to win back his affection. Her father is not aware of the children's existence and her plan is to keep it a secret. However, little by little, she conveniently forgets about the prisoners to the point of actually marrying another man and letting Cory die of pneumonia. Cathy and Chris, deeply in love after three years, finally plan a escape for them and Carrie.
  
- Asimov, Isaac. *The Robots of Dawn* (1984). London: HarperCollins, 1994.  
Elijah Bailey, an Earth plainclothes detective, is called to Aurora to solve the mystery of the 'death' of R. Jander Panell, a humaniform robot. R. Jander was the 'husband' of Gladia Delmarre, a widow to whom the robot had been offered by his creator, Dr. Fastolffe. He has called Bailey to help him clear his name of any suspicion of roboticide. As it turns out, R. Giskard, Fastolffe's other robot, has caused the freeze-out of Jander's positronic brain when he realizes that Dr. Amadiro, Fastolffe's arch-rival, can obtain from Jander the information to create others like him for space exploration. Since Fastolffe opposes this use of robots, for fear they might eventually create their own society, R. Giskard, who is actually a freak robot accidentally programmed so that he can read minds, kills R. Jander, acting in the interests of his master.
  
- Bainbridge, Beryl. *An Awfully Big Adventure*. London: Duckworth, 1989.  
\* Film based on the novel: Mike Newell, 1995, *An Awfully Big Adventure*.  
Stella, a 16-year-old girl abandoned by her mother because she is an illegitimate child, joins a theatrical company in Liverpool in the late 1940s. She is wilful and capricious and when she falls in love with the director of the company, Meredith, she is so blind to anything but herself that she fails to see that he is a corrupter of young men. When eventually another actor, O'Hara - a womaniser who knows about Meredith's sex life - is called to bring some lustre to the company, Stella starts an affair with him that she handles in a cold, aloof way. She fails to react with some emotion even when O'Hara accidentally kills himself, after finding out that Stella is his own daughter. The several subplots deal with unrequited love and explore how those who are loved may behave monstrously towards their lovers.

- Banks, Iain. *The Wasp Factory* (1984). London: Abacus, 1990 (1993).

Frank Cauldhame, 17, lives on a Scottish island with his father Angus, an ex-hippy. There, Frank performs odd, violent rituals that once included the killing of three children for which he has never been blamed. Frank, who does not officially exist, was abandoned by his mother, whom he hates, and has been educated by his father into believing a collection of absurdities. The family is completed by Eric, a madman on the run from the psychiatric unit where he was secluded after suffering a breakdown when training in the ward for severely malformed babies of a Glasgow hospital. Frank gives many hints as to being strangely disabled: he claims that he was attacked by the family dog when he was three and castrated. However, Frank's misogynistic, macho-style universe is shattered when he finds out that his father lied to him, and that he is in fact a woman, Frances.
  
- Banville, John. *The Book of Evidence*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1989.

Freddie Montgomery, imprisoned for life for kidnapping and murdering a young woman, has waited in vain for the chance to become a media celebrity during his trial. Since he has been denied the chance to offer his testimony in court, he writes instead a 'book of evidence', expecting that this will give him his fifteen minutes of fame, though not a real moral understanding of his crime. Freddie tried to steal one of his friend Anna Behrens' paintings, which he wanted to sell in order to raise money for the ransom demanded by the gangsters who held his wife and child captive in a foreign country. Yet the robbery was discovered by Anna's maid, whom Freddie kidnapped and later killed seemingly because he could not get rid of her. Later, Freddie let himself be caught, longing for the relief of public confession, though he was obviously more interested in his public exposure than in his redemption.
  
- Barker, Clive. *The Hellbound Heart* (1987). London: Fontana, 1991.

\* Film based on the novella: Clive Barker, 1987, *Hellraiser*.  
Frank invokes the demonic Cenobites in his brother Rory's empty house, thanks to the Lemarchand box. They grant Frank his wish of most intense pleasure, but, because of his arrogance, Frank is punished with the dismemberment of his body, though his mind survives the ordeal intact. A drop of Rory's blood accidentally triggers the remaking of Frank's body. He next engages the help of Rory's wife, Julia, who still loves him, years after the only sexual encounter she had with him. Though she is at first horrified, Julia soon sees that helping Frank means controlling him and, so, she starts picking up lonely men for Frank to kill and feed on. Yet her activities are discovered by Kirsty, a shy, plain friend of Rory's, who comes across Frank, then only partly remade, when spying on Julia. After stealing his box, Kirsty leads the Cenobites back to Frank. They dismember him for good, granting custody of the box to Kirsty.
  
- Barker, Clive. "The Forbidden" in *The Books of Blood, Volume 5*. London: Sphere, 1985.

\*Film based on the novel: Bernard Rose, 1992, *Candyman*.  
Helen is a PhD student working on a dissertation about graffiti, of which she finds many samples in the derelict Spector Street State in Liverpool. There she contacts a young, single mother (Anne-Marie) who tells her about a series of grisly murders the police claim to know nothing about. In one of the abandoned flats Helen finds an intriguing wall painting of a monstrous man and when he appears to seduce her, she realizes that the whole state is involved in his cult, which claims human sacrifices. These soon include Anne-Marie's baby and Helen herself, who is burnt at the Guy Fawkes bonfire. Her horrific death transforms Helen into yet another sinister local legend.
  
- Barker, Clive. *Imajica* (1991). London: HarperCollins, 1994.

Gentle, a London painter specialised in producing fakes, is sucked into a bizarre adventure when he becomes involved with Pie, the man sent to murder Gentle's ex-mistress, Judith. Pie, an androgynous shape-shifter, is actually a 'mystif', an

angelic inhabitant of another dimension in the Imajica, which encompasses four dominions and the Earth, the only one sealed up from the others. Gentle leaves with Pie for Yzzorderex, the capital of the main dominion. Eventually Judith, whose new lover is a member of a secret society seeking the opening of the Earth to the Imajica, follows him. As it turns out, Gentle is actually the double of a magician, Sartori (now Yzzorderex's dictatorial Autarch) born 200 years ago of the union between a human woman - Celestine - and the patriarchal God Hepaxamendios. Judith is herself a copy of Sartori's wife. Eventually Pie tells Gentle that he has been chosen by the goddesses, whose throne Hepaxamendios usurped, to liberate them by destroying Sartori's empire. Gentle does so, leaving Judith with the liberated goddesses. He begins then a new life with Pie in the dominions.

- Bear, Greg. *Blood Music* (1985). London: Legend, 1988.

Vergil Ulam, a genetic engineer, develops intelligent blood cells - 'noocytes' - that he injects into himself. He then develops a new contagious disease that gives his body a new, aberrant morphology. Neither Vergil's death, nor the also diseased Dr. Bernard, who offers himself as a specimen to a European laboratory, can halt the spread of the disease. The noocytes seemingly seduce all their hosts into accepting their dissolution and integration within the communal 'Noosphere'. As Bernard and others are offered the choice of a new life based on a reconstruction of their most valued memories within the Noosphere, the noocytes spread worldwide. While the individual self is replicated, so that there is no longer an original self but many avoiding death by sharing their memories in the Noosphere, the noocytes disappear in their exploration of the very small, leaving chaos behind.

- Brown, Christy. *My Left Foot* (1954). London: Minerva, 1990 (1994).

\* Film based on the autobiography: Jim Sheridan, 1989, *My Left Foot*.

Christy Brown (1932-1981) was one of the 23 children born to a Dublin bricklayer and his wife. He was affected by cerebral palsy but was fortunately protected by his mother, who always believed that her child's body and not his mind was crippled, despite the opinions of doctors and relatives. She was proven right when Christy, who had severe speech and mobility problems, learned to spell imitating his siblings but using his left foot instead of his hands. Then, she set out to secure an education for her child, always within a very supportive family context. Brown overcame the deep crisis of his teenage years thanks to his ability to paint and to write. A pilgrimage to Lourdes at the age of 18 reconciled him to his disability, making him see that he was but one member of a large community of sufferers. His book ends with his presentation in society and his vindication of his right to use his left foot regardless of the doctors' advice.

- Butler, Olivia. *Wild Seed* (1980). New York: Warner Books, 1988.

Doro is an immortal mind force and also a body snatcher, that is to say, he kills human beings whose bodies he successively occupies. For centuries he has been gathering people of special mental abilities from which he expects to breed a new race of supermen like him. When he meets Anyanwu in Africa his power is challenged for the first time: she is also immortal, a shape-shifter who can take any form but, unlike him, she does not kill. They become lovers but he soon betrays her, forcing her to take one of his sons as her husband and to move to America. She puts up with his manipulation of her husband and their children because she expects to redeem Doro before he becomes completely evil. However, when she finally confronts him, her love only persuades him to stop killing indiscriminately. Seeing that he no longer has unlimited power over her but that he is by no means a controlled force, Anyanwu abandons him to his fate and decides her own: becoming the matriarch of her own tribe.

- Card, Orson Scott. *Ender's Game* (1985). New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 1986.

Andrew Wiggins, a six-year-old child, is selected to enter the Battle School, which trains officers of the International Fleet, the only effective defence of Earth against

the insect-like aliens who have already attacked it twice. Although Andrew, nicknamed Ender, resists the idea of becoming a killer, he responds well to the intensive training, at the cost of nearly losing his humanity. The children of the school are trained with a video game supposed to be a simulation of a real battle. Yet when the maximum level of difficulty is reached and Ender wins the game, he is told he has actually wiped out the aliens. What the commanders ignore is that Ender is playing another game - Free Play - secretly supplied to him by the aliens, who have chosen him as their only hope: he is eventually sent to their empty planet from which he recovers a pupa of an alien queen. His new mission is to preserve the memory of the race he killed, and to find a new location for them to start anew.

- Card, Orson Scott. *The Abyss*. London: Legend, 1989.

\*Novelization based on the film by James Cameron, 1989, *The Abyss*.

The troubled childhood of Budd, Lindsey and Coffey prepares them for the events that will shape their adult lives. When they meet as adults in the underwater oil rig Deepcore, which Lindsey has designed and Budd's crew operates, the situation is extraordinary: Coffey is a SEAL in charge of a rescue operation involving a missing submarine which carries an atomic bomb. Budd and Lindsey, then about to be divorced, are forced to co-operate with him. Lindsey is then contacted by a race of beautiful aliens who live in the abyss and call themselves 'builders of memory'. They want to prevent humankind from using nuclear weapons; to do so they threaten to unleash a gigantic tidal wave that will sweep the world clean unless nuclear weapons like the one in the submarine are abandoned. When Lindsey confronts and kills Coffey, Budd visits the abyssal aliens to convince them that peace is assured. Aliens and human beings become then part of a unique, harmonious mental entity.

- Carter, Angela. *The Bloody Chamber* (1979). Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981.

\*Film based on the short story "The Company of Wolves": Neil Jordan, 1984, *The Company of Wolves*.

"The Company of Wolves" gathers several stories dealing with the theme of the werewolf. In one story, a hunter who kills a wolf finds that he has dismembered a man; in another, a witch turns the members of a wedding party into a pack of wolves because she wants the groom to serenade her. A woman marries a man who goes missing on their wedding night; when he suddenly returns years later he transforms into a beastly werewolf before her eyes. A young virgin who has just started menstruating, meets a handsome hunter in the woods, who dares her find the way to her grandmother's house after kissing her. The couple make love on Christmas Eve once he kills her grandmother. Christmas day finds the girl in her lover's arms: both of them are now werewolves.

- Carter, Angela. *Nights at the Circus* (1984). London: Picador, 1985.

Fevvers, the Cockney Venus, is a winged woman. She is a successful *aerialist* in a circus, but some suspect her of being a fraud, including a young Californian reporter, Jack Walser. In an interview with him for his series 'Great Humbugs of the World', Fevvers recounts her career: from her humble beginnings as a piece of decoration in a bizarre brothel to the current 'Fevvermania' sweeping Europe. In order to try to discern her real nature, Jack follows Fevvers to Russia, where she is on tour with the circus. There many adventures occur, among them an encounter with bandits in Siberia that leaves him amnesiac and in the hands of a strange tribe who do not distinguish between dream and reality. Fevvers rescues Jack and re-fashions him to become the New Man that will marry her, the New Woman, just when the 20th century begins. Whether she is a genuine freak or not becomes their shared secret.

- Chamas, Suzy McKee. *The Vampire Tapestry* (1980). London: The Women's Press, 1995.

Dr. Edward Weyland is a successful anthropology professor specialized in vampire legends and also himself a vampire. His vampiric nature is detected by Katjie de Groot, who prevents him from biting her by shooting him. Badly hurt, Weyland is then



trapped by a criminal, who has contacts with a small satanic circle and who exploits him as a highly-priced exhibit. Almost dying of starvation, the vampire is released by the criminal's 14-year-old nephew who pities him and returns to his college still unsuspected. Yet, before being hired again, Weyland is forced to undergo psychiatric treatment to justify his disappearance. His psychiatrist, Floria Landauer, believes that he is a real vampire and tries to turn him human by making him fall in love with her. She almost succeeds in humanising him, but he chooses finally to go back to earth and wake up in another century.

- Coetzee, J.M. *Waiting for the Barbarians*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1980 (1983).  
The life of an old Magistrate who rules the affairs of a small frontier settlement in an unspecified empire is altered by the visit of Colonel Joll, who is seeking evidence of an impending barbarian attack. The Magistrate discovers too late that Joll's methods to gather evidence involve torture. To ease his own sense of guilt he enters into a liaison with a barbarian woman who was one of Joll's victims. While he travels to return her to barbarian territory, Joll and his regiment occupy the settlement, though there are still no signs of an invasion. On his return, the Magistrate finds that a dictatorship has been imposed in his domain. His Quixotic attempts to save the natives from further torture only result in his humiliation. Eventually Joll and his men go, the regiment perhaps having been lost to the barbarians. The Magistrate reviews what he has seen, finally understanding that both himself and Joll are part of the Empire.
- Crichton, Michael. *Jurassic Park*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1990 (1991).  
\*Film based on the novel: Steven Spielberg, 1993, *Jurassic Park*.  
A series of strange attacks against people are perpetrated by mysterious animals in Costa Rica in 1989. This coincides with the visit to an island off the coast of a group including the palaeontologist Alan Grant, the palaeobotanist Elli Sattler, the mathematician Ian Malcolm and the children Alexis and Tim. All are invited by the children's grandfather, John Hammond, a Scottish ex-circus impresario, whose last venture is 'Jurassic Park'. The main attraction of this theme park are live dinosaurs, created out of fossilised DNA, that cannot escape the island or breed. However, Malcolm accurately predicts that the system of control will fail, as it does, and Alan soon discovers that the animals are breeding and that some have already escaped the island. The marauding animals stalk and kill all but Alan, Ellie and the children. They survive, but it is too late to stop the dinosaurs.
- Dick, Philip K. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968). London: Panther, 1984.  
\*Film based on the novel: Ridley Scott, 1982, *Blade Runner*.  
Rick Deckard is a hitman hired by the police to eliminate five illegal humaniform 'andys' of the Nexus 6 type. With the bounty of this assignment he expects to buy his wife Iran a real sheep to replace their electric pet. However, killing the Nexus 6 is no easy matter. Deckard has an affair with Rachael, a Nexus 6 made by the Rosen Corporation to prove that human and andys can no longer be told apart. Although Dick manages to kill the other andys, he is sickened by the sheer waste of their lives and by the discovery that Rachael's mission was to seduce him in order to make his task morally impossible for him. When he finally claims his reward and buys a real goat, Rachael kills the animal. The only use of the death of the andys is unmasking the addictive Mercer cult, which preaches mystical immortality: the andys' failure to enter the cult shows that loneliness and death cannot be overcome.
- Disch, Thomas. *The Businessman: A Tale of Horror* (1984). New York: Berkeley, 1993.  
Giselle has been raped and strangled by her husband, businessman Bob Glandier, when she tries to run away from him. She returns to haunt him as a ghost but Glandier is so intent on the macabre pleasures of his new life that he believes Giselle's ghost is part of them. Thus, when they have sex and she conceives a child, he still believes it is all part of his fantasies until the halfling - partly human, partly

spirit - contacts him after his bloody birth. The monstrous baby is the ghost of the child Bob forced Giselle to abort and he is set on revenge. The shape-shifting child soon frames his father by committing a series of crimes that are imputed to Bob. Eventually Bob is sent to prison but a pact with the baby releases him. The baby, however, kills Bob. Bob's ghost is then left stranded in his hated relatives' home, which is his own particular vision of hell.

- Dobbs, Michael. *House of Cards* (1989). London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993.  
\*BBC series based on the novel: Paul Seed, 1990, *House of Cards*.  
Francis Urquhart is the ambitious Chief Whip of the Tory party. After Thatcher's resignation, Collingridge becomes the new Prime Minister, but when he overlooks Urquhart in the first cabinet reshuffle, the Chief Whip decides to claim his due by other means. Urquhart spreads then a series of false rumours that jeopardise the government, firstly by blackmailing the drug addict who runs the advertising agency tied to the Conservatives, whom he later kills. Secondly, Urquhart involves Collingridge's alcoholic brother in a financial scam. Only Mattie Storin, a political correspondent who works for *The Daily Telegraph*, suspects Urquhart, despite having initially sided with him. When Collingridge is forced to resign she sees his game and confronts him with a recording that inculpates him. In despair, Urquhart throws himself off Big Ben and dies.
  
- Dobbs, Michael. *To Play the King* (1992). London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993.  
\*BBC series based on the novel: Paul Seed, 1993, *To Play the King*.  
Francis Urquhart becomes the new Prime Minister under the new king Charles III, a divorced man not too fond of the new PM. Urquhart's position as the successor of Collingridge is contested by other Tories and, to secure it, he organizes a general election that he wins by a narrow margin. Sally Quine, an American journalist, becomes Urquhart's press secretary and also his much abused mistress. When she sees how he manipulates public opinion to the point of almost forcing the King to abdicate, she teams up with Urquhart's main enemy, press tycoon Landless, a victim of Urquhart's blackmail, to bring his downfall. The King finally abdicates, for he thinks that he is not cut for the job, the young Prince becomes the new King, and Urquhart's career is destroyed by Sally and Landless' s exposure of his unsound methods.
  
- Dobbs, Michael. *The Final Cut*. London: HarperCollins, 1995.  
\*BBC series based on the novel: Paul Seed, 1995, *The Final Cut*.  
Francis Urquhart is about to break Thatcher's record as longest standing Prime Minister in the 20th century. Many Tory voices are demanding his resignation, whereas he seems to feel frustrated, seeing that he cannot surpass Thatcher. In order to win glory similar to hers, Urquhart plans to turn Cyprus into his own Falklands. A rebel Greek group who threaten the discussion of a peace treaty with Turkey, which is also threatened by the discovery of oil in the island's subsoil, become his target. However, Urquhart's attempted 'liberation' of Cyprus must be halted because his own wife has been secretly dealing with both the Greek and the Turkish government, precisely to raise money for a memorial library. Urquhart decides then to court immortality, orchestrating his own assassination by the elderly Cypriot ex-freedom fighter, Evangelos Passolides. He is the brother of two young boys that he had burned to death in Cyprus in 1956 when he was a young officer doing his military service. His death two days before the general election reunites the Tory party, which wins again.
  
- Dunn, Katherine. *Geek Love* (1983). London: Abacus, 1992 (1993).  
Lil Binewski, born a Boston aristocrat and known as the geek Crystal Lil, gives up her job in a freak show for motherhood. Lil and her husband, who owns a fairground, give birth to a family of freaks: Arturo (a seal boy), the Siamese twins Electra and Iphigenia, Chick 'Fortunato' (a boy with telekinetic powers) and Olympia, a hunchbacked albino dwarf. The family is a success until Arturo - the originator of a

macabre cult of mutilated followers - starts ruling it dictatorially and causes its disintegration by murdering the unruly Siamese twins. After this, Olympia secretly conceives the beautiful, tailed Miranda from Arturo's semen. The girl is raised as an orphan, but when a rich woman, Mary Lick, offers her money to remove her tail, Olympia starts her particular crusade to preserve the extraordinary nature of her unacknowledged daughter. Olympia kills Mary Lick and herself rather than see Miranda 'disfigured'.

- Ellis, Brett Easton. *American Psycho*. New York: Vintage Books, 1991.

Pat Bateman is a successful New York Yuppie: good-looking, well-liked, engaged to the beautiful Evelyn and possessed of a vast knowledge about good manners. He is also a psychopath who kills in particularly vicious manners anyone he regards as a loser: homeless people, gays, members of ethnic minorities, business rivals and, above all, women. However, no matter how often he declares what he does or others seemingly suspect his crimes, nobody stops him and he slowly falls into a spiral of madness that seems just a continuation of the yuppie vapid style of life. Tired of his routine of brutal killings, Bateman is almost tempted by his secretary Jean's innocent offer of love, but he finally decides that it is not worth accepting. Bateman faces the end of the 1980s knowing that his life is absurd but that nothing or nobody will purge it of this absurdity or, indeed, stop him.

- Ellis, Bret Easton. "The Secrets of Summer" in *The Informers*. London: Picador, 1994.

Jamie is a good-looking California vampire, fond of his anthracite Porsche and his customized coffin. He is in the habit of picking up young girls with whom he has sex and later, sometimes, kills after biting. Jamie is not alone, but part of a wide network of vampires acting in California. All of them enjoy an expensive life style, and live undetected despite the grossness of their acts. When Jamie starts having visions of an impending nuclear holocaust, he warns his puzzled psychiatrist, Dr. Nova, that the vampires will nonetheless survive.

- Fowler, Christopher. *Spanky*. London: Warner Books, 1994.

Martyn Ross, a dull sales assistant, meets in a London night-club a very good-looking man, somehow similar to him, who calls himself Spanky and claims to be a 'daemon'. He offers to be Martyn's personal daemon at no cost, enticing him with easy sex with a model (which he watches), getting clothes for him and in general promoting his welfare and his career. Martyn accepts this Faustian pact, unaware that his very weakness has attracted the daemon. When he is most enjoying his success, the daemon demands Martyn's body as payment for his new life of luxury. Spanky, actually a body-snatcher, needs a new body but, since he can only possess one if invited, he must cajole Martyn into accepting him. Martyn agrees to be possessed and, once Spanky is inside his body, attempts suicide, but he is saved and Spanky escapes. He spends the rest of his life as a homeless drifter, expecting to encounter Spanky in another body.

- Gibson, William. *Neuromancer* (1984). London: HarperCollins, 1993.

Case is a 'cyberspace cowboy'. He steals information for money until one of his victims cripples him, making it impossible for him to jack into cyberspace. A new employer offers him a cure, provided he breaks the 'ice' (electronic defense) blocking the access to the Artificial Intelligence Neuromancer, owned by the Tessier-Ashpool corporation. Helped by a ghostly cowboy, the Dixie Flatliner, and by the hitwoman Molly, both hired by his employer, Case discovers that this is the AI Wintermute, also owned by Tessier-Ashpool. Wintermute wants to free Neuromancer and become with him a free entity in cyberspace. When Case eventually reaches the core of Tessier-Ashpool, the villa Straylight, he cracks the code Wintermute so desperately needs to regain its freedom. He succeeds in setting Wintermute and Neuromancer free and they become a new god of cyberspace.

- Gray, Alasdair. *Poor Things*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1992.

In the late 19th century, the eccentric surgeon Godwin Baxter creates in his Glasgow home a new woman, made up of the body of a drowned mother and the brain of her eight-month fetus. Instead of fulfilling his dream of becoming a new Pygmalion, the childish Bella becomes engaged to Baxter's best friend, McCandless. Yet she elopes with her lover Duncan to travel around the Mediterranean and learn about life in general and sex in particular. Back to Glasgow, a mature Bella demands to know who she is. She is satisfied with Baxter's lie about her being amnesiac until a certain General Blessington claims her on her wedding day as his lost wife Victoria. Bella is then told how Blessington abused her but he is unmasked when she proves that he is a pervert. Bella starts then a career as a doctor specialised in family planning, eventually marrying McCandless. Yet a Victoria McCandless claims in a letter to her descendants that Bella is nothing but a figment of her poor husband's deranged imagination.
- Harris, Thomas. *Red Dragon* (1981). London: Arrow Books, 1993.

\*Film based on the novel: Michael Mann, 1986, *Manhunter*.  
Will Graham, the FBI agent who captured the notorious cannibal serial killer Hannibal Lecter, is forced out of his retirement by his ex-boss, Jack Crawford. Another serial killer, nicknamed the 'Tooth Fairy' because he bites his victims, is killing suburban families. As it turns out, the killer is a certain Francis Dolarhyde, who is traumatised by his malformed face and his irregular upbringing (he was rejected by his mother). He is befriended by a blind woman, Reba, who, unaware of who he is, seduces him. Her love causes a definitive split between his more human side and his schizophrenic alter ego, which he identifies with Blake's painting of the dragon of Revelation. While Graham traces Dolarhyde, the latter has contacted Lecter, his idol, and has been put on Graham's track. When Dolarhyde reaches Graham's home to carry out Lecter's revenge, Graham's wife Molly cannot prevent him from brutally slashing Graham's face, but she kills him.
- Harris, Thomas. *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988). London: Mandarin Paperbacks, 1993.

\*Film based on the novel: Jonathan Demme, 1990, *The Silence of the Lambs*.  
Clarice Starling, an FBI trainee, is sent by her supervisor Jack Crawford to meet Hannibal Lecter, the imprisoned cannibal serial killer, in order to engage his help in the case of a new serial killer of women. At first, Lecter despises Clarice because she is working-class but his snobbery is overcome by her ambition and he decides to help her. Meanwhile, the killer kidnaps Catherine, Senator Ruth Martin's daughter, and Clarice finds herself working against the clock to prevent her death. Lecter's hints lead Clarice to find out that the man who is killing and skinning working-class, big girls is a certain Jame Gumb. He is a frustrated transsexual who, as Lecter suggests, is making himself a suit out of the skins of the women he kills. In order to find him, Clarice has to break the rigid FBI rules, thus jeopardising her career, and must also overcome her dislike of upper-class Catherine and her mother, but she finally succeeds in killing Gumb as Lecter escapes his jailers.
- Hayslip, Le Ly with Jay Wurts. *Heaven and Earth: When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* (1989). London: Pan Books, 1994.

\*Film based on the autobiography: Oliver Stone, 1994, *Heaven and Earth*  
Le Ly was a peasant girl in Ky La, central Vietnam; when the Viet Cong reached her village. She was a Viet Cong fighter between the ages of 12 and 15, despite her pacifist father's opposition. During this time she was imprisoned and tortured three times by the government. Suspecting that she may have betrayed them, the Viet Cong condemns her to death but instead she is raped by two of their men. Unable to stand the shame, she escapes Ky La with her mother, becoming next a servant for a wealthy family. At the age of 16 she is made pregnant by her master and is expelled from the house. She moves then to Saigon, where she has her baby, becomes a black marketeer, and starts a series of liaisons with American men, hoping that one

will marry her and take her and her child to the USA. Eventually she meets a middle-aged civilian engineer, Ed Munro, who marries her and with whom she moves to California.

- Hayslip, Le Ly with James Hayslip. *Heaven and Earth: Child of War, Woman of Peace* (1993). London: Pan Books, 1994.

\*Film based on the autobiography: Oliver Stone, 1994, *Heaven and Earth*.

Aged 20, Le Ly Munro moves to the USA with her husband Ed and her two boys, only to find a strange land that does not welcome her, and a materialistic culture she despises. Back to Vietnam in 1971 because of Ed's job, she starts an affair with major Dante de Parma who, unknown to her, is an arms dealer. The family go back to the USA once again and Ed dies of a heart attack after discovering her infidelity. Le Ly marries then Dennis Hayslip but his passion for firearms and his religious fanaticism wreck the marriage. Eventually he commits suicide and Le Ly discovers that he had intended to kill her and the children for the money of their life insurance. Alone again, Le Ly succeeds as a businesswoman and when Dante reappears in her life she rejects him, choosing to devote herself to taking care of a number of Vietnamese orphans in the USA, and to running her American-Vietnamese foundation 'East meets West'.

- Herbert, James. *Shrine* (1983). London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1984.

Alice Pagett, 11, is working miracles, healing sick people in a field of her native village Banfield. The Catholic church attributes her powers to the Virgin Mary and the local businessmen see their chance to turn Banfield into a second Lourdes. Only journalist Gerry Fenn remains sceptical: what everybody thinks is holy, is for him distinctly evil. The innocent-looking Alice is for Fenn a clear suspect in the horrific deaths of Father Hagan and of her own father, even though this means that she must accept that some kind of supernatural power is at work. Eventually, Fenn discovers a manuscript about the 16th century nun Elnor, a powerful healer burnt as a witch, who appears to him as a horrific ghost. She has possessed Alice and though the child is killed by a megalomaniac in search of fame, only the apparition of the Virgin exorcises Banfield from Elnor's presence.

- Holdstock, Robert. *Mythago Wood* (1984). London: Grafton, 1986.

Back in Britain from World War II, Steve Huxley is told by his brother Chris that their father has died. He has become the wild man Urscumug in the primal wood that surrounds their home and that was his object of research. Suddenly Chris himself disappears in the wood, and when Steve discovers the dead body of Guiwenneth, Chris's wife, he thinks that his brother is a murderer. However, a younger Chris reappears, obsessed with the 'mythagos', entities that the wood's energy materialises in conjunction with the unconscious figures rooted in the viewer's mind and that appear in legends: Guiwenneth was, precisely, the mythical woman their father created. Steve eventually creates his own mythagos until he produces a new Guiwenneth, who becomes his own beloved wife. Chris abducts her back to the forest and Steve goes after them, discovering that Chris is now the legendary Outsider. Steve accidentally kills the Outsider and the Urscumug takes dead Guiwenneth to Lavondyss, where she is to live again.

- Holland, Isabelle. *The Man without a Face* (1972). London: Pan, 1993.

\*Film based on the novel: Mel Gibson, 1993, *The Man without a Face*.

14-year-old Chuck wants desperately to enter St Matthews', a boarding school, in order to eventually become a military pilot like his idolised dead father, and also to escape his mother and stepsisters. He needs a tutor to pass the entrance examination and, so, he approaches Justin McLeod, despite his fear of his badly burnt face and the wild rumours about him. At first Justin rejects Chuck, but he later agrees to tutor him if Chuck accepts his rather fierce discipline. Little by little, Chuck and Justin become close friends. Chuck reveals to him the trauma of the death of his

father and Justin explains that his face was burnt in a car crash in which a 14-year-old student of his died. When Chuck finds Gloria in bed with a boyfriend, she tells him the truth about his alcoholic father out of spite and Chuck runs to Justin's arms, discovering at last his own homosexuality. Justin commends Chuck to his new sympathetic stepfather, Barry, before dying of cancer.

- Hughes, Ted. *The Iron Woman: A Sequel to the Iron Man*. London: Faber and Faber, 1993.  
Lucy meets a giantess born from the filthy river mud who wants to destroy all the polluters. She can transmit through touch the wailing scream of all the creatures endangered by pollution. Lucy contacts Hogarth, the Iron Man's friend, and he realizes that the piercing scream is infectious: soon all human contact seems impossible. Suddenly, all the men become giant fish - only the women and the boys under 18 are left untouched. A monstrous cloud is formed, coming from the mouths of the bubbling fish men: the Iron Woman forces the cloud to confess that it is the evil god of gain, and with the help of the Iron Man's dragon, she eliminates it. The men regain then their human form, though a faint wailing can still be heard whenever pollution increases. Mysteriously, rubbish turns into a wonderful, non-polluting fuel: this saves the national economy for all the nations of the world send their waste to England for recycling into the miraculous fuel.
- Keneally, Thomas. *Schindler's List* (1982). London: Sceptre, 1993.  
\*Film based on the novel: Steven Spielberg, 1994, *Schindler's List*.  
Oskar Schindler was a Czech industrialist, the owner of a factory in Cracow that he had acquired with the help of the Nazi invaders. However, witnessing the massacre of the Cracow Jewish ghetto triggered in Schindler a wish to save as many Jewish lives as his money could buy. To this end he sought a relationship with Amon Goeth, the brutal Nazi commandant of the Pláaszow camp and Oskar's dark counterpart. Eventually, Schindler managed to buy from the corrupt Amon (together with other charitable businessmen) the lives of 1,100 Jews, even pulling away from Auschwitz a group of Jewish women included in his list. In the end, Oskar transferred his Jews to the safer camp at Brinnlitz and there they patiently awaited for the end of the war. When it came, it brought freedom for his Jews, Goeth's downfall and the beginning of a difficult life for Schindler.
- King, Stephen. *The Shining* (1977). Sevenoaks: Hodder and Stoughton, 1980 (1993).  
\*Film based on the novel: Stanley Kubrick, 1980, *The Shining*.  
After losing his job as an English teacher for attacking a student, Jack Torrance takes a new job as a winter caretaker in the Overlook Hotel, Colorado. He and his wife Wendy think that their stay in the lonely, snowbound hotel will help rebuild their family life - wrecked by his alcoholism and his having broken once his son Danny's arm - despite the fact that Jack's predecessor killed his family in the hotel. Once there, Jack is haunted by the evil spirits of the hotel, abandons the play he is writing for a book about the place and becomes a danger for his family that only his son Danny can avert. The boy, gifted with a psychic ability known as 'the shining', captures glimpses of the violent past of the hotel and, warned by his imaginary playmate Tony, senses that his father is possessed by a force which claims the sacrifice of the whole family. His love frees Jack's soul just before the hotel kills him - he and his mother escape.
- King, Stephen. *The Dead Zone* (1979). London: Warner Books, 1992 (1994)  
\*Film based on the novel: David Cronenberg, 1983, *The Dead Zone*.  
Johnny Smith is a high school English teacher in love with co-worker Sarah. The first night they go out together he suffers a car crash that leaves him in a coma for almost five years. When he regains consciousness he finds Sarah married, his mother in the grip of a religious mania that leads to her death and himself possessed of a strange ability to learn from people's past or future simple by touching them. Fighting off the sensationalist press that wants to exploit him and coming slowly to terms with the fact that Sarah is lost for him (except for a brief encounter) Johnny's sad new life begins.

He uses his ability sparingly (to help the police, to save the life of his benefactor's son) but when he touches the candidate to the US Senate, Greg Stillson, Johnny sees that this madman will trigger a nuclear war when he becomes the future US President and, so, decides to kill him. He fails and is himself shot, dying later, but he unmasks Stillson's foul play.

- King, Stephen. *Firestarter* (1980). London: Warner Books, 1992 (1994).

\*Film based on the novel: Mark Lester, 1984, *Firestarter*.

Andy McGee, and his daughter Charlie, 7, are on the run from The Shop's agents, who have killed his wife Vickie. The couple were involved in an experiment run by Dr Wanless for The Shop, in which a dangerous drug was secretly tested in college students. The drug Lot 6 gave an unexpected result when their daughter was born with the ability to start fires. The Shop suspects that her ability may be unbound and want to use her for military purposes. Eventually the psychopathic agent John Rainbird blackmails The Shop's head, Hollister, to let him catch the fugitives, as he is fascinated by Charlie. Soon succeeding, Rainbird gains Charlie's trust and convinces her to collaborate in The Shop's experiments. Andy uses his own psychic abilities to escape and tell Charlie who Rainbird really is. Maddened by his betrayal and by his killing Andy, Charlie kills Rainbird and sets out to destroy The Shop before reporting their activities to the press.

- King, Stephen. *It* (1986). London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1987

\*TV Film based on the novel: Tommy Lee Wallace, 1990, *It*.

Mike calls back to Derry his six friends Bill, Ben, Bev, Eddie, Richie and Stan to fulfil a promise they made in 1958 when they defeated together the monster It. 27 years later, in 1985, the monster has started killing children again and must be once again subjugated. All, except Stan (who commits suicide) go back to Derry to pool the combined faith that freed Derry from It in their childhood. This monster, an extraterrestrial evil entity arrived in Earth in prehistoric times, lives off the belief of children in monsters and also off the adults' evildoing. It is behind the deaths of the children but also behind the many violent incidents caused by adults occurred in Derry. It appeared once to the children as the monster they feared most and in 1985 It uses the same strategy to terrify them. Acting on their own and with the faith they had as children, the group traces the monster to its lair and using an old ritual Bill and Richie kill it. Then, they all forget what they have been through together.

- King, Stephen. *Misery* (1987). Sevenoaks: Hodder and Stoughton, 1992.

\*Film based on the novel: Rob Reiner, 1990, *Misery*.

Paul Sheldon, author of the best-selling Misery novels, is rescued from his wrecked car by the ex-nurse Annie Wilkes, his number one fan. Her admiration becomes hatred when she reads the last Misery novel: Paul has dared kill Annie's beloved heroine in order to give his career a more literary turn. Angered by his betrayal, Annie burns Paul's new manuscript and subjects her prisoner to all kinds of humiliations, withdrawing his painkilling medication and even cutting off his foot. To appease the irate Annie, Paul must write a new Misery novel; clinging to it as if he were a new Scheherazade, Paul survives until the manuscript is ready. Meanwhile, he discovers, thanks to a scrapbook, that Annie was once a notorious serial killer. Paul decides then to attack her, beginning by pretending to burn his manuscript before her very eyes. Annie dies in the attack and, once free, Paul publishes the new Misery novel, his best so far, to start immediately writing an entirely different kind of novel for a more demanding public.

- King, Stephen. *Pet Sematary*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1988

\*Film based on the novel: Mary Lambert, 1989, *Pet Sematary*.

Louis Creed moves to Maine with his wife Rachel and their children, Elli, 5, and Gage, 2, when he gets a new post as head of the University of Maine infirmary. Their new neighbour, Jud, cautions them about the danger posed by the constant flux of

lorries on the apparently quiet road but, despite his warning, Elli's cat is soon killed by one. Seeing Louis's anguish at having to break the bad news to Elli, Jud takes him to an ancient Indian burial ground, placed in the nearby woods, where they bury the cat, which returns to life the following day. Although Jud warns Louis that nobody should try to bury a person in the burial ground, when Gage is killed by another lorry, Louis does not hesitate to bury the child. Gage soon returns transformed into a horrific evil entity, killing Jud and his own mother Rachel before Louis can kill him for good. Yet Louis cannot help breaking the taboo again by taking Rachel to the burial ground.

- Lee, Tanith. *The Silver Metal Lover*. London: Unwin, 1986.

Jane, a seventeen-year-old girl, is the daughter of a rich, respected intellectual, Demeta, with whom she lives. Jane falls in love with a young man, Silver, who turns out to be a robot programmed to be a musician and also a sex toy. When Jane realizes that she really loves Silver, despite knowing that he is a machine, she sells all her possessions and buys Silver through a friend of hers, Egyptia, as Jane is still a minor. Jane and Silver live then together in hiding for some months, while Demeta cuts off Jane's resources to force her to come back home. The happy love story between Jane and Silver is interrupted when E.M. decides to withdraw their products from the market because of the recent riots against the presence of pseudo-human robots in the streets. Egyptia realizes that she might be in trouble herself because she legally owns Silver and betrays him to E.M.. He is then taken from Jane and destroyed, not before he develops a soul. His soul eventually contacts Jane and promises to her that they will meet again after her death.

- Lee, Tanith. *Heart-Beast*. London: Headline Feature, 1992.

Daniel Vehmund has killed his father to protect her mother from his violence. He flees then to a place in the Middle East where he is tricked into drinking a cup of wine with a strange diamond in it. A fever ensues and Daniel becomes a horrific werewolf on the ship taking him home, though he always remains unaware of the many deaths he causes. Back home, Daniel falls in love with beautiful Laura, a milkmaid who used to be his mother's companion and is now married to the rich Hyperion Worth, whom she does not love. Daniel's mother, Jenavere, is happy to enjoy his protection once more, but when she sees Daniel as a werewolf kill his brother Marshal she dies, believing that Daniel has materialised out of her wish to see her other son dead. Although Laura tries to discourage Daniel, Hyperion consents to their adultery, fascinated as he is by Daniel. He pays for this fascination with his own life, though. When Laura sees what Daniel really is, she kills him.

- Lessing, Doris. *The Fifth Child* (1988). London: Flamingo, 1993.

Harriet and David Lovatt are a middle-class couple who marry in the late 1960s, expecting to raise a large family against the advice of their relatives. Harriet's first four pregnancies succeed each other very quickly; the fifth is especially difficult as their respective parents start resenting the couple's dependence on them and because Harriet feels physically sick. When the baby is born Harriet rejects him: Ben is ugly in an odd way, as if he were of another race. As Ben grows up he behaves more violently until the family finally decides to abandon him in a special institution. Harriet retrieves him from the horrid institution where he has been placed and returns him home, even though this brings the slow disintegration of her family. Ben grows up and eventually forms a gang that Harriet holds responsible for a series of crimes in the neighbourhood. Harriet is relieved to see him leave home for good to meet those of his 'race'.

- Mahmoody, Betty with William Hoffer. *Not Without my Daughter* (1988). London: Corgi, 1989 (1994).

\*Film based on the novel: Brian Gilbert, 1991, *Not without my Daughter*.

Betty Mahmoody and her husband, Dr Sayyed Bozorg Mahmoody ('Moody'), travel to Iran from the USA, together with their four-year-old daughter Mahtob, to meet



Moody's family. Dismayed by the squalor and appalled by the realization that she is nothing in Iran but a despised Westerner and merely her husband's property, Betty soon tries desperately to return to the USA. Yet Moody and his family conspire to keep mother and daughter prisoners, while Moody becomes a tyrannical monster even for Mahtob. Eventually, on the rare occasions when she can escape Moody's vigilance, Betty contacts a network of sympathisers opposed to Khomeini's regime that offers her help. When Moody suggests that she may divorce him and leave Mahtob behind for ever, mother and daughter are helped to escape to Turkey.

- Martin, Valerie. *Mary Reilly* (1990). London: Black Swan, 1991.

\*Film based on the novel: Stephen Frears, 1995, *Mary Reilly*.

Mary Reilly, 22, is employed as a maid in the London household of Dr. Jekyll. She arouses his sympathy when she explains to him that the scars in her hands are the result of her drunkard father's abuse: Jekyll sees in her a person who has experienced contact with monstrosity. Little by little, Mary falls in love with Jekyll, observing from a distance the suspicious comings and goings of his guest, Mr. Hyde; on his part, Jekyll grows fond of Mary, trusting her with a delicate mission, namely, covering the tracks of one of Hyde's crimes. He is also fond of interrogating her cryptically about her fear of her own nature. Although Mary still does not suspect who Hyde is, one night he approaches her, claiming to know her, and attacks her, biting her in the neck. When finally Jekyll's dead body is found after his suicide, Mary recognizes him as Hyde and lies down by his side, letting herself be found with him as a sign of her devotion.

- McCabe, Patrick. *The Butcher Boy* (1992). London: Pan Books, 1993.

Francie Brady writes in a psychiatric hospital about why he killed Mrs. Nugent. His life as a child in a small Irish town changed with the arrival of the Nugents. Francie and his friend Joe once stole a collection of comics from Philip Nugent. Mrs. Nugent paid then a visit to the Bradys that changed Francie's view of his own family for ever: Mrs. Nugent made him feel ashamed for the first time of his mother's madness and his father's alcoholism, and of himself. He ran then away only to find on his return that his mother had committed suicide and that his father blamed him for it. When Joe shifts his allegiance to Philip, Francie's world collapses and, after breaking into the Nugents' home, he is placed in an institution. This place proves even worse for Francie as he is sexually abused by one of the priests that runs it. Back home, Joe and Philip finally disown him. He gets then a job in the local abattoir, lets his father die at home and finally vents his rage by brutally killing Mrs. Nugent.

- McCammon, Robert. *Swan Song* (1987). London: Warner Books, 1992 (1994).

The President of the USA starts a nuclear war, despite his reluctance, that destroys the country. Among the survivors are 9-year-old Swan, befriended by ex-wrestler Josh, who is amazed to see that she has the power to make grass grow in the new waste land. Unknown to both, a homeless woman (Sister Creep) has a vision of Swan and starts searching for her to give her an enigmatic crown that the Devil also covets. Col. Macklin and his young assistant Roland run one of the many new armies that terrorise the survivors. They all converge after years of roaming the waste land, for the Devil uses Macklin to reach Swan. When they meet at last, the survivors, plagued by the disease known as Job's mask, shed their skin and are transformed into beautiful or ugly people, according to who they are inside. Swan becomes then a beautiful woman and stops the Devil from causing a second holocaust. She exorcises him simply by forgiving him and then makes the land fertile again.

- McEwan, Ian. *The Cement Garden* (1978). London: Picador (1980).

\*Film based on the novel: Andrew Birkin, 1993, *The Cement Garden*.

Jack, 15, and his siblings - Julie, 17, Sue, 13 and Tom, 7 - become orphans when their mother dies at home, shortly after their father's death of a heart attack. Loathing the idea of an eventual separation, Julie and Jack encase their mother's body in cement and leave it in the cellar. They go on then with their lives. Julie and Jack take

the place of the missing parents, and Sue and Tom become their own children. They run the household, indulging their own fantasies and desires, allowing Tom to dress as a girl because he wants to be one, and entering into an incestuous relationship themselves. However, the family is eventually destroyed by the intrusion of Julie's middle-class boyfriend, Derek. He suspects what the cement block in the cellar contains but is willing to play their game if he is made part of the family. When this does not happen and he finds Julie and Jack in bed, he reports them to the police.

- McEwan, Ian. *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981). London: Picador, 1982.

\*Film based on the novel: Paul Schrader, 1990, *The Comfort of Strangers*.

Colin and Mary are both unemployed actors (she is divorced and a mother of two), trying to give their relationship of seven years another boost with a romantic holiday in Venice. There they are trapped in the web spun by Italian Robert and his ill-treated Canadian wife Caroline, who push onto Colin the harm they do each other. As Mary later discovers, their encounters with Robert are by no means casual: he has been following them all over Venice, taking pictures of Colin. One day Robert takes the couple to his home where they meet Caroline. While Robert is busy expounding on the pleasures of old-fashioned sexism and punching Colin for not agreeing with him, Caroline tells Mary about the sadomasochistic bond between her and Robert, which led him once to cripple her. Only too late, Mary realizes that they mean to kill Colin for their pleasure. When they do so, absurdly, before her very eyes, Mary can do nothing to prevent Colin's death.

- McEwan, Ian. *The Innocent*. London: Picador, 1990.

\*Film based on the novel: John Schlesinger, 1993, *The Innocent*.

Leonard Mamham, 25, an English specialist in telephones, is posted to Berlin in 1955 to collaborate with the Americans in the tapping of the Russian phone lines running into a tunnel they have just dug. His supervisor is Col. Glass, a man who mistrusts everybody, including Leonard's new girlfriend, Maria, a German secretary. On the night of their engagement, Maria's violent ex-husband Otto attacks the couple in her flat and they kill him. Rather than confess to their crime, they dismember Otto's body and Leonard conceals it in two suitcases that he leaves in the tunnel, determined to sell the secret of the tunnel to the Russians. However, somebody anticipates him and when the tunnel is found with Otto's body in it, only Glass can help the couple. He does so, and Leonard soon leaves Germany. Maria, however, stays, and, knowing that they cannot be together after Otto's death, she marries Glass and moves to the USA.

- Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. London: Picador, 1987.

1873. Sethe lives with her daughter Denver in a house haunted by the ghost of Beloved, her other daughter, who died at the age of 2. This changes when Paul D. arrives to see Sethe and exorcises the ghost. He was once a slave in the plantation Sethe escaped years ago with her three children, when the new master beat her even though she was pregnant. However, Paul is not aware that Sethe killed Beloved and tried to kill her other children when she saw her master come for them, though she was then a free woman in Ohio. Beloved enters again Sethe's house as a lovely teenager to spellbind Denver, seduce Paul D. (then Sethe's new companion) and make Sethe leave everything for her. Delighted by her supernatural return, Sethe fails to see that Beloved is wrecking her life until one day Sethe attacks her white benefactor when Beloved makes her believe that he has come to take her away. All see then that she is evil and, though Sethe is hurt by her vanishing, Beloved is forgotten like a bad dream.

- Piercy, Marge. *Body of Glass* (1991). Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992.

Dr. Avram Stein builds secretly a cyborg, Yod, to defend his free Jewish city, Tikva, from the covetousness of one of the multies, Yakamura-Stichen, in the 21st century. Yod is a warrior, jointly programmed by Stein and Malkah, but he lacks the social skills that would allow him to pass himself off for a human. Shira Shipman, Malkah's

granddaughter, is commissioned with the job of teaching Yod how to be human and in the process they become lovers. Meanwhile, Malkah, also his lover, instructs him with the legend of the 16th century golem. When Shira's mother, Riva, arrives with her lesbian lover Nili (who is to contact the resistance) Yod's disadvantages are made apparent: while Nili is a successful fighter who carries out her mission well, Yod, far from protecting Tikva, endangers it with its presence. Seeing his failure, Stein plans to destroy Yod but before he can do so, Yod kills him and commits suicide. Shira is tempted to rebuild Yod but finally accepts that this would be another mistake.

- Powers, Tim. *The Annubis Gates* (1983). London: HarperCollins, 1993.

When Dr. Romanelli and the gypsy Fikee invoke Annubis to flood England with its power, something goes wrong and Fikee is turned into a murderous ape. While Fikee transfers from one body to another (leaving on his trail the series of murders known as the Dancing Ape Madness), Romanelli tries another strategy to upset England: an artificial replica of his patient, Lord Byron, will kill the king. Upon these two plots stumbles Brendan Doyle, a 20th Century literature professor specialized in the mysterious American poet William Ashbless, who is left stranded in 1810 when he travels in time in an outing organized by the tycoon Darrow. A misencounter with Fikee leaves Doyle stranded as well in a body that is not his own: he is, to his surprise, William Ashbless himself. Meeting Byron's replica and later Coleridge himself, Doyle finally defeats Darrow's plans to become immortal with Fikee's help, and becomes himself immortal.

- Powers, Tim. *The Stress of her Regard* (1989). London: Grafton, 1993.

Crawford, a 34-year-old gynaecologist in the early 19th century unwittingly invites a lamia to haunt him by putting his bride's wedding ring on a female statue. The lamias are vampire serpents that take human form, male or female, to victimise their human lovers. They are the nephelim of the Bible that came back in the year 1,000 when a Hapsburg nobleman had a stone sewn into his body in a mock pregnancy. Crawford believes Keats, Shelley and Byron's claims that they are associated to lamias, who are their muses and cause the death of their relatives in exchange for the gift of creativity. Shelley hosted one (his twin sister) since the moment of conception, the same one now preying on Crawford. Shelley is finally released from her by his drowning, and the Hapsburg host of the vampires is killed, but Crawford fears that his newly-born baby by Josephine, another victim of the lamias, might be the last of the doomed romantics.

- Pratchett, Terry. *Guards, Guards!* (1989). London: Corgi, 1990 (1993).

The wizards of Ankh-Morpork's Unseen University summon a dragon from another dimension, expecting that it will attract an heir to the throne whom they will be able to manipulate as they like. The prince indeed exists in the person of corporal Carrot, the latest addition to the city's guard, though he has been raised by dwarves and ignores who he is. As a guard, Carrot takes part nonetheless in the hunting of the horrific dragon that stalks the citizens of Ankh-Morpork and that the wizards cannot control. Captain Vimes seeks the help of Lady Ramkin, an aristocratic breeder of the more domestic swamp dragons, who explains to him that the anatomically impossible dragon migrated to another dimension where it can simply be, without need of being believed in. The gigantic dragon, a female, becomes the new queen, though in the end it prefers to fly away with one of Lady Ramkin's tiny male dragons.

- Pratchett, Terry. *Moving Pictures* (1990). London: Corgi, 1991(1993).

Ribobe, last of the Keepers of the Paramountain, dies leaving no apprentice and, so, the prayers that keep a certain cave sealed, out of which monstrous things could escape, cease. In Ankh-Morpork the alchemists discover a method of keeping images in reels and move to Holy Wood to start producing the new moving pictures, haunted by an odd feeling of déjà vu. Victor, an apprentice magician, and Ginger become the film stars in the first blockbuster, *Blown Away*. The production of the film is halted by Ginger's sleepwalking to the cave, where the figure of a recumbent warrior is found.

When the opening night of *Blown Away* finally arrives, Victor realizes that the magic of the film allows the things from another dimension to enter his world. The spectators' belief in what they see on the screen allows a monstrous screen Ginger to leave it and storm the city. He can only defeat it by pretending he is indeed a hero as the Librarian invokes the golden warrior to their aid.

- Pratchett, Terry. *Small Gods* (1992). London: Corgi, 1993.

The Great God Om is fast losing his followers and has been reduced to assuming the shape of a tortoise constantly threatened by all kinds of predators, especially eagles. Desperate by his plight, Om chooses his own messiah in the person of Brutha, a young, rather stupid novice of his own cult, who turns out to have a special psychic power: a perfect memory. Brutha soon attracts the attention of Vorbis, the evil Exquisitor or head of the powerful Quisition, but because of his memory rather than because of his secret mission. Meanwhile, Vorbis is himself intent on another mission: extending his empire of fanaticism and cruelty, for which he travels to the Tyrant's dominion in Ephebe, where Om's main temple is. Eventually Vorbis announces that he is Om's own prophet and tries to kill Brutha. Yet Vorbis is killed by a tortoise when he is torturing Brutha, the 'false' prophet, in the temple. The tortoise has been dropped from the sky by a rather clumsy eagle before the eyes of all of Om's believers.

- Rice, Anne. *Interview with the Vampire* (1976). New York: Ballantine Books, 1977 (1989).

\*Film based on the novel: Neil Jordan, 1994, *Interview with the Vampire*.

1791, New Orleans. Louis's saintly brother commits suicide because of Louis's refusal to imitate him. Harrowed by his sense of guilt, Louis allows Lestat to make him a vampire. Life with Lestat soon becomes a dull affair, as Louis expects some kind of transcendence that the materialistic Lestat does not possess. When Lestat's killings go too far for Louis's liking, Lestat tries to appease him with a gift: a 5-year-old vampire, Claudia, who becomes their adoptive daughter. Years later, when Claudia finds out that she is trapped in her childish body because of Lestat, she kills him, fleeing with Louis to Eastern Europe in search of their roots. Unaware that Lestat has survived her attack, the couple move to Paris, where Lestat has orchestrated his revenge with the help of Armand's vampires. Claudia is killed and, though Louis destroys all the other vampires and goes back to New Orleans with his new lover Armand, life is no longer the same, especially when he learns that Armand teamed up with Lestat to kill Claudia.

- Roth, Philip. *Operation Shylock: A Confession*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1993.

'Philip Roth', the famous Jewish American novelist, visits Israel in 1988. There he attends the trial of John Demjanjuk, accused of being the notorious Nazi exterminator Ivan the Terrible of Treblinka. But Demjanjuk's true identity seems as impossible to ascertain as the identity of another Philip Roth campaigning in Israel for a return of the Jews to their European Diaspora. Eventually 'Roth' discovers that the other Philip Roth is a man who looks like him and is indeed called like him and whose life has been spoiled by the shadow that the more famous Roth casts. This man has passed from admiration to usurping 'Roth's' personality and has started working for what 'Roth' regards as a crazy project, the return of the Jews to Europe and of the Palestinians to their land. When this man finally succumbs to a cancer, 'Roth' accepts to meet Arafat on behalf of the Jewish state, for secret talks about the new Diaspora organized by the Mossad.

- Rushdie, Salman. *Shame* (1983). London: Picador, 1984.

Sufiya Zinobia, the daughter of Bilquis and Raza Hyder, is left mentally impaired by a brain fever when she is 2. Sufiya absorbs like a sponge all the shame heaped on her by her parents, who are convinced that she is a punishment. When she grows up her shame is expressed in outrageous acts of violence and in a psychosomatic skin disease. Omar Khayam, the doctor who treats her, marries her but, as time goes by, Sufiya's beast inside can be kept less and less easily at bay. She kills more often and

more brutally until the discovery of her husband's adultery transforms her into a monstrous white panther for good. The beast finally gets the upper hand and escapes her husband, who is now convinced that she is a willing host for evil. Sufiya rampages the country at will, protected by her ashamed father (now the president of the dictatorial republic) and becomes a legend. She returns nonetheless to claim the lives of her father and her husband.

- Self, Will. *My Idea of Fun* (1993). Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994.  
Asked by girlfriend Jane about his idea of fun, Ian Wharton remembers his last exploit: severing with his bare hands the head of a man in the tube. She is pregnant and Ian wonders how he can let her know that the child she is carrying is the last incarnation of a devil who has controlled his whole life. The Fat Controller appeared first in Ian's childhood as Mr. Broadshurt, a Falstaffian father figure, who tutored him well into his twenties. Eventually the adult Ian meets him again as the tycoon Samuel Northcliffe, for whom he works. Strangely enough, when Northcliffe's bizarre business ventures fail, Ian is told by Northcliffe himself and the mad psychiatrist in his pay, Dr. Gygges, that he is responsible for a number of terrible crimes. In the end Ian kills Jane and he and the new incarnation of the Devil, his own son, move to NY.
- Sheffield, Charles. *The Nimrod Hunt* (1986). London: Headline, 1988.  
The Morgan Constructs, biomechanical organisms endowed with nuclear weaponry, have been secretly built by Dr. Livia Morgan to defend the Perimeter, the portion of space colonised by the humans. However, they have turned against their creators and now have to be eliminated. Pipe-Rillas, Angels and Tinker Composites form with humans the four races of the Stellar Group and they are to form as well the Pursuit teams that will hunt the Construct known as Nimrod. Two commoners from Earth are selected to form part of the teams, Leah and her companion Chan. Unexpectedly, Chan turns out to be mentally retarded and must be subjected to a painful process of mental enhancement. When this is finally over, he is shipped to Travancore where Leah's team has gone missing; there, he finds out that the Nimrod construct has turned the team into a new multi-race construct that transcends individuality. Chan fuses with them after being told he is, like the Constructs, a new artificial form of life.
- Simmons, Dan. *Hyperion* (1989). London: Headline, 1990.  
The Church of the Shrike sends seven pilgrims to the Shrike in Hyperion before the planet can be taken by the enemies of the Hegemony, the Ousters. It is rumoured that the Time Tombs of the Shrike Temple are opening and the pilgrims are to confront the Shrike, if he appears. The Lord of Pain or Shrike has encountered each pilgrim as warrior, muse, lover, and each bears him a grudge that must be solved. Father Hoyt must solve the mystery of the cruciform - a cross of organic material - implanted in his chest, Col. Kassad wants to meet again the warrior woman of his dreams, Martin Silenus - the poet - his terrible muse and object of his epic poem, Brawne Lamia, a detective, wishes to meet her dead lover Johnny Keats - a replica of the poet - and Sol Weintraub, the scholar, wants stop the ageing backwards of his daughter Rachel, now a baby. Only the Consul and the Templar Het Masteen are moved by more obscure reasons.
- Simmons, Dan. *The Fall of Hyperion* (1990). London: Headline Feature, 1991.  
The Ousters have taken Hyperion with the Consul's help and the pilgrims are trapped in the planet, meeting the formidable Shrike one by one. Meina Gladstone, the ruler of the Hegemony, follows the events thanks to the new cybrid Johnny Keats, whom she suspects is a construct of the AIs and the anti-image (or anti-Christ) of the Shrike. Johnny is sent to Hyperion and through Lamia, who is linked to the Shrike's mind, he learns that the older Johnny Keats had been made by the AIs as a fusion of human and artificial intelligence and that the AIs are warring among them, trying to decide whether they will altogether eliminate humankind or not. They are controlling the Hegemony through the farcasters that link its many worlds: like the human God, the artificial God is located in the minds of all who use it. To vanquish the AIs, Meina

decides to switch off all the farcasters, even if that means chaos, while Johnny destroys the Shrike and announces the coming of a real cybrid, Lamia and the first Johnny's own daughter.

- Weldon, Fay. *The Life & Loves of a She-Devil* (1983). London: Coronet, 1984 (1989).  
BBC series based on the novel: Philip Saville, 1986, *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*.  
\*Film based on the novel: Susan Seidelman, 1990, *She-Devil*.  
Ruth determines to seek revenge when her husband Bobo abandons her for the pretty and rich romance writer Mary Fisher. Although far from beautiful, Ruth has been so far a good wife and mother, but her hatred of Mary overcomes her meekness and she sets out to become another kind of woman, a she-devil. Beginning by dumping her children Nicola and Andy in Bobo and Mary's lap, she rebuilds next her body in a slow, painful process that culminates in her assuming Mary's physical appearance. Meanwhile, she becomes a successful businesswoman, rising from being a servant to owning her own employment agency, and uses her skills to send Bobo to prison accused of embezzlement and to wreck Mary's life until she dies of cancer. When Bobo leaves prison, he is collected by this new Ruth in her Mary persona, now finally rich and powerful.
  
- Williams, Tad. *Caliban's Hour*. London: Legend, 1994.  
Caliban arrives in Italy looking for Miranda and Prospero, twenty years after the events narrated by William Shakespeare in *The Tempest*. When he finds out that Prospero is dead, he secretly visits Miranda, by then a married woman and a mother of a teenage girl, Giulietta. Caliban's initial intention is to avenge himself of his ill-treatment at the hands of Prospero and Miranda by killing her, only after narrating to her his version of the events that took place twenty years before on his island. The point that Caliban wants to impress upon Miranda is that he was victimised by Prospero because she lied, pretending that Caliban had tried to rape her, when in fact she was ashamed of the sexual attraction that she felt for the teenage Caliban. However, once Caliban has spent all his fury in telling Miranda how guilty she is of his unhappiness, he hesitates to kill her. Giulietta, who is angry with her mother because she has forced her to accept a marriage of convenience, takes the chance to avenge herself on her mother by offering herself to Caliban. A surprised Caliban accepts nonetheless Giulietta's hand and leaves with her for his island.
  
- Winterson, Jeanette. *Sexing the Cherry*. London: Bloomsbury, 1989.  
The Dog Woman lives with her foster child Jason in the 17th century. She is a woman of Rabelaisian anatomy, excessive in her naiveté and her unlimited strength. She is especially fond of killing Puritan men (whose teeth and ears she collects) though she despises all the men she encounters in her odd sexual adventures. On his side Jason undergoes his own adventures when he travels far from England; he gets involved with seven mysterious sisters who have killed the husbands they have been forced to marry. Some time in the 20th century, modern versions of the giantess and Jason are born - he, Nicholas Jordan, is the model of the New Man, educated and sensitive. She, a woman he fancies, is a mental giantess, a woman who fantasises about becoming somebody like the Dog Woman in order to be heard with the same ease she was heard then.
  
- Wolfe, Gene. *The Shadow of the Torturer* (1980.) London: Legend, 1990.  
Severian, a young apprentice torturer, stumbles one night upon Vodalus, a man risking his life to save a woman from the hands of the tyrannical Autarch. Impressed by Vodalus's courage, Severian's attitude towards his new charge, the chatelaine Thecla (who might be involved in Vodalus's conspiracy) changes radically: he falls in love with her and though he will not prevent her torture, piqued because she does not correspond his calf love, he betrays his oaths to the torturers guild by giving her a

knife with which she commits suicide. Severian is then sentenced to death by the guild, but his sentence is unexpectedly commuted for exile to an isolated city in an endangered country though not all the guild agrees that Severian deserves this pardon. He begins then a long pilgrimage towards his new destination, making a living on the way as a wandering executioner.

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