The Hesiodic *Theogony* describes how the violent emasculation of Uranus by his son paradoxically engendered numerous offspring; among these were the giants, who in later classical mythology attempted to overthrow the gods by scaling Olympus. The giant's violent and persistent presence in Western culture begins with this notion of the Gigantomachia and continues today, even while the modern phrase "gentle giant" obscures his transgressive birth and suggests new encrustations of meaning. Ovid placed the Gigantomachia in the Iron Age, the contemporary epoch, and rendered it a fable of political anarchy; Augustine worried about the souls of these giants and of the other monstrous races, concluding that they might be saved at the Final Judgement. David's encounter with Goliath established a narrative pattern of polarized virtue and validation endlessly repeated in the medieval romances, so that giants became the embodiment of all that was antagonistic to the chivalric ethos; Guillaume d'Orange adopted the Saracen giant Rainoart, whom Dante later placed among the Christian heroes in the fifth circle of heaven. Depictions of the menacing aboriginal giants of England stood enchained in London's Guildhall until destroyed in the Great Fire, were rebuilt in 1708, and were destroyed again during the bombing in World War II, potent symbols of aristocratic supremacy; Mikhail Bakhtin created a rather fanciful anthropology of what he called "folkloric giants", friendly figures of popular culture who function more as a modern wish-fulfillment fantasy of escape from the oppressive regime of Stalin's Russia

(Bakhtain's true "medieval, official culture") than as a real component of French history.[1] The 1950s science fiction thriller *Attack of the Fifty Foot Woman* originally encoded a societal anxiety about the women's movement with its depiction of a huge housewife run amuck, but today that same housewife has become more campy feminist hero than crazed and fearful horror. Fear and envy, attraction and repulsion, prohibition and liberation, "Other" and "Us" -these contradictions characterize the reception not only of the monster called the giant, but of nearly all monstrous figures. An examination of the category *monster* and its genesis, then, can provide useful tools for approaching a new understanding of the Middle Ages, revealing the way in which the monstrous was used then and the ends to which its study can be adapted now.

The English noun "monster" derives from Latin *monstrum*, a divine portent, usually of misfortune. Augustine, following Cicero (*De Divinatione* I.xlii.93), thought the Latin noun to stem from *mostrare*, "to show" (*De Civitate Dei*, XXI.8); Isidore of Seville, following Varro *(De Lingua Latina),* glossed *monstrum* as *contra naturam* and connected it to *monere*, "to warn".[2] The connotation of the word has always been negative and remains so today, even if modern monsters are as likely to be misunderstood innocents as violent ravagers. Generally speaking, medieval monsters are characterized by abnormality, dangerousness, and exaggeration; the logical questions which follow from these traits are: "What is the standard of normality, and by whom is it being promulgated?" "To whom or what is the monster understood as threatening?" and "Which qualities have become exag-

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[1].- See, for example, Richard M. Berrong, *Rabelais and Bakhtin: Popular Culture in* Gargantua *and* Pantagruel. (Linciln, NE: 1986).

[2].- See Norman Smith, *Loathly Births of Nature: A Study of the Lore of the Portentous Monster in the Sixteenth Century* (dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1978), p. 3.

gerated attributes, and why?" This may all at first seem a mere exercise in description, but once we move toward answering such questions, the anthropological value of monsters as social phenomena becomes more clear.

In addition to these three pervasive characteristics, monsters are usually associated with marginality (they dwell in a distant place with symbolic charge, on civilization's periphery), anteriority (the monster originates in some invented or re-invented history, rather than in the narrative present), excessive appetite, anarchic violence, and perverse or misdirected sexuality. "Marginality" and "anteriority" are traits resulting from the banishing of the monster from the *oikumene*, the fiction-producing center; the triple linking of violence and appetite with the destructive expression of libido suggests why this removal is necessary. The monstrous is thus intricately tied to that ambitious category in modern critical praxis, the Other; monsters may, in fact, be described as the primary vehicle for the representation of Otherness in the Middle Ages.

Every reuse of a monster is a reinvention. The Grendel of *Beowulf* exists in order to be unproblematically destroyed by the hero; the Grendel of John Gardner's work isn't sure why he exists, but the fact that the reader is privy to his existential musings makes him a character of sympathy rather than one of simple repulsion. Geoffrey of Monmouth's giant of Mount St. Michael was invented primarily to enlarge the impression of Arthur's martial prowess in the *Historia Regum Britanniae*; the same giant in the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* is quietly conflated with the now overly bellicose British king, replacing textual celebration with subtle re-evaluation. Monsters, then, are not to be thought of as having an existence outside of their social and literary contexts. Thus we can speak of the vampire of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, where the monster's transgressive sexuality is as subtly alluring to Jonathan Harker as Henry Irving, Stoker's mentor, seems to

have been to the author, or of Marnau's homophobic reinvention of the same vampire in *Nosferatu*, where the undercurrent of desire is replaced with waves of disgust; or even Anne Rice's modern rewriting of the myth, in which homosexuality and vampirism are conjoined and apotheosized; the historical influence of contemporary social movements (*la décadence*, nascent fascism, liberal humanism) is the determinant of the vampire's cultural charge in each case. Discourse extracting a transcultural, transtemporal phenomenon labelled as "the vampire" is of necessarily limited utility. Even if vampiric figures are found almost worldwide, starting in ancient Egypt and surviving today in Hollywood film studios, each reappearance (and its analysis) is still bound in its re-creating moment.

The genre particularly associated in the Middle Ages with the use of monsters is, of course, romance, which has at various times been denigrated or even condemned for its overabundance of the fantastic. Romance then seems the logical point of embarkation for this journey of monstrous encounters, and no figure would be more appropriate as an introductory example than Chrétien de Troyes' Giant Herdsman. Appearing in the opening segment of *Yvain (Le Chevalier au lion),* this Herdsman is the first important intrusion of the Other into the genre, a figure close to its very birth. The story of *Yvain* begins with the Arthurian knight Cologrenant's account of his own humiliating defeat beside a magic fountain, along the way to which he encounters a huge and hirsute *vilain* described in elegantly nonhuman terms:

> … il ot grosse la teste
> Plus que roncins ne autre beste
> Chevos meschiez et front pelé
> S'ot plus de deus espanz de le
> Oroilles mossues et granz

Autés come a uns olifanz
Les sorciz granz et le vis plat
Iauz de çuëte et nes de chat
Boche fandue come los
Danz de sangler, aguz et ros,
Barbe noire, grenons tortiz
Et le manton aers au piz,
Longue eschine, torte et boçue (II. 295-307).

He had a head larger than that of a pack-horse or any other beast. His hair was tufted and his forehead, which was more than two spans wide, was bald. He had great mossy ears like an elephant's, heavy eyebrows and a flat face with owl's eyes and a nose like a cat's, a mouth split like a wolf's, the sharp yellow teeth of a wild boar, a black beard and tangled moustache, and a long chin that ran into his chest…[1]

Calogrenant supposes that any creature which so much resembles a beast must be as senseless as one, but when he asks the churl what he is, the reply is simple and astounding: "*Je suis uns hon*" -"I am a man". There is something marvelous, unapproachable, and unknowable about this "man", however. To the knight's further question of "What kind of man are you?", the only reply is "*Tes con tu voiz./Je ne sui autre nule foiz*" ("I am what you see, nothing else"). Placed as it is after a catalogue of his extraordinary attributes and followed by a description of his uncanny power of control over his deadly herd, the Herdsman's assertion that he is not, after all, extraordinary makes him all the more marvelous, and his denial of self-interpretation heightens

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[1].- The Old French is excerpted from Foerster and Reid's edition (Manchester, 1967): the translation is from D. D. R. Owen in *Arthurian Romances* (London: 1987), pp. 284-285.

the effect by leaving his signification ambiguous; announcing that he is a giant born of the devil and proceeding to smash Calogrenant with his mace would ruin the atmosphere which Chrétien creates by suspending discernment. Faced with the mystery of the Herdsman, Calogrenant is forced to assert and therefore define his own identity as a knight. When the churl commands, "*Et tu me redevroies dire, /Ques hon tu ies etque tu quiers*", Calogrenant answers with what John Stevens has called "a classic definition of chivalric romance":[1]

> "I am, as you see, a knight who searches for what I cannot find; I have searched long and have found nothing."
> "And what would you want to find?"
> "*Avantures* [adventure] to prove my prowess and my courage."
>
> (ll. 358-63)

Calogrenant's meeting with the churl becomes an exposition of the essential attributes of knighthood; the Herdsman's inexplicability evinces a self-examination and definition which indicates less an interest in personal psychology than the self-reflexive impulse of a writer in an as yet undefined genre. The marvelous and hence the monstrous enter romance just as the Giant Herdsman does: sitting at the margins of the knowable, ready to test the characterizing essence of a hero by not partaking of that composition themselves, and finally forcing the heroic to assert itself against their Otherness and thereby define its own assumptions. Yvain will reinitiate the process later in the work when he fights Harpin of the Mountain, a marauding giant who is a negative representation of the state induced by a lack of

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[1].- *Medieval Romance: Themes and Approaches* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1973), p. 107.

chivalry; the Herdsman was likewise outside of the chivalric system, albeit ignorant of the function of knights rather than antagonistic to it. Yvain defines himself by encountering and *conquering* Harpin, so that the polarity between enemies is mutually identifying. In both cases, a revelatory instant of self-reflective examination is created.[1] The encounter with the Other, the encounter with the monster necessitates an assertion and evaluation of the textual (generic, chivalric, social) ideology. Monsters are in this way like textual fissures, revealing momentarily the underworks, the machinery.

Employing monsters as an instrument of analysis seems a very modern endeavor, the work of anthropologists and literary critics. Medieval usage is generally less self-conscious, but vast traditions of exegesis on the subject of the monstrous exist, engaged early in the classical period by Aristotle *(The Generation of Animals)* and Cicero *(De Divinatione),* refined in the days of the great naturalists like Pliny *(Natural History),* Christianized by Augustine and the other patristic writers, and continued into the Renaissance and far beyond by innumerable teratologists (Ambroise Paré, Pierre Boaistau, Conrad Wolffhart, Polydor Vergil). Teratology has always exerted a strange fascination, perhaps contingent upon the attraction of monsters themselves. The best way to account for the uses of monsters may in fact be to first examine some reasons for their widespread popularity, especially as figures of entertainment. On a very basic level, we as humans like to be frightened, provided the creation of fear can be bounded, as in the safe spaces of narrative. A recent psychological survey concluded that couples attending a horror movie are more

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[1].- This moment is perhaps related to Tzvetan Todorov's notion of "fantastic hesitation," although the horizons of expectation for medieval fantastic literature and the modern works that Todorov theorizes from are perhaps different enough to cast doubt on the utility of his findings; see *The Fantastic, A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1975).

likely to have had what they describe as "a good date" than those attending a romantic movie, apparently because of this enjoyment of the former genres' greater ability to activate the release of adrenalin; the production of excitement becomes attributed to the partner on the outing, rather than the monster, but the monster in fact deserves the credit. We watch horror films knowing that the cinema is a temporary place, that the denouement will be followed by re-entry into the world of comfort and light. As engrossed as we might become in a chilling book, we are always on some level aware that the number of pages in our right hand is dwindling, and that no matter how much terror a story can elicit, we are safe in the knowledge of its nearing end, and our liberation from it. The same is true of narratives received aurally; no matter how disturbing the description of the giant, Arthur will ultimately destroy him because the audience knows how romance works.

We retain to some degree as adults a childish delight in being frightened, and monsters engender that feeling well. A little later in this paper the sources of their terror will be probed, but it would perhaps be more helpful to explore first the use of monstrous figures as a source of delight. Late in the Renaissance the monster began to be pushed out of mainstream discourse and to take up its still familiar habitation in allegory and juvenile literature. The very young are attracted to monsters (dinosaurs, Skeletor, Freddy Kreuger) because they allow them to express in a safe, clearly delimited space fantasies of aggression, domination, and inversion. The monster can function as an alter-ego, an attractive and temporary projection of (another) self. Such escapist fantasy is no doubt behind much lavishly bizarre manuscript marginalia, as well as cathedral gargoyles and other grotesques, all of which seem to record the fancies of a bored or repressed hand suddenly freed. Jacques Le Goff, writing of the marvels in medieval maps and travel accounts of the lands surrounding the

Indian Ocean (a place he calls "a mental horizon, the exotic fantasy of the medieval West, the place where its dreams freed themselves from oppression"), says that these monsters inhabit a world:

> where taboos were eliminated or exchanged for others. The weirdness of this world produced an impression of liberation and freedom. The strict morality imposed by the Church was contrasted with the discomfiting attractiveness of a world of bizarre tastes, which practiced coprophagy and cannibalism; of bodily innocence, where man, freed of the modesty of clothing, rediscovered nudism and sexual freedom; and where, once rid of restrictive monogamy and family barriers, he could give himself over to polygamy, incest, and eroticism.[1]

The habitations of the monsters -Ethiopia or the Antipodes or whatever land was sufficiently distant to be exoticized- became more than dark regions of uncertain danger; according to Le Goff, they were also realms of happy fantasy, horizons of liberation.

Even the quintessential wicked giant, Goliath (or *Golias,* as he is called in the Vulgate), became something of a fantasy figure of escape. The group of poets known as the goliards traced their name from a mythical "bishop" or "mentor" named Golias, who of course derives from the biblical giant. Many of the goliards were bored university students applying some of their inculcated Latin compositional skills to the invention of verses praising love, food, and drink; some of them went further and extolled lust, gluttony, and drunkenness. In true schoolboy fashion, they wrote elaborate parodies of the ecclesiastical

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[1].- "The Medieval West and the Indian Ocean" in *Time, Work & Culture in the Middle Ages,* tr. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 197.

hymns and ceremonies; *Deus sit propitius huic peccatori* ("God have mercy on this sinner") became *Deus sit propitius huic potatori* ("God have mercy on this drunkard"). Rules requiring indulgence of all kinds were invented for this "goliardic order", but its existence continued to be more wistful fiction than actual brotherhood. In time such works as the *Apocalypse of Golias* appeared, in which the persona of Golias was co-opted yet again, this time to condemn the sins of the goliards by illustrating them; "Golias" was quickly restored as a word soaked in reprobation.

This ability of the monsters to encode desirable traits while remaining ostensibly negative representations of Otherness is ultimately responsible for the shift in their cultural valence. Recognizing the escapist possibilities of the monster, Rabelais, Rousseau, and Montaigne all envisioned narrative worlds in which the Other could sustainedly be thought of as *better* than the human rather than worse. As Richard Bernheimer has pointed out, the Wild Man metamorphosized from aphasiac, violent cannibal to eloquent pacifistic vegetarian.[1] The giant was likewise transformed from an embodiment of subversion, anarchy, exaggerated appetite, and perverse sexuality to a spokesman for the "Good Earth", and ultimately into a corporate emblem assuring the freshness of a certain well-known brand of frozen vegetables.[2]

These co-optations of monsters into symbols of the desirable, often by neutralizing potentially threatening aspects with a liberal dose of

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[1].- *Wild Men in the Middle Ages: A Study in Art, Sentiment, and Demonology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), pp. 4-5.

[2].- The same process adapted giants from impediments to expansionism into town mascots; an effigy of the giant Ascopart (from the romance *Sir Beves of Hampton)* appears on Southampton's city gate. Gogmagog, the primeval giant who opposed the Trojan settlement of England, was depicted as two giants (Gog and Magog) and placed in Guildhall by the reign of Henry V; as stated earlier, these statues were destroyed in the Great Fire, rebuilt in 1708, and destroyed again during bombing in World War II.

comedy, are ultimately less interesting than the retention of the monsters' original, fearful significations. Monsters may still work as fantasies even without their valence reversed. What Le Goff has called "oppressive institutions" can encode all that is necessarily viewed as bad in them in order to perform a wish-fulfillment fantasy of their own, by destroying the monster in the course of a narrative. The monster's eradication then becomes a kind of exorcism, and perhaps a catechism. The demons disguised as "ladies of high descent and rank" who tempt Sir Bors to sexual indulgence function in this way in the monastically manufactured *Queste del Saint Graal*; when he refuses to sleep with one of them, described as "so lovely and so gracious that it seemed all earthly beauty was embodied in her," his assertion of control banishes them all shrieking back to hell.[1] Monsters are, however, seldom so uncomplicated in their use and manufacture, no matter how thin allegory might flatten them.

Monstrous figures have often been promulgated in the service of political or nationalistic ends. The primary model for the Middle Ages of this kind of usage is to be found in the Bible, where the aboriginal inhabitants of Canaan are transformed into menacing giants. When Moses sends spies into the Promised Land in the Book of Numbers, they return to the Israelites with this report (in the Vulgate):

> "We came into the land to which you sent us, which indeed flows with milk and honey as may be known from this fruit, but it has very strong inhabitants, and the cities are great and walled. We saw the Enakim there… The land which we have seen devours its inhabitants. The people whom we beheld are tall of stature. There

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[1].- *The Quest for the Holy Grail,* tr. Pauline Matarasso (London: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 194.

we saw certain monsters of the sons of Enak, of the giant kind, in comparison to whom we seemed like locusts." (Num.13:28-29, 33-4).

The indigenous inhabitants of Canaan are here imagined as gigantic in order to convey the difficulty of the ensuing Jewish settlement. Just as the bounty of the land is great (*fluit lacte et melle*), so its resistance to colonization (*sed cultores fortissimos habet*); the abundance of the land is conveyed by the surfeit of valuable commodities and the exaggerated proportions of its warding occupants. Envisioning the anterior culture as monsters (*ibi vidimus monstra*) justifies their extermination by making the act heroic.

The groups of giants known in Hebrew as the Anakim, the Emim, and the Zamzummim all embody a similar set of textual ambitions in their various appearances in the Pentateuch. Walter Stephens summarizes their *raison d'être* when he writes that "[s]uch Giants embody the forces that resist expansion, conquest, cultivation, and domestication. Because they oppose the origin of a culture, they are envisioned as archaic, even autochthonic; they are an explanation of origins made by cultures that see themselves as invaders or latecomers".[1] This method of rationalizing displacement is a process very old and, throughout history, very useful. In the *Historia Regum Britanniae*, Geoffrey of Monmouth rewrote the passage previously quoted from the Book of Numbers, replacing the Israelites with exiled Trojans and Canaan with Great Britain, retaining giants as the distorted remnant of an anterior culture ready to be replaced. The *chansons de geste* transformed the Moslems into demonic caricatures whose menacing

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[1].- *Giants in Those Days: Folklore, Ancient History, and Nationalism* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), pp. 72-73.

lack of full humanity was readable from their bestial attributes.[1] The Scottish, Irish, Cornish and Welsh were at various times monsterized as an expedient to expansionism. More recently, in American history, Native Americans were depicted as feral savages so that the powerful political machine known as Manifest Destiny could push westward with disregard.

Especially prone in the Middle Ages to the use of this process of monsterization are historical writings such as chronicles and the popular "History and Topography" genre promulgated by Giraldus Cambrensis and others; the mapping of the geography or the history of a region is an act of colonization, of expansionism, and usually a reflex of incipient nationalism. Implicit in the creation of such textual "maps" is the superiority of the "cartographer" to that which becomes the cartographer's geography. In racial or cultural terms, an opposition is set up between the dominant culture which becomes encapsulated into story. Encoded in this set of assumptions and the works it produces is not only a xenophobic fear of the Other, but also the horrible suspicion that its Otherness originates within "Us", the race which fabricates the myth. Clearly, then, such stories also encode a fear of miscenegation -about which more will be said shortly.

These examples connecting monsters with political contrivance and the promulgation of nationalism function as invitations to action, usually military. Monsters were frequently used, however, as vehicles of prohibition, as admonitions against the engagement in certain endeavors. It has been suggested, for example, that merchants intentionally disseminated maps depicting monsters at the edges of their trade routes in order to discourage further exploration and to establish their own monopolies. More typical (and perhaps prototypical in

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[1].- This tradition is transplanted to England with a curious result in the romance *Sir Guy of Warwick,* which features a monsterized Dane, the giant Colbrond.

Western culture) is the function of the Homeric cyclops Polyphemos, a figure familiar throughout the Middle Ages from various Latin and vernacular reworkings of the *Odyssey*.[1] Essentially a xenophobic rendition of the foreign, the Cyclopes are depicted as savages who haven't "a law to bless them" and who lack the *techne* to produce through cultivation. Their primitivism is conveyed by a lack of hierarchy and of a politics of precedent, a dissociation from community leading to a rugged individualism which in Homeric terms can only be destructive. Because they do not partake a system of custom, the Cyclopes are a danger to the arriving Greeks, men who are defined by their compartmentalized function in a system of subordination and control.

Extended travel was dependent in both the ancient and medieval world on the promulgation of an ideal of hospitality in which the responsibility of the host to guest was sanctified. A violation of that assumed code was responsible for the destruction of the biblical Sodom and Gomorrah, and for the first punitive transformation in the *Metamorphoses* (Lycaon becomes a wolf, *Met.* I.199ff.), as well as for the devolution from man to giant in *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle*. Because Popyphemos is ignorant of his "sacred duty", he, like Lycaon and the monstrous Carl, becomes part of a fable constructed to validate this obligation by a violation of it. Thus when Odysseus finds himself trapped in the Cyclops' cave, he declares to Polyphemus that he and his men are:

> beholden for your help, or any gifts
> you give -as custom is to honor strangers.
> We would entreat you, great Sir, have a care

[1].- See Donald K. Fry, "Polyphemus in Iceland," *The Fourteenth Century, Acta,* vol. IV (1977), pp. 65-86.

for the gods' courtesy; Zeus will avenge
the unoffending guest. (IX.232-6)[1]

To this formulaic language of courtesy, Polyphemos replies in revealing action:

in one stride he clutched at my companions
and caught two in his hands like squirming puppies
to beat their brains out, spattering the floor.
Then he dismembered them and made his meal,
gaping and crunching like a mountain lion-
everything: innards, flesh, and marrow bones. (254-9)

Cannibalism is the ultimate violation of the divinely ordained host-guest relationship. The graphic and lengthy depiciton, down to a catalogue of devoured bodily fragments, increases the deviance of the actions by creating an extended visualization of the scene; this technique was later used extensively in encounters with giants in the medieval romances, with much the same repulsive effect. The creation of revulsion asserts the natural value of the societal constructs whose opposite or rejection the monster represents.

In the course of my research into the uses of monsters, I have come to the somewhat startling conclusion that when they are used as vehicles of prohibition, monsters most often embody a strong fear of interracial sexual relations, or even directly interdict miscegenation. Desire which crosses the imagined boundaries of race is envisioned as an illicit mingling with an Other who is a monster or by whom mon-

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[1].- *The Odyssey,* tr. Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Anchor Books, 1963).

sters are engendered; this negative depiction is the essence of the prohibition. The group most prone to transgression of this sort, and the group therefore most in need of protection against it and against themselves, turns out not surprisingly to be women.

The Bible was the primary source for the Middle Ages of divine decrees against miscegenation. One of these pronouncements is a straightforward command from God, coming through the mouth of the prophet Joshua (Josh. 23:12ff); another is a cryptic parable much elaborated during the medieval period, the story of how the "sons of God" impregnated the "daughters of men", engendering the wicked race of giants:

> Moreover giants were upon the earth in those days: for afterwards
> the sons of God went in to the daughters of men, and they bore
> children, who are the mighty men of old, men of renown. (Gen.6:4)

This biblical verse is highly problematic, and its ambiguity resulted in an extended period of erudite scrutiny and discourse, which in its turn influenced profoundly popular notions of the genesis of monsters. The importance of the cryptic references lies in their linking of the birth of the giants with a mysterious kind of interracial (or better "intergenus") relations, and in the narrative proximity connecting the advent of the giants, the multiplication of worldly evil, and the divine retribution of the Flood. All these events were read in the Middle Ages as linear history; what might strike the modern reader as an episodic collection, evidence perhaps of the Bible's composite author- ship, was treated by successive exegetes as a progressive narrative of causal connections.

According to the reworking of the history in the Middle English Genesis, the first miscegenation of the world occurred as follows:

Two hundred ger after Ío wunes,

Miswiven hem gunnen SeÍes sunes

Agenes Íat Adam forbead,

And leten Godes frigtihed;

He chosen hem wives of Caym,

And mengten wiÍ varied kin;

Of hem woren de getenes boren,

Migti men, and figti forloren.[1]

The passage goes on to state that the Flood was sent as a direct result of the increase in evil attendant upon the generation of the giants, who are true monsters in that they organically encode a divine judgement on the sexual act which produced them. The Old English *Genesis* and the Vernon manuscript's *Life of Adam and Eve* contain similar versions of the biblical story in which the "sons of God" (*filii dei*) are likewise men descended from Seth, and the women (*filiae hominum*) are of the race of Cain; these three works repeat the interpretation of the episode established by Augustine in his *De Civitate Dei.*

The verses of the Pearl Poet's *Cleanness* retell an older version of this same story in which the sons of God are immortals, fallen angels:

So ferly fowled her flesch pat pe fende loked

How pe de¥ter of pe doupe wen derelych fayre,

And fallen in fel¥schyp with hem on folken wyse

And engendered on hem jeauntez with her japez ille.

? ose wern men mepeles and ma¥ty on urpe.[1]

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[1].- *The Middle English Genesis and Exodus* (ed. Olof Arngart), Lund, Gleerup: 1968, ll. 539-546.

This notion that giants originated from the union of devils (or incubi) with earthly women, opposed as it is to the Augustinian orthodoxy, nonetheless flourished as a popular explanation for the origin of the giants in the romance tradition. In both its versions, the story revolves around miscegenation; the origin of the Other is thus always "an illicit mingling of heterogeneous ontological categories" (Stephens, p.79).

The complete Biblical episode was rewritten in the early fourteenth century as a prehistory of England. The Anglo-Norman poem *De Grantz Geanz* and its Middle English counterparts (*The Anonymous Riming Chronicle* of the Auchinleck MS and the preface to the *Prose Brut* of the MS Douce 323) invent an explanatory myth for the genesis of the giants which Geoffrey of Monmouth had asserted to dwell in Britain long before the arrival of Brutus and the Trojans. An extended swipe at feminine integrity, the myth links womanly desire with miscegenation and the birth of monsters. The production of monstrous progeny simultaneously condemns women in general for their unbridled appetite, and interracial mingling in particular as inherently degenerative. The women in consequence become hardly distinguishable from the monsters they bear, which in turn are the result of a "maternal impression" both physical *and* moral.

Re-encodings of the fear of miscegenation through the monsterization of other races and teratogenesis did not stop in the Middle Ages. Shakespeare's Caliban is such a product, the "freckled whelp" of the Algerian witch Sycorax and the devil. In modern America, Blacks have been variously demonized in a presentation of their imagined danger to white women, especially after the Civil War eroded some of

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[1].- *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript* (ed. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron), Berkely: 1979, ll. 269-273.

the restraints against interracial relations (the word "miscegenation", in fact, was not coined until 1863, in America). Charlotte Brontë reversed the usual paradigm in her *Jane Eyre*, but horror movies as seemingly innocent as King Kong demonstrate it in its essence. Even a film as recent as 1979's immensely successful *Alien* may have a cognizance of the fear in its underworkings: the grotesque alien creature which stalks the heroine (dressed in the final scene only in her underwear) drips K-Y Jelly from its teeth; the jaw tendons are constructed of shredded condoms; and the man inside the rubber suit is Bolaji Badejo, a Masai tribesman standing 2.2 meters tall who happened to be studying in England at the time.[1]

A societal anxiety surrounding interracial mingling is a powerful catalyst to the generation of monsters, but I would like to turn from it now to consider more fully the most useful of the monster's functions, at least from the viewpoint of the modern critic. I will return here to a notion introduced early in this discussion, that the appearance of the Other in the text is a revelatory moment of assertion during which the underlying ideology may be glimpsed. I suggest that this is especially so when the monster is being used as what could conveniently be called an illustrative antithesis, that is, as an embodiment of the textual suppositions' opposites. This unconscious but revealing dialectic is beautifully employed in the greatest of Old English poems and a work once devalued for its use of the monstrous, *Beowulf*.

Grendel is perhaps the most truly unforgettable monster in English literature, perhaps because he is born of the commingling of so many different traditions while transcending them all in his wonderful loathsomeness. He intrudes into the narrative just as the scop is singing, Caedmon-like, of the creation of the world -a bright song which

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[1].- See John Eastman, *Retakes: Behind the Scenes of 500 Classic Movies* (New York, Ballantine Books, 1989), pp. 9-10.

begins with the shaping of the earth and closes at its populating. Hrothgar's warriors are by conjunction immediately brought into this antediluvian Golden Age ("Swa Ía drihtguman dreamum lifdon" -"so the warriors lived in joy"[1]), until the music-hating Grendel intervenes; the parallel to the biblical advent of the giants and their spreading of evil among humanity in the days before the flood is subtle but unmistakable. Grendel is immediately linked with Cain, the first male Other and the progenitor of the very giants of the Books of Enoch and Genesis whose deeds Grendel is repeating ("swylce gigantas, pa wíÍ Gode wunnon / lange rage" ["such giants, that fought against God for a long time," ll.113-4]). Grendel as a result exists in a narrative temporality which is simultaneously before the Deluge (in its biblical time frame) and after it (in its historical setting). The attachment of monsters of Germanic provenance to this genealogy as Grendel's brethren further conflates the two frames, merging them into some uncertain, vanished past which they all suddenly share. This manifold past is quietly defined against the Christian present of the poet throughout the work; its point of vanishing is the interlocked deaths of Beowulf and the dragon at the close of the poem.

Grendel's relation to the *comitatus* or *Männerbund* is one of illustrative antithesis. He disperses the unity of the war band with an eruption of misdirected violence; he supplants Hrothgar as ruler of the hall through senseless, jealous slaughter. Clearly the maintenance of order in a warrior society is achieved only by the repression of what Grendel represents. *Wergild*, for example, the institution which allows a payment of gold to disallow blood vengeance in the case of a murder, works well at defusing destructive impulses only so long as a people can be made to abide by its strictures. Grendel represents the cultural

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[1].- Old English quoted from *ASPR* vol. 4, *Beowulf and Judith,* ed. Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), l. 99; translation mine.

Other to whom conformity to societal dictates is an impossibility be-
cause those dictates are not comprehensible to him; he is at the same
time a monsterized version of what a member of that very society can
become when those same dictates are rejected, when the authority of
leaders or custom disintegrates and the subordination of individual to
hierarchy is lost.[1] Grendel is therefore an uncontained version of the
wroecca, who in his exile turns not to elegiac poetry but to subversive
violence.

Beowulf's triumph over Grendel becomes a fantasy of the triumph
of *comitatus* (a homosocial society held together by metaphorically
fraternal bonds and a hierarchical system of allegiance) over individ-
uality (associated here with atavism and anarchy). Grendel's ingestion
of the sleeping man in Heorot and the numerous references too the
power of his grasp are the signifiers of his uncontrolled, destructive
appetite; Beowulf's balancing grip and remedial rending of this very
arm are its antidote: subordinated service which results in ataractic
unity for society and, to make the action attractive, a celebrated per-
sonal glory for its enactor. By the end of the long episode this arm has
been replaced with a more powerful emblem, the retrieved head of the
giant:

> ? a waes be feaxe on flet boren
> Grendles heafod, paer guman druncon,
> egeslic for eorlum ond paere idese mid,
> wliteseon wraetlic; weras on sawon. (1646-9).

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[1].- Cf. Hayden White's notion of "ostensive self-definition by negation" in his essay
"The Forms of Wildness: Archeology of an Idea," *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in
Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 151-152.

> Then the head of Grendel, held up by its hair, was carried into where the
> men were drinking; it was a thing of horror for the warriors and their
> queen, a stunning spectacle; they looked upon it well.

The men at first gape at the severed head, but their attention quickly moves from the fragment of the giant whole to the warrior who fragmented the giant and remained whole. The displayed remnant of the adversary becomes almost totemic, a Medusa-like organic symbol which causes the watchers to stare in the realization that the monster's powers have been transferred to the conqueror. Grendel is reduced to a trophy, a dumbshow of the punishment for deviation; his destruction is a public validation of the control and acceptance of structured society whose antithesis he represents. This validation is not complete until the emblem has been changed from a hand to a head; after his dismemberment, Grendel crawls back to his mother and unleashes another tide of condemnable violence, this time spawned of retribution. Grendel's unnamed mother suggests a spectrum of negative attributes not very different from her son's, but centered around violent revenge rather than individualism and destructive nonconformity; even though her vengeance seems outwardly fair (one of Hrothgar's men for the one child she has lost), her act threatens a spiralling cycle of death-for-death which it is in the best interest of the warband to defuse. Her appearance establishes, then, another dialectic to be resolved by a demise -which, like the death of her son, is a validation maneuver.

A monster's primary function as illustrative antithesis might best be described as an inducement to conformity. Giants, for example, are monsters connected to aberrant and voracious sexual appetite in the romances, where, following Geoffrey of Monmouth's giant of Mount Saint Michael, they ordinarily are encountered with at least one abducted noblewoman who is being overtly or implicitly threatened with

rape: in *Lybeaus Desconus*, two giants have kidnapped Violette in order to share her; in *Yvain*, Harpin of the Mountain wants to prostitute a maiden to his "rabble of knaves"; in Malory's *Launcelot du Lake*, sixty ladies have been enslaved. Because courtly love and the control inherent to it were linked inseparably in the romances, the giants became symbols of the anarchic power of both unsubordinated violence and of unchecked libido. This linking of force and sexuality is programatically shattered by the romance compulsion to restraint, but replaced with the interdiction of all sexual expression and the idealization of abstinence.

The repressed, however, like Freud himself, always seems to return. Monsters are continually linked to sexuality, the expression of which is depicted as perverse in its excess, or perhaps in its nature taboo. Monsters were earlier described as part escapist fantasy in their creation, and the linking of monstrosity with sexuality makes monsters all the more appealing as a temporary egress from repression. This simultaneous repulsion and attraction at the core of the monster's essential composition accounts greatly for their continued cultural popularity. We fear and loathe monsters at the same time as we might envy them.

Every monster is a measure of its age, a core sample of prevalent attitude and unspoken ideologies. So, too, is the process of interpreting them. The monster is a window into worlds perhaps now estranged; the value in their study is, in the end, to be found as much in the images visible through this glass as well as in the reflection of the observer cast suddenly upon it.

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