

Becoming Human

*New Perspectives on the
Inhuman Condition*

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Rights of Sacrifice

Richard Kearney

There is, in our contemporary popular unconscious, an intertwining of monsters and scapegoats. The two are codependent, in the sense that the pervasive obsession with the monstrous in our culture is symptomatic of the enduring role of sacrificial scapegoats.¹ This double helix of monster/scapegoat might be seen as an archetypal means of safeguarding human ways of being from those inhuman infiltrators that serve to undermine such ways of being. Yet if this safeguarding means the adoption of “inhuman” behavior, then any simple separation of human and inhuman becomes greatly complicated, as does the cluster of humanist beliefs that supports and maintains this separation. To understand further the complications involved, and to try to make sense of them, I propose to look at some dramatic reappearitions of the sacrificial demon in recent cinema: first, the extra-terrestrial monster of the *Alien* series, and then the figure of Kurtz in *Apocalypse Now Redux*.

THE ALIEN SERIES: ON BEING NOT AT HOME

My mummy always said that there were no monsters, no real ones—
but there are.

—First words of Agent Ripley in *Alien Resurrection*, echoing her
adopted girl, Newt, in *Alien 3*.

The *Alien* series consists of four films directed by Ridley Scott, James Cameron, David Fincher, and Jean-Pierre Jeunet over the two decades leading up to the third millennium. One of the most intriguing features of the quadrology is that it not only screens alien monsters but actually reflects the very process by which such screening takes place. This self-reflexive gesture is accentuated by the fact that the four directors quote each other’s

works—held together by the same, self-replicating protagonist (Ellen Ripley, played by Sigourney Weaver). But this mirror play recurs *within* the films themselves, as well as between them, to the extent that various exchanges between the characters focus on the *monstration* of sacrificial scapegoating, thereby exposing the ways in which our most feared monsters can serve as uncanny doubles for our all too human selves. The series has already been critically analyzed in my own *On Stories* and, more extensively, in Stephen's Mulhall's *On Film*,² so I confine myself here to a few remarks that I consider especially relevant to my present argument.

I think it telling that throughout the series allusions are made to the interchangeability of human and extraterrestrial aliens. Human space travelers actually find themselves playing “host” to the hostile monster from space, thus discovering (to their horror) that the monster is not just “out there” but “in here.” The dragon-shaped alien, recalling portraits of the satanic beast of the Apocalypse, is capable of invading our most intimate being. Thus the thing these human astronauts consider most foreign is in fact the most familiar.³ What really terrifies them is the alien *within*, already there in the homely situation but such that it cannot be integrated or named. The extraterrestrials in the series thus serve, I am suggesting, as imaginary personifications of our inner alienation, reminding us that we are not at home with ourselves, even at home. They are, we might say, postmodern replicas of the old religious demons—figures of chaos and disorientation within order and orientation.⁴

Stephen Mulhall argues convincingly that the monsters symbolize our fear of our own carnality—e.g., sexual difference, phallic penetration, genital violation, pregnancy, generativity, reproduction, labor, birth-death. The alien, he writes, “represents the return of the repressed human body, of our ineluctable participation in the realm of nature—of life.”⁵ More specifically, for the androgynous Lieutenant Ripley, maternal fecundity represents her “monstrous other.” But the monstrosity of the alien represents more than just life. It stems also from a deeper fear that nature may itself be reduced to the out-of-control and invasive culture of biotechnology. The alien's body, as Mulhall notes, *is* its technology, an unnerving phenomenon that suggests that science is amoral and inhuman, and terrifyingly “sublime.” Indeed in the last film in the series, *Alien Resurrection*, Ripley herself is replicated as a cloned, posthumous hybrid who behaves like an android but possesses the racial memory and flair of the alien who invaded her. Here Ripley embodies the saint and the stranger in one!

The sentiment that the monstrous nature of the alien is not in fact so alien to humanity at all is vividly captured in the scene in Ridley Scott's *Alien* (the opening film in the series) where the android Ash describes the monster-foetus that has exploded through Kane's chest as “Kane's son”—an allusion to the evil inherited from the original Cain of Genesis. Even

Agent Ripley comes to resemble the alien in terms of physiognomic features by *Alien 3*, and at one point she finds herself impregnated by the extraterrestrial beast whose offspring bursts through her torso in the final sequence. What most deeply defines Ripley is that she is so irrevocably obsessed by the Alien that she becomes incapable of recalling almost anything else.⁶ In this sense, Ripley is not just one of the alien family—“she is the alien; it incarnates the nightmare that makes her who she is, and that she has been incubating.” On this reading, Ripley’s encounter with the impregnating alien is paralleled by her sexual intercourse with Clemens, marking the decisive point where she overcomes her deep antipathy toward human embodiedness. For Ripley, “the sexual body is ultimately the long repressed and sublimated *das Ding* from which she has sought to flee.”⁷ Mulhall offers this reading of the final graphic scene: “As she descends into the flames, the alien queen bursts out; Ripley holds it gently in her cupped hands, and lays its crowned head on her breast, as if to suckle it. The logic of the Alien universe, and of Ripley’s own nature, is here finally consummated. Since the alien itself originates from within her, since it is an incarnate projection of her deepest fears, she can succeed in eliminating it only by eliminating herself.”⁸

This uneasy sense that we humans are in fact the *real* aliens—or at least just as alien as the “others somewhere out there”—is further reinforced by a number of revealing puns and allusions. One of the Hispanic women officers preparing to do battle with the monsters in the first sequel refers to herself as an “illegal alien.” The heinous criminals exiled in the space prison, Fiorina 161, in *Alien 3* are themselves so alienated from all humanity that some try to rape Ripley (just as the monster does). They can be saved only by following their Christian-apocalyptic leader, Dillon, into the ultimate sacrificial encounter with their own “in-human” double, the face-hugging, chest-bursting monster itself. Moreover, the suggestion of collusion between robotic clones and galactic aliens in the first film of the series—where the android Ash is conspiring with *Nostramo*’s central computer, Mother, to divert the ship to the alien-infested planet—is cleverly transposed in the second and third movies into a realization that the worst monsters are not: (a) the extraterrestrials, who are simply following their nature (like their Alien Queen protecting her nursery); nor are they (b) the robotic clones and androids (Bishop actually saves Agent Ripley and her adopted daughter, Newt, from the exploding planet). The ultimate monsters turn out, in the final analysis, to be the all too *terrestrial* humans of “the Company,” who have employed Ripley to hunt the space monster with a view to bringing it back to earth as a deadly addition to their bio-weapons program.

This reversibility between human and inhuman orders of monstrosity is underlined by James Cameron’s own avowal that his depiction of the Marine mission to LV 426 is a replay of the Vietnam War. In short, while

the alien movie series could be said to dramatize the rite of scapegoating, there is a radical religious inversion of this mechanism when Ripley finally chooses to transcend the mimetic order of sacrificial violence and offer herself up for the sake of the human race. In the final scene of *Alien 3*, Ripley defies the company's plans to extract the monster-foetus from her womb, falling in cruciform position into a pit of molten lead.⁹ Only, of course, to be miraculously reborn in the next sequel, *Alien Resurrection!*

This final reversal is, I think, key to the message of the series regarding the sacrificial phenomenon. For while ostensibly scapegoating monsters from other planets, the series actually suggests that the primary source of death and destruction is to be found in humanity's own will-to-power. The real culprits of the piece are the *human* manipulators of war technology and biogenetic engineering back on earth. In sum, the most alien-ating and alien-making forces of all are shown to reside not out there in intergalactic space but within the human species itself. Left alone, the aliens would have just done their own survival thing—reproduce their biological species in their “natural” way. It is humanity's tampering with this different order of being that causes havoc and carnage. It is *we* who have turned these strangers into scapegoats.

There is, one might say, nothing particularly new about this. Human interference with monsters goes back to Greek myths of the Minotaur, Kabbalistic stories of golems and gothic tales of vampires, ghouls, and Franksteins. Indeed, Dr. Pretorius sounds the typically apocalyptic note on this score when he makes his famous toast in *The Bride of Frankenstein*: “To a new world of gods and monsters!” But what sets the *Alien* series off from such prototypical versions of the human-inhuman monster is the fact that today we actually possess technology that can travel into space and bring the *imaginary* world of aliens into contact with the *real* earth. The boundary separating science from science fiction has become blurred—hence the inflation of our horror before the undecidability of the monstrous. As Stanley Cavell so astutely reasons, “Isn't it the case that not the human horrifies me, but the inhuman, the monstrous? Very well. But only what is human can be inhuman.—Can only the human be monstrous? If something is monstrous, and we do not believe that there are monsters, then only the human is a candidate for the monstrous.” Horror, Cavell deduces, is the name we give to the experience of the “precariousness of human identity, to the perception that it may be lost or invaded, that we may be, or may become, something other than we are, or take ourselves for; that our origins as human beings need accounting for, and are unaccountable.”¹⁰ Though he is not speaking of the *Alien* series as such, Cavell's deduction bears directly on our thesis. We will return to it in our conclusion.

**APOCALYPSE NOW REDUX: IDENTIFYING (WITH)
THE MONSTER**

Horror may have a face, and you must make a friend of horror. Horror and moral terror are your friends. If they are not then they are an enemy to be feared.

—Colonel Kurtz

“The Horror, the Horror”—a phrase made immortal by Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and given contemporary celebrity by Coppola’s film version, *Apocalypse Now Redux*. By way of offering an alternative look at the theme of strangers and scapegoats, I propose to end this chapter with a brief account of this film.

Apocalypse Now transposes the characters of *Heart of Darkness* to Vietnam. It tells the story of a U.S. Special Forces officer, Lieutenant Willard, sent up the rivers of North Vietnam in search of a renegade colonel, Walter Kurtz. Kurtz has gone AWOL after returning to Vietnam. He has forfeited a high-ranking job in the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington to counter a threat by double agents endangering the lives of hundreds of American soldiers. Operating deep within Cambodian territory—then legally off limits to U.S. troops—Kurtz disobeys orders and eliminates the threat. Faced with disciplinary action, he escapes deeper into the jungle and starts carrying out indiscriminate raids against military stations and villages. His methods are ruthless and utterly effective. But the U.S. command judges that he has gone too far. Willard is called in to terminate Kurtz’s command, and to do so “with extreme prejudice.”

This summary expression betrays how U.S. war policy mirrors the “illegal” activities of Kurtz. The mirroring becomes more and more alarming as the film unfolds, charting Willard’s journey toward the heart of darkness that is Kurtz’s hideout. The parallel between righteous executioner and evil criminal is signposted from the opening scene of the film: Willard admits that his narrative and Kurtz’s are inextricably bound up with each other. “There is really no way of telling his story without telling mine,” says Willard. “If his is a confession, then so is mine.” As he leafs further through Kurtz’s dossier, Willard discovers that Kurtz was once just like him. He reads one of Kurtz’s letters to his son in which Kurtz claims that the charges leveled against him by the high command are “quite simply insane” (the very term used by the high command to describe Kurtz’s behavior). In this same letter, Kurtz explains to his son that he is beyond the army’s “lying timid morality”—a morality that Willard has plenty of opportunity to realize is only skin deep. The photograph in the dossier is a shadowy silhouette marked “Believed to be Col. Walter Kurtz”—a signal that as we approach the heart of darkness the Minotaur lurking in wait becomes more undecidable. The question of whether we are dealing with a neo-

Nietzschean hero or a psychopathic monster grows problematic. “Who is the real demon?” we find ourselves asking—this out-of-bounds, unknown reprobate or his sanctimonious accusers back in Washington and Saigon? Should Willard embrace this estranged being or execute him? How, in short, is he to make the right call? How, in this night of fear and trembling, is he to *judge*?

The narrator’s odyssey to the heart of the labyrinthine jungle retraces Kurtz’s own itinerary. From the sententious briefing with top brass at home base, to the various detours through one horrifying U.S. Army outpost after the next, Willard begins to realize that Kurtz’s horrific acts are no more than efficient enactments of “legitimate” military behavior. Kurtz, he finally acknowledges, is playing the role of a sacrificial scapegoat as the high command keeps its hands clean. The final scene, in which the execution of Kurtz is juxtaposed with graphic shots of animal sacrifice (a caribou cleft in two by a sword), aptly captures this.

Several premonitory scenes anticipate this sacrificial denouement. Already at the opening military briefing, Willard is told by his senior officer that Kurtz has crossed the line between “us” and “them.” The general describes Kurtz as being “out there . . . with the natives . . . operating beyond the pale of any human decency.” He tells how Kurtz, once a prized, top-rated colonel, has supped with the devil and has gone beyond the point of return, traversing the border between civilians and barbarians. Kurtz has broken with the norms of civilized, reasonable behavior. He has gone “insane,” ultimately yielding to the temptation “to be a god.” He has become the Other, the Monster, one of the pure who has passed over to the Hades of the impure—a friend turned enemy. He is damned.

The irony of these demonizing sentiments is breathtaking, of course, in light of what we soon discover the “civilized, reasonable behavior” of the officially approved U.S. troops to be. But the discovery is gradual, as Willard steers his gunboat up the river leading from North Vietnam to Cambodia. His nightmare encounter with two military commands says it all. The first of these is led by Colonel Kilgore, a cavalry officer who has the same rank as Kurtz but seems more brutal in his bloodlust. He distributes “death cards” to his victims, orders his troops to surf on the river during military maneuvers, and plays Wagner—the chosen music of Nazi machismo and *Birth of a Nation* suprematism—to accompany his helicopter gunship missions. In contradistinction to Kurtz’s crystalline logic of terminating the war by whatever means, Kilgore just wants to keep it going for the heck of it. The banality of evil could hardly be more graphically illustrated than in these surreal scenes of gratuitous violence. If we are talking “insanity,” this is it—though Kilgore is considered “legitimate” while Kurtz is not. Compared to this hellish mayhem, Kurtz’s description of his incisive actions as “moments of clarity” begin to sound more convincing than the army’s dismissal of them as “unsound methods” (as if the actual *aim* of “extermi-

nating the brutes” is quite acceptable!) The army objects to the means, not the end.

The confusion of friend and foe, ally and alien, is compounded as Willard visits the U.S. frontier outposts. At the first we see GIs debauching themselves at an officially sponsored show of Playboy bunnies, while the second displays an inferno of military inefficiency, cowardice, and drug abuse. The U.S. myth of the noble frontiersman takes a last dive here as one of Kilgore’s super-surfers collapses in a hail of shrapnel. Could Kurtz possibly be worse than this?

As Willard arrives at his final destination—Kurtz’s hideout—the enigma deepens further. Willard is met by an American photographer who proclaims Kurtz to be a “poet warrior.” He hails Kurtz as the prophet of a new “dialectic” that, far from making him mad, brings him beyond conventional categories of good and evil. “No maybes, no supposes, no fractions.” Willard appears to vacillate yet one more time. He eventually meets Kurtz himself and is invited into his den.

So the pursuer confronts the monster. They talk for days without guard. Kurtz expounds his reasoning. He recounts how he learned from the Vietcong “enemy” the uncompromising logic of war. He tells the story of how he and his troops had vaccinated children in a certain village only to discover that, after they had left, the Vietcong had returned and cut off each inoculated arm. This enemy act struck Kurtz “like a diamond bullet through his forehead,” revealing to him the inner truth of military action—pure will to power, without judgment. These were “not monsters but men,” he learned. These were “geniuses . . . perfect, genuine, complete, crystalline, pure of act.” These were men who could both love and kill—love their own families with total passion and kill their enemies “without passion . . . without judgment. Because it is judgment that defeats us.” Kurtz ultimately confesses to Willard that if he had ten divisions of men like that he could have dispensed with all hypocrisy and terminated the war “in no time.” Even the corpses strewn on Kurtz’s compound serve a specific purpose—to instill enough horror to bring the war to an end. What looks like madness is in fact a (perverse) obsession with peace, the desire to win the war as effectively and rapidly as possible. Here we have a morality of immorality.¹¹ Kurtz’s speech culminates with the observation, “You can kill me but you cannot judge me.”

Having listened to Kurtz’s razor-sharp reasoning and witnessed the result of his new im/morality—a camp inhabited by crazed warriors and strewn with body parts and decapitated heads—Willard *does* eventually judge. He kills Kurtz. Coppola does not explain what criteria Willard deploys to differentiate between Kurtz the neo-Nietzschean hero and Kurtz the manic monster. We are not told how Willard decides, or how we might judge his decision in turn. Coppola, after all, is a moviemaker, not a philosopher. It is his business to screen this age-old conundrum, not to solve

it. But in dramatizing this fundamental question of discernment for a contemporary audience, Coppola has performed a great intellectual service.

From the perspective of our scapegoating thesis, this film raises key questions. Among these are: How do we judge the horror? How do we distinguish between one kind of monstrosity and another? How does one differentiate between “normal” and “abnormal” actions, especially in a war like Vietnam, where, in Willard’s words, “charging a man with murder here was like handing out speeding tickets at the Indy 500”? How is Willard to know who is on the “right” side in a war where even the Americans have changed sides, as he learns from French colonials on a lost plantation (where he also learns from a French widow that “men love and kill”)? If it is true that Kurtz has welcomed his potential executioner, Willard, in an act of unconditional hospitality, has Willard been entirely just in responding to this hospitality with an act of summary execution? (It is an execution without trial, to boot, in seeming defiance of Willard’s own prolonged scruples about high command’s order to “terminate—with extreme prejudice.”)

Moreover, the fact that his host, Kurtz, hangs out in a Buddhist temple and is an avid reader of Eliot’s *Hollow Men*—not to mention Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* and the Bible—sharpens the enigma by suggesting how deeply resolved Kurtz is to prosecute the chilling logic of war, even if it means succumbing to its “horror.” “After such knowledge what forgiveness?” as Eliot says. So, even if the demands of absolute hospitality seem impossible here, one is left wondering if the only alternative is the sacrificial killing of the monster at the heart of the labyrinth. Willard obeys his command. Theseus rules, OK. But does it have to be like this?

Two key scenes toward the close of the film put these questions into sharp relief. The first shows one of Willard’s troops, Chef, being terrified by a tiger as they patrol the jungle. They are on the lookout for the “enemy.” But what actually surprises them is an animal, who is perfectly at home in his local environment. Because they are estranged from this “foreign” place the U.S. Marines mistake one “monster” for another, confusing human and animal adversaries. At least one implication of this scene is that the “monster” Kurtz, who has gone over to the other side and assumed the mores of the natives, who revere him, may also be a case of mistaken identity. This suspicion is deepened by the fact that when Kurtz and Willard eventually encounter each other at the heart of darkness, their seminaked, sleek-headed figures have become almost indistinguishable. The question of who is the hunter and who the hunted accentuates the problem of prejudice and judgment.

The second image, also at the film’s finale, shows a Buddha in Kurtz’s Cambodian hideaway just before the latter’s execution. We see the veiled statue facing Kurtz as he recites his terminal reflections on war onto a tape recorder. (He is railing against the hypocrisy of the U.S. Army that trains

troops to drop napalm on innocents but refuses to allow the word “fuck” to be painted on its planes.) In the preceding scene Kurtz was seen entering the doorway of the Buddhist temple as a caribou passes him on its way to its own ritual sacrifice. Both will be offered as scapegoats to purge the community. It is significant that the twin sacrificial rites that follow—the slaughtering of the caribou juxtaposed with the killing of Kurtz, in graphic montage—give rise to a scene where the “purged” Willard reemerges through the same temple door. His bare, dark figure is almost identical to Kurtz’s, but with this difference: it is Willard who now wields the executioner’s axe and possesses the manuscript (Kurtz’s memoirs).

So here again the question is raised as to whether one is justified in executing an enemy deemed inhuman. With Kurtz’s closing statement to Willard—“You have a right to kill me but not to judge me”—still ringing in our ears, the calm visage of the bald Buddha that closes the film gives us pause. This is all the more the case if one is mindful of the Buddhist doctrine of nonjudgment. Could Willard have executed Kurtz had he heeded this ancient Buddhist prayer?

When I encounter beings of wicked nature
Overwhelmed by violent negative actions and suffering,
I shall hold such rare ones dear,
As if I had found a precious treasure.
When someone gives me terrible harm
I shall regard him as my holy spiritual friend.¹²

What, in short, if Willard had forgiven Kurtz and tried to save him from this inferno, acknowledging that Kurtz was not only the ultimate expression of U.S. military involvement in Vietnam but also a scapegoat serving to maintain the illusion of a clean conscience? A man who, for all his *kill-ing*, was still capable of *loving* (his wife and son, and even Willard, arguably, whom he refuses to slay). A man who, in his own words, hated the “stench of lies.”

Yet there is one mitigating factor in Willard’s role—the confessional narrative of these events. These events are related *retrospectively*, to be sure, but they are no less cathartic for that. In acknowledging that (a) there was no way to “tell his (Kurtz’s) story without telling my own” and (b) that “if his (Kurtz’s) story is really a confession, then so is mine,” Willard admits to a deep identification with the monster he has slain. He openly acknowledges his role as testimonial witness to Kurtz’s life, before the world but most especially before Kurtz’s son. “It was no accident that I got to be the caretaker of Colonel Walter E. Kurtz’s memory,” he concedes. Both Willard and Kurtz expose the mendacities of U.S. military practice in Vietnam. Willard does so by telling the whole story in direct response to Kurtz’s

final request: "I worry that my son might not understand what I have tried to be. I want someone to tell him everything. . . . There is nothing that I hate more than lies. . . . If you understand me, you'll do this for me."

These are hardly the words of an irredeemable monster. They are those of someone who was ultimately subsumed by the horror. Someone for whom the truth of war won out over the truth of poetry. Someone who could not survive to tell the tale. In this he differs from Willard, who in spite of his collusion with sacrificial killing, manages to transcend the logic of scapegoating in favor of narrative testimony and wisdom. He tells the story of Kurtz that he carries in his hand as he exits the temple and merges finally with the face of the Buddha.

Willard refuses to be divinized by Kurtz's followers after he has killed the demon. As the throngs of warriors kneel before him in their bandoleers and bloodied loincloths, Willard passes through them to his waiting boat. Having defeated the Minotaur, Theseus declines the sacrificial role of replacement deity. He escapes the cycle of bloodletting. In resisting the lure of false gods, he appears to choose the option of poetic catharsis so well described by Eliot himself: "[The storyteller] is haunted by a demon against which he feels powerless, because in its first manifestation it has no face, no name, nothing; and the words, the poem he makes, are a kind of form of exorcism of this demon."¹³ *Apocalypse Now Redux* is such a poem, as was *Heart of Darkness* and *The Hollow Men* before it.

Yet the tragedy for Kurtz himself is that redemption comes, if it comes at all, *posthumously*, through the confessional voice of the film's narrator. The catharsis by pity and fear comes to Willard the narrator, and perhaps also to us viewers, but not it seems to the crazed colonial. Willard's narrative testifies to the hidden root of the alienation in Kurtz that, it transpires, is symptomatic of the war itself. When Willard finally departs from the heart of darkness, refusing the nihilism of the "Horror," he takes Kurtz's story back with him. He carries the typed pages of testimony in his trembling hand. In the retelling that is *Apocalypse Now Redux* the Horror becomes that bit less horrible, the monster that bit less monstrous.

CONCLUSION: THE STRANGER WITHIN

If it is the sleep of Reason that produces Monsters, as Goya says, it is, I would suggest, the perversion of Reason carried out in a certain sacrificial mood. If we are to put an end to the cycle of scapegoating, might we not begin by trying to understand our own monsters? In so doing, might we not transform some of them into creatures of passionate peace? Might we not even (who knows?) help one or two of those real persons who behave monstrously "out there"—tyrants, torturers, rapists, murderers—to come to terms with their own internal monsters and thereby put an end to homicidal and genocidal practices of scapegoating, as Willard almost does in

the final confrontation with Kurtz? Or as Ellen Ripley and the prisoners of Fiorina do at the end of *Alien 3*? Indeed, is this not the very meaning of Ripley's crucificial act as she cradles her alien offspring and holds it to her breast? But we do not have to send our Ripleys and Willards to the darkest reaches of Asia or space to find our monsters. They are lurking within our midst here at home—often in the depths of our own selves.

The notion of the stranger within is as old as civilization itself. Almost every wisdom tradition attests to it. We find it in the story of Jacob struggling with his dark double through the night before transmuting his monster into an angel of God. We see it in the testimony of Jesus confronting his demons in the desert before giving himself, in an act of ultimate *caritas*. We encounter a similar lesson being offered by the Buddha when he takes the monster of violent hatred to his heart and meditates on it for so many years that it eventually mutates into compassionate calm. A disciple of the Tibetan Buddhist school, Milarepa, learned this truth the hard way when one day he discovered his cave taken over by a demon. After fighting with the beast for many years to no avail, he finally put himself into its jaws, saying, "Eat me if you want to." It was only then the demon left.¹⁴ When violent fears go, so do monsters. Love is the casting out of fear.

The key, perhaps, is not to kill our monsters but to learn to live with them. For that way there is hope that monsters may eventually learn to live with themselves and cease to scapegoat others. As Nietzsche put it in his own aphoristic way, "Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster."¹⁵ Agreed. Yet at the same time, embracing monsters does not mean you have to invite them to dinner—or set up house. Some monsters need to be welcomed, others struggled with. The important thing is to try to tell the difference.

NOTES

1. See Richard Kearney, *On Stories* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), especially part 3.

2. Stephen Mulhall, *On Film* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

3. This is another way of describing what Heidegger and Freud identify, in their different ways, as the "uncanny" (*das Unheimlich*): that which "invades one's sense of personal, social or cosmic security—the feeling of being at home in oneself" (Timothy K. Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters* [New York and London: Routledge, 2002]).

4. *Ibid.*

5. Mulhall, chap. 1.

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*

10. Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

1979), 418–19. I am grateful to Stephen Mulhall's *On Film* for this quotation and several others.

11. "In his turn, Kurtz the man, became a monster. He fused the moral and the immoral. Action, pure action, is the aim of any warrior for Kurtz. War is about action without thought, without hesitation and that is the new morality. Kurtz has, in a way, embraced the Nietzschean Will to Power in its most horrific form" (Anthony Sculimbrini, "Invitations to the Monstrous," graduate paper, Boston College, unpublished, 2001, 9f.). I am also grateful to Joshua McKimber and Joshua Mills-Knutsen, two other graduate students in my BC graduate seminar, "Strangers, Gods and Monsters," for their presentations on the subject.

12. The Dalai Lama, *The Good Heart* (London: Rider, 1996), 88, 98. Would Theseus (Willard) have slain the Minotaur (Kurtz) if he had observed this verse? Or taken this more explicit Buddhist tale to heart: "When one is thinking about devils, it is important not to have a notion of some independent, autonomous external force 'out there' existing as a kind of absolute negative force. The term should be related more to the negative tendencies and impulses that lie within each of us" (40)? One finds similar teachings on the nonjudgmental attitude to evil and the need to embrace negative energies in Thich Nhat Hanh, *Essential Writings* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2000), and *Bouddha et Jesus* (France: Le Relié, 2001), 136 ff. See also *Benedict's Dharma: Buddhists Reflect on the Rule of Saint Benedict*, ed. Patrick Henry (New York: Riverhead Books, 2001), e.g., the section "Freedom in the Mind's Mirror," which suggests how "our enemy teaches us patience and is therefore someone to be greatly valued" (15). I am grateful to Peggy McLoughlin, Emma Fitzpatrick, Sally Kearney, and James and Patricia Leydon-Mahony for bringing these texts to my attention.

13. T. S. Eliot, *The Three Voices of Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1943). See the fascinating discussion of this passage by Denis Donoghue in *Words Alone: The Poet T. S. Eliot* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000), 27 ff., and Mark P. Hederman, *The Haunted Inkwell* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2001), 14.

14. See Pema Chodron, *Start Where You Are* (Boston and London: Shambhala Books, 1994).

15. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (New York: Random House, 1966), sec. 146. I am grateful to Timothy Beal for bringing this quotation to my attention.