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The Dream of Reason¹

I. Prelude

On February 6th, 1799, the *Diario de Madrid* announced—or more precisely, advertised—the publication of *Los Caprichos*, a series of eighty aquatint plates by Francisco Goya. In retrospect, this date stands out as an epistemological turning point both in the personal evolution of Goya's style and in the development of art history. With *Los Caprichos* the Spanish painter set in motion an artistic production—*The Disasters of War*, *Los Disparates*,² *The Black Paintings*, etc.—that made of him a forerunner, the father, as Philip Hofer calls him, of modern art.

According to some preliminary sketches Goya made in 1797, the series of *Los Caprichos* should have begun with what we now identify as plate number 43, “El sueño de la razón produce monstruos” (“The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters”).³ Goya's final decision to change the order may be attributed to a political apprehension: the plate bears a strong resemblance to the title page of the 1783 edition of Rousseau's *Philosophie*, a work banned in Spain during the 1790's as dangerously subversive. Whatever the case, it seems certain that this particular *capricho* assumes some special significance within the series. Conceived as the opening plate, it summarizes the basic problematic of the entire collection: “Fantasy abandoned by reason,” reads the legend, “produces impossible monsters; united with it, fantasy is the mother of the arts and the source of their wonders.” The artist, leaning on his desk, sleeps; behind him, strange animals occupy the space of darkness. And as the pages unfold, an uncanny world, a monstrous universe of deformity and aberration faces the reader.

In principle, *Capricho 43* seems to condense the postulates of the Enlightenment: where reason fails, the forces of the occult prevail. Thus, the plate is structured around a binary axis contrasting two grounds: man/animals-monsters; light/darkness; formal clarity/diffused contours; writing as an act of reason/the irrational unconscious. And yet, it is precisely

the coexistence of two *exclusive* systems in one sign, the space of plate 43, that gives Goya's work a different dimension, projecting a new artistic expression. This paradox, I will argue, defines the core of the fantastic, and is crucial in establishing its history, in determining its emergence during the second part of the eighteenth century.

Walter Scott had already formulated the terms of this paradox in an introduction to Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*:

It was his [Walpole's] object to draw such a picture of domestic life and manners, during the feudal times, as might actually have existed, and to paint it chequered and agitated by the action of supernatural machinery, such as the superstition of the period received as matter of devout credulity. The *natural* parts of the narrative are so contrived that they associate themselves with the marvelous occurrences; and by the force of that *association*, render those *speciosa miracula* striking and impressive, though our cooler *reason* admits their impossibility. (8)

Scott acknowledges the co-existence in this "new kind of narrative" of two epistemological systems that belong to different historical periods: one corresponding to the irrational world of the Middle Ages, and another related to "more enlightened ages", to a society where the principles of reason appear to shape nature. The fantastic was thus born, and from this moment its history and characteristics would be determined by the constant shifting of the diffuse boundaries between reason and unreason.

The creation of the bourgeois state culminated a long process in which a new epistemology carved its space amidst the foundations of the old medieval world. By the seventeenth century—probably even before—the ascent of rationalism as a dominant world view began to take shape in Western societies. For Michel Foucault, the date that can serve as a landmark is 1656, when a Royal decree in Paris founded the Hôpital Général, thus creating the legal and physical structure of "confinement".⁴ The new order was rearranging geographical boundaries, reassigning the horizons of imagination. In this process, unreason was silenced, eliminated from daylight, cast out and imprisoned in the outskirts of the city, which had become the new "measure" by which social life was to organize its discourse. Hospitals, workhouses, pauperhouses and prisons assumed the function, not only of curing, educating or punishing, but of hiding. Madness, indigency and crime were, for all purposes, reduced to a single category and expelled from the visual milieu.

The act of confinement was also a process of excluding everything that rested in the 'margins' of the bourgeois order, erasing it from the dominant world view as well as physically removing it from the urban center. Even death, a familiar image in the Middle Ages, began to lose its role as a protagonist of everyday life. As Philippe Ariès shows, cemeteries started to

abandon their familiar site next to the church in the city: "There is no doubt that during the seventeenth century the umbilical cord that connected the church and the cemetery was loosened, without yet being cut" (321). By the eighteenth century, cemeteries such as Saint-Sulpice, in Paris, were being consecrated in the outskirts.

Of course, 1656 is an arbitrary date, a point of reference. Any other significant moment during that period could serve as landmark. Its importance resides in the fact that at some point a dramatic change had occurred in the nucleus of social imagination. Already in the first book of *Don Quixote* (1605) one can observe the act of exclusion at work. It is generally agreed that the scrutiny of Don Quixote's library can be read, among other things, as a lesson on literary criticism. In this aspect, the criteria used by the priest for saving or condemning a book are in themselves revealing: those that adhere to a sense of truth or "realistic" representation, that remain within the boundaries of the *vraisemblable*, will be spared; those that tell lies, that jump into the domain of "fantasy", will be burned. Thus, all the chivalry books full of magical and supernatural events are condemned, though with a few exceptions, like the *Tirant lo Blanch*, since in this one "knights eat and sleep, and die in their beds, and make their wills before dying, and a great deal more of which there is nothing in all the other books" (Cervantes 52). Even a pastoral novel such as the *Diana*, by Jorge de Montemayor, will suffer the rigor of exclusion: it will be saved for posterity but only if the passages dealing with the wisewoman Felicia and with the enchanted water are eliminated.

The determining factor in this literary "trial" can be found in the conception of what is real and true. Ultimately, for Cervantes, everything that is perceived as reproducing a feudal epistemology needs not only to be discarded but actually stamped out of the social memory.⁵ This is not to say that *Don Quixote* pretends to deny history. On the contrary, it is a book with a profound vision of historical development: Cervantes' novel aims at rewriting history, at forging a past with a sense of continuity that could, at the same time, justify a new attitude towards reality. The new social order required a distinct differentiation between true historical figures—such as El Cid—⁶ of heroic but proportional dimensions, and fictional knights whose size and exploits failed to meet the new perspective. In this sense, Don Quixote's embodiment of medieval epistemology, a living anachronism wandering through the plains of Castille, unveiled the inadequacy of the dominant ideology to meet the representation of reality. *El Caballero de la Triste Figura* must die for "in last year's nest there are no birds this year" (828). The Age of Enlightenment raised its foundations on the ruins of the medieval world. And yet, precisely at the moment when reason was reaching its apogee, unreason, as Foucault notes, reappeared on the edges of the scene:

classical reason once again admitted a proximity, a relation, a quasi-resemblance between itself and the images of unreason. As if, at the moment of its triumph, reason revived and permitted to drift on the margins of order a character whose mask it had fashioned in derision—a sort of double in which it both recognized and revoked itself. (201–2)

Why did the new order allow the resurrection of the images of unreason precisely at the moment of victory, when the process of exclusion seemed near completion? This is the question that must be addressed in order to understand the emergence of the fantastic.

II. 1789: The dream of reason.

In 1763, the Parliament of France started preparations for the transfer of cemeteries to the outskirts of Paris. The long trend towards making the city an image of life, a universal sign of bourgeois achievements, acquired legal formulation. One year later, in London, the dead were returning, reclaiming their space in the pages of social imagination: in 1764 the Gothic novel was born with the publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*. It was not a friendly return. In the first chapter of Walpole's book, a wedding is taking place (a wedding that assures the continuity of the protagonist dynasty), when suddenly a giant helmet appears and kills the groom, thus casting a shadow over the future of the house. It is, as we later learn, a ghost of the past asserting his right to intervene in the present in order to redress an act of injustice: his own murder and the expropriation of his land. Within the microcosm depicted in the novel, the tools of reason seem powerless, and order can only be attained through the intrusion of the forces of unreason, by the use of old and "supernatural machinery".

This problematic of a repressed medieval epistemology resurfacing in the Enlightened society seems to shape the defining parameters of the fantastic: it is, for instance, the necessary background for Todorov's formulation of his theory that "uncertainty" conforms the central mechanism of fantastic art;⁷ and it is the primary consideration of the psychoanalytic school⁸ as well as the basic approach of social/historical analyses.⁹ And yet, these critics do not address the central question: why did the bourgeoisie reactivate feudal visions at a time when it seemed to succeed in imposing its economic and political will?

Let us return to Goya's *Capricho 43*. As mentioned earlier, the plate adhered to the principles of Enlightenment: those "impossible" monsters, as Goya calls them, could only exist *outside* the domain of reason; the tension characteristic of the fantastic was produced by the simultaneous representation of two incompatible systems. The ambiguity of the message, nevertheless, seems to run deeper than this representational problem. The

title itself poses an enigma, since the word “sueño” in Spanish has several acceptions and can, for instance, be translated as both “sleep” or “dream.” An earlier sketch of the *Capricho 43* contains a different inscription: at the base of the desk one can read “Universal Language. Drawn and Etched by Francisco Goya. Year 1792.” At the top of the plate, one word: “Sueño”. And the legend starts with the sentence “The artist dreaming.”¹⁰ One can safely assume, then, that it is the dream—and not the sleep—of reason that produces monsters. Baudelaire had accurately perceived this interpretation when in his poem “Les Phares” he refers to the *Caprichos* as “les cauchemars”, the nightmares.

This semantic difference is a fundamental one. Instead of articulating a gesture of exclusion, *Capricho 43* proposes that there is indeed some continuity between the realms of reason and unreason—the latter being, in fact, a creation, a product of the former. The simple presence of irrationality, of otherness, within the boundaries of artistic discourse meant a negation of the principles of exclusion and confinement. But by establishing a relation of cause and effect, Goya implied something more than an affirmation of coexistence: the horizons of the bourgeois world create the inevitable threat of disorder.

The same year that Walpole’s *Otranto* appeared, Johann Joachim Winckelmann published his *History of Ancient Art*. It was not a mere chronology of different periods or a descriptive report of diverse artistic creations. Instead, Winckelmann mapped out a system that would show how art originated, changed, developed from one form to another. Approximately at the same time, between 1749 and 1785, Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, published his monumental *Histoire Naturelle*. One of his important achievements was to extend the Earth’s age well beyond the accepted biblical dates. With the 1779 volume *Epochs of Nature*, Buffon departed clearly from the medieval idea of a single divine creation to outline a world of progress and change, of constant transformation.

A new concept was thus spreading through Western Europe: the idea of History as a process. The seeds that allowed bourgeois society to conceive of itself as another “link” in the chain of time were sown. Reason as a monolithic, universal, and natural attribute of humanity began to be questioned when History introduced the possibility that the “self” could eventually become the “other”.

In the eighteenth century, the first fractures in the monolith were scarcely visible, hardly perceptible yet as a threat. As Foucault says, “unreason reappeared as a classification, which is not much, but it nonetheless reappeared, and slowly recovered its place in the familiarity of the social landscape” (200). The first encounters with unreason during the Age of Enlightenment translated into a central cultural metaphor, that of marginality. The causes and sources of all threat to the social order were portrayed as “peripheral”, located precisely in those same places of exclusion

that had slowly been erected at the outskirts of the city, at the point of intersection between the rural and the urban worlds: from the hospitals, the workhouses, the cemeteries, the new immigrant “faubourgs”, a moral and physical disease emanated. And the monster in which the social imagination embodied the irrational was portrayed as a barbarian, a foreigner who introduced violence, madness, and disorder into a system conceived as dominated by reason.

Gothic literature gave a precise form to the problematic of reason and its banished other. Besides representing the threat of the irrational, it is a literature that fully articulates the notion of marginality, whether it be spatial or temporal. The settings of Gothic narrative are always situated either in remote epochs—*The Castle of Otranto*—or in distant, “peripheral”, and “backward” countries—Potocki’s *The Manuscript Found in Saragossa*, Radcliffe’s *The Italian*, Beckford’s *Vathek*, etc. The symbols of the bourgeois world are not yet openly present within the framework of representation. The city and its streets, for instance, are conspicuously absent in early fantastic literature. Fantastic literature does not adopt a new spatial configuration until the “liberation” of La Bastille and Bicêtre, until the “mobs” of the French Revolution rampaged the urban landscape, until the reign of terror publicly showed what the consequences of a bourgeois revolution could be. In the meantime, irrationality still appeared only in “places of confinement”, within the walls of ancient monasteries or castles.

This revival of a feudal imagery in figures of the fearful creates an artistic paradox, for it is not the past that was feared but the visions on the outskirts of the future. And yet, for that future to be conceived at all, a discovery of the past, of historical process, was necessary. The Gothic became a sort of archeology of fear, a sadistic—the term here acquires its full historical significance—unearthing and reconstruction of irrational forms. Both Walpole and Beckford built and lived in replicas of medieval mansions.

Undoubtedly, the presence of these irrational signs, of these marginal images, still connoted an exotic intrusion. Ultimately, reason always triumphed, whether formally through the final rational explanation of seemingly supernatural events, or thematically, through the reasonable resolution of the narrative conflicts. But these narratives allowed unreason to reappear and, however briefly, to cast uncertainty over bourgeois epistemology. For a moment, irrationality was present and disorder menaced the principles of the reasonable society.

III. 1848: The assault on reason.

For Goya, the monsters of the *Caprichos* were still considered “impossible” within everyday life, within the parameters of reality. They existed only in the realm of visions, of dreams, of art. The legend in *Capricho 80* clearly states it: “If anyone could catch a denful of Hobgoblins and were to show it in a cage at 10 o’clock in the morning in the Puerta del Sol, he would need no other inheritance”. But the plates themselves offer a somewhat different impression: the figures do not present clear contours; there are no orderly transitions between the different planes; the frontier between the images of “reality” and those of envisionment are blurred. For Baudelaire, these were the outstanding and significant features of Goya’s art:

Goya’s great merit consists in his having created a credible form of the monstrous. His monsters are born viable, harmonious. No one has ever ventured further than he in the direction of the possible absurd. All those distortions, those bestial faces, those diabolic grimaces of his are impregnated with humanity . . . In a word, the line of suture, the point of junction between the real and the fantastic is impossible to grasp. (430)¹¹

As the French poet-critic implies, Goya’s portrayal of irrationality does not project into another time or space. It appears *hic et nunc*, here and now. The metaphor of marginality, so fundamental for the emergence of the Gothic, seems, therefore, to be a less distinctive characteristic in Goya’s representation of the fantastic. Perhaps Goya, situated on Europe’s “periphery” but embracing the principles of Enlightenment,¹² had trouble establishing an imagery of differentiation. The fact is that the Napoleonic invasion of Spain in 1808 brought to the forefront the atrocities which a “civilized” country such as France was capable of committing. During the Peninsular Wars, unreason acquired the status of reality. In *The Disasters of War*, Goya does not discriminate: Frenchmen as well as Spaniards protagonize barbaric acts. And in this sense, the forces of civilization exhibited the same irrational values that primitive Spain had represented. The impossible monsters that reason dreamed, suddenly materialized within the boundaries of the *vraisemblable*: “I saw it,” says Goya in *Disaster 44*. The revelation created an epistemological crisis. *Disaster 79* affirms it categorically: “Truth has died”; number 80 opens a question that will hover over the following centuries: “Will she live again?”

This crisis, so peculiar to Goya’s circumstances, will nonetheless become the distinctive mark of fantastic literature in general. But how did unreason move from a mere presence in the scene of order to a position from which it could question reason on its own terms and with the same rights?

Why and how did irrationality break through the boundaries that excluded it to invade and shake the very foundations of order?

In 1848, at Fox Farm in the state of New York, the first *séances* of modern spiritualism were conducted. That same year, across the Atlantic Ocean, Marx and Engels published the *Communist Manifesto*, which contains the now famous introductory sentence: "A spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of Communism". The language of esoterism connects two apparently unrelated events. When Marx adopted an image of the fantastic to depict a concrete political phenomenon he was both using dominant discourse as well as deconstructing a cultural metaphor. Throughout the nineteenth century, Europe portrayed itself as a world plagued by vague fears that tinged the imagination with colorful but imprecise menaces: the yellow scare, the red peril, the black or brown dangers, the Gold International . . . They all referred to specific problems and suggested that the social order was in danger, even though daily experience might disprove that they actually posed a threat. The empirical "testing" of social reality was not sufficient to dissipate the beliefs ingrained in bourgeois perception: these fears were the surface symptoms of a broader and deeper sickness whose manifestation revealed the extent of its underground presence. Louis Chevalier states it clearly: "Paris was described as a sick city . . . and much of the denunciation was directed against the sewers, drains and hospitals, all the places where the refuse of daily living piled up . . ." He adds that a series of correlations existed in public belief between these *loci* of unreason and "such social dangers as sickness, poverty, crime and prostitution; and riots and revolutions too" (206). Thus political, social, economic, even medical categories were fused into one single image of irrationality when they questioned or challenged the bourgeois world. These perils, no doubt, were considered immediate problems, but their true menace resided in what they projected towards the future. As E. J. Hobsbawm says,

Just as the European middle classes of the 1840's thought they recognized the shape of their future social problems in the rain and smoke of Lancashire, so they thought they recognized another shape of the future behind the barricades of Paris, that great anticipator and exporter of revolutions. (1975:11)

Once again the idea of historical process assumed a key role in reshaping bourgeois consciousness. If the perception of historical change had been merely a spark that touched off the Gothic genre, by the middle of the nineteenth century it was becoming a hypothesis on which a vision of the future could be based. From it Marx, of course, proclaimed the inevitable destruction of capitalism, thus materializing in political terms the cultural metaphor of fear. The main critique of bourgeois society came not from those who absolutely rejected all its principles, but from those who

took its traditional "reasonable" premises to its ultimate and anti-bourgeois conclusions. A philosophical challenge had issued from within the framework of dominant discourse. In the course of a few decades, then, what had been secluded broke its silence and, from within, had managed to create its own voice.

The case of Pierre Rivière, an 1830's murderer studied by Foucault and his team of collaborators, is in this sense exemplary. The confusion that Rivière's monstrous double crime provoked in bourgeois epistemology lay, not so much in the nature or essence of the crime, as in the fact that Rivière wrote a confession explaining, with impeccable logic, his motives. Was he crazy, and, therefore, innocent; or was he sane, and, therefore, guilty? Could a monster expound reasons? Goya's diffuse contours had already announced this cognitive crisis which would, as the century advanced, turn into a severe identity crisis. "Alas! Victor"—one of the characters in *Frankenstein* will say—"when falsehood can look so much like truth, who can assure themselves of certain happiness?" (21)

In 1816, after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the Congress of Vienna reordered Europe. A new era was beginning. At exactly the same time in Geneva a now famous meeting took place. Byron, the Shelleys, John Polidori, maybe even "Monk" Lewis, agreed one night that each would write a tale of terror: a new epoch of fantastic literature was also born. The "marginal" characters in this literary *séance* produced the two works that have since become cornerstones in the development of the fantastic: Polidori's *The Vampyre* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein. A Modern Prometheus*.

Some striking differences set these works apart from the Gothic, a genre that quickly faded away at the beginning of the century. Unreason—as Goya already anticipated—appears now much closer and its connotation as peripheral is less accentuated. Neither temporal nor spatial settings require medieval atmospheres or "primitive" surroundings. Even the places of confinement lose their predominant role. True, some of the old Gothic images still alternate with the new ones, but all in all there is clearly a new set of metaphors at work. In Polidori's novel part of the action does occur in Greece, but London salons also make their appearance. Both *Frankenstein's* monster and the vampire exist in contemporary time, and the former travels all through Europe, retracing the Napoleonic invasions.

Undoubtedly, threat is *hic et nunc*. Eugène Sue opens his *Mystères de Paris* (1842–1843) by calling the reader's attention to the fact that the barbarians and savages he will be introducing do not belong to remote countries but are to be found "among ourselves". And Saint-Marc Girardin, in the *Journal des Débats* of December 8, 1831, points out that,

Every manufacturer lives in his factory like the colonial planters in the midst of their slaves, one against a hundred, and the subversion of Lyons is a sort of insurrection of San Domingo . . . The barbarians

who menace society are neither in the Caucasus nor in the steppes of Tartary; they are in the suburbs of our industrial cities. (qtd. in Hobsbawm 1962:238)

Thus, working classes, ragged classes, and dangerous classes were associated to comprise a nucleus from which to draw fantastic images.

Movies have represented Frankenstein's monster as a proletarian figure. In Shelley's novel the association is not so blunt. The monster is, in reality, a simple distortion of bourgeois norm: too big; too ugly; dressed in clothes (the doctor's) too small for him. The vampire, on the other hand, does not deviate in looks, language or dress from the standard gentleman, but his behavior and his morals do prove his monstrosity.

Distortion is a new mechanism in the fantastic by which the frontiers between the real and the unreal become definitely blurred. And yet, by its own essence, distortion not only serves to portray monstrosity but also to reveal the familiarity of those images of unreason: just as the contours of norm are recognized in "the other", so too can the signs of monstrosity be discovered in the self. It is not surprising, therefore, that the name Frankenstein has come to denote the creature and not his creator. The psychological differentiation between the two beings is undoubtedly imprecise, permitting critics such as Harold Bloom to see the monster as Victor's *alter-ego*. The monster is, without any question, the doctor's creation, his literal "construction". And, in fact, the novel, as the subtitle suggests, invites us to read him as signifying the product of scientific and technological progress, the direct result of the industrialization process.

During this same period—that is, basically during the first two thirds of the nineteenth century—Marx's dialectical materialism and Darwin's theory of evolution erupted onto the European scene. The first acknowledged the idea that capitalism created its own contradictions and that society resulted from historical change; the second that man himself was nothing but the product of a biological process. How then could the bourgeoisie envision its own future? What lay ahead for humanity?

The Fall of the House of Usher (1839) has been interpreted as a representation of the fall of reason. When the narrator arrives at the old mansion,¹³ he notices a crack in the foundations. He enters the house of Usher, descends through its labyrinthine hallways until the image of tension is finally, although vaguely, located: it is the ghostly figure of Madeline, the *twin* sister of Roderick Usher. This intrusion into Usher's internal world, this introspective search, acquires all the characteristics of an exploration of the subconscious. Of course, a systematic and scientific study of the "soul", that is of the "psyche", will not be formulated until the latter part of the century, but the grounds for the discovery of the sources of irrationality within the self were already laid out. The narrator in Poe's tale

soon finds out that the causes of Usher's troubles form an intrinsic part of his being: "He entered, at some length, into what he conceived to be the nature of his malady. It was, he said, a constitutional and a family evil . . ." (66). Once the internal, endemic nature of monstrosity has thus been acknowledged, the house—the home—can no longer serve as a place of security. The crack that the narrator perceives at the beginning foredoomed the final destruction of the House of Usher. The principles of exclusion and confinement prove useless in the mid-nineteenth century. Prince Prospero, in *The Masque of the Red Death* (1842), in spite of the walls lined with armed guards that protect his society from the plague, will be unable to keep death from striking amidst his guests.

The assault on reason, therefore, runs through the entire spectrum of bourgeois life, reaching its most hidden corners as it questions the self and the images of affirmation that served to displace the "ancien régime". The new order includes now, in its own reflection, a sense of distortion.

IV. 1917: The eclipse of reason.

In 1905, Einstein published his first theory of relativity, shattering the Newtonian concept of the world. Between 1914 and 1918, World War I presented the world with a horrifying spectacle of technological and mass killing. In October 1917, the Soviet Revolution triumphed, bringing into power what was to become a permanent communist government. A decade later, in 1929, the world economy collapsed. In a span of less than thirty years, the scientific, moral, political, and economic universe of the bourgeoisie seemed to have fallen into chaos.

During the same period of time, the avant-garde, the entire amalgam of "isms" erased the premises of the realistic contract. The fantastic—or marvelous, if one follows Todorov's definitions—extends its area of influence and becomes one of the dominant traits of the new art. For Georg Lukács, Kafka's work represents the prototype of modernism since it centers on portraying "this experience, this vision of a world dominated by *angst* and of man at the mercy of incomprehensible terrors" (1973:297). Once merely a presence at the margins of order, the signs of unreason now form the central representation of bourgeois culture: indeed a profound "metamorphosis" appeared to have taken place.

The turning point of this evolution may be situated in the events of La Commune, in Paris, in 1871. For the first time, even if only for a brief period, a worker's government, an "unreasonable" government, was in power at the center of the bourgeois world. It was more a symbolic act than a real threat but, as Hobsbawm says, "it frightened the wits out of

it [the bourgeois order] by its mere existence” (1975:183). In *Tableaux du siège, Paris 1870-71*, Théophile Gautier described La Commune using the language that the fantastic had carved in the realm of representation. Underneath every city, writes Gautier, there are dark caverns containing wild beasts, monsters, and all such beings with a deformed soul. One day, somebody forgets to lock the gates of the caverns, and the city is invaded by the “hyenas of 93” and the “gorillas of La Commune”.

The perceived monstrosity of the invasion evoked an equally barbarous response: the drastic measures taken to put down the Parisian revolution proved to be just as irrational as the events they were silencing. The massacre of revolutionaries and workers implied a total transformation of the reasonable premises that had inspired the reasonable society.

Fantastic art incorporated the new factors shaping bourgeois perception. R. L. Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) is a case in point. On the one hand, it reproduces the features of fantastic literature written during the “assault on reason”: the space of representation is decisively contemporary; the irrational no longer inhabits only the places of confinement, but walks the open streets of the city; like Frankenstein’s creature, Mr. Hyde is a product of progress and scientific development, and his monstrosity is simply a deformation of the norm.¹⁴ And yet on the other hand, a new connotation emerges in Stevenson’s novel revealing it to be a different manifestation of the fantastic. Hyde is Dr. Jekyll’s creation. As is so often the case in the previous stage of fantastic art, the incarnation of a menacing “otherness” arises from within the foundations of reason. Irrationality is perceived as another component of the self, present within it, calling its integrity into question. The innovation resides in the fact that Hyde will ultimately replace Jekyll. Monstrosity becomes the product of an irreversible process.

Hence, although I had now two characters as well as two appearances, one was wholly evil and the other was still the old Henry Jekyll, that incongruous compound of whose reformation and improvement I had already learned to despair. The movement was thus wholly toward the worse. (435)

The take-over by the forces of unreason is presented as inevitable, and thus historical development points toward the irrevocable disappearance of dominant culture.

Social evolution might eradicate the remnants of a primitive and barbarian past, but it also reveals, through its own postulates, the fragility of the bourgeois world and its eventual final transformation. For Maupassant, the new “being” destined to usurp “man’s” place on Earth is *The Horla* (1886): “Who is he? Gentleman, he is the one that will dethrone us, subjugate us, tame us” (419).¹⁵ The ideas of historical change and biolog-

ical evolution fuse into one single theory to which Maupassant appeals in suggesting a scientific authority for the concept of metamorphosis.

The reign of man has ended . . . We are a small number, so few in this world, from the oyster up to man. Why not one more species, once the period which separates the successive appearances of all the various species is accomplished? (445)

No order is permanent; the new reign of the monstrous is perfectly plausible.

Faced with this eventuality, the solutions adopted by the bourgeoisie in order to negate its own idea of historical progress will reveal, as the events of La Commune anticipated, the full extent of the crisis affecting dominant epistemology. In *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), Henry James clearly delineates the terms of the conflict: the governess' fears, although awakened by the figures of the un-dead servants, become real threats to her *persona* when associated with the emancipatory demands of the children: "He [Miles] had got out of me that there was something I was much afraid of and that he should probably be able to make use of my fear to gain for his own purpose, more freedom" (59). The same principles of liberty that had been used a century ago to dismantle the "ancien régime" appear now to challenge the institutions of order embodied by the governess. Dr. Jekyll, in his moments of "lucidity", will approach the same problematic, preferring "the elderly and discontented doctor" to "the liberty, the comparative youth" of Mr. Hyde (442).¹⁶

In the final scene of *The Turn of the Screw*, the governess "kills" young Miles—and thus creates a confusion as to who is the real monster. This irrational act becomes the logical response to the menace posed to the house, of whose well-being and proper conduct the governess is in charge.

Here at present I felt afresh—for I had felt it again and again—how my equilibrium depended on the success of my rigid will, the will to shut my eyes as tight as possible to the truth that what I had to deal with was, revoltingly, against nature. I could only get on at all by taking "nature" into my confidence and my account, by treating my monstrous ordeal as a push in a direction unusual, of course, and unpleasant, but demanding, after all, for a fair front, only another turn of the screw of ordinary human virtue. (86)

Reason thus proves to be inadequate in dealing with the new situation, while extraordinary and even criminal measures are rationalized as a necessary extension of normal values. Jekyll-Hyde commits suicide. The narrator in *The Horla* opts for burning down his house—servants included—and the tale ends with premonitory words: "I will have to kill myself . . ." To destroy order so as to preserve order: this suicidal gesture will find in the

1920's and early 1930's concrete political formulations in fascist programs and ideals.

A central, crucial paradox, therefore, dominates the cultural panorama at the turn of the century: the discourse of reason that served to promote and justify the ascent of the bourgeois world now articulates its own negation. The premises of that discourse will be used precisely by that sector that had been excluded from the rational world to build an alternative society: the discourse of reason will shape the voice of the working class. This epistemological "exchange" could not fail to produce a crisis in language, in representation. How could otherness be distinguished from the self? Rimbaud's phrase "je est un autre" becomes, in this sense, a true summary of the problematic that plagued the cultural world of the bourgeoisie. "Distortion," says Lukács in "The Ideology of Modernism", "becomes as inseparable a part of the portrayal of reality as the recourse to the pathological. But literature must have a concept of the normal if it is to place distortion correctly, that is to say, to see it as distortion" (1973:293).

It becomes, then, increasingly more difficult to assign a profile as well as a place of containment to the images of monstrosity. Ghosts, spectres, monsters tend to disappear. In their place, a vacuum emerges, something—as Rosemary Jackson points out in regard to Lovecraft—that can only be registered textually as an absence. The Horla is, of course, invisible, capable of manifesting itself through each and all of the familiar objects that populate everyday life. The progressive masking and remasking of evil seems to reach an ultimate revelation: behind all those disguises stands the void, the *gouffre*. As Marcel Brion says, "emptiness has no form, but is capable of assuming them all" (113). Irrationality has, therefore, finally broken its chains of confinement and extends its presence across the entire social landscape.

V. Epilogue: Saturn devouring his children.

One of the secret "black" paintings in Goya's house, the Quinta del Sordo, is entitled "Saturn devouring his children": a monstrous Saturn, blood dripping from his mouth, stands in the foreground; behind and around him there is only darkness. Goya's inspiration for this painting might have come from Vergniaud's speech to the Assembly in Paris, in 1793: "So, Citizens, we had reason to fear that the Revolution, like Saturn devouring all his children one after the other, might give rise finally to despotism with the calamities that go with it" (qtd. in Paulson 24).

From 1816 on, as Lukács states, the concept that "revolutions constitute necessary, organic components of evolution" (1962:28) became ingrained in dominant epistemology. With it arose a vision that the road of

humanity, the road of bourgeois civilization, of reason, constituted a stage, a constant dynamic process that generated its own contradictions, its own negation. Saturn is the god that brings civilization; associated with Chronos, he incorporated the notion of Time as an agent of destruction. He thus becomes, at the end of the eighteenth century, a symbol of History, of historical process. Faced with the fear that the creatures he has precreated will rebel against him, Saturn destroys them: from creator he metamorphoses into destructor, killing his own continuity, his "self".

The dream of reason produces monsters: the offspring of Enlightenment threatened from within to terminate the order that the bourgeois revolution instituted in the name of progress. Civilization devours its own propositions. The new epistemology that had tried to exclude irrationality from its universe found itself instead defining boundaries, modifying its own premises in order to constantly relocate its margins, its space.

All these paradoxes, already articulated in Goya's work, comprise the core of the fantastic. The historical development of fantastic literature traces for us the transformation and legitimization of the discourse of unreason within the parameters of the "reasonable" society.

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NOTES

1. The arguments discussed in this article are further developed in my book *A Specter Is Haunting Europe: A Sociohistorical Approach to the Fantastic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990). It is published with permission from the Princeton University Press.

2. Translated into English as *The Proverbs*. A more accurate translation would be "the absurdities".

3. It is the only sketch that includes a title.

4. See Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*.

5. This does not necessarily imply that Cervantes rejects all medieval values. On the contrary, some of the ideals of justice, for instance, are portrayed positively. But the overall feudal world view is definitely discarded.

6. Cervantes carries out an identical argument in relation to the characteristics of art: "I have never yet seen any book of chivalry that puts together a connected plot complete in all its members, so that the middle agrees with the beginning, and the end with the beginning and the middle. On the contrary, they construct them with such a multitude of members that it seems as though they meant to produce a chimera or monster rather than a *well-proportioned* figure. And besides all this they are harsh in their style, incredible in their achievements, licentious in their amours, uncouth in their courtly speeches, long-winded in their battles, silly in their arguments, absurd in their travels, and, in short, lacking in anything resembling intelligent art. For this reason they deserve to be banished from the Christian commonwealth as a worthless breed" (374).

7. "The fantastic", says Todorov, "is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event. . . . The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty". Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975) 25. Todorov's structuralist

approach forces him not to consider the changing historical meaning of words such as "natural" and "supernatural". Could an inclusive epistemology, one that has not discarded supernatural events as "unnatural", create uncertainty about the "nature" of these events?

8. Freud's theory of repression in "Das Unheimlich" accounts for both the act of exclusion and the reappearance of the suppressed in an uncanny form.

9. Rosemary Jackson, for instance, argues that fantastic literature voices everything that society represses: "The shadows on the edges of bourgeois culture are variously identified as black, mad, primitive, criminal, socially deprived, deviant, crippled, or (when sexually assertive) female". Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy, The Literature of Subversion* (London and New York: Methuen, 1981) 181.

10. There is no doubt that in this case it means dreaming, since the present participle, "soñando", does not carry the double acceptance; "durmiendo" would have been the appropriate word for sleeping.

11. The translation is mine.

12. Goya was an *afrancesado*, that is, an admirer and follower of French civilization.

13. The old mansions in ruinous state—as opposed to the old but intact castles and monasteries of the Gothic period—that proliferate in the fantastic literature of this period are again another manifestation of distortion, both in the sense of physical "deformation" and of dynamic "degeneration".

14. As opposed to Frankenstein's monster, Mr. Hyde is "smaller" than his creator, Dr. Jekyll, and therefore the clothes he wears are too big.

15. The translation is mine.

16. The generation conflict between children/governess, youth/old age, also reveals the lack of confidence the bourgeoisie projects onto its own future.

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