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The myth of the monster

Fernando S. Vugman[1]

[1] *Doutor em Literaturas da Língua Inglesa. Autor de* A casa sem fim *(ficção) e* Ficção e pesadelos (pós)modernos *(teoria e crítica). Tradutor e crítico de cinema.*
e-mail: fsvugman@gmail.com

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Resumo

Neste ensaio é apresentado o que chamo de Mito do Monstro, aqui descrito e analisado como um mito que se origina da necessidade do indivíduo e das coletividades humanas de determinarem referências para se definirem como seres humanos, seja num plano espiritual, seja como seres corpóreos, materiais. A relação entre mitos e a noção de metáfora é discutida, enquanto monstros da literatura ocidental, como Caliban, Drácula, o monstro de Frankenstein, Dr. Jekyll e Mr. Hyde, entre outros, são analisados como metáforas do Mito do Monstro, sendo discutida a função metafórica dos monstros do Iluminismo e da Modernidade. Por fim, o zumbi hollywoodiano é proposto como a metáfora contemporânea do Mito do Monstro, devido a sua capacidade de expressar as angústias vividas atualmente diante de uma realidade que dificulta, ou impede que cada um defina sua própria identidade.

Palavras-chave: Mito; Metáfora; Monstro; *Hollywood*; Zumbi.

Abstract

In this essay is presented what I call the Myth of the Monster. Here that myth is described and analyzed as a myth originating from the need by individuals and human collectivities to determine references, which can help them to define themselves as human beings, both at a spiritual level and as corporeal, material beings. In parallel to that discussion on myth the notion of the metaphor is also debated, while monsters in Western literature like Caliban, Dracula, Dr. Frankenstein's monster, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, among others, are analyzed as metaphors for the Myth of the Monster. The metaphorical functions of monsters from the Enlightenment and from Modernity are also discussed. Finally, the Hollywood zombie is suggested as the contemporary metaphor for the Myth of the Monster, due to its ability to express the present anxieties experienced in face of a reality that makes it hard or impossible for each of us to define our own identity.

Keywords: Myth; Metaphor; Monster; Hollywood; Zombie.

The Myth of the Monsters is arguably one of the oldest myths ever. It probably appeared when our ancestors first began to question themselves about whom, or what they were. That question, which separated us from all other animals, generated an anxiety that haunts us until today. So that myth was born from our need to understand ourselves as human beings in a broader sense, involving issues both of human spirituality, and of the individual as a material being. Because it deals with an anxiety of identity, one of the characteristics of the monster is its relation to those frontiers that separate what is human from the non-human, the civilized from the uncivilized, right from wrong, good from evil. Because it was created from our need to define ourselves based on some essential humanity, that myth can be found in all cultures and in all times.

According to historian Richard Slotkin,

> A mythology is a complex of narratives that dramatizes the world vision and historical sense of a people or a culture, reducing centuries of experience into a constellation of compelling metaphors. The narrative action of the myth-tale recapitulates that people's experience in their land, rehearsals their visions of that experience in its relation to their gods and the cosmos, and reduces both experience and vision to a paradigm. (*Regeneration through Violence*, p. 6)

In the case at issue the myth settles the paradigm for identity and alterity. Indeed, possibly the most defining characteristic of the monster is that it is always wandering about the line separating the human from the inhuman: when one claims "I'm not a monster," one is implicitly restating his or her own humanity.

But the anxiety related to the Myth of the Monster is exactly that which arises from the impossibility to find a clear-cut and definite definition of what makes one essentially human, since the very concept of "human" will always vary in place and time. As a consequence, whenever it appears in a myth narrative the monster crosses and blurs the line separating good and evil, right and wrong, humane and monstrous. The monster undermines those lines, which before his appearance used to separate the "light" human world from the "dark" monstrous universe; it is not just that the monster casts its shadow on the luminous human world, but it also confounds things by calling attention to the possibility of light in its own realm.

From a psychoanalytic perspective one could claim that by crossing that line the monster functions as the surfacing of that which was repressed, reappearing in a deformed way, as a symptom. From a Darwinian evolutionist perspective that could be understood as the manifestation of the primitive animal from whom human kind would have evolved.

As mentioned above, myth is eventually reduced "into a constellation of compelling metaphors" (Slotkin, p. 6). Indeed, Slotkin distinguishes what he calls the "mythopoeic mode of consciousness" and the "myth-artifact, which is the actual tale or sacred image or object connected with the myth narrative (…) [and which] symbolically embodies the mythopoeic perception and makes it concrete and communicable" (idem, p. 8) In the case of the Myth of the Monster, its myth-artifacts and metaphors must deal at the symbolic level with the anxiety generated by the human need to find one's unique and collective meaning in face of experience, of the very human existence. And since such an anxiety can never escape history and culture its myth-artifacts and metaphors are always already historically and culturally determined. The metaphors of the Myth of the Monster comprise the almost infinite imagined monsters by all peoples and cultures, monsters that have inhabited an endless number of monster narratives.

So the monster is about crossing lines, about blurring all lines. As Western societies became increasingly urbanized and industrialized, monsters in their fiction moved geographically, appearing closer to what was seen as the center of civilization of the time. That is, in older stories the monster usually appears in remote and unpopulated places, while the more recent the story the closer the monster comes to the "civilized world." As it will be argued bellow, today one has a hard time trying to separate civilization from monstrosity.

Such a movement by the monster in its tales can be initially illustrated by the Shakespearean Caliban, from the beginning of the seventeenth century, a monster living on a desert island, deserted from human beings, with the exception of the

exiled Prospero and his daughter Miranda. As it is conventional in monster tales,[2] Caliban is ill-defined, a being who seems to exhibit different characteristics, human and non-human, as he appears to each character in the play. He does speak the civilized language, but only to use it in a monstrous way, as when he tells Prospero that if he had not been prevented, he would have raped Miranda and peopled the island with baby monsters. In any case, in relation to the geographical situation of the monster in *The Tempest* (1611/12), Caliban is fated to stay in the island, without ever getting closer to the civilized world.

By its turn, the monster created by doctor Frankenstein in Mary Shelley's story about two centuries later, wanders along the civilized world of his time and remote places in the planet. In order to get a monster bride and have an offspring, he promises his creator to move away, far from civilization, in the South-American jungle. But Dr. Frankenstein refuses to give him a female companion, and hunts him till the North Pole. Indeed, the geographical range of the monster's movements in the tale can be already read as an approximation between the civilized human world and that of darkness. Frankenstein's monster longs to become part in human society; he studies human history and strives to learn the social rules and to develop a moral code. But the more the monster behaves as a human being, the more the crowd behaved like wild animals, pursuing and attacking him, in a paradox that questions humane acts as essential in human identity. Created during the Enlightenment, the monster by Mary Shelley brings to the foreground the shadows of the irrationality that haunted the Age of Reason. In a period when the conquests of science and the rational thought made people believe they were closer to God, there came a monster to show how close human beings can behave like the devil.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Robert Louis Stevenson writes Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886), situating his monster much closer to civilization, or to the

[2] The monster always raises the question: "Am I a monster?" meaning "what/who am I?" In order to cause such an effect, the monster will always combine human and non-human traits, making it difficult to understand what one sees.

civilized man. So Caliban is stuck in a distant island, while Shelley's monster moves through Europe and the North Pole, but Stevenson's creature lives in London, arguably the heart of the civilized world in that time. In fact, his monster is so close to the civilized man that he inhabits his very body and soul, as it becomes ever more difficult to separate the civilized Dr. Jekyll from the monstrous Mr. Hyde. The darker side of Reason and Science already hinted at by Mary Shelley is explicitly denounced by Stevenson's creation. Indeed, other literary monsters of that time characteristically inhabit the very body and soul of the heroes in their stories, like Wilde's Dorian Gray (1891), and Balzac's Lucian Chardon in *Lost Illusions* (1837-1843). In the first half of the twentieth century Fitzgerald also imagines characters that carry in themselves a mixture of civilization and monstrosity, like Amory Blaine in *This Side of Paradise* (1920), and Jay Gatsby, in *The Great Gatsby* (1925).

But if along history monsters have crossed lines in a way to become increasingly indistinguishable from the civilized man, to generate an offspring is one thing that remains prohibited. Indeed, if the monster symbolizes evil, they should not be allowed to reproduce, or evil would spread all through society. More than that, if monsters were allowed to breed, the very idea of humanity would be at risk. So in every monster tale any attempt for it to reproduce is barred. If that wasn't avoided, it would symbolically mean that evil is part in each and all of us; right and wrong would be indiscernible. On the other hand, a monster can never be killed or destroyed in any final sense; the worse that can happen to a monster is to become a dead metaphor. Of course there never was, and never will be an individual or a community absolutely free of evil. In the world outside fiction good and evil do mix, as a universal and final concept for evil will always be out of reach.

So in the monster stories, if at the end the creature is destroyed in some way, or expelled from the community, at least a hint is always there that either the monster will somehow reappear or some other substitute monster will take its place. Evil cannot be expelled for ever, so in the monster stories the destruction of the monster is always provisional: Count Dracula never disappears for ever; Mr. Hyde will always creep inside us; a new gangster boss will take over; Freddy

Krueger haunts the dreams of every dreamer, while the zombies… well the zombies seem to be spreading everywhere and more about them will be said presently, together with a debate on the contemporary metaphors of the Myth of the Monster.

But now it should prove interesting to consider again Slotkin's claim that mythic metaphors and narratives eventually reduce life experience and perspectives to a paradigm. Thus one could say that the monsters and their tales deal with the anxieties of identity that lurk within the paradigmatic markers of identity for a specific society in a specific historical moment. Shakespeare's Caliban was the ghost that haunted the idea of the human being as the most perfect creation of God; Count Dracula expressed the dread in which to be wholly human was to be a nobleman; Frankenstein's creature challenged the Enlightenment's Man of Reason and Reason itself; Mr. Hyde derides the idea that the modern man is civilized, while tainting the paradigm of modernity. In the specific case of the US, one very popular monster to mark the transition of the country from a rural and wild territory to an industrial and urban society is the gangster.

So as metaphors, these monsters were directly connected to the ideological paradigm of their time and culture. But before advancing and following that path it is necessary to make it clear what "metaphor" means in this essay.

Unlike monsters, metaphors die. According to philosophers like Donald Davidson and Richard Rorty[3] living metaphors exist to name the new, that which has never been thought before, that which can only be named, or described, but cannot be understood, or explained.[4] In that sense, there is no "metaphorical meaning." That also implies that when a metaphor becomes understandable,

[3] For a comprehensive discussion on the metaphor, see DAVIDSON, Donald. "The social aspect of language." In: McGUINNESS, Brian; Olivieri, Gianluigi (Ed.). *The philosophy of Michael Dummett*. Boston: Dordrechet, 1994a, and RORTY, Richard. *Philosophy and the mirror of nature*. Princeton, USA: Princeton University Press, 1979.

[4] I am much in debt to Professor Aldo Litaif for his illuminating comments on the contemporary debate about the metaphor.

definable, it has lost its metaphorical function: it has petrified into a concept and can be enclosed in a vocabulary entry.

As said before, monsters are metaphors for the Myth of the Monster, that is, each imagined monster in each monster narrative functioned to name the anxiety related to one's search for identity within his living context, or within the paradigm of his time. So Frankenstein's monster was a metaphor for the anxiety generated by the idea of an all-powerful man defying God in a world still structured within religious and mystical paradigms. By the same token Dracula served as a metaphor for the anxiety generated by the idea of a man so free from the laws of man that only depravity could allure him. And Mr. Hyde was a metaphor for the idea of a man that just a while ago would defy God, only to be warned of how little he was able to control himself.

In America, the gangster became the monster that dealt metaphorically with the anxieties from having to fit within a new social structure in a new context. The Hollywood gangster, by the time its figure appeared around the 1930s, and for the following decades, functioned as a metaphor because he could only name new anxieties from a world which could not be explained; the gangster himself was very hard to explain, since he could be at once identified with the villain and the hero, mixing evil doings and some of the same values for which the American hero would stand for. As noted by David Ruth about Al Capone, his mixing of "violence with acts of charity encouraged his audience to confront the inseparability of good and evil" (p. 139). For the next decades, through the 1990s, the figure of the gangster would fascinate the public. As a living metaphor, he would change and adapt along these decades to the new forms of anxiety Americans experienced in their attempt to define their identities in an ever changing social, cultural and economic environment. The gangster was a living metaphor as long as he could stand for the confounding contradictions and paradoxes generated from the senseless routines and values in modern, i.e., industrial and urban America.

According to Slotkin, myth narratives "retain their mythic powers only so long as they can continue to evoke in the minds of succeeding generations a vision analogous in its compelling power to that of the original mythopoeic perception"

(*RTV*, p. 8). So as a metaphor for the Myth of the Monster, the figure of the gangster had to adapt to social, economic and cultural changes in the US in order to continue to retain the power to name the anxiety Americans felt when they had to define themselves in face of a changed national context. As such they now had to reject some established values and accept new ones; the gangster was the modern American monster because he expressed the difficulty Americans felt to define themselves as Americans. Together with industrialization, intense immigration and widespread urbanization would challenge those cultural values established in a land afore seen as of infinite geographical frontiers. As noted by Tom Schatz the "mythology of the classic gangster film, like that of the Western, concerns the transformation of nature into culture under the auspices of modern civilization" (p. 82). However, unlike the Western, which tells a story situated in a distant context, both geographically and in time, when nature was still the predominant environment for most Americans, the gangster film links more directly the audience to their present in the urban milieu. In contrast with the Western "[t]here is no limitless horizon, no sunset in the distance for the urban renegade" (Schatz, p. 83). In other words, as Schatz observes, "America's gradual shift from a primarily rural-agricultural to an urban-industrial nation, compounded by the Depression, Prohibition, and the other vagaries of city life, generated considerable cultural confusion and caused an extensive reexamination of our traditional value system" (HG, P. 84), with its consequent identity conflicts.

So during most of the twentieth century the gangster functioned as a good metaphor, since he was able to refer to every new cultural change. In the classical period of the gangster film, the casting of non-WASP actors to play the villains aimed at the anxiety generated by immigration, bring so many aliens struggling to become Americans. The gangster's relations to women, always consuming them as an object, but never interested to raise a family (in consonance with the fate of the monster), expressed the anxiety caused by the fear of the dissolution of the ideal family structure and values; by barring a family of gangsters, these film tried to reaffirm the existence of a "good family", a real American family, in opposition to other possibilities, which were beginning to show. It was a way to define and give

support to a supposedly "good" America.

The 1960s brought a number of culturally challenging events for Americans, as the invention of the pill, the Vietnam war, the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. and of John Kennedy, just to mention a few. Such events, by challenging dominant views on the US as a democratic nation and as a melting pot, would necessarily challenge Americans' own self-image, Americans' own identity. Again the Hollywood gangster would prove capable of naming the anxiety thus generated, as one can see in *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), by Arthur Penn.

Indeed, Penn's film appears in the context of a broad cultural crisis in America and as part of a wave of Hollywood films which "transcoded a growing sense of alienation from the dominant myths and ideals of U.S. society" (Michael Ryan *Camera Politica*, p. 17). Indeed, *Bonnie and Clyde* brings at least two important changes to the gangster film: the gangster protagonist that falls in love, and the presence of so many family relations –brothers, wives, husbands, in-laws—an unusual number for a film of that genre, especially when such relations occur among the gang members. That first hint at the possibility for a gangster to have a "normal" American family was the metaphor's way to adapt and retain its original compelling power. The level of anxiety generated from the suggestion that the ideal American family was much alike a "gangster family" (making it impossible to say what an American family was) can be measured by the fate of the protagonist couple: the sequence in which Bonnie and Clyde are machine-gunned in slow motion and a from number of different angles while their bodies are shaken and riddled with bullets in an ambush by the police inaugurated a new level of graphic violence on the Hollywood screen.

As a living metaphor of the Myth of the Monster, to dream of a family was a coherent move by Bonnie and Clyde. In all monster narratives, there always occurs the monster's attempt to integrate, or in some way to be accepted by the society it haunts. And the unbearable discomfort such a move causes comes exactly from the fact that if successful, the monster would demonstrate that what cultural convention calls a monstrosity is in fact normal, and that normality can be monstrous. The monster's victory would mean the disruption of the civilized social

rules, and his successful marriage would mean the very undermining of the values associated to the conventional bourgeois family in industrial and urban America. In the specific case of Penn's film, the anxiety expressed was the cultural difficulty to accept other forms of family as normal, including the acceptance of things like free sex before marriage, non-WASP families, inter-racial families, and that illegal money (for instance, by means of tax evasion, corruption, etc.) made a number of American families make ends meet.

Half a decade later, as it became ever more difficult to deny the crisis of the conventional family, the legacy of the Barrows resurfaced. Proving still to be a powerful metaphor, the gangster takes another step to bring to the foreground the many conflicts, which were disrupting the ideal American family: based on Mario Puzo's homonymous novel and adapted to the screen by Francis Ford Coppola, *The Godfather* (1972) would institutionalize the gangster family in the Hollywood mythological realm. The appearance of the Corleones after the unmerciful destruction of the Barrows in Penn's film illustrates how the killing of the gangster, as a monster, is always temporary, and how he is fated to try and return to his mother society, while addressing the anxiety generated by those conflicts and contradictions that confound the existing cultural references of identity.

Like other unconventional families that would appear on the screen after the 1960s,[5] the creation of the Corleones was one of Hollywood's attempts to negotiate and absorb the subversive family models that could arise from the crisis in the American family structured under patriarchy and the bourgeois values. But

[5] Films, which show families who, at least at first sight, try to deviate from the conventional model: mother and son, but no father (*Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*), father and son and a rejecting mother (*Kramer vs. Kramer*), loving couple who kill serially before having a bunch of kids (*Natural Born Killers*), a monstrous but adorable family (*The Addams Family*), or not so adorable and comprised only by men (*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*), just to mention a few. Though such films point, in some way or another, to problems in the conventional family model, their happy ending (which does not happen in the gangster film) generally functions to eventually support that same model or the ideological values on which it finds support. As Wood would put it, the dominant ideology in those films allows some variations as long as no radical transformation is carried out successfully.

by definition, the gangster resists to function as a supporting element for the dominant ideology. On the contrary, the institutionalizing of the gangster family served only to cast the light of monstrosity to the whole of the nuclear family and all social values associated to it. The strangeness caused by a gangster family can be illustrated by the way the critic David Howard chose to define *The Godfather*: "A family saga of epic proportions created with the most improbable of themes -- the universe of the organized crime in the United States" (*The Tools of Screenwriting*, p. 274).

Arguably, the gangster's last breath as a living metaphor was signaled by Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994), a film many would call a postmodern gangster film. If in the genre's evolution since the 1930s through the last decade of the twentieth century one observes a move by the gangster to integrate "normality," in *Pulp Fiction* one can see a withdrawal from reality. That happens because while in the previous gangster films there is a direct relation between the mythology on the screen and reality,[6] in Tarantino's film all myths refer not to the audience's real world in a direct mode, but always filtered through the Hollywood mythological universe itself. Instead, *Pulp Fiction* has a fictional world as its original inspiring source, a world in which, as Robin Wood observes, "America [is presented] as the land where everyone actually is/can be happy;" ("Ideology, Genre, Auteur", p. 47), that is, the myths in such a postmodern film make reference not to the ideological conflicts in real America, but to the 'reality' in a fictional world characterized by not having any insolvable ideological conflicts; there is always room for a happy ending. By the same token, in "Two Shots at Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*" Pat Dowell claims that "only in this most superficial way does *Pulp Fiction* traffic with everyday reality. In general, the tone of Tarantino's work is a rejection of anything resembling the 'real' world" (p. 4).

If the effort to avoid addressing American society's real conflicts and

[6] Notwithstanding the necessary erasure of the historical complexity resulting from the condensation of history, inherent to the mythopoetic process, all myths must relate to a society's reality, or they would not make any sense at all.

contradictions in Tarantino's film already signaled the exhaustion of the figure of the gangster to play the metaphor for the Myth of the Monster, other productions also from the 1990s would reinforce that fact. In 1999 the much successful TV series *The Sopranos*, created by David Chase, presented the gangster as the "regular working guy" that the conventional gangsters so far had avoided to become (even though, paradoxically, as a metaphor, his move was always in the sense of becoming part of the conventional society). Also in 1999 *Analyze This*, by director Harold Hamis, takes the gangster protagonist the psychiatrist's couch, while making fun of his psychological traumas. In addition to the humor with which the protagonists are treated in both production, they show that in late industrial America the monster has become the regular guy next door; as the century comes to an end, so America is not industrial anymore, but post-industrial, or postmodern. By that time, not just the US, but the whole world is witnessing the end of modernity, no matter how one defines modernity, and the transition to something new, some new world that already *is*, but that cannot be explained; a world that causes intense anxiety, but which cannot be understood according to the old paradigms.

The paradigm that is dying is that of Modernity, and along with it all the modern metaphors for the Myth of the Monster are dying too. In the present days what generates anxiety in building one's own identity is not the need to negotiate with modern conventions and references; what is one to do with the old metaphors of the 'family,' of the 'State,' of the 'Revolution,' of 'scientific progress,' of the 'sexual revolution,' and so many others from Modernity?).[7] From such a perspective, the Myth of the Monster calls for some new metaphor, and here I suggest that the zombie is the best candidate.

[7] For a comprehensive discussion on identity in postmodernity see HALL, Stuart. Da diáspora: Identidades e mediações culturais. SOVIK, L. (Org). Belo Horizonte: Editora da UFMG, 2003; HALL, Stuart. Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies. (Eds. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen). London and New York: Routledge, 1996.

Like the gangster films, the first zombie films can be traced back to the beginning of the 1930s, with *White Zombie* (1932), by Victor Halpering and starred by Bela Lugosi, followed by Jacques Tourner's *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943). Without the ability of the gangster to address contemporary identity problems, the zombie in the classic period of the genre would call mild attention from the public. Until 1968 all zombie films presented pre-modern scenes and story structure, but in that year George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* is exhibited. In that film gone are the sugar cane plantations, the dark castles and sinister farm-houses, the slave masters and the slaves. In their place, the well-cared and very modern neighborhoods of the 1960s, crowded with cars, TV sets, radios, and living-dead beings.

But more than just updating the context of the zombie, the changes in the genre's conventions made by Romero created the opportunity to transform his monster into a contemporary metaphor of the Myth. The zombie in *Night of the Living Dead* is semantically open, since its origin remains unexplained and undetermined in the story. More, it moves with no purpose, neither of its own, nor by some master's will. It is at once a force of nature and a supernatural force. George Romero's zombie appears as the name for something inapprehensible[8], which addresses the cultural anxieties of the time, but which cannot be defined based only on these anxieties, because their origins are not clear; that new zombie causes life and death to become indiscernible. Nevertheless, the zombie is dead, and death ends any explanation; death is beyond language, since one must be alive to talk about it. And that brings us back to the living metaphor.

In George Romero's creation, the monster is at once dead and alive. Death is not something that comes after life; the horror comes from the fact that there is something about each living dead that is beyond discourse, be it because in death no discourse is possible, be it because no words would be useful.

In *Filosofía zombi* Spanish philosopher Jorge Fernández Gonzalo distinguishes

[8] One should note that in *Night of the Living Dead* the word zombie never appears.

between the notions of "terror" and "horror." According to him, terror "refers to that situation capable of producing and exaggerated fear, while *horror* [is a] much more difficult feeling to characterize" (p. 30).[9] Gonzalo calls attention to the "spectacular quality of horror" (idem), referring to "the ability to produce images of great semiotic density, to the point of muddying all understanding of the phenomenon" (ibidem).[10] The philosopher observes that in his *Society of the Spectacle* Guy Debord claims that the spectacle, in general and as concrete conversion of life, is the autonomous movement of the non-living, or, as Romero called them, the living dead.

After George Romero the zombie has become a messenger of horror. Its existence, its action does not lead simply to an exaggerated fear; in zombie films one often sees characters unable to verbalize their thoughts and feelings, as when a mother watches her little daughter approaching with arms lifted as asking for a hug and a face that shows only death and decay. There is a lack of words to explain monsters that bring in themselves both humanity and the very dissolution of any coherent notion of humanity. The zombie causes that horror that "must be understood [as] a representation, which eclipses us, which blinds all the channels of reason, which exceeds by saturation or pulchritude the ability to *see*, which overflows that which one is culturally capable of contemplating, something for which we do not have *a language*" (sic) (Gonzalo, p. 30).[11] The zombie is within and beyond language; "zombie" names and addresses those anxieties that torment us, but in face of which we lay speechless, because the source of such anxieties is the dissolution of all structures, all institutions, all conventions, all

[9] In the original: "remite a la situación capaz de producir un miedo exagerado, y el *horror*, [es un] sentimiento mucho más difícil de caracterizar" (p. 30). My translation for all quotes from Gonzalo.

[10] In the original: "a la capacidad de producir imágenes de gran densidad semiótica, hasta al punto de enturbiar toda comprensión del fenómeno"

[11] In the original: "ha de entenderse [como] una representación que nos sobrepasa, que ciega todos los canales de raciocinio, que excede por saturación o pulcritud la capacidad de *ver*, que desborda aquello que culturalmente somos capaces de contemplar, para lo cual no tenemos *un lenguage*".

referents that sustained one's identity in the modern world; that world is falling apart spectacularly, without bringing anything new to show us the way. "Zombie" is a name for the existential and ontological anxiety caused by the end of the paradigm of modernity.

Since it was coined by architect Charles Jencks in 1972, the phrase "postmodernity" has been at the center of an intense debate around how to define and characterize the historical moment that must have started somewhere in the second half of the twentieth century. So far there has been no consensus neither about what characterizes, nor what defines the times we are living. Maybe the concept of postmodernity has become so elusive a theoretical tool because it has become a living metaphor itself, capable of only naming a moment in human history that eludes explanation as intensely as it demands to be acknowledged. Or maybe because all references one could resort to belong to a dying paradigm, and the words from the new paradigm that is forming are just too new to hold more than a literal meaning.

After the *Night of the Living Dead* the figure of the zombie acquired the characteristics of a living metaphor: it does not fit in any closed definition, or in a concept, and it names something, whose existence one cannot deny or understand.[12] And it functions well as a living metaphor for the Myth of the Monster: it addresses the anxiety of identity in all levels: of nationality and citizenship, of gender, of individuality, of culture, of profession, of religion, of social roles and rules and at any other level imagined, since together with the zombie comes always a post-apocalyptical world.[13]

[12] Always avoiding definition, depending on each narrative, the zombie can be slow, or very fast; can be completely alienated, with no ability to reason, nor with memories of its own, or it can think by itself, or and eat someone else's memories; sometimes it eats only humans, but can also eat animals and even other zombies; it can originate from some weird radiation, from a falling meteor, or due to spoiled food, or for no reason at all, and so on.

[13] In zombie films and narratives one often finds deeply distressed and confused characters in face of the impossibility to decide about the identity of their relatives, neighbors and about their own identity. The first episode of the TV series *The Walking Dead* (2010-), by Frank Darabont illustrates that very

As the changing, unstable and inscrutable world we live in, the figure of the zombie both attracts and scares us, fascinates and causes repugnance; it refuses to go and surrounds us as an imposing reality, even in the absence of any explanation. The zombie is the living metaphor for the Myth of the Monster in the present days, as one goes on even without understanding the context around, even incapable of determining one's own identity. In a reality of pure uncertainty we go on to go through improbable and uncertain experiences, but with the determination of a zombie.

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