

The beauty in the beast and the beast in the beauty. The voyeur's view

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Abstract. This paper would like to analyse two films, *The Elephant Man* (David Lynch, 1981) and *Blow up* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966) and one classic myth, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, through the very poignant figure of the *voyeur*. We will investigate this observer of the unnamable focusing on two characters, two eyewitnesses: the scientist who discovers John Merrick and the photographer who becomes obsessed with finding a corpse in an amplified picture. Both these *voyeurs* seem to be in search of the bewitching and sublime darkness that lies within, a search that in a way is inaugurated by the Promethean doctor at the break of Modernity. The corporeal distance between monster and voyeur creates the unbearable morbidity that devours our gaze. And at that exact point, the figures are reversed and the voyeur becomes the actual monster. Soon enough, we discover that their perspective as voyeurs becomes ours, because through the cinematic experience the spectator becomes witness of the crime, part of the freak show, morbid viewer of the abject. Lynch and Antonioni, together with Shelley's creature and creator, put the question of the body through a microscope and dare us spectators to look inside, to find the morbidity of truth and the limits of art.

Keywords: Voyeur, abject, eye, *Frankenstein*, *Blow-up*, Antonioni, *Elephant man*, Lynch.

[es] La belleza en la bestia y la bestia en la belleza. La visión del voyeur

Resumen. Este artículo pretende analizar dos películas, *El hombre elefante* (David Lynch, 1981) y *Blow up* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966) y un mito clásico, *Frankenstein* de Mary Shelley, a través de la conmovedora figura del *voyeur*. Investigaremos a este observador de lo innumerable centrándonos en dos personajes, dos testigos presenciales: el científico que descubre a John Merrick y el fotógrafo que se obsesiona con encontrar un cadáver en una imagen ampliada. Ambos mirones parecen estar en busca de la oscuridad hechizante y sublime que se esconde en su interior, una búsqueda que de alguna manera inaugura el médico prometeico en la ruptura de la Modernidad. La distancia corpórea entre monstruo y voyeur crea el morbo insoportable que devora nuestra mirada. Y en ese punto exacto, las cifras se invierten y el voyeur se convierte en el monstruo real. Pronto descubrimos que su perspectiva de voyeurs se convierte en la nuestra, porque a través de la experiencia cinematográfica el espectador se convierte en testigo del crimen, parte del *freak show*, espectador morbosos de lo abyecto. Lynch y Antonioni, junto con la criatura y creadora de Shelley, plantean la cuestión del cuerpo a través de un microscopio y nos desafían a los espectadores a mirar dentro, a encontrar el morbo de la verdad y los límites del arte.

Palabras clave: voyeur; abyecto; ojo; *Frankenstein*; *Blow-up*; Antonioni; *hombre elefante*; Lynch.

Summary: 1. Introduction; 2. Voracity, need for distance; 3. The sight that strikes; 4. Orphanage. "I am not an animal!"; 5. The unnamable; 6. The beast in the beauty and the beauty in the beast; 7. Bibliography; 8. Filmography.

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*Whoever fights with monsters should see to it that he does not become one himself.
And when you stare for a long time into an abyss, the abyss stares back into you.*
Nietzsche

In a perfect crime, it is perfection itself which is the crime.
Baudrillard

1. Introduction

Amongst the five senses of the body, sight has undeniably become the most menacing, the most jeopardous and therefore the most censured by all kind of societies. Gazing as a perceptive activity is obviously part of our biological skills but at the same time it inevitably carries an emotional and ideological load: it is always swinging on unstable ground, always finding itself in the whereabouts of moral transgression. That is why the prohibition of images, what is considered acceptable and therefore what is considered taboo in a certain society is established on the basis of a complex and vertiginous connection between power, sight and desire. In her essay on sight in contemporary culture, Carolina Sanabria intelligently discloses this entangled balance, demonstrating that sight determines the establishment of ethical and sociological boundaries: “En este contexto, la relación entre la mirada y la curiosidad y el deseo está a la base de la prohibición de las imágenes: de ahí que el contacto visual instaure un tabú, constatado en infinidad de culturas que desapruban la mirada fija en tanto revela un exceso de intimidad, de sexo o de expresión demasiado libre de las emociones”². Sight therefore coexists with curiosity, but also navigates through the politically incorrect desire that lives within curiosity: morbidity.

While gazing, or better said, while trying to *look beyond*, we feel an instinctive urge that makes us attracted to those images that society censures: an uncovered breast, a bloody wound, a disfigured face... When the observer feels this powerful desire, he or she is transformed into a *voyeur*; an uncensored observer. And due to the fact that contemporary creation is mainly focused on redefining its own limits, the figure of the *voyeur* becomes the definitive representative of the contemporary visual experience. It is the voyeur’s desire of looking beyond, his hunger for images, the essential motivation for exploration, but that drive does not only involve the creative territory but also the world of science and technology, if they ever were truly detached. We will try to display through a few great art texts how adjoining these two fields are, and how the interest for knowledge is somewhat equal because it is mainly controlled by the pressing appetite for sight.

Quoted by Chatman on the subject of *Blow-up*’ voyeur, Roland Barthes said: “Your favorite hero is the one who gazes (photographer or reported). This is dangerous because gazing at something longer than you were asked to... upsets the established order in whatever form since the extent or the very duration of the gaze is normally controlled by society”³. It is, therefore, culture itself that determines to which extent it is convenient to look. However, without that sometimes inconvenient

² Sanabria, C., *La contemplación de lo íntimo. Lo audiovisual en la cultura contemporánea*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nueva, 2011, p. 51.

³ Chatman, S., *Michelangelo Antonioni*, Cologne, Taschen, 2004, p. 100.

look that goes beyond the limitations of its present society, there seems to be no possible advance. Maybe the quest is part of the revelation, even if it is taboo, maybe it is starting from those detours of the gaze: when we amplify (or blow up) the limits of what can be envisioned, we slightly reframe the limits of society altogether.

We live in the time of the image. In fact, it is not at all strange that cinema has become such a powerful artform in a little more than a century of history, given the relevance that image has gained in our daily life. Even if nowadays social networks have managed to dethrone cinema as the voyeur industry *par excellence*, the impulse remains invariable: the spectator is guest to the experience of watching, and will go forward in that desire of looking beyond until he or she is faced with the boundaries that culture designs. It is once again the myth of Narcissus: we search in an image a darkened outside, maybe whatever we lack in ourselves. No wonder religions and other power systems have embraced iconoclasm and banned the cult of figures, because the drive to adore an image is incredibly powerful. Just like the tragedy of Narcissus taught us, we are clearly stimulated by image even if the reflexion is not authentic and the voyeuristic adoration of symbols can easily alter its initial meanings.

We can therefore state that there is a traumatic relationship between the urge that induces the *voyeur* to look beyond and the limits of culture and society. The discoveries that are generated from this initial transgression, this first sin of looking beyond, will take us directly into the roads abjection⁴, as we will observe in the visual and literary works that will follow. We depart with the iconic myth of the modern Prometheus, Victor Frankenstein, and his scientific quest on behalf of creation and at the same time towards condemnation. *Frankenstein* will be our indispensable reference while tackling our other two texts which will be, in this case, cinematographic: the Victorian voyeurism fabricated by David Lynch in his second film, *The Elephant Man* (1980), and the intense essay on the limits of amplification and the aesthetic experience portrayed by Michelangelo Antonioni in *Blow-up* (1966).

There are a variety of themes that these three texts share, but maybe the most remarkable would be that they all carry out a moral discourse that deepens on the limits of advance, and if science or art in search for discovery do in fact carry us towards the abyss of destruction. This has been studied both in the case of *Frankenstein* and in our filmic texts. However, here we would like to entrench how this question is linked to the figure of the *voyeur*, given that leaving out its negative connotations they all share the same instinctive impulse: the quest for visualizing truth that lies beneath convention, that has not yet been assumed, digested or admitted by their present context. In his now iconic 1973 tribute to Shelley's masterpiece entitled *Frankenstein unbound*, Brian Aldiss would agree with this idea saying: "Shelley understood better than you the passionate quest for truth which overrides any other considerations in the heart of those who would open the secrets of nature, whether scientists or poets. My responsibility must be to that truth, not to society, which is corrupt"⁵. Just like Doctor Frederick Treves (Anthony Hopkins) searches for the limits of the monstrous body fascinated with John Merrick, Doctor Frankenstein discovers how to challenge God through the creation of artificial life. The scientist

⁴ We are referring to the classical term extolled by Julia Kristeva which inaugurates a whole trend of studies on the concept of the abject and its moral limits.

⁵ Aldiss, B. W., *Frankenstein Unbound*, Cornwall, House of Stratus, 2001, p. 211.

who searches where no one has ever arrived before shares the same desire of the photographer who obsessively enlarges his own creation, like Thomas in *Blow-up*, or Roberto Michel, his *alter-ego*, who strolls with his camera through the Paris of Cortázar's famous *Las Babas del Diablo*. They are all *voyeurs* because they all gaze, desperately, in search of the unnamable.

2. Voracity, need for distance

The voyeur is born from a desire of looking beyond, of transcending the rules, and he generally finds his motivation in an *other* he lacks. Hence, the voyeur is the result of an absence, of an anxiety that quickly turns into voracity, the stimulation that provokes exploration. Sanabria explains how that voracity resolves the required distance for voyeurism: “La falta que denota la mirada evoca la experiencia primordial perdida e instaura una distancia entre quien mira y lo mirado [...] En el funcionamiento del *voyeurismo* la imaginación solventa, entre otros, los vacíos de la distancia”⁶. The voyeuristic exploration undertaken by Victor Frankenstein is absolutely voracious, just like the unceasing pursuit of his creature through the snowy valleys. The dissatisfaction of the scientist is clear, in spite of his ideal life, in fact there is a fundamental necessity shared by creature and creator, and that is to find themselves mutually, to gaze themselves once again, maybe because they are, as it has been said many times, Jeekyll and Hyde, unsatisfied halves of the same individuality. Equally voracious is the voyeurism of the men that meet and abuse of John Merrick. They all end up paying in some way to see this creature, including ourselves, the spectators, while going to the cinema just to gaze his atrocious face and his terrible story. From Bytes, the “tamer” of the freak show, who earns money just by revealing what is kept hidden by the mask, to all the visitors. Once Treves gives notoriety to Merrick's case, the rich pay to see him through gifts and the poor bribe the hospital's guards and unleash their own perversion with poor Merrick. They all exploit the elephant man's misery, including of course Dr. Treves, who is payed with social and scientific prestige in Victorian society due to the revealing of such an abnormal being's clinical case. Therefore, is there really a difference in the treatment of the creature between Bytes' grotesque spectacle and Treves' scientific conference? Not really. Just like Frankenstein with his Creature, Treves assigns himself Merrick's paternity and at the same time he is his first and most voracious voyeur. We cannot forget that he is the first to visit the freak circus. Tempted by the cart's advertising, Treves is dazzled by Merrick's sublime monstrosity, unforgettable just like Anthony Hopkins' speechless face when he sees him for the first time. There is no real difference between one exploitation and the other, as Lynch proves in that dialogue between Treves and Bytes: “You think you are better than me? We're not that different. You want the freak to show to those doctor champs of yours to make a name for yourself. I gave you the freak on trust, in the name of... science... and now I want him back”⁷.

There is another necessity while looking at the monster, and that is distance. The *voyeur* lives at the breakpoint, he keeps a conspicuous distance from the desired

⁶ Sanabria, Carolina, *La contemplación de lo íntimo. Lo audiovisual en la cultura contemporánea*, op. cit., pp. 114-115.

⁷ Lynch, D., *The elephant man*, 1980.

object. A distance which seems required and essential in the world of science, precisely to obtain objectivity. However, this distance is altered in all our texts once the *voyeur* gets closer to its creature: once we enlarge (or blow up) we cause the rupture with the contextual world and open the margins of the conventional. Both Treves and Frankenstein lose their objectivity by getting too near to the creature, due to ambition, paternalism or both at the same time; and *Blow-up* is no different, it is in fact a fable about the loss of objectivity, where the voracious approach to a potential truth drives to the destruction of sense and logic. Too much zoom will kill you.

Turning back to *Blow-up* and more precisely to Cortázar, its narrative source, the narrator-photographer-voyeur tells us the following: “Creo que sé mirar, si es que algo sé, y que todo mirar rezuma falsedad, porque es lo que nos arroja más afuera de nosotros mismos, sin la menor garantía”⁸. The voyeur’s gaze possesses a freedom that surpasses the patent, the tangible, the established, a gaze that breathes deceit because it can take you away from your own body, your own self, and, as Cortázar would say, with no guarantee of ever coming back. Due to that opening of our body, we feel the infinite possibilities of invention a camera can provide. Therefore, and in spite of its conventional objectivity, the voyeuristic perversion of the gaze absorbs impartiality and submerges the subjectivity and darkness of the abject. As the strange narrator would continue saying: “Michel es culpable de literatura, de fabricaciones irreales. Nada le gusta más que imaginar excepciones, individuos fuera de la especie, monstruos no siempre repugnantes”⁹. What takes us to the monstrous is not the image but the gaze, the voyeur is the only fabricator of perversion.

3. The sight that strikes

We have already stated that the eye is the scientist’s tool and the voyeur’s passport towards the unknown. In our three texts, the act of looking becomes a moment of absolute revelation for the voyeur and, together with him, for the reader/spectator, a second and more distant observer. We have already mentioned Treves’ gaze while staring at Merrick, but we can also recapture David Hemmings’ sweaty face in *Blow-up* searching desperately that hidden truth in his infinite blow-ups of that photograph he captured hazardously in the park. Both images display with absolute prominence the importance and effect of the gaze, the image reflecting the sight that strikes. However, it is not only in cinema that this image has notoriously resonated: we cannot forget the relevance that Mary Shelley gives to the eye at the moment of the Creature’s birth. Before the last light extinguishes, a monstrous yellow eye lights up: “It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs”¹⁰.

The eye opened up by the monster is equally terrifying and fascinating. It powerfully expresses the attraction of the abyss, as was noted by Lecercle in his

⁸ Cortázar, J., *Las Armas Secretas*, Madrid, Cátedra, 2004, p.128.

⁹ *Ibidem*. p. 128.

¹⁰ Shelley, M., *Frankenstein*, London, Penguin Popular Classics, 1996, p. 55.

1988 essay: “allí estaba el niño antes del nacimiento: en la mirada del otro. El nacimiento: el monstruo no nace impresionando el oído del espectador, es decir, llorando, sino abriendo el ojo, lo que provoca el horror de su creador. Nacer, es mirar”¹¹. To be born is to gaze, says Lecercle. To gaze, to search, to look beyond, the creature’s signal of birth is not the sound of a cry, it is the opening of an eye, a striking sight. Is gazing then the trigger of our original sin? At least this is what the slogan in the poster of *Frankenstein’s* classical version, the one directed by James Whale in 1931, asks itself. The creature becomes the fruit of an abominable sin, but, which sin? Maybe it is nothing more than the sin of curiosity, the sin of accessing what is forbidden. Adam and Eve are the original sinners *par excellence*, but Greek mythology has also been prolific in the creation of primitive and tragic *voyeurs*, all of them condemned by their instinctive curiosity. Actaeon, who dies after spying the nudity of the goddess Diane; Orpheus and his inevitable gaze of the abyss; Medusa, the very face of abjection; and, of course, Narcissus, the lover of the image, tragically beautiful, inevitably empty.

As Lacan taught us, the subject starts to assume its identity while comparing itself to the one at the other side of the gaze. We therefore understand our identity while becoming disintegrated from the figure in front of ourselves: “the subject originally locates and recognises desire through the intermediary not only of his own image, but of the body of his fellow being. It’s exactly at that moment that the human being’s consciousness, in the form of consciousness of self, distinguishes itself. It is in so far as his desire has gone over to the other side that he assimilates himself to the body of the other and recognises himself as body”¹². From a Freudian point of view, the narcissist gaze, hence the view of one’s own body has been seen as a previous circumstance to the voyeur’s activity, which resolves into the silent contemplation of an *other*. We have already stated that they come from the same drive, but maybe all voyeurism is in a way generated by a distorted narcissism, as Sanabria explains: “La ventana, que hace las veces de pantalla, se transforma en un espejo no sólo para Narciso, sino para el espectador (*voyeur*), con sus mismos riesgos: desear atravesarla”¹³. And with Narcissus in mind, this parallelism between window and mirror as the last viewing point of the observer brings us to the paradigmatic theory of the diaphragm that the great Roberto Longhi developed to explain the tension between realism and still life in baroque painting. Through the works of Caravaggio, another Narcissus lover, both Longhi and after him Pier Paolo Pasolini explained how the diaphragm created an invisible and luminous screen which divided both the creator and the spectators of the realities represented.

La terza cosa che ha inventato il Caravaggio è un diaframma (anch’esso luminoso, ma di una luminosità artificiale che appartiene solo alla pittura e non alla realtà) che divide sia lui, l’autore, sia noi, gli spettatori, dai suoi personaggi, dalle sue nature morte, dai suoi paesaggi. Questo diaframma, che traspone le cose dipinte dal Caravaggio in un universo separato, in un certo senso morto, almeno rispetto alla vita e al realismo con cui quelle cose erano state percepite e dipinte, è stato stupendamente spiegato da Roberto Longhi

¹¹ Lecercle, J-J., *Frankenstein, mito y filosofía*, Buenos Aires, Nueva Visión, 1988, p. 84.

¹² Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book I. Freud’s Papers on Technique (1953-54)*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 147.

¹³ Sanabria, C., *La contemplación de lo íntimo. Lo audiovisual en la cultura contemporánea, op. cit.*, p. 53.

con la supposizione che il Caravaggio dipingesse guardando le sue figure riflesse in uno specchio. Tali figure erano perciò quelle che il Caravaggio aveva realisticamente scelto, negletti garzoni di fruttivendolo, donne del popolo mai prese in considerazione, ecc., e inoltre esse erano immerse in quella luce reale di un'ora quotidiana concreta, con tutto il suo sole e tutta la sua ombra: eppure... eppure dentro lo specchio tutto pare come sospeso come a un eccesso di verità, a un eccesso di evidenza, che lo fa sembrare morto.¹⁴

As Pasolini himself explains, Caravaggio's realism probably was painted through the reflection of a mirror, and that strange diaphragm gives a certain stillness, an excess of evidence that makes it seem dead. We delve into that reality that lies within with curiosity and morbidity, the voyeur searches for himself and tries to resolve his own identity while looking into an otherness. It doesn't matter if we are creators or spectators, the diaphragm is as much a glass as it is a mirror, the mirror in the water carries the same darkness of the rear window.

4. Orphanage. "I am not an animal!"

It is time to ask ourselves what do monsters have that attracts and repels us so profoundly. Probably one of the reasons is the fact that they represent the more complex and unreal other, the one that comes from a random biological malformation which generates beings that are absolutely unrepeatable and fascinating. Hausman incides in this same idea of fascination linking Dr Treves' passion for Merrick to a certain darwinian interest in human origins that in Victorian times made zoos and other public centers for scientific biological knowledge quite fashionable and therefore reached their peak of success¹⁵.

Monsters are defined by Michel Foucault as a being that combines the impossible with the forbidden, a being that, for the sake of existing, violates the laws of normality¹⁶. In an unconscious matter, the monster shatters order and convention, so therefore it becomes an uncomfortable figure for the correct functioning of society. They are either condemned to isolation, solitude and darkness or their fate makes them a spectacle, an object to be displayed. In any case, they are the paradigm of orphanage: Shelley's creature is abandoned by his father-creator and Merrick is abandoned by his mother and eventually even by Treves. Their reactions to that orphanage are very different: Merrick silently forgives and accepts his fate, while the Creature builds up for an instinctive vengeance. However, they both end up consciously putting an end to their lives. That seems a particularly important and dignified statement, dying as true men, with the stature that they were always denied. While being arrested after involuntarily pushing a little girl at the train station, an unconsolable Merrick yells "I'm a man! I am not an animal!". Words that could easily have been said by the Creature, once again a scene that echoes Shelley's episode at the pond when the Creature meets the little girl and sees its monstrous reflexion on the water. We evidence how in both texts the reflection and the contrast with the

¹⁴ Pasolini, P.P., "La luce di Caravaggio", en *Saggi sulla letteratura e sull'arte, Tomo II*, a cura di Walter Siti e Silvia De Laude, Milano, Mondadori, 1999, p. 2674.

¹⁵ Hausman, V., "Turning into Another Thing in David Lynch's Elephant Man", in *Cinema, Technologies of Visibility, and the Reanimation of Desire*. New York, Palgrave, 2011: 106.

¹⁶ Foucault, M., *Los Anormales*, Madrid, Akal, 2001, 17.

other seems imperative to acquire the identity of the self. Once again, Narcissus is the myth that pursues our creatures.

So if a monster belongs to the territory of the forbidden because it is unrepeatable, is the monster fated to maintain his orphanage as loneliness? Could he ever find a lifetime companion? The question of the impossible companion seems to be another leitmotiv through our texts. "My companion must be of the same species and have the same defects. This being you must create"¹⁷, says the Creature. A requisite to palliate solitude, the desperate cry of a creature who violates society for the sake of existing. The creature's order, as we know, is never followed by Frankenstein and becomes the triggering fact for the monster's revenge. A moment of beauty from a beast which alternately becomes the motivation for monstrosity. In the other two texts we find two improbable companions that share a few things in common with *Frankenstein's* case. Mrs. Kendal, the actress portrayed by Anne Bancroft in *The Elephant Man*, meets Merrick after his case becomes famous and she gives him a copy of *Romeo and Juliet*. They act together a scene and, immediately, Merrick falls in love with her, he even keeps a photograph of her in his bedside table, sharing space with the portrait of his late and beloved mother. In *Blow-up's* case we find Jane, the ghostly *femme fatale* performed by Vanessa Redgrave who could have been the instigator of the possible crime that occurs before Thomas' lens. Jane becomes the photo's most attractive figure, *that obscure object of desire* as Buñuel would say, and is the trigger for the striking sight. Just like Cortázar, Antonioni plays consciously with the possibility of Jane just being a projection of the photographer's desire, manipulated, enlarged, maybe even invented by his own imagination. The story's narrator tells us: "Esa mujer invitaba a la invención, dando quizá las claves suficientes para acertar con la verdad"¹⁸. Are they all, perhaps, just an image as ambiguous and uncertain as the monsters' happiness, which is undeniably the fate of the voyeur, and thus, of Narcissus?

5. The unnamable

It is now clear that the monstrous creature lives daily in that limit of transgression, given its physical appearance. It doesn't correspond to any category on which one can base their knowledge and thus, it is scary and fascinating at the same time. Just like that classical reference to H.P. Lovecraft's unnamable: "No—it wasn't that way at all. It was everywhere—a gelatin—a slime—yet it had shapes, a thousand shapes of horror beyond all memory. There were eyes—and a blemish. It was the pit—the maelstrom—the ultimate abomination. Carter, it was the unnamable!"¹⁹.

As we have already stated, the monster is unacceptable because it is unclassifiable. Doctor Frankenstein does not give a name to his creation, nor even a label. He is the Creature, a being whose identity has to be absolutely rejected because it doesn't belong to society. Interestingly, in the theatrical adaptations that were presented while Mary Shelley was still alive, the play would refer to the creature with a blank

¹⁷ Shelley, M., *Frankenstein*, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

¹⁸ Cortázar, J., *Las Armas Secretas*, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

¹⁹ Lovecraft, H.P. "The Unnamable" in *Waking Up Screaming: Haunting Tales of Terror*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2003, p. 54.

or with suspension dots. A powerful example of identity privation in a character that, surprisingly, has been able to shadow his creator's prominence to the point of even stealing his name. In a letter sent to Leigh Hunt, Shelley herself commented on such a curious way of referring to the Creature: "Frankenstein had prodigious success as a drama & was about to be repeated for the 23rd night at the English opera house. The play bill amused me extremely, for in the list of *dramatis personae* came, ----- -- by Mr T. Cooke: this nameless mode of naming the u[n]ameable is rather good"²⁰.

The case of Merrick (whose real name was Joseph and not John) seems similar. The world will always remember him by a monstrous description, a seemingly mythological being. He used to be presented as "the *marvellous* elephant man" and in fact, the term *marvellous* stands out because it gathers the fascination provoked by the monstrous. Lynch narrates the trajectory of the monster, from freak to scientific evidence, all the way to museum piece; from the marginality of the circus and the darkness of his mask to the enlightened night at the opera, a quest for social equality that is never really achieved. The drama is precisely sustained in the fact that Merrick cannot be Merrick, thus, a name, because he will never be anything other than a marvel of nature, a beautiful beast. According to Hispano, Lynch wanted the monster to be the reflection of the turbulent Victorian period, "la concreción física del desorden de su tiempo, el de la eclosión industrial"²¹. So, just like Frankenstein's creature, and similarly to the mysterious shadow on the photographer's picture in *Blow-up*, the creatures that fascinate the *voyeur* are heirs of the machine, unnamable scientific products of Modernity.

So the monster in a way unbalances order in society, and also shows the true reflection of our own passions, our own desires and even our own discoveries. The monstrous, is incarnated in the Lacanian concept of the Real: it is undoubtedly a nightmare that becomes embodied, but it is *our* nightmare, our creation, our reflection. We have to ask ourselves, as Saint Girons does if we can ever free ourselves from the powerful ardor with which morbidity bewitches us:

¿Podemos librarnos del sentimiento de no-familiaridad que suscitan los monstruos? Los monstruos que nos sobresaltan no son formas estables. Son seres en mutación, que se dirigen a nuestra imaginación y remiten a la inestabilidad de nuestra experiencia corporal, [...] Indóviles a la objetivación científica, que les reduce a meras anomalías físicas, los monstruos provienen esencialmente de la elaboración estética y artística. Lo monstruoso es un significante que se encarna en lo real, una pesadilla que toma cuerpo [...]. Se trata, por tanto, de algo que depende, al mismo tiempo, de la alucinación -ligada al emerger del significante- y de la percepción concreta²².

The monster is born from a *voyeur* that knows how to look inside to look beyond. Goya had already warned us: *el sueño de la razón produce monstruos*.

The incapacity of naming or classifying the monster that at the end of the day becomes a reflection of the *voyeur* takes us to another important question: can there really be any interpretation hidden beneath? Susan Sontag would say: "To interpret is

²⁰ Haggerty, G. E., "Frankenstein and the Unnameable", in *Gothic Fiction/Gothic Form*, University Park, Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1989, pp. 37.

²¹ Hispano, A., *Lynch, claroscuro americano*, Barcelona, Glénat, 1998, p. 37

²² Saint Girons, Baldine. *Lo sublime*, Madrid, La Balsa de la Medusa, 2008, p. 205

to impoverish, to deplete the world in order to set up a shadow world of “meanings”. It is to turn *the* world into *this* world”²³. Because the creature lives in the abyss of abjection there is no possible signification, and while trying to apply to it a certain interpretation, we devalue its most powerful feature. The monstrosity’s strength happens to be the fact of being a *pure image*, because rationality lacks words in its presence. The great revenge of the monster is therefore its mysterious and fascinating absence of signification: the nothing.

Blowing up a photograph can reveal the truth, but it can also make the truth become a pure manipulation, once again, a powerful and unnamable nothing. Each of our three monsters is born sheltered by imagination, but they always vanish the moment we try to rationalize them. It is impossible to mistake Merrick as any given assistant to the opera, just like it is impossible to give an identity to the Creature. The same thing happens with the photograph in *Blow-up*, when we try to interpret the secret that it keeps, it becomes an empty image. What the eye observes becomes inaccessible. This is what Antonioni said at his 1967 Cannes press conference referring to the vanishing of reality in his film: “il fotografo di *Blow-Up* non è un filosofo, vuole andare a vedere più da vicino. Ma gli succede che, ingrandendolo troppo, l’oggetto stesso si scompone e sparisce. Quindi c’è un momento in cui si afferra la realtà, ma nel momento dopo sfugge. Questo è un po’ il senso di *Blow-Up*”²⁴. To look, to look beyond, is always an abyss, an abyss that is immense and paradoxically empty. In the case of *Blow-up*’s photo, the enlarged image does not become hyperrealist but abstract. In spite of lacking a rational interpretation, it becomes *a very precise nothing*²⁵ just as uninterpretable as our other monsters. As Cortázar himself would say: “entre las muchas maneras de combatir la nada, una de las mejores es sacar fotografías” (Cortázar, 2004: 126).

6. The beast in the beauty and the beauty in the beast

The monster, the unnamable being, is kept invisible because its mere existence unbalances society. The creature therefore stays latent at the other side of the diaphragm, awakening the morbid desire of the *voyeur*, and we understand that we spectators as much *voyeurs* as any scientist or artist obsessed with his endeavor. We are conscious participants of the delirious circus, we commit the sin of wanting to gaze. The mere envisioning of the creature makes them present, true, possible, therefore generates its birth in the world. In a way, the monster exists if someone gazes it so the observer is nothing else but a creator. Once again, the scientist and the artist seem to converge.

In the instant when the creature is viewed, therefore born, it looks back at his creator and the sight is reverted. We as viewers participate of that paternity and then, when rejecting the image, we force the terrible orphanage. Since that inaugural moment, the *voyeur* reveals his truth by looking into a mirror, creature and creator are symmetrical reflexions of the same image. And this is how the tragedy of Narcissus

²³ Sontag, Susan. *Against Interpretation*. New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966, p. 7.

²⁴ Tassone, Aldo. *I film di Michelangelo Antonioni: un poeta della visione*. Roma, Gremese editore, 2002, p. 138.

²⁵ Conde, Aurora. “La Precisión de la nada (Reflexiones sobre *Blow up*)” en *Cuadernos de Filología Italiana*, vol. 15, 157-179.

is once again inevitable. To this issue, Lecercle adds the following:

Lo que tanto horror produce a Víctor es, en primer lugar, que él *ve* al monstruo -si sale de la habitación, es para dejar de verlo-. Pero, luego, y sobre todo, cuando *es visto* por el monstruo, la relación de la mirada es simétrica. [...] Y esa mirada (allí reside la reversión característica del fantasma) se invierte: al comienzo de la escena, el monstruo está acostado y Frankenstein, de pie, lo observa. Al final, Víctor está acostado y el monstruo, de pie, lo observa.²⁶

It seems a marvellous paradox, but we need the presence of Dr. Jeekyll to feel the ghostly absence of Mr. Hyde. The symmetry is absolute, the beast in the beauty and the beauty in the beast. As an example of this symbiosis, we recall a surprising ending scene from *Frankenstein's* very first film adaptation in 1910 and produced by another scientist, Thomas A. Edison.

La conclusión del film es sorprendente. La Criatura penetra en otra estancia y contempla su horrible faz en un espejo. De pronto, la imagen que se refleja en el mismo es el bondadoso semblante de Frankenstein. Poco después entra el joven científico y, al mirarse en el espejo, éste le devuelve el reflejo del Monstruo. Finalmente, la Criatura se desvanece y Frankenstein vuelve a ver reflejada su propia imagen.²⁷

This resolution could give the novel a very interesting interpretation: imagining the creature as a simple projection of Frankenstein's imagination, a monster inside his head. A voyeuristic mirage with a very similar resolution to *Las Babas del Diablo/ Blow-up*. This theory of the Creature being a projection of the scientist's mind is sustained by Lecercle, who alludes to the fact that the only witness to the Creature's murders is doctor Frankenstein himself. He is the only one who *sees* the monster, which could perhaps make the Creature a mere splitting of himself or a fantasy of his mind. Maybe this intentional fusion and confusion of identities explains why popular culture has rebaptized the Creature as Frankenstein.

Doctor Frankenstein might be just as *guilty of literature* as Roberto Michel confesses to be. A don Quixote that becomes so obsessed in the fabrication of life that he ends up *envisioning* a creature that is nothing else than a projection of himself. This definitive fusion of creator and creature, of artist and art, could have influenced Shelley's resolute bet on the alternative narrative voices. As Lecercle explains, "narradores, como vimos, no faltan; y sus relatos están contenidos unos en otros, como muñecas rusas. [...] Yo, Víctor Frankenstein, veo esta escena: un monstruo es creado. Pero esa multiplicación de narradores encuentra su paralelo en la de los personajes, que nacen y mueren en la ficción"²⁸. A profusion of narrators that reminds us of the magnificent beginning of *Las Babas del Diablo* where Cortázar questions any trace of rationality disfiguring the limits between the person of the verb, between the supposed subjectivity of the storyteller and the supposed objectivity that relies on the camera's lens: "Nunca se sabrá cómo hay que contar esto, si en primera persona o en segunda, usando la tercera del plural o inventando continuamente formas que

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 76-77.

²⁷ Fernández Valentí, T.; Navarro, A. J., *Frankenstein. El mito de la vida artificial*, Madrid, Nuer, 2000, p. 164.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 72.

no servirán de nada. [...] Uno de todos nosotros tiene que escribir, si es que esto va a ser contado. Mejor que sea yo que estoy muerto”²⁹.

Roberto Michel is dead. Like Narcissus, he died in the very moment of revelation, of abyss, *l'instant décisif* as Cartier-Bresson would say when they dared to enter the otherness that was hidden at the other side of the diaphragm. The risk is great but the desire is greater. With a paintbrush or a scalpel, with the lens of a camera or just with a striking sight, *voyeurs* enroll themselves on a quest in search of the forbidden, the limitless... probably trying to find the monstrous reflections of themselves. These three texts tell with their eyes stories that knock on the deepest of our instinct. We cannot forget it, we are absorbed by a voracious hunger for image, we are the definite *voyeurs*. “Ce sont les regardeurs qui font le tableau», Duchamp taught us the *voyeur* makes the painting, the window, the mirror.

The window is a mirror. Prometheus is Narcissus. At that instant of abyss, the image has been devoured by Saturn.

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²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 124.

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