

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture

ISSN 1481-4374 <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>>
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Volume 21 Issue 7 (December 2019) Article 2

Robert Tally,

"Monstrous Accumulation: Topographies of Fear in an Era of Globalization"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol21/iss7/2>>

Contents of ***CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 21.7 (2019)**
Special Issue ***Monstrosity and Globalization***. Ed. Ju Young Jin and Jae H. Roe
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol21/iss7/>>

Abstract: The predominance of the horror genre, broadly conceived, in recent years attests to the profound sense of anxiety and dread permeating late capitalist societies. As the processes and effects of globalization become more viscerally experienced, they are also often rendered invisible or unknowable, and individuals and groups find themselves subject to an immense array of forces beyond their control. The contemporary scene is crowded with monsters, from alien invaders to the zombie apocalypse, set against the backdrop of darkly fantastic landscapes and dystopian visions. Drawing upon a variety of Marxist cultural theory, Robert T. Tally Jr. explores the topographies of fear generated by this monstrous accumulation, and argues for a fantastic Marxist critique capable of addressing the existential dread and structural conditions for its possibility. Tally maintains that even the "real world" may be fruitfully analyzed and evaluated in terms of the fantastic, outlining a radical alterity that subtends the image of the real. He provides an innovative reading of the present cultural climate and offers an alternative vision for critical theory and practice in a moment in which, as has been famously observed, it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.

Robert TALLY

Monstrous Accumulation: Topographies of Fear in an Era of Globalization

The contemporary scene is crowded with monsters, from alien invaders to the zombie apocalypse, set against the backdrop of darkly fantastic landscapes and dystopian visions. The dominance of the horror genre, broadly conceived, across various media and throughout popular cultural in recent years attests to the profound sense of anxiety and dread permeating late capitalist societies. I want to propose a rather tentative, uncertain, but searching explanation for this, which will involve some consideration of the world system today and of our situation with respect to and within it. As the processes and effects of the globalization of capitalism become more starkly experienced, they are also often rendered invisible or unknowable, for both individuals and groups find themselves subject to an immense array of forces beyond their control. It is "monstrous," in fact.

In this essay, I argue that monstrosity has become an aspect of any figural representation of the world system, and that this reveals the unreality of the so-called "real world" in an era of globalization. The world as seen through realism is itself unreal, inasmuch as it masks the underlying "truth" in its very surface-level realism. In China Miéville's analysis, for example, the truth of labor power is hidden from view by appearing as commodities, and the general process of reification has concealed the human and historical reality that may be disclosed precisely through the mechanisms of fantasy. In other words, in a world where reality is itself unreal, the non-realism of fantasy may offer the means to get at these hidden truths (Miéville 42). Similarly, with horror, these hidden realities may be rendered visible through the legitimate emotion of fear, combined with the imaginative process of projecting new models for understanding that allow one to overcome the fear. It should be noted that this activity, within the text and outside of it, is not rooted in any ethical program. Regardless of what the author, parents, or booksellers might think, the point is not to scare the reader into behaving a certain way, but to create means of understanding the world. Drawing upon recent fiction in both fantasy and more realistic modes, I will argue that monsters, by embodying a sort of political unconscious, become a means of demystifying and mapping the social world in an age of globalization.

What follows is not so much a detailed argument in favor of this hypothesis as a broader survey of the sites that such an argument must consider; I have in mind a sort of inventory-taking of the present condition as a prolegomena for any more positive inquiry into the topographies of fear that characterize the real-and-imagined spaces of our world today. Between and among these various sites, a properly critical theory would need to draw connections, ultimately forming a constellation that might serve, provisionally, as a frame of reference for further research into a largely unrepresentable but powerfully effective social totality. The monstrous accumulation is ongoing, not surprisingly, and its effects are only partially comprehended.

The phrase "monstrous accumulation" comes from the well-known opening lines of the first chapter of *Capital*, where Karl Marx asserts that "the wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as 'a monstrous accumulation of commodities'" (125, translation modified). Ben Fowkes translates the German adjective *ungeheure* as "immense," although the first English translation by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling preferred "monstrous." Miéville, consistent with his argument in favor of the fantastic and with his general teratophilia, points out that the German *ungeheure* does mean "monstrous," and in a sense, of course, Marx is indicating size or magnitude anyway, so whether the phrase reads the "immense collection" or "monstrous accumulation," each version works to define the enormous heaps of commodities in question. However, given the veritable phantasmagoria of otherworldly metaphors in *Capital*, with its frequent references to monsters, including vampires, ghosts, dragons, and evil spirits, the term monstrous seems especially apt. For Marx, the epoch in which the capitalist mode of production predominates is, almost by definition, an epoch of monsters.

The nineteenth century witnessed an explosion of monstrosity, ushering in a veritable Teratocene, an age of monsters. In art and literature, as well as in political economy, one finds frequent and regular reference to monsters of all sorts, and the fear of such monsters as often as not represents other terrors of a speedily transforming social sphere and the unforeseeable effects of those changes. As José B. Monléon has argued in *A Specter is Haunting Europe: A Sociohistorical Approach to the Fantastic*, the post-Enlightenment horror paradigmatically expressed in Goya's famous image, where "the sleep of reason breeds monsters" (see Fig. 1), comes to condition and be conditioned by the terrific uncertainties associated with social revolution (in 1789 and 1848, for instance) and its aftermath, not to mention the radical transformations of everyday life associated with growing urbanization, industrialization, and more generally, modernization. As Monléon concludes,

the fears and uncertainties, the monsters of a material and social reality, were neither existential abstractions nor expressions of some sort of human (psychological) attributes. Or, if there were, they were also much more. As social production, the fantastic articulated apprehensions that were deeply attached to the specific characteristics of capitalist society. The perception of monstrosity had significant correlations with the way in which dominant culture defined and redefined its political and economic supremacy, and depended upon concrete forms of class struggle. On the one hand, the fantastic "reflected" very real social threats; on the other hand, it created a space in which those threats could be transformed into "supernaturalism" and monstrosity, thus helping to reshape the philosophical premises that sustained the fantastic and effectively reorient the course of social evolution. (139)



Figure 1: Goya, *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* (No. 43).

Monstrosity in particular, along with the fantastic more broadly, became a means of making sense of the new social formations and relations that emerged and became increasingly dominant in societies organized in connection with the capitalist mode of production and its effects. Furthermore, as capitalism itself appeared more and more monstrous, as all that was solid melted into air and all that is holy was profaned, to cite Marx and Engels's evocative phrasing, the social system disclosed itself to be a kind of infernal machine, producing monstrosities and horrors even as it organized and reorganized social spaces into a living Hell.

If this is the case for the relatively simpler era of industrial capitalism in the early-to-mid-nineteenth century, how much more monstrous has capitalism become after the rapid and extensive expansions of the capitalist mode of production during what Lenin called the "age of imperialism" or monopoly capitalism or, even more so, during the post-World War II period of what Ernest Mandel has famously named "late capitalism," a moment typified by the infiltrations of capitalist relations into the most remote corners of the planet and throughout postmodern societies at almost every level? In the era of globalization, that is, both the monstrosity and the accumulation expand exponentially. In order to keep track of these exponentially increasing moving parts of a protean and expanding system, one characterized if not known (since true knowledge of the system is itself becoming harder and harder to come by) by its complicated web of interrelated forces operating across continents and oceans, a sort of monstrous mapping project is required.

I hypothesize that the present fascination with the monstrous in popular culture is a sign of the unfulfilled desire to map this monstrous system. Monstrosity, horror, and dystopia provide thematic forms or even genres by which the vast system may be made visible or conceived, but of course the image or conception itself relies on a broadly allegorical framework that can enable us to grasp in the figures or tropes a more basic notion of the global ensembles of capitalist political, economic, and social relations.

Monsters, to put it bluntly, help us to make sense of our world. Indeed, as Judith Halberstam has asserted in *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*, "Monsters are meaning machines." Halberstam explains that "[t]he monster functions as monster [...] when it is able to condense as many fear-producing traits in one body as possible into one body" (21). By engaging with monsters and the monstrous, we help to define the contours of our own experiences and understanding of the world, mapping the social spaces while also navigating our way through them.

The first task would be to define the idea of the monstrous itself. We know the etymology of "monster," which we could trace back to the Latin verb "monstro," to show or to point out, as leads us to words like "demonstrate." There is a connection, one that Foucault indicated in his study of the history of madness, which reminds us that so-called "monsters" were put on display, freakshow style, and the connection between monstrosity and visibility has never entirely faded. "Monstrum," in Latin, already indicated the ominous, the fearful or wonderous, and the thing to be shown was itself a warning. The monstrous was something to see, yes, but also something foreboding, and from this it naturally enlarged itself, becoming an entity both immense and dangerous. The monstrous thus appears as a warning, imbued semiotically with many taboos and proscriptions, while also interceding directly into our midst. As later "Monster Theory" will note, cultural relations to or with monsters speak to societal fears, and as monsters develop, their visibility and functions may change as well.

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen famously developed seven theses with respect to what he called "Monster Culture." These theses do not so much define what monsters are as they help to situate the monstrous within the larger space of a culture, showing how monsters help us to shape, maneuver within, and make sense of our societies and cultures. Cohen's seven theses can be briefly summarized and explained in his own words, but first, here are the theses themselves:

- Thesis I. The Monster's Body Is a Cultural Body (4);
- Thesis II. The Monster Always Escapes (4);
- Thesis III. The Monster Is the Harbinger of Category Crisis (6);
- Thesis IV. The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference (7);
- Thesis V. The Monster Polices the Borders of the Possible (12);
- Thesis VI. Fear of the Monster Is Really a Kind of Desire (16); and
- Thesis VII. The Monster Stands at the Threshold ... of Becoming. (20)

As Cohen elaborates, "[t]he monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy (ataractic or incendiary), giving them life and an uncanny independence" (4). In this way, the monster's very corporeality figures forth the broader social issues of which the monstrous body may then serve as the site of so many symptoms. The recurrence or resurrection of monsters after this or that apparent

victory over them testifies to this allegorical significance, as the underlying anxieties represented by the monster cannot be so easily vanquished. And, in Cohen's words, "[t]he monster always escapes because it refuses easy categorization. [...] Full of rebuke to traditional method of organizing knowledge and human experience, the geography of the monster is an imperiling expanse, and therefore always a contested space" (6–7). Unsurprisingly, the monstrous is experienced as a form of radical alterity, an otherness that threatens to destroy identities and familiarities by its very presence. Moreover, as Cohen points out, "[b]y revealing that difference is arbitrary and potentially free-floating, mutable rather than essential, the monster threatens to destroy not just individual members of a society, but the very cultural apparatus through which individuality is constituted and allowed" (12). Along these lines, then, the examples connected to Thesis V show how "[t]he monster prevents mobility (intellectual, geographical, or sexual), delimiting the social spaces through which private bodies may move. [...] The monster of prohibition exists to demarcate the bonds that hold together that system of relations we call culture, to call horrid attention to the borders that cannot—must not—be crossed" (12–13). This observation, in turn, suggests the ways in which fear and desire are so inextricably intertwined in monstrous discourse, where "fantasies of aggression, domination, and inversion are allowed safe expression in a clearly delimited and permanently liminal space" (17).

Cohen concludes this discussion by observing that "Monsters are our children" (20), a nod toward Frankenstein's Creature among many other such beings. This weird intimacy combined with a radical alterity enables monsters to help us understand and speculate upon our own world in new ways. As Cohen puts it, monsters "bring not just a fuller knowledge of our place in history and the history of knowing our place, but they bear self-knowledge, human knowledge—and a discourse all the more sacred as it arises from the Outside. The monsters ask us how we perceive the world, and how we have misrepresented what we have attempted to place" (20). As such, we might add, monsters are fundamentally ideological, while at the same time being fundamental to ideology-critique. That is, they can serve to illuminate the contours of the social sphere as it is precisely by providing the perspective of estrangement, but this otherworldly point of view necessarily estranges the images it depicts, a process that in turn inevitably conjures into being radically alternative ways of seeing. In this sense, monsters can help to evoke new spaces of liberty, "the scandal of qualitative difference," as Herbert Marcuse once put it in reference to utopian thinking (69), even as they haunt this vale of tears.

Space does not allow for an extensive discussion of broad trends within popular culture, nor am I qualified to lead such a discussion, but it seems to me that the enduring, and perhaps expanding, popularity of horror as a literary and cinematic genre is itself a sign of the respect given by readers to authors who refuse to deny the existence of monsters. The presence of monsters, and of horror more generally, offers a figural representation of the world which reveals the unreality of the so-called "real world." In this sense, the monstrosity explored in horror literature is a form of ideology critique, as China Miéville has suggested in his discussion of radical fantasy. That is, the world as seen through realism is itself unreal, inasmuch as it masks the underlying "truth" in its very surface-level realism. In other words, in a world where reality is itself unreal, the non-realism of fantasy may offer the means to get at these hidden truths. Similarly, with horror, these hidden realities may be rendered visible through the legitimate emotion of fear, combined with the imaginative process of projecting new models for understanding that allow one to overcome the fear. The horror in the text helps to engender a political or historical sensibility, in which the pervasive feeling of generalized fear may crystallize into a more concrete sense of the underlying reality. Note that this activity, within the text and outside of it, is not rooted in any ethical program: the point is not to scare the reader into behaving a certain way, but to create means of understanding the world itself.

In terms of political economy in the age of globalization, further analysis of the role that monsters play in the cultural imagination today would necessarily take the measure of the "infernal machine" that is capitalism itself. Several recent theoretical treatments of *Capital*, including *Marx's Inferno* (William Clare Roberts), *Representing Capital* (Jameson), *Marx, Capital, and the Madness of Economic Reason* (Harvey), and *Why Marx Was Right* (Eagleton), have highlighted the degree to which dysfunction is part of the functioning of the capitalist mode of production, and thus Marx's critique, updated and adapted to meet the contingencies of late capitalism, remains crucial to understanding the system that has become so pervasive and powerful that even the thought of its destruction or evanescence seems inconceivable today.

As in the classical Marxian accounts, the base-level terrors of the political economy find their counterparts in the superstructural proliferations to be found in the cultural sphere, among other spaces. In the cultural sphere, then, the emergence, re-emergence, and proliferation of monsters seem to reflect a sense of this doom. I think of Franco Moretti's famous 1982 essay "The Dialectic of Fear," which addressed the great bourgeois terror of zombies and vampires (more specifically, Frankenstein's

Creature and Dracula, as developed by Mary Shelley and Bram Stoker, respectively). Revisiting Moretti's argument today, we can see how these key figures have developed into critical embodiments of unnamed terrors in postmodernity, from the nameless terrors of the lumpenproletariat to the top-down hierarchy of the blood-sucking capitalist class, which are far less clearly understood now as compared to the nineteenth century. Dave McNally's impressive argument in *Monsters of the Market* indicates the ways that these monsters have come to symbolize aspects of not only industrial capitalism, but also the ever-more complex and expansive capitalism in the era of globalization, thus making them into exemplary figures of late capitalist dread.

Moretti's reading established the basic dynamics of class struggle in societies organized by the capitalist mode of production as the lens through which these powerfully representative literary monsters be viewed. The creature in *Frankenstein* stands in for the proletariat, and Count Dracula embodies a vision of the capitalist bourgeoisie. "Like the proletariat," for example, "the monster is denied a name and an individuality. He is the Frankenstein monster; he belongs wholly to his creator (just as one can speak of a 'Ford worker')" (Moretti 85). Moretti also notes that the creature is built from disparate parts, assembled, and not a natural being. "Like the proletariat, he is a collective and artificial creature. He is not found in nature, but built" (85). The creature represents the culmination of the Age of Enlightenment's achievements and terrors, the progeny of modern science and art that takes on a life of its own, in mockery and horror of those who brought it into being. As Moretti puts it, "Frankenstein's invention is thus a pregnant metaphor of the process of capitalist production, which forms by deforming, civilizes by barbarizing, enriches by impoverishing—a two-sided process in which each affirmation entails a negation. And indeed the monster [...] is always described by negation: man is well proportioned, the monster is not; man is beautiful, the monster ugly; man is good, the monster evil. The monster is man turned upside-down, negated" (87–88). This type of monster is allegorized in such a way that its very existence is menacing, and the terrifying strength and violence attributed to the creature are aligned with a sense of vengefulness and retribution. As Marx and Engels had noted, using a slightly different metaphor, bourgeois society was like "the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells" (57). Frankenstein's creature, along with the variously zombie- or mummy-like monsters to emerge in his wake, figures forth a more pervasive fear in modern industrial society, which—in the context of globalization—becomes a thoroughly global phenomenon.

The capitalist as vampire, similarly, is a figure so well-known as to almost be a cliché. Marx, in *Capital*, uses the metaphor frequently, as when he observes that "Capital is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks" (342). Moretti's reading of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* goes beyond this generalized figure in noting the degree to which Count Dracula is a vampire specific to the age of monopoly capital, which is to say the late nineteenth century (e.g., *Dracula* was published in 1897). As Moretti argues, "Dracula is a true monopolist: solitary and despotic, he will brook no competition. Like monopoly capital, his ambition is to subjugate the last vestiges of the liberal era and destroy all forms of economic independence" (92). Dracula, of course, is not only a monster in the sense that he is a vampire, but the monstrosity is compounded by his foreignness and his aristocracy, elements which combine to threaten the integrity of both the English national identity and the bourgeois individuality, each of which is compromised through the contagion and influence of the vampire's presence. Both living and dead—or, rather, Undead—the vampire occupies the spectrum of society, transforming its members into something new and different. As Moretti says, "All Dracula's actions really have as their final goal the creation of this 'new order of beings' which finds its most fertile soil, logically enough, in England" (92), one of the birthplaces of modern capitalism and the metropolitan center of the British Empire.

It is thus, perhaps, not difficult to see why Frankenstein's Creature and Dracula remain exemplary literary figures and representative monsters today. Notwithstanding their respective origins in post-Enlightenment fears of science and industry, on the one hand, and the late Victorian anxieties over monopoly capital, nationalism, imperialism, and rapidly shifting social relations associated with them all, these two monsters still serve to demarcate the central zones within the modern (or postmodern) capitalist system's topographies of fear. As McNally observes,

Capitalist market-society overflows with monsters. But no grotesque species so command the imagination as the vampire and the zombie. In fact, these two creatures need to be thought conjointly, as interconnected moments of the monstrous dialectic of modernity. Like Victor Frankenstein and his Creature, the vampire and the zombie are doubles, linked poles of the split society. If vampires are the dreaded beings who might possess us and turn us into their docile servants, zombies represent our haunted self-image, warning us that we might already be lifeless, disempowered agents of alien powers. (253)

Under the circumstances of a global economic system in which the class struggle between proletariat and the capitalist classes is simultaneously extended to a worldwide arena and rendered nearly invisible by ever more mystifying and vast relations of power, these traditional monsters may take on new forms, and yet their messages remain as urgent as ever. As McNally suggests, for instance, "In the image of the zombie lurks a troubled apprehension that capitalist society really is a night of the living dead" (253).

One might discuss a certain "Ideology of the Undead" in this context. For a variety of reasons, the present moment in world history seems to be particularly hospitable for the dead or the undead, monsters occupying this horrifying liminal space of the in-between, hybrid beings whose manner of simultaneous non-living and non-dying conjures up terrible visions of our own existential condition in the twenty-first century. Throughout different media in mass culture, as evidenced in popular novels like *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, television series such as *The Walking Dead*, or films like *Twenty-Eight Days Later*, *World War Z*, or *Train to Busan*, zombies run rampant, infecting the living and portending an apocalyptic end for humanity. In George R. R. Martin's series of fantasy novels *A Song of Ice and Fire* and its landmark television adaptation *Game of Thrones*, devotees of the Drowned God in the Iron Islands declare, "What is dead can never die," whilst an army of the dead commanded by fearsome Others slowly marches toward an ultimate showdown with the living. Although the tropes of death are likely as old as storytelling, and the encounters between the living, the dead, and the undead have a long history, these twenty-first century zombie-like figures appear rather timely now as the divisions between leisure and work-time, between activity and passivity, between resistance and capitulation to the system, and between even life and death appear less stark. An ideology of the undead has become an aspect of any figural representation of the world, such that zombie apocalypse and the overthrow of the living by the dead or undead carry with them an almost redemptive quality.

In "The End-of-the-World as World System," I discuss the ways in which apocalyptic narratives can be interpreted as figural representations of the vast economic, political, social, and cultural system we understand as globalization. That is, in imagining and giving form to some sort of global catastrophe, we can thereby find a way to think the system too vast to analyze using more conventional generic or narrative models. In what has become so well known a pronouncement that its frequent criers cannot seem to decide whether Slavoj Žižek or Fredric Jameson (or someone else) deserves attribution, we have been repeatedly told that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. In Jameson's version, at least, he conceded that this may have to do with a deficiency in our imaginative powers (see *The Seeds of Time*, xii). The quip has become a truism, as the once triumphalist or wary tone adopted by researchers into the phenomenon of globalization has turned increasingly apocalyptic. In this, globalization scholars join with popular culture, whose visions of a future tend to be almost exclusively dystopian. The apocalyptic sensibility or mode suggests that a "world system" under globalization can now only be imagined in terms of an end of the world. The global totality is, in a sense, more "representable" in its incipient end-of-the-world state than as an active, thriving system.

Paradoxically, there is also a utopian element to these various doomsday scenarios, which sometimes arrives in the realization that the world system too complicated and too large to change through political means can, at the very least, be destroyed. The means of the global destruction is not terribly important, and if the end of the world as we know it is caused by asteroids, natural disasters, nuclear warfare, cosmic cataclysm, alien invasions, zombie apocalypses, or whatever, at least the totality of the world system can finally be realized in theory and in practice. What is more, the leveling of what had been creates the possibility of some new order of things, as if the only way to get beyond the apparent impasse of historical development would be to wipe the slate clean and start over. As Antonio Gramsci famously put it in 1930, "the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear" (275). Faced with a seemingly never-ending onslaught of morbid symptoms, of which the current omnipresence of monsters itself may be a sign—indeed, Žižek has "misquoted" this passage from Gramsci, translating the last clause as "now is the time of monsters" ("Permanent" 95)—we might be forgiven if, in our aesthetic productions and entertainments, we imagine single-shot cures to this global, social disease. Where once such imaginative solutions to real social contradictions might have produced straightforwardly utopian narratives, such as Thomas More's foundational *Utopia* (1516), Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward, 2000–1887* (1888), or even Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975), our own epoch of globalization seems better suited to dystopian visions of societal and even planetary destruction.

In this matter, could it be said that we have something like a nostalgia for dystopia? As consumers of books, movies, and other media, perhaps we actually desire that spatial and social organization in which there can be found, and seen, a clear order of things, complete with a fairly recognizable enemy

and thus an easily identifiable hero. The social organizations depicted in the classic dystopian narratives of the last century, such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) or George Orwell's *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* (1949), in retrospect appear almost preferable to the societies in which we live. If nothing else, the conventional dystopian narrative offered a more simplified social system and a more easily imagined if not circumscribed social space, such as a single city or coherent national space. Contemporary dystopian narratives, in order to reflect the realities facing twenty-first century readers, would need to register the angst and dread associated with an unrepresentably vast, incomprehensibly dynamic world system in part by crafting allegories in which the invisible processes of globalization become discernible in a familiar, even homey image of the dystopian state. Ironically, to imagine oneself living in an Orwellian society makes more sense than trying to orient oneself in relation to the shifting coordinates of the social totality. This may also help to explain why recent dystopian narratives such as *The Hunger Games* feature overly simplified economies and social divisions (e.g., all coal comes from a single district, all produce from another, etc.), complete with the very conventional if not cliché totalitarian government with a single despot at its head. Such "monsters" are much easier to imagine and to resist, and this fact may in turn help to explain the great desire for monsters. Dystopia, in a way, becomes another form of cognitive mapping, an aesthetic and political program aimed at giving form to the baggy, protean system of a neoliberal world order.

This returns me to my thesis, which is that the extraordinary expansions and accumulation of monsters in the era of globalization can be interpreted, at least in part, as an attempt to make sense of, or give form to, the world system itself, which is itself "monstrous." As McNally reminds us, "[w]e live in an age of monsters" (1). In this sense, the recent rise of monsters, of horror as a genre or of supernatural terror as a theme, in mass culture can be connecting to a sort of cognitive mapping, as Jameson called it. As Jameson has put it in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, "all thinking today is also, whatever else it is, an attempt to think the world system as such" (4), and he insists "not merely that we ought to strive for it [i.e., a self-consciousness and representation of the social totality], but that we do so all the time without being aware of the process" (2). In that book, Jameson showed how conspiracy films, among others, serve as a means for producing such a figural representation or cognitive map, but one can easily imagine that monster movies, horror, and the like might also serve in this manner. But even if this cognitive mapping occurs via monsters, that does not mean the world made visible is necessarily more comforting or less scary. As Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle have pointed out, "one of the first products of a genuine striving for orientation is disorientation, as proximal coordinates come to be troubled by wide, and at times overwhelming vistas" (25). Monsters, like maps, may help us achieve a sense of the social spaces we inhabit and move within, but they do not immediately make those spaces any less frightening. One of the results of cognitive mapping is a completely different, perhaps unforeseen, or previously unimaginable image, and this may in its own right be terrifying. If the old world as we think we know it offers topographies of fear, the reimagined world may well look strange and new, but no less daunting.

That said, I agree with Jameson that we must not only strive for this sense of the big picture, but that we do so anyway whether we intended to or not. In projecting a monstrous system, a system filled with monsters, we are also constructing the framework by which to make sense of this global ensemble, and this activity, even when frightening, comes with its rewards. Additionally, it should not be forgotten that all this stuff can also be pleasurable. Horror stories, broadly conceived, operate at various affective registers into which fear or angst insinuates itself, showing how different ways of experiencing horror compel different attitudes toward both it and its underlying conditions. In the course of this analysis, we might see how the experience of fear can metamorphose into the pleasures of critique. As Miéville has argued persuasively, the monstrous world system requires a sense of the otherworldly to help produce alternatives to the tyrannical authority of "what is." In fantasy the impossible is taken as being real, thus allowing the possibility of alternatives to the merely actual order of things to be a starting point for critical thinking. The fantastic is a mode best suited for apprehending a system that masks the social relations of which it is constituted, as with the commodity fetish in Marx's original critique. This fantastic Marxist critique thus befits a system in which monsters are all too real, and the prospects of other worlds seem all too unimaginable.

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Author's profile: Robert T. Tally Jr. is the NEH Distinguished Teaching Professor in the Humanities and Professor of English at Texas State University, where he teaches U.S. and world literature, criticism, and theory. His books include *Topophobia: Place, Narrative, and the Spatial Imagination*; *Fredric Jameson: The Project of Dialectical Criticism*; *Poe and the Subversion of American Literature*; *Utopia in the Age of Globalization*; *Spatiality*; *Kurt Vonnegut and the American Novel*; *Melville, Mapping, and Globalization*; and, as editor, *Teaching Space, Place, and Literature* and *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space*, among others. Tally is also the general editor of *Geocriticism and Spatial Literary Studies*, a Palgrave Macmillan book series. Email: <robert.tally@txstate.edu>

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