

To Conclude

“Love Your Monsters”

The creature's indefinitely postponed or stubbornly ineffective suicide leaves us with a curiously bipartite moment that, on the face of it, resists my efforts, over the last six chapters, to present an understanding of stories that integrates what stories say with what stories do, of specifying the 'organic' connection between *how* they exist and *that* they exist, of elevating the correspondence between theme and practice from mere coincidence into a genuine cohesion. For the desolate, bitter non-end of the creature's life on the one hand and our obvious enjoyment of it, attested by the continuing popularity of *Frankenstein* and the way we, as it were, 'force' the creature to survive, on the other, no such genuine cohesion appears plausible. The bitterness and the enjoyment, the content of the story and the form of its reception, our pleasure and the creature's radical un-pleasure, appear irreconcilable except through an essentially subjective-anthropological argument (such that we pity the creature, or experience catharsis in his downfall, or simply select some parts of the story as enjoyable and therefore are willing to bear with others).

A related problem has already appeared in the last section, in the seeming contradiction between the creature's painful isolation and the company we, as audience, keep him in that isolation; and I have tried to integrate the two through an understanding of self and other that regards the two as oscillations in the process of being rather than as mutually exclusive states. This allows for the thought that the creature's isolation and our fellowship with him, rather than being stark opposites, do in fact cohere through more than an abstract form of compassion – a cohesion that is genuine though not, in a conventional sense, causal.

Is something similar possible for, not only the company that we keep with the creature, but also our enjoyment of its desolate fate? And why is this at all important? It is important, I would argue, because the scenario I have sketched so far might otherwise appear to leave no room for a form of pleasure routinely, and for good reason, associated with stories; which is, in the widest sense, a pleasure of escape and loss, connected to ideas such as, for instance, that stories are a relief from the seriousness of everyday existence, or a realm of freedom where no statement is ultimately binding. The peculiar relief through loss that stories enable – escaping ‘into the world of [insert your favourite story here]’ and forgetting yourself for a while – seems quite indebted to the idea that stories are mere fictional add-ons to reality, experiments in the what-if, immaterial products of the imagination. In that sense, when it comes to the question of the pleasure of fiction – of fiction, specifically, not so much the broader aesthetic question of the pleasure of art – one comes back quite quickly to the factor of non-referentiality, and to the idea that there is, on the one hand, a ‘full’ reality (full of, basically, matter), and on the other hand, a hollow imaginary realm, lacking substance.

However, my investigation seems to march quite firmly in the other direction. In a sense, I have been pursuing the claim that stories are, not so much *non-referential*, but more precisely, *non-referential*. Being an operation on the dynamics of the material and the symbolic (a practice of FIGURATION, that is), stories join in the differential going-on of existence (its REPETITIONS) and prompt a reconfiguration of singularity and alterity. Stories, in less abstract words, entangle bodies (and other stuff) with words, sameness with difference, one being with another; they work in and through the passage from one to the other, they even facilitate that passage. It is not enough – though seemingly an obvious claim – to say that *Frankenstein* is a text chasing after a body which, in its gruesomeness, exceeds the means of description available. For this insistent deviance of the creature’s body is at the same time the wellspring of the story and prompts everything that is said about it, even though it cannot be captured by any of it. The *Frankenstein* complex would not exist, not simply without this body, but would more specifically not exist without its constant organic divergence. This divergence is thus situated not only

between the body and the words we find *for* it, but inside the body and the words we find *with* it. *Frankenstein* therefore works as indication that fiction does not pretend signification, as is routinely claimed, but that it rather showcases signification's 'bare bones': the existential productivity of matter-form-interaction. This stands square against any ideological obfuscation of the madeness of meaning. If a text such as Rose's 2015 splatter version of *Frankenstein* refuses to present a naturalised, pure, and unfragmented narrative voice, it suggests quite insistently that meaning cannot simply be plucked from the world but that its articulation and transmission everywhere requires work and transformative processing.

In order for this not to become an indirectly positivist claim – by tacitly positing a standard, a normality that such divergence diverges from – it is necessary to understand such difference as existential, non-categorical difference (the founding accident of being, as it were). The creature can never be subsumed into any term that would pre-exist it. This is a trademark obstinacy of narrative creatures and events – for why else tell stories about them, if everything is already said? And yet, one need also take into account that the singularity or difference in question can never be attributed one-sidedly either to those creatures (or events), or to the story that relates them. To say that the narrative renders special whatever it reports, while not untrue, is not enough said; but likewise is it insufficient to claim that only what is special in itself will generate a story. Rather, it is the productivity of difference itself that enables creature and story alike. Therefore, when a sequel such as *Whale's Bride of Frankenstein* resurrects the creature with a specific narrative gesture – claiming that the end of the previous film, and therefore the monster's death "was not the end at all" – this gesture is enabled by the peculiarity of the creature as much as it can be said to 'bring the creature to life.'

All this suggests that stories, in fact, might not so much lack substance as lack the intermediaries – the abstractions, concepts, and categories – that, for better or worse, prop up referential discourse. Put differently: their non-referentiality, while in a certain sense undeniable – there is no *historical* Victor Frankenstein or creature – might not be the most important thing about them; their insistence, their stubborn (re)appearance in spite of the overwhelming agreement as to their insub-

stantiality, deserves at least as much attention, if not more. To reduce the issue of fiction to the issue of its referentiality is to eschew fundamental ontological questions.

Which consequences does this have, potentially, for the way we study narrative fiction? The fundamental claim of structuralist poetics, put forward for instance by Seymour Chatman as the claim for the existence of a “separate[e] narrative structure from any of its mere manifestations, linguistic or otherwise,” remains of fundamental relevance (*Story and Discourse* 15–6); in the sense that it consolidates the idea that there is such a thing as ‘story,’ which cannot be conceptually dissolved in any list of media, genres, or artistic traditions. This investigation is obviously everywhere indebted to the idea that the *Frankenstein* complex can be studied as something else besides a set of related novels, films, and stage plays. Importantly, this claim also enables, to begin with, the distinction of what Chatman captures accessibly as the “what” and the “way” of narrative (his paraphrase for narratology’s story-discourse-distinction [*Story* 9]).

However, *Frankenstein* suggests that narrative fiction is not the representation or the description but the production of another way of being, fragile as it may be. Narratology sees the transposability of stories from one manifestation to the next as, not only an indication of their independence from genre, but as proof of their immateriality. This is a curiously contradictory move which, quite as Latour puts it in a more general context, means that stories are “valued to an extreme” and yet “deprived of their ontological weight” (*Inquiry* 239). It puts stories in a gilded cage, as it were, as it allows them independence but no agency or effectiveness. For between the “what” and the “way” of narrative, only the latter can in this understanding have any proper purchase on reality; the arrangements, words, style, rhetoric, forms, colours, ..., figure as the real-world ‘arm’ of the flow of story, which otherwise is assumed to take place elsewhere. (“The substance of events and existents [in the story] is the whole universe,” Chatman says, but then goes on to correct himself: “or, better, the set of possible objects, events, abstractions, and so on that can be ‘imitated’ by an author (film director, etc.)” [*Story* 24]).

The independence that narrative is attested by narratology thus remains, in another sense, curiously un-implemented; narrative is said to exist beyond established institutions ('literature,' 'art,' 'film') but at the same time said not to exist at all. Story "exists only at an abstract level" (Chatman, *Story* 37) and thus, quite literally, does not ultimately 'matter.' Transposability is assigned the paradoxical role of proving both independence and non-existence: that the supposed "skeleton story" (Baldick) of *Frankenstein* can appear, say, in a 1927 stage play and a 1994 Hollywood film is taken as indication that *Frankenstein* is a purely abstract construction – when we could just as well argue that it is a sign that there is an actual consistency to *Frankenstein*, even if it is not the consistency of stones or chairs.

In response to structuralist narrative theory, Brooks's studies of narrative plot and the body point in the direction of an understanding of narrative that does allow for a nexus between the "way" and the "what" of story; and that is quite unafraid of the barrier between 'fantasy' and 'reality' (a consequence, not least, of the psychoanalytical grounding of Brooks's study) – for the object of narrative desire is, in Brooks's account, not bound to either sphere but drifts quite loosely between being the reader's desire for the story's ending, the protagonist's desire for their romantic (or commercial) interests, and the reader's desire for the protagonist's objects of desire.¹ But more than that, the "whats" of the story may not be willing to, as it were, content themselves with the status of objects (of desire or anything else); as for instance the curious role of the creature's body in Mary Shelley's novel has shown, working as the source *and* the aim of narrative enunciation. Narrative discourse may be *about* narrative events and existents, but if it weren't for the singularity of those events and existents, no such aboutness could come about; it is hence quite impossible to say with any definitiveness whether, for instance, the serial installations of *Penny Dreadful* bring about its protagonist Lily, or

1 "Plot' seems to me to cut across the *fabula/sjužet* [i.e., story/discourse] distinction in that to speak of plot is to consider both story elements and their ordering" (Brooks, *Reading* 13).

whether it is in fact Lily who enables *Penny Dreadful* to return and repeat itself in its narrative spirals.

The “what” of narrative fiction, then, has its own productivity, its own density. Where in a traditional narratological account, narrative is in a certain sense open only to one side, the story being accessible through the discourse, *Frankenstein's* long and meandering career through popular fiction may just as well be seen to suggest a more inclusive, immediate picture: such that the “whats” and the “ways” of storytelling form a productive pair where none has privilege over the other. This demands a narratological approach that gives some serious weight to the imaginary, and should therefore caution us against focusing narrative’s sense-making aspect to the exclusion of its other capacities. For the sense that narrative makes is, in the latter understanding, mostly sense of ‘the real world,’ such as it supposedly is. Justified as it in principle may be, therefore, such prioritising runs the risk of confining narrative to the function of figuring out the status quo (in better resolution, as it were), therefore giving too little credit to the productive aspect of narrative and in doing so, ultimately understating its ethical capacity.

It might well be the case that “although narratives are grounded in and adapted to a human-scale lifeworld, storytelling practices furnish means for negotiating the differences of scale introduced by phenomena beyond the scope of the human” and that “narrative-based resource[s]” afford the “conceptual scaffolding for engaging with macro-level phenomena more or less massively distributed in space and time” (Herman 258; 21). Such claims follow a logic of detection: they ascribe to stories the capacity to detect the parts of this world not (yet) accessible to our perception and understanding, and bring them “within the scope of human comprehension” (22). Certainly, storytelling lends itself to such ‘detective’ enterprises. And yet, I find it important to address the capacities of narrative beyond such use, valuable as the latter may be. For if this is *all* the narrative that we ever tell about narrative, then we curtail it more than we promote it, as we confine it, ultimately, to what is already given (though maybe as of now beyond our reach). Narrative does more than fill in missing information, or help gain information theretofore inaccessible. In fact, stories work against the persistently widespread agree-

ment, so characteristic of the 'information age' and likewise implicit in subordinating narrative to comprehension, that if we only know what is true, we will also know what is right; an understanding that, if practiced consistently, amounts to deleting the ethical as such. A more radical approach to stories – a radical narratology, as it were – by contrast insists that while certainly, stories are pathways to the theretofore un-detected (whether that be a critical or a cosmological insight), they are also, and more importantly, manifestations of the properly un-known.²

Returning to the question of what it means to enjoy all of this: if I expect, even in this kind of affirmative scenario – where what is fictional is, in some ways, *more* and not less 'there' – for there to be a genuine connection between the fictional and a pleasure with a decided tinge of the negative (where I can lose myself, speak without consequences, and so forth): how would that work? I am not quite content to leave it at the general aesthetic observation – however plausible – of the pleasure of form-giving. Leo Bersani, for instance, has argued that aesthetic practice can dismantle the armour of subjecthood, for it reveals to us that we are part of the world and thus diverts us from our attempts to possess it as an object of our desire. Art (in the widest possible sense) reveals to us "correspondences of forms within a universal solidarity of being" and can thus lead us "back from objects, or the actual hunt, to the vast repertory of virtual being that constitutes [...] the 'marvels' that art seeks beyond its own visibility" ("Aesthetic Subject" 164; 170). The inscriptions as which artworks manifest "are the world, and they are the subject" (171). The enjoyment which one gains from them is thus at variance with the essentially negative pleasure otherwise associated with subjecthood, which is essentially based on "the prejudice of psychic lack, a prejudice that conveniently justifies invasive appropriations of the world's seductive and threatening otherness." This prejudice is ultimately responsible for the

2 Lüdeke has argued that Gothic mimesis, specifically, alerts us to the possibility of reading contingency and realism differently: such that the question is not one of probability ('possible vs. impossible') but of radical being ('fiction depicts what does not exist according to realist standards'); whereby the status of 'reality' as benchmark is shifted ("Gothic Truth").

fact that “[p]sychoanalytically defined sexuality is not a relation; it is the fantasized ecstasy of a oneness gained by the simultaneous destruction of the self and the world. This ecstatic destruction of the subject is the most extreme consequence of a psychological subjectivity, a subjectivity for which the world as lack is an object of suspicion and of desire” (172). The aesthetic subject, however, enjoys quite differently; thus opening the way for art to become a practice that, upsetting though it may sometimes appear, counters what Bersani has elsewhere captured as “the sacrosanct value of selfhood, a value that accounts for human beings’ extraordinary willingness to kill in order to protect the seriousness of their statements” (“Rectum” 222).

This does much to reduce the tension between the constructive and the destructive that persists, likewise, in wanting to say of fiction equally that it is a generative, affirmative process, and that it is connected to some kind of loss, relief, and letting-go. One could thus say – as seems to follow from Bersani’s analysis – that fiction is a form of losing self (the suspiciously desiring self), and gaining world. Aesthetic practice might well be such a defense against the defense mechanism of substituting our selves for the world in order to cope with the traumatic memory and realisation that we cannot master it; it might be a chance to recognise, “as bizarre as this may sound, that, ontologically, the world cares for us,” that it affords us (Bersani, “Aesthetic Subject” 174). However, Bersani himself ends his proposal towards an aesthetic conception of the subject on a more ambivalent note, saying: “[f]inally, however, [...] it is part of the complexity of a human destiny that we may fail to find that care sufficiently satisfying, and so we will undoubtedly never stop insisting – if only intermittently – that the jouissance of an illusion of suppressing otherness can surpass the pleasure of finding ourselves harbored within it” (174).

This ambivalence is, I think, worth retaining; for a similar ambivalence characterises the notion that fiction might be a way of gaining *but also* of losing world, in a similar way as I have argued, in Part Three of this

investigation, that stories are a way of losing *but also* of gaining self.³ Stories are a practice of great potential and yet also of great fragility, dependent as they are on the ongoing cooperation of numerous participants (the COMPANY those participants keep each other). These entanglements are entanglements in a radical sense: not merely connections, but fundamental involvements and dependencies which nevertheless never quite dissolve one being in the other. Agency reveals itself, in *Frankenstein*, not as the opposite of but as born out of vulnerability and suffering (in that sense, agency figures primarily as resistance: appearing where one is not supposed to appear, speaking where one is expected to be silent – as the creature constantly does). In the face of such displacements, all ‘identity’ must fail, as to be oneself means, at the same time, to be quite beside oneself. And this is likewise true for the story’s audience, who, rather than having full control over their own position as creators or recipients, end up shifting from one role into the other. Thus vulnerability is revealed as the source of agency across any fictional-vs.-non-fictional divides; and individuality appears as a kind of unalterable alterability that, more than identification, requires intimacy as non-appropriative communal practice. Importantly, in this scenario, vulnerability is not so much overcome by agency as it conditions it, and is therefore everywhere at work in it. This yields a more ambivalent picture than is conveyed by the idea of an aesthetic subject that, through realising its affinity with the world, gives up on the attempt to master it. But it does resonate more clearly with Bersani’s conclusion that it may be “part of the complexity of a human destiny” that affiliation and withdrawal, immersion and deprivation both have a role to play in the way we relate to the world – stories included.

3 “World,” incidentally, here is supposed to indicate something quite different from what it tends to mean in the theory of fictional worlds, where its basic significance remains that which it used to have for possible worlds theory: a set of true propositions (a significance derived from the function possible worlds, as logical objects, were supposed to fulfil in formal semantics – explicating the truth conditions for counterfactuals). In comparison to the latter understanding, I intend the term to have a decidedly more ‘cosmological’ meaning.

Joan Copjec, in her *Imagine there's no Woman*, outlines an ethical perspective that makes use of such ambivalence. She draws for this both on a reading of Sophocles' *Antigone*, and on Jacques Lacan's seemingly depressing description of love as a process wherein "I love in you more than you" (see in particular Copjec's chapter on "The Tomb of Perseverance"). Her analysis culminates in a theory of sublimation that allows, precisely, to think of the enjoyment of stories as neither loss nor mastery of self but, in fact, a process of liberation that puts self and world on equal footing. It is an account that is helpful to come to terms with the pleasures of, not art in general, but fiction in particular because, more than in the aspect of giving form, it is interested in the changing of it. Bersani's account sticks to the idea that "psychoanalytically defined sexuality is not a relation"; which secures a distinction between the libidinal and the aesthetic that ultimately does more to keep the content of a story and its formal existence (the what and the way of narrative) apart than it helps to fuse them together. Copjec, however, reads subjective desire quite differently, as an experience of loss and gain alike. It is a reading that helps to sketch an ethical perspective on stories that, first, leaves room for their generative capacity rather than reducing them to instruments of detection, and second, is connected precisely to the pleasure we derive from them. This idea of pleasure can finally help to build a bridge between the creature's desolation, and our inclination towards it; between relief, on the one hand – a taking away or being-taken-away – and affirmation and productivity, on the other (and everything, in other words, that could potentially make fiction appear a dreadfully *heavy* and properly *serious* business).

In the psychoanalytic – more specifically, Freudian – conception, there is, as Copjec points out, no such thing as a drive toward higher development or greater complexity. Drives have nothing to do with progress. Rather the opposite: drives aim at the past. In a more narrow psychoanalytic interpretation, this is of course the mother-child dyad; but what is important about this aim of the drive is not only that temporal progress makes its fulfilment impossible but that it cannot be conceptually fulfilled, either, for it aims at what *founds* representation (categorisation, memory, ...) and therefore cannot itself be represented.

Through this double and inevitable inhibition, the drive is forced to become protean, making transformation, substitution, partialisation and particularisation part of its own way of functioning.

The vulgar translation of this scenario might go something like this: we all want to go back to the comforts of the early infant stage, and since that is impossible, we come up with substitute objects which are the next best thing, and to which we then attach our urges. A more nuanced understanding is possible, though, as Copjec shows; and it is one that has specifically ethical consequences. For rather than sticking to a narrow idea of substitution, we can allow for the idea of elevation: for the idea that, because of the drive's internal impossibility, it actually elevates items in the world to the status of being the source of satisfaction, genuinely willing a transformation from impossibility to presence (rather than contenting itself with compromises). Where the notion of 'the next best thing' preserves the object's self-identity as object, the notion of its elevation implies its genuine metamorphosis into something desirable – a metamorphosis that the object must afford or, so to speak, be complicit in. This concept of drive/desire is based, not so much on a logic of representation ('next best thing'), but on a logic of transformation. Rather than the prosaic idea of substituting sexual objects by more socially accepted interests, Copjec suggests (with Lacan), this process of elevation is what the concept of sublimation really implies.⁴

In this process, the object "is no longer a means of attaining satisfaction, [...] it is directly satisfying" (Copjec 37). (Nicely illustrating this in an anecdote, Copjec cites an interview with Jasper Johns who, asked whether he uses a specific sort of commercially available stencil for his

4 Copjec's analysis can thus help to refine Peter Brooks's concept of the "Freudian masterplot," based on Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Brooks's reading is based on the notion of the interplay of two drives, life drives and death drives. Copjec substitutes this with the idea of, not the interplay of several drives, but an internal splitting or modification of drive through its objects. If Brooks helps to put forward an understanding of narrative which is live-ly, that is, vital, Copjec's differentiations help to show its ethical aspect. Brooks shows the relation of stories to desire, and Copjec's account of the sublime aspect of desire shows up the ethics of this relation.

artwork because he likes it, or because that is the form in which the stencils are available, answers: “But that is what I like about them, that they come that way” [38].) “[C]onstruction and discovery, thinking and being, as well as drive and object” are thus “soldered together” (38): the object is elevated and at the same time left exactly as it is because of the subject’s, as it were, appropriate desire, the subject’s willingness and capacity to desire *this* object.

Copjec’s (Lacanian) reading of *Antigone’s* fate in Sophocles’ tragedy helps to illustrate this. For *Antigone* does not defend the brother she buries in any way against King Creon’s accusations regarding his character – all she does is insist on her love for him. This illustrates the literally ‘un-reason-able’ quality of love, the tautological quality in which it is directed at the object of love in regard, but not because of any of its qualities. Copjec captures this quality by saying that “love is that which renders what the other is loveable.” The point of this is not so much to simply point out the other’s singular, unfathomable otherness, that ‘they are just what they are,’ but to point out the transformative power of a desire that is never wholly the desirer’s. Lacan’s much-cited phrase “I love in you something more than you” is easily misunderstood in that sense. It does not mean ‘I love in you something that you are not/that isn’t you,’ it means that, as Copjec puts it, “the ‘is’ of the beloved is split,” that the “beloved is always slightly different from or more than, herself.” The beloved thus is, importantly, “more than just an ordinary object of my attention” (41–42). They mean more to me than their immediate presence and manifestation can account for – commonly understood as the violence of misrecognition, this can likewise be understood as the indicator of a reciprocal vulnerability and affectation.

The fact that *Antigone* rejects a compromise with worldly law in the name of such love is not, Copjec says, a sign of rigidity but instead of unboundedness: “If she is able to undertake such a fundamental break with the existing laws of her community, this is only because she has first been able to unloose herself from the fundamental laws of her own being” (42) (a “radical metamorphosis,” “inhuman rather than heroic” [43]). What this suggests is that “ethical progress has nothing to do with that form of progress promoted by modern industry, or the ‘service of good,’

but is rather a matter of personal conversion, of the subjective necessity of going beyond oneself" (43). Thus – and this is, as I read it, the pivotal point in Copjec's analysis – the elevation which the drive's inherent futility necessitates generates, in the subject, a capacity to turn love into freedom. There is a necessity on which sublimation is based – that the drive needs to elevate objects into objects of desire, as no 'natural' representative for what the drive wants is available; and this elevation demands, at the same time, a radical transformativity in the subject. Sublimation, therefore, "does not separate thought from sex, but rather from the supposed subject of knowledge" as it has the capacity to "unloose" a person from what is established (in laws, customs, forms of relation).

What happens when we miss out on this opportunity is illustrated in the figure of Antigone's adversary, Creon: "Creon's fixation on the laws of the State, betray a dependence of *jouissance* on a supposed subject of knowledge. This does not mean that enjoyment becomes proscribed [...] but that *jouissance* is now proscribed: 'Henceforth you will find your enjoyment in the following way!'" (45). In this way, Copjec says, Creon remains firmly under the rule of the superego: for the superego provides the "idealization of dissatisfaction" that induces one to bind one's enjoyment to laws, not because the superego is an internalisation of laws but because by fixing enjoyment to laws its proper fulfilment is transposed into an inaccessible beyond, and dissatisfaction thus secured (45). (In that sense, it is not, as popular understanding would have it, that the superego comes from laws which are internalized, but that Law comes from the superego and its insistence on dissatisfaction.)

Antigone, in contrast, raises herself out of this condition because she learns to transform herself alongside the world, alongside the objects which she elevates into the objects of her desire. She transforms herself not in the way the superego prescribes, that is, not in the name of an unattainable satisfaction – a transformation which would make her appear flexible but would really make her inflexible by keeping her bound to an ideal that is set in stone, because it is located beyond the limit of being. Antigone transforms herself, rather, in the name of the *potential* of what *is*. And this suggests a base for an ethics of sublimation because this way lies freedom, not only from the iron rule of the superego, but

also – another factor in Copjec’s analysis – from the sovereign rule over naked life. Here is how she puts it:

The superego thus maintains a rigorous division between that satisfaction available to us and the one that lies beyond. It is possible to argue that there where Agamben has observed the notion of “bare” or “nude” life emerging out of the metaphysical positing of a realm of pure Being, “indeterminant and impenetrable” and located beyond an “unthinkable limit” that separates us from all it offers, there, too, one can recognize the handiwork of the superego. If [...] Creon represents a sovereign law that knows no limit, if he seeks “the good of all without limit,” this is because his superegoic positing of a pure satisfaction or absolute goal is founded on the prior positing of an external limit to the world. This limit decompletes, empties out, all his endeavors, all his satisfactions, causing him to strive fruitlessly toward a goal he will never attain. Creon’s hounding of Polynices beyond the limit of death prefigures modern science’s hounding of the subject beyond death, apparently without limit, into infinitely extendable states (in principle, at least) of *coma passé*. When she covers the exposed body of her brother, Antigone raises herself out of the conditions of naked existence to which Creon remains bound. (46)⁵

How is this relevant to the enjoyment of stories? It is relevant because fiction might just go to show that, as the Lacanian lover loves in their beloved something more than them, we love in the world something more than the world – if we do not read this statement (as Copjec says we should not) as meaning that we misrecognise the world, but as indicating that we lift it up. This is more ambivalent – but therefore also possibly more appropriate – than saying that we lose the self (the fixed self, the master self, the one causing all the problems) in fiction and

5 It is interesting to see that, via the psychoanalytical route, Copjec arrives at a solution to the biopolitical impasse quite in keeping with what Agamben sketches in his notion of a form-of-life.

that it is therefore a practice of non-violence, as Bersani's concept of the "aesthetic subject" would suggest.⁶

So do we, or do we not, 'lose ourselves' in stories? If so, it is due to a radical freedom based on the capacity to lift what is (oneself, one's beloved, the world) from what is; in a similar way as Antigone, in Copjec's analysis, lifts herself from "the fundamental law of her own being." If "love is that which renders what the other is loveable," this sketches an ethics that upsets the boundaries between subject and object, who acts and who suffers, more thoroughly than even, for instance, a Foucauldian concern for self does (otherwise a plausible candidate, because it implies that I care for myself as for another, and for another as I do for myself, in "an exercise of the self on the self by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and to attain to a certain mode of being" ["Ethics of the Concern for Self" 282]). Where such an aesthetics of existence is in many ways indebted to the recognition of what is good, to conduct, these 'Antigonean' ethics are an ethics that includes radical novelty – one creates the lover that one falls for, but one does not therefore misrecognise them. It is out of love that one creates them that way. The love comes before the blueprint. Antigone does not recognise what is good, she makes it; her ethics thus includes the possibility of shedding all tradition. "I love in you more than you" basically means freeing the other – the beloved, the interlocutor, the world – from the obligation to remain.⁷

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- 6 Certainly, the move towards psychoanalysis to account for the pleasures of the unpleasurable is a conventional move, much practiced with gothic literature and horror fiction. But it yields insights on a more abstract level, too; that is, beyond the question of uncomfortable subject matter and its attractions, it also helps to formulate an account of the pleasure of stories *as stories* (and not as representations-of).
- 7 "Care of the self is, of course, knowledge [*connaissance*] of the self," Foucault elaborates, "but also knowledge of a number of rules of acceptable conduct or of principles that are both truths and prescriptions" ("Ethics of Concern" 285). Such "care of the self also implies a relationship with the other insofar as proper care of the self requires listening to the lessons of a master. One needs a guide, a counselor, a friend, someone who will be truthful with you" (287). Copjec's

And in that way, I feel tempted to propose, do we approach ‘what is’ in stories: without any expectation that it remain (remain ‘that way,’ remain ‘itself,’ remain at all) but in the willingness to remake ourselves always in such a way as to still be able to follow the story and everything in it, as the lover is willing to always generate exactly the desire that makes the beloved lovable. This is a necessarily two-sided transformation – and hence a proper union – as it includes the admission that I cannot change the other without changing myself (I cannot render the lover lovable without submitting myself to a transformation of my desire). It is in *this* way that fiction connects me to the world by making me lose my self – not so much because it shatters the ego that wants to master the world and therefore re-sub-jects me to the world; but because it “solders” me to the world in showing that any action on the world is an action on myself. This is the ethics *and* the pleasure of stories.⁸

In that sense, Copjec’s ethics of sublimation helps to follow Latour’s injunction to “love our monsters,” though Latour probably had something quite different in mind. The notion of love emerging from an ethics of sublimation that has nothing to do with care, it is not a care-full love, nor with self-negation or ego-shattering, nor with reflection and conduct. It preserves the inexplicability of love (though one could argue,

ethics of sublimation is, in turn, the opposite of listening to the master – even if the master is a friend.

- 8 We need not, therefore, take such great pains as for instance Derek Attridge does to exclude “sentimentality” from the ethical dimension of fiction; who insists that “it is in th[e] apprehension of otherness and in the demands it makes that the peculiar pleasure of the literary response (over and above the pleasure to be gained from new information, sensuous patterning, stirring of memory, moral exemplification, and so on) is to be experienced” (131). Attridge’s account is one that can salvage pleasure for an “ethics of literature” only at the cost of somehow diminishing it as pleasure. The point here is not to downplay this account as ill-humoured or pedantic or even prudish but to say that it misses out on an opportunity, the opportunity of allowing pleasure, *as* pleasure, the capacity for a genuine ethical contribution – which precisely amounts to liberating the idea of sublimation from its narrow conceptualisation as ‘substitution of a cerebral for a sexual object of interest’ and to translate it into something more transversal, profound, and unsettling.

that is its theoretical undercomplexity), it preserves love as love without translating it into care, affect, or reflection. Putting the enjoyment of stories into the context of sublimation thus brings the advantage of allowing for a precarious balance of construction and destruction, rather than indirectly translating one into the other. It thus helps to preserve the sense of a relief through loss that we associate with the pleasure of stories; without therefore committing us to the bi-partition of the world into reality (matter, discourse) vs. illusion (fantasy, *fabula*). If stories aren't opposed to 'reality' – if, in fact, 'the fictive, imaginary, symbolic, immaterial' doesn't provide the dichotomous reference point with the help of which 'reality' can be defined, as Latour's *Inquiry* suggests – then stories don't lack anything. Nor are they excessive. They are singular, material-semiotic processes such as everything else, to which an economic question – do they lack something, do they provide a surplus – cannot, it would seem, sensibly be posed: it would, after all, be 'reality' in relation to which they lack something, or which they exceed. And yet, the forms of enjoyment which we associate with stories – losing ourselves, liberation, relief, immersion – seem indebted conceptually precisely to the lack-surplus-reality nexus; the idea that in fiction, we 'lose' something. But if we "love our monsters" with a desire that includes radical transformation – then gain and loss necessarily go together in our enjoyment of stories.

How does sublimation help me with the organic cohesion – the non-separation of story content, and story existence – that appears difficult to spell out precisely when one looks at the pleasure of stories (and doesn't want to make an ultimately psychological argument)? Stories are productive, but the pleasure connected to them is negative: this contradiction is what sublimation (or the ethics thereof) helps to counter, because it allows for desire to have a constructive force: in this scenario, desire isn't, in the sense of the word, passion, at least not entirely. Nor is it mastery. That is to say, it isn't usefully captured either by a scenario of the individual subject, suffering so from its own lack that it keeps running helplessly after a series of object a's; nor by a scenario in which a greedy subject repaints a helpless world as its hallucinatory appetites dictate. Aaron Schuster, in another context, captures sublimated

pleasure as “an answer without a question [...] an answer that forces a new question precisely because it does not quite fit into any previously existing ones” (122): the willingness for transformation implied by an ethics of sublimation turns lack from something like an anthropological constant into a potential of the world. It re-conceptualises enjoyment in such a way as to allow an easy connection to stories, without therefore demanding that stories are something insubstantial.

In the bleak scenario of postponed suicide, then, where the creature trudges on forever through an arctic “darkness and distance,” lies in a coma between a film and its sequel, it is precisely our sublime interest that can rescue it from there. Living on and on, with no wish to do so, the creature ends up – not unlike Creon, though in the creature’s case, through little fault of his own – forever chained to a satisfaction, that of friendship and family, that through its unattainability limits his life to bare existence. The exit from such superegoic captivity demands the transformation of desire, a genuine elevation of ‘what is’ that affects desirer and desired alike. If desire is mutable in that way, if our attachment to Frankenstein’s creature can create an exit from ‘what is’ or rather, can transform ‘what is’ into more than itself, then, if we render what the creature is loveable (in Copjec’s terms), we change both his world and ours quite effectively. We change the terms – the Law, as it were – of what is loveable, thus making the creature other than what it is and our selves, too.

If the idealisation of dissatisfaction leads to an insistence on the unattainability of desire, and hence the prescription of desire in Law, then it is *inexplicable* desire, specifically, which indicates a way out of this predicament. For loving the monster and enjoying his bleak fate suspends precisely the prescription of enjoyment that would say, ‘enjoy only what feels good,’ or ‘love only what you like.’ The point here is that we don’t have to explain *why* we enjoy this gruesome story but that we must *do* it. The doing of it, not the knowing why, destabilises Law (with a capital L) and insists on the transformativity of the world, an insistence that stands contrary to an ontology which supposes the reality of stones on the one, and the irrelevance of Frankenstein’s creature on the other hand (and leaves it at that). This is the cohesion, organic but neither

causal nor necessary, between the bleakness of the creature's fate, and our enjoyment of *Frankenstein*. In that sense, then, can and should we "love our monsters" – or this particular monster, at least: not simply out of a sense of responsibility but because, as when Antigone covers her unburied brother's body, what is at stake is the potential of the world to be different from what it is.

