



new manifestations from the creation and thought of the fantastic

VICENTE J. PÉREZ VALERO
& FRANCISCO CUÉLLAR SANTIAGO (EDS.)

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AND THOUGHT OF THE FANTASTIC

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THE FANTASTIC AND THE MONSTROUS AS WE'VE NEVER SEEN THEM BEFORE

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THE SOPHISTICATION OF THE MONSTER: FROM FANTASY TO REALITY

The figure of the monster is, almost from its very definition, a product of the imagination and the scientific and technological skills of its creator, who is usually described as a prodigious and exceptional individual. Beyond the meanings conveyed by representations of the monstrous, however, the central question of all works of fiction that use this resource in the realm of the fantastic is also that of the role of man and the task he sets himself as creator and, therefore, as a true monster, according to the etymological meaning of the Latin *-monstrum*: something unusual, exceptional or a prodigy contrary to the natural order-. The question manifests itself in different ways in the realms of cinema, comics and, of course, literature. For example, through the purity of our species in *Gattaca* (Niccol, 1997): *Gattaca* (Niccol, 1997), hybridisation and mutation in *Alien* (Scott, 1979), *The Fly* (Cronenberg, 1986), *The X-Men* (Lee, 1963) and *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (Wells, 1895), or the scientific possibility of recreating extinct or mechanical life

forms in *Jurassic Park* (Crichton, 1990), *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (Spielberg, 2001) and *Ex-Machina* (Garland, 2014).

In the current context of social, cultural and philosophical change, the portrayal of the relationship between human beings and technology in fantasy fiction takes on significant relevance. Many literary and cinematic works invite us to contemplate the monsters that we create -and that we are- by exploring the ethical dilemmas, utopian aspirations and dystopian fears associated with the increasing integration of technology into everyday life. In this way, art confronts us with our reflections and poses the question of our postmodern condition as articulated by Jean-François Lyotard in *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* (1979) or by Gilles Deleuze in much of his work.

In his *The Dreams Our Stuff is Made Of: How Science Fiction Conquered the World* (2000), Thomas M. Disch proposes the idea that science fiction – including fantasy - is not just a form of entertainment, but also a reflection of our ambitions and concerns as a collective. He argues that it has played a crucial role in shaping our expectations of technology, society and the future and in prompting us to reflect on the ethical, social and philosophical implications of scientific and technological progress. Science fiction generates an unconscious premonition and acts as a revelator of society's collective longings, fears and aspirations, unconsciously anticipating and even triggering future events.

In this way, these fictional narratives provide a space for speculation about the future of humanity, as well as for questioning the limits and implications of technology in the construction of individual and collective identity. It is in this fantastic dimension that the minds of modern demiurges - from the Greek *dēmiourgós*: creator – dwell. They are monsters who are not so outwardly, but who translate into their ideas, projects or products what they have read and seen in their years of learning and openness to the worlds created by others, and which have allowed them to leave their room through their imagination. Some of them are what we call *geeks*, a term that, in a few decades, has gone from being pejorative to merely descriptive and sometimes even prestigious.

These new social actors, who are increasingly influencing industries, markets and cultural trends, have gradually emerged on the global economic stage. They are invariably associated with a passion for technology, fantasy, science fiction and video games, but their influence extends far beyond their traditional interests. With the advent of the digital age, the skills and expertise of geeks have become increasingly valuable in a technology-driven economy. Companies at the forefront of research and development in

artificial intelligence, biotechnology, blockchain and renewable energy, such as Google, Apple, Microsoft, Amazon and Facebook, which were once start-ups founded by visionary geeks, are now among the most powerful entities in the world. Moreover, eight of the ten richest people on the planet are related to new technologies. Geek culture is no longer the exclusive domain of intellectual technology and computer enthusiasts. It fuels entire industries, from consumer electronics – from which our ubiquitous smartphones are derived – to video games, comic books and science fiction films. As a result, government policy and private investment are heavily tilted towards the technology and innovation sectors, in the hope that this investment will stimulate economic growth and create new jobs. Technology companies are celebrated as champions of progress and their leaders, in particular, are revered as visionaries who are shaping the future. These individuals, fuelled by the utopias of science fiction, are shaping our present and our future as consumers.

The demiurges of our age are the figures of success who manifest themselves in a technological and economic opulence that fascinates us, whose seductive face is promoted by the social network. They are the monsters of this technological and ultra-liberal era who, who knows, may be hiding in their hands the progress of the human being through transhumanism or the greatest and most sophisticated slavery that the human history has ever known, in which the individual himself is unaware of his state of subjection. As slaves, *zombies* or technological creatures, we get a glimpse of the future through the minds of the true creators and artists of the fantasy genre, no need to go any further. Come and see!

CONTEMPORARY REPRESENTATIONS OF THE FANTASTIC

In the various chapters of this book, entitled *New Manifestations in the Creation and Thought of the Fantastic*, we look at the wide range of representations of the imaginary, the terrifying and the monstrous, in all their meanings, in film, television and other creative, artistic and audiovisual expressions, such as animation, video clips and video games.

The journey that we propose in these pages will end at the very origin of the fantastic genre: literature.

Firstly, Juan Agustín Mancebo Roca, immerses us in the work of David Cronenberg through his film *Naked Lunch* (1991), an adaptation of the literary work of the same name by William S. Burroughs (1959). In his text, the author analyses

the depiction of sexuality, in which female characters are highlighted and translated from a homosexual imaginary into a heterosexual one. He also studies the creatures that metaphorically represent the ghosts of addiction, sexuality and control, through psychological stages derived from a body that has ceased to be, in the words of James G. Ballard, a portrait of the interior landscape of the post-war world.

Secondly, researcher Michelle Lucy Copmans presents her text *Game Of Thrones: Between History And Political Science*, in which she analyses the theory of international relations of political realism, popular in the 1990s, within *Song of Ice and Fire* (1996-1998), written by George R.R. Martin, also known for the TV series *Game of Thrones* (Benioff and Weiss, 2011-2019). This theory, similar to those proposed by Henry Kissinger and Samuel Huntington, is reflected in his literary work. Thus, Martin can be considered not only a novelist or historian of the Middle Ages, but also a political scientist who analyses the end of the 20th century according to his own theory.

The third chapter of this volume is written by professor and researcher Manuel Sánchez-Angulo, who reflects on the term 'biotechnology' in fantasy and science fiction, and its negative representation in works such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein or Modern Prometheus*, which warns of the dangers of playing God. Shelley's novel combines several bioethical themes such as the creation of artificial life and human experimentation, and gave rise to the cultural icon of the *Mad Scientist* losing control of his creation. Later works, such as *The Island of Doctor Moreau* by H.G. Wells, continued this legacy. These works are probably at the root of today's public mistrust of biotechnology products, particularly genetically modified foods. Even today's life-saving biomedical applications are not free of this suspicion. Nevertheless, films showing the negative aspects of biotechnology can be used to demonstrate the true impact of this science on society.

The next contribution in this book is Fran Mateu's research work on Demián Rugna's film *When Evil Lurks* (2023). This film has had a fruitful tour of international festivals, winning the best film award (the highest award) at the Sitges Film Festival, the most important fantastic genre event in the world (Sitges Film Festival, 2023). The film combines several sub-genres, and is part of the new Argentinean horror cinema. Mateu analyses the director's main contributions to folk horror with a very specific vision, and the use of gore, blood and special effects to reach the audience with his proposal.

The work of a follower of Rugna's work, *Pan's Labyrinth* by Guillermo del Toro (2006), is the subject of analysis by researcher Vladimir Couți. In his work, Couți emphasises the value of emotions in film, since they are not sufficiently prioritised in film

studies. The intersection between cinema and psychology has focused on the emotions of the audience, leaving aside the emotionality of the work of art. The author suggests that a combination of psychological definitions and cinematic tools could improve interdisciplinary research. In fact, he suggests using Ekman's (2016) model of emotions and focusing it on the scary scenes of *Pan's Labyrinth*, a film that combines fantasy and horror, ideal for analysing this emotion.

In her chapter, Marta Miquel-Baldellou presents the horror trilogy created by Timon West, an American director and screenwriter. In it, West explores different genres and visual styles. The first film, *X* (2022), is a *slasher* set in 1979, in which a film crew encounters psychopaths on a Texas farm. *Pearl* (2022), the prequel, focuses on Pearl's youth in 1918 and uses Disney's colourful visual style and classic musicals to tell a female gothic story from a grotesque perspective. The trilogy concludes with *MaXXXine* (2024) which follows Maxine in 1985 on her quest for fame in Hollywood. In Miquel-Baldellou's analysis, each film shows a high degree of self-reflexivity about the genres of horror cinema, exploring both the aforementioned conventions of the slasher, and the Female Gothic, as well as folk horror in a Southern and rural American context.

Entering the field of futuristic fantasy, Rita Aloy Ricart and Nathaniel Sola Rubio reflect on the role of space in dystopian narratives, focusing in particular on the OVAs (Original Video Animations) of *Alita: Battle Angel* (Rodriguez, 2019). These animations, based on the 1993 manga *Gunnm* by Yukiyo Kishiro and directed by Hiroshi Fukutomi, explore themes of oppressive societies and ethical degradation through their depiction of two dystopian cities: Scrapyard and Zalem (Tiphares). Situated on the ground, Scrapyard is polluted by the waste of Zalem, a floating city inaccessible to its residents. Scrapyard's inhabitants endure hardship and engage in activities such as gladiator wrestling and Motorball racing. Zalem, on the other hand, remains mysterious and exclusive, strictly forbidding access from Scrapyard. The main protagonist, Alita, a cyborg discovered in Scrapyard by Doctor Daisuke Ido, seeks to uncover her origins and confront the injustices perpetrated by Zalem, particularly in protecting Yugo from illegal organ trade orchestrated by the businessman Vector.

Without leaving the orbit of the fantastical in the East, the Indian researcher Ghita Ait Bensalah presents a text that analyses the representation of Japanese ideology through the fantastic creatures created by Hayao Miyazaki for his animated film *Spirited Away* (2001). The success of his work within Studio Ghibli is attributed to his unique artistry and ability to emotionally resonate with audiences, reflecting Japanese culture

and ideologies through hand-drawn animation. Hayao Miyazaki's films are known for embodying several profound themes rooted in Japanese culture, such as Wabi Sabi and the beauty of transience; harmony between industrialisation and nature; dedication to life and craftsmanship; cultural synthesis. Influenced by both Eastern and Western cultures, his films resonate globally while maintaining a distinct Japanese authenticity. This blend allows his stories to appeal universally while celebrating the cultural richness of his homeland.

In the field of the fantastic, but within the music industry, Julia Sainz Cortés analyses this genre in the period in which it established itself in the Spanish music video scene, between the second and third decade of the 21st century. This period saw a variety of approaches in which fantastic elements were creatively integrated into music videos. Although budgets were smaller and the impact less pronounced than in the rest of the world, Spanish directors and musicians turned to fantasy to enhance the visual narrative and aesthetic appeal. In addition, the evolution of technology and digital platforms has opened up new avenues for artists to experiment with visual effects and storytelling techniques, pushing the boundaries of what can be achieved on smaller budgets.

Marcela Naranjo Velásquez will explore the complexity of the character of Gollum, a central figure in J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth saga, who embodies complexity through his dualistic nature and multifaceted roles. Initially driven by the desire to reclaim the One Ring, Gollum serves as a mirror for heroes like Bilbo and Frodo, reflecting their inner struggles and potential paths. His portrayal as the archetype of the Shadow highlights the dark aspects within the heroes' psyches that they struggle to acknowledge and integrate. Furthermore, Gollum can be interpreted as a tragic hero whose actions shape the course of the narrative, balancing personal turmoil with broader conflicts. His unique resistance to the corrupting influence of the Ring underscores his importance in the struggle against evil, positioning him not just as an antagonist but as a central force in the salvation of the Middle-earth.

In the section dedicated to video games, José Manuel Chico Morales presents his text *The Hybrid Identity Of The Monster: Dialectics Of The Possible And Impossible In Video Game Narratives*, whose main objective is to explore hybrid identity, where the boundaries between the human and the monstrous are fluid and subject to change. Three video games are used as modes for different modes of introspective fantasy narratives: *Shadow of the Colossus* (2005), *Undertale* (2015) and *The Dark Pictures*

Anthology: Little Hope (2020). Chico's methodology examines the interplay between the possible and the impossible in video game narratives, adapting theories from the literary studies of Roger Caillois and David Roas. He also uses discourse analysis is employed to explore narrative specificities.

On the other hand, the researcher Kevin Díaz Alché proposes to look at the historical origins of witchcraft in the current aesthetics of the witch, developed in painting and film, and to analyse how contemporary video games, especially *The Cosmic Wheel Sisterhood* (2023), developed by Desconstructeam, incorporate these aesthetics into their environments. Combining deck-building with a strong narrative, this video game stars a group of witches who use various supernatural abilities such as tarot, plant manipulation and the study of the cosmos. While Desconstructeam's previous works focused on science fiction, *The Cosmic Wheel Sisterhood* delves into fantasy and magic, highlighting the archetype of the witch. This shift is significant for its ability to raise questions about individual responsibility and emotional relationships, as well as the implications for the image of women and femininity.

Antonio Castro Balbuena immerses us in the epic fantasy of video games. Due to their hypermediatic characteristics, video games offer a rich platform for the creation and adaption of epic fantasy narratives. Among video game genres, the open-world format is particularly suited to these expansive and imaginative stories, often featuring the archetypal hero who embarks on quests and battles to save the world (Ward, 2011; Underberg, 2005). In this context, Castro explores a more recent depiction of heroes, which has shifted from a clear dichotomy of good versus evil to a more nuanced 'twilight hero' archetype that reflects complex moral landscapes (Castro Balbuena, 2022). This trend raises important questions about the nature of heroism in video games: How do players understand and enact heroism, what actions constitute heroic behaviour, and what kind of heroes can players become?

In one of the longest-running video game series in history, *The Legend of Zelda*, created by Shigeru Miyamoto, researcher David Serra Navarro examines the diversity of creatures, such as the cyclopean Hinox and the oni ogres - in a more mythological sphere- or monsters like the Moldorm and the Moblins, drawing on sources such as Roy Chapman Andrews' 1926 documentation of creatures and the 16th-century Asian novel *Journey to the West*. These mythological roots highlight the cultural hybridity inherent in these creatures. Serra explores the symbolic meaning of "the monstrous" within the game's narrative, which serves as a basis for interpreting how these fantastical

entities enhance the game's interactive narrative. This exploration reveals that these creatures are not mere obstacles, but an integral part of the player's progression and understanding of the game world.

Mario-Paul Martínez, a researcher at the Center for Research in the Arts (CíA), shares with us an analysis of the evolution of the graphic environments of video games, which took a significant leap forward in the 1980s. This period of early video games is notable not only for the rise of the medium, but also for the important evolution of the aesthetic and semiotic models used in game design. Among the various genres, conversational adventure games, especially those made by Sierra On-Line (formerly On-Line Systems), played a crucial role in advancing graphical capabilities. Games such as *Mystery House* and *Wizard and the Princess* (both 1980) pioneered the combination of graphics and text, creating memorable and innovative digital scenographies that would influence the future of video game design.

In the section of fantasy and horror on paper, the researcher María José González Dávila examines the complex use of intertextuality, the dynamic between fiction and reality, and the temporal aspect in Félix J. Palma's work *El mapa del tiempo* (2008) and his *Victorian Trilogy* (2008-2015), focusing on its mixture with science fiction and fantasy. The study highlights how the creation of texts involves both linguistic exploration and tradition, giving rise to infinite meanings through deconstruction and the relationship between different texts. González also emphasises the subjective nature of interpretation and rejects the idea of a single "correct" reading.

The chapter presented by Miguel Ángel Albújar-Escuredo analyses the novelist Fernanda Trías's depiction of the end of the Anthropocene, through her novel *Mugre rosa* (2020), and the failures of the city's financial systems in the midst of the new pandemic. He explores how the pink fog is triggering massive evolutionary changes and the emergence of a new history in which humanity may no longer have a place. Moreover, the emergence of this fog marks the emergence of an unexpected economy, disconnected from previous financial systems. The protagonist and narrator documents both the collapse of the financial world and her own emotional decline.

In the chapter *Nocturnal Queers In Hong Ling's Vampire Fiction*, researcher Alberto Poza Poyatos explores how the vampire in urban gothic literature serves as a metaphor for *queer* identity and epistemology, reflecting and subverting cultural fears and desires, and offering a unique perspective on gothic horror, modernity and queer theory. The vampire, central to this discourse, represents the only way in which the Heideggerian

‘Enlightenment subject’ can maintain a positive existence after the ‘advent of the subjectivity of the Modern Age’ (Žižek, 1991, p. 64). In our contemporary identity-centred paradigm, this nocturnal monster can be considered *queer*. According to Poza, both the *queer* and the vampire share an epistemology: they are entities that we strive to recognise within their concealment. This has led to metaphorical polarities in literature that allow us to conceptualise a mysterious but knowable figure.

Finally, we close this publication with *Spatial Landmarks From Middle-earth In The Lord Of The Rings*, a text by Alba Rozas-Arceo and Inmaculada Pérez-Casal that explores (postcolonial) literary cartography as a viable and enriching analytical tool to aid literary criticism.

The authors have also made a number of contributions to a better understanding of the complex relationship between history, ideology and space. As a case study, they focus on the imaginary geography of Middle-earth described in J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* (1954), going beyond mere textual analysis and showing the suitability of Geographic Information Systems for revealing the motives and functions underlying the most relevant spatial landmarks.

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The figure of the monster is, almost from its very definition, a product of the imagination and the scientific and technological skills of its creator, who is usually described as a prodigious and exceptional individual. Beyond the meanings conveyed by representations of the monstrous, however, the central question of all works of fiction that use this resource in the realm of the fantastic is also that of the role of man and the task he sets himself as creator and, therefore, as a true monster, according to the etymological meaning of the Latin -monstrum: something unusual, exceptional or a prodigy contrary to the natural order-. The question manifests itself in different ways in the realms of cinema, comics and, of course, literature.