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Author(s): RUSSELL J. A. KILBOURN

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Milton's Eve in *Paradise Lost* and Shelley's monster in *Frankenstein* provide the comparative intertext for a constructivist analysis of a key scene in Mary Harron's film adaptation of Bret Easton Ellis's novel *American Psycho*, in which Patrick Bateman emerges as an avatar of the "monstrous" postmodern masculine subject.

American Frankenstein: Modernity's Monstrous Progeny

RUSSELL J. A. KILBOURN

*Americans may have no identity, but they do have
wonderful teeth.*—Jean Baudrillard, *America*

To represent a monster is to tame him.
—Sabine Melchior-Bonnet, *The Mirror: A History*

As an early nineteenth-century text, *Frankenstein* is a book whose fascination for students of Western culture arguably has only increased within the context of a perceived shift to a postmodern cultural dominant. As a seminal rewriting of the Prometheus myth, and one of the first science fiction novels, *Frankenstein* articulates the modern monster myth—one of the foundational narratives for later modernity, particularly in popular cultural terms (Alkon 1). This approach to Shelley's novel invites a comparative analysis of Mary Harron's 2000 film of *American Psycho* as a particularly revealing version of what I am calling here the *postmodern* monster myth, in which the main character's "monstrousness" hinges on his masculine selfhood. The modern subject, characterized by the meaningful distinction

between a metaphysical interiority and all-too-physical body, gives way before this postmodern subject in which these boundaries have collapsed, producing a vacuity behind the mask of self-representation. At issue, ultimately, is the relation between Patrick Bateman's "identity" as a hypermasculine serial killer and monstrous consumer, and his identity in terms of a unique and authentic interiority.

As a focus of analysis, I have chosen one specific scene in Mary Harron and Guinivere Turner's film adaptation of Bret Easton Ellis's 1991 novel, in comparison to equivalent "primal" moments in Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. This comparison occurs within a theoretical framework suggested by feminist and post-colonialist comparisons of *Frankenstein* and *Paradise Lost*, alongside more recent thinking about what Sean Nixon calls new "visual codings" of masculinity and male beauty (Hall 294; see also Bordo). That the reader may question the relevance or value of placing such a film alongside these canonical literary texts only magnifies the significance of these emergent social-cultural codes and consequent practices of looking. The general argument here is that if the hegemonic visibility of contemporary culture, and the nature and place of the subject within it, are to be understood, then this kind of comparative analysis across genre, medium, discourse, and historical period becomes unavoidable.

In Daniel Cottom's view, the "parable" of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is this: "in seeking to represent himself, man makes himself a monster" (60). The crisis dramatized by *American Psycho*—both film and novel—is first of all epistemological, a crisis of the subject that in each text transforms into an ontological crisis. The analogous argument has been made for *Frankenstein*, in which conceptual and ontological fragmentation combine into a breakdown in *representation*: "the physical monstrosity of Frankenstein's creature is related to problems in the representation of man as a species, a social figure, an individual, a creature of reason, and a being in the contexts of science and political economy. [...] It is as if Victor [Frankenstein] sees in his creation the breakdown of the concept of man into an irreconcilable diversity of individuals or of qualities within individuals—a breakdown that leaves representation as a groundless, disordered, monstrous affair (61).

What Mary Harron's film manifests even more clearly than the novel is that Patrick Bateman's epistemological and ontological crises are ultimately reducible to the question of representation. In the first place, the flashpoint in the reception of both novel and film has been the representation of violence. Even during filming, as Harron admits, it became "an issue of representation [...] how much you show" (Ebner 2). The film ends up "showing" a mere fraction of the violence conveyed verbally in the book.

In both texts, though, the question of representation—and therefore of violence—centres around the protagonist. To quote the film’s official web page: “In the same way that *Frankenstein* gave us a monster for its time, *American Psycho* gives us a monster for the late 20th century” (“*American Psycho*—The Film” 1). In co-screenwriter Guinevere Turner’s view, Patrick Bateman “is a monster [...] our society created. To me, [Ellis is] really making fun of men. Look at how they preen, how they compete. Look how little they value women. They’re all monsters, they’re beasts. That’s what I saw, that’s what Mary saw, so we decided that if we take the violence away, and take the humanity away from him, we’d let him, as a man, dig his own grave just by letting him talk” (Turner 80).

Bateman, the film’s protagonist, is obviously a “monster” in the most current literalized sense: in the realist terms that the film, and the novel, in their different ways, eventually forego, he is a psychopath, a Norman Bates for the later twentieth century, personifying the depthless, ultra-materialist, name-brand era of Reagan’s 1980s. But the film’s Bateman also embodies the even more specific historical-cultural moment Ellis’s novel disturbingly epitomizes: the late or post-modern *episteme*, not in cultural terms alone but also in its political-economic expression as global capitalist consumerism. Bateman exemplifies the persistence—or survival—of a subjectively grounded self who could only be masculine and is therefore all the more monstrous and *inhuman* an example of humankind. This paper is therefore concerned with a cultural conception of the self that is irreducibly *masculine*—a fictional avatar of a self produced out of the intersection of violence and self-determination that takes place in a mirror.

The mirror scene in question is in fact the culminating shot of a sequence of brief shots together comprising a kind of prelude to the rest of the film. Just before the shot in question, there is an initial shot of Bateman from behind, 30° over his left shoulder, with duplicated reflections of his upper body in the bathroom mirror. He begins to apply an “herb-mint facial masque” (Ellis 26). In the next shot the application of the masque continues, with tighter framing, in a close-up on Bateman’s face with his hands in the frame. The angle is the same throughout but now his “real” body is gone and all we see (ostensibly) is the reflected face. The third shot returns to the angle and framing in the first, but slightly tighter, with only the upper half of his upper body visible. But the “real” Bateman is again visible opposite his reflections, as he removes skin care products from the medicine cabinet behind the mirror. Another close-up of the cabinet’s interior follows, with Bateman’s hand removing the curiously brandless containers. Finally, the scene in question: a return to the angle and framing in the initial close-up of Bateman’s face, without his “real” body between the camera and his

framed reflection. In effect, the central reflection in the intervening mid-range shots provides the basis for this shot, ostensibly showing just Bateman's reflected face with the black and white tiled bathroom and window in the background. When he begins to peel off the facial masque, however, the actor's arm can be barely glimpsed in the lower right corner of the frame, indicating that what we see is in fact his reflection.

The mirror scene functions as an introduction to Bateman's character comparable to the novel's "Morning" chapter (Ellis 24–30). Harron extracts key sections from a long, fragmentary internal monologue toward the end of the novel (376–77), but where in the book this speech takes place as if it were in his head, repeatedly interrupting a conversation he is having with his secretary Jean in a Manhattan sidewalk café called Nowheres, Harron transposes the monologue into a voice-over during the film's third principal scene. Here Bateman describes his morning ritual in exhaustive detail—the crucial "there is an idea of Patrick Bateman" line from the café episode laid over the film's version of the sequence in the book where he stares at his face in the bathroom mirror and then applies the "herb-mint facial masque." In the film, though, it is his meticulous *removal* of the masque that is the focus of the scene, as this voice-over is heard: "There is an idea of a Patrick Bateman, some kind of abstraction, but there is no real me, only an entity, something illusory, and though I can hide my cold gaze and you can shake my hand and feel flesh gripping yours and maybe you can even sense our lifestyles are probably comparable: *I simply am not there.*"

It is necessary to recall here that at the root of "monster" is the Latin verb *monstrare*, "to show" (Cohen, *Monster* 4). In other words, the monstrous is always in some sense concerned with representation, and by the same token representation is always in some sense monstrous. In a dangerous analogy, where the novel deals not merely with the unspeakable but also, more significantly, with the *unsayable*, the film is largely concerned with what is *unshowable*. In each case, the locus is the *self*.

In its extensive theorization ("teratology"), the monstrous is often defined according to either of two categories generally conceived of today as culturally determined and therefore never fixed or universal: standards of beauty, on the one hand, and notions of the "human," on the other. The monstrous, in both its engendering and its gendering, is thus a protean but useful term around which to organize the shifting meanings of the feminine and the masculine as gender identities. I will therefore move between two principle ideas: the cultural formation of specifically masculine identities as a type of representation that continues to go by the name of "self-determination"; and the notion of "self" as constructed, whether through conspicuous consumption, or violence, or both. These ideas can of course also be construed at the collective or social-political level, which draws attention to the role of *alterity*, in its simplest, most

readily grasped form, in relation to the socio-cultural constitution of an individual self. As Hent De Vries and Samuel Weber contend, “violence is not necessarily the exclusive characteristic of the *other* but rather, and perhaps even above all, a means through which the *self*, whether individual or collective, is constituted and maintained” (2, *emph. mine*). I agree with De Vries and Weber that the intimate relation between violence and self-determination is framed in contemporary culture in terms of the crucial significance of the specific form of representation or mediation, that being the medium and/or genre of the narrative in question.

By translating Ellis’s story into the language of cinema, stripping the narrative of almost all of its graphic violence, sexual and otherwise, Harron and Turner salvage in filmic terms the Austenesque ironies and Dostoevskyan echoes of the novel’s scalding socio-cultural satire. The Patrick Bateman of the film (British actor Christian Bale) appears to be what he is in the novel: the epitome of the late ’80s male yuppie for whom conspicuous consumption is not just a lifestyle or ideology, but an epistemology and a way of being. The initial temptation might be to say that Bateman is because he consumes, and therefore knows that he exists because the proof is there in the mirror, staring back at him. But this is contradicted by what he actually says in the scene: “There is an *idea* of a Patrick Bateman, some kind of abstraction, but there is no real me, only an entity, something illusory [...]: *I simply am not there.*”

Harron and Turner’s cinematic redemption of a novel that many have deemed unredeemable does not extend to Ellis’s protagonist (Eberly). The film’s Bateman, like the novel’s, is a chillingly convincing psychopath. But the film omits the novel’s post-modernist anti-eschatology; its emphasis, from the very beginning, is that Patrick Bateman is in a kind of *literal* secular hell. (The novel is book-ended by direct but utterly ironic references to Dante’s *Inferno* and Sartre’s *No Exit* as different versions, at opposite ends of modernity, of an afterlife in itself devoid of hope [see Ellis 3, 399].) In the world of *American Psycho*, the human soul does not signify except as a figure of speech, a cliché; and besides, there is nowhere else to exit to, no other world (in the film, the novel’s closing “This is not an Exit” becomes a ‘No Exit’ sign in a bar [399]). In film as well as book, transcendence is both literally and metaphorically impossible; it is unthinkable and therefore unrepresentable. Like the novel, the film conjures a world in which the Miltonic credo bears an ironic validity, where “[the] mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a heav’n of hell, a hell of heav’n” (Milton 1. 254–55)—only in the film the residual nominal difference is collapsed; a positive term, place, or state no longer exists even negatively, against which to measure Bateman’s world. As depthless as this world is, there is no “outside” on which to predicate even the loss of hope.

At the same time, the film capitalizes fully on cinema's unique properties of reification: of concretization and exteriorization. This, too, is very ironic, in light of the novel's dependence upon the first-person fictional confessional model. According to Ellis, *American Psycho* is a "monologue" (Amerika and Laurence)—a claim substantiated in the voice-over in the film's last scene: "This confession has meant nothing." The tradition of representing the narrating subject's interior life is the feature of the novel that presents the most interesting challenges in the translation into cinema's predominantly visual language. The fictional autobiographical novel has proven to be the ideal venue for that realism, or *reality effect* commensurate with a modern post-Cartesian dualism. For Ian Watt, "the autobiographical memoir shows itself to be [...] well suited to reflect the tension between the inner and the outer world" (295). But Watt does not go far enough: while the novel, as the quintessential modern genre, came into being alongside the modern self, in a measurable degree it also contributes directly to the production of that self; to the production, specifically, of the sense of interiority as an ideological construct characteristic of modern subjectivity.

A novel like *American Psycho* is typical of the genre to the extent that it presents a portrait of not just an individual but of an entire society *through* its portrayal of that individual: the external world is represented via the narrating subject's internal world; subjective psychological realism makes possible the mimetically believable representation of an objective world. Both novel and film foreground an examination of the function of autobiographical confession as not only self- but *world*-construction. But the film does not simply transpose the narrative point of view into some cinematic equivalent of novelistic first-person—like an optical point of view camera, in a specious analogy between radically distinct media. Harron shoots the film in a kind of second-order classic Hollywood style, the edits, framing, mise-en-scène, lighting, sound, etc., all contributing to an ultimately *ironic* realism that is the visual counterpart to the novel. The same may not be said for such realist conventions as character motivation and narrative causality, two elements with which Harron and Turner deliberately subvert and manipulate in the externalized presentation of Bateman's psychosis. Rather than abandoning altogether the novel's powerfully subjective impact, the film manages to bring out just as clearly but in an entirely different manner the paradoxically obscure transparency of Patrick Bateman's character. At the same time, the film visually objectifies Bateman's (Bale's) physical presence on screen, exploiting relatively recently established popular cultural conventions of representing the male body as a sentient commodity fetish conveying what would appear to be a wholly new brand of masculine subjectivity.

At this point, the question of the status of a text as *either* “modern” or “postmodern” must be further clarified, in order to avoid over-simplified distinctions. In Mieke Bal’s useful formulation, the putative shift from the modern to the postmodern is announced in the specific shift “from the typically modernist preoccupation with *epistemological* uncertainty [...] to the *ontological* doubt that results when one radically thinks through what epistemological doubt entails” (Bal 117, *emph. mine*). This transition can be framed in terms of a conceptual shift from a universal (Cartesian) subject or *cogito* which, although radically doubting the grounds for its thinking, nevertheless knows that it exists in some sense, precisely because it is able to think (and thus doubt)—the shift from *this* modern subject to a contingent, culturally determined subject that recognizes what appears to be the logical absurdity of its situation: that it has no guarantees of its authentic, material existence. Forms of fiction like the novel and the feature film allow for the representation of this paradoxical subjectivity, and it is on this point that the viability of categorizing a text as exclusively “modern” or “postmodern” is seen to be problematic.

The seemingly inescapable metaphysicality of the subject (even in its more radical post-structuralist or psychoanalytic forms) hearkens back to the Aristotelian *hupokeimenon*, the foundation, ground, or substratum, “upon which other qualities, such as predicates, accidents and attributes, may be based” (Critchley and Dews 13). There might appear to be a danger in such a discussion of eliding the philosophical or psychoanalytic with the *fictional* subject—but such an elision may in fact be justifiable. As Simon Critchley asks: “has there ever existed a unified conscious subject, a watertight Cartesian ego? Or is the subject some phantasy or abstraction that is retrospectively attributed to a past that one wants either to exceed, betray, or ignore? That is to say, is not the subject a fiction?” (22). Without posing a threat to philosophical speculation about the subject, the conclusion can be drawn that the modern subject is a “fiction,” not merely because, being a philosophical—and more broadly, cultural—concept, it is therefore a construct. Arguably, it is always possible to construe the modern fictional-narratological subject as *metaphysical*—a claim that underlies such prominent attacks as, for example, that of Deleuze and Guattari, who oppose to the Freudian, *oedipalized* subject a *deterritorialized* assemblage of desires (far more radical than the psychoanalytic subject to which they respond). From a constructivist point of view the always-metaphysical subject is always a fiction, always tropologically determined. It is therefore necessary to reflect upon the kinds of tropes that continue to determine *fictional* avatars of subjectivity, whether positively or otherwise: on the one hand, the *monster* as an extreme form of either the human or the inhuman; and, on the other, what Susan Bordo calls one of the “constant tropes of

female narcissism: women shown preening, looking in mirrors [...] exhibiting themselves for an assumed spectator, asking to be admired for their beauty” (139). In other words, the trope of narcissistic specular self-objectification; an updating and “masculinizing” of the pre-modern *vanitas* trope via the eighteenth-century cult of the aesthete (Melchior-Bonnet 178). As will be seen, both of these tropes, in their convergence with the master-trope of the mirror, contribute in significant ways to the history of representing a subjective interiority via exteriorized dramatizations of either unreflective desire or hyper-conscious alienation.

The monstrous begins as one of beauty’s others, in accordance with the dualism of Western metaphysics (Watt 295–96), with the long-standing and naturalized relation in Western culture between beauty and visible, external form: “For Plato and those who followed, the beauty of the body is a reflection of an ideal beauty and thus the expression of the good. [...] [By] the medieval period moral values had been firmly provided with this aesthetic foundation” (Hutcheon and Hutcheon 47, see also 43–4; Eco 4–16)—a link whose “conceptual and imaginative impact” was only reinforced through its Christianizing by St. Augustine (Hutcheon and Hutcheon 47, see also 43–4; Bordo 151–52). Since the eighteenth century at least, modernity has witnessed a strange transformation in the relation between beauty and the monstrous, the product of a larger transformation in the post-Renaissance Neoplatonic tradition of equating external, physical beauty with “inner beauty” as a special type of virtue (Melchior-Bonnet 136). At most levels of culture this habit of thought has been submitted to traditional gender categories, with woman’s “virtue” in particular signifying as more a kind of quantity, value, or capital, than as the basis for a concept of feminine subjectivity—with a few notable literary exceptions (to speak for the moment only of pre-twentieth-century Western culture).

Just as pre-twentieth-century literary representations of women frequently involve an impossibly ideal virtue, they frequently also embody the innate threat of vice, often in the same baroque figure. Milton’s diabolically clever amplification of the character of Eve from the book of Genesis, for example, for all its complexity, proves what became the rule for much of the modern period in the literary articulation of woman’s double obligation: to be as chaste as she is beautiful. In this schema, the woman who is the latter but not the former is always potentially monstrous, in a metaphorical sense that barely veils its moral import (Johnson 250). In Book 4 of *Paradise Lost*, Eve recounts to Adam her first memory of coming into being, but not into self-consciousness (she tells the story, of course, after the fact, from a position of epistemological enlightenment):

That day I oft remember, when from sleep
 I first awaked, and found myself reposed
 [...], much wond'ring where
 And what I was, when thither brought, and how.
 Not distant far from thence a murmuring sound
 Of waters issued from a cave and spread
 Into a liquid plain, then stood unmoved
 Pure as th' expanse of heav'n; I thither went
 With unexperienced thought, and laid me down
 On the green bank, to look into the clear
 Smooth lake, that to me seemed another sky.
 As I bent down to look, just opposite,
 A shape within the wat'ry gleam appeared
 Bending to look on me, I started back,
 It started back, but pleased I soon returned,
 Pleased it returned as soon with answering looks
 Of sympathy and love; there I had fixed
 Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire,
 Had not a voice thus warned me, 'What thou seest,
 What there thou seest fair creature is thyself,
 With thee it came and goes: but follow me,
 And I will bring thee where no shadow stays
 Thy coming, and thy soft embraces, he
 Whose image thou art, him thou shalt enjoy
 Inseparably thine [...] (2.449–73)

This is modern English literature's primal scene of woman tempted by her native beauty into a narcissistic trap, read by some critics as an allegory for her innate moral deformity: *vanitas* as metaphorical monstrousness. As a critical revisioning of art history has shown, this trope has innumerable visual analogues in Western painting and sculpture (e.g. Berger 50–1), and its roots in classical thought. In Aristotle's words: "we should look upon the female state as being as it were a deformity, though one which occurs in the ordinary course of nature" (qtd. in Shelley 239 n. 7). The scene epitomizes the structuring irony of *Paradise Lost*: as long as she gazes, rapt and unknowing, at her own beautiful reflection, Eve lacks reflective consciousness and therefore subjectivity in the modern sense. Once she is guided by God's voice (in a shift from looking to hearing) to assume her proper place by Adam, as the reflection of God's image in him, Eve becomes the gender-coded type for non-autonomous subjectivity in *Paradise Lost* and modernity per se: she is *subjected*, in the sense of the classical translation of *hupokeimenon* as *subjectum* or 'that which is thrown under.' At this

stage, of course, gender difference means everything: Eve's feminine beauty is set apart from Adam's masculine beauty. But Adam is *more* beautiful in Milton's doctrinaire sense, being, as an image of God, one step closer to real, ideal beauty: he is a *truer* image than she. The divine Grace reflected in Adam is *refracted* in Eve as feminine "grace." Her beauty, like her selfhood, is secondary, derived, and therefore inauthentic.

Still, Eve's subjectivity, unlike Satan's, is essentially *positively* determined, grounded in a second-hand but positive relation with an other. This is a Christianized version of a trope as ancient as the Narcissus myth itself: Narcissus, as Melchior-Bonnet reminds us, was "punished by Nemesis for having scorned Echo's love, for having refused the mediation of the other in the construction of the self" (106; cf. 112). The position of "other" that, in its Christian overwriting, is occupied by God as reflected in Adam's image, is subsequently vacated by a *deus absconditus*, and, ultimately, reconceived as always already vacant in one of the most radical definitions of the postmodern (this recognition of the purely fictive "reality" of God marks the decisive shift away from a Cartesian subjectivity predicated on an existent God [Taylor 156–57]). Such a version of a postmodern self is thus left alone, always already abandoned to face its own referenceless, purely simulacral, image. This is the "truth" that the film's first mirror scene illustrates in a collapsing of the metaphorical and literal levels of signification.

With reference to John Berger's famous formulation, "men act and women appear," Milton's Eve acquires the knowledge that, as a woman, she "exists to be seen" (47)—a politically disadvantageous and epistemologically complex position, in contrast to what would become the typically short-sighted popular cultural cliché of men, who, "immersed in what they are doing [...] never [...] display themselves purely as 'sights,' or gaze at themselves in the mirror" (Bordo 139). In focusing on Shelley's use of autobiographical discourse in *Frankenstein* (in an observation that is not contradicted by the second-hand status of Eve's selfhood, as noted above), Barbara Johnson discusses what she calls the "monstrousness of selfhood" with the observation that "the very notion of a self, the very shape of human life stories, has always, from St. Augustine to Freud, been modelled on the man" (251). It is out of this gender disparity that the female self's epistemological and ontological monstrousness emerges. What remains to be elucidated is the degree to which this seemingly gender-specific feature is incorporated, ironically, into the new postmodern masculine subject—ironically because this re-affirmation of gender difference occurs for once at the *expense* of the masculine.

Mary Shelley's monster, in his ugliness, self-loathing, and desire to be virtuous, has been read as equivalently morally deformed—as if his interior had to come,

ineluctably, to correspond with his repulsive exterior (34). The monster never self-identifies with Eve, but their metaphorical resemblance is the focus of Gilbert and Gubar's persuasive feminist reading: "just as surely as Eve's moral deformity is symbolized by the monster's physical malformation, the monster's physical ugliness represents his social illegitimacy, his bastardy, his namelessness" (240). For his part, the monster identifies first with the deeply embittered postlapsarian Adam (Milton 10.743–45), and then with Satan (Shelley 87–8), in a subjective reversal of the poem's redemptive trajectory. He is never even a *subjected* subject in the sense that Eve embodies for womankind. In this respect, as the monster becomes increasingly desperate in his isolation and desolation, and therefore increasingly "monstrous" in the escalating violence of his vengeance, he also becomes increasingly "human" in the emergent Romantic sense for which Milton's Satan is proleptic: no matter how evil the monster is or claims to be, no matter how far from human fraternity he is cast (like the abject Satan), he possesses, like Eve, a clear and subjectively grounded identity, and is thus a thoroughly modern self in this sense (De Vries and Weber 2ff). Ironically he is therefore also all the more *inhuman*: his subjectivity is negatively determined, lacking as he does any positive relation to an other. It is in this extremely significant sense that Frankenstein's monster remains distinct from the likes of Patrick Bateman: like Satan, he still has a creator to curse (Shelley 88) and can at least envision the possibility of an existence *not* defined by radical alienation. In the episode in question (as will be seen), Shelley's monster experiences for the first time the full brunt of his alienation not from the world, which he has already learned to hate, but from himself. Like Eve's, this ironically "formative" experience occurs by means of a reflective pool, in another key instance of the mirror trope.

During the Enlightenment, between the early modern period and the early nineteenth century, the mirror-trope becomes more complex, the polyvalence of reflection overlaying but not displacing altogether the mirror's imitative powers. Melchior-Bonnet affirms the double nature of the "importance of specular consciousness" from this historical moment on, as identity "takes a step from the outside to the inside" (176): "Through this doubled gaze [...] both introspective and mimetic, the individual could define himself as a subject. Examining the self in the mirror of 'Know thyself' allows the individual to understand himself through the mastering of his consciousness, whereas by creating his image in the mirror of others, he becomes a spectacle for himself under exterior gazes. To see oneself and to be seen, to know oneself and to be known—these are interdependent acts" (156).

Interposed between the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries, Shelley's monster stands as an utterly ironic instance of a highly introspective subject who is all-too

aware of his repulsive appearance. In a sense, as Eve is trapped in an unknowing narcissistic circuit, the monster is trapped knowingly within this interdependence of seeing/being seen and self-knowledge/being known. In their strong reading of *Frankenstein*, Gilbert and Gubar also develop Berger's axiom: "Women have seen themselves (because they have been seen) as monstrous, vile, degraded creatures, second-comers, and emblems of filthy materiality, even though they have also been traditionally defined as superior spiritual beings, angels, better halves." For these critics, "Shelley's conscious or unconscious awareness of the monster woman implicit in the angel woman [i.e. Milton's Eve] is perhaps clearest in the revisionary scene where the monster, as if taking his cue from Eve in *Paradise Lost* Book 4, first catches sight of his own image" (239): "How was I terrified, when I viewed myself in a transparent pool! At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification. Alas! I did not yet entirely know the fatal effects of this miserable deformity" (Shelley 76).

Despite the meaningful formal homology, the two scenes could hardly contrast more in their relevance to the history of the mirror as a trope for subjectivity. Eve "with unexperienced thought" sees a beautiful other and becomes trapped in a tautology of unknowing narcissistic desire (note Milton's pun on "vain"), and must be led away and taught to understand the difference between a genuine other and the "shadow" or false image that prevents her from assuming her rightful place at Adam's side. Her error inheres precisely in her initial ignorance of the double difference between image and reality and non-self and self. As a woman, her "innocence" is never completely innocent but compromised by an inherently idolatrous narcissism. The monster, on the other hand, sees what he knows full well is his own image and only wishes it were not so. In contrast to Eve, he comes to a bitter acceptance that the image and his self are one, an elision reflected in the novel's discourse, playing on the polysemy of the first-person pronoun: "I became fully convinced that *I* was in reality the monster that *I* am." The focus of this elision of heretofore human self and monstrous other is the creature's hideous appearance. More than the ugliness of his face, the narrative emphasizes throughout the grotesque and inhuman quality of his entire, monstrous frame: not merely his disproportionately large size but also the composite, heterogeneous nature of his body, stitched together out of the bits and pieces of stolen corpses. The monster is forced to confront this horrific, piecemeal exterior and try to reconcile it with the unique and sensitive soul he says he feels within. The tortured self that emerges as a result is very much a product of this collision of potentially beautiful inside and literally repulsive outside; this is the locus of the monster's monstrousness.

In a kind of psychological allegory, Shelley's monster thus becomes paradigmatic of the monstrous self in modernity; a self which, in its late or post-modern incarnations, demands to be read differently according to its specific gender characterization.

In Gilbert and Gubar's comparison of *Frankenstein* and *Paradise Lost*, the irony inherent in the scene of Eve's self-awakening is made manifest: "though her reflection in 'the clear / Smooth Lake' is as beautiful as the monster's is ugly, the self-absorption that Eve's confessed passion for her own image signals is plainly meant by Milton to seem morally ugly, a hint of her potential for spiritual deformity" (239). Gilbert and Gubar contrast this "figurative monstrosity of female narcissism" with "the literal monstrosity many women are taught to see as characteristic of their own bodies" (240). But there is yet another type of overtly monstrous femininity to compare to this "subtle deformity"; one that is more immediately relevant here, involving an almost Nietzschean revaluation of the term *monstrous*, bringing it into line with the reading I offer of Bateman's character in *American Psycho*, the film. This is the idea of *monstrous* feminine beauty purveyed in popular cultural representations of women throughout the twentieth century to the present moment, thanks to extraordinary advances in technologies of reproduction—not to say reproductive technologies—for which the mirror is now paradigmatic. This is a form of beauty in which the woman is objectified or reified as if she were only a body or a collection of specific body parts (a cultural practice with a long and influential history—for example, witness the *anatomization* typical of Renaissance love poetry).

In neither novel nor film is Bateman monstrous merely because he is a serial killer who graduates to mass murder by the end. In the film, far more directly than in the book, he is monstrous for reasons parallel to those criteria of monstrosity identified for mass media images of women. As a character he is an amalgam of various commodified attributes: muscular body, blandly handsome face, designer clothes, expensive haircut, Wall Street job, uptown apartment, and so forth. Bateman's attempts to assert any kind of *authentic* gendered identity fail to the same extent that they succeed: he is *more* fake and *more* depthless than all the other men around him, whom he resembles outwardly to the point of interchangeability—a joke underscored to great effect in the film in its presentation of Bateman as one of several nearly identically handsome young men in designer suits, tortoise-shell framed glasses, and slicked-back hair (e.g. Ellis 250; 379).

In what is now a cultural studies commonplace, the masculine or *hyper-masculine* is the "new beauty" alongside representations of women in Western culture, where the male body historically is already the standard for physical beauty (Bordo 122–29): "The implicit heterosexualizing of the Platonic notion of beauty that took

place in the Roman and then medieval worlds should not allow us to forget the fact that the beautiful body of which Socrates spoke was always the young male body, as it was in the Renaissance” (Hutcheon and Hutcheon 47). Cultural critics have undertaken the critical evaluation of the representation of the male body as an objectified or reified amalgamation of disparate but sexually charged parts held together and achieving integrity only through cosmetics, exercise, surgery, tanning, and the like — in short, as a sexualized commodity that still somehow possesses subjectivity and is therefore not reducible to its objectified physicality (Bordo 129). As Bordo amply demonstrates, this new man may be equivalent on the *formal* level to popular cultural representations of women, but the *meanings* produced are by no means necessarily equivalent (129–43). As a representation, the new man in fact continues to constitute the most privileged genre of subjectivity (see: Nixon 293–95; Bordo 112). To further update Berger’s axiom, then: this man is looked at (by the camera and the viewer) and he looks at himself being looked at, but he also just looks (at women, other men, etc.). But Harron takes this further: Bateman, in the scene in question (and throughout the film), looks most intensively at *himself* as *both* subject *and* object; he self-objectifies as he subjects himself to his own “cold gaze.” This represents, in effect, the logical extension of the reflexive subjectivity as *specular consciousness* that emerged in the eighteenth century — a *masculine* consciousness marked by vanity and narcissism refined over hours of idle inspection of a self-image that is its own spectacle (Melchior-Bonnet 178). (In the film’s notorious three-way sex scene, for example, Bateman, when he is not worrying that the proceedings are being properly videotaped, spends most of his time as a spectator of his own performance via a large mirror beside the bed. Bateman, in this scene, plays both director and male lead, directing himself and the two bored prostitutes in a staged re-enactment of one of the stock pornographic situations he habitually consumes.)

Outright identification and outright objectification are both inadequate responses to the film’s bathroom mirror scene, precisely because Bateman is shown to be looking at his own reflection. He therefore manages to retain a certain modicum of subjectivity even as he admits to being, as it were, absent from himself. In an interview, actor Christian Bale comments on his preparation for the role: “The strange thing with this character is that [...] Bateman is performing the whole time. [...] [W]ith most characters, there’s a great fear of showing, revealing that you’re performing. You know, you want to be as naturalistic as possible. With this, I didn’t have to hide that very much. Even when he’s by himself, there is no Bateman there. At all” (Ebner 4).

Because Eve gets to recount the narrative of her initial flirtation with idolatrous narcissism, the reader knows that she is granted subjectivity—a measure of Milton’s relatively progressive sexual politics. In *Frankenstein*, the monster, too, is granted

subjectivity—indeed, it is his curse. Like Eve, he gets to speak for himself, tell his own story, confess his crimes; we “see” things from his point of view. The reader is free to sympathize or even identify with him, just as many have identified with Satan (different readers, perhaps, than those who identify with Eve). But like Satan’s discourses, Eve’s and the monster’s autobiographical confessions are only small portions of much larger narratives, whereas Bateman’s confessional discourse is the whole of *American Psycho*; the novel’s perspective, and its voice, in general, are his. In the language of fictional psychological realism, we are privy only to his thoughts, and therefore only *his* interpretations of things—and this is a crucial factor in our own interpretation of Bateman as a character and of the novel’s outcome. As can be observed from this one scene, the film reproduces the novel’s monologic confessional perspective with the crucial distinction that we listen to Bateman’s voice-overs while watching him and therefore variously desiring and/or identifying with him in the manner typical of our consumption of mainstream cinema, television, and advertising images. Harron’s film does not translate the novel’s language more or less directly into cinematic terms any more than any other filmic adaptation. Rather, the film presents Bateman, the quintessential male yuppie, in terms of the visual codes of masculinity first introduced in fashion photography of the mid-1980s—which, as Bordo points out, drew on the visual vocabulary of the gay subculture of the time (122–29). The film *American Psycho* offers a strikingly different presentation of Bateman as a sort of ambulatory underwear model. That is, it presents Christian Bale’s body and face as a spectacle for the viewer’s visual consumption—an effect that is both illustrated and doubled in this scene in which he makes the almost Nabokovian confession that his face is a mask hiding the absence of any authentic, coherent self: “I have all the characteristics of a human being: flesh, blood, skin, hair—but not a single, clear, identifiable emotion, except for greed, and disgust. Something horrible is happening inside me and I don’t know why. My nightly bloodlust has overflowed into my days. I feel lethal; on the verge of frenzy. I think my mask of sanity is about to slip.”

That he calls this mask the “mask of sanity” only foregrounds the film’s revaluation of his psychopathology *as* identity. More than a project of self-maintenance or management, Bateman’s is one of self-construction; the creation not *ex nihilo* but out of the commodified materials of consumer culture of an identity that only resembles him externally because that exterior, that image, is already there for him to model himself after. Therefore it is redundant to add that this identity is not co-extensive with who he “really” is because *that* self is predicated on a radically, even paradoxically, absent substratum: “he” is the negative ground of his own absence from himself. Therefore the long-standing inside-outside dichotomy or dialectic fundamental to

modern subjectivity is rendered finally moot; the difference between subjective interiority as the locus of the “authentic self,” and misleading, “inauthentic,” external appearance, is collapsed—as if it had never existed at all. As Bateman mutters, in the film’s final scene, in response to a friend’s comment about Reagan’s televisual performance, “Inside doesn’t matter”:

“There are no more barriers to cross. All I have in common with the uncontrollable and the insane, the vicious and the evil, all the mayhem I have caused, and my utter indifference toward it, I have now surpassed. My pain is constant and sharp, and I do not hope for a better world for anyone. In fact, I want my pain to be inflicted on others; I want no one to escape. But even after admitting this, there is no catharsis; my punishment continues to elude me, and I gain no deeper knowledge of myself. No new knowledge can be extracted from my telling. This confession has meant *nothing*.”

Morally speaking, Bateman personifies what Mark Kingwell, in his deliberately banal inversion of Arendt, calls the “evil of banality”: the insidiously bland face of global popular consumer culture (58–65). This is Bateman’s face, which is his *mask*; they are continuous, indistinguishable. Thus what is underneath or inside cannot be called “evil” in any conventional moral or even psychopathological sense, unless evil is redefined in terms of that feature of Bateman’s self that makes him monstrous, and that qualifies the film as horror: the fact that “he simply is not *there*.” Moreover, there is no “inside” as such: his inside is the same as his outside, epitomized in the film’s fetishistic representation of Bateman/Bale’s commodified body. A *prosopopeion* of Baudrillard’s third-order simulacrum (in *Simulacra and Simulation*), Bateman is a mirror that reflects only itself, in a radical and ironic exteriorizing of specular self-reflection as the tropological basis for modern subjective interiority.

Of course some will point out the danger of forgetting that, on the literal level of both film and novel, Bateman is a psychopath—a fact well illustrated in the passage quoted above. But it must then be stressed that this very psychopathology becomes in both texts a sort of metaphor for Bateman’s alienation from not merely every other human being but from *himself*, in a manner more radical than the existential alienation characteristic of the modern episteme. Here again, the film emphasizes more clearly the narrative’s concluding, irreducible ambiguity, wherein Bateman appears to discern the horrifying knowledge that his absolute disconnection from others has made it possible for him to know himself well enough to know that there is no self “*there*” to know.

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RUSSELL J. A. KILBOURN is an assistant professor of Film Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University. He has published articles in film, cultural studies, and comparative literature, and is currently working on a study of W.G. Sebald's prose works.