

MONSTROSITY

AND THE MONSTROUS

The existence of monsters throws doubt on life's ability to teach us order. This doubt is immediate, no matter for how long a time we have had confidence, no matter how accustomed we have been to see honeysuckle grow on honeysuckle vines, tadpoles become frogs, mares suckle colts, and in general to see like engender like. It is sufficient that this confidence be shaken once by a morphological variation, by a single equivocal appearance, for a radical fear to possess us. Perhaps, fear, you will say; but why radical? Because we are living beings, real effects of the laws of life, and in our turn future causes of life. A failure on the part of life concerns us doubly: a failure could affect us, and we could cause a failure. It is only because we men are living beings that a morphological failure is, in our eyes, a monster. Suppose we were pure reason, a pure intellectual machine for observing, calculating, and accounting—inert, and indifferent to the objects that give rise

Translated by Therese Jaeger.

Monstrosity and the Monstrous

to thought: in that case the monster would simply be that which was different from the ordinary, of an order other than the most probable order.

The qualification of monster must be reserved for organic beings. There is no such thing as a mineral monster. There is no such thing as a mechanical monster. That which has no rule of internal cohesion, whose form and dimensions have no variations from one end to the other of a spectrum that can be called a measure, mold, or model—that cannot be called monstrous. One can say that a rock is enormous, but not that a mountain is monstrous, except in a fabulous universe where a mountain can give birth to a mouse. The relationship between the enormous and the monstrous has yet to be clarified. Both are well beyond the norm. But the norm from which the enormous escapes is purely metrical. In that case, why are only greatly enlarged objects called enormous? Doubtless because after a certain degree of growth quality becomes questionable. Enormity tends towards monstrosity. The ambiguity of being gigantic: is a giant enormous or is he a monster? The mythological giant is prodigious, his largeness “annihilates the end which inspired the concept.”¹ If man is defined by a certain limitation of forces and functions, then the man whose largeness carries him beyond the limitations of man is no longer a man. (To say that he no longer is a man, by the way, is to say that he still is one.) On the contrary, smallness seems to enclose an object’s quality intimately, in a secret. The less quality is exposed, the more it is preserved.

In our definition of a monster, then, we must include its nature as a living being. A monster is a living being of negative value. We may borrow at this point some of the fundamental concepts of Eugène Dupréel’s theory of values, which is so original and so profound. That which constitutes the value of living beings, or more exactly that which makes living beings creatures that can be evaluated in relation to the nature of their physical surroundings, is their specific consistency that cuts through the vicissitudes of their material environment. A consistency expressed by their resistance to deformation, by

¹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Section 26.

their struggle for formal integrity: the regeneration of mutilations among certain species, and reproduction in all species. The monster is not only a being of diminished value; it is a being that is valuable only as a foil. By demonstrating how precarious is the stability to which life has accustomed us—yes, only accustomed, but we made a law out of its custom—the monster gives an all the more eminent value to specific repetition, to morphological regularity, to successful structure; it makes us realise that these are not necessary. It is monstrosity, not death, that is the counter-value to life. Death is the permanent and unconditional threat of decomposition of the organism; it is exterior limitation; it is the negation of the living by the not-living. But monstrosity is the accidental and conditional threat of non-achievement or distortion in the formation of form; it is interior limitation; it is the negation of the living by the non-viable.

Surely it is a confused understanding of the monster's importance to a correct and complete appreciation of the values of life that is the basis for the ambivalent attitude of the human consciousness toward the monster. Fear, as we have said, and even panicked terror are a part. But another part is curiosity, and even fascination. The monstrous is the reverse of the marvelous, but it is marvelous just the same. On the one hand, it is disquieting: life is less sure of itself than we thought. On the other hand, it gives value: since life is capable of failures, all its successes are failures that have been avoided. The fact that successes are not necessary depreciates them en masse, but it enhances the individual success. When we approach the philosophy of values from the bias of negative values, there is no difficulty in agreeing with Gaston Bachelard that the true is the limit of lost illusions; and as regards our problem it is just as easy to agree with Gabriel Tarde that the normal type is the zero of monstrosity.²

But as soon as the consciousness has been led to suspect life of eccentricity, to dissociate the concepts of reproduction and repetition, who can forbid it to suppose that life is still more lively—that is, capable of an even greater exercise of

² *L'Opposition universelle*, Paris, 1897, p. 25.

Monstrosity and the Monstrous

liberty, capable not only of provoked exceptions, but also of spontaneous transgressions beyond its own custom? In the presence of a bird with three claws, should one be more aware that it has one too many, or that it has only one too many? To consider life timid or economical is to feel oneself capable of going further. What inspired man to juxtapose monsters with multiple heads, perfect men, or monstrous emblems, to the monsters produced by life, as if man's inventions were likely to tempt nature? Was it the fact that life might be inscribed, in the geometric sense of the word, in the curve of a poetic élan whose imaginary number is revealed to be infinite? Or could it be that the rudeness of life incites the human fantasy to imitation, in order to make life take as well as it gives? But here there is such a difference between what life gives and what we give back that it might seem unreasonable to accept, so virtuously rationalistic an explanation. Life is poor in monsters. The fantastic is a whole world.

It is here that the thorny question of the relationship between monstrosity and the monstrous arises. They are a duality of concepts with the same etymological root. They are at the service of two forms of normative judgment, the medical and the legal, initially confused rather than compounded in religious thought, and then progressively abstracted and laïcized.

There is no doubt that classical antiquity and the Middle Ages considered monstrosity to be the effect of the monstrous. The very term hybrid, apparently so positive and descriptive, proves this with its etymology. Interspecific animal products are the result of crossbreeding that has violated the rule of endogamy, the result of unions between dissimilar beings. The step from hybridization to monstrosity is easy. The Middle Ages preserved the identification of the monstrous with the criminal, but enriched it with a reference to the diabolical. The monster was at the same time the effect of an infraction of the rule of specific sexual segregation and the sign of a will to pervert the tableau of creatures. Monstrosity was less a consequence of the contingency of life than of the license of living beings. Why, demanded Scipion du Pleix, does Africa produce more monsters than other regions? "Because all sorts

of animals, meeting by the water to drink, normally couple there without discretion as to species.”³ Monstrosity occurred unexpectedly because of lack of discretion, an ambiguous term full of meaning in this context. Monstrosity was the result of an animals’ carnival, after too much drink!

Even more than in the case of animals, the apparition of monstrosity among men was a signature. Concern with the illicit eclipsed concern with the irregular, responsibility eclipsed causality. If the Orient considered monsters divine, Greece and Rome sacrificed them. Even more: the mother of a monster was stoned in Sparta, expelled from Rome, and reintegrated into the city after purification. Such a wide divergence of attitudes between Egypt and Rome came first of all from different theories of the possibilities of nature. To admit metempsychosis, metamorphoses, was to admit a relationship between the species, including man, that was a basis for interfertility. On the other hand, as soon as one distinguished in nature divine zones of influence, or fundamental pacts (Lucretius), as soon as one sketched a classification of the species based on their method of generation, and began to observe the conditions and circumstances of fertilization (Aristotle), nature defined itself by impossibilities as well as by possibilities. Zoomorphic monstrosity, if one admitted its existence, had to be considered the result of a deliberate attempt at infraction of the order of things, which is one with their perfection; it had to be considered the result of abandoning oneself to the dizzy fascination of the undefined, of chaos, of the anti-cosmos. The medieval bond between teratology and demonology appears, then, to have been the consequence of the persistent dualism of Christian theology, as pointed out by Ernest Martin in his *Histoire des monstres*.⁴ There is a great deal of literature on this subject. We shall refer to it only insofar as it helps us to understand that the monstrous, initially a legal concept, was progressively turned into a category of the imagination. It is a matter, all told, of a change in

³ *Corps de Philosophie: La Physique ou Science des choses naturelles*, bk. VII, ch. 22: “Des monstres,” Geneva, 1636. 1st ed. Paris, 1607.

⁴ *Histoire des monstres depuis l’Antiquité jusqu’à nos jours*, Paris, 1880, p. 69.

Monstrosity and the Monstrous

responsibility. The theologians, judges or philosophers who could not allow the possibility of women's direct commerce with incubi or succubi, did not hesitate to admit that the vision of a demoniac apparition could alter the development of a human embryo. The theory of birthmarks, still very much alive in popular belief, was expounded by Hippocrates in his treatise *On Superfetation*. They say of this prince of medicine that he applied this theory to disculpate a noble Athenian lady, explaining that it was quite sufficient that she should have looked at the portrait of an Ethiopian. Altogether, long before Pascal denounced the imagination as the mistress of errors and falseness, it had been credited with the physical power of falsifying the ordinary operations of nature. Ambroise Paré included power of imagination among the causes of monstrosity. Malebranche proposed a strictly physiological explanation, along the principles of Cartesian mechanics. In this case imagination was only a physical function of imitation, according to which the objects seen by a mother had a "counter-effect" on the child in gestation. Now Malebranche, as well as Hippocrates, admitted that the perception of an image had the same effect as the perception of the object itself. He affirmed that the passions, desire, and disorder of the imagination had similar effects.⁵ In a rationalized and therefore weakened form, we find the monstrous here at the origin of monstrosities. The advantage of this theory for Malebranche, a believer in the preformation and encasement of seeds, was that it removed from God the guilt for having originally created monstrous seeds. One would like to be able to object that such a theory, while it might be applicable in the case of human monstrosity, could not be generalized. But it has been. Dr. Eller (1689-1760), the director of the Royal Academy of Prussia, published a dissertation in the memoirs of that academy in 1756, crediting animals with the power of creating a notable monstrosity by the power of imagination. Eller described a dog which he himself had observed, that was born with a head "not at all dissimilar to that of a turkey." The mother had been accustomed to stroll in the lower court while pregnant, and

⁵ *Recherche de la vérité*, Book II, Part 1, Chapter 7.

had been chased away by blows from the beak of an irascible turkey. By virtue of which Eller wrote: "Therefore women should not pride themselves on being the only creatures with the prerogative of creating monsters by the force of their imagination; we are convinced, by the preceding story, that animals can do the same."⁶

We have just seen the imagination credited with the ability to imprint on living beings in gestation the traits of a seen object, an effigy, an image, the inconsistent contours of a desire—that is, basically, of a dream. On observing that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries imagination was credited with such power—and with the intention of presenting a rational explanation—how surprising it is to see the familiarity with which men formerly lived with monsters, whose legends they confused with history; to see their carelessness in separating reality from fiction, ready as they were to believe simultaneously that monsters existed because they were imagined and that they existed after they were imagined—put differently, that fiction fashioned reality and that reality authenticated fiction.

The teratology of the Middle Ages and of the Renaissance can hardly be called a census of monstrosities; it was a celebration of the monstrous. It was an accumulation of the themes of legend, and of schemes of figures in which animal forms played at the game of exchanging organs, of varying the combinations, a game in which tools and even machines were treated as organs, composed of parts of living beings. The monsters of Hieronymus Bosch recognized no demarcation between organisms and utensils, no border between the monstrous and the absurd. The recent works of Baltrusaitis, *Le Moyen Age fantastique*⁷ and *Réveils et prodiges*,⁸ are a decisive contribution to our knowledge of the origins and meaning of monster-motifs. Monsters were the unvarying motifs of cathedral bas-reliefs, of illuminated apocalypses, bestiaries and cosmo-

⁶ "Recherches sur la force de l'imagination des femmes enceintes sur le fœtus, à l'occasion d'un chien monstrueux" (*Histoire de l'Académie royale des sciences et belles-lettres*, 1756. Berlin, 1758, p. 12).

⁷ Paris, Colin, 1955.

⁸ Paris, Colin, 1960.

Monstrosity and the Monstrous

ographies, of droll prints, collections of auguries and prognostications. The same schemes of monsters, the same composite beings were sometimes symbolic, sometimes documentary, sometimes didactic. The different European countries spread them, exchanged them, brought them into contact with each other. The Netherlands and Switzerland, Anvers and Basel were very flourishing monster-fatherlands. The first works on teratology of etiological intention, those of surgeons or doctors like Paré or Liceti, are hardly to be distinguished from the prodigious chronicles of Julius Obsequens (fourth century) and Lycosthenes (1557). Their iconography juxtaposed monstrosity and the monstrous: the child with two heads, the furry child, the child with a cervical rat's tail, the bald woman, the girl with the legs of a female donkey, the pig with a human head, and the bovine monster with seven heads (like the beast of the Apocalypse), among many others. But the moment for the triumph of rational thought over monstrosity seemed to have arrived, just as the imagination had been pleased to believe that heroes and saints could triumph over monsters.

"The necessary complement to a monster is a child's skull," said Paul Valéry, who considered that the role which art has attributed to painted, sung, or sculptured monsters was uniformly ridiculous, and who confessed that his only response to the sight of the bizarre and baroque compositions of collections of paleontological animals was to laugh.⁹ Valéry's statement was a valid abridgment of the rationalist attitude toward the monstrous, in the age of positive teratology. When monstrosity has become a biological concept, when monstrosities have been classified according to constant relationships, when we flatter ourselves that we can create them experimentally, then the monster has been naturalized, the irregular has been subjected to the rule, and the prodigious to foreknowledge. It seems a matter of course that in such a period the scientific spirit finds monstrous the man who could formerly believe in so many monstrous animals. In the age of fables, monstrosity denounced the monstrous power of the imagination. In the age of experiment, the monstrous is considered a symptom of puerility or mental

⁹ "Au sujet d'Adonis," in *Variété*, Paris, Gallimard, 33rd ed. 1927, p. 81.

sickness; it points out the weakness or failure of reason. One repeats with Goya: "The sleep of reason gives birth to monsters," without asking sufficiently, precisely on consideration of Goya's work, whether by giving birth he meant engendering monsters or bearing them—put differently, whether the sleep of reason might not be the liberator rather than the generator of monsters. The same historical period that, according to Michel Foucault,¹⁰ naturalized madness, put itself to naturalizing monsters. The Middle Ages, which did not derive its name for having allowed extremes to coexist, was the period when madmen lived in the same society as the sane, and monsters with normal beings. In the nineteenth century, the madman was in an asylum, where he was useful as a foil for reason, and the monster was in the embryologist's jar, where it was useful as a foil for the norm.

The eighteenth century was not too hard on monsters. Although its enlightenment dispersed many of them, together with a large number of sorcerers—"If the day is breaking, let us be gone," say the sorcerers in one of Goya's *Caprices*—it retained the paradoxical search for an oblique approach to the intelligence of regular phenomena of organization in aberrant organisms. Monsters were used as substitutes in crucial experiments for deciding between the two systems explaining the generation and development of plants and animals: preformation and epigenesis. They were used also to support the case for transitional forms, or, as Leibniz said, middle species, in the theory of a continual ladder of beings. Because they appeared to be specifically equivocal, monsters assured the passage from one species to another. Their existence made it easier for the mind to conceive of continuity. *Natura non facit saltus, non datur hiatus formarum*: that was why monsters existed, but on a purely comparative basis. De Maillet and Robinet did what was necessary to evoke all the monsters they needed without having to invent them; we see all the fish-birds, marine men, and sirens resurrected from the bestiaries of the Renaissance. They reappeared, what is more, in a context and with an intention that recall the spirit of the Renaissance.

¹⁰ *Folie et déraison, Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, Paris, Plon, 1961.

Monstrosity and the Monstrous

It was a question of insurrection against the strict legality imposed on nature by the physical and philosophical mechanists, of nostalgia for the lack of distinction between forms, of panpsychism and pansexualism. Monsters were called upon to legitimize an intuitive vision of a life in which order was effaced by fertility. *Telliamed: Entretiens d'un philosophe indien avec un missionnaire français* (1748) is an example of oriental mythology resuscitated in the service of anti-theology. And we can read in the *Considérations philosophiques de la gradation naturelle des formes de l'être ou les Essais de la Nature qui apprend à faire l'homme* (1748): "Let us believe that the most apparently bizarre forms... serve as a passage to neighboring forms; that they prepare and lead into the combinations that follow them, as they are led into by those which precede them; that, far from disturbing the order of things, they contribute to it."¹¹ The same theses and similar arguments were taken up in the *Rêve de d'Alembert* and in *La Lettre sur les aveugles à l'usage de ceux qui voient*. In addition Diderot, in that same *Lettre* (in which he labels the professor of physical optics Saunderson, born blind, as a monster, and on whose story he expounds on the occasion of a visit to the man born blind at Puisaux), intends to give a demonstration of his systematic method of using monstrosity as an instrument for analyzing ideas and ideals, and for breaking them down into their original matter. To resume: whether it was a question of embryology, systematics, or physiology, the eighteenth century made the monster not only an object but also an instrument of science.

It was really in the nineteenth century that the scientific explanation of monstrosity was elaborated, and with it the correlative reduction of the monstrous. Teratology was born of the meeting between comparative anatomy and embryology as it was reformed by the adoption of the theory of epigenesis. Jean-Frédéric Meckel the Younger explained certain simple monstrosities, and notably the monstrosities that were then called monstrosities by default, by arrested development, as K.-F. Wolff (*De ortu monstrorum*, 1772) had already suggested.

¹¹ P. 198.

Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire substituted the notion of retardation for that of arrestation. Monstrosity was the development of an organ halted at a stage passed by the other organs. It was the survivance of a transitory embryonic form. For an organism of a given species, today's monstrosity was the day before yesterday's normal condition. And in a comparative series of species, it was possible that the monstrous form of one might be the normal form of another. In his *Histoire des anomalies de l'organisation* (1837), Isidore Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, the son of Etienne, domesticated monstrosities—and in a fashion that was definitive in some respects—by placing them among anomalies, by classifying them according to the rules of the natural method, by applying a methodical nomenclature to them that is still in use, and above all by naturalizing the compound monster, the monster in whom one finds united the elements, complete or incomplete, of two or more organisms. Formerly, the compound monster had been considered the monster of monsters, because it was contrasted to the norm of a single individual. But if one referred the compound monster to two or more normal individuals, this type of monstrosity was no more monstrous than the simple monster. Isidore Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire put forth very pertinent reflections on the existence of anomalies. One of his formulas summed them up: "There are no exceptions to the laws of nature; there are only exceptions to the laws of naturalists."¹² The way in which concepts of anomalies were brought into relation to concepts of variety was extremely interesting, and became actually important towards the end of the century, in the context of the theories of evolution.

Teratology, consisting of descriptions, definitions, and classifications, was from that time on a natural science. But in a century that was only two years older than the term and concept of *biology*, any natural history tended to become an experimental science. And teratology, the experimental study of the conditions for the artificial production of monstrosities, was founded by Camille Dareste (1822-1899) in the middle of the century. The medieval artist had presented imaginary

¹² *Op. cit.*, bk. I, p. 37.

Monstrosity and the Monstrous

monsters. The scholar of the nineteenth century presumed to fabricate real monsters. When Marcelin Berthelot said that chemistry created its object, Dareste proclaimed that teratogeny should create its object as well. He flattered himself that he had succeeded in producing simple monstrosities in chicken embryos, according to the classification of Isidore Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, and he hoped to succeed in producing hereditary varieties. Encouraged by Darwin's appreciation of his experiments ("full of promise for the future"), Dareste hoped to use the resources of experimentation to elucidate the origin of species.¹³

From that time on monstrosity seems to have revealed the secret of its causes and laws; the anomaly seems to be called upon to explain the formation of the normal. Not because the normal is only an attenuated form of the pathological, but because the pathological is the normal that has been hindered or has deviated. Remove the hindrance and you obtain the norm. The transparency of monstrosity to scientific thought henceforth deprives it of all relationship to the monstrous. Realism systematically condemns the monstrous to be nothing more in kind than the imprint of monstrosity. Nowadays one must be Japanese to paint dragons; this is the period in which Gustave Courbet muttered: "If you want me to paint goddesses, show me some." If it exists at all in Europe, the monstrous becomes wise and dull. Mr. Ingres needed to borrow the theme of Robert saving Angélique, from *Orlando Furioso*, in order to have an opportunity to paint a monster; and the result was, first, the Goncourts' remark that French art knew monsters only from the story of Theramène, and, second, Valéry's laughter. In parallel fashion, positivist anthropology devotes itself to depreciating religious myths and their artistic representation. In 1878 Dr. Parrot tried to establish before the members of the Society of Anthropologists that the dwarf god Phtah, adored by the Egyptians, reproduced the characteristics of an achondroplastic monster.

One would like to show how the monstrous took refuge

¹³ *Recherches sur la production artificielle des monstruosités*, Paris, 1877, p. 44.

in poetry from that time on, and it would be pleasing to follow the sulphurous path that begins with Baudelaire and passes Rimbaud and Lautréamont to end with the surrealists. But how can one resist the temptation of finding the monstrous installed in the very heart of the scientific universe from which it had theoretically been expelled—the temptation of finding the biologist himself *flagrante delictu* as a surrealist? Did we not understand Dareste to have claimed for teratogeny the glory of creating its object? Did we not see Isidore Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire and Dareste relate the two problems of monstrosity and the creation of races—the former timidly, the latter with assurance? Could the submission of science to the reality of laws be only a trick of the Desire for Power?

In 1826 Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire took up again in Auteuil some old experiments on artificial incubation attempted in Egypt, imitating techniques used in the famous chicken ovens. The experiments were aimed at the determining of embryonic anomalies. In 1829, drawing a lesson from this research and its relationship to the question posed by Lamarck's thesis of the modifications of specific animal types, Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire wrote: "I tried to draw organization into unaccustomed paths."¹⁴

Doubtless this decision, inasmuch as it led to work on birds' eggs, did not derive from any unconscious fabulous motivation. Can we say as much of Réaumur when, after having told at length of what he called the *amours* of a chicken and a rabbit, he expressed his disappointment with the fact that such a bizarre union brought him neither "chickens covered with fur nor rabbits covered with feathers"? What shall we say on the day when we learn that they have tried experiments in teratogeny on man? The road from the curious to the scabrous, and from the scabrous to the monstrous, is straight, if not short. If the attempt of *all* possibilities in order to reveal reality is part of the code of experimentation, there is a risk that the borderline between the experimental and the monstrous might not be perceived right away. For the monstrous is one of the possibilities. We should like to understand this to

¹⁴ Quoted by Dareste, *Recherches* etc., p. 35.

Monstrosity and the Monstrous

mean only the imaginary monstrous, but we are conscious of its ambiguity. We have covered the entire distance between biologists who create their object and the creators of human monsters destined to be clowns, as described by Victor Hugo in *L'Homme qui rit*. We must hope that this distance will be maintained, but we cannot affirm that it will be so.

The ignorance of ancient man considered monsters a toy of nature; contemporary science has made them a toy of scholars. Let us play at fabricating cyclopic chickens, frogs with five legs, and siamese salamanders while waiting, some people think, to be able to play at fabricating, not sirens or centaurs, but perhaps an orangutang. If we did not know the author, the formula "to try to draw organization into unaccustomed paths" could pass for the announcement of a diabolical project. In that case we should find the monstrous at the origin of authentic monstrosities. The century of positivism would have realized that which the Middle Ages dreamt of, under the illusion that it was abolishing it.

We have been writing in the conditional tense, because while it is true that the monstrous is being worked on, in its way, in experimental teratology, nonetheless it has not, in the quality of its effects, surpassed that which life obtains without experiments. Today's teratology is less ambitious, more measured, than that of Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire and Dareste. In a recent lecture,¹⁵ Etienne Wolff remarked that the experimental teratologist limits his intervention to the disturbing of a process begun without his aid, a process whose elementary initial conditions he does not know. He lets living matter act as it will; he only waits and watches developments. In brief, said Mr. Wolff, "the experimenter has the feeling that he is only an accessory." His power is sharply limited, first by the fact that the plasticity of embryonic beginnings is of brief durations, and then by the fact that monstrosities do not go beyond the specific level. Not only does the modern biologist not create anything really new, but he understands why. He understands the merits of the two Geoffroy Saint-Hilaires better from having seen that there are types of teratological

¹⁵ Collège philosophique, Paris, 24 January 1962.

organization dominated by the laws of their specific organization. This means that all cyclops, from fish to man, are similarly organized. Nature, said Mr. Wolff, always pulls the same strings.¹⁶ The experimenter cannot pull more strings than nature.

*

We have said: life is poor in monsters, while the fantastic is a whole world.

Now we can understand why life is relatively poor in monsters. It is because organisms are capable of structural eccentricities only for a brief moment at the beginning of their development. But why do we say that the fantastic is a whole world, if it is true that a world, a cosmos, is an order? Is it because there are types—some would even say: archetypes—of the fantastic? Indeed, we meant only to say that the fantastic is capable of populating a whole world. The power of the imagination is inexhaustible, indefatigable. How could it be otherwise? Imagination is a function deriving from no organ. It is not one of those functions that ceases to function in order to recuperate its functional power. It is nourished only by its own activity. As Gaston Bachelard shows, it incessantly deforms or reforms the old images in order to make new ones. In this way we see that the monstrous, inasmuch as it is imaginary, proliferates. Poverty on the one hand, prodigality on the other; that is the prime reason for maintaining the duality of monstrosity and the monstrous.

The second reason is at the origin of the first. Life transgresses neither its laws nor its structure. Accidents are not exceptions, and there is nothing monstrous about monstrosities. "There are no exceptions in nature," says the teratologist in the age of positive teratology. But this positivist formula, that defines a world as a system of laws, does not know that its concrete significance stems from its relation to the meaning of its maximum opposite, that science excludes while imagination applies. This maxim gives birth to the anti-cosmos, to

¹⁶ *La Science des monstres*, Paris, Gallimard, 1948, p. 17.

Monstrosity and the Monstrous

the chaos of exceptions without laws. This anti-world, when it is seen from the perspective of those who first create it and then haunt it, believing everything to be exceptionally possible in it—forgetting for their part that only laws create exceptions—this anti-world is the imaginary, indistinct, and dizzy world of the monstrous.*

* This article is based on a lecture delivered in Brussels on February 9th, 1962, at the Institut des Hautes Etudes de Belgique.