

Frankenstein's Children

by George McCartney

“*Monstrum horrendum, informe ingens.*”

—Vergil, *Aeneid*

Monsters From the Id: The Rise of Horror in Fiction and Film

by E. Michael Jones

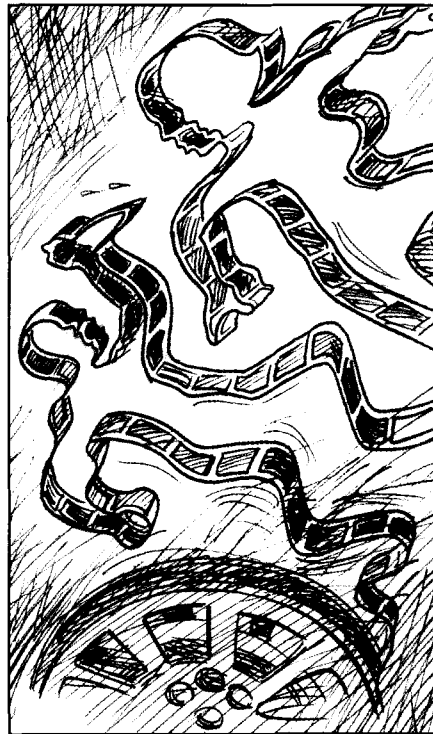
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In 1974, I first encountered one of the creatures E. Michael Jones writes about in *Monsters From the Id*. It appeared in the guise of one of my graduate-school classmates. She was a bright, pretty woman who seemed unusually self-possessed and accomplished for a 22-year-old. My impression changed, however, when I committed the *faux pas* of mentioning that my wife had recently become pregnant with our second child. Without a moment's hesitation, my colleague brightly inquired, “Are you considering abortion?” I was so astonished that I could not help laughing in her perky, well-scrubbed face. I do not believe she ever forgave my convulsive rudeness. Of course, had I been attentive to contemporary trends, her question would not have taken me by surprise. It had been a full year since *Roe v. Wade*, and the Robespierres of the feminist legal revolution had become tirelessly vigilant in its bloody cause.

Not coincidentally, this was the high-water mark of the left-liberal sexual agenda. Whenever sex was the topic (and when wasn't it?), the discussion was purely technical: positions, techniques, lubricants, and—of course—contraceptive measures, all talked about in the same tones you might use to analyze your golf game. Dalliance without consequences was the order of the day; it was called—how quaint it seems now—“recreational sex,” a pleasurable but routine matter to be managed sensibly to everyone's mutual satisfaction. Romance? Sure, if you

George McCartney teaches English at St. John's University.



Patrick Fitzgerald

needed it, but, really, it would not do to get too intense. Sexual relations should be as enjoyable and as significant as having dinner with a friend. Pregnancy was easily avoidable; should there be any mistakes, abortion on demand provided an ironclad backstop. Intercourse, after all, had loftier purposes than procreation. As another woman in my graduate program assured me, there would have been no Vietnam War if people had been “doing it more.” When I pointed out that the president who had dragged us into that mess was known to have made (in Iago's phrase) “the beast with two backs” about as frequently and indiscriminately as humanly—or should I say, inhumanly?—possible, she muttered darkly that J. Edgar Hoover and the CIA had forced poor Saint Jack to depart from his live-and-let-live *bon vivant* ways.

You could not really blame those poor dears for holding such preposterous notions. They had fallen under the sway of the 1970's university culture in which the tenets of such seers as William Blake had

become gospel. “Sooner murder an infant in its cradle, than nurse unacted desires,” Blake had counseled, and intellectuals of the 70's were only too willing to take him at his word. Now, a quarter of a century later, our enlightened nation has murdered well over 40 million infants, most of them sacrificed in the cause of adult desire. Strangely, people do not seem any happier than they did before the revolution; in fact, they seem considerably more confused. With the grisly specter of partial-birth abortion and the scandal of fathers abandoning their families by the millions to pursue erotic self-realization, many adults are having second thoughts about the virtues of sexual liberation. Young people, on the other hand, seem to be acting out their distress by torturing themselves with heavy metal and rap music, not to mention mutilating their bodies with tattoos and decorative piercings.

Jones traces the causes of today's sexual chaos to the Enlightenment of two-and-a-half centuries ago. The secular movements—Jacobinism, Illuminism, and scientific materialism—that emerged during the French Revolution presumed to take rational control of sexual desire but unwittingly set free the disruptive monsters from the id. Jones takes his title from the 1959 science-fiction film *Forbidden Planet*, which to his mind allegorically expresses what has happened to us in the modern era. In the movie, astronauts travel to another star and discover the artifacts of the Krell, a long-dead race of highly evolved beings who once commanded a supremely sophisticated technology—no levers, no buttons, no maintenance. They merely had to wish for something, and their machines would make it happen. This felicitous state, however, turned out to be their undoing. In their pride, they had overlooked the subconscious. Having achieved such extraordinary power, they eventually fell victim to their own de-

vices. “The Krell forgot one thing, monsters from the Id,” one of the film’s characters explains. It was not only their enlightened intellects that wielded power but their unacknowledged self-will: They could not prevent themselves from unleashing the destructive forces of their aggression and lust.

Jones finds in this piece of popular entertainment an allegory of the Enlightenment and its aftermath. He argues that, since the revolutionary movement of the 18th century, the West has entered into a Faustian bargain that has exacted an increasingly terrible cost. In our rational, secular hubris, we assumed we could dispense with traditional morality and freely indulge our erotic fancies without untoward consequences, especially since the advent of penicillin and scientifically improved contraception. Instead of achieving the peaceable kingdom of sexual liberation, however, we have erected a culture closer to the Marquis de Sade’s torture chamber. We have licensed brutality in the cause of pleasure and self-fulfillment: Instead of creating genuine liberty, we have managed to foster a society in which some—usually men—trample on the rights of others, usually women and children. Pornography, venereal disease, sexual cruelty, abortion, and abandonment are its hallmarks.

Jones begins with the Enlightenment’s impact on Mary Wollstonecraft and her daughter Mary. Inspired with revolutionary fervor, both women wanted to believe that the night of superstition had passed and that people would be able to live rationally without outdated institutions, such as marriage. They discovered instead that, once women agree to forgo the restraints imposed by traditional morality, they all too easily become victims of male wantonness. Wollstonecraft found herself and her first child abandoned in revolutionary France by her lover, Gilbert Imlay, and sought relief by attempting suicide. Twenty-two years later, her second daughter, Mary, fathered by radical thinker William Godwin, ran away with Percy Bysshe Shelley only to find herself pressed by the mercilessly idealistic poet into an incestuous *ménage* with her half-sister Claire. When Shelley’s abandoned wife Harriet committed suicide, the 18-year-old pregnant Mary suffered from nightmares, one of which became the seed of her novel *Frankenstein*. The monster is both the sign of her guilt for having absconded with Shelley and the embodiment of her fears about

bringing new life into a world of such domestic disorder. As Jones sees it, the forlorn monster symbolizes her remorse.

By complying with the revolutionary call for sexual liberation, Jones argues, these women and untold numbers since have found themselves enslaved in a Sadean universe. Arguing from Enlightenment principles, Sade had demonstrated that, in a godless world, the human body can be considered nothing more than a machine. Like any other machine, its purpose is to serve its master. He openly championed an ethos in which the body—the female body, in particular—becomes an appliance at the disposal of those in power, namely, upper-class men such as himself and Shelley. While Sade remained largely an underground figure in 18th- and 19th-century Europe, he had come into his own by the 1960’s, when pornography was becoming all but respectable in the West. The watershed, as Jones sees it, was 1973, when two pornographic films, *Deep Throat* and *The Devil and Miss Jones*, ranked among the top ten grossing movies of the year. Although pornography has always been with us, it had previously lurked in the darker corners of our culture, acknowledged (if at all) with signs of disgust or embarrassment. By the 1970’s, however, vice no longer paid lip service to virtue. When porn broke into the mainstream, our more advanced critics, pundits, and politicians found themselves unable to stand up to it, or even to evaluate it. As part of the liberal Enlightenment themselves, they, like my grad-school friends, were committed to the belief that sexual activity was value-free. One might comment on it as a species of sport, evaluating timing, technique, and style, but anything sounding like a moral critique was considered unfashionable. In the *New York Times*, Vincent Canby blandly reported that a lot of organic plumbing was surfacing at local movie houses and then professed to be utterly bored by its repetitive display. His response became the official line: Pornography’s sin was not that it corrupted its audience, scandalized children, defiled and often brutalized its participants, or lined the pockets of its mob-connected entrepreneurs; its gravest offense was that it was boring. This was a cunning dodge. After all, the last thing one wanted to appear was shocked or outraged: It was just sex, after all. Or was it? Jones brings forth Linda Boreman, a.k.a Linda Lovelace, to show it was not so. Years after her mo-

ment of dubious fame as the star of *Deep Throat*, Boreman revealed that she had been routinely beaten into submission and forced to perform sexual acts. Few in the mainstream media wanted to listen: Her revelations did not mesh with their enlightened sexual principles.

Jones adduces further evidence of our cultural sickness in what he takes to be the revival of horror films during the late 1970’s. After Hollywood managed to break the Production Code in the 1960’s and began to grace its movies with naked young women, he argues, a reaction set in. Suddenly, theaters were filled with horror films as never before. Its commercial antennae ever aquiver, Hollywood was instinctively responding to its audience’s uneasiness about graphic sexuality by giving it *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Alien*, films that seemed to serve retribution on such immorality. There is some merit to this analysis, but not as much as Jones thinks. For one thing, I cannot detect that much variation in the flow of horror films from Hollywood: They seem rather constant. For another, Jones’ interpretations of those made since the 70’s are tendentious. He wants us to believe, among other things, that Ridley Scott’s *Alien* is about the horror of abortion, its biomechanical monster standing for the fetus that Ripley, the astronaut heroine, tries desperately to purge from her space capsule at the end of the narrative. For Jones, the monster is, like Shelley’s in *Frankenstein*, the return of repressed guilt, not as denied impulse but as denied conscience. It embodies Ripley’s unacknowledged guilt as one who embraces feminism and its commitment to absolute control of the body’s procreative functions. While the movie’s closing episode is an ugly and horrific business, did the filmmakers intend it to carry the moral weight Jones detects? Or were they simply doing what has come naturally in every film since *King Kong*: put a nearly naked gal in the same frame with a gargantuan display of testosterone? (*Alien*’s monster looks a good deal more phallic than fetal.) Come to think of it, didn’t Edmund Spenser, in 1596, do something similar at the end of Book I of the *Faerie Queene* by having Una tied to a tree as St. George beats back the dragon holding her captive? Jones tries to sidestep such questions of intentionality by arguing that creators are often unaware of the meaning of their works. I am willing to accept this up

to a point, but Jones overreaches; unfettered by considerations of authorial purpose, his interpretations become overly ingenious. Most glaringly, he willfully misreads Don Siegel's classic, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, contending that the story's aliens proliferate in response to the hero and heroine's divorced condition, thereby allegorically scolding them for their sexual waywardness. But it is clear from both Jack Finney's novel and the film that divorce is meant to mark these characters as strong-minded individuals who refuse to bow to oppressive social norms. Indeed, their willfulness gives them the strength to stand up to the forces of collectivist conformity that the aliens represent. I have no quarrel with Jones' disapproval of divorce, but his morals do not license him to change an author's meaning.

On the whole, I am sympathetic to the main lines of Jones' argument. On substantive issues, he is broadly right. But to combat the modern dehumanization of sex, Jones seems to be prescribing a wholly unpalatable, not to say impossible, cure. He seems to suggest that sexual activity of any kind conducted outside the marriage bed leads to dire consequences. Does this mean we are to have no more

flirting? How are people ever to get to the marriage bed if there are to be no preliminary intimacies? Jones seems a little like Gulliver among the Houyhnhnms: He wants us to live in a dream of absolute virtue, our morality plotted out in advance with no surprises lurking along the wooded path. Affairs of the heart, from hand-holding to whispered endearments, are to be carefully legislated lest passion get the upper hand. Hauling in Andrea Dworkin to help support his case, he unintentionally gives his puritanical game away. Jones cites Dworkin's arguments about the brutal climate created by pornography but fails to mention that she also wants sexual intercourse abolished because she believes it is inherently abusive and degrading to women. This is strong medicine; I suppose most of us will be forgiven if, like St. Augustine, we defer the dose as long as possible. The truth is that, when it comes to sexuality, there are no tidy solutions. In suggesting otherwise, Jones mirrors the sexual liberationists he decries. Like them, he offers a simplistic response to an inherently complex challenge.

These reservations aside, Jones' book is well worth attention. His argument may be overstated and mildly puritanical, but

it is lively and often provocative. He is especially suggestive in his discussion of the Illuminists of the late 18th century, who sought to gain control of society by manipulating its leaders. The Illuminist method was to discover the illicit passions of key figures and pander to them. Jones argues that the Illuminist strategy manifests itself in the policies of our corporations, government, and other institutions today. (The Ford Foundation once funded the bizarrely lascivious notions of Alfred Kinsey in the supposed cause of sexual enlightenment.) Whether they intend it or not, all of these organizations have a vested interest in keeping us erotically distracted. As the Marquis de Sade argued, a shrewd government will see to its citizens' sexual excitation and gratification, reducing their desire for political action and contributing to their consumerist impulses as well as their physical ones. Lust, after all, requires endless blandishments. So it is that our great nation rivets itself to our Commander in Chief's every trouser twitch, while yawning at his distant bombings. Hour by hour, our brave new world slides smoothly toward quiet tyranny.

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Winter into Spring

by David Middleton

We drive north to New Orleans this far south
Where sea and land both lose themselves in marsh
And spring breaks through mild winter's brittle cold
When pansies blaze over the noonlight's ice.
We know, of course, the rare unsparing day
When sovereign Arctic blasts sweep south-southeast
Freezing the boughs of budding fig and pear
As in the fall and summer kindred winds
Bring down from mobile thrones of blade and air
Our ladybug and monarch butterfly.

But these are open winters where the sun
Tempers the sleet to rain and makes a dew
Of snowflakes on the maiden maple leaf.
And even in a January dawn,
Awakened by the salt breath of the Gulf,
Dutch clover, yellow mustard, and a thin
Unbending periwinkle on a stalk
Deep-rooted in its terra-cotta pot
Spread hues and scents across pale frosted lawns
Till once more spring's green regency has come.