The Gothic scene of international relations: ghosts, monsters, terror and the sublime after September 11

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> And yet an event, if considered in isolation, is unintelligible. . . . For it to acquire significance, it must be integrated into a pattern of other events, in relation to which it will become meaningful.
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> *François Furet*[1]

Accepting Furet's claim that events acquire meaning and significance only in the context of narratives, this article argues that a particular type of international relations narrative has emerged with greater distinction after the traumatic experience of September 11: the gothic narrative. In a sense the political rhetoric of President Bush marks the latest example of America's fine tradition in the gothic genre that began with Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne and extends through Henry James to Stephen King. His discourse of national security, it will be shown, assumes many of the predicates of gothic narratives. The gothic scenes evoked by Bush as much as Poe involve monsters and ghosts in tenebrous atmospheres that generate fear and anxiety, where terror is a pervasive tormentor of the senses. Poe's narratives, for example, turn on encounters with dark, perverse, seemingly indomitable, forces often entombed in haunted houses.[2] Similarly, Bush's post-September 11 narratives play upon fears of terrorists and rogue states who are equally dark, perverse and indomitable forces. In both cases, ineffable and potently violent and cruel forces haunt and terrorise the civilised, human world.

Bush's representation of the problems of terrorism and rogue states and his policies about how to deal with them has been at the centre of much controversy. The political consequences of accepting Bush's representation of events has become one of the key issues in world politics today. This article is a preliminary exploration of the terrain on which Bush's gothic representation of international relations has been

[1] François Furet, 'From Narrative History to Problem-Oriented History', in Geoffrey Roberts (ed.), *The History and Narrative Reader* (London: Routledge, 2001).
[2] See, for example, Poe's brilliant short stories, 'The Fall of the House of Usher', 'The Black Cat' and 'The Pit and the Pendulum', as well as his poem 'The Raven' in Edgar Allan Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings*, ed. David Galloway (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986).

formed. Section 1 briefly outlines the gothic tradition in literature, placing stress on terror and the sublime as central features. Section 2 surveys the gothic scenes of politics and international relations. The final section draws attention to some dangers inherent in the Bush Doctrine's search for monsters and ghosts. Politics and international relations have always been haunted by monsters and ghosts, and gothic narratives have been around for over two centuries; but since September 11, as we shall see, the gothic scene has become a much more prominent discursive feature of international relations.

The Gothic scene: an aesthetics of unrest

> Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing.
> *Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Raven'*

It may seem odd to characterise international relations as a gothic scene. The gothic genre, after all, is usually equated with dark fictional narratives that turn around haunted houses, ghosts, monsters, and the 'undead'. Images of architectural ruins, and silhouetted trees, leafless and lifeless, shrouded in mist, are typical in gothic narratives. All this seems a far cry from the study of international relations, not least because it draws upon the imagination rather than facts and analytical reason. Rushing to dismiss the gothic from the study of international relations on the basis of its fictionality would be a mistake. Fictions have a long history in political discourse, from Plato's cave through Hobbes's state of nature to Rawls's original position. The important point to note here is that representations of politics and international relations are unavoidably and necessarily aesthetic.[3] We begin our exploration of the gothic framing of international relations after September 11 by outlining the origins and characteristics of gothicity.

Monsters, ghosts, and terror: a very brief introduction to the Gothic

Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault have taught us that origins are always obscure and ineffable. Things begin undetected, in unsuspecting or dark places, often unexpectedly or accidentally. By the time the formlessness begins to take clear shape the dark origins have receded further from view, acquiring an ineffable quality. Residual traces may remain, but seem equally resistant to conceptual grasp. Something of the same quality defines the gothic, a genre of art and literature that takes obscurity and ineffability as abiding themes. However obscure the origins of the gothic genre may be, two contextual features are often identified with its emergence: the French Revolution and the Enlightenment.

The gothic became particularly popular in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The 1790s was the period in which the 'gothic craze', as Robert Miles calls

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[3] F. R. Ankersmit, *Aesthetic Politics: Political Philosophy Beyond Fact and Value* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996); and Roland Bleiker, 'The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory', *Millennium*, 30:3 (2001), pp. 509–34.

it, reached its height.[4] Accounts of the rise of the gothic generally single out the French Revolution for special mention. The Marquis de Sade's claim that gothic stories were 'the necessary fruits of the revolutionary tremors felt by the whole of Europe' was one early expression of this view.[5] The architecture of the *ancien régime*, built, as it generally was, upon piles of corpses and declining legitimacy, resembled the decaying houses portrayed by gothic writers. The revolutionary forces challenged the darkness, oppression, and malevolent forces symbolised by the *ancien régime*, and embodied the Enlightenment's political values of universal equality and liberty, at least according to their own accounts.

The other important context in which the gothic arose is the Enlightenment. Richard Kearney follows Nick Capasso's account suggesting that gothic literature and art emerged in the Enlightenment's shadow, and in some measure at least mocking its rationalism.[6] Indeed, the gothic genre has much in common with Romanticism which arose around the same time, likewise as a reaction to Enlightenment rationalism. The Age of Reason sought to banish monsters born of myth, superstition and religion. Rather than disappearing, however, the monsters simply reappeared elsewhere; they fled from the Enlightenment's illuminated spaces into the dark shadows it cast. They became constant reminders of the powers and mysteries that elude even Enlightenment's Reason. Not only were they potent signs of Reason's 'other', they were outgrowths of a perverted Scientific Reason, as in Mary Shelley's monster in *Frankenstein*. Though Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno make no mention of the gothic arts in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, it may be suggested that it is born out of the same dialectic of enlightenment that they reveal. In Michel Foucault's words:

A fear haunted the latter half of the eighteenth century: the fear of darkened spaces, of the pall of gloom which prevents the full visibility of things, men and truths. It sought to break up the patches of darkness that blocked the light, eliminate the shadowy areas of society, demolish the unlit chambers where arbitrary political acts, monarchical caprice, religious superstitions, tyrannical and priestly plots, epidemics and the illusion of ignorance were fomented.[7]

Writers and artists of all kinds became fascinated with darkness, strangeness and the dread they produce during the Enlightenment. Spanish artist Francisco Goya created some of the most visibly arresting images of dread. His brilliant series of etchings called *Los Caprichos* [The Caprices] (1799), which contained images of donkeys, witches, monsters and other liminal beings, was an attack on Spanish prejudices, superstitions and follies and their attendant social harms. Perhaps the best known of the *Caprichos* is plate 43 whose title is commonly translated as 'The sleep [*sueño*] of reason produces monsters'.[8] The etching depicts a man seated at a chair

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[4] Robert Miles, 'The 1790s: The Effulgence of Gothic', in Jerrold Hogle (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[5] Cited in Miles, 'The 1790s', pp. 42–3.

[6] Richard Kearney, 'Terror, Philosophy and the Sublime: Some Philosophical Reflections on 11 September', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 29:1 (2003), pp. 28ff.

[7] Michel Foucault, 'The Eye of Power', in Colin Gordon (ed.), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), p. 153.

[8] Goya's commentary in the Prado manuscript accompanying the etchings reads: 'Fantasy deserted by reason produces impossible monsters: united with it, fantasy is the mother of the arts and the source of their wonders'. See Frank Heckes, *Reason and Folly: The Prints of Francisco Goya* (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 1998), p. 37.

slumped over a desk where his forearms form a pillow on which to rest his head. Hovering behind and above the sleeping man, wrapped in obscurity, are owls and bats, both 'traditional symbols of darkness, folly and ignorance'.[9] Goya seems to be saying that Reason must govern the imagination, it must remain awake, vigilant, otherwise its enemies, the forces of darkness, will be unleashed on humanity. But an alternative reading, one more in tune with Romanticism, is that the rationalist dreams fostered by the Enlightenment are just as capable of producing their own monstrous aberrations.[10]

Normally we turn away from horrible, monstrous things, but gothic art and literature are exercised, even obsessed, by them: revulsion and fear are combined with attraction and desire. As David Galloway reminds us, this is exactly the combination that defines for Kierkegaard the meaning of dread: 'one fears, but what one fears one desires'.[11] Kearney argues that this simultaneous revulsion and fascination with monsters in particular was tied up with anxiety about self-identity. Monsters were metaphors of human anxieties. Part of the reason for this is that monsters are liminal creatures who 'defy borders' and defy 'normality'.[12] Their defiance of borders is taken as a threat demanding measures to reinforce the borders between the human and inhuman, to defend the civilised against the barbaric, and to uphold good in the face of evil.

Encounters between the human and non-human or natural and supernatural worlds, tensions between the soul and the flesh, reason and imagination, and quarrels between rationalism and empiricism over the power of scientific method all stirred curiosity during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For all their differences, the Enlightenment and Romanticism were alike in addressing these themes that reflected profound changes in science and society and continuing debates in philosophy; the Romantics, however, tended to valorise the latter terms in the above antinomies. From this grew a body of literature particularly intrigued by the psychological affects of sense-perception, especially feelings of pleasure and pain, and the role of the passions. Writers as diverse as David Hume, Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant, the Marquis de Sade, Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis, Mary Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne contemplated such matters in their distinctive ways.

Aesthetics of unease: fear, death and monstrosity in two exemplary Gothic tales

Gothic literature thus produces what might be called an aesthetics of unease or unrest.[13] The unease is a product of pallid and violent characters caught in gloomy, foreboding settings. Death is a permanent presence in these settings, manifesting itself in monsters, ghosts and the undead, in madness (the death of Reason), in ruined buildings (as a sign of social and psychological decay *à la* House of Usher), and of

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[9] Heckes, *Reason and Folly*, p. 37.
[10] See Kearney, 'Terror, Philosophy and the Sublime'.
[11] Cited in David Galloway, 'Introduction', in Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings*, p. 45.
[12] Kearney, 'Terror, Philosophy and the Sublime', pp. 27–8.
[13] Poe's poem, 'The Valley of Unrest', lies behind this suggestion.

course in the prospect of violent death (the victims of Frankenstein's monster). Gothic stories are built around the lived experience of fear; not simply of a single scary incident, but of more deep-seated fear, fear as an existential condition or state of being. Spiralling intensification of dark, oppressive atmospheres serves to heighten the sense of unease, raising the prospect of violence and terror.

Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher' is a classic example of how structure and tone work to this effect. It is the tale of a family's ruin manifested in their decaying house. The 'mansion of gloom' generates a tenebrous atmosphere, one heavy with fear, fatality and dread. Poe brilliantly evokes the sense of brooding terror in his descriptions of the house and its inhabitants, Roderick Usher, his sister Madelaine, and the narrator. Dark family secrets and other mysteries seem to have been stained into the architecture; the world's natural harmonies have become discordant, unhinged. The climax of Poe's tale occurs on a tempestuous night 'wildly singular in its terror and beauty'.[14] The blowing gales and banging doors reach a noisy crescendo which further amplifies the shocking appearance of Madelaine, who days earlier had been secretly entombed alive by Usher, standing in the doorway. Unsettled and 'undead' she now returns to haunt her brother. As death begins to invade life in the abject shape of Madelaine, the narrator takes flight from the cannibalising and sepulchral house, driven away by fear and terror.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; Or, The Modern Prometheus*, tells the story of Victor Frankenstein, an errant scientist, who vainly and obsessively chases his monstrous creation, assembled out of human body parts, across the planet. Having first bestowed 'animation upon lifeless matter'[15] to create the monster and then failing to prevent it from killing his loved ones, Frankenstein is condemned to perpetual torment in his hopeless desire to destroy the monster, his *alter ego*. The monster knows what Frankenstein is blind to: that their relationship is dialectical and interdependent, 'you live, and my power is complete. . . . Come on, my enemy; we have yet to wrestle for our lives'.[16]

Part of the unease produced in these tales relates simply to the appearance of strange, violent, unexpected presences, whether in the form of an 'undead' women or a motherless monster stitched together out of human fragments. But a greater part of the gothic's power relates to the destabilising effects of these presences. Easy assumptions about the nature of reality and received distinctions between right and wrong, civilised and barbaric, nature and artifice, reason and imagination, are disrupted and rendered ambiguous by these strange, unclassifiable presences. Indeed, one of the critical implications of the gothic is its wrestling with and shaking up of settled ontological and moral categories, especially those associated with the Enlightenment. As we shall see in the next section, some of this unease was already evident in political thought. Particularly vexing for political thinkers were epistemological issues: resolving contradictions between mind and body, nature and artifice, and the general question of knowledge's sources.

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[14] Poe, 'The Fall of the House of Usher', p. 152.
[15] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus*, in Peter Fairclough (ed.), *Three Gothic Novels* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 312.
[16] Shelley, *Frankenstein*, pp. 477–8.

Political philosophy and aesthetics: passions, terror and the sublime

A dominant preoccupation of seventeenth and eighteenth century moral and political thought was understanding the role of passions and sentiments in civil society. This preoccupation arose out of what might be called, following Kam Shapiro, 'political somatics', that is the study of the body in political philosophy.[17] After Descartes it became philosophically and politically important to reconsider the relationship between mind and body, cognition and sensation, reason and corporeality. Reasoning subjects are also feeling subjects, indeed, sensory perception seemed to many to precede knowledge. Terry Eagleton provides a useful gloss of the thinking here:

Before we have even begun to reason, there is already a faculty within us which makes us feel the sufferings of others as keenly as a wound, spurs us to luxuriate in another's joy with no sense of self-advantage, stirs us to detest cruelty and oppression like a hideous wound. The disgust we feel at the sight of tyranny or injustice is as previous to all rational calculation as the retching occasioned by some noxious food.[18]

For thinkers as diverse as Hobbes, Spinoza, Mandeville, Rousseau, Hume, Smith, and Burke, cognition depends on perception and experience, on how the outside world impinges on the body's sensory organs, on 'the gaze and the guts', as Eagleton puts it.[19] Human interaction with the world and with other humans cannot be separated from the sensate nature of human being.

This rejection of Rationalism opened difficult political questions. The body is not just a physical receptor of external information, it is also a producer of feelings and passions, including unruly ones which threaten to pull society apart by driving individuals into conflict with each other in the pursuit of their desires. The political question, then, was how to discipline or refashion the body in accordance with civil society's requirements, or, in more general philosophical terms, how reason and passion might be reconciled. It was a matter of harnessing the right passions, playing one off against another, or making sure that 'rational' self-interest prevailed over the more (self-)destructive passions.[20] This required rejecting the Rationalist assumption that only Reason, by transcending the body's corporeality, could enhance justice or the good life. Both Hume and Burke railed against Rationalism's privileging of reason. Reason may be a slave to the passions, as Hume famously remarked, however that in itself need not be a problem.[21] Indeed, it commends the passions, after all,

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[17] Kam Shapiro, *Sovereign Nations, Carnal States* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).
[18] Terry Eagleton, *Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 39.
[19] Eagleton, *Ideology of the Aesthetic*, p. 13.
[20] On the 'principle of the countervailing passions', see Albert O. Hirschman's classic account in *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism Before Its Triumph* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 20ff. Edmund Burke's argument is that external contrivances like government are necessary to restrain the passions in society. He asserts that 'Society requires not only that the passions of individuals should be subjected, but that even in the mass and body as well as in individuals, the inclinations of men should frequently be thwarted, their will controlled, and their passions brought into subjection. This can only be done *by a power out of themselves*' (emphasis in original). See Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 151.
[21] Burke adopts this Humean point in *Reflections*, p. 175. He suggests that when confronted with 'events like [the French Revolution] our passions instruct our reason'. Needless to say, horror and disgust were the passions that instructed Burke's reasoning about this event.

compassion, pity, sympathy, and affection all issue from the passions, as do love of family, property, and country.[22]

The question remained however as to the causes or forces that shaped the passions. According to one influential account it is pleasure and pain that trigger the passions. Edmund Burke, in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, develops an empiricist psychology which argues that pain makes a particularly powerful impression on the mind because it threatens self-preservation. Pain, he says, being a reminder and 'emissary' of that 'king of terrors', death, gives rise to passions such as fear.[23]

Burke on the sublime

Like many before him, Burke underscores the distinction between the beautiful and the sublime. Whatever causes positive pleasure is a source of the beautiful, whereas anything that may 'excite the ideas of pain, and danger', says Burke, 'operates in a manner analogous to terror, and is therefore a source of the *sublime*'.[24] Beautiful objects are characterised by smallness, smoothness, delicacy; they evoke tenderness and love like pearls, diamonds or red roses. Sublime objects, by contrast, are generally characterised by darkness, vastness, grandeur and danger; they evoke terror and awe.

It is important to note that Burke places his emphasis on the *idea* of pain, and not pain itself. The sublime finds its source in anything that may 'excite the *ideas* of pain, and danger' (emphasis added). If something directly affects our bodies it is simply painful. But some affects, like fear, for example, do not result from actual pain even if they operate 'in a manner that resembles actual pain'.[25] The source of fear may trigger bodily reactions, like perspiration, goose bumps, hair standing on end or physical trembling, but the fear is concentrated in the mind and lingers there long after the object of fear is removed. Burke's emphasis here is at one remove from physical pain. If the idea of pain or fear is excited without our being in actual danger, if we are safely out of harm's way, then there is a certain delight generated.[26] Burke describes this feeling as one of 'delightful horror, a sort of tranquillity tinged with terror'.[27] Fear is excited in the subject's mind by the existence of threatening potentialities.

As an example of delightful horror we might think of the feelings excited in us by standing on a rocky outcrop that meets the ocean, 'an object of no small

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[22] On the production of sympathy and sociability, see John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

[23] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 40.

[24] Burke, *Sublime and Beautiful*, p. 39, emphasis in original.

[25] Ibid., p. 57.

[26] Kant makes the same point in his discussion of the 'The Analytic of the Sublime': 'we must see ourselves safe in order to feel this soul-stirring delight', quoted by Kearney in 'Terror, Philosophy and the Sublime', p. 39. See also Alison Ross's account of the Kantian sublime's political comportment in 'The Kantian Sublime and the Problem of the Political', *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 32:2 (2001), pp. 174–87.

[27] Burke, *Sublime and Beautiful*, p. 136.

terror', as Burke says.[28] Standing on the precipice, we sense the indomitable power of the ocean as its roaring waves crash against the rock under our feet. The wind and the spray lashing against us are further testament to the ocean's wild power. Looking down we see the whirling eddies forming and reforming as the ocean sucks the water out before flooding in again. Were we by some misfortune to fall into the water, we know the ocean's awesome power would violently thrash us against the rocks or pull us under the water causing certain death. 'Tranquillity tinged with terror' washes over our bodies. In such moments we are excited by ideas of fear and danger even though the ocean does not directly or immediately cause pain or threaten our self-preservation. But because the ocean stimulates terror, Burke says it is sublime.

Terror then is crucial to feelings of the sublime; it is in fact its source. Indeed Burke variously refers to terror as 'the ruling principle of the sublime', 'the common stock of every thing that is sublime' and more directly as 'cause of the sublime'.[29] Terror, he says, is heightened through power, 'a capital source of the sublime',[30] as well as shapelessness, limitlessness and darkness. Of darkness, Burke says:

Every one will be sensible of this, who considers how greatly night adds to our dread, in all cases of danger, and how much the notions of ghosts and goblins, of which none can form clear ideas, affect minds, which give credit to the popular tales concerning such sorts of beings.[31]

Things that are obscure, indeterminate, unclear, incalculable, or unpredictable have a greater power to stimulate the passions, especially fear, than clear, familiar or knowable things. Darkness has the special quality of intensifying this mood.

But what does Burke have to say about the effects of terror? Terror, he says, stupefies and astonishes; it fills the mind with horror and fear,[32] impressing upon the mind more than the body, creating the *idea* of pain. While Burke recognised that sublime sensations stimulated the mind, he was also aware of their debilitating potential. Terror has the potential to freeze the mind and body, to paralyse by stupefying, by holding in awe, just like a leviathan.[33] 'No passion', he says, 'so effectively robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear'.[34] Terror stupefies, leaves one dumbfounded.

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[28] Ibid., p. 58.
[29] Ibid., p. 58, 64, and 136.
[30] Ibid., p. 70.
[31] Ibid., p. 59.
[32] As Dani Cavallaro notes, the Western literary tradition commonly distinguishes between horror and terror. Horror derives from the Latin *horrere* meaning to shiver, to bristle, while terror derives from the Latin *terrere* meaning to shake up. Horror is usually associated with the reaction one has to a tangible object, whereas terror is the reaction to an intangible one. Horror is more concrete, terror more abstract and intangible. The causes of horror are therefore less mysterious and obscure than that of terror. While horror gives one the 'creeps', terror shakes the foundations of one's world. Dani Cavallaro, *The Gothic Vision: Three Centuries of Horror, Terror and Fear* (London: Continuum, 2002), pp. 2–3. This distinction will not be maintained with any rigour in this article.
[33] Burke, *Sublime and Beautiful*, p. 66–7.
[34] Ibid., p. 5.

Burke on the sublime and the French Revolution

Out of the tomb of the murdered Monarchy in France has arisen a vast, tremendous, unformed spectre, in a far more terrific guise than any which yet overpowered the imagination.[35]

One of the interesting issues in Burke's thinking is how his aesthetic ideas relate to his political ones. While he praised the sublime in his aesthetics, Burke scorned it in his politics. The sublime qualities he ascribed to the French Revolution produced none of the salutary effects outlined in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*. Whereas the sublimity of the ocean or God or the sovereign produce feelings of humility and respect and reinforces a sense of human finitude, the Revolution seemed to Burke to do the exact opposite. The revolutionaries put themselves in the place of the sublime, ascribing to themselves the 'dread majesty' formerly possessed only by Gods, sovereigns and nature.[36] 'Assuming to be masters of everything human and divine', Burke said of the revolutionaries, they believe 'their will is the law'.[37]

This is why Burke took an extremely hostile reaction to the French Revolution. For Burke, the abstract Enlightenment principle of a self-determining, rational subject which underpinned the Revolution was a grotesque political fraud; it unleashed and excited violent passions, threatened moral propriety and social order, and enacted a 'monstrous tragi-comic scene'.[38] The Enlightenment conception of subjectivity, he believed, was the source of undirected and unlimited energy and power; empowering human will to defy all conventional limits of law, politics, and good taste. Eventually, of course, the Revolution did morph into the Terror as revolutionaries identified their will with the law. The self was construed as limitless, producing a version of human infinitude where obstacles are simply eliminated. Burke glimpsed that 'at the end of every visto [within the French republic], you see nothing but the gallows'.[39]

According to Stephen White, Burke's critique of the French Revolution depends on assuming a distinction between a false and authentic sublime. In adopting the Enlightenment's 'barbarous philosophy'[40] and believing themselves to embody infinitude, the revolutionaries incarnated a false sublime.[41] In so doing they deformed France and gave birth to a 'monstrous compound' of a state which insults the dignity of all nations in Burke's eyes.[42] The false sublime Burke discerns in the 'Republick of Assassins', as he calls it,[43] has made France the enemy of the European society of states, civilisation and humanity. The new, perfidious France has 'sanctified the dark suspicious maxims of tyrannous distrust'.[44] No longer animated by the kind of

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[35] Burke, 'First Letter on a Regicide Peace (1796)', in David Fidler and Jennifer Welsh (eds.), *Empire and Community: Edmund Burke's Writings and Speeches on International Relations* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), p. 289.

[36] My reading of Burke here is indebted to Stephen White, *Edmund Burke: Modernity, Politics, and Aesthetics* (London: Sage, 1994), ch. 4.

[37] Burke, 'First Letter on a Regicide Peace', p. 302.

[38] Burke, *Reflections*, p. 92.

[39] Ibid., pp. 171–2.

[40] Ibid., p. 171.

[41] White, *Edmund Burke*, ch. 4.

[42] Burke, *Reflections*, p. 318.

[43] Burke, 'First Letter on a Regicide Peace', p. 293.

[44] Burke, *Reflections*, p. 125.

passions and interests that drove other states, France 'is keeping no terms with [the] world'.[45] France, 'by the very condition of its existence . . . is in a state of hostility with us, and with all civilized people', laments Burke.[46] The monstrosity of France is no longer a distant or potential threat, but a present and immediate danger.

When confronted with a false sublime, namely a monster like the French republic, states have a duty to intervene, and a right to use pre-emptive force. Burke invokes what he calls a 'law of neighbourhood' and a 'right of vicinage' to defend a pre-emptive attack on France.[47] 'Better to be despised for too anxious apprehensions, than ruined by too confident a security', he says.[48] In fact, more than simply having a right, states have an 'indispensable duty', says Burke, to act preventatively.[49] Burke's gothic scene portrays a monstrous republic unconstrained by moral, legal and political limits. To combat this monster, European powers must use force to restore order. They must refuse its overtures for peace and use force, pre-emptively if necessary.

Unsettling presences: death, monsters and ghosts in politics and international relations

As we shall see, ghosts and monsters have long had a presence in politics and international relations, though it has rarely been remarked upon. In this section we survey some of the monsters and ghosts that have intruded upon political scenes. It should not, however, be inferred from this that the gothic scene has been a permanent feature of politics. It is only when death, dread, darkness, unease, terror and fear become the central, governing themes of a distinctive mode of storytelling, in the late eighteenth century, that the gothic genre appears. It is worth noting the obvious point that death is a permanent presence in politics and international relations despite its infrequent conceptual treatment. Indeed, as Hans Holbein's classic painting of 'The Ambassadors' (1533) reminds us, death occupies a central place in politics and international relations, despite the hubris and haughty comportment of statesmen.

In Holbein's richly textured painting, two ambassadors lean against a stand whose shelves are filled with an array of objects including globes of the heavens and of earth, astronomical instruments, books and a lute. The most arresting and famous thing about Holbein's painting is the mysterious oval object that hangs in the painting's foreground at the ambassadors' feet. Closer inspection reveals it as an anamorphic skull. John Berger is no doubt correct to say that it functions as a kind of *memento mori*, a reminder of death's permanent presence.[50] Diplomacy is haunted by death, by the possibility that dialogue will break down and war will break out, that 'blood and

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[45] Burke, 'First Letter on a Regicide Peace', p. 316.
[46] Ibid., p. 313.
[47] Ibid., p. 317.
[48] Burke, *Reflections*, p. 92.
[49] Burke, 'First Letter on a Regicide Peace', p. 318.
[50] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: BBC and Penguin Books, 1972), p. 91. For a comprehensive historical account of anamorphosis see Baltrušaitis *Anamorphic Art*, trans. W. J. Strachan (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1977). See also Costas Constantinou for a rare reflection on this remarkable painting in International Relations, 'Diplomatic Representations . . . Or Who Framed the Ambassadors?', *Millennium*, 23:1 (1994), pp. 1–24.

iron', rather than diplomatic words, will determine international outcomes, as Bismarck said.[51] Diplomatic peace is therefore always susceptible to potential violence and its concomitant piles of corpses. Indeed, a deconstructive reading of the painting might suggest that death is diplomacy's condition of (im)possibility. That is to say, death marks the failure of diplomacy, but also its necessity. War and death, signs of diplomacy's failure, ensures diplomacy's continued existence. The least that can be said is that in international relations the threat of war and death are never surmounted or overcome; they remain constant possibilities, despite (and sometimes because of) the confident assurances given by diplomats and politicians.

Holbein's juxtaposition of anamorphic and realist techniques in the same painting can therefore be read as a demonstration of their affinity, as Jurgis Baltrušaitis argues, or it can be read as testament to two radically incommensurable ways of being in the world. Either way, the anamorphic skull acts to unsettle the assured representation of international political life, indeed of representation itself, conveyed by Realism. It is a sign of the disturbing presences that haunt Realist ontologies of international relations, and a reminder that discursive 'props', like skulls or ghosts or monsters, contain a destabilising potential.

Monsters and otherness in social and political thought

We should not forget that ghosts and especially monsters, so central to gothic fictions, have also been strange, albeit mostly unremarked, presences in political thought. It barely needs saying, but monsters and ghosts long predate the emergence of gothic arts in the eighteenth century. Throughout the history of political thought they have helped contribute to tenebrous political atmospheres. But it is only in the eighteenth century that ghosts and monsters become central features in narratives designed to inspire fear. Having said that, a very brief survey of some famous monsters will act as a useful reminder of their place in politics.

From Machiavelli's centaur and Hobbes's leviathan and behemoth, to Montesquieu's troglodytes and Burke's ghosts and goblins, monsters have lurked persistently at the fringes of the political world.[52] One of the most commonly used images to denote a difficult political passage or balancing act also invokes two monsters: Scylla and Charybdis. The image originates in Homer's *Odyssey*, when the goddess Circe tells Odysseus to take care sailing his ship through a narrow strait menaced by two deadly monsters: Scylla, a six-headed, twelve-legged beast hiding in a cave over the water; and Charybdis, a monster that takes the form of a giant whirlpool sucking down then spewing up the sea three times a day.[53]

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[51] Cited in Martin Wight, *Power Politics*, 2nd edn. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 27.
[52] Machiavelli's reference to Chiron the Centaur comes in *The Prince*, trans. George Bull (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981), ch. 18. Hobbes's reference in his title is to the Book of Job (ch. 41) in the *Bible*, and Montesquieu's reference to the Troglodytes appears in his *Persian Letters* (trans. C. J. Betts, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), letters 11 and 12. Montesquieu's character Uzbek says that unlike the Troglodytes of ancient times, who were 'more like animals than men', the Arabian ones were 'not so deformed'.
[53] *The Odyssey of Homer*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1967), book XII, lines 80–110.

Monstrosity is also a common metaphor used to describe political systems. Among the many instances we might recall Samuel Pufendorf's description of the Holy Roman Empire as 'like some mis-shapen Monster', and William Godwin's description of the feudal system as a 'voracious monster'.[54] Political systems were often described as monstrous to convey the hybrid, ramshackle mix of old and new, liberty and tyranny in early modern Europe. This hybridity was an offence to political imaginations that demanded purity or rejected adaptation.

Monsters have also been present in the geographical mapping of the political world. As Kearney reminds us, late medieval and early modern maps of the world would often fill uncharted oceans with drawings of frightening sea creatures, accompanied by such captions as '*hic sunt dragones*' (here be dragons!).[55] Joseph Conrad wrote of the 'fabulous phase' of mapmaking during medieval times which 'crowded its maps with pictures of strange pageants, strange trees, strange beasts'.[56] These monsters helped divide cartographic space, drawing lines between the known and unknown, the civilised and uncivilised worlds much as they would later do in fictional literature. As Hayden White has shown, this spatial division was underpinned by tropes of otherness that helped define the self through negation of the other. Wild men and barbarians were typical devices for distinguishing the civilised self from a degenerate or monstrous other.[57]

Such beasts were always meant to inspire fear and terror because they defied normality. In fact, they are a strange mixture of the familiar and unfamiliar; neither the same nor wholly different. Machiavelli's centaur or Shelley's monster of Frankenstein may be grotesque hybrids and mutants, but they still carry traces of the human. Fundamentally, such creatures are ambiguous, difficult to classify and know, and thus the objects of fear. Indeed, as Mary Douglas notes, it is this very impossibility of classifying them, their 'categorical impurity', which makes them monsters.[58]

Monsters represent the ambiguity, indeterminacy and transgressiveness of the 'other'. Vanita Seth helpfully outlines three ways in which this transgressiveness was represented in medieval and early modern times:

- Firstly, in terms of physiological confusion ('anatomical disarrangement of human body parts or the intermingling of human and animal physiques');
- Secondly, in terms of moral ambiguity ('the wild man, like beasts, was often represented as oblivious to social norms and ethics');

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[54] Pufendorf makes this remark in *De Statu Imperii Germanici*, published under his pseudonym, Severini di Monzambano, cited in Peter Schroeder, 'The Constitution of the Holy Roman Empire after 1648: Samuel Pufendorf's Assessment in his *Monzambano*', *Historical Journal*, 42: 4 (1999), p. 964. We might also note that William Blackstone, the great collator of English law, positively characterised the English constitution as a gothic structure refurbished for modern living. On Goldwin and Blackstone see Miles, *Gothic Writing*, p. 44. It ought to be remembered that the English identified the gothic with fighting against tyranny, just as the Teutonic Goths did in resisting the Romans.

[55] Kearney, 'Terror, Philosophy and the Sublime', p. 31.

[56] Cited in Robert Hampson, 'Introduction', in J. Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1995), p. xiii.

[57] Hayden White, 'Forms of Wildness: Archaeology of an Idea', in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978). Also see Paul Keal's *European Conquest and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: The Moral Backwardness of International Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), ch. 2.

[58] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966).

- Thirdly, in terms of geographical displacement (the wild men and monsters were commonly situated beyond the boundaries of one's own community).[59]

In Julia Kristeva's terms, monsters are *abject*. Like the object, the abject is opposed to the subject. But the defining feature of the abject is that it is ejected, jettisoned, expelled, banished, cast off, thrown away, 'radically excluded'.[60] In *Powers of Horror* Kristeva shows how subjects are constituted through exclusion of what is different or other. 'Proper' modes of subjectivity and society require the expulsion of all that disturbs propriety, order, and cleanliness. Following Douglas, Kristeva points out that the abject is not in itself necessarily dirty or disorderly, but that in its ambiguity it disturbs the clarity of distinctions between order and disorder, clean and unclean, proper and improper.[61] However, that which is excluded, the abject other, can never be entirely banished or obliterated, instead, it hovers at the edges of the subject's existence, threatening its unity and identity with disruption and possible dissolution.[62]

Monsters have thus been a visible and disturbing presence. They symbolise deviance, madness, depravity, brutality, violence, and are thought to threaten civilisation and social order. Not all disturbing presences are quite so visible though. Elaine Scarry suggestively argues that overexposure and underexposure represent two modes of perceiving the other.[63] Sometimes the other is overexposed and highly visible (like monsters), other times underexposed, invisible and hidden from view. In the following section we shall attend to the way that overexposure and underexposure have featured in thinking about international politics. Specifically, we shall look at the overexposed otherness of Saddam Hussein and the underexposed otherness of Osama bin Laden, especially since September 11, 2001.

Monsters and ghosts in international relations today

Because monsters defy classification there are invariably disputes over their nature. In *Frankenstein* the monster's physical appearance predisposes people to fear and despise it. Only the elderly blind man treats the monster with respect. But when informed by his family about the being's monstrosity, he too rejects it and takes flight. This rejection confirms humanity's cruelty in the monster's mind and propels him on his miserable and murderous trail. Shelley, however, writes in a manner that arouses the reader's sympathy for the monster.

Robert Kagan also wants his readers to sympathise with a monster: the USA. In his prickly analysis of US-Europe relations, Kagan concedes that the USA is indeed a monster, but adds that it is a monster with a moral purpose, a good monster. In his

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[59] Vanita Seth, 'Difference with a Difference: Wild Men, Gods and Other Protagonists', *Parallax*, 9:4 (2003), p. 76.

[60] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection*, trans. L. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 1–2.

[61] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 4.

[62] Elizabeth Grosz observes that this is Kristeva's novelty in *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminisms* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1989), p. 71.

[63] Elaine Scarry, 'The Difficulty of Imagining Other People', in Carla Hesse and Robert Post (eds.), *Human Rights in Political Transitions: Gettysburg to Bosnia* (New York: Zone Books, 1999), p. 288.

words, the 'United States *is* a behemoth', but it is one 'with a conscience'.[64] 'Hyperpower' in a Hobbesian state of nature it may be, but the USA has never embraced Machiavellianism. Instead, says Kagan, the gentle giant seeks to advance principles of a civilised and liberal world order. Not all monsters, he reminds us, are bad.

Most monsters, however, are seen as malevolent. The monster *par excellence* in international relations is Hitler. He epitomises evil in a way that compares with the Devil. It would be no exaggeration to say that since the Second World War Hitler has displaced the Devil as the personification of evil. All cruel murderous rulers are compared with him. From Pol Pot and Idi Amin to Slobodan Milosevic and Saddam Hussein, monstrosity is measured against Hitler's example.

Hitler of course is not just a monster, he is also an exemplary ghost, an evil revenant. His ghost and the spectre of appeasement have appeared on numerous occasions: Korea, Vietnam, Yugoslavia, Iraq.[65] Alex Danchev has shown how the First Gulf War was fought as if it were Hitler rather than Saddam Hussein that invaded and occupied Kuwait, such was the debate about appeasement.[66] The debate over whether or not to invade Iraq in 2003 reprised the same choice faced by Chamberlain at Munich: war or dishonour, to use Churchill's terms.[67] In fact, it is not only Hitler's ghost that has reappeared. Churchill and Chamberlain are back too, the good ghost and the well-intentioned but culpable one respectively. On this occasion, however, Churchill, rather than Chamberlain, is in office in Washington, London and Canberra, and the failed strategy of appeasement, still with its Chamberlains in 'old Europe', has been discarded. As Patrick Finney points out, the employment of such analogies always serves a strategic purpose in political debate by laying claim to the moral high ground.[68] By positing Hussein as Hitler, George W. Bush, Tony Blair and John Howard position themselves as spectral Churchills.[69]

The Fall of the House of Hussein

Despite his ghostly apparitions, the more common depiction of Hussein is as a monster; he is the embodiment of evil, depravity and darkness. Hussein presided over a 'mansion of gloom', one that, like the House of Usher, harboured unnatural disturbances, irrational violence, death and terror. It was festering with morbid oppression and murderous cruelty; a grotesque and ghoulish distortion of the modern state.

Samir al-Khalil's *Republic of Fear: Saddam's Iraq* provides a fascinating account of Saddam Hussein's brutal regime.[70] The story revolves around the Ba'thist Party's

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[64] Robert Kagan, 'Power and Weakness', *Policy Review* (June–July 2002), p. 11. Emphasis in original.
[65] Y. F. Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).
[66] Alex Danchev, 'The *Anschluss*', *Review of International Studies*, 20:1 (1994), pp. 97–106.
[67] Churchill is reputed to have said to Chamberlain on his return from the Munich meeting with Hitler: 'You were given the choice between war and dishonour. You chose dishonour and you will have war'. Cited in Danchev, 'The *Anschluss*', p. 99.
[68] Patrick Finney, 'On Memory, Identity and War', *Rethinking History*, 6:1 (2002), p. 1.
[69] Bush together with Blair and Howard (the prime ministers of the UK and Australia respectively) led the self-proclaimed 'coalition of the willing' in the invasion of Iraq in March 2003.
[70] Samir al-Khalil, *Republic of Fear: Saddam's Iraq* (London: Hutchison Radius, 1989).

institutionalisation of fear, suspicion and violence. Al-Khalil describes how the regime depended on extensive networks of informants and a ruthless secret police to maintain high levels of fear across the whole of Iraqi society. Spectacles of violence, public hangings, Kafkaesque anticipations of the knock at the door, and disappearances also helped fuel the 'all-pervasive climate of suspicion, fear, and complicity' that characterised Ba'thist Iraq.[71] *Republic of Fear* recalls Hobbes's emphasis on the 'feare of death' that inclines men towards political order. However, in contrast to Hobbes's sovereign state, the Ba'thist regime made no attempt to allay the fear of death, instead it sought to heighten and intensify it. This 'deep-rooted fear' became the regime's source of authority,[72] and, together with violence, helped to reproduce the state's power.

The second edition of *Republic of Fear* includes a preface entitled 'On Violence' that opens by referring to Hussein's Iraq as a 'chamber of horrors'.[73] Indeed, the author relates that *Republic of Fear* is about how 'horror stories became the norm' in Iraq.[74] As with any horror story, fear and potential violence are ever-present. But in the specific horror of Hussein's Iraq violence is no longer a means to an end, it has become the end itself, says al-Khalil.[75] So successfully had Hussein institutionalised and expanded violence that the result was 'a true regime of terror'.[76]

Al-Khalil's story culminates in 'The Final Catastrophe', an account of the mindlessness of the Iran–Iraq war. In this final chapter, Al-Khalil outlines the senseless military strategies pursued by Baghdad and Tehran, and the political madness that leads the two protagonists of this war, Hussein and Ayatollah Khomeini, to subordinate reality to insane fictions and strategic irrationality. 'Conducting a destructive war of this degree of hopelessness takes two kinds of madness', says al-Khalil, '[one] to start it and [another] to keep it going.[77]

Madness, fear, death, not to mention spirits of the dead, haunt al-Khalil's tale of terror and horror. This explains the unending accumulation of bodies, the 'stench of slaughter' that arose daily in Hussein's Iraq.[78] The same themes are at play in George W. Bush's account of Iraq. In several speeches and interviews a common refrain has been Hussein's madness and his monstrous regime. In an interview with CNBC's Tim Russert on 8 February 2004 Bush refers to Hussein variously and repeatedly as a 'dangerous man' and a 'madman', against whom 'Containment doesn't work'. Speaking of Hussein, Bush says, 'you can't rely upon a madman, and he was a madman. You can't rely upon him making rational decisions when it comes to war and peace.'[79]

The House of Hussein is represented by Bush as pervaded by an 'air of stern, deep, and irredeemable gloom', to use Poe's description of the House of Usher.[80] He refers

71 Al-Khalil, *Republic of Fear*, p. 129.
72 Ibid., p. 126.
73 Ibid., p. vii.
74 Ibid., p. ix.
75 Ibid., p. xi.
76 Ibid., p. 276. I have discussed state terror in 'Violence, Order and Terror', in Alex Bellamy (ed.), *International Society and its Critics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
77 Al-Khalil, *Republic of Fear*, p. 282.
78 Ibid., p. xiv.
79 'Interview with President George W. Bush', NBC's 'Meet the Press', transcript for 8 February 2004. Available at ⟨http://msnbc.msn.com/id/4179618⟩, accessed on 30 April 2004.
80 Poe, 'The Fall of the House of Usher', p. 142.

frequently to Hussein's 'torture chambers' and 'mass graves',[81] reminding us that human rights groups have catalogued the various methods used in 'the torture chambers of Iraq: electric shock, burning with hot irons, dripping acid on the skin, mutilation with electric drills, cutting out tongues, and rape'.[82] Torture chambers and mass graves become metaphors for Hussein's regime in Bush's discourse. No wonder Hussein 'left deeply ingrained habits of fear and distrust', says Bush, because he 'ruled by terror and treachery'.[83] The darkness and terror that marked the House of Usher similarly marked the House of Hussein. This explains why Tony Blair remarked, upon hearing news that Hussein had been captured, that: 'It removes the shadow that has been hanging over them [the Iraqi people] for too long'.[84] Bush and Blair view the fall of the House of Hussein as liberation from tyranny and terror, or in Poe's words, release from 'the grim phantasm, FEAR'.[85]

Osama bin Laden: ghost

If Hussein governs a 'house of horrors', Osama bin Laden seems to combine monstrosity with invisibility or ghostliness, hiding in shadows and underground networks, operating by stealth and spreading fear through surprise acts of terror. In contrast to Hussein, bin Laden is an underexposed other; he is an elusive 'incorporeal presence', present and visible to the West only as an image on film, or a voice on audiotape. Even when US intelligence agencies have obtained footage of bin Laden, through the unmanned flying drone, Predator, it was impossible to be certain that it was him. The Predator's film revealed little more than 'a tall guy in robes surrounded by shorter guys in robes', as one official frankly conceded.[86]

Bin Laden and al-Qaeda represent a particularly grave danger because they embody the sublime characteristics that Burke says heighten feelings of terror: power, shapelessness, limitlessness and darkness.

- Bin Laden and al-Qaeda's *power* was amply demonstrated in New York and Washington on September 11, in destroying the World Trade Centre and part of the Pentagon resulting in the death of over 3,000 people. In this regard, the source of al-Qaeda's power is that it has the capacity to inflict pain and large-scale devastation on its enemies.[87]

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[81] 'President Bush Reaffirms Resolve to War on Terror, Iraq and Afghanistan', 19 March 2004. Available at ⟨http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/03/20040319-3.html⟩, accessed on 30 April 2004.

[82] 'President Delivers ''State of the Union'' ', 28 January, 2003. Available at ⟨http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/01/20030128-19.html⟩, accessed 30 January 2003.

[83] 'President Bush Discusses Freedom in Iraq and Middle East', 6 November 2003. Available at ⟨http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031106-2.html⟩, accessed 11 November 2003.

[84] Quoted in Paul McGeough et al., 'Saddam Captured', *The Age*, 15 December 2003. We might at this point also note Condoleeza Rice's comments about Kim Jong Il's regime: it is 'so opaque that it is difficult to know its motivations, other than that they are malign'. Condoleeza Rice, 'Promoting the National Interest', *Foreign Affairs*, 79:1 (2000), p. 60.

[85] Poe, 'The Fall of the House of Usher', p. 144.

[86] See Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror: Radical Islam's War Against America* (New York: Random House, 2003), p. 322.

[87] As Burke explains, it is really only when power has the capacity to inflict pain against our will that it becomes sublime. Even though dogs possess 'a competent degree of strength and swiftness', they are generally too domesticated and affectionate to inspire terror, he says. In contrast, wild animals like lions, tigers and rhinoceroses possess undomesticated power that causes terror. As such, they are sublime in a way that 'man's best friend' is not. *Sublime and Beautiful*, pp. 66–7.

- The amorphous and dispersed cell-structure of al-Qaeda's global terrorist network gives it a *shapelessness* that makes it almost impossible to detect or arrest. It is not uncommon to find descriptions of bin Laden as 'a disturbing, enigmatic presence', and al-Qaeda as 'virtually untraceable'.[88] In the same vein, George W. Bush refers to al-Qaeda as 'a faceless enemy';[89] he conjures an enemy difficult to envisage because of his virtual invisibility or ghostliness.

- Global ambition combined with modern technologies give bin Laden and al-Qaeda the impression of being *limitless*. Their attacks on Nairobi and Dar es Salaam as well as Washington and New York suggest that they have the capacity to take their war to the USA wherever they may be on the planet.[90] Moreover, there appear to be no limits on their destructive potential, and no end to their threat to repeat terrorist violence.

- And finally, bin Laden and al-Qaeda inspire fear because of their affinity with *darkness*, and darkness causes anxiety because it conceals threats. Al-Qaeda hide from view in the obscure labyrinthine tunnels of the Tora Bora mountains and exploit the dark recesses of sovereign states to prepare and launch their terrorist attacks. Darkness renders danger invisible.

All these characteristics create the impression that bin Laden's al-Qaeda is both elusive and uncontainable. Even should particular terrorist nodes be exposed and captured, the dynamic structure of the network enables it to survive in altered form.[91] Lacking fixed form or shape, al-Qaeda seems to vanish into the 'eternal silence of infinite spaces' that Pascal says fill him with 'dread'.[92] The source of the dread and danger, of course, is that terrorist violence can spring from these dark spaces without warning. Like a thunder-clap or lightning-bolt – popular examples of the sublime since Longinus – the planes crashing into the World Trade Centre on September 11 provoke the same affect as the sublime. However, from a Burkean perspective, Saddam Hussein's and al-Qaeda's terror can only be viewed as false sublimes since they cause real physical harm rather than 'delightful horror', and identify themselves with abstract universal will.

To summarise, the spectacular terrorist attacks of September 11, by virtue of their destructive power, shapelessness, limitlessness and obscurity, would seem to embody Burke's aesthetic conception of the sublime. As we have seen, however, when sublimity is embodied by humans it becomes tyrannical and terroristic. Hence Burke's revulsion at the French Revolution. The same could be said of September 11. If it is sublime, it is, from a Burkean perspective, a 'false sublime'; the threatening potentiality is realised, it does not remain ideational. Real physical pain is inflicted, rather than just an idea excited in the mind. It does not operate analogously to terror; rather, it enacts it.

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[88] Benjamin and Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror*, pp. 256, 282.
[89] Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), p. 41.
[90] Benjamin and Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror*, p. 265.
[91] See Ronald Deibert and Janet Gross Stein, 'Hacking Networks of Terror', *Dialog-IO*, Spring 2002, pp. 1–14, available at ⟨http://mitpress.mit.edu/journals/INOR/Dialogue_IO/diebert.pdf⟩.
[92] Cited in Simon Critchley, *Continental Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 8.

'In search of monsters to destroy': the Bush doctrine and the false sublime

> We will lift this dark threat from our country and from the world.
>
> *George W. Bush*[93]

Though it is highly unlikely that President George W. Bush has read anything by Edmund Burke, there are some interesting, and perhaps unsurprising, similarities in their political worldviews. It would be easy to outline the many similarities in their political discourses. Six spring quickly to mind. Firstly, both place great emphasis on the unprecedented nature of the present dangers. Burke calls the French Revolution the 'most astonishing [thing] that has hitherto happened in the world'.[94] Bush, sounding like Burke, is convinced that 'the civilized world faces unprecedented dangers'.[95] Secondly, both place great emphasis on the defence of civilisation and civilised values. For both Burke and Bush, the false sublime they confront represents a grave threat to civilisation. In Bush's words, the war against terrorism 'is the world's fight. [It] is civilization's fight.'[96] Thirdly, each pronounces a right of pre-emptive attack.[97] 'Better to be despised for too anxious apprehensions, than ruined by too confident a security', says Burke.[98] 'I will not wait on events, while dangers gather', says Bush.[99] Fourthly, each advocates a crusade against a ghostly enemy; an 'unformed spectre' (Burke) or 'shadowy network' (Bush). Fifthly, the domestic composition of states is thought to be essential to the homogeneity of international society for both Burke and Bush.[100] Finally, an argument could be made that both Burke and Bush are preoccupied with monsters. Burke's 'political teratology' has been extensively discussed by Mark Neocleous and will not be elaborated upon here.[101] This final section will instead present a brief outline of Bush's political teratology and his 'aesthetics of unease'.

Like any gothic storyteller, Bush seeks to excite fear in the mind of his addressees. As Chris Sparks points out, Bush has sought to exploit chronic mass fearfulness through the introduction of a permanent war on terror.[102] Speech after speech by Bush since September 11 invokes threatening potentialities and worst-case scenarios in what is best described as a gothic scene. The principal threats to America and world order, according to the White House, come from 'rogue states' and terrorist networks. A visceral fear of dark forces has become an existential condition, one where tyranny and terror hang together ominously in the air.

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[93] 'President Bush Delivers Graduation Speech at West Point', 1 June 2002. Available at ⟨http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020601-3.html⟩, accessed on 18 March 2003.

[94] Burke, *Reflections*, p. 92.

[95] Bush, 'Speech at West Point'.

[96] 'Address to Joint Session of Congress and the American People', 20 September. Available at ⟨http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20020920-8.html⟩.

[97] To be sure, when Bush refers to pre-emptive or anticipatory action, he in fact means *preventive* action. On the distinction between pre-emptive and preventive action, see Lawrence Freedman, 'Prevention, Not Preemption', *The Washington Quarterly*, 26:2 (2003), pp. 105–14.

[98] Burke, *Reflections*, p. 92.

[99] 'President Delivers State of the Union Address', 29 January 2002. Available at ⟨http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html⟩.

[100] This is a point Fred Halliday makes regarding Edmund Burke in *Rethinking International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1994), ch. 5.

[101] Mark Neocleous, 'The Monstrous Multitude: Edmund Burke's Political Teratology', *Contemporary Political Theory*, 13:1 (2004), pp. 70–88. Unfortunately, I became aware of this excellent article too late to engage with it more fully.

[102] Chris Sparks, 'Liberalism, Terrorism and the Politics of Fear', *Politics*, 23:3 (2003), pp. 203–4.

The House of Hussein is no longer a conventional or containable threat, according to Bush, because it 'possesses weapons of terror'.[103] As a 'rogue state', or part of what he calls 'the axis of evil',[104] Iraq constitutes a 'grave and gathering danger'.[105] Bush's speech to the UN General Assembly catalogued the regime's 'all-pervasive' repression: the arbitrary arrest and detention, the torture, rape, and summary execution of political opponents. In Bush's words, 'all of these horrors [are] concealed from the world by the apparatus of a totalitarian state'.[106] Also cloaked in darkness are the weapons of mass destruction that Bush believes are a threat to America and the rest of the world. By trying to keep these weapons hidden and the inspectors uncertain about their existence and whereabouts, Hussein keeps the world 'in the dark' and enlarges his fearfulness. Exploiting fear through darkness and uncertainty is a strategy common to both Hussein and Bush. For present purposes however, the important point is that Bush's narrative heightens the sense of unease caused by the dark and gloomy exterior of Iraq and other 'axis of evil' states.

There is, however, a more elusive, invisible, unconventional and uncontainable threat that concerns President Bush: global terrorist networks. 'Enemies in the past needed great armies and great industrial capabilities to endanger America. Now, shadowy networks of individuals can bring chaos and suffering to our shores for less than it costs to purchase a single tank.'[107] They too like dark, unilluminated spaces. They form what Bush calls a 'terrorist underworld' that 'operates in remote jungles and deserts, and hides in the centers [sic] of large cities'.[108]

Bush's point is that the twin dangers of tyranny and terror are unconventional and obscure threats originating 'in caves and growing in laboratories'.[109] '[O]ur greatest fear', said Bush in September 2002 when trying to make the case to the world for a war against Iraq, 'is that terrorists will find a shortcut to their mad ambitions when an outlaw regime provides them with the technologies to kill on a massive scale'.[110] The present danger then, as the White House has tried to explain to the world, is that 'rogue' or 'outlaw' states may collaborate with terrorist groups to inflict harm on innocent civilians. In other words, a new and more dangerous composite will be formed out of rogue states and ghostly terrorists. As President Bush explains:

Before September the 11th, many in the world believed that Saddam Hussein could be contained. But chemical agents, lethal viruses and shadowy networks are not easily contained. Imagine those 19 hijackers with other weapons and other planes – this time armed by Saddam Hussein. It would take one vial, one canister, one crate slipped into this country to bring a day of horror like none we have ever known.[111]

Bush here raises the spectre of the worst-case scenario: a hybrid or monstrous compound of ghost and monster. The frightening image presented in Bush's gothic

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[103] 'President George Bush Discusses Iraq in National Press Conference', 6 March 2003. Available at ⟨http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030306-8.html⟩.
[104] Bush, 'State of the Union', 29 January 2002.
[105] 'President's Remarks at the United Nations General Assembly', 12 September 2002. Available at ⟨http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/09/20020912-1⟩.
[106] Bush, 'Remarks at the United Nations', 12 September 2002.
[107] *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, September 2002, available at ⟨http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss1.html⟩.
[108] Bush, 'State of the Union', 29 January 2002.
[109] Bush, 'Speech at West Point'.
[110] Bush, 'Remarks at the United Nations'.
[111] Bush, 'State of the Union'.

scenario is of state and non-state terrorists conspiring to release one small container of invisible and uncontainable chemical or biological agents. 'Secretly, and without fingerprints', monstrous 'weapons of terror' might be transferred to terrorists.[112] When the overexposed, if localised, monstrosity of the House of Hussein is combined with the shapeless, limitless and obscure nature of global terrorism, the threat appears all the more disturbing and sublime.

Unmistakably, Bush narrates here a gothic scene: a tenebrous and threatening atmosphere pervaded by monstrous and ghostly beings. The monstrous tyrannies and the ghostly terrorists both represent sublime threats to America and the world. They are false sublimes of decidedly negative and destructive force. This is the 'dark threat' that the Bush Doctrine promises to lift from America and the world by a combination of unilateralism, pre-emption, and regime change.

One way of understanding the Bush Doctrine, then, is to read it as a heroic fight against monsters. Previous American leaders, however, have warned against foreign policy imagined as a crusade to hunt down and exterminate monsters. Before becoming President, John Quincy Adams, while Secretary of State to President James Monroe, made explicit reference to the potential risks associated with chasing monsters. In a 4th of July address in 1821 he stated:

America does not go abroad in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion only of her own. She will recommend the general cause by the countenance of her voice, and the benignant sympathy of her example. She well knows that by once enlisting under other banners than her own, were they even the banners of foreign independence, she would involve herself beyond the power of extrication, in all the wars of interest and intrigue, of individual avarice, envy and ambition, . . . She might become the dictatress of the world.[113]

When Adams made this statement he was, of course, adopting a 'Jeffersonian' foreign policy stance. Partly informed by Enlightenment ideals and partly driven by national interest, this strand of foreign policy wanted to maintain a healthy distance from the arcana of European power politics. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and John Quincy Adams all thought it imprudent for America to get entangled in permanent alliances and political commitments in faraway places, especially in dynastic and despotic Europe. America should, as far as possible, stand aside from the vicissitudes of power politics and avoid getting drawn into other peoples' wars. 'Why quit our own to stand upon foreign ground?' asked Washington in his 'Farewell Address'.[114] To do so, he continued, would entangle America's future in 'the toils of European ambition, Rivalship, Interest, Humour or Caprice'.

Perhaps Adams had read Shelley's *Frankenstein*, published in 1818, three years before his famous speech, and that is why he cautioned against America chasing monsters. Shelley's wonderful gothic novel, it will be remembered, ends badly for

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[112] Ibid.
[113] Cited in Walter McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World Since 1776* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), p. 36. This evocative passage is also referred to by Owen Harries in *Benign or Imperial? Reflections on American Hegemony* (Sydney: ABC Books, 2004), p. 75, and Vibeke Pedersen in 'In Search of Monsters to Destroy? The Liberal American Security Paradox and Republican Way Out', *International Relations*, 17:2 (2003), pp. 213–32.
[114] Cited in Felix Gilbert, *To the Farewell Address: Ideas of Early American Foreign Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 145.

Victor Frankenstein, the monster's creator. The monster murders Frankenstein's loved ones and leads his 'accursed creator' on a merry chase across mountaintops and oceans to the North Pole. Frankenstein goes abroad in search of his monster to destroy. The monster, however, remains forever elusive; leaving Frankenstein anguished, withered and eventually dead. Adams feared that if America intervened in Europe's conflicts to search out and destroy monsters, its founding principles would meet a similar fate to Frankenstein.

In recent years, exhortations have been made for America to reassert itself in world affairs.[115] Chris Reus-Smit describes how an 'idealism of preponderance' has come to shape foreign policy under the present Bush administration.[116] A coterie of neoconservative foreign policy specialists has put the case for America to embrace its hyperpower status. America, it is argued, is a 'benevolent empire' that should take a more assertive approach to world order.[117] Indeed, it should unashamedly transform world order into an environment more conducive to American values and interests. To do this will require more assertive unilateralism and a willingness to enforce 'regime change'.[118] In other words, and against the advice of Adams, America should indeed go abroad in search of monsters to destroy.

As part of the neoconservative ascendancy in Washington, William Kristol and Robert Kagan argued, in 1996, for a revival and refocusing of American foreign policy around Reaganite ideas. They asserted that America's 'remoralization' at home could not be achieved without the 'remoralization' of American foreign policy.[119] Recalling Adams's admonition that America should not go abroad in search of monsters to destroy, they rhetorically ask: 'But why not?' They continue:

The alternative is to leave monsters on the loose, ravaging and pillaging to their hearts' content, as Americans stand by and watch. . . . Because America has the capacity to contain or destroy many of the world's monsters, most of which can be found without much searching, and because the responsibility for the peace and security of the international order rests so heavily on America's shoulders, a policy of sitting atop a hill and leading by example becomes in practice a policy of cowardice and dishonor [*sic*].

This exhortation to search out and destroy monsters seems to have exerted significant influence over George W. Bush if his wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are anything to go by. But, as Reus-Smit has amply demonstrated, Bush's radical 'revisionist project of hegemonic renewal' raises certain dangers, both for world order and for America.[120] The danger for world order is that the rules and norms of international law are being subverted by the Bush administration's unabashed exceptionalism and unilateralism, as Andrew Hurrell and Tim Dunne convincingly argue.[121] The danger for America is twofold: firstly, the diminution of its moral

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[115] See Kagan, 'Power and Weakness', and William Kristol and Robert Kagan, 'Towards a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy', *Foreign Affairs*, 75:4 (1996), pp. 18–32.

[116] Chris Reus-Smit, *American Power and World Order* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), ch. 4.

[117] Robert Kagan, 'The Benevolent Empire', *Foreign Policy*, no. 111 (Summer 1998), pp. 24–35.

[118] Excellent critiques of the Bush Doctrine, though from very different perspectives, are to be found in Harries, *Benign or Imperial?* and Reus-Smit, *American Power*.

[119] Kristol and Kagan, 'Towards a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy', p. 31.

[120] Reus-Smit, *American Power*.

[121] Andrew Hurrell, ' ''There are No Rules'' (George W. Bush): International Order after September 11', *International Relations*, 16:2 (2002), and Tim Dunne, 'Society and Hierarchy in International Relations', *International Relations*, 17:3 (2003), pp. 303–20.

authority; secondly, the possibility that its aggressive actions may misfire strategically by multiplying enemies and eliciting greater resistance.

In fact, the greatest danger, as Adams and other American leaders have argued, is that in going abroad in search of monsters America will emulate what it fights against; namely, tyranny and terror. In other words, America runs the risk of becoming what it seeks to negate: 'the dictatress of the world', in John Quincy Adams's words. It risks becoming what Burke most despised, a false sublime, where the self arrogates the right to defy all limits and laws, where its will becomes law, and where all obstacles are simply eliminated.

The invasion of Iraq is particularly concerning in this regard. The wilful circumvention of the inspections process, the chicanery and deceit that marked deliberation about invading Iraq, the unilateral decision to invade Iraq without UN Security Council authorisation, the 'shock and awe' military tactics, and the scandals of Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay, should alert us to the dangerous obsession with chasing monsters. That Iraqi 'weapons of mass destruction' have still not been found, despite the much-vaunted, but highly dubious, intelligence used to justify invasion, suggests that the Bush Doctrine has turned Iraq into what we might call a 'monstrous tragi-comic scene'.

Conclusion

> The moral world admits of Monsters which the physical world rejects.
> *Edmund Burke*[122]

In conclusion, it is worth recalling the etymological connection between monster and demonstration. The Latin *monstrare* means to show or reveal. Monsters may reveal as much about ourselves as they do about external reality. They reveal our own conceptions of the world and our own normative disposition; for as David Punter and Glennis Byron note, the designation of others as monsters always serves a moral function. By providing visible warnings of the results of vice and folly, monsters offer a negative definition of civility, virtue, and the good.[123] Monsters help to reinforce boundaries between self and other, civilisation and barbarism, good and evil. At least, that appears to be Bush's purpose in articulating his gothic scene and setting out to destroy monsters. He presupposes the stability of these binary oppositions and the clarity of the categories. But monsters have the unsettling effect of destabilising the very categories and oppositions that Bush and others presuppose. Monsters demonstrate what Bush fails to see: that the gothic scene is 'the symbolic site of a culture's discursive struggle to define and claim possession of the civilised, and to abject, or throw off what is seen as other to that civilised self'.[124] Monsters, as Poe and Shelley reveal, are a sign of the impossibility of once and for all eliminating contestation over the meanings of civilisation, good and evil, freedom and tyranny, and so on.

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[122] Cited in White, *Edmund Burke*, p. 72.
[123] David Punter and Glennis Byron, *The Gothic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 263.
[124] Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*, p. 5.

Bush intended his gothic narrative of international relations to reinforce an image of American moral purpose. In the end, however, it is likely to do little else than demonstrate the political validity of Friedrich Nietzsche's insight, that 'He who fights monsters should look to it that he himself does not become a monster'.[125]

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[125] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), §146.