

Monstrous Reproduction: Werewolves, Zombies, and Pregnancy

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We have grown accustomed to the tingling fear of being hunted, bitten, and maimed by the abominable creatures embedded in folklore. We are wary of the danger of infection, of becoming *them*. But what happens when monsters take on human characteristics: the acts of sex, morality, and love? What does it mean for them and for us? Two recent novels explore this concept: *The Last Werewolf* (2011) by Glen Duncan and *Breathers* (2009) by Scott G. Browne. The biological intercourse and pregnancy of werewolves and of zombies, respectively, offer a point from which we can view these monsters as part of the human collective. The presence of death, murder, and scientific intervention that follows suggests we are not prepared for that drastic step. I assert that these authors make the attempt to humanize their monsters through the performance of sex and love to relate an abstract reflection of our contemporary society.

To understand the way monsters lend insight to human nature, we must first outline how these entities contrast one another. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a human is a biologically living animal in possession of specialized sense organs and a nervous system that has the ability to rapidly respond to stimuli (OED “human” 1a). How “human” is applied in this context is in the way that we often identify as rational and emotional beings with a generally inherent need for social or romantic relationships. Appositionally, the OED defines monster as “a mythical creature which is part animal and part human, or combines elements of two or more animal forms” (OED “monster” 1a). The dispute thus arises as to why we experience fear and repulsion when confronted with these “Others” if they *are*, at least in part, us.

One biological difference between the human and the monster is reproductive method: where human procreation is based on sexual intercourse, werewolves and zombies are conventionally “made” via infection. Duncan comments on human intercourse in the novel when he writes, “According to some authorities this aggressive element of the [human] sexual instinct is in reality a relic of cannibalistic desires” (Duncan 75). Here a parallel is drawn between human sexuality and the monstrous appetite in that there is a focus on violence and possession, of taking over the other so that two become one. It is important to note that this model does not gender intercourse; rather, both partners assume the desire to create a unified whole, the two pieces that complete the puzzle. The werewolf in Duncan’s novel does something similar by retaining the essence of its victims. The lycanthrope is not necessarily after the body; instead it seeks the *life*. Thus, we are faced with the realization that perhaps there is something monstrous about human sex itself, which is promulgated when the monsters start doing it, too.

Further, monsters shed light on the way society functions. Heather Schell, a Professor of Writing at George Washington University, states: “Lycanthropes [...] may seem an unlikely starting point for exploring genetics in popular culture, but they are actually vital to understanding certain aspects of our cultural geography” (Schell 110). We use monsters, and in this instance lycanthropes specifically, to explore the varying levels of society, from our autonomous selves--our emotions and morality--to how these affect us on both a personal and a social basis. Columbia University Professor of History, Caroline Bynum, cites Jacques Le Goff

in his argument, which claims: “[folklore] destabilizes reality, making boundaries fluid, categories and interpretations problematic. It lodges at the heart of the world (not just on its margins) events that seem to make all identity labile, threatening and threatened” (Bynum 998). Bynum uses the lability stance to demonstrate how the changing body shows us the “core of human nature,” the necessary cultural shifts that arise based on the needs of those living within its bounds (Bynum 995).

Hence, we have entered into the realm of transmutation: of person into werewolf and regression to the “natural” state of being human. Jake, the protagonist of Duncan’s novel, relates the dualism he experiences during his first transformation: “It was still him and me but we eyed each other knowing everything depended on bridging the gap. Cooperation would come, the two strands would plait so that *we* would become *I*” (Duncan 61). This description of binate existence demonstrates the distancing we see enacted in our society: that we push against what is unfamiliar when unification is key. Another bodily transformation takes place in the form of pregnancy. That parturition is possible for the monsters of these novels is evidence of the collapse of the boundary between human and monster. It is with this framework that we see monsters as Jeffrey Cohen phrased, “a form suspended between forms that threaten to smash distinctions” (Cohen 6). Self and “Other,” here, are inseparable--one symbiotically creates the other so that the two are permanently linked. Our understanding of monsters who are like us will lead to better understanding of humans: these dual identities exist within ourselves.

In *The Last Werewolf*, the hybrid soon-to-be parents, the WOCOP agents (World Organisation for the Control of Occult Phenomena), and the reader are surprised to learn of Tallula’s pregnancy since Jake is thought to be the last of his species. Plus, it is well-known fact that werewolves do not reproduce sexually (Duncan 28). Jake explains: “Howler girls are eggless, howler boys dud of spunk. If you haven’t had kids by the time you’re turned you’re not having any, get used to it. Lycanthropic reproduction is via infection: Survive the bite and the Curse is yours” (*ibid*). So how do we make sense of a monstrous fetus, one that is conceived outside of the full moon through conventional means, but could not possibly be human? Tallula wonders for the reader: “What would happen if I went into labour on the Curse? What shape would the child have?” (Duncan 289). This is the challenge posed by Duncan, that we take something as organic as pregnancy and birth and apply an uncanny tint to it. It is human-like, but it does not meet the criteria for human as that entity has been commonly understood and defined. For all intents and purposes, the fetus was conceived through natural means, will undergo gestation, and will be *born*--not *created*--as the first lycanthropic child (provided Tallula is able to survive with WOCOP on her trail). From the biological perspective, the child will be neither human nor monster, but simply werewolf (or perhaps another term would need to be constructed without the a priori connotation). It will not have experienced the othering of transitioning between forms, it will not lose a life to gain another. Rather, the child represents the future of a fused society. The *us* and *them* barrier is shattered to make room for an inclusive *we*.

Pregnancy plays a second, metaphoric role in the story as the model for crossing the threshold into lycanthropy. The novel is imbued with notions of conception, gestation, and birth. During what Jake calls the “*debut* transformation,” he describes how “the moon was an inscrutable pregnancy” (Duncan 55). As he slept he dreamt “a small wolf slept inside me and it wasn’t comfortable. It moved its heels and elbows and paws, struggled to make space between my lungs, stomach, bladder” (Duncan 54). The *wulf* within spent the month between full moons

in incubation, described as similar to human experience, and with the next lunar cycle comes birth. “The Hunger fits like a womb,” Jake says, “You deliver yourself from it. You must be born” (Duncan 67-8). Jake-as-werewolf becomes truly born in the midst of death as he tears into the flesh of his human wife Arabella’s thigh, consuming both her and their unborn child. This instance shows the cyclical dichotomy between human and monster, life and death. One must die in order for the other to survive, and life is only achieved in the presence of death.

Although he kills Arabella, she remains with him: “You don’t just get the body. You get the life. Take a life. Into yourself. The deepest nourishment. Something like love” (Duncan 64-5). Her soul, or essence of her soul, lives within Jake. He hears her voice from within, telling him to let go of the guilt he has been fostering for two centuries and love again. And so he does, better and stronger than he felt it for Arabella. Tallula represents a love more carnal and potent than anything Jake can recall from his human life. But is it because she is the only other werewolf or is it because werewolves *feel more*? Previous discussions on emotion only served to intensify Jake’s apathy about the world and about life. Indeed, the novel begins with Jake contemplating giving himself up to WOCOP because he just doesn’t want to fight. It is through the psychosocial perspective that these extremes of emotion can be analyzed. The part of Jake that is werewolf has discovered passion and intimacy with Tallula, what the *wulf* never thought possible to attain in the way love was experienced with Arabella. The monster has again settled into something familiar; where convention shows bloodthirsty beasts, Duncan has provided a more identifiable model. We are forced to question our own ideologies about love and romanticism when we see that this is not a unique feature of being human, and that in fact it appears a monster’s experience exceeds our own.

Psychosocial analysis is also applicable to monstrous existence. In *The Last Werewolf*, Jacqueline Delon, a conspirator against Jake, discusses the effect of the werewolf on mass society:

Werewolves are not a subject for *academe*, but you know what the professors would be saying if they were. ‘Monsters die out when the collective imagination no longer needs them. Species death like this is nothing more than a shift in the aggregate psychic agenda. In ages past the beast in man was hidden in the dark, disavowed. The transparency of modern history makes that impossible: We’ve seen ourselves in the concentration camps, the gulags, the jungles, the killing fields, we’ve read ourselves in the annals of True Crime. Technology turned up the lights and now there’s no getting away from the fact: The beast is redundant. It’s been us all along.’ (Duncan 119)

Admittedly, it is commonly recognized that monsters are a mere reflection of humanity. The “aggregate psychic agenda” is changed, however, in Duncan’s novel: it must make room not only for the monster as *reflection of* human, but for monster simply *as* human. Thus, redundancy becomes novelty, and academia must begin anew with deconstructing and defining the monster, as well as the human.

Moving forward, that the beast seeks humans as food and doesn’t feast on other living creatures (at least, not sustainably) is indicative of an inherent tendency for connection, life depends on unification, either by consumption or through general acceptance. This latter method of social recognition is utilized in S.G. Browne’s fiction *Breathers*, which offers another model of sex and love through zombies Andy and Rita. At one point in their relationship, Rita asks

Andy if he misses his human daughter who he has not seen since before his death. Andy ponders this; he recalls the question being posed in an interview and lied when he said he does miss her because he “didn’t want her to think her father was a monster” (266). Looking past the irony, this musing serves as a distinct shift along the human/monster spectrum. While Andy represents “monster” in physical form, it is suggested that he would only be a “monster” if he lacked love, that is, if he lacked emotion. In truth, he had made peace with the fact that he no longer sought his child, though for many months after his reanimation he had thought often about traveling to see her, “just to know that she *is*” (page?). When pressed to answer why she was asking, Rita radiantly tells Andy that she is pregnant (277). The zombie is *physically* imbued with life. The bliss of this seeming impossibility is short lived, however. During a hostile encounter with Breathers (humans), Rita is knocked unconscious and Andy is restrained. To his horror, the offenders pour gasoline over his beloved and he is forced to watch as they ignite her. “A few feet from me, her pale face no longer visible behind the flames, Rita burns in silence. I can smell her hair burning, her flesh cooking, melting from the bone. I open my mouth to call her name, but all that comes out is a sob... All I can do is watch and cry as... Rita and my unborn child burn to death” (Browne 293-94). Death--as in, they, as zombies, were alive. Andy fell in love with a woman whom he impregnated and had plans to start a family with, and then watched in distress as the life he had envisioned was engulfed in flame, turned to ash, died. The ability to transition into death shows that the zombies were in fact *alive*, which probes that the zombies fit the scope of human as previously outlined: they are rational being with emotions, with interrelations, and with a pulse.

Further, on reasoning that Rita’s and the fetus’ murder was “the only outcome that made sense and felt right,” Browne says the message he wanted to convey is the inimicality of discrimination and hate:

Whenever a group of people who have been discriminated against or treated unfairly have attempted to rise up and proclaim themselves as deserving of equal rights, those who feel threatened by this push for equality have often answered with violence. In the case of Rita and her unborn baby, they weren't killed because she was pregnant, since no one outside of the zombie community knew about her condition. But their deaths [... were] an unfortunate result of Andy's and the rest of the group's push for zombie rights.

Thus, we are shown that in continuing to make *us/them* distinctions, we risk the loss of the potential for a more unified connection, especially if we understand the monster to be an inherent aspect of our humanity. We see a similar dividing line when Andy protests that “Zombies Are People Too” (Browne 99). He displays this message in a park, terrifying adults when a little girl approaches him. She “looks at my face, glances down at my sign, then back up at my face as if she’s trying to figure something out. Finally she points at my chest, at my proclamation of equality, and says, ‘Is it true?’ I nod” (*ibid*). What Browne is attempting with this social commentary is that we hinder our own progression through acts of exclusion. The little girl is symbolic of the potential for change, for a better, unified existence, if we only look past the differences. If the monster is intended to show us a reflection of the evil within ourselves, then what does it say about our nature and our society when the monster becomes good, becomes human? While true that Jake, Andy, and the rest of the supernatural cast partake in dining on human flesh, it appears that the legitimately identified humans in the novel are the ones acting

monstrous: they show hate and fear, which when enacted becomes violence, torture, and murder.

These arguments are not without limitations, however. The possibility of lycanthropic pregnancy stems from the intervention of science and biology: Tallula is hit with an anti-viral dart intended for the bounty of WOCOP agents at the same time she is scratched by their target, and since “biology is destiny,” as WOCOP agent Grainer says, apparently Jake’s “spunk” wasn’t “dud” (Duncan 284). For the reanimated, Andy’s and Rita’s fertility is only revived through the ingestion of human flesh. These restrictions show that some kind of intervention would be required to allow the monsters to morph into an entity more closely resembling human. Also, that Duncan’s novel ends before the birth leaves room for speculation: what will it mean for humanity when the pregnancy comes to term? Or, what if it doesn’t?

As it stands, the more human that monsters become, the more the distinctions are smashed and we see clearly that “it’s been us all along” (Duncan 119). That they have been supplied with such a fundamental part of our culture--sex and love--illustrates the deterioration of barriers. They are becoming us, not just *like* us. Our children, who represent the future and the future of society, have the opportunity for the sort of hybridity that the werewolves and zombies experienced. Unfortunately, Andy’s loss is a loss for us as well in terms of seeing what comes next, but that there is hope yet for Jake’s offspring leaves *us* suspended. The lycanthropic child, we can speculate, would be an entirely new species rather than dangling between human and monstrous identities. It would be the living proof of the unified whole that society necessitates for the benefit of humanity.

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