

David Gordon WHITE, *Myths of the Dog-Man*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991, pp. 334)

Lindsay Dorney

Volume 14, numéro 1, 1992

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1082464ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1082464ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (imprimé)

1708-0401 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Dorney, L. (1992). Compte rendu de [David Gordon WHITE, *Myths of the Dog-Man*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991, pp. 334)]. *Ethnologies*, 14(1), 197–201. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1082464ar>

References Cited

John Fiske, "British Cultural Studies and Television Studies", Robert C. Allen (ed.), *Channels of Discourse: Television and Contemporary Criticism*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1987, pp. 254-289.

Livia Polanyi, *Telling the American Story: A Structural and Cultural Analysis of Conversational Storytelling*, Cambridge, The M.I.T. Press, 1989.

Gary R. BUTLER
Division of Humanities
York University

David Gordon WHITE, *Myths of the Dog-Man*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991, pp. 334)

This book is about monsters, specifically those with the head of a dog and the body of a man and others labelled Dog-Man, and their fantastic peregrinations in some 4000 years of monster traditions. David White's study of Dog-Men and Dog-Headed men is premised on the idea that monsters are an ideological construct; his objective is to present "an exercise in the history of religious method" [xiii] to show how the history of ideas is relevant to an understanding of their modern embodiment in contemporary sociopolitical situations. As an ideological construction, monsters are used for propaganda ("The Yellow Peril," "Communist") or social manipulation ("The Jewish Conspiracy," "Mad Dog Gadaffi," "The Evil Empire"). In a deeper sense, monsters are a lens through which humans refract their experience of the world and express that experience.

Monsters pose the existential question of self-identity; where does the human begin and the monster leave off — how do Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde cohabit? The Dog-Headed men, which White names "cynocephalics," are a hybrid creature; a male human companion yet a potential traitor (dogs of war) who can attack or become rabid. Dog-Men, cynoanthropics, are barbarians said to be descended from dogs which in turn stand as metonyms for their outcast masters, also male. Discussing physical and metonymic forms, White seems not

to question the idea that to be human, to be a monster, is to be male. This is a point on which I shall return: as White uses the myths of the cynocephalics and cynoanthropics to construct a theory of Otherness which links ancient monster lore to such behaviors as untouchable casts, racism, genocide and the bearing of the white man's burden, but not to misogyny.

Dog-Men and Dog-Headed men, as all monsters, must occupy a landscape to make their grotesquerie and terror real. Such landscapes are spatial antitypes for culture, society, or civilization: a desert (the Middle East and Puranic India), the wilderness (medieval Europe), or places of torrential waters (Asia). To these antitypes I include the urban landscape with serial/mad killers and rapists, and "wilding" or "swarming" by teenage (mutant) gangs (male). The terror lies in their potential as hordes or swarms to engulf us, bringing death and putrefaction. The hostile forces of nature from which monsters draw life — and in turn embody these forces — precede, define, and constantly inundate order: we "people" the blank spaces on the map of our self-centered universes with semi-human monsters with subhuman behaviors and social practices — Them, the Other.

Ordering — culture, society and civilization — seems to be an endless task of differentiating "them" from "us", distinguishing and defining human and not human (i.e. male and not male), chaos from cosmos. Lest we forget, our fascination with the monsters continues with freak shows, supermarket tabloid articles on animal-like infants and changelings from outer space, and much of science fiction. From myths to pulp literature, the monstrous races are generally cast as "outlandish, benighted, damned," [20] and not white skinned. "Redeemed" monsters are individuals as they have names: Dracula, King Kong, Godzilla, E.T., Chuckie, Romulians, and St. Christopher (a cynocephalic).

The ordering of chaos and cosmos, the monstrous and not monstrous, is embodied in myth, which White points out, is itself marginal both to the modern empirical search for truth and to plain everyday experience. Northrop Frye's definition of myth is fundamental to White's theory of Otherness: "through working at extremities of human possibility, a projection of a vision of human fulfillment and obstacles to that fulfillment" [1-2]. White's scholarship, interweaving archeological, historical, linguistic and textual sources, is meticulous and overpowering; brilliant in the use of history of the mythic and religions' idea to explain monsters and their persistent vitality in human affairs. However, to a general and necessarily dedicated reader, such scholarly brilliance and the language in which it is cast becomes arcan(in)ø.

White begins by demonstrating the myths of Dog-Headed men within Christianity with an analysis of a fourteenth century Ethiopic text of a legend of the Apostles which has its origins in Gnostic and Manichaeic sources. He then describes the general phenomenon of the cynocephalic and the dog in Western pagan and Christian religion, culture and society, such as the Hounds of Heaven and Hell and Anubis. Like a pack of feral dogs, Dog-Headed men and Dog-Men

run as faceless hordes. The fourth century A.D. Alexander Romance is a major text recounting the conqueror's battles with these hordes and the wall he built to confine them outside his particular universe. With this text, Dog-Headed men and Dog-Men are defined as a monstrous race and are attached to another monstrous race, the gynocratic Amazons with whom the canine monster may only copulate. Four chapters, forming the major portion of White's book concern the cynocephalic and cynoanthropic myths located in Northern India and China. To follow the analyses of the Vedic texts, Sanskrit etymologies, the activities of unclean Dog-Cookers and Dog-Milkers (unclean because of miscegenation), and brahmanic purity codes requires a doggedness in connecting White's readings with the why and wherefores of Otherness.

Based on this reading, White locates the vortex of the cynocephalic and cynoanthropic races in central Asia (Tibet, Western China, Afghanistan, and Kashmir); here Western Indian and Chinese traditions converge when Dog-Men are juxtaposed with the homelands of the Amazons, where polyandry and matrilinearity possibly originated — the genesis of European myths of Amazon women.

Like Alexander, the Chinese built their Great Wall to confine the Dog-Men — that is the barbarians — outside, as Other beyond the pale. The survey of ancient Chinese history, texts, and mythology opens a wilderness landscape — a complex antitype to Western myth and thought: the reader joins the monsters in their benightedness and ignorance. White's exhaustive consideration of the Chinese mythology of the dog and Dog-Men reveals that there is no clear notion of where barbarians leave off and civilization begins, an idea which returns to White's opening existential question of the monster and human residing in the microcosm of ourselves. What all this teaches, White writes, "is the interconnectedness of all that its (Chinese) elite tradition has so carefully attempted to classify, separate, and hierarchize" [79] — the ultimately impossible task of ordering chaos and cosmos.

Throughout all the myths of the cynocephalic and the cynoanthropic is a willful act of disobedience which shattered a harmonious social order: a monster, disposed and deformed, who is exiled as his punishment. China was unique in its classification of barbarians by assigning to them quadruped, insect, or reptile qualifers. In Europe, the villain, the peasant, found himself walled out of the lord's estate, the Church, and society as Alexander's hordes or Chinese barbarians had been. Europe named and located its monsters and Dog-Men in any direction the winds of invasion and conquest blew. Even in Greece and Rome, formerly adorable creatures, the kalustrioi and kynocephalic, became gigantic, cannibalistic and bellicose creatures. This transformation occurred as the democratic ideal of the Greek and Roman republics fell to imperial ideologies and conquest became a new political paradigm; there are no neutral populations in the imperial world view, in a Cold War, or in a Desert Storm.

In "Facing up to Other People," the last chapter, White returns to his concept of Otherness. Like the structuralists and post-structuralists, White sees ideology underlying myth and shows that we usually take for granted as "natural" and given serves other purposes. The myths of monsters tell of a willing submission to a higher order or great tradition by lesser beings. Whether the subject is redeemed cynocephalic St. Christopher, Visvamitra the Dog-Cooker village, or the Chinese emperor's dog P'an Hu who kills the general of the barbarians, the leitmotif is domination.

White's theory of Otherness focuses not on tribe, clan, family and individual, but on the imperial scale of propaganda and social manipulation. Popular ignorance continues to be the basic stuff from which superpowers and empire builders have systematically distorted and reduced other peoples' myths and self-understandings of their culture, history, and worth. (Orwell calls this newspeak; White, "bibble-babble.") "Them" and "us" must be ordered. Hitler and Joseph McCarthy had their lists of "them." White concludes that "only through an openness to meaningful encounter, to dialogue, to action can we hope to find a path to authentic self-understanding and hope for the continued existence of our fragile blue planet" [209]. White's embracing of the "monster" races is founded on the visions of Augustine and Isidore of Seville: Divine Will created both monsters and us. Such is the grand scale of this book.

As a feminist reading *The Myth of the Dog-Man*, my hackles rose; with a low growl I pawed through White's bibliography and index to search for any of the work feminist scholars have written on the Other, or "Otherness" as White prefers. Not an item, not even de Beauvoir; White seems to have "reinvented" the wheel called Other. Feminists' work on Otherness must apply, then, on only small, intimate scales, not on grand ones where male power is manifest destiny. Also, such an omission seems to imply that the feminist agenda of Other has been dealt with positively, for White does not acknowledge that the Other is constructed in the home and the family where it can be, obviously, worked upon by propaganda and social manipulation by the state and other authorities.

White's statements on the Otherness of the Amazons are most interesting, but they are given as asides. The Amazons chose to be outside the walls of Alexander and the Chinese. As great warriors — with both breasts — they also had fearsome magical powers. So powerful were they that Achilles had to couple with the slain body of the Amazon Queen to conquer her magical powers. White mentions in passing the existence of cynanthropic Greek goddesses — the original bitches; he omits Lilith, a demon of desert who ate children, cast outside Paradise's wall for disobedience, for refusing to submit to Adam.

Though White uses terms such as "gynocratic" and notes in passing that depicting dogs and women sexually engaged is a staple of pornography, female and Other are *de facto* linked. In all the myths, the cohabitation of human woman and male dogs reduces their offspring to the level of animals, not even of

monsters. As White acknowledges, this coupling is “a sort of male projection of sexual domination onto the image of bestiality” [89] MALE fantasy that is. However, he writes that Amazon tintillation has no impact on our perpetual horrified fascination with monsters. The Amazons, like all women, live in a double bind as sexual beings, as sexually deviant beings. Like that of Augustine and Isidore, Other/Otherness does not apply to Amazon/females. Rather in Otherness, “the submission [sic] of women to civilization is sexual but for men it is servile.” [199] In White’s map of the universe, a blank space exists where Amazons/females should be.

Lindsay DORNEY
University of St. Jerome's College
Waterloo, Ontario

Anne-Marie DESDOUITS, *Le monde de l'enfance: Traditions du pays de Caux et du Québec*, Québec, Presses de l'université Laval, Paris, Éditions du CNRS, 1990, 333 pp., ISBN 2-7637-7212-9 (PUL), ISBN 2-222-04170-8 (CNRS), \$39.00, (Préface de Françoise Loux).

Ce livre s'inscrit dans la suite d'un premier ouvrage intitulé *La vie traditionnelle au pays de Caux et au Canada français*, publié en 1987 chez les mêmes éditeurs. Il constitue la deuxième tranche d'une vaste étude entreprise dans le contexte d'un doctorat. Alors que le premier, son titre nous l'indique, privilégiait l'étude comparative du cycle des saisons et de la vie quotidienne relié à l'univers rural, dans la Haute-Normandie (France), dite pays de Caux, et au Canada français (le Québec et l'Acadie), le second nous conduit dans la sphère de la vie privée, décrivant dans les deux sociétés “la période marquée par les apprentissages, soit l'enfance, de la naissance à l'entrée dans le monde du travail” (p. 1). La période historique retenue est celle du début du siècle jusqu'à la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, un moment où le monde rural se transforme tant dans le Vieux Continent que dans le Nouveau, modifiant profondément les aspects caractéristiques du mode de vie traditionnel. L'auteure, elle-même d'origine cachoise, vit au Québec depuis plusieurs années; ethnologue et linguiste, elle est