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## **‘ESTA DESGARRADA INCÓGNITA’: MONSTER THEORY AND *HIJOS DE LA IRA***

*Dominique Russell*

*Hijos de la ira* is a peculiar book. Much has been made of the way its disordered, gargantuan verses burst onto the placid poetic scene of post-war Spain.<sup>1</sup> Its enduring appeal, however, has less to do with its historical effect as with its dramatic religious and existential questioning. It is the ‘Diario íntimo’ that continues to fascinate, with its nightmarish inner world populated by monsters.<sup>2</sup>

Yet it is curious how little critical attention has been paid to the meaning of the monsters that proliferate in these poems. Much enumerated, they are more often flattened into a general allegory, than treated as monsters qua monsters. Luis Fernández Vázquez, for example, in his recent study leaves a key insight undeveloped: “[Alonso] moviliza toda una teoría de monstruos, bestias, chillidos acres, sórdidas materias para poblar su selva poética”<sup>3</sup> (55). What is Alonso’s ‘theory of monsters,’ or, more accurately, given poetry’s unsystematic form, his conception and his use of the monstrous? How does it fit with other theories of monstrosity? These are important questions to explore, for if *Hijos de la ira* is a kind of diary, it is a portrait of the poet as monster, the intimate diary of a monstrous self, and one which conforms to many aspects of the grotesque.

As an intimate diary, however, it doesn’t quite deliver, as Philip Silver points out. There is a “willed reticence” that holds the reader now at a distance, now close, in a pattern of attraction-repulsion.

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<sup>1</sup> In Emilio Alarcos Llorach’s famous formulation: “fue una especie de terremoto, que subvirtió las capas poéticas e hizo aflorar a la luz los estratos latentes de que nadie hablaba” [It was a kind of earthquake that subverted the poetic surfaces and brought forth the latent strata that no one talked about (translation mine)] (146).

<sup>2</sup> A recent edition has been published to celebrate the centenary of Alonso’s birth.

<sup>3</sup> “[Alonso] mobilizes a whole theory of monsters, beasts, shrill cries, sordid materials to populate his poetic jungle”(translation mine).

At times the “I” speaks as an individual, and other times projects a voice that is disembodied and “universal.”<sup>4</sup> These ambiguities of tone, and of revelation and disguise seem to me related to the *poemario*’s fundamental motif. The monster is a contradictory figure, being on the one hand a singular, unrepeatable error of nature and on the other, a creation of the community, and thus exemplary. Like the poetic “I” the monster is inevitably displaced, its meaning impossible to capture directly.<sup>5</sup> According to Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “the monster is definitionally a displacement: an exhibit, demonstrative of something other than itself” (*Of Giants* xiv). The monster is thus an ideal disguise for the poetic “I”: pointing beyond itself, polysemic, at once fascinating and repulsive, promising intimacy, but nevertheless remaining aloof.

The monster disguise is also related to the poetic “I” in a more conflictual way. There are two “I’s” in the book, titled, significantly “children” rather than “child of wrath” (the singular being more appropriate to the “diaro íntimo”<sup>6</sup>). On the one hand, there is “ese Dámaso frenético”<sup>7</sup> mocked by the poet as “ese tristísimo pedagogo, más o menos ilustre/ese ridículo y enlevitado señor;”<sup>8</sup> and on the other the poet, hidden in the first poems behind “Dámaso,” and taking up space fully in the third-person poems, as the voice of “Man,” who calls God to account in the name of all Humanity. On the one hand, there is the “I” alone among monsters, and on the other the “I” who contains multitudes, a Nerudian voice who sings for those who cannot.<sup>9</sup> The tension between these two voices, the singular and the collective, is part of the meaning of monsters. At the same time, however, it is in this conflict between individual bodily experience and the universal, abstract voice that the monstrous arises. I want

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<sup>4</sup> I discuss the division and monstrosity of the poetic “I” in greater depth in “El poeta disfrazado de sí mismo: máscaras, monstruos y el yo poético en Dámaso Alonso” (269-278).

<sup>5</sup> “It may be that the nearest one can come to definition is to look not straight to the self, which is invisible anyway, but sidewise to the experience of self, and try to discover or create some similitude for the experience that can reflect or evoke it and that may appeal to another individual’s experience of self” (Olney 29).

<sup>6</sup> The title refers to the epigram “...et eramus natura filii irae scut et ceteri” “[and we were by nature the children of wrath, even as the others]” from the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians (11, 3). See Ferreres 133-137 for commentary.

<sup>7</sup> “this frenzied Dámaso” (“Monsters” 79).

<sup>8</sup> “that sorry pedagogue, more or less distinguished, that ridiculous man dressed up in a frock coat” (“On All Souls’ Day” 15).

<sup>9</sup> For another perspective on the poetic “I” see Marcelo Coddou “Notas para otra crítica: ¿Por qué los “Monstruos” de Dámaso Alonso?” (142-161).

to suggest here that the inevitable duality of the monster is resolved through the singular, abstract unity of the poetic voice. Monstrosity is left behind in disembodied verse.

In this study, then, I want to move beyond the authorized reading Alonso himself gave in his 1968 prologue:

El poeta, participante en la vida, la ama intensamente; odia, al mismo tiempo, la monstruosa injusticia que preside todo el vivir. Consecuencia de esto es considerar monstruosa toda la vida. Pero ya este sentido de la palabra monstruosa adquiere otro valor: la vida es monstruosa porque es inexplicable. Cada ser es un monstruoso porque es inexplicable, extraño, absurdo. Es el valor primordial que *monstrum* tenía en latín<sup>10</sup> (Alonso 14).

If the primary meaning of *monstrum* is “strange,” it has other meanings and uses that can shed light on the self and the world being scrutinized in these poems. As a singular being that serves as an example, a visible warning and embodiment of sin, the monster shares in the duality of the poetic voice, as an exemplary uniqueness. If, as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen claims, a monster “exists only to be read,” the Dámaso who is “monstruo entre monstruos” still has much to reveal (4). In the pages that follow, I propose to read *Hijos de la ira* through the lens of “monster-theory,” focusing on three uses of monstrosity: as signs of transgression, abjection and troubled paternity, showing how in each case the conflict arising from incompatible dualities is at the heart of the image of the monster.

## 1. The Monsters as Transgression Embodied

The monster is a sign, a horrible image that must be interpreted. The contested origin of the word—from *monstrare* (to show) or *monere* (to warn)—points to this double function.<sup>11</sup> The monster is a

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<sup>10</sup> The author, as a participant in life, loves it intensely; at the same time he hates the monstrous injustice that presides over every act of living. A consequence of this is to consider all life monstrous. But with this usage the word “monstrous” acquires another meaning: life is “monstrous” because it is unintelligible, strange, absurd. (This is the primary meaning that *monstrum* had in Latin (vii).

<sup>11</sup> Marina Warner comments: “Myths and monsters have been intersplined since the earliest extant poetry from Sumer: the one often features the other. The word myth, from the Greek, means a form of speech, while the word monster is derived, in the opinion of one Latin grammarian, from *monestrum*, via *moneo*, and encloses the notion of advising, of reminding, above all of warning. But *moneo*, in the word *monstrum* has come under the influence of Latin *monstrare*, to show, and the combination neatly characterises the form of speech myth often takes: a myth shows something, it’s a story spoken to a purpose, it issues a warning, it gives an account which

visible incarnation of a transgression: “The monster functions as the single evidence, both powerful and shameful, that a gross violation has taken place” (Vélez-Quiñones 50). It serves at the same time as a warning to those who would contemplate such a transgression. As Cohen has it, monsters “police the borders of the possible” while bearing the hideous mark of their rebellion against those limits (12). They are a warning against rebellion and a *de-monstration* that the established order has been disturbed.<sup>12</sup> The stricter the order, the more productive the teratogenesis:

cada monstruo es hijo de una contradicción (la que se crea entre el orden que la margina y la rebeldía que proclama) ... quienes transitan los márgenes son una amenaza y corren el riesgo de ser catalogados como monstruos. Y son tantas las fronteras como proliferativas las fábricas innumerables de monstruosidades.<sup>13</sup> (Lafuente 18)

It comes as no surprise, then, that images of monsters and monstrousness abound in Francoist Spain. *Hijos de la ira* is one work among many during the Francoist period, from Camilo José Cela's *La familia de Pascual Duarte* (1942) to Víctor Erice's *El espíritu de la colmena* (1973), that incorporates monstrousness as central to poetic and fictional worlds. The harshness of the fratricidal war and difficult post-war situation account in some measure for these images. More specifically to Alonso, the repression of the early post-war years and the ostrich-like determination to declare that all was well, in for example, the poetry of the *garcilacistas*, made it necessary to find a more authentic language with which to address the desultory reality of the period. Part of the proliferation of grotesque and horrific images, and the explosion caused by *Hijos de la ira*, has to do with the public release in speaking—metaphorically of course—of what could not be spoken of.

The regime itself engendered monsters by de-humanizing its enemies, forcing them to exist in the silence outside the publicly acceptable. The imposition of “one ‘Numantian’ Spain” emanating from the ideology of Franco's regime required the exclusion of any

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advises and tells often by bringing into play showings of fantastical shape and invention—monsters” (19).

<sup>12</sup> As Chris Baldick puts it, “in a world created by a reasonable God, the freak or lunatic must have a purpose: to reveal visibly the results of vice, folly, and unreason as a warning to erring humanity” (11).

<sup>13</sup> “every monster is the child of a contradiction (one created between the order that marginalizes it and the rebellion it proclaims) [...] those who travel the margins are a threat and run the risk of being catalogued as monsters. And the borders are as varied as the innumerable monster factories are prolific” (translation mine).

diversity from public life and a clear, fixed vision of what it meant to be Spanish. As José Monleón puts it:

The totalitarian public sphere admits only the voice of submission. Dissidence—political as well as aesthetic—belongs to silence, to the obscure realm of exile. This exclusionary act forged two monolithic blocks: on the one hand, an absolute, monovalent public “I”; on the other, a many-headed demon, one “absent other” invested with all the connotations that had been discarded from the public realm. (264)

Like many writers of the postwar period, Alonso breaks the condemnation to silence, yet the voice he finds is that of a “many-headed demon.”

Whatever the context from which they are born, monsters exist to be purged, the guilt embodied in their bodies expiated in order to restore the status quo. We may take pleasure in their rebellion, but we take more in their destruction, however sympathetic their appeal. As Stephen King points out:

We love and need the concept of monstrosity because it is a reaffirmation of the order we all crave as human beings...it is not the physical or mental aberration in itself that horrifies us, but rather the lack of order that these situations seem to imply. (qtd. in Carroll 199)

Monsters serve as the polar opposite of normal, yet their abnormality makes normality possible. Their disorder serves order. In the words of Lafuente: “aunque lo patológico, lo inusual o lo aberrante se definen como excepciones a la norma, es en realidad lo atípico lo que configura y define lo normal”<sup>14</sup> (21).

In *Hijos de la ira*, the warnings and demonstrations of disorder are grotesquely multiplied. From the outset, we are set in a night of the living dead, where the poet, one of more than a million living corpses, rails against God:

Y paso largas horas preguntándole a Dios, preguntándole por qué se pudre lentamente mi alma,  
por qué se pudren más de un millón de cadáveres en esta ciudad de Madrid,  
por qué mil millones de cadáveres se pudren lentamente en el mundo.<sup>15</sup>  
 (“Insomnio” 21)

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<sup>14</sup> “although the pathological, the unusual or the aberrant are defined as exceptions to the norm, it is in reality the atypical which configures and defines the normal” (translation mine).

<sup>15</sup> And I spend long hours asking God, asking him why my soul is slowly rotting

This first poem establishes a pattern of spiraling exaggeration that is at work throughout the collection. Fanny Rubio describes its structure as “construido en verso libre, casi versículo, con ritmo encadenado, obsesivas reiteraciones paralelísticas e insistencia formal que se acompañan de una repetición temática para comunicar la descripción de la ciudad como cementerio de vivos que se pudren”<sup>16</sup> (167). The rhythmic and thematic “insistence” serves to emphasize the monstrous as all-encompassing. It begins with the other, but eventually penetrates the very soul of the self. (I will discuss the abjection of this image in the next section.) The manifestations of guilt are everywhere. Alonso brings us into a universe where horror is complete, revealing divided and deconstructed identities, bodies in decomposition, deformed and deforming. The monstrous is so totalizing that the possibility of eliminating the monster and restoring order is gone. There is no order to be served by the removal of the monster. The pole of normalcy disappears as everything, from insects to God, is monstrous.

It is thus no surprise that the eyes that see this monstrosity should be those of a monster, the most horrible of all, “señalado del dedo de mi Dios”:

No, ninguna tan horrible  
 como este Dámaso frenético,  
 como este amarillo ciempiés que hacia ti clama con todos sus tentáculos enloquecidos,  
 como este bestia inmediata  
 transfundida en una angustia fluyente,  
 no, ninguno tan monstruoso  
 como este alimaña que brama hacia ti,  
 como esta desgarrada incógnita.<sup>17</sup>  
 (“Monstruos” 108)

These verses constitute a self-portrait as an agitated, grotesque beast, abjectly flailing before God. Like “Insomnio” the spiraling exaggeration and multiplication of images share in the grotesque,

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away/ why more than a million corpses are rotting away in this city of Madrid,/why a billion corpses are slowly rotting away in the world (“Insomnia” 3).

<sup>16</sup> “constructed in free verse, each verse, with a enjambed rhythm, obsessive parallelistic reiterations and formal insistence [is] accompanied by a thematic repetition to communicate the description of the city as a cemetery of the living who are rotting” (translation mine).

<sup>17</sup> “marked by the finger of my God: No, none of them is so horrible/as this frenzied Dámaso,/ as this yellow centipede that cries out to you with all his maddened feelers,/ as this immediate beast/transfused into a flowing anguish;/ no, none so monstrous/as this wild animal bellowing at you,/as this soul-torn unknown” (“Monsters” 79).

where “the ‘ludicrous’ is never far from the ‘fearsome’” (McElroy 12). As the grotesque mode demands, and monsters must be, these verses are supremely visual, at the same time as they gather rhetorical power in the use of the anaphora.

The poetic voice here is like Kafka’s Gregor Samsa, reduced to a ridiculous non-human condition, but a tragic figure nevertheless. This poet-insect, poet-beast bears the burden of social guilt, feeling more than anyone a shared suffering. His “sublime desperation” teeters on the absurd, as a kind of monstrous grandstanding. But the reader nevertheless identifies, as Ricardo Gullón puts it “con la angustia existencial de ser-para-la-nada”<sup>18</sup> (qtd. in Díaz-Plaja 21). Despite the meanings others can read into (and out of) monsters, for themselves they are precisely this, a being for nothing, an error, without projection or lineage.

## 2. The Monster as Mixed Category

Historically monsters were beings composed of incongruous elements: sphinxes, werewolves, dragons and others are all recombinations of animal or animal and human features. By presenting similarities to categories of beings to which they are not related, “monsters blur the difference between genres and disrupt the strict order of Nature” (Huet 4). The monster brings into question divisions between species and classifications. To quote Cohen, “the too-precise laws of nature as set forth by science are gleefully violated in the freakish compilation of the monster’s body” (7). One can question whether the violation is gleeful, but it is always present.<sup>19</sup> To an “either-or,” the monster responds “and.” It is fundamentally ambiguous, as mentioned at the outset, with an ambiguity paralleling that of the inevitably dual poetic “I.”

Of the monsters with which Alonso identifies—living corpse, “jayán pardo,” “enlutada ameba,” “alacrán,” “necrófago,” “fétida hidra”<sup>20</sup>—all are characterized by a painful duality, being on an

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<sup>18</sup> “with the existential anxiety of being-for-nothing” (translation mine).

<sup>19</sup> In the case of Alonso I would argue that these violations are not in fact gleeful at all. Thus, while his evocations of the grotesque body are often in line with that described by Mikhail Bakhtin, his essential pessimism distances his work from Bakhtin’s conception of the grotesque. Without the regenerative, subversive, celebratory view of bodily decay, Alonso’s poems fit a more Kayserian theory of the grotesque (considering these theorists as two poles).

<sup>20</sup> “dark giant,” “amoebas dressed in mourning,” “scorpion,” “necrophage,” “fetid hydra.”

uncomfortable border between the human and the animal, between life and death. For the poet, man's monstrosity comes principally from the fact that he is a being who is both living and dying, a mixture of spirit and body. Almost all the insults he aims at himself show an abhorrence of the body:

Y ahora,  
a los 45 años,  
cuando este cuerpo ya me empieza a pesar  
como un saco de hierba seca ("En el día de los difuntos" 35)

cadáver que se me está pudriendo encima  
desde hace 45 años ("Yo" 79)

ordre de putrefacción quiso que fuera esta cuerpo  
yo soy el excremento de can sarnoso

yo soy el montoncito de estiércol a medio hacer. ("De profundis"  
199)<sup>21</sup>

These images of detritus contaminate even the soul, described in "De profundis" as "ramera de solicitaciones"<sup>22</sup> and in "Insomnio" as subject to decay. One can hardly avoid evoking here the concept of abjection, as theorized by Julia Kristeva. For Kristeva abjection serves the formation of identity as a social and speaking subject, which requires a denial of the body and its functions. What threatens the stability of that identity is abject:

ce n'est donc pas l'absence de la propreté ou de santé qui rend abject, mais ce qui perturbe une identité, un système, un ordre. Ce qui ne respecte pas les limites, les places, les règles. L'entre-deux, l'ambigu, le mixte.<sup>23</sup> (12)

There is, nevertheless, a particular disgust associated with the waste that recalls our corporeality, and the death at work within us. The horror of the abject is the horror of our inescapable materiality,

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<sup>21</sup> And now/at the age of 45,/when this body of mine is beginning to weigh/like a bag of dry grass ("On All Souls' Day" 15)

corpse that has been rotting on top of me/for 45 years ("Myself" 51)

a wineskin of corruption he wanted this my body to become.../ I am the excrement of the mangy dog.../I am the little half-built pile of manure ("De Profundis" 147).

<sup>22</sup> "my soul a soliciting whore" (147).

<sup>23</sup> "It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva 4).

the organic reality of our being. It returns to remind us of our animal nature, our dependence and mortality:

tel un théâtre vrai, sans fard et sans masque, le déchet comme le cadavre m'indiquent ce que j'écarte en permanence pour vivre. Ces humeurs, cette souillure, cette merde sont ce que la vie supporte à peine et avec peine de la mort.<sup>24</sup> (Kristeva 11)

In *Hijos de la ira*, abjection contributes to a view of man (and indeed all living beings) as monstrous. The lyric “I”—a disincarnate subject—in creating himself as a character (object), notes with revulsion his bodily attachments.<sup>25</sup> He contemplates with anxiety the mixture of categories, the blurring of boundaries: life/death, animal/human, inside/outside, self/other. The ambiguities precipitate a category crisis that threatens the very construction of the self. The self becomes monstrous, dangerous, “a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions” (Cohen 6).

For Kristeva, the revulsion of the abject arises precisely from this reminder of the self’s lack of unity. The abject—excrement, mucus, pus—brings to consciousness that which threatens our integrity, but from the *inside*, from within our permeable, porous bodies. The abject on one level relates to the presence of dead matter within our live bodies. It relates to necessary functions that the mind (the conscious “I”) cannot impede.

The lyric voice in *Hijos de la ira* cannot reconcile itself to this dominion of the body, rejecting duality and the reminders of mortality. In this sense the aspiration is toward a disembodied “universal” voice. By being the voice of ‘Man’ with a capital, there is an escape from the individual “I,” crammed into a body for 45 years.<sup>26</sup>

Curiously, the ever-present and ‘unpoetic’ words—“putrefacción,” “hediondo,” “grotesco,” “nauseabunda,” “acre,” “fétido,” “pus”<sup>27</sup>—which relate to the destruction of the body, that is, the process of decomposition, are not used in relation to the dead. In a book where “la imagen de los monstruos...describe todo lo que existe: cosa, árbol, animal y hombre, o sea toda la circunstancia del poeta y aun el poeta

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<sup>24</sup> “No, as in true theatre, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order in order to live. These bodily fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death” (Kristeva, *Power 3*).

<sup>25</sup> “The monster is the subject itself, conceived of as Thing” (Žižek 66).

<sup>26</sup> As I mentioned in relation to “El último Cain,” the individual is always present within the abstraction.

<sup>27</sup> “putrefaction,” “stinking,” “grotesque,” “nauseous,” “acid,” “fetid,” “pus.”

mismo”<sup>28</sup> (Flys 253), it is striking that the dead are neither monsters nor monstrous. There are terrible images of open-eyed corpses in “Preparativos de viaje,” but the poem concerns the moribund in the moments before dying, rather than the dead themselves.<sup>29</sup> Once dead, their eyes reveal a sad wisdom:

No hay mirada más triste.  
Sí, no hay mirada más profunda ni más triste.<sup>30</sup>  
 (“Preparativos de viaje” 53)

In “El día de los difuntos” the dead are described with awe and praise, in rare exclamations that are not of horror but of admiration:

¡Oh! ¡No sois profundidad de horror y sueño,  
muertos diáfanos, muertos nítidos,  
muertos inmortales,  
cristalizadas permanencias  
de una gloriosa materia diamantina!  
¡Oh ideas fidelísimas  
a vuestra identidad...!<sup>31</sup> (33)

The images here are of crystalline transparency. The dead are immortal, permanent, pure spirit, disincarnate and always faithful to their identity. A “diamond-like material” suggests purity, multifaceted eternity. That is, the dead are no longer subject to change and confusion. Dying eliminates the ambiguity of matter and state that disconcerts the poet. One becomes an idea, not a body.<sup>32</sup> Once dead, the anxiety of the in-between state in which we exist (living with death within us) is eliminated. Identity is fixed, and, as we shall see in the

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<sup>28</sup> “the image of the monster... describes all that exists: thing, tree, animal and man, that is, the entire circumstance of the poet and even the poet himself” (translation mine).

<sup>29</sup> Flys comments: “Entre la vida absurda e indeseada y el estado envidiable de la muerte, el hombre siente un miedo invencible al tránsito, o sea, al momento de morir. Y así, el instante que promete traer consigo la solución definitiva a toda miseria existencial es, al mismo tiempo, el causante de la más profunda angustia [Between absurd and undesired life and the enviable state of death, man feels a invincible fear of the transition, that is, of the moment of death. And thus, the moment that promises to bring with it the definitive solution to all existential misery is, at the same time, the cause of deepest anxiety” (translation mine)] (308).

<sup>30</sup> There is no sadder gaze./Yes, there is no deeper or sadder gaze (“Getting Ready for a Journey” 33).

<sup>31</sup> No, you are not the depth of horror and slumber,/diaphanous dead, gleaming dead ones,/immortal dead,/crystallized continuations/of a glorious diamantine substance!/Oh ideas most faithful/to your own identity! (“On All Souls’ Day” 11).

<sup>32</sup> The exception is in “Elegía a un moscardón azul” where the dead insect becomes “sólo ya cosa, sólo ya materia/orgánica, que en un torrente oscuro volverá al mundo mineral.” Nevertheless death represents a singular state and matter.

next section, one resembles one's creator. For the present, however, alive and alienated, enclosed in the self, the poet finds himself anxiously in the fluidity of being:

Yo me muero, me muero a cada instante,  
perdido a mí mismo,  
ausente de mí mismo,  
lejano de mí mismo,  
cada vez más perdido, más lejano, más ausente.<sup>33</sup>  
("En el día de los difuntos" 33)

### 3. The Monster as Bastard Son

For Aristotle, "anyone who does not take after his parents is really in a way a monstrosity, since in these cases Nature has in a way strayed from the generic type" (401). Whether or not a distortion of the philosopher's concept, monsters were long thought of as creatures that did not resemble their father.

When the monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* speaks for the first time, it is to express this anxiety about the paternal relationship, the fear of not resembling the father. The same type of concern is present in *Hijos de la ira*, with God occupying the role of father and creator, usurping the role of mother. While the last poems of the book seem to give a place of honour to the mother as comforter and saviour, she is, like the Virgin Mary, only an intercessor. The mother will love her monster son, unconditionally, but this will not give him a place in the social order.

Indeed, the mother is not represented here as giver of life. There is an idealization of her role and an erasure of her procreative (and therefore sexual) powers. Mother is subsumed to the Virgin Mary. The mother-son relationship undergoes a curious reversal in "La madre" where she is represented as an older or younger sibling, in need of her son's strength:

Ah, niña mía, madre,  
Yo, niño también, un poco mayor, iré a tu lado,  
Te serviré de guía,  
Te defenderé galantemente de todas las brutalidades de mis compañeros.<sup>34</sup> (115)

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<sup>33</sup> I am dying, dying every moment,/lost from myself/absent from myself/distant from myself/ more and more lost, distant, absent ("On All Souls' Day" 11).

<sup>34</sup> Ah, my little girl, Mother,/I, a little too, somewhat older, will go beside you,/I'll be your guide,/I'll defend you gallantly against all the stupidities of my classmates ("Mother" 83).

A silent backdrop, a way station, a balm to raging existential questions, mother (woman, nature) is not the creator. The difference is made clear in "La isla," where childhood and rest are opposed to terror and insomnia:

Gracias, gracias, Dios mío,  
tú has querido poner sordo terror y reverencia en mi alma infantil,  
e insomnio agudo donde había sueño.  
Y lo has logrado.<sup>35</sup> (193)

Mother is comfort and rest, but the urgent questions about life and identity are reserved for the Father. Acceptance must come from Him. Resemblance must be to Him.

Thus the perfection of the dead and their lack of monstrous characteristics are related to their resemblance to the Creator. Says the poet in the last poem, "Dedicatoria final (Las Alas)" which is addressed to God: "la muerte es el único pórtico de tu inmortalidad."<sup>36</sup> Pure spirit and immortal, the dead resemble the Father in a way the poet longs for. His un-godly humanity disturbs him; he cannot bear to conceive of his spirit at the mercy of his body. Like the Frankenstein monster, Alonso finds himself a "mixed category" and calls his creator to account:

Oh Dios,  
no me atormentes más  
dime qué significan  
estos monstruos que me rodean  
y este espanto íntimo que hacia ti gime en la noche<sup>37</sup>  
("Monstruos" 107)

The questions posed to the creator are expressed differently, but they are essentially the same: Why was I created, *not* in your image? Why was I created, for so much solitude? In *Frankenstein* the questions are literal ones, and escalate towards outright hostility and condemnation, which the reader is inclined to share:

"When I looked around, I saw and heard of none like me. Was I then a monster, a blot upon the earth, from which all men fled, and whom men disowned?"

"Cursed creator! Why did you form a monster so hideous that even you turned from me in disgust?" (155)

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<sup>35</sup> Thank you, thank you, my God;/you have wished to put dumb terror and reverence in my infantile soul,/and acute insomnia where there was sleep./And you have succeeded ("The Island" 143).

<sup>36</sup> "death is the only doorway to your immortality" ("Final Dedication - The Wings" 163).

<sup>37</sup> "Oh God,/don't torture me any more./ Tell me what they mean,/those monsters that surround me./and this intimate fright that moans to you in the night." ("Monsters" 79).

In *Hijos de la ira* the questions circle the same sad territory of abjection, though the speaker is metaphorically a monster, rather than a deformed incarnation of his creator's hubris. Yet the speaker's questions are equally bitter, and cast a similar doubt on the creator's intentions:

Dime, ¿qué huerto quieres abonar con nuestra podredumbre?  
Temes que se te sequen los grandes rosales del día,  
las tristes azucenas letales de tus noches? ("Insomnio" 21)

¿Qué piedras, qué murallas  
quieres batir en mí,  
oh torpe catapulta? ("La obsesión" 135)<sup>38</sup>

The Creator of monsters becomes monstrous as he observes his creation from afar:

Tú me oteas, escucho tu jadear caliente,  
tu revolver de bestia que se hiere en los troncos  
siento en la sombra  
tu inmensa mole blanca, sin ojos, que voltea  
igual que un iceberg que sin rumor se invierte en agua salobre.<sup>39</sup>  
("En la sombra" 127)

The way in which the images in this poem recall the Mary Shelley novel is striking: the iceberg, the shadowy pursuit of the "beast." Like Dr. Frankenstein, God has become the monster, stalking his creature with a mixture of love and horror. The repetition of "¿Sí tú me buscas?" and the fear inspired by the nebulous presence suggests the mutual persecution of the novel:

A veces en la noche yo te siento a mi lado,  
que me achecas,  
que me quieres palpar,  
y el alma se me agita con el terror y el sueño,  
como una cabritilla, amarrada a una estaca  
que ha sentido la onda sigilosa del tigre.<sup>40</sup> (127)

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<sup>38</sup> Tell me, what garden do you want to fertilize with our rot?/Are you afraid they'll dry up on you, those great rosebushes of day,/the sad lethal lilies of your nights? ("Insomnia" 3).

What stones, what walls/do you want to beat against in me,/oh clumsy catapult? ("The Obsession" 97).

<sup>39</sup> You look me over, I hear your hot panting,/your milling around like a beast striking against tree-trunks;/I feel in the shadow/your immense white bulk, eyeless, turning over/like an iceberg that soundlessly turns upside down in the salt water ("In the Shadow" 93).

<sup>40</sup> Sometimes at night I feel you at my side,/that you're spying on me,/that you want to touch me,/and my soul becomes agitated with terror and sleepiness,/like a she-goat, tied to a stake, who has felt the stealthy emanation of the tiger ("In the Shadow" 93).

Creature and creator are locked in a fatal circle, each monstrous, one by creation and action, the other by having abandoned his proper paternal role towards his creation.

In "Hombre" the silent divine monster is dead:

¿Se te ha perdido el amo?  
No: se ha muerto.  
Se te ha podrido el amo en noches hondas  
y apenas sólo ya es polvo de estrella.<sup>41</sup> ( 175)

This killing of the 'owner' can be seen as an attempt to resolve the issue of resemblance to the Father. His death liberates the creature from the burden of monstrosity, but it is a temporary and unsatisfactory resolution in a poetic universe so strongly underpinned with religious longing.

The Divine returns, very much alive, oceanic and overwhelming:

...¡Ay, Dios,  
cómo me has arrastrado,  
cómo me has desarraigado,  
cómo me llevas  
en tu invencible frenesí,  
cómo me arrebataste  
hacia tu amor!<sup>42</sup> ("El alma era lo mismo que una ranita verde" 148)

This overwhelming power wins the poet, finally. God is understood as a demanding father, calling the poet through his pain:

Oh Dios,  
Yo no sabía que tu mar tuviera tempestades,  
Y primero creí que era mi alma la que bullía, la que se movía,  
Creía que allá en su fondo volaban agoreras las heces de tantos siglos  
de tristeza humana,  
Que su propia miseria le hacía hincharse como un tumefacto carbunco.  
Y eras tú.<sup>43</sup> ("La isla" 193)

Throughout the book, the lyric voice has railed against a God who should be peaceful and loving but who is instead threatening, and

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<sup>41</sup> Have you lost your master?/ No: he has died. Your master has rotted away on deep nights,/and now is hardly more than dust dust! ("Man" 127).

<sup>42</sup> ...Oh my God,/how you have swept me along,/how you have uprooted me,/how you carry me/upon your invincible madness,/how you have snatched me away/toward your love! ("My Soul Was Just Like a Little Green Frog" 113).

<sup>43</sup> Oh God,/ I didn't know that your sea had storms,/and at first I thought it was my soul that was boiling, was being churned up;/ I thought that down there in its depths were stirring in ominous flight the dregs of so many centuries of human sadness/ that its own misery was making it swell up like a tumescent carbuncle/ And it was you ("The Island" 143).

tumultuous. God's monstrous visage is but a reminder of his true nature as demanding, all-powerful and incomprehensible. Like Job, the poet must discover his powerlessness before God's mysterious ways. There can be no calling to account.

Yet there is a clear reconciliation in the last poem of the book. "Dedicatoria Final (Las alas)" reconciles Dámaso to God, and to himself, as the poetic "I" discovers that his monstrosity was temporary, his abjection a necessary purging:

cuando yo estaba más caído y más triste,  
entre amarillo y verde, como un limón no bien maduro,  
cuando estaba más lleno de nauseas y de ira,  
me has visitado,  
y con tu uZđa,  
como impasible médico  
me has partido la bolsa de la bilis,  
y he llorado, en furor, mi podredumbre  
y la estéril injusticia del mundo<sup>44</sup> (217)

In the oft-cited verse "tenía que cantar para sanarme"<sup>45</sup> it becomes clear that the cure has come through poetry. And it is poetic creation, precisely, that allows for an escape from the condition of monstrosity.<sup>46</sup> Creation allows him identity with the Father:

Oh Dios,  
comprendo,  
yo no he cantado;  
yo remedé tu voz cual dicen que los mirlos remedan  
la del pastor paciente que los doma<sup>47</sup> (218).

The poet's singing allows him to mirror God, to resemble him. It thus restores identity and allows for an escape from the abjection of the body. The last poem represents the triumph of the poet's immaterial voice over the corporeal. Singing the spirit, he is no longer "the last of all beings," a monster, but a disembodied, god-like voice, raised up on the wings of angels.

<sup>44</sup> after I reached my lowest and saddest point,/in between yellow and green, like a lemon not quite ripe,/after I was full of nausea and of wrath,/you have visited me,/and with your fingernail,/like an impassive doctor,/you have broken my sac of bile,/and I have wept, furiously, for my putrifaction/and the sterile injustice of the world ("Final Dedication - The Wings" 163).

<sup>45</sup> "I had to sing to get well" ("Final Dedication - The Wings" 163).

<sup>46</sup> My conclusion is similar in one sense to Philip Silver's although I give greater weight to the religious content. Silver, who cannot take it at "face value," states: "it now seems to me to be one of several generative systems of motivation—perhaps the most obvious—which disguise and distract us from a more elemental, more concrete, satisfaction that the poet finds in his craft" (288).

<sup>47</sup> Oh God, I understand,/I haven't sung;/I imitated your voice as they say black-birds imitate/the voice of the patient shepherd who trains them (165).

The monstrous in *Hijos de la ira* thus resolves itself through resemblance to the Father, a flattening of duality through a rejection of the body, and the embrace of a (limited) community and its rules. The reference to angels in the final poem reminds us how rich is Alonso's use of the monstrous. In comparison to the monsters of mass culture, Alonso uses the motif with its religious charge still (consciously) active. As Edward Ingebretsen demonstrates, angels and monsters resemble one another, each bringing frightening revelation. Until they were reinterpreted in a scientific paradigm in the seventeenth century, monstrous births were read as prodigious signs from the gods, portents of future calamity or consequences of past sins.<sup>48</sup> If monsters are transgression embodied, as I argued in the first section, they can be read as signs from God or Nature, depending on the paradigm.

In Alonso's "existential religious" poetic universe,<sup>49</sup> his monsters are signs from God of a social, natural and existential disorder, parallel, if opposite, messengers from the divine. Like the angel, the monster is a "remarkable presence," "an occasion of *pietas*, filial awe or awesome fear" with its "divinity marked on the sly"—a shadow of the fear inspired by God in every text in which He ever appeared (Ingebretsen, xiv). In *Hijos de la ira*, the monstrous is ultimately a "God-send," bringing news that is sacred, awful, but finally *awe-full* as well. Along with horror, they inspire awe of God's unfathomable creative powers. Poetic creation, singing in an abstract voice, allows the monstrous poetic "I" to assert his similarity to an angel, and thus to God.

Alonso's intimate diary of a monster is, then, in some sense a search, an escape from monstrous duality into wholeness and resemblance to the creator. I say "in some sense," since monsters, as I have stated, are by nature ambiguous and polysemic. In cataloguing some of the uses of the monstrous in *Hijos de la ira* I have by no means exhausted their meanings. If the monsters in this work exceed Alonso's own definition, it is because, as Slavoj Žižek reminds us, they function as "a kind of fantasy screen where [a] multiplicity of meanings can appear and fight for hegemony" (48).

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<sup>48</sup> See also Marie Hélène Huet 8-79 and Elena del Río Parra 11-68.

<sup>49</sup> See Flys 225-239.

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