

At Stake: Monsters and the Rhetoric of Fear in Public Culture. By Edward J. Ingebreetsen. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001; pp. xvi + 341. \$40.00.

After the ruinous ride of the Fourth Horseman of the Apocalypse last September, a "new" (or so it was claimed) and alien *Gojira* emerged from the smoldering rubble of our besieged buildings. His name, President Bush told us, was Osama bin Ladin, and his monstrosity was so monstrous that he could only be described as "Evil." During his September 20, 2001 address to the nation, Bush denounced bin Ladin and his clandestine cabal of "terrorists" (al-Qaida "network") as "enemies of freedom," "Yezeidi Satanists hell-bent on killing "Christians and Jews . . . [and] all Americans," making "no distinctions among military and civilians, including women and children." Under the pretense of piety, Bush said, the network carries out unspeakable atrocities, the likes of which we have undoubtedly seen before: these Muslim extremists "are the heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the twentieth century. By sacrificing human life to serve their radical visions—by abandoning every value except the will to power—they follow the path of fascism, Nazism, and totalitarianism. And they will follow that path all the way, to where it ends: in history's unmarked grave of discarded lies." Following these stalwart declarations of war and revenge, in the tone of prophecy and in the "patient" mode of cowboy justice, Bush threatened "every nation, in every region," that "either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists."

As James Darsey (1998) has reminded us, the evangelical tone of righteousness adopted by the "leader of the free world" bespeaks an underlying, prophetic tradition that resides deeply in the American political unconscious. In distinction from Hellenic modes of public address that stress reasoned judgment and evidence, Hebraic modes are characteristically obstinate in regard to evi-

dentary appeals, demanding action or belief on the basis of charisma and faith alone. Edward J. Ingebreetsen's *At Stake: Monsters and the Rhetoric of Fear in Public Culture*, like his previous work *Maps of Heaven, Maps of Hell* (1996), deepens our understanding of prophetic rhetoric by suggesting that Gothic narratives have also been woven into our theological habits. We are, says Ingebreetsen, "soul-deep in the Gothic" (p. 200), so soul-deep, in fact, that monster-talk has become an essential part of American civic pedagogy and "preachment."

Read along-side Ingebreetsen's creative and compelling study of monster metaphors in popular culture, Bush's patriotic sermon participates in a larger, cultural "rhetoric of monstrosity," a patterned and predictable genre of discourse which follows a relatively stable yet dynamic formula: (1) A monster is created or discovered; (2) the monster is subject to endless interpretive augury; and (3) the monster is killed. In the process of this kind of "drive-by vilification of failed humans" (p. 2), Ingebreetsen argues that the rhetoric of monstrosity functions as a kind of "social hygiene, helping to keep citizens straight," and is used to justify rhetorical—and in the end physical—violence. By carefully examining media coverage of the serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer (chapter two), the characterization of Andrew Cunanan as a *homicidal* maniac (chapter three), the portrayal of Susan Smith, a mother who killed her children (chapter four), the media's frenzied reportage of the priapic proclivities of former President Bill Clinton (chapter five), and the representations of the homophobic murder of Matthew Shepard (chapter seven), Ingebreetsen repeatedly demonstrates the predictable ways in which the mass media's portrayal of each different "monster" performs the ideological work of sexism, racism, and homophobia. By forcing Andrew Cunanan into a Gothic narrative of homosexual rage and confusion, for example, Ingebreetsen argues that heteronormativity was reinscribed

by a state-sponsored ceremony of fear, a spectacular ritual of masculinity under siege. "The moralized deviancy of Andrew Cunanan" perpetuated by the mass media, suggests Ingebretsen, was not only used to average homosexuality with perversity, but also to justify multiple civic reprisals (p. 85). As a monster who threatened the Body Politic with his mysterious (and therefore perversely "feminine") sexuality (also see Brookey, 2001), true to the formula, Cunanan had to die—as did numerous "perverts," including a young man who was "tied to a fence, beaten senseless and left to die in freezing weather" (p. 162).

That young man was Matthew Shepard, and in the most intriguing and final chapter of Ingebretsen's book, the uneasy tension between Christianity and sexuality central to the book's invention is highlighted with an analysis of the comparison, made by a number of "liberal persons . . . eager to mean well by the plight of homosexuals," of Shepard's fatal beating to Christ's crucifixion (p. 184). "Instead of Jesus' example sanctifying the viciousness of Matthew's death . . . the juxtaposition of Jesus' cross and the fence onto which Matthew was tied . . . draped Matthew with the scandal of the original," thus erasing Shepard's humanity and reducing his person to that of an "angel," "portrayed as a naïf, virginal and innocent" (p. 186). This representation partakes in the rhetoric of monstrosity because, of course, Jesus was a monster too.

Ingebretsen's discussion of the monstrosity and offensiveness of Christ, as interesting and deliciously impious as it is, points to the book's greatest weakness: as the author says of monster-talk, the "beauty" of the formula is its "almost infinite elasticity. It says nothing, or everything, at once" (p. 26). Monstrosity is defined and redefined in a cloying display of erudition and scholarly citation that tediously tries to say everything at once: it promotes violence and also turns a buck; it stabilizes civil order and disciplines civility;

it absolves us of responsibility; it reduces the rich variety of language to speechlessness; it attempts to contend with the ineffable and the sublime; it is about sexual desire and sexual identity; it is about our bodies and the abject body; it is about corpses and death; it is pornography in disguise—it is the "religious pornogothic" (p. 201). In the chapters in which Ingebretsen teases out the formula in case studies, the scholarship is tight and compelling, while those chapters more concerned with definitional argument lack a sense of critical focus.

Also troublesome is Ingebretsen's frequent, vocal disgust with the rhetoric of monstrosity—not to mention his distaste for a rhetorical understanding of social reality itself: "those who live only in metaphor suffer the tyranny of its misdirection" (p. 170). Although his passionate polemics are sometimes refreshing and fun, by the end of the book Ingebretsen's righteousness sometimes feels as inglorious as the monster-makers he condemns: monstrous rhetoric is characterized as "linguistic flatulence," "drive-by shouting," and "projectile contempt," as a collection of "punch-drunk metaphors" and as comprising "grade-b politics"—even a "pogrom" (organized massacre)! To understand the rhetoric of monstrosity as a symptom of the "pornography of the soul" is in some sense to deny human beings that which is distinctly human: sex and rhetoric.

Despite these problems, Ingebretsen has written a provocative work of cultural criticism, drawing on the insights of psychoanalysis, sociology, and literary studies to say something unique about public discourse. With considerable articulate skill, he demonstrates how "living in" monster metaphors promotes hateful ideologies and violence, and successfully argues that "monster-talk offers instructions for performance, justifying emotions, feelings, [and] actions that otherwise remain under civil erasure" (p. 172). As an example of what one could term the rhetorical cartography of idiom, *At Stake* is a

model contribution to the many fields of academic augury, rhetoric, media, and cultural studies most especially.

Because of his call for not making monsters, some readers may wonder about the status of the criminal or victim who is unmasked as a mere human. Without the category of monstrosity, how are we to describe, label, and understand those who do terrible or horribly offensive things? Ingebretsen's answer is not clear, but it is implied that something akin to reflexivity—to a realization of our own monstrosity—might occur. For example, although Ingebretsen would agree that bin Laden is responsible for crimes against humanity, he would argue that characterizing bin Laden as a monster is hypocritical and partakes of the same inhumanity as those who would kill thousands of innocent civilians, thus not only robbing bin Laden of his humanness and making two wrongs, but also Oedipally blinding ourselves from critical insight and a sense of social responsibility. After all, as many scholars and journalists have noted, U. S. foreign policy is perceived by many non-Americans as the most inhumane and "terroristic" of the Western world. The point is not so much to find common ground in the human essence of a violent criminal—as "Christian" as that may be—but to come to terms with our own complicity in atrocity and, hopefully, to secure and maintain a common hope for the end of human suffering.

Since the Enlightenment, many scholars have been claiming that traditional religion is on the decline, and this prophecy remains the party-line of contemporary sociologists of religion (Hammond, 1985, p. 1; also see Jameson, 1995, p. 67). Ultimately, Ingebretsen has mapped where religion is going, locating it in practices, habits, and forms that thrive in mass, public discourse. Although the *social significance* of traditional religious institutions may be waning, the theological and Evangelical persist in patterned rhetorics, generic narratives, and organizing myths. As a man of the cloth, Reverend

Ingebretsen might disagree, however, with the conclusions I draw from this secular persistence, this civil transubstantiation. As the history of religion is apt testament, the resources of theology will always be pilfered to justify violence and abuse, physical or rhetorical, monstrous or angelic. Indeed, our President's Hebraic characterization of bin Laden as pure "Evil" was used to justify and garner popular, world-wide support for bombing Afgani innocents—over 3,800 to date ("Afghanistan's," 2002, par. 1). Like a ravenous Godzilla on a rampage through New York City, a bomb can make no distinction between the military and the civilian, "including women and children."

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Shaping Science with Rhetoric: The Case of Dobzhansky, Schrödinger, and Wilson. By Leah Ceccarelli. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001; pp. xi + 204. \$55.00; paper \$20.00.

Ceccarelli maintains that science, at least in moments of interdisciplinary negotiation, can demonstrably be shaped by rhetoric. Shaping, in the relevant sense, is a form of persuasive action, rather than the solution to an epistemological problem. The case is based on three bold-to-audacious books by twentieth century scientists championing in-

