Transforming Ecocriticism and Inclusivity - Literature and Audiovisual Media on the Example of Guillermo del Toro's Films

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Abstract

Guillermo del Toro's films often feature monstrous characters as symbols of humanity, and the paper will show that the prevalent theme in his films is otherness and the unjust treatment of minorities by the perceived majority. This paper will analyse two of his films, *Pacific Rim* (2013) and *The Shape of Water* (2017), both of which deal with ecological crises and question social norms. The paper maintains that the monsters both in del Toro's original work and in its adaptations are always human, and that the two – the human and the monstrous – are inextricably interwoven, and often one and the same. Moreover, the paper will also look at the issue of adaptation and del Toro's approach to the adaptation process. Both films have official novelizations, and the books approach the source material differently. Whereas Guillermo del Toro and Daniel Kraus' *The Shape of Water* (2018) was written with del Toro's input, Alex Irvine's *Pacific Rim: The Official Movie Novelization* (2013) was written more independently, taking a markedly different direction than del Toro's film version, that is, the source material. Like the aforementioned two films, other del Toro's works also feature monster characters deeply anchored in humanity and interwoven with it, whose symbolism conveys both a positive message about differences and a cautionary tale about the human origins of the monstrous.

Keywords: Guillermo del Toro, *The Shape of Water*, *Pacific Rim*, adaptation, monsters, film, otherness.

Table of Contents

Introduction..... 1

1. Otherness in Guillermo del Toro's Works, Literary Teratology and Narrative Media... 2

1.1 Monsters and the Monstrous…….. 5

1.2 The Questions of Representation..... 6

1.3 Ecocriticism and Sociocriticism..... 9

1.4 The Challenges of Adaptation..... 10

1.5 Del Toro's Other Works..... 15

2. *Pacific Rim*..... 17

2.1 The Kaiju and the Jaegers – the Biological and the Mechanical..... 17

2.2 Characterisation and the Question of Representation..... 24

2.3 *Pacific Rim* in the Context of del Toro's Opus, Society, and Science Fiction... 26

3. *The Shape of Water*..... 28

3.1 The Symbolism of the Amphibian Man and the Depiction of Otherness..... 28

3.2 Richard Strickland – The True Monster of *The Shape of Water*..... 35

Conclusion..... 40

Works Cited..... 42

Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to show that the monstrous in the works of Guillermo del Toro is interwoven with and stems from the human. The thesis will analyse del Toro's films *Pacific Rim* (2013) and the Oscar-winning *The Shape of Water* (2017),[1] and their literary adaptations (novelizations), with the focus on the ecocritical and sociocritical perspective.

In the first chapter, the paper focuses on otherness in Guillermo del Toro's works and on literary teratology. The chapter briefly discusses the approaches to film adaptation which will be employed in later chapters, as well as key terms, such as ecocriticism. The second chapter discusses *Pacific Rim*, the film and the novelization, focusing on the dichotomy between the mechanical and the biological, various forms of representation in the film's story, and the story itself within a broader context of del Toro's work and science fiction in general.

The third chapter discusses *The Shape of Water*, the character of the Amphibian Man as the symbol of otherness, the portrayal of minorities and Western cultural values as they are represented in the work, and it briefly analyses the differences intrinsic to media and how they manifest in storytelling in the film and the novel. The analysis of the two films and their novelizations is based on insights into the theory of adaptation and literary analysis by authors such as Caroline Joan S. Picart and John Edgar Browning, Seymour Chatman, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, Peter Hutchings, Laura Podalsky, Robert Stam, Niamh Thornton, and David J. Skal. The concluding chapter revisits the most important points from the previous chapters, which reaffirm the thesis that the monstrous in del Toro's work and its adaptations is deeply rooted in and representative of humanity.

[1] *The Shape of Water* won four Academy Awards in 2018: Best Picture, Best Director, Best Original Music Score, and Best Production Design. It also won two Golden Globe Awards (Best Director and Best Original Score), and three British Academy Film Awards (Best Director, Best Production Design, and Best Original Music).

1. Otherness in Guillermo del Toro's Works, Literary Teratology and Narrative Media

Authors inevitably incorporate parts of themselves into their creations. This is true for all types of art – sculpture, visual art, music, and literature. It is no less true for contemporary media, such as comic books, games, or film. It is therefore of great importance to understand the author, and the context of their creative process if one wishes to truly understand their work. Guillermo del Toro is a Mexican artist, perhaps the most famous for his work as a film director. His work includes multiple genres, ranging from horror such as *Mimic* (1997) to contemporary fairy-tales such as *The Shape of Water* (2017). However, all of his films deal with the issues of monstrosity, inclusivity, and ecology – issues that are relevant for both contemporary art and everyday life and politics. Thus, there is one common element found in nearly all of his works: the representation of monsters, and, closely related to that, the question of otherness, which will be analysed in this paper primarily on the examples of del Toro's films *The Shape of Water* and *Pacific Rim* and their novelizations. The differences between film and literature as types of media, and the inherently different forms of narration (literary as opposed to audio-visual storytelling) contribute to a more complete view of the story and its various elements, which will be analysed from the ecocritical and sociocritical point of view.

According to Zygmunt Bauman, the idea of Otherness is a social construct crucial for the way in which identity categories are established in a society. Identities are set up as dichotomies in which "[t]he second member is but the other of the first, the opposite (degraded, suppressed, exiled) side of the first and its creation" (14). Bauman further explains:

> abnormality is the other of the norm, deviation the other of law-abiding, illness the other of health, barbarity the other of civilization, animal the other of the human, woman the other of man, stranger the other of the native, enemy the other of friend, "them" the other of "us", insanity the other of reason, foreigner the other of the state subject, lay public the other of the expert. Both sides depend on each other, but the dependence is not symmetrical. The second side depends on the first for its contrived and enforced isolation. The first depends on the second for its self-assertion. (14)

In this sense, the concept of Otherness implies also the relations of power, as the Other is not only seen as weaker but also treated as such. The first asserts its authority by undermining the Other. In the context of this paper, the Other is the "monster," whereas the first is the representative of the "standard" humanity or authority.

Del Toro's monsters are what he is perhaps the most renowned for; his approach to the near-infinite complexity of the symbolism of the monstrous and his unique creative vision makes his work a kind of a vivisection of both the human psyche and the human society. The prevailing

idea of del Toro's monsters is not fear, but indeed their Otherness which del Toro perceives as a trait shared by all of humanity. As he explains in his award acceptance speech at the Golden Globes in 2018, everyone is "other" and imperfect: "Since childhood I've been faithful to monsters. I've been saved and absolved by them because monsters, I believe, are the patron saints of our blissful imperfection" ("Guillermo del Toro Wins Best Director" 00:00:12 – 00:00:26).

In addition to del Toro's personal, individual view of the monster's meaning, Laura Podalsky sees political issues such as immigration as the underlying motif behind certain monster characters depicted in del Toro's films, particularly the repeating instance of a swarm or horde. She sees these monstrous masses primarily in *Blade II* and *Hellboy II*, and relates this demonization of multitudes with a critical approach to the way the United States handled the issue of the growing number of immigrant people (Podalsky 103). By expanding her argument, it is possible to argue that the motif of dehumanized (or non-human) masses is also present in the two films which are the primary focus of this paper. In the case of *Pacific Rim*, the numberless mass is the kaiju – alien monsters that come to claim humanity's home planet for themselves. However, the kaiju seem to symbolize an entirely different type of threat in this film. Their inhuman mind, homogenous and non-individual nature (they turn out to be highly specialized clones with a singular purpose of destruction) and hive mentality, combined with their ultimate goal and their clear link to environmental pollution and ecological disaster, links them to corporations which seem to endanger humanity and nature in the same way as the kaiju. The heroes of *Pacific Rim* are, on the other hand, the highly humanized amalgamations of the human and machine – the Jaegers, gigantic constructs that require two mentally linked pilots to function, and who respond to their pilots' thoughts, feelings and memories (as opposed to the brutal, inhuman efficiency of the kaiju).

The Shape of Water features the Asset as one of the key characters – a "monstrous" amphibian man torn from his home environment and brought against his will to a city, where he is harshly mistreated and experimented on. With this, the film entirely reinvents the trope of the "damsel in distress," kidnapped or otherwise threatened by the monster, and in dire need of saving by a "dashing" hero who takes it upon himself to undertake the dangerous quest of facing and defeating the monster entirely alone, relying on his masculine virtues, and ultimately reinstating the traditional order by saving her. However, in *The Shape of Water*, it is the "monster" that needs saving, and it is the heroine, Elisa Esposito, who accomplishes this, with the help from her "unheroic" friends. Elisa uses her cunning and courage to save him, but most notably (and unlike a typical masculine hero), she manages to do this despite her inferior social status and the inferior status of her friends. She is a woman in Cold War Era America, a cleaning person, and a person with a disability, and her friends are similarly oppressed: Zelda because of her race (she is Black)

and Giles because of his sexuality (he is gay). In the eyes of the White, patriarchal, Cold War Era American society, all these characters are branded as "monstrous," or, at the very least, aberrant. The film's villains are representatives of the government and the military, people who are expected to protect and take care of the citizens, but who are represented as both brutalized and brutal. They are the representatives of the authoritative "first" (Bauman 14).

1.1 Monsters and the Monstrous

Monsters have been a part of the human civilization, part of stories and myths, since the dawn of humanity across many cultures. Monsters such as the Cyclopes and the Minotaur of Ancient Greece, dragons both Eastern and Western, as well as the biblical Leviathan, illustrate that the monster is as ancient as story. These folkloric creatures represent the best and worst of humanity: human strength and bestial nature, and at times the "darkness" that must be held at bay by understanding it. The representation of the monster has been the topic of many literary works and debates. There is no single explanation or theory about monsters, and, to understand the fundamental symbolism of the monstrous in contemporary stories, one ought to be aware of its symbolism throughout history and how it relates to the human subconscious. David Skal makes it clear that the meaning of the monster is pliable and deeply connected with the culture in which it appears:

> Speak of monsters and you're soon speaking about all kinds of things. Shelley's Frankenstein can't be fully appreciated without a larger understanding of the tension between the self-satisfied Enlightenment and Romantic radicalism; Dracula doesn't start to make sense as a cultural document without at least a basic understanding of Darwinism's impact on Victorian thought and society. Movie monsters of the Great Depression similarly illuminate a complex social, economic, and political era with a renewed relevance to the present. . . . Monsters are slippery, ever-adaptive metaphors. (xi-xii)

This holds true for del Toro's monsters as well. A full understanding of the symbolism of kaiju in *Pacific Rim* is impossible without considering the issues that humanity faces today on a global scale, the ecological crisis, and the global sociopolitical situation. Similarly, one cannot truly understand *The Shape of Water* without understanding the intricacies of the Western society, the position of women and minorities, the stance of society towards people of different sexualities and identities. These "monsters" are a product of the times, an expression of today's *zeitgeist*, which implies a plurality of views in a culture that is becoming increasingly global and that is discovered to be infinitely multifaceted.

Skal contends that "[w]hile carnival monsters certainly serve the cathartic function of reinforcing one's own shaky sense of physical normalcy, and general good-standing membership in the tribe, they are also anxiety avatars for an age in which the familiar structures of society and identity are inexorably morphing" (xii-xiii). This is also true for both *Pacific Rim* and *The Shape of Water*; their monsters represent not just the Other as positive (or negative), but they are also an expression of anxieties. They bring to light the less savoury elements of our communal state of mind: the way our society treats the Other and the faults in ourselves. Just like the human

characters, the monsters are multifaceted, complex, containing the interplay of both light and darkness, our virtues and our flaws. They are often the mistreated Other, but they are also at times the embodiment of our darker nature, which is hidden beneath the veneer of civilization and culture:

> It's hardly surprising, then, that monsters have eagerly entered the lingua franca of political discourse. . . . Invading, economy-draining others, we are told, relentlessly, have our collective house under apocalyptic siege. Low-information voters (read: angry villagers) may not know much about history, science, or economics, but they know monster stories inside and out. (Skal xii-xiii)

While some monster stories may have been crafted to incite fear and fuel the distrust and mistreatment of the Other, they have also had a profoundly educational role when it comes to re-examining ourselves and our own nature. It is true that monster stories may be wielded as a tool to fuel hatred; however, del Toro's work proves that they can also have a positive, educational role as a medium of constructive social criticism, ecocriticism, and humanism: "That is, rhetorics of the 'monstrous' are not simply 'constructed by their social contexts' but that they are also 'constructive of their contexts: that they both produce and reproduce social discourse and practice'" (Bellin qtd. in Picart and Browning 3).

Much like the "drift" in *Pacific Rim*, which will be analysed later on, monster stories have a "two-way" interaction with culture as a whole and with the reader/viewer as an individual. They may produce social practice, but they also serve as a waking call on an individual level, making us re-examine ourselves and the social and cultural context we live in, as well as making us aware of our own "monstrosity," that is, of what sets us apart. They also call for the reconsideration of stale dichotomies according to which certain members of society are less worthy than others. In a way, monsters are mirrors of both culture and the individual; del Toro's monsters in particular have this role, as will be shown in the upcoming chapters.

1.2 The Questions of Representation

Of course, not only the monstrous or the "hybrid heroes" (Podalsky 100) represent the Other. Del Toro's work offers various kinds of representation; his characters include people of different nationalities, ethnicities, social backgrounds and sexual orientations, people with disabilities, women, and working class people. He strays far from the too-often depicted "ideal" of the White male hero. It is hardly possible to analyse any of del Toro's works without analysing the representation of minorities. This is important because of the visual quality of films that differs from the verbal nature of literature. According to Stam, "[t]he words of a novel have a virtual, symbolic meaning; we, as readers, fill in their paradigmatic indeterminances" (14). Film directors,

however, cannot afford the luxury of such indeterminacies. For the most part, the actors' faces and bodies are visible to the viewer, and the casting choice plays an important role. As Stam notes: "we are faced with an embodied performer, encumbered with nationality and accent" (15). The viewer's/reader's personal interpretation is crucial when discussing representation as such and every medium represents characters in their different ways:

> While no medium – whether theater, novel, film – really gives us direct access to a character, they do give us the forms of signification available to that particular medium – live performance in the theater, verbal evocation in the novel, performance and mise-en-scène in film. Each medium deploys significant traces to trigger a sense of a character in the mind of the reader or spectator. (Stam 22)

In this sense, relying solely on subtle signifiers that contribute to a character's representation can have both positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, "reading into" subtle signs can allow more people to identify with a said character; for example, Hermann's disability in *Pacific Rim* is never directly addressed, yet he uses a cane as a walking aid in most scenes. On the other hand, it also allows the creators to potentially claim there is representation (in the sense of representing minorities) where there is little to none, in order to "satisfy" both the wants of underrepresented minorities as well as the assumed conservative majority. One such example can be found in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series where Hermione Granger's race is never explicitly addressed. However, when the character was announced to be played by a Black actress in a show based on the original books, that – for reasons one can only try to guess – sparked a negative response from some fans (Ratcliffe). This shows the possible "double edged sword" of subtle representation. In del Toro's films, representation of otherwise underrepresented minorities was generally never brought into question. His work features characters of different nationalities and ethnicities, levels of physical ability, and sexual orientations. However, in addition to characters who are explicitly "Other," it is worthwhile to further examine some of his characters featuring subtle marks of difference which might go unnoticed by a viewer who is not particularly watchful of such subtleties.

An example may be taken from *Pacific Rim*, the film which represents del Toro's vision of a united humanity, the final last stand of all races, cultures and creeds. The characters of Newton Geiszler and Hermann Gottlieb can be understood as metaphors for the "right" and "left brained" stereotypes – chaotic environment, highly creative thinking and impulsiveness on one side, and highly ordered, logical, "mathematical" thinking on the other. Upon a detailed analysis, the film offers a deeper insight into these characters and what they might represent. More specifically, the "drift" sequence (see fig. 1), the memories, offer some insight into Hermann's past which helps the

viewers understand his behaviour. So, Hermann's antisocial tendencies, "Hermann, these are human beings. Why don't you say hello?" (00:24:01-00:24:03), and his apparent insecurities, "I asked you not to refer to me by my first name when I'm around others" (00:24:03-00.24:05), may stem from the fact that the character is implied to have been isolated or even bullied as a child.

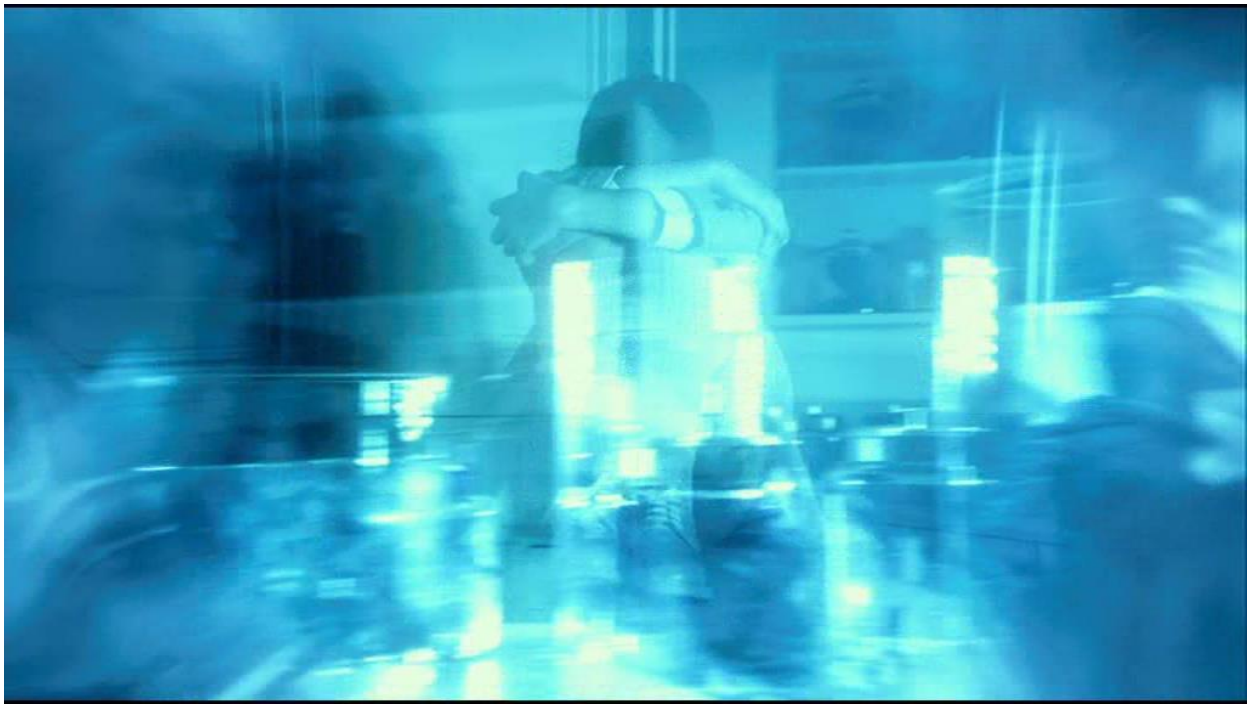

Fig. 1 A child seen in the "drift" Newton and Hermann initiate with a kaiju, image presumably depicting Hermann Gottlieb (*Pacific Rim*, 01:40:44-01:40:44).

The character's withdrawn pose and defensive posture (which indicates negative emotions, sadness or isolation) can easily be read as a hint of these experiences during childhood. This is an example of subtle or "open-ended" representation, and it allows the viewers to interpret the meaning of the subtle hints for themselves and possibly even project the traits they wish to see onto the character. Newton, conversely, is constantly rejected by other characters despite his extraverted behaviour and talkative nature. Namely, he seems to lack a basic understanding of social cues (for example, he offends Raleigh during their first meeting by expressing enthusiasm about the monsters which killed Raleigh's brother), despite his boisterous personality. Yet again, it is up to the viewers to interpret these traits. In addition to the films' attempt to represent individual, personal issues related to specific characters, they address wider issues too. The next chapter will look into their ecocritical and sociocritical aspect.

1.3 Ecocriticism and Sociocriticism

Both of del Toro's films analysed in this work, and their literary adaptations, feature important questions dealing with the environment, ecology, planet-wide pollution, the preservation of the planet for future generations and the relationship between culture and nature. An ecocritical approach is thus indispensable for fully understanding del Toro's work and vision. Ecocriticism can be broadly defined as a critical approach to media that explores the relationship between the work in question (film, novel, and other forms of art) and the environment, analysing how both nature and culture are depicted in said work, and the ways in which they interact. According to Paula Willoquet-Maricondi, "[s]ince its official inception . . . ecocriticism has expanded beyond the area of literary analysis to embrace the study of other forms of cultural production, including theoretical discourse, music, photography, virtual environments, and film and video" (1). *The Shape of Water* explores how Western cultural values affect the natural world; this relationship between society and nature is a critical point of the plot and the driving force of the story. The plot of *Pacific Rim* focuses on the importance of Earth as the only home of humanity, and explores the effects of human exploitation of the natural world on a global level, portraying humanity dealing with a crisis caused by this exploitation.

Due to its interest in the environment and the human interaction with it, examines a broad range of topics, such as:

> the role of the physical setting in literary productions, the values expressed in relation to the environment, and the correlation between what a culture says about the environment and how it treats it; it conceives of place as a critical category; it looks for correspondences among gender, class, ethnicity, and nature . . . and it examines representations of the environmental crisis in literature. (Willoquet-Maricondi 3)

Both *Pacific Rim* and *The Shape of Water* feature a strong message about the environment and the effects of human culture on the natural world. In *Pacific Rim* a hostile alien invasion would not have happened if it were not for the high levels of pollution caused by humankind, which made the planet habitable for extradimensional invaders. In *The Shape of Water*, del Toro weaves a powerful story centring on the violent removal of an extraordinary creature from its natural environment and the harm this act causes. It also explores the motivations behind it and the deeply-ingrained beliefs present in the Western culture about its perceived superiority over both nature and other cultures, leading to mistreatment of all who are seen as the Other. Callous disregard for the environment and the consequences thereof are a central theme of both works and their novelizations.

In many ways, ecocriticism corresponds with the idea of sociocriticism, particularly because of its interest in the relations between nature and social categories of class and gender. The idea and the term of sociocriticism was introduced to the field of literary criticism by Claude Duchet in 1971 in the first issue of the journal *Littérature* to denote a "third" approach to literature, between the formalist and sociological methods as two extreme approaches (5-14). According to Edmond Cros, sociocriticism has certain things in common with Marxism as it aims to reveal the relations between the structures of literary (or cultural) work and the structures of the society in which this work is deeply rooted, suggesting that the encounter with ideologies and antagonism between social classes is central to any reading of texts ("Towards a Sociocritical Theory"). Thus, the paper will approach del Toro's representation of monsters as being a representation of the "social unconscious" (Biron 190).

1.4 The Challenges of Adaptation

Finally, it is necessary to address the issue of adaptation from one medium to another along with the unique advantages and disadvantages which the text and film both have in comparison to one another. Each of the two media has a set of storytelling tools and devices inherent in their form; a film can rely on purely visual (or audio-visual) storytelling to convey many elements which have to be explicitly described in the novel. The choice of props, angle, and other visual elements plays an important role. Moreover, it is often up to the actors' skill and the viewers' interpretation to flesh out the internal world of film characters, where a writer can describe them at length.

According to Seymour Chatman, "[c]lose study of film and novel versions of the same narrative reveals with great clarity the peculiar powers of the two media. Once we grasp those peculiarities, the reasons for the differences in form, content, and impact of the two versions strikingly emerge" (122-123). As Chatman notes, the text relies on the reader to imagine a scene in detail, while a film gives its viewer a predetermined scene (125). While many other visual arts, such as painting or sculpture, offer to the viewer a moment "frozen" in time, and allow the viewer to analyse the still image at leisure, "narrative films do not usually allow us time to dwell on plenteous details. Pressure from the narrative component is too great. Events move too fast" (Chatman 126). Chatman further explains:

> most film narratives seem to be of the latter textual order: it requires special effort for films to assert a property or relation. The dominant mode is presentational, not assertive. A film doesn't say, "This is the state of affairs," it merely shows you that state of affairs. Of course, there could be a character or a voice-over commentator asserting a property or relation; but

> then the film would be using its sound track in much the same way as fiction uses assertive syntax. (Chatman 128)

At the beginning of *Pacific Rim*, a character describes the setting in a voice-over. Raleigh Becket explains the state of affairs in the world, the emergence of the kaiju, and the measures undertaken to fight them. That is the only instance of narration that the film offers. How, then, are the viewers to approach the question of representation in film, if so many details are left open to speculation, and if in-depth familiarity with a certain social context is required to understand these details? For example, to an individual unfamiliar with the significance of the "zoot suit," a clothing style which became popular in mostly non-White (African-American, Latino, and Filipino American, but also Italian American) communities during the 1940s (Maddan), the specific costume which the actor portraying Tendo Choi wears in *Pacific Rim* will be unremarkable, and the possible underlying message will completely escape that viewer's notice (Thornton 132). Chatman continues:

> So in its essential visual mode, film does not describe at all but merely presents; or better, it depicts, in the original etymological sense of that word: renders in pictorial form. I don't think that this is mere purism or a die-hard adherence to silent films. Film attracts that component of our perceptual apparatus which we tend to favor over the other senses. Seeing is, after all, believing. (128)

To summarize, significant background knowledge regarding history, author's own biography, and the sociocultural context is often required to fully understand the intended message of a film. Watching a film, the context of which is unfamiliar to one, is often akin to looking at a text written in a script which one cannot read. Certainly, it may be visually beautiful, but the message it is attempting to convey will inevitably escape one.

Because of the unique advantages and limitations of every medium, each author adapts the story accordingly. In order to offer a meaningful critique, the viewer/reader ought to be familiar with the advantages and the limitations of the medium and the way they have influenced the story; perhaps especially so in the case of adaptations, where the story was already told through one medium and its retelling through another will inevitably change it in order for the author to be able to use the chosen medium to its full extent:

> So writer, filmmaker, comic strip artist, choreographer-each finds his or her own ways to evoke the sense of what the objects of the narrative look like. Each medium has its own properties, for better and worse usage, and intelligent film viewing and criticism, like intelligent reading, needs to understand and respect both the limitations these create and also the triumphs they invite. (Chatman 140)

Unlike the author of a text, the film director can place a near-limitless amount of detail in a single frame, each detail carrying its own message. The text requires each significant object or character to be described, each significant trait pointed out, while the film director can place an object in a scene, things such as graffiti, a book, a price tag, a coffee mug… even minuscule details in a scene can (and do) carry meaning.

Because of how adaptations to different media change the story in accordance with the advantages and disadvantages of the chosen medium to which it has been adapted, adaptations (especially film adaptations of novels) are often widely criticized for a "lack of fidelity" to the source text, which is often labelled "original" as if the adaptation is a lesser form of art:

> The conventional language of adaptation criticism has often been profoundly moralistic, rich in terms that imply that the cinema has somehow done a disservice to literature. Terms like "infidelity," "betrayal," "deformation," "violation," "bastardization," "vulgarization," and "desecration" proliferate in adaptation discourse, each word carrying its specific charge of opprobrium. . . . Too often, adaptation discourse subtly reinscribes the axiomatic superiority of literature to film. (Stam 4)

Such views as Stam mentions are detrimental to the growth and development of any theory that deals with the rapidly advancing contemporary media. Del Toro and Kraus' joint work on *The Shape of Water* proves that audio-visual media and literature can not only exist in the same space without detrimental effects on one another, but also complete one another, with one medium making up for the "shortcomings" of the other. For example, the film cannot offer the viewer an insight into the Asset's rich internal world the way that the novel can by means of internal monologue and stream of consciousness, and the book cannot offer the nuance of expression and the complexity that an actor lends the character they embody: "Although novel reading as well as film spectatorship constitutes a purely mental event, novels are not literally seen through lenses, projected on wide screens, or heard in sounds measurable in decibels, sounds which can break glass or damage eardrums" (Stam 6).

Text as a medium relies solely on the imagination of the reader, and cannot lend the story it tells the "reality" which a film can. As Stam notes, while the projection is an "illusion," the light and sound are real; a film brings the story and characters one step closer to that reality which the viewer inhabits. The characters are portrayed by actors – embodied in an actual person, the set can be touched and the images of props are images of real objects, and even the special effects are "real" insomuch that they are the light and sound we can perceive with our senses. In short, the film adapts the story it tells to the actual senses, thus embodying it in a way that imagination by itself is not able to embody it. Because a film adapts the story to senses, and much is "presented"

to the viewer instead of requiring that the viewer (reader) relies on imagination and thus "creates" the story, and because reading requires a more obvious mental engagement, it was long held that reading is "superior" to viewing a film: "At the same time, 'facility' relays a cliché about reception: the idea . . . that 'it takes no brains to sit down and watch a film.' This is rather like saying that it takes no brains to sit down and turn the pages of a novel; what matters, in both cases, is understanding what one reads" (Stam 7). As Stam notes here, understanding plays a crucial role and can be similarly absent in both reading a text and viewing a film, if the viewer/reader takes the text/film at face value. In truth, a hidden deeper meaning can be present in both the phrasing of a text and the visual or auditory elements of a film.

As previously mentioned, understanding the contexts and detail of a film does indeed require mental engagement. It is possible to argue that it may require even more such engagement than reading a text where the author leads the reader more closely, by having to explicitly mention every significant detail: "the cinema has resources unavailable to the novel. The cinema can literally include painting, poetry and music or it can metaphorically evoke them by imitating their procedures; it can show a Picasso painting, or emulate cubist techniques, cite a Bach cantata, or create montage equivalents of fugue and counterpoint" (Stam 24). Thus, it is important to pay attention to all these seemingly inconsequential details and minor elements of the film's aesthetic appeal. The film is, essentially, a unity of various media; a great mosaic of detail where each piece is significant to the whole.

However, the final element of film is virtually impossible to objectively analyse: the mind of the viewer. As with any other work of art, it is the audience that projects meaning onto the myriad of tiny details and the empty spaces between them; the audience's experiences, thoughts and beliefs are all projected onto the work of art they are analysing. This is the reason there are so many possible ways to approach and understand a work of art; simply summarized, a tyrant king and his oppressed people would view a film about the French Revolution from very different standpoints. Perhaps less dire, but such is the case with any work of art. *The Shape of Water* will be viewed very differently by, for example, a working class woman with a disability, and by a man who spent most of his life in Strickland's position. Similarly, a young person watching *Pacific Rim* may view Pentecost's protectiveness of Mako Mori differently than a parent would.

Stam summarizes well why films, and film adaptations, should in no way be dismissed as "lesser" forms of art or inferior to the source text, as film requires a deeper understanding and mental engagement just as the text does, and perhaps more so, given that it is a combination of multiple artistic forms, such as music and various visual arts: "Any comprehensive theory of cinematic point of view must take into account film's multitrack and multiform nature. Each and

every filmic track and procedure – camera angle, focal length, music, performance, mise-en-scène, and costume – can convey a point of view" (Stam 39). The same can be said of novelizations, adaptations of films or video games into the form of a novel, which may be viewed as less of a literary text than a "proper" novel.

Far from being merely a form of "entertainment for the masses" that requires little to no mental effort, film is a complex and multiform work of art that includes other forms of art like music, sculpture, painting, and dance. Film also embodies the story it tells and its characters in a real, physical way available to the bodily senses of the viewer, whereas a text relies solely on imagination, that is, on that which the viewer has already experienced and can visualise. One cannot imagine a sound previously unheard or a work of art never seen before. It would have to be composed of the details we have already seen, of faces familiar to us. While a text relies on the reader's already existing internal world and a reserve of experiences, a film may offer new elements, new experiences, things both unheard and not seen before. Interestingly, whereas a novel and its filmic adaptation are typically seen as separate works of art, films and its subsequent literary adaptations (novelizations) are seen as being more connected in that the novelization offers a new, complementary representation of the same story. Films and their novelizations can thus offer both a unique and supplementary insight into the story, and (perhaps especially so in the case of del Toro's works) fit together to offer a more complete narrative than either medium would on its own.

1.5 Del Toro's Other Works

The story of Hellboy was created by Mike Mignola, and has since been adapted and transformed from the source comic series into various media like novels, video games, and film. Del Toro adapted Mignola's vision into *Hellboy* (2004) and *Hellboy II* (2008), and like other del Toro's films, these two films also deal with the topic of Otherness. Speaking of *Hellboy*, Laura Podalsky concludes:

> In referring to a mythical past in which humans and magical creatures coexisted harmoniously, the film positions the dank urban present as the outcome of a colonialist venture originating in humans' insatiable desire for more territory, entailing the subjugation and marginalization of "others" and culminating in the destruction of the natural environment. (116-117)

The subjugated minority are magical creatures, which may be understood as del Toro's criticism of the mystification and dehumanization of minorities. This also means these others are unique, as opposed to the teeming homogeneous masses that are, in this case, humanity. *Hellboy* inverts the

trope of the Other as the faceless, single-minded, non-sapient mass intent on colonizing and conquering the "civilized" world, which many fantasy and horror films promote.

The primary antagonist in *Hellboy II*, Prince Nuada, is for the most part sympathetic: a royal of a dying race of magical beings who are quickly pushed back by humanity. Even the villains who are at first glance completely irredeemable may provoke a spark of sympathy due to the fact that their story is ultimately a cautionary tale about the ways society fails in its mission to hold evil at bay. The character of Kroenen in del Toro's envisioning of *Hellboy* is less faithful to Mignola's vision than he is to del Toro's. This alone would allow for the analysis of the character as one of del Toro's monsters, in accordance with the main topic of this work. Peter Hutchings confirms this: "There is a fascination with what might be termed a masculine 'death in life' embodied by the surgery-addicted automaton-like Nazi, Kroenen, in Hellboy (who is very different from his presentation in Mignola's comic book and who is identified by Mignola in the DVD commentary as a del Toro invention)" (92-93).

One cannot help but ask the provocative question of what could possibly motivate a person to embrace a terrifying ideology of evil, like the character of Kroenen did, and what can be done in order for it to never occur again. Perhaps it is for this purpose that del Toro made Kroenen an absolutely obedient puppet to the will of his master, Rasputin. Not only is his mind completely enslaved, but it also seems that he lacks true bodily autonomy; his heart is replaced by clockwork. Kroenen is made into an automaton, a truly inhuman monster whose flesh is filled with mechanical parts that keep him alive and make it possible for him to murder with uncanny, mechanical precision. His absolutely inhuman nature is emphasized by the face-concealing mask he wears, which makes the revelation of his mutilated face in the film all the more terrible for the viewer, who is abruptly reminded that Kroenen was once human, but not any longer, and who is forced to understand that there is a process of dehumanization, of (mental and spiritual) "mutilation" that any human had to undergo to become such a monster. Ultimately, the story of Kroenen is a cautionary tale about how monstrous ideologies warp people into inhuman entities. As with all del Toro's monsters, this character shows us that the true essence of the monstrous lies within humanity itself.

Hellboy, the film's titular hero, is the stark opposite of this. His demonic origin would imply that evil is somehow inborn or natural to him, and yet he is humanity's hero and saviour. He is the perfect opposite of Kroenen. While Kroenen was initially human, he was warped into something beyond monstrous through ideology, indoctrination, and (physically) invasive surgical procedures. Hellboy is originally a demonic being, yet he leaves that "destiny" behind through his father and mentor's (professor Bruttenholm's) care and the way he was raised. He, too, modifies his body: by

filing his ever-growing horns, he shows that the rejection of evil is a continuing, everyday effort. Moreover, he suggests that appearance (skin colour, facial features, and so on) has very little to do with one's moral qualities.

Abraham "Abe" Sapien is yet another of del Toro's non-human characters in *Hellboy* who conveys an interesting message to the viewer. He is an amphibian person, classified as an "Icthyo Sapien" in the *Hellboy* universe, who has psychic powers such as telepathy and psychometry. He is an extremely intelligent, exceedingly polite person, yet he is an outcast, just as the "demonic" Hellboy and the pyrokinetic Elizabeth "Liz" Sherman are, due to his appearance and powers. In short, he is yet another character marked and isolated by his otherness, who still finds friendship and support in those with whom he shares the experience of being extraordinary.

While society generally rejects minorities, that is, those who appear to be different from the majority, del Toro shows his viewers that one's outward appearance has nothing to do with humanity or lack thereof. He shows them that there is strength in those differences, and that the only thing our humanity ultimately depends on are our choices and behaviour.

2. *Pacific Rim*

Pacific Rim, del Toro's 2013 film, tells the story of an alien invasion from a breach within the depths of the Pacific Ocean. The extradimensional invaders set gigantic biological monsters loose upon human cities with the intent to eventually claim the planet for themselves. The film continues to tell the story of human cooperation, unity, and bravery in crafting gigantic machines to repel the invaders. It also reveals the faults of humanity by establishing that the invasion would not have happened if mankind had not polluted the planet, and, in doing so, made it habitable for the invading extradimensional forces.

The gigantic machines, called Jaegers, that are used as a weapon against the invaders literally depend on the core of humanity within them: they can only be piloted by two (or in one case, three) people who have achieved perfect understanding and unity by entering the Drift, a state of interconnected thoughts and memories. *Pacific Rim* is thus more than a science fiction or an action "flick"; it is a story that explores the relationship between man and nature, and the role of emotion and human connection in an age of technological advancement. Moreover, by introducing the possibility of initiating the "Drift" with the invading alien monsters (the "kaiju"), *Pacific Rim* is blurring the lines between man and monster in a similar way the Jaegers blur the line between man and machine. By placing the responsibility for planetary pollution, which made the invasion

possible, firmly upon the shoulders of humanity, *Pacific Rim* is also making a strong ecological statement.

The film's novelization, *Pacific Rim* (2013) by Alex Irvine differs from del Toro's version of the story. Irvine deviates from it most notably by changing the characterization, which includes adding a physical fight between Raleigh and his co-worker, and by having the protagonists (Raleigh Becket and Mako Mori) kiss at the end of the book, adding thus a romantic twist, which is completely absent from the film. While del Toro seeks to avoid stereotypes, Irvine seems to embrace them in the novel. Nevertheless, the ecological and social message of the film remains unchanged in the novelization.

The following chapter is an attempt to analyse the most prominent symbols within the story in more detail, and to reaffirm the idea that kaiju and Jaegers are both inextricably connected to humanity by embodying its inherent flaws and virtues.

2.1 The Kaiju and the Jaegers – the Biological and the Mechanical

In many ways, Postmodernist thought has legitimized the fragmentation of knowledge, ideas, truths, and histories. According to Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, the Unified Theory, that is, the idea that a certain field (such as history) consists of epistemological wholes which encompass everything, has rightly become a thing of the past. Instead, the focus is on individual elements of history that make up a complete narrative viewed both by themselves and in relation to other elements; each of them is a story in itself, as well as a crucial and indispensable part of the narrative:

> We live in an age that has rightly given up on Unified Theory, an age when we realize that history (like "individuality," "subjectivity," "gender," and "culture") is composed of a multitude of fragments, rather than of smooth epistemological wholes. Some fragments will be collected here and bound temporarily together to form a loosely integrated net—or, better, an unassimilated hybrid, a monstrous body. (3)

Viewed as such, a "monstrous body," made up of seemingly disjointed narratives that form a whole, seems to be the dominant form – both metaphorically and in the sense of literal representation in visual media.

The question of the nature of the monstrous body is crucial for the full understanding of the *Pacific Rim*'s monsters. Both the kaiju and Jaegers fit the bill of the monstrous, and, rather than having a separate well-known form (a unified theory or "truth"), they appear as never-before-seen and temporally limited constructions of different parts. Kaiju, gigantic alien monsters that threaten human civilization and share a hive mind are a collective, unified consciousness exerting control over its constituent members. They represent the totality of their culture/civilization and work as

one, and their nature may be seen as ambiguous; they can both be seen as positive or negative, as a unified or a "patchwork" construction.

The monstrous is almost always tightly bound to the social and cultural context: "The monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read: the monstrum is etymologically "that which reveals," "that which warns" (Cohen 4). Indeed, the film establishes the monsters as the "hounds" of an alien race intent on destroying humanity and claiming the planet for themselves. This, however, would have been impossible were it not for the humans' in the first place, as their disregard for their own planet and the extensive damage that the ever-advancing civilization of humans inflicted upon it "invited" the invaders. In fact, Newton Geiszler, one of the characters, explains that it was precisely environmental pollution that made Earth a suitable target for planet-wide eradication of the human race (00:46:00-00:46:07). Therefore, the kaiju can be understood as the symbols of the terrible consequences of our own inhumanity – the callous disregard for the needs of others and the environment.

According to Cohen, "[m]onsters must be examined within the intricate matrix of relations (social, cultural, and literary-historical) that generate them" (5). Del Toro's kaiju must also be understood within the context of contemporary culture. Their alien and incomprehensible hive-mind may very well be a stand-in for corporate greed, where this large construct of worker bodies, subjugated under a singular will, finds its counterpart in the hulking mass of the kaiju under the direct control of their masters, the Precursors. The kaiju are, ultimately, just instruments for the destructive and compassionless will that governs them, focused solely on profit at the detriment of all other life (humanity). Furthermore, the kaiju are symbols of a global ecological crisis, and simultaneously a crisis of direction; they are classified into size categories because they defy every other classification: "This refusal to participate in the classificatory 'order of things' is true of monsters generally: they are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration" (Cohen 6). The kaiju are interesting symbols in this sense as well. Their bodies defy classification, because each is a unique weapon and there is no other basis of classification but the size scale. Additionally, later is found out that they are ultimately homogenous, perfectly the same on a genetic and cellular level. They are clones, bred and shaped for a purpose, and their outside appearance is merely an illusion of difference. The kaiju may thus be not just the symbol of corporate greed, but a symbol of the (concept of) corporation itself. While different on the outside, their composition and purpose are the same; the mechanized (and weaponized) biological body and a single, overarching purpose – material gain for the masters who rule (own) them.

The monster, as a symbolic monster-body, an amalgamation of seemingly contradicting parts, defies the laws of nature, effectively standing outside them. Such is the case of the Jaegers, machines which humanity developed to fight the kaiju. The Jaegers need their pilots to function; they require a core of human consciousness, emotion, and will to drive them. However, the mechanical is not merely a shell; the pilots become one with each-other and the robotic (monster) body, thus creating a unity of mechanical and biological/human, a hybrid that defies categories. As Cohen contends:

> The too-precise laws of nature as set forth by science are gleefully violated in the freakish compilation of the monster's body. A mixed category, the monster resists any classification built on hierarchy or a merely binary opposition, demanding instead a "system" allowing polyphony, mixed response (difference in sameness, repulsion in attraction), and resistance to integration. (6-7)

The Jaegers seem to be the perfect opposite of the kaiju, not only in that they are mechanical where kaiju are biological, but in their uniqueness. The Jaegers differ from one another in appearance, but unlike the kaiju, whose "difference" is merely superficial, they are a reflection of their pilots' unique humanity. These machines are highly individualized, and the novelization even suggests that they possess a mild sort of ghost sentience, a remnant of their deep connection with their pilots. Each Jaeger is also built specifically to accommodate its pilots' unique traits, needs, and combat manoeuvres. For example, the Jaeger Crimson Typhoon has three instead of the customary two arms, due to the triplets who pilot it (see fig. 2).

Fig. 2 Jaeger "Crimson Typhoon" with its three arms poised for attack (*Pacific Rim*, 01:05:52).

The message is rather clear – it is our differences that give us unique strengths in the face of the militarized, homogeneous, single-minded enemy. Significantly, del Toro visually represents both the heroes (Jaegers) and the enemy (kaiju) as monstrous hybrids underlining his claim that everyone is imperfect: "monsters, I believe, are the patron saints of our blissful imperfection" ("Guillermo del Toro Wins Best Director" 00:00:12 – 00:00:26). Ultimately, although *Pacific Rim* is a science fiction film, it is first and foremost about the human kind; the aliens are just metaphors for problems that people create/have.

For Laurence A. Rickels, "the theme of humankind treated as the livestock of uncanny heirs to technological progress introduces the problem of food and death on the basis of identification between humans and animals" (qtd. in Picart and Browning 9). Technological progress is relevant in the film; people have created unimaginable technological devices, and the Precursors, alien creators and masters of kaiju, use technology to produce kaiju (despite consisting entirely of biological material, the kaiju are technically manufactured). Nevertheless, humans are definitely likened to inferior animals; they are not even represented as livestock, but as pests who have outlived their usefulness. Namely, the Precursors needed humanity to pollute and terraform[2] the Earth, but, contrary to the popular trope of outside corruption or mind control, they merely had to wait to have it happen. Due to human negligence and greed, the planet was destroyed by humans themselves. One might argue that the greatest "foe" in *Pacific Rim* is apathy and the uncaring behaviour of humanity, which led to exploiting the planet's resources for as long as it facilitated progress, without any regard for the consequences. In this way, the film offers a cautionary, ecocritical message among many others that can be inferred from its plot. Namely, that the humans are their own and nature's greatest enemy and that people need to rethink their treatment of the planet. The film shows in an imaginative way that callous treatment of Earth's resources can have terrible consequences. Once the planet was sufficiently terraformed (ruined) through pollution, the Precursors send kaiju to remove humanity. Thus, the kaiju are not the cause, but the consequence. As so often happens in del Toro's films, the true fault and the definition of monstrous lies with the humans. In this way, del Toro blurs the boundary between what is stereotypically perceived as good and evil.

[2] In the film, the verb *terraform*, which in SF typically means to transform a planet so as to resemble the earth and support human life, is used to mean "transform the Earth in such a way as to make it habitable for the kaiju," which is the opposite of its original meaning. Namely, the Earth became interesting for kaiju only after people polluted (ruined) it.

In this sense, Isabel Pinedo talks about the distinction between "classic horror frame" and "conflicted horror frame": "In contrast to the classic horror frame, the conflicted horror frame views evil as residing within the 'normal.'" (qtd. in Picart and Browning 10-11). According to her,

> the boundary between good and evil, normal and abnormal, human and alien is as firmly drawn as the imperative that good must conquer evil, thus producing a secure Manichean worldview in which the threats to the social order are largely external and (hu)man agency prevails, largely in the figure of the masterful male subject. (qtd. in Picart and Browning 11)

This is certainly the case in *Pacific Rim*. Not only because of the aforementioned instances of humanity being the one to blame for the crisis, but also because of the depiction of the human-kaiju "drift." The drift is the mental link of two minds usually used by Jaeger pilots to direct the great machines and imbue them with their own consciousness. However, as an important plot point in the film, in one case the "drift" is initiated with the remains of a kaiju brain, and thus a link is established between a human mind and the vast, unknowable intelligence that is the hive mind of the kaiju. Significantly, it is once more a human character that initiates this connection; it was in no way forced upon humanity by the Precursors or their kaiju. This Promethean act of defiance is also the only thing that can save humankind, for without it – without understanding the *consequence* that is the kaiju – the resistance would have no way to know how the Breach (through which the kaiju enter our world) is protected or how to ensure that the plan for destroying it works.

It is Dr Newton Geiszler who initiates the "drift" with the kaiju, and he does it twice: first alone (with merely a fragment of a kaiju brain) and then together with his fellow scientist (and rival) doctor Hermann Gottlieb, who says that they do what "the jaeger pilots do. Share the neural load" (01:35:24-01:35:27). Once more, the film offers an educational tale about the strength that human differences, and unity in spite of these differences, gives to people. This plot point also makes it clear to the viewer that humanity must understand its monsters in order to fight them.

Newton's drift with the kaiju brain and the resulting possible "possession" is somewhat explained by Cohen's claim that "the monster's body is both corporeal and incorporeal; its threat is its propensity to shift" (5). The kaiju assume a new level of horror once the viewer is made aware that the drift is "two-way," and that Newton's brave and perhaps reckless action to save humanity came at the price of admitting some of the "alien" and "inhuman" into his mind. Since the kaiju possess genetic memory and a hive mind instead of an individual intelligence, Newton not only came into contact with the entire history and the whole scope of their species, but also inadvertently allowed the entire alien multitude to know him, to probe the depths of his mind and familiarize

itself with the human. It is only post the drift that the viewer understands the immensity and gravity of Dr Geiszler's sacrifice.

Cohen, speaking of the returning monster, speaks primarily of the undead, but this idea can be applied to *Pacific Rim* with startling accuracy. Namely, Newton's drift with the kaiju allows the Precursors, the selfish alien hive-mind, to bleed into his own psyche to the point of it being indistinguishable from his own thoughts and actions. This is hinted at in the scene where the scientist is trying to crawl away from the prematurely born offspring of kaiju Otachi: the monster and the human mirror one-another's movements subconsciously, or rather, Newton unknowingly copies the movements of the monster pursuing him (see fig. 3). Via the drift, the boundaries are crossed, and the alien Other can bleed into any psyche, indistinguishable from the human.

Fig. 3 Scientist Newton Geiszler crawling away from a new-born kaiju monster, one mirroring the other's movements (*Pacific Rim*, 01:31:39).

For the analysis of the Anteverse, the alien dimension that is home to the Precursors, Cohen's idea of the Outside as being Within is particularly vital: "In its function as dialectical Other or third-term supplement, the monster is an incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond—of all those loci that are rhetorically placed as distant and distinct but originate Within" (Cohen 7). The Anteverse is a remote, alien dimension physically accessible only through the Breach. Because of the unique and different approaches to storytelling, the film and the novel complement one another, giving the reader/viewer a more complete version of the story than either medium would on its

own; a comparative approach to the film and the novel offers the "missing pieces" needed to fully grasp the complex symbolism of the Anteverse, home of the kaiju's alien masters. The film's novelization by Alex Irvine describes its effects on Raleigh and, in general, its alien nature: "his every sense overwhelmed with the wrongness, the utter alienness. A great city made of flesh and bone and organ, grown and made over millions of years" (Irvine 327). The author describes "a wash of energies that painted the nearer structures of the city in colors for which Raleigh had no names" (Irvine 327). While an imaginative reader may at least attempt to envision such colours, the film, relying on the senses instead of primarily on the imagination of the viewer, must use other means to portray the utterly alien nature of this dimension.

While great scientific accuracy usually is not to be expected from a work of science fiction, this passage nonetheless offers interesting insight into what the author might imply. Given that the human eye ought not to be physically capable of perceiving any previously unknown colour due to a simple biological fact, this passage implies a sort of a (partial) mutation into the "monstrous"; at the very least, those who come into contact with the Beyond (the Anteverse, in this case) are irreversibly changed. The author confirms this by having Raleigh wonder if "[his eye] was bloodshot. Maybe going to the Anteverse, experiencing it from a human perspective, just did that" (Irvine 326). This reinforces the two-way connection between the human and monstrous. If that which is human is changed, tainted by the contact with the Beyond, to what degree is the monstrous then humanized? Both the film and its novelization suggest that this might be the case to some extent: kaiju Otachi is actively looking for Dr Newton Geiszler, who established "first contact,"[3] and seems to have some connection to him as it finds the scientist in an underground shelter and breaches the ground directly above him. Furthermore, the Precursors (and subsequently the kaiju) seem to possess some knowledge of Marshal Pentecost's plan, as the three newly emerged kaiju seem to be guarding the Breach, choosing not to venture further but instead prepare for the arrival of the Jaegers.

2.2 Characterisation and the Question of Representation

The monstrous is not the sole element of del Toro's work that is deserving of interest and an in-depth analysis. This chapter focuses primarily on the analysis of the human characters in the film and in its novelization, and attempts to compare how audio-visual representation and textual descriptions in the novel serve to represent different minority groups, which are present throughout

[3] The term "first contact" is established by Murray Leinster in 1945 in his novelette *First Contact*. The theme of the first encounter between people and aliens or between any two sentient races appeared in many previous works of SF literature, but the term for the encounter was taken from Leinster.

del Toro's opus and to which his protagonists often belong. In this sense, the term "representation" is used in two ways in this chapter: audio-visual or textual representation in the sense of presenting the characters to the viewer/reader, and representation of minorities in the sense of depicting minorities, that is acknowledging the minorities' existence in the text. At times, the nature of the works allows for an interchangeable use of these terms, as the audio-visual and textual representation of characters greatly affects how minorities are represented (that is, appear) in any given work. Put differently, the way characters are presented audio-visually to the viewer/reader directly affects how the viewer/reader will perceive the social group to which the characters in question belong.

In *Pacific Rim*, as in many of his works, del Toro's approach is transnational: "Del Toro decenters the United States as the usual power that must save the world and has this multinational resistance group taking on the task instead" (Thornton 137). Indeed, instead of a single nation, or even the united world government, the film depicts the Pan Pacific Defence Corps as the resistance to the alien invaders. People of various nationalities, origins, lifestyles and beliefs come together to make the final stand against the monsters that threaten humanity's existence. They are "an international group made up of multiple races and a higher than usual gender balance for an action film" (Thornton 125). Niamh Thornton explains that in Pacific Rim, "del Toro plays with generic expectations and shifts between national spaces (mostly the United States and Hong Kong), thus challenging fixed conventions and boundaries" (122). Del Toro breaks various stereotypes and disrupts the "US-centric" narrative that many films enforce. For example, "Ops Tendo Choi (Clifton Collins, Jr.), despite his name, is a markedly Latino character and is in charge of the controls in the base, which is still quite radical as Latinos on film are rarely credited with technical wizardry" (Thornton 130). As Thornton points out, "Choi is an example of how del Toro enacts a shift from WASP characters in a summer blockbuster film and how he inserts Mexican presence into otherwise generic US formulae" (130).

Choi is not the only character whom del Toro uses to break stereotypes. Namely, in addition to national stereotypes, he breaks gender stereotypes as well. Raleigh Becket is shown as emotionally sensitive (especially regarding the loss of his brother) and considerate, despite the traits he possesses which would otherwise mark him as a stereotypically overwhelmingly masculine character. The character of Chuck Hansen is Raleigh's opposite, but even in his case, del Toro breaks macho stereotypes by exposing Chuck's insecurities to the viewer in the scene where Marshal Pentecost describes Chuck as "an egotistical jerk with daddy issues. A simple puzzle [Pentecost] solved on day one" (01:38:26-01:38:30). Mako Mori is a complex, multifaceted female character that by no means falls under the "love interest" stereotype. In fact, despite the

ending scene being changed to a kiss in the novelization and thus not remaining true to del Toro's vision, Raleigh and Mako do not kiss in the film. In this way, del Toro avoids the stereotypical gender representations according to which the female and male protagonists' relationship must culminate in romance as if there is no other, more important, way for them to interact.

In Thornton's words, "Pacific Rim does not radically overturn the conventions of the genre, but it does reimagine a different, global, less triumphalist approach to the summer blockbuster movie" (137). It is possible to examine and possibly challenge Thornton's claim in several ways. This depends on what one considers a "radical overturning" of specific genre conventions. As opposed to the opinion of many critics (some of which Thornton lists), *Pacific Rim* can be described as radical in its handling of representation and inclusivity, in its dismantling of the US-centric narrative, in its powerful female characters, and its ecocritical questioning of the usually clear lines between the heroes and the villains (humanity's terraforming of the planet for the monstrous invaders via environmental pollution shifts most of the blame on humanity itself).

2.3 *Pacific Rim* in the Context of del Toro's Opus, Society, and Science Fiction

Pacific Rim offers a unique perspective regarding the traditional human-monster conflict. Namely, the human element can be found on both sides, and *Pacific Rim* does not alienate the "mechanical." Instead of the "evil robot" trope, *Pacific Rim* tells the story of humanity's ingenuity and inventiveness, saving the world precisely through the identification of the human with the mechanical. In that sense, Hutchings notes a "disturbing reversibility" when the film is compared to the ending of *Hellboy II*; in *Pacific Rim* the viewer is invited to identify with the mechanical (and monstrous) Jaegers and their human pilots against the monstrous (biological) kaiju, whereas in Hellboy the viewer is encouraged to sympathise with the "monstrous" hero Hellboy against the monstrous militarism of the mechanical army which the protagonists face (Hutchings 95). This can be said to illustrate del Toro's rejection of all potentially stereotypical representations, making it clear that everyone contains a bit of the monstrous and making it impossible to claim that mechanical or technological is unanimously evil, whereas biological is consistently good, or vice versa.

Moreover, despite the prominence of military-like characters, *Pacific Rim* does not promote militarism. This is made clear through the words of Marshal Pentecost: "We're not an army any more, Mr. Becket. We're the resistance" (00:24:48-00:24:52). The Hong Kong Shatterdome has lost military funding and support; it is instead the last bastion of humanity's fighting spirit: "we are cancelling the apocalypse," the Marshal explains in his speech (01:37:15-01:37:51). People from various cultures and of various backgrounds work together to battle the horrors which the

environmental pollution invited, and they rely on innovation, technology, and teamwork (most clearly exemplified through the "drift") to achieve this, rejecting monster-like and uniform corporate or military organizations that ignore individual humanity. Hutchings observes: "one could find in the film the apotheosis of the transnational qualities so often associated with del Toro, with the giant robots dependent on the support of a racially and ethnically mixed group of human beings who can interact very effectively across national differences" (95-96).

The kaiju, appearing as the result of human (in)action and the environmental pollution, are clones and can be regarded as "monstrous masses," a uniform body of indistinguishable individuals. Podalsky notes that in *Hellboy II* and *The Strain* trilogy, the monstrous masses are "less the perverse result of science gone astray than the (super)natural outcome of unchecked greed" (101). The same holds true for *Pacific Rim*. The kaiju are not a mistake of science, but rather the result of science that was improperly applied. Newton Geiszler explains: "We practically terraformed it for them" (00:46:00-00:46:07), referring to the kaiju's masters' desire to conquer the planet and listing various human failures to protect and preserve the environment, such as "ozone depletion, the carbon monoxide, polluted waters" (00:46:00-00:46:07). Humanity's callous greed was practically an invitation for kaiju. In the very beginning of the film, the narrator (Raleigh Becket) says the following: "There are things you can't fight – acts of God. You see a hurricane coming, you get out of the way. But when you're in a Jaeger, suddenly you can fight the hurricane. You can win" (00:08:18-00:08:33). In this, the film's ecocritical commentary is exceedingly clear: humanity has tried to conquer nature and surpass God in their control over nature and natural forces. This act of hubris has led to extreme danger and jeopardized human survival.

Even a brief analysis of del Toro's use of the tools that film offers as a medium, especially how the passage of time is depicted while guiding the viewer towards the main points of the plot, shows that film has the potential to be as flexible and changeable as a text can be: "A culturally polyrhythmic heterochronic, multiple-velocity and contrapuntal cinema becomes a real possibility. Those who argue that cinema lacks "tense" forget these protean possibilities" (Stam 22). The introduction into the plot of *Pacific Rim* is similarly handled. The voice-over, Raleigh Becket's inner monologue, explains a series of images, letting the viewer know how the kaiju war began. From that point on, del Toro shows the viewer what happens instead of telling, but the use of voice-over narration still serves its purpose, explaining the cause and flow of kaiju war quickly and succinctly. Some of the scenes that follow the narration lend credibility to the theory that kaiju represent the climate change, weather-related disasters and the way humanity may fight them: Raleigh compares kaiju to a hurricane, an "act of god" which can none the less be fought if one has the necessary technology available; namely, if one is in a Jaeger.

Ultimately, *Pacific Rim* is a film which approaches ecological and sociopolitical questions from a standpoint of constructive criticism. Some of its reviews, like the one by Phillip French, describe it merely as "summer blockbuster . . . a well-made sci-fi fantasy full of familiar but satisfying moments" ("Pacific Rim – Review"). However, *Pacific Rim* is much more than an action blockbuster relying solely on familiar tropes. It is instead a work of art that aims not just to amuse its audience (in which it succeeds), but to send a crucial, serious message to a vast audience (which, for example, an art film could not). It aims to depict the consequences of greed-fuelled decisions of the global governments, and succeeds in doing so through an age-old symbolism of the monstrous and its mutually-dependant coexistence with the human from which it ultimately stems.

3. *The Shape of Water*

The analysis of *The Shape of Water* allows for a different approach than the analysis of *Pacific Rim*. While *Pacific Rim* and its novelization were each written independently by their respective authors, the novel *The Shape of Water* lists both del Toro and Daniel Kraus as authors, and the novel seems to be a part of the film (and the film a part of the novel) rather than just its adaptation. The novel and the film both offer unique elements and insights that, together, give a more complete view of the story instead of just retelling it in a different medium. Instead, they each apply these tools unique to the medium (audio-visual storytelling in the case of the film, character introspection in the case of the novel) to offer a piece of the puzzle to the reader/viewer, completing a bigger picture together. For this reason, the novel and the film are analysed together in this chapter, as complementing elements that help tell a single, overarching story. The reason they complement one another is that the authors both worked on what was initially Kraus' idea, del Toro writing the script and Kraus writing the novel. While creating their respective works, del Toro and Kraus regularly communicated by email up to a certain point, and Kraus claims he was able to expand the story as he wanted while still encapsulating del Toro's vision within it as well (Lussier).

Like *Pacific Rim*, the story of *The Shape of Water*, both in the novel and in the film, takes a markedly ecocritical approach, with several minor differences due to the different medium. The film does not allow the viewer to see the process of the Asset's capture first-hand. The reader, however, joins Strickland during his time in the jungle, and witnesses his extraordinary cruelty towards both his fellow man and the natural world. The reader sees Strickland starve and kill an animal, and witnesses him pouring large quantities of chemicals into the water, without any regard for the natural world, in order to force the Asset, Deus Brânquia (Spanish for Gill-god), to appear. The fact that the Asset is referred to as Gill-god (or god with gills) symbolizes the blasphemy of the act of destroying nature and killing or capturing its creatures, all of which are divine. Additionally, the fact that the Gill-god is referred to as "the Asset" by the government agents and soldiers symbolizes that politicians, the army and other government bodies have no respect or feeling for nature and natural beings, but that they perceive the environment and everything (everyone) within it as goods from which one can make some kind of profit. The term "the Amphibian Man," used widely in critical texts to refer to the god with gills, attempts to establish the idea of equality between humans and other beings, as well as to suggest that there is humanity in every monster and monstrosity in every human, and in this sense it has a distinct anthropocentric connotation.

3.1 The Symbolism of the Amphibian Man and the Depiction of Otherness

The Amphibian Man, around whom the majority of the plot revolves, is as multifaceted, complex, and rich in symbolism as all del Toro's monsters, that is, as all monster characters in general: "[Monsters are] both living and dead, human and animal, or (in the case of cyborgs) organic and mechanical" (Skal xii-xiii). The Amphibian Man exemplifies this by primarily being the point where the human and the natural world meet, an embodiment of their union. Forcibly moved from his natural environment, transported against his will into the heart of civilization and from a living jungle into one of concrete and steel, the Amphibian Man is treated as a piece of merchandise, not even an animal, by those who make no effort to understand him and who refer to him as "the Asset."

As any monster, the Asset may be understood in several different ways. One of those ways is viewing the Asset as being on the intersection between the human and the animalistic, a forgotten (or suppressed) nature much more in touch with the natural world than civilization allows. While it is not as clearly depicted in the film, the book leaves no doubt that the Asset is very much "human," in the sense that he is a self-aware, cognitive being. His internal monologue proves as much by introducing the reader to the Asset's complex internal world, leaving no doubt that the Asset possesses both intelligence and a sense of self, that is, leaving no doubt that he is a sapient being: "and we are sorry we change to sorry color to sorry scent to sorry liquids to sorry stance we did not mean to attack we are not foe we are friend and good man smiles at us" (del Toro and Kraus 250). The Asset's point of view, the way the authors choose to write his thoughts, is a stream of consciousness without punctuation that sets him apart from the musings of the human characters and emphasizes his role as the "Other." The Asset also focuses less on objects and more on emotion and colour, but the way the authors shape his thoughts marks him as indisputably intelligent, that is, a person. While this removes the possibility of the Asset being "animalistic," he is still the embodiment of that part of human nature which the Western society suppresses, namely instinct.

The Asset is also glaringly "Other," due to his monster-like appearance, which makes it possible to interpret the Asset as the representation of the non-White, non-Western, and non-patriarchal, which is frequently demonized. It is important to emphasize that the "demonization" of the Asset depends entirely on the point of view and cultural context of the other characters. To Elisa Esposito, who herself has been ostracized and discriminated against because of the fact that she is a woman with a disability (she is mute) in a misogynist, ableist American society of the Cold War Era, the Asset is obviously human from the start; she can identify with him and see him as a person. To the strict, fascist-like Colonel Richard Strickland, the head of a government laboratory where the experiments on the Amphibian Man are conducted, the Asset is everything he was taught

to suppress and hate: The Asset is different. He is Other, and, like Elisa, he is voiceless and targeted in the patriarchal, insular, xenophobic society which Strickland equally represents and suffers in.

Namely, the book makes it abundantly clear, much more than the film, that the Asset reminds Strickland of all those things he passionately hates within himself, which can be summed up under the term "inhuman." Strickland's frequent flashbacks of the jungle serve to prove that:

> Deus Brânquia, at last, rises from the shoal, the blood sun carving the Serengeti, the ancient eye of the eclipse, the ocean scalping open the new world, the insatiable glacier, the sea-spray spew, the bacterial bite, the single-cell seethe, the species spit, the rivers the vessels to a heart, the mountain's hard erection, the sunflower's swaying thighs, the grey-fur mortification, the pink-flesh fester, the umbilical vine cording us back to the origin. It is all this and more. (del Toro and Kraus 24)

Strickland sees the Asset as the converging point of natural world, as the thing that ties humanity to its "animalistic" origins. He calls the Asset the "Gill-god" and sees himself as his opposite, a "jungle-god." Strickland and his expedition invaded the Asset's home as trespassers and conquerors, using large quantities of rotenone, a fish pesticide, pouring a barrel of the chemical into presumably untouched waters to force the Asset out of the water. Even then, the Asset did not fight back, instead "the creature reached out to him. Gill-god, Jungle-god. They could be the same. They could be free. He squeezes his eyes shut, kills the memory" (del Toro and Kraus 27). Strickland obviously sees himself as some sort of an ascended being (possibly due to a drug he had previously taken to survive the jungle): "The thing that hath been is that which shall be. There is no new thing under the sun. The century is a blink. Everyone is dead. Only the Gill-god and the Jungle-god live" (del Toro and Kraus 26). This quote goes a step further, allowing both Asset and Strickland to shed their physical aspects in the mind of the reader and be judged only by their actions. Being stripped down to personality alone also strips Strickland of those things that always defined him as "human" and "superior" in his own society without his input; being no longer immediately defined by being "White" and "a man," Strickland proves to be much more of an animal than the "monstrous" Deus Brânquia could ever be.

In addition to the Gill-god, the main female protagonist Elisa and her friends are also represented as Others. Namely, there is a notable significance to her last name and her disability (muteness). She is Elisa *Esposito* (from the Latin, meaning orphan, abandoned). Not only is she a Latina, uprooted in the US, but also denied heritage, silenced, and alone without a family of her own. Her friend Giles is similarly alone because he had been rejected and ostracized for his sexual orientation. Zelda is also alone in a way, as her husband Brewster does not talk to her, does not ask about her life, or help her – he expects her to do all the housework as a given – which clearly

depicts the alienation of women in patriarchal society. In fact, as an African American woman, Zelda is doubly alienated: she is the Other both in her patriarchal home and outside of it. The Asset is alone because he has been ripped from a larger whole (his homeland) and is brought to the Western society where he is rejected and dehumanized. All of these characters, alone in a society which dehumanizes and devalues them, band together and rely on each other to survive in a hostile system. They each have unique strengths, which the society views as flaws, and they use these strengths to free the Asset, that is, to act humanely where the very society that prides itself on being civilized has utterly failed.

The film takes yet another praiseworthy step; it depicts Elisa's sexuality in a way that does not cater to the male gaze. Instead, the viewer is inconsequential, granted the privilege of being privy to Elisa's moments of solitude without those moments being tailored to the tastes of the assumed viewer. The scenes where she is alone in her apartment are an excellent example of this. She does not wear revealing clothing in those scenes, and neither are they shot from angles which would cater to any voyeuristic desires of the perceived audience. Her actions are for herself, and the viewer is instead granted insight into her world. The nude scenes humanize Elisa instead of objectifying her (see fig. 4).

Fig 4 Elisa embracing the Amphibian Man/Asset (*The Shape of Water*, 01:29:20)

Regarding the character of Elisa, her disability plays a crucial role in the film, and it is not added as an afterthought to fulfil certain imagined requirements. Elisa's disability is not depicted

as a "flaw" either, but instead a crucial plot device. Elisa is dehumanized by certain characters in the story, but not by its authors. Her character is complex, multi-faceted, and her disability is not portrayed as a "lack" but merely as a part of her. This is yet another thing that makes *The Shape of Water*, both the film and its novelization, a truly praiseworthy work. One particular interaction between Elisa and Giles excellently portrays the message of *The Shape of Water*; when Giles tries to convince Elisa that the Asset is just an animal, a "thing," Elisa signs and asks Giles to repeat her words out loud because that is the only way he will listen – if she "talks" like him:

> "What am I? I move my mouth, like him. I make no sound, like him. What does that make me? . . . When he looks at me, the way he looks at me, he does not know what I lack or how I am incomplete. He sees me for what I am, as I am. He's happy to see me, every time, every day. And now I can either save him or let him die." (*The Shape of Water*, 00:45:19 – 00:46:39)

When Giles says "it's not even human," Elisa replies with: "If we do nothing, neither are we" (*The Shape of Water*, 00:47:13 – 00:47:26). This aptly summarizes the message del Toro and Kraus try to convey: humanity or lack thereof is not defined by certain external or biological characteristics, but by our empathy and choices, our willingness to stand against injustice.

In order to add to the characterization, del Toro and Kraus resort to colours, so the use and symbolism of colour is significant both in the book and the film. As opposed to the film, the book ascribes a much wider palette of colours to the Asset's natural bioluminescence. Colours are used by the Asset as means to communicate, to convey his emotional states and intentions. When he accidentally hurts Giles, he changes to "sorry colours," and his bioluminescence is particularly emphasized in his interaction with Elisa. While limiting the Asset to a narrower range of colour (blue), the film nonetheless employs colour in varied and subtler, but no less significant ways. Perhaps the first notable instance of the significance of colour is at the beginning of the film, when the viewer learns Elisa is working the night shift at the Occam research centre (see fig. 5). The meaning traditionally tied to night-time is that of secret, mystery, and the forbidden. Things that take place at night-time are invisible to the diurnal world; similarly, the cleaning staff is invisible to those in power, and the Asset himself is both a secret and a mystery.

Fig. 5 A view of Occam Aerospace Research Center at night (*The Shape of Water*, 00:08:51)

Once Elisa's romantic relationship with the Asset fully develops, the previously dark palette is interspersed by red – the colour traditionally associated with love, passion, but also with danger. She buys a pair of red shoes, which she is previously shown merely admiring from afar, never daring to actually purchase them. After she had encountered the Asset and allowed both danger and passion into her life, she feels more empowered and plunges into the world on the "other side of the glass," choosing red both for the shoes and the clothes. Her relationship with the Amphibian Man allows her to really live the life she had merely fantasized about before, all of which is symbolized by the colour red (see fig. 6).

Fig. 6 Elisa on her way to work, wearing red after she had had a romantic encounter with the Asset (*The Shape of Water*, 01:21:59)

Ultimately, the film is about seeing. It is about those who are "invisible" to the patriarchal, Western society, such as custodians, working people, disabled people, African American people, and others, who, despite of or because of their difference, are able to do something incredibly important. It is a film about solidarity, and also about recognizing "different" as human. In the end, the patriarchal, White, Western oppression rightfully crumbles with Strickland admitting to the Asset: "You are a god" (*The Shape of Water*, 01:51:19 – 01:51:20). Not *the* god, but one of many, admitting the plurality of views, the multitude of identities, and the divine complexity of the "monstrous."

3.2 Richard Strickland – The True Monster of *The Shape of Water*

While the Asset, Elisa, and other characters such as Giles and Zelda have to struggle to be seen and defined as people, Strickland is granted this status without any effort or thought on his part. However, outside of his own social context, that is, in the eyes of the Others, he is seen as brutal and inhumane, an "animal." He objectifies and demeans not only Elisa but all women on several occasions: "That's how all women should be" (del Toro and Kraus 95) he muses during a family breakfast, thinking of Elisa; "In fact, Elisa strikes him as the natural evolution of the female

species: clean, colorful, silent" (del Toro and Kraus 95). Not only is Strickland extremely sexist, seeing women as objects to be silent and used, but he sees women as an entirely different species.

This is, however, not limited to Strickland, but is a prevalent trait in society of the time. Elisa, thinking about her previous dating experiences, recounts this: "She's gone on dates, had sex, all that. But it's been years. Men meet a woman who's mute, they take advantage of her. Never once on a date did a man ever try to communicate, not really. They just grabbed, and took, as if she, voiceless as an animal, *was* an animal" (del Toro and Kraus 6). Parallels may easily be drawn between men seeing Elisa as an animal, and Strickland thinking of women as a different species. Having to deal with different expressions of sexism is an experience shared by various female characters in the book. For instance, Zelda, a Black woman, is expected to do all the housework for her husband Brewster; Elaine (Lainie) Strickland deals with harassment and devaluation at her new job solely because she is a woman: "The men at Klein & Sanders – well, they're men. For the first week, her rear end was pinched exactly once per day, each time by a different man acting with the smug entitlement of someone choosing the plumpest shrimp from a buffet" (del Toro and Kraus 159). However, the extent of Elisa's dehumanization is greater, due to her disability. Seeing the scars on either side of Elisa's neck, Strickland thinks the following: "The ferocity of Elisa's eyes makes her wild; the wounds indicate that she's tamed. It's an appealing combination" (del Toro and Kraus 84). Again, Strickland chooses vocabulary associated with animals, not humans, to contemplate about her.

The book and the film do not shy away from depicting the sexism of the American Cold War Era. In fact, it is an important plot point. Namely, Strickland disregards Elisa, Zelda, and the rest because of their social circumstances, gender, or the like, and this is what allows them to escape scrutiny and free the Asset. In simple terms, due to his privileged position from birth, Strickland never had to struggle for and thus never truly attained humanity. His humanity is circumstantial, present only within the rigid form of his society; the moment he is taken outside its borders (lost in the jungle during his search for the Asset), he becomes cruel, self-centred, and violent. Slowly, even he becomes aware of this: "Molten tears blaze down Strickland's face, already burned from the Caddy's steam. He will not become human again. Changing would be crawling back into the womb, voiding his whole story, confessing to a purposeless life" (del Toro and Kraus 301). It follows that the monster of *The Shape of Water* is Strickland. Interestingly, he is also a victim of the same system that dehumanizes and devalues Elisa, the Asset, and other characters. He is haunted by memories of war and the terrible things he had done under the command of General Hoyt:

> A scout had brought word to Hoyt that not all of those dispatched inside of this mine were dead. That was bad for Hoyt. Bad for America. If survivors crawled out and told their story, the US would have a real mess on its hands, wouldn't it? . . . But some were, in fact, alive; whispering, maybe begging, probably praying. He cut every throat he found, just to be safe. (del Toro and Kraus 230)

The terrible scene culminates with Strickland murdering an infant: "There was a puddle. Half rainwater, half blood. Strickland gently pressed the baby's face into the liquid. . . . A few twitches and it was over. Strickland, too, wanted his life to be over" (del Toro and Kraus 231). In "wanting his life to be over" after committing the terrible deed, Strickland shows some remnants of human empathy and conscience, despite following orders and murdering both a small child and many helpless adults. In this, Strickland fulfils his role and does what he can to please the authority figure he was moulded to obey: general Hoyt.

General Hoyt oversees Strickland's work during the events of the book and the film. Strickland is haunted by Hoyt's "shrieked redactions" (del Roro and Kraus 230) and desperate because of his own rapidly worsening inability to function in a society, to be human. He begins to see the jungle everywhere around him, contemplates violence against even those people closest to him (his wife) and displays increasingly erratic, violent behaviour. He is trying his best to fulfil the expectations which society places upon him, such as being a "man of the house," husband, father, and to function within the rigid social rules, but the illusion of civilized society disintegrates around him. Due to the infection of his injured hand and his subsequent abuse of painkillers, as well as repeating flashbacks and trauma, Richard Strickland becomes increasingly unhinged and dangerous, confirming his status as both the embodied villain of *The Shape of Water*, and the victim of that which he ultimately embodies: corrupted society and unethical military practices.

Referring to the age-old question of the prevalence of influence of human nature or nurture to one's behaviour, the film makes it clear that Richard Strickland has been shaped by the society, and the novel emphasizes that he raises his children to conform to the same social roles that he has been expected to conform to for his whole life: "Some days it seems like Richard is encouraging his son to denigrate his sister and challenge his mother, as if Timmy, at eight years old, is already superior to the household's females" (del Toro and Kraus 97). In this way, del Toro sides with the idea that natural is good, whereas the society functions as the source of corruption. Strickland's son is deliberately shaped to be cruel (his mother at one point catches him vivisecting an animal), dismissive, arrogant, and sexist. There is little doubt that Richard himself had been shaped by much the same system. Seeing Strickland's interactions with his son, one cannot help but wonder what had happened between the time Richard himself was an innocent, impressionable child, and the

time he was murdering innocents while following his superiors' orders. That is to say, one cannot help but ask where it is that society fails so gravely that it shapes monsters such as Richard Strickland, and what may be done to ensure that such a thing never happens in the future. Perhaps, as the novel seems to hint, the roots of that are prejudice and hatred, which are passed onto children, like Strickland passes his cruelty and disregard for others onto his son:

> Given that the recorders of the history of the West have been mainly European and male, women (She) and nonwhites (Them!) have found themselves repeatedly transformed into monsters, whether to validate specific alignments of masculinity and whiteness, or simply to be pushed from its realm of thought. Feminine and cultural others are monstrous enough by themselves in patriarchal society, but when they threaten to mingle, the entire economy of desire comes under attack. (Cohen 15)

In the film, the viewer relies on Strickland's own narration, "[they, natives] tried to stop the oil drill with bows and arrows . . . it's [the Amphibian Man] an animal, just keeping it tame" (del Toro, *The Shape of Water*, 00:41:20-00:41:44). Not only does this line imply that someone had come to exploit the land for oil and the wishes of the native people were completely disregarded, but it shows the viewer that Strickland, because of his inability to understand the way the Amphibian Man communicates, believes him to be nothing more than an animal and abuses him. The parallel between the Amphibian Man and Elisa herself is clear here; both of them are voiceless, relying on different means of communication to be understood (colour, sign language) and both are dehumanized for it. Strickland's weapon of choice, a cattle prod, symbolises this. It is a tool used on farm animals, and Strickland uses it, repeatedly, on the Amphibian Man. Both this and the way he treats Zelda and Elisa bear a stark, straightforward symbolism; Strickland is a representative of a society that treats the Others like animals. The film portrays it in multiple ways: through dialogue, and by the means of visceral, disturbing scenes of both the weapon in question and blood it leaves in its wake.

Among his many faults, Strickland is also openly racist. In his conversation with Zelda, an African American woman, while discussing a biblical story, he comments that god ("the lord") looks "like a human, like me. Or even you. Maybe a little more like me, I guess" (del Toro, *The Shape of Water*, 00:28:56 – 00:29:02). Strickland recounts the story of Samson and Delilah, and clearly sees himself as "chosen of God" on some level. There are numerous apparent similarities between Strickland's view of himself and his mission into the jungle to retrieve the Asset, and the idea of "Manifest Destiny." The film relies on dialogue and visual depictions to portray Strickland's faults, while the novel enables the authors to verbalize Strickland's thoughts to the reader, as well as to describe the world from Strickland's (distorted) point of view.

Strickland is not the only character showing appalling outbursts of racist and sexist rhetoric. Giles is romantically interested in a waiter at a diner, but becomes disappointed as the waiter refuses to allow an African American family to sit down, demanding that they leave. This is soon followed by his demanding the same of Giles for showing an interest in him, claiming that this is a "family restaurant" (00:49:28-00:50:00). This clearly shows the racism and homophobia of Cold War era America. Strickland's judgemental and dehumanizing views are not the exception, but a rule. Society itself is structured in such a way that it propagates and upholds these ideas; it produces monsters such as Strickland and the waiter, and the book and the film do not shy away from exposing this fact and addressing these issues openly, each by using the unique tools which the medium offers.

The film *The Shape of Water* boldly depicts the faults of Western society at the time (and possibly today too), reaching wider audiences than the novelization. Discrimination is not glossed over, but viscerally depicted and brought before the viewer who has no choice but to acknowledge it and explore the point of view of del Toro's heroes, who are labelled as Other. Stam notes that the visual is seen as almost blasphemous, more physical, wherein the text is seen as belonging to the sphere of the mind, traditionally elevated above the senses. Stam also sees the visual arts, film in particular, as the erosion of the power of patriarchal narrator (5). Thus, film delves into the untouchable and analyses that which was considered sacred and elevated by making it viscerally "material"; film has the power to shatter a "sacred" narrative, and this is precisely what del Toro's work does. Taking into account del Toro's own experience of being Latino, that is, Other, in the US, his films shatter the singular "White American" narrative of the falsely advertised and undeservedly glorified American dream, and reveal its vile underbelly of racism, sexism, homophobia, exclusion, and oppression of all kinds.

Conclusion

Del Toro is doubtlessly one of the great artistic minds of our time. Channelling his vision in particular through the monstrous characters which he brings to life in his work is something he is probably most famous for. Yet, his monster characters are ultimately founded upon, and deeply interwoven with, humanity. They are metaphors and symbols, and some of his stories are cautionary tales, but they are always deeply human, regardless of whether they represent the best of humanity (such as his hybrid and monster heroes) or humanity at its worst (represented by his villains and kaiju). The Jaegers of *Pacific Rim*, a (monstrous) unity of mind and metal, willpower and technology, teach us about the worth of humanity's capability of innovation and invention as well as about the value of cooperation and trust. In contrast, Kaiju warn us about the consequences of greed and apathy, as well as the necessity of taking into account the possible consequences of the exploitation of our planet's resources and the natural world. *The Shape of Water*'s the Asset opens our eyes to the way White patriarchal society treats those it labels Other, whether as individuals or as civilisations. Through a monster tale, del Toro exposes true monstrosities of Western society: discrimination, racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, and the destruction of nature. Similarly to the characters in these two films, *Hellboy*'s hybrid hero and the once-human villain also teach us that the true definition of humanity lies in our choices, not in our appearance or the circumstance of birth.

Besides a strong message regarding the global socio-political state and ecological crisis, Del Toro's work, particularly *Pacific Rim* and *The Shape of Water*, also presents an interesting opportunity to analyse the different ways a work may be adapted. The novelizations of the two films are arguably different in quality as well as different in their levels of (to use a somewhat unfitting but applicable term) "fidelity" to the source text. The novel *The Shape of Water* was a collaboration of sorts, and seems to complement the film wonderfully, providing extra insight and context, while *Pacific Rim*, the novel, is a work standing on its own, an adaptation in the true sense of the word in that it weaves a new story based upon but separate from the source, deviating from del Toro's vision to reflect the style, ideas, and priorities of its author.

In this sense, every reading or viewing creates an "adaptation." The readers or viewers necessarily adapt the source work of art, project their own experiences and apply their own knowledge towards the end of understanding the work in question. By consuming any type of media, the viewer or reader adapts its story. For every person that reads or watches a story, a new and unique understanding of it emerges, depending on one's beliefs, history, and similar. Still, del Toro's monsters are the key point in his work, and they consistently appear in his films in one form or another. What they all have in common is that they are all deeply human. Whatever our personal

understanding of them, del Toro's overarching narrative of the human as monster and monster as human is clear.

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