

## Twenty-First-Century Mythologies

### The Return to Satan

I began this book by speaking of the Devil, and that is how I close it. I looked at the figure of Satan in detail in Chapter 2, concluding that he had an ideological role in Jewish and Christian thought, as communities who felt themselves both under external attack and endangered by an enemy that hid within used the idea of the Devil to attack and destroy that internal threat. Rather than meta-physical, here Satan's presence is political, but I also identified another presence for him, a literary one, and it is this particular role I want to examine now. Neil Forsyth has written two important books here, one, *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth* (Forsyth 1987), which looks at the historical role of Satan in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and the other, *The Satanic Epic* (Forsyth 2003), which examines his presence in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Forsyth is clear that 'Satan is first, and in some sense always remains, a character in a narrative' (Forsyth 1987: 4). We do not need to try to understand his character or his motivation – rather, we need to understand the plot in which he has a role to play. In that sense it is always a mistake to worry about the motivation of evil agents in fictional narratives, to wonder what makes Iago tick for example; he has no motivation, only a narrative purpose. Of course, as we read these texts for their psychological meaning we search for the motive, but perhaps this is to mis-read them. For Forsyth: 'The essential role of Satan is opposition' (Forsyth 1987: 4), and this of course goes back to the original Hebrew meaning of the word as 'adversary'. 'He took his function for his title . . . so Satan's name is both paradoxical and tragic. It defines a being who can only be contingent: as the adversary, he must always be a function of another, not an independent entity. As Augustine and

Milton show, it is precisely when Satan imagines himself independent that he is most deluded. His character is, in this sense of the word, a *fiction*' (Forsyth 1987: 4). Satan, therefore, has a narrative purpose, and he gets his meaning from his role in a Christian mythological world history. 'The role of Satan in that narrative is to be the Opponent, the Adversary, the one who motivates the plot, who drives the story into motion. The idea that Christ, or God, is good and Satan evil, though very widespread, is not universal and is in any case secondary; it is an interpretation of the primary texts and traditions which are narrative and may reverse (or simply ignore) good and evil markers. Characters . . . are produced by the plot and function as the plot requires: evil comes later' (Forsyth 2003: 26). For example in *Paradise Lost*, Satan begins as the opponent of God and chooses evil later as a strategy, 'just to be different'; this is not a difference in essence, but of 'structure and direction' (Forsyth 2003: 27). We therefore misunderstand Satan if we characterise him as *embodied evil* – evil by nature; he *chooses* evil. In this sense, Satan is by no means a monster. He is, essentially, the opposition to the hero of a particular myth.

Although contemporary fiction is more complex than myth and has layers concerned with psychological character and motivation, it may be that the 'evil enemy' in modern literature and film still has this mythological element, such that they play a specific and prescribed role which makes *their* psychological character and motivation irrelevant or at least marginal, or even, as Adam Morton commented in Chapter 3, as 'diabolically alien' (Morton 2004: 98). Perhaps it is because we are trying to place an essentially mythological figure into a modern narrative that the character of evil agents become 'archetypal horrors' (Morton 2004: 102). One place where we can see the importance of the evil character more clearly is in fairy tales, which follow the mythological narrative structure more closely. In her study of evil in fairy tales, Verena Kast says: 'let us call evil that which opposes and obstructs the fairy tale hero and his will, or which disrupts his pre-existing situation' (Kast 1992: 18). And: 'By understanding evil as that which obstructs, various levels and qualities of evil emerge' (Kast 1992: 19). One important point that does emerge is that 'evil is not simply evil' (Kast 1992: 16), as the character that obstructs can be both good and evil at the same time. Animals which are vicious and dangerous can turn out to be helpful when tamed, and princesses can be beautiful but destructive when their suitors are killed if

they fail a seemingly impossible task. But another mythological sense of evil is not merely obstruction, but rebellion. Vitautas Kavolis looks at two classic myths of rebellion, of Prometheus and Satan. In both we have 'the general theme of rebellion by an individual against the supreme authority in the established normative order and against the rules by which this order operates' (Kavolis 1984: 18). The Promethean model comes out of Greek culture. In Greek mythology, Prometheus rebels against Zeus to bring fire to humanity, and so is the patron of civilisation. Here: 'Rebellion is . . . a "noble crime", and in the life history of the rebel . . . the substantive personal virtue of the individual overcomes the formal criminality of the rebellious act' (Kavolis 1984: 18). The Satanic model dominates Judaeo-Christian thought, and here Satan rebels through resentment, or in Nietzsche's terms, *ressentiment* – a grudge-filled hatred. This resentment has various causes in the traditional writings, pride among them (Kavolis 1984: 18–19). Here, the rebel is not concerned with the welfare of others; he does not rebel against an unjust order for the sake of humanity as does Prometheus, but rebels against an order which deprives him of power and status. He rebels not against the order of things, but against his place in that order, and he seeks to invert it rather than create a new one. In Christian thought, therefore, there is a strong connection between rebellion and resentment and destruction – rebellion against the established order is evil. Kavolis concludes: 'We have . . . two interpretative models of rebellion, both potentially applicable to the behaviour of actual rebels in any civilisation. The first model suggests that rebellion, motivated by humane sympathy for the sufferings of others and expressed through particular acts of practical assistance, results in an enduringly valuable change in the structure of the moral universe. The other model contends that rebellion, motivated by personal resentment and expressed in global attempts to create an alternative style of life and impose it on others, is destructive in its consequences' (Kavolis 1984: 20).

It should not be a surprise that the latter is how the contemporary problem of 'Islamic terrorism' is presented – as people motivated by *ressentiment* against the west and engaged in a global campaign to impose their own way of life upon others, a project which is apocalyptic in its destructive potential. Kavolis says: 'The dominant Judeo-Christian tendency, shaped or reinforced by Iranian influences and surviving in a variety of secular ideologies of western European derivation, has been to adopt a *mobilising*

or *reifying* attitude towards moral issues' (Kavolis 1984: 21). This means that we seek to promote good and oppose evil 'by rigidly separating them, as objects of total worship and of absolute condemnation . . . The good is . . . identified with lawful order, the evil with disorder that automatically arises from refusal to submit to lawful order' (Kavolis 1984: 21–2). Rebellion is judged as 'arising outside the normative order and as constituting a threat not only to the current political manifestation of that order, but to the principle of order itself' (Kavolis 1984: 24). Kavolis agrees with the account we developed in Chapter 2, that the Satanic myth emerged during a period when the Jewish community felt itself to be in extreme danger. 'Satan emerged as a religious interpretation of the perceived readiness of members of a community in which high value has been traditionally placed on group solidarity to abandon the moral ties of mutual obligation' (Kavolis 1984: 26). And, as we saw in Chapter 4: 'A similar situation developed in Christian Europe at the peak of the power of the devil and fear of witchcraft, toward the end of the Middle Ages' (Kavolis 1984: 26). Evil, then, is that which opposes us, that which rebels against the authoritative order of things, and by describing others as evil we condemn them as negative, resentful destructive rebels – we assign them a narrative role in a mythological world history.

## Mythologies

As Kavolis observes the witch trials in Europe and North America in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are a powerful example of the destructive power of the myth of the evil enemy. In Chapter 4 I suggested that the vampire epidemics of eastern Europe in the eighteenth century give us another example of the fear and panic that can grip a community that feels that it is under siege, and I argued that what is fundamentally disturbing about the vampire and the witch is their ability to pass among us undetected, to appear to be part of humanity but to be secretly scheming its destruction. The person sitting next to you now as you read this could be a witch or a vampire. This is by far the most frightening aspect of them. The evil enemy renders borders insecure and meaningless. In the case of witches the border becomes meaningless because they are already *inside* the community; in the case of vampires they have the demonic power to cross borders without detection, however secure we make them. There are

important parallels here with contemporary fears over mass migration and global terrorism, and these are further examples of the irrational fear of imaginary monsters. One objection to such a claim is, of course, that while witches and vampires are obviously the product of the imagination, migrants and terrorists are not – they *do* exist while the witch and the vampire did not, and so any attempt to draw lessons about our current ‘panics’ from the witch craze and the vampire epidemic must be flawed.

But there are two reasons to think we can illuminate the present with the past here. First, so far as European intellectuals and peasants were concerned up until the eighteenth century, witches did exist. Even those who protested most vigorously against the trials did not question the existence of witches; they merely suggested that the confused peasant women being executed were innocent, and the real witches were evading capture. And as far as the people of eastern Europe were concerned there was no question that vampires existed. What follows from this is that terrorists and global migrants do exist, but in the same way that vampires and witches existed in the epistemological/political frameworks of perception of the time. It can be objected that the evidence that terrorists and migrants have an existence beyond our frameworks of belief is overwhelming, but again the evidence that witches and vampires existed was also considered to be overwhelming. However, the most important and significant point is that there was undeniably some real process underlying the witch craze and the vampire epidemics which, to some degree, caused people to believe in the reality of these events. People were undeniably practising magical rituals with the intention of causing harm to their neighbours. What lay behind the vampire epidemics is more complex, but again *something* was happening. So certainly there are real processes in the world today that underlie our perceptions of a *crisis* of migration and the war on terror, but those processes may be very different to the way they are represented by the political authorities and in the media – the ‘official’ picture of the migrant and the terrorist may be exactly parallel with the demonological picture of the witch, an entirely fantastical picture designed through, in Hugh Trevor-Roper’s words, ‘political exploitations of a social fear’ (Trevor-Roper 1978: 54). These figures may have been demonised to such an extent that they are no longer reliable representations of the processes that are actually taking place in the world around us. And so the terrorist and the migrant as represented by the political authorities may well be imaginary.

There is a second, crucial aspect to this argument – that they are not only imaginary, but that they are monsters. What we have here is a mythology of the evil enemy, such that that enemy possesses the demonic, supernatural powers needed to destroy our communities. This, surely, is a step too far – nobody seriously believes that migrants and terrorists have supernatural powers. But this is *exactly* what happens through the discourse of evil: the migrant and the terrorist, while they are not represented as agents of Satan, *are* represented as possessing demonic and supernatural powers. With respect to mass migration, I argued in Chapter 4 that the example of the movement of Jews from eastern Europe to the west was entangled with the supernatural figure of the vampire, and the Jews were attributed with the ability to ghost across borders and threaten national identities. And I argued that contemporary migrants are still granted the same demonic powers and are still represented as a vampiric threat to the ‘national’ community. The same pattern can be seen in the representation of contemporary global terrorism. In Chapter 4 we saw how Christendom understood itself to be under ferocious attack from Satan in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and how this led to the suspension of legal procedures, mass arrests, the use of torture, and indiscriminate use of the death penalty. There are dramatic parallels here with the contemporary war on terror: the normal rules of justice have been suspended or simply ignored as new rules have been written to enable thousands to be detained and imprisoned, some without the prospect of trial; and the use of torture has been widespread. Here, there is the imaginary element – the extent to which the threat of global terrorism has been imagined and exaggerated; and there is the monstrous element – the extent to which the ‘evil enemy’ is represented as possessing demonic powers they intend to use to destroy us.

## Changing the Rules

In the United Kingdom new terrorism laws were passed in late 2001 in response to the September 11th attack on New York, and the government also opted out of an element of the European Convention on Human Rights ([news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/uk/3666235.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/uk/3666235.stm)). This allowed the Home Secretary to order detention of foreign terrorist suspects without trial, in the absence of sufficient evidence to bring a criminal case to the

courts. Fourteen people were arrested as soon as the law was passed, two of whom took the option of leaving the United Kingdom. The others were held in a high-security prison, and appealed to the Special Immigration Appeals Commission (Siac). This commission, described by the BBC as ‘one of the most controversial – and certainly the most secret court within English law’, hears appeals of foreign nationals facing detention, deportation or exclusion from the UK on grounds of national security, presided over by senior judges and with the same powers as the High Court. Its hearings are not fully revealed to the appellants because they include testimony from members of the secret security services. Siac was established in 1996 after the British government lost a case at the European Court of Human Rights, which criticised the old system on the grounds that appellants or their lawyers could not hear all the evidence against them. Siac is supposed to solve this problem with a system of security-vetted lawyers, separate from the appellant’s lawyers. These lawyers are subjected to intensive security checks before they are accepted as ‘special advocates’ for the appellants, and they are able to see all the secret evidence, but they cannot reveal any of it to the appellant or the appellant’s lawyers. The special advocate can challenge whether certain evidence should be made open, and, if Siac agrees, then the government must disclose it or may withdraw it. During the hearing the appellant and his or her team can sit in court to hear open evidence, but must then withdraw. The special advocate can then challenge the closed evidence, but obviously without instruction from the appellant. The commission, once it makes a decision, makes an open judgement for public consumption, but also a closed judgement which once more cannot be revealed. The commission was designed to prevent appeal over decisions, except to the House of Lords on a point of law, although a lower court, the Court of Appeal, did back the commission’s decision to release one of the detainees, ruling against the government. Amnesty International has criticised the system on the grounds that the burden of proof for the commission’s judgements is ‘shockingly low’, and that it may be in breach of international law as it relies on evidence that may have been extracted through the use of torture of suspects in other countries. Historically, evidence gained through torture has been dismissed by courts as unreliable, except, of course, during the witch-trial period.

In December 2004 the law lords, the highest court in Britain, ruled that detention of foreign terrorist suspects without trial

broke human rights law ([news.bbc.co.uk/go/fr/-/1/hi/uk/4100481.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/fr/-/1/hi/uk/4100481.stm)). One of the senior law lords, Lord Bingham, said the rules were incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights as they allowed detentions ‘in a way that discriminates on the ground of nationality or immigration status’ by justifying detention without trial for foreign subjects but not British nationals. The last eight detainees – three of the them being held in the high-security mental hospital Broadmoor because of concerns about their mental condition – were released on bail in March 2005. New legislation enabled the government to impose electronic tagging and control orders, which include a night-time curfew from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m., a ban on using mobile phones and the internet, obtaining permission from the Home Office if suspects wish to meet someone outside their home, living at an address notified to the police, who can search the property without warning, and having no visitors unless the Home Office has been informed in advance except for people under sixteen ([news.bbc.co.uk/go/fr/-/1/hi/uk/4338849.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/fr/-/1/hi/uk/4338849.stm)). In June 2005, the Council of Europe’s human rights commissioner, Alvaro Gil-Robles, criticised these arrangements on the ground that they violated the fundamental human right of the presumption of innocence (*The Independent*, 9 June 2005). He also criticised the British government’s view that it had the right to use evidence obtained by the use of torture in another country, a view upheld by the Court of Appeal in 2004. His report also criticised the criminalising of children through government policies on anti-social behaviour, and the detention of asylum seekers for long periods of time.

After terrorist attacks in London in July 2005, however, the British government is now considering more expansive legislation. The proposals include new offences of encouraging and glorifying terrorism, disseminating terrorist publications, and preparing terrorist acts and training. Police want to be allowed to detain terrorist suspects without charge for up to three months instead of the current fourteen days, and the rules on allowing security service phone tap evidence are likely to be changed. The government also wants to increase the powers of the Home Secretary to order deportations or exclusions of foreigners judged to be extremists, including those who express support of terrorist acts anywhere in the world through the internet, in bookshops, written word or preaching. The power to ban extremist groups will be extended from those directly involved in terrorism to include those who

'glorify, exalt or celebrate' terrorist acts (*The Guardian*, 16 September 2005).

There were similar developments in the United States, with the passing of what is known as the USA Patriot Act in October 2001, or, to give it the full title, The Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act. The Act allowed for the indefinite imprisonment without trial of non-US citizens that the Attorney General believed to be a threat to national security ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/usA\\_Patriot\\_Act](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/usA_Patriot_Act)). The government is not obliged, under the Act, to provide detainees with counsel, or to make any announcement or statement concerning the arrest. It also allowed the security services to employ a wide range of methods to gather information, raising fears that it violated the Constitution and was an attack on civil liberties. By late November 2001, more than 1,200 people in the United States had been detained and were being held at secret locations under the Act ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/September\\_11%2C\\_2001\\_Terrorist\\_Attack/Detentions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/September_11%2C_2001_Terrorist_Attack/Detentions)). These were mostly male Arabic or Muslim non-citizens. As with the British example, there were concerns about the lack of legal review, lack of evidence and the lack of publicity for these detainees. A report by Amnesty International expressed concerns about the situation of the detainees (available from its United States website, [www.amnestyusa.org](http://www.amnestyusa.org)). Of the around 1,200 people initially arrested, 327 were still in custody by February 2002. An unknown number have been released on bail or deported from the United States. Amnesty observed 'a disturbing level of secrecy surrounding the detentions, which has made it difficult to monitor the situation', but concluded that 'a significant number of detainees' were 'deprived of certain basic rights guaranteed under international law'. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), which carried out the arrests, was given sweeping powers after the September 11th attack, including the power to detain people without charge for up to 48 hours or, in an emergency or other extraordinary circumstances, for a further undefined period. The INS also has the power to override decisions by immigration judges to grant bail in certain cases. Beyond the concern that people were being detained without trial and without access to legal counsel, Amnesty was also concerned 'that some people may be returned to countries where they are at risk of human rights abuses'. It also received reports of detainees being 'routinely shackled with belly chains and leg shackles, with no regard as to

whether they have a record of violent behaviour or flight risk. Some have been held in prolonged solitary confinement. Other complaints include lack of exercise, poor medical care and failure to adhere to religious dietary requirements. Despite being held on non-criminal charges, INS detainees have not always been separated from criminal detainees, contrary to international standards.'

The United States has also been accused of disregarding international law when it comes to detention and imprisonment of terrorist suspects at its base in Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. More than 700 people from 44 different countries have been held there, many of them for more than two years (Human Rights Watch, *The Road to Abu Ghraib*: 5). The US government has argued that Guantanamo Bay itself is a place where no court has jurisdiction, American or international, and that the detainees are 'enemy combatants', and so neither civilians nor prisoners of war, which again places them beyond both US and international law, specifically the Geneva Convention. It has also argued that the detentions are not based on military orders, but on presidential common-law war powers. Adam Brookes reported the legal procedures of Guantanamo Bay for the BBC in April 2005 ([news.bbc.co.uk/go/fr/-/1/hi/world/americas/4422825.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/fr/-/1/hi/world/americas/4422825.stm)). Detainees go through three procedures. The first is a Combat Status Review Tribunal to decide if the detainee is an 'enemy combatant'; an Administrative Review Board decides if the detainee should be released because he poses no threat to the United States or whether he should be held for another year; and a military commission tries those considered to have committed serious crimes. It is not known how many of the Guantanamo detainees have actually appeared before any of these bodies.

On 28 June 2004, the US Supreme Court ruled that the Guantanamo detainees could challenge their detention in federal courts. A six-three majority stated that they had a right of *habeus corpus*, a right that extended outside the territorial boundaries of the nation. However, while the decision does give the Guantanamo detainees the right to challenge their detention, the ruling does not challenge the legal right of the government to hold both its own citizens and foreign nationals without charges or trial under the anti-terrorism legislation – those affected can challenge their detention on a case-by-case basis, but there is absolutely no guarantee that they would win those cases. Although two of the Supreme Court justices wanted to declare the detentions

improper, that was not the overall position arrived at by the Court. Another problem is that it only covers those held in the United States and at Guantanamo Bay, and one disturbing feature identified by Human Rights Watch has been the practice of ‘disappearances’ (*The Road to Abu Ghraib*: 12). The most sensitive detainees are held at undisclosed locations, and are therefore beyond any scope for monitoring. Human Rights Watch has identified thirteen people ‘apprehended in places like Pakistan, Indonesia, Thailand, Morocco, and the United Arab Emirates, who have “disappeared” in U.S. custody’ (*The Road to Abu Ghraib*: 12). At the time of writing this in May 2005, many have been released into the custody of their own countries and once there have been released without charge. However, about 500 detainees remain in Guantanamo Bay.

## Torture

Another issue that carries a deep resonance with the witch-trial period is that of torture. Once more this raises the issue of the suspension of international law. According to American news service CNN, a United States government classified report argued that the detention of al-Qa’ida and Taliban suspects was not covered by the Geneva Convention regarding the use of torture (edition.cnn.com/LAW/, posted 9 June 2004). According to the *Wall Street Journal* on 7 June 2004, it was an incomplete document prepared for the US government reviewing the laws of war under the Geneva Conventions regarding the use of torture. The report noted the US ratification of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhumane, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, but said it ‘did so with a variety of reservations and understandings’. One of these reservations was that ‘the United States has maintained consistently that the covenant does not apply outside the United States or its special maritime and territorial jurisdiction, and that it does not apply to operations of the military during an international armed conflict’. It concluded ‘that customary international law cannot bind the executive branch under the Constitution because it is not federal law’, and that ‘any presidential decision in the current conflict concerning the detention and trial of Al Qaeda or Taliban military prisoners would constitute a “controlling” executive act that would immediately and completely override any customary international law.’ This meant that ‘in order to respect

the president's inherent constitutional authority to manage a military campaign [the prohibition against torture] must be construed as inapplicable to interrogations undertaken pursuant to his [authority as] commander-in-chief'. The report lists cases where anti-torture laws could be set aside, and a set of 'torture techniques' that were justifiable. As for the detainees at Guantanamo Bay, 'The U.S. criminal laws do not apply to acts committed there by virtue of [Guantanamo's] status as within the special maritime and territorial jurisdiction', and the detainees 'do not have constitutional rights under the Fifth Amendment of due process'. Although the report was not published, it seems fair to say that it was a reflection of the thinking of the US government with regard to international law, Guantanamo Bay and the use of torture. Another factor has been the transfer of detainees from American custody to countries in the Middle East that are known to practise torture, such as Syria, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Morocco (*The Road to Abu Ghraib*: 10).

There is now overwhelming evidence that prisoners in United States custody in Iraq faced the possibility of torture. There were three levels of abuse of detainees at Abu Ghraib prison and elsewhere: first, a level the US government sanctioned throughout; second, a level it sanctioned between December 2002 and dropped in April 2003; and third, a level it claims it did not sanction at all, but was carried out by personnel. The first level of official interrogation techniques, according to *The Independent* newspaper on 24 June 2004, includes providing a reward or removing a privilege beyond those required by the Geneva Convention; significantly increasing the fear level in a detainee; adjusting the sleeping time of a detainee; boosting or attacking the ego of a detainee; invoking the feeling of futility in a detainee. The second level included forced shaving of the beard or head; hooding during transport and interrogation; interrogations for up to twenty hours; use of mild, non-injurious contact; stress positions for a maximum of four hours; removal of clothing; and use of dogs to frighten the detainee. Part of the US government's reply to the charges of torture has been that the practices employed at Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib and other locations fall short of it, except for some lapses which had no official sanction, and the internal documents which outlined the above practices that it released on 23 June 2004 were supposed to establish that case. But legal and medical experts have argued that even the officially approved practices violate the Geneva Convention in that some may amount to torture and are specifically

banned by international courts and torture conventions, and others would violate those aspects of the Convention which prohibit inhumane and degrading treatment. Robert Verkaik, reporting in *The Independent* newspaper on 24 June 2004, quotes Sherman Carroll, director of public affairs at the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture: 'The documents from the White House authorised specific interrogation techniques by U.S. forces abroad that amount to torture.'

However, it was the third level of abuse that received the greatest media attention in May 2004, and in Chapter 1 I looked at the suggestion that it was the background set in place by the political leadership that led to the horrific acts that took place at Abu Ghraib prison. Human Rights Watch concluded the same in a report called *The Road to Abu Ghraib* published on 10 June 2004. According to that report: 'This pattern of abuse did not result from the acts of individual soldiers who broke the rules. It resulted from decisions made by the Bush administration to bend, ignore, or cast rules aside. Administration policies created the climate for Abu Ghraib' (*The Road to Abu Ghraib*: 1). The worst abuses at Abu Ghraib occurred after a decision by the US government to 'step up the hunt' for intelligence, and Major General Geoffrey D. Miller, who oversaw interrogation methods at Guantanamo Bay, was sent there in August 2003 to review methods in Iraq. In addition, between three and five interrogation teams were sent from Guantanamo Bay in October 2003 'for use in the interrogation effort' (*The Road to Abu Ghraib*: 33).

What resulted included the following. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross Report of February 2004, 'methods of physical and psychological coercion were used by the military intelligence in a systematic way to gain confessions and extract information' (*The Road to Abu Ghraib*: 25). Those methods included hooding to disorient and prevent detainees from breathing freely; being forced to remain for prolonged periods in painful stress positions; being attached repeatedly over several days for several hours each time to the bars of cell doors naked or in positions causing physical pain; being held naked in dark cells for several days and paraded naked, sometimes hooded or with women's underwear over their heads; sleep, food and water deprivation; prolonged exposure while hooded to the sun during the hottest time of day. Another investigation was carried out for the US authorities by Major General Antonio Taguba, who concluded that 'numerous instances of sadistic, blatant, and wanton

criminal abuses' were inflicted on several detainees. These included punching, slapping and kicking detainees; jumping on their naked feet; videotaping and photographing naked male and female detainees; forcibly arranging detainees in various sexually explicit positions for photographing; forcing groups of naked detainees to masturbate themselves while being photographed and videotaped; arranging naked detainees in a pile and then jumping on them; placing a dog chain or strap around a naked detainee's neck and having a female soldier pose with him with a picture; a male military police guard having sex with a female detainee (not described as rape in the Taguba report); beating detainees with a broom handle and a chair; threatening male detainees with rape; sodomising a detainee with a chemical light and perhaps a broom stick; forcing male detainees to wear women's underwear (*The Road to Abu Ghraib*: 25–7). In addition, around thirty people have died in detention in Iraq. Some of these cases are being investigated as possible homicides (*The Road to Abu Ghraib*: 27). Human Rights Watch concludes: 'What is clear is that U.S. military personnel at Abu Ghraib felt empowered to abuse the detainees. The brazenness with which the soldiers at the center of the scandal conducted themselves, snapping photographs and flashing the "thumbs-up" sign as they abused prisoners, suggests they felt they had nothing to hide from their superiors. The abuse was so widely known and accepted that a picture of naked detainees forced in a human pyramid was reportedly used as a screen saver on a computer in the interrogation room' (*The Road to Abu Ghraib*: 34).

This is a story with no end in sight. On 4 August 2004, *The Independent* newspaper published details of a report published by the Centre for Constitutional Rights based in New York, which revealed that the prisoners at Guantanamo Bay 'were subjected to Abu Ghraib-style torture and sexual humiliation in which they were stripped naked, forced to sodomise one another and taunted by naked female American soldiers'. According to the newspaper, 'the report details a brutal yet carefully choreographed regime at the U.S. prison camp in which abuse was meted out in a manner judged to have the "maximum impact". Those prisoners with the most conservative Muslim backgrounds were the most likely to be subjected to sexual humiliation and abuse, while those from westernised backgrounds were more likely to suffer solitary confinement and physical mistreatment'. And in May 2005, a US army report was leaked detailing abuses of Afghan detainees at

Bagram air base. The report detailed abuses including the torture and killing of two Afghans. Details of the report were published by the *New York Times*, and include the claim that one prisoner was chained to a ceiling by his wrists for four days and beaten on his legs more than a hundred times during a 24-hour period ([news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/4570631.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/4570631.stm)). In February 2005, four British soldiers were prosecuted for similar offences after 'trophy' photographs were found of abuses committed at an aid depot near Basra in Iraq. However, there was no prosecution 'for some of the most shocking of the 22 images – Iraqi men stripped naked, being forced to simulate oral and anal sex, their humiliation completed by being made to smile and give a thumbs-up for the camera' (*The Independent*, 24 February 2005). Other cases are still being investigated – more than 160 charges of abuse have been investigated by British military prosecutors, and a number of British soldiers have been charged with murder.

## The Imaginary Iraq

In April, 2005, the Iraq Survey Group (ISG), the US team investigating whether Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, published its final report: its 1,700-member team had found no evidence that Iraq possessed biological, chemical or nuclear weapons (*Financial Times*, 27 April 2005). The head of the ISG, Charles Duelfer, said: 'As matters now stand, the WMD investigation has gone as far as feasible. After more than 18 months, the WMD investigation and debriefing of WMD-related detainees has been exhausted.' There was no evidence, said the report, that Iraq had moved its weapons of mass destruction to Syria before being attacked by the United States and Great Britain in 2003, as claimed by some members of the US administration. 'Based on the evidence available at present, ISG judged that it was unlikely that an official transfer of WMD material from Iraq to Syria ever took place,' said Mr Duelfer. The *Financial Times* also reported the concerns of Democrat Senator Carl Levin, a member of the Senate armed services committee, that members of the US administration continued to raise an alleged meeting of one of the September 11th attackers of the World Trade Center in New York, with an Iraq intelligence officer in Prague, despite a CIA report disputing that this meeting had ever taken place. There has been no evidence of any connection between Iraq and the September 11th attack. This is the state of the

world in 2005: Iraq had no connection with the September 11th attack and possessed no weapons of mass destruction. Someone visiting the planet for the first time would not find these reports remarkable; in fact, if that person had a journalistic background, he or she might wonder why they were being published at all: surely, that something had *never* happened, that a certain situation had *not* existed, is not news? However, what makes the reports news, indeed makes them remarkable, is the extent to which the world has changed in three years. As those of us who have been here that long know, three years ago there was no doubt that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction, and there was a firm possibility of a link between its regime and al-Qa'ida and global terrorism in general. So strong was the evidence that the United States and Great Britain felt they had the authority to attack Iraq and overthrow its government in order to save the world from these twin threats. Indeed, by March 2003, almost half of American citizens believed Saddam Hussein was personally involved in the September 11 attacks, and around 60 per cent believed him to be an immediate threat to the United States (Chomsky 2004: 18). Saddam Hussein was the 'demonic enemy', but it turns out he was an imaginary monster.

The full extent of the fabrication of the imaginary Iraq has yet to be written, and has to be pieced together from news reports and government statements. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the British intelligence services have been blamed for seemingly persuading their governments that Iraq posed a serious threat through its possession of weapons of mass destruction. In 2002 the evidence was clear enough for the White House to release a report claiming that Saddam Hussein was, among other things, 'continuing to seek and develop chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons, and prohibited long-range missiles' (White House press release, 12 September 2002, [www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/09/20020912.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/09/20020912.html)). According to that report, an Iraqi defector claimed to have visited 'twenty secret facilities for chemical, biological and nuclear weapons'. Also there was evidence to 'strongly suggest that Iraq maintains stockpiles of chemical agents, probably VX, sarin, cyclosarin and mustard'. Not only that, but Saddam Hussein 'continues his work to develop a nuclear weapon'; he could 'build a nuclear bomb within months if he were able to obtain fissile material'. The British government was equally convinced. Prime Minister Tony Blair told the House of Commons on 10 April 2002, 'Saddam Hussein's regime

is despicable, he is developing weapons of mass destruction, and we cannot leave him doing so unchecked'; and 'He is a threat to his own people and to the region and, if allowed to develop these weapons, a threat to us also' ([news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/uk\\_politics/3054991.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/uk_politics/3054991.stm)). The government published a dossier of intelligence evidence to back its case against Iraq on 24 September 2002 (see [news.bbc.co.uk/nol/shared/spl/hi/middle\\_east/02/uk\\_dossier\\_on\\_iraq/html/full\\_dossier.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/nol/shared/spl/hi/middle_east/02/uk_dossier_on_iraq/html/full_dossier.stm)). In its foreword, Tony Blair states: 'despite his denials, Saddam Hussein is continuing to develop WMD, and with them the ability to inflict real damage upon the region, and the stability of the world'; and 'What I believe the assessed intelligence has established beyond doubt is that Saddam has continued to produce chemical and biological weapons, that he continues in his efforts to develop nuclear weapons, and that he has been able to extend the range of his ballistic missile programme.' He says the intelligence also discloses 'that his military planning allows for some of the WMD to be ready within 45 minutes of an order to use them. I am quite clear that Saddam will go to extreme lengths, indeed has already done so, to hide these weapons and avoid giving them up.' In its executive summary, the report says Iraq has:

- continued to produce chemical and biological agents;
- military plans for the use of chemical and biological weapons, including against its own Shia population. Some of these weapons are deployable within 45 minutes of an order to use them;
- command and control arrangement in place to use chemical and biological weapons . . . ;
- tried to covertly acquire technology and materials which could be used in the production of nuclear weapons.

The British intelligence services and the CIA produced reports of Iraq's capabilities regarding weapons of mass destruction which their governments used to justify the attack upon Iraq to their public. However, as we have seen, no evidence has since been found to show that Iraq possessed these capabilities, and both in Britain and the United States enquiries have criticised the intelligence services for their misleading information, while clearing governments of pressuring them into producing such reports. In Britain the Butler Report was published on 14 July 2004. On the intelligence dossier of September 2002, the report concluded: '... in translating material from Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC)

assessments into the dossier, warnings were lost about the limited intelligence base on which some aspects of these assessments were being made' (All extracts of the Butler Report are taken from an edited version published in *The Independent* on 15 July 2004). And 'the language in the dossier may have left with readers the impression that there was fuller and firmer intelligence behind the judgements than was the case: our view, having reviewed all the material, is that judgements in the dossier went to (but not beyond) the outer limits of the intelligence available'. The statement by the Prime Minister to the House of Commons on the day the dossier was published that it was 'extensive, detailed and authoritative' may, says the Butler Report, 'have reinforced that impression'. The report concludes that 'it was a serious weakness that the JIC's warnings on the limitations of the intelligence underlying its judgements were not made sufficiently clear in the dossier'; and that 'making public that the JIC had authorship of the dossier was a mistaken judgement'.

The claim in the dossier that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction that were 'deployable within 45 minutes of an order to use them' made a particular impact in the British media, with the *Sun* newspaper using the headline 'Brits 45 minutes from doom', and the *Star* claiming 'Mad Saddam ready to strike: 45 minutes from a chemical war'. In fact this claim referred to battlefield weapons although this was not made clear in the Executive Summary, nor in the Prime Minister's introduction. However, British ministers took no steps to put this unfounded fear to rest. Indeed, Tony Blair told the House of Commons on 4 February 2004, that he did not know that the 45 minute claim only referred to battlefield weapons. On this the Butler Report said: 'Much public attention has been given to the Prime Minister's statement that he was not aware until after the war that this report should have been interpreted as referring to battlefield weapons. If this report was regarded as having operational significance, and if in particular it had been regarded as covering ballistic missiles (as was reported in some newspapers), this indeed would have been surprising. If, however, it referred to forward-deployed battlefield munitions, the time period given would not have been surprising or worth drawing to the Prime Minister's attention. But it was unclear both in the JIC assessment of 9 September and in the Government's dossier which of the two it was. The JIC should not have included the "45-minute" report in its assessment and in the Government's dossier without stating what it was believed to refer to. The fact

that the reference in the classed assessment was repeated in the dossier later led to suspicions that it had been included because of its eye-catching nature.'

In the United States, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence published its 'Report on the U.S. Intelligence Community's Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq' on 9 July 2004. Its primary conclusion was: 'Most of the major key judgements in the Intelligence Community's October 2002 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), *Iraq's Continuing Programs for Weapons of Mass Destruction*, either overstated, or were not supported by, the underlying intelligence reporting. A series of failures, particularly in analytic trade craft, led to the mischaracterization of the intelligence' (Senate Report on the US Intelligence Community's Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq: 1). In particular, the NIE's major judgements concerning Iraq's nuclear programme and chemical and biological weapons capacities were 'either overstated, or were not supported by, the underlying intelligence reporting provided to the Committee' (Senate Report: 1). However: 'The Committee found no evidence that the IC's [Intelligence Community's] mischaracterization or exaggeration of the intelligence on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) capabilities was the result of political pressure' (Senate Report: 2). Democratic members of the committee disagreed with this last finding, and argued that 'questioning from the White House was almost exclusively in one direction. Analyst assessments that were generally sceptical were much more likely to be sent back with queries scrawled in the margins than assessments that found that there were indeed weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and links between Baghdad and al-Qaida' (*The Guardian*, 10 July 2004).

Three paragraphs of the Senate Report summarise the failings of the Intelligence Community:

At the time the IC drafted and coordinated the NIE on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs in September 2002, most of what intelligence analysts actually 'knew' about Iraq's weapons programs pre-dated the 1991 Gulf War, leaving them with very little direct knowledge about the current state of these programs. Analysts knew that Iraq had active nuclear, chemical, biological, and delivery programs before 1991, and had previously lied to, and was still not forthcoming with, UN weapons inspectors about those programs. The analysts also knew

that the United Nations was not satisfied with Iraq's efforts to account for its destruction of all its pre-Gulf War weapons, precursors, and equipment. Additionally analysts knew that Iraq was trying to import dual-use materials and equipment and had rebuilt or was continuing to use facilities that had been associated with Iraq's pre-Gulf War weapons programs, and knew that WMD were likely within Iraq's technological capabilities.

The IC did not know whether Iraq had retained its pre-Gulf War weapons, whether Iraq was intending to use those dual-use materials and facilities for weapons or for legitimate purposes, or even if Iraq's attempts to obtain many of the dual-use goods it had been trying to procure were successful. The IC thought that Iraq had retained its pre-Gulf War weapons and that Iraq was using dual-use materials and facilities to manufacture weapons. While this was a reasonable assessment, considering Iraq's past behavior, statements in the 2002 NIE that Iraq 'has chemical and biological weapons', 'Iraq has maintained its chemical weapons effort,' and 'is reconstituting its nuclear weapons program,' did not accurately portray the uncertainty of the information. The NIE failed in that it portrayed what intelligence analysts thought and assessed as what they knew and failed to explain the large gaps in the information on which the assessments were based.

In the cases in the NIE where the IC did express uncertainty about its assessments concerning Iraq's WMD capabilities, those explanations suggested, in some cases, that Iraq's capabilities were even greater than the NIE judged. For example, the key judgements of the NIE said 'we judge that we are seeing only a portion of Iraq's WMD efforts, owing to Baghdad's vigorous denial and deception efforts. Revelations after the Gulf War starkly demonstrate the extensive efforts undertaken by Iraq to deny information . . .' While this did explain that key information on Iraq's programs was lacking, it suggested that Iraq's weapons programs were probably bigger and more advanced than the IC had judged and did not explain that . . . analysts did not have enough information to determine whether Iraq was hiding activity or whether Iraq's weapons program may have been dormant. (Senate Report: 3-4)

This confirms Dani Cavallaro's distinction between horror and terror in Gothic fiction which we encountered in Chapter 5: that horror is a matter of spectacle, while terror is a matter of invisibility (Cavallaro 2002: vii) – terror is 'deemed intangible and resistant to definition' (Cavallaro 2002: 2), and 'disturbs because of its indeterminateness', such that 'it cannot be connected with an identifiable physical object and the factors that determine it accordingly elude classification and naming' (Cavallaro 2002: 2). Its causes are always 'uncertain and obscure' (Cavallaro 2002: 3), such that 'if horror makes people shiver, terror undermines the foundations of their worlds' (Cavallaro 2002: 2–3). It is what we cannot see that scares us most. Unfortunately, our inability to see what terrifies us allows the possibility that there is nothing there at all.

## The Monster of Terrorism

In Chapter 4 we saw that the witch trials represented the belief that Christendom was under a ferocious assault by the forces of Satan, an apocalyptic assault that signalled the end of the world. Witches were part of a vast and highly organised conspiracy, working in league with each other, with demons, and with the Devil to overthrow Christian civilisation. Where one witch was found there had to be others, as they never worked alone. This perception of a global conspiracy is certainly an important part of how global terrorism is represented by political authorities. In his State of the Union address in 2002, George W. Bush said: 'Thousands of dangerous killers, schooled in the methods of murder, often supported by outlaw regimes, are now spread throughout the world like ticking time bombs, set to go off without warning.' A few sentences later, this threat had grown tenfold: 'tens of thousands of trained terrorists are still at large. These enemies view the entire world as a battlefield and we must pursue them wherever they are.' He went on to identify a 'terrorist underworld' which operated in remote jungles and deserts and also in the centres of large cities. There are clear parallels here between the witch craze and the contemporary perception of global terrorism, to the extent that it is represented as a global conspiracy bent on the destruction of western civilisation, consisting of enemies bent on bringing about an apocalypse. On 11 December 2001, Bush described terrorism as a 'great threat to civilisation' (remarks at The

Citadel, Charleston, South Carolina, [www.usinfo.state.gov](http://www.usinfo.state.gov)), and on 8 November 2001, said: 'We wage a war to save civilisation itself' (Address to the nation, World Congress Centre, Atlanta, Georgia, [www.usinfo.state.gov](http://www.usinfo.state.gov)). The second way in which global terrorism takes on the form of a demonic enemy is that the discourse draws on the conception of monstrous evil I described in Chapter 1. According to that conception, diabolical evil is a human capacity, but those humans who possess it take the form of monsters. In that monstrous form they pursue our destruction for its own sake. What is important here is that there is no history behind this, no set of grievances motivating this monster, and so no possibility of negotiation and compromise. That they are evil is a complete explanation for whatever they do and we need search no further. The only defence against such a monster is its complete destruction. In his remarks on 11 December 2001, Bush described terrorists as 'defined by hate', with a 'mad intent', and the vice-president Dick Cheney said in August 2002 that the war against terror would not end in a treaty or negotiations with terrorists, but only 'in their complete and utter destruction' ([www.defendamerica.mil/archive/2002-08/20020807.html](http://www.defendamerica.mil/archive/2002-08/20020807.html)).

Robert Jay Lifton notes the apocalyptic nature of the conflict in an article, 'American Apocalypse', published in *The Nation* on 22 December 2003. He comments: 'The apocalyptic imagination has spawned a new kind of violence at the beginning of the 21st century. We can, in fact, speak of a worldwide epidemic of violence aimed at massive destruction in the service of various visions of purification and renewal.' Lifton regards both Islamic forces and American forces as motivated by this apocalyptic vision. 'Both sides are energized by versions of intense idealism; both see themselves as embarked on a mission of combating evil in order to redeem and renew the world; and both are ready to release untold levels of violence to achieve that purpose.' The war on Iraq itself 'was a manifestation of that American visionary projection'. The American government, he argues, has a 'cosmic ambition' to control history. But the war on terror has not made the American people feel more secure. 'Despite the constant invocation by the Bush Administration of the theme of "security", the war on terrorism has created the very opposite – a sense of fear and insecurity among Americans, which is then mobilized in support of further aggressive plans in the extension of the larger "war".' And so: 'The projected "victory" becomes a form of aggressive longing, of sustained illusion, of an unending "Fourth

World War” and a mythic cleansing – of terrorists, of evil, of our own fear.’

Not only is the struggle apocalyptic, but the evil enemy possesses demonic powers. This is seen most starkly in a study of the conflict in Sri Lanka between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamil communities, as Tamil separatists used violence against the Sinhalese-dominated state in order to gain some degree of political autonomy. E. Nissan and R. L. Stirrat examined in particular the reprisals against the Tamil community after the ‘Eelam Tigers’, the Tamil resistance, attacked a military patrol in Jaffna in 1983 (Nissan and Stirrat 1987). These reprisals were especially brutal, and included several massacres of Tamils held in custody by the political authorities, who did little to prevent them. Nissan and Stirrat comment: ‘The brutality of the killings seems to have been linked, at least in part, with fearful representations of the “terrorist” which were very widely shared among Sinhalese at the time’ (Nissan and Stirrat 1987: 20). The distinction between ‘Tamil’ and ‘terrorist’ became blurred – ‘almost any Tamil might be a terrorist, might be a threat to Sinhala life’ (Nissan and Stirrat 1987: 20). And, critically, ‘At times of crisis, strong parallels are evident between representations of the terrorist and representations of the demonic among the Sinhalese’ (Nissan and Stirrat 1987: 20). This is not to say that Tamils and terrorists were seen as demons in some crude and primitive way, but ‘they were endowed with characteristics similar to those which are attributed to demons’, and ‘they were dealt with in a manner which might be compared with exorcism’ (Nissan and Stirrat 1987: 20). The violence ‘came to be a matter of “purifying” Sinhala space, of dealing with what was represented as an almost demonic threat to Sinhala integrity’ (Nissan and Stirrat 1987: 20). As with other struggles against an ‘enemy within’, limits which would hold in conflicts *between* states were ignored. ‘Tamil victims were not just knifed, they were slashed or cut into pieces; people were not just shot but were beaten to death, or doused in petrol and set on fire. Reports of torture at other times, too, have been frequent’ (Nissan and Stirrat 1987: 20).

The Tamils were accused of demon-like attacks on people, of committing atrocities which had ‘demonic characteristics’, such as drinking the blood of their victims or even cannibalism (a constant theme in the representation of demonic enemies). Most interestingly for this argument, ‘Like demons, they could move around at will, often unseen, and were believed to have

extraordinary strength and power' (Nissan and Stirrat 1987: 21). The best example of the fear created by this possession of demonic power came a few days after the worst of the 1983 reprisal attacks upon the Tamils. A shooting incident in Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka, was interpreted as a terrorist attack and provoked mass panic as huge numbers fled the city, including members of the police and army. Nissan and Stirrat comment: 'Given that the Tigers then numbered at the most a few hundred, and that there had been no guerilla shootings within 200 miles of Colombo, such a panic was not based on any reasonable assessment of the situation. It was based rather on the belief in the almost supernatural powers of the Tamil activists: on their ability to enter Colombo unseen, and on their ability to mount a successful urban attack with guns. The shooting incident . . . seems, instead, to have involved two army patrols firing on each other. There was no attack by Tigers in Colombo, but many people expected there to be. Tigers had even been "seen" hanging beneath trains bringing them the 250 miles from Jaffna – even though the trains weren't running' (Nissan and Stirrat 1987: 21).

In important respects, then, the Tamils were 'represented as something akin to the demonic' (Nissan and Stirrat 1987: 21), and this had horrific consequences in the nature and viciousness of the reprisal attacks on the Tamil community. While the violence in Sri Lanka continued after 1983, its nature changed, taking a less intense form, and an important factor was a changed perception of the 'enemy'. 'The violence of 1983 was directed against generalized Tamilness; against a constructed Tamil "other": dangerous, demon-like and threatening' (Nissan and Stirrat 1987: 24). But what became apparent was that this kind of violence was not going to destroy the Tamil presence in Sri Lanka or subdue the separatist activists; in fact it made things worse by seeming to intensify Tamil resistance. 'And from this period the Tamil separatists were transformed from semi-human demon-like beings in the press to being named people who the government had to negotiate with' (Nissan and Stirrat 1987: 24).

To portray an evil enemy, then, is to close off all possibility of understanding and communication and negotiation, to make all history disappear. But in the case of global terrorism surely this is the only rational response? Here we have an enemy with no demands, who does not wish to communicate or negotiate, and who is clearly intent on destruction with no comprehensible aim beyond that destruction. Surely here we have people who

can justly be represented as evil monsters? What appeared deeply monstrous about the events of 11 September 2001 was their unexpectedness and their arbitrariness. It has been pointed out since that to see them as unexpected and arbitrary is to misunderstand them and what they signify. The governments of the developed nations should certainly have expected some kind of attack upon their own territories at some stage, and there is evidence that these attacks were anticipated at some level but not adequately. And to see them as arbitrary is to fail to understand how the Pentagon and the World Trade Center can be taken to represent military and economic oppression. However, there is a level of arbitrariness which should not be lost, because it constitutes a central element of those acts which needs to be understood. The terrible bombings in Bali in October 2003, which killed 202 people, carried out by a group called Jemaah Islamiyah, and Madrid in March 2004, which killed 191 people, carried out by the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group, and in London in July 2005, in which at least 52 people died, enable us to see the sheer monstrous arbitrariness of the victims. There was no attempt by the perpetrators to distinguish their victims in any of these attacks, in terms of their nationality, their class, their ethnicity, their religion or their politics. It could be argued that they could have anticipated that representatives of a certain class, nationality and religion would be present on the hijacked planes and in the destroyed buildings. But even allowing for this level of foresight, there was still something shockingly random about those who died. Surely this arbitrariness fits the model of monstrous evil?

But there is no need to deny the arbitrariness in order to gain the kind of understanding that moves us beyond accounting for these events in terms of evil, or trying to grope for symbolic meanings in the destruction of the World Trade Center or the attack on the Pentagon. The arbitrariness itself is loaded with meaning. The symbolism of monsters in fact works against the model of monstrous evil here, because literary monsters most often have a history of grievance. We can see this best in the symbolism of Mary Shelley's monster, Victor Frankenstein's awful creation. Chris Baldick observes that those the monster destroys in seeking revenge against Frankenstein are horrifically innocent victims (Baldick 1987). He says, for example, 'he is . . . driven by a conscious sense of equity rather than mere frustration of vengeful rage; which is not to say his actions are just. On the contrary, the victims of his attacks are all *innocent*, which is exactly his grim

but satirical point' (Baldick 1987: 52). The framing of the servant girl Justine for murder will shock the fair-minded reader. However: 'It is criminal madness, but there is certainly a method in it, since what the monster is doing is providing an illustration of the arbitrary injustice of the human society which condemns him on sight' (Baldick 1987: 52). There is a list of victims who are punished by the monster for crimes they did not commit, as he stages 'parodies of the injustice he suffers . . .' (Baldick 1987: 53). The only parallel I want to read between the actions of the monster and the attacks on New York, Bali, Madrid and London concerns this arbitrariness of victims, because it seems to me that the arbitrariness of the victims of those attacks can be understood when compared with the extreme arbitrariness and randomness of the victims of the developed world's domination and exploitation of the rest of the globe. The identity of the people who are oppressed, displaced, or killed through that domination and exploitation are of no interest to the governments of the developed nations, and are never commemorated, if their existence is known at all, just as the identity of the victims of the September 11th attacks were of no interest whatsoever to those who executed them. The extreme injustice of one is mirrored in the extreme injustice of the other. To see these attacks as coming from a monstrously evil enemy with no history, whose only aim is our suffering and destruction, is to deeply misunderstand them, and if the example of the armed reprisals against the Tamil community in Sri Lanka is a sound one, it will not work. It will only make the enemy stronger, or, worse, create one where it never existed before. The truth of the crisis of global terrorism is that the developed world is plagued by monsters of its own making, and these monsters have a history which we would do well to understand.

## Conclusion

To close this chapter, and the book, I want to draw attention to three arguments that have run through it. The first is that we ought to dispose of the concept of evil. The argument is not that we *can* do without it, but that there are good moral and political reasons why we *should* do without it. In trying to eliminate the discourse of evil we may well be confronted by situations, actions and people that we feel compelled to condemn as evil, and we may have extreme difficulty in expressing our beliefs about them in any

other way. Was not the Holocaust an evil? Was not Hitler an evil person? But in the end we have to ask ourselves what it *means* to say these things. Does the concept of evil explain anything here? My main target has been those approaches that identify some kind of evil agency, such that the evil *nature* of this agency explains what they do. It may be protested here that such a notion of evil agency is so obviously nonsensical that it is a waste of time to attack it. But the fact is that this idea of evil – closest to the monstrous conception I described in Chapter 1 – pervades popular culture, the media, and much political and legal culture too. It's all very well to 'play' with such mythological characters in fiction, but this fiction has a devastating effect when it invades and dominates conceptions of reality. And I do not accept the validity of the discourse of evil when it comes to mere *description* of people's character or motives or actions, or the consequences of their actions, as proposed by John Kekes and others. Nor do I accept that the idea of evil, while it does not explain anything, is nevertheless an indispensable part of the moral description of the world, helping us to *understand* that world, as suggested by Raimond Gaita. On the contrary, the idea of evil does not help us to understand these things at all; rather, it takes on the role of the *satan* of the Hebrew Bible: it *obstructs* our understanding, blocks our way, brings us to a halt. 'Evil' is a black-hole concept which gives the illusion of explanation, when what it actually represents is the failure to understand. Not only that, but it brings with it a package of historical commitments which those who argue for its current use may well reject but will find it hard to resist – the complete condemnation of those described as evil and their rejection as not *really* human, the impossibility of communication and negotiation, reform and redemption. The discourse of evil is so dangerous that we *must* try to do without it. In the face of events like the Holocaust, we have to remember that one major factor in bringing it about was a particular discourse of evil, the anti-Semitism that drove Hitler and his followers, the belief that the Jews represented a cosmic evil enemy bent on the destruction of the German people and civilisation in general. And so my rejection of the discourse of evil is complete: we should treat it as it urges us to treat its victims – no negotiation, no reform or redemption.

The second argument has been that the idea of evil is not a philosophical concept at all, nor even a religious one. It is a mythological concept that has a specific role to play in certain narratives.

Satan is a meaningful character only in the context of the Christian mythological world history, and he makes no sense outside of it; indeed, a Christianity that abandons that mythological world history has as much trouble making sense of the idea of evil as any secular philosophy. Evil itself is an idea that only makes sense in a narrative context, in a story we tell about people and about the world. When we describe someone as evil, we are not saying anything about their character or their motivations – we are instead making them a figure in a story in which they play a specific and prescribed role. And in making them such a figure we do away with any need to understand their history, their motives, their psychology. Narrative characters have no such features, or rather they simply have the history, motives and psychology ascribed to them by the narrative plot, those required to drive the story forward. If we were to look beyond the narrative of evil, we may discover people very different to those we have imagined.

What the mythical nature of the concept of evil shows is the power of the monstrous conception I described in Chapter 1. According to that view, there are people with a distinct nature, inhuman/humans, who pursue human suffering for its own sake – they have a demonic aspect. This is often accompanied by a two-world model, that evil agents enter our world from another, so that all we have to explain is their journey, not their nature. In taking this view we draw a boundary between us and them, so that we are not infected with this kind of evil. Although this conception obviously has its place in the worlds of mythology and fiction, we have seen it erupt again and again as a representation of actual human agency – serial killers, paedophiles, children who kill, migrants, Jews, those engaged in global terrorism, dissident women, and those who participated in the Holocaust and other atrocities. Once these take on the dimension of the demonic, then there can be no negotiation, no understanding, and no possibility of redemption. In Chapter 1 I used the American television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as an illustration of the monstrous conception of evil along with the two-world view. Some of the demons Buffy and her friends battle against live in our world, but the most dangerous and potentially apocalyptic enter from a demon dimension through the hellmouth over which the Californian town of Sunnydale is situated. In the early episodes of the series, the demons that are found in Sunnydale are exterminated brutally and quickly, and there is something faintly disturbing about the way in which Buffy and her comrades perform this task with relish

and very little evidence of what we might call thinking. Their intellectual guide is the Englishman, Rupert Giles, who uses ancient texts to identify the evil demons, their powers, and how to destroy them – a combination, if you like, of Houston Stewart Chamberlain and the *Protocols of Zion*. However, as the series progresses a more complex view is taken, and the vampires and demons can no longer be condemned as malignant enemies in any simplistic sense. They have their own underworld in the back streets of Sunnydale, where they lead their lives out of sight of humans for the most part, running businesses and performing services – in other words, a typical community of illegal immigrants. Angel, the vampire with a soul, is an ally in the struggle against evil, and Spike, a vampire without a soul, eventually joins that struggle and performs heroic acts of self-sacrifice in attempting to protect Buffy's younger sister Dawn from a ferocious enemy that seeks her destruction; and in the series finale he has acquired a soul and is the figure who saves the world from the ultimate apocalypse.

However, the most shocking moments in the series are not demonic at all. The first is the killing by the slayer Faith of a human being who works for the demonic mayor of Sunnydale, and who is actually trying to assist the Buffy gang in their struggle against this latest apocalypse. She kills him by mistake, believing herself to be under attack by supernatural enemies; it is a moment of misjudgement in a battlefield, when a tragic mistake is made which has enormous consequences for all the characters in the series. The second occurs when Warren, a human attempting to be a supervillain, shoots and kills a member of the Buffy gang, Tara. He is in a state of irrational rage, having had his masculinity humiliated. In Chapter 6 we saw Katharine Kelly and Mark Stotten identify 'how we socialize boys to be male' as leading to an increased risk of violent behaviour, especially where 'young men . . . report feelings of being "disrespected", shamed, and humiliated by others and their circumstances' (Kelly and Totten 2002: 10). Warren takes a gun and, in his rage and humiliation, lets off a stream of bullets at Buffy, hitting her and wounding her – but a stray bullet kills Tara. This plunges the narrative into darkness, with the shock of the suddenness of death caused by irrational anger. Neither Faith nor Warren are demonic, and neither are their victims. Faith is eventually redeemed, but Warren never gets the chance, killed in an act of terrible revenge by Tara's partner, Willow, an act for which Willow herself must seek redemption. And so within all the demonic and supernatural dangers, the most shocking moments are human, all too human. This is Freud's uncanny in reverse. In Chapter 5 Freud

observed that writers of fiction can produce a sense of the uncanny by presenting what seems to be a profoundly ordinary world and then throwing in a sudden instance of the supernatural. Here the supernatural world is disrupted and disturbed by the ordinary – what is most shocking is what ordinary people do. In the end, *Buffy* forces us to look away from the comforts of the monstrous conception of evil, with its clear boundaries and sharp distinctions. We are left to choose between the pessimism of the pure conception – that all humans have the capacity for inflicting suffering for its own sake; or the optimism of the psychological conception – that under specific and extreme circumstances people will do dreadful things, but we can understand these contexts, and there is always the possibility of redemption.

The third argument I want to draw from the many that take place in this book is about fear. What the examples of global terrorism, the Iraq ‘war’, and world migration have shown is that we are most scared of what we cannot see, and this terror undermines the foundations of our world. The first challenge is, of course, to actually study these phenomena in their detail – to understand their *history* – to look beyond the imaginary monsters fabricated by our political leaders and the media. But there is a second challenge which is far more difficult, and that is to stop being scared. If we are scared of the dark because we believe there is some horrible thing that hides in it, we can illuminate the darkness and show there is nothing there to be scared of at all – if there *is* something there, it is far less dangerous and threatening than we imagined. But the problem is that once the light goes out again the fear returns: there may be a gap between what we know and what we fear. Earlier I used the example of someone who, after watching the film *Jaws*, refused to swim in the seas off British beaches despite knowing full well that there were no great white sharks hidden below the waves. I doubt they are unusual – how many of us, after seeing a horror film about vampires, for example, would walk back from the cinema at night through a graveyard; or not get ‘spooked’ by noises that wake us later that night when the house is filled with darkness? We know there are no vampires, but we fear that there might be; we know there is no one in the attic as the house creaks, but we are petrified. This gap between what we know and what we fear is the *real* black hole, where the discourse of evil, the *myth* of evil, takes root and grows.

It may be that we can only make sense of the world through mythologies, that we will never free ourselves of them because in the end the rational world view is too stark, a world without

meaning or significance, or at least one in which we have no meaning or significance. All kinds of myths give us a framework, a narrative, which makes our experiences coherent. Philosophy, psychology, science, history, politics, intellectual disciplines of all kinds at their best reveal these frameworks to be myths, but still do not tell us how to cope without them. We should remember that while Friedrich Nietzsche critiques the myth of the slave morality, he also considers it invaluable in that it made human suffering meaningful, and so gave humanity meaning. And in general for Nietzsche, myth is ‘an absolutely central element of culture – indeed, the only escape from the malaise from which he believed “modern man” was suffering’ (Megill 1985: 65). It is not that we can do without myths, but new myths are required. But my concern here is only with the myth of evil, one of the most powerful and enduring, and the most dangerous. In the face of it the question of whether we can make *some* philosophical sense of it seems marginal, which is why I have not focused exclusively on that question. My main purpose has been to attack it on moral and political grounds – even if it can be shown to be philosophically coherent, it still remains pernicious.

But I keep returning to the same place in the argument, that even though we know there is nothing evil there as the object of our fear, the fear remains. It may be that there is no philosophical or even rational response to this problem. I was recently introduced to the ‘Emotional Freedom Technique’ which aims to help people to control phobias by a system of physical tapping on ‘meridian’ points on the body. Of course in our rational moments we ask for evidence that such a method is successful, and then if it is, we further ask for an explanation of how it works. But if we are in the grip of a phobia none of this may matter any more. At the level of individual phobias we need to find ways of preventing our fears from controlling our lives, and at the political level we need to find ways of preventing politicians from controlling our lives through exploiting them. In *The Republic* Plato criticises the Sophists as educators, but in a way that has similarities to his critique of democratic political leaders: ‘It is as if a man were acquiring the knowledge of the humours and desires of a great strong beast which he had in his keeping, how it is to be approached and touched, and when and by what things it is made most savage or gentle, yes, and the several sounds it is wont to utter on the occasion of each, and again what sounds uttered by another make it tame or fierce, and after mastering this knowledge by living with

the creature and by lapse of time should call it wisdom . . . ' (Plato 1935: 39; 493a–c). Oppressive governments maintain their power by making their people terrified of them, but democratic governments increasingly maintain their power by making their people terrified of something else. Neither method has much to recommend it, although the 'democratic' method may be more efficient because all the governing group need do is invent objects of fear instead of having to invest in actual mechanisms of control. Even so, in the longer term the search for new evil enemies may drag democratic states towards these kinds of expensive and intrusive measures, such as the British government's proposals to introduce an identity-card system. One possibility is that this approach will create a highly paranoid society, very willing to support the political leadership as it takes these steps (the evidence is that the majority of the British public support the identity-card plan), but also capable of making more extreme demands and punishing those governing groups which refuse to take them seriously. In the general election of 2005 in the United Kingdom, the ruling Labour government found itself struggling to keep pace with the public anxiety over immigration, which had been fed by the opposition Conservative Party, but had earlier been inflamed by the Labour Party itself. There are similar fears about immigration throughout Europe which opposition parties exploit and those in power have to respond to. In this sense Plato is right that a democratic people are a dangerous and unruly beast, but the added insight is that it is the democratic leaders themselves who have created this paranoid monster.

So even if it is true that we depend on countless little mythologies to get us through the day or to drive us forward creatively, there are larger and more dangerous myths that we have to question and oppose at every stage. The myth of evil is one of these, perhaps the strongest and the darkest. As I observed at the end of Chapter 5, we the people are the monsters, and it is our fear of evil that makes us so.