Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies
Vol. 20, No. 3, September 2006, pp. 299–312

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Alligators, Crocodiles and the Monstrous Uncanny

Rod Giblett

> that hideous monster, the crocodile.
>
> (J. A. Hunter, a white hunter, author of *White Hunter* (cited by Guggisberg, 1972, p. 171))

In north Queensland during October 2004 a crocodile attacked a man in a tent and dragged him out of it only to be saved from a worse fate by the valiant efforts of a grandmother who jumped on the back of the croc which released the man and then proceeded to attack her. The print media headlined the story and captioned the accompanying photo with 'Gran who beat off croc attack' (*The West Australian*, 2004). This headline gave a curiously Australian, and horrifyingly real, inflection to the immortal lines of a Tony Joe White song, 'Polk salad Annie,/'gator's got your Grannie, / chomp, chomp' (White, 1997). The newspaper described the crocodile in a by-line of the dramatis personae for the story as 'a vicious predator'. This description of the crocodile was only jumping on the same bandwagon as its cousins in television news as they had already referred to the crocodile earlier in the week as 'the four-metre monster'. In both constructions of the crocodile as predator (more precisely a scavenger) and monster not only was its size but also its use of its jaws and teeth as a potentially lethal weapon and the fearful possibility of being eaten were placed on the menu for the delectation of the media consumer over breakfast or dinner who could savour with relief that they were safe from being eaten.

This event and its media aftermath harks back to other incidents and representations involving crocodiles, such as Baby Bob and Steve Irwin, especially as there was a baby involved in the most recent incident. Fears for the safety of Baby Bob and the vilification of Steve Irwin from Indianapolis to Indooroopilly highlight our fascination with, and fear of, crocodiles and their cousins, alligators. They also highlight the visceral nature of human bodily being and experience, particularly when

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ISSN 1030-4312 (print)/ISSN 1469-3666 (online)/06/030299-14 © 2006 Taylor & Francis
DOI: 10.1080/10304310600814128

it comes to food and feeding. With Steve holding a chicken in one hand to feed the croc and Bob in the other *not* to feed it, but with the possibility that it could feed on him, the blurry boundary between being food and not food was evident for all to see, especially as baby and chicken were about the same size and colour. This raised fears of an oral kind, about who gets to eat and who gets to be eaten.

It also raised again the horrifying possibility that a croc might take a baby, just as a dingo took one, too, as with Azaria Chamberlain in 1980. And just as she was taken from a tent, so in the most recent case the baby was in the tent. As in the Lindy Chamberlain case, the Steve Irwin case also brought about the equally terrifying actuality of another moral panic and trial by media with Steve accused of careless parenting like Michael Jackson, or attempted son-icide with the croc as weapon, or accomplice, or both. The portrayal of the croc as some sort of orally sadistic monster made it well suited, if not typecast, to play this role which it has been playing for a long time—but only since humans have appeared on the earth long after it.

In this article I argue that the typecasting of the alligator and the crocodile as orally sadistic monsters is a projection of human desires and fears on to these non-human beings. These desires and fears of an oral nature are tied up with what Freud calls 'the uncanny'. For him, the alligator and the crocodile portrayed as orally sadistic monsters are vehicles and vectors of the uncanny. This combination gives rise to what could be called 'the monstrous uncanny' in which the fascinating and horrific are projected onto, and embodied in, an orally sadistic monster. The uncanny, I have argued elsewhere, counters the aesthetics of the sublime, the picturesque (pleasing prospects) and the beautiful (see Giblett, 1996, 2004). Whereas the latter three privilege the distancing sense of sight, the uncanny engages the sense of smell which is much more up close and personal, though not as immediate as touch and taste. Smell is often commented upon in encounters, real or imagined, with an alligator or crocodile.

The monstrous uncanny, however, not only engages the olfactory but also the oral and tactile. The uncanny associated with smell (as Freud did) is a sublimation to some extent of the uncanny associated with taste and touch. The uncanny is evoked by what is not seen which could not only be what is smelt but also what is tasted and touched, both of which are involved when being eaten. The fear of being killed and eaten, and the desire not to be, are understandable, and certainly characterise the human side of the relationship with alligators and crocodiles. It also presumably characterises the other side too. The relationship between eater and eaten is ultimately non-reciprocal: only one being gets to eat and the other to be eaten. When humans venture into the habitat of alligator or crocodile they can be prey, and 'being prey', as Val Plumwood describes it, is a terrifying experience, but also instructive as it was for her (as we shall see). Being prey highlights the non-reciprocal nature of the relationship. Besides consuming alligators and crocodiles as meat, humans also consume their habitat by destroying wetlands in a colonising and non-reciprocal relationship.

The monstrous uncanny is also associated with the colonial unconscious, whether it be with William Bartram's and John Muir's encounter with an alligator in a Florida swamp or Val Plumwood's and Sigmund Freud's accounts of stories about crocodiles

in a New Guinea swamp. The return to the repressed is a return not only to the individual's own repressed but also to the culture's repressed. Both of these are figured in all these stories in association with the alligator or crocodile as an orally sadistic monster and the swamp as a grotesque place. Rather than reproducing this figuration of monstrosity, this article concludes by arguing for a relationship with alligators and crocodiles characterised by mutuality in which they and their habitat are respected and conserved.

Freud and the Smelly Uncanny

Alligators and crocodiles have been living on the earth for 200 million years, much longer than any other currently surviving, similar-sized genus of the animal kingdom. They are truly a 'blast from the past'. As such they are vehicles and vectors for the uncanny. Freud ([1919] 1985, p. 340) defined the uncanny as 'that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar'. The uncanny is not only a return to the past but also, in quasi-Freudian terms, 'a return *to* the repressed', including the colonial repressed (as I have argued elsewhere; see Giblett, 1996). What was repressed for the nineteenth-century, petit-bourgeois and Viennese Freud was invariably sexual in nature.

More generally in patriarchal culture it is what is corporeal, visceral, maternal and monstrous. These can include the sexual, oral and anal, all of which can be, and were, associated with the colonial. In Freud's 'The Uncanny' the crocodile emerges as a figure for the British colonial repressed to which he returns. The repressed does not have a fixed content or function but changes historically and varies culturally, though the crocodile and swamp as sites of the colonial unconscious have been with us for some time, as we will see. Crocodiles for the ancient Egyptians were sacred, as they are for Australian indigenes. How the sacred becomes the monstrous, and even demonic, is outside the scope of this article. The monstrously sacred/demonic, though, is perhaps an apt definition of the uncanny. Just as the sublime functions as a secular theology in which the sublime stands in for God in a culture for which God is dead (see Giblett, 1996, 2004), so the uncanny operates as a kind of secular demonology with the alligator and crocodile as devil and the swamp as hell (as we will see).

Perhaps no animals have been more demonised than the alligator and crocodile, the 'monarch of the marsh' and the 'king of beasts' of the tropical swamp. The alligatorian and the crocodilian have been repressed for at least since Freud's time and it still persists. For Vollmar (1972, p. ix) 'crocodiles, alligators and caimans both horrify and fascinate'. In Freud's (p. 339) terms, they are uncanny as he defined the uncanny as 'what is frightening—what arouses dread and horror'. Vollmar (1972, p. ix) suggests that 'lurid travellers' tales of evil reptiles lying loglike in tropical mud, ready to snatch and devour the unwary human, linger in the memory'. Freud's (p. 367) uncanny was developed from reading one such tale, L. G. Moberly's 'Inexplicable' published in *The Strand Magazine* in 1917. This story harks back to the ur-travellers' tale of alligators: William Bartram's account of his travels, and encounter with alligators, in a Florida swamp first published in 1791. I return to both these stories shortly.

A century and a half later, in the mid-nineteenth century, John Muir walked 1,000 miles from Kentucky to the Gulf of Mexico through a Florida swamp where he encountered an alligator. Fifty years later and a year before Moberly's story, Muir published his account of his encounter with an alligator, like Bartram, in a Florida swamp. His reflections on this encounter are seen by some as a crucial transition in his thinking to a bio-centric ethic. More recently, Val Plumwood's (2000a, b) gripping (perhaps the wrong word) autobiographical story of being crocodile prey first published in a collection by Travelers' Tales tries to avoid the lurid, but without success, as I will argue below. For Plumwood, as with Muir, her experience was the occasion to reflect on her place in nature. If one is an uninvited guest in, or intruder into, the home of the alligator or crocodile, one can only expect to be prey as they are predators, or, perhaps more precisely, scavengers.

In his reading of Moberly's story, Freud downplays the role of real alligators and ignores the swamp as the place par excellence of the uncanny (see Giblett, 1996). If I were Freud, I would psychoanalyse some long-lost and repressed memories to do with his father and the phallus, as the crocodile must be some sort of phallic symbol in Freud's lexicon of symbols, and to do with his mother and the swamp as a maternal place. Yet rather than psychoanalysing Freud's psychopathology, I want to analyse the psychogeopathology that portrays the alligator and the crocodile as orally sadistic monster, to engage in the talking cure of a psychoanalytic ecology that would regard them and the swamp in less demonic and more sacral terms and to promote eco-mental health that would mean that these psychogeopathological symptoms did not arise in the first place (see Giblett, 1996, 2004).

Freud, perhaps in typical fashion, gives a three- or four-sentence summary of the story he 'came across' in a magazine. He does not give a precise reference other than saying that it appeared in 'a number of the English *Strand Magazine*' (Freud, [1919] 2003, p. 151). Recently I 'came across' two precise references to it in Royle's *The Uncanny*, one to the original publication in *The Strand Magazine* and the other to a reprint in an anthology of stories from *The Strand Magazine* (Royle, 2003, pp. 140, 141, n. 3; Moberly, 1917, [1917] 1991). Rather than concentrating on the slips and mistakes in Freud's retelling as he himself would do, I want to consider the gaps and absences, the symptomatic lacunae, of Freud's reading in order to reinstate alligators and crocodiles living in a swamp as a vehicle and vector of the uncanny and disinvest their construction as orally sadistic monsters.

In 'The Uncanny' Freud ([1919] 2003, p. 151) relates how:

> I read a story about a young couple who move into a furnished flat in which there is a curiously shaped table with crocodiles carved in the wood. Towards evening the flat is regularly pervaded by an unbearable and highly characteristic smell, and in the dark the tenants stumble over things and fancy they see something undefinable gliding over the stairs. In short, one is led to surmise that, owing to the presence of this table, the house is haunted by ghostly crocodiles, or that the wooden monsters come to life in the dark, or something of the sort. It was quite a naïve story, but its effect was extraordinarily uncanny.

Freud makes at least two mistakes in summarising the story, the first of which is that the young couple move into a house, not a flat, furnished only with the table ('the table goes with the house' says the agent) and the table has carvings of alligators, not crocodiles, though Moberly's story itself slips between them. These slips may be symptomatic of something more profound and if I were Freud I would no doubt think so and would analyse them (and him) for it. I am more interested, though, in the presences and absences in Freud's account, what he reproduces correctly and what he misses out altogether. Freud is not alone in referring to alligators as monsters, as we have heard in recent television reports and as we shall see. There is a textual warrant for doing so in that the first-person narrator of the story refers to alligators as 'loathly monsters'. Yet this is not in relation to the carved, wooden alligators on the table, but in relation to a story within the story, a traveller's tale, about real, living alligators in a swamp in New Guinea that Freud does not consider at all, as if he read only half the story by Moberly (more of that shortly).

First, the table. The first-person narrator (May, the wife in Freud's 'young couple') describes the table as:

> Octagonal in shape, set on three twisted legs—just a small occasional table such as one may see in any drawing-room. But the way in which it was carved was entirely out of the common, and I crossed the room to look at it more closely, exclaiming as I did so, 'What a perfectly lovely piece of carving! Of course this has been left here by mistake.' And I turned the table more to the window to let the light fall upon it. The whole top was a crust of carved leaves and flowers, and in each curve of the octagon there was a small alligator, his head pointing outwards, his tail meeting the tails of the other crocodiles in the centre; and as the light fell on the scaly bodies they had an extraordinary look of life, and the little sinister heads with the small evil eyes almost seemed to move. I shuddered and drew away from the table. (Moberly, 1917, p. 573, [1917] 1991, p. 184)

May feels quite faint for a moment and says to the agent '"there is such a queer smell in here," . . . becoming all at once conscious of a strange and penetrating odour I had not before noticed'. She begins to suggest that it might be the drains but the agent is quick to interrupt and advise that they were '"set in order before the last tenant vacated the house . . . I have the sanitary people's certificate about them"' (Moberly, 1917, p. 573, [1917] 1991, p. 185). This terrace house is not, however, a working-class swamp whose bad air was the supposed vector of malaria in the miasmatic theory of disease and the target of the Sanitary Movement (see Giblett, 1996 and references therein). The carved figures on the table are creatures of the swamp and smell is a vector of the uncanny in the psychoanalytic theory of the psychopathology of everyday life in modernity (see Giblett, 1996).

May's husband Hugh's first encounter with the table is just as uncanny as hers. He runs his fingers over the carved surface of the table and rests them on the head of one of the alligators, 'a head fashioned with such skill that its loathsome naturalness made one shudder. "Good heavens, May, the things look so lifelike I could almost have sworn one of them squirmed"' (Moberly, 1917, p. 574, [1917] 1991, p. 186). Inanimate

things coming to life, or seeming to do so, or imitating life, is for Freud one of the features of the uncanny.

Hugh and May are visited by a friend called Jack Wilding for whom the carved alligators trigger memories not related by Freud in his recounting of the story which highlights the importance of the fact that the table is located in a house, not a flat. After dinner 'on a delicious May night' the two men friends are chatting with the windows open. The spring smells of the garden waft into the room:

> when all at once the drifting sweetness from without was tainted by that same strange odour which we had noticed once or twice before . . . As it drifted across the room our guest suddenly sat bolt upright in his chair, and a curious greyness overspread his naturally bronzed complexion. 'My God!' he said, what is that? And why does it smell the same—the same—.' His sentence trailed off into silence, and in the intense stillness following his strange words I heard a sound which, for some reason I could not pretend to explain, gave me a feeling of cold fear. I can only describe the sound as like a far-away bellowing—not precisely the bellowing of cattle, but a more sinister, more horrible sound, pregnant with evil. 'You hear it too?' Jack Wilding questioned, under his breath . . . 'And the stench is here too! Good God! If I thought I should ever have to cross that swamp again I would go mad.' (Moberly, 1917, p. 576, [1917] 1991, p. 190)

The immediacy of the sense of smell takes Jack back to what was old and long familiar, and to what was long forgotten, if not repressed. Jack then recovers himself sufficiently to say:

> 'I must have had a nightmare—a waking nightmare,' he said, looking around him. 'I could have sworn that I smelt the alligator swamp in New Guinea, the place where—' he broke off short. 'I heard the loathsome brutes bellowing,' he began again; 'but, of course—of course, it was merely some association of ideas.' (Moberly, 1917, p. 577, [1917] 1991, p. 190)

Hugh indicates the table and suggests that it was the trigger for Jack's association of ideas:

> Jack turned and glanced at the table, and he recoiled when he saw the grinning heads lying amongst the crusted delicacy of leaves and flowers. 'Loathsome beasts!' he said, and again his voice shook . . . 'I crossed an alligator swamp once with a friend . . . It was dark, the place swarmed with those unspeakable devils, their stench was everywhere. It was dark—and poor old Danson'—he paused, as if speech were almost impossible—'they dragged him off the path of the logs in the darkness' . . . Somehow his words brought before me the hideous swamp, the darkness, the loathly monsters waiting for their prey, and the remembrance of just such an incident in a book I had once read flashed into my mind. (Moberly, 1917, p. 578, [1917] 1991, p. 191)

The original *Strand Magazine* publication of the story has illustrations by Dudley Tennant, one of which is of this story within the story, complete with a glimpse of both the table and the log path, and a depiction of Jack as both the teller of the tale and character in it (Moberly, 1917, p. 577).

Jack goes on to relate how '"the place swarmed with those unspeakable devils"'. Swarming creatures, in biblical terms, are 'an abomination'. They are neither fish nor flesh nor fowl. They neither just swim nor walk nor fly, but do all three (see Giblett 1996, 2004). These alligators are no exception. When the wooden alligators come so life they always seem to be sliding or slithering between Jack's or Hugh's feet (but not May's, as presumably she keeps her legs together like a lady). The housekeeper later describes how they go 'slithering' and 'running on their underneaths' (Moberly, 1917, p. 574, [1917] 1991, p. 193). They do not walk on all fours like domesticated animals. They do not separate their grotesque lower bodily stratum from the grotesque lower earthly stratum, but are part and parcel of it. The abominable is also almost beyond words. It is inexplicable, as the story concludes and as its title signals.

Muir and the Terror-stricken Mouthful

A year earlier than the publication of Moberly's story, John Muir published *A Thousand-mile Walk to the Gulf*, relating a journey he had undertaken almost 50 years earlier. In 1867 Muir, 'one of the seminal figures in the history of modern environmental thought' according to Frederick Turner in his introduction to the Penguin Nature Library edition, encountered an alligator 'on the margin of a stagnant pool' in a Florida swamp which prompted Muir to reflect that:

> These independent inhabitants of the sluggish waters of this low coast cannot be called the friends of man ... Many good people believe that alligators were created by the Devil, thus accounting for their all-consuming appetite and ugliness. But doubtless these creatures are happy and fill the place assigned them by the great Creator of us all. Fierce and cruel they appear to us, but beautiful in the eyes of God. They, also, are his children, for he hears their cries, cares for them tenderly, and provides their daily bread. The antipathies existing in the Lord's great animal family must be wisely planned, like balanced repulsion and attraction in the mineral kingdom. How narrow we selfish, conceited creatures are in our sympathies! How blind to the rights of all the rest of creation! With what dismal irreverence we speak of our fellow mortals! Though alligators, snakes, etc. naturally repel us, they are not mysterious evils. They dwell happily in these flowery wilds, are part of God's family, unfallen, undepraved, and cared for with the same species of tenderness and love as is bestowed on angels in heaven or saints on earth. I think that most of the antipathies which haunt and terrify us are morbid productions of ignorance and weakness. I have better thoughts of those alligators now that I have seen them at home. Honorable representatives of the great saurians of an older creation, may you long enjoy your lilies and rushes, and be blessed now and then with a mouthful of terror-stricken man by way of dainty! (Muir, [1916] 1992, pp. 98–99)

Here endeth the sermon on 'how I learned to stop hating alligators, and learnt to love them'. Only a true greenie would hug an alligator metaphorically as readily as they would a tree in actuality. Perhaps needless to say, Muir was not a mouthful of terror-stricken humanity for the alligators of a Florida swamp. He may have thought differently and not have been quite so jaunty if he had been as Val Plumwood was, and did, as we will see.

Bartram and the Greedy Monster

The story of the abominable crocodile and the monstrous alligator lurking in the uncanny swamp surfaces much earlier in modern Western culture than with Freud, Muir and Moberly in the early twentieth century. In the late eighteenth century William Bartram travelled to a Florida swamp where he encountered 'the subtle, greedy alligator' about to devour 'the voracious trout', the eater eaten, the preyer predated by a larger predator:

> His enormous body swells. His plaited tail brandished high floats upon the lake. The waters like a cataract descend from his opening jaws. Clouds of smoke issue from his dilated nostrils. The earth trembles with his thunder. (Bartram, [1791] 1998, p. 75)

Two hundred years later Glasgow takes this last sentence as the sub-title for his social history of the American alligator and suggests that Bartram 'certainly wins, hands down, any contest for colourful alligator writing' (1991, p. 31). There is certainly plenty of that in the intervening two centuries, as Glasgow's study shows. Bartram's description is a lurid traveller's tale complete with exaggeration that the vapour is smoke, though in a later encounter he describes how 'the vapour ascends from his nostrils like smoke' (p. 82). It would only take the addition of fire from the alligator's mouth and wings on its back to complete the construction of the alligator as a dragon. Bartram's alligators are, as Slaughter (1996, p. 200) points out, 'monsters on a heroic scale. His drawing *The alegator of St Johns* [now housed in the Natural History museum in London] resembles medieval representations of the dragons battled by St George.' On a couple of occasions Bartram refers to 'the monster' (pp. 77, 80).

If, as I have argued elsewhere (see Giblett, 1996), the swamp is a secular underworld into which the hero of the modern adventure romance has to descend and in which he has to overcome monsters, then Bartram's travels involve him not only descending into Florida swamps but also overcoming their resident monsters, alligators—as he does later to emerge 'victorious, or at least [having] made a safe retreat' (p. 80) as he concedes. Bartram leaves us in no doubt that we are in the underworld when he describes 'the boiling surface of the lake' (p. 75) created by two alligators engaged in 'horrid combat' (p. 76). The alligator swamp is a hellish, hot place and a place where the elements of water (lagoon) and fire (or heat) mix, as do the elements of air, earth and water created by the alligator itself. The 'dreadful roar' (p. 76) or the 'terrifying roar' of the alligator 'resembles very heavy distant thunder, not only shaking the air and waters, but causing the earth to tremble' (p. 82).

The alligator mixes the elements of earth, air, water and fire (thunder and lightning are the fire in the sky) just as the wetland does more generally (see Giblett, 1996). Instead of these elements staying put in their proper place, the alligator and the wetland mix them up and violate the order of things that assigns them to a fixed and stable category. Even the smoke/vapour exhaling from the alligator's nostrils upsets the distinction between air, water and fire (where there's smoke, there's fire). The fact that the alligator in the water 'resembles, at a distance, a great chunk of wood floating

about' (p. 82) means that it pretends to be solid and earthy when in fact it is monstrous and slimy.

And orally sadistic to boot. If there is one feature of the alligator that more than any other arouses dread and horror for Bartram it is the fear of being 'dragged out of the boat and instantly devoured' (p. 76) by the greedy monster. Its jaws are prodigious, with the upper jaw opening at right angles to the lower one, according to Bartram (p. 82) but mistakenly for Glasgow (1991, p. 31). He also found that they are capable of 'belching floods of water' (p. 76). The jaws of the alligator emit terrifying roars and belch water, and so give out noise and liquid. They also take in liquid in the form of water and blood, and solid in the form of flesh, animal or human. Their jaws give and take. They are a transportational zone between the inside and outside of the body through which matter passes.

Alligators in a Florida swamp function in both Bartram's and Muir's texts as figures for the British colonial and American cultural unconscious. Florida and the American South more generally with its swamps have been repressed in the collective psyche of the American North and have functioned as a figure of the primitive and backward (see Giblett, 1996 and references therein). Relatedly, American wetlands have been drained and their creatures commodified from early colonial times. In Bartram's case he is returned to this repressed only to try to continue to repress it; in Muir's, he embraces it—albeit metaphorically.

Plumwood and Great-toothed Jaws

Unlike both Muir and Bartram and their encounters with an alligator in a Florida swamp, but like Danson in Moberly's story, the Australian eco-feminist and eco-philosopher Val Plumwood was a mouthful of terror-stricken humanity for a crocodile in Kakadu National Park in 1985. She lived to tell the tale, though, unlike Danson, but it took some time for her to be able to tell it. I am not going to attempt to retell the story in all its details and if I attempted to sum it up by saying it was a gripping and gut-wrenching story I would be making bad puns. Plumwood's story is worth reading for itself. By reading it critically I am not belittling or demeaning her experience, which was traumatic to state the obvious, nor her individually, as she was heroic to say the least. Rather, as with Freud, I am trying to critique the patriarchal and colonial elements that emerge in it despite her best efforts to keep them at bay.

Her story has some explicit elements of the uncanny, such as her description of 'the unfamiliar sensation of being watched' and her 'whispering sense of unease' prompted not by the sight of a crocodile but of 'a strange rock formation' (Plumwood, 2000a, p. 57) which is a portent of what is to come. Plumwood hears whispers of unease and observes the strange rock formation so she is in a heightened state of sensory alertness. When the crocodile attacks her flimsy fibreglass canoe 'the unheard of was happening' (2000b, p. 57). The uncanny is evoked by hearing (or not) and smelling, by what can be heard or not, what can be smelt, but generally not by seeing (see Giblett, 1996, 2004). Deathly silence evokes the uncanny. In this case, being seen also evokes it.

'Being prey' as she calls it, is the result of being seen. To be prey one has been seen already. Plumwood is not the subject of the gaze but its object. She hears whispers of unease and hears (and sees) the unheard of, a crocodile attacking a canoe.

The 15-year gap between 'being prey' and publishing her account and reflections on this event attests perhaps to the difficulty for her of coming to terms with her experience and expressing it. Part of the difficulty was not only the trauma of the attack itself but also the way in which her story was subjected to what she called 'the cultural drive to represent it [the attack] in terms of the masculinist monster myth: the master narrative' (Plumwood, 2000b, p. 59). In this myth the crocodile is constructed as a ravening, orally sadistic monster who (or which) rapes and eats his (and it is always a male in the myth) innocent female victim. Yet Plumwood reproduces the myth herself when, for example, she earlier describes in lurid terms how she had 'a blurred, incredulous vision of great toothed jaws bursting from the water' that then 'seized [her] between the legs in a red-hot pincer grip' (Plumwood, 2000b, p. 57). The crocodile is figured as a monstrous, orally sadistic and reptilian cousin of 'Jaws'.

Rather than only construing her experience in good ecological terms of being prey and so being a part of the food chain, Plumwood also turns in the longer version of her story to the mythology of New Guinea (and why not that of Australian Aborigines one wonders) as a way of accounting for her experience that does not merely deny or repress its mythological elements and significance. She suggests that 'crocodiles are masters of water' and goes on to argue that:

> the crocodile is an exploiter of the great planetary dualism of land and water. As Papua New Guinea writer Vincent Eri suggests in his novel, *The crocodile*, the creature is a sort of magician: its technique is to steal the Other, the creature of the land, away into its world of water where it has complete mastery over it. Water is the key to the crocodile's power, and even large crocodiles rarely attack in its absence. The crocodile is then a boundary inhabitant. (Plumwood, 2000a, p. 137)

In other words, the crocodile, like the alligator, is a wetland inhabitant, an inhabitant of the intermediary zone between dry land and deep water that crosses 'the boundary' between land and water and upsets the dualism between them (see Giblett, 1996). Yet, like Freud who ignores the story within the story of the alligator swamp in New Guinea (and like Royle who ignores the alligators and the swamp in the story within the story), and like both who ignore these aspects as the vector and vehicle for the uncanny, Plumwood overlooks the fact that the wetland with its distinctive features is the crocodile's habitat. She describes the latter as 'the swamp' and contrasts that with 'Kakadu's wetlands' with their 'dreamlike beauty' enticing her into 'a joyous afternoon's idyll' at the beginning of the story. She describes how here she 'glutted' herself on 'the magical beauty . . . of the lily lagoons untroubled by crocodiles' (2000a, p. 128, 2000b, p. 56). She moralises the pastoral world of the wetland as good and heavenly—good enough to eat, with herself as metaphorical glutton—and the swamp as bad and hellish, the place of the orally sadistic and gluttonous crocodile. For her, the crocodile lives in a swamp whereas the tourist visits a wetland; in brief, swamp is bad, wetland is good.

Naturally, she would rather eat than be eaten (and wouldn't we all?). Just as she is being watched, but prefers to watch, so she prefers to 'eat' the beauty gluttonously than to be eaten greedily by the crocodile. Who can blame her? The point is, though, oral sadism rules, okay? She is a metaphorical glutton and the crocodile is figured as an orally sadistic monster. Tourist and crocodile are going about their normal, everyday business, subscribing in both cases to the master narrative despite Plumwood's best efforts to avoid it and do otherwise. The tourist watches (preferably without being watched) and consumes beauty gluttonously through his or her eyes without being consumed; the crocodile watches the tourist and sometimes consumes him or her through his or her mouth. Both are just doing their thing in this mythology of modernity with its non-reciprocal and non-symbiotic positions of mastery of watching and eating, rather than being watched and eaten.

As the Kakadu wetland for Plumwood is good and heavenly, the crocodile swamp by implication is bad and hellish, though the wetland and the swamp are one and the same place—just figured differently. The Kakadu wetland is Eden before the Fall, or before the appearance of the serpent, here transformed into the crocodile. It is also the place of good magic, but crocodiles are excluded from this world of good magic as they bring trouble into paradise by enticing creatures of the land with bad magic into a watery grave, into a wet underworld, into its world—the swamp. The good magic is a sanitised white magic enticing Plumwood into the beautiful pastoral idyll of the wetland split off from, and valorised over, the black magic of the crocodile enticing her into the horrifying black water of the swamp. Magic is just magic, though, without the moralisation. Plumwood (strangely for an eco-feminist) reproduces not only the patriarchal, Western moralisation of the wetlandscape but also its dualisms and spatial metaphysics and poetics of land and water, good and bad, white and black, heaven and hell, above and below (see Giblett, 1996).

Yet humans are not simply or exclusively creatures of the land, just as crocodiles are not simply or exclusively creatures of the water. Alligators and crocodiles are creatures that live in the two elements of earth and water, just as their wetland home mixes these elements (Strawn, 1997, p. 14; Giblett, 1996). Humans are also creatures of water in that we are predominantly made up of water. Our beginnings as individuals are in the watery world of the womb and our beginnings as a species in evolutionary terms are in the womby world of water (see Giblett, 1996). Humans also have vestigial reptilian parts of the brain. Humans are meat for crocodiles (and vice versa), but we are also very distant cousins. We are both wetland creatures living on a complementary, non-dualistic planet of land and water, in short, of waterland.

Plumwood draws on Eri's novel to support her argument about crocodiles and water, but her reading has no real basis or textual warrant. Beside the perhaps customary references in the novel to 'the monstrous crocodile' and to 'the horrifying creature' (Eri, 1970/73, pp. 108, 113) the crocodile of the title does not figure (in two senses of the word) much in the novel. It is certainly not used, as Plumwood later suggests (2000a, p. 138), as

> a metaphor for the relationship between colonised indigenous culture and colonising Western culture. If the crocodile-magician-coloniser can drag you completely into its medium, you have little chance; if you can somehow manage to retain a hold on your medium, you may survive.

If the crocodile is used in Eri's novel as a metaphor for anything, it is as a device for explaining the inexplicable. When Mitoro, the wife of the central character Hoiri, disappears the whole village maintains that a crocodile took her. Interestingly, in one Aboriginal story the crocodile is a wife-stealer too (see Mudrooroo, 1994, p. 33). The men of the village hunt down a crocodile and Hoiri kills it in an act of revenge that he is privileged to perform as the victim. Yet at the end of the novel Hoiri encounters Mitoro. She does not acknowledge him and no explanation for her leaving him is given other than that she is under the power of the magicians who also control or transform themselves into crocodiles.

The crocodile is a scapegoat onto which her sin of leaving her husband is heaped (as she cannot be found and punished) and the village is expiated. The crocodile is a creature of the wetland figured as the scapeland, not only in the sense of the anti- or counter-landscape but also in the sense of the sacrificial victim onto, or into, which the sins of the community are heaped and expiated (see Giblett, 1996). Perhaps in modern Western medical terms Mitoro was suffering from post-natal depression following the birth of their son and left Hoiri as a result. This would highlight the connection between melancholia and wetlands, and the creatures of the wetland (see Giblett, 1996). Alternatively, perhaps she simply ran away with another man. The crocodile-magician is a part of indigenous culture that is not necessarily good, or acts for good, but functions to explain the inexplicable, as it does in Moberly's story of this title.

The coloniser, on the other hand, is largely represented by piggish Patrol Officers or draconian District Officers. One of them is 'referred to as "the crocodile," a title that was one of praise rather than abuse' (p. 141), presumably because of his power, cruelty and ugliness. He is monstrous and horrifying like the crocodile. The coloniser certainly wants to drag the indigene into his medium represented by patrols, prisons, cities and warships. The crocodile does not represent this world. It represents an unsettling liminal zone of indigenous culture that is not necessarily good or bad, but it is certainly not the coloniser's culture, or a metaphor for it other than for the monstrous, horrifying and inexplicable in it, and all cultures, again as in Moberly's story.

Plumwood associates the crocodile with the relationship between coloniser and colonised; Freud associates the uncanny with an artefact of colonialism with carved crocodiles that seem to, or do, come alive. Both are associated with a New Guinea swamp. The crocodile surfaces uncannily here in an Australian eco-feminist text quoting a novel, a colonial genre, written in a colonised culture. It also emerges in Freud's Viennese cultural and psychoanalytic repressed via a British magazine as a vector for the uncanny. In both texts the crocodile surfaces as a figure for the British colonial unconscious—repressed, but returning in their slips, gaps and lacunae.[1]

Monstrosity to Mutuality

My two encounters or interactions with alligators and crocodiles have been neither as spectacular nor as close as Plumwood's, and pretty tame by comparison but instructive nevertheless along the lines I have been pursuing in this article. I visited the Kimberley in 1992 and ventured into salt-water crocodile country down the lower Ord River in a small boat operated by a tour guide. This venture was part of research for a book on Western Australian wetlands with Hugh Webb. The photographer accompanying us, Simon Neville, took photographs of crocodiles which involved getting within a few metres of the shore. Greg, the guide, pointed out that he only went this close when there was enough water under the boat so that if the croc decided it wanted to go into the water it could go under the boat, rather than launching itself across the top of the boat and taking one of us with him or her. We all appreciated this consideration of *not* being prey!

My one and only interaction with alligators was perhaps a bit tamer and much more mainstream touristic. Like Bartram and Muir, it was in a Florida swamp. Wakulla Springs is a popular picnic and swimming spot outside of Tallahassee. Such films as *Creature from the Black Lagoon* and some of the old Tarzan films with Johnny Weismuller were shot there. You get the general picture of swampy jungle. It is alligator habitat, too, so the alligators are supposed to stay on one side of the river and people on the other. A lifeguard is stationed on the people side and if an alligator ventures across to this side the lifeguard evidently yells out 'Alligator on the people side!' Everyone is supposed to get out of the water. The people side is roped off to stop people going across to the alligator side. A short boat tour takes tourists downstream and into alligator territory for a closer look with plenty of photo opportunities. One photo I took shows two alligators and two turtles on a log, perhaps an instance of mutuality with two species living together and sharing the same living space, just as alligators and humans share the swimming hole with a degree of respect on the part of humans for the alligators in this place but not for many others (see Strawn, 1997, esp. p. 170; Giblett, 2004). The tour operator's commentary on the history and biology of the place was delivered in a slightly exaggerated Southern drawl to increase the mystique, if not the uncanniness, of the place. After all, according to the inevitable brochure for the place, Wakulla is a Seminole Creek word that means 'strange and mysterious waters'—in a word, uncanny, but not monstrous like the alligators.

Note

[1] I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for this insightful point.

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