Relatively few scientific inquiries have examined the relationship between physical appearance and moral status. Some early investigators stressed a biological determinism; they believed that criminality or psychopathology arose from biological sources, and that these biological springs of behavior were accompanied by specifiable physical appearance characteristics. At present, these biodeterministic views are not widely accepted in the social sciences.

Investigations of appearance, such as Erving Goffman's *Stigma* (1963) and F.C. MacGregor in the *American Sociological Review* (October 1951), have tended to concern themselves with the individual and social effects of appearance extremes: the effects of blemished physical appearance; the relationship between appearance and self; the effect of attractiveness on courtship; and the effects of shortness on male-female relationships, political and economic life, and popular culture. While these studies have examined the individual and social importance of appearance in everyday life, they have not touched on the use of appearance in artistic fictions nor on the use of artistic fictions to perpetuate appearance stereotypes.

Given that the arts draw their conventions from everyday life, we can see in them the association between appearance and moral status. There is likewise a reciprocal relationship between the arts and the wider social world. Artistic viewpoints significantly influence our perceptions of everyday life. The arts have been a major force in the construction of the deviant role and have helped create an image of evildoers; more specifically, physical appearance has been a prime artistic device in concretizing this image.

**Moral Champions and Transgressors**

Examining artistic treatment of the deviant suggests that conventional dramatized constructions of the deviant role in the arts have greatly aided in the reification of this role. A considerable amount of literary, theatrical, and graphic work poses dramatic interplay between opposing moral factions with polar attributes: moral champions are placed in conflict with moral transgressors. Typically a larger third group, the great mass of society, stands in the background as interested party to the conflict. The actions of this group tend to project a quality of moral irreproachability. While the moral masses do not directly contend with the transgressor, and hence make no claims to heroism, they do stand against the transgressors and support the efforts of the moral champions. The implied proportional balance of these forces, then, is a few transgressors and a few champions amidst a great mass of the morally irreproachable.

While moral transgressors are seen to be relatively few in number, their ranks are large enough to be a constantly troublesome societal concern. The champions are also perceived as few in number. Their actions are such that some transgressors are sanctioned, but all are not eliminated. Nonetheless, the accepted convention is that even the partial success of the champions is fully admirable. The masses are not expected to play a significant role in this conflict, since the illegitimate power accessible to the transgressors can only be effectively challenged by a superior and legitimate power possessed by the moral champions.

Judged against social realities, these artistic conventions of moral conflict present social roles having a greatly distorted moral character. The masses are presented as having
judgments also obtains for making moral judgments. The ugly fall at the other pole of the scale, simply, the linking allows us to easily distinguish between moral status accomplishes several things. First and most prominently, the linking allows us to easily distinguish between the good guys and the bad guys in artistic presentations: the handsome ones are good, and the ugly ones are bad. Second, appearance provides an additional dimension to reinforce our responses to moral status or to clarify such responses. Our positive (or uncertain) response to the moral champion is enhanced by our positive response to his physical attractiveness; conversely, our negative response to the transgressor is intensified by our negative response to his ugliness.

Third, by linking appearance and moral status the complexities of moral status are collapsed down and tagged by the relative simplicities of an aesthetic scale. An adequate judgment of moral status requires time and subtle discriminations. If an artistic product is to have an immediate impact, there is not sufficient time for subtlety. Hence devices need to be employed to clearly establish moral status in a simplified fashion. Evil incarnate and good incarnate must be presented in terms of contrasting aesthetic extremes so as to leave no doubt in anyone's mind that they are evil or good. There is also the implied suggestion that the ease of making aesthetic judgments also obtains for making moral judgments.

The psychological meanings of extreme deformations of appearance are multiple. Such deformations are negatively valued; they imply a sense of threat to the spectator, possibly because society imputes a degree of superior power to the deformation. Deformed individuals are often believed to have increased physical capacity, the strength of beasts, or the relentless power of machines. Further, this power is doubly fearsome, since there is also the implication that such beings are not likely to be held in check by the conventional morality. Their physical deformity puts them outside the pale of ordinary humanity.

Levels of Art

This appearance-moral status convention—utilizing the beautiful, the ordinary, and the ugly—is found at all levels of art. The presence of this convention in popular arts may be easily established for both the past and the present. A number of examples are provided by Allardyce Nicoll in Mask, Mimes, and Miracles (1963), an historical study of the popular theater. Popular medieval religious drama gave great prominence to Satan and a variety of his cohorts. Nicoll displays a number of medieval devil's masks with appearance deformations such as horns growing from the forehead, enlarged pointed teeth, out sized eyes, and long crooked noses.

Contemporary popular culture continues the use of the appearance-moral status convention. In comic books and comic strips recognizable heroes of superior moral status—such as Superman, Dick Tracy, Prince Valiant, Joe Palooka, and Steve Canyon—are depicted as better looking than everyone else. The villains are creatures from other planets, mustachioed war lords, oversized bruisers, wild-eyed mad scientists, and evil-looking Orientals. Dick Tracy specializes in fighting grotesque villains whose very names describe their physical deformities: The Mole, Piggy, Flattop, The Brow, Flyface, and Ugly Christine.

In films and television numerous examples also exist. The heroes are either clearly attractive or are noticeably better looking than the supporting players (although to a certain extent this situation is changing). The list is endless. In contrast, the villains tend to be thick and louitous, scowling, scowling, leering, sneiveling, slaverling, dirty, unshaven, and scarred—in short, visibly evil. As Colin McArthur notes in Underworld USA (1972), particularly in gangster films and thrillers “the physical qualities of the villains are used as visual shorthand to suggest depths of evil.”

The appearance-moral status convention is also widely used in the fine arts, including opera (Iago in Verdi's Otello, Caspar in Weber's Der Freischutz, Boito's Mefistofele, Gounod's Faust, the Witch in Humperdinck's Hansel und Gretel), the theater (Michael Chekhov as Erik in Strindberg's Erik the Fourteenth, Richard Mansfield in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Humphrey Bogart in The Petrified Forest, Boris Karloff in Peter Pan), and the visual arts (Bosch's Christ on the