# Monsters and the Monstrous

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*Special Issue*
# 'Monstrous Beauty/The Beauty of Monstrosity'

# Contents

Frankenstein in Belfast. © 2005, Sean Moran.

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# Monstrous Adornment: Juan Luis Vives' Lessons on Female Beauty

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## Abstract

Female beauty has been a prominent topic in the history of advice narratives, both religious and secular in nature. Whether directed at higher or lower classes, the oldest books and manuals of conduct about and for women were mixing praise of female natural beauty with warnings about its destructive agency and sinfulness, especially when God-given looks were tainted by means of make-up or fancy attire. While the present article will extensively refer to the Christian roots of negative attitudes towards 'making Nature up,' it ultimately focuses on the work of Juan Luis Vives, the Spanish humanist, whose conduct manual, *De Institutione Foeminae Christianae* (1524), known as *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, written for Queen Catherine of Aragon and her daughter, Princess Mary, is considered a ground-breaking educational programme for sixteenth-century women. This book of advice, which was written just before the Reformation, contains multifarious instructions and admonitions aimed at early modern women, and some of its many chapters concern beauty and the many ways of its adornment and enhancement. While identifying the remnants of medieval, strictly Catholic ideology in Vives' allegedly revolutionary humanist text, the article aims to show how the manual's discourse on female beauty is inevitably connected to the discourse of monstrosity.

## Key Words

Beauty, monstrosity, Juan Luis Vives, adornment, make-up, sin, Satan, Tertulian.

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## 1.    Introduction

Much has been said in recent scholarship on body and bodily practices about 'a narrative project of the self, and bodies (...) read as surfaces that display one's identity to others.'[1] This, in the postmodern era, lead to discussions on '"voluntary" projects of adornment'[2] and modification, which although seems to suggests individuality, subjectivity, originality and agency, ultimately only appear to be such due to the body and 'body projects' being part of historically and culturally located ideology.[3] Radical feminist criticism, of which the contemporary discourse of/on bodies is one of the most significant parts, particularly points to the fact that despite the earlier hailed 'rebellious' and 'freeing' potential of reclaiming the female body via body modifications, it may be as well seen as one of the many ways of objectification and victimisation.[4] While Victoria Platt and others refer to the meaning, value and function of contemporary 'adornments' such as tattoos, piercing, body-building, slimming down and plastic surgery, cosmetics and clothes are the ways of transforming the natural body that constitute the topic of the earliest writings pertaining to enhancing and modifying the bodily exterior. From the Church Fathers to other acclaimed medieval theologians, make-up practices and attiring the body—these earliest types of Platt's '"voluntary" projects of adornment,'[5] devoted to beautifying the body—posed a serious threat to salvation. While the

present article will extensively refer to Christian origins of western culture, pointing to the roots of negative attitudes towards 'making Nature up,' it is ultimately devoted to the work of Juan Luis Vives, the Spanish humanist who has inscribed himself into English culture of the Tudor era. His conduct manual, *De Institutione Foeminae Christianae* (written in 1523, published 1524), translated five years later by Richard Hyrde as *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, written for Queen Catherine of Aragon and her daughter, Princess Mary, is considered a ground-breaking educational programme for sixteenth-century women, but also contains multifarious instructions and precepts to be utilised by early modern women. Vives' text has been chosen not only for its acclaimed cultural value but also because it seems to constitute a hybridic narrative, merging medieval, Catholic rules of conduct for women, often in celibacy, with early Protestant conduct books devoted more to everyday domesticity or 'household diorama.'[6] Interestingly, then, just years before the formal Reformation heralded by Henry VIII, Vives' educational endeavour becomes a reservoir of cultural and political ideological truths pertaining to women. Adding to this scholars' later discovery that Vives' himself stemmed from a family of converted Jews, ostracised and invigilated throughout their lives, and might have suffered from trauma, which, together with his parents' original religious persuasion, informed his writings,[7] the anglicised *The Instruction of a Christen Woman* becomes an extremely valuable cultural research material. Vives' most well-known work, therefore, will be used in the present article to discuss the perception of women's looks and beautifying practices less than a decade before Henry VIII became the head of the English Church and divorced Catherine of Aragon, the praised subject of Vives' text. The article aims to show how Vives' discourse on female beauty was inevitably connected to the discourse of monstrosity.

## 2.  Fashioning or Faking Beauty

Female beauty and its agency or consequences constitute the theme of many theological discussions of the Church Fathers and medieval philosophers. In most of their writings concerning the theme, spiritual beauty is denoted as the proper goal of a Christian. Its opposite, corporeal beauty, becomes highly problematic. For the ascetically-oriented early Christians only the renunciation or even annihilation of the flesh offered the possibility of salvation. Bodies, then, no matter the sex, became 'ideologically loaded narratives,'[8] and only those who, at the same time as they were taming the body, were capable of translating or projecting beauty onto the soul, could reach 'beauty's virtuous ideal.'[9] Resultantly, 'normative beauty was (...) idealized as the physical sign of truth and virtue.'[10] Judging from early Christian religious writings, then, human beauty should denote virtue, and virtue should be the only 'clothing' of natural beauty. Beauty unchecked by virtue posed a problem, or, even worse, it became dangerous, even monstrous—its signification changes, becoming not an expression of virtue, but an indication of the potential to sin and make others sin. Even more so, when the beautiful subject and, consequently, the object of gaze of others, is a woman.

Beauty became a prominent topic in the history of advice narratives, both religious and secular in nature, directed at both higher and middle classes. Books and manuals of conduct about and/or for women, written first by men, then taken up by women as well, oscillate around praises of female natural beauty and warnings about pride, vanity and greed resulting from the focus on the outward instead of inward perfection. When studied chronologically, they attest to the religio-cultural changes observed in a given period, and prove that beauty is indeed a cultural construct—vulnerable to and dependent on dominant ideologies concerning class, ethnicity, religion and gender. The necessity of the correlation of beauty and virtue, however, seems stable in the prescriptive texts written by men and connected to women's conduct, just like the connection between excessive attention to beauty and its embellishments/modifications and sin. What may be noticed in all of them is that a woman *is* beautiful due to her virtuous

interior; and the chief female virtue is her chastity—always denoting modesty and humility. A woman *only seems* beautiful, when she artificially changes or enhances her looks, which suggests that she cares more for the corporeal rather than the spiritual. Her fashioned beauty, subsequently, is discussed as evil, deforming, degenerative, all possibly leading to death and the destruction of those around her. She is not only sinful, in religious discourse, but also a dissembler and/or a con-artist whose intentions cannot be virtuous. While this is more typical of women who use make-up and parade in over-fanciful attire, even those natural beauties who do not display readable shamefacedness dangerously approach the boundary between sin and virtue, often risking the labelling of a prostitute. Beauty, then, was a double-edged sword.

## 3. Beautiful Evil and Evil Stemming from Beauty

While the early religious thinkers attempted to discuss the sins of pride and lust caused by pleasure in beauty in gender-less categories, beauty itself eventually became a feminine quality and the admonitions were ultimately gendered as well. R. Howard Bloch, when discussing medieval misogyny, presents a three-fold process which occurred in the Christian Church and contributed to the vilification of female beauty:

> [W]e find in the writings of the early church fathers: (1) feminization of the flesh, that is, the association, according to the metaphor of mind and body, of man with *mens* or *ratio* and of woman with the corporeal; (2) the estheticization of femininity, that is, the association of woman with the cosmetic, the supervenient, or the decorative (...); and (3) the theologizing of esthetics, or the condemnation in ontological terms not only of the realm of simulation or representations (...), but of almost anything pleasurable attached to the material embodiment.[11]

To be a woman, was inherently problematic, as all religious and early medical treatises prove. Theologians and fathers of medicine enumerated the differences, read *flaws*, of the female body—always leaking, hence impure and even poisonous. Being a woman who artificially beautifies herself, however, seemed worse. A beautiful exterior was by the strictest Fathers of the Church seen as a cover-up, a façade hiding an ugly interior. Femaleness was, in a way, monstrous in itself—in comparison to the perfection of the masculine body, modelled on the body of Christ[12]—but a woman who was capable of making herself 'pleasing to the eye' despite her impure and corrupted interior and nature, was for the ascetically-minded theologians a true monstrosity.

Bernard of Cluny, a twelfth-century monk preaching *de contemptu mundi* and, in particular, the renunciation of the flesh due to the body being 'food for worms, a lump of dirt, an urn of ashes,'[13] judged women thus:

> Woman induces impious deeds by her nods, her arts, her actions; she rejoices to compel crimes.... Woman is a guilty thing, *a wickedly carnal thing, or rather all flesh*, quick to betray and born to deceive, taught to deceive, the lowest ditch, the worst serpent, *beautiful rottenness*, a slippery path, a wickedly common thing, plunder and plunderer..., a common doorway, *sweet poison*. ... [S]he is ... *a vessel full of decay*, a useless vessel, a vessel more breakable, shameful, insatiable, irreconcilable....[14]

His panicky, vitriolic attacks stem from his fierce religiosity[15] and pertain to all women, disregarding their looks. However, he adds an additional layer to his definition of female nature

by focusing on women who falsify their evil nature by adorning their deceptive exterior, enhancing their bodily qualities. How much more detrimental it is for God-fearing Christians, men in particular, when sin parades as virtue, he seems to ask. Women who draw attention to their bodies, by means of make-up or attire, are the worst kind, judging by Bernard of Cluny's further opinions:

> The evil woman paints herself for wickedness; she adorns, rouges, falsifies, alters, changes, and colors herself. ... [S]he circles like a lion, she rushes like a wild beast.... She is seductive in her glance, seething in her sin, and she is herself a sin.... Woman is foul, burning to deceive, a flame of fury, our first destruction, the worst portion, the robber of decency.[16]

'Painting herself for wickedness,' a woman confuses the stability of interpretation. This allows her to use her destructive power more effectively, alluring the voyeur who, if ignorant, is not suspecting the moral and biological corruption she represents. While Bernard himself is known for his 'most vehement, nasty outpourings of anti-feminism in the Middle Ages,'[17] and his opinions should not be accepted unconditionally or even seen as representative of the entire early theology, the connections between a beautiful yet artificial exterior and a corrupted and evil interior were further re-iterated in many subsequent theological texts, and then disseminated via other medieval narratives, also of a secular nature.[18]

Attesting to the existence of a pre-Bernardian tradition of the correlation suggested by Bloch—between women and the artificial—Marcia L. Colish expands on the so-called 'cosmetic theology' which can be traced back to the Stoics. Colish sees them as the ones responsible for the development of such theology, yet she stresses the fact of Christian feminisation of this religious topos, noting, however, that most of anti-cosmetic, or external embellishment admonitions pertained first to strictly ascetic and celibate vocations, and then to consecrated virgins and, eventually, widows.[19] Due to this, she pays much attention to Tertulian, and the fact that he is responsible for 'a new genre of Christian hortatory literature, cosmetic theology addressed to women.'[20] In his *De Cultu Feminarum* he not only enforces the idea that improving God-given shape and form is immoral, but also claims that no matter how natural female beauty is, it should be veiled, hidden or, as Colish states, women are advised 'penitential cloaking.'[21] In 'On the Apparel of Women,' Tertulian thoroughly explains the evil, monstrous nature of cosmetics and clothes, which are the tool or 'gift' of 'the Artificer of all things,'[22] Satan, who is always ready to lead Christians toward sin and destruction.

Discussing the 'unnatural' colours used in cosmetics or even clothes observed among his own people and Gentiles, Tertulian judges:

> Those things, then, are not the best by nature which are not from God, the Author of nature. Thus they are understood to be from the devil, from the corrupter of nature: for there is no other whose they can be, if they are not God's; because what are not God's must necessarily be His rival's.[23]

What does not come from God, what 'He' did not decide to create, should not be fashioned or used by people. To those who dare to alter what has been given, Tertulian judges, '[t]o them, I suppose, the plastic skill of God is displeasing!'[24] To avoid displeasing God, Tertulian advises his 'handmaids of God' not only to shun any form of artificial transformation of the exterior— 'pageantry of fictitious and elaborate beauty be rejected by you'—but even natural beauty should be cloaked—'even natural grace must be obliterated by concealment and negligence, as equally dangerous to the glances of (the beholder's) eyes.'[25]

Here he touches on the crux of the matter, an argument against beauty which has been repeated whenever women were concerned—beauty is the source of temptation, working within and without. It has the potential to destroy the beautiful 'subject' but it also has agency, the power to do evil and incite to more evil in the observers or its consumers. Tertulian continues:

> But why are we a (source of) danger to our neighbour? why do we import concupiscence into our neighbour? which concupiscence, if God, in "amplifying the law," do not dissociate in (the way of) penalty from the actual commission of fornication, I know not whether He allows impunity to him who has been the cause of perdition to some other. For that other, as soon as he has felt concupiscence after your beauty, and has mentally already committed (the deed) which his concupiscence pointed to, perishes; and you have been made the sword which destroys him: so that, albeit you be free from the (actual) crime, you are not free from the odium (attaching to it).[26]

Alluding to the correlation of action and thought in leading to sin, he sees the ostentatious woman as the one held responsible for inflaming of man's the passions. To make his line of thinking clear, Tertulian attempts to qualify his idea of beauty, however, and reminds that the form is, after all, given by God. As such, it is good. It is what you, the *female* you, do with the gift that matters.

> Let it now be granted that excellence of form be not to be feared, as neither troublesome to its possessors, nor destructive to its desirers, nor perilous to its compartners; let it be thought (to be) not exposed to temptations, not surrounded by stumbling-blocks: it is enough that to angels of God it is not necessary. For, where modesty is, there beauty is idle; because properly the use and fruit of beauty is voluptuousness, unless anyone thinks that there is some other harvest for bodily grace to reap.[27]

Modesty is what rehabilitates female beauty, perhaps even allows for some appreciation of it. Resultantly, since modesty is part of a larger concept of chastity, ideologically advised to or even enforced on women, a virtuous woman should need nothing more than chastity to beautify herself.

## 4.    Texts of Conduct: 'Dissecting' Women

The medieval period and its ideology 'infected' subsequent periods with its cultural anxieties concerning female beauty. Of course, beauty was continuously praised,[28] by artists, poets and painters in particular, but they also realised that it gave women power and agency, all of which can be distilled from early modern poetry which is 'beauty's most powerful advocate.'[29] Outside poetic and pictorial arts, conduct writers also displayed their concern about the power that beauty gives to women as well as the dangers beauty and its enhancement posed for the spiritual and material well-being of women and men.

Ingrid H. Tague suggests that the conduct manual for women began to develop as a genre during the seventeenth century, yet other scholars have proved that its origins should be searched for much earlier than that.[30] Tague is right, claiming that

> [i]t evolved out of two separate but related traditions, courtesy books and pious literature, combining the detailed prescriptions for behavior of the

> courtesy books with the moralizing tone and emphasis on self-scrutiny of the pious literature.[31]

This had significant impact on the content of advice aimed at women as authors of medieval and early modern manuals not only presented 'commonsensical' opinions and rules, based on their/society's first-hand experience, but also confirmed and justified by religious writings and supported by medical discoveries of early medicine. Therefore, texts of conduct with related pieces of advice offer a multifarious source with ideological legacy inherited from the ancient times and the Middle Ages intertwined with the authors' contemporary cultural convictions. However, one must not forget the fact that in analysing books/manuals of conduct we are not only dealing with the propaganda disseminated by a particular ideology but also with individuals shaped by this ideology. Additionally, conduct writers were likewise motivated by different personal reasons in creating their works, despite often claiming that their narratives stem from the general concern about the well-being of their nation or, more bombastically, humanity. As such, one should agree with Miles that '[j]udgements of positivity or negativity tend to reveal much more about the judge and her or his cultural presuppositions than they do about the image in its culture of origin.'[32] Nevertheless, texts on women and female nature do not exist independent of moral/social/religious implications, and some reality can be distilled from them, or as Laurie A. Finke states: 'If texts—both historical and literary—produce a reality of their own, it does not follow that this reality is entirely cut off from its historical moment of production.'[33] Conduct texts, in the main, were to be published so the authors had to present ideas which were already 'unwritten' rules. All this ultimately poses books and manuals of conduct as valuable resource material for studying the conceptualisations of women, their nature and social roles.

Tague opines that the ideological goal of conduct texts 'was to create a woman who was constantly aware of the fact that she was a woman, one who never stopped checking her behavior and thoughts against standards of ideal womanhood,'[34] which were defined by men. They, on the other hand, must likewise continuously study women's nature, or as Miles suggests, '[m]en must receive coordinated cumulative information about women's nature and body if they are to manage women with the confidence that they thoroughly understand the reasons for male and female familial and social roles.'[35] Unsurprisingly, then, conduct literature presented 'an anatomy' of the female, literarily and ideologically 'dissecting' women's bodies and nature. While the tone of the manuals progressively changes, affected by the rules of politeness for instance, one way or another, the authors continue to allude to, in extreme cases, the 'Hell of a woman's body,'[36] and, less 'infernally,' to the monstrous potential of women's attention to their corporeality and the body's external looks. And even when, due to secularisation of the conduct discourse, books of advice stopped using overtly religious language, the authors continued voicing similar admonitions concerning women's morality.

## 5.    Juan Luis Vives: The Revolutionary?

The editors of the new edition of *De Institution Foemine Christianae*, or *The Instruction of a Christen Woman* claim that the text is 'indispensable to any serious scholar of the period,'[37] meaning that no discussion of the culture of the sixteenth century should overlook the conduct manual by Juan Luis Vives, the Spanish humanist who advocated education for women. While the same scholars, and many others, notice that this 'education' should not be understood as it is today, they still stress the value of Vives' writing during the crucial period of political and cultural changes of Henry VIII reign.[38] Vives himself is, along with Erasmus or More, seen as one of the most important exponents of humanism and its attempts at '(en)lightening' the 'dark cultural residue' of the Middle Ages. His book of conduct, written in 1523, published 1524, and

translated into English by Richard Hyrde in 1529, by 1600 had eight further editions following the original, and was translated into many languages. It is commonly believed that the text was written for Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII's consort, and aims at offering advice to Princess Mary, future Mary I of England, although, as the editors remind, there is no extant document proving that it was in any way commissioned by the court. Vives was respected by the monarchs, even received a pension from them, but his *Instruction* seems a gift to Queen Catherine rather than ordered ware. She and Princess Mary are definitely its inspiration as the 'intellectual yet self-abnegating, the Queen seemed the perfect model for Vives' portrait of womanly conduct'[39] and Mary,[40] part of such a powerful royal family, was to be the beneficiary of the advice contained in the manual. Vives speaks directly to the Queen in the manual:

> Also your derest doughter Mary shall rede these instructions of myne, and folowe in lyvyng, which she muste nedes do: if she ordre her selfe after thexample that she hath at home with her of your vertue and wysdome. Nor there is no doubt, but she wyll do after them (...) she nedes be noth very good and holy, this is comme of you and noble kyng Henry the viii.[41]

Despite such designations concerning the recipient and consumer of the instructions, the book itself clearly shows that Vives had a much wider audience in mind as many pieces of advice seem rather 'royally-unbecoming,' despite Vives' insistence on the universal, egalitarian Christian value of his suggestions.[42] He is indeed creating an overall, though not necessarily class-blind, image of a perfect Christian woman, whatever her vocation or social duty. The only method of differentiation between women that Vives offers is the stage of life of his female subject, namely whether she is a maid (read virgin), wife or a widow, and thus he uses the pattern most commonly used in reference to women's life—based on her sexuality and in relation to men. The Book dedicated to maids is the longest and consists of most of his pieces of advice, which are then subsequently repeated and 'customised' when the woman marries and lives without her husband, as a widow.

It is due to Vives' 'compulsive insistence on preserving virginity and chastity'[43] that he is most typical in his endeavour to fashion the perfect woman. What needs to noticed, however, is that such 'supervaluation of virginity'[44] is more typical of earlier narratives, for instance medieval saint's lives, especially those of early Christian female martyrs, whose sainthood depended largely on preserving the integrity of their body, almost always ending with a set of tortures aimed at weakening the opposition of such a Christian believer to pagan faith or lustful cravings of their pagan oppressors. Just like authors of texts aimed at cloistered virgins, anchorites and writers of hagiographies, virginity is perceived by Vives as the greatest treasure a woman will ever own, or as he himself states: '(...) the mayde her selfe: (...) hath within her a treasure without comparyson, that is the purenes of body and mynde.'[45] Here, Vives' 'hysterical tone'[46] concerning virginity[47] observed throughout the book becomes more acceptable for the sixteenth century, in that through his admonitions concerning virginity, more typical for medieval texts, he ultimately preaches chastity, which was a much larger signification of female purity, allowing to extend it to wives and widows. Somewhat inconsistently, Vives himself states that his manual is a novelty, considering the didactic texts of his religious predecessors, on whom he bases his advice throughout his narrative—Cyprian, Hieronyme (Jerome), Ambrose, Saint Augustine and Saint Paul, because while these 'great wytted and holy' sages make the entirety of their preachings 'in laudes and prayses of chastite,' he focuses more on 'preceptes and rules, howe to lyve' to help women 'up to the hyghest.'[48] What he really means, however, is that 'a woman hath no charge to se to, but her honestie and chastyte. Wherefore whan she is enfurmed of that, she is sufficiently appoynted.'[49] Because honesty is part and

parcel of chaste female conduct, it once again proves that this is the only precept taught by Vives.

## 6.    Vives and the Beautiful Monsters

Since he promises to write more than his predecessors on how to live a thoroughly Christian life at every socio-biological stage of a woman's existence, Vives inevitably needs to touch upon the subject of beauty. It is in Book II, devoted to married women, that he offers his opinion on the subject:

> I wyll nat dispute, howe sklender a thing beautie is, whiche standeth but onely in mennes opynyons. For she that is fayre in one mannes syght, is foule in an others. Howe frayle, and unto howe many jeoperdies indangered, howe fletynge, and howe unstable a thyng is beautie (...)? (...) [V]ertue alone is both beautie and nobleness.[50]

How beauty translates into nobleness, and how virtue becomes the only allowable adornment of a woman is more thoroughly explained in Book I, which focuses on the maid. Having explained the rules and regulations concerning the raising of a daughter and preserving her purity, Vives finally touches on the issue of 'the raymentes,'[51] by which he means ornaments of the body. He begins his instructions with 'peytyng.' Already in his opening words he judges all cosmetic or make-up embellishments as not only ungracious but sinful as well. This pertains both to a woman who uses make-up for pleasing herself as well as the one who adorns herself because she might be searching for a husband. He judges that when a woman has nothing else to offer to a man than a painted image then she is 'but in yl case.'[52] If she paints herself for her own pleasure, it is a proof of vanity; if for others' eyes, it is sheer foolishness and sin. Interestingly, he begins his line of argumentation with secular evils of make-up, and not religious admonitions. As such, he seems to appeal to reason first, not involving God in his warnings. He, therefore, asks a series of almost rhetorical questions concerning the aesthetic as well as medical consequences of indulging in artificial beautifying the face. When asking about what will please the man once make-up is lacking, he further inquires about its durability: 'What a shame is hit, if any water by chance of lyght on it, or the peytyng fortune to melte by thoccasion of swet and heate, and shewe the very skynne?'[53] It stands to reason, then, Vives judges, that make-up is impractical and requires more attention to its preservation than actual enjoyment of wearing it. Once the meticulously fashioned face is ruined by such inevitable and natural phenomena as rain or bodily perspiration, the woman will end up looking filthy, and thus repel rather than attract suitors. Consequently, she will lose 'all the honour of beauty,'[54] and her façade will reveal the true being hidden underneath it, and this will be more of a monstrous than beautiful image.

Furthermore, admitting that he is forced to scold women of his own nation, he reminds the reader of the very nature of contemporary cosmetics—they are poisonous and destructive due to their chemical content. Edith Snook discusses the detrimental effects of the early modern use of mercury in cosmetics, claiming it was acknowledged to be dangerous, even by those not thoroughly railing against female power, agency or 'feminine artifice.'[55] She reminds that as part of the chemical therapies of Paracelsian medical practice, together with salt and sulphur, mercury was one of the principles that a human body was believed to consist of. Snook moreover opines that '[m]ercury is construed as a special ingredient that should only be in the hands authoritative users, whose possessions signals their intellectual prestige,'[56] because '[b]eautifying physic is often the knowledge of secrets.'[57] Interestingly, Vives the humanist, does not engage in his period's polemics on women's access to cosmetic and medical

knowledge. All he mentions is the deadly effects of using cosmetics, which, repeating after Ovid, he sees as venom. Subsequently, he offers a horrific description of the bodily monstrosity caused by cosmetics:

> (...) the tender skynne wyll revyil the more soone, and al the favoure of the face waxeth olde, and the breath stynketh, and the tethe rusten, and an yvel aire all the body over, bothe by the reason of the ceruse,[58] and quicke silver, and specially by the reason of sopis, wherwith they prepare the body, as it were a table, ayenst the peytyng on the nexte day. (...) She that is with so many oyntementes slubbered and starched, is hit to be called a face or a sore?[59]

Focusing then on the detrimental effects of various types of lead and quicksilver, Vives scares women with an image of a putrid body rushing headlong towards inevitable death. He does not explain how quick the process of putrefaction is; he even admits that some men will find the immediate effects of make-up quite pleasing and take delight in perceiving such a woman, yet such a man should be avoided because he is both too foolish to see beyond external, artificial beauty and soon will notice the aforementioned consequences of the adulteration of the skin.

This is where Vives changes the tone of his argumentation, and switches from aesthetically and medically-motivated advice to the religious exposition of the true monstrosity of bodily modifications. Showing intertextual connection to Tertulian's 'On the Apparel of Women,' he begins with reminding women that her body is God-given, or, more specifically, her face is created after the image of 'his sonne.'[60] As such, she is perfect and should not try to adulterate the ideal, unless the woman wants to stain divine creation with 'dirte and myre.'[61] By doing this, she not only negates the origin of perfection in God, but also joins the minions of Satan, using his techniques of counterfeiting and belying true nature. 'Purpurice and or ceruse in a Christen bodies face' is the cover of the Antichrist and leads to spiritual destruction of both the woman herself and all the men she manages to seduce with her 'precious stones in the lyppes' and 'the whitness of face and necke.'[62] Denying presumed perfection of God's work as well as consciously and purposefully inciting others' sinful thoughts and passions, the painted woman externally displays the foulness of her mind and soul. As such, the painted face reveals monstrous nature. Spiritually, it aligns such a woman with the devil; socially, it places her among 'harlottes and comen women.'[63]

The same fate concerns women who indulge in rich and extravagantly coloured apparel, which in the subsequent part of his chapter on 'raynementes' Vives treats as an extension of the painted face. Just like with the eyes, face and neck, clothes have the power to transform the body and thus allow women to 'lay violent hand on god hym selfe, (...) nat knowyng, that all thyng naturall is the worke of god: and all that is by alteration, is the worke of the devyll.'[64] Alteration and adulteration go hand in hand in Vives' lessons on chastity, and both corrupt and marr reality created by God. When jewellery is added, it pushes the woman even closer into the clutches of Satan, because precious metals, especially gold, hung on the body make her 'one of Satanas officers,'[65] who drowns people in his pomp of sinfulness. As such, a Christian woman has to decide, whether she prefers to beautify her body or her soul; gold in/on each of these dimensions means something different, and only 'bejewelling' the soul is a proof of woman's chastity.

Vives returns again to his argument that women dress and beautify their exterior not predominantly for themselves but for others to praise, causing jealousy in other women and erotic excitement in men. The latter is the most detrimental and monstrous in its goal, because it transforms the woman into the opposite of Christian fisherman of souls as she places devilish

nets within her body 'to catche with all the soules of them, that be holde [her].'[66] Arousing sinful thoughts and pleasure in men is also of utmost danger to a woman who wishes to maintain their purity until the religious and socially accepted moment of marriage, and more so when she does not want to marry. Prompted by vanity triggered by indulgence in looks, she will, however, risk losing her treasure: 'And when they be trimmed and dekked, than desyre they go to forth a monge men, to shewe them selfe. And therin is the shippe wracke of chastity.'[67] While Vives does not mention rape, he sees criminal potential in such an exposure, as this public lack of shame places the women in the same categories as prostitutes, therefore, in danger of corruption. In both contemporary and sixteenth-century misogynist parlance, he suggests that such a woman 'is asking for it.'

Vives is aware of the fact that, at times, he sounds harsh, but this is the only way to appeal to those who choose to live 'madly and folishly.'[68] He does, however, often feel that he needs to explain his precepts more personally, for instance predicting that his readers might think he wishes women to be 'fylthy and sluttishe,'[69] the latter not in reference to sexuality. On the contrary, Vives states, 'sluttishnes' is not what he preaches—he only advocates, supported by Saint Paul and other church representatives, 'meane clothyng' which is easy to come by as well as measure in everything the woman puts on herself.[70] To avoid 'abhominable synne' which excessive attention to beauty leads to, the Christian woman ought to clothe the 'deformite of body' with the 'beautie of the mynde.'[71] No sweet vapours, no members/parts of the body and pieces of garments 'defiled with yolowe, or blacke, or redde colours, layde on hit,'[72] and no gold dripping down the neck will cover up the stench of the rotting soul. Virtue is the only beauty principle a woman is allowed to follow.

## 7.    By Way of Conclusion: Still Afraid?

All Vives' instructions pertaining to abandoning the practices of enhancing or fashioning bodily beauty as well as the preachings on the importance of chastity are then repeated in the books concerning wives and widows. The only difference is that, in the case of the former, there is the authority and pleasure of the husband to be taken into account; and with the final stage of a woman's life—widowhood[73]—there is, generally speaking, absolutely no need for artificial adornment considering the woman's age and social position. The wife's aim should be to please her husband and remember that he is her 'head.' Still there is God's authority superceding the will of the earthy governor, hence even if the husband seems to expect or even demand her to change her 'naturall ymage,' the woman, fulfilling his wishes, needs to make him aware of the fact that such attention to her outward appearance almost causes her pain as it is so unnatural for her and against her moral convictions.[74] Vives, however, seems to see more prevalence in *women's* unforced need for further beautification, speaking about wives demanding means from their husbands to obtain various adornments, and so his final advice is the repetition of the lessons learnt in Book I, and based on the teachings of the ancient sages, which is that '(...) the true garnyshyng and ornamentes of wyves was chastite, and nat clothyng.'[75] Lessons on chaste widowhood, the state valued even more by early Christian writers than virginity,[76] and attention to physical beauty—if any is left—seems fiercer than in the case of the wives. Vives notes first:

> (..) let passe all that trymmyng and arayeng of the body, which whan her
> husband lyved, might seme to be done for his pleasure: but whan he is deed,
> all her lyfe and all her apparell muste be disposed and ordered after his wyl,
> that is successour unto her husbande, that is immortal god unto mortall man.[77]

As Vives has been repeating throughout Book I, God does not tolerate the 'pompe of Satanas,'[78] so it is even 'less becomyng for a wydowe to garnysshe up and paynte her selfe.'[79] While Vives

admits that, indeed, widowhood offers some form of agency and liberty, she cannot use it for evil—although from reading Vives' text it seems that she always will, especially in terms of engaging in lusty pleasures. Therefore, the proper behaviour of a widow is 'wepynge, and mournyng, solytarines, and fastyng, (...) the most precious doures and ornamentes of a wydowe.'[80] If she happens to be a young widow, she should pay even more attention to her soul, abandoning the sinful temptation to make herself attractive to any other man. The only beauty she should pay attention to is that one which will guarantee her a place in heaven, and not in men's minds.

Vives anatomy of female nature and womanly duties not only proves that conduct writing became part and parcel of the humanist didactic programme, but also shows how medieval, or even ancient 'truths' concerning the female sex were perpetuated in subsequent centuries, no matter how enlightened people vowed and wished to be. The discourse of ideal feminine beauty, despite progressive secularisation, cultural and political transformations, was still interwoven with allusions to chastity and sexual purity of the woman, using the language of religious (one may say, medieval) texts of moral comportment. In terms of the tone of the discourse on female beauty, a significant change occurs in the eighteenth century, which not only reformulated the philosophical ideas of beauty and taste, and proved a significant erosion of traditional, institutionalised religious authority over bodies, but, in the domain of conduct writing, also limited, if not almost entirely abandoned, the use f religious models for female behaviour. Amanda Vickery states that the early eighteenth century was a period 'when courtesy writers began to dwell at some length on the naturalness of female virtue,' and by the mid-eighteenth century this was further promoted by literature of sensibility, which ultimately glorified women's virtue and 'the supposedly "female qualities."'[81] Although, as noticed by scholars like Tague, texts of comportment began to display a decline of religious language,[82] they, however, never truly abandoned making connections between beauty practices and women's morality.

Artificially created and enhanced beauty, and devoting one's life to beautifying the exterior, remained a vital part of moral admonitions concerning beauty, but both religious and especially secular writers avoided vitriolic attacks on women who choose or are forced to correct Nature. Thomas Marriott, for instance, in his poetic essay on female comportment, titled *Female Conduct: Being an Essay on the Art of Pleasing to be Practised by the Fair Sex, Before, and After Marriage* (1759),[83] repeats the conventional: 'Beauty may Rapture, to the Eye, impart, / The Heart is won by Virtue (...),'[84] but he *gently* convinces women to take genuine delight in their natural looks:

> Of Washes, Paste, or Paint, vain is the Pow'r,
> To heighten Beauty, or its Loss restore;
> Content with native Charms, each needless Aid
> Of Art contemn, O much admonish'd Maid!
> Ah! vainly think not, your fantastic Skill,
> The wondrous Work of Nature, can excell. (...)
> Ye Maid! By Chance, or Nature, form'd less Fair;
> Of gaining Husbands, ne'er the more despair;
> Tho' rude Convulsions should distort your Face,
> And tho' your Body were a formless Mass;
> Yet form'd by me, you shall a Consort gain,
> Who will prefer you, to the beauteous Train.
> The far out-shining Beauties of your Mind,
> To your Deformity, will make him blind. (...)

> Adopt Accomplishments, one after one,
> Whate're, in female System, ever shone;
> Nature's Defects you may supply by Art,
> Beauty alone can seldom with the Heart.[85]

Words like modesty, chastity and self-effacement are aplenty in the manual, and, despite his own promises that he praises women because he sees them as more valuable than men, it is not really a proto-feminist text. Still, instead of offending women who pay attention to their looks, the author rationally proves how beauty is an unstable foundation of female happiness and advises elaborate adornment of the mind and soul rather than looks. 'Defects you may supply by Art,' he states, but these defects do not have to be bodily only—they are more monstrous when they pertain to lacking other men-pleasing graces.

Politeness in admonitions likewise informs James Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women* (1766), who insists on the goodness of beauty in 'safe doses.' In 'Sermon II: On Modesty of Apparel,' the Scottish Presbyterian minister and poet explains:

> Let me recall the attention of my female friends to a subject that concerns them highly. I hope that hitherto I have said nothing unkind. I would not rob your sex of a single advantage they possess from nature, providence, or legitimate custom. I would not divest you of a smallest ornament that Judgement has put on, that Prudence allows, or the Decency warrants. On the contrary, I would willingly add to your allurements: I want to see you yet more engaging, to see you still more completely adorned.[86]

He, however, subsequently insists on a clear distinction between the adornment of a virtuous woman and 'that of one who has renounced every title to the honourable name.'[87] There is, then, natural beauty, this one is virtuous, and the artificially created beauty—the sign of harlotry. As a representative of the church he is aware of the latest fashionable trends that people become slaves of, and that they are often mistaken thinking that all it takes to attract attention is simply artificial adornment of the body. Trying to 'sell' the idea of modesty as the only necessary adornment of a Christian woman, Fordyce points to the negative effects of enhancing and preserving external beauty, not only in spiritual terms—which one would expect from a member of the church and the genre of a sermon—but also in pragmatic and medical terms. Excessive beauty practices, whatever they are, endanger women's health and shorten their lives, he opines. And then 'bloom and sprightliness, the lucre of her eyes, and the freshness of her form, are impaired by such endless, such enormous fatigue, agitation, irregularity,'[88] which attending to artificial enhancement of natural beauty entails. He calls to his young reader/listener:

> You forget also that dressing up beauty continually, wears it out, that like strength, or study, or business, it requires the frequent intermission of its toils: but that, more than any of them, it is enfeebled by constant exertion, and that the arts commonly made use to heighten, and to repair it, only accelerate and increase its decay, while the complexion, the skin, and the hair, are all unnaturally disguised and tortured.[89]

Fordyce, therefore, calls for moderation in the world addicted to ostentation, and adds that simplicity, 'the sister of Truth' advocated by him, guarantees that 'attraction is eternal.'[90] Such

a stance in life is indicative of virtuous nature and assures a woman's 'resistless charm.'[91] Such female body, then, will be 'understood as exteriorizing an "inward depth."'[92]

Concluding then, in male-authored texts of conduct, represented by Vives, Marriot and Fordyce in the present article, female beauty seems to be a quality which needs to be properly evaluated in reference to morality. No tricks; no meticulous tampering with the 'natural material' may cover up the flaws which are, unlike corporeal beauty, *not* skin deep. The promoted solution, no matter the century the conduct writers represent, is modesty. To return to Tertulian and his reflections on beauty practices:

> To Christian modesty it is not enough to be so, but to seem so too. For so great ought its plenitude to be, that it may flow out from the mind to the garb, and burst out from the conscience to the outward appearance; so that even from the outside it may gaze, as it were, upon its own furniture (...).[93]

If modesty, or chastity in general, is lacking, sooner or later the painted eyes will reveal the fiery flames of the hellish pit and the elaborate hair-dress will not be big enough to hide the metaphorical horns of the devilish Artificer whom the adorned woman represents. Exterior beauty, then, provides a camouflage for the monster that inevitably hides beneath it.

# Notes

[1] Victoria Platt, *In the Flesh: The Cultural Politics of Body Modification* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 31.

[2] Ibid., 39.

[3] Ibid., 34

[4] Ibid., 49-52.

[5] Ibid., 39.

[6] Introduction to Juan Luis Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, eds. Virginia Walcott Beauchamp, Elizabeth H. Hageman and Margaret Miksell (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), xlii-xliii.

[7] Ibid., xvi-xvii.

[8] Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven and New York: Yale University Press, 2003), 3.

[9] Edith Snook, *Women, Beauty and Power in Early Modern England: A Feminist Literary History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 4.

[10] Ibid.

[11] R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 9.

[12] Jacqueline Murray claims that there was the 'medieval notion that women had specific, sexed, marked bodies whereas men had human bodies'. Jacqueline Murray, '"The Law of Sin That Is in My Members": The Problem of Male Embodiment', in *Gender and Holiness: Men, Women and Saints in Late Medieval Europe*, eds. Samantha J. E. Riches and Sarah Salih (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 10.

[13] Ronald E. Pepin, ed. *Scorn for the Word: Bernard of Cluny's* DeContemptu Mundi. *The Latin Text with English Translation and an Introduction* (East Lansing, MI: College Press Inc., 1991), xv.

[14] Bernard of Cluny in Ibid., 103. Italics are mine.

[15] Bonnie Anderson and Judith Zinsser stress that it was the '[f]ear of the male's sexual response [which] became fear of sexuality in general and led to denunciations of the female'. Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser, *A History of Their Own: Women in Europe from Prehistory to the Present, Volume I* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1989), 79.

[16] Bernard of Cluny in Pepin, *Scorn for the Word: Bernard of Cluny's* De Contemptu Mundi, 105.

[17] Pepin, *Scorn for the Word: Bernard of Cluny's* De Contemptu Mundi, xvii.

[18] For instance, in medieval exempla. These short story-like vignettes were to teach Christian precepts by examples, and could be used as parts of a sermon or read/listened to independently. As Gregg stresses, '[i]n these socially contextualized exempla we find mirrored not only the religious tenets of the day but the cultural norms as well,' showing both negative and positive examples of female conduct. Therein, one can also find examples of tales which feature the devil transforming himself into a woman. Other female anti-heroines are punished for their excessive attention and love of clothes with which they not only pride themselves on their affluence but also tempt men, of all vocations, who are an easy prey to their sin-provoking fairness. Joan Young Gregg, *Devils, Women, and Jews: Reflections of the Other in Medieval Sermon Stories* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), 8.

[19] Marcia L. Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages: II. Stoicism in Christian Latin Thought through the Sixth Century* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985), 86.

[20] Ibid., 27.

[21] Ibid., 28.

[22] Book II, Chapter V in Tertullian, *De Cultu Feminarum* ['On the Apparel of Women'], in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, Volume IV, eds. Rev. Alexander Roberts, D.D. and James Donaldson, L.L.D. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 20.

[23] Book I, Chapter VII in Ibid., 17.

[24] Book II, Chapter V in Ibid., 20.

[25] Book II, Chapter II in Ibid., 19.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Book II, Chapter III in Ibid., 20.

[28] While Renaissance poets extolled fair women, their beauty was likewise the source of frustration. To quote Edith Snook, '[i]f beauty's virtuous ideal includes chastity, a beautiful woman will inevitably frustrate the desire of the man who praises her'. Snook, *Women, Beauty and Power in Early Modern England*, 4.

[29] Ibid., 2.

[30] See for instance Suzanne W. Hull, *Chaste, Silent & Obedient: English Books for Women, 1475-1640* (San Marino: Kingsport Press, 1988).

[31] Ingrid H. Tague, *Women of Quality: Accepting and Contesting Ideals of Femininity in England, 1690-1760* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2002), 23.

[32] Margaret R. Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 120.

[33] Finke, referring to Toril Mori, states this when touching on feminist criticism which has had to return to the question 'of representation and literature's relation to the historical texts of medieval culture' in the context of its study of women's history. Laurie A. Finke, 'Sexuality in Medieval French Literature', in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, eds. Vera L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (USA: Garland Publishing, 2000), 352.

[34] Tague, *Women of Quality*, 22.

[35] Miles, *Carnal Knowing*, 168.

[36] Anderson and Zinsser, *A History of Their Own*, 435.

[37] Introduction to Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, ix.

[38] For his opinions on educating women and proper reading matter, see Book I, Chapters IV and V in Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*.

[39] Introduction to Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, xxiv.

[40] Eventually, he also became Mary's Latin teacher. Ibid., xxxiv.

[41] Vives' Preface to *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, 11. Spelling and punctuation in the original.

[42] See, for instance, Vives' exhortation of handling 'wolle and flaxe'. Book I, Chapter III in Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, 16.

[43] Introduction to Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, xxiv.

[44] Sheila Delaney, *Medieval Literary Politics: Shapes of Ideology* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 128.

[45] Book I, Chapter VI in Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, 28.

[46] Introduction to Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, xvii.

[47] Like theologians before him, Vives warns about pride which virginity may push a maid towards, staining her soul. He says: 'Be nat proude mayde that thou art holle of body, yf thouh be broken in mynde: nor bicause no man hath touched thy body, if many men have persed thy mynde. What avayleth hit, thy body to be clene, whan thou bearest thy mynde and thy thought infected with a foule and horrible blotte?' Book I, Chapter VI in Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, 28.

[48] Vives' Preface to *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, 8.

[49] Ibid., 9.

[50] Book II, Chapter V in Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, 114.

[51] Book I, Chapter IX in Ibid., 39.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Snook, *Women, Beauty and Power in Early Modern England*, 28.

[56] This is why she discusses the nature and use of mercury in her women-oriented study of cosmetics, suggesting that all the negative opinions on this ingredient should also be read as part of the antifeminist campaign of depriving women of their right to voice their opinion or practice medicine. 'As medical and alchemical secrets, cosmetic recipes are knowledge inappropriate for women'. Ibid., 32-33.

[57] Ibid., 35.

[58] White lead.

[59] Book I , Chapter IX in Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, 39.

[60] Ibid., 40.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid. The term 'common woman' is thoroughly explained in Ruth Mazo Karrass, *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) and Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven and New York: Yale University Press, 2003).

[64] Book I, Chapter IX in Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, 41. Vives often relates or theologians' teachings and does not clearly indicates when he adds his own words. Since he rarely objects to what he presents alluding to other religious leaders, it should be surmised that these are his own opinions as well.

[65] Ibid., 42.

[66] Ibid., 44.

[67] Once again it is difficult to say here, whether Vives quotes Cato or voices his own opinion. Whatever the case, he seems to support it.

[68] Book I, Chapter IX in Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, 45.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid., 46.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid., 40.

[73] Vives does accept second marriages but like early Christian theologians, he does not advise these to anyone.

[74] Vives alludes to the story of the Old Testament Esther and her apocryphal speech against the royal pomp practiced and enforced upon her by her Persian husband, Ahasuerus. See Name Glossary, 205 and Book II, Chapter VIII in Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, 125.

[75] Ibid., 127.

[76] For the value and meaning of widowhood in the Middle Ages, see Cindy L. Carlson and Angela Jane Weisl, eds., *Constructions of Widowhood and Virginity in the Middle Ages* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

[77] Book III, Chapter IIII in Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, 168-169. The old style Roman numbering in the original.

[78] Book I, Chapter IX in Ibid., 41.

[79] Book III, Chapter IIII in Ibid., 169.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 41.

[82] Tague, *Women of Quality*, 28-30.

[83] For more on the lessons on pleasing, see my ''Ye Virgins, (...) Learn to Please': Thomas Marriott's Lessons on the Art of Pleasing and Ideal Femininity' to be published by Inter-Disciplinary Press.

[84] Thomas Marriot, *Female Conduct: Being an Essay on the Art of Pleasing to be Practised by the Fair Sex, Before, and After Marriage* (London: W. Owen at Homer's Head, Temple-Bar, 1759), 44. In this article I use the manual republished by the British Library (Historical Print Edition).

[85] Ibid., 64-65.

[86] Sermon II in James Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women*.In Two Volumes.The Sixth Edition. Volume 1 (London: D. Payne, 1766), 27. In this article I use sermons reprinted by Gale Ecco Print Editions.

[87] Ibid., 29

[88] Ibid., 37.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Ibid., 38-39.

[91] Ibid., 40.

[92] Pitts, *In the Flesh*,31.

[93] Book II, Chapter XIII in Tertullian, *De Cultu Feminarum*['On the Apparel of Women'], 25.

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# Fame Monsters: Exploring the Monstrous Celebrity and Notions of Beauty in the Work of Orlan and Lady Gaga

*Siobhan Lyons*

## Abstract

The concept of beauty is of particular and somewhat trivial importance in contemporary society. Although notions of beauty have continually changed throughout history, there continually appears to be a benchmark on which to shape expectations and behaviours with regards to one's appearance. Various artists—performance or otherwise—utilise this benchmark in order to undermine and challenge notions of beauty in an age where celebrity culture tends to define trends of beauty and behaviour. French performance artist Orlan, and singer-song writer Lady Gaga both challenge notions of beauty not merely by rejecting current conventions, but by incorporating the theme of the 'monster' or the 'monstrous' within their and physical experiments. They do not simply offer up the idea of the monster as an alternative to common conventions of beauty, but instead replace those standards with the monster; the monstrous conversely becomes an aimage or figure with which to understand their own perspective of beauty. In this manner their respective performance and musical art becomes a novel method with which to undermine traditional theories of beauty by providing a monstrous figure to define their unique brand of beauty. Both women achieve this most acutely in their use of body modification and surgical work, most notably Orlan through her filmed surgical procedures to alter her body. Although both women have been criticised for their liaising of the monster with notions of beauty, for their stark and confronting depictions of themselves, they nevertheless prove fundamental in removing strict and conventional theories on which ideas of beauty are built. Of particular importance is their role in celebrity culture, a realm that relies on standard and trite conceptions of beauty. By incorporating the theme and figure of the 'monster,' Orlan and Lady Gaga help to subvert mundane concepts of beauty in celebrity culture, by challenging the way in which beauty is culturally constructed.

## Key Words

Beauty, monster, monstrous, Orlan, Lady Gaga, celebrity, fame, body.

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*Within ideal beauty exists the monstrous.*[1]

## 1.  Introduction

Perhaps no more than in the entertainment industry is the concept of beauty such an important attribute; film celebrities and musicians are continuously judged by their age and attractiveness, defining the film and music industry as one that is entirely superficial, that is, focused on exterior characteristics and physical bodies. In response to this obsession with beauty, French artist Orlan (1947- ) turned her art making practice upon herself by undergoing numerous surgeries to modify her face and body in what some would describe asa gruesome statement on the beauty industry. By turning body modification and surgery into art, Orlan

transformed the concept of beauty itself, disturbing viewers as she did by filming all of her surgeries. Almost two decades later, music artist Lady Gaga released her debut album, The Fame Monster (2009), beginning the performer's interest in a self-esteem campaign geared toward her loyal fans, whom she dubbed her 'little monsters'. Through her music and appearance, Gaga, in a similar vein to Orlan, advocated the concept of 'being yourself' and decrying the common standards of beauty. This paper will discuss this intriguing albeit rare development in the performance and art making industry of turning against beauty and the beauty industry in favour of the grotesque, alien, or monstrous.

For body and performance art in the postmodern world, creating art becomes limited in its capacity to be novel, or new, and so instead artists have turned their attention to the body, making the human body a workable canvas. French body artist Orlan has frequently shocked her audience with her audacious surgical performances while Lady Gaga's assorted costumes and social appearances have continuously made headlines. Although both Orlan and Gaga have a similar approach when it comes to the concept of beauty and the celebrity industry—as is evidenced by the recent law suit Orlan filed against Gaga for plagiarism, as I will discuss—they invariably interpret the notion of beauty in different ways.

## 2.    Orlan's Monstrous Beauty

Orlan, a French body artist notorious for her gruesome, confronting surgical works, was born in Saint-Étienne, Loire, 1947. From 1964 to 1982, Orlan created a wide range of artistic works that eventually became overshadowed by her more notorious surgical work. These works included the Marches au ralenti (slow motions works) in 1964, the MesuRages in 1965, her nude photographic series, The Vintages, of which only one copy of each photograph is preserved, Tableaux Vivants, a series conducted from 1967 to 1975, and several other performances. Her most famous work, however, is the Reincarnation of Saint-Orlan, a series of plastic surgery procedures which were filmed, showing Orlan herself being operated on, attempting to make Orlan resemble women from famous paintings and sculptures throughout history, including Leonardo Da Vinci's Mona Lisa. Yet Orlan's use of video cameras in surgery was not initially performative; the tactic was first utilised in 1978, when Orlan was given emergency surgery following an ectopic pregnancy. She decided to film the experience and to be awake during the procedure: 'I wasn't in pain and what was happening to my body was of profound interest to me," (cited in Jeffries, 2009). Orlan's interest in filming these procedures therefore is not inherently for the performance sake, but more focused on the actual transformation and visceral experience of the body itself. The method only subsequently became a performative strategy, with Orlan going under the knife—but not anaesthesia—in various operations from 1990 onwards. Jeffries identifies that this process places Orlan in a dual role: 'More importantly, Orlan saw that she had a double role in what was going on: she was both observer and observed' (2009). Asked whether or not these surgeries were done to make herself more beautiful, Orlan replied:

> No, my goal was to be different, strong; to sculpt my own body to reinvent the self. It's all about being different and creating a clash with society because of that. I tried to use surgery not to better myself or become a younger version of myself, but to work on the concept of image and surgery the other way around. I was the first artist to do it. [2]

Asked whether or not it was her aim to change ideas of beauty, she replied:

> I am not sure I can change such a thing, but I can produce images that are
> different from those we find in comics, video games, magazines and TV
> shows. There are other ways to think about one's body and one's beauty. If
> you were to describe me without anyone being able to see me, they would
> think I am a monster, that I am not fuckable. But if they see me, that could
> perhaps change.[3]

Arguably her most famous operation involved having horns implanted in her forehead, which garnered obvious surprise and criticism. Although these surgery works remain Orlan's most well-known, the artist also confronted notions of beauty in her more recent series, the Self-Hybridisations, in which her face is digitally projected onto facial images of non-western civilisations. Of the series, Orlan states:

> The surgical operation performances are at the crossroads of all my
> interrogations of art and religion in western civilisation. The post-surgical
> work continues to question standards of beauty and the body's status in
> western culture and beyond, since it is now done by suture to non-western
> bodies. With the Self-Hybridisations I pursue my work on hybrid self-
> portraiture, digitally grafting the ideals of beauty of other cultures and media
> (sculpture, photo, and painting) onto my own image.[4]

Orlan notes how ideals of beauty are fundamentally relative; this is not to say that the preoccupation with beauty is solely the concern of western culture. Rather, Orlan's work sheds light on the different notions of beauty specific to certain cultures in order to undermine the west's notion that their perspective on beauty is in any way superior or accurate. Furthermore, Orlan argues that her art making practice does not only confront notions of beauty but in turn makes the process, the distortion of face, body, and essentially recognition, beautiful. She states:

> A few generations ago, in the south-west of France, this kind of practice was
> still ongoing. Strabism was created by placing a ball of clay or a shell at the
> top of the nose, in between the baby's eyes. This distortion was considered
> beautiful, and thus contrasts with today's standards of beauty since we detest
> strabism now and try to correct it. Nonetheless those past ideas about beauty
> were also technical productions of bodies responding to ideological, often
> patriarchal, codes. The 'beauty' that I eventually create is on the fringe of past
> and present codes: it inhabits the margins, otherness: I reinvent myself to
> maintain myself as other.[5]

The intriguing notion of Orlan's observation is that she embodies a beauty perceived as otherness, essentially positing anything that opposes beauty, whatever this may be, as other. Through her experiments Orlan both undermines conventional codes of beauty while inventing newer models and understandings of beauty by aligning her concept of beauty with the monstrous. Kauffman describes Orlan as being essentially monstrous, arguing:

> Orlan desacralizes our culture's investment in medicine, which she sees as
> our epoch's religion. The medical ampitheater is our sacred sanctuary. In
> view of the new medical imaging devices that are transforming artistic
> practices, something else Barthes once said now resonates with added

significance: "The Image always has the last word." By seizing control of the medical apparatus, Orlan strips it of mystique. In so doing, she invokes another epistolary classic, May Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Since Mary Shelley's mother died giving birth to her, Mary never lost the uncanny conviction that she had been born of dying parts. Orlan is Frankenstein, the monster, and the Bride of Frankenstein all rolled into one.[6]

Indeed, Orlan does not only strip the medical apparatus of mystique through her filmic performances but in turn empowers the surgical procedure with a blatant ugliness that is useful and, moreover, essential for her uses. By incorporating, moreover becoming the essential monster of contemporary surgical society, Orlan requires her audience to feel uncomfortable in much the same way as an animal rights activist might show what occurs in a slaughterhouse to an otherwise self-protecting, self-censoring society. It is not simply enough for Orlan to undergo these procedures, but to film them as art in order to show the process to her audience, who are, for the most part, completely shocked and revolted. Her aim is to utilise the seemingly monstrous procedure of surgery—an indeed, the surgical knife cutting her face open comes across as indisputably monstrous—in order to show the cause and effect cycle of the attainment of beauty. Thus the notion of beauty in relation to pain is overwhelmingly central to Orlan's work. Rather than solely characterising the monster as psychically ugly with perhaps beauty on the inside, as for example Shelley's Frankenstein, Orlan subverts this binary to create a process through which beauty is achieved through pain and ugliness, furthermore articulating that the beauty we see is indeed something monstrous. As Gilman writes:

> Orlan subjects her body to increasingly complex aesthetic alterations—in spite of the public discussion about breast implants, she had silicone implants inserted near her temples to simulate bulges in the face of Leonardo's Mona Lisa. Her art, however, couples the Western obsession with "perfecting" the body through aesthetic surgery to "the modern love affair with the camera."[7]

Thus although Orlan has been criticised for her embracing of surgery as art, what her motivation seems to be is to invert Western stereotypes or standards of beauty by delving into the same apparatus used to manufacture ideal beauty. The concept of the ideal beauty, however, is integral in this discussion. For the purposes of this paper, beauty is undoubtedly subjective, and yet with each time period or era, the standards of beauty have always been there, they have simply shifted to accommodate differing social and cultural circumstances. Thus, although Orlan purports to undermine conventions of beauty, she nevertheless is forced to interact with some standard of beauty by acknowledging that these standards exist everywhere, but are not necessarily familiar to the West. Orlan's act of inserting silicone into her head to mimic Leonardo's Mona Lisa—and thereby mimic older conventions of beauty—is a way in which Orlan has bridged two compelling aspects of beauty into her art; the first is the bulges being representative of an earlier concept of beauty, while the second is the more contemporary method through which beauty is standardly expected to be achieved.Thus although Orlan's initial motivation may be to indeed subvert the traditional model of beauty by incorporating the monstrous element into her work—for example, by filming the surgical process of alteration— what her work seems to accomplish instead is to reiterate the notion that, however strange or unfamiliar they may be to us, that there has always been a particular standard of beauty, even if it has changed to suit newer circumstances. The act of surgically creating bulges in Orlan's head, for instance, may be no different than if Orlan purposefully gained weight to mimic

Rubanesque, Renaissance beauty, in which weight traditionally symbolised wealth, and therefore beauty, an opposite norm to the contemporary beauty industry.

An integral aspect of Orlan's work primarily involves her audiences' reaction, something which in itself solidifies Orlan's ultimately unfinished product as inherently monstrous, due to the strongly visceral reaction that her viewers experience. As Asma describes the procedure in his work *On Monsters: An Unnatural History of Our Worst Fears* (2009):

> Under local anaesthetic, Orlan will lecture on postmodern theory, reading
> from Baudrillard, Kristeva, and Lacan, while surgeons flay her face and
> perform her rhinoplasty…When the surgeries are completed, the excess bits
> of skin and fat are stored in jars for display at future performances.[8]

Furthermore, Asma asks whether Orlan, through this distinctly grotesque display, in actually turning into a monster:

> To some viewers Orlan is blasphemous. Some critics decry her project,
> claiming that it is playing God to rearrange the face or body that God gave
> her. Is she transforming herself into a monster? Perhaps there is something
> sacrosanct about the natural state of affairs. Then again, it seems far too late
> to raise such a nostalgic objection.[9]

Perhaps the majority of Orlan's viewers would regard the so-called 'finished' product as one of monstrosity, and therefore would substantiate Asma's suggestion that perhaps Orlan is transforming herself into a monster. However, the meaning behind the procedure is much more complex than simply Orlan attempting to defy notions of beauty, although indeed this is a part of her art making practice. As with so many body artists, including Mike Parr, Orlan turns to the body as a source of expression and exploitation in a postmodern frame of mind that sees the traditional canvas as obsolete. The body, therefore, becomes new terrain, and moreover sits perfectly in realm of celebrity culture, whose sole concern is the exterior model of the body. Orlan has often stated that her body is her art, yet contrary to popular perception, Orlan did not choose Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* and the other famous paintings due to their association with beauty. Davis argues:

> She did not choose her models for their beauty, but rather for their stories that
> are associated with them. Mona Lisa represents transsexuality, for beneath the
> woman is—as we now know—the hidden self-portrait of the artist Leonardo
> da Vinci; Diana is the aggressive adventuress; Europa gazes with anticipation
> at an uncertain future on another continent; Psyche incorporates love and
> spiritual hunger; and Venus represents fertility and creativity.[10]

In spite of this observation, what the viewer takes from Orlan's appearance is neither that she embodies the ideal beauty of art nor the supposed character traits of her models. Instead, many of her viewers regard the transformation with utter disgust. Her audience is made even more uncomfortable by the fact that although Orlan is being operated on, she is not only wide awake but is talking animatedly, quoting philosophers and writers while surgeons are cutting up her face, in turn making her audience members outraged or sick. But this reception, Orlan insists, is a necessary element to her art, the monstrous factor essential in forcing people to think. As Davis elaborates:

> Orlan's performances require a strong stomach, and her audiences have been known to walk out midway through the video. The confrontation of watching the artist direct the cutting up of her own body is just too much for many people to bear. Reactions range from irritation to—in Vienna—a viewer fainting.While Orlan begins her performances by apologising to her audiences for causing them pain, this is precisely her intention. As she puts it, art has to be trangressive, disruptive, and unpleasant in order to have a social function.[11]

Orlan continues to provoke disgust, scepticism, and ultimately confusion in the way in which she utilises (or mutilates) her body for the purposes of art. Whether or not her projects are successful in undermining notions of beauty, challenging the status of the body in society, or embracing the monster as a natural state of being, her provocation stands to at least confront her audience in such a way as to make discussion and uncomfortable thought almost an unavoidable task. Orlan thus embeds her message both in her flesh—thereby becoming a permanent mark of her art—and in the minds of people who attend her performances, since the extremity of her art forces the viewer to psychologically interact, even if it is in an overwhelmingly negative way.

## 3.    Lady Gaga's Fame Monster

Lady Gaga, born Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta in 1986, has continuously astounded the musical world through her performances and appearance. Her performance name is said to have been the result of both Queen's song Radio Ga Ga, and a predictive text glitch which changed 'radio' to 'Lady.'[12] Her musical career began in 2005 when she left the CollaborativeArtsProject 21 (CAP21), a musical theatre company, to focus on her own career as a singer and musician, forming the Stefani Germanotta Band (SGBand). Her band played in various clubs and bars in New York including The Bitter End in Greenwich Village and the Mercury Lounge. After being introduced to RedOne, a songwriter and producer, in 2007, Gaga began recording songs that would become part of her musical oeuvre, including Boys Boys Boys, but it wasn't until 2008 that her career and public image began to gain momentum. She established the creative team Hous of Gaga, which, Gaga claimed, is modelled on Andy Warhol's infamous factory,[13] but also, more importantly, launched her debut album *The Fame*. *The Fame Monster* (2009), originally intended to be a re-release, was launched as a standalone album in 2009, featuring eight new songs.

Discussing the concept of *The Fame Monster*, Gaga met with record producer Dr Dre and head of Monster Cable Products Noel Lee, claiming: 'I'm obsessed with monster movies right now and I'm kind of obsessing over the decay of the celebrity and the way that fame is a monster in society!'[14] Gaga's observation of the decay of celebrity alludes to Daniel Boorstin's theory of celebrity in his work The Image: A Guide to Pseudo Events in America (1962). Boorstin claims:

> Within the last century, and especially since about 1900, we seem to have discovered the process by which fame is manufactured […] Discovering that we (the television watchers, the movie goers, radio listeners, and newspaper and magazine readers) and our servants (the television, movie, and radio producers, newspaper and magazine editors, and ad writers) can so quickly and so effectively give a man "fame," we have willingly been misled into believing that fame—well-knowness—is still a hallmark of greatness. Our power to fill our minds with more and more "big names" has increased our demand for Big Names and our willingness to confuse the Big Name with the

Big Man. Again mistaking our powers for our necessities, we have filled our world with artificial fame.[15]

By arguing that society has prioritised and created artificial fame, Boorstin's comment aligns with Gaga's in describing the current celebrity, or the current notion of fame, as society's monster, as it embodies artificiality. By describing celebrities and the culture of fame as monstrous, Gaga does not necessarily posit that it is noticeably grotesque; rather, she seems to align fame and monstrosity on the basis of its artificial nature. In an interview with the Daily Star, Gaga confessed her obsession with the dialectics of death and sex in relation to the concept of the 'monster.' Discussing her album, she states:

I have an obsession with death and sex…Those two things are also the nexus of horror films, which I've been obsessing over lately. I've been watching horror movies and 1950s science fiction movies. My re-release is called The Fame Monster so I've just been sort of bulimically eating and regurgitating monster movies and all things scary. I've just been noticing a resurgence of this idea of monster, of fantasy, but in a very real way…If you notice in those films, there's always a juxtaposition of sex with death. That's what makes it so scary. Body and mind are primed for orgasm and instead somebody gets killed. That's the sort of sick, twisted psychological circumstance.[16]

Death and sex, while fundamentally tying into the monstrous element in classic horror films, also tap into the fundamental elements of Hollywood and celebrity culture. The fetishization of death, and the fanciful promise of vicarious sex in film and media, inherently determine the output of celebrity culture. As Gaga observes, and as has been evident throughout much of mid-to-late twentieth century cinema, the horror or 'slasher' film habitually ties death and sex, for example through the Scream franchise, which was marketed as both scary and sexy. Some of the more notable examples include *Bay of Blood* (1971), where two people having sex are killed with spears, *Jason Goes to Hell* (1993), where a similar fate occurs in a tent, and the film *Teeth* (2007), inspired by the folk tale of the vagina-dentata, or a vagina with teeth. These films, along with many others, do not simply feature death in relation to sex in a mundane manner, but are overtly gruesome, particularly, *Teeth*, which, in following with the folk lore, features several scenes in which the vagina brutally castrates the men as they attempt to penetrate the protagonist. Yet in Teeth, the attacking vagina is later revealed to be a useful weapon, rather than something that is simply monstrous. Discussing the concept of the monster further in her work, Gaga states:

On my re-release *The Fame Monster*, I wrote about everything I didn't write on *The Fame*. While traveling the world for two years, I've encountered several monsters, each represented by a different song on the new record: my 'Fear of Sex Monster,' my 'Fear of Alcohol Monster,' my 'Fear of Love Monster,' my 'Fear of Death Monster,' my 'Fear of Loneliness Monster,' etc. I spent a lot of nights in Eastern Europe, and this album is a pop experimentation with industrial/Goth beats, 90s dance melodies, an obsession with the lyrical genius of 80s melancholic pop, and the runway. I wrote while watching muted fashion shows and I am compelled to say my music was scored for them.[17]

In this respect, Gaga discusses the concept of the monster in negative terms, rather than depicting the monster as useful or even cathartic. Following the success of *The Fame Monster* album, Gaga launched a self-esteem campaign for her fans, dubbing them, her 'little monsters'. On the second on September, 2013, an article in the Independent dubbed Gaga 'the self-appointed Monster-in-Chief.'[18] Thus in her musical career, the use of the monstrous oscillates between a problematic obstacle and a social weapon. Observing Gaga's musical and social performances, however, seems to suggest a more standardised interpretation of the 'monster', that is, as typically grotesque, unflattering, and distinctly opposing common notions of beauty. Although many of her costumes and performances utilise hypersexuality, her more audacious guises include her infamous Meat Dress, which she wore to the 2010 MTV Video Music Awards, and which boats its own specific Wikipedia page. Gaga wore raw flank steak in a statement about, ironically, human rights and beliefs. Appearing on the Ellen Degeneres Show wearing the dress, Gaga claimed: 'it has many interpretations but for me ... if we don't stand up for what we believe in and if we don't fight for our rights pretty soon we're going to have as much rights as the meat on our bones.'[19] Gaga's dress was received with widespread shock, acclaim, and inevitable ridicule. Yet despite the shock with which it was received, this publicity stunt too was not Gaga's original concept. At a concert in 1982, visual and performance artist Linder Sterling wore a meat dress comprised of discarded chicken meat and a black dildo underneath as a statement for both her vegetarianism and stance in sexual politics. Also, in 2006, design studio Diller Scofidio + Renfro designed a meat dress. Thus Gaga's use and incorporation of flesh in her performances is at once intriguing though not anything new. And while she dons the meat on her own flesh, in contrast Orlan's use of her own flesh as canvas provokes a much more visceral and novel response.

Gaga has also incorporated elements of Orlan's surgical art into her own work. Yet while Orlan's plastic surgery was in itself a performative strategy, Lady Gaga, who, it is speculated, has undergone plastic surgery, has not done so in the same manner as Orlan, as a statement on notions of beauty. In mid-2013, Gaga was seen with what appeared to be an altered nose, fuelling speculation that the singer has undergone nose job after claiming plastic surgery to be an unnecessary, vain procedure. In 2011, after her single 'Born this Way' was released, Gaga was seen with prosthetic horns on her face that evidently appeared to be copied from Orlan's earlier symmetrical horns. Derek Blasberg of *Harper's Bizarre*, interviewed the singer in 2011, and asked about the prosthetics, to which Gaga replied: 'They're not prosthetics, they're my bones.'[20] Gaga further stated that the bones were always inside of her, and that they are revealed when she is inspired. Of body modification, Gaga stated she wasn't concerned about it, but stated:

> I have never had plastic surgery, and there are many pop singers who have. I think that promoting insecurity in the form of plastic surgery is infinitely more harmful than an artistic expression related to body modification.[21]

Although Gaga claimed the performance to be an artistic expression, many critics could see the resemblance between Gaga's horns and Orlan's earlier procedure. This habitual re-appropriation of other artists' works is not altogether surprising. Gaga has been accused of plagiarising the work or image of numerous artists, including David Bowie, Madonna, Kylie Minogue and even Christina Aguilera. In this manner Gaga can be seen as an artist who has either essentially copied most of her imagery from other singers, or, an artist who, in a distinctly postmodern fashion, has reappropriated these images and performances to demonstrate a postmodern state of repetition and chameleonic identity. The contradictions here are evident, especially considering that Gaga habitually preaches individualism and difference. Thus her

utilisation of the 'anti-beauty' rhetoric seems to rest on the previous experimentation of other artists.

The Fame Monster features a main cover image and an alternate cover. The first image shows Gaga in black leather, draping it in front of her face, while donning a white mushroom hairstyle. The alternate cover by cultural standards and assumptions is much more strongly associated with the theme of 'monster', showing Gaga with black tears running down her face and an expression of inertia, with unkempt black hair.

Compared to Orlan's more provocative artwork, Gaga's concept of the monster is much more romanticised, here positioned in a traditionally gothic sense. While not necessarily of a lesser use of the monster than Orlan, Gaga's monstrous element is much less thought-provoking than Orlan's, evidently due to the discrepancy between their respective artworks. While Gaga has been heralded as provocative and controversial in the media, most notably for her meat dress, Orlan's art is much more confronting on the basis that it delves into the flesh, the very symbol and metaphor of the relationship between the human and the monster. In Orlan's work, the line between monster and human is much less clearly defined, which is what makes it so tantalizing from both a social and philosophical perspective. Gaga's experimentation is conversely anchored in a safer realm of exploration and never explicitly features something as audacious as body modification, and herein lies the essential element of Orlan's work; by involving her own live flesh, not simply the dead flesh of an animal's, Orlan's understanding of monstrosity becomes more readily apparent as she opens up the dialectics of the life/death binary of the living dead, a living monster, becoming a Derridean undecidable in her utilisation of death, blood and live flesh.

## 4.     Orlan and Gaga's Monsters

The similarities between Orlan and Lady Gaga are not only apparent in the artistic/performance realm, but also in legal concerns. In 2013, Orlan sued Lady Gaga for $31.7 million for plagiarism, believing the opening scene in Gaga's videoclip, Born This Way, closely resembles Orlan's sculpture Femme Avec Tête. Indeed, the similarity between Orlan and Gaga's physical appearance and performances are strikingly similar, but this is not where the similarity ends. What is an integral similarity in both of their art making practices, though undoubtedly executed in starkly different ways, is the disavowal of a standard, elite model of beauty, celebrity and power. Orlan's utilisation of medical apparatus and surgical astonishment at once undermines conventional notions of both beauty and art making practice, but also enforces them, perhaps unintentionally. As O'Bryan writes, by using surgery as the very essence of her art making, certain critics have deemed Orlan to be sending contradictory messages, thereby having distanced herself from the feminist movement:

> Orlan rides a fine line between subverting and applauding cosmetic surgery. Even though she has exposed the extent of the invasiveness of surgical procedures, has mocked the surgical theatre by turning the operating room into a carnival, and has mocked the industry by turning herself into a monster, her use of cosmentic surgery and her willingness to allow herself to be mutilated marginalise her from the feminist community.[22]

Furthermore, O'Bryan writes that 'within the ideal beauty exists the monstrous',[23] a crucial observation that brilliantly identifies the dark, uncomfortable elements inherent in the manufacturing of contemporary beauty. Orlan's work is thus an important statement on the attainment and creation of ideal beauty, executed in an extreme manner, the only manner which could provoke such considerations. Gaga, on the other hand, in a much more camp manner, has

built her career around the promise of 'difference', that is, of attempting to be a unique creature in a world filled with manufactured creatures. Her self-esteem enterprise seems to embrace difference by turning the human into somewhat of a monstrous figure while at the same time unmasking the monster as a figure to be exiled and instead posits that the monstrous, the authentic monstrosity itself, should be embraced as a sign of individualism, perhaps ironically so. As a result, it is altogether unclear exactly where both Orlan and Gaga stand in regards to incorporating the monstrous into their works. On the one hand, both of their performances and identities may be seen as a manoeuvre to discredit the beauty industry—and the standard practices therein—as wholly monstrous. But it seems to be more complex than this, although these artists may say otherwise. Instead, what seemsblatantly obvious is that both artists have embraced the monster, and in so doing have confused certain viewers as to their motives.

The news that Orlan was suing Lagy Gaga produced two predominant reactions, that of simply intrigue and surprise, and one of familiarity and expectation. On the site Complex Art and Design, Justin Ray opens with 'A French artist named Orlan is suing Lady Gaga,'[24] while Mallika Rao, reporting for the *Huffington Post*, stated:

> Those "facial implants" are a sticking point between Gaga and Orlan. The French artist did them first and, in a sense, better—where Gaga's notorious horns were cosmetic, Orlan actually had cheekbone implants surgically inserted onto her temples as part of a series of surgical "interventions" she staged in the early nineties as performance art. When "Gaga first stepped out with what the press was calling 'bizarre flesh-coloured facial horns,' writes French blogger deCamille, there was little 'shock or surprise' in France. "Many people in my Parisian circle immediately were reminded of Orlan. A Tumblr, Gagaorlan, catalogues other artistic similarities'."[25]

Of course, Orlan is widely famous in France, but her reception in the US and wider world is much less mainstream, though it is likely that Gaga has incorporated Orlan's distinct concept of the monster in her work, such is the stark similarity between their physical performance and appearance. Yet while Orlan has retained, for the last few decades, her own unique image, she has invariably undergone drastic changes to her appearance, in a much more extreme manner than Gaga, though both women embody Jameson's theory of the schizophrenic in his work *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), in which he argues that 'with the breakdown of the signifying chain, the schizophrenic is reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers, or, in other words, a series of pure and unrelated presents in time.'[26] Gaga's performance and identity ties into distinctly postmodern aesthetics of performing multiple personas without actually possessing an actual, conclusive identity. Postmodern performance artist Cindy Sherman is perhaps the most notable example of being an adaptable canvas. Her various Portraits illustrate the extent to which her image become chameleonic. Yet it is Orlan who, more so than any other performance artist, embodies the postmodern sense of the schizophrenic identity par excellence, by continually morphing her face and thereby permanently removing the nostalgic, romantic idea of a natural, unaltered façade and state of being.

Any image one sees of Orlan is always temporal, and this is where her embodiment and use of the monstrous element becomes so important. Rather than attempt to remain exactly as she is, which is the entire essence of cosmetic surgery, Orlan embraces physical, irreversible change as a way to defy the practice of maintaining one's youth, beauty, or state of being. The cosmetic surgery industry promises to either delay or even reverse the effects of change to one's face. By habitually going under the knife, and filming this process, Orlan identifies change in

one's appearance as being interpreted by society as the ultimate monster, and thereby becomes that very monster in her work. While not confronting theories of beauty to the extent that Orlan has, Gaga has had an indisputable effect on the entertainment industry through her performances—both on and off stage—in which she advocates a non-conventional perspective on beauty and an appreciation of difference and otherness. In so doing she has not only internalised but thoroughly romanticised the concept of the monster, something which, arguably, Orlan has not at all attempted to do. For Gaga, hers is a softer, more glamorised conception of the monstrous element, and therefore is arguably much less effective and enduring than Orlan's committed body modification. The extremity of Orlan's art makes the presence of the monster more consistent in her work than in Gaga's, whose utilisation of the monster is more often playful, idealistic, and ultimatelyharmless. Both artists incorporate the monstrous element in their works in different ways, whether taking on the guise of the monster themselves or attempting to subvert the archetypal binaries put in place by society and culture surrounding notions of beauty. In any case, both Orlan and Gaga are still regarded as social outcasts, for their respective work, whether playful, or confronting and controversial, nevertheless remains much too threatening for some of their audiences. The idea of the monstrous, or monstrosity in music or art is still regarded unfavourably, for its poses a direct threat to the established and comfortable, familiar values and norms of gender, appearance and bodies. Yet this is what makes both Orlan and Gaga such important figures in society, as they are part of a minority of artists attempting to, if not push boundaries, than at least provoke a different way of seeing the world and the people in it by associating it with dark and ugly elements.

# Notes

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[4] Simon Donger, Simon Shepherd, and Orlan, *Orlan: A Hybrid Body of Artworks* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 113.

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[6] Linda S. Kauffman, *Bad Girls and Sick Boys: Fantasies in Contemporary Art and Culture* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1998), 80.

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[12] India Ross, 'Live Review: Lady Gaga, The Monster-in-Chief Takes a Conceptual Step Too Far', *The Independent*, September 2, 2013.

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[22] O'Bryan, *Carnal Art*,82.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Rao Mallika, 'Lady Gaga Sued By French Artist Orlan for $31.7 Million', *The Huffington Post*, June 18, 2013.
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[26] Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 27.

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Rabbit.© 2013, Alinta Krauth.

# How to Hold On

*Alinta Krauth*

This morning I found a dead hare by my front door.

Liquid from its eye covered half of one brick paver in a moist sheen, a rabbit-sized snail trail.

The curl of its nose, still sweet at this hour, a hooded fruit in a mossy gown.

With a gloved hand I picked it up and turned it over, thinking of what Frithrah would say, An untrained detective surmising subtleties in an unmarked car.

Into a garbage bag, tenderly, but head first, that mossy date crumbled into the ground with an uncoloured sigh.

So strange to be holding a body by the back legs.

A falcon couldn't carry that weight.

**Alinta Krauth** is a young researcher and academic at Griffith University. She lives sometimes in a rural landscape and sometimes in a tourist haven. She is interested in the use of technology in writing and art, among other things. She spends a lot of time with dogs.
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# Legally Undead

## Margo Collins

## Abstract

The following is an excerpt from *Legally Undead*,the first in the urban fantasy Vampirarchy series by author, and long-time contributor to the Monsters Journal, Margo Collins. The novel examples all the monstrous glamour of the vampire with all the thrills, spills, passion and blood-splattering action you would expect from an author in full command of their material and who understands the continual love/hate relationship we have with the 21st centuries monster of choice. Forthcoming from World Weaver Press, 2014.

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In the following scene, Elle Dupree accompanies Greg, her ex- fiancé -turned-vampire, to a vampires' ball in order to save her friend Malcolm from the Vampirarchy council member Deirdre.

## Excerpt

Deirdre was waiting for us at the bottom of the curving staircase. She spoke to us as we descended. 'Ah. Much better. Though I must say, the crucifix is a bit much.' She waved her hand at it with a faint smile. 'Now, please do come join us in the ballroom. We have a fabulous band this evening, and dinner will be served shortly.'

'Wait,' I said, stopping three steps up from the bottom. 'You told me I'd get to see Malcolm.'

'And you shall, very soon.' She stopped a passing waiter and grabbed a champagne glass from his tray. 'Here,' she said, handing the glass toward me. 'Do have some champagne.'

When I looked at the glass, though, I realized that the bubbly liquid inside it had a suspiciously pink tint.

Deirdre saw me examining the drink and laughed. 'It's raspberry, darling.'

I sniffed the contents; it did smell fruity.

'I promise it has nothing in it that will harm you, provided you don't drink too much and end up with a hangover in the morning,' she said in her lilting accent.

The ballroom was packed. More people had arrived while we were getting dressed. Women in sequined dresses and men in tuxedos sat around almost all the tables. Some of them were even eating. Couples crowded the dance floor. The band was indeed very good—they were playing a version of 'You'd Be So Nice to Come Home To' and the lead singer, a tall woman in a slinky black dress, had a deep, smoky-sounding voice.

It would be easy to be charmed by this setting, by all the elegance that surrounded me.

Of course, all the vampires that surrounded me weren't quite so charming. They were terrifying.

And in a room full of people, I discovered that it was easy to tell which ones were vampires and which ones weren't. Some of the humans were easy to spot—the ones who were eating food were easy to pick out as humans, of course, and many of them had bandages or

fresh wounds on various parts of their bodies. The parts where the veins ran close to the surface: the neck, the crook of the elbow, the wrist.

There were other humans there, too, though, humans who weren't eating and who didn't have any visible blood-donation marks. But they were clearly human, just as some of the other people moving around the room were clearly vampires. The vampires tended toward pallor, of course. And occasionally one flashed a fang here or there, particularly when they laughed—an effect that I found chilling. They were mostly extraordinarily beautiful, but then, so were the humans. Deirdre seemed to like surrounding herself with beauty.

It had something to do with the energy the vampires projected, I guess. They seemed strangely brittle, yet almost vibrating with a nervous vitality. I've seen a similar thing with people who were on the verge of an emotional breakdown but attempting to hide it. I've also seen it in people with bipolar disorder. It's a sort of forced, manic gaiety verging on hysteria.

But that energy was combined with an indolence of movement. They swayed through the room slowly, languorously, all the while virtually quivering with some suppressed power.

All in all, it was just about the creepiest thing I'd ever seen—toward the top of the list, anyway, right after 'Seeing My Beloved Eaten.'

I recognized now some of that same energy in Greg himself. It wasn't as pronounced, but it was there all the same. Perhaps it grew with age.

That meant that I was in a room full of old—perhaps very old—vampires.

God. I was in big trouble.

Deirdre herself moved with that vibrating slowness as she led us to an otherwise unoccupied table.

'Please, join us for dinner. And then I shall take you to see your lovely friend,' she said, then moved away from our table.

Almost instantly, a waiter—human, I noted—appeared as if from nowhere and set a plate in front of me. It held a gourmet meal of seared salmon and vegetables on a bed of saffron rice; if I had been able to eat anything at all, I'm sure I would have enjoyed it immensely. A second waiter, also human, brought Greg a balloon-shaped wine glass full of the dark red liquid I had noticed earlier. When he took a sip, it traced a thick, viscous path from the bottom of the glass to his mouth. Any trace of hunger I might have had vanished in a surge of nausea. I pushed the plate away from me.

'How long am I going to have to wait?' I demanded, turning to face Greg.

'As long as Deirdre wants us to. I recommend you follow her suggestion and enjoy your dinner.' He took another long drink from his wineglass.

I forced myself not to gag.

I also forced myself to sit utterly still, my arms crossed over my chest and hugging my crucifix to my body. I might not be able to change anything, but I didn't have to follow Deirdre's orders, either.

The meal seemed to drag on interminably. After what felt like about an hour, I checked my watch. Fifteen minutes had passed. I spent every moment tensed for something terrible to happen. I kept twisting in my seat, watching for someone to sneak up behind me. I felt awkward and exposed. Two different women approached our table and asked Greg to dance. Both of them were human. He declined the first offer, and she left, but not before shooting me a dirty look. I wondered if they knew each other. It was an odd feeling, watching other women proposition my ex-fiancé. It had never happened when he was alive and we were together, at least not to the best of my knowledge. He accepted the second offer. The woman had a large bruise on the left side of her neck spreading out from what were clearly two puncture wounds. Someone hadn't been very neat with his dinner. The other side of her neck was smooth and white.

This was horrible. This was beyond horrible. I was the anti-Cinderella at the Beasts' Ball. All I wanted to do was gather up my charming non-prince and go home.

Eventually I noticed that the crowd was thinning. Almost all of them left in pairs, some in groups of three or four. There was always at least one human and one vampire in each group.

I decided to see where they were going. Greg still wasn't back from the dance floor, so no one noticed when I stood up and made my way to the door. I was still clutching the crucifix, but I had almost forgotten about it until I accidentally brushed it against the back of a woman in a long, hunter-green dress. She hissed and turned toward me, baring her fangs. Her dark hair was pulled back tight from her face, and I could see that her fangs were crusted with an ugly brown substance; blood, I assumed. Gross.

In an instant, the veneer of civility, of humanity, was gone, and I was forcibly reminded that this was no ordinary gathering. I took a step back from her and came up against Greg, who had moved up behind me.

'This one's mine,' he said, putting his hand on my shoulder possessively. I flinched, but didn't move away from him. I was willing to let him protect me until I got out of this freak show.

The other vampire drew a long breath and visibly got her anger under control. I saw her look first at the bandage on my shoulder and then back up at Greg's face. Great. She thought I was a member of the Blood Donation Brigade.

'Then you should keep her on a shorter leash,' she said, nostrils flaring.

'I think that perhaps you should sit back down, Elle.' Greg spoke to me, but his eyes never left the woman's face. This was clearly some weird vampire dominance ritual, and there were undertones to it that I couldn't exactly read. What I could see, though, was the way that strange vibrating energy increased, not only in Greg and his opponent, but in all the vampires who were now standing around us watching the show.

Suddenly the woman laughed—a strangely girlish sound coming after such a display of ferocity—and the tension evaporated so quickly that I could hardly believe it had ever been there.

'You're not ready to challenge me,' she said to Greg. 'Go ahead and take your little pet away. But don't let her out in public again unless you restrain her.' She waved her hand dismissively and turned back to her group of friends. I heard one of her companions mutter something to her, and she said 'Oh, let it be, Angelica; the newly Turned have no sense of propriety. We must give them time to adjust.'

I let out a breath I hadn't even realized I was holding.

Greg gripped the top of my arm tightly and dragged me back to our table.

'Are you trying to get yourself killed?' he hissed.

'No. I'm trying to figure out what the hell I'm doing here in the middle of this Creature Feature. Who are these people? Why are they here? And where is Malcolm?' I whispered just as fiercely as Greg had.

That, of course, was the moment that Deirdre showed up again.

'Oh, my. I hate it when my guests are unhappy,' she said, scrunching her mouth up into a little moue of sympathy. I didn't believe it for a minute.

'Good. Take me to Malcolm and let me take him home. Then I'll be happy.'

'Take him home?' Deirdre raised her eyebrows and looked at Greg. 'Was that part of the agreement?'

'No,' said Greg, 'it wasn't. I just promised to bring her to Malcolm.'

'I see. I couldn't imagine that you would presume to speak for me; I'm glad to know I was right. Well, then, dearest,' she said, addressing herself to me again, 'I'm afraid you're going to have to bargain with *me* if you want to take your friend back home with you.' Her lips

curved up into a little half-smile. On anyone else the smile would have been enchanting. On her, it was perfectly blood-curdling.

'What do you mean by 'bargain'?' I asked suspiciously.

Deirdre laughed—the sort of laugh that under other circumstances might have been described as seductive. 'Let's wait until you've seen your friend and then we can talk business.'

I didn't like the sound of that.

But I still didn't have any choice; there were far too many vampires here for me to fight alone. And I wasn't getting any backup. So I followed Deirdre out of the room.

She led us down the marble staircase this time. I trailed along behind Deirdre, hoping that I could trust Greg to watch my back but not really counting on it. I ended up doing a sort of sideways step down the stairs that enabled me to see both vampires in our little group and still keep my back to the wall.

This wasn't the sort of creepy dungeon staircase I'd seen in countless horror movies. It was white marble with an obviously modern railing—light and airy. The chandelier on the first floor dangled just above the stairway and shined its light into all the nooks and crannies.

The bottom step ended in the middle of a long, burgundy-carpeted corridor stretching to the left and right and lined with numbered doors. Some of the doors were standing open, others were closed. It looked like an upscale hotel, of all things. There was even a cleaning cart in front of one of the open doors.

But it sounded like a down-scale brothel. I could hear people moaning behind the closed doors. I couldn't tell if the sounds were of pleasure or of pain, but either way, I didn't want to listen to them.

Deirdre turned to the left. As we passed the rooms, I caught hints of murmured conversations, low laughter, and more than a few screams. The screams made me wince.

We walked all the way to the end of the hall and Deirdre pulled a key out from between her breasts. She caught my look and said, 'I don't want it to be too easy to get to, pet.' Then she turned the key in the lock and opened the door on one of the most horrible scenes I could ever have imagined.

Malcolm's completely naked body hung from chains against the back wall. His knees sagged so that his arms, stretched to their utmost, took most of his weight. His head drooped to one side. His eyes were closed; he didn't try to see who had entered the room. I wasn't sure he was even conscious.

The bed in the middle of the room was a tangle of sheets and blankets, all smeared with old bloodstains. The carpet under Malcolm's body was also darkened with blood.

Worst of all were the wounds. His entire body was covered in bite marks. Big purple bruises spread out from the worst of them, painful looking quarter-inch puncture wounds, white and ragged around the edges. Several wounds ringed his nipples, another one punctured either side of his bellybutton. There was one particularly livid mark on his neck and what looked like the edges of another one on his inner thigh, though I couldn't see it well enough to tell how bad it actually was. His wrists had been rubbed raw by the shackles holding him, and underneath the chains he was pale.

Instinctively, I started toward him, but Deirdre gestured and a vampire I hadn't seen stepped out from the shadows beside the door. That hiding in the shadows business was about to get on my nerves. He was a huge black man, probably the biggest man I'd ever seen. He was bald and shirtless, dressed only in khaki pants, and his muscular upper body gleamed in the reflected light. If he'd been human, I would have said he was beautiful. As it was, he was just scary. He grabbed my arms, pinning them to my side and effectively holding me in place, though I continued to struggle against him.

'Oh,' I breathed out in a long, drawn-out syllable. 'Deirdre, you godforsaken bitch. Unchain him right now, or I swear to you—'

'If I were you, I'd be careful what I swore to right now, princess,' she interrupted me, speaking lightly. 'It might come back to haunt you.' She flicked her fingers at the vampire holding me, and he released his grip. I sprinted across the room and wedged myself up against Malcolm's side, trying to hold him up to take the strain off his arms. A low moan escaped his lips and he shook his head slowly. After a second I realized that he was saying 'no' over and over.

'Shh. It's okay, Malcolm. Everything is going to be just fine,' I whispered. 'I promise you, I'll get you out of here. Whatever it takes. I promise.'

He opened his eyes a crack and turned his head toward me. 'Elle?' he whispered. 'Oh, God, Elle. Get out of here. You don't know what they do—'

'Shh. It's okay. Don't talk. We'll get out of here together. You can tell me everything later.' I brushed his hair back from his forehead and he leaned into my hand. His eyes closed and he sagged against me.

I looked up at Deirdre, who had watched all of this from the open doorway with a satisfied smirk. Greg stood beside her, his expression unreadable. I had no idea what I could possibly offer in return for Malcolm's release, but I knew I had to try.

**Margo Bond Collins** lives in Texas with her husband, their daughter, several spoiled cats, and a ridiculous turtle. She is an assistant professor of English for DeVry University, though writing fiction is her first love. She enjoys reading urban fantasy and paranormal fiction of any genre and spends most of her free time daydreaming about vampires, ghosts, zombies, werewolves, and other monsters. She has also written a number of academic articles about television-series monsters.

Cecil © 2010, Jasmine Tenger

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# Buxom Monstrosity: Theatricality and the Ostentatious Body of the Horror Film

*André Loiselle*

## Abstract

The low-brow horror film is often criticized for indulging in the display of 'some stupid killer chasing some big-breasted girl.'[1] While this cliché is generally inaccurate, the presence of curvaceous young women in horror is common enough to have become a recognizable stereotype. Rather than merely claiming that they appear in horror films only to appeal to the sex-crazed teenage boys who apparently flock to see schlock, this article proposes that the voluptuous bodies that adorn much of horror cinema mirror the threateningly ostentatious physique of the monster in its subversive challenge against patriarchal normality. To make this argument, I consider first how the monster's impact on the audience results in great part from its theatricality. Subsequently, I discuss how the concept of theatricality and its various implications applies to the notion of buxom monstrosity. Using examples ranging from classics such as Terence Fisher's *The Curse of the Werewolf* (1961) to current releases like *The Exorcist Chronicles* (Philip Gardiner, 2013), I show that buxom monstrosity, in all of its aberrantly captivating theatricality, epitomizes the paradox of patriarchy. The monstrously curvy body stands for the (un)containable feminine figure that hegemonic masculinity finds at once irresistible and repulsive; endearingly fragile and frighteningly potent.

## Key Words

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## 1.    Introduction: Horror's Big-Breasted Girl

Early in Wes Craven's thoroughly self-referential slasher, *Scream* (1996), the main character, Sidney (Neve Campbell), summarizes the clichéd conventions of schlocky horror movies in these words: 'some stupid killer chasing some big-breasted girl who can't act, who's always running up the stairs when she should be going out the front door. It's insulting.'[2] While this is obviously not an accurate characterization of all horror films—there are very many cinematic tales of terror that feature neither stupid killers nor big-breasted girls, such as *Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991) and *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973) for instance—the presence of the bosomy young woman is common enough to have become the stereotype that Sidney identifies. From the many buxom wenches that are featured in Hammer Studio's 1960s and '70s film adaptations of gothic novels to the well-endowed Mistress of Darkness, Elvira (Cassandra Peterson), curvaceous damsels (in distress or not) have been associated with horror. Why would that be? The lazy answer is that voluptuous women appear in horror films to appeal to the sex-crazed teenage boys who apparently flock to see schlock. While this might be partly true, the association between horror and the buxom heroine deserves

closer scrutiny than this dismissive response. This article proposes that the voluptuous bodies that adorn much of horror cinema present a challenge against patriarchal normality comparable to the monster's threateningly ostentatious physique, which disrupts boring ordinariness. To make this argument, I will consider first how the monster's impact on the audience results in great part from its theatricality. Subsequently, I will discuss how the concept of theatricality and its various implications also applies to horror's 'big-breasted girl.' Using examples ranging from classics such as Terence Fisher's *The Curse of the Werewolf* (1961) to current releases like *The Exorcist Chronicles* (Philip Gardiner, 2013), I will show that buxom monstrosity, in all of its aberrantly captivating theatricality, epitomizes the paradox of patriarchy. The curvy monster stands for the (un)containable feminine figure that hegemonic masculinity finds at once irresistible and repulsive.



*Image 1:* Promotional still of Jane Haslehurst in *The Exorcist Chronicles.*
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## 2.    **Monstrous Theatricality**

I shall open my consideration of the theatricality of the monster with a brief reflection on syntagmatics[3] and etymology. If, as Robin Wood has famously suggested, the horror film can be summarized as 'normality is threatened by the monster,'[4] the question that comes to mind is how can we recognize the term 'monster' as the disruptive element in this phrase? How does 'monster' signify its unsettling difference from 'normality'? While there can be many definitions of what a monster is, including Jacques Derrida's statement that 'a monster is a species for which we do not yet have a name,'[5] etymologically the word is related to the notion of being put on display. Derived from the Latin *monstrare*, 'monster' connotes the state of

being shown. The word is also associated to *monere*, 'to warn': the monster is an ostentatious warning sign of impending disaster.[6] The term 'monster' therefore is recognizable as a signifier of threatening ostentation that brazenly challenges the 'normal' syntagma which, by definition, is unremarkable, banal and commonplace. The monster stands out in all its spectacular abnormality before the appalled gaze of the mundane observer who sees it as an omen of terrible things to come. The monster might be a person, object, image or merely an impression. But whatever it is, that which is displayed in all of its unsettling to-be-looked-at-ness[7] threatens nondescript reality.

The term 'monster' is also a close relative to the narratological term 'monstration,' used primarily by historians of early cinema, such as André Gaudreault, to discuss cinema's relationship to the theatre, and its departure from it. In his book, *Du littéraire au filmique: Système du récit* (1988), Gaudreault argues that film creates its meaning through a combination of two broad techniques: *monstration*, or showing in a continuous shot; and *narration*, or the juxtaposition of shots through editing. Monstration is the aspect of cinema that links it most directly to theatre. In fact, what Gaudreault calls profilmic monstration, 'is the equivalent on film of the monstrative work performed on stage.'[8] Although certain types of filmographic monstration, like variable framing, differ from traditional theatrical staging, monstration on stage and in film share the notion of the unity of time and space. But, unlike the theatre, Gaudreault continues, film can escape the limits of monstration through narration or montage, which allows it to move freely across time and space. Gaudreault writes:

> Although filmographic monstration […] can detach itself from profilmic monstration, although it can become autonomous and add a discursive layer to the profilmic, it is still nailed to the *hic et nunc* of the enunciation […] It is impossible for filmographic monstration to achieve what is so simple for the filmographic narrator: namely, to move instantaneously (time) from one place (space) to another.[9]

Monstration, therefore, is the characteristic of film that can most readily be labelled 'theatrical'; meaning that monstration is the aspect of the cinematic text that achieves its effects primarily through a straightforward showing within the unity of time and space.

Given the close etymological relation between monster and monstration and given that monstration is an instance of the theatrical within the cinematic, it follows that the presence of the monster in the horror film should operate as an instance of monstrative theatricality. In other words, the emergence of the monster in the horror film interrupts the 'normal' narrative flow of the film as theatrical monstration disrupts the straightforward *telling* of the characters' stories and imposes the terrifying regime of *showing* on the spectator, who is suddenly trapped in the *here and now* of the horrifying spectacle from which there is no *easy narrative escape*. Whether through ostentatious histrionics or unnatural stillness—both of which looking equality artificial within the otherwise realistic milieu depicted on screen—the theatricality of the monster appeals to the spectator as a *perceptual aberration* that shatters the banal familiarity of ordinary life.

Such moments of monstrous monstration on film correspond to a process of stylistic transformation that dates back to the theatrical precursor of the horror film: the Théâtre du Grand Guignol. In their book, *Grand-Guignol: The French Theatre of Horror* (2002), Richard J. Hand and Michael Wilson argue that horror plays performed at the Théâtre du Grand-Guignol from the late 19th century to the theatre's closure in the early 1960s generally oscillated in style between naturalism and heightened melodrama. The former would prevail during most of the drama, as the 'normal' narrative would unfold, until the 'moment of horror' when the tone

would switch drastically to melodramatic dread. 'It is at these moments that any pretence of naturalism is finally abandoned and the full force of stylized melodrama is brought to bear on the performance,' say Hand and Wilson. The moment of horror represents, through stylistic shift, 'a journey which leads from bourgeois security to mortal danger, from the rational to the insane, from—in effect—Naturalism to Melodrama.'[10] Many cinematic tales of terror display a similar shift, at the *moment of horror*, from the naturalism or realism of narrative normality to the fearsome theatricality of stylized melodrama. In the horror film, the 'normality' that is threatened by the 'monster' is cinematic ordinariness being challenged by blatant theatricality.

Theatricality in the horror film expresses itself in many ways. First, of course, it comes across in the physical performance of monstrosity. But it can also manifest itself through the depiction of the site of horror—the *locus horribilis*—where space, architecture and landscape operate as striking theatrical spectacles. The artifice of the gothic castle in shadowy ruins, the foggy cemetery with broken down tombstones and twisted gnarly trees, and the decrepit cabin in the woods surrounded by the creepy detritus of grotesque depravation are only the most obvious examples of how the theatricality of set design infringes on the realism of the peaceful village or dreary suburb where normal people live. Similarly, radical syntagmatic departures from realism through frantic montage create *showy* theatrical moments of dread that shatter the stability of the mundane and the everyday unremarkably conveyed through conventional continuity editing. More to the point of this article, the theatricality of horror also appears in ostentatiously sexualized female figures. In all of her astonishing physicality, revealed at specific moments of horror, the curvaceous protagonist functions as a brazen display that clashes with the humdrum reality that surrounds her in a way that is not unlike the monster's carnal disturbance of normality. The typical horror-film device of first hiding the monster to build up anticipation and then revealing it in all its horrific glory finds its origins in medieval morality plays like *Mankind* (c. 1470). In *Mankind*, the appearance of the devil Titivillus, who scorns moderation and common sense, marks the climactic point of the show, as spectators are solicited for donations before they can enjoy the excessive display of evil.[11] Like Titivillus, the voluptuous heroine is displayed at crucial moments of theatricality in the cinematic narrative to disrupt the flat banality of realism and astound the audience.

## 3. The Uncontainable Bosom

While the ample bosoms of horror form one of the more common 'show stoppers' in conventional scary movies, they are relatively rarely displayed in the nude. There is obviously a fair amount of nudity in horror films. But more often than not the ostentatious display of the curvaceous female figure centres on the spectacular cleavage mustered by large breasts compressed into tight, strategically designed low-cut outfits. What matters here is that horror seldom showcases the large breast in its 'natural state'. Rather, as in the case of Elvira and other ostentatiously curvaceous scream queens, theatrical femininity is constructed as an artificially cantilevered bust line that assertively sticks out from the unremarkably modest norm, like Quasimodo's cries during Low Sunday Mass. I would argue that the image of the buxom female character whose uncontainable, heaving bosom irrepressibly spills out of her low-cut garments signifies the destabilizing potential of the buxom monster. To quote Amy Jane Vosper, 'An untamed woman, like an untamed monster, can threaten the patriarchal order so the male must supress and dominate any threat before it can destroy him.'[12] The untameable bosom is evident in one of Hammer's best productions, *The Curse of the Werewolf*, which stars the shapely Yvonne Romain as the servant girl who gives birth to the son who is doomed to become a werewolf, charismatically incarnated by Oliver Reed.

Years before the werewolf kills his first victim, Romain's character, only identified in the voice-over account as the jailer's daughter, appears as the mute servant of the old, decrepit,

cruel and powerful Marques Siniestro. The turning point in the first part of the narrative occurs when the Marques makes advances on the servant girl. She forcefully resists him and bites his hand. She escapes the Marques, but is immediately captured and literally thrown in jail. The only other inmate in the dungeon-like cell, an old beggar unjustly imprisoned by the Marques decades earlier, emerges from the dark, grabs the girl and rapes her. The offspring of this violation will become the werewolf. In the first scene with the Marques, the servant girl's indomitable unwillingness to submit to his authority is visually allegorized through a medium shot showcasing her voluminous bosom weightily bulging out of her décolletage. This image of large heaving breasts refusing to be contained conjures up a sense of powerful irrepressibility.

Following the rape, which is not shown on screen, she is seen bruised and scarred. But significantly her bountiful chest still cogently suggests potency and determination. A cut reveals the dead body of the rapist, eyes wide open in terror. It is never revealed why or how the inmate might have succumbed. But visually the girl's hefty bust line seems aligned with the petrified eyes of the deceased, implying a certain correlation between his death and her imposing breasts. She soon manages to escape the dungeon and return to the Marques's chamber. Armed with a sharp instrument, she proceeds to violently stab the old man to death. In this moment of horror, her unrestrained brutality in killing her oppressor is equalled only by the sensual theatricality of her irrepressible cleavage, which suspends the narrative into an image of intensely sensual carnality. After the murder, she flees and eventually gives birth to her cursed child.

While the servant girl bears little resemblance to her monstrous son, Leon, the uncontrollable body of the werewolf under the influence of the full moon is clearly reminiscent of the servant's own unruly full figure as she achieves revenge, giving fleshy form to the concept of uncontainable resistance against repressive authority. The only onscreen transformation of Leon into a werewolf, late in the film, not coincidentally occurring in a jail cell in the company of an incarcerated vagrant, is performed through Oliver Reed's theatrical tearing off of his clothes and bearing his hairy chest. This other moment of theatrical horror performs a grotesque replication of his mother's bulging bust line signifying uncontainable corporeal power. Like his mother, who died shortly after giving birth to the werewolf, the adult Leon also succumbs shortly after his spectacular transformation on screen. In both instances, corporeal confrontation of oppressive normality only lasts the time of a brief disruption.

As is the case for the onscreen transformation, there is a strong element of artifice and exaggeration in the depiction of the servant girl, resulting from the filmmaker's intense emphasize on Romain's stunning curves. Obviously, the few scenes featuring the jailer's daughter are meant to appeal to the heterosexual male gaze. But beyond that, the lower-class girl's large breasts also stand in calculated contrast with the decaying aristocracy that surrounds her. As such, her brazenly protuberant breasts denote unruly otherness in a world of repressive nobility. Like the performance of monstrosity, looming architecture and the use of aberrant editing techniques, the display of flamboyantly heaving bosoms in horror movies is an instance of 'cinematic theatricality,'[13] where artifice stands in conspicuous *difference* from what is narratively presented as standard and normal; for the artificiality of the ostentatious spectacle is central to the pleasure of horror cinema. As Isabel Cristina Pinedo argues in *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing* (1997), 'awareness of artifice, then, is not a flaw but an essential ingredient of recreational terror.'[14]

## 4.    Bosomy Theatricality: A Certain Tendency of the Lower Genres

My contention here is not that all horror films must feature a shapely protagonist displaying miles of cleavage or that only horror films employ bosomy theatricality as a means to challenge boring normality. I am merely underlining what François Truffaut might have called 'une certaine tendance du cinéma d'épouvante'. Indeed, while this tendency is especially

common in horror films, it is far from limited to this genre. The theatricality of the curvaceous body is as obvious in the work of Russ Meyer as it is in the numerous instalments of the British sex comedy series 'Carry On!' What Meyer, 'Carry On!' and horror cinema have in common is that they are all 'low genres'. Sexploitation films, burlesque comedy and cinematic tales of terror are deemed to be facile entertainment that relies, among other things, on curvaceous starlets to achieve their easy thrills and cheap laughs. Save for the notable exception of Fellini, respectable film *artistes* never indulge in the superficial pleasures of overabundant flesh.

It is no coincidence that bosomy performers are associated almost exclusively with the more crass popular genres. For socio-anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu[15] the aesthetic experience linked to good taste (which provides symbolic or cultural capital), is associated with 'difficulty.' Those bourgeois individuals who can appreciate a difficult, avant-gardist work of art display the cultural power of 'good taste.' Conversely, those objects that too obviously or ostentatiously provide pleasure are in bad taste as they can readily be appreciated by the uneducated lower classes. The cheap, easy thrills of schlock horror, therefore, are of a lower aesthetic or cultural value than more 'difficult' art films. Even within horror, there is an obvious hierarchical divide between the simple gory pleasures of, say, David Cronenberg's *Shivers* (1975) and the more difficult aesthetic experience of his more complex, and therefore 'aesthetically superior' *Dead Ringers* (1988).

The same could be said of the relationship between social class and preferences for certain body types. The bodies deemed attractive from the highbrow perspective of the upper classes are those that are more *difficult* to appreciate. Those are bodies whose appeal demands a certain 'acquired taste'; bodies to which not everyone can be attracted. Conversely, bodies whose charms are too easily enjoyed are in bad taste. In other words, an ostentatious female body with large breasts, a small waist and protruding buttocks is too obviously feminine and readily appealing to be of interest for the educated upper classes. Conversely, the skinny, curveless, almost gaunt physique of haute-couture models best incarnates the upper-class ideal of beauty, for only the erudite few can appreciate the sensuality of the waif behind her emaciated surface. Any self-respecting bourgeois man, therefore, should stay away from both gory horror films and well-endowed women if he is to maintain the image associated with his high social status. As Carolyn Latteier suggests in *Breasts: The Women's Perspective on an American Obsession* (1998), according to patriarchal discourse:

> Woman is "the other" and somehow less than human. She is nature with all its unpredictable, untamed power. She is flesh with all its temptations. When she has large breasts, she is even more so […] Small-breasted women, on the other hand, are seen as competent, intelligent, moral, polite and modest.[16]

The large-breasted woman is just too *womanly* for the respectable gentleman to trust her.

The independent art-horror film *Love Object* (Robert Parigi, 2003) provides an interesting take on this cultural association. The film centres on Kenneth an educated, sophisticated, successful but lonely technical writer, who decides to order an anatomically-correct silicone doll to keep him company. When the online ordering service offers him 'full-figured' as an option for his silicone mistress he has a flashback from an earlier scene he espied where his lustful neighbour is fondling a young woman's ample breasts. His reaction to this is immediate: 'too cheap'. Rather than going for the 'cheap' option of a buxom doll, he chooses instead a more delicately proportioned model who reminds him of an attractively timid co-worker, Lisa. Horror ensues when Lisa and the doll start merging in Kenneth's confused mind. What is worth noting here is that *Love Object*, an intelligent, stylish horror film that avoids the cheap thrills of the slasher, features an intelligent, middle-class principal who also avoids the

cheap thrills of a bosomy love object. The more 'simplistic' horror films, which avoid intelligent realism and feature instead grotesquely histrionic monsters, or abnormally silent and expressionless sadistic killers, also tend to showcase the ostentatious charms of deviant women. 'Breasts are attractive,' says Latteier 'and yet there is something disreputable and *dangerous* about them.'[17]

## 5.    The Final Girl's Opposite

The bosomy figure of the horror film is in many ways the *opposite* of the 'final girl', famously theorized by Carol Clover[18] as the tight-laced, responsible, boyish, flat-chested good girl who helps re-establish normality by killing, or at least controlling, the monster in the end. Conversely, the big-breasted girl undermines normality. She is sometimes more sexually adventurous. But this is not her only, or even most important, attribute. More significantly, she is the one who *resists* patriarchy in one way or another and, as such, aligns herself with monstrous forces. A recent film that overtly displays the difference between the goody-two-shoes final girl and her voluptuously subversive counterpart is *Night of the Demons* (Adam Gierasch, 2010), which takes place during a wild Halloween party in an old cursed mansion, as real demons attack a group of fun-loving young adults. From the outset, Maddie (Monica Keena) is immediately recognizable as the final girl. She is modestly costumed, and readily perceived as less overtly sexual and more sensible than her friends Lilly (Diora Baird) and Suzanne (Bobbi Sue Luther), both of whom are dressed as pussycats for the Halloween party and show a remarkable amount of cleavage.

A typically postmodern, self-referential horror flick (it includes scenes that explicitly evoke Clouzot's *Diabolique* (1955) and Polanski's *Repulsion* (1966), as well as a number of more recent scary movies such as the *Saw* series) *Night of the Demons* is more blatantly sexual than most other comparable productions. For instance, in one quick shot, a female demon is noticed deep-throating the devilish horn of a male counterpart. Suzanne whose large breasts are most ostentatiously displayed during the film is the character who is most directly associated with the demons that ruin the Halloween party. She is the only character who is knowledgeable about the curse that afflicts the house in which the party is taking place, telling her friends the ancient tale of the mansion's original owner, Evangeline. As Suzanne seductively recounts, Evangeline unwittingly released cruel and forbidding demons when she resorted to black magic in a vain attempt to seduce an unresponsive love object. After being dormant for years, the demons have been disrupted by the party and return to overtake the realm of tediously hip twenty-somethings.

It is noteworthy that while the finale girl, Maddie, is typically more suspicious and less foolishly promiscuous than her friends—and of course, she is the only one who survives in the end—the character who displays most intelligence about the secret logic of the horror narrative is the character who also displays most abundant cleavage. Significantly, shapely Suzanne is also the character who is killed in the most gruesome way in a moment of truly effective horror, having her face literally torn off by a demon. As part of her gory destruction, which effects her own transformation into a deadly fiend, her breasts are also shredded by satanic claws, in a mixture of atrocious pain and ecstatic pleasure. In the irrational domain of the supernatural, the most conspicuous figure is the one who is at once best informed, sexiest and most gory: she embodies buxom monstrosity, where abundant female charms and destabilizing knowledge are treated as part and parcel of the monstrous spectacle that challenges patriarchal normality. Because patriarchy views the knowing woman *and* the ostentatiously feminine woman, as a menace, she must be disposed of. But it is also endemic to horror as a genre that the threat that must be most urgently repressed is also put on display—however temporarily—in a most attractively disturbing way.

## 6.    Busty Terror

Although she is generally *associated* with the monster, in the form of a lascivious demon or a voluptuous vampire, the bosomy heroine is rarely the actual perpetrator of horrifying deeds. There are, however, some instances where she does wield the weapons of terror. We have already discussed the case of the jailer's daughter, whose sensually savage stabbing of the Marques is a fully justified act of righteous revenge. In other cases, the bosomy killer's acts of violence are less self-righteous and more gratuitous. Often, the full-figured slaughterer is actually possessed by supernatural forces, and as such is not fully responsible for her brutal deeds. The low-budget schlocker, *The Possession of Nurse Sherri* (Al Adamson, 1978), is an intriguing instance of this phenomenon. Denoted through some of the cheapest special effects ever committed to celluloid, the evil spirit of a recently deceased cult leader (Bill Roy) enters the curvaceous body of the eponymous nurse (Jill Jacobson) and compels her to commit horrible crimes. She impales an elderly physician with a pitch fork; stabs another doctor with a steak knife; and almost kills a blind patient before a nurse barges in and stops her. In the climactic scene, she attacks her boyfriend, Dr Desmond (Geoffrey Land), with two meat cleaver and is about to chop him to pieces when the possession is finally exorcised as two other nurses burn the body of the cult leader.

In the end, hospital officials deem Sherri to be insane and commit her to an asylum. As such, Sherri's monstrosity is at once similar to, and different from, the typical serial killer *à la* Michael Myers in *Halloween* (John Carpenter, 1978). On the one hand, the authorities see Sherri, like Michael, as the incarnation of pure psychotic evil who must be incarcerated. But unlike the male psychopath, Sherri's possessed body is female and, in spite of her gory crimes, she still incarnates voluptuous femininity. Consequently, she carries with her a certain aura of defencelessness. She is *not* a 250-pound cold-blooded, faceless killing machine, who presents a massive physical threat to anyone who crosses his path. She is petite, pretty and ultimately looks innocent, even as she commits horrible murders. Michael Myers, Leatherface from *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974)and Jason from the *Friday the 13th*series, are bulky male monsters who incarnate a straightforward danger and can (generally) be unapologetically punished for their atrocious actions. Sherri *is* a menace to patriarchy—she exclusively kills men. But like most other buxom monsters, her threat is paradoxical, for as female her body also exudes vulnerability. 'Women's bodies are socially constructed as 'naturally' in need of assistance,' argues feminist author Kerri Froc.[19] 'Representations of the [female] body continue to hint at passivity and dependency,' adds Thérèse Murphy.[20] No matter how brutal and ruthless she might be, the buxom monster is never just a crudely aggressive beast. She always elicits contradictory responses of fear and pity.

This paradox is made even more evident in the recent 'mockumentary' *The Exorcist Chronicles* (Philip Gardiner, 2013). In the opening sequence, a possessed young woman only known as a 'Vatican Extreme Case Captive' (Jane Haslehurst) is seen beating a priest to death with her bare hands, and later viciously castrating a man who was innocently relieving himself near a tree. As in *Nurse Sherri*, this gratuitous cruelty on the part of the shapely monster against seemingly blameless men unquestionably presents a danger for the established masculine order. And indeed much of this film, which 'investigates' the current epidemic of possession cases across Europe, pits male clerics against devil worshipping women. Yet behind the ferocity of her actions, the rancid filth and foul obscenity caused by the possession, and the vulgarity resulting from the immodest exposure of her sizable breasts, the 'Vatican captive' exudes suffering, sorrow and anguish in an incongruous mixture of terror, loathing and lust. In this role, Jane Haslehurst is simultaneously putridly ugly and pitifully alluring; fiercely hostile and enthrallingly victimized. While hardly a masterpiece of horror cinema, *The Exorcist Chronicles* succeeds in exhibiting buxom monstrosity in all of its abhorrently captivating theatricality as

the paradox of patriarchy. The curvy villain stands for the (un)containable feminine figure that hegemonic masculinity finds at once irresistible and repulsive; endearingly fragile and frighteningly potent.

## 7.    The Paradox of Motherly Voluptuousness

The paradox of the busty horror fiend is also related to the appeal of the nurturing abundance, engulfing warmth and voluptuous comfort associated with large breasts. Ample bosoms embody motherly largesse, overflowing generosity and benevolent opulence. But these qualities are difficult to reconcile with typical representations of women in the horror film. As Barbara Creed has famously explicated, the Mother has tended to be depicted as the most disgustingly abject of all horror creatures.

> The modern horror film often "plays" with its audience, saturating it with scenes of blood and gore, deliberately pointing to the fragility of the symbolic order [the realm of the father] in the domain of the body which never ceases to signal the repression of the mother. […] This is particularly evident in *The Exorcist*, where the world of the symbolic, represented by the priest-as-father, and the world of the pre-symbolic, represented by woman aligned with the devil, clashes head on in scenes where the foulness of woman is signified by her putrid, filthy body covered in blood, urine, excrement and bile.[21]

While Creed's argument does apply to a number of films, the *motherly* can also be depicted in a more ambivalent way, where horrific images can coexist with the nurturing and protective large-breasted body. A good example of this can be found in Lamberto Bava's R-rated *Delirium* (1987), starring well-endowed Serena Grandi in the role of Gloria, the owner of the popular man's magazine *Pussycat*.

As the benevolent proprietor of a successful business, Gloria is caring towards her primarily-female employees and, as such, comes across as a motherly figure, even if she is as youthful-looking as the models she hires. Furthermore, she generously employs her younger brother, Tony (Vanni Corbellini), whom she has had to support since they were orphaned as youths. And, out of pity, she also patiently allows a disabled teenager, Mark (Karl Zinny), to indulge in his sexual fixation on her. But soon, her happy 'family' existence comes under attack when a number of her staff fall victim to a serial killer with a perverse penchant for gruesome photography. In the end, it turns out that the killer is Tony, who has developed a twisted oedipal obsession with his older sister, and proceeded to dispatch all those who (he imagined) threatened to take her away from him. During the mandatory climactic scene where Tony reveals his insanity to Gloria, he demands to see her breasts as an ultimate treat for the jealous child afraid of losing his mommy. In the nick of time, Gloria's teenage admirer Mark shoots Tony in the crotch. Tony falls to his knees before his sister, spews out blood on her torso and rubs against her chest before expiring.

This culminating moment of horror is significant, for it blends imagery of the 'good breast' and the 'bad breast', as theorized by celebrated psychoanalyst Melanie Klein.[22] According to Klein, while the 'good breast' incarnates nurturing abundance, the 'bad breast' reflects the infant's own aggressive anxieties. Generally, in the horror film, the 'bad breast' dominates. As Sarah Arnold explains in her book *Maternal Horror Film* (2013), the notion of the 'bad breast' upon which the infant projects its destructive impulses is central to the terror narrative.[23] This process constitutes a typical 'masculine fantasy/nightmare projected onto the body of the mother. Ritual acts of sacrifice, prohibitions, the process of abjection, all of these operate to disavow the maternal...'[24] As a typical child of horror, Tony does seek to destroy the

paranoid 'bad breast' by threatening Gloria with a knife. But he simultaneously experiences a deep desire to enjoy his sister's 'good breast', her 'rose-capped hills' as he says. And certainly, the film's visuals in that scene emphasize *simultaneously* the repulsive perversity of Tony's psychosis *and* the alluring form of Gloria's voluptuous bust line. Perhaps the most meaningful moment of the sequence is Tony's spewing his guts on his sister, squirting a fluid that is concurrently evocative of milk, blood and semen. In this one shot, Bava manages to evoke at once the twisted horror of morbid incestual fixation, the climax of conventional sexual desire and the comforting motherly appeal of the large breast. But as is to be expected within the peculiar logic of the tale of terror, bloody red rather than milky white dominates the shot and becomes the primary color associated with the large, motherly breast. In this moment of horror, buxom monstrosity appears as the paradox of spine-chilling fear and intense infantile desire, which is ultimately what horror cinema is always about.

## 8.    Conclusion: An Early Cinematic Memory

One of the first horror films I remember seeing as a kid is the Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee vehicle *The Creeping Flesh* (Freddie Francis, 1973). The neo-gothic chiller tells the story of a Victorian scientist, Emmanuel Hildern (Cushing), who develops an anti-madness serum derived from a weird skeleton he brought back from a research expedition in New Guinea. To protect his daughter Penelope (Lorna Heilbron) from hereditary insanity, he injects her with the serum. And of course, she immediately turns crazy and goes on a killing spree. The film itself is not bad, but generally unmemorable, with uninspired special effects and a prosaic sibling rivalry between Hildern and his half-brother, James (Lee). The only moment that breaks the banality of the narrative is a scene in a pub where Penelope, now under the influence of the serum, slashes the throat of an impertinent sailor. His blood spills on the ample cleavage of a nearby on-looker. This is the one moment from *The Creeping Flesh* that captured my imagination 40 years ago and, in some way, inspired this article. To me, the smudge of red liquid dripping on huge, one might even say 'monstrous', breasts is emblematic of the strange pleasure that the cinematic tale of terror provides. Screaming in horror or delight as the sailor's blood spills on her chest, the buxom wench offers her massive cleavage to the camera as either a voluptuous resting place where the weary traveller can lay his head or an overpowering abyss whence one could never return; probably both. This is the theatrical 'moment of horror' *par excellence,* when the tone of the drama switches from the mundane mad-scientist scenario into enthralling terror, aesthetic enchantment and sensual arousal. Buxom monstrosity at its best: delightful fear, spineless lust and uncanny comfort superimposed in a perfect image of terrifying cinematic pleasure.

### Notes

[1] Mark Clark, *Smirk, Sneer, and Scream: Great Acting in Horror Cinema* (Jefferson [NC]: McFarland, 2004), 183.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Here I use the term 'syntagmatics' to refer to the horizontal succession of signs that acquire meaning through their mutual relationship along a linear signifying chain. See for instance, Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), especially Chapter 5.

[4] Robin Wood, 'An Introduction to the American Horror Film,' *The American Nightmare*, ed. Robin Wood and Richard Lippe (Toronto: Festival of Festivals, 1979), 14.

[5] Jacques Derrida and Elizabeth Weber, *Points: Interviews 1974-1994* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 386.

[6] Marie-Hélène Huet, 'Introduction to 'Monstrous Imagination',' in *The Horror Reader*, ed. Ken Gelder (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 87.

[7] To borrow Laura Mulvey's well-known expression. See Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' *Screen* 16.3 (1975): 6-18.

[8] André Gaudrault, *Du litteraire au filmique: système du récit* (Paris: Meridiens Klincksieck, 1988), 121. All translations mine.

[9] Ibid., 123.

[10] Richard J. Hand and Michael Wilson, *Grand-Guignol: The French Theatre of Horror* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002), 37-38.

[11] David Bevington, *Medieval Drama* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), 901, 920.

[12] Amy Jane Vosper, 'Film, Fear and the Female: An Empirical Study of the Female Horror Spectator,' (unpublished MA Thesis in Film Studies. Ottawa: Carleton, 2013), 24.

[13] Timothy Corrigan, *Film and Literature: An Introduction and Reader* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999), 62-66.

[14] Isabel Christina Pinedo, *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing* (Albany: State University of New Press, 1997), 55.

[15] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 469.

[16] Carolyn Latteier, *Breasts: The Women's Perspective on an American Obsession* (New York: Haworth Press, 1998), 10.

[17] Ibid. Italics added.

[18] Carol Clover, 'Her Body, Himself: Gender and the Slasher Film,' *Representations* 20 (Fall 1987), 205-228.

[19] Kerri Froc,'Women's Multiple Rights Claims under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom,' *Feminist Constitutionalism: Global Perspectives*, eds. Daphne Barak-Erez and Tsvi Kahana. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 143.

[20] Thérèse Murphy, 'Feminism on Flesh,' *Law and Critique* VIII: 1 (1997): 51. Cited in Froc, 143.

[21] Barbara Creed. 'Horror and the Monstruous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection,' *Screen* 27.1 (Jan-Feb. 1986): 52.

[22] Hanna Segal, *Introduction to the Work of Melanie Klein* (London: Karnac and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1988), 11-81.

[23] Sarah Arnold, *Maternal Horror Film: Melodrama and Motherhood* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 82.

[24] Ibid., 113.

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# The Bald Beauty and the Alien Beast:
# Death and the Maiden in *Alien 3*

## Kevin McGuiness

## Abstract

David Fincher's 1992 film *Alien 3* fused a medieval sensibility with a cyberpunk aesthetic, creating an interesting intersection of Christian ideas with a nihilistic atmosphere. The film invokes a number of concepts dating from the Middle Ages, including the image of Death and the Maiden, a popular motif which depicts the meeting of a young attractive woman with the macabre figure of Death. This tableau likely developed out of the Biblical story of Eve and the serpent, whereupon Death assumes the role of the snake. The Alien organism is likened to the character of Death both visually and descriptively within the film, as it is often referred to as a 'dragon', a fantastical creature synonymous with serpents. Likewise, once she arrives upon the planet 'Fury' 161, Ripley is cast in the role of Eve, and her sexual nature is viewed with suspicion by the inhabitants of the prison colony. As the film progresses, Ripley begins to transgress the gender boundary, forging relationships with the male inmates and assumes a more assertive position as both leader and saviour to her comrades, adopting a role similar to the Virgin Mary. Ripley is ultimately able to transcend the virgin-whore paradigm of the pervasive patriarchal order on 'Fury' 161 and assumes control of her own destiny, conquering the figure of Death itself and destroying the Alien species.

## Key Words

Death, maiden, life, *Alien 3*, Ripley, David Fincher, Sigourney Weaver, Eve, Virgin Mary.

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## 1.    Introduction

In 1992, *Alien 3* was released to lukewarm reviews and disappointing box office sales, the nihilistic and Gothic world of David Fincher's film failed to grasp the public's interest in the same fashion as the two previous films of the franchise. However Fincher's macabre creation introduces many fascinating ideas concerning the relationship between the films protagonist, Lt. Ellen Ripley, and the Alien species with which she wages combat. Adopting a medieval tone, the film invokes numerous religious concepts concerning womanhood and maternity pervasive during the Middle Ages. Ripley plays a multi-faceted and layered part within the overall narrative, straddling the role of both the 'fallen woman' and the heroic martyr. Cast as both Eve and the Virgin Mary, she represents the progenitor of the Alien species, and an intermediary figure that embodies both the human and Alien realm, as her body becomes a battleground for the future of all human life.

Through Ripley's evolving relationship with the Alien creature, numerous medieval themes are invoked and reinterpreted within a cyberpunk milieu. Fincher's film ultimately conflates and reconfigures the historical motifs of Death and the Maiden, and Eve and the Serpent. Within *Alien 3*, the creature is envisioned as a manifestation of the serpent from the

Garden of Eden, while Ripley is cast in the role of Eve. Her kinship with the Alien species functions as a representation of her role as a contaminated figure that carries within her the future of the monstrous organism. The film casts Ripley and the Alien in diametrically opposing roles while simultaneously aligning them in a battle for physical and spiritual supremacy. Ultimately, Ripley is able to overcome the passive role of the traditional maiden, and conquer Death through her generative capacities as a woman and her connection to the force of life. Employing the writings of such theorists as Barbara Creed, John Phillips, and Jane Ussher, the manner in which director David Fincher implicitly invokes archaic concepts connected with women and death within *Alien 3* are uncovered.

The film merges elements of the cyberpunk aesthetic with a severe medieval atmosphere dominated by patriarchal authority. Though the plot of *Alien 3* does not include any typical cyberpunk topics, namely biological computer chips, governments run by multinational corporations, and innovative futuristic weaponry, it does borrow a great deal from the style of the genre.[1] The goggles, heavy trench coats and dystopic sensibility of 'Fury' 161 echo many of the qualities pervasive within the writings of Bruce Sterling, William Gibson and Philip K. Dick. These elements align beautifully with the apocalyptic medieval sensibility present within the film. The depressing tone of the picture is almost palpable in the opening shots of the bleak and arid planet. This is a world with archaic living conditions which force Ripley to shave her head and genitals, and salvage scraps of malfunctioning technology from rubbish heaps. The desolation of 'Fury 16' is emphasized in the trailer for the film which describes the planet as 'a world where the sun burns cold, and the wind blows colder'.[2] Indeed, *Alien 3* is an extremely introspective and dark film which focuses on themes of suffering, torture and 'the battle between the flesh and the spirit'.[3] Vincent Ward, the initial creator of the film, was inspired to construct this world based on the paintings of Gothic artist Hieronymus Bosch (c. 1450-1516) whose images of heaven and hell rank among the most vivid the world has ever seen.[4] The monastic conditions, epitomized by the shaved heads of the inmates and the religious rhetoric espoused by many of the planet's inhabitants evoke a medieval atmosphere. These characteristics of the Middle Ages are seamlessly merged with elements of the cyberpunk genre, illustrated in the barcodes which adorn the heads of the prisoners, and the heavily industrialized aesthetic of both the wardrobe and scenery in the film.

The overarching mood of *Alien 3* is nihilistic in nature, as the opening of the film documents the impregnation of Ripley which will result in her demise and the end of the *Alien* series. The fate which Ripley has struggled to escape since her ordeal with the Alien species began is realized within the first few minutes.[5] She cannot physically survive the alien's inevitable emergence, and since her deepest impulse throughout the series has been to stake her spiritual identity upon her refusal to be penetrated by the alien, her inclination is to kill herself.[6] Everything that occurs within the film is rendered futile by this opening scene, as the events which follow will amount to nothing more than a prolongation of the inevitable.[7] The central theme of the film is closure, and the conclusion of the *Alien* series.[8] The film therefore operates as a narrative concerning the struggle to attain dignity in the face of insurmountable odds and to preserve some sense of autonomy and respect in hopeless conditions.

The sparse visuals of the film parallel the sombre atmosphere and succeed in creating a depressing and melancholy world located at the end of the universe. The grey palette of the living quarters contrasts the burning yellow of the work facility, emblematic of human existence as a choice between living death or hell. 'Keep it dark!' Fincher constantly repeated during filming, an order which resulted in the film's Gothic look rife with decay.[9] Even Ripley's appearance is not spared from harsh treatment; her head is shaved as a result of lice on 'Fury' 161 and she is reduced to bare skin and bone to discover the indivisible essence of her character.[10] With her bald head and grey clothes Ripley resembles the ex-prisoners as well as

the Alien.[11] This visual likeness between Ripley and the beast is more than accidental, as it speaks to the deeply rooted biological and psychological affinity which the villain and heroine share.

## 2.    Ripley and the Alien

Within *Alien 3* the relationship between Ripley and the Alien species evolves dramatically, as Fincher establishes a kinship between both parties on both a physical and symbolic level. Ripley's shaved head resembles the streamlined physiognomy of the Alien creature, and serves as a visual indicator of their familial ties, which are revealed during the latter half of the film. In many ways the creature in *Alien 3* represents 'a dark physical and psychological mirror of [Ripley],' thereby transforming her confrontation with the beast into a struggle for selfhood.[12] Ripley is the Alien's queen, the source of its own life, and the successful 'birth' of the Alien foetus will ensure the continuation of the species.[13] Her pregnancy is 'sensed' by the Alien, who refuses to harm Ripley throughout the film. This turn of events is the fulfilment of Ripley's greatest nightmare, and the realization of a fear she has harboured since she first encountered the Alien, namely the fusion of her own flesh and blood with that of the sinister Other. This idea is illustrated through the employment of visual cues by director David Fincher, who establishes the symbiotic nature of the dynamic shared by Ripley and the Alien.

Ripley's increasing association with the Alien creature functions as a reminder of the monstrous aspects of the female body and its generative capabilities. Through Ripley's maternal ties to the Alien species, she gradually becomes a physical manifestation of the abject. In her book *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva argues that the abject stands for that which we most dread, the object of primal repression. The abject represents the hidden, unacknowledged, and feared parts of society, that which disturbs identity, system, and order, the 'Other' against which normality is defined.[14] Although the abject is ultimately part of the individual, it is rejected and expelled in order to protect the boundaries of the self.[15] Throughout history, and across cultures, the reproductive body of woman has provoked fascination and fear. It is an entity deemed dangerous and defiled, yet also a body which provokes adoration and desire, enthralment with the mysteries within.[16] In Ripley's chest, next to her heart, lies darkness, the beast, and the evil which threatens to transforms her body into a monstrous object that is to be discarded when her dark child is born. As the film progresses, the gestating Queen and Ripley begin to merge until they are viewed as one single entity.[17] Ripley's body now belongs to the narrative of demonic possession, supernatural rape, and monstrous motherhood.[18] Her lengthy battle with the Alien creature leads her to the devastating realization of her deep-rooted psychological and biological connection to the beast and the monstrous aspects of herself.

## 3.    The Alien as Dragon/Snake/Death

Throughout *Alien 3*, the Alien creature is described using antiquated and medieval terms, often referred to as a 'dragon' or 'beast,' emphasizing the diabolical and monstrous aspects of the organism. The creature becomes a blank canvas for the male prisoners of Fiorina 161, on which they project their deepest fears and fantasies. The symbol of the dragon, often used analogously to describe the creature, has strong religious connotations and has become synonymous with the Biblical image of the serpent from the Book of Genesis. Due to the diabolical aspects of the Western dragon's character, as well as its serpentine physical attributes, the dragon is often conflated with the snake, and by extension, the Devil. The dragon is not only monstrous and sinister but also fabulous, and thus represents the paradoxical nature of evil.[19] The Western dragon is a demonic image linked with hell, personifying the vast

menacing powers of the dark realm.[20] Spitting fire, demanding sacrifices, and crawling in filth, most Western dragons are identified as Satan incarnate.[21] Similarly, in *Alien 3* the irredeemable and anarchic nature of the Alien organism is explained in religious and mythical term, as illustrated by Golic's description of the dragon which 'slaughtered [his comrades] like pigs.'[22] Such remarks amplify the supernatural and malevolent aspects of the Alien, and cast the creature in a demonic light.

The Alien also personifies the Death force, and H. R. Giger's design for the creature shares many physiognomic and symbolic characteristics with medieval renderings of the figure of Death. Throughout Western history, Death is usually depicted as a sinister skeletal figure, riding on a pale horse, hooded and wielding a scythe.[23] His regalia often includes an hourglass and he is occasionally in the company of a young maiden who he is kissing or embracing.[24] Death generally functions as a manifestation of the serpent that tempted and seduced Eve, and his skeletal form is often rendered alongside images of snakes to make this relationship evident. The exoskeleton of the Alien creature is eerily reminiscent of the rotting appearance of Death, and the creature's animalistic claws echo Death's cloven hooves.[25] Similarly, much like the allegorical figure of Death, the creature in *Alien 3* appears to subsist not only upon the flesh but also the execution of the inhabitants on 'Fury' 161, killing indiscriminately and without mercy.[26] These qualities clearly link the Alien organism with the abstract figure of Death, adding a chilling and mythic aspect to this malicious creature.

## 4.    Ripley as Eve/Virgin Mary

As the Alien metaphorically adopts the role of the dragon/serpent/Death, conversely, Ripley is cast as the Biblical figure Eve. Ripley is viewed as both victim and conspirator by her peers in the film, as she carries within her the offspring of the Alien species. This liminal status will mark her out among the other inhabitants of 'Fury' 161 and bring to light the complicated relationship that she has shared with the Alien species since their first encounter in Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979). As Ripley functions as a surrogate mother for the Alien Queen, she represents a perversion of the life force and a liminal figure whose status is never fixed. This affiliation between Ripley and the Alien mirrors the alliance shared by Eve and the serpent and invokes certain notions connected to sin, sexuality and depravity.

Eve and the serpent share an implicit kinship and have become synonymous within Judeo-Christian iconography, a sentiment which is echoed through the relationship between Ripley and the Alien creature in Fincher's film. The triad between Eve, the serpent and Satan is evident in numerous interpretations of the story recounting the expulsion from Eden. The association of woman with the Devil evolved from readings of Genesis that identified the serpent as Satan in disguise. Within Western Christianity, the serpent is the symbol of evil and tempted Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, initiating the Fall.[27] Once Eve has consumed the fruit, she becomes conscious of her sexuality. The serpent is therefore regarded as a powerful symbol for the connection between evil and sexuality, and Eve thus became the vehicle for the intrusion of lust into the created order.[28] Therefore, what had originally been a dialogue between Eve and the snake evolved into a conspiracy between Eve and the Devil.[29] Eve has therefore come to be viewed as Satan's familiar, and she herself has at times been depicted as the serpent in paradise,[30] as the creature represents her psychic alter-ego.[31] Similarly Ripley and the Alien are bracketed together within the film, painted as both opponents and collaborators, as Ripley shares a biological connection with the creature which is inescapable.

The basic storyline of Eve and the serpent is symbolically reiterated within the opening sequence of *Alien 3* in which Ripley's peaceful hiatus in hypersleep is violated by the creature which inseminates her. At the outset of the film Ripley resembles Sleeping Beauty slumbering in her cryochamber, enjoying a peaceful break after her battle with the Alien hive on LV-426.

Her descent into Hell occurs once she is violated by an Alien organism, resulting in an electrical fire and the evacuation of her cryotube, as well as those of her comrades. She is expelled from the paradisiacal surroundings of the ship Sulaco and relegated to the arid bitterness of 'Fury' 161, much as Eve was cast out of Eden. However there is one small caveat which separates Ripley from Eve, namely the fact that Ripley is not a willing participant in her 'fall from grace,' as her impregnation is tantamount to rape. This lack of complicity causes a symbolic schism between the Alien organism and Ripley, and complicates their relationship as the film progresses. Though Ripley is biologically aligned with the Alien species, her allegiance is clearly pledged to the human race, permitting her a liminal status as both humanity's saviour and its potential destroyer. This dual state is epitomized by Ripley's symbolic role throughout the film as the monstrous mother. The fact Ripley's physical self has been corrupted is made evident through the initial images when she is brought to the infirmary on 'Fury' 161. She appears unclean, fallen and is depicted covered with grime and juxtaposed with grotesque images of death.[32] However the fact that she is unconscious and not a willing agent in the conception of the Alien Queen complicates her role and causes her status within the film to fluctuate and evolve as the narrative progresses.

Ripley is viewed with suspicion immediately following her arrival on 'Fury' 161, and once the presence of the Alien is detected, she is quickly scapegoated as the cause of the men's demise. The planet which Ripley's ship collides with is inhabited by violent convicts devoted to their zealous faith and they view the presence of a woman as a threat to their convictions. Her arrival releases latent sexual desires and she is treated with both reverence and revulsion by the inmates. These men have no desire to expose themselves to their old libidinal temptations, making Ripley an unwelcome and potentially dangerous guest.[33] In Fincher's film, Ripley has brought with her the serpent that will destroy the men's carefully preserved Eden.[34] This is evidenced in Ripley's first interaction with the inmates in the mess hall; as she moves softly around the cafeteria, one of the men crosses himself, as if to guard against the evil she presents.[35] Likewise, at a later point in the film during a group meeting, Morse accuses Ripley of colluding with the creature when he states 'she's the one that brought the fucker'.[36] Ripley is stigmatized as Woman the Sin, based on religious ideology, which equates her with the Alien, the physical incarnation of evil.[37] However as circumstances get progressively worse, she is also looked to as the only hope for the men's survival, and the convicts gather around Ripley for guidance and council like helpless children.

Ripley embodies numerous roles throughout the course of *Alien 3*, and as the film progresses her position in relation to the inmates takes on increasingly heroic facets. Specifically, her persona begins to merge aspects of the prominent Biblical figure Eve with her thematic successor, the Virgin Mary. Once it is discovered that an alien foetus is gestating within her body, Ripley assumes a messianic role akin to the Virgin. This progression makes perfect sense conceptually, as within the Judeo-Christian tradition, Roman Catholics came to believe that the Virgin Mary transcended the disobedience of Eve and vanquished the serpent (represented in the film as the Alien), which was synonymous with evil, and emblematic of death.[38] According to Genesis, the serpent beguiled Eve, and God put enmity between the serpent and Eve's progeny. However the Virgin Mary, one of Eve's seed, defeated the serpent, a being which deprived humankind of immortality. The Virgin Mary in Catholic sacred art is often depicted as treading on a serpent that is also called the dragon, Satan, or Lucifer.[39] In her function as Virgin of Mercy, Mary is a figure representative of the triumph over the 'bad' death of sin and decay introduced by Eve. She is a mediator for the living, sheltering the penitent under her cloak, an intercessor before God for the souls of the dead at the Last Judgement. Because she is the source of healing, consolation, and reprieve, she operates as a beacon figure over the sphere of Purgatory, a liminal realm reminiscent of the world in *Alien 3*.[40] Ripley's

association with the Virgin Mary is evidenced in numerous scenes, particularly in her suicidal plunge into the furnace at the conclusion of the film. Her affiliation with the Virgin allows Ripley to rise above the degrading and monstrous aspects of her violated flesh and attain spiritual transcendence.

The Christian imagery of Ripley's death, diving into the flames of the furnace with her arms outstretched on an invisible cross, implies her role as the redeemer of the lost souls of 'Fury' 161. As she falls, the Alien Queen bursts from her chest, and her arms close around it, in a final black parody of the maternal gesture, holding it close and ensuring that it falls with her into the fire.[41] Ripley caresses it gently in her gloved hands, and lays its crowned head on her breast, as if to suckle it.[42] This image is eerily reminiscent of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, with the Alien Queen infant taking the place of the symbolic, exposed heart.[43] Through this action, Ripley moves beyond evil into love, a love that can even encompass the being that has killed her. The sun rises on Fiorina as she is delivered into the flames, indicating the ever-revolving interaction between light and darkness.[44] Ripley's final sacrificial act serves to solidify her role as a martyr for humankind, invoking the maternal and selfless image of the Virgin Mary.

Despite Ripley's association with both the Virgin Mary and Eve, her role in *Alien 3* ultimately operates within a liminal realm which escapes the rigid binary of the virgin and the whore paradigm placed upon her by the male populace of 'Fury' 161. Reading Ripley's role as simply a reiteration of antiquated notions connected to womanhood would be purely reductive; her character within the film is far more varied and layered, offering a vivid rendering of a woman in a state of crisis. As Cynthia A. Freeland points out in the *Naked and the Undead*, Ripley's femininity is relevant to the *Alien* films, but even more important is her humanity.[45] Ripley is constructed as a liminal body, both the whore-destroyer and the good woman saviour of humanity.[46] Her intermediary status even applies to her appearance, as she appropriates the prisoner's look of the shaved head, gloved hands, and masculine dress indicating a blatant transgression of sexual and gender barriers.[47] Similarly, Ripley infiltrates the male ranks of the religious order, communicating and forging bonds with the inmates at Fiorina 161, resulting in her elevation to the position of leader. She becomes the phallic woman, and her strength, knowledge, experience, and training permit her access into the misogynistic ranks of the inmates.[48] As the plot progresses, Ripley assumes an increasingly powerful and authoritative role within the film's narrative, operating as both a leader and a saviour.

## 5.    Death and the Maiden

Ripley's role as a benefactor to humanity and an embodiment of the life force is starkly contrasted by the Alien creature which represents the antithetical state of death. They are sworn adversaries, yet their opposition connects them, as they are tied together in a physical and spiritual battle for the future of the universe, as Ripley points out 'if [the Alien] gets off this planet, it'll kill everything.'[49] The kinship shared by protagonist and villain in this film is emblematic of the eternal struggle between light and dark, good and evil, life and death. Both are bound to the other, and must fulfil their role in a disturbing interplay which resembles a macabre dance of death. Ripley resigns herself to her fate which is inextricably tied to her symbolic and physical adversary, the personification of her own morbidity, the Alien.

The pairing of Ripley and the Alien is an iteration of a symbolic union that has a lengthy tradition within the West connecting women with the force of Death. This trend seems to have reached its zenith during the Middle Ages with the advent of the Death and the Maiden motif. This type of image developed during the late medieval and early Renaissance period and was catalyzed by a cocktail of historical events, including plague and famine. Between 1347 and 1351, the bubonic plague had decimated the population of Europe by some 25 per cent. Fears of

the seemingly ubiquitous Black Death, and the preoccupation with mortality understandably gave rise to consternation which was manifested in visual depictions of Death.[50] Within rendering of Death and the Maiden, the beauty of the young woman is paired with that of a rotting corpse. The female's youthful form evokes notions of purity and unity, offering the viewer the false promise of the obliteration of death's ubiquitous threat.[51] However this beauty only vanquishes Death superficially,[52] as it is constructed simply to mask decay, not to destroy it.[53] The mother's gift of life is ironically conflated with the mirror image of Death,[54] as it represents the darker aspects of her capacity for birth. Certainly in the Judeo-Christian tradition the first woman, Eve, from whom all descend, is also the woman who, through her disobedience, brought death into the world. She is subsequently punished for her transgression through her biological function as life-giver.[55] Woman therefore gives birth to death because she cannot confer immortality on her children and in a paradoxical twist, by giving life, woman also ensures death.[56] It is for these reasons that the figure of the young maiden is often coupled with that of Death, in an embrace which signifies the collision of hope and nihilism.

Within renderings of the Death and the Maiden motif, the figure of the young female functions as the visual embodiment of sex, and metaphorically draws Death to mankind. Within particular renderings of this motif, there is even the suggestion that, far from rejecting death's advances, she permits or even encourages them. In these images, the female figure is depicted in increasingly suggestive poses and, at the same time, punished for her sexual freedom.[57] The figure of the young maiden and Death are at once dichotomous and unified, representing opposing sides of the same force, namely life and death. The youthful woman is connected to her male counterpart who functions as a constant reminder of her future. The meeting of Death and the Maiden ultimately represents the eerie merging of death and sexuality.[58] Thus, Death is often depicted as a lover, metaphorically combining the two consequences of the Fall, death and sexuality, both products of Eve's diabolical act.[59] The disturbing and enduring relationship between Death and the Maiden involves many of the same properties observed in the bond shared by Ripley and the Alien.

At numerous points within *Alien 3*, the motif of Death and the Maiden is implicitly invoked through the visual rendering of a psychological and biological kinship between protagonist and villain. Death, personified by the Alien, faces Ripley in many scenes and allows her to live, as she represents the future of its species and functions as a surrogate womb.[60] Following the death of Doctor Clemens, Ripley's love interest within the film, the beast approaches Ripley, looming over her and protracting its phallic inner jaw against her soft cheek, as though preparing for some sort of sexual encounter. The heavy breathing of the creature sways between sensuous embrace and violent attack, and Ripley quivers under the weight of the monster. The juxtaposition of the two faces is a study in polarity and alignment: white and black, attacking and defending, alien and human, they appear drastically different, and yet similar. Not only are the heads of both characters framed together in a loose mirror image, but their open mouths, slick shiny skin, and rigid lines all suggest an odd affinity between these two beings. Evil and good, darkness and light, they could be opposites, or perhaps two complementary parts of one entity.[61] This tableau illustrates the central focus of *Alien 3* which is the perverse and permanent connection between torturer and victim, body and spirit, Death and the sacrificial Maiden.[62] However, whereas in traditional renderings of Death and the Maiden it is the young woman who is victimized and rendered silent, at the conclusion of *Alien 3*, Death itself is conquered and destroyed.

## 6.   Conclusion

Ripley is able to destroy the symbolic figure of Death through her liminal status as the carrier of the Alien seed. Though the curse of being impregnated by the Alien species is a

horrendous burden for her to bear, it allows her to manipulate the creature's instinctive responses. The Alien's unwillingness to harm Ripley in her 'pregnant' state is used as a means of entrapping the creature at the conclusion of the film, luring it into the bowels of the refinery before pouring hot lead over it. Utilising the protective instincts of the Alien creature to destroy it represents the assertion of humanity over monstrosity, and the subversion of Ripley's 'victimized' state as a survivor of rape. Though Ripley's maternal link to the Alien species may threaten to transform her into the monstrous, she is able to retain her humanity through the destruction of the beast. This triumph is manifested in Ripley's final act of martyrdom, casting herself into the flames of the blazing inferno that consumes the refinery. Her death represents the complete reclamation of her humanity and her transcendence beyond the physical realm, embracing her monstrous child like a newborn baby as her body is destroyed by the fire.

The employment of the Death and the Maiden theme throughout *Alien 3* serves to add to the symbolic vocabulary of this motif. Within the film, Ripley and the Alien reach archetypal status, invoking ancient themes concerning the perpetual cycle of life and death as it relates to the Judeo-Christian faiths. However Fincher's use of the Death and Maiden motif within *Alien 3* also represents a turning point in this narrative tradition. Eve is no longer a 'fallen woman,' a helpless victim dependent upon her beauty to seduce Death, but instead she is an active agent in her own destiny. Through the Alien foetus which Ripley carries, representative of her generative capabilities, she is able to usurp power from the patriarchal order which surrounds her and choose her own fate.[63] Whereas in historic visions of Death and the Maiden the female is defeated by her adversary, either physically or spiritually, Ripley's life-giving power triumphs and she is able to assert her will even over Death.

## Notes

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# Sweetest Tongue Has Sharpest Tooth

*Alinta Krauth*

*Penge, South London, any time, alltime.*

When they find you, your body isn't how she remembers it. Hair mattered with prickles, waist painfully bloated, eyes vacant. All the terms you so often hear to describe a body missing life. Around your mouth froth has collected in a light green tinge, and the man from the clinic says you were no doubt throwing up for some time, your poisoned stomach to erupt with bile. With a scuffed heel she slowly kicks at the wall beside you as she buries her face in your hair, fondling the one spot of white grey on your head. When she sees you as this; the carcass, she lets go a pain-cry that is captured mid-scream and muffled into a pitiful gurgle. With red corset pulled tight against her ribs, she feels her own bones grate against the outer world as she touches your thin frame.

In the days post to this she remembers you. She remembers when she first met you. Back then your hair was a mixture of brown, black and white, and so thick, your skin pale underneath it. You wore a dapper red scarf and curious jacket that one might mistake for a lady's nightgown. In this attire you were tied up when she found you, tied by chains to a park lamppost that made a yellow world beneath it, where dew drops on undulating blossoms were mistaken for tiger's eyes in the dark. She came along and untied you, creating blisters on her palms. You would not tell her why you were tied there, left abandoned by a previous someone, and at first you appeared untrusting, humiliated.

She put you in the passenger seat of her car you pushed around the piles of CDs, making breakable plastic mounds on the floor below you, learning her through music. You leant out the window and breathed in the night air, tasting sky with a long tongue, inhaling pollen and sneezing into the glove box. She spoke of what made her happy and it made you smile as well. You told her secrets of how to turn spider-web into spun glass.

That night you followed her golden hair through her front gate, and never left until your last day.

As handsome as she thought you were, others thought differently. Even in a city of strange characters your love for each other was uninvited. Grocery store clerks would whisper in their uninformed way about your oversized teeth, shabby hair, uncut nails and moth-devoured clothes that seemed to be spun from spider-web and old ladies.

She was young, a baker who rose at 2am when the moon was still casting stretched black buildings on the water. She baked scones, breads, pies, cakes and macaroons; squeezing frosting from cloth dispensers with unsteady hands that knew how hard you touched. In her free time she was a keen milliner, and had made you a French beret to match your red scarf, a grandmother's bonnet to match your nightgown coat, and a top hat to wear on strolls in the park. Being young, she knew that her experience was limited, but somehow knew anyway that you were an excellent lover. In the community you were outcast for a tumultuous past, your record was said to include murder of an old lady you did not hardly know, however it could not be proved by those who flitted in front of bakery windows.

(She would wrap the buns in a blue handkerchief and placed them inside the lady's basket, 'Such nonsense isn't to be spoken of around here' she would say, pushing the basket into the customer's hand, eyes stern, a wisp of hair wet with sweat falling from her hairnet.)

Never the less, tales moved throughout the city, words hanging on tiny threads. But for some reason she granted you leniency, held on to you at night, was yours for the taking.

When no one would trust you to give you a job, she was left to support you. On Saturday nights she would put on her little red corset and lace black stockings under a red leather skirt and present herself to the road like a prisoner on role call stands begrudgingly. In her head your howling disapproval and desperate pleas not to go rattled her. Under her skirt she played with the nib of a small pocket knife she had slipped behind her leg for safety, and a bead of sweat appeared on her neck as she thought of your unhappiness, and, perhaps, her own. Red and blue lights up ahead caused her to dart backwards and stray from the main road. She chose dark back alleys; yellow lit with neon until a suitor was found, a slight shouldered man whose gaunt chin appeared under a blue hood.

At home that night you scratched at your eyes in anger, cried in unanswered lust and beat against the walls. You thought of the lunacy hours before her baker's rise, when she would feel you crawl into bed, a warm compact body, warm as blood, and together you would weave a tangled little web, as that was all you had to weave. You would heavily extend a dark silken paw to touch the small of her back, and she would know you were the gentlest of beasts.

With thoughts too fresh in mind, you began your revenge slowly by collecting every pair of her reading glasses and brought them together into a pile. After chewing softly on one pair as you tried to quell your heartbreak, you then stood up, looked down at the pile, legs of frames sticking out at odd angles like dead insects, and pissed warm treacle that covered from one pair to another and splashed out onto the wooden floors, following the wood's gentle decline towards the back door. Your anger at yourself then erupted. None of this was her fault, was it; but yours. You smashed yourself against piano keys and pulled the batteries out of alarm clocks, putting them in your mouth. With no clothes and a metallic tinge coursing around your teeth, you flung open the door and passed alone through the gate for the first time since you had met her.

With nose to the ground you followed her sad scent North towards Victoria Station. Following train lines you catch and kill any mouse, rat or small domestic cat that gets in your way with demon anger. An old grandmother places one unsteady foot after another onto the grass to see the cause of the strange crying in the street. She holds in her hand a small bowl of green Rat-Be-Gone pellets, and ever so slowly bends down to place it on the concrete path in front of her, muttering about pesky, good for nothing, neighbourhood dogs.

You rampage towards granny, quickly taking her off her feet. You howl and rip at the leg of her nightwear and pull her body into a nearby hedge, her cries for help buried in thick fresh foliage, new green shoots and unripe berries, thorns curling around to hold her body. Ridding her old tangled frame of her nightgown, you trade it for your red scarf, hanging the scarf lightly in the thorns. You slip the pale gown around yourself; it fits well, with a moth-made hole for your tail. You go to see what she has left you in the bowl…

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# A Place for Monsters: *Wolf Creek* and the Australian Outback

*Elise Rosser*

## Abstract

The international release of *Wolf Creek 2* provides an opportunity to revisit the representations of monstrosity in the Australian outback through the lens of rural horror. As a space defined in terms of key oppositions, rural idyll and rural horror, the outback presents a troubling place in Australian culture. This paper will engage with some of the interpretive themes offered by *Wolf Creek*, in particular by scrutinizing imagery of the outback. In contrast, tourism advertising offers an opposing representation of the outback yet relies upon the same language and context of the landscape. How monstrosity is constructed through the subversion of the rural idyll and how this rendering of the landscape is historically informed is discussed, as well as the role that true crime has come to play in such renderings of Australian monstrosity.

## Key Words

Outback, Australia, *Wolf Creek*, monstrosity, true crime, rural idyll, horror.

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## 1.     Context

With the international release of Greg McLean's *Wolf Creek 2*,[1] it seems timely to revisit key representations of the Australian 'outback' through the lens of rural horror. Of relevance is the impact of McLean's first feature film, 2005's *Wolf Creek*.[2] Made for just 1.2 million dollars, *Wolf Creek* is a low-budget horror film which (surprisingly) provided one of the largest box-office takings for an Australia film in the last ten years, grossing around $20 million internationally. *Wolf Creek*'s success and impact has been recognised through the inclusion of *Wolf Creek 2* at the Venice Film Festival in September 2013, and an operating budget ten times greater than the original. The film also generated a reasonable amount of scholarly discussion. The effect on international tourism, the role of true crime and the ways the film tapped into unique cultural fears were all features of this discussion, demonstrating the continual relevance of depictions of the outback for Australians. How the features of the landscape are aligned with monstrosity presented in rural horror is the focus of this paper, which poses the question of whether the outback is a monstrous place, or a place for monsters. Tapping into a well-mapped tradition of settler anxieties of viewing the land as alien and hostile, *Wolf Creek* appears to express all the features of rural horror, presenting a stark counter to the rural idyll that is embodied by overt nationalism. McLean was not the first director to represent rural space in this manner, and *Wolf Creek* is not necessarily the best example (Peter Weir's *Picnic at Hanging Rock*[3] springs to mind). However, *Wolf Creek* also relies upon a cultural memory of violent and shocking crimes, the perpetrators of which come to personify the monsters waiting in the outback. This demonstrates the manner in which true crime has played a role in the construction of the monstrous, and informs the inversion of the larrikin figure into the psychotic Mick Taylor.

The outback is a space that is defined in terms of key oppositions; at once a place of adventure and danger, of personal fulfilment and violent death. Mclean's first film, *Wolf Creek*, was notable for expressing this through its rendering of the landscape; portraying the Australian outback as harsh, distant and unforgiving while juxtaposing it against the cliché tourist experience. *Wolf Creek* is comprised of a two act structure, the first being a typical road adventure film, and the second belonging to the slasher/serial killer genre. Two female British backpackers, Kristy and Liz, spend their time partying with Ben (an Australian) in Broome. Beginning their adventure, Ben purchases an old Ford and the trio embark on a road trip to Cairns, travelling through country Australia. Their first main stop is Wolf Creek National Park, the site of an ancient meteor strike which left a cavernous crater. It is here that their adventure takes a dark turn—when they return to their car later that night they discover that, along with their watches, it has stopped working. Luckily (it would seem) a local kangaroo hunter by the name of Mick Taylor discovers their predicament and offers to tow their car back to his place and repair it. To the trio's amusement Taylor exhibits all the traits of authentic 'ocker' Australia, typified by famous Australians such as the fictional larrikin Mick Dundee and crocodile hunter Steve Irwin. Taylor's place is an abandoned mining site several hours away from Wolf Creek, riddled with broken-down cars and resembling more of a junkyard than a home. Rather than providing salvation, Mick is actually a serial killer who stalks the isolated highways for his victims. For the remainder of the film, Mick Taylor tortures and murders Kristy and Liz in a series of violent and shocking scenes. In a break with horror tradition, Ben manages to escape—becoming the 'final boy' rather than the 'final girl' generally favoured by slasher films. Upon reporting his story to the police, Ben cannot remember where Mick's campsite was and becomes the main suspect for the girl's deaths. The film closes with Mick Taylor literally vanishing into the outback.

One of the main obstacles for the backpackers is the vastness and isolation of the outback. When Kristy and Liz manage to break free they are rendered incapable of true escape by Mick; he derives power from his working vehicle and almost preternatural knowledge of his surroundings. The outback functions as well as any cage, and a killer such as Mick Taylor can be seen as a manifestation of the real dangers of isolation, dehydration and starvation.

*Wolf Creek* presents more themes of interpretation than the trope of lost tourists. It draws upon anxieties that Australians feel about the outback and is informed by a cultural memory of violent and shocking crimes. In this manner, rural Australia provided a fitting setting for the serial killer genre. Representations of serial killers in rural settings are a sub-genre in rural horror, and are not a common theme. One of the most influential is the North American *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974),[4] largely credited with popularising the genre. However, the little known *Night of Fear* (1972),[5] an Australian ozploitation film, preceded *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* by two years. *Night of Fear* is remarkable for its lack of dialogue. The plot is simple, a woman (known as The Woman) crashes her car and finds herself lost in the bush. The Man, a crazed, bush-living serial killer, proceeds to hunt her for the remainder of the film. One of the earliest examples of Australian horror, this provides some historical context for *Wolf Creek* in a specifically Australian setting. In these examples the main danger lurking in the outback is of human agency, a serial killer who utilises the landscape to his advantage. Obviously, *Night of Fear* was an ephemeral production which would have influenced few people. It does show that the themes found in *Wolf Creek* have existed for some time within the repertoire of Australian film makers. All that was needed was the right combination of art and creativity to bring this idea powerfully onto the screen. In the years between 1972 and 2005 there were no Australian horror films which attained success through interpretations of the outback.There were, however, a series of crimes, disappearances, discoveries of grave sites and sensational trials of murderers who preyed on their victims in the vast spaces of the Australian rural wastelands.

## 2. Idyll and Horror

Two opposed representations of the outback are predominant in Australia, that of the sort characterised by Tourism Australia and the rural idyll, and the inversion of these into rural horror.[6] Each of these representations is historically informed, and elements of the two can be traced back to colonisation. The rural idyll is a common ideology of rural Australia, and had particular prevalence during the twentieth century. In traditional Australian culture the rural landscape is idealised as the space that truly embodies Australia's spirit and national heritage. In this imagining of the land, defined in terms of an antiquated past, inherent concepts of mate-ship, a fair go and stoicism tie into the image of the humble bushman and the land he cultivates. The space commonly referred to as the 'outback' (a colloquialism that refers to the remote and central parts of Australia, or sometimes non-urban areas in general) is a central component of the idyll. Often pictured as the 'heart' of the country, the outback represents values inherent to Australia's nationalism and offers a unique way in which to define Australian culture. For cultural products of rural nostalgia and the rural idyll, Scott and Biron note that 'ideals of a beauteous, challenging but essentially benign countryside have underpinned various films of the New Australian Cinema.'[7] It is a space that resides as much in the imagination and folklore of metropolitan Australia as it does in reality. The outback of the rural idyll is a place unencumbered by modern problems; safe and carefree with old fashioned values. The rural idyll is by no means exclusive to Australia, though it does have a long standing tradition through Australian literature and film. According to David Bell the rural idyll '…is first and foremost a symbolic landscape into which is condensed and onto which are projected a whole host of things: identifications, imaginings, ideologies.'[8] From a historical perspective, Mathew Rofe explains that '…the rural idyll traces its origins to the Industrial Revolution, serving as a symbolic foil to urban squalor.'[9] Defined by a mythologised understanding of the past and underpinned by bush legend and settler mythologies, the rural idyll describes a space where the majority of Australians do not live and have very little experience. It is clearly ironic that international backpackers may have more involvement with Australia's 'national heart' than many Australians.

This leads to the other, darker, theme of interpretation of the Australian bush. A dominate feature of Australian Gothic, Australia had been imagined as a land of monsters before its existence was even confirmed, symbolising '… a world of reversals, the dark subconscious of Britain.'[10] Images of the bush have featured throughout literature and the arts since colonisation; many of them negative.[11] These have also been informed by the violence that is inherent to Australian history. The harsh and often murderous reality of settler life (often remembered through place names such as 'Attack Creek') had an effect on Australian literature, particularly in the nineteenth century. These experiences and social memories generated texts which are inimical to the tastes of modern Australians. As Rachael Weaver observes 'For early twenty-first century readers, the explicit violence and vicious racism that often characterises such stories can be shocking and disturbing.'[12] However, these histories have been carried forward into contemporary society and contribute to cultural anxieties.

A sombre and fearful representation of the outback draws upon historical experience. Historian Peter Pierce has traced the literary and historical significance of the 'lost child' and the threat of the bush, which extends into the twentieth century when children are at risk not of wandering off, but of threats posed by abduction by violent strangers.[13] The perceived threat has changed from death due to a merciless and unhospitable landscape, to one of violent strangers and serial killers. However, as is demonstrated through real life crimes and films such as *Wolf Creek*, the landscape still plays a pivotal role, particularly in the abduction and murder of urbanites and international tourists. In particular, modern images of the darker side of the rural in Australia are often observed as sexually and racially violent, outdated and

environmentally destructive.[14] In rural horror the features of the outback that inform the idyll become abject.[15] Running counter to the idyll, here the outback's vast spaces become menacing, spaces that cannot be consumed but instead consume. Here the outback becomes Australia's 'dark heart'– providing the setting for Mclean's *Wolf Creek*. These fears are sometimes literalised, as with Russell Mulcahy's film *Razorback* (1984)[16] in which a wild boar rampages through the outback, terrorizing and killing the inhabitants.

It is worth noting that the two main and opposing images of idyll and horror are features of a Eurocentric viewpoint, with Indigenous culture and perspectives rarely considered – the anxieties that are being expressed are ones with settler origins, and betray unease with the land that is entirely European. In contrast, stories featuring Indigenous perspectives are frequently imbued with a sense of displacement and loss of identity with which contemporary Australia is still struggling.

## 3. The Role of True Crime

The 2001 disappearance of Peter Falconio and the 1989-1992 murders by serial killer Ivan Milat are frequently interpreted as inspiration for *Wolf Creek*. Indeed, there are several allusions throughout the film, in particular the 'head-on-a-stick' method of killer Mick Taylor – directly taken from an alleged conversation with Ivan Milat.[17] In the early 1990s Ivan Milat hunted and killed backpackers in Belanglo State Forest, after picking them up hitchhiking. His crimes were only revealed through a series of accidental discoveries of human remains in remote parts of the forest, by individuals such as orienteers, and he was only convicted because of the decisive evidence of Paul Onions, an intended victim, who had managed to escape from Milat's attempt on his life. Although Milat is serving life imprisonment, 'the backpacker murders' as they came to be known, continue to be a matter of concern in Australia, not least because of speculation that Milat did not kill alone, and that there could be further unknown victims. In what sounds like a movie sequel, in 2011 the Milat family made headlines once again when Ivan's great-nephew Matthew Milat used a ceremonial axe to kill his friend, David Auchterlonie, also in Belanglo State Forest. He has been sentenced to a lengthy jail term. The body of another young woman backpacker was found in the forest in 2010, and this case is still unsolved.

In July 2001, British tourist Peter Falconio disappeared on the Stuart highway in central Australia. His girlfriend, Joanna Lees, claimed that a driver pulled them over, shot Falconio and attempted to abduct her. She managed to escape by hiding in bushland until she could flag down a passing truck. Police arrested Bradley Murdoch and in 2005 he was convicted of Falconio's murder. Once again, the murder of an international tourist in rural Australia made international headlines. As with the Milat case, speculation continues and many commentators believe that Murdoch was unjustly convicted. There are many complicating factors to the Falconio case, including the fact that his body has never been found, and that some people doubted aspects of Joana Lees' testimony.

These crimes, committed against international tourists in rural areas, are significant and memorable events in recent Australian history. Both are marked by irresolution, speculation and a presence in the news media. They challenged the notion of Australia as a safe destination, and provide context for the plot of films such as *Wolf Creek*. Violent crimes committed by strangers are not common, though are arguably a feature of contemporary society, and have haunting effects on place, quickly becoming a part of cultural memory. When violent and shocking crimes occur in rural areas it undermines the concept of the rural idyll. This is particularly demonstrated through media reporting of the crime, with some reports swooping in almost gleefully to pronounce a town as 'evil' and put on show the hidden rot in a (theoretically) previously idealistic space.[18] Violent interpersonal crimes are infrequently considered in a

scholarly context. The news media and the genre of true crime are the most likely places to read about crime, and their tendency to sensationalism and assumption are well-documented. However, contemporary crime is a powerful feature of Australian society, trickling through into film and literature. *Wolf Creek* taps into a cultural memory of these events, drawing on the knowledge that these violent and shocking crimes can and have happened in rural Australia. Since Peter Falconio disappeared there have been several more mysterious disappearances of young men on the Stuart Highway, prompting local rumours that a serial killer may be responsible (a suggestion absolutely denied by police). This also taps into lingering doubts concerning Bradley Murdoch's conviction for the murder of Falconio, with some commentators believing he was wrongly convicted. While none of these rumours can be substantiated, they feed into what writer Paul Toohey called a 'post Falconio world'; where the danger presented by a killer on a lone stretch of rural highway is an internationally known reality. By drawing on knowledge of these recent crimes *Wolf Creek* presents us with a knowable and believable, if not understandable, monster. However, it would be incorrect to say that the film is entirely based around these events. Rather, *Wolf Creek*'s allusions to these well-known crimes provide a source of authenticity for the story. The viewer does not have to really know about Murdoch or Milat to be aware that crimes of this type have occurred and this is sufficient for the film. This is possibly the intention of the filmmakers, as Taylor explains: 'The proximity of *Wolf Creek* to crime history would make explaining the motivations of the villain very challenging. It would bring the film closer to a confrontation with Australian society, and would replace entertainment with documentary reporting.'[19]

On the intertwining nature of fact and fiction in serial killer depictions Caroline Picart writes 'The focus on the twilight region of fact, fiction, and myth is important, because it gets at the ambivalent workings of the social construction of these contemporary monsters.'[20] However, Mick Taylor is not a contemporary monster. Neither, according to Anthony Gardner, is *Wolf Creek*. Gardner see's the film as an expression of the regressive and socially exclusionary politics of Australian neo-conservatism, and its resolute misogyny (shown through the torture and murder of Kristy and Liz) has more in common with a 1950's-esque era than the 21st Century.[21] Blackden also briefly examines the role of masculinity and crime in Australia, noting '…that in Australia, perhaps more than any other English-speaking country, the macho culture of man as hunter survives unchecked, particularly in rural areas.'[22] Indeed, in characters such as Mick Taylor, or real-life killers such as Ivan Milat, a monstrous masculinity is seen at the core of their actions, and hyper-masculinity is a feature of the outback in both imaginings of the idyll as well as horror. There are several interpretative themes working at the intersection of crime history and the outback. The limitations of the legal system and the inability of the news media to explain events such as the backpacker murders, as well as the inability of white settlers to tame the land and reconcile with their violent past are significant, and their influences can be seen in the production of cultural artefact such as *Wolf Creek*.

## 4.    Monstrosity and Beauty

Well placed shots of the landscape are arguably one of the defining elements of rural Australian films. Visually stunning, remote and diverse, the rural landscape often plays a pivotal, though not normally active, character in Australian stories. Able to be used in equal measure for horror or idyll, the framing of the land is generically important. Historian Therese Taylor explains that 'The vernacular of Australian horror relies firstly upon the natural threat of the wilderness—which is empty, pitiless and distant—and thus reduces each person to an isolated individual.'[23] The vernacular of the tourism industry relies on similar concepts; primarily it is the delivery and intent that changes the meaning of terms associated with the outback. Terms such as 'raw', 'wild' and 'ancient' are just as at home on a horror film poster as

an advertisement for outback tours, and they draw in consumers for similar reasons. Through the lens of horror they come to mean danger, fear and ultimately death. Wide, open spaces do not allow escape, and starvation and dehydration are very real threats for those who wander into the outback unprepared. For both tourism and horror what is being sold is the experience of the outback, with the spectacular natural beauty providing a backdrop to adventure. This same backdrop facilitates horror. While Tourism Australia uses the natural features of Australia's landscape as one of their main selling points, rural horror deliberately subverts this representation as a vehicle for fear. True Crime author Patrick Blackden makes a similar point in the introduction to his book on crime in Australia, observing that:

> The Australian brand is centred on the promise of a safe adventure in a youthful, vibrant country… But as Australian tourism becomes ever more mediated, so its dark side grows. What makes Australia attractive—the lure of the great outdoors—is also precisely what makes it dangerous.[24]

That tourism advertising relies on similar concepts of the outback and utilises the same language makes the inversion for rural horror a simpler task, and provides it with an easy authenticity; we already associate the outback with the concepts being explored. Tourism Australia resolutely ignores this other interpretation, and has had problems in the past maintaining Australia's internationally safe image when crimes against international tourists make headlines. Upon *Wolf Creek*'s release, several commentators speculated that it may have negative effects on the tourism industry. Certainly, the risks of hitchhiking in Australia became better known. However, Gemma Blackwood suggests that the relationship between a cultural production such as *Wolf Creek* and actual tourism is complex; any real effects on the tourism industry difficult to gauge.[25] The phenomena of 'dark tourism' can actually increase tourism, as some travellers set out to visit sites of significant death[26]—however it is doubtful a tourism board would choose to acknowledge this in an official manner, let alone capitalise upon it.

Jack Fennell writes that:

> Monsters no longer define the limits of human civilization, not necessarily because rationality and progress have banished superstition from the world, but because we no longer accept the notion that human civilization should have any limits…[27]

Within the changing landscape of the monstrous, historic cultural anxieties of the Australian outback continue to be relevant. While urban areas of the country are modernised and contemporary, the Australian outback is still understood in terms of ancient, unknowable and uncaring—a place where rules of survival exist, rules that urbanites and tourists are unable or unwilling to follow. The outback, through its particular climate and geography, is one of the last places largely inaccessible to human urbanisation and civilisation. The monsters that exist there are normally isolated, archaic and alone.The serial killer is frequently portrayed as the 'everyman', blending in with society until their monstrousness is revealed to their victims. In a space such as the outback, however, there is no need to conform to an acceptable social image, and they are permitted to behave as monsters.In this way the geography of the outback, and the national memory of the events that have occurred there, creates a place for monsters.

The view of the land as ancient and wild was evoked through Josh Reed's Australian horror film *Primal* (2010).[28] To outline the basic plot, a group of twenty-something's travel into deep bushland for a camping trip with an anthropology student. Their aim is to find an ancient Indigenous rock painting that has never been officially confirmed or recorded. The camping trip

takes a horrific turn when one of the friends becomes ill after skinny dipping, and then gradually regresses into a primitive and vicious sub-human. The group is then faced with the choice to kill their friend, or be killed. The Indigenous rock painting is revealed to have been a warning about the creatures, and their failure to initially understand what the painting meant contributed to their fate. The remoteness and ancientness of the outback is emphasised throughout the film, evoking the idea that it is one of the last places in earth where creatures such as this could still reside. As in *Wolf Creek*, the landscape remains visually stunning, yet resolutely uncaring of their fate. Their own mistakes and misconceptions are the downfall of the protagonists as much as the monsters they are confronted with. Another Australian horror film, produced in the wake of the success of Wolf Creek, was *Dying Breed*, (2008),[29] directed by Jody Dwyer. Again, the theme is of a group of friends who travel to a remote area of Australia—in this case the Tasmanian wilderness. They are seeking a survivor of an extinct species, the Tasmanian Tiger, but instead fall victim to a small community of savage Australians who are apparently descendants of escaped convicts who practiced cannibalism. This film takes inspiration from histories of violence, legends about the convict era, and a sense of risk in trespassing into a wilderness where creatures from the far past may still exist.

In these films the landscape of outback Australia is not the antagonist itself, and so the imagery and beauty associated with it takes on a menacing aspect, but is not corrupted. Rather it is as if the viewer is exposed to a truth they knew all along, that the beauty of the outback lies in its ancient supremacy and wilderness. The very thing that makes it beautiful is precisely what makes it dangerous. In films such as *Wolf Creek* danger is introduced through the arrogance and/or ineptness of the tourists who cannot adapt to the space nor tame it. While representing a powerful force Mick Taylor is not the outback, though his character has the tools to survive in such an unforgiving land. For tourism and advertising this presents a difficult concept to manage, as the main selling point of the experience must also be presented as exhilarating, but not dangerous. Perhaps this is another reason why rural horror resonates so well in *Wolf Creek*; through the lens of the rural idyll the viewer is still aware of inherent dangers of the outback, yet chooses to be immersed in it anyway.

## 5. Conclusion

As the vernacular of the outback is used for both its benign and monstrous depictions, they do not need to be changed dramatically in retelling. Rather the 'wild beauty' of the outback remains as such, imbued with an encroaching sense of menace to subvert the idyll and provide an oppositional depiction. Each of these manners of interpretation is historically informed, and has the ability to provide fruitful analysis regarding Australians and their relationship with the country. The monsters in contemporary films such as *Wolf Creek* and other rural serial killer films are of human agency, and in a space such as the outback have no need to blend in with the rest of society. Rather than a monster itself, the Australian outback has the ability to facilitate monsters for the very same reasons it is represented as a place of adventure and excitement. The influence of violent, shocking crimes in the contemporary depictions of the outback is revealed through *Wolf Creek*, and belongs to a cultural memory associated with the space. These types of crimes often exhibit a haunting effect on places and communities, and more research into their effects on cultural artefact is needed. Both of these interpretations of the outback are examples of an urban-centric perspective, one which leaves little room for nuanced views of rural Australia and its inhabitants. Whether *Wolf Creek 2* will perpetuate the discussion revitalised by the first film remains to be seen.

# Notes

[1] Greg Mclean, *Wolf Creek 2* (Emu Creek Pictures, 2013).

[2] Greg Mclean, *Wolf Creek* (Emu Creek Pictures, 2005).

[3] Peter Weir, *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (Greater Unuion, 1975).

[4] Tobe Hooper, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Bryanston Pictures, 1974).

[5] Terry Bourke, *Night of Fear* (Umbrella Entertainment, 1972).

[6] This has also be discussed as 'rural dystopia' and 'rural other', however this paper specifically focuses on the outback as seen through the lens of horror.

[7] John Scott and Dean Biron, '*Wolf Creek*, Rurality and the Australian Gothic,' *Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 24:2 (2010): 310.

[8] David Bell, 'Variations on the Rural Idyll.' *Handbook of Rural Studies*, ed. Paul Cloke, Terry Marsden and Patrick H. Moorey (London: SAGE, 2006), 151.

[9] Mathew Winsor Rofe, 'Considering the Limits of Rural Place Making Opportunities: Rural Dystopias and Dark Tourism', *Landscape Research* (2012): 1.

[10] Gary Turcotte, 'Australian Gothic,' *The Handbook to Gothic Literature*, ed. Marie Mulvey-Roberts (Macmilliam: Basingstroke, 1998), 10.

[11] Kathleen Steele, 'Fear and Loathing in the Australian Bush: Gothic Landscapes in *Bush Studies* and *Picnic at Hanging Rock*', *COLLOQUY Text Theory Critique* 20 (2010): 34.

[12] Rachael Weaver, 'Colonial Violence and Forgotten Fiction', *Australian Literary Studies* 24:2 (2009), 33.

[13] Peter Pierce, *The Country of Lost Children: An Australian Anxiety* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[14] Rofe, 'Considering the Limits,' 2.

[15] Scott and Biron, 'Wolf Creek, Rurality and the Australian Gothic', 310.

[16] Russell Mulcahy, *Razorback* (Warner Brothers, 1984).

[17] Therese Taylor, 'Sites of Death: The Fictions and Realities of *Wolf Creek,' Where the Crows Fly Backwards: Notions of Rural Identity*, ed. Nancy Blacklow and Troy Whitford (Brisbane: Post Pressed, 2010), 94.

[18] Kristy Hess and Lisa Waller, 'The Snowtown We Know and Love': Small Newspapers and Heinous Crimes,' *Rural Society* 21.2 (2012): 116-125.

[19] Taylor, 'Sites of Death,' 88.

[20] Caroline Joan (Kay) S. Picart, 'Crime and the Gothic: Sexualizing Serial Killers,' *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture* 13 (2006): 1-18.

[21] Anthony Gardner, 'Monstrous Nationalism: *Wolf Creek* and UnAustralianism,' *Dark Reflections, Monstrous Reflections: Essays on the Monster in Culture*, ed. Sorchia Ni Fhlainn (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2008), 270.

[22] Patrick Blackden, *The Dark Side of the Australian Dream: Danger Down Under* (Virgin Books: London, 2002), xiii.

[23] Taylor, 'Sites of Death,' 85.

[24] Blackden, *The Dark Side of the Australian Dream*, xi.

[25] Gemma Blackwood, 'Wolf Creek: an UnAustralian Story?' *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 21:4 (2007): 496.

[26] Philip R. Stone, 'Dark Tourism and Significant Other Death: Towards a Model of Mortality Mediation,' *Annals of Tourism Research* 39.3 (2012): 1565-1587.

[27] Jack Fennel, 'There Be Dragons (and Vampires, and Zombies): The Politics of Monstrous Communities', *Inter-Disciplinary.Net*, 3. Viewed on 5th September 2013. http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/at-the-interface/wp content/uploads/2012/08/fennelmonpaper.pdf.

[28] Josh Reed, *Primal* (Primal Films, 2010).
[29] Jody Dwyer, *Dying Breed* (Hoyts Distribution, 2008)

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# Of Wolves and Donkeys

*Kriscinda Lee Everitt*

Below is an extract from *Of Wolves and Donkeys: RLS's Untold Journey through the Cévennes* from the exciting new author Kriscinda Lee Everitt, and printed for the first time here in Monster and the Monstrous Journal. A truly gothic tale of intrigue and travel through the untamed and wild landscapes of 'Old World' Europe and where nothing is quite what it seems and even the prettiest face can hide the darkest secrets.

*****

At twenty-seven years old, in 1878, Robert Louis Stevenson embarked on a 12-day journey on foot through the Cévennes mountains in south-central France, accompanied only by his donkey, Modestine. The public read of this adventure in his travel memoir, *Travels with a Donkey through the Cévennes*, published the following year. But it wasn't the whole truth of his story.

Here is an excerpt from the novel, *Of Wolves and Donkeys: RLS's Untold Journey through the Cévennes*, a tale gathered from the unseen, unpublished notes Stevenson ultimately chose to discard. It is the story of peasants and monks, of inns and the outdoors, and, disturbingly, of murder, werewolves, and a mystifying stranger. In this selection, Stevenson has seen enough not only to be deeply suspicious, but to flatly accept that which his intellect had so recently refused to entertain. Here, the disquieting events he'd witnessed previously culminate in a true horror of humanity, as he hopelessly watches a mob of villagers—some with whom he'd just pleasantly dined—take justice into their own hands, spurred on by the mysterious 'cloaked man.'

## Excerpt

As they came into the town—over a stone hump-backed bridge that took them across the Tarn and ended on the other side with a medieval tower—it struck Louis that it had been exactly a week since he'd left Monastier. Pont de Montvert was all bustling with the Sabbath post-church activities—people buying a day's or a week's worth of necessities at the vendors that gathered loosely along the main thoroughfare, lined with one- and two-story stone houses.

Louis peered about them suspiciously, looking for a familiar face, listening for the singing voice that harassed him in the night amongst the trees of Mont Lozère, but there was nothing. Citizens moved about, jostling him, Modestine, and each other, an undulating sea of ruddy faces and muted colour, though the eyes and mouths smiled at a day's rest.

They made their way to the nearest public house, where Louis planned to hole up for the day and night, until events either played themselves out or enough nothing happened to warrant a feeling of safe passage. But Louis did not expect his stay to be without incident, and so he left Modestine in the stable with strict instructions to the stable boy to watch her carefully, then headed into the inn to wait it out.

There was a considerable crowd at the table for the mid-day meal, at least a dozen, including himself. The server called herself Clarisse—she was a buxom young woman: her hips

and bosom ample, her face round, her eyes and nose small. She had curly yellow hair that spiraled over her shoulders, her cheeks were naturally rosy. Clarisse moved about the crowded dining area deftly, despite her size and the speed at which she went.

Louis took an empty space between a middle-aged, well-dressed man and a dowdy, timid woman of roughly the same age as his other neighbour. Across from him sat two women who chatted animatedly to each other. They were both handsome, which Louis counted as a special treat as he swore he had not seen a beautiful woman since leaving Monastier, and even then, he could remember no female face from that village aside from the pamphleteer's ancient mother he'd endlessly sketched. The remaining travelers beyond this immediate group held no interest for him.

The two lovely women, as it turned out, were sisters—both married—travelling with the man to Louis's right, a cousin. They were meeting their husbands—railroad surveyors currently in Chasseradès—in a few days, before moving on to another town to spend a few weeks with their widowed mother.

'I know them!' Louis exclaimed. 'Well, that is to say, I passed a magnificent evening with them just two days ago.'

'They are well, then?' one of the sisters asked.

'Oh, indeed,' Louis said, 'very well.'

Stoneware plates were filled with stewed vegetables, beef, and bread. Cutlery clicked together and against teeth. Clarisse moved about the room, plate to plate, and rested by the stairwell in the corner until her service was again required.

'Are you familiar with the village, sir?' the man to his right inquired.

'This village? No, I am not. Though I mean to be. I am writing a book.'

And the conversation followed as such. The sisters fawned over Louis—having discovered a writer in their midst—and they all asked for the details of his travels so far. Louis did his best to leave out anything grisly—anything related to wolves or murder—and largely succeeded. This pleasant exercise gave him hope that his journal notes weren't all for naught and that he might—if he made it to Alès alive and back into the arms of his friends and family— still have a book from all this mess.

Clarisse suddenly appeared beside him and heaped a second helping of beef upon his plate before he'd even half-finished the first, and she was gone again in a flash. Louis hadn't had this much sensory excitement in weeks. Perhaps months.

'And, so the brothers of Our Lady of the Snows,' a sister began, 'there is no vow of silence?'

'Ah, no, see,' Louis explained, piling the beef onto itself. 'It is merely an economy of words. Nothing unnecessary nor impractical.'

He saw his shy neighbour to the left had drained her cup and he neatly refilled it without losing his thought.

She tried weakly to refuse, but then acquiesced for the sake of good manners and presented Louis with a wan smile. She styled her dark hair parted concisely down the middle and combed back in a low bun; she wore a small, modest cameo taut on a humble ribbon around her neck. It had a look about it that spoke of something handed down, possessing significant personal value. She was clearly not of the party immediately surrounding them.

'Where are you going to, Mademoiselle? Where are your people?' he asked warmly, trying to help her feel included.

Her face reddened with the attention. She smiled and tried to wave it away, but he persisted.

'Florac,' she finally answered. 'To see my sister.' Louis had to lean close to hear her, as she spoke barely above a whisper, and this caused her to blush further.

'If your sister is half as lovely as you, Mademoiselle…' he began.

Clarisse now appeared to his other side, laying down another roll, though his sat yet untouched. And, again, gone.

'Have you published other books?' one of the sisters across the table interrupted, and the little mouse to his left looked more relieved than spurned, so Louis turned his attention back to the beautiful women.

'I have had a book out this past spring,' he answered, and then opined appropriately on *An Inland Voyage*, which had met mixed reviews.

The sisters gushed, and Louis noted that they wore fairly low-cut chemises, with hanging necklaces that drew attention to their busts, quite unlike his easily-embarrassed neighbour. He took an opportunity to offer her more bread, which she declined. He got a closer look at her.

Her eyes were almond shaped and her brows neat and even; her face was the shape of her eyes and beginning to show just the first faint lines of age. Her mouth was not overly cheery, nor was it too firm. Louis judged her to be about as old as Fanny, about ten years his senior. In fact, once one tallied the merits of this woman's features as a whole, she was actually rather pretty.

He again turned to the laughter of the sisters in front of him and joined them in their joviality, but also re-examined their virtues. Their hair—tawny and blond, respectively—was curled and set with pins. Their cheeks blossomed with what he believed to be a powder of some sort. Their lips were also tinted.

They tittered on about the novels they were currently reading, which Louis should have been keen to hear about but was instead lost in a reverie of his own conclusions. He thought perhaps his modest neighbour could just as easily be as bland as the women before him, in character and in taste, that is, but she didn't open her mouth enough for that judgment. The sisters, however, exhibited a veneer that promised interest, when, in fact, they overflowed with tediousness in every breath. They were also both closer to his age, and if Louis had learned nothing else of his own inclinations in his short life, he learned that it was a mature voice that held his attention.

He was about to turn his mind back to his modest neighbour when the sisters' cousin started up.

'I'm in the quarry business,' he said. And while the man talked of the astonishing difference in stone and their application, the woman to his left presently finished her meal and quietly excused herself from the table to no one in particular.

Louis pretended to hear the man, nodding when it seemed necessary, and focused most of his attention on his plate, systematically filling his thin frame with the stuff. When he ate as much as he could and pulled his napkin from his lap, he excused himself. As he looked up, his eyes happened to fall across the room to Clarisse, standing beside the stairwell, hand on her hip. She was staring at him.

After lunch, Louis claimed a bed upstairs by tossing his fur cap upon it. He'd waited until Clarisse made to serve one of his fellow travellers and took the opportunity to run up. Similarly, he waited until he couldn't see her golden corkscrew ringlets below before making his getaway. He took his sack out to the stable where he hunkered down beside Modestine with his journal. She was paired with a chestnut mare, who chewed oats in a sack. He was only passing the time, but he might as well keep an eye on his companion, as he was feeling more vigilant than usual here in Pont de Montvert, despite nothing seeming particularly out of the ordinary.

The donkey chomped on some hay and gazed languidly at her driver as he scribbled away, catching up on his entries in as much detail as memory would allow. Then, Louis lidded

his inkpot and stowed his materials. From his vantage point, he could see the comings and goings of the inn, and now he watched the two sisters and their cousin exit laughing and make their way into the street, going off to see whatever sights the village offered. He thought he should be doing the same, but felt that if he made one wrong move, it would result in some horrific, irreversible tragedy, and so he opted to make a few moves as possible.

Soon after, his modest neighbour from the table also left the inn; she walked directly over to the church, and Louis smiled. Then, to fill the space of time, he produced his sketchpad and proceeded to make a study of Modestine.

Throughout the afternoon, Louis lay in the hay beside his donkey, drowsing, as the inn occupants came and went. Eventually, he fell asleep, and when he came to, it was coming on twilight. He woke with a start, unsure of where he was, and only aware that he was supposed to be on guard. It took a few moments to return fully to the present but when he did, he stowed his things back into his sack and scratched Modestine's ears.

'You were supposed to wake me,' he said.

She looked at him.

'Go to sleep.' He left the stable and returned to the inn, just in time for yet another meal.

It was almost an exact repeat of the mid-day meal, with the noted difference of the absence of his modest neighbour. That seat was now filled with a moustachioed Norman, who spent the duration charming the sisters and annoying the cousin. Though Louis was glad to have the attention taken away from his book writing, he found it difficult to eat being situated as such, in the middle of a raucous conversation that often bordered on sizzling debate. He was still full from lunch, and he ate little, but drank more wine than he knew he should. And the sisters still fussed about him, though a little more tamely—perhaps their cousin had had words with them. All the while, Clarisse hustled around the diners, replacing this and that, refilling that and this. She was particularly attentive to Louis's glass and kept it full at all times.

The more Louis drank, the more he talked. The more he drank and talked, the easier it was to lose track of time. Soon, it was late and most of the diners had gone to bed, save the two sisters, who seemed about as drunk as Louis, the cousin, the Norman, and a few more additions to the boisterous group. They laughed and talked loudly, occasionally hushing themselves so as not to keep awake the other patrons, only to then laugh themselves louder, until…there was no more wine. And Clarisse had gone.

'Allow me,' Louis said, dramatically pushing his chair out and rising, which prompted a smattering of applause, presumably for not falling over. And he disappeared into the kitchen to see if he could find either another bottle of wine, or Clarisse, whichever came first.

The kitchen was confined, compared to the dining area, and it didn't seem like the amount of food that came out of it could have fit in the first place. There was a stove, a basin, a table, and a large wooden cupboard. Louis looked around, but the place seemed bare. As he was about to open the cupboard and investigate, he heard a noise behind him.

'*Vous êtes ivre*,' said a woman's voice.

'I am *not* drunk,' Louis said as he turned around.

It was Clarisse. She had not gone to bed like he'd suspected, and was in fact still wholly dressed.

'You are,' she argued, and then walked around him and stood in front of the cupboard. Though she looked nothing like Fanny—she was taller, her hair yellow, her eyes blue—her plumpness reminded Louis of his American love, and all of a sudden, he found this girl attractive. Or, it might have been the wine, but he was in no condition to make such a call.

Clarisse crossed her arms, and leaned against the cupboard. It took Louis a moment to understand he was being blocked from the last of the wine.

'Come,' he said. 'Just one more.' The sound of laughter spilled in from the dining area, and he motioned to the door, as if to say, *see?*

'*Non*,' she said. 'And shouldn't you be more careful?'

'Careful? Careful of what?' He was seized with an almost uncontrollable urge to wind a finger through one of her curls.

'Aren't you hunted, as we are?'

'Hunted?' His hip slipped from the table and he barely caught himself, reseating once again on the table's edge.

Clarisse made a claw of her hand and thrust it at him.

'*Hunted*,' she said again.

The blood washed from Louis's face.

'My cousin is dead,' she said and looked at her feet.

'What? I'm sorry, how?' Though his body wasn't necessarily following, his mind was sobering rather quickly.

'You shot him; you killed him.'

Louis stared at the girl in disbelief as she reached into the collar of her blouse and pulled from it a small bell. She clinked it once or twice and looked at Louis knowingly.

It was the murdered foal's bell.

Louis gasped and was about to back away when Clarisse swiftly moved around him and now blocked the door to the dining area. Another wave of laughter came from the next room.

'Maybe you didn't,' she said. 'But you surely did not help.'

Louis struggled with a response. The drunken attraction had dissipated quickly and he now wanted to be anywhere than alone with this girl.

'Fouzilhac,' he stuttered. 'The man from Fouzilhac.'

'His name was Alphonse.'

'He was a beast when I made the shot.'

Clarisse sighed.

'I know.' She continued to toy with the bell and its clapper ticked dully against its sides. 'He gave this to me.'

'He may well have murdered the wearer of that bell,' Louis said.

'He may well have, if you can call killing a horse murder.'

'Some might.'

'It doesn't matter. He didn't do that either. And by that, I mean, he didn't kill your priest.'

'I know,' Louis said. 'I found the weapon wielded for that *definite* case of murder.'

As if confident he wouldn't now go running from the room, Clarisse walked to the table he leaned against and poured a glass of water from a pitcher. She handed it to him and he drank.

'You can't say, though,' he continued, 'that your family hasn't killed.'

'I wont say that then,' she rejoined. She leaned against the table next to him and crossed her arms. '*Oui*, my family has killed. But not all of us. We are not all *loup-garou*.' She shrugged her shoulders. 'Some are, and some are not. Alphonse was; I am not.'

'But the killing is wrong,' he said.

'I didn't say it was right.' Clarisse fidgeted with her sleeve. 'But it is not…' She searched for the right words. 'It is not always in one's control. Not when the change happens.'

'Some,' she went on, 'with much practice have trained themselves. They've mastered their animal time, like becoming conscious while inside a dream. And they've satisfied the hunger with deer, or other animals. But others, like poor Alphonse, could never manage it.'

'But you are not one,' Louis said.

'I am not.' She shook her head and her curls bounced. 'My father is. And he does not kill. Nor does my sister. We have been taught right from wrong. Still, we mourn our poor cousin.'

'I am sorry,' Louis offered, for he truly felt it, and he felt his fear of her retreating slowly into the well of sympathy he perpetually carried inside himself. Again, she shrugged.

The laughter had died down in the next room and the sound of chairs sliding indicated that the party was breaking up, probably leaving Louis for drunk on the kitchen floor.

'How do you know about the cloaked man?' he asked.

'Is that what you call him? We know him. We know his family. Do you know the story of *la Bête du Gévaudan*?' she asked.

Louis nodded and she continued.

The cloaked man, she said, was a descendent of the first hired hunters of *la Bête*, just as she, and Alphonse, were the descendents of *la Bête* himself. Jean Charles Marc Antoine Vaumesle d'Enneval and his son Jean-François had been hired to hunt the monster, to stop the killing, but they had only turned their hounds loose in the wood, and fired their guns at anything with a pelt. Many wolves were killed, but no beast was caught.

'They were being paid by the day,' Clarisse said. 'They had no incentive whatsoever to actually do what the villagers hoped. And, of course, my ancestors could not stop the killing. The change was new to us then.'

In the end, the father and son were replaced by the King's man who took down one beast, and then another local hunter took down the second. Then the politicians became embarrassed, everything was hushed, and Clarisse's ancestors continued to kill.

'But don't think we did so without conscience," she said sternly. 'Our curse has many faces, guilt not being the least.'

Louis nodded and tried to understand.

'All this time,' she continued, 'we have tried to be good members of our communities. And while not all of us have been successful, many of us have been. That does not, though, stop this family from hunting us.'

'Why?'

'This man that follows you—he's not the first. His father hunted us, and his father's father, but there seems to be a difference with this generation. While the men before him seemed to hunt us because they wanted to stop the killing, this man doesn't seem to care. This man *also* kills. And unlike my cousin—who had his faults, I will not argue—this man has no conscience.'

'But if he didn't want to stop the killing, what does he want?'

'Are you asking me?' She asked him, as if doubting her own opinion on the matter.

'I am,' he said.

'You are a writer?'

'*Oui*.'

'You are famous.'

'Oh, well, *non*,' he said, and found himself blushing and a little flustered as to how to respond. 'No. I have a book. I've written some articles and essays, some histories, but really…'

'It is only my opinion,' she said. 'But, kill a peasant and no one cares but the peasant's family and friends, however kill a famous writer…'

'But, really,' Louis held up his hands. 'I am not a famous writer.'

Louis wanted very much to *be* a famous writer, but he was glad, at this moment, that he was not one.

This time Clarisse waved her hand.

'Whatever the case,' she said. 'You should truly stay your guard.' She tipped the glass of water he was holding to his mouth. 'And don't get drunk.'

Louis laughed and took several long gulps.

'Is there more bread?'

With that, Clarisse disappeared into the dinning room for a moment and returned with a small basket of rolls. Louis grabbed one and piece by piece swallowed it. As he worked to soak away what wine was left sloshing around in his belly, and Clarisse went to clear the dining table, he thought.

This man—the cloaked man—could not possibly want to use Louis's fame as a writer, for he had none. But he was killing: first the poor foal and then poor Father Apollinaris. But were they the first? The man had fashioned himself a specialized weapon, in the form of a massive wolf's claw. Louis thought about the carnage wreaked upon the friar's body and tried to imagine a man inflicting that level of damage. Indeed, Louis thought, he may have fashioned at least two, one for each hand—all the more to imitate that of a wolf-man. He only lacked teeth, and that he made up for in tenacity.

Louis tried to form an image of the man—in those glimpses he'd had of him—and he could not remember him being exceptionally large. Average, at best. Even a little stooped. In trying to understand and fully command the facts Clarisse had given him through the drunken haze that was already dissipating, it hadn't occurred until now to ask the girl what the man's name was.

He slapped his forehead and made to leave the kitchen and join Clarisse in the dining room, when there came from the street a blood-chilling scream. It was a woman's scream, throaty and anguished, and it repeated itself over and over, with hardly a pause for breath.

Louis ran through the kitchen door. Clarisse was already moving through the front door of the inn and some of the male patrons were making their sleepy way down the stairs. He ran ahead of them, behind Clarisse. On the street, people were gathering slowly about a young woman, in whose lap lay the limp body of a small boy. Louis recognized him as the boy who waved at him this morning from the fields before the village.

The woman alternately hugged the boy close to her chest and then shook him feverishly, wailing all the while. Her clothes, like his, were soaked with blood. The crowd formed around her, but Clarisse hung back. So did Louis.

'Where did he come from?' Louis asked. 'The boy. I saw him in the fields today. Who brought his body in?'

Clarisse stood on her toes to look over the crowd.

'If you're looking for your cloaked man,' she said, 'he'll be hard to find.'

It was night and the air was chilled—many members of the crowd wore hooded cloaks. Louis stood on his toes as well.

'Blasted!' he said, and the mourning mother's cries seemed to take on a new life, hoarse as they were.

'What's happened?' The moustachioed Norman was at his side, still in his day clothes. Louis assumed he'd meant to sleep in them.

'Boy's dead,' Louis answered.

'Oh dear, that's horrible,' the man said. 'How?'

But Louis's mind was elsewhere. He turned to ask Clarisse what the cloaked man's name was, but she was gone. He craned his neck around, trying to see behind him, and then in front of him, amongst the assembly of gawkers. There were a number of lanterns carried, and even a few torches, but the light they threw only carried a few feet from the source and Clarisse didn't seem to be near any of them.

The people mumbled to each other in hushed tones, the mother still wept, and a few women pulled close to her, wrapping their arms around her in the solidarity of grief.

'This boy is dead!' a cry went up.

The crowd's murmurs fell silent and everyone looked around to see where the voice had come from, to see to whom they were supposed to be listening.

'Nothing can bring him back!' the call went again.

On the other side of the throng—which was at least thirty-to-forty head by now—someone had jumped upon the edge of the community well. Louis stood again on his toes, but so did everyone else, so it helped little.

'And I know who perpetrated this terrible crime!' the voice rang again. The entire crowd had turned toward the man clinging to the well. Louis tried to position himself better to see, first left, then right, and finally, his eyes locked on the cloaked man. Many of the peasants had now pushed back their hoods to better see within such close quarters, but this man—who perched with one foot along the edge of the well and clutched the beam that held aloft the roped bucket with one hand, while the other waved in the air above him—this man wore his hood and wore it low, and still Louis could not see his face. His cloak was bloody, for it was he who had brought the boy in from the field.

'And I believe that you all also know who perpetrated this *unthinkable* crime!' he yelled.

Louis attempted to push his way through the crowd to the front, but it was locked tight, and his shame would not allow him to too roughly jostle the women therein. There was no going around, as the mass filled the narrow street.

*La Famille de Loups!*'

And with that, fists flew into the air and yells erupted all around Louis. Lanterns waved and torches were swung about above the heads of the people as the cloaked man continued to stir their frenzy.

Then, to their left, the stable door flung open and the chestnut mare came bolting out, Clarisse astride and whipping the horse into a firm gallop past the mob and out of the village. All heads turned and watched while the cloaked man's waving hand pointed to her and he yelled.

'And she is one of them! This must be stopped, tonight!'

As he signalled after the escaping Clarisse, his cloak opened at the breast, and though his face was still hidden in his cavernous hood, Louis glimpsed—for but a brief moment—a wooden handle protruding from his peasant's belt. From this handle sprung four steel claws. And just like that, the cloak closed and it was gone.

Louis had been right; it had been a pair.

Suddenly, the crowd lurched forward and Louis could hear the yells of the people, crying out for blood and for vengeance. The cloaked man had come down from his position on the well and Louis could see the stricken mother close to him, cradling her small boy, whose limbs sagged like wilted flowers. She had stopped crying, stopped wailing, and now her face set grimly, her eyes filled with crimson murder.

The moustachioed Norman beside him moved ahead to join the rabble, and Louis grabbed at his sleeve.

'What on earth are you doing, man?'

'They say they know who the murderer is,' the man said. 'There is justice to be had tonight.' And he shook free of Louis's grasp and disappeared into the mass of fury.

'For God's sake,' Louis said out loud, but only to himself. 'It's a damned mob.' Being a Scot and a historian from that bloody city of Edinburgh, Louis knew well the ravages of an angry mob. He watched the crowd as it moved away, and in it, he recognised the hairstyles of the two literature-loving sisters, and nearby, their cousin, all raging against something they had

no idea of. This he half-expected. But when he located the good face of his modest luncheon neighbour, her neat hair covered in a simple nightcap, her once mousey voice raised against a foe she could not name, Louis wept.

He sat on the stoop of the inn with his face in his hands, knowing there was nothing he could do. Once the mob had disappeared, though their yells could still be heard, he went upstairs and grabbed his fur cap. In the stable, Modestine slept, and he woke her with the saddle on her back. He was glad they both had rested that afternoon, for tonight they wouldn't.

Once she was ready, he lead her out and down the street, toward the faint sound of the bloodthirsty horde. He knew there was no measure he could take to prevent what was going to happen, whatever that tragedy would be. He only hoped that Clarisse had convinced her family to run, flee the region for their very lives.

The night was dark, but Louis could see a faint path, recently tread by dozens of angry feet, by the slim light of a crescent moon. Ahead, he could see the glow of the lanterns and torches, and he nudged Modestine forward, if only to be a witness.

When Louis found the mob, they were closing in on and surrounding a two-story farmhouse about a mile out of the village. Some people were already busying themselves letting the livestock loose. Their faces twisted with their shouting, made all the more grotesque by the light and shadow thrown about their features by the wavering flames of the torches.

Louis tied Modestine far back from the house and small outbuildings, to avoid some mob member mistaking her as belonging to this family and making off with her and his effects. He walked slowly around the jeering bodies, as close to the house as he could safely get. People yelled terrible things to the occupants—for much to Louis's horror, there *were* occupants. Clarisse, perhaps, had come too late, or maybe could not convince them of the danger. They were a good family; they didn't kill their fellow citizens. *Why*, he could almost hear her old mother ask, *would they want to harm us?*

A faint light glowed in the upstairs windows, where he presumed the family had retreated. A group of men attempted to batter down the front door with a fence rail they'd pulled from the ground, and with every slam of wood on wood, there came the screams of two women from upstairs. Louis imagined them to be Clarisse's mother and sister. Clarisse, he suspected, was holding her own, as she'd struck him as rather sturdy for her age.

Finally, a window upstairs opened and a man stuck his head out—he was an older man, perhaps the father of the family.

'*Qu'avons-nous fait?*' he yelled down. He repeated this question—*What had they done?*—but there was no way for his voice to break through the cacophony of the bloodthirsty people below. They pelted him with stones until he pulled the shutters back over the window and withdrew with his family.

Louis caught site of the moustachioed Norman at the edge of the crowd, and he went to him.

'Sir, please,' Louis tried to yell above the din. He pulled at the man's sleeve, but it was yanked out of his grip and he was duly ignored as the man put up his own shouts.

'You don't even know these people,' Louis tried again. 'They are strangers to you, all of them!'

The man turned to Louis with a withering glare and Louis took a step back. The man's eyes blazed with murder. Again, Louis was horrified—not just for this poor, innocent family, but for all of humanity. If all it took was one life and the instigation of a madman to rouse peoples' blood to killing, then the species itself was rotten from the core.

Louis turned away and headed towards Modestine, when he heard another voice—this one sailing above the noise of the people, or, more precisely, the people quieted enough to hear

the voice speak. He looked back to see the cloaked man standing on the front stoop of the house, elevated slightly over the mass of maniacs he'd produced.

'Children of God,' he cried, 'hold your hands. Let us burn this house and its wild dogs!'

With that, a dissonance of approval rose up into the night joined by a single panicked scream from the house. The people moved as one, parting to allow torchbearers access to the corners of the house. In no time, it was on fire, burning from the bottom up. A few people managed to get inside the first floor, but made no attempt to climb to the second, for their only mission now was to help the house burn faster. They set fire to the things inside and then ran out victoriously to the cheers of their accomplices.

Louis could not seem to move. As much as he dreaded watching what was unfolding before him, he could not tear his eyes away.

The flames licked ever higher, eating away at the planks and beams. The autumn blooms that hung in pretty baskets from above the windows wilted and curled. The terrified whinnies of the now-loose horses combined with the whine of the inferno peeled in Louis's ears, and still he could not move. And then, another scream.

From a side window of the second floor, someone leapt. A woman, the mother or sister, perhaps even Clarisse. The screaming continued and Louis realized she was injured. Adrenaline finally pushed him to run toward the sound, but he was too late. The crowd had, upon seeing the woman fall and hearing her scream, shifted to engulf her and were now in the process of beating her. Another scream from the open window—the young sister. Louis saw Clarisse pull her back, and so it must have been the mother this mob was now beating to death.

Louis considered for a moment his pistol, though he knew it would be next to useless with a mad crowd such as this and would likely only end with his own murder. He wanted merely to end her searing misery.

Now, a man burst from the front door, his limbs all in flames. He managed to rush around the side where his wife had fallen, and the crowd parted easily for him. They either recoiled in horror or for self-preservation; Louis guessed the latter. As the man reached his wife he was a ball of flame, but the anguish of his cries were that of grief and not pain. He fell to his knees beside the unmoving woman and then toppled to her side, wrapping his burning arms around her. Then, he stopped moving. They both did.

A cheer rose up in the crowd.

Louis paced back and forth, tears streaming, wiping his eyes, and looking to the house, trying to craft some sort of saving plan, but there was nothing. The first story was engulfed, as the poor father had proven in his effort to get through it to save his wife. There couldn't have been another access from the second floor, or the woman would not have felt compelled to jump. And now, all there was to do was watch these two woman—girls, really—die an agonizing, terrible death. Knowing there was nothing he could do, he suddenly remembered the cloaked man and looked desperately for him amongst the swarm of fanatics, but he was nowhere to be found. Gone, again.

Louis turned and staggered back to Modestine, untied her, and pulled her back along the faint path, back to Pont de Montvert. When he got to town, he spared no time looking about; he stopped for nothing but just walked through to the other side and away.

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The night sky was clear and Louis was able to trace a discernible path as the roads were new and the moon, though small, was assisted by the stars. They walked until the sun appeared grudgingly from the horizon, Louis's pace as slow as Modestine's when their journey had first

begun; so slow, in fact, that the donkey sometimes stopped, as she loved to do, to munch on some patches of grass.

For the first few hours, his brain played the night's events over and over—the shouting, the screams. As much as he didn't want to, so long as he could smell the smoke from the burning house, he couldn't help it. The stink followed him to Pont de Montvert and beyond—it poisoned the air. Even after he was out of the deathly miasma, the stench clung to his clothes and to Modestine's mousy fur. It was more time still before the wind had cleared the odour from them. Only then was he able to distract himself.

The sun was up and they were well into morning proper. Louis walked, eyes to the ground, tapping his leg with the goad.

He had expected to arrive in London—his next stop after this trip before heading home to Edinburgh—a new man, a changed man. In this, he was not wrong. A new and changed man he would be. He shuddered to think of the impact all of this would have. He was not built for this sort of death. A *kind* of death, certainly. His periods of illness had conditioned him to believe that—of his friends—he would be the one to lead them to the grave, many, many years before their time. It was something he'd come closer and closer to accepting, to the extent that the prospect didn't incite the fear it once did.

But outright murder? The killing of innocents? This was not something he'd ever become accustomed to, surely not if he could help it. But it had been done now. He could not reverse it. Its effects were already being felt in the way his mind reeled when he thought of Clarisse and their conversation in the inn's kitchen at Pont de Montvert, in the way his stomach lurched when he thought, not of the live, burning figures on the ground, but of the very acts of the mob. It wasn't the visceral verity of the flesh, but the sickening debasement of the crowd; people he had so recently dined with and enjoyed the company of. Louis did not know if he could ever trust the character of anyone ever again.

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The Three Monsterteers © 2010, Jasmine Tenger.

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# Beauty, Eroticism and Monstrosity in Early Modern Book Illustrations

*Stephanie Spoto*

## Abstract

Anxieties surrounding the demonic and female beauty are connected in sixteenth and seventeenth century printed illustrations. With developments in printing methods early modern readers increasingly demanded images to accompany texts, and often these illustrations focused on the monstrous, the exotic, and the erotic. Edward Topsell's *History of Four-Footed Beasts and Serpents* (1658) and Ulisse Aldrovandi's *Monstrorum Historia* (1642) are copiously illustrated bestiaries which focus on the sensual and the dangerous aspects of the monsters, often including evidence of witchcraft in the narrative and conflating issues of monstrosity with contemporary witchcraft fears. This article looks at instances such as these which express the mating of the monstrous and the beautiful witch in seventeenth century monster stories, and explores the implications of this exoticised female and monstrous sexuality, and the attempts to catalogue, and therefore manage, it. Attention is given to the figure of Lilith, the mythical first wife of Adam, whose depictions in early modern illustrations represent her as simultaneously beautiful, monstrous, and dangerous. Her often half-human/half-animal appearance, coupled with her explicitly eroticised present in the images and accompanying texts, attests to the contemporary fears surrounding sensual pleasure, the female body, and the animalistic and monstrous nature of women's desire.

## Key Words

Lilith, demons, gender, renaissance, homosexuality, erotic, witch, tarot, Deleuze, bestiaries.

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## 1.    Lilith in the Early Modern World

In the fifteenth century, developments in moveable type and the printing of woodcut illustrations created the technology to match the demand for illustrated books, and by the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, printers regularly employed these illustration techniques to provide visual stimulus to two burgeoning literary genres: travel literature and the early modern bestiary. Artists were commissioned to create illustrations to accompany the descriptions of foreign lands and the strange creatures which were said to inhabit them. As tales from the orient made their way back to eager English readers, writers often conflated local contemporary fears of witchcraft with the exotic monsters who covered the pages of early modern bestiaries, and looking at these animal-human hybrids within the context of circulating anxieties surrounding witchcraft, sexual desire, and female beauty, reveals a fascinating connection between fears of the monstrous female form and the demonisation of sensuality as monstrous.

An exemplar of this conflation of the monstrous, the erotic, and witchcraft exists in copious early modern textual and visual depictions of the demon Lilith, the mythical first wife

of Adam.[1] The fascinating legend surrounding Lilith has her and Adam simultaneously created from the dust of the ground, and living alongside of him in the Garden of Eden.However, after an argument—heavy with language of power—about which of the two should be in the dominant position during sex, Lilith leaves Adam and the garden and flees to the Red Sea where she lives and copulates with demons, giving birth to innumerable monsters and devils. Adam appeals to God for a second wife, and He then fashions Eve from Adam's rib, and it is these two creations stories which explains the separate creations of woman in Genesis I and Genesis II. In Genesis I: 'God created man in his own image, in the image of God created him; male and female created het hem,'[2] implying that the creation of man and woman happened simultaneously, and from the same material.

On the other hand, in Genesis II: 'And the rib which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, & brought her unto the man.'[3] This legend of Lilith here exists as a connector between the demonic, the sexual, and the fears of female power in the sexual inversion inherent in Lilith's position on top during sex and her ability to procreate (demonic) children independently from Adam. When God initially sends angels to compel Lilith to return to Adam, she refuses, and remains sometimes within the Red Sea and sometimes besides it—a liminal, and perhaps primeval proto-human creature.

Perhaps just from these two small examples from Genesis it becomes apparent that when dealing with issues of political and sexual power, Lilith and her counterparts (the Lamia, Venus, Cynthia, and other moon spirits[4]) often appear as a focal point for writers as they begin to forge the links between the feminine, the demonic, and the monstrous for early modern readers. In sixteenth and seventeenth century bestiaries the situating of the beautiful witch in relation to the horrific female monster becomes something of a meme, creating a pathway that allows these textual and visual representations of the dangerous monstrous beauty to be traced from one source to another as writers replicate the more spectacular and sensational aspects of each other's work in order to draw interest to their own. When working with the monstrous, a particular theme which recurs throughout these texts and their attendant illustrations is the use of the erotic and the beautiful in order to warn readers of the dangers of beauty, sexuality, and the feminine. Beauty and sexuality coupled with the demonic and grotesque removes beauty from the pure and the celestial, and places it with the sensual, the fleshy, and the unholy. In this sense, the presence of beauty and sexuality in stories and images of exotic creatures and monsters acts as a mortality tale, detailing the horrors that befall man when lured by the temptation of these beautiful and sensual monsters. Depictions of Lilith often portray her as beautiful, but in the early modern world that beauty is only a satanic temptation, since copulation with Lilith leads to the reproduction of demonic offspring and possibly death for the unfortunate man lured by the trap of her sensual body.

Perhaps the earliest known depiction of Lilith, from which most other images of Lilith have been reproduced, is commonly known as the Burney Relief: a stone relief of the goddess (or demon) holding the a ring and scepter, with large wings, clawed feet, and flanked by lions and owls.[5] To mark its 250th anniversary in 2002, the British Museum decided to make this early relief its chief acquisition. It acquired its name from Sidney Burney, a collector who purchased it in 1935. It then eventually moved to the hands of a Mr. Sakamoto, from whom the British Museum purchased it for the price of £1,500,000. In celebration of its successful entrance into the museum's collections, it was renamed 'The Queen of the Night,'[6] and since then researchers in the Department of the Middle East have worked to connect this Lilith to other figures of the feminine divine and demonic, such as Ishtar and Astarte, and have begun calling her the 'Queen of the Underworld.'[7] This relief is millennia old, dating back to around 1800 BCE, and is remarkably preserved, allowing for an examination of the image's detail in this very early depiction of Lilth, whose face is beautiful and well proportioned with an inviting

smile. The beauty of the feminine form depicted is sensualised and almost certainly eroticised by her feminine figure, which is exaggerated with large round breasts, a very slender waist, and curved hips and thighs. She is welcoming, but also wild with her half-human and half-animal appearance, with the owls and cats surrounding her monstrous and beautiful form. She presents herself here as simultaneously fleshy, animalistic, and divine: she holds a ring a sceptre, classic symbols of divinity in the ancient near east,[8] and on her head she wears a crown. She is woman and animal, perfection and monstrous.

## 2. Animals and Female Monsters

Though the life of the Burney Relief in the pre-modern world is unknown, what is true is that a whole range of images almost exactly like it have flourished in representations of the demonic feminine or of the androgynous Devil. Many even show the exact proportions, symmetry, and animals which are present in the Burney Relief. So while it is unclear how the Burney Relief as a meme made its way into the demonology of Europe, or whether it was even the first archetype of such images, the similarities of the illustrations and images which followed are too great to ignore as mere coincidence.

An interesting example of how these correlations have made their way into European occult culture and imagery is the Payen tarot deck and the Jean Dodal tarot from Marseille, in particular 'le Diable,' or the devil, card. The deck containing this card dates to 1713,[9] and represents the transformations of Lilith in the early modern period: from figure of female divinity to androgynous masculine devil figure. It is also indicative of how images of sexual women become demonised through the course of the preceding centuries. Even though card is named for the devil 'le Diable,' and almost undoubtedly masculine being, much of this image is an almost exact replica of the Burney Relief. However, the minor variations demonstrate that this is probably part of a long chain of replications, each with slight shifts but still showing the lineage which leads it back to the original. Here the devil stands with wings, a crown, and a sceptre, with the toes curled downwards resembling some middle ground between feet and claws. The spiraling on his chest is reminiscent of breasts, suggesting an ambiguous gender, partially male and partially female, and perhaps pointing to the fact that—since masculine is upheld as good—the introduction of the femininity into this male figure makes him impure and corrupt. The face on the devil's stomach comes from the legends of the Blemmyes from East Africa, who were supposedly headless with their faces on their chests, making appearances as cannibals in both *The Tempest* and *Othello*.[10] Looking at tarot cards allows modern scholars to get a glimpse not of academic treatises and elite ideas, but populist viewpoints. This depiction of the devil not only vilifies previous incarnations of Lilith and Astarte as satanic, but also uses contemporary fears of non-European to create an exotified, Africanesque devil who enslaves men and women, dehumanising them and transforms them into animal-like creatures.

Forging connections between the monstrous, the demonic, and minority cultures was a pervasive practice in early modern Europe; and the demonization of Jewish people was common. In the sixteenth century French biblical scholar Samuel Bochart (1599-1667) connected the etymology of Blemmyes to two Hebrew words, which together mean 'People without Brains,'[11] Though this may seem like a tenuous connection between the presentation of Jewish people as monstrous or satanic, illustrations commonly positioned Jewish people as devil worshipers and monsters. In Pierre Boaistuau's *Certaine Secrete Wonders of Nature* (1569) there are several illustrations that show Jewish people performing rituals that were often also considered the rituals of witches, especially murdering children in order to steal their blood to raise demons.[12] This bestiary also contains an illustration of two Jewish men attending Satan (Fig. 1), which also has some striking similarities to earlier depictions of Lilith and to images that have come after it. Here we have a Satan whose sex is extremely ambiguous; he has large

and obvious breasts but also a penis. Though the devil here does not have the owl and cat—like the Lilith of the Burney Relief—he is, himself, part animal. The claws on his feet are like the Lilith's claws, and the feline-face like the two cats that flank Lilith.



*Figure 1:* Pierre Boaistuau, *Histories Prodigieuses*.
Paris, 1. © 1597, University of Melbourne.

Part of the anxiety caused by humanoid monsters is their proximity in form to the human viewer. In the *scala naturae*, or the Great Chain of Being,[13] man's position above animals and closer to divinity becomes complicated by the existence of liminal half-human/half-animal creatures. Pious and intellectual pursuits could help man move up the celestial ladder towards God, but giving into carnal desires—such as gluttony or lust—would force man down the *scala naturae*. These hierarchies were believed to exist everywhere, with men being superior to women. Women, being below men on the Great Chain of Being, could lure men into lust and therefore self-debasement. These monsters portray the dangers of these physical traps: the Marseilles tarot's devil, with his second face, reflects the belief that the Blemmyes existed in a perpetual state of hunger, turning to cannibalism; and the Satan of Boaistuau's illustration has a second face on his genitals, demonstrating the dangers of sexuality as a gateway into Hell. The more feminine traits these monsters possess, the greater threat they are to man's ability to maintain humanness. A beautiful witch uses her seductive powers to transform men into subhuman creatures or even animals, as was true in the case of Circe, the witch who cast spells leading to the metamorphosis of Odysseus's crew into pigs.

Lilith's connection with animals continues throughout her biblical and extra-biblical manifestations, particularly the animals which appear in the original Burney Relief. In translations of the Hebrew bible into English variants, often words relating to demons which were difficult to translate would appear as animals: the Hebrew תיליל, Lilith in Isaiah 34.14, is translated in an early sixteenth century text as *lamia*, in classical mythology said to be a demon

who devoured children,[14] and in contemporary English translations the Lilith/Lamia figure takes on a variety of attributes, from humanoid to animal. Mathew Parker's version of the bible (1568) and the *Douay-Rheims Bible* (1582) both preserve the *lamia* from the Vulgate text, but two later translations—William Whittingham's *Geneva Bible* (1587) and the *King James Bible* (1611)—both translate the Lilith to 'shricheowle.' These owls perhaps came from a trend which conflated women and demons together with wild and nocturnal animals.

Looking at contemporary paintings and book illustrations shows these depictions of dangerous women—normally witches—as beautiful, sexualised, and often as monstrous. Either in a process of metamorphosis or already monstrously transformed, demonic women or witches are often displayed in close proximity to animals, or fully animal themselves. The shifting and changing of Lilith into animal, and her maternal role as the mother of demons, mirrors many of the legends told about witches who would engage in satanic orgiastic rituals during the Sabbath and either copulate with or become animals, at least temporarily. Ulrich Molitor's late fifteenth century woodcut exemplifies the sexuality of this monstrous transformation of woman into animal (Fig. 2).[15] Here three witches are flying to the Sabbath, already half transformed into animals. The long slender legs of one of the witches is completely exposed, revealing the broom which is press high between her thighs. These monsters are women, witches, and dangerously sexy.

## 3. The Dangers of Lilith and Hungry Sexy Monsters: The Text Accompanying the Images

Early modern bestiaries frequently conflated female monsters with witches, and with interest in Lilith increasing in the early seventeenth century, she began to appear as both a figure of beauty and a figure of monstrosity, almost always related to witchcraft. When French inquisitor, Sebastien Michaelis, wrote his catalogue of demons in 1612 (translated into English a year later), he included a warning about Lilith:

> Saint *Ierome* translateth and thinketh to be a Sorceresse. *Ibi cubauit Lamia:* whereby is meant such women as vse to goe in the night. Againe in the Lamentations of *Ieremy* he interpreteth this word *Lilith* to be a Sorceresse, saying, *Sed & Lamiae. Lamia* (saith *Duris*) was a woman, […] and from her are such kinde of women by the Latines called *Lamiae*, whose custome was (as *Ieremy* hath it) to shew and offer their breasts vnto little children, thereby to still them, and to allure them to come vnto them, that so they might strangle them with greater secresie.[16]

According to Michaelis, the Lamia are not a kind of monster, but a woman who has become a witch and whose normal perceived maternal instincts have been inverted, so that the breasts are used to lure and murder children instead of offer nurturing milk. For this passage, it appears that any woman could in fact be a Lamia, and that it is these actions in 'secresie' which cause the writer so much anxiety.

Edmund Chilmead's translation of Italian rabbi, Leon Modena, is the first English text that I've found to state explicitly that Lilith is '*Adam's* First, though Dis-obedient Wife.'[17] His book continues the tradition of Lilith as a feared witch who murders newborn children before they are seven days old:

> When a Male Child is born to any one, his friends come to him, and make merry with him, wishing him much joy in it. Some of them use to set up

certain Scrols, or Billets, in the four quarters of the Chamber, where the woman lies in, with these Four Words written in Hebrew: […] *Adam, Chavah: Chutz Lilith:* that is to say: *Adam, Eve: Out Lilith.* And they also write the Names of Three Angels: conceiving this to be a means of defending the Child from the Strix, or Night-Witch.[18]

Here, Lilith seems to have become a singular demon again, and the woman a demon who steals and murders children. Writing the names of angels appears to have an averting effect on her, suggesting that the holiness of the names themselves (a common feature of Judaic folklore) repels the demonic Lilith and protects the child. Modena makes an almost casual mention here of Lilith as Strix, an ancient Greek legend relating to a woman, Polyphonte, who was transformed into a monstrous owl as punishment for cannibalism.[20] Horace, in his *Epodes*, explains that the feathers of this transformed bird have magical properties, and can be used by witches to make love potions.[21] The voracious physical appetite of Polyphonte/Lilith appears connected to Strix/Lilith as a method to seduce men through witchcraft, the product of punitive metamorphosis for cannibalism in the case of Polyphonte, and for refusing to lie beneath her husband in the case of Lilith. Her transgression is both consumptive and sexual.

Earlier in Edward Topsell's popular bestiary, *History of the Four-Footed Beasts and Serpents* (1608), Topsell outlines the relationship between the demon Lilith and the monster Lamia:

> To leave therefore these fables, and come to the true description of the Lamia, we have in hand. In the four and thirty chapter of Esay [Isaiah], we do findeth is beast called *Lilith* in the *Hebrew*, and translated by the Ancients *Lamia*; which is there threatned to possess *Babel*.[22]

The author makes a distinction between the fictitious tales of the 'fables' which circulate regarding Lamia, and the 'true description.' What may seem like various different monsters and demons is actually a singular creature: a 'beast called *Lilith*.' He draws from both classical sources from 'the Ancients' and from Judeo-Christian authorities of Hebrew etymology and Biblical scripture, citing Isaiah 34:11. In this chapter, Lilith is placed within the prophet Isaiah's vision of Zion alongside wild animals of the desert: vultures, jackals, ravens, and dragons. However, the plurality of meanings represented by this female beast is presented as problematic as Isaiah wrestles with his vision of transgression in Eden (Isaiah 34:4) and the resulting expulsion from earthly paradise into sin; and also wrestles with the fall from a singular language through the scattering of a postdiluvian united humanity. Topsell must now act as cultural translator, warning readers of the existence of these hidden monsters, whose secret meanings and hidden nocturnal attacks destroy new life, deceive men, and open society to a desert wasteland of wild beasts. Indeed, George Doukas recognizes the relationship between sexual transgression and monstrosity in early modern bestiaries in his own recent conference paper on the subject, when he points out that monstrous births were often moralised as 'divine punishment' as a result of what is presented as a bestial female sexuality[23]—an observation which connects the female sexuality with the animal and with the monstrous.

Perhaps influenced by his account of Lamia, Robert Burton includes a similar version of some of some of the 'fables' that are in Topsell's bestiaries. Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, which first appeared in 1621 and went through five editions in his lifetime, is work of over 900 pages and includes poetry, long quotations from classical authors, and is filled with references to the work of others. In Burton's version of the mysterious she monster, 'one *Menippus Lycius* a young man of 25 years of age, that going betwixt *Cenchreas* and *Corinth* met such a phantasine in the habit of a faire Gentle woman' and was 'able to moderate his passious, though not this of loue' and they agreed to marry.[24] At the wedding,

> Amongst other guests came *Apollonius*, who by some probable coniectures found her out to be a Serpent, a *Lamia*, and that all her furniture, was but as *Tantalus* gold described by *Homer*, no substance but mere illusions. When she sawe herselfe descried, she wept, and desired *Apollonius* to say nothing; but he would not be moued, and therevpon she, Plate, House, and all that was in it vanished in an instant.[25]

The unfortunate Menippus Lycius had mistakenly fallen in love with a monstrous serpent in the disguise of a beautiful woman, whose properties and wealth were merely illusions. Had the wedding taken place there might have been fatal consequences for Lycius.

In outlining the beauty of this type of monster and the danger she poses to men, Topsell demonstrates the threat caused by female sexual authority, and by Lamia as a symbol of this sexual authority. Topsell goes on to describe the physical body of Lamia:

> ...it shall appear that it must needs be this Lamia, because of her great breasts, which are not competible, either to the Dragon or Sea-calves [...] having a womans face, and very beautiful also very large and comely shapes on their breasts, such as cannot be counterfeited by the art of any Painter. [...] They are the swiftest of foot of al learthly Beasts, and by their fraud they overthrow men. For when as they see a man, they lay open their breasts, and by the beauty thereof, entice them to come near to conference, and so having them within their compass, they devour and kill them.[26]

The word breasts appears three times in this passage alongside terms such as 'great,' 'shapes,' 'beauty,' and 'comely.' The Lamia's breasts are so beautiful that no painter could replicate their allure. The "overthrow" of this passage emphasises the implied usurpation of power and reversal of roles involved in relationships with Lamia. Here the Lamia represents an archetypal image of the Anti-housewife, her beauty only serving to destroy. Exposing their breasts and making themselves seem sexually available, these Lamiae 'devour and kill' men, a story which fuels a fear of the beautiful, alluring and promiscuous woman with the power to 'entice' men into surrendering their power. Here, the anthropophagic and sexual monster is linked to the destruction of man, since 'by their fraud they overthrow' them.

## 4. The Suggestive Postures of Animal Women and the Fear of the Homoerotic

The image which accompanies this description of Lilith is fascinating in the way it combines elements of the sensual, the beautiful, and the monstrous (Fig. 3). She is woman and animal; beautiful and grotesque. Her breasts, which caused Topsell so much anxiety, and her beautiful face seem to be the only remaining human part of her, which seem to grow perhaps on top of her animal parts, or emerge from within them. These two human parts of her are all that transcend her monstrous body, which is covered in scales, and perhaps a reminder of her serpent and satanic body; she has claws on her front legs, similar to a wild cat, and hooves on her back legs, perhaps reminiscent of a goat. And though her expression is serene and maybe even angelic, her face is covered in hair, and her mouth devours any poor amorous man she comes upon. She is certainly more beast than woman. Not only does this image of Lamia exist in a liminal space between human and animal, she is also androgynous, similar to the devils of the later Marseilles tarot deck and the Satan in Pierre Boaistuau's illustrations: she has both breasts and a penis, complete with large testicles.
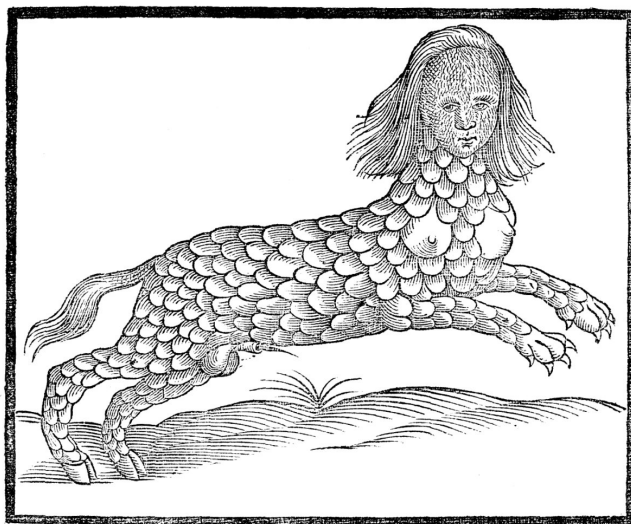


***Figure 3:*** Edward Topsell, 'The true picture of the lamia'. Woodcut.
In *A History of Four-Footed Beasts and Serpents*. London, 353.
© 1658, National Library of Scotland.

However, though the Marseilles tarot and Boaistuau devils are seemingly more male figures with female breasts, the Lamia is explicitly feminine with male genitalia. This image could conjure up tensions relating to other sensual temptations, such as homosexuality, where the beautiful, girl-faced man represents the dangers of same-sex love. In this interpretation, the disguise does not hide a literal demonic personage, but a metaphorical monstrosity, and indeed, perhaps an understanding the political and psychological function of androgynous monsters must include, not only an investigation of the fear of female sexual agency, but also the anxiety of homoeroticism. Turning the androgynous Satan into a manifestation of homosexual anxiety allows for a reading of Boaistuau's anti-Semitism not only as a warning against the supposedly Satanic Jew, but also against the emasculated and homosexual Jew, whose circumcision created fears of both castration and menstruation.[27] The action then of the men surrounding Satan becomes an erotic act of the men leaning in close to the devil's exposed breasts.

Liminal genders and the liminial placing of a monster as half-human and half-animal appear frequently in these early modern bestiaries. In Ulisse Aldrovandi's *Monstrorum historia* (1642)[28] the image of the *monstrum cornutum* shows many of the characteristics of earlier depictions of Lamia and Lilith—the clawed feet, scaled skin, breasts and wings are similar to the Burney Relief—but there are some notable differences: the head and face look almost boyish with blonde curls (Fig. 4). In a development on the earlier manifestations of the sensualised monstrous serpent, Aldrovandi's image features two pairs of genitalia resting on top of the lower scaly body. Accentuating the snake-like characteristics of this monster, there is only one leg covered in scales, with an eye on the knees (similar to the Jean Dodal's Marseilles tarot, 'le Diable'). Placed within a volume on monstrous births, hermaphrodites, embryonic mutation, and exotic beasts, Aldrovandi's *monstrum cornutum* is best understood as a product of monstrous transformation—and, with excessive genitalia, as a manifestation of social anxieties surrounding sexuality.



*Figure 4:* Ulisse Aldrovandi, 'V. Monstrum cornutum, & alatum cum pede rapacis auis,' woodcut. *Monstrorum Historiacum Paralipomenis Historiae Omnium Animalium.* Bologna. 369. © 1642. National Library of Scotland.

This coming together of the monstrous, the sexual, and the feminine is apparent in an interesting image in the work of Italian wood engraver, Philippo Ferroverde, printed in *Le vere e nove imagini de gli dei delli antichi* (1615) (Fig. 5).[29] This image of Hecate—who as the goddess of witchcraft has long been associated with Lilith and Lamia—presents a very animalistic interpretation of this genus of monster: in place of a normal human head are the heads of three dogs, looking in different directions, perhaps drawing a connection between Hecate and Cerberus. This linking of Hecate to hell is furthered by the caption beneath the image: 'Imagine di Hecate dea triforme detta anco Proserpina molie di Plutone reina dell'Inferno significante li tre aspetti della Luna, and la potenza lunare nella cose elemntari. [An image of the triple-formed goddess of Hecate, also known as Perserpine, wife of Pluto and queen of Hell, expressing the three aspects of Luna, and the lunar power in elemental things].' This version of Hecate represents the coming together of the bestial and the erotic, and the anxiety surrounding such links, manifested in the beautiful monster's relationship to death, or Hades. The allure of this monster's sensuality appears in her posture, her clothing, and her idealised feminine figure—visible once the viewer looks past Hecate's three heads on her shoulders. Her stance is sensual, emphasising the curve and sway of her hips, and her arms are open and inviting, and also a bit sassy in her positioning of her hand on her hip. Her dress drapes over her body so that it emphasises her breasts, actually showing the protrusion of her nipples, and drawing attention to the roundness of her thighs. The cloth folds on her dress draw the eye upwards between her knees and thighs, with the double fold of the skirt resembling a vagina—as the way she is lifting her dress makes it seem as though she is exposing herself. A visual depiction of the contemporary demonisation of sensuality and female sexuality.



*Figure 5*: Philippo Ferroverde, 'Imagine de Hecate dea triforme,' woodcut. In *Le Vere e Nove Imagini de Gli Dei Delli Antichi* by Vicenzo Cartari Reggiano. Padua, 1615: 105. Online. University of London Library Resources. © The Warburg Institute, University of London.[30]

The uncertainty of these images is striking: is Hecate clothed or not clothed? Is she women, animal, or monster? Is being woman linked to being somehow less than human, almost a beast? The ambiguity of these images and their accompanying texts are perhaps an attempt to confuse the categories of woman and monster, as a sort of misogynistic conflation of woman,

eroticism, homosexuality, and the demonic. Or they could be failed experiments in cataloguing these already ambiguous creatures, whose nebulous identities and relationships cannot ever be truly confined in encyclopaedic entries, despite the use of classical sources and etymology as tools to deconstruct and control them. In the center of these constellations of meanings and correspondences is often Lilith, from whom a whole range of monstrous beasts have evolved, and who operates as a kind of Deleuzian becoming-animal/becoming-woman escape towards freedom, and towards the eroticism of an unnamed and uncategorisable minority—which must be countered through the interventions of threats and paranoia. But these representations operate as an eternal liminality, and perhaps like all evolutionary processes, taxonomic attempts to understand it through the naming of stages and boundaries creates arbitrary delineations that are unrepresentative of the actual thing to which it attempts to circumscribe meaning.

## 3.    Conclusion

These dangerous monsters are threatening because of their reminder of freed existences, of alternative worlds that operate within and around the world of their cataloguers, who are drawn to these images as dangerous fetishes which open gateways into this hidden other world of unrestrained sensuality, operating outside the confines of the *scala naturae*. The Marseilles tarot deck represents 'le Diable' as inside a constrained physical space, boxed by the edge of the card itself, but it is through this image that the fortune teller is able to access the knowledge of that other world. The belief in this darkness and chaos was real, and these images represent the monsters as dangerous because of their seductive abilities to lure men into evil, and because of their ability to offer a mode of escape which may lead todevourment or immolation of the self; understanding and categorising these creatures is an attempt to hinder their expansion. These are the beasts that drove us from Eden, reproduced innumerable demons, and threaten humanity with an endless decentralisation. By presenting the mystical powers of the erotic as dangerous, immoral, and monstrous, these taxonomers can perhaps save the reader from this fate.

The monstrous women contained in these bestiaries display more than simply a few examples of early modern misogyny, but are the manifestation of a whole range of deep human fears: the fear of deviation from heteronormative society, paranoia surrounding the possibility of hidden evil, the desire for spiritual transcendence against the desire for sensual pleasure, and the anxiety surrounding the exoticised other. While the text represents the aspiration for intellectual ascension an understanding of the divine, the images which accompany these texts are a stark warning about how this ascension is often trapped by the human tendency towards sensualisation; the reader's eyes move over the words, but the voyeur's eyes linger over the erotic images. Together the text and illustration create a lasting example of the prevalence of mind/body dualism in early modern religious philosophy, which serves as tools for understanding this theology as we read from perspectives of materialism. The proliferation of these images suggests that their potentiality exists beyond merely being the curiosities of modern academics, but can be easily included into the intellectual history of human interaction with their own materiality and place in the cosmos.

## Notes

[1] For more information on the development of Lilith in early modern literature see Stephanie Spoto, 'The Figure of Lilith and the Feminine Demonic in Early Modern Literature.' PhD. Diss., University of Edinburgh, 2012. [Edinburgh Research Archive, retrieved from: Viewed on 28th June 2012.

https://www.era.lib.ed.ac.uk/handle/1842/7730]. For Lilith as Jungian archetype see Siegmund Hurwitz, *Lilith the First Eve: Historical and Psychological Aspects of the Dark Feminine*. Trans. Gela Jacobson (Einsiedeln, Switzerland: Daimon Verlang, 1999).

[2] Genesis 1:27.

[3] Genesis 2:22.

[4] The connection between Lilith, Cynthia, Hecate, and other representations of the moon was made very early on. For an early example of this link between Lilith and the moon, see John Selden, *De Dis Syris*, London, 1617.

[5] To see an image of this relief, visit
 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Burney_Relief_Babylon_-1800-1750.JPG.

[6] Dominique Collon, *The Queen of the Night: British Museum Objects in Focus* (London: The British Museum Press, 2005), 5-11.

[7] Dominique Collon, 'The Queen Under Attack: A Rejoinder,' *Iraq* 69 (2007): 50.

[8] Thorkild Jacobsen, 'Pictures and Pictorial Language (the Burney Relief),' in *Figurative Language in the Ancient Near East*, ed. M. Mindlin et al. (London: University of London School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987), 1-11.

[9] Jean-Michel David, 'Review: Jean Payen Tarot 1743/2008,' *Tarot Studies Newsletter*, last modified January 2009, Accessed 15 October 2013,
http://newsletter.tarotstudies.org/2009/01/review-jean-payen-tarot/.

[10] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. Stephen Orgel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), III, iii, 43-47; *Othello, The Moor of Venice*, ed. Michael Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), I, iii, 143-145.

[11] Ephriam Chambers, *Cyclopeadia, or, A Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* (London, 1728), 107.

[12] Pierre Boaistuau, *Certaine Secrete Wonders of Nature*, trans. Edward Fenton (London, 1569), 26.

[13] For more on the importance of the *scala naturae* in intellectual history, see Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1948).

[14] Encyclopædia Britannica Online, s. v. 'Lamia,' accessed May 20, 2012,
http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/328706/Lamia.

[15] Ulrich Molitor, *Von den Unholden und Hexen* (Constance, 1489), Columbia University Libraries, accessed October, 10, 2013,
http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/img/assets/10227/IMG_0023(FERRI).JPG.

[16] Sébastien Michaelis, *A Discovrse of Spirits, Containing Whatsoever is Necessary for the More Full Vnderstanding and Resolution of the Difficult Argument of Sorcerers*, trans. W. B. (London, 1613), 81.

[17] Leona Modena, *The History of the Rites, Customes, and Manner of Life, of the Present Jews, throughout the World*, trans. Edmund Chilmead (London, 1650), [xii].

[18] Ibid., 201-202.

[19] Accessed October 10, 2013.
http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/img/assets/10227/IMG_0023(FERR).JPG.

[20] Stephanie Thurmann, 'Polyphonte,' *Brill's New Pauly, Antiquity Volumes*, ed. Hubert Cancik et al, Brill Online 2013, Reference, accessed October 24, 2013.

[21] Samuel Grant Oliphant, 'The Story of the Strix: Ancient,' *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 44 (1913): 139-149.

[22] Edward Topsell, *History of Four-Footed Beasts and Serpents* (reprint, London, 1658), 354.

[23] George Doukas, 'Pierre Boaistuau's Monsters: Wonders of Nature in the Sixteenth Century,' paper presented at the 6th Global Conference of Monsters and the Monstrous, Mansfield College, Oxford, United Kingdom, September 25, 2008).
[24] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melanchony* (London, 1621), 533.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Topsell, *History*, 354.
[27] For more on circumcision and emasculation see Matthew Biberman, *Masculinity, Anti-Semitism, and Early Modern Literature* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2004).
[28] Ulisse Aldrovandi, *Monstrorum historia cum Paralipomenis historiae omnium animalium* (Bologna, 1642), 369.
[29] Vincenzo Catari,*Le vere e nove imagini de gli dei delli antichi di Vicenzo Cartari Reggiano* (Padua, 1615), 105.
[30] Accessed October 10, 2010. http://193.63.81.241/record=b2329048.

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# Book Reviews

*Monsters and their Meanings in Early Modern Culture: Mighty Magic*
By Wes Williams
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011
344 pages

Despite its capacious main title and a subtitle from *Othello*, Wes Williams's *Monsters and their Meanings in Early Modern Culture: Mighty Magic* concentrates almost exclusively on French texts, tracing their increasing internalization and domestication of monstrosity. Following the introduction's consideration of Shakespeare's Moor, the study embarks on its corrective to the 'overly anglophone emphasis of much work both on "the early modern" in general, and on "the monster" in particular,' a journey bookended by Rabelais and Racine.[1] This positioning renders Williams's work useful not only to scholars of early modern France but also to those engaged in broadening disciplinary studies or tracing international and intercontinental currents of thought and textual production, approaches that have been gaining momentum in early modern studies as of late.

Williams's account of early modern monstrosity—and metaphor—ranges through literature, philosophy, natural history, and theology, demonstrating their consistent interpenetration even within a single text. In doing so, it returns periodically to a group of touchstones: (representations of) the rescue of Andromeda from a sea monster by Perseus, the theory of maternal impression, and the intersection of the two in the *Aethiopica* of Heliodorus, specifically in its recounting of black parents producing a white child, Chariclea, because a portrait of Andromeda hung above the parents' bed. While it proceeds chronologically, *Monsters and their Meanings* also organises itself thematically, with the odd numbered chapters focused on 'the elaboration of the shape of the human, grasped in contradistinction to the monster' and the even on 'the themes of politics, and of witnessing to the monstrous spectacle of civil war.'[2] Within this structure, Williams promises to model his examinations on the discursive mobility of the monsters he examines, to resist a tidy from-to story in favor of tension and resistance; and he delivers on this promise, which may frustrate readers seeking a more teleological argument.

'Chapter One' begins with Pantagruel reading Heliodorus in François Rabelais's *Quart Livre* as a way into its discussion of Rabelais's monsters and their relationship to genre and the poetics of contextual reading. The monstrous whale at the center point of Rabelais's work anchors Williams's chapter as well, embodying arguments about and among natural history, romance, and allegory (are such beasts to be 'read,' for example?). According to Williams, the ultimate thrust of Rabelais's text, while it works to domesticate the monstrous, is to provoke readers to ask epistemological questions like what and why we know.

In the second chapter, the monstrous intrudes into the domestic, as Pierre de Ronsard attempts to 'let loose and then to manage that peculiar monster that is civil war.'[3] Williams traces changes in the representation of France in Ronsard's poetry from the mid to late 16th-century and his use of classical and allegorical monsters during the civil-war craze for 'real,' contemporary examples. Fertility shifts from celebrated to monstrous; Opinion becomes its own monster, one associated with Luther and reform; Hercules, a lover in early poems, appears as an analog for various historical figures, but always struggling against the same Hydra of rebellion. Williams concludes that the poet's deployment of monsters resolves into the human as

'orthodox unknowing' in which it is claiming to know 'God's secret designs' that is monstrous.[4]

Michel de Montaigne, the subject of Chapter Three, conceives of the human as the state of being 'at once miracle and monster.'[5] Focusing on the *Essais*, Williams also claims that although Montaigne uses the metaphor of book as (monstrous) child, he is skeptical of reading children or monsters as signs or figures, much as he is resistant to 'the over-imperious would-be *science* of historicizing allegory.'[6] Montaigne's restraint in these areas arises from a desire to explore interpretation itself and different procedures of reading.

The dynamic between restraint and display figures heavily in the fourth chapter, on Pierre Corneille. In his *Andromède*, the display in question as part of the tension between poetry and spectacle is both *of* and *for* the monster to whom Andromeda is intended as a sacrifice. Williams reads Corneille's Andromeda as ultimately refusing 'to be swayed by the performance of power,' a move that would push his audience to question such performance in the French theater and the French state.[7]

The connections between monsters and children runs through this examination of Corneille as well, and in 'Chapter Five,' concerned primarily with Blaise Pascal's *Penseés*, the book as monstrous child returns. Here, Williams elucidates what he sees as Pascal's modification of Montaigne's conception of humanity as *both* monster *and* miracle to *neither* beast *nor* angel. The argument detours through Hédelin's 1627 *Des Satyres*, which takes up the question of whether satyrs and other hybrids can be considered human, to show that Hédelin and Pascal are both, in the end, interested in defining the human through capacity for Christian salvation. Jean-François Senault's *De l'Usage des passions*, a work that characterises humans as part angel and part beast, serves largely as a further contrast to Pascal, although both use metaphors of civil war to discuss the human soul. In fact, Williams concludes that one who is not 'at war' with oneself represents Pascal's real monster.[8]

Conflict—over reading and writing about monsters—begins the sixth and final chapter. Williams uses some of Jean Racine's early poetry, which included nymphs and Tritons, and stories of his stubborn childhood refusal to abide by prohibitions of his reading Heliodorus as a way into an examination of his neutralisation of monsters. Racine displaces monsters offstage and/or into metaphor, along with overt references to France's civil wars. Early, children onstage are talked of as monsters, or monsters inhabit the talk of advisors; later, direct reference to monsters moves outside the plays proper, relegated to prefaces. *Phèdre*, however, marks the return of the monster to Racine's stage, 'both as a theme and the structuring force that drives the play from before its beginning to beyond its end,' even if the actual sea beast is never seen.[9] In doing so, Williams asserts, the play, in which tragic romance irrupts into political drama, puts forth an 'experimental assent' to a model of 'affiliation and adoption' over one of lineage—both for kinship and for genre.[10]

Williams's 'Epilogue' remarks on the recurrent return to maternal impression and the scene of the family and thus looks at Nicolas Malebranche's account of one monstrous birth in his 1674 *Recherche de la vérité*. Malebranche's analysis of this monstrous birth, caused by the mother's meditation on a portrait of Pius V, employs a lot of mechanistic and biological terminology, but its true subject is theology and original sin, and this particular child becomes a figure for all children. Williams ends by outlining the international dispute that began in 1727 as the anti-maternal impression James Blondel responded to Malebranche's work, Daniel Turner to Blondel, and Blondel to both. While the argument against maternal impressions provides a kind of end point for the various through-lines of *Monsters and their Meanings* with which it resonates, the underlying concern of the ostensibly medical Malebranche-Blondel-Turner dispute with original sin simultaneously suggests an open-ended continuity.

Open-endedness applies to the category of monster throughout Williams's book, one of the ways in which his study's form reflects its argument. Monsters can be many things in this book, and sometimes the conjoined twins and giant sea beasts disappear for large stretches, perhaps replaced by monstrosity as a controlling metaphor, whether of a chapter or of the writers that it investigates. There is also throughout far less historical material in and around the detailed literary close-readings than scholars of a cultural materialist bent might expect or the titular mention of early modern culture might imply. These close-readings, though, do introduce some amount of intertextuality, as well as an occasional and welcome wryness of tone, laying some of the groundwork for future study of where and how ideas of monstrosity modulate and overlap—or, equally importantly, do not—within and beyond early modern France.

## Notes

[1] Wes Williams, *Monsters and their Meanings in Early Modern Culture: Mighty Magic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 23.
[2] Ibid., 26.
[3] Ibid., 75.
[4] Ibid., 120.
[5] Ibid., 125.
[6] Ibid., 126.
[7] Ibid., 222.
[8] Ibid., 264.
[9] Ibid., 291.
[10] Ibid., 302.

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► ▼ ◄

## *The Harvesting*

By Melanie Karsak
CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012
394 pages

'Who would have thought that the end of the world would bring me the one thing I thought I wanted most. I did still want him, didn't I?'

Fans of post-apocalyptic fiction will enjoy Melanie Karsak's novel, *The Harvesting*, the first book in a trilogy that explores what happens when the survivors of a plague must defend themselves against an array of entities threatening to replace them at the top of the food chain. Medieval weapons expert, Layla Petrovich, returns to her Pennsylvania home town to find most of the people she knew dead or dying. Layla leads the survivors in efforts to organize themselves into a self-sustaining community cut off from the rest of the dying planet. But they must defend themselves against evolving and eerily sentient foes, some of whom are also organising themselves anew.

The first wave of enemies in *The Harvesting* is made up of zombies—re-animated dead bodies who are the product of the recent plague. Thus, the challenges Layla and her townspeople face may seem familiar to those readers who have followed the current fashionability of zombie destruction. But before long, Layla and her town are up against some very unpredictable enemies. What we thought were mindless zombies begin behaving in a subtly different manner. Sometimes, they move quickly rather than clamber, one makes eye contact, and another actually observes the heroine and goes away when told to. *The Harvesting* observes genre expectations, but moves beyond the strict confines of zombie fiction.

There are hints from the beginning that our kickass heroine will have to handle something more complex than standard zombie tropes. Layla herself is the granddaughter of a locally trusted Russian psychic, whose powers (passed onto Layla) lend the novel the occasional foray into Russian mysticism, a popular religious trend throughout the early 20th century when Rasputin, a healer and psychic, held considerable influence over the Russian Imperial family. However, this mystical history does not feature in the novel. It merely hovers in the margins, occasionally informing Layla's decisions and abilities.

The next wave of enemies is much harder for Layla and the townspeople to predict. In the guise of friendship, a group of survivors invite them to settle in a large, historic building that was, until Z-day, a seaside hotel. Their relief and gratitude at finding a clean, habitable space untouched by plague violence is, unfortunately, short lived when someone begins preying upon Layla's people. Tensions and fears cause some to turn against each other and alliances are formed outside the group, but what ensues is genuinely eerie set of circumstances that steps outside the usual senselessness of zombie onslaught. Layla must lead her people in a fight against a more mindful group of foes.

Although *The Harvesting* steps outside genre expectations in its selection of antagonists and allies, the book offers a welcome return to form in its reliance upon a female leader. Recently zombie war narratives have featured strong male characters with more traditional values. Consider, for example, how life affirming Rick Grimes' hard fought triumphs are in his people's otherwise discouraging existence. But masculine earnestness is not a genre staple. As recently argued by Zombie survivalist Chris Farnell, female leads of the canon are pretty badass. Although *Night of the Living Dead's* (1968) Barbra dies feebly without a fight, *Dawn of the Dead's* Francine (1978) flies the final escape helicopter and shots to kill. The remakes feature very capable fighting females, as does *28 Days Later* (2002). So, when Layla Petrovich

wields exotic swords in the frontlines against an array of unpredictable undeadlings, she is hopefully also ushering in a return to (female) form for the zombie narrative.

Book 2 of The Harvesting Trilogy is entitled *Shadow Aspect* and is due out in 2013.

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### *The Zombies are Coming!*
By Kelly J. Baker
New York: Bondfire Books
Kindle Edition

In the last decade popular culture has gone through an obsession with zombies that borders on the pathological. While a burgeoning field of scholarship has analysed zombies in films, television, and comic books, relatively little scholarly attention has been paid to the zombie phenomenon outside of fictional media. Baker's essay explores such topics as 'doomsday preppers' who stockpile weapons in case of a zombie plague, panics over 'bath salts' that allegedly induce outbreaks of psychotic violence in ordinary people, and 'zombie shooting targets' that appear to serve as stand-ins for actual people. Baker analyses the ways zombies achieve a form of reality by intersecting with America's culture of violence, paranoia, and apocalyptic expectation. By doing so, she provides the strongest argument yet for why critical analysis of zombies matters.

As a scholar of religion and American studies, Baker locates the zombie apocalypse genre at the intersection of two important discourses: apocalyptic expectation and monsters. As creatures that destroy the world to make way for a new one, zombies stand in a long line of apocalyptic discourse. American culture has been preoccupied with the apocalypse since the Puritans. Apocalyptic expectations reflect our desires and longings for a more ideal world. Zombies are also monsters. Baker employs Edward Ingebretson's theory of monsters as signs that serve to define and buttress the borders of a community. Thus the zombie apocalypse is firmly tied to both our deepest hopes for the future and our innermost fears about our identities and our relationships to others. As Baker explains, 'Americans both fear and desire the arrival of real zombies.'

By exploring how zombies have manifested in contemporary culture, Baker suggests that zombies have become not only a reflection of our hopes and fears but a lens through which we think about the world. In May 2011, the Centre for Disease Control launched a campaign to inform Americans of what to do in case of a zombie infestation. The campaign was meant to be playful and to raise interest in disaster preparedness. This was so successful that increased

Internet traffic crashed the CDC's server. Following the CDC, the Department of Homeland Security organized a drill involving a simulated zombie scenario. In fact, all of the armed forces seems preoccupied with zombies. A reporter described finding copies of Max Brooks' *The Zombie Survival Guide* (2003) and *World War Z* (2006) at every forward operation base in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Twelve months after the CDC's campaign, Rudy Eugene of Miami Beach, Florida, assaulted, bit, and horribly disfigured Ronald Poppo. The reasons for the attack are unknown but it was attributed to designer drugs known as 'bath salts.' Subsequent incidents involving particularly brutal behaviour were interpreted as part of a growing zombie epidemic. Popular news outlets produced maps of these incidents. The panic caused the CDC to release a statement reminding the public that zombies are imaginary. Meanwhile, zombies have become a five billion dollar industry. The most lucrative aspect of the zombie phenomenon is the sale of equipment, weapons, and ammunition to so-called 'doomsday preppers' who claim to be preparing for an actual zombie attack.

A disturbing trend that Baker finds in these incidents that zombies are acquiring a form of reality. That is, the zombie apocalypse has transitioned from being a purely imaginary idea to something like an anticipated prophecy. Over and over again the preppers did not speak of if a zombie apocalypse will happen, but when the zombie apocalypse will happen. In December 2012, Jared Gurman of Long Island, New York, shot his girlfriend in an argument that ensued after watching AMC's series *The Walking Dead*. Gurman insisted that the government would someday take an action that would lead to a literal zombie apocalypse. When his girlfriend disagreed, the argument escalated into a shooting. Baker writes, 'Imaginary monsters led to actual violence. Believing in the zombie apocalypse spurred attempted murder.' This angle of analysis locates *The Zombies are Coming!* within a larger body of scholarship on how popular culture such *Harry Potter* and *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer* have shaped plausibility structures and acquired a religious dimension.

Even more disturbing is the fact that the anticipation of killing zombies sometimes serves as a stand-in for a desire to kill actual people. This is especially true in America's gun culture where targets that resemble zombies (and even bleed when you shoot them) have become very popular. This leads Baker to ask, 'Who might these zombies represent?' This most controversial targets include 'Rocky,' a zombie who bears more than a passing resemblance to president Obama, and 'Alexa,' who has a healthy complexion and wears a pink bra. Alexa was originally called 'the ex-girlfriend' and for some shooters appears to serve as an outlet for anger toward women. Baker writes, 'I have so many questions for the men who buy this target.'

*The Zombies are Coming!* represents a deliberate attempt to bring scholarship to the public. Although Baker's approach to zombies is influenced by such theorists as Avery Gordon, Edward Ingebretson, Julia Kristeva, and others, there is virtually no overt discussion of theory. Baker's accessible writing style makes this essay ideal for an undergraduate course on horror, popular culture, the apocalypse in American culture, or (of course) the cultural significance of zombies. The greatest weakness of this essay is also its greatest strength. While zombies may shamble slowly, the culture that surrounds them evolves at lightning speed. This means that while this essay is painstakingly current it will soon be out of date. In a few years the zombies will still be coming and we will have to examine their meaning anew.

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machinations, the female's forced but persistent gaze, and the eroticised male body upon which the violence is perpetrated. The argument here is not that misogyny is absent from Argento's work, but rather that it is but one of several viewpoints available for the audience. Cooper posits that Argento actively refuses to engage in 'Freudian proclivities' by substituting visual aesthetics for psychological closure, thus challenging 'a viewer's accepted ideas about film spectatorship, meaning, storytelling, and genre.' Cooper's insistence, however, that Argento's films require 'moments of nonsense' to maintain the suspense occasionally feels like too simplistic an analysis for an auteur generally known for both his heavy reliance on affect-driven moments of silent tension as well as for excruciating hyper-visual spectacle.

Dario Argento ends with two interviews, translated from the original French by Cooper, which ultimately offer nothing the author has not already touched on in the much stronger, early sections of the book. In what might be a conscious parallel on the part of Cooper, the text ends without satisfactory closure, but directs us back to the moments of insight and strength that occur within. Argento has irrefutably contributed to the horror genre and pushed its boundaries in ways that continue to fascinate audiences. The fetish-like violence that boils just below the surface of Argento's later films, with its constant threat of eruption and the resultant suspense, mark a level of experimentation that is both unflinching and threatening in and of itself. With the recent spate of cookie-cutter horror films and the current trend towards derivative remakes, the freshness of Argento's visions makes him seem a much-coveted and necessary addition to the genre. To that end, Cooper's book offers organised and comprehensive close-readings of Argento's entire filmography and provides sufficient analysis to keep the current scholars and hardcore fans happy, while being accessible enough to bring new fans into the fold.

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# Film Reviews

## *Vamps*

Dir. Amy Heckerling, 2012
Anchor Bay Films
Film: 92 Minutes

## *Midnight Son*

Dir. Scott Leberecht, 2013 [2011]
Image Entertainment
Film: 105 minutes.

*Vamps* and *Midnight Son* are two films that anyone other than a vampire enthusiast would be forgiven for not seeing. Not least in that the first quickly vanished from the cinema (was not even released in some countries) and the other, though made and shown, to some critical acclaim, at film festivals in 2011 only received a straight to DVD release in 2013. In many ways the two films exemplify the opposite ends of the vampire genre—extreme campness, which quickly descends into bad jokes, and even worse taste and art house navel gazing that takes itself extremely seriously. That said both films contain elements that mark them out as a continuation and addition to the many splendid thing that is the vampire genre.

*Vamps*, subtitled *Nice Girls Suck*, boasts a star-studded cast, including Alicia Silverstone, whom Heckerling directed in *Clueless* (1995), Malcom MacDowell and Sigourney Weaver, and was marketed as something of a Dracula (or Carmilla/Bathory) meets *Sex and the City*. As such, pre-release trailers for the film, of which there were many, billed it as a girly comedy about shopping, living in the city, shopping and one may have many laughs in 21st century America, being a young sexy, female vampire. After the success of films such as *Twilight*, which by means of its female lead, Bella Swan, proved that all teenage girls wanted to be a vampire, and with her vampire 'sister-in-law,' Alice, showed that even vampires love to accessorise, how could a movie about young 'girly' vampires who love to go shopping fail? Watching the film you can see why, and also why the only version I could buy was Region 2 (i.e. viewable in Europe) version from Germany.[1]

In many ways *Vamps* ticks many of the boxes required of the contemporary vampire: the good vampires do not want to kill humans and so go to vampires anonymous; they are vegetarian and so find other ways to satiate their inherent thirst for blood (leading to an amazingly bad taste joke, where they stick straws in rats as substitute for sodas); they configure an alternative/minority life-style that is ultimately good for both vampires and the humans around them. However, even with all this going for it, it still fails to engage with its audience in a meaningful way. This, in part, is due to Alicia Silverstone who plays Goody, the main vampire lead. Goody has been a vampire for over 150 years, for she was 'turned' in 1841, and like many contemporary vampires she has been something of an immortal teenager for a very long time. This in itself is a further indication of contemporary vampire tropes, with films as varied as *Twilight* (Hardwicke, 2008) and *Let the Right One In* (Alfredson, 2008) using this idea. Whilst this excuses Goody's many bouts of nostalgia for earlier periods in history—in fact characters expressing excessive nostalgia appear to be the prime way of spotting the undead in this film—it does not excuse Silverstone's own insistence on constantly replaying her role as

Cher, the good-hearted and good-intentioned but slightly hapless teenager from *Clueless*, which is largely what we get here. However, whilst Robert Pattinson manages to remain looking something like a 17-year-old during the four or five years it took to film the Twilight Saga, Silverstone looks somewhat older than the eternal teen she is attempting to play here. Consequently, you get the sense that she is a slightly 'kooki' middle-aged lady, who is trying to hide her age and remember where she lost her marbles and the many admirers she fondly remembers during the film. This sense of loss that the film attempts to create oddly turns more into a feeling of being lost, and just as Goody seems slightly out of place, and indeed, time, so does the entire movie.

The plot further sees Goody living the life of a socialite in New York with her vampire sister, Stacey. Stacey was made into a vampire by Goody's sire, or 'stem' as they call it here, Ciccerus in the early 1990's mainly because Goody was feeling lonely. Goody pretends that Stacey and her are the same age, and much effort is made to keep the fact that this is not so from her.The vampire 'sisters' are enthralled to their 'stem' Ciccerus, played marvellously over the top by Sigourney Weaver, and both are unable to ignore her calls.[2] Ciccerus is one of the 'old ones,' and so manifests all that is wrong about old school or traditional vampires, living her undead life to the fullest, manifesting the excess of a Countess Bathory let loose with a platinum visa card.[3] Curiously, Malcolm MacDowell, another veteran of horror films, also appears as an 'old one,' but who curbs his blood lust through constant knitting. Thus, he envisions the vampire as a creature caught in a web of sublimation and self-loathing.[4] Whilst Goody and Stacey attend Vampires Anonymous[5] sessions to help the undead to 'blend in,' Stacey falls in love with Joey, who turns out to be the only son of who else but Dr. Van Helsing, head of the secret government agency created to destroy vampires. Much could be made here with America's views on illegal immigration at the start of the 21st century, not least as the vampires are largely configured as European and/or foreign, living outside of governmental control; however, like many possible interesting plot twists, this idea gets somewhat lost as the narrative descends into misplaced sentimentality.[6]

In an attempt to 'legally' take down these modern day gangsters—the vampires here are oddly configured as an old European empire not unlike the mafia),[7]—the secret government department tries to get the vampires out into the light of day through tax evasion. And so to prove they are US citizens, they must attend the tax office during daytime office hours. This ingenious plot is only thwarted through the help of some tax expert vampire familiars,[8] and all would seem well with the world, except for two things: Stacey discovers she is pregnant, and Ciccerus has just rampaged through a Chinese restaurant, slaughtering all of the humans within it, which of course threatens the continued anonymity of the vampire community. Fortunately, for the plot and the length of the film, the solutions to these troubles are simple and both require the death of Ciccerus. For the pregnancy side of the situation, this is slightly more involved, though contains a certain logic. As female vampires cannot have babies—although, apparently, they are able to conceive—Stacey must become human again. This requires killing the originator, or the 'stem' of your line so that all turned by them will become human again, and more problematically, become their true human age. For Stacey, this is not so bad as it will mean she will become a 40-year-old pregnant woman—not so unusual in 21st century America. For Goody, this is more involved as she will be about 200 years old.

Of course, like the new age vampire she is, Goody will sacrifice herself for her friend, and, as the film has intimated, even vampires get tired of repeating the same fashion faux pas over and over again. So the good vampires, Dr. Van Helsing and his special agents unite to kill Ciccerus and save the unborn baby as well as the secrecy of human-friendlyvampires everywhere. Once Ciccerus is dead, so is the vitality of the film, and the plot affectively collapses. Goody begins to age and disintegrate, enacting something of a longed for euthanasia

of someone who has outstayed their welcome. Stacey becomes a cougar-style mother with a now considerably younger husband, and betrays a certain desperation in hanging onto her man. As such, the film suggests that this is a world for the young and the repressed, human or vampire, and that anyone, particularly women, who refuse to play by the rules should take their leave of it before the inevitable craziness of old age sets in.

In many ways *Midnight Son* is everything that *Vamps* is not—no big stars, non-glossy production values, and realism as an over-arching narrative guide, although oddly, coming of age and youth are also central to its story. Unlike *Vamps*, it is also a film that has been in process for sometime. Originally scripted in 2004, it has the feel of a film that elided all the popular furore around The Twilight Saga, and so harks back to an earlier period of vampire films, such as George Romero's *Martin* (1974). Just like Romero's film, and indeed the Butcher Brothers' film, *The Hamiltons* from 2006, it is about the problems of real vampires blending in.[9] So *Midnight Son*, not unlike *Vamps*, is also about the problems of being a vampire living in the city. It focuses on Jacob who gets round his extreme aversion to sunlight by getting a job as a night security guard in an office block. Curiously, at this point, Jacob does not realise that he is, or is becoming, a vampire. It is after Jacob passes out and is approached by the building's janitor—played by horror regular, Tracy Walter—that we realise what is going on. The janitor leans in and asks Jacob how old he is, to which he replies '24.' The Janitor then continues: 'Ah! 'Cos they say that the human body stops growing at age 25... yeah, you're in the last staged of something... like a caterpillar turning into a butterfly.'[10] We now know that this is a coming-of-age story, and that Jacob is becoming something rather more sinister than a butterfly. Jacob then begins to experience blackouts and cravingsfor raw meat and bloodthat, although obvious to fans of the genre, leave him disorientated and confused. During this process, he meets and falls in love with Mary, a girl he bumps into on the street at night, whilst he is trying to satiate his growing hunger. This in itself proves problematic, both in terms of Jacob's ongoing transformation but also in terms of the film's plot. The constant pushing away and coming back together of the couple gives the narrative thrust a strong correlation to earlier films about the correlation between vampirism and addiction, seen in movies such as *The Addiction* (Ferrara, 1995) and *Habit* (Fassenden, 1997), but also tends to make the impetuous of their relationship feel imposed rather than natural. This rather upsets the subplot of the film, where Jacob paints sunsets to make up for the fact that he has never seen one, and is then given an art show in a gallery owned by a friend of Mary's feel somewhat trite or tagged on.[11] That said Jacob's descent into the darker side of urban life in order to feed his addiction nicely reflects both the underbelly of the city, whilst also exemplifying the ways that alternative lifestyles can slip under the radar in an urban milieu.

The conclusion of the film sees Jacob save Mary's life by turning her into a vampire but also make a leap of acceptance of his new condition. Knowing that newly–turned vampires require fresh blood, he kills a police detective that is investigating a string of recent murders that appear linked to Jacob, revealing the triumph of 'evil' over 'good,' or a prioritising of individual agency over societal welfare, a theme also seen in Matt Reeves' *Let Me In*.[12] The only problem with this conclusion is a certain incongruence in how vampires are made.Jacob would seem to be a 'natural'vampire, in that he matures into one, suggesting a genetically separate species, but we see various examples throughout the film where vampires are also 'made' or sired, which is not necessarily mutually inconsistent but it definitely problematises the nature of the plot (if vampirism is seen as a metaphor of addiction, is one then born an addict or is one infected by it?) That said, it is an interesting film and contrasts the eco-friendly message of *Vamps* with one where we are encouraged to accept our true natures, no matter how anti-social they may be. In *Midnight Son* love is indeed eternal, whereas *Vamps* shows us that sentimentality makes immortality seem very long indeed.

While being very different in purpose and execution, both films attempt to capture something of the nature of difference within the population of the city; the former opting for invisibility through copying normativity, and the latter through acceptance of difference and vanishing into the undercurrent of subcultures and anonymity. Curiously though, whilst both view age and experience as being of the utmost importance for survival—like many vampire narratives since *The Lost Boys* (Schumacher, 1987)—they ultimately suggest that the future is not for the old but for the eternally young.

## Notes

[1] Germany is often the only European outlet for films from America that are not thought suitable or profitable enough for the rest of Western Europe.

[2] A similar trope is used in the television series *True Blood* (Created by Alan Ball, Your face Goes here Entertainment for HBO, 2008—present), where Pam and Jessica, vampire children of Eric Northman and Bill Compton respectively, are unable to resist the calls of their sires.

[3] The necessary superseding of the old vampire order by a new one forms the basis of many films in the genre, from *Blade*, Dir. Stephen Norrington (New Line Cinema, 1988) where Deacon Frost, played by Stephen Dorf, takes control of the vampire world from the council of Elders led by Gitano Dragonetti, played by Udo Kier, up to The Twilight Saga (*Twilght* dir. Catherine Hardwicke, Summit Entertainment 2008, *New Moon*, dir. Chris Weitz, Summit Entertainment, 2009, *Eclipse*, dir. david Slade, Summit Entertainment, 2010, *Breaking Dawn Part I*, dir. Bill Condon, Summit Entertainment, 2011 and *Breaking Dawn Part II*, dir. Bill Condon, Summit Entertainment, 2012), where a new order, represented by the Cullen Family, led by Carlyle Cullen, played by Peter Facinelli, usurps the old regime of the Volturi led by Aro, played by Micheal Sheen. Curiously, in *Blade* the young ones want to embrace their 'true' nature as vampires, whereas in The Twilight Saga, the new order is all about restraint and living alongside humans.

[4] The act of knitting here oddly correlates to folkloric tales of ways to confuse and delay the vampire from raising from its grave, where nets or grains of rice could be strewn around the site causing the strangely OCD afflicted vampire to either undo all the knots or count the grains of rice before being able to escape from its coffin. An interesting example of this is shown in the film *Dracula II: Ascension* (Dir. PatrickLussier, Dimension Folms, 2003).

[5] There is actually a film called *Vampires Anonymous*, Dir. Michael Keller (Arts Alliance America, 2003), starring Michael Madsen, which shows just how unsuccessful the '12 step' programme can be for the undead.

[6] The correlation between the undead and the threat from illegal immigrants within American vampire films is quite a prevalent feature in movies, such as *From Dusk till Dawn*, Dir. Robert Rodriguez (Dimension Films, 1996), *Vampires*, Dir. John Carpenter (Columbia Pictures, 1998), and even *Underworld: Awakening* (Stein and Märland, 2012), exemplifying the danger of allowing undesirables to enter the US. This, of course, is also the same kind of anxiety that ran through Stoker's *Dracula* and the 'threat from the east' and reverse colonialism. See Stephen Arata, *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siecle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[7] A similar correlation between the mafia and vampires is seen in the film *Innocent Blood*, Dir. John Landis (Warner Brothers, 1992).

[8] Humans that assist vampires.

[9] Another interesting film that takes a 'fly on the wall' view of the problems of being a vampire in today's world is seen in the Belgian movie *Vampires*, Dir. Vincent Lannoo (Left Field Ventures, 2010).

[10] *Midnight Son*, 2010.

[11] That said, it also, to some extent, mirrors the vampires' obsession with sunrises as shown, most poetically in the film *Shadow of the Vampire*, Dir. E. Elias Mirhige (Lions Gate Films, 2000).

[12] In *Let Me In*, the human boy, Owen, offers no assistance to the symbolically named 'Policeman' when he is attacked and killed by the vampire, Abby, as such, indicating his acceptance of evil and the death of innocence and good within the film.

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*World War Z*
Dir. Marc Forster
Paramount Pictures
Film: 116 Minutes

Marc Forster's summer zombie blockbuster starring Brad Pitt, *World War Z*,[1] shares little more than a name with the Max Brooks novel that inspired it. However, despite falling into some familiar representational and narrative trends, the film manages some original and thoughtful moments in a genre that is quickly towards repetition and cliché.

Brad Pitt plays the hero of the film: family man Gerry Lane, a former United Nations employee who is reluctantly thrust back into action to investigate how to stop a mysterious new, infection that is ravaging the world's population. After narrowly escaping the infected in Philadelphia, Gerry and his family are rescued and take refuge on a large ship under U.N. and U.S. control, but there is a cost to their safety. In order for his family to stay on the ship, Lane must agree search for the cause of the disease or a way to defend against it. After close scrapes with the infected at a military base in South Korea and in the streets of Jerusalem, Lane makes his way to a World Health Organization research facility in Cardiff, Wales in order to test one

last, desperate hypothesis. Can he find a defence in time to save his family? Can he even save himself?

After its title sequence, analysed below, the film plays out in three acts that evoke different generic iterations of the zombie or outbreak narrative: the tale of urban flight, the (inevitably failing) military defence, and the medical research bunker. The monsters and the action of the film are a bit frontloaded, with the first two acts focusing on the violent, virulent, zombies in their many hordes. The zombies of the film appear as entirely inhuman, monstrous, and other—they wreak biological and political havoc, throwing the world into a global state of emergency. Their appearance as ravenous, undead creatures, different in colour and appearance from their human counterparts—perhaps a bit greener, a bit darker, a bit bloodier—appears to invalidate their simultaneous appearance as formerly human, or almost human. This portrayal, which is line with recent genre trends, emphasizes the irredeemable inhumanity of the zombies, sanctions their destruction without evoking guilt or remorse, and subtly raises the spectre of racial difference to which the zombie has always been bound. The film's portrayal of zombies, much like its narrative arc, is also something of a pastiche. *World War Z* combines the obsessive dedication and strength in numbers of shuffling zombie crowds, like those that famously lay siege to the farmhouse in Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*,[2] with the excessively violent and fleet footed carriers of infection like those in Zac Snyder's remake of *Dawn of the Dead*[3] and Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later*.[4] Indeed, the infected in *World War Z* even seem to have two gears, like those in *28 Days Later*: idle and ravenous. Infection sequences are violent, spasmatic, seizure-filled affairs that occur in the blink of an eye, and the infected feature uncanny tics and twitches. Through this combination of the singular minded zombie crowd and the fast, violent zombie individual, *World War Z* makes a fairly original zombie, one that moves in flows and torrents, strikes in swarms with a singular purpose, almost a hive mind.

The title sequence of the film primes the viewer to focus on these flowing crowds of swarm zombies, through a brilliant use of juxtaposition. The film opens with a montage of brief clips, rising in intensity along with the song they play over, Muse's 'Isolated System.' The clips begin minimally and calmly, juxtaposing footage of natural phenomena—waves gently lapping, clouds serenely floating—with cuts to calm, unpeopled urban settings. Then the footage shifts and flocks of wheeling birds flit across screen before several clips of commuters disembarking trains, walking city streets, and riding moving walkways. A shot of an airport flight tracker, the first of several, separates these commuters from a clip of a single plane in the sky, at once citing the flocking birds, the commuting humans, and the calm clouds that preceded it. After adding swarming ants, the footage returns to flocking birds and urban commutes, beginning to splice in journalistic footage and commentary about contaminants, WHO guidelines, and emergency precautions. At this point about halfway through the title sequence, the music shifts in tempo and the images change in tone. Scenes begin to become violent, the once peaceful nature footage shifts to animals attacking one another, ants swarming and devouring something larger, and a vulture eating carrion; the meanwhile the urban footage shifts to riots, ambulances, and talk of doomsday. As the title itself begins to slow become visible it is filled by new, violent nature footage interspersed once again with urban commuting, before it fades out to reveal the sun through trees and pauses, focused just out front of a two story suburban home. This series of visual juxtapositions primes the viewer to associate the zombie crowds with natural phenomena, creating an uncanny familiarity. At the same time, the shift to a suburban focus subtly suggests that the suburbs, the family, the quiet life are endangered by this rising tension, rising violence, and coming emergency.

Indeed, this is verified in the first act of the film, the tale of urban flight, where Gerry Lane, the hero of film, attempts to evacuate his family from a zombie outbreak in Philadelphia.

This segment of the film is deceptive as Karen Lane, played by Mireille Enos, appears as a strong assertive individual and the film seems poised to break genre norms. However, by the second act, we learn that fresh and original concept of two parents shepherding their children through the zombie apocalypse—trying to shield them from the monstrous creatures that seek to devour them and the inhumanity displayed by looting, rioting survivors—was but a tease. As Karen Lane sits helpless by the phone, or worse endangers Gerry's life by calling him and draining his satellite phone battery (his only way to call for help) and attracting attention to him: throughout the rest of the film, the audience is left wondering what could have been. While it teases with its portrayal of gender relations, falling back into genre norms, its portrayal of race is consistently problematic from the start.

*World War Z* is yet another zombie film where a white hero saves the world from an infection that originates somewhere outside of Global West. Whereas the novel bearing its title had the delicacy of a refracted global lens, eschewing a singular hero narrative in favour of a constellation of stories about international, nearly global cooperation;[5] *World War Z* the film follows the standard, linear tale of a heteronormative, western, (white) male hero. While all of the characters in the film appear as foils for Gerry Lane, the apparent powerlessness of the African American Deputy Secretary-General (played by Fana Mokoena) and the ineptitude under pressure of the ambiguously ethnic virologist Dr. Fassbach (played by Elyes Gabel) heighten the contrast along troubling lines. More problematic, however, might be the omission of global Eastern and Southern powers from the plot of the film, and the implication that the infection spread was first reported in North Korea and they have halted it in its tracks by removing the teeth of the entire populace.

Despite tending towards clichés and falling into problematic portrayals of gender and race, *World War Z* offers an interesting generic complication by demonstrating the inextricable entanglement of monstrosity, alterity, health, and illness. The final sequence of the film takes place in a World Health Organization research facility in Cardiff, Wales, where Lane saves the world by (almost) sacrificing himself. He explains that he has noticed a pattern in the zombie attacks, that certain people seem entirely unappealing to the infected swarms. From this he develops a dangerous stopgap measure to protect humanity—I'll spare the details to avoid spoiling the end of the film. Lane's temporary solution, however, subtly destabilizes the binary opposition between health and monstrous infection that the rest of the film—and much of the zombie and outbreak genres it draws from—seems to operate upon. His solution, in fact, pushes the seemingly human survivors into a position between life and death, between health and illness: in fact, to slow the zombie spread, Lane has the world occupy the same, abject, liminal space that the zombie has occupied throughout the film. In this way, the final act of *World War Z* quietly redraws the lines of conflict in the film by refuting the implicitly accepted notions of health and humanity that the rest of the film appears to take for granted. And as this destabilization of health and humanity occurs through the labour of the World Health Organization and the United Nations, and manages rather than cures the zombie problem, it reinforces Eric Cazdyn's theory in *The Already Dead* that medicine and capital have entered the age of 'the new chronic.'[6] The film reasons that at the moment we cannot cure what ails the medical or political system; rather, life is relegated to a chronic maintenance of biological and political states of emergency. This logical volta makes the film more than just another blockbuster.

## Notes

[1] *World War Z*, dir. Marc Forster, performed by Brad Pitt (Paramount Pictures, 2013).

[2] *Night of the Living Dead*, dir. George A. Romero (The Walter Reade Organisation, 1968).

[3] *Dawn of the Dead*, dir. Zac Snyder, performed by Sarah Polley, Ving Rhames, Mekhi Phifer, (The Walter Reade Organisation, 2004.

[4] *28 Days Later*, dir. Danny Boyle, performed by Cillian Murphy, (The Walter Reade Organisation, 2002.

[5] Max Brooks, *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* (New York City: Three Rivers Press, 2007.

[6] Eric Cazdyn, *The Already Dead: The New Time of Politics, Culture, and Illness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

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*Dawn of the Dead*. Directed by George A. Romero. The Walter Reade Organisation, 2004.

*World War Z*. Directed by Marc Forster. Paramount Pictures, 2013.

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## *Killer Joe*

Dir. William Friedkin
L.D. Entertainment, 2011
Film, 102 minutes. (98 minutes R-rated cut)

In the rain-lashed darkness, flames leap from a brazier and a devil-dog strains at its chain, barking ferociously. From its earliest moments to its horrifying end, *Killer Joe* presents

the viewer with a hellish vision of trailer park life. Friedkin's crime thriller highlights the tension between the limited financial reach of the Smith family and capitalism's cult of greed, in a warped domestic set-up where respect and loyalty have been replaced by self-interest and mistrust. This bleak view of modernity does not dissipate as the film progresses. Rather, the horror deepens as the protagonists are revealed to us in all their monstrous glory: slack-jawed, affectless patriarch, Ansel (Thomas Haden Church); his manipulative and faithless wife, Sharla (Gina Gershon); son Chris (Emile Hirsch), a small-time drug-dealer; and unnervingly childlike daughter, Dottie (Juno Temple). The titular lawman-cum-contract killer, Joe Cooper (Matthew McConaughey), is a charming and manipulative psychopath hired by Chris and Ansel to kill Adele (Julia Adams), Chris and Dottie's mother. The men believe that Adele has a life insurance policy worth $50,000, on which Dottie is named as the sole beneficiary. Chris is desperate for money, as the cocaine he intended to sell to repay his debt to a local thug has been stolen and sold by his mother. It is perhaps unsurprising that Friedkin, also the director of the *The Exorcist* (1973), should portray the family as the locus of horror, yet in *Killer Joe*, the family is not under attack by terrifying monsters but composed of them.

Unable to pay Joe's $25,000 fee upfront, Chris and Ansel agree to give him the virginal Dottie as a 'retainer', with Ansel wryly noting that 'It might just do her some good.' Although she is twenty years old, Dottie has a childlike innocence and simplicity. Her demeanour and comportment make her appear prepubescent, and her apparent mental and intellectual limitations reinforce her juvenile status. Yet she also has moments of preternatural knowingness which, coupled with her naivety, lends her an uncanny and unsettling presence. Having overheard Chris and Ansel plotting Adele's murder, Dottie tells them: 'I heard y'all talking about killing Momma. I think it's a good idea.' The juxtaposition of these words and Dottie's sweet, childlike voice and angelic face is chilling, and the viewer is immediately reminded of horror cinema's strong tradition of monstrous children (including, of course, Friedkin's bile-spewing Regan). Indeed, Friedkin makes great use of the conventions of horror cinema in Killer Joe, from flashes of lightning to warn us that something diabolical is brewing, to silhouetted crosses presaging a death, and the slow build of dread and anticipation. In a disturbing jump-cut dream sequence Dottie moves towards her prone brother in a manner reminiscent of the Grady sisters in Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980), the scene's unsettling blend of menace, forbidden sexuality and innocence offering the viewer a tantalising glimpse into Dottie's true and complex nature.

With her blonde hair, blue eyes and cherubic face, Dottie is often shot playing in sunlight or surrounded by toys in her juvenile bedroom; a vision of angelic innocence in a film concerned with the hell that is modern life. Joe is her perfect foil, a hard-hearted and manipulative assassin, dressed from head to toe in black like a Western villain. He is also a lawman, a representative of truth, justice and order. Friedkin's film highlights the danger of trusting in surfaces; Dottie is revealed to be dangerous and unpredictable whilst Joe shows an unexpected tenderness and emotional vulnerability. It is significant that we witness the exact moment that Joe falls in love with Dottie: Dottie questions Joe about his intention to kill her mother and her lack of affect both unsettles and intrigues him. He assumes a fatherly mantel, bringing discipline and domesticity to the disordered home. The power dynamic in his and Dottie's relationship remains one of father and child, a fact which makes their sex scene very uncomfortable and difficult to watch. The camera work encourages the viewer to feel complicit in Joe's 'abuse' of this vulnerable 'child,' yet, as the scene develops, we realise that Dottie welcomes Joe's sexual advances. The violence suggested by the hand he places around her throat is neutralised when she grips his hand more tightly to increase the pressure, silently and subtly announcing her own destructive power. Their relationship 'consummated', Joe slips into his role as father/head of the family—disturbing when we consider that this is achieved by his

sex with the daughter of the house. Yet rather than confirming the incest hinted at by Chris's dream, this shift underscores Dottie's unexplored but monstrous potency, a strength sensed by Joe but underestimated by the rest of the family. Of course, failed families—and in particular failed masculinity—is one of the key themes of the film. During the courtship of Joe and Dottie's dinner, Dottie, titillated by the idea of Joe's violence, asks 'What's the most exciting thing that's ever happened to you?' The subsequent anecdote tells not of a heroic deed or a terrifying gun battle, but of a man who set fire to his own genitals in order to teach his girlfriend a lesson. When Joe remarks 'I guess he showed her', Friedkin's vision of twenty-first century gender relations and masculine crisis is laid bare.

*Killer Joe* is a dialogue-driven, noirish nightmare, peppered with dark comedy and culminating in an extraordinary and disturbing denouement which raises more questions than it answers and will put you off KFC for life. Caleb Deschanel's cinematography is unsparing and impactful, veering between an unadorned reportage-style and gothic scene-setting. Stand-out performances from the entire cast ensure that this is a riveting if uncomfortable watch. Matthew McConaughey deserves special mention; Hollywood's romcom hero brings depth and likeability to the role, turning a hard-hearted killer into somebody human and relatable whilst maintaining an air of unbearable menace. As Friedkin notes, McConaughey's romcom heritage was vital to his casting as 'the fact that he was already established as a 'nice guy' for audiences meant there was less resistance to him in this role'.[1] Juno Temple also thrills; her ethereal beauty combining with steely determination and an unexpected depth of perception to create a terrifying Cinderella character. It is no surprise that the film begins and ends with men begging for her mercy; in Dottie's case, at least, the female of the species is most definitely more deadly than the male. In Friedkin's hands, a crime thriller about an unlikeable band of self-serving miscreants is transformed into a warped and pitch-black fairy tale. It is gripping, tense and unflinching, brutal, hilarious and disturbing.

If you love Jim Thompson's nihilistic noir, you'll love *Killer Joe*. Just don't eat a bucket of chicken whilst watching.

## Notes

[1] 'Extras' interview, *Killer Joe*, dir. William Friedkin (LD Entertainment, 2011), DVD.

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