

# **Monster Mash:**

*Transgression of Boundaries and Gender in Gothic and Modern Horror*

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Advisor: Prof. Charles McGovern

## The Cultural Crypt- Entering the Monster's Lair:

Mankind has been afraid of the dark since we first opened our eyes. The lurking fears of the unknown, of non-existence, and of creatures that wait out of sight have haunted us since our beginnings. To cope with these unnameable fears, mankind has told stories: myths, tales and legends of the things that go bump in the night. These stories serve to give a form to the formless, to make the unknown knowable, and to provide heroes to vanquish the monsters that haunt us. The separation between fiction and reality also provides a “safety valve for human anxieties.” In stressful times and situations, it empowers humanity to tell stories of horror to distract from horrifying daily realities.<sup>1</sup>

Stories also serve to delineate cultural norms, by creating dichotomies between good and evil-- hero and villain-- and ascribe certain characteristics to one or the other. As Jeffrey Cohen points out, “The monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and projection, the monster exists ... to be read: the *monstrum* is etymologically ‘that which reveals,’ ‘that which warns.’”<sup>2</sup> Villains and monsters take on the undesirable characteristics of a society, and are “ritually destroyed” to symbolically cleanse the culture, as well as to send a message: “This is what happens to monsters, so beware, lest you become one.”<sup>3</sup> As such, horror and horror stories, as a medium—with their strong demarcations of good and evil, and visceral and visual depictions of what ‘evil’ looks like and how it should be dealt with—are centrally important to reinforcing cultural norms and values. As Cohen, again, notes, monsters delimit the social spaces through

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Glut, *Classic Movie Monsters* (Scarecrow Press, 1978), xvi.

<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses) in *Monster theory: reading culture*, Jeffrey Cohen, ed. (University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

which private bodies may move. They are the threat at the borders of humanity, either attacking and annihilating it if it strays too far from its norms, or looming as the potential of the horror it may become if social norms are not obeyed.<sup>4</sup>

Storytellers can be understood as the keepers and perpetuators of culture, as stories both draw from the culture around them, and support it by their reinforcement of value systems. In this paper, I will be exploring specific stories propagated in pop culture. Jane Caputi, in her work *Goddesses and Monsters*, lauds popular culture as “a valuable index to what people commonly know, value, fear, remember, and believe.”<sup>5</sup> Stories are a central tenet of popular culture, especially in more modern eras where the popular is reinforced by mass production and consumption. As previously noted, horror rises in popularity amidst times of great turmoil, stress, or upheaval, serving as a catharsis and an escape from the ‘real terror’ in the world, as well as reminding the consumers of appropriate and acceptable social behavior. I will be drawing from specific classic horror texts, beginning in the Gothic period, considered to be the birthplace of pop culture horror, and proceeding to modern day horror stories and films. These texts are drawn from periods of great tension across history. The European Gothic literary revival, which created such classic works as *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, and *Carmilla*, stemmed from the dawn of England’s Scientific and Industrial Revolutions in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. During this period of scientific, feminist, and social justice revolution, social, class, religious, and gender boundaries began to fracture under the stress. I also reference films from the 1930s, during the great revival of horror in the United States during the Great Depression. Cinema from the 1980s, in the midst of the rise of the ‘slasher flick,’ is represented as well, as it responded to social

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<sup>4</sup> Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” 12.

<sup>5</sup> Jane Caputi, *Goddesses and monsters: Women, myth, power, and popular culture* (Popular Press, 2004), 5.

tensions brought on by cultural revolutions and rebellion against Reaganite conservatism. I also include films from the turn of the century, where developments in cinematic technology allowed many filmmakers the opportunity to revisit classic stories, and give them ‘modern’ updates. These stories all draw on a multitude of universal themes, as well as classic Western mythology, expressed through oral tradition. While these original sources are not considered in the scope of this paper, their themes and imagery will be utilized in the analysis of the texts.

Now that the texts have been defined, it is important to note what the working definition of the word ‘monster’ will be for the purposes of this paper. Scholars of literature and culture agree that the body of the monster is a place of “interpretive mayhem,” a complex creation hard to define.<sup>6</sup> Men, women, and beasts have all been called monsters, and yet this term means different things when applied in different ways. One of the basic cores of horror is the concept of abjection, or “that which does not respect borders, positions, rules ... that which disturbs identity, system, [and] order.”<sup>7</sup> It is this theory of border disturbance that I drew most significantly on in my search and analysis of monsters. In the consumption and digestions of a significant amount of monster horror in literature and film, I was able to discern common, underlying themes across the media, and across the monsters presented therein. For one, monsters are manifestations of the obliteration of the human, through their immorality, hunger for power, and destruction of human bodies. Monsters are also aberrations, disregarding numerous types of borders. As Judith Halberstam notes, “one thing slips into its opposite when it becomes too extreme,” and monsters

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<sup>6</sup> Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic horror and the technology of monsters* (Duke University Press, 1995), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), in Barbara Creed, “Horror and the Monstrous Feminine,” *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (Psychology Press, 1993), 49.

are extremes without limits.<sup>8</sup> These extreme behaviors (usually violent, aggressive, and destructive) are more commonly associated with men and masculinity.

Considering these defining characteristics, I argue that monsters are extreme boundary transgressors. Behaviors associated with monsters are almost always extreme manifestations of *masculine* behaviors (physical destruction, aggression, sexual predation) enacted by *feminized* characters, either female monsters, or male monsters with female characteristics. Their monstrosity stems from the disruption of an ordered binary and their Otherness. Female monsters are unique, however, in that their monstrosity (boundary transgression) requires an explanation, an origin story, which usually reveals that they were once a victim themselves. That is, when female characteristics are applied to men, or male creatures, it makes them monstrous, but at least conceivable, since the extremity of their behavior (murder, destruction, rape, etc.) is still predominantly masculine. But when male characteristics are applied to women, this monstrosity is beyond the realm of imagination and requires explanation. This is important, as it results in providing women with the potential for empowerment, since female victims are allowed (and even expected) to take on the nature of their (usually male) attackers and become monsters with justification.

The specific monsters I will be analyzing in the course of this paper include ‘sutured beings,’ creatures pieced together from other bodies, particularly focusing on Dr. Frankenstein and his monster, read together as two sides of a singular monstrous entity, and Buffalo Bill from *Silence of the Lambs*, as a character and identity separate from the man Jame Gumb. I will also examine mummies, werewolves, vampires, and the phenomenon of “vagina dentata,” that is, women with

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<sup>8</sup> Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 179.

a second set of teeth hidden in their vaginal canal. Finally, I will explore the trope of the “Final Girl,” which has become a staple of the modern horror genre, stemming from popular horror’s Gothic roots.

### **Breaking Bodies- Monsters Transgressing Boundaries**

Gothic and post-Gothic horror emphasizes the breaking and transgressing of boundaries as centrally thematic, particularly in their representations of the monsters. Monsters are created to demonstrate deviance. Effectively constructed deviance, in order to be all-inclusive, must disregard boundaries of race, gender, class, or sexuality.<sup>9</sup> As Cohen notes, “monsters are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions.”<sup>10</sup> There are four specific ways in which monsters defy and destroy boundaries—they burst them through their excesses; they defy them in their unnatural powers and abilities; they rupture or coalesce their corporeal forms; and they disregard them in their hybridization of man and animal.

### *Bubbling Bodies- Monsters’ Bodies in a State of Physical and Sexual Excess*

Gothic monsters draw heavily from the Gothic period’s tendency towards excess, particularly in its emulation of original Gothic art. Where the Classical period valued clean lines and minimalism, the Gothic thrived on chaos, detail, extravagance, excess, and “transgressing cultural boundaries.”<sup>11</sup> This contrast demonstrates the dual repulsion and fascination monsters

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<sup>9</sup> Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” 6.

<sup>11</sup> David Punter and Glennis Byron, *The gothic* (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), 7.

produced in the cultures that created them. Too much transgression and too much excess, however, were unequivocally monstrous, particularly in England in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as the nation faced an identity crisis brought on by its expanding colonial empire as well as increased immigration and mobility of the underclasses. As David Punter and Glennis Byron noted, “the gothic horror of decadence [excess] is the horror of dissolution, of the nation, of society and ... of the human subject itself.”<sup>12</sup> Decadence in art and architecture may have been acceptable, but human nature needed to be carefully policed and monitored lest it stray too far.

According to Halberstam, “the monster is not human because he lacks the proper body—he is too big, too ugly, disproportionate.”<sup>13</sup> For example, Mary Shelley’s monster in the classic horror story, *Frankenstein*, is a gargantuan creation, larger than any man, whose hideousness repulses his creator and all other humans he comes into contact with.<sup>14</sup> Dracula’s physical appearance is viewed with similar amounts of disgust and discomfort. Female monsters, however, add an additional form of excess in their physical appearance: they are either exceedingly grotesque, such as in the case of the mythic Medusa, or they are dangerously enticing, such as with Dracula’s wives or the vampiress Carmilla. These physical extremes serve to repulse the observers, and suggest to them the dangers of individuals who do not fit proper, mainstream society’s opinion of appearance. This includes individuals of different races and the criminal element, who in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, during the height of popular physiognomic “science,”

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<sup>12</sup> Punter and Byron, *The gothic*, 43.

<sup>13</sup> Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 35.

<sup>14</sup> Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus* (1818 original, reprint: Broadview Press, 1999).

were believed to have physical indicators of their less-than-human nature.<sup>15</sup> Exceedingly beautiful women, the monsters' bodies warn, are not to be trusted either.

These monsters of the Other are also described as having excessive sexual appetites. Criminals were thought to be sexually deviant, as were women in sex work, who took ownership of their desires and their bodies.<sup>16</sup> Linda Williams suggests that the seeping fluids depicted in both Gothic horror novels as well as modern horror films, are markers of both the overflowing of the body, a transgression of physical limits and sexual excesses.<sup>17</sup> Evidence of this is seen in the 1992 film *Dracula*, directed by Francis Ford Coppola, which focuses exceedingly on the sexuality of the vampires and their dripping and oozing of blood, with the implication of other, more sexual, fluid excretions.<sup>18</sup> Linda Williams defines these sexual excesses as excesses of desire deflected away from the "proper" goals, such as in Carmilla's lesbian longings for Laura.<sup>19</sup> These sexual desires occur in an unrestricted and non-reproductive environment, as monsters are never shown to be naturally fertile amongst themselves (although the fear exists that they might be), and almost entirely outside of the bounds of marriage. These sinful desires are exercised 'out of bounds' and outside a reproductive context, something socially unacceptable and unnatural for the Gothic time period.

An excessive desire for sex is seen as monstrous as well, as with Frankenstein's monster's desire for a bride, the implied goal being their lustful copulation. There is a fear rampant in Gothic monster literature, particularly *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, that the monsters in question

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<sup>15</sup> Punter and Byron, *The gothic*, 23.

<sup>16</sup> Punter and Byron, *The gothic*, 23.

<sup>17</sup> Linda Williams, "Film bodies: Gender, genre, and excess," *Film Quarterly* (1991), 5.

<sup>18</sup> *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, directed by Francis Ford Coppola (1992; Culver City, CA: ColumbiaTristar), Netflix.

<sup>19</sup> Williams, "Film bodies: Gender, genre, and excess," 6.

are going to breed and out-populate the “good” people, brought on by ethnocentric and nationalistic concerns of purity. Marilyn Brock points out the connection between Dracula and Carmilla as symbols of the “Other’s more vital sexuality ... [conflating] the sexually aggressive female and the racial other.”<sup>20</sup> The victims of these two monsters are ‘good,’ European women, would-be wives and mothers, who are corrupted and killed by the sexually parasitic force of the monster. Even Dr. Frankenstein’s wife is killed and their marriage corrupted by his creation, cutting off the scientist’s chances at natural reproduction rather than via perverse scientific experimentations. The secondary fear is that the women being targeted will like, or even prefer, these monstrous invaders.<sup>21</sup> Lucy Westernra, Dracula’s first victim in the 1992 film, is shown copulating with him in the courtyard of her house, laid out as if on a sacrificial altar to the beast, in throes of both agony and ecstasy; her first sexual experience is not with her fiancé, nor even any of her other English suitors, but with a monster.<sup>22</sup>

*Bodies Beyond- Monsters’ Bodies Transgressing Natural Law*

In the 1992 film version of Dracula, as Jonathan Harker explores the vampire’s castle he comes across a small glass vial which, when uncorked, drips liquid up into the air. This is just one example of the way in which monsters, by their presence, and by their mere existence, change and defy the laws of nature. Dracula himself is described as scaling the walls of his castle like a lizard; gravity, that force which controls the lives of men, has no effect on him. Most monsters are described as having unnatural powers, such as feats of speed, or super strength, or

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<sup>20</sup> Marilyn Brock, “The Vamp and the Good English Mother,” *From Wollstonecraft to Stoker: Essays on Gothic and Victorian Sensation Fiction* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009), 120.

<sup>21</sup> Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 29.

<sup>22</sup> *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (1992).

hypnotic mind control. The eponymous main character in the 1999 film *The Mummy*, directed by Stephen Sommers, is described as “an unholy flesh eater with the strength of ages, power over the sands and the glory of invincibility.”<sup>23</sup> Dracula has the strength of twenty men, as do most werewolves, and Frankenstein’s enormous creation. Some monsters can even change their forms to pierce physical boundaries such as locked doors. Dracula turns into mist and his wives become floating dust motes in the moonlight.<sup>24</sup> The 1932 version of *The Mummy*, directed by Karl Freund, showed Boris Karloff’s incarnation of Imhotep with mystic powers, allowing him to hypnotize and kill men from a distance with simply an eerie stare and an outstretched hand.<sup>25</sup> A scene in Sommers’ *Mummy*, shows the resurrected Imhotep turning himself into sand to pour through the keyhole of the room where his intended female victim sleeps.<sup>26</sup>

Monsters, in addition to disregarding natural and physical law and boundaries, corrupt other natural forms. The replacement of sexual and vital fluids in the vampire mythos with blood is a corruption; life-bestowing fluids of semen and breastmilk are bloodied and corrupted by the vampire’s influence. Additionally, the teeth of the vampires’ victims, and of the vampires themselves, reflect a loss of human i-dent-ity, as the tooth is “the last fragment of the presence of a human body.”<sup>27</sup> Dracula’s teeth are completely changed, symbolizing his complete loss of humanity, and the progressive revelation of the teeth from the receding gums is an indication in Dracula’s victims that his unnatural corruption is at work in their bodies.

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<sup>23</sup> *The Mummy*, directed by Stephen Sommers (1999, Universal City, CA: Universal), DVD.

<sup>24</sup> Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (1897 original, reprint: Penguin, 2007).

<sup>25</sup> *The Mummy*, directed by Karl Freund (1932, Universal City, CA: Universal), DVD.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 150.

Monsters, reflecting the Victorian English fear of contamination by external nations, tend to be homeless and wandering, and unbounded by limitations of nationality. For instance, Dracula is an immigrant to England, coming from a region which has been the source of contestation by many nationalities for centuries; his blood is an impure mixture of the lines of not only countless humans, but numerous races of people. The fear implied in these Gothic texts, then, is that with no boundaries or borders to define them, monsters possess a dangerous lack of nationality, infiltrating places, devouring their citizens, and moving on.

The “undead” nature of many monsters is yet another transgression of nature. Barring the werewolf and a few mythic creatures, many monsters come into existence after being resurrected from the dead. Kristeva notes that “the ultimate abjection is the corpse ... the most sickening of wastes ... a border that has encroached upon everything.”<sup>28</sup> Death is considered the ultimate Other, the border from which no one should be able to return. However, these monsters defy even this boundary, rising from the dead, and using death as a tool to create life. Buffalo Bill, for instance, “uses female skin [as a seamstress] ... to fashion death into new life.”<sup>29</sup> In the deaths of the women, Buffalo Bill is created, brought to life in his suit of skin. Mummies are bodies brought back from the dead- in the 1999 film there is a dramatic depiction of this as a mummy’s hand pierces through the sands, transgressing not only the boundaries of physical planes (above versus below) but also the boundaries of life and death.<sup>30</sup> Live burial itself is a “queerness of meaning,” in that if a person is alive, they do not belong in the grave.<sup>31</sup> Monsters exist in a space that is neither death nor life, and so they move easily between the worlds of the living and the

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<sup>28</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, 3-4 in Creed, “Horror and the Monstrous Feminine,” 47.

<sup>29</sup> Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 168.

<sup>30</sup> *The Mummy* (1999).

<sup>31</sup> Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 20.

dead. Lucy Westernra in *Dracula* is an excellent example of this transgression. In Stoker's novel, the "glow of life" is rich on her when she is seen by the men who come to open her tomb, and later she is found wandering the graveyard where she is supposed to have been buried. Carmilla, likewise, informs her friend/victim, Laura, that "I live in your warm life, and you shall die—die, sweetly die—into mine."<sup>32</sup> For the vampire Carmilla, life and death are inextricably entwined, and she desires most of all to draw her living friend into her undead existence by feeding on Laura's life, to the point of her death, sustaining her own half-life.

*Broken Bodies- Things Fall Apart (or Come Together)*

The third indication of a monstrous body is its lack of physical integrity. Monsters' bodies are made of bits and pieces; things fall off of them (or are torn or dismembered), and are re-attached. The Gothic monsters are ruptured, disjointed, and fragmented, and their evil nature is reflected externally in the decaying flesh of their bodies.<sup>33</sup> Mummies are excellent examples of this sense of physical decay—they have decomposed into bits of rotting flesh and bone held together by dusty rags. In the 1999 version of *The Mummy*, Imhotep regains his semblance of humanity by consuming and absorbing the essences and life forces of the men who awoke him from his tomb. Later on in the film, the creature loses its arm in a fight with the male protagonist; however, unperturbed, he merely picks up the fallen limb and re-arms himself, attaching it back onto his body.

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<sup>32</sup> Joseph Sheridan LeFanu, *Carmilla* (original 1872) accessed from <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/10007/10007-h/10007-h.htm>.

<sup>33</sup> Punter and Byron, *The gothic*, 42; 22.

Other monsters, however, are not so fortunate in their re-assembly. It is interesting to note that it is primarily *female* monsters who are torn apart, never to be put back together. The female mummy, Ankh-Su-Namun, in Sommers' film is torn to pieces by other undead soldiers. When Frankenstein creates his first monster, he stitches it together out of bits of dead humans and animals. When the creature awakens and demands that Dr. Frankenstein create a female mate for him, Frankenstein finds it "a filthy process,"<sup>34</sup> and cannot bring himself to go through with it, and tears the female creature apart on his operating table. The scene is graphic and visceral, "a deconstruction of woman into her messiest and most slippery parts."<sup>35</sup> The scene ends with the would-be female monster strewn across the floor of the laboratory, a "slippery mass," shapeless and without form. As Halberstam points out, "Woman is reduced to a 'half-finished creature' that man may take apart, but not assemble."<sup>36</sup> LeFanu's *Carmilla* is described as a "mass" as well; when feeding on a former victim, the girl's father enters the room to see "a large black object, very ill-defined ... spread itself up to the poor girl's throat, where it swelled, in a moment, into a great, palpitating mass."<sup>37</sup> All of these female monsters have burst their definitions and their boundaries, and are now simply formless pulp. This 'pulp' is a very literal metaphor that separates the threat of female monstrosity from male monstrosity, which is a 'fleshy' sexuality that will never be human. Male monsters are monstrous precisely because they assume the form of humanity, incorporating humanity into their monstrosity, while female monsters lack the integrity and completion of form to do so; they are "always only an object, a thing, unfinished."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 164.

<sup>35</sup> Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 47.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> LeFanu, *Carmilla*.

<sup>38</sup> Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 51.

In Francis Ford Coppola's *Dracula*, when Jonathan Harker is being seduced by the vampiresses, two of the women become joined together at the pelvis, creating a horrific crab- or spider-like monstrosity, which scuttles out of the room upon Dracula's arrival. Carmilla rearranges the letters of her name for each house she visits: in life she was the countess Mircalla, and at the home before Laura's, Millarca. The letters which make up her name are moved around and stitched back together, forming new identities. This piecing together of multiple parts (the opposite of the former phenomenon) is just as horrific, if not more so, than the monsters' tendency to fall apart. The monsters "transform the fragments of otherness into one body."<sup>39</sup> They are pieces and parts stitched together with no regards to proper separation into self and Other; for them, their Selves are construed of every Other. Buffalo Bill and Frankenstein's monster are both subjects of "a veritable carnage of identity," creating new identities from bits and pieces of men and women.<sup>40</sup> Dracula does the same, coming from his long line of mixed ethnicities and mixed blood. As Van Helsing warns his compatriots: "He is known everywhere that men have been. In old Greece, in old Rome, he flourish [sic] in Germany all over, in France, in India, even in the Chermosese, and in China."<sup>41</sup> Dracula travels the world, consuming peoples from all walks of life, and absorbing them into his own self. In Stoker's novel, the consumption of blood is a consumption of identity; it is interesting, then, to note that at the time of her "death," Lucy has the blood of four men in her, taking on their masculinity right before she transforms into a monster.

### *Bestial Bodies- Hybridization and Animality in Monstrosity*

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<sup>39</sup> Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 92.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>41</sup> Stoker, *Dracula*, 341

The final way in which monsters transgress boundaries is through their hybridization and mixing of man and animal. Numerous times in the Gothic monster stories, the monsters themselves are given animalistic characterizations. Dracula alone has hair growing in the center of his palm, fingernails like claws, long sharp, canine teeth, “a beaky nose [with]... lips red and pointed like an animal’s.”<sup>42</sup> <sup>43</sup> He is described as “panther-like and unhuman” and possessing “a lion-like disdain.”<sup>44</sup> The 1992 film honors this animalistic nature by having Dracula at one point actually turn into a pack of rats.<sup>45</sup> Lucy, Dracula’s first victim, is characterized with animal-based similes many times as well: she has “an appetite like a cormorant,”<sup>46</sup> and gives “an angry, cat-like snarl;”<sup>47</sup> when she becomes a full vampire, she victimizes children who have “wounds [which] seem such as might be made by a rat or a small dog.”<sup>48</sup> Dracula even refers to Lucy and the infected Mina as being his “jackals when [he wants] to feed.”<sup>49</sup>

The most appropriate exemplar of this hybridization is the Werewolf or Wolfman. The werewolf’s body best represents “the collapse of the boundaries between human and animal.”<sup>50</sup> Werewolves are notable in the monster world as they are one of the few monsters who can pursue their monstrosity voluntarily. In some folklore, a werewolf is a person “who is able to change shape to become a wolf or hybrid creature of human being and wolf and who, once in this altered state, is driven to commit acts of violence.”<sup>51</sup> This demonstrates some agency,

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 246.

<sup>44</sup> Stoker, *Dracula*, 439.

<sup>45</sup> *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (1992)

<sup>46</sup> Stoker, *Dracula*, 154.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 302.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 253.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 440.

<sup>50</sup> Creed, “Horror and the Monstrous Feminine,” 48.

<sup>51</sup> Glut, *Classic Movie Monsters*, 2.

perhaps associated with stronger ties to nature. People can become werewolves in many different ways, other than the standard infected bite from another werewolf (similar to the vampire): “drinking water from a wolf’s footprint, wearing a girdle made of wolf skin, eating a wolf’s brains or the flesh of a rabid wolf, [or] drinking from a stream used by wolves.”<sup>52</sup> These all show a disregard for the boundaries between man and beast, and a mingling of human and animal natures, such as drinking from wilderness sources, or eating the flesh of non-domesticated beasts.

Another strong connection to nature appears through the association of some of these monsters with felines. Dracula and his wives are both known to move with “cat-like grace.” When Carmilla first attacks Laura, she appears to be “a monstrous cat ... [with] two broad eyes,” lurking in the bedroom in the dark, stalking to and fro “with the lithe, sinister restlessness of a beast in a cage.”<sup>53</sup> Mummies tend to be associated with cats as well, stemming from their connection to ancient Egypt, where cats were considered sacred, having a connection to the gods. The animal nature of many of these monsters is directly linked to divinity, particularly goddesses. As Caputi points out, “Goddess/monster myths re-sacralize animals and, concomitantly, those traits we associate with animals in ourselves: intuition, instinct, sexuality, sensuality, and mortality.”<sup>54</sup> Femininity is commonly associated with nature, therefore the animal/human hybridization hints at a male/female hybridization as well.

Cats are only one connection to the female divinity. Snakes are also commonly utilized as symbols in monster mythology, in some senses drawing from a Christian tradition of evil being depicted as a snake in the Garden of Eden, but also from older mythologies as well. When Stoker

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>53</sup> LeFanu, *Carmilla*.

<sup>54</sup> Caputi, *Goddesses and monsters*, 14.

describes Lucy in her death throes, he says that “her brows were wrinkled as though the folds of flesh were the coils of Medusa’s snakes.”<sup>55</sup> Caputi, again, says that “[Earth] deities are depicted bearing not only fruits and flowers, but also snakes. . . . Serpents continue to be recognized as bearers of subterranean wisdom, signifiers not only of death but also of infinity and re-birth,” as they shed their skins to come back anew.<sup>56</sup> Snakes and monsters, therefore, are inextricably linked. Snakes are fanged, dwell in darkness, under the world, and are associated both with the natural female, but also the phallic male, making them an excellent symbol of ruptured boundaries.<sup>57</sup>

The borders which monsters will transgress know no bounds, and no limit is safe. However, for storytellers, writers, and policers of culture, the most problematic transgression of boundaries performed by monsters is that of gender.

### **Mixed Up Monsters- Monsters Transgressing Gender Boundaries**

The Other is that which is separate, “disowned, feared, and denied in the self [and] projected onto another being or group.”<sup>58</sup> Monsters are masters of the Other, in that they disregard the separation of the Self from the Other, creating in their own bodies a new Self, made up of pieces of diverse Others and incorporating characteristics of the majority power, the popular Self. In a Gothic world caught up in the increasing interconnectivity of the globe, increased mobility for previously restricted classes, genders, and races, and the seemingly

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<sup>55</sup> Stoker, *Dracula*, 303.

<sup>56</sup> Caputi, *Goddesses and monsters*, 13.

<sup>57</sup> Caputi, *Goddesses and monsters*, 320.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

perilous grip of those in power, transgressions of Otherness were incredibly distressing, and popular horror drew on these social fears.

Historically, within the gender binary, the category designated as “Other” is the feminine, aligned with other manifestations of Otherness, such as death, the grotesque, colonized nations and persons, and the non-human world. By sharing a common label of “Other” or “deviant,” these categorical qualities, such as “chaos, emotion ... animality ... darkness ... [and] death”<sup>59</sup> get mixed and layered onto one another, and “represent the limits of the human,”<sup>60</sup> with humanity being defined by the majority as “not Other.” Non-white races, because of their association with the Other, tend to be the bodies that carry many of these labels, particularly the bodies of women of color. A remarkable example of this trope of using black women as a “warning sign” of the presence of the Other is the unexplained “hideous black woman” who arrives in a carriage with Carmilla at the protagonist’s home.<sup>61</sup> Women of color symbolize “lesbianism, savagery, violence, and a contaminating touch,” which is exactly what Carmilla is about to bring upon the home.<sup>62</sup>

In addition to racial and colonial tensions, Gothic horror drew on the growing popularity of “the New Woman,” and women’s increasing visibility and desire for agency. To combat this, Gothic horror writers “tended to police the boundaries of male and female quite rigorously, aiming to control by defining and delimiting the nature and roles of the sexes in a manner that particularly constrained women,”<sup>63</sup> by writing and creating characters, such as Mina Harker and Laura, who are stereotypically “good English women,” to contrast with the monstrous characters,

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 141.

<sup>61</sup> LeFanu, *Carmilla*.

<sup>62</sup> Caputi, *Goddesses and monsters*, 68.

<sup>63</sup> Punter and Byron, *The gothic*, 230.

who disregard the gender binary and “proper” gender roles. Male and female, in Victorian socio-cultural theory, are supposed to be separate, and opposite. Monsters, in their disregard for separation demarcation, integrate aspects of both the male and the female into their characterization.

*Feel Like a Natural Woman- Nature and the Monstrous Feminine*

As previously noted, a thematic connection between nature and the feminine is prevalent in a significant amount of Western mythology, literature, and social constructions. Women are supposed to have a deeper connection with the natural world, due to their more ‘primitive’ tendencies, their life-generating nature, and their animalistic qualities, such as intuition, emotionality, and irrationality. The nature/female connotation is very strong in a number of Gothic monster stories. Dracula’s wives, in particular, are characterized by natural elements: they have pearly teeth, ruby lips, and sapphire eyes—all natural, rare, and beautiful gems. Monsters are also frequently allied with nature, or have power over elements of it; they can turn into its “lesser forms,” such as Dracula’s ability to turn into and communicate with or control other animals, such as the rat, and the owl, and the bat, the moth, and the fox, and the wolf.<sup>64</sup> Monsters can sometimes turn themselves into natural elements, such as the mummy from the 1999 film into sand, or Dracula into mist or fog. Sommers’ mummy also displays his power over nature as he re-creates the plagues of Egypt, calling not only frogs, locusts, and gnats, but eclipsing the sun and bringing down fiery hail.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Stoker, *Dracula*, 338.

<sup>65</sup> *The Mummy* (1999).

A feminine connection with nature extends particularly to the female, and divine, connection with the moon. The cycle of the moon and the female menstrual cycle are often conflated, and the moon and moonlight, as well as nighttime and darkness are considered times and elements of female power. In addition to being described in many natural terms, Dracula's wives turn into "dancing motes of dust" in the moonlight, strengthening the connection between the moon, women, and forces of evil. It is also interesting to note that in werewolf mythology the moon is incorporated into a transformation ritual which takes away a man's agency and turns him into a monster. As such, he (werewolves are usually men) becomes suddenly at the mercy of a twenty-eight day cycle.

### *Maternal Monsters- Monstrous Reproduction*

The monster's intrinsic link to nature extends to the maternal and reproductive nature of many monsters. An inherent fear of the Othered nature of monsters is that they will reproduce, but the maternal nature of the monster is linked more closely with the fear of the unknown that is the female genitals. Over and over again, the symbolism of caverns, gaping mouths, and yonic symbolism are utilized around the Gothic monsters. For instance, in *The Mummy* from 1932, Imhotep emerges from a womblike sarcophagus, and in the 1999 film there are numerous shots of the mummy's mouth open wide, usually emitting either animals or piercing shrieks. Monsters themselves frequently become yonic images, such as Medusa who, according to Freud, "signifies the female genitals in their terrifying aspect."<sup>66</sup> Female monsters, such as Medusa, are obviously more directly linked to the only partially-monstrous (normal) female. According to Halberstam,

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<sup>66</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Medusa's Head," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, vol 18*, James Strachey, ed. (London: Hogarth Press, 1964) in Creed, "Horror and the Monstrous Feminine," 61.

“the female monster represents ... the symbolic and generative power of monstrosity itself, and particularly of a monstrosity linked to femininity, female sexuality, and female powers of reproduction”<sup>67</sup>

Additionally, male monsters are often depicted as maternal as well. Dr. Frankenstein (who makes up half of the monster in Shelley’s work, and simply makes the other half), seeks not only to usurp the role of God in his creation of life, but also the role of women.<sup>68</sup> These unnatural tendencies haunt him after “birthing” his creature, as he dreams that his fiancée, Elizabeth, turns into the corpse of his dead mother. For Victor Frankenstein, women are either dead, like his mother, or dangerous as they can do naturally what he must attempt in an unnatural fashion; “monstrosity and maternity” are inextricably linked for him, and “threaten always to join forces to reproduce a ‘race of devils.’”<sup>69</sup> Dracula also corrupts the potentially maternal, in addition to taking on the maternal role himself. Under his influence, the “good English woman,” Lucy, becomes a devourer of children, instead of a bearer of them. Dracula also “nurses” Mina Harker on blood drawn from his breast. Dracula is also the only vampire in the novel to reproduce, that is, to create other vampires.<sup>70</sup>

### *FeMENine- Male Monsters with Female Sexualities*

In addition to the relationship between monstrosity and the maternal body, male monsters tend to take on other feminine characterizations, to demarcate them as improperly and inappropriately gendered, defining their evil and disordered existences. Buffalo Bill is a perfect

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<sup>67</sup> Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 50.

<sup>68</sup> Punter and Byron, *The gothic*, 199.

<sup>69</sup> Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 46-47.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

example of this, as he is a monster who is “a patchwork of gender, sex and sexuality.”<sup>71</sup> Buffalo Bill, from the 1991 film *Silence of the Lambs*, is the creation of a gender dysphoric man whose cross-dressing tendencies lead him to dismember women so that he can create a suit out of them. At one point in the film *Silence of the Lambs*, Jame Gumb puts on his suit of women’s skins, becoming Buffalo Bill, and performs in drag in front of his mirror. He is inside the skins of women, “[they] are upon him, he is inside [them.]”<sup>72</sup> This is not a sexual metaphor, at least not in terms of coitus, rather it is a metaphor for identity, and the layered and sutured nature of Buffalo Bill as a monster.

Homosexuality in monsters is not un-common. An underlying fear in *Dracula* is that he will “penetrate” another man, corrupting his body as well as his sexuality.<sup>73</sup> While homosexuality (particularly lesbianism) and vampirism are closely linked in popular culture, *Frankenstein* puts a great deal of effort into questioning the heterosexuality of Dr. Victor Frankenstein, in the depictions of his close male relationships, his aversion to his beautiful fiancée, his disgust when his monster, his creation, begs him for a heterosexual mate, and the masturbatory and homosexual attempts to create life outside of the bodies and reproductive capabilities of women. The creature itself is a sexual outlaw, strangling women rather than raping them, and unable to consummate a relationship with the female monster, which Dr. Frankenstein tears apart before the creature may have a chance to pursue a heterosexual relationship. Victor’s inability to create a female also indicates his distaste and distrust for the female form in general. As Halberstam notes, “Victor is ‘engaged upon a rape of nature, a violent penetration and usurpation of the

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>73</sup> Punter and Byron, *The gothic*, 232.

female's hiding places, of the womb ... in place of a heterosexual attachment to Elizabeth, Victor Frankenstein has substituted a homosexual obsession with his creature."<sup>74</sup> Dr. Frankenstein is seeking to destroy, devalue, and make irrelevant the female population, and in doing so disregards what should be his ordered attraction to the female, particularly his beautiful and winning fiancée. It is interesting to note, however, the parallels drawn in the text between not only the analogous relationship between Dr. Frankenstein and the creation as that of God and Adam, but also God and Satan, and most importantly in this context, God and Eve. The creation's connection to the flawed first woman implies the conflation of "bodily monstrosity with a fear of femininity," that is, the monster's piecemeal and imperfect body is directly correlated with the "imperfect" Eve, the original harbinger of evil, assisted by Satan, who is traditionally depicted as a phallic snake, penetrating the mind of the woman with doubt and questioning, but also inherently connected to the feminine.

#### *WoMEN- Female Monsters with Male Sexualities*

In the Gothic contexts in which the majority of these texts were created, women were not expected to be sexually empowered or dominant, as sexual control was the realm of the masculine. Female monsters take this control, however, and use it against their male and female victims, adopting penetrative male characteristics, an excessive appetite for sex, and a heightened sensuality. This makes them desirable and dangerous, emasculating their male victims and turning their female victims into their lesbian lovers. Punter and Byron note "Gothic texts of the time repeatedly produce powerful and sexually aggressive females as alien or monstrous, setting them in opposition to the 'pure' woman in an attempt to stabilize gendered

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<sup>74</sup> Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 42.

identity.”<sup>75</sup> By making the monsters empowered, sexually “deviant,” women, it reinforces the expected and socially acceptable behavior of “good” women.

As Caputi points out, “in a heterosexist culture, the aggressive, predatory, criminal woman is the conventional stereotype for the lesbian.”<sup>76</sup> Gothic era England was certainly a heterosexist culture; therefore all of the female monsters who are characterized as aggressive and predatory, such as Dracula’s wives and Carmilla, are certainly Sapphic. Carmilla targets the wives and daughters of the peasantry surrounding Laura’s home, and her interactions with the protagonist are always breathless and sexual. Time and again Laura says that Carmilla “would take my hand and hold it ... blushing softly, gazing in my face with ... burning eyes, and breathing so fast that her dress rose and fell with the tumultuous respiration. It was like the ardor of a lover ... her hot lips traveled along my cheek in kisses; and she would whisper, almost in sobs, ‘You are mine ... you and I are one forever.’”<sup>77</sup> The passion and borderline explicit sexuality of the encounter is not unusual. As Laura falls deeper under Carmilla’s influence, she begins to experience strange feelings in her sleep that seem akin to orgasms, describing certain “strange sensations ... [like a] pleasant, peculiar cold thrill which we feel in bathing, when we move against the current of a river,” and in one scene “a sensation as if a hand was drawn softly along my cheek and neck,” and “as if warm lips kissed me ... longer and longer and more lovingly as they reached my throat ... . My heart beat faster, my breathing rose and fell rapidly and full drawn; a sobbing, that rose into a sense of strangulation, supervened, and turned into a dreadful convulsion, in which my senses left me and I became unconscious.”<sup>78</sup> LeFanu certainly

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<sup>75</sup> Punter and Byron, *The gothic*, 40.

<sup>76</sup> Caputi, *Goddesses and monsters*, 52.

<sup>77</sup> LeFanu, *Carmilla*.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

does not shrink from describing the peculiar sensations of the female orgasm as a horrific and terrifying experience, as the Gothic society would have imagined such an unusual occurrence to be.

Lesbianism in monsters provides an additional danger in that “the lesbian/monster is all that is ‘unassimilable, awesome, dangerous, outrageous, different’ ... all that remains chaotic beyond the ordering, taming, controlling power of ... the ‘cock.’”<sup>79</sup> Carmilla outright rejects the notion that she might be in love with a man, declaring that she loves no one but the protagonist, Laura.<sup>80</sup> As male monsters, such as Frankenstein, try to reproduce without women, lesbian monsters have no interest in maternal reproduction (as evidenced by monsters like Dracula’s wives eating children and infants, rather than caring for them), and do not need men for sexual gratification. Because they do not pursue men sexually, lesbians cannot be controlled by them, and may even overpower them.

The fear of the emasculating female monster is expressed frequently in Stoker’s *Dracula*. Jonathan Harker, the only victim to survive the attentions of Dracula’s wives, is “made impotent with fear,” by them, and displays “feminine passivity ... [as he] awaits the moment of penetration” by the three female vampires.<sup>81</sup> In the cinematic reproduction of this scene Jonathan’s nipple is even shown to squirt blood, which the female vampires lap up eagerly, making him a source of maternal nourishment for their monstrosity.<sup>82</sup> Vampires in general make

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<sup>79</sup> Caputi, *Goddesses and monsters*, 317.

<sup>80</sup> LeFanu, *Carmilla*.

<sup>81</sup> Punter and Byron, *The gothic*, 232.

<sup>82</sup> *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (1992).

men metaphorically impotent, as noted by Dracula in the film as well, as the Englishmen are unable to protect their women from the Transylvanian's penetrating influences.<sup>83</sup>

Vampire women, in general, are some of the best examples of empowered male sexuality being expressed in a female form. Vampirism “transforms pure and virginal women into seductresses... [stressing] an urgent sexual appetite.”<sup>84</sup> Lucy, particularly in the 1992 cinematic version of *Dracula*, is sexually deviant, making her a prime candidate for becoming a monster; she is sexually bold with her three suitors, is vocal about her interest in sex, and even kisses Mina as they run around her garden in the rain.<sup>85</sup> Monstrous women, in addition to having the sexual appetites of a man, are also occasionally described with masculine characteristics. Carmilla, for instance, is tall, “above the middle height of women.”<sup>86</sup> In a more blatantly symbolic sense, the mother-monster in the 1979 film *Alien* is created to look like an enormous penis on legs. To reproduce, she orally rapes her victims (usually men), and forces them to gestate and carry her young, which also look like phalluses, which explode out of their bodies, tearing them apart.<sup>87</sup>

### *Making (and Unmaking) Female Monsters*

The majority of the female monsters who appear in the pages or on the screens of these horror stories are destroyed with a much greater regularity and with a more concentrated thematic intent than their male counterparts. As Punter and Byron point out, “boundaries must

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 100.

<sup>85</sup> *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992).

<sup>86</sup> LeFanu, *Carmilla*.

<sup>87</sup> *Alien*, directed by Ridley Scott (1979: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox), DVD.

ultimately be reconfirmed,”<sup>88</sup> and the transgressed gender boundaries of female monsters must be re-established in the course of the novel, since incorrectly gendered bodies pose the most threat to social constructs, as they threaten established hierarchies of power via the patriarchy, as well as threatening morality and reproductive integrity of the home and the nation as a whole. As such, female monsters are killed in such a way that emasculates them, such as the staking of Lucy in the graveyard. Her fiancé “pounds in the ‘mercy bearing stake,’”<sup>89</sup> as Lucy writhes and screeches, and the female vampires in Dracula’s castle are dispelled in an equally phallic manner. Dracula himself, however, is not dispatched in such a fashion, and dies instead on “the weapons of empire;”<sup>90</sup> his death receives much less coital pomp and circumstance, and he is defeated almost anticlimactically, unlike the female vampires who fight against their penetration. Female monsters who are improperly gendered, that is who maintain masculine characteristics, particularly sexual ones, must be punished, and their deaths serve this purpose, as well as re-establishing appropriately gendered behavior.

The status of women as Other makes them a prime target for the violent punishments exacted in horror, since they, as Other, have already partially transgressed patriarchal norms, simply by being female. Female monsters, then, are exponentially more Othered, and therefore are destroyed in even more visceral, violent, and sexual ways. Frankenstein’s aborted female monster is a prime example of this; while the original creation is able to “[educate] himself and [argue] eloquently with his maker,”<sup>91</sup> the female monster is far too Othered to even make an attempt at life, and is torn apart in a scene of fleshy violence. This perpetuated split between Self

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<sup>88</sup> Punter and Byron, *The gothic*, 233.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 233-234.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 50.

and Other, and even between the varying degrees of otherness, goes to show that all norms are only maintained at the continued existence of things which reject the norm, and the policing and restricting of these individuals, whether they are women, monsters, or both.

### **Bitten Bodies- Monsters and their Victimology**

Monsters prey upon their victims in a particularly visceral manner- they tear apart their victims' bodies, as well as their minds. In attacking the physical integrity of the victims, the monsters destroy their boundaries, turning the victims into boundary-less beings as well, both internally, as they ravage their psyches, and externally. Vampires and mummies, as creatures with mystic powers, are the most likely to engage in these psychic destructions. Ardeth Bey/Imhotep in the 1932 *Mummy* film controls the mind of the leading female protagonist as well as the Nubian house servant of the male lead, bending them both to his will, making them his slaves. Imhotep in the 1999 film exercises similar control over the minds of the citizens of Cairo. It is interesting to note that both mummies exercise their control over victims who are already Other- the Black servant, a woman, and the population of colonized Egypt. Dracula infiltrates and controls both the minds and bodies of Lucy Westenra and Mina Harker, and Laura feels the weight of lethargy and stupor slowing down her mind and body every time she is close to Carmilla. In the 1992 *Dracula*, Lucy confides to her friend that Dracula "speaks to [her] in [her] thoughts," a sentiment reflected in the original novel as well. Dracula's brides, particularly in the 1992 cinematic version, also exercise control over the body of Mina Harker and the mind of Dr.

Van Helsing, using her as a puppet to draw the doctor in, and when this fails resorting to full on psychic warfare.<sup>92</sup>

More external attacks are available to a wider range of monsters, especially because most are already equipped with super-human strength. Tearing of victims is seen across mythologies, including the ancient Greek origin story of the werewolf, where a mad king tries to kill Zeus and then feeds him the chopped up pieces of a servant's body. The god punishes him by transforming him into a wolf-man, a fitting exterior to match the ruthless violent nature that already existed in the man.<sup>93</sup> Sommers' mummy preys upon the bodies of the men who released him from his eternal grave, stealing the eyes and tongue of one, and "assimilating [the] organs and fluids" of the others, leaving them hollow shells. When he attacks the minds of the denizens of Cairo, he simultaneously infects them with boils - their physical state mirrors their mental lesions as they fall under the mummy's spell. These "infected" men become monsters in their own right when they tear to pieces a knight of the order commanded to prevent the mummy from ever awakening. The beetles which figure prominently in the film are also excellent transgressors of physical boundaries, as they crawl under the skin of living men to devour them from the inside out. The boundary of the skin is an incredibly important one, and skin factors into the mythos of many of the monsters already discussed. As Halberstam notes, "skin ... becomes a kind of metonym for the human ... skin houses the body and it is figured in Gothic as the ultimate boundary, the material that divides the inside from the outside."<sup>94</sup> The bounded nature of skin is expressed in *The Silence of the Lambs* as the flayed skins of young women are Buffalo Bill's

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<sup>92</sup> *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992).

<sup>93</sup> Ovid, A.S Kline, trans., *Metamorphoses*, book 1, verses 199-243, <http://ovid.lib.virginia.edu/trans/Metamorph.htm#488381098>.

<sup>94</sup> Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 7.

targeted medium for transgressing his own boundaries of gender. Clothing is sometimes used in addition to or in place of the skin, such as in the 1992 *Dracula* where Jonathan Harker's clothes are torn apart by the ravenous brides of the Count.

While the ways in which victims' bodies are ultimately attacked are more or less the same across gender, the motivation behind the attacks varies according to both the gender of the victim, as well as the gender of the monster. For instance, female victims tend to be hunted, while male victims are usually casualties of (in)convenience. This is a common theme in many of the 1980's slasher films, as male victims are killed relatively quickly, while female victims are "filmed at closer range, in more graphic detail, and at greater length."<sup>95</sup> In both cinematic versions of *The Mummy*, the men are eliminated as roadblocks or stepping stones to the monster's consumption of the leading female. Both *The Mummy* and *Dracula* tell stories of "a seemingly immortal fiend with supernatural powers [pitted] against a group of mortals as he attempts to claim a young woman as his own."<sup>96</sup> The male victims in these stories, such as a museum guard in the 1932 *Mummy*, or the Medjai elder, Terrence Bey, are simply roadblocks to the monster getting what he wants, namely the female object of his desire.

Female victims are also the most likely to be killed because of their gender. While monsters serve as a warning about the Other, by creating a grotesque, amalgamated body formed out of elements of the Other, they also serve as the punishment administered to Others, which is why women are often targets of monstrous killings, as the female is a representation of the Other. In *Frankenstein*, Elizabeth is sacrificed to the monster, and Justine stands in place of the monster at

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<sup>95</sup> Carol Clover, "Her Body, himself: Gender in the slasher film," *Representations* (1987), 201.

<sup>96</sup> Glut, *Classic Movie Monsters*, 165.

the murder trial. Lucy ends up a victim to Dracula, and the General's daughter, as well as the wives and daughters of the local peasantry, are killed by Carmilla, for no other apparent reason than their female status.

While gender is one reason behind monstrous victimology, sex is another. Monsters frequently kill their victims either for or because of sex, that is, to obtain it or to punish it. The horror genre is no stranger to sexualized imagery, particularly in its depictions of female evisceration. Freund's *Mummy* includes the climactic scene of the leading lady about to be sacrificed on an altar, with the camera fixedly focused on the blade of the knife slowly descending towards her exposed stomach. In Coppola's *Dracula*, sexual symbolism runs rampant, but one particular image, of Dracula's shadow withering the flowers in Lucy's bedroom, foreshadows her imminent "deflowering" by him in the courtyard. 1980's slasher films are notorious for this specific victimology, stemming from the popular youth culture's more adventurous and, some might say dangerous, attitudes towards sex. Girls suffer from this victimology to a greater degree than boys do in these films; however any individual who "seeks or engages in unauthorized sex" is liable to be punished by the enforcing monster. For young women in particular, "this surprise encounter ... often takes place at a moment of sexual anticipation where a female victim thinks she is about to meet her boyfriend or lover. The monster's violent attack on the female victims vividly enacts a symbolic castration which often functions as a kind of punishment for an ill-timed exhibition of sexual desire"<sup>97</sup>

Women who love the wrong person, whether it be another woman or a monster, are also doomed to be punished. While it was not included in the 1932 *Mummy* film, scenes were

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<sup>97</sup> Williams, "Film bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," 11.

recorded which showed, via flashback, the leading lady in various reincarnations, including “an early Christian, a princess of medieval times, a Viking and a French noblewoman,” all being violently murdered, supposedly because of her initial illegitimate affair in ancient Egypt with Imhotep, who becomes the mummy.<sup>98</sup> The message is simple—women who love monsters or are loved by monsters are always fated to die horribly; sexual deviance will always be punished. Conversely, while sexually active “bad” girls are punished, “good” girls survive and find agency, seizing the power of the often phallic weapons, without its sexuality.<sup>99</sup> Their disregard for improperly gendered sexuality allows them to survive, enacting the trope of the “final girl.”

While monsters may punish sexual exploration regardless of gender, the gender of the monster usually dictates their particular relationship between sex and violence. Female monsters utilize their particular sexuality as a lure to obtain victims on which to enact their violent tendencies, while male monsters utilize violence to obtain victims on which to enact their sexual fantasies. This is seen in werewolf mythology, supposedly based upon “a Navajo Indian legend in which a human being ... was transformed into a complete wolf. In this case, the werewolf was female, the daughter of an Indian witch, who [lured] white men to their deaths.”<sup>100</sup> In this case the female werewolf is a beautiful and enticing creature that turns violent. A male werewolf, on the other hand, is supposed to “kill the one he loves most,”<sup>101</sup> corrupting what should be the positive sexuality expressed in romantic love with violence. In *Dracula*, feminine sexuality is coded as dangerous, and yet highly attractive. Lucy uses a “soft, voluptuous voice”<sup>102</sup> to draw her

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<sup>98</sup> Glut, *Classic Movie Monsters*, 168.

<sup>99</sup> Williams, “Film bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess,” 8.

<sup>100</sup> Glut, *Classic Movie Monsters*, 1-2.

<sup>101</sup> Donald Glut, *Classic Movie Monsters*, 6.

<sup>102</sup> Stoker, *Dracula*, 230.

fiancé toward her so that she might kill him, and the children she preys on once she has become a full-vampire refer to her as a “bloofer” (beautiful) lady. The she-vampire’s greatest strength, according to vampire expert, Dr. Van Helsing, is “the mere beauty and fascination of the wanton Undead,” which can hypnotize a man who might otherwise destroy her as the monster she is, until sunset, at which point she will awaken and devour him.<sup>103</sup> *Vamp*, a film directed by Richard Wenk in the 80’s, utilizes this basic trope to tell the story of a “vampire coven [operating] out of a seedy urban strip bar where ... female vampires both perform and seek victims.”<sup>104</sup>

The toothed sexuality prominent in female vampire mythology is an exact parallel to the fear of the *vagina dentata*, the toothy representation of a “monstrous female sexual appetite.”<sup>105</sup> This vagina has castrating power- it can consume and expel the phallus, while itself staying wholly, and monstrosly, feminine. Women with this castrating power are worse than sexual deviants, who might “deceive, steal, embarrass [or] convey social diseases,” they are almost cannibals, and are able to “wreak social destruction through full-scale annihilative consumption.”<sup>106</sup> By utilizing the region which is supposed to be the source of life and reproduction and inverting it into a zone of death and dismemberment, bearers of the *vagina dentata* are some of the most monstrous, the ultimate “femme fatale.” While “good girls” are impotent and de-sexed, these bad girls are potent, powerful, and dangerous, and use this power to exact their monstrous revenge upon the phallic world.

### **Bodies with Backstories- Monstrous Origins**

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 529.

<sup>104</sup> Caputi, *Goddesses and monsters*, 67.

<sup>105</sup> Brock, “The Vamp and the Good English Mother,” 129.

<sup>106</sup> Caputi, *Goddesses and monsters*, 55.

One of the key differences between male and female monsters is that female monsters are usually written or portrayed as having origin stories, an inception point which explains their monstrosity. As described earlier, monsters tend to exhibit extreme portrayals of masculine behavior—elevated sex drive, violence, aggression, destruction, etc. While these behaviors are understandable for male monsters, whose monstrosity stems primarily from the extremity of their behavior, female monsters have both the extremity and the improper gendering of their behavior to answer for. This is so far outside the realm of the conceivable that creators of female monsters need to qualify the behavior of their creatures with explanatory backstories. These origin stories allow the writers to “preserve an emphasis on female victimization,”<sup>107</sup> even as their women become empowered, masculine agents of force. Often female monsters are described with a lack of agency, such as Carmilla, who “cannot help” her vampirism.<sup>108</sup> Other times female monsters are the products of women who tried to take agency and are being punished for it by their monstrosity; this is frequently the case of women who commit suicide. Ankh-Su-Namun kills herself to escape the pharaoh’s guards in Sommers’ *Mummy*, as does the Countess Mircalla, who eventually becomes the vampire Carmilla. She offers her own explanation of her infection, explaining that she was “assassinated in [her] bed” by a vampire. She is provided an origin story which is not present for Count Dracula, who is simply understood to have always existed; his background is hazy and nebulous, while the female vampire has a definite starting point—one

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<sup>107</sup> P. Pearson, *When she was bad: Violent women and the myth of innocence* (New York: Viking, 1997), 57 in Lynn Edith Paulson, “Mama Bears, Bitches, and Monsters,” in *Featuring females: Feminist analyses of media. Psychology of women book series*, Ellen Cole, ed., Jessica Henderson Daniel, ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2005), 133.

<sup>108</sup> LeFanu, *Carmilla*.

day she was Mircalla, an ordinary countess, the next day she is an infected woman who kills herself and re-emerges from the grave as a vampire.

Female monsters are also, interestingly enough, female victims who appropriate the monstrosity of their attackers, and bond it with their inherent feminine Otherness to become empowered bodies. Female monsters are sometimes the victims of rape or an unfaithful love affair, who, after being rejected by the male, appropriate his masculinity and use it to wreak havoc on the rest of the male population. The film *Teeth* is a splendid example of this, as a young woman with vagina dentata, after being raped and used by several men in her life, decides to use her monstrous power to exact revenge on other men who would seek to take advantage of her.<sup>109</sup> While being an Other may seem disenfranchising, it actually has a certain element of power in it, for when an individual is Othered, they are no longer bound by the rules of society, since they have been cast aside from it. Monstrosity, therefore, provides a potential for agency for women who have no other means of obtaining power, or who have had what little power they did have taken away from them, usually at the hands (or teeth) of another monster. Female vampires are the perfect examples of this, as women who are disregarded by society abandon their human weakness and take on the Vampiric strength and characteristics of their attackers.

The trope of the “final girl” also draws heavily on this concept. “Final girls,” are the ones who survive the horror tale, and emerge at the other end wiser and worldlier, usually after killing the monsters who have hunted them over the course of the story. In doing so, these women must take on an active agency which allows them to appropriate the “male” strength of the monster to destroy it. Evelyn, the leading lady in the 1999 *Mummy*, is an intelligent, if somewhat clumsy

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<sup>109</sup> *Teeth*, directed by Mitchell Lichtenstein (2007: Roadside Attractions).

and naive woman. However, as the film progresses she becomes more empowered; in particular, her fighting style tends towards the gouging out of her male attackers eyes, or the classic groin kick. She either eliminates them by emasculating them, or asserts herself as a penetrative force in order to escape and overpower the danger that trails her. In the earlier *Mummy*, Helen Grosvenor must save herself from the mummy's attempted sacrifice by drawing on her religious power from her former life as a priestess in ancient Egypt, praying to the goddess Isis to save her. The men in the scene are rendered impotent, and it is only by accepting her nature as foreign other, which she shares with the mummy himself, compounded with her status as feminine other, that she can save herself and destroy the monster. Clover notes that the Final Girl and the monster who attacks her, and who she ultimately destroys, share elements of mixed gender. In defeating the monster, the Final Girl seizes the masculine agency which has been used to hunt her and uses it to castrate (which emasculates and hyperfeminizes) the creature. She now holds the phallus of agency which she has claimed from the monster. In addition, this scene normally comes at the end of a long night of terror, or the escape from an enclosed space; the Final Girl exists the dark, uterine world of the feminized monster armed with phallic power.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Clover, "Her body, himself," 210.

Mina Harker is another example of the Final Girl. Clover describes the Final Girl as such:

“The Final Girl is boyish, in a word. Just as the killer is not fully masculine, she is not fully feminine-not, in any case, feminine in the ways of her friends. Her smartness, gravity, competence in mechanical and other practical matters, and sexual reluctance set her apart from the other girls and ally her, ironically, with the very boys she fears or rejects, not to speak of the killer himself”<sup>111</sup>

Mina fits all of these qualities. She is demure, nurturing, and a good housewife, yet educated, intelligent, hardworking, capable, and takes initiative. She is not as sexually active or available as her doomed friend, Lucy, as her fiancé spends the majority of the book separated from her, and when he does return, he remains weak, traumatized, and impotent. Her working-class background also prevents her from identifying with the upper-middle-class womanhood of her friend. She works directly with the team of men to track down the Count and his boxes of dirt, and even draws upon her connection with Dracula once she has been infected to help the men find his whereabouts. Mina “assumes the ‘active investigating gaze’ ... reversing the look, [and] making a spectacle of the killer and a spectator of herself.”<sup>112</sup> Mina’s adoption of the “male gaze,” especially when she utilizes her mental connection with Dracula to literally see and experience what he is seeing, it strengthens the connection between the female “victim,” and her monstrous attacker; she draws upon his power and knowledge, while simultaneously Othering herself with the admission of the connection. As Linda Williams writes, “the female look ‘shares

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<sup>111</sup> Clover, “Her body, himself,” 204.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

the male's fear of the monster's freakishness, but also recognizes the sense in which this freakishness is similar to her own difference."<sup>113</sup> Women have the chance to utilize their subversive Otherness to empower themselves, and even the men around them, through their own Othered monstrosity, especially as this monstrosity is compounded by the influence of an externally manifested monster.

Male monsters, on the other hand, often have deliberately clouded backgrounds. Freddy Krueger, from the *Nightmare on Elm St.* franchise is "the bastard son of a hundred maniacs," as his mother was accidentally locked in a room at a madhouse as a young woman, and repeatedly raped. While she never becomes a monster, she does give birth to one, but his parentage is nebulous and unclear. As Caputi notes, "it is mythically necessary to leave the paternity of these killers nebulous and even multiple, for their true father is indeed a collective entity- the patriarchy culture."<sup>114</sup> For men, under the patriarchy, are expected to behave in pseudo-monstrous fashions, therefore they have no need to be justified in their monstrosity, unlike the female monsters they occasionally create. Mummies tend to be an exception to this rule of nebulous male origins, as they are provided with a specific backstory. This might be because their backstory is usually inextricably linked with particularly feminized representations of Otherness, namely an exotic colonialism, making them closer to female monsters than male ones. Also, mummies themselves are highly feminized in their romantic endeavors, longing after a woman and pursuing her across the centuries; they have a specific goal, the pursuit of which is the focus of the story, rather than, in other horror stories, the protagonist's attempts to defeat the monster.

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<sup>113</sup> Linda Williams, "When the woman looks," *Re-vision: Essays in feminist film criticism* (1984), 143.

<sup>114</sup> Caputi, *Goddesses and monsters*, 135.

In mummy mythology, the protagonist is usually a competing love interest, and so the story unfolds as more of a romance than pure horror.

### **Concluding Carnage- Creating a Cohesive Monstrosity**

As seen throughout the course of this examination on the nature of monsters and their transgressions of boundaries, the monster's body is indeed a seemingly chaotic place, which, when broken down into its integral pieces, actually reveals common trends and thematic elements. Horror is a cross-cultural phenomenon, used to police the actions of a society, as well as reveal socio-cultural norms. Its influences are omnipresent, and omnitemporal, but it manifests itself most strongly in places and times of great cultural stress, such as the Gothic revival in England, or 1980s America. As a cultural revelator, horror is incredibly important to study and understand, as it not only indicates what values are being propagated in a society, but in undertaking in-depth readings and comparisons, certain elements reveal themselves which allow for a deeper understanding of the thought behind and means of enforcement of patriarchal hierarchies such as those present in Europe and the United States. This is revealed in a variety of ways, in the propagation of hyper-masculinity in monsters, particularly the aggression, destruction, violence and visceral nature of their attacks, the focused targeting of females, both human and monster, as victims, and the sexualized way in which they are killed, or, in the case of female monsters, the way in which they utilize their dangerous feminine sexuality to kill.

The enforcement of a status quo requires punishment for those individuals who transgress the boundaries set in place to establish it. Monsters provide the perfect punishment, as they serve as either the means or the end; they are either what "gets" you if you break the rules, or what you

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will become if you refuse to abide by social norms. Their extreme Otherness is an amalgamation of multiple manifestations of the Other- death, darkness, the animalistic, the feminine, and the exotic—intermingled with manifestations of the patriarchal self- humanity, integrity, masculinity, and the living. In transgressing these boundaries, monsters give a glimpse into the horror of ultimate abjection, complete separation from either the Self or the Other, by mingling the two together.

It is important, however, to understand that while the abject is a place of rejection, it can also be a liminal space of empowerment, as evidenced through the agency claimed by female monsters, particularly women who had been victims of monstrosity themselves. While a rejection of and alienation from society is not usually ideal, when “acceptable,” or “understandable” masculine behaviors edge too close to the monstrous, women are provided with the opportunity to ‘un-man’ their aggressors, and become, themselves, aggressive. There is a line that must be walked by these women, however, lest they become monsters themselves and end up annihilated. The ideal is that of the “Final Girl,” a balanced, inter-gendered, empowered woman, who is able to assimilate both masculinity and femininity without transgressing the boundaries of the extreme.

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