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Introduction

Submissions Editors

Srishti Guha & Grace Brooks

University of Newcastle & University of Western Australia

2023 has been a challenging year of change and transition for all of us here at *Limina*. We have had several senior members of the editorial collective leave us as they move on to a different stage of their lives. We wish Chris, Caitlan, and WhiteFeather all the luck! With that however, we have had several new members join us and who keep *Limina* going – we are excited for what lies ahead for *Limina* as we forge our path ahead. Thank you for all your hard work!

From 7–8 September this year, we held our annual *Limina* Conference around the theme ‘Crisis’ with the help of the UWA Institute of Advanced Studies and *Westerly* Magazine. This 17th Annual Conference was our return to a fully in-person conference at UWA and we think we can vouch for all that were present, that the conference was a much-needed space of community for HDRs and early career researchers. Our call for papers based on this year’s conference theme is out and we are looking forward to submissions until 29 February 2024.

This special issue on the theme ‘Monsters’ presents three articles that were first presented at the *Limina* ‘Monsters’ Conference in 2022. While Neelam Pirbhai uses a content analysis approach to analyse the mythic figure of the mermaid in Mauritian writing, Kim Pratt in her article, challenges the binaries of monster and hero through her reading of *Odyssey*. Sarai Mannolini-Winwood on the other hand, presents the monstrous not in mythic characters but in how a space can be constructed as monstrous through the use of liminal spaces and the concept of the city edifice, in the emerging literary genre of Australian Urban Fantasy.

Limina has a proud tradition of publishing creative writing pieces alongside scholarly articles, which we are delighted to continue in this special edition. Elizabeth Baca has two short stories – although stylistically different, both stories deal with monstrosity as a metaphor for loneliness and isolation. Madeleine Rose Dobson also has two pieces: a poem inspired by William Allingham’s 1883 poem *The Fairies*, and a short story that puts a feminist twist on the popular horror trope of psychic children. Kim Pratt’s poem responds to Homer’s *Odyssey* and builds upon her scholarly article to undermine the stable category of monstrosity through the ambivalent figure of the Cyclops Polyphemus. Sarai Mannolini-Winwood’s short story takes inspiration from Christopher Nolan’s 2001 *Memento* and combines it with the rape-revenge genre to examine the monstrosity of patriarchal violence. Lastly, Mannolini-Winwood and Dobson have also collaborated on an eerie perspective shifting short story about the afterlife.

This issue also includes nine book reviews, many themed around the topic of monsters: Simon Bacon, *Future Folk Horror: Contemporary Anxieties and Possible Futures* (Lexington Books); Barbara Creed, *Return of the Monstrous-Feminine: Feminist New Wave Cinema* (Routledge); Megan de Bruin-Molé, *Gothic Remixed: Monster Mashups and Frankenfictions in 21st-Century Culture* (Bloomsbury Academic); Michelle de Kretser, *Scary Monsters: A novel in two parts* (Catapult); Asa Simon Mittman and Marcus Hensel, *Classic Readings on Monster Theory* (Arc Humanities Press); Asa Simon Mittman and Marcus Hensel, *Primary Sources on Monsters* (Arc Humanities Press); Laura K Morreale and Sean Gilsdorf, *Digital Medieval Studies: Practice and Preservation* (Arc Humanities Press); Keith Moser and Karina Zelaya, *The Metaphor of the Monster: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Understanding the Monstrous Other in Literature* (Bloomsbury); and Michael Rees, *Tattooing in Contemporary Society: Identity and Authenticity* (Routledge).

We hope you enjoy this Volume 28, Issue 2 edition of *Limina* for 2023, as much as we enjoyed putting it together. *Limina* continues to be a free and open-access space for post-graduates and early-career researchers in historical and cultural studies to gain experience in the publication process and share their research. Our meetings are fully online, and this allows our collective to invite postgraduates to join us from across the country and world. If you are interested in joining the *Limina* Collective and being a part of a vibrant, dynamic group of postgraduates, email us with an expression of interest.

The Monstrous City of Australian Urban Fantasy: The City Edifice of Brisbane, Queensland in the novels of Angela Slatter and Trent Jamieson

Sarai Mannolini-Winwood¹
Deakin University

The cities of urban fantasies are monstrous. They are confining edifices, places full of liminal and hidden spaces, and they shape the narratives contained within. Urban fantasy as a genre is shaped by the unseen creatures that populate its cities, the archaeological striation of pasts pushing into the present, and the thematic tensions of anxiety, fear, and dread. The cities of Australian urban fantasy are presented as monstrous places. Angela Slatter's Vigil presents the city of Brisbane, Queensland as full of the contradictory spaces of churches, dirty street scapes, and elite hidden places that hint at a rot beneath the city. Trent Jamieson's Death Most Definite presents a night-touched Brisbane landscape of liminal spaces and terminal landscapes. The perspective both urban fantasies present is of a city as a place of darkness, of dangerous and forgotten edges, of anxious tensions, and boundaries that constrict. The sense of place created in these narratives present a near-dystopic view of the modern city: creating a place more terrifying than the monsters it contains. This article explores the creation of a sense of place through the gothic concept of the edifice, inclusions of liminal spaces, and terminal landscapes of the dead and undead, to present a monstrous city in Australian urban fantasy.

At its core, Urban Fantasy (hereafter UF) is a genre primarily constructed of urban dramas that build on already-present thematic concerns in real-world cities. Through the addition of fantastic elements, they act to emphasise feelings of anxiety and dread to create a monstrous city setting. The image of the contemporary city in UF, aided by descriptions of disorder, alienation, and violence, is deliberately positioned as unsettling.² Monstrous in this article is not framed with a focus on actual monstrous creatures, but rather on the way in which a space can be constructed as monstrous using thematic concerns and through the use of the city edifice, liminal spaces, and terminal landscapes. It is the inclusion of these elements common to most UF—which work to position a reader to perceive the city of the narrative as a recognisable but monstrous place—that actively shapes the narratives contained within. UF is not alone in its representation of gritty, problematic cities, and shares many commonalities with city literature of the nineteenth century, such as the works of Charles Dickens and Victor Hugo, alongside detective/crime/mystery and gothic literature both early and contemporary.³ However, UF utilises three specific frameworks that are inherently tied into its categorisation as a body of literature: the incursion of the supernatural into the mundane within the city edifice, the creation and utilisation of liminal spaces for both the incursions by the supernatural and the conflict with the protagonists, and the focus on terminal landscapes of the dead and undead. These elements, although

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² Dani Cavallaro, *Gothic Vision: Three Centuries of Horror, Terror and Fear* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 8.

³ Sarai Mannolini-Winwood, 'Theorizing the emergent subgenre of urban fantasy' [Polish 'Wokół definicji fantastyki miejskiej']; trans. Krzysztof M. Majl, *Creatio Fantastica* 1, no. 58 (September 2018), 42.

overlapping with horror and gothic literature, are constructed to position not only the supernatural creatures as monstrous, but also the specific setting of the city as such.

Although no literary discussion currently exists around Australian UF, there is a plethora of Australian UF that presents Australian cities as equally monstrous as their international equivalents. An examination of two such novels have been selected. Both share the setting of Brisbane (capital city of Queensland, Australia), and utilise its city edifice of liminal and terminal spaces to reveal the complexity of a city that in advertising is usually represented as a sun kissed paradise. Angela Slatter's *Vigil* (2016) depicts Brisbane as full of the contradictory spaces of the past and present, and hidden places that hint at a rot beneath the city. *Vigil* follows supernatural problem solver Verity Fassbinder who is drawn into an investigation on the death of local Sirens and the emergence of the sale of wine made from the tears of children, while also battling a new destructive force unleashed in the city: Angels. Trent Jamieson's *Death Most Definite* (2010) presents Brisbane as an inescapable edifice where the familiar is othered and the threat of nature and death overturns the mundane. *Death Most Definite* follows Steven de Selby's job as a Pomp, one who guides the spirits of the dead to the underworld, which is disrupted when a wave of dead spirits and undead people – including fellow Pomps – flood through Brisbane because his boss Death is facing the challenge of a corporate takeover. The perspective these two novels presents is of a city as a place of darkness, of dangerous and forgotten edges, of anxious tensions, and boundaries that constrict. The sense of place of Brisbane created in each narrative presents a near-dystopic view of the modern city, creating a place more terrifying than the monsters it contains. This is a monstrous setting, as Slatter and Jamieson position Brisbane to rival London for the secrets it is keeping below ground and the dangers that are lurking in every dark corner.

UF as a genre has deep roots in the gothic and horror traditions and draws upon many of the same thematic concerns: primarily fear, anxiety, and dread. The role of such themes is to position the reader to respond to representations of monstrosity.⁴ As such, that which is considered or positioned as monstrous is usually due to the response it evokes, rather than a universal set of principles defining it as monstrous.⁵ UF is fundamentally tied to the city. Thus, it is the presence of the fantastic *within* the city that evokes these thematic concerns, rather than the commonly external forces in gothic and horror literature. UF authors deliberately connect the intersection of the non-rational to the real-world setting of a city to unsettle the reader and evoke these themes.⁶ As Brian Levack stated, the effectiveness of terror themes is when 'those who are horrified at what they witness fear that they too may become victims'.⁷ The familiarity of the city setting in UF works in a similar manner to popular horror fiction. It uses the threat of within-the-known to excite a negative response in the reader and positions the reader to perceive the everyday threats, as well as the supernatural threats, present in a modern city as a monstrous reality.⁸ Thus far, these discussions of UF have only been applied to novels set in London, in abstract representational cities (such as in the works of Charles de Lint), or recognisable cities in

4 Elizabeth MacAndrew, *The Gothic Tradition in Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 8.

5 Cavallaro, 'Gothic Vision,' vii; Brian Attebery, 'Introduction: fear and fantasy,' *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* (vol. 19, no. 1, 2008), 1-4. 1.

6 Sarai Mannolini-Winwood, 'Fear, Anxiety and Dread: Examining the influence of antecedent genres on urban fantasy's thematic concerns,' *Dissection: The Journal of Contemporary Horror* 13, (March 2018), 1, http://www.simegen.com/writers/dissections/Dissections%202018/dissections_page_17.html

7 Brian Levack, 'The horrors of witchcraft and demonic possession,' *Social Research* 8, no. 4 (2014), 926-7.

8 Mannolini-Winwood, 'Fear,' 1.

the United States of America. Many of these cities already have clear and well-established representations for the authors to draw from, whereas Slatter and Jamieson are working with a lesser known (especially at an international level) city. Yet, the characteristics of the city edifice that emerge within these examples of UF are also present in the representation of Brisbane in Slatter and Jamieson's novels. This could mean that UF does not require a specific setting to enact its themes, as suggested by de Lint's work. Alternately, as I present in this article, it suggests that aspects unique to Brisbane are utilised by the authors to deepen the thematic responses. The thematic concerns of UF permeate the narratives and the protagonists' experiences, and thus the reader. When considering thematic concerns, there is always conjecture over the use of terminology, and the words fear, anxiety, and dread share common connotations. Even in their definitions they encroach on each other, with dread being an intense fear or anxiety about future events, and anxiety meaning uneasiness or uncertainty.⁹ This definition is also shared by fear, which is an uneasiness of impending danger.¹⁰ This fluidity and interdependence of the themes is a key component of much dark fiction, ranging from crime to gothic, but in UF they are often enacted to heighten the sense of reality through the tensions of the rising past (supernatural) and the threatened present (mundane). These are then reflected through elements of the setting.¹¹ As such, these framing emotions of fear, anxiety, and dread are used within Slatter and Jamieson's novels to position the reader to respond to not only the supernatural elements that appear monstrous, but to the city of Brisbane itself as monstrous. This article explores the representation of Brisbane through the concept of the city edifice, inclusions of liminal spaces and terminal landscapes, and the thematic emotions of anxiety and dread, to present the monstrous city of Australian UF.

Urban Fantasy's Relationship with the City

The city is a location of contradictions, dichotomies, and intersections. It is associated with modernity and the fluidity of change, yet can also be a place of stagnation, alienation, and decay. There exists a plethora of literary perspectives on the urban, from the utopic ideals of the renaissance fantasists to the dystopic cityscapes of instauration fantasy.¹² Burton Pike is aware of this bifocal view of Western culture and the 'myth of the city as corruption, [and] the myth of the city as perfection'.¹³ The urban is not only portrayed as one of these two static forms, but as engaging in a constant cyclical rotation between these extremes. Occurring in a multitude of states, the image of the city stands as 'the reification of ambivalence, embodying contradictory forces in both the individual and the collective Western minds'.¹⁴ Our relationship with the urban has always been complex, whereby cities 'have been either exalted as the centers of vitality, enterprise, and excitement, or denounced as sinks of crime, pollution, and depravity'.¹⁵ Moreover, this perception is unlikely to change with the continual growth of the world's urban centres. In fact, as John Palen pointed out over fifty years ago, '[d]uring the last 200 years urbanisation has

⁹ *Oxford English Dictionary Online [OED]* (2015), s.v. 'Dread,' <http://www.oed.com>; and, *OED*, s.v. 'Anxiety.'

¹⁰ *OED*, s.v. 'Fear.'

¹¹ Cavallaro, 'Gothic Vision,' 6.

¹² John Clute, *Encyclopedia of fantasy*, ed. J. Clute and J. Grant. (2012), s.v. 'Urban fantasy,' https://sf-encyclopedia.com/fe/urban_fantasy; and, Clute, s.v. "Instauration fantasy".

¹³ Burton Pike, *The image of the city in modern literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 8.

¹⁴ Pike, *Image*, 8.

¹⁵ John J. Palen, *The urban world* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Company, 1975), 59.

accelerated until today, for the first time, we are on the threshold of living in a world that is numerically more urban than rural'.¹⁶ It is telling that, in every genre, a series of city-centric works have been produced, yet only in fantasy has an entire genre developed with a distinct focus on the urban experience.¹⁷ As John Clute discusses, UF is a genre that uses the urban as a pivotal point through which the mundane and non-rational intersect.¹⁸ This dichotomous view has not changed and is a concern reflected throughout UF narratives.

Even though definitions of the UF genre remain contested, most theorising on the subject matter begins with a statement of urbanity. Jose Duarte's states that '[t]he city has long been playing an important role in fiction as the place of memory and archive, of inclusion and, above all, as the space where different stories can occur'.¹⁹ It is a genre where the key components are clearly outlined in its name: it is about the urban and the fantastic. Clute, who is largely credited with providing the seminal definition of UF, states that it is 'normally texts where fantasy and the mundane world intersect and interweave throughout a tale which is significantly *about* a real city'.²⁰ The specificity of 'real' remains a contested concept in UF theory, however, it does not diminish that a core category for identifying a text as part of the UF genre is the requirement of a city setting. Furthermore, the setting itself 'must operate as more than a backdrop and should reflect the experience of life within a real city'.²¹ Other scholars have also elaborated on the defining features of the genre. Duarte refers to it as work that focuses 'its attention on possible or impossible urban worlds' whereas Zuzana Slušná emphasis that such narratives 'are taking place in familiar everyday, routine city environment[s]'.²² Additionally, Stefan Ekman refers to it as 'fantastic stories about cities', Hadas Elber-Aviram connects it to a form of urban archaeology, and Jessica Tiffin calls it a 'complex fabulist construction of the city'.²³ Despite their different emphasis, these theorists all return to the idea the construction and representation of the city is key to the genre. Unfortunately, there is little written on Australian UF or even about UF by Australian theorists. Australian fiction author and scholar Kim Wilkins makes one mention of UF in her discussion on speculative fiction and notes that the urban setting is a key characteristic of the construction of UF. Wilkins also observes that 'UF relishes the careful building of realistic detail – usually, as the name suggests, within an industrial urban setting'.²⁴ Although Wilkins is discussing UF as a

16 Palen, *Urban*, 4. Also, according to data from the United Nations in 2018, the percentage of people living in urban areas, rather than rural areas, was 55% with an expected rise to 68% by 2050. (<https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/population/2018-revision-of-world-urbanization-prospects.html#:~:text=The%20urban%20population%20of%20the,to%204.2%20billion%20in%202018>).

17 Although detective and horror utilise urban environments it is seldom an exclusive element. In fact, both detective and horror in the late 1980s saw a rise in the popularity of suburban and small town settings.

18 John Clute, 'Urban fantasy,' in *The encyclopedia of fantasy*, ed. J. Clute and J. Grant (London: Orbit, 1997), 975.

19 Duarte and Coelho, 'Monographic: On the Fantastic and The Urban,' 7.

20 Clute, 'Urban fantasy,' 975.

21 Mannolini-Winwood, 'Theorizing the emergent subgenre,' 42.

22 Jose Duarte and Ana Daniela Coelho, 'Monographic: On the Fantastic and The Urban,' *Brumal. Revista de Investigación Sobre Lo Fantástico* 5, no. 2 (December 9, 2017), 7. <https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/brumal.457>; Zuzana Slusna, 'Paranormal and Religious as Part of Pop-Cultural Consumerism,' *European Journal of Science and Technology* 10, no. 1 (2014), 101.

23 Stefan Ekman, 'London Urban Fantasy: Places with History,' *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 29, no. 3 (2018), 380. <https://www.fantastic-arts.org/jfa/jfa-29-3-2018>; Stefan Ekman, 'Urban Fantasy: A Literature of the Unseen,' *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 27, no. 3 (2016), 452; Hadas Elber-Aviram, "'The Past Is Below Us": Urban Fantasy, Urban Archaeology, and the Recovery of Suppressed History,' *Papers from the Institute of Archaeology*, (University College London, 2013), 2. <https://doi.org/http://doi.org/10.5334/pia.426>; Jessica Tiffin, 'Outside/Inside Fantastic London,' *English Academy Review* 25, no. 2 (2008), 34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10131750802348384>.

24 Kim Wilkins, 'Genre and Speculative Fiction,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Creative Writing*, ed. David

larger category, there is evidence in both Slatter's and Jamieson's novels that the urban environment is at the forefront of the narrative.

Most UF can also be positioned within the framing of immersive fantasy, as though they may use a real-world setting, there is detailed world building required to fit the mythology of the supernatural, and it relies on reader belief.²⁵ Both Slatter's first novel in her 'Verity Fassbinder' series *Vigil* (2016), and Jamieson's first novel in his 'Death Works' series *Death Most Definite* (2010), follow the trajectory Farah Mendlesohn outlines. In these novels, 'the world is ruptured by the intrusion, which disrupts normality and has to be negotiated with or defended, sent back whence it came, or controlled'.²⁶ In *Vigil*, Brisbane is a city populated by a variety of mythological creatures with a long history of traditions linked to both magic and faith. The supernatural creatures of *Vigil* are positioned as having migrated to Australia during early settlement. In later novels, they migrated to escape persecution in Europe, or to find a new start. The Brisbane of *Vigil* is a place where the human and mundane exist alongside a hidden (and not so hidden) world of supernatural creatures. In contrast, Jamieson's work has a more human-centric framing. The city is not populated by creatures, but rather his main character is involved in the job of death. As a 'Psychopomp' Steve's job is to help the spirits of the dead crossover. However, *Death Most Definite* concerns a breakdown of this system and the sudden existence of spirits and the undead throughout Brisbane. Both novels position the supernatural as part of the mimetic presence of the place, meaning that they work to establish the supernatural as part of the mundane and 'real' existence of Brisbane.²⁷ The intrusive monstrous then, is the supernatural that ruptures the mundane city life and challenges its mimetic normality, which now requires negotiation to resolve.

The city edifice in urban fantasy

The city as a confining edifice in UF owes its roots to the gothic edifice. Frederick Frank argues that the blueprint of eighteenth-century gothic literature was to

Find a set of frantic characters restrained and enclosed by some version of a mighty and mysterious building beneath which there is a sort of hell or "long, labyrinth of darkness".²⁸

The gothic edifice was at the heart of what defined gothic imagery. It was more than just a setting, but also a representational landscape that reflected the psychological and emotional turmoil of the villain. As Jamieson Ridenhour stated, the gothic edifice was the 'physical metaphor of both the rotten inner self of the villain and a decayed and imposing history'.²⁹ It acted as a symbol for the fear and dread incited by the threats undermining the stability of the modern world. The nineteenth-century gothic authors adapted and transported this space from crumbling isolated castles to industrial urban cities. UF continues to draw on this stock setting because it offers the same imperative motifs as it did gothic authors: claustrophobic confinement, subterranean pursuit, and supernatural

Morley and Philip Neilsen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 37-51. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521768498.005.41>

²⁵ Farah Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), xxi.

²⁶ Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics*, 115.

²⁷ Kathryn Hume, *Fantasy and Mimesis* (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 23.

²⁸ Frederick S. Frank, *The First Gothics: A Critical Guide to the English Gothic Novel* (New York, Garland Publishing, 1987), xxiii.

²⁹ Jamieson Ridenhour, *In Darkest London*. (Lanham, Scarecrow Press, 2013), 8.

encroachment. All three motifs are present in Slatter and Jamieson's novels to varying degrees with protagonists trapped in confining spaces at perilous moments, involved in dangerous chases, and threatened on a personal level by supernatural creatures. They face the worst of the dangers while restricted and directed by the very topography of the cities. Further, each has their central character attempt to flee the city, even making it to outer suburbs, only to be pulled back towards the centre.³⁰ The city becomes confining and inescapable, as a place of restrictions that hamper rather than aid their actions.

In his definition of UF, Clute also suggested that it is reasonable to argue that UFs derive from the notion of edifice, which came into existence in *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole.³¹ UF cities are constructed as a type of edifice because they conform to the primary role of an edifice, which is: '[f]rom without, an edifice may seem self-contained and finite; from within, it may well extend beyond lines of vision, both spatially and temporally'.³² The city edifice allows authors of UF to construct a sense of a space that extends their narrative beyond the believable parameters of a real city, while still maintaining a sense of confinement. A feeling of being trapped – whether a physical, emotional, or psychological confinement – is understood in contemporary cities through Jorge Arango's metaphor of humans living a caged existence. For Arango, that city dwellers have adapted to their routine of captivity is evident in the rise of crime, suicides, depression, and anxiety disorders in contemporary times.³³ The city, which was once a site of security, has instead become a locale of unease. UF plays with these fears by emphasising elements of confinement, pursuit, and encroachment. Frederick Frank outlined claustrophobic confinement as follows: '[a]ll of the characters must feel enclosed by buildings, by compartments within those buildings, and by compartments within compartments such as coffins and cells'.³⁴ The sense of being trapped evokes a primal response of fear and dread. Although it was isolation in early gothic literature that worked to emphasise the terror of this situation, UF instead reveals that even in a city teeming with people, it is possible to be cut off from help, as places exist in a city that are ignored, forgotten, or unknown. The city edifice offers any number of 'compartments' that can entrap and hide a person. As such, the city is not an orderly safe place. Instead 'images which depict the city as an unruly, unsettling and disorderly place are increasingly dominant'.³⁵

The concern with unnaturalness and disorder is at the heart of humankind's monumental triumph over nature: the city. The urban environment is meant to protect. Yet, within its walls, people are aware of the potential of that order descending into chaos.³⁶ The city can still be viewed as inclusive of the need for control, as Richard Lehan suggests that the city is an act by humanity to control nature.³⁷ Furthermore, Pike notes that underlying the founding of ancient cities is the contradictory desire for a separation and conquering of nature, with the creation of a city as necessarily 'the imposition of divinity'.³⁸

³⁰ Slatter, *Vigil*, 154; Jamieson, *Death*, 138.

³¹ Clute, 'Urban Fantasy,' 976.

³² Clute, s.v. 'Urban Fantasy.'

³³ Jorge Arango, *The Urbanization of the Earth* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1970), 92.

³⁴ Frank, *Gothics*, 435.

³⁵ Jon Bannister and Nick Fyfe, 'Introduction: Fear and the City,' *Urban Studies* 38, (2001), 807.

³⁶ Richard Lehan, *The city in literature: An intellectual and cultural history* (California: California University Press, 1998).

³⁷ Lehan, *The city in literature*, 13.

³⁸ Pike, *Image*, 5.

This is an act designed to separate humans from nature which has subsequently become a defining characteristic for discussing what is considered urban.³⁹ As such, the city can be perceived as humankind's monument to dominion over nature. Indeed, Lehan explains that the 'city promises a way of regulating the environment, subduing the elements and allowing a certain control over nature'.⁴⁰ Thus, the city exists as an edifice to our power over the environment and a place where we believe we can maintain control. One of the strongest subversions that Australian UF offers is the challenge to this premise: that a city is safe from nature. Both Slatter and Jamieson utilise and comment upon the threat of natural disasters to Brisbane. Slatter at times refers to the damaging floods experienced in Brisbane and its surrounds.⁴¹ Jamieson, in turn, talks of damaging storms, the 'smoky haze' of bush fires, and the threat of drought.⁴² Australian literature has often engaged in a dichotomous tension with nature, especially the bush, as both life giving and life taking. It is unsurprising to find that Australian UF mimics this and acknowledges the lack of protection a city offers from the threat of nature. Such reminders throughout the narratives add to an Australian reader's experience of fear and dread, due to the realisation that the supernatural could also harness one of the city's greatest threats: nature. The city no longer represents safety, but rather becomes an inescapable edifice surrounded and permeated with danger.

The senses of fear and dread are emphasised by more than just the construction of the city edifice, as the influence of the supernatural encroachment removes the stories from urban realism to UF. Frank observed that these 'supernatural figures enter the lives of the characters and constantly impinge upon and disturb the order of the natural world'. The natural world is the setting unique to the story where the infractions of the supernatural act to disrupt the order of a normal city space.⁴³ UF authors add to the unruly elements already present in a city. Acting to subvert the norms of the city, the supernatural creatures deepen the fear and terror by offering added dangers to an already dangerous place. The safety a city should offer is further challenged when monstrous creatures invade and encroach on the protagonists' own homes. In both novels, the homes of the protagonists are invaded. Jamieson even has his character's home destroyed, while Slatter's characters' homes are invaded and threatened.⁴⁴ The result then remains the same, in that it forces them to become unmoored, out amidst the city edifice with no point of respite available. Confinement is now guarded by a supernatural creature, and pursuit on a dark night is by a monster. The creatures of UF tend towards the nightmarish, such as the undead and demons. However, it is worth noting that the strength of response to these characters is through their impingement on the city rather than their monstrous physicality. Their incursion and then withdrawal from the cityscape produces liminal spaces of fear and anxiety, as the known is challenged by the unknown's ability to appear and disappear in a non-rational manner. Thus, the city edifice is developed as a constrictive zone for the conflict between the ordinary and supernatural to occur, and the characters find themselves trapped within the boundaries of Brisbane.

39 The first meaning listed in the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (s.v. 'Urban' 2015) regarding the word 'urban' is 'a. Relating to, situated or occurring in, or characteristic of, a town or city, esp. as opposed to the countryside'.

40 Lehan, *City*, 13.

41 Angela Slatter, *Vigil* (London, Jo Fletcher Books, 2016), 16, 209.

42 Trent Jamieson, *Death Most Definite* (Sydney, Orbit, 2010), 160, 242.

43 Frank, *Gothics*, 436.

44 Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics*, xxi; Slatter, *Vigil*, 277.

Liminal spaces in the city edifice of Brisbane

A further element of gothic literature that UF draws from is the use of liminality within its city edifice. Liminal refers to being on the boundary or threshold of different states, or existing in an intermediary or transitional position.⁴⁵ Most commonly in UF, liminal spaces are how the monstrous creatures intersect and challenge the mundane city. Their existence in these liminal spaces ‘allows them access to the social structure at any number of points, much like a sewer dweller would have access to a city at any number of points’.⁴⁶ These antagonistic mythical characters are able to emerge from the liminal spaces ‘betwixt and between’ a city and influence the ordinary world.⁴⁷ Thus, they are able to ‘flit across the borders at any time, penetrating the social structure at will, but [they] cannot stay there’.⁴⁸ In contrast, the protagonists must act as a bridge between the real-world setting of the city and the liminal zones of the fantastic. The existence of liminal spaces situates the city edifice as further confining, as the compartments within compartments are no longer static (like the dungeon in the gothic mansion) but are in flux throughout the city’s boundaries.⁴⁹

UF authors tend to develop liminal spaces such as those that exist on the edges of human society but fit within a city edifice.⁵⁰ In a city, this can refer to the literal outskirts (often slums, ghettos, or industrial areas), but also to spaces that are unique to a city yet often overlooked or ignored by daily city dwellers. These places that exist but are often ignored in ordinary life still retain a hint of the unknown. Jamieson’s protagonist Steve, when forced to hide from the undead in an abandoned tower, observes ‘[w]e’re somewhere between worlds – a bubble of time and space, its surface marbled with possibilities, and far too many of them are grim’.⁵¹ Liminal spaces are also the abandoned or forgotten places around a city, such as alleys no longer commonly used, rooftops without access points, rubbish dump sites, abandoned transport centres, and unfinished or decayed buildings. They are locales forgotten or abandoned for various reasons, and while they may still be used by people, these are people on the outskirts of humanity: the homeless, lost, infirm, insane, runaways, and so forth. Several times, Slatter’s protagonist Verity ends up searching such outskirts, including refuse tunnels where ‘[d]own here were things that had been around for too long, and the scent of rot was overwhelming’.⁵² In turn, ordinary spaces can also become liminal when their usual purpose is usurped by the non-rational. At one point, Steve states ‘[i]t would almost be a normal day except there are bodies

⁴⁵ Liminal is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* as: ‘Characterized by being on a boundary or threshold, esp. by being transitional or intermediate between two states, situations, etc’.

⁴⁶ Charles La Shure, ‘What is liminality. Liminality: the space in Between,’ *Liminality* (website, 2005), para. 28, <http://www.liminality.org/about/whatisliminality/>

⁴⁷ Victor Turner, ‘Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage,’ in *Betwixt and Between: Patterns of Masculine and Feminine Initiation*, ed L.C Mahdi, S Foster, and M Little (Illinois, Open Court Publishing Company, 1994), 5.

⁴⁸ La Shure, ‘Liminal,’ para. 28.

⁴⁹ Frank, *Gothics*, 435.

⁵⁰ The function of liminal spaces varies between genres, but the underlying principles remain the same: it is a space that is accessed as both between and outside of the real. Adam Engel, ‘Between Two Worlds: The functions of liminal space in twentieth-century literature,’ PhD diss, (University of North Carolina, 2017); Stefan L. Brandt, ‘The City as Liminal Space: Urban visuality and aesthetic experience in postmodern U.S. literature and cinema,’ *American Studies* 54, no. 4 (2009), 553-581. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41158465>.

⁵¹ Jamieson, *Death*, 248.

⁵² Slatter, *Vigil*, 180.

floating in the water', bodies only he can see.⁵³ This is when the supernatural can subvert a traditional space for its own use. It is a distinct part of UF that the known may be turned unknown by the presence of the supernatural. The supernatural can render the ordinary fantastic, and subsequently create the liminal in the truest sense. These are transitional, in-between spaces that operate in a temporary state for the actions of the supernatural to occur. However, their greatest strength is in their use to further position the known city as a monstrous and unsafe place. Liminality in UF scaffolds the thematic concerns of fear and anxiety as it problematises every part of the city that was once recognisable to the protagonists. This edifice becomes increasingly confining, as the supernatural encroach on the safety of the mundane.

Terminal landscapes in the city edifice of Brisbane

In a city edifice, liminal spaces can also be explored through terminal landscapes, by which I mean a landscape involving, associated with, symbolic of, or populated by death, dying, or the undead. Such spaces can include, but are not limited to: morgues, cemeteries, hospitals, ancient ruins, burial grounds and crypts, or any space populated by dead bodies, bones or decaying bodies, vampires, ghouls, zombies, or other forms of the undead.⁵⁴ Furthermore, our association between the urban and death has been present since the development of the earliest cities. Lehan suggests that, as the first cities 'were founded as a place where wandering tribes could return to worship the dead ... the idea of the city has never been separated from the reality of death'.⁵⁵ UF often includes two locations associated with terminal spaces – hospitals and cemeteries – as significant locales in any city. Jamieson especially utilises such places to represent further liminality with the rising of the undead in both locations, describing Toowong Cemetery as where 'the land of the living and the dead intersect'.⁵⁶ Cities house the lives of people, yet also contain the dying and dead. UFs often centre on the transitional stage of life into death, and through magic and myth this can include the undead. Existence then becomes truly liminal because, with the option of being undead, the final resolution has been moved out of reach.

The terminal landscapes developed in a living city aid in the atmosphere of fear and dread. Many of the liminal spaces are situated in terminal landscapes, which are places in a state of decay or in abandoned/forgotten locales. However, a terminal space is further implied as any place touched by the dead. This opens all the traditional safe zones of a city (such as homes, sacred spaces, and places of authority) to the threat of the dead, thereby creating invasive terminal landscapes: for who can escape death? Both novels position the central Brisbane River as 'one of the many tributaries of the Styx'.⁵⁷ Slatter describes the boatman as casually present, with 'his cloak, roughly the same colour as the water, flapping lazily in the breeze'.⁵⁸ It is interesting that both writers perceived the river not as life giving, but as an element of death in their narratives. However, considering the impact of flooding in Brisbane it is perhaps not such an allegorical stretch. The emotional weight of a terminal landscape contributes to the development of UF's thematic concerns. The physical locales associated with the transition of dying are tinged already with fear

⁵³ Jamieson, *Death*, 240.

⁵⁴ Mannolini-Winwood, 'Fear,' 15.

⁵⁵ Lehan, *City*, 105.

⁵⁶ Jamieson, *Death*, 72.

⁵⁷ Jamieson, *Death*, 283.

⁵⁸ Slatter, *Vigil*, 140.

and dread. For although people may come to accept death, they have not accepted the process or its presence in modern life. The locales of the dead are touched by a mix of emotional worship, loss, and grief. However, the deep pain of loss is often negated by a final acceptance of the permanency of the state. By introducing the undead to such static places, UF authors are subverting and somewhat perverting these places. This creates a terminal landscape of liminality where the end point has become unclear because, even though zombies may be laid to rest and vampires 'die' in the day, the mythology of UF allows these creatures to rise again in the same space. This evokes an unsettling sense of dread not only of the creatures, but of every place they touch and taint within the city.

The Australian city edifice as a monstrous place

As both a physical and social construct, cities struggle between the polar influences of the past and present. Cities built on ancient foundations must learn to accommodate the archaeology of their past.⁵⁹ In much the same way, people struggle to resolve the traditions, expectations, and social constructs of their past with their new commercialised city life. This process of adaptation, change, and rejection creates an atmosphere of tension in the city. Brisbane, although not necessarily built upon the bones of older cities, has been rebuilt and reinvented numerous times due to environmental damage. It is also a city that sits upon a site of importance for the Turrbal and Jagera peoples.⁶⁰ The city depends on the development of old ideas, even as new ideas emerge. Michael Barer suggested that 'urban life is an odd amalgam of past beliefs, present perceptions, and future speculations'.⁶¹ UF explores this tension through its continuous collision of Western mythologies, ancient locales, and the modern city. It places supernatural creatures with roots in Western myth, fairy tales, and folk lore in seemingly real-world urban environments. They represent the old, traditional, and unwieldy. As their presence in the city heightens tensions and anxieties, it also heightens the comparison of past and present. UF in conjunction with the supernatural reveals the ancient, hidden, liminal, and decaying terminal parts of a city, places ignored by present-day city dwellers which threatens the established order.

The threat of the eruption of the past into a contemporary city adds to UF's thematic concerns with anxiety and dread. Pike suggests that humans' relationship with their created world evokes this deep-seated anxiety and that the city 'crystallises those conscious and unconscious tensions which have from the beginning characterised the city in Western culture'.⁶² No protagonist of UF is fighting a war on a visible battlefield; they are not the prototypical heroes of epic fantasy. Rather, they are involved in small private

⁵⁹ Elber-Aviram, 'The Past Is Below Us,' 3.

⁶⁰ It is important to note that neither novel touches on this context at all, however, there is not space in this article to discuss this important topic. Extensive discussion exists around the absence of Indigenous voices in Australian literature, including in the fantasy genre: Sonia Kurtzer, 'Wandering Girl: who defines "authenticity" in Aboriginal Literature?', in *Blacklines: Contemporary Writing by Indigenous Australians*, ed. M Grossman, 181-188 (Melbourne University Press, 2003); Amberlin Kwaymullina, 'Edges, Centres and Futures: Reflections on Being an Indigenous Speculative Fiction Writer,' *Kill Your Darlings* (2014), 23-30; Margaret Merilees, 'Tiptoeing through the Spinifex: White Representations of Aboriginal Characters,' *Dotlit* 6, no. 1(2007), 1-14. <http://www.dotlit.qut.edu.au/>; Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (University of Minnesota Press, 2015); J. Murray, 'Inheriting the Land? Some Literary and Ethical Issues in the Use of Indigenous Material by an Australian Children's Writer, 1960-1990,' *Literature and Theology* 10, no. 3 (1996), 252-60. <https://doi.org/10.1093/litthe/10.3.252>; Kim Wilkins, "'Cutting off the Head of the King": Sovereignty, Feudalism, Fantasy,' *Australian Literary Studies* 26, no. 3 (2011), 133-46. doi:10.20314/als.6005ca2f2f.

⁶¹ Michael Ian Barer, 'Cultural Analysis and the American Urban Landscape,' in *Varieties of Urban Experience: The American City and the Practice of Culture*, ed. M. I Barer (Maryland, University Press of America, 2006), 1.

⁶² Pike, *Image*, 4.

battles which, although they may affect the outcome of the city, remain unseen. Both Verity and Steve are battling for humanity, but their priority is to save Brisbane and resolve the incursion of the supernatural. In this manner, the protagonists are often engaged in a battle to subdue the past before it boils over onto the surface of the present city. Elber-Aviram states that, in UF, 'the fantastic city's subterranean history poses a constant danger to the integrity of the present'.⁶³ This is due to the symbolic representations of the past, as the city's 'underground layers harbour supernatural forces threatening to erupt onto the surface'.⁶⁴ This is often presented through the othering of iconic historical locales. For instance, both Slatter and Jamieson include several easily recognisable locations where the supernatural and mundane clash. Jamieson includes Mount Coot-tha and the heart of Brisbane's CBD, while Slatter uses the State Library of Queensland and Brisbane City Hall as places where the supernatural is already present within the city, but are endangered by insidious invasions from the forces of evil.⁶⁵ For both, these places of historical import are used to emphasise the threat facing the city by the unseen forces where the old and new have not been easily reconciled. Brisbane, similar to many Australian cities, has a dark history linked to settler colonialism, genocides, political and environmental abuses, and the subtler incarnations of racism and classism.⁶⁶ It is this history, of which an appropriately in-depth discussion is not possible in this article, that threatens to boil forth through the allegorical supernatural threats.

The tension between past and present is a common characteristic of civilisation because, even as progress occurs, it is reminded of the steps that came before. With its roots in gothic literature, UF unsurprisingly shares this thematic concern with those earlier works. Ridenhour outlines that the tensions present in gothic literature arise from a teleological view of history.⁶⁷ He suggests that the period reflects a belief that 'the progressive present is haunted by the primitive past, whose presence threatens the stability of the modern situation'.⁶⁸ Slatter includes this in her description of Brisbane as having 'all that modern steel and glass juxtaposed with the Verdigris dome and sandstone of Customs House and the past it represented'.⁶⁹ What Slatter is referring to is the architectural change in the city that also represents different historical attitudes to Australian cities. She further hints that in her construction of mythological creatures, there is inherently a difference in the past and present attitudes and beliefs of different supernatural creatures. In fact, Ridenhour argues that the myriad psychological, political, and symbolic readings of gothic fiction arise from a principal fear of the re-emergence of the past. Slatter draws this into her narrative through the angelic attitudes that do not align to contemporary ideas around rights and freedoms, and she reflects this through the landscapes in which they appear: old limestone churches, dirty side streets, in Verity's home, and alongside the river. There is a mix of old locations where the angels are most at ease, and new places where they are most threatening. The fear evoked by the past colliding into the present is used dually to reassure and threaten. As Ridenhour states:

63 Hadas Elber-Aviram, 'The Labyrinthine City: Bleak House's Influence on Perdido Street Station,' *English* 61, no. 234 (2012), 267. <https://doi.org/10.1093/english/efs028>.

64 Elber-Aviram, *Labyrinthine*, 267.

65 Jamieson, *Death*, 160, 47; Slatter, *Vigil*, 35, 143.

66 Slavoj Zizek, *Violence: Six sideways reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008), 12.

67 Ridenhour, *Darkest London*, 4.

68 Ridenhour, *Darkest London*, 4.

69 Slatter, *Vigil*, 12.

In a gothic novel, the threatening past is used as a foil for the more enlightened present, reassuring modern readers of a historical telos of which they are the ultimate beneficiaries while simultaneously threatening the overthrow of that progressive paradigm.⁷⁰

This statement is equally valid for UF. In both novels, the presence of the past is evoked through the mythologies of the creatures that come mostly from European origins and threaten the reality of the modern city. When doors to the underworld begin to open in Jamieson's novel, Steve comments '[i]t's as though Hell has sidled up next to the living world'.⁷¹ In Slatter's novel, the main threat is from abandoned angels seeking to change the nature of the world.⁷² They are a forgotten aspect of Christian mythology and have reared up from an ignored past to challenge contemporary understandings of faith. Such mythos continues to threaten and evoke fear and highlight the weakness of ignoring or choosing to forget the past.⁷³ However, neither Slatter nor Jamieson draw on Indigenous mythologies to construct their creatures. In fact, both are rather careful in drawing from traditional European mythologies. This differs quite strongly from Australian gothic literature. Although engaging in similar discussions of the threatening past, Australian gothic will typically utilise mythologies embedded in the locale, such as the bunyip, or allegorical of the colonial threat, such as the vampire.⁷⁴

The ambiguous city of the nineteenth-century gothics and urban realists is also present in UF. As Pike states, this ambiguity arises because, at a deep level, 'the city seems to express our culture's restless dream about its inner conflicts and its inability to resolve them'.⁷⁵ The image of the city reflects the tensions between trying to resolve who we are, while we equally attempt to accept or ignore our past. Thus, the Australian city remains an ambiguous place in much of the heterology of formative Australian literature; it is a bastion of safety, but constantly threatened by nature.⁷⁶ Similarly, in Slatter's and Jamieson's novels the city is a static and permanent place, but correspondingly is also full of liminality and terminal landscapes that undermine its stability. Brisbane, akin to many Australian cities, struggles to reconcile the past and present of this unceded land (as previously noted, neither novel overtly address this aspect of Australian history). The heroes of UF all struggle fundamentally with this problem: the difficulty of establishing their identity by accepting, but not being overwhelmed by, the past. The monsters and supernatural creatures offer a symbolic representation of this threat. However, they are too easily conquered and abolished. Instead, it is the architecture, the topography of the city in UF, which best reveals this tension, as even after the evil has been subdued, Brisbane remains. The city full of liminal spaces, terminal landscapes, and compartments

⁷⁰ Ridenhour, *Darkest London*, 8.

⁷¹ Jamieson, *Death*, 51.

⁷² Slatter, *Vigil*, 310.

⁷³ It is worth noting that both novels do not address colonisation as a particular tension but restrict the threats to those of European/Western concepts of old intruding on modern European/Western existence. An examination of the omissions in Australian UF was outside of the scope of this paper, but would be worth exploring as it is a common issue across the genre.

⁷⁴ Ken Gelder, 'Australian Gothic,' in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter (Somerset: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2012), 381; Naomi Simone Borwein, 'Vampires, Shape-shifters, and Sinister Light: Mis-translating Australian Aboriginal Horror in Theory and Literary Practice,' in *The Palgrave Handbook to Horror Literature*, ed. K. Corstorphine and L. R. Kremmel (NSW: University of Newcastle, 2018), 61.

⁷⁵ Pike, *Image*, 8.

⁷⁶ Jonathan Dunk, 'Short Fiction Short Nation: The Ideologies of Australian Realism,' *Australian Literary Studies* 33, no. 3 (2018), 1-19. <http://dx.doi.org/10.20314/als.8ae47e6166>. 4-6.

within compartments, cannot be banished. UF does not attempt to hide this fact, all the fear-inspiring places remain in both the figurative story city and real-world cities. The protagonists return to their lives, jobs, and homes in the city, changed by their experience, but still fully entrenched within the city. The implication is that, although they have resolved one vestige of the past, it was only one of many that exist in the city. Slatter ends her novel with 'This was my city, my home ... It was my place, and I had a vigil to keep'.⁷⁷ It is a statement that acknowledges that although the threatening past (used as Ridenhour suggested, as a foil to the current enlightened present) has been stopped, it still lingers beneath the city. It is worth noting that although both Slatter and Jamieson's novels end with a clear resolution to the central challenge of the novel, neither resolve larger issues implied throughout the city. The lingering threat of the supernatural therefore undermines any resolve to arrive at an enlightened present. Rather, both novels present the experience as standing upon thin ice above an uncontrollable threat of further dangers. This element adds to the novels' senses of threatening monstrosity. The city is not safe, it is simply safe from that particular threat.

Conclusion

Through their narratives, Slatter and Jamieson construct a city edifice rife with liminal spaces and terminal landscapes that is impinged upon by the tensions between the past and the present. Their representation of Brisbane is a place where the old and new clash, not only in the architecture but also in the mythologies of the supernatural, and through them, the city dwellers. It is a city full of places overlooked and ignored that confine and threaten its security. Death is present not only in the creatures, but in the mundanity of hospitals and cemeteries. The Brisbane River is a tributary of the Styx, and it threateningly flows through the heart of the city. Each aspect of the Brisbane edifice constructed by Slatter and Jamieson is a confining framework that shapes and directs the claustrophobic confinement, supernatural encroachment, and subterranean pursuit present in the narrative. The real locales, and the intersection of the imagined creatures, works to heighten emotions of anxiety and dread already in place in the contemporary city. Australian UF simply draws upon these unsettling tensions that are already embedded within our cities and brings to our attention their monstrous reality. The concept of monstrosity is one that is constructed often in UF through a dichotomy of perspectives. This article has examined how it is constructed through the design of the city itself. The use of a confining edifice, liminal spaces, and terminal landscapes are used to take the mundanity of a real city and re-present it through a darker supernatural lens that evokes a response of fear and anxiety. A reader is meant to feel unsettled by the reality and unreality of the city of Brisbane. Its gritty and complicated past is present beneath the larger tensions of the narrative, and the supernatural emerges to threaten idealised perceptions of a 'sun-drenched and young' city.⁷⁸ Both Slatter and Jamieson draw on imagery from abandoned places and areas of threatening atmosphere, working to other the known in a manner that removes a sense of safety. Finishing the novels provides a very minimal feeling of resolution, as they resolve the creatures, but the city itself remains a terrible and threatening place. It is interesting that concepts which have marked the genre (the unseen, the liminal, tensions between past and present) internationally are able to be easily transposed to a much younger city.

⁷⁷ Slatter, *Vigil*, 351.

⁷⁸ Amy Clarke, Stuart King, Andrew Leach, and Wouter Van Acker 'Can't touch this,' *Architectural Research Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (2019), 63-72. doi: 10.1017/S1359135519000058.

There are further explorations to make in relation to the way in which Australian UF is constructing and representing Australian cities, especially in relation to post-colonial and teleological understandings of cities. Nevertheless, it is also clear in Slatter and Jamieson's novels that there is space to examine Australian cities as monstrous places.

The Mermaids in Mauritian Writing: Replicas of the Western Mermaid or a Local Invention?

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The origins and meanings of legendary creatures/monsters have raised various questions among many philosophers and critics, who were desirous to understand the culture that created them, thus founding the monster theory. From classical antiquity to the Middle Ages, more particularly in Europe, the mermaid is represented as a hybrid being: half-woman from head to bust and half-monster, with wings in the versions of Antiquity, then a fishtail in medieval times. A symbol of seduction, the mermaid has fascinated and prompted Mauritian authors, poets and sculptors to immortalise her in their writings and sculptures. In this study, a list of published writings in French, especially 'La sirène' (1936) by Robert Edward Hart and 'Les sirènes de Morne Plage' (1957) by Malcolm de Chazal, and also an unpublished tale, not very widespread, and which still remain in the Mauritian oral tradition, will be presented and analysed. Our main objective is to use a qualitative – content analysis approach, based on the theory of otherness, to explore the representation of this mythical supernatural figure.²

The origins and meanings of legendary creatures and monsters have raised various questions among many philosophers and critics who were desirous of understanding the culture that created them.³ As Bernard Terramorsi⁴ points out, there are hardly any aquatic women in Creole legends or in the oral tradition of Mauritius. An island in the Indian Ocean that experienced double colonisation (French from 1715–1810 and British from 1810–1968), Mauritius is made up of peoples coming from diverse cultures from all over the world (Madagascar, Africa, Europe, India, China, etc.). However, as a symbol of seduction, the mermaid has fascinated and prompted Mauritian authors, poets, and sculptors to immortalise her in their writings and sculptures. Very few people know, for example, the existence of the stone sculpture of the mermaid by Yves Forget, which sits in the waters of Pointe aux Piments (Mauritius), but which was unfortunately decapitated in 2002 by the cyclone Dina. Sand sculptures of mermaids among others, by Sanjay Jhowry have also been mentioned in 2014.⁵

From classical antiquity to the Middle Ages, more particularly in Europe, the

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² A special thanks to: (I) My first-year students from the 2018 batch, who brought to life the captivating tales of mermaids from Mauritius and Madagascar during our “Renforcement de la langue française” module. In particular, Chloé Augustin, Sweeta Sungkur, Vaishnavi Jalim, and Mahanta Ghoorbin, who diligently worked on the Mauritian narrative, which they aptly titled ‘La vengeance d’une sirène’/ ‘A Mermaid’s Revenge’. And, Cynthia Rakotonia, Luciana Rakotomampionona, Voary Andriamarohery, and Hana Barthelemy, who shared an enchanting oral legend of Madagascar, reminding us of the poem of Robert-Edward Hart. They titled their story, “Les mystères des eaux du sud-est de Madagascar: la sirène, that can be translated as ‘The Mysteries of South East Madagascar’s waters: the mermaid’; (II) the reviewers of *Limina Journal* for their insightful feedback; and, (III) Sarai Mannolini-Winwood, for her support and invaluable comments.

³ Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, *The Monster Theory Reader* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020).

⁴ Bernard Terramorsi, *La fille des eaux dans l’océan Indien*, (L’Harmattan: Université de la Réunion, 2010), 9.

⁵ “Art of sand sculpting in Mauritius”, Air Mauritius, accessed November 20, 2023, <https://www.airmauritius.com/plan/travel-inspirations/art-of-sand-sculpting-in-mauritius->.

mermaid is represented as a hybrid being: half-woman from head to bust and half-monster, with wings in the versions of antiquity, and a fishtail in medieval times.⁶ Wilfred P. Mustard, in his study of the siren-mermaid, details the different representations of the creature in his work: the mermaid is often depicted as ‘winged maidens,’ and even as half woman and half-hen. The latter posits that in the ‘earlier English poetry’ of the thirteenth century, for instance, ‘the Siren is regularly a mermaid’, half woman and half fish.⁷ According to Ruth Berman⁸ and Jorge Luis Borges,⁹ sirens differ from mermaids, especially in the English language.¹⁰ In the early bestiaries, ‘sirens (bird-women)’ were included, but mermaids were not mentioned ‘in the entries.’¹¹ However, with time, ‘sirens and mermaids became merged in popular conception,’¹² and the bestiaries started merging the two terms.¹³ In fact, even today, both siren and mermaid, despite having different meanings, are often used interchangeably.¹⁴ Moreover, in the English language, the term ‘siren’ is often employed with a negative connotation and in the 1840s, referred to ‘prostitutes in publications that decried the prevalence of the sex trade.’¹⁵ In the French language, the only term, to my knowledge, used to describe the mythological mermaid or siren is *sirène*. The French Larousse Dictionary and Encyclopedia¹⁶ even refers to the *sirène* as female marine demons or monsters.

This study, which characterises the siren as both fish-tailed creatures and aquatic women, will analyse a list of published writings in French, especially ‘La sirène’ (1936) by Robert Edward Hart¹⁷ and ‘Les sirènes de Morne Plage’ (1957) by Malcolm de Chazal.¹⁸ An unpublished tale, not very widespread, that still remains in the Mauritian oral tradition, will also be presented. My main objective is to use a qualitative content analysis approach, based on the theory of otherness, to explore the representation of this mythical supernatural figure, and find out whether she is just a replica of the Western mermaid or if the various cultural contacts have changed her representation. Moreover, as a hybrid creature, the mermaid is perceived as the Other, and her presence in island literature raises questions about her identity, belonging, and inclusion.

A Quick Overview of Some ‘Contemporary’ Mauritian Stories of Mermaids

In ‘Les personnages de l’eau dans quelques romans et nouvelles contemporains de

⁶ Claude Lecouteux, “La sirène dans l’antiquité classique et au Moyen Age”, in *La fille des eaux dans l’océan Indien – mythes, récits, représentations*, ed. Bernard Terramorsi (Paris: Actes du Colloque International de Toliara, 2010), 28-51.

⁷ Wilfred P. Mustard, “Siren-Mermaid”, *Modern Language Notes* 23, no. 1, (1908), 21-24, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2916861>

⁸ Ruth Berman, “Mermaids” and “Sirens”, *Mythical and Fabulous Creatures: A Source Book and Research Guide*, ed. Malcolm South (Greenwood Press, 1987).

⁹ Jorge Luis Borges and Margarita Guerrero, “Sirens”, *The Book of Imaginary Beings* (Penguin Books, 1969).

¹⁰ Borges, “Sirens”.

¹¹ Berman, “Mermaids”.

¹² Berman, “Mermaids”.

¹³ Berman, “Mermaids”.

¹⁴ Lotti Mealing, “The Mermaid as Postmodern Muse, in Sarah Hall’s *The Electric Michelangelo*”, *Contemporary Women’s Writing* 8, no. 2 (2014), 226-227. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cww/vpt013>.

¹⁵ Mealing, “Mermaid”, 225.

¹⁶ “Sirène”, *Larousse*, accessed November 20, 2023, <https://www.larousse.fr/encyclopedie/divers/sirene/92096>.

¹⁷ Robert Edward Hart, *La sirène* (Port-Louis: Standard Printing Ltd, 1936).

¹⁸ Malcolm De Chazal, *Les contes de Morne Plage: Contes pour grands et petits enfants* (Saint-Denis: Vizavi Ltée, 2012).

Madagascar, La Réunion et Maurice,¹⁹ Valérie Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo provides an inventory and a detailed analysis of the aquatic, imaginary, or metaphorical female presence in some contemporary novels and several short stories from Barlen Pyamootoo's collection of stories, *Lor Lamer/lat sealen mer*.²⁰ This research will not dwell on the works studied previously, but it is important to mention that aquatic female creatures – whether in stone, imaginary, or symbolic – play a crucial role in Mauritian short stories. 'Fé lamer'²¹ by Loga Virahsawmy narrates, in Mauritian Creole, the story of a sea fairy who, once a year, drags two orphaned children, the main protagonists, into the depths of the waters to see their parents.²² In 'Entre ciel et mer', Mira's husband and daughter, Océane (a name that already connotes the sea or ocean), were swept away by the waves after a crash. Mira, endowed with the silhouette of a mermaid²³ and whose old Malagasy servant had consecrated her to the goddess of the sea at her birth, lets herself be carried away by this sea, her spiritual mother.²⁴ The story of Ramesh Ramdoyal, 'Didine', does not tell the story of a mythological mermaid, but references are made to it. One day, Didine thinks he sees a strange creature in the sea. He then falls madly in love with Estella, the daughter of the physical education teacher, who played the role of the mermaid in a high school play entitled 'The Mermaid and the Fisher boy'.²⁵ A reference to the mermaid sculpture is also made in the same collection of short stories. Having found a document on a treasure hidden by the pirate, La Buse, the narrator sets off on his quest under the sculpture of the Pointe aux Piments mermaid:

There she was, the Black Siren, towering above the surface, less than 100 meters from the beach: a sculpture carved out of rock, its tail pointing north. The head has disappeared.²⁶

Other works mentioned in Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo's article are 'La cave Madame de Roches Noires' by Anjani Murdan, *The Kaya Days* of Carl de Souza, and *The Life of Josephin the Madman* of Ananda Devi, where it is the man who seems to take the form of the merman.²⁷ However, with the exception of 'Fé lamer', only fragmented and hardly perceptible motifs²⁸ of the mermaid are presented. In other words, the focus is on girls/maids in the waters²⁹ and not on mermaids that exist in legends and oral tradition. As mentioned, even if this study will not analyse any of the stories mentioned above, this contextual information plays a pivotal role in reflecting the cultural and mythological

19 Valérie Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo, "Les personnages de l'eau dans quelques romans et nouvelles contemporains de Madagascar, La Réunion et Maurice", in *La fille des eaux dans l'océan Indien – mythes, récits, représentations*, ed. Bernard Terramorsi (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010), 111-128.

20 Barlen Pyamootoo and Rama Poonoosamy (éds.), *Lor Lamer/lat sealen mer* (Port-Louis: Immedia, 2004).

21 Loga Virahsawmy, "Fé Lamer", in *Lor Lamer/lat sealen mer*, eds. Barlen Pyamootoo and Rama Poonoosamy (Port-Louis: Immedia, 2004), 231-239.

22 Virahsawmy, "Fé Lamer".

23 Jean Claud Andou, "Entre ciel et mer", in *Lor Lamer/lat sea len mer*, eds. Barlen Pyamootoo and Rama Poonoosamy (Port-Louis: Immedia, 2004), p. 70.

24 Andou, "Entre ciel et mer", 64.

25 Ramesh Ramdoyal, "Didine", in *Lor Lamer/lat sea/en sea*, eds. Barlen Pyamootoo and Rama Poonoosamy (Port-Louis: Immedia, 2004), 176.

26 Elle était là, la Sirène noire, surplombant la surface, à moins de 100 mètres de la plage : une sculpture taillée dans le roc, la queue orientée vers le nord. La tête a disparu. Yash Nursinghdass, "Le cryptogramme du forban", in *Lor Lamer/lat sealen mer*, eds. Barlen Pyamootoo and Rama Poonoosamy (Port-Louis: Immedia, 2004), 48.

27 Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo, "Les personnages", 112.

28 Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo, "Les personnages", 112.

29 Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo, "Les personnages", 112.

heritage of the region. As Alan Dundes posits, folklore and mythology are windows into the collective psyche of a society, offering insights into its cultural beliefs and values.³⁰

Legends and Stories of the Past: Between Imitation and Invention?

It is by digging a little further into the island's literary past that the mermaids of legends and stories are (re)discovered. In 1979, eleven years after Mauritian Independence, Mauritian author Renée Asgarally published the story of a mermaid in Mauritian Creole Language, 'Zistoire ène ti la sirène,' which can be translated as 'Story of a Little Mermaid' in the collection of short stories, *Tension gagne corne*.³¹ In 1936, the Mauritan poet, Robert Edward Hart,³² published the prose poem *Sirène*. The story revolves around the fisherman Jean, a young man of twenty, who suffers from being alone.³³ One evening while on his boat, Jean finds himself face-to-face with a naked, laughing, and dishevelled young girl.³⁴ He falls madly in love with the blue-eyed blonde, and promises her that he will stop fishing and always keep her secret, that she is a daughter of the seas. They have three children, but one night he reveals his secret to his friends, and the mermaid jumps into the water with her children. But only the girl manages to swim into the water with her mother, and the two sons remain with their father. This story seems original, an invention of the Mauritian poet, but it is not, as it also exists in Malagasy legends, more particularly in the south-east of Madagascar.³⁵ Reference can be made here to the concept of *indianocéanisme*, a term coined by Camille de Rauville in 1961.³⁶ The emphasis is on this attraction for cultural unity in the Indian Ocean, as the same characters and tales are found in several countries in the south-east of the Indian Ocean. Just like the recurring creole characters of Ti Jean or Compère Lièvre³⁷ in the writings of several countries of the Indian Ocean, the tale about the mermaid has surely also circulated across the islands; and Mauritius, which has no indigenous people, may have inherited the stories of peoples who came to the island as travellers, workers or slaves.

However, despite some similarities between the two tales, there are differences in Hart's tale. While Hart's mermaid sings to Jean to spare his brothers,³⁸ the innocent fish³⁹ – the Malagasy mermaid – on the contrary, helps her fisherman secretly by luring fish into his net. The plot of the story is the same in the Malagasy legend and Hart's poem: one day,

30 Alan Dundes, *Folklore Matters*, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1989).

31 Robert Furlong, "Renée Asgarally", *Ile en Ile*, accessed November 20, 2023, <http://ile-en-ile.org/asgarally/> It is the story of a little mermaid who fell in love with a mortal. Signing a pact with a witch, she got rid of her tail, and became his fiancée, but he did not know that she was a creature of the seas. When his life was in danger during a sea voyage, the mermaid jumped in to save him, and broke the pact, and became mermaid again. She told her lover the truth, and returned to the ocean. One day, the depressed mortal ventured towards the seas and let the waters submerge him.

32 Robert Furlong, "Robert-Edward Hart", *Ile en Ile*, accessed November 20, 2023 <http://ile-en-ile.org/hart/>

33 Hart, *La sirène*, stanza 2.

34 Hart, *La sirène*, stanza 3.

35 "Les mystères des eaux du sud-est de Madagascar : la sirène": an oral legend, that can be translated as "The Mysteries of South East Madagascar's waters: the mermaid", re-told in French by Cynthia Rakotonia, Luciana Rakotomampionona, Voary Andriamarohery and Hana Barthelemy during the author's class, "Renforcement de la langue française" in 2018.

36 Jean-Louis Joubert, "Des îles et des courants", *L'île en littérature: situations*, www.institutfrancais.com/librairie/derniers/pdf/143_003.pdf.

37 Ti Jean can be translated as Petit Jean in French or Little John in English. Compère Lièvre can be translated as the Hare. They are well-known figures in the oral traditions of Mauritius, and many colonised countries and islands in the Indian Ocean.

38 Hart, *La sirène*, stanza 6.

39 Hart, *La sirène*, stanza 4.

taking human form, she confesses to him that she came from a secret universe that should not be revealed to mortals. In love, the fisherman accepts her conditions. They live happily with four children. A slight difference is certainly to be noted in the number of children, but just as in Hart's tale, one evening, the fisherman, completely drunk, reveals that his wife was a mermaid. Furious and troubled, she finds herself forced back into the ocean. While the Mauritian mermaid almost drowns her sons by throwing them into the water, in the Malagasy legend, the choice is given to them: two of the four children, who manage to breathe under water, follow the mother, and the two others, who remained with the father, become great fishermen.

Like several Mauritian authors of the first half of the twentieth century, Hart did not seem to escape the rule, and showed a preference for a specific literary movement. He published, from 1913–1948, several collections of poems inspired and influenced by the English romantics or the French symbolists.⁴⁰ By imitating European authors in his description of a blonde mermaid with blue eyes, and by winking at antiquity or Greek mythology with references to Ulysses, the Golden Fleece, or Thule, Hart seems to distance himself from the local culture and continue to devote a cult to the romantic period of the end of the nineteenth century. Zinovia Verghis points out that Ancient Greece represents, for the romantics, a golden age in the history of the West,⁴¹ and, indeed, Mauritian poets and writers have continued to model the themes of this period for a long time.

However, Gabriel Tarde, a French jurist, sociologist, and philosopher, who clearly stipulates that any imitation entails an invention or a renewal, can be cited here.⁴² Hart innovates and invents another mermaid. His mermaid condemns the consumption of animal flesh and advocates the right of all creatures to live, thus referring to the Hindu notion of vegetarianism. It should be noted that in 1934 Hart discovered his first Hindi translator, Mr. Goomansingh, and he then read the works of Rabindranath Tagore, Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, and other spiritual leaders of India before he became a member of the Indian Cultural Association. According to Hart, the Hindu soul is the most religious in the world.⁴³ A renewal of Mauritian literature is to be noted in the attraction for India and Hindu philosophy, especially by authors of white origins during an epoch that preached ethnic divide.⁴⁴

Island literature is therefore trying to emancipate itself, to find its own identity, by appropriating other cultures present on the island, and Robert-Edward Hart seems to submit to this *indianocéanisme* philosophy. In addition, he is the one who introduces Malcolm de Chazal to the innovative reflections, analyses, and conclusions of Jules Hermann, poet, historian, political figure, and, solicitor of Reunion Island. According to the latter, who must have read the works of Philip Sclater on the lemurs,⁴⁵ the islands of the south-west of the Indian Ocean belonged to a vast mythical continent, Lemuria, where proto-historical giants lived who, among other things, carved out the mountains.⁴⁶ Before

⁴⁰ "Maurice", *Larousse*, accessed November 20, 2023, www.larousse.fr/encyclopedia/literature/Maurice/175255.

⁴¹ Zinovia Verghis, "Les écrivains et artistes français du XIX^e siècle et la Grèce", *Cahiers Balkaniques* 44, (2016). <http://journals.openedition.org/ceb/9908>

⁴² Gabriel Tarde, *Les lois de l'imitation* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 1993).

⁴³ Furlong, "Hart".

⁴⁴ Prosper, Jean-Georges, *Histoire de la littérature mauricienne de langue française* (Maurice: Editions de l'Océan Indien, 1994), 197.

⁴⁵ Philip Sclater "proposed, in 1864, the former existence of a land connecting Africa with India that he so fortuitously named Lemuria": Sumathi Ramaswamy, *The Lost Land of Lemuria: Fabulous Geographies, Catastrophic Histories* (California: University of California Press, 2004), 185.

⁴⁶ Martine Mathieu, "Sur une Lemurie engloutie, les révélations du Grand Océan Indien", *Modernités – Mondes perdus* 3 (1991), 125-137. <https://books.openedition.org/pub/4620?lang=fr>.

analysing 'Les sirènes de Morne Plage', it seems important to introduce the collection of tales by Malcolm de Chazal, who is mainly known for works such as *Sens Plastique* (1947) or *Pétrusmok* (1951). It was not until 2012 that the Foundation of Malcolm de Chazal (Mauritius) published his tales, *Les Contes de Morne Plage*. The writings of Hermann and the feeling that the mountains of his island seem to have been sculpted and hammered⁴⁷ make de Chazal wish to revisit his island. His objective is to re-transform it into a magical universe worthy of this Lemuria, which was engulfed, and of which Mauritius would be only one of the emerged peaks, and whose mountains would have been sculpted by giant lemurs.⁴⁸

These tales do not mention the myth of Lemuria, but the concept of creation is there, especially in the shaping of the mountain. Still, in the 'Foreword',⁴⁹ the island he creates is an island where fairies live; it is the paradise lost, inhabited by mermaids and large white birds.⁵⁰ With de Chazal, religion and magic mingle, where the Garden of Eden is Mauritius and the Tree of Life (*arbre de vie*) is the Morne Mountain.⁵¹ Innovation or invention is there; de Chazal is the creator of the myths for Mauritius, a country that had no mythology of its own, and the mountain, Le Morne, becomes the cradle of these local myths. 'Les sirènes de Morne Plage' tells the story of old Allen, a fisherman and poet, who goes to sea in his blue boat. One day, he hears a voice in the water telling him that it is following him and is there for him. From that day on, he catches many fish. But the day he does not listen to the voice that prevented him from going fishing, he catches no fish. Another day, he feels his line bite in a very strange way. But the voice again forbids him to haul his fishing net. He cuts the thread and returns home. A few days later, he learns that a woman has drowned at Morne Plage. The stories of de Chazal, written before 1957, have been re-published in several formats, including comics,⁵² and the paintings by the author.⁵³

Several questions can be raised about de Chazal's representation of the mermaid. According to one of his interpretations, all fish are mermaids.⁵⁴ In his metaphysical momentum, he might have been trying to formulate another representation of the mermaid. Besides, the female voice in the water or the woman found at the end of the story remain quite mysterious. At the end of his tale, he tells his children a tale, that of the fairy, the drowned woman, who looked at the sea and wanted to reach for the moon; and when she ventured into the water, she became a mermaid, with the head of a woman and the body of a fish.

In addition to this, a seemingly unpublished traditional tale about the mermaid in Mauritius also exists. This story, told by first-year students in 2018,⁵⁵ is part of the oral tradition of Mauritius, particularly in the stories of the north of the island. By borrowing the technique of embedded storytelling, the storyteller presents a mermaid who, expelled

⁴⁷ Christophe Chabbert, "La Lémurie de Chazal 2", *La Revue des Ressources*, accessed November 20, 2023, <https://www.larevuedesressources.org/la-lemurie-de-malcom-de-chazal-2,1317.html>.

⁴⁸ Robert Furlong, "Malcolm de Chazal, the Mauritian magician", *Le Magazine Littéraire* 511, <http://www.magazine-litteraire.com/content/rss/article?id=19905>.

⁴⁹ de Chazal, "Foreword", *Les contes*, 9-11.

⁵⁰ de Chazal, *Les contes*, 9.

⁵¹ Translation: It has been told for centuries and centuries that there once existed a Garden of Eden. This Garden of Eden is Mauritius. It was told very anciently that in this garden was a tree of life. This tree of life is none other than the Morne Mountain which is in the middle of the promontory; de Chazal, *Les contes*, 9.

⁵² Christophe Caussiau-Haurie et al., *Les contes de Morne Plage* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2016).

⁵³ The Malcolm de Chazal Foundation has used the paintings done by the author to retell the story of one of his tales. See: <http://dodovole.blogspot.com/2013/08/les-sirenes-de-morne-plage.html>.

⁵⁴ de Chazal, *Les contes*, 27.

⁵⁵ The story, 'La vengeance d'une sirène' / 'A Mermaid's Revenge', was told by Chloé Augustin, Sweeta Sungkur, Vaishnavi Jalim and Mahanta Ghoorbin, first-year human resources degree students, in September 2018 for the module "Renforcement de la langue française".

from Beau Plan, finds herself in Solitude to then live near Flat Island. We are thus presented with a beautiful mermaid who lives peacefully in Beau Plan's lake during the period of British colonisation, in the nineteenth century. Since all things that are strange and out of the ordinary cause worry, the villagers begin to fear the mermaid and they decide to get rid of her. Physically and morally wounded by the cruelty of the villagers, she flees and takes refuge in the lake at Solitude. A few years later, young men from the village of Solitude begin to mysteriously disappear. However, one of the missing men returns to his family and narrates how he was drawn by the captivating, melodious voice of a creature, half-woman, half-fish, with blue eyes, sitting on a rock. Seduced, he allowed himself to embark on a journey into her magical universe. The mermaid could not kill him because she has fallen in love with him. One day, the young man speaks of his desire to return to his family, but the mermaid refuses. At nightfall, he runs away and returns to his family, leaving behind an angry mermaid. The third part of the tale takes us to the village of Grand-Gaube, where we are told how, near Flat Island, a fisherman in his small boat meets the same mermaid of Beau Plan and Solitude. Captivated, he listens to her song and allows her to caress his cheek. Even if he no longer goes fishing at night, he dreams of the mermaid who begs him to come to her. One evening, he lets himself be tempted. The next day, his wife, worried, goes looking for him and finds his inert body. It seems that other people have disappeared on this cursed island.

Towards the Construction of the Mauritian Mermaid: Looking at the Mermaid From a Postcolonial Perspective

Different themes related to postcolonialism will be discussed in this section to pinpoint the imitation and innovation behind the representation of the Mauritian mermaid. The colonial 'eye'/'I' had specific perceptions about white skin, blonde hair and blue eyes, drunkenness and colonised peoples, and the sexualised other in inter-racial relationships. Mentioning the colonial powers is important, as in 1947 only about 12,000 people out of 450,000 had the right to vote (the Franco-Mauritians, some 'Creoles' from the middle class and some Indians from the city).⁵⁶ Looking at the representation of mermaids with postcolonial lenses can give an indication of the social structure of the island and analyse whether the portrayal of the mermaid is just a mere imitation of the same creatures in European tales and legends.

Imitations of European mermaids are perceived in Hart's works, especially in her physical appearance. The unpublished oral tale only mentions her blue eyes, but de Chazal does not linger on her physical description. Beauty is a main theme in postcolonial study, especially when beauty, or more precisely, 'the myth of beauty' is linked with the 'western ideal of beauty' – that is, 'whiteness'.⁵⁷ Citing Fanon, L. Ayu Saraswati posits that it is only by having a physical relationship with a white woman that the colonised man is able to move forward, forget his 'internalized oppression' and rebuild or repair his 'masculinity' in front of society.⁵⁸ Citing Homi Bhabha, Fanon, Said, and Baiq Wardhani et al. explain the internalisation of the concepts of mimicry/imitation of the colonial powers

⁵⁶ John Addison and K. Hazareesingh, *A New History of Mauritius* (Revised edition) (Maurice: Editions de l'Océan Indien, 1993).

⁵⁷ Roro Retno Wulan, "The Myth of White Skin: A Postcolonial Review of Cosmetics Ads in Indonesia", *SHS Web of Conferences* 33, 00048, (2017). https://www.shs-conferences.org/articles/shsconf/pdf/2017/01/shsconf_icode2017_00048.pdf.

⁵⁸ L. Ayu Saraswati, "Why Beauty Matters to the Postcolonial Nation's Masters: Reading Narratives of Female Beauty in Pramoedya's *Buru Tetralogy*", *Feminist Formations* 23, no. 2 (2011), 111-131, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41301659>.

by the subaltern, where white skin is considered superior to black skin.⁵⁹ The inferiority complex is ingrained in the colonised, and citing Fanon, Bruno Viard unveils the obsessive needs of the colonised people to compare beauty, intelligence and social status with the white culture.⁶⁰ Thus, Hart describes a blonde woman to represent perfect beauty, also guaranteeing perfect offspring with hair blonde as Thule gold:

I embrace white culture, white beauty, white whiteness. In these white breasts that my ubiquitous hands caress, it is white civilization and dignity that I make mine.⁶¹

Another interpretation of the Mauritian mermaid might be possible and concerns questions of broken identity that the authors might have raised. A parallel can be seen between the mermaid and a colonised person since both tend to reject their bodies. In other terms, living among human beings definitely means that the monstrous fishtail – the difference – has to be shed to be accepted and to adapt to the civilised world. The same can be applied to the colonised person, who tends to dress and talk like the coloniser as illustrated by many postcolonial theorists. Acculturation, as Frantz Fanon points out in *Black Skin, White Masks*, is internalized among the colonised people, and black skin, considered impure, must be rejected. The skin colour of the mermaid is not mentioned in the oral tale. Only her blue eyes are brought up in the oral version that was recounted. She might, therefore, represent whiteness, or she may also be a mulatto. Children of mixed blood, considered hybrids by the colonised people, were often rejected during the colonial period. The violence of the villagers towards the mermaid of the oral tale, who keeps her fishtail on land (unlike Hart's mermaid) tends to emphasise her refusal to fit into society and society's rejection of difference.

Shedding colonial indoctrinated notions can be difficult, as social structures have an impact on the educational system in place. Since the two great powers of the period settled on the island, British and French cultures and literatures have permeated Mauritian society and schools. Mauritian authors must have been inspired by Andersen's tale of the little mermaid. But the contact of cultures and traditions and the living conditions of the different ethnic groups must also have influenced the authors. In fact, there seems to be a tug-of-war in the depiction of the mermaid in the colonial period: she seems to be a copy of the Western mermaid, but possesses at the same time some characteristics and attitudes that seem specifically linked to the island, its region, and its history. Unlike Andersen's mermaid, the Mauritian mermaids, for instance, rarely accept the option to sacrifice themselves.

Monsters, which can be seen as portrayals of 'strangers' or foreigners,⁶² put emphasis on the differences between the Self and the Other. The mermaid – who comes from another world – cannot co-habit in the human world: even married to a mortal, she leaves at the end (as depicted in the story of Hart). It can be assumed that 'inter-racial' or intercultural relationships between different groups are doomed to failure. This can be further explained in the unpublished tale, which introduces a different twist in the

⁵⁹ Baiq Wardhani, Era Largis, and Vinsensio Dugis, "Colorism, Mimicry, and Beauty Construction in Modern India", *Jurnal Hubungan Internasional* 6, no. 2 (2017-2018).

⁶⁰ Bruno Viard, *La Littérature et la République* (Aix-en-Provence: Presses universitaires de Provence, 2016).

⁶¹ J'épouse la culture blanche, la beauté blanche, la blancheur blanche. Dans ces seins blancs que mes mains ubiquitaires caressent, c'est la civilisation et la dignité blanches que je fais miennes. Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, (Paris: Seuil, 1952), 76.

⁶² Richard Kerney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness*, (London: Routledge, 2003).

story: it is the mortal man who runs away from the cave of the mermaid and returns to his family. Sibylle Erle and Helen Hendry, while citing Stephen Asma posit 'that monsters represent evil or moral transgression'.⁶³ The mermaid and her actions 'literalise [our] deepest fears'. In his examination of monsters and monstrosities, Foucault distinguishes three interrelated categories: 'the masturbator'; the one 'who breaks moral law';⁶⁴ and the deviant, or the one who deviates from the right path. In this context, the mermaid becomes the monster to be destroyed, encompassing elements of all the three categories. She emerges as a sexualised persona, tempting and leading others away from society's norms, thus challenging established moral and social codes of behaviour. This can be perceived as an extrapolation, but the social construction of the island during the colonial period seems to categorise people into different groups; and tales about monsters were mainly to categorise individuals. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen explains in one of his theses on monsters, 'the monster is the harbinger of category crisis'.⁶⁵ Physically, the mermaid, as a hybrid creature, cannot be categorised in the human society. By disrupting colonial rule, where cultural identities must not be mixed, the mermaid becomes the danger to be eliminated. Monsters in all these stories must be fought in order for the protagonist to 'regain his humanity' and 'embrace their new, better self and start afresh'.⁶⁶

However, another interpretation is possible in the stories where the mermaids leave at the end. It is interesting to note that in societies where separation or dissolution of marriages is considered sinful,⁶⁷ the woman leaves her husband in Hart's poem. Her independent mind and her decision to free herself from all social norms show that the mermaid, even if 'controlled by patriarchal traditions' is a 'symbol of change'.⁶⁸ Lotti Mealing also adds that the nineteenth century mermaid represented 'the social and political emancipation sought by the New Woman'.⁶⁹ In fact, the mermaid usurps the traditional patriarchal convention of the female as victim. This seems another reason to destroy her, even in the Mauritian society, as her presence is disruptive to what is known and accepted.

According to Cohen, monsters appear in a cultural space to reflect contemporary society's 'fear, desire, anxiety or fantasy' that needs to be addressed. This is why the mermaids in the stories are not named. The symbolic power of naming⁷⁰ cannot be ignored: naming will give an identity to the monster, and from 'they'/the other/the 'not I',⁷¹ the monster will become 'I', and will be able to leave their dwellings, that is the 'gates of difference'⁷² and the 'unknown', to use the terms of Paul Goetsch.⁷³

63 Sibylle Erle and Helen Hendry, "Monsters: interdisciplinary explorations in monstrosity", *Palgrave Communications* 6, no. 53 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-020-0428-1>.

64 Erle and Hendry, "Monsters".

65 Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

66 Erle and Hendry, "Monsters".

67 Love Obiani Arugu, "Social indicators and effects of marriage divorce in African societies", *The Business & Management Review/ International Conference on Business and Economic Development (ICBED)* 4, no. 4 (2014).

68 Mealing, "The Mermaid", 227.

69 Mealing, "The Mermaid", 227.

70 Erle and Hendry, "Monsters".

71 Adele Hanon, "Othering the Outsider Monstering Abject Bodies in *Wuthering Heights*", *Otherness: Essays and Studies* 6, no. 2 (2018).

72 Cohen, *Monster Theory*.

73 Paul Goetsch, *Monsters in English Literature: From the Romantic Age to the First World War*. (Peter Lang GmbH, 2002), 17-18.

This idea of being different from the norms, therefore of being abnormal, is also seen in the sexually deviant nature of the mermaid. Driven by what Freud calls the self-centred Id since it knows no control and is a distortion of societal norms, the mermaid in colonial Mauritius transgresses the moral rule by embodying a sexualised figure. Her nakedness is another element that reflects the concept of otherness. It unveils not only female perversity, voluptuousness, a degenerate and immoral life, and impurity,⁷⁴ but also ‘the savagery and backwardness’ of the colonised people, who are far ‘from civilization and reason.’⁷⁵

The Mauritian mermaid, especially the one in the oral tale, reminds us of the figure of the mermaid in African stories, Mami Wata. The latter is often portrayed with the head and torso of a woman and the tail of a fish, and possesses not only positive attributes (beauty, healing powers etc.) but is also considered ‘potentially deadly’ and is referred to as the ‘forces of Satan’. While the little European mermaid is considered pure, the mermaid of the unpublished Mauritian tale seems to possess the negative representations of Mami Wata and must, therefore, be feared.

Colonisers used religious scripts to denigrate the colonised beliefs, and the mermaid in Africa began to symbolise ‘immorality, sin, and damnation’, and those who deviate from the ‘path of righteousness’.⁷⁶ The mermaid in Hart’s poem charms her way into the life of her fisherman. In the oral legend, the mermaid seduces young men and forces them to live with her. Moreover, in his representation of the mermaid-woman, Hart emphasises the nudity of the woman. The metonymic description of her body – her flowing golden hair, her jamrose-colored arms, her mouth that looked like a rose and her eyes that were full of an unknown sky,⁷⁷ make her into an object of desire. According to Margaret Persin, unlike the male-writers, the female-poet hardly dissects female beauty and does not dwell on tropes or stereotypes of female beauty – lips, hair and eyes are forgotten.⁷⁸ Hart, on the other hand, describes the mermaid woman as a desirable being. The sexual availability of the mermaid refers to the images conveyed about indigenous women during colonialism and imperialism:

The mermaid: I am more alive/Than your human virgins.⁷⁹

One can note the taboos or their lack around the question of sexuality in the colonies, especially if it concerns non-Europeans: ‘the body of the “Other” is itself placed outside the licit field of norms, closer to the animal and the monster than human, more in affinity with nature than with culture’, possessing an ‘atavistic sexual depravity’.⁸⁰ Woman-mermaid or woman half-monster, just like the native, she is far from being the pure and modest European woman and does not hesitate to seduce, playing on her attributes:

⁷⁴ Asa Simon Mittman (ed.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*. (London: Routledge, 2016).

⁷⁵ Philippa Levine, “Naked natives and noble savages: the cultural work of nakedness in imperial Britain”, in *The Cultural Construction of the British World*, Barry Crosbie and Mark Hampton, eds, (Manchester: Manchester Scholarship, 2016), 17-38. 10.7228/manchester/9780719097898.003.0001.

⁷⁶ Henry John Drewal, “Beauteous Beast: The Water Deity Mami Wata in Africa” *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, Asa Simon Mittman, ed. (London: Routledge, 2016).

⁷⁷ Hart, *La sirène*, stanza 9.

⁷⁸ Margaret Persin, “Mermaids, Pirates, Women and the Sea, Recent Spanish Poetry by Women”, *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* (2007), 243. Doi: 10.1080/14753820701237480.

⁷⁹ La sirène: je suis plus vivante/Que tes vierges humaines. Hart, *La sirène*, stanza 4.

⁸⁰ Pascal Blanchard, Christelle Taraud, Dominic Thomas, Gilles Boëtsch and Nicolas Bancel, ‘Les imaginaires sexuels coloniaux ont façonné les mentalités des sociétés occidentales’, *Le Monde*, September 24, 2018, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2018/09/24/les-imaginaires-sexuels-coloniaux-ont-faconne-les-mentalites-des-societes-occidentales_5359511_3212.html.

The mermaid: And suddenly the desire came to me / To be a prey in your nets, / A happy prey, an offering / Mysterious from the sea.⁸¹

The woman, 'mysterious', as Hart points out, accesses otherness, thanks to the liquid and fluid symbol of water. Indeed, water and woman are closely linked: the indomitable ocean represents the mysteries and forces of woman; while the sea, symbol of the womb, is often perceived as a liquid cradle.⁸² Furthermore, the mermaid is also unattainable, as she lives in the deep seas of distant islands, thus adding to her otherness:

One of the prevailing tendencies of folk legends is that the intrusion of the supernatural into the everyday world most often occurs along the borders between the wild and the civilized, whether it be on the edge of the woods, near the entrance to the underworld (a cave), or along the bank of a river or shore of a lake, sea, or ocean.⁸³

The woman-mermaid is the epitome of Otherness, and foreign to the human world, she becomes an object of curiosity. In Hart's poem, Jean invented a story about her origins and that she came from Thule Island, but people were amazed at the green reflections in her seaweed hair and in her green eyes.⁸⁴ In the same poem, the mother-mermaid returns to her source – to the sea – with her three children; but while the boys nearly perished, the girl dived joyfully with a cry of deliverance, and both were gone forever. Water is, therefore, perceived as a means of achieving deliverance – but one wonders what one wishes to deliver oneself from: from society and from man?

The identity of the mermaid, who is nameless in Hart's poem and the oral legend, and who remains only a voice in de Chazal – just like her hybrid body – remains fluid, moving:

The earth is placed under the sign of belonging in contrast to the water, unstopably felt as the place par excellence of "dis-belonging"... The waters are opposed to the "solid" representing the anchoring of identity.⁸⁵

Despite her close link with the sea, the presence of women is almost non-existent on the sea in almost all colonial masculine discourse: the sea and its maritime creatures – which refer to the colony – must be conquered by men. De Chazal underlines it: Allen prefers to be alone in his boat. Indeed, as Persin points out, the female voice is often excluded, and the role of the woman is to faithfully await the return of the man on the beach.⁸⁶ This is what Allen's wife does. Again, de Chazal's fairies or mermaids are the drowned women or those who were trying to catch the moon, but who drowned and could not return. The question of suicide is raised, but the problem is being mitigated. Valerie Meessen

81 La sirène: Et soudain le désir me vint/D'être une proie en tes filets, / Une proie heureuse, une offrande/ Mystérieuse de la mer. Hart, *La sirène*, stanza 10.

82 Liz Jones, "Women and Water in Global Literature", *European Journal of Life Writing, Call for Paper* (2017). <http://ejlw.eu/announcement/view/47>.

83 Jason Marc Harris, "Perilous Shores: The Unfathomable Supernaturalism of Water in 19th-Century Scottish Folklore", *Mythopoeic Society* 28, no. 1/2 (2009), 5-25, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26815460>.

84 Hart, *La sirène*, stanza 17.

85 Yolande Aline Helm, "Les métaphores océaniques et la subjectivité métisse dans l'œuvre de Roland Brival", *Études Caribéennes* 23 (2012). <http://journals.openedition.org/etudescaribeennes/6348>.

86 Persin, "Mermaids", 239.

points out that in the nineteenth century, in an excessive representation of the dead, drowned woman emphasised the predominance of patriarchy.⁸⁷ Trying to catch the moon can be taken as a metaphor, which would mean satisfying one's desires, forbidden to women. Allen, warning his daughter not to venture into the sea to reach for the moon, takes the voice of patriarchy, the one who warns against female transgression. And this transgression will lead to the transformation of the woman into a monstrous creature, thus losing her human form.

Some aspects of colonial and patriarchal society are imitated in the tales. However, there also seems to be a re-appropriation of the legend of the Mauritius mermaid. In the French legend, Demeter transformed the nymphs, who were indifferent to the kidnapping of Persephone, into half-woman and half-bird-fish monsters.⁸⁸ In de Chazal's tale, a woman throws herself into the sea and becomes a mermaid. Despite some negativity, both authors try to keep a certain lightness to the tales. A second reading of the mermaid stories, however, reveals death. Suicide and murder are not mentioned, but it is clear that the mother in Hart's poem throws herself and her children into the sea after her husband's betrayal. In the unpublished tale, the mermaid at the beginning of the story is beaten by the villagers, and becomes a murderer. The woman in de Chazal's tale also kills herself. In parenthesis, the action of the woman in de Chazal's tale reminds me of the runaway slaves hiding on the Morne Mountain just before the abolition of slavery in 1835. The British army was sent there to inform the slaves that they were now free. However, on seeing the army, the slaves thought they were going to be re-captured. Men, women, and children jumped from Morne Mountain and killed themselves. I wonder if the mysterious woman in de Chazal's tale is a nod to the past and to the slaves' resistance against power.

Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection,⁸⁹ which is quite subtle in the Mauritian stories, can be used to shed some light on the representation of the mermaid. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva explains the reaction of horror when faced with a breakdown in meaning, especially the loss of distinction between the subject/self and the object/other. The abject disrupts 'identity', 'system', 'order', 'borders', 'positions', and 'rules'.⁹⁰ The deaths (suicide, murder) are masked in the tales, but these crimes are abject, whereby reality erupts suddenly into their lives, and cannot be discarded. The originality of the Mauritian mermaid's tales and poems seems to lie in the re-telling of the stories of those living on the island. Behind the fairytale like décor, suffering, and colonial segregation, and violence are not to be ignored.

Hence, the mermaid, a hybrid character, is an example of the exotic Other: she lives in the depths of the sea, and hardly belongs to the civilised world of men. According to Victor Segalen, exoticism suggests a geographical difference, a desire to be elsewhere,⁹¹ and to discover the Other. From a postcolonial perspective, the encounter with monsters suggests a colonial encounter between human beings and the natural world; a meeting that, according to him, can turn out to be violent.⁹² With Hart and de Chazal, the mermaid

⁸⁷ Valerie Meessen, *Postmortems: Representations of Female Suicide by Drowning in Victorian Culture* (Radboud University, 2016), 6.

⁸⁸ "Sirène", *Larousse*.

⁸⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror – An Essay on Abjection*, (transl. Leon S. Roudiez) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

⁹⁰ "Modules on Kristeva: II. On the abject", Purdue, accessed November 20, 2023. <https://www.cla.purdue.edu/academic/english/theory/psychoanalysis/kristevaabject.html>

⁹¹ Victor Segalen, *Essays on Exoticism: an Aesthetics of Diversity* (transl. Yaël Rachel Schlick) (London: Duke University Press, 2002), ix.

⁹² Emily Alder, "(Re)encountering monsters: animals in early-twentieth-century weird fiction", *Textual Practice* 31 (2017), 1083, doi:10.1080/0950236x.2017.1358686.

is far from evil. However, in the untold tale on Mauritius, the harmless mermaid becomes a killer in the face of human cruelty. Hart's mermaid is also dissatisfied with the life she leads, and desires the society of men.⁹³ By creating myths of monster-islands, and using the exoticism of the seas, and faraway islands, people have always found ways of putting down or 'demonising' the Other.⁹⁴ In fact, the tradition of locating monsters on islands in the Indian Ocean is ancient, and dates back to Ptolemy in the second century CE.⁹⁵ By taking some aspects of the Western thoughts on colonialism, the colonised or the representation of mermaids, the authors in this study have not completely created an original story. Hart, for instance, has given the same stereotyped image of the islanders, who are also considered monsters. Islanders, non-Europeans, and the colonised are often depicted as drunks in many colonised countries. Citing French doctors and psychiatrists who were in Maghreb, Nina S. Studer describes how the colonised individual is 'infantilised' and perceived as 'immature' and belonging to the 'lower evolutionary level than the French coloniser', especially since they consumed incorrectly and without 'taste' and 'adult reasoning' 'strong liquors'/alcoholic drinks and 'had to be taught how to drink in a civilized and responsible way by the French'. They drank only as they were seeking 'drunkenness'.⁹⁶ In human or mythical form, the Other remains a monster, to be conquered. Gabriel Tarde, in his writings, explains the links between the concepts of imitation and colonisation/imperialism. He also puts emphasis on the dichotomy superior/inferior, showing that colonised people (the inferior) tend to imitate the coloniser (the superior). This theory is debatable, and René Maunier,⁹⁷ on the other hand, tends to argue that the coloniser also imitates the colonised.

Conclusion

To sum up, what can be added is that cultural contacts have created power relationships, and the imitation of some characteristics of the other's cultural life, beliefs, and even tales is inevitable. The Mauritian mermaid has indeed inherited some characteristics of European mermaids. However, as Tarde also posits, imitation, which is a part of all social interactions, automatically entails innovation and new creations. The innovations and influences might seem minor in the Mauritian tales of mermaids, but the Mauritian mermaid becomes a creature of various cultures. During the inventory of mermaids in the writings of Mauritius, I was able to find a poem by Hart, short stories by de Chazal, and an unpublished oral tale that date back to the colonial era. These writings and tales focus on nameless creatures who certainly make the decision to leave and return to the sea but who remain the Other, the unnameable, mysterious, and desirable. Even while trying to copy the European mermaids, Mauritian mermaids seem to have a darker side. The unpublished oral tale, presented in this study, depicts a hybrid monster, who is

⁹³ Rhoda Zuk, "The Little Mermaid: Three Political Fables", *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 22, no. 4 (1997), 167, DOI: 10.1353/chq.0.1181.

⁹⁴ Partha Mitter, Asa Simon Mittman and Peter Dendle, "Postcolonial Monsters: A Conversation with Partha Mitter", *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, Asa Simon Mittman, ed. (London: Routledge, 2016).

⁹⁵ Chet Van Duzer, "Hic sunt dracones: The Geography and Cartography of Monsters", *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman (London: Routledge, 2013/2016).

⁹⁶ Nina S. Studer, "The Infantilization of the Colonized: Medical and Psychiatric Descriptions of Drinking Habits in the Colonial Maghreb", *Re-Configurations. Politik und Gesellschaft des Nahen Ostens*, eds. R. Ouaiassa, F. Pannewick, and A. Strohmaier (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2021), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-31160-5_9.

⁹⁷ Emmanuelle Saada, "Entre 'assimilation' et 'décivilisation': L'imitation et le projet colonial républicain", *Terrain* 44 (2005), <https://doi.org/10.4000/terrain.2618>.

tired of the cruelty of the villagers, takes revenge, and becomes evil. Influences from Indian philosophies or African tales have also added a new dimension to the representation of the Mauritian mermaid. Moreover, monster women attract, because, free from all social chains, they are immodest. This image of the woman-monster refers to representations of indigenous women, with naked bodies and pendulous breasts, which leads to review the representation of the mermaid from a postcolonial point of view. Further analysis of the double oppression of women⁹⁸ – by patriarchal society and by colonial power – in supernatural or fairy tales can be undertaken, as both feminist and postcolonial theories are concerned with the same issues of representation, voice, and marginalisation.⁹⁹ Hence, by investigating the complex origins and symbolic significance of the Mauritian mermaid from a postcolonial perspective, this study has tried to shed light on the underlying social and cultural norms.

⁹⁸ Ritu Tyagi, "Understanding Postcolonial Feminism in relation with Postcolonial and Feminist Theories", *International Journal of Language and Linguistics* 1, no. 2 (2014).

⁹⁹ Deepika Bahri, "Feminism in/and postcolonialism", in *Gender, postcolonialism and the diversity of women's movements*, ed. Christine Verschuur (Geneva: Graduate Institute Publications, 2010).

Monster and Hero?: Rethinking Polyphemos and Odysseus in Homer's *Odyssey*¹

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*In this article I will challenge the supposed binaries between monster and hero by offering a new reading of the *Odyssey* which invites us to rethink the monstrosity of one of Homer's most memorable monsters, the Cyclops Polyphemos, and the monstrosity of the poem's eponymous hero, Odysseus. While most definitions of the word monster have negative connotations usually referring to appearance, it can also be related to behaviour. By drawing on Cohen's *Seven Theses* as set out in his book *Monster Theory* and comparing the behaviour of both the supposed 'monster,' Polyphemos and his antagonist hero, Odysseus, I will show through selected examples from the text that a close reading of the *Odyssey* reveals signs of ambiguity and ambivalence towards both characters – breaking down the binaries between the two and creating a more sympathetic understanding of the ancient Cyclops.*

'Why is your killing justified, and mine is not?'³

As long as human beings have existed there have been monsters. Shortly after the emergence of *Homo sapiens*, monsters were first depicted in prehistoric wall art of Western Europe about 20,000–25,000 years ago.⁴ Believed to be used as an allegory to explain the fears of the unknown, they have been employed as cultural metaphors for the fears and anxieties of a given society ever since. Stories of monsters came to a peak in Classical antiquity particularly in ancient Greece and with them stories of heroes (and gods) to defeat them. While some heroes such as Herakles and Achilles have often been presented as problematic and transgressive, they still typically represent order and civilization while monsters represent 'chaos' and a threat. Thus, stories that tell of the vanquishing of monsters by heroes thereby establish the legitimacy of that civilization.⁵

Considered abnormal and different, monsters are placed in the position of the Other. As Wendy Reid Morgan asserts, the negative words abnormal, different, and other, are dependent on their counterpart positive terms, normal, same, and self. Defining what one is also defines what the other is not.⁶ This sets the boundaries, and binaries, of what

¹ A version of this paper was first presented at the 'Monster Conference' hosted by *Limina Journal* in collaboration with ARC Centre of Excellence for History of Emotions and the Department of Classics, University of Reading, 6-9 September 2022. I would like to thank all the conference organisers and participants for making it possible and for their feedback.

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³ Nick Dear, *Frankenstein* (London, Faber and Faber, 2011), 41. Dear's play is based on Mary Shelley's novel and was premiered at the National Theatre, London, on 5 February 2011.

⁴ David D. Gilmore, *Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts, and All Manner of Imaginary Terrors*, (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 1, 23-24.

⁵ For a more detailed discussion of this hypothesis see: D. Felton, 'Rejecting and Embracing the Monstrous in Ancient Greece and Rome', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, (London and New York, Routledge, 2016), 103-131.

⁶ Wendy Reid Morgan, *Constructing the Monster: Notions of the Monstrous in Classical Antiquity*, (unpublished

is the inclusive acceptable Norm of a given society and what is the excluded unacceptable Other. In Homer's *Odyssey*, the eponymous hero, Odysseus sets himself up as the civilised/Norm Greek Self by which all others must be measured. Thus, placing himself as the binary opposite of the ancient Cyclops Polyphemos who he conceives as being the savage barbarian Other. Therefore, any analysis of Polyphemos in the role of the monstrous barbarian Other must be compared with that of his literary antagonist and corresponding Self, the normative represented civilised hero Odysseus. This is a principle that Odysseus himself uses when he encounters Polyphemos in Book 9. However, monsters such as Polyphemos are particularly problematic as they can blur the boundaries between these two binaries, belonging to both the world of humans and of beasts. It is these perceived binaries that this article sets out to challenge.

Polyphemos is particularly important to any discussion on monsters and monstrosity because, as Paul Murgatroyd observes, he is not only one of the most famous of the monsters from Classical antiquity, but also one whose origins lie in the oral tradition of pre-classical folktales.⁷ Further, both as the antagonist of Odysseus and as the unrequited lover of the sea-nymph Galatea, he has featured in a variety of art forms ever since, from antiquity through to modernity. Although not widely documented, one of Polyphemos's most notable representations in modern literature is probably as the Creature in Mary Shelley's nineteenth-century novel *Frankenstein*.⁸ In her correspondence with the essayist Leigh Hunt, who considered Polyphemos as being 'pathetic' rather than 'monstrous,' Mary Shelley described her novel as 'a book in (favour) defence of Polypheme'; a book which itself, through ambiguity and ambivalence, also challenges the binaries between its monster and hero.⁹

Most definitions of the word monster have negative connotations and often refer to appearance such as 'any imaginary creature that is large, ugly, and frightening'. However, it can also be used in relation to behaviour as in 'a person of repulsively unnatural character or exhibiting such extreme cruelty or wickedness as to appear inhuman'.¹⁰ It is often presupposed that the 'large, ugly and frightening' is also extremely cruel and wicked; he 'resembles his crime before he has committed it'.¹¹ While monsters have always existed, Monster Studies as an academic field of study is relatively new and was greatly influenced by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's pioneering work, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. In the first chapter he unpacks the meaning of the concept of monsters by setting out seven theses to understanding their cultural formation. In 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)' Cohen singles out Polyphemos as a significant monster, citing him as the prototype of his Thesis V.¹² Although Polyphemos exemplifies the concepts that Cohen crystallises in all seven

PhD thesis, Melbourne, Deakin University, 1984), 5.

7 Paul Murgatroyd, *Mythical Monsters in Classical Literature*, (London and New York, Bloomsbury, 2007), 165.

8 Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein*, (New York, Penguin Books, [1818] 2018).

9 Leigh Hunt, *The Correspondence of Leigh Hunt, Edited by his Eldest Son*, Two Volumes, (London, Smith, Elder and Co, 1862), 129; Betty T. Bennet, (ed), *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, Volume I, (Baltimore, MD., The John Hopkins University Press, 1980), 91. My thesis examines how the ambiguities and ambivalence present in Homer's *Odyssey* influenced the development of the character of Polyphemos throughout antiquity and into modernity, most notably in Mary Shelley's nineteenth-century novel *Frankenstein*. Her novel, in turn, invites the modern reader to rethink the supposed binaries between, and the monstrosity of, antiquity's Polyphemos and Odysseus – monster and hero of Homer's *Odyssey*. I would like to thank my supervisors Joanna Paul (The Open University), M. A. Katritzky (The Open University) and Genevieve Liveley (University of Bristol) for all of their ongoing help and support.

10 All definitions refer to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) online.

11 Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France 1974-1975*, trans. Graham Burchell, (London and New York, Verso, 2016), 19.

12 Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, Jeffrey Jerome

of his theses, the Cyclops, as portrayed in Homer's *Odyssey*, is particularly important to Theses III, IV and V and it is these three Theses that I will be drawing on for my analysis in this article. Having described the monster's bodily appearance as being a transgression of the laws of nature (Thesis III), Cohen emphasises cultural differences as its most defining feature asserting that these are reflected in its deformed, or racially different features (Theses IV and V). Many of Cohen's theses reflect the findings of Morgan in her anthropological thesis on monsters in classical antiquity, who also singles out Polyphemos for special attention as does Robert Garland's seminal work on deformity and disability in the Graeco-Roman world.¹³ Garland also touches on Homer's ambiguity and ambivalence towards both the 'monster', Polyphemos and the eponymous 'hero' Odysseus in relation to Odysseus's (and the Greeks's) attitude towards cultural Otherness. In this article I will be examining the ambiguity and ambivalence in more detail, as well as comparing appearance, cultural differences, and behaviour. This analysis will explore the supposed binaries between monster and hero and invite us to rethink the monstrosity of both Polyphemos and Odysseus, subsequently reaching a more sympathetic understanding of the ancient Cyclops.

Homer's *Odyssey*

In the Introduction to the 1831 edition of her novel *Frankenstein*, Shelley claimed that 'Every thing must have a beginning ... and that beginning must be linked to something that went before.'¹⁴ This is as true for Homer's *Odyssey* as it is for Shelley's novel. Therefore, being the first extant literary depiction of Polyphemos, Homer's *Odyssey* constitutes a beginning, a beginning that is linked to an amalgamation of myths and folktales that went before. Whilst the poem as a whole is a variant of the returning husband/hero, the 'Cyclopeia' of Book 9 is mainly based on the folktale of 'the ogre-blinded.'¹⁵ However, just as Shelley gave a modern sympathetic voice to the ancient Cyclops, Homer took the otherwise two-dimensional folktale characters and imbued the ogre with more three-dimensional qualities able to evoke pity in his audience, and made his hero 'complicated.'¹⁶ The overall story is the tale of the homecoming of the Greek hero Odysseus after ten years of warring and the final sacking of the city of Troy by the Greeks. However, after being blown off course he enters a kind of magical 'Wonderland' where he incurs the wrath of the sea-god Poseidon after blinding his son, the Cyclops Polyphemos. As a result, Odysseus's journey home takes another ten years and he returns to find his home besieged by potential suitors who, believing him to be dead, are plotting against his son and competing for marriage to his wife.

During Odysseus's wanderings he encounters the Cyclops Polyphemos and this

Cohen, ed. (Minneapolis and London, University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 3-25. The full Seven Theses are: Thesis I: The Monster's Body is a Cultural Body; Thesis II: The Monster Always Escapes; Thesis III: The Monster is the Harbinger of Category Crisis; Thesis IV: The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference; Thesis V: The Monster Polices the Borders of the Possible; Thesis VI: Fear of the Monster is Really a Kind of Desire; Thesis VII: The Monster Stands at the Threshold ... of Becoming.

¹³ Morgan, *Constructing the Monster*, 242-7; Robert Garland, *The Eye of the Beholder: Deformity and Disability in the Graeco-Roman World*, (Bristol, Bristol Classical Press, 2010), 91-96.

¹⁴ Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein*, (London and New York, Penguin Books Ltd. 1992), 8.

¹⁵ For an examination of the Polyphemos/Odysseus episode as a variant of 'the ogre-blinded' folktale see, for example: William Hansen, *Ariadne's Thread: A Guide to International Tales Found in Classical Literature*, (Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press., 2002), 201 and 289; Lowell Edmunds, 'Epic and Myth', in J. M. Foley (ed), *A Companion to Ancient Epic*, (Chichester, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 31-44.

¹⁶ Homer, *Odyssey*, trans., Emily Wilson, (New York and London, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2018), 1.1, 105.

confrontation is Homer's version of 'the ogre-blinded' folktale recounted in Book 9. Odysseus and twelve of his crew venture inside Polyphemos's cave in his absence where they discover racks of milk and cheeses and well-tended lambs and kids. Odysseus's men want to take the food and animals and go back quickly to the ship, but Odysseus insists on staying to meet the owner in the hope of gaining even more acquisitions. They then eat some of the cheese and sit and wait. Eventually, Polyphemos returns home and seals up the entrance to the cave with a large rock. When he spies the trespassers, Polyphemos eats two of them and another four the next day. Odysseus gets him drunk on strong wine and Polyphemos passes out. While he sleeps, Odysseus and his men blind Polyphemos in his one eye with a red-hot stake. The next morning the Cyclops opens the cave to let out his sheep but unbeknown to him Odysseus has strapped his men to their underbellies and himself to the largest ram and they manage to escape from the cave and back to their ship with the Cyclops's animals. Odysseus then shouts out his name to Polyphemos as they sail away, thereby revealing his identity and their whereabouts. This enables Polyphemos to hurl rocks in the direction of his voice, almost capsizing the ship. He then prays to his father Poseidon cursing Odysseus, which brings about Odysseus's protracted journey home.

While most of the epic poem is narrated by the Muse through Homer as omniscient and therefore presumed a reliable narrator, in Books 9–12 Homer has Odysseus take over as bard and recount the story of his adventurous journey back home to Ithaca in his own words. At this point he has been washed ashore in the land of the Phaeacians where he is trying to secure passage home to Ithaca. Yet, even within Odysseus' own narrative there is evidence of ambivalence, he does not always show himself in the best light and there are moments of pathos for Polyphemos. Both in this episode and throughout the poem the two characters are connected in various ways in terms of appearance, societal situation, and behaviour, blurring the supposed boundaries between monster and hero, which will be unpacked next to explore the binary of monster and hero.

Appearance

In terms of appearance, the two characters, Polyphemos and Odysseus, are not disparate enough to clearly indicate singular monstrosity. At one point Odysseus calls Polyphemos 'a man' (9.187) but shortly afterwards 'not like men who eat bread' (9.192). From this it is clear Polyphemos must be anthropomorphic. By Odysseus's description of the stake Polyphemos uses for a staff as being the height of a large ship's mast (9.319-24), he must also be of an enormous height. Being an enormous one-eyed anthropomorphic man and yet not a man, places him in the category of Cohen's Thesis III, 'The Monster is the Harbinger of Category Crisis.' Polyphemos is abnormal, different, a mixed category that resists classification, making him dangerous as he 'threatens to smash distinctions.'¹⁷ However, this transgression also means his physical form blurs the binaries between man and monster. From a different perspective, in the Cyclopes' land Odysseus is abnormal, and he is viewed by Polyphemos as 'puny, a no-good and a weakling' (9.516). Polyphemos does, however, also fit into Aristotle's view of the monstrous as a being that does not resemble its parents and, therefore, is 'contrary to Nature.'¹⁸ Polyphemos, unlike the other Cyclopes, is the offspring of the Olympian god Poseidon and a sea-nymph named Thoösa

¹⁷ Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', 6, 7.

¹⁸ Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, trans. A. L. Peck, (Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1942), 770 b 5.

both of whom are two-eyed creatures of the sea while Polyphemos is monocular and land-bound. To Odysseus and his men, he is also 'large, ugly, and frightening.'¹⁹ Although in terms of appearance, Polyphemos does indeed fit into any definition of a monster, apart from oblique references Homer does not describe the physical appearance of Polyphemos in any great detail and even his monocularity is only inferred, by use of the singular 'eye,' rather than directly mentioned, as is his bodily form. Thus, it may be that Homer's ambiguity about Polyphemos' appearance means that his physical Otherness may not be considered of great importance to the story and, therefore, any monstrosity must be illustrated through behaviour instead. It is by comparing the behaviour of Polyphemos and Odysseus that the binaries between the two break down, especially when combined with more subtle connections such as their names and societal situations.

Names and Societal Situation

By giving the Cyclops a name, Polyphemos gains individuality and stands out from the other Cyclopes as being different. Odysseus also stands out from his shipmates in the same way as in the entire poem only three other crew members are ever mentioned by name and only one of those on more than one occasion. One meaning of Polyphemos's name is 'one who is talked about a lot' or 'of much fame.' This 'fame' attributed to Polyphemos could be a reference to how well known the character is from the 'ogre-blinded' folktale, but it also links him to Odysseus.²⁰ Heroes crave fame and at the beginning of Book 9 of the *Odyssey* Odysseus reveals his identity to the Phaeacians declaring 'my fame reaches the heavens' (9.19-20). Polyphemos's name also links him to Odysseus through the suffix poly in the many epithets given to the hero such as: *polytropos*, of many devices; *polymetis*, much cunning; *polytlas*, much-enduring. The meaning of the name Odysseus is either 'full of anger and hatred,' or 'the subject of much anger and hatred.' This is something that can also be said about Polyphemos. After Polyphemos had eaten two of his men, Odysseus tells us he was left 'devising evil in the depths of my heart, if in any way I might take vengeance on him' (9.316-7). After he has been blinded, Polyphemos had similar thoughts towards Odysseus, promising that if he finds him 'then would his brains be dashed on the ground throughout the cave, some here, some there once I had struck him' (9.458-9).

... **on the land's edge close by the sea** we
saw a high **cave** ... There a monstrous **man** spent his nights,
who shepherded his flocks **alone and afar**,
and did not mingle with others, but lived apart,
obedient to no law. For he was created a
monstrous marvel, and **was not like a man that lives by bread**,
but like a wooded peak of lofty mountains, **which stands**
out to view alone, apart from all the rest.²¹ (9.181-92)

Polyphemos is othered by Odysseus by marking him out as different even within his own societal group. He creates an adverse view of the Cyclopes from the outset with an

¹⁹ 'Monster,' OED Online. https://www.oed.com/dictionary/monster_n?tab=meaning_and_use#35945948.

²⁰ Definitions according to Liddell and Scott-Jones, <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/>. For further discussion of Polyphemos' name see Egbert J. Bakker, 'Polyphemos', in *Colby Quarterly*, Volume. 38, Issue no. 2, June 2002, 135-150. For 'the ogre-blinded' folktale see, for example, Hansen, *Ariadne's Thread*, 201 and 289.

²¹ As with all other translations of the *Odyssey* unless otherwise stated: Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. A. T. Murray, revised by George E. Dimock, (Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA and London, Harvard University Press., 1998), 9.181-92, 329-31.

emphasis on words and phrases such as 'alone,' 'afar,' 'did not mingle' that emphasises the isolation of Polyphemos. This could be interpreted negatively as a rejection of or from society, a concept that, as Odysseus makes clear, is alien to the civilised Greek. Unlike the other Cyclopes who live in the mountains, according to Odysseus, Polyphemos's home is at the furthest point of the land beside the sea, he shepherds his flocks alone far from the other Cyclopes, he also lives far away from them and never visits anyone. However, during the epic poem, we witness the gradual isolation of Odysseus himself beginning with the breaking down of relations between himself and his men, continuing with growing carelessness of his leadership. This leads to more and more loss of life until, in Book 5, Odysseus arrives in Scheria, the land of the Phaeacians, completely alone, stripped of his ships, his crew, his treasures and even his clothes.

With the purpose of persuading Alcinous, the king of the Phaeacians, to provide him with safe passage home to the island of Ithaca, Odysseus recounts the story of his troubled travels so far including his encounter with Polyphemos in the 'Cyclopeia' of Book 9. After arriving at a deserted island, now usually referred to as Goat Island, where they hunted and feasted on an abundance of sheep and goats, Odysseus noticed smoke coming from the nearby homeland of the Cyclopes and took twelve of his men to go and investigate.²² It was not necessity that caused Odysseus to risk his men's lives in this venture, they had everything they needed in the way of food and water on Goat Island, but pure curiosity and greed, hoping he would be able to accumulate further acquisitions in the form of guest-gifts or, if necessary, even theft.

... we came to the land of the Cyclopes,
 an insolent and lawless folk, who ... plant nothing with their
 hands, nor plow; but all those things spring up for them
 ... wheat, and barley, and vines, which bear the rich clusters of wine ...
 Neither assemblies for council have they,
 nor appointed laws, but they dwell on the peaks of
 mountains in hollow caves, and each one is lawgiver to
 his children and his wives, and they have no regard for one another. (9.105-15)

In his narrative Odysseus himself invites comparison between him and his men, and Polyphemos and the other Cyclopes by describing them and their way of life in purely negative terms in contrast to their own. As Kostas Myrsiades points out, this describes Odysseus and his values more than it does the Cyclopes.²³ Odysseus deems them arrogant and lawless (9.106) and criticises the fact that they do not have an agricultural system, they do not have councils or common laws but only make laws for their own children and wives, they live in caves on the mountain tops instead of in houses, and do not care for one another. Odysseus also criticises the Cyclopes for not having ships or skilled men to build and row them, which means they cannot visit other cities or even sail to the nearby Goat Island. The description of the Cyclopes and their land is interposed with a description of Goat Island which helps to emphasise the Cyclopes' Otherness in terms of their uncivilised existence and lack of *technê* ('art,' 'skill,' 'craft') in contrast to the technological skills of civilised Greeks that would have enabled them to, not just sail to the fertile island, but

²² The island opposite the Cyclopes's homeland has become known as 'Goat Island'. Homer does not name the island but according to Odysseus 'On it live wild goats innumerable, for no traffic of men prevents them, nor do hunters come there' (*Odyssey*, 9.118-20).

²³ Kostas Myrsiades, *Reading Homer's Odyssey*, (Lewisburg, PA, Bucknell University Press, 2019), 111.

also to colonise it.²⁴

Yet, the Cyclopes live in a type of primitive Golden Age of man, as described by Hesiod in *Works and Days* and in line with Cohen's Thesis IV, 'The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference.'²⁵ The 'abnormal' personal body is also reflected in the abnormal collective cultural practices. They resemble an 'anterior culture' which undermines and thereby threatens the more advanced cultural 'self.' Thus, if represented as monstrous, the displacement of the 'anterior culture' through colonisation would be justified and its eradication considered an heroic act.²⁶ Cohen's Thesis V, 'The Monster Polices the Borders of the Possible' extends the taboo of 'foreignness' warning against exploration and the very curiosity that leads Odysseus to investigate the land of the Cyclopes, for any being inhabiting the geographical realms beyond one's own cultural boundaries is likely to be 'cruel, and wild, and unjust' (9.175) and, therefore, monstrous.²⁷ But the primitive Cyclopes have no need to plough or sow or build ships and colonise another land, they live in peace with one another and are provided with all they need without toil. Polyphemos is even able to leave the entrance to his cave open during the day when he is absent with his flocks, without fear of another Cyclops entering and stealing his possessions. However, the same cannot be said about the behaviour of Odysseus and his men.

Behaviour

Odysseus measures the Cyclopes and their natural way of life against his own Greek identity and civilised culture, thereby, from Odysseus's perspective, placing them in the role of the monstrous Other. However, the Cyclopes may have a different way of life from that of the Greeks, but it is not a monstrous one and indeed, it is Odysseus and his men who act in an uncivilised manner when they enter Polyphemos's cave uninvited and eat his food. To the Cyclopes the Greeks are piratical invading foreigners. This is a role Odysseus and his men had already played out in Ismarus, which is referred to by Odysseus himself during the 'Cyclopeia,' thereby providing a link between the two episodes. When Odysseus set out from Goat Island to investigate the land of the Cyclopes, he said he took with him 'a goatskin of dark, sweet wine' (9.196) given to him by the priest Maro in Ismarus in return for sparing the priest's life during the raid. Parallels such as this form an internal intertextuality that invite comparison between the separate episodes.²⁸

Shortly after leaving the sacked city of Troy, Odysseus and his men were driven by the wind to the land of the Kikones and the coastal city of Ismarus where they slaughtered the men, looted their treasure, and raped the women.²⁹ Although they had once been allies of Troy, this invasion of the Kikones's land was an unnecessary and unprovoked attack on a people who were no longer at war with the Greeks. Odysseus, the self-proclaimed 'sacker of cities' (9.504) launched the attack still in the nature of the Iliadic hero but without just cause, making it, in the eyes of the Kikones, an act of piracy by marauding foreigners. Yet, Odysseus relays the information about the raid to his Phaeacian audience quite matter-

²⁴ Homer, *Odyssey*, 9.125-30.

²⁵ Hesiod, *Works and Days*, trans., Glenn W. Most, (Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2006), 109-26, 97.

²⁶ Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', 7-12

²⁷ Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', 12-16.

²⁸ For further discussion on the internal intertextual links as an invitation to comparison between episodes see: Egbert J. Bakker, *The Meaning of Meat and the Structure of the 'Odyssey'*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013), 157-69; and Maureen Alden, *Para-Narratives in the 'Odyssey'*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020) 6. Bakker refers to them as 'interformularity' and Alden as 'para-narratives'.

²⁹ Homer, *Odyssey*, 9.39-43.

of-factly without any sign of either justification or remorse. Odysseus claims he then 'ordered that we should flee with a quick foot, but the others in their great folly did not listen' (9.43-5). If Odysseus's account of the episode is an accurate one and he did not wish to stay and feast, then the men's 'great folly' in ignoring their leader's command is the first sign of the decaying relations between Odysseus and his men. The delay gave time for a counterattack from the Kikones, which resulted in much loss of life of Odysseus's crew. Odysseus is always quick to blame Zeus, the leader of the Olympian gods, for his mishaps, which he did when he was blown off course by the North Wind while rounding the cape of Malea and into the 'Wonderland' of his wanderings (9.67). This could be interpreted as a punishment by Zeus for the *monstrous* attack on the Kikones. Indeed, this is implied by the link between the two episodes and Polyphemos's first words when he finds Odysseus and his men in his home. Polyphemos calls them *xenoi* – 'foreigners' or 'strangers' and asks if they are like 'pirates ... who wander hazarding their lives and bringing evil to men of other lands?' (9.252-5). Just as in Ismarus, Odysseus had come ashore and into Polyphemos's home uninvited with the purpose of acquiring goods through theft if necessary. From Polyphemos's perspective Odysseus is the Other who neither knows nor conforms to the norms of Cyclopean culture (Cohen's Thesis IV).

Then my comrades spoke and besought me first of all to take some
of the cheeses and depart, and then speedily to drive to the
swift ship the kids and lambs out of the pens, and to sail
over the salt water. **But I did not listen to them** ... (9.225-30)

Yet, Odysseus did not learn his lesson easily but repeated the same mistake when he set off to the Cyclopes's land. In order to satisfy his own greed and curiosity Odysseus placed his men in danger, once again, this time through his own choice of staying to feast on purloined food instead of escaping while they could.

Two of them together he seized and dashed to the
earth like puppies, and their brains flowed forth upon the
ground and wetted the earth. Then he cut them limb from
limb and made ready his supper, and ate them **like a
mountain-nurtured lion**, leaving nothing – ate the entrails,
and the flesh, and the bones and marrow. (9.289-93)

In terms of Polyphemos's behaviour, his monstrosity is demonstrated, not just by eating six of Odysseus's men with the intention of eating them all, but in the brutal and nonchalant way, according to Odysseus, he went about it. After eating two of Odysseus's men on the first night, the next morning Polyphemos ate two more before heading off up the mountainside to pasture his sheep, casually whistling as he went on his way.³⁰ This is reminiscent of Odysseus' casual attitude to the raid on the Kikones. That night when Polyphemos returned and ate two more men, Odysseus offered him the strong Maron wine he had taken with him and plied him with it until Polyphemos passed out drunk, spewing up the wine and human flesh in his sleep.³¹ The wine that helped to cause the downfall of Odysseus and his men in Ismarus this time did the same for Polyphemos.

³⁰ Homer, *Odyssey*, 9.311-16.

³¹ Homer, *Odyssey*, 9.371-4.

... we took the
fiery-pointed stake and whirled it around in his eye, and
the blood flowed round it, all hot as it was. His eyelids
above and below and his brows were all singed by the flame
from the burning eyeball and its roots crackled in the fire. (9.378-94)

Polyphemos's deeds may appear to be the act of a monster, but Odysseus's retaliation is just as violent, and he appears to relish in recounting the blinding of the Cyclops in all its gruesome detail, which he performed with a brutality that is analogous to the monstrosity of Polyphemos's anthropophagy. Odysseus and his men sharpened Polyphemos's own staff and heated the point in the fire until it glowed red hot. They then plunged it much deeper into the Cyclops's eye than was required to merely blind him and thus going beyond an act of self-defence.

Beloved ram, why is it that you go out through the
cave like this, the last of the flock? Never before have you
been left behind by the sheep, but are always far the first to
graze on the tender bloom of the grass, stepping high, and
the first to reach the streams of the river, and the first to
show your longing to return to the fold at evening. But now
you are last of all. Surely you are sorrowing for the eye of
your master, which an evil man blinded along with his
miserable fellows when he had overpowered my wits with wine. (9.447-54)

The brutality of the prolonged attack and the detail in which it is described evokes a level of pity for the Cyclops. This is increased when, the next morning, the now blind Polyphemos, opens the cave to let out his sheep and 'groaning and toiling in anguish, groped with his hands' (9.415-6) to make sure none of Odysseus' men were amongst them. Although unbeknown to Polyphemos, they were strapped to the underbellies of the sheep and making good their escape. Homer's ambivalence towards both Polyphemos and Odysseus is expertly demonstrated in Polyphemos's pathetic address to his favourite 'beloved ram', whose habits he knows intimately, while Odysseus clings to its underbelly as it makes its way out of the cave. At the same time as evoking further pity for Polyphemos the audience is encouraged to feel trepidation for Odysseus.

Then we took out of the hollow ship the flocks of the Cyclops,
and divided them ... But the ram my well-greaved
comrades gave to me alone ...
and on the shore I sacrificed him to Zeus ...
So, then, all day long till sunset we sat feasting on
abundant flesh and sweet wine. (9.548-57)

Pathos shifts back to Polyphemos shortly afterwards when Odysseus and his men arrive back at Goat Island. Just as Polyphemos deprived Odysseus of six of his companions, after their escape Odysseus and his men slaughtered the entirety of Polyphemos's flocks, his sole companions, including his beloved ram, and feasted on them all.

As Odysseus and his men sail away, Polyphemos prays to his father, the sea-god Poseidon, cursing Odysseus to experience a similar fate to what had befallen him so that he may arrive home late 'and in distress, after losing all his comrades, in a ship that is

another's; and may he find trouble in his house' (9.532-4). This foreshadows Odysseus' homecoming in Book 13, when he arrives on the island of Ithaca alone to find that in his absence, believing Odysseus to be dead, his house has been besieged by potential suitors to his wife and they spend their days feasting on Odysseus' herds and flocks. This echoes the two episodes of Odysseus and his men feasting on Polyphemos's flocks and the purloined food of the Kikones, thereby placing Odysseus and his crew in the role of the 'insolent suitors' (13.373) and, therefore, questioning Odysseus's own morality, and so-called civilised nature.

Endure, my heart; a worse thing even than this you
once endured on that day when the Cyclops, irresistible
in strength, devoured my stalwart comrades; but you
endured until your wit got you out of the cave where you
thought to die. (20.18-21)

We are reminded of the episode with Polyphemos, again by Odysseus himself, when he recalls the incident the night before he wreaks his revenge on the suitors, thereby, once again, inviting comparison between the two episodes.

There she found Odysseus
amid the bodies of the slain, **all befouled with blood
and filth, like a lion** that comes from feeding on an ox of
the farmstead, and all his breast and cheeks on either side
are stained with blood, and he is terrible to look upon;
even so was Odysseus befouled, his feet and his hands above. (22.402-6)

Just like Polyphemos, Odysseus traps the trespassers in his home barring 'the doors of the stately halls' (21.387) and 'the gates of the well-fenced court' (21.388-9). He then slaughters the suitors, over one hundred of them, as well as twelve female slaves the suitors had taken as their sexual partners who, Odysseus himself acknowledges, only lay with them by force.³² When one suitor was struck with an arrow through his throat, he knocked his food to the floor which became 'befouled' (20.21) by his own blood when he fell. This again recalls Polyphemos's beast-like killing of Odysseus' men when 'their brains flowed forth upon the ground and wetted the earth' (9.230-31). The suitor's food and blood become one and thus metaphoric anthropophagy on the part of Odysseus. Odysseus becomes Polyphemos as the returning homeowner whose reaction to finding strangers in their house eating their food is to kill them.³³ After the slaughter, the resemblance is complete when, just like Polyphemos, Odysseus is described once again as a lion 'all befouled with blood and filth.'

³² Homer, *Odyssey*, 22.37.

³³ It had generally been considered that any connection with the suitors was with Polyphemos, but in recent years some scholars have also observed the resemblance with Odysseus. In particular: Rick M. Newton, 'Poor Polyphemos: Emotional Ambivalence in *Odyssey* 9 and 17', *The Classical World*, Vol. 76, No. 3, (1983), 137-142; Pura Nieto Hernandez, 'Back in the Cave of the Cyclops', *The American Journal of Philology*, Vol. 121, No. 3, (Autumn 2000) 345-366; Tim Brelinski, 'Medon Meets a Cyclops? *Odyssey* 22.310-80', *Classical Quarterly*, 65.1 (2015), 1-13; and Alden, *Para-Narratives in the 'Odyssey'*, 246-254.

Limits of Cohen's Theories in Summary

As I have illustrated, Cohen's Seven Theses are important to any discussion on monsters, as is the ancient Cyclops Polyphemos. While Polyphemos is, of course, relevant to all seven of Cohen's theses, I have concentrated on Theses III, IV, and V, which are related to appearance, race, and culture. As Morgan states, the Other can only be understood in comparison to the Self, but what that Self constitutes can itself be a matter of perspective. From most perspectives, and certainly for Odysseus, the Greeks, and Aristotle, Polyphemos does fit into Cohen's Thesis III: 'The Monster is the Harbinger of Category Crisis' and, as such, can be classed as the monstrous Other in terms of appearance. With his enormous height and his one eye, he is 'abnormal', 'different.' His anthropomorphic features as well as his dissimilarity to his parents, also place him as being hybrid, a mixed category and 'contrary to nature'. From Polyphemos's perspective, it is Odysseus who is different: he does not resemble the Cyclopes in size, or strength or monocularly. However, as any physical description of Polyphemos is kept vague, appearance cannot be considered of great importance to the status of monster in the story of Polyphemos's encounter with Odysseus. When considering his societal situation, culture, and behaviour, again, from Odysseus's perspective, Polyphemos also exemplifies Cohen's Theses IV: 'The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference,' and V: 'The Monster Polices the Borders of the Possible.' He is from a different race with different customs that may be considered primitive and savage, and Odysseus would have been better off not venturing into the Cyclopes's land. Again, from the perspective of the Cyclopes, Odysseus and his men are foreigners who do not understand or adhere to the Cyclopes's way of life.

However, it is when comparing Polyphemos' behaviour with that of Odysseus that the distinctions between the two break down. Odysseus' self-righteous superiority, as Garland observes, is called into question together with the hypocrisy of Greek civilisation with regard to the treatment of others.³⁴ Odysseus criticises the Cyclopes for having 'no regard for one another' (9.115), yet he disregards his own men, ultimately leading to the loss of life of them all and surmounts an unprovoked attack of slaughter, rape, and pillage, on the defenceless Kikones. Where Odysseus's monstrous behaviour not only mirrors but also magnifies that of Polyphemos is in his response to finding trespassers in his home. Polyphemos is brutal in his killing of Odysseus's men but Odysseus's unremittent slaughter of the suitors and female slaves, as well as the excessive violence in the blinding of the Cyclops, far exceeds the monstrous deeds of Polyphemos and definitely exhibits 'such extreme cruelty or wickedness as to appear inhuman.'³⁵

Odysseus labels Polyphemos's killings as 'savage' (9.215), 'pitiless' (9.287), and 'cruel' (9.351), yet considers his own as being justifiable retribution.³⁶ Polyphemos may be considered a monster and Odysseus a hero but, as this article has demonstrated, by concentrating on similarities of behaviour rather than differences of appearance and culture, the concepts of Self and Other become blurred. Through Homer's ambivalence and ambiguity and the internal intertextuality that invites comparison of the various linked episodes, a close reading of the epic poem does make the audience rethink the monstrosity of both characters, Polyphemos *and* Odysseus, breaking down the supposed

³⁴ Garland, *The Eye of the Beholder*, 91-94.

³⁵ 'Monster,' OED Online. https://www.oed.com/dictionary/monster_n?tab=meaning_and_use#35945948.

³⁶ Homer, *Odyssey*, 13.386. While it may be suggested that Odysseus's actions seem justified because of the support he gets from the gods, this delves into the notion of the monstrosity of the gods themselves which is addressed in my thesis but lies outside the scope of this article.

binaries between the two and creating a more sympathetic understanding of the ancient Cyclops.

Skin

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Another body washed up on the shore today. I found it while I was walking along the beach collecting shells. The sand was frigid under my bare feet, the sky grey overhead, the waves shushing me softly. I prodded the body with a stick to make sure it was dead. It wobbled a little. The wet, black eyes were open wide. I leaned forward to look into them and saw my silhouette reflected back, fisheye and odd.

As I walked home, I left a trail of bloody footprints behind me, an open cut on the sole of my foot. Mother would be angry with me when she saw. She always told me to wear boots when I was going to climb on the rocks, but I never listened, and I had the callouses to show it. On my way home, I stopped at the well, splashing my torn foot. The water dripped pink off my toes.

When I came in the front door, Mother was at the stove, stirring busily. On the kitchen table sat piles of chopped parsley and oysters waiting to be shucked. I felt guilty then, for having gone out, and for no better reason than to wander aimlessly along the shore. When she heard me limp in, she turned. Her eyes went straight to my feet.

'What have I told you, Liadan?'

I didn't respond to that. 'I found a dead seal,' I said instead. 'About half a mile from the old jetty.'

She frowned, holding her wooden spoon aloft. 'Really? Did you go and tell your father?' The forgotten pot on the stove burred in protest.

'I came straight home,' I said. 'Should I have told him?'

'Go now,' she said. 'And for God's sake, child, wear your boots.'

I picked up my boots, Mother's eyes on me, but outside I abandoned them by the doorstep. The cut on my foot stung salt-sharp with every step, but I hurried along anyway, the sky darkening over my head. The rain started pouring as I reached the docks. The fisherfolk watched me stumble through the deluge with ever-vigilant eyes. Father was watching too, from the deck of his boat. When I climbed aboard, he dropped his nets to huddle inside the tiny, stuffy cabin with me.

'Liadan?' His greeting was a gruff question.

'Father, I found a seal washed up on the shore,' I said. 'It was dead.'

He looked out the window, over my shoulder, at the tossing waves. 'I see.' His beard was flecked with salt and he smelt like peppermint.

'Mother said I should come and tell you.'

'Right then,' he said, then after a long pause, 'recognise it?'

I shrugged. 'Don't think so.' That felt like the right answer.

We stood in silence. Outside, the rain was letting up, but the clouds still lingered, as they did. I couldn't remember a day on dry land when I had looked up and seen sunshine peeking through the clouds. I sometimes wondered if the sun was a fairy tale Mother had made up to comfort me on the coldest winter days.

'Well,' I said finally. 'I should go.' I shuffled out onto the wet deck.

'Liadan,' Father followed and took hold of my shoulder gently. He looked as

though he wanted to say something, but instead he reached into a nearby barrel and handed me a fish, whole and wriggling.

I took it. 'Thank you,' I said, clutching it carefully in both hands.

He nodded once, then turned back to his tangle of nets.

I waited until I was out of his sight to take a bite. It was hard to get my teeth through the scales, but the flesh underneath was fresh and silky. As I ate, a seagull hovered overhead, watching me with dark, expectant eyes. Mother said feeding the gulls was a bad idea, because then they would all flock around you and scream for more. I chewed on the fish flesh slowly, then tossed what was left onto the rocks nearby. The gull landed, picked up a beakful of entrails and bones and took off again, flying away over the water. I watched it until it was just a speck. I wondered how it would feel to fly, or to swim in the deep ocean. Mother didn't like the idea of me swimming. Too rough, she said, too dangerous.

Sometime that night, I woke up shivering. It happened most nights. I would wake from dreams of dark blue, with icy, raw skin. I rubbed my arms and huddled down further under my blanket. It was quiet in the dark, but for the faint sound of the ocean. I thought about lighting a lantern, then I heard whispering.

'Do you think she knew the creature that washed ashore?' Mother asked Father softly.

I didn't hear him reply.

'Glenn, do you think she wants to ...' She trailed off.

Father sighed.

'I don't want to lose her,' Mother's voice cracked. 'She can't even swim.'

'She was alright at it when we found her, wasn't she?'

'That was years ago,' Mother said. 'She's different now.'

'Yes. But. Not so very different,' Father murmured, and I thought of the fish he'd given me. 'I half wonder if she'd be better off—'

'Don't even think it,' Mother whispered harshly. 'She's ours.'

They were both quiet for a while.

'Do you think she's happy here?' Mother asked him quietly, but he was silent again. 'Glenn ...'

'It's alright, Fiona,' said Father. 'She knows how to take care of herself.'

I could barely hear Mother's response. 'No little girl knows that.'

I turned over in bed, thinking back to the feeling of flesh falling away painlessly, the sudden cold of seawater on pink skin. I thought of Mother and Father, strangers on the shore. The look of shock on their faces. The warmth of their fireplace that night, and every night since.

Then I closed my eyes, trying not to think at all. Just listening to the hush of waves crashing outside.

In the morning I got out of bed early and crept quietly outside. I heard Mother muttering in her sleep and Father's gentle snoring as I passed their bedroom, and my heart felt strange and soft.

The rain had washed away the trail of bloody prints I'd left behind the day before,

but I remembered where I'd climbed the rocky barrier between the sand and the path that led home. I made my way there slowly, dawdling. Most days, while Mother kept the house and Father fished, I went walking far out where other villagers didn't go. I liked to look out at the ocean as I walked, trying to spot things below the choppy surface.

Today, the water was stiller than usual, only the gentlest of waves rippling toward the shore. A soft breeze was blowing along the coastline, tickling my hair against my shoulders as I clambered across the rocks. When I reached the last rock, I lifted a hand to block out the grey glare of the sky, scanning the edge of the water. There it was, the dark lump against the pale sand. As I got close to it, I saw that it had changed since I'd been there yesterday. It was as though the flesh and blubber had vanished with the lowering tide, leaving just the skin behind. I crouched down beside the empty skin and ran a shy finger over it. The mottled fur was soft and somehow warm, despite the overcast sky. I stroked it with my hand. It felt familiar, like something from a dream or a long-forgotten memory. I wriggled closer and curled up beneath it. I felt like I might go to sleep then, but after a while the lofty cry of a petrel flying overhead made me start. I sat up, draped in salty fur. The edge of the water had crept higher since I'd arrived. I waved at it cautiously. It waved back, cresting gently and rolling over with a *shhhh*. It seemed to invite me closer. I stood, wrapped in my sealskin, and stepped toward the water's edge.

Seawater rushed up to touch my toes, leaving bubbled webs along the sand. I crossed the threshold, stepping into the water, and started wading out. As I got deeper, I skimmed my fingers across the surface of the water, pulling it over me, molding the skin against me like a warm, wet cloth.

I should turn back, I thought. Go back ashore, dry myself. Father might be awake.

The further out I went, the easier it was to keep going. I stopped feeling the resistance of water against skinny, clumsy girl-legs.

Mother might be waiting for me.

The long-forgotten shape enveloped me, and something else started to fall away. My little life ashore, a short life spent waiting and wandering, met by loving but unfamiliar arms. It all dissolved around me like seafoam. The waves kissed my changed neck, buoying me and beckoning me. How easy it was to slip under the surface.

Teeth

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Me mammy always told me never to trust a soul. She said it to me often and loudly, through a mouthful of empty gums. Said there was no one in this world I could really count on who wasn't me very own self. In fact, she was halfway through saying it when I bit her throat open.

I was born with sharp teeth and a shock of white hair peeking out from under me skullcap, curling over me pointed ears. The ancient midwife didn't think I'd make it, weak and scrawny and feral as I was. I didn't like the way she was holding me upside down, her gnarled fingers wrapped around me ankles. So, I used the last of me strength to chomp down on her brittle arm. Her blood sprayed onto me face and soaked through me cap, and it filled me with such life that in that moment I knew me hair'd never be white again.

I won't say it's a fear of mine, a bloodless scalp. I'm not afraid of anything, I swear. It's just that I am certain that should the blood upon me head ever wash away or dry up, I would immediately drop dead, cold and hard as a stone. It would be a tragedy, I suppose, but worse things could happen.

I live a peaceful life. I like me solitude, and things have been a lot quieter since I dipped me head in me mam's open neck and watched the life fade from her yellow eyes. I have me wee cave, filled with books and jewellery and coinage and other trash I have collected from the bloody pockets of passing travellers. I consort with fairies on the rare occasion I feel like company, though they find me iron boots unnerving and I find their constant trickery and riddling a great bore. Why cast a spell or snatch a child when you can get straight on with slashing and splashing? So most of the time, it's just me all alone.

I don't know how long it's been just me, exactly. The constellations in the night sky have changed many times over since I settled here. I've been busy, you know, keeping me bloody skullcap fresh. I find it so easy to lose track of how much time has passed, how the forest has grown, how many bodies are rotting away in the lake at the bottom of the valley.

Things have changed though, let me tell you. What used to be a constant trickle of lost or weary travellers seeking shelter in a cave, on foot or occasionally horseback, has become a rush of humans moving along their paved pathways inside steel contraptions, throwing their strange and brightly coloured debris onto the forest edge, very rarely stopping. These days I'm lucky to catch a fellow a few steps into the woods, pissing unawares.

Most of the time animals will have to do. Little rabbits and deer caught and slit open mid-graceful leap. Me iron boots don't slow me down, not at all. But I much prefer people. The blood is richer, darker, wetter. Or maybe it's not, maybe I just like the sound of their screaming. Sometimes they don't just scream, they pray. I don't much like the sound of that. It makes me teeth ache just to think about it. But a swift bite ear-to-ear cheers me right up when that happens.

I am sitting one afternoon at the mouth of me cave, listening to the dull roar of the

steel contraptions passing by up the hill, when I start to notice me cap is getting crispy round the sides. It itches like mad when it happens, and it puts me right on edge. And then just like that, I hear soft footfalls coming close and I smell the blood pumping beneath that delicate membrane, the skin of the sweetest fruit you ever tasted. A juicy plum ripe for the slaying. I start to salivate. Oh, how me head itches.

There she is, coming through a patch of sunlight, a modest vision glowing in head-to-toe white. She's got a book tucked under her arm and around her neck hangs a holy symbol. She's humming a wretched hymn to herself, and she looks so like a young woman of yore that I watch her a moment, feeling suddenly thrown back in time. Long ago, girls would travel to and from the convent that once stood a few miles east of me cave. This one looks just like a novice who crossed me path long ago, whose liquid of life I bathed in most luxuriously. A devout delicacy indeed.

Sitting there watching her wander through the woods, I lose meself, remembering the past and forgetting the dreadful itch. She sees me and stops, and I snap out of the fog. I rise to me booted feet and grin at her before dashing to where she waits. But when I look up, preparing to spring, I can't make sense of the look on her face. Instead of horrified or even confused, she looks utterly serene.

'What a silly little fool you look' she says to me, in a gentle voice so sweet it hurts.

Then she leans over and whispers into me ear. I cannot bear to even think the words, but they are terrible and curs-ed. How I wish in that moment to run, to flee on fleet iron feet, but I am frozen stiff, captured in the woman's verbal embrace. The crucifix around her throat dangles in front of me eyes, hypnotic and nauseating. As her words reach me ears, me chin begins to quiver and me gums burn and burn. The pain of it builds, roaring like a beast, like a rush of blood in me ears. And then I feel it. I feel me teeth, me prides and joys, loosen and crumble. One by painful one, they fall out of me gaping mouth and scatter across the forest floor at me feet, like so many precious treasures. I fall to me knees and scoop at them, but they slip through me fingers like dirt. The woman smiles then, showing me a maw full of her own perfect pearls, shining with light from above. She gently lets me go, to tend to me lost teeth, then turns and vanishes up the hill.

And what now? What now? I would like to say I have me revenge, that I gather up me lost mouthpegs and chomp them back into their gumbeds and use them to tear the she-angel limb from limb.

Alas, it was not meant to be. This is a tragic tale, you see. I live on. I find a tiny blade, rusted, taken from a little pink contraption abandoned on the side of the paved path. I use me wee weapon in lieu of me once-mighty bite. But me heart isn't in it anymore. What is the slash of a blade compared to the feeling of sinking one's teeth into flesh? What is the sterile extraction of blood from a precise slice compared to the ripping, tearing, screaming chaos of the denticle kill.

I live on, but a part of me is lost. The skullcap of me spirit is a dry, bare thing. Every night I dream of teeth and screaming and when I wake, I curse the pale blue sky.

With Consequence

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The road is bitter cold when Frankie steps out of her car. As her bare feet hit the wet gravel, she winces, but it doesn't stop her from doing what she must. Slipping from the warmth of her car, she finds herself in the thick of the pitch-black night.

A sliver of moonlight scrapes its way through the trees overhanging the road. As it touches the rain-soaked gravel, it sets off a ghoulish sort of gleam. Apart from that, there is only the dull glow of Frankie's one working headlight, sputtering out a useless yellow beam that barely reaches a meter from where the car is stuck. Her brake lights haven't worked for six months now, so when Frankie goes to check the back of the car, she descends into the shadows.

Her feet are stinging from the cold as she examines the rear right tyre. It is sinking, slowly, sending her car lop-sided. Frankie turns and examines her surroundings. There is nothing but endless forest, sprawling around this lonely little ribbon of a road. She is half an hour from the service station at the edge of town. It is just past 2am, and the world is the exact kind of quiet she wishes it always could be.

Frankie pops open her trunk and examines its meagre contents. She hunches, hopping foot to foot to keep warm as she pulls her beanie further down her forehead, so that it nearly covers her eyebrows, then slips her hands inside the long, loose sleeves of her hoodie. This brings some comfort, if only for a mere moment.

That comfort is stolen away as the darkness is pierced by bright beams that come whipping around the bend of the road, accompanied by the roar of an engine. Frankie turns to see a car approaching. As it pulls up behind her, she is blinded by its headlights.

Frankie tries to shield her eyes, but there is no escaping the harsh light. Even when the driver steps out of the car, he keeps the lights on. Frankie has a vague impression of a shadowy figure hanging back, examining her, and though he keeps his distance, his gaze is so intense, he might as well be grabbing her, clutching her in his arms.

'You're all alone out here,' he calls, his voice hollow.

It strikes Frankie as a strange thing to say – why not ask if she is okay, if she needs help? And anyway, she isn't alone anymore. He is here now, standing with her in the middle of nowhere. They are here together, just the two of them, with nothing but the endless forest and whatever lurks in its depths.

'My tyre,' Frankie says, but that's all, because her heart is lurching in her throat. He is holding something in his hand. She tries to glimpse it, but peering through the blinding light is like swimming through tar. Whatever it is, it keeps catching the little shards of moonlight. *His keys*, she guesses, but that can't be – his engine is still running. And anyway, whatever he was grasping, it was as big as his hand.

He reaches up, bringing the item to rest on the roof of his car. The item clunks

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heavily against the rooftop, sending Frankie's heart sinking.

'This is no place for a girl to be all on her own', he says, and though he's all but a shadow, there is no mistaking the Cheshire cat-like smile curled around his every word.

'Can you help me?' Frankie nods to the trunk of her car. 'I think I need to replace the tyre. I have a spare, but...'

'... but you don't even know where to start, do you?' His words glitter with amusement. 'Let me show you.'

He withdraws his hand from the roof of the car, and there is no mistaking what he is holding now. The shrill scrape of the blade across the roof pierces the quiet of the forest. What follows is the heavy thump of his feet, and as he charges into the blinding wash of his own headlights, Frankie knows he is more monster than man.

She sees it all seconds before it happens: how he will reach for her with his empty hand, bring the knife to her throat with the other, and wrestle her into the trunk of her car. As her prediction manifests into brutal reality, Frankie doesn't scream. She lets him grab her and fold her into the trunk. He leers down at her, his mouth slick, and eyes dark. The blade stays tight against Frankie's throat.

She wants to know exactly what he is, so she waits. She lets him press the blade even closer. As its sharp edge bites at her skin, Frankie knows then what will happen next. She closes her eyes and imagines.

The crunch of his throat is the first thing she hears. He gasps, but it's a hopeless sound, followed by wet gurgling as he chokes on his own blood. His hands slip away. Frankie opens her eyes, wraps her arms around herself, and watches him die as his neck, collapsed now, gushes blood. He stares at her the entire time, and she drinks in his abject terror.

Frankie sticks a foot out and, gently, nudges him backwards. He tumbles against his own car and the blood spills, coating the hood and the headlights, dulling their harsh glow.

As he sinks to the road, clutching helplessly at his mangled neck, Frankie rises from the trunk. She stands over him and watches as the life drains from his eyes. She likes them better now, dull and emptied of all threat. There is no longer a Cheshire smile, only a slack mouth gurgling blood down his chin.

Frankie turns back to her trunk, retrieves the car jack and replaces her tyre in a matter of minutes. She wonders whether she should push his body into the forest to let the beasts within devour him. But she likes how he looks here, slumped on the road, head dangling precariously by the remaining threads of his neck.

'You're all alone out here', she says, mockingly, and with a smile, as she drives away.

The cinema is always abuzz on Saturdays. Frankie has been working front of house all morning and watched the lobby grow more and more packed throughout her shift. It is so busy now that there is a constant roar of conversation, accompanied by ice clinking into cups and popcorn popping as Frankie and her coworkers work to serve the movie-going masses.

As she goes to grab ice-cream cones for the teenage boys at her till, her manager calls to her. 'You can wrap up after this lot. You wanted a ticket to the horror marathon, right?'

Frankie nods, and her manager slides a ticket across to her.

'Take any treats you like. I'll see you tomorrow.'

'See you,' Frankie says, and she turns back to the boys, ice-cream cones in hand. 'Here you go. Enjoy your movie.'

They snatch the ice-creams from the counter, shoving them atop the mountains of other treats they've bought to last them through the same horror marathon Frankie is going to. Four of them go to leave, but one stays.

The ringleader, Frankie assumes, for he was the one who barked their order at her and made a show of paying for the lot.

He isn't barking orders now. Silkily, and with a sickly smirk, he drapes himself over the counter. 'You're cute. Can I have your number?'

'I need to serve the next customer,' Frankie lies.

The boy reaches for her, and before she can stop him, he touches the end of one of her purple braids. "Come on, give me your number".

He lets go of her hair before she can even try to remove herself from his touch. Frankie scans the crowds filling the lobby and the coworkers lined up alongside her. Nobody has noticed. This boy, this sixteen-or-so year-old *child*, is quiet enough, that nobody can see or hear what he is doing.

'I have to serve the next customers,' Frankie insists.

'No, you don't. Your manager said you're off now. And you're seeing the same thing I am.' He grins, and drawls, 'I have the perfect seat for you, if you want to join me.'

Frankie grabs the closed sign and sets it down on the counter. He looks at it, then glares at her, and hisses, 'You're not being very nice.'

'Enjoy your movie,' she chirps mechanically, pairing it with the meaningless smile she reserves for the worst customers.

All emotion slips from the boy's face, leaving nothing more than a blank husk. Anger begins to cross across his face, mangling it, making him look much older somehow.

'Frigid bitch,' he hisses, and then storms off while continuing to glare back at her. She stares him down, soulless smile still firmly in place until he vanishes around the corner.

Frankie takes the corridor accessible only to staff so that she can enter the cinema unseen. On her way, she ducks into the locker room to take off her apron, pin her braids up, and pull her pink beanie on. It is a decent enough disguise so that when she does slip into the cinema, the boy wouldn't notice her. He and his friends are sprawled out in the front row, taking up an entire section to themselves with their candy bar treats occupying the seats in between them. Frankie climbs the stairs to the back row, and huddles in her favourite corner seat, just as the lights go down and the trailers kick off.

She thinks at first, that she should let it go. He is younger than any of the others and far too close to home. But as the trailers end, Frankie finds herself reconsidering her decision. A pack of pre-teen girls have walked in and are trying to find seats. The boy is calling to them, demanding that they come and sit on his lap, as his friends laugh. A woman behind them tells them to shut up, and though this puts the boys in their place, the girls are now slinking to the back of the cinema, heads hung low.

'Pigs,' one of them whispers to her friends, who nod miserably in agreement.

They look over in Frankie's direction, since the only remaining seats are right by her. Frankie waves them over, which seems to cheer them a little. As they sit down, she notices how young they all are – ten, maybe eleven at most, and still so childlike.

As the movie begins, one of the girls whispers to her friends, 'Please don't tell my mum about those guys. She'll never let me out of the house ever again.'

Anxiety hangs over her every word, and as the girls take hold of each other's

hands, Frankie sees how they are all affected by the incident. Right then and there, she makes up her mind.

When the first feature ends, Frankie turns to the girls, who are giddy and giggling. 'Your first horror movie, huh?'

They nod and beam at her. She offers them her bag of jelly babies, and as they take one each, she asks if they're sticking around for the next one.

'It's pretty extreme,' she warns.

'We only got tickets to the first,' one of the girls says. 'We should probably head out.'

They all glance down to the front row, where the boys are still lounging about. None of the girls seem to want to move. Their giddiness has vanished in a flash.

Frankie cannot tolerate that. She hops up and whispers, 'I work here. Come with me.'

She pulls back the heavy velvet curtain draped along the wall to reveal the staff access door and smuggles them through the projection room. The girls are thrilled to be escorted out of the cinema in this way, and by the time Frankie gets them to the main hallway, they are hopping with excitement again. They thank her with radiant smiles and then dash off, hand-in-hand, laughing all the way.

Frankie sneaks back into the cinema and takes her seat. Intermission is nearly over. The audience has halved, an inevitability when the film has both a restricted rating and subtitles. The boys are still there, tossing popcorn at the screen as an Angelo Badalamenti number plays. The ringleader is kneeling in his seat, scanning the theatre – looking for the girls, possibly. He sees Frankie instead, alone in her corner, and his face goes slack at the sight of her.

'Typical,' he says, turning back to his friends, 'For some psycho dyke to be seeing *High Tension*.'

They turn to look at Frankie, all of them peering at her across the cinema as the lights dim and the music fades. She stares straight ahead at the screen, and eventually, they follow suit.

She waits until the theatre is fully dark and the audience is dead silent. *If it's a psycho dyke he wants, she thinks, a psycho dyke he'll get.*

All it takes is a handful of popcorn. Since he finished his ice-cream, the boy has been shovelling bucket after bucket of popcorn down his gullet, almost relentlessly. Frankie doesn't focus on the fistful he is cramming into his mouth – she focuses instead on the contents of his stomach and brings a lump of it surging back up.

When it collides with the mouthful he is trying to swallow, he twitches: once, twice, thrice, every single one unnoticed. Frankie sees his hands rise from the armrests; she gravitates into his consciousness and turns his limbs to stone. She feels what he feels, his arms sinking back down, his legs unable to shift, and the slow, warm trickle of blood seeping from his nose. For a moment, she wonders if he can feel her, invading his mind in these final moments, rendering him defenceless, and ensuring his death.

It takes nearly ten minutes. Life trickles away from the boy, bit by bit, and she stays with him until the very end. Onscreen, chaos and bloodshed reign. The boy's friends holler out with shock and horror. They are leaning forward in their seats, as their friend slumps slowly down in his.

When he finally fades into nothingness, Frankie is jolted back into her own body. She focuses on the screen as the movie comes to an end.

She leaves when the lights go back up. Frankie follows a flock of people down the

stairs and out the heavy doors, which let out a sombre moan as everyone spills out into the hallway.

Just as the moan comes to a close, Frankie hears the boys erupt into panic. They start shouting their friend's name: *Matthew? Matthew? Matthew!!!*

The people she has left the cinema with haven't noticed, so Frankie pretends she hasn't either. She ducks into the bathrooms and joins the queue lining up against the mint green tiled wall. The bathroom is too far from the cinema for her to slip into any of the other boys' minds, so no matter how much she longs to play the invisible observer, she is stuck here, listening for any signs of chaos outside.

It comes in dribs and drabs as the queue creeps along. First, the sound of running in the hallway. Frankie thinks it might be the boys. Next, the crackle of radios as her colleagues rush into the cinema. Last, and long after the rest of the activities, an announcement over the loudspeaker: *Today's horror movie marathon is cancelled due to an unexpected technical fault in Cinema Six.*

Frankie is at the basin now, washing her hands. She watches herself in the mirror as the announcement drones on before the loudspeaker emits a tell-tale, sing-song chime to close it out. The water is hot enough that it might just scald her hands, but Frankie tolerates it, and focuses on the scent of the lavender soap rising through the steam.

She imagines the water washing away Matthew, searing away the unwanted memory of his name, and spiralling his hatefulness down the drain and far, far away from here.

Matthew stays with her longer than the rest. Frankie ignores the news reports about his 'tragic' death and dodges conversations with her gossiping coworkers, but still, Matthew lingers.

Perhaps it's his age. He was three weeks shy of sixteen when he died, younger than any of the others bar one, by at least a decade. Frankie hasn't gone after a child since she was one herself. Children tend to have some shred of promise in them; some hope of betterment, and no matter how slight it may seem, Frankie takes that seriously.

There was none of that in Matthew: no hint of naïveté, no promise of redemption. Matthew, poisonous Matthew, was empty of any of that. Even as it lingered on her mind in the weeks following his 'untimely' death, Frankie forces herself to steer well clear of any guilt. She thinks of those girls, so visibly young, so undeniably sweet, and Matthew like a wolf snapping hungrily at their heels. She remembers, relentlessly, how he snarled those ugly words: *psycho dyke*.

Even as he died, Frankie could sense no remorse, not even a shred of it. Maybe that's why he stays with her – she can't forget how angry and bitter this sixteen-year-old felt in his final moments.

Fifteen, she thinks to herself late one night, as Matthew claws at the corners of her mind yet again. *He was fifteen. That ought to be against the rules ... right?*

There are rules to it, but they often feel evasive, like water held in the palm of her hand. No matter how hard Frankie tries, the rules inevitably slip through her fingers and trickle away.

She first thought she figured out the rules when she was six: *If you're close enough, you can see inside people. You can hear them.* This was how she learned her teachers thought

of her as 'damaged goods'. Along with that, Frankie discovered the sickly-sweet taste of pity within them, each and every one of them rendered lonely and hollow by their lack of genuine compassion.

Then, when she turned nine, she figured out there was more to it: *If you look and listen closely enough, they become rag dolls, and you can do with them whatever you want.* By that time, the entire school had seemingly turned against her. The lucky children, the ones with parents, saw her as a freak. Their parents looked at her with some hideous strain of pity, spiked and dangerously barbed with malice. The teachers wanted to wash their hands off her. Debate raged about whether she would fit best at a special school, or some kind of facility.

Frankie took her revenge in small, tidy portions: tossing children off swing-sets, making their parents fall and scrape their hands and knees during pick-up, sending a teacher or two slipping down the stairs. What delighted her most wasn't the blood and bruises, but the pure confusion that flooded their faces. When she slipped within them, she discovered a torrent of unease and distrust stemming from these inexplicable incidents. It rivalled her own distrust in them, which thrilled Frankie.

This is what they deserve, she decided, and on she went, exacting revenge in petty dribs and drabs.

When she was fourteen, she discovered the full force of it. After being cornered in a bathroom stall by a boy from a senior class, with nowhere to hide, nowhere to run, Frankie did the only thing she could think to do: she willed him away from her. The first attempt sent him stumbling and disoriented, but it didn't stop him from charging at her again. So, Frankie tried again, hurling him away from her this time, sending his body crashing against the door. It splintered from the unnatural force – solid wood caving in like wet cardboard. As he groaned in pain, he looked at her, eyes wild with fear. He could plainly see her arms hadn't moved from where he had pinned them at her sides.

'What the fuck,' he began, and Frankie could tell from the rounding of his lips what his next words would be: *are you?*

She ended him before those words eventuated. A simple flick of his head against the tile wall did the trick. Despite the force she used, the wall refused to yield, and so his skull gave way, just like the door, cracking wide open.

As Frankie stood there, watching blood spill through his hair, running in dark rivulets down his face, she pieced together what had happened. It was all so quick she had barely registered it, but now, it comes back in slow motion. He almost seemed like he'd done it several times – the way he jammed the main door shut, the speed at which he ran at her, how he pinned her arms and forced her into the cubicle in a matter of seconds.

Frankie tried to peer inside him, to see if he had done this before, but he was gone. There was nothing left, only a feeling lurking in her gut, which blossomed into a vicious rage.

That rage fuelled Frankie through the next few firsts. Killing him was easy. Dismembering his body, less so. Secreting the pieces of him away little by little, an undeniable thrill.

All these firsts led her to another: this was the first time Frankie felt the knot at her core ease. It tended to budge when she took revenge in incremental acts, but now, it seemed to unravel, unwind entirely. But it was more than a simple easing – the effort she went to, destroying this boy, craftily concealing his remains without even touching him, *delighted* the knot. *delighted* the knot.

For the next month, there were no more dead birds outside her bedroom window nor any compulsion to injure people over minor slights. And suddenly, her foster parents

were healthy and well. They had turned feeble after taking Frankie in, perpetually plagued by aches and pains and illnesses that never left. But now, miraculously, they were better. As missing posters littered the town and nightly vigils preoccupied everyone's attention, Frankie kept watch over her foster parents, who now had colour in their faces for the first time in years. They seemed happy, their moods matching the birdsong that now surrounded their home.

And there was the most important rule: *a little hurt goes a long way.*

Though she thinks that she knows the rules now, Frankie still has endless questions. The one she dwells on most is whether she is alone in this. She wonders, if there are others, do they live like she does? Or do they satisfy their tangled, aching knots in other ways?

Her first kill – Bobby, the only name she learned before Matthew – seemed too much trouble. His parents refused to let up. When the missing posters peeled or crumbled away, more would go up within days. Frankie couldn't walk a block in her own town without seeing Bobby grinning at her from the garish orange posters.

This isn't worth it, she decided, but the knot at her core felt differently.

It wasn't satisfied with mere bumps and bruises. It strained within her, yearning for more. At the two-month mark of Bobby's death, Frankie woke to an entire family of birds stiff on her windowsill, decaying rapidly under the summer sun. She had left her window slightly ajar during the night, and their stench had steeped in. When she went downstairs, she found her foster mother bent over the sink, coughing so forcefully her entire body was shaking.

Frankie skipped school that day and cycled out of town to a farm that sprawled for miles along the perimeter of the forest. She found a lone horse in a paddock far removed from the farmhouse and barnyards and climbed the fence to join it in the long, swaying grass.

'Hello,' she whispered, and the horse approached her, moving slowly on stiff legs. As it neared her, Frankie slipped her hand into the depths of its silvery mane and stroked it gently. She closed her eyes and became at one with the horse as it whimpered. It seemed to know that she was searching within it, seeking out its secrets. Frankie removed herself from its consciousness quickly, but stayed close, stroking the horse soothingly.

'I'm sorry,' she whispered, not for what she was intending to do, but for the amount of pain the horse was in.

It offered its head, inviting her to stroke its temple. Frankie indulged it, thinking that this might be a final kind gesture, but then came a rumble from across the paddock. She turned, and there were a dozen other horses all in a row, black coats gleaming in the sunlight, watching her carefully – almost thoughtfully. Frankie turned back to the horse in her grasp, its head still hung low. She kissed the top of its head, buried her face in his billowing mane, and whispered into its soft, pale coat, 'I can't.'

The knot was bulging within her, demanding something she couldn't give. The horse seemed to sense this. As Frankie fell to her knees and cried for the first time since her parents died, the horse joined her, wrapping itself around her as though she were its foal. Frankie curled up there and wept as the other horses trotted over, their hooves swishing in the long grass. They collapsed down on the ground, the twelve of them forming a protective circle around Frankie and their aged friend.

They stayed together until nightfall when the paddock started to turn lilac in the evening light. Frankie might have spent the entire night there, with the horses gathered

peacefully around her, but the tranquillity was severed by the arrival of the farmer.

'Hey,' he shouted, stopping just a few feet shy of their circle. The horses didn't move, but Frankie lifted her head, just in time to see him snarl, "What the hell is this? Who are you? You're trespassing, you know!"

The horses murmured around Frankie, the sound echoing, the echo matching the ceaseless beat of the knot as it roared and lashed. This time, it was incidental. She had waited too long, and the power lurking within her seemed to come out in a helpless burst.

As the farmer fell to his knees, the horses barely shifted. Frankie watched from the warmth of their embrace as the farmer choked out something that sounded like a plea, just as he fell face-first into the grass.

The rules had never seemed so slippery as they did in that moment. *If you don't do it, Frankie realised, it will happen in ways you can't control.*

She wished she had looked inside the farmer before he slipped away. Would she have found some justification for his sudden, lonely death? Or would she have found the same as she did in the elderly horse – a core purer than Frankie had understood, buried underneath all that pain?

As she wondered this, the twelve horses rose. They waited as their elderly friend clambered up and watched solemnly as it nuzzled Frankie. She kissed its temple again and didn't have to look within it again to feel its gratitude.

Then, in an incredible rush, all thirteen of them galloped away. Frankie watched her horse lead the other twelve, its legs now moving freely and without any hint of pain. The other horses almost vanished, their dark coats blending in with the night sky, but their friend, *her* friend, with its silvery coat, stood out like a moonbeam. Frankie watched until it disappeared over a slope, its friends chasing after it, leaving her alone with the dead farmer.

His body was almost hidden in the long grass. As Frankie examined it, she felt the knot smooth out. It seemed pleased with what it had done.

It had taught her the most important rule: *There is no avoiding this.*

She wonders sometimes if she will always have to move through the world like this, looking for people to punish, lest her anger unleash itself against her will. More often than not, she wonders if she has grown too accustomed to it, or, perhaps, even enjoys it.

She fears that she enjoyed Matthew's death a little too much. As months pass by and her thoughts of him dwindle, one of the last things she wonders is whether he realised the kindness that she had afforded him. To be extinguished in the comfort of a cinema, surrounded by friends, simply choking to death – it seems almost generous. In fact, it seems *luxurious*, to die a death so peaceful after spitting slurs and harassing little girls.

Though she has often mulled over what happened that day, flinging herself back and forth over the lines she crossed, Frankie's last thought of Matthew is resolute. She won't kill in a crowd again. She won't let others bear witness to this dark magic of hers.

It is his friends she continues to think of, those boys who left the cinema in tears. Frankie wishes she could peel the wool away from their eyes and reveal Matthew's rotten core. Better yet, she wishes she could take away what they had to witness that day, for though it had to be done, it didn't have to involve them.

Alas, they were there, and they have seen what they have seen. She can't undo that. She only hopes it might serve some purpose.

She never had the chance to glimpse within those boys. She will never know whether they were of Matthew's ilk, or whether they were more like those girls: bright-eyed and warm-hearted. When she thinks of the boys, she wonders if they have leant on each other in the aftermath, or if they dispersed, gravitating away from each other, bound for the same kind of lonesomeness that she knows inside and out.

If they have so much as an ounce of what was festering in Matthew, Frankie hopes that they might have learned something from his death. She hopes that they might move through the world more carefully, more thoughtfully, rather than storming through it as though there were no such thing as consequence.

Little Bridget

Madeleine Rose Dobson¹
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*"They stole little Bridget
For seven years long
When she came down again
All of her friends were gone"*

- excerpt from 'The Fairies' by William Allingham.

It started with a mushroom ring
I think it always does
I stepped inside and heard them sing
A whispering, a buzz
In a blink I went away
Vanishing far beyond
They carried me through night and day
Round every hill and pond
And with nobody to hear my screams, with me they did abscond
I begged and pleaded to be let go
But they did not respond

They calmed me with small tokens
Berries, bread, and tea
It helped me feel less broken
But they would not listen to me
And so in silence, I bided my time oh-so-carefully
Until the sky went deep, dark black
Then, they watched me run with glee
Into the night, through shadowlands, down the hairpin track
Then, cackling, cackling, cackling, they hastily brought me back

They kept me here throughout the week
Through seven days and nights
I learned to be mild, muted, meek
I didn't put up a fight
The fairies, they liked this, for them it was a delight
They laughed, they sang, they played their tricks and oh they had a lark
On the eighth day they took me home
Smuggling me in the dark

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Free at last, I ran and ran, I ran until I fell
Their laughter followed me everywhere
Like the tolling of a bell
I picked myself up and carried on; I whispered a quick prayer
Then on I went, on and on, shiv'ring in the nighttime air
To a house no longer a home
To a bedroom stripped bare
Around the ruins I did roam
But nobody was there

My heart, it broke inside my chest
It shattered like mere glass
Shards like knives against my breast
As I was dragged back through the grass
The fairies stealing me again; for them it was mere farce
Up the hill they sung and cackled; oh how they did roar
It echoed as far as far can be, right across the carse
Along the way a promise they made; one I couldn't ignore
Giggling, dancing all the while, they swore to keep me evermore

Through the veil I did slip
My heart broken beyond repair
All of it over in a blip
The fairies unaware
They laid me out, they shook me hard, they twisted at my hair
Uttering grumbles, growls, and groans
Hollering their despair
Filling my pockets with many a stone
For I was no longer there

I sleep beneath the water now
Where it is always cold
Still able to see somehow
And like my mother foretold
The fairies keep watch from up above, eyes aglint like gold
They whisper lullabies; when I don't respond they yell
They bellow rhymes across the divide; they keep me in their hold
And though there are no flames, no devils, it is a kind of hell

I'm sure I had a name before
I wonder often: what was it?
I can't remember anymore
Entombed in this watery pit
The fairies holler something sometimes; it sounds like 'little Bridget'
Just like my mother used to say in all the stories that she spun
Like those warning of mushroom rings
If you see one: run.

All the Decay Below

Sarai Mannolini-Winwood¹ & Madeleine Rose Dobson
Deakin University & Curtin University, Australia

A heart shouldn't be able to break after it has stopped. But mine felt like it did when I realise whose warm hands are heaving me into my grave: Laura and Phoebe, my two best friends.

Before I knew this, all I could sense was vast darkness enveloping me.

I notice a vicious cracking sound, like bones breaking. At first, it seems to echo, but it is only more cracking, over and over, underscored by a dull crunching noise. Not bones being snapped, but footfalls in the forest. I can hear it now, every twig and branch underfoot, the leaf litter rustling and then crumbling to dust. It is a symphony I remember well.

'Oof. She's heavier than I thought.' Phoebe stops talking, her shoulders tense. Her voice feels too loud in this forest.

'It's just that she always looks ... looked ... so skinny, but this is really heavy.' Phoebe whispers, hating the sibilance of her voice in the darkness. She tries to adjust her hold without looking down at what she is carrying.

The trees above sway in a faint wind, but the movement is a distraction. The women focus on the path, carefully traversing the unstable gravel. The tallest gums groan in the distance.

'It's because after death, the body hasn't any muscle control. It's just mass with gravity.' Laura retorts, eyes darting. She hates this treacherous forest.

Above, a shadow passes. A creature of some sort, maybe a bird searching for a safe harbour. Leaves scatter downwards. One flutters right over my face and lands on my lips. I can't reach to remove it. My hands are bound, possibly by rope or cloth. Whatever it is, it's damp, and as cold as I feel throughout.

I remember, we found each other in the darkness and met under a slender glimmer of moonlight. Laura was holding her arm, now marred by an angry red line carved from her wrist to her elbow. She complained that it was so dark that she couldn't see. That a branch had scraped her.

How lucky she was to be marked by this forest. As I grazed the hot, flushed skin around the scratch, I could sense the makings of a scar. I pointed that out to Laura: that the cut might heal but it would remain in some form forevermore.

Wounded now in more ways than one, she snatched her arm away, well beyond my reach. As she stumbled back, her feet sinking into the mucky earth and all that festered beneath it, Laura insisted that it was time to go. I listened, head tilting, to the quavering in her voice, like the trembling of leaves, like the shudder of a bird dispelling dampness from its wings. I never understood her fear of the forest. I had to tear myself away from its beauty so I could lead her back to the party. I had to watch as she bandaged the wound that I would have let breathe in the woodland air.

'Shit!' Laura's heel catches on a branch across the path and she drops her end. As a thump echoes through the trees, she stifles a scream.

Phoebe, pulled forward by the momentum, feels the weight of the body slide from her hands.

They stand stock still in the dark, the air full of their desperate breaths. They strain to hear if they have been caught.

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A roaring sound of blood through their heads muffling even the hot wind shaking the gums. Then, cutting through all else is a razor-sharp sound. Phoebe whips her head around. Whether it was a branch breaking, the sound of feet on the crushed limestone path, or a voice behind them, she isn't sure.

Perhaps it was nothing. Just the whoosh of road trains in the far distance or the sound of night-time creatures nestling in the shadows.

The cracking continues, a constant grating noise. The leaf wobbles on my lips, then falls into my open mouth. I can't spit it out. I can't flick it upwards with my tongue. My mouth is dry and slack. I think my tongue might be gone. Whether it is carved out or stuck down my own throat, I'm not sure. Or maybe it is as slack as the rest of me.

Do tongues turn stiff after you die? I hadn't ever wondered that until now. The rest of me is rigid. If I were placed underfoot, I would crack, just like everything else on the forest floor. I am nothing more than organic matter; a husk; and yet I can see, and think, and just about feel. I know the weight of my own body as it is carried through the woods. I can see two shadowy figures above me clutching at my cold limbs.

Laura finds her eyes dipping to the body. She can feel a softness where her sweaty hands are warming it.

'Do you think we did ... the wrong thing?'

Laura has never questioned right or wrong until now. It was a must, a necessity, like carrying onwards through this loathsome stretch of forest.

Phoebe stops walking, jarring Laura. Her eyes flick to the long silvery scar, just one of many, on Laura's arm.

For a long moment, Phoebe just stares at Laura until a hard light comes into her eyes. She shakes her head decidedly and they hurry on, deeper into the forest choosing now to leave the path. The crunch of their footsteps is brutal in the night. Branches and vines reach out to swipe and snare.

My heart is still and has been for some time. It feels heavy where it is settled at the core of my chest. A pit lodged in rotting stone fruit. No, that isn't quite right – a heart would rot with the surrounding flesh. Still, something is lodged there, resting weightily right at my core.

I remember I spent weekends here as a child, days slipping by as I explored the forest right up to the boundary my mother set, but never across. I got to know the trees as though they were my friends; which of them were good to climb and which were not. In Spring, I came to know the forest in all its colours. That was how I first understood where to stop. I always came to halt by the purple wildflowers which, though unruly, formed a border between where I could play safely and where the forest turned insidious.

Here it became cunning and sly. Paths that were clear disappeared in a blink and trees snarl and twist behind a turned back. Sound echoes in circles leading the wrong way and treacherous drops and holes are camouflaged with bright coloured flowers reaching towards the sun.

At the border, I glimpsed pitfalls and perils. Things would get lost in there so easily. Sticks and memories, tossed in, vanished in an instant. I understood how this forest worked.

I never explained that line to Phoebe. When she kicked the ball across, and we wandered up to that line together, I knew what had to be done. Neither of us could see where the ball had gone, but I sent her in. She had kicked it, after all.

'This looks like old grevillea'. Laura's clipped voice echoes oddly. 'It means the soil is acidic and will speed up the decay.' She knew so much of this forest and had bled for this knowledge.

They lay their burden down.

'How are we meant to dig?' Phoebe asks.

Laura turns to her with a condescending look.

'We don't want anything that will have soil from here. Find strong sticks and we will use those.'

Phoebe shudders as she looks out into the night. Bushes and branches seem to menace. Every shadow watches her. She turns her back to Laura and the burden and pushes into the undergrowth, wanting all of this to be finished. She shoves her arms into bushes and rakes her fingers through the leaves until she finds what she needs.

The sound of Phoebe in the bush sounds gunshot-loud to Laura, but she can't bring herself to tread too heavily here. This clearing if found in the light of day would be filled with wildflowers, now instead feels cadaverous with trees forming a boundary that threatens like teeth closing in. The forest does not care who walks upon its grounds, and Laura has never felt safe here.

I know this place. I wonder if Laura remembers it too?

Slipping through the trees in the cold night air I stopped and crouched on the forest floor. Rain made the leaves silent accomplices in the game. I heard her calling my name. I sunk my fingertips into the sodden soil. I wondered what was rotting beneath my fingers here.

I recognised that tone in her voice. Panic. Fear. It was rising so I stood to call, 'I'm here.' I don't know why she is so scared of the forest. It is a beautiful place to be, but I eventually lead her back to the party so she can huddle by the safety of the campfire. The others had not even noticed we left. I wondered if they would have noticed if we never came back.

Laura stands paralysed at the lip of the clearing. Phoebe shoves the heavy wood she found into her arms and begins to pull the grevillea back from the ground. Sweat cools as it forms, leaving their skin clammy as they dig, and dig, and dig.

Phoebe pauses and leans back on her haunches. Her muscles burn. She looks at the hole in dismay. They are barely a half metre down. The old soil is dense and full of roots.

'Lisa!' Phoebe's voice sounds panicked.

I gave the little girl's shoulder a shove causing her to stumble in the loose gravel, but she didn't cry out.

Stepping past the final layer of bottlebrush and sheoak onto the man-made paths. Seeming so safe, but we are but a step from wildness.

'What did you do?' Phoebe keeps the child nestled against her throat.

'You weren't watching her. I just collected her before she got lost.'

Phoebe stares at me, her eyes narrowing. I wonder if she remembers the first time she was lost in here with me.

Soon enough she can't hold my eyes and fusses with Lisa's dress. I watch as her fingers stutter and pause. A whisper of a question emerges.

'Is this blood?'

'Don't be stupid.' I walk back towards the picnic tables seeing Laura's eyes on me also. She knows where I've been. 'What would make you think that?'

In a strained voice, Phoebe insists, 'we have to keep digging. We don't have a choice.'

When it is time, it is Laura who rolls the body into the hole. It is Laura's hands that fill the soil back in and, when finished, she turns and walks into the night. Phoebe sits in the rustling silence looking at the dirt, staring until her eyes sting and burn, thoughts of Lisa playing over and over in her mind.

As the earth finishes crashing down, it seems to wrench me from the cold, empty thing in the ground. I am freed from the soil and find some new place amongst the trees, if only for a moment. Laura is bound directly for the road, but Phoebe is gravitating back to that line she ought not to have crossed. I can glimpse it from here as she nears it again, that near-invisible boundary.

I lose them in the dark of the endless forest, well hidden in all the decay below.

Memento Mori

Sarai Mannolini-Winwood¹
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(n.) a reminder of inevitable death; remember we all have to die.

I felt it move just as Preeti looked down. It was such a familiar crawling sensation, but I was just too tired this morning to respond with the speed needed to hide the faint spot from view.

With a look of disgust, Preeti leant forward and briskly, efficiently, flicked the insect away. I immediately tensed but forced myself to leave the top of my right wrist exposed to show only the clean, pale skin. No insect in sight.

I watched as little waves of emotion crested across her face. Pride that she had successfully defended this territory from an invader. Disgust that she may have just touched a bug of unknown type. Dawning horror that she had touched a person who was a veritable stranger to her. I realised that in different circumstances we could have been friends. But who wants to be friends with a stranger who seeks you out to only hear the worst moment of your life? Most people after the interview would not even remember what I looked like, and I became just another shadow surrounding a cataclysmic event in their otherwise ordinary lives.

'Oh, I'm sorry, I saw –'

'A bug. It's fine, thank you.' I said.

It wasn't, I hated to be touched without permission, but I needed her to keep talking to me. Making the effort, I reached out with my left hand and gently touched her fingertips and gave a thankful smile. Then I withdrew both hands to circle, protectively, around my macchiato.

I gave her a minute to settle back down and tried not to hunch in on myself. Preeti had selected a small rooftop café that hunkered down amidst the towering city skyscrapers of Perth. A looming tidal wall of glass that seemed to flex and shudder in my mind; as if from another world, the disjointed snatches of sky reflected in their panes. The air smelt of smog and mildewed water from the clogged river, fetid and still in the warmth of the day. It felt as if the towers were leaning over me, breathing their hot air over my neck, and sending all the tiny hairs into panicked standstills. I loved and loathed this city in equal measure.

Drawing my attention back to the table, Preeti's own fingers spasmed a little, and then went back to their dance of moving her cappuccino cup's handle from the left side to the right side. From the right to the back. From the back to the left. No, this time back to the right. I let her fidget. It was her story to tell however she wanted, and it was the reason I was here.

Well, it was part of her story, but not hers alone.

I had been doing these family and friends interviews long enough that I recognised the signs of the long drawn in breath, the slump to her shoulders, and most telling for Preeti, the stiling of her fingers. She was ready to tell me. Different people took different lengths of time. Some launched in before I had even sat down, for others they wanted small talk to assure themselves, or lie to themselves, I was here for any reason other than to hear their terrible tale. But they all signalled from their body first when they were ready

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to really talk.

'She was only seventeen,' she began, as if the age should make it worse or somehow excuse what occurred. But it mattered to her, as it does to most people who hear these stories. She was but a child...

And as she told the story, I felt itching on the inside of my left arm as the fine-line shadow image etched into my skin started to take on detail. Began to fill out with colour and depth in pace with the telling of Samara's story.

This morning did not start well. I had failed to close the shutters properly the night before, and thus vivid, angry yellow lines criss-crossed my room and burned through my eyelids into the back of my skull. I felt an ache on my arm that seemed to pulse in time with my heartbeat. I knew what that meant.

When I was younger, I would have launched from bed and rushed directly to the bathroom mirror to investigate the new shape. I had felt energised by the purpose I had been born with, and honestly excited to feel like I could make a difference. As if vengeance could ever compensate for the crime.

I wore too many failures upon my skin now to feel such excitement. Shoving up from the bed, I swung down my feet to clatter amidst glass and plastic bottles. At least for a change it seemed I had remembered to drink water, although probably not enough to wash away that much alcohol. A quick glance to my left showed that the long-limbed creature who had joined me at the bar had already, thankfully, departed.

Shuffling to the bathroom I looked at the new marks on my skin. Occasionally, lovers would want to talk about my tattoos. To know their stories. To want to trace them with their fingertips as if that was erotic, as if they were not touching the imagery of the last moment of someone's death. I would divert them with my mouth. With kisses or lies; if they became too insistent, with cruelty that would drive them away.

How do you tell someone you are nothing but a canvas for the dead?

Preeti's voice caught, but I did not reach for her. I knew that she would not welcome the touch. Sometimes they wanted to be held, those who were left behind, but most wanted only to speak their pain and to be heard. I dropped my eyes and tried to ignore the feeling of all that glass at my back. I tried to give her space to speak her loss.

She spoke of Samara. A younger sister with a wide grin and knobby knees who loved, of all things, tartan. Preeti had reached the end of the story and I could see her rebuilding the shell that kept her safe. I could see her anger rising after the vulnerability of her sharing. Protective barriers to keep the world away from her pain. I should know; my barriers are so thick they were a city on their own.

'Why does it even matter?' Preeti said bitterly. 'It's not like anything can be done.'

This moment here was one of the most problematic. I, who judge myself a very good reader of character, had gotten this wrong so many times. But I could see the rage burning in Preeti, so I let that part of myself also burn through for a moment. A bleeding of truth, or a setting aside of masks. Preeti drew in a sharp breath of both fear and pleasure. No, we were unlikely to be friends after this.

'It matters.' I said.

In the dirty toilets near the train station, I peeled off my long-sleeved blouse, so unsuited for this weather, and with a grip that hurt turned my arm to see what Preeti's story had added to the tattoo. Where this morning there had only been the outline of a girl and

the rough abstract suggestion of the lines of a railway track, there was now more detail. The figure of Samara had filled in further and I could see her now as a person, loved and mourned and yes, terribly young.

Before Preeti, I had already spoken with Samara's other friends. The ones that were there that night. The ones who should have walked her home and helped keep her safe. From some nothing had come; from others small details had begun to fill in. I knew that if I spoke to Samara's parents more would come, but Preeti had given me enough. The depth of her loss. Her pain and guilt had fleshed out the tattoo.

In the tattoo, Samara, with tight tartan pants, was glancing over her shoulder at a man following her. Her hair had been captured as if tangled around her face in the breeze, with some of the strands slipping into her open mouth. The man following, his form diminished by a shadow, was dressed casually in jeans with nice dress shoes, and over his face sat an Oni mask. The mask was rendered in black ink only, and the angle of the mask seemed to sneer not outwards from my skin but was turned very specifically towards Samara. The tattoo was no larger than my hand but filled with the intricate details of a surrealist photograph.

I gripped my arm tighter until the pain sliced through my own anger, and when I released it, the skin was mottled in a red and white pattern. A fitting frame for what had happened.

I turned my face from Samara and looked down instead at my right forearm. There, almost insect-like in form, was the two headed lodestone, now still, that Preeti had tried to sweep from my skin.

If only it was that easy. I had tried at first to rub that thing from my skin, and later I had tried cutting and burning. The scars never stayed, and the lodestone always came back. It was a guide to the guilty, but it was also the taskmaster that could drag me out of a drunken state by sending violent shocks up my arm or making my skin so itchy I had to scream as I dug at it with bloody nails. It would not let me rest once a tattoo had formed and drove me on every moment until I began hunting.

With the sharp edge of my nail, I pressed down on the lodestone until I felt bone move underneath it. It swam lazily up and over my right hand towards my middle fingertip. North and a little east. I walked out of the dingy toilets and along the litter, rubbish and human, scattered walkways to the northern train line.

It was still hours to dusk and although the lodestone throbbed with urgency, I knew I had time. This man only hunted in the dark. However, it took three trains and far too long to identify the exact tracks that matched the ones in the tattoo. It was a depot station that sat between a suburban area full of blindness, bigotry, and a dark enclave of pubs, supermarkets, and monsters.

In the morning light of my grungy bathroom, I looked at the new outline on my arm and I already knew whose story it was. Often it was hard to find out whose end I was wearing on my skin. Usually, I had to search and research and sometimes I even had to travel. For the ones I could not find the space remained abstract and shadowy. Those ones felt oddly tender, as if still only a day-old tattoo, even though some were decades old. The worst was the very first image. Each day the top of my knee ached and the vague outline that I knew was my mother stared up at me. A shadow beside her holding a knife with a face I have never been able to fill in.

But everyone had heard of Samara's story. Samara, the beautiful girl who was found on train tracks. A suicide, everyone said. Nothing suspicious, the police said. Delays to the lines this week the train company said.

So sad. So terrible. So young. Everywhere reminders were posted to reach out, to get help, to talk to your loved ones.

I knew though, when I saw the report, she would be visiting me. I could feel that

there was more to her story than what was said. It was in the terse lines of her sister's face and the rage in her father's eyes. I spent the morning reading all the socials I had not yet consumed, and the lines filled in a little further.

Another mark upon my skin. Another nightmare I would have to carry.
At least this one might be finished.

The trains sat on their tracks as shadowed beasts in the dark. A distant light not reaching between the spaces where they slumbered listlessly. Beneath the iron tang of oxidised air, I could still smell the musty algal scent of the river. I would have to travel much further inland to escape the serpent that wound through the city of Perth and its suburbs. The sharp blue stone crackled loudly underfoot so I shifted to the heavy iron lines, but distant sounds of trucks and sirens gave the warm night air a light wailing as if something was lost just beyond the edge of this place. These spaces on the edge of the city always felt as if they were unravelling to me, as if something vital was missing or had yet to be filled in.

'Yeah, I'm almost there.' The voice was slurred but loud in the night. He skipped over the tracks with a confidence that spoke of a long association. The tracks likely laid between his home and his hunting ground.

For a moment I just watched him. I was always surprised, although I don't know why, how many of these monsters that would appear with demon masks on my body were just so very ordinary. Sometimes the full face of the person would be in the tattoo, but most were like Samara's where they had not even really seen the face of the person that harmed them.

When he hung up and slid away his phone, I moved off my careful balance on the train line and stepped, heavily, deliberately, upon the gravel between the tracks. The crackle and grind seemed sharp in the still, hot air, but it took him a few feet to notice. He looked around but could not see through the shadows the sleeping trains had lent me.

As we continued through the dark night, the scent of tar heavy in the air, his movements became jerkier, his face harried, then angry, contorting and revealing a truth behind the handsome facade. *There was the demon. There was the face Samara had seen.*

His words painted the air blue as he yelled back at me, but they were as insubstantial and as unimportant as he was. I could smell the sweat on him turning from fear to adrenaline. The rank odour of his own rage rubbing up against my own. I could not help but breathe it in and let it stir the creature coiled inside me. I stayed in the shadows driving him forward trying not to pant and salivate like an animal.

It was only when we finally reached the spot where he had attacked Samara's that I moved so the light pollution of the city could highlight my form: my seemingly small, rounded, female form.

His fear and anger became predatory. 'Hey baby, don't know why you were so shy. Want a good time?'

I let him approach me and when he was close enough, I let the mask fall away. I let all that I was show through. I had never seen what they saw. Even when near mirrored surfaces all I saw was my own face. But I could feel the difference. It was a thinning, a narrowing, a harrowing that I knew was monstrous, but not as monstrous as they were, these killers, these rapists, these revolting creatures that I was driven to hunt.

'What the fuck are you?' He screamed, and turning, tried to run.

'I am memory.' I reached him without effort. At the end I also said, 'for Samara,' but I doubt he heard me.

The bathroom sink was still cluttered when I returned. I was never one to tidy up well.

I stood nude before the mirror and watched as the blood on my face and arms from

the boy slid slowly down towards the tattoo. It moved in liquid waves like the ebb of the tide as it draws back towards the sea. It coloured in the red of the Oni mask. It coloured in the red tartan stripes of Samara's pants, and it pooled beneath her feet like an anguished shadow.

I hated this part almost more than any other. Perhaps not as much as I hated when I did not find the answers, when I could not find those responsible and the tattoos remained unfulfilled upon my skin, but pretty damn close.

The skin on my arm burned and rippled in undulating patterns like when a stone dropped into the river, and slowly the blood was consumed inside the lines of the tattoo. I hated that the blood of these monsters was taken inside myself, but it did not work any other way. Slowly the image settled into a smooth, permanent tattoo, as if it has been upon my skin for years. Sometimes a lover would recognise an image and ask why such a tragic story was upon my skin. I always say the same thing: to remember that we all die.

I turned in the mirror and saw the other forms across my back, my legs, my torso. In some places my skin was overrun with crowded images and shadow shapes. But in others, there was space. Squares, circles, strips of pale untouched skin. A canvas waiting for the next vision.

A living memento mori.

Polyphemos' Lament

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*This poem is inspired by and in response to Homer's *Odyssey*. It builds on Polyphemos' speech to his favourite ram (9.447-460), the sympathetic tone of which is an example of the ambivalence and ambiguity towards the Cyclops and the eponymous hero Odysseus that is evident throughout Homer's epic poem and which I analyse in my critical essay in this same issue.²*

No more shall I see the sea, nor the ships on the horizon,
nor the sheep that were taken from me
with my sight and my sweet shield-like single eye
that shone from my brow like the sun
looking down from the sky.

No more shall I tend my fat thick-fleeced sheep,
nor taste their white milk from well-wrought vessels,
nor curdle it and set it aside in wicker baskets,
nor milk my ewes and bleating goats,
nor place the young beneath each dam.

No more shall I stroke the purple-dark fleece of my
beloved ram, the best of all the flock – always the first
to reach the tender grass of the mountain meadow,
to drink from the cool streams and with his long stride
to head for home at eventide.

Monstrously slaughtered upon the beach, feasted upon,
 thighs burned, sacrificed to the son of Kronos
by Noman and his men. They thought me a monster
for I am different to them for
I eat no bread and my meat is men.

I am no monster, born of the sea,
 the monster is Noman who came from the sea
to my land, my home and ate my cheese,
ate my well-fed thick fleeced flocks,
got me drunk and blinded me!

They took my own staff, sharpened it, heated it
 'till it glowed then thrust it in my single eye

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² Based on the following works: Homer, *Odyssey*, 9.105-566; Theocritus, *Idylls* 6 and 11; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 13.738-897.

whirled it round and whirled it round,
'till the root of my eyeball crackled
and my lids and my brow singed!

I groaned! I wailed! Laboured in pain,
tricked by Noman and tricked again
when he made off with the sheep
I tended so gently, the sheep
I shall see and tend no more.

I smell the apples, grapes, strawberries, cherries and plums,
But I cannot see their colours of yellow and gold
and purple-black. I cannot see to pluck them,
to know when they are ripe, so they fall and rot,
and I trample them underfoot as I lumber and grope.

I know it is day from birdsong and seagulls' cry,
from the heat of sand softly seeping through my toes
as I stumble to wash the blood, still oozing
from my eye, in the sea
the sea I shall see no more.

I feel the warm breeze and taste the salt air
that stings the mangled flesh that once was my eye,
still tender with a pain so sharp,
as sharp as the pain in my heart
for another who took my eye.

No more shall I gaze on my skittish white nymph,
whiter than curdled milk, softer than lambs,
sweeter than ripened grapes, smoother than shells
worn away by the waves in the sea where she resides,
the sea I shall see no more.

My father, the earthshaker, the god of the wine-dark sea,
may have dogged the trickster's journey home,
maybe Noman returned to trouble in his house,
but it was still to a son and a wife whose beauty
he could see and with whom he could share a life.

I sit alone, without my nymph, without my sheep,
without my sweet shield-like single eye
and I gaze at that sea that brought me life
that brought me love and brought me loss ...

I gaze at the sea I see no more.

Bacon, Simon (ed), *Future Folk Horror: Contemporary Anxieties and Possible Futures*; London, Lexington Books, 2023; hardback, xv + 329 pages, 6 b/w illustrations; RRP \$120.00; ISBN: 9781666921236.

The preface of *Future Folk Horror* establishes two key ideas: that folk horror is rooted in *place*, and typically follows a chain – an unnatural location leads to isolation, which produces a skewed moral or religious perspective, and ultimately leads to a supernatural ‘summoning’ or ‘happening’ (2). Edited by Simon Bacon and with a foreword by Dawn Keetley, this collection comprises twenty-one essays covering all forms of media, from books and films to graphic novels, video games and live performances. The aforementioned causal framework, first constructed by scholar Adam Scovell, is the backbone of *Future Folk Horror*. As this collection is concerned with retrospectively analysing where and how folk horror originated (9), the authors follow a ‘chain’ of similar narratives that formed its archetypal beginnings. However, Bacon’s chosen works also emphasize the rhizomic interconnectedness between past, present, and future in the folk horror genre (12), moving from ‘established places and into new spaces’ (xii).

Future Folk Horror is separated into two sections, with two sub-sections, or ‘parts’ in section one, and three such ‘parts’ in section two. Due to the intertwined nature of folk horror, with the featured authors regularly referencing the same overlapping media, this structural choice segregates the chapters according to location and era, slotting the subject matter into what Bacon considers as the ‘timeline’ of folk horror across various cultures. This helps establish context for the layman reader, as well as cement the ethos of the book; as Dawn Keeley’s foreword expresses the ‘rootedness’ of the genre, the fear within folk horror is tied to both ‘past’ and ‘place.’

The first section ‘Framing the Past to Make the Present’ is preceded by Tracey Fahey’s standalone essay, which features her original short story *Buried*. Due to its placing before timeline of the book begins, Fahey’s work is a useful framing device for the entire anthology. Her clear focus on the traumatic unearthing what is ‘buried’ effectively sets up the through-line of folk horror being inextricably tied to the past, continuously evolving by penetrating below the ‘layered strata of history’ (15–16).

The four authors in part one, ‘The Folklore of British Folk Horror’, address the genre’s origins and main influences, specifically the ‘unholy trinity of folk horror’: *Witchfinder General* (1968), *Blood on Satan’s Claw* (1971), and *The Wicker Man* (1973). These essays examine ‘traditional’ folk horror narratives from the last decade, concerning ideas that may resonate with English audiences such as rural horror, paganism, and local legends. Jimmy Packham’s essay ‘A Battlefield in England: Folk Horror and War’ is specifically resonant in how he draws attention to the colonial undertones of folk horror, referencing the 2013 film *A Field in England* and the influences of *The Wicker Man*. Packham discusses the tenet of isolation from Scovell’s chain, which is expressed by the film’s xenophobic and tribalist Protestant soldiers, deliberately comparing themselves to the rural ‘savagery’ of countries like Wales and Scotland.

Part two of section one, ‘America, Settlers and Belongings’, takes a transcultural approach to the heritage of folk horror, the three essays exploring stories set in locations other than England. Kit Hawkins’s ‘Fae Fight Back: Monstrous Mycelium and Postcolonial

Gothic in *The Hallow*' is a noteworthy contribution, as their chosen media explores the enduring generational grief from the Troubles in Northern Ireland, set against a supernatural foreground of classic folk monsters such as malignant fairies and changeling children.

Section two, (or the second half), of *Future Folk Horror*, 'Facing Backwards Whilst looking Forwards' 'uproots' from its Western English inspirations, and express the versatility of folk horror as refracted and interpreted by various cultures, such as Australian, Spanish, and Native American. Therefore, part three, 'Cultural Positionings', section two's first sub-division, marks a shift in the book, and a movement away from the 'unholy trinity' as inspiration. However, the folk horror chain is still a relevant feature, such as in Kingsley Marshall's chapter on the 2020 adaptation of *Candyman*. His essay expresses how a key facet of Scovel's typically British model, such as rural isolationism, can be appropriated into an urban Chicago environment when expressed through themes of race, gentrification, and ghettoization. Similarly, Lauryn E. Collins's 'Wendigo Tales' (which covers the novel *Moon of the Crusted Snow*), is notable in its discussion of folk horror narratives outside of a specifically Western canon of tropes. In *Crusted Snow*, the Indigenous Anishinaabe characters are 'uprooted' from their traditional land, but instead of presenting the colonial narrative of Nature as the uncontrolled, violent antagonist, the horror is relayed through the folk creature the Wendigo, as its 'personification of deadly hunger' represents the colonialising destruction of white settlers (152).

The description of part four 'Identity and Gender' in Simon Bacon's introduction hinted at 'examining the role of gender in different folk horror narratives' (11). Despite this, the majority of chapters appeared solely interested in the portrayal of non-normative femininity in horror, covering fairly standard heteronormative archetypes such as mother, maiden and crone (Ellis, 203-13), or the devouring, sexualized siren (Garcia-Karr, 229-244). However, the final chapter was a refreshing divergence, as Vicky Brewster addressed various non-human, cyborg, and alien perspectives in their work 'Religion and Rewilding in Michael Faber's Ecohorror,' which acted as a pertinent setup for the final part of the anthology, 'Intersections and Futures.'

Across the four essays of part five, the most consistent reading of the 'future' of folk horror are the prophetic themes of eco-horror and climate grief, and the innately destructive nature of humanity. There is a distinct pithy nihilism in these final chapters, especially in M. Keith Booker's *Annihilation* essay, as his conclusive statements about the film question whether 'replacement of the flawed human race by posthuman androids might be a good thing' (287). The anthology ends with Reece Goodall's chapter on ecological human sacrifice in *Inside No. 9*, which once again references the idea of a cyclic chain. This ritualistic narrative practise 'straddles the fine line between past, present and future'; with present sacrifices appeasing old pagan powers to present future catastrophes (313).

While most of *Future Folk Horror's* essays were united by the common theme of 'place', one issue with the compilation is that some of the essays seem peripheral to the genre of either 'folk', 'horror', or 'folk horror.' Notably, the penultimate essay on Terry Gilliam's *The Zero Theorem* seems more aligned with cyberpunk dystopia, as the only link to 'folk' came from the description of collective social anxiety of being intimately connected by technology and social media. The compilation has already established that folk horror is a fluid genre, but certain contributions would have benefited from either stronger conclusions or foregrounding introductions, tying them more neatly into the overall ethos of the book.

With its setup of exploring the genre's origins to clarify its future, this fascinating

anthology is an invaluable addition to the folk horror field of scholarship. It will no doubt appeal to folk and eco-horror students as a useful starting point of research, directing the reader towards key authorities such as Adam Scovell and his seminal work *Folk Horror: Hours Dreadful and Things Strange* (2017), as well as providing niche media recommendations. Furthermore, the diversity of essays constructs a uniquely global image of the genre within a single compilation, solidifying folk horror as a continuous 'reservoir of myth, memory and the eerie' (15).

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Creed, Barbara, *Return of the Monstrous-Feminine: Feminist New Wave Cinema*; London and New York, Routledge, 2022; paperback, pp. 192; RRP: \$69.00; ISBN 9780367478162

In the opening sequence of Emerald Fennell's *Promising Young Woman* (2020), establishing shots of several dancing men are soundtracked by Charli XCX's song 'Boys', before the music becomes diegetic and the camera reveals the location of a dark, sweaty bar. Close-ups of the men initially fill the screen, their gyrating bodies accentuated by the feral look on their faces. The men are intoxicated and unconcerned with the ill-fitted trousers or the sloppy, unbuttoned shirts that Fennell highlights in juxtaposition with the celebratory lyrics that dominate the soundscape. What follows is our first encounter with Cassie, a twenty-first century monstrous-feminine as Barbara Creed deems her in *Return of the Monstrous-Feminine: Feminist New Wave Cinema*, a protagonist avenging her best friend's brutal assault and consequent death. Creed's recent publication is an updated treatise of her seminal theory that was established in the 1980s and early 1990s, most prominently in her book *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (1993). *Promising Young Woman* is one of many pertinent films that Creed discusses, not least because two key features of the opening sequence exemplify the author's renewed theory of the monstrous-feminine in an age of #MeToo, fourth-wave feminism, mass disclosure, and transnational discourses on women's rights. Firstly, as Creed states in the book's Introduction: to the female protagonists of this new wave of cinema, 'the aggressive and/or violent male, along with the patriarchal system he represents, is a figure of abjection' (2). Secondly, what unfolds in the opening (and the rest of the narrative) of *Promising Young Woman* adheres to Creed's argument, in chapter three, that 'although the female protagonist seeks revenge at a personal level, directors depict her goal, not as revenge, but as revolt' (51). It is, as Creed describes, 'a film about feminist ethics that speaks directly to the twenty-first century' (56).

Creed has revisited the concept of the monstrous-feminine at just the right time. Over two decades into the new millennium, an historical movement has emerged. As outlined in the Introduction, 'Feminist New Wave Cinema' serves as an important rubric under which the 'astonishing number of groundbreaking and stylish films', primarily directed by women, which 'challenge dominant forms, adopt new styles, and speak for the rights of women and social minorities' (1), can be categorised, compared, and discussed. Most 'utilise horror as an aesthetic form to convey the reality... [and] focus on the *horrific* as it occurs in the family, relationships, political systems, the law, religion, race relations, and environmental discussion' (3). Apt to the current age of screen media, Creed also looks beyond film in chapter two, with special attention paid to *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017–), a TV series, like so many of the films of Feminist New Wave Cinema, that has a significant connection to #MeToo. Indeed, this book is as crucial a response to recent trends across cinema and television as it is to the related sociopolitical movements that have played out on mobile technology and shaped global discourses in the last two decades.

From a film analysis perspective, the post-#MeToo era has invited scholars and critics to reassess older films of the twenty-first century through a fresh lens. The revival of Karyn Kusama's *Jennifer's Body* (2009) is one such example, a film that has gained cult

status over the years since its release but was initially widely dismissed as trashy and exploitative. In chapter seven, 'Queering the Monstrous-Feminine', Creed describes the film as 'a belated beacon of queerness for female spectators angry about the invisibility of queerness in horror ... that draws on a lesbian sensorium to explore lesbian desire, the queer gaze, and queer touch' (114). Indeed, the eponymous Jennifer, as the seemingly heterosexual seductress, is the ultimate queer monstrous-feminine. Another contemporary classic steeped in queerness is discussed in chapter five, 'Vampires, Feminism, and Ethnicity'. Here, Creed highlights how the male characters of Ana Lily Amirpour's *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (2014) 'represent the worst of male abjection' (84), launching an intricate discussion of the film in the contexts of the female vampire across film history (and the radical nature of Amirpour's creation), the theme of revolt, and the significance of the chador-wearing female protagonist amidst increasing islamophobia in the US and in the West post-9/11.

While both Kusama's and Amirpour's films are expected (albeit essential) case studies to feature in the book, Creed's inclusion of a film like Todd Haynes' *Carol* (2015) widens the discussion of queerness and societal 'monstrosity' in a compelling way. In chapter four, 'The Monstrous-Feminine Forgets Her Manners', Creed asks: '[i]n films in which she does not commit a serious crime, murder, or shed blood, can she be defined as monstrous?' (68). She considers the queer protagonist of *Carol* as someone 'regarded as monstrous by those she opposes, critiques, angers, and unsettles' (68). Although Creed's analysis of Haynes' film is brief, like other points of focus in the book, it opens up interesting discursive space for the contemporary reader, particularly in light of the progress of LGBTQ+ rights campaigns globally since the beginning of this century. Social justice issues are also at the heart of chapter nine on 'Eco Horror', as the author explores films directed by women 'dedicated to fighting a range of abuses against the Earth' (142). This serves as one of many moments in the book where the legacy and enduring relevance of Creed's theory are solidified, as is its adaptability to new cinematic forms and new (female/queer) visions wherein the 'repression is gradually being undone' (155).

Themes and tropes that feature in Creed's first instalment thirty years ago are vitally present in this recent theoretical expansion: case studies of the mother, the vampire, the femme fatale, alongside the author's frequent referral to Kristeva's theories of abjection, ensure a fascinating dialogue between the two books without any sense of repetition or dilution. I would suggest that this latest offering is more accessible to students and scholars engaging with feminist film theory for the first time and might now serve as the entry point into Creed's earlier, more theoretically dense work. *Return of the Monstrous-Feminine* is more diverse in its (re)conceptualisation, a welcome feature, and will be a significant launchpad for further scholarly investigation into how the feminine is being represented across twenty-first-century screens — in revolt, in her monstrosity, in her power.

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Megen de Bruin-Molé, *Gothic Remixed: Monster Mashups and Frankenfictions in 21st-Century Culture*; London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2021; paperback, 264 pages, 21 b/w illustrations; RRP \$190; ISBN: 9781350234468.

Popular culture is perpetually appropriating and adapting the classics to the needs of new generations of readers, pushing the boundaries of acceptability, questioning the very essence of the text itself. The literary genre of the Frankenfiction is at the heart of this debate – but what even are Frankenfictions? Are they adaptations? Mashups? Parodies? Satires? Do they fall under the umbrella of remix? What *is* a remix, and how does it differ from a mashup? Megen de Bruin-Molé, whose research examines monsters and contemporary remix studies, aims to answer these questions in *Gothic Remixed*, a book which champions the relevance of Frankenfictions, and their socio-cultural impact on the modern literary landscape.

The first chapter, ‘Frankenfictions’, doubles as a lengthy introduction and addresses the awkwardness of defining this genre. de Bruin-Molé immediately positions Frankenfiction as an unexplored grey area – too literary for remix studies and yet not literary enough for adaptation studies (3). This niche genre does not exist as a unified whole, but on the periphery of multiple discourses. Therefore, she adopts a Frankensteinian metaphor: these texts become ‘monstrous’ adaptations (7), both featuring monsters and assembled from recombinant parts of past texts, deliberately transgressing ‘preconceptions about what it means to be faithful to an “original”’ (8). This questioning tone and eagerness to explore the boundaries between genre immediately sets up de Bruin-Molé’s work as a site of Gothic experimentation.

The second chapter, ‘Adapting the Monster’, explores how this label has changed and adapted over time and across mediums. de Bruin-Molé references texts which all feature variations of iconic monsters, such as *Anno Dracula*, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, and the TV show *Penny Dreadful*. Her argument focuses on the impact of past context and present legacy when constructing a Frankenfiction. This remix of old and new can evolve the monster into more than a stigmatized ‘Other’, and classic icons such as Moreau, Dracula and Doctor Jekyll can be reframed as agents of change or disruption.

The third chapter, ‘Mashing up the Joke’, expands on this potential to adapt by examining the most influential and iconic of Frankenfictions: *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (as well as its imitators). By asking ‘what is gained by adding zombies/werewolves/sea monsters’ to a classic novel, this chapter seeks to find the hidden depths in what is superficially seen as a cheap parody. She especially addresses the absurdism and deliberate camp of the ‘novel-as-mashup’ genre, which acts as a gateway for the author to critique outdated or potentially stagnant elements of the original texts.

This recombination of the past and present takes a fascinating turn in chapter four, ‘Remixing Historical Fiction’. Here de Bruin-Molé expresses the versatility of Frankenfiction as both an art form and a historical collage, as the featured digital artists use historical images to construct fictional narratives of difference. The author frames her selected art, such as Colin Batty’s Victorian cabinet cards and Travis Louie’s human/animal hybrid photography, as a cutting commentary on the types of people who are typically recorded throughout history. These digital creations interact with the past by telling the

'hidden' histories, where monsters become a stand-in for people whose individuality and legacy is obscured by the imperialist camera.

Expanding on this question of legacy in Frankenfiction by showing the effect of remixing an existing author's life, the final chapter, 'Appropriating the Author', is a case study of Mary Shelley. By referencing biopics and retellings, de Bruin-Molé considers how a Frankenfiction can 're-author' the author (217). Her analysis pointedly asserts the gains and pitfalls of the genre and its potential to provide multiple afterlives, as Shelley is equally remembered as a feminist icon, but also the 'inspiration', the muse, the passive 'mother' of the Frankenstein tale without authorial agency (221). Therefore, de Bruin-Molé ends chapter five by considering the multiple outcomes of what Frankenfiction can achieve, by either erasing, reconceptualizing or cementing aspects of the original source material in an updated format.

My single issue with *Gothic Remixed* is not the argument provided, but a certain omission. Despite a large portion of the text focusing on the combination of so-called 'mainstream' culture with classic literature, there was very little discussion of the inception of this elitism and the politics behind the term 'mainstream'. While de Bruin-Molé asks 'what does it mean when our historical monsters have moved from the margins to the mainstream' (3), the answers rarely reference what low culture and high culture status actually *is*, and moreover, who defines it? While the literary 'zombification' focus of chapter three notes how '*Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* ... successfully combined a literary classic with lowbrow pulp horror' (201), it seems like an opportunity to further interrogate how Austen is idealized in literature, and zombie horror is treated as a lesser form of art, was missed. Apart from scattered references and a few paragraphs in chapter five, this area of study was not explored, leaving me with a continuous sense of reading around a large hole in the page.

Despite this, *Gothic Remixed* is an informative and highly readable book that brings the creativity, impact, and future potential of the Frankenfiction to light. This optimistic tone was a highlight of the book, as de Bruin-Molé posits the Frankenfiction as the definitional narrative of our modern age; a palimpsest that represents, adapts, modernises, and critiques the texts of the past. Considering the great variety of subjects featured in the text, de Bruin-Molé's work acts as a useful starting point for anyone interested in remix or adaptation studies. Not only is *Gothic Remixed* well-stocked with interesting secondary sources and quotes, but the author's inquisitive tone invites the reader to question the media they consume. de Bruin-Molé neatly captures the perfect blend of providing her own argument, leaving the audience wanting more and encouraging her readers to seek out their own Frankenfictions in this creative, well-written contribution to Gothic scholarship.

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Michelle de Kretser, *Scary Monsters: A novel in two parts*; New York, Catapult, 2021; ebook, 288 pages; RRP \$17.95 USD; ISBN: 9781646221097.

Michelle de Kretser, born in Sri Lanka, emigrated with her family to Australia as a teenager, a fact that echoes meaningfully into her eighth novel in both its parts. Unusually, the novel is designed with two covers and can be read from either side to follow first the story of Lili, an Australian migrant teaching in the south of France in the 1980s, or of Lyle, a government worker in a dystopic near-future Australia. *Scary Monsters: A novel in two parts* has recently won the 2023 Rathbones Folio Prize for Fiction, was shortlisted for the 2022 Miles Franklin Literary Award, and longlisted for the 2022 Gordon Burn Prize (UK). Previously, de Kretser has been the recipient of a number of literary prizes and awards, including both the 2013 and 2018 Miles Franklin Literary Award, and is known for her literary fiction.

Scary Monsters is her first exploration into post structural form, and although the two parts can be read in conjunction to each other, they also operate on their own to represent different discussions on migration and identity. Both parts are constructed without chapters but rely on breaks to indicate time changes and operate with a close first-person voice. This provides the sensation of being invited into the significant moments of the private lives of both Lili and Lyle.

Lili follows the experiences of a young woman struggling with her first experience of being away from home. Although the reason for being in the south of France is to teach, this is not a dominant focus of the narrative. Rather, the focus is on her relationship with Minna, a wild, fashion-focused artist, and her reflections on the socio-political environment of 1980s France. The scenes flow between moments, at times immersing the reading into the scene, and at others withdrawing back to reflect upon these memories. They capture a sense of the lived experience of a young woman finding her own footing.

Throughout the moments of dealing with terrible heating in a heritage building, shopping at markets while watching police inspect foreigners of colour for visas, seeing shows that are meant to contend with socialist ideals, and her complicated relationships with Minna, Lili struggles continuously with her sense of self as a migrant. Towards the end of her part of *Scary Monsters*, Lili reflects that because of her skin colour she is perceived by others as '[n]ot a Real Australian' (103). And although she finds space as a visitor in France to explore herself, she constantly returns to concerns of her identity as a migrant. Lili is also consumed by concerns of serial killers and the threat she faces as a woman travelling alone. Not undue concerns, and although nothing untoward really happens to her, the inclusion of this ongoing dialogue relating to murder lends a heightened sense of anxiety throughout this part of the book.

Lyle's story is set in an unknown future, but one temporally near enough to the present to represent an understandable extrapolation based on Australia's current political and social dialogues. It is a decidedly dystopic warning made up of tongue-in-cheek hyperbole of current trends, and heart-rending, saddening predictions. The wider setting of this part includes anti-Islamic laws, bans on discussing climate change or other environmental impacts, and the development of The Amendment to allow for fast voluntary euthanasia to free up the housing market. Examined for the setting alone, it is a disturbing look at the consequences of extremist politics and capitalist dominance that

may be too close for comfort for many readers. Within this setting is Lyle, father of two and husband of Chanel, who immigrated to Australia from an unnamed country. Lyle's part, similar to Lili's, meanders around times, memories, and moments of everyday life as it follows Lyle's experiences and reflections on being an immigrant. Lyle is most concerned throughout with assimilating into his new culture; claiming at one time an envy of Danish immigrants as '[t]hey possess what every immigrant longs for: invisibility' (12).

Perhaps due to the genre change with Lyle's part – from realist to speculative – de Kretser can more directly address concerns about immigrant identity and assimilation. As both Lyle and Chanel begin to become further immersed into the country and make decisions that opt for assimilation over morally grey decisions, they both begin to develop patches of white skin, an unknown 'affliction' that others have also developed. This could also be used as a metaphor for the ongoing environmental damage hinted at throughout the narrative. However, early in this part Lyle observes that '[i]mmigration breaks people. We try to reconstitute ourselves in our new countries, but pieces of us have disappeared. Immigrants are people with missing pieces' (13). This message is echoed throughout the experiences of Lyle where the reader sees more of who he is, and his family, falling away until what is left leaves both Lyle and Chanel trapped within a life that, for Lyle at least who has also begun to lose control of language, has become unnervingly surreal. This sense of being unmoored is also present in Lili's part, and when read together the parts, representing the past and future, provide an interesting bookending to our present.

The approach of any post-structural novel can be jarring for an unwary reader, however, both Lili's and Lyle's parts operate well enough to be enjoyed individually or together. The only issue arose in the technical aspect of the e-book. As the novel is designed to be directly flipped when reading the second part this was not as easy to manoeuvre, or as enjoyable, in an e-book form as it would be physically. The monster in *Scary Monsters* is not a concrete creation, but rather a reference to a miasma of racism, misogyny, and identity loss that can haunt and stalk a person's life in a tangible manner. The novel also touches, delicately in Lili and heavy-handedly in Lyle, on the topic of migration, but both parts are an insightful exploration of identity and relationships that should appeal to readers interested in these contemporary topics. It does tend towards the literary in style and form, but both narratives are beautifully evocative and draw readers (whether they want to be or not) into fascinating worlds.

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Mittman, Asa Simon, & Marcus Hensel (eds.), *Classic Readings on Monster Theory*; Leeds, Arc Humanities Press, 2020; ebook, vii + 130 pages, 7 b/w illustrations; RRP £24.95, ISBN: 9781641894401.

In *Classic Readings on Monster Theory*, editors Asa Simon Mittman and Marcus Hensel present a comprehensive historical and theoretical approach to the field of monster theory through nine critical selections which explore how monsters and the monstrous function in a variety of contexts. An introduction to some of the most influential Western monster narratives, it serves as a theoretical framework for the companion piece, *Primary Sources on Monsters*. Divided into two sections, part one, 'Monster Theory', consists of five essays from 'monster theorists and the monsters they unleash or attempt to contain – each of which perches atop the previous creation, building the canon' (2), whereas the second part, 'Allied Theories', covers four approaches to monstrous images and texts, horror and abjection. The essays are preceded by a well-argued introduction, in which Mittman and Hensel provide an articulate explanation for the broad range of the selected works, some of which are not obviously related to the field of monster theory but which, they argue, nevertheless overlap with and influence monster theory.

The first part opens with J. R. R. Tolkien's 1936 essay '*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics'. Written ten years after his own celebrated translation of *Beowulf*, this essay was a radical departure from contemporary scholarship which viewed the poem purely as an important historical document, relegating monsters to the category of 'unimportant things at the centre' (12). Tolkien conversely argues for *Beowulf*'s intrinsic poetic significance, with 'the monsters ... not an inexplicable blunder of taste; they are essential, fundamentally allied to the underlying ideas of the poem, which give it its lofty tone and high seriousness' (20).

'A Measure of a Man' is excerpted from John Block Friedman's *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (1981), in which Friedman examines how Graeco-Roman sources othered non-Greeks and non-Romans, setting these people apart and marking them as monstrous 'because they did not look like western Europeans or share their cultural norms' (39). Friedman illuminates the culturally biased and relativistic ethos of monster creation which typically dehumanized people by focusing on their difference from the accepted norm in such a way it denied them the status of human beings.

Excerpted from *The Philosophy of Horror* (1990), in 'The Nature of Horror' Noël Carroll distinguishes monsters based on the attitudes of the characters who meet them. Monsters in fairy tales are a natural part of the metaphysical cosmology and are accepted as such, no matter how fearsome they may be. But monsters in horror stories are looked upon as an abnormal disturbance of ontological propriety which provokes a sense of revulsion and disgust on the side of the 'good' characters. This is exemplified by Jonathan Harker's description of the irrepressible nausea he felt upon first meeting Count Dracula, or by Victor Frankenstein's instinctive repulsion towards the creature he had assembled when he witnessed its first movements. Furthermore, readers' and audiences' emotional responses towards monsters are modelled on the characters' own reactions.

In 'Rethinking the Canon: Prophets, Canons, and Promising Monsters' (1996), art historian Michael Camille uses the monster to challenge the idea of 'the canon' as the

widely recognized collection of purportedly timeless works of art found in prestigious collections. According to Camille, the monstrous cannot ever be canonical: due to its instability, the monster blurs the lines between what is human and what is not, mixing the proper and improper, and presenting itself in ever-new and surprising ways. Hence, the monster is uncontainable, cannot be fully comprehended or recognized, and cannot establish itself as a reliable element of the canon, which 'is supposed to transcend space and time and stand autonomous' because it is 'stripped of contingency' (58).

Closing part one, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen proposes a seven-part framework in 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)' (1996) for understanding monsters, with the monster's body a cultural body which incorporates fear, desire, anxiety and fantasy because it dwells at the gates of difference. At the same time, fear of the monster is really a kind of desire, a simultaneous attraction and repulsion which evades simple binary dialectics. By arguing for the cultural origin and importance of the monstrous, Cohen highlights its ontological liminality which resists attempts at categorization, hence actively 'delimiting the social spaces through which private bodies may move' (68).

Part two opens with sections from Edward Said's Introduction to *Orientalism* (1978), a seminal text within postcolonial studies not often cited within the field of monster theory. Yet Said's positing of the relationship between the Oriental as 'irrational, deprived (fallen), childlike, 'different' and the European as 'rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal'' (83) is analogous to the relationship between 'us' and the monster as 'other'. As 'a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, 'us') and the strange (the Orient, the East, 'them')', Orientalism also conveys 'the strength of the West and the Orient's weakness – as seen by the West' (86–87) in the same way monsters are traditionally othered and constructed as inferior beings due to differences in key markers of identity.

'Approaching Abjection', a selection from Julia Kristeva's introduction to *Powers of Horror* (1982), renders problematic any premise about the permanence of the boundaries dividing subjects from objects and self from other. Although it does not refer explicitly to monsters, Kristeva's definition of the abject as 'necessarily dichotomous, somewhat Manichean' (95) intersects with the characterization of the monster as 'imaginary uncanniness and real threat' prefigured by 'something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object' (93).

'Parasites and Perverts: An Introduction to Gothic Monstrosity"', contains most of the introductory chapter to J. Halberstam's *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (1995). Here the monstrous body à la Frankenstein, Dracula, Dorian Gray, and Jekyll/Hyde is the classic shape of the Gothic *topos*, which represents the disruption of realism and of all generic purity. This racialized monstrosity has been successfully gothicized in the discourses of European anti-Semitism and American racism towards black Americans, suggesting the way 'Gothic monstrosity may intersect with, participate in, and resist the production of a theory of racial superiority' (112).

Part two concludes with Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's introduction to the edited essay collection *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body* (1996), 'From Wonder to Error: A Genealogy of Freak Discourse in Modernity'. Garland-Thomson makes the case that individuals with distinct visual characteristics which deviate from the norm or the expected, known as 'monsters' in antiquity and more recently, as 'freaks', are produced by culture via a process Garland-Thomson calls 'enfreakment', a word she takes from disability theorist David Hevey to signify 'the cultural rituals that stylize, silence, differentiate, and distance the persons whose bodies the freak-hunters or showmen colonize and commercialize' (125).

This volume is explicitly intended to introduce its primary readership of (most likely undergraduate) students to the most significant and renowned contemporary theorists of the monstrous. Thus, each essay is prefaced by thoughtful reading questions and a couple of well-chosen references, as well as a condensed critical introduction, which situates the essay in the wider context of the author's contribution to the field of monster theory. Furthermore, the editors have chosen to abridge most essays, likely as a space-saving issue, since there is nothing missing from the excerpts which detracts from the overall vision of the monster. A running thread through the selected essays is the 'potentially positive role of monsters that – evil or sublime – captivate us' (4). Mittman and Hensel point to Saint Augustine's use of the Latin puns *monstrare* (to show) and *demonstrare* (to demonstrate) to characterise *monstra* (monsters) as (inverted) mirrors through which humankind can learn about defining norms and mores through the monsters' inversions and transgressions and facing the hidden or repressed side of the human psyche. These editorial choices all guide the reader into a further pondering into the added meanings of *monstrare* as 'inform, advise, instruct' and *demonstrare* as 'indicate, designate, prove', hence pointing to a deeper meaning of the *monstrum* as a pedagogical tool as much as an omen which is outside of human control.

Classic Readings on Monster Theory provides an overall vision of the monster as aptly defined by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen: a dweller at the gates of difference, the monster is a dialectical cultural, political, racial, economic, and sexual Other which strikingly originates Within. This volume ably demonstrates that monsters are worthy of thoughtful scholarly consideration in light of a consistently positive interpretation, and provides the tools to afford the uninitiated a more guided incursion into monster land.

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Mittman, Asa Simon, & Marcus Hensel (eds.), *Primary Sources on Monsters*; Leeds, Arc Humanities Press, 2020; e-book, ix + 437 pages, 19 b/w illustrations; RRP £147.00; ISBN 9781641894418.

As Asa Simon Mittman and Marcus Hensel establish from the beginning of their edited volume, *Primary Sources on Monsters*, we have always lived with monsters. In their introduction titled 'A Marvel of Monsters,' Mittman and Hensel situate their source reader in the larger subject of monster studies and define the importance of the monster subject for cultural studies. The companion volume to *Primary Sources on Monsters*, *Classic Readings on Monster Theory* (2020), is a collection of key works that 'provide methods for considering monsters, approaches to them, [and] ways of seeing how monsters and the monstrous function in various contexts' (3). Mittman and Hensel's focus for *Primary Sources on Monsters* departs from the goal of theorising the monster and instead centres on gathering a collection of monsters as a reference source for the field of monster studies. Through this marvel of monsters, a collective noun borrowed from Siobhan Carroll to describe the grouping, Mittman and Hensel demonstrate how the monster refuses to be diminished as a significant figure in Western cultural narratives.

The sections of this source reader are organized in chronological order from Western antiquity to the 21st century. Spanning a stretch of over 4000 years, the collection begins with *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (circa 2000 BCE) and ends with contemporary monster fictions circulated online including the popular culture legend of 'Slender Man' and the collaborative wiki writing site 'The SCP (Special Containment Procedures) Foundation.' This broad range of entries demonstrates how monsters have evolved within Western culture over millennia. Ancient, Biblical, and Medieval mythological monsters mingle with later literary creations, including those penned by William Shakespeare, John Milton, Mary Shelley, Bram Stoker, J.R.R Tolkien, Ray Bradbury, and Margaret Atwood. In total, thirty-eight sections of different primary sources fill the volume with an introductory page accompanying the excerpt or selections from each source. Nineteen images also appear to give greater depth and context to several works; as noted by the editors, the visual element for monsters also exist as cultural and historical texts in their own right. Critical introductions and viewing questions supplement the images and aid in visual analysis endeavors.

True to the mission of the editors, this source is most useful for students, and while any researcher is also a student of their field, *Primary Sources on Monsters* is tailored to introductory-stage learners in monster studies. To this end, *Primary Sources on Monsters* is an accessible text with critical introductions, reading questions, editorial notes, and further reading sections accompanying each source. Written by Mittman, Hensel, or the translator of the selection, these short introductions provide valuable context and cross-reference information for the sections. This structure makes the source reader highly comprehensible and ideal for guided classroom instruction in high school or college-level courses. *Primary Sources on Monsters* fills an important gap in scholarship as a unified compilation of primary texts in one place. The volume's content is also valuable for researchers tangentially working with monster studies and requiring a brief history and development of the field in the Western context. Although advanced researchers in the

area are likely familiar with at least some of the selections, the further reading suggestions may be helpful for literature reviews and further directions connected to monster theory and studies.

Primary Sources on Monsters is a clearly formatted reference guide, but the volume's organization could be slightly improved by clearly separating selections into defined subsections by time period. Including the date of the work alongside the title in the Contents section and/or formally grouping works into divisions by period (e.g., Early Modern, Romantic) would aid learners unfamiliar with the works to quickly situate the work historically and in the larger context of monster narratives. Mittman and Hensel have assembled an essential source reader in the field with a necessary range of texts. With the vast timespan of the volume's entries, in no way could this source accommodate a fully comprehensive collection of monsters in lore, myth, and literature. However, major developments and defining works of Western monster culture are represented through the selections in *Primary Sources on Monsters*. The source reader's limit to the Western world establishes the scope of the work, and further volumes of primary sources from additional cultural and global contexts (i.e., Indigenous cultures) are critical for the field of monster studies following Mittman and Hensel's work.

While the monsters we create appear in ever-mutable forms, Mittman and Hensel's assertion that '[t]he world needs its monsters, and its monster stories' remains just as true for our contemporary moment as for generations before us attempting to form an 'understanding of the world and our place within it' (8). *Primary Sources on Monsters* serves as a necessary archive of these explorations of self and other, and it leaves the reader to wonder at, reflect upon, and have a deeper understanding of the 'marvel of monsters' existing through the centuries and enduring within the pages of this essential collection.

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Morreale, Laura K. & Gilsdorf, Sean (eds.), *Digital Medieval Studies: Practice and Preservation*; Leeds, ARC Humanities Press, 2022; e-book, 121 pages, 11 b/w figures; RRP \$119.00; ISBN: 9781802700152.

We live in a digital world. While such statement might seem bold, especially if we are to consider worldwide disparities in access to technological innovation, among others, it is undeniable that the digital world has progressively taken up spaces and places in the 'real' world that might have seemed impossible just a few decades ago. In the 'Introduction' to *Digital Medieval Studies: Practice and Preservation*, editors Laura K. Morreale and Sean Gilsdorf begin by addressing how much digital tools influence medievalists' daily research routines in terms that I admittedly feel mirror my own experience as a scholar. They also highlight how often medievalists find it hard to see themselves as 'digital scholars' even though we have immersed ourselves in online modes of research. Acknowledging the importance of digitally generated knowledge, which is frequently taken for granted, Morreale and Gilsdorf aim to ensure that Digital Humanities scholarship 'is taken seriously as an identifiable and articulated process, and just as importantly that it can exist as a durable intellectual product' (2). Envisioned as a kind of 'meet-and-greet' publication, to use the editors' words (8), each of the five chapters in this volume provides insight into what 'thinking digitally' is, how it has evolved, and how the past and the future can be connected. Furthermore, authors outline how the online projects under analysis started, matured, and either ended or continued to expand until the book's date of publication.

Chapter one, 'Beginnings: The Labyrinth Medieval Studies Website' by Deborah Everhart and Martin Irvine, focuses on the origin and development of the first medieval studies website, the Labyrinth (1992–), as well as on the demands faced by medievalists in a pre-World Wide Web era. In chapter two, 'New Approaches to Old Questions: Digital Technology, Sigillography, and DIGISIG', John McEwan addresses the challenges of medieval sigillography and discusses the contributions the Digital Sigillography Resource (DIGISIG; 2013–) has made to those working in the field, highlighting its transformative potential for sigillographic studies (46) while also acknowledging the challenges concerning the interpretation of search results (70–71). Chapter three, '*Corpus Synodaliūm*: Medieval Canon Law in a Digital Age' by Rowan Dorin, discusses how the database-in-progress – *Corpus Synodaliūm*: Local Ecclesiastical Legislation in Medieval Europe – came into being. With a special focus on diocesan statutes and provincial canons issued across Latin Christendom, *Corpus Synodaliūm* allows users to search a corpus of 1450 transcripts (from circa 1250–1500 CE) more effectively than ever before making it not only possible to access texts that would have otherwise been harder to study, but also to examine patterns, variations, borrowings, and discontinuities within broader chronological and geographical boundaries (54).

Chapter four, on the other hand, focuses on a very different approach as J. W. Torgerson walks the reader through his 'Constantinople as Palimpsest' project, which both studies 'Constantinople as a palimpsest ... [and is] also a literal and metaphorical palimpsest itself' (79). Torgerson's 'Teaching Constantinople as a (Pixelated) Palimpsest' sheds light on how digital tools can be used in the classroom to generate new ways of envisioning historical knowledge (93). Much like the remaining authors, Torgerson

describes the evolution of the project, its drawbacks as well as the lessons learned. However, 'Constantinople as Palimpsest' differs from all other projects considered in this volume since the research featured on the webpage results from work completed by undergraduate students (Spring 2015 – Spring 2020 semesters), with Torgerson and his team's support, of course.

Finally, chapter five, 'Life On—and Off—The Continuum' by Lisa Fagin Davis, is a retrospective essay where the author considers three separate Digital Humanities projects she worked with over the course of thirty years: DigiPal, DigitalMappa, and *Fragmentarium*. While this last chapter seems to be more like an overview of somewhat independent projects, Davis brings important critical attention to how medievalists can develop and use digital tools more efficiently (109), highlighting three key points that I would venture say every Digital Humanities project should consider: '[d]ata must be extricable if it is to survive; resources should be open access if possible; and interoperability points the way to a sustainable digital future' (109).

Morreale and Gilsdorf's *Digital Medieval Studies: Practice and Preservation* is a great contribution to the history of Digital Humanities with a special focus on medieval studies. While there are some shortcomings – the chapters are at times too descriptive and authors refer to computer programs, interfaces, and digital frameworks that readers might not be familiar with – this volume of essays is certainly a valuable resource for all those interested in Digital Humanities and how to use them to create innovative ways of learning, teaching, and conducting research.

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Moser, Keith & Zelaya, Karina (eds.), *The Metaphor of the Monster: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Understanding the Monstrous Other in Literature*; New York/London, Bloomsbury, 2020; paperback, 242 pages, 4 b/w illustrations; RRP £28.99; ISBN: 9781501369292.

The Metaphor of the Monster reconsiders various representations of monstrosity with the aim of eliciting new perspectives and producing innovative approaches to monster theory. Its 'radical transdisciplinarity' (1) results in a diverse collection of critical theory that transcends the traditional limitations of monster studies. The collection draws literary, philosophical, ethical, religious, and gender theories into a cohesive whole with the intention of understanding the social construct of the monster in a more complete sense. The book is divided into four sections spanning topics that encompass ecology, gender, education, and world literature. In his introduction, Keith Moser grounds this wide-ranging course of research in the context of humans and society during the Anthropocene. Moser posits that, by understanding and deconstructing the thinking that drives representations of the "monster" or "monstrous", we might find ourselves in a more 'compassionate world less scarred by the visible effects of human and other-than-human monstrosity' (10). Altogether, this collection provides thought-provoking insights into representations of monstrosity and anchors them in real-world concerns.

The book opens with an extensive first section concerned with 'Ecological Perspectives'. This section comprises six chapters that approach a broad range of ecological subjects using varied approaches, as follows: the Darwinian theory of evolution applied to fictional monsters (Dominique Lestel), a philosophical examination of cannibalism (Tony Milligan), a literary analysis of the hybrid Melusine as monster and victim (Jonathan Krell), Derridean biocentric theories in relation to the other-than-human (Keith Moser), the hybridity of *The Tempest's* Caliban in response to his environment (James Seth), and landscape-as-monster in the horror genre (Mindy Adams). Whilst the chapters are eclectic, they are all brought together by their consideration of what is meant by the category of "monster", how monstrosity is delineated, and where monsters reside within the ecosystem – be that literal or societal. Lestel and Milligan's chapters provide compelling theoretical frameworks that may inform or inspire future examinations of monstrosity in literature, and media more widely. The remaining chapters focus on specific literary case studies, drawing on ecological theories, to produce novel readings of monstrosity in their chosen texts. Of these, Adams' chapter is particularly striking. Adams conscientiously blends monster studies, ecocriticism, genre studies, and contemporary political issues to locate the function of the Sonora-as-monster within the complex situation at the US-Mexico border.

In section two, 'Transgressive, Monstrous Gender and Corporality', Touba Ghadessi and Elisa Carandina explore the intersection of monstrosity and gender. Ghadessi offers interpretations of known historical figures, with a particular interest in gendered monstrosity as a tool of ideology that either denotes power or fallibility. This historical overview is largely focused on the manipulation of imagery and public perception which introduces a further layer of complexity to understanding representations of monstrosity. Opting for a literary approach, Carandina analyses Etgar Keret's *Horsie* as a postmodern

rewriting of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. By reading these texts together, Carandina is able to identify the enduring features of monstrosity, that have been proven to resonate with audiences across time and culture.

The third section, 'Teaching Monstrosity in the (Post-)Modern World', explicates monster studies as an educational tool. By investigating the relationship between Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Neil Barrett convincingly connects the rhetoric of the modern incel movement to the misogyny of Frankenstein's monster. Barrett's work bridges the gap between reading about monsters and readers as monsters, where, like Frankenstein's monster, the incel community can be viewed as monstrous readers. The real strength in Barrett's chapter is its application to real-world issues and the consideration of how these might be resolved; he proposes that Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* contains the blueprint for teaching about monstrosity because, in reading it, 'a monster might recognize itself as monstrous' (148). From an entirely different perspective, Devon Pizzino's chapter seeks to illustrate the relevance and importance of monster theory as a tool to teach students how to analyse and construct arguments. Although this approach acknowledges the value of monster studies as a way to reflect on the "monsters" within society, the deconstruction of monstrosity is subordinate to Pizzino's educational framework. Despite the differences in focus and approach, both Barrett and Pizzino establish monster studies as an integral educational tool that is able to help in the conscious development of students' sense of self and skills.

Finally, the book turns to 'Monstrosity in World Literature', where a global outlook on monstrosity is explored. The chapters in this section provide a glimpse into the exciting potential for future research in global monster studies. The topics range from homoerotic vampirism (Alyssa Holan) and monstrous races in Indian Epic (Albert Watanbe), to the deconstruction of monstrosity through satire in African diasporic drama (Subbah Mir) and the moral ambiguity of Don Juan (Scott Truesdale). Both Watanbe and Mir examine the deconstruction of monstrosity in a postcolonial context that seeks to free the global majority from western constructions of the Other. Mir further argues that the deconstruction of monstrosity enables African diaspora to reconnect with their roots. Therefore, as this section shows, the significance of re-centring monster studies away from western perspectives cannot be overstated.

As a whole, this collection spans an impressive range of disciplines, subjects, periods, and places. The contributions within this collection all offer a valuable addition to the field of monster studies, be that in the form of a framework, a specific case study, or in its status as a catalyst that has begun new conversations. Ultimately, perhaps the greatest strength of *The Metaphor of the Monster* lies in its ability to relate the, sometimes intensely abstract, monsters of our imaginations back to the human experiences and thoughts that created the monsters to begin with.

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Michael Rees, *Tattooing in Contemporary Society: Identity and Authenticity*, London & New York: Routledge, 2022; hardback, 172 pp; RRP \$273.00 AUD; ISBN: 9780367271411.

As the interviewees in this this book remark upon, in recent years it has become increasingly common within Western societies to see greater numbers of openly and extensively tattooed people within public life. Even though the ‘tattoo renaissance’ has been underway since at least the 1990s, if not earlier, in the last decade or so, it seems that a tipping point of prevalence has been reached, especially among people under 40. Primarily concerned with understanding this recent ‘*perceived* ubiquity of tattooing practices in twenty-first century Britain’ both among the general population and the “celebrity” populace, this study ‘explor[es] how tattooing body projects are utilised in the construction of individual identities’ (1). Michael Rees achieves this through utilising and adapting Norbert Elias’ figurational/process sociology – that is, how interconnections and interdependencies between individuals (‘figurations’) themselves create social structures with multidirectional modes of influence and agency between the nodes of the individual and society. Following an overly minimal introduction, the first three chapters provide the disciplinary, theoretical, and methodological underpinning for the original research contained within chapters four to seven.

The historical overview in chapter one covers the reintroduction of tattooing to eighteenth century society, through adoption and adaption over the course of the nineteenth century, its decline in status through the early to mid twentieth century, and finally its contemporary revivals from the 1970s to the present. Though the narrative is linear, Rees uses overlapping chronological categories to trace the different concurrent social motives and expressions of tattooing within a predominantly English-speaking context. The next chapter consists of an academic literature review of tattooing studies, again dividing the material rather unusually by thematically discussing how different disciplines have considered ‘tattooing and the individual’, ‘tattooing as a marker of group solidarity’, and tattooing as a mark of resistance’. While the first category is mostly dominated by psychological and criminological studies, and the second covers mostly anthropological and sociological studies, the third category is not an entirely comfortable fit as it both overlaps with the previous two categories and covers just modern sociological studies which address individual and collective tattooing through a singular motivation of a personal deliberate choice. Finally, the third ‘background’ chapter outlines Rees’s mixed-mode methodology for his research which consisted of thirty in-depth interviews with tattooed individuals and five with tattoo artists, a content analysis of two tattooing magazines over a 12-month period, as well as disclosure of his own personal connection to the work being a heavily tattooed individual himself.

The rest of the book explores different ‘figurations’ for tattooed individuals through a series of discussions supported by significant portions of quoted material from the interviews. Some of the discussions – such as how employers perceive tattooed people, the development of tattooing into an art form, or how tattooed women are more transgressive than tattooed men – have been noted by other researchers, but other discussions provide fresh perspectives – such as detailing the process of researching

and choosing tattoo artists and designs, the occurrence of gatekeeping within the tattoo community, or how tattoos can be used by people to not just memorialise but to actively manage grief and positively overcome mental health issues including self-harm. But of course, given that the primary source material for this study is unique, there is no sense that even where material within this study overlaps with other studies, Rees' conclusions are repetitive or generic as they instead add weight to conclusions reached within other studies. This culminates in the final chapter which focuses on what Rees terms people's 'quests for authenticity' driving the uptake of tattooing as an edgy yet acceptable avenue for modifying the body and the need for individualistic designs and meanings.

Contemporary tattooing exists within 'something of a middle ground between respectability and stigma' (3), and Rees makes ample use of both secondary literature and his interviewees' responses to explore this space. He makes an interesting observation that the current media reportage of tattooing is not just largely favourable towards tattooing compared to previous generations, but that the commentary is to a certain extent pedagogical – advising by example what is in good taste or appropriate for different individuals, commenting on the skill level of artists, describing different styles, and so forth. This is especially evident within the competitive reality show *Tattoo Master*. Within the framework of figurational sociology, this demonstrates that tattooing is becoming normative cultural behaviour and perhaps in another generation, the commonly understood social 'rules' around tattooing will no longer require such explanations (74). On the other hand, I also find it an interesting omission that while Rees notes how tattoos are often motivated by fashions and by the locum being concealable, he does not mention tattoo removal as either an industry or a concept.

Even though no mention is made within the book itself, *Tattooing in Contemporary Society* is essentially the published version of Rees' 2015 doctoral dissertation from the University of Kent with seemingly minor structural editing. This is a significant gap between submission and publication which is unfortunately reflected in the bibliography which includes just nine sources published between 2014–2019 as well as in the literature review which could have incorporated some recent edited publications such as Kloß's 2019 *Tattoo Histories* or Krutak & Deter-Wolf's 2017 *Ancient Ink* that both have a number of important and relevant contributions. This is also an issue for just how up-to-date Rees' conclusions are, as the interviews and content analysis all took place almost twelve years prior to publication between 2010–2011. Given this gap, one wonders why it had not been possible to conduct further primary research in the intervening years which would have complemented the original body of work.

It must be remembered that this work does not aim to be a comprehensive overview of contemporary tattooing, being very much limited to just the English-speaking world, not only as a function of the interviewees being UK-based, but also in the historical overview and literature review which barely mentions tattooing outside of an English-speaking context except when direct cultural loans (or appropriation) are being discussed. Thus, the reader is not made aware of historical (Pigorini Beri, 2018; Meyer, 2020) or contemporary Continental European practices (Castellani, 2020), let alone any global practices (Krutak, 2017, 2020).

One feature present in the thesis (though admittedly within a short appendix) which is lacking in this book is the inclusion of photographs – both of some the interviewees' own tattoos, as well as some celebrity tattoos. *Tattooing in Contemporary Society* is not a work which necessitates the inclusion of illustrations (though when dealing with an essentially visual medium, this never goes astray), yet the choice was

made to not include even those pictures taken by the author himself. Given that the primary audience for the work would appear to be people more familiar with sociology than Tattoo Studies, this is an odd editorial decision.

While Rees intended for this book to be relevant to both academic and general interest audiences, it will likely be more appealing to the former purely on the basis of the relatively narrow focus and lack of illustrations, his approachable and engaging writing style notwithstanding. I found this this book to be an informative and engaging study which certainly taught me a lot about the sociological approach, and I am certain that students and researchers within sociology will be able to find much to occupy them within the field of Tattoo Studies. There is certainly ample scope for Rees' methodology to be utilised for future work which incorporate non-English-speaking experiences. Having said that, *Tattooing in Contemporary Society* is a well-structured sociological examination of contemporary Western tattooing which enriches the field of Tattoo Studies through its insights and is well worth the read.

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