Monsters and Monstrosity in Media

Reflections on Vulnerability

Edited by

Yeojin Kim

University at Buffalo/Singapore Institute of Management

Shane Carreon

University of the Philippines Cebu

Series in Critical Media Studies

VERNON PRESS

www.vernonpress.com

In the Americas:
Vernon Press
1000 N West Street, Suite 1200
Wilmington, Delaware, 19801
United States

In the rest of the world:
Vernon Press
C/Sancti Espiritu 17,
Malaga, 29006
Spain

Series in Critical Media Studies

Library of Congress Control Number: 2024931013

ISBN: 978-1-64889-846-4

Cover design by Greys Compuesto, UP Cebu.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Introduction

Anson Koch-Rein
University of North Carolina

Shane Carreon
University of the Philippines Cebu

Yeojin Kim
University at Buffalo/Singapore Institute of Management

From Creature to Culture

While monster studies as a distinct academic field is relatively recent, monsters and the fascination with them have deep historical roots. Before their study as cultural constructs, there were monsters as beings and stories. Monster figures can be traced back to ancient mythologies and folklore from cultures worldwide. Tales of mythical creatures and extraordinary, inexplicable, or supernatural beings were a crucial part of oral traditions passed down from generation to generation. Monsters were described as beings and worked as signs. Etymologically, the term monster is derived from the Latin *monere,* "to remind, bring to (one's) recollection, tell (of); admonish, advise, warn, instruct, teach" (Online Etymology Dictionary). Monsters have always pointed beyond themselves and carried messages. The narratives spun around their messages historically served to explain natural phenomena, delineate social norms, and instill moral order. Monsters were used to grapple with the unknown, forbidden, or mysterious and to understand the human condition. The study of monsters in these contexts was often situated in theology, metaphysics, and cosmology.

With the rise of scientific ways of knowing, the monster as a being disappears, in a sense, into different objects of knowledge. In the *Abnormal* lectures, Michel Foucault explains the beginning of the disappearance of the monster with the advent of the "abnormal individual" (Foucault 2003, 66f.). Disability studies scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thomson discusses this shift in the narrative framing and terminology of extraordinary bodies. Forms of embodiment that used to signal wonder and religious mystery became scientific pathologies (Garland-Thomson 2018, 91). Stephen Asma notes that the pejorative meaning of the term 'monster' intensified with this decline of the wonderous or religious study of the monster because, with the rise of modern science, "there is no longer any truly *literal* sense of the term" (Asma 2009, 15). Without 'literal'

monsters in authoritative descriptions of the world, the focus of the study of monsters shifted to the stories.

As cultural figures, monsters became the object of analysis for scholars seeking to understand human beings on an individual and collective level. Such work explored the universality of certain monster archetypes or the role of monsters in various societies (e.g., Frazer 1922). This early period laid the foundation for studying monsters as cultural constructs. With scholars from ever more disciplines, including literature, cultural studies, anthropology, history, art history, psychology, and sociology, beginning to delve more sustainedly into the significance of monsters and to move them from the periphery into the central focus, monster studies as its own field started to take shape in the 1980s (Mittman and Hensel 2018, x). Throughout the changes in the approaches and objectives of their scholarly pursuers, monsters have continued to thrive across cultures, genres, and media.

In the mid-1990s, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's influential essay "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)" helped put the academic study of monsters as its own interdisciplinary field more visibly on the map (Mittman 2012, 2). Based on Cohen's seven "breakable" theses that approach the monstrous body as "pure culture," the monster can be read as the embodiment of cultural conflict, individual fears, epistemic crises, desire, cultural moments, and historical forces. Importantly, for Cohen, the monster "exists only to be read" is a mode of reading. At the same time, monster studies takes seriously the monster's "uncanny independence" (Cohen 2018, 44). Reading the monster offers a means to understand the culture or context that made it (or the one that circulates it). Reading the monster can also give insight into the bodies and subjects that take on monstrous meaning. However, since "[m]onsters are meaning machines," their interpretability can never be fully exhausted (Halberstam 2018, 87). Monsters are independent and uncannily exceed their uses. Pejorative uses of the term can be reclaimed. A monster can circulate between media, cultures, authors, and audiences and take on new meanings along the way. Monster studies as an interdisciplinary field evolves with the ways monsters are read in each instance and with the lenses brought to the task. Vulnerability plays an important role in many approaches to the monster.

Monster as Metaphor

Mary Shelley's creature in *Frankenstein* may have started as one of the great literary monsters of nineteenth-century gothic fiction, but he keeps wandering on independently as one of the most prolific monster metaphors. He appears not just in theatrical or film adaptations of the novel; he has left Shelley's novel and crossed over into many other media, genres, original works, toys, and visual culture, reaching different audiences wherever he goes (Hitchcock 2007).

This monster, man-made and of questionable creation, is a prime example of the monster as pure culture. The novel makes him wear this fact on his body, as seen through the alienated reactions of others. The processes of his literal and social construction are "laid bare for the reader's condemnation" (Young 2008, 22). Not only is the reader in on these processes of construction but so is the creature. He is independent of his creator as he becomes explicitly self-aware as a monster. He is vulnerable to rejection and social misrecognition. He critically reflects on his becoming a monster, on learning the meaning of his embodiment, and he rages against the injustice of the way he is treated. His level of meta-monstrosity makes him "a metaphor for metaphor itself" (Young 2008, 12). As such, Frankenstein's monster will serve as a recurring example throughout this introduction for various interpretations of the monster.

While most scholarship, like Young's, read monsters as metaphors (Erle and Hendry 2020; Lecercle 2019; Hamilton 2020), sometimes scholars themselves introduce the monster. Peter Adams, for example, investigates metaphors as monsters. He defines "monster metaphors" as ones that forcefully dominate their discourse and "turn nasty" (Adams 2023, 3, 70). Adams recognizes that calling such metaphors monstrous "is a rhetorical maneuver in its own right" (Adams 2023, 8), a scholarly exercise in metaphor usage and monster-making rather than in their analysis. Calling metaphors that are forceful, nasty, and dominating monsters activates a powerful metaphor to draw on its negative meaning.

While also deploying the monster, Henriksen et al.'s exercise of "monster writing" uses the monster "to think with and through vulnerability in writing practices" (Henriksen et al. 2022, 563). They discuss the act of writing as one of creating and living with "text monsters" (Henriksen et al. 2022, 565). This use of the monster draws on a sense of creation and co-existence. Of course, this monster metaphor for the text itself is already present in Mary Shelley's preface to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, when she famously bids her "hideous progeny go forth and prosper" (Shelley 2017, 193), leaving a rich ambiguity of referent between the book and its monster. Such "text monsters" make the monster a figure for the process and product of writing itself. From nineteenth-century novelists to twenty-first-century rhetorical scholars, these writers turn to the monster to mark the idea that vulnerability (to the independence of the text monster or the text's monster) is inherent in writing and publishing.

Symbolic and Mediated Vulnerabilities

One particularly prominent tool for interpreting the meaning of monsters has been psychoanalysis. Anthropologist David Gilmore, for instance, argues that "monsters are universal" in a psychogenetic sense and that "a psychoanalytic approach is unavoidable" (Gilmore 2009, 15f.). He uses cultural comparison to arrive at a universalized psychogenesis of monsters emerging with human

civilization and self-consciousness: for him, monsters originate in "the urge for self-punishment and a unified metaphor for both sadism and victimization" (Gilmore 2009, 4f.). Other approaches are critical of universalizing or tautological tendencies in some psychoanalytic criticism (Corstorphine 2023, 14) and favor the close analysis of monsters in their specificity, be that regarding cultural, social, or historical contexts. Jack Halberstam, for example, urges scholars to "avoid psychoanalytic" interpretations of Gothic fiction long enough to allow for historicizing monstrosity in terms of the production of subjectivity, otherness, and embodied deviance (Halberstam 2018, 80).

Feminist theorist Margrit Shildrick offers a psychoanalytic approach to monstrosity that explores the centrality of vulnerability: being "always and everywhere vulnerable" is central to "the constant condition of becoming" (Shildrick 2002, 11). Therefore, "as we reflect on the meaning of the monstrous, and on its confusion of boundaries, the notion of vulnerability emerges precisely as *the* problematic" (Shildrick 2002, 15). The monster embodies this vulnerability of the subject as much as it is a figure of, necessarily incompletely, disavowing and rejecting it in the form of monsterized 'others.' Shildrick's approach shows that a careful handling of psychoanalytic conceptual tools can deploy them in nuanced ways that center vulnerability and explain the unstable production of both self and 'other' through the monster.

Where psychoanalytic approaches tend to be interested in the symbolic vulnerability that monsters reveal, some affect-oriented approaches focus on the vulnerability of the audience's body to the monster as a mediated experience (Hart 2019, 8). Making the case for such an "affective-corporeal model" of horror, Xavier Aldana Reyes argues that what is specific to horror is how the audience's bodies are affected by the genre's cinematic techniques (Reyes 2016, 15). In addition to film studies, the place of the audience's affective, embodied engagement with monsters has garnered particular attention in the study of video games.

For many scholars in media and game studies, what sets monsters in "videoludic horror" apart is the place of the (embodied) player (Marak 2021, 187). Compared to the audiences, viewers, or readers of other media, the level of immersion, engagement, and the interactive intensification positions players differently in relation to the monster (Krzywinska 2002, 13). On the one hand, this means players are vulnerable to the affective effects of game worlds in which they face, move toward, or run away from monsters, play from the monster's point of view, or play in monstrous ways. On the other hand, games can bolster a sense of player mastery that reduces monstrous independence to fit into tightly controlled computational logics, game stats, and boss fights (Švelch 2013, 194). In such scenarios, monsters are objects of play that give players a sense of control and function as nothing more than carefully calibrated challenges in a game's design (Švelch 2013, 202).

The tension between these two argumentative poles, game monsters as examples of players' immersive loss of control and game design that provides an experience of controlling and defeating monsters, is precisely the kind of unstable dynamic that characterizes and animates monsters. Rather than two distinct categories of games or gaming experiences, this tension is often dynamic and shifting within one and the same game. In fact, Tanya Krzywinska argues that the sense of mastery that players cultivate in moments of game activity is what makes the experience of loss of control in more passive or constrained moments of facing game monsters so acute (Krzywinska 2002, 20). The 'boss fight' with the monster sets up a sense of self-determination that the monster cutscene tears down. There is no doubt that the great variety of game genres, design approaches, and varying degrees of interactivity and player immersion populate gaming with a rich array of monsters. They range from generic cannon fodder to more powerful monsters that provide players with an experience of vulnerability that makes video games "the art of failure" (Juul 2013, 30). However, whether players position the monster as self or 'other' as a point of identification, desire, or fear arguably depends more on the monster's cultural than on its software-coded construction. Regardless of the medium under discussion, approaches that are centered on affect and the embodied experience of the audience, rather than the characteristics of the monster's body, add an important tool to the analysis of how monsters are made and acquire meaning.

Monster Studies from the Margins

Monsters defy temporality and expose linear chronologies as lies (Cohen 2017, 451). It is perhaps fitting, then, that they are studied in a field with ancient beginnings but a short history. Among monster studies' multiple origin stories within that short history, it is important to highlight the pivotal role of fields like feminist, queer, black, disability, and postcolonial studies. Asa Mittman calls monster studies "the most recent in a long series" of these thematic fields (Mittman 2012, 3). This version of the origin story places monster studies as the most recent of a list of thematic fields, which are notably all intersectionally related, to begin with. A more sharply pointed version of the story might claim these fields as part of its very foundation. Literary scholar Audrey Fisch, for example, argues in *Frankenstein: Icon of Modern Culture* that the proliferation of scholarly readings of *Frankenstein* starts with its feminist canonization in the 1970s (Fisch 2009, 202). If Shelley's novel became "a suitable subject for academic inquiry" through feminist work (Fisch 2009, 8), monster studies does not merely arrive chronologically in the wake of but is critically shaped by such work.

Concerns central to monster studies, such as who counts as human, the mechanisms of dehumanization, the cultural coding of marked embodiment,

resistance, and "the unpredictability of categories" (Hellstrand et al. 2018, 144f.) are of urgent interest to and pursued outside of monster-related topics in fields investigating social categories. Their contributions have directly and indirectly pushed the boundaries of analysis and brought monsters into the view of disciplines and canons that had traditionally dismissed monsters and monster genres from serious scholarship.

We can only briefly touch on some examples of their approaches and contributions to monster studies to flag their continuing importance. Critical attention to monstrosity and race analyzes the monster both as a tool of racist dehumanization and as a means of antiracist critique (Young 2008, 5). As part of that work, scholars trace the long history of the adaptation, reception, and intertextuality of Frankenstein as a Black American metaphor (Lacy 2015, 231). The history of that metaphor continues to unfold: in Bomani J. Story's 2023 film *The Angry Black Girl and Her Monster,* teenage science enthusiast Vicaria frankensteins her murdered older brother Chris back to life as a monster embodying and enacting violence, injustice, and community trauma.

Disability studies perspectives, as seen in Garland-Thomson's work on extraordinary bodies mentioned above, analyze ableist constructions of mental and physical diversity as monstrosities and interpret the monster, including in *Frankenstein*, as a disabled subject (Knight 2020). Feminist and queer studies perspectives shed light on the gendered and sexual aspects of monstrous beings. Analyzing the portrayal of monstrous women, mother figures, or feminine-coded creatures exposes underlying patriarchal norms and biases in cultural narratives (e.g., Palko and O'Reilly 2021). Queer studies also examine how monsters can serve as vehicles for subverting heteronormative ideals of sociality and embodiment or as figures of queer experiences of social exclusion. Non-heteronormative ways of being, embodying, or desiring are often dehumanized in monstrous media depictions (e.g., Benshoff 1997).

Through a postcolonial studies lens, scholars make visible the colonial legacies of monsters and connect monstrosity to the portrayal of the colonial 'other.' By analyzing how indigenous or non-Western cultures are represented in relation to monsters in the colonial imaginary constructions of peoples, places, and geographies, these perspectives challenge Western-centric narratives and highlight the importance of decolonizing monster studies (e.g., Davies 2016).

From all these perspectives and their intersections, monsters are of interest as symbols of vulnerability and resilience. They are claimed as cultural figures inviting identification and affective affiliation with the likes of *Frankenstein*'s creature, whose "blood boils" at the injustice of his rejection (Shelley 2017, 186). The monster's liminal and non-normative characteristics carry a history of symbolic violence at the same time that they offer a sense of validation and representation that resonates with marginalized audiences and critics. Of

course, the ambivalent resonance of the monster as a figure of 'othering'/dehumanization AND self-recognition/resistance potentially characterizes all encounters with monstrosity to varying degrees. After all, "*everyone* is a little hard to categorize" (Asma 2009, 40), and "[w]e are all one another's monsters" (Mittmann and Hensel 2018, xiv). The monster surely speaks to widely shared, even constitutive, experiences of embodiment and subjectivity. Nevertheless, the long history of using monsters to "exclude, disempower, and dehumanize a range of groups and individuals" in targeted ways gives them particular resonance with those groups and individuals (Mittman and Hensel 2018, xiii). It is no coincidence, for instance, that transgender monsters, both as figures of dehumanization and of reclamation, shape trans representation in the media as much as they recur in transgender studies (Stryker 2006; Nordmarken 2014; Zigarovich 2018).

As monster studies continue to evolve, it relies on diverse perspectives that "give voice to the things that dwelled on the fringes" (Newman-Stille 2018, 2) to deepen our understanding of the significance and construction of monstrous bodies, beings, and feelings.

About this Anthology

This anthology project began sometime during the global lockdowns when various forms of isolation, categorizations, and border controls were enforced in many ways. During this period, we observed across various media platforms the emergence of novel types of monsters related to issues of unidentified disease and infection, uncontrollable natural disasters, regional wars, intensified nationalism, and the influence of neoliberalism that naturalized the categorizing of persons and exacerbated profound disparities. We noted how the normative primacy of sight applies a biopolitical perspective and acts to separate constructed notions of human and monster.

Considering dynamics of power that socially and politically shape interpretations and understandings of what is visible, we ask, on the one hand, how constructions of the monster and monstrosity related to visuality and sight constantly prop up logic that protects borders and sustain binaries to maintain the power and the system that positions subjects in a chain of binaries subverting and transpositing with each other. On the other hand, we also ask how sight can be undermined in ways that disrupt traditional understandings of identity and human beings as humans and monsters become difficult to tell apart. In other words, how can sight blur a vision of who is seen as human or deemed as the monster. We noted how monster figures on-screen can signal a wide range of subversive destabilizations on the construction of the monster and the meaning/value of monstrosity, including who gets to define them.

Considering the COVID-19 situation as a point of departure, wherein contemporary nation-states seek to redefine and establish the meaning of "new normals" in order to sustain power hierarchies, we want to connect monsters and monstrosity to vulnerabilities through which tensions in understanding identity primarily constructed through sight are surfaced. As monsters are conjured by a society into existence, imbued with meanings and values based on what the society seeks to defend itself from, and positioned as antithetical embodiment of social norms, this volume looks into reimaginations of the notion of monstrosity and of monstrous subjects within society. Through collective scholarly effort, we rethink the monster on-screen as well as the notion of monstrosity not only as it represents perceived difference, (non)belongings, and disruptions of traditional identity markers but also as it either implicitly endorses violence towards or conceals varying vulnerabilities of the labeled Other.

The collection begins with chapters that analyze how authoritative social systems produce monstrous other(s) as a social apparatus to maintain power and structure and offer a critical perspective on monstrosity as an opposite component of the dominant within social systems. In the first chapter, "The Enemy as Monster, the Monster as Neighbor: Anticommunist Propaganda in South Korea and Kwŏn Chŏng-saeng's Korean War Trilogy," Youn Soo Kim Goldstein examines how nation-states create the image of monstrous Otherness to solidify ideological binarism as a mechanism to uphold its hegemony. By analyzing Kwŏn Chŏng-saeng's Korean War trilogy—*Mongsil ŏnni* (My sister Mongsil, 1984), *Ch'ogajibi ittŏn maul* (The village with thatched houses, 1985), and *Chŏmdŭgine* (Chŏmdŭk's family, 1990)—Youn Soo focuses on how the South Korean authoritarian state created the 'division system,' an anti-communist dichotomous structurer to reforge the ideological divide between South and North Korea, thereby constructing North Korea as an ethnic Other. Also, as a means to establish post-war South Korean subjectivity, North Korea's imagery is portrayed as monstrous in propaganda materials to recast it as the monstrous Other. However, by illustrating how the genre rhetoric of children's fiction can unveil the vulnerability of the structured system, the chapter challenges binary oppositions between South Korea and North Korea, comrades and enemies, and notions of good and bad. Furthermore, it exposes the true monstrous facet within the context by the child protagonist's perspective: the system itself.

In the following chapter, "Weaponizing Monstrosity: Starz's *Black Sails* and the Power of Monstrous Narrative," Min-Chi Chen discusses how the British Empire portrayed pirates as 'hostis humani generis' (enemies of all humankind) to legitimize the empire's status as a civilized nation in the early eighteenth century. Min-Chi reveals how the discourse of power necessitates the concept of monster(s) to establish a binary boundary between civilization

and the uncivilized, allowing the utilization of monstrosity as a mechanism to support the colonial system and social hierarchies. By looking into the narration of the story from the perspective of the pirates, this chapter challenges the social construction of monstrous subjects and explores the significance of their ontological presence in social narratives, as depicted in Starz's *Black Sails* (2014-2017).

In the chapter titled "The Move to Innocence: Reframing Monstrosity in Colin Trevorrow's *Jurassic World*," Angie Fazekas and Aarzoo Singh discuss how the ongoing investment in heteronormative whiteness in the *Jurassic Park* film series inevitably produces monstrosity as a means to sustain white heroism. By exploring how the monstrous dinosaurs in the film represent social anxieties regarding science and capitalism, posing a threat to the heteronormative system, this chapter delves into how monstrosity and racial subordination are constructed to uphold the heteronormative system. Introducing the concept of the 'race to innocence,' Angie and Aarzoo reimagine the filmic narratives of white dominance as the real monster, positioning racialized others as a subsidiary subject and creating monsters as a way of protecting the 'ordinary' subject.

Shifting gears from viewing monstrosity as a socially created concept to maintaining the hegemony's status quo, the following chapters subvert the anthropocentric understanding of monsters and monstrosity. Joshua Nieubuurt's "Dark Zombiecologies: Trekking through the Transformative Zombie Forest" examines the rhetorical transformation of cinematic zombies as a projection of societal anxieties and collective fears. While zombies are a relatively new monster in Western culture, they are established as a cultural metaphor representing the social anxieties of their respective time period. The chapter proposes that contemporary renditions of zombies serve as a form of eco-apocalyptic projection involving both human and non-human threats. It analyzes how the ontological nature and applications of the zombie undergo transitions, ultimately reshaping culture and redefining distinctions between the human and the non-human in societies where they emerge. This chapter offers an essential opportunity for readers to contemplate how we should interpret the recurring presence of monsters on screen, who or what causes their resurgence in history, and the roles they represent within the anthropocentric world.

The subsequent chapters bring in technology and the engagement with it as part of rethinking the idea of monster. In the chapter titled "Monstrous Gatekeepers – Eco-gothic Bodies in Video Games," Morgan Kate Pinder explores how ecogothic monsters are presented as transgressive and abject 'others' and analyzes the deep-seated anxieties related to the intricate barriers between the human and the non-human, as well as between video players and their objectives. By thoroughly examining video games—*Sekiro: Shadows Die*

Twice, *Inscryption* (Daniel Mullins Games 2021), *Return of the Obra Dinn* (2018), and *Until Dawn* (Supermassive Games 2015)—Morgan offers a significant perspective on ecophobia and eco-gothic bodies, which manifest as hybridized, mutated, or otherwise transgressive species. Morgan challenges the anthropocentric perspective of categorization and reimagines eco-gothic monsters as victims, portrayed through their experiences of trauma and otherness. This chapter holds particular significance in discussing how ecosystems have been relegated to the role of ecological 'others,' positioned in contrast to human civilization or technology; it is especially pertinent as we edge closer to the looming ecological crisis of the Late Anthropocene and the fragility of the structures that insulate humans from the unpredictable violence of nature have become increasingly apparent.

In "The Monstrous Gaze: Examining the Camera In Horror Film," Mychal Reiff-Shanks looks into slasher films and presents the hybridity of the camera as inhabiting a heterotopic space where the "tension of horror resides." Drawing from Patricia MacCormack's definition of monstrosity, Mychal argues how the camera created a new form of the monstrous in the horror film genre in the way it controls the precarious viewing position of the audience and turns it into a "subversive gaze of hybridity." In other words, the audience is made to identify with the POV of the camera that can take on not only the gaze of the killer and the gaze of the victim, which are both in the cinematic world, but also the simultaneous contradiction of indestructible killer, who is invincible so long as the audience is made to be their extension, as well as the indestructible victim, the final girl who has the potential agency against the killer. This chapter points at the implications of how technology can mediate the perception of monstrosity on-screen and the experience of it beyond the screen.

Later essays in this collection place gender and sexuality in conversation with the notion of monster/monstrosity. As the previous chapter notes how the camera in slasher films can shift the audience or the spectator's identification, Adam P. Wadenius, in the chapter "You are Trespassing in My House: Subverting the Gaze in Jennifer Kent's *Monster* and *The Babadook*," carefully unpacks shots and cinematographic techniques to show how counter cinema frees the female protagonist from typical representations in the horror genre, confronts and contests conventional symbolic structures that may take the form of a monster, and reveals the fiction of the Other.

Female protagonists in the horror film genre are also analyzed by Eleanor Gratz in, "Ladies of the Night What Pop Music They Make: The Monstrous Adolescent in *Jennifer's Body* and *Blue My Mind*." In particular, Eleanor looks into these films to see how women filmmakers explore the experience of female adolescence in relation to both the female body at the cusp of adulthood and the concept and figure of the monstrous adolescent. Eleanor argues that women filmmakers cinematically revise and reclaim female monstrosity by showing complexities in the feminine coming-of-age in terms of interiority, corporeality, and sexuality.

In "Watch Out Boys, She'll Chew You Up: Feminine Monstrosity's Linguistic Traps," Ryanne Probst points out disparities in the general reception of female monsters and male monsters and notes how perceptions of gender influence language that facilitates discussions on monstrosity. Using elements from Media Theory, Ryanne analyzes the etymology and (non)shifts in the meaning of the words *hero, heroine,* and *monster* from classical stories to contemporary popular culture that led to a distortion not only preventing meaningful and critical discourse on feminine monstrosity but also impacting views on real-life women. Central to discussions and story-telling surrounding monstrosity is who is chosen to be empathized with, how this empathy was arrived at, and, conversely, who is denied. This chapter's important contribution is an argument drawn from Suzanne Keen's theory of Narrative Empathy. Ryanne puts forward that in certain "valued emotional states" the audience is primed to prioritize gendered in ways that lead towards male monsters being understood, even empathized with as female monsters are ostracized; Ryanne calls for seeing the linguistic trap and for unlearning the vocabulary that sets up the general reception of woman as monster and feminine monstrosity.

Drawing theoretical foundations from Butler on the performance of gender and from José Esteban Muñoz on disidentification, Sheridyn Villarreal in "Trans/futurities: Queering the Cyborg as a Strategy of Transgender Disidentification" analyzes the connection between the transgender experience and the cyborg figure through three works of art: a French film by Julia Decornau; an immersive virtual reality environment by Tabitha Nikolai; and a music video by Arca. Villareal reads these works as acts of political disidentification wherein the notion and figure of the cyborg are invoked to probe conceptions of gender, sex, embodiment, and the body, particularly as mediated by technologies. Villareal argues that marginalized trans subjects in these works of art align with cyborgs, typically considered as monsters, to reject oppressive dominant scripts on gender and sexual deviancy and reclaim the cyborg as a symbol of radical self-determinacy and emancipatory transformation.

In the final chapter of this collection, "Boulet Brothers' Drag Supermonster: Goth, Macabre, and Queer Excellence," Charlito O. Codizar champions horror drag both for invoking responses that oscillate between terror and enchantment and for creating an afterlife for drag characters. By afterlife, Charlito means to exist as one's own entity, meaning, to have an aliveness beyond presumably repressive structures of lived realities. The chapter suggests performativity as well as transnational flows of representations of the monstrous. It also opens up multiple and varied conversations on potential other imaginings of the notion of monstrous or that which is truly feared, desired, or simultaneously both in relation to dominant ideological structures. Altogether, the chapters in this collection not only challenge the

conventional notions of monster/monstrosity with their attending racial, ethical, sexual, and gendered binary systems but also deconstruct representations of monster/monstrosity on-screen to reveal various lived vulnerabilities.

Bibliography

Adams, Peter J. 2023. *Monster Metaphors: When Rhetoric Runs Amok*. Taylor & Francis.

Asma, Stephen. 2009. *On Monsters: An Unnatural History of Our Worst Fears*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Benshoff, Harry. 1997. *Monsters in the Closet: Homosexuality and the Horror Film*. Neptune City, NJ: Manchester University Press.

Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. 2017. "Postscript: The Promise of Monsters." In *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, 449–64. Taylor and Francis. https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315241197. post.

———. 2018. "'Monster Culture (Seven Theses).'" In *Classic Readings on Monster Theory*, edited by Asa Simon Mittman and Marcus Hensel, 43–54. Demonstrare, Volume One. Arc Humanities Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvfxvc3p.10.

Corstorphine, Kevin. 2023. "Horror Theory Now: Thinking about Horror." In *The Evolution of Horror in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Simon Bacon. Lanham, KY: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uncsa-ebooks/detail.action?docID=7216737.

Davies, Surekha. 2016. *Renaissance Ethnography and the Invention of the Human: New Worlds, Maps and Monsters*. Cambridge Social and Cultural Histories. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO 9781139568128.

Erle, Sibylle, and Helen Hendry. 2020. "Monsters: Interdisciplinary Explorations in Monstrosity." *Palgrave Communications* 6 (1): 1–7. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-020-0428-1.

Fisch, Audrey A. 2009. *Frankenstein: Icon of Modern Culture*. Helm Information.

Foucault, Michel. 2003. *Abnormal: Lectures at the College de France 1974-1975*. Edited by Valeria Marchetti and Antonella Salomoni. New York: Picador.

Frazer, James George. 1922. *The Golden Bough: A Study of Magic and Religion*. Project Gutenberg, 2003. https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/3623.

Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie. 2018. "'From Wonder to Error: A Genealogy of Freak Discourse in Modernity,' from Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body." In *Classic Readings on Monster Theory*, edited by Asa Simon Mittman and Marcus Hensel, 89–98. Demonstrare, Volume One. Arc Humanities Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvfxvc3p.14.

Gilmore, David D. 2009. *Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts, and All Manner of Imaginary Terrors*. Philadelphia, UNITED STATES: University of Pennsylvania Press. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uncsa-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3441642.

Halberstam, J. 2018. "'Parasites and Perverts: An Introduction to Gothic Monstrosity,' from Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of

Monsters." In *Classic Readings on Monster Theory*, edited by Asa Simon Mittman and Marcus Hensel, 75–88. Demonstrare, Volume One. Arc Humanities Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvfxvc3p.13.

Hamilton, Jenny. 2020. "Monsters and Posttraumatic Stress: An Experiential-Processing Model of Monster Imagery in Psychological Therapy, Film and Television." *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 7 (1): 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-020-00628-2.

Hart, Adam. 2019. *Monstrous Forms: Moving Image Horror Across Media*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hellstrand, Ingvil, Line Henriksen, Aino-Kaisa Koistinen, Donna McCormack, and Sara Orning. 2018. "Promises, Monsters and Methodologies: The Ethics, Politics and Poetics of the Monstrous." *Somatechnics* 8 (2): 143–62. https://doi.org/10.3366/soma.2018.0247.

Henriksen, Line, Katrine Meldgaard Kjær, Marie Blønd, Marisa Cohn, Baki Cakici, Rachel Douglas-Jones, Pedro Ferreira, Viktoriya Feshak, Simy Kaur Gahoonia, and Sunniva Sandbukt. 2022. "Writing Bodies and Bodies of Text: Thinking Vulnerability through Monsters." *Gender, Work & Organization* 29 (2): 561–74. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12782.

Hitchcock, Susan Tyler. 2007. *Frankenstein: A Cultural History*. New York: W.W. Norton. http://www.loc.gov/catdir/toc/ecip0720/2007025466.html.

Juul, Jesper. 2013. *The Art of Failure: An Essay on the Pain of Playing Video Games*. 1st Edition, 1st Printing. Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press.

Knight, Amber. 2020. "Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, Disability, and the Injustice of Misrecognition." *Disability Studies Quarterly* 40 (4). https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v40i4.7109.

Krzywinska, Tanya. 2002. "Hands-On Horror." In *Axes to Grind: Re-Imagining the Horrific in Visual Media and Culture*, 2:12–23. Special Issue of Spectator 22. University of Southern California, School of Cinema Television, Division of Critical Studies.

Lacy, Michael G. 2015. "Black Frankenstein and Racial Neoliberalism in Contemporary American Cinema: Reanimating Racial Monsters in Changing Lanes." In *The Routledge Companion to Global Popular Culture*. Routledge.

Lecercle, Jean-Jacques. 2019. "What's in a Monster?" *Anglistik* 30 (3): 17–26. https://doi.org/10.33675/ANGL/2019/3/4.

Marak, Katarzyna. 2021. "Independent Horror Games between 2010 and 2020: Selected Characteristic Features and Discernible Trends." *Images. The International Journal of European Film, Performing Arts and Audiovisual Communication* 29 (38): 175–90. https://doi.org/10.14746/i.2021.38.11.

Mittman, Asa Simon. 2012. "Introduction: The Impact of Monsters and Monster Studies." In *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*. Routledge.

Mittman, Asa Simon, and Marcus Hensel. 2018. "Introduction: 'A Marvel of Monsters.'" In *Classic Readings on Monster Theory*, ix–xvi. Demonstrare, Volume One. Arc Humanities Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvfxvc3p.5.

Newman-Stille, Derek. 2018. *We Shall Be Monsters: Mary Shelley's Frankenstein 200 Years On*. Renaissance.

Nordmarken, Sonny. 2014. "Becoming Ever More Monstrous: Feeling Transgender In-Betweenness." *Qualitative Inquiry* 20 (1): 37–50. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800413508531.

"Monster (n.)." n.d. In *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Accessed August 14, 2023. https:// www.etymonline.com/search?q=monster.

Palko, Abigail, and Andrea O'Reilly, eds. 2021. *Monstrous Mothers: Troubling Tropes*. First Edition. Bradford, Ontario: Demeter Press.

Reyes, Xavier Aldana. 2016. "Introduction: The Affective-Corporeal Dimensions of Horror." In *Horror Film and Affect*. Routledge.

Shelley, Mary. 2017. *Frankenstein: Annotated for Scientists, Engineers, and Creators of All Kinds*. Edited by David H. Guston, Ed Finn, Jason Scott Robert, and Charles E. Robinson. Cambridge: The MIT Press. https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/6/oa_edited_volume/book/51933.

Shildrick, Margrit. 2002. *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Story, Bomani J., director. *The Angry Black Girl and Her Monster*. Crypt TV, 2023.

Stryker, Susan. 2006. "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage (1994)." In *The Transgender Studies Reader*, edited by Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, 244–56. New York: Routledge.

Švelch, Jaroslav. 2013. "Monsters by the Numbers: Controlling Monstrosity in Video Games." In *Monster Culture in the 21st Century : A Reader*, edited by Marina Levina and Diem-My T. Bui, 193–208. New York: Bloomsbury Academic. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781628928198.

Young, Elizabeth. 2008. *Black Frankenstein: The Making of an American Metaphor*. New York and London: New York University Press.

Zigarovich, Jolene. 2018. "The Trans Legacy of Frankenstein." *Science Fiction Studies* 45 (2): 260–72. https://doi.org/10.5621/sciefictstud.45.2.0260.

PAGES MISSING

FROM THIS FREE SAMPLE

List of Contributors

Yeojin Kim & Shane Carreon

Yeojin Kim is a Professor of Instruction at University at Buffalo/Singapore Institute of Management. She received her Ph.D in the English Department at Binghamton University, State University of New York. She was a Korean Government Honor Fellowship student in 2016. Her primary research interests are cultural studies, transnational cinema studies, transmedia studies, and gender studies. She is a contributor to the book, *Cinematic Women, From Objecthood to Heroism* (Vernon, 2020).

Shane Carreon is Associate Professor in the College of Communication, Art, and Design at the University of the Philippines Cebu. His creative work practice and research interests include writing and literature, multimodal artistic expressions, gender studies, translation, visual culture, popular culture, and decoloniality.

Anson Koch-Rein

Anson Koch-Rein is Assistant Professor in the Division of Liberal Arts at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts, where he teaches gender studies, literature, and humanities classes, including "The Monster as Metaphor." He holds a PhD from Emory University's Graduate Institute of the Liberal Arts with a certificate in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. His writing on horror and monsters has appeared in TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly, LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory, and the anthology TransGothic in Literature and Culture.

Youn Soo Kim Goldstein

Youn Soo Kim Goldstein is Ambrose Amos Shaw Assistant Professor of Localization and Translation in the Department of Foreign Languages at Weber State University, where she teaches translation, localization, and Korean language. She received her PhD in Translation Studies at Binghamton University, State University of New York in 2019. Her research interests include contemporary Korean literature, translation theories, and decoloniality.

Min-Chi Chen

Min-Chi Chen received her PhD in the Comparative Literature Department at Binghamton University (SUNY), USA. Her dissertation focuses on the FBI's criminal profiling techniques and their social influence on crime novels, films, and television series. Her research interests include media studies, cultural studies, crime fiction, and criminology, and has recently published in *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* (2023).

Aarzoo Singh & Angie Fazekas

Dr. Angie Fazekas is an Assistant Professor at the Women and Gender Studies Institute at the University of Toronto. Their research focus is adolescent online engagement and behavior, social media, sex education, and pop culture. In their doctoral dissertation, they considered how teenage fans interact with fanfiction as a mechanism for exploring their sexuality. Their publications include a co-authored chapter in Final Girls, Feminism, and Popular Culture and a chapter in Fandom, Now in Color.

Dr. Aarzoo Singh is an Assistant professor at the Department of Women and Gender Studies at the University of Winnipeg. As an interdisciplinary scholar, her research focuses on the theoretical and experiential connections between storytelling, objects, locations, and displacement for the South Asian Diaspora. Her current research and teaching interests focus on reparative justice narratives, alternative epistemologies, affective and personal archives, and postcolonial subjectivity. She was interviewed on her research for the British Museum of Colonisation's platform Paper Trails and her published work can be found in *DisClosure: A Journal of Social Theory.*

Joshua Nieubuurt

Joshua Nieubuurt is a PhD candidate in Digital Rhetoric at Old Dominion University. His previous published research has included topics in the realm of post-humanism, mis/disinformation, and New Materialisms. All of which specifically focus on attempting to breach through the anthropocentric lens to consider artifacts and other non-human things as potential agents dwelling alongside humans in the world. He currently resides in the lush subtropical island of Okinawa, Japan in where he holds several adjunct faculty positions in the fields of TESL, Humanities, Writing, and English Studies.

Morgan Kate Pinder

MK Pinder writer and PhD candidate at Deakin University, Australia studying eco-Gothic representation in media. Her research interests are in the intersection of genre, transmedia narratives, and ecocriticism. She writes about nature, video games, Gothic texts, and literary adaptation.

Mychal Reiff-Shanks

Mychal Reiff-Shanks is a Ph.D. candidate in the Moving Images Studies program at Georgia State University. They are a Black queer, non-binary person whose pronouns are they/them/theirs. An avid fan of media all their life, that idle love turned into a critical passion for Media Studies. Mychal's studies focus on aspects of their identity, such as African American, queer, and gender representation in media. They have been published in the journal Studies in the Fantastic by the University of Tampa Press for their work on Lovecraft

Country and the use of historical reenactment within the show as a possible tool for Black cultural healing. The one thing that they hope to accomplish with their career is to inspire and encourage others to think critically about the media they consume and give them the tools to make media criticism accessible for those in and out of academia.

Adam P. Wadenius

Adam P. Wadenius earned his Master's degree in Film Studies from San Francisco State University in 2007. He is currently an Assistant Professor of Film & Media Studies with Cosumnes River College in California, where he teaches film courses on topics of history, style, genre, and director's cinema, as well as media courses on issues of race, sex, and gender representation in the various modes of mass communication. His primary research interests include the work of Julia Kristeva, horror and the abject, postmodern cultural theory, and the concept of the foreigner in post-9/11 America. His current writing project examines the historical tensions between classical Hollywood cinema and art cinema narration as representations of Kristeva's ideas on signifying processes in language, specifically, the dialectic oscillation between symbolic and semiotic structures.

Eleanor Gratz

Eleanor Gratz is a graduate of the M.A. program in the Department of Film Studies at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. She previously attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she graduated with highest honors. Eleanor's work focuses on representations of the body, the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality in film, global cinema, essay filmmaking, horror cinema, and film aesthetics. She foregrounds these topics in her critical film scholarship, production projects, and role as an adjunct faculty member at UNCW.

Ryanne Probst

Ryanne Probst is a composition and first-year seminar instructor at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. Her research tends to follow the monstrous—modern-day Medusas and gorgons, the ladies who go bump in the night—and her writing reflects those explorations. She uses feminist scholarship and historical perspectives to complicate the ways we talk about gender, the feminine, and the feminine body. Her work has been published on Betches.com and SheKnows.com, among others. She resides in North Carolina with her dog Buffy: slayer of naps, vanquisher of houseflies.

Sheridyn Villarreal

Sheridyn Villarreal is an art historian and independent curator based in Chicago, Illinois. Their areas of research include intersections of art and

technology, queer art, and the art of Latin America and Latinx diasporic communities. They received their BA in Art History from Columbia College, specializing in Modern and Contemporary art movements and theory. Sheridyn's practice is informed by the field of transhumanism, posthuman-feminism, and critical queer theory. They are currently guest curator at the Hokin Gallery, adapting their research on the cyborg figure into a survey of contemporary queer and transgender artists invoking posthuman aesthetics to relate their experiences of gender nonconformity and transition.

Charlito O. Codizar

Charlito O. Codizar is a tenured faculty in the senior high school department of Sacred Heart School – Ateneo de Cebu. He is the current head of the Humanities and Social Sciences strand. He received his bachelor's degree major in English, master's degree in literature, and doctoral degree in Literature and Communication from Cebu Normal University. He is interested in literatures of the marginalized and the minority, magical realism, and historical fiction.

Vukadinović Maja

Professor of Vocational Studies, Novi Sad School of Business, Novi Sad, Serbia) is an individual reviewer of the anthology.

Index

T

U

V

W

Z