BURIED AT THE CROSSROADS: EXPLORING THE INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN MONSTROSITY AND QUEER STORYTELLING

by

CASPER BYRNE

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Approved: *Quinn Miller, Ph.D.*
Primary Thesis Advisor

Since the publication of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in 1819, Gothic monsters have become dominant figures of difference in the canon of Western media. Existing at the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, and geography, Gothic monsters embody the signifiers that their creators associate with deviancy and danger. These constructions often target queer-identifying people as deviant, a pattern which has persisted across the last 200 years. However, despite their vilification within the Gothic monster genre, monsters and horror media are incredibly popular within the larger queer community. This paper, through a mixture of personal narrative and academic research, explores the historic relationship between monsters and queer identity, as well as contemporary attempts to subvert the queer monster into an empowering force. I will pull from the original texts of *Frankenstein* (1819) and *Dracula* (1897) to understand the popular origins of Gothic monsters and compare them to *Frankissstein* (2019) and *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), which are queer retellings of each novel. In comparing these works I will explore how queer readings of the original texts have evolved, and how these modern adaptations have dealt (or not dealt) with the legacies of their source materials. While not the only factor, the length to which authors go to unpack the relationship between queer identity and monstrosity can largely affect the impact their works can have as authentic pieces of queer media.

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Table of Contents

Preamble 5
Chapter 1 7
Chapter 2 13
Chapter 3 28
Chapter 4 46
Post-amble 61
Bibliography 64

Preamble

As the skirt clung to my sweaty legs, I knew I was the monster. At first, I didn't recognise the feeling. It wasn't one that I was familiar with, at least not so directly. But quickly the panic grew, in time with my pulse. I had always felt at odds with the world around me, but the feeling had only been a slight tug. Now it was furious, grasping at something deep inside my chest. The room felt tight as my eyes scanned, searching for confirmation that I was as observed as I felt exposed. No one looked up, but they didn't need to; I was watching enough for everyone. I needed to leave, to flee, to save everyone from a danger they couldn't even perceive. I didn't have fangs or scales or wings, but I didn't need to. I was a monster all the same. As I pushed through the nearest exit door, I couldn't separate the fear from the shame, a feeling that would eat at me for months.

For as intense as I make this experience sound, the catalyst for my monstrous transformation was unassuming: waiting in line for the bathroom. In one of my college campus's main buildings, they had installed a large gender-neutral restroom, a long room with several stalls. Since coming out as Trans*, I had become increasingly dependent on this installation, as it was one of the few reliable places I could go without compromising on my gender[1]. There was also never a line (possibly because the lack of gendered signage was a turn-off for the average person). At least, there wasn't usually a line. The sudden presence of a crowd outside the

[1] For the sake of clarity -- as compromise is often a positively coded word -- compromising my gender, to me, is the act of inhabiting a space in a manner that knowingly allows others to assume my identity based on their preconceived notions. My usage of the men's restroom, for example, relies on others assuming that I identify as a man. In exchange for the ability to use those facilities, I must momentarily give up control over how I am perceived, because announcing my genderqueerness in a binary public bathroom is not an experiment I feel comfortable conducting. The tradeoff, unfortunately, is an acute awareness of the degree to which outside recognition seems to dictate my visibility as a Trans* person. Regardless of how accurate my assessment of my own visibility is, the feeling of compromise is often one of invisibility and slow burning grief.

bathroom was even more bizarre given that it was a Wednesday in August, a time when campus was usually empty. My realisation that the line was comprised almost entirely of young kids from an on-campus science camp was embarrassingly slow, and it brought with it an unfamiliar feeling of dread.

Alongside the campers I also saw the camp counsellors, adults who were waiting patiently for the campers to finish. As the strange feeling continued to bubble up from somewhere in my stomach, I started to wonder what they thought of me. Still early in my social transition, I had only recently become comfortable with a new name and a new wardrobe, one which consisted largely of ill-fitting and ill-styled skirts. It had been surprisingly hard to find skirts for someone my size, especially ones that didn't scream "eccentric great-aunt." I was proud of the clothes I had finally assembled, but in that moment the euphoria of thrifted polyester did little to drown out the anxiety brewing in the back of my head. "They must see you as a man pretending to be a woman", a sour voice somewhere inside me reasoned. "They must see you as a threat."

There was no way to know what the counsellors saw me as, just as there was no way to tell if they even saw me. However, the thought that I was a threat to the children ahead of me was enough to make me spiral, enough to make me wonder if the Rowlings of the world were right. I felt monstrous, misshapen, malformed, my skin a too-thick mask to let anyone see the person I am still trying so hard to be. I had always loved monsters, but in that moment the feeling of being one was all but unbearable. Unable to hide my shame, I pushed my way through the nearest set of doors and out into the summer sun.

This experience was in large part my motivation to write this thesis. With the feeling of painful otherness lingering in my mind, I became fixated on the idea of monsters, obsessed with

finding new ways to understand my feelings. I needed to find monsters that were unmistakably and unapologetically queer, capable of transmuting the shame directed at them into gleeful, furious pride. With the help of my advisors, I selected two texts: *Interview with the Vampire*, and *Frankissstein*, books that seemed to drip with queerness. However, I would soon learn that my hunt for the perfect queer monster was a far more complicated quest than I had anticipated.

Chapter 1

My first moment of humility came in realising that I could not describe a monster in concrete terms to save my life. As it turns out, no amount of gesticulation can make the phrase "something scary" sound like a meaningful definition of monstrosity. However, the texts I found painted a vivid picture, and I am in a better place to explain how monsters work and why we make them. For the purpose of this thesis, I will be focusing on Gothic monsters, as the Gothic tradition contains many of the most recognizable monsters in Western culture. The Gothic literary tradition, which was an offshoot of Romanticism, began in the tail end of the 18th century, and attained massive popularity across the 19th century and beyond. Part of the allure of the Gothic novel was its use of mystery, darkness, and fear to excite and terrify readers. Stories often featured decaying castles, supernatural events, and dark secrets lost to time, all of which offered readers a chance to measure their own humanity against the horrors contained within the novel. On the anatomy of Gothic literature, scholar Jack Halberstam writes, "Gothic fiction is a technology of subjectivity, one which produces the deviant subjectivities opposite which the normal, the healthy, and the pure can be known. Gothic… may be loosely defined as the rhetorical style and narrative structure designed to produce fear and desire within the reader"

(Halberstam 2). Prior to the introduction of monsters, Gothic narratives like *Jane Eyre* utilised this rhetorical model, pitting the pure and headstrong Jane against the corrupt and foreign Bertha Mason, who, while not a monster in the literal sense, still haunts the narrative as a monstrously sexual and racial body. In contrast, Jane is presented as intelligent, resilient, and above all, *English* — all traits which the text does not attribute to Bertha. The effect is a clear delineation between sane/insane, peaceful/violent, and domestic/foreign, all of which correlate according to the text's internal logic. However, despite these signifiers of difference, Bertha Mason is still held to be human — an identity which affords her a level of sympathy that is visible throughout the novel.

However, Gothic rhetoric would intensify with the invention of the Gothic monster. One of the most influential Gothic Monster stories was Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* published in 1818, which quickly achieved mainstream recognition. Unlike monstrous characters like Bertha Mason, Gothic monsters were explicitly inhuman, "mixed and matched [from] a variety of signifiers of difference to fabricate the deviant body" (Halberstam 3). Filled to bursting with every horrifying trait the author could imagine, Gothic monsters like Frankenstein's, Dracula (1897), Jekyll/Hyde (1886), and the Werewolf (made popular in the 19th century by Leitch Ritchie under the name of *The Man-Wolf* in 1831) provided lumpy, misshapen, and perilous bodies onto which an audience could project their deepest fears and desires. In this way, Gothic monsters functioned as machines, technologies constructed out of the signifiers of countless bodies and identities. As Halberstam writes, "If the Gothic novel produces an easy answer to the question of what threatens national security and prosperity (the monster), the Gothic monster represents many answers to the question of who must be removed from the community at large" (Halberstam 3). Monsters provided a terrifying glimpse into the currents bubbling below

mainstream English culture, the miasma of fears that solidify into abject bodies. However, as I will explore in more detail throughout this section, the threat of Gothic monsters is not that they represent any form of objective evil, but rather that they are a repository for everything that threatens the social norms that separate normalcy from deviancy. Monsters are as much a sign of revolution as ruin.

To better understand the construction and appeal of Gothic monsters, I turn to the essay, "Seven Theses on Monsters," in which scholar Jefferey Cohen offers seven co-constitutive characteristics of monstrosity. I will be outlining these theses, while stitching in elements of Jack Halberstam's book, *Skin Shows*, which applies a lens that is both Gothic and Queer to the production of modern monsters. First and foremost, monsters, according to Cohen, are "pure culture." In essence, this claim describes how monsters are artificial bodies their creators build from a subjective and context dependent vantage point. The monster is, Cohen writes, "an embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place. The monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy (ataractic or incendiary), giving them life and an uncanny independence. The monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read" (Cohen 4). Through this lens, producing monsters is a consumptive process rather than a productive one, pulling from the fears, anxieties, prejudices, and desires available in the moments of creation. Because monsters do not produce fear, they are "historically dependant rather than psychologically universal" (Halberstam 6). This helps to explain why monsters are so frequently subject to reinvention and why it is often difficult for modern viewers to find vintage monsters frightening. Dracula, who I will touch on more later, is the perfect example of this process, as the vaguely antisemitic looking Count has been replaced time and time again by newer, "scarier" versions of the Vampire. Halberstam

speaks to the process of renewing the monster, writing, "the body that scares and appals changes over time, as do the individual characteristics that add up to monstrosity, as the preferred interpretations of that monstrosity" (Halberstam 21). Monsters are thus modular entities, frames over which new monstrous bodies can be reshaped and recast. Halberstam describes this modular body as an "economic form" and a monstrous technology, spinning horrifying bodies out of unwanted and disparate elements of race, class, gender, and sexuality (Halberstam 21). Essentially, monsters are the "biggest bang for your buck" approach to demonising other people.

Cohen outlines this effect when he describes the common rhetorical uses of monsters throughout ancient and modern history. In his fifth thesis, "The Monster Polices the Borders of the Possible," Cohen describes how monsters have long served as terrifying reminders that "one is better off safely contained within one's own domestic sphere than abroad, away from the watchful eyes of the state. Invoking through images of domesticity a resting state of wealth, Whiteness, and high gendered passivity, the monster prevents mobility (intellectual, geographic, or sexual), delimiting the social spaces through which private bodies may move. To step outside this official geography is to risk attack by some monstrous border patrol or (worse) to become monstrous oneself" (Cohen 12). For example, many monsters embody racist warnings against miscegenation, a fear Cohen traces back as far as the book of Genesis and maps onto movies like *King Kong* (1933) and Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979). In all three instances, the monstrosity of the monsters is largely based in their predatory relationships with a White, female victim, a fear which Cohen recognises as representative of racist depictions of interracial relationships (Cohen 15). *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* can be read through a similarly prohibitory lens, promoting (for example) the dangers of scientific meddling and the purported risks of deregulating women's sexuality respectively. In this case, the term prohibitory indicates monsters whose existences are

designed to warn against certain behaviours or ways of being. According to Halberstam, "rather than condoning the perversity they recorded, Gothic authors, in fact, seemed quite scrupulous about taking a moral stand against the unnatural acts that produce monstrosity" (Cohen 12). Reading Stoker's work for example, it is difficult to ignore his constant allusions to Western superiority and his opaque jabs at the work of New Women. However, no matter how prohibitory authors like Stoker attempt to be, the boundary violating body of the monster is as much a product of desire as fear.

Monsters reside in the liminality between binary categories, and thus embody both a profound fear of disorder and a secret desire for the possibilities that it can bring. Monsters, according to Cohen, refuse to "participate in the classificatory 'order of things'" (Cohen 6), which makes the monster a dangerous creature of ontological liminality. Residing at the horizon of identity and meaning, monsters pose an ever-present risk of intruding into a carefully ordered and binary world. In a world supposedly built on clear distinctions such as man/woman, good/evil, heterosexual/homosexual, monsters offer a "third term" which challenges the existence (and thus legitimacy) of binary systems (Cohen 6). The idea of a third term comes from the (in)famous scholar Marjorie Garber, whose studies on cross-dressing and genderqueer people led her to label them a "Third Term" in the gender binary. The Third does not refer to a singular group or sex, rather being a "mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of possibility" (Garber 10). In a vacuum, the addition of a Third is not enough to tip the scales, however when all visible societal structures are built on the assumption of a binary, the introduction of an irreconcilable element can easily prove fatal. As Cohen writes, "monsters are a gleeful violation of scientific laws, threatening to usurp them as natural law" (Cohen 6). Monsters possess the frightening (and exciting) possibility of challenging the "natural" and

revealing it to be artificial; they infect the structural components of our world and demand a radical reassessment of hierarchy and order (Cohen 7). This reality is, at least to those who have built their identity and derive power from binary systems, a terrifying prospect. However, for those who find themselves at odds with the dominant systems — or even those who are merely curious — monsters offer a chance to inhabit a world without the artificial limits of a binary construction.

It is at this intersection of fear and desire that the transformative effects of monstrosity are most clearly visible. For audiences, "fantasies of aggression, domination, and inversion are allowed safe expression in the clearly delimited and permanently liminal space" (Cohen 17) that the monster provides. In this context, monsters become an escapist fantasy of unchecked bodily pleasure and exhilarating fear. Monsters have also historically offered a smokescreen for the exploration of (mostly sexual) societal taboos. However, the acceptability of monsters is highly dependent on the ability to put them back where they belong when audiences are done playing with them. Cohen writes, "escapist delight gives way to horror only when the monster threatens to overstep these boundaries, to destroy or deconstruct the thin walls of category and culture" (Cohen 17). Within the realm of early Gothic monster novels, the fear of escape manifested most clearly as a fear of reproduction, a term that, while strongly associated with human reproduction through birth, broadly speaks to the propagation of any bodies or behaviours that contradict the dominant narratives of the human and the normal. Monsters possess the capacity to reproduce physically, as well as socially, spreading deviant beliefs, sexualities, and expressions of self. Vampires for example, reproduce through seducing their victims and giving their new vampires the tools to further seduce other people. Halberstam refers to this practice as the reproduction of deviant sexuality, a form of reproduction which exists in opposition to traditional human birth

(Halberstam 100). The fear of reproduction outlines not only why monsters possess an enduring and prolific fear factor, but also why they must be killed or otherwise dispatched at the end of the story. Should the monster survive the end of the book, so too do the deviant bodies, sexualities, and existences that reside within it.

Chapter 2

With a working knowledge of monstrosity under my belt, I decided it was time to put my understanding of monstrous form and rhetoric to the test. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) were my first choices, as they are among the most popular and influential Gothic monster stories of the 19th century. Both texts (re)invented their respective monsters and gave readers both casual and academic an immense canvas onto which they could project and analyse. In this section I will be comparing the two narratives, paying particular attention to the ways that each author constructs and represents monstrosity, as this understanding will attune critiques not only to what each author considered monstrous, but by extension the traits they considered normal and human.

Considered the original Gothic monster novel, as well as one of the first science fiction stories, Mary Shelley famously wrote *Frankenstein* in 1818 at the age of 19 while vacationing with her husband Percy Shelley, Lord Byron, and Dr. John Polidori. Trapped inside and allegedly tasked with writing a ghost story, Mary wrote *Frankenstein*, subtitled *The Modern Prometheus*. The novel tells the story of Victor Frankenstein, a Swiss medical student who becomes enamoured with the sciences and obsessed with shattering the boundary between life and death. Victor succeeds in his goal, but much like his Promethean namesake, his actions

invite unintended and far-reaching consequences. Victor creates a monster over which he has no control and whom he fears beyond measure. The creature, shunned by his master and feared by everyone he meets, resorts to a life of solitude, fuelled by a deep and abiding hatred towards the man who made it. The novel utilises an epistolary format, conveying its story through journal entries and letters. Upon initial release, *Frankenstein* was met with deeply mixed reviews, with more conservative reviewers recoiling from its heretical writing and content (Baldick 338). However, any negative reviews were unable to contain the novel's meteoric rise in popularity, which resulted in the public's widespread adoption of Victor Frankenstein and his monster as cultural icons.

The same can be said for Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, which drew inspiration from John Polidori's *The Vampyre* and Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* to revolutionise the vampire as a pop culture icon. Initially published in 1897, Stoker's novel tells the story of Jonathan Harker, an English legal clerk, and his battle with Lord Dracula, an Eastern European count and vampire. The story begins with Harker exploring and attempting to escape Dracula's decaying castle, but eventually returns to England where he and his compatriots fight and eventually kill Dracula and his vampiric progeny. Like *Frankenstein*, Stoker also uses an epistolary format, conveying information through a mixture of journal entries, letters, and transcriptions of phonograph records. While the epistolary novel had been immensely popular since the mid eighteenth centuty,it had fallen out of fashion by the 19th century (Gottleib, n.d.). However, through the epistolary format, Stoker was able to weave several narratives together, creating a powerful sense of urgency and mystery as Jonathan's forces attempt to solve the mystery of Dracula's business in London and the sudden appearance of other vampiric figures in the city. Stoker's

work was instrumental in establishing many now-ubiquitous vampiric tropes as well as cementing vampires as one of the most popular recurring monsters in Western fiction.

Aside from their shared narrative devices, both novels feature monsters that fall within the category of the totalising monster. Halberstam introduces the concept of the totalising monster early in his work, building on the idea of monsters as technological and economic bodies. Halberstam explains that totalising monsters allow for multiple strains of monstrosity to exist within the same form, "[threatening] community from all sides and from its very core rather than from a simple outside" (Halberstam 29). Unlike the sea monsters on the edge of old maps who simply warned sailors against wandering too far from home, totalising monsters could serve infinite metaphorical functions from their position at the centre of class, race, sexuality, and gender. *Frankenstein,* for example, was quickly picked up for its power as metaphor, and the text is infamously interpretable across a variety of contexts. As one scholar writes, "[the text] can be a later version of the Faust myth, or an early version of the modern myth of the mad scientist; the id on the rampage, the proletariat running amok, or what happens when a man tries to have a baby without a woman" (Butler 439). However, for many who read *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* upon their respective releases, their multi-faceted bodies would have likely been seen primarily through the lens of race. As Halberstam writes, "race discrimination, indeed, displaces or at least supplements class hierarchies in this narrative partly because the theme of visible monstrosity demands that identity be something that can be seen" (Halberstam 40). In *Frankenstein*, the visibility of the monster is rooted largely in a terror of the East.

In her essay "*Frankenstein*, Racial Science, and the Yellow Peril," scholar Anne K. Mellor explores the relationship between Frankenstein's Monster, the growing influence of Orientalism in the West, and intense fears of the Far East. Concerning the opening chapters of

the book Mellor writes, “a yellow-skinned man crossing the steppes of Russia and Tartary with long black hair and dun-coloured eyes—most of Mary Shelley’s nineteenth-century readers would immediately have recognised the creature as a member of the Mongolian race, one of the five races of man first classified in 1795 by Johann Friedrich Blumenbach” (Mellor 484). While offensively outdated today, Blumenbach’s taxonomy of the human race was cutting edge science when Shelley first wrote *Frankenstein*. The five races (Caucasian, Mongolian, American, Ethiopian, and Malay) accounted for every major continent, and Blumenbach considered Caucasians to be the original group, with each subsequent group branching off it at some point in time. William Lawrence, a follower of Blumenbach (and friend of Percy and Mary Shelley) would take the idea of the five races a step further, attributing different moral and mental characteristics to each race (Mellor 486). Lawrence’s hierarchy described the Mongolian race as civilised but stagnant, resisting the rapid development that Lawrence argued made White civilisation a superior force. However, Mellor cites Lawrence as writing, “when [united under one leader], war and desolation have been the objects of the association. Unrelenting slaughter, without distinction of condition, age, or sex, and universal destruction have marked the progress of their conquests, unattended by with any changes or institutions capable of benefiting the human race… (Mellor 487). This view of Eastern people formed the basis of Orientalism, a monolithic and externalising view of Eastern cultures as antithetical to the Western world.

During the 19th century, Orientalism was as much a fad as a fear, and Western Europe became immersed in a heavily (if not entirely) fictionalised understanding of Eastern cultures, an image which served as “one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other” (Said 68). Within the body of the 19th century Gothic monster, Orientalism was inextricably linked to every other element of its construction. For readers of *Frankenstein*, the effects of Orientalism

would have been most apparent in descriptions of Victor's creation. Victor describes the creature as having dull yellow eyes and "yellow skin that scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath" (Shelley 38). Victor then goes on to describe his creature again, lamenting that "a mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch" (39). Shelley's use of a mummy as analogous to the monster is historically fitting, as mummies were an entrenched part of the Orientalism craze, with Western museums regularly looting Egyptian tombs and displaying their contents to eager audiences. The mummies available to European crowds at the time would have had yellowed skin and, according to Mellor, "may further link the creature with the Asian or Mongol race" (Mellor 487). While this detail may seem like a stretch, a speech during the creature's account of its journey indicates that Shelley was aware of Oriental stereotypes of the time. As the creature describes its self-education it says that it learned of the "slothful Asiatics" (Shelley 87), one of the primary views of Eastern peoples under Orientalism. Not only does Shelley invoke the monster's otherness though Asian stereotypes, but she also reasserts the danger of the Orient through her depiction of its people as monstrous.

The impact of Orientalism would only grow throughout the 19th century, strongly impacting art, philosophy, science, and literature — including the construction of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Taking place in the Eastern European country of Transylvania, Stoker describes the region as "one of the wildest and least known portions of Europe" (Stoker 10). Through Jonathan Harker's observations, Stoker paints the locals (especially Slovakian people) as superstitious barbarians and their countries as technologically and structurally inferior to the well-ordered world of Western Europe (Stoker 10-11). Dracula himself is an Oriental stereotype defined by his decaying castle, strange mannerisms, and his uncanny distortions of White European social

ideals. Upon first meeting, Harker notes that Dracula's English is excellent "but with a strange intonation" (25). The Count also possesses, according to Harker, a "marked physiognomy" (27):

> His face was a strong—a very strong—aquiline, with high bridge of the thin nose and peculiarly arched nostrils; with lofty domed forehead, and hair growing scantily round the temples, but profusely elsewhere. His eyebrows were massive, almost meeting over the nose, and with bush hair that seemed to curl in its own profusion. The mouth, so far as I could see it under the heavy moustache, was fixed and rather cruel looking, with peculiarly sharp white teeth; these protruded over the lips, whose remarkable ruddiness showed astonishing vitality in a man of his years. For the rest, his ears were pale and at the tops extremely pointed; the chin was broad and strong, and the cheeks firm though thin. The general effect was one of extraordinary pallor. (28)

Stoker's lengthy description of the Count reveals a description in keeping with anti-semitic representations of Eastern European Jews, a group which, by the end of the 19th century, had become "essentially criminalised and pathologized [bodies]" (Halberstam 95). As with the "Yellow Man" of the early 19th century, scientific racism had nearly entirely replaced religious prejudice with a "factual" basis for anti-Jewish discrimination, one built on biological inferiority and genetic degeneracy. Stoker fixates on this idea throughout the novel, constantly sorting his characters along lines of genetic integrity. Dr. Seward, speaking to the valour and integrity of Quincy Morris, states, "if America can go on breeding men like that, she will be a power in the world indeed" (Stoker 199). In contrast, the marked faces of the vampires and the mental patient Renfield reveal malignant and defective insides as legible to an outside audience. "Faces and bodies," Halberstam explains, "mark the other as evil so that he can be recognised and ostracised" (Halberstam 93). However, to maintain the legibility of Stoker's classificatory

system, he relies on bodies that are merely representational of the groups they are meant to signify. Just as the "Yellow Man" of Shelley's text overgeneralises Asian groups for the purpose of rhetoric, so too does the "Jewish" body of Dracula, which is an "aggregate of race, class, and gender" (Halberstam 88). Under these conditions, the bodies of both Frankenstein's Monster and Dracula become all-purpose monsters (Halberstam 93) which can be used to target a wide range of groups, behaviours, and beliefs as deviant and dangerous.

However, in both narratives, the material threat of both monsters is one of sexuality, which exists both as an independent threat as well as a modifier for the other tensions that exist within the monster's body. For Western audiences, the East was a source of diverse and deviant sexualities, and the bodies of monsters like Frankenstein's and Dracula served a cautionary and prohibitory function, warning readers against the dual threats of racial contamination and deviant sexual practices. For example, one of Victor's central terrors throughout *Frankenstein* is that his creation will, if given a mate, reproduce and destroy the world as he knows it: "Even if they were to leave Europe, and inhabit the desert of the new world, yet one of the first results of those sympathies for which the daemon thirsted would be children, and a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth, who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror" (Shelley 125).

This *race* of devils, like the monsters who bred them, would be similarly unstable in their gender, racial, economic, and sexual identities, feeding into anti-miscegenation narratives of the 19th century. Sexuality, rather than being a sexual act itself, is instead figured as reproductive control, a power Victor fears in the hands of a monster. Even if the monsters follow through with their promise to move to the New World, Victor argues, there would be no stopping their influence from someday coming back — a fear England was similarly facing in the rising

prevalence of Eastern culture and bodies. However, at no point does the monster demonstrate an interest in sexuality, having only spoken of companionship. As Halberstam points out, Victor's fears are a form of projection, hypocritical considering his own desire to create a new species of beings who would bless him as their creator (Shelley 35; Halberstam 45). Later in the novel, out of momentary sympathy, Victor agrees to make his creation a female companion. However, Victor's fear is so great that it leads him "trembling with passion, (Shelley 125)" to tear the unfinished creation to pieces. The following morning, Victor reflects on the leftover viscera, remarking "I almost felt as if I had mangled the living flesh of a human being" (Shelley 128). In this moment, the line between monster and human momentarily blurs, almost revealing the monstrous elements within Victor that motivated his act of violence.

Some scholars, such as Anne Mellor, read Victor's projection as proof of homosexual subtext and his violent destruction of a female monster as a fear of uninhibited female sexual agency. Mellor's argument, put simply, is that Victor fears that his female creature will be larger and uglier than the original, will refuse to comply with the contract between himself and his creature, and will possess the desire and power to seek a mate beyond Victor's original creation (Mellor 119). "What Victor Frankenstein truly fears is as such. A woman who is sexually liberated, free to choose her own life, her own sexual partner (by force, if necessary), and to propagate at will can appear only monstrously ugly to Victor Frankenstein, for she defies that sexist aesthetic that insists that women be small, delicate, modest, passive, and sexually pleasing -- but available only to their lawful husbands" (120). Halberstam builds on this idea, noting that Victor's murderous act is a radical act of dehumanisation, one which he justifies as a moral necessity, "a compulsion to save the world from the contaminating potential of a 'race of devils'" (Halberstam 48). Both Halberstam and Mellor make the astute observation that Victor was

entirely willing to create a male, despite its ability to do all the same things that he pre-emptively murders the female for. The implication of these observations is that an identical expression of sexual agency is somehow more dangerous in the hands of a woman. The male creation, still feared but very much intact, is viewed as a pre-sexual being, threatening only in theory, whereas the female comes fully armed (and supposedly pre-programmed) with the intention of reproducing.

Dracula in turn amplifies the narrative of reproduction, throwing yet another fertile, foreign sexual threat into the chaos of late 19th century British sexuality. By the late 19th century, sexual orientation was beginning to become a more visible discourse in the scientific and literary worlds, with an emphasis on male homoerotic love. Male homoeroticism was of course nothing new, but the idea of recognizable, pathologized homosexuality had only recently emerged. When it did, sexologists like Havelock Ellis and John Symonds labelled it as a "sexual inversion," which described a man or woman who possessed the sexual drive of the opposite gender. For Victorian audiences, the concept of sexual inversion was a terrifying threat. Not only did homosexuality between men damage the power structures of institutions like marriage, the concept of inversion also invited the concept of the "sexually self-motivated woman," a figure English society was entirely unwilling to accept (Craft 115). Dracula exacerbated these fears, threatening to produce an army of sexually aggressive women, who, along with himself, were equipped with the means of forcibly penetrating their victims. According to Craft, this image served two purposes: "first because it masks and deflects the anxiety consequent to a more direct representation of same sex eroticism; and second, […] because it justifies a violent expulsion of this deformed femininity" (Craft 111). Just as Frankenstein's Monster made legible the threat of

freeing women’s sexuality, so too does Dracula, whose feminized and fertile body evokes the existential threat of sexual inversion.

The reader’s first exposure to Vampiric sexuality comes early in the text during an interaction between Harker and Dracula’s “daughters," three attractive women who attempt to drink Harker’s blood while he explores the halls of Dracula’s castle after dark. As Harker writes in his fictitious journal: “There is something about them that made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time some deadly fear. I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips. It is not good to note this down, lest some day it should meet Mina’s eyes and cause her pain; but it is the truth” (Stoker 49). While the act Harker imagines is a kiss, the desire he describes implies that vampiric feeding is of an unambiguously sexual nature, a detail which Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* (1872) established nearly thirty years prior in the relationship between the titular vampire and her young female victim.

Within the context of *Dracula,* the inverse sexual nature of Dracula’s daughters is twofold: First, they are the initiators, taking on a traditionally masculine sexual role to pursue Jonathan. They are a threat for the same reason that Victor Frankenstein feared to build a female creature: their superior strength allows them to forcibly choose sexual partners. Second, Jonathan, placed in a subordinate sexual role, prepares himself (with equal parts excitement and fear) to be penetrated. Writing about this scene, scholar Christopher Craft notes, “Harker awaits an erotic fulfilment that entails both the dissolution of the boundaries of the self and the thorough subversion of conventional Victorian gender code” (Craft 108). In submitting to the coercion of Dracula’s daughters, Harker is giving up his identity as a Victorian man in exchange for the fulfilment of erotic desire. However, this exchange is ultimately foiled when Dracula bursts in and tears the woman from Harker’s neck: “How dare you touch him, any of you? How dare you

cast eyes on him when I had forbidden it? Back, I tell you all! This man belongs to me! Beware how you meddle with him, or you'll have to deal with me" (Stoker 51). To this, the woman laughs and taunts the Count, saying, "You yourself never loved; you never love," to which the Count responds "yes, I too can love; you yourselves can tell it from the past. Is it not so" (51)? This comment adds to a tension which Stoker had been cultivating since the onset of the novel. As Craft writes, "The novel's opening anxiety, its first articulation of the vampiric threat, derives from Dracula's hovering interest in Jonathan Harker; the sexual threat that this novel first evokes, manipulates, sustain, but never finally represents is that Dracula will seduce, penetrate, drain another male" (Craft 109-110). Dracula's desire to penetrate Jonathan (as well as Jonathan's own desire to be penetrated) is offset through the use of three vampiric women, which Craft goes on to argue provide a more permissible medium for male-male desire. In fact, women throughout the novel consistently serve as mediums for bonds between men, dictating the nature of their relationships (Sedgwick 21-28).

Nowhere are women more visibly a medium for male bonding than in the battle over the soul of Mina Harker's friend Lucy, who fills the dual role of bonding medium and cautionary tale. Lucy, for the duration of the novel, is what Spencer calls a ritual victim, someone who belongs to the community, "but must at the same time be somehow marginal, incapable of fully participating in the social bond" (Spencer 209). For Lucy, it is her sexuality that distinguishes her from the noble Mina and bars her from fully integrating into society. Early in the novel, Stoker establishes Lucy's sexual deviance through her one true crime: a theoretical desire for bigamy. Writing to Mina about a recent string of proposals, Lucy writes, "I know, Mina, you must think me a horrid flirt — though I couldn't help feeling a sort of exultation that he was number two in one day…Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and

save all this trouble? But this is heresy, and I must not say it" (Stoker 73). Lucy rejects these men because she is already in love with a man named Arthur, but her admission of (again theoretical) desire is enough to consign Lucy to her fate. Shortly after, she begins to sleepwalk (further evidence of her loose nature) and falls into Dracula's embrace. The fight to save Lucy from dying (and becoming a vampire) involves four blood transfusions, two from Lucy's suitors, one from Van Helsing himself, and the final one from her fiancé Arthur. The procedures fail to save Lucy, but at her funeral Arthur declares that his transfusion of blood made them married in the sight of God (Stoker 199). The other men, out of respect for Arthur, choose not to tell him that their blood also flowed through her veins, but Van Helsing laments privately, "If so that, then what about the others? Ho, ho! Then this so sweet maid is a polyandrist, and me, with my poor wife dead to me, but alive by Church's law, through no wits, all gone—even I, who am faithful husband to this now-no-wife, am bigamist" (Stoker 201). The other men dismiss this comment as dark humour, but the bond between the four men, cemented in Lucy's body, comprises a central role in the narrative. The men become closer friends than they ever might have been without the bonds they share in Lucy.

These bonds are again strengthened when the men, collectively called the "Crew of Light", realise that Lucy has come back as a vampire and set out on a quest to kill her.

Lucy's vampirism is both a literal state of being as well as a metaphor for her deviant sexuality, a characteristic which infects every other part of her being. As a vampire Lucy preys on children, a quality which violently subverts expectations of womanhood and acceptable sexual practices. In attacking others, Lucy demonstrates an active and unrestrained sexuality, which the narrative presents unambiguously as a threat. In her vampiric form, deviancy becomes legible on Lucy's body, a visibility that allows the men to kill her without remorse.

> Lucy's eye's [had become] unclean and full of hell-fire, instead of the pure, gentle orbs we knew. At that moment the remnant of my love passed into hate and loathing; had she then to be killed, I could have done it with savage delight. As she looked, her eyes blazed with unholy light, and the face became wreathed with a voluptuous smile (Stoker 240)

In this moment, the "voluptuousness" of Lucy's monstrous body (a descriptor only used while Lucy is a vampire) makes killing her not only morally justified, but a moral *imperative*, which sharply echoes Victor's pre-emptive killing of his second creature. When the band finally kills Lucy, they do so by ritualistically penetrating her body with a three-foot wooden stake. Arthur, dutiful to the last moment, chooses to undertake the task of hammering, and Stoker describes him as a "figure of Thor as his untrembling arm rose and fell, driving deeper and deeper the mercy-bearing stake" (Stoker 245). The violence of the scene then gives way to peace, as Lucy returns to her true form in death, marked with a face of "unequalled sweetness and purity" (245). The serenity of this scene indicates that the violence against Lucy's body was inarguably the correct action for the men to take. The act of killing also takes on a metaphorical victory, as it "restores both Lucy and the community she threatened…In sacrificing Lucy, the four men purge not only their fear of female sexuality generally, of which she is the monstrous expression, but also—and more importantly—their fear of their own sexuality and their capacity for sexually-prompted violence against each other" (Spencer 211-212).

As with *Frankenstein*, the death of the male monster is not framed through the same purely sexual lens as the female monster. Unlike the vampire daughters or Lucy, whose unforgivable sin *is* their sexuality, Dracula's sexual identity is deviant because it is unrestrained and foreign. Dracula is everything that the men stand against: the superstition to their

rationalism, the perverse individualism to their deep brotherly bonds. Dracula holds no community, forming connections only to further the reach of his perverse sexuality. Dracula is an invading force, conquering land as a means of feeding, which, through the metaphor of biting as sex, slips into an image of sexual conquest. I resist the term “rape” here only because Dracula’s sexual attacks don’t fall under the traditional definition of sexual warfare. Unlike the “Mongol Hordes” that Dracula describes, pillaging and raping across the land, Stoker frames Dracula’s conquests as seductions rather than assaults. When Dracula feeds on Lucy he does not need to force her to comply; her sleepwalking drives her to unconsecrated ground where the Count can feed. When Mina eventually succumbs to the vampire’s advances, she writes, “I was bewildered, and, strangely enough, I did not want to hinder him. I suppose it is a part of the horrible curse that is, when his touch is on his victim” (Stoker 324). Dracula attacks Mina, but she also puts up no resistance against the allure of the Count. “He is, in sexual terms, more seducer than rapist. For a modern reader, this might lessen the crime, but for Victorians seduction would have been infinitely worse. In Victorian theory, it is sexual desire rather than sexual activity that is the true source of danger” (Spencer 217). Dracula’s sexuality thus functions more as a contagious sexual urge, pushing those he infects to break the laws of permissible sexuality, inverting the hierarchy of community over sexual individualism. Dracula’s erotically motivated predation on women shows an intentional disregard for the structures of patriarchal society and opens a dangerous window on the expression of feminine sexuality, a crime for which Bram Stoker can only prescribe the cure of execution.

When Dracula is finally killed, doubly penetrated by Jonathan and Quincey’s knives, his hold on Mina is released, and her purity and conformity win out over the Count’s deviant influence. As the Count passes, Mina notes, “I shall be glad as long as I live that even in that

moment of final dissolution, there was in the face a look of peace, such as I never could have imagined might have rested there" (Stoker 424). As the story comes to a close, this moment marks the evil as eradicated and the community as safe. Just as with Lucy, the men have seemingly freed Dracula from his monstrosity, implying both that monstrosity can be (at least momentarily) killed and that monsters must secretly wish for their own demise. However, Stoker leaves open a distinct possibility that Dracula's influence may still survive. At the close of the novel, Mina's child is born, and Jonathan reflects on the child as a legacy of the Crew of Light, writing that "his bundle of names links all our little band of men together" (Stoker 426). However, the symbolically shared paternity of the child — strengthened by the presence of each man's blood in Mina's veins — includes Dracula, if only on a technicality. Thus, Dracula, as well as the deviancy he represents, survives within the body of Mina's child on the merit of blood and genetics as a measure of a person's compatibility with society. By Stoker's own logic, the son of the Crew of Light possesses the same inherent capacity for deviance as Renfield or Dracula, further proof that monsters never truly die.

In a way, I was thankful that Dracula's death was an uncertainty. By the end of novel I was ready for something new. Lured in by scholars' promises of scandalising queerness, I was disappointed to learn that, while inarguably present, queerness was often used symbolically to represent otherness and instability. I understood the veiled homosexuality of Stoker and Shelley, the half-hidden genderqueerness, and the subversive embodiments that made early monsters queer favourites. However, I needed more than scraps. While yes, technically there was queerness in these pages, the texts still buried their gays — often without their heads attached. I had grown up in an age of *Twilight* and slash fiction, Super Who Lock and head cannon. A

Freudian complex and a theoretical kiss weren't going to cut it. I needed explicit queerness, or at least a less thickly veiled metaphor.

Chapter 3

Looking forward nearly a hundred years, I rested my hopes on another vampire story, one which I had been told re-invented the vampire genre for new generation of viewers. Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* is considered by many to be a foundational text in modern vampire lore, as well as a canonically queer piece of media. I went into my reading with high expectations, hoping that the subversions of Rice's vampires extended to her depiction of queerness. However, what I would come to find was a book that defied all of my expectations — both good and bad. In Rice's work I discovered just how difficult it can be to engage with queer media, especially when the content seems incongruent with the legacy of the author's work.

When it first hit shelves in 1976, *Interview with the Vampire* offered a level of queer visibility that was hard to find anywhere else. *Interview* was Rice's first book, written in only five weeks, and it attained massive success thanks to its novel take on vampire lore. Throughout the previous decades, vampires had retained some popularity as counterculture figures, but their subversive antics had failed to resurrect the popularity of early 19th century monster flicks. Rice's work sent shockwaves through the world of vampires, fully committing to the violence and sexuality that had kept interest afloat for vampire media. However, not content to stop at simply letting Mina Harker moan, Rice let her vampiric cast flirt with something a little more dangerous: each other. As a *New York Times* review from the time of release eloquently

identifies, homosexuality was the “hardly hidden mainspring of Rice’s narrative” (Braudy 1976), an element which resonated with a population of queer readers. Rice’s work exemplified the queer gothic of the late 1970s and early, pre-AIDS 1980s, taking the traditionally prohibitive figure of Dracula, and offering explorations of explicitly gay characters when they were few and far between. Rice’s world defiantly overflowed with homoeroticism, abundant with depictions of queer family and love. Eric Diaz, a creator for the website Nerdist recalls his experience of Rice’s work and his own coming out as a queer youth. He writes, “the late ‘80s and early ‘90s were not an era when mainstream genre fiction explored queer themes. Certainly not the kind of fiction that sold millions of copies. Even a 14-year-old me understood that these characters, despite not having sex the way humans do, were explicitly queer” (Diaz). Rice’s world not only explored queer sexuality openly, but it offered queer readers role models who existed outside the confines of self-hatred and moral demonisation. While those narratives still appeared within the text (courtesy of Louis), queer readers rallied around the Byronic heartthrob Lestat. Diaz writes, “[Lestat] believed that their outsider nature gave them a unique perspective on humanity that no one else had. It wasn’t a curse, as Louis saw it, but a gift…. Absorbing these books, I felt a lightbulb go off over my head. ‘What makes you different makes you special, not lesser.’ It’s a lesson I internalised, and I have Anne Rice to thank for it” (Diaz). *Interview with the Vampire*, for many young queer readers, created a world in which queerness wasn’t relegated to the shadows — it revelled in them. From a vantage point beyond the human world, Rice presented vampires who eschewed the dichotomies of good/evil, masculine/feminine, and monster/human to which creations like Dracula and Frankenstein’s Creature were more strictly beholden.

One of the primary ways that Rice disconnects her vampires from the dualisms of *Dracula* is through redefining their relationship to Christianity (King 25). Unlike Dracula, whose

body steamed at the sight of communion wafer, Rice's progeny is unfazed by Christian symbolism, easily capable of penetrating sacred spaces like churches or the inside of a priest's neck (Rice 145). Rice's deviation from strict moral binaries provided the basis for her exploration of queer sexuality. The moral ambiguity of her monsters extended to the novel's presentation of homosexuality, an identity marker which Rice resists labelling outright. Rather than existing solely as a signifier of difference, as it did in Dracula's body, Louis and Lestat's homoeroticism is a deeply human element of their construction, one which radically reduces the distance between human and monster.

However, despite Rice's commitment to smashing binaries, *Interview with the Vampire* fails to entirely escape the homophobic undercurrents of traditional vampire narratives. While themes of love and family dominate Rice's narrative, these images are often confused with dynamics of interpersonal abuse and sexual violence which the texts frequently substitute uncritically for queer sex. Additionally, the echoes of older prohibitive monsters undermine any pro-queer messages, reinforcing rather than breaking bigoted ideological narratives (King 79). Rice's work collects narratives and straddles the line between a rebellious depiction of queer identity and an affirmation of the conservative beliefs that fuelled late 20th century homophobic rhetoric (Haggerty 5). While queer viewers could revel in the representation of visibility, conservative viewers could be equally affirmed in their views of queerness as a genuine threat to society.

The most prominent issue with Rice's take on vampirism is the disdainful tone that dominates the text's narration, painting a bleak image of both vampirism and homosexuality. While readers like Diaz seem willing to chalk the negative viewpoint of the narrative to Louis's discomfort and self-hatred (Diaz), Rice never seems to contradict the idea that Vampires are

insatiable predators and uncaring parasites. Louis, who Rice figures as the narrative's dominant voice, embodies a contradiction common in many Gothic narratives. Citing David Punter, Gothic literature scholar Paulina Palmer describes characters like Louis as "wishing to remain members of the conventional society and abide by its familial codes," while "simultaneously exhibiting a contrary desire to enter a less conformist social milieu" (Palmer 13). While Louis willingly engages in both queer and Vampiric behaviour throughout the novel, he also clings clumsily to his own sense of humanity, a mirage which causes him to lash out against his vampiric peers. Louis's clash with his own identity provides a powerful metaphor for the struggles of queer people living in a heterosexual society. Still, the actions of his fellow vampires seem to always reaffirm Louis's distaste.

Lestat, for instance, who queer viewers remember as a role model for unapologetic queer expression, is revealed to be a miserable loner, a tyrant who manipulates those around him to keep them as company. Throughout the novel, Lestat pushes Louis into increasingly abusive displays of vampiric sexuality, constantly forcing him into intimate relationships and situations. When Lestat first turns Louis, he forces the new vampire to share a coffin with him, a situation with which Louis is clearly uncomfortable. Remembering the incident, Lestat tells the interviewer, "I begged Lestat to let me stay in the closet, but he laughed, astonished. 'Don't you know what you are?'" (Rice 24). Aside from the obvious reference to the closet, which appears throughout the novel, this scene establishes a predatory overtone to Louis and Lestat's relationship. While Louis realises that he has conflicting feelings about going to bed with Lestat, his reaction to Lestat's predation, both literal and emotional, is disgust. As Louis recounts, "I lay face-down on him, utterly confused by my absence of dread and filled with a distaste for being so close to him, handsome and intriguing as he was" (Rice 25). This scene's potent mixture of

disgust and eroticisation sets the baseline for Louis's experience of vampiric life, and only becomes more violently discordant when the concept of feeding is introduced.

Similarly to *Dracula*, in which feeding is tantamount to sex, *Interview with the Vampire* figures feeding as an explicitly carnal experience. In this way, Rice pulls from and intensifies the sexuality of early vampire mythos, while simultaneously increasing the pool of viable victims/lovers. However, the ubiquity of the bite also results in a dangerous slippage between sexual and platonic relationships, with the difference often becoming imperceptible. While the metaphor of vampiric penetration consistently offers readers plenty of queer sexual encounters, it also makes their proclivity for children all the more disturbing. Rice's novel frequently features children as victims, and Louis establishes early in the novel that, "the most triumphant kill for Lestat was a young man…they represented the greatest loss to Lestat, because they stood on the threshold of the maximum possibility of life" (Rice 41). While the use of the term "young men" to describe Lestat's victims leaves an ambiguity to their ages, the definition of young is frequently stretched, with several of the feeding scenes featuring unambiguous children. These instances of child predation are upsetting on their own, but they also possess the most violently and sexually graphic descriptions in the novel. Unlike the countless adults who the vampires feed on, the intensity of which is barely dwelt upon, the scenes involving children indulge by far the most deeply in the erotic aspects of feeding. In the middle of the novel, when Lestat feeds on two small boys, Rice describes them as "totally abandoned to sleep as children can be, their pink mouths open, their small round faces utterly smooth" (Rice 131). When Lestat sees them, he lets out a "sigh which had again that longing, that sweet, painful anticipation" (Rice 132). The clear relationship between children and pleasure is uncomfortable, and Lestat's reactions seem to

mirror homophobic claims that queer people want to prey on children (Leary; Voeller 1977), an act which the narrative seems to frame as a natural desire for vampires.

At first, Lestat's fixation on children is abhorrent to Louis, but even the stubbornly human vampire cannot resist his nature for long. Louis feeds on children twice throughout the novel, first on the young Claudia, and second on a young boy residing in a coven of vampires. When offered a young boy, Louis engages in one of the longest and most graphic kills in the book, one which thoroughly blurs the line between metaphorical and literal homosexuality:

> I saw the bluish bruise on his tender neck. He was offering it to me. He was pressing the length of his body against me now, and I felt the hard strength of his sex beneath his clothes pressing against my leg. A wretched gasp escaped my lips, but he bent close, his lips on what must have been so cold, so lifeless for him; and I sank my teeth into his skin, my body rigid, that hard sex driving against me, and I lifted him in passion off the flood. Wave after wave of his beating heart passed into me as, weightless, I rocked with him, devouring him, his ecstasy, his conscious pleasure (Rice 228).

This scene is unambiguously the sexual assault of a child, one which incorporates queer sexuality, vampirism, and sexual violence into a single, indiscernible act. Because of how tightly wound these elements are, it also becomes incredibly difficult to distinguish queer sex from an act of impassioned violence. Consent, for example, is an element of sexuality that is entirely absent from Rice's feeding/sex scenes. Additionally, the violence of queer sex is not limited to the mechanics but persists in the driving forces of *Interview*'s queer desire. Louis, in recognition of the violence his feeding inflicts on others, resolutely condemns himself for giving into his desires. "I'm evil, evil as any vampire who ever lived," Louis declares, "I've killed over and over

and will do it again" (Rice 233). While the other vampires attempt to paint a more naturalistic, amoral image of vampirism, Louis remains convinced that his vampiric and homoerotic desires are a solely destructive curse, one which Haggerty succinctly describes as "compulsive, repetitive, and fatal" (Haggerty 13). The novel leaves no room for joy or growth to be a part of any vampiric experience, instead portraying each interaction as degrading and dangerous.

Louis's view of vampirism as void of humanity is also reflected in the relationships that adorn Rice's narrative, all of which are crushed under the poisoning influence of sex and desire. The most blatant instance of this dynamic exists within the vampiric family unit of Louis, Lestat, and Claudia. Claudia, a young and deeply ill child, becomes a central character when Louis feeds upon her in a fit of passion. Unable to control himself, he bites the young girl only to find an inexplicable connection. Sensing this, as well as his own loosening grip on Louis, Lestat finishes Claudia's transformation, making the trio a haphazard and unwilling family. Immediately, the manipulation the family is built on creates a sense of unease, predicated on the implied corruption of the nuclear family dynamic. Louis and Lestat perform the roles of mother and father, with Claudia playing at once the daughter and the son. Claudia adores Louis, spending long evenings pouring over books, but she also entertains Lestat, hunting with him on a regular basis. While this new dynamic brings some peace, Louis quickly realises that their irregular family is growing increasingly unstable. As Claudia becomes more familiar with her vampiric identity, Louis notices that she is entirely unlike himself or Lestat. "For little child as she was, but also fierce killer now capable of the ruthless pursuit of blood with all a child's demanding" (Rice 96). Trapped from a young age in a vampire's immortal body, the clash between Claudia's form and her internal age begins to warp her and corrupt her mind. Under the thin veneer of metaphor, Claudia can also be understood as a child burdened with an adult sexuality, a situation

thrust upon her by self-absorbed and abusive Queer parents. When Louis recounts Claudia's transformation, he says "keeping me with him, that was undoubtedly part of what pushed [Lestat]…I rather think that he ushered Claudia into vampirism for revenge" (Rice 95). The situation is further complicated by the nature of the relationship between Louis and Claudia. While the novel introduces the family as a parallel to a traditional family structure, Louis interacts with Claudia as if she is interchangeably a daughter, a friend, and a lover. The slippage between daughter and lover is particularly jarring and occurs a not insignificant number of times. While dancing, Louis refers to himself as Claudia explicitly as "Father and Daughter. Lover and Lover" (Rice 100). The predation, narcissism, and shattering of boundaries that exist within the story's central family visibly parallel real-world objections to same-sex adoption and other forms of Queer family. While *Interview* did offer a novel depiction of Queer family, it is a familial structure that is formed through — and destroyed by — the perversions and violence that define all of the relationships in Rice's novel.

The instability of Louis's relationships with Lestat and Claudia extends beyond the family unit, infecting each interaction he has with his fellow vampires. While Rice seems to offer Louis several opportunities to find love, the self-hatred and corruption of vampire culture dominates the narrative. "Rice makes it immediately clear…that this world of male-male desire cannot be satisfying. For all the homoerotics of this volume, Rice seems unable to create a bond between two men that is more than the symptom of a corrupt and corrupting culture" (Haggerty 14). While this relationship dynamic is pervasive between Louis and Lestat, I think it is most visible between Louis and Armand, an ancient vampire Louis meets later in the novel. Armand offers Louis not only a guiding figure, but a stability and guidance that makes Louis fall in love with him. "Not a physical love, you must understand…though Armand was beautiful and simple,

and no intimacy would ever have been repellent. For vampires, physical love culminates and is satisfied in one thing, the kill. I speak of another kind of love which drew me to him completely as the teacher which Lestat had never been" (Rice 252). While the nature of Louis's love remains ambiguous, the narrative makes clear that his feelings towards Armand are initially much stronger than those he had for Lestat. Armand also offers the strongest counterbalance to Louis's views on morality, framing the evils of vampirism as a natural gradation rather than "a great perilous gulf into which one falls with the first sin" (Rice 233). For the first time in the novel, this explanation seems to shake Louis's self-assurance in his own evil nature. Louis even reaches a point (almost) where it seems he might be willing to accept vampirism as something other than a vile threat.

Unfortunately (but not unpredictably), regardless of how much Louis believes the elder vampire, and despite their shared attraction, Louis's self-crucifying tendencies quickly derail his relationship with Armand. A downward spiral, which began with feeding on Armand's pet child, reaches a breaking point when Claudia asks Louis to make her a caretaker. Long frustrated with her limited physical form and noticing Louis's infatuation with Armand, Claudia demands that he take responsibility and make her a guardian. With great hesitation Louis complies, but the act of making a vampire proves to be too much for Louis's still too-human heart. As the woman Claudia chose dies in his arms, Louis laments that "what has died in this room tonight is the last vestige in me of what was human" (Rice 270). Symbolically, the act is a turning point for Louis. Having spent the entire novel resisting the realities of his desires, breaking his vow to never create a vampire represents a submission to desires that he wholeheartedly believes to be incompatible with a moral existence. When Louis describes his actions to Armand, he says:

> I broke a promise to myself that I would never do this, that my own loneliness would never drive me to do it. I don't see our life as powers and gifts. I see it as a curse. I haven't the courage to die. But to make another vampire! To bring this suffering on another, and to condemn to death all those men and women whom that vampire must subsequently kill! I broke a grave promise. (Rice 285).

Louis condemns himself and anyone like him as monsters who perpetuate violence at the behest of loneliness. Just as isolation drove Frankenstein's Monster to commit terrible acts of violence, so too does it form the basis of every tragedy in Rice's book. Loneliness drove Lestat to create Louis, to manipulate him. Isolation brought Louis to Claudia, and the desire for connection brought Armand in turn. The violent cycles of manipulation and desperation that begin and end each of *Interview*'s core relationships stems from the seemingly inherent isolation of being a monster or being different. From beginning to end, the plot of *Interview with the Vampire* revolves around the crushing loneliness of queer existence.

There is, of course, a place for narratives of isolation in the queer media. Marginalisation, internalised-bigotry, and lack of community make many of the themes of *Interview* relevant to queer audiences, especially at a time when queer media and existence had only recently reached widespread mainstream attention. However, Rice's narrative, like the Gothic narratives that informed it, seems to demand expulsion of the other as fiercely as Stoker and Shelley. At the absolute lowest point of Louis's journey, Armand's coven kills Claudia and her caretaker for the crime of murdering Lestat. Too late to prevent Claudia's execution, Louis blames himself and vows to take revenge on everyone responsible. While this set-up is a recognisable revenge plot, the language Louis uses echoes the brutal ritualism of Stoker's original novel as he declares "everyone who was closeted [in the coven] this dawn will die. And they are the only deaths I

have caused in my long life which are both exquisite and good" (Rice 310). In this, Louis returns to the strict moralism he had seemed so close to relinquishing. Through his numbing self-hatred, Louis becomes a mouthpiece for the prescription of devastating violence against the vampire/Queer community. When Armand finds Louis, the two embrace, but any chance at true love has been destroyed. Denouncing the viability of their relationship, Louis says "that is the crowning evil, that we can go so far as to love each other, you and I. And who else would show us a particle of love, a particle of compassion or mercy? Who else, knowing us as we know each other, could do anything but destroy us? Yet we can love each other" (Rice 314). While Louis's declaration acknowledges the existence of his queer love for Armand, it also holds the pair's love for each other as entirely incompatible with the outside world. Not only is their love at odds with compassion and understanding, but the outside world is justified, if not obligated, to destroy them.

For all of the novel's queer opulence, the destruction of its vampires leaves Rice's work ultimately rooted too deeply in 19th century sentimentalities to provide the revolutionary boundary violations that scholars now associate with the post-modern Gothic. However, given the time and space of the novel's release, it is difficult to critique the novel simply as a failed attempt at Gothic subversion. While anti-queer messages seem to exist at the core of Rice's narrative, it is also difficult to label the text as homophobic, especially given the positive response from queer audiences. There is little academic research directly on Rice's work, but critical responses to other queer media, such as William Friedkin's *Cruising* (1980), which featured depictions of the gay S&M scene during the late 70s are instructive. Like *Interview with the Vampire*, *Cruising* attempted to capture Queer culture for a general audience, a move which Friedkin claimed would "alleviate violence against gays… and turn a lot of people on"

(Guthmann 3). Friedkin's use of queerness as a means of enticing straight viewers is reminiscent of Rice's work. However, the public reaction to *Cruising*, which features a serial killer targeting gay men, was significantly more intense. queer rights groups blasted the film for inciting violence against queer people, or, as gay activist Arthur Bell labelled the film, "a blueprint for the destruction of the homosexual community" (Guthmann 3). Many of the issues queer audiences found with the film mirror my own issues with *Interview*. The bleak depiction of queer love, the violence of queer sexuality, and the predatory images that both works contain all evoke a strong desire within me to discount Rice's book as "bad" representation.

However, as Guthmann's article explains, the desire to condemn works as homophobic can misrepresent the contents and impacts of the actual content. "By always insisting on a 'positive image' to show the straight world, aren't mainstream gays merely imitating heterosexual lifestyles instead of celebrating the diversity and richness of their own?" (Guthmann 5). Rice uses vampires to explore a rich and overly decadent world of unauthorised desire; her characters, through the highly-coded bodies of monsters, are able to follow their every desire without outside intervention. Amongst the living, there is no one in Rice's world who can prevent the vampires from having families, having sex, falling in love, and enjoying power. Even with all the flaws I have thus laid out, one might argue that the heavily feminine, aristocratic, and lustful vampires are a form of camp, evoking extremes as a form of queer spectacle. Through reading the text as camp, Rice's vampires could become actors performing a "collective, ritual and performative existence" (Cleto 25) beyond the limits of the textual space. The monstrous form, through camp, becomes an object-subject that is able to revel in its of artifice and identity as a constructed being.

Haggerty argues that Rice fails to create authentic queer representation because her characters are ultimately "culturally determined," but a camp reading can turn this criticism around, as Rice's over-indulgent vampires also poke fun at the world's assumptions about queer men. Camp, as Susan Sontag famously writes, "responds particularly to the markedly attenuated and to the strongly exaggerated… [camp has] a relish for the exaggeration of sexual characteristics" (Cleto 56). Camp operates in a space of sometimes vulgar excess, an exploratory space in which moral and aesthetic norms are eschewed. I can see a reading of *Interview* in which the sheer chaos and debauchery of vampirism offers readers such a space, one in which they can more freely entertain aspects of sexuality and gender that are rarely, if ever discussed. While the violence and perversity of the novel can be sometimes overwhelming, the more sickening acts create a towering ceiling for the textual space in which the events of the novel can play.

Nowhere is this effect more visible than in Armand's theatre, a textual space that mirrors the relationship between *Interview* and its real-world readers. The theatre troupe, which features Armand and his coven, regularly feeds on young women for an audience of humans who believe the act to be a particularly enchanting and visceral form of performance art. While the act of killing a woman would be otherwise vile, the space created through the medium of theatre makes violence and suffering a temporary spectacle. The theatre, if only for the evening, offers viewers permission to indulge in socially unacceptable behaviour, diluted slightly by the assumed passivity of looking. In much the same way, readers of *Interview* have been, up until this point, voyeuristically indulging in depictions of violence and sexual deviance. While readers may not condone Louis and Lestat's more obscene acts, the "too much-ness" of their existence still creates a compelling space of exploration.

However, while compelling, Louis's narration complicates a camp reading of *Interview*. The view of the theatre is entirely from his point of view, and his awareness that the theatricality of the scene is a façade (Rice 217) for a real feeding limits the campiness of the novel to a smokescreen for the vampires' more egregious acts. Rather than a committed send up of reality, the true scene plays out between a group of predatory vampires and a terrified young woman who would rather die outright than face the fate waiting for her on stage. Louis's awareness and judgement cuts through the scene in much the same way as every other moment of excess that he witnesses or engages in. No matter what heights of ridiculousness the novel reaches, the pessimistic self-hatred that Rice writes for Louis pervades as a sobering force. For example, when Armand explains to Louis that vampires are not attached to Satan, the scene serves as a deeply sobering moment. Louis had, up to this point, assumed that his existence was emblematic of absolute evil. Instead, he leaves believing that the supernatural world is one without any meaning at all (Rice 237). In a world without meaning, Louis only becomes more disgusted with vampirism, which he deems a threat to the only thing that still matters: human life. While the traditional battle between humans and monsters is less visible in *Interview*, the narrative still seems to suggest that vampires are the villains. In conjunction with Louis's solution of killing his fellow vampires, I don't feel that a camp skin rests well on the *Interview*'s jagged bones.

In addition to the issue of queerness, Rice's novel also struggles with race, an issue stemming from her use of Gothic monsters as streamlined vessels for exploring queer existence. Halberstam's warning against reading Gothic monsters through a single signifier also applies to creating them, as linear constructions allow other signifiers to escape unread (Halberstam 29). While race and racism existed at the forefront of both Shelley and Stoker's narratives, their effects are pushed further below the surface in the constructions of Louis and Lestat. Both Louis

and Lestat are White and of Western origin, a detail which Rice draws no negative attention to. Unlike the descriptions of Frankenstein's Monster and Dracula, which dwelt on the difference of their skin and features, Rice treats the appearances of her vampires as gorgeous, a detail which she contrasts against the monstrosity of their actions. Rice's vampires are by all accounts "normal" until they show their hand and reveal their true natures. In some ways, Rice's choice to make her vampires conventionally attractive breaks the tradition of visible monstrosity, which makes her monsters more sympathetic, a state which Rice heightens by giving the monster the role of relaying the story. However, in subverting the visual signifiers that dominated 19th century monsters, Rice makes Whiteness the base on which her monsters' normalcy is predicated. Rice's novel, populated nearly entirely by attractive White vampires, thus creates an ecosystem of Whiteness that forms the context for her exploration of queer identity.

Even when race becomes an explicit factor, the novel never deals with the topic as openly as it does sexuality, treating race as an incidental element of the vampire narrative. Louis and Lestat, for example, derive their wealth and quality of life from the slave plantations that Louis's family owned and operated. Rice makes several references to Louis's relationship with the slaves, but Louis's identity as a former slave owner never seems to factor into his development as a character. Instead, the slaves are relegated to the role of superstitious witnesses to Louis's transformation. Mirroring Stoker's descriptions of Eastern Europeans, Rice paints the enslaved as an other, distinct even from her vampires: "They were very black and totally foreign; they spoke in their African tongues…and when they sang, they sang African songs which made the fields exotic and strange, always frightening to me in my mortal life. They were superstitious and had their own secrets and traditions" (Rice 49).

Within this context, race is a signifier of otherness categorically distinct from Rice's boundary breaking vampires. While Louis and Lestat may bridge the gaps between straight/gay, masculine/feminine, and human/monster, race seems to escape them entirely. When Louis and Claudia travel to Eastern Europe in search of ancient vampires, they again encounter the presence of race, this time in a conflict between a young Englishman and a rural town. The town, located in a nameless part of far east Europe, houses deeply superstitious people, a population that "believed completely that the dead did walk and did drink the blood of the living" (Rice 168). The people are framed as simple, and their methods of fighting vampires are depicted as brutal and ritualistic. Among the townspeople, there is an English man whose recently deceased wife is suspected of being a vampire. Terrified, the man pleads with Louis to protect him from the villagers. "'Perhaps you can bring some sanity to this place,' he said. 'You're a Frenchman, aren't you? You know, I'm English'" (Rice 173). Assuming that Louis will take his side and prevent the town from taking his wife's body, the English man goes on to say: "The same blood flows in our veins, you and I. I mean, French, English, we're civilised men, Louis. They're savages" (Rice 177). Within the narrative, racial and superstitious otherness becomes a signifier of an archaic way of life, one entirely distinct from the modernity and refinement of the United States and Western Europe.

And the concept of racial difference is not limited to the human world either, within vampire society there is a pervasive narrative of racial purity. While searching for the vampire who killed the Englishman's wife, Louis and Claudia encounter an ancient vampire from far Eastern Europe, whose hulking frame and violent tendencies distinguish him as abnormal and frightening. An other's other, the vampire Louis and Claudia find is nearly animal, lacking any of the beauty and refinement of the text's other vampires. Every aspect of the vampire's body

signifies a creature even more monstrous than Louis: “[The vampire’s] huge eyes bulged from naked sockets and two small, hideous holes made up his nose; only a putrid, leathery flesh enclosed his skill, and the rank, rotting rags that covered his frame were thick with earth and slime and blood…a mindless, animated corpse. But no more” (Rice 188). When Louis is later able to ask Armand about his encounter, Armand tells him that the creature was a “Revenant.” “Their blood is different,” Armand says, “they increase as we do but without skill or care” (Rice 243). Essentially, Revenants are vampires of a degraded order, infected with the curse of “inferior breeding.” The stark physical otherness of the Revenants, in conjunction with their unthinking violence and “bad blood” invokes a monstrous image pulled straight from 19th century Gothic fiction. Bad blood marked both Dracula and Frankenstein’s Monster as irreconcilable others, a shard of which Rice’s work retains nearly 100 years later.

In its identity as a queer narrative, *Interview*’s focus on Whiteness has a profound effect on its ability to represent queer identity and community, an issue stemming from the incorporation of Whiteness into the default construction of the queer monster. While sexuality is still the dominant signifier of otherness, race becomes a mostly unspoken mark of otherness, even amongst the “others.” The relatability of Rice’s vampires, and the acceptability of their queerness, becomes in part dependent on their proximity to Whiteness and its associations with wealth, physical attractiveness, and Western culture. Through their diminished otherness, Rice’s vampires appear more human, becoming what scholars refer to as the “sympathetic vampire” (Palmer 70). Unlike the prohibitory vampire, the sympathetic vampire took on the role of protagonist, an alluring outsider with a dark secret, the enigmatic bad boy. Between 1980 and 2000, the sympathetic vampire flourished, even among growing straight audiences who saw vampiric sexuality as an alluring taboo rather than a symbol of societal decay. Vampires like

Fright Night's Jerry (1985), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s Angel (1997), and Edward Cullen from *Twilight* (2008) provided sexy vampires for wide-ranging audiences. Like Rice's vampires, each of these characters are represented as relatively wealthy, educated, and white, characteristics which make their tortured vampiric lives all the more desirable. This isn't to say that no one was using vampires as a medium for nuanced explorations of race, gender, and sexuality, but the dominant image of vampires had become entangled with that of the White male heartthrob.

The development of the vampire in film and literature since the 1970s parallels the development of mainstream queer representation, one which also suffers from an overrepresentation of sanitised White queer identity. Examining the rise in queer representation, Whiteness has been a dominant identity within the community, to the point where Whiteness and queerness have become almost inextricable (Havey 144). While *Interview with the Vampire* is not responsible for the overwhelming Whiteness of queer media, the relationship between its racial undertones and queer overtones signalled a growing trend in mainstream queer media.

While *Interview with the Vampire* was a massive shift in the mainstream representation of both monsters and queer sexuality, Rice's individual usage of the vampire presented limitations to the legibility of the text as empowering for queer readers. Despite efforts to naturalise queer sexuality and family, Rice's vampires maintain far too intimate relationships with homophobic rhetoric of the 1970s to separate either concept from the predatory origins of vampires. Additionally, Rice's vampires, in trading racial signifiers for sexual ones, offer an image of queer sexuality that positions whiteness as the default for queer bodies, an image which still dominates queer representation today. While vampires offered Rice a creative means of challenging stereotypes and cultural barriers, the elements that disappear from her construction

of monstrosity set a precedent for mainstream queer monster narratives, one which we are still contending with nearly fifty years later.

Chapter 4

Leaping forward another thirty-six years, my hopes of finding the queer monster I set out to find were growing thin. While I understood the positive perception of Rice's work amongst queer audiences, I remained hung up on my perception of her queer vampires as vain child predators. Going into my final case study, I tried to take solace in the positive reputation of Jeanette Winterson, a longtime celebrated queer author. I was cautiously optimistic that her book *Frankissstein* would provide the bold, in-your-face queerness that her previous books had been celebrated for. However, what I found was story that used queerness — Trans* identity in particular — to add shock value and edge to a just-ok critique of the technological landscape surrounding Artificial Intelligence. As a Trans* person I placed too much faith in this book, expecting it to understand and redirect my own feelings of monstrosity into something new, something empowering. Instead, I turned the final page feeling dissected and inspected, the seams of Trans* identity stretched to bursting for the sake of cheap novelty.

Jeanette Winterson's *Frankissstein*, published in 2019, is a retelling of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1918) which centres on an exploration of artificial intelligence and Trans* embodiment. Like each of the books that came before it, the textual body of *Frankissstein* reflects the unique moment of its creation, drawing parallels between advances in Artificial

Intelligence and the ongoing debate around Transgender rights. Winterson uses Trans* embodiment as a biological reference point for the futurism of technology like sex bots and AI, with each serving as a different facet of the story's monstrous core. Trans* embodiment, like technology, pose a threat to the novel's status quo, an interpretation of monstrosity that echoes that of scholars like Susan Stryker, Jack Halberstam, and Stephen Cohen. However, as progressive-leaning as Winterson's work tends to be, her treatment of her central Trans* character often comes off as voyeuristic and objectifying rather than empowering. The text repeatedly dissects Trans* embodiment, exposing Winterson's Trans* character to ridicule, harassment, and violence, all while allowing other characters to experiment with their body and mind. Within the text of *Frankissstein*, Transness becomes a fetishised signifier of modernity, one which defines the Trans* body along strictly medical lines. While *Frankissstein* comes the closest of my modern texts to embodying the generative powers of the Queer Gothic, its essentialised image of Transness and its overemphasis on medical and scientific construction prevent its conception of monstrosity from being an empowering force.

The plot of *Frankissstein* features a dual narrative. The first is in the present day (then 2019), centering on the relationship between Ry Shelley, a Trans* medical doctor, and Victor Stein, a scientist and spokesman for the development of Artificial Intelligence. This narrative explores the rapid escalation of technological advancements and the potential effects a reliance on AI might have on the human condition. Winterson roots this exploration in Ry's interactions with Victor, as well as Ron Lord, a tech entrepreneur heavily invested in the production of sex bots. Each robotic element of Winterson's world, from automated vagina to online consciousness, represents a post-human future, one in which the human body is irrelevant. The culmination of this plot is the revelation that Victor, buried deep in a laboratory beneath London,

is working to digitise a human brain. The book ends in classic monster fashion with Victor (lab and all) disappearing into thin air. Ry, along with the reader, is left wondering what, if any of the plot was real.

The second narrative tells a thematically-linked story about Mary Shelley, set during the fateful Summer of 1818. Winterson uses this pseudo-historical narrative to explore the ideas and beliefs that went into the production of *Frankenstein* such as gender inequality, the human soul, and the post-human ramifications of the industrialisation. While the technology Mary, Percy, and Byron argued over was the power loom, Winterson's exploration of their debates indicates that the legacy of *Frankenstein* has always been concerned with the human impacts of technological advance. Through names, themes, and even characters, Mary Shelley's narrative haunts Ry's, reminding the reader that the questions at the heart of *Frankenstein* still reside, unresolved, within the text of *Frankissstein*.

Unlike the texts I have covered up to this point, the monstrosity of *Frankissstein* is a little harder to find. Rather than residing within the bodies of literal monsters, monstrosity is refigured as the desire to exist beyond the binaries of man/woman and human/machine. Winterson's construction of monstrosity most closely aligns with Halberstam's conception of the post-modern Gothic, which he views as having "progressive and even radicalising effects" (Halberstam 23). As *Interview with the Vampire* attempted in 1976, Winterson further pushes the envelope with an amoral view of monstrosity that, like the original text of *Frankenstein*, conveys a cautionary tale about unchecked scientific advance. However, unlike Shelley's original text, Winterson's understanding of technological change is not marked by physical difference, rather a critique of the institutions that control the flow of new technology and its applications.

Winterson achieves her critique through the use of Trans* identity as a lens for viewing the relationships of power within the field of future tech. The text is narrated from the perspective of Ry Shelley, a Trans* doctor who becomes deeply caught up in the development of Artificial Intelligence. From the outset, Winterson is explicit in identifying Ry as Trans*, often having Ry monologue about their personal experiences with gender and the effects of their gender affirming surgeries. The first time Ry alludes to being Trans*, they make their ambiguity unambiguous: "I am liminal, cusping, in-between, emerging, undecided, transitional, experimental, a start-up (or is it an upstart?)" (Winterson 29). Ry's fluidity is central to the text, a catchall reference point for the book's exploration of what it means to be human. Ry's Transness seems to place them, according to the text, somewhere on the spectrum between human and post-human.

While I want to address Winterson's rhetorical use of Transness, it is worth pointing out that Winterson's commentary is frequently compelling — her genderqueer lens picks holes in the egalitarian image which new tech claims to celebrate. Ron Lord's sex bots, for example, are advertised under the guise of sexual liberation, while practically functioning as pulsating bandaids for damaged masculinities. Winterson introduces Ron's character early in the novel, simultaneously introducing the reader to the first piece of tech on Winterson's chopping block: Sex Bots. Assuming that Ry is a man, Ron is incredibly candid in his presentation, discussing the proportions and features of his bots with what can only be described as locker room talk. As he continues the tour, it becomes increasingly clear that the primary function of the sex bots, which Ron officially claims to be sexual empowerment and marriage aid, is to affirm the masculinities and heterosexuality of Ron's clients. From his aversion to all semen-adjacent foods to his

unwillingness to name his bots, Ron's fragile masculinity is clearly visible in the hyper-sexualised bodies of his "girls."

Ry's role in this exchange is as an analytical reference point for the reader, serving as both the narrator and a medium through which Winterson can analyse the world. For example, Ry's gender doubleness giving them access to Ron's hyper-masculine world while also maintaining the distance required to see the insecurity that fuels Ron's industry. Ron frequently asks Ry rhetorical questions about their sex life, clearly under the assumption that Ry is a man and intimately aware of the difficulties of having sex with a robot, at one point remarking "God, I hated blow-up dolls, did you" (Winterson 43)? From the reader's perspective, Ron seems like a shallow, insecure man, heavily invested in decaying aspects of patriarchal life. Ron's justification for building sex bots, for example, while advertised as a practical solution, veers dangerously close to animosity for the empowerment of women: "Women aren't at home all the time like they used to be. I don't blame them; women aren't goldfish. They've evolved. But, like my mum says, emancipation can be a problem for a man" (Winterson 38). Again, from the point of view of Ry, Ron's rigid understanding of gender seems archaic and comedically constricting. From Ron's overbearing heterosexual performance to his hometown of "Three Cocks," it is clear that the text intends for the audience to laugh and cringe at Ron and his sex bots. In interviews around the publication of *Frankissstein*, Winterson describes sex bots as jokes on the one hand and "deadly serious" on the other. "It's uncomfortable for us in terms of what a certain kind of man wants from a female, even an invented one, that it's about sex and compliance. Men only want women to agree with them anyway, so it'll be perfect!" Winterson goes on to add that she doesn't believe in sex bots for lesbians because "with women, it's more nurture than nature, but we are relationship based. The lack of any genuine connection would be problematic" (Diva). At

least within the text of *Frankissstein*, sex bots are symptomatic of patriarchal gender and sexual oppression.

Ry's gender fluidity also provides critique of the supposed egalitarian future that the engineers of Artificial Intelligence are continually promising. Victor Stein, and AI developer and Ry's part-time lover, is adamant throughout that book that AI is a necessary and crucial step for evolving humans beyond the limits of embodiment. As Victor sees it, "the world that I imagine, the world that AI will make possible, will not be a world of labels — and that includes labels like male and female, black and white, rich, and poor. There will be no division between head and heart, between what I feel and what I think…" (Winterson 79-80). The world that Victor proposes is, at least superficially, similar to the one that Ry experiences as a Trans* person, living between and outside the binary of man and woman.

For Victor, Ry is a human example of what he is trying to achieve with AI, a person who has transcended at least one of the binaries that limits human evolution. For readers, Ry functions as a reference point for exploring the human impacts of AI beyond a shiny hypothetical. Ry's relationship with their body is more complicated than Victor's, and as such they have a more complicated time reconciling with the idea of leaving it. Late in the novel, when Victor reveals his plan to digitise a brain, Ry begins to doubt Victor's goals, questioning the role that embodiment plays in being human. In an exchange in Victor's underground lab, Ry confronts him about the hidden implications of evolving humanity beyond an embodied form:

> "For the human race," Ry says, "All our faults, vanities, idiocies, prejudices, cruelty. Do you really want augmented humans, superhuman, uploaded human, forever humans, with all the shit that comes with us? Morally and spiritually, we are barely crawling out of the sea onto dry land. We're not ready for the future you want." Victor responds, "Have we ever been

> ready? Progress is a series of accidents of mistakes made in a hurry, of unforeseen consequences."

As the two fight, Victor blames Ry for "lacking ambition," but Ry responds that "maybe [they] just don't want to be post-human" (Winterson 280-281). This moment is the critical climax of Winterson's book, a direct confrontation with the monstrosity of Victor's scientific goals. Like his namesake before him, Victor is unwilling to view uncertainty and risk as viable reasons for slowing progress, a recklessness that pushes Ry over the edge. While their Transness gives Ry a distaste for binary systems, the idea of leaving the body behind altogether is more than they can stomach. In describing AI as post-human, Winterson makes clear that some part of human embodiment, with all its messiness intact, is vital to being human. Additionally, in separating Ry's Trans* identity from Victor's post-human dream, Winterson also seems to imply that the disruptive nature of Trans* identity is separate from the potentially monstrous effects of AI on the structures of human existence.

On the surface, the dignity of Ry's character is an empowering moment for Trans* representation. Throughout the narrative, Ry is the primary character and narrator, a role which allows them to describe their identity on their own terms. Ry's narration allows their identity a level of complexity that is often left out of Trans* narratives, an element of Trans* media that Trans* scholars and activists have been demanding for decades. One of the instigating texts of Transgender Studies, Sandy Stone's "The Empire Strikes Back," was written in response to Janice Raymond's *The Transsexual Empire* and critiqued the lack of diversity in the genre of Trans* biography. In fact, as they existed, popular Trans* biographies often "uncritically reproduced discourses of gender that ultimately are unhelpful for understanding the complex specificity of [Trans*] embodiment and experience", often because Trans* people are reduced to

mouthpieces for other people’s ideas about gender (Stryker 221). Rather than being people, Trans* people become mediums for creating arguments. Trans* bodies become “screens on which we see projected the monetary settlements that emerge from the ongoing struggles over beliefs and practices in the academic and medical communities” (Stryker 229). Stone argued that the only way to combat the effects of these narratives is for Trans* people to launch a counter discourse and share stories that contradicted the patriarchal narratives that often dictated Trans* experience.

Nearly twenty years later, scholar Susan Stryker would also respond to Raymond’s work, in particular her comparison of Trans* women to Frankenstein’s Monster. Stryker’s article “My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village Chamounix” draws parallels between Stryker’s experience as a Trans* woman and the rejection of Frankenstein’s Monster due to its particular embodiment. Like the Monster, Stryker argues that Trans* people have become similarly Gothicized, forced to hold the fears and prejudices of society within their own skin. For Stryker, the effect of being labelled a monster is an abiding rage towards the rest of society, one which cannot be quieted or reconciled. Speaking to the transphobic rhetoric within the Lesbian community, Stryker writes,

> when such beings as these tell me I war with nature, I find no more reason to mourn my opposition to them — or to the order they claim to represent — than Frankenstein’s monster felt in its enmity to the human race. I do not fall from the grace of their company — I roar gleefully away from it like a Harley-straddling, dildo packing leatherdyke from hell. (Stryker 246)

Stryker takes a far more antagonistic stance to Trans* empowerment, advocating for Trans* people to reclaim words like “monster” and “creature” and use them to fight back against the

influence of normative society (Stryker 246-247). Returning the word monster to its origins, Stryker reminds her readers that "monsters, like angels, functioned as messengers and heralds of the extraordinary." Monsters, within the Queer framework of Stryker's work, function as an opportunity to reevaluate the world and to challenge hierarchies long justified as natural and inevitable (Stryker 247).

Superficially, the parallels Winterson draws between Ry's Transness and the revolution of Artificial Intelligence seems to satisfy the demands of both Stone and Stryker. Ry's gender expression resists, at least on paper, being sorted into either male or female, and Ry is content with their embodiment, even if others find their existence confusing. Additionally, the text holds both Transness and AI to be monstrous forces in their shared capacity to disrupt the boundaries between man/woman and human/machine respectively. In Winterson's own words, "If you don't gender your bot, or you let the gender be a little bit more fluid, then it will fuck the binary" (Diva), a witty line that makes Winterson's exploration of the intersection between sex, gender, and tech seem all the more cutting edge, especially among reviewers.

Upon release, the book was met with largely glowing praise, most of which was aimed at the Winterson's handling of 21st century world. Several publications named *Frankissstein* as one of the best books of 2019, and even Margaret Atwood weighed in, calling the book a "Hilarious but serious time-travel gambol with *Frankenstein*: modern doubles into AI, cryogenics, and sexbots" (Grove Atlantic). Many of the reviews centre on Winterson's exploration of sexual and gender politics, as well as her inclusion of a Trans* protagonist. A review from *Financial Times* claims that Winterson "reanimates *Frankenstein* as a cautionary tale for a contemporary moment dominated by debates about Brexit, gender, artificial intelligence and medical experimentation" (Grove Atlantic). Another review said that "*Frankissstein*, like its protagonist Ry, is a hybrid: a

novel that defies conventional expectations and exists, brilliantly and defiantly, on its own terms" (Grove Atlantic). From these fragments of the copious reviews on the publisher's website, *Frankissstein* seems to be a revolutionary book, one which deftly balances social commentary and groundbreaking Trans* representation.

However, for all of the nuance that Winterson squeezes out of her Trans* character, her use of Trans* identity as a rhetorical medium creates a text that likely unintentionally reproduces discourses of Transphobia and Whiteness that prevent Ry from being the positive representation that Winterson sets out to create. As the reviews unwittingly prove, Ry is less of a character and more of a tool for conveying Winterson's own beliefs about gender and technology. Through this lens, Ry's body becomes a voyeuristic playground for the audience.

During my own reading, the first warning signs came when Ry describes themselves as "experimental," a term which takes on an uncomfortably analytical lens as the text expands its understanding of Trans* identity. The first major moment of gender exposition comes when Ry describes their experiences with gender-affirming surgery.

> I am not especially tall at 5 foot 8. My build is slender. Narrow hips, long legs. When I had top surgery there wasn't much to remove, and the hormones had already altered my chest. I never wore a bra when I was female. I like my chest the way it is now; strong, smooth, and flat… When I look in the mirror I see someone I recognise, or rather, I see at least two people I recognise. That is why I have chosen not to have lower surgery. I am what I am, but what I am is not one thing, not one gender. I live with doubleness. (Winterson 89)

I want to draw attention to several elements of this passage, beginning with the phrase "when I was female." Winterson frequently uses this structure to introduce Ry's transition, a phrase that also appears as "when I was entirely a woman" (Winterson 118). In conjunction with

Winterson's careful attention to the logistics of physical transition, the approach she takes to defining Trans* identity is linear and nearly entirely medical. Through a medical conception of Trans* identity, Winterson maintains that Ry can exist in doubleness because they have a "male" top and a "female" bottom, an idea reinforced through claiming that Ry was entirely female before their top surgery. Returning to Stone's article, the heavily medicalisation of Ry's character is consistent with early examples of Trans* biography. While Winterson's conception of non-binary Transness is technically more complicated than transition narratives of the 1960s and 70s, the obsession with the medical status of Ry's body still maintains a too-narrow definition of what counts as Trans* embodiment. When the whole of Ry's identity as a Trans* person rests on the surgeries they have or haven't had, it becomes nearly impossible to explore the elements of Transness that can exist independently from medical transition.

The sex scenes that populate the novel are strong examples of the limitations of Winterson's conception of Transness, exemplifying above all else the fetishisation of Trans* bodies. On the several unfortunate occasions that Ry and Victor have sex, it is clear that Ry is equal parts the object of Victor's sexual and scientific fantasies. The first major sex scene begins with Victor examining every inch of Ry's body — which Ry strangely describes as smooth and hairless despite being on testosterone — like livestock.

> He moved nearer. He ran his long fingers down my forehead and over my nose, parted my lips and rubbed my two front teeth, pulled down my lower lip, passed on over the light stubble of my chin and to my non-existent Adam's apple, the dip of my throat, then he spread his hand, thumb and fingers on either side of my collarbone. (Winterson 119)

Victor's examination then veers into a sex scene narrated with the same medical textbook style, focusing on the changes in Ry's sexual experience compared to "when [they] were a woman"

(Winterson 121). The scene culminates in Victor's declaration that sex with Ry has become "delicious new data" (Winterson 123) in his understanding of himself, a view that reduces Ry's Transness to a mere variable in Victor's sexual exploration, Ry's body a testing ground for his heterosexuality.

The fallout of the sex scenes between Ry and Victor, especially Victor's assertions that he isn't gay for sleeping with Ry, also denotes a strange dynamic between cis-sexuality and genderqueer identity. Straight cis-gendered people, especially those who hold Transphobic views, frequently find themselves concerned about what a relationship with a Trans* person does to their own sexual orientation. For Victor, Ry's lack of penis allows the relationship to stay "straight," as he can pretend that Ry is a woman when the two are having sex. In a particularly nauseating quote, Victor claims that Ry is "now male, now not quite, now clearly a woman who will slip inside a boy's body" (Winterson 298). Between this quote and Victor's resolute rejection of the idea that he can be anything but straight, the text seems to suggest that Victor's perception of Ry's gender takes precedence over Ry's own gender identity.

In addition, Winterson's depiction of Ry as a well-educated, thin, and White further solidifies Ry as a product of late 2010s Trans* discourse, a space which was dominated by similarly thin, White, androgynous bodies. Winterson at least seems aware of ecosystems of Whiteness in the world of technology, having one of her side characters complain that the effort to produce Artificial Intelligence "is a race run by autistic-spectrum white boys with poor emotional intelligence and frat-dorm social skills" (Winterson 76). However, Winterson does not seem to attach the same level of thought to her construction of Ry, whose Whiteness is never unpacked in the context of Trans* identity.

Ry's Whiteness is especially problematic when it comes to Winterson's medically-based construction of Trans* identity. Winterson locates Ry's Transness largely in their access to gender-affirming surgery, asserting multiple times that Ry was "fully a woman prior" to receiving top surgery. Not only does this assume an anatomical or biological basis for gender, but it implies a hierarchy of Transness based on the choice to undergo medical transition. Additionally, Winterson indicates that the transformative/monstrous power of Ry's identity resides largely in their ability to confuse those around them. None of the scenes with Ron or Victor would have been remotely the same if they had been able to immediately identity Ry as Trans*. These moments, viewed uncritically, forget the fact that non-White Trans* people have a harder time accessing gender-affirming care, and therefore have less of the power that Winterson ascribes to Ry's androgyny. Ry's thin body and high level of education also affords them a level of respectability that is not afforded to other Trans* people, a detail which Ry never touches on in their extensive monologues. Ry does mention that they are incredibly attractive to women (Winterson 118), but never reflects on how their physical attractiveness and social status might affect how they pass through the world as a Trans* person.

Strangely, Ry's privilege as a White Trans* person is most visible during *Frankissstein*'s brutal rape scene, one which seems manufactured as an example of the dangers Trans* people face. According to an interview with the *Los Angeles Times*, Winterson included the scene because she "[has] friends who are trans, and myself, growing up gay, getting beaten up, getting threatened, is part of normal life. I wanted to put that in to show what it's like to find yourself in that situation" (Grove Atlantic). However, the commentary in this scene is heavy-handed and incongruent with the rest of the plot. Throughout the novel, Ry's normative traits had afforded them invisibility in the form of passing. Unlike Trans* people who struggle to pass as cis-

gendered, Ry had the freedom to move undetected, only revealing their Transness when they felt like it. However, this scene inexplicably reverses Ry's ability to pass, despite giving no indication that anyone was able to identity Ry as anything other than a man. The ending of the scene somehow makes it worse, closing abruptly with the line "is this the price I have to pay for…for…for what? To be who I am" (Winterson 244)? Ry's assault is subsequently never brought up, Ry having seemingly reconciled it as the reality of being Trans*. Any critique I have of this scene is not based in the realities of Ry's assault, as sexual violence is a very real and very heavy part of many Trans* people's lives. In fact, Trans* identifying people are over four times more likely to be victims of violent crime according to study at UCLA (William's Institute). However, Winterson's narrative, which bends over backwards to dissect Trans* identity, could have also used this scene to comment on the fact that Black and Brown Trans* people are even more likely to experience violence than White Trans* people. I would rather Winterson not have included the scene at all, but shoehorning it into Ry's story, one which had been operating from a place of relatively high privilege, made its existence even more regrettable.

I am also not the only person to have these thoughts about the book. In one of the few reviews I could find of *Frankissstein* that was written by a Trans* person, the reviewer writes:

> Winterson is a queer woman, a queer author, and in writing *Frankissstein* clearly sought to queer a canonical work of literature. Unfortunately, she missed the mark by a long margin…Ry, as a character is completely flat. Their only notable characteristic is their trans body. It is the only topic of conversation, the only factor at play in their relationships, and that bears little resemblance to the varied, interesting, and complex lives of trans people. (Cathal and Sheree)

Like my own reading of the Ry, Cathal saw Winterson's treatment of Transness as hollow, exploitative, and inconsiderate to Trans* readers. The obsession with Ry's body and the usage of words like "hybrid" consistently reduce Ry to an object of curiosity rather than a person. "Ultimately," Cathal writes, "*Frankissstein* is not a trans story, it wasn't written by a trans author, and… it wasn't written for a trans audience" (Cathal). Despite the largely positive reception, for Trans* audiences the book serves mostly as a reminder of their marginalisation.

While it is important to acknowledge Winterson's writing as a product of its time as well as a product of Winterson's satirically gifted mind, Winterson's depictions of Trans* people, from factual manipulations to objectifying writing, maintains many essentialist beliefs surrounding gender, ones which reproduce Transphobic discourses which have been historically applied to Trans* identities and bodies. While it is important to acknowledge that *Frankissstein* is a work produced in a sparser time for mainstream Trans* media, many of the issues with that Winterson's work exemplifies have been points of critique since as far back as Trans* media has existed. Both Stone and Stryker's work — which I used to affirm some of Winterson's thinking — rail against reducing Trans* people to medicalised bodies, a practice which Winterson centralises in her construction of Ry. Winterson's commitment to outdated narratives crushes any thoughtful progress that can be found in the text of *Frankissstein*. Also, like Rice, Winterson's attempts to house the Trans* experience within a thin White body contributes to the overwhelming Whiteness of queer representation, an issue that has remained pervasive despite decades of mainstream queer media. Despite the promises of monstrous possibilities of Trans* identity, the text of *Frankissstein* succeeds only in repackaging the tired narratives and discourses that surround Transness, leaving Ry largely as a monstrous discourse of late 2010s gender politics.

Post-amble

I need to take a moment to recognise that my feelings are embedded deeply within this thesis, an element which is incongruent with the detached and objective ideal for academic study. I am aware that my aversions to *Interview with the Vampire* and *Frankissstein* have little bearing on their literary value. However, as this thesis was an exploration of Queer storytelling, I found it impossible to entirely separate my analysis of these texts from my experience of them as a Queer reader and scholar.

The fact of my subjectivity only became more relevant as I realised that any analysis of Queer media is in part based on its perception within the Queer community. While I designed my thesis under the assumption that I would be reading distinctly empowering Queer monster stories, I quickly realised that the perception of Queer media often overpowers the creator's intention. *Interview with the Vampire*, for example paints an image of Queerness that is inextricable from violence, vanity, and predation, yet it is a beloved work of Queer fiction that has remained relevant for decades. In contrast, *Frankissstein*, advertised as a leap forward in Trans* representation, received a less than lukewarm reception from Trans* readers.

Under these circumstances, a monster is a more complicated story mechanism than I anticipated. While I initially assumed that an inversion of monstrosity would produce empowering results, the complicated dimensionality of monstrosity doesn't seem to allow for any form of linear inversion. The case studies I explored revealed that reclamations of monstrosity often involve a single trait — in this context Queerness — that overshadows the other facets that make Gothic monstrosity so overwhelmingly potent. In choosing Queer gender and sexuality as the definitive markers of Queer monstrosity, each of my studies presented

models of monstrosity whose inattention to other areas of difference rendered them one dimensional.

It was this discovery that led me to question the Queer monster as an independent creature. In proposing my thesis, I relied heavily on the subtext of monsters to hint at Queerness. I referred to the Queerness of monsters like Frankenstein's and Dracula as metaphorical and hidden. However, in watching the Queer monsters of my case studies crumble under scrutiny, I realised that monsters have always been Queer, just as they have always been subject to race, class, and geography. The Queerness of early monsters may have been referred to largely in allusion, but their Queerness was never hidden, never any less real than the "explicit" Queerness of later texts.

Thus, my search for a Queer monster was never a search for a monster that is "more Queer" than those that came before it. Instead, it was an attempt to find depictions of monstrosity that understand the intersectional realities of the Gothic monster and reckon with the histories that continue to create the discourses of monstrous bodies. In both *Interview* and *Frankissstein*, the failure to consider race and class still create a discourse, but one over which their respective authors have no control. The ecosystem of whiteness to which both contribute speaks more to the limits of monstrous discourse than it does to its possibilities.

In an ideal setting, the Queer monster in its infinite combinations would serve as a medium for the multitudes within Queerness, an identity too often represented as a monolith. The Queer monster cannot be contained within a single body, just as no one person can claim to represent what it means to be Queer. The best Queer monster is the one that is the truest to you, built with an understanding that the time and place of its creation, regardless of relatability, is unique to you and you alone. Everyone has a monster within themselves, and it is my sincere

hope that no one passes the chance to share theirs. My own monster is still in development, but when it's done, I know it'll use any bathroom it damn well pleases.

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