“WHY DOES MY FORM APPEAR TO CREATE SUCH TERROR?": MONSTROSITY AND GENDER IN FOUR NINETEENTH-CENTURY NOVELS

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This thesis is dedicated with love to Chris.
Thank you for your support, encouragement, and patience.
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Introduction

The monster is a recurring figure in narratives because the monster is simultaneously a figure of fear, disruption, and possibility. As Judith Halberstam succinctly states in *Skin Shows*, “Monsters are meaning machines. They can represent gender, race, nationality, class, and sexuality in one body. And even within these divisions of identity, the monster can still be broken down” (22). The monster has the ability to define the human and to challenge definition of the human. The monster also works to challenge the “divisions of identity,” as Halberstam has defined them, within the human. Because of this, the monster takes many forms. In the Middle Ages, the monster of *Beowulf* takes on three forms, but the most well known is

…warped

in the shape of a man, [he] moves beyond the pale

bigger than any man, an unnatural birth

called Grendel.[3]

The twenty-first century novel *Twilight* presents a monster who is remarkably more attractive:

His skin, white despite the faint flush from yesterday’s hunting trip, literally sparkled, like thousands of tiny diamonds were embedded in the surface. He lay perfectly still in the grass, his shirt open over his sculpted, incandescent chest, his scintillating arm bare…a perfect statue…glittering like crystal. (260)
The vast difference between these two monsters can be explained by the vast
difference in time between their creation. Halberstam asserts that “Monstrosity (and
the fear it gives rise to) is historically conditioned rather than a psychological
universal” (6), meaning that each monster is specific to the time period in which it is
created, and therefore speaks to the fears of that culture.\(^1\) While certain monsters
transcend this temporal limitation, Chris Baldick argues that what survives is the myth
of the monster rather than the monster itself because “The vitality of myths lies
precisely in their capacity for change, their adaptability and openness to new
combinations of meaning” (4). This adaptability explains why the nineteenth-century
vampire Count Dracula is an unsettling and unattractive man while the twenty-first
century vampire Edward Cullen is a handsome, romantic hero; the vampire \textit{myth}
sustains both interpretations.

Monsters have proven to be so enduring because they have the ability to speak
to a wide range of fears and anxieties, but they are also culturally and temporally
specific. The monster is reinvented so that he is continually relevant to the social
reality of a specific time and culture. But through these (re)inventions the role of the
monster remains the same: to produce fear and in doing so to challenge the prevailing
social structure in order to reveal something about that structure.

While there are many ways to interrogate monstrosity, this essay will explore
the ways in which bodily monstrosity is used to disrupt the binary of gender in four

\(^1\) Nina Auerbach explores how the various representations of the vampire throughout the history of
Anglo-American culture are representative of that culture in \textit{Our Vampires, Ourselves}. 
nineteenth-century novels: *Frankenstein* (1818), *The Mummy!* (1827), *The Coming Race* (1871), and *Dracula* (1897). This particular focus is in part a result of the influence of the critical work of gender theorists, discussed in detail in Chapter Two, who argue that the gender is a constructed category of identity. But the determining factor for the focus of this essay came from the recognition that all of these novels feature a monstrous body that disrupts the gender binary. While these novels possess other striking similarities, their particular use of the monster to interrogate gender as a category of identity demands their consideration as a group. While there have been many essays examining the novels individually or even examining *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* as a pair; *The Mummy!* and *The Coming Race* have garnered far less critical attention and their monster’s have not persisted in myth the way that Frankenstein’s monster and Count Dracula have.

As a genre—as I will define the group of novels in Chapter Three—the novels speak to the gender anxieties specific to the nineteenth century. But, as the twenty-first century reappearance of the vampire in the form of Edward Cullen proves, monsters are not strictly historical and so speak to larger issues such as the construction of categories of identity and their relationship to agency. Because of these considerations, this essay will explore the emergence of the monster as a method of disrupting the nineteenth-century patriarchal power structure based on the binary of gender, and will simultaneously enter the current critical dialogue interrogating the structures of power that are based on categories of identity. In Chapter One I will draw a connection
between the critical theory of gender and the eighteenth-century work of Mary Wollstonecraft, asserting that there are strong parallels between Wollstonecraft’s arguments in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and the gender disruption presented in these four novels. In Chapter Two I will use close readings of the monsters’ bodies in order to understand how the novels assert the monster as a figure that does not operate within the binary of gender and is therefore not subject to its rules of agency. In Chapter Three I will make the argument for a consideration of these texts as a genre unto themselves in order to understand how the monstrous disruptions they portray are an argument for an agency not determined by the binary of gender.

My aim in this essay is to demonstrate the political possibility located within the body of the monster. As a recurring character and as an enduring myth, the monster did and continues to capture the cultural imagination in a way that other characters do not. This is in part because monsters are a study in contrasts: they can be both specific and general; possess horrible bodies and human minds; cause fear and destruction and promote political possibility. Through their contrary natures, monsters question definitions of the human, through which process all of the categories of identity contained within the human are also called into question. As I will suggest, this ability to question identity is what gives the monster, and the novels in which they live, a unique power.
Chapter One

*In any attempt to fix monstrosity, some aspect of it escapes unread.*
—Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows*

As the looming figure of terror and theoretical possibility, the monster is the most important character in these novels and in this essay, but because of its multiplicity of representations, it is difficult to define a monster. *In Frankenstein's Shadow*, Chris Baldick’s extensive exploration of Mary Shelley’s novel, shares a similar concern and Baldick tries to define both the monster and his enduring appeal. He observes that the *myth* of monsters often precedes and outlives their original texts and he locates this persistence in the original Latin root: *monstrare*, where “a monster is something or someone to be shown” (10). The English derivative, *demonstrate*, indicates that a monster is something that explains or proves. According to this definition, the monster can be understood as an illustration of a principle or idea.

Marie-Helene Huet also traces the Latin roots of monster in *Monstrous Imagination*, but the focus of her work is monstrous physical and artistic birth. She traces her definition to the Latin *monere*, which means “to warn” (65), and explores the role of monster as a public omen. Following the logic of these combined definitions results in an understanding of the monsters in these texts as figures that both reveal and warn.

In this chapter I will argue that the monsters *demonstrate* the constructive nature of gender, as has been defined by feminist and gender critics. Through a close reading of four passages from the novels I will examine the role of the body in the disruption of the gender binary, a disruption that the monsters could be said to be
simultaneously revealing and warning the reader about. I will also assert that the role of the monsters is linked to the arguments posed by Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, the text in which Wollstonecraft argues that agency should not be determined by gender.

While a comprehensive examination of these monsters would allow for the interrogation of many categories of identity, such as race or class, the focus of this essay is the disruption of gender because, as Christopher Craft points out, nineteenth-century England was a “gender anxious culture” (110). While it can be argued that other categories of identity affected the development of the nineteenth-century subject with as much force as gender, the novels share a common focus on the social structures based on the binary of gender. From the division of the genders emerged the “separate spheres” of nineteenth-century society that determined social function and agency on the basis of gender. Since these roles were and continue to be open to individual interpretation, it is easy to understand how gender could become a site of anxiety. When that same anxiety-ridden category of identity is used as the basis of agency, the stakes of a large-scale disruption of gender within a patriarchal society are staggering. The frightening nature of such a disruption makes the appearance of a monster poetically just.

This interrogation joins the current lively critical debate surrounding the discursive construction of gender and its affects on subjectivity. One of the preeminent writers in this field is post-structuralist critic Judith Butler, who explores the “political
possibilities” that emerge from “a radical critique of the categories of identity” (xxxii) in her 1990 *Gender Trouble*. One of the aims of this essay is to explore how those possibilities are pursued in the disrupted social realities of four nineteenth-century novels. Just as Butler sees the body as an uneasy site of gender performance, so too do I read the bodies of these monsters as central to an understanding of them as subjects that move outside of the powerful binary of gender, and so disrupt any easy assumptions about agency based on that binary.

Butler argues, “Just as bodily surfaces are enacted as the natural, so these performances becomes the site of a dissonant and denaturalized performance that reveals the performative status of the natural itself” (200). As I will further explore in Chapter Two the bodies of the monsters are consistently presented as monstrous and ungendered. What gets imposed on monstrous bodies is the “dissonant and denaturalized performance” of gender; the traits identified as monstrous are not gendered, but have gender imposed upon them. The sense of dissonance is generated by the uncanny similarity between the gendered monstrous body and the gendered human body. Before it is gendered the monstrous body is simply monstrous. Once it is read as gendered the monstrous body does not signify gender in any “natural” way and so reveals the artificial or “performative” nature of such signification.

The source of terror in the novels is the disruption of categories of identity that promises both chaos and possibility. It is the realization that these categories could and should be irrelevant to agency. Butler criticizes the theories of subjectivity that
contend that the subject is formed within discourse through an epistemic engagement with the norms of culture because “the question of locating ‘agency’ is usually associated with the viability of the ‘subject’ where the ‘subject’ is understood to have some stable existence prior to the cultural field that it negotiates” (195; italics added). The monsters represent a subjectivity developed through another mode of knowing, one derived from personal rather than cultural experience. Donna Haraway argues that this method of knowing is “about lived social and bodily realities” (155; italics added) as opposed to the realities constructed through discourse. Such a reality is possible for the monsters because their unusual genesis doesn’t connect them to the epistemological tradition of the Western subject. The monsters “skip the step of original unity, of identification with nature in the Western sense” (Haraway, 151) because their creation places them outside of cultural discourse and their sense of subjectivity is developed externally to that discourse. Their subjectivity is determined by their lived experience outside of the discourses of culture before it is influenced by contact with those discourses.

But subjectivity is not based solely on individual experience; it is also based on how the subject is situated within culture. Even the inhuman monsters find themselves enmeshed in human social reality, and so the construction of their subjectivity is a product of both their lived reality and the cultural reality that they enter and then find themselves disrupting. For the monster, sense of self is not defined by a gendered “I” but by his primary understanding of himself as a monster. This subjective priority
establishes an agency that does not rely on the binary of gender for determination. Butler affirms this understanding of the constitution of the self when she states,

…the enabling conditions for the assertion of “I” are provided by the structure of signification, the rules that regulate the legitimate and illegitimate invocation of that pronoun, the practices that establish the terms of intelligibility by which that pronoun can circulate. (196)

Even after their induction into the human social reality, the terms the monsters use to establish their subjectivity are always based on their monstrosity rather than their gender. *Frankenstein’s* atypically articulate monster declares, “When I looked around, I saw and heard of none like me. Was I then a monster, a blot upon the earth, from which all men fled, and whom all men disowned?” (95). He separates himself not only from men, but also from man. His first subjective recognition is that his body is not recognizable in the binary of gender, that he is the Other to man. In fact his subjectivity is determined by *that* important binary, man and the Other, whereas his gender, when considered later in his intellectual development, determines only that he can demand a companion. He asks for a female, but his primary concern is that he have one who is *like him*; his first demand is that she be recognizable as the Other and his second is that she be gendered female. The monster is trapped by the same system of binaries that determine gender, but because the binary that determines his subjectivity precedes the binary of gender, the monster is endowed with an agency that only comes from operating outside of the binary of gender.
What the subsequent chapters of this essay will explore is the same question that Judith Butler explores on a theoretical level: “What constitutes a subversive repetition within signifying practices of gender?” (199). The monsters create “subversive repetition” in two ways. First, the monstrous body part refuses to signify as gendered and so subverts the entire notion of the gendered body. The vampire also demonstrates an excessive repetition of gender that signifies not only the subversive but begins to signify the other gender. Once gender signification is proven irrelevant to agency, a sense of possibility follows, because “the reconceptualization of identity as an effect…opens up possibilities of ‘agency’ that are insidiously foreclosed by positions that take identity categories as foundational and fixed” (Butler, 201). When Frankenstein’s monster asks, “Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination?” (102), the answers to who and what he is bear equally on the agency that those answers will allow.

If the monsters disrupt the binary of gender and perhaps even operate, discursively and subjectively, outside of that binary, is it possible or even necessary to place them into another binary, such as human/monster? I would answer that while such a categorization is not only unnecessary but antithetical to the interrogation of binaries, such a binary is the only basis for an understanding of the monster outside of established human binaries. What undermines the rigid establishment of such a binary is the fact that a norm for monstrosity is not established in any one novel or in the

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2 In this “exaggeration of sexual characteristics” the vampire seems to signify one aspect of personal Camp as Susan Sontag has defined it in “Notes on Camp.”
novels as a group. While it is easy to recognize the monster as Monster, there is always the anxiety that the individual monster will produce new, unknown types of monster, destabilizing the category of Monster before it is established. If no stable category of Monster exists, then the construction of a binary proves difficult because the boundaries of such a binary are in constant reevaluation. This not only upsets an easy categorization of Monster; it also demonstrates the instability of the gender binary, thereby disrupting from two different approaches.

While the monster refuses to be contained within one definition, or even within one body, I think that the monster can be understood as a disruptive figure by utilizing Donna Haraway’s definition of the cyborg. In “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” Haraway identifies the cyborg as “a fiction mapping our social and bodily reality…an imaginative resource” (150), a definition that seems to encompass the figure of the monster perfectly. The monster contains within one figure the significance of bodily and social realities because it is a subversion of them. Stefani Engelstein echoes this understanding of the monster as a sort of cyborg in Anxious Anatomy: “…the Creature by his very exceptionality unearths uncomfortable truths about humanity, revealing our proximity to both machine and animal” (183). While the monsters are in no way machines, as both authors point out, the monster reveals the human connection to both the natural and unnatural realms of reality.
Haraway further defines the cyborg as “a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation” (150), an image easily reflected onto the figure of the monster. Just as Halberstam argues that the monster is historically specific so too can it be said to represent the possibility of transformation as a consequence of its hybrid nature. Much of what the monsters reveal is the bodily fiction of gender, and I think it is possible, through Haraway, to move forward identify the roots of the “imaginative resource” at the genesis of the monsters in order to bring to light the “possibilities” monstrosity promises.

Like Butler, Haraway disputes the absolute reality of categories of identity because “identities seem contradictory, partial, and strategic. With the hard-won recognition of their social and historical constitution, gender, race, and class cannot provide the basis for belief in ‘essential’ unity” (155). Haraway’s essay precedes Butler’s work, and she is primarily interested in interrogating the line between human and animal in order to reveal the feminist possibilities of that interrogation. From that understanding, she defines the cyborg as “a creature in a post-gender world” (150) and argues that the cyborg operates in a world where gender is no longer a subjective consideration. The cyborg is “about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities” (154). Transgressed boundaries between human and monster and imminent fusions, made especially apparent in the novels’ concerted anxiety about reproduction, are all immediately apparent in these four novels.
While it is easy to identify the fear and anxiety produced by the monsters, it is also possible to identify the ways in which they reveal political possibility. Like Haraway’s cyborg, the monster “marks out a self-consciously constructed space that cannot affirm the capacity to act on the basis of cultural identification, but only on the basis of conscious coalition, of affinity, political kinship” (156). Just as Frankenstein’s monster experiences a conscious sense of separation from the deLacey family based on his bodily difference, so too do unusual collaborations arise that are based on different groupings of “affinity.” Cheops restores the British monarchy in an attempt to atone for his own previous misuse of power. Because of the affection she feels for Tish, Zee defies the cultural norms of her people. And the cohesiveness of the vampires in Dracula is determined not by gender, ethnicity, or class, but by a shared appetite.

The monsters are not only recognizable as the Other based on their bodies and their subjective construction but also because they cannot clearly identify with human beings on the basis of gender, or even race, class, or cultural groups. They must create relationships based on factors that transcend the importance of these binaries. They are always already identified as the Other and can only find kinship with humans when political or personal factors demand it, or circumstances make it unavoidable. Engelstein construes this circumstance to be a result of “a body that cries out, quite literally, for access to a community that will grant access” (180). The monsters are not only post-gender figures; they also reorder social reality into a post-gender
amalgamation where binary categories of identity become meaningless and affinity and purpose determine community.

In *Technologies of Gender*, Teresa de Lauretis reiterates Butler and Haraway when she defines the subject as a figure “not unified but rather multiple, and not so much divided as contradicted” (2), suggesting that categories of identity are always already unstable, fractured, and multiple. A social reality like patriarchy derives its power is from the idea of a discursive coherence in the binary of gender. This presents something of a problem for a project engaged in demonstrating how a figure such as the monster disrupts categories of identity when it has already been critically established that these categories are already disrupted, and are constantly in the process of being disrupted. In the face of this theoretical dilemma, I embrace the belief that gender is unstable and is in fact represented with multiple norms within these four novels. The task, then, becomes to examine how each novel—and the group of novels as a whole—represent and is representative of a nineteenth-century literary construction of gender. The close readings of the body in this chapter and Chapter Two reveal how the novels’ representation of gender is disrupted from within.

de Lauretis asserts that narrative is one of the social technologies (19) that constitutes the discourses that produce gendered subjectivity. That subjectivity is “the product of various social technologies…and of institutionalized discourses, epistemologies, and critical practices, as well as practices of daily life” (2). These
novels, then, constitute a social narrative of the body that works in part to create the
discourses that determine the norms for a gendered body. But while narrative
constitutes the discourse, as these novels demonstrate, there is no stability within that
discourse because it is prone to anxiety and correction. Although the monstrous body
is portrayed as the opposite of the human body, there is such a degree of variation in
both bodies that the discourse on the body must constantly revise its norms. Narrative
then serves as the interpretive and interpretable record of such discourses.

Each of these novels contains gender archetypes, or variations on the
archetypes, that serve as the foil to the subversive monster. The most productive aspect
of an interrogation of the category of gender in the face of these variations is an
exploration of how the monstrous body is presented first as ungendered and then has
gender imposed upon it. This point of access allows a measure of difference as it is
represented as a body not because gender is written on the body, but because narrative,
as a social technology, has chosen the body as the appropriate surface for inscribing
gender. But because the monstrous body initially resists a gendered reading, it
therefore becomes the location of dissonance, disrupting recognizably fixed markers of
genders. As de Lauretis points out, “gender, like the real, is not only the effect of
representation but also its excess, what remains outside discourse as a potential trauma
which can rupture or destabilize, if not contained, any representation” (3). Once gender
is imposed on the monstrous body what can be read there is that excess outside of
discourse that threatens social reality with its potential trauma.
What the following four passages reveal is that monstrosity can be located within a specific feature, and that the monstrous feature is read as monstrous and not as gendered:

His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful?—Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness. (Shelley, 41)

The dark eyebrows, the thick raven hair which hung upon the forehead, and the snow-white teeth seen through the open lips, forbade the idea of death; whilst the fiend-like expression of the features made Edric shudder. (Loudon, 71)

During your unconscious state your teeth were examined, and they clearly showed that you were not only graminivorous but carnivorous. Carnivorous animals of your size are always destroyed, as being of savage and dangerous nature. (Bulwer Lytton, 101)

The waxen face; the high aquiline nose, on which the light fell in a thin white line; the parted red lips, with the sharp white teeth showing between; and the
red eyes that I seemed to see in the sunset on the windows of St. Mary’s church at Whitby. (Stoker, 287)

What we see in these passages is the location of terror within specific physical features of the monstrous body. One such feature in all four passages that causes terror is the monsters’ teeth. Frankenstein’s monster, Cheops the Mummy, and Count Dracula are described as having excessively “white teeth” as an aspect of their horrible appearance. Even in *The Coming Race*, the Vril-ya are repulsed by the size and shape of the narrator’s teeth because they are vegetarians and so find his human teeth eerily similar to the teeth of predators, and therefore grotesque.

In his essay on the subversion of gender in *Dracula*, Christopher Craft analyzes the importance of the mouth as the bodily location of horror and concludes, “the vampire mouth fuses and confuses what Dracula’s civilized nemesis, Van Helsing and his Crew of Light, works so hard to separate—the gender-based categories of the penetrating and the receptive” (109). The possibility of the teeth as a means and a representation of penetration is apparent in both *The Coming Race* and *Dracula*; it is the shape of their teeth that causes terror. But there is another similarity in these four passages that goes beyond the shape of the teeth, and that is their excessive whiteness. That excess seems to suggest the artificial, the inhuman, the Other. They signal a being that is in many ways physically superior, aggressive, and unnatural. Judith Butler suggests, “those hyperbolic exhibitions of ‘the natural,’” such as the unnatural whiteness of the monsters’ teeth, are frightening because, “in their very exaggeration,
they reveal [the] fundamentally phantasmic status of gender” (200). Although teeth might seem like an ungendered physical attribute, as Craft shrewdly points out, teeth can stand in for other attributes, such as the phallus, making any physical trait a site of possible disruption.

**Wollstonecraft’s Ungendered Equal**

*She has man’s brain—a brain that a man should have were he much gifted—and woman’s heart. The good God fashioned her for a purpose, believe me, when He made that so good combination.*

—Bram Stoker, *Dracula*

While the discussion of the body as an imperfect representation of gender is under much current critical debate, the topic is far from new and can locate its literary genesis in the feminist writings of Mary Wollstonecraft. This connection is crucial because while my analysis of the categories of identity benefits from the critical work of the last fifty years, these theories were not available to the authors of these four novels. Their interrogation of gender grew out of a different discourse, one first begun in the debate over the natural state of man, which in turn led to an exploration of the ideal state of woman. I believe the literary precedent for the gender subversion in these four novels can be found in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft’s 1792 response to the writings of eighteenth-century male philosophers.
In *Emile*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau idealizes Sophie, the woman raised to be governed only by her husband. While the ideal state of her husband is to self-govern, Sophie is the female ideal because she submits fully to the will and wisdom of her husband. Wollstonecraft argues that this aim for women is untenable because “the first object of laudable ambition is to obtain a character as a human being, regardless of the distinction of sex” (14). She sees gender as largely created through affect, most importantly the affect of sensibility in women. The aim of *A Vindication* is to “persuade women to endeavour to acquire strength, both of mind and body” (14-15) in order to erase those sexual differences that mark women as inferior to men. Wollstonecraft argues that the body is used as evidence supporting the discussion of the natural separation of duties for the sexes and understood that the eighteenth-century cult of sensibility placed women simultaneously on a pedestal and out of reach of civil rights.

In her dedication of *A Vindication* Wollstonecraft asserts that “to render the human body and mind more perfect, chastity must more universally prevail, and that chastity will never be respected in the male world till the person of a woman is not, as it were, idolized” (5). In no way does she claim that the bodily ability of women is equal to the bodily ability of men; in fact she argues against it in order to demonstrate that equal roles will not produce women who are indistinguishable from men:

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3 Miriam Brody notes in her introduction to *A Vindication* that the text was in part a response to eighteenth-century philosophers such as Edmund Burke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.
The word masculine is only a bugbear: there is little reason to fear that women will acquire too much courage or fortitude; for their apparent inferiority with respect to bodily strength, must render them, in some degree, dependent on men in the various relations of life; but why should it be increased by prejudices that give a sex to virtue, and confound simple truths with sensual reveries? (15)

Wollstonecraft anticipates and parries the argument that a woman who strives for masculine qualities of the mind will also demonstrate those qualities in a bodily manner, disrupting the accepted roles of men and women. But Wollstonecraft also buries a critique of gender roles within her reassurance by pointing out that the woman on the pedestal is assigned the quality of virtue for no reason other than the fact that she is female.

Although Wollstonecraft reassures her readers that women who are intellectual equals to men will not adopt masculine bodily traits, she does argue against the continuation of bodily practices that relegate women to a life of sensibility, a life that separates them from a noble purpose of mind and body:

…in the education of women, the cultivation of the understanding is always subordinate to the acquirement of some corporeal accomplishment; even while enervated by confinement and false notions of modesty, the body is prevented from attaining that grace and beauty which relaxed half-formed limbs never exhibit. (33)
What she proposes is not a masculine form, but rather a body that is not so excessively
gendered—she would argue unnaturally gendered—as weak and restricted. Women
with healthy bodies can’t be as easily gendered, and therefore relegated to the role of
inferior, because they resist socially prescribed bodily gender markers that reinforce
the embodiment of weakness.

While Wollstonecraft’s discussion of the body is an important element of her
primary argument, the focus of *A Vindication* is the achievement of a feminine mind
that more closely resembles a masculine mind. Through an unlikely comparison of
women and soldiers, Wollstonecraft illustrates the similarities of the sexes. She argues,
“soldiers, as well as women, practise the minor virtues with punctilious politeness.
Where is then the sexual difference, when the education has been the same?” (33). By
comparing the minds of two groups who can find no parallel in body, Wollstonecraft
crafts one of her most striking and effective arguments: the similarity of women and
men lies in the similarity of their minds. Although soldiers are expected to risk their
life in battle—a distinctly masculine trait—they are also fascinated with the details of
dress, rank, and society. Soldiers must pay attention to these details because, “Like the
fair sex, the business of their lives is gallantry—they were taught to please, and they
live only to please” (34). She deftly demonstrates that a shallow education revolving
around the happiness and orders of others produces the same type of person, a being
consumed with the thoughts and happiness of others who feels no higher calling.
Wollstonecraft resigns women and soldiers to the same fate: “they are both thrown out
of a useful station by the unnatural distinctions established in civilized life” (34). Roles and even identities based solely on gender, Wollstonecraft laments, are at best arbitrary and at worst destructive. While she is willing to concede bodily distinctions of gender, her parallel of soldiers and women points out how those distinctions are often secondary to subjective distinctions, calling attention to the instability of gender.

What Wollstonecraft proposes as a solution to the unnatural roles based on gender is a figure whose body is recognizable as a woman’s—as a healthy woman’s—whose mind is indistinguishable from a man’s. In order to achieve this, she calls for equal and co-educational schooling:

…not only the virtue, but the knowledge of the two sexes should be the same in nature, if not in degree, and…women, considered not only as moral, but rational creatures, ought to endeavor to acquire human virtues (or perfections) by the same means as men….(52)

Because women cannot erase the bodily distinctions that separate them from men, in order to be viewed as equals, Wollstonecraft argues, they must erase those distinctions which are not bodily: mind and manners. Wollstonecraft proposes a life guided by an ungendered moral code, what we might characterize as post-gender, because it is not based upon gendered assumptions of abilities or considerations, but based on the ungendered principles of knowledge and morality.
Wollstonecraft’s second proposal for the erasure of sexual difference is the chaste marriage because she argues that “an unhappy marriage is often advantageous to a family, and…the neglected wife is, in general, the best mother” (42). While not advocating unhappiness, she was in favor of marriages devoid of passion, where sexuality was secondary to friendship, which she rated as a more rare and higher virtue than romantic attachment, and she bluntly argues, “friendship or indifference inevitably succeeds love” (41). She reasons that women spend their entire lives preparing for marriage and then expect it to fulfill all of their romantic expectations, further differentiating them from men, who have lower expectations from marriage. By approaching marriage as a chaste friendship, she asserts that women can prove that “the sexual distinction which men have so warmly insisted upon, is arbitrary” (241). Through an equal education and a chaste marriage, women can erase the gender differences and begin to claim their rightful place alongside men as their equal companions rather than their idolized inferiors. She asserts this erasure of difference is possible because she has seen that “the few extraordinary women who have rushed in eccentric directions out of the orbit prescribed to their sex, were male spirits, confined by mistake in female frames” (47).

At every turn of her argument Wollstonecraft both concedes and challenges gender norms. She admits that bodily differences between the genders do exist while simultaneously arguing for a lessening of those differences. She realizes that the body is the primary site of anxiety about gender without conceding that it is an inevitable
site of difference and points out areas where the norms can be transgressed. She also proposes lines of gender that can be safely breached without threatening total social upheaval.

*Frankenstein, The Mummy, The Coming Race,* and *Dracula* do not directly adopt the transgressions and solutions Wollstonecraft proposes, but strains of her argument are apparent in the figure of the monster. This is perhaps no surprise in a novel written by her daughter, but the repetition of themes of bodily excess and subjective equality seem to be, in their repetition, more than coincidence. A coherent pattern of gender transgression emerges that can be easily traced back to the arguments made in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman.*
Chapter Two

What manner of man is this, or what manner of creature is it in the semblance of a man?

—Bram Stoker, Dracula

In this chapter I will argue that monstrosity is first located in individual features before the monstrous body is read as a subjective, gendered whole. Once the monster is forced into the binary of gender, the discourses creating that binary begin to apply to the monstrous body and the underlying anxiety about the reproduction of monstrosity is revealed. Through this process the monster is understood as a monster before it is understood as a gendered being, and it is this understanding that disrupts the binary of gender. Once the binary is disrupted, reproduction becomes the site of anxiety because the monstrous body disrupts the reproductive process through its genesis, and introduces the possibility of monstrous or hybrid offspring.

Using close readings of the descriptions of individual body parts, I will demonstrate that the texts locate monstrosity in ungendered body parts in order to define the body as monstrous before it is defined as gendered. Gender assumptions can be imposed on these features, as Christopher Craft demonstrates in his reading of the vampire’s teeth, but read individually the body parts represent nothing but monstrosity. Once the monster is forced into the binary of gender, these features can be read as a metaphor for the monstrously gendered body and these features are usually characterized by an excessive signification of gender traits. This move locates the agency of the monsters outside of the binary of gender and demonstrates the
possibility within Mary Wollstonecraft’s argument that agency need not be dependent on gender. The texts’ primary focus on the body as ungendered also speaks to Wollstonecraft’s argument for a body, particularly a female body, that cannot be easily read as gendered and therefore prevent agency and equality. I will more fully define agency and explore how it is generated by the monstrous body in Chapter Three, but an understanding of agency as the ability of a being to act on its own behalf should serve as a working definition for this chapter.

In *Anxious Anatomy*, an exploration of the monstrous body in narrative, philosophy and medical writing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Stefani Engelstein asserts that while reading a text that contains a monster, “The main question that requires asking is not, What *makes* the Creature monstrous? but, Why is the Creature persistently *perceived* as monstrous?” (181; italics added). Stefani’s focus on perception is directly connected to the question of agency. If a monster is understood as a monster, then his ability to act on his own behalf is determined by his status as a monster. If a monster is perceived as gendered, then his agency is determined by his status as a being operating within the binary of gender. In all four of the novels, the monsters are identified, and identify themselves, firstly as monsters. The monster speaking “I” does not understand the “I” to be a gendered perspective of subjectivity; the “I” is first the perspective of an inhuman creature. Because of that subjective reality, the monster must necessarily first perceive the world and the events
around him from the subjective position of the Other before he can begin to perceive it from the subjective position of male.

The novels forcefully assert the primacy of monstrosity through the use of synecdoche. Initially, monstrosity is established through the detailed description of a single feature that stands in for the monster as a whole. Dupeyron-Lafay equates this move to the literary trope of synecdoche, where the description of the part serves as the description of the whole: “Representing a fragmented body involves a process of cutting out and framing, which invests body parts with terrifying emotional power” (68). Just as the teeth represented the penetrating phallus, the aggressive predator, or the unnatural body, so too do other body parts represent monstrosity as a whole. Not only is the dismembered feature particularly potent with meaning, it is a form of monstrosity in itself in that it is disconnected, or dismembered from the whole. Separated from the source of meaning, that feature can be read as gendered, but only if gender is imposed upon it. As an individual entity, the dismembered feature expresses only monstrosity.

What is especially striking in an exploration of the monsters is the realization that the monsters are the only characters fully described. As Dupeyron-Lafay points out: “Dracula barely offers a clue as to what its characters look like—the colour of their hair or eyes, how tall they are, their general aspect, the clothes they wear, etc.—despite the fact that the body and its integrity are the main issues at stake” (62; I don’t believe the pun was intended by the author). In fact, an understanding of the physical
nature of the human characters is only constructed in comparison to the monsters. In these novels human can only be defined as that which is other than monster. This tenuous distinction makes it easy to understand why the body is the locus of anxiety. If the human must be defined as the opposite of monster in order for the binary to remain intact, then those traits or features that humans share with monsters becomes the features that must be identified as monstrous in order to preserve the binary.

*Frankenstein* focuses on the eye as a dismembered feature of terror. Victor’s first glimpse of his creation fills him with terror because the body parts that he had chosen for their particular beauty have coalesced in a grotesque whole; the combination “only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set” (41). The eyes are horrific because they do not contract accordingly with the monster’s skin. In another boundary disruption, the color of the eyes and the skin has become almost indistinguishable, heightening the monstrous nature of the being. Hesitating to give…Victor hesitates to give the monster’s features a human name: “his [the monster’s] eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me” (41). in order to accentuate their inherent monstrosity. Yet the similarities between the monster’s features and man’s features are painfully present at this point. The monster’s eyes are watery, suggesting human tears, and the only distinction between the human and the monstrous appears to be their discoloration. Just as the unnaturally white shade of the monster’s teeth was identified as a sign of monstrosity, here color is again used to
demarcate the monstrous. The contrast between the too-white teeth and the too-dark eyes disrupts Victor’s expectation of the natural and he is forced to confront the true nature of his creation. But what seems even more significant is that in the first description of the monster Victor describes the eye as an individual feature, rather than as one part of a set, dismembering it not only from the body, but from the other eye, heightening the sense of monstrosity.

The connection between the synecdoche in The Mummy!, The Coming Race, and Dracula is striking; all three choose to localize the terror in the hand of the monster. In The Mummy! Cheops’ hand draws significant attention from the characters and garners the most description: “[Edric] heard the dry, bony fingers rattle as it drew them forth—he felt its tremendous gripe—human nature could bear no more…” (72). Edric understands the nature of the hand simply by hearing it move; the monstrosity of the hand is so intense that it does not even have to be seen in order to be perceived. Cheops’ body remains primarily hidden under a cloak throughout the novel, but his hand continually emerges as a representation of the monstrous whole. The hand serves to remind the characters and the reader that the mummy is monstrous and exists in a liminal state between life and death.

The other aspect of the hand that causes terror is also the one that seems the most surprising: the strength of the grip. A hand that so closely resembles a skeleton would be thought to possess no strength because of its lack of muscles, but because it is monstrous and does not adhere to the laws of the human body, Cheops’ hand
possess a startling strength that unnerves everyone he touches. In fact it is the chilling memory of the grip that remains once the original has been removed. All of the characters who have contact with Cheops experience this same effect: Father Morris “still felt the cold and iron grasp of the Mummy” (108) after his brief encounter with Cheops and Clara “attempted to fly—when a hand of iron grasped her arm and arrested her progress. An icy chill shot to her heart…” (261). While the focus of terror moves from the physical description of the hand to its unnatural strength the hand remains the dismembered locus of monstrosity.

It is Zee’s hand in The Coming Race that disturbs the narrator, Tish, and reminds the reader that although the Vril-ya appear to exist in a Utopian society, there is something disturbing in their control of the Vril. While Zee explains her control over her Vril staff, Tish notices that

In the first place, the thumb of the Gy…was much larger, at once longer and more massive, than is found with our species above ground…Secondly, the palm is proportionally thicker than ours—the texture of the skin infinitely finer and softer—its average warmth is greater. More remarkable than all this, is a visible nerve, perceptible under the skin, which starts from the wrist skirting the ball of the thumb, and branching, fork-like, at the roots of the fore and middle fingers. (67)

Although there is nothing particularly horrifying in the nature of Zee’s palm—in contrast to Cheops’—there is the reiterated sense that it is unnatural and strikingly
different than a human palm. The visibly perceptible nerve is the most unnatural aspect of the palm and stands in stark contrast to the soft and fine nature of the skin of her palm. Bulwer Lytton has made the palm terrifying both in what it can achieve—control of the Vril staff that has the power to destroy—and how the unnatural disturbs the expectation of femininity created by the initial lines of the description.

Dracula’s palms also upset the expectations of the reader and characters and highlight his extreme bodily abnormality. They also seem to possess contradictory qualities. When Jonathan first meets Dracula he remarks on the unnatural quality of his hands:

Hitherto I had noticed the backs of his hands as they lay on his knees in the firelight, and they had seemed rather white and fine; but seeing them now close to me, I could not but notice that they were rather coarse—broad, with squat fingers. Strange to say, there were hairs in the centre of the palm. The nails were long and fine, and cut to a sharp point. As the Count leaned over me and his hands touched me, I could not repress a shudder. (43)

Like Zee’s hand, Dracula’s is a study in contrasts. While it seemed to be fine, or feminine, in actuality it is excessively masculine, even to the point of unnatural hairiness. The description of his hands matches up with the later full descriptions of Dracula; upon first glance there is something strange but not monstrous about him, but a closer look reveals the monstrosity hidden just beneath the surface.
Another aspect of his hands that inspires terror is their unnatural strength, similar to the hands to Cheops. When Jonathan is first welcomed to the castle by the man he presumes to be Dracula’s servant he is pulled into the castle: “his hand grasped mine with a strength which made me wince, an effect which was not lessened by the fact that it seemed as cold as ice—more like the hand of a dead than a living man” (41). Just like Cheops, Dracula is a man existing in the liminal state between life and death, a fact communicated by his hand. The man’s surprising strength disturbs Jonathan and its echo is found in the icy temperature of the hand.

In each of these instances the hand stands in for the full measure of monstrosity, and in each description any gendered assumptions are disrupted. Cheops’ hand is so disfigured that the consideration of gender seems pointless, and Zee and Dracula possess hands with both masculine and feminine qualities. All three monsters possess unnatural strength, suggesting that strength is not a reliable indicator of gender. In fact, each hand shares more similarities with the other monstrous hands than it does with the human hand. This realization makes it seem as if there is more coherence in the markers of monstrosity than there is in the markers of gender. Even dislocated from the rest of the body the hand is easily understood as monstrous.

While synecdoche functions as the locus of terror in the initial descriptions of monstrosity, the monster refuses to be contained within one body part, and the terror expands beyond the disconnected feature to the organic whole. One of the primary
reasons for this is that the monsters begin to assert their subjectivity in the context of
the narrative, forcing the characters and the reader to consider the monster as a whole.

Victor Frankenstein’s monster in Mary Shelley’s 1818 novel *Frankenstein* is
perhaps the best illustration of this movement because, as Engelstein points out
“Shelley situates the gory physicality of the body in the center of her work” (180). But
the monster is also allowed to articulate his position—although through the mediation
of Victor and Walton, a significant consideration—in the narrative, an honor the other
monsters are not granted. The structure of the novel portrays the thoughts and feelings
of both the creature and the creator, and through this structure the reader learns how
the monster is viewed and how he views himself.

Frankenstein’s monster is defined by his body but as Wollstonecraft has argued, the
body is not a reflection of the mind, and there couldn’t be a more intelligent
illustration of this principle than Shelley’s monster. He is horrific because of his size
and his appearance, yet he is an intelligent, eloquent, and feeling being. In many ways
he could be considered the equal to Victor, yet his body prevents Victor from making
such a consideration. When Victor looks upon his creation he sees only horror and the
possibility of destruction:

> Oh! No mortal could support the horror of that countenance. A mummy

again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch. I had

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4 Newman, Beth. “Narratives of Seduction and the Seductions of Narrative: The Frame Structure of
gazed on him while he was unfinished; he was ugly then; but when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived. (42)

Victor considers the monster unattractive but not monstrous while unanimated. Yet as soon as the monster attains the same living status as Victor, the monster becomes a figure of terror. While the monster has the status of other animals, or even that of a scientific experiment, Victor recognizes the difference between himself and the monster. But once the monster wakes and is endowed with the same urges and desires, in short as soon as he is a man in the same way that Victor is a man, the monster becomes not only horrible, but also a threat.

In fact, Victor only realizes that the monster is grotesque in appearance after it awakes:

His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful.
Beautiful?—Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shriveled complexion, and straight black lips. (41)

In all of the monster’s traits there are clear markers of excess: his muscles are excessively large, his hair is excessively luxurious and black, and his teeth are
excessively white. This amalgamation of excess make the whole disturbing in a way that the unanimated individual features were not. Any one feature could be described as grotesque, but the assembly of the whole is a frightening spectacle.

Once animated, the monster takes the subjective position determined by his experience, and so adopts the reactive subjectivity that Haraway identifies as a post-gender marker that separates the cyborg from the post-enlightenment human. But while the monster’s subjectivity is formed from experience only, he does retain a distinctly human sense of a connection to his creator that echoes Adam’s connection to his maker in John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. But the monster also demonstrates parallels with the other inhabitant of Eden: Eve. When the monster first glimpses his reflection in a pond, the scene seems to directly allude to Eve’s first watery glimpse of herself in *Paradise Lost*. While the novel is full of references to the monster’s similarity to Adam—both question their form, their purpose and their maker—this crucial moment underscores the monster’s similarity to both Adam and Eve and both genders.

Like Adam, the monster questions his maker, but the monster asks Victor why he was given such a monstrous body: “Why did you form a monster so hideous that even you turned from me in disgust? God in pity made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image; but my form is a filthy type of your’s, more horrid from its very resemblance” (104). While both Adam and the monster question their purpose, the monster understands his purpose only through his body. Adam’s creator gives him a

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5 Milton’s epic poem *Paradise Lost* is quoted in the epigraph and recognized as one of Shelley’s artistic sources.
companion, but the monster must contain the significance of both male and female within one form because he is denied a companion by his creator. He is the only one of his kind and must contain all references to monstrosity within one body.

What the monster also reveals in his narrative is that he identifies himself first as a monster before he identifies himself as a male. In fact, he goes so far as to differentiate himself from man, and to point out that he is a “filthy type” of his creator, not a similar being. Since both characters are male, the difference is not in gender but in “type,” and so the monster sees more differences between himself and his creator than he sees similarities. Engelstein echoes the reading of the monster as inclusive of the signifiers of both male and female, but contradicts the monster’s assertion that he is more different than similar to man. She locates the horror of the monster in his similarity:

The Creature…is certainly an individual. He is a representative of no general whole, but is the sole member of his unhuman species. The great shock generated by viewing the Creature originates in this consistent similarity to the human form and expression, interrupted searingly by deviations from the expectations of humanity raised by the general conformity. (193)

While the monster is a terrifying figure because of his similarity to humans, he is himself terrified by his vast dissimilarity. The monster’s first subjective perspective, from creation through his decision to end his life, is that of monster:
And what was I? Of my creation and creator I was absolutely ignorant; but I knew that I possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property. I was, besides, endowed with a figure hideously deformed and loathsome; I was not even of the same nature as man. I was more agile than they, and could subsist upon coarser diet; I bore the extremities of heat and cold with less injury to my frame; my stature far exceeded their’s [sic]. When I looked around, I saw and heard of none like me. Was I then a monster, a blot upon the earth, from which all men fled, and whom all men disowned? (95)

The monster wonders first what he is because he doesn’t see any physical similarity between himself and the humans around him. Afterwards he constructs a binary of human and monster to explain the ways in which he is not human. He must do this in part because he recognizes that he does not have the same possessions as humans (money, friends, property), and also because he recognizes the ways in which his body makes him different.

While the monster’s traits can be read as excessively masculine—he is more agile and has greater physical resources to endure hardship—the monster reads these traits as monstrous because they further separate him from humans. This reading is evident from the first line he uses to describe his body: “I was, besides, endowed with a figure hideously deformed and loathsome.” The monster does not gender his body in any way because he recognizes it only as monstrous, which is echoed in one of his
final questions: “Was I then a monster?” For the monster this is the primary question and the one that defines him.

Jane Loudon draws many parallels between Frankenstein’s monster and her own in her 1827 novel, *The Mummy! A Tale of the Twenty-Second Century*. Cheops, the titular monster, is just as physically horrifying as Frankenstein’s monster, but he is far less introspective and less concerned with developing a subjective position than Frankenstein’s monster. Cheops is brought back to life with a galvanic battery, and he uses a balloon to make his way to England where he becomes involved in the lives of two families scheming for control of the British crown. Cheops has no clear stake in the outcome of the social and political maneuvers he coordinates, but he seems to act selflessly to restore order and happiness to the kingdom. But like Victor Frankenstein, Cheops has conducted his machinations for personal reasons. Before he returns to a state of death Cheops admits to Edric—his surrogate creator—that the desire that motivated his actions was atonement for past wrongs:

Permitted for a time to revisit earth, I have made use of the powers entrusted to me to assist the good and punish the malevolent. Under pretence of aiding them, I gave them counsels which only plunged them yet deeper in destruction, whilst the evil that my advice appeared to bring upon the good, was only like a passing cloud before the sun; it gave lustre to the success that followed. (298)

Indeed, by the end of the novel all of the villains are appropriately punished, all the heroes rise to their rightful place, and England sits powerfully atop the world. Unlike
Frankenstein’s monster Cheops doesn’t continually reveal his motivations and the reader is left wondering whether he is good or evil. One reason for this is the fact that *The Mummy!* utilizes an omniscient narrator while Frankenstein uses multiple, mediated first person narrators; Cheops doesn’t have a voice in the same way that Frankenstein’s monster does, but he still manages to assert his status as a complete being, forcing the focus of horror from the disconnected hand or eye to the monster as a whole.

Once considered as a monstrous being, the mummy’s concern for people outside of his immediate sphere again connects him to Frankenstein’s monster. The two monsters are terrible in body yet tender and emotional in soul. Frankenstein’s monster wishes only for love and affection while Cheops is motivated by the desire to right his past wrongs. Strikingly, both monsters are particularly concerned with people who are irrelevant to them (Frankenstein with the DeLaceys and Cheops with the British aristocracy). Like mothers, they wish to nurture and guide the players in the scenes they observe and so demonstrate a decidedly feminine and maternal aspect to their personality, further blurring the gender lines that would allow the reader to easily categorize their identity. Both monsters are hyper-masculine and externally terrifying, but also emotional, and internally feminine. This juxtaposition of traits allows the monster to resist easy gender categorization.

Unlike Frankenstein’s monster, Cheops is not ashamed of his monstrous body and makes himself known to the people of England. He is received in a manner similar
to that of Frankenstein’s monster, namely with terror and revulsion, yet Cheops does not seem to care that his body is grotesque. He instead chides humans for their reaction to him: “…why does my form appear to create such terror? Is it because a tomb has been my dwelling?” (111). In direct opposition to Frankenstein’s monster, Cheops realizes and embraces his subjective position. He is in some ways still human—he is, after all, a reanimated human corpse—yet he identifies himself first as monster and only at the end of the novel as a male.

Although this subjective position is dominant in the novel, it is not immediate. Soon after he is brought back to life by Dr. Entwerfern and Edric’s galvanic battery, Cheops throws himself upon the sand outside his tomb and questions his identity:

…he looked at himself, and a deep, unnatural shuddering convulsed his whole frame. His sensations of identity became confused, and he recoiled with horror from himself. ‘These are the trappings of a mummy!’ murmured he in a hollow whisper. ‘Am I then dead?...I cannot be more wretched; why should I fear a change?’(78)

Cheops experiences confusion about his identity, and sees himself, with horror, as a monster. But unlike Frankentein’s monster, Cheops spends only a few moments lost in fear and despair over his physical appearance before he embraces his identity as monster and moves forward in action.

Although Cheops accepts his form, the omniscient narrator continually asserts the truly grotesque nature of the mummy’s appearance. The Mummy! challenges
Shelley’s ranking of the hideousness of Frankenstein’s monster as superior to that of a reanimated mummy. Cheops immediately fills every character with terror and uses that terror to his advantage by manipulating the people around him. The villain Father Morris admits:

I am not timid, but my very soul recoiled from the hideous aspect of that awful being; the cerecloths of the grave are still wrapped round him, his fearful eyes glare with unearthly lustre, and his deep sepulchral voice thrills through every nerve. (105)

Cheops’ body is both human and monstrous. He still wears the clothes that remind the viewer that the human aspect of the mummy is dead, yet he walks and talks like any of the characters in the novel and in fact proves himself morally superior to the majority of them. But throughout the novel he is seen only as a monster and not as a gendered being. This is due in part to the narrator’s insistence on his monstrosity, but it is also due to the fact that his body is read primarily as monstrous. Although as a human Cheops was decidedly male, his transition into the mummified state erased those gendered markers and his subjective position in the novel is that of monster.

*The Mummy!* also sustains bodily synecdoche for the duration of the novel, underscoring a reading of the monster as ungendered. While the novel contains general descriptions of the mummy’s body as a whole, those passages are short and vague. Cheops is rather gaunt—this could be a nasty side-effect of the mummification process—and his physical form is just as horrifying as Frankenstein’s monster, but it
seems to be because he inhabits a strange liminal area between life and death. There are no extended descriptions of his body, and the narrator instead returns repeatedly to two specific features as the locus of terror: Cheops’ powerful eyes and compelling voice. While these characteristics are horrible, and usually inspire a shudder of terror in the human to which they are directed, they are also largely ungendered. Father Morris remembers how the mummy’s “eyes seemed as if they were looking into his very soul, and [his] solemn accents were even now scaring his faculties” (108) when he thinks about his meeting with Cheops. Similarly, the narrator describes how “his appalling laugh struck terror to the firmest breast, and even those who affected to despise his menaces could not prevent their minds from dwelling upon his words” (232). Although these features contain a great deal of power, there is nothing particularly masculine in them as dismembered features. In fact, Dracula also uses laughter to signify the monstrosity of the female vampires, illustrating its unreliability as a marker of gender.

The male monsters are easy to identify as monsters because their appearance continually betrays them. The female monsters in The Coming Race and Dracula upset this easy distinction and so create a different type of terror. The female monsters are excessively beautiful and at first captivate and draw in those around them rather than repelling them as the male monsters do. What is also significant in these two novels is that they both present male and female monsters, and there is only a degree of horror separating them. Both genders are capable of destruction and reproduction, and their
appearance betrays the viewer or victim before it betrays the monster. Both novels continue the use of bodily synecdoche, but also introduce excessively gendered whole as a signifier of both the monster and the Other—in this case the other gender. This transition marks a different approach to the disruption of gender boundaries that speaks directly to anxieties about reproduction.

Edward Bulwer Lytton’s 1871 novel, *The Coming Race*, is a tale of a subterranean race of beings who closely resemble humans yet have altered to adapt to their climate. They have grown taller, wiser, more attractive and live longer and healthier lives. Yet, our unnamed narrator can never shake the feeling of terror that their appearance gives him. The Vril-ya, as the race of people are called, are kind and hospitable to the narrator, but he experiences a feeling of vague anxiety in their presence that grows as he learns more about their culture. When the narrator first arrives in their city, after climbing down a mining shaft, his first impression of the Vril-ya is that they are

...above all, the same type of race—race akin to man’s, but infinitely stronger of form and grandeur of aspect—and inspiring the same unutterable feeling of dread...it seemed to me that in this very calm and benignity consisted the secret of the dread which the countenances inspired. (18)

Unlike the previous two monsters, the Vril-ya do not immediately reveal their monstrosity. Instead, there is something in the excess of traits, in this case strength and

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6 The novel’s extended philosophical discussion of the Vril-ya’s possible decent from frogs seems to reflect the evolutionary thinking first proposed by Charles Darwin’s 1859 *The Origin of Species.*
calm, that inspires terror. The Vril-ya as monster is in many ways recognizable as human, but the aspects in which they differ from humans are the aspects that create horror. In this instance, the narrator is frightened by the lack of emotions expressed on the faces of the Vril-ya that would normally allow him to understand what they are feeling. However this trait is common to both males (Ana) and females (Gy-ei) of the Vril-ya and so represents an ungendered trait of monstrosity.

While both the men and the women frighten the narrator—called Tish by the Vril-ya—his particular terror begins when he realizes that he has become the object of Zee’s affections. Zee is the daughter of his host and is, by all accounts, the wisest, strongest, and most beautiful of the Gy-ei of the Vril-ya. Although the narrator respects Zee and grants her a form of beauty, his every feeling for her is exactly opposite of affection:

There are times…that I could scarcely believe her to be a creature of mortal birth, and bent my head before her as the vision of a being among the celestial orders. But never once did my heart feel for this lofty type of the noblest womanhood a sentiment of human love. (97)

It is significant in this passage that Tish describes Zee as a “being” of the “celestial orders,” deliberately erasing a sense of her gender. He continues by describing her as a “type” of womanhood, a formulation that both connects her to women and also distances her in the same way that Frankenstein’s monster is a “filthy type” of his creator. Although both monsters are similar to their human counterparts, the use of the
word “type” insinuates that they are simply a distorted copy of the original, highlighting the artificial and monstrous aspect rather than the gender.

The narrator sustains this separation of Zee from femininity, and every description of Zee is balanced by an explication of the beauty of her form and character and the narrator’s simultaneous repulsion and terror. Zee is feminine, but only by the standards of her race. Her size and power terrify Tish, and her physical size and muscularity is a deviation on the human signification of gender. But Zee’s physical form is not unique to her; unlike the male monsters of *Frankenstein* and *The Mummy!*, Zee is part of an entire race that could be characterized as monstrous. In this way Zee could be said to act as a synecdoche for the larger monstrosity of the Vril-ya.

Within the Vril-ya, the Gy-ei are physically and socially dominant:

…the Gy-ei are usually superior to the Ana in physical strength (an important element in the consideration and maintenance of female rights). They attain to loftier stature, and amid their rounder proportions are imbedded sinews and muscles as hardy as those of the other sex. (40)

The physical superiority of the Gy-ei is only one element of their monstrosity. As Allan Conrad Christensen explains, “The Other is now the subterranean, inhuman, antidemocratic race of the Vril-ya…the menace emerges finally…in terms of gender and domesticity” (13). The Vril-ya as a whole are monstrous, but the women have completely disrupted the gendered spheres of society and so their power seems even more terrifying to the narrator.
The bodies of the Ana of the Vril-ya also disrupt gender norms. The Ana are physically smaller than the Gy-ei, and there is nothing that marks them as particularly masculine. In fact, their physical traits and behavior seem feminine by human standards. They do not grow facial hair and are the demure coquettes in love. The narrator remarks on “a handsome young An” who, “…as in the modest custom of the males when addressed by females…answered with downcast eyes and blushing cheeks, and was demure and shy as young ladies new to the world are in most civilized countries” (114). The Ana are also monstrous because they also subvert gender norms. They have adopted the traits thought to be essentially feminine, and in doing so demonstrate the instability of agency based on the binary of gender. The Vril-ya connect particular traits, such as the roles in courtship, to bodily traits—the Ana are smaller and therefore subject to the conquest of the Gy-ei—without fully subverting all gender norms. The Gy-ei are the aggressors in love because marriage is a defining aspect of their lives, where it is only one aspect of the lives of the Ana. This social understanding mirrors the human nineteenth-century understanding, suggesting that some gender traits are connected to the body while others are not. This dislocation of personal traits from the body recalls Mary Wollstonecraft’s argument and demonstrates the inability of the monstrous body to fully signify one gender because its primary signification is monstrous.

Bram Stoker’s 1897 Dracula also presents monsters of both genders who possess excessive gender traits but those same traits serve to link the two genders in
monstrous deviation from the human. Dracula’s vampires are less introspective than the other monsters and seem to be driven by animal, as opposed to human, desires. The vampire is a monster who can externally pass as human but who is internally closer to the instinctual animal than the human. The vampire exists to eat, and possibly to create more vampires, and there is no motive of love or atonement that drives the monster. The vampire seems to disrupt the pattern of monstrosity established in this essay while simultaneously reinforcing the primary physical elements of monstrosity.

Stoker maintains the synecdoche of monstrosity throughout the novel through descriptions of the pale skin, red lips and sharp teeth of the vampires, but also introduces other monstrous features. In another move similar to The Mummy!, the female vampires possess a haunting laugh that highlights their unnatural status. When Jonathan first encounters the female vampires in Dracula’s castle he remarks, “they all three laughed—such a silvery, musical laugh, but as hard as though the sound never could have come through the softness of human lips” (61). Strikingly, the locus of horror is brought back again to the mouth, and what is disconcerting is not only what the mouth contains—red lips and sharp white teeth—but also what it produces. The inhuman sound of vampire laughter signifies monstrosity and the monstrous body. Once Lucy becomes a vampire she too acquires this unnatural trait: “There was something diabolically sweet in her tones—something of the tingling of glass when struck” (219). Both descriptions of vampire laughter equate it with a hardness that is
distinctly un-feminine. Just as Cheops’ laugh is an ungendered signifier of monstrosity, laughter here signifies monstrosity rather than gender.

But *Dracula* disrupts the pattern of monstrosity previously established because the individual features of the vampire sometimes signify an excess of gender rather than the absence of gender. The laughter of the female vampires initially signifies as feminine, their laughter is described as “silvery,” “musical,” and “sweet,” but it then oversignifies on those traits, which leads to an interpretation of their laughter as “hard.” Throughout *Dracula* oversignification transforms a gendered trait into its exact opposite. Because gender is constructed as a binary, such a shift can only signify the other gender. Similarly the excessively gendered traits of the vampire are common to all vampires regardless of gender, connecting the traits to monstrosity more directly than they are connected to human markers of gender.

Although the terror continues to localize in one feature of the vampiric body, the vampire does assert its presence in a way that forces the reader and the characters to consider the vampire as a subjective entity. Lucy first demonstrates this when she attempts to lure Arthur to her so that she can “kiss” him: “In a sort of sleep-waking, vague, unconscious way she opened her eyes, which were now dull and hard at once, and said in a soft, voluptuous voice, such as I had never heard from her lips:--‘Arthur! Oh, my love, I am so glad you have come! Kiss me!’” (173). It is no longer the case that aspects of Lucy are monstrous; at this moment she has asserts her identity as a monster motivated by fiendish desires as opposed to human morals. Here, too, the
seemingly feminine voice oversignifies the feminine and begins to suggest the monstrous; Lucy’s voice is “soft” but also “voluptuous,” a dangerous quality that Stoker repeatedly presents as monstrous excess.

Dracula, too, asserts himself as a monster, but in a move typical of the pattern disruption that could be said to be the only thing that consistently categorizes him, he also expresses a human longing. When he tells Mina, “And you, their best beloved one, are now to me, flesh of my flesh; blood of my blood; kin of my kin; my bountiful wine press for a while; and shall be later on my companion and my helper” (288), he reveals a desire more complex than hunger; the desire for revenge and companionship draws him to Mina in the hopes that he can establish a relationship with her that mirrors the typical nineteenth-century marriage. Whereas Lucy disrupts the gender binary in order to achieve her goals, Dracula constructs a “filthy type” of the gendered binary in order to achieve his desires.

Another aspect of vampirism that is represented as a “filthy type” of its human counterpart is attractiveness. Any woman who was beautiful in life becomes excessively beautiful—to the point of voluptuousness as Stoker repeatedly points out—when undead. The vampires living with Dracula in his castle lust for Jonathan Harker’s blood and use their bodies to lull him into an unsuspecting stupor. Jonathan feigns sleep in part to mask his overwhelming—and to him, shameful—attraction to the three female vampires. When one vampire ventures close enough for him to see her, her beauty disconcerts him:
[She] was fair, as fair as can be, with great, wavy masses of golden hair and eyes like pale sapphires. I seemed somehow to know her face, and to know it in connection with some dreamy fear, but I could not recollect at the moment how or where. All three [women] had brilliant white teeth, that shone like pearls against the ruby of their voluptuous lips...I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips....(61)

Even in the midst of desire, Jonathan senses something about their sexual aggressiveness that inspires a vague dread. In appearance the female vampires are overwhelmingly beautiful, but their assertive sexuality reveals something of the monster beneath. As explored in the description of their laughter, the excessive nature of their gender traits reveals the sharp edge beneath their beauty. In fact, Jonathan feels both attraction and repulsion, and he explains, “There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive” (61). Stoker again uses voluptuousness as the dangerous physical quality of the body that stands in for monstrosity. While this repetition also speaks to the novel’s complex representation of sexuality it is the physicality of the trait of voluptuousness that is central to this essay.

Lucy demonstrates both attractiveness and voluptuousness because she is both the ideal Victorian woman and, in a grotesque reversal of the maternal instinct, a vampire that feeds upon the blood of children. Dracula first bites Lucy just after he

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lands at Whitby, and, in a monstrous form of reproduction, she becomes both his first victim and his first offspring. While his feedings eventually kill her, they also give her a new life as a vampire. When Van Helsing and Seward are initially uncovering the truth about her un-dead status, Seward describes their first trip to her tomb after her death:

There lay Lucy seemingly just as we had seen her the night before her funeral. She was, if possible, more radiantly beautiful than ever; and I could not believe that she was dead. The lips were red, nay redder than before; and on the cheeks was a delicate bloom. (209)

At this stage of monstrosity, Lucy exhibits many of the same characteristics as the other vampires: excessively red lips and startlingly white teeth. Lucy has become more beautiful in death because of her new status as a monster. This duality is particularly emphasized when all four of the men who donated blood to keep Lucy alive meet her in the graveyard to kill her in order to release her from her un-dead state. Seward recreates the scene in his journal: “She seemed like a nightmare of Lucy as she lay there; the pointed teeth, the bloodstained, voluptuous mouth—which made one shudder to see—the whole carnal and unspiritual appearance, seeming like a devilish mockery of Lucy’s sweet purity” (221). In death, Lucy the vampire has become a parody of Lucy the Victorian woman. She trades the maternal instinct for bloodlust and her desire is written on the body in exaggerated desirability. There are numerous references to her “voluptuousness” as if her sexuality is barely contained within the
confines of her skin, just as Frankenstein’s monster’s muscles are barely contained within his skin.

As a vampire, Lucy is also aware of her beauty and power, and she uses it to lure her victims. It is perhaps this fact above all others that upsets the men who previously loved her and are now repulsed by her. Seward scathingly writes, “The sweetness was turned to adamantine, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuousness wantonness…I call the thing that was before us Lucy because it bore her shape” (218; italics added). Again the monster is identified first as a monster—here described as a “thing”—before it is identified by gender. This passage is strikingly different to Jonathan’s reaction to the female vampires in Dracula’s castle. Whereas Jonathan felt a “burning desire” to be touched by them, the men who view Lucy see only the monstrous form of the woman they loved, proving that even a beautiful façade won’t long mask the horrible desire of the vampire, and every sense of attraction described in the novel ends in repulsion once monstrosity is revealed.

This assertion of monstrosity forces the terror of the novels back onto the physical body and the binary of gender because the greatest anxiety of the novels is revealed in their expressed anxiety surrounding reproduction. Every monster is produced, or produces others, through unnatural means, usually usurping the role of sex and challenging the separate spheres that structured nineteenth-century social reality. While one monster disturbs this gender binary, and in turn the discursive
structure of power, a race of monsters would render the discourse irrelevant, and it is this possibility that cannot be tolerated.

Victor has usurped the female role in Frankenstein by bringing the monster to life and making the female body unnecessary for creation. While the monster seeks a solution to the problem his monstrosity presents in the creation of a companion, Victor fears that with a companion, “one of the first results of those sympathies for which the daemon thirsted would be children” (135). The monster asks only for a companion in exile, but Victor sees the possibility of reproduction, which raises a terror in Victor that he cannot overcome and leads to the destruction of Victor’s wife Elizabeth, the monster’s mate, and essentially everything outside of the relationship between creature and creator.

Victor denies his monster the same power he took for him, that of creation, by destroying his intended mate. While he claims that he fears the propagation of a “race of devils” (135) on the planet, Victor reveals his own monstrosity through his denial. He wants to be the sole creator of a “A new species” (37) and is the only male who crosses this gender boundary. Because of this transgression, the monstrosity of both Victor and the monster must be destroyed and both meet their deaths in an ironically barren landscape.

*The Mummy!*’s central anxiety about paternity is revealed through the plot lines involving a switched baby and a line of virgin queens. Cheops’s sin was the usurpation of his father’s power in order to pursue an incestuous relationship with his sister, a
relationship that suggests that he would have produced either no offspring or terrible offspring. There are no instances of reproduction in the novel, and the mismatched couplings, incestuous relationships, and mandated chastity present in the plot all suggest that the disruption Cheops introduces is, in some way, the only path to reproduction. However, even after his intervention the novel still ends without a single birth, and the ending is as barren as *Frankenstein*’s. Cheops’ identity as a monster who usurps the traditional roles of both men and women suggests a gender fluidity that is hard to define as either masculine or feminine. While he is a figure of terror, there is not the same sense of anxiety that the mummy has a desire to reproduce, but like Victor Frankenstein he has the desire to control the reproduction of others because he controls who marries and who does not.

In *The Coming Race* the narrator finds the courtship role reversal strange and discomfiting, but that doesn’t stop his attraction to a younger Gy who is both shorter and less physically powerful than Zee:

…but there was an expression in her face that pleased me more than did the faces of the young Gy-ei generally, because it looked less bold—less conscious of female rights…thanks to [her] comparatively diminutive stature, I thought her the loveliest Gy I had hitherto seen. (117)

In short, she is more human than Zee and therefore a more appropriate mate for the human narrator. Instead of fearing such a match, Tish daydreams about making this Gy his wife and ruling the Vril-ya as king and queen.
Tish’s daydream makes him vulnerable to a threat from the community because of the threat that such a marriage would produce offspring. The law of the Vril-ya is to prevent anything that would endanger the common good, and so a marriage between a Gy and a human, considered an inferior race, would introduce a monstrous “type” of the Vril-ya that would disrupt their social structure. When the narrator tells Zee’s father that Zee intends to court him, Aph-Lin warns Tish that “…the children of such a marriage would adulterate the race: they might even come into the world with the teeth of carnivorous animals; this could not be allowed” (103). The roles have reversed and now the human is looked at as the monster, the possible polluter of the race. It is the human that has become the monster and must be either destroyed or separated from the group. Aph-Lin warns the narrator, “…if you yield, you will become a cinder,” (103) meaning that he will be destroyed by the Vril in order to prevent his marriage and the production of offspring.

Tish’s unresolved anxiety about the Vril-ya at the close of the novel suggests that, in his mind, the monstrosity of the Vril-ya overrules their recognizable humanness; they are still a threat to humans, hence his final words warning of “the coming race” (141). This strange ending also sets this novel apart from the other three novels, because it is the only novel that does not conclude with an actual or suggested death. The monsters still exist, still pose a threat to humans, and still retain their monstrosity. Nothing, in fact, has been resolved other than the fact that the narrator escaped before
he was put to death. The monsters have resolved their human problem, but the humans have not resolved their monster problem.

Reproduction causes such anxiety in Dracula because the vampires have the ability to rapidly reproduce. Although the novel only introduces five vampires, the suggestion is that a race of vampires could quickly flourish and overrun England. Jonathan is horrified to learn that he has aided Dracula in moving to London and fears that “for centuries to come he might, amongst its teeming millions, satiate his lust for blood, and create a new and ever-widening circle of semi-demons…(74).

Both males and females can reproduce, and in fact Dracula is the only vampire who accomplishes this feat, repeating the disruption of the gender binary first breached by Victor. Although Mina has given birth to a son at the end of the novel, Quincey Harker is actually a monstrous offspring since the blood that runs through his veins is the same blood Mina was forced to drink from Dracula’s chest.

The humans believe that the monstrosity of the vampire can only be resolved through destruction and so Lord Godalming drives a stake into Lucy’s un-dead body, Van Helsing stakes the three female vampires in their caskets, and Jonathan stabs a knife through Dracula’s heart. And yet monstrosity survives in both Mina and Quincey, a significant fact because Dracula is the only one of the four novels to conclude with a birth. This suggests that while Dracula expresses the most insistent anxiety about the reproduction of monstrosity, it is also unable to fully expel monstrosity if it is to uphold the traditional Victorian social values of marriage and
family. The novel’s inability to fully expel monstrosity in fact makes room for it within Victorian gender norms; an ironic twist that makes Dracula perhaps the most unsettling and the most promising, in terms of agency, of the four novels.
Chapter Three

*The boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion.*

—Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto”

The inconclusive ends of monstrosity within *Frankenstein*, *The Mummy!*, *The Coming Race*, and *Dracula* are only one aspect of the novels that suggest an agency not based on the binary of gender. In this chapter I will explore the use of technology as a key thematic element that both suggests possibilities for agency and separates the four novels from other Gothic novels. Through a reconsideration of their genre, I will assert that the novels fall within the pure fantastic genre because the same disruptions they introduce also produce a hesitation that characterizes pure fantastic texts.

It is a seemingly easy task to point out that categories of identity that are difficult to define, such as gender, are of course unstable and prone to disruption. What makes the argument worth pursuing is an understanding of how agency is determined by the construction of such categories. Interrogating the ways in which agency is produced, determined, represented, and enacted is work that is far from complete. I began this project expecting to uncover overtly feminist rhetoric hidden within monstrosity. What I discovered in these novels and the work of Mary Wollstonecraft is an argument for the agency of beings not determined by a gendered body. Agency, as it is used in this essay, is the ability for beings to enact their will within their social reality. Instead of being acted upon, the being that possesses agency will be able to act for herself in opposition to the aims of groups, structures, or norms antithetical to her
aims. This agency is what Mary Wollstonecraft argued was necessary in order for women to take their rightful place alongside men as equals, and as beings capable of determining their way in the world. While I believe that it was and still is important to produce feminist readings of texts, I also believe that an exploration into the determination of agency works towards many of the same ends as feminism and so is not in opposition to feminist criticism.

One aspect of these novels that creates agency is also the aspect that creates horror, and in a few instances, creates life. The plot of each novel, and the life of each monster, is dependent on technology. That term can be used in a multitude of ways, and in fact describes a multitude of things in these novels. The word technology comes from the Greek "techne" ("craft") and "logia" ("saying") and is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “a particular practical or industrial art.” This definition of technology includes science, but it also includes changes to the most mundane aspects of life that further the knowledge of and danger to the society in which they are introduced. In short, technology is a tool that shapes a subject’s knowledge of her social reality as well as her understanding of knowledge.

Technology is composed of a multitude of practices and it acts as a way of knowing the self and the reality of the self. Lisa Gitelman echoes this understanding of technology while raising an important consideration: “If technology is a form of knowledge, then it can be conflicted with doubt and contradiction, with assumptions and anxieties, just like other forms of knowledge” (7). Gitelman aptly points out that
the problem with any system of knowledge is that it is prone to the problems that it is used to understand. This inherent quandary makes the appearance of technology in novels preoccupied with the disruption of categories of identity apparent the reasons why technology appears in novels preoccupied with the disruption of categories of identity. It also explains why such a nebulous system is a suitable tool for both a monstrous creation and its destruction.

Theodora Goss and John Paul Riquelme argue for a slightly different understanding of technology: “The hierarchical relation of humans to the natural world, which is often an element of scientific, technological thinking, transfers easily to social relations, whether they involve race, gender, class, or other differentiating factors” (448). While this analysis seems correct on the surface, these novels appear to suggest the opposite. Technology is in fact opposed to hierarchy in that it is constantly reinventing itself and tearing down old forms of order. Technology puts knowledge into motion in ways that are—and were—continually changing, continually reinventing what it means to know. It is this fact that seems to appeal not only to female authors, but to all authors interested in, afraid of, or trying to face the changes in social reality that threaten to define self and agency differently.

While technology is often a tool used to implement change, it is important to remember that because it is an epistemological approach, technology acts as one way of knowing the world and is therefore subject to interpretation. Gitelman sees technology as producing some of the very effects that it disrupts: “…technology, like
science, has a rhetoric of its own. It relies upon rhetorical processes, the conventions of which contribute to a ‘thick’ description of culture” (6). Using the terminology from the social science work of Clifford Geertz, Gitelman correctly identifies the need for a further interpretation of the knowledge produced by technology. What technology produces is a knowledge that must be unwound and tamed into a narrative, or a discourse, that can be recognized as one aspect of social reality.

The authors of these novels avoid clearly defining, or unraveling, the rhetoric of technology, perhaps because the primary focus of the novels is the social reality produced by technology. In these novels, technology can function at the highest and lowest levels of social reality and so is either mysterious or mundane. The novels choose to focus on the effects of technology—what can be seen and understood as a product of its force—rather than engaging in a discussion of its specificity. This focus doesn’t mean that there aren’t explicit, or implicit, condemnations of or panegyrics to technology, but it does mean that while the authors are interested in the debate, they are more interested in the changes the debate produces than the outcome of the debate itself. They choose to illustrate the possibilities that technology introduces and its potential advantages and pitfalls rather than continuously asserting a viewpoint. This seemingly deliberate ambiguity corresponds to the anxiety surrounding the disruption of gender and makes the use of technology as the tool used for this disruption logical rather than surprising.

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8 Gitelman’s description of technology as “thick” alludes to anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s use of the term in his essay “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight” from *The Interpretation of Cultures.*
Perhaps the biggest question I am asking is not why monsters, or why technology, but why both. It is significant that monsters and technology are inextricably linked. On initial reading it would be easy to claim that the monster symbolizes the evil that technology is capable of producing: without technology, Frankenstein’s monster and Cheops would never have been brought to life and Dracula would never have made his way to England. But technology also plays a largely positive role in most of the novels: it enables Mina and her men to defeat Dracula; it creates a largely Utopian society for the Vril-ya; and it has greatly improved many aspects of British life in The Mummy! Even though Frankenstein makes the most explicit condemnation of technology, it also simultaneously, although cautiously, praises it and the possibilities it enables.

Dracula might seem like the least advanced and most organic of characters, but he is indeed the master technologian because he uses the tools of transportation and law to enact his ghastly plans. This is, in fact, the point that Van Helsing exhorts his colleagues to remember; although Dracula is a monster, he has consistently used technology to his utmost advantage:

With the child-brain that was to him he have long ago since conceive the idea of coming to a great city. What does he do? He find out the place of all the world most of promise for him…He study new tongues. He learn new social life; new environment of old ways, the politic, the law, the finance, the science, the habit of a new land and a new people who have come to be since he
was…His glimpse…help him to grow as to his brain. He have done this alone; all alone! from a ruin tomb in a forgotten land. What more may he not do when the greater world of thought is open to him. (317)

Dracula uses all of the technologies—even the seemingly mundane—available to him to achieve his goal and to adapt to a new environment. Van Helsing also reminds his friends that during his human years Dracula was a man of learning who studied the technologies of his time: alchemy and metallurgy. Van Helsing does this so that that his comrades will not underestimate the ability of Dracula to utilize technology for his ends, regardless of how anachronous he may seem.

In *The Coming Race*, the use of technology is obvious; the Vril-ya have harnessed the mysterious power of the Vril, which has enabled their utopian society to flourish underground. What truly defines their technology is not the power that already exists in the earth, but the Vril-Ya’s ability to control it for their own purposes. By utilizing that technology they are able to easily settle the land, settle disputes, and eventually fly. Their use of technology also changes their bodies, as Zee makes clear to Tish when she explains that the evolved form of her palm and thumb make it easy for her to control the power of the Vril contained in the staff she carries with her.

Technology plays a central role in every aspect of *The Mummy!*, a novel based in the twenty-second century. Loudon seems particularly interested in how the technology of steam will affect society in the future, so people travel by hot-air balloons and messages travel from steam cannons at great speed. While these
imaginings fall short of the actual inventions that over the past two centuries have
taken hold, Loudon has correctly identified that communication and travel will be two
of the areas most greatly affected by technology. Loudon also makes use of
contemporary scientific advances by having Edric and Dr. Entwerfen use the power of
the galvanic battery to bring Cheops back to life.

*Frankenstein* has the most subtly complex use of technology. While Victor
harnesses it for harm, he does so imagining that he is achieving a greater good for
himself and mankind. Walton’s quest to discover a passage to the North Pole is
dangerous, but is never fully condemned and Victor actually aids Walton’s pursuits
with a rousing speech to his men when they begin to question the aims of the voyage.
The point that *Frankenstein* continually reasserts is that a maniacal pursuit of any one
goal cripples the individual by separating him from a balanced life where technology is
only one part of a larger harmony. In fact the prevailing theme is that technology is
capable of immense good when its aims are pursued in moderation.

What technology supplies is that force for change that can’t be found elsewhere
in the social reality of the novels. It usurps the power of creation and replaces God as
the creator. The novels create a body that resists and disrupts gender discourse, which
means that the monstrous body needs access to a point of creation that differs from the
human body. Technology is the point of contact where the monstrous corporeal mass
receives divine spark. This fact explains much of the anxiety surrounding reproduction
in the novels; technology usurps the role of the human, bringing into the world an
inhuman figure by inhuman means. Teresa de Lauretis defines narrative as a “technology of gender,” meaning that it is one of the cultural discourses of power that generates the construction of gender. It is through narrative that a subject understands gender. The disruption of gender norms within these four narratives, then, underscores why such a disruption to the standard discourse is so powerful.

Technology also plays a role in the formal construction of the narratives. Three of the four novels—The Mummy! is the one exception—can be read as “found documents,” or papers collected to record a seemingly unbelievable chain of events. The narrators utilize the contemporary communication technology (phonograph, shorthand, mimeograph) in order to construct the narrative. Christopher Craft astutely points out that the majority of novels with a monster as their central character follow a particular formal pattern: “Each of these texts first invites or admits a monster, then entertains and is entertained by monstrosity for some extended duration, until in its closing pages it expels or repudiates the monster and all the disruption that he/she/it brings” (107). What he defines as the “triple rhythm” (107) is present in each of these novels. While I will go on to challenge his notion that the text is successful in expelling or repudiating monstrosity, his analysis is particularly astute and points to patterns within the novels that gesture towards the consistency of many of their formal and thematic elements.
A Reconsideration of Genre

He had heard my story with that half kind of belief that is given to a tale of spirits and supernatural events

—Mary Shelley, Frankenstein

These novels have often been defined as Gothic, late Gothic, Victorian, or Science-Fiction texts. While many of these definitions could apply in part to individual novels, an examination of the four works as a whole complicates an assumption of all four texts into any one of those categories. I think it is necessary to re-categorize these texts in order to fully understand the possibilities they are suggesting.

The traditional Gothic features that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick identifies in The Corherence of Gothic Conventions are “an oppressive ruin, a wild landscape, a Catholic or feudal society…the sensibility of the trembling heroine and the impetuosity of her lover” (9), many of which we see individually in these four novels. But perhaps more telling is that Sedgwick identifies the “fundamental reorganization” of the Gothic novel as “creating a doubleness where a singleness should be” (13). The resolution of the novel then attempts to “reintegrate the sundered elements” and the greatest anxiety surrounds “the impossibility of restoring them to their original oneness” (13). These particular energies seem quite different from the ones found in these four novels, and although there are similarities in features, the “energies,” as Sedgwick defines them, are dramatically different. While traditional Gothic novels tend to rely on the uncanny or the supernatural to propel their plots, these four novels
use technology to move their plots forward. And rather than attempting to reintegrate the disparate elements, *Frankenstein*, *The Mummy!*, *The Coming Race*, and *Dracula* must abject or destroy the monster in order to restore the social order they have disrupted.

One of the key factors of these texts that further differentiates them from Gothic novels is that technology is both the source of possibility and the source of horror. Frankenstein cannot bring himself to complete his second reanimation experiment, Edric and Dr. Entwerfen are horrified by what they have brought to life, the narrator of *The Coming Race* is doomed to be reduced to cinders by the Vril, and Dracula uses existing information and transportation technology to invade England. Rather than locating the source of terror in a location, these novels locate terror in a body made powerful through technology.

This crucial difference in the location and possible resolution of terror is what places these texts in the pure fantastic genre. In *The Fantastic*, his influential work on genre, Tzvetan Todorov defines the constitution of a genre and lays the foundation for discussion of the fantastic as a genre. He concludes that the “formulation of a text’s specificity automatically becomes the description of a genre, whose particular characteristic is that the work in question is its first and unique example” (7). While the similarity in the formal specificity of the novels could be used alone as a reason to examine the texts as a genre, it is the marriage of formal and thematic elements that
demands attention to the group of novels as a genre and to explore how those similarities can be used to reclassify them.

Todorov describes the realm of the fantastic as “a world which is indeed our world, [where]…there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world” (25). He categorizes this experience as a point along the genre continuum. Todorov sees that many genres contain elements of the fantastic, a “hesitation common to reader and character, who must decide whether or not what they perceive derives from ‘reality’ as it exists in the common opinion” (41) without containing the necessary elements required to categorize the text as pure fantastic. The pure fantastic is, in the majority of cases, a phase of the novel that cannot be sustained since most novels are resolved as either fantastic-uncanny or fantastic marvelous, the two genres that surround the pure fantastic on the genre continuum.9

One end of the genre continuum is anchored by non-fiction and slowly gradates into the fantastic-uncanny, where the novel is primarily realistic and any aberrations can be resolved through a rational explanation. In novels on this end of the continuum it is possible for readers to feel fear, particularly in the fantastic-uncanny genre, but ultimately fear is purged because the novel contains uncanny but not supernatural events that can be rationally explained. (Christine Brooke-Rose). On the other end of the continuum, mythology anchors genres with fantastic events that can be explained

9 Please see Appendix A for a full chart of the genre continuum.
by supernatural occurrences. A reader of this genre also experiences fear, but that fear is turned into wonder through the supernatural explanation.

The pure fantastic exists on a razor-thin line in the middle of this continuum. This line of this genre is so thin because it usually explains a state of mind that is not sustained at the conclusion of the novel. Todorov argues that “the fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event…[T]he fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty” (25). As Christine Brooke-Rose has pointed out, most novels are resolved as either marvelous or uncanny because the events in the novel are explained as either rational or supernatural. If a novel is resolved as uncanny-fantastic, a reader can reasonably accept the events of the novel. If a novel is resolved as fantastic-marvelous, the reader accepts the supernatural definition of events but does not accept the realistic possibility of the events described. The pure fantastic is unusual because the reader can neither purge her fear through rational explanation nor turn it into wonder through the acceptance of a supernatural explanation. In the pure fantastic neither explanation can be settled upon, so the reader’s fear remains, unresolved and inexplicable. An excellent example of a novel that manages to remain in the pure fantastic genre is Henry James’ *The Turn of the Screw*. At the end of the novel the reader is neither able to fully explain the strange events as supernatural and fully accept the governesses explanation, nor is she able to rule out the supernatural and accept the explanation of the children.
For readers, particularly contemporary readers, of these four novels I would argue that the sense of hesitation is never resolved and fear is neither purged nor turned into wonder. Instead, the resolution of the novel haunts them with a sense of vague dissatisfaction. One of the most important reasons for this reaction is the experience and expulsion of the monsters. While these monsters show many signs of the supernatural, all are brought into the realistic world of the novel through technological means. Rather than allowing the reader to resolve the novels into the realm of fantastic-uncanny or fantastic-marvelous, the role of technology prolongs the hesitation that characterizes the pure fantastic. The reader understands that the monsters do not exist, but the fear of the reader is that it is possible that the monsters could exist, given the right technology. Therefore, the reader cannot resolve her hesitancy as uncanny, particularly during the nineteenth century when technology and science were rapidly changing what was and was not possible, and she cannot resolve it as marvelous because the creatures are organic beings that have some connection to human origins. In addition, none of the novels ends with the absolute destruction of the monster. All of the novels end with the faint trace of possibility; a monster has been expelled but not necessarily permanently destroyed. These two elements create the prolonged hesitation that places the novels within the slim boundaries of the pure fantastic.

While Neil Cornwell argues in *The Literary Fantastic* that the fantastic is merely a mode of the Gothic, I think that this collection of texts adheres to Todorov’s
definition of genre, and moves beyond the classification of a mode. This point is fundamental because recognizing these works as a genre expands the sense of disruption and possibility that would be generated by the events contained within one novel. As a genre the repetition of gender disruption within the novels is more than coincidence, it becomes a fundamental characteristic to that genre, expanding the sense of hesitation. Because the reader is unable to resolve the fear produced by every novel within the genre, she is also unable to dismiss the repetition of gender disruptions, making room for the political possibilities suggested by the genre.

It is these “political possibilities” that Judith Butler argues will be “the consequence of the radical critique of the categories of identity” (xxxii). The monsters in these four novels call into question the fixed identity of gender. Through their monstrosity, as read on the ungendered body, the monsters disrupt gender and the fixed spheres that accompany gender roles, suggesting, as Wollstonecraft also suggested, that a gendered body does not result in a stable gendered identity. Instead, the body and identity are both subject to change which would suggest that the roles assigned to humans based on their gender are also subject to change. Judith Butler locates “‘agency…within the possibility of a variation on the repetition [of signification]’ (198) because “it is only within the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible” (199). Each novel contains an individual repetition of signification, as enacted by the monsters, as well as the
repetition of signification as enacted by these novels as a genre. This repetition produces agency not only within the individual narratives but also within the genre.

If the subject is constantly constructing its subjectivity based on unstable categories of identity, than the work of pointing out that construction is far from finished. Looking at these four novels makes it apparent that this gesture is not new, but it is not yet old, nor is the work of identifying the construction of categories of identity finished. Going back, once again, to Haraway’s essay, I am drawn to her “argument for pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and for responsibility in their construction” (151; author’s emphasis). I believe that there is a critical duty to attempt to understand how categories of identity, such as gender, are constructed so that an attempt can be made to avoid the obstruction of agency that results from rigid construction. As Shelley, Loudon, Bulwer Lytton, and Stoker have all brilliantly illustrated, it is easier to assume the responsibility Haraway recommends than it is to locate the pleasure in the resulting confusion.

One reason for this, as J.P. Delotte eloquently states, is that the disruption of boundaries has been and remains a source of fear because “…at some level horror always opens onto the issue of hybridity, simply by the way it challenges categorical ways of thinking or offers presences that are bizarre combinations of elements” (219). This concept of terrifying hybridity seems particularly true of the monsters in these four novels because each of them has an element of, or was at some point, human. Frankenstein’s monster is composed of human parts, Cheops was once an Egyptian.
pharaoh, the Vril-ya are descendants of the human race, and vampires begin as and return to human form. Each monster is terrifying because he suggests both a doubling and the Other. It is, as Freud has defined the Uncanny, the familiar made strange.

While gender markers are often the physical location of horror, they are merely a stand-in for the true psychological terror: the monster in the mirror is me.

There has been a great deal of critical work done about the doubling of Frankenstein and his monster, and Dracula and Van Helsing and what this suggests is that the gender of the monster is the gender of the Other—which is merely one step away from the self. Delotte points out, “[the monsters] suggest not merely the disturbing nature of something outside the natural order, something that defies understanding, but the persistence of a sense of human culture’s inevitably mixed nature” (219). If the monster is capable of agency regardless of gender, than the same holds true for humans as well. It is impossible to completely relegate the monster into the category of the Other because the monster contains and signifies human in ways that prove to be the most unsettling.

And the monster is nothing if not a hybrid. While the initial understanding of the monster is monster, or the Other, the disturbing similarities between human and monster become the true, deeply seated source of horror. The other source of terror is

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10 Freud defines the uncanny as derived from the German “unheimlich” in his 1919 essay “The Uncanny.”

the hybrid nature of gender, the fact that the oversignification of one gender begins to suggest the other, and not only the other, but the duality of both genders contained within the same body. Once gender is disrupted as a stable category of identity, or once it suggests the possible hybridity of a gendered body, it opens the door to a further shaking of the foundations of identity. The monster is monster first, subsuming gender and other categories of identity, but the monster is eerily human, or at least close enough to human to cause horror. That horror comes from the realization that what the monster demonstrates is not simply an aberration, but a deviation from the original form: a distorted copy, but a copy nonetheless.

This continues to hold true when one considers the implications of technology and its role in signification. While human characters use technology, they are not dependent on it in the same ways that monsters are. While the claim may certainly be made that the humans in these novels demonstrate a decided dependence on the ease that technology provides, it is not a vital component of their being. In stark contrast, technology is the force that gives the monsters life, and influences the way that their bodies are formed, and establishes the ways in which they are able or unable to achieve their goals. This dependence is the primary difference between human and monster because there is always the suggestion that while dependence on technology is a choice for man because he is in his natural (bodily) state, the monster always already signifies the distorted copy, and therefore has no recourse to a natural state if technology fails him.
Entering this argument brings this paper dangerously close to the critical discussion of the posthuman, which is the direction that a larger study might take. But in the scope of this examination it is my priority to examine how the monsters disrupt but do not dislocate the bodily markers of gender and so still signify, on some level, the human. What they signify is the possibility of human: the human transformed, the human not yet imagined, the human as it could be. Hybridity is the explanation for the terror, for if the monster was monster only, instead of monster first, then there would be no terrifying disturbance because the monster would signify only the Other instead of the possibility of the Other within the self.

Another source of terror, then, as demonstrated repeatedly in the novels, is the possibility that the monstrous will escape the boundaries of his bodily form and monstrosity will spread, either naturally or unnaturally. This is why companionate marriage is rejected as an alternative to abjection or destruction. Companionate marriage would allow room for monstrosity within social reality, and could result in monstrous offspring, one of the greatest sources of anxiety within the novel. Technology has already usurped the power of the body, and the role of gender along with it, in the act of creation. A willing union between the monstrous and the human would too closely align the human with the monstrous, or the realm of the Other. Unlike the disruption of boundaries caused by the appearance of one monster, a proliferation of monsters inspires a panic of invasion.
Like the monster, this argument has become a hybrid of gender, genre, history, technology, and futurity. Like the monster, this essay attempts to demonstrate the construction of the categories of identity. It gestures strongly towards the critical work currently exploring the idea of the posthuman, but rather than looking at how the posthuman is currently constructed, I am interested in the prehistory of the posthuman, the lumbering monsters that first threatened the categories of identity. Such a disruption serves as the force that shifts the bedrock of agency, allowing its proliferation among greater numbers, a shift for which Mary Wollstonecraft strongly argued. Agency is the aim and the ethereal end of disruption. As Donna Haraway imagines: “A world without gender…is perhaps a world without genesis, but maybe also a world without end” (150). That is the sense that remains at the end of these four novels; there is an ending, but not an end. All of the novels gesture towards a future that is dependent on the knowledge of the monsters. Robert Walton will continue his voyage northward and pass on the monster’s narrative to his sister. Cheops returns to his tomb to “sleep” after he has satisfactorily rearranged England, but he hints to Erdric that his sleep may be disrupted again in the future. The narrator of The Coming Race escapes back to his country, but the Vril-ya live on in their subterranean world as an ominous threat to the social reality above ground. And Dracula lives on in the blood of Quincey Harker, the offspring of the vampirized Mina and Jonathan Harker. Just as the persistence of hesitation allows the categorization of the novels as pure fantastic, that same persistence creates possibility. Monstrosity is not fully expelled from the
world because its gender disturbance *demonstrates* the possibility of an agency not based on that binary.
Appendix A

Genre Continuum

Rational explanation

Supernatural explanation

Fear is purged

Fear is turned into wonder
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