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Sharp Teeth, Red Lips, and Dangerous Ideas: The Construction of the Female Abhuman in Fin-de-Siècle Gothic Literature

by

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Sharp Teeth, Red Lips, Dangerous Ideas:
The Construction of the Female Abhuman in Fin-de-Siècle Gothic Literature

"'Dearest, your little heart is wounded; think me not cruel because I obey the irresistible law of my strength and weakness; if your dear heart is wounded, my wild heart bleeds with yours.'"

(Le Fanu, 263)

Gothic terror, particularly that of the fin de siècle, relies heavily on the concept of the Other and its comingling with the self; what we are most afraid of, what at first seems by definition unknowable, reveals itself to be a part of our very nature, something inescapable. Even worse, the Other proves to be dominant and all encompassing, eventually eradicating the self. Vampires, werewolves, scientifically engineered split personalities, aging portraits hidden in the attic – what we as human beings seem to fear most is the transformation of our humanity into something grotesque and wicked. What constitutes that Other, however, entirely depends on what we define as self, and in a patriarchal society whose literary works were being crafted primarily by white men, this distinction took on new meaning.

As new scientific theories, especially Darwinism, became known to the public at the end of the nineteenth century, the abhuman, a term Kelly Hurley has adapted for academic use from a work of fiction by William Hope Hodgson, found its place in Victorian Gothic literature. Hurley defines the abhuman thusly:

> The abhuman subject is a not-quite-human subject, characterized by its morphic variability, continually in danger of becoming not-itself, becoming other…The *fin-de-siècle* Gothic is…convulsed by nostalgia for the "fully human" subject whose undoing it accomplishes so resolutely, and yet aroused by the prospect of a monstrous becoming. One may read its obsessive staging and restaging of the spectacle of abhumanness as a paralysis, a species of trauma, but must also note the variety and sheer exuberance of the spectacle… (Hurley, 3-4)

Hurley's central concern is how the morphic quality of the human form in these works speaks to a larger cultural anxiety of shifting identities, "an anxiety generated by scientific discourses, biological and sociomedical, which served to dismantle conventional notions of 'the abhuman' as radically as did the Gothic which arose in response to it" (Hurley, 5). While I agree with this notion and intend to make use of it in the arguments to follow, the central issue I wish to explore is how the concept of gender fits into the construction of the abhuman. I wish to explore how the female abhuman is shaped not just as a response to larger cultural tensions, but how the new discourses that propagate such tensions are factored into her creation to express a specific fear of emergent feminism. I will address the female abhuman specifically, and in so doing situate her within a culture largely afraid of the progress of women's rights. By taking a closer look at four vital texts – Bram Stoker's *Dracula,* Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla,* Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan,* and Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* – I will begin the work of answering this crucial question: what is it about the female abhuman that is unique and intrinsic to her alone, and what do these qualities say about the culture out of

which she is born? To begin the work of answering this question, I will explore the complexities of the female abhuman through a comprehensive understanding of the cultural climate out of which she arises, her physical attributes, her juxtaposition with domesticated women, and finally her punishment at the hands of the male-dominated society in which she resides.

I. The Formation of the Female Abhuman

The first order of business is to understand exactly what the abhuman is, as well as the distinct features of its construction in *fin-de-siècle* Gothic fiction. In the first publication to give a name to the figure of the abhuman in scholarly discourse, Hurley expands on the reason for its creation in the midst of scientific and social expansion:

> The effect of this 'world explosion of knowledge' in Victorian England, even putting aside the tremendous issue of the challenge Darwinian science posed to religious faith, was to demolish the model of human centrality in the universe, and replace it with one of human ephemerality, relativity, and potential 'degradation' (to use Wells' term). The new discoveries in the geological and biological sciences required a radical rethinking of humanity's position relative to its environment: its intimate relation to lower species; the role of the mere individual within the far more important history of the human species; human insignificance in a world that, according to geology, had existed far longer than previously

> had been conceived and that, according to astronomy, occupied a place far more miniscule than previously had been conceived. (Hurley 56)

This was an age of a forced existential questioning. Darwin, following Charles Lyell's theorization of deep time, was discovering our natural origins and dispelling the Genesis creation myth, and Lord Kelvin was theorizing the eventual heat death of the earth[1]; we no longer seemed to hold a significant place either in the universe or on our own planet. "What could be more comforting," writes Steven Jay Gould in his analysis of the social and scientific impact of the theory of deep time, "what more convenient for human domination, that the traditional concept of a young earth, ruled by human will within days of its origin. How threatening, by contrast, the notion of an almost incomprehensible immensity, with human habitation restricted to a millimicrosecond at the very end!" (Gould, 2). Much in the same vein, Freud makes the assertion in the very early 20th century that the last and most damming blow to what he deems humanity's "naïve self-love" was "psychological research which is endeavoring to prove to the ego of each one of us that he is not even master in his own house, but that he must remain content with the veriest scraps of information about what is going on unconsciously in his own mind" (Freud, 240) Human centrality and identity, as Hurley asserts throughout *The Gothic Body*, were of course being questioned, and from varying angles, but it seems that much of this questioning had to do not only with the instability and impermanence of the human form, but with the loss of an idealized control and supremacy. It is no wonder then

[1] Burchfield, Joe D. *Lord Kelvin and the Age of the Earth.* New York: Science History Publications, 1975. Print.

that some people would begin to turn to the contemporary social stratification for a sense of order, while others might begin to see it as arbitrary and in need of change.

Not only was the origin and the importance of human existence being called into question, but the world was being made smaller through new modes of transportation and communication, Freud was convincing the world of the existence of the unconscious, neuroscientists were revealing that the brain functioned by way of electrical impulses, MacDougall was attempting to weigh the human soul, and spiritualism was on the rise. This was a culture forced to recognize its own insignificance in the face of eternity after having believed itself to be monumentally important. If we are descendant from primates, as Darwin suggests, then could we possibly be created in God's image? Could our will, morality, and every coveted and despised emotion really be nothing more than electricity? What truly distinguishes us from people across the ocean? Do we have souls? These were among many anxieties that *fin-de-siècle* Gothic literature exposed and exacerbated, and all were focused on the very notion of a stably centered humanity.

Joe D. Burchfield, in *Lord Kelvin and the Age of the Earth*, asserts that "Charles Darwin's (1809-1882) theory of evolution by natural selection was the most famous, the most popularly discussed, and perhaps the most important scientific hypothesis of the nineteenth century" (Burchfield, 70). The concept of evolution is vital when discussing the abhuman. Darwin, along with T.H. Huxley, H.G. Wells, and may others, became convinced of the concept of atavism, or the idea that evolution could work in reverse. If the ancestors of humanity were nothing but primates, did that not mean that humans could have retained some of the qualities thereof? Violence, depravity, base expressions of sexuality – these were all traits assigned to the very worst of society. If we come from

animals, what is to keep us from turning back into animals? Thus, we see creatures of human stock becoming terrifying monsters who exhibit the most shocking animalistic and unrestrained behavior; the abhuman is born.

Furthermore, it was not only scientific advancements that were altering the way that Victorian and early Edwardian culture thought about its humanity; certain social changes were taking place that troubled what was once thought to be a natural hierarchy. Women were denied the right to vote until 1928, after an arduous political battle that saw three reform acts, marches, arrests, hunger strikes, and violent protest[2]. While Darwin maintained that "man has ultimately become superior to woman" and that woman is "the intermediate between the child and the man,"[3] women were beginning to take on a new, often sexual agency that was perceived as threatening to the patriarchy, and therefore threatening to society as a whole.

Inevitably, this growing phenomenon of feminine self-actualization was expressed in *fin-de-siècle* Gothic literature as something monstrous to be feared and quashed. It is my intention to explore the ways in which the anxiety-producing modern theories and advancements of the *fin-de-siècle* figure into the casting of feminism as science fiction. Many of these texts present female characters who are abhuman as an expression or as a direct result of their explicit sexuality or their confused gender identity, and their eventual deaths become necessary for the restoration of male dominance. Contemporary Gothic literature featuring female abhuman antagonists can be viewed as a kind of attempted catharsis intended to alleviate the anxieties of a male-dominated

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[2] ELLIS, CAROLINE. "The Good Fight." *Britain*, vol. 81, no. 2, May 2013, pp. 87-90.
[3] Darwin, Charles. *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex.* Pages 565 and 557, respectively

society; the “New Woman” was emerging, and a demographic that had previously been considered inferior was showing its teeth.

II. If Looks Could Kill

The physical attributes that establish abhuman women as atavistic seem to be the very agents of their power, and therefore their horror. After marking instances of human beings snarling in anger, Darwin remarks “This reaction of the lips and uncovering of the teeth during paroxysms of rage, as if to bit the offender, is so remarkable, considering how seldom the teeth are used by men in fighting, that I enquired . . . whether the habit was common in the insane whose passions are unbridled” (Expressions 240). He receives an answer from Dr. Maudsley, who marks the “various strange animal-like traits in idiots” as an effect of “the reappearance of primitive instincts.” Darwin writes:

> Dr. Maudsley thinks that the same view may be extended to the brain in its degenerated condition in some insane patients: and asks, whence come ‘the savage snarl, the destructive disposition, the obscene language, the wild howl, the offensive habits, displayed by some of the insane? Why should a human being, deprived of his reason, ever become so brutal in character, as some do, unless he has the brute nature within him?’ The question must, as it would appear, be answered in the affirmative. (Expressions 241)

Thus we see the central preoccupation of the vampiric abhuman with the use of teeth, and in particular the canines. Darwin goes on to write:

> We may readily believe from our affinity to the anthropomorphous apes that our male semi-human progenitors possessed great canine teeth…We may further suspect…that our semi-human progenitors uncovered their canine teeth when prepared for battle, as we still do when feeling ferocious, or when merely sneering at or defying some one, without any intention of making a real attack with our teeth. (Expression 248)

It is vital that he identifies our toothy ancestors as male. The terror of the female abhuman's features is not merely that they are degenerative, but that they grant her brute strength. If she is an expression of male fear of female agency, it follows that that agency be granted in part by physical attributes, such as massive canines, usually assigned to males.

A vampire's teeth are phallic objects; they are agents of sexual dominance which allow for oral penetration. Perhaps this is why the targets of vampire attacks in Victorian Gothic literature are almost exclusively committed against innocent young women, even when the vampire is female. Because the ultimate goal of the vampire is to transform its victim into a being like itself, it seems that social anxieties are manifested in the sense of independent thought being something infectious in women, and something from which innocents like Mina Harker of *Dracula* and Laura of *Carmilla*, among many others, must be spared by the righteous hand of the patriarchy. On the other hand, when we see instances of men being targeted by female vampires, as in the case of Jonathan Harker, the apprehensions being expressed are those of a reversal of sexual dominance, in which circumstance the teeth are paramount.

While Jonathan feels a kind of ambiguous fear toward Count Dracula, it is not the latter who physically attacks him, but rather the three sisters. In his article, "'Kiss Me With Those Red Lips': Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," Christopher Craft seems to locate the anxiety of the text in the threat of the male Count Dracula biting, in a sexually coded act, another man. While I find this interpretation valid, his reading of the three sisters as merely an extension of the Count disregards their femaleness to a certain extent, and seeks in them the gender variability of Dracula when there is perhaps more to be gained by looking at their own sexual role reversal as abhuman women. Their physical atavistic abnormalities are explicitly linked with their sexuality and dominance. Harker describes the encounter in his journal:

> All three had brilliant white teeth, that shone like pearls against the ruby of their voluptuous lips. There was something about them that made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time some deadly fear. I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips. . . The fair girl went on her knees and bent over me, fairly gloating. There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive, and as she arched her neck she actually licked her lips like an animal, till I could see in the moonlight the moisture shining on the scarlet lips and on the red tongue as it lapped the white sharp teeth. (Stoker 39)

In this excerpt, the teeth of the abhumans are set against their red lips, to which Harker is erotically drawn. It is their sexual agency that provides much of the terror of the situation he finds himself in. Because sexuality was viewed as a degenerative quality when

expressed by women, the behavior of the fair woman marks her as animalistic and dangerous, a danger manifest in her "white sharp teeth."

Furthermore, the fact that she "went down on her knees and went over" Harker suggests not only that she is enacting some measure of physical dominance, but that she is in the coded process of performing a sexual act not performed by women in polite society. Innocent, well-bred women were not supposed to perform oral sex, nor display any kind of sexual aggression. Thus the female abhuman reveals the paradox of the Domestic Angel - they were to fulfill men's sexual desires without being overtly sexual; they were to be the objects that receive male sexual desire. Jonathan wishes to engage with the women, and yet the prospect inspires terror. This fear originates with the sight of their teeth, which also seem to spur much of the fascination; the aggressive sexuality of female vampires is explicitly linked with their teeth, which grant them some control over their male victims. Craft elucidates the gendered role reversal of this passage:

> Immobilized by the competing imperatives of "wicked desire" and "deadly fear," Harker awaits an erotic fulfillment that entails both the dissolution of the boundaries of the self and the thorough subversion of conventional Victorian gender codes, which constrained the mobility of sexual desire and varieties of genital behavior by according to the more active male the right and responsibility of vigorous appetite, while requiring the more passive female to "suffer and be still". (Craft, 108)

The comingling of the obvious enjoyment Jonathan experiences at the hands of this woman's "deliberate voluptuousness" with the horror of the situation expressed in the language of the text suggest that overt female sexuality is dangerous not only because it

represents a lower form of evolution, as much contemporary male-written fiction in the genre tries so hard to express, but also because it gives women some measure of control in a male-dominated world.

It follows that in Le Fanu's earlier *Carmilla*, in the second description of her teeth in the novella, there is a male figure who wishes to disarm her; a vagabond salesman comes to the schloss occupied by the sweet mortal girl, Laura, and her companion, the amorous vampire Carmilla, and offers to perform some dentistry on the latter:

> Your noble friend, the young lady at your right, has the sharpest tooth, – long, thin, pointed, like an awl, like a needle; ha, ha! With my sharp and long sight, as I look up, I have seen it distinctly; now if it happens to hurt the young lady, and I think it must, here am I here are my file, my punch, my nippers; I will make it round and blunt, if her ladyship pleases; no longer the tooth of a fish, but of a beautiful young lady as she is. (Le Fanu 269).

In designing to standardize Carmilla's fangs, the salesman is attempting to rob her of the very symbol of her power. While earlier physical descriptions of Carmilla only note how beautiful and charming she is, he alone, with his "sharp and long sight" sees her teeth as a threat. If we are to understand regressive, domineering canines to be coded as male, then the wanderer's playful characterization of himself holds some significance; as a male, he recognizes Carmilla's power as dangerous and believes that he has the tools to render her defenseless.

It is of course meaningful that the manner in which he intends to subdue her is a castration of sorts; he wishes to render her teeth less phallic in order to make her look

more ladylike. “Politically,” writes Elaine Showalter in *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin-de-Siècle,* “the New Woman was an anarchic figure who threatened to turn the world upside down and to be on top in a wild carnival of social and sexual misrule” (38). This scene acts as an element of foreshadowing employed to hint at the male recognition and dismantlement of the sexual and anarchic threat that Carmilla poses to the impressionable young women in her world. It is of no consequence that the wanderer is of a lower class, less educated, and less cultured in comparison with Carmilla; the sinister nature of her supposedly deviant sexuality and its eradication transcends class difference. The threat of the allegedly evolutionarily inferior woman usurping the position of social and political dominance by way of her sexuality was one that required all men to rise and quash it. Fred Botting, in his work simply titled *Gothic,* states that

> While science disclosed grand unifying powers, horror was another mode of cultural reunification, a response to the sexual figures that threatened society. One of the main objects of anxiety was the ‘New Woman’ who, in her demand for economic, sexual, and political independence, was seen as a threat to conventionally sexualized divisions between domestic and social roles. (Botting 138)

Thus we may interpret the descriptions of provocative female abhumans not merely as objectifying portrayals intended to titillate male readers, which in many cases – see the *Dracula* excerpt above – they most certainly are, but also as an expression of the fear of rising contemporary female sexual autonomy. These descriptions can be viewed as a

means of vilifying the New Woman as she was explicitly bound by patriarchal males to her identity as a sexually regressive being.

Many of the anxieties expressed by male authors in *fin-de-siècle* Gothic fiction centered around the explicit nature of the female abhuman's sexuality. While readers may now associate the vivid red of a vampire's lips with the blood that they drink, for example, we may also consider these images to be quite vaginal, and in fact not exclusive to vampires. While Bram Stoker describes the female vampires in terms of "the ruby of their voluptuous lips" and later has Jonathan Harker's sexual excitement heightened by "the moisture shining on the scarlet lips," Arthur Machen's description of the unambiguously sexually aggressive abhuman Helen Vaughan notes her "full lips,"[4] and Carmilla seems decidedly taken with her female would-be lover's mouth.

The focus on the female mouth as something "full," "red," or "moist," or the use of romantic allusions are telling of the female abhuman in particular and are necessarily excluded from descriptions of men in these texts. In constructing the mouth as something explicitly erotic and often vaginal, these authors are again pointing to a larger fear of overt female sexuality. In describing the female body, Victorian fiction often relies on synecdoche. According to Helena Michie,

> No matter how committed to the realist enterprise, an author cannot name or describe every bodily part. At some point the represented must come to stand for the unrepresented, the present for the absent. It is the intersection of the failure of language to fully represent, with a historical and political

[4] Arthur Machen. *The Great God Pan.* 33

> agenda, that concerns me here as elsewhere. In the Victorian novel, the language fragments itself as it fragments the female body it undertakes to describe…The bodily parts that comprise the litany which in turn constitutes the female body as it appears in the Victorian Novel, are carefully selected not only for what they represent but for the absences they suggest. Like the 'vital statistics' of the *Playboy* centerfold, the marked and selected attributes of the Victorian female body construct an imaginary body in the space between. (Michie 97)

The metaphoric construction of the female sex organ is an integral part of the description of the female abhuman because it signals the greater fear she produces; she is naked sexuality itself. She is immodest, wearing her sexuality, in the form of metaphorical genitalia, in the open for all to see, and using it, in the case of the vampire, to seduce her victims and to conceal the phallic teeth that give her power. Craft expounds on this topic in his reading of *Dracula*, however it can most certainly be argued that his assertions apply to motifs found in many, if not all, vampire tales of the *fin-de-siècle*:

> As the primary site of erotic experience in *Dracula*, this mouth equivocates, giving the lie to the easy separation of the masculine and the feminine. Luring at first with an inviting orifice, a promise of red softness, but delivering instead a piercing bone, 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… (Craft, 109)

As is typical of fin-de-siècle Gothic, metaphorical representations of male and female sex organs are thus conflated, indicating a cultural terror of a movement away from stringent gender boundaries.

The description of Helen Vaughan's abhuman form in Machen's *The Great God Pan* is a terrific example of this horrific pluralism. In a manuscript dated 1888, found among the papers of the story's Doctor Robert Matheson, the mystery of the malevolent and allusive Helen Vaughan is finally revealed to the protagonist, Clarke:

> The skin, and the flesh, and the muscles, and the bones, and the firm structure of the human body that I had thought to be unchangeable, and permanent as adamant, began to melt and dissolve…Here too was all the work by which man had been made repeated before my eyes. I saw the form waver from sex to sex, dividing itself from itself, and then again reunited. Then I saw the body descend to the beasts whence it ascended, and that which was on the heights go down to the depths, even to the abyss of all being. (60)

On the surface, this passage seems to be an articulation of the horror of Darwinian atavism and in many ways it is; Helen Vaughan evolves and devolves before Clarke, putting on display the unthinkable origins from which we all derive. However, numerous contemporary authors of Neo-Gothic Fiction were capitalizing on the social trend of Darwinism in order to propagate their notions of feminism; newly known to man was the horrifying concept that human beings were descendant from animals and were intrinsically natural, as opposed to divine, beings – there is structure in nature, hierarchy considered inevitable, and one that Darwin very clearly articulated as being male

dominant. True, he asserts that the females of most species have the advantage of selection due to their larger population,[5] but he maintains elsewhere that "Man is more courageous, pugnacious and energetic than woman, and thus has a more inventive genius. His brain is absolutely larger…" (*The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, 557). That scientific discourse was putting in terms of the absolute that man is superior to woman both in regard to physical prowess and in intellectual capacity set the stage for popular culture to further a sexist rhetoric now seemingly justified, and thereby villainize the New Woman on legitimized grounds.

After all, it must be noted, while awe and dread are experienced by many of these characters upon viewing the very fact of atavism, it is the monsters themselves that become the root of antagonism and horror. Both new scientific concepts and the New Woman represented uncontrollable and unaccountable change from what is known and accepted, and we see these ideas conflated again and again in *fin-de-siècle* fiction written by men for a general public already coping with the anxieties these changes produced. "The myth of womanhood," states Nina Auerbach in *Woman and the Demon*, "flourishes not in the carefully wrought prescriptions of sages, but in the vibrant half-life of popular literature and art, forms which may distill the essence of a culture though they are rarely granted Culture's weighty imprimatur" (Auerbach 10).

Thus, Helen Vaughan's body acts not only as a catalyst for depraved and salacious behavior, but also as a representation of the "firm structure" of humanity thought to be "unchangeable" and "permanent." The first operation of its repetition of

[5] Darwin, Charles. *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex.* New ed., rev. and augm. New York: AMS Press, 1972. Print. The Works of Charles Darwin, v. 9.

evolution is the confusion of the sexes; no longer is this structure a binary one, separated "adamantly" into male and female, and it is this transformation that seems to be the propulsion into lower forms of being. Here the text suggests that to alter the social architecture in a way that denies the segregation of traditional male and female modes is to devolve.

One of the most notable instances of gender pluralism in *fin-de-siècle* Gothic can be seen in Richard Marsh's *The Beetle.* The antagonist, known by many names, but most often referred to as "The Arab," appears to be male, when she is in fact biologically female, as the scientist Sydney Atherton discovers upon seeing her naked form. Holt, upon first seeing her, in the reader's first encounter, states, "I could not at once decide if it was a man or a woman. Indeed at first I doubted if it was anything human. But, afterwards, I knew it to be a man, - for this reason, if for no other, that it was impossible such a creature could be feminine" (Marsh, 12). Here, the text creates a mutual exclusivity between "supernatural ugliness" and femininity, and in not uncommon form glorifies the assumed gentle beauty of womanhood as the natural ideal in an attempt to leave no space for masculine elements, such as the dominance displayed by "The Arab." Much of this antagonist's power, and therefore horror, lies in the fact of her masculinity, and even goes so far as to deny her any claim to womanhood; even after the text discloses that she is biologically female, it refers to her only with male pronouns.

At the turn of the century the feminist movement was in its infancy in England, and both its own stated goals and the fears it produced were still coded according to assumed gender norms. Sally Mitchell, in her study entitled *The New Girl: Girls' Culture in England 1880-1959,* states that "to an extent, feminism was defined as seeking male

privilege… Masculinity provided physical and geographical freedom: nonobstructive clothing, an athletic body, safe passage through public spaces that men made dangerous for those who wore skirts…. "(104 – 105). And while young girls had dreams of boyhood freedom, adults were constructing a similar, more negative, case around feminists. Victoria Margree, in her article entitled "'Both in Men's Clothing': Gender, Sovereignty and Insecurity in Richard Marsh's *The Beetle*," writes that "As the New Woman became a figure of cultural recognisability and media currency, both celebrated and despised, detractors of the movement for women's rights repeatedly characterized her as actually desiring masculinity. If the New Woman sought the right to behave as a man, it was argued, she must in fact wish to be a man" (72). "The Arab" represents, among other concerns, the emancipated woman who occupies a male space; she is assertive, sexually dominant, and has complete physical and mental control over her victims. However, it is the fact of her masculinity that makes her entirely unattractive to the man she desires and bars her from engaging as a female. Kelly Hurley writes of the beetle-woman:

> …she is no cipher or lazily passive object of desire. She is a powerful, aggressive – most 'unfeminine' – creature, who seduces only to emasculate and consume her male object of desire…And just as the supernaturally exaggerated representations of the barbaric, primitive Oriental found in *The Beetle*, offer a rationale for xenophobia and for continued British colonial presence within Egypt, so does its fearsome depictions of unleashed feminine potency offer a rationale for the continued constriction of female roles, particularly in the context of the strong feminist movements at the turn of the century. (Hurley, 129)

While Hurley sees the hidden fact of the female identity of the beetle-woman as the underlying threat of the text, I understand it to be the masculinity that masks it. The true transgression of the antagonist is not merely her monstrous femininity, but that she looks and behaves like a man, a station not afforded her as a biological female. Women, by Darwin's standards as by those of much of the scientific community, were considered less evolved than men, and to allow them the independence and authority they were fighting for more publicly than ever before could only spell disaster for humanity.

III. The Domestic Angel and the Female Demon

In order to provide a greater sense of urgency for the task of suppressing the rise of the New Woman, abhuman women of the *fin-de-siècle* were often set in contrast to women who exhibited qualities of the traditional, sheltered feminine mode. In many, if not most, texts of this nature, the Domestic Angel also figures as the victim of the overt and aggressive female abhuman. Hurley writes that "Such a juxtaposition…. between good and evil women, at one level works to stabilize the meanings of 'proper' femininity by identifying the sexually active and aggressive woman as a literal monster, an abhuman, and her chaste and modest counterpart as 'fully human' by contrast" (Hurley 121). While I agree with this assessment, I believe that Hurley does not push this concept far enough. If we are to understand the female abhuman as the monstrous representation of early feminism, then the aforementioned structure also has a two-fold effect: first, as the domesticated woman is culturally understood to be the picture of virtue, her destruction, moral or otherwise, presents an illustration of cultural innocence being

dismantled by this new threat. Second, this construction suggests that chaste and subservient women are at risk of being corrupted by those who work to change the status quo and display their independence and sexuality proudly. Thus we see the opposition of Laura and her vampiric, would-be lover in a text written just before the late 1800's, Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872).

Laura, sheltered and constantly chaperoned by other proper women in her secluded schloss, represents an idealized femininity; she is obedient, kind, and void of any sexuality save that which Carmilla imposes on her. Carmilla, by contrast, is an utterly sexual being. Her "languid" movements and "low voice"[6] immediately characterize her as the embodiment of transgressive feminine sexuality, and as the story progresses, those attributes are revealed, through Le Fanu's use of vampirism and lesbianism, as markers of a deeper and darker violation of the feminine ideal. "Female sexuality," writes Fred Botting in *Gothic*, "embodied in Carmilla's languor and fluidity, is linked, in her ability to turn into a large black cat, with witchcraft and contemporary visions of sexual, primitive regression and independent femininity" (Botting 145). Her identity as a sexually transgressive female is illustrated through both her vampirism and her atavism, and the resulting figure is Sapphic and aggressive, ready to corrupt other young women.

In 1885, only thirteen years after the publication of *Carmilla*, a law was passed in England making homosexual encounters between men a criminal offence. The main focus of this legislation was to eradicate male homosexuality, and the clause denoting lesbian activity was omitted, at a time when lesbianism was famously deemed

[6] Le Fanu, 262

"impossible" by Queen Victoria.[7] Lesbianism was viewed, or rather repressed as, a lurid French fantasy – a phenomenon expressed only in the basest forms of literature. Given the widespread belief that women were not sexual beings, but merely bodies on which sexuality could be imposed by men, the idea that two women could engage in sexual activity became a kind of myth, one associated with a sort of horrific degeneration.

Nina Auerbach in *Our Vampires, Ourselves,* claims that "Carmilla is one of the few self-accepting homosexuals in Victorian or any literature" (Auerbach 41). While the huge rise in literature positively depicting confident LGBTQ characters in the last two decades renders the latter part of her claim somewhat outdated, the assertion that this kind of self-acceptance was rare in Victorian literature remains viable. Carmilla's self-assured nature is a large part of her depiction as monstrous; her confidence in her sexually transgressive behavior in this context marks her as atavistic and therefore threatening to social progress.

Carmilla is an object of both desire and disgust, a sexual being who uses her perversions to pervert others; she is a vampire who creates vampires, the embodiment of the fear of gendered role reversal. At a time when heteronormativity was the understood basis for interpretation, Carmilla's lesbianism acts as a corrupting force of confused gender identification, a representation of the fear of what might happen if women step out of their assigned roles and into those designated for men. Laura speaks to this issue when she theorizes that Carmilla's aggressive romantic overtures are possible because she is a male in disguise:

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[7] Marsh, Jan. "Sex & Sexuality in the 19th Century." *Victoria and Albert Museum Online*. Web.

> Respecting these very extraordinary manifestations I strove in vain to find any satisfactory theory – I could not refer them to affectation or trick. It was unmistakably the momentary breaking out of suppressed instinct and emotion. Was she… subject to brief visitations of insanity; or was there here a disguise and a romance? I had read in old story books of such things. What if a boyish lover had found his way into the house, and sought to prosecute his suit in masquerade…Except in these brief periods of mysterious excitement her ways were girlish; and there was always a languor about her, quite incompatible with a masculine system in a state of health. (265)

Here, Laura not only asserts that it is an impossibility for Carmilla to be her lover unless she is male, she also demonstrates that Carmilla's attempts at masculine behavior (insofar as she seeks to woo Laura) are entirely limited by her biology as a female. Here we encounter the same kind of horror that the antagonist in *The Beetle* represents – the appropriation of masculine privilege and behavior by markedly transgressive women. Thus a fear of feminism was a fear of the upheaval of gender norms – that women might take over coveted male roles.

Laura is an innocent figure, a woman in her time and place, and her denials of Carmilla's lesbianism and her vampirism as possibilities point to a culture's need to become aware of the dangers of a rising female agency as it represented corruptive change. Carmilla seeks to indoctrinate Laura, in terms of entering into a sexually predatory relationship with her and in the sense that she means to turn her into a vampire like herself. Her most frightening aspects are not her strength or speed or even that she can transform herself into a large cat, although these elements do make her formidable;

the one facet of her abhumanness that poses the biggest threat is her ability to convert young women into abhumans as well.

Likewise we see Lucy and Mina set in opposition in Stoker's *Dracula*. Although the two are very close friends, it seems that their interests and attitudes have splintered since childhood. Mina plays the part of the chaste and devoted fiancé, remaining faithful to Jonathan while he is away, staying by his side when he is mentally unwell, and even agreeing not to question what he has done while in Transylvania. Lucy, however, is salacious and even overly affectionate with her female companion at times. She enjoys the devotion of three handsome suitors, of which situation she boasts, "My dear it never rains but it pours" (Stoker 54), and when recounting her three proposals to Mina, she refers to the men as "number one," "number two," and "number three." Of her light-hearted response to her second suitor's proposal she writes to her friend: "I know, Mina, that you will think me a horrid flirt – though I couldn't help feeling a sort of exultation that he was number two in one day" (Stoker 57). She is a woman with a romantic and sexual appetite who is able to select a man out of a range and of her own accord – in other words, she is the active party in her courtships, a woman more independent than most.

Furthermore, and perhaps her most egregious transgression as a turn-of-the-century domesticated woman, she expresses her wish to enjoy a polygamous relationship in which she is the only woman – "Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble?" she asks Mina (Stoker 58). "Lucy's heretical question," write Jenny Roth, Lori Chambers and Dana Walsh, "connects her own womanish potential for degeneracy with the vampiric polygamy that exists at Castle

Dracula, and Englishwomen who challenged English marriage custom…" (Roth, Chambers, and Walsh 360). Her polygamous desires signal not only a voracious sexuality, but a denial of the supposedly inherent morality of the contemporary social order. She wishes to have sexual freedom and to alter the status quo much like the New Woman of her time.

Carol Sans writes in *Dracula: Between Tradition and Modernism*, "Lucy Westerna and the three vampire-women in Dracula's castle share traits that Stoker and his contemporaries associated with the New Woman: All four are sexual predators who relate to children as objects to devour rather than to protect, and all four initiate sexual relationships rather than wait patiently for men" (Senf 8). Lucy's sexual zeal is what links her with the three female vampires, and it seems to be suggested by the text that she is able to be turned into an anbhuman both because of her sexuality and as punishment for it, whereas Mina, who openly insults the New Woman, and maintains her innocent subservience even through Dracula's attempts to convert her, manages to remain human and reap the domestic rewards of her purity.

However, some chaste women who do not succumb to the degenerative effects of incipient feminism (as it is represented in these narratives) are not as fortunate as Mina and Laura in escaping destruction at its hands. Mary, the mother and very antithesis of Helen Vaughan, in *The Great God Pan* experiences complete erasure catalyzed by progress enacted for progress's sake. Mary, rescued by Raymond "from the gutter," is subservient to an extreme degree. Before using her in his highly dangerous experiment without remorse or worry, Raymond says of her, "I think her life is mine, to use as I see fit" (Machen 7). Indeed, she places her life in his hands entirely, and only requests a

single kiss from the scientist before he begins. She appears for the first time beautiful, blushing, and dressed in white, the epitome of the virginal Victorian woman.

Furthermore, juxtaposed to the unquestionably sexual nature of Helen's villainy, the text works very hard to assure the reader that her mother is virginal before she "sees the Great God Pan." Her dress, her blushing, her status as an unmarried woman and her tender age of seventeen are all enough to make this assertion clear, however the fact that her name is Mary and that she experiences a spiritual conception at the hands of an all-powerful "God" that results in a child solidifies the matter. Mary is pure and obedient, a woman for whom the reader, along with the protagonist, can mourn. She must die because in her encounter with the Great God Pan, she becomes knowledgeable of her own virginity. "There is no appeasement for virgin knowing" argues Adrienne Auslander Munich in *Virginal Sexuality and Textuality in Victorian Literature*. If Pan figures as a degenerative force, brought about by man's relentless pursuit of knowledge at the cost of humanity – humanity here being thought of in terms of Victorian social structure – then Mary's glimpse of him and her ultimate undoing might be considered as representative of the cultural consequence of science's rejection of god and acceptance of our beastly ancestry. She is a woman corrupted and regressed by an evolutionary force imposed upon her in the name of progress alone, and as such she is innocence and tradition swallowed by the movement of the society in which she lives.

The fact of her biological creation of the atavistic Helen Vaughan is the expression of the anxiety of devolution, and therefore Helen is the manifestation of her mother's corruption and of the possible corruption of all women. Her victims are found half naked, or are traumatized on their wedding night; her monstrous nature is overtly

sexual. The conflation of their identities, much like that of Laura and Carmilla, is meant as a warning; it is meant to inspire the fear that any woman can become monstrous, and the patriarchy must take heed. This anxiety finds focus as Clarke views a sketch of Helen Vaughan:

> Clarke looked again at the sketch; it was not Mary after all. There certainly was Mary's face, but there was something else, something he had not seen on Mary's features when the white-clad girl entered the laboratory with the doctor, nor at her terrible awakening, nor when she lay grinning on the bed. Whatever it was, the glance that came from those eyes, the smile on the full lips, or the expression of the whole face, Clarke shuddered before it at his inmost soul, and thought, unconsciously, of Dr. Phillip's words, 'the most vivid presentment of evil I have ever seen'. (Machen 33)

Although he sees clearly the visage of the sweet and non-threatening Mary, it is that unknowable and unnamable sense of "evil" that makes this woman something else, something abhuman. Her "full lips" hint at her overt sexuality, as discussed in earlier pages, and therefore mark her atavism. Clarke's mention of his "soul" sets him apart as a virtuous figure as it signals a traditional understanding of religion and anatomy and a rejection of neuroscientific progress such as that made by the fictional Raymond. He is every wholesome man's fear of every New Woman. In *Evil Sisters: The Threat of Female Sexuality and the Cult of Manhood*, Bram Dijkstra asserts that:

> The later nineteenth century used Darwin's discoveries to transform the scattershot gender conflicts of earlier centuries into a 'scientifically grounded' exposé of female sexuality as a source of social disruption and 'degeneration.' At

> the opening of the new century, biology and medicine set out to prove that nature had given *all* women a basic instinct that made them into predators, destroyers, witches – evil sisters. Soon experts in many related fields rushed in to delineate why every woman was doomed to be a harbinger of death to the male. (Dijkstra 3)

This concept is what makes Helen Vaughan so terrifying to a largely male audience; in her near-identical resemblance to Mary – presumably named after the virgin mother of Jesus – and in her body's morphic quality, she is not a singular evil but rather the symbol of the inherent evil believed to be possessed by all women. Like the female vampire, she threatens to destroy other women, and like both Carmilla and the transgressive females in *Dracula*, she does.

The antagonist in Marsh's *The Beetle*, as has been previously stated, acts a representation of the liberated woman in terms of her appropriation of masculinity. She is set against Dora Greyling and, most notably, Marjorie Lindon, two very domestic and feminine women. Hurley expands on the dichotomy of "The Arab" and Marjorie:

> Though the traditional polarity of good versus bad woman is presented untraditionally by *The Beetle* – Marjorie is too adventurous and outspoken to be a conventional heroine, and the "Woman of Songs," by the time she appears in London, too hideously ugly to be exactly a femme fatale – *The Beetle* does juxtapose a pert, lively, but desexualized heroine with a villainess whose fierce emasculating sexual aggressiveness has made of her a repulsive, yet sexually potent monster…As the novel progresses, each woman becomes transformed into a sheer parody of the polarity of femininity she represents: the Oriental is revealed as a literal monster,

> cruel, sadistic, castrating, and vile; while Marjorie becomes reduced to complete passivity – physical incapacitation, idiocy, and dependence – after she is captured and tortured.

The "untraditional" characterization of these two women may in fact be read as merely a new tactic in an old battle. Taking into account my differing reading of the "Woman of Songs" as a female character who has achieved a kind of masculine state, the influence she exerts over Marjorie takes on new meaning. If we are to read her as the male interpretation of actualized feminism, than we might begin to see her wish to corrupt Marjorie as a form of influence and her wish to ultimately destroy her as an enactment of the consequences of this influence.

It is no accident that the beetle-woman disguises Marjorie as a man while holding her under her mesmeric influence; her removal of Marjorie's long hair and feminine garb is a kind of symbolic de-feminization.[8] Just as the female vampires discussed seek to corrupt their female prey by exerting their influence to make them abhuman, so "The Woman of Songs" seeks to corrupt Marjorie. Her outspokenness and defiance of the men around her is, perhaps, representative of her possible future as a feminist, and her rescue and return to the domestic can then be read as her salvation therefrom. If "The Woman of Songs" were to succeed, Marjorie, and many innocent, explicitly white women like her would be corrupted to the point of an agonizing death. Thus, symbolically, it is not only the men in the novel who are saved from the dangers that the New Woman represents, but domestic European women as well.

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[8] Pages 99-102 of Helena Michie's *The Flesh Made Word* are particularly illuminating in regard to the importance of female hair as metaphor.

IV. Conclusion: Death and the Restoration of Male Order

Every tale must come to a close, and in fin-de-siècle Gothic literature, there is much to be resolved in the narrative before the last page – horrors must be reconciled and everything put right. "Each of these texts," writes Craft of the typical Gothic monster novel of the fin de siècle, "first invites or admits a monster, the 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" (Craft 107) – a simple enough formula, but one that takes on monumental significance when viewed in light of gender. There is a long-standing tradition in Western literature that demands the punishment of transgressive women. The sins of the woman must be reconciled; either through insanity, unfavorable marriage, death, or some myriad other creative penalties. In fin-de-siècle Gothic and the advent of the abhuman, an increasingly anxious culture required much more aggressive forms of punishment to assuage fears of the New Woman and all that she represented. It may be argued that in casting the independent woman as a monster, these authors were not only demonizing the feminist movement, but justifying a particularly violent, bloody, and often sexual retribution that attempted to reassert male dominance by force.

Bram Dijkstra asserts that:

> From Le Fanu's Carmilla through Bram Stoker's Dracula…, the ritual execution of female vampires always takes the form of a sadistic rape scene blended into a ritual of symbolic female castration. Carmilla, the

> earliest among the fin de siècle's beasts of feminine lust, is, in fact, made to undergo as graphic an analogue to clitoridectomy as the 'moral' strictures of the time permitted Le Fanu to depict. (118 – 119)

The "clitoridectomy" that Dijkstra recognizes is Carmilla's decapitation. He notes that her mouth is the site of her "*vagina dentata,*" and I have, in an earlier section, noted that the mouth of the female abhuman is the locus of a conglomeration of both the female and male genitalia. We might, therefore, view the necessary decapitation of the female vampire as the removal of both her transgressive feminine sexuality and her dominant male sexuality. As for the "rape" aspect of this ritual, it is easy enough to equate the forced penetration of the stake into the female vampire's heart with an act of sexual violence. It is the brutal reassertion of male sexual dominance that restores order to the chaotic worlds of these stories.

Of course, Carmilla's death takes on many other gendered implications tied to birth, death, sexuality, and motherhood. Carmilla's safe space, the blood-filled coffin in which she rests, may be viewed as what Claire Kahane refers to as the "dark, secret center of the Gothic structure, [in which] the boundaries of life and death themselves seem confused" (Kahane, 334). Baron Vordenburg, whom we might see as a prototype for Van Helsing, refers to her as "amphibious," and her time in the coffin – alive but not animate, suspended in bodily fluid that nourishes and sustains her within a close, protective encasement – conjures sure images of the womb. Carmilla, who has, at several instances throughout the novella, proven herself to be a kind of mother figure to Laura as well as her would-be lover, embodies the archaic notion that "lesbianism demonstrates the adult implications of remaining bound within a mother-daughter relationship –

erotically bound, that is, to a woman, a transgression of heterosexual convention" (Kahane, 342). Again, we see her tied with imagery of motherhood – she is both child and mother, both old and young, a representation of the horrors of femaleness and all it encompasses in its blood and sexuality, a chaos that must be reined in and subordinated by structured male order.

To that end, this "secret center," Carmilla's womb-like cocoon of female protection, is violated by a band of men who represent, collectively, fatherhood, science, the law, the military, and the church, and therefore the patriarchy in all its glory. Carmilla's death is in fact "ritual," as Dijkstra describes it, and in this case the ritual is that of male societal order – "Tomorrow," says the general after they have discovered the location of Carmilla's resting place, "the commissioner will be here, and the Inquisition will be held according to law" (Le Fanu, 314). The acts of staking, decapitation, cremation, and the abandonment of the remains in a river are all merely part of the "the formal proceedings"[9] necessary to ensure the safety of the community under male protection. This structure reflects quite clearly a state of social and political governance that legitimized the exertion of complete male dominance, whether violent or non-violent, under the guise of necessary and unavoidable regulation and control.

Lucy Westerna's ritual killing, too, reflects an institutionalized form of subordination. As Dijkstra puts it, "…Lucy's actual punishment is – quite appropriately, in Stoker's carefully structured world of male middle-class British dignity – left to Arthur, the man Lucy had chosen to be her husband and who is therefore forever her

[9] *Carmilla*, 315

master by natural right" (Dijkstra, 119). Again, we see the reassertion of male law and order in the face of the assumed disorder of female sexuality. Lucy must be made subordinate by the symbolic consummation of her marriage to Arthur; she is freed of her promiscuousness and "unnatural" sexual aggression by the institution of marriage. In this sense, the ritualized rape that Dijkstra writes of as being requisite in the eradication of the female vampire is painted by Stoker as more a representation of Lucy's first and last experience of marital sex:

> The Thing in the coffin writhed; and a hideous, blood-curdling screech came from the opened red lips. The body shook and quivered and twisted in wild contortions; the sharp white teeth champed together till the lips were cut and the mouth was smeared with a crimson foam. But Arthur never faltered. He looked like a figure of Thor as his untrembling arm rose and fell, driving deeper and deeper the mercy-bearing stake, whilst the blood from the pierced heart welled and spurted around it…And then the writhing and quivering of the body became less, and the teeth ceased to champ, and the face to quiver. Finally it lay still. The terrible task was over. (Stoker, 201)

The sexual imagery is unavoidable, beginning with the penetration, showcasing a hyperbole of the mix of pain and pleasure that can accompany a woman's first experience with penetration, leading to orgasm, and ending in post-coital peace.

Craft provides a succinct analysis of this scene:

> Here is the novel's real – and the woman's only – climax, its most violent and misogynistic moment, displaced roughly to the middle of the book, so

> that the sexual threat may be repeated but it's ultimate success denied…The murderous phallicism of this passage clearly punishes Lucy for her transgression of Van Helsing's gender code, as she finally receives a penetration adequate to insure her future quiescence. Violence against the sexual woman here is intense, sensually imagined, ferocious in its detail. (Craft, 122)

The undead Lucy, who has become a strong and seductive penetrator, must be dominated and penetrated by male force to ensure that she is the ideal, docile woman that she would have been expected to be in her marriage. And indeed, once they have violated her in this fashion, they are shocked and glad to see that her appearance has changed: "There in the coffin lay no longer the foul Thing that we had so dreaded and grown to hate that the work of her destruction was yielded as a privilege to the one best entitled to it, but Lucy as we had seen her in life, with her face of unequalled sweetness and purity" (Stoker, 202). Through their efforts, she has become "holy," and her aggressive, more masculine features, such as her phallic teeth, are replaced by feminine softness. Through this act of violent assault, the men in the novel, once again representative of medicine, the church, and the law, restore Lucy to her place as submissive woman. Her death, much like Carmilla's, is a punishment disguised as a mercy.

Likewise, Helen Vaughan, at the moment of her death, reveals a final, acceptable version of womanhood in the form of her virginal and submissive mother; "I know that what I saw perish was not Mary," writes the fictional Clarke, "and yet in the last agony Mary's eyes looked into mine" (61). This further asserts that what has been done to Helen Vaughan is a mercy meant to restore normality, although her death is portrayed much

more as a brand of cleansing revenge meant as a catharsis for the reader. Just as she causes deaths second-hand, Clarke and Villiers kill her by convincing her to hang herself, an act which simultaneously keeps their hands free of blood and displaces the monstrous responsibility of a woman's death onto the monster already constructed in the novella.

Furthermore, Helen Vaughan's body, the location of so much anxiety and horror in the text as her overwhelming sexuality claims more and more lives through increasingly vague means, is at the center of her death, and its metamorphoses is the last terror she offers mankind. Throughout the story, as the reader has only a cloudy sense of the sexual horrors that Helen produces, so does one only have a cloudy sense of who she is as a character. Her identity seems to be tied almost exclusively to her dangerous beauty and the fact of what her physical existence can produce – her body is paramount. Hurley writes:

> One cultural tradition, earlier than the Victorians, but nonetheless prominent within the late nineteenth century, identifies women as entities defined by and entrapped within their bodies, in contrast to the man, who is governed by rationality and capable of transcending the fact of his embodiment. In nineteenth-century social medicine in particular, women were theorized as incomplete human subjects. They are but partially evolved from the state of animalism…and thus are essentially admixed creatures. They possess the intellectual qualities that distinguish Man from brute only in the most limited and imperfect sense. Woman's consciousness does not transcend physicality; her consciousness rather is

> enmeshed in and determined by the fact of her overwhelming physicality. (Hurley, 119 - 120)

Helen's death means utter destruction because it involves the complete breakdown of her physicality. As a transgressive woman, her demise must involve a complete eradication of the source of her evil, which lies in the fact of her sexuality.

Helen Vaughan, in her physical existence as an amorphous being and in her vague connection to a world beyond becomes more of a symbol than a character, more of an embodied warning than a fully-fledged woman. The breakdown of her body at the moment of her death is indicative that "woman" is just a form that she has taken on, a "veil" of "human flesh"[10] not something concrete and irreversible in her biology. Furthermore, the horrors that she inflicts remain unnamed – the text does not allow the reader to witness her evil, aside from the transformation at her death. Hurley reads this obfuscation as a necessary act of repression in order to construct the sense of hysteria that the novel makes its principal concern: "The trauma Helen represents is absolutely central to the novel – manuscript after manuscript masses itself around that center – and yet the novel will not – or cannot, say what the trauma is" (Hurley, 48).

While Hurley sees this "hysteria" as a reaction to the "intolerable prospect of the loss of human specificity,"[11] and I agree, one must also take into account the gendered implications of hysteria that existed at the time of *The Great God Pan*'s creation. "Hysteria," which was, in the fin-de-siècle, "a highly gendered concept associated with

[10] Machen, 65
[11] Hurley, 48

malingering, sexuality and madness,"[12] would have characterized the threat of the novel, while vague, as intrinsically female.

Helen Vaughan's function is not that of a character, but that of an *idea* of female behavior that warrants an extreme reaction of the flesh-and-blood male characters from whose point of view we understand Helen's place. Helen Vaughan is not *real* to the world of the novel like Clarke, Villiers, and Dr. Raymond are; the ideas that she represents – a lack of bodily shame, a denial of traditionally moral behavior, and, most importantly to this argument, female sexual freedom – produce hysteria in these men, signaling not only a reversal of gender norms, but also the seriousness of the problem of the sexual and independent New Woman. Hurley writes that "…*fin-de-siècle* Gothic is *training* its readership somatically, underscoring that nausea is the proper response to a confrontation with abhumanness. Hystericized itself, the genre seeks to draw its reader into the field of its hysteria" (Hurley, 49). The reader's experience of Helen, however, is not only an encounter with the abhuman, but specifically with the abhuman *female* as I have previously characterized her, and so with rapidly changing and troubling concepts of the feminine. Her demise is a return to order – those men who were brave (and therefore masculine) enough to seek to understand and vanquish her survive, and shield others from the knowledge of her exploits. Again, it must be noted, that her aggressors are men of wealth and repute, including a surgeon. In her function as an idea, Helen's death is a representative punishment of *all* transgressive women.

[12] Matus, chapter 1

The death of The Woman of Songs, discussed briefly in earlier pages, serves a similar purpose, although it seems that the central fears being squashed – if you'll excuse my pun – are that of infectious free thought and the morphic gender of the New Woman. The differences between *The Beetle* and typical fin-de-siècle narrative structure are most notable toward its resolution, with the death of the beetle-woman; she is not killed by the men who are chasing her, nor by the woman who is her prisoner, but rather she is crushed by a freak train accident and resembles in death, almost comically, a bug spattered on a windshield. While it seems that many other Gothic texts of this era tend to infuse fears of scientific and social progression into one frightening hodgepodge of Modern evil, Marsh's male characters use several different forms of new technologies of communication and transportation to achieve their ends. The Woman of Songs' death by train may be more symbolic that what may have been regarded as man's superior intellect in his invention, construction, and operation of such devices as trains would surely prove the winning argument in the case against Women's Rights.

In her function as a symbol of transgressive femininity, much like Helen Vaughan, there is no punishment that can be administered to return a passive constitution, and in fact there is no indication that she ever was a domesticated woman – the change is complete, unseen, a fact of her existence, unlike that of Lucy Westerna, whose punishment restores her to angelic womanhood. In *The Beetle*, it is Marjorie who must be punished, as it is her sense of independent womanhood, watered down and yet expanding, that threatens to transform her into a creature akin to The Woman of Songs, masculine and dangerous. Margree expounds on Marjorie's significance:

> That Marjorie is a 'New Woman' – a late nineteenth-century 'feminist' claiming political and sexual rights for women – is established early in the text, by her political engagements and interests in public affairs, and by her defiance of her father in her pursuit of a husband of her own choosing. In fact, as Wolfreys suggests, Marjorie is always rather a pale version of the New Woman…However, despite the apparent endorsement of [Marjorie's] right to contest paternal authority in matters of marriage, as well as the rather circumscribed nature of her political aspirations, closer reading reveals the figure of Marjorie to be a source of anxiety in the text, both a 'destabilizing trope and a signifier of otherness,' to use Wolfreys' words.[13] (Margree, 72)

There was never a chance of survival for the beetle-woman; she is merely a warning of what Marjorie might become – "…the Gothic plot of supernatural female sexuality functions as site of displacement for an active non-Gothic female sexuality the text simultaneously points to and denies," writes Hurley[14] – but Marjorie, as she begins the work of becoming a wife, is still allowed opportunity for salvation by the text. First, however, she must suffer for her transgressions. Much like the illnesses in earlier British fiction that afforded a character clarity by bringing them to the brink of death – think Marianne of *Sense and Sensibility*, Pip of *Great Expectations*, Lady Delacour of *Belinda*, among many, many others – fin-de-siècle Gothic occasionally affords its characters

[13] Here, and elsewhere in her article, Margree references Julian Wolfreys' Introduction in the 2004 Broadview edition of Marsh's *The Beetle*

[14] Hurley, 126

punishment that does not involve actual death. However, these trails may be considered much more violent, perhaps, and far more specific to the various infractions they seek to correct.

If we view *The Beetle* as a work that attempts to create a trauma which it then invites the reader to experience, much like *The Great God Pan*, in Hurley's previously mentioned analysis, then we might read Marjorie's experiences as a pursuance of that trauma to its necessary end, at which there is catharsis and resolution. Margree writes:

> If nineteenth-century culture saw the New Woman as desiring masculinity, the *The Beetle* performs what would be a particularly pointed punishment for wishes that are seen to be impertinent: that of fulfilling them, in order to reveal to the wisher the inappropriateness of their desire, and to allow them to suffer the consequences of their own impropriety. That Marjorie does indeed suffer for her desires is, I think, clear, as is it that this suffering represents a form of punishment. (Margree, 74)

The trauma being produced is that created by the perceived masculinity of the New Woman and the danger she presents insofar as she threatens the gendered social structure. In order to exercise this trauma, it must be worked to what might have been considered by a male-dominated culture to be its logical conclusion – the restoration of male order via marriage and implied subservience.

Perhaps by taking a closer look at the female abhuman and what she represents, we might gain a more rounded appreciation for the long and difficult journey of women's rights and a more motivated attitude toward feminism in general. It was only last century that women were being demonized by popular culture in this fashion, only last century

that independent women were being transformed into monsters to justify their violent deaths and defilement at the hands of patriarchal order – and only by the worst form of ignorance can we deny that this pattern has continued into modern culture. There has been a shift in perception, to be sure, but in many cases modern gothic literature still presents the woman as othered, her sexuality either dangerous or her only redemption, her purity either coveted or despised. If we are to move forward, we must understand the creation of these dichotomies and reject them as fallacy; the study of the female abhuman is vital in our understanding of Western culture's treatment of women and the social perceptions that surround them, not only at the fin-de-siècle, but today as well.

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