

Introduction

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The chapters collected in this volume are only a small sampling of the fruit which came out of the Evil, Women and the Feminine conference held in Prague in May 2010, hosted by the Inter-Disciplinary.Net. Our hopes are to bring together some of the chapters, in expanded form, which seemed, without previous planning, to speak to each other during the conference and which, herein, more directly engage with one another, opening up a space for dialogue and interaction. While we have divided the work into four sections, they are not discrete boundaries but, we hope, they work together to elicit an interdisciplinary approach to our understandings of women who push the limits of 'the feminine.'

For many of the authors collected here, the depictions of 'evil' women or femininity serve to highlight the very constructedness of the category of 'Woman,' questioning the idea that 'bad' women are all of those who cannot be confined within the more rigid category of 'good' women. The 'good' woman, not surprisingly, is one that necessarily relies on the existence of the 'bad' woman as the binary foil which gives her meaning. Both, of course, are determined through a patriarchal lens that imposes a prescribed (and controllable) ideal of Woman, but the chapters presented in this volume look at the ways in which it is possible to break free of this mould and reinterpret the behaviour of the so-called 'evil' woman.

The first section in this volume, *Monstrous Mothers*, interrogates two very different deviations from the maternal female. Theresa Porter's chapter, 'Caesarean Kidnapping: Motherhood at Any Cost,' looks at several cases of foetal abduction in the United States. What these cases reveal is a clear sense that to be a new mother, or a pregnant woman, confers a special status – while the actual task of mothering is often less desirable – and that violent means appear justified in these women's minds. This chapter teases out the relationship between motherhood – a time often presented as 'natural' for women – and those who would commit actions (like murder or forced Caesarean sections) that are decidedly not maternal. To take a life, or even threaten it, can be seen as the opposite of the maternal role of giving life. Though, if the role of motherhood is further considered, the protection of the offspring is often seen as a legitimate use of female violence, these women so manipulate the role of the mother that they force us to question how and why this role has been constructed, and to what extent women are pressured to occupy it.

Continuing this section, Andrea Ruthven's 'Unnatural Mothers, Mothering Unnaturally; Technologies of Reproduction and The Politics of Maternity in Hiromi Goto's 'Hopeful Monsters', looks at the way in which the mother-child relationship, so long considered natural (though not unproblematically so), is disrupted by reproductive technologies. If society must now confront the long

ignored idea that motherhood is not only the result of heteronormative sex, the construction of the ideal/fit mother must be alternatively positioned. Following these lines, this chapter argues that late capitalist discourse, which has increasingly made medicine a commodity like many others, entangles women within a disciplinary apparatus so as to strictly control and enforce ideals about maternity. As a way of positing alternatives, this chapter looks at Hiromi Goto's short story 'Hopeful Monsters' and the possibility it opens up for reconfiguring the mother-child bodies.

In the second section of this text 'The Feminine and the Supernatural,' Cynthia Jones and Per Faxneld turn to the question of the supernatural, looking to see how and where it is a possible outlet for female transgression. In her 'The Werewolf and the Modern Woman: The Metaphor of the Female Werewolf as Modern Day Woman in *The Wolf's Bride* by Aino Kallas', Jones interrogates the female werewolf as a liberatory metaphor for 21st century women. By disrupting ideas about what constitutes a 'bad' woman, the redeemed werewolf posits the possibility of choice and agency for the female protagonist. Jones further argues that the constraints placed on the protagonist of *The Wolf's Bride* force her to choose between her human form and her wolf form, highlighting the patriarchal either-or dichotomy of good-wife/bad-wife, good-mother/bad-mother, and good-woman/bad-woman that must be challenged for alternative positions to be occupied by contemporary women. In so doing, Jones calls into question the role of Satan as a necessarily evil influence, arguing instead that what is 'evil' about him may be his disregard for the patriarchal norms established by Christianity.

Faxneld's 'Feminist Vampires and the Romantic Satanist Tradition of Counter-Readings' takes up the issue of Satan, as raised by Jones, and posits a reading of 'Satanic Feminism' as that in which the female vampire is liberated from the bounds of patriarchal womanhood. Vampiric women, for Faxneld, like many monstrous women, are freer to express their sexuality as their position as dangerous Other sets them on the border of social control. While they may be vilified or held up as negative examples, their very existence suggests an alternative to the role of the 'good' woman. In a chapter which takes into consideration the possibility that the female vampire can be read as critical of both the Catholic church and of the 'New Woman,' the role of Satan as pivotal for this process is investigated, and the mere substitution of one male figure of power for another is critically analysed.

For both Jones and Faxneld, the werewolf, the vampire, and the witch are recovered as female positions of power or at least subversion. They also question the extent to which the sexuality of these positions is both that which marks it as 'dangerous' or 'evil' and that which simultaneously works to counteract oppressive discourse about women's bodies.

The third section, 'Class Relations,' considers how the perception of women is inherently tied to questions of class, using the media as the basis for analysis. Ann-

Marie Cook's chapter 'Hornbags' and 'Foxy Morons' of the World Unite: Transgressive Comedy in *Kath & Kim*', offers the possibility of transgression through class discourse in her work on the Australian television program *Kath and Kim*. This chapter situates the lead characters from the Australian comedy series as transgressive figures whose refusal to follow rules governing fashion, language, motherhood and respectable conduct render them as grotesque, monstrous figures. Their 'monstrosity,' for Cook, challenges the norms of materialism and conformity that prevailed during John Howard's time as Australian Prime Minister.

The grotesque or monstrous woman is further challenged in Tadeusz Lewandowski's 'Lamponing "The Queen of Mean": Representations of Leona Helmsley in Popular Culture', which looks at how American billionaire Leona Helmsley (1920-2007) was depicted in various print comics and television programs. Like Cook's fictional characters, Helmsley is portrayed as monstrous because of her refusal to obey social norms for femininity. The media, argues Lewandowski, has reduced her to a caricature because of class and gender prejudices, and because she threatens the prevailing ideas about women's role in business and society. This chapter considers how the presentation of a ruthless *businesswoman* is necessarily one that ridicules, as though to say that to take her seriously is to challenge patriarchal codes for female behaviour. Through this analysis, the author attempts to find a space of redemption for Helmsley, one that is not contingent upon her representation in terms of her class or gender, but rather one that seeks to locate her agency.

In her chapter 'Aileen Wuornos: Sympathy for the Devil', Christine Rogers challenges the narratives of women's violence which would render those who commit it as either victims, insane, or inhuman. By robbing women of their agency in the violent acts they commit, it becomes impossible to be narrated as both feminine and violent. Just as Helmsley in the previous chapter and *Kath and Kim* in Cook's work demonstrate, women and violence, whether it be symbolic or physical, are often rendered as a 'flawed' femininity. For Wuornos this depiction is especially fraught as she is further alienated by the discourse surrounding her work as a prostitute, her lesbian sexuality and finally her serial-killer label. Rogers considers how the cinematic portrayals of Wuornos help to break with the predominant narratives surrounding her by opening up alternative ways of reading her. For the three chapters in this section, the narration of grotesque or troubling femininity is itself indicative of the highly constructed roles for women and the damning effects of breaking with these roles.

Cook, Lewandowski and Rogers all point to the way in which questions of class, race and sexuality can all converge and problematize how women are represented in the media. This convergence is, as Lewandowski and Rogers show, a damning position for many women and yet, it is one from which, as Cook illustrates, social critique is possible. As women who disrupt prevailing notions of

femininity, the women described in this section all challenge how the social construction of 'women' is, sometimes tragically, an impossible ideal.

The last section is devoted to the three chapters focusing on 'Deviant' Sexuality. As the title suggests, the chapters included here consider how female sexuality is both a source of power for women and of control over them. It interrogates how the *femme fatale*, the nymphet, and the witch all embody patriarchal fears about women's sexuality, demonizing them when their hungers cannot be controlled by men but rather feed on them.

The first chapter is Brian Walter's 'It was Lilith He Longed For: Romanticism and the Legacies of Lolita'. Through his focus on how Lolita is constructed through tropes pre-figured by the Romantic poets, Walter analyses the nymphet and her power over the male imaginary. As with the other chapters in this section, female sexuality is revealed as a projection of the patriarchal ideal, suggesting that the 'Deviant Sexuality' of the section's title has more to do with male than female desire. For Lolita, the *femme fatale*, Walter points to the power of her sexuality even if this power is bestowed by the male gaze.

Malwina Degorska observes how, through queer theory, a lesbian *femme fatale* can be twice as dangerous as the heterosexual *femme fatale*. She interrogates the theme of the neo-Victorian *femme fatale* by analysing Sarah Waters' novel *Affinity*. Degorska's 'Neo-Victorian Sapphic *Femme Fatales*: Manipulation and Double Game in Sarah Waters' *Affinity*', inverts the male gaze of Walter's analysis for a Sapphic gaze which directly threatens patriarchal constructions of female sexuality. For Degorska, the Sapphic *femme fatale* is not only the object of male desire, but also of female desire. More importantly, however, she has the power to become a desiring subject, something which is denied Lolita, as Walter suggests.

The final chapter in this section takes the reader back to the Late Middle Age and the construction of the female body as evil and the witch as the embodiment of threatening sexuality. As seen with the *femme fatale* and the nymphet, the witch is, for Brenda S. Gardenour in 'Sculpting Wanton Vessels: Physiognomy, Medical Theory, and the Construction of the Evil Feminine in the Later Middle Ages,' the creation of male anxiety about female sexuality. By locating the construction of evil femininity at the intersection between theological and medical texts, Gardenour links the fear of the female physicality with the exaltation of the sainted virgin who, not coincidentally, is asexual. Taken as a whole, the women in this volume are all interrogated as ways of pushing the boundaries between good and bad representations of femininity, and opening up new possibilities for female subjectivity.