

Abstract

Using Barbara Creed's theory on the monstrous-feminine and supplementing it with selected terms from Homi K. Bhabha's brand of postcolonial theory and Naomi Wolf's beauty myth, this thesis sets out to investigate how women are construed as monstrous outside of the horror genre. The focus is on four main texts – *Queen of the Damned* (2002), *X-Men: The Last Stand* (2006), *Game of Thrones* (2011-) and *Gone Girl* (2012). The women of this thesis are all construed as monstrous because of their gender. They are all construed as Other and share some specific ties to the abject. Otherwise, they have diverse ties to the abject, they transgress different borders and some defy the beauty myth. This thesis also discusses the possibility that the monstrous-feminine becomes a way of silencing women, but that the use of the monstrous-feminine in fiction might also allow us to see more clearly how we treat women who defy gender norms.

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Good Girls Conform;

A feminist inquiry into the representation of women as monstrous in contemporary fiction

1. Introduction

Why do we fear women? From the earliest Greek myths to modern day television and literature, there has just always been something that has made us uncomfortable about women. Women have been construed as monstrous in a multitude of ways; from the Gorgons, harpies and Valkyries of olden myths to Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth (*Macbeth* 1606) to Stephen King's Carrie and Margaret White (*Carrie* 1974) to the more contemporary Samara Morgan (*The Ring* 2002) and Kelly Stable (*The Ring Two* 2005) - fiction is positively littered with dangerous women, regardless of which medium one chooses to study. All these women manage to strike fear into the hearts of their contemporary audiences because of what they do, what they do not do and how they look. But the monstrous-feminine is not confined to the horror genre and ancient myths. The astute reader will find her in many places that might not be exactly obvious. This thesis tries to locate the monstrous-feminine outside of the horror genre and get to the bottom of how she is construed as monstrous, despite not necessarily being traditionally monstrous.

This thesis sets out to examine how women are construed as monstrous and dangerous in contemporary television series and movies by employing and combining three different theories. The main theory that will guide this thesis is Barbara Creed's theory of the monstrous-feminine as it is presented in her work *The Monstrous-Feminine* (1993), as it focuses explicitly on how women in horror movies have been construed as monstrous because of their gender. Two additional theories will be employed to help present a more nuanced understanding of how women are depicted as scary. These theories consist Naomi Wolf's concept of the beauty myth (*The Beauty Myth* 1991) and Homi K. Bhabha's notions of the Other, mimicry and stereotypes as they are presented in his work *The Location of Culture* (2007).

The focus of this thesis will be on five different characters, all of whom are construed as monstrous within their respective fictional universes. This thesis will investigate how Queen Akasha from *Queen of the Damned* (2002), Jean Grey from *X-Men: The Last Stand*

(2006), Cersei Lannister and Arya Stark from *Game of Thrones* (2011-) and Amy Dunne from *Gone Girl* (2014) are construed as monstrous according to the abovementioned theories. The characters have been selected for analysis as they each represent different facets of how women are represented as monstrous, thus giving this thesis a wide variety of monstrous archetypes to investigate. In terms of methodology and how I intend to answer my problem statement, this thesis employs a close reading of the selected works in order to examine how the chosen theoretical terms could be applied to these works. The focus of this thesis is on movies and TV-series, all from after the turn of the millennium. I chose movies and TV-series as I find the visual aspect of these helpful in analysing the physical appearance of the characters that are portrayed as monstrous.

With the abovementioned considerations and theoretical and methodological framework in mind, the question that will lead this thesis will be as follows:

How are women portrayed as monstrous in selected contemporary movies and television series?

Going onwards from this introduction, this thesis will be structured in the following manner: Firstly, a chapter has been devoted to introducing and detailing the theoretical material that will be the basis of the analysis. In this chapter, a reader will also find some general thoughts about the theoretical framework along with the historical and scholarly context for the main theory of this thesis, namely Creed's theory on the monstrous-feminine. This framework allows us to move on to the main part of this thesis, the analysis, in which I will endeavour to apply the theoretical framework to my chosen objects of analysis. The chapter will be split up into five main parts – one for each text I work with and a concluding coda. Each character will each have their own chapter as this makes for an easier overview of what is going on. The coda will serve to sum up before I move on and to compare and contrast the characters. The second to last chapter of this thesis will be the discussion. In the first part of this chapter, I will try to place the characters of the analysis into a social and cultural context to gain a better understanding of them and their perceived monstrousness. In the latter part of the discussion, I attempt to discern whether or not this act of construing women as monstrous can be seen as a way of silencing women, who do not conform to the beauty myth. Last but not least, this thesis concludes with a conclusion, summing up the most important discoveries and points made in this thesis.

2. Theory

This section aims to introduce the reader to the theoretical framework and terms which will be applied to the subjects of analysis in the next chapter. In order to put the main theory of this thesis – Creed’s theory on the monstrous-feminine – into context this chapter opens with a brief examination of the historical contexts the theory can be placed within, namely the feminist and the scholarly contexts. Following this will be an introduction to Creed’s theory itself, which briefly delves into Kristeva’s theory on the abject. Hereafter, Wolf’s beauty myth will be presented to the reader. Lastly, before moving on to the analysis, this section will include a presentation of Bhabha’s terms the Other, mimicry and the stereotype.

Now, before this chapter can properly begin, there are a couple of things that must be said. First of all, the curious reader might already have wondered what on Earth Bhabha, the postcolonial theorist, might have to do with Wolf and Creed, who are feminist theorists. While their points of departure and schools of thought are different, they all concern themselves with how certain minority groups of people are construed as out-groups by majority in-groups. I chose Bhabha for this because he specifically works with the concept of the Other in a way that is easily transferable to other contexts, such as the feminist, contemporary and western context within which this thesis can be placed. Bhabha’s contributions to postcolonial theory are thus more easily transposable than, say, Edward Said’s contributions which focus on the Eurocentric and Middle Eastern relationship and the particular context within which that exists. In this thesis, the concept of Otherness will be used to analyse and describe how exactly women who fail to conform to gender roles are alienated and construed as monstrous. What is more is that both the abject and the Other both deal with that which must not be included in the construction of the Self (Creed 37). So, while the theories are different, there are some similarities that make for an interesting cooperation between the theories.

The second thing that must be mentioned is the difference in source material in my work and Creed’s. Creed’s theory is focused on horror movies, while this thesis steers clear of outright horror. Thrillers, yes – but never anything like Creed’s chosen objects of analysis. There is also the fact that the movies I use are more contemporary than Creed’s. Creed’s work focuses on movies from the 1960s to the 1970s, while the oldest of my movies is from 2002. Thus, there will be some discrepancies, which I, of course, will try to handle as elegantly as possible. While much of the theoretical material is directly applicable to this thesis – the monstrous-feminine can easily be found outside the horror genre – the

conclusions I will draw will differ from Creed's. Through my previous work with the monstrous-feminine in relation to non-horror texts, I have found that it is not so much a woman's maternal functions that make her abject or worthy of shivers, but rather her way of not conforming to gender roles and her contact with abject materials and substances. As I elaborate on in the next chapter, feminism can be divided into waves, and there is much discussion about the existence of a fourth wave, which I will not go into. Taking the position that fourth wave feminism exists, this might have a hand in explaining why my conclusions will differ from Creed's. My conclusions might be seen as a comment on how women have been silenced physically and verbally, and culturally and politically – women are not so much scary because they can give birth, but they are scary because they have agency. Now that women have obtained the vote worldwide, the fight has moved on. When women break with gender roles by doing things that are frowned upon by the patriarchy, they are construed as monstrous, and in that way, they are silenced. Someone who is monstrous has no credibility and is cast out from society. Consequently, the monstrous-feminine as it is used in this day and age can be seen as another instrument of social control, much like the beauty myth. This use of the monstrous-feminine is a point I will elaborate on and discuss in more detail in the second chapter of the discussion.

2.1 Historical context

Creed's theory on the monstrous-feminine did of course not just spring into existence from a void. The theory has been moulded by that which came before it and that which it was written in response to. The following two sections try to first identify the historical feminist context of Creed's writings and then to place her within the context of others who have written about how women are construed as monstrous.

2.1.1 Feminism

In this chapter, Creed's theory is placed within a feminist historical context. One common (though hotly debated (Code 474)) way of talking about the history of feminism is to divide it into waves – specifically the first, second and third.¹ Code defines the waves as periods in which “questions of women's social, economic and political rights generated

¹ There is some discussion of whether or not we can talk about a fourth wave of feminism just yet, but this thesis is not the place for such a discussion.

substantial popular support and public discussion (...).” (208) For there to be a wave in the first place, something must have to had come before, and Code states that before the first wave of feminism, there had been a long tradition of thinkers and writers that had criticised women’s position in western societies (208). Osborne mentions Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, published in 1792, which scholars see as the foundation of modern feminism (7). She dates the beginning of the women’s movement in the Western world back to 1789, the year of the French Revolution (9). It was during this crucial period of European history that women for the first time raised their voices in unison (Osborne 10). After the bloody upheaval of the French Revolution, most countries reacted with conservatism (Osborne 13), and though women continued to carve out a civic role in society for themselves little happened in the way of furthering women’s emancipation (Osborne 13).

It was not until the nineteenth century that tradition became practice and a mass movement was born (Code 208). Though the first wave started in 1880 and ended in 1920 (Code 208), it was not until the 1910s that the term “feminism” started to come into use (Code 208). Code identifies the origins of the first wave of feminism as the changes that “transformed western societies” (208) during the early twentieth century. She lists changes such as industrialisation, which undermined household production and created a hierarchy between a male public sphere and a female private sphere (208), and a series of ideologies and social reform movements, especially abolitionism, which both Code (208) and Osborne (15) identify as having a strong link to feminism. Before it became a fully fledged movement, the women’s rights movement in the 1850s to the 1870s advocated dress reform, equal property rights, legal rights, higher education for women and a single sexual standard for men and women alike (Code 208). After 1880, the movement grew dramatically and feminism allied itself with many other social reform movements (Code 208), and we start to talk about an actual wave. The goals and ideological underpinnings of first-wave feminism diversified quite a bit, but by 1900 the ideological differences were overshadowed by an agreement that success for first-wave feminism depended on women obtaining the right to vote (Code 208-209). Suffrage became a “unifying objective of feminists of all persuasions” (Code 209). The First World War era yielded significant suffrage victories, but with the shadow of the Great Depression looming over the western world, the opportunities for the fight for women’s rights died down (Osborne 24) and when the 1920s passed, so did the momentum of the first wave (Code 209). Though the first wave died down, women’s rights still made some small advancements in the years after the Second World War (Osborne 25).

The second wave of feminism emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Osborne 25) and ended in the 1980s (Osborne 32). Texts such as Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) inspired this wave, and feminists began to articulate "the cultural and social forces" that disseminated the subordination of women (Code 209). These feminists insisted that the struggles they faced were not caused by individual problems, but stemmed from larger social structures. Within this movement, there were many different factions, but Osborne identifies three main categories – radical feminists, Marxist feminists and liberal feminists (29-30). Furthermore, there were groups addressing particular issues within feminism, such as the issues that pertained specifically to black women and lesbians (Osborne 29). Though they all differed in goals and means, second-wave feminists agreed on the two major issues of this age: abortion and equal pay for equal work (Osborne 30, Code 209). Code mentions some other causes as well - a demand for greater sexual freedom for women through measures such as legalised birth control and abortion and women having control over their own bodies (209). The second wave was also characterised by an insistence that men share housework and childcare duties, which helped change the narrative of women's traditional responsibilities in the domestic sphere (Code 209). According to Code, socialist-feminists focused on class-based differences among women throughout the second wave (209), but by the 1980s non-western and non-majority women entered the arena and thus diversified the standard feminist notions of the female condition (209). Furthermore, academic second-wave feminists started to challenge the notion of women being united by a biological sex. They declared that womanhood was socially constructed instead of natural or essential (Code 209). The second wave quietened down in the 1980s as the Western world took another conservative turn, this time headed by Ronald Reagan in the US and Margaret Thatcher in the UK (Osborne 32).

The third (and last this thesis will discuss) wave of feminism is said to have started in the 1990s and is a term used to describe the wide body of feminist works from that period (Code 209). According to Osborne, claims that the world had become post-feminist, women had gained equal rights and thus there was no need for feminism (32) prefaced this period. The new generation of feminists disagreed – there were still many issues to be solved for women. Though they acknowledged the debt they owed to the feminists that came before them, they felt that they must move on to new issues (Osborne 33), and thus third-wave feminism became a sort of generational challenge to the second- and first-wave feminists (Code 474). Third-wave feminism concerns itself with a plethora of areas of debates, but some stand out (Osborne 33). Osborne mentions the need for a more balanced political

representation, sexual harassment, inclusivity (which Code agrees with (474)) and body issues (which admittedly has been on the feminist agenda since the second wave) (35). Code adds that third-wave feminism also focused on the issues that faced adolescent girls and young women in particular (474). As it was inspired by several strands of feminism, the third wave endeavoured to be inclusive of “race, class, gender, and sexuality” (Code 474). Code concludes that third-wave feminism in general challenges the feminist culture that their predecessors from the previous waves had established (474).

It is within this third wave we can place Creed, as *The Monstrous-Feminine* was first published in 1993 – and she definitely focuses on at least one of the key issues of third-wave feminism, namely body image. In Osborne’s section on body image describes it as “The emphasis upon the way women look and the way that they are portrayed in magazines, film and television” (35). Creed’s theory on the monstrous-feminine works with how women are portrayed as monstrous in horror films – and when women do not live up to the way magazines, films and television tell them to look and live, they are susceptible to being portrayed as monstrous. By pointing this out, Creed joins the chorus of feminists condemning the way patriarchal societies treat women. Perhaps Creed is not as strongly condemning as Wolf, whose theory on the beauty myth claims that the pressure upon women to act and look a certain way is detrimental to women’s physical and mental health (Wolf 249), is.

2.1.2 The female monster in horror movies

Having placed Creed within a historical context, she then needs to also be placed within a context relating to the specific study of female monsters in horror films. Here, Creed has kindly done some of the legwork herself, as the introductory chapter to *The Monstrous-Feminine* contains a description of the work that came before hers. She dedicates some of the chapter to an investigation of the various way theorists and critics have approached women as monsters in popular films (3). According to herself, Creed is the first to present a “sustained analysis” of the different aspects of the monstrous-feminine (3). She argues that those who have come before her have generally chosen to adopt one of four approaches to women as monsters – they have either, “simply discussed female monstrosity as part of male monstrosity; argued that woman only terrifies when represented as man’s castrated other; referred to her only in passing; or argued that there are no ‘great’ female monsters” (3). Creed compares her work to a number of theorists and critics, and she remains largely unimpressed with their work on the monstrous-feminine. She divides her peers into two categories. Those

who “work from the Freudian position that woman terrifies because she is castrated” (5) and those who do not. She finds one major flaw within both categories – all but one of the theorists work with woman solely as a *victim* in the horror film (7) instead of woman as the monster.

The latter category – those who do not work from the abovementioned Freudian position – contains three theorists: Gérard Lenne, David J. Hogan and James B. Twitchwell. According to Creed, Lenne analyses from a sexist notion of chivalry (3) – he argues that there are few monstrous women in fiction and that that is for the best since that better suits women’s “‘natural’ role in life” (Creed 3). He is dismissive of the monstrous-feminine – he discredits all the female monsters he finds (Creed 3), and according to his view, women only exist in horror films mainly as a victim (Creed 4). Hogan does not fare much better in Creed’s view. Though he examines the sexual aspect of horror cinema, “he does not examine the nature of female monstrosity in any depth” (Creed 4). Though he does state that there are horror films with female monsters as a leading role, he promptly dismisses these as “obvious and childish” (Hogan qtd. in Creed 4). Creed sums up his attitude of films with female monsters as “generally dismissive” (4). Twitchwell is similarly dismissive of women as monsters (Creed 5).

In the first category – the category of those who work from that Freudian position – Creed mentions Stephen Neale, Susan Lurie and Linda Williams. Though these writers seem to be closer to Creed’s ideas, both Neale and Lurie also mainly view women as victims within horror movies (Creed 7). Though her work leaves questions about the nature of female monstrosity unanswered (Creed 7), Williams, drawing on Lurie’s work, manages to challenge the conventional approach to horror movies through her work with woman’s “power-in-difference”. She studies with the affinity between monster and woman in classic horror movies, as both are “biological freaks” (Creed 6). Williams challenges the idea that the monster is tied to the masculine and masculinity by identifying this affinity because it is “a recognition of their similar status as potent threats to vulnerable male power” (qtd. in Creed 6). This interpretation gives women an active role in horror movies that is not present in any of the other interpretations of woman’s role in horror movies. Having now placed Creed contextually – both in relation to the monstrous-feminine and to feminism in general – it is time for this thesis to move on to the theoretical framework that will back the analysis.

2.2 *The Monstrous-Feminine*

In her work *The Monstrous-Feminine*, Creed tries to coax out the reasons why we view women as monstrous. She establishes that every single human society has “a conception of the monstrous-feminine” detailing what they find to be “shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject” (1) about women. Because this theory deals exclusively with why we are horrified by *women*, Creed adds emphasis on the “importance of gender in the construction of her monstrosity” (3) by using the term “monstrous-feminine”. Like all other stereotypical ideas of femaleness, the monstrous-feminine is also determined in terms of her sexuality, whether she is a whore or a virgin (3).

In her description of the monstrous-feminine and why women are scary, Creed relies heavily on the term “abjection”. Creed’s usage and understanding of abjection – or the abject – is influenced by Julia Kristeva’s work on abjection in her essay, *The Powers of Horror* (1982). Therefore, the next section of this thesis presents the term abjection as Creed uses it in her work. Creed’s understanding is supplemented with text from Kristeva herself.

2.2.1 The Abject

In *The Powers of Horror*, Kristeva argues that abjection is not that which is grotesque or unclean (225), but it is rather caused by that which “disturbs identity, system, order” and does not “respect borders, positions, rules” (4). The abject constitutes the in-between and the ambiguous, and thus, it is both “fascinating and terrifying” (Kristeva, *Portable* 225, 232) and simultaneously a source of horror and attraction (Creed 10). The abject has to be “radically excluded” (Creed 9) from the self and the living subject. It is excluded by being pushed across an imaginary border, that separates the self from that which threatens it. The abject is “permanently thrust aside in order [for the subject] to live” (Kristeva, *Powers* 3). Though the subject must exclude the abject to survive, the subject must also tolerate the abject, because even though it threatens to destroy life and the self, it helps define life (Creed 9). Thus, the abject is always present (Creed 10) and “the subject is constantly beset by abjection” (Creed 10), and it always draws the self towards abjection, where meaning collapses (Kristeva, *Portable* 232).

Kristeva characterises abjection as “immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady” (*Powers* 4) and gives it a number of faces in order to illustrate this: “a terror that disassembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you” (*Powers* 4). Crime, then, in whatever form it might take is

also abject because it “draws attention to the fragility of the law” (*Powers* 4). Premeditated crimes are even more abject since they make the display of fragility of the law even more evident. Creed mentions hypocrites and liars as abject figures as they have the same effect that crime has (10). Furthermore, Creed defines abject things as those that “exist on the other side of the border which separates out the living subject from that which threatens its extinction.” (10) According to Creed, it is evident in Kristeva’s writings that the modern horror definitions of the monstrous are grounded in historical and religious notions of the abject (9). Creed lists the abominations that make a subject abject: “sexual immorality and perversion; corporeal alteration, decay and death; human sacrifice; murder; the corpse; bodily wastes; the feminine body and incest.” (9).

In the section called “Abjection and the horror film”, Creed elaborates on the relationship between the two and why they go together so well. Firstly, it is because the horror genre is inundated with images of abjection, such as images of the corpse, both whole and mutilated, and images of all types of bodily wastes, both liquid and solid (10), in a way that other genres are not. Secondly, the idea of the border - which, as mentioned above, the abject subject or object continually fails to respect – and the transgression of it is central to how the monstrous is constructed in horror films. The exact nature of the border changes from film to film (Creed 11), but the monstrous always has the same function, which is to “bring about an encounter between the symbolic order and that which threatens its stability” (Creed 11). Things or people who either cross the border or just threaten to cross the border are abject because as mentioned above the abject must be kept away from the subject, because if the border is transgressed and collapses then, “How can I be without border?” (Kristeva, *Powers* 4). Without the borders that surround the “I”, it is drawn all the way to the abject and meaning collapses. Now, what could then constitute these borders? As mentioned above, the borders move from context to context, but Creed mentions the border between man and beast, those who take up their proper gender roles and those who do not, and those who have a normal sexual desire and those who have an abnormal sexual desire (11). According to Creed, the horror film endeavours to redraw the boundaries that might have been transgressed and eject the abject once and for all by bringing about a “confrontation with the abject” (14).

Concluding on part one of *The Monstrous-Feminine*, Creed makes it clear that though it might seem like it, women are not abject by nature (83). She asserts that women are represented as monstrous in popular discourse as a part of the ideological project of horror movies, which is designed to disseminate a belief that women’s monstrosity is intricately

bound to her status as man's sexual other (83). The monstrous-feminine is construed as abject because she threatens the symbolic order and draws attention to its frailty by evoking the "natural, animal order" (Creed 83) and the associations with the journey through life that is shared by all humans. Finally, she emphasises that the construction of woman's reproductive and maternal functions as abject is a result of a patriarchal ideology (83).

2.2.2 Faces of the Monstrous-Feminine

Having established what constitutes abjection and the monstrous-feminine, I now move on to the different archetypes of the monstrous-feminine that Creed presents in her work. I will only be presenting the archetypes that will be relevant to the analysis – and in the manner, they are pertinent to the analysis – because of spatial constraints. However, before we move on to a presentation of the archetypes, I will briefly define the term. I acknowledge that "archetype" is a key term within Jungian psychoanalysis; however, this definition is not relevant to this thesis, and thus I will employ a more general definition of the term. For the purpose of this thesis, I will define an archetype as "the most typical or perfect example of a particular kind of person or thing" (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English 65).

2.2.2.1 Woman as possessed monster

The first archetype this chapter will be focussing on is woman as a possessed monster. In the chapter "Woman as possessed monster: *The Exorcist*", Creed details how spiritual possession of a woman is seen as monstrous. Creed describes the possessed figure as being abject because the boundary between self and other has been crossed since something or someone other has taken over the body of the self (32). The possessed woman is even more abject if she is invaded by the personality of a man since that transgresses yet another border – namely that between genders. Often it is also the boundaries between "innocence and corruption, purity and impurity" (Creed 32) that are transgressed in cases of stories about possessed women. Creed argues that women are constructed as possessed when they attack the symbolic order and thus demonstrates that the symbolic order is nothing but a fiction made from sexual repression (41). The possessed woman highlights the weaknesses of the symbolic order and "plays on its vulnerabilities" (Creed 41), and consequently, she exposes the symbolic order. Creed walks us through her train of thought: if we apply the definition of sin or abjection as something that can come from within (through possession), then we open

up for a way of positioning women as “deceptively treacherous” (42). Though she may appear chaste and beautiful, it may all just be a façade, as evil and corruption may lurk beneath the surface. The dichotomous view of women portrayed here is, Creed argues, essential to how female killers are represented in horror films (42) and constitutes what Creed calls the “stereotype of feminine evil” (42). The stereotype is prevalent in the patriarchal way of talking about women’s nature as fundamentally evil.

Concluding the chapter, Creed asserts that, “Horror emerges from the fact that woman has broken with her proper feminine role – she has ‘made a spectacle of herself’ – put her unsocialised body on display” (42) when talking about why the possessed woman is a face of the monstrous-feminine. This quote leads us back to the idea of abjection again – if woman has broken with her gender role, she has transgressed a border, specifically the border between those who take up their proper gender role and those who do not. Creed herself supports this reading, as she believes that the possessed female is a female who refuses to take up her proper place within the symbolic order (38).

2.2.2.2 Woman as vampire

The second archetype of this thesis is the woman as a vampire. The vampire is a well-known monster to most, and the concept of the vampire is nothing new – the blood-sucking fiend with varying supernatural or superhuman powers. According to Kristeva, the female vampire began rising to prominence in the vampire films of the 1970s, and it was during this period that vampire movies began to explore the relationship between sex, violence and death explicitly (59). Quoting Tudor, Creed ponders on the connection between the new interest in the female vampire and the rise of the women’s liberation movement, as both lead to fears about a newly aggressive expression of female sexuality (59).

According to Creed, the female vampire’s abjection is attributed to a couple of different things. First of all, she disrupts identity and order (61). Since she is driven by her unquenchable lust for blood, she fails to respect “the rules of proper sexual conduct” (61). Furthermore, she transgresses the boundaries between the living and dead (61) – vampires are famously said to be undead, having come back from beyond death through the magic of vampiric blood. The vampire also transgresses the border between human and beast, since their bloodlust and pointed fangs suggest something animalistic while their humanoid form suggests humanity (Creed 61). The female vampire is also doubly abject because of her gender. While blood itself is an abject substance, since, as Kristeva states, “Any secretion or

discharge, anything that leaks out of the feminine or masculine body defiles.” (qtd. in Creed 62), the blood of a *woman* is even more abject. This idea can be attributed to the fact that women’s blood is taboo in many religious and cultural discourses (Creed 61). This connection with women’s blood makes for a particularly abject figure to be found in the female vampire (67). This connection to blood is also why Creed categorises vampires as a “creature of evil” (66) – the vampire draws blood from the inside to the outside through a wound, which also is part of the reason women’s blood is seen as abject. The “vampire’s union” (Creed 70) also points to abjection, since a wound must be opened on the victim for the vampire to obtain their blood. Openings of the bodily surface in this way are abject because they point to imperfections in the bodily surface which are similarly abject (Creed 70).

Another dimension that is particular to the female vampire is the mother-child relationship. Since the vampire does not necessarily destroy all its victims but lets some of them be reborn as vampires themselves, a mother-child relation is born. In many movies, the vampire chooses a lover and turns that person into a vampire. This makes for a strange situation in which the vampire and their newly turned prodigy engage in an incestuous relationship since the vampire is both mother and lover to their newly turned “child”. According to Creed, this is made especially explicit when we deal with female vampires (70).

As it is made evident in the section above, the female vampire is not only a terrifying figure, but also undeniably a highly sexualised figure, and so, like all abject figures, the vampire manages to be both repulsive and attractive at the same time (Creed 66). Creed notes that, unlike any other monster born from horror films, the vampire envelopes its victim in an erotic embrace while sucking their blood (59). She also remarks that the vampire is a “seducer *par excellence*” (61), again emphasising the sexual dimension of the vampire. Creed writes about the transformation from human woman to female vampire, “from an innocent into a creature of the night who, because she has been sexually awakened, is now a threatening female figure. She is the deadly vampire who desires to suck men’s blood, which in this context could be seen as a metaphor for semen.” (66) The female vampire is *sexually awakened* – the lovers’ embrace, the facsimile oral sex are all parts of her new “life” as a vampire. As this aggressive sexuality crosses a border – most cultures prefer women who are sexually passive – the vampire is abject. According to Creed, vampires are almost always represented as sexually aggressive in popular culture (59). Her sexuality is also part of why Creed deems her to be monstrous and attractive. The female vampire threatens to “undermine the formal and highly symbolic relations” (61) between men and women, that are paramount

to the patriarchal society and its survival because she can seduce the daughters of the patriarchy away from their “proper gender roles” (61).

2.2.2.3 Woman as monstrous womb

The third and final archetype this chapter will introduce is the archetype of woman as having a monstrous womb. This archetype focuses heavily on women’s reproductive and mothering capabilities, and it is precisely those that make her scary. Creed presents a couple of reasons why wombs and mothering functions are construed as abject. First of all, women’s reproductive capabilities place them closer to the world of nature than men (44), which places them on nature’s side rather than the symbolic order’s side (48). Women are linked to the animal world – and therefore also to the cycle of “birth, decay and death” (47) – through their ability to give birth. This connection that woman has to the natural and animal world serves as a reminder to man that he is not immortal and that the symbolic order is fragile (47). Secondly, this archetype plays on the outside/inside dichotomy much like the archetype of woman as possessed monster does. A woman may look perfectly pleasant on the outside, but her womb may be corrupted, carrying a potentially evil alien being. (48)

Creed’s theory on why women’s wombs are horrifying is linked to the womb’s essential function – giving birth. For nine months (in the case of human women, at least) an “alien life form” (49) is carried in the womb. The pregnancy causes an array of changes to the female body, shattering its link to the symbolic order even more, since the body must be unmarked and “bear no trace of its debt to nature” (Kristeva qtd. in Creed 47) in order for it to represent the symbolic order. If a body is not clean and proper, it is not fully symbolic. Finally, the pregnancy leads to giving birth. She argues that the womb is horrifying by itself, and that it has been used to represent women’s bodies as impure and reinforce the idea that women are part of the natural or animal world instead of the symbolic order (49).

Lastly, Creed also speaks about how motherhood and the maternal figure are construed as abject and horrifying. Though this is not directly from her chapter on the monstrous womb but the first chapter of *The Monstrous-Feminine*, I would argue it is sufficiently related. In the chapter on the monstrous womb, Creed references the movie *The Brood* (1979) in which one of the main characters, Nola, asexually produces murderous offspring that has no will other than Nola’s. They do her bidding and then perish. Creed interprets this as a symbolic representation of the “horrifying results of permitting the mother too much power” (47) over her offspring. In the first chapter of *The Monstrous-Feminine*,

Creed investigates why maternal figures are construed as abject. Quoting Kristeva's understanding of the mother-child relation, she describes it as "marked by conflict: the child struggles to break free but the mother is reluctant to release it." (11) Creed argues that essentially all horror texts can be interpreted as representing the monstrous-feminine in relation to Kristeva's idea of maternal authority and in relation to the concept of the mapping of the self's proper body (13). As has already been established earlier, bodily fluids and waste are considered abject and are essential in our culturally constructed ideas of what is horrific (13). Here we find a split between two orders, the maternal authority and the law of the father. The maternal authority constitutes a universe of no shame, while the paternal laws constitute a universe of shame (12-13). Creed argues, that on the one hand, images of bodily fluids and wastes fills the subject, that is already constituted as whole and proper, with disgust and loathing (13). On the other hand, these bodily wastes refer back to a time where there was a fusion between mother and nature. Even though bodily wastes were set apart from the body, they were not seen as objects of shame in this time (13). According to Creed, Kristeva argues that defilement rites are used to point to the boundary between the maternal authority and the paternal law (14).

2.3 *The Beauty Myth*

Though it might seem counterintuitive, Naomi Wolf's theory on the beauty myth does not endeavour to dictate that women look a certain way. The beauty myth *is* prescriptive – just not of physical appearance. What the beauty myth prescribes is a certain, desirable way of behaving (14). This behaviour is determined by politics (12) – what is deemed "beautiful" is ever-changing, always determined by what serves the social order (Wolf 150). Wolf recounts how the image of feminine beauty can change, giving an example from real life: "the gaunt, youthful model" ousted the "happy housewife" as the ideal of "successful womanhood" (11), all in order to suit the social order whatever it might be. What is deemed to be beautiful depends on both the geographical and temporal context. These changes expose the truth – there is no universal beauty, and consequently, beauty is not changeless or static (Wolf 12), though the West might like to pretend that it is, and that beauty ideals stem from one "Platonic Ideal Woman" (Wolf 12).

The beauty myth tries to sell men and women a story about themselves. First of all, Wolf argues that it claims that "beauty" objectively exists and it is universal (12). It dictates that women must want to *be* beautiful, and men must want to *have* women who are beautiful (Wolf 12). Beauty becomes a currency system, not unlike the gold standard (12). But the

beauty myth is not true – Wolf stresses that it has no grounding in truth, history or biology (13) and that it is but a fiction (16), fickle and dependent on politics. The myth is based on “emotional distance, politics, finance, and sexual repression” (13), and not on any kind of science. Wolf calls the beauty myth a “weapon against women’s advancement” (10) and a “counteroffensive against women” (13). The myth uses stereotypes and ideals to control women (15) and keep them manageable. The all-pervasive myth keeps women preoccupied with chasing beauty, which is utterly unattainable. Wolf calls the materialisation of this hallucination of beauty “the Iron Maiden”, named after the spiked medieval torture instrument (17). Women are reduced to “formulaic and endlessly reproduced” (Wolf 18) images of what is deemed beautiful, while all their differences are ignored, in an effort to fit this impossible mould. Those who fail to fit into the Iron Maiden’s mould are called monstrous and since the Iron Maiden is “exactly that which no woman fits, or fits forever” (Wolf 228) all women are made to feel monstrous despite the fact that they adhere to the common human phenotype. Since men are never made to fit into a rigid mould like this one, they can look however they want without being made to feel monstrous, unless they are missing limbs or features, so they do not fit the human phenotype (Wolf 228).

With all this talk of how the beauty myth impacts women, one might think that it is about women. Wolf reminds us that that is the farthest thing from the truth; the beauty myth is about men and their institutions and institutional power and how that power is exerted over women (13). Through an asymmetrical sexual education, this position of power is upheld – men learn to look at and evaluate women’s bodies, while women never engage in that type of behaviour against men (Wolf 152). While women experience the pain of being evaluated and then either accepted or rejected time and time again, men never experience it. This situation helps maintain men’s power while controlling women at the same time. Even though this sounds like a highly advantageous arrangement for men, it is more of a double-edged sword. While the beauty myth benefits men, it also hurts them in ways most are not aware of. Wolf claims that the beauty myth teaches men how to avoid loving women and prevents men from seeing them as they are (174). It has a numbing effect on men, reducing or impairing all of their senses (Wolf 174-175).

As it was just established above, the beauty myth keeps women from men through its asymmetric nature, but it also keeps women from other women (Wolf 13). Sisterhood is never allowed to flourish between women. Old women fear young women and vice versa (Wolf 14), because aging in women is not considered beautiful. According to Wolf, aging is accompanied by the threat of invisibility for women, as old women are “erased from the

culture” (259), becoming a nonperson as they are ostracised. As she loses “beauty” the aged woman slips into “nothingness and disintegration” (Wolf 230). Wolf highlights how this shows the inequality of the beauty myth – old men run the world (the most powerful man in the world, the current President of the United States of America, was 70 years old when he was instated as president), while old women disappear (260). An integral part of the beauty myth is competition between women to drive them apart (Wolf 14). Though the beauty myth drives women apart, it also has a hand in binding them together to fuss over one woman who needs to be adorned for a special occasion. As soon as this occasion is over, though, and women re-enter the public space they resume their “isolated, unequal, mutually threatening, jealously guarded ‘beauty’ status” (Wolf 76). The solidarity never lasts long before women are back to competing with each other.

The paragraph above focused on a type of mental pain – the pain of lacking sisterhood, but Wolf also touches on the beauty myth in relation to *physical* pain. Speaking from the viewpoint of a mid-20th century woman, Wolf states that, “For as far back as women could remember, something had hurt about being female” (219). As female pain began to dissipate with the progression of medical science, the beauty myth pushed beauty to occupy the spot that the pain and danger of birth and sex had previously occupied (Wolf 218-219), so that “Today, what hurts is beauty” (Wolf 219). Wolf argues that “beauty thinking” is anaesthetic (249). Sensation is cauterised, leading the healthy body to ignore pain in the pursuit of beauty. Through this cauterisation women are more object than subject (Wolf 249). The beauty myth embraces the idea that beauty is pain. The objective of women becomes to live hungry, die young and leave a pretty corpse (Wolf 231), leading to a life lived in pain and in vain trying to fit into the Iron Maiden. As mentioned above, this is how the beauty myth keeps women manageable – by keeping them occupied with chasing them impossible.

In an earlier chapter of this thesis, I introduced the concept of the abject and borders. The function of the beauty myth in this thesis is to try to establish some of those borders. Since the beauty myth prescribes behaviours that women must follow if they want to be embody beauty (or at least attempt to embody beauty), there must also be a flipside to this, as certain behaviours then must be considered unbeautiful. Wolf calls it social control or “social limits” (270). These behaviours can then be considered abject, since the beauty myth dictates that all women must want to embody beauty (Wolf 12). Furthermore, in the next chapter of this thesis, I present the idea of the Other within postcolonial theory. Within the beauty myth, woman is the Other – she is the inferior sex (Wolf 264), the “misbegotten man” (English &

Ehrenreich qtd. in Wolf 220). Wolf remarks how women share this evaluation as inferior with “other excluded groups” (264), such as the colonised subject.

2.4 Postcolonial theory

This section endeavours to introduce the reader to the postcolonial terms that will be employed in this analysis, namely the Other, mimicry and the stereotype. As it has been mentioned earlier, this thesis bases its understanding of postcolonial theory on the works of Homi K. Bhabha, especially his book *The Location of Culture* (2007).

Before diving into the terms presented in this chapter, I would like to elaborate a bit more on how Bhabha fits into this rather feminist thesis. In his works, Bhabha talks of a colonial discourse that is used to talk about the colonial condition, the coloniser and the colonised. In his own words, the objective of the colonial discourse is “to construe the colonised as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest” (101). Seeing as this thesis works with gender rather than race, the scope of Bhabha’s idea of the colonial discourse is reduced a bit and moved to an individual level. The women of this thesis are not construed as monstrous on behalf of their entire gender; they are the outliers who do not fit the mould made of society’s expectations of women. Furthermore, it is not conquest that is sought to be justified, but rather society’s horror at and rejection of women who do not act as expected.

2.4.1 The Other

The first postcolonial term this thesis sets out to introduce is the Other, also called Otherness. This term is central to postcolonial theory, as it is used to differentiate the coloniser from the colonised, though in the context of this thesis, it is used to differentiate a dominant, majority group from a minority group. I will also refer to the Other as the colonised subject. The colonial discourse, which I mentioned above, depends on the concept of “‘fixity’ in the ideological construction of otherness.” (Bhabha 94). In this context, fixity is paradoxical, as it connotes rigidity and order as well as disorder and degeneracy (Bhabha 94). Stereotypes, which I will describe in more detail in a later chapter, help the coloniser in his attempt to fix the Other’s identity (Bhabha 94-95). The colonial discourse constructs an Other that is “entirely knowable and visible” (Bhabha 101).

The Other must be kept separate from the self – Bhabha describes the Other as “an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity” (96). This

fantasy highlights the coloniser's need for the Other to be different from himself. However, even if that is what the coloniser desires, it is not possible. It is with the Other as it is with the abject – though it must be kept separate self, it must simultaneously be tolerated because it helps define life. Regardless of the coloniser's wishes, the Other and the self are intertwined – both need the other part to attempt to stabilise their inherently unstable identities (Bhabha 116). As one might imagine, this means that the relationship between the Other and the coloniser is fraught with anxiety. The coloniser has everything to lose – his concept of having an identity, his perceived superiority over the Other and thus the legitimacy of his rule – while the Other has everything to gain (such as an identity of their own instead of the stereotypical representations that the coloniser puts forth). But since, according to Bhabha's view of identity, neither the coloniser nor the colonised subject has a stable identity (70), this is a hollow consolation. Like the abject, the Other is extremely ambiguous. Within postcolonial theory, the Other is the object of both “desire and derision” (Bhabha 96), and the coloniser constantly vacillates between these two positions. This vacillation is also evident in the way in which the coloniser constructs stereotypes about the Other, which I will elaborate on later.

2.4.2 Mimicry

The second postcolonial term I will introduce is mimicry. This thesis works with Bhabha's definition of the term, not just the dictionary definition of mimicry, which would be “The action or skill of being able to copy the voice, movements, etc. of others” (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English 973). Bhabha opens his chapter on mimicry in *The Location of Culture* with a quote from Jacques Lacan: “The effect of mimicry is camouflage... It is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled – exactly like the technique of camouflage practiced in human warfare” (qtd. in Bhabha 121). According to Lacan's definition, mimicry entails the colonised subject taking on characteristics from the coloniser's culture so that they may blend in. It is not so much a harmonisation reached through repression of difference, but a resemblance (Bhabha 128). Using Lacan's allegory of camouflage may suggest that something is hidden by the paint of camouflage. Bhabha makes it clear that this is not the case: “Mimicry conceals no presence or identity behind its mask” (126). There is not essential Other identity obscured by mimicry, since, as has already been discussed, there is no such thing as a fixed, stable identity (Bhabha 70). Mimicry represents an ironic compromise

between the coloniser and the colonised - it represents a desire for a “reformed, recognizable Other” (Bhabha 122), that is almost identical to the coloniser, but not completely. Since the colonised cannot become identical to the coloniser, mimicry must be constructed around ambivalence (Bhabha 122), meaning that it must always produce a difference, so that the colonised does not become *too* much like the coloniser. This ambivalence is central to mimicry since the probability of the Other becoming too much like the coloniser causes the coloniser to be fraught with anxiety.

If the Other did become too much like the coloniser, it would break the coloniser’s illusion of a fixed and stable identity, but it would also challenge the very objective of the colonial discourse. If the colonised is the mirror image of the coloniser, then it is impossible for the coloniser to justify the conquest of their lands and the subjugation of its people. The whole act of making in-groups and out-groups is threatened, and thus the coloniser’s superiority is threatened too. This might make it seem as if the ambivalence solely benefits the coloniser – “the slippage of meaning” (129), as Bhabha also calls it, protects the coloniser’s “right” to rule – but it also benefits the colonised subject. As I mentioned in the chapter above and as I also will touch upon in the chapter on the stereotype within postcolonial theory, the coloniser tries to fix the colonised subject’s identity. The slippages of meaning let the colonised subject have some modicum of agency, as they can control this aspect of their identity – even though the coloniser of course also tries to fixate that part of their identity.

Though it is an important part of it, mimicry does not exclusively deal with the visual representation of self that the colonised subject puts forth, but also about how they act and what is inside of them – which we will also see in the analysis of this thesis. Bhabha speaks about the concept of a “mimic man” (124-125), a colonised subject brought up in the coloniser’s culture. Working within the British colonial context, Bhabha characterises him as, “Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and intellect” (124-125). While these mimic men would be physically Other, mentally and intellectually they would be just like the colonisers. This notion that one can be “English” in matters of behaviour and in ways of thinking implies that there is a way of thinking and behaving that is considered decidedly Other and thus unwanted.

2.4.3 The stereotype

The last postcolonial term of this thesis is the stereotype. Bhabha calls the stereotype the “major discursive strategy” of the colonial discourse (94). As with mimicry, the stereotype is also dependent on ambivalence. It is what gives it its repeatability through different historical and discursive contexts (Bhabha 95). The colonial stereotypes are based on “a form of knowledge and identification” (Bhabha 94). This form of knowledge and identification continuously vacillates between that which is already known and “in place” (Bhabha 94) and that which must constantly and anxiously be repeated (Bhabha 94). The act of creating a stereotype in the postcolonial sense is not so straightforward as just setting up a “false image” (Bhabha 117) which then becomes a scapegoat. It is rather an ambivalent text consisting of “projection and introjection, metaphors and metonymic strategies, displacement, over-determination, guilt, aggressivity, the masking and splitting of ‘official’ and phantasmatic knowledges to construct the positionalities and oppositionalities of racist discourse” (Bhabha 117). Having this “knowledge” of the colonised subjects allows the coloniser to legitimise his “discriminatory and authoritarian forms of political control” (Bhabha 119) over the colonised subjects. To the coloniser, the stereotypes about the colonised subjects highlight the “necessity” of colonisation (Bhabha 119).

Bhabha claims that the stereotype should be envisioned as a continuum (113) since the stereotyping of the Other is not solely negative or solely positive. He suggests that this continuum would range from “loyal servant to Satan, from the loved to the hated” (113) since the coloniser might have use of the Other but also might hate the Other. Bhabha mentions the “terrifying stereotypes of savagery, cannibalism, lust and anarchy” (104) and the “Simian Black, the Lying Asiatic” (128) as examples of these stereotypes. Bhabha states that the stereotype is a simplification of the truth, but not because it is a false representation of reality. He argues that it is a simplification because it is “an arrested, fixated form of representation” (107), that denies the Other the possibility of changing. By fixing the Other’s identity, the coloniser is able to imagine his own identity as fixed, though it is not.

In his usage of stereotypes, the coloniser’s anxiety about his identity is once again revealed. Though the coloniser might try, the stereotype can never stand in for an actual and stable identity. Using “lack” in the Freudian sense, Bhabha asserts that “‘the fullness’” of the stereotype is always threatened by this lack (110). To illustrate this lack, Bhabha rewrites a quote from Freud: “‘Some do not have the same skin/race/culture’” (107). The lack of similarity causes the coloniser anxiety, so as mentioned above, this might be why the

coloniser tries to avoid this by stereotyping the colonised subject – in an attempt to lessen his own anxiety by bolstering his own identity.

3. Analysis

After having presented the theoretical framework for this thesis, this chapter will contain the main part of this thesis, namely the analysis of the characters mentioned in the introductory chapter. In terms of structure, this analysis will first look into Queen Akasha from *Queen of the Damned*. Next is Jean Grey from *X-Men: The Last Stand*. Then this analysis ventures into the universe of *Game of Thrones* with a short explanation of the fantasy society prefacing the two analyses of Cersei Lannister and Arya Stark. The fifth and last object of analysis of this thesis will be Amy Dunne from *Gone Girl*. Lastly, a short coda will sum up differences and similarities in how these women are construed as monstrous.

3.1 Mother, lover, vampire queen – Akasha

The first subject of this analysis is Akasha, the ancient vampire queen. The most obviously monstrous thing about Akasha is, of course, the fact that she is a vampire. By virtue of her vampiric nature, she is abject in many ways. First of all, there is the connection to blood. Akasha drinks it – from men and women alike – and lets it coat her mouth and hands (*Queen of the Damned*² 00:53:30). Furthermore, she also allows Lestat to drink from her multiple times (00:33:09; 01:27:04), and since (as established in chapter 2.2) a woman's blood is doubly abject due to religious and cultural discourses, this adds to Akasha's abjection. Female vampires are more abject than male vampires since they are connected to women's blood and the feminine body at the same time. In order to obtain the blood that keeps her alive, Akasha opens wounds – either tearing out beating hearts or by biting the victim of her bloodlust. Wounds are abject since they are imperfections on the bodily surface. We see Akasha feed (01:15:46), and we also see her covered in wounds (01:28:41), so she is continuously connected to this abjection. Secondly, Akasha also transgresses two major boundaries: the boundary between the living and the dead and the boundary between beast and man. Both boundaries are transgressed by her being a vampire. The concept and the mechanics of the vampire changes from text to text, but in *Queen of the Damned* the body dies during the process of becoming a vampire (00:24:13). Akasha is a reanimated corpse, an

² Unless otherwise specified all references in this chapter will be to *Queen of the Damned*

impossible being that nonetheless persists in existing. By being a vampire, she transgresses the border between the living and the dead. By transgressing this particular border, Akasha is connected to death which – according to Creed – is considered abject (9). The boundary between humans and animals is also transgressed because of Akasha’s bloodlust and sharp fangs, which aligns her with the animal world – but since she retains a humanoid form, she straddles the border between what is human and what is animal.

Even though she is a vampire and thus transgresses the borders I mentioned above – making her abject – being a vampire is not what ultimately marks her as monstrous in this movie. There are non-monstrous vampires in the movie, such as Marius and Maharet who may be connected to some abject matters, but are not construed as vampires to be feared. And there are many more reasons why Akasha is construed as monstrous. Akasha is not just *a* vampire – in the universe of *Queen of the Damned* she is *the* vampire; the first vampire to roam the Earth and thus the mother of all other vampires (00:34:39). This fact is revealed through a conversation between Lestat – Akasha’s lover – and Marius, who is his maker. After having seen Akasha in her statue form, Lestat asks Marius who she is. Marius tells him that, “She’s your mother. She’s my mother. Akasha, the queen of all who are damned” (00:34:39). Akasha herself strongly emphasises this familial relationship between her and *all* vampires when she addresses the vampires who have gathered to end her: “See, my children? Remember your real family” (01:26:33). So, when Akasha – the mother of all vampires – takes Lestat as a lover (01:14:13), they enter into what can best be described as an incestuous relationship, since Lestat is also a vampire and thus related to Akasha through his vampiric ancestry. Creed mentions the incestuous nature of the vampire in her chapter on the female vampire – and even though there is not necessarily any physical or genetic familial bond between a vampire and her maker, it still becomes an incestuous relationship because of the implied kinship (Creed 70). This incestuous relationship is another way in which Akasha is construed as abject since incest is considered abject (Creed 9). Though Akasha is not the one who turns Lestat into a vampire, she becomes his mother in other ways. As already mentioned, there is a familial bond in that Akasha is the first vampire, but there is also the mentor/mentee relationship that they share. Akasha nourishes Lestat – when she allows him to drink her blood, he gains new powers. He becomes stronger (00:35:18), and he gains the ability to walk in the sun which is impossible for other vampires (01:19:31). Akasha’s blood becomes equivalent to a mother’s milk, which again connects her to the abject since she violates food taboos by symbolically mixing blood and milk (Creed 69).

In addition to making her the mother of all vampires, being the first and oldest vampire on Earth grants Akasha special powers. She is much stronger than any other vampire she faces, and it takes multiple vampires working together to finally take her down (01:28:41). She flicks her wrist and vampires burst into flames (00:53:55). She walks unharmed through a fire that has just killed other vampires (00:54:47), and she can levitate (01:12:31). These extra powers make Akasha Other within the vampire community – she is incomprehensible even to other vampires because of her ancientness and might. Vampires are by definition Other – they are a minority that must be kept separate from the Self because they threaten to consume it. But Akasha forgoes all attempts at mimicry; she rejects the mere thought of it. *Queen of the Damned* is set in an American context. Now, it is a commonly held belief that America is a melting pot and contains all kinds of different cultures, but we can still identify a dominant culture – one in which it is mandated by social pressure that we dress to cover up most of our bodies. The vampire subculture is a bit more liberal – consider the scene where Jessie goes to the night club, the Admiral’s Arms (00:51:06). Most of the vampires are dressed in what can be best described as a type of industrial, gothic punk – a lot of leather, a lot of studs and clothes that are tighter and more revealing than the dominant culture would condone. In the movie, it is made clear that Akasha once ruled ancient Egypt with her husband Enkil (00:34:53) – thus she dresses as an Egyptian queen in *very* revealing clothes, complete with a headdress. She turns heads at the Admiral’s Arms, but she does not care – she almost relishes in it (00:51:37). Akasha does not care that she is seen and recognised as Other, and unlike the other vampires in *Queen of the Damned*, she has no desire to hide away or blend in with humanity; she wants to **rule** it (01:23:48).

Though she is by no means chaste, Akasha embodies Creed’s stereotype of feminine evil (see Appendix A). She is exquisitely beautiful – her movements are sensual (00:52:28), she speaks in a slightly warbled and throaty voice (00:51:50), her body is slim and often put on display, her hair is long and jet-black, and her eyes are an alluring green. This erotic and enticing appearance hides a vicious killer who nearly “drank this earth dry” (00:34:53), according to Marius. We see her kill, drink blood and engage in near-incestuous relations. Akasha does change the stereotype a bit – she does not conceal her evil deeds. In fact, she wants others to participate in it as she strives towards world domination for vampires. This beautiful outside also aligns with Creed’s description of the female vampire as a highly sexualised figure. All through the movie a connection between vampires and sex is established – we see it with all vampires in the movie’s universe. They are seductive and sexual creatures. An example of this can be found at Lestat’s press conference when Lestat

tells a reporter that, “If you like, I can give you a private demonstration in your hotel tonight” (00:08:30). Judging by the reporter’s response and Lestat’s tone of voice, it is clear that this references something sexual. The sexualisation of vampires is also present in the scene where Akasha kills the vampires in the Admiral’s Arms. When she first enters the night club, it is crawling with vampires engaging in seductive or sexual behaviour (00:51:07). This heavy correlation between vampires and sex makes them desirable to the viewer. However, Creed also mentions how we are both attracted to and repulsed by the monstrous-feminine and the abject. With Akasha that is true as well – first of all, she is beautiful on the outside and corrupt on the inside, so here we see the dichotomy at work. Secondly, the seductive vampires engage in heinous acts of violence – mutilation, immolation and worse. While Akasha might be the most traditionally attractive of the vampires we see in the movie, she is also the most violent. Akasha is so magically entrancing that when Lestat joins her, the other vampires consider him to be beyond their influence and thus lost (01:22:39). Akasha also pulls the beating heart out of a vampire and takes a large bite out of it before crushing it with her bare hands (00:52:58) – a repulsive act that is executed rather seductively. These acts repulse the viewer and cause horror, even though a viewer might still be attracted to the vampires because of their behaviour and otherworldly good looks.

Akasha is also highly prone to murder and does so rather indiscriminately. In the course of the movie, it is revealed that Akasha has violently murdered Enkil, her husband, so that she can be with Lestat (00:50:14). In this sense, Akasha is not only abject because she murders, but she is abject because she is the “friend who stabs you” (Kristeva 232). Enkil should be able to trust his wife, but she betrays him by killing him while he is still a statue and thus vulnerable to attack. As we can see from Enkil’s corpse, it is a rather vicious murder. Enkil’s throat appears to have been torn open, and his face is contorted in pain. This murder has some motive – it frees her from Enkil so that she can take Lestat as her lover. But Akasha also murders with no real motive, seemingly committing carnage just because she feels like it. We see Lestat waking up to discover a mansion and a beach *littered* with corpses (01:20:43), and when he asks Akasha why she would do such a thing, she counters him with a rather flippant, “Why not?” (01:21:17). Akasha apparently murders for fun which makes her terrifying and deepens her connection to the abject.

Furthermore, Akasha is also connected to death and decay. Not only is she, as mentioned earlier, a reanimated corpse and a bringer of death in general, but she also dies near the end of the movie (01:30:23). The regular vampires of *Queen of the Damned* mostly just die in a manner befitting the way they were killed – so if they were immolated by

Akasha, they smoulder and turn to dust (01:11:50) and if they were decapitated they would simply just leave a headless corpse (01:11:13). When she dies, Akasha's body sizzles and turns completely black (01:30:00). Terrible, otherworldly sounds seemingly emanate from her, while her flesh turns to ash, swirling in the wind until only a skeleton remains (01:31:21). The skeleton then vanishes into thin air, and Akasha is finally nothing (01:31:32). This death also points towards decay – it is as if time suddenly catches up to Akasha as her body decays and dies. This decay is another way Akasha is abject. As it takes several vampires to overpower and kill Akasha (01:28:41), she is covered in bite wounds in the moments before her final death. In this way, she is covered in abjection – as discussed earlier, wounds are abject because they are imperfections in the bodily surface. If the bodily surface is not intact, it is not in compliance with the symbolic order, and this is yet another way in which Akasha does not comply with the symbolic order.

Akasha's sexual behaviour also marks her as abject. She engages in abnormal sexual behaviour and perversion in a couple of ways. First of all, there is her relationship with Lestat, which is technically incestuous in nature. The pair engages in sexual activities of different natures (01:15:08, 01:16:23), but one uniting theme is blood. In one scene, where the pair is in a large bathtub, Akasha bites Lestat in his pectoral muscle and drinks his blood (01:15:09). She then leans up to give him an open-mouthed kiss, in which it seems as if the two share the blood rather erotically (01:16:05). The involvement of blood alone is perverted – as I have mentioned numerous times already, blood is abject and involving it in sex as a way of giving and receiving pleasure constitutes perversion. Within the universe of *The Queen of the Damned*, drinking blood and having your blood drunk seems to have the potential to take on a rather sexual and pleasurable nature, which is evident in a couple of places, such as when Akasha bites Lestat's pectoral muscle (01:15:09) or when Lestat first drinks from Marius' wrist in order to become a vampire (00:23:18). Both scenarios imply pleasure through the moans and facial expressions of those who are involved in the actions: Lestat clenches his hands and throws his head back when Akasha bites him, and Marius releases a trembling moan when Lestat starts to drink. Akasha also has another encounter of a sexual nature during the movie before she takes Lestat as her consort (01:14:13), which I have briefly mentioned earlier. During her rather murderous visit at the night club called the Admiral's Arms, Akasha meets an unnamed male vampire. They briefly talk, and she then moves to the dancefloor of the club, writhing seductively before beckoning him to join her. They share a passionate kiss (00:52:59) which is interrupted by Akasha reaching into his chest cavity and pulling out his heart, indulgently biting into the still-beating heart and

relishing in it (00:52:58). Again, Akasha exhibits a rather abnormal and perverse sexuality. Consequently, Akasha is defined in relation to her sexuality – she is almost *too* sexual, and she performs her sexuality rather aggressively and perversely. Akasha’s sexuality is a defiance against the beauty myth – as I mentioned in theory chapters, the aggressive sexuality crosses a border between those who have a normal sexual desire and those who do not. The beauty myth of the *Queen of the Damned* seems to prescribe a more toned down sexuality for women – Akasha is the only woman we see express her sexuality like this. Her sexuality is also repulsive because of its inclusion of blood and violence. More than just her sexuality being abject in the situation I just mentioned, her actions are also abject. She manipulates the vampire she kills and lies with her body language – he thinks he is approaching her in order to initiate some type of sexual contact, while only she knows that is about to kill him gruesomely. Kristeva mentions the liar (232) as someone who is abject, and while Akasha does not often lie, the instance above should be considered lying.

Another way Akasha is abject is her eerie transformation from a bleeding, moving marble statue (00:00:40) (see Appendix B) to flesh and blood. Creed talks of corporeal alteration as being abject and Akasha seemingly undergoes this type of transformation when she goes from being a marble statue (albeit one that moves very slowly and bleeds (00:33:09)) to once again being of flesh and blood. Here Akasha also transgresses the border between the natural and supernatural. Even though Akasha seems alive – she bleeds, speaks and feeds – she is still essentially a reanimated corpse, which makes her abject. Furthermore, there is also some small measure of corporeal alteration in the fact that Akasha’s fangs extend when she feeds. We never see Akasha’s fangs extend, but there are clear shots of Akasha with shorter fangs when she just talks or does something mundane (01:13:58) and more pronounced fangs in feeding situations (00:53:37), so it is established that some sort of transformation takes place.

Another way in which Akasha is construed as abject is in her disrespect for the moral laws of the world. Marius tells Lestat that Akasha is dangerous, because “She respects nothing except the taste of blood, human and immortal alike” (00:35:08). As I have mentioned, Akasha does not care for peaceful cohabitation with humans like the rest of the vampires of *The Queen of the Damned*, and thus she commits crimes against these codes by publicly exhibiting her powers at Lestat’s concert (01:12:20) and plotting to take over the world (01:21:36). While these laws or codes are not written down nor strictly formalised, they are codified enough for what seems like the vast majority of vampires to band together against Lestat, when he threatens to expose vampires through his music (00:08:46), and then

later against Akasha once they realise the danger she poses. By not adhering to the moral laws of the world, Akasha threatens the symbolic order in terms of what is considered morally acceptable and what is definitely not.

So, is Akasha construed as monstrous, just because she is female? Let us compare her to the other vampires we meet in the course of the movie. Her closest associate is Lestat, whom she takes as a lover. He is the brat of the bunch – a moody, aspiring rock star, who relishes in having the world’s eyes on him, spurning everything his maker taught him about keeping their secret from mortals. He has a voracious thirst for sex and blood, a thirst which Akasha gladly helps him slake. He is – of course – also a vampire, and consequently, he transgresses a lot of the same borders that Akasha does, and he is also abject in many of the same ways that she is. As such he teeters on the edge of being good or bad until the very last moment when he chooses to join the “good guys” to take down Akasha (01:27:23). Within the movie, Akasha is the villain; she is the one who must be stopped, the one who is a threat to vampires and humanity alike according to the vampires with which we can sympathise. Ultimately, we are not “told” by the movie to be afraid of Lestat, so we are not. We can sympathise with him – he is incredibly lonely and expresses a desire for a companion to help him through immortality (00:01:44), and consequently, he exposes vampires to humankind. We also meet other vampires, such as Maharet and Marius, who are part of the group of vampires who fight to stop Akasha from committing genocide against the human world. As they are vampires, we *know* that Maharet and Marius both transgress the exact same borders that Akasha does, and yet they are the heroes of the story. The same goes for Lestat. What then is the difference between Akasha and the other vampires of this movie? I see two parts to this. The first part has to do with the fact that Akasha also breaks with the rules established within the universe of *The Queen of the Damned*. Early on in the movie, Lestat establishes that vampires have a “code of secrecy” (00:04:30) that he betrays through his music and his open call to other vampires to come out and be shown. Marius tells a newly-turned Lestat that, “Mortals must never know about us, for the sake of all our kind.” (00:26:20). As mentioned, Akasha could not possibly care less about this code of secrecy or about Marius’ notion of protecting vampires from mortals. She refuses to use mimicry to be more acceptable to humankind. Thus, she is what Creed calls an “enemy of the symbolic order” (76) – she threatens to topple the system we know and replace it with one that is completely foreign to most. The other part has to do with viewer identification. The movie asks us to have little sympathy for Akasha – she has no real motive for being the way she is, she has no redeeming qualities for us to like, and she never sees the error of her ways. In this case, we

have no sympathy for the devil. In conclusion, Akasha's femaleness is part of her monstrosity – she refuses to adhere to rules and to the beauty myth, she has countless connections to the abject and she conforms splendidly to the stereotype of feminine evil.

3.2 *A woman possessed – Jean Grey*

The next subject of analysis this thesis will turn to is Jean Grey from *X-Men: The Final Stand* (henceforth referred to as *X-3*), which was the third movie in the original X-Men trilogy. In this movie, Jean, a telepathic and telekinetic mutant, comes back after supposedly having sacrificed her own life to save the other X-Men in *X2* (2003) (*X-3* 00:09:05)³. But she does not come back alone – Phoenix, a personality that has been locked away within Jean's mind for most of her life in order to control it (00:30:00), emerges and takes control of Jean's body for most of the film, with Jean only resurfacing briefly a handful of times, most notably at the end as she dies (01:33:25). When Jean does resurface, she has little to no recollection of what has happened. One of the times Jean resurfaces, she begs Logan to kill her: "Kill me. Kill me before I kill someone else" (00:42:01). Jean fears what Phoenix will do with her body and powers while Jean is not in control of her own body. The situation that Jean finds herself in most closely resembles Creed's "woman as possessed". Creed describes the possessed woman as a figure of abjection since the boundary between self and other has been breached, in this case by Phoenix, the invading personality. Because she traverses this boundary, Phoenix is abject. In the case of possessed women, the gender of the invading personality also plays a role, since if it is male, it is even more abject because another boundary has been breached, namely the one between genders. It is difficult to determine the exact gender of Phoenix, but judging by the pronouns that Charles Xavier uses to talk about Phoenix's gender, it seems Phoenix has no gender, though he is a bit ambiguous. When he first speaks of Phoenix, he describes it as, "A personality that, in our sessions, came to call itself the Phoenix" (00:29:43). Notice how Charles here uses "it" to denominate Phoenix. Not much later, he says, "Far more critical is whether the woman in front of us is the Jean Grey we know, or the Phoenix furiously struggling to be free" (00:30:01). Here he uses the noun "woman" – whether or not this is just in reference to Jean's physical body or Phoenix's gender is unclear to this writer. At the end of the movie, Logan kills Jean in order to finally end the possession (01:33:17). The darkness on her face disappears completely, and she

³ Unless otherwise specified all references in this chapter will be to *X-Men: The Final Stand*.

smiles as she dies (01:33:25), finally free from Phoenix. Just as Creed writes of Reagan, the main character of *The Exorcist* (1973), her example of the archetype of woman as possessed, Jean's possession becomes an excuse for displaying aberrant female behaviour that I will discuss in more detail later. Among others, Phoenix "unleashes" Jean's sexuality, uses her body to commit murder and other atrocious acts of violence that are considered abject and that the Jean that has been established in the two previous movies (*X-Men*, 2000 and *X2*, 2003) probably would balk at committing.

Much like Creed's description of the possessed woman, two of the other boundaries that Phoenix traverses with Jean's body are the boundaries between purity and impurity and innocence and corruption. First, I will tackle the breach of the boundary between purity and impurity. While Phoenix inhabits Jean's body, she becomes more sexually aggressive. When Scott – her romantic partner before she disappeared – finds her again after she emerges from the water, they kiss (00:26:15). This sweet reunion does not last long though. Though it is a bit unclear, it appears as if Phoenix sucks the life from Scott, leaving only his trademark sunglasses behind (00:28:30). Later on in the movie, Phoenix almost throws herself at Logan. She kisses him aggressively, raking her nails along his arms, leaving gouges in his skin (00:39:43). When Logan tries to pull back from her, Phoenix uses her telekinetic abilities to remove his belt (00:40:12), marking her as the sexual initiator and implying sexual aggression from her. More than just transgressing a border and being abject because of this, these acts of sexual behaviour also mark Phoenix as abject, since they can be characterised as perverse and abnormal.

The boundary between corruption and innocence is also thoroughly transgressed with Phoenix in control of Jean's body. Before Phoenix gains control of Jean's body, Jean is part of the X-Men, which is a superhero team that fights for mutant rights and peaceful cohabitation between humans and mutants. Phoenix abandons the X-Men and instead joins the Brotherhood, which fights for mutant superiority over humans. This group does not hesitate to use violence to achieve their goals. This new alignment shows Phoenix's move from innocence to corruption. But while Phoenix seems like she is loyal to – or at least aligned with – the Brotherhood, she turns on them near the end and kills indiscriminately (01:30:16). While we never learn of Phoenix's motivation or end goal, it seems like she has manipulated the mutants of the Brotherhood into helping put her in a situation where she can wreak havoc. These instances of manipulation and lying mark her as abject again. Phoenix transgresses the boundary between corruption and innocence in another way. Phoenix – as mentioned above – uses Jean's body and abilities to kill. She kills Scott (00:26:24) and

Charles Xavier (00:49:32), which makes her abject. She tries her best to kill Logan (01:32:09). When the Brotherhood storms the prison near the end of the movie, Phoenix wreaks havoc (01:30:30), and she disintegrates mutants and humans alike with no regard for anyone (01:30:15). She does not take affiliation into consideration; she just murders senselessly – proving that she is beyond innocence and thoroughly corrupt in terms of morality.

Charles Xavier seems to suggest that Phoenix transgresses the border between man and beast. Speaking of how Phoenix came to be, he characterises her as, “A purely instinctual creature, all desire and joy and rage” (00:29:49). Charles also mentions how he is struggling to “cage the beast” (00:30:14). Notice here his use of the words “creature” and “beast”. Both seem to connote some connection to the animal world, pushing Phoenix beyond the border between human and beast. Another way in which Phoenix moves towards being not quite human – or not *just* human – is through the corporeal alteration that takes place during the movie. When Phoenix uses her powers, she changes. Even with Phoenix in charge of the body, Jean is a normal, beautiful woman (see Appendix C), but when Phoenix uses her powers on a grand scale, such as when she kills Charles (00:49:32) or when she tries to kill Logan (01:32:10), she starts to change. Jean becomes almost inhuman to look at – her eyes turn completely black, and her skin darkens starting around her eyes and then moving outwards (see Appendix D), making it seem like she has black blood flowing through her veins. This change makes Jean look more alien than human, once more pushing her beyond the boundary between that which is human and recognisable as such to us and that which is not recognisable to us as human. The fact that her eyes turn *black* and not any other colour also suggests that she is evil since many societies associate the colour black with evil. This change in Phoenix’ looks also plays into the idea of a vacillation between desire and horror, because we can desire Jean as Phoenix when she just looks like Jean as she is beautiful and alluring with her shapely, feminine body and her long red hair. However, her transformations inspire horror and disgust – the physical changes coupled with the exhibition of her powers scare us because the beautiful outside belies what is on the inside.

The last boundary Phoenix transgresses is one that every mutant transgresses, but Phoenix does so more than most. It is the boundary between the natural and the supernatural – or human and superhuman, if you will. Jean – or Phoenix – comes back with greatly multiplied powers. Jean was already rather powerful in the earlier movies, but unleashing Phoenix makes her exponentially more powerful. A couple of other powerful mutants comment on her powers. Charles Xavier remarks how, “The sheer mass of water that

collapsed on top of Jean should have obliterated her” (00:28:57), implying that Phoenix’s powers must be grand for her to be able to hold back the water, and that “her potential [is] practically limitless” (00:29:18). Magneto, who in opposition to Charles Xavier thinks that Phoenix should remain the dominant personality, says, “Why would Charles want to turn this goddess into a mortal?” (00:56:20) We also get to see her powers unfurl; Phoenix bends gravity (00:47:23) and lifts an entire house (00:48:10) – all just with the power of her mind. More than that, she moves with superhuman speed (00:38:25) and stops projectiles mid-air (01:06:32). All the things Phoenix does are well outside of the human realm of abilities, and she does them with incredible ease.

Just as Creed describes it, part of why Phoenix is construed as abject is because she attacks the symbolic order. Phoenix highlights the weakness of humans against a mutant like herself, who can practically bend reality to suit her needs. As the President remarks: “I worry about how democracy survives when one man can move cities with his mind” (00:37:44). Her extreme powers make Phoenix Other, but she is an Other among Others. Like the vampires of *Queen of the Damned*, the mutants in *X-3* are already Other. Mutants are radically different from humans both physically and mentally, and thus they are construed as dangerous, wrong and ill by the non-mutant majority. Jean’s father refers to her extraordinary powers as an “illness” at the very start of the movie (00:01:52), and the big issue that the movie revolves around is the development of a cure for the x-gene that causes the mutations (00:16:17). When Magneto and Charles Xavier visit a young Jean, they try to foster a sense of community. Charles tells her, “We’re mutants, Jean. We’re like you”, to which Jean responds, “Really? I doubt that” (00:02:40). And just as the majority – the humans – construe mutants in general as Other, stereotyping them as dangerous and wrong, so do the other mutants construe Phoenix as dangerous and ill. Charles is especially keen on “curing” Jean of Phoenix. He construes her as ill with rhetoric such as “She needs help, she is not well” (00:44:20) and telling Phoenix/Jean that, “I want to help you. (...) Trust me. You’re a danger to everyone and yourself” (00:46:14). While that might be true, it becomes part of the discourse about Phoenix/Jean and thus influences how she is treated and seen. In this situation, thus, we should think of Otherness as more of a sliding scale and less of an either/or state of being. Mutants are Other, but Phoenix is even more Other because she is feared by mutants and humans alike. Furthermore, she is so powerful that she is hardly comparable to other mutants, which again sets her apart and makes her Other.

Another part of the discourse on Phoenix is how Magneto sees her. He speaks of Phoenix in two ways – he calls her “a goddess” (00:56:16) and also implies that he sees her

as a weapon (01:06:32). These two stereotypical ways of seeing her are at different ends of the spectrum. Calling her a goddess is, of course, positive – Magneto is putting her above other mutants and humans in a positive way. However, it is also another way of construing her as Other by setting her far apart from other mutants. Calling her a weapon also has some nuances to it. Jean is useful to Magneto because her immense powers can help him further his cause of mutant superiority. But at the very same time, Jean scares Magneto. His fear is evident in one specific scene in which Jean disassembles a weapon containing the cure against being mutant and points the phials of the cure towards him (00:56:49). Magneto is not completely sure that he can control this weapon. But even though these events transpire, Magneto’s desire for Phoenix’s powers is greater than his fear of them, so he brings her along to the prison as his last weapon (01:17:34). After Phoenix wreaks havoc at the prison, a wide-eyed Magneto realises his mistake, exclaiming, “What have I done?” (01:30:57). Here we see how Phoenix is Other to other mutants and how Magneto takes on the role of the coloniser here because he vacillates between desire and fear in regards to Phoenix. He is both attracted to her powers and horrified by them. This discourse feeds into a stereotype of Phoenix as being dangerous – that is all everyone around her sees her as and she is never allowed to be anything but dangerous.

Though the existence of mutants is no longer kept secret in *X-3*, mutants and their role in the world are still highly controversial, and thus it becomes paramount for most mutants to fit in and not seem like a mutant both physically and mentally. Most mutants in the movie make an effort to fit in, using mimicry however they can – be it altering their physical appearance to hide physical markers of Otherness⁴ or their way of thinking or behaving. For the most part, the mutants of the Brotherhood forgo mimicry because they do not believe in peaceful coexistence and so why should they submit to the “coloniser”? Phoenix – much like Akasha – also forgoes mimicry entirely. She makes it blatantly obvious that she is not like the others, by using her powers in a grandiose manner for everyone to see. Phoenix even stands out from the Brotherhood in her clothing (which I will elaborate on later) and the physical changes she undergoes when she uses her powers. Physically, she does nothing to disguise her Otherness, and one might even say she highlights it through her choice of clothing. Mentally, she does not employ mimicry either. Phoenix does not assimilate at all, keeping to herself most of the time. Furthermore, she joins the Brotherhood, who believe in mutant

⁴ Mystique, for instance, can alter her appearance to look like anyone she pleases – her natural appearance features blue skin and yellow eyes

superiority. Phoenix flaunts her Otherness and does not care who sees because she is so powerful that it hardly matters who sees it.

Jean is without a doubt a beautiful woman (see Appendix C), but with Phoenix in charge of her body, she is also evil. Once more we are confronted by the stereotype of feminine evil. Creed specifically mentions this within the context of woman as possessed, since the possessed woman's abjection comes from within (Creed 42). The same definition is at play here; without Phoenix at the forefront, Jean is – as mentioned earlier – aligned with the X-Men, she is good, and she tries to fight for mutant rights peacefully. But when Phoenix escapes her mental cage all hell breaks loose, and suddenly Jean acts entirely differently. Therefore, Phoenix's appearance is deceitful – because of the way she looks, we expect her to be nice and perhaps compliantly sexual, but she is actually sexually aggressive and murderous.

Phoenix is also connected to blood, an abject substance. This connection can be found a couple of times in the movie – the first time is when she has her tryst with Logan. As mentioned earlier, she makes gouges in his arms (00:40:04). When we see a glimpse of his arms, it looks as if there is blood coming from the wounds – but since Logan – also known as the Wolverine – heals from any injury near instantaneously, no blood leaves the wounds. When Phoenix tries to murder Logan at the end of the movie (01:32:12), there is another connection to blood. She tries her best to disintegrate Logan as she did Charles Xavier earlier in the movie, but Logan heals too quickly for her to disintegrate him completely. She succeeds partially, exposing Logan's adamantium⁵ skeleton, blood and muscles to us (01:32:20). A more symbolic connection can be found in her appearance and choice of clothing. Phoenix dresses exclusively in red, and her hair is a deep red colour contrary to the rest of the Brotherhood who dress exclusively in black. While it is not a direct connection to blood, it is rather telling. The colour red is associated with blood and seeing Jean dressed in this colour through nearly all of the movie strengthens a symbolic bond between her and blood, the abject matter.

After all, the question remains – is Jean (or Phoenix) construed as monstrous because she is female? Let us compare her to another villain of the movie and franchise, Magneto. Mutants are not necessarily monsters. Magneto does what he deems to be necessary for the survival of mutants – as a survivor of the Holocaust he is understandably wary of being any

⁵ A fictional metal alloy within the *X-Men* universe. Logan's skeleton has been infused with the metal.

kind of minority and being under any kind of government control. The audience understands his motivation and though he should be considered abject in many of the same ways that Phoenix is – he transgresses the border between the natural and supernatural by being a mutant, and he is a threat to the symbolic order as he wishes to upend it – we are not necessarily afraid of him. The difference seems to be their motivations – we might go as far as having sympathy with Magneto because after all, it is a somewhat noble cause. But Phoenix appears to have no discernible goal with her carnage. Charles puts it well when he calls her a “purely instinctual creature, all desire and joy and rage” (00:29:49). Because Magneto has a motivation we can understand, we can sympathise with him and understand him in a way that is impossible for us to do with Phoenix. We see the same thing when we compare her to Logan – it is motivation that makes the difference. Logan’s main motivation in this movie is to save Jean from her possession. Furthermore, he is aligned with the morally good X-Men, and because of this, we excuse his flaws and his abjection. Comparing Phoenix to these other mutants, it seems as if Phoenix is indeed construed as monstrous on the basis of her gender. Phoenix is connected to a number of different abject matters, she is the epitome of feminine evil, and thus gender is definitely part of her monstrosity.

3.3 *Game of Thrones*

In an effort not to repeat myself unnecessarily, this section will offer some insights into the society of the *Game of Thrones* universe. It will henceforth be referred to as the Westerosi society or the Seven Kingdoms, as it is called within the show’s universe. These insights are vital to the understanding and analysis of the two characters from the show that this thesis works with and thus they will be presented here.

The Seven Kingdoms is a highly patriarchal society, dominated by men both young and old. The Seven Kingdoms are ruled by lords and kings. Sons inherit their fathers’ titles and lands, while daughters are expected to marry well – a typical feudal society. This patriarchal structure is supported by the doctrines of the Faith of the Seven (henceforth referred to as the Faith), which is the dominant faith in Westeros. The Faith has seven gods – three male, three female and one of indeterminate gender. The male gods represent features such as divine justice, strength and courage in battle, creation and craftsmanship, while the female gods represent mercy and peace, motherhood and childbirth, innocence, beauty, love, chastity and wisdom (“Faith of the Seven” *Game of Thrones* Wiki). Thus, the Faith prescribes a culture of active men and passive, submissive women. Women are largely

banished from leading roles in society and confined to domestic pursuits. This is within this societal context that Cersei and Arya act out their lives.

3.3.1 The Mother of Madness – Cersei Lannister

This section of the analysis will focus on Cersei Lannister. In the early seasons of *Game of Thrones*, she is the Queen of the Seven Kingdom, assuming the title of queen regent when her husband, the king, dies, leaving the throne to her eldest son, Joffrey. After all her children die (two are assassinated, one commits suicide), she assumes the throne as sole ruler. She is a woman in a powerful position in a patriarchal society, and that is not tolerated well – Cersei is indeed a controversial figure in Westeros.

One of the most important ways in which Cersei is construed as monstrous is in terms of her sexuality. Most infamous is her incestuous relationship with her twin brother, Jaime (S01E01)⁶. In Westerosi culture, incest is seen as filth (S02E02), and thus Cersei and Jaime's relationship breaks with social conventions. In this way, Cersei helps show how fragile the symbolic order is. What is more is that Cersei is cheating on her husband. While it is expected of men to keep a mistress in the Seven Kingdoms, the same cannot be said for women. Furthermore, the pair has sex in semi-public places (S04E03, S04E10), putting their relationship on display for those who might stumble into those locations. This relationship can be described as sexually immoral and perverse. However, it is not only the sexual dimension of the relationship that causes abjection – it is also the children that come from it (S01E07). Cersei's three children are passed off as the offspring of her late husband, King Robert Baratheon. Because of this lie (and other lies which I will elaborate on later), Cersei is a liar and therefore abject.

But Cersei's relationship with her twin brother is not the only way in which she is sexually immoral and perverse. While Jaime is held captive by enemy soldiers, Cersei develops a relationship with her cousin, Lancel (S01E10). The main purpose of this relationship for Cersei is to make Lancel do her bidding (S02E04). Though this relationship is not considered incestuous in the Seven Kingdoms, where it is normal for first cousins to marry, it is still perverse and abject for a woman to use her body to get what she wants.

⁶ Unless otherwise specified all references in this chapter and the next chapter (3.3.2) will be to *Game of Thrones*. In order to preserve space for more important words, I will not refer to times but only seasons and episodes

Kristeva calls this “a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it (232) because Cersei trades sex and intimacy for influence and information. We also see this in how Cersei thinks of her sexuality as a weapon and uses it thusly – she tells Sansa Stark that, “Tears aren’t a woman’s only weapon. The best one is between your legs. Learn how to use it” (S02E09). Cersei weaponises her gender and sexuality, which is a perversion of what we might consider the purpose of intercourse – an expression of love between people. There is also the connection to the feminine body and the use of it, which is also considered abject.

After Robert’s death and Joffrey’s coronation, Cersei becomes queen regent (S02E02), and after Tommen’s suicide, she ascends the throne as sole ruler of the Seven Kingdoms (S06E10). As Robert’s queen, she had little influence and seemed to mainly exercise influence through Robert, who seemed mostly indifferent and often did not heed her advice. As queen regent, Cersei sits on the small council, which advises the king on all matters, as the only woman. As I described in the chapter prefacing this one, the Faith prescribes that women stay in the domestic sphere, and women like Cersei are indeed rare. There are few females in powerful positions in the Seven Kingdoms, and the ones that are, seem to face a categorisation similar to Cersei’s. Here, Cersei transgresses the boundary between those who take up their proper gender roles and those who do not. Consequently, she is abject again since she transgresses a border. Furthermore, she disrupts the symbolic order of the genders by constantly questioning the status quo and expressing a wish to change it. She is actively dismissive of gender roles – she mockingly tells her uncle how she could never be Hand of the King⁷ because, “Clearly it would not be appropriate for a woman to assume that role” (S05E02). Cersei makes this statement despite the fact that she practically controls her sons – Tommen more so than Joffrey – while they reign, making it a rather ironic statement. Cersei is practising mimicry and doing it very ironically – she pretends to conform to the beauty myth by never exercising her power publicly and by behaving in a manner that is compliant with the Westerosi beauty myth all the while she has a considerable amount of power to influence things. She also questions the status quo, asking her father why he chose to put his trust in her two brothers rather than in her (S03E04) and also telling her husband, Robert, that, “I should wear the armour and you the gown” (S01E06), suggesting that they should switch places in the grand scheme of things. Cersei certainly wishes that things were different – and through her rise to power, she tries to make a difference for herself, at least. It

⁷ The Hand of the King is the most powerful position in the Seven Kingdoms second only to the king.

is not only in regards to gender that Cersei is disruptive. As I have already stated, Westerosi society is built upon religion. Cersei is dismissive of religion, which we see when she dismisses Lancel's new-found religiosity as a Sparrow, telling his father that she is, "sure he'll grow out of it, whatever it is" (S05E01). She only acts respectfully of the Faith when it serves her purposes, such as when she courteously speaks with the High Sparrow (S05E03) or when she arms the Faith (S05E06), giving them enough power to imprison Margaery Tyrell⁸ and her brother, Loras, whom Cersei is expected to marry (S05E06). As I will elaborate on in the next section of this chapter, Cersei is a highly manipulative woman – and her false relationship with the church is another facet to her manipulative and deceptive character.

More than just being abject because she defies gender roles by taking up a leading role in a patriarchal society that fundamentally disapproves of it, she is also abject through the way she got to that position. An important part of how Cersei exercised power as queen regent was through manipulation, lies and threats of violence, death or exposure of secrets. Cersei is a seasoned liar, and throughout the series, she uses lying to get what she wants. First of all, we see that Cersei has a very nuanced view of what constitutes truth, when she tells her son, Joffrey that, "Someday, you'll sit on the throne, and the truth will be what you make it" (S01E03). This quote reveals that Cersei sees truth as something determined by whoever is strong enough to impose and enforce their vision of it upon others. In episode six of season one, we get to see this played out. Cersei tries to impose her image of an episode that happened in order to make the outcome of it more favourable to herself, despite the fact that her retelling of the events is untrue. Not only does Cersei lie, but she lies so much that she has earned a reputation – Margaery snidely remarks that, "Lies come easily to you, everybody knows that" (S05E07). She even lies before the High Sparrow even though he explicitly tells her that it is a sin to lie before the Gods (S05E10). When she is not outright lying, she manipulates and schemes to get her way. When Cersei's brother, Tyrion, is to be tried for the murder of Joffrey, he tells Jaime that, "Cersei has manipulated everything, and you know it" (S04E06). Just as her duplicity is common knowledge, so is her manipulative nature. Kristeva categorises the abject as "scheming" (232), a word that most certainly fits Cersei manipulative and deceiving nature.

In the beauty myth, Wolf writes of how society has figured out how to handle powerful women – they are simply retrained as men (Wolf 143). It is evident that the same

⁸ Wife of Joffrey, then Tommen when Joffrey died. Of the rich and prestigious house Tyrell

thing has happened to Cersei. We see it in the ways she emulates her father, the influential and powerful Tywin Lannister. At one point, Robert, her husband, remarks that, “It’s a neat little trick you do; you move your lips and your father’s voice comes out” (S01E05). Here, Robert implies that Cersei emulates her father to the degree that her husband is sure that it is simply her father’s words he is hearing. Her brother also comments on it just before the Battle of Blackwater Bay – while discussing strategy, Cersei tells Tyrion that they will “rain fire down on [the enemy] from above”, to which Tyrion drily remarks, “You’re quoting father, aren’t you?” (S02E07). However, Cersei does not just emulate her father’s way of speaking and thinking; she also emulates his way of handling some people. When Olenna Tyrell, whom Cersei thoroughly dislikes, shows up at Cersei’s quarters, Cersei pretends to be busy writing something down in order to assert herself as the most important person in the room (S05E06). We see Tywin employ the exact same tactic in episode one of season three – the scene plays out much the same and with the same effect just with different actors. This emulation of her father becomes another way in which Cersei is abject because by imitating her father to this degree she again transgresses the boundaries between men and women.

Another boundary that Cersei transgresses is the one between the natural and the supernatural. As with her connection to murder (which I will elaborate on later in this chapter), Cersei is never the one to physically carry out the acts of supernaturalism, but she is the one who orders them to happen – she is the catalyst. The first instance of this type of transgression is shown to us in the form of a flashback. A teenaged Cersei meets with a witch and allows her to taste her blood in exchange for a glimpse of her own future (S05E01). These uncanny fortunes haunt Cersei in her adult life, and they all come true. Besides this, Cersei transgresses the border in one other way. After having been killed in a trial by combat, Ser Gregor Clegane is brought back to life by one of Cersei’s trusted advisors, Qyburn (S04E10). Clegane continues to serve as her bodyguard (S06E08), doing her bidding, whether it be killing (S06E08) or torturing the septa who harassed Cersei while she was imprisoned (S06E10).

While Cersei never personally kills anyone, she is nonetheless a murderer, as she has murders carried out on her command and with her approval. She is the mastermind behind the murder of her husband, constituting both matricide and regicide (S05E01), she orders the execution of three peasants (S02E09), and she is the force behind the explosion of the Great Sept of Baylor, which kills many of Cersei’s adversaries, such as Margaery, the High

Sparrow and Mace Tyrell⁹, along with a whole host of unrelated people (S06E10). Again, Cersei is the catalyst for this. Without her, these murders would not have taken place. Cersei is also highly abject for other reasons – as she is a murderer, she is closely related to death, which is abject. But she is also linked to death through the death of all her children, both the three she has with Jaime and the one son she has with Robert, who dies during infancy (S01E02). She is also connected to the corpse when she holds Joffrey as he dies and she cradles him after his passing. Furthermore, in episode three of season four Cersei and Jaime have intercourse¹⁰ right next to where Joffrey’s corpse is lying. These actions strengthen Cersei’s connection to corpses and thus her connection to abjection. More than just being connected to death through the death of her children, she is also connected to death through her willingness to kill to protect herself and her children. During the Battle of the Blackwater, Cersei is prepared to kill her youngest son, Tommen, rather than having him fall into the hands of the enemy (S02E09).

Though Cersei is not an old woman by any means, she is no longer completely young, and thus, the beauty myth starts to weight on her in a different way. Even though Cersei appears to be in her early to mid-thirties, Olenna Tyrell (who herself is at least 80 by my estimate) has no qualms about calling her old (S03E06). Lancel, her cousin/lover, asks her if war was as exciting last time, “when you were young?” (S01E10), implying that he also considers Cersei to be old. As I described in the theory chapter, the beauty myth keeps young women from older women through fear. This fear becomes especially apparent in Cersei’s relationship to her daughter-in-law, Margaery. The two have a tense relationship because Margaery is younger and is thus considered more beautiful, and because she threatens to replace Cersei in a number of places – both as queen and as the most important person in the lives of her sons. The two constantly exchange snide remarks to each other and talk behind each other’s backs (S05E03). As I mentioned above, Cersei is construed as ageing by the people she is surrounded by, and she is no longer considered young and attractive. Consequently, she is – in the eyes of the higher classes of the Seven Kingdoms – connected to abjection because she is decaying. Her beauty is worth less and less, and she is constantly at risk of being replaced by a younger, more beautiful woman – be it Sansa Stark, Margaery

⁹ Margaery’s father

¹⁰ While I acknowledge that there has been much controversy about whether or not Jaime rapes Cersei in that scene, this is not the place for that discussion, and for the sake of this analysis I will maintain the position that it is consensual intercourse.

Tyrell or someone else entirely. As Wolf mentions, old women are forgotten – and that fact also holds true in the Seven Kingdoms. Two of the richest and most influential people in the Seven Kingdoms are Tywin Lannister and Mace Tyrell. Both are – by my estimate – at least 60 years old. Olenna Tyrell – the mother of Mace Tyrell – is the only ageing woman we see with any clout, and her influence seems to be restricted to what she can accomplish by using her family’s wealth. She never fills any official political position. As she grows older, Cersei is increasingly in danger of losing the power she has.

Much like the other objects of analysis in this thesis, Cersei fits the stereotype of feminine evil rather perfectly. Cersei is a beautiful woman – long, blonde hair, a pretty face and a stately kind of poise (see Appendix E), but inside she is a scheming and conniving person, as I have detailed above. She is truly a “hatred that smiles” (Kristeva 232). An illuminating example of this is how she treats Margaery after she is imprisoned by the Faith (S05E07). Cersei comes to Margaery’s cell, bringing her some tasty venison to eat. In front of Margaery, she plays at being the concerned mother-in-law, appalled at the state of Margaery’s cell, telling her how much she and the king are doing to get her out. Obviously, Margaery does not buy Cersei’s fake concern. She tells Cersei, “I know you did this. (...) Get out, you hateful bitch!” (S05E07). After leaving the cell, Cersei struggles to contain a *very* smug smile, since she is indeed the one responsible for Margaery’s imprisonment. There are also acts that Cersei commits that scare us but that are difficult to place within Creed’s theory of the monstrous-feminine, namely her threats of violence against anyone who opposes her and the violence she actually commits against the septa (S06E10), who supervised her while she was jailed by the Faith. What scares us about this might be the fact that they come from someone who does not look the part and the fact that we do not expect violence from women in the Seven Kingdoms in the same way that we expect it from men.

However, her wicked temper and “un-womanly” ambitions are not the only ugly things that Cersei’s beautiful appearance conceals. The fact that all Cersei’s children die, and that her eldest son is considered psychopathic by many seem to point to Cersei’s womb being unusual or even monstrous. As I also stated in the theory section of this thesis, the mere existence of women’s reproductive functions places women closer to nature than to the symbolic order, linking her again to “birth, decay and death” (Creed 47). Her reproductive abilities constitute yet another way that Cersei challenges the symbolic order, which I have discussed above. Cersei has gone through several pregnancies, and though it is difficult to judge, it seems as if her body shows the signs of this (see Appendix F), which it is not

supposed to because that means that she once again breaks with the symbolic order. The idea of a monstrous womb speaks to the idea of a sort of concealed evil – the stereotype of feminine evil. Her beauty obscures this evil thing she carries inside of her. Cersei’s womb can be viewed as evil or corrupted since it carried only children who ended up dying very young, and a child who turned out to be rather sadistic. Furthermore, we must also look at her way of mothering her children as this is yet another area of abjection for Cersei. Cersei is a very controlling mother who tries to be the only influence in her children’s lives (S04E04, S06E04), which is part of why her way of being a mother is abject – the children want to be their own people, while Cersei will not let go (Creed 11). She has a hard time accepting Margaery’s influence on both Joffrey and Tommen, and it is equally difficult for her to accept that her daughter, Myrcella, is shipped to Dorne¹¹ (S02E06). Furthermore, Cersei seems to be permitted too much power over her children – Robert dies early on in their lives and has apparently never really spent too much time with his children, Tywin – their grandfather – tries his best but he also dies, and Jaime simply cannot fill his true role publicly for fear of repercussions. Whether Joffrey’s sadistic streak can be contributed to his incestuous parentage or because Cersei has been allowed too much influence matter little – the fact is that we find the cause of his monstrosity within Cersei’s.

Since Cersei defies society and its expectations in so many ways and thus is construed as monstrous, she must be punished. Her punishment comes in the form of a walk of atonement through the capital of the Seven Kingdom for her sins of “Fornication, treason, incest, the murder of King Robert” (S05E08). She must walk naked through a throng of people and accept their psychological abuse. But before she even has to walk the walk, she is subjected to abuse by the Faith in order to make her confess her sins. She is kept in a dark cell and is left to wallow in her own filth (S05E08, S05E10). During the walk, a flurry of curses from the townspeople hits Cersei – “Brother fucker!”, “Cunt!”, “Whore!”, “Slut!”, “Bitch!”, and a prostitute yells that she has had, “half as many cocks as the queen!” (S05E10). These curses all are centred around her sexuality, and specifically describe her sexuality as abnormal. Creed states that the monstrous-feminine is always defined in relation to her sexuality – that is also true in this context. The townspeople see Cersei as some insatiable sexual monster, who is abject because she is sexually immoral (they believe her to have had many sexual partners) and perverse because she has an incestuous relationship with Jaime. During this walk, Cersei is not only hit with curses, but she is also hit with rotten food,

¹¹ A region of the Seven Kingdoms far from the capital

spit and other indiscernible fluids (see Appendix F). Walking barefoot on the cobbled streets of King's Landing splits open her feet, further marking her as abject, as she both bleeds and has open wounds. As Creed and Kristeva mention, all bodily fluids are abject and so are wounds, and thus Cersei is once again connected to the abject by being covered by it.

As I have speculated with the other objects of analysis in this thesis, is this treatment and depiction of Cersei as monstrous only due to her gender? In order to investigate this, I will compare her with male characters that have similar "flaws". First, characters like Petyr Baelish and Lord Varys are both renowned spymasters, having far-reaching networks of informants whispering in their ears. Petyr Baelish is the epitome of being untrustworthy; he is constantly scheming and manipulating everyone around him in his quest towards becoming king. Similarly, Varys is known as the Spider, because he knows everything that goes on in Westeros and Essos¹². Both are fickle and deceitful, working only for their own gains, but neither are construed as monstrous because of it. In terms of sexuality, it makes sense to compare Cersei to her twin, Jaime, since they both engage in incestuous relations. Despite the incestuous ties between Jaime and Cersei becoming common knowledge by the second season of the show, Jaime is still held in high regard by his peers and is awarded important positions to fill. Moreover, Jaime kills repeatedly and nobody bats an eye – because it is expected of him to be aggressive since he is a man. He also loses a hand (S03E03) and is still deemed highly attractive – in the words of Bronn: "The way all women look at him is frankly irritating" (S06E06). Much like Baelish and Varys, he is not construed as monstrous. Judging by this, it seems plausible that Cersei is construed as monstrous because she does not adhere to the beauty myth that is prevalent in the Seven Kingdoms.

3.3.2 Wolf Girl – Arya Stark

This section will focus on how Arya Stark is construed as monstrous in the first six seasons of *Game of Thrones*. Arya goes through a major change throughout the series. At the start of the series, Arya is an unusual child. She is the daughter of Lord Eddard Stark and such she is expected to act in a manner that conforms with Westeros' particular brand of the beauty myth. In the first episode of the first season, we see her struggling to keep up with her older sister, Sansa, at embroidery, a typical task for Westerosi women, but then outshining her little brother, Bran, at archery. Arya is vehement that she does not want to be a lady. As the series progresses, Arya becomes an increasingly capable sword fighter – and it is sort of

¹² The continent located to the east of Westeros

the tipping points that firmly defines Arya as someone who defies the border between genders and the border between those who take up their proper gender roles and those who do not. Two comments from men illustrate this – first of all, in episode two of season three, when Arya defensively states that she is proficient with a sword, the men Arya is with laugh. The idea of a woman – a little girl, nonetheless – wielding a sword is ridiculous to them. To humiliate her and try to restore the symbolic order, one of the men quickly disarms Arya, putting her back in her place. Secondly, the Hound, a man that Arya is kidnapped by and also travels with, states that, “poison’s a woman’s weapon. Men kill with steel” (S04E08). As I will elaborate on later in this chapter, Arya frequently commits murder. While she does kill with poison (S05E06¹³) and attempts to kill with poison (S06E06), she mainly uses swords and daggers – steel – to kill. And while the sword fighting might be the breaking point, there are plenty of other ways in which Arya breaks the boundary between genders. Arya is mistaken for a boy (S01E05) because of her preference for wearing men’s clothing (S01E05 and many others) and short hair (S01E10). Not only is Arya mistaken for a boy, but she also assumes the identity of a boy for a long while to keep herself safe. As a Stark, Arya is widely sought after so she can be punished for her father’s alleged sins, so she assumes different names and lives as an orphan boy when it is convenient.

Another major boundary that Arya transgresses in *Game of Thrones* is the boundary between beast and man. In some instances, the transgression is linked to her rejection of gender roles – her sister comments that, “Arya would rather act like a beast than a lady” (S01E03), creating a causality between two of the borders that Arya transgresses. This causality also highlights the general attitude in the Seven Kingdoms towards the transgression of gender roles – it is so unthinkable that it is ascribed to animals more than humans. Moreover, Arya is called a “little animal” (S02E01) by Cersei, and “wolf girl” by the Hound (S03E07) because of her – at times – rather wild appearance. Both suggest that Arya is somewhere between human and animal. Especially “wolf girl” seems to suggest that Arya embodies a bit of both worlds – human and beast, and thus she is abject.

As mentioned above, Arya goes through a major change in the series. She goes from living in a loving nuclear family to being a homeless orphan driven solely by her desire for revenge. Throughout the series, Arya compiles an ever-expanding list of all the people she feels has wronged her or her family and thus must be brought to justice. The list almost

¹³ I would hesitate to call this instance murder, as the girl Arya “kills” is very sick and is brought to the House of Black and White by her father to end her suffering in a humane way.

becomes an object of obsession for Arya, who has to repeat it to herself before she can sleep (S02E04, S03E05, S04E05), and it appears to bring her some comfort or at least purpose in dark and trying times (S05E02). For Arya, the only way to achieve justice is to kill the people on her list (S04E05). The abjection connected to the list is twofold – first, we have the revenge aspect. Arya exacts a hypocritical revenge several times by killing people she feels wronged her. Arya names herself judge, jury and executioner but her punishments are not sanctioned by any Westerosi laws, except, perhaps, moral laws. Though the continent is embroiled in the War of the Five Kings, laws are still in place. Secondly, the revenge Arya exacts constitutes a premeditated crime. She makes it clear that she intends on killing everyone on her list (S04E05), and – as I will elaborate more on later – some of her murders take quite a lot of effort, meaning that they must be premeditated. Both the hypocritical revenge and the premeditated crime highlight the fragility of the symbolic order.

Since Arya's major motivation throughout the series is revenge, and her idea of revenge is biblical, she commits or is behind a plethora of murders (S01E08, S02E05, S03E10, S04E01, S04E07, S05E02, S05E10, S06E08, S06E10). Some of the killings might be easy to defend from a moral standpoint – Meryn Trant likely killed Arya's beloved sword fighting teacher, liked to beat little girls before raping them (S05E10), and Walter Frey allowed the murder of Arya's brother, mother and other innocents to happen in his house (S03E09). However, no matter how just we might think them they still constitute crimes and murder, both of which connects Arya to the abject. Moreover, Arya seems to become more and more brutal with her killings. The first time she kills (S01E08), she kills out of necessity. A stable boy recognises her in King's Landing as she is trying to escape capture, and in order to stop him, she stabs him in the gut. Arya seems surprised at her own actions. But later, when Arya has started her list of people she wants to kill, she changes. The next person she kills is a man sitting by a fire whom she brutally and repeatedly stabs after calmly walking up to him, pretending to be a starving child. After this murder, Arya only grows increasingly more sadistic and brutal with her murders. Along the way, she also grows more satisfied with her murders, telling the Hound that, "killing Polliver, killing Rorge" made her happy (S04E08). Not only does Arya kill, but she also takes satisfaction in it. The murders of Meryn Trant and Walder Frey were both premeditated, as they both took meticulous planning. According to Kristeva's description of the abject, premeditated crime is even more abject since it highlights the fragility of the symbolic order (232).

Unsurprisingly, Arya is also abject through her connection to blood. We often see her covered in someone's blood – either her own or the blood of someone she has slain. In

episode ten of season five, when Arya kills Meryn Trant, she is coated in the spray of blood coming from his throat. Arya is also associated with blood when the Waif attacks a blinded Arya and strikes her across the face with a staff – blood wells from her nose and runs down her face (S06E02). Later in the same season, the Waif stabs Arya, which results in Arya's clothing being covered in quite a large volume of blood (S06E07, S06E08). On the basis of this, it is safe to say that Arya's connection to blood is fairly consolidated.

Arya's involvement in the strange rituals that take place in the House of Black and White in Bravos transgresses yet another border, namely that between the supernatural and natural – or that which is human and that which definitely is not. Filled by her need for revenge, Arya starts the journey towards becoming a part of the Faceless Men, a guild of assassins. These assassins assume the faces of people who have died to get close to their targets, and so does Arya (S06E03). This change of faces also constitutes corporeal alteration, as Arya does not only take on the face of the person she impersonates, she takes on their entire appearance. Through her work with the Faceless Men, Arya comes into contact with numerous corpses, as the Faceless Men harvest faces from corpses. Arya helps disrobe and wash the corpses. She clips their nails and washes their hair, helping prepare them for the magic of having their faces skinned (S05E03, S05E06). It is a very intimate process that involves close contact with the corpses, and Arya does it numerous times. Corpses are abject, and Arya's extensive contact with them constitutes abjection. Through this connection to corpses and her propensity for murder, Arya is also connected to death, further marking her as abject.

Throughout the series, we often find Arya lying about who she is. At first, it is a matter of survival – she lies rather innocently about her and the Hound's identity and relationship to secure them a place to sleep one night (S04E03). But when she joins the Faceless Men lying becomes business and a serious one at that. The Faceless Men play the game of faces in which you are supposed to construct stories about different identities to use as an assassin. In order to become a Faceless Man, Arya must master this game, and thus she engages in it a multitude of times (S05E06, S05E08, S06E06). Both as a means of survival and as a member of the Faceless Men, Arya assumes different identities which also constitutes an act of manipulation and lying. Furthermore, Arya does not only lie with words - the corporeal alteration of assuming another's face and body becomes another way of lying for Arya. Assuming a new personality along with another's face is a form of lying, as Arya presents a false front. This penchant for lying makes Arya abject as lying challenges the symbolic order by drawing attention to its fragility. Arya's violation of religious laws also

questions the symbolic order – she openly defies the rules set out by not only the faith that she left behind in the Seven Kingdoms but also the new laws of the Many-Faced God whom she served as an apprentice Faceless Man in Braavos. I have already detailed many of Arya’s crimes against the Faith in what is written above – she does not conform to the gender stereotypes specified by the Faith, she lies and murders – but her crimes against the Many-Faced God are more direct. First of all, in episode ten of season five, Arya steals a face from the Hall of Faces in order to kill Meryn Trant. When she returns to the House of Black and White, a person who appears to be Jaqen H’ghar¹⁴ tells her that she has taken the wrong life and that by taking that life, Arya has stolen from the Many-Faced God. Instead of murdering a scamming insurance broker, Arya has used the magic of the Many-Faced God to exact a personal vengeance. Again, Arya commits a premeditated crime – she knowingly takes a face from the House of Black and White and uses it for something other than what it was intended for. Similarly, in episode eight of season six, the Waif – after having killed a target Arya befriended instead of killing – informs Arya that when the Many-Faced God is promised a name, no one can change it. Arya was supposed to carry out the assassination, and since she did not, the Waif carried it out instead but in a much more violent fashion than Arya was supposed to. By not carrying out the command she was given, Arya violated the laws of the Many-Faced God, and someone else had to step in to rectify it.

As mentioned earlier, the monstrous-feminine is often defined in relation to her sexuality. Though Arya is but a young girl, somewhere in her early teens by my estimate¹⁵, she is still sexualised to some extent. During the series, we see Arya be sexualised on two separate occasions. She is never an active participant in the discourse on her sexuality. We see this first in a conversation between the Hound and a soldier named Polliver (S04E01). At this point in the series, the Hound has kidnapped Arya and is trying to ransom her to her aunt. Polliver, not knowing about this situation, assumes that the Hound has brought Arya with him to satisfy his sexual needs – willingly or unwillingly. Polliver suggests that they trade: the Hound will receive a chicken if he will allow Polliver and his men to have their way with Arya. Polliver remarks that, “Lowell there likes them a bit broken in”, suggesting that he believes Arya is far from a virgin and a whore. A season later, a man calls out to Arya as she

¹⁴ It is all rather complicated – the person commits suicide and in order to uncover who this person was, Arya removes face after face from the body. When she sees her own face, she turns blind. We never discover who this person is.

¹⁵ Her age is never discussed nor stated in the show

walks by him with a waggon full of clams, asking “How much for your little clam?” (S05E09). Again, Arya is stereotyped as a whore. In terms of her own sexuality, Arya is but an object to be used, bartered with and bought – basically she is a whore. Arya is stereotyped this way despite never having had any type of sexual contact with anyone. There seems to be some sort of desire and derision in this stereotyping of Arya. While they desire Arya’s body, there is still an element of derision in the fact that Polliver considers Arya’s body to have the same value as a roasted chicken.

Arya – with her elfin features and young, slender body (see Appendix G) – is certainly beautiful in the traditional sense of the word. However, since Arya spends most of the series masquerading as someone she is not, it is not her beauty that catches the eye of most people. In order to appear to be someone else, she takes several measures – including cutting her long hair off (S01E10), wearing the same clothes for months on end (Season 2) and being covered in filth (Season 2) – thus disguising her beauty. Because of this, the application of the stereotype of feminine evil is a bit different when it comes to Arya. She is unlike the rest of the characters, this thesis examines. It is not her beauty that misleads people, who interact with her. Arya looks young – she is small and short, and thus she has an air of innocence about her. But as I have detailed above, Arya is anything but innocent. She commits a slew of sadistic murders – just to mention a few stabs the Waif in the eyes and skins her face and stabs Meryn Trant in the eyes, letting him suffer before she slits his throat. Arya seems to be solely motivated by revenge. Arya also plays to this innocence - when she murders the man by the fire in episode ten of season three, she pretends to be adorable and starving to gain an advantageous position against him. While Creed does not explicitly mention cannibalism in her writing, it is certainly part of why we fear Arya in the series. In episode ten of season six, Arya kills Walder Frey. But she does not only kill him; she feeds him two of his own sons, baked into a pie. This first of all implies that Arya has killed *again* and secondly it implies that Arya herself has dismembered both of the corpses to put them into the pie. Again, I think this speaks to the way she conforms to the stereotype of the feminine evil. When Arya commits this atrocious act, she looks innocent as she is disguised as a young servant girl. She tricks a man into unknowingly eating his own sons, only to reveal it to him seconds before she kills him. The fact that there is this stark difference between what is outside and what is inside is a large part of what sets us on edge in regards to Arya.

If we were to compare Arya to another character within the universe of *Game of Thrones*, Samwell Tarly is an apt comparison. Samwell, who mostly just goes by Sam, is a

brother of the Night's Watch, the military order that guards the northern border of the Seven Kingdoms. Sam is comparable to Arya in quite a lot of ways. First of all, both commit murder¹⁶. Secondly, Sam also exists on the border between genders. Sam is a fat, clumsy young man whose skills with a sword are severely lacking (S01E04). He is much more interested in reading and collecting knowledge than he is in fighting and he sees value in knowledge (S01E04). At the end of the latest season, Sam is pursuing higher education as a maester¹⁷. The Night's Watch is a rather masculine culture, which mainly values strength, prowess in battle and leadership. Sam also grew up with a father who valued physical strength (S01E04), something Sam lacks. But Sam is not restricted by the beauty myth in the same way that Arya is. So, while Sam might be ridiculed because of his weight, general cowardice and his inability to fight by the more traditionally masculine members of the Night's Watch and by his father, he is never construed as being monstrous or as being someone the viewer is supposed to fear. Mostly, the viewer simply pities Sam, an unfortunate soul, who struggles to find his place in the world. On the basis of this comparison and all the abject matters that she is connected to, it seems fair to conclude that Arya is indeed construed as monstrous because of her gender. Arya does not conform to the beauty myth that we find in Westeros and the Seven Kingdoms in a number of ways, and she transgresses boundaries between genders and species, and thus she is considered to be monstrous.

3.4 *Mind-fucker of the first degree – Amy Dunne*

The final subject of this analysis is Amy Dunne from *Gone Girl*. Though she may be last, she is not the least scary of my five subjects of analysis. The story of *Gone Girl* centres on how Amy goes to great lengths to stage her own disappearance. Initially, she tries to pin it on her husband, Nick Dunne, but she ultimately chooses to pin her disappearance on Desi Collings, an old boyfriend of hers whose mental illness makes him the perfect scapegoat. What becomes evident from this brief description of the movie is that a central part of what makes Amy monstrous and connects her to the abject is lying and manipulation. First of all, Amy lies to almost every single character in the movie: Nick, Desi, Greta, every single law enforcement officer she meets and so the list goes on and on. Amy orchestrates the investigation into her disappearance as much as she can – making sure that key pieces of evidence are found at the right times, fabricating a diary full of economic and domestic

¹⁶ Sam murders a White Walker in episode eight of season three

¹⁷ Healers and scholars

problems (01:07:11). The key component of Amy's manipulation and lying is her diary. She fabricates most of the entries (01:09:25) to paint a picture of herself as a dutiful wife and Nick as an abusive husband. She makes it so that the diary is found at a crucial point in the investigation to portray Nick as even more guilty. She lies time and time again in the diary, but as it turns out that is not the only lie we can trace back to Amy. First of all, there is the fabricated pregnancy (01:07:04). Amy goes to great lengths to harvest urine from a pregnant woman which she has befriended (01:06:56). Then Amy goes to the doctor for a pregnancy test (01:08:02), so that the pregnancy is in her medical journal to be discovered by the police (01:08:09). Secondly, Amy fabricates a rape to get back at Tommy O'Hara, an ex-boyfriend who spurned her (01:23:27). Again, she puts in a lot of work for it to be believable – she pretends that she is not angry with him anymore, and comes over for some casual, but rough, sex. Ultimately this has life-changing consequences for his him – having to register as a sex offender makes it impossible for him to find work (01:22:44) – and none for a satisfied Amy. Thirdly, Amy assumes a fake name and identity while on the run. She becomes Nancy (01:15:55) from New Orleans (01:17:45) and implies that she has been beaten by an abusive domestic partner. Fourth and finally, she also lies to Desi about how why she ran away from home, telling him that she was fleeing the abusive Nick after a miscarriage (01:42:17). Taking all these actions into consideration, describing Amy as “immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady” (232) – Kristeva's description of the abject – would be deadly accurate. Tanner Bolt, Nick's attorney, also accurately describes Amy and the effect she has on those around her when he calls her a “mind-fucker of the first degree” (01:21:22), capturing how Amy plays with everyone around her to get what she wants.

Amy has another rather deep connection to the abject. She commits a number of crimes, which all seem to have a uniting theme - framing. In all of her crimes, Amy frames someone innocent. At first, the intent behind all the lies and the manipulation I detailed above is to frame Nick for murder. During Amy's monologue, the viewer is shown her extensive to-do list and timeline (01:06:20), featuring tasks completed a long time before she disappeared. Later in the movie, we also see that Amy has a wall-hung calendar befit with little sticky notes suggesting when to carry out which part of her plan (01:15:24). She flips through the calendar, and we see that she has planned months ahead. It is clear that Amy has been minutely planning every move of her disappearance for a long time, so when she leaves, she commits a premeditated crime. As I have mentioned before, premeditated crimes are highly abject, and thus we see another connection between Amy and the abject. Amy commits another premeditated crime – this time against Desi – when she thinks she has finally gotten

the old Nick back. Again, she goes to great lengths to get what she desires. She needs Desi gone, and she also needs someone to blame for her disappearance, and who better than Desi, who has a history of mental illness and of loving Amy? Amy manipulates the surveillance cameras that Desi has installed in the house he allows Amy to inhabit – the cameras see a dishevelled Desi leaving the house and what looks like a bleeding and screaming Amy throwing herself against a window, begging for help (02:01:05). None of this is, of course, true – all of it is a fiction concocted by Amy. She then takes it one step further, making ligature marks on her wrists (02:02:27) and inserting the neck of a wine bottle into her vagina (02:02:50) in order to simulate internal trauma consistent with rape. Finally, we figure out that all of this was a ploy, designed to make it seem like Desi had kept Amy captive and raped her since his semen could be found inside of her after a formal examination of her (02:06:40). Lastly, there is also the premeditated crime that Amy commits against her former boyfriend, Tommy O’Hara, which I previously mentioned. After the two had broken it off, Amy lured Tommy to have rough intercourse, leaving Amy with ligature marks on her wrists and “wounds that are consistent with rape” (01:23:56) according to the police. Tommy’s description of Amy and the way things happened makes the fabricated rape very likely to have been a premeditated crime, just like the ones above.

While Amy does not escape the oppression of the beauty myth, she does manage to turn it into a weapon to use against Nick. Amy attributes to herself all the characteristics that today’s patriarchal society wants a woman to possess – the Amy we see in the diary takes care of Nick’s financial, emotional and sexual needs. She moves with Nick from her native home of New York to his hometown in Missouri, she stays home and cooks, yet still funds Nick’s bar. Furthermore, Amy lets Nick do as he pleases – both with her body and just in general. Amy does all of this despite the fact that the Nick she portrays in her diary is on the verge of murdering her (01:05:25). She adds the faked pregnancy to complete her deceit, because according to her, “You need to package yourself so that people will truly mourn your loss. And America loves pregnant women” (01:07:31). This way of conforming to the beauty myth – becoming exactly what patriarchal, small town America wants to see – becomes a form of mimicry for Amy and she is highly skilled at using it. Amy becomes the stereotypical “Good Wife” who does everything to make her husband happy. Amy needs this mimicry because, in the small town of Podunk North Carthage in Missouri, Amy is decidedly Other. Detective Rhonda Boney’s questions to Nick about Amy describe her well: “So your wife has no friends here. Is she kind of standoffish? Ivy League? Rubs people the wrong way?” (00:17:25) It is also Boney who notices Amy’s diplomas hanging in her office, commenting

how Amy is an “Impressive gal” (00:11:40). The diplomas signify Amy’s higher education which seems to be scarce among the people of North Carthage. Marybeth’s¹⁸ description of her at the press meeting is also very telling of the person they believe Amy to be and how she can be seen as Other in relation to the people of North Carthage. Marybeth details how Amy is a “decorated scholar”, who had a “successful career in journalism” and who “returned here to her husband’s hometown. And she made a life in her adopted home” (00:26:12). It becomes clear to us that Amy does not really belong in North Carthage – Marybeth’s use of the word “adopted” construes Amy as someone who is not an organic part of the unit that is North Carthage. Still, since Amy is skilled at mimicry, she succeeds in befriending Noelle Hawthorne, a woman living in the same neighbourhood as Amy and Nick (01:06:56). In her friendship with Noelle, we also see that Amy considers herself above the people of North Carthage and separate from them – she consistently refers to Noelle as “idiot” (01:06:54 and 01:07:50), putting Amy above Noelle in her own mind.

Lies and manipulation are not the only connections that Amy has to the abject. As all other iterations of the monstrous-feminine that this thesis has examined, Amy is defined in terms of her sexuality. Amy’s sexuality can best be described as aberrant and purposeful. First of all, we see Amy and Nick have intercourse in a bookshop (00:20:56), which arguably constitutes a public space, thus making for a perverted expression of sexuality, since it is not so much about two people expressing love, but more about the thrill of possibly being caught. Moreover, she has sex with Desi so that she can kill him (02:04:53) – which again perverts what most people might think of being the purpose of having sex. Furthermore, Amy is married to Nick, and so, she is cheating on him by having sex with Desi. Amy is sexually immoral, and consequently, she is considered abject. Her sexuality is also immoral (and purposeful) for a few other reasons. First of all, before she even has intercourse with Desi, she starts the whole thing by manipulating the security cameras that Desi has put up around the house (02:01:07) and takes several steps (which I have described above) to make the consensual intercourse look like rape. This deceit is also another way in which Amy lies and is manipulative, and thus this is another connection to the abject. As I mentioned before, Amy also had rough sex with a former boyfriend of hers, so it would look like he had raped her because she was spurned by him (01:23:53) and wanted revenge. Though it is only mentioned briefly in the movie, it seemed a rather hypocritical revenge. The only thing Tommy O’Hara – the ex-boyfriend in question – did was to keep his distance because he felt

¹⁸ Amy’s mother

she was a bit too intense and wanted to change him. As I mentioned above, this causes Tommy to be unable to get a job, while Amy continues in life without it affecting her life and possibilities.

Another way in which Amy is abject is through the murder she commits. As I detailed above, Amy commits the very premeditated crime – making the crime even more abject – of murdering Desi mid-coitus. Above I described just how the crime was premeditated, and how Amy goes to great lengths to make it seem as if Desi raped her and she killed him in self-defence. It is a rather cunning murder for a couple of reasons – Amy has hidden a box cutter under some pillows on the bed and lures Desi to that bed under the pretence of finally wanting to have sex with him (02:04:07). It is hard to determine, but it seems as if Amy cuts his throat right as he is about to orgasm (02:04:54) – at a moment when he is vulnerable. As Kristeva establishes, cunning murder – just like premeditated crime - is even more abject than heat-of-the-moment crimes (Kristeva 232). Furthermore, Amy is the epitome of a criminal with a good conscience. First of all, we see this in relation to the murder of Desi. Amy feels that she is in the right doing it, and when she returns to Nick, she tries to turn the murder into something positive for their marriage, telling him that, “I’ve killed for you. Who else can say that?” (02:21:48). Secondly, she also seems to have a good conscience in relation to everything that she has put Nick through. She feels that it brought back the Nick she married (02:12:15), who had gotten lost amidst all the troubles of the world. So, for Amy the end justifies the means – she is not troubled by the crimes she has committed, not in the least.

Other than a connection to murder, there is also the connection to death and the corpse, both of which are considered to be abject. Both of these stem from the murder of Desi, which I have already described in some detail. The death connection naturally stems from the fact that Desi unsurprisingly does not survive having his throat slashed with a box cutter (02:04:54). The link to the corpse stems from the interaction that Amy has with Desi shortly after he dies. She remains on top of him, keeping his penis inside of her vagina (02:05:00), constituting a very intimate connection to corpses. But the connection to death also stems from Amy herself – the first time we hear from Amy herself after her disappearance she opens with, “I am so much happier now that I am dead” (01:06:12). Amy is, of course, not actually dead, but until that point – when the twist of the movie is revealed – audiences could envision her as such. Amy continues her monologue telling us that she is, “Technically, “missing”. Soon to be presumed dead” (01:06:26), implying what also plays out in the viewer’s head and in the heads of the other characters of *Gone Girl* – we might at

first think that she is missing, but we will soon presume her to be dead as the investigation proceeds. The movie also features very suggestive imagery allowing the audience to think of Amy as dead and thus connect her to the thought. Especially evocative is the clip that shows a dead Amy floating through water (01:10:13).

Amy is furthermore associated with abject fluids, most prominently blood and urine. Her connection to urine is minor and mostly consists in Amy mentioning stealing the urine of her pregnant “friend”, Noelle Hawthorne (01:08:01). We then see Amy at the doctor’s office emptying the glass of urine she harvested from her toilet into a sample cup (01:08:02). Amy’s connection to blood is much more expansive than her connection to urine. First of all, we see Amy bleeding herself (01:08:46) and by her own estimation losing “A lot, a lot” (01:08:43) of blood. We also see her handling the blood – using some kitchen utensil to spatter the blood onto the kitchen cabinets (01:08:49), and dumping out containers of blood onto her kitchen floor, using her hands to spread the blood around (01:08:50). Amy then cleans the blood up using paper towels (01:08:58), again having direct contact with the blood. Much more disturbingly, we also see her being coated in blood after killing Desi (see Appendix I) and actually moving Desi around a bit to get just the right amount of blood on herself.

Part of what makes Amy abject is also her (actual) pregnancy. First of all, there is the mere fact that she is pregnant, because it highlights her reproductive capabilities, that – as I mentioned in the chapter concerning Cersei – puts her on the side of the natural and animal world more than the symbolic order. This connection stresses the fact that the symbolic order is fragile. Amy’s real pregnancy – though it is only in its early stages – also draws the mind to her body. By the time Amy tells Nick of her pregnancy, we have already seen her half-naked (see Appendix I) or entirely naked body (02:12:34) a couple of times, so it is easy for the mind to stray to the thoughts of how it might affect her body. Subsequently, Amy has a connection to the female body in the mind of the viewer – and since the female body is considered abject, this is another way in which Amy is abject.

As I mentioned earlier, Amy turns the beauty myth around so that it benefits her in framing Nick for her disappearance. She seems to have an intricate knowledge of how it works – she knows how to make herself attractive and likeable, but she also knows what type of women do not attract attention. After her disappearance, Amy changes her looks drastically. She gains weight (01:11:28), buys a pair of clunky glasses (01:11:10), cuts her long, luscious blonde hair and dyes it a darker, dirtier shade of blonde (01:10:33), and she also hits herself in the face with a hammer in order to look like a victim of abuse (01:12:56). Though not as all-encompassing as other women in this thesis, this is still an instance of

corporeal alteration. Corporeal alteration is – as mentioned quite a few times before in this thesis – abject and consequently connects Amy to abjection yet again. We also see how Amy – despite all her guile and seemingly deep understanding of the beauty myth – is a victim of it. Just as Cersei resents the younger queen, Margaery, Amy resents Nick’s mistress, Andie, a twenty-something student of Nick’s (00:44:05). Amy bitterly remarks how Nick has replaced her with “a newer, younger, bouncier cool girl” (01:12:13). Amy’s comment centres on the fact that Andie is younger than she is and thus more beautiful – especially the use of the word “bouncier” suggests that Amy considers the younger Andie to be more conventionally beautiful because her body is tauter, less distressed by gravity.

Everything taken into consideration, it is no great surprise that Amy also fits the stereotype of feminine evil. Amy is a typical American beauty, a girl-next-door kind of woman – blonde, slender and with a sweet face (see Appendix H). As I have spoken about above, Amy presents an image of herself as a dutiful wife, taking care of Nick in every possible way. As Tanner Bolt puts it, “She is telling a perfect story” (01:21:06). His use of the word “story” emphasises the fact that Amy’s sweet demeanour is just an image – it is just Amy playing with and manipulating the beauty myth. Beneath that perfect surface and story that she presents, something incomprehensibly vindictive lurks, something that is willing to and highly capable of going to extreme lengths to get what she wants and what she thinks she deserves – she will lie, manipulate and kill. The ultimate goal for Amy was getting revenge on Nick for turning her into someone she did not feel like she was (01:10:26), and she is willing to kill herself and Nick in order to get back at him for what he has done to her (01:06:38). Amy is absolutely ruthless but hides it well through her use of mimicry. Because of this Amy becomes the stereotype of the conniving woman, and we see both desire and fear in how Amy is presented to us. She is of course conventionally beautiful, and thus we desire her. But because we know what she is capable of and how twisted her ideas of revenge are, we also fear her.

In terms of viewer identification, it is hard for a viewer to feel any real sympathy for Amy because of her methods. Many may have been in a similar situation, but few will take a standpoint as extreme as Amy’s, whose internal monologue reveals her motivation to us. She is framing Nick because she feels like he succeeded in making her “The nagging shrew. The controlling bitch” (00:34:12), because he has forced the “cool girl” stereotype upon her (01:11:06), because he “became someone I did not agree to marry” (01:12:03) and thus he has destroyed and killed the real Amy (01:06:45). Because Nick has killed the real Amy, she finds it only fair that he receives the death sentence for the “murdering” her. Now, it is

difficult to find someone to compare Amy to within *Gone Girl*, but that does not make it impossible to examine whether or not her monstrosity can be attributed to her gender. Amy morphs the beauty myth from a tool of oppression to a weapon used to punish her cheating husband. While Nick is by no means the perfect husband – what with his adultery, his subsequent lies and his “little box of hate” (01:02:15), his solution to their problem is divorce – not to disappear and frame Amy for his murder. In conclusion, Amy’s monstrosity is highly linked to her gender, from the way she fits with the stereotype of feminine evil to her connection to the abject through her pregnancy and feminine body.

3.5 Coda

After having examined and analysed the characters, this coda serves the purpose of summing up the ways in which the characters are alike, but also compare them to see how they differ. As one could almost predict, all the characters this analysis examined were found to be construed as monstrous due to their gender. Where we find comparable male characters within the same universe, we are not asked by the movie to fear them the same way we are asked to fear their female counterparts. All of the women of this thesis have connections to the abject in several different ways. A connection to the abject that they all shared is the connection to blood. Similarly, they all share the fact that their sexuality is used against them – they are all in some way considered to be sexually immoral or perverse, and they are defined by others through their sexualities. Another similarity all the women of this thesis share is the fact they conform to the stereotype of feminine evil. As expected – since they do participate in Hollywood productions – all the characters are of course gorgeous and construed as being attractive within their respective universes. But underneath the thin veneer of beauty, they are all construed as devious and dangerous because they do not respect boundaries and they can be connected to abject matters. Within this particular selection of women, there also seems to be a tendency towards using manipulation and lying as a means of construing women as monstrous. All the characters I have examined use manipulation, lying and committing crimes to achieve their personal goals. All the women of this thesis can also be seen as Other since they all go against the grain of their respective societies.

These characters, of course, differ in terms of exactly *how* they are construed as monstrous in terms of what their specific connections to the abject are. But where the women of this thesis differ the most is in terms of viewer identification. The viewer can identify with Cersei and Arya because they both have a motivation that we can understand and sympathise with. Cersei does what she does to help her children survive and thrive, and Arya seeks

revenge for all the wrongs she has suffered. Both have good sides and bad sides. Phoenix seems to lack any discernible motivation – her actions are only sought to be explained by Charles when he calls Phoenix, “A purely instinctual creature, all desire and joy and rage.” (*X-3* 00:29:49), and thus she is difficult to identify with. Akasha wants to rule the world and bases it on a sort of reverse Othering of humankind, construing them as lesser and in need of ruling. She calls humans “animals, brute creatures” (*Queen of the Damned* 01:23:40) and argues that, “Their destruction can only make sense” (01:23:42). Again, this puts her in a position that is difficult for a viewer to identify with. Lastly, Amy is also rather difficult to identify with. The fact that she sets out to destroy her husband so completely because she feels he has changed her, that he has effectively killed her (*Gone Girl* 01:06:43) makes her almost compellingly unlikable. Part of the reason why we can sympathise with Cersei and Arya is that we are supposed to. Amy, Akasha and Jean are all the antagonists of their movies, and their motivation for doing what they do is either seriously twisted – or just lacking entirely, in the case of Jean. This unholy trinity is presented in a rather black and white fashion, and while many people might find themselves hoping that there is some comeuppance in store for Cersei in later seasons of *Game of Thrones*, we can still recognise her redeeming features¹⁹, though they may be few.

4. Discussion

Having now completed and summed up the analysis chapter of this thesis, it is time to move on to a broader perspective. First of all, this chapter endeavours to characterise and discuss the cultural and social context that has shaped the creation of the movies and characters this thesis examines. Following that, this chapter will move on to discuss whether or not construing women as monstrous can be seen as a way of silencing them.

4.1 *The social and cultural context*

As mentioned above, this chapter seeks to put the findings of the analysis into a larger perspective by placing them within the broader cultural and social context in which the characters have come to life. The characters this thesis subjects to analysis all appear in movies that were made after the turn of the 20th century, meaning that they have come into being during a period awash in strong, independent female characters. This century has seen

¹⁹ Tyrion sums them up well – “You love your children. It’s your one redeeming quality; that and your cheekbones” (S0201)

cinema and fiction become more interested in the representation of women and minorities as more than token figures so stereotyped that they are unrecognisable as real people. Women are no longer always relegated to be props, but are allowed to take the lead in movies – this decade alone has produced characters such as the eponymous Moana (*Moana* 2016), Rey (*Star Wars: The Force Awakens* 2015), Merida (*Brave* 2012) and Katniss Everdeen (*The Hunger Games* series 2012-2015) – and so many more that I do not have the space to name. This is not to claim that women were never allowed to be strong lead characters before the 21st century; there are certainly strong female leads from before this era. Clarice Starling (*The Silence of the Lambs* 1991), Ellen Ripley (*Alien* franchise 1979-) and Princess Leia Organa (*Star Wars* franchise 1977-) are all examples of capable women in movies from before the 2000s and 2010s. But as time has gone on, characters like Clarice, Ripley and Leia have become more and more common – and they have evolved, becoming more well-rounded characters. Because of this, women are no longer just there to be eye candy or on-screen homemakers. Female figures are now allowed to tell alternate tales of what it is like to be a woman. One might wonder, though, how many of the characters I just mentioned would conform to Creed’s theory on the monstrous-feminine and what that might mean for the representation of women in movies.

4.2 *The Silence of the Monstrous-Feminine*

This part of the chapter sets out to investigate whether or not we can perceive the construction of women as monstrous as a way of silencing them. The main point of departure will, of course, be the portrayals of the monstrous-feminine that I have analysed in this thesis, but I will also be drawing on Hillary Clinton during the 2016 United States presidential election. First I will outline Rebecca Solnit’s ideas which will be the point of departure in terms of theory. Secondly, I will apply and discuss Solnit’s ideas in relation to my objects of analysis and Hillary Clinton. Lastly, I intend to discuss why being construed as monstrous should not be viewed as exclusively negative.

As I mentioned above, this discussion will draw on some of Rebecca Solnit’s ideas as she presents them in her collection of essays, *Men Explain Things to Me* (2014). In this Solnit details the many different ways in which women have been silenced throughout time, and how women are silenced for “claiming voice, power, and the right to participate” (30-31). Solnit mentions violence as one of those ways (6), but she also mentions much more pervasive ways of female nonexistence, such as western naming conventions in which women traditionally take on their husband’s name and thus a woman’s genealogy and even

her identity is erased (66-67). The ultimate silencing, according to Solnit, is death (71). Solnit envisions silencing as a continuum, stretching from “minor social misery” (16) to violent silencing. Solnit does not take silencing lightly, and she explains how the silencing of women negatively impacts them. She writes that, “Having the right to show up and speak are basic to survival, to dignity, and to liberty” (16). Despite all the progress that feminism has made, Solnit makes it clear that most women are still fighting for “the right to speak, to have ideas, to be acknowledged to be in possession of facts and truths, to have value, to be a human being” (10-11). The two quotes above also express the importance of having a voice, and that having one and being allowed to be heard are fundamental parts of what it means to be human, according to Solnit. Furthermore, Solnit describes silencing as having concentric circles akin to Dante’s hell (107). The first circle consists of the internal inhibitions a person might put on his or herself (107). These make it difficult or impossible to speak up and be heard. Outside of that circle, Solnit identifies the forces who attempt to silence those who speak up despite the first circle of silencing (107-108). Lastly, Solnit defines the outermost circle – in which “tale and teller are discredited” (108) if they have not yet been so before the story was told.

Drawing on Solnit’s ideas and arguments that I presented above, my argument is then that by applying this categorisation of “monstrous” or “Other” to women they are silenced, because who indeed would listen to someone they fear? Why should we listen to someone who has been discredited? Someone who is so unlike ourselves? Much like the stereotyping and othering of colonised populations have been used to fix them in place in terms of identity and thus not allowing the Other to change, the construction of women as monstrous also takes away women’s chances to be something other than what society thinks them to be. Seeing women who break with gender stereotypes being construed as monstrous might discourage other women from doing so, thus keeping them “in place”.

The women of this thesis are all silenced in one way or another. Phoenix is hardly allowed to speak for herself. She is allowed very little dialogue because the movie and the other mutants of the movie are so preoccupied with stereotyping her as a weapon more than a person. Phoenix is also silenced psychically by Professor X. In the movie, it is revealed that he put up psychic barriers to isolate Jean’s powers and that was the birth of Phoenix (X-3 00:29:24), denying that part of Jean the chance to speak and express herself. Akasha directly refers to silencing in *The Queen of the Damned*, when she remarks how cohabitation with mortals has forced vampires to lead their lives “In silence! In shadows and shame!” (*Queen of the Damned* 01:23:48) all in pursuit of the respect of mortals. For both Phoenix and

Akasha, not being allowed to speak is detrimental to their survival. Both are ultimately killed because they are deemed dangerous. Amy is a bit of an outlier in terms of this, as she differs from Akasha and Phoenix. We get to be privy to a lot of Amy's thoughts and reasoning, which does give her something of a voice. But Amy almost becomes a Men's Rights Activist's ultimate wet dream; all the ills men have allegedly caused her are exposed as falsehoods, and Amy is portrayed as a pathological liar with a vengeance against men. Consequently, she is discredited – as I will elaborate on later in this chapter – and by association, Amy's falsehoods become the falsehoods of all women who report sexual abuse. By construing these women as monstrous, they are denied the chance to speak and to be heard. Another thing worth highlighting is the difference between when men are antagonistic monsters and when women are. A good example of this is Magneto, one of the antagonists of *X-3*. Magneto, the metal-manipulating mutant, is arguably also a monster, sharing many of Phoenix' markers of abjection and transgressing many of the same borders that she does. We can sympathise with Magneto, the Holocaust survivor, but we cannot feel the same for Akasha, Amy and Jean, who all are simultaneously monsters and villains. Why? Because of a lack of backstory and therefore a lack of sympathy with the character. When women are construed as monstrous villains, we are not allowed to know more about them, and they are not allowed to tell us about themselves. They are silenced – we never hear about traumatic experiences Akasha might have had, or perhaps what has caused Amy to be the way she is.²⁰ There is never one single point in the movies where we feel sympathy for those three women – Jean, perhaps, being the exception here, because she herself is innocent, while Phoenix is a murderous, rampaging nightmare.

The silencing of women works slightly differently in the case of *Game of Thrones*. Again, part of this difference is the fact that Arya and Cersei are not the main antagonists of their specific contexts, while the unholy trinity mentioned above are. Arya and Cersei are denied the chance to do the same things that men do. When Arya takes lessons in sword fighting, it has to be disguised as dancing lessons as not to cause too much of a ruckus (S01E03). Cersei is kept from power by men such as her uncle Kevan (S05E02), but there is

²⁰ However, it is quite clear that Amy is quite bothered by the “Amazing Amy” franchise built around her as a child and adult (*Gone Girl* 00:13:45) and that might be part of why she acts the way she does. This aspect is developed more in the book (*Gone Girl* 2012) upon which the movie is based.

a chance that she is actually a rather competent ruler – she has been close to power all of her life and has had ample opportunity to observe and study it, so it is not unreasonable to assume that she actually knows something about ruling and should not be discredited solely on the basis of her gender. There is also that fact that the gender roles of the Seven Kingdoms are more harshly demarcated than they are in the everyday American context that the other movies take place in. Women are more or less banished from what we might call public office because of religious dogmas and consequently we only see few women in positions of actual and official power – Daenerys Targaryen²¹ and Lyanna Mormont²² are the only two that spring to mind besides Cersei. If women dare to step outside of these gender roles and if women dare to question them, they will be silenced and attempted to be pushed back inside the border.

As I mentioned in the coda, the portrayals of the monstrous-feminine we have seen in this thesis are all presented as dishonest, manipulative and scheming. This is one thing that all the women of my analysis have in common. Women being construed as untrustworthy is not unique to Creed's theory. Twice Solnit mentions how women are construed as dishonest or manipulative in an effort to silence them. She relates how women are often seen as “subjective, delusional, overwrought, dishonest – in a nutshell, female” (7) or even “delusional, confused, manipulative, conspiratorial, congenitally dishonest, often all at once” (104) when they object to men. The first quote here is especially telling – in it Solnit emphasises how being female is seen as synonymous with being dishonest. Construing women as dishonest or duplicitous is, first of all, a connection to the abject and secondly also a way of silencing women. When women are construed as manipulative and dishonest, so is everything they say and their credibility and thus their ability to speak in public is demolished. Solnit discusses this topic, calling credibility “a basic survival tool” (6) – and as I mentioned above, being silenced led to death in the instances of Akasha and Phoenix.

All of the above takes its point of departure in fictional characters. And while the fictional portrayals of groups certainly are telling of and vital to understanding the general attitude a society can hold towards a specific group, an example from the real world is even more telling. A highly relevant example of a real-life person who was construed as monstrous can be found in Hillary Clinton and how Donald Trump and his campaign talked about her during the 2016 United States presidential election. If we look at how Trump talked about

²¹ A claimant of the title of ruler of the Seven Kingdoms

²² The Lady of Bear Island who rules on her own despite being a young teenager

Clinton during the election campaign, we start to see some similarities between his discourse and the markers of abjection that Creed presents in her work. Presumably, the biggest problem with Clinton was the fact that she was trying to make American history. Had she been elected, she would have been the first woman to become President of the United States; and in a world where men are President, and women take the role of First Lady, Clinton would have transgressed the border between men and women, and the border between those who take up their proper gender roles and those who do not. Most famous is probably Trump's comment during the final presidential debate. Clinton throws a barb at Trump – "My Social Security payroll contribution will go up, as will Donald's, assuming he can't figure out how to get out of it" (Blake), and Trump says into his microphone, "Such a nasty woman" (Blake). Not only did he attempt to silence Clinton by interrupting her while it was her turn to speak, but he also construes her as unpleasant at best and damaging or harmful at worst. Moreover, Trump's discourse construed Clinton as abject on several occasions. A favoured slogan of the Trump campaign was "Crooked Hillary". It was used in speeches (Jamieson), on Trump's personal twitter handle (Trump) and even in a Facebook video (Trump). By calling Clinton "Crooked Hillary", Trump implies that Clinton is a liar who plays fast and loose with the rules of the political game and just about everything else. "Crooked" also implies that Clinton is a criminal, which is another way Trump's discourse ties her to the abject. Since the slogan was so ubiquitous during the election, it became a part of the discourse on Clinton and her campaign. However, Trump and his campaign did not stop at insinuating – Trump also said it outright in a speech. During a rally in Manchester, Northampton, Trump told the assembled listeners that Clinton, "lies, and she smears, and she paints decent Americans – you – as racists" (Collins). The connection to the abject thus becomes painfully obvious.

But Trump did not just connect Clinton to lies and crime. He and his campaign also managed to define Clinton in relation to her sexuality, which is also considered abject in women if it deviates from our cultural norms. On April 16th, 2015, his account retweeted the following taunt directed at Clinton: "If Hillary Clinton can't satisfy her husband what makes her think she can satisfy America?". Though it did not come from Trump himself, retweeting it without a condemning message expresses consent – and that was exactly the situation. By

retweeting the tweet, Trump also broadcasted the message to his 29 million followers²³. Though the tweet was hastily removed from his Twitter feed, the Internet is slow to forget and even quicker to share outrageous proclamations. Some articles claim that it was not Trump himself that retweeted the tweet, but a social media staffer (Martosko), but the average person would not dig that deep – they would see the screenshot of the tweet and leave it at that, believing that it came from Trump himself. Thus, the tweet became part of the discourse on Clinton. The implication of that tweet is that Clinton is somehow sexually deficient since her husband famously pursued extramarital intimacy. Thus, she is unfit to serve as President of the United States of America. Again, we can see a similarity to Creed's theory – women are defined in terms of their sexuality, and Clinton is here defined as sexually dysfunctional. I am not trying to argue that the Trump campaign's way of talking about Clinton is *the* reason that she lost the election – that would be a simplified answer to a complex question because of course there were a plethora of other factors that also had an effect on the outcome of the election. What I am trying to argue is that by construing Clinton as monstrous and abject, the Trump campaign managed in discrediting her to certain audiences – and by discrediting her, they consequently silenced her. They construed her as someone wrong for America based on reasons that tie her to the abject and her gender.

Let us take a look at what kinds of women are being silenced by this categorisation as “monstrous” and “Other”. Jean, Akasha and Amy are all obviously evil – but what is their crime? Being powerful and smart? Being *more* powerful and smarter than the men of their respective universes? In terms of the more morally ambiguous individuals I have focused on, we see that it is powerful women and women who *dare* to defy gender roles and cross the boundaries that separate men and women. Both Cersei, Arya and Hillary Clinton question the norms of the society they live in. All three are powerful and ambitious, and because of this, they appear threatening to the symbolic order, even in today's America. The beauty myth, the tool of the patriarchal society, tries to slow these women down by demanding they occupy themselves with their looks and their behaviour and thus stick to behaviour deemed appropriate for women. By being construed as monstrous and Other, they are discredited and silenced, but they persevere.

²³ This number was taken from Trump's personal twitter profile, @Realdonaldtrump, on 10th May 2017

Solnit's concentric circles of silencing are at play for all the women I have mentioned in this chapter. The beauty myth seems to have a part in how silencing works in this context at least. The internal inhibitions that a person places upon themselves resembles the constraints women put on themselves in order to conform to the beauty myth – for example how some women refuse to lift heavy weights because they fear being seen as overly dominant and masculine. It is akin to how some women will not speak up in crowds for fear of being seen as “bossy”. Both are thus silenced by the fear of being perceived in a certain way. Those same restraints are placed upon the women I have mentioned in this discussion. None of the women of this discussion care much for those constraints, which is part of why they are construed as monstrous. The forces who attempt to silence those who speak up are also reminiscent of the beauty myth. These forces are comparable to the forces that try to enforce the beauty myth. We see them in the religious dogmas of the Seven Kingdoms, and in the way in which the beauty myth labels certain behaviours as beautiful. The third and final circle is also at play – we see it in how all the women I have mentioned so far are made out to be liars. Their stories must be discredited because they threaten the status quo.

Might this way of construing powerful women who do not adhere to gender roles and the beauty myth as monstrous to silence them then be part of a conservative “backlash” against women? Solnit also speaks of this backlash in her essay “Pandora’s Box and the Volunteer Police Force”²⁴. She cites Susan Faludi’s *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (1991), in which Faludi describes how women at the time were in a double bind – even though women were now considered fully liberated, they were also told how because they were liberated, they were bombarded by voices – TV, magazines, movies, telling them that they were miserable because they were liberated (146), implying they should return to the old ways and their old roles. Though Faludi’s book is more than twenty years old, Solnit documents how Faludi’s book is still relevant today, as women still face this backlash (147), characterising it as a war of gender roles (148). What Solnit describes as holding women back today (148-149) is much the same as what Wolf called the beauty myth. The backlash tries to push women back to where misogynists think women *need* to be, which is in a place of silence and powerlessness (146). As I detail in the chapter on the development of feminism from the first to the third wave, feminism has obviously come a long way, but there is still quite a way to go. Most of the world allows women to vote, but things like

²⁴ Also from *Men Explain Things to Me*

abortion, maternal and paternal leave and reproductive rights for women persist in being hotly debated in parts of the world. And the constraints of the beauty myth still weigh on women, trying to push them to behave in a certain way. With all these powerful women – both in cinema and in the real world – some might feel that the patriarchal system is in danger of being toppled by these women. So, in order to discredit strong women and silence them, they are construed as monstrous and wrong because they try to change the status quo and work away from a world in which women are silenced. Many of the women in my thesis are even punished for their actions – Cersei is forced to go through a walk of penance, Arya is repeatedly beaten, and Akasha and Phoenix are killed, all because of their actions. It becomes a warning to women – do not try to push forward; nothing good awaits you.

But maybe we should not only see it as a negative thing when the so-called monsters of this thesis are construed as monstrous and Other. While it is certainly not very constructive to do so in real life and discourse on actual people, fiction has a different function in society and culture, allowing it to do something else entirely and to wag a finger in the face of society. It can be hard to shake the negative connotations that we have with the words “monster” and “monstrous” because they usually connote danger and unpleasantness, something we would rather distance ourselves from as much as possible; because of this, it can be hard to see the positives of being construed as monstrous. But maybe this categorisation of women who break stereotypical gender roles as monstrous is not set in place to “scare women straight”, but instead to highlight how *we* in the western world treat women who do things the patriarchy is uncomfortable with, by making us care for women who are treated unfairly. The monstrous-feminine helps to emphasise the unfairness women face when they make everyday choices – whether a woman chooses to be sexually active or to remain celibate should not impact what other people think of her, but it does. The beauty myth reveals the limitations that women face every day – there is a certain way of behaving that is approved by the patriarchy and to be considered beautiful, women must conform to it, and if they do not, they are cast out. Another way in which the construction of certain women as monstrous can be seen as something positive, is, as I mentioned in chapter 4.1 about the social and cultural context of these characters, that these monstrous women allow filmmakers and storytellers to tell different stories about women and move beyond the trite stereotypes of the beauty myth. They allow storytellers to focus on portraying women as they truly are. Perhaps we should not see characters such as Cersei and Arya as something that goes bump in the night. They are strong female characters who break the limitations that gender roles impose on their lives in order to do what is right for them – *yes*, Cersei plots, murders and

schemes her way to the top of the hierarchy of the Seven Kingdoms, but ultimately, she does a lot of it for the sake of her beloved children. And *yes*, Arya murders even more and even more brutally and sadistically than Cersei does, but before she was a murderer, she was a child who thought archery was more fun than embroidery and was consequently viewed as odd and construed as beastly and Other. Perhaps it is with being construed as monstrous as it is with most other things in life – it is all about the context in which it happens. Context is crucial in deciding whether a piece of fiction is a critique of society or the silencing of an entire group of the world's population.

5. Conclusion

This section of the thesis endeavours to summarise the conclusions I have reached through my work with the problem statement that I presented in the introduction to this project. First, I will conclude on the findings of my analysis. Secondly, I will sum up the ideas and arguments I presented in my discussion.

On the basis of my analysis, I can conclude that the women this thesis examined are construed and treated as monstrous because of their refusal to adhere to gender roles and the behaviour that their respective beauty myths prescribe as beautiful. They are tied to the abject in different manners, but there were some commonalities that united them. A common theme of the analysis is Otherness. Both Phoenix and Akasha represent the situation of being an Other in a group that is already considered to be Other because they are set apart from the rest of their respective groups. They also all shared connections to the abject – especially the connection to blood. True to Creed's prediction in her text (3), all the women examined in this thesis were defined in terms of their sexuality. Even Arya who has had no sexual contact with any person whatsoever was defined as a prostitute. The rest of the women of this thesis were just generally defined as *too* sexual or too sexually aggressive. The women of this thesis also all conform to Creed's stereotype of feminine evil, being beautiful or alluring on the outside but being corrupted on the inside through their connections to crime, murder and other abject matters. Another shared connection to the abject came from the fact that all the women of this thesis were liars or manipulators.

Where I found the women of the thesis to differ the most was in terms of viewer identification. While Phoenix, Akasha and Amy were all indisputably the villains and main antagonists of their particular movies, Cersei and Arya are more morally grey characters. The three villains are harder for us to identify with because we cannot sympathise with them. We are not privy to their motivations and what might have happened to them to cause such

malice within them. Here I noted a difference between men and women – we could easily identify with Magneto, a Holocaust survivor and the other antagonist of *X-3*, but we could not identify with Phoenix, Akasha or Amy exactly because we often do not get to know the motivation behind their actions.

Moving on to my discussion, I started by briefly summing up the cultural and social context that the characters I have examined in this thesis exist within. This decade has seen a rise in the existence of strong leading female characters on the silver screen and a move away from overly stereotyped female characters that only serve as eye candy or props, consequently allowing alternative female narratives to emerge in cinema. Among these are characters such as Moana (*Moana* 2016) and Rey from *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (2015). After establishing the social and cultural context of the characters of the analysis, I moved on to discuss how the fact that the characters are construed as monstrous might play into how they are silenced. I drew on Rebecca Solnit's book *Men Explain Things to Me* (2014) and her work on how women are silenced. The women studied in this thesis were silenced in different ways. Arya and Cersei were of course silenced by the patriarchal and strictly religious society of the Seven Kingdoms, while both Akasha and Phoenix were silenced and ended up dead as a result of it. Amy was the outlier in this context, as Amy herself was not silenced, but her actions in the movie could result in the silencing of victims of sexual assault in the real world. I also worked with how we see this construction of women as monstrous at play in the real world. Here, I drew on different sources to discuss how Donald Trump and his campaign characterised his opponent in the 2016 US presidential election, Hillary Clinton, as monstrous and how that had a part in discrediting her and thus silencing her. Trump's campaign tied Clinton to the abject in a number of ways. The Trump discourse on Clinton construed her as duplicitous, a criminal and as sexually dysfunctional, all in order to insinuate – and at times outright state – that Clinton was unfit to serve as president. This way of construing her as monstrous became a method used to discredit Clinton in the eyes of specific audiences. But more than that, I also discussed how – in fiction at least – construing women as monstrous and Other might not only be a bad thing, solely silencing women. Construing women as monstrous in fiction might allow filmmakers and storytellers a way to represent how the western world treat powerful and ambitious women and thus shine a light on the unfairness of it – all depending on the context, of course.

6. Appendixes

Appendix A



Aaliyah as Queen Akasha

Source: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0238546/mediaviewer/rm3622476032>

Appendix B



Aaliyah as Queen Akasha before she is awakened by Lestat

Source: [https://s-media-cache-](https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/originals/4e/18/47/4e1847446e452a3b436f9b851ab00b7c.jpg)

[ak0.pinimg.com/originals/4e/18/47/4e1847446e452a3b436f9b851ab00b7c.jpg](https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/originals/4e/18/47/4e1847446e452a3b436f9b851ab00b7c.jpg)

Appendix C



Famke Janssen as Jean Grey

Source: [http://x-men.wikia.com/wiki/Jean_Grey_\(Cinematic_Universe\)](http://x-men.wikia.com/wiki/Jean_Grey_(Cinematic_Universe))

Appendix D



Famke Janssen as Jean Grey (as Dark Phoenix)

Source: http://vignette2.wikia.nocookie.net/x-men/images/2/24/I_am_phoenix.jpg/revision/latest?cb=20110605193423

Appendix E



Lena Headey as Cersei Lannister

Source: <http://static3.comicvine.com/uploads/original/14/148983/3275759-7760386458-Cersei.JPG>

Appendix F



Lena Headey as Cersei Lannister after her walk of atonement

Source: S05E10, screenshot from HBO Nordic (<https://dk.hbonordic.com/series/game-of-thrones/season-5/episode-10/1f10ced-007bf6dfc56>)

Appendix G



Maisie Williams as Arya Stark

Source: http://www.barringtons-swords.com/media/catalog/product/cache/1/image/1200x1200/9df78eab33525d08d6e5fb8d27136e95/g/a/game_of_thrones_swords_needle_sword_of_arya_stark_valerian_steel_image_4.jpg

Appendix H



Rosamund Pike as Amy Dunne

Source: <https://images-na.ssl-images-amazon.com/images/M/MV5BMTQ3NTQwMjI3MV5BMl5BanBnXkFtZTgwODAxOTMzMjE@. V1. CR42,15,2916,1933 SY1000 CR0,0,1508,1000 AL .jpg>

Appendix I



Rosamund Pike as Amy Dunne after having killed Desi

Source: *Gone Girl* (2014)

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8. Summary

This thesis sets out to investigate why we are afraid of women. The inquiry into this topic is guided by the following problem statement: “How are women portrayed as monstrous in selected contemporary movies and television series?”. To answer these questions, this thesis utilises Barbara Creed’s theory of the monstrous-feminine, Naomi Wolf’s beauty myth and Homi K. Bhabha’s terms the Other, the stereotype and mimicry in order to gain more nuanced conclusions. I selected the following five women for analysis in this thesis: Queen Akasha from *Queen of The Damned* (2002), Jean Grey from *X-Men: The Last Stand* (2006), Cersei Lannister and Arya Stark from the television series *Game of Thrones* (2011-) and lastly Amy Dunne from *Gone Girl* (2014). In order to answer the question I posed, I applied a close-reading of the texts in order to examine how I could best apply the theoretical terms to them.

In the analysis, I came to a couple of conclusions. Though all the women were abject in different manners, they shared some characteristics. Every object of analysis had a connection to blood, a fluid that is especially abject when it comes from women. All of them also conformed to the stereotype of feminine evil; they were all beautiful, but beneath that thin veneer they hid all their ties to the abject. Furthermore, they were all defined in relation to their sexuality, even though Arya had never had sexual contact with anyone. Although they shared these features, they also differed some from each other. This was most pronounced in terms of viewer identification – the viewer could identify with Cersei and Arya because they were presented as having a motivation for their actions, while the viewer could not identify with Akasha, Phoenix (Jean) and Amy, the villains of their movies.

Having completed the analysis, I examined the purpose of construing women as monstrous might be. Inspired by Rebecca Solnit’s essay collection *Men Explain Things to Me* (2014), I set out to discuss whether or not construing women as monstrous silences them. While I could conclude that the fictional characters of my thesis experienced silencing in different ways. Not wanting to dwell solely on fictional characters, I looked to the real world for instances of silencing. I settled on how Hillary Clinton was treated during last year’s US presidential election, where I found several of Creed’s traits of the monstrous-feminine had been applied to Clinton. As a last thought, I also wondered whether or not silencing was always bad, settling on the fact that fiction has a different function than reality has. Thus, silencing fictional characters serves to illuminate how we treat women who do not conform to the beauty myth and do things that a patriarchal society finds unacceptable and uncomfortable.