



MONSTER FEST

Abstracts

Presentation Abstracts

Alphabetical by last name

Gerjan Altenburg, faculty, St. Francis Xavier, “Let’s Talk to Some Spirits: a demonstration of some contemporary ghost hunting tools.”

Through his fieldwork as an “active-member researcher,” Marc Eaton (2015) has convincingly demonstrated that as “it fulfills both the personal and social requirements for a religion, paranormal investigating may be considered a spiritual practice.” So-called ghost hunting (searching for, and/or attempting to make contact with, the spirits of the deceased) might therefore be understood best within frameworks applied to new or alternative religious practices.

Technology often plays a role in new religious practices. Electropsychometers (E-Meters), for example, used by the Church of Scientology, and members of breakaway groups in the “Free Zone,” do measure electrodermal activity (galvanic skin responses). The religious aspect of their use lies in the interpretation of an E-Meter’s results by trained “auditors.” Similarly, technology plays an important role in many paranormal investigations (ghost hunts). Devices used to pick up electro magnetic frequencies (EMFs) are interpreted as being able to record and/or communicate with spirits.

In this presentation, which is an abridged version of a lecture scheduled for the course RELS 225 Cults and Alternative Religions at Saint Francis Xavier University, I will demo a little bit of ghost hunting tech. I will show how EMF readers are supposedly used to communicate with spirits. Specifically, I will showcase two popular tools: Ghost Stop’s DeadBell and the P-SB7 Spirit Box. I will argue that although these devices do indeed pick up something, how one interprets those results slips into the realm of spirituality or theology.

Andréas Arteaga, faculty, Saint Mary’s University, “Liberating Horror: How Contemporary Latin American Horror Literature Provides a mode of recognition and reconciliation with the self.”

In contemporary Latin American literature, a thematic current has emerged in which horror—the monstrous, the uncanny—through its most fantastic and imaginative dimensions, serves not only as a mechanism for denouncing reality but also as a means of disrupting it and ultimately seizing hold of it. Federico Guzmán Rubio refers to this as a “liberating horror” (2024), in which literary creation “paradoxically makes

use of certain fears, largely imaginary, in order to dispel others that are real” (Guzmán, 3).

From this perspective, horror is not a paralyzing sentiment but rather a mode of recognition and reconciliation with the self. It is a fear that feels oppressive until it is crossed, at which point it opens onto a new reality—idyllic in its darkness, utopian in its perfect world of witches and ghosts.

This presentation examines key elements of this “liberating horror” in three stories from some of most acclaimed contemporary Latin American writers such as “Auction” by María Fernanda Ampuero, “Things we lost in the fire” by Mariana Enríquez and “Mouthful of birds” by Samanta Schweblin. In these works, the protagonists move beyond the immediate terrors of ghosts, corpses, or murderers to discover a liberating dimension of their identities—one accessible only

through the ordeal of the fantastic. This imaginative crossing not only grants them access to new forms of subjectivity but also enables them to confront the cruel realities of their daily lives.

Ryan Ash, BA student, Saint Mary's University, “Melusina's Human Base: Monstrous Marriages and Mythic Thinking.”

In “The Second Sex”, Simone de Beauvoir makes reference to the Brittonic legendary figure Melusina finding her “human base” as she is liberated from the “burden” placed upon her “by man alone”. The allusion illustrates Beauvoir's argument that women are mythologized into irreconcilable archetypes and consequently deprived of personal subjectivity. The allusion invites a deeper analysis into Melusina's mythology and the dichotomy of her monstrous dual-nature creating a border between social acceptance and monstrosity. Melusina is able to pass as human, as opposed to a serpentine lower half, as long as her husband does not look at her one day of the week. Thusly, Melusina's “human base” and viability as a wife is predicated upon the agency of a man.

Beauvoir examines the functionality of myths and mythic thinking of the feminine in the “The Second Sex”. Melusina's example is particularly apt as Beauvoir's analysis examines how such mythology serves a ruling caste and how mythical feminine archetypes imply the existence of their opposites. Melusina's story is not unique and follows the pattern of myths and legends involving animal bridegrooms. Similar stories model parallel relationships where marriage is oppositional to a monstrous feminine character. Thusly, stories that share the Melusina-motif might also be examined by using Beauvoir's premises in the “Myths” part of “The Second Sex”. The mythology and critical theory hold up a mirror to each other, isolating something of the monstrous between them and reflecting it back on to the reader to ask where the monstrosity really lies.

Alexander “Al” Scott Pearce Baker, staff member, Museum of Natural History, “Where are the Wolves? Lycanthropy and the Mythologizing of Cruelty.”

This presentation examines lycanthropy — the mythic transformation of human into wolf — as a cultural device for making sense of human cruelty. Across folklore and Gothic literature, the werewolf emerges as a grotesque cipher for violence, allowing societies to displace and mythologize the horrors committed by humans.

Wolves, once widespread across the Northern Hemisphere, were ideal vessels for projecting sadism and transgression. In vilifying the wolf, cultures externalized what they could not face: that the true monster might be human. Yet in recent decades, the werewolf has faded from cultural prominence, supplanted by more mundane horrors — true crime killers, clinical psychopaths, and the banality of domestic evil. This eclipse reflects a grim recognition: the monstrous no longer requires disguise. It looks familiar, even ordinary.

At the same time, evolving ethical attitudes toward animals have unsettled the symbolic function of the wolf. No longer a scapegoat, it increasingly appears as a victim — of fear, projection, and ecological devastation. In light of these changes, this presentation explores the future of lycanthropic imagery in horror media, asking what roles the werewolf might yet play in a cultural landscape newly attuned to questions of nonhuman agency, ecological crisis, and the porous boundary between species. In doing so, it reflects on the uneasy tension between the myths we inherit and the truths we can no longer avoid: that the face beneath the civilized mask may not be bestial, but all too human.

Todd Calder, faculty, Saint Mary’s University, “Evil and Monsters.”

Most monsters are depicted as evil. And oftentimes evil people are described as monsters. But what is the connection between evil and monsters. My focus in this presentation is on whether evil people are necessarily, or almost always, monstrous? Some philosophers who write about evil equate evil persons with moral monsters (Cole 2006, Haybron 2002, McGinn 1996, Barry 2009). Others suggest a strong connection without explicitly equating the two concepts (Russell 2014, Garrard 2002). I believe the connection is much weaker than many suppose.

On my view, an evil person is someone who has a strong disposition to have evil attitudes in certain contexts. An evil attitude, on my view, consists in valuing a lesser good more than someone else’s freedom from extreme harm. I argue that on this attractive account of evil persons most evil people are not moral monsters.

Amanda Comeau-Williams, BA student, Cape Breton University, “The Spectre of the Female Hockey Player.”

With the advent of the Professional Women’s Hockey League (PWHL), the third attempt of its kind, hockey joins the growing contemporary interest in women’s

sports and negotiates the professional female athlete as a monster in their quest for sponsorship partners. Historically, women involved in professional sports have faced intense grooming and behaviour standards to ward off the fear of female masculinity, and that fear is what creates the monstrosity of the subject. This monster is the spectre of the powerful, often queer female athlete emphasized by bulky equipment that erases most gender markers, in a sport known for strength, speed and brutality.

One of the answers presented to the public has been to play up the femininity of players in advertising campaigns - ranging from makeup and underwear to kitchen appliances - to the forefront in an effort to increase the financial stability of the league and show the sport to be less deviant from cultural expectations of women. The PWHL centres the narrative around how “inspirational” the players are to young girls, and focuses less on the immense amount of skill the players bring to the league. Outside of advertising, other measures to mitigate the brutality of the game and therefore the monstrosity of the players can be seen in rules governing body contact and fighting. This presentation will combine queer theory and media analysis to explore the monstrous figure of the female hockey player, question homophobic and gendered norms, and explore the possibility of a liberated future.

Thomas Curran, faculty, King's College, “Gatekeepers and Border Guards in Dante's Inferno.”

In Dante's *Inferno*, the journey (in the year 1300) to the Pit of Hell requires the co-operation and agreement of various monstrous Gatekeepers and Border Guards. These specific Border Guards are provided to Dante from his close reading of Book vi of Vergil's *Aeneid*. My presentation will analyze how Dante's parade of Vergilian grotesques teaches us the subtleties of Dante's epic method. The particular attraction, for Dante, is the hybrid nature of some of these “monstrosities”: the three-headed canine, Cerberus; the noble, but violent, Centaurs; the fraudulent and “triform” Geryon (Gerion: lion, snake, scorpion) — so, three “incompatible” species, together sporting (or hiding behind) a human face. The descent to the 9th Circle of Hell, the final Satanic resting-place, is by way of an assembly of the Olympian Titans. Especially: Anteo (Antaeus), who, secures safe passage for Vergil and Dante — Geryon had, earlier, provided the same service for the wayfarers in their transition to the 8th Circle. Dante identifies the rebarbative Titans: Briareus, for instance, with fifty mouths — and the hundred-headed Typhon (Tifeo), reputedly imprisoned, impotently, under Mt Etna. All of these pestilential aberrations anticipate the final encounter with Satan (the adversary) himself. The Head of Lucifer is here discovered with three faces, six eyes, and three mouths. Dante's “hierarchical” macabre catalogue of Gatekeepers, Border Guards, and Conveyers prepares the Comedy's readers for this definitive glimpse into the Abyss, which we might describe as a Black Hole, where all human hopes and aspirations are annihilated.

Ken Derry, faculty, University of Toronto, “FLAAAT FEEEEET! Monster Barbie, Transgressions, and Humanity.”

In **The Horror Film**, Stephen Prince draws on theories of taboos to think about the ways in which monsters in horror movies transgress various boundaries. These boundaries include physical spaces, moral codes, and bodies. Prince argues that transgressing such boundaries speaks to anxieties about what it means to be human. He concludes that what is truly horrific is the breakdown of socially imposed systems of order. Ultimately, horror movies affirm that boundaries themselves are sacred, and must be maintained so we can hold on to our humanity.

As it happens, many comedies include elements that overlap with horror tropes, including the transgression of boundaries. For example, the plot of **Barbie** is set in motion when the protagonist experiences the terror of a changing body: she develops bad breath, cellulite, and flat feet. Which is to say, she becomes a monster. In response to the existential crisis precipitated by these experiences, Barbie crosses the border between her reality and ours, which leads to further boundary-related horrors: sexual violence, the colonization of Barbie’s Dream House, and the reversal of gender roles. While a degree of order is restored in the end, the film is clearly not affirming the status quo – particularly in terms of gender. Some boundaries remain important and helpful, others need to be more fluid or eliminated entirely. In this paper I will reflect on the significance of these various boundaries, and consider what a film about dolls is saying about what it means to be human.

Ace DeWolf, BA student, St. Francis Xavier, ““Wouldst Thou Like to Live Deliciously”: Monsters as Subjects of Queer Desire.”

In this presentation I would like to take a step back from my work on transgender representation in the monstrous divine and look more broadly at what draws the queer community to monsters. I am interested in the connections and social circumstances that lead to Voidpunk communities, where those that identify with the non-human, and often overtly monstrous, are commonplace. Ultimately, I want to discuss how queerness can be partly defined by a desire for what has been deemed other. Consequently, it is also defined by the horror that comes with that desire. I argue that monsters as the model representation of the “other” then offer clear avenues to expressing that desire, whether it be through identification with the monster, or conversely, radical acceptance and even love for that monster. All together, these desires and the liberty given to them through monsters turn some queer communities into what I will playfully and affectionately refer to as “monster towns”.

Brenton Dickieson, faculty, University of Prince Edward Island, “The Monster in Me: C.S. Lewis’ Inversion of the Monstrous Other in his Speculative Fiction.”

In his earliest unpublished, unknown, and disregarded fiction, C.S. Lewis’ protagonists encounter grotesque, chimerical, and abhuman otherness: the Mothlight of Yesterday, the unseen Bethrelladoom, the half-blind all-father, a mis-formed teratogenic bastard, dragons of fire and ice, giants of despair and madness, and—somewhat on the nose—Nazi-sympathizing dwarfs. Whether writing as an atheist philosopher or a Christian seeker, however, the true enemies the protagonists flee are God and their own hearts.

In Lewis’ first popular science fiction, *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938), the timid Cambridge philologist, Dr. Ransom, is kidnapped by an aristocratic scientific team in their attempt to colonize Malacandra (Mars) through the subjugation or eradication of the planet’s three evolutionarily distinct sentient-sapient species—human-like in intelligence but abominably uncanny in form. Fleeing from his English captors and the alien bogies of his imagination, Ransom encounters true “humanity” among indigenous Malacandrians. His idyllic life shatters when his comrades are murdered by classical European colonial invention—an English rifle—and Ransom must face the real monsters at last.

C.S. Lewis’ sometimes troubling relationship between monstrosity and alterity includes an element of prophetic self-critique that is critical to understanding the nature of temptation in *The Screwtape Letters*, the heart of each quest in Narnia, and the technocratic evil of his dystopic writings. This paper draws the line of continuity through his early fiction into his more mature corpus, demonstrating that “I” as the reader will always misunderstand the “other” in Lewis’ speculative universes unless I consider the monster in me.

Alexa Dodge, faculty, Saint Mary’s University, “Digital Monsters: Understanding Boys’ Exposure to Violence & Gore in Digital Spaces”

Teen boys are often portrayed as the “monsters” of the internet, as they are often the ones perpetrating harm against their peers. However, this story does not capture the ways that boys too can be harmed in digital spaces, often at the hands of the algorithms and platforms themselves. Young people, especially boys, are regularly encountering videos of authentic violence (i.e. real depictions of violence that are not from fictional sources such as movies, video games, or AI) on prominent online platforms. This includes videos of self-harm (Stänicke et al., 2025), fist fights and stabbings (Youth Endowment Fund, 2024), sexual violence and abuse (Dodge, 2016), and more. This content is insufficiently moderated, or at times even algorithmically amplified, by many popular social media and messaging platforms, such as Instagram and Discord (eSafety Commissioner, 2022). This presentation will frame the companies that run these platforms as the monsters, analyzing the ways that

boys can be harmed by the platform algorithms and (lack of) safety regulations that result in exposure to authentic violent and gore content.

Moe Fujiwara, MA student, University of Alberta, “Tomie as an Ambivalent Icon: Empowering the Monstrous, Reinforcing the Norm of Beauty.”

The manga *Tomie* (1987-2000), the debut work of Japanese artist Junji Ito, is a popular series adapted into films, TV dramas, and anime. It tells the story of Tomie, a beautiful and immortal girl who repeatedly returns to life after being murdered by men she has captivated. As a figure of the monstrous feminine, Tomie captivates men with her beauty but needs no men and continuously replicates herself endlessly.

This paper focuses on the fact that, in recent years, Tomie has become an object of admiration, particularly among young women in East Asia, especially in Japan and South Korea. Her popularity stems precisely from her monstrous femininity—namely, her relentless pursuit of beauty for her own sake, her unapologetic self-expression, and the persona of a strong and independent woman. This can be seen as a good example of how fans subvert the view of the monstrous feminine.

At the same time, it is crucial that many East Asian women who are fans of Tomie idealize her appearance and aspire to emulate it. Especially on social media, some K-pop idols are often described as “like Tomie,” and makeup tutorials aimed at achieving a Tomie-like appearance are frequently shared. This raises an important tension: while Tomie offers an empowering reclamation of monstrosity, she also risks reinforcing aesthetic norms and creating pressure around how women ought to look. By exploring this ambivalence between subversion and conformity, this paper considers the complex negotiation between empowerment and discipline in the reception of Tomie’s image.

Merrill Greene, faculty, Kingswood University, “Birthing Beelzebub: Possession and Pregnancy in the Judeo-Christian Tradition and Contemporary Film.”

The trope of women becoming pregnant with Satan’s offspring or the Antichrist is a staple of the horror movie genre. Films like *Rosemary’s Baby* (1968), *The Omen* (1976), and more recently *Immaculate* (2024), showcase the bizarre ways that female bodies are taken over by evil entities and controlled by secretive cults for nefarious goals. The idea of women being forcibly impregnated by otherworldly entities is not new. From the Biblical period onward, Jews and Christians held to traditions that supernatural beings could and did conceive children with humans, leading to monstrous hybrid children. In addition to the Nephilim (a group of human-angelic hybrids found in Genesis 6:1-4 and related Jewish texts), Christians during the Early Modern Period believed that women’s wombs swelled due to a possession experience that was interpreted variously as the work of God or demonic powers. This paper looks at how modern horror films have used this historical trope of women

becoming pregnant by malevolent forces to portray and comment on issues of female autonomy and female bodies.

Atticus Hagel, BA student, Saint Mary's University, "The Monstrous-Victim and How to Make One."

Through the lens of Creed's study of women in horror I intend to observe the 2015 Sony video game Bloodborne, a story where the player is a Hunter in a city full of Beasts, with Great Ones lurking overhead. Within the game itself, women are kept as pets, tapped like kegs, and stripped of any and all agency in the name of bringing these Great Ones to Earth to. By looking at three female characters within the game (Arianna, Rom, and Kos) I wish to present a third classification for women as they appear in horror media: victim-as-monster. This specific classification looks at the removal of agency and desire for purity as seen in the woman-as-victim classification, but also looks at the warped realities, monstrous forms, and destruction that comes with the woman-as-monster classification. Creed's proposal that the monstrous-feminine being monstrous due to her abilities to reproduce and seek sexual desire, but also presents the horror that can come with man taking control of those abilities and desires to then use them for himself, thus robbing her of autonomy, turning the monstrous-feminine into the victim-as-monster. With this paper/presentation, I begin to look at women as pawns in the games of hubris played by the dominant characters within video games (often men) and what that can tell us about perspectives of women in real life, and how video games as a constantly changing media can bring about new ways to look at women and feminine and even non-binary identities.

Jodi Hamilton, MA student, Saint Mary's University, "Vampirism and Sexual Desire/Incorporation "

Maddie Hare, PhD candidate, Dalhousie University, "Frankenmetrics: Assembling a scholarly record of monsters."

Monsters in literature, film, mythology, and popular culture do not exclusively exist in these domains; scholarship across disciplines places monsters at the forefront of scholarly inquiry, and entire fields (i.e., Cryptozoology) are dedicated to such investigation. We propose a bibliometric analysis of monsters scholarship showing how the scholarly attention to specific monsters and genres has evolved over time (number of publications), what disciplines study monsters, in what journals monster scholarship is published, who produces this research (authors, institutions, countries). We will use network analysis to map the monsters scholarship landscape and identify topical and authorship communities. This in-progress research may also reveal how monsters inhabit disciplines, time periods, and geographical regions. It may aid other monster researchers who consider scholarly and cultural perceptions

of monsters — often used as symbols and metaphors — and their interaction with societal events.

Jay Heisler, faculty, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, “Mad Studies, art and hallucinations of people becoming monsters”.

This presentation is an attempt to draw from personal experience, and the experience of students, from now six years teaching "Mad Studies" at NSCAD. While I will leave students anonymous and not show their art without their permission, I will use as a jumping off point the fact that several have done artworks about how their friends and family turn into monstrous figures during moments of their own madness. I will relate this to my own time going through an episode in Ottawa, where I believed at the time I witnessed three incidents of someone's face transforming into macabre monstrous figures. One of those people, my very own psychiatrist. I plan to use my lessons from teaching the course to explore ways this can be used in art, and some of the sensitivities involved. For example, I plan to discuss with colleagues what is owed to friends and family when it comes to their turning into monsters in your art -- or in my case, in your writing. Additionally, some of the issues of capitalist exploitation of your experiences, and how it could contribute to the toxic romanticization of so-called mental illness.

Pauline Hoebanx, faculty, Saint Mary's University, “In the Monster's Den: A Feminist Researcher in Antifeminist Terrain.”

How do you study real-life monsters? The political movements, social media communities, or influencers you find detestable, ignorant, infuriating? Antifeminist women's spaces are a monster's den for feminist researchers, yet turning away from the belly of the beast limits our understanding of the global backlash that feminism faces today. Step into antifeminist shoes, and suddenly the figure of the feminist researcher distorts into a monster too: an intruder, a threat poised to twist one's beliefs into a feminist framework. Monstrosity is relational, and polarized digital spaces demand extra ethical labor to collect, interpret, and analyze ideas with care. This paper offers a reflexive framework for feminist researchers venturing into antifeminist online communities. Drawing on netnographic fieldwork in women's manosphere spaces such as Red Pill Women and Femcels, I present guiding questions for three critical stages of fieldwork: entering the field, collecting data, and analyzing findings. The framework focuses on transparency, self-awareness, and situated knowledge. By confronting the those we despise (and those who despise us), the framework helps researchers pick their way through prickly fieldwork. We should not shy away from studying those we hate, but we must acknowledge that we are always someone else's monster.

Julie Hollenbach, faculty, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, “Cat Ladies vs. “Trad” Wives: The 'Stuff' of Femininity Made Monstrous & Toxic (white) Femininity.”

This presentation explores how domestic material culture (such as handicrafting) is central to the construction of fake and real feminine “monsters” alike in popular culture; the two examples explored here are the recurrent trope of the Cat Lady and the contemporary phenomenon of “Trad” wives. The presentation juxtaposes the much-maligned fictional trope of the Cat Lady with the very real community of influencers who brand themselves “trad” (short for traditional) wives to critically engage the domesticity central to popular representations of femininity and how those representations can be instructive. Here, the Cat Lady archetype is unpacked as a cautionary tale about the childless spinster made monstrous by her unfulfilled drive toward maternity and forsaken for her betrayal of the nation and the race. And “Trad” wife culture is explored for its adherence to and promotion of traditional gender roles, traditional family values, and patriotic pride in community and nation. The presentation proposes a queer recovery of the Cat Lady, while critiquing the white supremacy and toxic femininity core to the enshrinement of maternity within “Trad” wife culture and rhetoric.

Mariah Hudec, faculty, Cape Breton University, ““Don’t your parents mind you being out so late?”: Vulnerability, Agency, and Safeguarding Children in R.L. Stine’s *Welcome to Dead House*.”

How did medieval English laws, hagiography, court records, as well as medical and ecclesiastical texts view sexual non-consent? How did laws and popular culture use a literal body of proof for the crime of raptus? And in turn, how did medieval English culture victimize perpetrators of sexual violence?

This paper explores the theme of rape and monstrosity as discussed in my monograph, *Representations of Rape and Consent in Medieval English Laws and Literature* (Arc Humanities Press, 2024). In this book I scrutinize medieval English understandings of rape, (non-)consent, and the assumed mind-body dichotomy of rapists and rape victims. I demonstrate how laws, trial records, popular romance, and ecclesiastic and medical texts defined sexual consent and non-consent, and the monstrous consequences of such ideologies.

In this paper I will discuss the bodily victimization of both rapists and rape victims in diverse primary source material from twelfth to fourteenth-century England. I will demonstrate how the bodily victimization of perpetrators of sexual violence was legally condemned, and yet societally pitied, meanwhile the bodily victimization of survivors of sexual violence was legislated against. The perceived internal conflict between one’s “monstrous” desires and their “rational” mind will be analyzed to demonstrate how medieval England positioned rapists as more monstrous than human and yet, pitied them for their own crimes. Overall, this paper will focus on the connections between the physical body, the crime of rape, the rational mind, and the monstrosity of rapists in medieval English legal, medical, and cultural discourses.

Syed Adnan Hussain, faculty, Saint Mary's University, "When Fire Bakes Clay: The "Monstrous" hybrid of a Jinn and Human and their real-world consequence in Islamic Law and society."

The Jinn are beings made from fire, before humans, mentioned explicitly in the Qur'an (e.g. Q15:27). They exist on the boundaries of the visible world and the invisible world (al ghayb) and are therefore a conduit between the many realms of creation (Q1:2). In the Islamic legal tradition, the fact of their existence makes possible love, marriage, and progeny. In the modern day these hybrid children (zuhri) are identified by heterochromia, special marks in the eyes or the palms and are frequently stolen and trafficked by those hunting for treasure as detailed in sensational news stories from Algeria and Morocco. They feature prominently in fantastic literature from the Arabian Nights to Ms. Marvel and are profoundly disruptive of human categories in line with Cohen's thesis of monster culture (Cohen, 1996). But they also challenge Cohen's classification as the Islamic model contemplates integration where they are considered full participants in our society, and they can even profess Islam. This paper explores this history of these "monstrous" hybrids and the ways they materially challenge the boundaries of the human. In addition, I will speak to how their existence makes possible an ethic for love and tolerance in our xenophobic times.

Zea Jones, MA student, Saint Mary's University, "I Will Eat Me Alive: Trans Desire and Cannibalism."

Through cannibalism, the boundary of flesh becomes obsolete. You are no longer forced to understand your existence as it relates to the other, or even the self, as they collapse into each other through the intimate process of consumption. It reshapes what it means to be human, and to embody that humanness. Cannibalism manages to reframe your body into something more than a social vessel, encouraging an almost idolatrous relationship in which the individual is worshiping the very nature of flesh, blood, and bone. This paper considers trans identity in light of cannibalistic desire, taking literal and metaphorical eating as a form of survival, eroticism, and identity-formation, particularly in the consumption and re-consumption of human flesh.

Adam Jortner, faculty, Auburn University & Acadia Divinity School, "What Demons Are: Salem Witchcraft, Monsters, and US History."

Salem witchcraft stands out in the American imagination. Its terrors have been traced to religious extremism, economic inequality, and drug use, among other things. Yet these historiographies focus on social dynamics, not the actual content of belief. The prevailing notion in American historiography is that demons are irrational and premodern, and therefore ahistorical and not worth considering.

In fact, the opposite is true: the 1692-93 witch trials explicitly turned on a changed understanding of the nature of demons and the physical powers of demonic agents. The trials were an argument about monsters, and cannot be understood without it.

This paper explores the contested aspects of the monstrous in 1692 Salem, with specific attention to rival schools of demonology present. The concept of spectral evidence (a key component of Salem) derived from Cotton Mather's thinking on the Blakulla trials of Sweden in 1671. Salem's courts built their convictions on a Swedish understanding of demons. The trials ended when a series of other ministers prevailed on the governor to reassess how demons worked, not an outcry over the existence of demons.

This paper reviews the demonologies of Salem as laid out in the writings of ministers and in the court documents. It explains the chronology of the trials as a chronology of changed thinking about the monstrous, and suggests that monstrosity is central to a wide array of American historical topics, and that social and economic histories ignore it at their peril.

Kharnie Keddy-Clark, BA student, Saint Mary's University, "Teratophilia."

There has always existed a fear of the grotesque and monstrous, from which numerous tales, horror and death-filled, sprung. But alongside this fear also exists an attraction. Just as many would run from a beast there are also those who would run towards it, as if pulled by invisible strings. Now the fear is understandable; monsters are meant to be frightening and deadly. But what about the attraction? What is it that draws some people in, despite knowing a monster would most likely rip them apart or eat them alive? And why has this attraction begun gaining momentum, particularly amongst women and those in the queer community?

The attraction to monsters is known as teratophilia, the word coming from the Ancient Greek 'teras' for 'monster' and 'philia' for 'love'. This paraphilia is often associated with hybristophilia, attraction to criminals, usually murderers, and xenophilia, attraction to aliens. Teratophilia has existed for a long time, gaining more recognition which is reflected in the types of media that have been coming out in recent years. For example, *A Court of Thorns and Roses*, written by Sarah J. Maas, includes romantic and sexual relationships with fae, or faeries, and has become quite popular amongst primarily women since its release in 2015.

In this proposed presentation I will be seeking to answer these questions, delving into trends, stories, and various media throughout history, along with the possible psychological and sociological aspects that could be coming into play.

Sailaja Krishnamurti, faculty, Queen's University, "Intestines Hang from her Teeth: Cannibalism, Midwifery, and Vengeance in the Periyachi Goddess tradition."

Periyachi is a Tamil 'village' deity whose devotees are largely Hindus in the South Asian diaspora, primarily in Singapore, the Caribbean, and South Africa. Periyachi is honoured in these global locations but is not well-known in India. Periyachi is revered as the protector of new babies and new mothers. At Periyachi shrines, parents of newborn babies leave offerings of meat and other gifts. They pray to Periyachi to protect babies from evil and illness. Before she was a goddess, it is said, she was once a highly respected and very learned mortal, a brilliant midwife and healer.

At her temples, statues of Periyachi present a fearsome, monstrous image: she is usually shown seated, with her feet upon a man's corpse. In her lap lies a woman's corpse with a gaping belly wound, as Periyachi's hands are pulling her intestines into her mouth. In Periyachi's other hands she holds various weapons, a bowl of blood, and the body of a new-born baby.

In this paper, I discuss the folk narratives of Periyachi as a cannibal goddess and protector of children. What does a feminist reading of the Periyachi story tell us about childbirth, male violence, and women's revenge?

Daphna Levit, independent scholar / artist, "The Memory Monster - a play written by Daphna Levit."

Inspired by a book entitled *The Memory Monster* by Yishai Sarid (Am Oved, 2017), this is a short play set in 2025, about the creation of human soldier monsters. The book focused on the successful exploitation of collective memory for a narrative with specific political and nationalistic ends. Today in much of the world the lines between factual truth and ideology are becoming increasingly blurred and technology provides accessible tools to manufacture belief and consent. The monsters we currently have the ability to design are more threatening and more insidious than past fictional conceptions. This play dramatizes the horrific potential for motivation and manipulation by demons devised for pragmatic amoral conquests.

Torrin Maag, MA student, Atlantic School of Theology, "Playing in the Deep; or, Why the Leviathan is Not Evil, She's Just Misunderstood."

Readers of the Bible have often interpreted the leviathan allegorically as a representation of chaos, death, competing gods, or even Satan. More broadly, the Leviathan is an evil force which God must overcome. These allegorical interpretations rely on the seemingly common-sense impression that the Leviathan is a big evil monster. After all, it has teeth like swords and breathes fire!

However, a close reading of the book of Job demonstrates quite clearly that while the leviathan is dangerous, it is not evil. In fact, I argue that evil does not exist anywhere within the God's creation as presented by the Job-poet. Humanity is the central source of violence within the text; a violence which cannot overcome this pinnacle of God's creation. By understanding the Leviathan as a creature among creatures that

provides a limitation on humanity's control, we might better capture the Job-poet's vision of humanity's place in creation.

Ashley MacKinnon, Staff, Saint Mary's University, "Power in Death: Female Ghosts from the *Hanamichi* to the Silver Screen"

Japan boasts a vast array of spirits and beliefs surrounding them. While tales of *kami*, *yōkai/bakemono*, and *yūrei* have always held a significant place in Japanese culture, the Edo Period saw an explosion of interest in ghosts and all things otherworldly. Ghosts and *yōkai* became popular subjects for *ukiyo-e* prints as well as *bunraku*, *rakugo*, and *kabuki* theatre. The genre of *kaidanshū* or horror literature was in high demand, with *hyakumonogatari kaidankai*—social gatherings devoted to the telling of ghost stories—driving the creation of even more supernatural narratives.

This paper will explore ghost stories featuring female *onryō*, or vengeful spirits, as they were portrayed in *kabuki* theatre, focusing on *Banchō Sarayashiki* and *Yotsuya Kaidan*. The *onryō* in these two plays became so influential that they continue to appear in new forms in modern cinema. By situating these *kabuki* representations within their cultural and historical contexts, this paper illuminates how Edo-period anxieties surrounding gender, morality, and social change have persisted across centuries. The continued reinvention of the *onryō* in modern media underscores the enduring power of Japan's ghostly imagination—revealing the supernatural not merely as spectacle, but as a narrative medium through which enduring questions of justice, agency, and social constraint are expressed.

Lindsay Macumber, faculty, Saint Mary's University, "Witches who eat Kids: An Inspirational Motif."

This paper explores the complexities, tensions, and potentials of reclaiming tropes associated with witches and witchcraft in contemporary discourse and popular culture and invites reclamation of the child cannibal trope. Drawing on the work of Sylvia Federici and Barbara Creed, I argue that the satirical foundation of this trope (I do not, in fact, advocate eating children), makes the child cannibal witch a site not only of subversion, identity, and community, but also of revolt. Though originally constructed to police women into motherhood within a capitalistic system, while also constructing the mother as abject in patriarchal society, reclamation of this trope makes space for rethinking motherhood and child-bearing in an inclusive way and inspires monstrous response and revolt against the policing of reproductive rights in our current political climate.

Noah Marshall, BA student, Saint Mary's University, "Crip Monstrosity: Disability and Fear as Politics."

I argue that monstrosity evolves in tandem with sociopolitical anxieties, and that disabled and trans/queer bodies are often made monstrous to reflect cultural fears.

From the hunchback or the asylum inmate in Gothic narratives, to propaganda images like the 1917 poster *Destroy This Mad Brute*, to filmic villains coded as disabled or gender-deviant, the monstrous body has long stood in for instability, excess, and threat.

Emma Martel, staff, King's College, "Doctor Vampire: Medicalization as Body Horror."

The representation of medicine in late Victorian vampire stories indicates a gendered distrust of exclusionary medical advancements. Mary Elizabeth Braddon's "Good Lady Ducayne" establishes a specifically medical vampire which raises issues of medical consent. Braddon writes from a period when medicalization of the female body had been firmly established and medical control over female bodies was being exerted through new technology. The topic of medical consent and control is one that plays out in Braddon's story through both the transfusions and the inclusion of chloroform as a sedative. The issue of consent also ties into the way transfusions are depicted in *Dracula*, where they become more sexual in nature. Lucy is an object of desire who receives transfusions from a series of suitors who compare their transfusions to marriage or sex. She undergoes a pseudo-insemination through the transfusions she receives. Comparing the two texts, there is a shared concern about medicine mistreating or exploiting female bodies. This theme comes out in *Dracula* through Stoker's treatment of his female characters, but it is even more poignant when considering *Dracula* in conjunction with Braddon's "Good Lady Ducayne", where a female author writes a literal medical vampire as the novel's monster.

Fred Mason, faculty, University of New Brunswick, "From Saving Grace to Violated Space – Baseball in Stephen King."

Stephen King's love of baseball is well known. He wrote editorials and letters about baseball in the *Bangor Daily News* many times. His essay "Head Down," about his son's Little League state championship team, ran in the *New Yorker* and was selected for Best American Sport Writing in 1991. King's baseball obsessions got full vent in *Faithful*, the memoir of the Red Sox's 2004 championship season, cowritten with Stewart O'Nan. In *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* (1999), baseball features as the "saving grace" for Trisha McFarlane when she is lost in the woods for nine days. In more recent fiction however, baseball is a space of normality and joy violated by murder, monsters and other horrors. After a break-through season, catcher Billy Blakely (*Blockade Billy*, 2010) is revealed as an imposter and flies into a murderous rage. In *A Face in the Crowd* (2012), Dean Evers begins to see people in the crowd at Rays games on TV, who he knows are dead. He eventually ends up at the game himself, "doomed to baseball." *The Outsider* (2018) opens at a baseball game, with the shockingly public arrest of Little League coach Terry Maitland for the brutal murder and sexual assault of a local child. In these works, baseball as a place for fandom and community is juxtaposed against creeping tension, psychosis, and

supernatural evil. For later King, baseball is a violated space, a place of good things and good people that serves to accentuate the bad as it happens.

Geoff McCormack, faculty, Saint Thomas University, “East of Eden: Monsters, Mind, and the Dialectics of Change.”

In this paper, I read the biblical cherub guarding Eden through the lens of monster theory. Like the monster, the cherub defies binary categories and conventional ways of seeing. In Genesis, it appears at the east of the Garden of Eden with a flaming sword, guarding access to the Tree of Life. In Ezekiel, its four faces, multiple wings, and countless eyes overwhelm the observer and exhaust conceptual frameworks. These depictions situate the cherub in the realm of the monstrous. It is ambiguous, excessive, and resistant to simple classification. Drawing on the work of Jeffrey Cohen and Timothy Beal, I interpret the cherub symbolically as a gateway to nondual consciousness, in which opposites are preserved in a higher unity. Paradise, in this reading, represents an awareness prior to the fall into duality and alienation. The cherub stands at the threshold of this consciousness. Confronting its monstrous form precipitates the dissolution of conventional subject-object distinctions, thereby preparing the way to Paradise as a nonbinary way of seeing and experiencing reality.

Jodi McDavid & Stephan Mentore, faculty/staff, Cape Breton University, “Sexuality and Systems in *Sinners*.”

Ryan Coogler's *Sinners* (2025) has entranced audiences with its intertwining of genres and complex, layered symbolism. The theme of temptation runs throughout *Sinners*; the temptation of power, music, and adultery. Its portrayal of gender, sexuality, religion, and last but not least, vampires has caused extensive online discussion. Using gore and the genre of horror the director explores other horrific details of the black experience in the 1930s in the Mississippi Delta, bringing them forward to new audiences through playing with the genre of horror.

There are three classes of monsters in *Sinners*: vampires, the KKK, and the system of colonization itself. The name of the movie itself is complicated; one may assume the main characters are the sinners, trying to enjoy what meagre time they have free from various forms of oppression, exploitation and segregation in forms that the church, prohibition, and other systems would not approve of. But the true *Sinners* are the colonizers, or those who have benefitted from their systems (like the KKK), both from the perspective of the main characters, but also from the perspective of the Irish, the unlikely vampires of this film.

We will explore how this film presents race, religion, sexuality and monsters, how it fits in the cannon of vampire films, especially those that portray vampires as people of colour (such as *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (2014), and *Blade* (1998) and how this portrayal allows for a circumvention of audience's expectations as well as an opportunity for previously oppressed people to obtain power.

Beth O'Brien, MA student, Mount Saint Vincent University, "Monsters and Demons: Affect, Neurodivergence, and Buffy the Vampire Slayer's Anya."

I will explore monstrosity through affect and normativity by looking at the character Anya from the TV series Buffy the Vampire Slayer. I will examine how, through her non-normative affective expressions, she could be considered autistic-coded.

Ariana Patey, faculty, University of Prince Edward Island, "'Absurd, Race-Crazed Monster': Monstrosity, Horror and Transformation in the Catholic Alt-Right."

Like the leviathan housed in the fathomless sea, monsters abound on the internet. The dark arts of the virtual landscape are said to exert a siren call to the young and vulnerable. If enough time is spent there, a disastrous transformation can occur, and the youth is lost forever. These stories of transformation and loss are often violent and are told both inside and outside of the internet. The mirror to the tales told by anxious (and equally internet-dependent) members of the mainstream is exemplified by Legio Christi, a Catholic alt-right group. The alt-right is an amorphous, internet based, racialized opposition to liberal ideals. Made up primarily of young men, members of the alt-right believe they have been "red pillled," transformed by the discovery that modern (western) society is composed of lies designed to enslave and manipulate them. In Legio Christi, this new understanding of the world is given cosmic weight by their religiosity, transforming the everyday into a war between good and supernatural monstrosity. The group carefully constructs their mythology wherein the world is one of frightening depravity and horror. They repeat it amongst themselves to fortify their members and reinforce their self-understanding as participants in the salvation of the world against outside accusations of monstrosity.

Emmett Paul, BA student, Dalhousie University, "Going Viral: Lycanthropy, AIDS, and Popular Media."

This article argues that J.K. Rowling's use of werewolves in the Harry Potter universe is meant to act as a stand-in for the depiction of queer men – specifically gay men living with HIV/AIDS. The monstrous nature of the lycanthropy virus is made synonymous with the debilitating effects of HIV on the human body. Furthermore, the social repercussions of contracting either virus are nearly identical. In pushing this association, Rowling is contributing to an ongoing pattern of harmful depictions of non-normative sexual identities in popular media under the guise of "representation". In addition, the enormous popularity of this franchise allows for a far-reaching influence that encourages the continued villainization of queer people. Using a mixture of queer theory and film analysis, the article calls to attention the lack of proper queer representation in the series, the harmful connotations of the established connection, and the real-world impact it has on the queer community.

Dan Phillips & Sarah West, faculty, Saint Mary's University, "The Unholy Trinity: Vampires, Zombies, and Copyright Law."

Vampires, Zombies, Ghouls – all these terrifying beings __draw the crowd in__. What of the dark presence that will have you __screaming out to the hills__? Consider Copyright Law.

This presentation examines how copyright frameworks have played a considerable role that both constrain and inspire the creation of monsters on screen. Through a series of case studies, Sarah West and Dan Phillips will explore scenarios where Copyright has shaped the lore and design of monster mythos. Sometimes it is Abby Normal's intellect behind intellectual property, and other times the monster's crypt lies within the public domain. Attendees will leave with a looming sense of how copyright acts as an unseen force in shaping the monsters we know.

Martha Radice & Kathleen Daly, faculty / PhD candidate, Dalhousie University, "Why Monsters, why Now? The Rise of the Maraude des Monstres in New-wave Carnival in New Orleans."

In 2022, a new 'underground' night parade appeared on the new-wave carnival scene in New Orleans: the Maraudes des Monstres, or Monsters Parade. Artist Henry Lipkis and friends founded it with the idea that everybody in the parade would costume as monsters, with "NO HUMANS ALLOWED," as the posters insisted, even as spectators. Since then, the parade has drawn ever larger crowds of monsters to maraud through the Bywater neighbourhood—though some humans do sneak in. Drawing on our long-term ethnography of carnival in New Orleans, and specifically on an in-depth interview with Lipkis and participant observation in the Monsters Parade, our paper explores its remarkable popularity. Why monsters, why now? With the help of monster theory, we identify several salient interpretations. Even though pre-Lenten carnivals often conjure up the grotesque body in their excess, monsters can still be a subversive contingent, as they defy expectations to look pretty or polished (especially for women). Monsters appeal also as performance because they are a way to shed one's human skin and channel primal or non-verbal expression. Finally, as an underground parade with no official city permit, the Monsters Parade is a political mobilization, though its anarchistic aspirations may be trammelled by the context of urban gentrification and its aura of exclusivity. That said, the monsters are clearly scratching an itch. Monsters come out to play in monstrous times.

Rubina (Ruby) Ramji, faculty, Cape Breton University, "Djinn and Ghouls: The Islamic Monstrous in Hollywood Horror Films."

The concept of the Djinn, taken from Islamic folklore, was seen as the Hollywood genie, an emasculated mythical figure trapped in a lamp, forced to fulfill the desires of capitalist society. These early "Arabian Nights" themed films, starting in the 1940s, often replicated the comedic discourse of Djinn as secularized genies, but by the

early 1980s, the genie has become malevolent. Aladdin-and-the-genie tales have been replaced by sinister beings in Hollywood horror films: djinn portrayals, based on Arabic folklore and Qur'anic depictions, have now evolved into monstrous, satanic creatures – from Islam – that stand in opposition to the western world. This paper will examine the way Djinn, and Muslims have been, and are now, portrayed in western made films over the past eighty years.

Geneviève Richer, independent scholar, “Naked as Sin: An Exploration of Abjection and The Monstrous Feminine in The VVitch.”

This paper explores the 2016 Robert Eggers film The VVitch through the lens of Creed's theory of the Monstrous Feminine paired along with Kristeva's theory of Abjection. It will mainly focus on the portrayal of the character of Thomasin and her relationship to sin, monstrosity, weakness, and desirability by way of her blossoming femininity. I will explore her role within her family in the story by way of religious and cultural context, paired with analyses of the physical storytelling. Exploring the use of colour, saturation, and sound alongside the textual storytelling I will discuss how she embodies the transition from innocence to sin and abjection.

Neil Robertson, faculty, King' College, “Monsters in Hell: Monsters as Marking the Logic of Dante's Inferno.”

This paper will look at the role of various monsters as marking important transitions in the structure of Dante's Inferno. Dante uses monsters as “warnings” (from the latin monere) to symbolize various stages in the descent of Hell. This paper will read Inferno as an allegory of the ethical self-destruction of the soul. The various monsters in it mark the stages of this destruction by providing mythic and symbolic precision to each stage. The paper will consider Minos, Cerebus, Medusa, Geryon and Satan among others in portraying that psychological descent.

Marie-Anne Sergent, MA student, Saint Mary's University, “Neuroqueering the Supernatural: An Exploration into Gothic Narratives of Madness and Queerness.”

I argue that the production and consumption of Gothic literature can contribute to deepening our understanding of madness and queerness, and can be a helpful tool for writing or reading about trauma creatively.

Nadine Sures, Performance artist and MFA candidate, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, “Rose the Vampire: An Autoethnography.”

Rose the Vampire's Autoethnography is a 20-minute performance-lecture in which my “vampire self”, a semi-fictional character, shares her autoethnography with the audience. Rose will be reading the prose, demonstrating typical vampire behaviour, showing a short excerpt from an experimental vampire film in which she stars (shot at the abandoned Nova Scotia Textiles Factory in Windsor) and answering questions. As part of my ongoing MFA thesis research, I have constructed a red vampire costume

inspired by traditional transcarpathian Ukrainian motifs, that Rose will wear during the presentation.

Here is a short excerpt of the auto ethnographic writing:

“The sun shone too bright in Saskatchewan. Although it could get very cold, I found days with sun dogs the most difficult to withstand. I got to hiding in my closet with the orange and red 70’s wallpaper on the base board. Afraid of the monsters in the daytime sky and what I describe as the airplane feeling.

I was always fed by others. I never learned to kill. When I would get hungry, I would run into my sister’s room while her friends were over and would exhibit myself in the window, perched on the window sill, my butt to the room, front side naked to the street.

Or I would perform at parties in the living room, dancing diabolically to jazz trombone tunes on the record player; toes brushing the bushy brown carpet, audience comfortably tucked into the tacky plaid sofa, pleading to mom and dad for blood.”

Spencer Vallis, BA student, Saint Mary’s University, “Queer Amongst the Fog: Monsters, Marginalization, and Belonging in Rural Atlantic Canada.”

In rural Atlantic Canada, queer life can feel like living at the edge of the map - half in the light, half in the fog, and always a little bit mythical to the communities that watch from ashore. Queer identities are often cast as “monstrous” within the heteronormative, small-community contexts of rural Atlantic Canada. This paper seeks to explore the existence of queer life within local cultural narratives, whilst drawing on Jeffrey Cohen’s 7 theses of monster theory. In this paper, I treat the queer “monster” not as something to be ostracized, but as a “tidal creature”, shaped by isolation, weather, and the pull of elsewhere. Through examining oral histories, media portrayals, and drawing from regional folklore, I argue that the monstrous queer offers a paradoxical kind of home: a place where otherness becomes a source of power, kinship, and creative resistance. In rural Atlantic regions, monsters don’t just haunt the shores they live, but they find belonging, reshape the shoreline and refuse to be washed away. This analysis of rural Atlantic Canadian queer life treats the queer “monster” not as a figure to be feared or assimilated, but as a presence that challenges dominant narratives of belonging and identity.

Megan Wennberg, independent filmmaker, “Bloody Mess - short animated documentary.”

Bloody Mess is a short, animated documentary.

When documentary filmmaker Megan Wennberg’s period went nuts, she thought her Uterus was out for revenge because she was almost 40 and hadn’t given it a baby. But it turned out she had fibroids. Bloody Mess follows Megan and her Uterus (voiced

by actor Susan Kent) on their harrowing but darkly funny journey through the medical system to try and stop the bleeding.

“A raw, satirical take on menstrual stigma, “Bloody Mess” turns a taboo into animated liberation, balancing personal anecdotes with educational bite. It’s advocacy through absurdism: accessible, memorable and necessary.”

- Jamie Lang, Variety