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Making Space at the Queer Intersections of Sex and Gender

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in Contemporary Transgender Short Fiction

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# The Outsider's Space In-Between: Renegotiating Monstrosity in Contemporary Transgender Short Fiction

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## **Abstract**

The image of trans monstrosity has been firmly anchored in mainstream North American popular culture, most notably through films such as *Psycho*, *Dressed to Kill*, and *The Silence of the Lambs*. This cultural vilification has had catastrophic effects on trans communities, stoking violence especially against trans-feminine people, promoting discrimination, and severely affecting trans people's self-images. By analysing two contemporary short stories, Julian K. Jarboe's *I Am A Beautiful Bug!* and A.K. Blue's *God Empress Susanna*, this paper examines different approaches to the monster trope from trans perspectives and investigates the entanglements between trans identity, monstrosity, and disability.

**Keywords:** trans identity; trans monstrosity; transgender short fiction

In June of 1993, at an interdisciplinary conference on rage at California State University, San Marcos, trans historian Susan Stryker appeared at the podium dressed in what she calls 'genderfuck drag', a black lace bodysuit covered by threadbare jeans and a cut-up Transgender Nation t-shirt, combat boots, a pink triangle pendant and a six-inch fishing hook around her neck, her biker jacket, complete with handcuffs and various queer patches, displayed at her panel seat (Stryker, 1996, p. 196). She proceeded to perform a monologue in which she aligns herself with the monster of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and expresses her rage at having to experience struggle and marginalisation due to the transphobic society that is the United States. At this time, Stryker had just finished her PhD and begun transitioning (*Screaming Queens*, 2005); three decades later,

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she is often considered one of the mothers of trans studies, and one of the most, if not *the* most, recognized scholars in the field. The essay Stryker wrote based on her monologue *My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix*, not only marked the beginnings of a tradition of trans scholars and creators reclaiming the trans monster trope, but is also credited with unleashing a shift within the then emergent field of transgender studies, inspiring work that presupposed a transgender speaking subject instead of trans individuals as the object of medical study (Sanders, 2019). Besides blessing readers with mental imagery of Stryker despising self-ascribed feminists who call trans lesbianism ‘mutilated perversion’ and trans women freaks and deformities, “roar[ing] gleefully away from it all like a Harley-straddling, dildo-packing leatherdyke from hell” (Stryker, 1996, p. 198), *My Words* is also the second-most read work of Duke University’s *A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* (Sanders, 2019).

In the introductory notes to *My Words*, Stryker (1996, p. 195) recalls being involved with actions of the advocacy group Transgender Nation to obstruct the 1993 annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association in San Francisco. One of the more recent examples of trans scholars who followed in Stryker’s footsteps did so in more than one way: In 2019, philosopher Paul B. Preciado (2021, p. 13) delivered a speech at the 49<sup>th</sup> Study Day of the École de la Cause Freudienne, for which 3,500 psychoanalysts had congregated at the Palais des Congrès in Paris to discuss the role of women in their field. Preciado (2021, p. 19) sharply criticised his audience for continuing to uphold outdated and harmful ideologies on sex, gender, and sexuality. This time, however, the rage was more palpable on the other side of the pulpit, as members of the auditorium began disrupting his speech with shouts and laughter to the point where he was unable to finish (Preciado, 2021, p. 15). One year later, in 2020, Preciado published *Je suis un monstre qui vous parle* as the full paper he would have liked to present at the conference, and in 2021, the text was translated to English with the title *Can the Monster Speak?* by Frank Wynne.

As Stryker identifies with Frankenstein's monster and calls to reclaim transphobic imagery of monstrosity in order to dispel its harm, Preciado (2021, p. 19) invokes Franz Kafka's *A Report to An Academy*, in which an ape compares human subjectivity to a metal-barred cage in front of a gathering of scientists and positions himself as a monstrous speaking subject:

And so, it is from the position assigned to me by you as a mentally ill person that I address you, an ape-human in a new era. I am the monster who speaks to you. The monster you have created with your discourse and your clinical practices. I am the monster who gets up from the analyst's couch and dares to speak, not as a patient, but as a citizen, as your monstrous equal.

Preciado continues Stryker's performative reclamation of an outsider status, a monster status, speaking to a gathering of insiders that have harmed them, assuming a position of agency and subjecthood.

The conceptualisations of the monster, the inside, and the outside deserve further attention here. On first glance, Stryker and Preciado's texts seem to reinforce binary structures of inclusion and exclusion: the transgender monster versus the cisgender human, the marginalised outsider versus the dominant insider. Looking closer, however, these binaries are not so clear-cut. After all, materially, both Stryker and Preciado are undoubtedly humans – at the same time, they assert their positionality as trans *and* human, trans *and* monstrous, monstrous *and* human. They claim an in-between space between the inside and outside, incorporating elements from both realms into their beings and assertions as such. Building on theories by Michel Foucault and José Esteban Muñoz, I posit that this in-between space can be made particularly fruitful for resistance towards dominant insides – perhaps even more fruitful than the assumption of a complete outsider stance. However, this in-between space is still rife with contradictions. Two contemporary trans short stories exemplify the different negotiations of inside, outside, in-between, and the role of monstrosity in all three especially well: Julian K. Jarboe's *I Am A Beautiful Bug!* (2020) and A.K. Blue's *God Empress Susanna* (2017). Through my analysis of these narratives, I argue that, in

some cases, an escape to the outside might be necessary instead of remaining in the instability of the in-between, and that the in-between can also be stifling rather than empowering. In the end, the question remains: who can reclaim monstrosity, from which positionality, and how?

In Stryker's and Preciado's texts, as well as in the two short stories examined in this essay, monstrosity is firmly tied to corporeality. Stryker (1996, p. 196) connects transphobic uses of Frankenstein's monster as a metaphor for trans bodies to the cultural conception of trans bodies as unnatural, "the product of medical science," "a technological construction," "flesh torn apart and sewn together again in a shape other than that in which it was born." Preciado (2021, p. 29) recounts being contemptuously gendered as female early in his transition, even though he already sported a beard and a moustache, and people then insulting him behind his back. In the short stories, the protagonists' bodies are animalistic, even though they continue to exhibit human consciousness and move through the world as a human would. In Jarboe's *I Am A Beautiful Bug!*, the protagonist has always wanted to be a gigantic insect and finally has their wish for full-body reconstructive surgery granted, while Blue's protagonist Susanna is stuck in the body of an earthworm because the government funding for her transitioning programme ran out. Whether bodily human or not, all four examples straddle the boundaries between human and non-human, between "natural" and constructed, between beautiful and frightening. Their bodies become the site where dominant insider and marginalised outsider perspectives clash.

The straddling of boundaries and clashing of meanings can be understood within the concept of the grotesque. As Justin Edwards and Rune Graulund (2013, pp. 39-40) write, "monstrosity and grotesquerie merge in the hybrid forms that disrupt the borders separating what is acceptable within the categories of 'human' and 'non-human.'" The grotesque eludes fixed meaning and stable grounds of interpretation, "there can be no certainty, no exclusive or permanent state of something which does not already contain within it something else" (Edwards and

Graulund, 2013, p. 3). Similarly, the monstrous body is “a site where meaning is made” (Long, 2012, p. 205), as opposed to a site where meaning is found. The monster becomes a cultural canvas for societal fears and anxieties, but also desires and fantasies (Cohen, 1996, p. 4). The simultaneous existence of contradictory elements within the same phenomenon is what makes the monster and the grotesque threatening to binary, stable structures that seek to affirm normalcy.

Edwards and Graulund (2013, p. 6) describe a phenomenon of the uncanny grotesque, building on Peter Stallybrass and Allison White’s conceptualization of “a liminal form of the grotesque that is not monstrous Other, but that emerges as a ‘boundary phenomenon of hybridization or inmixing, in which the self and the other become enmeshed in an inclusive, heterogeneous, dangerously unstable zone.’” Implicated in this liminal form is Sigmund Freud’s concept of the uncanny as a fear that derives from something being both alien and familiar at the same time, as well as Julia Kristeva’s notion of abjection, in which an Other simultaneously and oddly mirrors the Self (Edwards and Graulund, 2013, p. 6). Stryker, Preciado, the bug protagonist, and Susanna can all be read as liminal, uncanny grotesque bodies, as they mesh elements of humanness, animality, and gender which are familiar to the dominant inside on their own, but become grotesque, uncanny, and frightening when combined.

Due to this mixing, all four figures cannot be completely discarded as monstrous outsiders. Instead, they seem to inhabit an in-between space between inside and outside. Edwards and Graulund (2013, p. 10) point to the opportunities that arise from this in-between space, as the grotesque “can also be harnessed as a powerful force to resist the tools of normalisation” by challenging “notions of normality in favour of conceptualising and recognizing broader varieties of being.” Further, I understand the in-between through Michel Foucault’s theories on discourse and José Esteban Muñoz’s concept of disidentification. Concerning the relations between power and discourse, Foucault (1978, p. 100) writes that discourse cannot be conceived as a binary, as “a world of

discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies.” Discourses thus always connect with each other in multiple different ways, and I read these connective spaces as in-betweens, where different meanings clash and overlap, where opposites can be true at the same time, where incongruencies and instabilities are created. As Edwards and Graulund read the grotesque as a tool for resistance, Foucault (1978, p. 101) points to a similar nature of discourse: “Discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy.” In examining discourses on outsides, insides, and monstrosities, the connectives between them all become the stumbling-blocks and the points of resistance.

The in-between is also implicated in Muñoz’s (1999, p. 4) concept of disidentification, which he describes as a strategy for survival utilised by minority subjects in order to counter a majoritarian pressure towards conformity. Muñoz (1999, p. 11) bases this concept on Michel Pêcheux’s theory about subject formation through ideology, in which Pêcheux describes three modes: identification, counteridentification, and disidentification. According to Muñoz (1999, p. 11), the importance of disidentification lies in the fact that it forgoes both the assimilation and acceptance implicit in identification as well as the danger of inadvertently confirming majoritarian ideology’s dominance through counteridentification. Instead, disidentification offers the opportunity for transforming the majoritarian ideology from the inside and making its logics expedient for outside resistance at the same time (Muñoz, 1999, p. 12). Specifically, this transformation “scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message’s universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications” (Muñoz, 1999, p. 31). Muñoz (1999, p. 31) characterises disidentification as a process that does not stop at

deconstructing dominant culture but takes things a step further by reconstructing its elements in favour of empowering a marginalised outside. Disidentification can thus become a strategy to consciously occupy the connectives, the in-betweens, of different discourses, to refuse being folded into dominant insides and instead use inside elements to challenge, subvert, and ultimately transform the inside itself.

In *I Am A Beautiful Bug!* and *God Empress Susanna*, the protagonists are both initially positioned in an in-between space and have to resist the societal, or insider, backlash they receive due to this positionality. At the beginning of the story, the narrator in *I Am A Beautiful Bug!* undergoes full-body reconstructive surgery to become a large insect. They travel to Canada for the procedure, recover well and are mesmerised by their new body: six legs, long antennae, a shell with stripes and dots, pneumatic joints, and wings (Jarboe, 2020, pp. 186-188). Very soon, however, they run into a string of problems that begins with detainment at the U.S. border due to their ID photo not matching their current embodiment and their documents thus being confiscated; continues with their bank account being frozen due to their lack of ID, them not being able to update their ID at the Registry of Motor Vehicles because they lack a medical confirmation attesting to the necessity of their transition; trouble at their job due to the number of sick days they had to take in order to try and update their documentation; and, finally, the loss of their apartment due to the landlord being convinced of an infestation (Jarboe, 2020, pp. 189-196). In sum, the protagonist is stuck in the space in between human and bug, deliberately hindered from participating in human society as a bug, and thus kept in stasis.

While the bug's positionality as in-between is not at all freeing or productive, the narrative's language employs a strategy of in-betweenness that subverts the structures which hold the bug in their bind. Throughout the story, it is always clear that the problem lies with the unaccommodating structures rather than with the bug themselves. In order to emphasise this point, these discriminatory structures are continually addressed with humour and irony in order to mark their ridiculousness.



For example, while detained and questioned at the U.S. border, the narrator notices fellow detainees and remarks, “There were all kinds of people raising the suspicions of the American law enforcement, with diverse traits such as having skin and also names, but certainly I was not the only arthropod either” (Jarboe, 2020, p. 189). The irony especially is overdrawn to the point where a definitive interpretation becomes impossible, and the reader is stuck between different readings with vastly different implications. As the bug struggles to sort out the bureaucratic issues, they remark, “I thought my hardest about how to show a good attitude and accept full responsibility for my own satisfaction. I decided to be more patient and better consider the feelings of others” (Jarboe, 2020, p. 193). Later on, at the Registry of Motor Vehicles, they become more and more frustrated and climb onto the ceiling of the waiting room “where I thought I might take a moment to shriek without bothering anyone else” (Jarboe, 2020, p. 194). But “unfortunately, this backfired. I frightened several people, but I felt so, so bad about it! I should have asked the plastic surgeon to make me invisible as well, if I were really smart and considerate, but I was foolish and selfish instead” (Jarboe, 2020, p. 195). One could read this literally and simply ascribe a good-natured, unobtrusive personality to the bug, or perhaps attribute this passage to the internalisation of the widespread transphobic view that the basic accommodation of trans people within society is an inconvenience or burden to everyone else. Reading these passages as ironic, however, turns the narrative into a masterfully sarcastic commentary on the expectation that trans people should put on an extra ‘good attitude’ and ‘consider the feelings of others’ before their own.

The different implications of a more literal or more metaphorical reading intensify over the course of the story. At the Registry of Motor Vehicles, the bug is told they may not update their documents without a metamorphosis permit from a licensed entomologist. To a reader with a literal approach, this passage may simply fall in line with the larger imagery of the transformed bug. But to the reader with a metaphorical approach, especially if they are informed about the historically and

currently problematic relationship between trans people seeking gender-related health care and the medical establishment, this passage may reveal a tongue-in-cheek reference to gatekeeping practices that require medical ‘experts’ to allow a trans person to receive body altering procedures (Spade, 2006). The same dynamic continues as the Registry of Motor Vehicles’ ‘Director of Diversity and Inclusion’ appears and apologises for the bug’s negative experience while swiping at them with a broom (Jarboe, 2020, p. 195). With a metaphorical approach, this passage can be read as an ironic commentary on neoliberal efforts of inclusion and diversification that only change surface appearances while continuing to perpetuate the very systemic marginalisation that is claimed to be eradicated. The story culminates when the Director of Diversity and Inclusion informs the bug that he wrote a college paper on Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* and deems the insect to be merely a metaphor (Jarboe, 2020, p. 195) – which again could be read as a jab at non-trans individuals with minimal expertise claiming superior knowledge over trans experiences.

At this point, the bug has had enough, sheds their ‘good attitude’ and consideration for others, claims a positionality of rage, and asserts themselves as “not a metaphor” (Jarboe, 2020, p. 195). Here, the binary between the reader with the literal approach and the reader with the metaphorical approach is questioned – if the bug is not a metaphor, can we conduct a metaphorical reading of the narrative? Or can the bug still be a metaphor for a trans individual who asserts themselves as not a metaphor? Either way, the bug has more material concerns, as they arrive at their apartment to find an exterminator sent by their landlord. They evade the toxic fumes narrowly by flying out the window and making their final grand escape (Jarboe, 2020, p. 197):

Once outside the building, I smashed the driver’s side window of the exterminator’s truck, hot-wired it, and made off westbound [...]. I trilled and buzzed and chirped out into the air. I hissed and strummed as hard as I could stridulate my limbs together while maintaining control of the truck. Very soon, my calls were answered by other insects in the area! Hundreds and then thousands of them darted out from grates and crevices, flew down from high, and enveloped the truck as we continued through the suburbs.

[...] The exterminator had been totally correct. Of course there was more than one of us! I was impressed by how different and yet equally beautiful we all were. [...] We sawed and bored and chewed across North America! We clogged and encased those who would detain us or others with regurgitated fibers and secreted wax, acid, and oil! [...] We rolled up all the land we passed through into a dung ball like no one had ever seen before, turning all of it over and over into something a bit more positive.

For the bug, the in-between state of trying to regain access to the inside was frustrating, and their attempts at pacifying the inside, speaking its language, and playing by its rules did not help them achieve their goal. In the end, the outside is where the bug is free and, invoking Stryker's and Preciado's approach, is able to reclaim their monstrosity. Speaking their own language, the bug's calls are answered by other monstrous outsiders who form a chaotic and supportive community around them. In this way, perhaps the outside becomes a different inside at the same time, a safe space from where the agency and energy for change, for rolling up the land like a dung ball, can be generated. And yet, precisely this imagery of rolling up the land simultaneously implicates a process of disidentification, of passing through the insider's land, repeatedly overturning it and, finally, transforming the soil into 'something a bit more positive.' In the end, *I Am A Beautiful Bug!* manages to straddle different modes of resistance, combining a rageful, full-force run on the inside from the outside with a disidentificatory practice that then seizes the inside in order to deconstruct and repurpose its parts.

Switching from the joyous, chaotic ending of *I Am A Beautiful Bug!* to A.K. Blue's *God Empress Susanna* may be rather sobering. *God Empress Susanna* deals with the reclamation of the monster, and monstrous embodiment itself, in a much more ambivalent way and questions the privileges that might be necessary to be able to reclaim monstrosity in the first place. The protagonist Susanna is initially also positioned in an in-between space, although hers is more corporeal than situational. Susanna is a trans woman who has undergone a novel form of transitioning, in which she was temporarily transformed into an earthworm in order to use its ability to change gender (Blue, 2017, p. 129). She should have been converted back to human form afterwards,

however, government funding for the programme has run out and Susanna is now permanently stuck with the earthworm body (Blue, 2017, p. 129). At her retail job, she is unable to perform most tasks and is only still employed due to a job protection bill (Blue, 2017, p. 129). Unlike the beautiful bug, Susanna doesn't celebrate her body; her earthworm form rather seems like a necessary evil that comes with significant setbacks. Due to being exothermic, she frequently struggles with cold-induced fatigue (Blue, 2017, p. 128) and her stomach is only able to digest dry cat food (Blue, 2017, p. 135). In order to make up for hands and arms, she handles things with her mouth, but can taste everything as she still possesses human senses (Blue, 2017, p. 131). Emotionally, she grieves her life that could have been and is jealous of her cis woman co-worker's looks (Blue, 2017, p. 131) and her boyfriend (Blue, 2017, p. 135). Due to her lacking ability to perform the same kind of work as her co-workers, Susanna is acutely aware that "she was a liability, costing the other employees money" (Blue, 2017, p. 129). Her co-workers mostly also treat her as such, as she is often told to wait in the break room so she is not in the way of the others, and yet, her co-workers get annoyed when they see her not working (Blue, 2017, p. 131). While the beautiful bug mainly experiences hardship through outside influences, Susanna is disabled by both her social environment and her body itself.

Reading transness in connection to disability is often perceived as controversial, but Alexandre Baril (2015) asserts that the overlap is actually significant. Baril picks up discussions within disability studies where both the medical and social models of disabilities are rejected due to their shortcomings. While the medical model ignores the disabling nature of "social, economic and architectural structures" (Baril, 2015, p. 64) and focuses on 'fixing,' preventing and treating disability medically, the social model, which developed in opposition to the medical model's ableist assumptions, is not capable of considering that "for some disabled people, suffering is not merely a consequence of ableism and would not disappear in an ideal society" (Baril, 2015, p. 65). What Baril (2015, p. 60) calls a 'composite model of disability' seeks to take into account both of

these shortcomings and consider that social structures as well as physical and mental disabilities can both be sources of impairment and debility.

Baril argues that transness has been viewed through very similar lenses as disability. Following a medical model, “transsexuality has been reduced to an individual pathology curable with hormonal and surgical treatments” (Baril, 2015, p. 66), while issues such as mental health problems due to widespread transphobia within society are often left out of the picture. A social model of transness, on the other hand, supposes that eliminating cisnormativity would also obliterate all suffering that trans people experience (Baril, 2015, p. 67). While the medical model has long been deemed transphobic and pathologizing by trans scholars and activists, Baril illustrates how the social model falls short of encapsulating the complexity of different trans experiences. Baril argues that transness itself, without the social context of cisnormativity, can already lead to debilitation. He lists gender dysphoria as a cause of mental distress, “the dysfunction or absence of organs, body parts or physical characteristics,” and the fact that being trans interferes with every aspect of life, whether in professional, financial, legal, social, interpersonal, or sexual spheres (Baril, 2015, p. 62). Implementing a composite model of looking at transness, Baril (2015, p. 69) hopes to make room within social discourse for more varied experiences of trans identity: “For some, transness is a neutral, even positive, aspect of their lives. For some, it is difficult. For others, it is both.” Baril (2015, p. 70-71) is aware of the possible backlash his assertions may prompt from within trans communities who insist that transness must be viewed as a source of pride against the social context which shames it; however, he concludes that a wholly positive model of transness is not worth it if it deliberately excludes the concerns and feelings of trans people who do not fit this model.

Baril’s theory is especially helpful in reading *God Empress Susanna*, as Susanna would also rather not be an earthworm. In order to escape her situation, she frequently daydreams herself into the fictional world of Frank Herbert’s *God Emperor of Dune*, where she can “imagine being a titanic sandworm powering her way through the solid earth,

mouth glowing like a furnace, crystal teeth glittering like diamonds” (Blue, 2017, p. 130) or dream of being a face dancer with the ability to shapeshift whenever she pleases (Blue, 2017, p. 136). Susanna’s ability to reclaim and celebrate her monstrosity only exists within a fantastical realm, where she is the ruler of the galaxy Arrakis and controls its resources of melange, a consciousness-enhancing drug (Blue, 2017, p. 130). With her role of galaxy empress comes unlimited admiration from her subjects, as “wherever she glanced, the people cheered, jumped, danced, excited by her notice” (Blue, 2017, p. 130), but also the satisfaction of realising how limited the minds of humans are (Blue, 2017, p. 133). In Susanna’s fantasy world, she has all the power she lacks on human earth and possesses the agency to control her surroundings and how they perceive her. While she remains stuck in an in-between in her real life, she manages to reclaim an outside, reclaim the monster within her imagination. The fact that Susanna’s reclamation of her monstrosity is tied to her reading of *God Emperor of Dune* opens up an interpretation of literary fiction itself as an outsider’s safe space, where renegotiations can take place that are discouraged within an inside discourse.

Within this fictional safe space, Susanna is able to reclaim her body and celebrate it as the bug does, which stands in stark contrast to the disregard and disgust she experiences from her co-workers. Cindy, the cis woman Susanna is jealous of, literally exclaims, “Ewww! Susanna!” when she discovers that Susanna had been hiding under a table in the break room while Cindy and her boyfriend Bobby were flirting and kissing on their lunch break (Blue, 2017, p. 134). Bobby, on the other hand, simply remarks, “I didn’t see anything” (Blue, 2017, p. 135). Susanna’s position under the table, hidden away from sight, can be read as an in-betweenness that evokes elements of the ugly and the abject. In their introduction to *On the Politics of Ugliness*, Sara Rodrigues and Ela Przybylo (2018, p. 1) point to the history of ‘ugly laws,’ which aimed to keep people whose bodies were constructed as ugly out of sight to avoid any “aversion and discomfort” for the general public. Similarly to the aforementioned trans individual who is expected to actively work against

being an inconvenience to the rest of society, the ugly individual is expected to stay out of view – hidden under a table in the break room, for example. Bobby’s insistence that he ‘hasn’t seen *anything*’ fixes Susanna not only in her in-between position as physically present, yet out of sight (and expected to *remain* out of sight), but also in her position in-between human and animal, being and thing, subject and object. Precisely this ambivalent positioning in between subject and object, as neither fully subject nor object, reminiscent of what Julia Kristeva (1982) has conceptualised as the abject, seems to be what elicits Cindy’s disgust. Pertinently, Anson Koch-Rein (2019, p. 57) posits that disgust does not emerge from an inherently disgusting monstrous body but rather from the monster’s particular subjectivity – a subjectivity evocative of the aforementioned grotesque (Edwards and Graulund, 2013, p. 39-40).

Clearly, the ability to reclaim and celebrate her monstrosity in the outside fictional world does not translate to Susanna’s real, in-between life, which is emphasised by the story’s ending: When the retail store Susanna works at goes bankrupt, she faces long-term unemployment, declining mental health, and impending homelessness (Blue, 2017, p. 138). While the beautiful bug joyfully escapes their impending doom and is able to make community with other monsters, Susanna ends up isolated and miserable (Blue, 2017, p. 139):

The fear hit her like a physical force. The kitchen wavered as her body seemed to dissolve. She felt dizzy, off-balance, as if the room was tilting with nothing anywhere to hang on to. [...] She crawled to the bedroom. Sheets, blankets, pillows lay in a pile on the bare mattress. She burrowed inside them, shutting out the world.

Contrary to the bug, who is able to utilise both the idea of outside resistance and disidentification, Susanna is left with her imagination and her pile of blankets as the only spaces for retreat.

In conclusion, this paper has examined the entanglements between trans monstrosity and notions of inside, outside, and in-betweenness. Based on Foucault’s discourse theory, Muñoz’s concept of disidentification, academic works by Susan Stryker and Paul B. Preciado and the fictional short stories *I Am A Beautiful Bug!* and *God Empress*

*Susanna*, I have argued for a particular potential for resistance and subversion within the in-between. However, as both short stories, and especially *God Empress Susanna*, show, the in-between and its promise of reclaiming monstrosity is not inhabitable for everyone. The question remains then, who is able to truly reclaim monstrosity? What happens to monsters living in economic precarity, who cannot afford to be monsters, monsters who are racialized, monsters whose presence on certain land is criminalised, monsters who are subject to settler colonialism, monsters who do not want to be monsters? Who is able to enter the realm of the in-between and withstand, or even flourish in, its instability and indeterminacy? When does the in-between simply not hold enough space for the monster's rage? Muñoz (1999, p. 5) himself admits that "disidentification is *not always* an adequate strategy of resistance or survival for all minority subjects. At times, resistance needs to be pronounced and direct; on other occasions, queers of colour and other minority subjects need to follow a conformist path if they hope to survive a hostile public sphere." In the end, perhaps the path to resistance then lies in covering all the bases due to our best abilities: some employing their speaking skills at public podiums dressed in 'genderfuck drag', others gathering outside communities in joyful monstrousness, and still others simply staying alive under a pile of blankets and daydreaming of a universe in which they are able to celebrate themselves and be celebrated by others.



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