What Medieval Monsters Tell Us: A Comparative Analysis of European Medieval Representation and Its Impact on Contemporary Video Game Art

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Abstract

There is a fascination with the things that cannot be explained in full, and a fascination with moments in time shrouded in mystery. In the instance of the monsters of the Medieval period, both of these facets will be subject to exploration. At this still rather mysterious point in history, there was an understanding that prowling the land were monsters which could not be explained through either the natural or the supernatural. Although these creatures may appear to be trapped in the past, their representations continue even in modern works, keeping the kindle of these dormant interests lit. Detailed accounts of history and events allows contemporary media a chance to reinterpret these writings in a visual way; permitting the audience to see these stories in action. As this is true for historically accurate events that have been recorded, those do not hold as much interest as stories that are almost impossible to explain; specifically in the case of European monsters. This thesis explores the recording of European monsters especially during the Medieval period, investigates stories told about humanoid creatures, especially when gendered as female these creatures visualize societal deviances, and notes their continued reimagined visual presence in contemporary media. Through analyzing origin stories of notable creatures such as Succubi, Sirens and witches with a feminist lens, these creatures show the expectations placed on women as well as see how interchangeable women had been considered to Medieval European society. Using an analysis of European Medieval monster representation in comparison with an examination of contemporary renditions, this thesis will explore the enduring allure of the inexplicable, the focus on gendering these humanoid creations and what the continued efforts to give them visible form through art says about our society.

1. Introduction

There is a fascination with the things that cannot be explained in full, and with moments in time shrouded in mystery. In the instance of the humanoid monsters both of these facets will be subject to exploration. At this still rather mysterious point in history, it was believed that prowling the land were monsters which could not be explained through either the natural or the supernatural. Although these creatures may appear to be trapped in the past, their representations continue even in modern works, keeping the kindle of these dormant interests lit. Using an analysis of European monster representation, from the Middle Ages through the Renaissance, in comparison with an examination of contemporary video game monster designs, this thesis will explore the enduring allure of the inexplicable, the focus on gendering these humanoid creations and what the continued efforts to give them visible form through art says about our society.

Since the forms monsters take can vary wildly, the focus of this thesis will be on some popular humanoid creatures. While there are many more of these creatures that contain animalistic qualities, the humanoid creatures allow for us to study what differentiates them from being human. Among the most notable humanoid monsters are: Witches, Sirens,

Succubi and Werewolves. The main commonality shared between most of these iconic creatures is that they are presented female. Contrary to what one might think, though, this is not a coincidence.

The idea of the unnatural world has existed throughout history by taking different forms and mimicking the fears of society which are immortalized through stories both written and spoken. The most notable time period for visualizing these fears and the one most associated with monstrous creatures is the Middle Ages in Europe. These creatures, although known to our contemporary minds as unreal appeared real to the citizens of the Middle Ages, through the popular method of writings and storytelling.[1] The first written record that successfully convinced people at the time of the existence of monsters was by a notable Roman author known as Pliny the Elder.[2] He is known for documenting and compiling in thirty-seven books the "*Natural History of the World*, a work which was written up until 77 AD, two years before his death.[3] These accounts recorded everything Pliny considered valuable knowledge and spanned across biological, astronomical and ecological science. Scattered among his many factual observations of creatures, stones, and stars, Pliny included descriptions of fantastic creatures. Among these lesser known creatures, Pliny was one of the first to write documentation of beings such as dragons, a fantastical creature most people have heard of or seen art depicting. This is important because it gives us a larger timeline for these recorded creatures than most would expect.

When his writings were transcribed into illuminated manuscripts during the Middle ages, these otherworldly creatures were once again brought to life from Pliny's texts.[4] They began their new existence in written texts accompanied by small visuals which were both executed by a scholarly monk. A key reason for the translation of these works lies in the detailed appendix of information Pliny provided which intrigued contemporary medieval scholars. Since these writings contain factual descriptions and accounts of worldly things, the ability to distinguish what is real from what is imaginary became difficult. On top of this, authors began to delve into the monstrous depictions and records in Pliny's work by making it their own.[5] What makes these creatures, which have been rhetorically revived numerous times, so convincing is their detailed explanations provided in these descriptions as well as their combination of natural elements. However, since these unknown beasts are not solely associated with either the spiritual world or the unnatural, their existence is then seen to lie in the supernatural which is somewhere between the two.

These creatures' designs have been recorded and immortalized in bestiaries. These bestiaries contain monsters of various forms drawn and recorded for reference. Although not necessarily scholarly sources they were prominent in their myths and stories. For many common people of the time, these monsters provided a look into another form of the supernatural that is not associated with the holy and in doing so, it piqued their interest and brought up a fear: what was their origin? Where did they come from? Had these abnormal creatures always been like this or had there been divine intervention that shifted them to become this way to repent for their actions? According to stories told throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance, these creatures can both already exist and be created. Myths thus include stories of monsters created by participating in heinous acts or as a rebuttal for living an unholy lifestyle. There are also stories of creatures who exist with no direct intended design by a higher creator. This fear of not knowing strengthened the idea that these creatures strayed from godliness conflicting with the doctrine and practice of the Catholic church at the time.[6]

During the Romanesque Period many churches were constructed allowing for pilgrimages to take place, this in turn would popularize their specific practices and bring wealth. On display for the public were items such as illuminated manuscripts, relics displayed in ornate housing, and embellished altars, which prove that religious ideas place pressure on societal systems that keep them in power. Public displays of these adorned books and objects granted larger audiences which subsequently gave those areas more tourists and helped boost the economy. A common theme presented through both Biblical stories and secular texts in the Medieval period include the relation to the unholy. The term "unholy" was used by the church to reference spiritual elements which are unrelated to Christianity (even with its many facets), thus Pagan Gods, rituals, and stories were categorized as "demonic,"[7] and their religious texts and creatures became a part of the monstrous as well. Among the many things deemed unholy, were the things that could not be fully explained logistically.

A popular form of contemporary media that reimagines these lore-filled stories is *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*. Among the many video games producing medieval-esque fantasies,[8] this particular game places the audience in the position of an unlikely hero who, although slaying monsters, is the result of many mutagen phases, which make him an abnormality in his own right. These phases take place over time in an experiment-type method, forcing different genes to mutate usually costing the experimental subject's life, if they survive however they are stronger and farther from human physically, even as far as sharing less DNA. While the monster story in the Middle Ages was told from the perspective of onlookers who saw monsters as ghastly creatures that were destroyed by magical items or with weapons gifted by God[9], this contemporary monster game allows for the player to become the monster slayer which was impossible to experience during the Middle Ages. This reinterpretation expressed a new form of understanding of the

historical beliefs from the Middle Ages by focusing on the perspective of an outsider, who falls in neither solely human or beast but falls in the space between. This liminal space between grants hims access to knowledge from both parties which is not something that occurs naturally.

Monsters, however, also had another function: they gave the common people of the Medieval world a way to view themselves without being labeled as the worst creatures alive, for they were at least above monsters. The caste system and abuse of the working class under the royal and wealthy, applied a systematic categorization of beings by worth to society pushing manual laborers to the bottom even though it was their work that kept the system afloat.[10] When the ideas of monstrous creatures being plausible sprouted, the lower class found that their status was raised up one step. While they were not actually raised in status, they were able to feel some of the same superiority those above them felt and might have helped mitigate their hatred for their unfair societal systems. It most likely also contributed to allowing the rich and royal to stay in power with less resistance.

An analysis of monsters and their myths proves that there is a consistency in how they usually end: most often it involves an immense battle where the abnormalities end up slain. Since monsters come in an array of forms, and are generally composed from several creatures, they must be slain according to the shapes they take. The practical reason for monsters needing to be slain was their presumed strong connection with the demonic.[11] To put themselves on good terms with the public, stories of rulers slaying these beasts were published and told orally to the public, regardless of their truth. In doing so this not only raised their status but restored order and permitted the public to confirm the existence of these fantastical creatures.[12]

The female image has often been used to express specific personality traits which include but are not limited to: lustful desires, cunning wits, and innocence, which are presented in several myths and allegories. Even though these traits contradict one another this does not stop them from being used as representative iconography.[13] Female bodies are manipulated and morphed with animal features throughout female monster depictions, and this reflects the standard societal expectations of women, both during the fifteenth century and today.

Among Medieval European traditions, there is the idea of courtly love which expects knights to fight and win battles and accomplish great feats with the hope to win the "prize" of the woman they were fighting for.[14] This is because the code of knights proclaimed love was the only thing worth sacrificing so much for and if they did not reach the final goal of gaining the woman's interest they did not succeed. The women in this case were simply a possession to be won, and although the story created a desire for romance, the female was never given the ability to choose for herself. As women fall into the category of objects, the ease with which they can be taken apart piece by piece and re-arranged in numerous ways to extreme degrees becomes more commonly practiced. In this way, a knight can dream up the perfect lady to pine for as well as picture the most inscrutable—simply by replacing her features.

The Witcher 3 was a videogame released in 2015 for multiple consoles which follows the story of a Witcher[15], who is controlled by the player, that journeys around following quests to hunt monsters for coin. However noble the players intentions are though the main character Geralt, is dragged into politics along with this monster slaying usefulness. This game with its unique perspective on retelling a combination of Medieval and Renaissance stories became popular and has been rated the highest personal computer (PC) game on Metacritic. With its release on multiple platforms including xbox, playstation and PC, the Witcher is a Medieval[16] Age based game that is accessible to many gamers and introduces these players to its unique universe that takes from older European mythological monsters. This accessibility and unique perspective of medieval history played an important role in more than 50 million copies being bought by consumers worldwide. Along with the Witcher 3, the Witcher was first introduced in the witcher book series by Andrzej Sapkowski, a polish author who wrote the first witcher book in 1993, which was originally in Polish. As the videogames are based on these books the visual depictions used are modeled after the descriptions presented in Sapkowski's writing.

2. Sirens: From Pliny to The Witcher

Although depictions of monstrous creatures took many forms during the European Medieval period (mainly in reference to bestiaries), there were commissioned works that depicted them to enhance manuscript pages. Many of the imagery commissioned included monsters that feature composites of women and would be in prominent places for audiences to view. An image of the Siren (Figure 1.) is found in *Les Abus de Monde* (The Abuse's of the World), which is a manuscript created in the sixteenth century.[17]

Figure 1. Siren, *Les abus du monde*, France, Rouen, ca.1510. http://ica.themorgan.org/manuscript/page/6/76877

This image of a Siren takes up much of the central space in the image. Her figure stands on top of two fallen townspeople who look like they could be her victims although there are no signs of injury on either of them. The middle ground of the image shows several figures who seem to be in the midst of trying to escape from both the Siren and the pool of water. It is important to note that the imagery of Sirens uses a composite of female parts as well as fish parts, which is usually divided halfway down the body. However, this Siren is more than just those two bodies in one composite for this Siren is also imagined with two sets of wings, birds feet and a dragon's tail. In each arm she holds an instrument, one a harp and the other an old trumpet which she could not play with just the one hand. Her gaze is fixed past the humans surrounding her feet and in the immediate area to somewhere in the middle distance off the page. Somehow her expression and body language appear composed next to all the figures surrounding her. Even with her form composed of several creaturesque features she appears somehow angelic with her golden hair and extremely pale skin, which adds to the idea of an otherworldly being.

   The true nature of Sirens however, was supposedly hidden under their amorous and enchanting exterior, for when they successfully lured men into the open water, these men were never to be seen again. The long wavy hair of this Siren and her face shape feels representative of the Renaissance movement and as this piece was crafted in France where there were many artistic styles shifting around. Since this manuscript measures 200mm by 130mm (roughly 8 inches by 5 inches) it is smaller than a piece of paper. The image itself is in a very elaborate and golden frame that separates the edge of the painting and the white of the vellum. The golden frame has two columns standing vertical with the image, each different stylistically but colored the same, and small monkey shaped creatures that act as cherubs embellishing the frame playfully with their swinging. Although this Siren is meant to be a show of a monstrous creature, her face is crafted to be beautiful with rosy cheeks and soft shapes along her feminine body, representing the idealized view men presented on women.

   What embellishes this piece, expressing the art is for wealthier viewers, is shown in the use of blue pigment that makes up most of the imagery. While there are other pigment mixtures that are used to create the pale skin and clothing,

their position in the image keeps these colors from overthrowing the central image of the Siren. In contrast to the blue the other brightly colored elements seem to share the same color orange tinted color palette complimenting the blue which helps the image stand out and keeps the almost pure white of the feminine torso central.

Even though this image of the Siren found in a manuscript was designed for the wealthier audience, the stories Sirens played roles in flourished and were known by people from all social classes. The most accessible way to understand Sirens and these unusual monsters were through stories as mentioned earlier and as shown through the desire to represent these creatures visually, artists are always trying to bring fantastical concepts into the real world. Stories such as *The Odyssey*[18] by Homer gave people from all over a chance to experience the wonder of these fictional creatures as if they were real.

Modern artists have continued interpreting and reimagining mythical creatures that occupied the minds of so many from the the beginning of the Middle Ages to the end of the Renaissance. With mostly stories to go off of including very little imagery, artists have explored, created and recreated mythological creatures from the past as seen through their own eyes. Before giving these creatures life and including them in bigger works of media they go through stages and transformations as most any artistic processes. For example when the Sirens were reproduced and crafted for the Witcher III, the image went through many changes until it fit well into the Witcher Universe.[19]

The Witcher Universe is the complete existence of all creatures in the witcher including the regular citizens whose only part to play is their regular lives as well as horrid creatures that are products of curses. This world operates with Witchers being the mediary as they protect the regular people (from lower class to Kings) from these creatures, so they can live their lives normally and hopefully in peace.

The three digitally sketched images, (Figure 2-4), are the concepts that were tossed around to create the iconic sirens found in the Witcher III.[20] The artist behind these designs, Bartlomiej Gawel, allowed these creatures to go through many stages in his process as he worked out the detail and interpretations[21].

Figure 2. https://www.artstation.com/gawel Bartlomiej Gawel. Digital monochromatic painting.
https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/witcher/images/f/fb/Bartlomiej-gawel-mermaid-got2.jpg/revision/latest?cb=20181022180042

Figure 3. https://www.artstation.com/gawel Bartlomiej Gawel. Digital monochromatic painting.
https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/witcher/images/1/1d/Bartlomiej-gawel-mermaid-
got3.jpg/revision/latest?cb=20181022180044

Figure 4. https://www.artstation.com/gawel Bartlomiej Gawel. Digital Painting.
https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/witcher/images/c/c2/Bartlomiej-gawel-mermaid-
got.jpg/revision/latest?cb=20181022180040

The fourth image (Figure 5) rendered to fit the video game models depicts the final forms they take in the game.[22]

Figure 5. https://www.artstation.com/gawel Bartlomiej Gawel. Digital 3D modeled render with digitally painted skin. https://img.game8.co/3224043/56fdb9c7035ec96820b05ddb5b8c097f.jpeg/show

To accentuate the duality of these creatures there were different forms Sirens could take, all of which were part of the Siren subspecies. When examining these images all together they have the same composite of features which include the top half made from female parts and pale in skin tone, while the bottom half is formed from wings and a tail bound together by their set of scales and boney skeletal structure. These wings are unlike the wings of most avian creatures appearing more like a bat, lacking feathers and layers but instead mimic the water-resistant skin surrounding the tail, stretching it over the winged structure. The wings also hold the specific feature of not being attached to the shoulder blades of the Siren, instead they begin near the bottom of the spine near the pelvic bone. This allows for the wings to hide underneath the water's surface, keeping the siren's identity safe from above.

The color palettes for these creatures mimic the tone they are meant to convey to the viewer but also mimic the color of the water pools they are found in. The gentle and dull lavender color is reflective of the water near the shores during the daytime, while the deep blue/green and red palette of the second siren is representative of a raging sea. The blue/green and red contrast invokes stress as it plays into a stressful complementary palette. The facial features of these two creatures changes drastically as the tame one is represented as an idealized female, using the best of each feature to create an alluring creature while its counterpart is shown rejecting female beauty in its facial features and shows the upper body as the body of an aging woman.

These Sirens as re-imagined in *The Witcher III* contain the same original elements that were described and depicted in earlier works including theLes abus de monde. These sirens composed of human features and otherworldly anatomy showcase the most common way society uses imagery to control women which is by giving them less than human characteristics. The usage of female parts and a combination of other animalistic features makes it easier to control women's image in the publics' eye as well as giving control to the more "predictable" sex of men. Even though men and women are supposed to be viewed equally even if they are considered counterparts to one another however for both past European society and the current social structure of the United States men have been the default human. Historically men have been studied more in both mental and physical health leading society to believe that because females deviate from these findings that they are abnormalities in themselves, diverging from the basics of what is known about men.

As this imagery is used and reimagined with different female humanoid creatures, the usefulness of this tactic circulates in society even if they are not fully aware that these feminine humanoid creatures are articulating what the male-dominate society perpetuates. Since this is the case, monsters are not usually classified as being male unless they are completely changed and do not resemble any human characteristics. This is apparent with monsters like wyverns, basilisks, and golems which are not hybrid creatures and are not shaped by gender.[23] What differs between the imagery of the Siren from *Les abus du monde* and the Sirens from the Witcher III is the emphasis placed on their monstrous parts. In the manuscript the wings, bird legs and scaly features although detailed and seemingly out of place do not appear to be being used in any sort of attacking motion unlike how the Sirens in the witcher are animated. This information can be used to infer that the most monstrous part of these earlier Sirens was their femininity and ability to represent as human while the modern counterpart found in The Witcher III is the various other creatures that make them up.

Another reason why the leap from female to monster went so smoothly during the Middle Ages through the Renaissance is due to the fact there was little to no public information on the female body.[24] The ways in which the female body aged and changed with age—including the beginning of menstruation and changes undergone during pregnancy—were surprising. Usually the only citizens who knew these changes were natural and expected were medical practitioners such as doctors, wetnurses, midwives and the occasional elite. The only reason these things were not public knowledge from the sharing of experiences of wetnurses and midwives was because as women their experiences and understandings were not considered normal, even if it happens to all women.[25] This also ties back into the idea that since men are the base human, women are already abnormal in themselves. When this important developmental information is hidden from the common class, not recorded in literature or story it transforms women's bodies into temples of secrets. Keeping this knowledge to the aforementioned few perpetuates this idea that women are easier to connect to creatures than men because there is less known about them.

In regards to women who did understand their own bodies and used home-brewed remedies for aiding in many common injuries or illnesses, society was far too patriarchal in standing to accept such practices which is where the idea of witchcraft being a demonic tradition began. For the belief of monsters and natural abnormalities to be considered real to the common people of the Medieval Ages, it was important that it was recognized by the higher authorities, whether it be through text or storytelling. One book in particular written in the 1400's titled in Latin: *Malleus Maleficarum*(The Hammer of the Witches), was created with the intent to explain to the readers (who were most likely priests) that the unseen world is capable of interfering with the seen world. There are chapters that explain how to spot these demonic possessions and what can be done in any case, as well as explaining what normal female behaviors are. The author specifically emphasizes that witches cannot be men, women are the only sex seen as weak enough to become susceptible to such dark practices.[26] In the Witcher Universe female witchers are an extreme rarity and are not usually sought to be made[27] because they would not become as powerful or as strong as a male witcher. Although sorceresses and magic wielders are prominent throughout the series, they are not equivalent to witches. Witches have their own set of specific practices which is represented with the Crones.

3. Witches and Witchcraft

As mentioned previously[28] witchcraft was traditionally thought of as a form of female monstrosity, targeting only women and converting them from the ideal Biblical image of a woman into a sinful combination of a woman. Perhaps the most interesting and unique reinterpretation of the old haggard witch is the imagery of The Crones from the Witcher III (Figure 6). In contrast to the youthful allure that both the sirens and succubi[29] have, the Crones are known for their heinous appearance. While the Crones can also appear beautiful and alluring to their victims what makes these women dangerous is their knowledge and ability to connect to the natural world in a way uncommon to the world.

Figure 6. Marcin Blaszczak. Digitally modeled characters with painted overlay and textures.
https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/witcher/images/1/15/Tw3_journal_crones.png/revision/latest?cb=20160320064504

To emphasize this element about the Crones, one of the Witcher character design artists Marcin Blaszczak, chose to portray these witch sisters with distinct features that played on their inhumane nature. The Crone seen on the far left of the image wears a butcher apron and decorates herself with a necklace fashioned from ears cut from their victims, going off of the lore and stories embedded in the game that are most likely from children. This imagery could be alluding to the perverted sense of responsibility women must have over home life which includes chores and children. The face is actually covered in a bright red veil that appears to look fleshy and slightly rubbery in nature protecting the audience from seeing her face. Her skin is suctioned to her body leaving almost nothing ,from bones to muscles, to the imagination and where her fingers lead into her nail beds, the flesh turns a charcoal black.

The Crone in the Middle is taller and more muscular than the other two, which was atypical for feminine beauty standards. In place of a face this Crone has a woven mass that resembles that of a Medieval beekeepers mask from France[30]. This important and subtle usage of the wicker beekeeper mask is used to reinforce the idea that women are only as good as the services they provide, which in this case and the case of earlier European economics was their ability to cultivate honey. [31]When carefully examined this Crone sister also wears a metal chain around her neck as if a servant or an animal forced to comply to the feminine ideals. Her hands battered and worn have three fingers shaped like a bird's talons formed of pink flesh which sprout dark nails. The last Crone on the right has the most human features of the three. Her face is visible up to a certain extent, but her eyes can not be gazed upon for one is covered in cloth and the other is a boil-esque looking shape with deep circular cavities. Her outfit looks the most uncomfortable out of all three with starchy looking fabric tied around her with fraying rope. This same rope is actually used again in her design with the frayed noose that hangs from her neck. This symbol of death and suicidal ideas indicates the mental torment and physical stress placed on women to portray all of these specific roles forced upon them. The continued theme of having all three Crones be related and bound by blood as well as bound to their positions contextualized through wearing some form of neckwear gives the audience a glimpse into the responsibilities that have kept a hold on them.

Having all three of these Crones represent the idea of a haunting and haggard witch gives a more developed and full view of the witch identity. It expresses the multiple conflicting statements that were thought of both females and

witchcraft that could not reasonably coincide with one another. For instance, this could be the ability to be perceived as a beautiful fair maiden for a time but ultimately reveal their form to their victims which terrorizes either way.

4. Succubus: From the Bible to the Renaissance

The Succubus for instance first appeared when the idea of Lilith was presented as an earlier more untamable partner to Adam. This biblical story was not introduced in the conventional version of the Bible, however it was popularized and known through old Sumerian texts.[32] In these stories she refused to be mounted by him (as she was supposed to become his mate in the Garden of Eden) which defied God's will. Her disobedience sent her to Hell and this was problematic for two reasons. The first expresses that not obeying your husband would result in sinning vile enough to send a wife to Hell, and the second more tragically plants the idea that females are not in charge of their own sexual experiences, instead being used as pawns for who they are wed. Historically any sexual deviance from what God intended was considered unholy and this is why females who want little sexual encounters or too many, have been publicly and privately shamed. Even though Lillith was not interested in having intercourse with Adam, she pursued sexual encounters from other sources. This sexual deviance from normal standards had made her into a sexual demon, monstrous because of her viewpoint on intimate relations which made her the first and possibly most well-known, Succubus.

Succubi were first portrayed in writings bringing their intentions and credibility as creatures to the natural world but have since shown up in other mediums as well. Although they were popular there are minimal visual representations. Instead of analyzing an image of Succubi from the fifteenth century it might be helpful to examine how women are mixed with reptilian imagery in an attempt to represent the monstrosities of evil. An example of this is *The Fall of Man and The Lamentation* by Hugo van der Goes crafted between 1470 and 1475 (Figure 7).
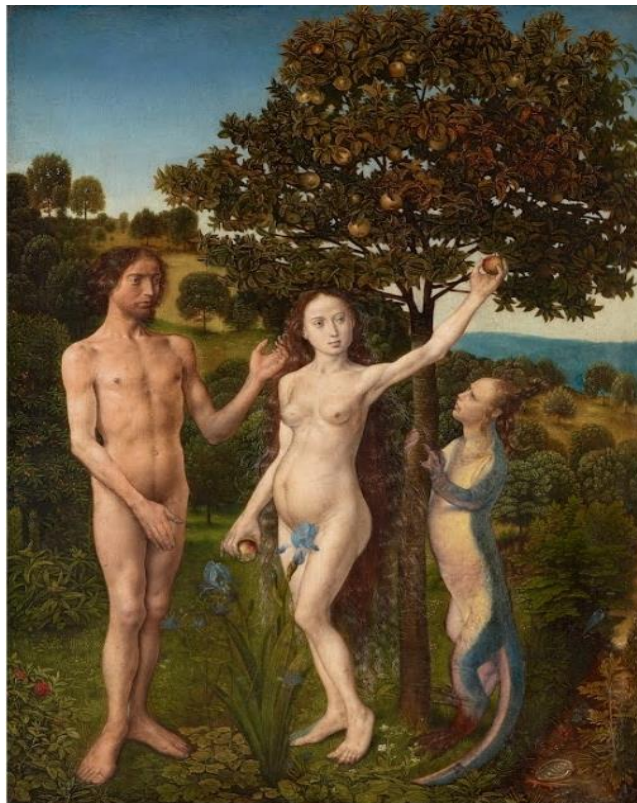

Figure 7. Hugo van der Goes, *The Fall of Ma*n and *The Lamentation*, ca. 1470.
https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/the-fall-of-man-and-the-lamentation-hugo-van-der-goes/YwF0m02NUM1SeA?hl=en&ms=%7B%22x%22%3A0.5%2C%22y%22%3A0.5%2C%22z%22%3A8.923478653262%2C%22size%22%3A%7B%22width%22%3A3.64847453571217%2C%22height%22%3A1.2374999999999996%7D%7D

The painting presents three figures to the audience surrounded by lush greenery. This greenery is seen expanding through the middle ground and continues to coat the mountainous backgrounds with shrubbery. The piece is split down the middle by a young apple tree bearing fruit. The two figures to the left of it appear to be slim but muscular in build emphasizing their good health. These figures are depictions of Adam and Eve as they commit the original sin of biting into the forbidden fruit. To the right of the tree hidden under the shadow of Eve, a smaller figure stands gripping onto the trunk. The body appears to be reptilian in form with a smooth stomach, scaly back, webbed appendages, and the presence of tail. Without seeing the face of this creature, the audience might perceive this as a different version of the snake, however, the face of this creature is human and very feminine in nature and she looks at Eve with such an expression of contempt or perhaps this is the aftermath of a nod. This scaly creature is a physical representation of the poisoning of the apples by a demonic tempter that uses Pliny's recorded misinformation surrounding salamanders[33]. Even in Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel, the depiction of a similar creature is seen tempting Adam and Eve into biting from the apple shows their with snake-like features[34]. Her lower half remains almost the same color as the rest of her pale fleshy exterior with a brighter orange overtone but now forms into a long thinning band which resembles the shape of a serpent's tail. This tail wraps around the tree which grows the forbidden fruit as this demonic force reaches for Eve's hand itself. (Figure 8)

Figure 8. Michelangelo, Sistine Chapel, Temptation and Expulsion of Adam and Eve.
Fresco on ceiling. 1475-1654.
https://www.michelangelo.org/images/artworks/the-fall-of-man.jpg

Projekt CD Red also recreates Succubi in their contemporary video game, The Witcher III. As Succubi are hybrids they have humanistic features that allow them to blend into society and take part in daily activities. An example of one of these Succubi from the Witcher is Salma (Figure 9). This Succubus resembles a feminine figure with darker skin for the most part until the audience is able to see that her head has horns which are normally hidden away and her legs resemble that of a goat shielded under her long skirt. The white painted circles across her body against the darker palette used for her skin and skirt help play into the idea that she is more monstrous than human by associating her with discordian colors schemes. Unlike the other humanoid creatures sent to be killed by the Witcher, these Succubi actually live among humans since that is where they get the source of their power and it is easier to live among their prey than live outside the city limits.

Figure 9. Salma, a Succubus

Although this contemporary image of the Succubus isn't being directly compared to an earlier version, comparing it to the idea of personifying evil, specifically beasts that deal with temptation and have close ties to demonic forces. This comparison alone shows the importance of feminine features in these hybrid style designs and how it translates differently from the Middle Ages through the Renaissance to contemporary media. For The Witcher games monsters, the incorporation of female form was not as important as the monstrous features for their character design. Although these monsters are feminine in nature, they are not designed to glorify their beauty but to enhance their unusual composites.

5. Werewolves and Elements of Gender

The one male sexed monster listed above is the Werewolf.[35] To analyze the Werewolf alongside these female monsters allows a look into societal expectations for women and men. The Werewolf, although resembling a larger fiercer wild dog who hunts humans, did not conceal his monstrous traits under a guise of innocence. Instead, when the Werewolf reverted back to being human, he would lose the attachment to their supernatural strength and senses. To view the Werewolf in human form and monster form is to view different people entirely.

In contrast to this, there is the title of a "she-wolf"[36] which was intended to be the female counterpart to the Werewolf however her form is who she is and what makes her a monster is her unwillingness to bend to society's will.[37] There is no way to distinguish a she-wolf from a regular maiden for the intent of an innocent maiden or a vicious and cunning monster cannot be seen from her demeanor. This inability to completely understand women through their societal paradoxes is mirrored in the lore of female creatures, perpetuating the idea that females cannot be trusted for their looks can be deceiving. This notion also expresses that while the female creatures of abnormal combinations are truly alienated, the men who are "seduced" by these women are the victim.

Even as the Middle Ages have passed, the imagery of the Sirens, Succubi and Witches can still be seen flourishing in European Medieval-based media. One thing that can be said for certain is that their designs remain as interesting to the public now as they once were. This is proven by the simple fact that although they have been added to and changed

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partially, their original concept and design are still kept in mind when being reimagined in movies, games and tv-shows.[38] This is helpful because it keeps the original traditions alive and enhances the lore by going into further detail. On another note however, this timeless female portrayal and the re-imagination of similar creatures, proves a consistency in the societal views of women.

Although art has historically been popularly consumed through painting and more tangible mediums, with todays' modern technology it is easier to consume art through more electronic mediums. This can be taken through the artform as video games for an example which although they are not a direct representation of real life, they certainly borrow enough of it to create their own interpretation. In this desire to recreate worldly surroundings, game creators[39] deploy the same type of methods as artists. To start off with the game must have a location whether it is in a different location or time, the world must be built to successfully convince the player that the surroundings are real to the main character. This is done using the same basic art techniques employed by artists everywhere. First the world is constructed through mapping out blocks and chunks of areas with different meaning, and even if the final product does not represent real life exactly it is still modeled after the same types of landscapes painters have been navigating and trying to recreate for years. Both these art forms rely on the artists' ability to break down natural shapes into segments which can be sculpted using coloring techniques as well as sizing to present a specific viewpoint to the audience. Although in painting the final product is only viewed from one two-dimensional angle, videogames rely on creating a three-dimensional virtual space that can be viewed through a two-dimensional platform. This is because the player is in control of the angle and direction of character movements. This difficult task, however painstaking allows the player to become more immersed than other media for it grants access to viewpoints not accounted for in still art imagery.

For Geralt, the protagonist from the Witcher series, and for the other powerful beings who have obtained the ability to fight monstrous creatures on a level ordinary humans could not, they had to undergo a transformation which took from them things that make them human. Taking the example of Geralt evolving into the monster slayer he becomes, he loses the ability to procreate along with the ability to experience certain emotions.[40] The loss of these characteristics, though alone not enough to make these powerful beings a monster themselves, separate them far enough away from being human that the common people consider them abnormalities. In comparison, a powerful woman named Yennefer lost her ability to bear children when she was schooled in the ability to fight monsters using sorcery and magic. To grant her more power than humanly possible she had to undergo surgery that took away the function of her reproductive organs. Even in today's political climate the function and use of sexual organs dictates a woman's status even though these standards were created by men to enforce on females as to what the ideal should be. Although there is no physical way to anticipate her magical powers, she is still denied the right to be considered human for the simple fact of gaining the powers she now possesses.

As these examples show, a common theme in the categorization of Geralt and Yennefer is the way their reproductive rights have been stripped from them. Therefore, those who defeat the abnormalities of the earth are considered so abnormal themselves that they are not allowed to reproduce. This idea of control over the monsters and the supernatural is usually expressed in the continuous defeat of their kind; however, when the slayer is not only a hunter but an abnormality in their own right, there is an unusual contradiction at play. These powerful sub-humans are needed to keep the world in order, and act as a checks and balances system between the elite and the monsters terrorizing the people. Without them neither would be able to defeat the monsters or use them to their advantage. So to keep these monster slayers and sorceress' at the disadvantage of not being able to reproduce offspring is not only in the best interest of society but also to show power and imply that these beings can be controlled. In this way these extravagant capabilities do not belong to them since they are ruled over by the public.

Their usefulness then becomes measured by the amount of righteous deeds they do to defeat those beneath even them, which grant them the privilege to live among society. Although their presence is needed to keep the lowly categories of monsters at bay, as abnormalities themselves, their existence is held with contempt by the common people. As mentioned earlier monsters fall to the very bottom of the societal caste system giving the common people authority over something even if the monsters only existence lies in stories and written text. In addition, when classifying these monster-esque humans as monsters, the common people are now superior in status to both monsters and creatures with supernatural powers.

Among these created warriors with superhuman features, the power to understand and wield magical elements is taught through rigorous training. Since each monster is unique, it only makes sense they would be defeated in unique ways as well. It is known that during the Middle ages along with these scares from monsters, ideas of magic and sorcery appeared. Although it may not be the spellcasting "magic" thought of today, it was used in superstitious ways meant to fend off monsters from homes and land.[41] While these superstitious means may not have worked as intended there were likely other benefits that cropped up with their creation. For stories though many show this knowledge of "magical" substance combinations that is only useful if the user is physically able to combat the creature with the necessary supplies. This is seen in previous popular literature such as "The Sword in the Stone," where the mythical

sword could only be used by someone with the exact bodily (both mental and physical) conditions.[42] This is seen in the unspoken understanding that in these tales once the specific conditions are met they must be recognized and approved by a greater outside force, a supernatural force if you will.

6. Conclusion

With all of the scarier aspects surrounding monsters, their lore, and the implications they provide about society, why do humans find them so fascinating? For one thing, they were not easily glimpsed by the public, if they were even seen at all. When people are not exposed to seeing something for themselves, their brains create an exaggerated image of the described experience. This made for the creation of tall tales full of these creatures and led to them being even more dramatic in idea. Since there are no scholarly records[43] of the appearance of these medieval abnormalities living in the contemporary world, these medieval creatures are seen and reproduced in modern media. The idea that monsters might be real even though there is no physical evidence, makes the consumption of stories presenting them even more fascinating. Even as time has gone by these stories persist and expand, allowing these legends to traverse across countless regions and cultures. This exchange gives people a larger compendium of creature lore than ever before, allowing them to learn about monsters from across the globe. Along with this, because humans are mortal creatures, there is an instilled fear of creatures that cannot be understood or identified. This is because there is no certain way to identify their level of threat.[44] Even if the threat is a small one, there is no guarantee that they are capable of handling it mentally or physically. This instinctual fear which keeps humans on edge around the unusual, also keeps them intrigued because there is no safe way to look away from danger.

The desire to view and understand foreign creatures, comes from wanting to better account for their threat level which would help alleviate some of the instinctual fears present. For example, for the longest time and to this day, snakes have been recognized as a big fear for many people. This is not because these people have personally been attacked or hurt by snakes, but because they are not sure they are capable of handling themselves in a situation where a snake is present. People who study snakes and understand them have a much easier time predicting their behavior and assessing their mood because they have learned to understand them.[45] When applying this to the concept of monsters and unidentifiable creatures, it is easier to understand that the knowledge needed to assess this threat level comes from interacting and observing the creature safely which for these creatures, is hard, near impossible, to do.

Another reason medieval monsters captivate audiences is because of their association to the unholy. When there are two opposing forces, one will be marked good and the other evil[46]. With this, the audience will desire to see the unrighteous side defeated, which in this case were the medieval abominations that stemmed from sub-humans to mutated animals. The idea of what is created good versus what is created evil was heavily influenced by the sway of the Catholic church which although made clear distinctions applied bias to the division through their religious ideologies. With their religious lead and elite power given to them by the ruler, their ideas were rewarded and flowed through society seamlessly as law. When the law and the church are so closely interwoven, making it so impossible to separate at times, even those who do not follow the Catholic church are forced to succumb to some of its ideologies. This is especially true in what is designated as good and what is designated as evil.

Among their many uses monsters also became a symbol for people, representing hidden emotions and desires that were rarely addressed. For instance, examining the intended meaning behind the she-wolf, which was supposed to be a female version of a werewolf and finding that its use refers to females with progressive feminine ideas which were considered rebellious during this time. It was rarely if ever used to describe a female Werewolf and because female Werewolves simply do not exist. For the idea of a wolf hidden under the guise of a normal feminine exterior ready to strike at any given moment, showed the fear men had for women who valued their own ideas over the man-made system. Their ideas did not bode well for the society in which they lived since it contradicted many of the systems that were set in place by the patriarchy. To refrain women from expressing opposing opinions it was easier to turn them into monstrosities' in the eyes of the public since people were willing to believe in monsters for the many previously stated reasonings.

The interest in monsters from their appearance to their lore has persisted even as the Middle and Renaissance periods have passed. Through thorough examination of both humanoid monsters from this span as well as these creatures reimagined in modern media the enduring allure of the inexplicable, the focus on gendering these creations and the continued efforts to give them visible form through art can be seen. With the female form being the primary focus of these humanoid creatures, closer examination of their attributes reveals that modern forms of media such as the Witcher III put more emphasis on the monster parts of these creatures, rather than turning the female image itself into the most terrifying and prominent segment. This stylistic choice makes these creatures even more intimidating than just a part human-monster hybrid. These earlier images presented, with the definitions in beastial manuscripts which

focus on turning the feminine form into a monstrous component, becomes a stark contrast to this modern mindset that takes out the mystery and disgust that surrounded the female form in the earlier writings.

This desire to understand and connect to these unattainable beasts aids in the long standing interest humans have for them, allowing their legacy to continue on even if they can not explain it themselves.

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8. Endnotes

1 Unreal is understood in this paper as not taking up physical space in the world.

2 Peter Brown and Mary Beagon, *The Elder Pliny on the Human Animal: Natural History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. 1-5. Pliny was born in 23 AD and died in 79 AD.

3 Ibid., 2.

4 Lilian Armstrong, "The Illustration of Pliny's Historia Naturalis: Manuscripts before 1430," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 46 (1983): 20.

5 Manuscript artist Bede was known for such.

6 It is important to note that while Christian worship was found throughout Europe, practices varied from city to city, among the majority of churches however, they found agreement in their disdain for monsters.

7 Richard Kieckhefer, "The Specific Rationality of Medieval Magic," *The American Historical Review* 99, no. 3 (1994): 816-818.

8 For example: Kingdom Come: Deliverance, Chivalry: Medieval Warfare, and aspects of Assassin's Creed heavily rely on trying to understand the Medieval and putting it into a modern perspective.

9Albrecht Classen. "The Monster Outside and within: Medieval Literary Reflections on Ethical Epistemology. from Beowulf to Marie De France, the Nibelungenlied, and Thüring Von Ringoltingen's Melusine."

10 Lynn T Smith. "The Class Structure in Contemporary Society in the USA." *Social Science* 45, no. 3 (1970): 133-42.

11Andrew Michael Flescher. "Evil versus Goodness: Satan and Other "Evildoers"." In *Moral Evil*, 23-66. Georgetown University Press, 2013.

12 Lisa Verner. *The Epistemology of the Monstrous in the Middle Ages*. Florence: Routledge, 2005.

13 Sarah Alison Miller, *Medieval Monstrosity and the Female Body* (London: Routledge, 2010), 1-7.

14 Pamela Porter. *Courtly Love in Medieval Manuscripts*. British Library, 2003.

15 Someone who is subjected to mutations and taught to fight monsters. If they live through these terrible experiments they are hired to slay fantastic beasts which hunt townsfolk.

16 Medieval to a degree with aspects pulled from both the Renaissance and fantasy.

17 See Fig 1.

18 Which became popular with the Renaissance

19 The Witcher Universe is mentioned in reference to the world where the Witcher 3 takes place. This world is fictional and resides in the original books, the videogames and most recently the tv series.

20 Fig 2, Fig 3, Fig 4,

21 These designs and artists are associated with CD Projekt Red, the company that created the Witcher videogames.

22 Fig 5.

23 Lilian Armstrong. "The Illustration of Pliny's Historia Naturalis: Manuscripts before 1430."*Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 46 (1983): 19-39.

24 Miller, *Medieval Monstrosity and the Female Body,* 55-59.

25 Ibid.

26 Christopher S. Mackay. *The Hammer of Witches : A Complete Translation of the Malleus Maleficarum*.Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

27 The word created is used in reference to how Witchers are made through complex experiments and several forced mutations.

28 Page 10.

29 Succubi are creatures that have historically been known as sexual demons who get their powers by stealing sexual energy from their usually male victims during their sleep.

30 Tammy Horn. "Europe: A Bridge of Honey Bees." In *Beeconomy: What Women and Bees Can Teach Us about Local Trade and the Global Market*, 85-146.

31 Ibid..

32 Raphael, Patai. "Lilith." *Journal of American Folklore* 77, no. 303 (October-December 1964): 295-314.

33 Robert A Koch. "The Salamander in Van Der Goes' Garden of Eden." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 28 (1965): 323-26

34 Fig 8.

35 It is important to note here that anatomic features are not to be confused with gender

36 Context is used to differentiate which of the two versions of female wolf is being referenced

37 Elizabeth Casteen. *From She-Wolf to Martyr: The Reign and Disputed Reputation of Johanna I of Naples*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016

38 Supernatural, The Witcher III.

39 Simon Cook. "The Contrasting Experience of Story-Driven Videogame and Novel: a Narratological Case Study of The Witcher Novels and The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt."

40 This transformation is done by forcing genes to mutate which uses the Medieval love of understanding the scientific and alchemic.

41 Kieckhefer, "The Specific Rationality of Medieval Magic," *The American Historical Review* 99, no. 3 (1994): 813-36.

42 T.H, White. *The Sword in the Stone*. London: HarperCollins Childrens, 2010.

43 Of course, there were scholarly writings published about monsters including Pliny the Elders' *Natural Historia,* however they have not been verified to be true even today.

44 Stephen T. Asma, *On Monsters : An Unnatural History of Our Worst Fears* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

45 Ibid.

46 Andrew Michae Flescher. "Evil versus Goodness: Satan and Other "Evildoers"." In *Moral Evil*, 23-66.