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Jolene Zigarovich

The Trans Legacy of *Frankenstein*

In her recent afterword for Barbara Johnson's *A Life with Mary Shelley* (2014), Judith Butler describes Frankenstein's creature in terms of both gender and monstrosity:

The novel *Frankenstein* manages to keep women in their place, and yet the monster may well be carrying that excess of gender that fails to fit properly into "man" and "woman" as conventionally defined. If the monster is really what a "man" looks like when we consider his aggressive form, or if this is really what a "woman" looks like when her own gendered place is destabilized ... then the "monster" functions as a liminal zone of gender, not merely the disavowed dimensions of manhood, but the unspeakable limits of femininity as well. (47-48)

Notably binary, Butler's rhetoric describing the creature's gender representation relies on terms such as "destabilized," "liminal," "excess," and "unspeakable." For Butler, "monster" functions in a space where "manhood" and "femininity" meet. I quote this passage here to underscore the persistent critical difficulty in describing not only Frankenstein's creature but also his "monstrous" gender. Realizing that she is writing in response to Johnson's foundational work on Shelley and is thereby responding to particular feminist paradigms, I believe the potential of trans theory definitions and concepts could expand her reading of the creature and gender beyond queer excess and liminality. Illuminating the powerful role the monster plays in trans narratives and theory, the following essay speaks to the remarkable influence of Susan Stryker's "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage" (1994) and its powerful effect on gender studies and Shelley's novel.

With the 200th anniversary of the publication of *Frankenstein* in 2018 and the upcoming 25th anniversary of Stryker's essay in 2019, the intersection of Gothic literature with gender studies has a lengthy history. Stryker's essay profoundly shifted interpretations of *Frankenstein* and altered the view of the Creature's gender malleability in literary criticism. The present study is devoted to examining the influence of Stryker's essay on studies of gender and Shelley's novel, and in particular, the interstices of science fiction, monster theory, and transgender studies.

From Stryker's intersection of transsexual and transgender experience with monstrosity, to Sandy Stone's posthuman concepts, to Gayle Salamon's rhetorics of materiality that explore the "phantasmatic" trans body, trans theory has always been rhetorically haunted.¹ Before I examine this alignment more specifically, I will briefly explain the influence of gender and sexuality studies on critical approaches to the Gothic. Historically, Gothic studies have worked with a conservative, binary-based approach such as "Female" versus "Male" theories of the Gothic. In fact, the classification "Female Gothic," a term

famously coined in 1974 by Ellen Moers, has been abundantly helpful in interpreting a subgenre of eighteenth-century literature focused on women's anxieties about domesticity, sexuality, and childbirth.² Moers theorizes that works of Female Gothic were generally produced by female authors, and their plots favored terror over horror, female passivity over action, and upheld virtue and morality. With critics such as Donna Heiland and Diane Long Hoeveler, feminist theory uncovered the masquerade of the professional female writer who "exploded the limited gender constructions" of her tightly demarcated social sphere (Hoeveler 31). This identification of a binary-based classification engendered Gothic feminism and resurrected numerous female writers. Yet the gendered classifications relegated authors and texts to this binary system, based mainly on the gender of the author and the plot content: the tantalizing terrors of a passive Radcliffean Gothic, for instance, were naturally juxtaposed with the sexually threatening, action- and horror-filled Male Gothic. In the wake of both poststructuralism and queer theory, a destabilization of this gendered binary proved both inevitable and fruitful.

With the rise of third-wave feminism and sexuality studies, the late 1990s and 2000s marked the queering of Gothic studies. In light of this development, William Hughes and Andrew Smith recognize in their introduction to *Queering the Gothic* that Gothic has "always been 'queer'" (1). George E. Haggerty, Eve Sedgwick, Ellis Hanson, and others suggested that a wide range of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers used "Gothic" to evoke a "queer" world that attempts to transgress the binaries of sexual decorum.

Following the lead of these scholars and others, queer criticism of the Gothic has attracted greater attention. Numerous recent book-length studies, such as those by Paulina Palmer, Max Fincher, and Ardel Haefele-Thomas, illustrate how queering the Gothic is a necessary and continuing project. William Hughes and Andrew Smith recognize that the movement of the Gothic from the margins to "the mainstream of academe" must be resisted by reconsideration of the genre's queerness, which will critically push the genre "once more away from the comfortable center and back towards the uneasy margins of transgression and experimentation—a place where it undoubtedly belongs" (5). And it is the purpose of my essay to push back (in a small way) on this "comfortable center" and to destabilize normative approaches to the Gothic. While Moers's umbrella term spawned "Women's Gothic," "Feminist Gothic," "Lesbian Gothic," and others, I agree with Smith and Diana Wallace that these terms are too essentializing. Yet this same essentializing applies to various forms of "queering the Gothic" as well. Non-normative sexuality, non-normative bodies, and gender variance in the Gothic often fall under a queer umbrella. So how can we discuss Gothic as a genre that crosses over boundaries constructed by a culture to define and contain gender and sexuality? And how do monstrous bodies specifically mark or disrupt this boundary crossing?

Stryker's Monster Trans. Stryker's groundbreaking trans scholarship and its intersection with the Gothic offers an additional perspective and approach that moves toward answering these questions and alleviating this theoretical

frustration. First a performance piece presented in 1993, then an essay blending the personal with the academic in 1994, “My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage” powerfully expressed Stryker’s transsexuality, her physical transition, and her alignment with the Creature. Stryker’s retelling of the story of Frankenstein’s monster responded to Sandy Stone’s call for “post-transsexual” theorizing rooted in the embodied experience of transgender people (Whittle and Stryker 244). Citing the scene from Shelley’s *Frankenstein* in which the monster first speaks back to its maker (“By the virtues that I once possessed, I demand this from you. Hear my tale; it is long and strange” [67]), “revealing itself as something other, and something more, than its creator intended,” Stryker turns this literary meeting into “a metaphor for the critical encounter between a radicalized transgender subjectivity and the normativizing intent of medical science” (Whittle and Stryker 244). For Stryker, the trans body and trans phenomena produce an “alien” result, as signified by her science-fictional rhetoric and description:

The transsexual body is an unnatural body. It is the product of medical science. It is a technological construction. It is flesh torn apart and sewn together again in a shape other than that which it was born. In these circumstances, I find a deep affinity between myself as a transsexual woman and the monster in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Like the monster, I am too often perceived as less than human due to the means of my embodiment; like the monster’s as well, my exclusion from human community fuels a deep and abiding rage in me that I, like the monster, direct against the conditions in which I must struggle to exist. (238)

Her words not only invoke the monster’s body but also Victor Frankenstein’s rhetoric and acts of “construction”; they gesture toward other literary examples of “unnatural” medical and “technological” interventions, such as the biomedical manipulation of bodies that blur species boundaries in H.G. Wells’s *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896). She writes from the visceral position of monstrous experiment and lays the groundwork for subsequent alignments of trans embodiment with the Gothic monster, science fiction, and mad science. As Victor’s “creation” is given his own voice and narrative in Shelley’s novel, Stryker too finds power in narrating her trans physicality and journey:

These are my words to Victor Frankenstein, above the village of Chamounix. Like the monster, I could speak of my earlier memories, and how I became aware of my difference from everyone around me. I can describe how I acquired a monstrous identity by taking on the label “transsexual” to name parts of myself that I could not otherwise explain. I, too, have discovered the journals of the men who made my body, and who have made the bodies of creatures like me since the 1930s. I know in intimate detail the history of this recent medical intervention into the enactment of transgendered subjectivity: science seeks to contain and colonize the radical threat posed by a particular transgender strategy of resistance to the coerciveness of gender: the physical alteration of the genitals. (244)

Stryker’s formulation reflects a confluence of dominant cultural, medical, legal, and transgender community discourses (including the nontranssexual regulation

of transsexual bodies). These matrices—racio-gendered-sexualized-speciesist—effectively colonize all subjects excluded from the normative domain of “human.” Stryker calls attention to this virulent specio-transphobia that has categorized her (and her body) in terms of a Frankensteinian monster. Rejecting a sense of lack or loss of personhood, Stryker is empowered by her rage and monstrous embodiment, urging her readers to “discover the enlivening power of darkness within [themselves]” (254).

Stryker calls for a transsexual embodiment that does not aim to reaffirm gender binaries but seeks rather to attain a “monstrous” subjectivity. By declaring “I am a transsexual, and therefore I am a monster” (254), she is reclaiming the word *monster* in order to relieve it of its power. But more importantly, abjection becomes a tool with which to further challenge and problematize conventions of socially constructed gender categories.³ Recognizing herself in Frankenstein’s creature, who likewise exceeded the purpose of its maker, she asserts: “As we rise up from the operating tables of our rebirth, we transsexuals are something more, and something other, than the creatures our makers intended us to be” (248). The newly enlivened body of the creature attests to its maker’s failure to attain the mastery he sought (“A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs” [Shelley 33]). Stryker writes, “Frankenstein cannot control the mind and feelings of the monster he makes. It exceeds and refutes his purpose” (248). Diffracting Shelley’s novel through her own personal experience, Stryker eventually “claims her own transsexual body as a monstrously powerful place, situated outside the natural order, from which to speak and write and act” (Whittle 244). She boldly pronounces:

Hearken unto me, fellow creatures. I who have dwelt in a form unmatched with my desire, I whose flesh has become an assemblage of incongruous anatomical parts, I who achieve the similitude of a natural body only through an unnatural process, I offer you this warning: the Nature you bedevil me with is a lie. Do not trust it to protect you from what I represent, for it is a fabrication that cloaks the groundlessness of the privilege you seek to maintain for yourself at my expense. You are as constructed as me; the same anarchic womb has birthed us both. I call upon you to investigate your nature as I have been compelled to confront mine. I challenge you to risk abjection and flourish as well as have I. Heed my words, and you may well discover the seams and sutures in yourself.⁴

This passage is directed to those who position their bodies as natural against the monstrosity of trans embodiment. Here she both claims and rechannels the rage that many transgender people feel, recasting the outcast as a self-affirming human being who embodies “intellectual inquiry, moral agency, and political action” (Whittle 244). Stryker argues that all people (trans or not) are subject to “a gendering process that sustains the illusion of naturalness” (250). “Nature,” Stryker writes, “exerts such hegemonic oppression” (250). By acknowledging that biological sex is discursively imposed, Stryker ultimately claims that transsexuality can widen the gaps in how sex and gender are reiterated, and that trans embodiment is a source of transformative power.

This personal, bold exposure of transgender experience paved the way for various memoirs and narratives about trans identification and the journey to embodiment. And almost simultaneously, numerous queer (not necessarily specifically trans) approaches to Gothic literature emerged. The essay spoke to other transgender theorists, paving the way for the articulation of their own affective experience (and rage) in their critical work. For Stryker and others, *monster* proved an appropriate term for identification, and we can recognize this in its etymology. From its origins, the term “monster” connoted the sphinx and centaur: “a mythical creature that is part animal and part human,” “something extraordinary.” Later associations defined monster as an “imaginary creature that is large, ugly, and frightening,” “disfigured,” “a misshapen being,” “a person of repulsively unnatural character.” From its Middle French origins, though, *monstre* is defined as “a prodigy, a marvel.”⁵ These intersections of the unnatural with the extraordinary are identified by Foucault in his lectures (gathered in *Abnormal*). Foucault remarks that the human monster exists not only as a “violation of the laws of society but also a violation of the laws of nature” (56). Combining the impossible and the forbidden, the monster, Foucault defines, is ambiguous and outside of law. Recognizing the term’s obvious negative and unnatural valences, we must also value its reappropriation and potential power. As Anson Koch-Rein underscores, “When trans* people are cast as less than human, the monster (and the creature from Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* in particular) is often the metaphor of choice” (134-35). This is not an accidental alignment. And clearly Stryker’s essay was the first to metaphorize fully trans embodiment in these literary, science-fictional terms. In light of Stryker’s groundbreaking piece, my essay will address these issues and approaches, and assess the influence of transgender theory on the Gothic and *Frankenstein*.

Transgothic, Somatechnics, and Diffraction. A transgothic approach acknowledges “trans” as connoting unstable, transient, or in-between, but also offers “trans” as transformation, development, creativity, reorganization, and reconstruction. Working from Haggerty’s reading of queer Gothic, which argues that “transgressive social-sexual relations are the most basic common denominator of gothic writing” (*Queer Gothic 2*), “transgothic” helps us understand the genre as a mobile one that actively crosses boundaries and margins, creating and marking various forms of transitions and migrations in its narrative path. As I detail in *TransGothic in Literature and Culture*, a transgothic approach is concerned with several questions, including: How can we discuss the Gothic as a genre that crosses over boundaries constructed by culture to define and contain gender and sexuality? How do transgender bodies specifically mark or disrupt this boundary crossing? In what ways does the Gothic open up a plural narrative space for transgenre explorations, encounters, and experimentation? Stryker’s influential essay in part addresses these questions as it plays with genre, diffracts *Frankenstein*, and thereby produces a personal narrative of trans embodiment. These matrices inevitably generated critical responses and similar approaches. In my view, the first and most influential is

Jack Halberstam's *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (1995). Halberstam's study suggests that the transsexual provokes category crises that are displaced onto the place of gender ambiguity. He claims that "all difference in modernity has been subsumed under the aegis of sexual difference" (189). Notably, Halberstam reads Freud's case studies with a monstrous, transsexual lens. The case study of Dr. Schreber includes a transsexual fantasy that Halberstam reads as "Gothic hallucination" (108). Schreber tells of the onset of hypochondria followed by delusions in which he imagines his body becoming female. Freud writes: "He has a feeling that great numbers of 'female nerves' have already passed over into his body, and out of them a new race of men will proceed through a process of direct impregnation by God" (qtd. in Halberstam 109). Halberstam notes Freud's "Dr. Frankenstein"-like reaction and rhetoric: "It is not hard to find in this passage the echoes of Dr. Frankenstein's venture in solo reproduction.... Schreber's monstrosity, like Dracula's and like Frankenstein's involves both the desire to reproduce alone and the pathologization of that desire" (qtd. in Halberstam 109). *Skin Shows* opens with the chapter "Making Monsters: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*," and Halberstam reads the Gothic, monstrous body as the locus of fear. As a body with the potential for "prodigious generativity" and unnatural reproduction, the unfixable creature is a gender hybrid and "sexual outlaw" (42). *Skin Shows* demonstrates with numerous examples that the mobile Gothic monster is at odds with gender identity or sexual identity; monsters imitate, exaggerate, perform, and shed gender. Monstrosity is "an amalgam of sex and gender" (6); the monstrous body indeed produces gender. As in Stryker's conceit, Halberstam argues that Frankenstein's monster specifically is foreign: as an outsider to the community, "his foreign sexuality is monstrous" and he embodies "species violation" (6). These are all terms that Stryker invokes when she describes her non-traditional family and "monstrous" transsexual body in "My Words to Victor Frankenstein." Like Stryker, Halberstam initiates the radical, political potential of becoming-monster that emerges from self-transformation. As Halberstam argues, "We need monsters and we need to recognize and celebrate our own monstrosities" (27).

This embracing of becoming-monster has proliferated and been reproduced in provocative ways. Relevant areas include an amalgam of trans and scientific theories, including somatechnics. More recently, Harlan Weaver's "Monster Trans: Diffracting Affect, Reading Rage" (2013) cogently reacts to and extends Stryker's intention in "My Words to Victor Frankenstein."⁶ As Weaver brilliantly outlines, textured by rage and tempered by writing, the relationship between Stryker's transsexual monstrosity and Victor Frankenstein's monster produces "a uniquely queer fury that reaches kraken-like into the space of reading" (287). Weaver compellingly traces the movements of this affect and the changes it conveys in thinking through the relationship between Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Stryker's "My Words to Victor Frankenstein." Unlike other readers of *Frankenstein*, Weaver does not address the questions posed by the novel's enigmatic form, nor does he outline the ways that Stryker directly reflects Shelley's monster. Rather, Weaver's reading focuses on the interplay

between the texts, or what he terms the “diffraction patterns” that emerge between them.

Uniquely, Weaver’s chapter takes up Donna Haraway’s definition of diffraction as “an optical metaphor for the effort to make a difference in the world” (16), a means to see and better understand difference over sameness. This intersects with Karen Barad’s material explanation of the physics that diffraction delineates in this sense of difference. Describing an experimental apparatus in which a screen with multiple slits is placed upright and light is shone through the slits onto a second screen, Barad notes that, instead of slit-sized spots of light, what one sees on the second screen is a diffraction or interference pattern (75). In this setup, light acts as a wave, and the diffraction patterns mapped onto the second screen reveal points where the waves engendered by movement through the slit screens are augmented—overlapping and becoming larger than before—and diminished—cancelling each other out in those places where a peak meets a trough (Weaver 288). Weaver takes up diffraction by reading how Shelley’s and Stryker’s texts, already in close proximity to each other, act as slits for the monstrous anger and intense feelings that move, wave-like, through both of them. By tracing the patterns produced by the movement of these feelings through these proximate texts, Weaver identifies points of constructive interference that demarcate the emergence of differences between them. It is a unique examination of the changes produced by the emotions that move through and shape “My Words to Victor Frankenstein” and *Frankenstein*.

Stryker’s queer transgender fury pushes her to speak her disidentification with gendered norms and to name ways to become differently legible in spite of those strictures. This fury, affect at its most material, a potent somatechnic, gives Stryker new language, words she lacked before, words engendered through the interplay between her experience and that of Shelley’s monster, through which she can explore a mode of becoming that allows bodies to interact differently with gender. Weaver insightfully explains the productive space produced by the conjoining of Stryker’s transgender subjectivity and Shelley’s novel:

The theoretical language Stryker’s rage engenders expresses a new understanding of the kinds of resistances available to specifically transgender subjectivities. By articulating experiences of “different codes of intelligibility,” Stryker analyzes what she saw but could not adequately interpret before: the ways that specifically transgender fury can push those who live it to disidentify with norms, incorporate the affect that comes from encounters with a hostile world, and bring it within to the point where it transforms. (299)

In Weaver’s view, this affect, developed through intra-actions with Shelley’s text, unearths a new monstrosity.

While Weaver’s essay deploys Barad’s and Stryker’s arguments with *Frankenstein*, Barad’s follow-up essay, “Transmaterialities: Trans*/Matter/Realities and Queer Political Imaginings,” again returns to *Frankenstein*, Stryker’s core literary correlation. Drawing on disparate fields and theories from

biology, quantum field theory, and trans theory, Barad's essay embraces bioelectricity, primordial ooze, monstrosity, Stryker's trans rage, and, notably, galvanism and lightning (perfectly aligning itself with Shelley's novel). Barad's essay of diffraction sutures narratives of monstrous trans embodiment with scientific and medical theories. As Weaver's essay diffracts Shelley's and Stryker's texts with Haraway's theory of diffraction and Barad's explanation of the physics of diffraction, Barad's essay rereads Stryker's "My Words to Victor Frankenstein" and diffractively intercuts her words with those of "an electron I imagine to be speaking contrapunctually of its own perpetual (re)birthing" (414). This produces a beautifully creative and profound diffracted poem (and prose poem), which concludes with "Let us align ourselves with the raging nothingness, the silent howling of the void, as it trans*figures fleshy possibilities. Wandering off the straight and narrow path, wonderings alight. Trans* desire surges forth electrifying the field of dreams and transmateralities-to-come" (416). With this, Barad explores the trans nature of nature. She asks, "What would it mean to reclaim our trans* natures as natural? ... to recognize ourselves as part of nature's doings in its very undoing of what is natural?" (413). By exploring regenerative medicine and bioelectric studies and intersecting these with Stryker's story of trans embodiment (and other theories), Barad discovers the possibilities of subverting science's conservative agendas from the outside, by opening up science from the inside. "Can we cultivate bioelectrical science's radical potential," she asks, "subverting Dr. Frankenstein's grab for power over life itself, aligning (neo)galvanism with trans* desires, not in order to have control over life but to empower and galvanize the disenfranchised and breathe life into new forms of queer agency and embodiment?" (411). Barad is ultimately hopeful that the radical opening up of science from within can launch new understandings of materialist practices and the nature of change. It is both remarkable and telling that, embedded within this provocative diffracted reading, is the pulp of Stryker's 25-year-old essay, demonstrating its own regenerative purpose in trans theory.

Trans Monstrosities. Stryker's essay is indeed regenerative and transformative. It has been morphed, resurrected, disseminated, cut, dissected, sutured, and (re)birthed. Studies such as Jay Prosser's *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (1998) would not be possible without Stryker's insistence on the narrative work of transsexuality. Prosser recognizes this when he claims, "Reading transsexuality through narrative, I suggest that the resexing of the transsexual body is made possible through narrativization, the transitions of sex enabled by those of narrative" (5). Yet Prosser's biographical project did not benefit from diffracting Stryker's text; it ignores the monstrous, abject, unnatural aspects of trans embodiment that Stryker's essay so compellingly reveals. One of the most powerful rebirths and transformations of "My Words to Victor Frankenstein" has been the spawning of a genre that takes up these aspects of trans body narratives. Stryker's essay is one of the earliest instances of what can now be termed the genre of trans monstrosity (or as others signify it, trans*monstrosity).⁷ Her subversive identification with Shelley's monster and

the reclaiming of monstrosity in her journey to trans embodiment continues to resonate for those experiencing a similar trajectory of emotion.

A notable contribution to trans monstrosity narratives is Boots Potential's "Monster Trans" (2004), in which Potential, writing about his desire to combine an obsession with B-movie monsters, gender transgression, political engagement, and "an unquenchable urge to fuck shit up," notes how, eventually, "I became the monsters I used to watch" (34). For him, monsters "open up new and unfamiliar categories with regard to their bodies" (35). "Monstrosity-as-gender" is "hopeful and beautiful" (38), and allows mobility and simultaneity. This sense of monsters as category-breakers shapes Potential's conception of becoming trans, and he argues that thinking of "gender-as-monster" gave him "a tangible example and concept of how I could explain my transness outside of the medical model" of Gender Identity Disorder (38). True to his monstrous affiliations, Potential seeks to "create a lack of gender-cohesiveness" (36) on his body in order to defy gender norms. Noting the drawbacks of associating with monstrosity (racial, behavioral), Potential still chooses to embrace the power of monstrosity to avoid, disrupt, and question traditional, socio-historical norms.

Another key entry in the genre of trans monstrosity is Sonny Nordmarken's recent autoethnographic piece, "Becoming More Monstrous: Feeling Transgender In-Betweenness" (2014), which takes up this aspect of Stryker's sense of monstrosity by exploring how it "sticks differently to differently monstered bodies" (39). Analyzing his relational transgender journey in light of the monster's life in Shelley's *Frankenstein*, he traces his daily indignities and complex transgender positionalities. Following Stryker, Nordmarken proclaims "monstrosity" a tool of resistance and reconnection that can help build connections across difference: "Claiming humanity in my monstrosity as a transsexual, I make my monstrosity human" (38). Experiencing the effects of high levels of testosterone and being medically diagnosed with "Gender Identity Disorder," Nordmarken sees his trans-masculine, "monstered" self reflected in Stryker's transfeminine experience. Feeling excluded from community, he admits, "I too feel indignity and rage at my exclusion and the effects of social trauma" (39). He asks

How can this isolation, this pain, this rage engender productive possibilities for resistance? How can we find freedom in and through the monsters in ourselves? What freedom can this be? Frankenstein's monster resists dehumanization by learning to speak, enacting subjectivity and claiming himself as a subject. He makes himself legible by speaking about his experience of exclusion. (39-40).

Like Stryker, Nordmarken embraces his monstrosity in order to define his life and its value:

I "monster," or make visible the dehumanization I have faced, which is a result of dominant, rational ways of thinking—what individuals deploy to render me "monstrous." I take power in exhibiting others' terrorizing behavior. Perhaps surprisingly, love has a part in shaping our stories of monstering and of being made into monsters. (40)

While physically transitioning, Nordmarken's physical androgyny and gender ambiguity proves powerful as he challenges cisnormative conceptions of gender. Invoking the rhetoric of Frankenstein's creature, Nordmarken proclaims:

My androgyny fucks with their imagined able-bodiedness: I impair their ability to categorize me. I challenge their conceptions of gender; I shake the foundations of their narrative. I upheave their ideas of Truth and their trusty methods to know it. I am successfully undoing gender (Butler, 2004) by being illegible. I am living the unlivable. Their failure to attribute a gender category to me makes my ambiguous gender performance a form of resistance. I take power in their confusion. I feel a rush of heat and euphoria in this moment of freedom—as I monster gender-fuck and gender-terrorize. (40)

As Nordmarken traces his frustrations and rage, loss and isolation, he reminds himself that Frankenstein's monster only finds relief from his miserable isolation through suicide. Resisting this narrative of self-destruction and internalized oppression, Nordmarken determines to "write an alternate ending to a story about monstrosity. I want to find selfhood, love, and resistance, and hope for justice within monstrosity" (48). Embracing "fragmented parts" and "betweennesses," he proclaims, "I want to claim all the rejected parts of me. All the disdain, all of the shame. Claim all the ways I am Other. Bring them into my full being.... Growing my fragmented selves and fragmented relationships together" (48).

As these critical narratives about trans identity and monstrosity claim, "monstrous" is both a construction (a figure that signifies a culture's unbearable, abject elements) and a narrative (the power of monstrous autoethnography to dismantle gender binaries and heteronormative social constructs).

Though I do not have the space here to describe all of the important trans critical responses to and reimaginings of Stryker's essay, my hope is that this essay has illuminated its significance and profound influence, not only for studies of Romanticism, the Gothic, sf studies, and *Frankenstein*, but for gender studies and trans narratives. Stryker's merging of the critical and the autoethnographic dramatically transformed gender approaches to *Frankenstein*. In fact, a queer or feminist examination of *Frankenstein* does not exist without citing Stryker. (For example, a cursory Google Scholar search of "Stryker and *Frankenstein*" results in over 175 citations). My larger purpose here is to illuminate the productive ways trans studies has sutured itself to the Gothic since her essay's publication. Stryker's alignment of trans experience, embodiment, and subjectivity with the monstrous was groundbreaking, shocking, and powerfully accurate for its time. Her essay has inevitably inspired numerous studies of gender and *Frankenstein* (beyond queer, feminist, homoerotic) and, in a profound fashion, has spawned a new genre: trans monstrosity. Suturing science, medicine, reproduction, and science fiction with trans embodiment served to stimulate examinations of animal trans, somatechnics, the subhuman, the posthuman, and the cyborg. By incorporating a positive monstrosity, Stryker's essay exposed the unlimited body and created a space of radical

possibility. Moreover, “My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage” laid the necessary groundwork for strategic appropriation and redefinition of the self’s cultural construction as monstrous Other.

NOTES

1. For a larger discussion of the intersection of transgender theory and the Gothic, see Zigarovich.
2. See Moers’s *Literary Women*. Other notable studies include those by Hoeverler, Williams, Clery, Horner and Zlosnik, Smith and Wallace, and Wallace and Smith.
3. See Robert Phillips’s helpful definition of “Abjection” and Anson Koch-Rein’s entry on “Monster.”
4. Stryker 240–41. As she mentions in her essay, Stryker was not the first to align transsexuality with *Frankenstein*. See Mary Daly’s chapter “Boundary Violation and the Frankenstein Phenomenon” and also Raymond.
5. All these references are from the *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.
6. A revised version of Weaver’s essay was recently published as a chapter in Zigarovich, 119–38.
7. Though I recognize the importance some place on the hyphen (trans-) as well as the asterisk (trans*), in a broader gesture I have chosen to not hyphenate *trans* or *transing*. See Stryker et al. 11–22.

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ABSTRACT

With the 200th anniversary of the publication of *Frankenstein* in 2018 and the upcoming 25th anniversary of Susan Stryker's influential essay "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage" in 2019, the intersection of Gothic literature with gender studies has had a lengthy history. Stryker's essay profoundly shifted interpretations of *Frankenstein* and altered the view of the Creature's gender malleability in literary criticism. This essay examines the influence of Stryker's essay on studies of gender and Shelley's novel. Written in the early 1990s, Stryker's essay powerfully expressed her transsexuality, her physical transition, and her alignment with the Creature. This personal, bold exposure of transgender experience paved the way for various memoirs and narratives about trans identification and the journey to embodiment. Like *Frankenstein* and its creature, her essay has been morphed, resurrected, disseminated, cut, dissected, sutured, and (re) birthed. I argue that suturing science, medicine, reproduction, and science fiction with trans embodiment stimulated a positive monstrosity, exposed the unlimited body, and created a space of radical possibility.