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- 1 Fischer-Hornung, Dorothea, and Monica Mueller, eds. *Vampires and Zombies: Transcultural Migrations and Transnational Interpretations*.
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The 21th century has been very good on monsters, scholarship-wise; upping the ante from medieval *bestiaria* and cryptozoology catalogues, myth and folklore studies prepared a fertile ground for the cultural theory-informed body of scholarship that, drawing from both traditional representations of monstrosity but, mostly, from pop-culture (post-)modernity, has set up the monster as a prime trope of contemporary identification and cognition. Following fast at the heels of such classics as Barbara Creed's Kristeva-inspired 1993 *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* and Judith Halberstam's 1995 *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*, a brood of

scholarly monographs and anthologies (some more theory-informed than others) on all aspects of monstrosity as subject and/or as methodological tool have hatched, notable among which are Richard Kearney's 2002 *Gods and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness*, Stephen T. Asma's 2011 *On Monsters: An Unnatural History of Our Worst Fears*, and the tellingly-titled collection *Monster Culture in the 21st Century*, edited by Marina Levina and Diem-My Bui (2013).

Into this rather crowded state of affairs Fischer-Hornung and Mueller's new collection of essays from scholars around the world claims the competitive advantage of first, dealing exclusively with the undead as a distinct category of monstrosity and, second, focusing on "what happens when the undead go global" (back cover), i.e. on the transformations befalling the said undead when their lore or cultural image crosses national borders, especially in the mobility-inducing context of contemporary globalization. In that sense, it does feed on the premise of the postmodern condition as a monstrous one *par excellence*, underlying not only the "queerness" of the undead position, but also its amenability to transcultural translatability. Indeed, in the book's very informative introduction, the editors justify their focus on these two figures precisely because recent changes in the fundamental depiction of the vampire (as sexier and "nicer," 5) and the zombie (as more ghoulish and "nastier," 6) resulting from transcultural flows have increased their "trendiness" exponentially, thus encouraging yet further transcultural flows and transformations; hence the book's thesis stemming from "the conviction that transcultural and transnational imaginaries have shaped and altered the zombie and vampire tropes, fundamentally affecting their representation based on their movement through time and space" (8).

The book is divided into 4 parts with some minor degree of overlapping (and a bit of repetitiousness). The key theme of "Part 1: Migratory Transformations" is what happens when an undead figure already established in the western pop-cultural imaginary is transplanted into another culture. Katarzyna Ancuta's "The Smiling Dead; Or, the Empirical Impossibility of Thai Zombies" pits very convincingly Thai folklore and cultural beliefs, in which the idea of a zombie cannot possibly exist (since Thai dead are cremated), versus the zombie figure imported in homemade horror films, which then has to be translated in various

creative alternative ways: “Zombies were ‘explained’ in terms of ghosts inhabiting the dead body, black magic, possession by a shaman, or foreign disease. In one instance, the zombie became a metaphor of racial oppression” (25). Ancuta goes further to read into each of these reconfigurations a specific political-cultural anxiety engendered by the frictions of colonialism and globalization, when, for example, the zombifying virus is brought into Thailand by a white foreigner (32), thus symbolizing fear of foreign cultural influences, or when exploited illegal Burmese workers become hordes of vengeful zombies (34). The author’s informed blend of folklore, history, cultural studies and film studies makes this a very engaging as well as informative article.

In a similar vein, Sabine Metzger’s “‘She loves the blood of the young’: The Bloodthirsty Female as Cultural Mediator in Lafcadio Hearn’s ‘The Story of Chūgōrō’” looks at the importation, by Lafcadio Hearn, of the vampire figure into Japanese culture that does not have a vampire concept. Metzger examines how Hearn’s vampirized retelling of a classic Japanese *kwaïdan* (ghost) tale prudently eschews all the Gothic accoutrements and even the appellation “vampire,” thus constructing a critique of western intrusiveness into Old Japan culture. More importantly, though, Hearn also brings to the fore the “queerness” of vampires and ghosts as cultural mediators—Metzger coins the term “‘transcultural supernatural’: a neutral territory unfolding between East and West, uniting them but at the same time defying all appropriation,” 44)—and, I would add, the queerness of Hearn himself as a multi-culti author and thinker using “folktales to mediate between cultures” (58). Although the idea that Hearn was consciously grafting vampire lore into his Japanese tale is not very convincingly supported—Metzger herself ends up identifying the tale more often as a ghost story than a vampire one—the author’s exploration of the link between Freudian maternal femininity and vampirism (following both Creed and Bram Dijkstra) is toothsome indeed (56-57), even though it doesn’t explore more the ties of Hearn’s supernatural seductress to a worldwide set of similar dangerous female water-sprites

Timothy M. Robinson’s ensuing article, “Octavia Butler’s Vampiric Vision: *Fledgling* as a Transnational Neo-Slave Narrative” takes a different turn, exploring those rare instances within the work of black authors (all of them

female) where the parallelism of the condition of vampire-victim and master-slave has become operant, upon the premise borrowed from Nina Auerbach that “vampires are an ever-changing archetype reflecting societal concerns and anxieties of the particular generation that it derives from” (61), and more so as a further articulation of the violently hierarchical bond of males and females within patriarchy (63). To support his thesis that “[t]he vampire... is a border-transgressing figure, speaking to issues between migrants and indigenous residents, such as irrational fears of contact, miscegenation, and xenophobia” (64), Robinson revisits carefully the prior manifestation of vampire figures in African, Caribbean, and African-American lore and literature, tying the migration of such myths to the Middle Passage and slave exploitation history. He then convincingly situates Butler’s vampire narrative within the neo-slave genre as an integrationist fantasy, showing how it differs radically from other, more sexist or convention-informed readings of the vampire figure, concluding that “*Fledgling* critiques depictions of blackness as other. Additionally, it interrogates migration and immigration policies in First-World countries in terms of how these groups are positioned as other, yet as requisite for development and prosperity” (78).

The focus of the essays that constitute Part 2 of the collection is on “Non-Normative Sexualities,” i.e. such monsters as traditional and revamped signifiers for perversion and fatally seductive contagion. Rasmus R. Simonsen’s enthusiastic survey of “Appetite for Disruption: The Cinematic Zombie and Queer Theory” explores alternative modern readings of zombie abjection as metaphors for queerness, queer/homo-sexuality, the AIDS epidemic and even the mesmerizing lure of popular cinema. It is one of the two essays in the collection (along with Kirkland’s exploration of video-game zombies) that pays due attention to a “trans-” dimension rather taken for granted in other pieces, i.e. the *transmediality* involved in the overwhelming majority of these “migrations,” and the frictions between the purely folkloric representation of the undead versus their cinematic (or other popular media) counterparts. In that sense it resembles Dwight Codr’s brilliant *PMLA* essay “Arresting Monstrosity: Polio, Frankenstein, and the Horror Film” (March 2014; 129.2: 171-87) that chronicles the monster’s transformation from text to image as ground-breaking and definitive; however, Simonsen does not stay grounded so much on fact. The

author's convictions that zombies are the queerest monsters (87; 90) and that "we can revel in the gory intrusion upon the Symbolic reality" (91) are not necessarily upheld, despite his considerable arsenal of queer theorist readings, since he himself admits that the terminal abject condition of "zombification...usurps...potential for story making" (96) and "the fantasy" of zombie queerness overturning the hegemony of the heteronormative "cannot be sustained" (102); nevertheless, his informed reading of Bruce LaBruce's 2008 gay zombie parody *Otto; Or, Up with Dead People* as a deconstruction of the AIDS epidemic scare is a noteworthy case of filmic study.

A more cautious (t)reading can be observed in Danielle Borgia's "Vampiros Mexicanos: Nonnormative Sexualities in Contemporary Vampire Novels of Mexico," albeit with less spectacular scholarly results. In an essay that would fit better in the first part of the collection, Borgia situates the vampire as a signifier for "marginalized sexual behaviors...including aggressive female sexuality, oral sex, group sex, pedophilia, homosexuality, and necrophilia" (110) within the adverse context of conservative, patriarchal, Catholic Mexican culture, whose history of homophobia she very carefully explains prior to the examination of three contemporary instances of mass-market novelistic vampires. While the 2009 *Vampyr* by Carolina Andújar and a trilogy (c.2008) by Ramón Obón are denounced for their homophobia, sexism and blatant otherization of the monster for the purpose of upholding heteronormative tradition, even while they "acknowledge the growing public visibility of Mexico's queer community" (126), Adriana Díaz Enciso's *La sed* (2001) is hailed as a daring exploration of "bisexuality and polyamory in ways that envision these sexualities as viable" (124).

Part 2 concludes with another careful reading that would also fit within Part 1, Monica Mueller's "Hybridity Sucks: European Vampirism Encounters Haitian Voodoo in *The White Witch of Rosehall*." Through an impressively detailed delineation of both the European and the Haitian voodoo folklore that was, as Mueller's thesis goes, united by Herbert G. de Lisser in his 1929 sensationalist novel about the legendary white Jamaican plantation owner, Annie Palmer, the idea of transculturality in building specific tropes of the undead monster vis-à-vis other folkloric tropes (e.g., Jamaican *obeah*) is indubitably established, as well as

the functionality of this monster “as an emblem of the abuse of colonialist social privilege and power” (132). Mueller compares Annie Palmer to the protagonist of Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* to designate how European Gothic vampire signifiers are both transplanted and translated within a colonial Caribbean context, thus drawing an interesting parallel between Eastern European/Balkan and Caribbean economic politics, gender attitudes, and cultures.

“Part 3: Cultural Anxieties” contains some of the best essays in the collection. Carmen Serrano’s account, “Revamping Dracula on the Mexican Silver Screen” offers some really original insight on how transcultural migrations not only transformed, but *created* the legend of the vampire, melding the 15th-century explorers’ accounts of South-American vampire bats with European history and folklore on the undead; then re-transporting that cultural amalgam back across the Atlantic, first as an American cinematic monster, then as an exported world-pop icon that unwittingly returned to the country of its origin having lost the memory of its creation there (151-55). If, for Serrano (following Halberstam), the vampire is the demonized other, especially the economic migrant seen as intruding upon a hegemonic culture parasitically (155), then her thesis explores the question of what that other might be in the already-otherized culture of Mexico—and the answer is “a white, foreign, aristocratic, and perverse body that threatens Mexican identity” (156), as *gringos* (from the U.S. but also, here, from France) have done for indigenous Native and Mexican populations historically. Serrano shows step-by-step how the 1957 horror classic *El vampiro* uses Mexican cultural tropes to further the plot and relate it to the country’s national imaginary (drawing from the past and the present). In that sense, the film’s release coinciding with the centennial celebrations for Mexico’s constitution after the expulsion of the French invaders at the aftermath of the Franco-Mexican Pastry War (1838) casts the vampire once more as a versatile, prolific metaphor for transcultural events.

In “The Reanimation of Yellow-Peril Anxieties in Max Brooks’s *World War Z*,” Timothy R. Fox reads the not-so-clandestine politics of “fanatic patriot” (181) Brooks in this extremely successful specimen of “the future war” sci-fi subgenre, specifically known as “zombie apocalypse” (178). Following a detailed explanation of the origins and meaning

of the term “Yellow-Peril” (i.e., “the irrational fear of conquest or domination by an Asian power, specifically a Chinese or Japanese invader”—169), Fox catalogues all the instances in the novel that point to this motif, from the Chinese origin of the zombie plague, to the jabs against corrupt and ineffective Chinese politics and the Chinese-inspired international black-market organ trade. He also ties the fear of “the enemy within,” a key component of Yellow-Peril anxiety, to the fear of queer and/or “infected” (morally or virally) homosexual people who can “pass” as straight folk (180), thus reinforcing a point made in earlier articles (like Simonson’s). Finally, Fox ties the novel to recent historico-political events in the U.S.A., especially 9/11, seeing the attempt of the novel’s individuals to reclaim Earth and their humanity from the rampaging zombies as a “cathartic,” if ultimately ineffectual, “dismissal of actual anxieties” pertaining to global economics and world terrorism (181; 183).

Johannes Weber’s “‘Doctor! I’m losing Blood!’ ‘Nonsense! Your blood is right here’: The Vampirism of Carl Theodor Dreyer’s Film *Vampyr*” introduces “Part 4: Circulating Technologies”—a part that is most concerned with transmediality, even if the term is not made sufficiently prominent. Weber here attempts, quite successfully, the complex operation of not only showing how “the film is less an adaptation of this Gothic tale [Sheridan Le Fanu’s 1872 “Carmilla”] than an appropriation of certain modes of narrative representation surrounding earlier vampires,” but also—predominantly—how “Dreyer turns the representation of this experience into a depiction of the filmic condition per se” (192). Weber annotates carefully all the ways the expressionist film offers “a systematic subversion of the contemporary viewers’ cinematic storytelling expectations” (193), from an unreliable “dreaming” protagonist/narrator to a distorted sense of time, space, and audio track (193-95), and goes on to explore the film’s vampiric drawing-upon prior written tradition, like Polidori’s “The Vampyre” and especially Le Fanu’s 1872 collection *In a Glass Darkly*. Finally, he offers an exemplary reading, informed by both film and gender theory, of a scene in *Vampyr* where the protagonist meets his own corpse as a metaphor for the death of the author and the birth of the film viewer enthralled by the very medium that feeds on his passive existence for its survival (206), thus casting

Dreyer's opus as "not only a vampire film but also a vampiric film" (207).

From film—that, along with the popular novel, has had the lion's share in this anthology—we move, in the two final articles, to two other representative categories of pop culture, the comic book and the video game. Richard J. Hand's "Disruptive Corpses: Tales of the Living Dead in Horror Comics of the 1950s and Beyond" on the one hand celebrates the pre-Comics Code Authority creative freedom enjoyed by artists and storytellers of horror comics, who gave the world the absolutely abominable yet delightfully Lucianic undead in such publications as *Tales from the Crypt*, and on the other convincingly traces the lasting and potent influence of those comics, even as memories, in the definitive formation of today's iconic undead, like George Romero's *Living Dead* or those allegorical "monsters inside" that serve "as a vehicle for sociopolitical comment" (214). Hand cites the sources of inspiration for the undead produced by comics companies like EC from the 1930s until 1957, when the Code went into effect, noting the absorption by comics of underlying threads in those sources, like the mandate for vengeance (216) that the undead fulfill, or the exploration of "sexual horror" and anxiety over changing gender roles in the invocation of the archetypal *vagina dentata* symbolism (218-21). He then notes how those tropes, complete with "fetid" explicitness of all sorts and sardonic, politically relevant humor, have been kept very much "undead" in a variety of later media, from a slew of comics (like Kitchen Sink's c.1973 comics series *Tales from the Fridge 1*) to Romero's filmic remake of the zombie slave into aggressive ghoul and comics-TV hybrid *The Walking Dead* (2003-).

Finally, Ewan Kirkland's "Undead Avatars: The Zombie in Horror Video Games" examines the particular and multivalent bond between video games and zombies. As the author claims,

- ¹⁸ Just as photography can be associated with the ghost, and cinema with the vampire, so too a relationship can be demonstrated to exist between the video game and the zombie, a connection evoking a similar sense of ambiguity concerning the technology of the video-game apparatus, the experience of video-game play, and the ontology of the zombie. (231)

¹⁹ This affinity that is “making the zombie a potentially useful metaphor in understanding the process of game play in general” (230) is then systematically traced onto the aforementioned dimensions of game-playing that, ironically, echo the agonies of certain parents and educators about the detrimental influence of video games on the minds of the young and impressionable. Kirkland proceeds to take a closer look at two iconic zombie games, *Resident Evil*—“the first [game] to coin the term *survival horror*” (235)—and the Japanese-originated *Forbidden Siren*, especially in terms of the gaze politics that relate player to avatar and their zombie enemies. Tricks like the disassociation of avatar gaze from player vision via a “third-person perspective” in *R.E.* and the “sight jacking” trick—seeing the playing field through the surrounding zombies’ eyes—in *F.S.* create in the player a sense of disembodiment that is both external (in relation to the avatar) and internal (in relation to one’s own faculties) and resembles in many ways the condition of the zombie slave whose willed is controlled by that of the *bokhor*, the master, as well as our own postmodern condition of “disciplined subjects of Foucault’s panopticon, internalizing the regimes of surveillance imposed upon them” (241).

²⁰To conclude, one could say that this anthology is equally about transcultural transformation and intercultural dialectics, with popular culture—much like its iconic undead—appropriating, parodying, subverting and building upon other levels of culture and tradition to both propagate itself (rather incestuously, as many critics have noted) and criticize hegemonic tropes from a position queer enough to defy cooption. In short, it is a useful tool in the hands of the cultural critic looking for theory-informed praxis in the field of globalized pop.

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