

# THE BROODMOTHER AS MONSTROUS-FEMININE— ABJECT MATERNITY IN VIDEO GAMES

Sarah Stang (York University)

**Abstract:** *This article examines examples of the monstrous-feminine in the form of abject maternal monsters in a selection of commercially successful and critically acclaimed mainstream video games using conceptual frameworks and textual analysis methods established in the work of Julia Kristeva and Barbara Creed. The Broodmother from Dragon Age: Origins (2009) and the Mother from Dragon Age: Origins—Awakening (2010) are considered as problematic examples of the abject monstrous-feminine which fall into a long tradition in horror media of framing the female body and the birthing process as something horrific and repulsive. Kerrigan from the StarCraft series (1998–2017) is examined as a possible counter-example, demonstrating that the monstrous-feminine can exist in a playable and potentially empowered form, though she is problematically empowered within a violent, militant framework. Overall, this article critically analyses the ways in which video games remediate tropes of gendered monstrosity and reinforce the misogynist norms and values of hegemonic heteropatriarchal ideology by forcing players to enact symbolic violence against transgressive female bodies.*

**Keywords:** *video games; monstrous-feminine; maternal; abject; motherhood; Dragon Age: Origins (2009); Dragon Age: Origins—Awakening (2010); StarCraft series (1998–2017).*

## Introduction

Monstrosity has long been the subject of much interdisciplinary research, particularly for scholars interested in questions of meaning-making and identity formation. Theorists have deconstructed the ‘monstrous’ as a broad category of alterity, marginality, abjection, deviance, and even potential agency and empowerment. Monstrosity is of particular interest to media scholars, since portraying monsters with certain physiological, phenotypical, or cultural qualities that reference specific groups of people and specific types of bodies, or inversely, portraying specific groups of people with monstrous qualities, has been a common practice in all media forms. In this sense, scholars have long noted that the mediated monster often functions as a symbolic representation of some kind of marginalized identity.

In his book *Monster Theory* (1996b), Cohen observed that “any kind of alterity can be inscribed across (constructed through) the monstrous body” (Cohen 1996a: 7). Stories which present the monster as a terrifying and abject Other who must be slain by a hero in order to restore normative order—a narrative set-up rooted in mythology and familiar to all media forms—can therefore be read as means to demarcate and police the boundaries separating what is considered to be the normal, rational, healthy Self from the abnormal, irrational, unhealthy Other (Picart/Browning 2012: 1). That monstrous Other is often portrayed as female: from the seductive siren and enraged gorgon to the

evil witch and the castrating *vagina dentata*, female bodies and female sexuality have commonly been rendered monstrous and threatening within patriarchal ideology.

While female monstrosity in art, literature, and horror films has been extensively studied (see, for example, Creed 1986; Dijkstra 1986; Creed 1993; Huet 1993; Grosz 1996; Caputi 2004; Wood/Schillace 2014; Santos 2017; Harrington 2018), female monstrosity in games has received less attention (Santos/White 2005; Spittle 2011; Sarkeesian 2016; Stang 2018). This is a particularly egregious gap in media scholarship because in many games, fighting and slaying monsters is central to gameplay. This is undoubtedly due to their historical connections to the popular fantasy tabletop roleplaying game, *Dungeons & Dragons* (Gygax/Arneson 1974–), which involves players enacting a power fantasy by killing monsters in order to gain experience points and level up. *Dungeons & Dragons* itself drew heavily from war games and classical mythology, which is rife with stories of heroic characters slaying monstrous Others (Nikolaidou 2019).

As an effort to contribute to addressing this gap, this article examines the ways in which a selection of commercially successful and critically acclaimed mainstream video games present the female body—particularly female reproductive processes—as monstrous. This analysis utilizes and builds upon the psychoanalytic concept of the abject as developed by Julia Kristeva and Barbara Creed’s influential concept of the monstrous-feminine. Tropes associated with the abject and the monstrous-feminine found in horror film are remediated in many video games, though unlike film, games force the player to embody the heroic representative of normalcy and slay the monster themselves. The argument underpinning this article is that the act of playing as a hero who slays pregnant and birthing monsters—referred to here as ‘Broodmothers’—functions as a re-enactment of the violence directed at women’s bodies within our heteropatriarchal societies. This virtual symbolic violence therefore reinforces misogynistic hegemonic ideologies.<sup>1</sup>

The article begins with a discussion of female monstrosity as it has been theorized by media scholars and an explanation of both the abject and the monstrous-feminine as conceptual frameworks. This is followed by a brief discussion of the severely lacking (or problematic) representation of motherhood in games as compared to the medium’s overabundance of fathers and father figures—a trend known within game criticism and scholarship as the ‘dadification’ of games. This leads into the analysis of the maternal monsters themselves, which have been studied using visual and textual analysis (close reading) techniques drawn from both film studies (Creed 1993; Williams 1991) and game studies (Carr 2009; Carr 2014). While there are dozens of abject mothers and maternal monsters in games, this article focuses on two particularly obvious and egregious examples of the trope: the Broodmother from *Dragon Age: Origins* (BioWare 2009) and the Mother from *Dragon Age: Origins—Awakening* (BioWare 2010). Finally, the central character Sarah Kerrigan from the *StarCraft* series (Blizzard Entertainment 1998–2017) is discussed as an alternative—but ultimately problematic—vision of a

---

<sup>1</sup> Women who are not biologically female are particular targets for heteropatriarchal violence, and historical concepts of monstrosity and abjection are directly tied to both femaleness and femininity; however, as this article is addressing reproduction and birth, my focus is necessarily on biological femaleness. Accordingly, when I use the word ‘female’ I am referring to biologically female bodies, and when I use the term ‘woman’ or ‘feminine’ I am referring to gender, which does not necessarily correspond to physical femaleness.

monstrous-feminine Broodmother, revealing the possibility of playable and therefore potentially empowered monstrous mothers.

### **Monstrosity and the Female Body**

As a tool of oppression, the monster polices the borders of what is permissible, and to step outside of social norms risks, according to Cohen, either “attack by some monstrous border patrol or (worse) to become monstrous oneself” (Cohen 1996a: 12). This is particularly true for women: not only are women often the victims of monstrous aggression in popular culture, but they are also commonly portrayed *as* the monsters. As Cohen observed, “the woman who oversteps the boundaries of her gender role risks becoming a Scylla, Weird Sister, Lilith, [...] or Gorgon” (Cohen 1996a: 9). Female reproduction has always been especially heavily policed within patriarchal society, and the male fear of female fecundity and potency has resulted in maternal bodies being strictly controlled or reviled as abject (Kristeva 1982 [1980]). The association of maternity with monstrosity in mythology, religion, folklore, storytelling, and popular culture has been well documented (Kristeva 1982 [1980]; Creed 1993; Huet 1993; Caputi 2004; Wood/Schillace 2014; Santos 2017; Harrington 2018). Monstrous mothers make monstrous offspring, often without any kind of paternal input, and even the ostensibly ‘normal’ female body parts which are directly involved in the reproductive process, particularly the uterus and vagina, are themselves associated with monstrosity in the form of the monstrous womb and the *vagina dentata*, or ‘toothed vagina’ (Creed 1993; Caputi 2004).

This article draws primarily upon Barbara Creed’s (1986; 1993) influential analysis of female monstrosity—what she termed the monstrous-feminine—in film. Although critical of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, Creed effectively applied the psychoanalytic concept of the abject, as theorized by feminist scholar Julia Kristeva in her book *Powers of Horror* (1982 [1980]), to a wide selection of well-known horror films. Kristeva drew on Lacanian psychoanalysis to articulate the abject as that which disrupts, disturbs, and is rejected by the normative, patriarchal realm of law, order, and propriety. The abject is associated with the primal, bestial, physical, and the feminine. The abject disturbs identity and threatens the borders we have established between human and animal, culture and nature, self and other. In signalling this categorical breakdown, the abject draws one “toward the place where meaning collapses” and so “is radically excluded” from normative society, thought, and behavior (Kristeva 1982 [1980]: 2). Facing the abject is therefore a traumatic experience, and a common reaction to it is disgust and horror. Any activities or substances which invoke disgust or horror are all part of the abject, such as bodily fluids and excrement, disease, open wounds, death and decay, cannibalism, bodily alteration or transformation, dismemberment, and even sexual perversion. However, the abject is, paradoxically, associated with both fear and *jouissance*, as we are often both disgusted by and drawn to that which is abject. This helps to explain the popularity of the horror film, the most abject of genres.

Importantly, the abject also exists in the infantile time before we separated ourselves from our mothers, that is, before we recognized a boundary between our own bodies and the nourishing maternal body. Female reproduction and motherhood are therefore especially associated with the abject. This was made clear by Kristeva when she stated that “[f]ear of the archaic mother turns out to be essentially fear of her generative

power” (Kristeva 1982 [1980]: 16). The archaic mother, or the primal mother, is the mother of earliest infancy—who Freud called the “first nourisher and first seducer” (Freud 1949 [1940]: 188)—and is a repressed presence in the human psyche and, unsurprisingly, a common monstrous presence in many horror films (Creed 1993). Accordingly, psychoanalytic theory argues that we must reject our mothers in order to form our own identities and become part of the normative, patriarchal world, which is represented by the father. At the moment the child rejects the mother for the father, the mother becomes abject. This division between the embodied, natural feminine and the mental, ‘civilized’ masculine reinforces the taxonomical patriarchal hierarchy which places women beneath men (MacCormack 2012: 257). However, by framing maternity as abject, there is also a recognition of its power to disrupt the patriarchal symbolic order, especially when that maternity is presented as monstrous, threatening, and powerful.

In her application of abjection to the monstrous-feminine in film, Creed observed that “[a]ll human societies have a conception of the monstrous-feminine, of what it is about woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject” (Creed 1986: 44). Her analysis included the primordial Archaic Mother in *Alien* (Scott 1979) and the Monstrous Womb in *The Brood* (Cronenberg 1979), which both represent the fear of female generative power; the Possessed Monster in *The Exorcist* (Friedkin 1973) and the Witch in *Carrie* (De Palma 1976), which both embody the cultural association of female sexual maturation with corruption and sin; and the Vampire in *The Hunger* (Scott 1983) and the Castrating Mother in *Psycho* (Hitchcock 1960), which both directly threaten male sexual identity. These are more than just female versions of male monsters, as “[t]he reasons why the monstrous-feminine horrifies her audience are quite different from the reasons why the male monster horrifies his audience” (Creed 1993: 3). Creed found that it is the female physicality of these cinematic monsters that was so disturbing and abject, particularly monsters which give birth, possess phallic symbols, and penetrate or castrate their victims.

Of course, as Creed observed, “the feminine is not per se a monstrous sign; rather, it is constructed as such within a patriarchal discourse which reveals a great deal about male desires and fears” (Creed 1986: 70). This is likely because the films Creed analysed were all directed by men and appear to be intended for male audience members. The same can be said of most mainstream video games: according to the International Game Developers Association’s 2016 *Developer Satisfaction Survey*, 72% of game developers are male (Weststar/Legault 2016), and game scholars like Jesper Juul (2012 [2009]) have long noted that developers often make games that would appeal to their own demographic. Although Creed was discussing film, her observations and theories about the monstrous-feminine, particularly abject maternal monsters, can be readily applied to video games.

While the application of psychoanalysis to horror films and monsters is a popular theoretical approach, and the monsters discussed in this article clearly embody aspects of the abject and monstrous-feminine, it is important to underscore the generic differences between horror, fantasy, and science fiction. While the games under study here certainly remediate tropes common to much horror media, the *Dragon Age* series is a fantasy series (perhaps more specifically dark fantasy, but it is not categorized as ‘horror’) and *StarCraft* is science fiction. This is an important distinction to make,

because in horror media there is generally a single monster, or single kind of monster, who disrupts normative society and must be slain, controlled, or contained to restore the symbolic order. However, in fantasy and science fiction, the worlds are populated by monstrous creatures or ‘monstrous’ (i.e. nonhuman) races. In this sense, monstrosity is normalized in science fiction and fantasy in a way it is usually not in horror. Given that Creed identified the abject monstrous-feminine in the context of horror films, this necessarily means that the concept cannot be perfectly mapped onto science fiction and fantasy. However, the creatures and characters I discuss here do exemplify aspects of both the abject and the monstrous-feminine, suggesting that while monstrosity is normalized in these games in the form of populations of monstrous beings who share the same world as the human (and humanoid) races, it is still presented as horrific and abject. This is particularly the case with female monsters, as I demonstrate in this article, underscoring the fact that certain tropes connected to the act of othering female bodies and female reproductive processes are not limited to the horror genre.

In addition, while there is a strong tradition of adapting feminist psychoanalytic film theories to games (Santos/White 2005; Spittle 2011; Rehak 2013; Carr 2014; Trépanier-Jobin/Bonenfant 2017), rather than immersing the viewer in the story through shots designed to foster identification with certain characters, video games position the player as an actor in the game’s narrative. In this sense, by forcing the player to control a generally normative, non-monstrous heroic representative of the symbolic order, games make players complicit in the violence enacted against monstrous bodies. Although *Dragon Age: Origins* and *Dragon Age: Origins—Awakening* allow players to embody marginalized identity positions, such as a racialized elf or a persecuted mage, these characters are not monstrous. Rather, players enact the role of heroic Grey Warden tasked with slaughtering countless monstrous Darkspawn—the primary enemies in the game—and their monstrous, abject mothers. This complicity is precisely why studying the monstrous-feminine in video games is an important task: we do not simply watch the cathartic re-enactment of patriarchal violence directed at non-normative and transgressive reproductive female bodies as in the horror films discussed by Creed—we *perform* it. This is why my discussion of Kerrigan in this article is given so much attention: As I demonstrate, she embodies aspects and tropes of the horrific monstrous-feminine, but she also subverts them in several ways and is, most importantly, a *playable* character. Rarely are players given the opportunity to embody the monstrous-feminine themselves, and this speaks to not only the unique medium specificity of games in their incorporation of the player, but also to the ways in which games allow scholars to push psychoanalytic textual analysis past its established cinematic constraints. As this article outlines, the abject and monstrous-feminine manifest very clearly in games, and while most games with female monsters simply present them as horrific creatures to defeat, there remains the possibility for a repositioning of the player *as* monster.

### **The Brood and Its Mother (*Dragon Age: Origins*, 2009)**

Video games have always struggled to represent motherhood. While fathers are often featured as heroic player characters—a trend known in game criticism as the ‘dadification’ of games (Brice 2013; Joho 2014; Voorhees 2016; Stang 2016)—mothers are generally absent, deceased before the story begins, killed off during the game, or

portrayed as villains or monsters. This tendency has become so common that some critics have demanded to know where the mothers are in video games and why they are portrayed so poorly when they are present (Smith 2014; Campbell 2016; Gray 2017). While killing off mothers to spur the protagonist on his hero's journey certainly points to patriarchal ideology in game narratives, when mothers are present but framed as evil or monstrous the misogyny becomes particularly palpable. The trope of pregnant or birthing female monsters is clearly tapping into the previously discussed revulsion and fear towards female fecundity, particularly when that birth is non-normative, when the mother or her offspring are transgressive in any way, and when the mother reproduces independently. Female reproduction without male input is, understandably, a particularly potent fear in patriarchal society. Like most fears and anxieties, it has manifested in horror media; as such, the birth-as-horror trope is so widespread that it has proven a popular subject for feminist film scholarship. For example, in writing about David Cronenberg's 1979 body horror film *The Brood*, Creed points out that:

The mother's offspring [...] represent symbolically the horrifying results of permitting the mother too much power. An extreme, impossible situation—parthenogenetic birth—is used to demonstrate the horrors of unbridled maternal power. Parthenogenesis is impossible, but if it could happen, the film seems to be arguing, woman could give birth only to deformed manifestations of herself (Creed 1993: 47).

Although parthenogenetic reproduction might seem to empower the mother, giving her uncontested control over her offspring, it generally comes at a high price. While her pregnancy is certainly unconventional, it is often the result of infection, contamination, or mutation and causes abject transformations, madness, and, eventually, death at the hands of the protagonist. In *The Brood*, Nola is infected/impregnated by her own psychotic rage caused by the abuse she suffered from her parents. She uses her monstrous offspring to try and reclaim her daughter from her husband who wants full custody of the child. To save the girl—and keep her for himself—the husband murders Nola, though the final scene of the film reveals that the daughter has begun to show symptoms of the same infection which plagued her mother. These themes of enraged and abused women, horrific maternity, bodily transformation, and infection-as-impregnation are clearly paralleled in BioWare's critically acclaimed fantasy role-playing game *Dragon Age: Origins*, and its expansion *Dragon Age: Origins—Awakening*, in the figures of the Broodmother and the Mother, respectively.

In *Dragon Age: Origins*, the player encounters the monstrous Broodmother—an enormous multi-breasted female creature who exists to give birth to litters of twisted and evil Darkspawn, the primary enemies in the game (see figure 1). The player must fight this monster—who attacks by screaming, spewing vomit and saliva, sending her Darkspawn children to attack, and grabbing with her tentacles—in the fleshy, pulsating, pink walls of her lair. The atmosphere surrounding the player as they uncover the truth about Darkspawn procreation is like a horror film: dark, dank underground caverns, creepy music, the manic whisperings of prisoners driven mad by their captors. The Darkspawn are the primary enemies the player must fight throughout the game, though little is revealed about them until this moment. The Darkspawn resemble twisted,

monstrous versions of the gameworld's normal 'races': Humans, Elves, Dwarves, and Qunari, and in this scene, the player learns why. The Darkspawn breed by capturing women of these various races, force-feeding them poisonous Darkspawn blood, body parts, as well as flesh from people of their own race. This process kills most captives, but some survive the Darkspawn poison—called the Taint—and mutate into cannibalistic Darkspawn Broodmothers. Each race of Broodmother gives birth to a specific type of Darkspawn—a twisted manifestation of the monstrous mother herself, just as Creed described in her discussion of *The Brood*.



**Figure 1.** The Broodmother from *Dragon Age: Origins*. Screenshot by the author.

This segment is rife with abject symbolism. First, the Broodmother is an animal-human hybrid, with tentacles and a spider-like protrusion: hybridity, liminality, and categorical breakdown all signal the abject, especially in terms of challenging the boundary between human and animal (Kristeva 1982 [1980]: 207). Kristeva notes that women are often associated with the animal in patriarchal society, and that the abject subject is one who is “heterogenous, animal, metamorphosed, altered” (Kristeva 1982 [1980]: 207). Second, she resides in a lair that is clearly coded as vaginal or uterine: dark, dank, fleshy, pulsating rooms and corridors are particularly common visual motifs in horror and reference the psychoanalytical ‘archaic mother’ (see Creed 1993: 18). Third, she spews vomit and saliva: bodily substances are always abject and so it is no surprise that they are framed in the game as both a deadly threat and a revolting mechanic (Creed 1993: 2–3). Finally, she has been transformed through torture, cannibalism, and consuming ‘tainted’ blood: Bodily transformation and cannibalism are both abject—again, signaling the breakdown between Self and Other—but the Darkspawn blood is a particularly powerful abject symbol. Blood itself is an abject bodily substance (Kristeva 1982 [1980]: 3), but tainted blood can be read as a reference to menstrual blood, which both Kristeva and Creed discuss at length as being particularly abject in patriarchal

society as a symbol of female fertility, sexual maturation, and sexual difference. Kristeva writes that “blood, as a vital element, also refers to women, fertility, and the assurance of fecundation. It thus becomes a fascinating semantic crossroads, the propitious place for abjection” (Kristeva 1982 [1980]: 59). Creed notes that “[i]n the horror genre [...] menstrual blood is constructed as a source of abjection: its powers are so great it can transform woman into any one of a number of fearful creatures” (Creed 1993: 83). The most fearful of creatures is, of course, a monstrous mother who parthenogenetically spawns monstrous offspring. Naturally, those offspring are loyal only to her and pose a threat to the protagonist/player-character, who serves as the representative of the normative, patriarchal symbolic order.

The connection between blood, transformation, fecundity, monstrosity, and the female body is worth exploring further. In her book *Managing the Monstrous Feminine*, Jane Ussher observes that:

Menarche marks the point at which a girl becomes a woman; when childhood innocence may be swapped for the mantle of monstrosity associated with abject fecundity. The physical changes of puberty—breasts, pubic hair, curving hips and thighs, sweat, oily skin, and most significantly, menstrual blood—stand as signifiers of feminine excess, of the body as out of control (Ussher 2006: 19).

The transformations undergone by the Broodmother are particularly excessive: she swells in size, grows multiple breasts, her lower body transforms into tentacles, she becomes violent, and she apparently loses the ability to speak (she only roars and grunts, like an animal). In other words, the process that turns her into a mother also makes her monstrous (or vice versa). That process itself is articulated by one of the Darkspawn’s prisoners, a woman named Hespith. She explains:

We tried to escape, but they found us. They took us all, turned us. The men, they kill... They’re merciful. But the women, they want. They want to touch, to mold, to change until you are filled with them. They took Laryn. They made her eat the others, our friends. She tore off her husband’s face and drank his blood. And while she ate, she grew. She swelled and turned gray and she smelled like them. They remade her in their image. Then she made more of them. Broodmother... (*Dragon Age: Origins*).

It is unclear whether, after their initial transformation, Broodmothers begin to reproduce parthenogenetically or not; however, the Darkspawn appear to be loyal to their mother, sacrificing themselves to try and stop the player-character from killing her. As the Broodmother dies, Hespith finishes her story: “[t]hat’s where they come from. That’s why they hate us... That’s why they need us. That’s why they take us... That’s why they feed us” (*Dragon Age: Origins*). The line “that’s why they hate us... That’s why they need us” is particularly potent here, as it also articulates the contradiction inherent in misogyny, especially revulsion and hatred towards the maternal.<sup>2</sup> However, even

---

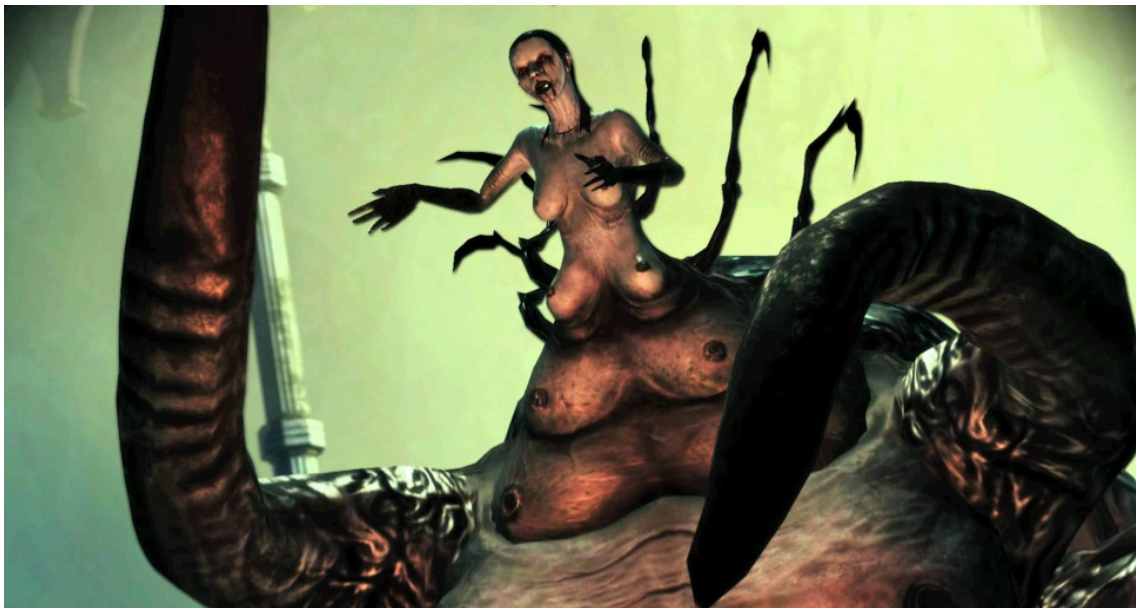
<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note that *Dragon Age: Origins* features a far less abject monstrous mother in the form of Flemeth, a witch who embodies a maternal, antagonistic, and ambiguous role. Flemeth is the adoptive



after learning that these Broodmothers are tormented victims, the player is not given an option to be merciful. The act of murdering this tortured and mutated woman is perhaps rendered less disturbing because she does not speak, she only shrieks and screams. What if she could vocalize her own agony? As it turns out, we still have to murder her even as she speaks to us: in the following game in the series—which features a psychoanalytical familial drama in which the maternal is pitted against the paternal—the main antagonist and final boss is a uniquely self-aware and fully sapient Broodmother.

### **The Mother vs. The Father (*Dragon Age: Origins—Awakening*, 2010)**

The main antagonist and final boss of *Dragon Age: Origins—Awakening* is unironically called the Mother. She is a unique, self-aware Broodmother who can speak but has been driven mad by her own mutations. Her dialogue and narrative function reflect common ableist tropes of madness in video games (Lindsay 2014; Goto 2015; Chang 2017): she laughs to herself, repeats herself, speaks in the third person, and is, of course, *evil*. Her character design is similar to the Broodmother in *Dragon Age: Origins* in that she is also a half human-half tentacle/spider monster hybrid with multiple breasts (see fig. 2).



**Figure 2.** The Mother from *Dragon Age: Origins—Awakening*. Screenshot by the author.

---

mother of one of the player's party members, a mage named Morrigan, who believes her mother plans to take over her body in order to regain her youth. At Morrigan's behest, the player can confront and kill Flemeth, who takes the form of a dragon in the battle. Although she appears to die, Flemeth reappears in subsequent instalments in the series, occasionally helping as well as hindering the player-character. As a mother figure, an older woman, a witch, and a shapeshifter, Flemeth also embodies aspects of the monstrous-feminine, though she turns out to be much more than simply another monster for players to kill. Future research on Flemeth as an embodiment and subversion of the monstrous-feminine could provide another valuable example of ways for developers to allow for a potentially empowered and appealing monstrous mother.

However, the Mother's human half is thin whereas the original Broodmother is fat (though the Mother is much larger in size), her skin is less pink, and her face is more human—though she can open her mouth in an entirely inhuman way (see figure 3). She also has a comparable combat style, grabbing and swatting at the player-character with her tentacles, spewing vomit and saliva, shrieking loudly to stun the player-character, and sending waves of her Darkspawn children to attack.

In the game's narrative, the Mother's desires are contrasted with those of the Architect, a paternal, male Darkspawn who is also uniquely intelligent and self-aware. The Architect was responsible for granting sentience to the Mother. This caused her to remember who she once was and the fact that she was forced to devour her own family when she was mutated into a Broodmother, a realization that drove her mad. Her awakening also caused her to no longer hear the call of the Archdemon that normally controls the Darkspawn, and she blames the Architect for the loss of the Archdemon's 'sweet song'. The other sapient/awakened Darkspawn are torn between loyalty to the Architect, the reformer who wants them all to become sapient and self-sufficient, and the Mother, the traditionalist who wants them to return to mindlessly serving the Archdemon. Both characters control hordes of Darkspawn, but the Architect is presented as calm, logical, and wanting only peace for his 'children', whereas the Mother is portrayed as mad, evil, emotionally unstable, and using her children as tools for her own desires. Although the Architect refers to the Darkspawn as his children, and the Mother even refers to him as 'the Father', he cannot reproduce. The Mother, on the other hand, gives birth to uniquely mutated Darkspawn called the Children who are protective, obedient, and loyal only to her.



**Figure 3.** The Mother's Final Scream (*Dragon Age: Origins—Awakening*). Screenshot by the author.

While the Mother has awakened Darkspawn who follow her and call her 'mother', her offspring are more monstrous and abject than regular Darkspawn, who emerge from

normal Broodmothers as monstrous toddlers. The Mother's Children are born instead as worm-like Darkspawn called 'childer grubs' which hibernate in cocoons after birth. These grubs emerge from their cocoons to attack and devour nearby prey, which determines the next stage of their evolution. If the grub consumes the flesh of a tainted creature, like another Darkspawn, it transforms into a 'childer hatchling', with legs and claws. According to the *Dragon Age Wiki*, after consuming another tainted creature, the hatchling evolves in a fully grown 'childer' (see figure 4a):

This final form of the Children is by far stronger and deadlier than all previous forms. Their claws have grown long and sharp, and they sprout additional insect-legs. Their body is encased by a protective carapace, making them much harder to kill than a childer grub or hatchling. They are also frighteningly fast; adult childers are capable of speed unmatched by every other type of darkspawn (*Dragon Age Wiki*: paragraph 6).

By making her offspring even more repulsive, monstrous, non-humanoid, and abject, the game reinforces the message that she is worse than the Architect, and that she must be stopped before she covers the world in monstrosities that are loyal only to her.



**Figures 4a–4b.** An Adult Childer (*Dragon Age: Origins—Awakening*; left) and The Architect (*Dragon Age: Origins—Awakening*; right). Screenshots by the author.

Regarding the Architect, the Mother states that “[h]e claims he wishes the darkspawn to be free. What he truly wants is to correct them!” (*Dragon Age: Origins*). The Architect, on the other hand, argues that “I do not seek to rule my brethren. I only seek to release them from their chains” (*Dragon Age: Origins*). Although this may appear to be a noble goal, the Darkspawn will never co-exist peacefully with the other races in the world given the grotesque and violent way in which they procreate. While the player can

choose to agree or disagree with the Architect, there is no room for understanding in the player's interaction with the Mother. This is perhaps because she is physically far more monstrous than the Architect (see figure 4b) and she is framed as delusional and described as 'mad' by other characters. The Architect describes her as his 'most flawed creation', explaining that "freedom drove her mad, and she has poisoned the minds of others" (*Dragon Age: Origins*). Before killing her, the player has the option to call the Mother a horror and say she must die, or to say that "[e]ven were she not mad, the Mother would still be disgusting" (*Dragon Age: Origins*). She deserves to die, apparently, either because she is a horror, because she is mad, or because she disgusts the player. Interestingly, none of the dialogue options refer to her Children as a reason for killing the Mother. The motivation, then, for killing her is because she is abject or mad rather than the actual threat her offspring pose to the world. In this sense, the game's developers assumed that the player would not feel pity or sympathy for the Mother, let alone agree with her desires. Yet, if players are familiar with the first game in the series, they know that the Mother must have once been a human woman. Tortured and mutated, forced to devour her own kin, and then made to 'awaken' from the Archdemon's song, losing her blissful ignorance and mindless purpose. Importantly, the Mother speaks to the Architect and the player, so even if the game forces players to murder her, she can at least vocalize her anger and pain. Indeed, when the final battle with her begins, the Mother tells the Architect that he cannot hurt her anymore than he already has, suggesting that the greatest pain he could ever have inflicted upon her is to make her aware of her own abjection. She then opens up her mouth like an alien and screams (again, see figure 3), a common image of the monstrous-feminine, and begins attacking the player. The player is forced to fight her, and when she is defeated the player-character kills her by stabbing their sword deep into her throat or electrocuting her while she screams in agony.

This narrative framing of the father as good, trustworthy, logical, and calm and the mother as evil, mad, emotional, controlling, and abject demonstrates the patriarchal fear of the maternal, birthing body as well as the misogyny embedded in the game. Kristeva noted that the logic behind patriarchal power structures is to contain female generative powers within strict behavioral codes due to the underlying assumption that women are always teetering on the brink of evil and want to create children that are loyal manifestations of themselves (Kristeva 1982 [1980]: 91). The maternal body is therefore a nexus of abjection and existential anxiety, the cause of an abject fear that the makers of *Dragon Age: Origins—Awakening* remediated by uncritically representing the mother as a literal monster. At the end of the game, the Mother refers to the player-character as 'the instrument of the Father' and while she is referring to the Architect, this could also be interpreted as her recognition that she, a deviant, mad, hybrid, monstrous mother, is being slaughtered by a servant of patriarchal ideology. Indeed, the game frames the player-character in that way, allowing only for an (admittedly very suspicious) alliance with the Architect. The player is never given an option to agree with, support, or even sympathize with the Mother. Murdering her by stabbing a phallic sword down her throat as she screams and opens her mouth up in a horrific, alien manner reinforces the player's position as a dominant, masculine, and violent representative of the symbolic order.



### An Empowered Broodmother? (*StarCraft*, 1998–2017)

The Broodmothers in the *Dragon Age* series clearly embody the abject and function as ludic versions of Creed’s monstrous-feminine. However, not all maternal monsters simply exist for the player to slay: Sarah Kerrigan in the *StarCraft* series is an important example of a kind of Broodmother who serves as a central, playable character. Her position as player-character is important to consider because of its implications for female representation in games. Indeed, the incorporation of players into game narratives is a way in which they open up space for alternative kinds of identification and the potential disruption of misogynistic tropes. At first glance, allowing players to embody the monstrous-feminine could be read as a progressive move and a decentering of patriarchal ideology. Kerrigan is, however, an ambiguous character, and as I demonstrate, she is entrenched within patriarchal control structures even as she fights to resist them.

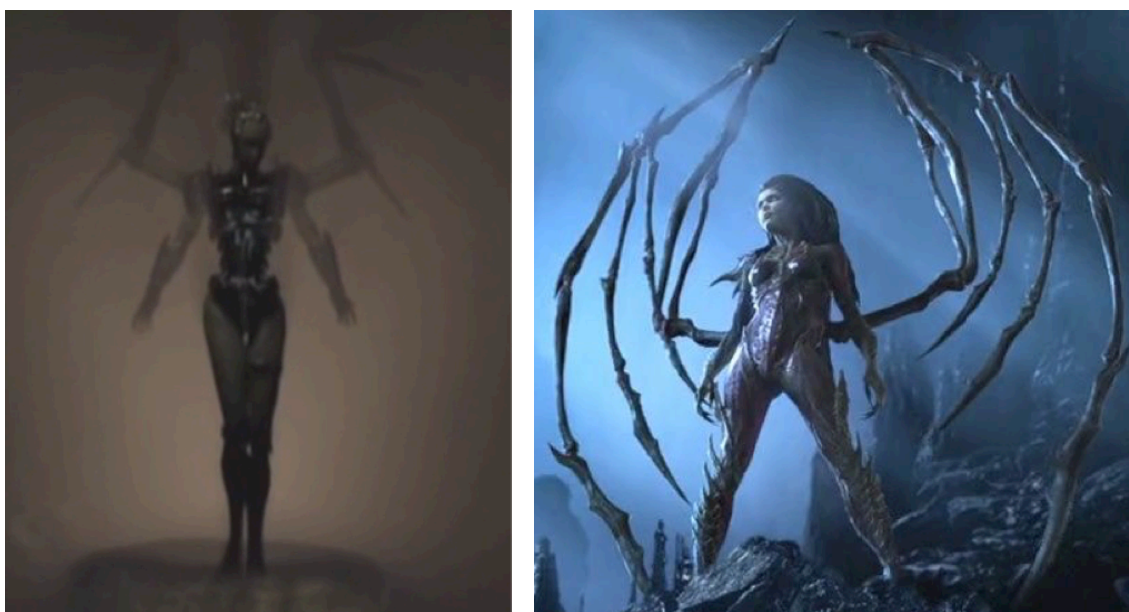
First introduced as a highly trained Terran (human) espionage agent and assassin with powerful psychic abilities, Kerrigan was captured by the Zerg, a race of biologically advanced, hive-minded, arthropodal aliens. Dedicated to the pursuit of genetic perfection, the Zerg relentlessly hunt down and assimilate advanced species across the galaxy, incorporating useful genetic code into their own. Kerrigan was chosen for this process, placed in a chrysalis, and forcefully infested by the Zerg. Through this painful process, reminiscent of the way Darkspawn turn women into Broodmothers, Kerrigan became a Zerg-Terran hybrid, under the control of the Zerg Overmind. The Overmind is the leader of the Zerg swarm, and while it is ostensibly genderless, it is voiced by male actors. The Overmind was responsible for capturing Kerrigan and turning her into a Zerg weapon, and it also refers to her as its “daughter” (*StarCraft*). Kerrigan in turn refers to the Overmind as her “father” whom she “live[s] to serve” (*StarCraft*). Her ‘infestation’ caused her to physically mutate, developing green skin, a hard carapace, skeletal wings, claws, yellow eyes, and worm-like protrusions which grow from her head (for the change in her avatar appearance, see figures 5a–5b).



**Figures 5a–5b.** Kerrigan’s avatar in her human and Queen of the Blades form (*StarCraft*). Screenshots by the author.

Her design became considerably more elaborate in *StarCraft II* (to understand how her full body cutscene design changed between the first and second games, see figures 6a–6b). In the expansion, *StarCraft: Brood War* (Blizzard Entertainment 1998), the Overmind is killed and Kerrigan fights to claim undisputed control over the Zerg, becoming the self-proclaimed Queen of the Blades. In this expansion, Kerrigan is a central character, although a villainous one. She is ruthless, cunning, and manipulative,

willing to brainwash, blackmail, and betray when it suits her purposes. She is completely self-aware and unapologetic, as exemplified by her observation that “at this point, I’m pretty much the Queen Bitch of the Universe” (*StarCraft: Brood War*) and her declaration that “every living thing in the universe will bow before the Queen of Blades, or else they will die” (*StarCraft: Frontline: Why We Fight*). Instead of being driven mad by her abject mutations, Kerrigan embraced them.



**Figures 6a–6b.** Kerrigan as the Queen of the Blades in *StarCraft* and *StarCraft II* cutscenes. Screenshots by the author.

In *StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty* (Blizzard Entertainment 2010), Kerrigan is defeated by the Terrans and is de-infested, a process which alters her DNA again, rendering her more human than Zerg. This de-infestation was done to her against her will, and the attack against her was led by her former lover, Jim Raynor. Unfortunately, the de-infested Kerrigan struggles with her own identity and the guilt she feels for her behavior under the influence of the Zerg infestation. As she laments to Raynor, with whom she has rekindled a romantic relationship, in a companion comic to *StarCraft II*: “I was a billion claws. A billion fangs. I was in control. I killed. And killed. I was in control. At my word, mountains fled. Planets died. I was in control, and I was the monster” (Dayton 2013: 9). Kerrigan’s de-infestation also disempowers her: she loses her confidence and her self-assurance, she questions her own identity and purpose. In this sense, Raynor’s work to remove Kerrigan’s Zerg infestation is also a project to turn her from a threatening *femme fatale* (in reference to Doane’s 1991 work on the dangerous, seductive woman archetype from *Film Noir*) into a ‘damsel-in-distress’ for him to protect. Indeed, as soon as they are reunited, players are shown several scenes of Raynor acting ‘manly’ and protective, and Kerrigan looking up at him with loving eyes. However, Kerrigan is not really the damsel-in-distress that Raynor desires: she still retains her powerful psychic abilities and in *StarCraft II: Heart of the Swarm* (Blizzard

Entertainment 2013), Kerrigan discovers that although she appears mostly human, she can still control the Zerg and even spawn Zerg and Zerglings at will (see figure 7). While she struggles with guilt and the awareness that she would never again be fully human, she is also driven by a desire for vengeance against the evil Terran emperor, Mengsk. Kerrigan originally served emperor Mengsk before her capture by the Zerg, but he used her as a weapon, ruthlessly torturing and brainwashing her to increase her powers. Although she was his most powerful soldier, Mengsk did not bother trying to rescue Kerrigan from the Zerg Overmind, instead leaving her for dead. After their reunion, Raynor begs Kerrigan to give up on her plans for revenge against Mengsk and focus on their relationship instead. However, Mengsk captures and supposedly executes Raynor, rekindling Kerrigan's obsession with vengeance. In order to gain enough power to defeat Mengsk, Kerrigan decides to secure her role as Zerg queen once again. She re-infests herself by entering the spawning pool where the Zerg first evolved, losing her humanity and being reborn as the Primal Queen of the Blades. In this form, she is more powerful than ever, and is finally able to murder Mengsk.



**Figure 7.** Zergling from *StarCraft*. Screenshot by the author.

Although Kerrigan certainly embodies aspects of the abject, with an insect-like body and the ability to instantly spawn monstrous alien beings, she is not as physically grotesque as BioWare's Broodmothers. Kerrigan is conventionally attractive and is the subject of much fan art, fan fiction, and cosplay. While she is a human-alien hybrid, she is alien in a more traditional science fiction media sense: mostly an attractive human but

with subtle elements of exotic Otherness. One aspect of her Otherness is her skin color, which becomes green after her transformation. Alien women characters are often portrayed in science fiction media as beautiful humanoid women but with ‘exotic’ skin colors like green (such as Gamora from *Guardians of the Galaxy* [Gunn 2014]) or blue (such as the Asari from the *Mass Effect* series [BioWare 2007–2017]). A second aspect that reinforces this reading is her hair: her human form had long, straight, red hair and her eyes were green, coding her as white, but once she was transformed, her hair turned into long, brown, dreadlock-like tentacles.<sup>3</sup> Like the alien from *Predator* (McTiernan 1987), these brown dreadlock-like protuberances code her as racialized, placing *StarCraft* into a long popular culture tradition of visually depicting alien and alien-human hybrid characters as racialized Others (see Guerrero 1993; Nama 2008; Bernardi 2008). As Bernardi observed, “[r]ace in Hollywood cinema is often played out, encoded and articulated, in the representation of humanoids of all kinds, from aliens to hobbits to post-humans of color” and “phenotypes such as skin color and hair provide clues to [their symbolic] racial identity” (Bernardi 2008: xix). Interestingly, when she temporarily becomes (mostly) human again—the form I refer to as ‘de-infested’—Kerrigan’s brown dreadlocks remain, suggesting that her hair represents her alien aspect (see figures 8a–8c). Indeed, the *StarCraft Wiki* states that “Kerrigan’s new state had a mostly human form, but still had some zerg traits such as her dreadlock-like antennae instead of hair” (*StarCraft Wiki*: paragraph 77). In an attempt to rid herself of her Zerg aspects, Kerrigan even tries to remove her ‘hair’, though she is unsuccessful. Although Kerrigan’s relationship with her own hybrid identity is fraught, by making her appear white in her human form but symbolically coded as racialized in her alien (monstrous) form, *StarCraft*, like much science fiction media, creates a clear association between humanity/normalcy and whiteness and between monstrosity and the racialized/exotic Other.



**Figures 8a–8c.** Kerrigan in her human, de-infested, and Queen of the Blades forms as portrayed in *StarCraft II*. Screenshots by the author.

<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note that some fans assumed human Kerrigan was a woman of color because her avatar in *StarCraft* has a tan and her hair, although red, already appears to be dreaded (see figure 6a). Her clearer and more graphically-advanced portrayal in *StarCraft II* (see figure 9a), in which she is more clearly coded as white and her red hair is not dreaded, therefore surprised some fans.



While Kerrigan is undoubtedly empowered in the sense of being a powerful queen, her empowerment came at the cost of her own agency and placed her within a militaristic command structure. She also has a past filled with abuse and suffering—a common backstory given to ‘strong female protagonists’. She developed psychic powers as a child and accidentally killed her own mother and severely injured her father. She was then conscripted into a militaristic Ghost Program where she was tortured under the guise of training her to use her powers. Her training turned her into a ruthless, remorseless assassin, and her mental conditioning meant she was unable to refuse any direct order given by a superior officer. Her infestation was done to her against her will by a male-coded character, as was her later de-infestation. Although she did choose to re-infest herself, she did so to get vengeance for the death of her lover, meaning that she sees her powers and her offspring (and the entire Zerg species) as tools for her own violent ends and her motivation is tied to her relationship with a man. In this sense, Kerrigan is unfortunately not really ‘empowered’, nor can she be read as a feminist reworking of the monstrous-feminine. Although she is complex, fully developed, and certainly designed in a less misogynistic way than the *Dragon Age* Broodmothers, she is still framed using tropes common in the representation of female characters in games: as both a victimized damsel-in-distress and a dangerous *femme fatale*.

As a violent, ruthless, power-hungry, vengeful queen who cares little for the wellbeing of her subjects and offspring, Kerrigan certainly embodies the monstrous-feminine. While her maternity is not as abject as that of BioWare’s Broodmothers, she orders the Zerg to create larva-producing hatcheries, which briefly look like pulsating yellow sacs. Kerrigan can then mutate the larva into various types of Zerg creatures. She can also spawn larva-like parasites out of her hand, which can infest others and become Zerg Broodmothers. Kerrigan created intelligent, sapient Broodmothers who could take over the swarm in case of her death. In this sense, Kerrigan is the mother of Broodmothers, or a Broodmother Queen. The Mother similarly controlled other, unawakened Darkspawn Broodmothers. Like Kerrigan, she was once human but was mutated against her will into a monster, then ruled and propagated the very species that tortured and mutated her. Unlike the Mother, however, Kerrigan is not presented as mad—though she is clearly driven and passionate—and she is framed as a villain rather than as a monster. She is a fully developed character, with a personality, emotions, and even a love story in *StarCraft II*.

Like many powerful nonhuman or hybrid female characters in science fiction, fantasy, and horror media, Kerrigan is villainous, deceitful, violent, and cruel. However, towards the end of *StarCraft II: Legacy of the Void* (Blizzard Entertainment 2015b), Kerrigan is ‘redeemed’, though that redemption comes with a high price: she becomes a Xel’naga—a race of powerful god-like beings—and sacrifices herself to save the universe. While Kerrigan is (effectively) forced to die by merging with a god and then exploding, she dies as a hero and a giant flaming goddess (see figure 9), rather than, for example, having the player-character’s phallic sword slammed down her throat, like the Mother in *Dragon Age: Origins—Awakening*. Kerrigan leaves the Zerg in the care of one of her Broodmothers and her ultimate fate is left unknown, though a blurry silhouette of her human form appears in a cutscene with Raynor at the end of the game. In this sense, Kerrigan is granted a ‘happy’ ending; however, it is important to note that she appears fully human in the final scene, suggesting that the monstrous-feminine can

only get a happy ending if she gives up her monstrosity in favour of normalcy—in this case in the form of a heteronormative romantic relationship. While the games seem to suggest that Kerrigan’s happiness can only occur with her in human form and with Raynor as her lover, she spends most of the games as a monstrous-feminine character, and most *StarCraft* fan art of Kerrigan features her as the Queen or Primal Queen of the Blades. In this sense when players use her as their avatar, they are not really choosing to play as a regular human woman, rather they are enacting the role of monstrous-feminine, of Broodmother, of villainous *femme fatale*. Indeed, due to her popularity, she—in her monstrous form—is also a playable character in the popular multiplayer online battle arena game *Heroes of the Storm* (Blizzard Entertainment 2015a). However, Kerrigan cannot be uncritically celebrated as an example of ‘positive’ female empowerment: though Kerrigan is undeniably ‘empowered’ in the sense that she is powerful, her powers—both psychic and Zerg—were forced upon her against her will by male characters and her empowerment occurs within the violent, militaristic context of galactic conquest and bloody vengeance. Kerrigan’s lack of care for her ‘children’—which she simply uses as weapons—means she is not an example of a positive maternal figure either. Like the monstrous-feminine and the abject itself, Kerrigan is ambiguous. Her character shifts and develops considerably throughout the games: Kerrigan appears as a tormented human soldier; an obedient Zerg hybrid; the cold and calculating *femme fatale*-like Queen of the Blades; a self-doubting damsel-in-distress; the ruthless and vengeful Primal Queen of the Blades; and a giant, fiery Xel’naga goddess. Although she is ambiguous, this depth and her status as playable character makes Kerrigan an alternative and far more interesting version of a monstrous-feminine Broodmother.



**Figure 9.** Kerrigan ascended as a Xel’naga (*StarCraft II: Legacy of the Void*). Screenshot by the author.

### Conclusion—The Monstrous Female Body

Kristeva argued that the maternal body is a site of conflicting desires because it is both reassuring and stifling. In its association with bodily waste and bodily movements, including the birthing process, the maternal is also framed as primal, physical, and natural. Yet bodily wastes, bodily movements, and the birthing process fill us with disgust and revulsion. This is the tension between the abject and the symbolic order: The former represents all that is natural but dirty and so must be repressed and rejected, whereas the latter represents that which is clean and proper. It is no coincidence that the first is associated with the feminine and the female body and the second with the masculine, the phallic, and the patriarchal. “Classical mythology”, Creed observed, “was populated with gendered monsters, many of which were female” (Creed 1986: 44). These creatures were almost always killed by the male protagonist, punished for their unchecked sexuality, fecundity, and feminine power. This narrative structure is common in Western literature and cinema, and, of course, in contemporary video games. To progress in games such as *Dragon Age: Origins* and *Dragon Age: Origins—Awakening*, the player is forced to serve the symbolic order by slaying the mother figure, along with her unnatural, monstrous offspring.

Although this is a common narrative set-up, it is not the only possibility. Kerrigan in the *StarCraft* series demonstrates that the monstrous-feminine and hybrid, abject maternal can successfully exist in a centralized role. Of course, this is at least partially because Kerrigan is only slightly abject compared to the other Broodmother examples and is empowered within a violent, militaristic context. She is also framed as a villain rather than as a monster, though she certainly embodies aspects of the monstrous-feminine. However, while her death is heroic, she still dies at the end. Even if she does reappear in the final cutscene, she appears as fully human and apparently back in her old relationship with Raynor. In this sense, Kerrigan the independent, powerful, monstrous Queen of the Blades dies—like most monstrous women she is not allowed to remain monstrous *and* get a happy ending. Kerrigan is, therefore, an ambiguous character—a monster, a villain, a damsel, a *femme fatale*, but also a playable character and in many ways a very different manifestation of the monstrous-feminine.

In the late 1980s, Creed lamented the fact that feminist film scholarship had focused primarily on woman-as-victim and wondered why woman-as-monster had been so neglected. The same could be said of current video game scholarship: the lack of dynamic female representation in video games has been a heated topic of discussion for years (for example, see Miller and Summers 2007; Williams et al. 2009; Hayes and Gee 2010; Sarkeesian 2013–2017); however, while feminist scholars focus on woman as damsel-in-distress, the study of woman-as-monster has been neglected. Although this article focused on Broodmothers, there are several other examples that could be discussed. Future research could examine The Vagary from *Doom 3* (id Software 2004), a spider-woman hybrid pregnant with a visible foetus in her translucent abdomen; Cleopatra from *Dante’s Inferno* (Visceral Games 2010), a giant purple goddess who births monsters from her nipples; the final boss from *The Evil Within 2* (Tango Gameworks 2017), a giant monstrous woman called the Matriarch who spawns spiderlings that burst from her stomach; Mother from *The House of the Dead: Overkill* (Headstrong Games 2009), who releases bloated mutant offspring. She is also the final boss of the game, and when she dies her son, the game’s main antagonist, crawls up her

giant vagina. In addition, both the *Silent Hill* (Konami 1999–2014) and *Resident Evil* (Capcom 1996–2017) series feature several monstrous creatures that clearly embody anxieties around female reproduction and reproductive organs. These examples of the abject maternal monstrous-feminine demonstrate how the patriarchal fear of and revulsion towards female reproductive powers manifest in the form of video game monsters. While film and literature also commonly utilize these tropes, the fact that the player is the one who must murder these maternal monsters and their twisted offspring—often as a major boss or the final, climactic battle of the game—makes them complicit in the misogyny these games represent. Players must kill these monstrous women to proceed or to win the game, and since they are presented as unquestionably horrific and abject, there is little room for a resistant or oppositional feminist interpretation of these monsters. Perhaps ambiguous and/or playable monstrous mothers like Kerrigan offer an alternative reading and a less misogynistic representation of powerful, monstrous (i.e. non-normative and transgressive) maternal figures. In any case, it is important to ask why these tropes are so popular and enduring; why developers keep drawing on this abject reproductive imagery; how players read, interpret, and react to these monsters; how they differ from their cinematic and literary counterparts; and how generic differences between horror, science fiction, and fantasy change the way monstrosity is presented. Given the ubiquity of ludic monsters across genres, there is considerable work to be done on this topic.

The monster, like the abject, is inherently ambiguous—both repulsive and attractive—and it is important to note that within the ambiguity of the abject maternal monster lies great potential for feminist reclamation. Indeed, for feminist scholars like Patricia Yaeger (1992), Mary Russo (1995), and Deborah Covino (2004), the abject woman is subversive and liberating: she “immers[es] herself in the significances of the flesh, becoming willfully monstrous as she defies the symbolic order” (Covino 2004: 29). This description could easily be applied to Kerrigan, particularly when she ignores Raynor’s desires and embraces, then re-embraces, her own monstrosity. Kerrigan also embraces her own reproductive powers as the Queen of the Blades, which relates to Yaeger’s proposal that women seek a grotesque and sublime feminist aesthetic by embracing their own maternal power (Yaeger 1992). The imagery of Kerrigan as ruthless alien hybrid Broodmother Queen and then as a fiery, unstoppable goddess reinforces a reading of her as empowered and empowering, though she is couched within a problematically patriarchal context in a game designed by men primarily for male players. The enduring popularity of Kerrigan, particularly as she is envisioned and remixed by fans and as she appears in other titles as a playable character, speaks to the attraction to and identification with the monstrous-feminine. Perhaps we will see more games in which we play as Kerrigan-like monstrous spider goddess-queens who slay representatives of normative, heteropatriarchal, hegemonic ideology.

## **Bibliography**

- Bernardi, Daniel (ed.). 2008. *The Persistence of Whiteness: Race and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*. London: Routledge.
- BioWare. 2009. *Dragon Age: Origins*. Redwood City: Electronic Arts, Playstation 3 game.
- . 2010. *Dragon Age: Origins—Awakening*. Redwood City: Electronic Arts, Playstation 3 game.

- Blizzard Entertainment. 1998a. *StarCraft*. Irvine: Blizzard, PC game.
- . 1998b. *StarCraft: Brood War*. Irvine: Blizzard, PC game.
- . 2010. *StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty*. Irvine: Blizzard, PC game.
- . 2013. *StarCraft II: Heart of the Swarm*. Irvine: Blizzard, PC game.
- . 2015a. *Heroes of the Storm*. Irvine: Blizzard, PC game.
- . 2015b. *StarCraft II: Legacy of the Void*. Irvine: Blizzard, PC game.
- Brice, Mattie. 2013. “The Dadification of Video Games is Real”, *Alternate Ending*, August 15. Available online: <http://www.mattiebrice.com/the-dadification-of-video-games-is-real/> [May 15, 2017].
- Campbell, Colin. 2016. “Where are All the Video Game Moms?”, *Polygon*, July 7. Available online: <http://www.polygon.com/features/2016/7/7/12025874/where-are-the-video-game-moms> [May 15, 2017].
- Caputi, Jane. 2004. *Goddesses and Monsters: Women, Myth, Power, and Popular Culture*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Carr, Dianne. 2009. “Textual Analysis, Digital Games, Zombies”, paper presented at *DiGRA 2009—Breaking New Ground: Innovation in Games, Play, Practice and Theory*, London. Available online: <http://www.digra.org/wp-content/uploads/digital-library/09287.241711.pdf> [December 22, 2018].
- . 2014. “Ability, Disability and Dead Space”, *Game Studies* 14:2, without page numbers. Digital object identifier not available: <http://gamestudies.org/1402/articles/carr> [October 31, 2019].
- Chang, Edmond. 2017. “A Game Chooses, A Player Obeys: *BioShock*, Posthumanism, and the Limits of Queerness”, in *Gaming Representation: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Video Games*, edited by Jennifer Malowski and TreaAndrea M. Russworm. Indiana University Press, 227–244. Digital object identifier: <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt2005rgq.18>.
- Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. 1996a. “Monster Culture (Seven Theses)”, in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, edited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 3–25. Digital object identifier: <https://doi.org/10.5749/j.cttsq4d.4>.
- (ed.). 1996b. *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. Digital object identifier: <https://doi.org/10.5749/j.cttsq4d>.
- Covino, Deborah Caslav. 2004. *Amending the Abject Body: Aesthetic Makeovers in Medicine and Culture*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Creed, Barbara. 1986. “Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection”, *Screen* 27:1, 44–71. Digital object identifier: <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/27.1.44>.
- . 1993. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. New York/London: Routledge.
- Davis, Laura K., and Cristina Santos. 2010. *The Monster Imagined: Humanity’s Recreation of Monsters and Monstrosity*. Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press.
- Dayton, Cameron. 2013. “Kerrigan: Hope and Vengeance”, *Blizzard Entertainment*, March 12. Available online: <http://us.battle.net/sc2/en/media/blizzard-comics/kerrigan-hope-and-vengeance/#/1> [link defunct as of December 22, 2018].
- Dijkstra, Bram. 1986. *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Doane, Mary Ann. 1991. *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis*. New York: Routledge.
- Dragon Age Wiki* (author unknown). 2018. “Children”, *Dragon Age Wiki*, July 20. Available online: <http://dragonage.wikia.com/wiki/Children> [December 22, 2018].
- Freud, Sigmund. 1949 [1940]. *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*. Translated reprint edition. New York: Norton.
- Goto, Lindsay. 2015. “Vilifying Mental Illness: Horror Games and The Insanity Trope”, *FemHype*, March 16. Available online: <https://femhype.wordpress.com/2015/03/16/vilifying-mental-illness-horror-games-the-insanity-trope/> [November 27, 2018].
- Gygax, Gary, and Dave Arneson. 1974–. *Dungeons and Dragons*. Lake Geneva: TSR Hobbies.
- Graham, Elaine L. 2002. *Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens, and Others in Popular Culture*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Gray, Kate. 2017. “Why Is Motherhood so Poorly Portrayed in Video Games?”, *The Guardian*, May 9. Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/may/09/video-games-motherhood> [September 20, 2017].

- Grosz, Elizabeth. 1996. "Animal Sex: Libido as Desire and Death", in *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism*, edited by Elisabeth Grosz and Elspeth Probyn. New York: Routledge, 278–299.
- Guerrero, Ed. 1993. *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Harrington, Erin. 2018. *Women, Monstrosity and Horror Film: Gynaehorror*. New York: Routledge. Digital object identifier: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315546568>.
- Hayes, Elisabeth R., and James Paul Gee. 2010. *Women and Gaming: The Sims and 21st Century Learning*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Headstrong Games. 2009. *The House of the Dead: Overkill*. Tokyo: Sega, PlayStation 3 game.
- Huet, Marie-Hélène. 1993. *Monstrous Imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Joho, Jess. 2014. "The Dadification of Video Games, Round Two", *Kill Screen*, November 2. Available online: <https://killscreen.com/articles/dadification-videogames-round-two/> [link defunct as of December 22, 2018].
- Juul, Jesper. 2012 [2009]. *A Casual Revolution: Reinventing Video Games and Their Players*. Reprint edition. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Kearney, Richard. 2002. *Strangers, Gods and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Kristeva, Julia. 1982 [1980]. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lindsey, Patrick. 2014. "Gaming's Favorite Villain Is Mental Illness, and This Needs to Stop", *Polygon*, July 21. Available online: <https://www.polygon.com/2014/7/21/5923095/mental-health-gaming-silent-hill> [November 27, 2018].
- MacCormack, Patricia. 2012. "The Queer Ethics of Monstrosity", in *Speaking of Monsters: A Teratological Anthology*, edited by Joan S. Picart and John Edgar Browning. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 255–265. Digital object identifier: [https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137101495\\_23](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137101495_23).
- Miller, Monica, and Alicia Summers. 2007. "Gender Differences in Video Game Characters' Roles, Appearances, and Attire as Portrayed in Video Game Magazines", *Sex Roles* 57:9, 733–742. Digital object identifier: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-007-9307-0>.
- Nama, Adilifu. 2008. *Black Space: Imagining Race in Science Fiction Film*. Austin: The University of Texas Press.
- Neale, Stephen. 1980. *Genre*. London: BFI.
- Nikolaidou, Dimitra. 2019 [forthcoming]. "The Wargame Legacy: How Wargames Shaped the Roleplaying Experience from Tabletop to Digital Games", in *War Games: Memory, Militarism, and the Subject of Play*, edited by Philip Hammond and Holger Pötzsch. London: Bloomsbury Academic, without page numbers yet.
- Picart, Joan S., and John Edgar Browning (eds.). 2012. *Speaking of Monsters: A Teratological Anthology*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. Digital object identifier: <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137101495>.
- Rehak, Bob. 2003. "Playing at Being: Psychoanalysis and the Avatar", in *The Video Game Theory Reader*, edited by Mark J. P. Wolf and Bernard Perron. London/New York: Routledge, 103–128.
- Russo, Mary. 1995. *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess, and Modernity*. New York: Routledge.
- Santos, Cristina. 2017. *Unbecoming Female Monsters: Witches, Vampires, and Virgins*. Lanham: Lexington Books.
- Santos, Marc C., and Sarah E. White. 2005. "Playing with Ourselves: A Psychoanalytic Investigation of *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill*", in *Digital Gameplay: Essays on the Nexus of Game and Gamer*, edited by Nate Garrelts. Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 69–79.
- Sarkeesian, Anita. 2013–2017. *Feminist Frequency—Tropes vs. Women in Video Games*. Video and podcast series. Available online: <https://feministfrequency.com/series/tropes-vs-women-in-video-games/> [November 20, 2018].
- . 2016. "Sinister Seductress", *Feminist Frequency*, September 28. Available online: <https://feministfrequency.com/video/sinister-seductress/> [November 20, 2018].
- Smith, Carly. 2014. "Gaming's Mom Problem: Why Do We Refuse to Feature Mothers in Games?", *Polygon*, November 10. Available online: <http://www.polygon.com/2014/11/10/7173757/mothers-in-video-games> [May 15, 2017].
- Spittle, Steve. 2011. "'Did This Game Scare You? Because It Sure as Hell Scared Me!': *F.E.A.R.*, the Abject and the Uncanny", *Games and Culture* 6:4, 312–326. Digital object identifier: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412010391091>.



- Stang, Sarah. 2016. "Controlling Fathers and Devoted Daughters: Paternal Authority in *BioShock 2* and *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*", *First Person Scholar*, December 7. Available online: <http://www.firstpersonscholar.com/controlling-fathers-and-devoted-daughters/> [September 20, 2017].
- . 2018. "Shrieking, Biting, and Licking: The Monstrous-Feminine and Abject Female Monsters in Video Games", *Press Start* 4:2, 18–34. Digital object identifier not available: <https://press-start.gla.ac.uk/index.php/press-start/article/view/85> [October 31, 2019].
- StarCraft Wiki* (author unknown). 2018. "Sarah Kerrigan", *StarCraft Wiki*, July 20. [http://starcraft.wikia.com/wiki/Sarah\\_Kerrigan](http://starcraft.wikia.com/wiki/Sarah_Kerrigan) [December 22, 2018].
- Tango Gameworks. 2017. *The Evil Within 2*. Rockville: Bethesda Softworks, PlayStation 4 game.
- Trépanier-Jobin, Gabrielle, and Maude Bonenfant. 2017. "Bridging Game Studies and Feminist Theories", *Kinephanos* 4:1, 24–53. Digital object identifier not available: [https://www.kinephanos.ca/Revue\\_files/2017\\_Trepanier\\_Bonenfant.pdf](https://www.kinephanos.ca/Revue_files/2017_Trepanier_Bonenfant.pdf) [October 31, 2019].
- Ussher, Jane M. 2006. *Managing the Monstrous Feminine: Regulating the Reproductive Body*. New York/London: Routledge. Digital object identifier: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203328422>.
- Visceral Games. 2010. *Dante's Inferno*. Redwood City: Electronic Arts, PlayStation 3 game.
- Voorhees, Gerald. 2016. "Daddy Issues: Constructions of Fatherhood in *The Last of Us* and *BioShock Infinite*", *ADA—A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology* 9:1, without page numbers. Digital object identifier not available: <http://adanewmedia.org/2016/05/issue9-voorhees/> [October 31, 2019].
- Weststar, Johanna, and Marie-Josée Legault. 2016. *Developer Satisfaction Survey 2016: Summary Report*. Toronto: International Game Developers Association. Available online: [http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.igda.org/resource/resmgr/files\\_2016\\_dss/IGDA\\_DSS\\_2016\\_Summary\\_Report.pdf](http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.igda.org/resource/resmgr/files_2016_dss/IGDA_DSS_2016_Summary_Report.pdf) [September 20, 2017].
- Williams, Dmitri, Nicole Martins, Mia Consalvo, and James D. Ivory. 2009. "The Virtual Census: Representations of Gender, Race and Age in Video Games", *New Media & Society* 11:5, 815–834. Digital object identifier: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809105354>.
- Williams, Linda. 1991. "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess", *Film Quarterly* 44:4, 2–13. Digital object identifier: <https://doi.org/10.2307/1212758>.
- Wood, Andrea, and Brandy Schillace. 2014. *Unnatural Reproductions and Monstrosity: The Birth of the Monster in Literature, Film, and Media*. Amherst: Cambria Press.
- Wood, Robin. 2003 [1986]. *Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan... and Beyond*. Revised and expanded edition. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Yaeger, Patricia. 1992. "The 'Language of Blood': Toward A Maternal Sublime", *Genre* 25:1, 5–24.
- Young, Helen. 2016. *Race and Popular Fantasy Literature: Habits of Whiteness*. New York: Routledge.

### Biographical Note

Sarah Stang is a PhD candidate in the Communication & Culture program at York University in Toronto, Canada. She is also the editor-in-chief of *Press Start* and the essays editor for *First Person Scholar*. She approaches the study of digital games and other media from an interdisciplinary, intersectional feminist perspective. Her current research explores the representation of non-normative and marginalized bodies in both digital and analog games.

