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Representations of the Monstrous-Feminine in Selected Works of C. S. Lewis, Roald Dahl and Philip Pullman

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*This paper examines the representation of female antagonists in three popular children's books – C. S. Lewis's Narnia books, Roald Dahl's *The Witches*, and Philip Pullman's *The Amber Spyglass* – by referencing Kristeva's theory of abjection and Creed's discussion of the monstrous-feminine. In both the Narnia series and *The Witches*, female antagonists are simplified, stereotyped and negatively portrayed as evil figures that threaten the stability of a well-ordered community. They are represented as the abject that blurs the borderlines between life and death, human and non-human, masculine and feminine. At the end of both narratives, the monstrous-feminine is ejected, eliminated, and the 'purification' brings relief and a vengeful pleasure. In Pullman's book, the harpies are represented as monsters that can be reasoned with. They are honoured as generous and "Gracious Wings". Yet, while the attempt of positive reinvention of the monstrous-feminine is noticeable, they play only a secondary role acknowledged by the symbolic order – the monstrous-feminine stereotype is nevertheless perpetuated.*

Keywords: *the abject, children's fantasy, grotesque, monstrous-feminine, stereotypes*

Introduction

In *The Structural Study of Myth* (1967), Levi-Strauss writes that myths from different cultures from all over the world seem so similar. Later he also states that it is as if the mythological stories had "meaning and order of their own" (1978: vii).

He claims that like language, myths have their own structure. Each myth is made of units, or what he calls mythemes, that are put together according to certain rules. These units form relations with each other, based on binary pairs or opposites, which provide the basis of the structure. Indeed, such units can often be found recurring in many myths. But most importantly myths are not self-made, nor are they natural and universal. Rather, they are, as Barthes argues, “a type of speech”, “a system of communication”, and “a mode of signification” (1957/2000: 109). In other words, the recurrence of orders, patterns or prototypes in myths does not point to pre-existing realities; rather, it can be viewed as a set of ideological stereotypes.

Ideological stereotypes can also be found in classic children’s books. For instance, in fairytales, good girls stay at home, a private sphere that is “isolated and protected from the competitive male world outside” (Bixler 1991: 210). On the other hand, men and boys dominate the public sphere. They play the active, dynamic roles as warriors, knights, adventurers and rescuers. Assertive female characters (usually antagonists) are often evil queens, mean stepmothers, witches and other monstrous-feminine, who are punished and killed at the end of the story because they have trespassed into the men’s domain.

Relying on existing theories and discussions about the monstrous-feminine, I will investigate how abject women are represented in a selection of English children’s writers in the 1950s, 1980s and at the turn of the twenty-first century. The monstrous-feminine that I have chosen to examine include Jadis in C. S. Lewis’ *The Magician’s Nephew* (1955) and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950), the witches in Roald Dahl’s *The Witches* (1983), and the harpies in Philip Pullman’s *The Amber Spyglass* (2000).

The Monstrous-Feminine

Children’s books are thought to be good for children, but often they are filled with insidious gender stereotypes. In C. S. Lewis’s *The Magician’s Nephew* and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, many readers, in particular feminists, notice the traditional depictions of female characters. These female characters are either stereotyped as ‘good’ women who adhere to the constructs of femininity, or evil beings that refuse to play the conventional gender roles and create disturbances. Simply put, if women characters are not “daughters of Eve”, it is almost certain that they are “daughters of Lilith”, that is, the evil witches or queens who want to be men’s equals, but are “mesmerized, somnambulistic, vampirized, or variously transfigured” (Auerbach 1982: 39). Either way, female characters are restricted by these stereotypes. The uniqueness of characters is set aside. They are over-simplified

and generalized as either good, peaceful women (such as Lucy and Susan Pevensie) who love and obey Aslan, or as intolerable evil ones who hate Aslan and threaten to destroy all life.

Influenced by the Christian thinking of the time, Narnia is a world polarized into a binary ideological division of good versus evil, light versus darkness, life versus death, creation versus destruction, salvation versus damnation, warmth versus coldness, vitality versus sterility, etc. Simplistically, all characters can be defined as either black or white. Grey areas and complications are out of the question. While the positive force is represented by the masculine Aslan, a divine, god-like figure who sacrifices himself to bring hope and salvation to the world, the negative, evil force takes the form of a ferocious, dangerous witch, Jadis.

Daughters of Lilith

In *The Magician's Nephew* and *The Lion...*, Aslan, the symbol of Jesus, is “the Master”, or as Cixous would put it, “the single, stable, socializable subject” (1974: 389) that evokes faith, hope, love, honour, and a sense of security. In contrast to Aslan, the White Witch is portrayed as pure negativity. During her reign, Narnia suffers winter for a hundred years. People are frightened of her because she has the power to turn anyone into stone. She is an evil, scary character associated with fear, destruction, and death. According to Sammons, the name “Jadis” may be associated with at least two negative connotations about women. Firstly, in the English language, ‘jade’ is a contemptuous name for a woman. Secondly, ‘jadish’ also bears the meaning of “worn or wearied” (1979: 144). Apart from her name, the self-professed, callous and tyrannical Queen also inherits the wild, threatening blood of the monstrous feminine. In *The Lion...*, Mr. Beaver tells the children as well as the readers that the White Witch is a daughter of Lilith (1950 / 2002: 76):

[...] she's no Daughter of Eve. She comes of your father Adam's...first wife, her they called Lilith. And she was one of the Jinn. That's what she comes from on one side. And on the other she comes of the giants. No, no, there isn't a drop of real human blood in the Witch.

Lilith is the first woman created by God, but she refuses to be Adam's submissive wife. Because of her rebellion, she is driven into exile, and God creates Eve to take her place. What is more, God's punishment for Lilith's disobedience is that each day she has to give birth to one hundred babies. Yet, by the end of the day, her babies all perish. Burned with agony, Lilith becomes a monster that takes on the appearance of an owl and roams at night. She “hates fruitfulness and love and the honest intercourse of man with woman” (Howard, 1987: 58). The story

warns women that they should never disobey men, because it is God's will that men are superior to women. Rebellious and evil women who dare to resist God's will will be severely punished. Following the motifs of Lilith, in the Narnia books Jadis symbolizes the intrinsically evil female power and sexuality that seduces and entraps righteous men (*cf.* Hourihan 1997). According to Briggs, the White Witch's Turkish Delight and Edmund's "perverse hunger" (1996: 28) can be read as an implicit implication of sexual seduction and desire, but the explicit sexual themes are suppressed. Now the sexual impulse, the vulnerability and the indulgence of the body are "displaced by that other primal and atavistic pleasure of eating", that is, "the appetite of food" (*ibid.*). In short, Jadis, the female character, is the antagonist associated with the evil force that diverts "male energy away from the cause of 'virtue' and patriarchal dominance" (*ibid.*).

Like the White Witch in *The Lion...*, the witches in Roald Dahl's *The Witches* represent evil, death, destruction, damnation, coldness and sterility. The reader is not given an explanation for the existence and presence of the monstrous-feminine. They simply exist as "the most dangerous of all the living creatures on earth" (Dahl 1983: 3), or, as Creed remarks, "an implacable enemy of the symbolic order" (1993: 76) who wreaks destruction in the community. Incapable of creating life like ordinary mothers, the witches hate children "with a red-hot sizzling hatred" (Dahl 1983: 1). They all share a satanic hobby – murdering babies, children and young teens. It is said that a real witch "spends all her time plotting to get rid of the children in her particular territory. Her passion is to do away with them, one by one" (*ibid.*). In the witches' meeting, the witches show their hatred of children through chanting, clapping and cheering, "Wipe them away! Scrub them off the face of the earth! Flush them down the drain!" (71). Dahl presents the sick, evil thoughts of the witches in a humorous way, but still the witches remind us of Lilith, the woman who refuses to be the obedient wife of Adam. Much affected by the anti-female bias of the contemporaries, Lilith is depicted as a jealous, diabolic, vengeful, childless woman who cannot tolerate to see the children of Adam and Eve. Her sole purpose and pleasure is to kill infants and little human children. Interestingly, female child eaters, like Lilith and Dahl's witches, bring only death, but they do not bring new life or new order, like male ogres do, "they [male ogres] embody the contradiction of symbols in that they mimic death, they bring death, but the result of their intervention is new life" (Warner 1998: 3). It is a common motif that female children-eaters such as Lilith and Dahl's witches are, in the end, "sidelined, even combusted" (*ibid.*).

Aggressive Women

Besides portraying female antagonists as “daughters of Lilith”, children’s books also tend to represent evil female characters as macho-women, or, in other words, women who possess masculine qualities. In *The Magician’s Nephew* and *The Lion...*, the negative image of the White Witch comes from her incongruous dualisms: Jadis has the form of an irresistibly beautiful woman, but contrary to what is expected of her graceful appearance, she possesses abnormal macho aggression, brutal strength and bestiality. When she is first introduced in *The Magician’s Nephew*, she is the most beautiful woman in the world, “a woman even more richly dressed than the others, very tall..., with a look of such fierceness and pride that it took your breath away...she was beautiful. Years afterwards when he was an old man, Digory said he had never in all his life known a woman so beautiful” (1955/2002: 48). She has airs and graces too, “[...] you could see at once, not only from her crown and robes, but from the flash of her eyes and the curve of her lips, that she was a great queen” (53). Yet, soon after that, the readers find out more about her unwomanly behaviour. For instance, when she speaks, her voice is strong and terrifying, “Then Jadis spoke; not very loud, but there was something in her voice that made the whole room quiver” (68). She is also too barbarous and ferocious to be considered feminine. The following is what happens when she rides a hansom (82):

On the roof – not sitting, but standing on the roof – swaying with superb balance as it came at full speed round the corner with one wheel in the air – was Jadis...The hansom crashed into the lamp-post and shattered into several pieces. The Witch, with a magnificent jump, had sprung clear just in time and landed on the horse’s back.

In the scene above, Jadis is portrayed as a wild and threatening destroyer. As a woman with a graceful, feminine appearance and aggressive behaviour, Jadis possesses both womanly and manly features. This incongruent presence blurs the boundaries of feminine and masculine, transgresses conventional gender roles, which in turn challenges the patriarchal system. To protect the system from being overthrown, the writer portrays Jadis as a dangerous monster, an abject other that destroys and threatens the lives of others.

Similar to Jadis in *The Magician’s Nephew* and in *The Lion...*, the Grand High Witch in Dahl’s book also manifests incongruous dualism – she has the fake angelic look of a tiny, young, pretty woman, but she also possesses beast-like aggression and temper. When the Grand High Witch is first introduced, she is described as “tiny, probably no more than four and a half feet tall”, “quite young...about twenty-

five or six” and “very pretty” (1983: 59). However, soon after that, it is discovered that her pretty face is just a mask to cover up her horrible face. It is also found that the tiny woman can shout so loudly and harshly that her voice fills the room and bounces off the walls. According to the protagonist, the voice of the Grand High Witch has a “hard metallic quality” (62). Far from being lady-like, “[i]t rasped. It grated. It snarled. It scraped. It shrieked. And it growled” (62). In daily English, these verbs often appear in negative contexts bearing derogatory meanings. For instance, “rasped”, “grated” and “scraped” are used to describe dry, hoarsely, metallic sounds. Also, “snarled”, “shrieked” and “growled” are usually wild and animalistic in nature.

Apart from the frightening voice, the ruthless, aggressive behaviour of the Grand High Witch strikes a drastic contrast with her petite figure. For instance, when she talks, no one can answer her back or argue with her. Anyone who dares to do so and ‘make her cross’ will be punished by death, regardless of how one begs for forgiveness. This shocks the readers because the Grand High Witch’s pretty and harmless appearance contrasts strongly with her bestial, grudging manners. In Pullman’s *His Dark Materials*, Mrs. Coulter, the only powerful woman in the trilogy, is also portrayed as a menacing figure of incongruous dualism. In *The Golden Compass*, this *femme fatale* is well-known for her charming beauty and elegance, “...those who saw her said she was very beautiful” (1995: 23). Yet, in *The Subtle Knife* (1997), we witness that the beautiful woman is in fact a callous and experienced inquisitor who is good at torturing people, and who does not hesitate to say so: “You will suffer...Oh, there is more suffering to come. We have a thousand years of experience in this Church of ours. We can draw out your suffering endlessly” (1997: 39). In accordance with the monstrous-feminine stereotype, the negative representation of Mrs. Coulter seems to convey to readers that powerful and assertive women, be they beautiful or attractive, are perverse, dangerous and satanic. ‘Good’ women are never those who trespass on the men’s domain.

Human-like, Nonhuman Creatures

Another incongruous dualism embodied in the monstrous-feminine is her human-like, yet nonhuman origin. For instance, when the witch first appears in *The Lion...*, she is described as “a great lady” (1950/2002: 33). However, Lewis also foreshadows that there is something strange about this ‘great lady’. Suspicion and an uncanny feeling emerge as readers are informed that she is “taller than any woman that Edmund had ever seen”, and abnormally pale; “Her face was white – not merely pale, but white like snow or paper or icing-sugar, except for her very

red mouth” (*ibid.*). Her extreme tallness and vampire-like whiteness suggest that she is not a ‘normal woman’. In the patriarchal order, men should always excel over women in physical prowess. A good, ‘normal woman’ should therefore be built smaller and shorter than men. The witch’s extreme tallness and vampire-like whiteness suggest that she is a monster that disguises itself as a woman.

In the middle of the story, it is finally revealed that “there isn’t a drop of real human blood in the Witch” (76). This does not only create confusion, but also fear and abjection in other characters. As Mr. Beaver says, “[...] when you meet anything that’s going to be human and isn’t yet, or used to be human once and isn’t now, or ought to be human and isn’t, you keep your eyes on it and feel for your hatchet” (77). With the discovery of her disguise and her nonhuman origin, the queen gradually loses her persona of decency and solemnity. She sinks backwards towards animality, behaving like a wild beast. When she speaks, she roars like an animal (106). In the chapter “The triumph of the Witch”, we are told that people of her kind are all evil beasts and detestable monsters (138):

But such people! Ogres with monstrous teeth, and wolves, and bull-headed men; spirits of evil trees and poisonous plants; and other creatures whom I won’t describe because if I did the grown-ups would probably not let you read this book – Cruels and Hags and Incubuses, Wraiths, Horrors, Efreets, Sprites, Orknies, Wooses, and Ettins.

Such “recidivism (a relapse in crime)” and “regression to bestial levels” (Jackson 1981/2003: 116) suggest that Jadis, the frightening human-like, nonhuman creature, does not belong to the human kind. Focusing on the physical debasement and bestial features, Lewis constructs the notion of Otherness. He makes it clear to readers that Jadis and her kinds are wild, bestial, uncontrollable and different from us – they are the Other from which people should stay away. The disobedient woman who refuses to conform to the patriarchal paradigm is again portrayed as a threat, a disgusting abject figure to be killed and destroyed. Otherwise, norm and order cannot be redeemed.

Harpies, the female monsters in Pullman’s *The Amber Spyglass*, are also human-like, non-human creatures. In fact, ‘harpies’ were not invented by Pullman. Rather, they are legendary dead spirits borrowed from Greek mythology. Literally, the word ‘harpy’ means ‘that which grabs.’ It is a half-human and half-animal that is made up of a woman’s head (usually with long hair) and breasts, with a vulture’s wings, body and claws. In the book, Pullman does not change the appearance of harpies. He presents the harpies just as they were presented in the Greek myth. In Pullman’s words, “[t]he thing was a great bird the size of a vulture, with the face and breasts of a woman.” (2000: 304). If Pullman had wanted to question and transform

the patriarchal order, he could have changed the gender of harpies – a creature with a male’s head, a male’s chest, a vulture’s wings, body and claws would be equally terrifying. Pullman could have assigned the female monsters with a more important role, like the roles played by Zeus and Hades. Regarding the harpies in Pullman’s book, however, now that Pullman has not renewed the appearance of and the role played by the harpies, he seems to have no objection towards the negative portrayal of harpies. With the archetypal fixity, the monstrous-feminine continues to be viewed as the in-between, uncanny and horrifying.

The Abject Figures

The ambiguous, in-between qualities of the monstrous-feminine are the source of all fears and abjection. According to Kristeva (1983), the idea of the abject takes shape at the moment when the child enters into the Symbolic, forms the notion of the Self and acquires language. Boundaries between proper and improper, clean and unclean, self and other, etc. are drawn so as to form and maintain the stability of the subject. Everything that threatens to transgress borders and the sanctity of the Symbolic order is the abject, which has to be “radically excluded” (Kristeva 1983: 2) from the living subject’s proper body.

In *The Magician’s Nephew* and *The Lion...*, Jadis is an abject figure. As a living-dead, human-like, nonhuman creature empowered with bestial ferocity and superhuman strength, the White Witch does not fall into the binary division of subject and object, self and other, man and woman, living and dead. She is the in-between, the ambiguous, the abject that “does not respect borders, positions, [and] rules” (Kristeva 1983: 4). Her presence threatens the stable identity of the patriarchal subject. The patriarchal subject, though only a social construct, is considered as permanent, rational and autonomous; women, from the dualistic viewpoint, are objectified as the Other. To keep its advantageous position, the patriarchal subject refuses to be reinvented. It rejects all that possesses a fluid, transgressive and/or ambiguous identity. Jadis is portrayed so negatively that even her name is intended to create a deep repugnance. A number of incongruous dualisms can be found in Jadis: first, she is not human but she has the face of a beautiful woman; then, she looks womanly but her manners and behavior are brutally macho. Also, she is ungodly, but she has supernatural powers. All this suggests that the White Witch is the undefinable in-between with which the subject in the patriarchal system cannot be identified. In addition, the multiple dualisms manifested by Jadis also go against the concept of the unitary self in the social norm. According to Jackson (1981/2003), in the dominant culture, the conception of a person is a unitary self.

The unitary self needs to be consistent and congruent at all times. For instance, masculinity and femininity are two separate sets of attributes and roles that are not supposed to co-exist in the same person. Beings comprised of multiple selves violate the boundaries. They are an assault on the construct of the unitary self in the dominant ideology. Hence, creatures that undergo disintegration, such as Dr. Jekyll, Dorian Gray and werewolves are perceived as abnormal, horrible and monstrous, because they disturb identity, system, and order (Kristeva 1983). C. S. Lewis' Jadis is not different from these abject figures.

It is noteworthy that while the presence of an abject creature threatens the subject, it does not necessarily subvert the dominant ideology of the self. By causing abjection, the abject helps to reaffirm norm and order. In *The Philosophy of Horror*, Carroll points out (1990: 178):

Many of the divided, disintegrating selves of fantasy fiction – Dr. Jekyll, Dorian Gray, werewolves, and so on – in fact literalize popular religious and philosophical views of the person (as divided between good and evil, between reason and appetite, between human and beast). Thus, these creatures do not subvert the culture's conceptions of personhood, but rather articulate them, or, at least, certain of them.

Similarly, Jadis, a multiple complex of an aggressive woman, a human-like nonhuman creature and a living dead, is the “in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (Kristeva 1983: 4) creature that blurs the line of demarcation between life and death, human and beast, masculine and feminine. Her fluid, multiple self-expressions disturb the notion of an inflexible, unitary self in the patriarchal system. To reaffirm the norm and order, Lewis portrays the White Witch as the evil abject Other. Her “demanding, desiring, angry and violent presence” (Jackson 1981/2003: 150) is a curse – because of her, it is always winter and never Christmas in Narnia. To save the lives of all, the evil witch must be eliminated.

Dahl's witches are also abject figures that threaten and challenge our bodily identity. In the story, the witches are represented as the ambiguous, nameless creatures that cause fear and repulsion in us. Their feminine appearance and masculine behaviour, their human-like, yet nonhuman identity, their disfigured, grotesque physical appearance, together with the range of abject things they are associated with, such as decay, maggots, toads, rat's tails, disturb the border between human and beast, natural and supernatural, living and dead, clean and defiled, self and other.

In Pullman's *The Amber Spyglass*, harpies, the ancient living dead creatures that do not age, are abject figures as well. When they first appear in Pullman's text, their repulsive features are described in detail (2000: 304-307):

Her eye-sockets were clotted with filthy slime, and the redness of her lips was caked and crusted as if she had vomited ancient blood again and again. Her matted, filthy black hair hung down to her shoulders... a drift of putrescent stink wafted from her every time she moved... the harpy... opened her mouth and directed a jet of noise right in their faces... the sheer power of her scream had made him dizzy... The harpy shook her wings wide, and the travelers nearly fainted in the hideous smells of corruption and decay that wafted from her.

On reading Pullman's description of the appearance of harpies, the polluting, excremental bodily wastes and decay invoke a response of disgust. The monstrous-feminine has been aligned with the abject. Similar to Dahl's witches, Pullman's harpies are abject, and thus loathsome and intolerable. Both Will and Lyra feel "sick and full of pain" (305), "repelled" (*ibid.*) when facing the monstrous-feminine. When Lyra is attacked by the harpies and has a clump of her hair torn out, she is "shaky" and "ash-pale" (309). Will also has a hard time "trying not to think of the filthy state of the claw" (*ibid.*) that made the wound on Lyra's head as he takes care of the gash. The unclean abject needs to be "radically excluded" and propelled away from the self because the abject reminds the living subject of deterioration and death. The negative portrayal of harpies, together with the unpleasant representations of other female characters (such as the satanic Mrs. Coulter, the dull women teachers at Oxford, and the marginalized gypsy women) reflects gender stereotypes: women are almost assigned minor and unpopular roles, whereas men play central roles that symbolize order, power, strength and autonomy.

The Living Dead

One of the most obvious abject features of the monstrous-feminine is her vampire-like appearance. In *The Magician's Nephew*, the White Witch's morbid quality is often in focus. When Digory and Polly see her for the first time, Queen Jadis is as lifeless and still as a piece of waxwork, "There was not a movement nor the sound of a breath" (1955/2002: 46-47). In the chapter "The beginning of Uncle Andrew's troubles", the queen comes up to the real world by holding on fast to Polly's hair. There, her stale-pale whiteness and vampire-like appearance is described in great detail (66):

Queen Jadis looked different. She was much paler than she had been; so pale that hardly any of her beauty was left. And she was stooped and seemed to be finding it hard to breathe, as if the air of that place stifled her.

A similar description can be found in *The Lion*.... Also, in "Deep magic from the dawn of time" her stale whiteness is the centre of attraction; "Her arms were... terribly white. Because they were so very white he could see them" (1950/2002:

124). She is so abnormally sterile and pale that it is as if there is no life in her. Under her reign, “it is always winter...and never Christmas” (57) in Narnia. Strangely enough, while she shows such morbid features, she can be “ten times more alive than most of the people one meets in London” (1955/2002: 67). In light of the abject combination of such living-dead features, it makes sense to associate her with vampires, or any creatures that drain and dry up people’s life forces. As Manlove notices (1987: 131):

The Witch...is a vampire, a drawer of life from things to herself, and one who lives only with the unnatural and the deformed – with Hags, Werewolves, Minotaurs and the like. She drains the vitality from Narnia, literally ‘bleeds it white’, and she would with her dagger do the same to Aslan.

Howard also notes the Witch’s vampire-like feature, “If she can lull you and entice you away from light-of-day reality, and lead you into the sterile limbo of illusion where you will dry up and die, then she has done what she wants to do” (1987: 58).

To sum up, Jadis is a living-dead, a human-like nonhuman creature, and a queer woman who suspiciously possesses overwhelming virility. Her fluid, ambiguous presence transgresses the binary distinctions between male and female; it disturbs the fabricated notions about the unitary self and ‘true identity’. Her existence is a threat to the system and order. Hence, the White Witch is represented as an evil, abnormal, horrible, unclean being that needs to be eradicated. At the end of *The Lion...*, she is well-punished and killed by Aslan and his league. Her evil power over Narnia is repressed and dismissed.

Closely associated with death and decay, Dahl’s witches are no exception. In chapter seven, we are told that the Grand High Witch’s pretty face is just a mask. Her real face is (1983: 60):

[...] crumbled and wizened, so shrunken and shrivelled, it looked as though it had been pickled in vinegar... There was something terribly wrong with it, something foul and putrid and decayed. It seemed quite literally to be rotting away the mouth and cheeks, I could see the skin all cankered and worm-eaten, as though maggots were working away in there.

The adjectives used to describe her face are associated with the abject – “foul”, “putrid”, “dreadful”, “decayed”, “rotting”, “cankered”, “worm-eaten”, all of which trigger fear and disgust in the reader. This is because these adjectives are usually used to describe body waste, dead flesh, deterioration, illness, our bodies’ decay and eventual death.

In *The Amber Spyglass*, Pullman, too, adds an exaggerated vampire-like appearance to the monstrous-feminine. For instance, the life-in-death feature of

the harpies is focused and magnified to create the feeling of abjection in readers. In chapter 21, there is a detailed description of the uncanny, scary face of a harpy (2000: 304):

Her face was smooth and unwrinkled, but aged beyond even the age of the witches: she had seen thousands of years pass, and the cruelty and misery of all of them had formed the hateful expression on her features.

What is weird, confusing and disgusting about the harpy's face is that it is young and aged at the same time. If a face that has seen "thousands of years pass" is extraordinary, supernatural, and associated with death, a smooth, unwrinkled face that has seen "thousands of years pass" is incoherent, disturbing and nightmarish. The monstrous-feminine is doomed to be negated and discredited.

Dehumanizing Threats

What is even more frightening about the monstrous-feminine is her power to dehumanize the subject, transforming it into various unrecognizable, peculiar creatures. For example, in *The Witches*, there are numerous examples of witches turning humans into peculiar animals, into stone, and even into a character in an oil-painting. As the protagonist's grandma reveals in chapter four, children are often turned into slugs, so that "the grown-ups step on the slug and squish it without knowing it's a child" (1983: 36). A crueller trick is to transform children into pheasants when the pheasant-shooting season is about to open. In order to make the evil transformations sound more realistic and terrifying, 'authentic cases' of the dehumanizing processes in Norway are mentioned often with the 'real names' of the victims given. Firstly, it is said that a little girl called Solveg Christiansen vanished after eating an apple given by a 'nice lady'. Later on, she was found to have become a part of an old oil-painting in the living room. Also, a boy called Harold was turned into stone as if he had suffered from the Medusa's gaze (15):

One morning his skin went all grayish-yellow. Then it became hard and crackly, like the shell of a nut. By evening, the boy had turned into stone.

Two more cases of children being dehumanized are also mentioned in the same chapter: a girl called Birgit Svenson was transformed into a chicken that lays big, brown eggs. It is said that her parents had to keep her in a cage in the garden. Also, a nine-year-old boy called Leif was transformed into a porpoise after diving into the water. As the story goes on, we are also told that the protagonist and a boy called Bruno Jenkins were turned into rats and they were not turned back into humans. Below is the detailed first-person description of the metamorphosis (109-110):

It was quite literally a tightening and a shrinking of the skin all over my body...I was squeezed like an orange into a pulpy mess with the juice running out of my sides. After that there came a fierce prickling sensation all over my skin...and this...was the growing of the mouse-fur...I am not myself any longer! I have gone clear out of my own skin!

The graphic description may look humorous, but it also creates a revolting feeling. The scene reminds us of the eerie transformation of a werewolf. Much against the subject's will, the repulsive abject keeps invading. The identity of the subject collapses as the acceptable boundary is transgressed without resistance. Such dehumanizing transformation evokes abject horror and "reinforces culturally conditioned misogyny" (Itzin 1985: 13).

Demonic Creatures

The misogynistic notion is reflected in the demonic portrayal of the female antagonists. For example, in *The Witches*, first of all, the reader is informed that "[a] witch is always a woman" (3) and "[t]hey all look like nice ladies" (4). However, later, it is revealed in chapter three that witches are not women but in fact "demons in human shape" (1983: 24), and further (23-24):

[...] witches are not actually women at all. They look like women. They talk like women. And they are able to act like women. But in actual fact, they are totally different animals. They are demons in human shape. That is why they have claws and bald heads and queer noses and peculiar eyes, all of which they have to conceal as best they can from the rest of the world.

The narrator remarks that the fact that witches do not look dangerous makes them doubly dangerous. Similarly, the fake womanhood and the uncanny human-like camouflage (such as their wigs, gloves and pointed shoes) make the witches even more loathsome and disgusting to the reader. The feeling of abjection is also reflected in the first person narrative. In chapter seven, the protagonist happens to see the real body forms of all the witches in the RSPCC (The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) meeting. With the most negative vocabulary, he describes that the sight is "awful", "grotesque", "monstrous" and "unnatural". The witches are portrayed as the monstrous alien other in disguise, and readers are warned that they should be careful of the deceptive creatures, because physical deformities that distinguish them from human beings are hidden "in fashionable and rather pretty clothes" (64).

Another demonic feature possessed by the witches is the deformity of their bodies. When the body is displayed as disfigured, deformed and/or mutated, abject

horror is created because it prevents the subject from defining itself in opposition to the alien object. A slippage between the self and the object is suggested because a part of the object is too close and similar to the subject. The object threatens to dehumanize the subject. Dahl spends more than a chapter describing the secrets about the witches' hidden and abnormal body parts. Firstly, the focus is on the witches' hands: they have hands like humans, but there is some hideous difference – in chapter three, grandma tells the protagonist that witches do not have fingernails, but thin curvy claws like a cat's. Later on in chapter seven, the protagonist sees the difference with his own eyes, "I could see the brown claws curving over the tips of the fingers! They were about two inches long, those claws and sharp at the ends!" (62-63). Beside the claws, there is also something wrong with the witches' feet. It is said that "[w]itches never have toes". "They just have feet" that "have square ends with no toes on them at all" (24). This is confirmed by the protagonist as well, as he hides in the ballroom which the witches have booked for a private meeting (63):

I got a glimpse under the chairs of several pairs of stockinged feet, square and completely toeless. Revolting they were, as though the toes had been sliced away from the feet with a carving-knife.

Other subtler but equally disgusting deformities include the witches' "naked scalps" (64) where "not a single hair grows on" (19), their "slightly larger nose-holes than ordinary people" (20), their supernatural power of smell, their blue spit, and their colour-changing pupils, where "you will see fire and you will see ice dancing right in the very centre of the coloured dot" (22). All these peculiar bodily differences cause fear. It is the witchophiles' wish to look out for the little signals, root out and destroy all the witches. In the same light, it is a problem that the object cannot be easily spotted and got rid of, as the protagonist discloses, "if only... we could round them [the witches] all up and put them in the meat-grinder. Unhappily, there is no such way" (5). The narrative magnifies bodily differences to create feelings of disgust and irrational fear. It expresses a similar kind of misogynistic notions manifested in the infamous witch-hunts in the pre-modern Western society.

A Breakthrough? Harpies as Unclean Maternal Figures with Pure Reason

Previously, I discussed that in *The Amber Spyglass*, harpies are abject creatures that disturb the symbolic order and create fear. Nonetheless, Pullman's monstrous-feminine is slightly different from Dahl's witches and C. S. Lewis' Jadis in the Narnia books. At first glance, the representations may look similar. Yet, the representation of the abject figure changes across the narrative. As the story goes

on, the reader finds that the harpies in *The Amber Spyglass* do not actually desire evil. In chapter 23, No-Name (a harpy) discloses that they are not happy with doing sheer evil. Though they belong only to the underworld and are made subservient to the Church, they need a duty that brings them honour and a task that they can perform with pride. Ultimately, it is pride, respect and honour that the harpies long for (2000: 333):

We have our pride, and you should not let that be dispensed with. We need an honourable place! We need a duty and a task to do, that will bring us the respect we deserve!

It is also revealed that their resentment towards humans and their ghosts only comes from the wickedness, cruelty and greed they see in people. Their aggressiveness is not entirely their fault because it is the Authority who gives them “the power to see the worst in every one” (331). They are made to feed on the worst till their “hearts are sickened” (*ibid.*). By nature, they have a deep hatred towards liars, lies and fantasies. This explains why they attack and mock Lyra when she tells them fictitious stories. Instead of being irrational and unpredictable, the harpies love and are attracted by truth, knowledge and wisdom. They stop their attacks and listen solemnly while Lyra shares true stories of her life and experience. When Lyra asks them why they have stopped their attack, the harpies explain (332):

Because it was true...Because it was nourishing. Because it was feeding us. Because we couldn't help it...Because it brought us news of the world and the sun and the wind and the rain.

In Pullman's story, harpies may be depicted as monstrous, abject figures with supernatural power, but what is amazing is that they can also be reasoned with, negotiated with, and eventually tamed. Pullman's harpies can be viewed as a re-version (*cf.* Stephens and McCallum 1998) that uses the monstrous-feminine stereotype, but changes the negative connotation in the pre-text; it is “a new textual and ideological configuration” (*ibid.*: 2). Pullman's harpies may look as ugly and scary as other monstrous-feminine, but to the readers' surprise, they are not evil. They can be honest, reliable, trustworthy, and virtuous if one knows how to respect them and understand their pursuit for truth and knowledge.

In the typical monstrous-feminine stereotype, the female abject is a source of the deepest horror. It threatens the existence of the subject and the Symbolic order. Therefore, as Creed points out, “[a]n opposition is drawn between the impure fertile (female) body and pure speech associated with the symbolic body” (1993: 25). Interestingly, in Pullman's book, the opposition is overthrown. The abject female is now a combination of both – it is a living dead creature with a non-human body,

but it also has a rational, logical mind. While rational explanations are held in the hands of most male protagonists, reasoning, negotiation and reconciliation with the harpies are possible, too. For instance, in exchange for Lyra's true story, they show Lyra and her companions the way out to the upper world. They "take the travelers and their knife to a part of the land of the dead where the upper world was close" (334). The bird-forms are also willing to make a treaty with the ghosts – when the ghosts tell them true stories of the world, the harpies will guide them faithfully "from the landing-place by the lake all the way through the land of the dead to the new opening out into the world" (*ibid.*).

As the plot develops, Lyra even goes as far as to make friends with the monstrous-feminine. Instead of drawing the boundaries between the self and the abject, Lyra embraces the abject, embracing her own femininity in the process. The fear of not being able to keep the subject "whole and proper" is dismissed. This happens when Lyra is at the edge of the abyss, falling, and when the monstrous-feminine rescues her (2000: 379):

And out of the dark swooped that creature whose claws had raked her scalp not long before, No-Name the harpy, woman-faced, bird-winged; and those same claws closed tight around the girls' wrist... the harpy carried the child up and up out of the gulf and brought her limp and fainting to Will's reaching arms.

Because of the rescue, No-Name, the harpy, is blessed, praised, and called "the saviour of all, generous one" (379) by many. Moreover, to thank the harpy for saving her life, Lyra gives the monstrous-feminine a beautiful and respectable name, "I'm going to call you Gracious Wings. So that's your name now, and that's what you'll be for evermore: Gracious Wings" (405). The filth and disgusting features of the harpies are rather forgotten. For more than once, Lyra kisses and hugs the female monster lovingly (379, 405):

As soon as Lyra could move, she reached out trembling for the harpy and put her arms around her neck, kissing and kissing her ravaged face [...]
She embraced the harpy, hugging her tightly and kissing her on both cheeks.

In Pullman's reinvention, the stories of people's lives, "the truth about what they've seen and touched and heard and loved and known in the world" (333) are of first priority. Truth and the pursuit of knowledge are honoured and respected by all, including the female monsters. The oppositions between the self and the abject, the clean and the foul, human and non-human, living and dead etc. are put aside. The role and the fate of the monstrous-feminine are rewritten in a positive light.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have analyzed the descriptions of female antagonists in two C. S. Lewis' Narnia books, Roald Dahl's *The Witches* and Philip Pullman's *The Amber Spyglass*, with reference to existing theories and discussions about the monstrous-feminine. I have shown that a reductive, repressive pattern recurs in the Narnia series and in Roald Dahl's children's book. In the Narnia books, Jadis is stereotyped as an ungodly, Lilith-like *femme fatale* who possesses multiple divided, disintegrating selves. As a multiple complex of an aggressive woman, a human-like nonhuman creature and a living dead, Jadis is the "in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva 1983: 4) creature that blurs the line of demarcation between life and death, human and beast, masculine and feminine.

Employing the same monstrous-feminine stereotype, Dahl's witches are portrayed more or less in the same light. As reflected in the plot and in the choice of specific vocabulary that the witches are represented by, the female antagonists are represented as the ambiguous, nameless abject that causes fear and repulsion in us. Their feminine appearance and masculine behaviour, their human-like, yet non-human identity, their disfigured, grotesque physical appearance, together with their evil desire and power to dehumanize and kill children, make them a life-threatening negation that must be radically excluded. At the end of the story, the abject is ejected, eliminated, and the demarcation line between the subject and that which threatens its existence is redrawn more rigidly. The purification from the abject brings relief and a vengeful pleasure.

In Pullman's *The Amber Spyglass*, the harpies continue to be represented as the monstrous-feminine creatures who do not "respect borders, positions, rules", and that disturb "identity, system, order" (Kristeva 1983: 4). To a large extent, they look the same as the harpies in Greek myth and are only active in the underworld. Very few changes are made in the female monsters' physical appearance and role. The authority of the patriarchal order is not challenged. Having said so, in Pullman's rewriting, harpies are reasonable creatures that crave for truth. One of them is called "the saviour of all, generous one" (2000: 379) and honoured as the "Gracious Wings" (405). They are somewhat different from the female monsters that are totally negated. Pullman's monstrous-feminine is nonetheless presented in a positive light.

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Prikazivanje čudovišno-ženskoga u odabranim djelima C. S. Lewisa, Roalda Dahla i Philipa Pullmana

Rad istražuje načine prikazivanja ženskih likova u ulozi protivnika u trima popularnim književnim pripovijedima za djecu – u ciklusu Chronicles of Narnia [Kronike iz Narnije] C. S. Lewisa te u romanima The Witches [Vještice] Roalda Dahla i The Amber Spyglass [Jantarni dalekozor] Philipa Pullmana – pozivajući se na teoriju abjekcije Julije Kristeve i na raspravu o čudovišno-ženskom Barbare Creed. I u ciklusu o Narniji i u romanu Vještice, ženski su protivnički likovi pojednostavljeni, stereotipni i negativno okarakterizirani kao zle figure koje prijete stabilnosti dobro organiziranoga društva. Prikazane su kao abjekti koji nejasnima čine granice između života i smrti, ljudskoga i ne-ljudskoga, muškoga i ženskoga. Na kraju obiju pripovijedi čudovišno-žensko se izbacuje, eliminira, a 'pročišćenje' donosi olakšanje i osvetničko zadovoljstvo. U Pullmanovoj su knjizi harpije prikazane kao čudovišta s kojima se može razborito razgovarati. Časti ih se kao velikodušne i imenom „Dobrohotna Krila.“ Pa ipak, premda je uočljiv pokušaj ponovnoga uspostavljanja pozitivnoga pojma čudovišno-ženskoga, takvi likovi igraju tek drugorazrednu ulogu koju im nameće simbolički poredak, a stereotip se ipak i dalje održava.

Ključne riječi: abjekt, dječja fantastika, groteska, čudovišno-žensko, stereotipi

Darstellung des Monströs-Femininen in ausgewählten Werken von C. S. Lewis, Roald Dahl und Philip Pullman

Anknüpfend an die Abjektionstheorie von Julia Kristeva und an die Diskussion über das Monströs-Feminine bei Barbara Creed werden in diesem Beitrag die Darstellungsweisen der Frauengestalten als Kontrahentinnen in drei populären kinderliterarischen Erzählwerken – im Romanzyklus Chronicles of Narnia [Die Chroniken von Narnia] von C. S. Lewis sowie in den Romanen The Witches [Hexen Hexen] von Roald Dahl und The Amber Spyglass [Das Bernstein-Teleskop] von Philip Pullman – erörtert. Sowohl im Narnia-Zyklus als auch im Roman Hexen Hexen werden diese Frauengestalten auf eine vereinfachte, stereotype und negative Weise als Verkörperung des Bösen dargestellt, die die Stabilität einer ansonsten gut organisierten Gesellschaft bedrohen. Sie werden als ‚Abjekte‘ dargestellt, die die Grenze zwischen Leben und Tod, dem Menschlichen und dem Unmenschlichen, dem Männlichen und dem Weiblichen, verwischen. Am Schluss beider Erzählwerke wird das Monströs-Feminine ausgegrenzt bzw. eliminiert, wobei diese als ‚Purifikation‘ empfundene Aktion das Gefühl der Erleichterung und Zufriedenheit hervorruft. In Pullmans Werk dagegen werden Harpyien als Monster dargestellt, mit denen dennoch eine vernünftige Kommunikation

möglich ist. Man verehrt sie als großzügige Wesen, weshalb man sie u.a. als „Sanfte Flügel“ bezeichnet. Obwohl darin der Versuch einer Wiederherstellung des positiven Begriffs vom Monströs-Femininen zu erblicken ist, spielen solche Gestalten jedoch nur eine – von der symbolischen Ordnung zugewiesene – zweitklassige Rolle, so dass das Stereotyp trotzdem erhalten bleibt.

Schlüsselwörter: ‚Abjekt‘, kinderliterarische Phantastik, Grotteske, Monströs-Feminines, Stereotype