

OH MY GOD

A MONSTERS SEARCH FOR MEANING

In the context of YORGOS LANTHIMOS'

POOR THINGS (2023)

BY BRYCE MANOOVALOO

Submitted to the Faculty of Film, Art and Creative Technology in candidacy for the
BA (Hons) Degree in Design for Film

Submitted 12/2/2026

Declaration of Originality

This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of the examination for the BA (Honours) (programme name). It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.



Bryce Manoovaloo

Acknowledgements

I would love to give a huge thanks to Dr. Nina Holmes for being my thesis tutor during this process, her support and knowledge was tremendously helpful. I would also like to acknowledge the IADT Library staff as a resource for all my books and references that helped me write this thesis.

Abstract

Monsters give form to our worst fears and phobias, a manifestation of hate and our own prejudice. They are nothing more than a reflection of our own monstrosity. Yet, we blame them, we as a society label certain people as 'monsters' and deem acts as 'monstrous' reluctant to consider our own biases. Mary Shelley's Victor Frankenstein is no less a monster than his 8-foot reanimated corpse, a doctor willing to alter the course of reproduction for the purpose of his own hubris, and doing what he wants because he can, never considering the aftermath of his discovery.

The link between God and creation is universally linked. You could describe Victor as having a *God Complex* a mortal man subverting the laws of nature to spit in the face of the *Divine*. Like the book's full title suggests, he is the *Modern Prometheus*.

However, a detail I'm fascinated by, and what I want to explore through this essay, is the lack of women within this narrative. This removal of the feminine speaks to the theme of Frankenstein, the creation of life that bypasses women. From it comes a being, plagued with hatred and vengeance, looked upon as evil. It begs the question, of what would a creature born in the opposite means be treated like within society.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	10
CHAPTER I	11
' <i>THE GARDEN</i> '	11
CHAPTER II	16
Part I	16
' <i>BABYLON</i> '	16
CHAPTER II	22
Part II	22
' <i>THE 'WHORE'</i> '	22
CHAPTER III	25
Part I	25
' <i>The Prodigal Daughter</i> '	25
CHAPTER III	31
Part II	31
' <i>God was lonely</i> '	31
CONCLUSION	35
BIBLIOGRAPHY	36

Figure 1 Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film] Searchlight pictures & Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures] [SHOTDECK - The World's Leading Cinematic Image Library](#) (Accessed 26th September 2025)

6

Figure 2 Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film] Searchlight pictures & Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures] [SHOTDECK - The World's Leading Cinematic Image Library](#)(Accessed 26th September 2025)

7

Figure 3 Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film] Searchlight pictures & Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures] [SHOTDECK - The World's Leading Cinematic Image Library](#)(Accessed 26th September 2025)

8

Figure 4 Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film] Searchlight pictures & Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures] [SHOTDECK - The World's Leading Cinematic Image Library](#)(Accessed 26th September 2025)

9

Figure 5 Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film] Searchlight pictures & Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures] [SHOTDECK - The World's Leading Cinematic Image Library](#)(Accessed 26th September 2025)

10

Figure 6 Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film] Searchlight pictures & Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures] [SHOTDECK - The World's Leading Cinematic Image Library](#)(Accessed 26th September 2025)

11

Figure 7 Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film] Searchlight pictures & Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures] [SHOTDECK - The World's Leading Cinematic Image Library](#)(Accessed 26th September 2025)

12

Figure 8 Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film] Searchlight pictures & Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures] [SHOTDECK - The World's Leading Cinematic Image Library](#)(Accessed 26th September 2025)

13

Figure 9 Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film] Searchlight pictures & Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures] [SHOTDECK - The World's Leading Cinematic Image Library](#)(Accessed 26th September 2025)

14

Figure 10 Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film] Searchlight pictures & Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures] [SHOTDECK - The World's Leading Cinematic Image Library](#)(Accessed 26th September 2025)

15

Figure 11Frankenstein. (1931). [Film] Universal Pictures.] [SHOTDECK - The World's Leading Cinematic Image Library](#)(Accessed 26th September 2025)

16

Figure 12 Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film] Searchlight pictures & Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures] [SHOTDECK - The World's Leading Cinematic Image Library](#)(Accessed 26th September 2025)

17

Figure 13 Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film] Searchlight pictures & Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures] [SHOTDECK - The World's Leading Cinematic Image Library](#)(Accessed 26th September 2025)

18

Figure 14 Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film] Searchlight pictures & Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures] [SHOTDECK - The World's Leading Cinematic Image Library](#)(Accessed 26th September 2025)

19

Figure 15 Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film] Searchlight pictures & Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures] [SHOTDECK - The World's Leading Cinematic Image Library](#)(Accessed 26th September 2025)

20

Figure 16 Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film] Searchlight pictures & Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures] [SHOTDECK - The World's Leading Cinematic Image Library](#)(Accessed 26th September 2025)

21

Figure 17 Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film] Searchlight pictures & Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures] [SHOTDECK - The World's Leading Cinematic Image Library](#)(Accessed 26th September 2025)

22

Figure 18 Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film] Searchlight pictures & Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures] [SHOTDECK - The World's Leading Cinematic Image Library](#)(Accessed 26th September 2025)

23

Figure 19Frankenstein. (1931). [Film] Universal Pictures.] [SHOTDECK - The World's Leading Cinematic Image Library](#)(Accessed 26th September 2025)

24

Figure 20 Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film] Searchlight pictures & Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures] SHOTDECK - The World's Leading Cinematic Image Library (Accessed 26 th September 2025)	25
Figure 21 Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film] Searchlight pictures & Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures] SHOTDECK - The World's Leading Cinematic Image Library (Accessed 26 th September 2025)	26
Figure 22 Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film] Searchlight pictures & Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures] SHOTDECK - The World's Leading Cinematic Image Library (Accessed 26 th September 2025)	27
Figure 23 Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film] Searchlight pictures & Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures] SHOTDECK - The World's Leading Cinematic Image Library (Accessed 26 th September 2025)	28
Figure 24 Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film] Searchlight pictures & Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures] SHOTDECK - The World's Leading Cinematic Image Library (Accessed 26 th September 2025)	28
Figure 25 Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film] Searchlight pictures & Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures] SHOTDECK - The World's Leading Cinematic Image Library (Accessed 26 th September 2025)	29
Figure 26 Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film] Searchlight pictures & Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures] SHOTDECK - The World's Leading Cinematic Image Library (Accessed 26 th September 2025)	29
Figure 27 Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film] Searchlight pictures & Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures] SHOTDECK - The World's Leading Cinematic Image Library (Accessed 26 th September 2025)	30
Figure 28 Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film] Searchlight pictures & Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures] SHOTDECK - The World's Leading Cinematic Image Library (Accessed 26 th September 2025)	30

Figure 29 Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film] Searchlight pictures & Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures] [SHOTDECK - The World's Leading Cinematic Image Library](#)(Accessed 26th September 2025)

31

Figure 30 Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film] Searchlight pictures & Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures] [SHOTDECK - The World's Leading Cinematic Image Library](#)(Accessed 26th September 2025)

32

INTRODUCTION



Figure 1 Victorias body on Gods operating table Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film]

‘Monsters’ are not real, they exist within the collective mind as manifestations of fear, they reflect the dark underbelly of society, the dirt we brush under the rug, truths we refuse to confront, so we turn them into these unimaginable creatures that defy explanation. We can't find a reasonable explanation for why someone might act against the social norms, so we label them as a monster as an explanation. Everyone knows that monsters are mindless and are driven by instinct, right?

If you would refer to Frankenstein as the monster in the story, you might be greeted with a correction that Frankenstein is in fact the scientist, not the big scary 8-foot-tall creature. However, in the original novel by Mary Shelley, there's ambiguity in that question, yes Victor Frankenstein is the obsessed scientist on the pursuit to create life, but that goal could be considered monstrous, is it the creature's fault that it was created? All it knows is Victor, he is a baby in this new world even if his body isn't, is the creature then not a manifestation of Frankenstein's own monstrosity? These are the kind of questions I want to explore through this thesis, through the Lens of Bella Baxter. ‘POOR THINGS’ (2023) was directed by Yorgos Lanthimos and written by Tony McNamara, it's an adaptation of Alasdair Gray's 1992 novel of the same name. My job is not to compare the story and its adaptation to screen, instead I'll be focusing on the film and how it details the journey of the titular lead character. On the surface the story appears to be a telling of the Frankenstein story which it is in aspects of visuals and themes, but it also tackles a wider concept of monstrosity by making Bella Baxter, a beautiful woman as its ‘Monster’ she has no deformities and visually shares no real connection to what we expect a monster to look like, so where does her monstrosity come from? A key to answering that question lies in the setting of the film, taking place in a surreal whimsical world but very clearly set in an alternate Victorian era. My aim for this thesis is to break down the societal and cultural theories and beliefs that made women into monsters and the demonizing of female sexuality as a way of control, through the lens of a creator and creation relationship. Each chapter tackles an arch within Bella's story.

In chapter 1 I will be analyzing the birth of Bella Baxter, using stills from the film and referencing theories related to the creation of Monsters and the space they inhabit. In my second chapter, I will focus on her journey away from home. Throughout I'll be referencing biblical and religious concepts as they link to her story and in cases are the roots to why she is seen as a Monster. In my final chapter I will look at her return, the meaning she has found while on her journey but also how she faces the truth of her past self and what that will mean for her future.

CHAPTER I

'THE GARDEN'



Figure 2 Birth of Bella Baxter Lanthimos Y. (2023) *Poor Things*. [Film]

In Fig 2. as seen above we witness the birth of Bella Baxter. Bella in the context of the story is the monster, the creature born out of perverse science, a hybrid of an infant's mind and a woman's body, and like God she stands out from society. In God's case it's the clear facial deformities as a result of his cruel father's experiments, "people scared of God, laugh at God", *Lanthimos Y. (2023)*. while Bella's unfiltered and unrestrained thoughts paint her as crude and impolite, "why keep it in my mouth if it is revolting", *Lanthimos Y. (2023)*, not seen as appropriate for the time, "Will you behave", *Lanthimos Y. (2023)*. Duncan demands her. Though all of this begs the question of identity, in the beginning she is clear in herself, "you hold Bella to tight", *Lanthimos Y. (2023)*, she refers to herself in the third person, Bella Baxter is her name, and she has no doubt in it. But what happens when she decides to leave the 'Garden'?



Figure 3 Bella exploring Gods House Lanthimos Y. (2023) *Poor Things*. [Film]

“The domestic Eden is maintained by enforced ignorance of anything outside its inward-looking boundaries”, *Cohen J.J (1996) pg.127*. Bella’s feet touch the only natural material found in God’s glass and concrete home, left to observe the boundless sky, unobstructed by stone walls. In the garden she’s joined by her fellow hybrids of creature crudely stitched together, the head of a pig and the body of a chicken. God doesn’t want Bella to leave; she is his magnum opus a creation he must look over and study “she’s an experiment, and I must control the conditions, or our results will not be pure”, *Lanthimos Y. (2023)* God says to Max. He makes the house feel like a home for Bella, as a result his objective viewpoint becomes clouded by a parental role. The fear of his experiment leaving and ruining his study becomes entangled with the fear his “daughter” will leave and discover the true evils of the world. “You know so many things outside can kill you Bella”, *Lanthimos Y. (2023)*. warning her and sowing a seed of doubt so she doesn’t run away, an effort that’s made fruitless a couple of scenes later. “It is not good that a man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him”, (Gen. 2.18) enter Eve, birthed from a male’s need for validation and want for companionship, Eve is seen as second, the afterthought to the creation of Adam and exits only for his needs. Bella too was created to serve the needs of men, birthed from God’s sick curiosity and a perversion to the natural order. Victoria Blessington the body which Bella puppets, was a woman who committed suicide in the opening act of the film, a tragic event but one that can be viewed as her way of taking control “carefully chosen blank eternity”, *Lanthimos Y. (2023)*. a decision she makes in a society that doesn’t respect her voice. We see this embodied in Victoria’s husband later. This final decision in defiance and lack of control within her own life is immediately reversed by the doings of the mad scientist with a God complex, a man who seems content in controlling life and death yet aware of what boundaries he is crossing. In his own words, “For in this Christian nation suicide is treated as lunacy or crime”, *Lanthimos Y. (2023)*. “Who was I to decide her fate”, *Lanthimos Y. (2023)*, yet in this moment of self-reflection, he continues going against his morals and pursuing in the name of science. He claims fate had “brought me a dead body and a live infant”, *Lanthimos Y. (2023)*. Bella was created without permission, but instead of sorrow we watch as Bella explodes with energy, a sense of adventure and endless curiosity about the world, which scares men like Duncan and creates worry for God and Max.



Figure 4 Bella's bedroom Lanthimos Y. (2023) *Poor Things*. [Film]

“Monsters cannot be created under the gaze of society. In fiction, subverting the natural laws by creating clones and hybrids is done in secret”, *Montin, S. and Tsitas, E. (2013) pg. 121*. He doesn't want people to know about Bella, allowing only one maid to care for Bella as a child and Max a promising young student he asks to join him in his experiment to note down Bella's progress. This artificial family is all she knows. The first act of the

film we watch as Bella's curiosity grows, the urge to step outside, tempted by her want of adventure. Though she is coddled and shielded from the outside, the house is almost babyproofed in a way. The hard concrete exterior contrasted by the plush interior; her bedroom walls padded, and her clothes, like oversized bibs and large billowy sleeves. The “Victorian home is therefore more accurately defined as a kind of battleground: a place of constant struggle to maintain privacy, security and respectability in a dangerous world”, *Chapman T. & Hockey J. (1999) pg. 34*. Bella's sense of newness contradicts the rigid belief system, confused on why she can't do certain things as a result of external factors she doesn't understand. God too doesn't follow the norms of the time, though preforms his experiments in the dark, cloaked in secrecy. Max too fears for her “Bella this is dangerous”, *Lanthimos Y. (2023)* both view her as fragile and need of protection, “Australia far away and dangerous in both people and animal”, *Lanthimos Y. (2023)* Max responds to Bella's question, simply asking what that place is called on a map.



Figure 5 Bella masturbating Lanthimos Y. (2023) *Poor Things*. [Film]

The ambitious doctor Frankenstein within Mary Shelley's original story ‘Frankenstein; Or the modern Prometheus’ finds “a homosexual obsession with his creature” *Cohen J.J. (1996) pg.124*. The idea of ‘sex’ and procreation is at the core of the classic gothic novel, the creation of a “creature without women's agency”, *Cohen J.J. (1996) pg. 124*. Bella

discovering her body and the concept of self-pleasure is the catalyst that leads to her search for independence. The term monster gives form to our worst fears and phobias, a manifestation and hate, and our own prejudice. In modern media we paint these creatures with sharp fangs, ravenous beasts ready to eat us. Classic films like ‘Wolfman’ or ‘Dracula’ give fear to the shadows. They can also be viewed in sympathy; one we feel pity for; both view the monster as lesser than humans told from the perspective of those around them. Rarely are they portrayed as proactive in

their journey, often set on a course of revenge for those who created them or wronged them in a way. The story of Frankenstein has the doctor actively escape his creation, sharing his life as a cautionary tale about disturbing the natural order of things. Bella may not be heavily disfigured, or have an urge to consume flesh, but her “monstrosity” comes from what she represents in the context of 19th century England. In Montin, S. and Tsitas, E. (2013). *Monstrous geographies: places and spaces of the monstrous* there's a chapter ‘Monstrous homes’ analyzing ideologies of Victorian England and how that shaped the space and architecture around them. “There were parts of the house reserved for the master and his male guest and those that were assigned to the mistress”. *Montin, S. and Tsitas, E. (2013) pg. 75*, this separation from the outside world is what kept the perfect image amongst society, keeping the not so Savory elements of life secret. The idea of “bodily desires” was considered “monstrous”. We see this in how Max and the maid react to Bella trying to share her new discovery of ‘masturbation’ they are shocked, Max quickly shooting down her curiosity.

“I will marry Max as he seems right, but first I shall adventure on Duncan Wetanbur, Who I think cares little of damage to me but will be interesting”, *Lanthimos Y. (2023)*. On the cusp of freedom, God decides for Bella to marry her off to Max, with the condition they must live here with Him. A decision made without Bella’s knowledge or consent much like her life so far



Figure 6 Bella is visited by Duncan Lanthimos Y. (2023)
Poor Things. [Film]

after being reanimated. “Fathers should be breadwinners, true heads of the household: mothers should stay home”, *Dyhouse, C. (2012) pg. 92*, a common phrase and myth that permeated Victorian thought and culture around the ideal working-class family, mothers “were held to be uniquely responsible for working class living”, *Dyhouse, C. (2012) pg. 93*. This family dynamic would of course shift as the industrial revolution kicked off, industrializing the family structure, women entering the work force on an official level, Dyhouse refers to Samuel Smiles a Scottish author who had thoughts on the effects of industrialism to the household and women, claiming it took women away from their proper roles, no longer “the gentle wife, companion and friend of man, but his fellow laborer and fellow drudge”. *Dyhouse C. (2012) pg. 92*. The statement both devalues the work women do within the house as simple niceties and not true “labor” but also claims that wives were ‘companions’ and ‘friends’, this would suggest a mutual respect, putting both parents on the same level, though it's clear the expectations of the wife align more with a maid. Maintaining the domestic Household both physically and emotionally, having an “evening meal ready by a welcoming fire for their husband”, *Dyhouse C. (2012) pg. 93*, to keep them happy and content, Smiles even suggesting a man's failure to stay loyal would be as a result of women performing poorly in this role, he “observed where the mother was prudent and sensible the family might still be kept together”, *Dyhouse C. (2012) pg. 93*.

These were the expectations of the time, we see it embodied through God’s maid, the only other women in the house and the closest to a ‘Motherly’ figure. Bella is the antithesis of this Victorian expectation for women, she yearns for life and adventure, this is where the introduction of Duncan invites temptation within the garden, his manipulative nature invites Bella to explore the world with her, “you like me are like a creature of freedom in the moment”, though we soon learn he isn't and in fact reflects the views of Victorian thinking. Bella agrees and takes her first step beyond the boundaries of her house, unaware of what she will discover, “she is a being of free will”, *Lanthimos Y. (2023)*.

CHAPTER II

Part I

'BABYLON'



Figure 7 Bella arrives in Lisbon Lanthimos Y. (2023) *Poor Things*. [Film]

Babylon has soaked itself in the cultural zeitgeist; it's shrouded in myths and assumptions, no longer just a place. It represents a way of life and acts as an allegory for sin. "From earliest times, western commentators depicted Babylon's inhabitants as decadent and corrupt", Scheil A. (2016) pg. 126. In his book *'Babylon under western eye's: A study of Allusion and myth'* Scheil discusses the themes of 'sexual deviancy', much like the apprehension towards sexuality in Victorian England, we find this fear of "Transgressive female sexuality", Scheil A. (2016) pg. 127, in early texts depicting humanity and their attitudes towards such acts. Whatever stood against western Christian values would manifest within Babylon, "All sins of the flesh find a home in Babylon", Scheil A. (2016) pg. 131. They heavily focused on female sexuality and femininity, Semiramis the Queen of Babylon was known for her "depraved sexuality", Scheil A. (2016) pg. 127, and stood as the personification of the sin of lust. Another story the book looks at is that of Alexander the great, as he and his fellow soldiers take refuge in the city of Babylon. It touches on the idea of influence, "and though their spirit had been pure and noble, the corrupting feminine influence of Babylon takes its toll on their Western virtue", Scheil A. (2016) pg. 130. Again, we see this correlation between evil and specifically feminine sexuality and desire. Even with the use of the word 'depraved' we feel the level of malice and hate linked with feminine desire.

From Christianity to ancient Greek, I'd like to take a look at another story, one possibly more well known, Pandora. In Vered Lev Kenaan's book 'Pandora's Senses: The Feminine character of ancient text' they discuss Hesiod's poem 'Theogony' and the story of Pandora, the first mortal woman. Within the book it looks at the misogyny and objectification of woman through Pandora, "the first work of art, the first product of manufacture", *Kenaan V. L. (2007) pg. 49*. In its wording it's clear the role Pandora plays, although the first mortal woman, she's described as an object of beauty, a piece of art for men, the name meaning 'All Gifts', she was an "artificial product contrived by the gods", *Kenaan V. L. (2007) pg. 62*, sounding quite familiar to the creation of Bella, seen as more than just a human. This also compliments the idea of monstrosity and otherness, Bella much like Pandora embodies "a dimension of otherness that threatens the natural and self-sufficient rapport between men and their world", *Kenaan V. L. (2007) pg. 62*. Exactly like in Mary Shelley's original novel, it's the creation of life that bypasses the natural order of things, both Bella and Pandora stand as a representation of 'newness' uncharted territory and the fear of the unknown, the textbook definition of a 'monster'.



Figure 8 Bella explores Lisbon Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film]



Figure 9 Duncan angrily waiting for Bella to return Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film]

Lisbon marks Bella's first steps beyond the Garden, "understand me never lived outside gods house", *Lanthimos Y. (2023)*. Embroiled with an immense sense of curiosity. Like a child she wanders the streets, buildings loom over, the scene is saturated, Bella finds herself speechless, only able to observe. Coming back from her brief adventure, we find Duncan in the mood, angry that she left without his knowledge. Though instead of it being out of worry about her safety, it's clear on his face it's about control, Bella "belongs" to him, like a piece of art he uses and flaunts to his friends like an exotic creature, one he cannot "tame". "You will rejoin the table, and you confine yourself to the following three phrases, how marvelous, delighted and how do they make the pastry so crisp", *Lanthimos Y. (2023)*. This need for control speaks to the themes explored in Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the creator enraged by the creature's simple mind. However, while Duncan seems enraged by Bella's un-lady like etiquette, he also claims to be attracted by that quality of Her's, the literal foundation to why he asked her to come to Lisbon with him, "you like me are like a creature of freedom in the moment", *Lanthimos Y. (2023)* he claims after being strung about on the dance floor.



Figure 10 Bella and Duncan Dancing Lanthimos Y. (2023) *Poor Things*. [Film]

Though when he learns of her ‘infidelity’ he’s outraged, “he just fast licked my clitoris”, *Lanthimos Y. (2023)* we see his hypocrisy, feeling betrayed when he himself claimed to be adventurous and free spirited but gets angry when she does the same. This again reinforces the difference between masculine and feminine sexuality and how such behavior is viewed in society; her use of her body is seen as shameful.

There’s cruelty as well as irony in calling Victor Frankenstein's creation a ‘Monster’, although physically being foreboding, a being made of remnants of the deceased, standing tall and seemingly having animalistic traits, at its core, he is a child, a newborn. Simply curious of who he is and what it means to be alive and searching for affection from his creator. His ‘Monstrous’ qualities reflecting Victor Frankenstein's own aggression, malice and ego, like a mirror Frankenstein is the Monster.



Figure 11 Frankenstein's monster meets a young girl Frankenstein. (1931). [Film] Universal Pictures.

In "Frankenstein" 1931, we see the Monster reflect the kindness and joy of the young girl. His anger and viciousness aren't linked to his natural being but instead inherited from the Doctor himself, He copies the little girl's movements, kneeling and picking a flower up from the ground. This small but tender moment shows us a brief innocence to the creature, his curiosity of the world around him, his intentions are not to hurt but like a naive child he is unaware of his own strength. I bring this all up to say Bella too is a mirror, reflecting what she sees, saying what she feels. Her intentions are pure, but she has not yet learned that her mere existence spits in the face of Victorian ideals for a women's role, Bella is aware of her strength but unaware of her impact.



Figure 12 Bella returns from the slums Lanthimos Y. (2023) *Poor Things*. [Film]

Although we watch Bella grow, become well rounded in both thought and language she stays true to herself as she navigates the challenges of life, she's always been human from the start, the monstrosity comes from those surrounding her, each person she experiences an aspect of life and the human condition that's then reflected back at them through the bluntness of Bella, who's untethered by any pre conceived notion to how the world should be. "I couldn't bear see such dumb beautiful happiness in someone, it was cruel of me", *Lanthimos Y. (2023)*, Harry admits to Bella his intentions after showing her the slums, her first look at corruption, the cries of helpless people forced to live in poverty while they sit high above enjoying a meal, she begins to cry, knowing she must help but feeling powerless, "who am I lying in feather bed, while dead babies lie in a ditch", *Lanthimos Y. (2023)*. In response, she kindly but swiftly sums up his character, "I realize what you are now Harry, just a broken little boy who cannot bear the pain of the world", *Lanthimos Y. (2023)*. Bella as a character makes us the audience look at ourselves, our own biases and our own 'monstrosity' whether its Harry's bleak nihilism towards the world seeing no point in improving it, or Duncan's need for control and vain obsession with appearances masked beneath a supposedly wild and free-spirited attitude.

CHAPTER II

Part II

THE 'WHORE'



Figure 13 Bella gets a job in a brothel Lanthimos Y. (2023) *Poor Things*. [Film]

In “Beyond Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Thinking about women's violence in Global Politics” by Caron E. Gentry and Laura Sjoberg analyses the multiple archetypes of ‘the Whore’ “the first whore narrative about violent women is one that characterizes them as almost exclusive sexual beings”, *Gentry C. E. & Sjoberg L. (2015) pg. 121* , the assumption that a women’s ‘sex drive’ is linked to their outbursts of violence but on the other hand “violent women are often characterised by their capacity (or lack thereof) to have sex with men”, *Gentry C. E. & Sjoberg L. (2015) pg.121*. It creates a contradiction, men demanding for sex and considering women who don't perform for them as failures, but demonising women who search for sexual pleasures themselves, almost like the idea that they have a say in when women can share their sexual desires is what they search for, that control and power over their body. This links back to Pandora, an ‘object’, and any sense of bodily autonomy is seen as gross and against nature. Though this demand for sexual gratification manifested itself in brothels, like a localised ‘Babylon’ such buildings existed throughout Europe, Licensed and recognised by the government, considered as a necessary evil and even the “foundation of social order”, *Karras R. M (1996) pg.48*, although such acts were deemed evil, they were tolerated, “because of masculine demand”, *Karras R. M (1996) pg.48*. However, even though considered a necessity this in fact “did not confer respect or privilege on those who worked in them”, *Karras R. M (1996) pg. 49*. The brothel would treat its prostitutes “as degraded and defiled”, *Karras R. M (1996) pg. 48*, according to the doctrine of the church. All of this complicated bureaucracy and religious jargon to deny women respect and dignity for expressing

the most human feeling, an experience Bella must endure as an outsider, seeing the absurdity of society and its rules as someone who was born beyond its strict border.



Figure 14 Bella and Duncan stuck in paris Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film]

We see this anti 'Whore' sentiment through Duncan, now poor and with no money both Bella and Duncan find themselves in Paris, the toll of Bella's outgoings and seemingly reckless behavior has finally broken Duncan, the final straw being Bella finding work in a Brothel, "you are a monster, a whore and a monster", Lanthimos Y. (2023) "you whored yourself, it is the worst thing a women could do", Lanthimos Y. (2023). This is the first time Bella is outwardly called a 'Monster' fitting that it's when she uses her sexuality for monetary gain, while Duncan holds the standards of European views on prostitution, for Bella its merely another experience, as well as purely logical, she looks for sexual exploration and is also in need of money, like a scientist she weighs her options and looks at the logical outcomes.



Figure 15 Madame Swiney Lanthimos Y. (2023) *Poor Things*. [Film]

In D. Herzog's book 'Brutality and Desire: War and sexuality in Europe's twentieth century' they bring up how such relationships between soldiers of war, often non-white soldiers engaging in such relations challenged, "the prestige of European Women', Herzog D. (2008) pg. 59. This notion of purity and virginity is at the core of religious belief, the story of 'the Garden' I discuss in chapter 1 looks at the loss of that purity, giving into temptation, and even Pandora encapsulates this impossible role women must adopt as this forever youthful and young creature, perfect and pure and how any deviation is deemed monstrous or damaged. There's a sense of ownership of a woman's sexuality by men within a patriarchy, "female virginity is established by the patriarchy as a valuable characteristic", Santos C. (2018) pg. 17, but on the other side, if a woman chooses to save her own virginity it," is seen as defiantly deviant because she is intrinsically denying the male the power of initiating her into the next stage of female development", Santos C. (2018) pg. 17. This shows how a woman's virginity is seen as only valid when enforced by a man." Gosh you look pretty, how it goes with you to be ravaged", Lanthimos Y. (2023), Madame Swiney tells Bella. The introduction of Madame Swiney stands as a possible version of Bella, a woman who's made it in the world by playing its cruel game, her initial reaction of Bella is that of excitement and familiarity," A woman plotting her course for freedom, how delightful", Lanthimos Y. (2023). She stands at a pivotal moment in Bella's self-discovery; while working in the brothel the endless sex by men whose only interest is to use her beauty and youth then discard her, Bella begins to grow numb to the feeling," my empathy is creeping toward what I would describe as contemptuous rage", Lanthimos Y. (2023). Though Swiney reminds her she must push through, as to experience everything is to also the bad, the horrors and sadness of life," this makes us Whole Bella", Lanthimos Y. (2023).



Figure 16 Bella takes an anatomy class Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film]

The core of her journey has been to explore the real world, but as her discovery reveals a world sick and diseased, she begins to look inward; while working, she reads on ethics and morality, attending surgeon demonstrations, she wants to fix the world, “If I know the world, I can improve it”, Lanthimos Y. (2023) Bella claims. She seems to have found her purpose and true reason for living, but like any form of self-discovery and search for meaning, comes a point of reevaluation of oneself, for Bella that's her doubt in who she is and where she actually comes from, a truth that God and Max chose to withhold from her, with God about to die, she finds herself returning home, for the ultimate answer.

CHAPTER III

Part I

'The Prodigal Daughter'



Figure 17 Bella returns to where she killed herself Lanthimos Y. (2023) *Poor Things*. [Film]

'In the Mirror of the Prodigal Son: The pastoral uses of the Biblical narrative (c.1200-1550)' written by Pietro Delcorno, he discusses the many interpretations of the iconic parable, one “in which the younger brother represents humanity who returns after the occurrence of original sin”, *Delcorno P (2017) pg. 24*. In all iterations the son returns and is accepted without hesitation back after living a life of sin, on the surface it speaks to the idea that sinners are loved and accepted by God. Though after all we've learned about Victorian society and its attitudes towards women's autonomy and double standards surrounding 'sin', would a prodigal daughter be just as accepted back? And in the context of 'Poor Things' what happens when God is lonely?

Bella arrives at her front door; the monolith stands as her birthplace, unaltered and indifferent to her return. After a fantastical and surreal journey, we are immediately brought back to a reality, what felt like an ever-expanding world within God's home in the beginning, feels small in comparison to the outside world.



Figure 18 Bella talks to her dying God Lanthimos Y. (2023) *Poor Things*. [Film]

Over the course of the film, we watch as Bella goes from a childlike being, with limited motor skills and warped sense of emotions as she attempts to navigate this new body of Her's, into a developed woman, one well-spoken and read. Bella stands over God, that whimsy of adventure and self-discovery melts away as we focus on a dark picture, of a gritty reality, God is dying. To Bella, God was everything, "you cannot die", Lanthimos Y. (2023), but after learning the truth of her perverse method of creation she stands conflicted on how to feel about her creator. "I will forgive you the act but always hate the lies and trapping that followed", Lanthimos Y. (2023) Bella may have found her meaning and purpose in life but now she must find her identity, the core of who she is without God.



Figure 19 Victor is confronted with his creation Frankenstein. (1931). [Film] Universal Pictures.

In David Higgins *Frankenstein: Character Studies* he analyses Mary Shelley's original novel and has a chapter looking deep into the character of Victor Frankenstein. Higgins would describe Frankenstein as a "man of science or a natural philosopher", *Higgins D. (2008) pg. 30*, In Shelley's novel she writes of Frankenstein's obsession with occult science and fascination for Alchemy. This obsession acts as the catalyst for his pursuit to create life, but his "aggressively antisocial curiosity, his desire to penetrate into the recesses of nature results in monstrous events", *Higgins D. (2008) pg. 31*. This need and want for control over life speaks to Frankenstein's true self, an egomaniacal man who seeks to create life for recognition, shifting the natural order because he can and feels entitled to do it, "Frankenstein emphasizes 'glory' as the outcome of his explorations", *Higgins D. (2008) pg. 28*. "a new species would bless me as its creator and source", and "No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs", *Shelley M. (1831) pg. 36*. This highlights both his ego and God complex, he views himself a creator whose creations must act out his will. His creation is a dark reflection of himself; he stands facing the creature too blinded by his own pride to understand the 'Monster'.



Figure 20 Godwin Baxter and Alfie Blessington Lanthimos Y. (2023) *Poor Things*. [Film]

In the context of 'Poor things' I believe both Godwin Baxter and Alfie Blessington seen above represent Doctor Frankenstein, specifically I believe each stand as a different aspect of the Frankenstein archetype. Godwin is the most literal approach, being the literal scientist and creator of Bella, and though we see the ego and obsession of Victor through Godwin's character for merely making Bella and in turn taking away the decision Victoria Blessington chose for herself, his reasoning was initially purely scientific but soon turned parental, becoming a father for Bella. Its Alfie Blessington who stands as an authoritative figure, we see the controlling and egotistical features of Frankenstein in him, Claiming Bella as his and ownership of her body, referring to her as Victoria as his wife and therefore Bella as his daughter.



Figure 21 Alfie's and Victorias Home Lanthimos Y. (2023) *Poor Things*. [Film]

As Bella and Alfie arrive to their home, we immediately get the sense of their life before, compared to Godwin's Garden, this garden is barren, devoid of life and cold, the house foreboding and dull in appearance, one might say it's an environment designed for birthing monsters. Although no cruel experiments were done in this house nor any bodies reanimated by a 'mad scientist', it was still home to Monsters. Throughout this thesis I've discussed the link of monstrosity to behavior not just physical deformities, In the film Bella's supposed monstrosity comes from her attitude and 'deviant sexuality' however these monstrous qualities are more to do with how Victorian culture perceives her. "Kind, you would never be so dull Victoria", *Lanthimos Y. (2023)*, Alfie claims after Bella learns about how Victoria was before her suicide. We begin to learn what kind of character Victoria was, seemingly just as cruel as Alfie, both having fun at the misfortune of their servants, from Bella's perspective, this is monstrous behavior, and we see her as she tries to come to terms with her past life, "was I nice", *Lanthimos Y. (2023)*. Bella asks to clearly nervous housemaid.

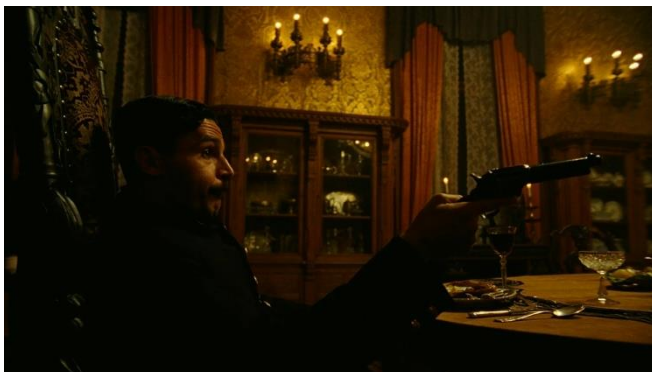


Figure 22 Alfie threatens the maid with a gun Lanthimos Y. (2023) *Poor Things*. [Film]

"My life is dedicated to the taking of territory, you are mine", *Lanthimos Y. (2023)* Alfie exclaims. This quick line reinforces his ego and ownership of Bella's body, as well as the attitudes of men during Victorian England that I had looked at in Chapter two with

the character of Duncan. He viewed her sexuality as a sickness, In Barbara Ehrenreich, Deirdre English and Susan Faludi's 1993 book *Complaints and Disorders: The sexual politics of sickness* they discuss how male doctors would propose "medical theories that were actually justifications of Women's social roles", Ehrenreich B. English D. & Faludi S. (1993) pg. 34. They would link" any sort of activity beyond the mildest feminine pursuits", Ehrenreich B. English D. & Faludi S. (1993) pg. 35, as a reason for their disorder, sex was often linked, as well as reading. The association of women and academic study was alien for the time, "To much development of the brain, they counseled, would atrophy the uterus", Ehrenreich B. English D. & Faludi S. (1993) pg. 36, speaking to how they viewed women as subservient, restricting women of knowledge keeps them from disobeying their husbands. This dynamic of the Husband and Wife of late Victorian England could easily be transposed over the Frankenstein and creature relationship; The doctor's creation has no access to books, its source comes only from his Master, what the creature learns is at Victor's will, he could choose to let it learn and become intelligent and self-sufficient, or trapped and completely dependent but loyal to him. Bella had the chance to explore the world; she returns home well read and educated, with that experience she sees through Alfie, Bella doesn't listen to him, as she is no longer Victoria, who in the past life was bound, like the creature to Frankenstein, to Alfie, her cruelty learned from him, trapped in their loveless and cold home.

"I will have to shoot you in the fucking head if you try to leave darling", Lanthimos Y. (2023) Alfie threatens, with Bella back, Alfie traps her, insisting she stays inside for the foreseeable future. He believes he is being a "forgiving husband", Lanthimos Y. (2023), he sees him the victim to her actions, "When I list the ways you wronged me, Jesus Christ himself would probably beat your head in with a bat", Lanthimos Y. (2023), these



Figure 23 Bella tries to leave Lanthimos Y. (2023) *Poor Things*. [Film]

threats of violence and shame he puts on her only paints a clearer picture of what Victoria probably endured herself, and what led to her committing suicide.



Figure 24 Alfie plans to get Bella operated on Lanthimos Y. (2023) *Poor Things*. [Film]

“I shall get her sedated and bring her to your surgery this evening”, *Lanthimos Y. (2023)* Alfie says to the doctor, like I briefly discussed, at the time ‘disorder’ found in women were often linked to sex drive and in general any acts that weren't considered ‘feminine’, the treatment would range from avoiding physical activity and rest to serious surgical involvements.

At the time of it was believed, “a women's nature was determined solely by her reproductive functions”, *Ehrenreich B. English D. & Faludi S. (1993) pg. 37*, so to the doctors of the time the only logical approach was the “surgical removal of the clitoris as a cure for sexual arousal”, *Ehrenreich B. English D. & Faludi S. (1993) pg. 41*. This mirrors the beginning of the film; a cruel surgery planned without the consent and knowledge of both Bella and Victoria. The idea of ‘genital mutilation’ speaks to the clear objectification of women, Alfie's constant insistence on how he has control over her body, and how he must rid her of this ‘sickness’. Both God in the beginning and Alfie see her body as something to be altered, as if she were a mindless doll with no actionable will of her own.

CHAPTER III

Part II

'God was lonely'



Figure 25 Godwin and Max Lanthimos Y. (2023) *Poor Things*. [Film]

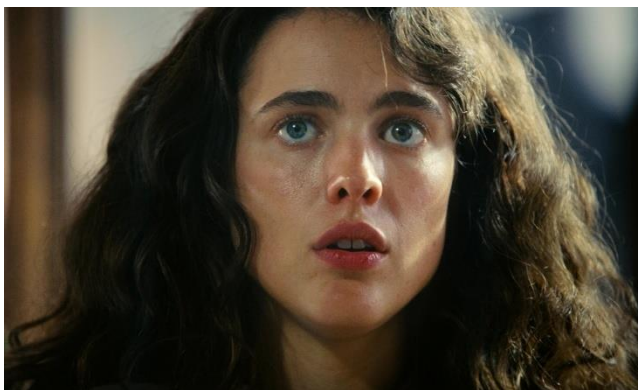


Figure 26 Felicity Lanthimos Y. (2023) *Poor Things*. [Film]

In the absence of Bella, Godwin recruits Max to repeat the experiment and makes Felicity. He repeats the monstrous act this time justifying his actions due to him missing Bella and needing another project to focus on.

“Monsters”, Lanthimos Y. (2023), Bella calls Max and God, enraged after she learns of their actions.

Both for subjugating another woman into their cruel experiment, but also for withholding the truth about her own creation. we see the same justification here, committing an act that they know is evil because they as men feel lonely and miserable, placing more value on their own emotions, over the moral dilemma of bringing an unwilling subject back to life to live as an experiment. We even see Godwin disappointed at the outcome, unhappy that Felicity is not like Bella.

“As I was before when I threw myself from a bridge”, Lanthimos Y. (2023) Bella points out Alfie's claim that she was happy as Victoria. The theme of isolation and

desperation is not just seen in God, who at his lowest does something he knows is morally wrong, but chooses it anyway. We see this dilemma through Victoria, who we learn more about from Alfie, but also these framed shots of her room. Cold and hollow, an ornately decorated prison cell. She clearly wasn't happy, contrary to whatever attempts Alfie tried, to convince Bella that she was.



Figure 27 Bella in Victoria's room Lanthimos Y. (2023) *Poor Things*. [Film]

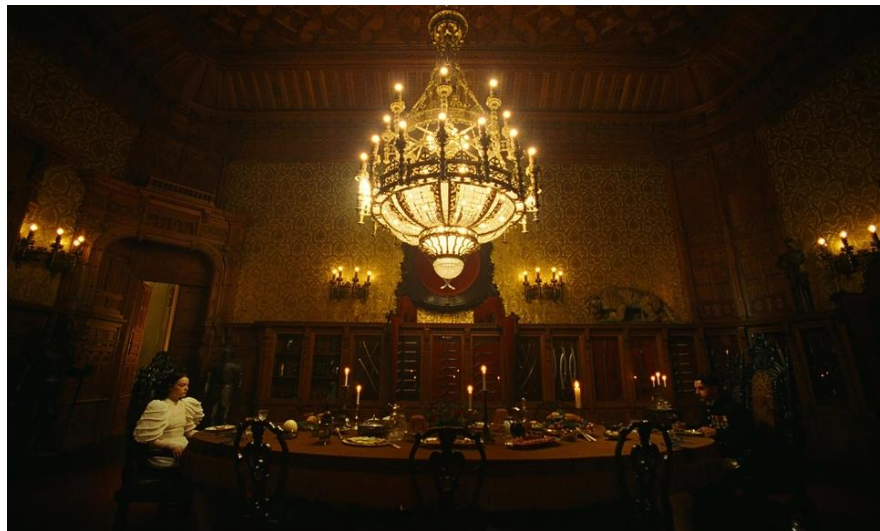


Figure 28 Bella and Alfie at dinner Lanthimos Y. (2023) *Poor Things*. [Film]

“You hated the baby, you called it the monster”, *Lanthimos Y. (2023)* Alfie response to Bella's query of her life as Victoria. In Raymond Stephenson and Darren Wagner's *The Secrets of Generation: Reproduction in the long Eighteenth Century*, they bring up the concept of both the “natural mother” and the “unnatural mother”. The former is “typically defined as nurturing, self-sacrificing, domestic, sexless”, *Stephenson R. Wagner, D. (2013) pg. 238*. The quality of being ‘sexless’ is interesting, again the notion of female sexuality being linked with evil, or in this case a ‘bad’ mother persists. The ‘unnatural mother’ “assumed qualities of bodily excess and emotional

changeability”, *Stephenson R. Wagner D. (2013) pg. 238*, the ideal mother was built of the fact that a women could not have or engage in their personal desires, as it would be selfish, monstrous even, “a women's life work is children”, *Lanthimos Y. (2023)*. Bella acknowledges’ this within herself, “I have noticed a lack of maternal instinct”, *Lanthimos Y. (2023)*. In the case of Bella, can you judge her actions? She may share the same body, but she is no longer the same person, both physically, having a different brain, but also emotionally, having experienced the world, she has gained a new unique perspective separate from the experiences and perspective of Victoria. Frankenstein's monster is a sperate being apart from what humans he is made from; his monstrosity is learned through Victors own behavior, and in the same way, Bella discovers her purpose, following in the footsteps of God, she becomes God, as she sits and observes her Garden, looking over her creation.



Figure 29 Gods Garden in the beginning and end Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film]

Bella’s journey is complete, in a full circle she returns home, no longer is her world black and white, her adventures have made her full, she's learned to accept the worlds complex beauty both the good and bad, and what she must now do in order to fix it in the way she can, “I will be a doctor”, *Lanthimos Y. (2023)*.



Figure 30 Bella Baxter Lanthimos Y. (2023) Poor Things. [Film]

CONCLUSION

My aim going into this thesis was to simply analyze the societal and cultural environment that breeds ‘monsters’ and as a whole gain a deeper understanding of what a monster can be. In each chapter I dug a bit deeper into that singular question, beginning with her upbringing. People aren’t born monstrous, this idea that there are humans and there are those who are monsters is a world we try to create to avoid dealing with the reality, the reality that we are all capable of monstrous deeds, what differs is how we are brought up. Frankenstein hated his creation, and that hate was reflected through his monster. God, although morally complicated, loved Bella and that was shown through her character as she progressed through the film, showing empathy and a desire to fix the world.

My second chapter delves into the larger world, my research revealed a long-lasting culture of objectifying women, from the ‘whore’ Queen of Babylon to the pure and untouched perfection of Pandora. Throughout my writing I’ve mentioned the concept that monsters simply reflect our own monstrosity back to us, Bella represented a whole culture’s fear of what a liberated woman could be, her sexuality was made out to be ‘deprived’ and ‘evil’ when it’s the most human desire. The monstrosity Bella reflects is the shame society has around sex largely due to organized religion and the Church. There’s a religious subtext that runs through the film, Godwin being referred to God is obvious, but the general idea of creation and free will is the main through

line, and we see the values of the church through characters like Alfie Blessington and Duncan Wedderburn.

In the end monstrosity is not inherently evil, but instead a byproduct of what society considers to be the normal both good and bad, what was monstrous before might not be anymore, and it's up to the individual to find the meaning of their 'monstrosity' for themselves.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

Asma, S.T. (2011). *On Monsters: An Unnatural History of Our Worst Fears*. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cohen, J.J. (1996). *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 3–25.

Chapman, T. and Jennifer Lorna Hockey (1999). *Ideal homes? social change and the experience of the home*. London: Routledge.

Delcorno, P. (2017). *In the mirror of the Prodigal Son: the pastoral uses of a biblical narrative (c. 1200-1550)*. Leiden: Brill.

Dyhouse, C. (2014). *Girls growing up in late Victorian and Edwardian England*. London: Routledge.

Ehrenreich, B., English, D. and Faludi, S. (1993). *Complaints and Disorders: The Sexual Politics of Sickness*. Feminist Press at CUNY.

Gentry, C.E. and Sjoberg, L. (2015). *Beyond Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Thinking about Women's Violence in Global Politics*. London: Zed Books.

Herzog, D. (2008). *Brutality and desire: war and sexuality in Europe's twentieth century*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Higgins, D. (2008). *Frankenstein: character studies*. London; New York: Continuum.

Karras R. M. (1998). *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England*. Cary: Oxford University Press.

Lanthimos Y. (2023) *Poor Things*. [Film] Searchlight pictures & Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures <https://www.disneyplus.com/en-ie/browse/entity-72867b3c-0c4e-4107-aff7-a1f876c7242f?msocid=3f9b675ea60668e00a3571f9a7ec69ff>

Lev Kenaan, V. (2008). *Pandora's senses: the feminine character of the ancient text*. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press.

Montin, S. and Tsitas, E. (2013). *Monstrous geographies: places and spaces of the monstrous*. Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press.

Santos, C. (2017). *Unbecoming female monsters: witches, vampires, and virgins*. Lanham: Lexington Books.

Scheil, A. (2016). *Babylon Under Western Eyes A Study of Allusion and Myth*. University Of Toronto Press.

Stephenson, R. and Wagner, D. (2015). *The Secrets of Generation*. University of Toronto Press.

Whales J. (1931) *Frankenstein*. [Film] Universal Pictures.
<https://archive.org/details/frankenstein-1931-english>