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How to Fuck a Kraken: Cephalopod Sexualities and Nonbinary Genders in EBook Erotica

1. We are living in the time of the tentacle. A May 2016 *Current Biology* article made blogosphere headlines for claiming that cephalopods are taking over the earth, multiplying rapidly in oceanic conditions of global warming (Doubleday et al. R387, Stone). Recent humanities books have fixated on tentacles: philosopher of science Peter Godfrey-Smith's *Other Minds: The Octopus, the Sea, and the Deep Origins of Consciousness* sees cephalopods as "the closest we will come to meeting an intelligent alien," or alternate visions of mind and consciousness (9), while Donna Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Cthulucene* offers invertebrate tentacles as a paradigm for entanglement, multiplicity, mutual responsibility, and interdependency in the era of global crises. Science fiction in 2016, from the blockbuster film *Arrival* to Nnedi Okorafor's Hugo- and Nebula-winning novella *Binti*, featured spacefaring tentacled aliens forming unlikely alliances with human peoples on earth. Tentacles have been swimming around American imaginations at least since H.P. Lovecraft's weird fiction in the 1920s and 30s, and since Japanese tentacle erotica filtered into American visual culture.¹ But there is a new burst of attention to cephalopods — and invertebrates more generally — in animal studies, posthumanism, and science fiction studies that provides new alternatives to vertebrate embodiment, genders, and sexualities. These slimy, intelligent, alien, soft-bodied creatures are increasingly providing a paradigm for our apocalyptic world, the newest wave of apocalypse.

Given this proliferation of cephalopods and other invertebrates, it is somewhat odd that most work in animal studies has focused on land-dwelling, vertebrate animals like mammals and birds that are human companion animals (Haraway's dog, Derrida's cat) or attractive objects for conservation campaigns (like polar bears). Simon Watt's *The Ugly Animals Project* points out the ecological losses incurred by focusing exclusively on charismatic animals like pandas, while slimy animals like blobfish and hagfish get less scientific funding (9-10). But this vertebrate trend is starting to change. Eva Hayward, a scholar who works at the intersection of science studies, visual studies, and transgender studies, has opened a line of inquiry into the aesthetics, ethics, and embodiment of marine invertebrates in a series of essays. In "Fingereyes: Impressions of Cup Corals," Hayward examines how creatures touch and experience each other across species in synaesthetic ways in regimented spaces like marine biology labs (581). In "Enfolded Vision: Refracting *The Love Life of the Octopus*," she parses how octopuses look and act

back on human spectators who watch their strange bodies from outside the tank or behind a camera (42). In “Sensational Jellyfish: Aquarium Affects and the Matter of Immersion,” Hayward calls for an aesthetics of diffraction as an ethical way of encountering nonhuman animals. My essay here is, in part, a love letter to Hayward’s sensuous engagements with aquatic invertebrates and their intimate universes, an homage to her queer trans-species sensibilities.

Yet why imagine invertebrates? Why and how are humans imagining invertebrates in scholarship and cultural production with renewed energy, and what does that mean for the invertebrates, and for the humans? Hayward’s work often invokes the strange genders and sexualities of invertebrate animals with respect to vertebrate, mammalian, heteronormative terms. Standing in front of a Monterey Bay Aquarium jellyfish exhibit, she ponders in her Jellyfish essay, “My body knows that I am not in the kingdom of the vertebrates, with all their supposedly predictable binaries” (181). In her brushes with the invertebrate world, her argument sometimes pauses poetically in this way to allow readers to muse on the intimate connections between hermaphroditic invertebrate animals and queer or trans human bodies.²

Hayward, as a scholar of the visual and a student of real-world human/non-human relations, is most interested in the materiality, affect, and aesthetics of how human bodies meet invertebrate bodies. She invests in the complex, entangled, and reflexive space of real-world or filmic interspecies meetings, and her work therefore offers important insights into the ecological, economic, and ethical interplays between human and nonhuman animals. For example, in “More Lessons from a Starfish: Prefixial Flesh and Transspeciated Selves” Hayward skirts away from some of the provocative corporeal fantasies she conjures up, critiquing the excesses of cross-species imagination, especially identification, as “a politics of erasure rather than empathy” (177). This critique is an important one from the standpoint of conceptualizing animals as having distinct being from humans and material worlds affected by us; in this vein, it is important to resist anthropomorphization as an “alibi” for bad “human behavior” (Vint 13). But it is also important to investigate how, in Myra Hird’s words, “[n]onhuman animals have for some time been overburdened with the task of making sense of human social relations” — in other words, the imaginarium in which humans imagine animals in order to reimagine ourselves (Hird 227). Hayward alludes to the implications of invertebrate genders, sexualities, and sensoria for human queer and trans people, but leaves it as an allusion, moving on quickly to the important work of understanding jellyfish, octopuses, and corals as agential, experiencing, living, material beings in the world along with, but distinct from, human cultures.

At the risk of being accused of anthropomorphization, I want to go there: not to straightforward identification with invertebrates, as Hayward words it, but to a deep working-through of the imaginative frameworks through which humans engage and imagine animals in order to reimagine ourselves, especially in terms of gender, sexuality, and race. In other words, I want to draw attention to the cultural politics of human-animal imaginations in literary texts, with particular attention to nonbinary genders. As Haraway writes in *Staying with the Trouble*, “[t]he tentacular ones tangle me in SF. Their many appendages ... entwine me in the poiesis — the making — of speculative fabulation, science fiction, science fact, speculative feminism, *soin de ficelle*, so far” (31). Which is to say, in my terms, humans are related to tentacled creatures, and those relations are always entangled in speculation and political imagination. The ways in which we speculate about invertebrates matter and have deep ethical stakes precisely because they are always imaginative in some way. I do not see this as more important than the project of studying the life conditions of real-world animals and preserving an ethics of their alterity; however, criticizing and immediately dismissing anthropomorphization is not enough. What of the structuring paradigms of imagination that mediate my relationship with animals, especially invertebrates? What shapes do they take, how have they been used, and how can they be remade or redeployed for new ends?

These structuring paradigms of animal imaginations historically have been used not only against nonhuman animals, but also against certain groups of humans. Here I am indebted to Michael Lundblad’s and Mel Chen’s instructive framings of animality as an imaginative concept. Lundblad reframes the question of the animal as not only about “universal advocacy for actual animals,” but also about understanding “how we think about ‘real’ animals,” a distinction he sees as crucial to making the field of animal studies more responsible to the messy cultural politics of gender, race, and sexuality (“From Animal to Animality Studies” 497). Chen defines “animality” as not just a nonhuman concept, but a trope “that sometimes sticks to animals, sometimes bleeds back onto textures of humanness” (90). In this light, it is impossible to use terms like “anthropomorphization” or “the animal” without understanding how they have been used against beings of all species of animals, including some humans. I appreciate Neel Ahuja’s call in *Bioinsecurities: Disease Interventions, Empire, and the Government of Species* for attention to “the processes that anthropomorphize the human in order to characterize the human’s sovereign domination of the nonhuman” (viii). In other words, if the “human” referred to in animal studies is a culturally-specific category invented by Western men and presented as if universal, as Sylvia Wynter has argued,

then anthropomorphization is a process that must be applied (selectively) to humans before it is used to (mis)represent nonhuman animals (Wynter 260).

While Lundblad acknowledges that animality studies might be interpreted as a speciesist line of inquiry, it is an urgent project, partly because ideas about animals have been central to Western projects of dehumanization of humans through vectors of race and gender. Recent research in black feminist and queer studies has begun to unpack the deep ramifications of the racialized human-animal threshold for representations and theorizations of the nonhuman. Alex Weheliye's 2014 book *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* takes posthumanism and animal studies to task for "reinscrib[ing]" the Eurocentric human subject as "the category to be overcome," and for "presum[ing] that we have now entered a stage in human development where all subjects have been granted equal access to western humanity" (9-10).³ Likewise, in "Outer Worlds: The Persistence of Race in Movement 'Beyond the Human,'" Zakiyyah Jackson cautions that the "distributive ordering of race ... authorizes and conditions appeals to the 'beyond'" the human (215). The stakes of how "we" (that messy, dissonant, falsely-universalizing human pronoun) imagine animals in order to reimagine ourselves in differential ways are quite deep.

In this essay I am particularly interested in how speculative representations of aquatic invertebrates might expand, transform, or otherwise reframe human gender beyond stubborn paradigms of "men" and "women," "masculinities" and "femininities," and the racialized weight of animality that rests on them. In particular, I am curious whether invertebrate imaginations offer alternatives for trans and nonbinary genders to the limiting paradigms of autobiography, mundane fiction, rights, and appeals to the "real." Building on previous work by Myra Hird, Eva Hayward, and Joan Roughgarden at the intersection of trans, queer, and animal studies, I am curious what generative frameworks for gender and sexual politics exist in the alien life-worlds of slimy sea creatures like starfish, octopuses, and jellyfishes. Many invertebrate sea creatures reproduce asexually (e.g. through budding), are monogender or multigender, or are what biologists term hermaphroditic, switching gender throughout their lifetime or encapsulating large and small gametes in their bodies simultaneously.⁴ If, for a long time, animals and biology have been used to naturalize certain kinds of gender, sexual, and racial hierarchies in Western cultures,⁵ then perhaps attention to different kinds of animals that do not bear out normative American conceptions of heterosexuality, patriarchy, gender binarism, and vertebrate-centric ways of mapping bodies might provide fruitful terrain for imagining otherwise. Hird's essay "Animal Trans," for example, looks to the gender and sexual diversity of bacteria as a way to destabilize

transphobic conceptions of “nature” that are built on binary- and cis-gendered assumptions about animals (243), while Roughgarden’s book *Evolution’s Rainbow* parses the sexual diversity of multi-gender fish societies (80). I, instead, turn to invertebrate animals, which are prominent in the canon of monsters and aliens in American science fiction and provide particularly fruitful ground for reconceptualizing nonbinary genders. When transformed by speculative queer cultural production, invertebrate sea animals offer a rich set of vocabularies and fleshly imaginaries for genders other than men and women, masculinities and femininities.

If Hayward is interested in real-world seagoing invertebrates, in this essay I explore fantasies about aquatic invertebrates in speculative erotic fictions with particular emphasis on nonbinary genders rather than femininities or masculinities.⁶ Rather than examining aquaria or laboratories, I look to textual fantasy — to speculative, highly sexual visions of invertebrate animality in the alien, monstrous bodies of science fictional ebook erotica. In particular, I examine monster erotica, an archive of erotica stories sold in ebook, often self-published forms on kindle, nook, smashwords, and other for-pay sites. In these works, the narrative tropes of erotic fanfiction and romance narratives are used to envision explicit plots in which humans have sex with creatures from classic horror and science fiction films: Bigfoot, dinosaurs, centaurs, kraken, and so on.⁷ These erotica stories are not just sensational, however: they offer a window into very graphic representations of cross-species sexualities, a phenomenon perhaps uniquely suited to speculative fiction.⁸ While monsters and aliens might seem a bit far afield from animal studies, entangled as they are in human projections onto animals, I contend that these monsters and aliens offer important insight into how different animals become enlisted in the work of legitimizing particular human genders, sexualities, and races through animal imagination. In other words, monsters and aliens are imaginary beings, but their textual bodies are composed of specific animals — bears, lizards, birds, crabs, squid, etc. — that are deployed for the purposes of different fantasies of gender, sexuality, race, and species. In particular, vertebrate- and especially mammal-based monsters make it easier to confirm heterosexual, racialized fantasies about bestial dominant masculinities and fragile white femininities, whereas invertebrate-based creatures open up a whole different realm of embodied animal relations, fantasies, and desires. It is invertebrate, nonbinary genders that my inquiry tracks: genders that are neither masculine nor feminine but slimy, starfishlike, tentacled, or jellyfishlike.

2. To my knowledge ebook monster erotica has not yet been mentioned in academic print at all, partly because of its newness, and partly because of its multiple distances from respectable literatures as self-published, electronic-only, mass market, for-profit,

fanfiction-derived, science fictional smut. It would not make sense to call this work marginal to the literary canon, in fact, because as a subgenre of pornography it so clearly stages itself as guilty-pleasure reading and does not make any appeal to literary respectability. It therefore offers a remarkable look at what kind of fantasies are flourishing under the radar in feminist porn in a time when mainstream video porn continues to so spectacularly fail at adequately representing the erotic lives of gender-nonconforming people.⁹

The Kindle market for this material is a wild, weird, and contested place, and for a time these stories sold well. Between 2011 and 2013, the Kindle self-published erotica market (Kindle Direct Publishing) briefly offered a space in which a few dedicated, prolific authors could make a living from monster porn. Virginia Wade's series *Cum for Bigfoot* began a trend, and received more media attention in the blogosphere than the work of other authors. Eric Spitznagel reports (and authors confirmed by email) that after Amazon began its Kindle Unlimited program in 2014, it became harder for authors to earn enough for their work (Xavier, email to author 7/12/2016). Additionally, in 2013, Amazon began an unevenly-enforced crackdown of sensationalized bestiality and monster porn in its sprawling erotica catalog that forced many authors to remove their stories, change their titles, and made it harder for readers to search for their work on Amazon's website (Spitznagel; Lipstein; Kinderton, email to author 7/14/2016). While most of the works that received negative attention are still available on the Kindle store in altered form, some authors stopped writing new stories, while others are earning less for what they do write. But the stories were popular and sold well, which indicates that there is more of a place for weird, speculative, nonhuman erotica in today's pornography world than some might think.

While this archive of stories has been dismissed in media attention as bad writing or self-evidently ridiculous (e.g. calling it "dinosaur porn" in itself constitutes the joke [Beck]), erotic monsters, aliens, and animals in this genre offer a rich case study in how animal sexualities become recruited into human erotic fantasy literature.¹⁰ At least since the *Twilight* phenomenon and the slew of young adult paranormal romances that series spawned, nonhuman creatures like werewolves and vampires have become newly sexy in American imaginations, especially in women- or queer-centric erotica and romance. Sexy vampires are not entirely new, of course: queer theorists have proved that the gothic novels from which these romances are descended are also very erotic portrayals of monsters (Haggerty; Azzarello). But the eroticism of the nonhuman animal has now become more explicit or intense. Paranormal romance often involves either humanoid monsters like vampires or spirits, or shapeshifting beings who are animal half of the

time, but become human during scenes of sexual tension — for example, the morphing Quileute werewolves in *Twilight*. Monster erotica and related genres in the wild world of speculative erotica, however, offer a step beyond this paranormal romance: humans having sex with animallike, explicitly nonhuman extraterrestrials or monsters that do not first safely transform into humanoid shapes. In the words of one monster erotica author, E.M. Beastly, the payoff for this is an expansion of what is possible in human erotic imaginations through the genre tools of speculative fiction. In the preface to *Monstrous Lust: The Forest of Lust Collection*, Beastly offers, “[I]f you are curious about what sex could be like with creatures of fur and fang; or scales, gills and feathers.... If it has a human level of intelligence or better. [sic] If it can communicate with a language. If it is sexually mature for its species. Then you should be able to fuck it. Not that something like that exists in our known reality. But that is what fiction is for, right?” (loc. 27).

In tune with Lundblad’s understanding of animality as a sexual trope, I find monster or cryptozoological erotica on the Kindle store a particularly useful textual archive for working through the erotic imaginations humans project onto the animal world. Stories that, in Beastly’s terms, are about human sex with furry, fanged, scaled, feathered, or otherwise clearly nonhuman beings provide fascinating paradigms for how humans imagine animal and human sexualities. Series like *Beastly’s Monstrous Lust*, Emerald Ice’s *Sydney’s Alien Escapades* (formerly titled *Alien Love Slave*), and Alice Xavier’s *Alien Seed* consist primarily of a series of sex scenes between a human protagonist and a seemingly endless array of variously catlike, reptilian, birdlike, bovine, insectoid, octopoid, and many other varieties of animallike monsters. Xavier’s *Alien Seed* is an alien-abduction breeding fantasy, in which the extraterrestrials turn out to be far more complex than the usual little green men. After the unnamed protagonist has been taken onto the spaceship, she discovers that she is being held captive for sexual experiments, and her captors are rather unintimidating-looking androgynous gray beings (loc. 109). But to take part in the sexual experiments, the aliens announce that they will transform into horrific beastlike shapes in order to better suit the protagonist’s fantasies (which do, indeed, center on monsters). These shapes include a wolf-like furry beast, a panther-like feline beast, a blue-grey ogre, a scaly Lovecraftian “tentacle-faced monster” (loc. 184) and something the narrator describes only as an “alien kraken” (loc. 294). A hyperbolic series of sex scenes follows in which each monster in succession has sex with the helpless narrator while she is wired into medical machines that measure her vital signs and her arousal. These monster sex scenes offer important insight into what, exactly, “animality” means in narratives of human sexuality.

One way this erotic animal imagination manifests is in how the genre overwhelmingly describes sexual drive or desire in terms of animality, literalizing the expression, “fuck like an animal.” *Alien Seed* capitalizes on cultural discourses of animality that use the animal to figure raw, unrestrained, or improper desire or sexual acts, repeatedly describing sex with the monsters as “mating,” “breeding,” and “mounting,” a fairly standard trope for the genre. In one sex scene with a panther-like beast, Xavier represents the human protagonist’s desire as *caused by* the beast’s catlike qualities, not in spite of them. As he performs oral sex on her, she notices that his animal attributes make him capable of more than a human partner: “Something hot, wet, and snakelike slipped between my folds and pressed hard and wonderfully against my clit,” which turns out to be the panther’s “impossibly long and almost reptilian tongue,” which, she reflects, “push[es] [her] ordinary human body to the edge of what it could handle, all that it could contain” (loc. 246). Not only does his animality make him a superhuman lover — she begins to take on animal qualities, in turn. The panther’s nonhumanness rubs off on her as she internalizes the animal she desires: she notes that the panther “fulfill[s] all [her] animal wants” (loc. 250), and she is so aroused that she “might as well have been an animal right then, all sense and sanity overridden by that inexorable need to fuck” (246). In *Alien Seed*, nonhuman lovers bring out “the lustful animal within” the human (loc. 203).¹¹

Beastly’s exploration of sex with “creatures of fur or fang; or scales, gills and feathers” points to a whole new level of attention to erotic relations between human and nonhuman animal beings (loc 2). This erotic relation, not just *ethical* relation, is new to the field of animal studies. Little work in queer animal or animality studies has taken up pornography or erotica, nor has porn studies had much to say about animals, perhaps with good reason. As a field, porn studies tends to gravitate toward non-digitally-enhanced film, video, and other media where interspecies sex would clearly constitute animal cruelty. Speculative representations of humans having sex with animallike nonhuman beings in any medium or genre tend to conjure up what Chen calls “the specter of bestiality,” and at the very least to epitomize the problems of anthropomorphization from a traditional animal studies perspective (145). Essays in animal studies and ecocriticism that do engage pornography tend to do so as a metaphor for nature photography, in a way that treats pornography as a synonym for exploitative modes of viewing, in line with 1980s modes of feminist critiques of pornography as “the linked exploitation of women and nature” (Welling 55). These analyses are not informed by more contemporary feminist engagements with queer pornography as an instrument of, not just an obstacle to, feminist imaginations (Taormino et al., Howard).

In queer studies, on the other hand, the 2015 special issue of GLQ devoted to queer inhumanisms contained no analyses of cultural representations of sex between human and animal beings; Noreen Giffney and Myra Hird's 2008 collection *Queering the Non/Human* contains little, and none of that focused on erotica or pornography. Chen gets close in *Animacies* with an analysis of artist Xu Bing's performance "Cultural Animal," which involves a live pig mounting a paper-maché human figure as part of a critique of sexual stereotypes of "West" and "East" (145-6). Donna Haraway has an intimate and sexualized description of her dog licking her tonsils as "hav[ing] oral intercourse" in *The Companion Species Manifesto*, but it is unclear whether the dog and cat find these erotic experiences as well (2-3). I do want to credit Dominic Pettman with grappling with the gnarly topic of interspecies sex in realistic genres like the documentary, in *Human Error: Species-Being and Media Machines*, where he parses the "powerful dialectic of repulsion and fascination" around the prohibition against human sex with animals (85-6).¹² How animals are used to justify human gender and sexual norms, yes; how animals are queer, yes; how animals are literary figures for queerness, yes; how animals have sex with each other in ways Americans might interpret as queer, yes; critiques of the conflation of bestiality and homosexuality, yes; platonic love or intimacy between humans and animals, yes; how real-world animals used in reproduction-related medical experiments become materially interlaced with human bodies, yes. But representations of actual interspecies sex acts are remarkably hard to find in animal studies, porn studies, or queer studies.

Speculative fiction has a unique role to play in the interface between porn studies, queer studies, and animal studies, and these fields' proclivity toward realistic genres has limited their scope in this area. Speculative romance and erotica like Xavier's offers a unique window into the erotic overlap between human and nonhuman beings. While Katherine Hayles was not speaking to the erotic when she asked this question, I am inspired by her provocation in *How We Became Posthuman*: "What about the pleasures" of the posthuman (285)? This is a particularly important question to ask because, as Lundblad argues, animality has historically functioned as a trope of human sexuality in the wake of Freud and Darwin in American culture (*The Birth of a Jungle* 4).¹³ Human genders, sexualities, and races in American literature are already bound up with the animal, for better or for worse.

If monster erotica uses animality as figures for "the lustful animal within" the human, then what kind of animals, and what kind of desires? (Xavier 203). Monster erotica stories in this genre more broadly use the animality of the monsters and aliens within their narratives as a fantasy for sexual extremes not possible with only human bodies,

but many are readable as masculine. In Xavier's *Alien Seed*, each of the monsters except the last one boast "monstrous cock[s]" that are the focus of the scenes' erotic fireworks (loc. 207). Vertebrate-based monsters all, the ogre, the wolf, the panther, and even the tentacle-faced swamp monster (which has a fishlike and catlike body, and only a tentacled face) draw on vertebrate animal forms that biologists tend to interpret as "male," "female," and "heterosexual," whether or not the animals themselves actually bear out this evidence (Roughgarden 5-6).¹⁴ Within the story, the panther, ogre, wolf, and swamp monster are all male in their monstrous transmogrifications (although in their original forms they are small, gray, and androgynous). These first four monsters are also the ones that Xavier unfailingly refers to using traditional masculine pronouns "he" or "him," whereas for the fifth monster this nomenclature changes to gender-neutral pronouns. In a story featuring a cisgender female protagonist, this seems to make the trope of animality in *Alien Seed* a fantasy about bigger, badder, more dominant heterosexual cisgender men: superhuman tops not limited to the mundane morphology of the human body, if you will.

Many of the erotica stories sold under the genre-heading "monster erotica" are labeled as heterosexual, even if their nonhuman content makes that label an uneasy fit. In Virginia Wade's words, this is an archive of stories about "monster cock" and its superhuman possibilities for heterosexual women's desire and sexual satisfaction (Wade 49). Stories like Wade's *Cum For Bigfoot* that feature vertebrate, land-dwelling mammals as the basis for the monsters' bodies are full of heterosexual imperatives: at one point the protagonist of *Cum for Bigfoot* repeatedly insists to herself that she is "not a lesbian" when she is in close sexual proximity to another captive woman (95). Other stories follow this script: K. J. Burkhardt's *Taken by the Monsters*, Azuree Loveley and S.L. Ramsey's *Enslaved: The Orc Captive*, Christie Sims and Alara Branwen's dinosaur erotica series, and many others. Yet some of the erotica published during this period was very queer. A significant subsection of the genre (much like fanfiction) offers male-male romance rather than yet another heterosexual love story: Roman Pyre's *Serpent Lover*, Lyn Gala's *Claimings, Tails, and Other Alien Artifacts*, Jessie Snow's *Taken by Tentacles*, etc. Even the ones that are labeled F/M in subgenre categories exceed their designation or are only tenuously so, because of the ways that the monsters' animality overwhelms human heteronormative paradigms.

While monster erotica authors get a lot of bad press for writing perverted or bestialized erotica — and I want to defend them from that type of criticism — some of the more popular stories traffic in sensationalized stereotypes of bestialized men of color, using racialized tropes of animality that tend to come from particular ways of imagining

vertebrate, land-dwelling, usually mammal species — especially apes. Vertebrate, land-dwelling, mammalian animals most frequently form the stuff of “animality” as a trope of sexual intensity, fantasy, or internal sexual drive, and also of the racialized gender and sexual stereotypes that Lundblad, Chen, Jackson, and others critique in animal studies and posthuman theory. Many stories in the genre seem to be woven out of not just heterosexual fantasies, but also racialized gender and sexual tropes all too familiar from the history of colonial fantasies and fears about nonwhite peoples. *Cum for Bigfoot*, Jayme Knight’s *Captured by the Lizard King*, and many others draw on a long Western science-fiction tradition extending back to the pulp era’s images of beautiful, white, cisgender women falling into the arms of dangerous, dark-colored, male monsters from which they must be rescued. As I critique these racialized gender and sexual stereotypes, I want to be clear that I am not pathologizing the genre as bad because it is pornography or because it is self-published or because it is nonhuman, the charges usually leveled against monster erotica authors.

The large, dark, masculine, sexually-threatening ape has been a well-worn trope in this colonial science fiction tradition at least since *King Kong* and *Tarzan (The Birth of a Jungle 142)*. Monster erotica stories that feature pale-skinned human women having sex with large, dark-skinned apes cannot avoid this representational history. For example, Wade’s *Cum for Bigfoot* documents the adventures of three white women captured by a Bigfoot tribe, while camping in the Appalachian mountains, who fall in love with their Bigfoot partner-captors. The series draws on the allure of the scripted vocabulary of white women’s sexual danger in the hands of dark, primitive, part-human bestial captors, combining primitivist tropes of indigenous masculinities with stereotypes of the black male rapist. The Bigfoots’ speech is limited to monosyllabic words and sentence fragments (“You good girl” (97)), their bodies and fur are repeatedly described as “black” and having “enormous” penises (46), and the entire story is built around the trope of dubious consent or captive love. In one scene where the white female protagonists have fallen into the hands of a Bigfoot tribe, the sex scene takes place against a signifying backdrop of conventional Hollywood primitivity: beating drums, an “animal pelt” by a “fire pit,” “thatched huts,” “ancient” cultures, and “grunts and shouts” (58). The Bigfoots drag one of the voluptuous white women onto a rug by the fire while she lodges her protests: “No! Don’t do that! Stop!” (58).¹⁵ Not all representations of mammalian monster sex point directly or straightforwardly to this history of racism as animalization and hypersexualization, but Wade’s description of light-skinned women having sex with a hypermasculinized black beast conjures up a representational history it cannot quite contain.

Chen argues in *Animacies* that apes in particular bear a particularly heavy representational weight in the West, in the wake of anthropological and biological sciences that construed peoples of color as evolutionarily closer to large apes than white people. Human-ape hybrids in American cultural texts cannot be separated from the “long history of British and European associations of apes and monkeys with African subjects” (97). Large apes star in Donna Haraway’s analyses of animality, race, and gender in *Primate Visions*, in which she noted that “the signs of orientalist discourse mark primatology” when Western scientists mapped sexual, gender, and racial ideals onto apes’ bodies in order to justify certain claims about human genders, sexualities, and races (10). So when Zakiyyah Jackson writes that “[t]he animalization of blackness has been central” to anti-black and other racisms from the beginnings of American nationhood, it is the colonial connection between peoples of color and large nonhuman primates that most overshadows fraught mammalian species boundaries (“Losing Manhood” 108). Representations of animals having sex with humans are not neutral or apolitical with respect to the colonial politics of gender and sexuality, and this racialized history is partly what is at stake in a turn to invertebrate animals that might provide ways to imagine and map cross-species relations differently. When Chen argues that animals have been used as figures for Western colonial representations of peoples of color, it is vertebrate land mammals the argument refers to: apes, pigs, dogs, etc. On the other hand, monsters that resemble octopuses, sea serpents, or aquatic invertebrates do not graft so easily, or in the same way, onto the racialized gender and sexual categories that are the legacy of 19th century Western science and empire. Stories like Kylie Ashcroft’s *Mating with the Jungle Tentacle Plant 2: Mating in Paradise*, Emerald Ice’s *Sydney’s Alien Escapades* series, and T. L. Giffin’s *Taken by Tentacles* draw on invertebrate animality and tentacles in particular to suggest alternate interspecies animal imaginations and a different gender and sexual universe.

In the text of *Alien Seed*, the final monster of the story offers some provocative alternatives to the limitations of vertebrate land mammality and its racialized heteronormative animal imaginary. The creature Xavier describes as an “alien kraken” brings out a whole different set of “animal wants,” a new “animal within” that is both gender-nonconforming and invertebrate-like. After sex scenes with the panther, the wolf, the ogre, and the “tentacle-faced swamp beast,” all of which the story represents as dark, cisgender male, and (mostly) mammals, Xavier introduces the alien kraken as an amorphous, gender-indeterminate, invertebrate sea beast. Xavier introduces this alien kraken in gender-neutral and alien terms when the narrator gets her first view of the beast:

Behind the ogre and the wolf-man lurked something worse, something huge. I felt paralyzed. I'd never seen anything like it. The tentacle-faced swamp beast was nice and tame compared to this. It was some sort of deep sea nightmare beast, with a long, serpentine body ridged with fins and covered in glistening green skin, and a horrifying jawless maw. It reared up before me, and I was staring into the many glowing eyes of a kraken. Long, slick tentacles whipped about and wicked-looking spines bristled. I took in the scent coming off the monster's skin, and it smelled like darkness and the ocean. (loc. 280)

In this passage, the masculine pronouns Xavier used to describe the wolf, the panther, the ogre, and the swamp beast disappear into the gender-neutral, nonhuman, and alien pronoun "it." As Hayward and Jami Weinstein point out, "the indeterminate pronoun it" for many trans people has been "bor[ne] as a mark of our inhumanity, our sexual indifference" (196). In monster, alien, and animal literature (and in everyday conversational parlance), creatures more distantly related to human beings tend to become this nonbinary "it," while creatures more similar to humans are more often allowed the gender binary "he" or "she" as an indicator of more complex personhood (e.g. houseflies compared to golden retrievers).¹⁶ This ends up framing the gender binary as the threshold of familiarity or personhood, in addition to gender-binarizing and cisgendering the vertebrate mammal world. One monster erotica author I spoke with over email described her use of "he" and "she" vs. "it" in these terms: "I also consciously employ the 'it' vs 'he/she' pronouns to create that sense of distance and otherness; often, my monsters transition at some point from 'it' to 'he' to represent the protagonist's changing perception of them ... it symbolically represents the transition of one character from being outside the social milieu of the other to being inside the same social milieu (as a romantic partner)" (Kinderton, email to author, 7/14/2016). It is not my intent to suggest that all monster erotica that uses masculine and feminine pronouns is faulty or insufficient. Rather, I want to point out the connections between the gender-nonbinariness of the pronoun "it" and its distancing, depersonalizing, objectifying effects. This differential personalization in the figures of monsters and aliens depends on specific ways of gendering, sexualizing, and racializing the nonhuman animal world, in which simpler invertebrate animals with single-gender or gender-switching populations are imagined as distantly-related to human beings, in part because of those gender and sexual differences. From this point of view, it makes sense for Hayward to imagine trans and nonbinary-gendered people having more in common with jellyfish, coral, or octopuses than with cisgender, heterosexual, vertebrate mammals.

Hence, in *Alien Seed*, it is the kraken's kinship with invertebrate aquatic animals that imbues it with the gender and sexual nonbinariness and alienness that merits the pronoun "it." Xavier scripts the kraken's body using the morphology of invertebrate sea creatures: it is a "deep sea nightmare beast" that has "fins" like fish, "slick tentacles" reminiscent of squid or octopuses, and a "jawless maw" like a lamprey. It resists the male/female rubrics the narrator has to describe desire, genders, and bodies ("I'd never seen anything like it") through these aquatic invertebrate animal body parts and the alien gender and sexual connotations these real-world animals bear (280). Xavier's description of the kraken's genitals as tentacles in particular use invertebrate animality to subvert and rewrite the heteronormative mapping of genitals, bodies, and sexual positions that dominate the genre's sexual tropes. During the sex scene with the kraken, its genitals finally emerge from the interior of its body, from its mouth rather than from between its legs; it's not clear that the kraken *has* legs. The kraken's maw is fleshed out with the body parts of aquatic animals: its mouth is "like a shark's mouth," it has "strange feelers" like an insect or crab, and a "jawless maw" like a lamprey. Its head is bioluminescent like many deep-sea creatures, "aglow with ... intricate yellow patterns" (loc. 377). The genitals are essentially tentacles or anemone fronds, displacing expectations that a penis will be the focus of the story's culmination, as is the case in almost every story in this genre: "Then slowly, a twisted glowing tongue emerged from the darkness of its maw. I gasped as it unfurled — it was not one appendage, but hundreds, all glowing, flowing and undulating as if they were underwater" (loc. 388). The "appendage[s]" are "undulating" "underwater" like a sea anemone (which are usually hermaphroditic species in real life) or like octopus arms. So *Alien Seed's* figuration of the kraken-beast's body capitalizes on the gender and sexual diversity of sea animals to build a fleshly imaginary of nonbinary genders, rerouting gender nonconformity through the animal and monstrous world.

This monster is remarkable in itself, but it is the culminating figure in a hyperbolically erotic storyline, making gender-nonbinary invertebrate animality the pinnacle of erotic desirability over comparatively "tame" masculine monsters. The alien kraken is not just a scary, gender-nonbinary monster, but a deeply, overpoweringly desirable one within the text. Unlike in other genres of monster literature, the protagonist actually has sex with this creature and its tentacles in detailed, close-up focus. Her "gasp," and her admission that she "was ready for it to mate with" her, are only a few of the story's signifiers of the protagonist's hyperbolic desire for the kraken (loc. 388): under the kraken's predatory gaze, "powerful lust hit [her] like a train," and all she can think about is "throw[ing] [her]self at" the kraken and "fuck[ing] like [she]'d never fucked before" (loc. 290). Once the kraken's genitals have appeared, she reflects that she

“do[es]n’t think [she]’d ever *needed* anything so urgently or profoundly before” (loc. 377). Readers become interpellated into the protagonist’s excess of desire through her first-person narration, which places readers in the position of the human woman getting fucked by the monsters, not a distanced observer or the monster itself (loc. 388). The narration imagines in multisensory detail what it feels like to be touched by tentacles rather than human skin, for example, “straddling the creature’s slick, serpentine body” while the narrator’s “smooth folds glided along” it (358). Not only does Xavier’s writing of the monster’s body imagine invertebrate species and nonbinary genders coming together in a kind of underwater world of slimy sexualities. Her imagination of the alien kraken deeply eroticizes both invertebrate animality and nonbinary genres, enormously important in a genre like pornography (or mainstream American culture more generally) where gender nonconformity is most frequently represented as a barrier to desire.

One interpretation of this tentacle erotica story might be to understand the alien kraken’s tentacles and penetration of the protagonist’s body as yet more phallic imagery, drawing on psychoanalytic paradigms for sexuality and gender. However, the multiplicity of the kraken’s limbs and genitals exceed the singular phallus, and invoke a range of polymorphously perverse blurrings of limbs of locomotion, eating, and sex (tentacles can penetrate, feed, hunt, bind, or vibrate against the protagonist’s body). The kraken’s genitals are oral and multiple rather than phallic: a “twisted glowing tongue” that emerges from the mouth rather than between its nonexistent legs, it is actually “hundreds” of appendages rather than just one (loc. 377). Reading this as phallic imagery would be an impoverished interpretation that cannot account for how nonhuman animal imagery shapes human racial, gender, and sexual formations. To put it bluntly, a tentacle is not a penis, and to see it as such is to cover over the perverse trans-species mapping of bodies going on in *Alien Seed*. Invertebrate animals that have tentacles do not always or often take forms that could be called “male.” The multiplicity of tentacles, in fact, allows them to resonate in important ways with the gender-neutral pronoun “they” (rather than “he” or “she”) that some trans people use to describe themselves. Within the text of the story, this registers in the way that Xavier describes penises and tentacles as mutually exclusive: she expresses desire for “one of those cocks ... or one or more of those tentacles, filling and violating me soon” (loc. 293). No other monster in the story is described as having tentacles instead of a penis. In this speculative feminist erotica genre, tentacle monsters offer a fantasy of pleasure unanchored to the constraints of human bodies or heteronormative realistic porn, and they do so by turning to invertebrate animality rather than vertebrate vocabularies. Tentacles in *Alien Seed* transform what might appear to be a heterosexual erotica story into a deeply queer fantasy of human sex with nonhuman, nonbinary, extraterrestrial

beings. Xavier's writing here displaces the heteronormative, genital-centric mapping of bodies to stage the multiplication of nonbinary gender — from two to multiplicity, from “he” to “they,” from human to invertebrate.

This gender, sexual, and species innovation also affects the story's racial politics. While the mammalian, vertebrate-based, masculine monsters of the story all are dark-colored and (at least in part) evoke racialized masculinities, the kraken functions differently. The kraken “smells like darkness” (which is not exactly the same as being dark colored or visually interpreted as racialized), and it is not black or white, but has “glistening green skin” (loc. 283). While it is a dominant sexual figure, it is not a masculine figure, because of the different pronouns, body morphology, and species differences Xavier uses to present it. Because of these differences, the racialization of other monsters in the genre does not function in the same way, or as well, because there is no masculinity, femininity, or vertebrate mammalia to graft them onto. While this does not mean the story is free of racial politics at this point (the human protagonist is never described in phenotypical or racially-coded terms, which leaves her open to an interpretation of whiteness as neutrality), the kraken's aquatic and invertebrate animality makes it slippery with respect to these formations. I am not arguing that vertebrate mammals are always heteronormative and racist where they are used as literary tropes for human sexuality or desire, nor that invertebrates are always queer.¹⁷ But the different gender and sexual politics of invertebrate-based monsters mean that the racialization of animals happens through different gender and sexual vectors that do not map as directly onto Western body politics. The genderqueerness, alienness, and evolutionary distance between *Homo sapiens* and invertebrates makes the imaginative logics of animality function much differently than with closer related species. And the gender and sexual strangeness of simple marine invertebrates with respect to human western white norms makes representations of invertebrate animality very different kinds of sexual and gendered logics.

This invertebrate imagination does not only function as the object of desire in the story, such that the text projects human desires onto invertebrate animals in anthropomorphized form. This invertebrate, nonbinary animality also cycles back to the human protagonist in a kind of circular animal imaginary that cycles across bodies and species. At the end of her sex scene with the alien kraken, after it has unfurled its genitals as a “twisted glowing tongue,” and the protagonist is in the throes of her most superlative grip of lust (loc. 376), she begins to feel more like a cephalopod than like a *homo sapiens*. A “strange liquid seeped into [her] quivering body through [her] pores” after the kraken touches her, and suddenly her sense of embodiment cartwheels into a

different dimension. “Everything seemed to change and warp as the alien’s strange nectar took effect. Suddenly, I was in the wrong body. I was confined to a shell that was too small and unable to move in the graceful, fluid way I now knew was right. I wanted to reach out and touch this magnificent creature in ways beyond what my arms and mouth would allow” (loc. 394). She “float[s]” and “fl[ies]” in ways impossible for mundane human bodies (loc. 411). Not only does her phenomenological felt sense of her body’s limits change, but her sensory world does, too, in ways that recall the kinds of synaesthetic world Hayward attributes to octopuses and corals: she “saw strange half-formed visions and fluid colors, felt heat and cold, burning and tingling, all the time” (loc. 411). Here, invertebrate imagination involves a mutual cycle of desire, touch, embodiment, and pleasure between the human woman trans-ing into alien kraken, and the alien kraken who has trans-ed from small gray avian-insectoid alien. I cannot think of a better example of what Hayward and Jami Weinstein call “tranimalities” (200-201) than Xavier’s use of a human woman temporarily transitioning into a cephalopod alien and expanding her sense of embodiment and awareness. Perhaps Xavier’s words near the end of this scene best encapsulate the work this genre of monster erotica can do at its best: “I was the vessel for a thousand beings,” alien invertebrates and monstrous “its” that far exceed the heterosexual racialized imaginary of what is usually figured as “animality” in American literature (loc. 411).

3. Trans theorist and biologist Joan Roughgarden writes in *Evolution’s Rainbow* of the problems of animal imagination, “parallels can sometimes be drawn between how people behave and how animals behave, as though animals offered biological cultures resembling ours. I’m quite willing to anthropomorphize about animals” (4). Conversely, what feminist and antiracist scholars criticized for a long time was the differential animalization of the human, in which certain groups of human beings are imagined as more animallike than others, such that animal traits become signs that confirm the naturalness of (usually heterosexual) desires, (patriarchal) genders, or (almost always nonwhite) races. I want to propose that anthropomorphization and animalization are twin halves of the same process of a circular animal imagination that cycles unevenly through human and nonhuman beings for wildly differing purposes. Understood this way, the vertebrate-centric and racially- and gender-hierarchical animal imaginary American culture has been living with in the wake of 19th century colonial anthropology and biology is one form of the circular animal imagination that confirms stratified associations between human beings of color and large land-dwelling vertebrate animals; but it is not the only kind of animal imagination nor an inevitable one. Many other imaginaries are possible. In this essay I have begun the work of tracing out what a queer, trans, and invertebrate animal imaginary would look like through the wild and weird archive of monster erotica stories that focus on invertebrates. This

invertebrate imaginary makes a different interspecies constellation of gender, sexuality, and body morphology than does the hierarchical vertebrate imaginary that has been a crucial element in consolidating human racial *and* species hierarchies. Crucially, it creates cultural room for genders other than masculinities and femininities, men and women, and opens up a different conception of animality as a figure for human desires. Invertebrate imaginaries are not immune to racialization, but their gender, sexual, and species logics are so different that they may provide alternate routes of connection and entanglement between species and bodies.

Where does tentacle erotica leave us, then? These highly eroticized, nonrealist, and genderqueer fantasies offer important bridges between trans or gender-nonconforming bodies and the nonbinary universe of invertebrate animal genders and sexualities. Rather than the vertebrate land mammals that more frequently form comparisons between humans and animals, or are the subject of anthropomorphization, or are used to differentially animalize human beings, cephalopods, anemones, and other aquatic invertebrates offer a different set of connotations and associations to the word “animality.” If, as social Darwinists are so fond of claiming, human inner nature is purportedly readable in terms of the figure of the animal (understood as evolutionary ancestor and racialized-gendered other), then “animality” might mean a whole new set of ideas if it is attached to sea slugs or squid. Monster erotica capitalizes on these alternate associations to envision a different world of gender, sexuality, and embodiment than is available in human, mainstream, realistic porn. In light of how trans people are alternately hypersexualized or de-eroticized with sometimes deadly consequences, proliferating the vocabularies available for trans and nonbinary erotic life is urgent and needed.¹⁸

The fleshly imaginaries I find in monster erotica like Xavier’s offer alternatives to yet another heterosexual white porn video by turning to a speculative treatment of invertebrate animals’ alien worlds. It makes a difference that this is not realistic erotica: the alien kraken is a figment of Alice Xavier’s imagination, and therefore does not bear the same representational burden of what gender, sexuality, or desire are supposed to look like based on what kind of genitals one has, or what kind of animals supposedly represent “natural” human behavior. This speculative function transforms real-world cephalopods and their nonhuman sexualities into important registers of nonbinary-gendered imagination in human cultural texts. It does not negate the need for research on real-world invertebrate genders and sexualities, the effects human actions have on their lives, nor, in Sherryl Vint’s words, the need to engage ethically with “a being whose embodied, communicative, emotional and cultural life ... is radically different

from our own" (1).¹⁹ But centralizing imagination as a framework of investigation in speculative erotica and centralizing the cultural politics of animality leads to a very different set of questions, problems, and possibilities than those traditionally posed in "the question of the animal." In this essay I have tracked some of the racial, gendered, and sexual politics of invertebrate animality, tentacular sexualities, and the fleshly imaginaries of nonhuman erotica. I hope this will lead to more attention to the function of animality in erotica, pornography, romance, and other explicit genres.

What alternate conceptions of desire, beauty, pleasure, and sexuality do animals like anemones, octopuses, and starfish offer? What might an aesthetics of snails look like? What models of desire, attraction, beauty, and pleasure emerge from the sexualities and genders of nonbinary invertebrate animals that do not depend on the human gender binary or heteronormative animal narratives? What might sex and gender become when they are no longer human? Starfish, jellyfishes, squid, and other animals that do not bear much apparent bodily similarity to human beings frustrate the logics of animality that are central to Western racialized gender logics. These are slow-moving, sticky, soft, malleable, unstructured by internal skeletons, full of orifices, and register as genderless and sexless in terms of the binary gender and sexual criteria 19th century biologists used to evaluate species' "high" or "lowness." Yet they are not genderless or sexless, if gender is not limited to a dichotomy of masculinity and femininity. Slimy invertebrates do not have backbones, which opens their bodies up to conceptual rhymes with spinelessness, softness, femininity, and limp-wristedness in different ways than the vertebrate animal homosexualities that have dominated "gay rights" rhetorics in the United States and animal studies's focus on vertebrate mammals closely related to humans. Once sex and gender are no longer entirely human, they no longer necessarily involve men, women, masculinities, femininities, or even vertebrates, and sometimes they lead to alternatives to the racialized gender and sexual paradigms of the human that continue to haunt American culture. *Alien Seed* and other invertebrate-based monster erotica stories make more room for nonbinary genders by rerouting human eroticism through the nonhuman animal and plant world in different ways than the all-too-familiar deployment of Western racialized genders and sexualities through fantasies, fears, and colonial kinships with land-dwelling vertebrates, especially mammals. These stories suggest some of the possibilities of invertebrate aquatic animality and its nonbinary gender multiplicity as they are imagined through the bodies and behaviors of monsters. The sheer campy strangeness of these erotica stories, of humans getting fucked by a kraken, offers a different, underwater world of erotic imagination in contrast to the mundane constraints of realistic genres, straight porn, and (supposedly) gender-binary vertebrates.

4. I want to conclude with some thoughts on monstrosity, animality, desire, and trans bodies as further suggestions about the potential of speculative erotica as a genre. I have been in conversation with some monster erotica authors over email, asking about their writing and the conditions under which they work, and a few of them shared with me their reasons for creating this kind of material. One of them, Clea Kinderton (who is the author of *Mounted and Bred by the Centaurs*, among other titles), shared some beautiful insights into the power of monstrous animallike representations for the erotics of trans imaginations.²⁰ Kinderton identified herself to me as a “white, bisexual, polyamorous, pre-op trans woman (mtf).” For Kinderton, writing about monstrous bodies is a way of grappling with the way her own transfeminine body has been interpreted as monstrous (I quote with permission):

[A]s a trans person, I have always felt like a monster. I identify with them because they’re misfits and outcasts, feared and hated by others simply because they’re an “unnatural” mix of things that shouldn’t be mixed together. So in a way monsters have always felt like “my people”. A monster isn’t going to reject me over the way that I look because its standards of beauty are utterly foreign. It allows me to suspend my disbelief that another “person” could desire me as intensely as they do. (email to author, 7/14/2016)

Not all monster erotica authors or readers are trans. But Kinderton’s connection between monster fantasies and being treated as monstrous oneself sheds light on the potential this genre holds (at its best) for queer and trans politics today. If the gender binary often legislates dominant beauty standards, and certain monsters are illegible to this binary, then monster erotica might be a place to rework the politics of desirability that leaves many human and nonhuman bodies behind. Kinderton’s words imagine monsters as a place to rewrite the sexual politics of trans, especially transfeminine, bodies under white hetero-patriarchy, and my essay here is as much a love letter to her work and Xavier’s as it is to Hayward’s.

For Kinderton, it is difficult to identify with realistic erotica because of the difficulty projecting herself into them long enough to suspend disbelief. She writes, “I struggle writing heteronormative romance simply because it seems absurd to me that I would ever find myself in that kind of relationship; I find it easier to imagine falling in love with an orc or a minotaur, of bonding over our mutual strangeness with a yeti or a ‘creature from the black lagoon’” (email to author 7/14/2016). Kinderton suggests that trans people and others who struggle to see our bodies as desirable are already unlikely

to identify with realistic mainstream porn, and may be particularly well situated for nonhuman or speculative genres instead. Her words provide a provocative response to Tristan Taormino's question in *Take Me There: Trans and Genderqueer Erotica* (a paper collection published by Cleis Press): if "[o]ur language is ... severely limited when it comes to describing the bodies of trans people," then "[h]ow do we eroticize these bodies, talk about them in dirty ways, worship and respect them?" (xiii). The language of invertebrate animality and the monsters based on them in ebook erotica is one underexplored avenue in reply to Taormino's question. This is a different kind of response to the problems of mainstream porn than the burgeoning world of queer, trans, and feminist porn in realistic genres being produced by queer organizations like *The Crash Pad* (Taormino et al.). Kinderton's response is a speculative one rather than a realistic or indexical approach to transgender representation: "So I've created my own little kingdom, with my own 'knights' (shaggy, scaley, hooved, and horned), people I can relate to, and who aren't so quick to reject me for being different" (email to author 7/14/2016). I am not a sociologist, and I make no quantitative claims about readership here. But I think Kinderton has a point — that feeling monstrous and fantasizing about monsters have much in common, and this might be the starting point for a new politics of the erotic, a new politics of monstrous desirability and erotic animality based in the language of invertebrate animals and their nonbinary genders. There's a lot to learn from the slimy sexualities of sea animals as they are reimagined in queer and trans speculative fiction. The imaginative capacities of nonbinary invertebrate animals offer an expanded and much more livable take on the erotic life of gender nonconforming bodies than the violent framework we still labor under in the long shadow of the 19th century. Reimagining cephalopod sexualities through nonbinary aliens might help imagine trans bodies differently.

Notes

1. China Miéville argues that Lovecraft's work marks the entrance of tentacles into American speculative fiction, "a limb type largely missing from western mythology" previously (xiv).
2. Hayward does this without treating animals as naturalizing evidence for human queerness or transness (Hayward, "Fingereyes" 590; Wilson 284; Roughgarden 4).
3. My work is inspired by Weheliye's definition of racialization as a process of distributing humans "into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans" (3). See also Jackson's argument in "Losing Manhood: Animality and Plasticity in the

(Neo)Slave Narrative” that “‘the human’ and ‘the animal’ are not mutually exclusive ontological zones but rather positions in a highly unstable and indeterminate relational hierarchy ... that requires blackness as exception” (123). See also Jayna Brown’s “Being Cellular: Race, the Inhuman, and the Plasticity of Life.”

4. Roughgarden notes in *Evolution’s Rainbow: Diversity, Gender, and Sexuality in Nature and People* that “hermaphroditism is common in the ocean,” listing “barnacles, snails, starfish, fan worms, and sea anemones” as examples that might reverse scientific predilections for seeing binary sex-separated bodies as the norm for animals (30). Darwin observed this in *The Descent of Man*: “With animals belonging to the lower classes, the two sexes are not rarely united in the same individual” (301). As Elizabeth Wilson, Elizabeth Grosz, and other feminist science and technology studies scholars have proposed, feminist and queer criticism might be enriched by not just critiquing the misuses of biology in service of gender and sexual hierarchies, but also by drawing on scientific knowledge about animals for new, queer ends. See Wilson’s “Biologically Inspired Feminism” and Grosz’s *Time Travels*.

5. Helmreich 7; Hird 227; Alaimo 51.

6. Nonbinary trans genders have been discussed hardly at all in gender and sexuality studies, compared to binary L, G, B, and T identities. Iranian historian Afsaneh Najambadi asks if “we [have] really finally done away with gender binaries in our historical and analytical work,” pointing out that “the only categories of gender that run through so much of our gender scholarship are women and men, masculinity and femininity” (12). It is my goal in this essay to show that speculative erotica texts about invertebrate animals demonstrate that nonbinary genders do exist in American cultural production in a different way than in realistic transgender, queer, and gender-nonconforming literatures.

7. For analyses of the queer cultural work of women-centric erotic fanfiction (or slash fiction), see Henry Jenkins’ “‘Welcome to Bisexuality, Captain Kirk’: Slash and the Fan-Writing Community,” Joanna Russ’s “Pornography By Women, For Women, With Love,” Constance Penley’s *Nasa/Trek: Popular Science and Sex in America*, and Alexis Lothian, Kristina Busse, and Robin Anne Reid’s “‘Yearning Void and Infinite Potential’: Online Slash Fandom as Queer Female Space.”

8. Monster erotica authors have, in fact, had to defend themselves continually against charges of bestiality in repeated cat-and-mouse games with Amazon’s vague, unevenly-

enforced anti-pornography rules for the Kindle market. Many of them have lost income and access to sales platforms because they write forms of erotica particularly vulnerable to public scandal. Vanilla, human-only, heterosexual erotica stories are not subjected to the same levels of scrutiny.

9. See discussions in Tristan Taormino, Constance Penley, Celene Shimizu, and Mireille Miller-Young's collection *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure*. In monster erotica, I have only self-reported information about who authors are. Because this is pornography, authors publish their work under pseudonyms and do not provide public biographical or demographic information.

10. It is true that there is plenty of bad monster erotica out there. Author Alice Xavier reported to me in an email that the Kindle Unlimited payment scheme (a monthly subscription service rather than a per-story price tag) rewards fast, badly-written stories over quality, well-edited work (email to author 7/12/2016). But I do not invest as heavily in the concept of literary quality. Or, at least, I am more interested in these stories' gender, sexual, racial, and species imaginations than in whether they are written like fiction that comes out of MFA programs (which tend to stigmatize both genre fiction and erotica).

11. *Alien Seed* is couched within a framing narrative of alien breeding: the story concludes with the protagonist waking up in her car, happy to discover that the aliens have left her pregnant with one of the offspring they created over the course of their breeding experiments. But this reproductive trope does not invalidate the story's queer sexual politics. While queer theory has spent much of its disciplinary history critiquing the limitation of sex to reproduction, recent queer feminist scholars have reexamined reproduction as a queer and feminist phenomena, in part because earlier queer theories tended towards gay male-centric cultural production, and in part because the history of race and sexuality in the U.S. complicate a simple equation between "nonreproductive" and "queer" (Lothian; Streeby). The presence of reproduction in itself does not make Xavier's story heteronormative. Alien breeding fantasies are one of the most common speculative erotica tropes on the ebook market, and Xavier is not alone in this framing device, in which an alien species's need to reproduce serves as the narrative's occasion for wild interspecies sex. Ice's series *Sidney's Alien Escapades* offers a similar story device of a human woman abducted by little gray aliens and subjected to a series of sexual experiments with a wide range of alien species who need her to reproduce: spiderlike, plantlike, fishlike, sluglike, crablike, etc. Words like "breeding" and "mating" seem to function as a bridge between the narrative-framing justification of the need to reproduce and the construction of animality as internal drive or desire. Perhaps half of

the stories I read during my research for this project involved reproduction as a narrative justification for indulging in forbidden sex with monsters (including some fascinating male pregnancy, or “mpreg,” fantasies): Kylie Ashcroft’s *Mating with the Jungle Tentacle Plant*, M.A. Church’s *The Harvest: Taken*, K. J. Burkhardt’s *Taken by the Monsters*, Soichiro Irons’s *Forced by the Forest*, Lucia Lace’s *Mating with the Science Experiment*, and many others. My stance with regard to reproduction in these stories is simply agnostic. I treat it as a plot device, as a fantasy that appeals to wide numbers of readers in this genre, and a device that (as Joanna Russ argues of dubious consent) serves as narrative legitimation for deviant desires (Russ 93). But it is not the aspect of these stories’ sex scenes that most interests me.

12. Drawing on Peter Singer’s statements on zoophilia and Robinson Devor’s 2007 documentary about bestiality on a horse farm, Pettman’s argument is useful for unsettling easy assumptions that sexuality among humans is entirely about the human, but sometimes slides into the kind of comparisons with interracial sex and homosexuality I would like to question (86). See also Pettman’s 2017 book *Creaturely Love: How Desire Makes Us More and Less Than Human*, which traces representations of animality in canonical Western literatures about love in an effort to show that “two humans making love are (always already) animals engaged in sexual intercourse” (*Creaturely Love* xi).

13. In *The Birth of a Jungle*, Lundblad defines animality as a Darwinian-Freudian discourse of the animal in the early 20th century that gets used to naturalize a range of constructions of human gender, sexuality, and race (2).

14. See Roughgarden’s *Evolution’s Rainbow*, which draws on scientific research to argue that biologists over-rely on heteronormative and gender-binaristic assumptions about animal genders and sexualities that result in both cultural problematics and bad science.

15. This is a genre built on a tradition of reluctant consent emerging from women-authored romance novels and fanfiction, in which dubious consent serves as a thin layer of legitimization for illicit desires and fantasies (Russ 93). But with such stark black male/white woman signifiers in the context of the racialized history of the human/animal divide, it is hard to free this narrative from its historical legacy.

16. This is reflected, for example, in nature documentaries, where birds and mammals become personified through binary gender-specific language, while invertebrates,

insects, and monocellular organisms become distanced through gender-neutral pronouns.

17. H.P. Lovecraft's uses of invertebrate and monocellular animality in "At the Mountains of Madness" and his letters certainly prove that any animal can be used to demonize people of color and elevate whiteness.

18. The stakes of the politics of desirability are quite high, especially for trans and gender-nonconforming people without the protection of whiteness or class privilege. Every year in the U.S. dozens of trans women, especially trans women of color, are murdered by straight cisgender men who feel somehow tricked. As of the moment of writing, three black trans women in Louisiana alone were killed in February 2017 (Ciara McElveen, Chyna Gibson, and Jaquarrius Holland), and at least seven trans women of color have been killed in the U.S. since the beginning of the year (Murdock).

19. Vint sees speculative fiction as a particularly important and appropriate venue for conveying precisely this alterity of animals "as beings in their own right," taking a different approach than mine to triangulating science fiction and animal studies (6).

20. In her 1994 essay, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage," Susan Stryker calls for reclaiming the toxic associations between being trans and monstrosity: "I want to lay claim to the dark power of my monstrous identity without using it as a weapon against others or being wounded by it myself. I will say this as bluntly as I know how: I am a transsexual, and therefore I am a monster" (240). Stryker's piece focuses on connections between gender-affirming surgeries and Frankenstein's monster's stitched-together body, while monster erotica author Clea Kinderton is interested in the cis-normative, transmisogynist gazes that render non-passing transfeminine bodies monstrous.

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