

Breaking the Mold: Mother/Daughter Representations in *Resident Evil*

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Keywords

Resident Evil, monster studies, gender studies, monstrous-feminine, intersubjectivity, recognition

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This paper presents a work in progress that delves into the monstrous representations of mothers and daughters in Capcom's *Resident Evil VII: Biohazard* (2017), *Resident Evil Village* (2021), and the latter's DLC, *Shadows of Rose* (2022). Its aim is to explore how these games construct different models of motherhood and daughters. The focus will be mainly on the characters of Mia, Rose, Mother Miranda, and Eveline. Mia is the wife of protagonist Ethan and Rose is their daughter. Meanwhile, both Eveline and Miranda are the final bosses in these games. Eveline is a bioweapon that takes the form of a little girl. Miranda, on the other hand, is a scientist and cult-leader seeking to revive her daughter. The depiction of these women shows varying degrees of monstrosity, from the undeniably inhuman, such as Mother Miranda and Eveline, to those like Mia and Rose whose bodies and minds, not quite monstrous nor human, blur the boundaries between these categories (Pinder 2021, 2). This paper will analyze and compare these four women in terms of Benjamin's intersubjectivity and recognition, with the goal of assessing each character's level of success in engaging in these processes. This will potentially shed a light to the foundation of the monstrous nature of these characters.

According to Benjamin (1988, 20), intersubjectivity stems from an individual's ability and need to recognize the other as its own self, yet alike to itself in the sense that the other can share a similar mental experience. This ability creates a spectrum of possible relations between the self and the other, in which one key component is that of recognition of the other as its own self. It is also possible for recognition to break down or be missing entirely from a relationship, in which case "a person feels that aloneness is only possible by obliterating the intrusive other, that attunement is only possible by surrendering to the other" (Benjamin 1988, 28). Being based on Benjamin's study of new mothers and their infant children, her ideas of intersubjectivity and recognition constitute then the ideal framework through which to analyze mother/daughter figures and their relationships to each other and the world that surrounds them. These ideas provide an explanation of both the success and failure of these figures to interact with their environment, and perhaps even a reasoning behind their monstrosity.

Monsters have also been traditionally linked to gender and womanhood. Braidotti (1997, 64) establishes that "[...] monsters are, just like bodily female subjects, a figure of devalued difference; as such, it provides the fuel for the production of normative discourse", in other words, women have been deeply associated with monsters in the sense that both of them patrol the limits and create boundaries defining what is and is not normal. Furthermore, in her book *The Monstrous-Feminine*, Creed (1993, 1) establishes that "All human societies have a conception of the monstrous-feminine, of what it is about woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject". These terrifying elements of womanhood not only make women into an equal to the monster, but make them monstrous themselves, sometimes because of their bodies or their failures to conform to their assigned gender roles (Santos 2017)¹. This tradition of equating femininity to monstrosity has been enacted by transforming women's bodies into hybrid creatures, because "An extremely effective way of dehumanizing someone is to make their body hybrid, transformative, or grotesque" (Stang 2021, para. 5).

Proceedings of DiGRA 2023

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Regarding the monstrous mother, she has been depicted in different ways, each of them highlighting different aspects. Firstly, we have what Creed (1993, 17) has called the archaic mother, which she defines as “the parthenogenetic mother, the mother as primordial abyss, the point of origin and of end”. This figure is thus monstrous because some of her bodily functions—reproduction, pregnancy, and birth—and her maternal love are seen as such. On the other hand, not complying with this role also poses the danger of becoming inhuman. Motherhoods that deviate from self-sacrifice and pre-established roles “[...] are then deemed abnormal and monstrous in such figures as wicked stepmothers, murderous mothers and witches who negate motherhood” (Santos 2017), that is to say, there are some common tropes to make these women horrific, particularly to signify unnatural women who refuse to become mothers or even threaten other motherhoods. Thus, both enacting and defying motherhood can be construed as monstrous. Mothers are also horrifying because of the monsters they produce, particularly when men are not involved, because “without man, woman can only give birth to a race of mutant, murderous offspring” (Creed 1993, 45). Additionally, these monstrous children become particularly dangerous, given that “Naturally, those offspring are loyal only to her and pose a threat to the protagonist/player-character, who serves as the representative of the normative, patriarchal symbolic order” (Stang 2019, 240). In other words, another danger of the mother is the monsters she can generate.

It is also important to highlight that the monster is also comprised of a dialectical function (Cohen 1996, 24). This means that, to analyze and understand the monster to its full extent, it is necessary to acknowledge its counterpart dwelling inside of the limits rather than on the outskirts. That is to say, the monstrous mother and daughter need to be contrasted with the intelligible versions of this figure, with intelligible being understood as Butler’s (1990, 17) idea of intelligible genders: “those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire”. This comparison serves a dual purpose: firstly, to establish their differences and thus what is not permissible, and secondly, to reveal the similarities between these figures. After all, the monster expresses not only the anxieties regarding those mothers and daughters who refuse to be categorized within the limits of assigned gender roles, but also the desire of those within to break said norms, the temptation to lean into the monstrous (Cohen 1996, 19). Therefore, this paper will also study how Mia and Rose approach and embody their own monstrosity, both being infected by the same mold that gives Eveline and Miranda their powers.

ENDNOTES

¹ This citation corresponds to a Kindle book with no pages.

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