Cleaning Away the Bad Stuff

A Comparative Analysis of the Use of Cleaning for Getting Rid of Monstrosity in Dead Until Dark and Shakespeare’s Landlord

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# Contents

Introduction .................................................................................................................................................. 2

About the Novels ......................................................................................................................................... 4

Relevant Theories and Previous Research .................................................................................................. 5

Being “Other” than “Normal” ..................................................................................................................... 8

The Monster Polices the Borders of the Possible ....................................................................................... 16

Fear of the Monster is Really a Kind of Desire ........................................................................................... 17

The Monster Always Escapes .................................................................................................................... 19

Conclusion ................................................................................................................................................... 20

Sources ......................................................................................................................................................... 22
Introduction

Lily, in *Shakespeare’s Landlord* (1996), cleans for others and Sookie, in *Dead Until Dark* (2001), is really house proud. They both take pride in looking good and they want their bodies to be smooth as a baby’s bottom. Why? What is it that they are cleaning away? Is it filth or is it something else? Lily and Sookie are the protagonists of the Shakespeare and the Sookie Stackhouse series respectively, both written by Charlaine Harris. They have many things in common; female, young, single, low educated, hardworking etc., but the most fascinating similarity is their dedication to cleanliness. One might say that keeping clean and well groomed is something quite natural for young women their age (31 and 25 respectively), but I argue that their cleaning and grooming has quite another purpose, and the aim of this essay is to show that they use cleaning and grooming as a means to get rid of their inner monstrosity. The novels belong to different genres, realism and vampire fiction, which makes expected that the forms of monstrosity will be different.

To examine monstrosity, I take a version of teratology as a starting point. In the foreword to the anthology *Speaking of Monsters*, Caroline Joan S. Picart and John Edgar Browning explain that the word “teratology” has multiple meanings, depending on field and discourse, and that etymologically it comes from the Greek word “teras,” meaning “monster” and the Latin “logy,” meaning “speaking, discourse, treatise, doctrine, theory, science.” Hence, teratology is “speaking of monsters.” Picart and Browning then underline that teratology is very fluid and capable of crossing disciplinary boundaries. It is used within medicine, as the domain of studying physical abnormalities on fetuses or embryos, within biology as the study of “abnormal formations in animals and plants.” (1) To describe the use of teratology within literature, Picart and Browning refer to definitions in *The Free Dictionary*: “a collection of tales about mythical or fantastic creatures, monsters etc. [...] a type of mythmaking or storytelling in which monsters and marvels are featured” or “the writing or collecting of fantasies containing monsters and prodigies,” which leads the thought to fairytales and both wonderful and frightening things.

Picart’s and Browning’s descriptions of the different fields of teratology focus on the monstrous as abnormal, though, and less on the marvels. One should, however, be careful when defining what is monstrous and what is not. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen pinpoints this problem in his “Monster Theory – Seven Theses” in *Monster Theory*, where he claims that a society can be defined by its monsters. That is, the values of a society can be understood through what is considered monstrous in that very society at a certain time. The definition of a
monster can therefore vary over time, geography, social status etc. Keeping in mind the different definitions of teratology, I want to point out that I will focus on the theory that monstrous is synonymous with abnormal.

In this essay, I also use Cohen’s discussions to demonstrate how Lily and Sookie are “other” than “normal” and how they display and fight their inner and outer monstrosities. Inner monstrosity, in this essay, refers to monstrosity that cannot be seen, other that by the person’s actions. Outer monstrosities are visual, such as scars, bite marks etc. In his seven theses, Cohen defines what a monster is and what monstrosity is. His purpose is to provide a method of understanding a culture from its monsters, “rather than argue a ‘theory of teratology’” (Cohen 3–4). In his first thesis, The Monster’s Body is a Cultural Body, Cohen explains that the monster is the embodiment of a particular cultural moment. The second thesis, The Monster Always Escapes, explains why we never can confine a monster, and, more importantly, why it always returns, and each time in a slightly different form. This leads to Cohen’s third thesis The Monster is the Harbinger of Category Crisis. Here, Cohen continues the explanation as to how the monster always escapes; it refuses to be easily categorized. The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference, the fourth thesis, connects the previous theses by claiming that “the monster is made flesh, come to dwell among us. In its function as dialectical Other or third-term supplement, the monster is an incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond – of all the loci that are rhetorically placed as distant and distinct but originate within” (7).

Cohen also claims that the monstrous difference tends to be cultural, political, economical, racial or sexual. In The Monster Polices the Borders of the Possible Cohen explains that since the monster functions as a warning; exploring can be dangerous and being curious is more often punished than rewarded, and it is better to remain in your own domestic sphere, where it is safe. (12) Cohen continues to argue that the monster prevents geographical, sexual and intellectual mobility, and that challenging these borders is risking being attacked by monsters, or even becoming monstrous oneself. In the thesis Fear of the Monster is Really a Kind of Desire, Cohen explains how the monster is tempting, as we, through the monster, can live out feelings and actions otherwise forbidden. We can enjoy being frightened by it, as we know that the hero will win in the end. Lastly, The Monster Stands at the Threshold… of Becoming indicates that monsters are our children. By examining the monster, we can understand why we have created it (20). Cohen underlines that a society can be understand by its monsters, since what is considered monstrous tells us which qualities are appreciated in that society at that time. In this essay however, Cohen’s theses will be used to show how the normality of a
society creates monsters, as the norms of Shakespeare and Bon Temps will explain Sookie’s and Lily’s monstrosities respectively.

The structure of my essay will be loosely based on Cohen’s theses, as some of these gain by being discussed together and as some are not relevant when analyzing these two novels. Julia Kristeva’s theory on abjection will provide the explanation as to why it is important to Lily and Sookie to get rid of their monstrosities, and Mary Douglas’s theory on purity and danger will explain why cleaning and grooming are efficient means.

By examining the instances of cleaning and grooming against the backdrop of teratology, I consequently demonstrate that Lily and Sookie clean and groom to get rid of their inner monstrosities.

**About the Novels**
The novels I have chosen to analyze are *Dead Until Dark* (hereafter Dead) and *Shakespeare’s Landlord* (hereafter Landlord) as they are the first novel in each series. In the first novel, the reader gets a quite thorough presentation of the protagonist, and of her society respectively. This makes these novels suitable for the analysis I aim to make, as these descriptions are vital for me to define the monstrosities connected to the protagonists.

*Shakespeare’s Landlord* by Charlaine Harris is the first book in a series of five, featuring the female protagonist Lily Bard. Lily is a young woman in her early thirties, who moved to the small town of Shakespeare, four years before the event of the series. She works as a cleaner, has no friends and she lives by herself in a house that she owns. Her personal privacy is extremely important to her. The reason she moved to Shakespeare is because she does not feel comfortable staying for too long in the same place, and she is surprised that she has stayed in the community this long. Lily has a traumatic and secret past; she has been gang raped and badly abused by a biker gang. She was chained to a bed, raped and cut and left to live or die. When she begs for help, Lily realizes that one person in there is a woman, and she pleads to her for help, but gets none. The leader of the pack gave her a gun with one bullet – to shoot the man who rented her out to them, or to commit suicide. She chose to kill the man, but she almost died by her wounds before she was found. Before all of this, she lived close to her parents and had a boyfriend, but all of this was ruined for her and she chose to leave. In Shakespeare she keeps to herself and does not want anyone to know her secret. The only time she is social is during karate class – a sport she has taken up to be able to defend herself. She
has no understanding for women who do not take precautions. In the beginning of the novel, Lily witnesses a person hiding a body, and although she does not want to get involved, she anonymously reports what she has seen. This is the start to both the solving of the crime as well as a personal development for Lily, a development that includes facing and handling her monstrosities.

*Dead Until Dark* is the first book in the Sookie Stackhouse series. The female protagonist is Sookie, a 25-year-old barmaid. She lives in Bon Temps, where her family has lived for generations. Her parents are dead, but she has a brother, Jason, and a grandmother with whom she shares a house. At the beginning of the novel we learn that the vampires have “come out of the coffin,” due to the Japanese invention of synthetic blood. Sookie meets her first vampire at work, Bill Compton, and she is mesmerized. Sookie herself is a telepath, and her ability helps her save him from being drained. The purpose of draining a vampire is to sell the blood on the black market, as a vampire’s blood will improve your health and your sexual ability. This is the beginning of their relationship. Sookie has had no intimate relationships before Bill, mainly due to her ability to read minds, but also due to her being abused by an uncle as a child. Bill seduces her and, later on, kills the uncle. Her ability to read minds is discovered by the vampires, and she gets “persuaded” to help them read minds of, for instance, human employees. This is the beginning of Sookie’s partaking in the supernatural society around her, a society where she will fit in better than in a human society that is struggling to handle the fact that monsters – vampires – are real. A series of murders takes place in Bon Temps, and Sookie’s grandmother is one victim, and blame is immediately put on the vampires. They are monsters and therefore they must be guilty. This creates a tension between the normal citizens of Bon Temps and the abnormal. This makes the situation even more difficult for Sookie, as she is situated somewhere in-between.

The way people of Bon Temps perceive Sookie’s monstrosity is affected by the more open monstrosity displayed by the vampires. In a way, monstrosity is a fact in a very obvious way in Bon Temps, whereas monstrosity is something still in the dark in Shakespeare. This gives Sookie and Lily different premises for hiding their monstrosities.

**Relevant Theories and Previous Research**

Neither of these novels has received much academic attention. There is quite a lot of research on the TV-series *True Blood*, based on the series about Sookie, and some of this research is
relevant to this essay, but no study has examined the aspects of cleaning and grooming. Close to nothing has been written about the novels about Sookie, nor on those about Lily.

In this essay, I will discuss the inner and outer monstrosities of Sookie and Lily. Inner monstrosities would be what you cannot see, such as Sookie’s telepathic ability, and outer monstrosities what you can see, such as Lily’s scars. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen provides, in *Monster Theory*, an extensive definition of what a monster is, and how to define a monster and monstrosity. I will discuss Sookie’s and Lily’s monstrosities against the backdrop of these theses. Some of the theses are more applicable, and some are more applicable to one protagonist than the other, which I will show in my analysis.

Cleaning and grooming will be seen as strategies Lily and Sookie use to deal with their monstrosities, connected to ideas about hygiene and order. Valerie Curtis claims in her article “Hygiene: How Myths, Monsters, and Mother-in-Laws can Promote Behaviour Change” that “taking care of one’s body, being clean mentally and physically, is healthy. It is clean to tidy things, to separate paper and garbage” (77). She connects this to Mary Douglas’s idea of order; “To be tidy and to put things in the right places is a strong motivation for hygienic behavior in the home” (77). Although Curtis is discussing physical health, her theories can very well be applied to Lily and Sookie. In today’s society, as well as in Bon Temps and Shakespeare, being healthy is considered good, and being unhealthy, thus, is bad. Lily and Sookie are no exceptions to this “rule.” They both know that they are different, and one thing they can do actively to get rid of or at least hide this difference, is being neat and tidy. Following Curtis’s chains of thought to Douglas’s idea that being tidy and orderly indicates health, shows that the cleaning and grooming that Lily and Sookie performs is quite logical; stress the features that make you appear normal in the society you live in, and in both Bon Temps and Shakespeare being clean and groomed is considered norm. Every society has its system of categorizing features that are valued, and features that are not. Picart explains:

Douglas claims that ‘ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience’. Creating systems of order based on a network of culturally constructed classification – human and nonhuman, female and male, edible and inedible, holy and profane – is a fundamental prerequisite of social experience. (Picart 20)

Thus, society craves systems of order, where everything that does not fit in is taboo; “The linguistic and social creation, realized through an elaborate classifying activity in which male
is sorted from female, and so on, creates at the same time a system of disorder, whose categories are regarded by members of the social community as dirt, pollution, taboo.” (Picart, 20) Picart’s reasoning indicates that order craves disorder, and in the same way I argue that normality craves monstrosity.

Mary Douglas sees normality and monstrosity as something fundamentally human, that what fits in and what does not are basically two sides of the same coin, one cannot exist without the other. Julia Kristeva, on the other hand, sees what not fits in as something we all want to get rid of, although it is a part of us. She argues that “[a]bject […] is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object” and that “to each ego its object, to each superego its abject” (Kristeva, 2, 4). She continues by claiming that it is “not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system order.” It is also what does not respect borders, the in-between, that causes abjection. She also mentions specific stereotypes, such as “the traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience [and] the shameless rapist.” Kristeva continues that any crime will cause abjection, since it draws attention to how fragile society is, but also that there can be admiration for a rebel. The conclusion must therefore be that what is abject is closely linked to the surrounding values. Kristeva underlines that it is “what disturbs identity” and “the in-between, the ambiguous” that cause abjection, and this applies very well to Sookie; she is human, but her telepathic ability makes her uncomfortable: “I have a disability. That’s how I try to think of it. The bar patrons just say I’m crazy” (Dead 2). Sookie is not, however, dirty or unhealthy, which seems to fit in with Kristeva’s theory. I insist, though, that although lack of cleanliness and health does not cause abjection, it can enhance it, and that the opposite, being clean and healthy, can hide or even get rid of features that are abject. It can also be added that the abject of the vampires being (un)dead rub off on Sookie; her connection with death increases her monstrosity in the same way the abject of the rapists rub off on Lily.

In previous research on literature where abjection is discussed, it is often closely linked to the female body. One example is Raechel Dumas’s article “Historicizing Japan’s Abject femininity: reading Women’s Bodies in Nihon ryōki,”1 in which monstrous femininity and female bodies in Japanese literature are discussed. Of particular interest is how Dumas shows the connection between femininity, abject and domesticity. Her example is from Nihon ryōki, first volume, thirteenth tale, where a poor village woman becomes a role model for being devoted to motherhood. This woman is the mother of seven, but her refinement and lack of

1 Nihon ryōki was written in the late 8t and early 9th century, and is a collection of Buddhist stories.
vulgarity save her from being abject. Dumas continues: “In this tale the woman’s spiritual discipline is presented as firmly linked to both her procreative capabilities and steadfast devotion to the maintenance of the domestic realm” (253). Although neither Lily nor Sookie are mothers, they are domestic, in different ways. Both of them are neat and orderly, and a tidy home is of importance to both of them. At the very beginning of *Shakespeare’s Landlord*, Lily witnesses how a person hides a dead body. She calls the police anonymously since she does not want to get involved, but her occupation, which she thought would be “the ultimate in detachment,” makes her interesting to the police. Police chief Claude Friedrich comes to her house to question her, and the reader gets to see Lily’s home for the first time: “I watched [him] scanning the sparse furniture, pieces that were on sale at the most expensive local stores, pieces I had carefully selected and placed exactly where I wanted” (*Landlord* 32). Although Lily does not invite people into her home, as she is an extremely private person, it is still important to her to have a neat home. As Picart notes, Douglas claims that social perception of dirt is synonymous with disorder (Picart, 20) I claim that to Lily order is synonymous with normality. By having a home that is neat and, to some extent, expensive looking, she tries to avoid attention, and the fact that she chooses furniture from “the most expensive local stores” also conveys a message: she is not white trash, but a solid, trustworthy person.

As mentioned above, abjection is often connected to the female body and motherhood. Kristeva claims that the ultimate abject is death (3), and Sally Minogue and Andrew Palmer connect abject and abjection to giving birth, bleeding and abortions. I on the other hand connect abjection to unwanted mental features or abilities. I claim that the abject can be some ability you have, from birth, as in Sookie’s case, or acquired, but also the memories and consequences of a trauma, as in Lily’s. Both protagonists do, however, also manifest outer monstrosities. Sookie does so by seeming stupid when she makes an effort to block out other people’s thoughts. Another even more visible outer monstrosity is her fang marks, which can be compared to Lily’s outer monstrosity, namely her scars.

**Being “Other” than “Normal”**

Lily and Sookie are both “other” than “normal” and they both use cleaning and grooming to move towards what is considered normal in their respective societies. In this part of the essay I will discuss Lily and Sookie against two of Cohen’s theses: *The Monster’s Body is a Cultural Body* and *The Monster Dwells at the Gate of Difference*. These two theses work well
together, as the first will help establish that monstrosity is depending on the society where it exists, and the second explains why being different makes you monstrous. Firstly, I will establish how normality is depicted in Bon Temps and Shakespeare, secondly I will show that Lily and Sookie are different from this normality, thirdly I will establish that this makes them monstrous, and lastly I will show how they use cleaning and grooming to get rid of this monstrosity.

Cohen states that the monster’s body is a cultural body, and that it is pure culture (4). Therefore it is necessary to define normality in Shakespeare and Bon Temps, the cultures depicted, since it is against the backdrop of that normality Lily and Sookie consider themselves/are considered different although the way they feel different is not the same.. Further, Cohen points out that the monster is always different from what is considered normal in its society (7). A monster is different – that is what makes it a monster, and according to Cohen, this difference tends to be cultural, political, racial, economic or sexual (7).

Both Shakespeare and Bon Temps are small towns situated in the American south (Arkansas and Louisiana respectively). Sabrina Boyer describes the American south as “[r]ich with a cultural and political history of repression, racism, and a steep rejection of outsiders,” (27) and although her article focuses on vampires in True Blood, the TV-series based on the Sookie Stackhouse novels, this definition of the American south is still valid in the novels. Victoria Amador (2013) notes that “Harris locates Bon Temps in the northern rural area rather than the more urban southern part of the state [of Louisiana] and one which has a more prosaic and mundane reputation than the gaudy image of New Orleans” (166). Alan Ball, producer of True Blood, describes that it was the “small-town small-mindedness [and] the way in which certain minorities are demonized and oppressed for political or social gain” that attracted him to the stories in the first place (Amador 167).

The society of Shakespeare, Arkansas, is depicted as a small and calm town. Police chief Friedrich talks about “the slower pace of life in little Shakespeare” (Landlord 20) and Lily herself refers to Shakespeare as “this little town” (35). It is also described as quite conservative. One example is when Lily eavesdrops on a Shakespeare Combined Church (SCC) meeting where the board discusses whether they should fire a preschool teacher for mentioning evolution to the children. Lily does, however, point out that SCC is made up of a number of conservative individuals, and that she never would consider SCC as her church. Another example is how Alvah York sticks to her habit of spring cleaning (38). Traditions are
important, as is family. This is apparent when Mrs. Hofstettler is being questioned by police chief Friedrich and she first has to establish his family connections: “I believe, young man, that I knew your father…” and Lily describes this as “the inevitable establishing of connections that made southern introductions so cozy and drawn out” (20). These examples establish that Shakespeare is a small town, where everybody knows everybody and where people behave as they always have.

Similarly, Sookie describes Bon Temps as “our little town,” (22) where everybody knows each other. Traditions are important in the community, which is evident through how Sookie describes the house where she lives with her grandmother: her great-great-great grandfather had built it, her grandmother wants to keep the tin roof although it is old(fashioned) and “of course the clothesline was in the backyard, where clotheslines should be” (19). Sookie has lived in this house since she was seven, when her parents died, and thus is raised by her grandmother. Inquisitiveness and an openness to learning new things are traits Sookie and her grandmother have in common. When Sookie tells her grandmother about Bill for the first time, the reaction is “I’d surely love to meet him” (18). This is, however, not the attitude of everyone in Bon Temps. Many do not like vampires at all. Sookie has been brought up to be open minded but with a strong sense of modesty; Sookie’s brother Jason talks openly about prostitutes while having dinner with Sookie and her grandmother, but still Sookie tries “to think about a question we could ask without being indecent” (25). This indicates that although Sookie and her grandmother both are fascinated by new things, they still have a strong sense of what is decent and not, and that they will stick by that.

It is against the backdrop of this small-town normality Lily and Sookie are different. Culturally, Lily is different because she is very asocial. She wants no contact with other people, and although she has lived in Shakespeare for four years, she has close to no social life at all, and she rarely invites people to her house: “After I’d locked the door behind [Police chief Claude Friedrich], I realized, apropos of nothing, that he was maybe the fifth person who’d entered my house in four years” (Landlord 35). There is no indication in the novel of who these four previous guests are, but the fact that she has seen five people in her house in four years and one of them is there in his professional capacity underlines that she is a lone wolf, which contributes to her choice of work. Before the assault, she worked for a cleaning company, but she was not cleaning herself. After the assault, she chooses to work as a cleaner, because “I’d thought of housecleaning as the ultimate in detachment when I decided how I would try to support myself, but cleaning has turned out to be an intimate occupation.”
(Landlord 35-36). She finds housecleaning intimate, meaning that she learns things about her clients; Bobo is practicing safe sex, the doctor is getting a divorce etc., but her job reveals nothing about herself and her clients know nothing about her or her background. This is exactly how Lily wants it. She prefers to work alone, when her clients are not at home. Some of her clients, though, like to small-talk with her, so Lily makes herself an outcast. It is her choice not to participate. It is through cleaning other peoples’ homes Lily is forced to be social, but her relationship with her clients vary. She is comfortable chitchatting with her more elderly clients, as Mrs. Hofstettler: “I’m not normally chatty with my clients, but I admire Marie Hofstettler; she doesn’t whine and she isn’t clingy.” (Landlord 14). Lily is also positive towards Mrs. York, who is described as a person with very little tact, but who is good, honest and generous. (Landlord 41) Lily has a much harder time with her younger, female clients, such as Beanie, who Lily describes as “undeniably attractive” but who Lily finds incredibly annoying as Beanie is a very social person and always wants to talk to her, or as Deedra Dean, who Lily considers pretty but stupid.

Sookie is, contrary to Lily, a very social person. What makes her not fit in socially in her society is her biological/supernatural difference as being a telepath. She was born with this ability, and as a child she did nothing to hide that she could “hear” people’s thoughts. Her parents sought help, but no-one could, or would, believe the truth. Her mother denied Sookie’s ability, but her father believed her and even asked for her help before an important business decision. As Sookie gets older, she learns not to talk about her ability, but she feels that people still thinks she is crazy, since it takes a huge effort for her to block people’s thoughts and work at the same time. Sookie’s impression is therefore that people find her strange and stupid.

Interracial relations are also something not taken lightly in Shakespeare. Lily warns Deedra, one of her clients, who is quite promiscuous, that “sleeping with a black man is still such a delicate thing” (103) and later on Deedra gets her car trashed for that very reason. Lily understands this, and she accepts it too, as she warns Deedra. On the other hand, Lily, who is Caucasian, has a relationship with Marshall Sedaka, who is part Chinese. This indicates that to Lily, skin colour is not an issue to her, but to Shakespeare. It is important to note, though, that no one seems to mind that Lily has a relationship with a non-Caucasian. This relationship is not what makes Lily an outsider.
The colour of your skin is an issue in Bon Temps as well, although more discretely indicated than in *Landlord*, as Sookie reflects that “anyone who wanted could be buried by Spencer and Sons Funeral Home; but only white people seemed to want to. Likewise, only people of color chose to be buried at Sweet rest” (*Dead* 44). Racial segregation between black people and white people has in Bon Temps been overshadowed by the vampires coming out in the open. Instead of the division between black people and white people, people are now more concerned with the division human/non-human, i.e. human/vampire. Both black people and vampires are minorities that do not fit the norm, but vampires even more so. Having sex with a vampire is thus not considered normal. This difference can also be seen as cultural and racial, if you consider the conservativeness of the American south, and the parallels that can be drawn between vampires and blacks. In her article Boyer notes that there are places where vampires can and cannot go, like the “white” and “colored” demarcated areas during the Jim Crow era. Unlike those areas, the places where vampires cannot go are not labelled, but there are still dos and don’ts, known by both vampires and humans. Boyer mentions one example from TV-series, when Bill comes to Merlotte’s for the first time, and orders wine instead of Trublood, in order to fit in. As a vampire in a Southern bar he is an other, and by ordering wine, although he does not drink it, he blends in. (29) Sookie and Bill goes even further than having sex; they become a couple, and dating a vampire is not entirely accepted in Bon Temps: “Lafayette about dropped his bottom jaw. […] ‘I thought you were going to say you were dating a black, but you’ve gone one better, ain’t you girl?’ Lafayette said, picking at his fingernail polish” (*Dead* 166-167). This clearly indicates that although there still is a black/white race issue in Bon Temps, vampires are (at least) one step below black people.

To be monstrous economically, according to Cohen, is when you stand out, either as poor, or as thriving economically on behalf of someone else, as the Jews were accused of doing. (Cohen, 8). Neither Lily, nor Sookie can be seen as monstrous according to this definition. They are both neither poor nor rich. Economically, Lily does what little she can to fit in. As mentioned above, it is important to Lily to have a neat and orderly home. This helps her give an impression of being a good and law abiding citizen – which she actually is – and it also signifies that what meets the eye is important to her. Sookie has quite another financial situation. Her parents have left some money to Sookie and her brother, and Sookie invests this money in her home. Keeping a nice, proper home is important to both protagonists, and having the economy for doing so is obviously important. It cannot, however, be argued that their respective financial situation affect their monstrosity.
Being sexually different can make you monstrous in other people’s eyes. Cohen connects sexual difference very much to heterosexuality, but also to race. Black people, “the West’s significant other[s]” (10), are accused of having a huge sexual appetite, which makes them monsters. Sexually, both Shakespeare and Bon Temps seem conservative but tolerant. As mentioned above, skin colour is an issue in Bon Temps, but the big issue is the vampires. They overshadow homosexuality as well, as the people of Bon Temps more or less accept Lafayette, the cook at Merlotte’s, who is gay, and wears false lashes and make-up (Dead 101). As mentioned above, Sookie having a relationship with Bill is not entirely accepted in Bon Temps. After her first night with Bill, her friend Arlene realizes that Sookie has had “some fun” and wants to know with whom: “‘Bill’ I said. […] ‘Bill Compton,’ Sam [the owner of the bar and Sookie’s boss] said flatly, just as I opened my mouth to say the same thing. ‘Vampire Bill.’ Arlene was flabbergasted, Charlzie Tootsen immediately gave a little shriek,” (Dead 166-167) After the first shock, Arlene asks Sookie what it is like, having sex with a vampire (it is supposed to be better than having sex with a “regular fella,” something Bill confirms when Sookie asks him). They manage to joke about it, until Sam pulls down her collar and shows the puncture marks on her neck. The puncture marks stop the joking, since their presence reminds them that the relationship is different, too different to be accepted: “you could have cut the silence of my friends with a knife. ‘Oh shit,’ Lafayette said, very softly. I looked right into Sam’s eyes, thinking I’d never forgive him for doing this to me.” (167). Sookie’s reaction here shows that she is well aware that what she has done will cause a reaction, but it also shows that what she regrets is not the action, having sex with Bill, but being revealed having done it. To Sookie, having sex with Bill is not wrong, but as she knows that it will not be accepted, at least not to begin with, she feels the need to hide it. She therefore chooses a collared shirt instead of her usual T-shirt, not to show the marks on her neck. The bite marks create an outer monstrosity, in addition to her inner monstrosity (being a telepath). Although she is in love with Bill, she realizes that their relationship will make her even more Other than she was before. Sookie’s immediate reaction, after telling Sam off, is to clean: “And I stalked away to wipe down the Formica on one of the tables. Then I collected all the salt shakers and refilled them. Then I checked the pepper shakers and the bottles of hot peppers on each table and booth, and the Tabasco sauce too.” (168). Working gives Sookie, and the others, the time to cool down, but it also brings things back to normal. By setting the tables straight, and by filling the salt and pepper shakers, Sookie also reclaims normality. Thus, being neat and orderly becomes a strategy to Sookie. That will help her preserve an image of normality, although she is fully aware that she is different.
The rape makes Lily consider herself different in a sexual way. Rape is an act of violence and has nothing to do with sex, but the gang rape affects Lily’s sexuality as well as her view on humankind. During the gang rape, a woman is present, but she does nothing to help Lily. Instead she states that “I lived through it and you can as well” (76). Lily is betrayed by both man- and womankind, and this leaves deep scars. This connects well with Kristeva’s view on abject. Kristeva points out that “what does not respect borders, positions, rules” should be abject, and she specifically mentions “the shameless rapist” (4). The abject of the crime is then transferred to Lily, as it makes her feel monstrous. This feeling of being monstrous becomes Lily’s abject, and she has a need to be well groomed and keep things neat and orderly in order to get rid of her abject. Lily loses faith in humankind, which makes her different in a cultural/social way, but it also affects her sexuality. This is well described when Marshall, Lily’s karate sensei, approaches her in a sexual way for the first time.

We were still sitting astride the bench, facing each other. Slowly, giving me plenty of time to get used to the idea, he leaned forward until his mouth touched mine. I tensed, expecting the flood of panic that had marked my attempts to have a close relationship with a man during the past few years. (100)

This passage clearly shows that after the rape and before Marshall, she has not been able to have a sexual relationship with a man. It is important to note though, that this difference is more important to Lily that to the men who discover her secret. In fact, both Marshall and Friedrich are attracted to her, in spite of, or maybe even because of her previous experiences.

Emma Somoyogi and Mark David Ryan claim that abject “is not about uncleanliness and health, rather the abject ‘disturbs identity, system (and) order’” and I agree that abject is not necessarily about being literally dirty. The abject is, as Kristeva describes, connected to the Superego, hence not easy to wash off or to “cure” with medicine etc. I do, however, argue that being clean is one way of getting rid of the abject, which, in both Lily’s and Sookie’s case, is their difference or Otherness. Abject is not quite as simple as being literally dirty, but it is closely connected to what is socially accepted and not. As established above, both Lily and Sookie are different from the norm in their respective society, and by following the norm of being clean, they hide their abject.

Both Sookie and Lily wish to be considered normal and to be a part of their society respectively, although to different extents. In an article on Doris Lessing’s *The Grass is Singing*, Grogan focuses on Kristeva’s definition of abject and group identity: “Group
identity, like individual subjectivity, is maintained via abjection,” (Grogan 32). She connects this reasoning to Mary Douglas: “Douglas espouses the link between the social and the physical body by arguing that the boundaries of the physical body decided upon within culture are taken up in discourse to represent necessary social limits […] According to Douglas, the boundaries of the body become the boundaries of the social order and *vice versa*” (Grogan 32). This explains why keeping the body neat and clean is a useful means to Lily and Sookie to reach their purpose. Grogan also mentions Hobbes, and his famous quote that without society, man must live with “continual fear, and danger of violent death” (Grogan 33). If living without a society equals fear and death, it would effectively explain why it is so important to Lily and Sookie to fit in, at least to such an extent that they are accepted, although neither one of them is willing to completely get rid of their monstrosities. Sookie cannot, as her ability is something she was born with, and Lily considers her behavior necessary as protection. She is fully aware that she has changed after the rape, and that his change is visible to others: Once upon a time, years ago, I thought I was pretty. […] Though my face hasn’t changed, my mind has. The workings of the mind look out through the face and alter it.” (Landlord, 2) In her mind, the assault has changed her permanently. She claims that “once upon a time,” in the fairytale Before, she thought she was pretty, even prettier than her sister. But now it is different. She is, in her own opinion, no longer pretty. It is, however, still important to her to groom.

My hair is short and light blond now. One of my few extravagances is getting it colored, permed and cut at Terra Ann’s, the fanciest hairdressing salon in Shakespeare. […] I do get rid of excess hair; I pluck every stray eyebrow, and my legs and armpits are shaved smooth as a baby’s bottom (Landlord 2).

This grooming, though, is not made in order to attract the opposite sex. Partly, the haircut and colour can be a way to distance her from the Lily who was raped. Her hair then was brown and she used to wear her hair long. It can be no coincidence though that she chooses “the fanciest hairdressing salon in Shakespeare”; it is important to her to look good. Instead I argue that this grooming is important to Lily, as it makes her both feel and seem more normal. Lily uses cleaning as a means for being looked upon as normal, but it also functions as a peephole, through which Lily observes normal people, much like Frankenstein’s monster watched a family, learning how to speak. Sookie on the other hand is initially different in a more biological or supernatural way, but also sexually, being a virgin at age 25, and losing it to a vampire.
Although not all of Cohen’s theses are applicable to Lily and Sookie, most of them are which explains why they feel monstrous. Being normal in the case of Lily and Sookie is to get rid of or hide their abject. Julia Kristeva claims that “I experience abjection only if an Other has settled in place and stead of what will be ‘me’,” (Kristeva, 10) and as shown above, both Lily and Sookie suffer from being Other. Kristeva discusses what she calls “the fundamental opposition” between I and Other, or between Inside and Outside. As mentioned earlier, Kristeva connects the abject to the superego, which “normally” is the unconscious part, which makes it difficult or even impossible to affect one’s abject. Both Lily and Sookie manifest abject behavior though, such as Sookie seeming stupid when she tries to block out other people’s thoughts, or Lily seeming hostile when she tries to protect her privacy, which is visible to the conscious Ego, and therefore possible to affect. This abject behavior is also visible to others, which makes it even more important to Sookie and Lily to handle their abject.

The Monster Polices the Borders of the Possible
Both Lily and Sookie are limited by their monstrosities. They cannot partake in their respective society, to a full extent, due to them being different. This is a problem for Sookie, who actively suppresses her ability until she meets Bill, but to Lily it is an active choice to be somewhat of an outsider. In The Monster Polices the Borders of the Possible Cohen explains that since the monster functions as a warning, exploring the unknown can be dangerous and being curious is more often punished than rewarded, and “that one is better off safely contained within one’s own domestic sphere.” (12) Here, Cohen describes how the monster prevents curiosity and keeps normal people in their place. It can also be interpreted the other way around: the monster is prevented from being a part of society. Cohen continues to note that the monster prevents geographical, sexual and intellectual mobility, and that challenging the limits, or borders, is risking being attacked by monsters, or even becoming monstrous oneself. Where the border lies is highly dependent on the society one lives in, and can vary over time. This Cohen calls “the monster of prohibition,” which prohibits some actions and supports other, and the borders are primarily set to control women and maintain patriarchy.

Believing in Sookie being a telepath, is also believing in the impossible, or at least believing in something that should not be possible according to the “laws” of normality in Bon Temps and places her on the wrong side of the border. She is normal, inasmuch as she is a human and

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2 When I use the words ”normal,” “normality” etc., I refer to what is considered normal in Bon Temps and Shakespeare.
not a vampire, and superficially no one can tell that she is different. Cohen claims that “[t]he monster’s destructiveness is really a deconstructiveness: it threatens to reveal that difference originate in process, rather than in fact (and that ‘fact’ is subject to constant reconstruction and change)” (Cohen 14-15). A “fact” in this case would be that vampires are monsters, different enough to be safely categorized as Other. This fact needs reconstruction, though, as Sookie polices the borders of the possible; she is different, yet similar enough to be frightening to the normal people of Bon Temps. By openly associating with monsters, Sookie also challenges the notion that curiosity about monsters put you at risk of being attacked or turning into one. This makes her even more monstrous, as the normal people of Bon Temps draw parallels between her being a telepath and the vampires being monsters – if you associate with monsters you must be one yourself. What saves her from being defined, once and for all, as a monster is the fact that her family has lived in the area for quite some time and her strategy of maintaining a normality on the surface, by keeping her home neat and orderly, and by looking neat and proper herself.

Lily on the other hand is not “impossible” in the way Sookie is. She, too, is different, but her difference lies in the changes in her personality due to the assault. Regrettably, though, there is nothing impossible in a woman being raped, nor in the way Lily copes with her otherness. She is different, and some people feel uncomfortable around her, due to her difference, but there is nothing impossible in her otherness. However, a monster prevents mobility in the intellectual, geographic or sexual field (Cohen 12), and Lily is limited in geography, as she feels that she cannot live where people know her background. She chooses to leave her hometown, because people do not feel the same about her after the assault, and when she realizes that her secret is no longer a secret in Shakespeare, her first reaction is to flee. She does, however, choose to stay and fight. She is also limited in a sexual way, as she has been unable to maintain a sexual relationship after the assault. Her boyfriend broke up with her, unable to handle what had happened, and she has not been able to start a new sexual relationship until she meets Marshall, as mentioned above. Thus, her monstrosity prevents her from being a part of Shakespeare, until it is challenged, first by Marshall, then by Friedrich.

**Fear of the Monster is Really a Kind of Desire**

According to Cohen, the fear we feel for monsters and the monstrous is intimately connected to desire. In the thesis *Fear of the Monster is Really a Kind of Desire*, Cohen explains how the monster is tempting, as we, through the monster, can live out feelings and actions otherwise
forbidden. We can enjoy being frightened by it, as we know that the hero will win in the end. “We” in this case refers to the readers, but I will take the perspective of the characters in the novels. One significant difference is that the other characters in these novels do not have the distance the reader has. They cannot be thrilled by the monstrous, knowing that they are safe, because they are not. Therefore, Sookie, for instance, does not become attractive because of her ability. The people of Bon Temps call her crazy and avoid her. The ability itself, on the other hand, becomes attractive to the vampires, as they use her to read the minds of human employees. The use of Sookie’s ability escalates throughout the series, and it becomes a problem to her, as it puts her in dangerous situations. Cohen links the monster’s ability to exist between attraction and fear, to Julia Kristeva’s definition of abjection: “The monstrous lurks somewhere in that ambiguous, primal space between fear and attraction, close to the heart of what Kristeva calls ‘abjection’:

There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, fascinates desire, which, nonetheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects… But simultaneously, just the same, that impetus, that spasm, that leap is drawn towards an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned. Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside himself. (Cohen19)

On the surface, neither Lily nor Sookie are applicable to this definition, though. Sookie describes herself as pretty, “And it’s not because I’m not pretty [I do not get out much]. I am. I’m blond and blue-eyed and twenty-five, and my legs are strong and my bosom is substantial, and I have a waspy waistline” (1), and Lily too is described as attractive. They both represent the Western female ideal; Sookie as blond and curvaceous, Lily as blond and extremely fit. The way they look, make them attractive to the opposite (or, in Sookie’s case also to the same) sex, in spite of their inner monstrosities. But there is also an element of repulsion. In Sookie’s case, she is considered crazy by her society, and when she accidently reveals that she “listens,” people feel abused. Before Sookie meets Bill, she considers her ability a curse, and as something she must control and subdue. Throughout the series, she accepts her ability, and the cleaning more or less ceases. Lily, on the other hand, is sickened by herself and not so much by the people around her. To Lily, what sickens her is intimately connected to her sexuality, and even if she promises herself that she will never be victimized again, she cannot avoid her sexuality. Her monstrosity is challenged by Marshall, who manages to see the
normal parts of her, instead of focusing on the monstrous, which Lily feels that everyone must see; the very parts of herself that she is sickened by and thus rejects. His ability to look past these abject parts of Lily is what forces her to acknowledge her sexuality; with Marshal she can once again enjoy sex.

**The Monster Always Escapes**

*The Monster Always Escapes* underlines that it is not possible to confine a monster. I argue that this interpretation is very much valid in both novels. Both Lily and Sookie try to hide some kind of monstrosity, but they only succeed to a certain extent. The most frightening monster is the monster you cannot see. What you can see is in some aspect real, and something your senses can process. Something you cannot see, on the other hand, is something you need to define yourself through your imagination, guided by the hints you get from the monster (sounds, glimpses etc.). According to Cohen, a monster is always hidden and we only get to see fragments of it, and the damages caused by it. Neither Lily nor Sookie are “open” monsters, as for instance vampires or werewolves, but their monstrosity is hidden. The glimpses we get from Lily, is the way she behaves around people. She is brusque, almost rude in her relations with other people. Her scars are also a glimpse of her outer monstrosity, although she always hides them from view. She also refrains from sunbathing, as this makes her scars stand out. Marshall Sedaka asks her about her scars, which he has felt through her gi, and she is very uncomfortable telling him how she got them. The glimpses from Sookie, on the other hand, are different depending on who is watching. Around people, she hides her ability, and what they see is her effort to not use it. Around vampires, on the other hand, she is open. The vampire society has another definition of normality, where Sookie fits in better. In the supernatural society, Sookie is “out,” but not in the human society. During the series, she grooms/cleans less and less often, which might be due to the fact that she gets more and more involved in the supernatural society. Among supes she has nothing to clean away. Later in the series, one vampire asks her about her “disability,” and a disability is not something monstrous, as Picart well describes it: “Disability may well be something that upsets the natural order, but disability is not monstrosity because it has a place in civil or canon law…” (Picart 56). That is, when Sookie is in a surrounding where her ability is seen as a disability, she ceases to be monstrous and her need to clean/groom lessens.
Conclusion
The aim of this essay is to demonstrate how Lily and Sookie clean and groom to get rid of their inner monstrosities, by examining the instances of cleaning and grooming against the backdrop of teratology. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and his seven theses have helped define the inner and outer monstrosities of the protagonists, and I have structured the essay based on these theses.

Firstly I have, against the normality depicted in Bon Temps and Shakespeare, showed that Lily and Sookie are other than normal. Secondly, I have established that what makes them other makes them monstrous, and lastly I have examined how they use cleaning and grooming to get rid of this monstrosity.

Cohen defines in his theses what a monster is, and although not everything is applicable to Lily and/or Sookie, most of it is, and this defines their monstrosities, both inner and outer, in a clear way. Superficially, Sookie can be seen as monstrous because she is a telepath, but by applying Cohen’s theses it becomes clear that she is monstrous in other ways as well (socially, sexually etc.), and the same goes for Lily. She could be seen as merely “different” but following Cohen’s reasoning, her monstrosities become clear. Mary Douglas claims that normality and monstrosity are binary, that one cannot exist without another, but also that the reaction to monstrosity is an urge to get rid of it. Her theory on purity and danger also shows how cleanliness is a way of handling monstrosity, both inner and outer. Julia Kristeva sees monstrosity as abject, something we disown, which clearly explains why Lily and Sookie actively try to get rid of their monstrosities. There is a difference, however, in how they handle their inner or outer monstrosity. To both Lily and Sookie, it seems more important to hide their inner monstrosity. Although Sookie hides her bite marks, she does allow Bill to bite her, and the same goes for Lily; although she normally hides her scars, she does show them to Marshall Sedaka.

Lily and Sookie are definitely seen as different in their respective society, but they are also different from each other. Superficially, they have a lot in common: American, white, women, about the same age, attractive, heterosexual, hardworking, low educated etc. There are some important differences between them though. One important difference between Lily and Sookie is that Lily is keeping the reason for her monstrosity a secret. People in Bon Temps, on the other hand, seem to know about Sookie being a telepath, although some may not believe it. This makes it more difficult for Sookie to hide her monstrosity and at the same time
less necessary. Being a Stackhouse, Sookie has her place in Bon Temps, although it might not be the place she would have wished for. Belongs in Bon Temps. Lily on the other hand tries to find her place in Shakespeare, where she has lived for four years only. This makes the need to fit in more urgent. She has no given place though family. What also makes Lily different from Sookie is that Lily was normal before she was raped. Thus, Lily knows what it is to be normal, but she feels that the assault has fundamentally changed her: “Though my face hasn’t changed, my mind has.” (Landlord, 2) Lily’s monstrosity is achieved, so to speak, while Sookie’s is something she was born with. Despite all these differences, they use the same strategy to hide their monstrosity; they clean and groom. By having a neat home, by looking good and having a tidy “charisma” they both fly beneath the radar; they hide their monstrosity.
Sources


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