"Heretofore Considered Legendary": The Harpy of 1784 and Meanings of Monstrosity in Eighteenth-Century France

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“Heretofore Considered Legendary”

The Harpy of 1784 and Meanings of Monstrosity in Eighteenth-Century France

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelors of Arts in French from The College of William and Mary

by

Philippe Langellier Bellevue Halbert

Accepted for ________________________________
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

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Williamsburg, Virginia

28 April, 2011
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To all my friends and little monsters, merci bien for colloquium fun, indulging random comments and Facebook updates related to monsters, non-French translations, putting up with piles of books taking over my car and room, and for being awesome.
Author’s Note

A large part of the material of this thesis is drawn from French primary and secondary sources in the collections of French libraries, including the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and the Bibliothèque municipale de Versailles, as well as that of the Réunion des musées nationaux at the musée du Louvre and the Etablissement public du musée et du domaine national de Versailles. In order to reach a wider audience, I chose to present this study in English. However, I felt that the inclusion of original primary source citations in French was a necessary component to my study. I have included my own translations of direct quotes from French language texts in the footnotes and transcribed period French as accurately as possible. Exceptions include my having replaced “f” with “s” and “o” with “a,” as well as inserting accents where necessary. Historic spellings found in the respective sources have been retained, however, and are indicated by [sic].

Certain abbreviations have been used in footnotes and in identifying images in the appendix. With respect to the images, nearly all cited images are included in the appendix. The abbreviations are as follow:

- BNE: Biblioteca Nacional de España
- BNF: Bibliothèque nationale de France
- BMV: Bibliothèque municipale de Versailles
- LOC: Library of Congress
- RMN: Réunion des musées nationaux
Introduction

“Bon public qui d’un œil surpris
Contemple ce monstre en peinture,
Regarde-toi: d’après nature
C’est ton portrait fait à Paris.”

[“Good public who with a surprised eye
Contemplates this monster in painting
Look at yourself: done from life
It is your portrait done in Paris.”]¹

Paris, October 1784: From taverns and cafés to polite salons, the capital is abuzz with a singular, albeit curious, piece of news related to natural history. A report from Madrid of a fantastic monster discovered and netted by Spanish hunters along the banks of a wild, exotic lake in South America has taken Paris by storm. Even Versailles is consumed by reports that such beasts, referred to as harpies, “heretofore considered legendary,” could still exist in a remote corner of the New World.² Along with printed accounts in journals and in newspapers, numerous engraved and etched images of these fantastically hybrid monsters are printed and sold in France and abroad. As they allegedly lay waste to the surrounding countryside and terrorize the local population, publications accentuate their insatiable, monstrous appetites that seem to know no bounds as they reportedly consume with impunity scores of oxen, sheep, and pigs.

Interest in the harpies extended beyond such anecdotes recounted in journals and printed representations. Despite their fearsome appearance, they were molded, shaped, and appropriated by intellectual discourse, fashionable dress, decorations, and even on-stage at the theatre. Once news spread of the arrival of a male specimen at Cadiz, the scientific world also expressed

² “[...] regardées jusqu’ici comme un animal fabuleux.” Affiches, annonces et avis divers ou Journal général de France no. 127 (Paris: 1784), p. 594. Although not exactly analogous to the beast of classical mythology, as will later be discussed, these monsters were referred to as harpies in a majority of period documents and images. I have kept this period convention; however I also call this creature the monstre unique or Lake Fagua Monster, as do several prints, as well as the Monstre du Chilly, as seen in the aforementioned contemporary poem.
interest in the harpy and the hope to bring it a mate for closer scientific study. Whether or not one truly believed in the existence of these seemingly legendary harpies, the symbolic and allegorical potential of the Lake Fagua Monster was exploited by journalists and other observers as the rest of the public remained mesmerized. Political events of the decade then made use of these ambiguous creatures, playing on their allegorical potency in part derived from classical mythology to caricature destructive ministers and queens. As stated by art historian Eva Baer, conceptions of monsters like the harpies did not develop in a vacuum. Inspiring and subsequently shaped by visual culture such as engravings and etchings, artists, craftsmen, fashion merchants, playwrights, naturalists, and social critics used the harpy to speak to numerous concerns and issues.

France in the early modern period was and is still known as a country that had given rise to enlightened philosophers, scientific revolutions, and the roots of contemporary political structures. Belief in monsters would ostensibly seem at odds with modernism. As early as the seventeenth century, the idea that fantastic and terrible monsters existed only in fantasy and folly was preached by thinkers such as René Descartes, who used reason to rationalize them and relegate them to the world of dreams. Similarly, an early seventeenth-century engraving by Strasbourg printer Matthäus Greuter entitled *Le Médecin guarissant [sic] Phantasie [sic]*, *purgeant aussi par drogues la folie* satirizes the belief in all things fantastic. As a physician physically expels or purges small monsters, demons, and fools from his patient with a dose of *sagesse* or wisdom, his assistant steadies another patient into an oven which literally burns or

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cooks strange beasts and other “follies” out of him.  

Eighteenth-century texts such as the *Dictionnaire littéraire* were quick to declare the irrelevance of fantastic monsters and marvels to the people of Enlightenment-era France, stating that “Quelque chose que l’on dise, le merveilleux n’est point fait pour nous[…]”6 The exact same phrasing would be incorporated by Denis Diderot in a 1778 edition of the *Encyclopédie*.7

Similarly, in reference to an incident at Gonesse, where a hydrogen balloon, the *Globe*, was attacked by peasants who mistook it for a monster in August of 1783, the *Correspondence secrète* scoffed at the irony of a nation that prided itself on producing some of the greatest thinkers of the age and yet continued to demonstrate irrational fear of and even hysteria at reports of supernatural beings and mythical creatures: “Remarquez que tous ces jolis contes se faisaient à quatre lieus [sic] de cette capitale, si célèbre par tant de philosophes fameux, si zélés, nous disent-ils, à propager l’immensité de leurs lumières.”8 This discourse suggests that the dual fear and attraction of monsters persisted in the face of enlightened discourse and philosophy.

Despite a renewed need and respect for reason in the eighteenth century, the power of the irrational and unexplainable remained strong. The *Convulsionnaires* of Saint-Médard in the 1720s and 1730s, reports of the monstrous beast that terrorized the Gévaudan province in the 1760s, Anton Mesmer’s animal magnetism, and the séances of Italian charlatan Giuseppe Balsamo, better known as the comte de Cagliostro, in the 1780s all demonstrate the allure of and contemporary interest in the unusual, mysterious, or seemingly irrational. The astonishment at

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5 [*The Physician curing Fantasy and Purging Folly with Drug*], circa 1600-1620, Matthäus Greuter, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, collection Hennin, inv. 1877.
8 [“Note that all of these pretty stories were being told four leagues from this capital city [Paris], so famous for its many philosophers, so zealous…to declare the greatness of their enlightenment.”] *Correspondence secrète, politique et littéraire*, Tome XV (London: John Adamson, 1788), p. 94.
and importance attributed to reports and descriptions of harpies in 1784 suggests that an interest in monsters did not disappear in the face of the secular attitudes and scientific introspection that rocked prerevolutionary France.

Real or not, monsters real and imagined played important and highly visible roles in French society as they both incited and maintained cultural and national interest through a combination of functions and meanings derived from emotional terror, seductive allure, and commercial profit. Some, such as the Beast of Gévaudan, actually existed. Hypothesized to have been everything from a wolf or hyena hybrid to a human murderer or even a werewolf, this monstrous creature attacked, mutilated, and killed over one hundred peasants in south-central France from 1764 to 1767. “Dragons” and “chimeras” constructed from dried fish and ray parts by charlatans, along with formidable giants, curious dwarves, and other anomalies, were a standard attraction at fairs and in private curiosity cabinets as well as an important part of scientific discussions and the development of modern medicine. Other monsters existed only on paper, giving travel narratives, plays, and other literary works a sense of mystery and wonder that captivated audiences across society.

These varying conceptions of monstrosity give context to the ways in which enlightened, secular discourse actually intertwined with that of the superstitious. The harpies of 1784 did not materialize accidentally; they were in effect part of a larger pantheon of eighteenth-century monsters. The *Monstre du Chilly* was no different in the excitement and sensation that its image and description aroused beginning in October of 1784. The *harpies* in particular reveal the

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contradictions of the Age of Reason, addressing the superposition of the medieval and Renaissance wondrous and the rational sensibility of the Enlightenment as reports of such monstrous, hybrid beasts could still provoke both irrational fear and fantasy as late as the turn of the nineteenth century.

The historiography of monsters and monstrosities in early modern Europe has begun to be explored by anthropologists, historians, and other specialists in the last few decades. Studies of changing conceptions of monstrosity, fear, and the irrational in early modern Italy, Spain, and the British Isles have been undertaken by such historians as Zakiya Hanafi, Suzanne Magnanini, and David Castillo. These scholars look at what they define as wonders and curiosities, to include “monsters,” from a largely scientific perspective, with Hanafi going so far as to declare the monster a necessity in order “to tell ourselves what we are not” or what is otherwise undesirable. Such a reading of monstrosity is particularly effective in exploring the political uses of the harpies in late eighteenth-century France.

As the eighteenth century was a period of renewed interest in nature, historians such as Keith Thomas have worked to uncover early modern perceptions of how exactly man, animals, and even monsters fit into the natural world, a universe that could seem disorderly and require domestication or taming. Although medievalist Lorraine Daston and early modern historian Katharine Park identify the Enlightenment in Europe as a turning-point in attitudes towards monstrosities, arguing that they were relegated to popular culture and ceased to be considered

11 Hanafi, p. 218.
worthy of serious intellectual pursuit, both textual and iconographic sources attest to the wide variety and broad diffusion of “monsters” in eighteenth-century France.  

With regards to monsters in the French tradition, Julia Douthwaite and Anne C. Vila have undertaken literary studies exploring issues of monstrosity in the works of the marquis de Sade. Antoine de Baecque and Joan Landes have discussed the ways in which monstrosity took on political proportions during the French Revolution in the guise of multi-headed hydras and a hybrid monster called Iscariot. Annie Duprat especially has contributed to the study of representations of political power and their use of monstrous metaphors. The scientific work of sixteenth-century physician Ambroise Paré and the development of naturalist Etienne Saint-Hillaire’s theory of teratology, the study of monsters, in the early nineteenth century have been a constant source of study and introspection. The presence of monsters in medical treatises and in the discourse of philosophers such as Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond d’Alembert has likewise been examined by historians including Marie-Hélène Huet. Especially with respect to d’Alembert, Saint-Hillaire and naturalists such as Carl Linnaeus and the comte de Buffon, greater attention has been given to such technically-detailed scientists. This has often produced a two-dimensional view of the Enlightenment as a period that simply did away with mythical monsters and saw the triumph of classifying reason over the ambiguous supernatural.

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The value and potency of monsters and monstrous metaphors, inherited from the medieval cultural imaginary of gargoyles and demons, was too great to be simply dismissed or done away with completely, and it manifested itself through diverse media and materials. I intend to demonstrate that the popularity of different artistic as well as literary representations of the harpies speaks to a broad collection of contemporary attitudes towards nature, science, political power, personal reputation and virtue. As the concept of the monster was and remains anything but static, monstrosity could take varied forms and embody a variety of psychological and material meanings. Monsters did more than rouse fears or sensations of fascination and humor. Although this definition of the monstrous certainly applied to the harpies, these fantastic creatures also triggered questions over the classification of species and sexual ambiguity through their hybrid, often androgynous composition. In addition, the disorder and devastation that they wreaked upon the landscape dovetailed with current questions about political legitimacy and stewardship, specifically that of the monarchy, in the late eighteenth century.

Chapter one will present the prints that inspired such phenomena, exploring the variety of images that existed and explaining their cultural value within the context of eighteenth-century French and wider European society. Chapter two will delve into the material world of the harpies and how popular culture refashioned them into aestheticized, sociable objects of consumption. Chapter three will place these monsters in the context of contemporary scientific debate surrounding hybridity and crossbreeding. Finally, chapter four will survey the harpies’ role in political satire of the end of the Ancien régime and during the French Revolution as their allegorical value was exploited and appropriated by social critics and revolutionaries to depict Marie-Antoinette and Charles-Alexandre de Calonne, minister of finance.
Visualizing the *Monstre du Chilly*

“Voici les tristes lieux que le monstre ravage.”\(^{18}\)

Monsters of all kinds, whether fantastic beasts or human medical anomalies, actually found new ways to assert themselves in the eighteenth century as intellectuals, philosophers, scientists, and others theorized on the instructive potential of nature and the natural world. Such distinguishing elements of the intellectual atmosphere and discourse of the period explain the excitement over creatures like the heteroclite, epicene *harpies* that defied taxonomical classification and “undermine[d] the certainty of language and science”\(^{19}\) as late as the 1780s. The overstated, unemotional rationalism that for many historians has come to characterize the Age of Reason is quickly debunked in light of this monstrous tradition.

It is perhaps because of this interpretation of the Enlightenment that these monsters have been largely neglected, often dismissed as simple journalist *canard* for gullible readers and having little to do with larger cultural or intellectual issues. For example, two harpy prints included in the exhibition catalogue for *French Caricature and the French Revolution, 1789-1799* at the Grunwald Center for Graphic Arts in 1989 are described as “nothing more than an obvious hoax intended to attract attention to the newspaper.”\(^{20}\) Antoine du Baecque, Jill Casid, Robert Darnton, Annie Duprat, and Simon Schama are among the historians and scholars who have made note of the existence of monsters in the French press of the 1780s and 1790s, alluding to them as nothing more than thinly veiled criticism of Marie-Antoinette by her jealous brother-

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\(^{18}\) [“Here are the miserable places that the monster devastates”]. Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Dardanus, tragédie mise en musique*, Act IV, scene 4 (Paris: La Veuve Boivin 1739), p. 132.


in-law, the comte de Provence. It seems important nevertheless to explain the symbolic power of these monsters as their images and descriptions were manufactured, sold, and interpreted on a wide scale.

The very variety of harpy prints has caused confusion among scholars, as seen in the 2009 exhibition catalogue of Beautés monstres: Curiosités, prodigies et phénomènes at the musée des Beaux-Arts in Nancy; this record incorrectly identifies two prints and does not take into account the progression of physiological differences in representations of the monster. This chapter will therefore explore the ways in which the image of the harpy was shaped by contemporary visual culture, specifically by printed and etched representations sold in Paris and abroad. Through an analysis of their physiological variety and supposed geographic origins, contemporary attitudes towards the fantastic and the unknown will be considered as the harpies took the printed world by storm less than a decade before the French Revolution.

The (Un)Reality of the Monster

Reports of “unique” and “amphibious” harpies made their first mark on French society in prints and periodicals. The first publication in French that dealt with the creature appears to

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22 The catalogue misidentifies two prints, labeling them as part of the first known French language pamphlet describing the monster, the Description historique d'un monstre symbolique. Generally agreed to have been anonymously authored or at least sponsored by the comte de Provence in 1784 and sold by Basset in Paris, this pamphlet is exceedingly rare. One of the prints in the catalogue, however, actually identifies the libraire, or bookseller, who carried it whereas the other is anonymous, excluding the possibility that they were part of the Description historique.

23 The bulk of these illustrations, which include printed engravings and etchings, are in the collection of prints and photographs of the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris. They are contained in the seventh volume of a special holding of visual culture spanning the period of 1770 to 1870 (collection du baron Carl de Vinck: Un siècle
have been a twenty-nine page pamphlet entitled *Description historique d’un monstre symbolique.* Sold in Paris by Basset, this text reported that the monster had been discovered in the vicinity of a lake known as Fagua, and credited the viceroy of New Mexico, Francisco Xaveiro de Meunrios, comte de Barcelone with its capture. Of the over one dozen French and Francophone images inspired by this report that I have located, those that include descriptive captions generally agree on the main details of its size, habits, etc. The following text that accompanies an etching of a male harpy sold by Parisian libraire Bevallet is representative of the various captions:

“Monstre qui a été pris dans le lac de Fagua, au Royaume de Santa Fé, Province du Chili au Pérou, dans l’Amérique méridionale, en enlevant un bœuf. Ce monstre a 12 pieds de long a la face de l’homme, des cornes de Taureau, des oreilles d’Ane, la gueule et la crinière d’un Lion, deux pattes assez courtes, deux queues dont l’une avec un dard pour tuer et l’autre pour emporter la proie ; il a 2 ailes de chauve-souris et son corps est couvert d’écailles ; il mange par jour un bœuf et trois ou quatre cochons. On prend de grandes précautions pour le conduire vivant au Roi d’Espagne.”

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24 Copies of the *Description historique d’un monstre symbolique* were asserted to be lost by 1930, although two copies are currently conserved at the Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal in Paris and one at the Beinecke Special Collections Library at Yale University. See the *Inventaire du fonds français: Graveurs du dix-huitième siècle*, Vol. VII, Ed. Marcel Roux (Paris: 1930), p. 269. The original pamphlet included an illustration of the male harpy in profile and a three-quarter length image of the female. See J.M. Quérard, “Louis XVIII,” *La France littéraire, ou dictionnaire bibliographique des savants*, tome V (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1833) p. 368. A lengthy description that derives from this pamphlet can be found in no. 40 of the *Mercure de France*, published by Pancoucke on 2 October 1784 and dedicated to Louis XVI.  

25 [“Monster taken from Lake Fagua, in the Kingdom of Santa Fe, Province of Chili in Peru in South America, taking a bull. This monster is 12 feet long with the face of a man, the horns of a Bull, the ears of an Ass, the mouth and mane of a Lion, two short legs, two tails of which one has a dart to kill and the other to remove its prey; it has two batwings and its body is covered in scales; it eats a bull and three or four pigs per day. Great precautions are being taken to bring it to the King of Spain alive.”]
The image sold by Bevallet sets the fantastically hybrid Lake Fagua Monster against a rather bleak, empty landscape. The monstrous harpy represented in his print is a hybrid creature, combining a human face with the horns of a bull, a lion’s mane, the ears of a donkey, bat wings, two tails, and fearsome, raptor-like talons with three claws each in addition to sort of a spur; in similar fashion, it blends mammalian fur with reptilian scales. Rather than enriching its rather sterile environment, Bevallet’s beast is a monstrous killer, plunging its darted tail into the belly of a cow gripped in the second tail used to constrict and asphyxiate. It literally snatches the writhing cow, living up to the name harpy applied to it. Although the monster is a fearsome killer, this and the image of one sold by Devere reveal a level of ornamentation, including decorative crescent- or oval-shaped figures on its wings and scaly rings around its tails that contrast with the defined scales.

Multiple Parisian publishers began printing similar images and descriptions of the Peruvian monster. Brothers Jean and Pierre Le Campion printed and sold at least three prints of the bearded male specimen. Two of these images depict the harpy, referred to as the *monstre unique* or Lake Fagua Monster, in standard profile like Bevallet’s. The third, printed under **Fé**, 1784, anonymous, chez Bevallet à Paris, BNF, coll. de Vinck, inv. 1151. I was unable to find any exact details on this engraver, but a Bevallet cited in an 1816 almanac is described as a *marchand de curiosités* (merchant of wonders) working in rue du Petit-Pont in Paris. *Almanach de 25,000 adresses de Paris, pour l’année 1816* (Paris: Pancoucke, 1816), p. 97. From the Latin verb *harpeia*, to snatch, rob, or spoil, in reference to the classical harpies from Greek and Roman mythology. These foul-smelling, terrible beings had been sent by Jupiter to torment a prideful king by contaminating and despoiling his food. See Adam Mclean, “The Harpies,” *The Triple Goddess: An Exploration of the Archetypal Female* (Grand Rapids: Phanes Press, 1989), p.44.

26 Descriptions de ce Monstre unique, 1784, chez Devere à Paris, BNF, coll. Hennin, inv. 10008.
27 Their works are sold alternately by “Les Campion frères” and “Noipmacel scps,” an anagram and abbreviation for “Le Campion sculpsit.” Of Norman origins, the Le Campion brothers appear to have been rather prolific engravers in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, especially of views and monuments of the capital and scenes of the Revolution; their prints detail their having operated in the rue Saint-Jacques in Paris at the sign of the Ville de Rouen.
28 Description de ce monstre unique, 1784, anonymous, chez les Campions frères à Paris, BNF, coll. Hennin, inv. 10009.
the name “Noipmacel” and titled *Monstre Vivant*, is a variation of Bevallet’s bearded, hybridic harpy with the addition of new aquatic and androgynous features including female breasts, a fin, and a more elongated, serpentine body sometimes described like a seal in contemporary periodicals. Unlike the other prints, the Noipmacel monster set the standard for a variation of the more bird-like monsters, illustrating a monster that not only showcased a deadly double-tail, frightening wings, and horns, but long, extended front paws or flippers, each equipped with five sharp claws.

Although it was the male monster that had been captured by Meunrios, illustrations of its mate soon appeared for sale, echoing the pseudo-scientific desire expressed in similar prints to “perpetuate the race” in Europe. In these images, the lion’s mane is replaced by loose, flowing hair that is more evocative of the loose morals of a fallen woman than of a beast. To further this iconographic reference, the female harpies all reveal uncovered female breasts that probably resonated with the public, given the appeal and censure of sexual scandal in fashionable literature and the booming trade in pornographic texts and engravings, especially those in relation to Marie-Antoinette to be discussed in Chapter four. A print sold by Mixelle in Paris in 1784 would have surely caught public attention. Unlike the representations of the bearded male harpy commonly shown in profile, Mixelle’s monster confronts the viewer directly.

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30 *Monstre trouvé dans le Lac de Fagua, dans la province du Chili qui dépend du Pérou, au royaume de S.a Fé*, 1784, anonymous, chez les Campion frères à Paris, BNF, coll. de Vinck, inv. 1155.
31 *Harpie monstre vivant qui a été trouvé et pris sur les bords du lac de Fagua, 1784*, anonymous, Noipmacel scps (Le Campion), BNF, coll. de Vinck, inv. 1153.
32 This desire will be further explored in Chapter two.
33 Women generally wore some form of cap, hat, or other head covering, for modesty’s sake, when the hair was not dressed.
34 *Harpie femelle, monstre amphibie*, 1784, anonymous, chez Mixelle à Paris, BNF, coll. Hennin, inv. 10007. Little documentation survives about Mixelle, who appears to have flourished in the 1780s and worked in the rue de Rohan in Paris. His most important work appears to have been the plates for the *Histoire de la Grèce*, written by Sylvain Maréchal and published between 1787 and 1789. See J.M. Quérard, *La France littéraire*, tome VI (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1834), p. 164. It appears that Mixelle did sell a print of a male harpy; one was in the collection of Parisian antiquarian Jacques Cambry as late as 1907. See *L’Intérimienne des chercheurs et curieux*, vol. XXXI (Paris: 1907), p. 683.
combining a sense of horror as it bares its sharp teeth with one of seduction with its exposed breasts, tousled hair, and ornamental tail showcasing decorative rings. Mixelle’s harpy also presents a new form for the monster, replacing the birdlike legs shown by Bevallet with a longer, more serpentine body, clawed, mammalian front paws, and fishlike fins like Noipmacel.

The feminine allure of Mixelle’s imagery, however, would have been quickly trumped by an anonymous print of a far less appealing female harpy crushing a snake between her teeth. Although her heaving bust confirms her feminine nature, these are covered in hair that also extends along her back and in between her tails. This hideous monster also sports a moustache, goatee, and thick eyebrows. Of note is her serpentine tail, used to entice or seduce her prey; unlike the darted tail, this appendage showcases apparent rings that distinguish themselves from the scales covering the rest of her back half. Although the harpy could feign ostensibly feminine beauty and attraction, at its core was hideousness, malice, and sheer vulgarity.

This monstrous iconography found a market outside of France, where it appears that the Noipmacel version had the most success. Several prints demonstrate the power that such imagery had even beyond the borders of Louis XVI’s kingdom. In Bern, the Swiss printer Marquart Wocher produced his own representation of the harpy in 1788, a variation of the specimen illustrated by Noipmacel. According to the text accompanying the image, the Harpie, Monstre Amphibie et Vivant “sortait pendant la nuit de son lac pour dévorer les cochons, les vaches, et même les taureaux…Les habitants des bords de ce lac dissent [sic] avoir aperçu la

35 Harpie femelle, 1784, anonymous, Réunion des musées nationaux, musée Carnavalet, inv. G. 36005
femelle et le Viceroi [sic] a donné des ordres pour la prendre afin d’en perpétuer la race en Europe.”

The 1786 edition of the *Almanach du messager boiteux*, the French language edition of a Swiss almanac printed annually in Vevey, included an image of two harpies based on the prints by Bevallet and Noipmacel. The Bavarian Jean-Martin Will’s harpy, or *monstre amphibie*, printed in Augsburg, combined the novelty of the monster with an element of obvious violence as it reworked the Noipmacel prototype. Like Bevallet’s monster, the Augsburg harpy is shown in the act of an attack, although one much more graphic. As its tails clutch a writhing pig, drained of its blood by the sharp, darted tail, Will’s amphibious monster claws at an ox as it sinks its jaws into a sheep. A note reveals that the accompanying German text is a translation of the original French caption.

The variety of these prints is at the very least indicative of the interest that reports of a mythical creature could inspire in late eighteenth-century France. As late as 1829, printed reports of the same creature were still being sold by printer Charles Boulay. Printed in both French and in German, he took the Noipmacel print as his inspiration for the harpy, this time netted at a lake called Fagna. His prints give further scale to the beast as they include human

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36 *Harpy, Amphibious and Living Monster* [*“emerged during the night to devour the swine, cows and even bulls…the inhabitants of the area around the lake claim to have seen the female and the Viceroy has given the orders to take her in order to perpetuate the species in Europe.”*], 1784, anonymous, chez Marquart Wocher, BNF, coll. de Vinck, inv. 1151. Born between 1758 and 1760, Wocher was of Swabian origin and raised in Berne, where he worked until relocated to Basel. He died around 1830. See Francois Bulliot, *Dictionnaire des monogrammes*, vol. II (Munch: J.G. Cotta, 1833), p. 276.


figures in addition to animals. A pair of engravings printed by Jean-Pierre Clerc between 1831 and 1842 is based on the work of Boulay. These images depict a male and female harpy, the former clawing at a steer as the latter prepares to devour a seal. Notable is the female’s unique horn; her mate retains the double horns seen in the 1784 prints. In light of the continuity of such images into the nineteenth century, reports of the harpie were not limited to the years around 1784. The images produced in the earlier period, however, show a multiplicity of artistic interpretations that merit attention and indicate the appeal of such hybrid, monstrous entities.

The Cultural Origins of a South American Horror

The cultural framework of the Chilean harpy is necessary to understand the historic context of these prints and descriptions. These monsters carried multiple meanings derived from classical Antiquity in addition to fantastic tales and stories recounted in travel narratives. In light of this symbolic heritage, their fearsome appearance and the devastation that they wreaked upon the landscape took on various meanings and themes as these monsters were both depicted and described in French media of the 1780s.

Traditionally linked to the mythology of Greek and Roman Antiquity, harpies first figured as winged female spirits of wind and storms. Ancient iconography including architectural reliefs and ceramics soon transformed them into hybrid creatures with the bodies of vulture-like raptors and human female heads. Authors such as Hesiod, Homer, and Ovid recorded the names of several harpies, including Podarge or Celeano (“Blackness”), Aello

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39 Harpie male, 1829, RMN, musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerrané, inv. 986.81.44 D.
40 Harpie femelle, 1829, RMN, musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerrané, inv. 986.69.2 D.
(“Howler”), and Ocypete (“Swift” or “Rapid”). They were depicted as horribly ugly and smelled of filth, polluting anything that they touched.

Harpies figure most prominently in the story of the king of Thrace, Phineas, who possessed the power of prophecy. Angered by the indiscretion shown by Phineas in his revelations, Jupiter blinded the mortal king and banished him to a remote island where the only source of food was an elaborate banquet. Whenever Phineas tried make his way to the table, however, a band of vicious harpy sisters was dispatched to continually defile the food and drink until the Boreads, the sons of the north wind, succeeded in driving them off. Such imagery would have rung a bell with both eighteenth-century French elites and others with exposure to classical studies and depictions of the classical world in popular culture such as the theatre and other literature. A 1733 engraving by Bernard Picart, a French engraver who worked in Amsterdam, showcases the deliverance of Phineas. The devastation of the landscape and the voracious appetite evoked by prints of the Lake Fagua Monster thus suggest a source of inspiration rooted in classical Antiquity. As this story raises questions about proper forms of royal stewardship and the authority of the monarchy, it opened itself to important political ramifications that will be discussed in Chapter four.

The South American setting of the 1784 harpie is no less symptomatic of contemporary interests and gives another meaning to these monsters as they would have been understood in France. The reality of this monster seemed to be supported by examples of monsters and hybridity in travel narratives and histories of exotic and foreign lands, especially the New World.

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42 Bernard Picart, Phinée délivré des Harpyes [sic] par Calaïs & Zethes (Phineas, delivered from the Harpies by Calais and Zethes), Le Temple des Muses où sont représentés les evenemens les plus remarquables de l’antiquité fabuleuse (Amsterdam: Zacharias Chatelain, 1733).
as well as utopian societies. These abound in reports and descriptions of fantastic beasts and strange occurrences, and the title of the first printed pamphlet describing the harpy, the *Description historique d’un Monstre symbolique*, took the form of a narrative recounted to a Parisian reader by his merchant friend at work in South America. As explained by David Fausett, French thinkers and authors of the eighteenth century cultivated a sense of “otherness” with respect to the Americas and “needed to define it as exotic” in order to give meaning and validation to European civilization. This phenomenon fostered the existence and appeal of a monster as fantastic and *unique* as that reported to exist along the banks of Lake Fagua in the “Kingdom of Santa Fé.”

Although this study has thus far concentrated on the production of harpy prints in France, few historians have delved into the origins of this monster before it attracted an avid French readership. It appears that the first image of the *Monstre du Chilly* was not French in origin, but rather produced in either Chile or Spain in early 1784. An iconographic prototype exists in the form of a print in the collection of the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid that depicts a similar monster. It appears to be based on a colonial ink drawing now conserved at the Archivo General de la Nación in Bogotá that depicts a fearsome, scaly creature with long, flowing hair, wings, donkey ears, cow horns, and what appears to be a human face.

The caption that accompanies the Spanish engraving gives further context to the French texts and explains where prints like those sold by Bevallet and the Le Campions derived their inspiration. It indicates that the monster was captured near Lake Tagua; the Lake Fagua referred

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43 The full title is *Description d’un Monstre symbolique…envoyée par un négociant du pays à un Parisien son ami.*
45 The existence of this print has, to my knowledge, never been addressed by historians of the prerevolutionary and revolutionary periods of France, who tend to attribute the entire harpy phenomenon to the comte de Provence.
46 *Mostruo [sic] Apareció [sic] en la Laguna de tagua [sic], 1784, Archivo General de la Nación.*
to in Francophone prints is obviously a corruption of the original Chilean lagoon. A transcription is as follows:

“Este horrible monstruo apareció a principio de este año 1784 en la laguna de Tagua…cual hacía muchísimo daño, comiendo cuanto animal iba a beber a dicha laguna, hasta que con mucho silencio le esperaron 100 hombres con bocas de fuego, y le cogieron vivo… la cola mucho mayor que el cuerpo… la melena de la cabeza llega hasta el suelo de modo que te enreda los pies… la boca es del ancho de la cara, las astas son… muy bien torneadas.”

Of course, depictions of strange creatures, including those that could be likened to harpies, had been printed in Europe. In his 1646 Historica relacion de reyno de Chile, the Chilean Jesuit Alonso de Ovalle included an anecdote and an accompanying illustration of an idol of such a creature. In a plate illustrating the defeat of an indigenous tribe by a heavenly host, represented astride a charging steed and leading a troop of soldiers, the natives are pushed into a body of water and raise their arms and eyes towards the idol. Similar in appearance to the monstre unique, Ovalle recorded that this idol represented “una beília fiera llena de hadas retorcidas la cabeza, dando espantosos bramidos, y lainencables vozes.”

Its human head is crowned with seven horns and it has donkey-like ears. The rest of its body combines reptilian and bird-like characteristics, including a slithering tail and bird legs and plumage. Although the beasts represented in French engravings of the 1780s are always depicted with two tails, Ovalle’s idol illustrates a similar coiled tail. To add to the dramatic

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47 [“This horrible monster appeared at the beginning of 1784 in Lake Tagua…it did much damage, eating so many animals and going to drink from said lake, until with much silence 100 men waited for it with fire and they took it alive…the tail is much greater than the body…its mane falls to the ground by way that tangles your feet…the mouth is of the width of the face, the horns are… very well shaped.”] Monstro aparecido en la Laguna de Tagua, 1784, anonymous, Biblioteca Nacional de España, inv. 14807.
48 [a fierce beast full of convoluted antlers on its head, giving horrifying groans and dreadful sounds.] Alonso de Ovalle, Historica relacion de reyno de Chile (Rome, 1646), p. 303.
effect of the image, hail falls from the sky and lava flows from a volcano, echoing the image of
devastation done to the landscape by the harpies in the 1784 prints.

That a seventeenth-century Chilean author made note of a creature similar to the harpy
depicted in both Spanish and French prints of the 1780s is important for exploring the
significance of the beast’s South American origins within the cultural imaginary of
Enlightenment-era France. Despite scientific progress and the intellectual headway made in the
eighteenth century, French attitudes towards the New World and the monstrous often retain the
sensationalism of earlier voyagers and popular legends and lore of cannibals, giants, and
monsters. Eighteenth-century cartographers, for example, held on to the same sea monsters and
bizarre animals depicted in Renaissance maps. South America proved an especially rich source
for strange and mysterious beasts. Louis Feuillée, a Minim monk sent to the Caribbean and
South America by Louis XIV in 1707, published his *Journal des observations physiques,*
*mathématiques et botaniques* in 1714, two years after his return. In addition to describing local
geography and plant life, Feuillée included a unique account of a one-eyed monster born to a
ewe in Argentina in August of 1708. According to his notes,

“Le monstre... parut à Buenos Aires le 26 du mois d’août. Le contraste de trois ressemblances
qu’il avait avec un enfant, un cheval, et un veau, surprit étrangement tous ceux qui le virent...

Ce monstre avait onze pouces de longueur, il avait sur la tête un poil naissant, & sur le reste du
corps une peau de couleur de chair lisse, marquant que ce fœtus était venu au monde avant son
terme ; il avait un tête d’homme, le dessus du crane était sphérique, à la naissance de la partie
supérieure du front sortait une corne mollasse, qui pendait en bas, et cachait un œil de taureau
bien formé, qui était au milieu du visage, où nous avons le nez, et se terminait un peu au-dessus de la lèvre supérieure.”

The accompanying illustration by Pierre Giffart depicts a bizarre creature resembling a bovine animal from the neck down. Its humanoid head combines human lips with a cyclopean eye, horn, and pointed ears.

In addition to anomalies such as Feuillée’s cyclopean sheep and “manufactured” monsters exhibited by charlatans, real animals from the New World could also elude even the most seasoned of academicians and naturalists. For example, the kinkajou, an arboreal mammal from the rainforests of Central and South America, was unknown to the comte de Buffon, who surmised it to be an African species upon viewing one at a Parisian fair in the summer of 1766. In similar fashion, Louis-Antoine de Bougainville cultivated a sense of the South American marvelous in his record of experiences with the Patagonian “Giants” in the 1760s, noting that

“Ces hommes sont de belle taille : parmi ceux que nous avons vus, aucun n’était en dessous de cinq pieds cinq à six pouces, ni au-dessus de cinq pieds neuf à dix pouces [...]. Ce qui m’a paru gigantesque en eux, c’est leur énorme carrure, la grosseur de leur tête et l’épaisseur de leurs membres.”

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49 [“The monster…appeared in Buenos Aires on 26 August. The contrast of three resemblances which it had, that of a child, a horse, and a calf, surprised all who saw it…The monster was 11 inches long; its head was covered with fuzz, and the rest of the body with smooth skin, denoting the fact that it was born prematurely; it had a human head, with a spherical cranium, at the top of the forehead was a limp horn which hung and hid a well-formed bull’s eye in the middle of the face at the location of the nose and terminated slightly above the top lip [Here Feuillée notes that the horn is shorter in the drawing to avoid covering the eye]…”] Louis Econche Feuillée, Journal des observations physiques, mathématiques et botaniques, Vol. I. (Paris: Pierre Giffart, 1714), p. 242.

50 Ibid.


52 [“The people are of handsome height; among those that we saw, none were under five fee and five to six thumbs, nor over five feet and nine to ten thumbs…What appeared gigantic to me was the enormous size of their shoulders,
With their fantastic, hybrid appearance and their associated meaning derived from both the mythology of classical Antiquity and the tales of exotic, faraway lands, the harpies depicted in prints sold by Parisian *libraires* in the rue Saint-Jacques and elsewhere inspired excitement and curiosity. The classical aesthetic of the period made them readily available and familiar to a broad French public. The existence of a Spanish prototype, neglected in most studies of the harpy prints, gives further context to the *monstre unique*’s South American habitat which gave it additional appeal as stories and accounts from abroad continued to regale French audiences. Although this period was hailed as an Age of Reason, the variety of images and descriptions of the harpies was not unimportant and would continue to inspire popular culture into the 1780s, as will be seen in Chapter two.

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Monster Mania

“A la harpie tout va se faire.”53

France in the eighteenth century was in the throes of an economic and cultural revolution well before that unleashed with the storming of the Bastille in July of 1789. Developed trade networks, the influx of foreign and colonial products, and technological industry led to a veritable explosion of goods. The phenomenon, referred to as the Consumer Revolution, touched much of Europe and even extended to the colonies as both production and marketing of all sorts of products reached a new high. Paris, the epicenter of fashion, set the scene for wider European consumption patterns as hundreds of foreign travelers made their way to the capital throughout the century. As described by historian Cissie Fairchilds, pre-revolutionary France was not only home to fabulously wealthy nobles who could afford costly luxuries, but also a growing bourgeoisie and lower classes who displayed a more than fleeting desire to equip themselves with the latest quality goods or even imitations.54

Within this context, the hybrid and diverse nature of the monstrous made up an important repertoire of marketable “products” and attractions that continued to be produced and sold or exhibited for a profit through the Ancien régime and into the nineteenth century. Monsters became part of a “larger world of objects,” participating in the development of a broad material culture built around monstrous images and metaphors.55 The existence and circulation of monsters in the decorative arts speak to the ways in which monstrous images were molded and

53 [“In the harpy style, all will be made.”] François-Benoît Hoffmann on the rise of the harpy in popular fashions, printed in December of 1784 and cited in the Biographie universelle, ancienne et moderne, tome LXVI, Eds. Joseph Michaud and Louis-Gabriel Michaud (Paris: 1839), p. 236.
55 Landes, p. 35.
made marketable at the same time that they were coming to play significant roles in contemporary intellectual, political, and scientific discourse. This reduction of the Monstre du Chilly to a sociable, aestheticized, and marketable object, a sort of taming through art, popular fashions, and theatre, speaks to a culture and society interested in collecting, measuring, and giving reason to everyday life while still cultivating a sense of the fantastic or unexplainable. This chapter will explore the ways in which the Lake Fagua Monster’s image was further exploited and related to popular consumerism.

The sensationalism of the monstre unique had made the aforementioned prints and etchings a hot commodity. Like many contemporary prints and pamphlets, these were produced and sold en masse by libraires in the rue Saint-Jacques in central Paris near the Sorbonne, an important thoroughfare and hub of movement and activity. With harpie prints selling for as little as 1 livre and 5 sols in Paris, such images could be widely diffused. In similar fashion, growing literacy rates made stories of the monster’s existence and capture more easily accessible for the public.

For the large number of people unable to read, the illustrations fulfilled a more than supplementary function. Even without purchasing one’s own harpy print, perusing a newspaper or journal in a café, listening to someone read its description aloud, or simply hearing the news hawked in the street could bring the beast to life for interested readers across social classes. This

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56 The Le Campion brothers, for example, operated their business in this street. 57 This was the price of a harpy print sold by “la dame Boutelou” the 21 of October 1784. Affiches, annonces et avis divers ou Journal général de France no. 127 (Paris: 1784), p. 594. An untitled harpy print has been linked to the name of Boutelou. BNF, coll. de Vinck, inv. 1150. An artist whose talents as a painter and restorer of paintings were lauded in a 1782 edition of the Journal de Paris, her shop was located in the rue Saint-Hyacinthe in Paris. The notice does not record whether she created the harpy print in question herself. Journal de Paris no. 150 (Paris: 1782), p. 599. With respects to the pricing of individual prints, the difficulty in establishing reliable rules regarding currency of the Ancien régime is discussed by Daniel Roche. He estimates 360 livres to be an annual wage for a day laborer in the early eighteenth century. Roche, Daniel, La Culture des apparenaces: Une histoire du vêtement XVIIe-XVIIIe siècle (Paris: Fayard, 1989), p. 159.
phenomenon represented a sort of social or communal activity, described in detail by Roger Chartier and Daniel Roche, that would later lead to the development of popular political opinion as the monster’s image was eventually used to critique figures such as the queen or royal ministers.58 The broad social base mobilized by such politicized images will be further discussed in Chapter four. Although distribution figures and rates of diffusion are difficult to establish, the existence of more than fifteen harpy engravings and etchings attests to their popularity, or at the very least that printers thought that they could continue to make a profit from their production.

Taking Paris by Storm

In addition to maintaining a presence in French print and visual culture, monsters found ways to integrate themselves into popular fashions and pastimes of the period. Dress during the reign of Louis XVI, for example, can be described as fantastic as the harpies of Bevallet and the Le Campion brothers. This was a period in which the evolution of clothing did not go unnoticed as fashion journals were published annually. In addition to satisfying human vanity, clothing also reflected historical and political events such as the American War of Independence, industrial advances and technical development like hot air balloons, and influences of the arts and culture, including popular interest in monsters like the Monstre du Chilly.

Near the end of 1784, Parisian marchandes de modes and other fashion merchants began offering creations embellished in a style dubbed à la harpie after the monsters whose image and description had been the success of so many libraires. Fashionable ladies, from bourgeois wives to the queen and her ladies at court, immediately took to adorning dresses and hats with block-

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printed ribbons and trimmings adorned with triangles evoking the claws, fangs, horns, and wings of the Peruvian monster. Playwright François-Benoît Hoffmann noted the rise of the harpy style in a poem published in December of 1784 entitled Les modes:

“A la harpie tout va se faire. Rubans, lévites et bonnets, Mesdames votre goût s’éclaire: Vous abandonnez vos colifichets pour les habits de caractère.”

Hats, especially, seem to have been the most affected by reports of the Lake Fagua Monster. 1780s headgear was almost as outlandish and capricious as the towering hairstyles of the previous decade. Straw and cloth hats, trimmed with feathers, ribbons, and cloth, were all the rage, and often outshone the simple, natural curls upon which they sat. A series of engravings in the Gallerie des modes et des costumes français dessinés d’après nature, an annual periodical of French fashions published in Paris from 1778 to 1787, showcases the ways in which women’s headgear took the harpies as fashionable inspiration. Most chapeaux feature the harpy triangles along the outer edges or brim, as seen in several prints by Nicolas Dupin.

At least one hat suitable for morning dress took them to the extreme as it was entirely covered in rows of the motif in green and blue, only broken by a pair of yellow ribbons and a white ostrich

59 [“A la harpie, everything will be made. Ribbons, lévites [a type of loose-fitting gown inspired by Near-Eastern dress], and bonnets, all will be made à la harpie. Ladies, your taste shines: you abandon your baubles for a dress of character.”] Biographie universelle, ancienne et moderne, p. 236.
60 The publication was a joint collaboration between Jacques Esnauts (also spelled Esnaults) and Michel Rapilly, both born in 1739. See Stella Blum, Eighteenth-Century French Fashion Plates in Full Color (Mineola: Dover Publications,1982).
The same hat can be seen in another print of a promenade dress. Although the harpy motif is more restrained on her hat, the lady’s dress more than makes up for this as it is bordered with a bold harpy-style trim in orange, yellow, and black. This fashion was popular through the 1790s.

There was no point to dressing fashionably if one had nowhere to go and be seen. This was especially true if the “where” in question was someplace fashionable, like the theatre. Paris boasted over a dozen theatres by the 1780s, not including the various street or boulevard theatres erected during public fairs. Dressed à la harpie, theatregoers might have seen the very beast that had inspired their clothing as the harpy made several on-stage appearances in the middle of the decade. The Théâtre-Italien, built between 1781 and 1783 by Jean-François Heurtier, was one such establishment. Subsidized by the king, it showcased Les Trois Folies, a parody of Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais’s Le mariage de Figaro “in one act and with vaudevilles” by Charles-Simon Favart, in January of 1786.

In the play, Figaro and Suzanne are shipwrecked on an exotic island, with Suzanne taken captive by a hostile native chief who can be interpreted as the count in the original play by Beaumarchais. Not only does he take the object of Figaro’s love prisoner, but the audience is informed that the chief cannot control a dreaded harpy, apparently modeled on the engravings of Noipmacel, that also inhabits the island. Marlborough (or Marl-bourouk, as he is identified in the January issue of the Journal de Paris) appears to Figaro, presenting him with a pair of pistols.

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63 Jeune Dame assise dans une promenade vêtue d’une robe à l’anglaise bordée à la harpie et coiffée [sic] d’un chapeau de paille, 1784, Nicolas Dupin, Gallerie des modes, Planche 240, BMV, fonds Jean Houdon J 134_pl 240.
64 This theatre was coincidently also under the protection of the comte de Provence, who would claim authorship for the first pamphlet relating the story of the harpy entitled Description historique d’un monster symbolique. This detail will be further developed in Chapter four. The three follies in question were Figaro, Marlborough, and the harpie. The theatre was destroyed and replaced by the present Opéra Comique in the nineteenth century.
that he uses to combat the harpy that lays waste to the island. A contemporary aquatint engraving by Louis Le Cœur depicts the final showdown, although it replaces Marlborough’s pistols with a sword and shield.  

Suzanne escapes her captor, and the other natives rush to proclaim Figaro their new king. He makes his way off-stage carried on a sort of litter or dais upon which the harpy’s head is mounted.

In the context of this comic play, as a monster the harpy represents a fearsome and formidable foe. It assumes the dual form of adversary and foil to the character of Figaro. Its defeat at his hands serves to further valorize the bravery of Figaro’s character. At the same time, the play showcases issues of critical political importance as the harpy would become associated with finance minister Calonne as well as Marie-Antoinette by 1786. This link will be further explored in Chapter four. With respect to the play as popular culture, however, the servant Figaro’s victory over both the monster and the irresponsible native chief would have struck a chord with a public growing increasingly dissatisfied with royal absolutism and growing financial troubles.

**Making Monsters in the Decorative Arts**

These cultural developments refashioned the harpy, reducing its claws, horns, and fangs to a geometric embellishment for a hat, or its fierce nature to an entertaining effect in a play. As stated by Richard Nash, the tensions and anxieties inspired by a monstrous being such as the Monstre du Chilly could be “defused and recontained through public display.”

In similar fashion, fantastic beasts and hybrid monsters enjoyed a revival in the domain of the decorative arts.

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arts and in architecture over the course of the long eighteenth century. The immense assortment and mixture offered by monsters lent themselves perfectly to both the asymmetrical, rococo forms and later neoclassical motifs fashionable at this time. There was almost no limit to the variety of beasts created and used.

In light of period technology and the first steps towards industrialization in the mid-eighteenth century, the presence of the monster and monstrous entities in architecture and the decorative arts speaks to contemporary questions on the role and function of “wonders” and the “marvellous” in early modern France. In effect, the very hybrid nature of the monster, composed of various human, animal, and fantastic elements, allowed it to be fully integrated into multiple artistic media by skilled craftsmen and architects. Their manipulation of terrible or otherwise fearsome animals for utilitarian or decorative purposes represents a symbolic “taming” of the beast that could be ascertained, measured, and valorized through artistic skill and prowess. The fearsome, formidable, and even frightening attributes and physical characteristics of traditional monsters, hybrids, and hermaphrodites could be retained for dramatic effect and aestheticized.

In addition to beastly chimeras and dragons, human-animal composites were also produced on a wide scale, similar to later neoclassical styles that incorporated mythological creatures including sphinxes and satyrs. The fusion of animal, human, and fantastic imaginary form during this period resulted in equally eccentric decorative embellishments and objects. The creation and utilization of hybrid and hermaphroditic creatures such as sphinxes in addition to entirely new beasts in the decorative arts of the early eighteenth century speak to contemporary
issues surrounding contemporary attitudes towards gender, alterity or otherness, and the demarcation of proper behavior and morals.\textsuperscript{67}

The biological flaws and oddities manifested in the monstrous body of a late seventeenth- or early eighteenth-century gilt bronze object in the collection of the musée des Arts décoratifs in Paris illustrates this “monstrous” blending perfectly.\textsuperscript{68} The piece takes the shape of a fantastic human-animal hybrid, strikingly similar to that of the \textit{monstre unique}, and is most likely a part of the support for a mantle clock or a wall sconce. With its human head, goat’s horns, aquatic front fins or flippers, and serpentine, fish-like tail, the object is demonstrative of biological species hybridity created in multiple media by artists working in the movement today qualified as Régence.\textsuperscript{69}

Above all, this object showcases a fantastic blend of hermaphroditic characteristics. Although the seemingly male face is bearded, the figure has large female breasts protruding from a mass of hair or fur. On a basic level, by the seventeenth century the hermaphrodite was understood as a figure that was “non-viable and unwanted by the parts from which it was composed”; these parts themselves could not identify with each other, which “in the end led to confusion”.\textsuperscript{70} Since the Middle Ages, hermaphroditism had been linked to homosexuality. Medieval bestiaries often feature sexually ambiguous and grave-robbing hyenas, an animal that

\textsuperscript{67} Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills, \textit{The Monstrous Middle Ages} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), p. 11.

\textsuperscript{68} Gilt bronze decorative element, circa 1700-1730, Musée des Arts décoratifs (Paris), inv. 37215 A-B.

\textsuperscript{69} The period stretches from roughly the 1680s, when Jean Berain began taking classical and Renaissance grotesques and transforming them into graceful yet symmetrical arabesques, into the 1730s. See Claude-Paule Wiegandt, \textit{Le mobilier français: Régence et Louis XV} (Paris: Editions Massin, 2005), p. 28.

coincidentally functioned as a symbol for Jews.\textsuperscript{71} This monster is therefore a symbol of difference and alterity on multiple levels. In a period whose fashions dictated bodily integrity and dignified carriage, either through tight-fitting coats for men or stays and corsets for women, its sinuous and voluptuous aspect helped distinguish proper deportment and reinforce respectable behavior.

Such lessons can also be drawn from harpies depicted on a pair of circa 1730 chenets, or decorative andirons, à la harpie, also in the collection of the Musée des Arts décoratifs.\textsuperscript{72} These are female from the waist up and devoid of any hermaphroditic qualities. Yet, they demonstrate how “monstrous encounters could be gendered encounters” even by the second quarter of the eighteenth century as their prominent human breasts, vivacious female faces, and elegant hairstyles and adornments are joined to the sinuous, seductive, and serpentine lower halves.\textsuperscript{73} Like the gilt bronze hermaphrodite hybrid, the harpies that figure on the andirons embody the same uncertainty of taxonomy or classification and therefore excited interest.

Sexual ambiguity can be read as a warning against straying beyond the confines of established gender roles and identity. Rumors and scandals surrounding such taboos were well known in eighteenth-century Europe. The accusations of bisexuality leveled at Marie-Antoinette and her sister Maria Carolina, queen of the Two Sicilies, and Frederick the Great of Prussia further underscored the negative attitude exhibited towards venturing beyond clearly-demarcated lines of gendered behavior and appearance. These questions of sexual generation, hybridity, and hermaphroditism and gender would prove perfect fodder to contemporary scientific inquests as

\textsuperscript{72} One of a pair of gilt bronze and iron chenets à la harpie, circa 1730, Musée des Arts décoratifs (Paris), inv. 20872 A-B.
\textsuperscript{73} Bildhauer and Mills, p. 9.
naturalists and others sought to make sense of the *Monstre du Chilly* and other specimens derived from experimentation in crossbreeding and hybridization.
Towards a Science of Monstrosity

“J’ai besoin de me rappeller [sic] le temps où tout Paris souhaitait si fort d’en être instruit... où la curiosité de les voir...amenait chez moi tant de gens de différens [sic] ordres. Mais ce qu’on était au moins aussi curieux de l’avoir, c’est quels seraient les produits d’une union si bizarre.”

As the monstrous form of the harpie was symbolically tamed, its striking features reappropriated in fashion and onstage, and other “monsters” were exhibited at fairs and in curiosity cabinets, naturalists were working to produce a rational, scientific discourse that would account for all regards to all monsters. Described with painstaking scientific detail, the harpies represented in the engravings and etchings of 1784 speak as much to contemporary scientific concerns over the natural world as they do to the persistence of mythological and fantastic literary traditions. Combining both human and different animal parts, the Chilean harpies took on an even more fantastic form than the traditional creature represented in the *Ornithologiae* of late-Renaissance naturalist Ulisse Aldrovandi. As explained by Jay Thomas in his study of the Beast of the Gévaudan, unknown animals, hybrids or suspected hybrids such as the Lake Fagua Monster held a special place both in the popular imagination and in contemporary scientific inquiry as they appeared both at fairs and in the discussions of academicians.

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74 [“I recall the time when all of Paris so greatly wished to be instructed...where the curiosity to see them...brought so many people of different rank and order...curious to see what the products would be of such a bizarre union.”] René-Antoine Ferchault de Réaumur, *Art de faire éclorre et d’elever en toute saison des Oiseaux* (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1749), p. 322.
75 As discussed in Chapter one, the captions accompanying most harpy prints include details related to the monster’s size, feeding habits, etc. Such concerns are indicative of wider trends in contemporary science, notably within the realm of natural history.
77 Thomas, p. 37.
As early as 1554, Michel de Montaigne had described the lack of order and reason manifested by fantastic monsters: “[…] tant de chimères et monstres fantasques [sic] les uns sur les autres, sans ordre et sans propos.” On a basic level, what is qualified as “monstrous” or a “monstrosity” cannot function without being compared to what is considered within the bounds of normalcy and propriety. Delving deeper into this idea, definitions of monstrosity can thus extend from judgments of physical qualities to moral attributes, to include a combination of the two. With their unusual, unexpected, illogical, or extraordinary features and behavior, so-called monsters served as foils for the enlightened need to distinguish and create boundaries that could define the “classifiable” from the “unclassifiable.”

By way of their fantastic combinations and mixtures, hybrids and hermaphrodites could serve to help define the reasonable or normal. In her study of the latter in early modern Europe, Ruth Gilbert writes that such composite entities revealed as much about “our own political and critical tendencies” as they did “the position of sexually ambiguous individuals.” With the emergence of a new way of thinking based on reason, monstrous, hybrid bodies and figures were approached through a more systematic method that attempted to classify them in a reliable and ordered way. In addition to questions over hybridity and hermaphroditism, naturalists struggled into the nineteenth century with concepts related to the classification of species. Subjecting the harpy to intellectual inquiry derived from the scientific desire to place it and other fantastic beasts within greater systems of knowledge in order to understand their position relative to the larger natural world.

Scientific approaches to the monster in the eighteenth century often remained infused with a sense of the wondrous inherited from traditional legend and folktales. Faced with fantastic, pseudo-scientific descriptions and images of monsters and other anomalies, such as that of Louis Feuillée in 1714, scientifically-inclined thinkers in France endeavored to give reason to accounts like those of the Monstre du Chilly in 1784. As early as the 1690s, the secretary at the Académie des sciences, Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle had expressed his exasperation over studies of monstrosity, arguing that further research without set laws or rules by which to study the monster would produce little in the way of instructive worth. Such an opinion gave way to major studies at the Académie bent on discovering the origins of the monstrous by the second quarter of the eighteenth century.

Through experiments and studies centered on both human and animal congenital malformation, such as Noël-Antoine Pluch’s 1730s study of sterility in mules, the comte de Tressan’s 1760 paper on dwarfism, and even Jean-Marc Itard’s work with a feral boy named Victor beginning in the 1790s, intellectuals in France sought to end once and for all the uncertainty and mystery embodied by the monstrous and the natural origins of monstrosity. The Danish-born anatomist, Jacob B. Winsløw, better known as Jacques-Bénigne Winslow and a professor at the the Jardin du Roi in Paris, proposed a concept of monstrosity printed in a series of treatises between 1733 and 1740. His theory was one based on divine order. According to Winslow, monsters did not come about through any sort of progressive development; rather, he

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theorized the preexistence or preformation of monstrous germs. Their unusual, “monstrous” qualities, no matter their form, were still indicative of divine perfection.

An opponent of Winslow’s preformation theory was Louis Lémery, court physician to Louis XV and the aged princesse de Conti, who as early as 1724 argued that the origins of the monstrous could be explained by looking at accidental components, to include the mixture of two eggs or mechanical lesions in the womb. Winslow’s theory, that imperfection could have its origins in the divine, was incomprehensible to Lémery, who saw the monstrous as resulting from an unexplainable disorder. For Winslow, the ideas of Lémery proved problematic as they did not attribute total control over creation to God.

When taken seriously, accounts such as the capture of a harpy in South America did not seem absurd in light of scientific theories surrounding species classification, sexual generation, and hybridity. Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus had proposed a taxonomical system that included “monsters” in his Systema Naturae, published in 1735. For Linnaeus, making sense of different species of plants and animals in addition to geological features such as rocks and minerals was a question of legislating hierarchical classification of the natural world. As he categorized different animal species based on physical qualities, he included such mythical examples as the hydra, the frog-fish, the satyr, and the phoenix. Subjected to his meticulous eye, such fantastic creatures could be explained as easily as an elephant or a horse, reduced to a series of taxonomical nomenclatures and brief scientific descriptions meant to demystify popular superstition. The satyr, for example, was classified along with all human and human-like

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83 Douthwaite, p. 16.
creatures, to include primates and sloths, in the genus *Anthropomorpha*. Such a system, although groundbreaking for the period, assumed that species remained static and unchanging.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, Georges-Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon, would play an even more important role in including monstrous entities in the development of his natural theory. Skeptical of his Swedish counterpart’s theories and methods, Buffon published his own theory in his *Histoire naturelle*. His work became a bestseller beginning in 1749, with additional volumes printed through the 1770s and 1780s. Enhanced by skillfully produced plates of both domestic and exotic animals drawn with scientific exactitude that also catered to the taste in decorative prints, the *Histoire naturelle* conflicted with the biological classification of Linnaeus. Buffon believed in the mutability of species and that classification ought to take into account such factors as intellect and behavior over simple physiological similarities. For Buffon, monstrous beings could not simply be explained away as Linnaeus had done in subjecting them to what he considered to be an artificial, man-made system of classification. As he stated in a 1749 article on the pig,

“*Il faut ne rien voir d'impossible, s'attendre à tout, et supposer que tout ce qui peut être est. Les espèces ambiguës, les productions irrégulières, les êtres anormaux, cesseront dès lors de nous étonner, et se trouveront aussi nécessairement que les autres dans l'ordre infini des choses.*”

Although Buffon stated that such “ambiguous species” and “anomalous beings” would cease to amaze or astonish, this did not mean that they would be done away with completely. As he

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84 [“It is necessary to see nothing as impossible, to expect everything, and to suppose that all that can be is. Ambiguous species, irregular productions, anomalous beings will henceforth cease to astonish us, and will become as necessary as others in the infinite order of things”] Buffon, “Le cochon, le cochon de Siam et le sanglier,” *Histoire naturelle et générale et particulière*, tome V (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1755), pp. 102-103.
expounded on the power of natural elements, forces, and other processes, his work extended into establishing the importance of the study of hybridity, anomaly, and, by extension, monstrosity.

Public as much as intellectual interest in such scientific questions manifested themselves across the eighteenth century. In addition to Buffon’s writings on ambiguous species, the possibility of creating new, hybrid creatures would continue to influence academic treatises in addition to philosophers and novelists alike. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Rétif de la Bretonne, the marquis de Condorcet, and the comte de Volney all expounded on ideas related to meliorism or perfectibility and regeneration. This applied as much to the development of a superior class of domestic animals for both work and food, as to that of a “new man.” This last idea, intimately linked to the radical ideology of the French Revolution, can be understood in the context of the following experiments in hybridization. These experiments can be understood to give further meaning and importance to the harpies of 1784 as naturalists tried to comprehend the nature and limits of crossbreeding.

Especially at mid-century, several scientific experiments and publications fueled widespread interest in the exotic, the hybrid, and the monster. Buffon’s experiments in crossbreeding everything from dogs and foxes to sheep and goats beginning in the 1750s corroborate the interest in a hybrid creature such as the Monstre du Chilly in 1784. However, Buffon was in fact not the first to investigate these scientific possibilities as he drew on slightly earlier trials by entomologist René-Antoine Ferchault de Réaumur. Published in 1749, Réaumur’s *Art de faire éclorre et d'elever [sic] en toute saison des Oiseaux* [The Art of Hatching

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and Raising Domestic Fowl in All Seasons] recorded his attempts at hybridizing different strains of barnyard fowl such as roosters and ducks.

In addition to chronicling his own work, Réaumur also included details on his attempts at reproducing the apocryphal but widely believed creation of his colleague the abbé Louis-François de Fontenu: a chicken-rabbit hybrid. The mere suggestion of such an achievement was accepted by Linnaeus; fueling the fire and testing the credulity of the academic and amateur world were other claims, such as that of polygraph Jean-Baptiste-Claude Deslisle de Sales, who in 1777 spoke of the possibility of taking indigenous French and Old World animals such as bulls and giraffes and breeding them with those of overseas colonies, such as pumas. Franco-Swiss naturalist Charles Bonnet fueled public discussion on these topics as he refuted such dubious theories and discoveries in 1762, citing the ridiculousness of “[…] des Poulets vêtus de poils, ou des Lapins couverts de plumes.”

Although the chicken-rabbit only existed in the realm of the imaginary, Réaumur described the growing public interest in such “discoveries.” By the 1780s, real results in crossbreeding were achieved through royal intervention at Rambouillet, fifty kilometers from Paris. Purchased by Louis XVI from his cousin the duc de Penthièvre at the price of 16 million livres in December of 1783, Rambouillet was both an official seat of royal government and a hunting residence. With its existing fourteenth-century château, Louis XVI saw his purchase as more than a country refuge from the intrigues of Versailles. Rather, it would serve as an extension of the royal hunting domain and a place where he could also hold royal council.

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88 “[…] Chickens covered in fur, or Rabbits covered in feathers.” Charles Bonnet, Considérations sur le corps organisé, tome II (Amsterdam: Chez Marc-Michel Rey, 1762), p. 255.
1786, he gave the estate a third purpose when he established the Bergerie royale, or royal sheepfold, at Rambouillet. Having received a gift of several hundred merino sheep from his cousin the king of Spain, Louis XVI ordered that the flock be raised at Rambouillet. A total of 318 ewes, 41 rams and 7 wethers arrived on 12 October 1786. It was the first significant release of merinos outside of Spain and the beginning of serious French attempts at developing a home-based wool industry through scientific innovation that was directly inspired by earlier experiments in crossbreeding.

The Spanish merinos raised at Rambouillet descended from sheep originally from North Africa and brought to Spain by the Moors. After the Reconquista of the late-fourteenth century, the remaining merinos allowed Spain to dominate the European wool trade. Spain eventually forbade the export of the precious breed, which produced super-fine wool of the best quality in all Europe. As early as the seventeenth century, Colbert had underlined the necessity of creating a French wool industry as a means to break the Spanish monopoly. Despite his views, France became heavily dependent upon a stable supply of raw clip wool from Spain to keep up its own textile economy. By the mid-eighteenth century, France began to fear that increasing Spanish industrialization might lead to an embargo on merino wool as well as that already placed on the merinos themselves.

That concern and the desire to develop domestic production to offset it have been understood to have played a large part in Louis XVI's establishment of the experimental farm at Rambouillet, headed by Philibert Chabert. The Rambouillet merinos not only maintained their superior fine-wool characteristics, but also developed in body size through Chabert’s experimentations in crossbreeding them with native French sheep. Other breeders and

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agronomic scientists including Jean Chanorier, Jean-Marie Heurtault de Lamerville, and Louis Silvy would conduct similar research. Although not as seemingly fantastic as Fontenu’s chicken-rabbit or the suggestion of puma-giraffes and bull-lions made by Delisle de Sales in 1777, the successful mixing of indigenous French sheep and Spanish merinos at Rambouillet and even Buffon’s wolf-dog hybrid explain the broader interest in a creature as fantastically composite as the *Monstre du Chilly*. Monsters such as the Beast of the Gévaudan had been hypothesized to have been hybrid animals, and here was living proof of such interspecies mixing.

Such scientific inquiry would not stop in the face of the harpy, as detailed in many of the prints and descriptions of it. Periodicals and engravings alike attest to the desire to classify the species and observe it in captivity. Several of the prints discussed in Chapter one mention that the harpy was to be brought back to Spain for the court of Carlos V, and periodicals relate its journey from South America to Spain by way of Cuba. An exceptional image printed by Esnauts and Rapilly depicts the male harpy being wheeled to the Spanish court in a cage followed by a cortège of sheep, pigs, and cows, presumably its food. The engraving repeats the desire for a female to be brought to Spain in order for the species to continue in Europe.

Just as Bonnet had questioned the veracity of mixtures as seemingly fantastic as chicken-rabbits, not all readers were convinced of the harpies’ existence. This debate can be traced in numerous periodicals published following the first reports of one’s capture. In an edition of the *Mercure de France* published in early October of 1784, contributors questioned the truth of the captions accompanying the various illustrations, stating that:

“On nous a déjà fait tant de contes de cette espèce, et on le joue avec tant de succès de notre

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90 *Départ de la Harpie ou monstre amphibie de Cadix pour être conduite au roi et à la famille royale d’Espagne*, 1784, chez Esnauts et Rapilly à Paris, BNF, coll. de Vinck, inv. 1157. These are the same Esnauts and Rapilly who published the *Galerie des modes* beginning in 1778.
crédulité, qu'il est prudent d'attendre avant d'ajouter foi. Le monstre pourrait bien n'être qu'un serpent monstrueux, tels qu'on en trouve fréquemment dans les parties inondées de l'Amérique.”

The same article deconstructs the setting of the harpy’s South American home, noting that Chile is, of course, not in Peru. After debunking the fanciful Kingdom of Santa Fé, the proposed route that the beast would take to Spain via Honduras is then criticized as geographically impossible.

In similar fashion, the Correspondance secrète provides further analysis, explicitly debunking the harpies’ scientific interest and emphasizing their satirical value as a metaphor for larger French society. In reference to captions relating plans to bring a harpy to Spain, this text sees such a plan as

“[… ] assez curieux et assez philosophique d'annoncer le soin de perpétuer une race aussi dévorante ; l'animal en question mange, dit-on, un bœuf et trois ou quatre cochons par jour. Les mécréans [sic] (et l'on sait que cette espèce abonde) prétendent que cet animal n'existe pas, & que c'est une caricature allégorique de nos mœurs. On a même fait là-dessus quelques quatrains assez plaisans [sic].”

This poem had been printed several years earlier in 1785, and opened with the following four stanzas that equated the Parisian public to the monster:

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91 [“We have already been told so many stories about this species, and it has had such success with our gullibility that it would be prudent to wait before according it more. The monster could just be a monstrous serpent such as are frequently found in the swampy parts of America"], Mercure de France, Pancoucke, 2 October 1784, pp.164-165.
92 [“[… ] rather strange and philosophical to announce the care to perpetuate a race so voracious; the animal in question eats, they say, an ox and three to four pigs a day. The scoundrels (and we know that they abound) pretend that this animal does not exist, and that it an allegorical caricature of our morals.”] Correspondance secrète, Tome XVII (London: John Adamson, 1789), pp. 83-84.
“Bon public qui d'un œil surpris
Contemple ce monstre en peinture,
Regarde-toi: d'après nature
C'est ton portrait fait à Paris.”

[“Good public who with a surprised eye
Contemplates this monster in painting
Look at yourself: done from life
It is your portrait done in Paris.”]³

Although some critics refused the accounts and descriptions of the Lake Fagua Monster, scientific discourse tried to make sense of questions over regeneration and hybridity while also using such monsters to test their theories about regeneration and hybridity. Contributors to periodicals such as the Correspondance secrète continued to maintain the danger, real or imagined, posed by monsters as seemingly violent and voracious as the harpies. This element, combined with related allegorical meanings of harpies, would be utilized to the fullest extent possible by revolutionary critics of the monarchy, a theme to be more fully explored in Chapter four.

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³ Bourdeaux, p. 266. The poem was reprinted in the Correspondence secrète, politique et littéraire, vol. XVII (Paris: 1789), p 107.
Monstrous Monarchies

“J’ai vu sur les marches du trône un monstre à cent têtes et à cent voix s’élever, agir, parler, de son soufle empesté, courber les lys et flétrir les roses.”

In the realm of French social criticism of the early modern period, monsters were a device invoked to critique as early as the period of the Reformation and Wars of Religion that ravaged Europe beginning in the sixteenth century. An anonymous caricature of Henri III, created during the campaign waged against him after the assassination of the duc de Guise, a challenger to royal authority, in 1588, depicted a creature that shares the same wings, scaly body and tail, fearsome claws, and androgynous breasts and facial hair of the monstre unique. In similar fashion, the king’s protégé, Jean de Nogaret, duc d’Epernon, was represented as a three-eyed demon with a forked tongue, wooly fur, and swinging tail in a 1589 woodcut.

In the eighteenth century, the figure of the monster continued to play an important role in representing and stimulating changing notions of political power, especially the monarchy’s public image, in the decades leading up to the French Revolution. Accusations of monstrous deeds- to include everything from royal spending and irresponsible stewardship of the land to sexual immorality- and representations of the royal family as monsters were used to question

94 [“I saw upon the steps to the throne a monster with one hundred heads and one hundred voices rise, act, and speak, with its stinking breath, bending the lilies and withering the rose.”] Anonymous, Marie-Antoinette, archiduchesse d’Autriche, reine de France; Ou causes et tableau de la Révolution française par le Chev. de M... (Paris: 1795), pp. 21-22.
95 Such imagery is also noteworthy in light of contemporary attacks on the king based on his perceived effeminacy and even supposed homosexuality. Portrait monstrueux et allégorique d’Henri III, circa 1588, anonymous, BNF, inv. Qb1 1589
royal authority as the monarchy went through a process of desacralization. In bringing down the prestige of the monarchy and emphasizing its negligence and unfit leadership, the use of monstrous metaphors and images such as the harpy in political caricatures could influence conceptions of both national identity and political legitimacy.

Monstrous attacks on the monarchy’s public image before and during the Revolution were most virulently expressed through underground pamphlet literature and satirical caricatures that could be mass produced quickly and cheaply. As described by Robert Darnton, dozens of seditious pamphlets made their way into France from London, Amsterdam, and Geneva. Etchings printed on loose sheets of paper could be prepared, colored, and made ready for sale within a week. In the last years of the reign of Louis XV, enemies of the king printed scurrilous pamphlets attacking him and especially his mistress, the comtesse du Barry. Social critics churned out a regular slew of printed material attacking the king’s, and by extension the monarchy’s, perceived corruption and degradation, notably by invoking sexual allegations and indictments. Louis XV was described as a lecherous beast, ruled by “whores…pimps…wicked courtesans.” A “zealous patriot” in 1790 went so far as to describe the king’s pleasure

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97 For an in-depth look into the process of prerevolutionary “dethronement” or “desacralization” through printed and spoken discourse in addition to popular culture, see Jeffrey Merrick, *The Descralization of the French Monarchy in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1990).
100 The king’s numerous mistresses were well known, and although he had begun his affairs with women of the nobility, his most famous mistress, Jeanne Poisson, marquise de Pompadour, hailed from the bourgeois world of financiers and creditors. With Jeanne Béeu, the reputed illegitimate daughter of a seamstress and a monk and former fille galante made comtesse du Barry in 1769, the king could fall no lower in the eyes of the court and many of the people.
pavilion at the Parc aux Cerfs at Versailles as the origin of the national deficit. Monstrous spending and a debauched sexual appetite, it seemed, could be great enough to weaken the nation and lead it on the road to revolution.

For some pamphleteers, the king was not only a monster himself, but engendered equally monstrous ministers. In a satirical letter addressed to the king in March of 1770, Parisian lawyer Pierre-Denis de La Rivoire made the following accusation:

“You enrich monsters who despoil you, will ruin you and your descendants, and eventually offer to foreigners or turn against you the powers that they have acquired through your weakness.”

Another letter by La Rivoire reads

“The realm is full of monsters such as d’Aiguillon, covered in royal crime, charged with satisfying your despicable inclinations.”

Even after his death, Louis XV and those close to him continued to be ascribed monstrous characteristics or described as monsters. The king’s chief minister, René-Nicolas de Maupeou, was lambasted in 1782 as

“[…] le monstre le plus abominable que l’enfer ait pu vomir pour le malheur du Royaume.”

Illicit pamphlets and popular engravings attest to the political power and overall attraction of the discourse on monstrosity in the second half of the eighteenth century. These broadsides, etchings, and similar accounts define monstrosity by behavior and actions, making

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104 *To the King and all his trouble-makers and inhere* [nts* undated. Ibid, p. 244.
them doubly important in delineating the cultural space occupied by the monster. The images of the Lake Fagua Monster appropriate both the image of a monstrous beast and its behavior in a way that could be immediately likened to the person of Marie-Antoinette and by extension the royal family in pamphlets, broadsides, and prints. This phenomenon will be discussed and related to contemporary events in this chapter.

**Marie-Antoinette, Monstrous (M)Other**

The arrival of the new dauphine, Marie-Antoinette, in 1770 set off a new stream of pamphlets and images condemning the monarchy for its monstrous- to the point of being incestuous- sexual appetite as well as its equally undesirable sterility. It is no surprise that the monstre unique first appeared in print in 1784, near when the Affair of the Necklace would become the bestselling tabloid story, and continue in popularity well past this scandal. As the public became engrossed in the monster’s capture, the beast contributed to the creation of public opinion that steadily drew a link between it and the queen. Like Marie-Antoinette, born an Austrian archduchess in Vienna in 1755 and whose multinational origins inspired xenophobic prejudice, the harpy was also a foreign import whose mere existence provoked fear and anxiety. Despite the presence and power of royal censors, however, the symbolic power of the harpy as

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107 Although it is too long to recount here in its entirety, this scandal revolved around a sumptuous diamond necklace created by court jewelers Bassenge and Boëhmer for the comtesse du Barry in 1772. Despite a growing financial deficit, Marie-Antoinette reputedly managed to purchase the necklace. In reality, it had been stolen by a conwoman, Jeanne Rémy de La Motte, who convinced the highest ranking prelate in France, the cardinal de Rohan, to purchase it for the queen after beginning an affair with him in 1784. Marie-Antoinette was never actually implicated in the swindle, but her name was dragged through the mud and her reputation was in ruins following the cardinal’s 1785 arrest and subsequent acquittal in 1786 and the escape of La Motte to England. For an in-depth account of the scandal, see Sara Maza, “The Diamond Necklace Affair 1785-1786” *Private Lives and Public Affairs: The Causes Célèbres of Prerevolutionary France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 167-211.
criticism of the monarchy could be masked by the popular and scientific interest in the harpy as discussed in Chapter three.

In his memoirs, the brother of Marie-Antoinette’s ill-fated husband, Louis XVIII took credit for printing the first account of the beast in the *Description historique d’un monstre symbolique*, presented in Chapter one. Although this is not entirely true, as seen in the Spanish representations of the Tagua Monster, details in French visual culture of the Fagua Monster indicate some participation on his part in diffusing the image and description of the beast in France. Born comte de Provence at Versailles in 1755, the future Louis XVIII was given the name of Louis-Stanislas-Xavier at his baptism six years later. Upon the accession of Louis XVI in 1774, he was also referred to by the courtesy title of Monsieur as the king’s eldest cadet brother. The viceroy of New Mexico, Francisco Xaveiro de Meunrios, credited with the harpy’s capture, features the exact anagram of this courtesy title as well as the name of Xavier.

No friend of Marie-Antoinette, the comte de Provence saw his brother and his Austrian wife as impediments to his accession and did not hesitate to make his opinions known. At the baptism of the king and queen’s first child, Marie-Thérèse-Charlotte, known as Madame Royale, in 1778, Monsieur’s offensive comments about her paternity were recorded by the Austrian ambassador, the comte de Mercy-Argenteau, and the correspondent of the king of Naples at Versailles, Luigi Pio.\(^\text{108}\) He was known to secretly slip short articles or letters against his

\(^{108}\) The first lengthy pamphlet attacking the queen’s fidelity appeared the following year with the publication of *Les Amours de Charlot et de Toinette* in 1779, which described the supposed affair between Marie-Antoinette and the libertine comte d’Artois, the king’s youngest brother who was part of her circle of young, fashionable members of the court. Supposedly written by Beaumarchais, the text had been entirely bought up by the royal censors and stored in the Bastille, where the copies remained until July of 1789. See Vivian Gruder, *The Notables and the Nation: The Political Schooling of the French 1787-1788* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008) p. 425 note 33.
enemies into periodicals such as the *Gazette de France* or the *Journal de Paris*. It is more than possible that he had caught a glimpse of a report from South America detailing the capture of a harpy. Louis XVI, an avid reader who spoke several languages, including Spanish, could very well have subscribed to a newspaper or journal that detailed the beast’s capture or included a description; his younger brother therefore may have drawn inspiration from such a source of international news.

The monstrous, voracious qualities of the harpy made it the perfect symbol for the revolutionary press. A new harpy, attributed to Parisian printer Villeneuve, would appear on the scene in 1789. Dubbed *Madame l’Aspict*, or *Asp*, this creature is depicted inside a medallion and combines the harpy body depicted by Devere and the Le Campion brothers with a fully human, female head complete with an earring. Instead of tearing some farm animal to pieces, this new monster is shown shredding a document identified as the Constitution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man in her claws. With its aquiline nose, the monster’s profile would have been instantly recognized as that of Marie-Antoinette; in addition, the façade of the Tuileries, the palace occupied by the court after the royal family’s move to Paris in October of 1789, is visible to the left of the medallion.

Villeneuve’s caricature was not the first time that Marie-Antoinette had been likened to a monster, and its potency cannot be understood without first linking it to the trajectory of the queen’s reputation over the course of her time in France. Although welcomed upon arriving in France and popular in the early part of her husband’s reign, she progressively created enemies at court and among her subjects. In her quest for privacy from the non-stop intrusions that were an

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110 BNF, coll. De Vinck, inv. 1148.
established part of court etiquette and protocol, she denied both courtiers and the public the right to access their queen at all times. As Marie-Antoinette retreated behind closed doors, the attraction of going to court, in addition to its function as a veritable temple to the monarchy, was lessened. It also set the rumor mill in motion as the queen’s whereabouts, while never completely private, were obscured from the public eye. Hiding behind the gilded doors of her petits appartements, what secrets did the queen possess? Her elusive nature, well-known by 1784, perhaps struck a chord with those familiar with the description and image of the Lake Fagua monster.

It was the queen’s habit of shutting herself off completely at the Petit Trianon, however, which did the most damage to her reputation. This estate adjacent to the edges Versailles had been created by Louis XV beginning in the 1740s and given to the queen as a gift by Louis XVI in June of 1774. With its small, intimate salons and rooms, the château, a neoclassical structure constructed by Anges-Jacques Gabriel from 1761 to 1768, was conceived on a more human scale compared to Louis XIV’s baroque château. As recorded by Jeanne-Louise Campan, her first lady of the bedchamber, at Trianon Marie-Antoinette adhered to the idea of individual liberty.\footnote{Jeanne-Louise-Henriette Campan, \textit{ Mémoires sur la vie privée de Marie-Antoinette, reine de France et de Navarre}, tome I (Paris: Baudouin Frères, 1822), p. 254.} As she removed herself from the prying eyes of courtiers, dignitaries, and those of the curious public, the queen was determined to live informally at her estate as a private person.

Although content with her grandfather-in-law’s furnishings at first, Marie-Antoinette began extensive renewal of her estate beginning in 1777, especially of the landscape, to be refashioned in the English style. Two artificial lakes and a meandering “Swiss” stream were dug, enhanced by the addition elaborate follies including a Temple of Love, a rock formation,
and a belvedere. The ultimate and most famous creation was that of series of pastoral, thatched “Norman” cottages, the *hameau de la reine*, designed by Hubert Robert and built by Richard Mique around one of the lakes. A rustic boudoir, mill, dairy, lighthouse, and a farmhouse for the queen equipped with a dancing hall and billiard room were among the structures created by 1787. These were enhanced by the addition of livestock and occupation by actual peasant families.

Although the curious were eventually allowed to visit the queen’s idyllic domain, as noted by American emissary Gouverneur Morris in 1789, they were initially open only to the queen’s closest friends. The “high cost, exclusivity, and assertion of female agency and self-sufficiency” of Trianon gave rise to scurrilous rumors and accusations attacking the queen.

Developed by the marquise de Pompadour and inaugurated by the comtesse du Barry, the estate linked Marie-Antoinette to a line of royal mistresses. Mockingly referred to as “Little Vienna,” those invited there by the queen were likened to monstrous creatures slowly sucking the lifeblood of the kingdom. Courtiers of established noble houses resented the queen’s fondness for aristocratic *parvenus* such as the comtesse de Polignac, elevated to the rank of duchesse in 1780 and made governess of the royal children two years later. The foreign set that Marie-Antoinette maintained instead of the old nobility caused further irritation. Of her favorites, the princesse de Lamballe was Savoyard by birth, the prince de Ligne was Flemish, the comte de Fersen was a Swede, and the baron de Besenval was Swiss (and a Protestant).

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112 In light of the queen’s multinational, foreign background, the same critique could ironically be leveled at her choice of landscaping as she renounced the formal, geometric French gardens that had been the mainstay at Versailles since Louis XIV in favor of Austrian, English, Swiss, and even Chinese features. The same applied to her taste in music as she lent her patronage to the likes of Austrian composer Christoph Willibald Glück and the Italian Antonio Sacchini.


114 Martin, p. 167.
Adding to the scandal was that the queen, not the king, owned the domain in her own name; Louis XVI could not visit without an invitation from his wife, and orders executed de par la reine, or by order of the queen. It was Marie-Antoinette who dictated style and demeanor, to include dress, at the estate. After the birth of her son, the dauphin Louis-Joseph, duc de Bourgogne, the queen began ordering simpler clothing in keeping with the Rousseauian ideas of the day. Dressed in a sheer muslin gown with a ribbon around her waist, dubbed the robe en gaulle, and a straw hat upon her head, Marie-Antoinette and her favorites were granted an ease of movement and comfort that could never be achieved in the stiff, corseted grand habit de cour required for events at Versailles.

The freedom of movement afforded by such garments, however, was quickly equated with ease of access to the female body and immodesty. Sexually-themed pamphlets were quick to point out this fact. When the queen went so far as to commission a portrait from Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun wearing her Trianon fashions, a new scandal erupted as soon as the work was exposed at the Paris Salon in 1783. The queen, it seemed, was immoral enough to sit for a portrait wearing a garment no better than her underwear. Such sexually corrupting dress was more suitable for the boudoir, the setting for libertine novels and pornographic pamphlets, than the Hall of Mirrors.

The Salon, described by Mary Sheriff as a school of virtue and morality by the 1780s, had become increasingly intolerant of the voluptuous curves of ladies by François Boucher and, it seemed, the indecent queen painted by Vigée-Lebrun. The growing literary and visual

\text{\textsuperscript{116}}\text{ Madame Elisabeth, the king’s sister, the comtesse de Provence, and the duchesse de Polignac would commission similar portraits from Vigee-Lebrun.} \\
culture portraying the queen as a sexual deviant only added to the public outrage that such a portrait could and did incite. The queen’s shocking dress and her expenses in refashioning the landscape of Trianon could be easily linked to the doubly seductive and destructive harpy sold in Paris by Mixelle a year later. In the world of popular prints and pamphlets, rumors of the queen’s behavior served to further mold her image into that of a sexual monster.  

According to pamphleteers, the queen’s sexual appetite encompassed everything from nymphomania and incest to lesbianism, bestiality, and child abuse. Even before the announcement of her betrothal to the dauphin had been officially declared 1768, Marie-Antoinette’s detractors vehemently asserted that she had been born to be a sexual deviant. The “female royal Veto,” claimed the author of the undated Description de la ménagerie royale d'animaux vivants was a monster born of the union between the Empress Maria Theresa, described as an ape, and either a bear or a tiger. The young archduchess had then engaged in a slew of unbridled sexual relationships with everyone from her valets to her brother, the future Joseph II.

Although Marie-Antoinette eventually produced heirs to the throne, revolutionary-era prints such as Madame l’Aspict and an anonymous etching of the royal couple as a double-ended monster entitled Les deux Ne font qu’un confirmed the view that the Austrian crossbreeding with the king of France had deformed rather than regenerated the kingdom. Finding her husband unsatisfactory, the queen allegedly turned to her brother-in-law, the comte d’Artois, continuing the journalistic tradition of Marie-Antoinette as a libidinous, incestuous monster bent on sating her monstrous lust. Even during the virtual imprisonment of the royal family in the Tuileries

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119 Le deux Ne font qu’un, anonymous, 1791, The British Museum, inv. 1999,0627.18
from 1789 to 1792, popular engravings showed that the queen continued seducing everyone from National guardsmen to the marquis de La Fayette.\textsuperscript{120} Called before the National Convention in October of 1793, she was found guilty on all charges, including that cited by radical journalist Jacques-René Hébert of her having molesting her then eight-year old son during captivity. Although her sublime rejection of this charge has remained legendary, such an accusation was rendered believable and only natural in light of the past decade of damning pamphlets and prints, to include those that linked her to a ravenous harpy.\textsuperscript{121}

Thus, in her human form Marie-Antoinette was deemed a monster of immorality and sexual savagery. In anthropomorphic caricatures of her as a tiger, panther, and other savage beasts including the harpie, she continued to embody such carnal debauchery and monstrous behavior. As depicted by Villeneuve, the double tail of the Lake Fagua Monster clearly bound her association to the problem of female sexuality and appetite, linking her to other classical monsters including Homer and Hesiod’s Scylla. Artistic representations of this hybrid sea monster that combined a woman’s face and human-dog torso and a double tail also recalled the image of the Biblical serpent of Genesis. Such monsters came to figure female sexual display, and, as written by Marina Warner, served to inaugurate a line of abhorrent and fatal female monsters beyond redemption.\textsuperscript{122} These themes would not have been unfamiliar to the

\textsuperscript{120} The 1791 engraving \textit{Bravo! Bravo! La reine se pénètre de la Patrie} \textit{[Bravo, bravo, the Queen is penetrated by the Fatherland}, anonymous, The British Museum, inv. 1994,U.1] features the half-naked queen reclining in her apartments, baring her genitals at group of National guardsmen. In similar fashion, La Fayette swears upon Marie-Antoinette’s \textit{res publica}, placing his right hand between the queen’s legs, in the contemporary print \textit{Ma Constitution} \textit{[My Constitution}, 1790, BNF, coll. De Vinck, inv. 1128].

\textsuperscript{121} Variations of her response are along the lines of the following: “Si je n’ai pas répondu, c’est que la nature se refuse à une pareille accusation faite à une mère” [“If I have not answered, it is because nature itself rejects such an accusation made against a mother.”]. See Lynn Hunt, “The Many Bodies of Marie-Antoinette: Political Pornography and the Problem of the Feminine in the French Revolution,” \textit{Marie-Antoinette: Writings on the Body of a Queen}, ed. Dena Goodman (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 122-124.

eighteenth-century French public, as seen in the discussion of classical mythology and symbols of Chapter one.

Royal favorites such as the comtesse de Polignac were no different. In a 1789 pamphlet entitled *La Chasse aux bêtes puantes et féroces*, Polignac is described as a Barbary she-wolf who ‘having coupled by a monstrous caprice of nature” with both the queen and the comte d’Artois, represented respectively as a panther and tiger, echoed the condemnation of incest as they engage in inter-species sex. 123 The implications of this portrayal are two-fold. Firstly, that the queen and her friends are reduced to an animal state speaks volumes on the regard in which she was held by the general public and on the process of monarchical desacralization. More generally, however, such representations exploited contemporary interest in the scientific debates and fears of the monstrous. At the same time that the comte de Buffon and other scientists and thinkers were philosophizing on the origin of species and their classification, popular literature went so far as to depict the queen as the fruit of an interspecies relationship.

Villeneuve was thus drawing on a longstanding history of iconography and body politic when he depicted the queen’s profile atop the body of the bare breasted harpy. Of course, the association of the female image with all things monstrous dates to Antiquity. In his *Generation of Animals*, Aristotle had noted the “deviation” resulting from when “a female is formed instead of a male.” 124 Marie-Hélène Huet notes the persistence of such ideas in the eighteenth century, citing the widespread attribution of error to female organs. 125

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123 “Une Louve de Barbarie, élevée par curiosité par la famille des Polignac, par une bizarrerie monstrueuse de la nature , s'étant accouplée avec le Tigre & le [sic] Panthère… ainsi qu'avec une prodigieuse quantité d'animaux de différentes espèces” [A Barbary Shewolf, raised out of curiosity by the Polignac family, coupled by a monstrous quirk of nature with a Tiger and the Panther...as well as with a prodigious number of animals of different species]. See Anonymous, *La Chasse aux bêtes puantes et féroces* (Paris: Imprimerie de la Liberté, 1789), p. 6.
125 Huet, p. 57.
iconography makes use of this same element, as seen in the frontispiece of a pamphlet entitled *Crimes des reines de France*. This illustration depicts an imaginary female ruler taking the reins of government from her dead royal husband, sunken into the throne with a knife in his breast.126

As traditional symbols of monarchical authority are usurped or toppled by the queen, represented as a hybrid snake-woman, a double warning is made against those who “lower their heads before the scepters of queens.” From the waist up, the human queen is nude, her hair falling over her shoulders and her breasts exposed. The debauchery of the woman as a ruler is coupled with her monstrous appearance.

As a Habsburg archduchess, Marie-Antoinette also came to embody popular fears and longstanding xenophobic prejudice. The hybrid in addition to foreign features of the harpies would be echoed in contemporary representations of Marie-Antoinette’s foreign origins: Austrian, Lorrainer, German, and Bohemian. As described by Lynn Hunt, revolutionary images of Louis XVI as a pig and even the comte de Provence as a cat, like those of the harpies in 1784, could be “mobilized in an attempt to create a “new man”’” in the struggle to reform French political character beginning in 1789.127 This development gives implicit explanation of the political use and value of the harpies whose symbolic potential could spread to encompass themes of gender or sexuality along with nationality.

An engraving that appeared around the time of the fall of the monarchy in August of 1792 plays on this theme of Marie-Antoinette’s foreign, to the extent of being hybrid, and female

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126 The frontispiece is entitled *Un peuple est sans honneur, et mérite ses chaines, quand il baisse le front sous le sceptre des reines* [A nation is without honor and merits its chains when it bends its head under the scepter of queens]. Published in *Les crimes des reines de France depuis le commencement de la Monarchie jusqu’à Marie-Antoinette* [Crimes of the queens of France since the beginning of the Monarchy to Marie-Antoinette], authored by Louis-Marie-Prudhomme and published in 1791.

monstrosity in much the same way as printmakers did when depicting the *monstre unique* in 1784. The Austrian “Panther” is described as

“voué [sic] au mépris et à l'exécration de la nation française... cette affreuse Messaline, fruit d'un des plus licencieux concubinage [sic], est composée de matière hétérogène, fabriquée de plusieurs races, en partie lorraine, allemande, autrichienne, bohémienne.”

Shown in profile against the backdrop of a black lantern, the image continues its presentation of the queen, describing “son nez et ses joues […] bourgeonnés et pourprés par un sang corrompu […] sa bouche fétide et infecte recèle une langue cruelle.”

The same monstrous, composite royal body of the queen would be adopted in a revolutionary periodical, the *Petit journal du Palais-Royal*, describing the erection of a bronze statue that “excite[d] the liveliest admiration because of its singular composition” which included the head of a woman whose “facial features are very similar to those of Marie-Antoinette, Queen of France” as well as the “body of a harpy, the pudenda of a cat, the talons of an eagle, and the tail of a pig.”

**The Monarchy and Monstrous Appetite**

Similarly to the Peruvian harpies, whose avidity destroyed the land and its natural resources, the theme of monstrous and deformed appetites gives further context to both criticisms

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128 [“destined to the hate and curse of the French Nation...this horrible Messalina, the fruit of one of the most licentious concubinages, is composed of heterogenous matter, fabricated from several races, in part Lorrainer, German, Austrian, Bohemian.”] *La panthère autrichienne*, circa 1792-1793, Villeneuve, BNF, coll. de Vinck, inv. 550.

129 [“her burgeoning nose and her cheeks turned crimson by the corrupt blood... her fetid, stinking mouth conceals a vile tongue.”] Ibid. The reference to crimson cheeks is also interesting in light of the symbolism of rouge, a standard of feminine court makeup and appearance that, as Caroline Weber describes, “emphasized [Marie-Antoinette’s] membership in the ruling caste as distinct from any other social group.” By 1792, however, such distinction would soon come at a deadly cost for the queen and could then be understood to equate her to a monster. See Weber, p. 66.

130 Landes, p. 116.
of the monarchy, specifically the queen’s spending, and conceptions of monstrosity. The metaphor of Gargantua, derived from Renaissance humanist François Rabelais’s *La Vie de Gargantua et de Pantagruel* was also utilized to represent the magnitude of the irresponsible and destructive sovereign during the Revolution. Marie-Antoinette’s insatiable, cannibalistic thirst for blood served to further identify her as monstrous. According to the anonymous author of the 1792 pamphlet *Désespoir de Marie-Antoinette sur la mort de son frère Léopold II*, the queen’s sole desire was to see Paris bathed in its own blood. The skulls of the Parisian dead were then to be used as cups. A history of the “crimes of the queens of France” published in 1791 made the same assertions, claiming that “Antoinette had declared more than once that she would not be happy until she had washed her hands in the blood of France.”

Contemporary iconography also illustrates the theme of Marie-Antoinette’s monstrous bloodlust. A circa 1791 engraving entitled the *Ci-Devant Grand Couvert de Gargantua moderne en famille* depicts the royal family indulging in a feast of horrific proportions. Set in the middle of the image is the royal dinner table or *grand couvert*, a court spectacle open to the public in addition to courtiers. In the image, however, the honor of serving the royal family goes to miniature peasants and laborers, who form lines conveying various foods and drinks to the ogre-like Louis XVI and his family. As his brothers and their wives dine on plates of coins and paper money, the king, in the guise of Rabelais’s Gargantua, prepares to take a bite. To his right assisted by the marquis de Bouillé, identified as the “butcher of Nancy,” Marie-Antoinette holds

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131 “Antoinette avait dit plus qu’une fois qu’elle ne serait contente que quand elle aurait lavé ses mains dans ton sang.” Prudhomme, p. 451.
132 BNF, inv. QB MIOO 480.
up a cup into which the blood of a soldier gushes forth.\textsuperscript{133} She exclaims: “\textit{Faut-il que le verre ne soit ma baignoire.”}\textsuperscript{134}

Like these caricatures of the queen, the classical harpy of mythological origins was a symbol of famine and desolation, devastating fertile fields and consuming whole animals and stealing food directly off of tables or vomiting on or otherwise defiling Phineas’s feast. As they represented gluttony and ruin, it is no surprise that underground pamphleteers quickly came to associate reports of exorbitant royal spending, notably that of the queen at Trianon, with those of the Lake Fagua Monster. Although some scholars such as Meredith Martin see Marie-Antoinette’s redesign of the Petit Trianon as a “novel manifestation of queenship” that combined feudal ritual and display with pastoral sensibility and \textit{bienfaisance}, it came at great cost that put it at odds with popular conceptions of royal stewardship and land ethic. The political legitimacy of the monarchy was in effect partially derived from the “strategic exploitation, expansion, and general “improvement”’’ of natural resources.\textsuperscript{135} Like the harpies, who devoured valuable livestock and laid waste to the lake and surrounding South American landscape, Marie-Antoinette’s pastoral pursuits were seen not as enriching or productive. Widely perceived as a wanton extravagance that went so far as to aggravate the national deficit, the \textit{hameau} symbolized incompetence and political mismanagement.

In addition to popular condemnation of royal excess at Trianon, disapproval also came from courtiers such as the duc the Croÿ, who in his journal exclaimed: “\textit{Jamais deux arpents de}

\textsuperscript{133} Bouillé had gained the nickname of “butcher” for having mercilessly put down a mutinous rebellion in Nancy in the summer of 1790
\textsuperscript{134} [“The glass must be my bath tub.”]
terre n’ont tant changé de forme, ni coûté tant d’argent.” One thousand white faïence
flowerpots, complete with the monogram of “MA,” ornamented the structures of the hameau,
and despite her adoption of simple, rustic gowns en gaulle, Marie-Antoinette managed to work
up bills over 250,000 livres on clothing and jewelry in 1785. The diamond necklace
supposedly purchased in her name the same year had been valued at 2 million. Superintendent
of the queen’s household beginning in September of 1776, the princesse de Lamballe was
reported by the comte de Mercy-Argenteau as receiving 150,000 livres a year in 1776 in addition
to a pension of 40,000 for her brother and 14,000 more in supplementary income as a colonel.
In similar fashion, Marie-Antoinette provided the daughter of the duchesse de Polignac, Aglaé,
with a “monster” dowry of 800,000 livres upon her marriage to the comte de Guiche in 1780.
As she accumulated debts and expenses, it appeared as though she could not help but continue
drawing funds from the rapidly depleting treasury as if she were a private individual and not a
queen.

Both the harpy and Marie-Antoinette were accused of depleting basic resources in
addition to posing a direct threat to the very lives of Frenchmen and women. The rapacious
harpies despoiled land surrounding Lake Fagua like the queen, accused of denying the French
people food in the Ci-Devant Grand Couvert. Such fears had materialized as early as 1775 when
finance minister Anne-Robert Turgot attempted to liberalize grain sales, abolishing internal duty
taxes and allowing foreign imports, in effect leaving the prices to free trade. Combined with a
poor harvest the season before, prices skyrocketed as a result of this reform, leaving thousands of

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137 This expense was more than double her annual allowance of 120,000 livres. See Weber, p. 175.
starving people clamoring for bread. As some millers were keeping flour in reserves, riots were organized to demand their sale, some making their way to Versailles where a mob of five thousand nearly stormed the palace after hearing rumors of royal hoarding.\(^{140}\)

Although not directly implicated in any political legislation at this time, Marie-Antoinette’s flour powdered coiffures made her suspect of intrinsically evil decadence. Combined with Turgot’s harsh quelling of the riots, popularly referred to as the Flour Wars, the queen’s frivolous use of flour that could have alleviated the people’s suffering served to further place her in a negative light. The fact that many of the engravings detail the monster as vivant or living reinforces the idea of actual danger posed by the harpy. The monster did, in fact, exist, and could pose a threat to the people’s safety, security, and well-being.

Around 1784, the Controller-General of Finances, the vicomte de Calonne, also found himself compared to the harpy. Appointed in November of 1783, Calonne envisioned plans for fiscal reform by 1786 that called for a universal tax that also applied to ecclesiastical and noble properties as well as the institution of free trade. His profligate personal spending and authoritarian manner made him widely unpopular, as did his association with the court faction headed by the duchesse de Polignac.\(^{141}\) This ministerial despotism went further as Calonne submitted his proposals directly to Louis XVI and a special assembly of his handpicked notables, not the sovereign courts, the parlements, in 1787. The last such Assembly of Notables had not been called into order since the reign of Louis XIII.

\(^{140}\) See Cynthia A. Bouton, *The Flour War: Gender, Class, and Community in Late Ancien Régime French Society* (University Park: Penn State Press, 1993).

To discredit Calonne, pamphlets and periodicals made scathing allusions to the South American *monstre unique*, whose mythological prototype, the harpy Celaeno, even featured a crude anagram of his name. Journalist and future Jacobin Jean-Louis Carra pointed out this detail, adding that the harpy was a veritable emblem of the royal administration as envisioned by Calonne. As illustrated in numerous engravings published after 1784, the harpy’s open mouth, filled with sharp, jagged teeth was invoked by Carra to symbolize the growing financial deficit in part attributed to Calonne. “How many unfortunate animals of all species,” he exclaimed “it appeared to need in order to sate its cruel voracity!” Speaking in the voice of Calonne himself, another satirical pamphlet published in April of 1788 declared that any claims of his brilliance or innovation would be shattered “en retraçant [sic] à la nation indignée, le portrait de la harpie qui l’avait dévorée pendant quatre ans.”

Once again, fashionable dress assumed symbolic power as milliners began creating *chapeaux à la Calonne* that featured a crown trimmed *à la harpie* in 1787. In light of the harpy’s symbolic resonance, the opening of Favart’s *Les trois folies*, originally planned for 1785, was delayed until January of 1786 for its perceived allusions to the minister. Comparable to the native chief in the play, Calonne had proved an unfit steward of the royal treasury and by extension the kingdom. A circa 1790 caricature, complete with a dog defecating on his failed

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143 “[in recounting to the outraged nation the description or image of the harpy that it had devoured for four years.]” Anonymous, *M. de Calonne tout entier: Ouvrage critique, politique et moral* (Brussels: 1788), p.2.


reforms, poked fun at his economic “paralysis.” Like the harpy, crushing financial deficit had also led to the stagnation of the monarchy.

Despite her personal distaste for him, stemming in large part from his disapproval of her purchase of the château of Saint-Cloud in 1785 for 6 million livres, Marie-Antoinette and Calonne became intimately linked in revolutionary propaganda, such as the politicized prints of the *Monstre du Chilly* and *Madame l’Aspict*. French collective memory placed the queen and the minister, popularly referred to as Monsieur and Madame Déficit, at the forefront of the dilapidation of the prerevolutionary treasury. At her trial the queen was even described as having worked in concert with the “infamous and execrable” Calonne to have brought France to ruin.

By likening Calonne and Marie-Antoinette to harpies and condemning the queen as a monstrous mother, social critics and revolutionaries alike attacked the reputation of the monarchy and called into question its political legitimacy. Calonne’s dismissal and subsequent exile to Lorraine in the spring of 1787 ultimately rested upon his failure to repair the state of the kingdom’s finances. Popular discontent over his program for reform had in large part been fueled and mediated by comparisons made between him and the Lake Fagua monster. By the Revolution, the harpy was used in a way that gave meaning to such critiques and actually took

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146 Anonymous, *Calonne en parlisie* [sic], circa 1790-1791, BNF, de Vinck, inv. 3705.
147 Like the Petit Trianon, this estate ten kilometers from Paris was given to the queen by Louis as her own personal property. Unlike Trianon, however, public funds were used to purchase Saint-Cloud from the duc d’Orléans. Jean Vatout, *Le palais de Saint-Cloud: Souvenirs historiques, son histoire et sa description* (Paris: Bonaventure et Ducessois, 1852), p. 208. In addition to public disapproval of so lavish an expense in plain sight of Paris, magistrate Jean-Jacques Duval d’Eprémesnil would describe the idea of palaces owned by a queen of France as “impolitique et immoral” [“unwise and immoral”]. Campan, p. 200.
the image of the queen herself. Marie-Antoinette’s death on the scaffold on 16 October 1793 represented the Revolution’s symbolic and material triumph over a monster. Unmasked as a self-defined libertine woman in pamphlets that described her blatant disregard for court etiquette and decent behavior, Marie-Antoinette could no longer assume a conventional social role as either queen of France or a Frenchwoman.

Calonne, a ministerial monster whose reforms had led to financial sterility, was successfully rejected from the *polis* in the hopes of cleansing and regenerating the treasury just as the Boreads had rid Phineas of his harpies in classical mythology. In similar fashion, the fall of the guillotine’s blade represented a final victory over a monstrous queen. In light of the years of defamatory gossip and underground literature, the queen could not help but be likened to Medusa, snakes and all, or to the strange beast captured in Peru and labeled a harpy.
CONCLUSION

“Des monstres rôdent, dont la forme change avec l'histoire du savoir.” 149

Even after 1789, when enlightened principles took hold of French social and political institutions as never before, the allegorical power of the harpies did not wane, as seen in at least two etchings depicting a fantastic creature representative of the National Assembly. 150 Similar to the Peruvian monsters of 1784, these horned, winged, snaky-haired, multi-breasted, and blind hybrid creatures from 1791 and 1792 are even more politicized as they string together veritable rosaries of legislation perceived as useless or blindly idealistic. The fear of sexual indeterminacy, a key element in many representations of the androgynous harpies, also manifested itself in depictions of the aristocracy and the clergy as multi-headed hydric of privilege and rank, described in revolutionary almanacs as neither male nor female, but of both sexes. Insofar as it undermined the authority and legitimacy of the elite, the harpy functioned as a catalyst of the political process of the French Revolution as much as it did in the development of fashionable dress, scientific discourse, and the diffusion of printed literature before the taking of the Bastille.

This thesis has aimed to showcase the importance of the harpies as symbolic monsters in late eighteenth-century France. In focusing specifically on the frequently ignored example of the harpie, I have traced a cultural history of monstrosity in eighteenth-century France and the Enlightenment in addition to simply presenting the merit of these neglected engravings and accompanying descriptions of the monster as catalysts for popular culture, scientific inquiry,

149 [There are monsters on the prowl, whose form changes with the history of knowledge.] Michel Foucault, L’ordre du discours (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), p. 35.
150 Harpie aveugle tenant un chapelet de décrets [Blind harpy holding a rosary of decrees, interpreted to represent the National Assembly], 1791, BNF, coll. de Vinck, inv. 2751; Identical print, 1792, BNF, coll. de Vinck, inv. 2752.
public opinion, and political transformation. As seen in the previous chapters, the harpies of 1784 belonged to a culture complicated by interests and concerns that spread across various cultural and intellectual spheres. The images and descriptions of the harpie did not function in an isolated way. A fascination with the wonders of the New World, coupled with knowledge of classical myths from Antiquity, fostered the popularity of these creatures whose physical attributes could be appropriated by marchandes de modes, their equally fashionable clients, playwrights, writers, and scientists. Likewise, their symbolic power was utilized by caricaturists and revolutionaries to question political events and society at large.

As we continue to tell stories of monsters and other fantastic creatures through literature and in cinema, we perpetuate the narrative of the Monstre du Chilly. On a deeper level, we still use monsters and monstrous iconography to attempt to derive control and provide symbolic resolutions to problems and concerns that cannot be solved at the level of our everyday experience. Monsters such as Frankenstein, vampires, and werewolves offer answers or at least lend additional context to real problems, a sort of victory of matter over mind. In much the same way, people in 1780s France looked to the Lake Fagua monster or harpie as a means by which to explain contemporary questions of natural order and political legitimacy, in addition to projecting their own views on its usefulness, whether in appropriating its image to trim a hat or to provide a theatrical element in a play.
Appendix: Images

**Figure I** Le Médecin guarissant [sic] Phantasie [sic], purgeant aussi par drogues la folie [The Physician curing Fantasy and Purging Folly with Drug], circa 1600-1620, Matthäus Greuter, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, coll. Hennin, inv. 1877.

**Figure II** Allarme [sic] générale des habitants de Gonesse occasionnée par la chute [sic] du ballon aréostatique [sic] de Mr. de Mongolfier [General alarm of the inhabitants of Gonesse occasioned by the descent of the aerostatic balloon of Monsieur de Montgolfier], 1783, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, lot 13403, no. 38.

**Figure III** Monstre qui a été pris dans le Lac de Fagua, au royaume de S.ta Fé [Monster taken in Lake Fagua, in the kingdom of Santa Fe], 1784, anonymous, chez Bevallet à Paris, BNF, coll. de Vinck, inv. 1151

**Figure IV** Description de ce monstre unique [Description of this unique monster], 1784, anonymous, chez les Campion frères à Paris, BNF, coll. Hennin, inv. 10009.

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Fig. VIII
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Fig. XXX

Fig. XXXI
LES FOLIES.

Fig. XXXII
Fig. XXXIV

Fig. XXXV
LA PANTHERE AUTRICHIENNE

POUR AU MECHERIT ET L’EXCERATION DE LA NATION FRANCAISE DANS LA POSTÉRITÉ LA PLUS RECULÉE.

Fig. XXXVIII
Vn peuple est sans honneur, et mérite ses chaînes,
Quand il baisse le front sous le sceptre des Reines.
Fig. XLV

Fig. XLVI
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