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“My Hideous progeny”: creative monstrosity in the works of Kiki Smith, Abigail Lane and Cindy Sherman

The expression “My Hideous Progeny” is widely known to be taken from Mary Shelley's preface to the revised (1831) edition of *Frankenstein*, in which she wrote, of the novel itself and of its creature, Frankenstein's monster, “And now once again I bid my hideous progeny go forth and prosper”. If the monster was not only the product of Frankenstein's “workshop of filthy creation”, but also the “child” from whom Frankenstein as parent recoils in horror, the works of Kiki Smith, Abigail Lane and Cindy Sherman, created out of body parts, can also be considered hideous progenies of female creativity.

Like in Mary Shelley's gothic novel, the body, in the works of these three American artists, is not only the raw material of their art, but also the screen on which we project our bad dreams, because as Christoph Grunenberg notes, in *Gothic: Transmutations of Horror in Late 20th Century Art*, postmodern Gothic takes the shape of “formless, horrendous, shocking images of mutilated and rotting bodies with limbs covered in boils and wounds,” of disjoined body parts uncannily “transformed into nightmares.” Through the art of Smith, Lane and Sherman, we can certainly feel the shudder of body horror that ripples through the Gothic canon from *Frankenstein*, whose manmade monster's “yellow skin barely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath”, a monstrosity also common to Kiki Smith's *Virgin Mary*, a sculpture where the woman's nude body is flayed, with the skin removed to reveal bare muscle tissue, which shows that the monstrous feminine in contemporary art can be grounded in a very famous hallmark work of Gothic literature.

SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Maria Antónia Lima teaches American Gothic Literature at the University of Évora in Portugal; coordinates a Master Course in Contemporary Literary Creations; is a member of the International Gothic Association and of the American Studies group at the University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies (ULICES); is President of the Portuguese Association for Anglo-American Studies; has participated in some international gothic conferences; has published several essays in international and national literary magazines; writes Gothic fiction. Some publications include *Tragic Emotion and Impersonality in Modern Poetry* and a PhD thesis entitled *Brown, Poe, Hawthorne and Melville: Terror in American Literature*.

