

Coming Out of the Casket: Lisi Harrison's Monster High and Queer Identity

While much has been written about queer identity in Monster High doll fandom, less attention has been paid to the treatment of queer identity in the original book series. These four novels, written by young adult author Lisi Harrison and aimed at an older audience than most of the subsequent novels, take place in a universe to which the franchise never returns. In this alternate universe, our titular monsters are presented as RADS (“regular attribute dodgers”) who, as high-school students, struggle to pass as “normies” (aka normal humans).

Post-Harrison, Monster High and its offshoot texts primarily focus on the Ghoulfriends, seven monstrous high school students who are the offspring of well-known monsters. Comparatively, Harrison's novels differ by including a large network of characters that features normies—such as the Carvers, a traditional nuclear family— as diegetic characters. The addition of normies to this already large network of character relationships works to create a paradigmatically complex text in which each character can be read as both an individual and as an exemplar of “social and moral values” (Fiske 196). Placed in contrast to the Carver family and other normies, the monsters become Halberstam's “meaning machines,” nonnormative characters “coded to represent...repressed and oppressed groups in society” (Hills 49).

While monstrosity as metaphor can be attached to a variety of differences, Harrison returns again and again to the language of the coming out narrative to present the Ghoulfriends and other assorted monsters as a distinct, subaltern, population that hide the truth of their identities from the normal, or normie, majority. This paper argues that this indirect expression of queerness allows Harrison to craft a text that elides the expected ending, an ending in which the monsters are vanquished and a heterosexual couple lives happily ever after. Instead, Harrison moves the monster from a figure that threatens the heteronormative lifestyle of the normies to a “tolerated

subaltern” (Britzman 160) figure that has to acclimate themselves to a role in the heteropatriachal society of the normies.

Note:

This proposal was initially accepted for ChLA 2018, but I was unable to present due to a death in the family. I enjoyed presenting at ChLA 2017, and I was disappointed to miss last year’s conference. Thank you for your consideration!