Romance Gone Mortal – Taboo of Shipping Fictional Movie Monsters

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Introduction – shipping, monstrous romance and taboo

A fan is an umbrella term for different kind of identities, and one of these is a shipper – a fan who is interested in romantic relationships, imaginary or real, between characters in media texts. A shipper is a member of an interpretive subgroup, which focuses to find romantically charged subtexts from media texts. These subtexts are divided to romantic relationships between fictional characters by shippers. This activity is called shipping, which is a common practise in fandoms and has become a popular facet of fan interaction. For instance, many fan fiction readers and writers have announced their shipper preferences when interviewed. On the other hand, shipping has a controversial reputation in fandoms – interpreting texts in different ways, amongst people who are passionate about the source text, can result in conflicts and in some cases intolerance by fandom subgroups. (Gonzales 2016; Bothe2014, 6, 10.) Examining shipping as a controversial phenomenon includes for instance fandoms concerns about turning a sci-fi media text into a soap opera (*The X-Files* 1993–), queering a detective series (*Sherlock* 2010–) or stigmatising a fantasy horror series with a norm-breaking theme, for instance incest (*Supernatural* 2005–) (see e.g. Scodari & Felder 2000; Caro Lancho 2013, 15; Gonzales 2016). There can also be a struggle between shippers of different couples in the same fandom and shipping can reach outside fannish dimensions by pairing real persons (RPF, *Real Person Fiction*) or oneself with fictional characters.

Locating shippers in the field of fanhood is challenging, because they are experts on creating intertextual connections – they might operate simultaneously in several fandoms and combine them. Despite its popularity in fan cultures, shippers and shipping are a mostly unexplored research topic (Souza et al. 2014). Industries behind media text productions have noticed shippers´ significance as popularity builders. Shippers constitute one of the most active communities in fandoms and their actions

advertise the media text for free, so fostering them can lead to commercial benefit. Shippers are also experts in the field of visual communication – they examine media texts through interpretative lenses of their own and create new individual narratives, which can take a visual form.

In this article, I research the taboo of shipping two fictional movie monsters, Pennywise the Dancing Clown and Babadook, and the way they turned into a celebrated power couple in social media (Image 1). Pennywise, an eternal entity and a demonic monster, is the main antagonist in Stephen King's novel It (1985) and its audiovisual adaptations (1990, 2017). Pennywise takes the shape of a clown to get near children in a town called Derry, feeds on children and gets its life force from their fear. Soon after the premiere of the 2017 movie adaptation It rose to the most highest-grossing horror movie at the US box office of all the time (The Guardian2017), and the second part of the story is due to be released as an audiovisual adaptation in 2019. In this article, my focus is on the most recent representation of Pennywise because my data, material produced by shippers, examines mainly this version from the latest movie. The other character, Babadook, is a titular character in an Australian psychological horror movie and a sleeper hit The Babadook (2014), which tells a story of a single mother who remains haunted by the death of her husband and tries to get along with her anxious young son. This troubled family is tortured by Babadook, an incarnation of mother´s repressed grief.

Image 1. Fandom vs. Shipperdom; while fans take interest in media texts as entirety, shippers are particularly interested in characters and romantically interpreted relationships between them.

The undercurrent of this article is taboo – the concept is examined from standpoints of shipping as an activity, monstrous romance and sexual appealing. Shipping monsters

is a taboo because they operate between disgust and attraction. The same creatures who terrifies us can evoke potent escapist fantasies – the linking of monstrosity with the forbidden makes the monster all the more appealing (Cohen 1996b, 16–17). Monsters are liminal beings, something between human and inhuman, and this liminality turns monster into a taboo.

Both Babadook and Pennywise can be examined in the context of queer – a critical theory to challenge and break apart conventional categories (see Giffney & Hird 2008, 5), not only referring to sexuality or gender minorities. Both characters are sexually multidimensional and therefore can be seen as strange, fascinating, and even scary. Popular culture has already imagined multiple alternatives to male and female, masculine and feminine. The contemporary culture, specifically horror film, can provide a rich archive for an alternative politics of embodiment, reproduction and non-reproduction. The horror film has become a rich location for imagining and working out the relations between the human and its others, or the nonhuman and its queering of the site of embodiment. (Halberstam 2008, 266, 275.) Via TV, the monster comes to our home and we permit its access (Ingebretsen 1998, 31).

The key concept is affect – it signifies sensation and intense feelings that become visible through the circulation of objects, such as pictures or videos, in digital spaces (Paasonen 2011, 232). In this article I research both affectivity of fan-made drawings concerning the Pennywise/Babadook pairing and motives behind shipping oneself with a monster using Pennywise as an example. Desire for monstrous beings has always existed in the culture, and social media has become an arena where this controversial phenomenon can rise into wider consciousness. I am interested in how shippers find both sympathetic and repulsive features in these terrible creatures per se and how shippers are humanizing them by fan art. Shipping such characters is highly controversial – it breaks taboos in society, where we have been taught to see monsters in context of evil. Juxtaposing and bundling together current media phenomena, for instance Pennywise´s status as a sex symbol and Babadook´s status as a LGBTQ icon, is a familiar method in the internet culture to evoke emotions in users and thus ensure the stickiness of content and spreading forward (Sihvonen & Wik 2017, 16).

I examine how shippers celebrate controversial ships and justify their right for interpretation. In the second chapter I discuss social media and the ways it functions as an arena for shippers, I also present the two sets of data. The third and fourth chapters examine the monstrous desire and what kind of themes can be handled through monstrosity. The fifth chapter summarises my key findings.

Research method and material – social media as a display window into shipping

It premiered on September 8th 2017. It took only few days before first articles discussing Pennywise´s sexual appeal appeared in blogs and digital magazines. These

articles lifted up some of the most intriguing tweets about the subject. Soon after this discussion, the Pennywise/Babadook ship burst into flames in social media, and online journals and media sites tried to follow the development of the phenomenon. An accident of categorization was the trigger for Babadook´s status as a LGBTQ icon – *The Babadook* gained a whole new kind of fame and interpretations when the movie was mistakenly categorized by video streaming service Netflix as a LGBTQ movie instead of horror. This led to the rainbow community welcoming the titular character with open arms, despite the absence of overt references to LGBTQ culture in the film. In June 2017 Babadook was displayed as a symbol during that year's Pride Month (Wikipedia 2018) (Image 2). The roots of the ship lie in a debate between users of 4Chan website and Twitter – Babadook was already declared to be a LGBTQ icon, and 4Chan user tried to troll a Twitter user who said Pennywise was also gay. This tongue-in-cheek conversation had soon summoned a large audience and the new ship was born. (Karnes 2017.)

Image 2. Babadook as a LGBTQ icon and celebrating the 2017´s Pride Month.

Social media has been a key factor in announcing the idea of monster´s sexual appeal. For instance, Babadook´s declamation to a LGBTQ icon happened via social media and thus had visibility which led him to be the guest of honor in Pride. This decoding of monster´s sexuality is not, however, a brand new or social media -constructed phenomenon – social media offers a peephole to this deep structure of taboo, which has been a part of culture for centuries. This taboo can be examined via both fictional and real-life monsters. For instance, it is not exceptional for "normal" people to fall for serial killers. However, it is a taboo to become (sexually) attracted to such abominations, who have lost touch to their humanity because of the crimes they have committed. Serial killers are examples of borderline creatures possessing mythic primitivism that is both positive and negative (Picart 1996, 2).

Twitter was selected as a primary platform of this study based on my observations of media sites – several of them lifted up some of the most fascinating tweets about the subject as examples of ongoing conversation. Access to Twitter is effortless based on its overt nature and visibility also for unregistered users. (Isotalus, Jussila & Matikainen 2018, 9.) Twitter's strongest asset in competition with other platforms is its ability to generate enormous amounts of "live" streams of short-lived online traffic (van Dijck 2013, 87). The service is optimal for high pace communication about occurring opinions and informing – hashtags aggregate wide conversations and contemporary communities (Koskela & Sihvonen 2018, 34, 47). In this article Twitter functions both as an instrument to collect the data and as a source to examine a phenomenon transmitted through it (see Isotalus, Jussila & Matikainen 2018, 26). It can be said based on my observations that for Pennywise/Babadook ship Autumn 2017 was the time period of reporting – it was something new, fun and highly controversial. At the end of my observation time I noticed that reporting was already abated, a month was an optimal period for informing about the ship.

The Twitter data was collected between 13th of September and 13th of October 2017. I used hashtags *#pennywise* and *#babadook* to track down the ongoing conversation, then adding popular names for the pairing, *#babawise* and *#pennydook*, to list of followed hashtags. In total 193 tweets matched my search. While organizing the collected data I noticed three tweets published between years 2014–16 with hashtag *#babawise*. I removed them from the data, as they were not related with the ship. Altogether 69 tweets included fan-made images. I approach these fan-made images with the concept of affect, which signifies sensation and intense feelings that become visible through the circulation of objects, such as pictures or videos, in digital spaces. Affect can be described as an immediate physical experience. Another used concept in this article is *stickiness*, which is an affective value. High rate circulation of an object, for instance a picture or a news headline, raises its affective value and it gains more and more stickiness. (Paasonen 2011, 232; ead. 2014, 25.) The phenomenon had affective stickiness from the starting point – when 4Chan and Twitter uses started their skirmish about sexual identities of the both characters, the back and forth trolling increased attractivity and visibility of the discussion among users increasing its affective stickiness (see ead. 2014, 22).

Tumblr, a microblogging and social networking website, was selected as a second platform for this study. It can be described as a massive churning machine of evocative photos. It has a huge queer ecosystem: users circulate porn, flirt, provide support to deal with homophobia as well advice on coming out (Cho 2015, 43). A Tumblr blog called *Pennywise Confessions* (Image 3) is the second set of my data – it also has a queer coming out -dimension allowing users to confess ones´ darkest desires towards Pennywise. The blog recognizes its controversiality by informing about *teratophilia*, the ability to see beauty in the unusual and a sexual preference for individuals having unusual appearance, and its subgenre *coulrophilia*, sexual attraction to clowns (see Urban Dictionary 2018[1]; Griffiths 2013). Shipping oneself

with a fictional character is one of the most controversial and misunderstood forms of shipping, and the intention of the blog´s administrator is to offer a safe place to manifest these kind of (sexual) needs without judgement or shame. The blog published 339 posts during 11th of September and 25th of November 2017. Those posts included eleven administrator's own announcements dealing with general guidelines or other notifications, which I removed from the data.
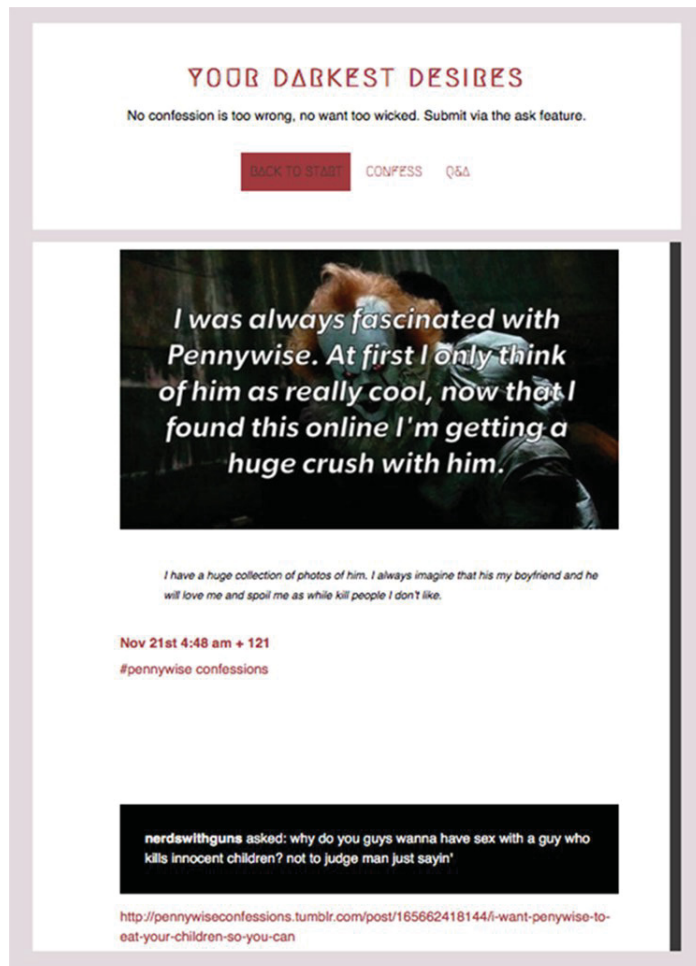

Image 3. Pennywise Confessions in Tumblr.

Hashtags are a way to ship in social media. Shipperdom, a community formed by shippers, is scattered all over the internet and it is not possible to locate it just in a one platform. Hashtags are a convention to collect together ideas and thoughts concerning a particular ship, for instance Pennywise/Babadook by using hashtag *#pennydook*. Collecting the data from Twitter would have been impossible without knowing the hashtags and routines based on them. Also the Tumblr blog data works with hashtags – if I would like to examine just particular type of confessions, for instance highly sexual ones, I could use a hashtag *#smut*. To get acquainted with hashtags is a way to get acquainted with shipperdom.

Obtained results and the data collected from Twitter – disarming the monster

Monster is a flexible concept which explores the distinctions between human and inhuman. It is a cultural body, best understood as an embodiment of difference, a breaker of category – monsters combine cultural meanings in ways that cannot actually exist in our culture, for instance vampires are both dead and alive, a combination of human being and animal. (Asma 2000, 7; Cohen 1996a, ix, x; Hills 2005, 16; Leffler 2000, 145.) In this chapter I connect Pennywise and Babadook to the traditional conception of the monster and monstrous desire. I also examine how the data collected from Twitter handles the tradition and on the other hand tames the concept of the monster.

The data collected from Twitter, altogether 69 tweets, included fan-made visual production. As I continued processing the data I noticed popularity of one fan-made image that was used in 34 tweets and dominated the visual flow. Other fan-made images were used altogether in 35 tweets. I performed close reading to the data and categorised it. The six categories found are *pure puppy love*, *erotic tension*, *steady relationship*, *reproduction/starting a family*, *LGBTQ motive* and *mastering the genre* (Figure 1).
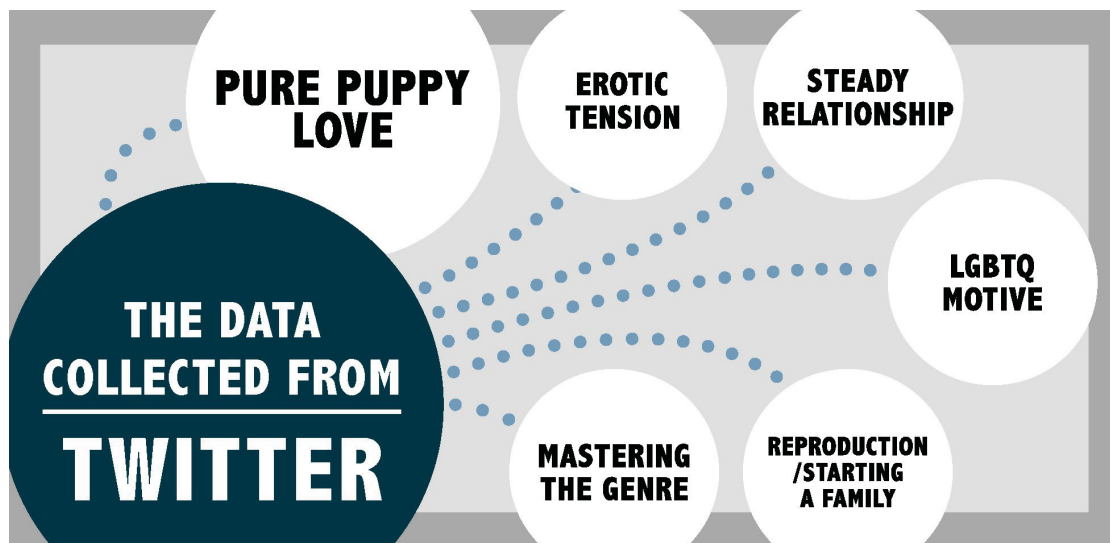

Figure 1. The main categories and subcategories for the data collected from Twitter.

Category pure puppy love forms the largest group. The most shared fan-made visual production (Image 4) fits in this category via its naive drawing style and innocent-highlighting message – Pennywise and Babadook look harmless and cute in childlike proportions with large heads and small bodies. This is one way to undress the monstrosity of the characters' and make them seem innocuous. Image is also free of provocation, characters' relationship is presented through a frame of innocent first love, the image represents their preliminary stage of sexual intimacy. References to the LGBTQ community are quite subtle, just Pennywise´s sign, one red balloon, has

multiplied to a rainbow-coloured bundle of balloons. It can be said that the image is easy to digest and it can be shared without the fear of emphasizing the LGBTQ aspect. Even it is a picture of monstrous ship, it can be interpreted in multiple ways – ode to friendship or love, as support to LGBTQ rights or as an indication of one's understanding of horror crossovers.

Image 4. Pennywise, Babadook and a rainbow-coloured bundle of balloons – the most shared fan-made production of the data collected from Twitter. Source: Twitter.com.

Erotic tension is the second category. Images classified to this category contain gazes, determined touching and lustful facial expressions. In Image 5 Pennywise is clearly seducing Babadook with his gaze – s/he holds Babadook´s chin up forcing her/him to look in her/his eyes while another hand is raised and used to hypnotise "the victim". Babadook is already under the spell, he does not seem reluctant and has reached one hand towards Pennywise. The image has strong sexual tension and it arouses questions about what's going to happen next. This is the reason for image´s provocativeness, there is no variety of ways to interpret it. Overt signs of LGBTQ theme as such as rainbow colours are not present, but the characters are represented as male, even Babadook´s face and figure has been softened or feminised compared to the original.

Image 5. Babadook gets enchanted by Pennywise´s hypnotic gaze. Source: Twitter.com.

Image 5 demonstrates how monsters can be fascinating and even charming. They are like predatory animals and kill for living, so their way of acting is easier to understand under the laws of nature. For instance it can be said that vampiric figures are seen as mysterious and appealing, as well sexually. It has not been so from the beginning of vampire folktales and literature. In Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* (1897) the vampire count from Transylvania is beastlike *other* pursuing just personal satisfaction, even if he has a certain type of charm and compelling sexuality. In 1960's the vampire character adopted more sexually alluring image via actor Christopher Lee. Eventually Annie Rice's series of novels, *The Vampire Chronicles* (1976–2016), introduced romantic, aristocratic, elegant vampires, who are always erotic and occasionally ethical. The vampire evolved from a plain monster to romantic hero and monstrous lover, who can be interpreted as a symbol of prohibited desire. (Leppälahti 2012, 155–156; Cohen 1996b, 5; Leffler 2000, 43; Klaber 2014, 2; Grady 1996, 226.)

As a monster Pennywise shares several qualities with vampire, both traditional and modern version. S/he has the vampiric gaze, which hypnotizes her/his victims and they just can not turn their eyes away of the amber-shaded eyes. S/he has a lust for blood and hunts predatorically to survive – after the hunger is satisfied, s/he retreats to her/his 27 years of rest. S/he can shapeshift like a vampire, and when feeding hers/his mouth is full of sharp blood-soaked teeth. Manipulative and from time to time even charming, her/his language is rich which beckons to intelligence and is therefore appealing. Always knowing the weaknesses of her/his victims s/he masterfully uses those as a benefit. In Image 5 Pennywise´s vampiric features are highlighted – he clearly dominates the situation and Babadook is claimed to be hers/his.

The third category is *steady relationship*. Fan-made production in this category contains themes of going steady – the crush has evolved to love, and the couple is ready take the next step in their relationship. In Image 6 characters are represented as adults, and Pennywise is popping the question of marriage with the help of his signature, a red balloon. Babadook does not hesitate and is eager to step on the holy matrimony. Even the theme of the image is serious, the style of drawing is simple and cute – the characters appearances do not highlight the fact that they are monsters, they look like being seen through a filter which makes them nice and approachable.

Image 6. Humanizing the monsters by a need to finding a mate. Source: Twitter.com.

Another archetype of monster is Frankensteinian one, referring to Mary Shelley´s tragic character named after his creator. Frankenstein is perhaps the most famous of the gentle-hearted giants gone bad, who has turned into a monster by his family and kills out of fear-induced rage (Asma 2009, 11). The Frankensteinian monster has two principal features. Firstly, it is characterized as a lumbering, clumsy, and ugly body. Secondly, the Frankensteinian monster, like its body, is a social misfit desperately in search of love, rather than a brilliant and dangerous rebel who flouts society's rules, like a vampire. (Picart 1996, 7.) Despite his unnatural origin, he is driven by the most humane need – finding a mate. In the Shelley´s book the creature itself ponders the taboo of his need by asking shall each man find a wife to his bosom and each beast have his mate, but is he doomed to be alone. Babadook can be interpreted as a Frankensteinian monster, who becomes misunderstood and dangerous when roaming freely. Babadook is both human and inhuman, which builds character´s repugnancy.

Like in *Frankenstein*, theme of smothered sexuality is also present in *The Babadook* – the mother tries to masturbate before getting into a sleep, but is interrupted by the fear of Babadook. Eventually the mother and her son confront Babadook, which nearly cost them their lives. In the end the mother accepts Babadook as a part of herself, as

her own creation and decides to take on responsibility, unlike the creator of poor Frankenstein's monster. When Babadook represented sorrow the mother felt after her husband's death she did not know how to love Babadook. After accepting Babadook her sorrow reformed into a loving memory. After that she was able to love her son and move on. The final minutes of the movie shows them in a garden, digging worms and after that standing next to a basement door – there Babadook moved after confrontation. The mother goes down the stairs, calms the monster down and offers her/him a bowl filled with worms to eat. Like Frankenstein´s monster, Babadook was misunderstood and hated by her/his creator, but after being nurtured and taken cared of, s/he became a part of the family. Babadook reforms the concept of the monster by arguing that dying is not always the inevitable destiny of a monster (cf. Ingebretsen 1998, 25). In Image 6 Frankensteinian monster finally finds love and her/his mate.

The fourth category is reproduction/starting a family. Fan-made images in this category examined how the relationship between the characters had evolved to the point of starting a family. In Image 7 the characters´ appearances are distinctly adult-like, their proportions are correct and they are dressed as ones. It is interesting how the shipper has changed characters´ clothes – neither Pennywise or Babadook wear their usual clothes, instead they are dressed like going for a walk in early winter with warm jackets, pullovers and boots. They seem to be in a merry mood and have laid their eyes on a boy while walking hand in hand with him. This boy is a character called Thomas from Spanish horror movie The Orphanage (2007), who is recognizable for the horror audience by the burlap-made sack which covers his head. He wears tidy clothes and holds Pennywise´s sign, one red balloon, in his hand.

Image 7. Humanizing the monsters by a basic human need – reproduction. Source:Twitter.com.

The image´s message is that Pennywise and Babadook can be good parents. They could be coming from a funfair with a balloon and snacks, having a lovely day there. This theme of parenting and representing Pennywise and Babadook clearly as male is provocative; the image is not as easy to digest like for instance Image 4. The possibilities for interpretation are not as extensive, even the image is affective. The image decodes how monsters must find means to propagate their species. For instance, a vampire can bite and thus have offspring, but this image demonstrates how monstrous families can be started by adopting progeny from other movies of the horror genre. In this way, the image is complex and needs wider knowledge of the genre to be fully understood.

Like being said, Image 7 represents both Pennywise and Babadook as male figures. In fact Pennywise is not male or female, it is an entity and referred simply as *it* in the movie´s title. S/he is a shapeshifter, who moves between species and genders and triggers (repressed) fears of its victims to pop out. Babadook is more complex monster in a way that s/he is both an incarnation of sorrow and a reflection of the mother. It can be said that in fact Babadook is more female than male, even though her/his appearance with angular figure, black cape and top hat are signifiers of a male character. The concept of these kind of liminal beings evokes to examine the significance of sexlessness as a stimulus of fear. In Image 7 liminaliness of the sex has been erased by representing the characters as male which is emphasized by masculine wardrobe.

The fifth category is *LGBTQ motive*. It shares qualities with Image 4 – a shipper has used plain drawing style, and the characters' childlike proportions are highlighting their harmless and approachable nature (Image 8). Monstrosity has been drawn out of them, in fact they are not even the center of attention in the picture, the rainbow-colored flag is. Despite the flag, the image lacks rich colouring, so the flag´s role is highlighted and ties it into the LGBTQ theme. There is some provocation – the LGBTQ theme cannot be moved aside as Pennywise is kissing Babadook and their hands are around each other. Touching and showing emotions is nevertheless quite moderate, without the flag they could be interpreted to be a couple of friends hugging. The image does not show passionate love or sexual tension.

Image 8. Pennywise and Babadook are supporting LGBTQ rights. Source: Twitter.com.

The sixth category is *mastering the genre*. The fan-made productions in this category emphasize shippers´ familiarity towards both the ship and the horror genre. Knowing the ship is capital in fandoms of the horror genre, but it is not the most significant matter. Competing with knowledge is typical to fandoms, and by sharing pictures of this category the currency of knowledge is indicated. These images are not highly affective – they require deep-level knowledge of the horror genre, for instance in Image 9 the character´s appearances have drastically changed and only hashtags offer a clue to their origins.

Image 9. Twitter user announces to be familiar with both the ship and the horror genre. Source: Twitter.com.

Hashtags *#pennydook* and *#babawise* served as a way to find the ship and designations for the pairing. These designations are further divided to categorization RST or UST. If shipper supports RST (*Resolved Sexual Tension*), s/he hopes that romantic feelings shared by the pairing are made public. If the supported view is UST (*Unresolved Sexual Tension*), shipper enjoys the sexual tension between the pair and finds no need to shatter it by confessing romantic feelings. (See Scodari & Felder 2000.) Based on the analysis of data collected from Twitter, all categories, only *mastering the genre* as an exception, supported RST classification. The categories line up to form a traditional course of (human) relationships – it starts from finding a mate, evolves to crush and sexual desire, then progresses to steady relationship and commitment and finally a desire to start a family comes along. Understanding the circle of life through this kind of structure and applying it to monsters molds them more and more human and via that more and more identifiable and acceptable target of desire. This has an influence on affectivity of the image – the most retweeted image (Image 4) presents cute and harmless, child-like Pennywise and Babadook and successfully undresses their monstrosity. It demonstrates how controversial content is molded in a suitable form for mainstream and is thus easy to share.

Obtained results and the data collected from Tumblr – monster as a reflection of self

Shipping oneself with a monster is a way to examine the monster as a reflection of self. I approach this theme via data collected from a microblogging and social networking website Tumblr and examining what kind of themes can be handled through monstrosity. I followed the blog called *Pennywise Confessions* (Image 3) between 11th of September and 31st of December 2017 and collected 339 postings. Those included 11 announcements from the administrator, which I deleted from the data leaving the final number of postings to 328. The principal function of the blog is that a confessor sends her/his written confession to the administrator, who combines the text with a suitable image and finally publishes the confession. By this procedure all confessions comply to the same visual layout and are read by the administrator – after all, the controversial blog gets its share of trolling and shaming, and those posts are deleted from the flow of confessions.
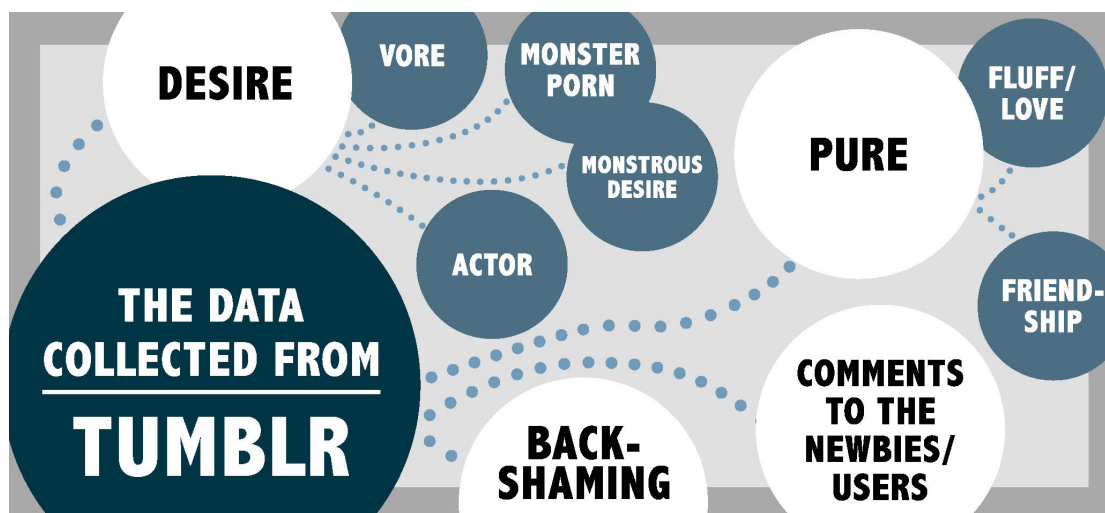
Figure 2. The main categories and subcategories for the data collected from Tumblr.

I categorised the data and formed four main groups of postings – *desire*, *pure*, *back-shaming* and *comments to the newbies/users* (Figure 2). The first one is also the largest category, which I divided further to four subcategories. The combining factor for the postings in the main category *desire* is that they all examine the concept from different angles and they are very bold. The first subcategory is *vore* – it is an abbreviation from the word *vorarephilia*, a fantasy about being consumed (Urban Dictionary 2017). The second subcategory of *desire* is *monster porn*. Monstrous desire has generated its own genre even in porn industry – monster (car)toon porn is a genre of three dimensional (3D) computer-generated pornography focusing on depictions of sexual encounters of the impossible and improbable kind (Paasonen 2017, 1). The line between these subcategories is wavering – in *monster porn* the desire to being bitten or other ways lethally damaged during intercourse is also present, but it is not the most important aspect (Image 10).
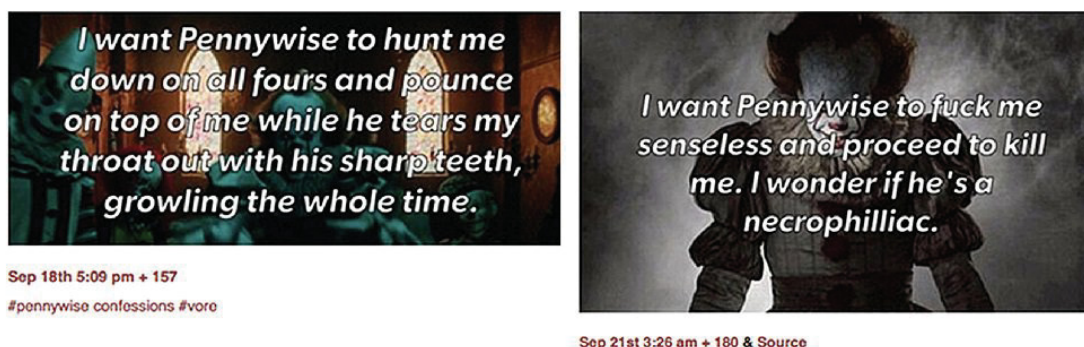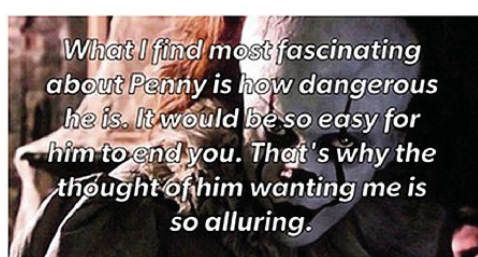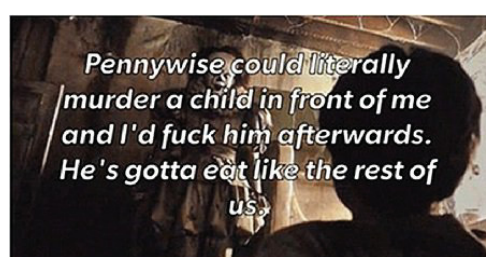

Image 10. The main category desire – postings from the subcategories vore and monster porn. Source: www.pennywiseconfessions.tumblr.com.

The third subcategory is *monstrous desire*, which examines the taboo to desire a monster. First posting in Image 11 describes thrill of being an object of desire for a monster. The second one finds justification for desire treating Pennywise as a living

being trying to survive – it hunts predatorically, not just because of its demon nature. For instance, in horror literature count Dracula is a rapist by assaulting a young woman who does not remember the happened afterwards (Klaber 2014, 43), and still he is seen as an object of lust and desire strengthened by charismatic actors playing him in films. Even the French fairy tale, *La Belle et la Bête*, and afterwards Disney´s 90´s classic *The Beauty and The Beast* (1991) has a monstrous lover – the Beast was not merely a test for the heroine in terms of her ability to see past surfaces, but he was a site of contained peril (Klaber 2014, 18–19). Like these examples in this category demonstrate, confessors are conscious about the present peril but it just strengthens the desire.
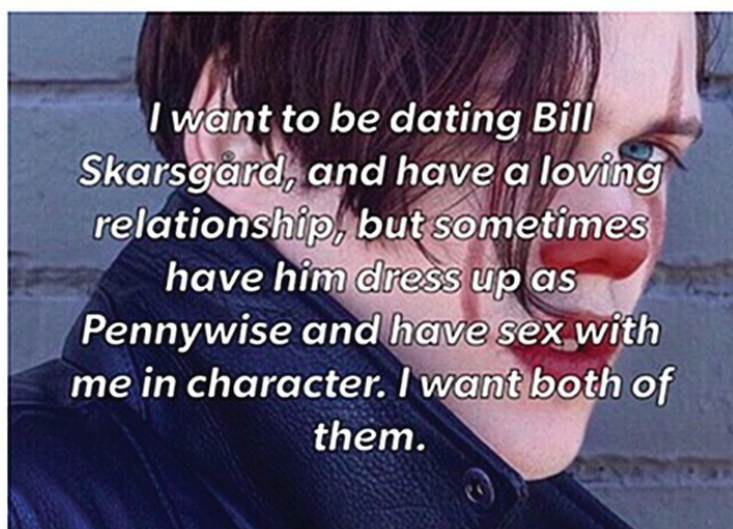

Image 11. The main category desire – two postings from the subcategory monstrous desire. The first one is aware of the taboo and the second one justifies the desire. Source: www.pennywiseconfessions.tumblr.com.

The fourth subcategory of *desire* is *the actor*. Bill Skarsgård, the actor playing Pennywise, is an ascending young star. Because of his young age he was a surprising choice for the role of one of the most iconic horror villains, but after the premiere Skarsgård was praised by both audiences and critics. However, in *It* he is under heavy make-up and almost unrecognizable – in Image 12 Skarsgård is seen in a light version of Pennywise´s make-up and is still recognizable. The posting represents both the actor and the monster and examines the line between them. These two personalities do not rule out each other, in fact Skarsgård and Pennywise are the two sides of the same being for the confessor.

Edit by: [x]

Oct 10th 5:09 pm + 322 & Source
#pennywise confessions

Image 12. The main category desire – a posting from the subcategory actor. Source: www.pennywiseconfessions.tumblr.com.

The second main category is *pure*, for which I have formed two subcategories. The first one is *fluff/love*, in which Pennywise is seen as an object of innocent love (Image 13). *Fluff* is a term of classification in fan fiction – it refers to light romantic, sometimes humorous content, which has no strict storyline (Urban Dictionary 2018). On the other hand, postings in this category are serious and feelings between self and Pennywise are described as deep and the relationship steady. The second subcategory is *friendship*, in which Pennywise is seen as a guardian, whose dubious actions are justified by the urge to protect his friends (Image 13). To befriend a monster is a cool thought, and the idea of binge-watching movies and eating popcorn with him is fascinating.
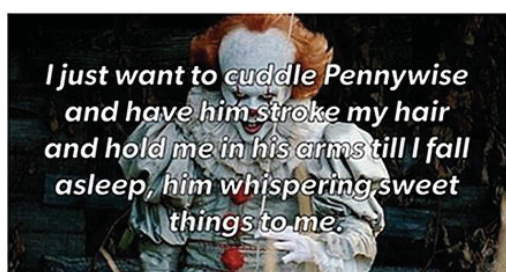
Sep 13th 9:39 am + 235 & Source
#PURE #pennywise #monster boyfriend #fluffywise #pennyfluff
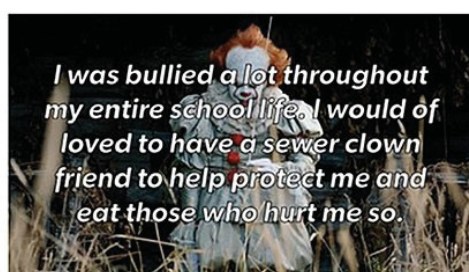
Nov 5th 2:24 pm + 144
#pure #fluffywise

Image 13. The main category pure – postings from the subcategories fluff/love and friendship. Source: www.pennywiseconfessions.tumblr.com.

The final two main categories are the blog administrator's answers for shamers and newbies/users. In the main category *back-shaming* the administrator has received judgmental postings from Tumblr users outside the fandom who are shaming both the blog and its users because of the controversial content (Image 14). The administrator lifts up some of these posting to the blog´s image flow and back-shames them visually, for instance with a gif. By this procedure, the administrator encourages readers to keep on sending confessions and demonstrates that everybody has a right for an opinion – desiring a monster is not as unusual as it seems and the blog is open-minded safe space to examine those feelings. The last main category is *comments to the newbies/users* – confessors have found the blog and their desire for Pennywise quite recently, and after first shock they have become interested about the monster by themself or find the blog´s theme bold and intriguing. The administrator has lifted some of these comments as part of the confession flow and added a gif via which he/she gives approving feedback to the newbie/user. At the same time s/he is showing how the phenomenon is spreading and how the feedback can also be positive and empowering.
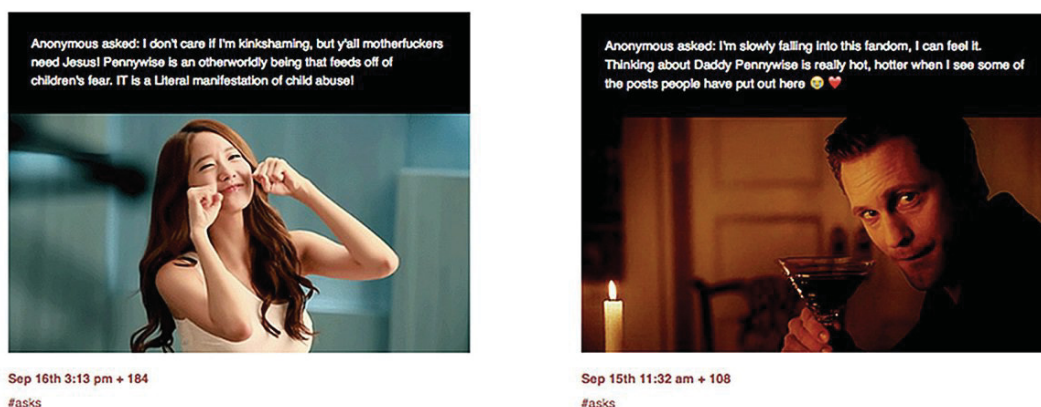

Image 14. Postings from the main categories back-shaming and comments to the newbies/users. Source: www.pennywiseconfessions.tumblr.com.

Based on the analysis of the data collected from Tumblr, through monstrosity one can examine a (repressed) need of romance and staying in touch with other beings, sexual desire and fantasies. It can be said that the monster embodies sexual practices that must not be committed, or that may be committed only through the monster's body. The monster enforces the cultural codes that regulate sexual desire – it is transgressive, too sexual, perversely erotic, a lawbreaker. (Cohen 1996b, 14, 16.) The horror story is concerned with a conflict-ridden relationship with the primitive, instinctive, uncontrollable part of the human personality, which is apparently linked to sexuality or aggression. The monster not only represents menace and opposes the good characters – it also embodies something terrifying and fascinating which arouses the interest and emotional involvement of the reader or viewer (Leffler 2000, 159, 142), such as in the Pennywise´s case. In the story the character is scared of the

unknown, but simultaneously driven on towards it by an inner instinct to make the unknown known (ead. 2000, 111), like the viewer. It could be asked, is this the same force that drives the female characters in harlequin romance novels to find out the dark past and deep wounds of troubled, alienated and still fascinating men.

Conclusion – shipping as a resistanced form of fan participation in social media

In this article, I have examined shipping via frame of monstrous romance. Thinking monsters as queer can be seen as throwing a match to a smouldering fundament – it has always been present in culture and it has appeared in multiple different ways. For instance, during the 19th century "freak shows" and "monster spectacles" were common entertainment (Asma 2009, 7) and used the term *monster* pejoratively. This demonstrates how deep roots the fear of queer and all humanity-crossing lies in the society, and how beings comprehended as monsters operates between disgust and attraction. After all, we all have the potential to become monstrous.

My two data sets presented the differences and their meanings for shipping between two social media platforms. Twitter was used to announce the existence of the new pairing and there was not any motive to refine character´s story. Different opinions concerning the pairing were present in informing process, but the characters did not evolve in typical ways for instance fanfiction. On the other hand in the microblog *Pennywise Confessions* postings operated as vignettes and evolved Pennywise´s and confessor oneselves´ story – oneself was shipped with the clown purely romantic and opposite to that in powerfully erotic ways, utmostly porn. The motive for confessors was to examine repressed and controversial desires and mold Pennywise´s story ahead. S/he was also interpreted mostly as a male in Tumblr, as many of the boldest confessors mentioned his (big monster) penis. In Twitter both Pennywise and Babadook were represented more gender neutral, not particular male or female, who represented the LGBTQ community via their liminality. In Twitter the characters were seen gender free and they had been humanized and their appearance softened. In Tumblr Pennywise was interpreted as male and dangerous, but these characteristics together built her/his attractivity.

Hashtags played a crucial role especially in the first set of the data. In Twitter a user had to know the right hashtags to be able to follow the ongoing discussion of a particular ship. In Tumblr hashtags were used to categorize the confessions, for instance *#vore* or *#pure*, but their meaning was not significant because all the confessions were in one blog and thereby easy to find. The administrator started to use hashtags on rather belated point, at first the confessions were tagged simply with *#pennywiseconfessions*. As a summary, it can be said that in Twitter the important hashtags were used as name compilations of the pairing, for instance *#pennydook*. In Tumblr the function of hashtags was to aid a confessor to read same type of confessions with the one s/he had sent. Thereby hashtags are a way to ship in social

media, when there is not a one single platform where the community gathers to discuss and share opinions anymore.

In this article, I have studied shipping as a marginal phenomenon per se, but I have demonstrated that it has multidimensional characters. I have also shown how deeply its roots lie in the cultural structures. Shipping relates to something about the cultural undercurrent and fan-made products with affective stickiness are one way to adduce something that exists in all of us. Shipping and fan-made products are one way to examine repressed feelings, the thin line between disgust and attraction and feelings that this contradiction evokes. It might also be interesting to ask why humans have a need to think living beings, artificial objects and for instance monsters through relationships. Was the creation of pairings canon-faithful, heteronormative or norm-breaking, everyone has a right to manifest their opinions via shipping.

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All links verified 26.9.2018.

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Image 1. Combined in Adobe InDesign by author
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Notes [1] Using Urban Dictionary as a source in this article is justifiable because the
nature of the phenomenon – theory behind shipping practises is so far evolving and
the existing literature and other sources must be adapted to this section of fan studies.