

Universität Siegen Fakultät I – Philosophische Fakultät

## “The Evolution of Gender Constructions in Gothic Narratives“

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## 1. Introduction

The eighteenth century was one marked by an exceptional amount of social, cultural, and economic change. It was essentially the beginning of what is now understood as a modern culture and underscores a shift away from antiquated feudal ties of the aristocracy toward a more nuanced rise of a middling class and the possibility of self-made social ascension (Mooney Marini 105-106). The transformation of an entire way of life was not entirely voluntary but rather a process of enforced acclimatization to the profound cultural changes brought about by industrialization, as well as to broader societal upheaval and unrest, exemplified by the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. It thus comes as little surprise that contemporaries frequently found it challenging to contend with the rapid transformations affecting their lives (Paulson 536). Virtually all aspects of life were subject to change, ranging from socio-economic conditions and public innovation to the intimate domains of the household and personal identity. Among the most salient developments of the eighteenth century was a profoundly personal transformation: the transition from a one-sex to a two-sex model of gender (Chamberlain 294–97). No longer were man and woman two reflections of the same coin; instead, they were separated into fundamentally different bodies and characters — a divide which would distance them not just on an emotional, but also a physical level (314). As the two-sex model gained wider acceptance over the course of the century, it was increasingly considered necessary to physically separate the sexes according to the perceived strengths and weaknesses associated with each gender (Laqueur 16–18). Thus, men were expected to thrive within the public sphere of economic commerce and politics, while women were relegated to the private sphere, in which they were to handle household chores and children, as well as the emotional and sexual needs of their husbands (Carr 38).

To consolidate these changes, laws were enacted that explicitly defined a woman's designated place within society, effectively subordinating her to her husband's authority. Women were rendered legal non-entities, subsumed under the laws of primogeniture and coverture and treated, in effect, as extensions of their husband's property (Bienstock Anolik 26). Therefore, with their agency largely restricted within the private sphere and practically non-existent in the public one, many women sought a sort of cathartic escape through fiction (Paulson 532).

Amid the rapid and often overwhelming transformations of the eighteenth century, fiction flourished as a means of negotiating cultural anxiety. This environment proved fertile for the development of the Gothic genre, with Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794)

generally regarded as its foundational text (537). Characterized by its enigmatic nature and dark, atmospheric aesthetics, the Gothic does not, at first glance, present itself as an overtly escapist genre. Its unsettling and often divisive themes, however, lend themselves particularly well to an identification and analysis of cultural boundaries and their transgression (Zigarovich 261). It demands of its readers to suspend reality and confront uncomfortable questions. During a period marked by the imposition of new constraints on personal agency, the Gothic provided a fictional arena for the exploration and subversion of social limits and norms. Central to the genre is the concept of the sublime, as articulated by Kant and Burke, whose formulations need not be understood as mutually exclusive (Hill-Caruso 12). The sublime denotes the affective response elicited by the perception of the unspeakable and the unthinkable, encompassing both beauty and terror (12). As such, the Gothic is made up of opposites – beautiful/terrifying, light/dark, desire/fear, woman/man. Within the genre, however, these opposites are not always clearly delineated; rather, the Gothic allows for the blending and reassessment of binaries and otherwise clear-cut boundaries.

The Gothic and its relation to boundaries is the focal point of this paper. The genre's fluid and deconstructive character renders it uniquely apt for the study of historical gender relations. Attending to the fears and desires encoded in these narratives exposes the underlying power dynamics, as well as the gendered expectations and transgressive possibilities they contain. Importantly, novels can serve as representatives of the socio-cultural atmosphere in which they were conceived. They reflect the attitudes and expectations as well as (implicit) desires commonly exhibited at a given point in time. Changes and adjustments to themes and motifs within the genre over time are an indication that the hierarchical system of dualisms — of which gender is amongst the most prominent — is considerably more unstable than is commonly assumed. If fundamental categories can be influenced and adjusted, perhaps even disregarded, then it can only be deduced that they were never essential and stable to begin with.

Even today, there is no clear-cut understanding of gender, no unbiased idea of what gender really is. Some, like Judith Butler, have theorized that sex and gender are social constructs society has naturalized (3). There is a great amount of research going into defining sex and gender in a way that befits modern standards, but for this paper, I do not want to restrict the categories any further by providing a pseudo-coherent model of definition. Modern research agrees on the fact that what we understand as gender is not as stable and essential as previously assumed (Butler 2). What I intend to focus on is evidence of

gendered characteristics as visible consequences of hierarchical binaries. Raewyn Connell, for example, does not attempt to define masculinity itself, merely its apparent attributes at a given time, which, in turn, gives us a better understanding of the category as a whole (129). While there is no stable definition of gender itself, there are trends and hegemonial models of gender expressions that rise in popularity and influence at specific points in time (Connell 129).

This thesis addresses the question of whether such shifts can be discerned in Gothic literature across different historical periods, beginning with the eighteenth century. By examining the ideals and “monsters” that emerge in specific eras, it seeks to reveal the extent to which associated gender constructions are subject to historical variation and transformation.

In order to devise a comparable analysis, I have gathered nine novels representing different time periods and ordered them according to the “monster,” or thematic cluster, they encapsulate. Therefore, they are categorized first by theme, and then chronologically by the time in which the initial premise was adapted. This study is organized into three parts, a structure that is visually represented to support clarity and facilitate comprehension. The first part considers Ann Radcliffe’s *A Sicilian Romance*, alongside Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and Daphne du Maurier’s *Rebecca*, which are united by the recurring motif of the missing or dead wife/mother. It investigates the centrality of this motif to the Gothic genre, particularly at the moment of its emergence, and traces its transformation across centuries of literary adaptation.

The next part focuses on the topic of the vampire in Gothic fiction by examining some of the most prominent examples, such as Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, followed by Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire*, and finally Elizabeth Kostova’s *The Historian*. The vampire figure highlights the supernatural power of evil, and yet its transgression of boundaries is not always demonized. It is a particularly salient metaphor in terms of gender constructions due to its fluid and often ambiguous nature that allows several possible interpretations. One of the most important secondary sources forming the basis of my arguments here is Raewyn Connell’s model of hegemonial masculinities. She offers a unique understanding of the social mechanisms of patriarchal systems and the power hierarchies within. Most notably, she explores versions of masculinity that are very much subject to societal changes – much like the gender constructions, or rather, monsters, of the narratives I discuss.

Having by then analyzed the changes and reconfigurations of central motifs of the Gothic from the eighteenth century to the very beginning of the twenty-first century, the final part contrasts Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* with two very modern adaptations: Sarah Maria Griffin's 2016 novel *Spare and Found Parts*, as well as Addie Tsai's 2022 *Unwieldy Creatures*. This stark comparison is meant to highlight the ways in which the original issues and themes first brought up by Shelley still resonate in unique ways to this day. Frankenstein's creature may be read as a compelling metaphor for the modern condition, encompassing not only technological and medical innovation but also the impact of such progress on contemporary conceptions of gender as socially constructed rather than biologically determined. Central to this discussion is Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto*, which theorizes modern advancements as offering possibilities for resisting entrenched gender binaries. At its conclusion, this paper seeks to have advanced an understanding of the connection between the Gothic and Gender Studies more broadly, and of the ways in which gender constructions are subject to influence and transformation in tandem with the societies in which they are embedded.

### Part I

*A Sicilian Romance* serves as the basis of this section. Ann Radcliffe's novel is the earliest of the three depicted in this part and thus the others can be viewed as adaptations of this original. The question I seek to answer here is whether the great Gothic monster within this thematic complex is either the hidden/imprisoned madwoman or the patriarch as a symbol of her oppression. Both figures are more or less present in each novel, and interpretations vary according to personal bias and context. I aspire to provide an objective analysis that accurately reflects the often-conflicting conclusions of different researchers and ultimately reach one of my own.

#### **2. A Sicilian Romance: Feminist Manifesto or Patriarchal Reinforcement?**

Ann Radcliffe is one of the first Gothic writers, and her works have contributed a great deal to the conception of the genre and the ways in which we understand and define it today. Her narratives fit well into what Ellen Moers titled the "female Gothic," denoting primarily novels that depict typically female experiences and issues which are targeted toward a mostly female audience (qtd. in Sadat Yahyapoor 19). The Female Gothic deals with tropes such as discovering a nightmarish world beneath the pastoral safe space of the family and patriarchal villains oppressing female characters, forcing them to flee established traditions (19). Gothic terror is experienced along the discovery that the domestic private sphere is a prison, rather than a tranquil safe haven. The Gothic in this

sense serves as a “way of expressing the repressed fears and feelings in a male-dominated society, a kind of safety valve, a relief for the pains of women” (19). While supernatural elements are present to create a Gothic sentiment, they are ultimately exposed to be rooted within a more rational, earthly evil — ghosts wailing in the dark turn out to be imprisoned mothers crying out for their daughters (Hill-Caruso 8). The Male Gothic, in contrast, is understood to leave supernatural phenomena unexplained and tend to include more on-page violence and gore as opposed to the psychological terror and violence emphasized in its counterpart (Guitar 9). Consequently, the Gothic was regarded with some disdain in the eighteenth century, frequently criticized for its dependence on “cheap parlor tricks” to provoke fear and engage its readership (Hill-Caruso 9).

While this type of categorization of the Gothic into male and female is disputed today as too restrictive due to its binary character and tendency to reduce literature to gendered ideals, I nevertheless find the theory persuasive. As a female author addressing a predominantly female readership and repeatedly portraying the destabilization of social hierarchies, Ann Radcliffe has long been situated within the tradition of the Female Gothic. Yet, it is debatable whether she ultimately created a feminist narrative. Scholars identifying *A Sicilian Romance* as a sort of original feminist manifesto tend to disregard the traditional and conservative values also present within the story (Durant 520). Notably, while the novel allows Julia to usurp her father-villain, she eventually ends safely back within the traditional confines of marriage, reflecting the custom of having romance narratives end in matrimony. Ultimately, she loses her newly discovered independence almost as soon as she finds it and surrenders herself to the dominion of her new husband. There are nuances, however, that keep the story from fully conceding to conservative values: Julia recovers her mother from oblivion, literally uncovering a matrilineal genealogy that had been carefully hidden by her father. After denouncing their father’s patriarchal estate, the children move away to build a new community elsewhere. There, it is Louisa, rather than the male heir Ferdinand, who is head of the family, and Julia’s children are expected to carry on the name of Mazzini. Therefore, while at first glance remaining safely within the bounds of conservative values, the novel’s ambiguous ending suggests a subversive potential of female agency.

Given that Julia remains largely unaffected by the events of her flight and exhibits no significant personal growth beyond acknowledging her father’s moral corruption, the novel ultimately cannot be considered a successful Bildungsroman (Durant 528). The text withholds any concrete ethical or behavioral framework that might instruct a young

woman in responding to patriarchal abuses of power, offering only rejection and flight as viable options. Nevertheless, the narrative provides transgressive ideals that reject the notion of unfailing submission to male dominance, especially in cases where that power is utilized for evil or selfish purposes. The text endows the female character with a limited but significant form of agency, most notably in her capacity to choose her own husband, thereby privileging companionate marriage over patriarchal systems in which women circulate as objects of exchange between men. Considering the time of its conception, *A Sicilian Romance* carries definite feminist undertones carefully disguised within traditional narrative constructions.

### 2.1. Emilia and Julia, Docility and Rebellion

From the beginning, the reader is provided with two contrasting versions of femininity. Emilia is a secondary character, seldomly speaking or behaving in any active capacity. She is the kind of woman that is seen, not heard; carefully adhering to the Victorian “Angel of the House” ideal. She submits to her father’s authority and has little to no ambition to question his feeble lies and rules. Notably, Emilia is compared to her secretly imprisoned mother: “Emilia, the elder, inherited much of her mother’s disposition. She had a mild and sweet temper, united with a clear and comprehensive mind” (Radcliffe 4). From the beginning, she is marked as a passive victim, much like her mother, who, emotionally abused by her husband, freely and unquestionably walks into his trap and therefore her own imprisonment. Throughout the narrative, Emilia is mostly disregarded, as her passivity confines her to the domestic sphere Julia is able to leave behind for a short while.

Julia is depicted as starkly different from her elder sister, although it can be argued that she retains the same naïveté and passivity when surrounded by her male “superiors.” Notably, however, once Julia becomes aware of her father’s corrupted character and his attempts to dominate and steer her life, she rebels by fleeing his grasp. Although she has nowhere to run — since her world is thoroughly patriarchal and every turn seems to lead her into another trap — Julia remains resolute in her refusal to tolerate her father’s cruelty. She is depicted as an overly virtuous character; her moral authority carries a certain weight that gives her the power to expose the implicit abusive power hierarchy governing a woman’s life for what it is.

Julia’s rebellion can be ordered into three stages. The first is triggered by her realization that her father intends to marry her, against her explicit wishes, to his virtual double, the much older Duke of Luovo. From this point on, Julia is set on a path of defiance, fleeing

from her father's oppressive power. From the beginning of the narrative, it is clear that the Duke of Mazzini is not a particularly caring parent toward his female children due to his clear preference for his male heir: "His son, who had been educated under his immediate care, was the sole object of his pride..." (10). Notably, while he takes it upon himself to personally see to his son's education, his daughters are not a part of this patriarchal education, instead, they are distanced from the father-son duo not just emotionally but also physically: "The marquis, whose heart was dead to paternal tenderness, and whose present lady was too volatile to attend to domestic concerns, committed the education of his daughters to the care of a lady..." (3). The siblings do not grow up together, as Ferdinand and his father exist separately from the remote domesticity of the estate, while the sisters are kept away from the public sphere of the city in which their male relatives thrive.

Therefore, while Julia loves and respects the idea of her father and brother, she barely knows them beyond their familial affiliation. When she pleads her case before her father, she appeals to his presumed role as the protector of his daughter's innocence and happiness. In rejecting her desire to choose her own husband, her father is exposed as a callous tyrant who prioritizes the prestige and financial advantage of homosocial bonding over the mental and physical health of his daughter. Unable to accept the dawning realization that her father does not care for her beyond her profitability on the marriage market, Julia flees the estate with the help of her brother. Ferdinand breaks patriarchal ties by taking the side of his sister: "Do not suffer the prejudices of education to render you miserable. Believe me, that a choice which involves the happiness or misery of your whole life, ought to be decided only by yourself" (63). Here, Julia is urged to reject the dictates of society that restrict her fate to the whims of her father. Ferdinand validates her desire for individualism and agency, despite the acknowledgement that society at large might be opposed to such ideals.

This idea is only highlighted during the second stage of her rebellion, when Julia's experiences at the abbey once more force her to flee patriarchal institutions; this time in the form of the catholic church. Here, the reader is once again presented with a corrupt patriarchal authority, the abbot, whose selfish cruelty and fickleness force Julia to leave in search of safety. Julia initially perceives the abbey as a sanctuary, a belief reinforced by her friendship with Cornelia and the solace she derives from her company, following her conviction that her lover, Hippolitus, died while attempting to liberate her from her father. However, once her father's forces discover her whereabouts and the abbey faces

intrusion, the illusion of safety is shattered. While the abbot agrees to keep Julia safe out of incensed pride rather than the supposedly virtuous and protective nature his station suggests, his treatment of Madame Menon exposes him as nothing more than another corrupt imposter who utilizes his superior position to abuse his subordinates. When Julia does not act according to his expectations, he immediately rescinds his protection on a whim: “Since the lady Julia is insensible of my condescension, she is unworthy of my protection, and I will resign her to the cruel tyrant who demands her” (130). Any perceived injury to his pride instigates him to lash out at those he is supposed to protect from harm. It becomes clear, therefore, that although the abbot changes his mind once more after Madame Menon cleverly persuades him, Julia’s safety cannot lie in the hands of such a fickle, selfish leader. Making her protection conditional on her becoming a nun, the abbot leaves Julia no choice but to flee once more. He doubles the father’s attempt to marry her against her will, this time symbolically, to Jesus and the church. Upon discovering Hippolitus’ survival, Julia is validated once more by Ferdinand to continue on her path of individual agency. She leaves the abbey in search of her lover, who will ostensibly keep her safe.

Crucially, when Julia discovers Hippolitus, he cannot keep this promise. Her search for peaceful tranquility does not end upon reuniting with her lover, it is only after she rediscovers her mother that she can finally live freely. The scene in which Hippolitus is defeated by bandits in the cave systems surrounding the Mazzini castle represents the final stage completing Julia’s rebellion. Rather than continuing to rely on male protection, Julia takes matters into her own hands. Fleeing from the bandits who seek to capture her, Julia discovers the entrance to the cave-like room within which her mother has been kept immured all this time. Finding her mother, a passive victim of patriarchal abuses of power, she realizes she must become an active agent opposing her father’s designs: “Oh! Let me lead you to light and life! ... Surely heaven can bless me with no greater good than by making me the deliverer of my mother” (182). While it is ultimately Hippolitus who opens the door to their freedom, Julia’s active role here is starkly contrasted with her mother, who admits that her “meek submission, and tender assiduities” (176) could not save her from the Duke of Mazzini’s oppression.

It is rebellion, then, rather than passive docility, that enables Julia to defy her father’s power and free herself, as well as her female relatives, from his control. Their shared imprisonment highlights the common fate of women under patriarchal control (König 209). She teaches her sister and her mother that unquestioning submission can only lead

to pain at the hands of an uncaring master. It is therefore Emilia, as one of the most passive female characters of the story, who is rescued last from the estate by Ferdinand and reunited with the rest of her family: “These terrible events so deeply affected Emilia that she was confined to her bed by a dangerous illness. Ferdinand struggled against the shock with manly fortitude” (Radcliffe 193). She does not act, rather, is acted upon; all her movements still determined by outside influences. Therefore, in the end, while taking up an active stance may defeat the tyrannical patriarch, the “prejudices of education” are not so easily defeated, and the patriarchy lives on.

## 2.2. (Re-) Birthing the Missing Gothic Mother

One of the most compelling arguments I have come across in my research for this chapter is Ruth Bienstock Anolik’s analysis on the Missing Mother often prevalent in Gothic novels, where she explains that marriage and motherhood ultimately lead to the self-effacing disappearance of the wife/mother due to the harsh legal realities affecting women’s lives in and outside of literature (26-27). Under the system of coverture, women become “femme covert,” meaning their legal identities became subsumed under that of their husband (Bienstock Anolik 26). Legally speaking, women were a non-entity. These laws, coupled with those called primogeniture, which kept women from legally inheriting estates, arrested them in a constant infantilized state of economical and emotional dependence; their very lives in the hands of their spouses (27). Such laws persisted until the married women’s property act passed in the late nineteenth century, which allowed for more freedom and independence (27). In these instances, Gothic horrors connect real life and fiction, and Bienstock Anolik goes on to highlight the ways the narrative of *A Sicilian Romance* mirrors childbirth (31).

Eva König emphasizes a connection between Freud’s psychoanalysis and the Gothic, in that the plot of a young woman attempting to free herself from maternal influence recalls the birth process and the separation of mother and child (206). She quotes Luce Irigaray when she claims that “the Freudian unconscious is conceived as masculine and that all Western discourse, including psychoanalysis, is built on the edifice of the repressed feminine” (qtd. in König 206). Western discourse is therefore entrenched in a normative ideology that seeks to separate (female) children and their mothers by suppressing feminine influence as early as possible. In *A Sicilian Romance*, however, this scenario is reversed; in this case, it is the daughter who frees the mother in a birth-like escape narrative and ends up closer to her than ever before.

From the beginning, the story reinforces Gothic tradition by stressing the mother's absence, focusing starkly on the empty and confusing labyrinthine spaces within and surrounding the Mazzini castle, which many researchers have interpreted as a representation of the enigmatic female body (Bienstock Anolik 37). Indeed, the womb-like hiding place of Louisa and as her periodic moans and groans that so threaten her husband's secret crime seem to support that theory, as well as recall images of childbirth. The decade-long confinement and subsequent labor end in Julia's delivery to her mother. The specific definition of confinement as both imprisonment as well as the period in which a pregnancy progresses implicitly connects the narrative to the imagery of captivity and release, of pregnancy and birth. Once Julia is delivered to her mother, they form a bond that explicitly renounces the separation of mother and child proposed by Freud: "She pressed Julia to her heart, and a few moments of exquisite, unutterable emotion followed" (174).

The more important "birth," however, follows when Julia determines to free her mother from her long imprisonment. Julia alone cannot open the door to freedom; she requires someone to do it for her. It is Hippolitus, who, tracking Julia's traces, finds and frees the mother-daughter duo from their shared imprisonment. His final act of benevolence is meant to assure the reader that his marriage to Julia will be entirely different from the corrupt model she has observed in her father and his wives. Julia is indirectly involved in her mother's escape after a period of communal confinement. The pains of childbirth are mirrored in their perilous escape, in which they once again risk death in order to be free. Even this aspect of the story is analogous to childbirth, as women and infant mortality was especially high during the eighteenth century, where medical care and knowledge of a woman's body was still in its infancy (Rauch 232). The outcome of a birth, whether fatal or joyous, was as uncertain as their escape from the Duke's forces.

In the end, Julia's symbolic (re-)birth of her mother concludes successfully. Her mother is able to live her life free from the literal shackles of her previous marriage, in a sort of pastoral harmony, along with the children she was deprived of for so long. Rather than echoing Freud's sentiment concerning the separation of mother and child, the narrative separates the virtuous family from the corrupting influence of the father. The reversal functions as an implicit critique of eighteenth-century legal structures that rendered women and children the property of the husband or father. Deprived of legal autonomy, women lost control not only over their own lives, but also over their children. As husbands possessed custodial rights over all heirs, even a woman who sought to escape patriarchal

oppression, as Julia does, would be forced to leave her children behind, thereby intensifying the limitations placed on female agency (Bienstock Anolik 26). Therefore, Louisa gaining control over her own individual freedom as well as custody over her children and inheritance is a symbolic and perhaps utopian reversal of gender roles. Her rebellious child defies the father's, as well as society's, dictates to free them all from the restrictions of the past. Radcliffe's new family constellation presents a model of pastoral bliss that is free from the threatening control of patriarchal domination.

Other researchers disagree with the analogy between the underground passages of the Mazzini estate and the female body. David Durant argues in his paper, "Ann Radcliffe and the Conservative Gothic," that the labyrinthine tunnels and caves of the castle represent a dark, patriarchal underground, which seeks to hinder the heroine's escape attempts (524). This theory is not without merit, since the caves are connected to paternalistic institutions. The Mazzini estate, as well as the abbey, are surrounded by maze-like tunnels in which male criminals seem to thrive. Crucially, these passages seem to suggest a hidden world of violence beneath the seemingly benevolent, righteous dominance of patriarchal institutions. Within a Freudian interpretive framework, the tunnels may be read as representing the darker dimension of patriarchy, which, much like Julia's tyrannical father and the corrupt abbot, operates through the abuse and repression of those it constructs as inferior. The Gothic depiction of the decay of these traditional sites and institutions reflect a broader disillusionment with the present, potentially rooted in the swift erosion of long-established traditions brought about by the Industrial and French Revolutions (524). Julia and her close female relatives find no domestic peace within a world so degraded, seeking to find it elsewhere. Ultimately, she realizes she must build her own pastoral ideal, far away from the corrupting influence of modern society. Durant criticizes the novel by arguing that instead of solving the problem of how to survive within a degenerate society, Radcliffe avoids it altogether by simply removing the villains through death (526). Rather than finding a way to live in a modern setting, Julia and her family choose to turn to the traditional, familiar ways of the past.

I would argue that while Julia and her family do seem to reject the model of masculinity and corrupted virtue they encounter within the bounds of their contemporary society, they do not necessarily turn back to a traditional ideology. Instead, they craft a version of modernity they can live with. The women seem to have achieved equal status with the men in their lives. Julia and Hippolitus have a companionate marriage of love rather than convenience. By rejecting the ways of his father, Ferdinand, as well as Hippolitus, openly

oppose the kind of masculinity that would seek to destroy and exploit the women of their family. As described before, this is by no means a family model that could be widely practiced. The women have created their own “counter-publics” (Hill-Caruso 1), of which the two male members of their family are allowed to partake due to their exceptionally egalitarian mindset.

### 2.3. Happy End?

By now, it is clear that the ending is, from a modern perspective, quite ambiguous. The story ends in marriage, a happy end; and yet the contemporary reader may question the utopian status quo proposed by the closing of this narrative. Coincidentally, marriage means death — not just the legal death of the bride, but also the death of the narrative (Bienstock Anolik 27). Radcliffe herself questions the longevity of Julia and Hippolitus’ joyous union: “The recollection of the difficulties they had encountered, and of the distress they had endured for each other, now served only to heighten by contrast the happiness of the present period” (Radcliffe 198-99). It remains unclear whether their elation at having found one another can outlast this “present period.”

Throughout the novel the reader does not encounter any successful marriages, all end in death and/or despair, as is the case with the Duke and his wife Maria, Hippolitus’ parents, as well Louisa’s and Madame Menon’s marriages. Why, then, should Julia and Hippolitus be spared? The narrative seeks to answer this question by highlighting the alleged equality between both partners. Hippolitus listens and follows Julia’s directions and desires, never belittling or infantilizing her as the other characters tend to do. His performance of masculinity, however, seems to suffer for it, as he does not seem to be able to protect Julia from outside influences. Twice he is defeated during ill-suited rescue attempts, and Julia is forced to fend for herself or rely on her brother. His depiction as a true gentleman hinders his ability to appropriately handle threats to his partner. Rather than demonize this apparent weakness, the narrative offers an alternative model of masculinity that eschews the violent outbursts to which corrupt patriarchs seem prone. Hippolitus is depicted as an ideal marital partner for a woman, owing specifically to his lack of aggressive tendencies, a trait that distinguishes him from more conventionally dominant male figures such as Julia’s father.

Furthermore, although the narrative ends in marriage, this fact is only superficially addressed. Radcliffe places a much greater emphasis on the family at large, recreating for her happy ending the initial tranquility and peace of the pastoral world that had been disrupted by corrupted patriarchal influence. The marriage, while a necessary next step at

the time, preserving Julia and Hippolitus' virtuous character, seems more like a socio-cultural obligation performed to legitimize the family model proposed at the narrative's closing. Although the title, *A Sicilian Romance*, suggests a grand, epic love-story, the romance between the characters ironically remains backgrounded compared to all the issues Julia and her family face within the oppressive structures of the patriarchy. Certain associations between marriage and bondage are hard to deny at this point, and this issue can never be addressed since the story ends here. Marriage emerges as a problem that resists easy resolution, particularly in light of the period in which Radcliffe composed her novel. It thereby highlights the limits of what can be imaginatively conceived within an existing social order.

Therefore, although marriage has previously been established and criticized as dangerous and oppressive, Radcliffe, perhaps hindered by her own socio-cultural conditioning and biases, cannot do away with it. As Fatima Sadat Yahyapoor states, while Julia yearns for a matriarchy, she ultimately "consciously accepts an ideal Patriarchy" (18). It goes to show the incredibly far-reaching influence of gender stereotypes and expectations, especially in connection to romantic relationships. Despite negative connotations that come with marriage, Radcliffe, as well as her character Julia, can picture no alternative. The concept remains Gothic, seemingly pastoral yet implicitly dangerous and threatening.

### **3. Jane Eyre – a Feminist Bildungsroman?**

Compared to Radcliffe's novel, *Jane Eyre* readily explores the question of marriage. It is not truly the end of the narrative, nor the beginning, but rather takes center stage within the story. Similarly to Julia, Jane refuses a marriage based on economic calculation or lies, she requires an emotional basis that is somewhat outside the social norm. However, that is mostly where similarities end. In this case, it is the potential husband who is a threat to Jane's wellbeing and virtuous nature, rather than a father figure, although the two are often conflated in Gothic literary works (Perry 273). Still, where Julia fully renounces her father's corruptive influence on her life, Jane engages in a complicated negotiation with her adversary, in which she fights for, and eventually achieves, a somewhat equal place along his side. Despite the obstacles that would prevent a true partnership, such as her lower-class status, as well as her gender and age, she prevails and eventually manages to overcome them primarily due to her practical, virtuous character. Looking at it from this perspective, it is no wonder that the novel is recognized as a sort of feminist Bildungsroman, as it presents a young female character, who, by adhering to

a strong moral character as well as her education, achieves the dream of rising above her born station.

Yet, as is shown to be the case with *A Sicilian Romance*, *Jane Eyre* is strongly influenced by the social stereotypes and expectations of its age. The character of Jane is not free of prejudices, as is highlighted in her relationship to her husband's wife, Bertha. Additionally, it is made clear that although Jane eventually overcomes her lower-class origins, she is still influenced in her behavior and attitudes, often acting with deference and submission where Rochester is concerned. Her gender, age, as well as their previous relationship as employer and employee, hinder any hopes of a truly equal partnership between the two. Therefore, while their marriage at the end of the narrative seems superficially equal, there are some elements of doubt that prevent the reader from unquestionably accepting Jane's judgement of her situation. Nevertheless, *Jane Eyre* was indeed very progressive for its time, overcoming the strict class and gender restrictions that governed Victorian England, as is showcased in upcoming chapters. Therefore, I would concede that it can be considered a feminist Bildungsroman, if not necessarily from a modern perspective.

### 3.1. Power Dynamics in Heterosexual Pairings

The novel's heterosexual power dynamics are especially notable if considered through a Gothic lens. The genre is defined by its often-dualistic and contrasting nature — which mirrors the structure underlying the gender binary. This hierarchical system categorizes the genders based on characteristics that are valued more or less within a given society (Connell 129). Since the male is ranked above the female, features associated with the masculine — such as strength, or stoicism, are generally admired within larger society, while purportedly female traits, though necessary as the “Other” upon which the masculine establishes itself, are less desirable (129).

Nevertheless, the Gothic is also a genre in which such categories are evoked, only to be transgressed. Brontë's novel reflects this aspect by endowing her characters with conflicting traits that render their gender performances ambiguous. Jane often shows a propensity toward the kind of stoic masculinity traditional for the Victorian period, whereas Rochester, as well as St. John Rivers, act irrationally, led by emotions in a way that was characteristically associated with femininity (Lindell 4).

Still, upon objective reflection, there are certain traditional gender and class boundaries that are reflected within the novel, specifically where Jane's relationships with males in her life, such as John Reed, Mr. Brocklehurst, Rochester, and John Rivers are concerned

(Ilie 11). John Reed, though still a child at the beginning of the narrative, is considered the “man of the house.” Jane, as a female dependent, ranks lower than even the servants: “No; you are less than a servant, for you do nothing for your keep” (Brontë 15). Her earliest lessons, then, include an acute acknowledgement of her own worth as a dependent orphan: barely above that of an animal. Indeed, John and the rest of the Reed family repeatedly refer to Jane as a “bad animal” (11), a “rat” (13), or a “mad cat” (15). Jane is endowed with a deeply intrinsic knowledge of the class system in which she is treated as less than: “... you have no money, your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not to live here with gentlemen’s children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mamma’s expense” (13). From the beginning, she struggles with her station and as soon as the opportunity to advance presents itself in the form of the Lowood school, she seizes it. Jane cannot abide being considered lower-class, since she early on reproduces society’s prejudice conflating poverty and a corrupt moral character: “... they think of the word only as connected with ragged clothes, scanty food, fireless grates, rude manners, and debasing vices: poverty to me was synonymous with degradation” (30). Jane’s relationship to the Reed children, especially John, allows insight into the tyrannies of hierarchical relationships. Her early experience with class-related injustice motivates her to advance her social station, as well as avoid relationships that would place her in a subordinate position. This determination follows her throughout her life, affecting intimate relationships.

Mr. Brocklehurst, the cruel headmaster of Lowood Institute, reinforces this opinion as he utilizes his power over his employees as well as the orphans under his care for exploitative purposes, advancing his own reputation instead of supporting them earnestly. One specific example of such shallow, inauthentic fulfillment of his duties is expressed in the scene in which Brocklehurst cuts the girls’ hair on a whim in a grand gesture, purportedly in an attempt to prevent vanity: “... my mission is to mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh, to teach them to clothe themselves with shamefacedness and sobriety, not with braided hair and costly apparel ...” (76). Here, Brontë creates a notable juxtaposition when Brocklehurst’s wife and daughters are introduced during this process, “... splendidly attired in velvet, silk and furs. The two younger of the trio ... had gray beaver hats, ... and from under the brim of this graceful head-dress fell a profusion of light tresses, elaborately curled...” (77). Once again, Jane is confronted with the corrupt and selfish nature of her supposed “betters,” while simultaneously realizing the moral superiority of those living in poverty among her. Helen Burns and Miss Temple finally

trigger the realization that higher class and moral integrity are not to be conflated. From this point on, Jane determines to be better than her alleged superiors by adhering to strong moral virtues regardless of her caste.

These virtues continue to guide her in her relationships with her future husband, Rochester, and her cousin, John Rivers. Tasneem Zaman Nova identifies a strong benevolent sexist attitude in their interactions with Jane (9171). Benevolent sexism is conceptualized as a seemingly positive form of paternalism that, despite its protective veneer, operates to regulate and limit women's behavior through implicit and explicit expectations (Zaman Nova 9171). Marriage is one of the primary means through which such attitudes are conveyed, as it is closely associated with social expectations and traditional gender roles. As renowned scholar of gender studies, Raewyn Connell, states, "[m]arriage is, thus, gendered as other social institutions are, and dominated by men, while subordinating women and femininity" (qtd. in. Vicario 16).

Jane's relationship with Edward Rochester is defined by her role as his emotional guide. Several times, he makes it clear that he views her as "his better half," his "angel," who is meant to guide him away from sin and towards a more virtuous way of life. By imposing the Victorian Angel of the House ideal on Jane, he severely restricts her agency. She is portrayed less as an independent subject and more as a moral prop in his service. Rochester views Jane not as an equal partner, but as someone who can service him. Their previous relationship of employer and employee continues to affect their interactions. Even after their marriage, Jane continues to refer to him as her Master.

Still, Jane refuses to fully adhere to the strict moral codes her fiancé seeks to impose on her. In a rare instance of passion, she denounces this benevolent sexist attitude that would restrict her agency: "I am not an angel, ... and I will not be one till I die: I will be myself. Mr. Rochester, you must neither expect nor exact anything celestial of me — for you will not get it, any more than I shall get it of you: which I do not at all anticipate" (300). Here, she confidently reasserts her own identity as a person, rather than an ideal. By refusing to act according to the gender role socially prescribed to her, Jane holds on to personal agency outside of these restrictions. To make Rochester understand, she reminds him of his own moral failings. He is widely known to possess a morally dubious history, characterized by what Victorian society would classify as vice, most conspicuously evidenced by his having fathered a child out of wedlock through his apparent sexual excesses. After she uncovers the existence of the wife he had hidden from her and seeks to leave him, he attempts to coerce her into staying through a benevolent sexist appeal

that shifts responsibility for his misconduct onto her: “Then you snatch love and innocence from me? You fling me back on lust for a passion — vice for an occupation?” (364). Rather than take on responsibility for his moral failings, however, Jane places it solely on his shoulders by reminding him that everyone is responsible for their own actions: “*I* care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself. . . . Laws and principles are not for times when there is no temptation: they are for moments such as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour...” (365). By prioritizing her own moral convictions over his desires, Jane challenges the gender norms that would force her into the role of his mistress, expected to relinquish her virtue in order to safeguard his moral standing.

Similarly, Jane refuses to marry her cousin St. John Rivers, who wishes her to become his religious “helpmeet”. Through a benevolent sexist attitude, John attempts to convince her that it would be only natural for her to follow a religious calling: “God and nature intended you to be a missionary’s wife. It is not personal, but mental endowments they have given you: you are formed for labour, not for love. A missionary’s wife you must — shall be. You shall be mine: I claim you — not for my pleasure, but for my Sovereign’s service” (464). He takes on a paternalistic role, attempting to guide her actions through superficial benevolence, as if acting in her favor: “Jane, I shall watch you closely and anxiously — I warn you of that. And try to restrain the disproportionate fervour with which you throw yourself into commonplace home pleasures” (451). Supervision and judgement are weaponized to keep her in line, acting according to John’s desires. Any deviation from this path would be deemed irrational and willfully obtuse. John, as the architect of the narrative he has constructed for himself, and as the public representative of his household, possesses the power to frame Jane’s actions for a wider society. Given hierarchical gender roles that privilege male narratives over female ones, Jane’s account would not be afforded the same credibility as his (Vicario 12). It is therefore imperative in regards to Jane’s reputation that she maintain a favorable relationship with her cousin. While she endeavors to reject his proposal, she cannot defend herself too vigorously or risk public censure. Like Rochester, John seeks to dominate and bully her into submission. When Jane’s strict adherence to her own values forecloses the possibility of a union based on anything other than true love, John attempts to coerce her into compliance by excluding her from her newfound family. He ignores and ostracizes her, causing her to feel not just unwanted, but endangered, since her economic standing within the household seems conditional on her acceptance of his proposal: “... he made me feel what severe

punishment a good yet stern, a conscientious yet implacable man can inflict on one who has offended him” (473). Societal and gender expectations, along with financial pressures, exerted a powerful influence on Victorian women, severely restricting their personal agency to the extent that declining a marriage proposal was highly unusual (Lindell 25). Once Jane realizes that John’s treatment of her is not just irrational but cruel, she decides to follow her own judgement instead.

When he calls her decision “violent, unfeminine, and untrue” (Brontë 474), Jane counters with a sort of benevolent sexism of her own: “Keep to common sense, St John: you are verging on nonsense. . . . You are not really shocked: for, with your superior mind, you cannot be either so dull or so conceited as to misunderstand my meaning” (476). By calling into question his supposedly flawless judgment, she simultaneously challenges his masculinity. As a man, he is subject to gender expectations much like women; accordingly, he is expected to exhibit superior reasoning compared to a woman, who is presumed to lack his level of education and worldly experience (Vicario 12). She leaves him no choice but to concede. In this instance, Jane shows a remarkable level of instinctual understanding of the power dynamics that govern the binary relationships of men and women. She also seems aware of her own capabilities and the degree to which she can manipulate this system to her advantage. Rather than accept the status quo, Jane has shrewdly analyzed her position and tests its limits. Her struggle with St. John has forced her to realize her own agency within a restricted position: “I broke from St John, who had followed, and would have detained me. It was *my* time to assume ascendancy. *My* powers were in play and in force” (484).

All in all, there are clear boundaries and forces that restrict a woman’s place in the binary and hierarchical model of sexual difference. Heterosexual relationships offer a wealth of potential for analysis of this power dynamic, as here, socio-cultural expectations are made explicit, where elsewhere they remain implicit. Victorian marriage ideals, for example, highlight women’s allegedly subordinate position. They are viewed as a helpmeet, rather than as individuals in their own right. Far from an equal partnership, a woman is meant to offer emotional and moral support, receiving paternal supervision, often in the form of benevolent sexism, in return. Marriage, in Coventry Patmore’s ideal of the Angel in the House, involves self-negation; there is no such thing as a woman apart from her husband. She is solely an extension, or treasurer, of his moral character (Zaman Nova 9172).

Jane has internalized these expectations, yet she also revises them. She rejects the Angel of the House ideal, accepting self-negation only on the condition that it is reciprocated.

She is focused on a companionate match, which, by nature, requires a more equal connection. Therefore, she cannot accept the idea of being Rochester's mistress, or St. John's religious support. To achieve an equal partnership, she is forced to develop her own personal freedom and individuality. Through her past experiences as a lower-class orphan, Jane becomes assured of her own moral character and conduct, and, combined with her financial independence gained through inheritance, this enables her to develop beyond the identity of a helpmeet.

### 3.2. Bertha: Monster in the House?

If Jane is meant to be the Angel of the House, Bertha is presented as her dark alter ego. Throughout the narrative, both women are contrasted sharply. Bertha embodies all that Jane is unable to outwardly display due to her role as the presumed "Angel," as construed in Rochester's mind (Ilie 10). Bertha is violent, passionate in a way that is not considered attractive, rebellious instead of submissive. She does not easily accept her imprisonment by her husband; instead, she makes her presence known to Jane and the others to the point that her incarceration is an open secret. She also attempts to free herself by taking active steps against her husband, going so far as to set his room on fire in a bid to kill him.

Jane is starkly opposed to Bertha. She finds everything about her abhorrent, starting with the ghastly laughter that she initially associates with Grace Poole. Despite this clear antipathy, Jane and Bertha are implicitly connected through narratives of madness and imprisonment throughout the story (Ilie 8-10). Similarly to Bertha, Jane has experience with incarceration after being detained in the Red Room of Gateshead. In a remarkable parallel, both women experience backlash due to the violent outbursts they cannot control. Crucially, those fits seem to be a reaction to oppression and violence they encounter at the hands of their supposed carers. Bertha is abused by her husband, and Jane, as a child, by the family on which she depends. Their alleged madness seems to stem from self-defense, a reaction to harm done unto them (Vicario 5). Violence and rage erupt in a dramatic manifestation of the Gothic return of the repressed, as women momentarily lose control over the strict emotional constraints imposed upon them after recognizing that the abuse they endure is legitimized by society at large.

An additional connection between Jane and Bertha is the fact that the former associates her early rages with the color red, as well as visions of fire. It seems too coincidental, then, that Bertha's preferred medium of rebellion is fire, as is showcased when she attempts to kill Rochester, as well as when she burns down Thornfield Hall. Many researchers have thus concluded that Bertha enacts the violence and rage that Jane has

been taught to suppress at Lowood (Ilie 10). As Jane's darker double, whose reputation is already in shambles as a racialized and dehumanized Other, Bertha has nothing left to lose by giving herself fully to her violent emotions (Akman 31). Tragically, her final act of violence is targeted towards herself, as she commits suicide. There seems to be no room for a woman full of unrestrained anger in Jane's love story. Ultimately, Bertha is a tragic figure, although the narrative seeks to demonize her. Jane, perhaps blinded by her love for Bertha's abuser, cannot see the connection between herself and her predecessor. Their first physical encounter leaves Jane with a nightmarish impression: "It was a discoloured face — it was a savage face. I wish I could forget the roll of the red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments!" (Brontë 327). Her description is steeped in racial ideology, and her association of Bertha with "the foul German spectre — the vampire" (327) further dehumanizes her.

Rochester's own account of his first marriage to Bertha is incredibly self-serving; he positions himself as the helpless victim of a marriage of convenience, arranged by his male relatives, and Bertha as an exotic seductress. He spins his acceptance of this marriage as a narrative meant to portray the opposite: "She flattered me, and lavishly displayed for my pleasure her charms and accomplishments. All the men in her circle seemed to admire her and envy me. I was dazzled, stimulated: my senses were excited; and being ignorant, raw, and inexperienced, I thought I loved her" (352). To save face, he positions himself in a clearly feminized role, his virtue besieged by the masculinized Bertha (Akman 43). His account of her violent outbursts and madness posits him as a victim of domestic violence: "Bertha Mason, the true daughter of an infamous mother, dragged me through all the hideous and degrading agonies which must attend a man bound to a wife at once intemperate and unchaste" (Brontë 353). Male victims still suffer from prejudice today; therefore, it is reasonable to assume that Victorian England treated them even more harshly. As if to legitimize this narrative, Bertha is later described as large in stature, and wild: "She was a big woman, in stature almost equalling her husband, and corpulent besides: she showed virile force in the contest — more than once she almost throttled him, athletic as he was" (338-39).

Due to his obvious bias in recounting these events to Jane, the reader might find his account of her supposed madness questionable. Considering the fact that Rochester essentially kidnapped her from her home country and then imprisoned her once she dared to oppose him, it is understandable, at least from a modern perspective, that Bertha would act out. Even Jane, who seems to abhor her, comes to her defense at one point: "It is cruel

— she cannot help being mad” (347). While she can recognize objectively that Rochester’s treatment of his first wife is unjust, she seems to be swayed by her feelings for him.

There is a moment, however, that has not received much attention in research, where he shows his true face. When Jane decides to leave him for making her, essentially, his mistress, he is willing to stop her at all costs: “‘Jane! Will you hear reason?’ (he stood and approached his lips to my ear); ‘because, if you won’t, I’ll try violence’” (349). Here, it becomes clear that Rochester is willing to act out physically even against those he supposedly loves if it suits his wishes. This moment undermines his narrative, calling into question his entire account of Bertha’s alleged madness. It opens the possibility of Jane becoming the next prisoner at Thornfield Hall, for his erratic behavior toward Jane mirrors his treatment of Bertha once she began to fight for her agency.

His argument that her wish to leave him is unreasonable goes to show how easily Rochester is willing to spin the narrative in his favor, positioning himself as a victim, and Jane, in this case, as the madwoman who must be controlled. She, herself, recognizes the danger of the moment, but feels she has enough power over him to avoid the worst: “... a movement of repulsion, flight, fear would have sealed my doom — and his. But I was not afraid: not in the least. I felt an inward power; a sense of influence, which supported me” (349). Rochester is presented as instinct driven and animalistic, giving chase at the slightest hint of weakness. Jane, either unable or unwilling to see the parallels to her predecessor’s situation, feels empowered by her momentary hold on him. Perhaps Bertha, less enamored with him after her forceful relocation to England, had shown fear in the face of his violence and thus “doomed both of them.”

To the reader, this scene highlights the unreliability of both Jane and Rochester as narrators. Searching for objective facts and clues between the lines, it is easy to poke holes in his account of history. Bertha, living at the mercy of an oppressive and misogynistic patriarchal system, as well as her inhumane treatment at the hands of supposed medical professionals pathologizing the female body, serves to highlight the powerless and subordinate position to which women — specifically non-white women — were subjected: “One night, I had been awakened by her yells — (since the medical men had pronounced her mad, she had, of course, been shut up) ...” (354). She is at the mercy of a man who stands to benefit from announcing her insane. Her apparent madness enables his dominion over her and allows him to act for her, even against her wishes.

The case of Bertha mirrors the experience of Black women ostracized from early waves of white feminism (Akman 31). While white women, in their fight for freedom and agency, compared their situation to that of a slave, true slave women were not considered worth advocating for in a feminist sense (33). These implicit racial ideologies of colonial England are very much present in *Jane Eyre*, yet the connection between race and femininity is overlooked (43). Bertha's characterization inadvertently exposes the intersection of gender and race in sustaining unequal hierarchies, revealing how gendered oppression is compounded by racial difference. While Jane herself resists the dominion of her patriarchal "superiors," she is unable to recognize Bertha's doubly bound position as both a woman and racialized Other. From this perspective, Jane is a complicit party in the systemic abuses the patriarchal gender binary enforces upon those who do not or cannot conform. However, if Bertha is truly a victim, the story takes on a truly Gothic tone, as the reader becomes aware that Jane, due to her unquestioning acceptance of events, might just become the next one. In that sense, Jane partly perpetuates her own oppression. Still, the true monster of the house is not Bertha, nor Jane, but their husband.

### 3.3. "Nature" vs. Virtue

The gender performances in the novel are extraordinarily ambiguous, which is uncharacteristic for a supposed Victorian romance novel. "'You might mistake her for a man'" by Capuano et al. develops a classification model that compares and examines the relationship between characters and gender by analyzing the verbs and actions associated with each character (822). They observe that specific verbs are more often performed by either male or female individuals, due to the social conditioning and codification of behaviors into gendered categories. For example, verbs connotating action and physical motion are more likely to be connected to male characters, whereas verbs describing emotional behaviors are associated with female ones (823). *Jane Eyre* is one of the few outliers in the study, as its protagonists do not fit as easily into their classification model. Remarkably, females in *Jane Eyre* perform typically male actions at a significantly higher rate as compared to the corpus of works analyzed for the study; and male characters are engaging in so-called female behaviors at double the usual rate (828). However, it must be stated that males still perform typically masculine actions at a higher rate than, for example, Jane herself does. Nevertheless, it seems that this novel is subversive when it comes to conceiving what constitutes as male and female behavior.

What could explain such discrepancies between the novel and the rest of the corpus? On one hand, Jane, as a first-person narrator, is certainly predisposed toward action-driven

behaviors. After all, a novel featuring a protagonist who never engages in purposeful action would be narratively untenable. Still, Jane is a special case, since the narrative continuously highlights the point that she is, in fact, not very feminine (832). What constitutes female characteristics is relatively well-defined, as is indicated above. However, the class system of Victorian society complicates an easy identification, as with different castes came differently gendered expectations in regard to women (Ayyıldız 147). This integral aspect explains why transgressions of class through social mobility were deemed so radical. A lower-class female would not have been imbued with the specific type of femininity an upper-class woman had been brought up with, would not understand or perform the codified behaviors expected of one (Godfrey 853-54).

Stoic Jane, with her often pragmatic worldview, is well-educated and much less driven by emotion than, ironically, Rochester. He frequently performs feminine actions, which complicates a clear classification of his gender performance as well. This fact is enforced through episodes of inversed gender, such as his cross-dressing as a “gypsy” woman, or his weakness after having been crippled by the fire. Due to her humble beginnings, she has learned to be self-sufficient and frugal, in a clear contrast to the lavish, hedonistic aristocratic femininity showcased by Blanche Ingram. Her gender and class position are very much ambiguous, mostly due to her occupation as a governess. As a member of the working class, she is expected to behave differently as compared to “true” ladies of the upper-class. The working class was seen as uncomfortably androgynous, since both men and women were expected to perform labors that were deemed unbecoming of ladies (Ayyıldız 147). Here, notions of separate spheres, dress-codes, and specific behaviors became blurred almost to the point of non-existence (Godfrey 853). Females of the working-class were under specific scrutiny, their lower origin was associated with an unrestrained sexuality, similar to a man’s (854). Governesses were therefore defined by the uncertainty of their position, androgynous and class-less. They were members of the working class yet lived and worked amongst the upper levels of society (855). They educated the next generation of leaders and wives. Their sexuality was often assiduously scrutinized because of their close relationship to their male employer and lower-class origins (855).

Due to this polymorphous ambiguity, they were often treated with disdain, the uncertainty of their position causing those opposed to social mobility to outwardly reject them. Therefore, Jane occupies a unique place among the Thornfield household that allows for a sort of mediation between class and gender identities. Her presence serves to blur and

highlight lines that would otherwise remain unquestioned. Her relationship to Rochester is subversive; there are fewer clear boundaries between them due to her status as governess. Jane's struggle with this becomes obvious when Rochester attempts to elevate her to become his wife, wishing to adorn her with feminine accoutrements befitting her new station: "Glad I was to be out a jeweller's shop: the more he bought me, the more my cheek burned with a sense of annoyance and degradation" (Brontë 309). She cannot bear being treated like an upper-class lady, not after having been conditioned her whole life that such things are beyond her reach. Her declaration, "I will not be your English Céline Varens" (311), indicates that she feels cheapened for allowing him to dress her up, as if he was paying off his mistress. Her deepest wish is not to be elevated beyond her status unfairly, but to achieve a higher-class position through her own merit: "'It would, indeed, be a relief,' I thought, 'if I had ever so small an independency; I never can bear being dressed like a doll by Mr. Rochester ...'" (309).

The focus on independence is integral in *Jane Eyre*. Unbeknownst to her, Rochester is her biggest opponent when it comes to this goal. He prefers to keep her in a submissive, dependent position in which he can control her actions: "'... and when once I have fairly seized you, to have and to hold, I'll just ... attach you to a chain like this' (touching his watchguard). 'Yes, bonny wee thing, I'll wear you in my bosom, lest my jewel I should tyne'" (312). Perhaps Jane implicitly realizes this issue, because she only returns to Rochester once their relationship can resume on a more equal footing. After inheriting a large sum of money from her late uncle, she has become independently wealthy, especially compared to Rochester's reduced fortune: "I told you I am independent, sir, as well as rich: I am my own mistress" (501). Meanwhile, his former wife, Bertha, has committed suicide, burned down his ancestral estate, and blinded him. Now in a significantly weakened position, he is dependent on Jane to secure his happiness, not the other way around. In fact, Jane is doing him a favor by marrying him, as she has nothing to gain by binding herself to a disabled man of similar, if not lower, status.

Furthermore, his age has ceased to be of advantage to him. He has reached a state of feebleness that highlights his advanced age as compared to Jane's youthful strength. Whereas before, it allowed him to assume a paternalistic control over her allegedly inexperienced mind and actions, by now, she has regained and reversed this power (Godfrey 855). Rochester seems uncomfortably aware of this reversal, especially when he questions whether Jane has found love with a younger man in the meantime. Meanwhile, Jane relishes her newfound power: "I love you better now, when I can really

be useful to you, than I did in your state of proud independence, when you disdained every part but that of the giver and protector” (Brontë 513). The narrative has weakened and feminized Rochester to strengthen, or masculinize, Jane. She has achieved a truly equal status in her marriage, in which her husband depends on her absolutely: “... I am in my husband’s life as fully as he is mine. No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am ...” (519).

For Jane, a rise in social status is not legitimate if it does not result from inner worth. She believes her ascent is only possible through steadfast adherence to her morals and values, which is why she refuses to remain with Rochester after the truth of his first wife is revealed. She chooses a life of hardship and poverty over becoming his mistress, because, to her, moral corruptness is the lowest form of class there is. This also explains why Jane judges Blanche Ingram to be unworthy of Rochester; although she embodies all the attributes of a high-society wife, she cannot match Jane on an intellectual and moral level. Jane creates her own class system, one in which moral strength is valued over birth. Similar to Julia in *A Sicilian Romance*, Jane recognizes that the current system does not fit her needs, so she invents one for herself. Both stories ultimately focus on young women discovering ways to be independent, despite the dominating influence of husbands, fathers, or male relatives.

Truly, husbands and fathers are the monsters the heroines must flee, rather than the protective carers they are supposed to be. The true Gothic terror in these stories lies in the dawning realization that the heroines cannot rely on anyone but themselves, as their so-called betters turn out to be morally corrupt, or at least compromised. While both stories ultimately end in marriage, and thus, remain anchored in traditional depictions of gender binaries, they also subversively challenge this discourse by altering their own position within this system. Rather than remain a mere object, the Angel of the House serving their masters, they take on a more active subject position. They ultimately choose marriage, for one reason or another, but they do so on their own terms. The monstrous husband/father must be destroyed or changed for a woman to find true happiness. The message apparent in both novels is rebellion against the status quo if it does harm. The search for alternative paths to happiness leads the heroines away from the safety of the domestic sphere, and only once their monsters are vanquished do they willingly return to it.

#### 4. Rebecca – a true Gothic Heroine

One may ask themselves why it is still necessary to write novels about female agency and rebellion in the twentieth, or twenty-first, centuries, when there has been so much progress in terms of women's suffrage and emancipation. Yet, we cannot forget that it was only during the 1970s that women were allowed their own bank accounts, and in the 1990s that marital rape was abolished legally (Bienstock Anolik 40). That goes to say, we still have a long way to go. Altering a centuries-old system of hierarchical power is not easily accomplished. It takes time as well as targeted efforts, such as writing subversive novels that challenge the ideals held by society at large. Daphne du Maurier has created a Gothic heroine that rebels against yet recalls gender ideology to use it to her advantage. *Rebecca* is Gothic due to the title character's liminality, her fluid and ambiguous nature that defies easy categorization. She is a different person in different character's perspectives, to the point that the true Rebecca remains unknowable, even for the reader (Körösi 165). Her characterization as helpless victim versus villainous femme fatale contrasts so sharply that it is impossible for either category to truly contain her.

Maxim, the villainous husband, attempts to demonize her, claiming that he had no choice but to kill her. He resembles Rochester, spinning a narrative that paints him in the best possible light. It is difficult to determine whether this is done consciously or not. Do they truly regard themselves as victims, or do they possess an underlying awareness of their wrongdoing? After all, no excuse can justify the murder of his wife, even if Maxim and Mrs. de Winter seem to think so. The fact that Rebecca constantly evades him is a clear indication that his picture of her is not as accurate as he believes it to be. Even Mrs. Danvers, Manderley's obsessive housekeeper, is ultimately unable to accurately predict Rebecca's actions. Towards the end of the novel, she is unable to comprehend the fact that Maxim would have murdered her, as such a death seems below her. In her imagination, Rebecca dying in a wild sailboat accident seems more apt to fit the ideal she has created in her mind. Where Maxim demonizes her, Mrs. Danvers idolizes the woman. She considers herself Rebecca's closest confidante, and learning that she kept secrets from her, such as her trips to the London doctor, shatters this image. Finally, her cousin, Jack Favell, believes himself in love with her. He attempts to defend her character and avenge her death by exposing Maxim but is stumped once Mrs. Danvers mocks him by stating: "She was not in love with you, or with Mr de Winter. She was not in love with anyone. She despised all men. She was above all that" (Du Maurier 382). It becomes clear, then, that none of the characters truly know Rebecca or her motives. She is a

dazzling female character that revels in her own agency, even beyond death. For Rebecca, the rules and boundaries of social convention are mere obstacles to overcome, and she does so with reckless abandon. Her Gothic nature cannot be restrained, and even after her untimely demise she continues to live on through her haunting of the nameless Mrs. de Winter. She transgresses boundaries yet is not demonized for it by anyone but her husband.

#### 4.1. Haunting the Patriarchy – the Return of the Repressed

The Gothic motif of the return of the repressed is strong in *Rebecca*. While the character herself is dead from the beginning of the narrative, the circumstances of her death, as well as her presence, begin to haunt her murderer, Maxim, as well as the unnamed character who becomes his wife. Rebecca's influence continues to live on in the décor of the manor, as well as personal belongings such as remnants of her handwriting or clothing, and also through the memories of the people living in close contact. Maxim and his new wife are constantly reminded of Rebecca, no matter how much they attempt to suppress her. Mrs. de Winter, for a large part of the narrative completely unaware of the nature of Rebecca's demise, compares herself to her predecessor and finds herself lacking.

Maxim, the murderer, cannot remain at his ancestral estate without constant reminders of his deed. A man's estate, such as the Mazzini castle, Thornfield Hall, or Manderley, carries more than just memories. They are the physical representation of their aristocratic masters, traditions of patrilineal heritage and patriarchal power (Gkatzelaki 6). The destruction of their power base, as is the case in all three novels to a degree, is simultaneously an eradication of the gender identity and influence of their owners. Maxim's allegiance, as he himself states, is, above all, to Manderley: "I accepted everything — because of Manderley" (Du Maurier 308). Everything he does is aimed toward maintaining his traditional power as landowner and lord of his estate. Rebecca's scandalous influence threatens this dominance as she begins to take over the manor. At first, Maxim welcomes the changes as he delights in her sense of style, the changes made to Manderley are necessary to keep it up to par with modern, upper-class taste. She hosts balls and parties that serve the estate's reputation as exquisite.

Yet, increasingly, he feels his control slip — mostly due to her transgressive behaviors, contradicting the image of the aristocratic lady of the house. She begins to invite her lovers to the estate, flaunting her affairs and disregard for the institution of marriage. She spends time away from Manderley, be it in London or down at the lake, where she keeps her own sailboat, the ironically named *Je reviens*. In short, she does not, in Maxim's eyes,

prove her value by putting effort into maintaining his ancestral power as represented by Manderley.

When she goes too far, threatening patrilineal heritage by claiming to have fallen pregnant by another man, Maxim sees his control in tatters. Here, the pervasive influence of gendered expectations becomes explicit. Mr. de Winter cannot uphold the image of Manderley's patriarch, who reigns over his estate and its people with absolute dominion. His wife defying him at every turn weakens the ideal he wishes, and is expected, to portray. Unable to withstand the pressure of his perceived deviation from "normality," he comes to believe that he has no choice but to eliminate her threatening influence, destroying and silencing her in the most fundamental way possible. The novel highlights the fragility of hegemonial masculinity; the patriarchs are forced to commit transgressive acts to sustain their power (Gkatzelaki 8). In these scenarios, as is argued in Dimitra Gatzelaki's "A Study of Female Haunting," "... the abject does not cease challenging its master.' ... For the female ghost, this *challenging* entails endangering the apparent wholeness of male identity..." (qtd. in Gatzelaki 52).

After killing her and depositing her body in the lake adjoining his estate, Maxim feels he has regained power and vanquished her transgressive femininity once and for all. Yet, as is the case in all Gothic novels, the repressed tend not to stay that way. His new wife, Mrs. de Winter, attempts to emulate Rebecca as she finds her own identity lacking in comparison. However, Maxim has dispassionately chosen her as his wife precisely due to her difference from the threatening Rebecca, and her emulation scares him. It is obvious that the young Mrs. de Winter, still unnamed and obviously still searching for her own identity, finds the specter of Rebecca's self-assured, confident femininity intimidating. She becomes despondent and depressed once she realizes that she will never be able to achieve the type of upper-class femininity that her predecessor so effortlessly performed. Upon learning from Maxim that his feelings for his first wife were destructive rather than an expression of the idealized true love she had imagined, she becomes able to abandon the Angel in the House model against which she had measured herself. Once she learns that Rebecca was anything but an angel, the narrator feels relief to be rid of the compulsion to act like one as well.

Ironically, in letting go of the idea of Rebecca as perfect and untouchable, Mrs. de Winter assimilates more to her predecessor than when she was actively attempting to emulate her. This scene mirrors Hélène Cixous' famous statement about killing the false woman in order to free the live one (qtd. In Jönsson 43). What Maxim fails to realize is that the

changes he witnesses in his second wife indicate a return of the repressed, as is highlighted by Rebecca's body being washed up and symbolically returning after having been concealed. However, by the end of the novel, when the couple lives in a hotel due to Manderley being burnt down, it seems that Maxim has realized that Rebecca was never going to back down without a fight: "Rebecca would win in the end. Finding you has not made any difference, has it? ... Rebecca knew she would win in the end. I saw her smile, when she died" (316).

#### 4.2. Bluebeard's ally or enemy?

Mrs. de Winter herself is difficult to place as well. Is she another potential victim of Maxim's, or is she his ally? In research literature, the story of *Rebecca*, as well as *Jane Eyre*, and, to a lower degree, *A Sicilian Romance*, have been linked to Charles Perrault's 1697 Bluebeard legend (Gkatzelaki 5). Bluebeard is a malicious figure who imprisons and kills his wives. His last wife discovers his crimes and is able to defeat him. *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca* seem to rewrite this story from a female perspective. The young wives do not ignore their curiosity; disregarding the mandates of their husbands, they actively search for answers within their maze-like ancient estates. They symbolically gain entry into locked or abandoned rooms, attaining access to hitherto forbidden knowledge. In the end, they use this information to escape from their captor's evil clutches. Jane flees a false marriage that would have turned her into a mistress. She leaves, her husband is destroyed, and his estate and reputation with him. Only once he has atoned and she herself attained equal standing does she willingly return.

In contrast, however, once Mrs. de Winter realizes her husband is a murderer, she doubles down on her love for him instead of exposing his crimes or absconding to safety. Similarly to Jane, the narrator seems hindered by her love for the Bluebeard figure, which keeps her from fully renouncing him. Yet, where Jane leaves, Mrs. de Winter stays. Jane strongly opposes Rochester's actions, but in *Rebecca*, the narrator seems to admire Maxim for his actions: "I did not care about his shame. None of the things that he had told me mattered to me at all" (306). In fact, after his confession, the pair is closer than ever. This episode complicates a feminist reading of the story, after all, it begs the question: Is Mrs. de Winter Bluebeard's ally or enemy?

Ultimately, it is undeniable that both Rebecca and the narrator occupy strong positions within the patriarchal system and seek to defend them (Llompart Pons 72). While the hierarchical class-gender categorization eventually subjects them to a subordinate role, their position as wife of the patriarch comes with its own perks. Rebecca is free to live

lavishly according to her own wishes, even if those tend to stray outside the norm — her pact with Maxim ensures that he turns a blind eye to her affairs. She is free, at least compared to other women, as she may do as she pleases as long as the pair presents a united front toward outsiders. Mrs. de Winter also enjoys the perks of being rich, as well as the power she has over servants. Whereas before, those same servants would treat her with disdain, she now has the power to subjugate them. She also experiences firsthand the kind of transgressions possible once one has the connections to ensure they are hidden from the scrutinizing eyes of the public.

Once Maxim is questioned in relation to Rebecca's murder, his connections within the legal system ensure that her death is deemed a suicide. The patriarchal system of power protects itself at the cost of a woman's justice. The narrator is complicit in this as she keeps Maxim's secret instead of exposing his crimes. She acts against Rebecca's interests in order to protect her own. Having experienced both ends of the class system, she is determined to keep her privileged position as Maxim's wife.

Crucially, however, it is after the narrator learns of the circumstances of Rebecca's death that she begins a slow change, increasingly resembling her predecessor. At the end of the narrative, Mrs. de Winter dreams of looking into a mirror and seeing Rebecca in the reflection. The prologue indicates a symbiosis of the two, where "[t]he rhododendrons stood fifty feet high, twisted and entwined with bracken, and they had entered into alien marriage with a host of nameless shrubs, poor, bastard things..." (Du Maurier 2-3). The ending is marked by ambiguity, implying that once the narrator comes into her identity as a hybrid of Rebecca/Mrs. de Winter, monster/angel, she may eventually learn to resist Maxim in ways similar to Rebecca. The narrator's identity is constructed through a logic of absence and indeterminacy, as her youthful status precludes her full participation in adult femininity (Miquel-Baldellou 94). Maxim has selected her as his second wife precisely due to her docile, submissive naïveté that is far from the confident, adult sexuality his former wife represented. In fact, their heterosexual marriage lacks any sort of passion, and the narrator associates this sexual intensity with Maxim's lost wife Rebecca (Gkatzelaki 102). Compared to her, Mrs. de Winter feels she still has a lot to learn. The age gap between Maxim and his second wife is pronounced, highlighting the forbidden knowledge he wishes to keep from her in order to keep her in an innocent, naïve, unquestioning state: "Well then. A husband is not so very different from a father after all. There is a certain type of knowledge I would prefer you not to have. It's better

kept under lock and key. So that's that. And now eat up your peaches, and don't ask me anymore questions or I shall put you in the corner" (226-27).

Mrs. de Winter, however, is not content to stay within this restricted role her husband has prescribed to her. She seeks this forbidden knowledge as a rebellion at the idea of remaining infantilized: "Would we never be together, he a man and I a woman, standing shoulder to shoulder, hand in hand, with no gulf between us? I did not want to be a child. I wanted to be his wife, his mother. I wanted to be old" (220). In pursuing knowledge, the narrator begins to grow into herself as a woman, and by the end of the narrative, the reader views the pair years later, with Mrs. de Winter finally able to perform the kind of adult femininity her younger self had yearned for. Maxim, in contrast, seems destabilized, weakened: "I can tell by the way he will look lost and puzzled suddenly..." (5). It seems that the patriarch must lose some of his power for his wives to gain it. The same theme seems to be present in both *Jane Eyre* and *A Sicilian Romance*. Perhaps, these stories serve as a sort of revenge fantasy that simply inverts the system, giving the female similar power over their male counterparts. The destruction of ancestral estates is a symbolic obliteration of masculine influence and tradition, replaced by a system that seeks to rediscover matrilineal heritage. After all, the overarching plot is the (re-) discovery of lost or hidden women. The patriarch desires to suppress female lineage and power to preserve his own, but the heroine's curious exploration ultimately undermines this aspiration.

Maxim is linked to Bluebeard in the way he murders his former wife without regret. Mrs. de Winter is an ambiguous figure that superficially seems to support her husband. Still, over the course of the narrative, she grows into her identity that increasingly resembles his rebellious former wife. Rebecca embodies the kind of adult, self-assured, streetwise femininity that Mrs. de Winter has been denied by Maxim. By disregarding his dictate, she is able to leave her naïve youthfulness behind and grow into the person she was always meant to be, reversing their power dynamic. Rebecca has unwittingly taught her how to use her position to her advantage. The open-ended conclusion sustains the possibility that her allegiance to her murderous husband may yet be subversively challenged. While she superficially seems to be Bluebeard's ally, the ending suggests she might ultimately become his foil.

#### 4.3. Doubling Mrs. de Winter

As is described above, Mrs. de Winter and Rebecca are doubled in a way that makes a clear separation of the two impossible by the end of the novel. The story is one of a young woman in search of identity — at the beginning she is shy, cautious, and uncertain, which

is what attracts Maxim to her. Yet, throughout the narrative, she grows into herself, essentially by studying her predecessor, Rebecca. The fact that the heroine of the novel is nameless insinuates a lack of identity, of clear categorization. By taking on Maxim's name, she becomes his. Her identity now revolves around being his property and acting according to the codified behaviors she has learned are expected of a high-society wife. However, there is a subversive undercurrent that focuses on the idea that she did not solely take on his name; more explicitly, she takes on Rebecca's name and identity as Mrs. de Winter. Initially, this identity chafes — she cannot be both Maxim's ideal wife and Rebecca (as she later learns).

Throughout the narrative, she is constantly reminded that she cannot be what his first wife was — an ideal wife and partner. Rebecca embodies a sort of knowledge of herself and her sexuality that seems entirely lacking in the narrator's relationship with Maxim. The deepest bonds within the novels are found between women. Mrs. de Winter's obsessive fascination with Rebecca borders on homoerotic, as it becomes increasingly unclear whether she wants to be her or be *with* her (Körösi 166). Her intense focus is reinforced and mirrored by Mrs. Danvers, the housekeeper. Danvers' relationship with Rebecca carries implicit lesbian undertones, as is evidenced by the way in which she neurotically attempts to keep her memory alive at all costs (Harbord 101). Similarly to Bertha in *Jane Eyre*, Mrs. Danvers is associated with distinctly vampiric qualities, from her appearance: "... someone tall and gaunt, dressed in deep black, whose prominent cheek-bones and great, hollow eyes gave her a skull's face, parchment-white, set on a skeleton's frame" (Du Maurier 74), to her often-malicious character. Here, the analogy serves to highlight the connection and even doubling of Danvers and Rebecca. As her living representative, Danvers keeps the deceased Rebecca alive, or undead (Kędra-Kardela 81). She haunts Maxim's new wife in order to make her realize that, in her eyes, she can never measure up to her predecessor. The narrator's very existence chafes Danvers' sense of righteousness, and she feels she must defend Rebecca's memory.

It becomes clear, however, that over the course of the novel, as Mrs. de Winter grows to better understand herself and her position within the household, she begins to resemble Rebecca. Scenes such as the masquerade ball and the final dinner with Maxim before the revelation suggest that her gradual shift toward a Rebecca-like identity was already inscribed in the narrative, preceding her husband's confession that ultimately empowers her to perform it openly: "My old fears, my diffidence, my shyness, my hopeless sense

of inferiority, must be conquered now and thrust aside. If I failed now I should fail for ever” (296).

Against Maxim’s explicit desire, the narrator ultimately gains the forbidden knowledge that strips her of her innocent and naïve state. After, Maxim takes on distinctively child-like quality, depending for the first time on his new wife. It is only after the murder confession that Maxim tells her he loves her for the first time. Crucially, the reader is confronted with Mrs. de Winters unreliability as a narrator. She does not question Maxim’s account of Rebecca, which, similar to Rochester’s description of Bertha, serves primarily to legitimize his self-victimizing narrative. Rather than being shocked or disgusted by Maxim’s deed, the narrator disregards his violence in the face of her perceived victory over Rebecca. She is no longer the untouchable idol on which to base all her decisions, but a flawed woman of flesh and blood. As such, the narrator finally achieves the previously impossible: imitating her. Suddenly, she gains the confidence she previously lacked: “I had not thought it would be so easy to be severe” (324-25). She acts as Maxim’s defense in a way that highlights her shrewd intelligence and socio-political agency. While Mrs. de Winter consciously denies any association with Rebecca, the implicit similarities are evident. When Danvers, Rebecca’s other double, burns down Manderley, her final revenge is enacted. Maxim loses his identity and Mrs. de Winter gains hers through Rebecca. The end shows a despondent, lost Max, who is feminized in his useless incapability of accepting what has happened to him. Similarly to Rebecca in Danvers’ description of her, Mrs. de Winter takes on a more masculine role, self-assured and dominant in comparison to her husband: “At any rate I have lost my diffidence, my timidity, my shyness with strangers. I am rather different from that self who drove to Manderley for the first time, hopeful and eager, handicapped by a rather desperate gaucherie and filled with an intense desire to please” (10).

In the end, however, it becomes apparent that nobody really knows Rebecca, except, perhaps, for Mrs. de Winter, who becomes her. She absorbs the accumulated knowledge and experience of generations of repressed femininity, a transmission visually encoded in the silent portraits of female relatives that line Manderley’s gallery. Instead of remaining a passive victim, Rebecca reaches beyond the grave in order to enact her revenge. She bequeaths it to Mrs. de Winter, who sustains a cycle of female agency and identity in defiance of the patriarch’s attempt to negate its existence. Rather than adhering to the expected image of the perfect wife, the Angel of the House, Rebecca firmly establishes a female identity beyond these restrictions. Even her physical body resists these ideals:

“The X-rays showed a certain malformation of the uterus, I remember, which meant she could never have had a child...” (413). Her transgressive character enforces the idea that women are more than their reproductive capabilities. Her fluid, ambiguous identity denies any kind of categorization that would restrict her actions and force her into a role. She is beyond the clear and codified behaviors her gender role would assign to her, highlighted by her pseudo-sexual relationship with Danvers, her alleged distaste for men in general, and her more “masculine” propensities that do not fit into the image of the aristocratic housewife: “She had all the courage and spirit of a boy, had my Mrs de Winter. She ought to have been a boy, I often told her that” (272).

By the end of the narrative, it is clear that Mrs. de Winter cannot resist Rebecca’s pervasive influence; she is explicitly doubled, both women merging into one when looking in the mirror, or comparing handwriting: “But when I looked down to see what I had written it was not my small square handwriting at all, it was long, slanting, with curious pointed strokes ... A face stared back at me that was not my own” (426). Rebecca, as the voice for the repressed feminine knowledge of agency and individuality, lives on in Mrs. de Winter, inspiring her to finally grow beyond the strict limits Maxim and society at large have set out for her.

*Rebecca*, as well as *Jane Eyre* and *A Sicilian Romance*, find Gothic terror in the discovery of the nightmare beneath the pastoral domestic sphere. The patriarch is exposed as corrupt, fragmenting the heroine’s sense of identity and position within a hierarchical system. Discovering their own moral superiority allows them to question their subjugation. They seek to find alternative identities that enable more agency than they were previously allotted. The characters are confronted with a range of femininities that ultimately teach them to avoid becoming fallen women, while still preserving their heightened sense of personal identity. They come to realize that “the fallen woman concept was a stigma created by powerful men through social conditioning which helped maintain a gender hierarchy which favoured men” (Cowan 6).

Gothic terror is enabled first and foremost by the “enduring role model valorized by patriarchy, rather than its transgressive Other” (Gkatzelaki 17), meaning the pervasive Angel of the House ideal. Where Bertha’s haunting of Jane leaves her with no lasting consequences after her death, *Rebecca*’s influence on Mrs. de Winter allows for the establishment of a subversive hybrid femininity (14). All the female protagonists encountered in these narratives ultimately come to question their roles within the patriarchal system, a process that leads them to discover their personal identities and a

transgressive potential for agency from within that very system. It is my understanding that *Rebecca* goes even farther by accepting the fallen woman as part of the self, rather than rejecting her as is the case in *Jane Eyre* with Bertha, and *A Sicilian Romance*, with Maria. By recognizing all the differing aspects of femininity, Mrs. de Winter is ultimately allowed to grow her identity as a woman beyond the strict confines of the patriarchal system by which she is restricted. Therefore, *Rebecca* is the latest in a series of narratives that seeks to answer questions concerning the nature of femininity and female agency within the patriarchal system that subjugates it.

## Part II

Having explored the implicit dangers and desires that govern women's lives, as evidenced by Gothic literature, I have observed that certain themes and issues prevail over time. Even today, the danger emanating from the patriarchal system echoes the past. Although certain changes are made to the configuration of the Gothic monster of the husband/father, the core of patriarchal danger and abuse of power remains the same, even after centuries of socio-cultural progress. It appears that the Gothic motif of the return of the repressed has a tangible connection to the real world. No matter the degree of extra-literary subjugation, different authors have reanimated female agency time and time again within their stories. The ghosts of the past, similarly to the wives and mothers hidden away in cave-like chambers, or murdered, refuse to be silenced forever.

The second part goes on to analyze a different monster of Gothic literature: the vampire. I will go on to explain why the vampire is not just a Gothic metaphor, but incredibly relevant and applicable to modern Gender Studies as well. It highlights the genre's connection to queerness; its transgressive potential that rejects and yet depends on the abnormal. I will examine three vampire novels: Bram Stoker's *Dracula* as a foundational text when it comes to the figure, Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*, as well as Elizabeth Kostova's *The Historian*, a contemporary example. I will show that our understanding of the vampire figure has changed drastically over time and speculate why this adjustment may have occurred.

### 5. Dracula: The Vampire's Threatening Influence

As a reanimated corpse, the vampire is a literal representation of the return of the repressed. An outsider figure, it is nonetheless essential, as the so-called norm may only establish itself in contrast to the abnormal. The vampire is dangerous as it threatens the conventional way of life, traditional values and norms. As such, the literary rejection of this evil represents and strengthens our inherent desire for conformity and order. Charles

Prescott and Grace Giorgio argue that this production of scapegoats is meant to cleanse a respective community by reinforcing established traditions (499). The vampire's threat is terrible because it parallels evils already present within society, rather than incorporating a completely alien identity (Prescott and Giorgio 499). Getting rid of the scapegoat therefore symbolically purifies society at large, allowing the pretense of having expunged all transgression within (500).

Yet, the figure is notoriously difficult to kill; and in almost all cases able to transcend even death. Therefore, it is highly subversive, as even the most stable of boundaries prove useless against its power and influence. Thus, rather than merely reinforcing the gulf between normal and abnormal, it also questions it: "Because monsters are always the constitutive outside of normativity, the scapegoats constructed of society's devouring anxieties, they can never safely be tucked away" (507). This subversive nature links the vampire and other socio-cultural "outsiders" — women, homosexuals, and queer individuals in general (508). The ease with which the vampire crosses limits arguably emphasizes their instability, their permeability. Thus, the Gothic genre is highly connected to the Queer, as queerness is defined as whatever goes beyond the contemporary norm (Osap 6). Although not necessarily inherently evil, the vampire is met with loathing and disgust, precisely due to its queerness that challenges the norms of society.

Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, a novel that underscores the apparent bridge between good and evil, ultimately reinforces the belief that queerness must be controlled and denounced to maintain personal moral superiority. However, the modern reader may be able to question the ways in which Stoker does so, as the methods of his heroes end up mirroring those of the villains, their similarities undeniable (Guitar 120). I will argue that there are no clear or easy boundaries, as Stoker would maintain; instead, they are shown to be easily transgressed and more of a social construct than a stable category. His attempt to diffuse the threat of the nineteenth century's New Woman (Prescott and Giorgio 487) ultimately fails as he is unable to portray a stable traditional model of femininity.

### 5.1. (Dangerous) Female Friendships

Mina and Lucy's relationship is one example of the kind of normative and corrective gaze the novel perpetuates. Their intimate friendship is deemed dangerously close to homoerotic, which is why Lucy becomes susceptible to the corrupting influence of the vampire. As Prescott and Giorgio explain in their paper "Vampiric Affinities," before the nineteenth century, homosexuality as a term did not exist (494). Homosexual behaviors,

especially between men, were recognized and discussed, yet not in terms of homosexuality, but rather as an aberrant form of “normal” heterosexuality. Men who preferred other men were understood to have been born incorporating a female subjectivity within a male-presenting physicality — in a kind of sexual inversion (494). This explanation seeks to displace the threatening idea of true homosexual connection within the safe bounds of heterosexual pathology (494).

Female homosexual desires were largely undiscussed as, up to the eighteenth and even nineteenth centuries, female sexual desire in general was not acknowledged (493). Women were not recognized as sexual beings, their alleged passivity extended so far as to eliminate any kind of intimate desire (Craft 120). Active sexuality was the prerogative of men, and only due to the nineteenth century’s feminist advances in favor of equality was the question of female aberrant desire brought up (Senf 35). Though understood to be much less common than the male version due to lingering stereotypes, female homosexuality became a topic of discussion. Consequently, intimate female friendships, previously deemed completely innocent, now came under scrutiny (Prescott and Giorgio 487). The idea of a sexual relationship between women was particularly transgressive, as it had the potential to render male participation redundant. Women spending their lives together independently were such a threat that contemporary sexologists pathologized the desire; lesbianism was deemed a sexual inversion, meaning that the women in question allegedly retained traces of masculinity somewhere in their biological or spiritual makeup, leading to a rejection of traditional feminine roles (Craft 120). Thus, female sexual inversion masculinized women in the eyes of society; they were understood to “have unusually large clitorises, which they [sexologists] said the inverts used in sexual intercourse as a man would his penis” (Craft 120). Crucially, any kind of gender non-conforming behavior, even ones fully separate from lesbianism, could now be deemed pathological (Prescott and Giorgio 494). Women in general, particularly their relationships with each other, were scrutinized more than ever before.

Mina and Lucy are observed as well, most suspiciously by the men in their lives, specifically Van Helsing. Although he only learns of their close bond through reading their personal letters, he clearly finds it remarkably intimate, as he seeks out Mina immediately after apprising their correspondence. He is sure Mina knows more about Lucy than anyone else, even compared to Lucy’s fiancé, Arthur. It is unclear whether Mina and Lucy truly have any kind of homosexual relationship, yet the debate is not without foundation. Homosexual behavior between women was seldom recognized as

such, even by the individuals themselves, simply due to the fact that such vocabulary or language did not exist to define and categorize their desires: "... if a woman felt a high degree of sexual attraction for another woman, she lacked the language and social understanding to realize her affection was sexual" (qtd. in Prescott and Giorgio 494). Therefore, any indication of same-sex desire was much less explicit than it would be today, often veiled within the bounds of a particularly close female spiritual connection. Mina and Lucy's letters, for example, are the only truly intimate writing of the novel, the emotional center around which the story revolves (495). Interestingly, none of the heterosexual relationships can match the passion these two women seem to hold for each other.

For example, in their writings, it becomes clear that both wish to be free of their husbands/fiancés; they would prefer to live together instead. Mina's letters indicate that she is overworked and that the responsibilities of a fiancée have become too much: "... I have been simply overwhelmed with work. . . . I have been working very hard lately, because I want to keep up with Jonathan's studies, and I have been practicing shorthand ..." (Stoker 60-61). She has learned shorthand for Jonathan, as well as memorized train schedules, all to make his life easier. Lucy, besieged by the attention of her three suitors, is uncertain which one she should choose, clearly understanding that refusal is not an option. In the end, her mother selects Arthur for her and Lucy has no choice but to accept. Outwardly she seems happy with this, yet it is notable that her strongest emotions and passions are reserved only for Mina "... I love you with all the moods and tenses of the verb..." (151).

According to Prescott and Giorgio, same-sex desire could also be displaced onto discussions of heterosexuality or marriage as an eroticized topic within their private communications (496). Indeed, Mina often admires Lucy through Arthur's eyes, for example: "She has more colour in her cheeks than usual, and looks, oh, so sweet. If Mr. Holmwood fell in love with her seeing her only in the drawing room, I wonder what he would say if he saw her now" (93). By displacing her own appreciation and longing onto Arthur as the appropriate heterosexual subject, Mina is able to express her own feelings and desires.

Furthermore, Lucy is partly the cause of Mina's masculinization (as contemporary sexologists would argue), as it is only after losing her that Mina is motivated to step outside the bounds of acceptable female behavior and join the "Crew of Light" in order to destroy Dracula. However, even before Lucy's transformation, their affection for each

other can be deemed transgressive. Particularly, passages such as, “I wish I were with you, dear, sitting by the fire undressing, as we used to sit; and I would try to tell you what I feel” (62), or, “I am longing to be with you, and by the sea, where we can talk together freely and build our castles in the air” (60), underscore the theory that there might be more to their friendship than a purely asexual, spiritual connection. After Mina unwittingly rescues Lucy from Dracula, she fears she has pricked her with a needle. The connotation of penetration indicates a homoerotic undertone. The taboo nature of this experience is emphasized by the characters clear repression of the topic, as Mina attempts to hide their midnight adventure from others.

While physical desire is displaced in these descriptions, they carry a certain erotic imagery that is implicit in many of their exchanges. Therefore, while Mina and Lucy lack the language to accurately express their feelings and desires, they are present within the subtext of their letters. Normative supervisors, such as Van Helsing, seem to pick up on these nuances, leading him to recognize Lucy’s sexual nature as subversive. Although her behavior is not overtly sexually transgressive, her relationship to her three suitors, as well as the latent desire implicit in her writings to Mina, cause Van Helsing to demonize her sexuality as the reason for Dracula’s targeting of her.

Symbolically staking her into submission, he is able to literally eradicate the kind of female sexuality that threatens to weaken Victorian gender boundaries. He punishes Lucy overtly yet disguises himself as a benevolent savior. The explicit, drawn-out nature of Lucy’s staking scene highlights the emotive force and passion in the Crew of Light’s actions. The men seem to delight in their mutilation of Lucy’s body yet claim to be doing so out of love. The scene carries a certain punitive satisfaction inspired by the rectification of Lucy’s perceived wrongdoings.

## 5.2. Mina, Lucy, and the New Woman

By the nineteenth century, the strict division of gendered spheres was increasingly contested, with suffragette movements advocating women’s equal rights emerging as a prominent subject of public debate (Prescott and Giorgio 487). The aims of first-wave feminism were relatively restrained, focusing on educational access, employment rights, and the circulation of information regarding the risks of venereal disease (Senf 35). Women fought for the right to refuse conjugal relations if her husband’s affliction endangered them or their potential children. Nevertheless, these demands were deemed radical, and women connected to the movement were criticized as sexual libertines, masculine lesbians, or shrill madwomen (Prescott and Giorgio 488).

*Dracula* is decidedly ambiguous on the topic of the New Woman, a term coined during this period. On the one hand, Mina appears to embody certain aspects of the New Woman, as she is both educated and gainfully employed. The novel foregrounds her education and shrewd intelligence, attributing her strategic acumen to a “man’s brain” that enables her to devise plans instrumental in the destruction of their enemy. On the other hand, this very intelligence is seen as a threat to male superiority. Other aspects of the New Woman, such as the association with sexual liberties, are clearly condemned within the novel.

Lucy’s supposed sexual nature leads to her doom. When finding herself surrounded by suitors, she wishes she could marry all three: “My dear Mina, why are men so noble when we women are so little worthy of them? ... Why can’t they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble?” (65). This, coupled with her subversive relationship to Mina, makes her susceptible to the transgressive influence of the vampire. After several sleep-walking incidents, which serve to highlight Lucy’s repressed desires making themselves known unconsciously, she is demonized and turned into one of the undead. Vampirism itself is connected to the kind of unrestrained sexuality late Victorians feared, as the character’s vamped appearance turns sensual and suggestive: “All three had brilliant white teeth that shone like pearls against the ruby of their voluptuous lips... There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive” (46-47). As a vampire, Lucy can live free from the normative and patronizing influence of society. She even commits the ultimate taboo — she feeds on a child, rather than the other way around. By bastardizing the ideal of motherhood, Lucy’s character reflects contemporary fears that the New Woman might desire more than motherhood and family, or worse, seek to avoid them altogether (Demetrakopoulos 107).

Vampiric Lucy is the ultimate threat to patriarchal society; her unrestrained sexuality, along with the loss of a woman’s supposedly essential nurturing character, defeminizes her in the eyes of the Crew of Light. By stepping outside the bounds of normative femininity, Lucy becomes something monstrous that is incompatible with the idealized concept of womanhood. Therefore, she can be dispatched without regrets; the group of men even seem to delight in their actions, viewing themselves as Lucy’s saviors. The gratuitous mutilation of her body ends with Lucy’s smiling death, which legitimizes their actions. Depicting the victim as apparently relieved or pleased by her own death functions to absolve the group of lingering guilt, allowing them to construe their actions as morally justified. As Alison Case states, “The only genuine Angel in the House is a wife who has joined the angels” (224), as the characters seem to prefer an “idealized dead fiancée over

a sexually initiated wife” (224). The narrative seeks to punish and refute female sexuality, as well as the idea of a woman’s life outside the private sphere of the family.

Mina is similarly punished when she falls prey to Dracula’s erotic influence: “‘Do you forget,’ he [Van Helsing] said, with actually a smile, ‘that last night he banqueted heavily, and will sleep late?’ . . . As he placed the Wafer on Mina’s forehead, it had seared it...” (Stoker 273). Having been thoroughly disfigured by a mark on her forehead for her transgression, she is publicly shamed for her weakness. The men ignore that her victimization results directly from their gendered exclusion of her from their confidence. Their ostracization leaves her vulnerable and receptive to Dracula’s influence. This passage seeks to demonize female sexuality, as well as legitimize the narrative that posits women as weak, passive victims of male predators. Unable to save herself, she relies on her male counterparts to rescue her virtue. Her relationship with Jonathan seems almost asexual, any passionate feelings of hers were apparently reserved for the late Lucy. In this respect, Mina adheres to the strict guidelines set for her by the supervising paternal gaze of Van Helsing.

Still, Mina often seems ahead of her male company, her ideas and clues serve to guide them. It is she who connects Van Helsing to the crucial knowledge within Jonathan’s diary, which she has translated and typed into a comprehensive manuscript. Nevertheless, rather than appreciate the help Mina provides, the Crew of Light is threatened by her apparently superior intellect, particularly Van Helsing. He is not content allowing a woman to assume such an integral role in their group; her intellect and capabilities threaten the gender role she is supposed to perform. In a long, drawn-out monologue that is ultimately self-serving, he seeks to justify her ousting from their company, claiming she might have a man’s brain, but a woman’s heart:

Ah, that wonderful Madam Mina! She has a man’s brain — a brain that a man should have were he much gifted — and a woman’s heart. . . . Friend John, up to now fortune has made that woman of help to us; after to-night she must not have to do with this terrible affair. . . . We men are determined — nay, are we not pledged? — to destroy this monster; but it is no part for a woman. (220)

In reminding the other male group members of her emotional inferiority, he firmly puts Mina in her place. His use of casual benevolent sexism stems from a place of discomfort concerning the changing role of women in fin-de-siècle Victorian society. Still, ultimately, the company cannot succeed without Mina’s guidance. Her connection with Dracula can lead them straight to him, which necessitates her presence despite her supposed lability.

By the end of the novel, Mina is silenced, her narrative voice having disappeared along with her influence. Yet, modern readers may question this absolute negation of her influence. The vehemence with which her potential is smothered indicates a certain awareness of her subversive nature. The fact that she is an essential member of the group, no matter how disputed, lends credibility to the notion that women should be educated (if only so as to better serve men). The novel displays an ambiguous relationship with the concept of the New Woman. The idea of an educated woman is acknowledged as long as she serves, and does not surpass, her male counterparts. Female sexual freedom, however, is strongly contested, as is evidenced by the treatment of Lucy's body, as well as the public shaming of Mina's connection to Dracula.

### 5.3. Homosocial Bonding and Patriarchal Supervision

The male group members' combined interest in keeping the female characters in their "appropriate" places is a form of homosocial bonding that extends beyond mere friendship and turns into an essential quality of masculinity. Their common attitudes of superiority and benevolent sexism connect them where other factors cannot. On the face of the story, the men are very different and perhaps would not have interacted with each other outside of a great necessity, such as Dracula. Yet, their experiences form a bond that is not unlike the marriage bond, as Van Helsing himself states:

'Just so. Said he not that the transfusion of his blood to her veins had made her truly his bride?' ...  
'If so that, then what about the others? Ho, ho! Then this so sweet maid is a polyandrist, and me, with my poor wife dead to me, but alive by Church's law, though no wits, all gone — even I, who am faithful husband to this now-no wife, am bigamist.' (169)

This scene refers to the fact that all the men have exchanged blood indirectly through the body of Lucy, which can be interpreted as a form of marriage according to Lucy's fiancé, Arthur Holmwood. While they only refer to Lucy as a figurative wife to three husbands, they fail to acknowledge the subtext that connects the men themselves to one another. This configuration reflects the necessity for homosocial — or sexual — desire to be displaced and enacted through the female body (Kuzmanovic 412). Given the pathologization and social stigmatization of homosexuality, the men are compelled to express their desires only through the sanctioned, heterosexual mediation of the female body.

Another such instance of displaced homoerotic desire is the one in which Lucy is killed. The scene of the staking is described with such hedonistic fervor that a certain erotic undertone cannot be denied. Lucy, though the object of the men's attention, is not an

active participant — she is acted upon. What is occurring can be described as a group sexual encounter between the men, only performed upon the passive female to safely displace their true desires. The stake's phallic association is explored in a way that underscores the intimacy of the act they are executing on Lucy's unconscious body. The delight that results is shared between the men, the only active participants of this pseudo-orgy/rape: "... and came and looked too: and then a glad strange light broke over his face and dispelled altogether the gloom of horror that lay upon it" (Stoker 205).

The fact that the staking scene of *Dracula* is so brief and lackluster in comparison to Lucy's indicates a certain hesitance in performing the same erotic actions in the context of an actual homosexual encounter, without the mitigating presence of a female to serve as the scapegoat (Craft 124). Furthermore, the actual staking of Dracula is ironically not performed with a wooden stake, but a metal knife. It seems that Stoker was attempting to keep this final exchange as asexual as possible to avoid further homoerotic undertones, yet, ultimately, this scene leaves Dracula's death ambiguous. The only vampires who are truly, factually killed are the female ones. The repressed male homoerotic longings seem to hinder the vampire hunters from fully banishing the object of their desire.

A final instance of potentially displaced desire is showcased in the last scene of the novel. The Crew of Light has received an heir, as Mina has given birth to a son. The child, however, is not described as hers, rather, as a lovechild of the men's illicit homoerotic union through Lucy (Craft 130). It is Van Helsing who holds the boy (named after the group), while Mina is silenced. The child connects the men on a physical level. Yet, through his connection to Mina he may also have inherited a link to Dracula, as his transgressive blood lives on in the boy. The ending, therefore, remains ambiguous: a child that reinforces the homosocial bond of his "parents," while also highlighting their connection with the threatening, queer influence of the vampire they claim to abhor. Gothic stories seem to thrive on this dichotomy of fear and desire, and one does not exclude the potential presence of the other.

The similarities between *Dracula* and *The Crew of Light* are not to be disregarded; after all, the group's brutal treatment of Dracula's victims certainly resembles, if not surpasses, the cruelty of their enemy. The way they hunt and kill Dracula and the vampire women mirrors their enemy's initial vamping of Lucy and Mina. Additionally, their "marriage" to Lucy also implicitly marries them to Dracula, as their blood consequently flows through the veins of their enemy as well, "He have always the strength in his hand of twenty men: even we four who gave our strength to Miss Lucy it also is all to him" (Stoker

193). The Crew of Light is much more closely linked to their supposed Other than it wishes to admit.

This complex mix of fear and desire is also evident in Jonathan's relationship to Dracula. He has the most intimate connection to the vampire due to his prolonged stay at his castle in Transylvania. The novel, while never explicitly stating that Dracula has fed on Jonathan, certainly hints at it. After having narrowly avoided an attack by the female vampires, Jonathan is left weak and barely conscious in Dracula's care. The vampire carries him to his bedroom and disrobes him, yet the following feeding is left out of the narrative, probably due to its radical nature of seduction and sexual contact between two males. It seems that Jonathan cannot even bring himself to write of it, for fear of having anyone discover his encrypted diary, particularly Mina.

The narrative's tendency to deny and deflect homosexual desire highlights the immense pervasive and normative influence of contemporary gender roles and prescribed heterosexuality. Any deviation was deemed so threatening to personal identity that it had to be suppressed. The only indication that Dracula did feed off Jonathan is the fact that he is discovered, "... looking as if his youth had been half renewed ... the mouth was redder than ever, for on the lips were gouts of fresh blood, ... simply gorged with blood; he lay like a filthy leech" (58), almost immediately after the encounter. Jonathan's "brain fever" after escaping the castle further hints at some kind of contact with Dracula that has left him permanently altered. As the only male character to be targeted by the vampire, he is feminized in his role as a weak, passive victim. This idea is further underscored by the following events, during which he cannot process what happened to him in Transylvania, and is ultimately unable to kill Dracula in a direct confrontation. The ending indicates something the male characters are not ready to admit to themselves: that their own homosexual desire is as impossible to kill as a vampire.

The Crew of Light's male members' repudiation of female desire and influence is rooted perhaps not just in fear of the New Woman, but in an unconscious envy of her role as the "appropriate" sexual partner to the male. Women in the novel are mostly utilized as tools or objects of displaced desire, allowing the males in their lives to act out their desires for each other without opening themselves up to social reproach. This self-scrutinous approach is made apparent in the difference in the killings of Lucy and Dracula. The characters' gender performances are supervised not just by others, but by themselves. They show a keen awareness of what is and is not acceptable sexual behavior. Transgressive desires are either punished, displaced, or repressed entirely.

The novel does not allow for much female agency, yet Mina's often implicit but integral influence is not to be denied. The narrative remains as ambiguous as its villain, but there is a clear tendency toward keeping female agency as minor as possible. By killing off any threatening female scapegoats, the narrative purifies the male community and assures their gendered dominance. The novel seems to be a response to the social changes wrought by the New Woman and highlights the anxieties these changes inspired. Stoker's response is to put the New Woman, as represented by Mina and Lucy, back in her place: the traditional female gender role of the submissive housewife. The female vampire is used as a "tool to control societal expectations, especially those concerning women. ...and is...used to enforce this hierarchy through fear tactics and moral propaganda" (Petersen 54). Modern readers, however, cannot fail to notice Mina's integral role within the narrative, which challenges any easy acceptance of Stoker's account.

#### **6. Interview with the Vampire – the Evolution of the Vampire Myth**

The twentieth century witnessed a transformation in the representation of monsters. Instead of relying on the absolute fear provoked by external figures such as Dracula, authors began to locate Gothic terror within the subject itself (Guitar 107). This shift from a stark, externalized conception of monstrosity toward an internalized Other gave rise to a more complex and intimate experience of fear. The monster within, being far more resistant to eradication, emerges as a particularly perilous and terrifying enemy.

However, the internalization of the monster also renders it more sympathetic. Vampire novels like Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* reflect this change by presenting a vampire that is much less Other than previous incarnations (107). The Gothic fear Louis inspires relies on his resemblance to and transgression of humanity. He battles his own vampiric nature when he attempts to resist attacking human victims. His fight is not against an external evil, but his own subversive nature. Where before the vampire was a largely mute evil, Anne Rice gives hers a voice. The reader is confronted with the moral struggles her protagonist faces, and, in turn, is more inclined to forgive his faults. Dracula is an abstract evil, his actions apparently randomly malicious. With the vampires in *Interview*, the reader encounters the vampire as a lonely outsider, attempting to reconnect with a lost humanity while simultaneously fighting his own, baser nature. The change towards a sympathetic monster makes him seem more realistic, and more terrifying. Furthermore, the socially outcast perspective of the vampire allows for a greater understanding of the shifting nature of values and boundaries over time: "When, in fact, all things change except the vampire himself; everything except the vampire is subject to

constant corruption and distortion” (Rice 254). Their queer vampiric nature allows the characters to discard the boundaries and norms of society as arbitrary and subject to change. Therefore, the vampire is unique in its perspective on the gendered, racial, and sexual boundaries that limit other, human characters.

### 6.1. A Queer Vampiric Family

The Gothic connection to the queer is especially prevalent in *Interview with the Vampire*. After their transformation, Rice’s vampires lose interest in genital sex, however, they still form close physical and emotional relationships. The protagonist, Louis, enters a homoerotic relationship with his vampire father, Lestat. Though their connection is often toxic and misaligned, they have developed a strong dependency on one another. Their relationship is marked by profound complexity, conveying the sense that while they are unable to coexist harmoniously, they are equally incapable of existing independently. Lestat enforces Louis’ subordinate position by deliberately withholding vital information. Louis resembles classic heroines such as Jane Eyre or Mrs. de Winter in the way he depends on his partner to pass his long-forbidden knowledge on to him. His curiosity disrupts what might otherwise be an uncomplicated partnership; much like a proverbial patriarch, Lestat seeks to prevent him from acquiring this knowledge, as it would alter the power dynamics of their relationship. Louis, in turn, keeps Lestat financially dependent on him in an effort to maintain some sort of power in their unequal relationship.

When he decides to leave Lestat behind, the latter retaliates by binding the former to him through a child, Claudia. Louis feels responsible for her transformation, as he was the one who initially targeted her, believing her to be dead after attacking her. Finding that Lestat had followed him and transformed Claudia into a vampire, Louis becomes a pseudo-parent to their new daughter. Living together as a queer vampire nuclear family, Lestat takes on the role of the patriarch, while Louis is feminized in his passivity. He is portrayed as a markedly inert character, giving the impression that he rarely, if ever, makes decisions independently. Lestat’s and Claudia’s plans govern his life, and Louis seems to prefer it that way. Apart from his financial power, Louis has no influence within the family. He is also relatively absent, preferring to be by himself since his moral standards do not align with those of his other family members.

Once Claudia inevitably “grows up,” she seeks to gain more independence: “... how many times I must have forgotten, spoken to her as if she were the child, fondled her too freely, brought her into my arms with an adult’s abandon” (218). Their complex and often abusive dynamic hinders her individuality and agency. She therefore finalizes a plan to

rid the family of the patriarch, Lestat. Ever passive, Louis goes along with this plan, although he does not do so enthusiastically. Although his passivity keeps him from protesting Claudia's actions, he ultimately holds this event against her. Once separated from Lestat, Louis lets Claudia take the lead: "She was helpless. But she was stronger than I" (189). After choosing Armand for a lover, he neglects her in favor of his own love life. Despite the fact that Claudia suspects Armand is planning to kill her, Louis prioritizes him over his child. Consequently, after her death, he is forced to realize that his lover has betrayed him. In the end, Louis returns to Lestat, their common relationship to their child keeping them bound together in eternal grieving parenthood.

This vampiric family is characterized by an ironic normalcy, with their queerness highlighting, rather than obscuring, their remarkable resemblance to conventional family structures. Beyond their monstrosity, they reflect familiar domestic tensions and conflicts, though in heightened and distorted form. Their relationship reproduces the hierarchical power dynamics typical of the nuclear family, marked by a dominant patriarch, a largely passive matriarch, and Claudia's role as the rebellious daughter. The Gothic tension here lies in the ways this vampire family exposes the nightmare hidden within the seemingly ordinary nuclear family model. The unsettling power dynamics as well as the parents' refusal to let their daughter grow into her own individual agency create a troubling atmosphere that highlights the untenability of this living situation. In revealing contemporary power dynamics, the text underscores the emotional damage sustained by each member of these nuclear families.

## 6.2. Claudia – a Feminist Icon?

Claudia may be understood as a feminist icon in that she embodies generations of women whose capacity for growth was curtailed by oppressive social structures. Claudia, to her fathers, is somewhat of a doll, rather than an individual: "An endless train of dressmakers and shoemakers and tailors came to our flat to outfit Claudia in the best of children's fashions, ... Lestat played with her as if she were a magnificent doll, and I played with her as if she was a magnificent doll..." (89). They dress her and play with her, but her unique thoughts and feelings are rarely acknowledged. The trauma left behind after her violent turning is hardly discussed. Claudia becomes a mere object within a homosocial exchange that allows male vampires to become mothers (Doane and Hodges 424-25). Louis often describes her as disturbing, due to the dualistic nature of childhood innocence and monstrous predilections. The victims she targets are those who would help a young child in need, such as mothers and other children. This obsession hints at the envy and

resentment she feels as a motherless vampire child. She implicitly yearns for what has been taken from her and displaces her anger over this loss onto her victims in a childlike manner. One particular instance of this obsession proves to be so disturbing that Louis and Lestat take notice. She kills and stages the bodies of a mother and child, seemingly playing with them in a way other children might play with their dolls.

Still, after years of playing at being a child, Claudia grows into herself as a woman in a way neither her fathers, nor her childish body will allow:

Yet more and more her doll-like face seemed to possess two totally aware adult eyes, and innocence seemed lost somewhere with neglected toys and the loss of a certain patience. There was something dreadfully sensual about her lounging on the settee in a tiny nightgown of lace and stitched pearls; she became an eerie and powerful seductress. (Rice 91)

The pain at being confined to a role she no longer feels fits her growing mind is expressed in rare instances of violent temper: “But then she laughed softly, a woman’s laugh, and said, ‘Did you think I’d be your daughter forever? Are you the father of fools, the fool of fathers?’” (188). Notably, even the reader does not have full insight into Claudia’s mind, as they can only rely on Louis’ arguably lacking evaluation of her. Claudia is, in a way, silenced in both voice and body.

Resigned to her fate, Claudia is forced to accept the fact that she will never grow out of her false child-body, and seeks a mother for herself, recreating her original desire to return to her own mother. She befriends a nearby dollmaker, Madeleine, who, having lost her own daughter, is somewhat of a kindred spirit to Claudia. The pair are equally obsessive in their need for a mother/daughter. In a rare show of influence over Louis, Claudia forces him to turn Madeleine into a vampire for her: “You haven’t tears enough for what you’ve done to me. Six more mortal years, seven, eight...I might have had that shape! ... Monsters! To give me immortality in this hopeless guise, this helpless form!” (235). She utilizes his guilt and acknowledgement of the pain he has caused her to get her wish. Louis, ever the passive protagonist, allows her to use him for his power to turn others. Claudia, forever restricted within the bounds of her weak, childlike body, is unable to turn others due to a lack of reproductive power; another instance that highlights the truly grotesque power her fathers have over her life and choices. She is forever reliant on a guardian figure, never to make her own independent decisions, despite her ardent desire to do so: “But I’m fighting for my life! Give her to me so she can care for me, complete the guise I must have to live! And he can have you then! I am fighting for my life!” (238).

Claudia, the person, has long outgrown her body. She becomes aware of her subjugated position and initially rebels against it, ultimately arriving at a form of resigned acceptance of her fate. Yet, like earlier fictional women such as Jane Eyre or Rebecca, she learns to manipulate the very system that confines her from her unique vantage point. She is not entirely without power or influence, although the ways in which she may exercise them remain restricted.

She is able to serve as a feminist icon due to the way her experience unwittingly mirrors that of generations of women who were and still are kept from growing into their full potential. The oppressive system that seeks to restrict womanhood by keeping it bound to an ideal — The Angel of the House — arrests women in a perpetual state of infantilized innocence and dependence on their male relatives. Claudia rebels by killing her father figure, Lestat, and, after learning Louis would prefer Armand over her, also determines to rid herself of the need for another. The turning of Madeleine can be viewed as an attempt to finally free herself from the oppressive influence of her male supervisors. Tragically, Claudia is unable to do so, as she is killed in a plot devised by Armand only a short time after Madeleine is transformed. She and her new daughter are burned by the sun in a close mirroring of the mother-daughter duo Claudia had so artfully staged before. It seems that at least in death, she got her wish of finally returning to her mother.

Her death, in feminist terms, recalls Hélène Cixous' famous statement of "kill[ing] the false woman who is preventing the live one from breathing" (qtd. in Jönsson 43). Claudia would not have been able to keep up the charade of remaining a dependent child for all eternity. Her mind, having long outgrown the confines of her small body, transcends it in a spectacular death scene that finally frees her from her fathers' oppressive influence. She leaves behind the dress and golden locks her fathers had so praised, finally able to let go of the oppressive masquerade of infantile femininity (43). Though ultimately a tragic character, Claudia highlights the struggles faced by women within a hierarchical binary system. Her character enforces the untenability of forever remaining in a dependent, submissive state as is expected when conforming fully to a traditional female gender role. Even as a vampire, whose queerness would seemingly free her from such ideals, she cannot be released from her fathers' restrictive expectations for her. They have chosen a child for themselves, and so she is expected to remain one forever. Claudia rebels against this idea, killing Lestat and seeking to free herself from Louis, when she is ultimately murdered. Still, in a way, she has achieved her goal, as she managed to escape her fathers forever, if tragically. She, full of repressed anger, represents generations of women, who,

especially during the twentieth century, found it within themselves to rebel against this role set for them. Therefore, Claudia can be viewed as a feminist icon, despite, or perhaps because of, the way she is silenced throughout the novel, both figuratively and literally, through death — “mute and beautiful” (87).

### 6.3. Power Hierarchies in Louis’ Relationships

As previously stated, Louis is remarkably passive for a protagonist, which puts a special focus on the surrounding characters. As Doane and Hodges criticize: “predatory men who also willingly adopt a feminized passivity, [signify] another way of absorbing and containing femininity” (427). Especially his romantic relationships with the other vampires in his life, Lestat and Armand, highlight the fact that there seem to be implicit and gendered power dynamics even between all-male characters. Raewyn Connell explores a theory on hegemonial masculinities, which posits those who can adhere most closely to a given ideal masculinity at the top, while others are more closely aligned with femininity and thus rank lower (130-31). Due to this power imbalance, gender non-compliance is punished harshly, often resulting in experiences of ostracization and discrimination, or patronization (Connell 131). Hegemonial masculinities tend to want to prove their dominance through tactics of Othering even within the seemingly complete category of masculinity. By establishing “weaker,” or less ideal types of masculinities, the hegemonial version may secure its dominant position within the system (131-32). Hegemonial masculinity is strictly heterosexual, which precludes homosexual individuals from participation (132-33). Connell also rejects the idea that hegemonial masculinity itself is ever a stable category, as the idea of what makes up an ideal man continues to change over time. A hegemonial masculinity is one that is considered most ideal at a specific point in time within a specific community (130).

Louis himself, as well as all other vampires, cannot perform ideal masculinity due to their connection to queerness. Society at large would not consider the vampire particularly “manly” — the ideal man of the twentieth century was still strictly heterosexual, and the relationships between the characters in the novel carry strong homoerotic, if not sexual, undertones. Yet, within vampire-society, there are visible differences in power as well as representations of masculinities that lend themselves to an analysis based on Connell’s principles. Louis, as previously stated, is more or less feminized in his passive role as Claudia’s pseudo-mother/lover. Lestat maintains his authority over Louis by positioning himself as his sole mentor in all vampire-related matters, and Louis makes no attempt to

acquire knowledge independently. Thus, he is reliant on Lestat, the keeper of forbidden knowledge.

This relationship closely mirrors earlier romance fictions, repeating the need for male control over female knowledge — as is the case in *A Sicilian Romance*, *Jane Eyre*, as well as *Rebecca*. The female character encounters many locked doors during her curious search of the patriarch's estate, which represents his explicit control over just what she is allowed to know or experience. Similarly, Louis takes on the role of the curious female heroine seeking the patriarch's hidden knowledge. Lestat and Armand are masculinized not just in relation to Louis, but because they have established themselves as powerful vampires. Armand, particularly, has power over many other vampires as well, as he controls all the individuals of the "Théâtre des Vampires." Masculine power is primarily exhibited through a dominant position over others, which both Lestat and Armand are able to achieve, if to differing degrees (Connell 133-34).

Since Louis is feminized, his relationships with the male vampires take on traditional undertones. He is courted by Lestat and Armand in a way that, once again, remarkably mirrors heterosexual romance traditions, which he himself seems to realize when he makes statements such as: "And it was as if the great feminine longing of my mind were being awakened again to be satisfied" (Rice 212). The female is not expected to actively seek out a partner; she is instead a passive recipient of male attention. As such, Louis never sets out to find a romantic connection — Lestat, and especially Armand, are the ones who pursue him with intent, performing hegemonial masculinity by assuming an active role. Although their relationships are undeniably queer, the associations inspired by Louis' feminized role recall traditional gender stereotypes that remain influential to this day. He feels a certain kinship with Babette, whose situation as a woman expected to submit to the will of her male relatives mirrors his hierarchical relationship with Lestat. Similarly to Lucy in *Dracula*, Louis is besieged by male attention. Seemingly overwhelmed, he wishes he could choose both, as he clearly still has feelings for Lestat even while being courted by Armand. Additionally, his pseudo-incestual relationship with Claudia further enhances the impression of Louis' eroticized vampire nature. He, too, feeds on a child, like the female vampires of *Dracula*. However, in a stark contrast to the character of Lucy, he is never demonized for this unrestrained sensuality. Because Louis is not burdened with the role of paragon of morality assigned to Lucy, his status as a male vampire grants him a relative freedom in action and choice that is denied to her.

Still, this freedom is seldomly realized as his actions are predominantly led by others. First, by Lestat, as he consents to emotional and financial abuse in order to gain the secret knowledge his maker holds over him. After that, he is led by Claudia, who only loses influence over him once Armand appears and takes control of Louis. It is only after he discovers Armand's betrayal that Louis is by himself for the first time. Yet, instead of finally enjoying his independence, he feels adrift at the end of the novel. He realizes that he has lost all the meaningful connections of his life and is ultimately completely alone. The ending makes clear that Louis regrets his passivity, and the ways he has allowed others to exert control over his life:

That passivity in me has been the core of it all, the real evil. That weakness, that refusal to compromise a fractured and stupid morality, that awful pride! ...Well, I tell you I am no longer that passive, weak creature that has spun evil from evil till the web is vast and thick while I remain its stultified victim. It's over! (276-77)

Ultimately Louis, like Claudia, is a tragic figure. He has much latent potential that he is never able to realize due to the control of powerful masculine figures in his life. Unlike Claudia, however, he, from the beginning, has the power and privilege as an adult male vampire to make his own choices. Although he never does, he could have, which is the crucial point that separates his experiences from Claudia's.

Though Rice claims her novel to be free of gender stereotypes, critics have argued that this is simply a byproduct of it not portraying any strong female characters (Schram Magnúsdóttir 19). After all, by the end of the narrative, all female characters are dead. Additionally, some of the characters are caught up in traditional gendered behaviors even while engaged in queer relationships. This suggests that, while there is a concerted effort on behalf of twentieth-century authors to do away with the binary categories determining an individual's behavior, social conditioning is not easily disregarded. Implicit biases and attitudes remain apparent despite the desire to exceed such categorization.

### **7. The Historian: A Vampire for Every Age**

Elizabeth Kostova's *The Historian* is a modern rewrite of the original *Dracula*. As such, it highlights specifically the shifting values and responses to the vampire myth over the ages. It also emphasizes the fluctuating nature of the fears of a given society. The original *Dracula* story focuses on the vampire women in particular, the master-plot therefore underscores the dangers of female sexuality. The perceived threat of women's power over men is mapped onto the figure of the vampire, a conflation that serves to reinforce their cultural Othering. *Dracula* systematically neutralizes threatening women, who are either

eradicated or rendered silent through their repositioning within conventional feminine gender roles. Dracula is only threatening due to his ability to corrupt perfectly traditional Englishwomen and turn them into sensual creatures who defy the status quo.

*Interview with the Vampire* takes the vampire myth to the twentieth century. Here, the monsters themselves are provided with the opportunity to speak and become more sympathetic in turn. Claudia can be viewed as a form of feminist protest of the oppressive structures that keep women trapped in an infantilized state of existence. However, while she and other female characters are not demonized for their eroticized vampire nature, they are also not given a voice.

*The Historian* was published in the twenty-first century, but the story spans several decades that reach back to the twentieth century. The reader watches numerous generations battle a similar evil. The modern monster is war and violence. The modern Dracula is one that seeks to gather knowledge on warfare and control to influence geopolitical currents and cause chaos or dissent. His legendary bloodlust as Vlad the Impaler carries over into his vampire nature, leading him to forever chase the next kill. In the modern age of technological warfare, he has realized he is able to cause death on a larger scale than ever before. He targets librarians and professors of history who may be able to assist him in gathering the necessary knowledge. Although knowledge remains the central pursuit, *The Historian* shifts the focus toward the ethical risks and potential abuses of power that arise when forbidden knowledge is appropriated for self-serving purposes. The age of rapid technological advances turns Dracula into a more dangerous foe than ever before. His far-reaching influence gives him great power over those he considers lesser, which seems to be everyone but the great historic authoritarian dictators. Compared to Stoker's Dracula, Kostova's seems more complex. He has more personality than the original, yet his evil machinations are all the more tempting due to the persuasive nature of his power. He is able to sway historians to his side because he offers them a position of great power and influence. This novel presents an important comparison to the original story; it does not just highlight the shifting fears of a modern society, but also the changing nature of female agency and independence. Kostova's vampires are committed to sustaining a form of evil that silences the perspectivism and critical engagement necessary for democratic life. In a manner reminiscent of Stoker's work, they strive to preserve a hierarchical society structured around dualistic binaries such as strong/weak and male/female.

Here, vampire hunters do not fight against subversive perspectives, but against those who would silence them in favor of a single authoritarian voice. Compared to the original, the story “reorients the female scholar as an active agent” (Guitar 135). Helen’s family line serves as a literal representation of waves of feminism furthering this goal. Her daughter is a modern woman who has achieved the kind of status and acclaim of which generations of women before her could only dream. In contrast to *Dracula*, the reader is presented with strong female characters, who are not just able to resist the tempting power Dracula offers, but ultimately manage to defeat him. *The Historian* refutes *Dracula*’s subjugation of its female characters by giving them the power, knowledge, and influence Lucy and Mina were denied, without demonizing them for it.

### 7.1. De-Monstrating the “Monstrous” Female

*The Historian* follows the Getzi matrilineal genealogy, and the reader is able to follow three generations of women during their lives. Their lived experiences highlight the shifting attitudes concerning the role of women and what is expected of them. As professional women and protagonists, Helen and her daughter are given a voice and agency previously denied to women. Stoker’s *Dracula* already recognizes the changing role of women in the nineteenth century, and feminist advances up to and during the twentieth century have furthered the gap between individuals who view gender roles as stable and essential and those who seek to contest this ideology.

Helen’s unnamed mother experiences this turning point of conservative ideology and the feminist urge to exist beyond the tightly contained role women were assigned in this period. Her decision to pursue a relationship with Professor Rossi without the sanction of her male relatives constitutes a transgression that results in her pregnancy out of wedlock. She is fully aware that this condition would be condemned by the village community, as it was culturally coded as particularly shameful for women in the 1930s (Wetterstroem 23). She fears she would be ousted from her family and left to die in the wilderness should they learn of the pregnancy. One of her sisters saves the single mother by offering her asylum in a remote village near Budapest where she and her daughter may live safely and supported by the more liberal side of the family. Her aunt’s education and connections to the Hungarian government enable Helen’s survival; without them, she and her mother would almost certainly have met a far worse fate. Helen’s mother, despite her subversive desire to find love out of wedlock, is still rather traditional overall. She is content performing the work of a housewife and mother, and she does not seek additional education or professional work outside those manual chores needed to support her simple

life. Her subversiveness is expressed in her refusal to accept a marriage arranged by her father for economic reasons, insisting instead on choosing a partner for love. In a historical context in which companionate marriage was not yet customary, Helen's mother exemplifies an emergent claim to personal agency within intimate life.

Helen herself, inspired by her more modern aunt Éva, decides on a different life for herself. She, like many early-wave feminists during the twentieth century, seeks education in order to gain legitimate access to the public sphere, which was previously denied to women (23). In choosing a non-traditional lifestyle, Helen encounters obstacles on the way. She is masculinized, not unlike many of the New Woman feminists of the nineteenth century and must fight for her place as one of only a few women in academia. In her role as a trailblazer, she is held to a higher standard of scrutiny than her male counterparts and is required to exert exceptional effort to counter the low expectations of her disparagers. Helen is exceptional due to her intelligent and stoic nature; she is able to make a name for herself in the male dominated academic world. Helen, like her mother, chooses her own partner based on common interests and love, and manages to have a child despite having to juggle familial and professional responsibilities. She leaves her family, confirming the fears of many anti-feminist critics, and becomes an absent mother (45). Still, she is not demonized for this decision, as she does so in order to free her family of the threatening presence of Dracula. In the end, it is Helen who is able to defeat their enemy and return to her daughter.

Helen's daughter is named after her grandmother, whose name is never revealed. This lack of identity underscores the growth the narrator must still go through at the beginning of the narrative, around the early 2000s. Her story is a coming-of-age search for identity as much as a search for her missing parents. Throughout, she eventually gains the kind of independent experience that allows her to live without them and grow into her adult self (30). Much like her mother, she is incredibly intelligent and well-educated. Due to a shifting response to female agency in the later twentieth century, Helen's daughter does not struggle like her ancestors when it comes to making room for herself in the academic world. Her involvement in academia and the public sphere is not only tolerated but actively praised by those around her. No longer are women expected to become housewives, and the narrator is free to choose her own path in life. Her relationship with Barley is largely free of the gendered expectations that have determined the relationships of her parents and grandparents. Marriage is no longer construed as a requisite or normative element of romantic relationships, and the narrator embodies a generation of

women unprecedentedly liberated from the gendered expectations that had governed the lives of their predecessors. As such, her lack of a name suggests an absence of easy categorization, and a search for identity — of what constitutes “woman” without predetermined gender roles. The nature of the narrator’s gender performance and identity is left largely undetermined so as to highlight the freedom of choice where they were prearranged before. The novel leaves it up to the readers themselves to find just what and who a twenty-first century woman is.

The three generations of Getzi women function as an allegorical reflection of the three waves of feminism, each of which has contributed to expanding women’s capacity to define their own identities (23). Where before, feminine agency was demonized and shown to be monstrous, as is the case in *Dracula*, *The Historian* demonstrates the portrayal of a well-rounded female identity beyond constricting gender roles. The reader is confronted with a wealth of female identities, ranging from hyper-feminine to hyper-masculine and everything in between (39). The story denies an easy categorization of womanhood and allows for the freedom of choice and expression.

#### 7.2. Helen and Paul: a Gender Role Reversal?

The portrayal of the characters of Helen and Paul is remarkable due to a simultaneous denial and reaffirmation of the gender roles and expectations assigned to them. This play with gender serves to question the limits and boundaries of gender expression. Compared to the original *Dracula*, Helen and Paul, as well as their personal relationship to each other, draw noticeable parallels to the portrayal of Mina and Jonathan. Helen, like Mina, is an educated woman who supports her husband’s goal of vanquishing an enemy. She is also masculinized through her competence in defending him — Helen is the one to shoot an advancing vampire with silver bullets, stunning her male companions. This scene highlights the preexisting gender stereotypes that may limit a woman’s agency, yet Helen acts in spite of these limits: “Before I could so much as step between Helen and the ghoulis figure, she pulled a pistol from her jacket pocket and shot him” (Kostova 287). Paul’s initial portrayal of Helen’s character is steeped in sexist stereotypes of the 1950s (Wetterstroem 44).

Like Jonathan, Paul is feminized due to his passivity and his dependence on his wife’s protection. He similarly has a special bond with his mentor figure, Professor Rossi, one that carries undertones of homoerotic desire since he constantly compares Helen to her father: “... Rossi’s heritage — mild, patrician, Tuscan and Anglo — also ran through her, and I saw Rossi’s incomparable kindness in her eyes. In that moment, I think ... I married

her, I wed her in my heart” (478). His depiction of the two recalls the mechanism by which homosexual desire is redirected onto the female body to render it culturally acceptable and safely expressible. Rossi is the one who mirrors Jonathan’s experience in Dracula’s castle, he is targeted by the vampire and forced to remain in his secret abode. Helen and Paul relive this experience vicariously through his letters, which likens both of them to Mina when she uncovers Jonathan’s diary in order to understand what he went through.

However, this is where similarities end. *The Historian* seems to be an answer to *Dracula*’s restrictive gender politics, and Helen is given more agency and influence than Mina was ever allowed. She is not just well educated, but an aspiring educator in her own right. Her academic credentials rival those of her father, a well-acclaimed university professor. She is allowed and encouraged to nurture her exceptional intelligence, rather than having to suppress it so as to preserve her husband’s ego. Where Mina’s competence is viewed as a threat to patriarchal ideals, Helen has long since ceased caring about optics. She is an independent young woman forging a path for herself in a male-dominated academic world. She often acts out of spite; her desire to surpass her father’s achievements stems from a place of hurt at his alleged rejection of her. Instead of allowing herself to be cowed by male refutation, Helen rebels and defies expectations set for her. She is described as a rather stoic young woman with masculine features: “Standing, she looked as tall as I’d imagined her, a little sinewy, with broad shoulders” (74). Her outer appearance highlights her gender non-compliance. Helen is a woman who exceeds the gender role set out for her; she is female, yet not. A woman who smokes, shoots guns, and hunts vampires is about as far removed from the traditional female ideal as possible.

Her masculine traits, however, do not take away from her femininity. Helen’s character serves to re-define the category of woman, and what a woman is allowed to be. Helen is not meek and submissive; she often takes charge and is an active participant in the action, as well as a driving force of the narrative. Her intelligence and conviction bolster Paul’s in times of doubt, and, in the end, it is she who defeats Dracula in a direct confrontation: “Someone [Helen] searched the scene swiftly with the light, raised an arm, and fired once” (686). Mina, as a woman, never would have been allowed to vanquish their evil opponent, as it was not a woman’s place to participate in active combat. Helen shatters this constructed identity by appearing to kill Dracula when Paul and the other males have given up all hope, precisely at the moment the male characters would have lost this

confrontation. It is Helen who kills the vampire with a silver bullet, rather than the typical phallic stake.

The symbolism here is not to be disregarded. *The Historian* allows women to be their own saviors, they no longer require male intervention. In fact, the women of the story take on traditionally male roles in an almost complete reversal of gender roles. Helen, as well as her daughter and other female characters, such as Éva or Turgut's mother, reestablish themselves as integral participants in their family history. They highlight the importance of their matrilineal heritage and the strength of previous generations of women inherited by Helen and her daughter. These women are allowed a voice and agency that have long been denied to characters such as Mina and Lucy. The re-animation of their matrilineal heritage seeks to relieve women of their enforced silence, a literal return of the repressed.

Paul, as well as Turgut and his male relatives, are confronted with the changing role of women. Rather than demonize this shift in value, they proudly encourage it. This places them in direct contrast to the previous Crew of Light in *Dracula*; instead of ousting their female group member, they accept her as a necessary and even integral part of it. It is made exceptionally clear that without Helen, Paul would not have succeeded. Here, *The Historian* actively renounces *Dracula*'s reassertion of strict gender boundaries. Helen, as well as Paul, exceed the bounds of their gender categorization. Paul is also allowed leeway in his gender expression; he is less active and assertive than would be expected for a male character. He allows Helen to lead him as well as their mission. He is often more akin to Mina supporting Jonathan than the other way around. Yet, ultimately, Helen and Paul are more or less equal partners in their quest, in a way that *Dracula* denied its group members.

Rather than describe Helen and Paul's apparent inverted gender performance as such, I would argue that both simply exhibit non-compliant gender traits that nevertheless do not take away from their overall gender identity. In other words, Helen is still female even if she shoots a gun; and Paul is still male even if he allows his girlfriend to take charge. Their non-compliant behavior serves as a reevaluation of gender roles and stereotypes themselves, questioning the rigid norms that restrict an individual's behaviors. Helen and Paul inadvertently extend the limits of gender identity, integrating behaviors that were formerly excluded from specific gender expressions. Still, any kind of shift in gender identity serves to question the stability of the category as a whole. Their non-compliance with existing gender expressions highlights the unstable and variable nature of gender

categories and stereotypes. *The Historian* decidedly refuses *Dracula*'s easy restriction of women and men into defined and essentialized categories.

### 7.3. Narrator as Dracula's Modern Double

The unnamed female narrator's similarities to the figure of Dracula further complicates an easy categorization of the characters. The Getzi matrilineal line being descended from the vampire highlights the connection between queer vampiric transgression and female agency. Due to the vampire's strong link to the ab-normal, it is an apt metaphor for female identity outside the bounds of the norm. If Dracula's blood is a subversive influence giving Helen's matrilineal line the power to resist patriarchal subjugation, then he can hardly be deemed a fully villainous agent (Yergensen 88). Yet, the women do not give him credit for their resistance; they view their power as having been sparked *in spite of* his influence. In fact, Helen, as well as her daughter, utilize this unconventional attitude against him, the essential totalitarian patriarch. Still, the similarities between Dracula and these women cannot be denied. Paul even remarks upon it when he views a portrait of the vampire in Turgut's office: "Looking at Helen as she turned to me with her level gaze, I was unavoidably struck by the similarity between her strong yet fine features and that luminous, appalling image behind Turgut's curtain" (Kostova 267).

If Helen resembles Dracula so strongly in modern times, it is clear that she, as well as her daughter, must share a certain affinity with the figure. Their blood relation allows them to be more rebellious compared to other women within the patriarchal system of female oppression. Their rebellion manifests in acts such as conceiving a child out of wedlock, in Helen's mother's case, or achieving a degree of education that had previously been inaccessible to women.

This connection to Dracula is further highlighted when Helen is attacked not once, but twice, by a vampiric librarian, and is consequently bitten. The bite causes every other victim to immediately assume vampiric qualities, and by the third bite, one would turn into a full vampire. Yet Helen is bitten twice and remains fully human, whereas the other victims feel the stark consequences of their encounter with a vampire immediately, as is the case with Turgut's friend: "When it [the sunlight] struck Mr. Erozan's face, he cringed, shrank against my shoulder, and held one hand up to his eyes as if warding off a blow" (297). Helen is particularly resistant to vampiric influence, perhaps because she was always already vampiric to begin with, due to her close blood relationship to the original vampire and her rebellious nature.

The novel further cements this rule of three by having Helen miscarry twice, only the third child remains viable until birth, the narrator. Here, vampiric conception is conflated with the human one: Helen's daughter is the result of the third implementation of Dracula's blood. Helen and her daughter are linked through appearance, meaning that both share a certain traditionally masculine look with a strong resemblance to their male forefather. The daughter is never explicitly named, the only reference is made when it is mentioned that she is named after her grandmother, who also remains nameless. Through these links, Helen's daughter is connected to her matrilineal heritage. However, to the reader, this blank space remains an enigmatic reminder that she is still, at least at the beginning of the novel, in search of her identity.

Throughout the story, she grows into herself as a woman and as a scholar, being able to track her parents through their shared letters. Much like her mother, she disrupts the male claim to knowledge and learning by proving herself equal, if not superior. Instead of assimilating to patriarchal forms of knowledge, they build their own: "The women tend to deviate from older interpretations in order to create new knowledge and challenge old belief systems" (Guitar 135). After all, Dracula himself claims he only chooses the best of the best, and both Helen and particularly her daughter are targets of his attention. Nearing the end of the narrative, it is only the young narrator who is able to hear the vampire in her mind, which would indicate both a strong blood-link to him, as well as her own value as an academic: "*You are a remarkable scholar*. I don't know why, but at that moment, my body seemed to move toward him slightly of its own volition" (684). Having achieved the impossible — tracking the vampire's origins — it is undeniable that Helen's daughter has become a historian in her own right.

The ending of the story is incredibly ambiguous. Similarly to the original *Dracula*, it is unclear whether the group has managed to kill the vampire indefinitely. The narrator receiving a book indicates that the vampire himself, or at least one of his disciples, has once more taken up the work of creating a dictatorial library. It also suggests that, despite having supposedly killed Dracula, he (or someone similar) is still interested in swaying the narrator to their side. At the end of the narrative, she has grown into herself as a woman and an acclaimed scholar; she even teaches her own students. She has achieved what other women could not for generations. Her value to Dracula's cause seems stronger than ever before.

The ending also once more highlights the connection between the narrator and the vampire, their actions and appearances are doubled in a way that renders the story

enigmatic: “But it was not this scene that filled my gaze. I was thinking, in spite of myself, of another one, which I seemed to have watched before” (700). Following this statement of the protagonist, the reader is presented with one last scene from the perspective of a human Dracula. In placing the narrator and Dracula in similar positions, they are exposed as equals. Their similarities give validity to the question of whether the narrator has established herself as a formidable opponent to the vampire, or if Dracula, having been killed by Helen, now lives on in the form of her daughter. It seems that, similarly to Mrs. de Winter and Rebecca, the narrator cannot free herself from the influence of her dark alter ego. The two are conflated in ways that make a distinct separation impossible. The ending indicates that perhaps the narrator has been chosen as the new leader of the Order of the Dragon.

Still, it is unlikely that she would continue to follow in Dracula’s footsteps. His goals have been to acquire political power and use it to cause bloodshed and turmoil by emulating past dictators. He is primarily interested in modern warfare and conquest to regain his prior fame. The narrator has already achieved the (previously) impossible. She is content with her accredited position as a university professor and influential historian. She has become a Van Helsing in her own right, whereas before, women were confined to the role of Mina. Instead of following in Dracula’s footsteps, the narrator uses her newfound power to oppose him. Her values rely on shared knowledge utilized for the greater good, rather than hoarding information for selfish gain. They have fundamentally differing attitudes concerning the nature of knowledge and what it represents.

The narrator, having experience with the powerless position of those without knowledge — if not personally, then through her matrilineal history — fights for the freedom of information. Much like previous heroines in Gothic narratives, such as Julia in *A Sicilian Romance*, Jane Eyre, Mrs. de Winter, or even Mina and Claudia, the narrator’s curious mind directly opposes the patriarchal tendency to keep women in a perpetual infantilized state of gullibility. If knowledge is power, these heroines constantly fight to gain access to it. Rather than keep it to herself, however, the narrator opposes Dracula’s mindset by sharing information freely with her students. She does not discriminate and hoard the power of knowledge for herself. These facts underscore the idea that the doubling of her with Dracula serves to highlight not just their similarities, but their differences. Ultimately, the story is one that focuses on the nature of knowledge, and how it grants power to those who gain it, for good or for evil.

### Part III

The last section has depicted a change in the way society views its monsters. The shift towards an internal enemy has rendered the monster all the more terrifying, if somewhat sympathetic. *Dracula* has defeated the external enemy of monstrous female sexuality by staking Lucy and the female vampires back into submission. With Claudia, Rice portrayed the consequence — a woman forever trapped in a state of infantilized dependence. Finally, *The Historian* allows its female characters the agency they have been denied. Instead of being demonized, they are celebrated and become an integral part of their society. In reviving forgotten matrilineal lines they show that women always have been, although they were not given the credit they deserved. *Dracula* clearly intended female sexuality and agency to be monstrous, but toward the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, we witness a clear shift away from the demonization of them, de-monstrating women in general. In fact, “it is the suppression of that female desire that becomes monstrous” (King 78).

The vampire’s connection to the queer has allowed it to embody ever-changing meanings — from the threatening outsider figure, the fear of homosexuality or venereal disease, dangerous female sexuality, to modern warfare and the patriarchal abuse of knowledge — it is a metaphor for anything that might exceed the bounds of what is considered the norm at a given point in time.

This next part focuses on a similar iconic figure of Gothic literature: Frankenstein’s monster. As I will show, it is a very modern monster. Although the original novel was published in the nineteenth century, its essence is of particular interest today. This monster reinforces the Gothic’s relationship to the Queer; its body, formed from different parts, threatens the seemingly stable dualistic nature of modern society. Its existence questions essential binaries such as animal/human, man/woman and genius/madness. The technological and medical advances of the modern world equally endanger any easy separation of these categories that had been naturalized until then. Twenty-first-century Gothic literature seems to pay particular attention to the assimilative monster, rather than the sympathetic or hostile one of earlier decades (Guitar 108), meaning one who attempts to be as human as possible despite its differences. I will contrast Shelley’s *Frankenstein* with two very recent publications — Sarah Maria Griffin’s *Spare and Found Parts*, as well as Addie Tsai’s *Unwieldy Creatures* — in order to highlight this connection with

contemporary fears and desires, with a particular focus on those concerning gender and sexuality.

### **8. Frankenstein – Not Your Average Monster Novel**

Frankenstein's monster is one of the most iconic ones in modern history, which makes it all the more surprising that, initially, the novel found no great acclaim (Burdiel 274). It was only after a stage adaptation that the novel finally drew interest from contemporaries (274). Its connection to the visual arts and its adaptations might explain why there is such a great number of differing portrayals of this story. The monster, like the vampire, is a figure of shifting meaning. Its body is a playground of interpretation, which renders it a perfectly queer outsider.

Another important aspect concerning the novel's genesis is the shift from high to low culture and back again (280). Conceived in the intellectual milieu of figures such as Byron and Shelley's own husband, Percy, the story is far removed from its popular adaptations. Yet it was precisely such an adaptation that secured its fame. The novel's often heterogeneous audience reinforces the idea that the story appeals to a wide range of individuals. Rather than merely gaining attention in the lofty circles of intellectuals, the novel speaks to fundamental fears and desires and is ultimately relevant to an even wider audience. It is therefore no surprise that it has retained its fame until this day. As of November 2025, the streaming service Netflix has released a new visual adaptation called *Frankenstein*, emphasizing the fact that the story is far from obsolete in the modern world. The most recent film is a little more faithful to the original story than others, allowing the monster his voice, whereas other adaptations portray him as mute. There is a clear shift in modern iterations to return the story to what it once was and allow a more assimilative portrayal of the monster.

#### **8.1. "A blot upon the earth" – Lack of Strong Female Characters**

Any analysis of the novel's gender constructions is complicated by the near absence of female characters. Those who do appear are marginalized to such an extent that they receive scarcely any direct attention. Yet, a close reading reveals indications that some of the novel's women possess greater depth than a superficial glance would suggest. As Joyce Zonana would propose, Safie's letters take on an integral role within the narrative (171). Through her words, we encounter a woman who realizes her own father's corrupt nature and dares to defy his expectations by taking off on her own. Her situation remarkably parallels that of the monster reading her letters, which explains why they gain such emotional influence over him. His own creator is exposed as selfish and neglectful,

leaving his creation to fend for himself. He clings to the family of which he imagines himself a part. Throughout the narrative, these letters take on a legitimizing power, which does not make much sense superficially, as they can prove virtually nothing (170).

The monster produces these letters when confronted with Victor to showcase his experiences after he was abandoned, and Victor, in turn, uses them to prove to Walton that his monster exists. The fact remains, however, that the letters contain no proof but that of a young woman's rebellion against her oppressive father. Why, then, does the narrative place such emphasis on them? Zonana suggests that the monster's fate is meant to portray an analogy to women's situation at the close of the eighteenth century (171). Mary Shelley, growing up, was undoubtedly influenced by her mother's, Mary Wollstonecraft's, feminist writings (171). Perhaps these ideas have found their way into the genesis of Shelley's monster, creating him in a bid to expose women's suffering under systemic oppression as well as the gender binary's Othering. Women were either idealized as the Angel of the House, the lofty model that was never achievable for any woman who wished to avoid self-negation, or they were Othered on the basis of new medical discoveries concerning the female body (Liggins 130). This technological advance was yet rudimentary, and the pseudo-scientific theories that arose concerning the female body were steeped in gendered stereotypes, serving largely to legitimize the separation of the genders into different spheres (Rauch 232).

The Madonna/whore complex forces women into an impossible situation which posits them at either end of a black-and-white scale. The monster, similarly, is assembled to be a beautiful image of its creator, Victor. All of his parts are chosen carefully in order to serve as his "father's" ideal product. He is meant to reflect well on Victor. When the creature reveals itself as monstrous through its exercise of agency and emergence as an individual subject, Victor responds with violent rejection. Confronted with the fact that the creature has developed into an identity separate from and resistant to his intentions, Victor withdraws from and shuns him: "Unfeeling, heartless creator! You had endowed me with perceptions and passions, and then cast me abroad an object for the scorn and horror of mankind" (Shelley 131). The monster has been exposed as a failure because he cannot meet his maker's expectations. Women, similarly, fail to meet the ideal of the Angel of the House. When he describes himself as "a monster, a blot upon the earth, from which all men fled, and whom all men disowned" (111), the monster mirrors the lack felt by women who cannot meet society's expectations of an idealized version of themselves.

In describing his failure to adhere to the strict codes of masculinity set before men, the monster allies himself more closely with femininity.

His enigmatic and queer nature also mirrors that of women, who, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, were constituted as entirely different from their male counterparts (Chamberlain 294-97). Whereas before, women were deemed a slightly inferior version of the same gender, the eighteenth century's conditions necessitated a separation of the two into categorically differing identities (297). The female body is the mysterious Other upon which the male standard one defines itself. The actual creation process of the monster is kept remarkably vague in the novel, as such, the reader never learns the exact components that make up the monster's body. Similarly to female bodies during the eighteenth century, the monster's remains a mystery.

Safie's letters and their importance to the monster indicate that the creature, though he considers himself male, is meant to portray the female experience of oppression as well as the inevitable failure to meet a patriarchal society's expectations of perfection. The fact that the letters appear at the narrative center and continue to retain legitimizing force throughout the story would suggest that Shelley wished to remind her readers of the analogies between the monster and Safie, as well as the fact that women have rational souls (Zonana 171).

By blocking out female characters, Shelley forces the reader to search for them in particular. None of the women in the story are able to tell their own, which highlights the silencing of women through their confinement within the private sphere. By offering Safie's letters as proof or truth, Shelley reminds the reader that Safie ultimately found happiness by rebelling against the oppressive father who wished to betray her. The monster, similarly, must realize that there is no use in attempting to convince his father to better himself, he must find his own way in the world independently of his creator's wishes. As suggested by Zonana, Safie's letters are the feminist core of the novel — even if they constitute a silent rebellion (180).

## 8.2. Victor and His Creature: Ambiguous Gender Performances

Rather than focus on merely those silenced characters, I therefore analyze those that exhibit traditionally queer or feminine characteristics. Literary scholars have concentrated on Victor Frankenstein's portrayal of the typically "female" disease of hysteria (Hobbs 153), as evidenced by several rather dramatic outbursts whenever he is confronted with his own actions and their consequence: "Memory brought madness with it; and when I thought on what had passed, a real insanity possessed me; sometimes I was furious and

burnt with rage, sometimes low and despondent” (Shelley 184). He is feminized first and foremost through his often-irrational behavior. The connection of the female to the irrational, as well as the male’s claim to rationality has already been explored in chapter 3.1., yet this character offers another perspective. Victor, like St. John Rivers, acts irrationally, but the former is openly criticized for this weakness. While the conflict between St. John Rivers and Jane Eyre is conventionally contained through gendered reasoning that frames Jane as irrational, Victor is, by contrast, openly identified as a male hysteric, thereby disrupting such gendered explanatory frameworks (Hobbs 152).

His early choices convey a certain feminine predilection, as his seclusion from society as well as his study of long-absconded strains of natural science — “I had a contempt for the uses of modern natural philosophy. It was very different, when the masters of the science sought immortality and power; such views, although futile, were grand ...” (Shelley 34-35) — reflect a fanciful character who does not seem overtly concerned with common norms and traditions. “My dreams were therefore undisturbed by reality...” (28). The resulting feminization, as well as his often-subversive relationships to other male characters, such as Henry Clerval, force him into an outsider position not just within his own family, but society at large.

His closest and most passionate relationship is the one to Henry, and even his fiancée Elizabeth cannot engender these feelings in him: “Alas! to me the idea of an immediate union with my cousin was one of horror and dismay” (147). It is, after all, Henry who joins Victor on his recovery trip, rather than Elizabeth. Their close bond suggests certain homoerotic undertones, particularly when Frankenstein laments that his monster has killed his pseudo-lover: “His soul overflowed with ardent affections, and his friendship was of that devoted and wondrous nature that the worldly-minded teach us to look for only in the imagination” (151). This statement suggests their relationship was one traditional society would not comprehend or condone. Love and death are closely tied in this Gothic novel; everyone loved by Victor ends up dying.

Victor, seemingly realizing his own subversive tendencies, often overcompensates by putting on what Bette London calls a “spectacle of masculinity” (254). He performs stereotypical masculinity almost to the point of caricature in an effort to dispel any doubts caused by his gender transgressions (256). His relationship with his monster frequently reads as one such spectacle. The monster, similarly, is feminized due to his sensitive and emotive nature. Both creature and creator are never particularly masculine in a traditional sense, except during instances of extreme violence. This violence, too, emerges as an

expression of frustrated longing, stemming from the absence of the close relational bond the creature seeks with his creator.

Crucially, the monster tragically loses Victor's allegiance the moment he gains consciousness. It is at precisely the moment of the dawn of the monster's awareness that Victor's feelings turn from anticipatory expectation to absolute disgust: "I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open... How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, ...?" (45). In a scene that has confused many readers, his feelings towards his creation seemingly flip on a dime. The self-referential spectacle of masculinity is disrupted at this point because the monster returns the gaze (Salotto 194). Victor, the spectator, becomes the subject of the gaze in a remarkable reversal of roles. The monster gaining awareness confronts Victor with his own subjectivity in a way that appears to stun him momentarily with horror (194). Here, Laura Mulvey's film theory on the male gaze is adapted to the literary perspective. The uncanny experience of the monster's return of the gaze feminizes Victor, turning him into an object to be perceived by another masculinized spectator (195). It is precisely this reversal of power that seems to inspire the kind of negative emotions that ultimately trigger an immediate rejection of his creation. The instinctive fear he experiences at assuming the female-coded role of the object of the gaze indicates that the characters are subconsciously aware that this position goes hand in hand with a subjugated and dehumanized nature.

Another possible explanation lies in the monster's queer composition. The inherent destabilization of boundaries involved in his creation renders him ambiguously genderless. Though Victor intended to form a male creature as the ultimate prize: "To be a great and virtuous man appeared the highest honour that can befall a sensitive being" (Shelley 110), the creature's gender performance as a being of many (perhaps differently gendered) assembled parts complicates any easy categorization. His fragmentary nature suggests that the idea of a stable "identity is a fiction...underscoring the fissured and profoundly split subject" (Salotto 192). Having internalized the essentialist, binary logic of eighteenth-century England from an early age, Victor perceives the creature's effortless subversion of categorical limits as a destabilizing threat to his own identity.

Looking at the monster as a queer spectator returning Victor's expectant gaze, his creator's immediate rejection takes on a censoring tone. At the realization that he has generated a fully functional queer identity, Victor is overcome with disgust. He realizes then that by association he himself has put his reputation in danger. Victor's status as the creator of a queer creature implicates him in queerness himself; his rejection of his

“progeny” can thus be read as a symbolic refutation of his own queer associations. His reaction to his conscious creature is a direct reflection of eighteenth-century fears concerning abnormal gender performances and identities. It highlights the pressure individuals are under to perform according to a set of behavioral rules determined by their biological sex, and to shun any and all diversions.

### 8.3. Mental and Physical Tyrannies of Hegemonial Masculinities

Further examples of such pressure to conform are evident in Victor’s relationship to his father. Alphonse is the epitome of the stoic eighteenth century patriarch, and he expects his son to adhere to a similarly strict code of conduct (Hobbs 154). Particularly after his younger brother dies at the hands of the monster, Victor cannot allow himself to grieve openly even when surrounded by his family, as his father would not approve: “‘Do not,’ said I, ‘welcome me thus; try to be more calm, that I may not be absolutely miserable the moment I enter my father’s house after so long an absence’” (Shelley 66-67). The gendered expectations of eighteenth century masculinity keep Victor from being able to adequately express his emotions and work through his grief. The responsibility of managing a male’s emotions lies firmly on the shoulders of Elizabeth as the woman of the house, as such, she is the only one allowed to openly express her emotions (156). When they are away from female influence, men are expected to keep their emotional outbursts to themselves; “... knowing my father’s advanced age, ... and how wretched my sickness would make Elizabeth, he [Henry] spared them this grief by concealing the extent of my disorder” (49).

Victor is ultimately unable to perform the kind of stoic masculinity expected of him, and he devises a plan to avoid his father in order to hide this supposed weakness. The emotional repression enforced by his father, and societal hegemonial masculinity ideals in general, cause Victor to ultimately lose control of his feelings. Increasingly, he falls prey to what he himself describes as hysteric symptoms: “Every night I was oppressed by a slow fever, and I became nervous to a most painful degree; a disease that I regretted the more because I ... had always boasted of the firmness of my nerves” (44). He recognizes that his failure to adhere to a dispassionate masculine gender performance puts him in a feminized position, a fact that he is ultimately unable to hide once he is imprisoned and falls ill after Henry’s murder. The loss of his close friend is a particularly difficult blow for Victor since his relationship to Henry was his only close emotional one. With him, he could be free of the gendered behavioral codes enforced by his father. Henry similarly did not adhere to hegemonial masculinity, he rejected the stoicism performed by Victor’s

father: “Those maxims of the Stoics, that death was no evil, and that the mind of man ought to be superior to despair on the eternal absence of a beloved object, ought not to be urged. Even Cato wept over the dead body of his brother” (62).

In a final confrontation with his father, Victor attempts to express his true feelings and is met with rejection:

The conclusion of this speech convinced my father that my ideas were deranged, and he instantly changed the subject of our conversation, and endeavoured to alter the course of my thoughts. He wished as much as possible to obliterate the memory of the scenes that had taken place in Ireland, and never alluded to them, or suffered me to speak of my misfortunes. (180)

Victor’s relationship with his father is marked by his desire for emotional intimacy and his father’s stoic coldness, which keeps them at a distance. Because of the secretive nature of his experiment, Victor’s efforts to achieve academic acclaim fail, leaving him unable to secure his father’s approval. The creature’s queer and therefore socially unacceptable nature is such an intense experience of failure for Victor because he is living proof of his unsuccessful attempt at gaining his father’s respect.

Victor is unable to recognize the ironic parallels to his connection with his monster and ultimately perpetuates this trauma. This continuation of parental rejection causes a chain reaction of violence. His creation, desperate to gain the attention of his only parent, if not his love, starts on a murder spree of Victor’s closest relatives. Like Victor’s attempts to connect with his own father, the monster’s misguided deeds only cause further rejection and the gulf between them grows. Similarly to the Angel of the House ideal, hegemonial masculinity is ultimately unattainable for most of the male population. The socio-cultural pressure to conform to this ideal, and the inevitable failure of such a venture, cause irreparable harm not just to the psyche of the male individuals, but, in this case, also to the physical wellbeing of bystanders.

The novel highlights the mental and physical tyrannies of eighteenth and nineteenth-century hegemonial masculinity by having its characters fail to meet the ideal. Victor, and consequently, his progeny, suffer the consequences of this failure. The emotional repression the ideal requires leads Victor to become a male hysteric and reject a chance at the kind of close emotional relationship he secretly craves. The following deaths are a direct result of the harm caused by the influence of this lofty male ideal. Anyone who cannot adhere to the constraints of such a limited category must endure censure and, in the worst case, complete ostracization. The monster, similarly to Victor himself, fails to meet his father’s expectations and is shunned as a result.

### 9. Spare and Found Parts: YA Frankenstein

The enduring adaptability of *Frankenstein* is demonstrated by its revival in the form of a Young Adult novel, Sarah Maria Griffin's *Spare and Found Parts*. Given that Mary Shelley wrote her novel while she herself was a teenager, the narrative contains distinct coming-of-age elements that render it particularly appealing to a younger audience. Like the original, *Spare and Found Parts* engages with the conflict between creator and creation, or parent and child, especially at the moment when children become aware of their own agency and independence. The differentiation of an individual, separate identity from that of the parent takes up a major part of the story.

In conjunction with this theme, the protagonist experiences a disillusionment with the once-idealized image of the parent they had held dear. Maturation requires the recognition of the parent's fallibility in order to move beyond the limitations imposed by parental supervision. Along with the protagonist, the monster is on a search for identity. We witness the construction of a queer identity that is encouraged, rather than feared. The crucial difference in modern *Frankenstein* adaptations is that the monster is a more sympathetic figure. Rather than being demonized, it is recognized for its distinctive and valuable perspective and is subsequently assimilated into the community.

*Spare and Found Parts* adapts the original story in a way that highlights its connection to modern and future generations. The novel describes a futuristic society that relies on mechanic modifications to balance birth defects, such as missing limbs. By having its characters blur the line between human and machine, the story questions the viability of such boundaries in general. Modern technological advances render previously stable categories and boundaries permeable. Therefore, Frankenstein's monster is a modern one. It is a highly versatile metaphor for the ways in which modern advances serve to destabilize traditional norms and expectations.

The title of the story suggests the creation of a being out of "spare" and "found" parts, meaning fragments that are considered undesirable or useless by most. The queer, abnormal nature of such a being cannot be denied, yet the story allows Io, the AI robot, to incorporate all these rejected parts into one valuable, beloved whole. *Spare and Found Parts* re-defines the nature of the queer, allowing the fear of the unknown to make way for considerations of its potential. Instead of rejecting Io as unnatural, Nell welcomes him with open arms: "A whole person. Hang limbs on a spine and find a way to give him a brain, a heart — a soul. Could you make a soul out of spare and found parts? Why not?"

(Griffin 47). Where Victor feared and rejected his queer creation, *Spare and Found Parts* imagines a reconciliation between creator and queer creature, ultimately highlighting a shift in the way modern society treats its so-called monsters.

#### 9.1. The Link between Creature and Creator

As mentioned above, modern adaptations place a much more sympathetic focus on the monster-figure. In comparison to the original, Victor's immediate rejection of his supposedly perfect creation is a stark contrast to Nell's awe when she first beholds Io, the badly assembled AI robot. Similarly to Victor, Nell must defy contemporary prejudices in the creation of her companion, as computers of any kind are outlawed in her society. Similarly, grave-robbing and the experimental creation of life from death were certainly illegal in Victor's time (Liggins 133). However, where he cannot handle the result of his subversive actions, Nell, as well as her friends, learn to embrace her queer creation. Of course, Nell, as a mechanically altered being who has always felt Othered as a result of her own unique nature, is predisposed to sympathize with her unique creation.

Victor, from the perspective of hegemonial masculinity, only stands to gain from rejecting his failed, queer child. To safeguard his position within the patriarchal system, he denounces the creature, whose subversive nature poses a fundamental threat to that order. Therefore, Victor uses every opportunity to separate himself from the being he has made, both physically and morally. Although, as the reader, one discovers certain similarities in their behavior, Victor adamantly refuses any connection. There has been ample discussion on who the true monster of Shelley's work is, and I do not wish to repeat it here. Still, it must be mentioned, that Victor and his monster are ultimately more similar than he would like to admit.

In comparison, Nell and Io are extremely close, their bond supersedes almost any other in her life. Where Victor distances himself, Nell embraces her monster. In fact, she herself never describes Io in monstrous terms. The crucial difference between the original story and its adaptation is the redefinition of monstrosity itself. In fact, Nell and Io often seem to merge into one when the first-person narration shifts between them, seemingly without warning. Their experiences and voices overlap until it is difficult to discern who is speaking. The queer nature of Io, and Nell's relationship to him, is celebrated, rather than demonized. The ending of the novel presents Io to the world as Nell's contribution to her society, a tribute meant to aid all who live within the community. Where Victor's monster remains his secret shame, Nell openly shares Io with the world. There is a definite shift in the way society views queer ideas and individuals, becoming more openly accepting

of changes and adaptations to the norm. In a futuristic world where boundaries are shifting and permeable, new queer creations like Io seem to inspire less fear and shame than before. Ultimately, the ending remains ambiguous, because the reader never learns how society at large reacts to this subversive character, but Nell is so confident in her decision to present him to the world that one cannot help but remain optimistic.

The true monster of the narrative is neither Nell nor Io as representatives of queerness and change, but those who would seek to hinder or abuse them. Nell's parents are revealed as corrupt scientists primarily because both choose to hoard their revolutionary ideas for selfish gain rather than publicize them in the interest of the common good. The novel questions not queerness itself, but the nature of knowledge as a weapon or a tool. By exposing her parents' hidden machinations, Nell claims their knowledge for herself and the world at large. Victor is here more closely aligned with her parents, who seek knowledge only in pursuit of selfish goals and glory. Nell's story presents an alternative ending to the original narrative, one where the monster is acknowledged as a valuable member of society, and those who would seek to harm him are exposed as corrupt.

## 9.2. Female Genius

The original *Frankenstein* strongly reinforces the male prerogative of genius, of knowledge and scholarly pursuits. The female characters are far removed from the public sphere of Victor's professional activities. At first, Nell's experiences mirror this impression. Her father is a recognized genius, an inventor who has changed the face of his society. Nell views herself as lesser, a weak shadow of her father's intelligence. Like Alphonse, Julian encourages her to keep her subversive emotions in check under the guise of benevolent concern: "You'll never get anything done if you worry all the time; you'll run down your engine from the stress. Wouldn't want that, would you?" (Griffin 58). During the course of the narrative, however, he is exposed as corrupt, having appropriated her late mother's inventions in a bid to gain personal glory. Nell's own creation, Io, is revolutionary. In fact, he is so advanced that Nell's father attempts to steal him for himself as well. He is willing to cheat his daughter in order to claim credit for her genius.

This appropriation of female talents is nothing new; throughout history, there are many instances of fraud precisely due to the gendered expectations that grant the right of genius to men only, which is why a great number of female authors wrote under a male pen name. An example of this is the reception of Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Many contemporaries could not believe a woman to be capable of writing such an influential, and often

Gothically frightening tale (Burdiet 276). They argued that her husband, Percy Shelley, must have aided his wife significantly in the creation of such a story (276).

Nell's father is a representative of this idea of patriarchal genius, one that is reclusive, greedy, reckless, and solely accepting of other male intellectuals. Nell is not taken seriously as a female scientist, and, in turn, does not take herself seriously in the beginning. Her father consistently prioritizes Oliver's education despite clear evidence of Nell's superior intellect. As a result, she adapts by teaching herself and developing into an independent thinker. When her father turns out to be a fraud, the story denies patriarchy's claim to ownership of genius and knowledge. Nell's mother is fiercely intelligent as well, encouraging her daughter to think beyond society's doctrines and patriarchal scientific tradition. Nell constructs her own version of scientific research that is independent of those norms that seek to exclude female genius and individualism. She recognizes a necessity for a scientific hermeneutic of her own, away from the patriarchal influence that seeks to suppress her. As Donna Haraway argues:

Humanity's face has been the face of man. Feminist humanity must have another shape, other gestures. . . . Feminist figures of humanity . . . must somehow both resist representation, resist literal figuration, and still erupt in powerful new tropes, new figures of speech, new turns of historical possibility. (qtd. in Llompart Pons 34)

Io is Nell's attempt at her own "feminist figure of humanity" (qtd. in Llompart Pons 34). Despite her intellectual brilliance, the mother's quest for knowledge remains fundamentally self-serving, as she withholds her discoveries rather than deploying them for the common good. Nell is therefore unable to look to her as a moral or intellectual role model. This reclusive mode of genius mirrors that of Victor Frankenstein. It is also ultimately the reason his pursuit fails. His secretive nature keeps him from making connections with other individuals that might have aided his endeavor or kept his hubris in check.

Nell herself disagrees with her parents' methods; she wants to publicize her knowledge despite the prejudices and obstacles in her way. At first, she creates Io for selfish purposes, as he is supposed to be her companion. He is created specifically to serve as Nell's friend because she feels lonely and isolated in a society that prioritizes individuals without the kind of mechanical enhancements she cannot live without: "If it wasn't her dour expression or the scar that ran from her chin to her gut, then the ticking would send them running. There's not much thrill in kissing a grandfather clock in a girl's dress. Nobody wants to dance with a time bomb" (43). However, she ultimately recognizes the

selfishness of her venture, and strives to give her creation a full life, one free of the oppressive desires of his creator:

She hadn't built him to watch him interact with things like him. . . . She'd built him for herself, for her world, but she had never considered for a moment that maybe he would prefer the company of someone more like him. . . . Maybe he didn't want a programmer or a maker condescending to him. (Griffin 349-50)

Io does not have to ask for a companion like himself, Nell offers him one out of concern for his well-being. By allowing him the freedom Victor's monster was denied, Io independently makes the choice to remain at Nell's side, her offer becoming obsolete: "If you want to build me a friend, I will have a friend . . . But I am happy to be your friend, just yours, if that is what you wish" (350). Io is treated as a loveable, awe-inspiring creation, despite his frightening outward appearance: "He looked awful. *It* looked awful" (264). He is able to win people over, and together with Nell, they create a network of heterogeneous individuals who, nonetheless, support each other. Despite initial concerns, Nell's friends learn to accept and appreciate Io. Here, the story is contrasted sharply with the original one, Griffin exposes Victor's secretive and oppressive goals as ultimately the cause of his downfall. Had he been more open about his endeavors, and given his monster more freedom, the ending might have been averted. The original monster is likened to women fighting for emancipation in the nineteenth century, he believes that "though he is physically confined within the hideous body, he is mentally free" (Purinton 63). Though his ending is slightly ambiguous, it is ultimately tragic.

*Spare and Found Parts* is a revision of *Frankenstein*, presenting an alternate ending that allows both creator and creature to thrive. After recognizing her idealized version of her parents as false, Nell finally gains the courage to step out of their shadow and become her own person and scientist. Io can bridge the gap between human and machine; he helps her to finally accept herself as a being worthy of love and attention. Instead of continuing to call herself a monster, she begins to accept her queerness as a valuable part of herself, one that is cherished by those around her. Io and Nell are doubled in a way that blurs the line between monster and creator. No longer is there a discernable hierarchy between the two, instead, they become equals in a way that allows them to build the kind of close emotional relationship the original Victor and his monster were unable to. They overcome the stereotypes and prejudices of society, their shared queerness connecting them on an intrinsic level. Nell revises the definition of female genius her mother provided, she

remains an independent thinker but uses her knowledge for the good of all instead of keeping it to herself. In turn, she succeeds where her parents — and Victor — failed.

### 9.3. The Cyborg's Connection to Binaries

Donna Haraway published her “Cyborg Manifesto” in 1985, an influential text that is of particular relevance in this context. The queer nature of Nell's futuristic endeavors parallel Haraway's ideas about the effects of modern technology on the gender binary. She argues that in a modern world, traditional boundaries become obsolete. She uses the metaphor of the cyborg to visualize this issue. The cyborg is, like Frankenstein's creature, a being made up of many different parts. Additionally, it is the product of a patriarchal system, and yet, it can exceed the bounds of the so-called norm due to its hybridity and transgressive makeup:

The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism. But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential. (Haraway 151)

The cyborg figure is able to transcend previously essentialized categories, and in doing so, exposes them as arbitrary constructions. Their very nature is an act of rebellion against the interests of their creator, who seeks to uphold the patriarchal ideal of militarism and capitalism.

Nell represents a significant deviance from the original story because she is female and, as such, has no interest in upholding the patriarchal system. She accepts, instead of rejects, the queer creature that threatens the dualistic nature of post-modern society. Here, creator and creation work together to perpetuate a common ideal, moving away from traditional norms and towards a lifestyle of hybridity and heterogeneity that allows for difference, rather than enforces sameness. Haraway highlights the necessity of such hybridity by focusing on the category of women.

She shows that, for the longest time, Black women were not recognized as human, much less as women. This issue is highlighted in chapter 3.2., where Bertha is ostracized not just on the basis of femininity, but also her ethnicity. The differentiation between a range of feminist groups and individuals shows that Othering and exclusion occurs even within supposedly stable categories. If even essential categories can be disturbed and hierarchized, then they cannot be as stable as previously assumed: “There is nothing about being ,female‘ that naturally binds women. There is not even such a state as ,being‘ female, itself a highly complex category constructed in contested sexual scientific discourses and other social practices” (155). The attempt to construct any kind of stable

category of “woman” must fail, because such a thing does not exist. Nell’s story highlights this fact by presenting the reader with very different women throughout the narrative. She differs greatly from her ambitious mother, traditional grandmother, and hyperfeminine best friend. Their similarity lies in their shared dissimilarity.

The original *Frankenstein* story highlights the fact that performing gender goes hand in hand with self-sacrifice; Victor must act against his own nature in order to fit the mold society has deemed male. The censure and pressure he experiences at the hands of others, such as his father, emphasize the enormity of the influence these gender codes have on our lives. However, Haraway argues that the modern world makes it more or less impossible to fit into any kind of stable category, as identities become more multifaceted and complex in response to modern conflicts: “By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs” (150).

Nell is a great example of such hybridity, her body human but augmented with a ticking time bomb for a heart: “Why couldn’t he have made the machine in her chest quiet, instead of so imposing and loud” (Griffin 59). In contrast to Victor, she is already monstrous from the start. Her kinship with her own creation complicates any kind of clear separation of the two. Nell’s society represents what Haraway imagined as a cyborg world: “... a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints” (154). The cyborg serves as criticism of the kind of dualisms inherent to Western civilization that reinforce social isolation. Haraway argues that there is no need to fear the partiality or hybridity of modern existence, as Victor instinctively does. His rejection represents contemporary fears of the transgression of previously essential and naturalized categories.

Nell’s example, however, is meant to show that hybridity can connect individuals, rather than separate them. The story proposes we accept heterogeneity as natural and inevitable: “Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves. This is a dream not of a common language, but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia” (181). Rather than define ourselves through constricting and arbitrary identity constructions, Haraway — and Griffin — suggest one should live according to uniquely different, individual selves and desires. Nell acts exactly as propositioned by Haraway, and Alan Rauch: “The scientist needs to recognize that all knowledge has a monstrous quality and the only way to introduce

knowledge is to de-monstrate it, that is, to display it and in doing so, to demystify it” (Rauch 237). In presenting Io to the world as her contribution, Nell de-monstrates him, and queer, fragmentary identities in general.

### **10. Unwieldy Creatures – The Gothic and the Queer**

For the last novel to be analyzed in this paper, I have chosen Addie Tsai’s *Unwieldy Creatures*. The fragmentariness and heterogeneity of the characters’ lives represent the modern condition to an extreme to which few authors have dared venture. The novel emphasizes the connection of the Gothic and the Queer by showcasing the exact kind of abnormal identities and sexualities contemporary society still fears. None of the characters are easily categorizable, neither their cultural and ethnic backgrounds, nor their gender identities or sexualities are to be ordered at either end of a scale. They are disturbances in a system that is based on black-and-white hierarchies and dualisms. Almost all the characters are built up on identity fragments in a way that closely links them to the monstrous and queer nature of Victor’s creation.

This unconventionality is exaggerated through the “unnatural” conception of a child, mirroring contemporary fears concerning artificial insemination, cloning, sex-transitions, and human experiments. Modern technological and medical advances have destabilized traditional conceptions of humanity and identity, a disruption that continues to generate cultural anxiety. The rapidity of these changes encourages a nostalgic retreat toward a constructed vision of a simpler, idealized past, coupled with a broader rejection of modern life and its perceived complexities. The apprehension concerning these shifting identities is highlighted through the experiences the characters must endure when confronted with their more traditional families. The reader watches the characters’ isolation and exclusion from society, and, in turn, is able to sympathize with them. Their liminality serves to question the rigid standards of contemporary society, and their suffering turns them into martyr-figures that humanize their alleged monstrousness. However, the story highlights that acceptance is not fully achieved but remains an ongoing, internal process for the characters themselves. Their internalized biases work against their interests, which is exemplified in Dr. Frank’s treatment of her child/creation.

*Frankenstein* seems to be more influential than ever before, an apt metaphor for the fragmentariness and often internally conflicting nature of the modern world.

#### **10.1. Calalai, Bissu, Dia – Monstrous Modern Gender**

Modern gender identities are a contentious and oft-discussed topic. Advances in hormone therapy and sex-change operations, alongside increased social acceptance of non-

normative gender expressions, have contributed to an expansion of gender constructions that has transformed the rigid gender binary into a more fluid gender spectrum. The notion of a strict male/female dualism has become increasingly untenable. The space between these categories continues to widen as individuals express their distinctive understandings of their own gender identities. Once gender itself came to be recognized as a social construct, many began to formulate alternative identities that freed them from the constraints and normative expectations tied to traditional gender roles.

*Unwieldy Creatures* confronts the reader with some of these new constructions. The premise is a gender-swapped version of *Frankenstein*, in which Dr. Frank attempts to create life without the need for a male. Where Victor created life without a mother, Frank attempts to do so without male intervention. The idea here is to create a child to complete the queer family unit of Dr. Frank and her girlfriend, Hana. The narrative incorporates modern fears and questions: What does a family consist of? Can it be created? What is a man or a woman? Can genders be created or changed?

The text further addresses issues of ethnicity and hybrid existence, examining the condition of belonging to two racial categories while experiencing a sense of alienation from both. In doing so, it poses the question of whether nature or nurture determines racial identity. The narrative seeks to answer these questions by providing an alternative model of a lifestyle that is more open to difference and so-called monstrosity. The story humanizes modern monsters by giving them a voice. Queerness is de-monstrated; instead of being rejected and suppressed, queer fragmentary identities are supported and encouraged by the people around them, if not their biological families. The social injustice these queer characters are forced to face highlights the intense conflict between contemporary desires and fears. Gothic tension is maintained through the dualistic rift between an individual's needs and society's prejudices.

The characters' queer identities and lifestyles unwittingly transgress social boundaries just by existing. They pay the price by having to endure social ostracization and shame, as well as economic hardship, once they are forced to leave their biological families at a young age. The characters are modern monsters because their gender identities as well as their subversive queer sexualities are so radical that they apparently cannot coexist within their more traditional family structures. Dr. Frank is forced to hide her gender non-compliance. She meets Hana only in public, never at home. She knows her family would not approve of her having a relationship with another female. Her gender expression is also a point of contention as she is not allowed to dress in the more masculine fashion she

prefers: “I also began dressing one way in front of my family and another saved just for Hana, which I felt matched the true me” (70). During the course of her relationship with Hana, she realizes that she does not identify with traditional femininity. She calls herself “calalai,” a term stemming from her research into the “Indonesian Bugis”:

Their language accounts for five different gender categories, and *calalai* is their gender term for masculine women. The first time I read the passage in the book, my skin tingled in recognition and validation of a way my body felt that I’d never heard of or even knew existed. (Tsai 66)

Her mother learns of her secret, and she is cautiously supportive in that she warns her against revealing it to any other relatives, claiming they would not understand. When her father burns her brother Ezra’s dresses, she knows she has no choice but to hide an integral aspect of herself: “And so it was that I learned I was a calalai and to keep it secret” (68). Her abusive father and brother hold a strong position within their household, and eventually, after her father’s death, Frank is forced to leave them behind in order to be true to herself, and safe from the remaining threat of her brother. Her father’s last wish of a pseudo-incestual marriage between Ezra and Frank mirrors *Frankenstein*’s marriage pact between Victor and Elizabeth. Similarly to Victor, Frank attempts to avoid having to comply with this idea. She leaves her family behind to be with Hana and become independent as a reproductive scientist.

Her upbringing leaves traces — Frank herself turns into a complicated and often narcissistic or abusive person; a fact she blames on her father’s genes and influence: “... that the further I traveled in my identity and ownership of being a calalai, I was inevitably taking on the only masculine model I had ever known: My abusive, violent, intolerably narcissistic father” (72). Frank’s complicated relationship with gender and her own family lead her to demonize masculinity itself, rather than merely the violent and abusive version her father embodies. Her calalai nature is blamed for her abusive actions toward Hana, and yet, Frank cannot stop herself. She attempts to save their relationship by recreating a family union that would be free of male influence; she intends to create a child without sperm: “I saw myself as a benevolent God who could create complex, flawless, mixed race, nonbinary creatures. They would be the ideal combination of all the best parts of human life and embodiment” (126-27). This endeavor ultimately fails due to her adoptive brother, Ezra’s, interference, and the child is eventually created out of Frank’s egg and Ezra’s sperm. Frank’s ethical corruption is underscored by her treatment of Hana, as she instrumentalizes Hana’s body as an incubator for the embryo while remaining fully conscious that the child is not hers. Her pride and narcissistic nature lead her to violate

her partner: “I would not let a man stop me now. So, I made a decision. One that would forever alter the course of my life, of Hana’s life, the lives of so many others” (151-52). Hana is forced to carry the child even after she discovers Frank’s deceit, due to strict anti-abortion laws: “Since you did not give me all the information to make a sound decision about what was to happen inside my own body, I am now having this child against my will. I am nothing more than an empty vessel to you, a container to hold your secrets and your ambitions” (154).

After it turns out that the baby suffers from several genetic disorders, Frank is disillusioned with the experiment. Similarly to Victor once he deems his creature to be imperfect, she loses all interest. Like him, she also does not hold herself accountable, instead blaming both her brother and her own child. She abandons them in the woods only minutes after the traumatic birth that costs Hana her life, figuratively washing her hands of both and starting anew. Ash, as the child comes to be called, is described as a monster due to disabilities that cause them to grow beyond what is considered normal, and since it seems difficult to determine a definite biological sex. Against all odds, they survive with the help of a benevolent outsider-figure, a homeless man who takes pity on the abandoned child.

Growing up, Ash quickly realizes that they are different from others. They feel excluded from society at large and cannot fit in with other children and young adults their age. Like the original monster, Ash tracks down their creator, Dr. Frank, pleading for a companion who would be able understand and sympathize with their condition. The narrative draws a sharp contrast between Frank and Ash’s guardian, Pine: while Frank persistently misgenders her child, Pine affirms Ash’s identity by granting them freedom of expression and respecting their chosen self-identification: “I did not come of age in the gender binary world that you and all other welcome bodies are accustomed to....The name he gave me came from his understanding and love of all that I was” (192). Frank’s ignorance concerning her child’s gender identity is ironic as well as particularly vicious considering her own experiences of gender-based violence. It highlights the complete emotional separation between the two. Frank simply does not care enough to respect her child as a human being, a fact even Plum remarks upon: “But it struck me as strange and disorienting for a nonbinary person to be unable to hold all the truths that lay within the one she had made” (236). Ash, however, is not content to let their mother distance herself, and reminds her of their gender identity:

As I was reading about your calalai, I came across the word *bissu*, which technically translates to transvestite priest but has evolved ... to describe someone intersex or even metagender. . . . And so, I tell you now that my name is Ash, and I am a *bissu*, and I hope you can understand why, in all future cases both within my company and beyond it, I want to be referred to by the pronoun *dia*. (198)

*Dia*, as a pronoun, is of Indonesian origin and is not gendered, which appeals to Ash's "dual-gendered self, my thinginess" (198). Going forward, I will refer to *dia* as such. While Frank may find Ash distasteful, the narrative does not conform to her assessment. Ash is humanized by *dia*'s account of life up to this point, the struggles and hardships *dia* have faced in an effort to find community and acceptance. Ultimately, Frank is able to create a companion for Ash, in a crucial revision of the original story.

Ash's ending is not tragic, *dia* finds happiness in the found family of Plum, Ko, and the nonbinary child *dia* wished for. Frank is exposed as the villain of the story, not as a result of her queerness, but because she perpetuates the injustice and prejudices she herself experienced at the hands of her father and brother. The true monster here is Frank's selfish pursuit of glory and acknowledgement at the cost of all she holds dear. Like Victor, she is unable to connect with someone who does not serve her in some way. Her reliance on traditional patriarchal values proves to be her downfall, as it was to Victor. *Unwieldy Creatures*, like other contemporary adaptations of *Frankenstein*, humanizes queer identities in an effort to dissuade unjust fears. "Monstrous" new, fragmentary gender constructions are exposed to be just as human; their Othering lessened or dispelled. As Haraway proposed in 1985, Tsai argues for a world in which we find community through a shared experience of heterogeneity, rather than forceful assimilation. By expanding the strict limits of the gender binary, characters such as Ash, who cannot easily fit into a mold, may experience the freedom that comes with a self-determined gender identity. Where the modern world makes it exceedingly difficult for individuals to remain within simplified, traditionally accepted categories, Tsai aims to show that this change must not be feared.

#### 10.2. Similarities and Revisions to the Original Story

*Unwieldy Creatures* remains very faithful to the original story in some respects and yet differs fundamentally in others. An analysis of the specific alterations invites reflection on why Tsai chose to intervene at certain moments and how these changes adapt the narrative to modern contexts and debates. On one hand, direct quotes from *Frankenstein* reinforce the stories' close connection; on the other, the gender-bent, queer, technological

themes enhance and/or dispute certain attitudes inherent to the original, emphasizing a shift in values over time.

One such example is the writing style, which mirrors the original story. The reader is met with a story-within-story type narrative, highlighting individual lives and often conflicting experiences. The narrators are exposed as flawed and unreliable. The narrative closely adheres to Shelley's original plot, with characters such as Plum and Frank guiding the reader through a deliberate reimagining of her work. It opens with their formative experiences as societal outsiders and traces their subsequent self-discoveries, which propel them toward unconventional trajectories in both their personal lives and scientific pursuits. The creation of Ash and the immediate refusal to accept dia mirrors Victor's initial reaction. Ash, like the monster, goes on to kill Ezra's child in a fit of revenge and places the blame on an innocent woman, Caroline. Seeking dia creator, Ash asks Frank to make dia a companion. Frank acquiesces yet secretly schemes to convince Plum to keep the child to themselves and cheat Ash. The story deviates from the original with Plum's decision to honor the original agreement, have the child, and leave Frank behind. Providing the monster with a happy end is a crucial and meaningful revision of Shelley's tale, highlighting the shifting values of modern society.

Specifically, the nature of Ash, the "monster," is thought-provoking when compared to the original one. Where he was made up of different body parts, Ash is explicitly multi-gendered. Tsai highlights contemporary fears concerning the shifting nature of gender constructions by having her monster incorporate seemingly differing and contrasting gender identities. The obvious fragmentariness of Ash's gender identity is a compelling shift from the original, highlighting the queer nature of the monster in *Frankenstein*. Tsai obviates what has been implicit in Shelley's story. By creating a whole being from gender fragments, Tsai shows that complex modern gender expressions do not have to be easily categorized in order to be complete.

Furthermore, Frank's connection to her father parallels Victor's relationship to Alphonse. Like the latter, Frank's father embodies the patriarchal ideal as the head of the house. He is the one making decisions for everyone in the family and enforces his power through physical violence if need be. Similarly to Alphonse, he takes measures to force his children to adhere to traditional gender norms. Particularly memorable instances of such aggression occur, for example, when he burns Ezra's dresses after he had shown an interest in designing clothing, and also when burning Frank's "male" clothes: "Well, I will just do what I did with the evidence of Ezra's monstrosity. I will burn it in the

backyard. But I want you to watch me do this, so you will know never to do this again” (106). Here, queer, gender non-compliant behaviors are explicitly linked with monstrosity. He destroys what he cannot or will not understand. His abusive behavior toward both his children and his traditionally feminine, submissive wife exposes the fundamental impossibility of successfully conforming to his ideal. Tsai has made the abusive nature of Alphonse’s doctrines more apparent by reinforcing them in characters such as Ba or Frank’s father.

Where Frank is able to recognize the cycle of abuse she is entrenched within, she is ultimately unable to break it. She perpetuates the abuse she herself experienced growing up, exploiting both Hana and Plum for their bodies, endangering and neglecting her child, Ash, and hurting others with her selfish and cruel actions. Like Victor, her hubris ends up causing her downfall. Tsai’s story, in a diversion from the original, offers hope to the characters injured by Frank’s ambitions. They go on to create their own found-family unit, a safe space for their queer and transgressive progeny. Plum, Ko, Ash, and Iphis free themselves from the cycle of patriarchal abuse represented by Frank and live unbothered by the prejudices of society.

The changes made to the original work show a greater commitment to diversifying the range of characters and experiences, as well as reinforcing certain issues. Tsai has taken the lessons learned from *Frankenstein* and expanded on them to fit modern conditions. She has radicalized the character of Alphonse in Ba and Frank’s father in order to showcase the deep-seated impact of prejudices and abuse-cycles on an individual. Having Frank continue this cycle complicates her character in compelling ways. She is both victim and perpetrator, her intrinsic desire to prove herself to the patriarchal world that has rejected her ends up leading to her downfall. By rejecting her own allegiance to monstrosity, Frank sets herself up for failure.

In contrast, Plum, having grown up with a similar experience of abuse at the hands of her Ba, serves as a positive example. She does not go on to perpetuate violence; instead, she accepts both Ash and Iphis with open arms. The focus on a happy end allows Tsai to emphasize that “monstrous” modern queerness does not have to end in tragedy: “I would always be Ba’s daughter, with hopes and ambitions of making something of myself that could be embraced by the world I wished I no longer needed. I was both monster and scientist, and I wanted to be lover and maker” (202).

### 10.3. Resisting Patriarchal Power Structures

Before concluding, I would like to emphasize the influence of patriarchal power structures even within queer spaces. While most characters of the novel are female-presenting, characters such as Dr. Frank showcase the kind of hegemonial masculinity Connell speaks of in *Masculinities*. Here, it is made clear that hegemonial masculinity is not necessarily bound to the male sex. It is a hierarchical system of power that relies on the weaponization of certain character traits and attributes to separate itself from, as well as subjugate, those considered weaker or less ideal. Frank, like her father, like Ba, like Alphonse and Victor, uses her influence and power over the other characters to further her own ambitions. Her story highlights the fact that even with the rise of queer and non-traditional identities, patriarchal power and hegemonial identity models still exert significant influence and power in modern society.

Frank uses her influence over Hana to convince her to carry their child. Although their previous relationship has proven abusive as a result of Frank's inability to contain her temper, Hana feels she should agree. Their bond is imbalanced from the beginning; Frank cannot stand the threat of Hana's own intelligence: "How dare you do this! What made you think that my work – MY work – was for you to uncover? If you ever do anything like this again, you will be nothing to me" (74). Like Mina in *Dracula*, Hana is put in her place by Frank's often violent rebuttals. She falls into the role of Frank's support, a service that turns out to be very much one-sided: "I expected Hana to stop at nothing to make me whole again — to stop me from my basest impulses and to save me from my own violent tongue" (77). When she realizes that she is nothing but an "empty vessel" to her lover, it is too late. The body horror of the pregnancy and birth of an unwanted child emphasizes the lengths Frank is willing to go to achieve her goals. The violation of her own partner on such a personal level is one of the most Gothic and terror-inducing aspects of the novel. The birth/death scene highlights the medical horror female patients have gone through to fulfill society's mandates of becoming mothers. Hana's sacrifice turns out to be for naught, as Frank abandons the child as soon as she is born.

Frank's callous use of Hana's body is repeated when she coerces Plum to carry Ash's companion. She exerts her powerful, hegemonial influence over Plum; not only is she older and Plum's scientific idol, but she is also her direct professional superior. Plum is reliant on Frank's approval on both a personal and an economic level. Having experienced homelessness and hardship firsthand, the threat of having her privileges removed leads her to make decisions she may otherwise have evaded: "Could be pretty life-changing for

you, and for your career from here, wherever you decide to go next. Just think about it” (243).

Ultimately, however, Plum is able to free herself from the oppressive influence of her lover. Her morality and love for her unborn child prevent her from remaining a submissive victim of Frank’s ambitions. With the help of her past girlfriend, Ko, she escapes from her abuser and is able to build the kind of family for which she had always wished. Her refusal to continue to perpetuate Frank’s abuse by cheating Ash out of a companion leads her away from the controlling influence of her partner.

Accepting the queer identities Frank has denounced allows the characters to free themselves of the oppressive bounds of hegemonial power. Plum and Ko refuse to perpetuate their own abuse, allowing Iphis to grow up free of the suffering they themselves experienced early on. Ash is allowed the happy end that was denied the original creation, which shows a shift in the way society treats its so-called monsters. Queer identities are de-monstrated and humanized instead of demonized. Despite the continual influence of traditional power structures, queer monsters are shown thriving and accepted. *Unwieldy Creatures* gives hope to those who still feel excluded and isolated within dominant power structures of a society that seeks to further ostracize them. The focus on a new-found family is an optimistic rewrite of *Frankenstein*’s ending, which allows for the potential of queer community and acceptance. The true monster is exposed as one who would seek to impede or alter such an ending.

## 11. Conclusion

To summarize, this thesis aimed to showcase the deep connection between the Gothic and the field of Gender Studies, particularly through its relation to the Queer. Throughout the course of this paper, I have analyzed society’s fears and desires in relation to gender constructions over time, as evidenced by specific influential Gothic narratives. Part I focused on the trope of the dead or hidden mother/wife. The common theme highlights contemporary fears concerning the subjugated role of women within patriarchal systems of oppression. The legal situation of women was such that they underwent a legal death at the point of marriage, which posits them under the control of their husbands. The Gothic also serves to transgress the boundaries it invokes, and the reader witnesses the heroines escape the control of their male superiors and establish their own independent identities. Over time, with the advance of feminist movements, these adaptations have become more radical. *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca* are more aggressively vindictive compared to the original, *A Sicilian Romance*. The reader witnesses the heroines/their alter egos, the

oppressed wives, commit literary vengeance against their oppressors. Up until the twentieth century, we encounter through these narratives a growing dissatisfaction with the submissive role allotted to women, which led authors to question these traditions via their fictional Gothic works, exposing the nightmare within the domestic sphere. The Gothic restructuring of gendered power-relations allows for the transgression of norms that otherwise go unquestioned.

Part II expanded upon this issue by highlighting the vampire figure as an apt metaphor for the social outsider, which intrinsically connects it to the female, the queer, and the abnormal. Not only is the vampire an analogy for all things forbidden, but also a fictional figure upon which authors may enact implicit desires. Traditionally, the vampire comes with negative associations such as homosexuality, venereal disease, and moral deviance. Female vampires, particularly, have proven to be particularly divisive. Some authors, such as Stoker, present the female vampire as a demonized version of the Angel in the House ideal, a corrupt femininity that is unrestrained in her sexuality and her independence. His portrayal highlights contemporary fears concerning the changing role of women in nineteenth-century society, who started to question their allotted roles and more often chose to lead independent lives outside the traditional private sphere of marriage and motherhood. Others, like Rice in the twentieth, and Kostova in the twenty-first century, show a tendency toward a more sympathetic portrayal of the vampire. Modern adaptations of *Dracula* tend to give voice to the repressed, be it a vampire or their female hunters. Claudia, Helen, and her daughter are examples of a slow shift toward a more complex understanding of female identities. These characters show a clear desire for equality and freedom of expression. The male characters surrounding them, similarly, change to adapt. Instead of performing traditional masculinity, they are allowed leeway in their gender expression that expands the bounds of the construction.

Lastly, I have analyzed *Frankenstein* as a modern monster. While the original story is relatively conservative, it ultimately questions the viability of gender stereotypes. Its modern adaptations highlight the relevance of Shelley's work in the modern context of technological and medical advancement. In a world in which gender expressions have become increasingly complex — such that even the formerly unquestioned category of biological sex is rendered unstable — Frankenstein's monster emerges as a metaphor for queerness and the freedom of gender expression. Like the vampire, the monster has become more sympathetic and assimilative in recent years. I have explored a clear shift toward acceptance and even celebration of the monster's unique, queer perspective.

Modern narratives seek to de-monstrate the Queer, accepting fragmentariness and heterogeneity as part of the modern condition rather than something unnatural, to be feared and repressed.

All in all, I have showcased a trend toward acceptance of the previously unacceptable. The narratives I have explored highlight the Gothic's return of the repressed. Repeating themes suggest a continued occupation with unresolved issues of the past. Over time, individuals continue to question and test the limits of the social boundaries imposed upon them by the strict dualisms of Western society. We are forced to recognize the human face gazing back at us from beneath the mask of monstrosity. In a truly Gothic fashion, the ghosts of the past will continue to haunt us until the issue is resolved; the monster defeated or assimilated.

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