

# Monster Image: Gothic Creatures in British Literature: Contemporary Reinterpretations and Cultural Resonances

#### **Editors:**

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#### **Preface**

Monsters emerge as confined figures between the pages that are kept at a distance from the reader through the boundaries of an alternative dimension. They constantly test this comfort zone through an artifice that is readily inclined to transform fear into pleasure. Within this framework, such creatures are aligned with the concept of aesthetic fear, frightening and entertaining their audience from a position of safe detachment. The distance that emerges between the monster and the reader is proportionally insurmountable. Prevented by a mimetic barrier from infiltrating everyday life, these wild figures function as fantastic typologies; yet, upon close reading, it becomes evident that the fear they generate positions them as representatives of an alternative dimension of meaning.

For instance, although Frankenstein's celebrated creature is animated through electrification and presented as a grotesque aberration of creation, the true source of terror embedded within the text does not reside in the monster's physical existence. Rather, it emerges from the quietly but deliberately articulated anxieties surrounding post-mortem existence, the notion of the afterlife, unresolved questions, and the transgression of uncanny boundaries. Even if the monster does not exist in a literal sense, it remains alive through the fears it represents, exerting tangible influence upon everyday life.

This dynamic can be aptly illustrated by the image of a skull inscribed on an electric pole. Observers are not unsettled by the skull as an object in itself; rather, they respond to the lethal danger it signifies and accordingly exercise caution. In a similar manner, this book aims to examine the fears embodied by monsters in British literature, drawing on the same semiotic mechanism as the warning symbol on the electric pole, and to trace their resonances in the contemporary world.

It is at this juncture that aesthetic fear yields to ontological fear. Artistic representation begins to illuminate existential truths; pleasure and suspense are transformed into caveats, functioning as instruments through which both society and the individual are compelled to confront themselves. When the book is closed, the monster retreats back into the pages and disappears, yet the fear it signifies continues to live on within the reader's world. The

present academic study aims precisely to delineate and identify the contours of this enduring fear.

**Keywords:** British Literature, Gothic, Monster Image, Contemporary Resonances, Cultural Transformation.

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### Theoretical Groundwork: The Monstrous Bodies and the Gothic Tradition 3

#### Ferhat Ordu<sup>1</sup>

#### **Abstract**

The chapter assembles a theoretical framework used to analyse the monster in the Gothic literary tradition. It combines the basic scholarship to suggest that the monster is a multifaceted cultural representation but not a one-dimensional antagonist. The monster, whose body is a cultural text according to Cohen (1996), derives its power to disrupt order from its status as the abject as defined by Kristeva (1982). It also tracks the symbiotic development of this character as well as of the Gothic tradition, its externalized form as a spectre in haunted castles of the eighteenth century, its internalized form in the form of a psychological twin in the nineteenth century and its modern forms. The crucial aspect of this enquiry is the social and affective role of the monster: to patrol cultural boundaries, project latent desires and bring into being the historically particular anxieties, including scientific hubris, racial trauma. The chapter illustrates the use of Gothic conventions in supplying the narrative grammar to the long-lasting resonance of the monster by a close reading of canonical texts: Frankenstein, Dracula, and Beloved. The overall impact of these necessary views will be seen in the chapter not only making the key areas of the monster theory and Gothic studies clear, but also give a numerical authorised measure of the analyses that follow in this volume, thus, inviting the cameo movement of academic research into the folds of the human condition.

The chapter marks the slightest theoretical and historical facets which help to comprehend the monster as a leading cultural image in the Gothic literary tradition. To question the monster, its sociocultural roles, and its development throughout the eighteenth century to modern Gothic aesthetic works, the chapter provides a presentation analysis of the crucial texts in forming the discipline and the combination of efforts of the most influential

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scholars. By creating a coherent outline of the understanding of monstrous bodies, through the analysis of the most essential key concepts, including the abject, monster theory and the conventions of Gothic fiction, the book eventually attempts to use this rich base as a launching point as a sequence of more detailed examples in later chapters that will use these interpretive prisms to help disclose the darker sides of the human condition.

#### The Monster as a Cultural Hieroglyph

The monster is a paradoxical figure, the side of utmost otherness on the one hand and on the other hand an index of the self, of which it is essentially only a cultural product, which, as it were, serves as an intrinsic source of meaning. As Mittman and Hensel (2018) argue, by inverting and transgressing boundaries and norms and mores, monsters "perform important work for us as individuals and communities, policing our boundaries, defining our norms and mores through their inversions and transgressions" (p. x). In this way, monsters are not only scary images but can be seen as the inevitable tools of cultural self-identification. This part of the chapter queries the definitions and ontological position of the monster and assumes the fact that, since its etymology to its grotesque corporeality, the monster is a cultural hieroglyph, a symbolic structure that is to be read, just as Cohen claims that the monster "exists only to be read" (1996, p. 4). A critical examination of the monster as a demonstration, a cultural body, and an aesthetic transgression, we can begin to unpack the human anxieties and desires that give it such enduring vitality.

#### Definitions and Nature of the Monster

The main purpose of the monster is not to hide, but to reveal. It is demonstrative in nature, which is encoded in its very name. In accordance with the writings by Saint Augustine, Mittman, and Hensel (2018) pointed out that the word monstrare is a derivative of monstrare (to show) and demonstrare (to demonstrate) (p. x). This subjective word root makes the monster not the end but a medium of communication: it works as a signifier pointing to a didactic lesson. A physical manifestation of a social, moral, or cultural transgression, the monster serves as a warning. Its existence serves a pedagogical purpose by compelling a community to face its fears and, in doing so, define its values. In the words of Mittman and Hensel (2018), "Through their bodies, words, and deeds, monsters show us ourselves" (p. x).

To perform this demonstrative role, the monster needs a corporeal form, but this body goes beyond the biological limitations. Cohen (1996)

conclusively makes the argument that it is "a cultural body" (p. 4). The corporeal body is a discursively fabricated text, a symbolic territory on which collective anxieties are inscribed. Cohen (1996) continues to explain that "the monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy... giving them life and an uncanny independence" (p. 4). The fur, scales and slime are therefore representational expressions of the abstract culture pressures rather than arbitrary features. This means that when the monster is dissected the analyst ends up discovering self. This is confirmed by Mittman and Hensel (2018), who state that "Peel back the fur, the scales, the spikes, the slime, and beneath the monstrous hide, there we are, always and inevitably... inside every monster lurks a human being" (p. x). To suit, the body of the monster is thus a projection, an outreach, a "construct" that is intended to outwardly manifest the internal struggles in the society in which it is created (Cohen, 1996, p. 4).

This is why the very existence of a monster is a threat to order and categorizing. It is a transgressive form of its nature as it does not conform to natural and aesthetical standards. According to Botting (1996), the term monster has historically "applied in aesthetic judgements to works that were unnatural and deformed, that deviated either from the regularity attributed to life and nature or from the symmetry and proportion valued in any form of representation" (p. 26). By nature, the monster defies both the rules of harmonious form and the recognized classifications of the natural world. It is the in-between, the ambiguous, and the composite that defies simple classification. According to Cohen (1996), its enduring power stems from this resistance to fixed meaning. The monster, according to him, is a "glyph" that resides in "the gap between the time of upheaval that created it and the moment into which it is received" (p. 4). The monster can never be completely contained or eliminated because of its innate slippery nature, or "genetic uncertainty principle" (Cohen, 1996, p. 4). Because the cultural fears it represents are never entirely solved, it always manages to slip away.

#### Characteristics and Function in Culture

Monsters are not objects of passive nature but the objects of dynamism that challenge even the primordial constructs of human thinking. Their unusual feature is the natural violation of the conceptual boundaries that creates a complicated combination of desire and fear in the cultural milieus they are developed. The continuing difficulty that monsters create of the established order of society and the consistent demarcation of self and other lies in their end-in-themselves rejection of traditional classification into taxonomies. Monstrosities find inspiration in being in a categorical crisis.

They appear in the form of composite entities that fill the interstitial space between conventional ontologically fixated categories, and as such disrupts the very taxonomic apparatus with the help of which the reality is meant to be produced. As Cohen (1996) asserts, "The monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions" (p. 6). This quality of being "in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" is what Julia Kristeva (1982) identifies as the core of the abject (p. 4). The abject what disturbs "identity, system, order"—is not defined by uncleanliness but by its refusal to "respect borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). The creature is either the zombie (dead and alive), the werewolf (human and animal), or the creature created by Frankenstein (living and made) and it is in this balance character where boundaries become unclear and fall apart. Kristeva (1982) notes this confrontation "with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of animal," highlighting the monster's role in destabilizing the hierarchy between human and beast (p. 12). Consequently, "the monster always escapes because it refuses easy categorization," systematically violating the "too precise laws of nature" and demanding a system that can accommodate "polyphony, mixed response... and resistance to integration" (Cohen, 1996, pp. 6-7). In the face of this ambiguity, "scientific inquiry and its ordered rationality crumble," rebuking any attempt at "boundary and enclosure" (Cohen, 1996, p. 7).

This ontological transgression triggers a culturally multifaceted reaction whose inclination to terror and attraction is impossible to separate. The monster is not just disgusting; it is also enticing. Kristeva (1982) encapsulates this duality by asserting, "The abject is edged with the sublime" (p. 11). It embodies a terrifying yet exalted liberation from the laws it transgresses. The abject, as something we don't want to be a part of, "beckons to us and ends up engulfing us" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). This explains the strange desire that comes with our fear: the subconscious pull toward the very taboos that the monster represents. This phenomenon is specifically referred to by Cohen (1996) as he states that the monster is frequently too sexual, perverse and erotic, a lawbreaker thus containing hidden urges that a society openly denies but of which it is secretly fascinated (p. 16). The ideological drive to exile or kill the monster is therefore, a direct answer to this perilous temptation, an effort to purge the community of its own forbidden impulses.

In its end, after all, the main cultural purpose of the monster is to render the abstract anxieties concrete and manageable, in the capacity of acting as the Other. Cohen (1996) defines the monster as "difference made flesh, come to dwell among us," a "dialectical Other" that incorporates the threatening "Outside" which actually originates from "Within" the culture itself (p. 7). The monstrous body can be projected onto and constructed at any kind of cultural, political, racial, economic or sexual alterity. The culture can then face, negotiate, and try to strengthen its boundaries through the monster's story by giving a face to these vague fears, whether they are of racial difference, sexual deviance, or social upheaval. The monster is an important safety wall and a black mirror that helps society keep an eye on its rules by showing what they are not in a very dramatic way.

#### Social and Epistemological Roles

In addition to causing immediate fright by their nature, monsters play an essential, albeit much or much too disturbing, task within the social and epistemological systems of the culture in which they are found. They operate as normative enforcers and conceptual challengers, as well as defining the sense of community, and pushing the boundaries of knowledge. Essentially, monsters, as Mittman and Hensel (2018) note, "monsters do perform important work for us as individuals and communities, policing our boundaries, defining our norms and mores through their inversions and transgressions" (p. x). This is one of the major social functions of this role of policing. The "monster of prohibition" as elaborated by Cohen (1996) "exists to demarcate the bonds that hold together that system of relations we call culture, to call horrid attention to the borders that cannot—must not—be crossed" (p. 13). The monster reinstates these social, sexual, or moral codes by deliberately violating them, providing a warning to us that something like this is detrimental since it "prevents mobility (intellectual, geographic, or sexual), delimiting the social spaces through which private bodies may move" (p. 12).

It is ironic that this same use as a symbol of taboo gives the monster its strength as a carrier of escapist fantasy. The monster represents the enticement of the taboo and transient freedom of social servitude. This twofold aspect, as explained by Cohen (1996) is due to the fact that "the linking of monstrosity with the forbidden makes the monster all the more appealing as a temporary egress from constraint" (p. 17). Therefore, the very thing that is horrifying is also fascinating, giving a chance to explore safely the suppressed desires in a narrative way. Such a tense relationship is projected on the monster's own body. Thomson (2018) suggests that extraordinary bodies "function as magnets to which culture secures its anxieties, questions, and needs," (p. 91) becoming politicized entities upon which a society projects its meditations on "individual as well as national values, identity, and direction" (p. 92). The monstrous body is thus exploited, a tangible screen for the projection of intangible cultural concerns.

As a result, the monster plays an important epistemological function as a limit-case for knowledge in principle. The classification urges of science, philosophy, and other systems of logical inquiry are actively resisted by the monster's ambiguous and composite nature. According to Cohen (1996), "the monster resists capture in the epistemological nets of the erudite," resisting any one consistent interpretation (p. 49). Its presence continuously demonstrates that the world is more terrible and complex than our categories can account for, posing a challenge to organized mind. However, the monster also offers a special kind of information in this resistance. In any case, it is a reflection. In the words of Mittman and Hensel (2018), "Through their bodies, words, and deeds, monsters show us ourselves" (p. x). The monster exposes the innermost fears, unspoken desires, and frail roots of the society that gave rise to it. The monster's epistemological lesson is that comprehending it entails comprehending the human world that considers it to be so hideous.

#### Affective Response (Fear, Disgust, and Desire)

The perpetual power of the monster is not only a cognitive but also actually a very visceral kind, witnessing how unpredictable and even paradoxical the emotional reactions of people to it can be. The exposure to the monstrous creates a strong emotional threefold (fear, disgust, and a perverse and multifaceted lust). This complex affective environment which determines the reception of the audience and is the essence of the Gothic experience is important to the cultural functioning not just a product of the monster. Following Mittman and Hensel (2018), "it is not the inherent qualities of the being that make it monstrous but the response 'we'—characters within a narrative and readers/viewers of these narratives—have to it that renders the creature a monster" (p. xi). As a result, the monster is an affective construct, which should be analysed analytically that should begin with the emotions which it is supposed to trigger.

Fear and disgust are the most instant reactions; they are closely related but separate emotions. Fear is a response to a threat, a sense of threat that prompts self-defence. On the other hand, disgust is a more instinctive, visceral reaction. According to Carroll (2018), As Carroll (2018) emphasizes, "The monster in horror fiction, that is, is not only lethal but—and this is of utmost significance—also disgusting" (p. 30). The element of this disgust is a major part of the abject, a response to that which does not respect bodily integrity and the categorical limits, such as rot, decay, and ambiguous flesh. The example of the zombie though is not only feared due to its ability to kill but is also very disgusting to look at how it decomposes and its collapsing body is

likened to the collapse of the border between life and death. These reactions are not accidental but are carefully edited to the audience. According to Carroll (2018), "The emotional reactions of characters... provide a set of instructions or, rather, examples about the way in which the audience is to respond to the monsters in the fiction" (p. 29). It is the screams and the revulsion on the page or on the screen that bring the audience into proper affective response of the monstrous threat.

Nevertheless, revulsion does not hold the underlying position of the affection of the monster. The most interesting, even culturally valuable power of it is its ability to be repulsive and attractive at the same time. This duality is the core of Cohen's (1996) sixth thesis, "Fear of the Monster Is Really a Kind of Desire." He elaborates that "the monster is continually linked to forbidden practices," serving to normalize social codes, but it "also attracts." This creates a powerful psychological conflict: "the same creatures who terrify and interdict can evoke potent escapist fantasies; the linking of monstrosity with the forbidden makes the monster all the more appealing as a temporary egress from constraint" (Cohen, 1996, p. 52). The vampire, specifically, is not just a usurpation of the position of the predatory killing, he is an ideal of the temptation of immortality and the transgressive sexuality, and offers a utopia that releases him of the bounds of death and social ridicule. This repulsions-fascination contrast allows the monster to overcome the reductive dichotomy and as such explain his continued popularity in the cultural canon. As Cohen (1996) concludes, "We distrust and loathe the monster at the same time we envy its freedom, and perhaps its sublime despair" (p. 52). This envy demonstrates a unique human interest in the very boundaries that the monster goes so crazily out of his way to break.

The Gothic style is the ideal setting for this whole emotional complex, which includes the interaction of forbidden love, revulsion, and dread. By definition, the Gothic is an intense and extravagant genre intended to elicit powerful emotional reactions. "Gothic condenses the many perceived threats to these values, threats associated with supernatural and natural forces, imaginative excesses and delusions, religious and human evil, social transgression, mental disintegration and spiritual corruption," according to Botting (1996) (p. 2). It is the literary and cultural apparatus designed specifically to produce the emotional sensations connected to the monster. Additionally, visual transgression is used to generate this emotional impact. Botting (1996) notes that Gothic productions were historically deemed "aesthetically excessive" and "unnatural in their undermining of physical laws with marvellous beings and fantastic events" (p. 6). This excess is the artistic equivalent of the monster's own categorical excess, both of which

combine to submerge the audience in a state of heightened experience and overwhelming reasoning.

In the end, this emotional hurricane fulfils a significant ontological function. Cultural identities are created and maintained via the powerful emotions of fear, contempt, and want. According to Cohen (1996), the monster is "the abjected fragment that enables the formation of all kinds of identities—personal, national, cultural, economic, sexual, psychological" (p. 19). By identifying the "Them," our communal, visceral rejection of the monster serves to reinforce the "Us." It lives in a "marginal geography," which is "doubly dangerous: simultaneously 'exorbitant' and 'quite close" (p. 20). These strong and sometimes aversive affective reactions that the monster experiences are an empirical confirmation of its immediate presence, as well as, a testimony to its capacity to be dangerous. After all, the monster is moulded directly instead of being viewed on an abstract level. It plays its major part by way of this visceral, emotive experience, this intense and disgusting synthesis of fear and desire that does not only form our epistemic consciousness, but above all influences our understanding of ourselves and our experience of the milieu that surrounds us.

Besides, monsters are not to be considered as the sole antagonists in narrative schemes but they may serve as complex reflections of ourselves on which we project our self. They can be fictionalised as cultural artefacts that were developed to express deep rooted communal worries and suppressed desires. Their etymology, which is based on Latin, monstrare, which means to make visible, best summarises their purpose; to make visible revealing aspects of the psychic dimension that should be identified. Essentially, monsters act as travelling talking limits. They consist of the things that make us unsettled, of the things that do not fit in the descriptions of human, animal, alive, or dead. It is here in this liminal space that their efficacy is manifested. They are disturbing and at the same time irresistible, our concern is usually mingled with a curious fascination with the freedom that their lawlessness represents. They live outside the guidelines that we are under. This interaction makes monsters and Gothic literature a logical combination. Gothic, in its fondness of drama and overindulgence, furnishes a most favourable situation where such creatures are able to haunt the popular fancy. In the end, all monsters, such as the ancient dragon or the modern zombie, present one basic lesson, that in order to understand the monster we must understand the society which bred it, and the hidden apprehensions and unspoken laws of which it is the outcome. Therefore, at least monsters are our mirrors as they show the fears related to our possible transformations.

Having worked out in full the theoretical framework which the monster was to have, in terms of definitions, characteristics and functions, the time has now come to place these abstract constructions in their appropriate literary-historical settings. The following part of this chapter accordingly will treat of specific texts of monsters which fill out the Gothic tradition, examining how canonical figures, including the brooding Byronic villain and the reanimated creature in Percy Bysshe Shelley's Frankenstein (1818), or the haunting Count Dracula in Bram Stoker and the spectral haunting of Toni Morrison's Beloved (1987), represent these theoretical propositions as historically specific to their time and place, through the dynamic and flexible figure of the monster.

#### The Gothic Tradition: Definitions and Characteristics

To get a full understanding of the habitat of the monster one must first of all draw the landline of the Gothic tradition as such. The Gothic signifies an expressive mode characterised by its impulses of crossing boundaries, its emotional depth, and obsession on the dark-sided matters of enlightenment and advancement. As Fred Botting (1996) asserts in his seminal work, "Gothic signifies a writing of excess" (p. 1). This excess serves as the main locomotive of the genre, driving it to the boundaries of reason, decency, and traditional aesthetic canons. The history of the term is complicated: William Hughes (2013) mentions that "Gothic is a complex cultural term, and its meanings have varied greatly across the 400 years of its persistence in the English language" (p. 1). Moreover, Hughes notes that "Historically a derogatory synonym for barbarism and vulgarity, the term was appropriated in the mid-18th century . . . as a suitable generic descriptor for an innovative form of literature: the Gothic novel" (p. 1). It is a serious appropriation, a repossession of one of the terms of abuse to designate a literature that tried deliberately to challenge the values of its own period. As Botting (2012) explains, "The word 'Gothic' assumes its powerful, if negative, significance: it condenses a variety of historical elements and meanings opposed to the categories valued in the eighteenth century" (p. 13). The Gothic is in a way the negative antithesis of the Enlightenment rationality that actualized what it attempted to supress.

The traits of the Gothic are the direct results of such antagonistic attitude. It is filled with peculiar characters in its storeys. According to Botting (1996), "Gothic focuses on the various styles and forms of the genre and analyses the cultural significance of its prevalent figures: the ghosts, monsters, vampires, doubles and horrors that are its definitive features" ("Gothic", para. 2). These figures inhabit worlds designed to evoke specific emotional states,

characterized by "Gothic atmospheres - gloomy and mysterious - [which] have repeatedly signalled the disturbing return of pasts upon presents and evoked emotions of terror and laughter" (Botting, 1996, p. 1). The obsession on the negative is the key point; Botting (1996) states that Gothic "remains fascinated by objects and practices that are constructed as negative, irrational, immoral and fantastic" (p. 2). The Gothic is essentially a discovery of great ambivalence. The definition provided by Botting (1996) is as follows: "[gothic is] an inscription neither of darkness nor of light, a delineation neither of reason and morality nor of superstition and corruption, neither good nor evil, but both at the same time" (p. 9). This ambivalence turns out to be strong in the emotional reactions it causes: "The emotional reactions which Gothic fiction is most closely linked to are also ambivalent: objects of terror and horror will not only arouse repugnance but also a very intense pleasure and excitement (Botting 1996, p. 9).

The gothic as a thematic working precedes as a cultural hoarder of anxiety. According to Botting (1996), "Gothic condenses the many perceived threats to... values, threats associated with supernatural and natural forces, imaginative excesses and delusions, religious and human evil, social transgression, mental disintegration and spiritual corruption" (p. 2). These threatening factors are not abstract; they are based on historical basis. According to Botting (1996), "Gothic narratives never escaped the concerns of their own times," and their location be it a castle or an old house became "the site where fears and anxieties returned in the present" in response to "political revolution, industrialisation, urbanisation, shifts in sexual and domestic organisation, and scientific discovery" (p. 3). The style applies a unified scheme of aesthetic principles to ensure that emotion is more valued than reason. In Gothic productions, Botting (1996) states, "imagination and emotional effects exceed reason. Passion, excitement and sensation transgress social proprieties and moral laws. Ambivalence and uncertainty obscure single meaning" (p. 3). This results in a style that is "aesthetically excessive," one that was historically considered "unnatural in [its] undermining of physical laws with marvellous beings and fantastic events" (Botting, 1996, pp. 6-7).

This transgressive excess is not merely thematic but also formal, relying on what become familiar conventions. "The genre's consistency relied on the settings, devices and events," Botting (1996) notes, pointing to the "desolate, alienating and full of menace" landscapes and the stock features that "provide the principal embodiments and evocations of cultural anxieties" (pp. 2, 45). Finally, these norms are united by one crucial and disruptive element the unstable threatening body. According to Kelly Hurley (1997),

"The Gothic body is a not-quite-human subject, characterized by its morphic variability, continually in danger of becoming not-itself, becoming other" (pp. 3-4). This organ, the body of the monster, is the final place of Gothic profligacy and stress, which serves as a physical signifier of everything that crosses the lines of humanity, nature and conceivability. With the theoretical bases of the concept of monstrosity and the fundamental aesthetics/thematic conventions of the Gothic mode in place, what follows then is a historical tracing of the lineage of the tradition. The following section will map the path of the Gothic as it consolidated itself formally during the eighteenth century, as it vastly altered during the nineteenth and twentieth century, and into its countless incarnations during the modern age. This diachronic review is critical to comprehending how the character of the monster, along with the instruments of terror and horror, has been continually re-invented relative to the cultural, political and scientific paradigm changes. This diachronic approach is thus essential to the contextualisation of particular monstrosity manifestations as acute at various specific times, as seen in the spectres of the early novel through to the psychological hauntings of modernity and the virtual hauntings of the present day.

#### Historical Development: From External Spectres to Internal **Shadows**

The Gothic tradition need not be understood as a static construct but a fluid mode that has been radically reformed since its genesis, continually reconceiving its monster figures to reflect the fears of each subsequent era. As charted by Botting (1996), its trajectory runs "from its sources in the eighteenth century through to modernist and postmodernist representations" ("Gothic", para. 2), a trajectory in which the focal point of the horrors undergoes a considerable shift from the outside, supernatural threats to the inside, the psychological abyss. Its genesis occurred from a varied body of literary sources, Botting (1996) noting that the earliest tradition draws upon "medieval romances/super-natural, Faustian and fairy tales, Renaissance drama/sentimental, picaresque and confessional narratives and the ruins/tombs/nighttime speculations that captivated Graveyard poets" (p. 14). This diverse amalgam took shape in a recognizable form around a time that is commonly accepted as its most central epoch, a timeline Botting (1996) reports lasting "from Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) to Charles Maturin's Melmoth the Wanderer (1820)" (p. 15).

During the formative period of the eighteenth century, the Gothic genre operated within a relatively defined moral and narrative framework. As Botting (1996) articulates, the emphasis was "on expelling and objectifying threatening figures of darkness and evil, casting them out and restoring proper limits: villains are punished; heroines well married" (p. 10). This framework facilitated the containment of transgressive elements, with the "excesses and ambivalence associated with Gothic figures" functioning as "distinct signs of transgression" that were ultimately eradicated to reinforce societal order (Botting, 1996, p. 6). The haunted castle, the oppressive aristocrat, and the ghostly apparition were external entities that could be confronted and, at least within the narrative, overcome.

The nineteenth century, however, experienced a radical shift in the Gothic imagination brought about by the intellectual and political upheaval characteristic of the period. Building on Botting (1996), in this period "the security and stability of social, political and aesthetic formations are much more uncertain," a situation further compounded by the French Revolution that questioned all the social hierarchies (p. 10). The Gothic images of the past—"Gothic castles, villains and ghosts"—had become "cliched and formulaic," having lost the potency to induce genuine fear. This decline in threats from the outside led to a decisive shift that Botting (1996) pinpoints as the "internalisation of Gothic forms" (p. 11). The new Gothic themes "appeared as the darker corollary to Romantic ideals of individuality," further becoming "part of an internalised world of guilt, anxiety, despair, a world of individual transgression interrogating the uncertain bounds of imaginative freedom and human knowledge" (Botting, 1996, p. 10). This internalization constituted a decisive shift in the emotive registers of the genre: "Terror became secondary to horror, the sublime ceded to the uncanny" (Botting, 1996, p. 11). Fear of things that may be (terror) gave way to loathing of things (horror), and the terrifying powers that came from the outside (the sublime) gave way to the familiar and repressed that intrudes from the inside (the uncanny).

The redefined Gothic tradition continued through the Victorian era; yet, according to Hughes (2013), this later era "spans the Victorian era through to the 19th-century fin de siècle, but is perceptibly far less distinct a genre than its innovative predecessor" (p. 47). It is in this time when the monster indeed invaded within, the doppelganger, the split personality and the degenerate body, a reflection of the new anxieties of the human psyche, sexuality and evolution. This evolutionary pattern: the outward projection of the spectres of the eighteenth century to the inward projection of the shadows of the nineteenth century, attests to the extreme plasticity of Gothic and preconditions the very particular monstrous texts that shall be addressed in the next part, each the creation of its own historical circumstance in this larger pattern of evolution.

#### Anatomies of Terror: Gothic Conventions in Frankenstein, Dracula, and Beloved

The iconic monster texts are the strongest expression of the theoretical and historical parameters of the tradition of the Gothic. Clearly, the evolution of the Gothic conventions and the flexibility of these principles can be seen through the prism of analysing such works as Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, Bram Stoker's Dracula, and Toni Morrison's Beloved. The works-although separated by time and context, all share similarity in that the fundamental preoccupations inherent in the genre, including fragmented narratives, transgressive bodies and the spectral reemergence of the past-are restructured to meet the concerns of their respective periods. The analysis will follow the way all these novels use widely-known Gothic tropes; the spectral and the double, the rotting castle and the haunted house to unleash deep-seated cultural anxieties.

The major change that occurred in the Gothic tradition is forcefully introduced through the first book of Mary Shelley, which is titled Frankenstein; Or, The Modern Prometheus. The novel shifts the location of terror out of external settings and into the nature of the human body itself. As Jack Halberstam (1995) argues, "While the Gothic Romances of the 1790s associated horror with locale, Frankenstein's monster makes flesh itself Gothic... Shelley... maps out a new geography of terror and finds fear to be a by-product of embodiment rather than a trick played upon the mind" (p. 28). The Creature, famously described by H.P. Lovecraft (2000) as being "moulded from charnel fragments" and possessing "a hideously loathsome form" (p. 35), becomes the ultimate abject being, a "composite" that horrifies because he disturbs the boundaries between life and death, human and artificial. This internalization of horror is further complicated by the novel's structure of doubling. As Cavallaro (2002) notes, the "multifacetedness of Shelley's novel is underscored by what Fred Botting describes as 'patterns of doubling and reversal" (p. 117), weaving a "tortuous, fragmented narrative" (Botting, 1996, p. 2) that implicates both creator and creature in a shared monstrosity. Halberstam (1995) concludes that Frankenstein "not only gives form to the dialectic of monstrosity itself... it also demands a rethinking of the entire Gothic genre in terms of who rather than what is the object of terror" (p. 28).

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* represents a later Victorian synthesis of Gothic conventions, projecting anxieties about racial purity, reverse colonization, and rampant capitalism onto a monstrous, aristocratic body. The Count is a figure who embodies what Botting (1996) identifies as the genre's "spectres,

monsters, demons, [and] evil aristocrats" (p. 2). His transgression is geographic and cultural, as he "dwells in a horrible castle in the Carpathians; but finally migrates to England with the design of populating the country with fellow vampires" (Lovecraft, 2000, p. 56). This migration updates the Gothic landscape, with the decaying Carpathian castle giving way to the modern city, which, as Botting (1996) suggests, combines "the natural and architectural components of Gothic grandeur and wildness, its dark, labyrinthine streets suggesting the violence and menace of Gothic castle and forest" (p. 2). Dracula himself is a composite of threats. Halberstam (1995) reads him as "a composite of otherness" and "gold brought to life and animated within monopoly capitalism" (p. 103), while Punter (2013) sees him as "the logical culmination of the Victorian and Gothic hero... for whom the price of immortality is the death of the soul" (p. 22). The novel's fragmented narrative, composed of journals and letters, is a formal convention that, as Halberstam (1995) points out, presents "a body of work to which, it is important to note, only certain characters contribute" (p. 90), linking narrative control to the policing of knowledge and power against the monstrous threat.

In the late twentieth century, Toni Morrison's Beloved performs a radical reclamation and revision of the Gothic, using its conventions to articulate the unspeakable trauma of slavery. The novel transposes the Gothic's haunted castle into the site of the "old house" at 124 Bluestone Road, which is, as Fred Botting (1996) describes, "the scene for a narrative that moves between the past and the present to uncover... the external and internal effects of racial oppression" (p. 161). The ghost, Beloved, is not a supernatural specter in the traditional sense but, as Cavallaro (2002) notes, a manifestation of what is "unspeakable," a figure that "problematizes the retrieval of lost or missing subjects" (p. 71). This spectral presence makes visible the "seething presence" of a history that ideology seeks to render invisible (Cavallaro, 2002, p. 71). Morrison utilizes the Gothic's central affective dynamic, but recalibrates it; the terror and horror here are not born of imagination or the grotesque alone but from the real, historical horror of systemic violence and its enduring psychological scars. The novel, as Cavallaro (2002) states, "foregrounds the ideological dimension of spectrality with reference to the legacy of slavery and racial oppression" (p. 71), proving the Gothic's enduring power to give form to the most profound and repressed anxieties of a culture, making the past a palpable, and monstrous, presence in the present.

#### Conclusion

In this chapter the multifaceted theoretical and historical framework

has been developed in a bid to explain the complex association that existed between the Gothic tradition and the monster. The ultimate aim of it has been to conglomerate the core works of Cohen, Kristeva, Botting, and Halberstam with the help of an in-depth descriptive investigation of those critical writings that form the canon of monster theory and Gothic studies. It is based on this synthesis that the chapter shows how the monster is more of a deep cultural construct than a mere narrative tool a hieroglyphic text that, according to Cohen (1996), is there "to be read" (p. 4). The word is demonstratively attached to its etymology, which was based on monstrare (to show) and it underlines its potential in policing boundaries and in defining the self through the spectre of the Other. Thus, the monster is a complex of social fears and desires. The chapter goes on to suggest, that monstrosity is a central process, through which cultures describe, negotiate, and control their most profound anxieties. This is achieved through the definition of the monster, its characteristics which are based on abjection and category crisis, as well as its general social and affective actions.

In addition, this discussion will place these theoretical elements in the context of the dynamic development of the Gothic tradition itself. Since its inception in the eighteenth century in the enthusiasm of the tourist for the ruins of the feudal past, and external of the city, the Gothic has terminated up to now as a mode that is both resilient and flexible. It is a "writing of excess", as Botting (1996) defines it as (p.1), its conventions, the haunted space, the fractured narrative, the double and the switching between terror and horror, are the basic grammar of the monster appearance. Discoveries of major texts including Frankenstein, Dracula and Beloved reveal this flexibility in action where the same gothic lexicon can be used to address the terrors of scientific ambitions, imperial and sexual neurosis and the longstanding wound of past atrocities.

The chapter performs two roles in providing this groundwork. First, it aims at shedding light on the contemporary state of the critical discourse, and stimulating an additional study thus establishing an updated stable base on which all the further investigations of the monsters and of the Gothic can be sustained. All of the theoretical frameworks discussed in this chapter, including abjection and monster culture, provide fruitful possibilities to analyse the constantly growing body of monstrous portrayals in media and times. Second, and more proximate, this unified framework is the vital element the basis of the case studies which are to follow in this book. The definitions, historical paths and theoretical paradigms developed in this chapters will be used in the coming chapters with direct applications to concrete and limited effects on a given text. With the identification of what the monster is and the functioning of the Gothic tradition now in place, this book project turns to a more specific and detailed analysis of how those forces are brought together in specific times of culture and specific monstrous bodies to illustrate the continuing ability of the monster to extract the lines of the human condition.

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## From Victorian Terror to Digital Control: Wells's The Invisible Man and the Gaze of Surveillance Capitalism 8

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#### **Abstract**

This article argues that H.G. Wells's 1897 novel, The Invisible Man, functions as a radical literary inversion of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, offering a profound critique of power, visibility, and social control. The protagonist, Griffin, a brilliant but morally corrupt scientist, achieves absolute invisibility, thereby escaping the social contract and becoming the ultimate "unseen watcher." Unlike the Panopticon's inmate, who is controlled by the possibility of a perpetual gaze, Griffin's unaccountable invisibility grants him freedom that accelerates his descent into megalomania and terror. By detailing the structural reversal embodied by Griffin—the visible majority subjected to the invisible few—this study connects Wells's Victorian-era cautionary tale to modern anxieties surrounding digital surveillance. The essay demonstrates how contemporary phenomena, such as the "chilling effect" of mass monitoring algorithmic gaze of Surveillance Capitalism, realize the terrifying potential of Griffin's "Reign of Terror." Ultimately, The Invisible Man transcends its genre to serve as a timeless reflection on the politics of gaze, warning that the unchecked power of the invisible few will always threaten the liberty of the visible people.

#### Introduction

Rapid scientific advancement and profound social change in the late nineteenth century created the ideal setting for H.G. Wells's fiction. His 1897 novel, *The Invisible Man*, transcends its genre as a cautionary tale of scientific hubris, offering a critique of power, visibility, and social control that remains acutely relevant today. The novel's protagonist, Griffin, a

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brilliant but morally bankrupt scientist, achieves the ultimate escape from the social contract by rendering himself invisible. This act of self-erasure from the visible world immediately invites a comparison with the architectural and philosophical model of control established a century earlier: Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon.

Surveillance is vital to keep the population docile. The "new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind" started with Jeremy Bentham's idea of Panopticon in the 18th century (1995). The Panopticon is a type of institutional building and a system of obtaining power over people originally designed in order to observe the people in a building, especially in prisons. Michael Foucault carried the idea of Panopticon one step further in his Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (1975) and used it as a metaphor for modern disciplinary superstructures, which rely on discipline through surveillance to maintain order. Bentham's model was physical and helped the people in control have the upper hand in those kinds of institutions. The Panopticon is one of the most significant architectural designs in the history of social control. Initially proposed as an ideal design for a prison, Bentham envisioned its principles applying broadly to any institution requiring efficient supervision, including schools, hospitals, and factories. Architecturally, the Panopticon was circular in shape with cells for single inmates arranged along the outer wall, each being illuminated by a window. The central lookout tower was situated right at the centre. The core concept of the layout was the mind game: a supervisor in the tower had the ability to see all the cells, however, the prisoners could never find out whether they were really being watched at any moment. The Panopticon's power lay in the inmates' inability to verify if they were being watched. Bentham believed that the constant possibility of surveillance would lead the inmates to a state of "conscious visibility." This psychological pressure would compel them to regulate their own behaviour, acting as if they were perpetually under inspection, thus achieving "the power of mind over mind" with minimal physical intervention or staff.

Foucault moves it further and asserts that the panopticon should not be seen as "a dream building." To be more precise, it is a schematic depiction of a power mechanism in its ideal condition. It is crucial to demonstrate the faultless operation of the "architectural and optical system" without any impediments, objections, or opposition. As a matter of fact, it is a political method that should be separated from any particular use (1977, 205). Foucault believes that Bentham's original idea of panopticon has been used by the ruling class to exert their power over their citizens. For him, the aim of the panopticon is to create and sustain "a power relation independent of the person who exercise it" (201). The physical model of Bentham was based on the concept of discipline. The prisoner would be in the gaze of the watcher and check his/her behavior accordingly. Also, they would feel the watchtower psychologically. The objective of this is to determine the existence or absence of persons, to ascertain their whereabouts and how to discover them, to build effective means of communication, to disrupt the activities of others, and to continuously monitor the behaviour of each individual (143). Using panopticon, the superstructure controls the subjected bodies, who start to normalize and internalize the gaze psychologically. As a result of being observed, the subjected bodies feel more isolated, and this prevents the subjects from organizing. Foucault suggests that "he who is subjected to a field of visibility... makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection" (202-203). Knowing they might be watched, the individual regulates their own behaviour, thus becoming both the subject of control and the agent of their own discipline.

The Invisible Man presents a radical inversion of this paradigm. Unlike the Panopticon's inmate, who is perpetually visible and thus controlled, Wells's Griffin is the unseen watcher—a man who has completely escaped the radar of social accountability. His invisibility grants him a sense of absolute autonomy to break the moral and social shackles of civilization. This work argues that H.G. Wells's *The Invisible Man* functions as a literary inversion of the Panopticon, using Griffin's unbalanced visibility to prefigure modern anxieties surrounding digital surveillance and unaccountable power. By analysing Griffin's descent into megalomania and terror, this study will first establish the novel's critique of unchecked scientific power. It will then detail the Panoptic model of control to highlight the structural reversal embodied by Griffin. Finally, it will connect the novel's central theme—the danger posed by an invisible entity that can observe and manipulate without consequence—to the contemporary issues of digital surveillance, where corporations, governments, and algorithms operate as unseen watchers over a visible society. The novel, therefore, serves not merely as a work of science fiction, but as a profound reflection on the limits of surveillance and the corrosive nature of absolute, invisible power.

#### Griffin: The Unseen Watcher

Griffin is a brilliant scientist who, against all odds, manages to make himself invisible through a groundbreaking discovery. This scientific achievement is immediately corrupted by his moral failings, thus turning him into both a scientific wonder and a threat to the society. Griffin is depicted as a human

monster, a figure whose body and behaviour deviate from social norms. Griffin embodies a complex duality where he is simultaneously a victim and a perpetrator of exploitation. He represents the system's creation and now, he angrily confronts the system, and, therefore, his childhood memories of being marginalized, rejected, and isolated which eventually caused him to commit exploitative actions. He stands for chaos, flaw, and irregularity as the representative of a pervert whose looks go beyond the visible realm.

Griffin's moral trajectory is defined by a destructive blend of isolation and megalomania, a process that his invisibility merely accelerates. Even prior to his scientific breakthrough, Griffin was an isolated figure, driven by a singular, all-consuming ambition that placed him outside the conventional social sphere. This pre-existing alienation is both a cause and a consequence of his subsequent actions. His inability to integrate into the community of Iping and his profound scorn for human connection stand in sharp contrast to the expected conduct of a Victorian scientist. As his experience of invisibility deepens, this alienation is exacerbated, severing his final connection to the moral and social world (Glinski, 39). He admits to Dr. Kemp:

I did not feel then that I was lonely, that I had come out from the world into a desolate place. I appreciated my loss of sympathy, but I put it down to the general inanity of things. Re-entering my room seemed like the recovery of reality. There were the things I knew and loved. There stood the apparatus, the experiments arranged and waiting (81).

After Griffin makes himself invisible, his one ambition quickly becomes a wild and destructive megalomania. He acts in a terrorizing way after obtaining his power of invisibility, and to make himself feel even more superior. His overestimation of himself stems from intellectual arrogance, a trait evident even during his student days, as shown by the Kemp rivalry. For him, invisibility is the turning point that leads to his fall of morals. Having the freedom to do as he pleases without being caught ruins his morality. He "descends into a mental state of paranoid savagery as he carries the weight of his moral degeneration" (Glinski, 37). He considers people as simply tools for achieving his own ends. Griffin's scientific attitude is a pseudoscientific one. He does not follow the standard Victorian scientific rule, "formal procedures should be congruent with the phenomena observed" (Kucich, 123). He recklessly exploits his scientific knowledge for his own personal gain, without giving a thought to the consequences for others.

Griffin's descent is fuelled by his experience of social rejection and isolation. His intellect and heart are polluted by the cold logic of the modern world which he takes from his own groundbreaking scientific discoveries. Although he is a scientific genius, he turns out to be a fugitive whose works and achievements are regarded as mere abnormalities by a society that refuses to recognize him. In the end, he is a victim of the system he fights against, physically susceptible to being badly handled by an angry crowd and getting defeated even though he is invisible. He benefits from horror mechanisms by employing fear and physical danger, primarily facilitated by his invisibility and psychological instability. The primary mechanism of horror is the unseen, intangible threat that can strike at any moment. The terror is a response to the disruption of the normal way of life and the hierarchical system that the threat to the Griffins represents. The townspeople's initial reaction to his reveal is pure panic:

It was worse than anything. Mrs. Hall, standing open-mouthed and horror-struck, shrieked at what she saw, and made for the door of the house. Everyone began to move. They were prepared for scars, disfigurements, tangible horrors, but nothing! The bandages and false hair flew across the passage into the bar, making a hobbledehoy jump to avoid them. Everyone tumbled on everyone else down the steps. For the man who stood there shouting some incoherent explanation, was a solid gesticulating figure up to the coat-collar of him, and then--nothingness, no visible thing at all! (35).

The basic terror that the book conveys is the fact that this horror cannot be shown visually. When he shows himself to the villagers, they expect "scars, disfigurements, tangible horrors, but nothing!" This awful "nothingness" causes terror and makes the people run away.

Griffin dangerously challenges the existing order and terrorizes society. Among the crimes he commits with the help of his invisibility are robbery, violation, terrorization, and murder. The town is immediately seized with horror upon the arrival of the invisible man and people start to scream, run, and lock their doors. The invisible Griffin violates the most basic social contract: visibility. He is a walking paradox, an "exposed interior" with an "absent surface." This, in turn, compels society to confront the "horrific inability of interiority to manifest a legible identity" (Bowser, 22). What frightens people is the fact that a person can still be there and be active yet be completely unaccountable and unknowable.

He considers himself a revolutionary, announcing the beginning of the "new epoch—the Epoch of the Invisible Man". One of his ideas is to create a "Reign of Terror" in a selected town by dictating orders and slaughtering

the disobedient to assert his power. Ultimately, his goal is to control the entire world and assert his dominance over those who once scorned him. He seeks to dominate society through fear and violence. His method is a calculated form of psychological warfare:

Not wanton killing, but a judicious slaying. The point is, they know there is an Invisible Man--as well as we know there is an Invisible Man. And that Invisible Man, Kemp, must now establish a Reign of Terror. Yes; no doubt it's startling. But I mean it. A Reign of Terror. He must take some town like your Burdock and terrify and dominate it. He must issue his orders. He can do that in a thousand ways-scraps of paper thrust under doors would suffice. And all who disobey his orders he must kill and kill all who would defend them (106).

Griffin's desires and goals transitioned from one of a scientist by nature to purely greedy, and finally, to that of a power-hungry one who wants to see the world burn. The initial one is the intellectual and scientific triumph of his discovery. After that, the only thing he can think of is to use the benefits of his new state. Invisibility gives him "impunity" to do "all the wild and wonderful things" (88). The first things he intends to do are selfish and criminal in nature: to use his invisibility in robbery and violations. He manipulates others to carry out his work, including his father: "I robbed the old man—robbed my father. The money was not his, and he shot himself" (80). Griffin's far-fetched, megalomaniac idea is to take over and create a new social order in which he is the invisible, absolute ruler. One of the things he is going to do, among others, is the "Reign of Terror." It comes about as a result of the vicious circle of social rejection and loneliness he experiences, which makes him want to flip the roles and become the oppressor. He wants "to terrify and dominate" a community and at the same time be "the enforcer of the unseen tyranny" that is himself (Nakwah, 253). His last, hopeless idea is to kill Dr. Kemp, his betrayer, as a public hanging to show the beginning of his reign: "The first day there will be one execution for the sake of example—a man named Kemp. Death starts for him to-day... Death, the unseen Death, is coming" (Wells, 114).

The terror that Griffin describes in his 'Reign of Terror' can be considered as the totalitarian regime of fear that is used to control people when the power source is completely mysterious and not subject to any kind of control. Still, the book illustrates this absolute liberty as a kind of self-destructive weapon that drives the character to paranoia, violence, and deep isolation. The invisibility of Griffin, who looks for power through it, finally separates him from humans. He loses the basic things that constitutes human life as

he can neither reveal his secret, nor have real relationships, nor even make use of the simplest things. Besides, this estrangement is intensified by the continuous necessity to avoid being caught, which leads to a pessimistic state of mind, even paranoia. So, the world turns out to be his enemy and his power, instead of making him happy, becomes the cause of his disorder. In the beginning of the book, for instance, he declares, "An invisible man is a man of power," seeing invisibility as a victorious scientific breakthrough that takes him beyond common human limits (44). However, as the story goes, so does his "power" become paranoia and estrangement. Not only is he chased by society but also by his own solitude, and thus he complains he is lonely and miserable. The very same invisibility that is to be the source of his absolute power is the one that disentitles him and separates him from the human community.

In Wells's *The Invisible Man* (1897), invisibility is used as a radical foil to Bentham's Panopticon. While Bentham's structure guarantees order through the possible constant observation, Griffin's invisibility power flips this hierarchy—he is the one who is invisible and therefore free from being seen and from giving account of his actions to the moral sphere. In the terrifying picture of a "Reign of Terror," Griffin dreams of being able to carry out total observation and control of other people without being himself under any kind of control. His invisibility thus makes him the very person who has an immense power without regulation—the individual Panopticon without a moral side. One of the key characteristics of the architecture designed by Jeremy Bentham was the establishment of a hierarchical system of power in which the person in charge monitoring from the central, secret location was invisible, but the inmates who were under observation were made to be visible at all times, thus being forced to regulate themselves. Griffin's invisibility, however, is a complete contrast to this by giving the ability of the invisible observation not to a centrally located, strictly disciplinary institution, but to just one, free individual. Griffin becomes the ultimate unseen watcher, able to watch others without ever being seen, thus acquiring a frightening freedom from moral and legal accountability. The single, uncontested power of observation is basically what his metamorphosis is all about. In the Panopticon, the mere chance of being watched regulates behaviour; in Griffin's world, the certainty of not being watched eliminates it. His invisibility is certainly not just an product of science but a moral abyss which makes him able to go beyond social norms. The very liberty he achieves is not that of emancipation, but he transforms from a genius scientist to a megalomaniacal villain. As the ultimate unseen observer, Griffin attains an absolute dominance of vision over a world which is always visible.

While the Panopticon employs the invisible gaze to impose conformity, morality, and discipline on the masses for low-cost control, Griffin's invisibility enables him to disregard all norms and social rules for private gain. Griffin's invisibility essentially changes the character of the game by granting the power of the unseen watcher to a single person who is highly self-interested, rather than to a bureaucratic or institutional authority. The use of this unrestrained power is most obvious in Griffin's horrifying idea of a "Reign of Terror." Fed up with being driven to desperation and violence by the practical difficulties of his situation, he imagines using his invisibility to take over society. He sets up a concept of a total, invisible dictatorship where terror, rather than law, is the tool of governing.

The story dramatically shows how this invisible power that no one can see but is self-destructive. When Griffin is caught and killed, he becomes visible again. His death makes him visible again—quite literally bringing him back to the human condition only through death. So, Wells is implying that a very total invisibility, or the illusion of watching without any accountability, will wipe out the very core of being human. Where Bentham's Panopticon is a device of control through the look, the absence of the look in Griffin's reversed Panopticon kills. The invisible watcher, who is not restrained by the social sight, turns out to be a demon, thus proving that being seen and moral involvement are necessary for human living together.

#### From Victorian Invisibility to Digital Surveillance

The history of surveillance could be tracked through three distinct models of the gaze that illustrate different power-subject relationships. The first one was Foucault's Panopticon which was intended to reform and promote self-discipline only by the architectural assurance that the inmate might be watched at any time. The disciplinary power exercised through the Panopticon resulted in the emergence of "docile bodies," i.e., subjects who had internalized the gaze and consequently became their own wardens. This power is essentially productive as it legitimizes behaviour so as to make individuals useful members of society. The second model, Griffin's Reversed Panopticon, on the other hand, is completely different, as it aims at the domination and control of a single individual by the absolute, invisible power. The terror caused by Griffin's inability to be located is thus immediate and, consequently, collective resistance becomes the final reaction of the frightened people. Being a purely repressive power, this system depends on the threat of force to oppress the people and impose an arbitrary will upon them. The third and most complex model of surveillance is one of Digital Surveillance, which can be seen as a combination of the two previous

models. The first of its two purposes is to create a profit for Surveillance Capitalism (Zuboff, 2019) by means of extracting and selling personal data, while the second one is to assure security through state surveillance. So, the control here is of a layered nature whereby the self-discipline of the Panopticon (the chilling effect) is present, as well as the fear of an unseen, unaccountable watcher (Griffin's terror), and voluntary participation which Byung-Chul Han terms as the exploitation of freedom (2015). Therefore, the digital gaze is capable of not only being productive shaping behaviour towards consumption and normalization but also being repressive dissent and enforcing compliance. The integration of productive and repressive forces accomplished via the invisible, algorithmic gaze is what identifies the digital era as the most penetrating and impregnable system of control so far, a system that has effectively realized the potential of the unseen watcher to govern the visible subject.

The most profound parallel between H.G. Wells's invisible man and the modern digital gaze lies in the psychological mechanism of control: the chilling effect of mass surveillance. The chilling effect is described as follows by Manokha: "the concept of 'chilling effect' is now widely used to describe changes in behaviour made by individuals, aware of being under surveillance, to be in conformity with the perceived norms or expectations of the surveyors" (228). This effect, which describes the voluntary selfcensorship and behavioural modification induced by the awareness of being monitored, is the modern, systemic realization of the terror Griffin seeks to unleash.

In The Invisible Man, Griffin's single hand power to victimize is not the main factor that gives him power, but rather his indeterminate presence. The people of the town are kept in a condition of continuous dread as they know that the invisible man could be anywhere, looking, listening, or getting ready to attack. That incessant threat, which could not be found, forces them to change their way of living, to use lower voice levels when speaking, and to consider that every unexplained noise is a trick of the invisible man. Their fear is not of something visible but rather of the invisible that could be capable of acting. This frightening fiction from the past has a modern-day counterpart in the Snowden revelations in 2013. The disclosures laid bare the extensive and unobserved powers of the NSA and other similar state agencies to collect and analyse digital communication of millions of people. In Snowden's view, "because he [Snowden] made the public more aware of the NSA's operations and the extent of their surveillance, he reinstated a culture of self-surveillance that had been lost in the rise of the digital age" (Sheridan, 8). The surveillance machinery, however, was still concealed—a

kind of decentralized network of algorithms and data trawlers. Nevertheless, the awareness of such an apparatus was given to the public. For Ivan Manokha, this awareness is what turns the digital environment into an even more 'panoptic' one than the original architectural model (2018).

Such a chilling effect that followed is quite comparable with the fear of the people of the town in the digital world and is the new version of it. The studies that came after Snowden revelations depicted that a noticeable increase in the cases of self-censorship was recorded, especially that of journalists, activists, and those individuals who involved in the discussion of sensitive topics. People started to avoid using certain search terms, stop airing their controversial views on the internet, and went for encrypted communication methods not because they did something illegal, but because they knew that they could still be monitored. The main reason why the modern Panopticon is so effective is because people "aware of being under surveillance, may end up exercising power over themselves without any coercion or use of force by other actors" (Manokha, 3). This is the core of the chilling effect which is a perfect analogy with the psychological terror that Griffin tried to establish. His power is not from a visible army but from the threat that was not locatable, yet his invisible presence forces the townspeople to change their behaviour, talk in low voices, and live in constant anxiety. In the both worlds-the fictional one and the digital realitythe watcher who is not seen whether it is a scientist with megalomaniacal tendencies or a large data-collection system achieves his/its goal by making the visible subject their own jailer, thus ensuring compliance through the potential of the gaze rather than through physical power. In both situations, the power of the invisible observer is not the mere act of watching, but rather the self-discipline which it internally evokes. The terror of the unseen—be it a megalomaniacal scientist or a huge, incomprehensible data-collection system—forces the visible subject to follow the rules, to regulate their own thoughts and actions, and to give up the freedom which the digital age was supposed to bring. The Snowden revelations briefly made the invisible watcher visible, but the main lasting effect is the self-imposed silence of the watched, which is a proof of the still powerful unseen gaze.

Another major similarity is the invisible tracking of digital cookies and the unnoticed change of society by Griffin, which provides an example to the central thesis of the Reversed Panopticon. In a similar way, as Griffin secretly enters the town, spying on the public's movements, talks, and secrets, digital cookies are in a similar way invisible in their operation across the internet and are mostly without user consent or at least consent is not explicitly given. Cookies are there to record each click, each search term,

and each buying preference, thus personal data is stored as a commercial product. This invisible tracking has the same fundamental power as Griffin's manipulation: information asymmetry. However, the difference is that Griffin uses the invisibility to gain knowledge and terrorize and dominate society, whereas the data collected via cookies is used to make behavioural predictions and subsequently "nudge" user behaviour toward profitable outcomes. As Byung-Chul Han puts it, this dynamic is a system of invisible control which works by exploiting the subject's freedom: "The digital society of control makes intensive use of freedom. It is only possible thanks to voluntary self-illumination and self-exposure. It exploits freedom" (Han, viii).

Han's idea of "exploiting freedom" is central to grasping the psychological depth of both the Panopticon and Griffin's terror. Essentially, it is a critique of the stereotypical view of power as mere coercion, revealing it as internalization. In the original Panopticon, the system utilizes the prisoner's cognitive freedom — their freedom to think they are being watched — in order to dominate. The prisoner is supposedly free to act as he pleases, but the fact that he could be observed at any time exploits his fear of punishment. The prisoner voluntarily embraces the gaze and thus controls himself, in effect, making himself his own guard, for he is free to choose the less dangerous path. The system takes advantage of their freedom of choice to create a docile body that behaves as expected without the need for constant, visible coercion. Griffin's control over the public is a forcible, but nonetheless, a direct exploitation of the public's freedom. The townspeople could physically do whatever they wanted, but Griffin's invisibility was taking advantage of their fearlessness. By murdering people at will and without being seen, he forces the public to opt for self-censorship and compliance voluntarily. They choose their own free will to give up their freedom in return for security which, at least from their point of view, is guaranteed. Griffin is taking advantage of their basic right to live without fear to establish his imperceptible reign. Nowadays, with the advent of the internet, the exploitation is even more sneaky, as it is aimed at the user's need for self-expression and the desire for the things to be easy. The system takes advantage of the user's need for connection by forcing them to give up their privacy. Those in power are at their best when they manipulate the targets' own rational decisions and freedoms for self-control, thus making subjects not only the most helpless, but also active, willing participants in their own domination.

Shoshana Zuboff refers to this apparatus as "surveillance capitalism," in which people see themselves turned into a data commodity. According to

Shoshana Zuboff in The Age of Surveillance Capitalism (2019), this new system is essentially to be seen as the commoditization of the human experience that is given for free and made subject to behavioural data. In this so-called "economy of visibility," the human being is on one hand the generator and on the other hand the product: practically every click, movement, and interaction is seized and turned into data that help the predictive models. The cell of Bentham's Panopticon is replaced by the algorithm's architecture—a system that monitors but does not reveal itself. Users, similarly, to the inhabitants of Bentham's prison, are always visible but do not know who or what—is watching them. The power dynamic has been turned to become even more asymmetrical: visibility no longer guarantees accountability but instead it deepens the dependence on the invisible digital gaze. The watcher is now a system, not a human, a decentralized network of surveillance that makes the concept of privacy almost disappear. Thus, the digital era is a realization and even a progression of the Panopticon's logic: a complete observation without a visible observer.

In addition, isolation is the shared destiny of both Griffin and the modern subject under the Reversed Panopticon. Griffin's invisibility, which he considered as the ultimate freedom, turns out to be his most terrible prison. Separated from real human connection, not being able to share his secret or take pleasure in the simple things of life, his power makes him paranoid and thus, he ends up in a desperate, solitary struggle against the world. He is, in fact, the very isolated figure, the tragic outcome of his power. Similarly, the digital gaze, though it seems to connect us, is the cause of a new kind of isolation. The chilling effect leads individuals to self-censorship and selfrestraint; thus, they disengage from real, open communication. Byung-Chul Han defends the idea that the human soul needs "realms where it can be at home without the gaze of the Other" and that if there were no shadows, "it would scorch the soul and cause spiritual burnout of a certain kind" (3). The continuous being of watched even if by an algorithm imposes on the subject a condition of perpetual performance and guardedness which in the end leads to psychic isolation - the same lonely, paranoid fate that devoured Griffin.

#### Conclusion

H.G. Wells's, The Invisible Man remains a profound and unsettling work precisely because it offers a radical, literary inversion of the Panoptic model of control. By granting Griffin absolute, unaccountable invisibility, Wells effectively flipped the hierarchy established by Bentham and analysed by Foucault. The novel's central argument is that the true danger to society is not the perpetually watched inmate, but the unseen watcher—the individual or entity that can observe, manipulate, and terrorize without ever being subject to the moral and legal constraints of visibility. Griffin's descent into megalomania and his terrifying plan for a "Reign of Terror" serve as a cautionary tale about the corrosive nature of power divorced from accountability.

This story from the Victorian era miraculously connects with our times. The Panopticon is no longer a literal building that shows each prisoner to the guard but has changed into a global digital world where everyone can be watched and no one knows when. So, the ordinary person is now a kind of prisoner who is always under the eye and is chased by his/her numerous invisible watchers: algorithms, business enterprises, and state surveillance apparatuses. These modern entities operate with a degree of invisibility and impunity that mirrors Griffin's own, collecting data and exerting control over behaviour without ever being fully seen or held to account. Ultimately, The Invisible Man transcends its genre to become a timeless reflection on the politics of sight. Wells's novel forces us to confront the uncomfortable truth that in any system of power, the greatest threat to freedom is the one who can see everything while remaining unseen. The enduring relevance of Griffin's story lies in its warning: that the unchecked power of the invisible few will always threaten the liberty of the visible many.

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#### Chapter 3

# Gothic Self-Alienation and Psychological Collapse in Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray 8

#### Ali Kubat<sup>1</sup>

#### Abstract

The Victorian era, a period when human life changed and transformed, opened the door to a new world for humanity. As life changed with industrialization, people also transformed some of their ideas along with the changes in their mindset. Lifestyles, morals, ideas, and values were affected and transformed in many segments of society by these changes and transformations. Disproportionate shifts in social structure have caused the rich to become richer while the lower classes become poorer. All of this has led to hypocrisy, immorality, and many other negative transformations in society. Developments in morally degenerate societies have had profound repercussions on human life. Oscar Wilde, one of the most important writers of this period, demonstrated the degeneration of humanity and how it can become monstrous in a changing world in his intriguing work, The Picture of Dorian Gray. Therefore, this study will explain how this work, considered gothic, addressed human life and how the deterioration of social structures in a changing and transforming world affected people's search for meaning and their mindset. It should be noted that the work argues that Dorian's transformation into a monstrous figure stems from the tension between aesthetic surface and moral interiority, generating a form of horror rooted in psychological and ethical decay. At the heart of the book is the portrait, which functions as a site of externalized abjection: a Gothic mirror that absorbs the consequences of Dorian's actions, revealing his hidden self as he becomes increasingly grotesque. Starting from this point, the fact that man becomes a monster by succumbing to his inner ambition, endless desire to live and emotions will be discussed and from this point on, the ways in which man has alienated himself, broken away from society and become a monster in today's world will be revealed. Through the examination of Dorian's portrait, a mechanism emerges that reveals moral collapse and psychological degeneration; this is Dorian's loss of humanity, even of himself, by revealing the dark side inherent in every human being.

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#### Introduction

Oscar Wilde's work, The Picture of Dorian Gray, holds a crucial place in late 19th-century English literature in terms of moral aesthetics. The relationship between art, beauty, and morality was a prevalent topic of discussion during this period. The Picture of Dorian Gray is a decadent novel that tells the story of a young man who sells his self and soul to the devil for eternal youth and beauty. And also, it is accepted as a Gothic fiction. Gothic is considered to be a genre or mode of literature that combines fiction, horror and romanticism. From another point of view, Douglas H. Thompson says that "the Gothic, with its gallery of dissipated aristocrats, expresses middleclass rage against unchecked aristocratic power" (Thompson, 2002, p. 406). Wilde, in writing, challenged social expectations. While Dorian is initially presented as a beautiful and captivating person, his transformation into a monster gradually unfolds. He describes how his transformation into a monster leads to a moral collapse and alienation from himself. This depresses Dorian, and his inner self decays.

Dorian Gray's portrait not only depicts his frightening transformations but also his decline and loss of humanity. This portrait reveals Dorian's detachment from the world, from his gradual descent into ecstasy to his moral decline. Every time Dorian looks at the portrait, all he sees is his own ugliness, and as a result, his humanity is dragged into darkness. The book depicts the striking struggle between society's perception of ideal beauty and Dorian's monstrosity. Thus, Wilde's transformation of the concept of horror through the character of Dorian Gray reveals how modern man conceals his inner conflicts, self-alienation, and moral decline under the guise of beauty. This, in turn, reveals problems not only for Dorian but also for society as a whole, from multiple perspectives.

## The Novel's Central Internal Tension: Pleasure, Spiritual Progress, and Psychological Darkness

Wilde explores the loss of self-caused by the pursuit of pleasure. Dorian's changes in behavior reflect both psychological collapse and the collapse of the self. This section will examine how Dorian loses his humanity in his pursuit of pleasure. Dorian is very young, beautiful, and inexperienced. He is someone who does not know himself and has not discovered his inner self. Consequently, he is vulnerable to emotional influences. His emotional state is susceptible to influence and manipulation by anyone. He accepts his beauty as a natural state, believing it to be a necessary moral value. This, in turn, paves the way for his psychological downfall. Even today, people experience

downfalls because they fail to achieve this kind of self-awareness. For Wilde, achieving personal pleasure is achieved by abandoning moral values, and these values are reflected in Lord Henry's thinking throughout the story. After meeting Lord Henry, Dorian descends into an even more rapid moral decline. Lord Henry convinces Dorian that pleasure is the sole purpose. He believes one must live life to the fullest. In other words, hedonistic thinking, the idea that one should live for pleasure and that pleasure should form the foundation of one's life, is so effective at manipulating Dorian that his psychological voids are easily influenced by these ideas. It is clear when Lord Henry starts seducing Dorian as he (Henry) says:

"I believe that if one man were to live out his life fully and completely, were to give form to every feeling, expression to every thought, reality to every dream - I believe that the world would gain such a fresh impulse of joy that we would forget all the maladies of medievalism, and return to the Hellenic ideal - to something finer, richer, than the Hellenic ideal, it may be. But the bravest man amongst us is afraid of himself. The mutilation of the savage has its tragic survival in the self-denial that mars our lives. We are punished for our refusals. Every impulse that we strive to strangle broods in the mind and poisons us. The body sins once, and has done with its sin, for action is a mode of purification. Nothing remains then but the recollection of a pleasure, or the luxury of a regret. The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it. Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden to itself, with desire for what its monstrous laws have made monstrous and unlawful. It has been said that the great events of the world take place in the brain. It is in the brain, and the brain only, that the great sins of the world take place also" (Wilde, 2013, pp. 30-31).

As a young man, unable to establish his own values, he suddenly finds a gateway to his purpose in life, and this gateway proves alluring. For Henry, even if his youth and beauty fade one day, only pleasure will remain. Dorian embraces this idea so deeply that he believes he will live happily if he lives a life focused on pleasure, while at the same time, the transience of his beauty and youth fills him with profound fear. Psychological conflicts continue to escalate throughout the book. Dorian, who does not want to lose his beauty in his pursuit of pleasure, sees beauty as a moral immunity from that moment on. He idealizes himself so intensely that he begins to see any means necessary to preserve this ideal. Consequently, his psychological collapse gradually paves the way for his downfall.

Pleasure is a very attractive principle, but it is fleeting. When it fades,

when the truth emerges, it is impossible for a person to accept it. A person who cannot accept it falls into psychological depression. Modern humans are also lost in their pursuit of pleasure. Wilde, centuries ago, brilliantly laid out the foundation of human psychological and moral decline with philosophy. Lord Henry describes pleasure to Dorian, but he doesn't specify what the consequences will be. By the time Dorian realizes the consequences, it will be too late for him. This decline has become difficult to reverse and has given rise to profound pathological problems. No matter how beautiful, attractive, or aesthetically pleasing a person, if their inner self is engulfed in darkness, that darkness will not change. Consequently, a person's inner darkness breeds shame. As Allan Baker says:

"It is important to realize that Dorian is first of all an artistic ideal, and the corruption that he undergoes in his hedonistic pursuit of pleasure is the corruption of an artistic ideal. The fact that Dorian's corruption shows only on Hallward's canvas. Hallward's initial self consciousness and mishandling of the ideal have doleful consequences, and it is significant that the artist himself introduces Dorian to Lord Henry's capture (Baker, 1969, p. 355)."

Dorian is horrified after hearing from Henry that his beauty will one day fade. This marks a psychological turning point for him. Beauty is his most important existential value, and facing the reality of losing it brings out the monstrous and terrifying side within him. His fears drive his thoughts, and the decisions he makes are never right. To protect himself, he makes the wrong decisions. He looks at the portrait painted by Basil Hallward and wishes that this portrait would age, not him. While this desire is impossible in the real world, it materializes as a psychological metaphor in the novel. The portrait becomes the carrier of Dorian's spiritual life. As Dorian descends into darkness, depravity, and decadence, the portrait takes on an ugly and aged appearance, while Dorian remains the same no matter how much time passes. Thus, Dorian's soul is split into two distinct objects. This is contrary to human nature. As a person is split into two halves, they continue to drift towards the dark side.

The psychological and spiritual transformation Dorian undergoes begins to leave ugly marks on his portrait. Wilde touches upon the psychological point at which a person can sacrifice all their inner beauty for beauty. Pleasure may temporarily bring Dorian pleasant feelings that bring him happiness, but over time, he becomes so insensitive and unfeeling that his psychological collapse transforms him into an insensitive monster. As he becomes more insensitive, Dorian becomes irrational and lacks the capacity for empathy.

It could be argued that his alienation from his true self and his moral and psychological collapse are a consequence of this insensitivity. As Dorian's psychological makeup evolves towards darkness and monstrosity, he takes on a personality impervious to the feelings and experiences of others. This isolation creates a complete egocentrism. A person who sees himself as the center of the world fails to understand the suffering of others, fails to hear their desires, and fails to acknowledge their existence. Just as pleasure isolates a person from others, so too does he become alienated from his own self—in other words, he becomes alienated from himself. A person alienated from himself cannot be expected to live a morally and psychologically correct life. The more painful his portrait becomes, the more insensitive he becomes in an attempt to escape his own suffering. Because deep down, he knows that the portrait has become this way as a result of his evil actions. Humanity is terrified of facing its own truth. These truths are a tool for him to find his true self. But using these tools requires responsibility. And a person who is not strong enough avoids responsibility, just like Dorian.

Dorian's transformation into a monster doesn't happen overnight; he gradually slides from the allure of pleasure to spiritual degradation, and each stage of this slide is psychologically based. The most dangerous aspect of pleasure is that it makes one feel good but doesn't make one better. A person who fails to see the difference between these two points gradually becomes alienated from themselves. This is Dorian's situation. He feeds himself on pleasure, but becomes empty inside. For someone addicted to pleasure, there are no limits; they only want more. Dorian, too, lives with the desire to "feel more," but every feeling brings a new collapse. Here, Wilde demonstrates that pleasure does not sustain one; it only deepens the emptiness within. The story of Dorian Gray is not an aesthetic-social event; it is the story of the growing power of the psychological monster a person creates within themselves.

## Dorian's Psychological Disintegration: Shame, Fear, and Alienation

Dorian Gray's collapse, which unfolds as he distances himself from his true self, is the most striking aspect of the novel. As Dorian becomes increasingly alienated from himself, his actions begin to change. Fear, shame, and self-alienation are central to the process of change and transformation. All these elements of change carry profound implications for how Dorian's psychological collapse occurs. When a person avoids confronting their own self, what emerges is actually fear. For Dorian, the source of this fear is the terrifying changes he sees in his self-portrait. As the portrait changes,

Dorian's fear intensifies. The painful emotions he feels when he looks at his portrait are the root cause of the growing darkness within him. As this darkness grows, Dorian transforms into a monster and loses his humanity. Although The Picture of Dorian Gray is considered a Gothic and philosophical novel, it can also be classified as a horror novel. The Picture of Dorian Gray was quite remarkable at the time of its publication because it disregards Victorian morality.

When the portrait reveals Dorian's unacceptable inner darkness, he becomes simultaneously frightened and ashamed of himself. Fear of the monster within, of his own reality, is also known in psychology as "the fear of self-awareness." In other words, this fear is a way for a person to escape their dark side. As Dorian flees this fear, he distances himself further and further from himself, and this increasing distance eventually begins to uglify the portrait. Ultimately, all these feelings lead to his alienation from himself. Self-alienation is the loss of one's own self and the inability to recognize oneself. When Dorian notices the horrific transformation in the portrait, he avoids looking at it, thus escaping both himself and his true self. Over time, his feelings dull, and all emotional connections are severed. Emotions are the most fundamental bonds a person forms with themselves. Losing them makes it difficult for a person to find themselves.

Self-alienation is a psychological state in which a person loses touch with their own identity, loses self-recognition, and becomes a character alienated from their own existence. Dorian's avoidance of looking at the portrait also means avoiding self-awareness. Each time this avoidance repeats, Dorian distances himself further from his true self and begins to perceive himself as an externally created image, such as an 'external image,' a 'role,' or a 'performance.' As he distances himself from himself, a feeling less being emerges, a monstrous being, just like Dorian. In today's world, people have become so disconnected from their inner worlds by the influence of the outside world that self-alienation is inevitable. In light of all this, moral alienation also begins in people. Because a person who fails to consider the consequences of their actions deteriorates their morality, and every time Dorian commits an act—a horrific act—he blames the portrait for it, increasing his immorality. It becomes increasingly difficult for him to truly recognize himself. Over time, Dorian loses his ability to recognize himself, but at the same time, he sees himself as beautiful and good, and the portrait continues to become uglier, leading to self-doubt. As he sees himself as both good and beautiful and ugly in the portrait, he experiences identity confusion and becomes alienated from his own identity.

## The Portrait's Monstrous Metaphor: The Development of Monstrosity and the Hidden Self

The decadent style centers around themes such as cultural disintegration and identity confusion. In this context, Slusser evaluates the work's position within decadent horror literature as follows:

"An important prototype of the decadent horror story, *The Picture of* Dorian Gray treats thematically a number of ideas that influenced the stylistic and aesthetic choices made in later, and more sophisticated, works of decadent horror literature. In spite of the fact that it was one of the first stories to broach the subject of cultural decadence and its attendant stylistic analogue, however, Wilde's portrait is not the quintessential decadent horror story that critics have generally taken it to be. It does, of course, possess many of the earn marks of the genre. It gives a decadent treatment to a traditional supernatural theme or motifs-in this case, the motif of doppelgänger that arises as the spectral, subconscious other in such early supernatural fiction". (Slusser, 1992, p.96).

In the novel, portrait makes invisible emotions visible. Dorian Gray becomes a typical example of monstrosity since he violates the moral principles of Victorian society. As Christine Feruson says:

"In the scandalous The Picture of Dorian Gray (1890), the young protagonist is freed from social and moral accountability through his representation in Basil Hallward's painting. No longer forced to bear the physical markings of his own compromised soul, Gray indulges in a series of increasingly vile acts that culminate in murder and suicide. (Ferguson, 2002, p. 471)".

A person's psychological well-being, fear, shame, and negative thoughts, are internal experiences. These are not visible in the social sphere. Wilde aims to reveal hidden emotions through portrait. In this way, he reveals and embodies the darkness hidden within a person. Dorian's inner darkness and moral collapse are also revealed through the portrait. Without the portrait, it would have emerged in a different form. This phenomenon is called "concretization of projection" in psychology. In other words, it is the perception of behavioral patterns or thoughts that one does not want to see in oneself, through an object.

Dorian Gray's behavior gradually leads to a loss of emotion and a tendency toward violence. After fear and shame, the worst thing a human can experience is becoming a monster and losing their emotions. For someone

without emotions, a tendency toward violence is inevitable. Even today, it's clear that those who have lost themselves and cannot reveal their humanity turn to violence and evil. Dorian, too, is losing his emotions day by day. In the story, we see this loss in various forms, including violence, suicide, murder, and death. Oscar Wilde portrays a crucial situation in the story after Sybil Vane commits suicide after Dorian betrays her and leaves her alone. When Sybil becomes Dorian's girlfriend, Dorian is captivated by her beauty as well as her theatrical talent. However, when Sybil, influenced by true love, performs poorly in the theater, Dorian becomes estranged from Sybil and breaks up with her, driven by the monstrous part of himself. Sybil commits suicide after learning that Dorian no longer loves her. Dorian, who felt horror when he first learned it, thought;

"So I have murdered Sibyl Vane," said Dorian Gray, half to himself, "murdered her as surely as if I had cut her little throat with a knife. Yet The roses are not less lovely for all that. The birds sing just as happily in my garden And to-night I am to dine with you, and then go on to The opera, and sup somewhere, I suppose, afterwards. How extraordinarily dramatic life is! If I had read all this in a book, Harry, I think I would have wept over it. Somehow, now that it has happened. Actually, and to me, it seems far too wonderful for tears. Here is the first passionate love-letter I have ever written in my life. Strange, that my first passionate love-letter should have been addressed to a dead girl" (Wilde, 2013, p. 121).

This situation is considered one of the first steps that affect her becoming a monster. Sibly's death becomes a tool to open the doors to the deep emptiness within him. From that day on, Dorian takes on a completely different personality, detaching himself from his true self and disappearing. Dorian then murders Basil Hallward, the artist who painted his portrait and his close friend. Dorian professionally covers up this crime, showing no remorse. This could be considered his second, frightening side. In fact, once a person surrenders to darkness, they become alienated from themselves, unable to escape it.

## **Analysis**

## Modern Man and Hedonistic Culture: The Psychological Pressure of Pleasure

Today, the modern world touches people's most sensitive points, affecting them psychologically. According to the modern world, pleasure should always be a constant in a person's life. In this pleasure-focused world,

people shape themselves, their thoughts, and their values accordingly. People resort to any means necessary to achieve their desires and pleasures. As labeled after Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, Freud never focused on the term "desire" as a separate manifesto; in fact, he related the term to the unconscious, where he saw it as an original storehouse of instinctual pleasure for the unconscious (Thurschwell, 2009, p. 4). In fact, if we look at Freud, unlike other scholars, Freud clearly stated that human interest stems from their needs. It is inevitable for a person who seeks to achieve these needs to experience pleasure at its highest. You cannot reach yourself without pleasure, and with pleasure, you begin your journey to yourself. Which takes it back to Freud's words that "the pleasure principle is proper to a primary method of working on the part of the mental apparatus[...] under the influence of the ego's instincts... the pleasure principle is replaced by the reality principle" (Freud, 1961 p. 4), and in accordance with Freud and both drives it is clearly deduced that without unpleasure, it is impossible to reach the pleasure itself, "the feeling of pleasure and unpleasure into relation" (Freud, 1961, p. 3).

These thoughts he developed about the human mind demonstrate that Freud viewed the concepts of pleasure and desire as components of the human mind. When Dorian, under the influence of Lord Henry, made pleasure the fundamental basis of his life, he actually opened the door to a human condition. However, like the person who experiences pleasure in the wrong way and cannot close himself off from its dark influence, Dorian found himself a monster in the darkness. In this context, Dorian Gray can be considered a prototype of a line of psychological reading that stretches from the 19th century to the 21st century. Modern humans, like Dorian, are psychologically driven to seek "maximum pleasure" from their lives. This is because the human brain is convinced that pleasure will lead to happiness. While pleasure is always expected to bring goodness and happiness, emotions inherent in life, such as sadness, anxiety, and fatigue, disrupt a person's psychological balance. A person whose balance is disrupted makes poor choices in their pursuit of self-discovery and meaning.

Aristotle, one of the most important philosophers of antiquity, considered pleasure as the completed result of every action while simultaneously considering it as happiness. In fact, for him, pleasure is not a becoming, not an action, but a goal. Plato, on the other hand, placed pleasure within the realm of what happens, within the realm of non-conceptual existence. He believed that happiness, too, depends on the spiritual and ethical state of man (Akarsu, 1998, p. 129). In hedonism, pleasure was a way of life. The basis of the understanding adopted by the doctrine of pleasure is as follows:

"We tend towards pleasure from childhood. We avoid pain" (Akarsu, 1998, p. 60). While pleasure was once thought of as simple relaxation, today it is misperceived as a means of self-affirmation. Like Dorian, those who misunderstand the nature of pleasure become attached to the external rather than the internal. The fundamental pillars of identity are moral consideration, self-honesty, responsibility, and inner peace. Constantly prioritizing pleasure weakens these pillars. Aesthetic pleasures sometimes provide such intense pleasure and happiness that they can even lead to a higher level of thought, that is, metaphysics (Hutter Throsby, 2013, p. 58). As Dorian's inner peace fades, his morality erodes, and ultimately, a monstrous identity emerges. To avoid recognizing his inner emptiness, Dorian turns to various pleasures, a form of escape. Hedonistic culture not only legitimizes this escape, but also encourages it. "Enjoy yourself until you feel good," he says. Wilde, on the other hand, has shown in Dorian Gray that there is a huge gap between feeling good through pleasure and being good.

### Modern Identity Collapse, Uncanny, and a Form of **Self-Alienation**

Today, the foundation of human identity lies in making oneself more human. However, when the fatigue, stress, and weaknesses inherent in life interfere with this, people feel incomplete, distance themselves from their true self, and become alienated from themselves. Just as Dorian Gray avoids looking at his portrait, people avoid confronting their true self. Chaudhary and Reddy (2025) define self-alienation among high perfectionists as "not immediately observable..." (p. 246). Instead, it manifests in more subtle existential domains: a chronic sense of being "out of sync" with one's inner experience, dissonance between values and actions, and a mechanized approach to life that prioritizes image over authenticity (Khossousi, 2024, Nam & Lee, 2020).

Narcissism is often at the core of self-alienation. In the modern world, when people focus on the external rather than the internal, they believe their own value comes only from the external. Thus, the ideal self becomes a necessity in life. It is explained as follows, "It is argued that every grandiose narcissistic individual has a shy and vulnerable side, and every fragile and self-critical narcissistic individual has feelings of entitlement and grandiosity" (McWilliams, 2013, cited in: Akça, 2017, p. 12). As people act to prove and show themselves to others, their inner identity disintegrates. In their daily pursuit of self-promotion through virtues like beauty, goodness, and success, they ignore their inner anxieties, fears, shames, and weaknesses. And as they avoid their inner selves, they lose themselves through buried feelings.

Dorian, captivated by his unchanging external beauty, failed to see the portrait's increasingly ugly face as he lived, fueling the darkness within him.

As Dorian's portrait continued to grow uglier, he unwilling to see it, had it removed to a dark room in the attic. There, he revealed his repressed inner self, the monster within. He was so afraid of it that he hid it to prevent this fear from destroying him, just as he had hidden his own inner self. But the portrait was there, and its existence was undeniable. As long as it remained there, every evil act Dorian committed only further uglied it. The story of Dorian Gray is not merely a reflection of youth and depravity in the 19th century Victorian era. It is a depiction of the internally fragmented and selfalienated human condition still experienced today.

### Spiritual Emptiness and the Return of the "Monster Within"

The final chapters of Dorian Gray reveal that Dorian's behavior has, in fact, shifted from finding goodness and happiness through pleasure to a spiritual collapse. Initially, as he engages in petty pursuits for his own pleasure, his increasingly monstrous side leads to a disconnection from his inner values. Because The Picture of Dorian Gray is considered a Gothic novel by its central theme and use of setting, the monsters do not reside in castles or cemeteries, as in Gothic literature, because monstrosity is a Gothic perspective that inhabits the inner world of the modern individual. Dorian continues to be recklessly lost in evil, unquestioning why he does what he does. Other people's pain, love, emotions, and lives are tensions that do not concern him. As his portrait becomes uglier, the void of meaning within him grows, and his drift continues. Basil, seeing the scarred portrait, reminds Dorian of his monstrosity, while simultaneously asserting that he can change and still turn to good; Basil wants to see Dorian's soul, but he says, "Only God can do that" (Wilde, 2013, p. 181). He is so enraged at Basil that when Dorian kills Basil without a blink, he actually kills any possibility of change within him. From this perspective, killing means Dorian letting go of his last remaining human conscience. Dorian Gray glanced at the picture, and suddenly an uncontrollable feeling of hatred for Basil Hallward came over him, as though it had been suggested to him by the image on the canvas, whispered into his ear by those grinning lips. The mad passions of a hunted animal stirred within him, and he loathed the man who was seated at the table, more than in his whole life he had ever loathed anything. He glanced wildly around. Something glimmered on the top of the painted chest that faced him. His eye fell on it. He knew what it was. It was a knife that he had brought up, some days before, to cut a piece of cord, and had forgotten to take away with him. He moved slowly towards it, passing Hallward as

he did so. As soon as he got behind him, he seized it and turned round. Hallward stirred in his chair as if he was going to rise. He rushed at him and dug the knife into the great vein that is behind the ear, crushing the man's head down on the table and stabbing again and again. (Wilde, 2013, p.187).

With Basil's murder, the reader witnesses the truth a person hides within, the destruction of their identity. The portrait, disfigured by years of misdeeds, and the evils it accumulates, comes back to Dorian. He allows the monster within him to completely consume him, completely destroying his own self. Basil was the last vestige of Dorian's humanity, a conscience. And with his murder, the monster within him spiraled out of control. During and after the murder, Dorian believed he had temporarily silenced his fear and shame. However, the darkness within him deepened. With each day his portrait changed, he avoided responsibility for his actions, but after killing Basil, he reached the pinnacle of monstrosity. At the height of his monstrosity, he destroyed his narcissistic self, built on pleasure, and became even more fearful. Dorian believed that by killing Basil, he had forever rejected the moral responsibility that both he and the portrait bore. In light of this, he fell silent, but the unquenchable fear and shame within him drove him to his own death.

Dorian's stabbing death, unable to bear the darkness within his inner self, can be considered the culmination of the novel's Gothic atmosphere. From this perspective, Dorian succumbs to the monster within. The terrifying sensations he experiences when looking at his portrait lead him to suspect that the truth will eventually be revealed. Unable to accept the destruction of his beauty and the narcissistic identity he built upon pleasure, Dorian destroys reality once and for all. This is the final stage of narcissism: the individual is ready to destroy his true self to preserve his idealized image. After death, Dorian's body becomes ugly and aged, and in place of his disfigured body, the portrait returns to its original beauty. Dorian Gray's suicide is not only a tragedy of Victorian youth but also a significant preview of modern man's psychological decline. Like Dorian, modern man avoids confronting the truth hidden behind external beauty. In a modern pleasure-oriented culture, shame and self-reflection are buried deeper, and as a result, the individual must constantly create new stimuli to avoid seeing his self-portrait—his true self. But this buried "hidden self," like the decaying portrait Dorian keeps in the attic, sooner or later returns as behavior, emotional exhaustion, and moral conflict.

#### Conclusion

The Picture of Dorian Gray is a philosophical and psychological novel set in a Victorian Gothic atmosphere, depicting the monster a person can become when they run away from themselves. It depicts a person's alienation from their inner world and the consequences of this alienation. Dorian's pursuit of pleasure, followed by his narcissistic admiration for his own beauty, marks the beginning of his moral decline. The monstrous identity hidden behind their beauty symbolizes how terrifying a person can become as they distance themselves from their inner world. The danger Dorian faces grows as he distances himself from his true self. As the distance in his search for meaning deepens, he is driven to acts of self-destruction. Wilde thus demonstrates that ethical collapse and the fragmentation of identity do not stem from major, sudden moments of darkness, but rather from an inner decay accumulated by the lies of the lesser self. In the novel, the murder of Basil and the attempted destruction of the portrait demonstrate that the more a person attempts to silence their conscience and truth, the more destructive they become. Therefore, Dorian's death represents the psychological collapse of a person who has lost their own self.

This situation also applies to people in the modern world. Human beings suppress their true self for the sake of their external image and pleasure. The modern individual operates through the mechanism of external selfpresentation. In every realm where shame is suppressed and pleasure becomes the norm, the individual distances himself from himself, and the darker aspects within him grow uncontrollably. Wilde's work thus reveals not only the moral panic of the Victorian era but also the crisis of the modern subject, characterized by persistent alienation and lack of identity. The Picture of Dorian Gray warns us that truth does not disappear when it is concealed; a person can only become whole when he honestly confronts the monster, he has created within himself.

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#### Chapter 4

## Locked Rooms and Open Bodies: Gothic Entrapment and Female Transgression in Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" 3

## Selma Parlakay Topbaş<sup>1</sup>

#### Abstract

This chapter examines Angela Carter's story "The Bloody Chamber" as a modern Female Gothic based on the traditional Bluebeard tales. The analysis employs the Female Gothic as its main framework and uses the key concepts such as "transgression", Kristeva's "abject", and Freudian concepts of the "superego" and "repression". The study aims to reveal the systematic subjugation of women in a patriarchal domestic sphere. Carter intentionally uses a familiar fairy tale structure wherein the figure of Bluebeard, husband, patriarchy, the Marquis victimises and imprisons women by forming the source of fear and violence. Gothic tension and suspense are sustained through several key elements: the fearsome character of the Marquis, the terror of the forbidden chamber, a space containing the corpses of previous female victims, and the labyrinthine, eerie castle, deserted from the land by the sea. Carter subverts the typical motif by offering the transgression as both an inevitable patriarchal tool and an empowering journey for women that ultimately leads to self-discovery and freedom. Reintroduction of the mother figure in Carter's version as the protector and saviour turns the traditional narrative trajectory into a story of female empowerment. The unnamed narrator is rescued from her impending death at the last moment when her mother arrives to kill the monstrous Marquis, turning the conventional fairy-tale ending into a powerful form of female agency.

#### Introduction

Angela Carter (1940–1992) is a central figure recognised within Second-Wave Feminism and is mostly associated with the *Female Gothic*. Through her writing, she questions and subverts the restrictive gender roles created

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by grand narratives. Carter writes retellings of classic folk and fairy tales, including "Bluebeard", "Puss-in-Boots", and "Little Red Riding Hood", to reveal and subvert the patriarchal motives under the surface. In The Bloody Chamber (1979), she explores the Gothic's thematic and structural possibilities, the principles of feminist theory, and the universal expectations surrounding women's roles. Her stories frequently delineate the movement of female protagonists from a victimised position, often represented in patriarchal "locked rooms", towards a new autonomy wherein they confront and destroy the established systems of male power.

Carter's method is to discover the latent implications embedded in fairy tales that have historically been spread through a male-centred ideology and then to rewrite them from a distinctly feminist perspective. In her own words, she aims to put "new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode" (Carter, 2013, p. 27). She further explains that her intention is not to produce "adult" fairy tales or "versions" but rather "to extract the latent content from the traditional stories" (Haffenden, 1985, p. 80). This process of forcing the "old bottles" to split enables Carter to transform the heroine of "The Bloody Chamber" from a locked-up victim of a "homme fatale" (Turki & Saeed, 2021, p. 324) into a figure of sexual, emotional, and physical agency whose transgression of patriarchal constraints ultimately leads to her salvation.

The term "Female Gothic", first coined by Ellen Moers, originally referred to the novels of Ann Radcliffe, whose heroines are characterised by virtue, sensibility, vulnerability, and eventual triumph over patriarchal oppression. In Literary Women, Moers defines this subgenre as "the work women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic" (1976, p. 90). She describes it further as "a long and complex tradition... where woman is examined with a woman's eye, woman as girl, as sister, as mother, as self" (p. 109), locating this tradition within the literary productions of British and American women from the eighteenth century to the twentieth. Whereas the male Gothic typically charts the tragic experiences of a male protagonist who confronts external and frequently supernatural threats, the Female Gothic focuses on the psychological and emotional turmoil of its female protagonists as they negotiate social constraints and endeavour to escape male tyrants or captors (Williams, 1995, p. 101). Within this tradition, the central source of fear is no longer a supernatural presence or familial villainy, as is common in early Gothic texts, but rather the lived realities of gendered oppression, the domestic sphere, and the patriarchal structures governing marriage and family life (Ağır, 2023, p. 240). Judith Butler, in her conceptualising "gendered

agency", similarly argues that agency, the capacity to make decisions about one's own life, is located in the repetition of norms, just like Bluebeard tales motivate the continuity of these patriarchal forms (Kovacs, 2013, p. 39). In other words, the Female Gothic has come to identify the traditional Gothic dynamics of terror that confine, silence, or destroy women and to reverse them. This motive enables a questioning of concerns surrounding sexuality, motherhood, and "gendered agency", associated with the main concerns of Second-Wave Feminism.

Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith, in The Female Gothic: New Directions, trace the origins of the Female Gothic tradition back to Radcliffe and identify the symbolic significance of women imprisoned in the patriarch's house, where they face fears as both domestic and psychological entrapment (2009, p. 2). These victim-heroines ultimately achieve liberation, thus breaking the social and familial regulations designed to control female behaviour. Carter provokes this tradition by using the Female Gothic not only to criticise patriarchal domination but also to underline the role of female transgression as a transformative and radical act. According to Gilbert and Gubar, women's incarceration is not merely the result of physical restrictions; emotional and psychological constraints also serve to marginalise them and push them to the fringes of society. To name an example, Bertha Mason, Jane Eyre's double alter ego, embodies the patriarchal construction of women who exist at society's margins as threatening or insane just because the patriarchy labels her so (2020, p. 360). Patriarchal ideology has long associated femininity with monstrosity and demonisation. Since antiquity, cultural narratives have portrayed figures such as snaky-haired Medusa, rebellious Eve, witches, female vampires, and other unsubmissive femme fatales as inherently perilous to male authority. Medieval theological misogyny similarly announced that "woman [is] the unhappy source, evil root, and corrupt offshoot, who brings to birth every sort of outrage throughout the world" (Gilmore, 2001, p. 86). In the Renaissance, the pregnant female body was insulted as a "two-legged she-beast" (p. 88). The Victorian era further entrenched restrictive ideals through its construction of the woman as the "angel in the house", while classical representations of ideal femininity emphasised containment: "the closed mouth, enclosed body, and locked household door" (Mulvey-Roberts, 2016, p. 107). It means that patriarchy has historically devised multiple strategies to dominate and control women, employing myths, folklore, and explicit implications designed to instil fear and prevent potential acts of female resistance.

The Bluebeard narrative is among the most frequently revisited fairy tales, particularly since Charles Perrault's canonical transcription. Perrault's

"Bluebeard" (La Barbe bleue), included in The Tales of Mother Goose (Histoires ou contes du temps passé), was first published in 1697 and later translated by Angela Carter in 1976. Bluebeard's figure is based on the historical figure of Gilles de Rais, Joan of Arc's lieutenant, who was notorious for his terrible secrets (Williams, 1995, p. 40). In the traditional versions of Bluebeard tales, a young woman marries a wealthy widower with a distinctive blue beard, and the man forbids her from entering a locked chamber, announcing that her disobedience will cost her life. When the wife inevitably breaks his rule, she discovers the murdered bodies of his former wives. Horrified, she drops the key into a pool of blood; its permanent stain reveals her transgression. As Bluebeard prepares to execute her, she is dramatically rescued by her soldier brothers (Pyrhönen, 2010, p. 3). This pattern of patriarchal dominance and female transgression is even called "Bluebeard syndrome", which carries four stereotypical characters: "a persecuted young woman and a mysterious, possibly dangerous man"; there may also appear, in the Bluebeard pattern, two optional characters: "a helper or rescuer figure, and a mad, bad, or very unlucky wife" (Barzilai, 2005, p. 250). As a whole, the Bluebeard motif has a consistent place in the imagination of patriarchal culture.

The Bluebeard motif has a prominent place in European folklore, appearing in numerous adapted forms. In Norwegian tradition, the husband takes the shape of a troll, while Italian versions portray him as a devil, and an ancient Greek variant personifies him as death itself (Lokke, 1988, p. 8). In other interpretations, Bluebeard is depicted either as a stereotypical Turkish tyrant who is about to behead Fatima for her disobedience, or as a wealthy merchant, a king, or the folkloric Mr. Fox in the English tradition (Hermansson, 2009, pp. ix, xi). Despite its diverse forms, the Bluebeard tale cycle consistently revolves around the uncanny ambiguity of the Bluebeard figure and the heroine's coercion to uncover his secret (Pyrhönen, 2010, p. 4). As Carter observes in her foreword to her translation of Perrault, "Each century tends to create or re-create fairy tales after its own taste" (Perrault, 1979, p. 41). Consequently, the Bluebeard archetype has taken a remarkable interest among feminist fiction writers, and in numerous Gothic works, including Jane Eyre, Carter's "The Bloody Chamber", and Daphne du Maurier's Rebecca, as well as Margaret Atwood's "Bluebeard's Egg". The Bluebeard motif has also become recurrent in Gothic literature as it provides a range of Gothic conventions: the vulnerable but "curious heroine; a wealthy, arbitrary, and enigmatic hero-villain", and a grand, mysterious castle-house whose labyrinthine spaces conceal violent and often implicitly sexual secrets belonging to the homme fatal (Williams, 1995, p. 38). Although Perrault reassures his readers by noting that the events in the

Bluebeard tale occurred "many years ago" and that "no modern husbands would dare be half so terrible" (1979, p. 41), the tale nonetheless endures as a potent symbol of violence, exploitation, and physical-emotional isolation of the female.

The Bluebeard legend and fairy tales in general, in terms of Female Gothic, particularly, and more broadly from a feminist perspective, refer to the patriarchal impulse to restrain the transgressive curiosity of the female protagonist. The male in power, endowed with property and social authority, easily acquires successive wives who might otherwise have rejected him. Female curiosity, depicted as irresistible, is strategically set in opposition to the unvielding prohibition imposed by the husband/patriarchy. In this sense, Bluebeard's wife becomes the archetypal descendant of Eve and Pandora: figures whose male-defined identities assume their inevitable disobedience (Williams, 1995, p. 42). Atwood, despite claiming that Grimm's Fairy Tales contain many stories that posit women as the central characters who win by using their intelligence, accepts that some "tarted-up French versions of 'Cinderella' and 'Bluebeard'" portray women as weak who "get rescued by her brother" or another male emancipator (1979, p. 28). As a result of this pre-formed cycle of domination, the Female Gothic offers the woman's transgression as both predictable and necessary to achieve liberation from patriarchal dominion.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the verb "transgress" as "to go beyond the bounds or limits" (OED, n.d.); a paradoxical expression that underscores the relationship between a rule and the desire to exceed it. Yet, as cultural theorists such as Jenks have emphasised, transgression does not mean the pure negation of limits; rather, it exceeds them and thus completes them, as every boundary contains the latent possibility of its own violation (Jenks, 2003, p. 7). Accordingly, transgression means not the elimination of the rules but a structural part of them. This notion aligns with Georges Bataille's claim that prohibition and transgression are reciprocal, for "two diametrically opposed views" follow each other in a continuous dialectical movement; more interestingly, "often transgression is permitted, often it is even prescribed" (Bataille, 1986, p. 63). Foucault, similarly, notes that transgression "does not seek to oppose one thing to another... [but] no limit can possibly restrict it" (1977, p. 35). In other words, the paradoxical nature of transgression shows its inevitable encounter with the moral and social boundaries.

Within a Freudian psychoanalytic analysis, transgression can be thought of as a moment in which the id, governed by the pleasure principle, presses

for immediate fulfilment of urges which are internalised as forbidden by the superego. In this regard, the prohibition of Bluebeard's forbidden room functions as a manifestation of the superego, or ego ideal, which enforces the culturally approved codes of obedience. The desire to know more serves as the motive of the id; when the heroine wants to discover what lies behind the forbidden chamber, the ego, struggling to make a balance between the conflicting forces, temporarily fails. Freud's statement that "the repressed is merely a part of the id and merges into it" (Freud, 1989, p. 17) is reclaimed as the form of latent forces hidden beneath the surface and inevitably reemerge, like the desire to transgress the boundaries. Accordingly, the guilt and punishment that traditionally follow the act of transgression in both the Bluebeard archetype and Gothic literature can be understood as expressions of both social discipline and internal moral judgement. As Kristeva suggests in her theory of the abject, the boundary-crossing act, here the heroine's desire to know the forbidden, produces a hesitation, a mixture of guilt and desire; thus it signifies the instability of the structures that seek to control female curiosity, sexuality, and self: as claimed by Kristeva, "The abject shatters the walls of repression and its judgement" (1982, p. 15). Thus, transgression of the female in the Bluebeard tradition becomes not merely a narrative device but a theoretical dilemma where psychoanalytic, cultural, and Gothic elements coincide.

## Gothic Chamber and Transgression

In Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber", the unnamed young narrator is newly married to the enigmatic and recently widowed Marquis, and as the legend necessitates, breaks the rule of entering the forbidden zone of the Marquis. She faces the dead bodies of his former wives and thus forecasts her similar fate. However, Carter subverts the traditional Gothic tale, which turns into a reclamation of the heroine's autonomy by disrupting the familiar script of the vulnerable and obedient heroine and by introducing a protective mother figure. Carter's retelling revisits the conventional tale of female curiosity and male perversity and locates it within the established framework of the female Gothic, where patriarchal spaces and their tools of control become central to the heroine's struggle.

Carter draws her story upon the foundational Gothic motifs: the figure of a husband who murders or imprisons his former wives, the motif of the haunted castle, and locked rooms to interrogate women's physical and mental incarceration within the domestic sphere. As Horner and Zlosnik explain, the recurring narratives of "heroines in flight", originally identified by Moers as the depiction of heroines terrorised and confined by a tyrannical

patriarch within the domestic sphere, have long been appropriated by women writers to symbolise the gendered anxieties embedded within seemingly protective household spaces (2016, p. 3). In Carter's version, the archetypal narrator is situated in a remote, almost isolated castle that foreshadows entrapment through its uncanny atmosphere inside and outside. Initially described as "the facry solitude" by the narrator, the setting is "cut off by the tide from the land for half a day... that castle, at home neither on the land nor on the water, a mysterious, amphibious place... that lovely, sad, sea-siren of a place!" (Carter, 2015, p. 9). This antagonistic depiction of the castle highlights its menacing effect: its ambiguity evokes an apprehension between safety and danger, enchantment and threat; it also aligns with the Gothic's preoccupation with liminality and anticipates the narrator's physical and psychological imprisonment within a patriarchal structure. It is clear that Carter uses a Gothic atmosphere so as to declare a critique of patriarchal dominance over women's bodies and identities.

A further indication of Gothic entrapment in Carter's tale is the seemingly safe marital bedroom; a space traditionally associated with intimacy and protection. Carter subverts this expectation by transforming the bedroom into a site of scrutiny, destabilization, and patriarchal domination. The room's most striking feature is the abundance of mirrors, a motif that, as Horner and Zlosnik (2016) observe, is frequently used in Gothic fiction to create uncanny distortions of identity. In a similar vein, Gilbert and Gubar, in The Madwoman in the Attic, claim that patriarchal culture imposes upon women the anxiety of being both 'angel' and 'monster' as a divided self, reflected in a male-authored mirror (1979, p. 17). Therefore, the mirror becomes an instrument through which women confront a reflection that is not her own but the patriarchal ghost of herself, a doubling effect that destabilizes female selfhood. This effect is dramatized when the narrator's own reflection is multiplied into uncanny identical versions: "The young bride, who had become that multitude of girls I saw in the mirrors, identical in their chic navy blue tailor-mades..." (Carter, 2015, p. 11). The multiplication of her image enacts precisely the fragmentation Gilbert and Gubar associate with patriarchal control, an imposed self-division that turns the heroine into an object dispersed across reflective surfaces. Thus, "what she sees in the mirror is usually a male construct" (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979, p. 17). This fracturing is intensified by the chamber's function as a site of feminine imprisonment. Gilbert and Gubar argue that patriarchal structures often confine women to architectures of containment in which female characters are locked away, both literally and figuratively, within male-constructed spaces: either "in men's houses" or "into male texts" (1979, p. 83). The

heroine's feeling of entrapment, thus, she, far from feeling secure, trembles when "a dozen of husbands approach me [her] in a dozen of mirrors (p. 44). Carter's transforming of the bridal bedroom into a site of horror anticipates the narrator's later discovery of the Marquis's murderous chamber below. Near the story's end, when she is ordered to prepare for her execution, the mirrors again reproduce this crisis of identity as the mirrors reflect a hopeless woman, not a young girl and the same lilies look like angels of death: "Twelve young women combed out twelve listless sheaves of brown hair in the mirrors, soon there would be none" (Carter, 2015, p. 40). Here, the multiplied reflections foreshadow erasure, reinforcing her entrapment.

Kristeva's theory of abjection further illuminates the narrator's horror. In Powers of Horror, Kristeva defines the abject as "what disturbs identity, system, and order" and "what does not respect borders, positions and rules" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). The mirrors' grotesque multiplication of the narrator's body disturbs precisely these boundaries, dissolving the coherence of the self and exposing the heroine to a form of psychic disintegration. Kristeva also notes that the abject is often linked to the "feminine" as a culturally coded site of danger and destabilization; "the feminine, becomes the synonymous with a radical evil that is to be suppresses" (p. 70), a dynamic Carter exploits by making the bridal chamber, a supposedly sacred feminine space, into a place where identity collapses. Thus, the mirrors in "The Bloody Chamber" function not merely as decorative objects but as theoretical instruments: they enact the patriarchal doubling and self-division described by Gilbert and Gubar, while simultaneously producing the boundary-breaking horror theorised by Kristeva. In this way, Carter transforms a traditionally feminine domestic space into a Gothic landscape of entrapment and psychic dissolution.

In "The Bloody Chamber", the primary patriarchal threat and the embodiment of Gothic monstrosity is the figure of the Marquis, a quintessential "homme fatal" as previously noted. As the counterpart of the femme fatale, the homme fatal is a seductive and destructive male figure whose lineage includes archetypal predators such as Don Juan and Dracula, both defined by their relentless desire to dominate, possess, and consume women (Turki & Saeed, 2021, p. 324). Carter's Bluebeard wears a monocle, which demonstrates the wealth, refinement, status, and more importantly, superiority: according to Hentea, monocles were popular in the modernist period and worn by famous modernists such as G. K. Chesterton, Joseph Conrad, and W. H. Auden (2013, p. 214). The villainous Marquis in Carter's version is sure to depict a modernized Bluebeard. His aristocratic taste and refined outlook function as a mask of his predatory violence: the "streaks

of pure silver in his dark mane," his lavish gifts, and his scent of "Russian leather" give the impression of his rituals intended to attract vulnerable young women into his domain. The narrator verifies his seductive influence in these words:

This ring, the bloody bandage of rubies, the wardrobe of clothes from Poiret and Worth, this scent of Russian leather—all had conspired to seduce me so utterly that I could not say I felt one single twinge of regret for the world of tartines and maman that now receded from me as if drawn away on a string. (Carter, 2015, p. 7)

The monstrosity of the Marquis precisely aligns with the disguised villain of the Gothic tradition. In the narrator's description, he watches her "in the gilded mirrors with the assessing eye of a connoisseur inspecting horseflesh, or even a housewife in the market, inspecting cuts of the slab." (Carter, 2015, p. 6). In other words, the watching eyes of the Marquis stand for the male gaze, reducing women into objects to be purchased.

Carter increases this predatory masculine symbol through the frequent use of animal metaphors such as "tiger-beast" and "Erl-King" in her retellings. Such metaphors function, as Arıkan notes, to foreground male sexuality as a force of power and supremacy, casting the male body as instinctive, unrestrained, and fundamentally bestial (2016, p. 122). Mills similarly argues that representations of male sexuality in animalistic terms naturalise extreme behaviours, including sexual violence:

Male sexuality is often described in terms of metaphors of animal behaviour, as an animal's, and as little under control. The describing of sexuality in these terms means that extreme male behaviour such as rape may be understood to be only 'natural'. (1995, p. 137)

From a psychoanalytic standpoint, Carter's depiction of the Marquis resonates with Kristeva's concept of the abject, in which the monstrous male figure embodies that threat to the boundaries of the feminine self. The Marquis's bloodstained chamber, his voyeuristic surveillance, and his ritualised seduction all operate as abject encounters: thresholds where the heroine confronts the dissolution of identity and bodily autonomy. Additionally, in a Bataillean register, the Marquis's eroticised violence reflects the "transgressive excess" that aligns eros with death, pleasure with annihilation, a dynamic Carter both exposes and ultimately subverts.

The relationship between the young heroine and the Marquis becomes increasingly unsettling throughout the narrative, as the narrator repeatedly blurs the boundaries between husband and father figure when describing him. From the beginning, the significant age gap, Marquis defined as "much older" than her (Carter, 2015, p. 3), signals an unbalanced power relation that resembles, rather than a marital partnership, a hierarchical parent-child structure. This paternalistic dominance becomes explicit when the Marquis discovers her reading one of his pornographic books, he says: "Have the nasty pictures scared Baby? Baby mustn't play with grownups' toys until she's learned how to handle them, must she?" (p. 14). His language reduces the heroine to a child incapable of sexual agency, casting himself as the authoritarian father who dominates access to forbidden knowledge. The manifestation of the father as the figure who both embodies desire and imposes prohibition resonates in the young heroine's non-existent real father and the deliberate ignorance of Carter for the heroic paternal figure. Freud's term "uncanny", as "a class of terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar" (Freud, 2018, p. 85), explains the defamiliarized image of the father and husband for the young girl. In Carter's narrative, the Marquis functions precisely as this uncanny figure: familiar yet terrifying patriarch whose authority manipulates the heroine's transition from innocence to sexual awakening.

One of the most powerful Gothic elements in "The Bloody Chamber" emerges through the spectacle of the murdered wives whose mutilated bodies are arranged within the forbidden chamber. This chamber, described as the "private slaughterhouse of his" (Carter, 1979, p. 31), functions as the darkest locus of Gothic horror because it transforms the female body into an emblem of patriarchal violence, repetition, and possession. The Marquis anticipates his young wife's curiosity and disobedience, as it happened with his earlier wives, and deliberately entrusts his keys to her before leaving on his trip:

All is yours, everywhere is open to you—except the lock that this single key fits. Yet all it is the key to a little room at the foot of the west tower, behind the still-room, at the end of a dark little corridor full of horrid cobwebs that would get into your hair and frighten you if you ventured there. Oh, and you'd find it such a dull little room! But you must promise me, if you love me, to leave it well alone. (Carter, 2015, pp. 19-20)

Tempted by her curiosity, the young bride rebels against the restrictions imposed on her and specifically takes the forbidden key and leaves the others lying there. Her uprising and showing no feelings of fear, "no raising of the hairs on the back of the neck, no prickling of the thumbs" (Carter, 2015, p.27) are significant marks of her departure from the passive portrayal of the victimised heroines in traditional fairy tales. Carter, somehow, achieves this re-centring by employing a first-person narration to give voice to silenced female victims of the traditional tales. She discovers that the 'bloody chamber' is a gruesome torture room filled with instruments of suffering. Among the corpses, she recognises the previous wives of the Marquis, the embalmed body of a murdered opera singer, a skull adorned with a bridal veil, and the fresh corpse of the Marquis' most recent wife, impaled with an Iron Maiden. In this regard, the aestheticized dead bodies as the representative of the erasure of the feminine by the patriarchy are the symbols of the totalising patriarchal control the Marquis seeks to impose on the living heroine, and the bloody chamber represents the climax of Gothic entrapment.

Following her moment of transgressive courage in entering the forbidden chamber, the young narrator immediately recognises that the same act that has granted her knowledge now places her in mortal danger as she faces a similar fate. Her fear, as she admits, paradoxically gives her strength yet this temporary hope to escape the castle dissolves the moment the Marquis returns unexpectedly, transforming her trespass into a predestined end and forcing her to confront the inevitability of patriarchal punishment. The heroine's confession, "I only did what he knew I would", highlights the deterministic structure of patriarchy, in which male authority anticipates and controls female disobedience in order to justify punishment (Carter, 2015, p. 40). The piano tuner, who has become a helper and lover for her now, frames her transgression in line with Judeo-Christian myth by saying, "Like Eve", situating female curiosity as the original sin (Carter, 2015, p. 41). As Warner observes, Eve's notorious legacy has frequently been adapted as the archetypal transgressor, whose desire for knowledge and tempting Adam with her words, function as the latent symbol for moral condemnation and subjugation of women (1995, p. 30). In a similar vein, Williams states that Bluebeard's women act as her "nature" demands when she breaks his rule; "Like Eve and Pandora, she then may be held responsible for any ill that ensues" (1995, p. 42). Carter's recontextualization of this myth connects the Bluebeard narrative to the myth: the woman who seeks forbidden knowledge is punished not only because she threatens her husband's power but also as she threatens the ideological foundations of patriarchal order.

The heroic mother figure in "The Bloody Chamber" is one of Carter's most noteworthy subversions of the fairy-tale tradition. As noted by critics, classical fairy tales offer only two mother models:

Either they are the perfect birth mother who tragically dies at the very beginning of the heroine's story, thus becoming an unattainable ideal who provides no comfort or help and is not present for the heroine's journey, or they are the evil stepmother, 'greedy, ambitious, and ruthless'. (Wynn, 2019, p. 79)

Carter introduces the biological mother not as an idealistic but absent or a demonic figure; the mother is rather a living, heroic, and authoritative agent; thus, disruption of this traditional legacy posits Carter's version in the feminist writing. Introduced at the beginning of the story as an "eaglefeatured, indomitable mother [who] outfaced a junkful of Chinese pirates, nursed a village through a visitation of the plague, shot a man-eating tiger with her own hand..." (Carter, 2015, p. 2), she embodies a blend of nurturing presence and martial capability rarely attributed to maternal figures in patriarchal narratives. Her dramatic return at the climax of the story further disrupts traditional fairy-tale gender roles. Where Perrault's tale grants the rescue to the heroine's brothers, a reinforcement of male protection, Carter replaces them with a singularly potent maternal force. Gamble points out that Carter's "introduction of the mother... changes everything", which adds a "third element into the fixed dualism of the couple" (1997, p. 155). At the moment when the Marquis prepares to behead the narrator, the mother arrives "on a horseback" and provokes in him a terror "as if he had seen Medusa," before firing the fatal shot: "Now, without a moment's hesitation, she raised my father's gun, took aim and put a single, irreproachable bullet through my husband's head" (Carter, 2015, p. 44).

This disruption of the traditional fairy-tale gender roles echoes the ancient Demeter-Persephone myth, one of the oldest motifs of maternal intervention against male abduction. Like Demeter, who descended into the underworld to reclaim her daughter from the abduction by Hades, Carter's mother figure invades the Marquis's slaughterhouse castle, a symbolic underworld, and rescues her daughter from patriarchal law. The parallelism is strengthened by the imagery: the Marquis's territory, with its forbidden chamber of corpses, functions as a Gothic counterpart to Hades' underworld. The mother's intervention, like Demeter's universal search for her daughter, reasserts the holy maternal bond over the possessive claims of a patriarchal predator. Simultaneously, by evoking the terrifying image of Medusa on the Marquis, Carter evokes an impression of the mother as what Cixous calls the "laugh of the Medusa", a symbol of female power that patriarchal culture has tried to demonise, but which feminist writers recover as a symbol of resistance and liberation; a feminine text for Cixous is like a volcano to "smash everything, to shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the

law, to break up the 'truth' with laughter" (Cixous, 1976, p.888). In this regard, the Marquis/ patriarchy is scared stiff "as if he had seen Medusa" (Carter, 2014, p. 44) and the new feminine order is established.

In restoring agency, physical power, and moral authority to the female, Carter reconfigures the familial hierarchy: she extracts salvation from the paternal line and returns it to the mother, transforming the domestic sphere into a site of female solidarity rather than patriarchal domination. The mother thus becomes both rescuer and avenger, a figure who breaks the Gothic cycle of female victimisation and enables the heroine's final escape from the Marquis's deadly system of control. Female transgression against Bluebeard, the Marquis, and patriarchy, in this context, functions as an act of resistance against both the structures of patriarchal society and the mechanisms of terror and entrapment through which it asserts control. Carter's subverted version of the female victim, paternal Gothic, and avenging mother has inspired many works, including Margaret Atwood's "Bluebeard's Egg" (1983), and Helen Oyeyemi's 2011 novel Mr. Fox.

A later feminist version of the Bluebeard pattern can be seen in Atwood's "Bluebeard's Egg", which objects to the French version of the rescue tale of the heroine. She builds her characters mostly on Grimm's version, in which "women are not only the central characters but win by using their own intelligence", stating that "in many of them [fairy tales], women rather than men have the magic powers" (Atwood, 1979, p. 28). In Atwood's version, the protagonist, Sally, is seemingly in charge of the house while her husband, Ed, appears to be an ordinary husband, a surgeon. Yet, Ed turns out to be just the opposite, cheating on Sally with her best friend. Sally discovers his secret when she attends a writing course and reads a traditional version of the Bluebeard story; in this version, the husband gives an egg to the heroine to keep unbroken as a sign of her commitment to not entering the forbidden room. Sally, in Atwood's story, associates her husband not with Bluebeard but with the egg, which symbolises the secret of the husband. "Sally thinks, "the egg is alive, and one day it will hatch. But what will come out of it?" (Atwood, 1983, p.146). In other words, Atwood's story recognises the significance of continual investigation of the cliches, such as the nature of the husband and the persisting unequal balance of power.

A more recent reconsideration of the Bluebeard tale is by Helen Oyeyemi, a Nigerian-born British novelist. In Mr. Fox, Oyeyemi achieves a subversion of the masculine gaze, and claims female agency for Black women in literature typically dominated by patriarchal and colonial narratives. Here, Mr. Fox, as the representative of Bluebeard, is a wealthy author who frequently kills

his fictional heroines in the same way patriarchal society turns women into passive, helpless victims (Sumedha, 2025, p. 399). His muse, Mary Foxe, reverses male violence by defying his trend, prompting him to re-evaluate his perception of women. One of the female characters in Mr. Fox's stories, Daphne, not accepting to be a victim of a man's murderous scheme, and she "encouraged herself to see her very small presence in the world as a good thing, a power, something that a hero might possess" (Oyeyemi, 2012, p. 65). In this way, Oyeyemi distorts the relationships between male gaze and violence, and implies that women are more than passive victims of male aggression; they rather actively oppose and write their own stories.

#### Conclusion

The analysis of Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" demonstrates a feminist reclamation of the Bluebeard fairy tale pattern for the Female Gothic. By deploying theoretical concepts such as transgression, repression, and the abject, this chapter has revealed how Carter systematically exposes and dismantles the patriarchal mechanism of subjugation embodied by the Marquis and his ancestral castle. The story operates on multiple symbolic levels: the castle's liminal position functions as psychic and physical containment, the mirrors fragment the heroine's identity under the authoritarian look, and the forbidden chamber stands as the ultimate signifier of patriarchal violence and the reality of female erasure. Carter's feminist subversion reframes the heroine's curiosity as a vital act of resistance. Her transgression is not a moral breakdown but crucial for knowledge and female autonomy, which inevitably means a confrontation with patriarchy. Carter breaks the traditional Gothic cycle with her introduction of a female/ mother agent, in compliance with Second Wave Feminism. "The Bloody Chamber," therefore, reclaims female power and agency, leaving future feminist writers a powerful legacy of reimagining alternative possibilities outside the confines of patriarchal order.

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#### Chapter 5

## Narratives of the Damned: Monstrosity, Metafiction, and the Modern Gothic in Martin McDonagh's The Pillowman 8

#### Ferhat Ordu<sup>1</sup>

#### Abstract

Utilising the complex mechanics of monstrosity and horror in The Pillowman by Martin McDonagh, this chapter places a marker on it as one of the pillars of this current tradition in British Gothic literature. The analysis first establishes a theoretical foundation, drawing upon Gothic theory and monster studies to situate the play's distinctive aesthetic, which has been critically described as a grotesque and inhumane cartoon-heightened style. It therewith proceeds to anatomize the main monstrous characters of the play, not just to one archetype, but to evil itself on a scale. This is the monster-perpetrator of the form of the child-like murderer Michal; the monster-authority of the form of the brutally self-righteous detectives Ariel and Tupolski; and the monster-parent, the bearer of a primordial, marketbased brutalities. In the case of each, the analysis investigates what they desire and the particular mechanisms of production of terror, psychological, physical, and systemic. There is a fundamental inquiry into the most innovative horror in the play, the metafictional. In this case, the very process of telling the story turns into a monstrosity because narratives mix too dangerously with reality and serve as templates of violence. The chapter finally concludes that the vicious circle of abuse illustrated in the play is the greatest horror therein since monstrosity is not a condition but a vice that is being passed down to the subsequent generations, as well as to the state machine and its domestic sphere. The paper concludes by arguing that The Pillowman is a dark mirror of our own age that carries with it the old-felt fears about unchecked state authority and the eternally existing intoxication of toxicity and mutilation of the human spirit through narratives, which here are storytelling.

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Gothic literary tradition has been functioning, as it were, as a cultural conscience where it has created an expression of the fear most profound of the society in which it is created. Since its inception in the rubble of the ancient castles and the shadows of an overly superstitious history, the genre has redefined its monsters over time to shape the concerns of the modern world. The Pillowman by Martin McDonagh is a play that renders such evolution in the disturbing form. The play is based on a writer called Katurian who works in a totalitarian society and is being questioned by two sadistic police officers on any information regarding the horrific nature of the content of the stories he writes, and how they are gruesomely coinciding with the series of child murders occurring lately. When Captain Ariel becomes involved in the torture, the story spirals out of control to expose the part played by intellectually disabled brother, Michal, of Katurian and the grotesque childhood test conducted by their parents, who tortured one son to inspire the other's art. The common motifs of the genre have therefore adapted to the modern world in shifting from the external and supernatural to the internal and systemic. The haunted castle is replicated in the interrogation room, the abusive house, the supernatural terror is a mental wound of inherited trauma, the monstrous Other turns out to be an uncomfortable aspect of the self. The Pillowman takes the very mechanics of the genre like horror and the excess to light the mundane and omnipresence of evil in a world where the highest frightening narratives are not those our society has been told, but rather the ones we have been telling, and finally, and the ones we have been experiencing daily.

This chapter is structured to analyse this contemporary Gothic environment in a systematic way. It starts with creating the theoretical basis of monstrosity and Gothic tradition. It then goes further to a detailed study of the monstrous beings in this play and classifies them as the monstrous perpetrator, the monstrous authority, and the monstrous parent. The play's central innovation—metafictional horror, in which narrative itself turns into a horrible act—will be examined in the following section. The analysis will conclude with a look at the cycle of abuse and the issues of the play's contemporary relevance, contending that the real monster in The Pillowman is the terrible power of the narrative and the unavoidable inheritance of trauma.

# **Introduction: The Anatomy of Modern Monstrosity**

Gothic tradition since its emergence in the eighteenth century has been essentially a "writing of excess" (Botting, 1996, p. 1), a mode that exists to probe the darker side of the society in terms of spectres, haunted spaces,

and above all, the monster as representative of this mode. These characters have functioned as societal barometers, externalizing ingrained fears about the self, the other, and the limits of knowledge. Examples of these include the menacing antagonists of Ann Radcliffe and the scientifically created Creature in Frankenstein. "The monstrous body" as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (1996) contends is a "cultural body" (p. 4), which is a construct that, in all sense of the term, makes "fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy" live and become uncannily independent (p. 4). These monsters are not only scary but also demonstrative, their very name, *monstra*, which is the adjective of *monstrare* (to show), exists to caution, educate, and offer the lines of the society in which they were created (Mittman and Hensel, 2018, p. x). The thesis of this chapter is that The Pillowman by Martin McDonagh represents a pivotal evolution within this canon, transplanting the Gothic's familiar terrors from the feudal castle to the sterile brutality of the police interrogation room and the grotesque intimacy of the family home. The Pillowman ushers in a "new nightmarish phase," employing "archetypal Gothic fairy tales to disturb and unsettle and to tap into a more unnerving depiction of violence and extremes of the theatrical grotesque". McDonagh's work is frequently praised for its "extreme and grotesque depiction of violence" (Rees, 2018, p. 61). The monster in this play is a ubiquitous state rather than a solitary, exterior thing. A pathological state power, a generational cycle of abuse, and—most unsettling of all—the act of storytelling itself are all involved.

According to researcher Eamonn Jordan (2005), the play presents its audience with a universe in which the past is accommodated "through a sort of monstrous and transgressive, almost carnivalesque summation ... in favour of the grotesque, inhumane cartoon-heightened style" (p. 52). The primary monstrous characters of the story are the detectives Ariel and Tupolski, the child murderer Michal, and the author Katurian, each representing a distinct aspect of modern horror. They are human agents, not ghosts or vampires, whose acts are made "monstrous" by their transgression of basic moral and physical boundaries. This exemplifies Julia Kristeva's (1982) definition of the abject as that which "disturbs identity, system, order" and "does not respect borders, positions, rules" (p. 4).

This chapter will offer a thorough examination of these beings, breaking down their personalities, particular horror mechanisms, and motivations. It will examine how McDonagh modernizes the Gothic project for the present day by "forcing audiences into identification with monstrous characters" (Eldred, 2007, pp. 118-119). Lastly, it will assess the play's deep relevance, contending that The Pillowman captures modern fears of trauma, state power, and the horrifying possibility that narrative—the very thing we use to make

sense of the world—can turn into a catalyst for unimaginable violence. This analysis will show us how the monster continues to reveal itself to us in its unrelenting evolution.

# Theoretical Foundations: Monstrous Bodies and Gothic Landscapes

To properly understand the horrors at work in *The Pillowman*, one must first grasp the theoretical tools used to analyse monstrosity itself. This is not about simple ghost stories; it is about how certain figures and spaces come to embody our deepest cultural fears. The work of scholars like Jeffrey Jerome Cohen provides a compelling starting point. He famously argued that the "monstrous body is a cultural body," a construct which "quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy... giving them life and an uncanny independence" (1996, p. 4). In other words, monsters are never just monsters; they are physical manifestations of what a society dreads or desires to repress. They are, as Mittman and Hensel (2018) remind us, rooted in the very word monstrare—to show. Their primary function is to demonstrate a warning, to point towards a transgression.

This connects powerfully to the psychoanalytic concept of the abject, developed by Julia Kristeva. The abject is what people violently reject because it disturbs their sense of identity, system, and order. It is, as Kristeva (1982) writes, "what does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (p. 4). Think of things that provoke a visceral recoil—corpses, waste, open wounds—which horrify people because they remind them of the fragility of their own bodily boundaries and the fact that people are, ultimately, material beings that will decay. The monster often resides in this territory of the abject, its very existence creating a challenge to a clear categorisation.

These monstrous bodies need a habitat, and this is where the Gothic tradition offers a ready-made architecture. As Fred Botting (1996) succinctly put it, "Gothic signifies a writing of excess" (p. 1). It is a mode that thrives on transgression, on pushing beyond the limits of the reasonable and the polite. From its origins, Gothic fiction has relied on "tortuous, fragmented narratives relating mysterious incidents, horrible images and life-threatening pursuits" (p. 2). Its landscapes are traditionally "desolate, alienating and full of menace" (p. 45), from crumbling castles to haunted forests.

How does this relate to McDonagh, then? The Pillowman takes these classic Gothic foundations and recalibrates them for a modern, bureaucratic age. The haunted castle is replaced by the stark, oppressive "Police interrogation

room" (McDonagh, 2003, pp. 5, 50), a sterile, institutional space where the dungeons are not hidden but are the very rooms next door. The spectral ghost is supplanted by the very real, corporeal spectre of state-sanctioned torture, embodied by detectives like Ariel, who calmly informs a suspect, "kneel down over here, please, so I can connect you to this battery" (p. 53). This is paired with the lingering phantom of childhood trauma, acoustically haunting the narrative with "the low whirring of drills, the scritchety-scratch of bolts being tightened, the dull fizz of unknown things electrical, and the muffled screams of a small gagged child" that emanated from a locked room (p. 23). The Gothic 'writing of excess' is found not just in the bloodshed, but in the grotesque, almost cartoonish extremity of the violence, what one critic described as an "inhumane cartoon-heightened style" (Jordan, 2005, p. 52). This is realised in moments where a character can matterof-factly state, "I chopped his toes off and he didn't scream at all. He just sat there looking at them" (McDonagh, 2003, p. 34), or in the visceral discovery of "the horrific corpse of a fourteen-year-old child... barely a bone of which wasn't broken or burned" (McDonagh, 2003, p. 24). The play thus foregrounds the production of the monstrous 'cultural body' within its most disquieting sites of manufacture: through the brutal machinery of the state, within the intimate cruelty of the family, and, perhaps most disturbingly, via the narrative constructions whose inherent destructive capacity is catastrophically unleashed.

## An Anatomy of Monstrosity: The Perpetrator, the Authority, and the Parent

After establishing the theoretical framework, it is time start analysing the particular monsters that prowl The Pillowman's world. It soon becomes evident that McDonagh is showing a range of monstrosities, each of which serves as a dark mirror reflecting a distinct aspect of a sick society, rather than a single, instantly recognizable creature. The play challenges people with the disturbing notion that the real horror is something ingrained in their very homes and institutions—something we may even recognize in ourselves—rather than an outside, supernatural force.

Perhaps the most immediately recognisable monster is the Monstrous Perpetrator, embodied by Katurian's brother, Michal. He is the character whose actions most directly mirror the violent, child-killing figures of folklore, the one who commits the acts that so horrify us. Yet, what makes Michal so particularly disturbing is his jarring disconnect from the gravity of his own crimes; it is the chasm between the horrific nature of his acts and the childlike simplicity with which he describes them. His recounting

of violence is delivered with a baffling pragmatism that is more unsettling than any display of rage. He tells Katurian of murdering a little boy, Aaron, matter-of-factly stating, "I chopped his toes off and he didn't scream at all. He just sat there looking at them. He seemed very surprised. I suppose you would be at that age... God, he bled a lot. You wouldn't've thought there'd be that much blood in such a little boy" (McDonagh, 2003, p. 34). The horror for the audience mounts as he then pivots seamlessly to the domestic problem of laundry, observing, "It's really hard to get out of your clothes, isn't it, blood?' (p. 34). He doesn't frame his actions in terms of sadistic pleasure, but as an almost mundane execution of a story's plot, telling Katurian with an air of inconvenience, "I didn't enjoy killing those kids. It was irritating. It took ages. And I didn't set out to kill those kids. I just set out to chop the toes off one of them and to put razors down the throat of one of them" (p. 34). His subsequent confession about hiding the severed toes—"I hid 'em under the dirt in the Christmas tree pot in the attic, 'cos I knew we wouldn't be getting the Christmas tree pot out again for ages" (p. 33)—further underscores this monstrously warped practicality.

In Michal as a character, a terrifying literalisation of Cohen's concept of the monster as a 'cultural body' can be seen. He is a living testament to the idea that a story, once released into the world, can take on a life of its own with devastating consequences. He has absorbed Katurian's stories not as fictions, but as manuals, his own mind becoming the site where narrative transforms into horrifying reality. Katurian himself, in a moment of furious despair, brands Michal a "sadistic, retarded fucking pervert who enjoys killing little kids" (p. 35), a label that attempts to contain and explain the threat by naming it. However, Michal's monstrosity is more complex than simple perversion; it is a warped innocence, a broken moral compass forged in the crucible of his own abuse. This makes him one of the play's most pitiable and yet most dangerous figures—not a demon, but a damaged human being who enacts the darkest of fairy tales because, in his world, that is what stories are for. He is the ultimate warning of what happens when the line between fiction and reality catastrophically collapses.

## The Monstrous Authority and the Monstrous Parent

Going beyond the character of Michal, the play makes the reader confront the monstrosity in the most organised and cunning designs: the state and the family. In this case, horror is not created by a twisted psychology but is coldly premeditated and effectively implemented and that makes it even more horrible.

Detectives, Ariel and Tupolski, are the embodiments of the Monstrous Authority. This is not just how they are rotten officials, they are the eloquent engineers to a system where pain is the major language of communication. Their menace is immediate. Ariel doesn't ask questions; he makes declarations, telling Katurian from the outset, "You will answer everything we want you to" (McDonagh, 2003, p. 6). Their monstrosity lies in its bureaucratic sheen; it is horror wearing the mask of procedure. From the very beginning, the dynamic is established not as a search for truth, but as a game of cat-andmouse where torture is a foregone conclusion. Ariel's opening salvo—"You will answer everything we want you to.' There was never a question, 'You will answer everything we want you to.' There was a question, 'How much are you going to make us fuck you up in the meantime?' was what the question was" (p. 6)—immediately immerses us in a world where power is the only currency. This preconditions a procedure, in which the truth does not matter, and authority is absolute. They are not always very serious with their brutality. At the point when Ariel vicious attacks Katurian, the stage direction is that Tupolski just "looks at this, sighs" (p. 11) normalising the atrocity as just another part of the job.

The reason why they are so chilling is the cynicism that they have with themselves. Tupolski freely satirises even the concept of having any sort of trust in their system when he says, "I am a high-ranking police officer in a totalitarian fucking dictatorship. What are you doing taking my word about anything?" (p. 18). This is a boast rather than a confession, serving as a reminder that they function in a moral vacuum where their word is law because it is unreliable. Tupolski's line, "Oh, I almost forgot to mention... I'm the good cop, he's the bad cop" (p. 11), which appears just before the violence starts, highlights the grotesque parody of their good-cop-bad-cop routine.

Ariel's intense, self-justifying faith in his own righteousness, however, is arguably the most nuanced aspect of their monstrosity. He describes his motivation as a "overwhelming, and there is an all-pervading, hatred... of people who lay even the littlest finger... on children" in a lengthy and unsettling monologue (p. 52). In order to defend his use of "excessive force" on innocent people, he claims that if they leave the room, they will never "contemplate even raising their voice to a little kid again, just in case I fucking hear 'em" (p. 52). His final statement, "I stand for something," is a startling statement of his purpose. On the right side is where I stand. "The side of the child" (p. 53). "I would torture you to death just for writing a story like that, let alone acting it out!" (p. 53) is his final conclusion as a result of this conviction. Ariel demonstrates that the most dangerous monster is one that

is completely convinced of its own virtue by fusing the banality of evil with the zeal of the zealot.

However, according to the play, these state leaders are only signs of a more serious, underlying decay. The one place that should be safe—the family—is also the site of the first and most profound horror. The ultimate perversion of care is exemplified by the Monstrous Parent. The dark secret at the heart of the play is the tale of Katurian and Michal's childhood. Their parents were cold-blooded social experimenters, not just violent. Michal's note, written in blood, reveals the truth: "They have loved you and tortured me for seven straight years for no reason other than as an artistic experiment, an artistic experiment which has worked" (pp. 23-24).

This was not a sporadic outburst of anger but a sustained, calculated programme of torture. Katurian's childhood was soundtracked by a hidden, ongoing horror, described as "the low whirring of drills, the scritchetyscratch of bolts being tightened, the dull fizz of unknown things electrical, and the muffled screams of a small gagged child [that] began to emanate through its thick brick walls. On a nightly basis" (p. 23). The physical proof of this years-long atrocity is discovered when Katurian finds "the horrific corpse of a fourteen-year-old child that had been left to rot in there, barely a bone of which wasn't broken or burned" (p. 24). In this, the parents become the ultimate source of the abject. They are the monsters who do not simply cross boundaries; they systematically destroy the most sacred one of all—the bond that should protect a child. They create the damaged individuals that the state then hunts down, completing a vicious cycle where monstrosity begets monstrosity, leaving no institution and no relationship untouched by its corrosive influence.

## The Metafictional Monster: Storytelling as Violence

Having considered the monstrous people in the play, we reach what is perhaps the original and disturbing thought of the play, that the monster is not a person at all, but a process. The Pillowman compels the reader to pose a very awkward question: Is even telling a story a monstrous activity? What would become of stories no longer being merely accounts of violence, but practical plans of the same? It is this meta-horror, in which there is an ugly blurring of fact and fiction, which is actually the genuine intellectual and emotional core of this play of McDonagh.

This is demonstrated in the play at an early stage. The dark short stories by Katurian are not merely abstract fictions, but they are directly involved in the crimes in the real world that are under investigation. The horrendous

parallel is spelled out by the detective Tupolski. He describes one of Katurian's stories, in which a girl carves little figures from apples and her father swallows them. But then, Tupolski continues narrating the story, "it goes on. The girl wakes up that night. A number of applemen are walking up her chest. They hold her mouth open. They say to her ... 'You killed our little brothers.' They climb down her throat. She chokes to death on her own blood. The end" (McDonagh, 2003, p. 11). This is not just a tale; it is a precise mirror of the murder of a little girl, whose cause of death, as Ariel bluntly states, was "Two razor blades down her little fucking throat, both wrapped in apple, funnily enough" (McDonagh, 2003, p. 21). The story has jumped from the page into the real world, with fatal consequences.

This terrifying transference is most perfectly embodied in the character of Michal. He does not see the stories as metaphors; he reads them as instructions. He confesses to Katurian that he killed a little boy because "The little boy was just like you said it'd be. I chopped his toes off and he didn't scream at all" (p. 34), directly enacting Katurian's "The Tale of the Town on the River." His actions reveal a literal-mindedness that exposes the dangerous power of art. In his formal confession, Katurian is forced to write this dynamic into the official record, stating, "And I held him down as my brother cut his toes off, acting out a story called 'The Tale of the Town on the River.' Attached." And later, "And I held her down, as he fed her a number of little figures made from apples, with razor blades inside them, acting out a story called 'The Little Apple Men.' Attached" (p. 51). The word "acting out" here is crucial; it frames the murders not as original crimes, but as performances of a pre-written script.

This blurring is further intensified by the play's staging, which brings Katurian's fictional worlds to life on stage. The narrative of "The Little Jesus" is not just told; it is performed, with the girl being crucified and eventually buried alive. The audience is made complicit, forced to witness the very horrors that inspired Michal. As the girl is buried, Katurian narrates the dreadful conclusion:

Three days later a man out walking the woods stumbled over a small, freshly dug grave, but, as the man was quite quite blind, he carried on by, sadly not hearing a horrible scratching of bone upon wood a little way behind him, that ever so slowly faded away and was lost forever..." (p. 49).

This is the culmination of the metafictional horror: we are not just hearing a story, but witnessing the visceral, sensory reality of its execution, a reality first conceived in a writer's mind.

Ultimately, the play presents a world where, as scholar Eamonn Jordan (2005) notes, characters "both tell their Grimm and terrorizing narratives, monstrous in different ways, over which they cannot control either meaning or interpretation" (p. 61). Katurian may have written his stories as dark art, but he cannot control their migration into the world. His desperate plea to the detectives—"I just want you to keep your word. To go ahead and kill me, and to go ahead and keep my stories safe" (McDonagh, 2003, p. 52) is a futile attempt to re-cage the monster he has unleashed. In doing so, The Pillowman holds a dark mirror to the act of creation itself, questioning the ethical responsibility of the artist in a world where a story is never just a story, but a potential weapon waiting for the right, or more accurately, the wrong, reader.

## The Vicious Circle: Monstrosity as an Inheritance

Thus far, we have examined each of *The Pillowman*'s monsters as distinct species: the Parent, the Authority, and the Perpetrator. The worst fact in the play, though is the fact that all these forms of monstrosity are connected. These are all links of a single chain. Monstrosity, in the world that McDonagh shows does not represent an independent, single defect of a personality. Instead it is treated like a contagious disease that transpires through one family to the other and even to the institutions of a state. Each fresh violence is merely the reverberation of an even greater and older hurt, and it comes down to a dreadful curse, in which the very one who was hurt turns out to be the injuring one.

The parents' deliberate, cruel brutality sets off this vicious cycle. In addition to being a horrifying act of abuse, their so-called "artistic experiment"—torturing one son in order to motivate the other—is a direct recipe for producing monsters. More than just a startling admission, the note Michael left behind—which states that he was tortured for seven years straight for this "experiment" (McDonagh, 2003, pp. 23-24)—is a diagnosis of their entire worldview. This diagnosis demonstrates that the parents saw their kids as raw material to be shaped—or, more accurately, as being torn apart and reshaped—rather than as human beings to be raised. Katurian and Michal's childhoods were accompanied by those sounds of disintegration— "the whurr-whurr of drills, the scribble-scribble of bolts being tightened... the smothered screams of a small struggling gagged child" (p. 23). These dark, venomous nursery rhymes taught them their first lessons about pain, power, and the close relationship between the two.

The aftereffects of this parental trauma are disastrous in Michal. The

most immediate product of the experiment is himself a living embodiment of the harm caused. His violent actions are not born in some vacuum, it is just the perversified offspring of his upbringing. As Katurian stamps him, the debate goes to the root of this inheritance. He says, "You are just like mum and dad, you cry out, Michal! Hitting me, and shouting at me!" (p. 37). Any display of anger or violence is a repetition of the parental model in his head. The sad, hopeless logic of the cycle can be played out furious by Katurian in his infuriated reply:

"Mum and Dad had their first-born son in a room and tortured him seven years in it, and you made a little boy bleed to death... and you are not like Mum and Dad, but I banged the head of a dimwit in the wall once and I am like Mum and Dad" (McDonagh, 2003, p. 37).

It is at this point that Katurian understands the dreadful reality: not only in opposing the monstrosity, not only in attempting to prevent his brother, he has been subjected to employ its tactics. He has joined the same life that he is trying to avoid.

And yet, the circle is not complete with the brothers. It extends to absorb the state per se. The play implicitly recommends that the detectives, despite all their institutional authority are also victims of this economy of abuse. Ariel, who presents himself as the avenger of children is a broken man. During one of the most dramatic scenes of psychological conflict, Katurian finally breaks through his mask, asking him to remember that "And who was the first one who told you to kneel down, Ariel? Your mum or your dad?" (McDonagh, 2003, p. 54). The question lands like a physical blow, and Tupolski's subsequent, cynical commentary—"What phrase would you use? A 'fucked by your dad' childhood?" (McDonagh, 2003, p. 54) confirms that Ariel's own history is one of victimisation. The violent, crusading campaign he has made to save children, is seen as a traumatised reaction on his own childhood, and a desperate attempt to conquer his past by recreating it through an authoritative place. He is not breaking the cycle; he is just continuing it under another label.

That is the pessimistic, strong ending of the play concerning the character of evil. It is not an external factor that penetrates into a healthy system. It is an acquired habit, a scenario that is passed on between the parent and the child, domesticity to the powers that be. The Pillowman is the last symbol of this cycle who is haunting, a kind of animal, who does not provide a solution to a sufferer, but assists him to transfer the painful experience to the next generation, persuading children to kill themselves to avoid further tortures. There is no clean break in the world of the play, just endless grim repeats. McDonagh demonstrates that the reaction of merely punishing the monster of the moment is the last thing we need. The actual labour, the actual horror, is to track down the monster back to its beginning and realise the dreadful, familiar mould of its beginnings.

## Contemporary Relevance: The Modern Gothic Mirror

The Pillowman is not the dark fairy tale or a shock-piece written for stage that should be ignored. The real strength of it comes in the fact that it is highly relevant to the contemporary real life issues. The real genius of the play is that it applies the traditional qualities of the Gothic, the creepy space, the dirty secrets, the monstrous characters of the Gothic, and uses them as a faulty, but frighteningly transparent reflection of the world we live in now. The play is able to transcend its fictional and totalitarian environment to address pressing, real-world concerns regarding power, trauma, and the reality of the twenty-first century. It shows that the Gothic was never about ghosts and castles, it is always about those atrocities that we bring on each other and The Pillowman proves that atrocities have merely had a new clothing.

The closest reverberation is, perhaps, in the factors of state power and institutional cruelty expressed in the play. The Ariel and Tupolski interrogation room is infinitely far away, a mediaeval dungeon, yet it achieves the same end; that is, terror and extracting a confession. Their nonchalant and almost bureaucratic attitude towards torture is very relatable today when there are recorded cases of human rights offences, black site prisons and the psychological manipulation of detainees. When Tupolski quips, "I am a high-ranking police officer in a totalitarian fucking dictatorship. What are you doing taking my word about anything?" (McDonagh, 2003, p. 18), he is not just describing his fictional reality; he is articulating a deep-seated public scepticism towards authority figures who operate with impunity. Ariel's self-justifying monologue, where he declares, "I stand for something. I stand on the right side. The child's side. The opposite side to you" (p. 53), echoes the rhetoric used to justify extraordinary measures, illegal wars, and the erosion of civil liberties in the name of a "greater good." The play forces us to ask: how thin is the line between a protector and a persecutor? And what does it do to a society when that line is repeatedly crossed by the very institutions designed to uphold it?

In addition, the theme of the play, which is cycle of abuse and the post-traumatic inheritance relates directly to our acquired contemporary knowledge of the psychological harm. We have, now, recognised, what former epochs had not so clearly, how deeply the misfortune of childhood memories influence the adulthood. The horrific "artistic experiment" conducted by Katurian and Michal's parents is an extreme, Gothicised representation of the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) that clinicians study today. The play is a dramatic expression of the fact that any untreated trauma does not disappear; it spreads. Michal that was the main victim renders into another victim, and the violence that he invents is his revenge, although taken to the extreme, directed at the same person. The secondary witness Katurian is psychologically traumatised and his life drive is just the sound of a tortured brother. This is not merely a plot device, but a strong allegory for the intergenerational transmission of abuse, addiction, and poverty with which communities are cursed. According to the play, it is only possible to conceive of possibilities to know and avert violence by having the courage to contemplate the rooms in the dark where the violence originated.

Above all, *The Pillowman* is frighteningly timely in the matters of narrative and metafictional horror. This is the world of saturation with narratives, a digital ecosystem where the narratives can be weaponised, may go viral and make the people take action in the real world with especially frightening rapidity. The hopelessness with which Katurian realises that his tales have slipped out of his hands and are now operating at an instructional level by assisting in a killing spree may be a primordial fear of any artist, although it is also the fashion of the day in our internet lives. The play is an augur of a time of "fake news", when rival narratives fight for dominance, and in which ideologies of violence are propagated via internet manifestos and echo chambers of earlier times. In thinking of a fictional story as a literal teaching, Michal is the focus of the worst repercussions of a world in which the boundary between reality and fiction has been purposefully obscured. The play contains a solemn reminder of the moral duty of the creator in the era of mass distribution. It poses a question to people: what is the price of a story? And who becomes a target when a story that has been put out into the world causes real damage?

And lastly, the character The Pillowman himself, a troubled comforter that suggests death as an advance cure to misery, echoes the modern debate of despair, agency and the right to die. Although not a direct comparison to assisted dying laws, the character exploits a massive contemporary fear of the quality of life and fear of pain in the future. In a culture where it becomes more common to experience a mental crisis, the reasoning of The Pillowman is an ugly portrayal of their desperation that is, at times, unavoidable. He is the ultimate disavowal of hope, and his appearance in the play makes us think over what type of society might think of producing circumstances in which such a figure can be even viewed as a relief.

To conclude, The Pillowman lives on not due to the Grand Guignol effect of the violence within it, but because the anxieties its main characters are facing are ours. Essentially the native language of horror is the Grand-Guignol style of the play. It is the aesthetic vehicle, under which McDonagh brings out the most shocking concepts regarding violence, storytelling and trauma, and makes them, not merely intellectual, but manifestly, nauseatingly real. Monstrous government, the leftover poison of being violated as a child, the menacing aspect of free-floating narratives, the spectre of desperation these are not Gothic fantasies. They are titles of our days, the manipulated black and brilliant spectacle of McDonagh. The play shows that the Gothic mode is alone able to solve the existential anxieties of any era we now find ourselves living in and in portraying its own Gothic reflection on us nowadays remind us of something terrifying and something that is not to be forgotten.

#### Conclusion

Moving out beyond the bleak and depersonalised Pillowman, we are not only left with the penumbra of the violence the book explores, but with a greater disturbing issue that makes us think deeply, even deeply, about what we have learned about the nature of monstrosity. The unrealistic play with its unblushing approach to the matter provides a difficult and thoroughly contemporary solution. It shows us that the monster is hardly ever an isolated subject to be defeated. It is rather an epidemic, a disease that is transmitted by the society, its manifestation is the brutal state, sick family, and the darkest regions of human consciousness. What McDonagh has here done with his usual mixture of the grotesque and the tragic is to reduce to the scalpels of the Gothic the malaisees of our own time.

The passage of this play has given a view of a land where the horror is massproduced. We have observed how monstrous power of Ariel and Tupolski is not an exception but a logical result of a system which perversifies brutality as right. Back of the genealogy of corruption we have tracked the trail of vice into the monstrous mother, and discovered that even cold artistry shows that the permanent evils are frequently created at home. And, perhaps, most frighteningly, we have seen the emergence of the teratologic offender in Michal, a human being who demonstrates how readily a narrative can turn into a killing when it gets into the head of a traumatised individual.

The devastating point of the play is monstrosity that is cycling. It is echoing along the generational lines and this is not just a story it tells, but it is a story that has been lived. The Personality of such an abject economy is The Pillowman himself, who is the animal which can not repent, it can only

be killed in time, in order that the sequence of the silence and the suffering can be renewed and continued. It is a vile self-examination of picking up this dark mirror in the play. It puts us to think about the role that we have in the storeys that we read and write. It is a challenge to us not only to take a glance at the working out of the power in our own societies but also to listen to the yet cry of the suppressed, we ourselves otherwise being prone to discount.

At some point The Pillowman does not just frighten us. It implores us to understand. It argues that simply disapproving the monster is only denying the fact that the person is trying to cure a symptom but not the disease. The real horror of it, its real labour is to discover the origin of the monster, to discover it in the state or the family or in the tales which we tell our children and to start to realise with a sense of horror shock that we are the ones who can create a cycle and that we are the ones who can destroy. There is no straight forward solution in the play. Instead, it creates a hair-raising realisation of its own: the greatest narratives are the ones which lack a happy ending, but prompt us to keep on asking ourselves the disheartening questions in the wake of the final curtain being lifted.

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## Chapter 6

# Playing God and the Aesthetics of Exclusion: Unveiling the True Monster in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein 8

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#### Abstract

Monster figures have traditionally represented something inhuman or partially human. As a pioneer of the Gothic genre, Frankenstein both transformed this genre and provided a new perspective on the definition of a monster, a perspective that has endured for two hundred years. This chapter examines how Mary Shelley, a prominent female writer of the time, wrote this story in the context of the Enlightenment era, as well as the consequences of humanity's assuming the role of the God. Furthermore, it explores the topics science has addressed, their reflections from the nineteenth century to the present, and the concept of the successful scientist as represented by Doctor Victor Frankenstein. Also, it reveals whether scientists choose to play the role of the God or science itself, while working on a new discovery, as the character Victor does. On the other hand, the concept of the absence of divinity (atheism) and the aesthetics embraced by the creature are studied in this context, with an emphasis on both social and psychological consequences. In these circumstances, where unbelief and science come into conflict, they shed light on both Mary Shelley's critique of her time and current studies concerning the concept of creation. As a result, the contemporary reflections and ethical debates surrounding these and similar issues have been examined from both the Creature's and Victor's perspectives, as well as from a discussion of who the true monster is.

#### Introduction

Monsters, created as symbolic figures rather than genuine individuals, have been used for generations as mirrors of human terror. This vantage point is occasionally associated with concepts such as ghost stories and

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zombies, which have continued from the past to the present. However, this perception is reversed in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus, which depicts a creature whose very existence reveals the human roots of horror. Frankenstein is an alienation story of the unnamed monster.

This novel is considered through the following mythical perspective: Prometheus is a titan who stole fire from the Gods and is punished for his attempt, until the end of the world. In the novel, Prometheus is a doctor named Victor Frankenstein, who is interested in galvanism and desires to create a new kind of entity from a compound of human bodies; his creation led to the birth of a monster. It is highly suggestive in that the novel was believed to be under the influence of the concept of galvanism because debates as to the boundaries between life and death were quite common in Europe at the time. In 1803, the Royal College of Surgeons invited Professor Giovanni Aldini to conduct galvanic experiments on the body of George Foster, who had been convicted of killing his wife and child by drowning them in the Paddington Canal. Aldini believed that the bodies of those who had passed away still possessed their "vital powers," so he needed access to them.

Reading the records of this scientist's work at the College in 1803, it is not difficult to see why others believed such men liked to play at being God. Always conscious of his audience, Aldini made the dead perform tricks. He boasted that in Europe he had once placed the heads of two decapitated criminals on separate tables, then connected them with an arc of electricity to make them grimace to such an extent as to frighten spectators. He had also made the hand of a headless man clutch a coin and throw it across a room (MacDonald, 2005).

Thus, Victor Frankenstein's character is inspired by this idea; he steals the idea of creation, which belongs only to gods, and believes he is able to create a new kind of human, so he collects body parts from autopsies and disposal parts from abattoirs.

Most critics would probably agree that Frankenstein and the creature cannot be separated from one another. To talk about one means to talk about the other. Muriel Spark goes a step further, saying, "There are two central figures—or rather two in one, for Frankenstein and his significantly unnamed Monster are bound together by the nature of their relationship" (Keese, 2011, p. 3).

This creation of a monster is, in fact, a basis for atheism. It is a revolt against the God since the monster consists of human body parts, and Victor takes these parts from dead people. "I collected bones from charnel-houses

and disturbed, with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of human frame." (Shelley, 1818, p.50) The dead is sacred, inevitable, and irreversible. Victor is defying the idea of death, but he also intends to understand it to create the monster. However, Victor is not God, even though he behaves as if he were. Throughout the story, he despises the creature. One of the main reasons for this is the creature's ugliness. Victor himself creates it and rejects it. One irresponsibly takes life into his own hands and abandons it; the other takes life into his hands and extinguishes it. One creates; the other destroys (Keese, 2011, p. 3). He himself creates an ugly, large, and misshapen monster; however, when he sees what a repulsive and unmanageable creature it is, he begins to flee from it.

It is believed that the idea of the monster is inspired by the perspective of Mary Shelley's own life. However, before that, there was an incident that is believed to inspire Shelley. In 1816, 13,000-foot-tall volcano on the Indonesian island of Sumbawa erupted starting a gloomy weather condition across Europe that is known by the infamous name the year without summer. One of the largest volcanic eruptions in recorded history occurred in April of 1815 as follows:

Mt. Tambora ejected immense amounts of volcanic ash into the upper atmosphere, where it was carried around the world by the jet stream. The volcanic dust covered Earth like a great cosmic umbrella, dimming the Sun's effectiveness during the whole cold year. This resulted in a further reduction in solar irradiance, which brought record cold to much of the world during the following summer. Such an eruption would explain the appearance of the 1816 sun as "in a cloud of smoke (Steinberg, 2024)

During this time, Mary Shelley was enthused while staying with her husband, Percy Shelley, at the house of their friend, poet Lord Byron, on the shore of Lake Geneva in Switzerland. As the weather directly affected them, they were unable to see the sun, and it was cold and rainy most of the time. One evening, Lord Byron intended to organise a horror story competition. Percy Shelley wrote poems, and Lord Byron wrote a vampire story that inspired the well-known The Vampyre, but Shelley was unable to write for days. However, one evening, somewhere between sleep and wakefulness, I noticed a pale student kneeling beside the dead body he had created, which was slowly coming back to life. This dream sequence she had stimulated the creature's resurrection scene, and she began writing Frankenstein. (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.).

Prior to this, according to Mary Shelley's diaries, there were some events that influenced the novel. Shelley begins her life without a mother. Mary

Shelley's name comes from her mother, Anne Mary; her father demands that her name to be Mary. In light of this situation, it relates to Victor and the Creature's relationship because the Creature takes his name from his creator, Victor, and this could be a significant clue to Shelley's life. Victor flees from the creature after bringing it to life, so it becomes an unnamed creature. The Creature adopts Victor's name because it reflects his shadow. When Mary Shelley's relationship with her mother is examined, it can be observed that she carries the shadow of the person who gives her birth and whom she would never see again for the rest of her life. Thus, it is acknowledged that she draws inspiration from her own life experiences in creating the creature. Her journals clearly point out that she had nightmares wherein she was trying to restore a dead baby to life by "rubbing" it. It is interpreted in terms of the psychological impact of the baby she had lost and her miscarriage. Dilemma in her vision as to resuscitate her deceased infant by rubbing it, drawing a direct parallel to the creature. In her journal, she notes that when this act of resuscitation failed, she fled the room. It is said that the exact same action Victor takes when the creature comes to life. Furthermore, considering the period in which it was written, it is vital to remember that Shelley is a female author who remains, in a sense, in the shadow of her husband. In her youth, as a young woman in her 18, drawing attention to her personal experiences to produce such a work is remarkable for the 19th century. It is noticeable as both a major achievement and a scientific contribution to Gothic literature. Therefore, the monster idea is a creature brought to life through a (purportedly) scientific method. Nevertheless, it is concluded that the author is deeply influenced by her own life and traumas (Taylan, 2018).

Every form bears the God's mark, but the creature's appearance is grotesque. This is inevitable for Victor, who plays the God and becomes arrogant in his quest to create a new species of humankind. This new creature sees him as its creator and obeys him. "A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs." (Shelley, 1818/2019, p. 49). Considering this, it is claimed that Victor plays the role of the God. Before going through today's perspective of assuming a godly position over life, it ought to be agreed that the creature's aesthetic perception is different from a normal human being. No matter how attentively it's created out of a meticulous selection of the human cadavers, the creature itself is told to be ugly by Victor.

His limbs were in propotion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips (Shelley, 1818/2019, p. 53).

He says, "I had selected his features as beautiful...", but he underscores that he is an ugly monster. This perception displays the aesthetic concerns of the 19th century. However, the problem persists in the 21st century. He wishes him to be beautiful, but it turns out to be one of the creature's weaknesses. The Creature is an outcast. It is despised by the people because of its appearance, it terrifies people, and it does not fit the idea of aesthetic beauty. Being labelled monstrous by its own creature alienates the monster from society. If your god/creator does not love you, who will love you unconditionally? If that notion is recognised from today's perspective, aesthetic concerns remain a top issue for people.

According to Aristotle, in *Metaphysics* XIII.3, "The chief forms of beauty are order and symmetry and definiteness, which the mathematical sciences demonstrate in a special degree" (1078b). For instance, the objects of geometry, such as the sphere, and the cube and the pyramid, with their symmetry and order and wondrous elegance of line, specially reveal the beautiful. Thus, when something is dissimilar to human eyes, it outcasts them. This notion becomes a weakness for the creature; that's why he wishes Victor to create a female creature for him. The Creature assumes that this woman will accept him because of their resemblance. However, Victor is afraid of creating a female creature because of women's fertility. Considering this, Victor assumes that she becomes worse than him, and he rejects this request. The Creature's fundamental weakness -society's disregard- is once again exposed during the encounters with villagers. First encounter with the shepherd and seeing himself on the surface of the water represent the effects of his weakness. The Creature's encounter with the shepherd is the first stage of rejection. While escaping the cold, the creature comes across a hut and seeks shelter there. Although the creature approaches the two people eating breakfast in the shed with good intentions, the man screams in terror and runs away.

Nevertheless, the only hospitable character towards the creature in the novel, De Lacey, is blind, therefore he can only hear the Creature's speech, and he is not aware of his appearance. Just as he sees his reflection in the surface of water and is startled, the creature realizes how his appearance evokes fear in humans. Considering these circumstances, as Aristotle states,

it illustrates how aesthetic beauty and appearance can lead to judgments. Even today, it is almost impossible for society to accept the Creature though, it is believed to have human origins. If society were as blind as De Lacey, it would be possible then to accept this kind of creature. Evidently, a beauty standard has been imposed on people by the Western mind from ancient times to the present day. Ancient Greek and Roman sculptures, with their magnificent depiction of Gods and Goddesses, always highlight the greatness of human form- large, powerful, and aesthetically attractive- and dictate it upon people. Additionally, they would classify this creature as a mythological if it were a statue, but a mythological creature still fits the description of a creature. As a result, even if the monster is composed of human body parts, people who see the statue would classify the monster as a mythological creature, like Medusa, whose characteristics are defined as human but do not conform to the ideal of human form. Concluding, Frankenstein's creation is made of human parts. Moreover, the creature does not fit within a boundary or border (life and death), which evokes Victor's fear of death as well, but in quite a subtle manner.

## The Creation: Playing the God

"O mankind! Be conscious of your Lord, who created you from a single soul and created from it its mate."

(Our'an, 4:1)

"So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him."

(Genesis 1:27)

The Enlightenment, the period in which Frankenstein was written, is considered a time when men played the God in their positions and claimed nature for themselves. As Francis Bacon states, "Ipsa scientia potestas est" which means knowledge itself is power (Bacon, 1597). This philosophy is not about knowledge being power, yet it is dominating knowledge. Just as mentioned in the galvanism experiments conducted during this period, it implies playing with a force of nature, which may ultimately be comparable to imitating the role of the God. Additionally, the era is characterised by the rise of logic and science over faith and the soul, and by the discovery of everything through experimentation, yet it is the beginning of the collapse of the system of faith. Nevertheless, the Enlightenment has a humanist face; it adopts a way of thinking that separates and classifies people, marginalises them, and destroys the faith order.

No one can conceive the variety of feelings which bore me onwards, like a hurricane, in the first enthusiasm of success. Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world. A new species would bless me as its creator and source. (Shelley, 1818/2019, p. 55).

Frankenstein's religious beliefs are unknown, but considering this period, the Enlightenment, Shelley actually criticises people for imitating the God's position in defining life through a humanistic perspective that would be denoted as the Enlightenment Humanism. They are overconfident and believe that knowledge is power, just like Victor ensured in the novel. Influenced by the galvanism that flourished during this period, humanity's attempt to create a superior species and its frustration with the result when it is unsuccessful, leading to its rejection and avoidance, demonstrates that humans are not like God but rather helpless. The topic of creating a superior human being was also addressed by Hitler in a time very close to the present times. He argued that with the idea of the Ubermensch, a superior race could exist. Hitler's adoption of the Ubermensch concept, according to Justus H. Ulbricht, "the ideal of the non-conforming "Ubermensch" (superman) was reinterpreted and heroicised as the "Herrenmensch" (member of the master race) and "Aryan". (Ulbricht, 2025). Thus, Ubermensch constructs his life according to the physical reality conditions of material life while after life promises are ignored. Hitler's efforts to create a master race truly indicate how Shelley's novel is criticised by her in light of the conditions of the day. Since Western minds apparently believe in annihilation after death. In the novel, the creature is brought back to life as a whole body, invoking the idea of immortality.

Herman Joseph Muller (1890-1967), who won the Nobel Prize for discovering that X-rays could induce mutations in living organisms, altered 20th-century genetics and laid the groundwork for both molecular biology and bioethics. However, for instance, he is not an upholder of the ideas in question; he rather sees it as a threat to humankind. Shelley's opinion of a modern Prometheus is similar to Victor's in the 19th century, and Muller presented his viewpoint to the public and conducted studies on the subject.

...indeed, at once so powerful, so virtuous and magnifi-cent, yet so vicious and base? He appeared at one time a mere scion of the evil principle and at another as all that can be conceived of noble and godlike. To be a great and virtuous man appeared the highest honour

that can befall a sensitive being; to be base and vicious, as many on record have been, appeared the lowest degradation, a condition more abject than that of the blind mole or harmless worm. (Shelley, 1818/2019, p.120-121)

The creature is beginning to comprehend and question humans thanks to De Lacey and his family. It is the indication that if a new species starts to doubt humans, other species might follow as well; therefore, this assumption increases doubts about the future of humanity. Substantially, Muller mentions, "Frankenstein's monster was a fantasy; ours will be living, thinking men." (Muller, 1959). In response to this idea, Shelley's 19thcentury concept of playing the God still exists in the 20th century; these studies are still being conducted and are experimenting with this topic. Manipulating humanity's genetics is legal in some places, which illustrates that the idea of playing God, and the idea at the foundation of the novel, are not only from the 19th century; even 200 years later, people still keep the same mentality. Hence arises the questions: What is the purpose of this? What is the main element of fear? The contradiction in aesthetic perception is one of the creature's main weaknesses, due to its ugliness and appearance, which are alien to human perceptions of beauty, leading to the creature's social exile. No matter how hard Victor tries to make him beautiful, he creates a monster; he is afraid of him because of his hideous appearance. Indeed, it demonstrates that people may be afraid of things they are unable to comprehend or control.

Therefore, Muller converses moral ethics of genetics, and the capacity to redesign life, because it seems inconceivable that the secrets of human creation and moral ethics are being thrust in front of the uncontrollable and incomprehensible thing he does, just as Shelley states, just because mankind is able to do everything does not mean they should do it. The fact that creation, which is God's possession, is handed over to a defenceless human being is a question of faith, even though the outcome is unknown. Even under the mask of science, as Muller also pointed out, "to play with the human germ line is to take the place of God" (Muller, 1959). That is another way of honouring the Enlightenment mentality. The only thing that humankind has not encountered is a story with a creative core and conflict about life after death. Death is the only thing that human beings have not experienced. Consequently, developments and research on post-humanism, death, and the afterlife, which are among the most important issues of the present day, are also reflections of Frankenstein and are being investigated through vital scientific studies.

#### The Mad Scientist

Many scientists, particularly those working in bioethics and AI, have chosen Frankenstein as an ethical role model because Victor is a prime example of a mad scientist. Moreover, if one sets aside the pretence of God, this character can be an example of scientific ethics, empathy, and a sense of duty. Victor Frankenstein exemplifies the dark side of science and scientists for the participants, the dangers that science poses to society (Nagy, et al., 2019, p. 13-14). Just as Muller also argues, Frankenstein posits much credibility to be a modern ethical instance of science. With its anthropomorphic appearance and lack of resemblance to humans, it evokes fear, but if approached through Victor, it also serves as an example of what science may achieve today and the consequences for humanity. Thus, it becomes a source of fear. Based on this impression, a scientist must be ethical and moral, have developed empathy and sympathy, and understand the limits of human nature. On the contrary, Victor is perceived as having abandoned his creation and failed to take responsibility for this scientific (!) work of his own. This also implies that science bears a responsibility to humanity. Victor, as a brilliant scientist, lacks these qualities. He is a character who attempts to resolve all of humanity's questions about death and immortality, but he is unable to bear the consequences. Nevertheless, it is possible to say that the Frankenstein novel does not tie in with a single scientific issue, instead contributes to many.

Scholars note that the story is a cautionary tale. The theme of scientific hubris in Frankenstein is not just a fictional element; it also reflects ethical failures in the real world. One of the most remarkable examples of this is the case of Henrietta Lacks. Just as Victor Frankenstein ignores the suffering of the creature he created and becomes 'myopic 'by his own obsession with his creation, doctors took Lacks' cells without her consent. It is about arrogance. Through this arrogance, scientists can create a lot of suffering. They often think that their work is so great. As Rebecca Skloot (2010) also points out, the scientific community was so focused on the benefits of 'HeLa' cells that they forgot the human behind them. Scientists begin to forget about the suffering that their work can cause to other people. They can easily become myopic.

The narrative is fairly straightforward about how much Victor suffers and regrets what he created after witnessing it. In fact, in chapter 17, when the creature expresses his desire for a partner who resembles him, Victor begins to see this as his responsibility, but then he decides it is improper and refuses to create a partner for the creature.

"How can you, who long for the love and sympathy of man, persevere in this exile? You will return and again seek their kindness, and you will meet with their detestation; your evil passions will be renewed, and you will then have a companion to aid you in the task of destruction. This may not be; cease to argue the point, for I cannot consent." (Shelley, 1818/2019, p. 150)

Although many aspects of it are scientifically applicable to the present, it can be considered a complete post-human work. However, when approached from a scientific standpoint, those fields that are still ongoing today and on which research is being conducted, a variety of subjects are highly susceptible to instilling anxiety in human beings. Frightened by a monster in the past, but today's fears stem from the unknown and negligence. In today's world, the rise of genetic disorders, scientists who refuse to accept responsibility for their actions, and unsolved mysteries are creating new concerns (Badii, et al., 2021, p. 2). It raises the question of whether the problem is finding the monster or discovering what caused the monster.

Reactions to unusual situations are interpreted as indicators. This particular topic of discussion clearly demonstrates who the true monster is. When a person sees someone soaked in blood, is it the victim they fear, or the unseen hand that caused the blood to flow? Thus, Victor's personality is at the heart of the debate. Putting human parts back together and creating a new species may appear scientific, but it actually reveals who the true monster is. The idea of creating a new species using the body parts of people who have died long ago, and rejecting it, is not something a person with a conscience would do. It is now clear that Victor, who is attempting to play the God, can never be the God himself. Any human being who believes in the God or a creator understands that their creator will not abandon them. However, Victor, the Creature's creator, is a scientist and a man who claims to be doing this for science. Assuming that a person returns from death, but the creator does not want that person in life, who would be the true monster in that case? The answer is obvious: Victor, a scientist who does not take responsibility for his actions. The creature's disillusionment and self-loathing lead him to deem himself inferior to Satan, whereas Satan has followers; he is completely alone. Victor is the sole cause of all of this. Hence, the expression: Why did you create me if you did not intend to love me?

There are serial killers mentioned in the world who instil terror in people. For instance, Jack the Ripper is a famous serial killer known for brutally murdering women in the Whitechapel district of London in 1888 and never being caught. Noticeably, this is just one example, but what needs to be highlighted here are some horrific things this serial killer did to women's

bodies, such as chopping off their genitals. If this instance is taken into account, who should be held accountable: the women or the serial killer who victimised them?

In 1803, the College invited Professor Giovanni Aldini to carry out galvanic experiments on the body of George Foster, who had been found guilty of murdering his wife and child by drowning them in the Paddington Canal. Aldini required access to the bodies of people who had died very recently, in the belief that these still held their 'vital powers'. In contrast, those who had died of disease might have 'humours' which would resist his experiments. Later, writing up his London work, Aldini admired England's 'enlightened' laws, which provided murderers with an opportunity to atone for their crimes by such uses of their bodies after death (MacDonald, 2025).

In today's moral framework, according to this experiment, people hold the murderer accountable first, so why is Victor exempt from the same moral gaze? When human body parts are reassembled to create something dreadful, what else is it but the work of a murderer or a monster?! Thus, when this fact is taken into consideration, the line between them and Victor blurs, for the true monster is, in fact, Victor himself. Nevertheless, the monster's experiences are so vivid throughout the novel that the reader begins to sympathize with Victor, especially when the creature murdered William. "The child still struggled and loaded me with epithets which carried despair to my heart; I grasped his throat to silence him, and in a moment he lay dead at my feet." (Shelley, 1818/2019, p. 145) Indeed, this is the creator's responsibility because the creature expresses its rage toward Victor here, but murdering a child is unethical and morally wrong. Simultaneously, the fact that Justine Mortiz is wearing William's necklace is morally shocking because the two characters die at the hands of a monster Victor created. Mortiz, in her trial, states the following:

"God knows," she said, "how entirely I am innocent. But I do not pretend that my protestations should acquit me; I rest my innocence on a plain and simple explanation of the facts which have been adduced against me, and I hope the character I have always borne will incline my judges to a favourable interpretation where any circumstance appears doubtful or suspicious." (Shelley, 1818/2019, p. 80-81)

It is evident that both William and Justine are victims of Victor. In chapter 8, it can be relatable both Victor's suffering and the condemnation of an innocent woman to death. Even though Victor tries to get away and ignore the creature, it is obvious from these two events that the creature is following him and that he is desperate for his creator's love. The immense

suffering, he endured, culminating in his death and the abandonment of his creation, illustrates that monstrosity can exist not only in form but also in moral failure.

## The Idea of Beauty

Kant claims that, because natural beings are considered beautiful, the human race will undoubtedly be regarded as beautiful (Kant, 1790/2000). However, there is one significant difference that distinguishes the Creature of Dr. Frankenstein from this: it is not a natural structure. Even if Victor selects the most beautiful parts to form the creature, it is not beautiful as a whole because it is not a natural pattern. This is one of the main reasons for the creature's exclusion: it's terrifying appearance. This particular aspect of appearance and aesthetic perception is still prevalent today. The increasing number of plastic surgeries and the beauty standards created and imposed by social media are ultimately disrupting a natural process because, even today, just like Victor, there is a perception of being perfect. Since in aesthetic operations the idea is to disrupt what is natural and replace it with something better, Victor's desire to create a perfect living being is associated with today's esthetical operations. Victor states that in order to understand life, understanding of death is essential (Shelley, 1818/2019, p. 46). As a result, he is both embracing death and opposing it at the same time.

If this situation is addressed today, monsters may become associated with people's aesthetic concerns and efforts to appear much younger. The Creature is initially rejected by its own creator, society eventually joins in, and the doctor triumphs over death. However, the consequences are inevitable. The monster Victor created is not accepted by society. Indeed, the subtext of racism and excluding those who are different may be derived from this idea. The exclusion and marginalization of people with different skin tones or those who do not conform to the same beauty standards in society reflect the monster's experiences. However, based on Derrida's argument of binary oppositions, it is occasionally argued that concepts are defined by their opposites; for instance, one cannot define white without black; one view must have a contrast (Derrida, 1972/1981). "But the monster cannot enter society because he is inhumanly hideous and gigantic. Yet he must enter society if he is to become part of society. Thus, the monster forms a rational solution to his aesthetic problem" (Abrams, 2018, p. 14). In other words, the Creature's appearance and exclusion pose much credibility to stand for today's fear: the fear of aging and aesthetics. Moreover, aging is

also associated with death, which is illustrated as a fear of death. Although the creature believes it can persuade the villagers through kindness, it took that approach and was utterly unsuccessful.

I looked upon them as superior beings, who would be the arbiters of my future destiny. I formed in my imagination a thousand pictures of presenting myself to them, and their reception of me. I imagined that they would be disgusted, until, by my gentle demeanour and conciliating words, I should first win their favour, and afterwards their love. (Shelley, 1818/2019, p. 111)

Thus, it can be deduced that there is a universal-scale ongoing concern for aesthetic disposition. It has been imposed on society as a magnificent, perfectly shaped form, and if humans cannot adhere to these forms and standards, they may be considered outside of society. The fact that certain aesthetic concerns about submitting to society and skin colour are addressed in Europe, where humanism was born, is no different from Victor, who collects perfect body parts but still creates an ugly monster.

#### Conclusion

This body of analysis demonstrates that Frankenstein is the source of numerous issues that are still debated today. Although it is one of the pioneers of Gothic literature, it is also considered a foundation of science fiction, making it a strong example both scientifically and literarily. It is noticeable that Doctor Frankenstein's creation of the monster, which he thought was an outstanding example of science, was a failure. Playing the God and stealing creative power from him causes a drastic problem in the eyes of a scientist, as well as the accompanying monstrous consequences. However, in the novel, the true monster turns out to be the doctor himself. Victor, who abandoned the Creature he created, condemning it to loneliness, inciting anger, and driving it to commit crimes. The numerous themes that this creature has encountered throughout the story, exclusion, being perceived as ugly, and not being considered human, serve as a good example of both life and what society imposes today. To sum up, the real monster in this case is the pseudo-creator, Dr. Frankenstein, not the creature he has revived. Because everything the monster has gone through is the fault of its creator; it didn't ask for resurrection, and its creator did not endow it with a soul. The Creature has to rediscover what it means to be human, just like a newborn baby. Thus, the real monster becomes the unmerited creator himself who ventures beyond his limits in an oblivious arrogance.

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## Chapter 7

# Reconfiguring the Gothic Body: Abjection, Identity, and the Monstrous Feminine in Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* 8

## Gözde Begüm Mızrak<sup>1</sup>

#### Abstract

This chapter examines Angela Carter's The Passion of New Eve through the interwoven lenses of the Gothic and Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, centred around the monstrous figures of Mother and Eve/Evelyn. By situating the novel within the contemporary female Gothic fiction, the analysis demonstrates how Carter handles monstrosity as a strategic tool to investigate ideological constructions of gender, identity, and bodily autonomy. Mother's explicitly exaggerated entity and mythic authority display how illusory visions can duplicate intimidating structures under the disguise of revolution. Conversely, Eve's surgically constructed body and in-between identity represent the abject from within, exposing the psychological and symbolic violence of forced transformation and the instability of binaries regarding gender. Through close textual analysis, the chapter identifies the horror mechanisms Carter expands on, including grotesque corporeality, identity fragmentation, and the downfall of symbolic boundaries. These elements are combined to create a Gothic atmosphere that criticises the extremism of both patriarchal and radical matriarchal systems. Furthermore, the chapter shows that the desires motivating these monstrous figures shape their destructive courses while revealing the ideological fantasies they aim to reform. Ultimately, Carter's representations of monstrosity reflect contemporary concerns surrounding gender fluidity, reproductive technologies, and bodily regulation, positioning the monstrous as an effective ground for challenging and reimagining the social order.

#### Introduction

Psychoanalytic studies demonstrate that repressed returns frequently manifest in characters that are commonly featured in Gothic works. A close examination of many Gothic narratives reveals that violence, murder and

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death dominate their plots. Sigmund Freud, one of the leading figures of psychoanalysis, identifies the death drive as one of the two fundamental human drives (Uğurlu, 2022, p. 21). Therefore, at the core of murders portrayed in Gothic works particularly at those committed without a detectable motive lies Freud's concept of the death drive.

Although Gothic literature revolves around this death drive, fear, uncertainty, and the extraordinary, these elements paradoxically evoke pleasure in the reader. By focusing on such themes, Gothic fiction attracts sustained interest and thus continues to evolve. In this sense, Gothic works acquire a quality that runs counter to conventional notions of beauty, yet they inspire fascination and pleasure in the reader despite or because of this contradiction. The fear-inducing and unsettling elements of Gothic literature evoke the feeling of the sublime precisely because they appear inappropriate, alien, or violent in relation to human consciousness, perceptual capacity, and external reality. The pleasure derived from this sense of the sublime contributes to the appeal and popularity of Gothic fiction. Being related to Freud's uncanny, there appears to be the sense of ambiguity in the Gothic fiction enabling the reader to keep fear and satisfaction simultaneously. In Gothic literature, grotesque also plays a key part, which usually couples with the uncanny. While reading many Gothic texts, the reader interprets events from the narrator's perspective. Since narrators do not always present events as they occur, the reader often remains uncertain as to whether what is described is real or imagined. Thus, the distinction between reality and the supernatural becomes blurred.

In numerous Gothic works, manifestations of human evil are attributed to an invisible, spiritual being: the devil. Just as Gothic literature itself has undergone transformation over time, its conceptualisations of evil and demonism have also evolved. Witches, often characterised by their malevolence, have traditionally been associated with femininity, as women in various societies have historically been perceived as possessing negative traits. In contrast to that, there are also a considerable number of texts in which the devil and demonic entities are represented as male. Such gendered approaches in Gothic narratives have contributed to the classification of subgenres as Male and Female Gothic. In works by male authors, female characters are often portrayed as abject, which is to say, more uncanny, ambiguous, liminal, and socially marginalised due to their perceived differences described as such by Anne Williams (1995):

In light of Kristeva's analysis of horror, therefore, we can see that Male Gothic conventionally echoes that primitive anxiety about "the female", specifically the mother. The gruesome physical materiality of Male Gothic horror expresses the "abject", the otherness of the mater/ mother who threatens to swallow or engulf the speaking subject. (p. 106)

Thus, the female is alienated and 'the other' needs to be suppressed by the speaking subject as a representative of the power of patriarchy. This situation results from the threatening quality of the abject against the symbolic order. Female authors, particularly in the early phases of the tradition, depicted their heroines in domestic settings either as motherless or powerless, usually bearing names suggesting purity and innocence, isolated from the public sphere, struggling to endure dire circumstances, often within narratives enveloped by romance and ultimately featuring rescue by another woman or through their own evolution into the heroine figure (Gündüz, 2025, p. 17). Over time however, especially in the 20th century works, female characters began to be depicted as more liberal and autonomous, defying norms, questioning patriarchal structures, appearing in more unconventional spaces, and lacking the conventional need for a romance or marriage narrative. In doing so, postmodern and contemporary women writers usually employed rewriting techniques, subversion, and deconstruction to challenge or dismantle traditional and mythological perspectives as well as binary oppositions.

In their engagement with abjection, Gothic texts stage a process that resists completion or resolution. Recognising that any effort at sublimation inevitably collapses back into the manifestations of the abject, they demonstrate that the cycle of abjection, which is structured as an ongoing dialectic of confrontation and struggle, remains perpetual mainly because the pure and the dangerous mutually sustain and continually reproduce one another. Therefore, Gothic narratives invite us to "stay attuned to the unnamable force that undercuts our sense of stable identity, inside and outside, foreign and unfamiliar" (Bronfen, 2016, pp. 3-4). In other words, binary oppositions in such texts, first consume and then, refute each other causing the attributed meaning to them to collapse.

Angela Carter stands as one of the foremost and most influential authors within this tradition performing the abovementioned practice. She remarkably blends feminist and humanist perspectives to subvert binaries as well as othering stereotypes directed towards women to dismantle restrictive social norms. This approach clarifies Carter's close alignment with Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject. Building upon Freud and Lacan's psychoanalytic frameworks and introducing a feminist psychoanalytic

perspective, Kristeva's abject theory helps explain why monstrous or unusual figures in Gothic literature are perceived as such. According to Jerrold E. Hogle (2002):

Julia Kristeva has gone on more recently [...] to see the return of the repressed familiar in "the uncanny" as based on a more fundamental human impulse that also helps us to define the cultural, as well as psychological, impulses most basic to the Gothic. Kristeva argues for ghosts or grotesques, so explicitly created to embody contradictions, as instances of what she calls the "abject" and products of "abjection," which she derives from the literal meanings of ab-ject: "throwing off" and "being thrown under". (p. 7)

What is buried in the depths of unconscious finds its way in the outside world in the form of an extraordinary being i.e. a monster, a vampire, a mad scientist, a woman and needs to be expelled just as abject elements are expelled from the body in such forms as blood, sweat, urine etc. labelled as unwanted. For Kristeva, when these elements are oriented within the flow of body, which confronts to the pre-determined codes of society aka the Law of Father, these are not unwanted or othered. However, they become abject and othered when they go outside of the body and arise fear or disgust. To illustrate this with an example, when blood flows within the veins of a human's body, it does not pose a threat to the person or society whereas it causes fear and is treated as something to be kept out of sight when it is outside. The same applies to the pieces of hair: when they are placed on a person's head where they belong to, they are embraced whereas they are disgusted when seen in a bowl of soup or on the floors of a house. Departing from that, these abject elements are approached as things inbetween without belonging to anywhere certainly just like female characters. When they fit in the society and its codes, women are welcomed; however, they are thrown on the edges as outcasts when they present their differences and true identities to the world. They are 'angels in the house', but devils outside. They are subjects in process trying to realise themselves, but to do so, they need both sides of binaries.

Kristeva makes the borderline of binaries more fluid and deconstructs them where necessary. To be accepted inside as a subject with an independent and valued identity, the person needs to experience, learn and exist in the outside world. Therefore, in order to continue their race, males and females need to coexist, cooperate and be in harmony for the peace and well-being of the society. Likewise, a person needs both the evil and innocent sides of the identity to survive in the course of life when faced with various

circumstances. Binaries like male/female, inside/outside and evil/angel are made more transparent and the borders separating them are more flexible in the new world order. In line with that in this chapter, a literary analysis of the Gothic figures Eve/Evelyn and Mother in Angela Carter's The Passion of New Eve will be conducted through the lens of Kristeva's theory of abject.

Carter is widely recognised for a distinctive literary aesthetic that positions her among the most significant British writers of particularly the late 20th century. Her narratives are marked by a striking fusion of violence and eroticism with elements drawn from the fantastic, the Gothic, and science fiction (Yılmaz, 2015, p. 36). Owing to this uninterrupted engagement with violence, sexuality, and pornographic imagery, Carter's work has frequently been interpreted as deliberately transgressive and she was defined as "an unorthodox figure" appreciated with her resolute fiction, paving her way into "the most unsettling depths of Western culture, only to transmogrify its myths and unleash its monsters" (Bristow and Broughton, 1997, p. 1). She was regarded as not only a daring and innovative writer but also a good defender of social justice protesting inequalities, which made her significantly influential in shaping what is called the contemporary British fiction today. In terms of style, as Jago Morrison (2006) states:

She makes good use of eighteenth-century forms, especially the picaresque and the gothic. Her texts are patterned with iconic references to the history of European art, from the ancient Winged Victory of Samothrace to the modernist nudes of Toulouse Lautrec. In texts like The Passion of New Eve, Nights at the Circus and Wise Children, there are all sorts of witty references to popular songs, film iconography, variety and music hall. (p. 157)

As a postmodern and contemporary writer, she benefitted from intertextuality in her works combining various forms of art; therefore, her ideologist side in regard to feminism makes a valuable match with the Gothic. Although she initially focused on the criticism of patriarchy in her earlier works, she did not intend to design her plots revolving around it. In her later works, she expanded upon it and concentrated on "mocking and exploding the constrictive cultural stereotypes" (Makinen, 1992, p. 3). Therefore, her main concern was not limited to the criticism of the superiority of men in a male dominated society, rather she was an objective observer making harsh criticism against oppressive metanarratives including matriarchy, especially when it is practised irrationally and unreasonably. This view was also upheld by Ali Smith and Carter was depicted as "an exceptional thinker, critic, reviewer and essayist, a transformer of cultural

history and cultural potential" (Smith, 2007, p. 3). Evolving her writing to a wider selection of topics and being more involved in decoding culturally imposed norms through feminism, she describes that era in her life as "the part of the process of maturing" (Carter, 1998, p. 37). Through feminism, Carter came to recognise that her own femininity was a construct shaped by patriarchal ideology, and that the cultural myths imposed upon women produced a reality in which they could not comfortably exist (Aktari, 2010, p. 156). Consequently, she dedicated herself to the "demythologising business" in order to cultivate a political awareness capable of exposing the cultural formulations of sexuality within Western civilisation (p. 156). Her writing is marked by a rich imaginative power and sharp wit, which are qualities that enable her to contest both patriarchal conventions and rigidly defined literary genres.

Following her contemporaries with the same aim, central to her oeuvre is the act of rewriting. Via rewriting the familiar stories, she attempted to reconstruct some cultural concepts specifically the ones regarding gender stereotypes. As she famously remarked, "I am all putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode" (Carter, 1998, p. 37). In this sense, her rewritings take apart the oppressive boundaries through which the world is conventionally understood. In doing so, Carter "is always on the side of the less powerful against the powerful, and in her context, as she freely admits, she is mainly concerned with women's experience" (Eaglestone, 2003, p. 204).

What affected her inclination towards the female Gothic was also her life-changing experience in Japan. Following a two-year stay there, Carter returned to England in 1972, stating that she felt as though she had arrived in an entirely new country: "It was like a waking up, it was a rude awakening. We live in Gothic times. Now, to understand and to interpret is the main thing; but my method of investigation is changing" (Carter, 1997, pp. 459-460). Here, she highlights the postmodern condition of the contemporary Western world, in which the once-familiar has become uncanny. This postmodern condition shares significant affinities with the Gothic: the dissolution of binary structures, epistemological and ontological indeterminacy, the erosion of stable subjectivity, and the loss of coherent meaning have produced a world that is unstable, anxietyinducing, and uncanny, defined by blurred boundaries. Fred Botting observes that contemporary Gothic narratives exemplify the collapse of a prohibitive or regulatory force. Whereas traditional Gothic tales ultimately reintroduce normative boundaries by destroying their monstrous figures, in contemporary Gothic fiction, these figures:

[...] retain a fascinating, attractive appeal: no longer objects of monstrous others become sites of identification, sympathy, desire, and self-recognition. Excluded figures once represented as malevolent, disturbed, or deviant monsters are rendered more humane while the systems that exclude them assume terrifying, persecutory, and inhuman shapes. (Botting, 2002, p. 286)

Accordingly, the Gothic of the present moment tends not to endorse the eradication of monstrous figures but rather to celebrate them. Destabilising conventional norms instead of reinforcing them has become the prevailing political orientation of contemporary Gothic fiction. Carter adopts Gothic motifs in a decidedly insurgent manner, overturning the structures and representations characteristic of the traditional Gothic. As Linden Peach (1998) notes:

The Gothic genre itself is subversive, giving expression to what is culturally occluded such as sexual fantasy and female desire. However, Carter's novels are frequently subversions of the genre; themes and ideas first explored - albeit however crudely - in Gothic writing are re-examined, challenged and expanded. (p. 28)

Carter's inclusion of Gothic elements in her texts is linked to her desire to reconstruct stereotypes concerning gender. She aims at saving the female gender from being materialised and objectified. She is also interested in rescuing her characters from the political and ideological aspects of the social codes by converting the binaries that have been attributed the characteristic of normative for long. Therefore, with these in mind, "Carter has found a battle ground in the Gothic to make her feminist ideals fight against established norms" (Aktari, 2010, p. 161). In order to get a thorough comprehension of these agendas of Carter illustrated in The Passion of New Eve, it is useful to mention the novel's plot briefly.

The events in the novel are expressed through Evelyn's point of view and his experiences, who is an Englishman arriving in New York for a university position only to encounter a city in a grotesque mood dealing with disorder both environmentally and politically. Right after Evelyn shows up in the city, the events get more violent and armed groups take over the control of the streets including the university he applied for, so he loses the chance to get the position and is left without an aim at the centre of a dystopia.

In the middle of this chaos, Evelyn meets a young black woman called Leilah, whose relationship is mainly based on the physical resulting in the woman's pregnancy, which is firmly unwanted by Evelyn, so the condition is finalised with an abortion. This leads him to the desert, and he finds

himself in a kind of oasis called Beulah, a technological and organised place displaying order, which is the opposite of New York. The place is ruled by a leader called Mother, who holds a grotesque, mythic and giant appearance. She is not only the mother of the community in Beulah, but also a scientist conducting operations, biggest of which is her project in mind to turn a male into a female and making her impregnated with the old male body's sperm. Evelyn becomes the victim of this project and with this transformation, the gender is, in a way, reinvented and matriarchy is welcomed in her world.

Before this last step of the experimental process; however, Eve understands the future awaiting for her and manages to escape from Beulah. While she is out in the desert, she is captured by a character named Zero, a one-eyed man who has established his own harem in another part of the desert torturing women with sexual abuse. This time, Eve falls victim of a patriarch and is exploited sexually by Zero, who is ironically infertile and blames a Hollywood film star called Tristessa for it, whom Evelyn once admired. Because of his obsession, Zero directs his militants to Tristessa's house, where they find out that she was actually a male by birth. Eve decides to save and protect Tristessa owing to her past admiration and together they flee into the desert. There they get intimate and are involved in an intercourse. Unfortunately; however, the peace does not last long and Tristessa is murdered by a youth militant group.

Eve manages to run away and finally makes her way to Los Angeles, which is not less chaotic than New York. There she comes across Leilah again, who now calls herself as Lilith and confesses that she is indeed the daughter of Mother. She convinces Eve to meet her creator one more time. Though she tries several times, she fails to find Mother. In the end, cutting off all her old connections, Eve faces towards the ocean, setting off by herself leaving the collapsing society behind as the New Eve.

In The Passion of New Eve, the character to be identified as the Gothic monster is Mother with her artificial, feminine, grotesque and mythic appearance blended with her technological competence increasing the fear she creates. Since she pictures misdirected maternal power, Carter hints she is not in favour of ill-motivated matriarchy for the sake of getting rid of patriarchy. Mother shows how certain ideologies including the feminism driven ones pose a risk for repeating the same motives of mechanisms that are aimed to dismantle. In that way, Carter situates Mother as a character hosting instability of power and the horrors of mythical absolutes.

Another character in the novel with an unstable and ambiguous 'monstrous' image is Eve after being surgically transformed from Evelyn. It

connotates a threshold suggested by Kristeva as the abject because of being in both sides of the gender and moving in-between them. Additionally, she is on the threshold of being in the real world with all the chaos it ignites and of a mythical dystopia with immense order. That is why, this in-betweenness is not only on the physical level but also on the psychological sense. She does not feel belong to either side and is not indispensable. She is an abject being, which makes her to be comprehended as monstrous, and feels neither female nor male completely. She is not adapted to being in a new body and mind because the old self and mind are still inside, which makes her both victim and victimiser. When she was Evelyn, she abused Leilah as a man and commodified her, while she experiences the same treatment herself tragically not only from the opposite gender (Zero) but also from the same gender (Mother). By doing so, Carter puts forward that she does not favour her own gender; instead both genders can be recognised as monstrous and in Eve's case, it is indeed doubled. She experiences segregation within segregation and becomes a figure desired but feared at the same time. She is linked to both uncanny and abject that suits the themes covered in Gothic fiction. In an indirect way, Carter implies the performative status of gender through this character. Gender is not only about being in a certain body, because when the body is switched, the mindset is not. In presenting Eve as an abject figure, Carter challenges the foundations of gender identity, suggesting that monstrosity emerges when the supposedly stable boundaries of sexed bodies are laid bare as fictions.

Mother's representation of the monstrous is more explicit and outstanding while Eve's is more complex and internal. Besides, Mother's monstrous character is based more on the material while Eve's fragmented self dwells more on the emotions making her scarier for the reader, who feels a sense of Catharsis. This double composition of monstrosity lets the novel to question not only the patriarchal constructions of the feminine but also the irrational fantasies attempting to replace them, which makes the idea of monstrosity an analytical tool Carter handles skilfully to work on cultural myths and codes.

# **Analysis**

# Abjection, Monstrosity, and the Gothic Reconfiguration of Gender

Carter's The Passion of New Eve creates a Gothic universe in which the monstrous functions not simply as a category of the supernatural, but as a structural principle shaping identity, gender, and power. The novel's central characters Mother and Eve/Evelyn are not merely 'monstrous' in a grotesque, external way; rather they exhibit different forms of monstrosity surrounded

with abjection, which unsettles the symbolic order, destabilises intelligibility, and encourages the subject to confront what society strictly rejects. Through these characters, Carter interrogates the fragility and sensitivity of gendered categories and exposes the violence long inherent in ideological systems, which provide a so-called liberation, but in fact administer rigid norms. In Carter's hands, the Gothic becomes a terrain of boundary collapse, producing beings whose existence reveals the contradictions within both patriarchal and matriarchal discourses.

Mother stands at the narrative's core as an exaggerated, grotesque figure of the monstrous feminine: her body, her mythic authority, and her technological mastery all come together to make her both awe-inspiring and terrifying. Evelyn's first description of her goes as such:

This woman has many names but her daughters call her Mother. Mother has made herself into an incarnated deity; she has quite transformed her flesh, she has undergone a painful metamorphosis of the entire body and become the abstraction of a natural principle. She is also a great scientist who makes extraordinary experiments and I was destined to become the subject of one of them; but I was ignorant of everything when, fainting, I arrived in Beulah. (Carter, 1982/1992, p. 46)

Her body is not simply metaphorical, but materially hybrid: part flesh, part synthetic artifact, part deity evoking what Julia Kristeva terms abjection, a space that is "neither subject nor object" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 1), the "in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (p. 4) in Powers of Horror. She explains that for her, what is abject is "the jettisoned object [...] and draws me toward the place, where meaning collapses" because it is "radically excluded" (p. 2) from the symbolic order. Mother's grotesque form, then, is the embodiment of excess and symbolic overload; she cannot be fully contained within any stable category. Evelyn goes on further in his first impressions of Mother illustrating her as "the fearful, archaic thing" (Carter 1982/1992, p. 55), "a sacred monster", "was personified and self-fulfilling fertility" (p. 56). She may not be a typical half human half animal being, but she is a very grotesque figure of Cybele. She is a goddess of fertility but is an artificial and self-made one. Hence, Beulah is not a promised land for Evelyn. The fact that she was 'personified' and is at first referred as a 'thing' proves that she has this artificial and non-human appearance. Mother's corporeal enormity is emphasised continually from the moment she appears. She is so vast that she seems to "fill the round, red-painted, over-heated, red-lit cell in which she chose to manifest herself," and Evelyn immediately "became aware of an appalling sense of claustrophobia" (p. 60). Her overwhelming

presence goes beyond not only the boundaries of the room but also the boundaries of representation itself: she is "Mother; but too much mother, a femaleness too vast, too gross for [...] imagination to contain" (p. 63). Carter renders her not as a symbolic mother but as an excessive one, which is to say, a maternal force swollen beyond symbolic proportion, a grotesque embodiment of fertility, power, and myth.

Moreover, this above-mentioned enclosure is not merely spatial; it is apparently womb-like, with its circular architecture, oppressive heat, and suffocating redness. Evelyn is overwhelmed in a symbolic womb, trapped in an environment that imitates the conditions of pregnancy. Carter uses the foreshadowing technique here to underscore the symbolic rebirth through this scene. The womb is an abject place because it is between life and pre-life; in other words, it is a threshold, but a Gothic one with uncanny qualities: it gives life and is not normally supposed to cause terror, but it does without a proper reason and it is the exact place where categories concerning binaries like life/death, inside/outside and self/other begin to shatter.

Julia Kristeva's abject is a concept which "disturbs identity, system, order," (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4) mainly because it draws the person towards the mother from whom the subject needs to be disconnected in order to have a non-fragmented and lucid self. Evelyn is stuck in a state of in-betweenness meaning that he is neither the man he was nor the woman he will be yet. He is alive but going through a symbolic dissection; he is present, but psychically dissolving under Mother's gaze and dominance. The space around him exercises what Kristeva describes as the abject's erasure of borders; which is to say, a blurring of limit that destabilises the subject's sense of autonomy. Evelyn's panic; for this reason, does not solely result from Mother's physical scale but also from the abjection itself. He is terrorised by the idea of being drawn back to the pre-symbolic maternal space in which the identity is dissolved. His body, which is soon to be surgically transformed, is already in pieces and unstable because of this environment. The Gothic atmosphere contributes to this dissolvement, pointing Evelyn as an abject being caught between states, trapped in a liminal area where life and death, masculinity and femininity, self and other become indistinguishable. In this sense, the scene unfolds the novel's core absorption into the collapse of boundaries and the monstrous potential of forced transformation.

Mother's political desire, which is to establish a society ruled by women and "to make a start on the feminisation of Father Time" (Carter, 1982/1992, p. 64), is not rendered as legitimately utopic or a product of ideological fantasy. It is monstrously actualised through surgical violence

and mythic intimidation. When Mother says, she is about to "make a start on the feminisation of Father Time," the capitalised Father hints her twofold intention. She addresses both the symbolic figure of patriarchy and the masculine principle which builds the Western culture. At the same time, by situating herself as the one capable of 'feminising' Time itself, she is loaded with a God-like, creator status, which shows the extreme margins of her aspiration. In attempting to cross out the patriarchal creator figure and exchanging it with a maternal one, Mother reproduces the very totalitarian mindset she alleges to resist. Her vision becomes as violent, dictator-like, and socially destabilising as the patriarchal order she pursues to annul. By generating a new Eve through surgery and artificial mythmaking, Mother does not genuinely demythologise; instead, she basically relocates the place of myth from a divine and heavenly dimension to her own laboratory on earth. In doing so, she replaces one infinite authority with another. This act exemplifies Carter's subversive technique: it demonstrates that even movements claiming to be revolutionary may turn out to be cloning the same oppressive, hierarchical structures they expect to challenge.

The narration below describes how Evelyn is physically transformed with the force and practice of Mother herself:

And now Mother was armed. The monstrous being brandished an obsidian knife as black as she was. I found it very difficult to see, in that abattoir light, and remember, now, an atmosphere rather than an event – a lowering sense of antique ritual; of the presence, also of stern adults who knew what was best for me better than I did myself; the full panoply of human sacrifice, in fact. [...] Raising her knife, she brough it down. She cut off all my genital appendages with a single blow, [...] And that was the end of Evelyn, who'd been sacrificed to a dark goddess [...]. (pp. 66-68)

This forced dismemberment and reconstruction literalises the violence of ideological imposition. Mother imposes her vision on the very matter of the body, converting Evelyn into her experiment aka her playground. In this process, she weaponises biology, technology, and myth, turning creation into domination. Her grotesque maternity becomes a Gothic spectacle but also a deeply political critique of what happens when power speaks through the body. Carter's Mother is not monstrous because she is essentially evil, but because she presents a summating view provided with plain bodily control. Her order is simple and direct: the myth she frames demands submission. In Kristevan terms, Mother represents the abject maternal that is a distorted symbol of motherhood, which gives life with pure intentions and aims at forming a society as such, may easily end up being domineering and destructive.

While Mother's horror derives from external magnitude and ideological imposition, Eve, formerly Evelyn, embodies the internal, lived horror of abjection. Her transformation marks a central Gothic catastrophe, meaning the self is rearranged, physically and psychologically. Upon awakening after the surgery, she reflects: "I know nothing. I am tabula erasa, a blank sheet of paper, an unhatched egg. I have not yet become a woman, although I possess a woman's shape. Not a woman, no; both more and less than a real woman" (p. 79). These lines exemplify Kristeva's notion of abjection as the collapse of coherence in the subject. Eve is confronted with the absence of a singular, stable self, and with the traumatic remainder of a former identity. She is totally in limbo here and portrays her position with these words:

I was in an abject state and, besides, I had no money; no clothes, besides the ones I wore; no passport; no means of identification: no traveller's checks; no credit card. All my existential impedimenta had been tossed carelessly into Mother's wastepaper basket once it no longer fitted me. (p. 79)

Eve's body is neither fully male nor fully female, but instead a hybrid, liminal space that materialises cultural anxieties about gender, sexuality, and the invasive role of technology. Her existence unsettles the symbolic categories that society relies upon. The 'identification' mentioned here does not only refer to the ID card obviously, but also the identity of Eve/Evelyn covering his past and her present. The character has Eve's body, but Evelyn's mind, which is supported with her confession after looking in the mirror and remarking: "[...] I saw Eve; I did not see myself. I saw a young woman who, though she was I, I could in no way acknowledge as myself, [...]" (p. 71). It is as if she had been denied of existence and does not fit into any category or location, but the question is 'Does s/he have to?'. She implicitly provides an answer towards the end of the novel:

Masculine and feminine are correlatives which involve one another. I am sure of that – the quality and its negation are locked in necessity. [...] But what the nature of masculine and the nature of feminine might be, whether they involve male and female, if they have anything to do with [...] my own factory fresh incision and engine-turned breasts, that I do not know. Though I have been both man and woman, still I do not know the answer to these questions. Still they bewilder me. (p. 146)

This kind of liminality is precisely where Kristeva in Powers of Horror locates the abject as a threat to identity. She asserts:

A massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A "something" that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture. (Kristeva, 1982, p. 2)

Eve lives within that "something" — an otherness that is not quite measurable because she is her own transformation. Her horror is introspective and epistemological. She carries within her the memories, guilt, and desires of Evelyn; the man she was is not simply erased but inscribed in her flesh. She mourns that previous self and yet must live without it. This guilt-knitted self-awareness mirrors Kristeva's idea of the 'abjection of self', where the subject realises that its whole identity is built around a foundational loss. It is hypothesised by her in this way: "The abjection of self would be the culminating form [...] revealed that all its objects are based merely on the inaugural loss that laid the foundations of its own being" (p. 5). Eve is, in effect, that 'stray' or 'misfit', who cannot fully belong to the symbolic order because her very being is structured around this irreducible loss. Her monstrosity is not one of brute force, but of unsettling contradiction: she is simultaneously vulnerable and powerful, re-made and fragmented, a hub of ideological conflict between Mother's vision and Zero's patriarchal tyranny. In other words, she harbours both sides of binaries within herself, and this duality constitutes her true, idiosyncratic identity, which she can only embrace, appreciate and eventually celebrate once she becomes aware of its complexity and of the fact that it is something to be affirmed rather than suppressed. For now, her terror lies in her own body, a body that refuses to resolve into a stable identity and thus defies any system that demands purity or fixity.

Carter crafts horror through both excess and instability, using Mother and Eve to materialise different modalities of Gothic terror rooted in abjection. Mother's horror stems from her grotesque physicality and mythic ambition. Her body is described as colossal in scale and oppressive in its promise. The place she reigns, the subterranean domain of Beulah, "a strange land" (Carter, 1982/1992, p. 48), "where contrarieties exist together" (p. 45), is

itself a Gothic space: an underground world of transformation, ritual, and bio-technological experiment. Here, the holiness of birth is degraded and converted into a cold, clinical process. Horror comes out through her control over life, from mythmaking to duplication revealing that the maternal, too, could be the centre of pressure rather than safety, ease and comfort.

In contrast to that, Eve's horror appears sincere and destabilising. Her body is ceaselessly abused and is tortured psychologically beginning from Zero's violence and the flashbacks from being Evelyn, continuing with her own alienations of the self. Carter unveils her new form as exposed and susceptible. Her gender is not a trusted identity but a disputed one, always under revision. The monstrosity she embodies is not simply about what is done to her; it is more about what she has been turned into that is an absurdity – alive outside, dead inside. Hers is a body that both pushes away and amazes and she is a subject whose mere existence is a challenge to the symbolic order.

When it comes to what these characters really seek to achieve, Mother's ambition is illusory, in that she wants to disassemble the patriarchal world and build a new mythic order that is as symbolic as the available one. On one hand, she dreams of a race born of women alone, desiring a kind of homogeneity which eliminates the male influence completely. Ironically; however, while doing that, she copies the patriarchal dynamics. Her authority is unlimited, and her utopia is sustained via physical intimidation. Her appetite is not fed with political sources only, but also with the Gothic itself, meaning that she aims at petrifying when she paves her way through her aim.

Eve's desire, on the other hand, is ruptured and deeply existential. She longs to discover who s/he has become yearning for self-definition, freedom, and escape. Her journey is not about establishing a society, but about restoring her subjectivity, adrift from Mother's ideology and Zero's tyranny. Her final decision to set sail into the ocean signifies a refusal to be identified by any myth or system; it is the desire for a new narrative, one not imposed but chosen with freewill, even if that narrative remains ambiguous and open-ended as the New Eve in a new world order, where binaries are deconstructed and flexible borders are embraced for the sake of a profound society in harmony. This manifests itself and is inserted in the novel by Carter reflecting her own realistic vision upon Eve's question: "Will I be happy now I am a woman?", which is answered as, "Of course not! Not until we all live in a happy world!" (p. 73).

Mother and Eve, as Gothic-abject monsters, speak powerfully to contemporary concerns about identity, technology, and ideology. Mother's experiments in reproductive control foreshadow current debates around artificial wombs, genetic engineering, and bioethics. Her vision may raise significant concerns such as: who has the right to define reproduction? And whose bodies are shaped by ideology? Eve's threshold existence underlines modern discussions of gender fluidity, transition, and bodily autonomy. Her horror lies not in her queerness but in the violence which social and ideological structures inflict on bodies that refuse or 'fail' to conform to normative patterns. Through binaries, she parodies the daily lives of common contemporary people who burden each other with their own fears and desires and then expel them labelling them as 'the other' when such desires and fears disturb them after reflected backwards.

Furthermore, Carter's novel reflects today's ideological polarisation. Mother's radical feminism, Zero's patriarchal tyranny, and the protestors battling in the novel's chaotic America mirror contemporary controversies around gender, authority, and ideology. The monsters in Carter's world are not simply figures of fantasy, rather they are reflections, warning readers to examine how the boundaries we take for granted such as gender, power, identity are constructed, maintained, and challenged.

In Kristevan terms, the monsters are representations of the abject: they force us to confront what we exclude, supress and reformulate so as to sustain meaning. As Kristeva reminds us, the abject "marks what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). Carter's Mother and Eve do not transgress these borders, more importantly, they uncover their fragility. In so doing, she reimagines the Gothic not as a retreat into horror but as a political and philosophical analysis, using the monstrous to illuminate the unsettling truth that even our most stable categories depend on rejecting what they are unable to contain.

### Conclusion

Angela Carter's The Passion of New Eve positions monstrosity as a critical instrument through which the contradictions of gender, identity, and political ideology are possibly explained and reconceptualised. By centring the Gothic figures of Mother and Eve/Evelyn as reflections of Kristeva's abject, Carter demonstrates how the idea of monstrosity is produced not through metaphysical evil but through the fierce clash of social norms, mythic structures, and incarnate experience. Mother, with her grotesquely

magnified maternity and technologically engineered illusory vision as a mad scientist – a typical Gothic monster figure, reveals the dangers intrinsic in systems that claim to liberate while simultaneously reproduce oppressive forms of control. On the contrary, Eve becomes the centre of internal abjection: her surgically altered body and fractured identity illustrates the destabilisation of symbolic categories on which both patriarchy and radical matriarchy are based. Through her, Carter enunciates the horror of inbetweenness tied to the terror and potential that emerge when the self is pushed to occupy the space between binaries.

Together, these figures highlight the Gothic's capacity to articulate anxieties which surpass the limits of realist representation. Carter's use of abjection deepens the Gothic mood by taking the psychological, physical, and ideological fractions implanted in modern individuals to the foreground. In a world marked by political polarisation, technological invasion into bodily autonomy, and by the breakdown of stable identity categories, Carter's monsters feel uncannily contemporary. Their terrors lie not in their peculiarity or difference but in what they reveal about the systems that create and regulate this condition. By showing how bodies are controlled, myths are built and identities are imposed, Carter transforms the Gothic from the genre of fear into an instrument that encourages readers to confront the fragility of social structures.

In this sense, The Passion of New Eve approaches monstrosity not as a deviation to be eradicated but as a means of resistance and potential transformation, which reinforces the meaning and helps convey the message of the novel in a more clear and accurate way. The Gothic setting pictured as the city of New York in general with all its chaos and disorder indeed lead to new opportunities for characters especially in their quests of identity formation. It is the situation of New York that drags Evelyn into becoming the New Eve. Carter applies her style masterfully by mirroring the chaotic, fragmented and in limbo state of Eve on the paper with chapters that proceed in a non-linear form and in different lengths. In her hands, Gothic becomes a means of her style and fits well in the pitch-dark mode of the setting before enlightenment that calls for a change. At the same time, the abject states of Mother and Eve acknowledge the subtlety of ideological classifications that claim universality, while simultaneously opening pathways for imagining new forms of subjectivity beyond them. Carter's Gothic world, with its collapsing boundaries and ambivalent monsters, thus serves both as a warning and an invitation. It reminds us that any system striving for utter homogeneity risks duplicating the exact violence it condemns, and invites us to embrace the fluidity, multiplicity, and ambiguity that the Gothic prioritises.

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## Chapter 8

# Snake Lady as an Emphatic Monster: An Analysis of the Monster Figure in Vernon Lee's *Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady* 3

## Ayça Gülünay<sup>1</sup>

#### Abstract

This study examines Vernon Lee's short story Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady (1896) within the aesthetic and thematic context of Gothic literature and the monster figure of British Gothic tradition. The study is structured on three main axes: (1) a feminist-psychoanalytic analysis of the theme of monstrosity and the female body as a Gothic figure of fear, (2) the function of space in Gothic aesthetics, and (3) contemporary reflections of the monster image and snake woman. In the first part, the figure of the Snake Lady is analysed through Barbara Creed's concepts of "monstrous-feminine" and Julia Kristeva's "abjection". Oriana, an inversion of the femme fatale archetype, becomes a symbol not of fear but of wisdom and transformation. In the second part, spaces such as the Red Palace, Castle of the Sparkling Waters, and Alberic's apartment are examined according to the Gothic aesthetic principle of "horror within beauty". These spaces function as concrete extensions of the character's inner world; stone, light, silence, and colour are means for emotional experience. The study argues that Lee distanced the Gothic from traditional dark imagery and redefined it along the axis of empathy, aesthetics, and melancholy. Thus, Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady transforms the female monster figure and the gothic space, becoming a precursor to modern feminist and Eco-gothic narratives.

#### Introduction

### Vernon Lee: on the boundaries of Gothic Aesthetics

Vernon Lee (the pseudonym of Violet Paget, 1856–1935) was a distinctive writer situated at the intersection of the aesthetic movement,

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psychological realism, and late Victorian Gothic in late 19th-century British intellectual life. Lee was a female writer that had always been an outsider (both literally and figuratively), who has been historically overlooked by most of her contemporaries. As well as examining the relationship between art, gender and morality through the filter of the psyche, in all of her literary works, she produced an extensive body of Gothic short stories. The themes depicted in her short stories regarding the duality of beauty and terror, desire and horror reflect to a degree the artistic sensibilities of Walter Pater and Henry James. Though recognised for her essays and her ghost stories, many consider that her Gothic short stories are the best examples of the stifled passion and subconscious desires of her characters, especially in works like Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady (1896) and Hauntings: Fantastic Stories (1890) (Stetz, 2006).

The evolution of the British Gothic literature began to take shape in the second half of the 19th century. Beginning with The Castle of Otranto (1764), written by Horace Walpole, the genre would ultimately be shaped by the literary works created by Anne Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis and Mary Shelley. By the end of the 19th century, the original form of the Gothic was transformed into a more introspective style, incorporating the psychological, aesthetic and sexual concepts into stories. Most Gothic literature from this era focused on the human mind and its complex creations, public pressures, identity crisis, and traditional elements such as dark setting, supernatural events or mythological beings. Vernon Lee and her literary work contributed to the transformation of the Gothic literature. While many Gothic writers created fear through a variety of supernatural ways, Lee creates fear by presenting the reader with a portrayal of the dark parts of a person's psyche. In Lee's stories, she uses the concept of the "monster" to suggest the presence of a monster does not exist in the physical, worldly realm but rather it exists within oneself as a result of one's own fears, ambitions, and desires (Kane, 2006).

The writing style in Lee's works is considered to be associated with the Aestheticism movement closely. Aestheticism celebrates the art as the centre of life and the beauty as a representation of morality. The aesthetic approach can be strongly seen in her Gothic tales. In Lee's narrative, the search for beauty has never drawn a portrait of tranquillity and innocence; instead, danger, seduction and uncanniness (Pulham, 2002). The dual structure of her Gothic writing makes her distinctive: coexistence of darkness in destruction and pleasure of aesthetic in Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady. Lee's Gothic stories, as a result, arouse the melancholic feelings and spiritual confusions which has an enchanting effect on readers rather than frightening.

Vernon Lee's writings participate in a tradition that is referred to as the "feminine gothic". This form arose primarily from women's literature and provides an allegory through desires and fears, as well as for women's struggles against the restrictions imposed by the patriarchal structures of society; it serves as an avenue for women to express themselves through writings about their own experiences. The women that Lee writes about within this tradition are depicted as both alluring and threatening; Lee investigates the reasons why femininity can be interpreted as either desirable or a potential danger within this genre of literature. The concept of femininity and the representation of women's sexual bodies often functions as the major focus for both beauty and destruction in many of Lee's works. As an example, in the story of Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady, while the snake lady character is portrayed as a "monster", she is also viewed as representing wisdom, compassion, and spirituality. Lee's monstrous representation evokes fear and compassion for her characters and allow readers to develop an understanding of the internal conflicts of the characters. Thus, in Lee's works, rather than focusing solely on the aesthetic appeal of horror, she reinterprets the Gothic genre as a vehicle for intellectual and moral exploration.

Vernon Lee's Gothic literature is of particular interest in the male-centred literary environment of her era because she fictionalizes the figure of the "monster" not only as a supernatural being, but also as a representation of ideas, identities and desires excluded by society. (Blumberg, 2017). The monsters in Lee's writings deal with a variety of topics including female desire, aesthetic sense, liberation of thoughts, and gender identities. Oriana shows an archetypal femme fatale as she challenges the constraints placed on women by religion and society in her quest to show her value in a maledominated world (Martorell, 2015). Lee's works, as a consequence, lead contemporary Gothic to be read from a feminist and queer point of view. Lee's monsters both confront the concept of morality of the time and reflect a question that remains relevant today: "Who is the real monster?"

Vernon Lee was not only a bearer of the Gothic tradition in the late 19th century, but she also reconstructed it as a model through which borders between human identity, nature, and animality could be explored. Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady could be cited as an exemplar text in this developing model, an area of ecological view, psychoanalysis, and gender issues (Murga Aroca, 2020). The "monster" in Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady was an internal construct, reflecting the world inside. Thus, Vernon Lee wandered on the limits of redefining Gothic literature, and this have been carried out until present day: the borders that connects death and desire; horror and beauty.

## Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady: both fairytale and gothic

Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady combines both fairytale and gothic elements, redefining the concept of "monster" as a violation of psychological and moral boundaries rather than a physical deformity. Lee's serpent woman, combining seduction with danger, desire with guilt, reveals the fragility of the Victorian patriarchal order. Thus, the author constructs the mechanism of Gothic horror not only as a supernatural threat but also as an aesthetic confrontation of repressed desires.

The story introduces young Prince Alberic whose grandfather is the Duke Balthasar Maria of Luna. The Snake Lady and the Prince's bonding begins in his early childhood years when he was brought up -both socially and culturally- neglected, isolated and uncared in the Red Palace where is artificially manufactured in a baroque style. Besides, no living animals are allowed in the Duke's Palace, which saddens the young Prince. His longing for nature is only met by picture on a tapestry in his room. Tapestry presents a compassionate scene of his ancestor Prince Alberic the Blond and a lady. The orphan and lonesome Prince admires and idealizes the lady as his only companion during his childhood. Due to a heavy iron crucifix hanged on the tapestry, only upper part of the beautiful lady's elegant gown is visible. When the Prince becomes 11, her nanny decides he is older enough to rearrange his room. This rearrangement made Prince Alberic discover -and be as astonished as one can be- the fact that the beautiful lady's lower body is a snake tail. Despite the first moment of great bewilderment, the lady's long, twisted body of a snake's tail leads Alberic to admire the Snake Lady more than before.

Once the Duke replaces the tapestry as he isn't keen on the art of dark ages, the Prince goes mad and cuts the new tapestry into pieces. Thereupon, the Prince is banished from the Red Palace and sent to the Castle of Sparkling Waters, which is a remote, ruined home to only one peasant family and is surrounded by a wild garden. The Prince feels vivid because of this beautiful environment. However, he feels lonesome as well until the encounter to a green snake near a strangely decorated tomb. The innocent and naive Prince takes pity on the cold creature and wants to keep it warm. Without fear or hesitation, the Prince touches the cold body of the snake. Its body arouses a sensual pleasure in the Prince without guilt or regret.

When the snake glides out of sight, the Prince meets a beautiful lady at the Castle of Sparkling Waters and she introduces herself as Prince's godmother. She visits him daily just for an hour "before dusk", to play with him and to teach him a range of skills for being a righteous prince.

The Prince discovers the myth of the Snake Lady and her ancestors' connection to the story. According to the myth, Lady Oriana is cursed, and she has to have a lover who will be faithful to her for ten years for the spell to be broken. Two princes who are Alberic's ancestors has fallen in love with the snake but failed to be faithful for ten years. Alberic acknowledges his "fate" and takes on the task to rescue the lady, which requires him to kiss the snake. He adheres to the narrative of the historical legend and places his lips on the snake's head, rendering him unconscious. However, he soon wakes up to find his head resting on the knees of his beautiful godmother, who will care for him from that moment on.

As the story progress, the Castle of Sparkling Waters represents a deeper contrast to Duke Balthasar Maria's Red Palace. Red Palace is characterized by rivalry, bribery, corruption and desire for power while the Castle of Sparkling Waters is heavenly furnished with love, sensual charm, and a refined education. As a prince, Alberic has never been provided the essential knowledge and the possessions such as books to learn to be a prince, clothes suitable to his social status and a horse to ride. In the time he passes in the Castle of Sparkling Waters, the beloved godmother provides him all he needs to become a prince. Duke's three ambassadors – the Jester, the Jesuite, and the Dwarf - visit the Prince and try to influence him through bribery but Alberic is resistant to all their flatteries and gifts.

The Duke's recklessness has left the palace facing financial difficulties, and he decides that the Prince must enter into an arranged marriage to resolve the issue. Indeed, Alberic has gained the independence to reject this and doesn't seem interested in any of the women his grandfather introduces him. The friendship between the Prince and his grass snake instils fear and loathing within the Red Palace and Duke's patriarchal order.

Suspecting that the creature influences the disobedient Prince "evilly", the Duke has the serpent killed. This devastates the Prince Alberic and he dies of grief shortly thereafter. The story comes to an end with a rumour that where the snake was killed, there was a deformed and mutilated naked body of a lady, lying dead on the floor.

# **Analysis**

# Monstrosity and Female Body: the dual nature of the Snake Lady

The union of woman and snake is one of the oldest "monstrous feminine" images in Western mythology; figures such as Lilith, Lamia, and Medusa can be read as symbols of male desire and fear embodied in the same body

(Creed, 1993, pp. 1-3). According to Barbara Creed (1993, pp. 7-8), these figures are the historical antecedents of the concept of the "monstrous feminine"; woman is represented as the source of fear because her body is a fluid and uncontrollable space that violates the "natural order". Julia Kristeva (1982, pp. 10-12) also identifies this transgression in Powers of Horror, developing the concept of the "abject": the maternal body is an "other" that society excludes to define its own boundaries, yet constantly returns. This mythological line is revived in Vernon Lee's story *Prince Alberic* and the Snake Lady. Oriana is a snake woman figure, both seductive with her allure and transformative with her wisdom. Carmen Miralles Martorell (2015) emphasizes that Oriana is a character who inverts the femme fatale archetype; she is not fatalistic but "wise and loving". Thus, Lee transcends the snake woman myth as a representation of patriarchal fear and associates it with wisdom, nature, and spiritual integrity.

In the aesthetic and gothic discourse of the fin de siècle period, the femme fatale is identified with fatal beauty. However, Vernon Lee's Oriana transforms this tradition. According to Martorell (2015, pp. 1), Oriana is the woman "who fights against society, religion, and she will have to demonstrate that she deserves a place in a predominantly masculine world which overcomes her". Patricia Pulham (2008) also interprets Lee's female characters as monsters born of the "aesthetic form": beauty here is not a threat but a form of transformation.

This transformation parallels Barbara Creed's (1993) concept of the "monstrous-feminine". For Creed, the "monstrous" aspect of women derives from fertility and sexuality, repressed by the patriarchal system; this aspect is the abject itself. Lee's Snake Woman, as a figure that affirms this very repressed feminine power, points to the liberation of the "abject" (Kristeva, 1982, pp. 9-14). Thus, Oriana transforms the femme fatale's fatal eroticism into "empathetic wisdom"; her beauty is not fear, but teaching.

In Lee's story, desire (Eros) and death (Thanatos) are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they complement each other. Alberic's attraction to the Snake Woman reflects an "uncanny reunion with the mother figure" (Kane, 2006, p. 45-46). This is a scene in which sexual desire and maternal affection are uncannily intertwined. Kristeva's theory of the "abject" is similar to Freud's (2003) concept of "das Unheimliche": the violation of boundaries (human/animal, mother/beloved) is the source of the uncanny.

Oriana is a symbol of both love and death. When she encounters Alberic, rather than solely seducing him, she changed him on a spiritual and cognitive level. Therefore, the Snake Lady embodies two essential conflicts: life within death and death within life (Martorell, 2015; Kane, 2006). Desire is the symbol of both freedom and destruction, and Gothic's conception of aesthetics appreciates this duality.

Gothic literature has always depicted the female body as a threat. Julia Kristeva (1982, pp. 70-71) introduces the "abject", which causes to be isolated in society: the woman, with her body's fluid aspects such as giving birth, bleeding, and milking, stains the "cleanness" of the social order. Barbara Creed (1993) points out that in patriarchal culture the terror and horror are caused by these bodily fluid deficiencies which breeds the belief that the woman body contaminates the social system.

In this regard, however, it may be said that Lee's point of view is transforming the fear around the woman's body to create a different identity for Oriana. This was an understanding made possible through Zeynep Lebe Watson's (2003; pp. 6-7) ecofeminism and their exploration of how Oriana reflects the disconnection between humanity and nature, with a female body serving as the voice of nature in that the female body represents the natural world. Serpent-like form of Oriana's body represents "living nature", rather than a "hostile nature" that is associated with patriarchy. Therefore, the female body can be viewed as a source of wisdom and empowerment, rather than an object of repressed fear (Watson, 2023; Creed, 1993).

In Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady, the "monster" figure dwells within the subject. Mary Patricia Kane (2006) connects Alberic's interest in the Snake Woman with the Lacanian "mirror phase", where Alberic experiences both his identity and alterity in Oriana. Here, the Snake Woman becomes an image of the unconsciously repressed wholeness of the subject's nature, body, and desire, therefore excluding her from becoming an object of external danger.

Kristeva (1982) argues that individuals disguise their bodily nature in order to become part of the social order; however, the "abject" in them always resurfaces. The signs of this can be seen in Alberic's attraction to the Snake Woman; the repressed natural feature of the "snake" within him resurfaces. Consequently, the "monster" exists as a mirror to the split identity of the subject instead of being an outside threat. The psychological elements of Gothic aesthetics create the introverted quality, which defines this artistic style (Kane, 2006).

Aurora Murga Aroca, in her article titled Neither Animal nor Human (2020), relates the presentation of the character of the Snake Woman to the "human-nature-woman triangle", through an Eco-Gothic lens. As stated in

the paper, Lee critiques the anthropocentric foundation that allows humans to dominate nature and women, making the character of the Snake Woman an example of rejecting that hierarchy and reconciling with nature.

Watson (2003, pp. 9-10) supports this interpretation, defining Oriana as "feminine wisdom identified with nature"; Alberic's union with her symbolizes the collapse of human authority over nature. In this respect, Lee's figure is not only feminist but also ecocritical. Woman and nature are reborn as two "others" united against the same system of oppression. As such, the combination of feminine and ecological elements, represented by Oriana and Alberic, reflects the idea of "returning" to the "repressed feminine", as described by Kristeva (1982), whereby nature and truth are being reclaimed through feminine and ecological representation.

Gothic literature's traditional concepts of the female body and monstrosity is transformed in Lee's Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady. Oriana is both a victim and a threatening figure, a blend of nature and culture, desire and fear. This character is "a kind of transitional object through which both art and identity are formed." (Pulham, 2008, p. 114)

The Snake Lady of Lee inverts the monstrous-feminine type as characterized by Creed (1993). Rather than a terrifying bestiality, the Snake Lady is viewed through the lens of the viewer with empathy. Oriana's wisdom signifies a rebirth of feminism and ecofeminism. Therefore, Oriana/the Snake Lady has become a precursor for the empathetic monster archetype, which has appeared in more recent Gothic literature. Within the context of this archetype, the empathetic monster can represent an individual who is able to understand and accept both themselves, their bodies (nature), as well as those around them (Murga Aroca, 2020; Watson, 2023).

# Space as a Gothic Figure: the spatial representation of horror

The significance of place in Vernon Lee's tale of Prince Alberic and The Snake Lady is not limited to being an element of the plot but also serves as an expression of emotion and a source of beauty within the story itself. Architecture and nature are key elements in all Gothic literature, as they reflect the mood of the characters and events taking place within a story. Lee's knowledge and understanding of architecture, history and aesthetics are used to create an almost tactile experience for the reader through the use of Gothic spaces. The use of settings such as the Red Palace, the Castle of Sparkling Waters, the gardens, and the Prince's apartment not only set the scene for impending doom but also personify the dualities of Gothic literature (e.g., beauty and decay).

This is seen in the Red Palace, which appears at the start of the story, being one of the locations most expressive of Lee's Gothic sense of space. The Palace is a setting described with these words: "a monolith built of cold red stone, surrounded by high walls, in echoless silence". The use of the colour red symbolizes both life and death, with the colour in Gothic art symbolically depicting the "depravity of the sacred".

According to David Punter (2013), Gothic architecture turns the threat of the world outside its walls into something you are inside of: that is, it creates an internal experience that feels less secure. The Red Palace is an example of this idea, where the function of what looks like a haven is actually more of a prison for you, with the repressed emotion echoing back at you from these confines. Patricia Pulham (2002) contends that Lee utilises space as a place where visual and emotional elements coalesce – in particular, he uses enclosed spaces to let us know about the character's mental state.

It is in this sense that the Red Palace is an architectural equivalent of emotional dullness and aristocratic decay. The grandeur of the palace contrasts with the emotional coldness inside; this is indeed one of the most obvious strategies of Gothic: beauty coexists with horror. Alberic's childhood in the heart of these stone walls, the space that is cut off from the vitality of the outside world, is one symbol of emotional repression.

The Castle of the Sparkling Waters is the second key setting in the story. In contrast to the Red Palace, it offers a strong atmosphere of splendour created through a combination of images that represent lights, reflections, and running water. Nevertheless, as in many cases of Gothic literature, this splendour is inherently unstable and potentially dangerous. In his description of the castle, Lee writes of light dancing on the surfaces of the water but at the same time swallowing the human voice. That is a captivating image, but one that also creates a sense of dread.

According to Fred Botting, the Gothic "produces a literature of shadows, of uncertainty and obscurity, where the Enlightenment's rational light cannot penetrate" (1996, p. 2); the brighter the beauty, the deeper its shadow. Lee strikes this balance perfectly: in Castle of the Sparkling Waters, aesthetic pleasure and unease are felt simultaneously. According to Kane (2006), it is a castle which combines romantic landscape with Gothic darkness, while the relentless movement of water evokes at once the life-bearing and deathbearing power of nature.

Alberic's meeting with the Snake Woman is in this dazzling realm. The radiant here, is a terrifying one. The Castle of the Sparkling Waters is the model for the "sublime" idea in Gothic art: it generates a sublime feeling that is both amazing and chilling. Lee's detailed colour and light descriptions turn the place into an emotional stage. According to Kutluata (2015, p. 79), Lee merges Renaissance aesthetics with "an understanding of art that transforms space into emotion".

Lee's gardens hide a dreadful Gothic vibe under their calm, pastoral charm. The pictures of the gardens with phrases like "long narrow ropes of maize, like garlands of gold" (p. 300), and "big carnations hung down from the tower windows" (p. 300), are showing how nature is slowly taking back what used to be its domain from people. It is a typical Gothic literature theme: nature is the symbol of the power that has been repressed by culture and reason making a comeback.

Zeynep Lebe Watson (2023) sees these images as an ecofeminist point nature taking over the space with a feminine wisdom. The quietness of nature here is not tranquillity but tough opposition. As Barbara Creed (1993) explains, "the uncontrolled fluidity of the physical and natural" is the patriarchal order's fear; Lee's gardens convey the sense of "fluidity" as well. Ivy is acting like snakes; marble and stone sculptures are turning into different forms as if they were alive.

Besides that, the gardens become a Gothic temple where nature and love are merged when Alberic and Oriana encounter in the scene, and they are surrounded by the gardens. According to Pulham (2008, p. 110), this moment portrays the idea of "aesthetic intimacy"; art, nature, and feelings are united within the same body. Lee's portrayal of nature as a reflection of the human soul is the integration of the romantic sensibility in the Gothic space.

The most acutely melancholy space of the story is Prince Alberic's chamber, with its faded tapestries hanging on walls, pictures of past kings, and curtains that have faded with time. This apartment symbolizes the burden of the past and the decline of an aristocratic lineage. In this place, typical Gothic building decay serves as both a physical and a psychological function.

Patricia Pulham (2008, p. 112) describes Lee's Gothic interiors as "the architecture of memory". In Alberic's childhood apartment, the past that is repressed can return at any possible moment. This is, according to Kane (2006), a space that functions as a transitional element between personal memory and social history. The apartment's heavy atmosphere is the source of Gothic melancholy: time seems to have stopped while the past exists only as pale echo.

As Kutluata (2015) mentions, when she was in Florence, Lee had a historic consciousness of the space; it was a living artifact of the past. This view is evident in Alberic's apartment with the scenes on tapestries. The room is a microcosm of the way that personal solitude and cultural decay intermingle. The room symbolizes an inner world, which is disguises the past time with its corruption.

Lee's creation of Gothic space highlights uneasiness within the beauty rather than generating horror directly. This creation represents the terror of a space as an aesthetic form of exaggerated emotionality. Botting (1996, p.1) describes Gothic as an "excess: the excess of reason, the excess of desire, the excess of meaning", and Lee delivers "excess" through colour, light, and silence. All are forms of aesthetic horror, from the cold atmosphere of the Red Palace's stones, through the brilliant reflections from Castle of the Sparkling Waters, through the adorable silence of the gardens to the melancholy felt in the apartment.

Therefore, Lee constructs a Gothic space dissimilar to the dark castle narrative which is traditionally Gothic. In this story, space is not the source of terror but the space of emotional experience. Alberic's spiritual journey is in line with the change of the place: from the petrified palace to the bright castle, from the melancholic apartment to the peaceful garden. This change also serves as a sign of the Gothic genre; the co-existence of ruin and charm.

# A Contemporary Echo of the Snake Woman

Vernon Lee's story Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady anticipates the transformation of the concept of the "monster" within the historical evolution of Gothic literature. This late-19th-century fin de siècle text reshaped representations of fear and otherness, paving the way for contemporary feminist, queer, and Eco-gothic narratives. This chapter will examine how the figure of the Snake Lady is reproduced in contemporary culture and how it relates to modern identity politics and environmental discourses.

Traditional Gothic literature positions the monster as the bodily expression of fears repressed by society. However, in the 20th and 21st centuries, this figure has transformed: the monster is no longer the excluded but the voice of difference. Lee's Snake Woman is a precursor to this transformation. Oriana evolves from a threat to a figure of empathy and wisdom; this directly connects to today's "empathetic monster" archetype (Pulham, 2008; Overman, 2022).

In modern Gothic narratives – for example, in Guillermo del Toro's The Shape of Water (2017) or Neil Gaiman's The Sandman series - the

monster represents bodily differences excluded by society, queer desires, or existences that transcend the nature-human dichotomy. These figures continue an understanding pioneered by Oriana: the feared other is now part of the human being's inner whole. As Fred Botting (2014, p. 22) notes, contemporary gothic reveals "repressed anxieties and differences beneath rational order". Lee's text thus stands on the borderland of a period in which the monster ceases to be an object of fear and becomes a symbol of the search for identity. Alberic's attraction to the Snake Woman is the first expression of the modern individual's ethical relationship with the other.

From its mythological origins, the snake image has been associated with both wisdom and seduction. Figures such as Lamia, Medusa, and Lilith are symbols of feminine danger in Western mythology (Creed, 1993). Lee reverses this tradition, reconnecting the snake with wisdom, intuition, and nature. This transformation explains the reemergence of the snake in new forms in modern culture.

In contemporary examples in popular culture – for example, in the film Medusa (2021) or the half-human, half-snake female characters in video games - the snake figure no longer functions as a monster to be punished, but as a figure through which the woman regains control of her body. This transformation bears traces of the mythological rewriting initiated by Oriana. Aurora Murga Aroca (2020, p. 90) describes the Snake Woman as "a figure of rebirth in the human-nature-woman triangle", according to which the snake's body represents the repressed power of nature. Zeynep Lebe Watson (2023, p. 8) states that the snake figure has been reinterpreted as the "voice of nature", carrying a critique of the anthropocentric world, particularly in ecofeminist narratives. In today's culture, the snake is no longer a symbol of decline, but of transformation.

Lee's story is one of the forerunners of contemporary Eco-gothic literature, which questions the distinction between human and nature. Oriana is an intermediary being who possesses both human and animal qualities; her story thwarts humans' desire to dominate nature. Murga Aroca (2020, p. 94) interprets this figure as "a feminine-eco-consciousness that rejects human anthropocentric superiority" (p. 94).

In contemporary ecofeminist narratives, such as in Jeff VanderMeer's novel Annihilation (2014) or Robert Eggers's film The Witch (2015), nature is no longer a punishing entity but rather an entity that integrates with humans. Lee's Snake Woman, like the nature-beings in these modern narratives, evokes both fear and desire because nature is the resurgence of the feminine consciousness suppressed by patriarchy. Watson (2023)

summarizes this relationship as follows: The Snake Lady's hybrid body represents reconciliation, not domination: a feminine wisdom that opposes anthropocentrism. In this context, Lee's story is not only a feminist but also an Eco-gothic manifesto. Oriana's transformation symbolizes the emergence of a subject integrated with nature. This sensibility aligns with the fundamental tenets of 21st-century ecofeminist theory.

The figure of the Snake Woman opens up a space for reading that is not only feminist and ecofeminist, but also queer. Oriana's nature, which transcends the boundaries of human-animal, woman-soul, mother-lover, dissolves fixed identity categories. Kristeva's (1982) concept of the "abject" gains new meaning at this point: the abject is that transitional space where the boundary between subject and other dissolves. Oriana inhabits this very space; her existence rejects the fixity of identity.

In modern queer gothic - for example, in the series Penny Dreadful (2014–2016) or the adaptation of Interview with the Vampire (2022) - the figure of the monster becomes a representation of queer desire. In these narratives, the monster's "otherness" is no longer perversion but an acknowledgement of the plurality of existence. Lee's relationship between Alberic and Oriana can be read in the same way: Alberic's desire transgresses normative boundaries; his attraction to the Snake Woman is experienced as both sexual and spiritual union. Patricia Pulham (2008, p. 3) argues, Lee's characters occupy "states of divided subjectivity and the instability of self-other boundaries". In this sense, Oriana becomes a queer subject: her identity is fluid, neither fully human nor fully monstrous; neither woman nor nature. This fluidity anticipates the liberating power of anonymity, which lies at the heart of contemporary queer gothic narratives.

The Snake Woman figure echoes in contemporary culture, both in high art and popular narratives. In cinema, female characters featuring snake motifs are no longer merely figures of horror. The alien being played by Scarlett Johanson in *Under the Skin* (2013), like Oriana, conveys both death and empathy; upon contact with humans, she becomes transformative. Similarly, in The Shape of Water (2017), the "monster" lover represents the humanity within the inhuman. These figures carry the emotional DNA of Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady: beauty and threat, nature and culture, love and death are intertwined. Furthermore, in contemporary fantasy games - for example, in Dark Souls or The Witcher series - the "serpent woman" or "snake goddess" figures simultaneously convey themes of wisdom and curse. This is a contemporary version of Oriana's Gothic legacy, extending to digital culture. These forms of representation demonstrate that the monster

is no longer an other to be suppressed, but rather a way for humanity to recognize its own fragility. Lee's narrative offers a paradigm that transforms the aesthetics of fear into empathy.

The Snake Woman emerged at the end of the 19th century as a figure who disrupted the order of patriarchy and rationalism; today, she is a multilayered symbol that questions the boundaries of the anthropocentric world. Feminist, queer, and Eco-gothic readings have revitalized her mythological roots, revitalizing her in contemporary culture. Oriana's story opens up a space where nature and humanity, body and soul, and otherness and self can reconcile. Ultimately, Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady is an early forerunner of the modern Gothic's empathetic, environmentalist, and multi-identity sensibility. Lee transforms the monster into a means of understanding, not fear. Therefore, the Snake Woman is not merely a ghost of the past but a voice of the future - a symbol of re-hearing nature, the body, and otherness.

#### Conclusion

Vernon Lee's story Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady is a threshold text representing the formal and thematic transformation of late-19th-century English Gothic. This study explores the work along two main axes: monstrosity and the female body and the aesthetic function of the Gothic space. Both axes demonstrate Lee's inversion of traditional Gothic horror conventions and his redefinition of the boundaries between women, nature, and art.

As seen in the first chapter, the Snake Lady figure, unlike her mythological predecessors such as Lamia, Medusa, and Lilith, is not a deadly femme fatale but a bearer of wisdom and love. In a reading contrary to Barbara Creed's (1993) concept of the "monstrous-feminine", Lee transforms the monster figure into a symbol not of fear but of transformation. Julia Kristeva's concept of the "abject" allows us to explain this figure's dual nature: Oriana inhabits the transitional space between human and animal, nature and culture. As Mary Patricia Kane (2006) has noted, the relationship between Alberic and the Snake Woman is an expression of an unconscious conflict oscillating between motherhood and desire. Lee's monster thus represents the rebirth of repressed feminine power as an "empathetic monster" figure.

The second chapter focused on the spatial dimension of Gothic aesthetics. The Red Palace, Castle of the Sparkling Waters, the gardens, and Alberic's room in Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady are not external scenes of fear but reflections of the character's inner state of mind. As Patricia Pulham (2008) notes, Lee's Gothic spaces convey "aesthetic and emotional resonance";

architecture is a form of memory and the self. While the Red Palace is a petrified state of aristocratic dullness and repression, Castle of the Sparkling Waters becomes a scene where light, desire, and death converge. The gardens symbolize the feminine power of nature and a vibrant beauty that transcends the boundaries of culture. Alberic's room, on the other hand, is an "architecture of memory" where personal solitude and historical decay converge (Pulham, 2008; Kutluata, 2015).

Lee's Gothic aesthetic, rather than directly generating fear, operates within a melancholic beauty. In Fred Botting's (1996) words, Gothic is the aesthetic of "excess" and Lee constructs this excess through emotional intensity, light, silence, and architecture. In her world, horror is intertwined with an aesthetic sense: a constant transition occurs between shadow and light, death and allure, stone and body. In this respect, Lee transforms Gothic from merely the Gothic "art of darkness" into a form of aesthetic consciousness.

At this point, the work's contemporary resonances become significant. In 20th- and 21st-century gothic narratives – for example, in Guillermo del Toro's The Shape of Water (2017), Jeff VanderMeer's Annihilation (2014), or Robert Eggers's The Witch (2015) - the monster is no longer the feared other, but rather a way for humanity to confront its own fragility. Lee's Snake Lady is an early example of this transformation: as an "empathetic monster", she evokes understanding, not fear. As Aurora Murga Aroca (2020; p. 94) emphasizes, The Snake Lady demonstrates "a feminine-ecoconsciousness that rejects human anthropocentric superiority"; that is, it recentres nature through feminine wisdom. This perspective is a precursor to contemporary ecofeminist theories. Patricia Pulham (2008) defines Lee's characters as transitional figures living between self and other. When these two interpretations come together, Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady opens up an ethical and aesthetic space that transcends the boundaries of humannature, self-other, and life-death.

Ultimately, Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady can be read as a feminist, Eco-gothic, and aesthetic manifest. The figure of Oriana transforms traditional myths in which women are identified with nature; space becomes the material form of the human soul. Lee transcends the dark structure of Gothic tradition to a sensory and intellectual plane - humanizing the monster and beautifying fear. Thus, her work becomes a modern bridge from the late 19th century to the queer, feminist, and Eco-gothic readings of the 21st century: The heart of the Gothic no longer beats in darkness, but in the aesthetics of understanding and empathy.

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## Chapter 9

# The "Beast" Within: Mr. Hyde and the Islamic Concept of the Untamed *Nafs* as a Gothic Monster 8

## Mustafa Canlı<sup>1</sup>

#### **Abstract**

This chapter presents an interdisciplinary exploration of Robert Louis Stevenson's Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde through the perspective of Islamic theology and ethics, with a particular focus on the concept of the nafs. The text has been generally analysed through Western concepts of psychoanalysis, Victorian cultural criticism, urban degeneration, and the Gothic doppelgänger. However, this study proposes an alternative Eastern framework. It argues that Hyde can be productively understood as a literary embodiment of nafs al-ammarah, the soul that pushes toward evil, as articulated in the Qur'an and developed in classical Islamic scholarship and Sufism. Rather than confining the novella to a simple duality between good and evil, this chapter highlights the Islamic understanding of the self as capable of both erosion and enhancement. Dr. Jekyll's failure is interpreted not as the inevitability of human corruption but as a spiritual and ethical collapse resulting from the neglect of inner struggle and moral discipline. The Gothic monster Mr. Hyde's increasing takeover and violence are read as symptoms of an untamed nafs. Moulding a Gothic narrative with Islamic conceptions of the soul echoes the novel's universal concerns about desire, shame, and guilt.

### Introduction

Robert Louis Stevenson's story *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* presents us with a man divided into two distinct selves: the good and the evil. However, this is just the surface of the story and the hypothesis. It is actually a tale of a haunting exploration of the human psyche that has a striking similarity with the Islamic concept of the *nafs*. This "monster"

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refers to the multifaceted self or soul, as conveyed in the Holy Qur'an and also in Sufism and other literary representations of the religion. This chapter portrays Mr. Hyde not only as a symbol of the repressed Victorian vices and fears but also as a flamboyant embodiment of the nafs al-ammārah (the soul that incites to evil and always orders evil). Through an Islamic perspective, Hyde's violence, coarseness, and dependent relationship with his body double Jekyll display the consequences of ignoring the religious and spiritual discipline necessary to refine the self and personality. The last chapter in the story, Dr. Jekyll's confessions in a letter, reflects one's failure to engage in the inner struggle (mujahadah) to balance desires and elevate the soul toward a pure soul nafs al-muțma'innah which is declared at peace with divine will in Qur'an (89:27). Moving from classical Islamic scholars and their concepts and evaluations, this chapter evaluates Stevenson's Gothic narrative as an instructive tale about the dangers of limitless bondage of the pleasure and fulfilment of the basic needs and the beastlike id. At the end of the story, Jekyll destroys the evil side, along with his body, to destroy it. However, Islamic teachings propose an incorporation of these two through moral teachings and divine help. The chapter argues that Hyde's uncontrollable transformations arise not from inherent evil but from Jekyll's untamed nafs. Ultimately, the perspective in this chapter reveals how Stevenson's 19th-century Victorian novella, steeped in Western tradition and culture, resonates with an Islamic understanding of the self. The lesson to be learned is that the human soul encompasses darkness, but it can be transformed through disciplined ethical attention and divine grace.

Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde stands as one of the most popular and frequently reinterpreted texts in Gothic fiction, despite its formal and narrative uniqueness. It is a concise literary work, measuring under a hundred pages in length. However, Stevenson brings together a complex narrative on identity, morality, repression, and the boundaries between civilized manners and savagery in the last years of the Victorian era and society. The last twenty or so years of Victorian literature are a grotesque criticism of Imperial London, culture, and empire, with all its features. These years are considered a transition to a modernist style of writing in English literature. Stevenson's story manages to fulfil the criticism and narrative uniqueness of this transformation in English literature. It examines the hypocrisy of the upper classes and the society that hides their vices, failures, and darker side in the face of a seemingly perfect and mighty Victorian society and its advancements. Since its publication, critics and readers have considered Mr. Hyde through the dominant paradigms of Western thought. Freud's id, Victorian anxieties about urban decay and sexual deviance, the myth of the doppelgänger, and the clash between public respectability and private vice are among the key themes analyzed in the text. These interpretations were useful and necessary, but they propose a biased Eurocentric outlook.

My chapter offers a distinctive perspective on the text. It considers Mr. Hyde not merely as a cultural representation of Victorian repressions and problems, but as a literary embodiment of the nafs. Actually, the nafs in Islam is divided into several parts, where the evil one is nafs al ammarah, one that constantly orders evil. This concept is present in the Holy Qur'an and further developed in classical Islamic studies, as well as in Sufi metaphysics. The *nafs* described in the Qur'an is a complex, dynamic, and morally charged concept of the self or soul that humans must control and fight against at all times. It is not static, but can transform back and forth, changing layers and positions. It also has a divine potential for upgrading the man or causing his fall. In Islamic thought, the human being is not merely good or evil, but is engaged in a lifelong struggle (mujahada) to purify the soul from its basic needs and impulses, which are considered unacceptable most of the time, in obedience to the religious orders.

In an attempt at a unique interdisciplinary analysis and outlook, Hyde is compared to the Islamic concept of the nafs. In doing so, I have three objectives. First, it offers a new character analysis of Hyde that will skip the binary of civilized versus savage, rational versus irrational, and good versus evil. Second, the Gothic element found in the evaluation is a spiritual failure and its possible effects on society. One's ignorance and desertion of ethical discipline, and the use of chemicals (perceived at the time as a form of black art) to meet his needs and desires, would trespass on the role of a subject and become that of a creator. Third, and most significantly, it demonstrates the contemporary relevance of this reading in an age marked by psychological problems, moral laxity, and the endless fulfilment of pleasures. In doing so, the chapter challenges the assumed Western psychoanalytic analysis of the story with an Eastern and Muslim one, leading to a comparative strategy that reveals the universality of the struggle with the beast within us. Nevertheless, this is not an exercise of theological dictation but a literary attempt at a hermeneutic exploration of how Gothic monstrosity often resonates with other traditions. The text universally deals with the same fundamental human experiences: desire, shame, and guilt.

## The most Gothic monster of all - nafs al ammarah

The term nafs appears frequently in the Holy Qur'an, highlighting its significance and importance in Islamic teachings and the pursuit of moral

living. To understand it and relate it to Hyde in the story, an examination of Islamic discourse on the self, psyche, and the inner self is needed. Some scholars have speculated that it is an unseen part of the human body itself, while others have described it as an unseen aspect of the soul, and still others have defined it as a kind of monster living within. It appears over 290 times in the Qur'an. Moreover, it is not only used in the sense of the soul, but also as a changing, reactive, and living creature capable of rising to holy positions or degenerating into animalistic behavior. The verse where the clearest information on the nafs is in Surah Yusuf (12:53), where Prophet Yusuf (pbuh) says: "Yet I do not absolve my nafs; indeed, the soul is a persistent enjoiner of evil, except when my Lord bestows mercy." This verse gives us the basics of the meaning and definition of the nafs according to Islam. First, the nafs has an innate programming of evil and vices. Secondly, this potential tendency for evil can only be overcome with the help of Allah and his divine grace. Therefore, as the order of the universe and the wisdom of the test on this world, the human being is going back and forth between these two forces, choosing his side and place in the hereafter.

In another verse of the Holy Qur'an, the features and stages of the nafs are mentioned. In Surah al-Qiyamah (75:2), the second level of the nafs is named as the nafs al-lawwamah. This means the self-reproaching soul that feels remorse after sinning and self-checks for a better form, unlike the first one that constantly orders evil and sin. Another mention is in Surah al-Fajr (89:27-30). In this instance, we see the holy and divine nafs achieved through good deeds and a constant check of Allah's orders, known as nafs al-mutmainnah. This is the nafs that achieved peace with the creation, living, afterlife, and the struggle on earth, all inspected by the orders of Allah. This verse is translated as such: "O nafs al-muțmainnah, return to your Lord, well-pleased and pleasing to Him. Enter among My servants and enter My Paradise." These three positions of the *nafs*, named in order as *ammarah*, lawwamah, and mutmainnah, are also central to Islamic morality, sermons, teachings, and the psychology of the subject. Great scholars such as Imam Al-Ghazali explained and systematized this progression in his seminal work Ihya Ulum al-Din (The Revival of the Religious Sciences). For Al Ghazali, the nafs should not be seen as an enemy to be destroyed but a wild animal to be tamed through discipline. If tames it will take you upwards in your moral journal: "The nafs is like a rebellious donkey; if you do not beat it, it will not carry you to your destination. But if you beat it too harshly, it will die. So strike the middle path: discipline with mercy" (Al-Ghazali, 1997, p. 65).

The *nafs* has also been used as a metaphor in both religion and literature. The nafs is riotous and evil by essence, but also capable of becoming the

best of all characters and virtues. Its transformation is achieved through the discipline of the self, known as mujahadah in religion. Sufis who have theoretically and practically devoted themselves to the application of the sharia in detail have developed elaborate practices for this. They employ several methods, the first of which involves self-checking and reflecting on your day and progress in terms of religious practices. Remembering Allah and His rules and presence in all things is another. The nafs is required for life as well, so it was never meant to be annihilated or killed in physical terms. Nevertheless, the aim is to revive, discipline, and motivate it. Rumi famously quotes: "The *nafs* is like a mirror; when covered in dust, it cannot reflect the light of God" (Rumi, 1995, p. 89). In our story, when Hyde dies, Jekyll dies as well. So killing Hyde was not a solution but a loss to the evil side and a lack of self-discipline, forgetting social, virtuous, and religious rules of the culture. Hyde is a permanent part of Jekyll's body that should be tamed rather than listened to and consulted.

This understanding of the nafs, self, or psyche, whatever cultures, religions, and science call it, reinterprets Western and aesthetic dualist concepts. In addition to Manichaean understandings of the West that foresee an eternal battle between evil and good, Islam teaches that evil arises not from a separate substance but from the mismanagement of human powers. Desire is not always evil; it is needed for the management of the physical body, the continuation of the population, and the balance in the economic systems. It is an innate ability that becomes devastating when unchecked by the laws of religion and virtues. As explained in religious studies: "The nafs has rights just as the body has rights. To deny it entirely is tyranny; to indulge it entirely is slavery. Justice lies in balance" (Ibn Qayyim, 1997, p. 112). This ethical framework stands in absolute contrast to Jekyll's plan and reveals why his experiment was doomed to fail and cause catastrophe from the start.

# Hyde as Nafs

As literature represents the culture and people of its time, the monsters in Gothic fiction have served as fictional reflections of the cultural fears, evil, and anxieties of their era. Just like Dracula is the product of racial and sexual contamination (Stoker, 1897), Frankenstein mirrors the dangers of unchecked scientific ambitions (Shelley, 1818). Gothic monsters are primarily symbolic, allegorical, psychological, and socio-political in nature. Mr. Hyde has always been the secret upper-class deviant figure in Late Victorian London, living in secrecy and shadows with a respectable outer social circle and occupation. Hyde is a product of a different perspective.

He is not an external intruder but an internal discharge of the social and psychological problems. He is not "other" in the sense; he is Jekyll's own flesh. His monstrosity lies in being alone, shame, and the deep labyrinths of the nafs. His problem and physical ugliness are felt but not precisely locatable, as they are central to his horror and Gothic features. In a similar vein, Jerrold Hogle argues, Hyde "evokes a primal revulsion that cannot be rationalized" (2001, p. 124). As Stevenson narrates through Mr. Enfield, he is a man who "gave a strong feeling of deformity, although [he] could not specify the point" (2010, p. 6). The other narrator in the story, Utterson, observes that "there is something wrong with his appearance; something displeasing, something downright detestable" (p. 15).

Along with his appearance, the true fears of Hyde stem from his shameful, unacceptable, and deviant actions that will lead to his humiliation, social banishment, and loss of reputation. His violence is mindless, extreme, and unacceptably intimate. The first and unspeakable act of Monster Hyde is that he tramples a young girl without remorse and leaves her "screaming on the ground" (Stevenson, 2010, p. 6). This resonates an act of paedophilia that is one of the most heinous atrocities in religious rules as well as the social paradigms. That is one of the destructive aspects of the nafs that it not only destroys its own reputation but may cause destruction and suicide, as Jekyll decided at the end. The second malicious action of Hyde is that he murders Sir Danvers Carew not in self-defense or pleasure, but "with a sound of screeching and a storm of blows" that the maid witness describes as "ape-like fury" (p. 30). This dehumanizing labelling "ape" connects Hyde to Victorian fears of evolutionary regression. It also signals a loss of moral agency that Victorian society thinks unacceptable. Just like untamed nafs, Hyde does not reason, negotiate, think, or calculate; he reacts intuitively and instantly. He functions as what might be called an embodiment of the abject that "disturbs identity, system, order" by blurring the boundary between subject and object, human and animal (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4).

In the story, Stevenson portrays Hyde as pure evil: "Edward Hyde, alone in the ranks of mankind, was pure evil" (2010, p. 75). However, thinking of him as the embodiment of nafs, Hyde is not pure evil in the theological sense. He is not the outer side of Jekyll, a devil, or a demon. He is Jekyll's uncontrolled desires unmediated by conscience, restraint, or social decorum. He also embodies a projection of Jekyll's own guilt and denial. Hyde is not "pure evil"; he is a wild craving which precisely aligns him with the Islamic concept of the nafs al-ammarah. When we consider Hyde as nafs alammarah, his actions assume a new connotation. His trampling of the child is not random sadism but the nafs's indifference to the vulnerability of other

humans, the disruption of the social order, and its pursuit of immediate satisfaction without regard for consequences at both personal, social, and religious levels. His murder of Carew is not a random or planned murder but the *nafs*'s unpredictable rage when its desires, wishes, and satisfaction are obstructed. The physical characteristics of Hyde, such as "dwarfish," "hairy," "troglodytic," echo Islamic descriptions of the untamed self as animalistic and spiritually impeded:

He is not easy to describe. There is something wrong with his appearance; something displeasing, something downright detestable. I never saw a man I so disliked, and yet I scarce know why. He must be deformed somewhere; he gives a strong feeling of deformity, although I couldn't specify the point... No, sir; I can make no hand of it; I can't describe him. And it's not want of memory; for I declare I can see him this moment. (p.15)

In the story, one of the subplots that the reader should be aware of is Jekyll's initial motivation for the experiment. It is intentional and reflects a profound misunderstanding of the self, religious virtues, and the social norms of the Victorian Era at the time. He writes: "If each [side of man], I told myself, could be housed in separate identities, life would be relieved of all that was unbearable [...] the unjust might go his way, delivered from the aspirations of his more upright twin" (Stevenson, 2010, p. 72). Jekyll's biggest error is his belief that the untamed self can be isolated rather than transformed. Jekyll attempts to separate himself from the nafs, which is deadly both physically and emotionally. At the same time, the Islamic resolution is to restore and discipline yourself with the virtues of the Prophet and the morals of the Holy Qur'an, as well as the strict practices of prayers. He seeks to outsource and export his moral struggle and the consequences rather than engage in it. The potion is not a tool of transformation, but of evasion: a magical, supernatural, and chemical bypass of the mujahadah that defines the spiritual path.

In the story, Hyde gains power; the more transformations he undergoes, the stronger he becomes. When Jekyll gives way to Hyde, it is a bodily transformation that takes over and refuses to return. The transformations become unintended, and this is a feature of the *nafs* that it never holds back. As the tale advances, Hyde's increasing control over Jekyll mirrors the nafs's behavior when indulged in pleasures and his endless vicarious wishes. Jekyll notes with an alarming sensation that "The powers of Hyde seemed to have grown with the sickliness of Jekyll [...] I was slowly losing hold of my original self, and becoming slowly incorporated with my second and worse" (p. 78). He starts losing control and then realizes that he has become his

"second" self, which is evil, and the situation is worsening. This is a precise description of what Islamic scholars refer to as the colonization and takeover of the higher (virtuous, humane) self by the lower (wild, lowly) self. When the nafs al-ammarah is continually obeyed, it strengthens; while the good side, nafs al-lawwamah, weakens; and the possibility of return narrows. Dr. Jekyll's fear is not that Hyde exists inside him and sometimes appears, but that he has made him unbeatable and strong by transforming him too much and giving him what he wants as pleasure. As observed in this quotation, Hyde's takeover is slow but absolute:

The powers of Hyde seemed to have grown with the sickliness of Jekyll. And certainly, the hate that now divided them was equal on each side. With Jekyll, it was a thing of vital instinct. He had now seen the full deformity of that creature that shared with him some consubstantial semblance of the human; and his disgust, his horror, his fear, were increased a thousandfold by the knowledge that this evil was part of himself. (p. 78)

In the final transformation of the story, Jekyll becomes Hyde involuntarily, a symbolic representation that Jekyll has lost his senses, control, and moral agency. He tells us about his unaware transformation like this: "I looked down; my clothes hung formlessly on my shrunken limbs; the hand that lay on my knee was corded and hairy" (p. 79). This is not only a depiction of a gruesome physical takeover but also the death of his morality and spirituality. The self has been consumed by its physical, sensational, and endless unacceptable pleasures. In Islamic terms, Dr. Jekyll's heart becomes solid and motionless, where repentance becomes nearly impossible: "Even then your hearts became hardened like a rock or even harder [...]" (Qur'an 2:74). His suicide is not a complete redemption or regret but a surrender to the inevitable. His actions are an acknowledgment that he cannot win the inner war, which he has refused to fight properly with guidance and divine help: "I bring the life of that unhappy Henry Jekyll to an end." (p. 83).

The duality and horror of Jekyll and Hyde run on several levels. Nevertheless, its deepest fear for the reader is existential: the loss of selfcontrol and consciousness:

It was on the moral side, and in my own person, that I learned to recognise the thorough and primitive duality of man. If each, I told myself, could be housed in separate identities, life would be relieved of all that was unbearable [...] the unjust might go his way, delivered from the aspirations of his more upright twin. (p. 72)

Jekyll initially sees this progress as an experiment, where he witnesses duality and learns moral lessons. He realizes that the nafs could be separated into two with different personalities each. He thinks that these two sides are twins, but one is more violent, while the other is respectable and understandable by society. Because they are twins and physically connected, Jekyll realizes that, unlike external monsters that can be banished or killed, Hyde cannot be eliminated because he is the *nafs* of Jekyll. This internalized horror finds its most potent expression in Jekyll's final letter, a document of spiritual despair. This extract from the novel is quite beneficial for our hypothesis that the Islamic concept of nafs or religious critical analysis can be applied to the novel: "I have now learned that all the virtue I possess is but the grace of my good angel, and when that grace is withdrawn, I am as other men - nay, worse, for I have sinned against knowledge" (Stevenson, 2010, p. 76). In this sentence, Jekyll comes close to the Islamic concept of divine grace, yet he reads it as an inactive transfer rather than an active subjection to the applications of prayers. In Islam, grace is not granted to the passive but to those who make every effort to get it: "Indeed, Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves" (Qur'an 13:11). Jekyll never changes what is in himself; he hides it.

What Jekyll does at the end by committing suicide is called irreversible fragmentation in the Gothic genre. Once whole, when the self is fragmented and destroyed, it cannot be reassembled as he confesses: "My devil had been long caged, he came out roaring... I was conscious, even when I took the draught, of a more unbridled, a more furious propensity to ill" (p. 77). This reflects a Western anxiety about the stability and integration of identity in the contemporary age. A theme echoed in the popular movie Fight Club. However, Islamic scholars and science present a positive and enabling counter-narrative: fragmentation is not destiny, but rather a catalyst for change. Wholeness and reparations are always possible through repentance and determination. Stevenson's horror, then, arises from a specific philosophical failure which he says was pure evil:

I have observed that when I wore the semblance of Edward Hyde, none could come near to me at first without a visible misgiving of the flesh. This, as I take it, was because all human beings, as we meet them, are commingled out of good and evil: and Edward Hyde, alone in the ranks of humankind, was pure evil. (p. 75)

In this quotation, the belief that the self can be engineered rather than cultivated is confirmed, as Jekyll's failure is quoted by himself in his realization after his transformation and attempts to create a body that cannot be caught red-handed and blamed. Jekyll treats the soul like a laboratory specimen,

rather than a garden that requires daily tending and a divine, fragile entity that should not be interfered with. His hubris lies in his scientific skills, and his hamartia is his transformation. His tragedy is not that he succumbs to his dark side, but that he refuses the dangers of the creative role of the subject and the necessary and humble duty of moral refinement. As al-Ghazali warned humanity, "Knowledge without action is like a tree without fruit" (p. 45).

# The Nafs in the current age

In the century we live in, Jekyll's dilemma has become a universal phenomenon and a part of our everyday lives. We have masks, nicknames, and other digital ways to attempt at evildoings that society finds disgusting and unacceptable. Therefore, digitalization and new social media encourage the performance of pseudo-selves. Consumer capitalism worships instant pleasure, having, and satisfaction. Medical and metaphysical cultures often reinforce, support, and pathologize desire rather than balancing it in an ethical manner, where it is acceptable in terms of the moral values of the self and society. We live in the age of Dr. Jekylls and Mr. Hydes. Although they are not portrayed as freaks, monsters, deviants, or criminals, but rather as acceptable, understandable, empathetic, and fragmented selves trying to find their place in social life by seeking dopamine hits, outrage, or validation from family, friends, and the public. Against such problems, Islam offers a powerful antidote to overcome them. It teaches that the self is not fixed but can be taught and transformed. Contemporary Muslim thinkers argue that "the greatest jihad of our time is the struggle against the commodification of the self" to destroy Gothic Hydish selves and monstrous personalities (Ramadan, 2009, p. 88). Moreover, modern psychology often lacks a "moral compass" that traditions like Islam provide (Badri, 2000). Physical, mental, and moral discipline is beneficial, and inner peace comes not from indulgence in immoralities, vices, evil, and the burden of modern life, but from orientation with a higher moral and social purpose.

Reading a hundred-year-old story from a contemporary perspective is a rare occurrence. This means the work has achieved what we call universality and is beyond the limits of time. Hyde as nafs challenges the modernist, post-modernist, and contemporary secular assumption that religious frameworks are outdated, useless, mystical, supernatural, and backward. The modern world, literary studies, and academia do not fancy or promote religious analysis of the texts. On the contrary, the religious analysis of texts offers strong insights, connotations, and vocabularies for understanding the inner conflict of man that secular models often reduce to psychology,

pathology, or chemistry. The nafs and Mr. Hyde are not illnesses or entities to be eradicated; they are indispensable dimensions of being that require ethical navigation. This reading also makes an anticolonial and postcolonial attempt to explore the significance of the human body. Through an Islamic perspective on a canonical Gothic Victorian British text, I challenge the hierarchy that positions Western thought as universal and non-Western, religious, and Sufi thought as particular and not appropriate. As Said argued, "Gothic fiction was always already imperial," nonetheless, it contains its own critique (1993, p. 241). Viewed through the perspective of nafs, Hyde becomes a critique of pure positivist and Enlightenment contempt, the belief that reason alone can comprehend human nature in all its aspects.

Stevenson's story offers only tragedy, evil, death, suicide, and pessimism. The taming of the nafs towards a better personality and character will bring about better transformations in our time. The nafs cannot be tamed through technology, potions, or repression, but only through ethical practices and etiquette. The goal is not the annihilation of the evil self and desire, but their redirection towards the good, with a balance of needs and social rules. This is a process that produces the *nafs al-muţmainnah*, the soul at peace, in a world increasingly populated by digital Gothic Hydes, where addiction, rage, alienation, and despair rule. The Islamic model and purification of the nafs provide not just understanding but also tutoring. It reminds us that pure animalistic monstrosity is not inevitable; it is the result of intentional evil and neglected teachings and decorum. It affirms that even the most fractured self can, with grace and effort, return to wholeness as the Holy Qur'an promises: "And those who strive for Us—We will surely guide them to Our ways" (29:69). Jekyll did not strive; he sought humane deflection and Prometheus-like shortcuts. The monster he created, Hyde, consumed him.

### Conclusion

Robert Louis Stevenson became a prominent writer after his work, Treasure Island. An adult story of adventure, betrayal, and danger, unlike what is promoted as children's classics. The novel in this chapter, Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, offers us a disturbing psychology behind a split personality, disorder, and schizophrenia. This is a story of good versus evil, told through the experiences of two characters who share the same body. The potion used in the story for transformation might refer to drugs and opium that Stevenson had to use in his life because of his permanent illnesses. Therefore, this book is somehow regarded as an expression of the feelings of suppression that Stevenson felt in Victorian society. He escaped

with a married woman to a remote island and died there. Victorian society had established certain ways and decorum for public behavior, and while Dr. Jekyll adheres to them, Hyde despises them and evades them. Stevenson, just like Dr. Jekyll, might have thought that the basic instincts of humans and their body is disregarded in society as unacceptable. So, transforming into a Gothic monster was his plan and message in his writing.

This story presents innovative approaches to fiction during the final period of the Victorian era, particularly in terms of narration and psychological perspectives. The story can be regarded as an innovative and visionary exploration of both Gothic and technological themes, as well as the chemistry and societal fears that dominated the turn of the century. Mr. Hyde is not a monster to be destroyed, but a warning to be noted. His existence and struggle to overcome within Jekyll mirrors the nafs alammarah within every human being. This is a reality acknowledged in both Gothic literature and Islamic spirituality. Stevenson's novel, for all its Victorian context, formulates an undying truth: that the greatest danger lies not in external threats but in the uncontrollable self. This is a compelling story of a character. Especially the last chapter of the text, entitled "Henry Jekyll's full statement of the case," in a letter format, where Jekyll recounts the story and confesses to this horrific experiment. This chapter aligns with Stevenson's personal clash with Victorian society.

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### Chapter 10

# The Green Knight: Proto-Gothic Monster, Suspension, and the Ecology of Horror in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* 8

### Asım Aydın<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

This paper discusses the title Green Knight of the late fourteenth century alliterative romance Sir Gawain and the Green Knight as a prototypical Gothic monster, some of whose modes of terribilita are leading indicators for modern horror genre conventions. Even though Gothic literature is often dated back to the publication of Horace Walpole's 1764 novel The Castle of Otranto, this study reveals how an anonymous medieval writer was responsible for a character with all the features of canonical Gothic: grotesque body, mental apprehension about events, moral complexity and breakdown in civilized society. The Green Knight's monstrosity works through three dimensions: his visual aberrancy (supernatural greenness, paradoxically noble yet savage aspects, and the refusal to submit to death); his use of that brand of horror mechanics typical for only the most refined beings (temporal choreography, site-specific psychological entrapment outside space-time by way of a one-year contract in uncanny terrain, weaponizing suspense); and finally he functions as a moral judge standing at the head of an elaborate test designed by Morgan le Fay in order reveal how paper-thin is Arthurian perfection. The essay locates the poem in the anxious historical moment of post-Black Death England, contends that the Green Knight's ecological significance, surveillance-driven judgment, and exposing of the chasm between performed and real identity have never been more salient in light of present fears about environmental cataclysm, loss of privacy, and an inability to keep up false social fronts. Reading the Green Knight as both literary forebear and enduring prototype, this analysis recontextualizes medieval romance in relation to the Gothic novel tradition and argues that the most powerful monsters work not only as destroyers but as revelators of unsettling truths about human vulnerability and civilization precarious.

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### Introduction: Gothic Dread and Its Medieval Antecedents

Literary horror history is generally segregated with pretty fat lines between the medieval imagination and subject matter that creeps us out today. As defined in the tradition, what one can consider the Gothic story begins with Horace Walpole's The Castle of Otranto (1764) and is concerned more or less with terror; grotesquerie; at times the supernatural (Punter 1996:1). This conception has, since the birth of trade-fiction, acted as a boundary for what we call 'Gothic', effectively caging in the "Gothic" within that easily charted trajectory from Enlightenment-to-Romanticism. But the Gothic is a on something less than eighteenth-century Enlightenment that forgets how deeply medieval it is. Its own architecture — its falling down castles, its obsession with lineage, its general air of doom — is itself built on something else entirely ancient.

Underlying Gothic obsessions, monstrous impingements upon the civilized world, horrifying psychological arrangements, and the nerveracking apprehension of concealed diabolic agencies in this respect have been medieval fears transformed by the enlightened age (Botting, 1996). The anxieties that fuel the Gothic engine are not inventions of the 1700s; rather, they are resurfacings of ancient dreads. One of the most commanding instances of such prefiguration is found in the late-fourteenth-century alliterative romance Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. While nominally a chivalric romance, the text operates on a frequency of unease that anticipates the genre of horror. Read in terms of its treatment of chivalry and truth, aspects that grow out of the poem's commitment to explore rather than to espouse them, the Green Knight is a monster that succeeds splendidly. He achieves this success by focusing on three course requirements: to produce a terrible-monster image; to wield high-order psychological terror and emotional horror for those capable of feeling such; and to develop an ethical test for probing human societies' fundamental flimsiness against their cultural fears.

The historical context of the poem's composition supports this reading of deep-seated anxiety. The end of the fourteenth century was a particularly fecund period for proto-Gothic anxieties. The collective memory of Europe had been scarred by the Black Death, within living memory a plague which had for 1/3 to 1/2 annihilated its population and rocked social hierarchy and religious conviction (Horrox 1994). It was not a settled world of ordered feudalism, but a society in shock. It was the year that the Peasants' Revolt in 1381 rattled England's feudal order, and it was marked by a schism of papal authority, known as the Great Schism.

A text that further demonstrates how it engages with questions of authenticity, performance and the precarious nature of civilization which would become characteristic in later Gothic tradition in this period of radical instability is Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (Brewer & Gibson, 1997). For the anonymous poet was a strange creature who succeeded, more or less, in being both backwards and forwards looking. The alliterative lines take the verse form back to Anglo-Saxon traditions, but the existential content connects with current anxieties about courtly behavior, religious observance, and Christianity's uneasy coexistence with the pagan natural world. This temporally complex, eruptive force is neogothic (Classen, 2015). This essay claims that this is also the role of the Green Knight in focussing a complex proto-Gothic monster intent on breaking down the illusion of perfection at Arthur's court by means of physical and metaphysical challenges which are spectacular and personal simultaneously. Unlike the conventional adversaries of heroic tradition, the Green Knight moves by terror and deceit and time, transforming quest into moral and psychological hell (Putter & Stokes 2007). He will be evaluated within the following thematic quartiles: (1) his portrayal as an abnormal figure; (2) significance of his perfected horror mechanics; (3) intent and desires as a moral examiner; and, finally, relevance thereafter to present fears.

# I. Depiction and Character Analysis: The Anomaly of the Grotesque

The fundamental operation of the Gothic is to disrupt the visual field—the presence that doesn't make sense. For the visage of the Green Knight is, after all, not simply a phantasm for literary pursuit; it provides an exposure to a particular intervisability cultivated precisely in order to provoke wonder, terror and loathing—a corporeal-event that catches up with thought-to-date but hitherto unthought-of by any cogent imagination (Freud, 1919/2003). His monstrousness comes from color's paradoxical language and also from scale.

For Cohen (1996), hauntological bodies are "pure culture," a manifestation of anxiety concerning the Other's body, and the end of binaries (4). The Green Knight dwells in a corporeal register that evades simple description in terms of either courtly registers or wild, natural/supernatural ones – the one wreaking Christmas jollies and yet also heralding death. How he articulates this contradiction puts him at the site Mittman and Dendle (2013) identify as the monster's essence: on the horizon between what is known and what is unknown, where cultural categories collapse.

# The Striking Monstrosity of Color and Scale

The poem manages to be descriptive and telling at the same time in recounting the creatureliness of the Green Knight when he arrives in King Arthur's court as Camelot. First, we are told about his size: he is "tallest of all men on earth, high towering I of him" (Weston, 1910/1999, Book One, VII). This scale creates an immediate, goosebumping effect. In such a culture of the body and its association with martial excellence, the Green Knight\u2019s sheer size leaves him so far superior to humanity that it becomes super-human (Phillips, 2003).

But the unnatural greenness, from his skin and hair to his horse and equipment, brands him as something alien, we must juxtapose with a civilized human world of gold and scarlet at court. Arthur's court generates a beautifully polished palatte: gold for divine providence and lawful kingship; red for martial prowess and noble generation (Morgan, 1991). Into this orderly spectrum intrudes the Knight: "All green bedight that knight, and green his garments fair... His vesture, verily, was green as grass doth grow... The very steed beneath the self-same semblance ware, he rides A green horse great and tall" (Weston, 1910/1999, Book One, VIII). This vivid green is the colour for alarms, overwhelming and unsettling, compared to enamel on gold that "gloweth bright" (Weston, 1910/1999, Book One, XI). The comparison with the enamel is also significant: it is not an innate greenness which would vary under natural light, but an artificial and permanent nearly metallic nature that can be read as negatively "unsweetened", maybe chaotic or wild, even demonic (Davenport, 1978).

The semiotic heaviness of this color is worth further thinking about. In the medieval colour symbolism and medieval physiology of color, green was commonly associated with the liver. It's a gesture that signifies rebirth and fertility, an indication that spring is hopefully on its way – one that mirrors the message we find in the holly bough brought in by the Knight. But green was also the colour of fairies, changelings and those danger zones at the edge of a forest (Pastoureau, 2014). So green stood for rot and decay as much as it did growth, associating it with envy and poison. This chromatic openness precisely captures the double-sidedness of the Green Knight: he arrives as both threat and hope, horror and finally clemency.

Furthermore, there is a lot of "total green". The poem goes on in a manner so precise as to be obsessive, listing every green thing - hair, beard, skin, clothing, horse and saddle and stirrups; the very trim of his garment. This all-encompassing coloring represents, not a covering up, but in this case essential or inherent nature — the Green Knight is what he turns out

to be; as opposed to wearing green, he actually is green (Heng, 1991). This difference separates him from a human agent using symbolic coloring, and makes him into something altogether "other" - that is to say, an entity whose very substance is foreign to the realm of the human.

# The Paradox of Courtly Savagery

In Camelot, the Knight is an exquisite paradox. He combines the brute, physical reality, the terrifying presence of a giant or wodewose (wildman) with courtly finesse and rhetorical control (Husband, 1980). The hairy, club-wielding wild men found outside the bounds of civilization, in both wilderness and forests, conveyed the idea that humanity had to make do with its bestial origins or, conversely that such men reduced to brute existence were the punishment for disobedience. However, the Green Knight enjoys linguistic humor and speaks in a courtly manner, demonstrating his knowledge with Arthur's court and customs (Spearing, 1970).

He is the Grotesque Outsider incarnate, a verbal sparrer and scorner [Weston, 1910/1999, Book One, XIV], but he is even more fundamentally born of this relationship to a wild frontier world. His statement has a double edged quality, which is present in those opening words. Rather than merely howling them down like a beast in reply, the Green Knight properly accosts them with due courtesy and then goes on to break another courtly convention by not alighting in hall; this touch of insubordination lets us know that, while he knows what's done (and life imitates art), neither does he mind it (Benson, 1965, p.177).

The Green Knight epitomises a ghastly bust of chivalric value: he is over blazoned in his colour ("Decked was both horse and he, decked at stern and bold," (Weston 1910/1999, Book One, VIII) suggesting as task a figure of an image conscious but utterly inhuman control of appearance. The decoration is itemized — gold embroidery, jewels and harness bells — all in or against the background of that pernicious green. Not a barbaric, savage thing that attempts to mimic civilisation; it reflects the operations of a highly developed artistic intelligence dealing with materials and functions totally outside its own sphere (Cooke, 1959). This monstrous body containing hypercivilized brain is a prototype of the Gothic figure who uses fine manners ("politeness") to conceal savagery (Cohen, 1996). You may think of Dracula, whose archaic politesse and noble air conceals an appetite that is predatory; or the gothic villain - Schedoni in Radcliffe's The Italian, say – with religious power as cover for murderous urges. The Green Knight sets the tone: monstrosity is most fearsome when it can speak for itself, and control the very systems that it threatens (Punter, 1996).

### The Paradox of the Monstrous Artifacts

The Green Knight's weapons define the character as a paradox figure of both terror and calm, civilization yet nature: an archetype agent of gothic tradition in which material items are imbued with symbolic dread and drive plot (Brewer & Owen, 1975). He starts with a Holly Bough, which traditionally symbolises peace, new life and the coming of Christmas. The poem affirms its liveliness: "When all the groves are bare / Then merrily sings the jay" (Weston, 1910/1999, Book One, X), as if it were not an invasive pose; just a "Christmas jest" (Weston, 1910/1999, Book One, XIII). In an obvious instance of foreshadowing, the holly is evergreen, symbolizing immortality and the nature that continues through life's dormant state and death during winter—a parallel which takes on a more horrific aspect when the Knight tells his immunity from demise. The holly bough is also drenched in Christian symbolism—the sharp leaves and red berries were said to be a symbol of Christ's crown of thorns and his sacrifice blood. What is deeply ironic about the Green Knight bearing this symbol is that he holds in his hand a Christian emblem, while offering them a game which dismantles it's sacrificial logic. Not one man sacrificing himself for the many but an even fight that will prove individual honour (Putter, 2009).

Second, he swings an Axe - functional and ghastly- a tool of death and work in equal. The poem focuses on the volume of the "big axe, sharp and sheen" (Weston, 1910/1999: Book One, X) that speaks brute power more than knightly courtesy. The axe is lovingly, fearfully described: the head immense, the haft long as a lance, the whole weapon inlaid with green and gold. This is no peasant's axe for cutting wood but a ceremonial machine of death that has been transformed into a grotesque monstrosity by its scale and decoration (Blanch et al., 1991). Symbolically, the axe is a rich choice. While the sword is a symbol noble, just and lawful authority (representation of), the axe, on the other hand, represents execution used in judicial murder of traitors and criminals. It is the axe of the headsman, not of the knight. In framing the fight with an axe, the Green Knight's terms replace knightly contest with courtly execution and noble quest with legal execution (Barron, 1974).

It is already a leap and shock to the system just going from the Holly Bough to the Axe in terms of narrative thematics alone. The Green Knight is peaceful and violent, haunted by an aura of allure as much as dread. Life and death are in every palm, a 'ticking off' of seasons and lives. His horror means his being: he is monstrous exception, grounded in a way that is not human (Mills, 2006).

# The Mechanism of Invulnerability and Body Horror

The characteristic that turns the Green Knight from simply odd to truly monstrous is his otherworldly impenetrability. The act of decapitation is at the heart of The Beheading Game; a game that overturns the structure of human mortality. When Gawain chops off his head, the resulting scene is peak proto-Gothic body horror:

The fair head from the neck fell even to the ground, / Spurned by the horse's hoof, e'en as it rolled around, / The red blood spurted forth, and stained the green so bright, / But ne'er for that he failed, nor fell, that stranger knight, / Swiftly he started up, on stiff and steady limb, / And stretching forth his hand... Grasped at his goodly head, and lift it up again. (Weston, 1910/1999, Book One, XIX).

This set piece deserves some close scrutiny of its horror mechanics. First, the physical grotesquerie is astonishing: here the head rolls about on the ground, kicked by horse's hooves as if it were a ball in some cruel game. The theater celebration is transformed into an impious scene of sacrilege by the gushing blood splotching the green, which acts as a violent chromatic juxtaposition between the green of supernatural life and the crimson of mortality (Bildhauer & Mills, 2003, p. 11).

Secondly, the eerily realistic motion of the decapitated body is especially creepy. Instead of falling as any natural body would, the Green Knight's body "leaps": the 'controlling power' freezes in its members with one leap "with stiff and stable strength". The adverbs and adjectives stress intentional activity and preservation of the body even when it has been cut off. This is not the involuntary jerk of a dying nervous system, but rather purposeful; it's controlled movement (Burrow, 2008).

Third, and most sickening of all: that severed head? You are awake in it. The Green Knight then retrieves his head and turns it back toward the court, at which point the now-living head speaks as though nothing had occurred and gives instruction to Gawain for how to find the Green Chapel before getting up to leave. This is an image we find in medieval hagiography of the decapitated head that miraculously continues to talk, whether it was white speaking wondered and later written into medieval tales of saints who after having their heads cut off kept preaching but here subverts this miracle of Christian origins into something horrific (Bildhauer & Mills, 2003). It is there not just for the spectacle, either; this is a rules-establishing scene of extreme violence and light reanimation. The Green Knight goes from being a challenger to an eternal, otherworld force that operates beyond the realms of birth and death. Bloody but undaunted, the body is identified as

a "phantom from Fairyland" (Weston, 1910/1999, Book One, XI) or an envoy of chaos sent to spook court. A monster's first and greatest fear is its ability to literally avoid death, which opens the door for psychological flaying (Morgan, 1991).

# II. The Mechanics of Horror: Suspense and Psychological **Imprisonment**

The Green Knight's weapon is scarcely brute, blunt-force violence, but instead a deep psychological disquiet that festers — if not the idealized attenuated weapon of honed Gothic fiction over "is decapitation way gross?" (Punter & Byron, 2004). Any other, lesser monster would just threaten raw violence in the here and now; not our Green Knight so much as he suspiciously sets an elaborate trap made of layers of temporal, spatial and psychological twine that will lead Gawain to question the very worthiness of his life, right down to it being something unworthy even his attention for a very long horror movie.

# The Horror of the Contract and Temporal Displacement

In the end, The Beheading Game is little more than a psychological trap in chivalric drag. In doing so, however, Gawain has bound himself by an oath which will take him "a twelve-monethe, and a day" beyonde to the far reaches of shores (Weston 1910/1999, Book One, XIII). If there's a horror mechanism, that time lapse is it, in all its slow, sick brilliance. The Green Knight does not immediately kill; he haunts, instituting a prolonged and unbearable wait for the later blow (Kierkegaard, 1844/1980).

The difference between fear and dread is important to understanding what the Green Knight also shares with the Gothic. Fear is an instinctive reaction to threat in the now, which readies the body for either action or safety and then quickly recedes once the danger is past. Terror, on the other hand, is anticipatory and prolonged. It's not a problem that can be solved by doing something, because the peril is always postponed — always imminent but never quite arriving. Dread infects time as such, turning every moment into a ticking down towards destruction (Heidegger, 1927/1962).

The horror of it all comes via multiple interlocking mechanisms:

Immobility and Waiting: For a year Gawain is physically secure but also psychologically confined by the contract, knowing that, unlike his horrible nemesis, his counterattack will be fatal. The poem memorialises Care with a metronomic account of the seasons - the "crabbéd Lent," "blossoms fair," and "winter's cold" (Weston, 1910/1999: Book Two, I-II) - in which each cycle acts as a clock counting time down to Gawain's death (Putter, 2009). The seasonal detail in the poem is not decorative, it's functional: it gives the temporal horror multiplied dimensions. Every beautiful account of spring's coming or autumn's harvest is undercut by the sense that it's all going to pass, passing Gawain toward his date with destiny. The natural world is beautified, but distorted into gothic beauty; "blossoms fair" lose their association with renewal and become a sign of how time passes (Spearing, 1970).

The Daunting Journey and Notion of Horror: When the Green Knight challenges Gawain to find him at a place he calls "the Green Chapel" (Weston, 1910/1999, Book One, XX), he does not give Gawain much information beyond that, turning into a nightmare a journey we undertake willingly with a misguided sense of safety. This vagueness is intentional and fearful: Gawain sets out in search of this is what Gawain should fear, the fact that he must find "the Green Chapel" with no idea about where it might be situated or what he might see when he gets there -or even if it exists (Borroff, 1962).

Gawain's path takes him across the "Isles of Anglesey" and through "Wirral's wilds"—wastes existing in "few within that land, they love or man or God!" (Weston, 1910/1999, Book Two, IX). The voyage forces him to face a horrific taxonomy of physical and spiritual threats: "the worms. ... wolves ... woodmen wild ... giants (Weston, 1910/1999, Book Two, X). This catalogue builds up an etching of the geography of terror as a terrain rather than a culture, one made itself hostile by threats native (wolves, grim weather) and exotic (dragons, greats) (Andrew & Waldron, 2007). The description of Gawain's winter pursuit in the poem is especially good at creating a sense of foreboding. He sleeps in his armor during a blizzard, goes to battle in scenes that sit un-described (indicating their frequency and the toll they take), and prays for shelter. The figure on physical pain is intense: "And near slain with the weet he slepe in his ire, / More nygtes than enex in euyn roches" (Weston, 1910/1999, Book Two, XI). This environment itself as Gothic monster, creating a terrain that offers an ordeal of his will and faith (Classen, 2015).

# The Green Chapel as Gothic Ruin

The final setting, the Green Chapel, is described as anti-sanctuary and genuine landscape of dread, fitting Gothic ruin description. It is ominous space where natural world seems to mock human religion (Weston, 1910/1999, Book Two, VII). When Gawain arrives, he finds no chapel but:

"A hole was at the end, and one on either side, / And all with grass o'ergrown, in clumps its form that hide, / 'T was hollow all within, e'en as a cavern old, / Or crevice of a crag..." (Weston, 1910/1999, Book Four, VIII).

This is Gothic terror's anti-architecture: not a building, but an absence; not built space, but organic absence. The 'Green Chapel' is a barrow, cave or sinkhole in the earth—abodes inherently associated with death, burial and a pre-Christian world. It is not garish but verdant — the green not one of artifice, but rather mould, moss and growth — suggesting that this may once have been a human building (or it never was at all) but is now nature's again (Classen, 2015).

Gawain immediately recognizes the horror, declaring it a place of black magic: "The devil at midnight / Might here his matins tell!" (Weston, 1910/1999, Book Four, VIII) . The inversion of religious language—devil saying matins, morning prayers—suggests this is site of perverted worship, where Christianity's forms are maintained but emptied of sacred content. This is Gothic par excellence: corruption of religious spaces and language, suggestion that evil can adopt holy forms (Punter, 1996). The sound of the Green Knight sharpening his axe—"The whetstone whirled awhile, ere he his foe might see" (Weston, 1910/1999, Book Four, X)—acts as visceral auditory cue of impending, mechanized violence, heightening tension moments before final confrontation. The repeated, monotonous noise is both an aural preparation and a torture: It counts as psychological torment, making Gawain wait it out and hear the instrument of his death getting ready (Lerer, 2008).

# III. Desire and Goal: The Monster as Moral Judge and Hidden **Architect**

The Green Knight's purposes are not those of blind savagery or bloodlust, but part of a well-planned judicial scheme instigated by the true secret architect behind the poem, Morgan le Fay. But that the Green Knight is entirely their for his purpose as both immediate and more general goals of his mistress must by recognized in order to understand the role of the Green Knight With respecting; agent (Heng, 1991).

# The Goal: Testing Arthurian Virtue

The Green Knight (revealed at the Green Chapel to be Bertilak de Hautdesert) explicitly states the entire ordeal's purpose: "She sent me in this guise unto King Arthur's hall / To test your knightly pride, if it were sooth, withal, / The fair renown that runs, of this, your Table Round" (Weston,

1910/1999, Book Four, XX). The test works on many levels at once. It tests on the surface for courage: Will Gawain meet his appointment and offer up his neck to the return blow even though he is likely to be killed?. Its subject (at another, secondary level) is Gawain's integrity: will he be true to his word in the Exchange of Winnings agreement given the temptations that arise?. At the deepest level, it is questioning whether human perfection can even exist: can any mortal knight truly represent here on earth the Five Virtues embodied in Gawain's pentangle? (Spearing, 1970).

The pentangle itself merits scrutiny. The five points on Gawain's shield, representing the five fives of the pentangle (five sets of five things – in this case, virtues), are an allusion to Christ's Five Holy Wounds. The pentangle is said to be "endless" with its five lines connecting so as to form a whole, even perfection of man's virtue. The Green Knight's test will reveal the breaking point in the perfect mechanism (Benson, 1965). The answer, it turns out, is yes — but only barely so, and only by playing on the most basic of human instincts: survival. Through it, Gawain continues to display courage, courtesy, generosity, camaraderie and compassion. He fails only in "purity" (in that he does not show the girdle) and perhaps in pure "generosity" (he keeps something that should be shared). The Green Knight has reached his goal: every knight of Arthurs, however pure in honour, when brought to an absolute necessity will value life above perfect honour. But the Green Knight's verdict is not damnatory; that would be too simple coming instead with almost pitying conciliation. He doesn't kill Gawain; he barely nicks him. His last words to Gawain are not condemning but understanding, acknowledging both Gawain's fall and his great virtue. This latter complexity, which renders the Green Knight more than simple monstrosity may be placed at the level of moral sophistication (Putter, 2009).

# Morgan le Fay: The Monstrous Architect

Crucially, ultimate monstrous desire belongs to Morgan le Fay, Arthur's half-sister, who is hidden force behind the Green Knight's transformation. Her motive is not chivalric correction but vengeful chaos, directed both at Arthur's court's reputation and specifically at Queen Guinevere: "T is she, Morgain la Faye, who dwelleth in mine hall, / (Who knoweth many a craft, well versed in cunning wile, / Mistress of Merlin erst,) doth many a man beguile, /... T was she taught me the craft which ye so strange have found, / To grieve Gaynore, the queen, and her to death to fright" (Weston, 1910/1999, Book Four, XX).

Morgan is the ultimate Gothic plotter. She's totally magical/magical

manipulation/magically disguising, using him/to use the Green Knight as a fabulous/patriotic and very disposable minion. As the Green Knight is a monster in form, though not necessarily nature, Bert and Hebert (2012) observe that her power is more intellectual and psychological. Morgan is connected with earlier forms of ladylike powers in Celtic and Arthurian literature. As Arthur's sister, her treachery is imbricated within a familial bond, and on the Gothic aesthetic of family as a figure of horror. She has been a pupil of Merlin, and is linked to the bedrock magic of Arthur's kingdom. Morgan represents both a source of healing and destruction, feminine sexuality and crone-esque wisdom—the embodiment of the Gothic monstrous feminine (Williams, 1995). Her form, in which she disguised herself as an old and unlovely Before-Middle-Aged Woman at Hautdesert, is an eeric rendition of the magical victim Guinevere's youth and beauty (Weston 1910/1999, Book Three, XVIII). The grotesque symmetry of Lady Bertilak's physical...appearance and attitude on the one hand, and Morgan's decrepitude and repulsiveness as a woman are presented through doubling Gothic figures: both women participate in the same plot as actants, yet each represents-depicts different sides of femininity perceived-as dangerous (Hebert, 2012).

Morgan's wish "to death to fright" Guinevere adds another layer of complications. The whole elaborate structure - the chopping-off-head game, year-of-dread, temptation and revelation - has a second function apart from that of simply testing knightly virtue. As women are queens, it is supposed to inspire terror in a woman. The Green Knight's bursting into the Christmas banquet (along with his beheading and revival) is supposed to upset Guinevere so much she dies of shock. It is this gendered violence the use of spectacular male monstrousness as a tool of female terrorization — that ties this medieval verse tale to future Gothic traditions (Mills, 2006).

# The Mechanism of Exposure and Shame

By testing Gawain, the Green Knight guarantees that failure will be public, personal and deeply shaming. But his real weapon is this psychological cut he delivered when Gawain comes to know that in order to avoid death, he made a pact(Exchange of Winnings) with the Green Knight and betrayed his word. This is more traumatizing than any bodily harm (Shoaf, 1984). The Green Knight's last stroke, only a "nip" at neck (Weston, 1910/1999, Book Four, XIV), is not lethal punishment but symbolic marring -inerasable badge of Gawain's momentary slack.

The three axe strokes precisely match the three nights of temptation,

resulting in exact moral accounting:

- Stroke 1 & 2 (Feigned): For his fidelity on first two nights, which Green Knight honors: "To true man payment true, / Of that may none have dread" (Weston, 1910/1999, Book Four, XV).
- Stroke 3 (The Cut): For his failure on third night, when he withheld girdle: "Then, didst withhold my due, / Therefore thy blood I shed" (Weston, 1910/1999, Book Four, XV).

This measured retribution highlights the Green Knight's role as a judge, not an executioner. He does not punish Gawain's fear, which is a natural human reaction, but focuses solely on the sin of deception (Schwoegler, 2008). The single cut on Gawain's neck represents a penalty that is 'measured, proportional, and ultimately merciful' (Heath Burrow, 2008). But the psychological wound is much greater than the physical one. Gawain's reaction is over the top: he rips off the girdle, throws it at Bertilak's feet and goes on a tirade about his cowardice and cupidity. He reproaches himself worse than ever the Green Knight does. He impugns his failure to the uttermost and as a violation of his being: "I am guilty, I acknowledge myself condemned!" (Putter & Stokes, 2007).

The Green Knight does not accomplish his end by death but by selfhumiliation of the hero and a follow-up, communal reaction from the court. Upon Gawaine's return to Camelot, the girdle turned symbol of shame and repentance becomes a community emblem; the Green Girdle has made visible this sin of pride until it is embodied by those who adorned themselves (Weston, 1910/1999, IV.XXII). This group common property can be interpreted in a range of manners: it could signal solidarity as an act of mercy; it may signify denial that they have seriously failed, or it could be indicative that all knights would have failed in the same way had they similarly been put to the test (Mann, 1986). It is the Green Knight's victory in moral and symbolic terms, then, that makes him a sophisticated Gothic forefather: his revenge being predominantly of a psychological rather than physical nature.

### IV. Reflections and Relevance in the Contemporary World

The Green Knight remains as a monstrous image, expressing in and through himself several modern concerns: the apprehension of an unregenerate nature, untoward; the terror of moral dilemmas; angst-ridden surveillance and hidden judgment; and dread time (Battles, 2013).

The Ecology of Horror: Nature's Vengeance and Cyclical Threat

The Green Knight is a figure of the wilderness, representing uncontrollable natural life. His green nature associates him with the "Green Man" narrative trope—a fertility, growth, and death spirit present in medieval church carvings and folk culture (Raglan, 1939; Winick, 2021). The Green Man usually depicts a face consisting of or surrounded by leaves with vegetation sprouting from his mouth, symbolising growth, death and rebirth. The Green Knight is this animated figure, a subject with voice and autonomy, interrupting humanity to be recognised (Hicks, 2002).

In a postmodern era of ecological angst and climate catastrophe, the Green Knight stands as the sonnet to Mother Nature's Vengeance; an ecoviolent and supragendered entity that arrives on schedule to crash in upon civilization and make it answer for itself (Morton, 2016). He disquiets all this sham heat and self-comgratulation of the court (Weston 1910/1999: Book One, III) — they were feasting and being proud in their pride out of doors nature tenders to its due return. The intrusion of the Green Knight punctures this bubble of self-regard and makes the court acknowledge powers that are beyond humanity (Cohen, 2015).

Furthermore, the invincibility of the Green Knight mirrors nature's resistance to be overcome. We Human folk can mess up an ecosystem, drive a species to extinction and convulse climate patterns, but there's always nature, isn't there? The Green Knight's nonchalant return from the dead underscores this elemental truth: Nature cannot be killed, only temporarily wounded. It is not less bearable as such that humans die and civilizations end than the nonhuman world lives on, coming back (and away) (Morton 2013). This "ecology of horror" is reinforced by the lacking death in any real, deep sense of the literary work. The Green Knight returns to life; the seasons renew; only human arrogance and innocence die. The only one that really ends is the illusion of human perfection and control. This persistence of monstrous, natural order—of Green Knights who will return, of winters that will keep coming back and deaths that await all things made mortal is a powerful metaphor for our own incapability to definitively defeat the environmental Omega Menace (Clark, 2015).

# The Horror of Surveillance and the Uncanny Judge

The Green Knight's entire plan is based on secret surveillance and deception. He comes in two versions — the fearsome Green Knight and when being, well, playing the role of the friendly host Bertilak. Gawain's two pivotal decisions - to accept the girdle in the bedroom, and then to hide it – are taken under the explicitly watchful gaze of his host (and by implication Morgan le Fay). This doubling engenders a pervasive paranoia: who is looking? Who knows? Can anyone be trusted? (Foucault, 1977).

Rereading the castle's hospitality from the perspective of monitoring reveals a deadly twist. Every luxury is provided—good food, a comfortable bed and polite company—and each is part of the observation machine. Gawain is invited to take it easy, to relax his defenses, to feel at home, so he can be properly judged. The Beheading Game (as the exchange of winnings) makes it reasonable for Bertilak to ask what Gawain has won from him every day, although Bertilak's last visit to Gawain's bedroom is an egregious intrusion in a man's most private space. The entire institution of hospitality morphs into a technology for monitoring morals (Staples, 2000). The discovery that monstrosity was plotted, watched and engineered by the affable host is a blow to trust and domesticity. The Green Knight is the Uncanny Judge in his most primal form — a foe who opens himself with a smile, the familiar face of monstrous threat. His profession is to pry loose the comforting fantasy that dangers are always alien, readily labeled others. On the latter horror: It is not that the Green Knight lived, but rather we find out his entire person was an elaborate ruse played to test integrity (Freud, 1919/2003).

The narrative does not lose sight of the current climate of social media shame and the permanent record. It is possible to revive old statements, images, and private communications for evaluation under the revised norms of acceptability. The Green Knight's revelation in the revelation scene himself, when he threatens to bring Gawain's hiding of his failure before a public account is an analogy theatre would be performing in. Shame is an intimate secret, a hidden emotion that is privatized; it becomes shame, when once made public (Solove, 2007).

# The Performance of Identity and the Impossibility of Perfection

Another aspect of the Green Knight's relevance to today is around presenting identity and not being able to meet these synthetic standards. Gawain's shield has the pentangle, which represents his dedication to five different groups of virtues— an impossible level of perfection. He's supposed to be all these things at once, and NOT let us down in any way with human flaws or slip-ups (Benson, 1965). The modern human does likewise, playing identity in various platforms and contexts: work self, socialmedia self, family self, public self. Each performance is expected to be an advocated expression of consistent, sincere and value-driven actions. But the Green Knight's challenge shows that there is an unavoidable gulf between

your expected self and what you are actually going to do when called upon. Gawain is sincerely committed to his principles; it is not hypocritical yes, impossible for a human idealistically to live out such abstract virtues when the alternative is literal survival (Goffman, 1959).

### Conclusion

For anyone interested in how the Gothic creature changed in British culture, The Green Knight is crucial. The term 'Gothic', of course, was coined long after Sir Gawain—centuries later, in fact—but not only does the antagonist's gross images and complex mechanics of terror make him a virtual Gothic monster, we can see that the Gothic sensibility has far earlier eighteenth-century sources (Punter 1996; Botting, 1996). He is not just a neato figure of vengeance, however: He's a carefully built engine of nervous energy — a visually stunning miraculous body who introduces metashock directly into the physical by being preternaturally green, paradoxical in artificery and casually transcendental in death. His assault is rooted not in immediate violence but a psychological dread that mounts over the course of a year, the defilement of an otherwise safe haven through sexual and moral seduction, and the weaponization of time itself. His own end game is not to shed blood or bring someone down but to show the moral weakness in the hero and that all of courtly perfection is a lie – orchestrated by the secret monster in their midst, Morgan le Fay. The Gothic fear of the adversary within is represented by magical drugging and familial betrayal (Cohen, 1996).

In addition to his wild nature connection, covert outsider judginess and coccyx-boney enactment of natural time being circular, the way he reveals the disjunction between professed morals and actual conduct — these are as very modern anxieties (ecological surveillant and authenticity related). Using the grotesque, uncanny and psychological suspense, the Green Knight demonstrates that a monster can evoke more than simple physical fear: it can provoke a questioning of personal identity and social order (Punter & Byron, 2004). He demonstrates that true horror comes not from the monster's ability to destroy, but from its function as a revealer — pulling back the curtain on our supposed virtue, and laying bare in their weakness the built-in fragility of goodness, the impossibility of perfection and timeand-nature's eventual win over human civilization.

The Green Knight serves as a reminder that the most terrifying creatures are rule-based rather than chaotic; they judge rather than merely destroy and present an apparently fair challenge with unachievable boundaries (Asma,

2009). His descendant can be followed through the visiting monsters of Gothic literature: men who multiply physical terror by intellectual cunning, who know more than their victims about how they think, who make use of time and suspense as instruments of malevolence, and hint all along that they were there beside us — in disguise (Botting, 1996).

In today's moment, when ecological catastrophe hovers within measurable time frames, when surveillance is everywhere, when the performance of self constantly exhausts and humiliates us, and where everything done in the past can be dug up and judged as good or bad, maybe there has never been a better time for the Green Knight. He is a deadline that will not listen, a judge who never sleeps, an elemental force beyond civilization's slick artifice, and above all – a test which either way will tell us the size of the gap between what we'd like to think ourselves as and what we are when it comes down to trying not to die (Morton, 2016). As such, he is not simply a determining figure for sixteenth-century British monstrous iconography but remains an enduring instantiation of the "ur-human" anxieties which it has been the fate of anti-utopian criticism to come back to again and again throughout history. The Green Knight is eternal because it holds true to the fact that human beings have always feared judgment, feared dying, feared the power of nature. He is a monster that always returns, green-faced and grinning with its axe in hand, to demand of us: Are you who you say you are? Will you honor your promises? Are you ready for what is coming?

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### Chapter 11

# The Monster as Marginalized Subject: Intergenerational Trauma, Xenophobia, and the Violence of Exclusion in Grendel's Perspective 8

# Abdullah Boyar<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

The figure of monsters and the monsters themselves, such as Grendel and Grendel's mother, have been conveyed through oral tradition or manuscripts, reflecting their historical significance in today's society. This paper examines the representations of Grendel and Grendel's mother within the broader framework of the Beowulf narrative and its modern interpretations, at the intersection of psychoanalytic, exclusion, and cultural critical approaches. It is argued that Grendel's mother is a figure positioned outside the symbolic order but serving an essential part in the establishment of heroism and cultural identity. Beyond that, the study also asserts that by reconciling Grendel's stigmatization with original sin stemming from ancestral corruption rather than personal guilt, the text renders visible medieval anxieties with regard to lineage, destruction, and moral determinism, with their impacts that endure in families and communities of contemporary society. These themes are addressed alongside contemporary psychological readings that juxtapose Grendel's position of exclusion with the hardship of immigrants; in particular, the socio-emotional consequences associated with Xenophobia and exclusion due to differences. In conclusion, the lasting effect of Grendel's narrative on modern concerns regarding marginalization with the fragility of identity sheds light on these dynamics in the construction of reflective attitudes of Grendel on modern perception.

### Introduction

Monsters possess a subconscious akin to humans in a different dimension, and this consciousness is woven into works of art, narratives, and mythology

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as frightening and destructive elements. Monsters serve a purpose for humans and heroes. These effects can vary significantly in terms of the monsters' intentions and what they are capable of causing. "Monsters are fictional, but they are often fictionalizations of real people. It is common for dehumanized people to be explicitly represented as monsters or described in terms that capture their monstrous" (Smith, 2016, p. 433). Monsters originate from the underclass and lower strata of society, and this greatly influences their appearance, distorted ideas, and behavior. "The subject of the "uncanny" is a province of this kind. It is undoubtedly related to what is frightening to what arouses dread and horror; equally certainly, too, the word is not always used in a clearly definable sense, so that it tends to coincide with what excites fear in general" (Freud, 2020, p. 59). They appear to humanity as phenomena remarkably uncanny, yet their destructive nature and depraved minds enable them to achieve their goals by the devastation they cause to society. Monster figures in literature are not just plain narrative gimmicks that attract the reader's attention; on the contrary, they are very complex tools with profound cultural, symbolic, and psychological effects. The era in which these characters were created through the author's reflection of the social norms, the people's fears, and the desires that were not openly expressed, has a significant influence on how the monsters are recognized and defined. For humans, the monsters represent chaos, savagery, or the supernatural; in other words, they operate through defining this opposition for themselves, deviating from socially acceptable circumstances.

In accordance with the idea that the monster's influence and, consequently, the concept of heroism are inextricably linked, this formation combines the monstrous nature and heroism found in the epic poem Beowulf, as well as monstrous figures with Paganism and Christianity. In the epic narrative, Beowulf sets out as the Danes' spearman in order to protect Hrothgar's Heorot from Grendel and Grendel's mother. Further, Beowulf respects the ideological hero figures based on the Anglo-Saxon worldview by incorporating many Christian and Pagan principles for expressing the ideals of loyalty and heroism. When analyzing the monster representations, it is also necessary to take into account that Beowulf is widely recognized for illustrating the shift from Paganism to Christianity. Grendel is a figure who requires being viewed inside his own framework, with the background information that a monster possesses, even though Grendel portrays the attack as a typical demonstration of power within his own monster code. The main protagonists of the Beowulf epic are monsters, individually Grendel and his mother. After arising from an indication of power (Heorot), they stand for anarchy, marginalization, and the Other in opposition to social order.

The epic's central theme of the conflict between Christianity and Paganism, civilization and savagery, is embodied by the presence of monsters. Therefore, the defeat of the monsters stands out as a work representing the triumph of human order and the virtues of heroism over chaos.

### Grendel and Grendel's Mother

Grendel and Grendel's mother reflect a universal foundation in that poem, with blended creatures that are banished by God, and their purpose is to be justified by the protagonist of the work. Religion and belief systems have profoundly employed subtle meanings in morality. Concerning Beowulf's Grendel in terms of his divine purpose with his mother, the phenomenon will be analyzed in the upcoming chapters of the figure of monsters by universal psychology over characters. Furthermore, Beowulf is blended with symbolic and theoretical figures to pave a way for monsters due to the clash between Pagan and Christian, which triggers Beowulf and Grendel to form a vital catalyst for the purpose of the monster figure. "But the gigantic foes whom Beowulf has to meet are identified with the foes of God" (Tolkien, 1936, p. 8). Thus, Beowulf stands as a synthesis of Pagan Germanic tradition and Christian moral interpretations, presenting the scope of the heroic deeds through a warrior of the Geats to help King Hrothgar in his great hall, Heorot, by facing brutal monsters to protect his title and honor. That poem recounts the heroic exploits of the eponymous protagonist. As the story is told orally and anonymously, the narrator attributes monsters such as those described in the Bible.

While the poem is considered an ode to a hero, it enlarges its hidden interpretation from those theological elements or the clash between monsters. "Most important is it to consider how and why the monsters become 'adversaries of God', and so begin to symbolize (and ultimately to become identified with) the powers of evil, even while they remain, as they do still remain in Beowulf, mortal denizens of the material world, in it and of it" (Tolkien, 1936, p. 8). Monsters are the pivotal instance to underline how they are mortal in Beowulf. Grendel and Grendel's Mother, in Beowulf, precisely rehearse this ideological tension between pagan valor and Christian redemption forms of the moral axis of Beowulf. The Monsters, such as Grendel, act as intermediaries through which the poem negotiates this duality. Even while their destruction validates the hero's materialistic glory, their biblical ancestry places the struggle within a moral sphere ruled by divine justice.

As a result, monstrosity becomes a moral metaphor that makes use of the outward expression of spiritual corruption rather than just a physical

condition. The matter of the monster figure of Grendel is related to heroic deeds to be embodied by its purpose of making a moral attack on the protagonists of the stories, as it can be witnessed in *Beowulf*. Depictions of monsters have expressed the genuine fear of cultures concealing their appearance and their purposes, attributing human features to them, in accordance with their cultural and religious testimonies. "For the ambiguous standing of the Beowulf monsters, and more specifically the liminality of the brood of Grendel, who is neither fully human nor fully bestial, is an essential defining characteristic of the particular challenge to human community that the poet wishes to pose" (Parks, 1993, p. 1). It clarifies that human perception through monsters enables people to create their own version to get meaning in life with challenges. Therefore, human beings have often interpreted unknown forces and phenomena through their own limited understanding, transferring these interpretations into literature. These capabilities are shown as a battle or a monster. Monstrosity characterizes their adversaries as monsters, providing them with strength, and illustrates how the monster and the hero have a mutually beneficial relationship. Beowulf would not be seen as a hero or as a Thor-like character without Grendel. Grendel would not have died if it had not been for Beowulf. The characters complement one another forming a complete unity. The nemesis roots in this direction and the hero can sense the monster's purpose as a result of this dual completion.

### **Inherited Sin**

Predominantly, the notion of Grendel serves as a banished creature of God in the Christian perspective. "Grendel was that grim creature called, the ill-famed haunter of the marches of the land, who kept the moors, the fastness of the fens, and, unhappy one, inhabited long while the troll-kind's home; for the Maker had proscribed him with the race of Cain" (Tolkien, 2016, p. 16). This aspect provides proof of what kind of monster Grendel is and how he adopts this characteristic to carry out his crimes. That matter discloses bloodshed in menace among humanity, as his instinct could be a phenomenon of why he is brutal to condemn his biblical symbol for the reason that Cain slew Abel. His punishment alters his identity on Earth to complete his inner conflict with blood, as if Grendel were a wild creature that is unable to be domesticated. Divine punishment lays out Grendel's appearance to the creature of darkness, composing a horror element that occurs in Heorot of the Scyldings. As his attacks are a terror of his kin, disturbing Beowulf and Hrothgar in peril as an inevitable outcome of his punishment:

He came now to the house, a man-shape journeying of men's mirth shorn. The door at once sprang back, barred with forgéd iron, when claws he laid on it. He wrenched then wide, baleful with raging heart, the gaping entrance of the house; then swift on the bright-patterned floor the demon paced. In angry mood he went, and from his eyes stood forth most like to flame unholy light. (Tolkien, 2016, p. 33)

Grendel's claws are his eternal weapon, and it is possible to interpret that the projection of his divine punishment plants Grendel's nature of a bloodthirsty monster to grasp the meaning of Pagan elements as well. Grendel's attack justifies the action of murdering as heroic deeds in the monster realm, as Beowulf accomplishes among the nations. Their testimonies conclude that Grendel is a catalyst for Beowulf because Beowulf pulls off his heroic title by slaying the monster without any hesitation to compromise the symbolic relation between the monster and the hero. That conclusion suggests Grendel is a blended cultural product of both Pagan and Christianity. Turbulence of Meadhall is the prominent effect of his attack.

However, Grendel intends to take vengeance on God due to his punishment. Descending from Caine justifies Grendel's action in being a bloodthirsty creature in an impulsive manner. "Unconscious and conscious transmission of parental traumatization always takes place in a certain family environment, which is assumed to effect a major impact on the children" (Kellermann, 2001, p. 262). The transmissions that Grendel's mother passed by internalizing the crimes of her predecessors claim that Grendel only serves to make situations worse for himself. Traumatic experiences live beyond those who are the direct recipients. We know how unwittingly new generations, in fact, can inhabit a past that preceded them, can be carriers of it, can continue to live it, reproduce it, pass it on' and, at the same time, imagine or think themselves free from their history' (Prager, 2016, p.18). In modern times, generations suffer under the weight of twisted ideals and broken identities as a result of the hardships endured by the family. The next generation takes up these issues as well, sometimes even using transmitted traumas as an excuse for criminal behavior.

The Lineage of Grendel acquires the divine curse that was committed as the first kill by Caine, composing that Grendel is an outcast not just for being a monster but for having a fragmented consciousness. Therefore, inherited sin as a key fundamental element of Grendel outlines that Grendel is the inevitable hostile figure that paralyzes his actions rooted in nature in terms of impulsiveness. Thus, Grendel's motivation to massacre the people of Meadhall is the outcome of that theological frame that shapes Grendel's exile for showing alienation among humanity. "...but God drove him for

that crime far from mankind" (Tolkien, 2016, p.16). That line supports the idea that Grendel and his mother are exiles and marginalized. Given that he lacks an explicit ideology and is motivated solely by his destruction of humans instead of through greatness, he is not regarded as a true villain either. The fact that his actions take place within the hall of Heorot and in opposition to Beowulf prevents him from transcending the role of a mere monster. His motivations, rooted in impulsive and primal instincts, render him not a deliberate antagonist but rather an uncontrollable force of nature—one that, in the end, seems to sacrifice itself to elevate the characters who are struggling to emerge from their former selves.

#### Grendel's Attacks

Grendel embarks on his massacre in Meadhall, a hall which is regarded by the Scylding people as the center of joy. Indeed he aims to demonstrate his inherited sin during these attacks. Besides, Heorot stands for the first reflection of that issue as unconscious upheaval for the outcast, although Meadhall is the communal subject to gather people as to establish an ordered society, which Grendel lacks in terms of his divergent psyche, altering his manner. "One way, therefore, to think about narrative intimacy as it operates here is that it creates or reinforces a community around a shared body of knowledge, but it also has the potential to disrupt that community as it introduces knowledge from the outside" (Saltzman, 2019, p. 34). It demonstrates that Grendel's attack is incorporated within his behavioral and psychological perceptions, which result from his outcast concept and provide the way for other people's disturbed behavior.

He came now from the moor under misty fells, Grendel walking. The wrath of God was on him. Foul thief, he purposed of the race of men someone to snare within that lofty hall. Under cloud, he went to where he knew full well that house of wine was, hall of men with gold bright-plated. (Tolkien, 2016, p. 33)

Grendel's attack on Heorot, combined with the beauty of Meadhall and Grendel's wrath, provided by his envy, sheds light on the resemblance of political and social corruption in the world. For instance, the average annual rate of student exposure to school shootings increased from 19 per 100,000 in 1999-2004 to 51 in 2020-2024, according to KFF analysis of the Washington Post's school shooting database (Panchal & Zitter, 2025). The scenario provides a contemporary view through the lens of school shootings in the US, which is similar to Grendel's attack in that people are acting rashly and trying to kill others, because they feel like outcasts and a part of society that has been neglected.

In several cases, individual attackers had experienced bullying and harassment that was long-standing and severe. In some of these cases, the experience of being bullied seemed to have a significant impact on the attacker and appeared to have been a factor in his decision to mount an attack at the school. (Vossekuil et al., 2004, p. 21)

In addition to that finding, Grendel is viewed as a cause of nuisance to disturb people, which is a reflection of his bearing the very antithesis of the established state order that Beowulf possesses. The state of order and harmony upsets Grendel in Heorot, where entertainment and order are sovereign enabling people peace of mind. While he is serving his punishment in the wilderness, his arbitrary attacks on humans indeed portray him as an anarchic monster against this order. The conflict between order and chaos, embodied by the savage code within Grendel, is reflected today, particularly in the attacks on schools in the US. Schools, where entertainment, order, and progress are paramount, share the same foundational level as Heorot. In this respect, school shootings stand as modern times' Grendel attacks. People who are marginalized by society, both inside and outside of schools, are the contemporary Grendel-ones who perpetrate these murderous acts. Much like Grendel, who seeks a method to articulate his fury, individuals, such as a kid in the rear of the classroom or someone subjected to ridicule for their appearance, exemplify the consequences of bullying and exclusion, commonly being categorized as outcasts. The violence of Grendel embodies a specific form of chaos due to being a descendant of Cain. Reminiscent of school shootings that still happen today, this spontaneous act, which is the result of Grendel's rejection, is sparked by a desire for recognition.

Then the fierce spirit that abode in darkness grievously endured a time of torment, in that day after day he heard the din of revelry echoing in the hall. There was the sound of harp and the clear singing of the minstrel; there spake he that had knowledge to unfold from far-off days the first beginning of men. (Tolkien, 2016, p. 15)

Grendel exhibits a nearly similar mindset, motivated by this desire, when he emerges from his cave, unwilling to put up with human joy and making it his purpose. Besides, he is a shadowy figure who stands for the Unknown. His presence mirrors his exact punishment of exile. Individuals who assault educational institutions and the Grendel surroundings expose the underpinnings of an anarchic structure, propelled by an unrestrained compulsion to aggress, opposing societal order and the amusement they covet, as though incurring a retribution. Correspondingly, while articulating the monster's hostility, it simultaneously executes retribution on others. This projection characterizes the rise of monsters in civilization against this

dilemma, reflecting their contemporary manifestation. Besides, "Beowulf, like the scop and the other characters, reveals no knowledge of a realm outside the material universe and sees evil solely as a threat to his own and others' lives on earth" (Kroll, 1986, p. 121). Grendel's presence poses a danger to materialist ideals, utilizing his physical accomplishment and distorted morality to demolish humanity's joy. It presents an allegory to elucidate the inevitable massacre against joy that fuels Grendel's desire to satiate his envy. He also serves as a trial for humanity, a punitive entity dispatched by God to assess how humans confront the adversities Grendel imposes upon them. The assault on Heorot occurs in a setting where individuals simultaneously experience strength and vulnerability, and Grendel's attack is a formidable response to his inclination for devastation.

The gratification derived from destruction constitutes an incessant cycle of external display, exemplified by the assaults on schools. As a result of this exclusion, Grendel's symbolism and how it is reflected in modern times shed light on contemporary assaults. This demonstrates that these attacks nonetheless have an identical role with assaults. "Ostracism has negative effects on a person's affect, cognition, and mental health" (Williams, 2007, as cited in Zhang et al., 2019). This attitude of Grendel is reflected in today's society in the form of marginalized and othered children, whose primary goal is to make themselves visible. This may be the underlying motive behind the recent school shootings in the US and Europe, stemming from these othered children's desire to make themselves visible. There is a domino effect of events when attack and exclusion work simultaneously. On the other hand, the fact that he has been ensnared in his cave and has been savage for years makes him envious of Beowulf's entertainment and the order in Heorot. This suggests that the established state order, Hrothgar, may be another factor that sets Grendel off. As a consequence of dispossession and exclusion, Grendel and those children derive motivation from the debris to feel fulfillment in destruction.

#### **Maternal Reflection**

While certain sections of society regard motherhood as essential, other groups acknowledge that it is a natural and instinctive response. It resembles an institution where the mother is expected to raise her child and correct the mistakes that the child brings with them. This emphasizes that due to the inherent nature of motherhood, mothers should be guiding role models for their children, aligning with society. In fact, this is not a criterion that applies to Grendel's mother. On the grounds that Grendel's mother is a character who acts entirely without being mindful of the consequences of her actions

To better understand mothers' struggles, we need to investigate their beliefs about the nature of mothering, which motivate a wide range of their attitudes and behaviors. By simply conceptualizing mothers' sacrifice as an innate or even divine trait, we cannot successfully capture mothers' lives in relation to changing family structures and demographics. (Nam et al., 2022, p. 358)

It implies that Mothers have a strong power to carry out their duties in parenting to handle the corruption in society by sacrificing themselves. Therefore, in the poem, Grendel's mother is literally a character even more potent than Grendel himself. Despite being a woman, she is a female monster who takes action to avenge her son's death. "Grendel's mother, ogress, fierce destroyer in the form of woman" (Tolkien, 2016, p. 49). After Grendel is killed by Beowulf with his bare hands, his mother attacks Heorot without a moment's hesitation. As a mother, she reacts with an instinctive urge to attack, without questioning what her child has done. Grendel's mother is not a corrective figure; she is a monster who has never embraced this role. Descended from the Cane's lineage means that her constructive attitudes are subverted in a way that confronts them. "Grendel's mother merits this title simply by virtue of her masculine behavior patterns. In other words, her moral ambiguity resides in her departure from the peaceweaver stereotype" (Alfano, 1992, p. 5). Her maternal reflection composes Grendel's aggression. Hence, the core relation between son and mother is framing Grendel's reaction with the mother's corrupted moral compass.

Grendel's mother is defined by her maternal role, but she does not represent motherhood in its entirety. She is the aspect of the abject mother, a dual persona which both gives life and takes it. As with the rhythmic transgressions of the abject over the boundaries of the ego, she creates and brings forth but also destroys and consumes. (Ball, 2010, p. 12)

Mother's abjection shapes her attitudes towards Grendel's problem by justifying his massacre in the Meadhall. Instead of accepting his son's mistake, she attacks as if she were right, presenting the mother and son as an utterly corrupt family. This allows it to be seen as moral blindness in the dynamic relation to that matter. "The abjection of self would be the culminating form of that experience of the subject to which it is revealed that all its objects are based merely on the inaugural loss that laid the foundations of its own being" (Kristeva, 2020, p. 98). Primal loss in Grendel's mother develops an identity that "self" collapses in the "abjection of selfness". "She

purposed to avenge her kin, and indeed hath carried far the feud, as may well seem to many a knight who mourns in his heart for him that gave him bounty: a heartpiercing grief and bitter" (Beowulf, 2016, p. 52). It justifies that Grendel's mother externally projects her anger through his son's death. In contemporary families, members often tend to deny the guilt of their family members, and they swiftly take action to blame others without facing the truth. 'Recent incidents included a father who had encouraged his child to start a playground fight and a parent who had provided a raw egg for a pupil to crack over a teacher's head" (Lightfoot, 2009). As it is stated in the report, Parents tend to undermine their environment to protect their children, provoking them to others. Just as children acquire the aggression in their families and project this anger toward the outside world, Grendel and his mother share similar ethical stances.

Those families' immorality defends abusive members attacking outsiders for their misunderstanding of the issue in the 21st-century atmosphere. People raised in this freedom, like Grendel, feel their families' power behind them and take action like Grendel when faced with even the slightest situation that is unpleasant for them. Although mother affection should correct all the members, Grendel and his mother do not tend to display obedience to moral codes. Therefore, Grendel is equipped with the knowledge that his failure to demonstrate basic morality, which his mother does not provide, and his dysfunctional relationships put him in a toxic state. Present-day familial views align with the unsustainable attitudes Grendel possesses in this epic narrative. The mother figure in this family resembles both Grendel's mother's mindset and her protective nature. "If parents attribute such types of misconduct to child deliberate intentions, children might gradually become confused with the standard of distinguishing the right from the wrong doings, risking them for morally disengaged beliefs and behaviors" (Qi, 2019, p. 20). According to this consequence, the reason behind Grendel's antisocial behavior toward the society he lives in is that he descended from Cain and his mother's failure to fulfill her maternal duties. That renders Grendel's persona an instance of his mother's introspection by reflecting on modern times. The fact that this phenomenon endures sheds light on the universal nature of disrupted motherhood's impact on personal behaviors in the analysis of what they stand for.

# Grendel's Appearance

Xenophobia comes from the Greek words xenos (foreigner), phobos (fear). "People hate or despise aliens because they fear that they may induce harmful changes" (Ortona, 2016, p. 46). Therefore, it is used as hostility

or prejudice in the contemporary era. It conveys a fear or hatred towards strangers or foreigners. This type of attitude is prevalent and has always been present. This act of leaning, born from a sense of belonging and an effort to integrate within a group or society, has had a negative backlash, making the monsters' mindset and its reflection in society quite evident. The portrayal of Xenophobia, that is, the idea of fear or hatred of the unknown or foreignness, in Beowulf is to represent the core issue towards Grendel's presence in the poem by paving the way for Grendel's reflection. Xenophobia against Grendel is being discussed as a threat to human society of the Danes. Thus, society bars him from human joy by eliminating him as an outsider. That labeling of Grendel's monstrosity as a xenophobic entity follows his physical appearance, which does not fit into the common ideal of beauty in that society, in accordance with Xenophobia. His portrayal as the outsider is the symbol of ambiguity, being fiend and grim.

Xenophobic imagination on Grendel delivers the complication of his exclusion. It reminds the modern society's concept of immigrants. "An atmosphere of hostility can shape the cultural discourse on immigration and can have detrimental affects on those who are the targets of prejudice toward immigrants" (Yakushko, 2008, p. 50). Modern society has a moderate tendency towards people who do not belong to that society. Otherwise, Grendel's struggle for a sense of belonging is reminiscent of the manner in which immigrants, particularly in the face of xenophobia, try to overcome exclusion in Europe. "Thus, people with non-white skin in Britain have habitually been designated as outsiders (or other), as 'ethnic minorities' whose culture is alien and incompatible with that of the host nation" (Saeed, 2007, p. 446). It indicates that foreigners' ethnicity constructs a harsh bias in society. Those who encounter the consequences of xenophobic sentiment caused by being foreign, particularly within Europe, are in a situation equivalent to that of Grendel towards the Danes.

Though Grendel's representation of the unknown and, by far, his appearance is not described extensively, His ill-famedness justifies the severe clash that xenophobia imposes over the differences between society's needs and his appearance. "Evolutionary approaches to xenophobia claim that moral dispositions – including tendencies towards xenophobia – are deeply rooted in the human psyche" (Peterie & Neil, 2019, p. 8). It is concerning that Grendel's consideration of modern society emulates the monster figure in xenophobic reality, which is unable to proceed beyond a mindset. In addition to that fact, the amount of admiration for and judgmental feelings concerning constant differences and the unknown are prone to vary. This variability leads to a surge in these hate-filled impulses, converting into

negative actions as Grendel imparts. "He came now from the moor under misty fells, Grendel walking" (Tolkien, 2016, p. 33). The depiction of Grendel is an instance of how he is dehumanized as an imposter to the Danes. Hence, his migration from the moor signifies his lack of belonging and inhumanity, comparable to how humans are marginalized and denigrated by an entirely foreign nation. "Both anger and disgust have a mediating effect on how dehumanization influences attitudes toward immigrants. Anger has a bit larger indirect effect than disgust, and both have relatively strong negative effects on attitudes toward immigrants" (Utych, 2018, p. 446). The effects of this negative attitude are thus reflected in the psychology of the monster or any marginalized immigrant, manifesting outwardly.

Along with a shift in that perspective, Grendel outlines the consequences of alienation through his inevitable anger and attacks. The identical offense applied to immigrants results in a suppressed form of exclusion. This dehumanization leads to a fractured sense of identity, similar to the one within Grendel, who finds himself caught between human consciousness and monstrous otherness. His awareness of exclusion forces him to internalize the hostility expressed against him. Such fragmentation in a xenophobic atmosphere mirrors the immigrant's struggle to reconcile a sense of belonging amid a society that perpetually labels them as outsiders. Hence, Grendel's violence stems not solely from inherent monstrosity but from a desperate assertion of existence within a hostile social institution.

#### Conclusion

This examination reveals that Beowulf is a multidimensional literary work, integrating psychological dilemmas related to cultural consequences with insights from modern social psychology. The wrath of Grendel symbolizes the psychological devastation of being an immoral outcast in an ethic built on kinship and violent codes. It provides a more intense and distressing dimension to the story of Grendel. Grendel and his mother are not merely enemy figures designed for the glorification of the hero; they are personalities shaped by hereditary prejudice, symbolic exclusion, and the majority of social groups' lack of ability to internalize difference. The analysis illustrates that the monstrous image developed through the text is not a fundamental essence, but rather a product of ideological boundaries that determine who is included and who is excluded from social order. In this sense, Grendel in Beowulf becomes an environment where ancient anxieties, such as kinship and alienation, negotiate with contemporary issues of invisibility and cultural fear. The power of Grendel's perspective lies in its essential portrayal of how humanity seeks to define itself by creating outcast figures. Shedding light on these dynamics not only allows one to read through Beowulf but also provides a frame for how Grendel's destructive notion is perceived in the aspect of exclusion.

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## Chapter 12

# The Monster Within Us: Heathcliff, Moral Monstrosity, and the Haunting of Contemporary Obsession 8

## Gökhan Tugay Köksal<sup>1</sup>

#### **Abstract**

This article analyses the main character, Heathcliff, in Wuthering Heights, written by Emily Brontë, and takes this character as an original figure of monstrosity paralleled to the British Gothic Tradition. Rather than his supernatural entities, Heathcliff's monstrosity is defined in the crucible of human extremity, such as his strong emotional obsession, his meticulously executed revenge, and the profound social ostracism he withstands, while it is not a product of the otherworldly. This article discusses that Heathcliff symbolises a mode of moral monstrosity, in which his humanity is purposely eroded by a singular, all-consuming passion that defies societal and ethical boundaries. Moreover, the characters, Heathcliff in Wuthering Heights and Joe Goldberg in You, are going to be analysed through the quintessential Gothic atmosphere of the novel, like isolated moors, old houses, and a pervasive sense of psychological horror that works as an external manifestation of his internal turmoil. The horror he inspires spreads through the fearful potential of unchecked human emotion, showing how love turns into a destructive force. Eventually, the article links this symbol between nineteenthcentury figures to contemporary cultural phenomena, illustrating Heathcliff's echo in modern narratives of toxic relationships, the glorification of obsession culture, and the cyclical nature of vengeance. Therefore, by deconstructing Heathcliff's tragedy, this article shows how the anxieties surrounding and social transgression in Gothic literature keep going to resonate, offering a timeless, cautionary tale about the monstrous capabilities latent within the human heart.

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## Introduction

In English Literature, Wuthering Heights, written by Emily Brontë, takes its place as a brutal and major monument in the lens of the 19th century. When it was published in 1847, it was met with a combination of bewilderment and revulsion. Some scholars who were accustomed to the moral clarity of Dickens or the social criticism of Jane Austen were faced with a novel that defied easy categorisation. As Shapiro (1969) highlights in his studies, F.R. Leavis evaluated it as a "kind of sport," an abnormality living outside the main custom of the English novel, an idea echoed by critics who saw its world as "pre-moral" and its characters as untethered from conventional ethics (p. 284). However, strangeness is the enduring power that makes this book so special. Heathcliff pulses with dark, elemental energy, eschewing easy resolutions and instead immersing the reader in a maelstrom of passion, vengeance, and spiritual desolation. Throughout the novel, having a turbulent heart, the main character, Heathcliff, is not solely a romantic hero or a simple villain. But a figure of gothic monstrosity forged not from supernatural evil, but from the intolerable extremities of human experience.

Wuthering Heights's placement within that tradition is unconventional, although it is undisputedly a Gothic novel. As Qiao (2019) states that it does not follow classical examples like crumbling castles or overt supernaturalism that defined Gothic works of Horace Walpole and Ann Radcliffe. Conversely, Brontë creates a stage where there is more insidious and psychologically resonant horror. Moreover, as Aldewan (2017) illustrates that Gothic elements are highly embedded in the very core of the narrative such as the wild, desolate moors which separate Wuthering Heights from civilized world, common atmosphere of decay and death, enigmatic premonitions and ghostly apparitions that blurs the clarity between the living and the dead, and most vigorously, the psychological torment which pushes its characters to the brink of madness. As Weirong Qiao (2019) writes, the novel becomes a Gothic novel "by building wild and dark characters, gory environment, uncanny plots and supernatural scenes" (p. 1578). Therefore, the fear in the novel is internal rather than external. This is a Gothicism of the soul where the true monsters are the untamed passions of the human heart. This Focus of internalism pays attention to Heathcliff, such a terrifying and complex figure. Briefly, He is not a vampire or a demon in a literal sense; however, his war documents the process by which a human soul, twisted by obsession and brutality, turns into something monstrous and unrecognisable.

The novel's geography offers a powerful allegory for its central conflicts, especially through the rigid opposition between its two primary settings:

Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. This division symbolises the irreconcilable conflict between nature and civilisation, passion and restraint, chaos and order. The home of the Earnshaws, Wuthering Heights, is a fortress against the elements, its very name arousing the harsh, ceaseless winds that batter the moors. Qiao (2019) mentions that the narrator, Lockwood, explains the house's exposure to "the atmospheric tumult", a place of "pure, bracing ventilation" which the north wind's power is proof in the "excessive slant of a few stunted firs" and " a diversity of gaunt thorns all stretching their limbs one way" (p.1582). Moreover, this house is associated with the natural habitat of the primal, passionate bond between Catherine and Heathcliff, a place where social conventions hold little sway and raw emotion reigns. Thus, it symbolises a world of dangerous freedom, in which love and hate come into being in their purest, most destructive forms.

Conversely, for Adrian A. Husain (2021), Thrushcross Grange, where the Lintons live, embodies the ideals of civilisation, refinement, and social order. Moreover, it is a "splendid place carpeted with crimson," loaded with elegance, comfort, and propriety (p. 45). These places are exposed and rugged, whereas the other place, Grange, is sheltered in a valley, protected from the rigidity of the moors. These also become a world of books, decorum, and emotional restraint, a place where identity is defined by social status, wealth, and marriage. The Grange, for Catherine, symbolises a tantalising but eventually suffocating alternative to the wild freedom she shares with Heathcliff. For her, the decision to marry Edgar Linton is a deliberate choice to join this world of civilised comfort, a treachery which sets the novel's tragic events in motion. This geographical separation is associated with Heathcliff's monstrous transformation. It is Catherine's abandonment of their divided, wild world for the artificial comforts of the Grange which breaks into pieces their unity and awakens in Heathcliff a monstrous desire for revenge. As Aldewan (2017) mentioned in his academic study, the two houses represent "two different worlds" in conflict, a clash between the "gentle, moral Edgar Linton of the Grange" and the "malevolent and magnetic Heathcliff" (p. 3). So, the Gothic Character, Heathcliff, being an integral part of the untamed landscape of the Heights, turns out to be an outsider to both worlds, his anger directed at destroying the social order that has stolen his other half.

Heathcliff's monstrosity is inextricable from his origin as an outsider, a racial and social "other" in the firmly structured society of nineteenthcentury England. The novel starts with the arrival of Heathcliff at Wuthering Heights as a "Foundling", a dirty, ragged, black-haired child, and Mr Earnshaw discovers him on the streets of Liverpool. As Husain

(2021) suggests that his appearance in terms of physicality is referred to as a "gipsy brat" or "as dark as if it came from the devil", which positions him in ambiguity and alienated (p. 44). People called him just "Heathcliff", which offers as a combination of his first and last name, a metaphorical gesture that intensifies his position as an individual without lineage, property, or a legitimate place in the family tree. For Shapiro (1969), from the outset, he is dehumanised, referred to by the Earnshaw family as an it rather than acting like a human being. Therefore, this fundamental ostracism creates the groundwork of the brutalisation to come surface.

Heathcliff is condemned to systematic degradation at the hands of Hindley, whereas Mr Earnshaw shows him a puzzling favouritism after the old man's death. Moreover, he is dismissed from a family member to a common labourer, denied education, and treated with relentless cruelty. That can be seen as both a social demotion as well as being a calculated stripping of his humanity. As Arnold (1969) shows that the attitude toward Heathcliff "dehumanises him," solidifying him as an object rather than a person (p. 286). Critics, throughout the years, blamed this cruelty on Hindley; nevertheless, a more nuanced reading, like James Hafley (1958), offered that the abetment of other characters, like Nelly Dean. Hafley posits Nelly as a "consummate villain," whose effective manipulations and classdriven resentment support substantially to Heathcliff's pain. Moreover, she admits her early hatred for the boy and her actions. For example, the event of leaving the abandoned child on the staircase landing "hoping it might be gone on the morrow" shows a coldness that abets Hindley's more overt cruelty (p. 202). Even if he is at the hands of Hindley or the more subtly prejudiced members of the household, the main character, Heathcliff, is explicitly "othered" through a role that combines the demonic with the animalistic. This merciless alienation guarantees that his potential for love and loyalty, reserved exclusively for Catherine, becomes pathologically intense. On the other hand, his response to the rest of the world solidifies into a monstrous desire for revenge. Therefore, his monster side is not innate. However, it is a direct consequence of a society that refuses to see him as human.

Nevertheless, the main catalyst for Heathcliff's transformation from a wronged boy into a vengeful monster is the devastation of his bond with Catherine Earnshaw. Moreover, their relationship is not a traditional romance; it is a deep, notably metaphysical mixture of identities that transcends social norms, romantic love, and even the boundary between life and death. For this situation, Anne Williams (1985) highlights that this is a "mythical" bond, constructing similarities to the tragic, all-consuming

love of Tristan and Iseult, where the lovers' identities merge into one (p. 117). Moreover, as Aldewan (2017) mentioned in his article, this love is articulated most famously in Catherine's iconic confession to Nelly Dean: "he's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same... " (p.3). This implication highlights a unity that is pre-social and elemental, forged in their shared childhood roaming the wild moors. As quoted in Qiao's (2019) study, their pure love, as Catherine mentions it, "resembles the eternal rock beneath: a source of little visible delight, but necessary" (p. 1580). It is about a bond of being rather than being a social or romantic convenience.

For the turning point and moment, the monster within Heathcliff is fully seen, is Catherine's decision to marry Edgar Linton. What Catherine does is a pragmatic betrayal of this spiritual reality for the sake of social advancement. When she chooses the Grange, she also accepts the civilisation over nature, security over soul, effectively tearing their unified being in two. For Heathcliff, overhearing just her whispering that it would "humiliate" her to marry him, this behaviour is an absolute annihilation. All the emotions that were his sole connection to humanity and his reason for being are irrevocably broken. Thus, his subsequent escape from Wuthering Heights points to the end of his innocence. After Heathcliff returns three years later to Catherine's house, He has already become a wealthy, calculating man, his entire being repurposed for a singular, monstrous goal that is revenge.

As Susan Jaret McKinstry (1985) examines, the fulfilment of this desire is worth any price, leading to a world of "dangerously powerful children, where fantasy and desire beat the adults' laws of reality and order" (p. 142). Ultimately, Heathcliff becomes a spectre of vengeance, a gothic force determined to visit upon his enemies, their children, and the same agony of dispossession he struggled with. His desire for revenge becomes the engine of his monstrosity, leading him into a "tyranny-a hero villain" means that he is both an object of terror and a figure of tragic magnificence (Qiao, 2019, p. 1580).

This chapter aims to explore Heathcliff's transformation into a gothic monster whose humanity is eroded by obsessive love and social alienation, and to argue how this monstrosity mirrors modern manifestations of emotional extremity. By following his journey from an alienated foundling to a vengeful tyrant, this chapter will discuss how Heathcliff's monstrosity is an extreme, horrible expression of human nature. He experiences the demolishing part of a love that defies all boundaries and a spirit that, when denied its rightful place, seeks not to reform the world but eventually destroy

it. He is, finally, a writer's dark exploration of what happens when the human soul is pushed beyond the limits of endurance, drawing a monster whose legacy of pain and passion goes on to haunt the literary imagination.

Therefore, the centred enigma becomes the monstrosity of Heathcliff in Wuthering Heights, which is a phenomenon that has fascinated and disturbed readers for generations. Moreover, Heathcliff is frighteningly and tragically human rather than being a ghoul and a spectre of traditional Gothic fiction. What makes him a monster is that his personality is cultivated within the fertile ground of social alienation, psychological obsession, and a landscape that reflects the desolation of his soul instead of springing from a supernatural curse or a demonic pact. Consequently, he has become a monster manufactured by the world that denies him, a living testament to the scary potential of human passion when it is denied, perverted, and left to fester. To figure out Heathcliff is to examine a uniquely gothic creation: a figure who becomes a force of nature by being denied his place in society, a mental phantom who blurs the borderline between victim and victimiser, and a liminal being who appears in the narrative long before he is told to walk the moors as a ghost. In conclusion, his horror is associated with the monstrous depths latent within humanity itself; on the contrary, the common belief is that he is inhuman.

## Social Monstrosity: The Unmaking of a Man

Heathcliff's complex journey starts in his very presence rather than an act of malice. He is accepted as an object of profound social disruption in the Earnshaw household, and his devilish characteristic is created in the crucible of his violent and systematic expulsion from the human family. He is not solely an outsider character who can not succeed in belonging. On the contrary, he is an "other" who is incessantly and brutally made to be outside. As A. Husain (2021) explains, Heathcliff's existence as a dark-skinned, speechless "cuckoo" ushers in "dissonance, the infernal, poisoning the ethic of home, creating division and conflict" (p. 45). Moreover, as Shapiro (1969) assumes that his origins are deliberately blanked, which makes him racially and socially ambiguous in a society obsessed with lineage and purity. The resident of the house always reacts to his foreignness by dehumanising him, referring to him as "it" (p.286). This linguistic implication is the beginning of a social process which denies him a name, a root, a gender, a family, and eventually, a soul separate from Catherine's.

Heathcliff's monstrosity is depicted with the illuminating the lens of class distinction. Hindley seizes the chance to reassert the tough social

order which Heathcliff's presence threatens, whereas Mr Earnshaw offers him a perplexing and disruptive form of protection. He explicitly reduces Heathcliff to the status of a common labourer, stripping him of his education, his companionship with Catherine, and his prestige. This is not about personal cruelty, but it is a calculated act of social engineering designed to push Heathcliff to turn into the animalistic, servile role his appearance recommends to them. What Arnold Shapiro (1969) highlights, the Victorian families in novels like Wuthering Heights perform as a "tribe, governed by power and the desire for money rather than by love" (p. 286). In this family, as mentioned, Heathcliff is the grabber who must be cast out. Moreover, the Lintons at Thrushcross Grange support this expression, acting him with the narrow prism of class. They disgust him and are labelled as "gypsy," incapable of realising past because of his rough exterior to the humanity within, a judgment Heathcliff bitterly recounts to Nelly: Cathy "was a young lady and the Lintons made a borderline between her treatment and mine" (Shapiro, 1969, p. 287).

This brutal social banishment Heathcliff faced makes him bitter and substantially reshapes his understanding of the world. When he is denied by society, he internalises the crucial sense of his oppressors. His primary aim is to master the system that crushed him rather than transcending it when he comes back to Wuthering Heights. As Shapiro (1996) discusses, he comes as a "capitalist," using energy and trickery to exterminate the Earnshaw and Linton estate (p. 291). His revenge is a monstrous reflection of the very ethics that disenfranchised him, such as property, lineage, and ultimately power. When he turns back, Heathcliff becomes a space of "chaos and anarchy", obviously by getting mastery via the laws of property he has cunningly manipulated. His devil side lies in his excellent, horrendous adoption of the society's own latent cruelty. What he does is to hold a gloomy mirror up to the civilised world, expressing that his "barbarism" is merely a more honest and potent version of its own hidden violence. He becomes a terrifying production, which is a monster born of its own hypocrisies that the system did.

# Psychological Monstrosity: The Abyss of Obsession and Vengeance

As long as society provides the necessary mould for Heathcliff's monstrosity, it is his own psyche, which was ravaged by an obsessive love and a fairly strong wish for revenge, that provides it with its terrifying form. Therefore, as Aldewan (2017) notes, throughout the novel, Heathcliff's humanity is gradually eroded by a highly mighty passion for Catherine Earnshaw. This is, rather than being a simple traditional love perspective,

"metaphysical bond," a terrifying fusion of identities which the self ceases to exist without the other. Moreover, Susan Jaret McKinstry (1985) assumes that their relationship is a form of "mimetic desire," a "childlike struggle for power" that peers become a purpose in the other's desperate search for a complete self (p. 143). Heathcliff mostly quoted the assertion, "I CANNOT live without my life! I CANNOT live without my soul!' (Bronte, 2021, p.97). It is certainly a literal statement of his psychological reality. Catherine is not his beloved. On the contrary, she is the very substance of his being.

Nevertheless, this metaphysical bond is severed by Catherine's betrayal, and Heathcliff's mentality breaks down. The only anchor to the world, love, turns into a monolithic obsession with vengeance. As one of the scholars, Qiao (2019) implies that for Heathcliff, the idea of revenge becomes the "only goal of his living," and he is himself by it with a chilling, inhuman focus (p. 1579). He loses his capacity for empathy, and other basic human skills become mere instruments in his grand, disruptive design. For example, the character whose love is purely innocent for Heathcliff, Isabella Linton, becomes the first and most pitiable victim of this dehumanisation. Moreover, Husain (2021) assumes that Heathcliff himself confesses his monstrosity to Catherine, explaining Isabella as a mere tool in his war against Edgar: "a pearl-containing oyster of a rustic: he's a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man" is Catherine's own alert to her (p. 54). Heathcliff does not frustrate, subjecting Isabella to an expedition of psychological and physical torture that converts her from a naïve girl into a broken, vengeful woman. His attitude towards her shows the mentality of his psychological monstrosity, which is associated with the inability to recognise the humanity of anyone who is not Catherine.

This dehumanisation of Heathcliff peaks when Catherine passes away. His attitude is not the grief of a mortal man: it is the goal, cosmic rage of a being torn from its other half. In this place, Emily Brontë deploys one of the subtle Gothic horror mechanisms. The main character, Heathcliff, thought that disentomb Catherine's body is a frightening act which collapses the boundary between grief and necrophilia. As Matthews (1985) explains, Heathcliff explains to Nelly his plan to have the sexton remove her coffin. Therefore, when Heathcliff is buried beside her, their bodies can inosculate and separate together till "Linton finds us, he is going to now know which is which!" (p. 36). This expression of a desire for a literal, mental, moral and metaphysical fusion with a corpse is the eventual expression of his obsession. This is a yearning which defies the nature laws and morality, signifying his integrated departure from the realm of conventional human feeling (p. 36).

The last level of his psychological unmaking is his cold, considered brutality

towards the second generation. Therefore, he analyses everybody, such as Hareton, Linton, and young Cathy, not individuals, but pure recurrence of his old enemies. He remembers the abuse he suffered at Hareton, twisting the boy into a brutish, illiterate parody of his younger self. As Shapiro (1969) emphasises, this attitude is getting more monstrous by Heathcliff's chilling self-awareness: " I might sympathise with all emotions, having felt them myself," he admits, "I see what he suffers now... and certainly, he will not be able to emerge from his bathos of coarseness and ignorance" (p. 292). Moreover, he appreciates this produced suffering, proving himself a far monstrous figure than his own tormentor, Hindley, who was "too brutal or too foolish to understand Heathcliff" (Shapiro, 1969, p.292). Eventually, for Heathcliff, the brutality has become a refined, enlightened art. His mind is now a completely Gothic space, which is a prison of memory and hate from which there is no exit.

# Spatial Symbolism: Wuthering Heights as the Monster's Lair

When Gothic Literature is handled in the novel, the placement and setting are merely a backdrop. On the contrary, it is an active participant, an externalisation of the character's inner turmoil. Moreover, in Wuthering Heights, the settings and surrounding moors are the stages for Heathcliff's tragedy, as well as being a living embodiment of his soul. As Qiao (2019) assumes the exact name "Wuthering" as Lockwood notes, it explains an "atmospheric tumult," a place battered by storms, completely reflecting the violent, untamable pleasure that defines Heathcliff's monstrosity (p. 1582). Moreover, the house is a castle, isolated and grim, its design as undesirable as Heathcliff's own demeanour. Its gloomy, unadorned interiors and its state of progressive decay under his ownership mirror the spiritual rot and solitude within him. The moors, at the same time, highlight the wild, presocial wilderness of his roots and the basic nature of his Platonic love with Catherine. Therefore, they are a space of freedom and danger, a landscape as "barbarian" and wild as the emotions that drive him (Qiao, 2019, p.1578).

Author Emily imperiously depicts the natural world as a direct parallel to Heathcliff's emotional state. The event that took place on the night when the storm started is a clear appearance of the tempest in his soul. Moreover, when Catherine passes away, the house descends into a deeper gloom, leading to a literal prison for the younger Catherine and Hareton, while Heathcliff's own heart has become a prison of sorrow and vengeance. In Emily Rena-Dozier's (2010) study, she argues that the story of Emily Brontë's dog keeper, whose existence metaphorically serves as an anecdote to fill the savage energy of the novel, illustrates the tension between the "delicate whiteness of the domestic

interior" and the "masculine animal presence that would sully" it (p. 764). Therefore, Heathcliff represents this animal presence. As a result, Catherine decides to be in the civilised, orderly world of Thrushcross Grange; she leaves this shared space, leaving Heathcliff to make him alone, and a monstrous sovereign of the wild. Therefore, Wuthering Heights becomes his lair, a Gothic space where he is both king and prisoner, its isolation and gloom an excellent echo of his self-inflicted exile from humanity.

## The Supernatural Echo: A liminal Monster

Even if Heathcliff is implicitly seen as a casual human, Brontë intentionally imbues him with a supernatural aura, depicting him as a figure that occupies the liminal space between the natural and the otherworldly, the living and the dead. He is inspired by some of the key Gothic elements, such as haunting, monstrous repetition, as well as the violation of fundamental boundaries. Moreover, as Matthews (1985) notes, Heathcliff is not only haunted but also a haunter. Therefore, as soon as Catherine passes away, he is literally possessed by her memory, directly begging to torment him: "Be with me always-take any form-drive me mad! Only do not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you!" (p.31). This poor being to be haunted marks his definitive break with the world of the living, that he prefers to live in a world which is populated by ghosts. In turn, he becomes a ghostly presence himself, his sudden appearances and uncanny intensity giving him a demonic quality. As Hafley (1958) Heathcliff is an "evil" a "fiend", and Lockwood believes that his presence is meaningless and unsettling.

Additionally, he turns into the engine of a monstrous Gothic repetition, circumventing the characters in a seemingly inevitable cycle of suffering. Therefore, all the time, the fears of the past are not only remembered; they are reenacted. Thus, Heathcliff pushes Hareton to comfort his own degradation, changing young Catherine into a prisoner while her mother was, and revives a parody of his own tragic love story with his sickly son Linton. This ruthless recurrence is a central point of Gothic horror, implying a world governed not by advance, but by the deterministic and inescapable return of past trauma. According to Diana (2022), as long as the Jungian lens is used, Heathcliff can be observed as representing the "unknown, unconscious part of the being," the "chaotic forces lying underneath the rational surface" (p. 196). In this apprehension, his implementation of repetition is similar to the return of the repressed, a psychological horror made manifest.

Eventually, his monstrosity is resolved thanks to his liminality. He stands on a tightrope between states which are man and beast, master and maid,

good man or villain, and most noticeably, life and death. His final days are a chilling depiction of a man willingly crossing this last boundary. He starves to death himself, his perception fixed on a sight just he can see, interacting with a presence that does not exist. He is stuck in material life, already half in the ghostly realm he longs for. The open window by his dead body, wet in rain, elucidates his successful passage into the supernatural world, ultimate victory, and victory in unification with Catherine. Finally, Heathcliff's fear is the fear of the broken boundary which exists between love and obsession, passion and cruelty, humanity and monstrosity, and finally between life and a love that is stronger than death itself.

## **Analysis**

## Reflection in The Contemporary World: The Modern Heathcliff

Even though 175 years have passed since its publication, Wuthering Heights maintains its importance in English literature as being cultural touchstone. It is a dark mirror that reflects contemporary concern about love, obsession, and the slim veil separating civility from savagery. The enduring fascination with Heathcliff is especially telling where the toxic relationships and psychological manipulations reached their peak. Moreover, his monstrosity character has not receded into literary history but has, on the contrary, gained a disturbing new relevance. Although the moors have been modified by the sprawling metropolis and handwritten letters by encrypted texts, the monstrosity of Heathcliff, like obsessive passion, his vengeful nihilism, and his romanticised persecution, is incessantly resurrected in modern narratives. Throughout the term "dark hero" of popular media to the stalker anti-hero of streaming television, the Main character, Heathcliff, is offered as a potent symbol of our era's complex relationship with emotional extremity. This rebirth of this archetype illustrates a deep-seated cultural ambivalence, a contemporaneous condemnation and romanticisation of the very behaviours that constitute his monstrosity, discovering the enduring appeal of "the monster within us."

# The Archetype of the Obsessive Lover: From Byronic Hero to Digital Stalker

Fundamentally, Wuthering Heights' main character is the classical obsessive lover and a figure who consumes his identity by his object of affection. This obsession, according to Emily, is not just a flaw; it is his entire mode of being. It is what pushes him not only tragic but also terrifying, making his pain sensible, while fueling his monstrous actions. In today's world, this archetypal characteristic has slightly gained new and chilling expressions,

especially in Joe Goldberg from Caroline Kepnes's novel You and its popular television adaptation. Also, Joe, when compared with Heathcliff, is an outsider who builds his identity around an idealised, all-consuming love. Both suffer from the idea, which can be described as a catastrophic failure of boundaries; they see the women they wish not as independent individuals but as missing pieces of themselves, spiritual or psychological necessities for their own completion. That's why the famous quote of Catherine, "I am Heathcliff' (Bronte, 2021, p. 49) reaches its contemporary, distorted reflection in Joe's internal monologues, where he carefully deconstructs the women he stalks, changing their lives to fit a romantic narrative that exists only in his mind.

These two figures, Heathcliff and Joe, employ the same horror mechanism even though publication is separated by nearly two centuries. Both characters exemplify a mentality of justified transgression. Heathcliff's quest for revenge is framed, in his own mind and to some extent in the narrative, as a righteous response to the loss of his soul. His cruelty towards Isabella, Edgar and even their children is, from his perspective, a necessary rebalancing of a cosmic injustice. In the same way, the character of  $\Upsilon OU$ Joe Goldberg ironically attempts heinous behaviour such as kidnapping, stalking, and murder to protect his beloved from a corrupt and undeserving world. Moreover, he posits himself as a romantic guardian, a dark knight willing to eliminate any obstacle to their perfect union. This mentality that monstrous attitudes are rationalised as expressions of profound love is the engine of their shared horror. Therefore, both push the audience into a deeply uncomfortable complicity, inviting us to empathise with their action besides meanwhile recoiling from their actions.

Also, Heathcliff and Joe are examples of how social invisibility can increase monstrosity. Because of the ambiguity of the racial and social status of Heathcliff, he is rendered functionally invisible to the gentry, allowing him to operate outside their moral codes. On the other hand, Joe Goldberg thrives in the anonymity of the digital age. For example, He prefers to use social media to build a friendly but false knowledge of his victims, exploiting the very tools of modern association to facilitate his predatory isolation. Thanks to his ability to move through the world unseen, his behaviours behind a carefully curated façade of a charming, sophisticated book lover reflect Heathcliff's returns as a polished "gentleman," a concealment which hides his savage purposes. One of the contemporary genres, "Stalker Thriller" staged by YOU, offers a modern Gothic atmosphere, changing the desolate moors with the equally isolating landscape of the internet. The horror Heathcliff created is modernised for an age where a person can be

completely known and yet fully objectified, their digital footprint paving the way for their own destruction. Therefore, Heathcliff's target to physically merge with Catherine's corpse finds its chilling modern equivalent in Joe's collection of digital and physical trophies, a venture to possess the principle of a person by curating the fragments of their life.

#### The Anti-Hero and the Romanticisation of Toxic Love

Heathcliff can be viewed as the progenitor of the modern "dark hero" or "anti-hero", a character that is immoral, whose mostly brutal actions are rendered compelling and even attractive, by a backstory of severe suffering. This archetype has become a popular strength in today's popular culture, shifting from the vampires of Twilight to the ethically ambiguous protagonists of prestige television. These Characters, like Joe, are described by their pain. Their beast side is shown as a tragic result of trauma highly associated with social rejection, lost love, and unbearable suffering that serves to excuse or at least confuse their villainy. What Emily Rena (2010) highlights in her investigation of the Gaskell anecdote about Brontë's dog, the novel elucidates a Gothic principle that "violence is at the heart of the domestic" (p. 764). At the same time, in the same way, the anti-hero in modern products puts this extreme violence into the realm of romance, recommending that the most intense structure of love is inextricably related to danger, possession, and pain.

The cultural understanding of "romanticising toxic love," precisely common in social media spaces like TikTok and Instagram, is directly descended from the attraction of Heathcliff. Therefore, the readers and the fans of Wuthering Heights mostly focus on the passionate, transcendent nature of his love for Catherine, especially editing out the monstrous abuse he inflicts on others. Moreover, they create virtual mood boards and video montages set to melancholy music, believing that the love in Wuthering Heights is the ultimate "twin flame" romance, whereas they explicitly ignore the reality that Heathcliff's obsessive love is the direct cause of multiple deaths and a generation of suffering. This understanding of the romanticisation is a selective one, rather than being a misreading or preference to privilege the emotional density of the anti-hero over the ethical results of his actions. The declaration of Heathcliff's "If he loved with all the powers of his puny being, he couldn't love as much in eighty years as I could in a day" (Bronte, 2021, p.87) is isolated and renowned, separated from the terrifying reality that his "love" is a power of pure destruction.

Yet, this trend goes to a contemporary cultural longing for emotional

authenticity, even at its peak and unhealthy. The anti-hero Heathcliff has a fantasy of profound, all-consuming feelings in a world where it is mostly perceived as anaemic and emotionally sterile. Therefore, Heathcliff's rageful attitude towards his love is perceived as a justified response to an unjust world, and his obsession is thought of as a testament to the depth of his capacity for love. Therefore, this is the stage where his relevance becomes most disturbing. Heathcliff is increasingly reinterpreted as a tragic, romantic ideal. Thus, Social media aesthetics, with their emphasis on curated and decontextualised moments are clearly fit into this kind of romantic story. The allowance of the appealing elements of the anti-hero, such as his tortured soul, his deep intensity for love, or his unwavering devotion, to be differentiated from the toxic reality of his behaviour. Finally, the monster is thus domesticated, made clear for consumption as a romantic fantasy.

# "The Monster Within Us": Heathcliff as a Mirror to Modern **Extremity**

As well as being the realm of fiction, Heathcliff's mental profile echoes with broader social stress about the nature of modern identity and the expression of emotion. As identity politics rise and social discourse has increased polarisation, it has created a stage where empathy is mostly reserved for one's own "tribe", whilst those outside it are easily dehumanised, which excellently reflects the social landscape of Wuthering Heights. Therefore, Heathcliff's monstrous behaviour comes with his absolute belief that the world is split into two categories: Catherine is on one side, the rest are in one side. His inability to analyse humanity in anyone outside his circle of care is a pathological extreme, but it mirrors a disturbingly prevalent urge in contemporary social and political life.

Moreover, anti-heroes symbolise a strong critique of a specific kind of performative victimhood. He is clearly wronged, a victim of horrific abuse and social injustice. Yet, he uses his victimhood as a lifelong justification for his own monstrous cruelty. For this reason, his suffering turns into a license for inflicting pain on others, trapping him and everybody around him in a ruthless cycle of vengeance. That's why past suffering is invoked as an irrefutable moral authority for present aggression, which is an extensive feature of contemporary conflict, from subjective disagreement to geopolitical conflicts. Emily's novel is just a reminder that trauma does not automatically lead to moral purity. However, it can just lightly get the seed of a new and more horrible form of monstrosity. As Husain (2021) mentions in his study, Dorothy shortly assumes, anti-hero Heathcliff symbolises a

"metamorphic" breakdown of the self, where pain acts as a catalyst which turns a victim into a creature indistinguishable from his oppressor.

Eventually, the most powerful idea of Heathcliff lies in his role as a manifestation of "the monster within us", the identification that the most horrible evils are born from the very passions we prize most immensely: love, loyalty, honour, passion, and the desire for justice, rather than being external, metaphysical or supernatural. Therefore, what makes Wuthering Heights different is that it declines the easy comfort of an easy moral binary. On the contrary, it pushes the reader to acknowledge that Heathcliff's potential for deep love is inseparable from his potential for monstrous cruelty. His desire is sublime, yet it is the sublime of a hurricane, a force of nature which is awesome in its power but completely reckless to the destruction it leaves in its wake. In romanticising Heathcliff, we are satisfied with a dangerous fantasy which is the intensity of a feeling can be separated from its ethical results.

Consequently, when Wuthering Heights is analysed with the elements of Gothic literature, it serves as a powerful antidote to this modern tendency. It draws us completely into the terrible, claustrophobic stage that Heathcliff's desire builds, pushing us to witness the generations of misery which flow from his singular, obsessive love. Therefore, this character does not allow us the luxury of a sanitised anti-hero. On the contrary, the monstrosity of Heathcliff is not an exotic "other" to be safely admired from a distance, analysis. He is a terrifying chance latent within the human mind, a gloomy potential which is unleashed when people let pain become their identity and their love to get an excuse for their own monstrosity. That's why Heathcliff continues to haunt as a creepy reflection of the darkness that we all can deal with, if people lose sight of the line between a grand passion and a monstrous possession.

#### Conclusion

As Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights declines to offer easy answers about the nature of love, humanity, and monstrosity, this novel stands on a formidable and horrifying note. Moreover, Heathcliff remains not as a spectre from a forgotten age but as an enduring archetype of human capacity for self-destruction. This chapter has discussed that Heathcliff's monster side is not an external or supernatural force. On the contrary, it is an internal catastrophe experienced in the crucible of deep human experience. This monstrosity of Heathcliff is born of social alienation that mercilessly rejects his humanity, and a psychological obsession, such as absolute trauma, that

corrodes his very being, existing only as a vessel for vengeance. Thus, this transformation illustrates that the most terrifying monsters are the ones who reside within the passionate, wounded human heart rather than the one who lurks in the shadows of haunted castles.

This chapter deconstructs the romantic ideal that transcendent love elevates the human spirit. Especially, love, in Wuthering Heights, is not a way to gain freedom. On the contrary, it is a gateway to a terrifying form of "dehumanisation" Their metaphysical bond that offers a unity beyond mortal comprehension eventually directs a shared abyss rather than a divine merging. Heathcliff's lost soul devotes his life to a nihilistic campaign of destruction; his attitudes exemplify how an unchecked passion, severed from empathy and morality, can be a monstrous and insatiable force. His psychological unmaking because of the obsession with Catherine's corpse to his calculated cruelty toward the next generation offer a cruel cautionary tale. It shows that the density of an emotion is no measure of its virtue; love, in its most extreme form, can be a tool, and sorrow can be justification for unrelenting evil. The Gothic elements of the novel, supernatural echoes work as an external manifestation of this internal decay, showing that the true haunting is not just by a ghost, but by the relentless memory of a love that was too strong to exist in the world and too destructive to truly die.

When Heathcliff's reflection is explored in the contemporary world, it is seen that his figure is not close to a mere historical curiosity. He is the terrifying progenitor of the modern "dark hero" and obsessive lover archetype, characters dominating our cultural landscape from television to social media trends. The characters like Joe Goldberg in You, with modern fascination and the broader cultural romanticisation of toxic relationships, illustrate a contemporary mirror of the Gothic elements that Brontë highly articulated. In these modern narratives, as in the reception of Wuthering Heights itself, there is a risk of aestheticize pain and packaging psychological extremity as a form of profound authenticity. The devil side of the characters' acts of the anti-hero are often framed as a tragic but compelling consequence of a deep and misunderstood love, a novel is trying to show their cruelty and invites a perilous form of empathy.

Finally, what makes Heathcliff so popular is his status as a forerunner to the "emotional monster" of the modern world. Wuthering Heights is a highly relevant reminder that the forces that give rise to a terrifying monster, which have social ostracism, tribalistic prejudice, and the weaponisation of trauma, are continuous dangers. Brontë's novel offers a crucial and uncomfortable inquiry into the darkness which supports our most cherished ideals of love

and justice. It leads the reader to face the possibility that within magnificent desire lurks a potential for monstrous possession, and that the line between a tragic victim and horrible villain is dangerously thin. Moreover, Heathcliff is more than just a character in a nineteenth-century novel: he is an eternal example of "the monster within us," a remarkable warning against the destructive allure of a love that seeks not to coexist with the world itself, but to consume it entirely.

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### Chapter 13

# The Monstrous Masculine: Gothic Horror and the Crisis of Male Power in Sarah Kane's *Blasted* 8

#### Zeliha Kuruducu<sup>1</sup>

#### Abstract:

This article analyzes Sarah Kane's *Blasted* as a modern Gothic horror masterpiece through the frameworks of Raewyn Connell's concepts of masculinity and crisis, Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject, and Giorgio Agamben's theory of biopower and bare life. Focusing on key scenes—such as the toxic relationship between Ian and Cate reflecting the crisis of masculine identity, the escalation of violence and humiliation with the entrance of the Soldier, and the aftermath following the Soldier's suicide—the study reveals how power, violence, horror, and destruction intersect within the Gothic atmosphere. Kane's theatre reveals a double-edged structure of violence, in which the perpetrator becomes the victim and domination consumes all. In *Blasted*, Kane exposes the decay inherent in the existing order and evokes ethical responsibility amidst the ruins, transforming horror into a shocking form of catharsis that reawakens the possibility of renewal. Such an alternative form of life redefines what it means to be human after the collapse of order, turning the stage into a space where destruction and creation coexist.

#### Introduction

Gothic literature, dating back to the seventeenth century, has continually evolved to represent both the fears and anxieties of humanity, from the haunted castles of the past centuries to the so-called modern cities of the present. Therefore, it is inescapable that Gothic fiction has constantly redefined its boundaries by absorbing new forms of horror and uncertainty. Fred Botting (1996) highlights this continuity by underlining that "Gothic

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figures have continued to shadow the progress of modernity with counternarratives displaying the underside of enlightenment and humanist values" (p. 1). Considering his claim that "Gothic signifies a writing of excess and appears in the awful obscurity that haunted eighteenth-century rationality and morality" (p. 1), the twenty-first-century representation of excessive violence and horror can likewise be read through the Gothic aesthetic of excess.

In classical Gothic the source of horror and anxiety lies in supernatural things or creatures. However, as exemplified by Sarah Kane, the modern form of Gothic situates terror and violence in the political and corporeal realities of modern existence, thereby transforming Gothic horror into a site of ethical questioning as well as reflecting the sense of fear and anxiety.

Sarah Kane's Blasted (1995) functions as a site for the representation of power and violence on the human body and psyche through the counternarration technique of Gothic horror and aesthetics within a modern and political context. By integrating Gothic motifs and elements into the language of terror, violence, fear, and destruction, Kane projects an ethical lens that fosters awareness in the audience. Kane's excessive use of violence and terror on stage reveals how a postmodern form of Gothic operates in the modern world. Therefore, such a dynamic reconfiguration of the Gothic tradition redefines Gothic as a medium of moral confrontation with contemporary issues. Accordingly, to examine the Gothic extremity and ethical tensions in Blasted, this paper is grounded in the theoretical frameworks of Raewyn Connell's concepts of masculinity and crisis. It also resonates with Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject and Giorgio Agamben's concept of biopolitics and bare life.

Connell emphasizes gender as a social practice. He writes, "Human beings construct themselves as masculine and feminine. They claim a place in gender order—or respond to the place they have been given—by the way they conduct themselves in everyday life" (Connell & Pearse, 2009, p. 6). This dynamic shows the fact that both masculinity and femininity are forms of performance that are shaped by social norms and traditions rather than a concrete essence.

In this regard Connell & Pearse (2009) articulate that "one is not born masculine but has to become a man" (p. 5), echoing that masculinity is an ongoing process that intersects with social expectations. Both further assert that "most of the social arrangements that have been encountered daily include various unconscious behaviors and practices without any specific concern of their origins as socially predetermined patterns" (2009, p. 5, as cited in Kuruducu, 2019, p. 8). This reveals that masculinity is constructed and sustained by socially constructed practices, yet it seems that it is natural and acceptable. However, there is always a tension between the performance of men and what is expected from them. Because it is not fully possible to fulfill social expectations.

This tension between performance and masculinity is underlined by Connell with these lines: "Men's power and men's lack of power in and outside the world, putting the men into the line of a paradoxical masculinity," lead to recurring crises (Kimmel & Messner, 1992, p. 162). Such dynamic mirrors the ongoing crisis of masculinity. Thus, this notion resonates with domination and vulnerability simultaneously. As masculinity is a social performance built upon hierarchy and exclusion, when they cannot reach control and authority, or when they lose them, crisis becomes inescapable. Tim Edwards sharpens this tension when he writes (2006) that "the crisis of masculinity centers precisely on a perceived shift in men's experiences of their position as men, their maleness, and what it means," often resulting in "powerlessness, meaninglessness, or uncertainty" (p. 6). Therefore, as Kuruducu (2019) summarizes, masculine identity "emerges with a crisis and/or leads to a crisis" (p. ii). In this regard, while the portrayal of each character in the play Ian and the Soldier, on the other hand, embody the crisis of masculinity.

Julia Kristeva's formulation of the abject, introduced in Power of Horror: An Essay on Abjection (1982), provides a critical framework for understanding the ways in which identity is (de)constructed and functions. Kristeva (1982) defines the abject as neither "an ob-ject facing me, which I name or imagine. Nor is it an ob-jest, an otherness ceaselessly fleeing in a systematic quest of desire" (p. 1). Therefore, as Kristeva (1982) writes, "The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I" (p. 1). This idea suggests that identity—the Self—defines its borders within this process. It means that identity is never secure, as Kristeva (1982) highlights, but it returns to threatening Self.

In turn, the notion of *abject* provides the self being protected from the collapse of meaning and the identity, as Kristeva (1982) further notes: "On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture" (p. 22). Here, the concept of the abject converges not only with psychological but also with cultural and political mechanisms of exclusion. This dynamic operates not merely within the realm of the psyche but extends to broader systems that define the subject and the otherness. Such

a dynamic, conceptualized by Kristeva, provides a theoretical foreground for understanding how the exclusion is (de)constructed as it echoes in Blasted.

Giorgio Agamben's reformulation of Foucault's conceptualization of biopower in his well-known work Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life (1998) offer a lens for examining how modern power operates. As summarized in Leitch's anthology, Foucault notes that "modern power can operate physically on bodies, but discursively it carves up the world" (Leitch, et al., 2018, p. 1619). In this light, the production of modern power is first demonstrated through its manifestations on bodily experiences, practices, and clothing in detailed ways. In contrast to Foucault, Agamben argues that modern biopolitics functions within the realm of sovereign power that operates on individual bodies, reducing them to a biological existence. Agamben characterizes this form of existence with the term bare life," where the law is suspended, leaving individuals or groups vulnerable to violence and the whims of authority" (Kuruducu, 2023, p. 20). He also asserts that in modernity "the interlacing of politics and life has become so tight that separating bare life and 'its modern avatars' becomes impossible (Agamben, 1998, p. 120). Therefore, the connection between bare life and politics, a link that secretly governs the modern ideologies seemingly most distant from one another, remains a crucial point (Agamben, 1998, p. 4).

In order to represent the being whose life was reduced to biological existence in the political realm, Agamben employs the archaic figure of homo sacer. For Agamben, modern power structures reshape human experience and sociopolitical meaning. Homo sacer embodies a life "situated at the intersection of a capacity to be killed and yet not sacrificed, outside both human and divine law" (Agamben, 1998, p. 73). This dynamic shows that homo sacer has a life stripped of political form.

Such a process is mirrored in Blasted, where the suspension of law and moral boundaries is eroded; therefore, the characters are exposed to violence and terror. They become both the victim and the victimizer within the very same dynamic that mirrors Agamben's conceptualization. Seen from this perspective, Kane presents the modern condition of the subject, echoing in each character, which becomes an object within the process, as a way to question or rethink ethical, cultural, and psychological boundaries of being.

Taken together, the conceptualization of masculinity and crisis, the term abject, and the theoretical framework of biopower and the notion of bare life underline the fact that the construction of identity is not an absence but a process linked to power structures; therefore, there is always a double edge in which it forms the subject yet simultaneously haunts it, projecting a Gothic landscape where identity becomes a site of vulnerability as well as destruction, violence, and excess, as the forces that construct the self also threaten to collapse it.

Kane's theater presents the dynamics of power and violence as well as reconfiguring power as a medium for ethical awareness. In this study, the initial focus is on the concept of violence, especially men's violence in the play. The issue of violence discussed here is not new in history, but what matters is the way it extends beyond personal into the socio-political arena. Violence has long been a subject on stage—for example, in King Oedipus, the king violently blinds himself as punishment for his own transgression. Traditionally, such acts of violence on stage, especially within the Aristotelian tradition, serve the purpose of catharsis: to evoke pity and fear and offer emotional release. This tradition has continued for centuries. However, in Kane's *in-yer-face* theatre, the function of on-stage violence shifts. It is no longer simply about catharsis but about confronting the audience, shaking them out of their comfort zone, and making them empathize with the characters' pain and trauma. The theater of this period aims to make the audience aware of the harsh realities of life and to provoke them to question and reflect beyond mere entertainment or education. With this perspective in mind, the following analysis will focus on how Sarah Kane, in *Blasted*, employs violence as a Gothic strategy in a contemporary context to challenge perceptions of power, suffering, and empathy.

Blasted was written in the early years of the 1990s. It consists of five scenes. It is set in a luxurious hotel room in Leeds, and the story is based on the experiences of a middle-aged journalist, Ian, with his young lover, Cate. However, it is not merely a love story; indeed, it is a story of violence, murder, trauma, war, crisis, and suffering. The first half of the play is centered on Ian and Cate, whereas in the second half of the play, a soldier without a name appears. On the one hand, Kane manages to make the crime of violence more visible to illustrate issues beyond routine love experiences. On the other hand, she explores how the dynamics of power and violence shift direction yet are never eradicated.

In the opening scene of the play, Ian and Cate are in the hotel room. Cate rejects Ian's insistence on eating the piggy sandwich, responding, "Dead meat. Blood. Can't eat an animal" (Kane, 1995, p. 6). Within this interaction, Kane underscores the tension between them; through the lens of masculinity, this moment reveals how the patriarchal language they employ manifests domination and control, framing the dynamic between man and woman in terms of authority and resistance. In this way, Kane prepares the

audience for the broader power struggles that will define Ian and Cate's relationship.

As the scene progresses, Ian uses insulting comments about Cate's clothing, saying, "I don't like your clothes," and "You look like lesbos" (Kane, 1995, p. 7). This exchange indicates that the masculine ego manifests its power through sexual dominance. Such a dynamic gains further clarity when read alongside the comments in Kimmel and Messner's Men's Lives (1992), where the authors underline that male dominance and violence can only be understood through culturally imposed gender roles:

In order to understand physical violence, one must first understand male violence, since most acts of violence are committed by males and primarily against other males. Crucially, they maintain that male violence can only be understood through an analysis of the sex roles, or gender roles, into which males are socialized by the gender codes of their particular cultures (Kimmel & Messner, 1992, p. 553).

This suggests that Ian embodies hegemonic masculinity performance, which foregrounds cultural codes and expectations within the patriarchal power system.

However, as the following dialogue indicates, this dynamic is neither stable nor has a single direction—from man to woman. Ian's utterance— "You want to"-implies that Cate is not a passive counterpart in this interaction. The dynamic becomes clearer in the subsequent dialogue:

Ian That wasn't very fair.

Cate What?

Ian Leacing me hanging, making a prick of myself.

Cate I f-f-felt-

Ian Don't pity me, Cate. You don't have to fuck me 'cause I'm dying, but don't push your cunt in my face then take it away cause I cause I stick my tongue out.

Cate I-I-I- Ian.

Ian What's the m-m-matter?

Cate I k-k-kissed you, that's all. I l-l-like you.

Ian Don't give me a hard-on if you're not going to finish me off. It hurts.

Cate I didn't mean it.

**Ian** Shit. (He appears to be in considerable pain.)

Cate I'm sorry. I am. I won't do it again.

(Kane, 1995, p. 14).

This brief interaction dramatizes the vulnerability of the masculine body while also revealing Cate's micro-level aggression, as she uses sexuality as a site of subtle manipulation. Through such a relational tension, Kane shows how the power relations between Ian and Cate are unstable and fluid and leaking into every moment of their interaction. This dynamic of vulnerability, sexuality, and micro-power can be further illuminated through Foucault's comments in Volume 1 of The History of Sexuality:

Imbedded in bodies, becoming deeply characteristic of individuals, the oddities of sex relied on a technology of health and pathology. And conversely, since sexuality was a medical and medicalizable object, one had to try and detect it—as a lesion, a dysfunction, or a symptom—in the depths of the organism, or on the surface of the skin, or among all the signs of behavior. The power which thus took charge of sexuality set about contacting bodies, caressing them with its eyes, intensifying areas, electrifying surfaces, and dramatizing troubled moments (trans. Hurley, 1978, p. 1664).

Furthermore, the following scene in which Cate takes Ian's gun and turns it against him underlines not only the unstable nature of power but also mirrors the collapse of Ian's masculine authority.

Ian Don't worry, I'll be dead soon.

(He tosses the gun onto the bed.)

Have a pop.

Cate doesn't move.

Ian waits, then chuckles and goes into the bathroom.

We hear the shower running.

Cate stares at the gun.

She gets up very slowly and dresses.

She packs her bag.

She picks up Ian's leather jacket and smells it.

She rips the arms off at the seams.

She picks up his gun and examines it.

We hear **Ian** coughing up in the bathroom.

Cate puts the gun down, and he comes in.

He dresses. He looks at the gun.

Ian No? (Kane, 1995, p. 25).

Through this symbolic scene, Kane reveals how masculine power and authority can unravel almost instantly, exposing the fragile core of the hegemonic masculine subject whose symbolic potency is momentarily castrated by the formerly subordinated and objectified figure. Read through this lens, the moment also functions as a Gothic inversion in which roles shift, and the force of power and violence returns to Ian himself—now destabilized, vulnerable, threatened, and literally powerless.

Taken together, the highlighted scenes generate a Gothic tension in which intimacy and threat unfold simultaneously between Ian and Cate. Through these scenes, Kane creates a haunting atmosphere in which power and vulnerability collapse into one another through the shifting interplay of sexual desire and performance.

With the explosion of the hotel room, Kane crafts a distinctly Gothic horror atmosphere, turning the once domestic space into a violent battlefield—a Gothic ruin. This moment, therefore, recaptures the shifting nature of power from Ian to the Soldier, who represents a hierarchy positioned at the top of sovereign authority.

The hotel has been blasted by a mortar bomb.

There is a large hole in one of the walls, and everything is covered in dust, which is still falling.

The **Soldier** is *unconscious*, *rifle still in hand*.

He has dropped Ian's gun, which lies between them.

Ian lies very still, eyes open.

Ian, Mum?

Silence.

The Soldier wakes and turns his eyes and rifle on Ian with the minimum possible movement. He instinctively runs his free hand over his limbs and body to check that he is still in one piece. He is.

Soldier The drink.

Ian looks around.

There is a bottle of gin lying next to him with the lid off.

He holds it up to the light.

Ian Empty.

The **Soldier** takes the bottle and drinks the last mouthful.

Ian (chuckles) Worse than me.

**Soldier** (holds the bottle up and shakes it over his mouth, catching any remaining drops)

Ian (finds his cigarettes in his shirt pocket and lights up)

(Kane, 1995, p. 37).

Through the lens of Kristeva, this dynamic reveals how the explosion transforms the hotel room into a modern Gothic castle overtaken by a modern monster, the Soldier. In this way, Kane dramatizes how meaning collapses within an instant. As Kristeva (1982) notes, when "the boundary between subject and object is shaken" and "the limit between inside and outside becomes uncertain," the narrative itself begins to collapse, yielding what she calls "the theme of suffering-horror," the ultimate evidence of abjection within representation" (p. 141). In this scene, Kane exposes the collapse of meaning and subjectivity.

This scene can also be interpreted through Botting's point of view. As Botting (1996) highlights, echoing Stephen King's *The Shining* (1977):

An old, deserted, and isolated hotel is the site of terror while a family are its victims. As a place of shining, projections of violent disturbances in the past or future, the hotel acts as a magnifying glass or mirror for psychic energies and psychotic impulses of certain events and individuals. In an uncanny movement within the isolated hotel, the father becomes more and more psychotic while his son glimpses the spectral returns of past scenes of violence (p. 14).

This intertextual resonance foreshadows Botting's later conceptualization of modern Gothic as a new domain for the encounter with dark powers, now secular, mental, and animal rather than supernatural" (p. 13). He highlights a critical transformation whereby horror and violence no longer arise from external or supernatural forces but instead emerge from within the modern, so-called rational power structures—a condition disturbingly exemplified in the highlighted scene.

As I have previously argued in my discussion of Bond (see Kuruducu, 2023, p. Chapter 2). Certain urban spaces, such as the town, the hotel room, etc., are the areas that generally function as insecure places surrounded by destruction, violence, and terror that "destroys the rational ordering of a society" (Khatoon & Khatoon, 2023, p. 438). In much the same way, in Blasted, the hotel room, once a domestic place, becomes a zone where the biopolitical power materializes through violence, destruction, humiliation, and tragedy. Likewise, both the hotel room and the world outside are not simply spaces of shelter but rather places where sovereign power is enacted and maintained through threats, risk, and extreme violence. Whether these spaces are constructed as secure or threatening, it is evident that biopower establishes itself via various power management technologies that persist throughout the narrative. The dialogue between the characters reveals the process vividly.

**CATE:** Everyone in town is crying.

IAN: Touch me.

**CATE:** They can't stop. Soldiers have taken over.

IAN: They've won?

CATE: No.

**SOLDIER:** You never fucked by a man before?

IAN: doesn't answer

SOLDIER: Didn't think so. It's nothing. Saw thousands of people packing into trucks like pigs trying to leave town. Women threw their babies on board, hoping someone would look after them. Crushing each other to death. Inside of people's heads came out of their eyes. Saw a child most of his face blown off, young girl I fucked hand up inside her trying to claw my liquid out, starving man eating his dead wife's leg. Gun was born here and won't die. Can't get tragic about your arse. Don't think your Welsh arse is different to any other arse I fucked. Sure, you haven't got any more food, I'm fucking starving. (Kane, 1995, p. 47).

In this scene, Kane's narration of the events and the depiction of the setting resonate with the Gothic framework of violence, terror, and manifestation of sovereign power that reduce the human beings into mere bare life in Agambenian terms. This is evident in the scene of the explosion, which recalls Agamben's thesis on concentration camps as testing grounds for experiments in total dominance and, "in some ways, as the hidden matrix and nomos of the political space" (Agamben, 1998, p. 166). Accordingly, the ruined hotel room, which exposes the *nomos* of political space, recaptures a Gothic scene marked by architectural ruin and decay alongside bodily horror and disgusting in other words, what Kristeva terms the abject.

As in Bond (see Kuruducu, 2023, p. Chapter 2), Kane's narration of the events and the presentation of the setting also resonate with the "Gothic discourse of monstrosity and barbarity underlying the veneer of civilization" (Khatoon & Khatoon, 2023, p. 435). Here, the body and the environment also stand as a site of ethical contestation. By using the characters and the environment within a gothic atmosphere, Kane posits a "counter-discourse that creates its macabre reality" (Khatoon & Khatoon, 2023, p. 435).

The soldier's presence is a turning point because it marks a shift in the play's power dynamics once again. His mode of being evokes Agamben's analyses of bare life and biopower. As Agamben (2004) portrays, the soldier embodies the figure produced by a new order that "radically erases any legal status of the individual, thus producing a legally unnamable and unclassifiable being" (p. 3), a body tortured both physically and psychologically, deprived of a name—a condition that signifies the erosion of identity left. Therefore, in Agambenian terms, the soldier embodies the condition of homo sacer.

As the play progresses, the subsequent scenes further reveal and echo the relationship, especially between Ian and the Soldier, as articulated by Zeynep Sayın (2016):

Torturers become the masters of life and death by reducing the human being before them to a whimpering heap of flesh. Yet what they fail to see is that at the very moment they objectify others, they too can be objectified by others. Hence, the purpose of destruction is not to transcend torture but to return to itself (Kötülük Cemaatleri, p.78).

This dynamic becomes visible in the pivotal scene below, where the Soldier's rape and torture of Ian by sucking his eyes and eating them expose the fluid, vulnerable, reversible nature of power.

He puts his mouth over one of Ian's eyes, sucks it out, bites it off, and eats it.

He does the same to the other eye.

**SOLDIER:** He ate her eyes.

Poor bastard.

Poor love.

Poor fucking bastard.

Blackout.

(Kane, 1995, p. 48).

Kristeva (1982) defines abjection as "what disturbs identity, system, order" (p. 4). The soldier's suicide illustrates this assertion. Kane represents the Soldier as an abject figure, as previously highlighted, whose body embodies decay, trauma, and violence that destabilize the boundary between the human and the inhuman. Therefore, soon after his ultraviolent act against Ian, "the Soldier lies close to Ian, the revolver in his hand. He has blown his own brain out" (Kane, 1995, p. 48). As a monstrous being, the Soldier turns sovereign violence inward, becoming once again both the perpetrator and the victim. This logic aligns with Botting's (1996) observation that Gothic becomes "a world of individual transgression interrogating the uncertain bounds of imaginative freedom and human knowledge" (p. 11) and foregrounds Kane's depiction of the Soldier's mind.

Ian's distorted body can be read as a Gothic body that reveals the body's entanglement with politics, parallel to Agamben's (1998) claim that "the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power" (p. 5). This biopolitical reduction reaches its culmination in the final scene, which has already embodied multiple and conflicting layers of meaning. In the closing moments of the play, Cate gives water to Ian, who has been reduced to a mere biological body. Although some readings of the play interpret this gesture as a sublime act of compassion—an ethical awakening achieved through horror—Botting's (1996) notion of the sublime terror offers a more complex frame for this moment:

Terror, in its sublime manifestations, is associated with subjective elevation, with the pleasures of imaginatively transcending or overcoming fear and thereby renewing and heightening a sense of self and social value: threatened with dissolution, the self, like the social limits which define it, reconstitutes its identity against the otherness and loss presented in the moment of terror (p. 131).

This sense of sublimity is dramatized in the play's final moments:

Ian That wasn't very fair.

Cate What?

**Ian** Leaving me hanging, making a prick of myself.

Cate I f-f-felt-

Ian Don't pity me, Cate. You don't have to fuck me 'cause I'm dying, but don't push your cunt in my face then take it away cause I cause I stick my tongue out.

Cate I-I-I- Ian.

Ian What's the m-m-matter?

Cate I k-k-kissed you, that's all. I l-l-like you.

Ian Don't give me a hard-on if you're not going to finish me off. It hurts.

Cate I didn't mean it.

Ian Shit. (He appears to be in considerable pain.)

Cate I'm sorry. I am. I won't do it again.

(Kane, 1995, p. 14).

From this perspective, Cate's gesture may at first seem to suggest transcendence or renewal. However, Kane's vision resists such an interpretation. Cate's act does not restore meaning or rebuild any moral order; rather, it simply acknowledges Ian's bare life—his presence stripped to biological survival. Thus, her compassion is not redemptive; it is administrative, functioning as a biopolitical response to the body's need for survival.

At this point, Cate can be seen as assuming the role of the new power. Ian, once the embodiment of masculine dominance, is now rendered powerless and dependent, and Cate becomes the agent who governs life at its minimal threshold. As Zeynep Sayın (2016) notes, "Arendt denied that evil could possess an ontological status; figures like Rudolf Höss and Adolf Eichmann were merely obedient instruments, and to call them 'radically evil' would mean taking them seriously as moral subjects" (p. 42). Yet, as Sayın continues, "Such people had ceased to be subjects whose intellect we could trust; they had turned into objects from which we needed to protect ourselves" (p. 42). Such an observation redefines the landscape of evil as a relational process rather than an essence—a process of de-subjectivation that aligns with Ian's final condition. Sayın (2016) deepens the discussion by arguing that "evil has lost its absoluteness—it becomes relative, and with it, the philosophical subject loses its centrality.

Following Ebeling, such relativization, she Sayın (2016) articulates, "reduces humans, cows, pigs, and dogs to the same level," casting humanity into a moral void where judgment collapses and barbarism begin" (pp. 42-43). However, when Ian asks her to pray that she recalls her earlier prayer for the dead baby, Cate refuses. This refusal is crucial: it marks her withdrawal from transcendence and any illusion of moral restoration. She provides food but not grace; biological continuation but not meaning. At this

point in the dialogue, the shifting dynamics of power and violence become visible, revealing their fragile and contagious nature—how domination and vulnerability continuously exchange positions.

Ian Cate?

Cate Shh.

Ian What you doing?

Cate Praying. Just in case.

Ian Will you pray for me?

Cate No.

Ian When I'm dead, not now.

Cate No point when you're dead.

Ian You're praying for her.

Cate No point when you're dead.

Ian You're praying for her.

Cate She's a baby.

Ian So?

Cate Innocent.

Ian Can't you forgive me?

(Kane, 1995, p. 55).

Through this gesture, the play enacts what Sayın (2016) describes as the continuity of "micro evil"—the transfer of power, not its resolution. Violence in Kane's play does not end; it merely changes hands. Cate's silence at the end is not a moment of enlightenment but an acceptance of the same biopolitical order she once suffered under.

As Botting (1996) notes, Gothic fiction "is not subjected to a singular, restricted, and politically interested meaning" (p. 116). In this sense, Kane's conclusion resists any stable or comforting interpretation. The scene remains open, oscillating between compassion and domination, between the ethics of survival and the persistence of violence. Rather than offering moral closure, Kane leaves the audience in an uneasy position, confronting the limits of empathy and the ambiguities of power.

#### Conclusion

Art and literature once again affirm their critical function by revealing the violence and danger sustained through social, cultural, and political apparatuses. In this regard, Kane's Blasted operates as a tool that shakes the social consensus and destabilizes the moral and political order. Through the Gothic aesthetic, her theater transforms art into a mode of critique that unveils the hidden mechanisms of power and control. As Botting (1996) argues, Gothic terrors threaten "not only the loss of sanity, honor, property, or social standing but the very order which supports and is regulated by the coherence of those terms" (p. 5). Kane's dramatization of violence through the Gothic aesthetic functions as a force that unveils the ferocity operating within the very system in which both the oppressor and the oppressed are simultaneously crushed. Her theatre therefore unveils a double-edged structure of violence, where the perpetrator inevitably becomes the victim, and the cycle of domination ultimately consumes all who participate in it. In Blasted, Kane not only projects the decay and corruption inherent in the existing order; she also evokes a renewed sense of self-consciousness and ethical responsibility amidst the ruins of decay, transforming horror into a shocking form of experience that reawakens the human potential to imagine and act toward something different—an alternative form of life grounded in compassion, awareness, and the possibility of renewal. Such an alternative way of life may not assure salvation but reminds and redefines what it means to be human even after the entire collapse of law.

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#### Chapter 14

# The Monstrous "We": The Society as the Ultimate Gothic Creature in Shirley Jackson's *The Lottery* **3**

#### Ömer Özdemir<sup>1</sup>

#### Abstract

In most cases of Gothic literature, the monster is portrayed as a freakishly different entity that inhabits the human world. Nevertheless, Shirley Jackson's The Lottery declines such a conception of the monster and goes much further, endorsing the monstrousness of a Society. In this chapter, the monster acquires no supernatural connotations; rather, it becomes a self-sustaining organism composed of integrated citizens. The monster depicted here is a degraded collective, one led by the black box of tradition and operating through the mechanism of a hive mind, which renders individual moral agency invisible under the weight of the whole. Moreover, the study conducted investigates the representation of such a 'Social Monster', as it questions the ways the monster/method of horror produces evil through the banality of evil, which includes the use of administrative bureaucracy and civic order to mask the ritual of killing. In fact, the monster's gratification consists in only one thing: the maintenance of homeostasis and, though only in the name of an antiquated belief, blood as the indispensable medium of exchange. Moreover, the present study highlights the Gothic relevance of such a monster and argues that the Social Monster typifies a dark allegory of systemic complicity for our time. It portrays a world in which institutional violence has become normal and collective, cruelly, yet mercilessly, sacrifices the individual to keep the status quo. Eventually, the text uncovers that the real Gothic terror is not something dark lurking, but the faceless, stone-throwing crowd that society becomes when tradition prevails over humanity.

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#### Introduction

Traditionally, the source of terror in Gothic literature has been the 'Other', a different-worldish anomaly, which comes in as an unwelcome guest to the ordered sanctity of the civilized world. Gothic genre, as David Punter (2009) elaborates in the Literature of Terror, is essentially about a "breakdown of boundaries" between the rational and the irrational, and the mentioned boundary breakdown, most of the time, is the fear of the "barbaric" past that "haunts" the industrialised present (p.5). Monsters in these texts, such as Dracula or The Monk, are beings that are cast out in order that order can be restored. Nevertheless, Shirley Jackson's groundbreaking short story, The Lottery (2001), does away with this stereotype in a very different way by moving the monstrous from the dark corners of the room to the banal centre of the village square. Therefore, this chapter argues that the main villain in Jackson's narrative is not a supernatural entity or a deviant individual, but rather a Society that acts as a single, self-regulating organism, which seems to awaken every year only to devour its own parts. Through the analysis of the story, with a focus on the "Social Monster," I aim to reveal the Gothic framework, where the villain is the collective identity, and the fright is not caused by the disruption of order but rather by its brutal, bureaucratic, and ritualistic aspects.

An attempt to delineate the features of the "Social Monster" requires one to first ask questions of the misleading background that disguises it. The story is told on a day that seems vehemently anti-Gothic: "The morning of June 27th was clear and sunny, with the fresh warmth of a full-summer day; the flowers were blossoming profusely and the grass was richly green" (Jackson, 2001, p. 7). There are no ruined abbeys or stormy nights; instead, there is a rural idyll of a village which is not specified. The thing is that this very familiarity is the source of the terror. The author refers to Sigmund Freud's (2003) notion of the unheimlich (the uncanny) when he asserts that the fear in Jackson's village stems from the transformation of the heimlich (home-like/familiar) into a place of danger. Freud posits that the uncanny is not new or alien but "something that has long been familiar to the psyche and has been estranged from it only through the process of repression" (Freud, 2003, p. xlii). In The Lottery, the repressed element is the primal violence inherent in community formation. By introducing the proposal of ritual murder into the midst of the banal "planting and rain, tractors and taxes" (Jackson, 2001, p. 8) conversation, Jackson succeeds in creating dissonance in which the home becomes the primary site of dread.

"Social Monsters" typically do not exhibit emotional malice, but instead

have a sociological imperative that essentially functions as a survival instinct for the collective. The village is like a hive mind that is very strict in its law enforcement, which leads to what René Girard (1988) calls "unanimous violence" being used to keep social cohesion. In his groundbreaking book, Violence and the Sacred, Girard argues that communities resolve their internal conflicts through the "surrogate victim" mechanism. To prevent an infinite series of reciprocal violences, such as blood feuds, that would result in the destruction of society, the group directs its overall rage at a single, totally random scapegoat, thereby solving the problem of the others (Girard, 1988). This makes for the monstrous situation, in which the mob, identified as the monster, does the killing in order to avert its own annihilation. The "Monstrous We" in *The Lottery* is after homeostasis; the ritual is not carried out because of the hatred of the victim, Tessie Hutchinson, but out of the necessity to keep the structure of the whole intact. This necessity reveals itself as a belief embodied in Old Man Warner's ancient saying, "Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon" (Jackson, 2001, p. 18). The terror, as a result, is a utilitarian one; the monster consumes to guarantee the harvest.

Such individual consumption is contingent on the performance of a psychological rejection process. The one chosen by the black box undergoes a terrible transformation in front of the collective; the person is immediately transformed from 'insider' to 'outsider'. At this moment, Tessie Hutchinson becomes the abject, as per Julia Kristeva's (1982) terminology, the thing "opposed to I" that must be thrown out if the cleanliness and borders of the subject are to be maintained. Kristeva argues that the abject is "not me. Not that. But not nothing, either"; it is a threat that needs to be permanently put aside for the subject to live (Kristeva, 1982, p. 2). Before she drew the paper with the black dot, Tessie was a very lively part of the social body. She even joked with Mrs. Delacroix to "be a good sport" (Jackson, 2001, p. 20). The instant the slip is revealed, she is no longer a neighbour but a pollutant, human waste that the social organism is obliged to eliminate in order to survive. The rapidity of this change is the Social Monster's hallmark move: it can redefine its definition of 'human' in an extremely short time to justify its exploitation morally.

The identification of the collective as a Gothic monstrosity in this way is in line with Jackson's own declared intention and the text's historical reception. As her biographer Ruth Franklin (2017) brought up, the story's first appearance in The New Yorker, led to a record number of subscription cancellations and hate letters, not because the story was unreal, but because it was a mirror. In her own words, Jackson claimed that she was aiming to "shock the story's readers with a graphic dramatization of the pointless

violence and general inhumanity in their own lives" (Franklin, 2017, p. 235). The angry reaction of the public serves as proof of the effectiveness of the "Monster Image"; readers understood the monster not as a vampire or a werewolf, but as the faceless complicity of their own neighbours.

# The Anatomy of the Beast: Critical Perspectives on the Collective

To understand the village as a monster, you should not only consider the narrative of the story but also analyse its symbolic elements. The organs of the body here mean the symbols that are contained in the story. Every organ is a symbol of the collective, a concept explored in the text. The horror of the lottery has been seen by literary scholars as the result of the interaction between the evil of the old ritual and the evil of the modern world. Helen E. Nebeker (1974) sees the story as a "symbolic tour de force" and hence objects in the ritual like the black box, three-legged stool and the stones are not mere things but it folklore artefacts binding the collective Nebeker (1974) brings her point home by indicating that the example of the three-legged stool can be a representation of the Christian trinity or the Fates being distorted and hence the implication that the creature derives its power a perversion of the sacred or mythological one (p. 106). Here we see the "Social Monster" not as a rogue mob but as a well-organized entity supported by a regressive religious and historical dogmatic core.

Besides that, the origin of this social monster-marvel of a tale is ancient; the implication is an entity that has existed for millennia in human history. John M. Gibson (1984) compares Jackson's story directly to the Old Testament story of Achan in the Book of Joshua, where casting lots is used to identify a sinner who is then stoned by the community. Gibson (1984) notes that whereas the biblical narrative provides the rationale for the violence, Jackson eliminates the moral justification, leaving only the "mathematical" process of selection (p. 195). This marks a significant change that distinguishes the Social Monster character from its counterpart in the Old Testament: it retains the predation mechanics of the Old Testament, but now, lacking moral guidance, it is a machine of pure, meaningless efficiency.

Angela Hague (2005) points out that the monster's ability to blend in with the home environment is what she considers the story's lasting impact. In A Faithful Anatomy of Our Times, Hague points out that Jackson's work can be seen as the dissection of mid-century consciousness, unveiling the violence that lies beneath the surface of custom. In such a case, the monster is not an invader, but the community itself, as it is argued. In the transition from "planting and rain, tractors and taxes" to murder, the villagers show what Gorman Beauchamp (1981) calls a distorted "distributive justice" whereby the state, or here, the collective, takes the absolute right to kill its citizens for a presumed greater good (pp. 202-203). Hence, the articles agree that the Monster Image in The Lottery is a hybrid monster, carrying the symbolic load of the ritual of old and the bureaucratic coldness of the modern state.

#### The Mechanics of Horror: Bureaucracy as a Weapon

The monster of bureaucracy is, perhaps, the most terrifying weapon of the Social Monster, i.e., the village collective identity. The horror in *The Lottery* derives from the very fine detail with which the community manages its own self-destruction. Unlike Gothic monsters caused by chaos or uncontrolled emotions, Jackson's monster is an entity that deals with administrative procedures. The horror here is about the deadliest and the most ordinary being juxtaposed, creating a system in which murder is handled with the same casual efficiency as any other civic event. The bureaucratic monster, to put it differently, is Mr. Summers, the officer who runs the lottery. He is not characterized as an executioner, but as "a round-faced, jovial man" who is also in charge of the coal business (Jackson, 2001, p. 9). His characterisation plays a major part in the monster's camouflage; he normalises the violence by making it an integral part of the schedule of the ordinary life of the village. The story goes on to say that the lottery is held by Mr. Summers in connection with "the square dances, the teen-age club, the Halloween program" (Jackson, 2001, p. 9). By putting the ritual of picking the victim at the same level of administration as social dances and youth clubs, the Social Monster downgrades human life to that of a mere logistical unit. It is noted by Angela Hague (2005) that this merging of the trivial with the tragic lies at the very core of the story's power to disturb; the horror is born of the perfect integration of violence into the domestic sphere.

The emotional distance of this operation from the audience's point of view is very close to Hannah Arendt's (1963) idea of the "banality of evil". In her study of the Holocaust's administrative machinery, Arendt found that extreme evil is very often perpetrated not by sadistic monsters but by ordinary functionaries who take the society they live in for granted. Mr. Summers is the village's terrifying normalcy personified; he is a desk murderer brought from the city to a pastoral setting. By doing the ritual as he does his coal business without losing his casual efficiency, he takes away the moral side of the act; thus, the killing of a neighbour becomes no more than a clerical procedure. As a result, the terror of Jackson's story is in line with Arendt's view that such thoughtlessness can be more destructive than all evil instincts put together (p. 252).

The local organ of this bureaucratic beast is the black box. Helen E. Nebeker (1974) identifies the box as a powerful symbol of the "dead hand of the past" and argues that its rundown state signifies the decay of the tradition it represents (p. 103). The description of the box - "splintered badly along one side to show the original wood colour, and in some places faded or stained" (Jackson, 2001, p. 10) - reflects the villagers' own ritual. They no longer know the chants or the salute, just as the box has lost its original shine. Still, they hold on to the object with great fear and disbelief that replacing the box would be "to upset even as much tradition as was represented by the black box" (Jackson, 2001, p. 10). The box is the monster's externalized brain; it contains the logic of the kill (the slips of paper) in its old wooden frame, thus freeing individual villagers from the necessity of thinking or choosing.

The actual agent of the monster's will is the lists, which denote the final instrument of bureaucracy. The horror is brought about through a process of mathematical narrowing: from the community to the family, from the family to the household, and from the household to the individual. Such a method of elimination gradually instils in one the sense of inevitability which, according to John M. Gibson (1984), is very much like that of the casting lots in the Old Testament, only without God's intervention. The wording used by Mr. Summers is very much that of a census taker: "Heads of families first... heads of households in each family... members of each household in each family" (Jackson, 2001, p. 11). This classification strips the victims of their humanity long before the stones are thrown at them. When Tessie Hutchinson claims that "It wasn't fair", she is not addressing morality, but procedural justice. She accuses Mr. Summers of "not giving him time enough to take any paper he wanted" (Jackson, 2001, p. 20). The monster has so thoroughly inculcated its parts that even the victim concedes to the lottery's premise, contesting only the method of its execution, not its existence.

Lastly, to understand what this monster wants, one must see the only person who gives a reason for the violence: Old Man Warner. While the younger generation considers the lottery as a bother, Warner brings out the monster's instinct to survive: "Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon" (Jackson, 2001, p. 18). The Social Monster is a utility-type beast; it wants homeostasis and agricultural prosperity. It follows a very basic economic principle where blood is the price paid for survival. Warner cannot see any good in the north village of their neighbours, who are thinking of giving up the lottery, and calls them a "pack of crazy fools" who will soon be "eating stewed chickweed and acorns" (Jackson, 2001, p. 18). The monster's desire is, therefore, not sadistic but existential. It does kill because it thinks that if there is no sacrifice, the social and agricultural order will fall, and the village will be back to "living in caves" (Jackson, 2001, p. 18). So, the lottery mechanism of horror is basically the nightmare that the collective is ready to kill its own children, not out of hate but out of a fearful surrender to the status quo.

# The Patriarchal Beast: Gender, Scapegoating, and the Feminine **Abject**

The village Social Monster operates on the level of a collective hive mind, but an investigation of its internal hierarchy shows that it is not a gender-neutral being. It is a patriarchal beast, fundamentally. The lottery's mechanism is not only for saving the harvest but also for backing up a maledominated order of society where women's agency is involuntarily erased. If the black box is the monster's brain, the male's hands are the only ones that hold it. The terror of The Lottery, therefore, is made to have a gender aspect, which makes it doubly terrible. The monster demands submission from everybody, but from women, it requires complete erasure. This text, first of all, reveals the patriarchal structure of the monster through the performance of the ritual. The lottery is conducted by Mr. Summers and Mr. Graves, characters whose names signify the seasons (life/summer) and death (grave), thus symbolizing the world as a whole run by male authority. Women, on the other hand, are pushed to the margins. They come "shortly after their menfolk", and stand by their husbands in "faded house dresses and sweaters" (Jackson, 2001, p. 8). This description in terms of looks points out their passiveness; they are like the rest of the village, invisible and secondary. Lynette Carpenter (1984), in The Establishment and Preservation of Female Identity, argues that Jackson frequently portrays a world where female identity is weak and depends on male approval. In the village square, a woman's identity is often defined by her connection to a patriarch. This becomes clear when Mr. Summers says, "Wife draws for her husband... Don't you have a grown boy to do it for you, Janey?" (Jackson, 2001, p. 14). The Social Monster follows a very strict succession rule: power is handed down from father to son. A woman can only be a temporary standin for a man, and even then, her involvement is met with regret rather than acknowledgement.

The choice of Tessie Hutchinson as the victim is not a matter of chance, statistical anomaly, but a narrative device that uncovers the misogynistic foundation of the social beast. Tessie is the only villager who comes late, the only one who makes jokes, and most importantly, the only one who verbally

protests the black box's authority. Her shouting, "You didn't give him time enough to take any paper he wanted. I saw you. It wasn't fair!" (Jackson, 2001, p. 20), means that she is challenging the male-run bureaucracy's procedural integrity. The Social Monster reacts by activating its immune system to keep it quiet. The very first person who seizes her revolt is not Mr. Summers but her own husband, significantly. Bill Hutchinson's command, "Shut up, Tessie," (Jackson, 2001, p. 20) is a very sad moment of betrayal when the smallest unit, the family, turns into the needs of the bigger one, the collective. Roberta Rubenstein (1996), in House Mothers and Haunted Daughters, suggests that Jackson's fiction primarily explores the haunted domestic space, where the familiar roles of mother and wife are inverted and become a place of entrapment. Bill's denial of Tessie is his indication that his Monstrous We compromise comes before his wife's. He forcibly takes the slip from her hand, thus performing her transformation from subject to object with him.

The harsh treatment of Tessie can be looked at through Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject. As the scapegoat, Tessie stands for the chaotic, emotional, and disruptive characters that have been traditionally assigned as feminine in a patriarchal binary, which must be eliminated if the clean order of phallic law (the box, the list, the stone) is to be maintained. Her killing is definitely a ceremonial way of purging. The Social Monster is not satisfied with the killing alone; it goes to the extent of silencing her. Her last words, "It isn't fair, it isn't right", are, in fact, overwhelmed with the sound of the stones (Jackson, 2001, p. 25). Rubenstein (1996) points out that in Jackson's work, the mother character is a main source of terror, being consumed by the very domesticity she is trying to maintain (p. 319). The core horror of *The Lottery* is not just the death of a woman but that she is killed by the stones of her own children. Little Davy Hutchinson receives stones to commit matricide. It is the patriarchal beast's total triumph here: it manages to brainwash the next generation to do away with the maternal origin, thus ensuring the unbroken cycle of male violence.

Moreover, the village's Social Monster achieves terrifying conformity among the women using the lottery as a tool. The other village women do not come to Tessie's rescue. Instead, they turn into the monster's agents. Mrs. Delacroix, who a minute ago had been joking with Tessie, picks "a stone so large that both hands had to be used to lift it" (Jackson, 2001, p. 24). The betrayal here is a faithful representation of the collective's wickedness: it turns the oppressed into their own oppressors. Carpenter (1984) argues that such internalized misogyny is a woman's way of survival; by becoming perpetrators of violence, women momentarily put themselves on the side of the aggressor's power, thus they think they are safe from being the next victim. Therefore, the Social Monster in *The Lottery* is uncovered as a specifically male entity that is masculine and brutal in essence, exploiting the female body for its sad needs, and at the same time using tradition as a shield to defend itself against the charges of systematic annihilation of women who dare to speak out of turn.

# Inheritance of the Stone: The Corrupted Innocence of Childhood

The survival of the Social Monster is not dependent only on the obedience of the adults but also on the successful brainwashing of the children. For the social organism to live beyond one generation, it must have a way of reproduction, a method of transmitting the virus of the black box into children's minds. In The Lottery, Jackson shows a horrifying childhood picture in which the innocent are not shielded but are systematically torn down and weaponized. Village children are not reluctant villagers; they are the monster's apprentices. The terror of the story is greatly intensified by the fact that the Monstrous We has come into the playground, thus turning the children's games into rehearsals of ritual murder.

The story begins with children coming together, a point that, at first glance, suggests a typical summer holiday. "School was recently over for the summer, and the feeling of liberty sat uneasily on most of them" (Jackson, 2001, p. 7). Nevertheless, their conduct soon contradicts any idea of innocent freedom. School, usually a symbol of light and progress of the society, is found to be the main factory of the Social Monster's logic. Children do not run wild; they "quietly gathered for a while", their talk was still "of books and reprimands" (Jackson, 2001, p. 7). This remaining discipline highlights the village's educational structures, which serve to enforce conformity rather than nurture critical thinking. As Amy A. Griffin (1999) notes, Jackson continually questions the hidden curriculum of social institutions, suggesting that the real lesson taught is blind obedience to authority (p. 45). The move from the classroom to the square is done without interruption because both places follow the same authoritarian rules: listen to the official, obey the rules, and wait for your turn.

The children's association with the stones is the most disquieting aspect of their corruption. Even before the adults, the boys have already been working out the details of the killing: "Bobby Martin had already stuffed his pockets full of stones, and the other boys soon followed his example, selecting the smoothest and roundest stones" (Jackson 2001, p. 7). The exact terms for the stones "smoothest and roundest" show a terrifying

de-violentizing of violence. Kids handle the murder weapons as if they were collectibles or playthings, thus separating the object from its deadly function. Helen E. Nebeker (1974) suggests that stones are the primary, pre-bureaucratic counterpart of the black box; while the box represents the decaying logic of adults, the stones signify the raw, unchanging force of the mob (pp. 102-103). Giving children the task of collecting stones is a way for the Social Monster to ensure that the younger generation is already involved in violence. They are not just witnesses; they are the providers of the ammunition. Their initial complicity with the ritual ties them with it by guilt, which makes it impossible for them to later inquire into it.

The disintegration of the family unit is most evident in the way Little Davy Hutchinson is treated. He is the youngest participant, a toddler who, by all rights, should be outside the monster's influence. Yet, the story takes pains to include him in the lottery mechanism. When the Hutchinsons are to draw, Mr. Summers orders, "Harry, you help little Dave" (Jackson, 2001, p. 22). The picture of the postmaster, a state official, showing a toddler the way to the black box is a brutal mockery of civic education. Davy, as he draws the paper, laughs, not realizing that he is taking a risk with his life and his family's. This laughter may be the most terrifying sound in the story, signifying the complete unawareness of the innocent to the killing machine happening around them.

However, the very climax is where the real horror is. The Social Monster not only insists on the youngest child of Tessie's participating in her slaying but also demands it: "The children had stones already, and someone gave little Davy Hutchinson a few pebbles" (Jackson, 2001, p. 24). The entire moral order breakdown is embodied in this one sentence. The community neither protects the child from the dreadful act of killing the mother; it actually makes it easier. By putting the pebbles in Davy's hand, the villagers are bringing him to the Monstrous We. He is being taught that his loyalty to the collective comes first before his biological bond to his mother. As Freud (2003) points out in his study of the uncanny, the double often signals death; here, Davy is a small double of the mob, doing what they do and not understanding it (p. 142). Ultimately, children's presence is a compelling argument against the future of any village.

In numerous Gothic stories, the child serves as a symbol of possible salvation or a new beginning. In The Lottery, the child is the heir to the stone. The fact that the boys were defending their pile of stones against "raids of the other boys" (Jackson, 2001, p. 7) implies that they had already taken in the tribalism and brutality of the ritual from within. They were

guarding their ability to kill. The Social Monster, therefore, turns out to be a forever entity, not because it is beyond natural, but because it can bring forth offspring in the minds of its young. Until there is a Bobby Martin to gather stones and a Little Davy to throw them, the lottery will be with us forever. The purity of childhood is not only gone; it has been eaten and processed by the beast to provide another year's yield.

# The Reflection in the Mirror: The Social Monster in the **Contemporary World**

One of the most unsettling elements of the Social Monster in Shirley Jackson's The Lottery is its unwillingness to stay within the confines of the page. While one can generally comfortably categorize traditional Gothic monsters, such as vampires, ghosts, and werewolves, as fantasy, the being Jackson depicts in her story undergoes a frightful transformation that enables it to fit well with the structures of reality that is not fictional. In fact, the monster in The Lottery is nothing but the present-day world. The Monstrous We that Jackson analysed in 1948 is still alive and thriving; in fact, it has evolved, exchanging the physical stones of the village square for the digital and systemic weapons of the twenty-first century.

At the core of the monster's evil the scapegoat still stands the very basis of social structures of modern times. René Girard's concept of "unanimous violence" suggests that the sacrificial victim is a timeless one, necessary for communal stability (Girard, 1988). Nowadays, the lottery has left the agrarian village behind and gone virtual. The phenomenon of cancel culture, or online shaming, is a chilling and accurate reflection of Jackson's ritual. Villagers of the story need no personal ill-will in order to throw stones at Tessie; likewise, in the modern world, digital mobs are not really outraged at the victim of moral wrongdoing but engage in destruction of reputation or livelihood as a show of their moral virtue. The secret box is no longer the algorithmic feed that chooses the victim of the day, and stones have been replaced by hashtags and doxing. In both cases, the individual moral agent dissolves into the collective "We" and thus can find shelter and release in the annihilation of the abject Other. The Social Monster today is as eager to consume the exclusion of the deviant as it was in Jackson's fiction.

Moreover, the Social Monster's most comfortable home can be found in the expanded bureaucracies of the modern state and corporate world. The lottery's frightfulness lies in the fact that the villagers follow a rule, the black box, which is very old, has been used for a long time, is somewhat dirty or stained, and is even somewhat forgotten, yet they obey it without any doubt or inquiry (Jackson, 2001, p. 8). This is the ultimate Gothic allegory for institutional inertia. Nowadays, it is viewed as systemic violence, i.e., the harm resulting from policies, zoning laws, and economic algorithms operating without oversight, although not directly caused by individuals. When a family is forced out of their home due to an automated banking error, or when a community is pushed to the margins because of historical redlining, they are the victims of the black box. The officials, the modern Mr. Summers, are merely the performers of a tradition they didn't create and don't challenge. According to Gorman Beauchamp (1981), "the state often assumes a form of distributive justice that overpowers the individual's rights" (p. 3). Jackson's monster is there to warn that a society that prioritizes procedure over the person is already on its way to stoning the individual.

The character of Old Man Warner is a powerful symbol of the reactionary nature of modern politics. His scorn of the north village, "Pack of crazy fools. Listening to the young folks, nothing's good enough for them," is a kind of rhetoric that is heard in contemporary debates on social progress (Jackson, 2001, p. 17). Warner is the Social Monster's immune system fighting against the change. He likens the end of violence to the fall of civilization. This error, that injustice is what holds society together, can be found in today's conversations, where the mere suggestion of dismantling systemic structures of inequality is greeted with warnings of a complete wipeout of traditional values or heritage. The Social Monster survives by persuading its parts that the only alternative to the status quo is chaos. Jackson's story disproves this notion; the North Village has discontinued the lottery, and they haven't reverted to living in caves. The monster deceives in order to safeguard itself.

First, the Social Monster's relevance is corroborated by its historical and ongoing attempts to suppress the story itself. The Lottery's reaction, in fact, is another layer of the narrative. The society saw itself in the mirror and tried to break the glass as evidenced by scribbling up letters and subscription cancellations in 1948 and later by school curriculum challenges. Edna Bogert (1985) provides the example of the story being frequently challenged in schools, mainly by parents who say it damages children (p. 2). Similarly, Bill Brown et al. (1986) shed light on the reasons for censoring the text and give defendant voices, which describe the work's "violence" and "lack of religious hope" as their main grounds for objection (pp. 2-4). But to this, one must contend that the real reason behind censorship is the heimlich self-recognition. The Social Monster detests being named. By trying to prohibit the tale, the communities are performing the very rite Jackson talks about. They single out a deviant object that threatens their comfort and try to discard it in order to keep their idealized self-image intact. The Lottery's censorship is a meta-textual stoning. It is an acknowledgment that the Monstrous We exists, that it is defensive, and that it can still be found in our school boards and libraries nowadays.

Hence, the Monster in The Lottery should not be considered a burden of a superstitious past, but rather a sharp and clear image of the present. It is a being that thrives in the gap between individual conscience and collective action. Whatever form it may assume, i.e., a social media mob, a faceless bureaucracy, or a book-banning committee, the Social Monster is still the ultimate apex predator of the human condition, thus proving that the scariest Gothic creature is the one that we see in the mirror every morning.

#### Conclusion

Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery" ultimately doesn't merely expand the Gothic genre; it largely uproots the Gothic genre altogether. Jackson's work, by a sort of genetic operation, eliminates the supernatural elements - the vampire, the ghost, the werewolf - and with that, she also removes the genre's number one means of comfort: the reassuring impossibility. Consequently, she reveals a monster much more terrifying, which cannot be repelled by sunlight or holy objects: the Social Monster. Hence, the argument made in this chapter is that the adversary of the story is not a single villain but the village as a whole, a self-regulated system run by bureaucratic inertia and patriarchal violence, both of which were the driving forces behind this system.

Unlike a typical Gothic "Other" that is from the outer margin and threatens the stability of civilization, Jackson's monster is "Self," a gestalt entity composed of average citizens who have relinquished their moral authority to the workings of the black box. This monster's terrifying quality is that it achieves its ends with an almost mechanical precision. It is not hidden in the darkness of the night; rather, it is under the bright light of the sun. Its deception is the normality of a "clear and sunny" day; its intellect is the rotting logic of an unquestioned tradition; and its fingers are the villagers who do not perform the act of the lottery out of malice, but due to a deadly compliance with the established procedure. Jackson shows that the biggest nightmare of the twentieth century and even the twenty-first is not the chaos caused by the lawless but rather the cruelty of the lawful. The "Social Monster" establishes a system in which killing is not an offence but an administrative necessity that is made clean and acceptable by the presence of the postmaster and the ledger.

Moreover, this monster is also a patriarchal one that feeds on the female

body to keep itself alive. The ritual is not arbitrary; it is the sacrifice of a gender where the female becomes the subject who is erased in order for the phallic continuity of the state to be preserved. As the house collapses and becomes the public square, the Social Monster perpetrates its most despicable act of reproduction: it turns the innocence of children into a weapon. Little Davy being handed pebbles is not only a deeply sad moment; it is also the very point of contamination. It is the act through which the collective guarantees its eternity, by telling the ones to come that "We" require the ritual killing of "I" in order for us to belong.

The Monster Image in *The Lottery*, to a large extent, survives; because it is the ultimate condemnation of the bystander. In our contemporary world, which is predominated by algorithmic echo chambers, systemic inequality, and the digital stoning of the abject Other, the creature of Jackson is not a thing from the past but a present-day condition. The British Gothic has been cautioning that the beasts one needs to be on the lookout for are those lurking in the moors; instead, Jackson cautions the readers about the beast that is present at the PTA meeting, town council, and family dinner. The main horror of The Lottery is not the monster under the bed, but rather the one reflected in the mirror, holding a stone and, most importantly, convinced of its own righteousness. We are not the ones on the receiving end of this monster's actions; instead, we are its parts.

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#### Chapter 15

# The Mother in Mourning: Women's Trauma and the Gothic Ghost in Susan Hill's The Woman in Black &

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#### Abstract

Susan Hill's The Woman in Black (1983) reimagines the Gothic ghost story, transforming the traditional ghost into a contemporary symbol of female oppression, maternal grief, and haunting as resistance. In the novel, Jennet Humfrye, the "ghost mother" in black, emerges as a woman silenced by patriarchal norms, whose repressed suffering over the loss of her child returns in the form of ghostly revenge. Through the lens of trauma theory and feminist Gothic criticism, this chapter explores how Hill modernises the Gothic genre by combining psychological trauma with supernatural horror and creating a story where fear arises not only from the unknown but from emotional wounds that refuse to heal. As depicted in the narrative of Arthur Kipps and the oppressive setting of Eel Marsh House, the ghost's maternal grief becomes both her power and her curse, turning affection into monstrosity and sorrow into ghostly resistance. This analysis displays how the "ghost mother" functions as a voice for the silenced woman and as a metaphor for repressed trauma in contemporary society. The chapter also touches upon the concerns about motherhood, women's marginalisation, and the social pressures that continue to shape and intensify female suffering, showing how *The Woman in Black* still speaks to readers today as a powerful Gothic reflection on how trauma endures in both personal and collective memory.

#### Introduction

In her essay "Professions for Women," Virginia Woolf reflects on the struggle to break free from societal expectations that silenced women, declaring that she had to kill the obedient 'Angel in the House,' who was

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repeatedly "creeping back" like a ghost until she finally vanished (1942, p. 237). The death of this ideal woman, constructed by the boundaries of patriarchal society, paved the way for women to redefine themselves as individuals capable of pursuing their own dreams, hopes, and desires. Yet, this long struggle for selfhood, rather than falsehood, has never been without pain. As Gilbert and Gubar (2000) demonstrate, women's repressed anger, creativity, and forbidden selfhood often led them to assume the role of the "madwoman in the attic," to make patriarchy "take seriously the struggle of authors or their characters toward self-sovereignty" (p. xxxviii). In this respect, such madwoman figures, like Bertha Mason in Jane Eyre and Catherine Earnshaw in Wuthering Heights, serve as metaphors for the hidden self that refuses silence even within the confines of the nineteenth-century novel.

The long history of women's struggle and survival finds a haunting reflection in the work of award-winning and best-selling English novelist Susan Hill, whose The Woman in Black revives the Gothic tradition as a contemporary ghost story in the late twentieth century. Hill, as a modern successor of the British Gothic, blends traditional ghost story conventions with psychological realism. The Guardian writer Rustin (2013) portrays Hill as "the author of the most celebrated ghost story of modern times" because The Woman in Black has achieved remarkable popular success, selling millions of copies worldwide, inspiring a long-running West End stage production, and being adapted into a major film starring Daniel Radcliffe in 2012. According to Rustin (2013), The Woman in Black has a strong sense of the uncanny, although Hill denies believing "in ghosts as such" (para. 10). Hill distinguishes between belief in ghosts as literal supernatural beings and her deep awareness of Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny as a psychological and emotional phenomenon rather than a physical one. In The Uncanny, Freud (1997) defines it as "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (p. 195). The uncanny occurs when what should remain hidden or repressed suddenly reappears, blurring the line between the known and the unknown, and this is precisely what happens in Hill's novel, where buried memories, unresolved grief, and traumatic past events violently return to haunt both the characters and the reader.

The fear and disturbance come not from ghosts in Hill's fiction, but from the haunting return of what is repressed, such as memories, guilt, or grief. In an interview with Reynolds and Noakes, Hill expresses her frustration "when people call The Woman in Black a horror story," (2003, p. 31), insisting that it is chiefly a ghost story, even with its frightening elements. In

fact, she uses ghosts not to terrify, but to reveal emotional truth and human vulnerability. Her ghost stories are thus not about supernatural horror but about psychological haunting as the way past trauma and emotional pain continue to intrude upon the present. In The Woman in Black, the ghost of Jennet Humfrye is not only a spirit seeking revenge but the physical manifestation of suppressed sorrow and injustice, making Hill's sense of the uncanny an emotional rather than metaphysical experience. The familiar domestic world becomes terrifying because it presents what society tried to bury: a mother's grief, rage, and loss. In this regard, Hill's story clarifies that the scariest ghosts are not strangers from another world but reflections of our own buried emotions and unhealed past. This idea of haunting as Freud's "the return of the repressed" connects to Caruth's view of trauma, who describes it as "a wound inflicted . . . upon the mind" (1996, p. 3) that arises from an overwhelming experience not fully understood when it occurs, but grasped "only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it" (1995, p. 4). Moreover, as Leys (2000) suggests, "the experience of the trauma, fixed or frozen in time, refuses to be represented as past, but is perpetually reexperienced in a painful, dissociated, traumatic present" (p. 2). In The Woman in Black, Jennet Humfrye's unresolved grief and rage over the loss of her child are never fully confronted but endlessly replayed through her haunting, turning her ghostly presence into the living repetition of a pain that time cannot heal.

In the novel, the ghostly figure of Jennet Humfrye represents the silenced woman whose pain has been ignored by society. Her story turns grief and anger into a lasting presence that refuses to fade away. Through Jennet's haunting, Hill gives voice to the emotional and social wounds women have carried for generations, indicating how trauma, when left unseen and unheard, can return in powerful and devastating ways. In this sense, The Woman in Black is not only a Gothic tale of fear but also a profound exploration of how women's suffering, silence, and strength continue to echo through time. Building on this, Gothic fiction more broadly reveals that the female self must tell her own story, challenging the patriarchal assumption of the universality of the male self; indeed, after the 1970s, it was increasingly recognised that "gender is crucial in Gothic" (Williams, 1995, p. 100). In her Literary Women, Ellen Moers accordingly coined the term 'Female Gothic' as "the work that women writers have done in the literary mode" in Gothic literature (1976, p. 90). As Fitzgerald (2004) observes, Moers's coinage became "a pivotal moment in the timeline often drawn of twentieth-century Gothic criticism" (p. 8). Through the works of British female novelists such as Ann Radcliffe, Mary Shelley, Emily Brontë,

and Christina Rossetti, Moers illustrates how female fears, traumas, and anxieties are explored and expressed within the Female Gothic tradition.

The heart of the Female Gothic, as Wallace and Smith (2009) note in their discussion of Juliann Fleenor, lies in a deep uncertainty about female identity, particularly in "the conflict with the archaic all-powerful mother", a figure often imagined as a spectral presence or in the Gothic house itself (p. 3). This conflict, however, demonstrates women's struggle for selfhood within oppressive structures, as seen in Susan Hill's The Woman in Black, in which female suffering manifests as ghostly vengeance. Jennet Humfrye, the ghost mother in black, embodies the trauma of her lost child and the haunting grief that consumes her. Socially condemned and deprived of her child, Jennet's pain becomes inescapable and repetitive through her supernatural return. Her haunting expresses what cannot be spoken within a patriarchal society that punishes female desire and motherhood beyond marriage. Through Arthur Kipps's encounter with her, the reader experiences not only fear but a deep empathy for her suffering: "I felt not fear, not horror, but an overwhelming grief and sadness, a sense of loss and bereavement, a distress mingled with utter despair" (Hill, 2012, p. 157). This proves how Hill's The Woman in Black locates horror not in violence but in the persistence of female sorrow, turning the ghost story into a powerful exploration of trauma and compassion. In this way, Jennet's haunting becomes both accusation and expression as a ghostly voice that speaks for the silenced mother.

# Maternal Grief: The Ghost Mother as a Voice for the Silenced Woman

Jennet Eliza Humfrye's story as a denied mother is uncovered by the narrator Arthur Kipps when he decides to write his own ghost story to "finally be free of it" (Hill, 2012, p. 19). Arthur's narration of both his and Jennet's traumatic past also reflects Caruth's belief that "trauma is not simply an effect of destruction but also, fundamentally, an enigma of survival" (1996, p. 58). As the surviving witness of the events at Eel Marsh House, Arthur remembers the ghost mother's fearful and recurring hauntings as a way to confront and release the story that continues to possess him. Through this act of testimony, Arthur mirrors Susan Hill herself, whom Reynolds and Noakes describe as "haunted by ghosts and characters whose stories she must tell in order to exorcise them" (2003, p. 7). In The Woman in Black, Arthur bears witness to "a true story, a story of haunting and evil, fear and confusion, horror and tragedy" (Hill, 2012, p. 18). Jennet Humfrye's haunting in the novel emerges from the trauma of motherhood denied, which involves preventing Jennet from fulfilling her role as a mother

and enforcing a violent separation that leaves deep wounds on her soul. Although Jennet initially refuses to give up her newborn child for adoption, saying repeatedly that they will "never be parted" (p. 139), she cannot resist the pressure and surrenders her son, Nathaniel, "to her sister, Alice Drablow ... because she'd no choice" (p. 183). Condemned by Victorian morality for bearing an illegitimate child, Jennet is forcibly separated from her own son and deprived of her maternal identity, dignity, and individuality, which silences her most essential human connection.

The ghost mother's first encounter with Arthur, who arrives in Crythin Gifford as a young lawyer to deal with Mrs Drablow's properties including Eel Marsh House, occurs at the funeral of Alice Drablow, where he notices a woman "dressed in deepest black, in the style of full mourning" and assumes "she was suffering from some terrible wasting disease" (p. 53). After the funeral, he even considers offering help "for the sick-looking woman" (p. 55) and escorting her safely, but she is nowhere to be found. When he later asks his companion, Mr Jerome, who manages Mrs Drablow's business affairs during her lifetime, about the woman's identity, he turns frozen with fear and claims to know nothing about her. Arthur finds himself questioning the woman's connection to Mrs Drablow and "what extremes of sad feeling she was now suffering, alone there" (p. 58). However, when he points out the woman in black to confirm her presence, Mr Jerome becomes so terrified that he holds Arthur's wrist "in an agonisingly tight grip" (p. 58). Mr Jerome hints that Arthur would be far safer in Crythin Gifford than at the Eel Marsh House and informs him that Mr Keckwick will accompany him on his necessary visits there. Moreover, at lunch, a local farmer warns Arthur that nobody, including the wealthy landowner Mr Sam Daily, would be bold enough to purchase Mrs Drablow's estate, leading Arthur to interpret that the town is governed by fear and superstition.

Arthur's indifference to the anxieties of the townspeople makes him stay in the late Mrs. Drablow's isolated estate, Eel Marsh House, located at the end of the Nine Lives Causeway, a path that becomes impassable after certain hours, in order to sort through her papers. Upon Mr Keckwick's departure, Arthur wanders outside the house and admires the beauty and quietness of the surrounding nature. However, his calm is suddenly broken when he sees "the woman with the wasted face" (p. 74) again in the ruined graveyard near the house. Jennet Humfrye's haunting signals her transformation from a woman confined within Eel Marsh House into a homeless, ghostly feminine figure whose deep grief reshapes her into a vengeful ghost mother rather than the powerless woman she once was. This sense of entrapment supports Ferguson Ellis's observation that the Gothic is deeply concerned with

domestic spaces that imprison women and with the ghostly "homelessness" that follows when they are cast out:

Focusing on crumbling castles as sites of terror, and on homeless protagonists who wander the face of the earth, the Gothic, too, is preoccupied with the home. But it is a failed home that appears on its pages, the place from which some (usually "fallen" men) are locked out, and others (usually "innocent" women) are locked in. (1989, p. ix)

In this context, Eel Marsh House becomes the architectural embodiment of Jennet's suffering as a place haunted by the trauma of a silenced woman. When Arthur finally studies her face in detail, he finds himself unable to describe it clearly, perceiving only "a desperate, yearning malevolence; it was as though she were searching for something she wanted, needed . . . and which had been taken from her" (Hill, 2012, p. 75). Arthur feels terrified by "the combination of the peculiar, isolated place . . . and the dreadfulness of her expression" (p. 75), yet at the same time, he is driven by a growing curiosity to learn more about her as he is unable to grasp that she is not alive and does not believe in ghosts. Feeling suffocated by the gloomy atmosphere of the house, Arthur decides not to wait any longer for Mr Keckwick and sets out alone on foot toward Crythin Gifford. However, as he crosses the causeway, the thick mist blinds his vision, and he is abruptly overwhelmed by "the last noises of a pony and trap, carrying a child in it . . . dragged under by the quicksand" (p. 88), a sound that fills him with agony and terror.

No matter how unbelievable it seems, Arthur is eventually forced to accept the grim reality that the woman in black and the child dying in screams are "unreal, ghostly, things that were dead" (p. 97). Even though he initially wants to return to London as quickly as possible, Arthur gathers his courage to complete his work at Eel Marsh House, but no one, not even Mr. Jerome, is prepared to assist him. Mr Daily also considers Arthur foolish when he hears his plans, yet Arthur's determination persuades him to let his dog, Spider, accompany Arthur for protection. In the middle of the night, they are alarmed by a sound coming from a locked room, which Arthur later realises is the nursery that once belonged to Jennet's son. The voice they hear is both horrifying and strangely calm, producing an uncanny effect as familiar but unknown. Through the letters he discovers at Eel Marsh House, Arthur learns that Jennet, as an unmarried woman, is forced to give her child to Alice Drablow despite her resistance to such unfair and cruel treatment: "Why should I not have what is mine?" (p. 139). After adoption, they never wanted to let Jennet see her son, "brought up as a Drablow" (p. 183). After reading the letters, Arthur genuinely feels sorrow for Jennet and empathy for her suffering:

Her passionate love for her child and her isolation with it, her anger and the way she at first fought bitterly against and, finally, gave despairingly in to the course proposed to her, filled me with sadness and sympathy. A girl from the servant class . . . might perhaps have fared better . . . than this daughter of genteel parentage, who had been so coldly rejected and whose feelings were so totally left out of the count. Yet servant girls in Victorian England had, I knew, often been driven to murder or abandon their misconceived children. (p. 176)

Arthur's reflection reveals how women across social classes were trapped by Victorian morality and patriarchy, making Jennet's despair and her transformation into the ghost mother upon the death of her son in an accident both a personal tragedy and a critique of systemic injustice.

Her transformation into the ghostly woman in black externalises her maternal grief: she becomes the embodiment of pain that cannot be expressed within patriarchal structures: "Mad with grief and mad with anger and a desire for revenge. She blamed her sister . . . She died in hatred and misery. And as soon as ever she died the hauntings began" (p. 185). However, the ghost mother's monstrosity and vengeance are inseparable from her deep sorrow. Her story echoes the central concerns of the Female Gothic, which represents the silencing of women's voices, the repression of desire and loss, and the haunting return of what patriarchy denies. In this sense, as Wallace (2009) clarifies, "one of the most powerful metaphors in feminist theory, the idea of woman as 'dead' or 'buried (alive)' within male power structures which render her 'ghostly' (...) made literal in the supposedly dead mother" (p. 26). Wallace's metaphor is vividly observed in *The Woman in Black*, where Jennet Humfrye becomes the literal manifestation of a woman 'buried alive' by patriarchal authority. Susan Hill accordingly expresses compassion for Jennet's maternal grief as the ghost mother, recognising that she cannot forgive or let go, even though "she is perpetrating evil . . . because the person who is most tormented by it all is her" (2003, p. 33). Her ghostly return makes visible the emotional and social pressure that Victorian culture imposed upon unmarried mothers, turning symbolic oppression into brutal haunting. As Wallace (2013) argues, "Gothic language and imagery – live burial or entombment, spectrality, death-in-life – extensively to symbolise the erasure of the feminine within history" (2013, pp. 52-53). This is brought to life through Jennet's haunting, transforming the buried feminine into a literal ghost whose return exposes her silenced maternal grief and repressed trauma.

## Haunting as Resistance: Trauma of Loss and the Gothic Ghost

Whereas being forced to give up her child to her sister's family is already traumatising for Jennet Humfrye, witnessing his death as he is dragged into the quicksand in the mist inflicts an irreversible wound on her mind and soul. Devastated by the trauma of losing her child, Jennet eventually dies of heart disease in her thirties: "Whether because of her loss and her madness or what, she also contracted a disease which caused her to begin to waste away" (Hill, 2012, p. 185). Jennet's decline suggests that her physical deterioration is inseparable from her emotional suffering, indicating how unresolved trauma can manifest somatically. As Judith Herman, a professor of psychiatry, asserts in her Trauma and Recovery, "psychological trauma is an affliction of the powerless" as children or women (1997, p. 33). Herman's perspective illustrates how Jennet's trauma is rooted in her social powerlessness, both as a single mother and as a woman silenced by patriarchal authority. Upon the child's adoption by Mrs Drablow, he is "never intended to know his mother" (Hill, 2012, p. 183). Yet Jennet returns to Crythin because of the overwhelming pain of being separated from him. Although the boy, Nathaniel, never knows that Jennet is his true mother, mother and son become increasingly attached to one another over time. Their forced emotional distance intensifies Jennet's trauma, as she is only permitted to watch her child grow up without ever acknowledging her presence.

Before the accident in which the boy, his little dog, the nursemaid, and the driver Mr Keckwick's father all drown in the quicksand, Jennet indeed plans to reclaim her child and take him away. Instead, Jennet can do nothing but helplessly watch him dying in screams, a moment that drives her into madness with grief and anger. Hence her suffering exemplifies Gilmore's notion of trauma as "the self-altering, even self-shattering experience" (2001, p. 6). In this sense, Jennet's trauma ultimately reappears as haunting which symbolises the return of the dead, the repressed, or the silenced. As Gordon (2008) identifies in Ghostly Matters, "the way of the ghost is haunting, and haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening" (p. 8). While the ghost mother makes visible the injustice, oppression, and even violence that society prefers to forget, haunting functions as a form of protest or resistance against the systems that attempt to erase or suppress such voices in life. On the other hand, her fierce desire for revenge turns her haunting into something genuinely terrifying and malevolent: "whenever she has been seen . . . there has been one sure and certain result . . . In some violent or dreadful circumstance, a child has died" (Hill, 2012, p. 186). Jennet wants others to suffer the same pain by losing their own children, and this desire leaves the entire town in fear.

The narrator Arthur Kipps's trauma in The Woman in Black is, at least initially, secondary and reflective, as he inherits Jennet's suffering through witnessing her haunting; however, it becomes primary and personal when the curse causes the loss of his own baby son and his wife, Stella, in his first marriage. After many painful years, Arthur finds happiness again and marries Esmé, who has four children from her previous marriage. At the beginning of the novel, however, Arthur's traumatic memories are awakened when Esmé's children begin telling ghost stories on Christmas Eve. Once his most distressing memories are triggered, Arthur becomes determined to write his ghost story in the hope of exorcising the repressed and silenced trauma of his past. As he admits, "I had always known in my heart that the experience would never leave me, that it was now woven into my very fibres, an inextricable part of my past" (p. 18), confirming that the trauma he seeks to confront has become an enduring part of his identity. In fact, through the act of writing, these buried memories are brought back into consciousness, allowing his trauma to be worked through in a repetitive process that reflects what Freud (1955) calls the "compulsion to repeat," defined as "the manifestation of the power of the repressed" (p. 20) in Beyond the Pleasure *Principle*. His most agonising moment arises when he recalls the death of his family in a park outside London: "I have sat here at my desk, day after day . . . a blank sheet of paper before me, unable to lift my pen, trembling and weeping too" (Hill, 2012, p. 195). Jennet's haunting also makes Arthur feel truly "possessed by it . . . as though I had become paralyzed. I could not bear to stay there, for fear, but nor had I any strength left in my body to turn and run away" (pp. 75-76). His reactions reveal psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk's view of trauma as "the imprint left by that experience on mind, brain, and body" (2015, p. 24), and this imprint becomes tragically evident when, despite believing the hauntings end after he departs from Crythin Gifford, he encounters the ghost mother again and ultimately suffers from the same fate as the townspeople and Mr. Jerome by losing his own child.

The final incident that pushes Arthur to decide sharply to leave the tragedies connected to Jennet Humfrye behind occurs when her terrifying presence emerges in the nursery room of Eel Marsh House, where her child once lived before his death. Her malevolence becomes even more apparent when she attempts to kill Mr Sam Daily's dog, Spider, by drawing it into the quicksand with a whistle. While desperately trying to save the dog, Arthur has a near-death experience and eventually faints. Mr Daily rescues him, takes him into his home, and gives him time to recover before going back to London. Arthur later explains his retreat from these dangers should not be mistaken for cowardice, because "when things supernatural,

insubstantial and inexplicable threaten not only his safety and well-being but his sanity, his innermost soul, then retreat is not a sign of weakness but the most prudent course" (Hill, 2012, p. 175). Jennet's fearsome haunting is, furthermore, not the only source of terror; Arthur is repeatedly tormented by the sound of her child dying in screams, a traumatic echo he hears over and over again. This auditory haunting overwhelms him, as he describes the "dreadful sequence of sounds repeated again, as would be repeated in (...) [his] head a thousand times forever after" (p. 143). In this respect, Arthur's experience appears to mirror Caruth's definition of trauma "as the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena" (1996, p. 91). Such continuous replaying of the past, what Arthur also calls "an overdose of bad dreams" (Hill, 2012, p. 102), shows how profoundly the haunting affects him.

Almost losing his sense of reality, Arthur realises that every unbelievable thing he sees or hears alters him profoundly, becoming "fixed and immovable, perhaps during that restless, anguished sleep" (p. 97), and this transformation ultimately leads him to acknowledge that his "innocence, once lost, is lost forever" (p. 46). As Hill asserts in an interview with The Telegraph writer Flanagan, "There are these two sides in life, always: the innocent do suffer and there is evil" (2005, para. 13). The Woman in Black, therefore, presents evil not as an exaggerated supernatural threat but as an inherent part of human existence, rooted in the everyday realities of pain, injustice, and trauma. The haunting in the novel illustrates this inescapable coexistence of innocence and evil, revealing how unresolved human suffering can become a devastating and enduring presence as resistance. In this sense, Hill (2003) interprets Jennet as such a figure trapped in a cycle of trauma shaped by social cruelty, the loss of her child, and the denial of her maternal identity: "As long as this woman in her misery as a ghost continues to try and get revenge for what happened to her child, she will walk the earth unsettled and evil will just go on and on" (p. 32). In an interview with The Guardian reporter Kellaway, Jane Goldman, the screenwriter of The Woman in Black, portrays anger as a kind of disease and suggests that Jennet's misery inevitably "creates more misery" (2012, para. 14). Her vengeance in this cycle of trauma that manifests itself as haunting becomes both her pain and her punishment.

Due to the torment she inflicts not only on Arthur Kipps but on the entire town, Jennet Humfrye can be regarded as "an excessively transgressive Gothic 'heroine'" (Scullion, 2010, p. 296). After witnessing the unbearably tragic accident that leads to her son's death, Jennet dies in anguish as a lost

mother and is reborn as a ghost mother who is completely dehumanised by her suffering. Each appearance of her ghost signals the death of another child, signifying the eternal reenactment of her own loss and grief. This repetitive cycle eventually concludes with the death of Arthur's own baby boy, bringing the novel to its tragic close: "He lay crumpled on the grass below it, dead . . . I had seen the ghost of Jennet Humfrye and she had had her revenge" (Hill, 2012, p. 200). After discovering her tragic story in particular, Arthur always struggles to sympathise with Jennet as a "troubled woman, dead of grief and distress, filled with hatred and desire for revenge" (p. 194), considering her wickedness as understandable yet not forgivable. Instead of healing or resilience, Jennet's trauma returns in the form of haunting as resistance, so that she can be remembered. As a Gothic ghost mother, she becomes determined to punish the patriarchal world whose injustices deny and erase her maternal identity.

Susan Hill's The Woman in Black, as a renowned contemporary work of Gothic fiction, has attracted significant attention from visual media and achieved remarkable success both on stage and on screen. As Pegg (2012) maintains, "the play is the second longest-running play in the history of the West End . . . [and] the highest-grossing British horror film" in the UK for two decades (p. 1). Gumushan (2025) likewise reports in WhatsOnStage that the production of *The Woman in Black*, adapted by Stephen Mallatratt, "played in the West End for 33 years, running for over 13,000 performances at the Fortune Theatre before closing in March 2023", and now it returns to the stage "for a UK tour in 2025 and 2026" (paras. 1-3). The 2012 film adaptation of the novel, on the other hand, marks a major revival of the Gothic ghost story on screen. Adapted for the screen by Jane Goldman and directed by James Watkins, the film introduces Jennet Humfrye and Arthur Kipps's story through the stars, Liz White and Daniel Radcliffe, to the new generation. The film also reflects the Gothic atmosphere of Eel Marsh House, the psychological horror of maternal grief, and the visual representation of Jennet as a ghost mother locked in sorrow and anger. Like in Hill's novel, the archetype of the Gothic ghost continues to powerfully shape contemporary British Female Gothic fiction, as seen in Catriona Ward's Rawblood (2015), Laura Purcell's The Silent Companions (2017), and Anita Frank's The Lost Ones (2019). In these works, women's suffering transforms into haunting that refuses to be buried or forgotten, acting as a powerful expression of silenced female trauma.

#### Conclusion

Female Gothic fiction, as exemplified by Susan Hill's *The Woman in Black*,

has become a means of giving testimony for women whose identities are suppressed and often erased, both as women and as mothers. In this sense, the Gothic ghost embodies the return of silenced female histories, expressing repressed trauma through psychological or supernatural haunting as a form of resistance to women's oppression. Accordingly, in The Woman in Black, Hill inherits and revives the Female Gothic tradition to mirror contemporary women's trauma by recasting the ghost mother Jennet Humfrye's maternal grief over the loss of her son as vengeful monstrosity. When the narrator Arthur Kipps discovers Jennet's letters to her sister Alice Drablow, he can initially sympathise with her suffering after she is forcibly separated from her child. Jennet is harshly judged and rejected by Victorian morality for bearing an illegitimate child, Nathaniel, who later dies tragically in an accident by drowning in quicksand. Hence her grief and anger to return to the world as a fierce desire for revenge. Jennet's haunting, however, becomes both a weapon and a testimony to female repression as a mother in a patriarchal world that destroys her life. In this regard, her haunting represents unresolved traumatic memory and becomes a symbol for a feminist figure of women's resistance and rebellion as a Gothic ghost mother.

The Woman in Black speaks directly to ongoing concerns about women's oppression and the violence of a society that denies or controls their experience of both womanhood and motherhood. Although the novel is set in Victorian patriarchy and displays women's entrapment in domestic spaces through the metaphor of the haunted Eel Marsh House, many women across the world are still oppressed, exploited, condemned, and silenced. In Female Gothic fiction, dying paradoxically enables them to be seen and heard in ways they are never permitted while alive. The ghost thus becomes a mode of speech when their voices are denied, and a refusal to be forgotten. Jennet's ghostly revenge in The Woman in Black is not driven by cruelty alone but emerges from the depths of her profound pain as a mother who has lost everything. Yet her anguish has devastating consequences for the innocent: parents and children in Crythin Gifford, including Arthur and his family, suffer for witnessing her ghostly presence and lose their own children, which makes her both victim and victimiser. In Hill's novel, every character is touched by the trauma of loss, magnified by a ghost mother who refuses to forgive or fade away.

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# The Network of Cthulhu 8

# Lokman Şehitoğlu<sup>1</sup>

#### Abstract

The Call of Cthulhu by H.P. Lovecraft, which shifts the focus of Gothic literature from the human to the cosmic, necessitates an analysis that transcends traditional interpretations of monsters. This study aims to add depth to horror literature by examining the Cthulhu mythos, by applying Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of field and habitus, and Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory. The study establishes an efficient dialogue between the text and social theory by analysing the concrete scenes in the story, such as Wilcox's dreams, R'lyeh's architecture and cult rituals. Through the swamp flower and sand snake metaphors, themes of the deceptive allure of knowledge and the inherent deceptive reality are explored. The study's fundamental premise is that Cthulhu is not merely a monster, but an entity that destabilises human-constructed meaning (science, religion, art) and functions as an obligatory passage point in a network of non-human actors (sculpture, dreams). In this sense, how Cthulhu's human centre fragments the world will be revealed through Bourdieu's tools and Latour's relational network analysis. Ultimately, it is argued that Cthulhu functions as a metaphor for the modern individual's presence in the universe, a denial of his arrogance and confrontation with cosmic scarcity. This interdisciplinary approach positions Cthulhu as more than a monster, but a powerful metaphor for modern humans' confrontation with cosmic insignificance. This study aims to bring Gothic literature research into an interdisciplinary dialogue with social theory.

#### Introduction

Since its birth in the eighteenth century, Gothic literature has depicted the chilling world of castles, shadows, and human frailties that lurk in the dark recesses of the human mind. Initially lurking behind haunted castles, the threat gradually evolved into the monster within, and then, like Frankenstein's creature, into the *other* ostracised by society. However,

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doi

by the twentieth century, writers like H.P. Lovecraft radically shifted the focus of Gothic horror from the psychological and social to the cosmic and existential. The symbol of this new fear is finding oneself surrounded not by the walls of a fortress-like castle of the mind, but by the deep, indifferent darkness of a vast and indifferent universe. The most iconic representation of this cosmic gothic and modern horror is undoubtedly Lovecraft's 1928 work, The Call of Cthulhu.

This kind of disengagement by Lovecraft is not limited to only one work; it is the product of a philosophical foundation called Cosmic Horror that spreads throughout its vast mythos. For example, in his work At the Mountains of Madness, an ancient civilisation discovered in Antarctica reveals forbidden knowledge that fundamentally shakes human history and our place in the universe. Similarly, the threat or evil in The Shadow over Innsmouth goes beyond social alienation to a cosmic invasion of one's own biological origins and integrity. The Call of Cthulhu is located at the centre of this Cosmic Horror as it brings together the themes that are found scattered throughout other works (ancient beings, the fragility of the human mind, the danger of forbidden knowledge) and weaves them around the concrete presence of the sleeping devil, Cthulhu. From this, the analysis of Cthulhu refers to comprehending not just one story. It is the essence of Lovecraft's entire horror universe.

This chapter aims to examine the Cthulhu mythos within the context of Pierre Bourdieu's field theory and Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT). It goes beyond traditional Gothic monster interpretations. Among the fundamental questions are: What does an entity like Cthulhu actually want? What categories and structures of humanity does it disregard and how does this disregard contribute to making it a monster? And ultimately, what does this cosmic monster suggest about humanity's place in the universe, its knowledge systems, and its beliefs?

Bourdieu's concept of field views society as a series of structured spaces in which actors struggle within the framework of specific rules, types of capital, and habitus. This study will demonstrate how the scientific, religious, and artistic fields established by humanity collapse or become meaningless in the face of Cthulhu's presence. Cthulhu is an external entity that refuses to belong to any of these spaces; in fact, it fundamentally undermines the very search for reason, causality, and meaning that underpin them. Its call is a manifestation that invades these stable spaces, shattering human habitus our ways of understanding and conceiving the world.

Actor Network Theory, on the other hand, underlines the significance

of the roles that the nonhuman entities, such as sculptures, dreams, texts, and myths in the story, act as active actors in social networks. Rather than a solitary monster, Cthulhu is the obligatory passage point of a vast network that brings together cults that worship him, sculptures depicting him, artists' dreams, and researchers' notes. Within this network, human actors unknowingly become elements that fuel this cosmic entity's power and mediate its dissemination.

To enhance this analysis, thematic parallels between the demonic figures in religious mythologies and the type of evil symbolised by Cthulhu will also be investigated. Characteristics such as the desire to mislead people from the truth, cloud their judgment, and undermine stable belief systems emerge as common denominators that bring these two figures closer together. However, this connection will not be considered a direct equation, but rather a parallel that suggests reflection on the metaphorical representations of evil and deviation throughout human history.

This chapter, therefore, examines Cthulhu not simply as the monster of a horror story, but as an agent who transgresses the boundaries of our anthropocentric world, disrupts our spaces in the Bourdieusian sense, and wields unimaginable power within our nonhuman networks in the Latourian sense. Ultimately, this examination aims to demonstrate how the monster of Gothic literature can illuminate modern man's deepest existential fears.

#### Theoretical Framework

The tools that the scholars use for literary criticism are not enough to go through The Call of Cthulhu as it has totally changed the understanding of horror in Gothic literature. The mythos is mainly made up of themes like cosmic fear and post-human existence. So, a combination of sociological and philosophical frameworks is required. Therefore, the two distinguished theoretical approaches in the field are chosen: Pierre Bourdieu's field theory and Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT), and they will be the basis of the study. These theories will enable us to understand Cthulhu as a force that invades the meaning universes constructed by humans, moving beyond being merely an element of horror. After introducing the basic concepts of both theories, it will be shown how these concepts synergise to analyse the Cthulhu mythos.

Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theory conceptualises social life as structured fields in which actors struggle around specific rules, values, and practices (Bourdieu, 1993). A field is shaped by a belief system (doxa) that is valid within it and shared by actors, and by the types of capital (economic,

cultural, social, and symbolic) that are operative within that field. Bourdieu (1977) introduced the concept of habitus as the enduring structures that individuals acquire within these fields, which embody their dispositions to perceive, evaluate, and conceive of the world. Another concept that supplements the structure is doxa. Doxa refers to the fundamental beliefs and assumptions within a field that are unquestionably accepted and that are indisputable (Bourdieu, 1977). Humanity's scientific and religious spheres are built upon a doxa that the universe is rationally understandable or has an anthropocentric meaning. Cthulhu's existence works precisely by shattering this doxa. Habitus is, in a sense, both the product and the producer of an individual's interaction with the social world; it governs the dialectic between social structure and individual action.

In the analysis of the Cthulhu mythos, Bourdieu's conceptual framework is of critical importance in demonstrating how the human world of meaning is fundamentally shaken. Humanity has constructed various domains such as science, religion, art, and law, making a seemingly chaotic reality understandable and manageable. Cthulhu, however, belongs to none of these domains; it exists outside, beyond them, in a completely alien position. Its existence fundamentally invalidates the principles of causality, measurability, and empirical verifiability that form the foundation of science; the spiritual solace, moral framework, and relationship with the sacred offered by religion; and the ultimate goal of art: the creation of meaning, beauty, and aesthetic expression (Bourdieu, 1993). In this context, the fear emanating from Cthulhu stems not from a simple physical threat but rather from its invasion of these stable domains, completely disrupting human habitus—that is, the ability to understand, interpret, and act upon the world. This process can be interpreted as a manifestation of Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence on a cosmic scale. Bourdieu (1990) states that "symbolic violence is the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with their complicity". Hence, it operates the imposition of meaning and thought structures by presenting social order as natural and inevitable. By researching, inspecting and trying to understand its existence, the victims (artists, inspectors, researchers) actually become the collaborators in this violence.

Taking a step further within the Bourdieusian framework, it is possible to interpret the cult that worships Cthulhu as a deviant counter-field positioned outside legitimate religious spheres (Bourdieu, 1971). This counter-field has its own doxa (the belief in Cthulhu's awakening), rituals, and form of capital (the proximity to the power of magic and to non-human beings). The symbolic capital found in traditional religious fields (e.g., religious authority, piety) is of no value here. This deviant field embodies the threat to the

stability of the fields, functioning as a tumour within the meaningful world constructed by humanity, yet rejecting all its rules. Bourdieu's theory has been exposed to criticism from structuralism and determinism. In particular, it has been argued that individuals are overdetermined by habitus, and the possibility of change or resistance is underemphasized (e.g., Jenkins, 1992). However, in this study, this structural emphasis is used consciously to show how the habitus experiences disintegration and helplessness in the face of a completely unstructured and overwhelming entity like Cthulhu. In this way, the stability of field and habitus is valid only until a non-human reality is encountered.

Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT) offers a radical critique of the anthropocentric approach in the social sciences by defining the social as a network composed not only of humans but of all interconnected entities and forces, including objects, technologies, texts, organisms, and discourses (Latour, 2005). According to the theory, anything (human or non-human) has the capacity to act and to make a difference within a network. Anything can be included in the network and considered an actor or actant. Latour emphasises the ability of non-intentional entities to act, and so he commonly employs the terms actant and actor (Latour, 2005). This distinction allows us to grasp how non-human entities, such as Cthulhu sculptures and the character's dreams, play critical roles in shaping the flow of action in the story, even if they have no intention to act. They are crucial parts of the network: they help to mediate the spread of Cthulhu and maintain its existence as actants. Another crucial concept is the "obligatory passage point", which was put forward by Michel Callon (1986). This concept highlights the importance of the central position of the network: it is a must for all actors to interact or negotiate to fulfil their goals in it.

Actor Network Theory takes its roots from (is based on) Science and Technology Studies. Its main purpose is to observe how the scientific fact is built socially within the network by human or non-human actors as it is carried out in laboratories (Latour & Woolgar, 1986). From this point of view, the tools in Actor Network Theory can help us to observe and analyse how a reality (such as the subject research for Thurston, the object of belief for the cult, the physical experience for Johansen) is built, gains stability and spreads socially. The Call of Cthulhu is almost an ideal example to illustrate the principles of the Cthulhu Mythos. Cthulhu is not merely a single, isolated monster, but rather a posthuman actor at the centre of a vast and complex network that brings together cult members who worship him, sculptures depicting him, artists' dreams and visions, newspaper clippings,

academic research, and police reports. Each element in this network becomes an actor that feeds Cthulhu's existence and threat. In particular, the Cthulhu sculpture is not merely a passive work of art, but a powerful nonhuman actor that triggers the entire research process in the story, directs the characters' actions, and thus creates a significant impact (Latour, 2005). From Latourian perspective, Cthulhu becomes the obligatory passage point of this network; no character in the story—be they a detective, an artist, or a cult member—can live their story or achieve their goal without being part of this network woven by its presence (Callon, 1986). This situation reveals how evil or threat operates not as a personal and intentional hostility, but as an inevitable and spreading product of a relational network. However, the ANT has been criticised that it makes invisible the power relations, political context and normative stance by oversimplifying all in a network (Winner, 1993). This study does not ignore the criticism; rather, it utilises ANT's mapping power while analysing how the Cthulhu network fundamentally produces a relationship of domination. One of the main purposes of the study is to uncover this asymmetric power dynamic underlying the seemingly neutral structure of the network.

Bourdieu and Latour's approaches complement each other perfectly when understanding the Cthulhu mythos. While Bourdieu explains how Cthulhu destabilises the structural fields (science, religion, art) that constitute human worlds of meaning and fragments the habitus (the human cognitive map), Latour shows how this structural disruption spreads through concrete, relational networks, becomes embodied, and is embodied through nonhuman actors (sculpture, dreams). Bourdieu's fields help us understand Cthulhu's goals, while Latour's networks help us understand how it achieves them. Together, the two theories offer the opportunity to read Cthulhu not as a mere element of fear, but as a multilayered phenomenon representing the existential crisis experienced by modern humans' search for meaning and their arrogance regarding their place in the universe when confronted with a posthuman reality.

# Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design and aims to analyse a literary text in light of sociological theories. The primary methods of the research are text analysis and theoretical application. In the first step, the story The Call of Cthulhu is examined in detail in the context of its departure from traditional Gothic monster representations and the elements of cosmic horror. In the second step, the key concepts of Pierre Bourdieu's field theory and Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (field, habitus, capital, nonhuman actor, obligatory passage point, network) are introduced. Hence, the aim is to demonstrate how these concepts can provide a framework for literary analysis.

The analytical framework was applied in two stages: First, from a Bourdieusian perspective, it was demonstrated how Cthulhu destabilises the scientific, religious, and artistic domains of humanity and how it fragments the individual's habitus (schema for perceiving the world). Second, through a Latourian reading, the actor-network centred on Cthulhu (cult members, sculptures, dreams, newspaper clippings) was mapped, analysing how this posthuman entity became an obligatory passage point and how it functions as a relational power. The intersection of these two theoretical lenses allows us to grasp simultaneously both the structural and relational dimensions of the threat posed by the monster. This approach provides a chance to read or analyse a literary work through the prism of modern social theories, going beyond merely formal or thematic analyses.

## **Analysis**

The Call of Cthulhu by H.P. Lovecraft challenges the traditional boundaries of gothic in literature. The source of fear shifts from the psychological and social to cosmic and existential dimensions. This radical shift requires analysing the story beyond traditional literary analysis methods and requires the involvement of other frameworks in fields such as sociology and philosophy. This analysis section will go beyond viewing Cthulhu as merely a monster figure, in light of Pierre Bourdieu's field theory and Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT). Our fundamental argument is that Cthulhu is a relational power (Latour) that structurally disrupts the fields of meaning constructed by humans (science, religion, art) (Bourdieu) and is simultaneously positioned at the centre of a vast network of non-human actors. These two theoretical lenses will help us to understand both what the Cthulhu myth destroys and how it exists through its actions.

Pierre Bourdieu's sociological conceptual framework allows us to grasp Cthulhu's threat to humanity's world of meaning at a structural level. Humanity has constructed domains such as science, religion, and art to bring order to chaos, developing a habitus (schemes for perceiving and conceiving the world) around the rules and forms of capital of these domains. Cthulhu, however, is an *external entity* that challenges this entire order.

The researchers in the story use every single tool of scientific methodology to understand the phenomenon which they encounter. Professor Angell's nephew shows a rational attitude while he is going through his uncle's notes.

Similarly, Inspector Legrasse shows the same attitude while he is searching for the deviant ritual in New Orleans as a phenomenon. However, every single piece of evidence they collect, such as sculptures, etymological connections, and statements by cult members, undermines the principle of causality, measurability, and empirical variability which underpin the scientific field. What they encounter is the reality that science cannot classify and explain. The result is not scientific data but is a dead-end that contributes to madness. Scientific habitus breaks into pieces by becoming completely dysfunctional in the face of this new reality. The researchers' effort to unravel the secret of Cthulhu can be understood through the metaphor of a flower blooming in aswamp. Like a traveller heading towards the beautiful and alluring flower in the middle of the swamp, Professor Angell's nephew and Inspector Legrasse are initially driven by the pure scientific curiosity and a thirst for discovery (What an interesting finding!). However, every single step brings them closer to the inevitable: mental collapse and madness. Even if the scientific realm seems like a safe and stable ground, it is actually a swamp filled with Cthulhu beneath it. Bourdieu's scientific habitus is an illusion that unknowingly leads one into the very heart of this deadly swamp.

The cult worshipping Cthulhu creates a deviant counter outside the legitimate religious field defined by Bourdieu (1971). In this counter-field, the spiritual solace and moral framework offered by traditional religions are replaced by the expectation that a non-human entity will awaken and bring chaos. The symbolic capital here is not traditional religious authority or piety, but proximity to the great and ancient power of Cthulhu and to have a grasp of its secrets. The statements of the cult members questioned by Legrasse, "We believe that in those ancient times the people of Great Cthulhu raised their cities..." (Lovecraft, 1928, p. 11) constitute the doctrine of this heretical belief. This counter-field functions like a tumour within humanity's meaningful religious universe, turning all its values upside down.

The field of art is traditionally seen as the highest expression of human creativity and sensitivity. However, Cthulhu invades this field too. The fact that sculptor Henry Wilcox suffers from nightmares and, based on nightmares, he creates the sculpture of Cthulhu that "no sane person could model" (Lovecraft, 1928, p. 4) is the radical distortion of the source of artistic inspiration. While the artist thinks he is chasing his muse, he is indeed feeding a destroyer waiting for him in the depths of his own mind. This indicates that the creative process and habitus in the field of art are captured and directed by a post-human power.

The Actor Network Theory by Latour shows how Cthulhu's structural

fragmentation operates through concrete, relational networks. Cthulhu is not a single entity on its own, but it is the centre of a heterogeneous network that involves various and numerous actors that attract and connect to Cthulhu. The components of this network include human actors (Investigator Thurston, Inspector Legrasse, sculptor Wilcox, cult members, sailor Gustaf Johansen) and non-human actors (Cthulhu sculpture, Wilcox's dreams and nightmares, Johansen's diary, press clippings, old texts). Even spatial actors like R'lyeh, the unspoken city in the Pacific Ocean act as active players within this network. This assemblage clearly demonstrates that the social is not limited to humans, but is collectively constructed by objects, texts, ideas and spaces. All of them act within a Cthulhu-centric network.

One of the most critical concepts in Latourian analysis is the "obligatory passage point" (Callon, 1986). Cthulhu is at the centre of all the research, exploration and escape attempts in the story and becomes an unavoidable focal point of encounter. Thurston, in his research beginning with his uncle's notes; Legrasse, in his investigation of heretical ritual; Johansen, as a crew member of a ship that accidentally approached R'lyeh, each arriving by different paths, they ultimately find themselves forced to confront Cthulhu. None of the characters can live their stories or achieve their goals without being a part of this web which is woven by its existence. This is evidence that Cthulhu operates as an inevitable and central product of a relational network rather than a personal adversary.

The Cthulhu sculpture is a perfect example that proves the stressed idea of non-human actors in ANT. The sculpture is not only a passive work of art or evidence. It actively affects all the research or investigation process and drives the characters' actions. Therefore, it is a powerful actor that creates an important effect. It is this sculpture that drives Wilcox to create it, that started Thurston's research, that became the focus of Legrasse's investigation. Just as Latour's (2005) example "You are different with a gun in your hand; the gun is different with you holding it" (p.71), the sculpture turns into a catalyst thanks to the relationship it establishes with researchers.

Cthulhu's invasion towards the human world of meaning starts in the dreams that are the most intimate area of the mind before the physical world. Sculptor Henry Wilcox's nightmares, made up of great grey sheets of water, and timeless, formless silhouettes, are Cthulhu's first and most insidious attack on human consciousness. These dreams serve a two-way function considering Bourdieu's theoretical framework and Latour's network analysis: They both perform a foreground invasion by distorting the individual's habitus before they confront the reality and constitute one of the first and most powerful

non-human actors, which is necessary for the expansion of the Cthulhu network

From Bordieuan perspective, dreams are the first primary front of the invasion. Habitus for Bourdieu is a permanent structure formed as a result of individuals' concrete practices in the social world. However, Wilcox's case shows that this schema can be overturned by pre-experiential, direct, perceptual invasion. Dreams destroy the possibility of constituting a stable habitus from the very beginning, before they encounter real physical evidence. The artist's mind prepares for a posthuman entity or reality, and it is forced to express this entity through his art in the absence of any empirical data. The sculpture that Wilcox made is a concrete product of this foreground invasion. This process represents the silent and individual collapse of habitus that precedes the final collapse of the fields.

From Latourian perspective, on the other side, Wilcox's dreams are not only a psychological symptom but also one of the most effective non-human actors or actants. These dreams unearth a concrete component (sculpture actor) of the network by triggering the creation of the sculpture. The sculpture, later, launches Thurston's research and causes the network to widen even further. Dreams here function as a precursor of a catalyst, an obligatory passage point, that transmits, amplifies and activates the power of Cthulhu. What transforms Wilcox into a puppet is not a physical contact but the network relations that function through dreams. The fact that the other sensitive characters have similar dreams shows how common and systematic this transmission is. It is as the inspector Legrasse expresses "The sensitive persons in diverse parts of the world could and did dream very peculiar things during the nights of that period" (Lovecraft, 1928, p. 12). This proves that the dreams in the story are not an individual phenomenon but a part of a coordinated invasion and of a network that continuously widens.

Consequently, dreams in the Cthulhu mythos are an important crossroad for both Bourdieu's structural and Latour's relational analysis. They are a perfect demonstration of how a post-human reality/entity penetrates the most fundamental layers of human consciousness and starts destruction on both the individual (habitus) and collective (network) levels. Before the danger knocks on the door, the threat or devil has already penetrated or been welcomed through the dreams.

The threat or devil operates not only through dreams or individuals but also through the physical presence of a concrete space. R'lyeh is the unspoken city which lies deep in the Pacific Ocean, and which is the tomb of Cthulhu that has been dead but dreaming. However, R'lyeh is not a passive decor

or a simple city; it is an entity that transcends Bourdieu's concept of spatial field and that Latour might describe as an actor, that affects, transforms and acts on its own.

Spaces for Bourdieu are places (fields) that are the physical equivalents of fields where the social relations are produced and reproduced. Human beings organise the space in line with their own habitus, give meaning to it and establish dominance over it. R'lyeh completely reverses this relationship. The city Johansen and the crew came across has immeasurable blocks of stones, walls that meet an unnatural angle and a non-Euclidean geometry (Lovecraft, 1928, p. 21). This architecture completely destroys the habitus of people to perceive space and to find their way in it. R'lyeh rejects the symbolic dominance of humans over space and leads them into a physical and mental impasse. The nature of this threat is further clarified by the metaphor of the sand snake. R'lych, just like the snake in the desert that conceals itself in the sand and lures its prey with its flower-like tail, lurks beneath the ocean's seemingly calm surface. What Johansen and the crew see first is merely an elevated landmass with unusual architecture (the snake's deceptive tail). However, as they approach this tail (the visible space), the huge, vivid and deadly reality that lies beneath it emerges. Lovecraft's cosmos works likewise: the perceptual reality that human beings rely on is merely a deceptive surface, beneath which lie dormant dangers that the human mind cannot grasp. R'lyeh shows that the space/place itself is the ultimate deception. This is not the invasion of space but rather the space (field) itself becoming a threat.

From Latourian reading, R'lyeh is not just a scene; it is the most powerful non-human actor in the story. The rise of the city and its emergence on the ocean surface create an obligatory passage point that determines the actions of all other actors in the network (Johansen's ship, the crew, Cthulhu). Furthermore, the architecture of the city is an actor itself. Labyrinthine corridors, massive structures, and the unreasonable geometry guide the characters' movements, trap them, and finally force them to confront Cthulhu. The architecture functions not as an extension of Cthulhu's power, but as an independent actor working in alliance with it (Cthulhu). The existence of R'lyeh demonstrates how a space can be not only an object but also a subject that decides, directs and changes the outcomes within the network.

R'lych functions as a stress test for both Bourdieu and Latour's theories. It confronts Bourdieu's concept of social field with a non-human and superhuman space. It expands Latour's actor-network with an architectural actor whose scale and power far exceed human understanding. R'lyeh, in the Cthulhu mythos, demonstrates that the thread comes from not a mere biological entity but from the very space where it lies dormant, alive, responsive and actively dangerous. This is the evolution of gothic horror from castles into a cosmic dimension where the castles themselves can come to life. In the Cthulhu mythos, the most radical manifestation of the collapse of human meaning worlds is experienced in language itself. Language, the primary means of human communication and information transfer, experiences a complete bankruptcy when confronted with Cthulhu, loses its symbolic capital and turns into a tool for madness.

Language, for Bourdieu, is not only a means of communication but also a form of symbolic capital. Individuals use language to position themselves in social spaces/fields, to persuade, to convey information and to establish authority. Yet, this capital becomes completely worthless in the face of Cthulhu. The adjectives that the characters use in the story to describe Cthulhu and his existence -indescribable, unfathomable, formless- point to the limits of language's expressive capacity. Language cannot conceptualise or classify this new reality and therefore loses its function as a symbolic force in the face of it. Wilcox's characterisation of his dreams as ineffable or Thurston's constant use of the phrase *ineffable* in his notes are evidence of the decline of language as a symbolic capital. This is not the invasion of a field but the destruction of the communication field itself

From Latourian reading, the linguistic elements such as the name Cthulhu, the cursed texts in old manuscripts, and the mantra-like repetitions of the cult members are active actors in the Cthulhu network. These actors, however, cause the destruction of meaning rather than building it. Especially forbidden texts, rather than being a source of information, function like mistranslation machines that shatter the reader's mind and drive them to madness. Invented sound expressions like "Hprida pnisgua'menter Cthulhu R'lyeh dwgn'inusty trnuiden1" do not convey meaning but spread directly like a mental virus. While these linguistic actors connect human actors to the Cthulhu network, they simultaneously disrupt their mental stability and ensure the stability of the network. Language here stops being a means of communication and becomes an instrument of dissolution and destruction.

The Cthulhu mythos calls into question the central role of language in human existence. When we encounter a reality, we cannot understand, even our most basic tool, language, becomes dysfunctional: Bourdieu's symbolic

This sentence represents a deliberate modification of the original sentence due to the author's personal ethical considerations.

capital evaporates, and in Latour's actor-networks, language transforms into a destructive power. This is not merely the indescribability of a monster, but the absolute defeat of language, the cornerstone of the human universe of meaning, in the face of a posthuman reality. Lovecraft's fear comes not from a nonhuman entity but from the abyss of meaninglessness, the desert of communication where silence and scream mean the same.

#### Conclusion

This study aims to transcend the boundaries of traditional gothic monster readings by examining H.P. Lovecraft's The Call of Cthulhu in the light of Pierre Bourdieu's field theory and Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory. The resulting analysis moves Cthulhu beyond being a mere object of fear and allows us to position it as a multilayered phenomenon that invades human worlds of meaning at both structural and relational levels.

Bourdieu's theoretical framework helps us to reveal how Cthulhu destabilises the human worlds of meaning, such as science, art and religion. With the state of belonging to none of these fields, Cthulhu undermines the underlying doxa- the belief that the universe is understandable and humancentred. The fact that the scientific field is dysfunctional, the evolution of the religious field into a deviant counter-field and the capture of the artistic field by nightmares, reveals how stable structures become fragile in the face of a posthuman entity.

The synergy of the two theories is more meaningful with the metaphors swamp flower and sand snake. Swamp flower shows how even the noblest human efforts, such as scientific and artistic curiosity, may host traps. Sand snake prognosticates that the nature of reality might be fundamentally deceptive, that the danger might lurk in the most unexpected places, in the most innocent forms.

Last but not least, the Cthulhu mythos is a rejection of modern individuals' arrogance regarding their place in the universe, and it is a mirror that confronts them with cosmic insignificance. Lovecraft's genius lies in shifting the source of fear from the personal or social to a cosmic dimension that transcends human limitations and pushes the boundaries of human understanding. This study has demonstrated that Gothic literature can enter into an interdisciplinary dialogue with social theories and that a literary text can be a powerful tool to question the deepest existential questions about human beings. Cthulhu is not only a literary monster; it is the representation of the modern human's search for meaning and the darkness that lies within this search.

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## Chapter 17

# The Vampire in the Void: A Logotherapeutic Reading of Le Fanu's Carmilla 8

## Tuba Aydan<sup>1</sup>

#### Abstract

This chapter provides an extended logotherapeutic analysis of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's (1814–1873) Carmilla (1872), a foundational Gothic novella that has long been read through lenses of sexuality, gender, and the supernatural. By bringing Viktor Emil Frankl's (1905-1997) Logotherapy into dialogue with the text, this study reconsiders the novella not merely as a work of Gothic horror but as a narrative shaped by nineteenth-century crises of faith, identity, and meaning. Without a doubt, every human being encounters innumerable trials and tribulations throughout life. Pain, death, and guilt are the three most striking of these, which Frankl collected under the heading The Tragic Triad. Such events create an inner void in the individual's mind and soul, which manifests as depression, aggression, and addiction—what Frankl refers to as The Pathological Triad—if they are not processed healthily through Frankl's Triad of Pathways: creative, experiential, or attitudinal. This chapter suggests that Carmilla's vampirism is a psychological expression of this inner void, rather than a supernatural characteristic, in line with the nineteenth-century global crises of faith and identity, particularly with respect to the incapacity to face the trials of the era. Ultimately, this study examines Carmilla (1872) through the lenses of the Tragic and Pathological Triads, demonstrating that what initially appears as an uncontrolled appetite and terror is, in fact, the breakdown of human freedom and the manifestation of spiritual deprivation when the pursuit of meaning fails.

### Introduction

The nineteenth century was a pivotal period in both science and literature, marked by significant advances in the fields of neurology, psychology, and moral philosophy. During this period, the human mind began to be re-

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examined from various perspectives within literary circles, and the nature of 'evil' attracted considerable attention and discussion. As a result, a new literary genre emerged in which evil was depicted as a necessary element and villains were given the status of protagonists. Gothic literature evolved from a mere horror genre into "a textual 'symptom' of anxiety" that discovered the underexplored existential and psychological issues of the human mind (Townshend, 2019, p. viii). Long before psychology was recognized as a formal study, J. Sheridan Le Fanu (1814–1873) was notable for his profound understanding of how the human mind functions and for his ability to convert these concerns into fiction. His ongoing preoccupation with mental disintegration and the variability of perception is seen in his three-volume collection In a Glass Darkly (1872). The title, which was taken from St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, refers to the ambiguity surrounding truth and the boundaries of human comprehension (Gin, 2013). Here, the 'glass' is a metaphorical mirror, reflecting human mind's darkest sides. Le Fanu reinterprets it through this illustration to show the reality that self-awareness is never complete or stable. It is, rather, ambiguous and limited, flickering on a cloudy or dark surface. Presented as case studies by the metaphysician Dr. Martin Hesselius, the five stories in In a Glass Darkly (1872) blend factual observation with theoretical investigation to become early psychological examinations of moral and spiritual breakdowns. Le Fanu's interest in mental turmoil stems from both personal tragedy and intellectual curiosity. The remorse, helplessness, and fear of death that his wife's prolonged illness and spiritual decline placed in him are evident in his later writings. Because of these personal difficulties, he became preoccupied with themes of guilt, mortality, and inner collapse. Le Fanu made Gothic horror a profoundly contemplative meditation on the instability of perception and the burdens of the human soul by fusing artistic intuition with personal suffering, transforming the genre from an area of external fear into an investigation of internal consciousness.

In this broader framework, Le Fanu's most psychologically complicated story in In A Glass Darkly (1872) is Carmilla. According to Kathleen Costello-Sullivan (2013), it can be regarded as "the overlooked older sister" of Stoker's Dracula (1897), with its focus on the characters' inner worlds and psychological complexity, which distinguishes it from the subsequent, more sensational vampire stories (p. xvii). It is set in a remote Styrian castle in Austria, an ironic location that would later become the birthplace of major schools of psychotherapy. Laura, the sheltered young narrator of the story, lives in an isolated castle where she has grown up without the companionship of her peers. For this reason, the moment Carmilla arrives at

the neighbourhood through dubious coincidences, Laura clings to her like a branch in solitude. Regrettably, she devotes all her delicate feelings to this stranger after a long deprivation and emotional hunger, only to discover in time that her beloved companion is, indeed, a vampire. Laura's relationship with that mysterious woman leads to a plethora of conflicting emotions in her soul, such as love, horror, dependence, attraction, and terror. It is precisely the most enduring and critical vitality of Le Fanu's novella, as it draws a powerful connection with nineteenth-century Europe. Similarly, with its exotic setting alongside its spiritual catastrophe in the background, Victorian Europe also oscillates between connection and rupture through its "domestication and internalization to explore the dark recesses of the human- and, thus, the national- psyche" (Davison, 2009, p. 220). It is a fact that this oscillation still resonates with today's existential struggles, and through its themes of loneliness, repression, and the desire for connection, one could easily feel the timeless journey of meaning in the hidden chambers of history. Therefore, Carmilla (1872) compels its readers and scholars to reevaluate its reverberations through different theoretical frameworks.

Likewise, the philosophical and historical background of Le Fanu's novella is connected to the broader Victorian struggle to restore equilibrium between faith and the rapid advancement of modern science, as well as the emerging tensions surrounding gender roles and the redefinition of femininity in an age dominated by rationalism. To begin with, people of that century were frequently confused in a world that seemed to be losing its sense of wonder due to a rising skepticism about traditional religion and an increased reliance on empirical reasoning. At that very point, Gothic literature emerged as an equalizer in response to scientific rationalism. The ethereal and the mysterious could still find means of expression in its imaginative context. For instance, while Laura's father embodies the Enlightenment ideal of reason with his firm principles of natural science, Carmilla serves as the irrational dimension that defies such order. Throughout the story, the reader senses the fact that science fails to explain the spiritual, emotional, and metaphysical aspects of the mysterious woman. What Le Fanu illustrates in the novella is the limitations of materialism and the human's need for a higher dimension. In the end, the novella becomes a mirror image of its time as well as all times. In other words, it is an ordered chaos in which supernatural and natural forces coexist and influence each other. Additionally, the novella became the representative of the 'feminine contagion' through the collision of the magical and the logical. As Miles (2020) observes,

[...] the fear underlying the porous self—the fear of once more finding oneself vulnerable to the contagion of superstition that reenchants and re-animates the world—is resolutely gendered as feminine, not just in its putative audience, but in the subject suffering the 'contagion', a word that nicely catches the abjection at work in the Enlightenment construction of 'superstition'" (p. 438).

In this context, Le Fanu's novella not only dramatizes the clash between modern science and faith but also subverts the strict gender hierarchies of the Victorian era. According to Hogle (2020), the late nineteenth century witnessed "the desire for the post-Enlightenment' New Woman' to emerge," and this caused a form of cultural anxiety about female agency and recognition (p. 82). Therefore, the Gothic image became an indirect site of voicing the repressed female agency. Similarly, Carmilla's alluring yet transgressive dual role destabilizes the patriarchal ideal of female passivity and domesticity. Her defiance against reason, control, and moral order allegorizes the fear of society of the women who stand for categorization and discrimination. In the end, Carmilla's conflict between the spiritual and the material, as well as the subversion of Victorian gender roles, alludes to the same existential dilemma that Viktor E. Frankl would later postulate, emphasizing the human capacity to find meaning even amid suffering, societal constraints, and existential conflict.

Logotherapy was founded as the third Viennese School of Psychotherapy in the mid-twentieth century by Frankl. Due to the limitations and basic psychologism that Freud and Adler's theories offer, he presented a more holistic perspective for the interpretation of human's primary motivation in the face of life's predicaments, "to clarify the difference between meaningful and meaningless suffering, and to analyze suffering in the life of an individual regarding his capacity for experiencing meaningful suffering" (Frankl, 1953, p. 13). It is based on the idea of will to meaning, proposed as a response to timeless existential challenges that every individual encounters in life. To attain the meaning of life, one can benefit from The Triad of Pathways, which encompasses creative, experiential, and attitudinal aspects of life. To illustrate, the creative pathway focuses on one's endeavours for personal contribution to society, the experiential pathway prioritizes the relationships with the divine, the loved ones, or beauty, and the attitudinal pathway centres on one's positive reaction towards life's unavoidable difficulties. In Frankl's hierarchy of values, suffering holds a superior position to both creative and experiential values, for it is through pain that the human being is most profoundly tested and granted the ultimate opportunity for transcendence (Costello, 2015). For Frankl (2006), it is an "ineradicable part of life, even as fate and death" (p. 64). However, through The Triad of Pathways, people can turn their tragedies into triumphs and be guided on a meaningful and purposeful journey through life. All in all, Logotherapy is not merely a type of clinical psychology, but also a philosophical anthropology that offers guidance on developing and prospering as a community in the face of various predicaments of existence. For this reason, Gothic conflict, fear, and moral disintegration can be examined through Logotherapy to draw conclusions and valuable lessons for future generations.

The characters in Le Fanu's novella embody the human condition that Viktor Frankl identified as The Tragic Triad. It is humans' inevitable and numerous encounters with pain, guilt, and death throughout life. According to Frankl, these encounters both define the tragic aspect of existence and have the capacity to transform. He asserts that "the undeniable transitoriness of life ... really applies only to the possibilities to fulfil a meaning, the opportunities to create, to experience, and to suffer meaningfully. Once such possibilities have been actualized, they are no longer transitory" (Frankl, 1985, p. 117). Resilience is developed via pain, and guilt may reveal one's moral compass. The awareness of death, however, is the most potent of all since it emphasizes the value of life. When individuals avoid confronting the tragic events of life and miss the opportunity to get the most out of them, as Frankl warns, depression, aggression, and addiction arise from this inactive reaction. It is called the Pathological Triad, and Carmilla masterfully epitomizes this tragic end with all its consequences after succumbing to the evil's influence. Although at first sight, the hardships of life seem impossible to manage, and circumstances can make the situation harsh, taking initiative and facing them bravely, like appreciating the beauty of the ocean with its waves and storms, alongside its liveliness and depth, results in one's elevation of their psychological and mental well-being. Since "responsibility grows ... with the uniqueness of the person and the singularity of the situation. Uniqueness and singularity ... are fundamental components of the meaning of human life (Frankl, 1986, p. 62). In that regard, the reader witnesses the failure of this appreciation in Carmilla's case, and the novella becomes the very tool of psychotherapy itself. Therefore, this study aims to analyze Le Fanu's Carmilla in relation to Frankl's Tragic and Pathological Triads, examining the nineteenth-century Gothic imagination while exploring the underlying reasons for its failure to find meaning in life.

Although Le Fanu's novella has been extensively examined through postcolonial, feminist, queer, psychoanalytic, and sociological frameworks, its existential dimension has remained largely underexplored. Few studies have focused on the novella's existential crisis at its core, and most have reflected upon its gender, postcolonial, or psychosocial aspects. What is more, a logotherapeutic analysis, which could be illuminating for further

insights into Gothic society, has not been attempted before. Gothic focal figure of vampire becomes an imaginative laboratory of Frankl's Tragic and Pathological Triads, and this reinterpretation suggests new insights into the novella's analysis. In that regard, Carmilla's vampirism becomes not only a supernatural phenomenon but also a symbol of the existential emptiness with the loss of purpose and transcendence. Her insatiable hunger represents the spiritual void of the Victorian era, when the human capacity to create, relate, and react positively is wasted. As a result, if the pursuit fails, the emptiness of The Tragic Triad remains unfulfilled through The Triad of Pathways, and inevitably, The Pathological Triad occurs as a tragic end. In conclusion, the fragmentation, repression, and futile engagement with the human mind's limitations in the Gothic atmosphere are masterfully portrayed in Le Fanu's novella. Through the lens of Logotherapy, it can be understood in a more comprehensive and humanistic light.

# Carmilla and the Collapse of Meaning: The Tragic and Pathological Triads in Le Fanu's Gothic Imagination

When scrutinized through Logotherapy, Carmilla's horror could be regarded as a psychological portrait of meaninglessness. Viktor Frankl's assertion that The Tragic Triad, namely pain, guilt and death, is an inevitable but potentially redemptive reality, invites the reader to understand Le Fanu's vampire not as a predator but as a subject unable to turn her tragedy into transcendence, because "human existence is always directed toward something that is not itself' (Frankl, 2004, p. 4). Carmilla's recurring languor, her refusal to confess, and her continuous exposure to death dramatize the paralysis of the human soul when it refuses to give meaning to suffering. In this context, her wanderings at night reflect the psychological process by which contemporary humans ritualize pain into repetition to avoid facing it. She does not resemble the traditional Gothic monsters who search for compensation or redemption to free themselves from the "existential vacuum" that Frankl (2011) coins (p. 70). She is literally the embodiment of this vacuum with her futile striving for survival. As a result, this futility makes her a representative of Victorian society as well as of nihilistic postmodern humanity.

Long before Carmilla's teeth ever contact human flesh, her tragedy starts. Not only does her body change when she is transformed into a vampire, but her ability to find true meaning also crumbles:

"There occurred that night what has confused the picture, and made its colours faint. I was all but assassinated in my bed, wounded here," she touched her breast, "and never was the same since."

"Were you near dying?"

"Yes, very—a cruel love—strange love, that would have taken my life. Love will have its sacrifices. No sacrifice without blood" (Le Fanu, 1872/2013, p. 45).

The fundamental trauma that moulds her life is captured in this confession: abuse disguised as closeness, destruction disguised as love. Considering Viktor Frankl's view, Carmilla's first suffering marks the start of her tragic triad, which refers to pain as an inevitable part of life. Carmilla, however, gives in to her anguish, in contrast to Frankl's patients who turn it into purpose. Her suffering becomes the cause of her pathological fixation rather than a means of personal development. What started out as a victim's wound becomes the aggressor's curse. According to Frankl's attitudinal pathway, "meaning rests on the attitude the patient chooses toward suffering" (Frankl, 2014, p. 80). Obviously, without the ability to give meaning to her suffering, Carmilla descends into the pathological realm of aggression.

If her pain marks the beginning of *The Tragic Triad*, her guilt initiates *The* Pathological Triad. The model for all her subsequent relationships is likewise established by Carmilla's transformation scene. Frankl's conception of the defiant power of the human spirit is perversely reversed by the unidentified lover who transforms her into a vampire. Carmilla's assailant forces misery upon her and destroys her agency, depriving her of the possibility of choice. This is a "cruel love" that exploits and abuses rather than relates or bonds; it imitates love and feeds upon addiction (Le Fanu, 1872/2013, p. 45). However, instead of turning her unavoidable suffering into an achievement, from that very moment, Carmilla chooses to reexperience the same trauma with her victims and start a new vicious cycle with each one. In this context, Frankl (2020) suggests, "true suffering of an authentic fate is an achievement, and, indeed, is the highest possible achievement" (p. 26). Yet, although it is possible for her to stand against this cycle, she fails to endure. Still, her "wild heart bleeds" with the heart of her victim: "Dearest, your little heart is wounded; think me not cruel because I obey the irresistible law of my strength and weakness ... I cannot help it; as I draw near to you, you, in your turn, will draw near to others, and learn the rapture of that cruelty." (Le Fanu, 1872/2013, s. 29). This confession epitomizes what Frankl would call The Pathological Triad: guilt transforms into aggression and addiction. Carmilla's consciousness of her cruelty is intertwined with her addiction to blood and affiliation. Guilt, here, functions not as a moral compass but as a self-destructive drive that could be satisfied neither with blood nor with love, an echo of an existential vacuum.

Finally, her confrontation with death, or rather her denial of it, completes the triadic fall. Carmilla's pain is more of an existential suffering and struggles rather than physical or psychological distress when she is repeatedly described as "languid", "faint", and "incapable of exertion" (Le Fanu, 1872, p. 41). In other words, as Frankl (1986) puts it, noögenic neurosis arises out of the feeling of her meaninglessness and void, which is her primary source of pain. Carmilla's soul is surrounded by this existential vacuum, and her existence unfolds as a continuous languor—depression. These symptoms are not merely Gothic settings in the novella, but also a reflection of the threshold between life and death. Her languor is her existential exhaustion, namely, it is the result of denying transcendence and finality, depriving her of the ability to die or give meaning to life. Carmilla's desire for love "to death" is a distorted image of her need for the divine, leaving her body suspended in this world and her soul suspended in the other (Le Fanu, 1872, p. 44). In conclusion, Carmilla's overall mood is the representation of the Victorian individual in the Gothic melancholic atmosphere, with the absence of meaning and the spiritual languor.

This pathological repetition extends beyond Carmilla herself, infecting those who attempt to preserve or possess her. The Moravian nobleman who hides Carmilla's body further dramatizes the distortion. He epitomizes the pathological transformation of love into an obsession. The nobleman deepens Carmilla's tragedy by preserving her body rather than freeing her spirit; his denial of death perpetuates further deaths across generations. Carmilla's assertion that "love will have its sacrifices" embodies this very denial, and it is grotesquely reflected in the novella as the striving for cherishing love by killing the loved ones. The nobleman's remorseful letter that shows Carmilla's coffin is another example of guilt resembling Carmilla's. Both characters are captured in the same existential impasse. They maintain the distortion since they cannot face the painful truth of death. In Frankl's view, both exemplify the failure of attitudinal values with the pathological illusion of controlling the harsh circumstances around them rather than benefiting from them to turn their tragedies into triumphs.

When Carmilla reemerges centuries later in the household of General Spielsdorf and his daughter Bertha, the cycle begins anew. Her predation disguises itself as affection, and her emotional hunger manifests in letters trembling with both tenderness and aggression. Spielsdorf's final letter, mourning his lost daughter-"I have lost my beautiful daughter-for as such I adored her ... in the peace of innocence, and in the glorious hope of a blessed futurity."—encapsulates the tragic fusion of love and death that defines Carmilla's existence (Le Fanu, 1872/2013, p. 11). Through Frankl's

lens, this recurrence is not mere horror, but the dramatization of humanity's recurring failure to find meaning in pain—a timeless descent from tragedy into pathology. "The fiend who betrayed our infatuated hospitality has done it all" (Le Fanu, 1872/2013, p. 11). At this point, the reader witnesses the externalization of Carmilla's inner decay. Her longing for connection and her desire to destroy become inseparable. She no longer distinguishes between closeness and consumption, between tenderness and aggression. "The striving to find a meaning in life is a primary motivational force in man" (Frankl et al., 2010, p. 77). In this sense, Carmilla's vampirism is not rebellion but the perversion of this striving, and it leads to damaging and neurotic results. In Carmilla's case, the result is an aggressive, insatiable hunger instead of spiritual purpose.

When the town is plagued by unexplained deaths in the following scenes, Carmilla's inner turmoil is further exposed by her abhorrence of a passing funeral. She angrily interrupts Laura as she joins the mourners at a peasant girl's burial and starts to sing the hymn: "Don't you perceive how discordant that is? ... your forms wound me, and I hate funerals. What a fuss! Why you must die—everyone must die; and all are happier when they do" (Le Fanu, 1872/2013, p. 31). Her denial of death is her deep hatred of being neither alive nor dead, namely, her existence. Her disruption of the funeral mirrors the burial she perpetually resists—her own. Her inability to confront death prevents her from completing the human cycle of life and death, which Frankl identifies as the very process through which meaning is born. Carmilla's pain has no such horizon, despite Frankl's claim that struggles cease to be suffering at the time they find meaning (Zalli, 2024). She turns suffering into aggression and death into addiction, and she is cut off from both the divine and human orders. Ultimately, her resistance to death is not an affirmation of life but its negation—an endless struggle to escape limitation, which paradoxically imprisons her in a static state of despair. The ultimate rejection of meaning, the will to emptiness that characterizes Frankl's existential vacuum, is her fight against death—against finitude itself.

The most obvious reverberations of Carmilla's tragedy could be witnessed in her last and the most complicated relationship, with Laura. Their first meeting long before they meet in person, realizes in Laura's 'so-called' blurred dream of affection and horror. As a child, she awakes to see "a solemn, but very pretty face looking at me from the side of the bed" and feels "as if two needles ran into my breast very deep at the same moment" (Le Fanu, 1872, p. 7). This initial vision, suspended between tenderness and violence, plants the seed of an emotional paradox that will later define her relationship with Carmilla. Through Frankl's framework, this scene already dramatizes the

human tendency to turn pain into repetition rather than meaning—it marks the beginning of The Tragic Triad through unacknowledged suffering. The hollow and the warmth in the bed symbolize the persistence of unprocessed trauma, a metaphor for the lingering emotional vacuum that will later consume both Carmilla and Laura. Years later, Laura identifies Carmilla as the same face that had tormented her nightmares as a child when she first arrives: "I saw the very face which had visited me in my childhood at night ... It was pretty, even beautiful; and when I first beheld it, wore the same melancholy expression" (Le Fanu, 1872/2013, p. 23). They interact in the realm of the uncanny through this spectral déjà vu, as though Carmilla is stuck in a cycle of reenacting her unresolved tragedy. As Kyrpyta (2020) argues, "the text's uncanniness is primarily expressed in terms of its unsettling deployment of a version of doubling ... in which Carmilla is Laura's doppelgänger." Nevertheless, Carmilla momentarily rediscovers some purpose with Laura. She has an authentic, even delicate desire for emotional reciprocity: "Dearest, your little heart is wounded ... my wild heart bleeds with yours" (Le Fanu, 1872/2013, p. 29). On the other hand, her love becomes annihilating to both herself and others because it is unable to express itself within moral or temporal boundaries. According to Frankl's experiential pathway, love that transcends oneself and points toward another is the source of meaning. However, Carmilla's love is self-referential, reflecting her own void.

Carmilla's romanticization of death as union, "You must come with me, loving me, to death; or else hate me and still come with me, and hating me through death and after," is the pinnacle of the pathology (Le Fanu, 1872/2013, p. 44). This scene is the embodiment of her "unconscious desire to appropriate her lover for herself and bring her into her realm of death" (Oki, 2022, p. 19). In this case, death is an eternalization of possession rather than a destination—love without release, pain without redemption. Carmilla's desire to merge affection and destruction reflects her inability to perceive love as a creative or transcendent act. In Frankl's terms, genuine love should point beyond the self, affirming the value of the beloved as an end. Carmilla, however, transforms love into a means of self-preservation, reducing it to a mechanism for maintaining her own existence within the void. This is the most extreme misrepresentation of *The Tragic Triad* proposed by Frankl. Carmilla converts suffering into fixation instead of meaning; she recycles shame into compulsion instead of moral duty; and she turns death into a continuation of violation instead of acceptance of finitude. In this sense, the longing for union is inseparable from the craving for domination in Carmilla, which reflects a perversion of Frankl's experiential pathway.

The cause of her tragedy is not only the unavoidable vampirism but also her conscious choice of the traumatic cycle, both for herself and her victims, instead of approximating the moral or the spiritual. Pain has turned into depression, guilt into aggression, and death into addiction-each tragic element has degenerated into its pathological equivalent.

Her death, or more accurately, her ultimate demise, highlights Carmilla's cyclical nature of her tragedy rather than a resolution to her crisis. The community could exhume and stake her body after discovering the note written by the Moldavian nobleman confessing his long-standing transgression. In a way, Carmilla herself was never able to accomplish the delayed moral repair that this deed accomplishes. Although it fails to restore personal salvation, it reestablishes the traditional order. Carmilla was trapped in a lifelong state of pathology because she refused to deal with suffering, rebelled against remorse, and avoided dying. Even in the face of unavoidable suffering, one retains the freedom to choose one's attitude (Bulut & Sarı, 2020). In this sense, Carmilla's damnation is not the result of her transformation alone but of her refusal to find a moral stance within it. She could have chosen the path of meaning instead of the path of destruction. As seen in later reinterpretations of vampirism—such as the Cullen family in the *Twilight* saga—immortality itself does not necessitate moral decay; it can also be turned into creativity, love, and contribution to humanity. Every suffering, as Frankl insists, contains the potential for transformation. Carmilla's failure to actualize this potential turns her tragedy into pathology, whereas her story may inspire future studies that examine the possibility of a 'logotherapeutic vampire'—a being who transcends suffering rather than perpetuates it.

Carmilla's story ultimately functions as a Gothic parable of Logotherapy in reverse. Carmilla dies by denying her pain, whereas Frankl's patients find purpose in accepting it. Carmilla's guilt turns into depression, aggression, and addiction, in contrast to Frankl's idea of guilt, which demands accountability and rejuvenation. Carmilla's immortality makes all experience barren, in contrast to Frankl's view of death as the borderline that gives life urgency. Her life takes place in what Frankl referred to as the existential vacuum, which is exaggerated to the paranormal; her existence is reduced to "mere sustenance for her blood-thirsty standards of living", a hollow routine that replaces meaning with survival (Altun, 2025, p. 93). The impossibility of meaning is the vampire's affliction, not just her bloodlust. Her only hope would have been death—the essential threshold that allows meaning to be resurrected. Carmilla's captivation to immortality epitomizes Frankl's warning that when will to meaning is retarded, then, will to nothingness

takes the stage. For this reason, one could argue that Le Fanu's novella is among Gothic literature's most eerie depictions of the entwined tragic and pathological triads. Beneath this horror lies a stark realization: Pain, guilt, and death are among the human experiences not to avoid and flee from but to accept, embrace, and get the most of them to reach one's self-awareness. Carmilla's denial of these is the signal of her existential sorrow as well as a lack of morality. She is the dark twin of Frankl's survivor, the one who loses meaning due to immortality rather than the one who finds meaning in suffering. She ultimately demonstrates that to deny death is to deny life itself, and how love, devoid of transcendence, turns into the most vicious kind of hunger. Thus, through the inverted lens of Logotherapy, Le Fanu's Carmilla (1872) reveals that the horror of meaninglessness surpasses even the horror of death itself.

#### Conclusion

Le Fanu's Carmilla (1872) could be considered both a Gothic horror story and a modern psychological analysis of meaninglessness when scrutinized through the lens of Viktor E. Frankl's Logotherapy. It masterfully portrays the moral decay, repression, and the indispensable longing for meaning of the Victorian era, which is in complete line with the fact that the moment humanity escapes its tragedies rather than facing and challenging them, and as Frankl put it, experiences the existential vacuum, it is ultimately dragged into tragedy. In Carmilla's case, escapism is merely a temporary solution; her tragedy ends tragically since it is not bravely welcomed. If she had confronted it with Frankl's 'responsibleness' and courage, every tragic event she endured, whether it was pain, guilt or death, could have been transformed into life-changing experiences. Unfortunately, the failure to attain the meaning of life led to a pathological result, and Carmilla necessarily faced depression, aggression, and addiction. Through her tragic death, she epitomizes the unavailing effort out of the timeless struggle of humans' desperate need for meaning in times of tragedy. However, she is more than just a villain; she is the victim of moral and spiritual deprivation. Instead of contribution, connection, and creation, she prefers consumption and represents exhaustion. Her existence is characterized by an absolute will to nothingness, a state where her consciousness of eternal life paradoxically renders all moments meaningless and fleeting. She cannot engage with the unique possibilities of the present because she has no sense of finitude. This self-consumption that resulted from Carmilla's denial of her tragic triad is an existential horror transcending the physical terror of the traditional vampire myth. In conclusion, lost in touch with Frankl's creative, experiential,

and attitudinal pathways, Carmilla could be deemed as a precursor of the contemporary existential problems of the postmodern human with her insatiable hunger, constant languor and hopelessness.

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# Vampiric Identity in Transition: From Stoker's Demon to the Ethical Modern Immortal 8

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#### Abstract:

This study explores the evolution of the vampire archetype from Bram Stoker's Dracula to contemporary reinterpretations, focusing on the shifting cultural, religious, and psychological meanings attributed to vampiric figures. By analysing Stoker's depiction of the Count as an embodiment of darkness, spiritual corruption, and metaphysical threat, the text highlights how early vampire literature relied on religious binaries and sacred symbolism to frame evil as an external, objective force. In contrast, modern narratives - exemplified by works such as Twilight—recast the vampire as a conflicted, sympathetic figure whose monstrosity is internalized and humanized. This transformation aligns with broader cultural trends including rising secularism, changing moral frameworks, the popular fascination with morally ambiguous villains, and the psychological exploration of identity. The study argues that the vampire myth functions as a cultural mirror, adapting to society's evolving anxieties, desires, and uncertainties. Through close reading and comparative analysis, it demonstrates how the transformation of the vampire from demonic antagonist to romantic anti-hero reflects fundamental shifts in beliefs about evil, desire, selfhood, and the boundaries between the sacred and the secular. Ultimately, the persistence and adaptability of the vampire figure reveal its enduring usefulness as a symbolic tool for negotiating existential and cultural tensions across time.

"Welcome to my house! Enter freely and of your own free will and leave something of the happiness you bring! I am Dracula, and I bid you welcome ... to my house." Stoker

"Whoever fights with monsters should see to it that he does not become one himself. And when you stare for a long time into an abyss, the abyss stares back into you." Nietzsche

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#### Intro

To look a monster in the eye is an act that requires courage. This courage first demands resisting an existing danger, but in the allegorical depths of this attempt lies another vein of bravery. For although the monster is an entity composed of traits the person does not wish to possess, in essence it serves as a mirror in one's journey of self-recognition. While Dracula's dark and gloomy castle - surrounded by wolves - is an obvious trap even for an ordinary mind, and although this uncanny atmosphere is noticed by Jonathan Harker at first glance, the young solicitor, captivated by the lure of worldly opportunities, cannot keep himself from advancing into the belly of the beast. And as Dracula states above, he enters the castle freely and of his own free will by leaving the happiness he has brought behind.

At this point, one aspect becomes crucial: the monster's threat forms a unity with the character's weakness. In other words, the monster gives birth to the victim, while the victim defines the monster. Thus, the two halves of a whole are completed, and Nietzsche's concise maxim finds its meaning through a literary manifestation. Building on this understanding, the main aim of the study has become to analyse Bram Stoker's Dracula by listening to what the monster tells us - indirectly and implicitly - about human beings, and to make this secondary voice, which remains in the shadows, more audible. For although Harker's relationship with Count Dracula is presented through a Harker-centred perceptual framework, Dracula's own perspective is relegated to peripheral spaces in this relationship; yet it remains within the field of vision of literary analysis and continues to be accessible. In other words, Nietzsche's abyss, however distant, still gazes directly into our eyes.

This, in a sense, evokes a Kafkaesque unease: the initial joy of Little Red Riding Hood's rescue is overshadowed by the fact that the Big Bad Wolf is slain. By the end of the tale, the child to whom the story is told slips into bed safe and happy, unaware that the hunters—hailed as heroes—will themselves turn into bloody wolves throughout the night because of their gruesome deed.

This mentality not only redefines the monolithic roles of the monster and the victim but also destabilizes the norms of villainy by triggering a transitional process in which evil, long assumed to be lurking outside, resonates from the different shades of the human mind. Therefore, knowing ourselves-especially by confronting the ignored and unwelcome aspects of our psyche—as prescribed by the reinterpreted Greek maxim Nosce te ipsum, becomes highly significant. Recognizing one's darker sides and

vulnerabilities can be achieved most powerfully through a monster capable of representing that very darkness. For this reason, understanding Dracula constitutes an important step toward understanding ourselves.

## Into the Abyss

Sigmund Freud explains the uncanny as the return of the repressed something that should remain hidden but comes to the surface, something familiar yet disturbing because it is at the same time unrecognizable (Freud, 2003). To take a simple example: a pupper, when it is motionless on its own or moves in coordination with the puppeteer's fingers, does not produce a feeling of unease in the viewer. But when the puppet begins to move on its own, without a puppeteer, it steps outside the familiar order and takes on an unrecognizable identity beyond what is known. Entering the realm of the uncanny, the element of fear in the story draws on this Freudian principle and tends to transform the puppet into a monster. A literary manifestation of the uncanny is epitomized by Shelley. While Dr. Frankenstein's cadaver is merely a simple corpse, at the end of the successful experiment it becomes a walking dead body - distorting what is familiar and customary, turning into a phenomenon that the reader cannot easily place within a framework of acceptance, and thus opening a channel for the uncanny within the text, allowing the element of horror to dominate the story.

The character of Dracula, which Stoker constructs upon a historical figure of Romanian origin, serves as a perfect example of the mentality mentioned above. From the outside, Dracula possesses an ordinary human body, apart from a few visible defects that could be attributed to the physical deformities of old age. In this sense, he has a familiar disposition. However, as the story progresses, the reader is confronted - through Mr. Harker's eyes - with the truth that the Count is in fact an undead figure, one who has returned from death. His transformation is rooted in occult knowledge such as black magic and alchemy, and he brings about the same transformation in those who fall under his influence. These individuals use their coffins as beds of isolation during the daytime and, in a rather suggestive manner, 'rise from their coffins' at night and return to life. Viewed from this perspective, Dracula possesses a connection with the act of restoring life to death, with existence beyond death. This undead nature, which drives the other characters in the novel into a state of uncanny dread, tends on the allegorical level to become a direct reference to life after death.

Dracula, as a monster, possesses a motherly aspect. Unlike many of his violent counterparts in English literature, Dracula is not merely an agent

of destruction. Through the biological metamorphosis he spreads, he forces human beings to assume a disposition of his own making—that is, he vampirizes them. Rather than offering his victims to the dominion of annihilation, he prefers to make them a fragment of himself, aiming for a kind of transformative upheaval through those he alters. In this respect, it may be said that Dracula functions not only as the representative of a malevolent revolution and a process of change, but also as its instrument.

In the ranks of monsters, he places himself as the chief-or, more accurately, as the lord. This lordship inherently involves the corruption of what is holy, for the Count strives to demonize the innocent subjects of God by tainting their divinely bestowed humanity and compelling it into savagery and parasitism. Thus, a lecherous and degrading disposition defiles the once exalted state of human life.

When John Seward, a former associate drawn under the Count's dark influence, is confined to the asylum, his cry of "The blood is the life!" dismissed as the rambling of a madman but in truth the core principle of Dracula's existence - offers another crucial clue to the monster at the heart of the story. This fact, which underscores the vampires' unquenchable thirst for human blood, expresses the reality that Dracula can sustain his existence only through human life. In other words, for the Count to live, ordinary people must forfeit their own vital fluids and be exposed to mortal danger. By its nature, this relationship contains the domination of the strong over the weak and is rooted in violence. Dracula satisfies his need for blood by hunting humans - luring them through various tricks and then consuming them. He does not see himself as a violator in this relationship; according to the worldview he constructs and pursues, he possesses an ethnic superiority, and thus the hegemony he inflicts upon human life is, in his eyes, a birthright.

At the foundation of this aristocratic order lies a racist division. When speaking of himself, the Count boasts of the blood of Attila that runs through his veins, seeking to legitimize his superiority as a Székely through this lineage. He invokes warrior ancestors who surged across the world like a wave of fire, believing their might gave them the right to subdue the weak. Acting with the logic of 'a wolf is born of wolves,' the Count, within this worldview, assigns to humans—whom he designates as the Other—the role of sheep, following this exploitative metaphor. The following declaration, delivered by the Count with a tirade-like air, constitutes an important step toward grasping this mentality:

"We Szekelys have a right to be proud, for in our veins flows the blood of many brave races who fought as the lion fights, for lordship... What devil or what witch was ever so great as Attila, whose blood is in these veins?" He held up his arms. "Is it a wonder that we were a conquering race; that we were proud"... (Stoker, 1897, p. 27)

For the reasons mentioned above, it can be said that the Count possesses an aristocratic nature founded on racism. Considering his ruthless attitudes and behaviours, this nature takes on a feudal primitiveness. The Count manipulates reality with a selfish and calculating mastery, using his supposed right to restrict human freedoms and even to violate the fundamental right of life. This domination has caused great harm in the lands of his birth and left a negative impact on human communities. However, the Count aims to move beyond the boundaries of the territories he has exploited and consumed, seeking to transfer his dominion to new lands - specifically England - through the estates he purchases. One may argue that the Count holds an imperial agenda. In imitation of the ancestors he speaks of with great admiration, he envisions a new wave of conquest, and he initiates its first phase through a commercial investment. What is noteworthy is this: the Count begins his undertaking in England by purchasing the Carfax estate. The weapon he uses is bloodstained money. In this foreign territory, he secures the hospitality he needs, so to speak, by buying it. In light of hitherto debated issues, it can be said that the Count embodies a racist, aristocratic, and imperial entity. His goal is to expand the scope of the superiority he has constructed and to carry his imperialist expansion to further dimensions through new lands.

As one delves into the depths of the Count's personal character, it becomes evident that behind his seemingly positive qualities lie certain undeniable dark tendencies. The Count, in his daily life, presents the refined identity of a well-educated nobleman belonging to a foreign culture. His castle, lifestyle, manner of thinking, and the language he uses constitute the visible insignia of this elite disposition; yet this cultivated refinement soon becomes engulfed in an aura of xenophobic dread. This fear stems from the Count's deceptive and secretive nature.

Although he behaves with the courteous manners of a sincere host, he actually acts under the guidance of a predatory mentality. While he distracts Mr. Harker - whom he regards as a clear prey and who has become trapped in his castle - by assuming the affectionate demeanour of a benevolent old man, he is in fact developing an exploitative and toxic relationship dynamic. In exchange for the false courtesy he displays, he expects thoughtful and polite behaviour from Mr. Harker, using these gestures to identify the man's weaknesses and further attempting to turn these refinements into

vulnerabilities. When, for instance, the diabolical women with whom he shares his castle attempt to harm Mr. Harker, the Count intervenes, telling them to wait until he is finished with the business he has with Mr. Harker. In this sense, an exploitative and merciless insincerity becomes visible behind the polite face and identity he puts forward. Through these behaviours, the Count indeed stands a justifiable excuse for the xenophobic dread displayed toward unwelcome strangers.

Another aspect of the Count that is of great importance to uncover is his connection to darkness. Both literally and metaphorically, the Count is shrouded in darkness. In addition to the night shadows in which he first presents himself to the reader, he inhabits a bleak climate and resides in a black, oppressive castle. He commands nocturnal creatures such as wolves and bats. He hunts by exploiting natural phenomena - fog and mist - that narrow one's field of vision, and most importantly, he cannot endure sunlight. All of this reveals the Count's inherent bond with darkness.

On the other hand, the Count uses the ignorance of those around him like a shadow or a veil of darkness, drawing strength from it. He leaves the questions of Harker - whom he has invited to his castle - unanswered, brushing them off with lies. Some rooms filled with secrets are kept locked, and the ones he leaves open are deceptively decorated to create false impressions. He forms misleading telepathic connections with the women he targets, such as Lucy and Mina, guiding them toward misguided actions through his hypnotic abilities.

In summary, the Count possesses a nature that drives people into ignorance and forces them to remain within the boundaries of unknowing. This grants him the upper hand in his relationship with human communities he regards as prey. In other words, Dracula's power feeds on the ignorance of people. Supporting this argument, the Count's death is made possible by a doctor (!), Doctor Van Helsing. Abraham Van Helsing is a medical expert and a professor of metaphysics - a man who has devoted his life to science and knowledge. He is the one who reveals the Count's weaknesses, how he can be killed, and his true purpose to the group pursuing the monster. With a title that evokes education and knowing, Van Helsing enters the story as the antidote to the Count who thrives on ignorance, and in the allegorical depths of the narrative lies the triumph of knowledge over ignorance.

In the Holy Qur'an, shadow is presented as a universal allegory. "To God prostrate all who are in the heavens and the earth, willingly and unwillingly, as do their shadows in the morning and the evening" (Rad 13:15, Edip & Layth, 2013). The fact that the sun - described in another surah by Allah the Almighty as "among Our signs" - is invoked as the sovereign sustainer for the existence of the shadows by creating a cause-and-effect dynamic in this relationship. In other words, the sun and projected shadow form a visual allegory for the divine supremacy and submission to this power. As clearly expressed in the sacred passage mentioned above, the shadow is said to be in a state of prostration. This signifies the submission of human beings - who possess free will - to the divine power through their shadows. That all created beings possess shadows underscores the inclusiveness of this divine sovereignty. A shadow, therefore, becomes a direct reference to God's omnipotent and omnipresent dominion.

Nevertheless, Dracula has no shadow; in other words, Dracula casts no shadow because it does not exist. Mr. Harker, who witnesses this, attempts - unsuccessfully and with great astonishment - to comprehend how Dracula reflects no shadow even in the light of a candle flame. When considered within the universal symbolism of the shadow mentioned above, Dracula's lack of a shadow under light by annulling the mechanism of physics, evokes a state of complete deprivation from divine intimacy and total banishment.

The Count's lack of a shadow, in this foretold religious yet universal context, is a skilfully constructed reference to his diabolic nature - a nature bereft of submission to divine grace. Once the literary language is deciphered, it becomes evident that the Count has irreversibly annihilated his own sublimity through a base and ignoble essence, and the absent shadow underscores this truth in bold, unmistakable terms.

Supporting the argument above, Dracula—despite all his supernatural power—shows a clear vulnerability not only to the sun but also to the religious symbols. Sanctity and faith weaken his strength and limit his dominion. Temples, holy books, consecrated objects, religious rituals, and acts of worship serve as the primary instruments that restrain the monster within the Count. By his unique nature, he is able to reside in foreign lands only through the soil of his homeland. To ensure this, he transports boxes filled with earth of his castle to England and uses these crates to defile and claim the areas he desires. Just like holy water to baptise, the Count uses the damned soil to desecrate what is clean.

Yet even the cursed power of this earth is neutralized by Van Helsing using a powder made from holy bread. The notion of the diabolic earth that the Count carries evokes, on one level, an inherent vice resembling a xenophobic prejudice toward the foreign; yet it simultaneously reinforces this perception through the theme of heathenism. Thus, the battle between vampire and human, between the lines, morphs into a duel between religion

and the diabolic. In this sense, Dracula acts as a litmus test for human faith, for what he represents in essence is a form of diabolism that draws its strength from godlessness.

The xenophobic, infidel-enemy argument is sustained in proportion to how it is supported by the other details of the story. Dracula - an unrecognizable, unknown threat living in far-off lands - is portrayed through a distinctly England-centred perspective. The Count's castle lies beyond the Carpathians, in a region where Russian, Hungarian, and Turkish communities meet, where Catholicism borders Orthodoxy and Islam, and where bloody wars have long taken place. This distant and nefarious setting becomes desecrated by the visit of an Englishman - Mr. Harker. In other words, Pandora's box is opened, and the enemy that emerges follows Pandora's own hands all the way to the heart of the Empire.

The irony, of course, is that Pandora - who opened Zeus's cursed box - ended up giving the artifact her own name through this mistake. Here, Stoker engages in a subtle form of self-critique. The gates of the Empire are opened to the bloodthirsty being from forsaken lands through the agency of purchased Englishmen, and this wave of evil ends only with a bloody war that advances all the way back to the homeland of Dracula himself. Evil brought in by money is repelled by the sword. While criticizing human greed, the author also emphasizes the inevitability of war as its indirect consequence. Because Dracula cannot be persuaded, simply banished, or converted to the side of good. As we learn from Van Helsing, the method required to deal with the monster (!) is to cut off his head and drive a stake through his heart.

The idea that material appetite gives rise to imperial problems that render war inevitable is woven with subtlety. The author's foresight - veiled in a literary language - took on real form in the first two quarters of the following century: the greed of the Empire resulted in British soldiers engaging in bloody wars against unknown peoples in various parts of the world. An example of this can be found in Alan Moorehead's Gallipoli (2007), where he recounts soldiers who believed they were fighting a horde of monsters and, fighting under the English flag, thought they were making the world a better place by ridding it of such creatures - only to realize, all too late, that they were fighting ordinary people defending their homeland. In this regard, the following statement by Arnold J. Toynbee - the author of The Murderous Tyranny of the Turks (1917), a work used to rally soldiers to the front - is not only remarkably but also intriguingly consistent with this underlying narrative: "The Ottoman Empire literally drained its victims' blood, and its history as a Vampire-State is unparalleled in the history of the world" (p.12).

Another point that emerges from a detailed analysis of the character of Dracula is his ancientness - the fact that he is centuries older than the people he encounters. In this respect, the Count represents an evil born from the darkness of bygone ages, feeding on the historical ignorance of those he interacts with, for he is a remnant of a time so old that it lies far beyond the reach of their knowledge. He conceals this revenant self behind an exceedingly charismatic persona. The monstrous motive hidden beneath his courteous manners transforms him into a creature that preys upon beings far beneath him; yet the Count is in no hurry to display this wicked side, for he is an intelligent hunter and strategically patient. While creatures like werewolves, ghosts, or the giants often embody uncontrolled and explosive fury, in him this fury becomes a deliberate, silent, calculating perseverance. In this regard, the Count distances himself from radical behaviours such as sheer brutality and acts with a unique intelligence and slyness, ensnaring the humans he sees as prey only after weakening them through an elaborate mental game. The fear he spreads does not evoke an irresistible, reckless destruction but rather a cleverly constructed diabolical scheme. Like his monstrous kin, the evil he disseminates does not stem solely from himself; rather, it positions him as a spokesperson for a broader, more primordial current.

Reaching for the darkness of bygone times, the emergence of the Count embodies a fusion of black magic and the dark ancestry of exotic worlds. Yet his identity stretches beyond the shadows of occult art and points toward two distinct modes of creation. The first detail that adds dimension to the Count's disposition is what may be called the "Demeter Effect." The Count reaches his new target, England, from the homeland to which he had brought immense suffering, aboard a ship named *Demeter*. This naming is far more than a random decision. As is well known, Demeter is the Greek goddess of agriculture, harvest, and fertility. In this regard, she may be considered a positive figure, yet she also possesses a side that could be deemed malevolent. In the story of the abduction of Persephone, her role condemns all humanity to famine and an unending winter, effectively attempting to sacrifice the entire world for her own personal grief. In this sense, she shares the same mentality as Dracula, who likewise sees all humanity as his potential prey (Agha-Jaffar, 2002).

Another point is that from a Christian-centred perspective, Demeter represents a pagan belief system. In established Christian thought, pagan

religions are believed to be under the sway of demonic forces. In other words, pagan gods are nothing more than manifested images of the devil. From this viewpoint, the arrival in England of a ship named after Demeter, a pagan goddess, can be interpreted allegorically as a demonic intervention. The name Demeter becomes a semi-transparent mask designated for this particular evil, one that only the discerning eye can fully grasp.

The other side of this identity contains a form of self-critique directed at the radical rationalism of the Enlightenment. Anchoring in England as a representative of the revived ideals of ancient Greece, Demeter becomes a wolf in sheep's disguise by hiding a monster within its hold. Once that monster begins spilling blood on English soil, it is confronted by the very element the period's mindset had marginalized: faith. Because it lays beyond the boundaries of rationalism, faith had become something unfashionable, yet it is precisely this force that is mobilized to stop the Count. Even Van Helsing, a man of science, resorts to crosses, holy water, and sacred texts to destroy him. In this sense, the Count stands at the intersection of the occult and dark sciences, pagan belief, and the strict rationalism of the Enlightenment, all the while exhibiting an uncompromising intolerance toward religion.

In the final analysis, Dracula emerges not merely as a gothic antagonist but as a multilayered symbol that gathers within himself the anxieties, contradictions, and ideological undercurrents of the human condition. He is simultaneously the revenant of ancient darkness, the aristocrat who wields his feudal brutality as a birthright, the imperial predator who seeks new territories to devour, and the occult embodiment of godlessness whose very lack of a shadow signifies spiritual exile. His existence thrives on ignorance, fear, and the erosion of reason, yet his downfall is orchestrated through the alliance of knowledge, faith, and moral conviction. The Demeter Effect reveals him as both a pagan spectre rising from the ruins of antiquity and a critique of Enlightenment rationalism that blinds itself to metaphysical dangers. In this sense, Dracula functions as a mirror - reflecting humanity's vulnerability to seductive power, its capacity for moral blindness, and its perennial struggle between light and darkness, knowledge and ignorance, faith and nihilism. Listening to the monster thus becomes a means of confronting the hidden abysses within ourselves, for the true terror he represents is not merely the undead figure wandering through Stoker's pages, but the latent monstrosities that human beings, when stripped of conscience and restraint, may harbour within their own shadows.

## And the Abyss Stares Back

## Life after Death

Starting from the anatomy of a monster to reach the fears of contemporary human beings may seem as tenuous a connection as expecting to find a count with a bowler hat, a cloak, and glowing red eyes wandering the streets today. Yet although Stoker's 1897 novel Dracula shuts its monster away in the distant history of the 19th century by the end of the story, the shadow of that creature still falls upon modern humanity. A count with bloodthirsty fangs roaming among us certainly does not exist, but the fears he represents continue to influence everyday life, assuming new bodies, new shapes, and new names. As elaborated in the previous chapter, these fears will now be examined under the title Into the Abyss, and through specific references the study will attempt to identify the new identities that Count Dracula has adopted within contemporary life.

Sigmund Freud (1909) speaks of the tendency of repressed human traumas, fears, and desires within the subconscious to take on bodies and form, manifesting themselves outwardly. These projections establish a unique symbolic link with the fear they represent. For instance, a rat can express anxieties about cleanliness or material concerns, while a horse can symbolize the fear of punishment at the hands of authority. This connection functions symbolically, much like the veiled allegories in literature. For example, the skull in Hamlet, ontologically speaking, may be defined as a mere anatomical object; yet when interpreted within symbolic -allegorical parameters, it signifies either an imminent mortal danger or the transience of life. Considering the outcome of the play, it becomes clear that the skull serves as a harbinger, reaching far beyond the limits of a simple object.

When approached from this framework, Dracula's resurrected state - his rising at night from the coffin in which he spends his days, his wandering the world as a walking corpse - recalls, through an allegorical-symbolic nexus, humanity's repressed and overlooked thoughts about life after death and the afterlife. Apart from a few miraculous exceptions, humankind, shaped by materialist and atheistic modes of thinking, has long regarded death as an irreversible threshold and imagined what lies beyond this definitive point as either absolute annihilation or complete non-return (Dawkins, 2006). Yet the Count and those under his influence leave death behind as though it were a mere station and return to life, walking among the living in a disposition that can be described as 'undead'. In this respect, the Count and his followers may be seen as epitomized examples of post-mortem existence.

This condition produces in the observer a sense of the *uncanny*: the figure before one's eyes possesses the body of a living human yet is, in truth, a corpse. The familiar appears in a profoundly unfamiliar aspect. Those who witness the phenomenon describe Lucy Westenra - who, despite having died recently, rises from her grave and hunts at night - as follows:

We were starting forward, but the Professor's warning hand, seen by us as he stood behind a yew-tree, kept us back; and then as we looked the white figure moved forwards again. It was now near enough for us to see clearly, and the moonlight still held. My own heart grew cold as ice, and I could hear the gasp of Arthur, as we recognised the features of Lucy Westenra.

She still advanced, however, and with a languorous, voluptuous grace, said:

"Come to me, Arthur. Leave these others and come to me. My arms are hungry for you. Come, and we can rest together. Come, my husband, come!" (Stoker, 1897, p.196)

Although Lucy approaches people in the guise of a compassionate wife, the fact that she is ultimately a risen, reanimated corpse allows her to inspire fear even before revealing her diabolic face. This fear, as mentioned above, is nothing other than the repressed yet ever-returning notion of the existence of an afterlife—one that refuses to be forgotten. Stoker repeatedly places this idea before the eyes of his readers through the figures of the dead who emerge from their graves.

## Silent Racism

Lastly, I could show fight on natural selection having done and doing more for the progress of civilization than you seem inclined to admit. Remember what risk the nations of Europe ran, not so many centuries ago of being overwhelmed by the Turks, and how ridiculous such an idea now is! The more civilized so-called Caucasian races have beaten the Turkish hollow in the struggle for existence. Looking to the world at no very distant date, what an endless number of the lower races will have been eliminated by the higher civilized races throughout the world. (Darwin, 1887, p.316)

We Szekelys have a right to be proud, for in our veins flows the blood of many races who fought as the lion fights, for lordship... What devil or what witch was ever so great as Attila, whose blood is

in these veins?... When was redeemed that great shame of my nation, the shame of Cassova, when the flags of the Wallach and the Magyar went down beneath the Crescent? Who was it but one of my own race who as Voivode crossed the Danube and beat the Turk on his own ground? This was a Dracula indeed! (Stoker, 1897, p.27)

When examined with a critical eye, free from perceptional bias, it becomes evident that Darwin's statement - quoted above - transform what should be an academic pursuit into a politicized act of war-mongering; these very ideas echo within the mind of Stoker's bloodthirsty monster, Dracula. As detailed in the previous section, the Count nurtures the belief that he possesses an aristocratic superiority and seeks to justify this through an ethnicity-based distinction. The blood flowing through his veins elevates him to the position of the hunter; furthermore, in contrast to the Turks - whom he once fought and implicitly labels as an inferior race - it grants him an additional layer of exalted privilege, marking him with the indelible emblem of noble distinction. In short, the Count exploits the ethnic and aristocratic grandeur of a self-imposed value system, not only placing himself in a superior position but also condemning others to the unwelcome and inferior tiers of this dichotomy, thereby rendering them victims.

In today's world, aside from a few radical organizations, it may seem that openly practiced racist policies no longer operate visibly; yet the existence of a silently persisting, ethnicity-based worldview is an undeniable reality. To use a fitting metaphor, the racism that blazed like a bonfire during the Second World War has lost its intensity, but its embers continue to glow within the intellectual landscape of Europe. This is a new and quiet form of racism. It not only permeates thought but also functions as a perceptual filter regarding difference, condemning certain groups to ethnic and sociological marginalization and sustaining this process through a mentality that demonizes the Other (Fekete, Cole, 2005; Fekete, 2018; MacMaster, 2001). As reported in a piece by The Guardian concerning the Russia-Ukraine war, the remarks made by Europeans while speaking of the innocent civilians who suffered damage are considered to be manifestations of the very mindset in question.

It's very emotional for me because I see European people with blue eyes and blond hair ... being killed every day...We're not talking here about Syrians fleeing the bombing of the Syrian regime backed by Putin. We're talking about Europeans leaving in cars that look like ours to save their lives. (Bayoumi, 2022)

For the aforementioned reasons, the aristocratic and violence-prone racist discourse embodied by Dracula has, in today's world, transformed into a silent and covert form of racism. Unlike its notorious counterpart, this kind of ethnic segregation proceeds inconspicuously and develops an indirect system of intervention into life and everyday experience. Those who fall under Dracula's sway and embrace the credo that 'blood is life' transform into beings who regard their former companions as mere prey. This shift reflects a rupture rooted in creation itself, one that ultimately drives them toward an expansionist, dominating mentality. Once a graceful and delicate lady, Lucy Westenra, under Dracula's sway, turns into 'the Bloofer Lady,' becoming a different kind of human who sustains herself by consuming the lives of children - that is, by feeding on human life. The existence of exploitative and self-serving systems of thought that underlie the policy of belittling and devaluing human beings - the core essence of racism - is evident. Although the idea Dracula represents with sheer intensity has now taken on a covert, more veiled form, it continues to live on today.

## **Neo-Imperialist Facets**

In the section above, it was noted that Count Dracula seeks to gain power and dominance by using money as a weapon, and in this respect evokes an imperial form of fear. By bringing with him desecrated and accursed soil from his homeland and defiling the lands of England with it, he acts under the notion of becoming a sovereign force. A crude form of Imperialism he manifests is defined by those who study the field as a practice through which a dominant entity establishes control over other societies by economic, political, military, or cultural means, directing them, managing their resources, and reorganizing them in line with its own interests. This process involves elements of hegemony, ideological expansion, and geopolitical influence. (Hobson, 2005; Luxemburg, 2024; Said, 1994)

The notion that communities mobilized by flashy uniforms, fervent and devoted oaths, and romantic ideals had been buried within the twentieth century and vanished from history was, until recently, sustained as an optimistic assumption. Yet today, the wars continuing across the world although not always driven by a hardcore imperialist agenda - are widely believed to have been initiated by an imperialist mindset and, at the very least, to employ the violent methods historically favoured by imperialism. In some cases, the pursuit of capital that underlies these conflicts, as well as the desire to expand existing capital, is openly articulated by official state institutions and their spokespersons (Antadze, 2025; Pascual Marquina, 2025). Upon the emergence of death lists numbering in the thousands, the transformation of worldly interests into the sole motive reflects the idea that a system once operated by empires now persists through sheer greed for profit.

The imperial expansion symbolized by Dracula manifests itself in contemporary humanity in two distinct forms. The wars launched under the plainly stated pretext of seeking natural resources demonstrate that the imperialist threat continues today, nourished by a capitalist vein. Wars erupting along the axes of north and south, east and west -erupting first as armed conflicts in peripheral regions known as the Third World and eventually managing to reach the doorsteps of Europe - have, to borrow an allusion from the story, brought Dracula's ship Demeter to the harbours of Europe.

The other face of the imperialism in question aligns with its neo-capitalist characterization. It denotes an economic order in which international capital has expanded, multinational corporations have become dominant actors, production dynamics are driven not by necessity but by a culture of consumption, and where weapons and brute force have been replaced by advertising and finance. In this respect, neo-capitalism may be defined as a subsequent stage of capitalism - an evolutionary phase in which the capital released into the market creates the very habitat it requires in order to remain alive. In other words, the piston-like mechanism necessary for the functioning of the market - first ignited by the capitalist engine - has been sustained through the neo-capitalist order. This culture, built upon rampant consumerism, has transformed into a self-feeding closed circuit where demand continually triggers further demand so that supply may keep pace.

It has been stated earlier that Dracula is a creature driven by the pursuit of blood, and those who fall under his influence likewise become beings who thirst for it. Yet when Dracula intends to turn someone into a vampire – in a highly suggestive manner - he does not drain their blood; rather, he makes them drink his own. In doing so, he transforms them into a fragment of himself, elevating them from the status of a mere source of blood to that of a predator who will require blood in turn. This transformation resonates with the uncontrolled consumerist frenzy of neo-capitalism: capitalist economic systems, which ruthlessly exhaust natural resources, simultaneously produce miniature versions of themselves - feral consumers whose voracious habits perpetuate a system that 'produces by consuming consumption' itself.

#### The Known Unknown

The paradoxical and distinctly obvious oxymoron in the title constitutes

a literary counterpart to the cloak of unknowability that Dracula dons. Its significance extends far beyond a mere wordplay, a fact that becomes evident when one examines Dracula's manner of living and hunting. Although he occupies a human body, Dracula is by no means an ordinary man. This human façade is but a pleasant and deceptive mask concealing his cruel nature - a wolf in sheep's disguise, to borrow the familiar adage. The victims in the narrative are deceived by his old age, his noble title, and his exceedingly pronounced civility, refinement, and cultured demeanour. Yet all these traits are manufactured, duplicitous character constructs designed to conceal the Count's true nature.

In essence, the Count is a profoundly formidable and diabolic monster. Conventional means of combat prove ineffectual against him. Those who pursue him are, after all, attempting to kill someone who is already dead. They are fully aware that they are surrounded by a ring of unknowability. What is known is simply the existence of an as-yet-unknown force. These men, tracking shadows in the dark, falter because they face a creature whose strength is drawn precisely from its inscrutability - at least until they receive the guidance of Dr. Van Helsing. Lucy's transformation before their eyes, Mina's gradual deterioration, and Renfield's uncontrollable madness serve as visible signs of this very enigma. In sum, while the Count terrifies the people of his time through his bloodthirsty monstrosity, he also, through his aura of unknowability, keeps his monstrous nature unreachable and preserves his superiority. The system of ignorance he constructs resembles a game of blind man's buff-except in the Count's version, he blinds everyone else while keeping his own eyes wide open. He exploits this ignorance with utmost manipulativeness, driving those around him into delusion and reducing them to the roles of victim, prey, and foolishly ignorant beings. It is quite allusive that he reassures Mr. Harker - whom he keeps well-fed and locked away like a sacrificial lamb - by pointing to the wolves outside his castle, giving the illusion of safety. For the real monsters are within the castle walls, under his command, and indeed, he himself.

The symbolic fear of unknowability that the Count wears like his famed cloak emerges today as an invisible threshold that prevents individuals from stepping out of the comfort and security they desire. Scholars in the field define fear of the unknown as a universal form of anxiety experienced when one faces a complete or partial lack of information about the future or about life itself. Fed by uncertainty and obscurity, this anxiety renders foresight impossible and creates mental vacuums that paralyze the individual. The individual's sense of security weakens, and feelings of unease intensify (Carleton, 2016; Grupe & Nitschke, 2013).

This fear of the unknown - one of the most common psychological afflictions of modern life - has the potential even to trigger depression, and it negatively impacts educational, familial, social, and intimate relationships. Although it may not blind a person's eye-sight, it binds their thoughts and expectations, preventing the maintenance of a healthy cognitive framework. The rapidly changing conditions of daily life, shaped by unpredictable variables, can nullify expectations without a warning. A simple market fluctuation may drive the so-called millionaire into overnight bankruptcy, while sudden outbreaks of armed conflict may result in thousands of deaths within hours. Modernity, increasingly inclined toward chaos-driven frameworks, seems eager to impose a grand narrative of unpredictability across all aspects of life. Even AI-generated videos cast a shadow upon media reliability, causing individuals to lose their grip on reality and sink deeper into the mire of uncertainty. In this respect, the manipulative unknowability that the Count maintained in a primitive form has evolved, from the shrouded face of a monster hidden in darkness, into a social and psychological phenomenon that continues to consume contemporary individuals. The Count has long vanished; yet his absent shadow lingers, cast upon the modern world as a vast, ominous question mark.

## Metamorphosis

As mentioned earlier, Count Dracula is far more than a mere creature devoted solely to destruction; for reasons known only to himself, he initiates a wave of transformation by turning the humans into vampires. It is certain that he possesses a nature that is both evolutionary and revolutionary destroying as much as he transforms. For instance, while Quincey Morris suffers the monster's destructive disposition, Lucy undergoes the diabolic defilement of a transformative process. For this reason, when the Count's transformative aspect is considered alongside his destructive power, a social metamorphosis marked by corruption and decay becomes unmistakably evident.

The transformation triggered by the Count unfolds as a biological process. Those he bites - and to whom he makes his victims drink his own blood experience not only identity-based alterations but also profound biological changes. The victims' blood is drained, their skin grows pale, their eyes and speech mutate, and their thoughts and behaviour become hysterical. Spiritual decay accompanies physical deterioration. The transformation of Lucy Westenra - a graceful lady - into a frail, ravenous living corpse displays both the psychological and physiological dimensions of this collapse. Once she completes her vampiric rebirth, she becomes mendaciously powerful

and violent using her dark charm as a sensual trap. This identity appears to be a total negation of her previous innocent one. Though both women carry the same body and name, Vampiric Lucy embraces a seductive, wicked and corrupt disposition. Noteworthy here is the fact that transformed individuals ascend from the status of victim to that of hunter, becoming agents in the spread of the evil the Count disseminates. This change, marked by sudden fits of rage and aggression, resembles the rabies cases of earlier centuries diseases that induced both mental and physical breakdown.

Today, humanity is no longer terrified by a monstrous transformation transmitted through a bite; it possesses a more grounded sense of reality and the capacity to manage rabies outbreaks. Yet even medical progress has not succeeded in preventing the spread of pandemic viruses, which have produced consequences as widespread and destructive as anything Dracula could inflict. According to a study by the World Health Organization, as of 2023, the COVID pandemic claimed more than seven million lives (COVID-19, the 2019–20 coronavirus pandemic, n.d.). Bird flu, swine flu, tick-borne haemorrhagic fevers, and the well-known COVID pandemic have all triggered societal transformation processes in which careless patients could infect healthy individuals. These diseases, transmitted from person to person, have turned individuals into potential threats to one another. Accompanied by fear and alienation, pandemic-era social isolation has negatively affected psychological well-being. From this perspective, Dracula's infamous transformative bites have found their modern equivalent in the infected individual's breath and sneeze.

Another misconduct-based modern phenomenon shaped by a similar logic of 'the transformed becoming the transformer' is social media. The desire for popularity, the negative influence of unqualified influencers, the waste of time and the drift toward addiction all reveal how especially young individuals are lost day by day (Bennett 2015; Otway 2018). What begins as casual use gradually transforms - under uncontrolled engagement - into addiction. Dracula's thirst for blood evokes the irresistible craving many feel toward digital devices such as phones and computers. Excessive time spent on social media and the habits formed within it can lead to physical health problems. From skeletal disorders to obesity and diabetes, health issues fuelled by physical inactivity can, in turn, give rise to psychological difficulties. Violent content, shallow and narcissistic thinking styles, homogenizing provocative rhetoric, harmful encouragements, and morally corrosive displays all leave unwelcome psycho-social effects on individuals.

Considering these biological and psychological negative transformations,

social media addiction - though it does not drain one's blood - consumes something equally valuable: time, attention, and personal capacity. It stands as one of Count Dracula's twenty-first century manifestations. As discussed earlier, just as the Count elevates his victims into hunters and thus expands the scale of the corruption he creates, a parallel dynamic can be observed in social media use. Users influenced by the content they consume gradually turn into content producers themselves, fuelling the very frenzy that ensnared them. The rapidly spreading and largely purposeless 'challenge culture' serves as an example. The 'Ice Bucket Challenge,' originally initiated to raise awareness for ALS, ultimately transformed into a mere entertainmentdriven contest among youth; the campaign's original purpose was lost as its media-driven appeal dominated. Today, such trends turn social media into a virtual landfill, drawing in more and more users and expanding its sphere of influence. For these reasons, addiction-inducing social media use has become a modern source of anxiety - one with the potential to transform into the Count Dracula of our age.

## Representation of Darkness - Atheism - A New Identity

When the identity of Dracula is considered as a whole, it becomes clear that he serves as the representative of dark forces, by epitomizing darkness itself. This representation is not mere spokespersonship but manifests as a consciously pursued and devoted mission. The Count's demeanour, actions, and the ancestral history he strives to carry into the future are filled with examples of this representational purpose. These examples appear in the form of bloody and violent events, and in the eyes of virtuous people, Dracula embodies evil in its most literal form. In Stoker's fiction, Dracula appears as a blood-drinker, a killer, an instigator of murder, manipulative, secretive, and hegemonic. Even the rare courtesy he displays becomes a deceptive lure and a trap. The evil darkness he channels permeates the entirety of the narrative, and he ties his dominion to the power and spread of this darkness. In short, the Count is both the embodiment and the representative of evil.

At the root of this evil lies unmistakably, a pagan and atheistic orientation. The Count does not lead a life grounded in religious belief; on the contrary, he moves within a Nietzschean Übermensch framework toward pure power and domination. Yet this orientation surprisingly reveals a profound vulnerability toward religious symbols. The Count displays fear and weakness in the face of crosses, holy books, holy water, and consecrated bread. He travels to England - where he intends to extend his imperial dominion of evil - aboard a ship named Demeter. As previously discussed, Demeter is a figure inherited from pagan belief systems, at once nurturing

and diabolically ambivalent. In light of this information, it is plausible to argue that Dracula, shaped by pagan connotations, at times represents a covert form of atheistic and heretic, dominative evil.

Today, this fear is widely associated with the rapid rise of non-religiosity and alternative spiritual movements (Smith, 1979). Studies show a significant global increase in non-religious or unaffiliated belief systems (Hackett et al., 2025). From the perspective of religious communities, these movements appear immoral, dangerous, and devoid of values (Harris, 2005). The concerns regarding the moral and social decay that atheistic thought may provoke expressed by scholars who advocate faith in face of disbelief further reinforce this argument (Hart, 2010; Holland, 2019).

The religious communities' assumption of atheistic groups as immoral, dangerous, and valueless aligns significantly with Stoker's depiction of Count Dracula. The Count possesses no moral compass outside his own interests. His value system is pragmatic, self-serving, and abusive, lacking any sense of just ethics. He enforces and maintains his worldview through violent methodology. The central dynamic in his constructed logic is a malevolent essence devoid of religious grounding. Stoker reinforces this argument repeatedly. One of the clearest examples is Professor Van Helsing's confrontation with the Count: Van Helsing sets aside his medical identity and becomes a metaphysical specialist, wielding faith as a weapon. To protect those under Dracula's influence, he draws a circle of sacred Christian objects around them. This circle creates a metaphorical boundary, one into which the Count's influence cannot enter. When decoded, Stoker's allegorical language depicts the Count as a creature empowered by irreligion and religious opposition. His vulnerability and eventual destruction occur through faith. Thus, one may argue that the Count represents an antireligious or irreligious worldview. In this respect, the cross image stands a substantial ground. When a peasant encounters Jonathan Harker at the beginning of the story and gives him a crucifix for protection, this gesture ventures beyond merely symbolic; it is the loading of Chekhov's gun. The crucifix becomes a narrative signpost in the form of a rally point, gathering the forces opposing the monster under the shared domain of faith. Today, the worldview symbolized by the Count - irreligion or anti-religion remains widespread, and from the standpoint of the story's Christiancantered worldview, while such alternative belief systems rise, commitment to Christianity continues to decline (Statista, 2025).

As explained in earlier chapters, Dracula not only embodies the force that triggers transformation but also represents it. He brings with him a wave

of change, turning those under his influence into vampiric beings. Darkness and the colour black - universal archetypes of evil - serve as the main dynamic keeping this malevolence alive. Thus, he constitutes an inherent threat, and both he and the vampiric identity he represents are identities erected in the name of evil.

In contemporary forms of art such as literature, cinema, and video games, a new form of vampire figure has emerged - one that diverges from tradition. These characters, though originating from monstrous roots, increasingly transform into empathetic anti-heroes. Shaped by emotionality, humour, aesthetics, nobility, and aristocratic elitism, they evolve from feared other into admired and desired icons. Edward Cullen of the Twilight series, for instance, is not a monster to the ordinary human Bella Swan but a compassionate lover, a dark prince. Throughout the story, Bella willingly transforms into a vampire to sustain an otherwise impossible love. The Cullen family is not portrayed with Addams-like grotesque strangeness but with a dignified and appealing elitism, presenting readers with a 'sweet devil' test (Meyer, 2008). The question remains: can a charming yet uncanny identity alter a reader's perception of evil? Meanwhile, a deconstructive narrative framework rewarding failure becomes increasingly noticeable. When Bella Swan becomes a vampire, she is 'punished' with immortality, family life, superhuman abilities, and eternal love (!), while Stoker's Lucy Westenra pays with a stake through her heart and decapitation.

In light of the foregoing discussion, Dracula's identity can be understood as the representation of evil and darkness. This representation does not pursue the annihilation of goodness but aims to contaminate and transform it. In contemporary narratives, however, the vampire identity - framed by nobility, romantic mystery, superhuman traits, and dark allure - has shifted from an avoided identity to an admired and desired one. Stoker notes that Dracula cannot enter a house unless invited: "He may not enter anywhere at the first; unless there be some one of the household who bid him to come; though afterwards he can come as he please." (Stoker, p. 223). Within the allegorical depth of the narrative, for Dracula - the embodiment of evil to penetrate a household, he must be welcomed. Unless he is invited, he remains outside and powerless. In other words, the evil outside poses no threat unless one opens his heart for it and enmeshes with it. Yet, in modern culture, this rule has reversed: people no longer flee from the vampire; rather, they seek him out and embrace him. This perceptual shift is striking, for the transformation of the monster into an anti-hero signals a profound deviation in the cultural understanding of good and evil.

#### Conclusion

In examining Stoker's Dracula through the intertwined lenses of religious symbolism, atheistic reinterpretation, the evolution of the vampire archetype, and the shifting cultural landscape of modern popular fiction, a larger pattern becomes visible: every age recreates its monsters according to its own fears, desires, and uncertainties. Stoker's Count stands as the embodiment of darkness, otherness, and metaphysical threat - a figure whose power derives not merely from physical predation but from his direct opposition to the sacred order. His inability to enter without being invited, his recoil from the crucifix, and his parasitic dependence on the living reflect a worldview in which evil exists as a real, objective force, and faith holds protective power. The vampire here is not a misunderstood outsider but the manifestation of spiritual corruption.

Yet as the modern world gradually secularized, the vampire narrative transformed. The sympathetic anti-hero, the beautiful monster, represents a cultural shift away from metaphysical fear toward psychological and emotional complexity. The vampire is no longer a curse imposed by dark powers but a conflicted individual negotiating morality, desire, and identity. This shift mirrors the broader cultural fascination with morally ambiguous characters suggesting a collective movement toward exploring interior darkness rather than externalizing it. The monster becomes a mirror rather than a threat.

At the same time, rising rates of unbelief, the crisis of traditional authority, and the fragmentation of moral frameworks have all contributed to a renewed interest in narratives that problematize certainty. Dracula's terror is rooted in the unknown; modern readers, confronted with their own forms of uncertainty - social, existential, technological - turn to stories that reflect this instability. The old religious binaries give way to emotional dilemmas, ethical ambiguities, and characters trapped between humanity and monstrosity. In this sense, the evolution of the vampire is also the evolution of cultural self-understanding.

Taken together, these transformations reveal a continuous tension between the sacred and the secular, the known and the unknown, the monstrous and the human. By comparing Stoker's original depiction with contemporary reinterpretations, it becomes clear that the vampire myth is not static but responsive - a literary vessel through which society negotiates its fears, desires, and shifting beliefs. Whether as a demonic invader or a tragic romantic figure, the vampire remains a potent symbol for examining the boundaries of identity, morality, and belief.

Ultimately, the persistence of the vampire across eras demonstrates that even as worldviews change, certain questions endure: What is evil? What is forbidden desire? What remains sacred in an increasingly secular world? And perhaps most importantly, why do we continue to be drawn to creatures that reflect the darkness we struggle to name? The answer lies not in the monsters themselves, but in the societies that create them.

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