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Gothic Margins: Queer IR and the Politics

of Sexual Transgression

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Abstract

Traditional IR has been constructed through a behavioralist approach to research. Theoretical depth and historical analysis were replaced in favor of empirical observations. However, poststructuralist scholarly work would argue on the importance of cultural products, such as literary fiction, to global political discourse. Contributing to this debate the paper will explore socio-political attitudes towards homosexuality not as inherent truths but as cultural and political narratives. Drawing on the theories of Eve Sedgwick, Adrienne Rich, and Michel Foucault the research will parallel the societal attitudes targeting homosexuality with the Victorian Gothic monster. Introduced at a time when developments in medicine, education, and religion regulated sexual desires, the Gothic monster came to represent all that was 'wrong' with transgressive sexualities. Thus, homoerotic desires became a staple in the Gothic genre, both explored and marginalized they would mirror a society's fears and prejudices. Amidst this the vampire, as depicted in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) and Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1972), became the living and breathing embodiment of the queer 'Other' and its threat to the heteronormative order of things. By linking the vampire to queer identities, this paper will connect the historical prejudices, that would paint homoerotic desires as monstrous and perverse, with contemporary political issues. Specifically, by examining the metaphor of the queer monster, this paper will speak on the political prejudices of queer moral corruption, contagion, and sterility.

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Introduction

"The worlds of literature and politics today are in some ways dramatically different – the one critical, devoted to spirit and sensibility… the other constructive and devoted largely to the practical affairs … And yet the two worlds are not entirely dissimilar; they intersect at points." (Woodcock, 1979). Since the mid-20th century and the behavioralist turn in international politics research, the focus shifted from normative theories and historical analysis to empirical observation. The new 'scientific' IR prioritized hypothesis testing, drawing clear dichotomies between science and ideology that notified scholars "to their own preferences, assumptions, and biases, and of how these polluted the scientific process (Hamati-Ataya, 2018). Theoretical depth and intuition were replaced in favor of quantitative methods and pattern identification. Even though, the field has evolved, with feminist and gender studies offering a poststructuralist insight into the ways culture and identity shape international politics, the legacy of behavioralism endures in contemporary IR. However, as scholar Lee Trepanier argues in his paper *What Can Political Science Learn from Literature?* Fiction remains essential to the discipline because it accomplishes what detached behavioralist methods could never. It depicts "the particularity, concreteness, and detail of a world but also … the innermost thoughts, feelings, and irrationality of characters (2020: 9). Utilizing the ideas of political theorist Allan Bloom, Trepanier would speak on political philosophy's unique positionality to investigate and educate through literature. By crediting political philosophy's work in navigating the inner world of "the

whole man in relation to the order of the whole" (1960), theorists could reproduce an author's original teachings providing a truth that was universal and transhistorical.

Similarly, anthropologist Gayle Rubin would argue that "sex is always political" (1993, cited in Spargo, 2000). She would go on to argue that "The realm of sexuality has its own internal politics, inequities, and modes of oppression … [that] are products of human activity … There also historical periods in which sexuality is more sharply contested and more overly politicized." (1993, cited in Spargo, 2000). Whether the reader chooses to focus on the contemporary liberal discourse on sexuality and gender, or further in the past, in the Victorian Era, the themes of politicization and vilification are consistent. Against the backdrop of 19th-century England, society emphasized propriety and decency as a response to the moral panics and fears about sexual immorality, criminality, and technological advances. In turn, the Christian dogma and the emergence of the burgeoning field of psychiatric medicine demonized transgressive sexualities like homosexuality, labeling them as "an injury, dysfunction or a symptom located in the depths of the organism." (Foucault, 1999). Fast forward to today's political landscape, where issues of sex, bodily autonomy, and gender are at the forefront, anti-queer rhetoric echoes historical prejudices, with homoerotic desires portrayed as monstrous and perverse. Therefore, to understand the long shadows cast upon queer identity, one must familiarize themselves with the Queer monster.

To do so, this paper follows a post-structuralist approach to linguistic practices and how they (re)construct sociopolitical anxieties and power structures. By following the teachings of poststructuralism, which argue that "subjects are not autonomous creators of themselves or their social worlds. Rather, subjects embedded in a complex network of social relations … [which] in turn determine which subjects can appear where, and in what capacity" (Namaste, 1994), this paper will examine anti-queer

political rhetoric on otherness, decease, and bareness. This examination will parallel the figure of the Victorian Gothic monster, in the hopes that Queer IR will revisit literature as a powerful tool that shapes normative narratives on sexual desires. Gothic literature has long been preoccupied with themes of the monstrous, and the transgressive, creating a safe space where societal fears and taboos can be projected and scrutinized. In a similar fashion, Queer theory, with its origin in LGBT studies, works as an avenue through which to deconstruct established concepts and norms, while interrogating binary distinctions and socioeconomic hierarchies in the context of International Relations (Thiel, 2017). By linking the Gothic with the Queer, this thesis aims to contribute to both fields, serving as a site to negotiate issues of identity, power, and otherness and how these mirror deeper sociopolitical concerns. As such, this paper shouldn't be read as a critique of the deterministic nature of IR, but instead as an analysis of the intersection between literature and politics through the representation of the perverse in both the Gothic monster and the homosexual.

Literature Review

       The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union sent a shock wave through the discipline of International Relations and the study of "realpolitik", with scholars and practitioners left stunned by the relinquishment of power and sovereignty (Zalewski, 2013). This event served as a catalyst that prompted the reevaluation and questioning of the prevalent IR limits and ushered in a "destabilizing decade" (Sylvester, 2001) where discussions on gender, sexuality, and human rights, in general, were front and center (Prata Filho, 2019).

       The emergence of Queer theory can be traced back to the mid-late 1990s when scholars like Cynthia Weber tried to ask questions about how queerness was capitalized and disciplined by States and international players (Weber, 1998). At its core, the theory tries to destabilize fixed notions of identity and deconstruct the binary dichotomy of male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, and Self/Other, while also showcasing "the political struggles, for recognition, rights, and the basic survival of "queer" people" (Wilcox, 2014). Moreover, Queer Theory would "challenge heteronormative assumptions in IR theory arguing that certain actors in global politics can be read as queer … [challenging] the dichotomization of masculine and feminine, straight and gay." (Wilcox, 2014). In greater detail, although the State, as a central actor in IR, had been conceived through traditional heteronormative and masculine frameworks, Queer theory would suggest that the field of IR itself can be described as "queer", with power operating through discourses of normalcy and deviance. As Cynthia Weber would argue, "sovereignties produce identities that are claimed to authorize national and

international orders ... [as a result] the will to knowledge about sexualities is a specifically *sovereign* will that makes possible and presupposes specifically sexualized *sovereign* subjectivities." (2016: 3). It's this power that Queer Theory is trying to destabilize, aiming to "expose the limitations, unstable foundations and power-laden assumptions of the 'straight' political, psychological, cultural and economic discourses that govern us." (Griffin, 2011, cited in Smith and Lee, 2015). A similar undertone can be found in the words of Amy Lind who argues that LGBTQI rights intersect with various political struggles such as sovereignty, westernization, modernity, (de)colonization, and globalization. As such how can we claim sex and sexualities don't matter in IR, when the 'homosexual" has become integrated into domestic politics, with the attitude of states towards 'normality' and 'perversion' formulating their national and foreign policies (Weber, 2014).

'Politicized homophobia' referring to the targeting of individuals who refuse to conform to dominant cis and heteronormative structures, isn't something new (Gifkins and Cooper-Cunningham, 2023). According to scholars Rita Schäfer and Eva Range, "Homophobia is deliberately fomented by political actors as soon as they get into a legitimacy crisis" (2014), with the homosexual becoming a 'shield' against criticisms of power abuse and excessive corruption (2014). Similarly in the words of Michael Foucault "persecution of the peripheral sexualities entailed an *incorporation of perversions* and a new *specification of individuals* ... The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species." (1980: 42-43). Homosexuality as a term can be traced back to the 18th century when it was used to refer to sexual practices of sodomy between men and the emergence of a perverse population deemed as an "abomination" of normal sexuality (Weber, 2016). Even though this paper would argue differently, 'Victorian' has always been perceived to be

a period of sexual repression (Mort, 2016) where fields from biology to medicine and psychology analyzed the discourse around sex and what is perceived to be "normal, healthy and moral" (Weber, 2016). As such, homosexuality became a deviant, a medical dysfunction in the depths of an organism that needed to be studied through constant management and surveillance (Crespo et al, 2016). Through this discourse, the 'homosexual' came to be perceived as 'the Other', a creation devoid of their innate humanity (Cooper-Cunningham, 2023). This depiction as immoral and deviant was broadcasted through various domains, from medical discourses and more prominently to literary representations, which were in the process of a Gothic renaissance. Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), regarded as the first Gothic novel, established the norms that would later describe the canon of Gothic Fiction. In her book *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, Eve Kosofsky Sedwick speaks on the so-called 'laundry list', the Gothic stock conventions of "the priesthood and the monastic institutions … the poisonous effects of guilt and shame, nocturnal landscapes and dreams; apparitions from the past; Faust- and Wandering Jew-like figures; civil insurrections and fires; the charnel house and the madhouse." (1980, 9-10). Consequently, whether the reader decides to focus on catholic monasteries, medieval castles, or ancestral curses the 'Gothic' became a breeding ground for themes of transgressive sexuality and the 'Other' (Westengard, 2002). Specifically, Gothic fiction allowed unsanctioned genders and sexualities, it provided a 'safe location' to explore taboo sexual desires that Victorian Britain tried persistently to silence. (Haefele-Thomas, 2012). Eric Garber and Lyn Paleo would also reflect on the genres of the supernatural arguing that they "always contained depictions of homosexuality, both male and female … portraits of androgynes, transexual, gender switching people, and alien sexuality that is clearly not heterosexual." (1990). As such, to quote George

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Haggerty "social-sexual relations are the most basic common denominator of Gothic writing" (2006), with monsters, mad scientists, and ghosts embodying the 'otherness' and pushing the limits of acceptable behaviors.

One shiny example of the taboo sexual fantasies that plagued the 18th-19th Century is *Carmilla* by Sheridan Le Fanu. In this cult classic, the myth of the vampire is represented through the female body for the first time. Carmilla described as a "beautiful, mysterious, entrancing companion" (Le Fanu, 2020) sneaks into women's bedrooms and feeds from their breasts, going against all that was expected of a young woman, seemingly refusing to comply with the moral codes of reproductive related sexual practices in Victorian Era (Milhomem Moscoso Maia, 2013). By being a woman and a vampire, she is an even bigger threat to the heterosexual patriarchal family model, so her destruction is the only way to restore normative sexuality (Uygur, 2013). The literary work of Le Fanu was used as a stepping stone for Bram Stoker's epistolary novel Dracula, which has been described as inherently queer. Specifically, in Stoker's novel the homosexual is portrayed as monstrous, a deviant that pushes the limits between femininity and masculinity and needs to be exterminated through the ritual of staking and beheading (Eltis, 2002: 451).

Consequently, Gothic is far more complex than it might seem initially, while its's intersection with queer theory can shed light on queer anxieties and harmful social narratives. On the one hand, it provides the gay reader with "inscriptions of [their] condition, for texts that will confirm a social and private identity … Reading becomes a hunt for histories that deliberately foreknow or unwittingly trace a desire." (Koestenbaum, cited in Eltis, 2002). On the other hand, the reader must endure portrayals of monstrosity and death, since "[The] hidden queerness represented by the uncanny, the ghostly or the monstrous often serves as a cautionary tale by making

queerness the source of evil, violence and fear." (Westengard, 2022). This paper would argue that 'queer monsters' in Gothic literature aren't a relic of the past, instead their grotesque or threatening figures are still shaping political narratives. As such, queer international relations should not rest assured on the triumph of LGBTQ+ rights penetrating the realm of global politics, but instead, focus on the patterns of stigmatization and pathologization experienced by queer communities (Janoff, 2022).

## Poststructuralist Methodology

The purpose of this paper is twofold. On the one hand, this paper will aim to convince that the echoes of the Gothic grotesque aren't a relic of the past, still shaping cultural and political narratives. Utilizing a poststructuralist Queer IR lens, this paper will seek to explore how political issues are shaped through established dichotomies of normal and perverse (Charrett, 2018), dichotomies that negotiate the normativity of heterosexual desires, and the punishable desires of the homosexual. On the other hand, this paper will hopefully play a significant role in contributing to the existing discourse on whether art, in general and specifically literature can provide useful insights to the field of International Relations.

Poststructuralism, particularly the works of Michel Foucault, Eve Sedwick, and Adrienne Rich, provides the critical lens to this study and the "constructedness [of identities] as shifting subjects in terms of power inequalities such as gender and sexuality, color, creed, age, disability." (Mccormick, 2005). Given that a poststructuralist approach "only exists in relation to something other than itself" (Foucault, 1997), it represents a useful critique that raises questions "about the theory of theory - in order to understand how particular ways of knowing, what counts as knowing, and who can know, have been established over time" (Campbell and Bleiker, 2016). Similarly, the teachings of Queer IR have long evaluated ideas on how the construction of identity, sexuality, and power dynamics came to be. Works, like those of great queer theorists like Judith Butler who seem to find themselves wondering when did the term 'queer' that "had been used as a paralyzing slur, as the mundane

interpellation of pathologized sexuality" (1997, p. 223) became a future affirmation. Hence Chapter One will set out, through the respective works of Sedwick, Rich, and Foucault, to demonstrate that normative ideas around homosexuality are socially constructed rather than inherent truths. Following this nuanced understanding of the social construction of homosexuality, Chapter 2 will introduce the reader to Gothic Literature and its embrace of transgressive sexualities. Gothic literary criticisms allow us to tap into the genre's fascination with the monstrous, and the uncanny as embodiments of queerness and otherness. As Michael O' Rourke and David Collings suggest, it is not just a case of the Gothic being inherently queer, but queer theory always being Gothic (2005). Therefore, considering the historical and cultural contexts in which these texts were produced, coupled with the thematic elements and characterizations of queer desires in Gothic, the second chapter aims to discuss how Gothic proves both a symbolic terrain for the navigation of homoerotic desires but also a venue where ideas of extermination and marginalization were born.

Building on this theoretical baseline, the subsequent chapters will take a deeper dive into the links between the gothic vampire/homosexual and its broader implication in political prejudices that relate homosexuality to otherness, disease, and sterility. The 'vampire' came to embody identifications of queer that seem to "attack the dominant notions of the natural" (Case, 1991), the quintessential queer monster who as Ellen Case puts it "revels in the discourse of the loathsome, the outcast, the idiomatically proscribed position of same-sex desire" (1991, p. 3). Notably, Chapter 3 will analyze Bram Stoker's *Dracula* to uncover its homoerotic elements, while simultaneously drawing the connections between the text and contemporary socio-political anxieties that highlight the persistent marginalization of queer identities. This will associate the

monstrous 'Other' with populist[1] regimes and the central "juxtaposition of 'morally superior us' versus 'morally corrupt them'" (Mudde, 2007, cited in Reid, 2021). Additionally, Chapter 3 will touch upon the parallel between Stoker's vampire and AIDS, an outbreak centered around normative constructions of 'Others' and contagion. Last but not least, Chapter 4 will examine contemporary issues around adoption and fertility policies for queer people in the US through the metaphor of the lesbian vampire. In particular, Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* will uncover the vampire/homosexual as a mirror to the themes of sterility and bareness that still perpetuate anxieties around queer reproduction and family structures.

By employing this approach, this paper hopes to deconstruct normative ideas around homosexuality not as concrete concepts but as efforts to "stabilize something that is essentially unstable and chaotic" (Derrida, 1998, cited in Aker, 2022).

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[1] This paper will define populism as presented in the works of scholars like José Osuna (2022) and Benjamin Moffitt (2016), specifically, as a form of moralistic, regressive politics that utilizes the distinction between 'in-groups' and 'out-groups' to reinforce the idea of self-morality and the 'otherness' of minorities.

# Chapter 1 "Foundations of Queer Theory: Understanding the Monstrous"

## 1.1 Unpacking Queer: From Marginalization to Empowerment

Queer theory emerged as an interdisciplinary field of studies combining the fields of lesbian, gay, and gender studies, as a way of examining concepts outside the cisgender and heterosexual "norms" (Indiana University Bloomington, 2024). Revolutionary Queer theorists like Eve Kosofsky Sedwick and Adrienne Rich, whose theories are going to be touched upon in this chapter, challenged the notions of sexual identities as natural or fixed and instead argued that these concepts are constructs of societal pressures and political forces that define and regulate what is permissible and impermissible.

The history of the word 'queer' is a long one, with its uses never being singular but instead everchanging and fluid. Its first established definition corresponds with the one found in the *Oxford English Dictionary* since the 19th century which reads "strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric. Also: of questionable character; suspicious, dubious" (*OED,* 2007). The first recorded use of the term to describe a person's identity came in 1894, in a letter from the Marquis of Queensberry during Oscar Wilde's notorious trial (Clarke, 2021). In his letter the Marquis expressed his revulsion over the relationship between Oscar and his son, Lord Alfred Douglas, referring to homosexual men as "snob queers" (Clarke, 2021). By the end of the century, it was established as a derogatory term to refer to people who were considered to deviate from what was perceived as socially acceptable, especially when it came to sexual behavior and gender-normative

expectations. It wasn't until the end of the 20th century and the fight for civil rights in the backdrop of the AIDS crisis that the term was reclaimed as part of efforts to dismantle the negative association with non-heteronormative identities. Specifically, the adoption of the term 'queer' as a positive self-identifier can be credited to *Queer Nation*, an organization founded in New York City in 1990 by AIDS activists as an answer to the increasing anti-gay discrimination (Perlman, 2019) — their mission, to eliminate violence against homosexuals and increase LGBTQ visibility (Queer Nation NY). Queer activists fought to turn the word on its head, transform it from a term of oppression and exclusion into one of liberation. *Newsweek* in 1991 would write "By co-opting the word 'queer', QN claims, they have disarmed the homophobes". This change of narrative worked to challenge the very same structures of power and prejudice that the original slur embodied.

The reappropriation of 'queer' had profound impacts on academic discourse, sifting courses and utilizing the term as a way of describing positions that go against the normative or dominant modes of thought, positions neither of strength nor weakness, or clear definition. (Whittington, 2012). Scholars like Eve Sedwick seem to agree when they write that queer is "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances, and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality, aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically." (1993: 8). Consequently, in this chapter, I hope to utilize queer theory as a tool to showcase that the abnormality of homosexual desires was born from society's pressures to regulate what is acceptable (normative) and unacceptable (deviant).

## 1.2 The Fear Within: Eve Sedgwick's Homosexual Panic

Eve Kosofsky Sedwick, a prominent figure in Queer Studies, introduced the concept of 'homosexual panic' to articulate, exactly those anxieties and fears provoked by the presence of homosexuality, which in turn work as a powerful tool "for the manipulation of every form of power that was refracted through the gender system" (1985: 87). Firstly, introduced in her book *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* the author borrows the term from a "rather obscure psychiatric classification" (Epistemology, 1990: 20) to describe a feeling of paranoia that seemed to underline all structures of Western patriarchal societies of the 19th century since homosexual desires potentially tainted any and all male-male relationship. At the center of her analysis lie the concepts of homosociality, as a definition of the social bonds between people of the same sex that are non-sexual but are often imbued with a certain level of intimacy, and homosexuality, referring to an impermissible same-sex sexual desire. As she notably mentions in the fifth chapter, the choice of 'desire' rather than 'love' was a conscious one, since where 'love' is an emotion, 'desire' is regarded as a social structure, "a social force, the glue, even when its manifestation is hostility or hatred or something less emotively charged, that shapes an important relationship." (Sedwick, 1985: 2). Moving on, Sedgwick argues that although homosociality and homosexuality are similar terms their sole distinction lies in the involvement of women. In the first case, men-men relationships are centered around the desire of women as a form of 'male bonding' (Hammarén and Johansoon, 2014), whereas in the case of homosexuality, women are not included.

Within the space of those extreme sides resides the threshold of permissible and impermissible, the normative and the perverse. As such, the sexual repression of the 19th century doubled with the shifting definitions of acceptable sexual desires

created within a lot of men a 'homosexual panic' that made them confront "an exaggerated fear of monstrous homosexuality dwelling within themselves." (Imko, 2013). That fear of their desires being deemed perverse was articulated by Sedgwick through the concept of 'homophobia', which affects all men alike and works as both a symptom and defense mechanism. Through Sedgwick's statement "not only must homosexual men be unable to ascertain whether they are to be the objects of 'random' homophobic violence, but no man must be able to ascertain that he is not (that his bonds are not) homosexual." (1985: 88), this feeling of paranoia becomes evident. As a logical consequence, the anxiety of male bonding slipping into homoeroticism adds to the 'homophobic blackmail', since men in an attempt to prove their heterosexuality and protect themselves from the unpredictable and unstable shows of power, develop misogynist languages promoting the fear and hatred of the homosexual (Hammarén and Johansson, 2014). Thus, normative hetero-sexuality is reinforced, whereas the homo-sexual remains in the periphery, condemned for behaviors and desires that are unacceptable within the borders of Western societies. This stigmatization is crucial for maintaining the social order, one that ensures that heterosexuality and patriarchy remain the uncontested norms. A conclusion that Sedgwick herself comes to when she writes "most patriarchies structurally include homophobia, therefore patriarchy structurally *requires* homophobia." (1985: 5). Throughout her book Sedgwick brings homophobia to the forefront, making it a central element of Western society, the ever-present obsession with the permissible forms of male bonding. Homophobia thus becomes a tool to police male behavior, by setting rigid boundaries on what is acceptable by heteronormative standards men demonize same-sex desires, in order to mitigate their own homosexual panic. "The shape of the entire male homosocial spectrum" (Sedgwick, 1986: 90) – which one can reinterpret as all aspects of public life from

education to politics are seen to be under the regulation of homophobic paranoia (Bagocious, 2022). Consequently, Sedgwick's concept of 'homosexual panic' perfectly exemplifies the precarious balance between men's bonds which are essential for the maintenance of patriarchal power structures, and the ones fraught with the potential of eroticism. These sexualities which "function as a signifier for power relations" (Sedgwick, 1985: 7) are either "built into male-dominated kinship systems" (Sedgwick, 1985: 3) reinforcing patriarchal norms, or help establish the societal norms that characterize homosexuality as perverse and monstrous, a desire that needs to be constantly denied and suppressed to preserve the illusion of heteronormativity.

## 1.3 The Invisible Foe: Adrienne Rich on Compulsory Heterosexuality

On a similar note, the work of poet and essayist Adrienne Rich provides a critical framework for understanding how enforcing heterosexuality as the normative contributes towards the stigmatization of same-sex desires and the perception of them as deviant and monstrous. In greater detail, by drawing focus on Rich's 'compulsory heterosexuality' as presented in her seminar essay *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence* this paper argues that "[through] the bias of compulsory heterosexuality… lesbian experience is perceived on a scale ranging from deviant to abhorrent or simply rendered invisible" (1980: 13). The foundation of her argument is structured around Kathleen Gough's essay *The Origin of the Family* in which she lists the ways that male control is weaponized, used as a tool to restrain and regulate women's creativity and professional success (Chaisson, 2021):

> Men's ability to deny women sexuality or to force it upon them; to command or exploit their labor to control their produce; to control or rob them from of their children; to confine physically and prevent their movement; to use them as objects in male

transactions; to cramp their creativeness; or to withhold from them large areas of the society's knowledge and cultural attainment's. (Gough, 1902, cited in Rich, 1980)

Although Gough describes these various acts of oppression in the context of inequality, Rich sees them as a consequence of enforcing heterosexuality on women, with lesbians bearing the brunt of it. For her, it's almost obvious that it's the societal forces and male-dominated cultural narratives that divert women from creating meaningful relationships, whether emotional or erotic, around their own gender. Rich argues that compulsory heterosexuality has established itself as a powerful institution affecting "the idea of 'preference' or 'innate' orientation" (1980: 13) and as a result has created the false image that marriage and sexual desire directed towards only men is inevitable, even in its oppressive an unfulfilling nature. It's argued that heterosexuality binds women to the role of wife and mother, to that social sphere where gender binarism and male superiority are normative and compulsory (Seidman, 2009). For the author, the assumption that "most women are innately heterosexual" (Rich, 1980: 26) is directly linked to the erasure and marginalization of the lesbian experience. Lesbian relationships are rendered invisible or dismissed "as exotic and perverse', with art, film, and literature idolizing the heterosexual couple. At the same time while society tries to forget and "forcibly and subliminally" (Rich, 1980: 30) impose heterosexuality, women everywhere resist, persevering over "physical torture, imprisonment, psychosurgery, social ostracism and extreme poverty." (Rich, 1980: 30). Thus, applying Rich's theory to illustrate that notions of homosexuality as monstrous is a socially constructed phenomenon isn't an outlandish concept. Rich herself seemingly comes to the same conclusion when she writes:

If we think of heterosexuality as *the* natural emotional and sensual inclination of women, lives as these [referring to the examples of women who refuse to conform to

societal expectations] are seen as deviant, as pathological, or as emotionally and sensually deprived. (Rich, 1980: 30)

For Rich, the concept of heterosexuality seems to surpass the simplistic notions of natural and individual desire. Instead, she reexamines it in the form of a social order structured around the gender binary or sex and male dominance (Purple September Staff, 1975, cited in Seidman, 2009). Even though heterosexualism in Rich's essay seems to be seen more as a tool for the maintenance of female subordination, it's not an outreach to also see it as defining the 'otherness' of homosexuality. By reinforcing its own legitimacy, it threatens the social and existential survival of anyone seen deviating from the established heteronormativity (Miriam, 2007).

The same conclusion seems to be drawn over the function of pornography and its influence in painting a sadistic and degrading image of women. The depiction of heterosexual sexual intercourse in pornography has always been devoid of emotion, with women being objectified through the male gaze for the male gaze. As she writes "Soft-core pornography and advertising depict women as objects of sexual appetite devoid of emotional context…[a] commodity to be consumed by males." (Rich, 1980: 20). Linking it back to compulsory homosexuality, violence, masochistic humiliation, and physical abuse are overlooked in favor of the heterosexual pairing and deemed 'normal'. Whereas same-sex desires, in this case, lesbian sensuality is seen as 'sick' or not as pleasurable and exciting as whips and bondage. As such, similarly to Eve Sedwick mentioned above, Adrienne Rich seems to reach the same conclusion, one that sees heterosexuality as more than the pairing of man and woman. Instead, heteronormativity functions as a sentinel of conformity, imposing the power relations

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which would see the heterosexual man on top and the homosexual cast out in the periphery, the monster inside the 'dark closet'.


## 1.4 Confessing Desires: Foucault and the Politics of Sex

French historian and philosopher Paul-Michael Foucault acknowledged the same hypothesis mentioned above, which saw sexuality carefully confined through the Western power structures. The turn of the century, one that saw the birth of the Victorian way of life, ushered "a single locus of sexuality in social space as well as at the heart of every household. The rest had only to remain vague … [tainted by] abnormality." (Foucault, 1978: 3). In his four-volume study *The History of Sexuality,* and especially in *Volume 1* which this chapter will focus on*,* Foucault challenged the commonly held belief that sexuality had been repressed by society. Instead, it was its proliferation due to the developments in fields like medicine, education, and religion, that established the rules and restrictions for sexual subjects (Bernal Crespo, et al, 2016).

Specifically, according to Foucault up until the end of the eighteenth century, the light shined predominantly on matrimonial relations; the sex of husband and wife was regulated and picked apart. Sexuality was confined within the bounds of marriage and the household, governed by canonical law, the Christian pastoral and civil law. These three major explicit goals "determined, each in its own way, the division between licit and illicit" (Foucault, 1978: 37). The marital obligation was nature, a law that saw the strange pleasures outside of those confines condemned as sins. However, despite their stigma, these 'unnatural pleasures' were not viewed as inherently different from other unlawful behaviors, but rather more extreme examples of going 'against the law'.

The turn of the century, however, brought along with it a significant shift in how sexual practices were understood and regulated. The nineteenth century moved away from the heterosexual couple, instead "the sensuality of those who did not like the opposite sex" (Foucault, 1978, p 38) came to the forefront. The mad men and women were made to speak up. They were made to confess and be condemned. Homosexuality was no longer understood as a type of acting but instead became a distinct identity or species:

> The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle, written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away. (Foucault, 1979, p 43)

This transformation traces back to the rise of scientific discourses, particularly in the fields of medicine and psychiatry (Bernal Crespo et al, 2016). The idea of 'discourse' is a critical concept in Foucault's theory, referring to the ways knowledge and truth are constructed and have tangible effects in creating "practices that systemically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972, cited in Adams, 2017). In other words, discourses, especially those over sexuality aren't neutral or purely descriptive but are seen actively shaping the social apparatus, imbued with power (Adams, 2017). The power the French philosopher is referring to is one that "is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere." (Foucault, 2978: 93). His interpretation of power is decentralized manifesting in society's every nook and corner, created by many tiny things (Ly, 2012). In turn, it's this power, that operates at all levels of society, dictating what knowledge is permissible and produced (Raine,

2023). Through the same power sex "[is placed] in a binary system: licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden" (Foucault, 1978: 88).

Bringing it back to the medicalization of homosexuality, the proliferation of discourses over sexual irregularities worked as "a blanket guarantee under cover of which moral obstacles, economic or political options, and traditional fears could be recast in scientificsounding vocabulary." (Foucault, 1978: 55). As such, society did not try to suppress talks of sex, instead, it created a mechanism centered around knowledge to produce new discourses concerning it. According to Foucault, these mechanisms, centered around the relation of power-knowledge, were applied at an early age. The sexualities of children and adolescents were constantly regulated by educators, physicians, and parents "[by] speaking to them about it, causing children to talk about it … as the basis of constructing a science that is beyond their grasp." (Foucault, 1978: 30). Since this alien strain became a part of an individual's whole personality, "embedded in bodies" (Foucault, 197: 44), it was up to these disciplines to categorize and study sexual behaviors. The peculiarities of sexual pleasure needed to be categorized and dissected. As a result, one's sexual instincts were under constant supervision, they became "a lesion, a dysfunction, or a symptom – in the depths of an organism, or on the surface of the skin" (Foucault, 1978: 44). Homosexuality became something to be identified, diagnosed, treated, and punished. Thus, his analysis reveals that power operates not just through repression but through the production of knowledge and discourse, which in turn shape what is permissible or impermissible, natural or monstrous.

Conclusively, this chapter presented the works of Eve Sedgwick in *Between Men*, Adrienne Rich's *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*, and Michael Foucault's *The History of Sexuality,* as critical lenses to explore how

normative ideas of homosexuality as perverse and monstrous aren't inherent truths, instead they are socially constructed narratives. Sedwick spoke about the homosocial desire, where the need to regulate men's relationships created rigid boundaries on what permissible male bonding looks like. Rich's powerful argument against compulsory heterosexuality highlights the coercive social structures that enforce heterosexuality and would see other forms of sexual desires cast into obscurity. Last but not least, Foucault chooses to shine the spotlight on the ways power dynamics and social discourse shape the norms around what is natural and unnatural. Scholars like Ki Namaste and Diana Fuss would utilize Foucault's approach to discourse to argue a poststructuralist relationship between heterosexuality and homosexuality. On the one hand, the discursive formation of homosexuality gave it the chance "to speak on its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or naturality be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified." (Foucault, 1980, cited in Namaste, 1994). On the other hand, Fuss would argue, that the classification of the homosexual also brought in the notion of the closet. To be a lesbian, gay or bisexual that isn't 'out' paradoxically "marks the moment of the homosexual's disappearance" (1991: 4). The birth of these limits, the ones that would assert one's self 'inside' or 'outside' suggests a dynamic relationship between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Therefore, this paper is interested "how these [limits] are created, regulated and contested." (Namaste, 1994: 24). By synthesizing these theoretical perspectives and addressing the constructed nature of sexual norms, which aim to maintain traditional hegemonies, this paper looks to draw lines between queer theory and the genre of gothic literature. Gothic literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was developed as a way through which one could explore everyday anxieties

about sexuality and identity. Anxieties and prejudices are still present in contemporary culture and politics.

Chapter 2: Monstrous Desires and Inevitable Fates: Gothic Literature's Embrace and Erasure of Homosexual Desires

## 2.1 Understanding the history of Gothic.

"Gothic fiction is hardly 'Gothic' at all." (Hogle, 2002: 1). Through this Jerrold E. Hogle seems to want to indicate that the genre which brings to mind "an antiquated or seemingly antiquated space – be a castle … an aging city or urban underworld." (2002: 2) is a post-medieval and quite recent phenomenon. The Gothic with its intertwined webs of horror, romance, and the sublime traces its roots back to the 18$^{th}$ century, with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764, with many seeing this dark foreboding story as the first gothic novel (Kennedy, 2020).

However, even though the term has established itself as a way of describing decaying mansions, windswept moors, and ancestral secrets it predates the literary genre, originating from the East Germanic tribes known as the 'Goths'. Often portrayed as brutish and uncivilized 'barbarians' they brought the fall of the Roman Empire and signaled the beginning of the Middle Ages in Europe (Pruitt, 2016). It wasn't until centuries later that the literary genre formally began, during the Romantic period in Britain (Kennedy, 2020). Walpole's fascination with Gothic architecture may have worked as an incentive for his work (Loiseau, 2012), which has come to be considered a blend of medievalism and romance completed with supernatural elements and a sense of terror that would become hallmarks for the genre. The novel, first published anonymously as the translation of an ancient Italian manuscript, captivated readers and led Walpole to publish it a second time, under his real name this time (Loiseau, 2012).

It's Walpole's newly found success that inspired a wave of gothic novels that explored themes and motifs that would later become staples for the genre. In greater detail, the Gothic plot is characterized by its emphasis on a melancholic atmosphere, typically set in spaces imbued with a sense of decay, haunted by supernatural elements that seem to create a bridge between the real and the unreal (Laredd, 2019). It's within those crippling arches and bleak landscapes that readers come across a battle between tradition and modernity, with gothic literature serving as a mirror to the anxieties and fears brought by technological and scientific advances:

> Since its birth in the mid-eighteenth century, Gothic literature has always been paradoxically yet inextricably entwined with modernity and the Enlightenment. Its emergence coincides with the development or acceleration of dramatic cultural, social, economic, and political changes, and it has continued to evolve in parallel with modernity's inexorable expansion. (Wiseman, 2019)

The late 18th Century was marked by significant social and economic shifts that saw the fall of the aristocracy and the rise of the middle class through trade and industrialization (Smith, 2013).  It's exactly those anxieties about the legitimacy of the past and the turn to the future, that first took form in *The Castle of Otranto,* which signaled the birth of a genre that questioned the nature of reality itself. Or in the words of Jerrold E. Hogle "Gothic fictions since Walpole have most often been about … [the] terrors of a past once controlled by overweening aristocrats and priests … and forces of change that would reject such a past." (2002: 3). At the end of the century it was Ann Radcliffe, considered a pioneer of the gothic, that defined the genre. Through her works, *A Sicilian Romance (1790)* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794)* 'Mother Radcliffe' (Keats, 1819, cited in Holge, 2002) contributed to the creation of a subgenre that put women's struggles and triumphs to the forefront. The 'Female Gothic' first introduced by Ellen

Moers in 1976 was used to describe women's writing, with Radcliffe being the first (Wallace, 2012). Ellen Moers argues that what sets Radcliffe apart is her "traveling heroine" (1976), one "who moves, who acts, who copes with vicissitude and adventure." (1976) that male/masculine characters have long experienced in gothic stories.

The turn of the century, signaled by the reign of Queen Victoria, was a period of transformation, reflecting the technological advancements and breakthroughs in fields like medicine and psychiatry. The invention of the steam trains and the electric telegraph revolutionized transportation, industry, and the economy, which in turn led to rapid urbanization that changed the social landscape of England (Clark, 2019). Amid this 'metamorphosis' it was works like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein (1818)* and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray (1890)* that translated the fears of a shifting society into paper and inc. Shelley's Gothic terror tale "takes up a cross-section of philosophical questions, including the origins of evil, nature versus nurture, good and bad authority, the abuse of the natural words, and the misuse of science/technology." (Davison, 2010: 179). On a similar note, Wilde's work can be seen as a critique of the Victorian's obsession with aestheticism and morality (Clark, 2019). Patrick Duggan argues that "Wilde, through Lord Henry, laments the stifling nature of his contemporary Victorian society and how the supposed morality it boasts necessitates self-denial and rejection of life's most beautiful aspects." (2008: 63). Simultaneously, the 19th century was a time of rigid social expectations and sexual anxieties. As George Haggerty points out in his book *Queer Gothic (2006)* "the cult of gothic fiction reached its apex at the very moment when gender and sexuality where beginning to be codified for modern culture… Gothic fiction offered a testing ground for many unauthorized genders and sexualities.". Once again it was gothic fiction that put societal anxieties to paper. Bram

Stoker's *Dracula (1897)* can be interpreted as a lament on sexual anxieties of the time. The vampire along with the monstrous and the abnormal served as metaphors for the repressed desires and fears of the 'Victorian Others'. In his novel "the Other is categorized, identified as monstrous, and then exterminated, in the ritual staking and beheading." (Eltis, 2002: 451).

In essence, the Gothic genre's rise in the 19th century was intertwined with the period's technological and social changes. Consequently, it became a safe haven where fears and anxieties could be explored without the societal stigma. Similarly, in the words of Carol Margaret Davison:

> [Gothic] reveals to us our greatest dreads and desires, joys and fears and, most deliciously and/or horrifyingly at a remove, our most sublime terrors. Indeed, it has always traded in cultural contradictions: at the core of a dream, the Gothic discloses a nightmare; at the heart of rational modernity, irrational darkness; at the root of romantic intimacy, terror, at the heart of Enlightened liberty, slavery. (History of Gothic, 2010: 225)

## 2.2 The Gothic Closet; setting the monster free.

"Gothic was the first novelistic form in England to have close, relatively visible links to male homosexuality, at a time when … its visibility and distinctness, were markers of division and tension between classes as much as between genders." (Sedwick, 1985: 91). As already mentioned the Victorian Era was a harbinger of monumental change. The Industrial Revolution and the rise of the middle class, the eclipse of England's aristocracy, coupled with advancements in medicine and psychiatry, created an overpowering need to hold on to the familiar through rigid codes of morality, emphasizing propriety, chastity, and purity. Tracing it back to the proliferation of sexual desires, as described in the work of the French historian

Foucault, 19th-century England confronted issues of homosexuality largely framed by a conservative moral perspective, marking it as socially unacceptable and punishable (Walker, 2023). Most famously *The Labouchere Amendment (1895)* saw same-sex relationships criminalized (Fize, 2019). Specifically, *Section 11* titled *Outrages on decency* reads:

> Any male person who in public or private commits or is a party to the commission of or procedures or attempts to procure the commission by any male person of any act of gross indecency with another male person shall be guilty of a misdemeanour and being convicted thereof shall be liable to be imprisoned for any term not exceeding two years with or without hard labour. (The Criminal Law Amendment, 1986, cited in Fize, 2019)

Gothic literature brought much-needed relief through stories of fiction where "all normative, heteronormative, if you will – configurations of human interaction [were] insistently challenged and in some cases significantly undermined." (Haggerty, 2006: 3).

Specifically, as George E. Haggerty argues in his book *Queer Gothic (2006*) "A range of writers, dispersed historically and culturally, use 'gothic' to evoke a queer world that attempts to transgress the binaries of sexual decorum." (2006: 2). In other words, at a time where gender identity and sexuality were beginning to be "codified for modern culture" (2006: 2) Gothic worked as a haven and testing ground for perverse and monstrous sexual desires going against normative ideologies. The genre's engagement with the supernatural offered a rich symbolic terrain where the deepest and darkest aspects of the human psyche could be explored, a terrain where sexual transgression and hidden desires mirrored the monsters stalking darkened corridors or visiting sleeping maidens. A character's monstrosity, vampirism, and ghostliness mark them as 'Others, a threat to the social order, meant to impose fear and simultaneously

eroticize and captivate (Westengard, 2022: 261). Haggerty argues as much when he mentions that "terror is always sexual terror, and fear and flight, and incarceration and escape are almost colored by the exoticism of transgressive sexual aggression" (2006; 2). This sexual terror seems to grow limps, pointy teeth, and corporeal form in gothic fiction, inviting madness and the grotesque as a way of establishing a breeding ground for contemporary anxieties about sexuality and normalcy. In similar fashion to Queer theory, the binaries of hetero- and homo- sexual desires are blurred, in turn allowing a glimpse into "the sensuality of those who did not like the opposite sex" (Foucault, 1978, p 38).

Amid Gothic works, motifs are born that give voice to the mad men and women mentioned in Chapter 1. Even though, this paper doesn't aim to examine closely all said works, a brief mention will only enhance the argument that sees the Gothic genre as a subversive outlet for exploring monstrous sexual desires. Tracing it back to homosocial bonds as described by Eve Sedwick, in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein (1818)* the relationship between Victor Frankenstein and his creature is a complex and intimate, blurring the lines between companionship and unspoken longing and dependence. Judith Halberstam argues as such when she writes:

> The endeavor of Frankenstein to first create life on his own and then prevent his monster from mating suggests, if only by default, a homoerotic tension which underlies the incestuous bond … His creation of 'a being like myself' hints at both masturbatory and homosexual desires which the scientist attempts to sanctify with the reproduction of another being. (Halberstam, 1995, cited in Eberle-Sinatra, 2005: 188).

Similarly, one could not pay testament to Gothics' broader understanding of erotic transgression without mentioning *The Picture of Dorian Gray (1890)* by Oscar Wilde, where "homosexual desire is brazen enough … to venture past the avenues of intimation

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and [spill] out into the wider boulevards of the novel's plot" (Nunokawa, 1992: 311). Whether the reader chooses to focus on Basil Hallward's fascination with Dorian. A fascination that crosses over to the sphere of explicit homosexual desire, or Dorian's portrait as a symbol of the duality of his desires, with the picture bearing the marks of his moral and sexual depravity, the consequences of living a double life, Wilde's engagement with sexual transgression becomes evident. The picture's deformity can be interpreted as mirroring the late Victorian beliefs that saw homosexuality as sinful, a part of oneself that needs to be "confined to the privacy of the domestic walls". (Sanna, 2012: 34).

As such, this chapter aims to highlight that the feelings of paranoia and anxiety, as described in Chapter 1 were crystalized within the Gothic genre. The rich symbolic language and the animation of the 'queer monster' allowed both, the writer and reader to engage with forbidden desires. However, as this, last part of the chapter will explore, even though the 'queer monster' was set free at last from its decaying 'closet', it was only so it could meet an untimely end for the sake of the norm. A conclusion Laura Westengard herself seems to draw when she argues that "Gothic othering…fetishizes, marginalizes, and ultimately destroys difference for the shake of shoring up notions of what it means to be a normal human being." (2022: 261).

## 2.3 The Gothic Narrative; Transgressive Desire and Extermination

"Monsters and homosexuals have existed chiefly in shadowy closets, and when they do emerge from these proscribed places into the sunlit world they cause panic and fear. Their closets uphold and reinforce culturally constructed binaries of gender and sexuality that structure Western thought." (M. Benshoff, 1996: 117)

The shadowy, liminal spaces and tales of horror, that are established in the Gothic genre, allow for the articulation of desires and identities that lie outside societal norms. However, while such fictions provide the stage for such explorations, they simultaneously reinforce heteronormative paradigms by "[trying] to define and establish what it means to be 'normal' by telling tales that marginalize, exclude and destroy those who diverge from the norms." (Westengard, 2022). The motif of monstrosity and evil is inherently connected with one's queerness, thus death is the only road toward the restoration of the familiar heteronormative structure. George E. Haggerty seems to imply as such in his book *Queer Gothic (2006).* By utilizing the notion of 'dominant fiction' by Kaja Silverman, who argues that the 'state apparatus' is not real, instead, it's legitimized through ideologies and cultural narratives, which in turn make established norms inescapable:

> No writer completely escapes the force of the dominant fiction within she or he constructs imaginative fictions. In this sense, of course, gothic fiction can be read as reinscribing the status quo. Gothic resolutions repeatedly insist on order restored and (often) on reassertion of heteronormative prerogative. (Haggerty, 2006: 10).

Once again, the reader is made to confront the abnormality of homoerotic desires. In a world that would push for the hegemony of the "Malthusian heterosexual couple' (Weber, 2016), homosexual stories rarely have a conventional 'happy ending', with the stigma of binary distinctions still encompassing all things 'queer'. Therefore, the duality of the Gothic genre is not lost on this author. The Gothic's fascination with the grotesque makes a transgressive dialogue possible, one that sees traditional gender roles and sexual norms 'stripped to the bone' and defined by the ones who would be cast in obscurity. The remote villages, crumbling catacombs, and dark forests do more for the cast-out homosexual than the mainstream world could ever, they provide a refuge,

concealed from the judging eyes of society. However, one should challenge those motifs, the ones that would see the monstrous 'others' cast out in places as remote and inhospitable as the societal acceptance of their existence. In the words of Barry Keith Grant "The queer is the taboo-breaker, the monstrous, the uncanny, Like *The Phantom of the Opera* the queer dwells underground, below the operatic overtones of the dominant, frightening to look at, desiring" (1996: 119). In a similar vein, Laura Westengard in her essay *Queer Gothic Literature and Culture* argues that Gothic tropes "function as affirmation and representation, as well… to further marginalize those who stray from the norm." (2022: 261).

At this stage, one would hope that the central argument of this paper becomes clear, with the inherent connection of the homosexual and the gothic genre neatly outlined. 19th century would see the "pathologization of pleasure" (Foucault, cited in Haggerty, 2006: 13) where homosexuality would be dissected, diagnosed, and punished, which in turn would make the Victorian homosexual "[evolve] into a secret but active subculture, with its own language, styles, practices and meeting places." (Showalter, 1990). A secret double life "in a respectable daytime world often involving marriage and family… alongside a night world of homoeroticism." (Showalter, 1990). These very same anxieties would find refuge in Gothic's eerie scenery, often intertwined with characters embodying unnatural, dangerous, and morally corrupt traits. The queer monster's predatory nature would transgress bodily boundaries and "challenge the cultural system that commodifies desire and renders it lurid and pathological." (Haggerty, 2006: 10). However, as the double life of night and day, the duality of gothic should be explored. The story of the queer monster bursting free from its 'gothic closet' reaches a climax with its violent end serving as a symbolic act reinforcing heteronormative values and stigmatizing queer existence. As such, this

paper doesn't look to reject the role of the Gothic narrative in enabling themes of queer expression, instead, it aims to highlight a less visible side of the genre. One that "performs 'trauma' for queer readers … who turn to the gothic to see representations of queerness. But who must endure the underlying message that queerness is monstrous and must be destroyed for the sake of the norm." (Westengard, 2019). This duality is essential in understanding the Gothic's role in queer representations, one that celebrates and condemns.

Within these intricate works of fiction, the vampire emerges as a potent symbol for people who embody a fluidity that defies the rigid boundaries of heterosexual desires. In the next chapters, this paper will try to propose that the act of vampiric feeding and exchange of bodily fluids in Bram Stoker's *Dracula (1897)* can be read as a way of shaping the understanding of HIV/AIDS and sexuality (Hanton, 2020). Similarly, Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla (1872)* can be seen touching upon a shift in gender roles, where women manipulate women (Leary, 2024) and same-sex desires move away from the questions of reproductive sexual practices, with normative heterosexuality being life and homosexuality death.

Chapter 3: Dracula's Closet: Homosexual Panic in Stoker's Vampire

3.1 Cultural Products and their Overlooked Potential as Empirical Data

"For a lesbian and gay political project that has to combat the heteronormative tyranny of the empirical in order to claim a public existence at all, how visibility is conceptualized matters." (Hennessy, 1994-1995). Queer International Relations emerged as a subfield, within traditional IR, aiming to highlight how global relations intersect with issues of sexuality and gender. To quote Cynthia Weber, a prominent figure within the field, "Queer IR scholars [seek to] track when queer figurations emerge and how they are normalized and/or perverted" (2014: 598). However, as already mentioned, the behavioralist nature of IR, commonly anchored in empirical and positivist approaches, often rejects qualitative or interpretive forms of knowledge, in favor of measurable and rational calculations. More specifically culture in its many forms, from literature to music, is still regarded by many international relations scholars "as a distraction" (Daniel and Musgrave, 2017: 503). With this in mind, this chapter aims to deconstruct the above argument and in turn, highlight that these cultural products do not merely entertain; they inform and influence societal norms and public opinion, including those related to homosexuality and anti-queer sentiments in politics. "For example, nobody has ever fought a nuclear war, but most of us can imagine what one might be like … not from academic accounts … but from sources like the 1982 TV movie *The Day After.*" (Daniel and Musgrave, 2017: 504).

This paper in no way reads as a critique of the progress made by Queer IR, instead, it can be reimagined as a dialogue between cultural products, in this case literature, and the field of IR, in the hopes that the latter accepts fiction as a powerful weapon that shapes narratives and sets the boundaries between permissible and impermissible. In other words, as J. Jack Halberstam mentions in his book *In a Queer Time and Place Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives (2005)* "queer academics can – and some should – participate in the ongoing project of recording and interpreting queer culture and circulating a sense of its multiplicity and sophistication." (2005: 133). That being said, the remainder of this chapter will examine how the vampire presented in Bram Stoker's gothic fiction *Dracula (1897)* not only reflects the anxieties over homosexuality in the Victorian era but also in more contemporary reads, as a representation of the 'Other' in populist regimes and the AIDS outbreak.

## 3.2 Bram Stoker's Count Dracula

Abraham (Bram) Stoker, born on November 8th, 1847, in a small village on the outskirts of Dublin would go on to produce one of the most identifiable characters in world literature (Killeen, Trinity College Dublin). The gothic horror novel *Dracula (1987)* considered a part of the late nineteenth-century 'Gothic Revival' would invent the vampire in the form of Count Dracula, to mirror the pervasive anxieties of the Victorian Era (Riquelme, 2002: 11), a time when "figurations of the 'savage, the primitive, the colonized' and the 'underdeveloped' all appear … as sexualized and racialized degenerate" (Weber, 2015: 12). The novel originally titled *The Un-Dead* would take seven years to be completed (Stoker, 2018) and the extensive research on geography and Eastern Europe superstitions would produce a fiction "combining the

menace of Gothic writing with the fascination for the exotic that was strong at the end of the nineteenth century" (Riquelme, 2002: 11).

The narrative is developed in the form of an epistolary novel and unfolds through a series of journal entries, letters, and telegrams produced by the main characters (Lohnes, 2024). Even though, a summary of the plot doesn't contribute much to the arguments developed later on, it is necessary so the readers can familiarize themselves with the characters who seem to embody so much of the 'homosexual panic' mentioned already. The novel begins by introducing Jonathan Harker and Count Dracula, an erratic and peculiar individual who instills within Harker a deep-rooted terror that he may not be entirely human. Harker is seduced by three female vampires, which results in him discovering Dracula's true nature. Meanwhile, back in England, the reader is introduced to Lucy Westenra, a character reminiscent "of the traditional feminine, defenseless and frivolous Victorian lady' (Eltis, 2002: 457). Lucy's strange behavior and ill demeanor, which began after two tiny red marks appeared on her throat, signal her as the Count's next victim. Professor Abraham Van Helsing arrives soon after and takes up the role of "father/mentor/tutor" (Eltis, 2002: 458) for Lucy's suitors. However, after several failed blood transfusions, whose symbolism will be explained later on, Lucy is finally turned into a vampire. With the book reaching its crescendo, the group decides to go after the Count, as the source of all their trouble. This dramatic chase takes them across England and ultimately back to Transylvania. The final confrontation sees Dracula defeated and the world saved from his influence. Within the folds of this story, the characters are more than mere participants that drive the story forward, instead, they can be read as embodiments of the anxieties about sexuality, disease, and the permeability of boundaries that have persisted through the ages. Whether interpreted as a reflection of the 'homosexual panic' of its era, or a metaphor

for contemporary fears, *Dracula* remains a cautionary tale about the homosexual monsters that 'bite'.

## 3.3 Dracula's Legacy: Queer Fangs, Populism and Modern Epidemics

**Vampire, n.**

(ˈvæmpaɪə(r)) Also vampyre.

A preternatural being of a malignant nature (in the original and usual form of the belief, a reanimated corpse), supposed to seek nourishment, or do harm, by sucking the blood of a sleeping persons; a man or a woman abnormally endowed

with similar habits.

(OED, 2023)

The vampire has long held a place in literature. The literary vampire first appeared in the spring of 1816 when Lord Byron in the company of Mary Shelley and Percy Shelley, challenged each to write a ghost story. It was that fateful night that saw Mary Shelley write *Frankenstein,* that his physician, John Polidori, would publish his short story *The Vampyre* (Ramizez, 2022). It was this story that introduced many of the characteristics of the vampire that would later become staples – a charismatic noble, a polished visage, and a predator who ultimately preys upon the innocent. This depiction would set the stage for the vampire's dual nature as both alluring and terrifying. However, Bram Stoker's gothic villain solidified the vampire's place in the literary canon.

As such, Bram Stoker's vampire has endured as a subject of fascination and analysis for over a century, with most contemporary readings concerning themselves with questions over human sexuality and particularly themes of transgressive sexuality, and homoeroticism, that seem to mirror the author's struggles with sexual identity. Stoker's close relationships with several prominent men of his time, including actor

Henry Irving, and writers like Walt Whitman and Oscar Wilde, led to the eroticization of Stokerian biographies. Scholars like Brigitte Boudreau in her essay *Libidinal Life: Bram Stoker, Homosocial Desire and the Stokerian Biographical Project (2011)* seem determined to uncover the homoerotic themes in the author's life. These themes can be seen as a poignant backdrop in a lot of his work with Boudreau arguing that his fiction can be read as expository texts, revealing the author's unstable sex life (2012: 42). Utilizing Eve Sedgwick's 'homosocial desire' as mentioned in Chapter 1, Boudreau aims to propose "that the man behind Count Dracula has ultimately been merged with Irving, and that an understanding of one is incomplete without the other. Similarly, Nina Auerbach seems to suggest that Count Dracula mirrors Oscar Wilde's visage during his infamous trial:

> [Count Dracula] was the ill-fated figure of 'Oscar Wilde' … Dracula's solitariness, the intense opprobrium which he arouses and the state of silence he assumes in contrast to the loquaciousness of Van Helsing and his Crew of Light who fold forth volubly about their moral rectitude – all these features she observes, correspond to the circumstances of Wilde during his trial. (Auerbach, 1995, cited in Palmer, 1999: 99-100)

While Stoker's letter to Whitman seems to offer a more unambiguous look inside the author's potential homoerotic desires. "How sweet a thing it is for a strong, healthy man with a woman's eyes and a child's wishes to feel that he can speak to a man who can be if he wishes father and brother and wife to his soul." (Horbelt, 2022). Thus, the novel's heightened interest in issues of sexuality isn't a farfetched notion, instead homoeroticism 'grows' fangs and stands as a testament to the alluring power of the human psyche's darkest corners. Talia Schaffer reaches a similar conclusion in her essay *'A Wilde Desire Took Me': The Homoerotic History of Dracula (1994)* when she argues

that "Through descriptions of himself, his idol Whitman, his employer Henry Irving…

Stoker invented the discourse that became Dracula." (1994: 385).

The homoeotic undertones of the novel are the most prominent in the Count's

relationship with Jonathan Harker. From the moment Harker enters the Count's

crumbling castle he is met with a sense of intimacy and possession that surpasses the

borders of homosocial bonds. Dracula's predatory and possessive behavior seems to

breathe life into a relationship laden with the horror and revulsion of monstrous desires.

This dichotomy of revulsion and intimacy, homosexual panic, and homosexual desire

can be seen in the words of Harker when he narrates "As the Count leaned over me and

his hands touched me, I could not repress a shudder. It may have been that his breath

was rank, but a horrible feeling of nausea came over me, which, do what I would, I

could not conceal" (2002: 57). On the other hand, the more time the Count seems to

spend by the side of Harker, his sexual deviancy becomes all the more evident. Sos Eltis

in his essay *Corruption of the Blood and Degeneration of the Race: Dracula and

Policing the Boarders of Gender* expresses a similar view when he writes "Dracula's

red lips, long pointed nails, and his housekeeping skills – making Harker's bed and

preparing his meals with invisible ease – are suggestively effeminate." (2002: 456).

Thus, efforts in seduction move beyond desire and disrupt gender identity and sexual

normalcy (Clark, 2007: 170).  The tension between the men reaches its crescendo when

Harker is attacked by the vampire women and in a moment of fury the Count declares

"How dare you touch him, any of you? How dare you cast eyes on him when I had

forbidden it … this man belongs to me!" (2002: 62). For many scholars, like Belford

this scene is the most revealing from "a biographical point of view" (1996: 7). In greater

detail, for Belford, this scene reads as the embodiment of all the Victorian male fears

that would see Dracula "seduce, penetrate (with his phallic-shaped canine teeth), and

drain another male." (1996, cited in Boudreau, 2011: 53). Thus, the queer monster is cast aside, with its face mirroring society's fears and grievances. The monster, now a homosexual proves the biggest threat to the natural/heteronormative order of things.

However, this paper would argue that this is not just a sentiment of the nineteenth- century, not when almost two centuries later political homophobia is on the rise. Maybe the contemporary "queer monster' has replaced the draping cape with a colorful flag, but it still remains in the periphery, exploited for political ends. Michel Maietta, in his paper *The Geopolitics of Homophobia,* points to that arguing that "political homophobia is a deliberate strategy to scapegoat sexual minorities. Politicians and social influences fuel pre-existing prejudices to redirect the public's social grievances towards an expedient target" (2019: 2). Especially potent in populist regimes the emphasis on the 'people' vs the 'outsiders' constructs a powerful dichotomy central to their political rhetoric. Tradition, nation, and family become the ideals, inherently good and morally superior, while the 'Other' becomes the threat, deviating from the supposed moral and cultural norms. Therefore, utilizing an anti-LGBTQ+ narrative they present themselves as the defenders of the heterosexual family institution, relegating non-normative sexualities to embodiments of deviancy (Unal, 2024). The dynamics of fear and moral superiority, once again bear a striking resemblance to the themes explored in Gothic Literature. As Gothic becomes an electrified barrier between generations, classes, and sexual choices (Nichols, 1972, cited in Sedwick, 1985: 96), populism unifies the 'us' against the queer monster that needs to be contained and eradicated. The connection is further exemplified by George Mosse when he argues that:

> Nationalist ideologies which arose in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century
> Europe [similarly with Gothic fiction] were associated with attempts on the part of

national bourgeoisies to create national collectivities in their own image. This image was grounded in a specific gender division of labor, sexual orientation, and ethnicity which involved notions of respectability and appropriate sexual behavior. (1985, cited in Mole et al, 2021)

Whether the reader focuses on the Victorian, with its sharp tooth monster, or contemporary queer representation, LGBTQ+ communities are framed as the 'Other' excluded from a homogeneous and morally pure identity. It's this weaponization of political homophobia as part of a state's foreign policy, that this paper argues, sees same-sex desires stigmatized and oppressed. Tracing it back to the importance of literature, there are the ones who would dismiss Stoker's gothic fiction as insignificant in IR, however, the connections are unquestionable. Regardless of how we choose to classify it literature provides a visibility that shapes societal attitudes, influences public policies, and drives social change. To quote Cooper–Cunningham "visibility/visual artifacts are mobilized in a variety of ways, both oppressive and liberatory – visibility is a crucial part of queer politics" (2024). Thus, the nineteenth century, beneath the veneer of propriety, saw homosexuality dissected and punished, presented as perverse, with the echoes still visible.

Moreover, the homosexual context in Bram Stoker's Dracula moves beyond the relationship between the Count and Harker. More importantly, the queer vampire can be read as a direct translation of the anxieties of contamination, both in the Victorian Era, which saw homosexuality as a disease, but also in contemporary anxieties and the outbreak of HIV disease during the 90s. HIV/AIDS has been frequently linked with a plethora of metaphors of otherness and contagion, that would see those who test positive further stigmatized and ostracized (Fink, 2010: 416). Frances Coppola's 1992 movie can be seen as the first contemporary rendition to draw parallels between Stoker's monster and AIDS, through Professor Van Helsing's obsessive search for a

cure for blood diseases and Lucy's repeating blood transfusions (Reardon, 2019). In the gothic narrative, the vampire's attacks are loaded with sexual imagery – penetration, blood exchange, and the creation of an intimate, yet perverse bond. Dracula's vampiric bite threatens to contaminate the 'pure' blood and transform the body, which results in the loss of identity and humanity. In the novel, both Lucy and Mina undergo horrific transformations after being bitten, becoming something 'other' and monstrous. No longer human, they degenerate into almost something animalistic, with Lucy growling over her infant prey "as a dog growls over a bone" (Elits, 2002: 456) and developing an "aberrant sexual appetite' (Eltis, 2002; 457). Similarly, during the AIDS crisis, public discourse frequently framed the disease as a punishment for sexual transgression, particularly targeting gay men. The connection between the vampire and the queer becomes all the clearer through the work of Carlen Lavigne and her paper *Sex, Blood and the (Un) Death: The Queer Vampire and HIV* where she proclaims that:

> The post-1980 emergence of blatantly queer vampirism is not surprising; in addition to the growing strength of the gay rights movement, blood was suddenly of paramount importance to gay and lesbian communities. With the discovery of HIV and AIDS, first associated with the lifestyles of gay men, blood became a source of horror not through images of splattered gore, but through the creeping threat of decay (2004: 2).

To this point, the paper has argued that the vampire is more than a monster in the pages of a book, instead, it's the queer monster that would see the heterosexual norms destroyed, or worse tainted. It's exactly this heterosexual panic that creates the social narrative that would label same-sex desires as perverse and see them destroyed, since "the practice of social labeling of persons as deviant operates as a mechanism of social control… to provide a clear threshold between permissible and impermissible behavior. (McIntosh, 1968). Similarly, Dallimore suggests that labeling someone as a sexual

deviant is often a scapegoating tactic employed by the dominant social group, motivated by feelings of being threatened (Dollimore, 1991, cited in Hanton, 2020). In the case of *Dracula,* this perceived threat is aimed at heteronormativity (Craft, 1984, cited in Hanton, 2020). Once again the narrative seems to mirror the one developed during the global COVID-19 pandemic, where several U.S. religious and conservative political figures would suggest that the emergence of coronavirus was divine retribution for the sinful same-sex activity (Greenhalgh, 2020). Steven Andrew of the US Christian Church would argue that "God's love shows it is urgent to repent, because the Bible teaches homosexuals lose their souls and God destroys LGBT societies." (Greenhalgh, 2020). This is where, once again, notions of extermination in favor of the correction of the natural order come into play. In the words of Carlen Lavigne "The vampire, its kinky bite representative of the erotic 'other', has traditionally been defeated by heterosexual heroes: in all his incarnations Dracula falls again and again before Jonathan Harker." (2004: 1). Harker and his band of male friends become "the embodiment of determined, self-controlled masculinity" (Eltis, 2002: 456) in their crusade to rid the world of the queer bite of the vampire and reassert the proper order of things. It's the novel's exploration of contagion, sexual transgression, and societal panic that offers a chilling reflection of the real-world anxieties of queer people that drives this paper to suggest that global politics and Queer IR would both benefit by engaging with these texts and their interplay between cultural narratives and political realities.

## Chapter 4: Fangs and Family: Carmilla and the Politics of Reproductive Exclusion

## 4.1 Sheridan Le Fanu's Carmilla

As argued multiple times Gothic extends beyond literary analysis; instead, this paper would use it to reflect on the uncertainty and discrimination faced by the LGBTQ+ community. Amidst this, the vampire becomes more than the master of the supernatural tale. In this paper, the vampire becomes a point of contention in the interplay between cultural narratives and political realities. Chapter 3, through Stoker's Count Dracula, spoke of the anxieties of contamination with the vampiric bite embodying the homosexual kiss, that would see queers punished in an inferno of decay and horror. Similarly, Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* is centered around lesbian desire and touches upon "the association of the vampire with … barrenness and sterility" (Palmer, 1999: 102). This vampire's non-procreative behavior starkly contrasts with the heteronormative expectations of reproduction, since it doesn't create life, instead, it infects. It's this symbolic representation that resonates with the contemporary struggles faced by queer communities, particularly in the realm of reproductive rights. Just as the queer monster is condemned as a threat to the 'natural', the current anti-queer mentality would dismiss queer relationships for not conforming to heteronormative reproductive expectations.  Six years after the U.S. Supreme Court's federal marriage equality ruling *Obergefell v. Hodges,* which protects the right of same-sex couples to adopt, right-wing rhetoric against the queer community is on the rise. With right-wing propaganda claiming that same-sex marriage could lead to human extinction, as it does not "serve the propagation of the species" (Rohy, 2012), the reader is given a chance, once more,

to reflect on the ongoing tensions regarding non-normative sexualities and social control on reproductive choices.

Sheridan Le Fanu, born on August 28, 1814, in Dublin, is often hailed as one of the most influential writers of Victorian-era Gothic fiction. Predating *Dracula* by 26 years, the Irish author is credited as one of Stoker's many literary influences, with his stories capitalizing on the themes of the uncanny and atmospheric horror that have become staples for the genre. However, it's the psychological depths of his characters that make him stand out (Maye, 2014), with literary critic VS Pritchett arguing that:

> Le Fanu's ghosts are the most disquieting of all ghosts … The secret doubt, the private shame, the unholy love scratch away with malignant patience in the guarded mind. It is we who are the ghosts. Let illness, late nights and green tea [the title of one of the *In a Glass Darkly stories]* weaken the catch we normally keep clamped so firmly down, and out sink one by one all the hags and animals of moral or Freudian symbolism. (Pritchett, 1947, cited in Maye, 2014)

His novella *Carmilla*, first published in 1872, is no exception. Arguably one of his most enduring works, the fiction part of a collection of tales called *In A Glass Darkly*, reads as more than an explicit portrayal of lesbian desire. Same-sex relationships are intertwined with notions of secrecy, seduction, and intimacy, with Le Fanu exploring these relationships not just in terms of sexual desire, but as deeply emotional and psychological needs, as well. In greater detail, the Gothic novel tells the story of young Laura living in a remote manor in Styria with her widowed father and overprotective governesses. Laura's recollections, as presented in the essay of Doctor Hesselius, speak of a girl leading a life of isolation, a solitary young woman, who despite her spoiled upbringing, all she seems to yearn for is companionship. However, her prayers finally seem to be answered, when their lives are disturbed by the mysterious arrival of

Carmilla, a beautiful and enigmatic girl who becomes their houseguest, after suffering a carriage crash that leaves her weak and injured. Carmilla's allure becomes evident early on when Laura recognizes her as the girl from her dreams. This leads them to create an intense and affectionate bond that seems to surpass that of friendship and embody themes of seduction and forbidden desire. Despite her charm and beauty, Carmilla exhibits strange behaviors – she avoids religious practices, develops unexplainable mood swings, sleeps during the day, and has a strong aversion to sunlight, which seem to confuse and trouble Laura, who finds herself caught between desire and repulsion, disgust, and adoration for her new companion. As the story progresses Laura begins to suffer from terrifying nightmares and a debilitating illness, that leaves her weakened and her health ever declining. The turning point in the story occurs when General Spielsdorf, a family friend, arrives greatly affected by the sudden death of his niece, who had similarly formed a close relationship with a noble girl called Millarca, who he immediately recognizes as Carmilla. The story's climax leads the heroes to the ruins of Karnstein, a village ravaged by "revenants' (Le Fanu, 2020: 132) – vampires. It's there where Carmilla is uncovered as Countess Mircalla Karnstein, a vampire who had lived for centuries preying on young women. With Carmilla's tomb finally found, the vampire is ultimately destroyed, and Laura is freed from her torment.

Once again this gothic story is anything but a story about vampires. Considering the historical and cultural context in which Le Fanu was writing, the story becomes a daring exploration of same-sex desires. Through the unexpectedly sensitive depiction of Carmilla, "one of the few self-accepting homosexual vampires in Victorian literature" (Auerbach, 1999, cited in Palmer, 1999), Le Fanu manages to navigate 19th-century censorship and moral scrutiny. This chapter aims to trace the novella's enduring significance not only to Carmilla's same-sex desires and her powerful and assertive

character, refusing to abide by the rigid heteronormative gender roles, but also the association of the queer monster with ideas of moral and social barrenness.

## 4.2 Unnatural Affections: Lesbian Desires in Carmilla

Le Fanu's queer monster, which embodies both the allure and threat of queer sexuality, allows for an exploration of the fluidity and complexity of sexual desires, reminiscent of Paulina Palmer's Lesbian Gothic. The term first introduced in her book *Lesbian Gothic Transgressive Fictions (1999)* aims to highlight once again how the supernatural elements of Gothic serve as metaphors for same-sex desires and sexual deviance. The vampire, the witch, and the grotesque allow for the exploration of lesbian experiences, while the horror element speaks to the societal fears about lesbianism, a desire seemingly outside the rigid gender roles. By doing so she aims to comment on "the connections between the emergence of particular gothic motives in this fiction and the changing agenda and priorities of lesbian culture and politics." (Palmer, 2012). This chapter hopes to utilize a similar strategy, one that illuminates Carmilla not only as a lesbian vampire, but as an unconventional heroine whose subversion of patriarchal norms speaks to contemporary anxieties of the queer community, especially when it comes to the themes of reproduction and, as this paper would argue, LGBTQ+ adoption.

The central relationship of the novella revolves around the protagonist, Laura, and her sensual companion, the vampire Carmilla. From their first fateful encounter there is an unmistakable undercurrent of erotic desire, with Laura intrigued by her beauty and complexion, describing with almost rapturous attention her dark hair and the way she "used to fold and braid it, and spread it out and play with it" (Le Fanu, 2020: 44). In turn Carmilla, exhibits an almost possessive affection with Laura, with her embraces and kisses charged with a sexual desire that suggests that their bond

surpasses that of mere friendship. "I live in your warm life, and you shall die-die, sweetly die into mine." (2020: 46). In *Queer Others in Victorian Gothic Transgressing Monstrosity*, Arder Haefele-Thomas points to this scene as one of the most sexually loaded of the novella. The author moves away from literal readings of death and instead highlights "the notion of *la petite mort*" and "connections between homosexuality and masturbation, both forms of sexual expression that are not 'productive'" (2012: 104). Carmilla's homoerotic allure is expressed through not only physical interactions but fervent declarations of love, cloaked in a language of Victorian propriety, that leaves sheltered Laura hanging between desire and aversion. The duality of gothic homosocial panic, first mentioned in Chapter 2, takes new life through the lesbian vampire with the binary significations of love/hatred and forbidden/desirable. Tracing it back to Palmer, she seems to hint at something similar when she mentions 'the tension between the need for privacy and anonymity on the one hand and the interaction with 'members of their own kind on the other" (1999: 102). These ideas seem to mirror Laura's anxieties when she mentions "In these mysterious moods [meaning Carmilla's embraces] I did not like her. I experienced a strange tumultuous excitement that was pleasurable, ever and anon mingled with a vague sense of fear and disgust." (2020: 47). Similarly, Carmilla's emergence only in the late hours of the evening can be seen referencing the secret double life of the Victorian homosexual (Showalter, 2020), or in the words of Palmer:

> The association of the vampire with the period of the twilight, since the sunset is supposed to liberate her from her coffin and permit her to venture abroad to stalk her prey, is pertinent in metaphoric terms to the closeted lesbian who, having concealed her sexual orientation during the day, emerges at night to seek romance in the half-lit world. (1999; 104)

However, what makes Carmilla's character worth mentioning is that she stands out not merely as a queer vampire, but as a queer vampire woman who embodies the rejection

of male authority and the rigid gender expectations of her time. In greater detail, from the outset, her dominance and self-assurance in her sexual desires set her outside the bonds of human morality, with her very existence seen as a form of rebellion that challenges the heteronormative framework of her time. While Stoker's Dracula never got to satisfy the hunger for Jonathan, Le Fanu's vampire gives in to her erotic desires (Panadero, 2022). Aware of her nature she doesn't cower away from it, instead she embraces it and hopes to infect Laura with it, through her vampiric kiss. When Laura first dreams of Carmilla she's awakened "by a sensation as if two needles ran into [her] breast" (2020: 14), and while this can be associated with "the vampire, on account of her connections with blood and oral sex" (Palmer, 1999: 101) it also speaks to the demonization of the queer body.

As Sue-Ellen Case would point out in her essay *Tracking the Vampire* "Within the horror genre… it is the monster's body that the sexual interest resides" (1991: 11). The vampire's defiance of the life-death circle condemns them to a barren existence, while the draining of the blood becomes associated with a perverse eroticism that drains the vitality and morality of their victims. In the case of Carmilla, her dismissal of heteronormative relationships and gender expectations are mirrored in her vampiric nature and are what ultimately make her unnatural and dangerous. Her love for Laura, however passionate, is destructive and monstrous because it lacks the possibility of growth and procreation. In a society where women were expected to be submissive and content with the inevitable heterosexual image of marriage and sexual desire (Rich, 1980: 13), Carmilla's sexuality is transgressive, independent, and decisively sterile. This disruption in the continuity of human life is once again queer. "The equation of hetero = sex = life and homo = sex = unlife, generated a discourse … within the realm of the other-than-natural, and the consequent other-than-living." (Case 1997, cited in

Lavigne, 2004). The homoerotic relationship between Laura and Carmilla is depicted as a challenge to the patriarchal order, where the lesbian vampire infects 'pure' Laura with a desire that goes against the natural cycle of life, fulfilling instead the unnatural carnal desires of the perverse homosexual. As the vampire would choose to infect and drain, subjected to a barren existence, similarly the homosexual's perverse desires, would see them condemned. As such Gothic and Queer politics aren't mutually exclusive. "Queer challenges the borders, of life and death … by focusing on non-procreative sexual behaviors, making especially suited to a genre that takes sex and death as central thematic concerns." (Benshoff, 1996: 120).

## 4.3 Queering Fertility: The Politics of Homosexual Reproduction

The general consensus has long associated homosexuality with bareness (Palmer, 1999: 102). The heteronormative beliefs that see biological reproduction as the ideal of societal stability, are often weaponized to argue against the legitimacy of queer rights to family. Even though Harry M. Benshoff in his essay *The Monster and the Homosexual*, speaks on the role of films in shaping culturally constructed binaries of gender and sexuality, his argument can be applied in the case of the Gothic. "Like fairytales that prepare the child for the anxieties of separation, modern horror myths prepare the teenager for the anxieties of reproduction" (Twichell, 1985, cited in Benshoff, 1994) functioning as indicators for patterns of normal or sexual desires that are too appetitive and inappropriate (1994: 24). Using Michel Foucault's approach on discourse, in this case, as established by the Gothic narrative, portrayals of homosexuality become twisted, aiming to "make prohibition into the basic and constitutive element from which one would be able to write the history of what has been said concerning sex." (1978).

Alas, it's no surprise that anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric in contemporary politics is still persistent, in shaping political discourse and policy decisions. The vampire Carmilla's death, because of her symbolic resistance to heteronormative gender roles of desire and reproduction, reinforces the anxieties about non-normative sexualities disrupting traditional reproductive expectations. For example, in the context of US politics, despite significant advances after the rulings of *Obergefell v. Hodges*, these already-established prejudices, often embedded in state laws and institutional practices, create substantial barriers when it comes to queer rights to adoption and fertility treatments. Many democratic states, being more favorable towards queer rights, have in place nondiscrimination laws for adoption and foster government-funded care agencies (Bruinius, 2020). However, as of 2024, according to the data of *Family Equality,* a US-based organization championing LGBTQ+ right to family, 14 States allow for discrimination in adoption, based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Conservative States like Arizona, Alabama, or Idaho have in place laws that permit state-licensed child welfare agencies to refuse to place or provide services to children and families, if it comes to direct conflict with their religious beliefs, creating roadblocks for same-sex couples who want to jointly adopt from foster care (Farr and Goldberg, 2018). These 'roadblocks' become of consequence in light of the data from the Williams Institute at UCLA indicating that same-sex couples are more likely to be raising adopted children than their heterosexual counterparts. Specifically, 21% of same-sex couples who are parenting adopt, while the same percentage for straight cisgender parents drops to 3% (Wilson and Bouton, 2024). The right-wing religious rhetoric that would deny same-sex couples a chance to family, is the one that sees them condemned to a barren existence due to their perverse desires. As Sue Ellen-Case would argue:

> From the heterosexist perspective, the sexual practice that produced babies was associated with giving life or practicing a life-giving sexuality, and the living was established as the category of the natural … In contrast, homosexual sex was mandated as sterile – an unalive practice that was consequently unnatural or queer, and, as that was unalive, without the right to life. (1991: 4)

Normative prejudices and discriminatory policies as these would see thousands of children without homes (ACLU), rather than in the care of the perverse homosexual. Similarly, as same-sex couples look to intrauterine insemination (IUI) and virto fertilization (IVF) for a chance at reproduction, deep-rooted inequalities, often a result of heteronormative beliefs that prioritize traditional family structures, implicitly restrict their access (Dwyer and See, 2023). In some states, insurance laws and policies warrant a clinical diagnosis of infertility, while in others like Maryland and Arkansas, insurance coverage for IVF requires the spouse's sperm (Center for Reproductive Rights). Consequently, most insurance companies exclude same-sex couples by default, coupled with the high cost of the procedure, fertility care is out of reach for many.

As Carmilla, a queer vampire who didn't fit in the Victorian woman niche had to be destroyed in favor of a heteronormative patriarchal society that would see her virginal and obedient, today's queer community faces a similar marginalization and symbolic 'death'. The established biases that would see homoeroticism as perverse and deviant have manifested in the form of legal and political barriers, creating a daunting and uneven landscape for same-sex couples.

Conclusion

Greek philosopher Aristotle would famously say that "every man, by nature, has an impulse toward a partnership with others" (1998: 1253a29) therefore "[every] man is by nature a political animal" (1998: 1253a1). Poet and novelist Olive Senior would refer back to that to reflect on the power of literature to transform and represent. She would argue, "Literature is political because we, the creators of literature, are political animals; it is part of accepting our responsibility of being human, of being citizens of the world." (2013). Expanding upon this narrative, this paper set out to explore the intersection between literature and politics through an analysis of the queer monster in Gothic Literature. The first chapter established the theoretical framework that would see hegemonic norms around identity and sexuality not as inherent truths, but as social narratives maintained through discursive practices and rigid boundaries, defining the limits between permissible and impermissible. Drawing on the work of Eve Sedwick on 'homosexual panic', coupled with Adrienne Rich's critical framework on 'compulsory heterosexuality' and Michel Foucault's emblematic study *The History of Sexuality* (1978), the chapter revealed that what is often perceived as normative, in this case, the regularity of hetero- over homo- sexuality, is the result of historical and cultural processes that actively shape societal attitudes. Further elaborating on the implications of this, Chapter 2 credits Gothic literature as a genre that has openly explored transgressive sexualities. Through an analysis of the genre's historical context and thematic elements the chapter aimed to highlight its crucial role in both the dismissal and reinforcement of normative sexual ideologies. This dual function of

Gothic would "evoke a queer world" (Haggerty, 2006) only to see it punished and decimated. Delving even deeper, the third chapter would acquaint the reader with Bram Stoker's vampire, focusing on its homoerotic desires and broader socio-political implications. Specifically, Count Dracula is not just a horror icon, but an embodiment of the 'queer Other' who threatens to infect and corrupt the normative social order. The 'Othered' monster leaves the page with its bite festering into anxieties surrounding the AIDS crisis and the rise of populist regimes, which have often used the homosexual as a scapegoat for broader societal fears. The final Chapter provides a close reading analysis of the queer vampire as presented in Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla.* The lesbian vampire allows for an even more detailed analysis of the prejudices associated with homoerotic desires. This analysis revealed that the association of the queer other with sterility and bareness isn't just a literary trope but a deeply ingrained cultural narrative that is still mobilized to deny the queer community the family right, reinforcing their status as 'other'. Drawing the parallels between contemporary US adoption and fertility policies and the Gothic monster, Chapter 4 touches upon those heteronormative and obsolete beliefs that would see biological reproduction as the ideal of social stability.

Although this paper has made a significant effort to connect Gothic literature to broader political prejudices directed at the queer community, it is also important to acknowledge that the analysis presents limitations. One potential critique would be the lack of more concrete empirical data to help ground the arguments in the current socio-political landscape. While this paper would claim a clear relationship between literary representations and socio-political narratives, a more direct engagement with current political discourses, such as media representations or political speeches, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how Gothic tropes fueled contemporary political prejudices. However, time constraints would prove an obstacle in providing a

more nuanced understanding of how literature's interplay with more cultural narratives can influence public policy.

Nevertheless, the author hopes this paper lays a valuable theoretical foundation for future research. The Gothic genre, often dismissed as mere entertainment has both reflected and contributed to the ongoing negotiation for power, gender, and identity. It remains a Gordian knot waiting to be untangled, with its threads pointing into the cultural and political dynamics of sexuality. Thus, the author would push literary and political fields to continue investigating this intricate relationship, not only for a better understanding of the past but a more informed view of the contemporary debates about representation.

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