QUEER VAMPIRES AND THE IDEOLOGY OF GOTHIC

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The French philosopher Michel Foucault is one of the most influential figures who contributed to the shaping of the notion of power in contemporary culture. According to him, "power is everywhere," it is embedded in our actions, life-styles, our beliefs and in every other concept that claim to be neutral (Foucault, 1998, p. 93). What's more, it is embedded in language, and through discourse it creates "regimes of truth" (as cited in Rabinow, 1991, p. 73). He equates power and the knowledge of truth because he thinks that power is established through socially accepted forms of knowledge. He suggests that

> [t]ruth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of

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those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (as cited in Rabinow, 1991, p.73)

Furthermore, according to Foucault, the regimes of truth are continuously imposed on the individuals in a society through schools, media, law, politics and various other tools that are constructed for the smooth operation of a society. In this sense, discourse becomes the major guarantor of conformity and discipline in a society, and of teaching people to suit themselves to the given regimes of truth and to behave in expected ways. A discursive practice, thus, defines the normal and the abnormal, the appropriate and the inappropriate and the self and the other.

Literary genres as sites of discursive practice, from a Foucauldian point of view, become part of the power mechanisms that operate within a society. In this sense, they function as the producers and the reproducers of the regimes of truth, and cease to be mere structures or tools used to communicate meaning or, simply, the aesthetic aspect of the text. They, rather, contribute to the production of meaning and become a part of the meaning. However, Foucault is not nihilistic or pessimistic about the power-discourse relationship and suggests that "[d]iscourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart" (Foucault, 1998, p. 100). Within this frame of mind, the discursive patterns of power within a textual body are traceable and possible to reveal. Accordingly, the aim of this work is to reveal the discursive power mechanisms within the Gothic genre focusing specifically on the portrayal of the lesbian vampire in several vampire movies as examples of contemporary Gothic.

Gothic, as a genre, can be evaluated as a set of discourses that serve to create and consolidate certain regimes of truth. The nature of monstrosity, the patterns of the narrative and the representations of characters in a Gothic fiction tell the readers a lot about the power mechanisms that operate within its discourse. Teresa Goddu suggests that, in the nineteenth century, Gothic fiction produced a racist discourse that functioned to pacify the deviant voices within an ethnic majority. She suggests that the basic function of Gothic fiction was to "domesticate and therefore disempower" what is alien and threatening (Goddu, 1999, p. 127). She highlights "[t]he Gothic's role in generating racial discourse and its production from the context of slavery" (p. 136). Stoddard similarly proposes that Gothic fiction is closely related to the imperialist discourse of the nineteenth century (1991). Cavallaro (2002), on the other hand, asserts that Gothic fiction is the embodiment of the enlightenment ideals that tend to degrade anything that is outside its classification of legitimate. According to him, "[t]he multi-faceted figure of the monster acquires its most starkly negative connotations in the eighteenth century, as a result of a neo-classical aesthetic devoted to notions of

unity and harmony, and hence inclined to brand anything which might fail to fulfil these criteria as irrational, immoral and viciously ugly" (p. 171). He suggests that the Gothic monstrosity is intended to be portrayed as the enemy of Enlightenment ideals and as a threat to "the socio-ethical fabric" (p. 171).

Andrew Sharpe (2009) brings up a broader perspective on the issue and suggests that monstrosity is a portrayal of the outsiders in a society. In his work, he examines Foucault's concept of the monster, as well as Zygmund Bauman's "stranger," Rene Girard's "scapegoat" and Carl Schmitt's concept of "enemy." He suggests that each society needs enemies, strangers or scapegoats in order to be able define themselves. Thus, production of monstrosity is "sociologically and psychologically functional" (Sharpe, 2009, p. 2). What's more, "monsters are produced within and by law," according to Sharpe, through the imposition of the concepts of normal and abnormal (p. 4). Julia Kristeva (1982) conceptualized the labelling of the abnormal as abjection. She suggests that "[t]here looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable" (p. 1). Therefore, "what[ever] disturbs identity, system, order" is abject in Kristeva's frame of thought (p. 4). As Foucault (2003) also notes, "[t]he monster is by definition the exception; the individual to be corrected" (p. 58). He points out that "the core of monstrosity [is] hidden behind little abnormalities, deviances and irregularities" (p. 56). There is no place for the abnormal in the society and that is why they are either monstrosized or corrected right away. If the necessary correction is not done, the subject automatically becomes a deviation, an outcast, and hence, a monster.

But why is the abnormal so threatening? Foucault suggests that the fear of the monstrous is a consequence of the capacity of the abnormal to deviate or disturb the norm and proposes that "[m]onstrosity [...] is the kind of irregularity that calls law into question and disables it, [...] it is a legal labyrinth, a violation of and an obstacle to the law, both transgression and undecidability at the level of the law" (2003, p. 64-65). He exemplifies this threat through the concept of homosexuality in *The History of Sexuality*. Even today, homosexuals are seen as abnormal and as individuals to be corrected. Foucault proposes that homosexuality came to be considered as a deviation only after the nineteenth century, after a process of regulation and institutionalization of sex. He says,

> [o]f course, it had long been asserted that a country had to be populated if it hoped
> to be rich and powerful; but this was the first time that a society had affirmed, in a
> constant way, that its future and its fortune were tied not only to the number and

the uprightness of its citizens, the their marriage rules and family organizations, but to the manner in which each individual made use of his sex […] It was essential that the state know what was happening with its citizens' sex, and the use they made of it, but also that each individual be capable of controlling the use he made of it. Between the state and the individual, sex became an issue, and a public issue no less; a whole web of discourses, special knowledges, analyses, and injunctions settled upon it. (Foucault, 1998, p. 26)

So, sex happened to be an issue of contract between the state and the individual. It is used as a tool of empowerment by the state and if an individual refuses to make use of his/her sex for the purposes of regeneration—and thus empowerment of the state—s/he is considered to be a deviation of the norm and a threat for creating the possibility of deviating other people. In short, if one has an alternative story to tell, s/he is monstrosized.

According to Kristeva, the most common way of representing the 'Other' or, in her own words, "the socialized appearance of the abject" is as corruption (1982, p. 15-6). As the 'Other' is not normal, it is corrupt and thus scary. It is represented as a "decaying body, lifeless, completely turned into dejection, blurred between the inanimate and the inorganic, […] body without soul, a non-body" (1982, p. 109). That is why "it is to be excluded from God's *territory* as it is from his *speech* […] It must not be displayed but immediately buried so as not to pollute the divine earth" (p. 109). The monster or the abject is the untouchable with great potential to contaminate the divine, and Kristeva suggests that this frame of mind is what horror fiction is based on. She asserts that such fiction reflects the deepest fears and concerns of a society: "far from being a minor, marginal activity in our culture, as a general consensus seems to have it, this kind of literature, or even literature as such, represents the ultimate coding of our crises, of our most intimate and most serious apocalypses" (1982, p. 208).

Therefore, vampires in Gothic fiction can be read as the marginalized, the 'Other,' the untouchable, the unwanted, the deviant, and the abject in a society. As Punter and Byron (2004) propose, "[i]n nineteenth-century vampire fiction, the representation of the vampire as monstrous, evil and other serves to guarantee the existence of good" (p. 270). The narrative structure is mainly constructed as the appearance of the monster, his/her disturbing of the social order, the defeat of the vampire by the good followed by the reestablishment of the order. This pattern can be simply read as the oppression of the deviant by the mainstream, but according to Judith Halberstam (2007)

there is a specific target there. She points out that the monster is not always necessarily a female, but that it is always feminine:

> By reworking Butler's brilliant phrase from *Bodies That Matter* into "bodies that splatter," we commit ourselves to tracking the path of the storm and accounting for the bodies that register the violence of their own exclusion. Not all bodies that splatter are female, but all do become feminine (penetrable) in the process of splattering; not all bodies that remain whole are male, but those female bodies that withstand the assault tend to signify as masculine (impenetrable). (Halberstam, 2007, p. 32)

As understood from Halberstam's approach, the monstrous bodies that are mostly penetrable are basically drawn as feminine regardless of their sexes. Especially, a male vampire who takes great pleasure in sucking on another male is attributed with a highly feminine trait. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1986) further suggests that the monstrous bodies, especially of vampires, embody homosexuality, and that Gothic fiction is a representative of 'homosexual panic' in a society. The vampire is the monstrous reflection of a homosexual/bisexual that is a threat to every single individual due to their potential to spread their deviation to other individuals of the society. Thus, when the reader sees that the vampire is defeated at the end of a Gothic work, s/he is ensured that the threat is destroyed and that the norm is restored. According to Fred Botting (1995), the origin of the belief in vampire is the fear of Plague. Since the eighteenth century, however, it turned into the fear of homosexuality, which has been perceived as a kind of Plague by modern society since then (Foucault, 1998). As Botting highlights, especially the exchange of fluids between the same sex parties is a transgression and violation of the predetermined gender roles. He states,

> Dracula's fluid, shifting and amorphous shape is, like Carmilla's, threatening because it has no singular or stable nature or identity. Meanings, identities and proper family boundaries are utterly transgressed in the movements of vampiric desire and energy. For all his sovereignty and violence, Dracula is, in respect of his polymorphousness, strangely feminised. (1995, p. 98)

Botting further suggests that the vampire is represented as a thing that is disempowered by the phallic law with a stake through the heart and decapitation. It is apparent that the stake here is a phallic symbol and its penetration in the vampire's body renders it more feminine and, thus, vulnerable. On the other hand decapitation obviously stands for castration and hence the

disempowerment of the homosexual male. "Restoring the boundaries between life and death, body and soul, earth and heaven, the ritualised killing of vampires reconstitutes properly patriarchal order and fixes cultural and symbolic meanings" (Botting, 1995, p. 98). In this sense, one is right to argue that what creates the 'Other' in Gothic fiction is patriarchy, says Anne Williams (1995). The idealized family model, according to Williams, organizes many aspects of social life and it "holds the disparate and unequal 'male' and 'female' forces in tension, in a balance that may be disturbed, in a distribution of powers that may be defied, and perhaps even invite defiance" (1995, p. 22). Thus, vampires can be associated with anything that would disturb this model: homosexuals, feminists, or any other marginalized group that offers an alternative to this model.

Among these groups associated with a deviant life-style, lesbians attract attention as doubly marginalized people both as homosexuals and as women. The fact that they are homosexual women makes them doubly dangerous and threatening to the patriarchal family model, so they can be considered the most dangerous of all vampires because they are doubly sinister as they are doubly lethal. They can simply hide themselves behind 'the female weakness,' which makes them very difficult to detect. Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's character Carmilla is the prototype of all the lesbian vampires that pose such a great danger to the society. A great majority of lesbian vampires, especially in cinema, are inspired by Le Fanu's sinister, cunning, merciless and compelling Carmilla. As a lesbian vampire, Carmilla

> is seen positing attacks on every front and at every turn. In this light it is little wonder that her annihilation is so vigorously executed and so spectacularly displayed by her victims' avengers. What she comes to represent, goes far beyond any immanent physical threat, which could be confined in even this single, toothy female body. It remains now to extricate some of these oppositions as they appear through the text, to suggest some of their contextual implications and also why the social counter-values have been individualized, marginalized, and extinguished in the vicious way that they have. (Stoddart, 1991, p. 28)

The lesbian vampire posits such a big threat to the norm that only a destruction of great violence can repair the damage she causes to the patriarchal family structure. She not only leaves her victims dry of blood, but she also leads them to non-productive sex by making love to them and by compelling them to it against their will. Thus her destruction is crucial for the restoration of the norms of sexuality. She is on such an extreme point of contamination that her domestication or taming is not possible; she has to be destroyed by the masculine power that she 'falsely' claims.

'Carmilla' represents aristocratic female homosexual desire. Yet the physical nature of the relationship between the narrator and the vampire is a far cry from mutual lesbian desire and can more clearly be seen in this light as a masculine fantasy of and about lesbianism. Rather, then, it becomes the violent Gothic invasion by one figure, this time a woman, with power over another. The nature of the aggression emerges as the narrator charts her scarcely-understood responses to Carmilla's intimate advances. She is told '—I live in your warm life and you shall die—die, die sweetly into mine. I cannot help it; as I draw near to you, you in your turn, will draw near to others, and learn the rapture of that cruelty which is yet love' (3I7); 'I live in you; and you would die for me, I love you so' (329). This is female sexuality, not turned toward itself but turning on itself, and the result is not desire for love but cruelty, possession, contagion, and, potentially, death. (Stoddard, 1991, p. 32)

As Stoddard suggests, the female desire towards another female is represented as a destructive power and a threat because the lesbian, by laying eyes on another woman, also claims the male power. She is the metaphorical "Medusa, the sight of whose hideous head paralyzes the male spectator" (Hurley, 2004, p. 118). Judith Butler (1993) suggests that lesbian character is granted a symbolic and displaceable phallus. Some other part of her body represents the phallus and, hence, a kind of power position. This makes her a great threat to the patriarchal order and it has to be corrected so that the order can be restored.

The reflections of the lesbian vampire myth in contemporary cinema, unfortunately, posit the same kind of marginalization. The women that deviate from the patriarchal norm are represented as femmes fatales, compelling and evil vampires. As the production dates of the movies are considered, which are mostly around 1970s, it can be observed that the dates coincide with the time period that the feminist movement was on the rise. It is not surprising in the sense that "[t]he Gothic is frequently considered to be a genre that re-emerges with particular force during times of cultural crisis and which serves to negotiate the anxieties of the age by working through them in a displaced form" (Punter and Byron, 2004, p. 39). Hence, it can be deduced that Gothic fiction, in a way, is meant to function as a social pacifier to keep people in line within the rules of the dominant ideology. It is used as a tool to give subliminal messages concerning the dangers of the sexual liberation movement that started during the sixties and went on until the eighties, and to impose the necessity to conserve the patriarchal family structure.

Roy Ward Baker's *The Vampire Lovers* (1970) is a typical example of the marginalized, deviant women as monstrous. The movie is highly influenced by Le Fanu's story of Carmilla. The movie is set around Karnstein castle as in the original story. Marcilla, a beautiful, charming, young and noble lady is left by her mother to stay with the General and his daughter Laura. Although Marcilla seems to be quite 'normal' at first sight, as the narrative proceeds, she is represented as strangely and passionately staring at the beautiful and naive daughter of the General during the ball. She starts to seduce the young girl right away and at night she pays a visit to her room in form of a cat, compels her and feeds on her. Laura is seen to get weaker and weaker in Marcilla's claws. Laura does not seem to realize what is really going on until the other characters realize the marks of a bite on her breast. After being exposed as a lesbian vampire, Marcilla runs away, and during the chase it is revealed that she is indeed Carmilla, the vicious lesbian vampire, and that she has disguised herself as Marcilla. Getting away with the murder, Carmilla goes on with her meticulous plan one more time. The victims name is Emma this time. Carmilla loves and possesses Emma and strangely Emma seems to like it. Emma describes her dreams, how the cat comes to her bed, lies beside her and then how she turns into Carmilla, how she kisses and caresses her. She says: "And then everything becomes all right and I am so happy" (Baker, 1970). However, at the same time she still feels some kind of pain, as if her blood is being drawn. They kiss and touch each other after the scene but it is implied that Emma is not able to make a sense of what is happening to her. Therefore, it is secured in the movie that the sincerity that Emma shows to Marcilla in return is seen by the audience as accidental and as a result of the young girl's naive nature. That night Emma gets bitten on the breast and Carmilla's identity is revealed. They find her grave and stake her to death. As Emma's father says after Carmilla's death, "There is no other way" (Baker, 1970). Carmilla cannot survive as a deviant character in this society and she has to die. The discourse of the movie is quite applicable to Sedgwick's theory of 'the panic of homosexual.' This vampire is a threat to young girls who become preys to this compelling, lustful, wicked, deviant 'Other' one after another. So she is beheaded, metaphorically disempowered as a powerful and deviant female, and order is restored.

The Lust for a Vampire (1971) by Jimmy Sangster, is also a similar narrative that is modelled on Le Fanu's *Carmilla*. This time the story is set at a girls' school around Karnstein castle. The villains's name is Mircalla and she is the representative of perfect beauty. From the very beginning of the movie, a very erotic friendship between the schoolgirls is depicted, including a lot of touching and nudity. It is of course intended to satisfy the male fantasy of the sight of a lesbian affair rather than a kind of approval of lesbian relationships as alternative ways of living. Mircalla, disguised as a student, starts to slay the girls at school one by one. She is drawn as a pervert/murderer who

sexually seduces/compels girls first and then murders them. So as a villian/rebel she has to die in the end. And the movie ends when the order is restored, with a prayer.

Harry Kümel's *Daughters of Darkness* (1971) adapts the story of the Hungarian evil character Elizabeth Battory, who is famous for drinking virgin blood and blood-baths. The story revolves around a newly-wed couple, a harsh, wife-beating man and a naïve, beautiful girl. Two strange women arrive at the same hotel, one of whom happens to be Elizabeth Battory, the vampire countess. Battory is represented as a femme fatale, noble and beautiful and it is revealed that she has an affair that depends on dominance over her female companion. Valerie, the married woman is the representation of the ideal woman, but she is so unlucky that she is surrounded by wicked women and violent men. She is the one that the audience is intended to identify themselves with. The duchess is impressed by her at first sight, however as she comes open with her feelings, Valierie tells her that she disgusts her. Yet as the first lesbian kiss occurs, Valerie does not respond in a negative way. The duchess is portrayed to be so strong, cunning, and dangerous that every unmarried girl, no matter how perfect she is, can be her victim. Valerie even refuses to stay with her husband and chooses to stay with the duchess. She is converted. They make love in the hotel room while the husband is having nightmares. Valerie says "when she is near me I become someone else" and confesses that she is in love with the duchess (Kümel, 1971). However, it is not represented as a romantic love story. Elizabeth is portrayed as a cold-blooded, despotic character. She puts a collar on Valerie and commands her. Rather than a loving partner, she is portrayed as a character that brings enslavement and death. Even though the husband is a cruel, wife-beating, murderer the audience is made to hate Elizabeth as the victimizer. The two women kill the man and drink his blood, which represents the violation of patriarchy. However, it is impossible for them to survive this way. Typically they are made to die at the end of the movie. They are caught in daylight, and, after a car accident, Elizabeth is staked to death by a tree branch that happens to be there. Though victorious, she is not allowed to live at the end of the movie. She is dead, but on the other hand the threat that is posed by her is still alive as Valerie takes over her position as the dominant lesbian vampire. Order is restored, but the audience is warned that the danger still exists.

Vampyres (1974) by Jose Ramon Larraz, starts with two women passionately making love to each other until someone comes in and shoots them. So the threat, the deviation is destroyed at the very beginning of the movie and the story behind the shooting is revealed as a flashback. At the very beginning, two mysterious women in dark cloaks are seen by the side of the road, hitchhiking. Shortly, it is revealed that hitchhiking is only a small part of a meticulous plan. Their intention is to take men to their house and suck them dry off blood after having sex with them. The phallic tool of

the female vampires is a knife. They cut their victims and then lick the blood off of their body in a very erotic way. After the ritual, the two women make love to each other under the shower in a fierce way. These women are drawn as gluttonous in terms of their sexual appetite, which is the most striking thing about the movie. What is depicted as vampirism is not limited to same-sex desire, but excessive sexual desire—which is another deviation from the ideal female model—is also implied to be some sort of vampirism. Fran, one of the vampires, says, "[t]hat's the way I have to be accepted. With no questions and no explanations" (Larraz, 1974). However, she cannot be let to live the way she is. They die and the order is restored.

The Hunger (1983) by Tony Scott is the story of Doctor Sarah who becomes a victim of Miriam, the monstrous bisexual vampire, and is doomed to be a vampire out of her consent and leads a life of sorrow. After the loss of her vampire husband, Miriam, the noble and rich vampire widow, has a crush on Doctor Sarah. She flirts with Sarah and Sarah is drawn to her. Eventually, they make love to each other in a very tender way and it feels so good to Sarah at first. However, she is turned into a vampire (lesbian) as a consequence of the affair, and the negative aspects of the relationship occur as the hunger arises within her. Only then Sarah comes to realize that Miriam is indeed a dead-end, no matter how good she makes her feel. So once more, the lustful female is represented as a monster consuming other lives. Miriam makes Sarah a vampire out of her will but as a devoted doctor she cannot yield. She finds a way to weaken Miriam and locks her in a coffin and dooms her to eternal suffering. The defeat of the lesbian vampire by her victim is meant to have a cathartic effect on the audience. The rejection of lesbian desire and its destruction by the female victim can be read as a pay-back taken from the victimizer. The order is succeeded again and the deviance is destroyed. The very end of the movie shows us that Sarah takes over Miriam's role. She establishes another life for herself with another young woman but it is clearly seen that she is rather a regretful, sad, desperate, and passive replacement for Miriam.

Obviously, Gothic, as a genre, degrades and monstrosizes the marginal, since as a tool of discourse it functions as force to manipulate people to believe in certain regimes of truth. However, if the Gothic monster is the 'Other', the unwanted and the improper, why is it so popular? Edmund Burke seems to answer the question proposing that fear is the most powerful feeling that appeals to artistic taste and that it is the source of the sublime in art. He suggests in *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* that "[w]hatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime" (Burke, 1971, p. 310). However, a more satisfying answer would be the perception of the monster as the

reflection of the oppressed self within the individual, which is both feared and desired. The vampire, thus, as the 'Other,' becomes a figure that the modern individuals can identify themselves with. Modern people have parallel experiences of being silenced and being denied the right to exist in their own unique ways just like the Gothic monster. As Foucault suggests, in the contemporary world, individuals are made to live in glass prisons that shape people, make them fit into certain models and inflicting the terror of the 'good'. In such a world, the existence of the Gothic monster both scares people and is desired by them because it represents the part of them that is repressed. People still have the transcendent, passionate, wild desire to 'be' in this mechanistic, oppressive society. The modern society keeps this desire under control in the name of preserving order and labels the deviant versions of 'being' as monstrous or 'abject.' The abject or the monstrous is, then, "anchored in the superego" as Kristeva (1982) suggests. The version of 'being' that is not possible to place into categories or to domesticate is rejected and monstrosized; the vampire represents the oppressed 'Other' within every individual. As Maurice Hindle (2003), the editor of *Dracula* observes, "the menace of the vampire is that [...] it works on us from the *inside,* taking over our bodies" (p. ix). This observation made by Hindle indeed refers to a crisis within the human psyche. Vampire is an embodiment of the oppressed desires that are locked in the darkness of the human psyche. In this sense, it is not coincidence that vampires are attributed with characteristics such as immortality and an ability to compel and control minds just like the oppressed desires that would never die within the self and take over the individual from time to time when they become irresistible. In brief, the vampires are the repressed, locked up, and denied versions of us. That is why the vampire figure evolves and changes in time along with the evolving individual, and why it is so frightening and desirable at the same time.

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