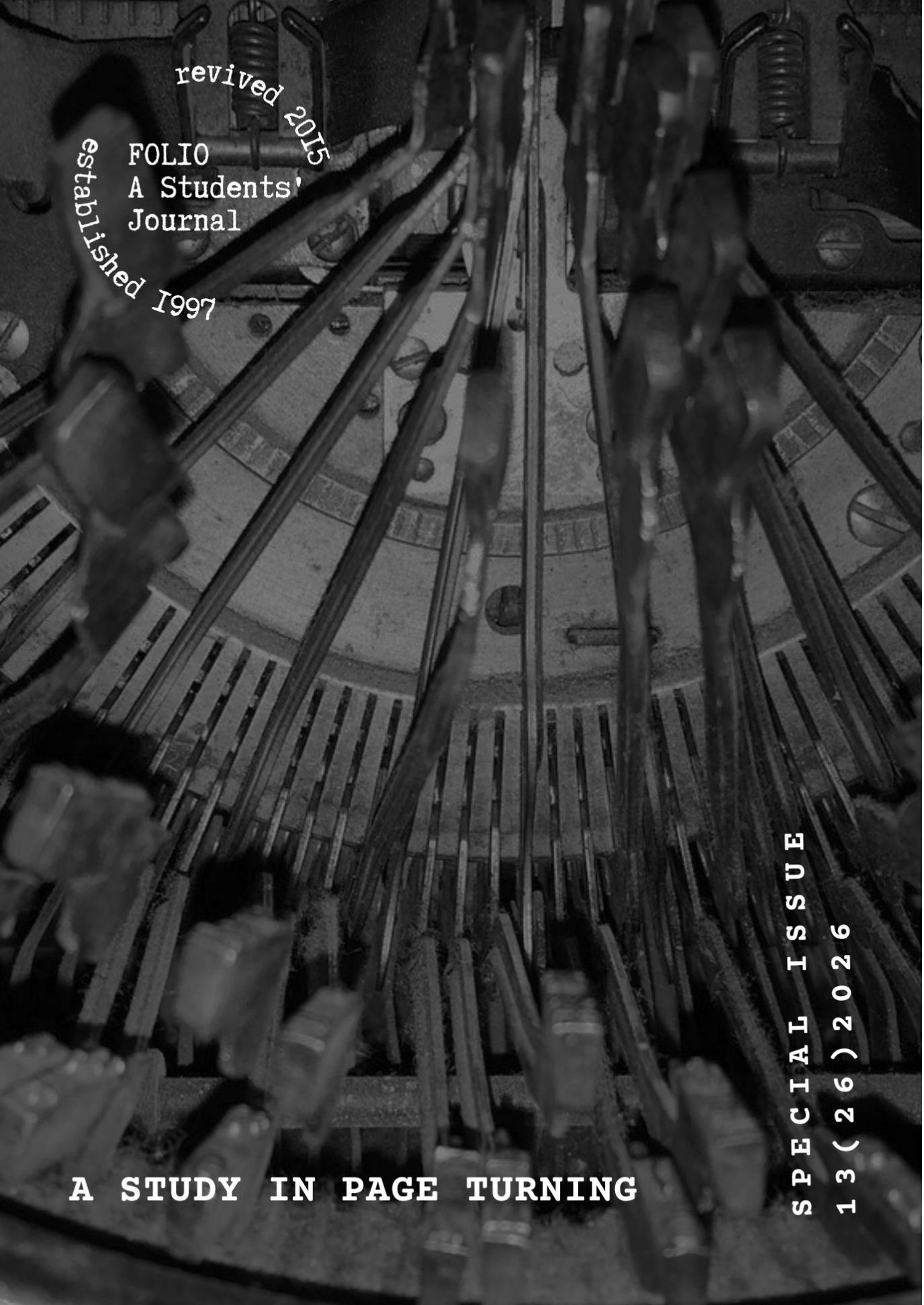


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A STUDY IN PAGE TURNING

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Dear Readers,

Long autumn evenings make the best conditions to lose yourself in a long and captivating read. What a time to publish the newest special edition of *Folio. A students' Journal*, and what an edition that is! We give these pages to those who know a thing or two about enchanting stories in hope that their essays inspire you to discover, or rediscover, the absolute literary classics.

The members of our beloved student club, Page Turners, take us on a journey through the troubled lives of Emily and Charlotte Brontë's characters, and the dilemmas surrounding the double identity of dr Jekyll. We get the opportunity to examine Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* and Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* through the lenses of sexuality and desire. Finally, we are invited to explore how our own experiences may shape the way we read beloved novels like *The Hobbit* and how Agatha Christie's mystery novels may resonate with their readers.

The selection of topics is as broad as it is exciting, making it a particularly good companion for a cosy evening, preferably with a nice cup of tea at hand. I hope you have as much fun reading this edition as I had editing it. And if you would like to share in some of that fun, new editors are always welcome!

In the meantime, as always, enjoy!

Natalia Wilk

A Study in Page Turners

Lucyna Krawczyk-Żywko
Student Club Supervisor

> *I have had such an overdose of him that I feel towards him as I do towards pâté de foie gras.*
> Arthur Conan Doyle

This text was supposed to be on the first book we discussed as the Page Turners Book Club. I was the one that suggested Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* for the inaugural meeting but not because I am a fan of the Great Detective – I prefer his persistent transfictional and transmedial presence. I thought students exposed to numerous and varied adaptations of the character might benefit from getting to know the text that introduced Sherlock Holmes or enjoy rereading it after some time, possibly in a new light. Texts do not change but we do, and so do our readings and interpretations. Two years later, after two other Sherlock Holmes novels selected by the group for our anniversary meetings, it is even more fun to precede the texts in this special issue with a few words on the club itself rather than the book that opened its meetings. Still, Doyle's spirit informs them as it is his idea for Part I of *A Study in Scarlet* that gives this preface a structure.[1]

Page Turners

I had been longing for an institute book club for a long time. I even wanted to start one – but I knew for it to last, it needed to be a students' grassroots idea. So I kept relatively quiet and organised a course around my favourite neo-Victorian novel. I run it biennially, each time starting with its origin story, hoping for a continuation. Last

[1] Chapters in Part I of *A Study in Scarlet* are titled: I. Mr. Sherlock Holmes, II. The Science of Deduction, III. The Lauriston Gardens Mystery, IV. What John Rance Had to Tell, V. Our Advertisement Brings a Visitor, VI. Tobias Gregson Shows What He Can Do, VII. Light in the Darkness.

time it coincided with a need among some students to read more classics and *voilà* – we talk books. Students come and go and the group keeps changing, but the original idea keeps working.

The Science of Book Clubbing

Each student club is different. Each has its own rules. Page Turners read British classics of various genres. As stated on the website, the meetings are open to everyone but the first rule of book club is reading the book; the second rule is talking about it in English ("Page Turners"). That is it. Less structure, more space for personal engagement. Everyone is welcome to join the discussions at any time of the year for whichever book they want to (re)read. Students vote on the titles, invite guest speakers, and collaborate with a fellow American Book Club, Bookin' It; we talk, watch adaptations, and fight for a book during the Christmas party gift game.

The BWN Mystery

During the first meeting I was asked for the reasons behind the choice of location. They were simple: 1) the Reading Room of the Library of the Faculty of Modern Languages (Biblioteka Wydziału Neofilologii) is the only space were books are on permanent display; 2) there are sofas I bought for students of the Institute of English Studies back when it was located at Hoża Street (trivia: the money came from second-hand book fairs I had been organising for a few years); the staff of the library, especially Dorota Traczewska who is in charge of the English studies section, are super friendly and willing to accommodate us approximately every third Friday.

What Students Had to Tell

At the time of publication of this issue, we have discussed 25 titles (the complete list is available on the Page Turners website), 6 of which I had not read before. Each time there are students who read a given book for the first time and those who re-read it. Some are or become fans, others vehemently dislike the story or style. Each time the clash of perspectives and interpretations not only ensures a lively discussion, but also makes me pause and think about the extent of various gaps, including generational. Among the points that stirred more animated discussions or surprised some participants was young Jane Eyre as a brat, red flags regarding Mr Rochester the older

Jane missed, the naiveté of the successor of Rebecca, the violence of *Wuthering Heights*, the pace of *Dracula*, the gendering of *Lord of the Flies*, Agatha Christie's writing style, the number of ponies dying in *The Hobbit*, et cetera, et cetera. Some viewpoints are really refreshing, others truly surprising. All are welcome.

Our Advertisement Brings Visitors

Page Turners are also active during the annual Student Club Fair, which translates into an even more varied group. Students of the Institute of English Studies form the core, but we also boast members from the Institute of Applied Linguistics, Faculty of Journalism, Information and Book Studies, Faculty of Sociology, or Faculty of Physics (to list the affiliations I am aware of), and even candidates for undergraduate programmes at the IES.

A Few Page Turners Show What They Can Do

If you want to get a taste of the range of readings and interpretations that some of the club members are capable of, keep reading this issue. Due to my dual role as both the main editor of *Folio* and the supervisor of the book club, I was not involved in the selection of texts. Each article went through a double-blind review process (i.e. an academic expert read and reviewed an anonymised text). The result? Scroll these digital pages and enjoy Aleksandra's take on *Jane Eyre*, Małgorzata's on *Wuthering Heights*, Yaryna's on *Carmilla*, the other Aleksandra's on *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Esmanur's on *The Turn of the Screw*, Aliye's on *And Then There Were None* and Göktuğ's on *The Hobbit*.

Light in the Darkness

At the time when so many fellow academics bemoan AI-propelled decline in deep reading and critical thinking, I am privileged to be starting another Page Turners reading season. This time, the list is even more varied – we will get to read novels and short stories, and this time 6 out of 9 titles will be new to me, at least in the book format. You may join us, and in the meantime enjoy Part II: while Arthur Conan Doyle took his readers to The Country of the Saints, you are about to explore the Space of the Page Turners and the works they selected as worthy of further critical examination. Quoting Sherlock Holmes, "my case is complete" (Doyle).

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Jane Eyre: The Victorian Crossroads of Reason and Superstition

Aleksandra Gałązka
MA Student

During Queen Victoria's reign, Britain underwent a period of robust intellectual growth and significant technological advancement. The progress was wide-ranging, encompassing developments from Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and Michael Faraday's discovery of magneto-electric induction to the emergence of nationwide railway networks, accompanied by innovations such as steam engines, telegraphs, and photography (Peterson xii). Revolutionary as these changes were, they also triggered a spectrum of social anxieties, sparking lively ontological and ethical debates within the growing and evolving middle class (Houghton 54–58; Briggs 312–318). Furthermore, as scientific progress was unevenly distributed, fascination and scepticism went hand in hand, despite the technological optimism often attributed to the era (Inge 9). Literature provided a significant outlet for the clashing outlooks on life, with Gothic fiction serving as a widely popular and well-established cultural vehicle for surfacing, naming, and processing societal doubts and fears (Lamont 313). Romantic-era works of the genre, such as Lord Byron's *Manfred* (1817) and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), not only raise questions about the ethics and dangers of intellectual ambition but also depict the strong, widespread tension between rational inquiry and unfounded belief that informed Victorian thought. Throughout the nineteenth century, people of all ages, classes, and intellectual backgrounds engaged in practices such as physiognomy, hypnosis, and clairvoyance, as well as ghost storytelling, séances, and protective rituals against supernatural forces, despite the controversy and criticism these activities frequently attracted. The picture is further complicated by the fact that some of these practises, such as physiognomy, were widely considered legitimate scientific tools at the time.

Although involvement in the occult and belief in folk traditions were even more disreputable for women (Dickerson 20), both women writers and their works attest to the persistent tension and blurred boundary between fact and superstition that troubled the Victorian mind. One such prominent manifestation of this conflict can be found in the first novel published by Currer Bell, today known as Charlotte Brontë.

The daughter of an Anglican clergyman who ministered in the parsonage of the sheltered English village of Haworth (Przedpełska-Trzeciakowska 35), Brontë was exposed to supernatural beliefs in English folklore from an early age:

> Living where she did and as she did, she was aware of the world of superstition and magic, of the Old Religion which had survived in rural England among the less educated and which kept alive a tradition totally alien to the ideals of a progressive, industrial, and patriarchal society. (Martin 86)

Charlotte Brontë's best-known work, first published in 1847 under the title *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*, is a Gothic coming-of-age novel that combines the harsh reality of nineteenth-century English orphanhood with Christian, supernatural, and Romantic spiritual elements (Franklin 462). One of the most impactful moments in Jane's young life occurs when she is granted an opportunity to obtain an education and, consequently, a profession that can provide her with stability, respectability, and independence. Yet the protagonist's journey also abounds in observations and events that either question or altogether escape conventional knowledge and rationality. These occurrences significantly influence the heroine's mental, physical, and spiritual development. This paper examines Jane's progress by mapping the narrative elements that belong to both the worlds of reason and superstition, analysing their functions and representations to determine which of the two emerges as the dominant narrative force.

The protagonist of the novel is a lonely, abused orphan excluded by the wealthy wife of her deceased uncle and her three children: John, Eliza, and Georgiana Reed. Jane is depicted as a complex child. She is sensitive, strong-willed, and individualistic—qualities that both the Reeds and their servants find awkward and irritating. Jane, in turn, perceives their cold and often aggressive treatment as cruel and unjust, and she emerges as a tragic figure whose actions repeatedly lead to conflict and severe repercussions. The situation reaches its climax when John Reed returns home from school and bullies her. The boy's depiction, particularly of his face and body, is highly relevant for this study: "large and stout for his age, with a dingy and unwholesome skin; thick lineaments in a spacious visage, heavy limbs and large extremities" (Brontë 5). Many Victorians strongly believed that a person's outward appearance reflected their character and potential. Physiognomy and phrenology, with roots extending back to ancient Greece, were widely recognised nineteenth-century fields of study and were applied in education, medicine, and even criminal profiling.

Brontë demonstrates a clear engagement with these disciplines, as her character descriptions frequently mirror the behaviours, strengths, and flaws attributed within these frameworks. John Reed serves as a prominent example of this narrative technique: his physical description underscores his sluggish intellect, self-indulgence, and bad temper. Consequently, the reader is inclined to accept this judgment as presented, despite the limitations of first-person narration from a young girl's perspective.

Brontë also employs physiognomy and phrenology extensively as a form of foreshadowing. In later chapters, John's initial description aligns with his development into a morally corrupt, unstable, and irresponsible adult. The author's fascination with reading character from appearance has been widely discussed in relation to the emergence of psychological studies, Victorian socio-political dynamics, and contemporary understandings of physical and mental illness (Bailin 50, Shuttleworth 54–69). In *Charlotte Brontë and the Victorian Psychology* (1996), Sally Shuttleworth uses biographical evidence to demonstrate Brontë's interest in the size and strength of faculties responsible for different cognitive processes, such as imagination or critical thinking (Shuttleworth 60–69). She also identifies Jane and Mr. Rochester's relationship as grounded in a phrenological model of trust, authority, and understanding, referring to the scene in which Rochester invites Jane to examine his skull (170). The scholar further notes an important ambiguity in assessing Brontë's engagement with these two systems of thought. While phrenology is described as "relational, materialist, and closed off to the uninitiated", physiognomy emerges as "essentialist" and "idealist" (Shuttleworth 61). This distinction aligns with Brontë's characterisation: neither Jane nor Mr Rochester conforms to conventional standards of beauty, and although Rochester's morality is questionable, Jane's kind, diligent, and principled nature does not correspond to physiognomic expectations. Consequently, while Brontë frequently employs body-character parallels associated with contemporary scientific theories, she also introduces a degree of scepticism that complicates their authority.

Jane Eyre features multiple narrative arcs that can be interpreted as forms of defiance against Victorian rationalism, with the red-room episode serving as the first seed of doubt sown within an ostensibly Enlightenment-oriented environment. The novel opens with Jane withdrawing from the emotionally charged presence of the Reeds and seeking refuge in the drawing room. Meanwhile, John comes looking for her, eager to provoke a confrontation. After eventually tracking her down, he strikes her and berates her until she finally snaps and retaliates. As a result, Jane is punished

for her 'misbehaviour' and is locked in the red room, the site of her uncle's death. Initially, Jane's wrath and indignation suppress her belief in ghosts and other supernatural phenomena that her nursery maid had cultivated in her. Gradually, however, the room's oppressive atmosphere, combined with the imagination of a ten-year-old child, overwhelms her anger. She begins to brood over her situation and the unfulfilled promise Mrs Reed made to her husband on his deathbed:

> A singular notion dawned upon me. I doubted not – never doubted – that if Mr Reed had been alive he would have treated me kindly... I began to recall what I had heard of dead man, troubled in their graves by the violation of their last wishes, revisiting the earth to punish the perjured and avenge the oppressed; and I thought Mr Reed's, harassed by the wrongs of his sister's child, might quit its abode – whether in the church vault or in the unknown world of the departed – and rise before me in this chamber. (Brontë 15)

In that moment, Jane's imagination and her resentment towards all the Gateshead residents overpower her to the point that she begins to believe she possesses the ability to unwittingly summon her dead uncle's spirit. Subsequently, in her agitated state and surrounded by darkness, she notices a ray of light entering the room through the window, which appears to affirm her belief in her supernatural powers. The scene serves as one of the clearest examples of the tension between reason and superstition that the novel sustains. Although the protagonist is a young, traumatised girl and the reader is given her retrospective adult reinterpretation of the events, the deeply embedded Victorian belief in the supernatural lingers, lending credibility to the irrational perspective of the distressed child.

This cultural context aligns with Alice Diver's claims in her essay "Jane Eyre and Social Justice: How to Survive a (Victorian) 'Witch' Trial". Diver argues that Jane is more than an ordinary girl and may indeed possess supernatural abilities (Diver 209–242). This interpretation reframes the novel as a nineteenth-century witch-trial narrative, extending the scale of Jane's persecution beyond gender and class while granting her the form of agency unavailable within a strictly rational framework. According to Diver, Jane's powers only begin to manifest at this early stage of the novel, and several arguments support this reading (212–221). Jane's condition aligns with the typical profile of a woman accused of witchcraft—"marginal, of poor reputation, and low social status", "the kind of person viewed as most likely to succumb to diabolical temptation in order to improve her situation" (Garland 1166). The narrative also

follows "the norms of the witch-trialling process, carrying her aloft" when she is first taken to the red room and later publicly chastised at Lowood (Riddell 259). Drawing on Diver's claims, one might even argue that Jane unwittingly casts a kind of spell on her aunt when she voices her grievances after their encounter with the headmaster, effectively cursing the Reeds for their lack of empathy and persistent mistreatment. This interpretation shifts the narrative authority towards the supernatural, positioning it as an overarching force that exceeds—and cannot be fully comprehended through—human faculties or the conceptual frameworks they construct. By extension, this logic can be applied to English patriarchy and other forms of social oppression depicted in the text, which are gradually challenged, if not destabilised, by Jane's seemingly irrational powers.

There are, however, many more rationalistic readings of Jane's childhood. One of the figures of power and authority that appears during her stay with the Reeds is Mr Lloyd, the apothecary whom Jane's aunt sends for when the girl suffers a fit in the red room and loses consciousness. Despite his humble standing in comparison with a physician, the man clearly represents the world of science, and it is he who restores Jane and shows her genuine concern. After Jane recovers somewhat, he returns to Gateshead, elicits from her the real cause of the fit, and influences Mrs Reed accordingly, thereby improving the child's circumstances and prospects. Despite lacking any further obligation to help the girl, Mr Lloyd is the person who shows her the most consideration at this stage of the narrative. The Thornfield episode of the novel, in which Jane is already a grown woman working as a governess, features another appearance of a medical practitioner who succeeds in helping his patient, notably without shrinking from his responsibility despite suspicious and inconvenient circumstances and without displaying any racial prejudice.

Throughout the narrative, medical professionals are portrayed as decent, competent, and level-headed individuals; however, Mr Lloyd stands out for his significant contribution to Jane's welfare and for the crucial role he plays in her early life. Yet apothecaries and physicians are not the text's only representatives of the scientific world. Other figures of note, such as teachers, can be found in Lowood's milieu, with Miss Temple's numerous virtues representing the profession in its finest form. The rest of Lowood's staff, such as Miss Scatcherd, is more open to interpretation. It can be said that this highly principled and intolerant teacher aptly conveys the rigidity and firmness associated with science. While rigidity denotes a negative quality, firmness is usually used in a positive context, and this is how Jane's friend Helen perceives Miss Scatcherd, noting that her punishments are both well-

founded and constructive. Conversely, Jane's perspective and the woman's physiognomic reading label the teacher as a villain; however, similar to Helen's pronounced piety, both the narrative mode and Brontë's scepticism towards physiognomy undermine this assessment, ultimately rendering the character's true motives unresolved. The novel's representation of the world of reason also includes a significant figure from another relevant professional domain. Later, when Jane leaves Lowood and moves to Thornfield, the reader is introduced to Mr Briggs, a man of law and, specifically, John Eyre's attorney. Mr Briggs not only saves Jane from bigamy and the loss of her independence but also ultimately formally secures her financial empowerment through her uncle's inheritance, constituting one of the most significant examples of the positive way in which Brontë portrays representatives of the rational world.

The world of reason – education in particular – serves as an important catalyst for Jane's development and can be seen as the primary source of her empowerment, which is not merely granted to her but largely self-achieved. As an orphan and the daughter of an aristocratic woman who married beneath her social standing, Jane belongs to the lower middle class and, without the support of a male relative, her best prospects lie in training to become a governess. As austere and underfunded as Lowood school initially is, it equips Jane with the academic and social skills essential for earning independence. She also acquires several accomplishments associated with upper-class women, such as drawing, music, and needlework, which prove pivotal in securing her a well-paid and respectable position at Thornfield. In contrast to the isolation she suffers while living with the Reeds, Lowood provides her with a wealth of kind and supportive female role models who give her a sense of agency, dignity, and belonging:

> I toiled hard, and my success was proportionate to my efforts; my memory, not naturally tenacious, improved with practice; exercise sharpened my wits; in a few weeks I was promoted to a higher class; in less than two months I was allowed to commence French and drawing... That night, on going to bed, I forgot to prepare in imagination the Bermecide supper of hot roast potatoes, or white bread and new milk, with which I was wont to amuse my inward cravings: I feasted instead on the spectacle of ideal drawings, which I saw in the dark; all the work of my own hands... Well has Solomon said – 'Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.' (Brontë 102–103)

While empowering and mentally enriching, Jane's educational experience is somewhat overshadowed by several events and aspects that call into question the esteem for the world of reason Brontë generally seems to express. One of the most significant events is the typhus outbreak. As Jane observes, Lowood lies in a forest-dell and is "the cradle for fog and fog-bred pestilence", which, with the arrival of spring, "breathed typhus through its crowded schoolroom and dormitory" (105–106). Frequently interpreted as a critique of radical social inequalities, the story arc can also be read as an expression of fear and distrust towards science and reason. This helplessness in the face of death is reflected in Jane's changed behaviour, which results not only from the school paralysis caused by the epidemic but also from her subconscious longing for a force capable of resolving the crisis. Her idle wandering in the woods can be interpreted as an escape into the world of magic and folklore, which, at this moment, emerges as more merciful and reassuring. Deliberately distancing herself from Miss Temple and Helen, Jane, much like the science-oriented and progress-optimistic Victorians, cannot fully understand her own actions. The hours preceding Helen's death, when Jane finally ventures to reconnect with her, mark the climax of the scientific scepticism that the novel frequently, though implicitly, expresses. The way the dying girl perceives her fate not only reflects her deep Christian faith but also prefigures the unease later caused by Darwin's theories, such as the principle of natural selection, fully formulated in *On the Origin of Species*, published in 1859. Oddly enough, Helen seems to allude to these ideas while comforting Jane, justifying her death with her own shortcomings: "By dying young, I shall escape great sufferings. I had not qualities or talents to make my way very well in the world: I should have been continually at fault" (Brontë 113). Not only Miss Temple's subsequent departure but also Helen's illness, which lies beyond the power of medicine, can be seen as causes of Jane's characteristic restlessness. As a result, she eventually leaves the seemingly peaceful and well-supplied school and returns to the world of superstition she seemed to have abandoned upon her departure from Gateshead. Furthermore, Jane's struggle to formulate a coherent plan to achieve her new goals suggests that even the most exercised and logic-driven mind needs the help of a "kind fairy" to find a final solution to a problem (Brontë 121). This disillusionment with the world of reason is apparent throughout the novel, as Jane restlessly moves from one place to another, with a life of agency, dignity, and purpose proving ultimately insufficient.

While addressing numerous social-realist themes, *Jane Eyre* can also be read as a fairy tale. Some critics interpret the novel as a rewriting of *Cinderella*, *Bluebeard*,

or *Beauty and the Beast* (Sass 19). Both Mr Rochester's inclination to label Jane as an "elf", "sprite", and "fairy" and his refusal to perceive reality as it truly is largely contribute to such interpretations (Campbell 235). These readings also align with the fact that, despite being an orphan living in an oppressive patriarchal society, the protagonist is repeatedly favoured by good fortune. She is often almost miraculously preserved, as during the typhus plague at Lowood and her arduous journey to Moor House (Garland 1154). Moreover, in keeping with fairy-tale conventions, Jane's life is populated largely by morally black-and-white characters who are either villains, such as Mrs Reed, or angelic figures, such as Miss Temple. Jane's connection to folklore and the supernatural is further supported by elements such as the "empowering moonlight" and her mystical bond with winged creatures (Diver 218). Her link to magic and superstition is also evident in her dreams, omens, and premonitions, which she repeatedly experiences—including the final one, which saves her from accepting St. John's rational yet loveless proposal and reunites her with Mr Rochester. However, both Jane and Mr Rochester have complex relationships with the rational and superstitious. Jane is often empowered by the world of magic, which appears to guide, protect, and grant her the strength to face various challenges. Mr Rochester also shows a strong connection to the magical world, which he frequently exploits to win Jane's sympathy. Yet this interpretation primarily highlights the dangers of indulging in superstition, positioning Jane as a damsel in distress. This perspective also tends to diminish the complexity of Rochester's first wife, Bertha Mason. Similar to interpretations that view Bertha as a mere metaphor for marginalised groups in Victorian Britain or for the injustices of British imperialism (Beattie 493), the fairy-tale reading strips her of her humanity, portraying her as an ominous force haunting Thornfield whose defeat is necessary to resolve the main story arc, rather than recognising her as a woman suffering from mental illness, as more rational modern interpretations suggest.

Jane Eyre offers a complex portrayal of the forces this research has sought to examine. The world of reason emerges as a potentially empowering system, but not an omnipotent, entirely efficient, or consistently reassuring one. The protagonist's journey to adulthood clearly attests to this view. While knowledge, reason, and science frequently contribute to her autonomy and agency, they are neither the dominant forces operating within the text nor are they consistently portrayed as unambiguously positive. In fact, the novel's social-realist dimension at times renders rationalism unjust or even vicious, reducing individuals to their utility, as illustrated by Helen. This aligns with historical accounts of Victorian life, in which reliance on reason did not always

prove safe or effective, even for those with access to its resources. Conversely, a substantial part of the novel's portrayal of superstition also renders it threatening, particularly through Mr Rochester's fairy-tale-like manipulations, which frequently place Jane in danger. The destructive potential of such influences is further conveyed through their tendency to distort characters and events, often presenting them in binary or excessively figurative terms. Nevertheless, supernatural practices and occurrences hold a prominent position within the novel, partly drawing on the text's Christian spirituality. Regardless of how one interprets the protagonist, otherworldly beings, omens, dreams, and premonitions profoundly influence her development, often acting as decisive forces that propel her beyond her comfort zone. Still, just as Jane refuses to submit to Mr Rochester's fantasies, she does not willingly surrender to other forms of the supernatural—a dynamic not immediately apparent at the surface level of the plot. Consequently, the resolution of the main storyline is ultimately grounded in the world of reason, which the text often appears to disfavour. Although nineteenth-century science could not account for all the eerie phenomena depicted in the novel, it is rationality—and the representatives of the world of reason—that prevent Jane from succumbing to Mr Rochester's temptations, ultimately enabling her to assert an agency and autonomy that surpass his own.

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A Love Story with More Misery than Love? Discrimination and Trauma in *Wuthering Heights*

Małgorzata Komor
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Wuthering Heights, published in 1847 by Emily Brontë, is a novel that is considered one of the most influential and iconic classics of English literature. Primarily defined by themes present in the romantic tradition and Gothic fiction, the book is often described as a powerful and moving love story between Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw. It is sometimes assumed that it is indeed love that constitutes the main theme of the novel, as the all-consuming passion between Heathcliff and Catherine is extremely deep and unique. After its publication, however, the novel received mixed reviews from the critics who regarded its themes of violence and abuse as vulgar, partially due to the challenge that they posed to the notions of Victorian morality: "In *Wuthering Heights* the reader is shocked, disgusted, almost sickened by details of cruelty, inhumanity, and the most diabolical hate and vengeance" ("Review of *Wuthering Heights*"). Currently, we are better equipped to examine those themes of trauma and discrimination due to development of trauma theory and studies on the cycles of violence, which allows us to recognise their importance in the novel as well as understand the message that they convey. In *Wuthering Heights*, Brontë emphasizes the destructive nature of violence by exposing the mechanisms behind cycles of abuse and demonstrating ways in which they can be stopped through depictions of social discrimination and gender disparities.

The first victim of abuse presented in the novel is Heathcliff, whose mistreatment starts the very first moment that he is introduced to the members of the family. Throughout the whole book Heathcliff is described as having dark skin, but the first time it is mentioned in the story (apart of the account of Mr Lockwood) is when Mr Earnshaw states that the child is "as dark almost as if it came from the devil" (Brontë 31), signalling to the readers the harmful way in which the members of the family perceived him. Their racism is further visible in the constant use of discriminatory language, treating Heathcliff as "the Other" and dehumanizing him: "I was frightened, and Mrs Earnshaw was ready to fling it out of doors" (Brontë 31). In

this way, the place where he was supposed to feel safe became a place of rejection and humiliation (Montwieler 56). After some time of Heathcliff being favoured by Mr Earnshaw, it became apparent that Hindley and Nelly were jealous of him and, in turn, started resorting to violence: "He would stand Hindley's blows without winking or shedding a tear, and my pinches moved him only to draw in a breath and open his eyes" (Brontë 32). Mrs Earnshaw never intervened when she saw him being wronged by other children, facilitating the physical abuse and adding to the neglect and trauma that he experienced. It further emphasises the fact that "these characters do not seem to have any awareness of how dehumanizing, brutalizing, or isolating their acts are" (Montwieler 56). They did not realize how harmful their prejudice was or the extent to which their treatment of Heathcliff could affect him, both immediately and in the long term.

After Mr Ernshaw's death Hindley took control over Wuthering Heights and allowed the grudge that he held towards Heathcliff to dictate his actions, which manifested in mental and physical abuse: "Hindley, feeling neglected and mistreated by his own father, becomes determined to neglect and even actively mistreat Heathcliff" (Evans 9). Hindley made him work tirelessly outdoors, depriving him of education and further excluded him by treating him like a servant. Now with them both not being young children anymore, Hindley's violent tendencies became even more apparent: "Mr Earnshaw snatched up the culprit directly and conveyed him to his chamber, where, doubtless, he administered a rough remedy to the cool fit of passion, for he appeared red and breathless" (Brontë 49). This kind of treatment resulted in Heathcliff desiring retaliation. In a conversation with Nelly he admits that he want to have his revenge on his oppressor, which is then followed by him stating: "I'll plan it out: while I'm thinking of that I don't feel pain" (Brontë 51). Similarly, earlier in the chapter, Heathcliff admits of envying Edgar Linton his looks, manners and status, which, together, show his deep desire and need for acceptance that he was constantly denied. They also showcase the pain that surfaces as a result of discrimination and abuse – without respect and understanding, especially early on in life, we run "the risk of creating "monsters" who grow up to traumatize others" (Montwieler 53), which is clearly visible in Heathcliff's story and his reaction to the trauma he experienced.

After experiencing discrimination and violence in his childhood, Heathcliff perpetuated the abuse cycle as an adult, hurting mentally and physically people around him. As part of his plan of enacting revenge upon Hindley, Heathcliff takes complete control over Hareton after his father's death: "In one of the novel's many ironies,

Hindley, having spent years degrading Heathcliff, has only thereby given Heathcliff a strong motive to mistreat Hareton" (Evans 10). Being first abused by his own father, Hareton finds himself at the mercy of Heathcliff who denies him education, forces him to work on the farm and treats him as a mere servant, mirroring the ways in which Hindley mistreated him. This is the reason why Heathcliff openly admits to seeing himself in Hareton: "I can sympathize with all his feelings, having felt them myself" (Brontë 184) and continues the cycle of violence that started during his childhood. Hareton, however, does not realise the extent to which Heathcliff mistreats and abuses him, continuing to stand by his side and holding him in high regard: "I've got him faster than his scoundrel of a father secured me, and lower, for he takes a pride in his brutishness ... And the best of it is, Hareton is damnably fond of me!" (Brontë 184). Heathcliff is aware that he perpetuates the exact same behaviour of his own oppressor, but it seems that he takes pride in the degradation that he caused and the only thing that matters to him is getting retaliation. It indicates that Heathcliff's emotional and educational neglect of Hareton stems from his own experiences and trauma, as well as his unresolved desire for revenge, fuelled by discrimination.

Linton Heathcliff, being the second child in Heathcliff's care at Wuthering Heights, received a completely different treatment from Hareton. Linton obtained good education – he could read, write and was knowledgeable, contrary to Hareton who was denied this privilege. The possibility of education, however, did not come from Heathcliff's genuine care but rather "reflects his intention to make Linton a suitably respectable future husband to Cathy" in order for Heathcliff to take control of both Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange (Evans 14). Despite Linton being an important part of his plan, Heathcliff viewed him as otherwise useless and weak. He despised his son and even after seeing him for the first time, said: "That's worse than I expected – and the devil knows I was not sanguine!" (Brontë 174). When Linton's health started deteriorating, Heathcliff's need for his son and Cathy Linton's marriage was becoming more urgent. This, in turn, resulted in him abusing of his own dying child, which included threats, physical violence and exercising him beyond his abilities: "I could not picture a father treating a dying child as tyrannically and wickedly as I afterwards learnt Heathcliff had treated him" (Brontë 217). Linton being terrified of Heathcliff and dying as a tool in his own father's scheme showcases that, mostly because of his own trauma, Heathcliff did not stop at violence or threats of physical punishment whenever he thought it may benefit him (Evans 13).

Despite most of the violence in the novel being enacted by men towards other men, we are also presented with female characters who struggle with abuse, but

generally react differently than male victims. Isabella and Cathy Linton are among the characters whom Heathcliff uses as instruments in carrying out his revenge. His real motive is revenge against Edgar Linton, but he manipulates Isabella by allowing her to believe that he actually loves her. Even before their marriage he does not completely conceal his cruel nature, but Isabella ignores warnings about his character, being already too infatuated with him. Later, after marrying Isabella, he confined her to Wuthering Heights and, even though it is not explained directly what he dared to do, we know that after spending time with him Isabella started questioning his sanity and humanity: "Is Mr Heathcliff a man? If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil?" (Brontë 115). We may assume that those questions stem from Heathcliff's psychological or even perhaps physical abuse (Pike 359). She stated that she tried to escape once but would not dare do this again, because of what happened last time. This is opposed by Heathcliff's false claim that she could leave anytime she likes but, out of her own will, decides not to. It would be difficult to come to understand which of the versions are true, if it were not for Isabella's letter (Pike 352). It is a very important part of the novel and a crucial tool in understanding Isabellas character: "One of the most telling clues as to why we should not trivialize Isabella's role either as character or as narrator is given to us by Brontë when she dedicates a chapter to Isabella's letter to Nelly" (Pike 354). By doing that, Brontë put an emphasis on this chapter and signalled that Isabella's account of domestic abuse within a middle-class setting is an important theme in the novel.

Isabella "continually defies both Hindley and Heathcliff, intimidated by neither one", which is visible in the scene, in which Heathcliff throws a knife at her and she "reacts with such defiance as to fight back" by attacking him with the same weapon. Contrary to other characters, for her violence serves an "act of self-preservation, presenting Isabella as a courageous woman who frees herself from her husband's incarceration" (Pike 376–378). Because of the fact that Heathcliff let go of his prudence and resorted to "murderous violence" (Brontë 145), she had to make an attempt to run away. She became the only person in the novel that was able to escape Yorkshire and build a life for herself somewhere else. Despite initially being described as weak and fragile, Isabella proves capable of enduring more than most characters, even in the harshest conditions, and is a great example of "a strong woman who regains her composure and is in full command of herself" (Pike 378). Through Isabella's story, Brontë is able to convey a message regarding the true, hidden and painful truth about domestic abuse and abusive relationships: "Brontë dismantles the sentimentalizing of the middle-class home throughout her novel, and Isabella's story lends a female

perspective to these issues, which become further developed when young Catherine is confined to the Heights later in the novel" (Pike 381).

The cycle of violence continues when Cathy Linton shares a similar fate to Isabella but, just like her predecessor, she does not yield to Heathcliff's demands easily. When he imprisons her in Wuthering Heights in order to force her to marry his son, Cathy tries to force the key to the door from his hand to free herself, but ultimately fails when Heathcliff resorts to violence: "he seized her with the liberated hand, and, pulling her on her knee, administered with the other a shower of terrific slaps on both sides of the head". (Brontë 226). Apart from physical abuse, Heathcliff degrades her in front of other people, threatens on multiple occasions and openly admits that he detests her. Despite that, Cathy is willing to comply to his demands, but when she sees that this will not help her case, she does not shy away from speaking the truth, even if it might provoke him: "Mr Heathcliff, you have nobody to love you, and however miserable you make us, we shall still have the revenge of thinking that your cruelty arises from your greater misery" (Brontë 240). It is difficult to determine to what extent the time she spent in Wuthering Heights alongside Heathcliff impacted her and in what ways, however, it is safe to assume that exposition to such experiences at a young age changes people: "The lives of various youthful characters (including ... Isabella, Cathy, and Linton) are definitely damaged by many of the various kinds of neglect and maltreatment" (Evans 8).

Another character who contributes to Cathy's mistreatment is Linton Heathcliff, whose own experiences of mistreatment lead him to perpetuate the cycle of abuse.: "Linton, abused by his own father, Heathcliff, does in some ways become reluctantly abusive himself (especially toward Cathy), but only because he fears being further mistreated by his abusive father" (Evans 4). When Linton demands that Cathy gives him her necklace, Heathcliff's intervenes by structing her and destroying the jewellery, to which Linton does not react and even admits that he "was glad at first – she deserved punishing" (Brontë 234). Linton not only uses his health to manipulate Cathy, but also facilitates physical abuse done by his father, to which he is completely indifferent or even experiences relief when she is hurt. Although he does not engage in physical violence, Linton acts as a pawn in Heathcliff's plans and contributes to Cathy's suffering.

After Linton's death, Hareton, who Cathy initially hated, proved to be a better companion for her and the person who finally managed to break the cycle of abuse. Having been first mistreated by Hindley and later by Heathcliff, Hareton is the person that was subjected to abuse for the longest amount of time among all of the characters

in the novel. Despite that, he did not perpetuate the violence himself: "it is Hareton, abused both by Heathcliff and by Hindley, who manages to escape becoming truly abusive of anyone else", and the reversal of the pattern of abuse was possible not only because of Hareton's reluctance to violence and Heathcliff's death, but also because of Hareton's relationship with Cathy (Evans 4). He tried to better himself and prove that he can achieve something more in order for Cathy to recognise him as equal and, at the same time, Cathy worked on her hurtful preconceptions and decided than instead of mocking Hareton for his defects, she could help him overcome them. Having both changed for each other, they serve as foils to Heathcliff and Catherine, whose love, no matter how deep and powerful, was like "eternal rocks" (70) – constant, but unchanging. Heathcliff stating "I cannot live without my soul" (141) and Catherine saying "he's more myself than I am" (Brontë 68) showcase that their love denies difference in one another and discourages change that are both essential for a healthy relationship. Their obsession with each other was full of pain (Thompson 73), which contrasts a more healthy relationship between Hareton and Cathy that is defined by mutual growth and understanding. This is the reason why it was them who finally managed to stop the reproduction of violence and end the abuse cycle that took root in discrimination and exclusion.

Despite love being an important theme in the novel, Brontë "seems reluctant to share this rich, wild relationship with the readers and even the characters themselves", offering only a few, but very powerful scenes through which the readers are able to understand the depth of Heathcliff and Catherine's feelings (Lutz 389). Through structuring the story around themes of violence and abuse, Brontë defies the notions of conventional love stories, highlighting the challenging and thought-provoking subjects covered in the novel. She illustrates that feelings of affection in families and relationships coexist with cruelty and destruction, presenting a reality that not many people were willing to talk about at the time of the publication of the novel. She showcases that the violence is not innate, but rather learned and acquired through environment. In *Wuthering Heights* its transmission happens mostly at home through family members, making the place that should always be safe and protective the root of characters' trauma. It was discrimination of Heathcliff by his family that started the cycle of abuse and created someone very violent and unpredictable, but in reality "Heathcliff's cruelty and inhumanity is matched only by [his] original desire for acceptance" (Montwieler 63). Brontë argues that "monsters" are not born, but rather created and while that does not excuse Heathcliff's actions, it helps us understand how violence originates and the reasons why it is perpetuated. Through that, Brontë

emphasises "the importance of childhood experiences and the lingering consequences of trauma" (Montwieler 52), which constitutes an important message and was especially powerful in a period when children did not possess the same autonomy and rights that they do today.

In *Wuthering Heights,* the characters and their relationships with each other reflect the social struggles that Brontë aimed to confront. They are not shaped solely by mutual feelings and affection, but also by fear, power imbalance and pure survival, which is visible in the portrayal of women in the novel. Through Isabella and Cathy, Brontë represents feminine voices and their responses to violence that differ from the masculine ones. Instead of perpetuating the violence, they either try to free themselves of it, in case of Isabella, or try to eliminate it completely, as seen through Cathy. It is also Isabella's marriage with Heathcliff that gives Brontë an opportunity to emphasise the importance of addressing the subject of domestic violence, while highlighting the fact that middle-class households are not free of it and "how, even in the nineteenth century, homes can turn into Gothic castles, imprisoning young women" (Pike 381). While discourse regarding domestic violence may be familiar to modern readers of the novel, in the 19th century those subjects were considered taboo, making Brontë's message even more impactful and relevant.

By presenting Hareton and Cathy as foils to Heathcliff and Catherine, Brontë explores the true nature of romantic relationships and their profound influence on people. Despite Heathcliff changing his social status out of his affection for Catherine and need for her approval, he still believed that his own suffering justified seeking retaliation and perpetuating abuse. Given the fact that it was the younger couple that managed to break the cycle of violence, it is clear that Brontë sought to indicate that their mutual recognition and emotional understanding were crucial to the matter: "Cathy and Hareton . . . live lives suggesting that children can survive mistreatment and can even eventually thrive after it" (Evans 15). Despite struggling at first, they persisted in their endeavours and succeeded at finding comfort in one another, revealing the meaningful results and importance of changing.

While featuring a love story as a catalyst for the events, Emily Brontë offers a powerful commentary on the pervading and destructive nature of violence that ensues as a consequence of discrimination and prejudice. She explores its harmful influence, showing how it leads to the creation of cycles of abuse and produces lasting consequences that affect especially those most vulnerable. She also illustrates that domestic violence affects women regardless of their social standing and challenges 19th century preconceptions about family and femininity. Ultimately, *Wuthering Heights*

demonstrates that these patterns can be broken and suggests that, instead of focusing on obsession and vengeance, its best to seek relationships grounded in empathy and mutual understanding.

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Carmilla: Desire, Disgust, and the Male Gaze as a Force of Narrative Control

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Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* is an insightful illustration of how Victorian culture explicitly portrays expressions of female sexuality and same-sex desire – both acceptable only on the condition that they are rendered monstrous. Published in 1872 as part of the collection *In a Glass Darkly*, is a staple text of the Gothic genre, as well as the originator of the lesbian vampire trope in Western literature. Predating Bram Stoker's *Dracula* by twenty-five years, it served as a direct inspiration to that novel, with Costello-Sullivan describing it as "*Dracula*'s older sister" (17). From a historical standpoint, Le Fanu was writing at a time when the early feminist movement was gaining momentum in Britain, marked by the Married Women's Property Act of 1870 and the founding of Girton College in 1869, when anxieties around female autonomy and sexuality were prevalent in Victorian society. Published thirteen years before the Labouchere Amendment of 1885 that criminalised male homosexuality, *Carmilla* is positioned in a social context where female same-sex desire was not outlawed legally, but was invisible socially. Therefore, this aspect of female experience could only be made visible in a deliberately grotesque way – through the lens of the Gothic genre.

This tension is represented in the novella's two central characters. Laura, as a markedly passive, domestic, and emotionally sensitive character, embodies the Victorian ideal of the Angel in the House. Carmilla, in direct contrast to her, is autonomous and sexually assertive, embodying the image of what would, 20 years later, be termed the New Woman – a figure who represented anxieties of female autonomy and sexual agency that broke the ideals of Victorian femininity.

The novel's portrayal of their ambiguous relationship operates simultaneously on a psychological and an ideological level. From a psychological perspective, the motifs of fear and repressed desire permeating this Gothic novella invite psychoanalytic readings of the uncanny and the double, as well as gender theories such as Sexual Othering. From an ideological standpoint, the narrative is structured by what Laura Mulvey terms the male gaze: a controlling, heteronormative perspective that

sensationalises and ultimately destroys female autonomy and sexual desire (11). While the theoretical concepts employed here were formulated decades later than the novella itself, Le Fanu employs them rather unconsciously, and this anachronism speaks to the text's complexity. Gothic fiction has long been understood as giving a metaphorical form to culturally repressed phenomena before they could be articulated directly, and Le Fanu's novella in particular anticipates what Freud would later theorise in the 1890s and what second-wave feminist critics would systematise in the 1970s.

Firstly, to achieve the intended horrific effect, the novella widely employs the Freudian concept of the Double, which works through externalisation and othering of the self's hidden desires, feared aspects of identity, and repressed drives given form outside the self. The double is at once familiar and alien, and it can be argued that Carmilla is portrayed in this way in relation to Laura: since she cannot consciously define her lesbian desire and erotic agency, she externalises by giving it a body and a name. In Freudian terms, Carmilla is narratively positioned as Laura's Id to her Ego: the subconscious, pleasure-seeking urge that continuously takes control over her, and which her socialised self must suppress in order to remain in the acceptable bounds of Victorian femininity.

This doubling is especially apparent in Laura's dream encounters with Carmilla. Laura describes her altered state in terms that are conspicuously ambivalent:

> I felt myself a changed girl. A strange melancholy was stealing over me, a melancholy that I would not have interrupted. Dim thoughts of death began to open, and an idea that I was slowly sinking took gentle, and, somehow, not unwelcome possession of me. If it was sad, the tone of mind which this induced was also sweet. (50)

The language used by Laura throughout the book does not suggest that she is experiencing something violent or painful – on the contrary, the calm and passive words she uses suggest her voluntary acceptance of the emotions she feels in her dream state. From a Jungian perspective, this is the Shadow asserting itself: the repressed self recognising itself in the other and moving toward integration rather than rejection.

The centuries-old portrait of Countess Mircalla of Karnstein that has "a wonderful likeness" to Carmilla, found by Laura's father (39) introduces a second and, arguably, more uncanny dimension to the concept of the Double, suggesting that Carmilla is not only Laura's double, but also her own. Mircalla and Carmilla are the same person separated by time, endlessly recurring, unable to die permanently.

Through the portrait, the novel employs Freud's concept of "The Uncanny" (1955): arising when something familiar becomes strange, and when something that should have remained hidden suddenly resurfaces in the consciousness (241). The portrait of Countess Mircalla Karnstein employs both of these aspects simultaneously, making it one of the novel's most unsettling moments, and marking a plot point that becomes one of the first hints at her vampiric identity.

The aspect of the familiar made strange is shown through Laura's intimate knowledge of Carmilla's face. Having looked at it with both fascination and unacknowledged desire, that face is close and attractive to Laura. However, when the same face appears in a portrait dated a century and a half earlier, the familiar becomes destabilised through its displacement in time, and what was a source of comfort and visual pleasure becomes rather disturbing. Le Fanu shows Laura's feelings of confusion and disorientation: "I was more and more lost in wonder the more I looked at the picture" (39).

The return of the repressed aspect is represented by the suggestion that Carmilla has returned from death, from history, from a buried past. In that moment, the portrait becomes undeniable evidence. Although it is regarded by both Laura and her father as a remarkable coincidence, Carmilla is visibly disturbed and embarrassed by their discovery and tries to brush it off. Carmilla's true nature and age, her centuries-long history of vampirism resurfaces as clear visual representation: a painting that has hung in plain sight for years, "blackened by age" (39) until it was restored and its hidden meaning revealed by Laura's father. This suggests that the repressed did not come from outside but was always already present in Laura's house, which, once again, can be interpreted as an allegory of her innate subconscious desires coming to the surface. Moreover, there is a further uncanniness in Carmilla's constantly changing name with which she reinvents herself throughout the centuries, using different names when presenting herself to different families whose daughters she preys upon: Mircalla, Carmilla, Millarca. These names are all anagrams of one another, suggesting that her identity and self-presentation is fluid and artificial on the surface but stable in its fundamental essence that cannot be changed, creating versions that are at the same time familiar but somehow wrong. The portrait, showing the same face, also points to the same name, although in a different order: her deliberately constructed image is nothing more than the letters rearranged.

In *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (1995), Jack Halberstam argues that the Gothic monster functions as a mechanism of othering, through which culture distorts and externalises what it cannot explicitly accept within

normative social structures (2–4). In *Carmilla*, this framework reveals how Le Fanu uses Carmilla's vampirism to portray lesbianism as a monstrosity rather than as a variation of ordinary female experience – horrifying precisely because it has been artificially positioned as The Other.

Vampirism in the novel operates as a metaphor for non-reproductive, same-sex desire. By aligning queerness with monstrosity, the text deploys the othering mechanism. Carmilla's relationship with Laura is characterised by overtly romantic language, physical intimacy, and strong emotional attachment, and her declarations of love, lingering touches, and nocturnal visits render her a source of sexual threat. Moreover, the monstrosity attributed to Carmilla represents the more general contemporary anxieties of female sexual agency: as Déborah Garancher observes, her ability to seduce women away from traditional roles reflects the period's fear of disruption to patriarchal order (14). Her foreign roots and supernatural nature allow her direct expression of desire to be framed as an unnatural intrusion going outside the boundaries of normal femininity rather than being a potential aspect of it, functioning as a destabilising force in Laura's household.

Carmilla's monstrosity simultaneously suggests empowerment: the female vampire, as Daniella Bellafiore notes, escapes "the rigid social and gender boundaries enforced by societal norms, embodying a fluidity that is both liberating and frightening" (1). Her immortality, strength, and sexual assertiveness position her as a woman who refuses submission to patriarchal authority. At the same time, Carmilla's empowerment is regarded not just as immoral, but also pathologically unhealthy, harmful, and, in the case of General Spielsdorf's daughter, even deadly. The text allows the explicit portrayal of her behaviour only on the condition that it is violently punished at the end, and her eventual destruction restabilises the social order that her existence subverted. Therefore, the character of Carmilla is equally a figure of liberation as much as a Victorian cautionary tale.

The novel constructs a "predatory lesbian" figure whose monstrosity lies not only in vampirism but in her sexual assertiveness, which Victorian culture associated with danger and moral decay. By coding Carmilla's expressions of sexuality as dominant, direct and persistent, the novel positions her behaviour as resembling period-typical expectations of masculinity: she embodies both queerness and the violation of normative gender roles. Meanwhile, Laura's sharply contrasting naivete and anxious passivity preserves her moral purity, ensuring that desire is not openly reciprocated but rather represented as a threat to the feminine norms of gender and

sexuality that she represents. Their dynamic is most vividly demonstrated in this exchange:

> '...How jealous I am you cannot know. You must come with me, loving me, to death; or else hate me and still come with me, and *hating* me through death and after. There is no such word as indifference in my apathetic nature.'
> 'Now, Carmilla, you are going to talk your wild nonsense again,' I said hastily. (44)

The women's clear difference in self-expression points at the artificiality of gender as performance, rather than an innate set of behaviours. In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Judith Butler argues that gender is a set of repeated acts that produce the illusion of an intrinsic gender identity (xiv–xv). In *Carmilla*, this framework reveals that the contrast between Carmilla and Laura lies primarily in their two performances of gender: while one is compliantly normative, the other is destabilising, which exposes gendered behaviours as constructed, as something that can have multiple variations.

Laura's performance of femininity is extremely normative throughout the novel. Her emotional reactions to Carmilla are a mix of confusion, passivity, emotional receptivity without active desire, aligning with what Barbara Welter identifies as the Victorian feminine ideal: purity, passivity, and the suppression of sexual agency (151). This is most legible in Laura's account of their encounters:

> I experienced a strange tumultuous excitement that was pleasurable, ever and anon, mingled with a vague sense of fear and disgust. I had no distinct thoughts about her while such scenes lasted, but I was conscious of a love growing into adoration, and also of abhorrence. (29)

The language suggests that Laura cannot consciously verbalise her desire because, within the Victorian gender norms that she has to perform, this expression is unacceptable. Her desire and sensuality, therefore, can be expressed only if it is accompanied by repression, shame, and anxiety; the experience for her is pleasurable but disgusting, adoring but terrifying. Carmilla, by contrast, performs a destabilising gender identity. She is assertive, possessive, and explicitly desirous: "You are mine, you shall be mine, you and I are one for ever" (30). She initiates erotic encounters, expresses her feelings both verbally and physically, exercises power over her object of desire, and the text responds to this threat by punishing this deviant performance.

Since *Carmilla* is written by a male author, the whole story should be viewed with this in mind in order to assess the portrayal of Carmilla and Laura's relationship, since the two women are shown through the male perspective. The representation of the two female characters in *Carmilla* can be analysed through the lens of Laura Mulvey's work *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975). Mulvey argues that classical Hollywood cinema is structured around a heterosexual male spectator, and that this structuring produces a gendered division between active male subjects and passive female objects which Mulvey terms "the male gaze", leading to distorted, sexualised, or one-dimensional depictions of women in art (11–13). "In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness", she argues (11). Although written with the purpose of analysing visual media, it has since been also applied to literary analysis as well, where the visual manifestations of the male gaze are comparable to their textual counterparts. Female characters are portrayed through detailed physical descriptions, and female agency is tightly controlled, which raises the question of whose pleasure the text's representations ultimately serve.

There is one important deviation from the classic framework of Mulvey's theory. In *Carmilla*, Laura is the focaliser: it is she who looks at Carmilla with desire, fear, and fascination, who admires her beauty. However, her gaze is innately controlled by the male: her account is framed, edited, and presented by Doctor Hesselius, a male physician as a case study in his collection of supernatural medical documents. The gaze is therefore doubled through this layered narrative: female on the surface, but always already contained within a male diagnostic structure and interpretation. No female voice in this text reaches the reader unconstrained by male interpretation. Laura's experiences, including her erotic encounters with Carmilla, which are heavily implied rather than depicted, are filtered through a medical framework that pathologises them before the reader encounters them, rather than allowing the reader to make their own conclusions. Furthermore, Laura's perspective is inevitably unreliable for two reasons: whether she omits or alters details that she considers too scandalous to record, or whether Hesselius has done so on her behalf, the text's silences are deliberate. What cannot be said within the male diagnostic frame is as revealing as what can. Mulvey argues that classical cinema builds a heterosexual male spectator into its structure, and in *Carmilla*, the case notes of Doctor Hesselius perform a similar function. By pathologising and analysing through the male doctor's perspective, the text aims to produce horror in a heterosexual, socially conservative

reader, who would see Carmilla's desire as monstrous and unnatural. It is worth noting that the same text, read by a lesbian reader, would produce quite the opposite effect, which exposes the limitations that the male gaze creates in the narrative's intended reception.

The male gaze also operates at the level of prose style. In cinema, the male gaze manifests through the camera lingering on the woman's body through slow pans, close-ups, and lighting and framing that emphasises the female form. In prose fiction, the visual techniques are replaced by descriptive attention to the details of female appearance. When Le Fanu describes Carmilla's incredible beauty, her neck, her eyes, her languid movements, he does so in extended, sensuous detail that exceeds narrative necessity:

> Her complexion was rich and brilliant; her features were small and beautifully formed; her eyes large, dark, and lustrous; her hair was quite wonderful, I never saw hair so magnificently thick and long when it was down about her shoulders; I have often placed my hands under it, and laughed with wonder at its weight. It was exquisitely fine and soft, and in colour a rich very dark brown, with something of gold. I loved to let it down, tumbling with its own weight, as, in her room, she lay back in her chair talking in her sweet low voice, I used to fold and braid it, and spread it out and play with it. (27)

Therefore, although Carmilla possesses agency on a narrative level, the extensive descriptions of physical qualities render both women as objects of aesthetic contemplation rather than agents of action. This directly echoes Mulvey's view that

> Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning. (7)

Carmilla's narrative resolution makes the ideological function of the male gaze explicit. In fiction, the male gaze maps onto who acts and who is acted upon. While Carmilla initially resists this distinction, seducing, choosing, moving, and speaking her desire directly, the narrative ultimately strips her of agency at the end: she is staked, beheaded, and burned by the male figures of authority. Moreover, her one-dimensionality as a sexually predatory, immoral, supernatural character is not a failure

of characterisation but an ideological necessity; a multi-dimensional Carmilla given full interiority and moral complexity would simply be a woman in love, and as a Victorian Gothic horror novella, the text cannot permit that interpretation.

The expulsion of female desire by "protecting" Laura through the destruction of Carmilla is carried out by three male authority figures whose distinct institutional roles collectively represent the mechanism of Victorian patriarchal control. Laura's father provides domestic surveillance and, at the end, physically removes her by taking her on a year-long tour of Italy in an attempt to restore his daughter to normative femininity. Doctor Hesselius provides medical diagnosis, recording Carmilla's desire as illness and vampiric infection, and presenting Laura as an innocent victim rather than as a person with agency, which transforms their relationship into a medical phenomenon or a case of abuse. General Spielsdorf represents the religious and military authority that carries out the violent physical acts on Carmilla:

> The body, therefore, in accordance with the ancient practice, was raised, and a sharp stake driven through the heart of the vampire, who uttered a piercing shriek at the moment, in all respects such as might escape from a living person in the last agony. Then the head was struck off, and a torrent of blood flowed from the severed neck. The body and head were next placed on a pile of wood, and reduced to ashes... (92)

Notably, the text presents this extreme violence against the transgressive female body not as horror but as a harmonising resolution. Together, these three figures represent the institutions through which Victorian patriarchy surveilled, pathologised, and suppressed female agency and desire: the family, medicine, and religion.

At the same time, as Mulvey's framework suggests, the male gaze both narratively dismisses female sexuality and regards it as an erotic spectacle through the objectification of the female body (11). Although *Carmilla* represents a collection of Victorian anxieties about lesbianism, overt female sexuality, and the expression of desire in general, the text is fascinated by what it fears. Lesbianism in the novel is regarded as both monstrous and erotic, as repulsive and compulsively watchable. This voyeuristic feature is not a flaw in the text but the ideological basis of visual pleasure through its portrayal of taboo subjects. The male gaze cannot accept female, especially lesbian, desire, as a normal part of the human experience except as a perverted spectacle to be watched with both excitement and disgust, and then judged and

punished. To be truly pleasurable and interesting to the spectator, the action also must be morally transgressive and provocative.

This dynamic reveals the novel's central contradiction. Rather than simply distancing the reader from transgression, the text draws them into it. Their encounters are described through a language of mutual affection, suggesting that desire is not unidirectional but shared, and the narrative lingers on its emotional and erotic appeal in ways that blur the moral boundary between innocence and transgression. At the same time, Laura's extreme passivity provides her with a degree of narrative innocence. Although she describes the experience as pleasurable, she never fully says what she feels without it being somehow obscured by ambiguity. She does not directly protest Carmilla's advances both because she cannot physically resist them and because her performance of femininity does not allow her to do so. Her desire is presented only in underdeveloped, involuntary form, allowing the text to preserve her moral legitimacy while still rendering her complicit in the reader's fascination. As the narrative both invites and punishes identification with Carmilla's desire, it blurs the line between disciplined and perverse sexuality that Gothic punishment seeks to enforce.

At the end of the novella, the authority figures of the father, Doctor Hesselius, and General Spielsdorf destroy Carmilla, and Laura's father takes her away from the place on a year-long tour of Italy, presumably to restore normalcy and heteronormative order. However, Laura's noted lingering psychological disturbance after Carmilla's death suggests that the threat of female (homo)sexuality can never be fully erased. Laura still listens for her at the door:

> to this hour the image of Carmilla returns to memory with ambiguous alternations – sometimes the playful, languid, beautiful girl; sometimes the writhing fiend I saw in the ruined church; and often from a reverie I have started, fancying I heard the light step of Carmilla at the drawing-room door. (96)

Desire has been displaced rather than resolved, revealing the fragility of the norms the narrative seeks to uphold. Ultimately, this suggests that the male gaze can destroy Carmilla's physical body but cannot do anything to ensure that Laura's desire is fully extinguished from her memory. Sheridan Le Fanu writes this limitation of male authority into the final lines, and, perhaps, this is one of the reasons that make the

novel linger in the imagination of the reader from the Victorian era to modernity, firmly establishing itself as one of the foundational works of the Gothic literary canon.

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The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde: The Time Mr Hyde Came Out of the Closet

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When the night enfolds itself and one steps out to explore the city strange figures tend to lurk from around the corner. As they come out into the darkness, unspeakable acts are committed in those places safely covered with shadows. Edward Hyde, released from the prison of the doctor's body, is free to roam and enjoy his "undignified pleasures". What is it that we could consider Mr Hyde's most outrageous crime? Murder? Or maybe something else, something that the Victorians would not dare to speak about during daylight. It seems that the prominent doctor needed to create his other half to finally be able to fulfil his carnal desires. And when the fear of them being exposed was too great, he decided to end it all.

Robert Louis Stevenson's novella *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is rooted in a long tradition of the Gothic genre, which is recognized as literature that deals with those tendencies that could not be spoken of freely. According to Sanna,

> Indeed, in Gothic novels and short stories, subjects such as (homo)sexuality, sadomasochism, and sexual violence were often alluded to or even explicitly represented, as several critics of the genre have argued in the past decades. Many actions of Gothic narratives have been repeatedly read as metaphors of sexual performances, though frequently the explicit language is encoded. (25)

Therefore it is even more probable that homosexuality could be in fact a part of the darkness that could be found in the depths of the main character's inner self.

In his book *Queer City* Peter Ackroyd tells a tale of London as a city entangled with queerness in its very core. Queerness has been there since the very first days of London's existence, but the attitude of its citizens towards its queer inhabitants has changed over the centuries. One and probably the most drastic change happened in 1885, a year before the book was published. The Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885 brought a harsh change for homosexuals in the United Kingdom. As Peter Ackroyd

describes it, the new law made it unnecessary to actually prove that a sexual act did indeed happen and there was now no difference between public and private spheres. It was intended by the lawmakers to make this new law unclear enough to allow blackmail to flourish under the new order (236–237). And the issue of blackmailers turned out to be quite important in the book as well.

The traces of homosexuality are not as easily found in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* as they are in the famously queer *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by, also famously queer, Oscar Wilde. There are, however, some traces of homosexual desires in Stevenson's work as well. Aside from everything that Jekyll confesses in his final letter to Utterson, which will be discussed later, there is also one event that shall be taken a closer look at.

It is a rather strange idea for a widely recognized and probably well respected MP such as Sir Danvers Carew to meet Hyde at night, alone, and in a rather unsuitable neighbourhood. No kind of respectable business could be settled in such inappropriate circumstances. Unless, of course, it was something they both were ashamed to admit, there was no need to arrange such a meeting. It is possible that their encounter was related to something far from any intimacy, but the question of the nature of their relationship remains unanswered. It would be unreasonable for Hyde to attack a man with whom he was having any kind of intimate relations unless he feared that their relationship might be exposed. Moreover, in Jekyll's final confession the miserable man writes that after two months of consciously avoiding transforming himself into his other self when he finally did he was overpowered with some kind or urgent desire "My devil had been long caged, he came out roaring" (64). It seems probable that whatever it was that overtook him might have been related to what he called "undignified" pleasures. Homosexuality seems to be one of the probable options, as it was considered an unspeakable crime at the time. The society turned against queer people at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries (Ackroyd 205). In consequence, queers were forced to try to hide in the shadows more carefully than they had been doing before. This attraction to what the society considered disgraceful could also be something that people quite literally saw in Hyde; everyone that interacted with him instantly felt unreasonable disgust and hatred towards the man. He was described as someone deformed, but in a way that those who looked at him could not entirely grasp. If we consider the interpretation that suggests that it was his immorality and soul rotted with wickedness that people sensed in his physicality, then homosexuality could be one of those unspeakable evil tendencies that his inner deformation, visible in his appearance, consisted of. As Corlett furthermore explains:

> Jekyll can be read as internalising the negativity associated with homosexuality at the time and as a result he is unable to comprehend it, thus his denial is displayed through his fiendish scampering and appearance; '[he] is not easy to describe. There is something wrong with his appearance'. (Corlett 1)

Those tendencies that Jekyll worked so hard to cover by the mask of a respectable figure that he put on every day were finally revealed once he transformed himself into Hyde, on whose face they could be traced by every observer.

As the law regarding homosexuality changed towards the end of the 19th century, blackmailing became popular. In the *Introduction* Robert Mighall mentions that

> [b]lackmail and homosexuality have a long story of association. According to Rictor Norton; 'Before the passing of the 1967 Sexual Offences Act the law prohibiting homosexual intercourse was described as a "Blackmailers' Charter", for many – perhaps even "most" – blackmail attempts involved a threat to expose a man as a homosexual, whether or not he was in fact gay (*sic*).' (xix; original emphasis)

Meanwhile, what Mr Utterson feared most about his friend and client was that the sudden and rather peculiar change in his will was due to him becoming a victim of blackmail with the blackmailer being, of course, a man unfamiliar to him called Mr Hyde. Bearing in mind the historical context and being aware of the association with the word 'blackmail', we can say that it is quite possible that Mr Utterson feared that Dr Jekyll and the two men were involved in an intimate relationship, or that Hyde found out about something that Jekyll managed to hide over the years and was threatening him with exposing his well-kept secret. Either way, both of these possibilities would involve Jekyll being threatened with exposure of his homosexual tendencies, and as a respectable member of society he could not afford such a scandal to break out. The fact that Jekyll provided Hyde with a house and decorated it along with his taste definitely did not help him avoid anyone growing suspicious. Neither did the fact that he told his servants to obey and tolerate Hyde in his house and meanwhile, from their point of view, only allowed him to enter through the back door. That intrusion into Jekyll's private sphere he wished to conceal as much as possible even from his servants could be read as something leaning towards intimacy (which brings

us back to Sanna) if the two men were not in fact two split parts of the same person. Jekyll himself admitted that he had always been driven by some impulses that he dared not name even in the letter that confessed him being at least partially involved in a murder. As he confesses it in this final letter:

> I would still be merrily disposed at times; and as my pleasures were (to say the least) undignified, and I was not only well known and highly considered, but growing towards the elderly man, this incoherency of my life was daily growing more unwelcome. (Stevenson 59)

The word "undignified" seems rather suitable if we consider the way late Victorian society perceived queerness as something unspeakable. Moreover, Sanna argues that "Such unspecified pleasures are seen as undignified because society considers them as such, not because they are vicious in themselves" (26). It is not the act itself that is reprehensible, but it is considered as such because of the view that Victorian society developed. It is also quite telling that even in Jekyll's confession, written in confidence to one of his closest friends, the pleasures and desires remain unnamed, as he fears that his facade would fall completely.

The vast majority of the acts of evil that Hyde committed were not presented to the reader, so the reader is left to speculate about what they indeed were. Jekyll himself chose destruction of the one he brought to life, or brought into the daylight, and himself over the perspective of living the rest of his life as Hyde. He chose suicide over exposure; his desires, the dark side of his nature, were to remain something he could not bear to live with on a daily basis, as a member of the Victorian society. The idea that "A liberation of internal tension can be externally released in a range of ways: violence, delusion, self-destruction, to name but a few" (Corlett 2) did, after all, apply in his case; Jekyll wanted to achieve this liberation through Hyde, but only when he could control him and pose for a prominent member of the society during daylight. Once he realised that he would spend the rest of his life as Hyde, forced to live in a miserable state of contempt, and probably self-hatred, he chose self-destruction.

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The Turn of the Screw: The Politics of Sexuality and Power

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Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) resists resolution. For over a century, readers have disagreed about whether the ghosts are real, whether the governess can be trusted, and whether Miles dies from supernatural force or psychological pressure. These are real questions, but they have often pushed a more basic one aside: what is the novella actually afraid of? This essay argues that the answer is sexuality. Not in the narrow sense of a repressed woman with romantic feelings for her employer, but in a broader sense, a world in which desire that has no sanctioned form generates displacement, control, and, eventually, death. The governess's campaign to protect the children is not separate from her own unacknowledged desires. The ghosts of Quint and Jessel are not merely supernatural presences; they are what Victorian culture did with sexuality it could not name.

Desire Without an Object: The Governess and Triangulation

The novella's frame narrative sets up its central problem immediately. The manuscript belongs to Douglas, who loved the governess. The governess loved her employer. The employer, as far as we can tell, loved no one who was present. Desire in *The Turn of the Screw* never moves directly from one person to another. It requires an intermediary, a detour, a third party. This is what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls the "triangulation of desire" in *Between Men* (1985): erotic feeling that cannot take a direct route and so finds another path (21).

The governess's situation makes this structural. She takes a job that requires total isolation from the man she is drawn to. She is forbidden from contacting him. She must manage his house, protect his nephew, and keep his secret, all of it constituting a kind of closeness, while keeping her completely apart from him. Her desire has nowhere to go, so it goes into her work. She loves him through obedience. She stays connected by honoring his order to cut contact.

When the ghosts arrive, this process intensifies. The governess turns her attention to the children, and that attention quickly becomes excessive. Miles is too beautiful, and Flora is angelic. The descriptions are charged in ways that go beyond professional concern. Shoshana Felman, in *Writing and Madness* (1985), reads this idealization as symptomatic (30). The governess needs the children to be pure so that she has something to protect, and protecting them gives her desire somewhere to go. She manages her own unacknowledged feelings by projecting danger onto them and then fighting it.

What is striking is how desire accumulates rather than resolves. The employer is absent, so the children absorb her intensity. The children may be corrupted, so the ghosts absorb her fear. The ghosts resist direct confrontation, so Mrs Grose absorbs her need for confirmation. Nothing is discharged. The desire keeps moving through the house, finding new objects, and this restlessness is what drives the narrative forward.

The Ghosts as Queer Residue

What Quint and Jessel did wrong is never stated clearly. Quint was too free with Miles. He was infamous. His connection with Jessel was improper. Jessel was lost. The language circles around something without naming it. This vagueness is not carelessness – it is how Victorian culture managed sexuality it could not openly acknowledge. The transgression is registered but never articulated. The reader understands something happened without being told what.

Terry Castle, in *The Apparitional Lesbian* (1993), describes this as the spectral logic of queer sexuality in Victorian fiction (10). Queer desire does not disappear under censorship; it becomes ghostly. It can be felt, feared, and perceived, but it remains deniable because it is never directly stated. The ghost, Castle argues, is the literary form that Victorian fiction used to represent what could not be represented otherwise (10). Quint and Jessel work this way in the novella. Their desire was too visible when they were alive. Dead, they return as threats, their sexuality now attached to ideas of corruption and contagion.

Quint's relationship with Miles carries the most charge. Eric Haralson, in *Henry James and Queer Modernity* (2003), connects this to a recurring pattern in James's fiction, where intimate relationships between men across class lines are figured as dangerous and in need of suppression (80). The governess's fear of what Miles might have known or experienced with Quint is not simply about ghosts. It is about a

particular kind of knowledge, a specific history of closeness, that she can only approach indirectly, through horror.

It matters that Mrs Grose never actually confirms the governess's reading of Quint and Miles. She supplies a name and some background, but not the interpretation the governess needs. The governess has to construct her certainty from very little. This, too, is characteristic: queerness in Victorian culture was something suspected and inferred, read in silences and close proximities, never openly named. The governess's detection is also a projection, and the two cannot be cleanly separated.

Miss Jessel sits differently in the text. She appears at the lake in attitudes of grief and degradation. The governess consistently describes her as ruined. But she also recognizes something in Jessel's position, the educated woman in service, attached to a man whose house she manages but who owes her nothing. The identification is uncomfortable enough that the governess has to insist, repeatedly, on Jessel's hostility. Judith Butler's concept of melancholic identification in *Gender Trouble* (1990) helps here (63). The governess cannot grieve what she shares with Jessel because she cannot name what it is. Her hostility toward Jessel is partly the refusal of a mirror.

Innocence as a Technology of Control

Victorian childhood innocence was not a simple description. As James Kincaid argues in *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (1992), it was a construction, something adults produced and maintained in order to manage their own anxieties about desire (7). The idealized innocent child marked a boundary that required constant surveillance, and that surveillance itself became a site where adult sexuality was organized and contained.

Miles and Flora trouble this construction from the start. They are too perfect, too knowing, too composed. The governess finds this troubling rather than reassuring. A genuinely innocent child would not provoke this much attention. What unsettles her is not evidence of corruption but the impossibility of certainty. She cannot be sure they are not corrupted, and that uncertainty is what drives her.

Her response is to watch them constantly. She listens at doors. She reads their behaviour for signs. Miles wandering the garden at night is not boyish, it is evidence of communication with something illicit. Flora at the lake is not playing, she is performing for an invisible presence. Michel Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality, Volume I* (1976), argues that the nineteenth century's approach to sexuality was not suppressive but productive: it generated discourse, classification, and scrutiny around sexuality

even as it appeared to restrict it (17–35). The governess's obsessive monitoring of the children fits this model exactly. She is not simply protecting them. She is producing sexuality as a category, tracking it, locating it, making it visible so it can be managed. Here is the irony. The governess is structurally powerless. She is poor, unmarried, isolated, and has been explicitly forbidden from seeking outside help. She was handed a responsibility she did not ask for and given no authority to back it up. Within these conditions, her control over the children is one of the only kinds of power she has. She cannot examine her own desires, so she examines theirs. The energy that cannot go inward goes outward - onto the children, the ghosts, the house.

This also means the governess is not simply a victim of Victorian repression. She is one of its instruments. She reproduces the system that constrains her by applying its logic to two children. She does not do this with any awareness of what she is doing. That is what makes her a tragic figure rather than a villain.

Adaptations and the Visibility of Desire

The governess never identifies her own desire as desire. She frames her feelings for the children as devotion, her feelings for her employer as duty, her feelings for the ghosts as righteous opposition. None of this is quite adequate to what the text actually shows. Her attachment to Flora in particular exceeds anything professional care would explain. She watches the child sleep. She returns to Flora's physical appearance repeatedly, in terms that are reverent in a way that is not quite maternal. When Flora rejects her, the governess experiences it as something closer to abandonment than professional disappointment.

Later adaptations have found different ways to surface what James left beneath the text. Jack Clayton's *The Innocents* (1961) does not explain or moralize. Deborah Kerr plays the governess as someone whose feelings for Miles are tender in ways that are not quite right, the long kiss before bed, the particular way she looks at him. Clayton does not tell us what to make of this. He simply shows it and lets it sit. The result is uncomfortable in exactly the way James's text is uncomfortable: the desire is visible, but its nature is never declared.

Mike Flanagan's *The Haunting of Bly Manor* (2020) makes the choice to be direct. His governess figure, Dani, is a woman who has spent years performing a life she did not want, the fiancé, the expected future, the whole apparatus of a heterosexual normality she did not feel. Her experience at Bly is the experience of moving toward a desire she has been running from. Her relationship with Jamie, the groundskeeper,

is where the horror resolves, not into safety, but into something liveable. That Dani ultimately becomes one of Bly's ghosts is Flanagan's reading of the novella's central logic: queer desire in both texts survives only as haunting. It does not get to be ordinary. It gets to be spectral.

What Flanagan makes clear is that the house in both texts collects people who could not live openly as themselves. The governess's trajectory and Dani's trajectory are versions of the same story: desire that the world cannot accommodate does not disappear. It stays.

Miles, Confession, and the Politics of Naming

The ending of *The Turn of the Screw* has never been settled. Miles dies in the governess's arms after she has spent the final scenes forcing him to name Quint, to acknowledge the ghost, to confirm her version of events. James does not explain the death. Miles's heart stops.

What the ending stages is a forced confession. The governess needs Miles to speak, to name what he knows, to produce in language the events she has already interpreted. Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*, argues that confession was one of the central mechanisms through which modern subjects were produced as sexual subjects: desire was made visible by being spoken, named, and submitted to a supervising authority (58). The governess is applying this mechanism to a child. She is not trying to save him. She is trying to know him, to settle him within her framework, to turn uncertainty into legibility.

The gendered dimension of this scene is also worth noting. The governess, who holds no power in the wider world, holds all the authority in this room. An adult woman is interrogating a ten-year-old boy. Her need for his confession is partly her need for vindication. When she gets the name from him, she has everything she wanted, and he is dead. Judith Butler's analysis of compelled performance in *Gender Trouble* is relevant here (179). The governess forces Miles to inhabit a particular identity, to relate to a particular past in a particular way, on her terms. When the performance is complete, he has nothing left. Whether the cause of death is supernatural or psychological, the structure is the same: it is the demand for naming that kills him. The desire itself was not the problem. The problem was the insistence that it be spoken, classified, and confessed on someone else's terms.

Miles is also worth thinking about in his own right. He was expelled from school for reasons that are never given. He has had unusual proximity to Quint. He

knows more than a child his age is supposed to know. The governess cannot tolerate this. Her goal is not to preserve his innocence, that may already be gone, but to reconstruct its appearance, because she needs the category to remain intact. His death closes off this possibility. He dies knowing, and the knowledge goes with him.

Conclusions

The Turn of the Screw is about the cost of not being able to name desire. This is not only the governess's problem. It is Quint's and Jessel's; their desire was readable and they were punished for it. It is Miles's, whatever passed between him and Quint, the adults around him could only approach it as something dangerous. It is possibly James's own, writing in 1898, using Gothic form to say something that had no other available form.

The queer desire in the novella is not hidden. It is everywhere: in the governess's attention, in the ghosts' return, in the children's disturbing perfection, in the silence that sits over the whole house. What the text refuses is not desire but its open acknowledgment. It shows a world saturated with sexuality and declines to name it. The discomfort readers feel is not a side effect. It is the method.

Flanagan's *Bly Manor* names what James left unnamed and traces what happens when queer desire tries to survive in the world. Clayton's *The Innocents* leaves everything unnamed and watches the pressure build. Both are working with something James put into the text and left there. The Turn of the Screw turns because the thing at its centre was never released.

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And Then There Were None: Mystery, Guilt, and Justice

Review

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*And Then There Were Non*e by Agatha Christie, published in 1939, is one of the most famous mystery novels ever written. The book tells the story of ten strangers invited to a remote island called Indian Island; each has a dark secret from their past tied to the deaths of some people. As the story unfolds, they begin to die one by one in the same way that the nursery rhyme mentions. These types of mystery novels captivate readers because the characters cannot leave the island, and the killer is one of them. While all the characters suspect each other, the reader tries to solve the mystery alongside the characters. Although *And Then There Were None*'s storyline lacks the depth and complexity expected of a truly outstanding mystery novel, its use of suspense, isolation, and psychological tension makes it a compelling and enduring mystery novel. Moreover, trying to guess the killer among the dwindling number of characters and then quickly reaching the end to find out if we guessed the killer correctly is quite enjoyable.

The story begins with ten foreigners being summoned to the isolated Indian Island with various excuses. The guests never see the mysterious host, and on the evening of the first day, a recorded message accuses them of being the murderer. They are stranded on the island with no way to leave. Initially, they look for the killer outside their group, deciding it's the host, but there's no way anyone else could be on the island. When they realize the killer is among them, they constantly suspect each other. Since deaths follow the pattern of a strange nursery rhyme displayed in the house, it adds a creepy and chilling atmosphere to the situation. As the number of survivors decreases, tension rises, and trust breaks down.

Regarding the characters, there are ten main characters. I want to discuss what I consider to be the three most important characters: Vera Claythorne, Judge Lawrence Wargrave, and Philip Lombard. Firstly, Vera Claythorne is a young woman who works as a governess. Before arriving on the island, Vera was looking after a young

boy named Cyril, but the boy drowned in an accident that Vera was supposed to be watching over. Vera feels guilty because she thinks that her carelessness led to his death. This guilt haunts her throughout the story. Sometimes she has nightmares or hallucinations in which she sees her former lover, Hugo, and sometimes the child. Philip Lombard is a former soldier who worked as a mercenary, which means he took dangerous jobs for money. His actions include morally questionable decisions during his military work, which make him scary and untrustworthy to others. He stays calm under pressure, thinks practically, and usually volunteers for dangerous tasks. Lastly, Judge Wargrave is a retired judge who is serious, stubborn, and very observant. His past is connected to his role as a judge; he is accused of being responsible for the death of a man, Seton, whom he sentenced to execution, and that he may have been biased or unfair in his decision

One main theme is justice and punishment. The novel shows how people who escaped legal punishment for their crimes are still "judged" in another way; in other words, they cannot escape from justice. And that raises questions about what true justice really is. For instance, in Emily Brent's panels reflected a more religious perspective like:

> The heathen are sunk down in the pit that they made: in the net which they hid is their own foot taken. The Lord is known by the judgment which he executes: The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands. The wicked shall be turned into hell. (Christie 39)

Also, the most important speech on the subject of justice is what the doctor says in the book, because it reveals the killer's, or rather the judge's, opinion on the matter:

> I mean it explains Indian Island. There are crimes that cannot be brought home to their perpetrators. Instance, the Rogerses. Another instance, old Wargrave, who committed his murder strictly within the law. (Christie 117)

The other major theme is guilt and conscience. Each character reacts differently to their past actions. Some feel strong guilt, while others try to justify what they did. This shows how people deal with responsibility and regret. For example, Emily Brent still stands by what she did and completely refuses to see any fault in herself. While Dr. Armstrong has accepted his mistake, strived to prevent it from happening again, and pulled himself together. In General MacArthur's case, he isolated himself from his

professional and social circle because he feared the possibility that people might find out the truth about himself.

Christie shows how fear, guilt, and isolation can affect human behaviour and reveal people's true nature. General MacArthur was one of the first to mentally surrender, simply waiting for death on the shore. Vera lost control and had a breakdown after seeing Rogers' death, saying the next person will die from a bee sting, and then being brought back to her senses by the doctor's slap. Later, towards the end of the book, they abandon all sense of decency and transform into "five enemies, tightly bound together as if by an instinct for self-preservation" (Christie 220). They lose their humanity and, as described in the book, act barbarically, driven by an instinct of fear.

Agatha Christie's writing style in *And Then There Were None* is clear and easy to understand. She doesn't use heavy language; however, she still manages to create a tense atmosphere. Information is revealed slowly with each death, and that building suspense makes the reader keep guessing. Unfortunately, I suspected the wrong people until the very end (the last person I suspected was Vera), and I could not find the killer until the end.

Although the story is well-told, in a good mystery, I prefer the mystery to be solved within the story itself, rather than in a note at the end, because, in my opinion, this shows that the plot wasn't well structured. I also did not find the killer's motivation sufficiently clear. While reading, I thought that someone had gathered these people to take revenge and deliver justice, and I expected there to be a common person who knew them all in the end. However, the killer's motivation was simply, "I've always wanted to kill people, but my sense of justice was also strong, so I decided to kill those I thought were guilty" (Christie 309). It was impossible to be certain of some people's guilt, like Vera, because he could not read people's minds.

I really enjoyed reading *And Then There Were None* because the story kept me guessing until the end, even though I could not guess the real killer. In my opinion, Lombard's character was the most likeable because he was straightforward and was the one who searched for the murderer most coldly. Although the book sometimes showed suspicion towards him, I never suspected him. Furthermore, he never denied his guilt or claimed to be a paragon of virtue. He was also often humorous despite the tragic situation in which he found himself. His honesty sometimes made him suspicious in the eyes of others. As for what I disliked, some sections were too short; they sometimes detached me from the book. Moreover, some of them did not serve

the plot. Being unnecessarily diverted from the storyline caused me to be distracted while reading.

And Then There Were None is a mystery novel that successfully keeps the reader interested until the very end. Although I found some aspects of the plot and the killer's motivation less convincing, the overall experience was satisfying because of the tension and the unique concept. I can recommend the book to those who want to read a mystery book but want to do it without tiring themselves and getting overwhelmed, take a short break from life, and go to Agatha Christie's Indian Island.

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The Hobbit, or There and Back Again: Identity, Transformation and A Journey That Ends at Home

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Journeys have long been portrayed in literature and media as eye-opening experiences. Since Gilgamesh and Homer's *Odyssey*, literary traditions have been filled with narratives of journeys, exploration and return, and we love these stories because we often recognize our own hopes, desires and fears within them.

The Hobbit, or There and Back Again, by J.R.R. Tolkien, was first published in 1937, becoming one of the major works of modern fantasy literature, influencing the development of the fantasy genre for decades to come. Tolkien's own life experiences greatly shaped his storytelling and world-building. He served in the British Army during the First World War and fought in the Battle of the Somme in 1916, one of the most devastating battles of the war. Scholars argue that Tolkien's first-hand experience in the Great War shaped his understanding of heroism, good and evil, and the role of ordinary individuals in extraordinary circumstances (Croft 6). In one of his letters he described the trench warfare experience as an "animal horror", stressing the chaos and brutality soldiers had to endure (Tolkien, *Letters* 72).

Although Peter Jackson's film adaptations are widely known, reading Tolkien's original work provides a deeper understanding of the themes and narrative messages behind the story. The book offers a richer exploration of Tolkien's ideas about identity, heroism and moral responsibility than the cinematic adaptations can convey. *The Hobbit* is frequently categorized as a children's book yet it deals with themes that adult readers can relate to: courage, moral choices and personal transformation. As Paul E. Michelson points out, Tolkien's fairy-stories are not "juvenile trash" (84) but serious works that offer readers "Fantasy, Recovery, Escape, and Consolation" (Tolkien qtd. in Michelson 90). These elements are, as Tolkien concludes, a "natural human activity" that is as "necessary for the health and complete functioning of the Human as is sunlight for physical life" (Tolkien qtd. in Michelson 91).

Among these themes, I will focus on identity and personal transformation. In *The Hobbit*, Bilbo's journey across Middle-earth is more than a physical adventure; it is a life-changing process through which he discovers a new sense of identity. By leaving the comfort of the Shire, facing peril, and finally returning home as a changed person, Bilbo illustrates Tolkien's idea that identity is shaped by the experiences we live through and the growth they force upon us. My fondness for *The Lord of the Rings* is not the only reason I chose *The Hobbit.* I also chose it because I recognize myself in Bilbo's story. Like him, I used to be a timid, comfort-loving person who never left his country, and a trip to Poland a few years ago became my own "there and back again", forcing me to grow and see myself differently. In that sense, *The Hobbit* can be described as a bildungsroman in which Bilbo discovers his identity through adventure, facing challenges and making moral choices.

In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell writes that many mythological stories follow a common structure, utilizing the term "monomyth" (xxv). This pattern has three main stages: separation, initiation, and return, which Campbell describes as the "nuclear unit" (28) of the hero's journey. In Bilbo's case, we can clearly see this pattern: he is separated from the safety of his hobbit-hole in Shire, initiated into the dangers of unfamiliar realms such as the Misty Mountains and Mirkwood, and eventually returns home as a changed individual.

The protagonist of the novel, Bilbo Baggins, grew up in a comfortable and socially respected position within the hobbit society. The Shire can be seen as a symbol of stability, security and domestic comfort. Middle-earth has witnessed several wars in its history, still the Shire appears largely untouched by chaos and destruction, representing a sheltered environment far from the perils of the outer world. Bilbo is initially portrayed as a timid and comfort-loving hobbit; he is also described as a second edition of his father. Reading it made me think Bilbo lacked an opportunity to discover new things and form a more independent character. Bilbo can also be interpreted as an internal conflict between his two family identities: the orderly, comfort-loving Baggins side and the bold, adventurous Took side. This internal tension serves a key role in Bilbo's development throughout the story.

Bilbo's calm life is suddenly disrupted when Gandalf, the wizard, and thirteen dwarves unexpectedly arrive at his home. Upon Gandalf's invitation to the quest, Bilbo's inner conflict emerges. Gandalf's role in the story reflects a common element of mythological narratives: the call to adventure. In many heroic myths, a guiding figure appears to summon the hero from ordinary life into a greater destiny. For instance, in the Arthurian legend, Merlin calls Arthur to a great destiny, disrupting his ordinary

domestic life and leading him toward heroic action. In a similar way, Gandalf's arrival challenges Bilbo's quiet life. At first, Bilbo resists the idea of a risky adventure, manifesting the hesitation that often characterizes the early stage of a hero's journey. In Chapter 2, Bilbo attempts to stop himself from joining the quest: "Don't be a fool, Bilbo Baggins!" he said to himself, "thinking of dragons and all that outlandish nonsense at your age!" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 40). This is another instance of internal Baggins vs Took conflict. The Took side of him yearns for adventure, whereas the Baggins side encourages him to remain in his comfort zone. Bilbo, as many people would do, attempts to stay in the comfort of familiarity, dismissing the idea of adventure as irrational and dangerous. Still, his Took side prevails and he sets off. However, at the early stage of the journey, Bilbo repeatedly expresses longing for the comfort of the Shire. He regrets leaving his home and asking himself why he ever abandoned his peaceful hobbit-hole. This nostalgia for home highlights the depth of Bilbo's attachment to familiarity. To the protagonist, adventure is still mostly a discomfort rather than an opportunity.

Bilbo's encounter with the three trolls represents the first time he attempts to act on his own during the journey. This part marks an important step in his character development, as he begins to move from being a passive member of the group toward becoming an active participant in the mission. Even though Bilbo is frightened by the trolls, he attempts to steal from them anyway, in order to prove his usefulness to the rest of the group. Because he thinks if he goes back empty-handed, the dwarves will be disappointed in him. His determination to take this risk is an early sign of courage and independence. Although he fails, the troll encounter sparks the change in Bilbo. He begins to confront his fears.

Bilbo's discovery of the One Ring and his encounter with Gollum in Chapter 5 represent one of the most significant turning points in his character development. It is important to remember that when *The Hobbit* was first published in 1937, Tolkien had not yet written *The Lord of the Rings.* As a result, the Ring's true nature and powers were not yet known to readers, and it initially appears simply as a magical object that grants invisibility to its bearer. Earlier in the story, during the encounter with the trolls, Bilbo had depended on the help of the dwarves and Gandalf. In contrast, his meeting with Gollum takes place in complete isolation without any help from others, forcing him to rely entirely on his own abilities. Bilbo demonstrates not only courage but also intelligence, creativity, and quick thinking at the riddle game with Gollum. The contest of riddles is a psychological battle and Bilbo had to remain calm and resourceful despite the constant threat posed by Gollum.

A particularly important moment happens when Bilbo has the opportunity to take away Gollum's life but ultimately he chooses not to do so. This decision is a crucial step in Bilbo's moral development. Although the Ring grants him power through invisibility, Bilbo chooses mercy rather than violence. By using the Ring to escape from hostile goblins, Bilbo demonstrates that he is beginning to act independently and make decisions under pressure. The fragment marks a shift from the hesitant hobbit at the beginning of the story to a more capable and self-reliant individual.

At this stage of the journey, the dwarves begin to reconsider their initial doubts about Bilbo's abilities as a burglar and a companion. At the beginning of the quest, many of the dwarves viewed Bilbo as an unnecessary burden rather than a useful companion. However, as Bilbo demonstrates courage, intelligence and reliability again and again, the group gradually develops respect for him. This shift in the group's attitude reflects an important aspect of Bilbo's transformation. He is no longer a reluctant hobbit recruited by Gandalf, but an increasingly valuable member of the company whose contributions are vital to the success of the quest.

Through these experiences, Bilbo gradually emerges as an unexpected hero. When confronted with dangers such as goblins, trolls, and other creatures of Middle-earth, he demonstrates the ability to act independently and make decisions without relying on others. In my opinion, this transformation is particularly striking as Bilbo begins the story as a shy and comfort-loving hobbit and yet he faces scary beasts now. His development illustrates Tolkien's recurring idea that courage and heroism can emerge even in individuals who initially appear ordinary or unremarkable, for example, Frodo Baggins and Sam Gamgee in his later books. By the later stages of the journey, Bilbo accepts challenges that would have seemed unimaginable during his peaceful days in the Shire, including the dangerous task of entering the lair of the dragon Smaug.

Gandalf also plays an important role in Bilbo's transformation through the journey. In Chapter 7, Gandalf temporarily leaves the company, forcing Bilbo and the dwarves to continue their journey without the wizard's guidance. From the beginning of the story, Gandalf expresses his confidence in Bilbo when he says, "There is a lot more in him than you guess, and a deal more than he has any idea of himself" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 31), which reflects Gandalf's belief that Bilbo possesses qualities that have not yet fully emerged. In this sense, Gandalf functions as a mentor figure who recognizes the hero's potential before the hero recognizes it himself.

A crucial moment in Bilbo's transformation occurs after Gandalf's departure, in Chapter 8. During the encounter with the giant spiders in Mirkwood, Bilbo shows leadership for the first time in the story, taking responsibility for the group. At this point in the narrative, Bilbo recognizes the change within himself, describing himself as "much fiercer and bolder" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 154) than before. Rather than relying on physical strength, Bilbo once again uses creativity, intelligence and strategy by distracting the spiders and creating a chance for his companions to run away safely. Later, when the company is taken captive by the Wood-elves, Bilbo again takes initiative by coming up with a plan of escaping in barrels. Through these actions, Bilbo clearly establishes himself as a capable leader, and the dwarves begin to recognize him not merely as a hired burglar but as a courageous and bold adventurer.

When they finally reach their destination, the Lonely Mountain, Bilbo faces the most treacherous challenge of the entire journey: the mighty dragon Smaug. For a hobbit, who once valued tranquillity and safety above all else, voluntarily approaching such a terrifying creature represents a remarkable transformation. Similar to his earlier encounter with Gollum, Bilbo relies not on physical strength but on his intellectual skills. During his tense conversation with Smaug, Bilbo remains calm despite the threat, and avoids revealing his identity while also gathering information about the dragon's weaknesses.

After Smaug's fall, the relationship between Bilbo and the dwarves becomes significantly stronger. Having survived several perils together, they develop a sense of camaraderie similar to the bonds often formed between soldiers during war. At this point, however, Bilbo makes one of the most important decisions of the entire story when he secretly leaves the camp to meet Bard and the Elven-king. The Elven-king welcomes Bilbo kindly and even offers him the opportunity to remain with them in the safety of his realm. In my opinion, this moment represents a critical test of Bilbo's character. Although he could choose comfort and security, Bilbo refuses to abandon his comrades. By rejecting the offer, Bilbo demonstrates that his identity has drastically changed since the beginning of the journey. The timid hobbit who once valued comfort more than anything else now places loyalty and responsibility above personal safety. At the same time, another milestone moral decision occurs when he gives the Arkenstone to Bard instead of returning it to his companion, Thorin. Earlier in the journey, Bilbo rarely acted independently and usually followed the decisions of the dwarves. However, by giving the Arkenstone to Bard, Bilbo puts peace and prevention of conflict over blind loyalty to Thorin in spite of knowing how angry and disappointed he would be. Bilbo has developed the courage to act according to his own moral

judgment rather than simply following the wishes of others or pleasing them to avoid the conflict.

When the quest to the dragon's lair and the Battle of Five Armies are over, Bilbo finally returns to the Shire. Unlike many heroic narratives, however, his return is not presented as a triumphant victory filled with joy and appreciation from others. Instead, Bilbo discovers that he has been presumed dead and that many of his belongings are being auctioned off. He must struggle to reclaim his home and possessions, emphasizing that his adventure has distanced him from the society he once belonged to, and the person he once was. Bilbo does not return as a celebrated hero but rather as a changed individual whose experiences have transformed his worldview. He is now more courageous, independent and reflective, yet he still retains his affection for the peaceful life of the Shire. Upon returning home, Bilbo experiences a form of social alienation, as many of his neighbors begin to regard him as strange and unreliable. The society of the Shire cannot fully comprehend the transformation he has undergone. As Joseph Campbell suggests, at the final stage of the journey, to complete his adventure, the returning hero must survive the impact of the world (209).

This experience of alienation can also be compared to the difficulties faced by soldiers returning from war. Many World War I veterans struggled to reintegrate into ordinary society because their experiences had profoundly changed their perspectives on life. Scholars such as Janet Brennan Croft have noted that Tolkien's own wartime experiences may have influenced the way he portrays characters returning from difficult journeys (14). After returning home, Bilbo devotes himself to writing memoirs and poetry, documenting the story of his adventure. Writing becomes a form of reflection through which Bilbo attempts to understand the experiences that transformed him. In this sense, Bilbo's writing symbolizes the completion of his personal journey: he has become someone with knowledge and experiences worth sharing with the world.

Bilbo's journey through Middle-earth essentially depicts far more than a physical adventure; it is a process of personal transformation and self-discovery. By the time he returns to the Shire, Bilbo possesses a new understanding of both himself and the meaning of home. Throughout the novel, Bilbo struggles with the tension between the cautious Baggins side of his personality and the adventurous spirit inherited from the Tooks. Although the Tookish side eventually proves stronger, the conclusion of the story suggests not a complete victory of one side over the other but rather a balance between the two aspects of his identity. Tolkien's narrative suggests that identity is rarely defined by simple oppositions. Bilbo's transformation does not

erase his earlier personality but instead incorporates both sides of his character. Rather than abandoning his former self, Bilbo develops a more complex identity shaped by experience and growth. He is still capable of appreciating the comfort and peace of his hobbit-hole while also embracing the possibility of adventure beyond it. As Joseph Campbell suggests, the hero's journey ultimately allows individuals to reconcile opposing aspects of their lives, "permitting the mind to know the one by virtue of the other" (212).

In his stories, Tolkien repeatedly gives the power of the Ring not to kings or warriors but to hobbits, characters who are generally regarded as insignificant within the history and the political affairs of Middle-earth. The Ring passes successively through several hobbits, including Déagol, Sméagol (Gollum), Bilbo, and later Frodo. This narrative choice is unlikely to be accidental. Instead, it reflects Tolkien's recurring theme that courage and moral strength can emerge from the most unlikely individuals. Due to their isolated and unimportant position in the world, no one would expect hobbits to change the world, but sometimes the biggest achievements come from the smallest ones. Tolkien also suggests that personal transformation results from a combination of internal growth and external circumstances. Bilbo develops courage and independence through the challenges he encounters during the journey. At the same time, his transformation is supported by the companions who assist him along the way, including Gandalf, the dwarves, the Elves, and even the eagles. These relationships highlight another important theme of the novel: personal growth often occurs within a community rather than in isolation. By the end of the story, Bilbo is still a small hobbit yet with more confidence and a wealth of memories. Tolkien's novel suggests that we, like Bilbo, only discover the full possibilities of our identity when we dare to leave our comfort zone, face peril, and then return to live differently in the place we once thought we knew.

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