

**SALACIOUS SADE AND PERVERTED POE:
PERVERSITY AND THE QUEST FOR KNOWLEDGE FROM 1740 TO 1895**

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– ABSTRACT –

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the role of perversity within the Self as a quest for individual knowledge. Libertine and Gothic literature will be characterized as an individualized reflection on society's fragmented role as part of the Whole. I will discuss how Libertine and Gothic literature utilize the supernatural, the cloister, and melodrama to characterize the fluidity within gender and sex. In turn, I will locate the essence of perversity in literature between 1740 and 1895 as an intellectual pursuit and an ideology of independence. The time period I have chosen to examine encompasses the lives and deaths of the authors I am analyzing, from the birth of Donatien Alphonse François de Sade (also known as the Marquis de Sade) in 1740, to Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's death in 1895. I will illustrate how perversion and radical individualism creates personal freedom that also works to undo widespread attempts at systematic authority while paradoxically depending on the very norm it seeks to pervert.

By analyzing the works of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, Edgar Allan Poe, Ann Radcliffe, and the Marquis de Sade chronologically backwards, I plan to reveal the transitions of perverse thought as a perpetual shift alongside cultural needs. By using resources written before, during, and after the focus time period that deal with subversion and perversity, I will illustrate how cultural perpetual motion lead to sexual revolution as well as how individual development manifested from its quest for knowledge. Beginning with the psychopathology of sexual deviance and ending with the radical politics of pre-Revolution France, I will illustrate how, despite the fragmentations inherent in perversity, its manifestations are at the root of the quest for knowledge. The overall conclusions are that perversion manifests in the Self as a combination of biology (individual physiological development); environment (cultural systems in which an individual is reared); reason (how the individual engages with their environment); and individual ideas that develop through the quest for knowledge as layered fragments of the societal Whole. Perversity's dependence on static norms in order to subvert them ultimately provides recourse built on individually-defined intellect for its own sake.

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“As the old supernatural structures faded, sensation and emotion took on value in themselves; the Seducer exults in the turbulence of his awakening love.”

-- John Updike, Foreword: *The Seducer's Diary* (Updike 13).

– THE ESSENCE OF PERVERSITY FROM 1740 TO 1895 –

While discussing the essence of perversion in a society centuries previous to our own, it is important to recognize how attributing modern definitions to the past can be problematic. Perversity is manifested through a need to differentiate the Self from the Other and to inspire independent definition¹. In any light, the action of defining perversion is entirely antithetical to the practice of perversion to begin with; by aligning perversion alongside a virtue/vice dichotomy, one inherently renders the alternative purpose of perversion (to undo the existence of systemic norms) obsolete.

Perversity is a deliberate alternative, with the individual at its root, to avoid being characterized by authoritative norms. Due to perversion's purposeful deviation, it is paradoxically irrational yet aware; an individual intellect of the Self. The parallel between irrationality and individual intellect is that the Self willingly ignores the Other in favour of its own learning. Yet, perversion is also rational because the individual recognizes its own existence within the outside world. As the Self develops this intellect, it goes through a metamorphosis; a cycle of relation and separation between the Self as a separate entity, yet part of the external Whole. Supervert characterizes the perpetual motion of transitional change with a comparison to the movement of "perversion" as a verb through its etymological roots in the Latin *pervertere* – or "to turn". "To pervert is to turn around. To avert is to turn away. To revert is to turn back. To divert is to turn aside. All of these imply hydraulics, a flow being steered this way and that" (Supervert 7). The Oxford English Dictionary confirms that "perversion" is defined as "the action of turning aside what is true or right; the diversion of something from its original and proper course, state or meaning" (OED). The OED also cites the root of "perverse" in its noun form with another Latin word, *perversus*, which refers to wrong-headedness, unreasonableness, or an individual who is misguided: "the quality or character of being perverse"(OED). The contrasts and comparisons between the various forms of perversity (and there are several more) suggest that the very nature of the word refers to a perpetual differentiation from what is expected of the individual; what is "right". With the existence of perpetual – or

¹ Throughout this thesis, I will be utilizing the terms "the Self" and "the Other/Whole" to refer to the fluid manifestations of how the individual engages with society, systems of institutional control, and how it views its own existence within them. The Self/individual represents each person as their own agent of education and desire throughout the perpetually transitioning quest for knowledge through perversion. The Other/Whole represents society as a separate aspect of humanity which the individual is part of and simultaneously wishes to differentiate from.

perverted – motion, it becomes impossible to theorize that individual sexuality, gender, and even politics exist within a system of static norms; the very nature of perversity questions: “what *is* right?” The succinct question that “when the sex flow is re-routed to the anus, why is it considered a perversion and not a diversion?” provides evidence that a “relationship between perversion and subversion” exists (Supervert 10). By focusing this study on Leopold von Sacher-Masoch (1836 – 1895), Edgar Allan Poe (1809 – 1849), Ann Radcliffe (1764 – 1823), and the Marquis de Sade (1740 – 1814), I will characterize how Gothic, Romantic, and Libertine literature relies on perversion to construct plot and examine perverse behaviour (as per the norms of their environments, respectively) in a medium that rely on the separation from reality.

The quest for individual knowledge is illustrated in the above texts in several ways. Leopold von Sacher-Masoch relies on perversity to narrate the quest for knowledge by examining the motives and experiences of his male-masochist protagonist, Severin. Before the middle of the twentieth century, it was believed that masochism is inherent in the physiological development of women via Freud and Krafft-Ebing. Sacher-Masoch created perversions even from perversity by also creating a female sadist, Wanda, who drafts a contract that places her in control of Severin’s very life. Severin fantasizes about being Dominated by fur-laden Wanda and in this way Leopold von Sacher-Masoch examines the ambiguous identities inherent in humanity and the transition through self-definition². Edgar Allan Poe flirts with the Imp of the perverse through his Gothic and philosophical narratives to examine the individual’s impulsive freedom to engage in perversion for its own sake.³ In Poe’s work, perversion is manifest in homoerotic subtext, fetishization of the dead, and the innate freedom of the individual to do as they please. Ann Radcliffe represents the perverse quest by naturalizing the supernatural; it is as if she is satirizing the constructed dichotomies of gender and sex by lifting the veil of ignorance. Radcliffe’s protagonists frequently go on a literal quest and transition during their geographical journeys. Her female heroes fall into revelations that shatter their previous outlook as a symbolic characterization of the internal upheaval experienced during the individual quest for knowledge. Donatien Alphonse François de Sade embodies the

² For stylistic purposes, I have chosen to adopt the popular practice of capitalizing “Dominant” and writing “submissive” in a lower case. This is done in online communities to characterize the popular (but not exclusive) Dom/sub relationship dynamic. Bonnie Shullenberger offers this explanation: “the initial letter of Dominant/Dom[me] is capitalized, as are, typically, personal pronouns and other references to the Dom[me]” (Shullenberger 254).

³ I will evoke Poe’s Imp of perversity throughout this thesis to illustrate the impulsive urge to be perverse.

perverse spirit; he is rumoured to have narrated sexual deviance in its entirety throughout his writings, offering hundreds of perversions in *The 120 Days of Sodom* alone. The Marquis de Sade relies on the perverse quest for knowledge to satirize the hypocrisy of the church and aristocracy by epitomizing sexual excess and featuring graphic scenes of sexually unrelenting vice. In this way, Sade even perverts the norms of belonging to the aristocratic class by viciously attacking his own social standing. His works demand philosophical engagement with the innate fragmentation of society by shattering cultural ideals of appropriateness and embodied the violent unrest of society during the French Revolution. The Marquis de Sade's work has a role in nearly every study of perversity because it illustrates humanity's most extreme perverse behaviours by relying on personal (as well as public) narrative and an endorsement of individual knowledge through carnal means.

Although eighteenth and nineteenth century culture was not necessarily dominated by a system of cultural virtue *en masse*, there was (and is) a dominating presence of repression dictated by class, judicial, and religious norms that sought to punish revolutionary behaviour that deviated from institutional control. The rise of literary pornography in eighteenth century Europe relied on exaggerated satire to illustrate the hypocrisy of the ruling class and the laws of censorship projected onto "obscene" books.⁴ The history of pornography has always been bound to the novel and the body politic. According to Joan de Jean, the development of pornography is inherently linked to the epistolary novel itself and how the genre's success relied

on the (guilty) attraction to first-person narrative displays. [This created] a transition into literary subversion of subversive contents that were intentionally left undefined [and] to re-channel within a literary context energy recently devoted to political sedition. [...] The classic French pornographic tradition places pornographic literature at the intersection of sexual explicitness of obscenity and political dissidence (de Jean 121).⁵

⁴ This is illustrated through Sade's apprehension to publish *Justine* and *Juliette* under his own name and his publisher's incarceration for circulating Sade's works. Further, in "Sade and the Pornographic Legacy", Frances Ferguson states how Sade's pornography meant that "politics could be waged by sexual means [...] pornographic pamphlets and cartoons, particularly those directed against the royal family, made private sexual acts look like public crimes" (p. 5). These attempts at censorship ensured that political enemies like Sade could not gain political control from the aristocracy, regardless of whether or not they were part of the very same class.

⁵ The relation of pornography to obscenity characterized by de Jean is also evident in the way that the epistolary form was sometimes utilized by Sacher-Masoch, Poe, Radcliffe, and Sade throughout their literary careers. The "subversive contents" Jean de Jean refers to are erotic subject matter.

Existing at the intersection of sexual explicitness and political dissidence caused pornography to become difficult to control and in turn contributed to the historical manifestation of a vast cultural transition in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Inherently related to pornography, perversity becomes virtually impossible to define.

The idea that pornography and perversity are linked with literature is illustrated in the development of sexual pathology that gained popularity during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Perhaps the most famous collection of theory focused on human perversity is Richard von Krafft-Ebing's 1886 publication, *Psychopathia Sexualis*. In it, Krafft-Ebing illustrates the psychopathology of sexual deviance and theorizes that perversity is inspired by a combination of biology and environment. Krafft-Ebing states that sexual maturity is a physiological law, and that "the processes in the sexual organs as well as the strength of the sexual desire manifested, vary [...] in individuals [as well as] races. Race, climate, heredity, and social circumstances have a very decided influence upon sexual desire" (Krafft-Ebing 18). Confirming that although biology and environment are part of the "physiological law" of sexual desire, perversion from this law is brought on by the perpetual motion of the environment as well as how the Self reacts to the understanding of the ever-shifting climate in which it lives.

Engaging specifically with perversity, Krafft-Ebing states that engaging in vice for the purpose of simply having the freedom to do so is based on

the moral freedom of the individual, and the decision of whether, under certain circumstances, excess, and even crime, be committed or not, depend, on the one hand, upon the strength of the instinctive impulses and the accompanying organic sensations; on the other, upon the power of the inhibitory ideas. Constitutions, and especially organic influences, have a marked effect upon the instinctive impulses; education and cultivation of self-control counteract the opposing influences (Krafft-Ebing 26).

Being perverse simply because one has the freedom to do so is integral in discussing the roots of perversity between 1740 and 1895. Figures most associated with sexual perversion as well as literary obscenity were part of cultural groups whose socio-political standing was entirely dependent on their freedom to do what they pleased (such as Sade and his place within the aristocracy). Accompanying the social freedom to do as thou wilt, Gothic authors like Edgar Allan Poe believed in a propensity of perversion. "I am not more sure that my soul lives, than I am that perverseness is one of the primitive impulses of the human heart" (Poe, *Black* 49). Thus, the focus on perversity between Libertine

literature and the Gothic is created from the inherent urge to be perverse and the freedom to act upon the deviant impulse.

In her introduction to *Sexual Perversions 1640 - 1890*, Julie Peakman discusses the history of perversity and how it has never been completely characterized since it has historically transcended (and avoided) the action of definition; if a definition does exist for perversity, it is because it has been improvised by institutions – whether they be religious or political authorities – to further dominate. “Yet seemingly contrarily, [perversity] also has been defined as inherent in nature, as essentially bound up with the individual. Sexual perversion, then, is made up of a complex interweaving of ideas and beliefs in history” (Peakman 1). The perpetual transitions of perversion are also followed by continuous attempts to define its existence; this perpetual cycle creates an intersection of biology and environment in perversity just as pornography exists at the intersection of sexual explicitness and political dissidence. Arguments about *what exactly perversion is* have shifted between relation of the Self to the Other around it; or, around the Self as initially being educated by the Other until the impulse arises to pursue an individual quest.

The deliberate avoidance of defining perversion inspires confusion and difficulty in recognizing its manifestations. Norman Breslow traces much of the confusion back to Freud and his frequent revision of his views on sadomasochism, stating that “these changes create a maze which is difficult, if not impossible, to accurately negotiate” (Breslow 264). Rather than placing the complete blame on Freud’s sexual theories, the idea that humanity exists within perpetual motion of the life cycle and the pursuit of knowledge would guarantee that any definition remains fluid until life ceases. Ideas that certain behaviours are inherent in the psychopathology of gender (such as masochism in women) are difficult to negotiate because of the ambiguous identities retained by “perverse” individuals as an exercise in actively deconstructing static norms that suggest women, for example, are predisposed to submit in the first place.

Confusion surrounding the definition of sadomasochism (as well as Kink and perversity in general) appears to mirror the Gothic suggestiveness – the manifestation of several related yet separate layers in a work of literature, similar to frame narratives – that is heavily utilized in Poe’s work. There are three more factors that contribute to the theoretical confusion surrounding the characterization of sadomasochism: “[...] the tendency to base broad theoretical statements on observations made from a small and possibly unrepresentative clinical sample, [and] generalizations from findings based on one form of behaviour to other incomparable forms of behaviour, [and the] lack of

consensus on the defining features of sadism and masochism” (Breslow 269). Creating clinical claims based on manifestations of the human mind (such as the predisposition to receive and enjoy pain from a Dominant) is problematic because although the mind *can* be defined in clinical terms, its definition is necessarily limited because it does not take the perpetual motion of the mind into account. Another problem that arises in characterizing sadomasochism using a static dichotomy (such as whether or not behaviour is perverse) is the “failure to differentiate [its] subgroups; this failure is due to lack of accepted definitions, resulting in different writers creating their own or misusing existing ones” (Breslow 269). The apprehension of ascribing to a static characterization of perversity stems from this failure, as well as the fact that between the nineteenth century and the current era, knowledge surrounding human sexuality has adapted to include terms that were not in use during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Continuing to engage the essence of perversity and discuss the failed attempts at pathological definition of perversion, I would like to touch on Libertine and Gothic genres briefly before discussing them in depth in the next section. These genres (including the Dark Romantic) often rely on secluded settings to elevate lived social issues to the supernatural sphere in order to engage with them on a level that separates them from the real. Christopher Rivers provides an example of the separation in how Libertine convent novels seek “to explain away homosexuality by defining it as situational [such as occurring only in depraved convents or in Silling]⁶, as a ‘perversion’ created by the repression of more ‘natural’ sexual desires” (Rivers 386). Therefore, Libertine deviation is blamed only on eighteenth century norms (such as the attempt to repress or cloister homosexuality) and not on the Perverts themselves. The Libertine genre becomes, then, a political discussion of the state of society and a growing discourse on variations on eighteenth century life; pushing the envelope just enough to force new thought. By representing the existence of socially perverse activities as forbidden and cloistered, Libertine literature creates an image of deviance being both figuratively and literally confined behind the walls of the cloister.

By circulating sexually perverse representations of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, Libertine literature fought against perverse institutional hypocrisy and signified the political inadequacy of the monarchy. According to Mary Bellhouse, “intense pornographic attacks were made [and these] representations of ‘improper’

⁶ Château de Silling, the setting of Marquis de Sade’s *The 120 Days of Sodom*.

sexuality worked to discredit the monarchy as an institution and to desacralize the king's body" (Bellhouse 681). Pornographic texts undermined the bourgeoisie and labelled them as hypocritical by illustrating the upper-class taking part in sexually deviant acts that they specifically created laws against. When the French Revolution erupted in 1789, "pornography did not disappear in the flood of new publications; instead, it came to the surface of the new popular politics in the form of even more vicious attacks" against the aristocracy (Hunt 301). Perversity is at the root of cultural transitional periods of culture and is one of the tell-tale signs that radical change has occurred. Perversion and politics are intrinsically linked by the revolutionary need to reclaim the body politic as belonging to the individual rather than a governing body. Although the political fight for the individual freedom to simply *be* an individual continued throughout much of the French Revolution and, for some, this freedom was granted, several lost their remaining freedoms (and lives) under the guillotine.

Perversity is caught up in culture and literature between 1740 and 1895 to the point that it is taken for granted and weaves into the tapestry of its social definition. The most famous example of this is the fact that although sadism and masochism were practiced long before they were coined in *Psychopathia Sexualis*, the terms became common knowledge after Richard von Krafft-Ebing evoked the names and works of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch and the Marquis de Sade to illustrate the behaviours that characterize masochism and sadism, respectively.⁷

While the Self continues to try and differentiate and define itself on the spectrum between the religious and the secular, the projection of godhead and what it represented to the masses became entwined with individual intellect. In the context of a Kink dynamic and its relationship between the Dominant and their submissive, Bonnie Shullenberger compares the godhead to the former. She describes this comparison by three characteristics:

1. **Transcendence** – The sub looks to the Dom as a god, loses [themselves] in the desire of the Dom [...] we might say it is a kind of exaltation in identifying with the revered Other and being accepted by [Them]. The lover finds in the Beloved that which is "greater-than-myself" and is willing to accept whatever is required to participate in that.
2. **Self-abandonment** – [...] the quality of experience which occurs in certain forms of prayer and meditation, as well as in sexual relations and prominently in sadomasochism. The disappearance or lessening of awareness of barriers

⁷ This has been confirmed in several sources (including *Psychopathia Sexualis*). Some of these include (but are not limited to): Bronken's "Sado-Masochism" in *The Handbook of the Gothic*, Supervert's *Perversity Think Tank*, Deleuze's *Coldness and Cruelty*, and Iwan Bloch's *Marquis de Sade: His Life and Work*.

between “self” and God, or between “self” and an Other or Others is well known in religious experience and in accounts of sexuality [...] Both Dominance and submission require and act of will.

3. **Recognition** – Sadomasochistic practitioners seek yet another engagement: they seek to be recognized. The lover desires recognition of the Beloved, [their] attention to [the lover], paradoxically thereby for [the Beloved] to “submit” to [their] “control”. We might call this a dialectic of control (Shullenberger 254 – 58).⁸

Comparing the Dominant to a godhead, one can see how spirituality is not only entangled with sexuality, but creates an alternative explanation as to the purpose of systematic authorities of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and their attempts to separate individual sexuality from their sex. Dominant/submissive pairings (or groups) are frequently built around a hierarchal structure in which the submissive willingly seeks to serve (or please) the Dominant figure. Differing from institutional control, Dominant/submissive sex features the *choice* to serve rather than the social obligation. However, spirituality and institution remain part of Kink culture in the way that the submissive replaces a godhead (or government) with an individual (or individuals) whom they willingly seek to worship through perverse sexuality. Darrin McMahon further links intellect to spirituality by examining how “genius in the nineteenth century echoes the magical properties of the deeper forces in the world; the godlike seeing the unseen creates a mimetic echo between the genius and the godhead. Libertines are imitating the divine form by bringing something new into the world – the awareness of humanity’s inherent perversity as a quest for knowledge” (Darrin McMahon). Technically, perversity was already manifested within the universe, but through Libertine mimesis, it was brought to the forefront.

The ambiguity that surfaces between the explanation of the Self, religion over secularism (or vice versa), gender, and sexuality illustrates the difficulty of statically characterizing perversity between 1740 and 1895. Instead, these fragments eventually join together to create an ideology of independence. Similarly to the Gothic genre, the value of aesthetics and the perverse existence of the Self as a part of a fragmented Whole becomes so convoluted and wound up in the individual definitions of each fragment that the overall message of perversity as an independent recourse from the Whole becomes lost; perversion thus demands the re-imagination of human relationships. Perversity as a

⁸ I have taken another stylistic liberty here by placing gender neutral terms in square brackets to remain loyal to the topic of perversion and the fact that sadomasochistic couples do not always fit the Dominant/Male and submissive/female dichotomy.

re-imagination is explained by Richard C. Sha's use of aesthetics to characterize and define perversity as the ability to allow the Self to invoke the Imp.

Aesthetics claims that pleasure without function (perversion) yields disinterested judgements brought about by the concept of freedom [...] When applied to sexuality, this positive stance towards perversion allows us to revalue sexual perversion as a form of purposiveness: to see how sexual perversion obviates reproduction and the interests that perversion serves purposiveness [and reveals it] as a form of perversity [...] Under the aegis of purpose, the body is [denied] free will, sexuality becomes subsumed under brute instinct, and aesthetics becomes selfish and determined. In a word, ideology. Thinking about sexuality without regard to purpose enables reflection about the forms that sexuality takes [...] Thus, if heteronormativity is form, rather than a naturalizing of function or purpose, one can see it as an ideology [...]: the reduction of sexuality to reproduction and animal instinct (Sha 2 – 3).

Defining the human body by its supposed purposes (such as conceiving and birthing an eventual child) rather than by its inherent autonomy denies the individual of its free will; they are legally (or spiritually) bound from fucking for fuck's sake. The interplay between aesthetics of the Romantic period recalls Supervert's question of re-routing the sex flow (from procreation to recreation) and why subversion seems inextricably linked to perversion.

The discussion of perversity between 1740 and 1895 rests in the Self and it is up to the Self to define; there are as many perversions as there are Perverts. The paradoxical dependence on culturally-accepted definitions of obscenity (such as the sexualized Libertine political attacks) to define perverse alternatives is indicative of the state of the widespread confusion in defining sexual culture. If perversity is the anti-norm, it becomes inextricably linked to the pathological cultural behaviours it is attempting to separate from. No matter how hard the Self fights to become fragmented from the Whole, it is entirely dependent on the Whole to know how it is meant to behave, and to actively choose the opposite. The overwhelming presence of paradox, confusion, and ambiguity is precisely why perversity is inherent in Libertine and Gothic literature.

– THE INHERENCE OF PERVERSITY IN GOTHIC AND LIBERTINE LITERATURE –

In much the same way that Libertine pornography is inextricably linked to politics, Elisabeth Bronken illustrates how sadomasochism is a frequent undertone in the Gothic.

Within Gothic literature, phantasy enactments of sadomasochism can be found in the inter-subjective conflict [...] where characters enact the struggle between a sadistic super-ego as representative of the law and a masochist ego as representative of forbidden pleasures, by suffering from guilt, self-punishment, or self-purging (Bronken 232).

The Gothic coming-of-age trope and the struggles of protagonist self-realization become entwined with perversity in the way that sadomasochism re-routes the sex flow to create (and receive) pain rather than to reproduce. Gothic melodrama is also linked to masochism and the personal attack upon the Self.⁹ In his book *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception, and Canon Formation*, Michael Gamer evokes criticism by Maggie Kilgour that further characterizes the Gothic as a part of the unrest manifested during cultural change. “Gothic, [Kilgour] argues, cannot be dismissed as a premature manifestation of Romanticism or as a missing link between the eighteenth and nineteenth century novel because it cannot be seen in abstraction from the other literary forms from whose grave it arises [as a] carnivalesque mode for representations of the fragmented subject” (Gamer 9). If the Gothic cannot be simply dismissed as pre-Romantic or even a post-Libertine genre while being inextricably linked to both of them, it becomes a fragment of characterizing the period of unrest that all three genres are tied up in. Or, to evoke Judith Halberstam’s definition of the Gothic as “overdetermined – which is to say, open to numerous interpretations”, one is able to relate Gothic ideology to Romantic (and Libertine) without specifically dismissing the Gothic genre as but a fragment (Gamer 28).

Perversity is inherent in the Gothic body in the way that the genre is largely a reflection on the ever-changing state of humanity; this is often manifested in the Gothic use of melodrama. Gothic reflection on the perpetual motion of human existence is labelled by Kelly Hurley as “the Abhuman”, or, “the image of ruination of the human subject; violent, absolute, repulsive, and often mirrored with obsession” (Hurley 3). The tropes of the Abhuman are found in each thesis figure: Masoch’s Severin is ruined by Wanda’s transition into sadism as well as Severin’s “feminized” masculinity; Poe illustrates human emotion through violent outbursts of passion, repressed urges, and obsessed narrators; Radcliffe’s protagonists face overwhelming melancholy when the supernatural shifts to the natural; Sade is repulsively absolute in his criticisms of the entire world and its apparent hypocrisy through narratives of extreme, obsessive violence.

⁹ One only has to look as far as Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and the way that his protagonist was rent by emotional trauma over the unavailability of the *object* of his affection and driven to suicide. I will analyze the objectification of the female body later in this thesis.

There is a link between the pedagogy of the female body and the Abhuman/abject. “The female body is abject. Male submission to the abject is cause for Othering within the masculine sphere [or a] sudden death [and] alienation from the culture that desires, protects, and motivates gendered oppression” (Hurley 118). Based on accepted norms, it appears that femininity in and of itself – regardless of the gender expressing it – is linked to the act of perversity. Cultural abominations are specifically female ones. If a woman exercises her sexual autonomy, she is disloyal to the roles she is expected to fill; she is also labelled a Whore, rather than simply embodying norms accepted as “male”. If a man illustrates feminine aspects (such as Severin’s masochism in *Venus in Furs*), or showed unrestrained emotion, he is alienated.¹⁰ “Women as entities [are] defined by and entrapped within their bodies in contrast to the man, who is governed by rationality and capable of transcending the fact of his embodiment” (Hurley 118). There is an inherent thing-ness of the female body, an objectification, which illustrates the larger cultural issue at hand: the female body is intrinsically pathological. “Perversity [in literature between 1750 and 1832] resists pathology in part because the science of pathology is instrumental to the consolidation of the norm. Scientists therefore had to construe the norm from pathological specimens. Perversity’s very existence in culture thus gives it the potential to challenge dominant values” (Sha 23). The freedom of the Self to dictate its own ideology (including how to identify within – or independently of – gender dichotomies) challenges established controls by creating infinite alternatives to norms created by the courts and churches. The Gothic frequently uses this struggle for control between the Self and the Other (with each part seeing the other as *the* Other) to foster tropes such as upheaval, melodrama, violence, and terror.

Andrew Tierney believes that the “Gothic themes of violence, usurpation, and repression resonate with the religious conflict and mass dispossessions” of the time and offers a way for novelists to deal directly with cultural upheaval (Tierney 7). Although Irish literature is not a focus of this thesis, Andrew Tierney’s essay on haunted cloisters in seventeenth-century Munster perfectly characterizes the Gothic trope of haunted locations in order to address an author’s demons through literary output. In studying the

¹⁰ This is also illustrated in the fact that in sodomy trials, it was frequently the “passive” male partner who was punished more heavily than the “active” partner. The latter, regardless of the same-gendered partner, was illustrating the “normal” male role whereas the former was embodying “female” submission. David M. Halperin engages with sodomy laws in his work on pre-Modern sex; specifically, throughout “Sex Before Sexuality: Pederasty, Politics, and Power in Classical Athens”. This is also discussed by Vern L. Bullough throughout *Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender*.

Self, Irish pre-Gothic figures “repeatedly feature usurpers, acts of regicide, and visions of ghostly return. [These] complex narrative devices prefigure the workings of the later Gothic novel” (Tierney 24). Supernatural feeling that an individual is being haunted by an unseen force is also found in the English Gothic, including in Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* which is analyzed later. Hauntings “constitute a potent symbol of the violent intersection between politics and religion that underpins our understanding of the Gothic” in that they represent the individual’s reaction to being split between religious faith and political alignment; they are haunted by the need to define themselves by what is appropriate, rather than what is individually correct (Tierney 26). Perversity is inherent in Gothic and Libertine literature because of how the Self gravitates from norms to reach one’s subjective truth. The combination of environment, biology, reason, and ideas leads them to place truth in individual intuition.

Since sexuality is inherent in the body politic, the Libertine genre is an obvious manifestation of how humanity engages with sex. Deviations and alternatives to sexual norms suggested by courts, religions, and political powers are intrinsically linked with sexuality. Human beings have for a long time sought to separate pleasure from procreation by inventing methods to divert reproduction until the action is deemed necessary – if at all. This perverts the “purpose” of sex and defines it based on the individual. This cyclical fluidity begs the existence of a (perverse) culture of individualism – or if I may, indivi[dual]ism.¹¹ Since Libertine and Gothic literature is a characterization of the Self, or the perverse group othered from “the Whole”, James Grantham Turner believes this creates a spectacle of “perversion-as-diversion that clearly act[s] out the fantasies [of a sexually free society], and reveals the tensions, of the sexual counter-culture at a period of institutional flux that ideologues presented as the victory of carnivalesque hedonism over ‘Puritan’ repression” (Turner 118). Despite how Libertine literature attempts to subvert public opinion for the benefit of the individual (and the individuals that make up society), it tends to ignore other sociocultural issues in favour of projecting a culture of free sex. For example, whether or not Libertine prose illustrates both genders as sexually liberated, female Libertines are usually (with exceptions such as Ninon De Lenclos and Aphra Behn) written by men. So, to illustrate the oppression of the sexual masses, women are objectified and sexualized – but by the very revolutionaries

¹¹ By pointing out the inherent dualism within the individual, the fragmentation of the Self and how the doubled individual adapts to the ability to transition alongside change is illustrated. The term is stylistically similar to writing “submissive/Dominant” to illustrate dynamic.

attempting to demonize the courts, churches, and monarchy for the same behaviour. Rochester's protagonist, Lady Elizabeth Howard, illustrates the "conjunction of *politesse* and 'Wit' applied to the sexual realm. Putting erotically charged words into her mouth, Rochester makes Lady Elizabeth constitute herself simultaneously as a courtier and courtesan. Even in his high-cultural register she is wholly sexualized" (Turner 240). Illustrating the hypocrisy of control, the female body politic is controlled by the group seemingly attempting to liberate it. In this way, the paradoxical web of perpetual perverse motion continues to become as messy as the characterization of perversity in and of itself. The cult of genius of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that embodied perversion is

defined by eccentricity, lovability, [and the] ability to see into the fabric of the universe – to literally understand god's mind. There is a yearning and desire to know truth that is largely pursued by the stereotypical figure of the "white European male". Aside from Gertrude Stein's "I am a genius" as a mimetic flaunting of the way that genius is a male creation in the same way that female hysteria is, the public pursuit of knowledge is a male (and dominant) attitude. Genius cognates with "genitals" and those with internal genitals are not permitted to present their external genius (Darrin McMahon).

Obscenity and perversion in the Libertine is therefore linked to the female body (whether it is objectified or revered) and contributes to the inherent ambiguity of perversion within Gothic and Libertine literature. Although the female Libertine (or Libertine Whore) is ultimately objectified by her male creator, she embodies an alternate state of femininity. According to Kathryn Norberg, the Libertine Whore, like Sade's Juliette, is

independent, sensual, sensible and skilled. She is healthy and possessed of a very healthy – that is, normal – sexual appetite. She is a businesswoman and an artist who provides "varied" sex for men who can afford it. She is a courtesan who lives in luxury and abides by "philosophy", usually materialist philosophy. Intelligent, independent, proud and reasonable, she is *not* diseased or monstrous; she is not humiliated or victimized either by her life or her clients (Norberg 227).

Through Gothic ambiguity and Libertine sexual freedom (no matter how conditional the latter may be), another reality becomes possible. The true alternative (and public label of "obscene") comes when figures create alternatives to political control. By mimicking the overarching control systems, Libertine literature not only poses a threat to authority, but inspires lower classes (including women) to follow suit; it is in this alternate reality where perversion lies.

Linking itself to the Gothic in terms of perverting static norms in favour of ambiguous or perpetually changing existence, Libertine literature embodies the Double in

order to draw attention to the inherent fluidity of the Self. Both genres double the Self, albeit in different ways. Whereas the Gothic provides readers with an ambiguous character (such as the often hysteric and therefore feminized Valancourt in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*), the Libertine blurs its characters through authorial persona. Through Libertine literature, Martin Mulsow believes “it is possible to speak as a theologian and as a philosopher and thereby occupy very different roles: because of their divergent characteristics, it is not allowed to fuse and shape into one person the two *personae morales* of the theologian and the philosopher” (Mulsow 340). The Doubled character illustrates the problem of the cultural separation between the public and private spheres. The Self is both public and private; therefore society should be presented in the same way. Paradoxically, Libertine characters “exist in something like a public sphere, whereas [the author has] a private existence” in order to protect themselves from prosecution under laws against obscenity (Mulsow 343). Yet, in order to achieve true knowledge, Socratic dialogue suggests that “the author needs to ‘multiply [themselves] into two Persons and be [their] own Subject’” (Muslow 343).

Death is also a predominant trope within the Gothic and Libertine genres. It is frequently used with combinations of sexual deviance, philosophy, and passionate lust.¹² Humanity becomes discontinuous in that sex without reproduction is intrinsically linked to the Self as it is primarily *for* the Self. Eroticism can be achieved without procreation, but fulfills life based on the independent quest for knowledge; humanity essentially has to choose between its own eventual extinction and the individual quest for knowledge. One could argue that a cultural balance between individuals who choose to procreate and those who prefer the pursuit of knowledge (rather than projecting the importance of procreation) would remove this ultimatum. The interpretations of what the balance entails are where individual perversity lies.

Sexuality in the Gothic and Libertine genres is independent from public and political morality. It is an exercise of the Self. When the individual living in an opposite reality learns of this separation, they experience a death of the previous Self. According to Eric Russell Bentley, “one might even suggest that history is constant and simultaneous growth and decay and that the rigid separation of the two processes into

¹² In terms of Libertine literature, the work that first comes to mind is the Marquis de Sade’s Gothic short stories in *Crimes of Love* in which characters are routinely subjected to Libertine whims and disposed of if they do not fit with Libertine agenda. The pairing of sex and death is also rampant throughout *The 120 Days of Sodom* in which those kidnapped to be used as sexual objects are ultimately tortured to death while being forced to hear virtues of libertinage.

distinct periods [similar to the separation of sexuality and the Self] is a misleading distortion of the truth” (Bentley 8). Just as the Self is separate from the public, eroticism is inherently separated from the “purpose” of humanity to reproduce – yet, it is part of society as an Othered fragment – like the preordained action of death. According to Georges Bataille,

eroticism is assenting to life even in death. Indeed, although erotic activity is in the first place an exuberance of life, the object of this psychological quest, independent as I say of any concern to reproduce life, is not alien to death [...] There does remain a connection between death and sexual excitement. The sight or thought of murder can give rise to a desire for sexual enjoyment [...] we cannot just pretend that a state of neurosis is the cause of this connection. [The relation between death and eroticism] extends far beyond the confines of vice; I believe that it may even be the basis of our images of life and death. [...] Reproduction was opposed to eroticism, but while it is true that eroticism is defined by the mutual independence of erotic pleasure and reproduction as an end, the fundamental meaning of reproduction is nonetheless the key to eroticism. Reproduction implies the existence of discontinuous beings [...] If you die, it is not my death. You and I are discontinuous beings (Bataille 11 – 12).

Here, perversion acts as a doubled alternative to what humanity is culturally expected to do, which is to pair off and reproduce so that our spawn may repeat the cycle and continue our discontinuous species. Thus, we are not only perverse if we embody eroticism without reproducing (re-routing the sex flow as Superverv suggested), but we also become perverse if we show an appreciation of death like that which is illustrated in Gothic and Libertine literature. Death and eroticism represent an interest in the end of humanity and therefore the end of systemic social control. Death also puts an end to the individual pursuit of knowledge, which control systems are not able to do. Arguably, the mind is the only thing that cannot be controlled – except by death. “Death means continuity of being. Reproduction leads to the discontinuity of beings, but brings into play their continuity; that is to say, it is intimately linked with death [...] death is to be identified with continuity” and inspires an individual fascination which is the dominant element in eroticism (Bataille 13).

The interplay between the erotic and death is also illustrated by terror and its part as an important trope in terms of history as well as literature. Terror also manifests itself, along with melancholy, within the Self as it continues its transitional quest for knowledge. Marcel Hénaff characterizes terror during the French Revolution as an “[implication of] self-justification, a debate as to its function, its ends and even its limits [...] It is impossible to overlook the articulation between the theory and the practice of terror

which appears during the Revolution. War is declared on those responsible for the tyrannical oppression that crushes the populace” (Hénaff 9). The role of eroticism that proliferates throughout Libertine literature is illustrated by

that of the Libertine masters organizing their round-ups of victims, stockpiling them here and there – castles, monasteries, fortresses – to use them as they will for all sorts of sexual abuses, tortures, and humiliations until their victims collapse or die.¹³ But the real scandal is that this terror allows itself no social or political legitimation [...] It remains completely gratuitous and even makes this gratuitousness the source of pleasure it procures. It does not serve to found an order, to confirm a truth, or to carry out a law: it serves only to demonstrate their radical absence (Hénaff 10).

The role of social privilege in this case (such as Sade’s own place within the aristocracy) is important to discuss; not only are the Libertines essentially free of consequences (or at least largely ignored, especially in the case of Sade’s crimes) for publishing their criticisms, but should they be incarcerated, they are punished only to quell public outrage.¹⁴ Perversion and terror are inextricably linked in that the target of objectification is terrorized by their oppression (such as the victims of *Sodom*). “If it seems uncouth, insensitive, cruel, even solipsistic to speak of perversion in a time of terror, it is precisely because the immediate effect of the [French Revolution] is to achieve through violence what [Marquis de Sade] hoped to achieve through [Libertine] philosophy: a revaluation of all values” (Supervert, *Perversion*). The need to revalue morality stems from the individual freedom of choice; for the individual to characterize their own sexual and social politics. “In a closed, repressive society, perversion is itself a kind of moral terrorism. It threatens the social order [...] when terrorism – such as the violence waged during the French Revolution – is an attack on freedom; it is also an attack on perversion” (Supervert, *Perversion*).

Thomas de Quincey muses on the subject of murder as a fine art and a perverse human interest: “a man is not bound to put his eyes, ears, and understanding into his breeches pocket when he meets with a murder. If he is not in a downright comatose state, I suppose he must see that one murder is better or worse than another, in point of good

¹³ Again, this is most effectively illustrated throughout Desgranges’ narrative in Sade’s *The 120 Days of Sodom* during which mechanical and physical tortures are carried out on nameless victims by a nobleman and his torture machines. The nobleman does not ejaculate until he witnesses all fifteen machines simultaneously at work. This is a succinct image of how Sade utilized sex to demonize the aristocracy during the Revolution.

¹⁴ For example, while Sade was burned in effigy for his sexual crimes – specifically the “Rose Keller Affair” in which he horribly assaulted and maimed a beggar woman and the 1772 orgy in which he gave guests “aphrodisiac candies” - he was permitted to escape to Savoy (de Beauvoir 13).

taste. Murders have their little differences and shades of merit". (de Quincey) Thus, de Quincey suggests that unless an individual is comatose, they must have some thought process regarding a hypothetical murder – it opens the gates of reflection on topics humanity would rather avoid. The taboo surrounding death and eroticism, although both are evident in human existence, relates directly to society's need to illustrate themselves as continuous beings when they are entirely the opposite; humanity is forced to come to terms with the death of the old Self, and its aware rebirth.

– PERVERSION, THE QUEST, AND THE SELF –

The individual quest for knowledge that permeates Gothic and Libertine narratives is also known as "lifting the veil". Each of the authors I will be analyzing in this thesis uses travel as a symbolic illustration of the quest for knowledge. Sacher-Masoch's protagonist begins to loathe his sought after masochistic lifestyle when his Dominant embarrasses him during their public travels; Poe's narrator in "Man of the Crowd" follows a male stranger through the streets before coming to an unknown realization at the end of the story; Radcliffe's female protagonists travel throughout her novels to and from haunted locations that soon reveal their not-so-haunted realities; and Sade's women are educated by older (usually male) libertines in the ways of vice. During their perverse education, they travel through (and sometimes desperately try to escape from) the lands of the "educators" all the while gaining more knowledge in terms of the Self and the body politic through perverse sexual experiences, consensual or not. These characters all experience shocking revelations that force them to re-evaluate and ultimately redefine how they engage with the Self; the struggles of the individual to encompass their personal identity into the role of the Other and society demands detailed individual analysis. According to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick,

While the 'identity' a pedant represents is only [an individual's] social identity, [it] turns out to be an intimate and inclusive category: one's true name, one's closest ties, and one's radical erotic choices [...] all hang on it. The only attributes it seems to leave out are, finally, the initial sexual differentiation and the education that has preceded the discovery [...] The belated establishment of identity, coming after the accumulation of the various inscriptions of character, occurs only with the retracing or recognition of pairs of marked countenances that are ocularly confronted and compared with each other (Sedgwick 262).

Through Sedgwick's analysis of the pedant, the very term itself appears to illustrate a major stake in humanity's understanding of the Self as a part of the social Whole; the role of the pedant may be to intellectualize the individual attributes of "one's radical erotic choices", but individual differentiation and education are essential events needed within a systemically equal society. This is expressly why Self education is an enemy of the State between 1740 to 1895 as well as in the current era and what Sedgwick is referring to when she says that the "*re*tracing" and "*re*cognition" of the Self is "ocularly" confronted – materially visualized – rather than just as a metaphysical musing.

The tension between the aristocracy and the Self-educated individual is that the Self ends up in the position to represent the true Other that has been cast away by pious social norms dictated by class and church. Sexual or ideological perversion is a revolutionary tool because it suggests the presence of short-comings in the ruling class to essentially rule over their subordinates; perversion is an enemy of the State. Referring specifically to libertine Claude le Petit, Robert Muchembled characterizes how the Self-inspired quest challenged the shaky status quo:

Not only did he poke fun at the authorities, mock their highest principles and seek sympathy for a sodomite executed in 1661, but worse, he represented a perversion of the intellect and of culture. Well educated, a lawyer and a poet, Le Petit pitted his appetite for liberty and his youth against the advance of religious and political moralization that was gaining ground after Louis XIV seized personal power (Muchembled 106).

Thus, Libertine politics essentially lift the social veil of political control; the individual quest for knowledge – not necessarily perverse sex – is the true enemy of the State. Perversion is one of the many manifestations of Self education due to the fact that social control systems tend to demonize aspects of the Self that relies on independence.

Similar to the class hierarchy illustrated in pre-Revolutionary France, Perverts essentially construct their own sense – a flipped hierarchy – of control that echoes how Libertine extremity essentially posits itself alongside the same political extremities as the aristocrats before them. Inge Boer evokes Montesquieu to illustrate how the new hierarchy, placing perversion above the monarchy, functions as an "opposite to the pair republic/monarchy. But, simultaneously, this pair is continually in danger of falling prey to despotism through the corruption of the principle of the republic/monarchy. [The new hierarchal system] implies that despotism is always lurking in the background" as a function of the Self (Boer 47). The hierarchy of perversion creates a sense of terror within the republic/monarchy in terms of a decapitation of power and a visual confrontation of

the change within the perverse individual. Referring to Marcel Gauchet, Darrin McMahan illustrates the terror inherent in the transition to radical individualism from anti-*philosophie* religious morality and their fears of eventually losing power to the Perverts of the Enlightenment:

Stripped of higher calling, the *philosophes* responded only to pleasure and interest, refusing to recognize God. The only being recognized by the *philosophes* at all, it seemed, was the Self. [...] ‘the great motor of human action is love of the Self, and of this *me* that constitutes the center and final end of everything. All is related to the Self and to one’s well being, one’s interests, [and] one’s pleasures’. Following from this radical individualism – the core of *philosophie’s* ethics – was complete denial of social responsibility. (McMahan 29).

Thus, another inextricable link between perversity and the quest for knowledge between 1740 and 1895 is formed through awareness of the Self as existent under an Othered power structure; a power which is ultimately threatened by the action of independent education.

Posing independent knowledge quests as a State enemy, we see the relation between engaging in vice and practicing radicalism. Seeking perverse education for the purpose of individually educating the Self *by* the Self allows the individual to utilize radical freedom to reject and willingly deviate from norms that were constructed, according to Peter Cryle, in order to define “sexual deviation in terms of normative ideas of gender so that pathologies of both genders were seen as a sign of misplaced traits attributed to the other gender, resulting in ‘feminized’ men and ‘masculinized’ women” (Cryle, *Feminine* 2). Further, the radical link between vice and individual freedom is illustrated in the way that repressive pathologies frequently cause a manifestation of sexual excess that ends up to be more damaging than the initial perversity. Relating pathological hysteria to sexual perversion,

Madness was an overexcitation, and sexual activity with its natural excitement might easily give rise to imbalance. ‘Sexual need,’ wrote the French physician Henri Beaunis, ‘can reach an incredible degree of intensity and lead to excesses which need no further description. When not satisfied, it can lead to serious disturbances: neurosis, hysteria, erotomania, nymphomania, etc. At other times [...] one encounters a veritable perversion of sexual need’. ‘Sexual excess’ threatened in fact to become a tautology, and sexual life was inhabited by a compelling tendency toward perversion, madness, and death (Cryle, *Feminine* 3).

The creation of sexual pathologies allowed the church, courts, and State to punish and further exercise their control over their “deviant” subjects. The radical politics inherent in

vice allowed for oppressed groups to fight against repressive dichotomy and claim their own power. Although socio-political privilege worked against the oppressed – in the way that the aristocracy and churchmen were more likely to be forgiven for their “perverse” crimes – vice allowed them a place to start. The influences from the creation of sexual pathologies in and of themselves support a “deeper understanding [of “appropriate”] sexuality as a construct constituted simultaneously through cultural practices and institutional agendas” (Cryle, *Feminine* 7). The radicalism inherent in vice is that the individual recognizes pedagogical constructs as a system of institutional control and is free to deviate.

The freedom found in embodying ambiguous humanity through perverting institutional agendas is that it demands the redefinition (or *recognition* as Sedgwick states) of the individual. Ambiguous traits also suggest that static dichotomies did not necessarily ever exist, that they were indeed (lived and experienced) “institutional constructs”. Despite the technical non-existence of static social norms, the individual is forced by institutions to live alongside these dichotomies as if they are as real as the urge to engage in the perverse; rather than continuing to attempt defining innately ambiguous traits of humanity, institutions have instead settled on creating (and imposing) static norms. Georges Benrekassa believes that Gothic ambiguity and madness as well as Libertine sexuality represent the inherent fluidity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and that

nothing can be done [to quell the apparent dangers of “perversity”]. Desire is caught amongst the constant emergence of illusions, a variety of forms of energetic dissolution, the necessity of protecting a tolerable social life, and the repercussions on our freedom of the perpetual search for the obscure object of desire. We have not moved forward one bit [in understanding the depths of ambiguous human nature] despite what the now faded glory of libertine desire had attempted to illuminate (Benrekassa 51).

Essentially, the intrinsic fluidity that accompanies humanity’s perpetually transitioning quest for knowledge cannot be completely defined because the Self’s definition of its quest changes alongside cultural shifts. We have not moved forward because society’s needs are perpetually shifting; this is specifically why I have resisted seeking to define but rather chosen to engage the prevalence of perversion and the ambiguous purpose of the perverse knowledge quest. As with providing a definition of perversity, characterizing ambiguity is antithetical to its cultural role as a symbol of deliberate deviation and re-education.

Although pornography was labelled by institutions as “seditious” and “vulgar”, Iain McCalman suggests that the shift into pornography paradoxically “occurred at the very time usually associated with popular radicalism’s absorption of the ethic of moral respectability and self-improvement” (McCalman 77). So, while the bourgeoisie viewed pornography/perversity as an enemy of the State, the Libertines defined it as a radical milieu. “Bawdiness and promiscuity were integral to this rough radical milieu. They [converted] bookshops and chapels into brothels when business looked down [...] Obscenity did not represent anything exceptional or deviant [...] it was a part of their everyday lives and appeared naturally in their writings” (McCalman 84). Since pornography was the enemy of the State, libertines and Perverts relied on cultural ambiguity and perversity from norms as the catalyst for their quest for knowledge; a shaky balance that is utilized in Libertine and Gothic literature through coming-of-age education and the explained supernatural, respectively. It appears that radical life during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was anything but overwhelmingly virtuous.

Creation of “hedonistic morality” and ambiguous gender identification in Libertine literature is comparable to certain elements of early nineteenth century Romanticism (such as the avoidance of modesty in Byron’s *Don Juan*). Intellectual hostility towards religious authority and an endorsement of hedonism both “emphasized instinctual sexuality” that mirrored the Romantics’ attitudes of art for art’s sake and placed the Self in control of creating definitions of purpose – if they chose to create any in the first place.¹⁵ The role of ambiguity in the quest for knowledge is much the same as the role of perversity as an enemy of the State: it renders the establishment unable to define and therefore control its subjects. It places the individual in charge of the Self as a fragment of the Whole and inspires a balance between virtue and vice that renders outward violence from repression obsolete.¹⁶ According to Georges Bataille, “the independence of one man has never ceased to be any more than a boundary to the interdependence of mankind, [and] without [interdependence] there would be no human life” (Bataille 168). Human life as we know it is (unfortunately) dictated by external forces that dominate regardless of how hard the individual deviates. For example, the sociocultural privilege of libertines is at the root of their power.

¹⁵ The terms in quotation marks were taken from McCalman’s paper cited above and used, in part, as a paraphrase of his comparisons of Libertine and Romantic ambiguity (99).

¹⁶ Vice in the form of violence (sexual or physical) or crimes of violent passion caused by repression of the Self are both illustrated by the Marquis de Sade and Edgar Allan Poe. The trope will be fully engaged with in those sections.

– CONCESSIONS AND CONTEXTS –

As mentioned above, one of the most glaring differences between Libertine freedom and true, material freedom lies in the fact that the privilege of living a life of libertinage relies on being born with the power to do as thou wilt. It is in this reality that one of the biggest critics of Revolutionary France’s libertinage, Andrea Dworkin, reveals her utter disgust toward the Marquis de Sade both as an individual and an author. “Sade’s cultural influence on all levels is pervasive. His ethic – the absolute right of men to rape and brutalize any ‘object of desire’ at will – resonates in every sphere” (Dworkin, *Pornography* 71). Though Dworkin’s criticisms of the Marquis de Sade are warranted and arise from a misunderstanding of context due to her own experiences, they are important to include in any analysis of Sade. As mentioned above, Sade’s purpose is to rally against hypocritical institutions (such as the church) and to characterize *them* as the most callous and violent enemies of the people. Utilizing satire and extremity, Sade successfully illustrates his point. In *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, Dworkin is determined to cast Sade and sexual freedom in a negative and ultimately society-shattering light.¹⁷

Similar to how the melancholy Pervert feels repressed as an Othered member of a “normal” society around them, Dworkin reasons that “the essence of oppression is that one is defined from the outside by those who define themselves as superior by criteria of their own choice. That is why women are defined – from the outside, by men – as masochistic. Masochism is intrinsically both provocation and submission” (Dworkin, *Pornography* 149). This ideology endorsed by [male] sexuality theorists (including Krafft-Ebing and Freud) essentially justifies force against women and “at the same time makes that force invisible, requires that masochism be the normal female state: she wants it, they all do” (Dworkin, *Pornography* 149).

Dworkin’s tendency to ascribe to static definitions of the state of society (or perversion) to illustrate her stance embodies the problems that Sade satirizes in his prose: the projection of static norms onto an inherently fluid society. Dworkin’s criticism of Sade does not allow for deviation from her belief. Could the “provocation” of masochism

¹⁷ In the true spirit of fluidity and the refusal to ultimately define perversity in this thesis, it must be granted that Andrea Dworkin’s perceptions are, to some degree, truthful – they are *her* truth. In the first section, I engage with humanity as a fluid combination of biology, environment, reason, and ideas. Through an individual’s lived experience and awareness of their own fragmentation, perception varies. It is in this way that experience that Dworkin lived differs from my personal experiences. Though I vehemently disagree with her perceptions, I will not discount or discredit them. I will however, engage with them through literary criticism and attempt to characterize them alongside the study of perversity.

instead be a symbol of female control over the male? Is not the willingness to submit to a consensual partner the “provocation” which the Dominant responds to? Rather than characterizing perversity as a necessary attribute of an individual’s quest for knowledge, Dworkin presents her interpretation of Georges Bataille’s theories of the virgin/whore dichotomy in his *Eroticism: Death and Sensuality*.

Bataille introduces the all-or-nothing variant: [a woman] can choose to be chaste or she can choose to be a whore. The assertion that she has even this choice – that she can choose chastity – ignores the whole history of the world, in which rape is the perpetual motion of the male. Any so-called choice for sex is a choice for prostitution (Dworkin, *Pornography* 151).

Paradoxically, Andrea Dworkin is essentially characterizing the very same issues with the biologically deterministic gender norms that were dictated to eighteenth and nineteenth century society by its governing institutions.¹⁸ If gender is but a cultural construction, then the authority divide between male and female should technically become obsolete. However, class constructs dictate society – and the upper-class is coincidentally dominated by men. The inherence of class construction in the gender dichotomy dictates the roles of society. Thus, to avoid losing power, the upper class continues to fight against the deconstruction of norms lest their own hierarchal control becomes obsolete.

Another issue with the attempt of Gothic literature to champion abolishing gender dichotomy comes when the genre ends up inherently manifesting the dichotomies in and of themselves. This cycle of oppression in the Gothic and Libertine genres echoes Brison’s characterization of trauma above. “Although we usually think of trauma as a specific incident with exterior causation, it can also be a situation that endures over time, shaping individual identity and ways of dealing with the environment. Nowhere is this

¹⁸ The various traumas such as the spousal abuse experienced by Andrea Dworkin in her life and narrated in her literary works were ultimately the catalyst for her radical feminist views and subsequent political activism (see below). Trauma has a tendency of undoing the Self and further illustrates the interplay between life, death, and rebirth. According to Susan Brison, “a traumatic event is one in which a person feels utterly helpless in the face of a force that is perceived to be life-threatening. The immediate psychological responses to such trauma include terror, loss of control, and intense fear of annihilation [...] When the trauma is of human origin and is intentionally inflicted, [...] it not only shatters one’s fundamental assumptions about the world and one’s safety in it but also severs the sustaining connection between the self and the rest of humanity. Victims of human-inflicted trauma are reduced to mere objects by their tormenters” (Brison 13 – 14). Andrea Dworkin’s criticisms are evidentially projections of her own traumas onto the world around her. It also becomes crystal clear why she would militantly rail against the prose of the Marquis de Sade whose works frequently feature rape and torture – regardless of their overall critical merit. Her autobiographical works narrate the author’s personal experience as an abuse victim at the hands of her ex-partner such as being burnt with a cigarette and beaten with a wooden beam (*Letters* 103, 332) (*Heartbreak* 119).

more obvious than in gender expectations, and nowhere is the trauma of those expectations more fully presented than in the Gothic” (Massé 685).

As Rogers and Bentley suggest, the fixity of gender norms is an anti-Romantic demand. According to Winfield H. Rogers, sentimental romantic novels pervert reality and produce “females whose view of life becomes so completely perverted by reading novels that they insist upon melodramatic sentimentality in their own lives” (Rogers 101). For anti-Romanticists, “values are fixed, and fixity is their faith, their touchstone, and their panacea [...] the fixity demanded by the anti-Romanticists is of three kinds: fixity of religion and philosophy; fixity of social and political outlook; and fixity of aesthetic standards” (Bentley 10). According to the anti-Romanticists, fluidity inherent in perversity is against human nature; the individual quest for knowledge is not a tool of social revolution (though the anti-Romanticists appear to be anti-revolution in this right) but of decay.

In terms of Libertine literature and the role of language within it, Said’s account of Foucault’s theory characterizes Sade’s extreme use of violence and metaphor as an important tool in denaturalizing sexuality. Rather than engaging with the perverse, Sade instead dismantled sexual behaviours that were classed as “normal” and introduced a whole other catalogue of sexuality. Even while reading the deviant narratives in *The 120 Days of Sodom*, the reader is forced by social indoctrination to place the perversions along a spectrum that characterizes some fetishes as more socially acceptable than others. “Sexuality was denaturalized, made to submit and thrown into the empty space of language [...] This sort of feat is associated with a new heroism, that of the artist, which has displaced the heroism of the epic hero [...] language [is an] on-going hermeneutics of itself and not a primary given” (Said 17 – 18).

If the individual is the dominant force in the characterization of perversity as well as society, then perversity as a quest for knowledge appears to be entirely up to the Self to define. Deviating from any and all sociocultural suggestions of appropriateness and creating its own alternatives to the systems, the Self is the creator of the Whole rather than the Whole being the dictator of the individual. In this way, the Self is ultimately free to decide its own path and deviate from its expected roles.

**SACHER-MASOCH: “Supersensuality” and the Psychopathology of Masochism
– PASSION, MELODRAMA, AND THE MIND –**

The transition from belief in a unifying godhead to the individualistic pursuit of knowledge is dictated by the intuitive properties of perverse passion. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, perversion is a manifestation of passion. Melodrama is often illustrated as hysteria’s passion-laden sibling and manifested in “feminine” personality tropes. The Gothic and Libertine genres offer alternatives to these tropes by placing otherwise “masculine” characters in melodrama’s grasp. In the genres, melodrama echoes (or mimics) hysteria in a way that creates a male version of hysteria that includes reason alongside madness and emotion. Creating a kindred relationship between both ends of the male/female gender dichotomy suggests that opposites are fragments of one Whole.

In Leopold von Sacher-Masoch’s *Venus in Furs* the male protagonist, Severin, asks that his lover, Wanda, begin acting as a sadistic Dominant in their sexual relationship.¹⁹ At first, Wanda is hesitant in filling this role, but she does so because, paradoxically, she submits to Severin’s wishes to be dominated by a woman and subvert the usual norms of heterosexual relationships. Eventually, Wanda’s dominance transcends the fantasies that Severin initially wanted to pursue. When he tells her how she has become “heartless” towards him and takes his fantasies “too seriously”, she replies: “Too seriously? When I undertake something, there can be no question of jesting. You know that I detest all playacting and melodrama. Was it my idea or yours? Did I lead you to this or is it you who aroused my imagination? At any rate we are now in earnest” (Sacher-Masoch 200). Illustrating a reversed gender dichotomy, Sacher-Masoch characterizes how melodrama is instead a male personality trait rather than a feminine curse. He posits Severin in a vulnerable role and sets him up for the same tribulations that females often face under patriarchy – being objectified as a means of solely sexual gratification.

In *Venus in Furs*, melodrama and passion are the pervading masculine personality tropes. Just before Severin complains to Wanda of her cruelty (the very same cruelty he spent the first several pages begging her to embody), he reflects to the narrator of the text:

¹⁹ I would like to clarify the use of the word “sadistic” in terms of illustrating the sexual role embodied by Wanda throughout *Venus in Furs*. Today’s colloquial use of “sadistic” often refers to an individual who is “evil” or mentally unstable for enjoying pain inflicted on others. I am referring to Wanda as “sadistic” strictly as a sexual Dominant who seeks her pleasure from physically and forcefully Dominating her submissive through erotic pain.

Now I understand Manon Lescaut and the unhappy Chevalier who even in the pillory still adored his faithless mistress. Love knows neither virtue nor merit; when we love, we forgive and forget everything, for we have no choice. It is not our judgement that leads us, it is not the qualities or faults that we discover in the loved ones that inflame our passion or cause us to draw back in horror. We are driven by a gentle and mysterious power that deprives us of all will and reason, and we are swept along with no thought for the morrow (Sacher-Masoch 198).

Despite his belief that he is devoid of reason while under Wanda's control, it is precisely Severin's reason that causes his melodramatic melancholy in the text; he is unable to disconnect from his social calling to be the "hammer over the anvil" in terms of the gender dichotomy and therefore struggles with his unavoidable deviation from the role that society calls him to embody. Severin also continuously curses his own "supersensuality" in *Venus in Furs* as the reason behind his misfortunes. He blames the violence afflicted on him by Wanda on this melodrama. As characterized by Gilles Deleuze in *Coldness and Cruelty*,

Masochistic coldness represents the freezing point, the point of dialectical transmutation, a divine latency corresponding to the catastrophe of the Ice Age. But under the coldness remains a supersensual sentimentality buried under the ice and protected by fur; this sentimentality radiates in turn through the ice as the generative principle of new order, a specific wrath and a specific cruelty (Deleuze 52).

Since perversity is a manifestation of the individual pursuit of knowledge, it frequently involves the Self engaging with their own interpretations of the Other. In characterizing Severin as an Othered male in rapidly industrializing Central Europe, Sacher-Masoch uses perversity to illustrate the transition (or destruction) of traditional values. As David Biale states, "the rapid industrialization of Central Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century brought with it the destruction of traditional village life and a corresponding nostalgia for this vanishing idyllic world" (Biale 305). In this way, Severin's melodramatic and indecisive feelings towards this sought after dominance are symbolic of the Self's struggle with the transitioning world around it. Sacher-Masoch is suggesting the presence of interconnectedness between passion, the individual, and the mind in the same way that perversion is a series of fragmented engagements between biology, environment, reason, ideas, and the ways in which these manifest within the individual as a part of the Other. The interconnectedness symbolizes the psychological dimensions of the Self that echo the fragmentary conventions of the society in which it exists.

Sacher-Masoch's pornographic works "are tediously repetitive and they are distinguished by one persistent motif: they invariably feature domineering, aristocratic women dressed in furs" (Biale 312). Pornographic literature is largely a genre involved with self-reflexivity to analyze the Self in much the same way that the Gothic and Romantic elevate problematic issues (such as gender ambiguity) to fictionalized narratives in order to safely engage with them. Sacher-Masoch's female characters

enslave and torture their male companions in scenes with strong erotic undercurrents, even where the eroticism itself may not be fully explicit. The nature of these erotic relationships led the late-nineteenth-century psychologist, Richard [von] Krafft-Ebing, to coin the term 'masochism' after [Leopold von Sacher-Masoch], just as he labelled 'sadism' after the Marquis de Sade [...] Both were members of the aristocracy and both had rather anarchistic philosophies of society in which their sexual predilections played a central role. Bought sought to play out their sexual fantasies in real life and turned to fiction as a release from those fantasies whose very nature made realization impossible. The line between fiction and reality is sufficiently blurred in both Sade and Sacher-Masoch for it to be unclear whether their fiction was a substitute for frustrated reality or reality a theatrical extension of their fiction (Biale 312).

I am inclined to suggest that Sacher-Masoch's (as well as Sade's) fiction was a combination of a frustrated reality and a theatrical extension. The very nature of perversion avoids a static explanation and therefore encompasses the complete existence of the Self. Sacher-Masoch's privilege was essential in securing his place as a pornographic author, but this power also added to an overall sexual discourse that is (clearly) still a mode of important philosophical discussion in today's society.

Another purpose for Masoch to characterize Severin as the passionate melodramatic in his text over Wanda is to illustrate the resilience of the human mind in a perpetually transitioning society. Severin and Wanda both symbolize an alternative existence within an opposite group just as the Self seeks to differentiate itself from the Other while simultaneously being influenced by it; hence the melancholia experienced by Severin during the sexual scenes between Wanda and himself. Relating the interplay of Kink to the fact that the masculine realm is not meant to be susceptible to passionate melodrama, the Death Instinct as characterized by Freud and Georges Bataille symbolizes the mental transition between death and rebirth as Severin, through Sacher-Masoch, reflects on what masochism means for himself as well as his place as an individual within the Other.

Freud's instinct that masochism was generated in the death instinct is half right, but it is not empty obliteration that masochism seeks. It is rather the loss of self into the desire and spirit of the Other. In a world where God is dead, the final

moment of masochism, the surrender unto death, at the hands or at the behest of the Beloved Other, is the ultimate transcendence

above the static norms of the Self and a complete surrender to the emotions is characterized in the Gothic (Shullenberger 268).

Wanda's literary deviation from her gendered realm also symbolizes the "loss of Self into the desire and spirit of the Other" in the way that she engages in sadistic acts that she (initially) is against because Severin requests them; both characters embody a masochistic attitude in the pursuit of knowledge. Severin desires to be Dominated by a fur-laden woman completely and wholly; Wanda desires to please her lover and therefore gives in to his fantasy. Both characters eventually return to their preferred role, which happens to be the female/submissive and male/dominant role that is accepted by "proper" society; or perhaps they never left and instead opted to pervert that which was already in place. Perversion lies in the fact that Wanda and Severin both transitioned from blindly accepting their social roles to deviating in order to study the Self (and the Other) both privately and publicly – and were completely inspired by the passion to do so before returning to their preferred roles, educated. Interestingly enough, the melodramatic and passionate narrative that follows Severin and Wanda throughout *Venus in Furs* was inspired by a dream that Severin had; the passion to deviate from previous experience stemmed from the mind.

Early theorists of sexuality thought that masochism, like Severin's dream, stemmed from an intensification of the mind as well as how the individual's environment inspires the perverse sexual need to submit (masochism) or Dominate (sadism). The intensification (or degeneration, in the case of masochism) of human emotion as well as the Self-characterization of the individual's environment illustrates sexual need as part of the nuanced human mind. According again to Richard von Krafft-Ebing, an explanation of masochism

must first seek to distinguish in [the masochist] the essential from the unessential. The distinguishing characteristic in masochism is certainly the unlimited subjection to the will of a person of the opposite sex (in sadism, on the contrary, the unlimited mastery of [the masochist]), with the awakening and accompaniment of lustful sexual feelings to the degree of orgasm [...] While sadism may be looked upon as a pathological intensification of the masculine sexual character in its physical peculiarities, masochism rather represents a pathological degeneration of the distinctive psychical peculiarities of women (Krafft-Ebing 133).

Evoking Krafft-Ebing, one can see how sadomasochism is a machinery of the mind. In terms of Sacher-Masoch and the relationship between Severin and Wanda within *Venus in Furs*, one can see how their sexual (and mental) passion leads to their perversion from their gender roles as well as their “place” within the public sphere: for example, the way in which Wanda re-names Severin “Gregor” when they are in public and forces him to carry her luggage and live in slave quarters. Perversion in the text leads to shared as well as individual knowledge for Severin and Wanda that causes a transitional change within them. Severin becomes aware of the fact that he is able to be Dominated by a woman and that he would rather return to his rightful place as the “hammer over the anvil” (Sacher-Masoch 271).²⁰ Wanda realizes that not only is she capable of Dominating a man, but that she personally prefers to submissively please a male lover as her individually-defined role as a woman.

If masochism was initially thought to be a deviance in human sexuality explicitly found in female patients, then sadistic females were an anomaly. Male masochism appears in sexual theory in much the same light; a double-layer of perversity is illustrated in the fact that the sex flow has not only been re-routed, but that a male is illustrating deviant *female* sexual traits. Similarly to the way in which passive homosexual partners were punished more heavily than their active counterparts, male masochism is illustrated in early sexual theory as much more of a problem than female sadism. The pursuit of individual knowledge through perversion via male masochism is illustrated in *Venus in Furs* as a self-reflexive narrative of perversion, diversion, melodrama, and healing.

– PERVERSITY VIA MALE MASOCHISM –

Perversity is found in manifestations of male masochism in the way that sex theorists, specifically Freud, characterized masochism as an inherent female trait. Essentially, a woman’s purpose is to be subservient to the male and therefore masochism is the epitome of this norm. Although perversion and perversity are interchangeable throughout this thesis, Krafft-Ebing, in his *Psychopathia Sexualis*, believes that there is a difference between the two forms: perversion is a disease, perversity is inherent in vice.

²⁰ I am referring specifically to Severin’s musings on the male/female dichotomy: “For the time being there is only one alternative: to be the hammer or the anvil. I was fool enough to let a woman make a slave of me, do you understand?”

Perversion of the sexual instinct is not to be confounded with perversity in the sexual act; since the latter may be induced by conditions other than psychopathological. The concrete perverse act, monstrous as it may be, is clinically not decisive. In order to differentiate between disease (perversion) and vice (perversity), one must investigate the whole personality of the individual and the original motive leading to the perverse act (Krafft-Ebing 53).

Either way, perversion is inherent in the individual's mind. If they ascribe to social expectations (such as those latent in Freud's sexual theory), then the male masochist is therefore perverse, or diseased; if the individual seeks to pervert these social expectations, then they are exercising autonomous vice – or perversity – to be able to separate themselves from the institutional expectations in favour of self education. I would like to engage with Krafft-Ebing's differentiation between perversion and perversity. First of all, utilizing the term “dis-ease” rather than “disease” would be more appropriate in the study of perversity because of how the terminology that characterizes sexual perversion creates a question of what (or *who*) decides what exactly denotes a difference (or deviation) in sexual instinct. “Dis-ease” would illustrate a purposeful deviation from the sociocultural ease inspired by systematic and static norms – removing the ease of statically defining deviant groups. Utilizing a term like “dis-ease” illustrates the cultural reaction to individuals who engage in perverse sexualities rather than socially “easy” sexual practices that are normalized. “Perversion” appears to be a psycho-pathological predisposition to engage in perverse sexual acts whereas “perversity” is illustrated as an action of rebellion against institutional and social norms (such as the vice exercised in Masoch and Sade's prose). Sexual “disease” would therefore be a diagnosis of a mental and sexual difference from those labelled sexually appropriate. Again, who or what truly delegates what is normal? Would labelling Perverts as “dis-eased” rather than “diseased” not serve as a reinforcement for figures like Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, Edgar Allan Poe, Ann Radcliffe, and the Marquis de Sade to utilize perversity in their prose in the first place to deliberately politicize their subversion of the same constructed norms that label individuals as “sick”?

Richard C. Sha critiques the problematic pathologization of sexuality through the suggestion that humanity is not dependent, and by its very nature, resists organization. “Anatomy is far from destiny [...] Physical determinism does little to explain human life. [...] By the end of the eighteenth century, sex was thought to take place in the head, not the genitals. [This meant that] sexuality could now become central to psychology” (Sha 21). If perversion is therefore an aspect of the individual mind, then the psychopathology

and cultural definitions of perverse (and “normal”) sexuality is literally obsolete. Perversity is located in the non-definition of the aspects of human experience and deliberately contradicts norms constructed on equally contradicting norms. Thus, the manifestation of Severin’s masochism within *Venus in Furs* illustrates the source of perversity via masochistic masculinity as well as the way in which Severin defines his masochism: though he wants Wanda to Dominate him, he does not want her to do so to the point that his agency is removed from him – despite the fact that he signed a contract granting her literal permission to end his life if she wished. Perversity is further illustrated in Severin’s character in the way that his disposition, through Sacher-Masoch, undermines the purposiveness of sex: to reproduce. The “perversification” throughout *Venus in Furs* undermines the “normative connection between pleasure and function that allowed sex to be thought of as a form of purposiveness. The sciences, by contrast, helped separate reproduction and pleasure. Romantic poets and scientists thus claimed that pleasure was either an unnecessary or insufficient cause of reproduction” (Sha 22 – 23). Severin therefore perverts from his role as a man as well as illustrates the lack of connection between pleasure and function. Reproduction is separate from masochism (lest a masochist [consensually] wishes to be forced to carry a child) as much as masochism was thought to be separate from masculinity. Pleasure itself becomes a perversion of the purposiveness of reproduction and therefore independent of reproduction all together. So, if purposiveness is absent from perversity, then so too would be the institutional norms projected upon humanity in order to pathologize and control them. The purpose of ascribing norms is to characterize dissent; by creating alternative ways of achieving sexual pleasure that are independent of reproduction, perversity is inherently part of rebellion. When Wanda’s cruelty becomes too much for Severin, he no longer experiences sexual pleasure in her Domination and rebels against her creating a perpetual cycle of perversion and diversion.

The relation to perversity that the epistolary novel has is its inspiration of the reader’s (and in the case of *Venus in Furs*, the narrator’s) guilty attraction to first-person experience. Comparing Severin’s journal with the epistolary novel, the journal serves as a private document being made public just as written correspondence in the epistolary is shared with readers. Discussing the role of Severin’s journal as a transition from the epistolary and taking place at the intersection of sexual explicitness and political sedition, Simon Pender writes that

Venus in Furs opens with a dream of “the goddess of Love in person,” a dream in which the dreamer and goddess debate the nature and possibility of love in the modern age [...] On being wakened, the dreamer goes to tea with a certain Severin, whose masochistic adventures, recorded in a journal (apparently read by the nameless dreamer-narrator during the conversation), comprise the bulk of the novel and whose painting, titled *Venus in Furs*, appears to have provoked the narrator’s dream (Pender 103).

The debate in question introduces the reader (and narrator) to the presence of a cultural transition to the modern age. The question of what it means to be an individual within the novel is engaged and left unanswered: Severin’s transitioning opinions of being a masochist echo that of the changing culture around him and ultimately echo the wishes of Radcliffe’s protagonists who wish to return to the moral and ignorant life before the mysterious veil was lifted by the pursuit of knowledge. The presence of a female and all-knowing deity over the previously-worshipped male one further characterizes the transitional aspects of the text. Wanda’s character echoes the dream goddess and suggests that, in *Venus in Furs*, women (instead of men) have the power and thus pervert the text further from the norms; in Sacher-Masoch’s literary world, men are masochists and women are the Dominants.

The quest for knowledge inherent in the perversity of male masochism suggests the awareness of what is socially expected along with the knowledge of how the Self relates to it. Along with the sexual preference of being Dominated, the guilt associated with unintentionally (in the way that perversity stems from a combination of biology, environment, reason, and ideas) deviating from the purposiveness of “appropriate” sex suggests a masochistic reaction to the Othered interpretations of the Self. However, there is also a presence of individuals who recognize culturally constructed norms and willingly exercise their subversion in seeking Dominant partners.

This “masochism” is the core of all fantasy for Freud, who regards masochistic desire as a part of “normal” human sexuality (especially for women), just as he does for sadistic desire (especially for men): “instinct with a passive aim must be taken for granted as existing, especially among women. But passivity is not the whole of masochism. The characteristic of unpleasure belongs to it as well, a bewildering accompaniment to the satisfaction of an instinct” [...] Freud aligns sadism with activity and man, masochism with passivity and woman. He remains, however, unable to account for the role of unpleasure in masochism and he does not even seem to question its role in sadism (Pender 105).

The presence of unpleasure sometimes experienced in masochism is illustrated towards the end of the novel when Severin begins to regret signing Wanda’s contract. He begins

to call her out on her unrelenting cruelty towards him suggesting that masochism is, essentially, as active a sexual position as sadism.

Indeed, the tendency to regard sadism and masochism as parts of a single entity with two forms, active and passive, is likely to distract us from the essential problem of the masochist's contradictory pleasure-in-unpleasure. As Deleuze shows, the masochist can never be the sadist's object-victim, any more than the sadist can be the masochist's object-torturer, since both sadism and masochism are active subject positions. [Deleuze's point is that] the masochist's torturer is manipulated, compelled, educated, even tortured into the role by the masochist (Pender 105).

The dominant role of the masochist is manifested in the presence of the dream goddess at the beginning of *Venus in Furs* as well as within Wanda's character. Summarizing Deleuze's theories, the aspects of masochism and sadism are as fluid as the individual themselves illustrates the way in which perversity via male masochism is Severin's manifestation (through Sacher-Masoch) of the individual's quest for Self knowledge.

– TRANSFORMATION OF THE SELF –

The masochistic properties of self transformation are directly illustrated with a comparison of *Venus in Furs* and Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. The "most striking object in Gregor [Samsa's] room is a photograph of a lady in a fur coat with a muff", an image which echoes the painting, "Venus in Furs" in Sacher-Masoch's novel (Angress 745). The climax of *The Metamorphosis* occurs when Gregor's mother and sister start removing furniture from his room. "At this juncture the transformed Gregor leaves his hiding place, and at the risk of deeply offending the two women by his sudden appearance, he climbed the wall to the picture and clings to it, stubbornly refusing to give it up" (Angress 746). Clearly, the erotic image is of great importance to Gregor. According to R. K. Angress, the masochistic transformation of Gregor Samsa as well as Severin – as both protagonists feel as if they deserve their misfortunes and are powerless to stop them – is characterized by a descent into humiliation. Gregor is humiliated by his menial occupation and wakes up to the realization that he has transformed into the insect he felt like; Severin is humiliated by Wanda and his transformation into her butler.

The possibility of a connection between this photograph and [...] Sacher-Masoch's *Venus im Pelz*, has been seen before but dismissed for lack of evidence. What has been overlooked is that the name Gregor occurs in *Venus im Pelz* and that it has considerable significance. The masochistic hero, Severin, is

“transformed” towards the middle of the novel from an independent gentleman into a butler, complete with livery and servant quarters and obliged to obey the most outrageous commands of his mistress with whom he travels incognito. As a butler he is Gregor. The author stresses that the change in name involves a change to the butler personality, a descent into humiliation (Angress 746).

Though *Venus in Furs* deals mainly with male masochism and *The Metamorphosis* narrates the humiliation latent in repetitive and thankless work, both include a layer of fetishism. Severin-Gregor grants Wanda permission to Dominate him conditionally if she promises to wear furs as much as possible; Gregor Samsa is drawn to an inanimate painting of a woman in furs. Peter Waldeck is also convinced the masochistic transformations of the Self in *Venus in Furs* and *The Metamorphosis* are accompanied with a sense of shameful guilt. Interestingly, the protagonists have deviated from cultural norms (read: male masochism) but still wish to lie at the feet of their *female* authoritative figures. Peter Waldeck suggests that “just as Sacher-Masoch’s Gregor yearns to lie at the feet of his beloved reclining on a sofa, so Kafka’s Gregor experiences shame and pleasure to hide [...] under the couch in his room. Similarly, he must repress the urge to throw himself at Grete’s feet” in much the same way that Severin throws himself at Wanda’s feet in his usual supersensual fits (Waldeck 148).

The perverse transformation of the Self in *Venus in Furs* occurs with the relation of sexual pleasure to the quest for knowledge. As the Self continues its awareness of individual sexual interest, liberation from norms and Self repression is achieved. But why? According to Richard C. Sha,

If pleasure and sex as well as sexuality exist within a grid of power and knowledge, there is no need to give up liberation in favour of pleasure because both pleasure and liberation have the same possibilities and liabilities [...] pleasure and sexuality could be worked for both resistance and domination [...] If the gaps between normative sexual pleasure and function helped to make sexual liberation seem possible, this gap also enabled [the individual] to recognize the gaps between pleasure and liberation and between liberation and liberty (Sha 44).

Even sexual liberation from institutional norms is perpetually changing as illustrated in deliberate perversion from static norms (such as early psychopathology of sex) only to settle on deviations from the same norms. Throughout *Venus in Furs*, the transformation of the Self continues to perpetually change Severin-Gregor and how he identifies himself, through Sacher-Masoch; in the broadest sense, it appears that the protagonist of Sacher-Masoch’s novel needs to experience consensual Domination at the hands of Wanda to truly understand who he is and how he identifies with the world around him.

The novel maps Severin's transformation starting as a child who is supersensually affected by women and someone who characterizes himself as the Other: "Already in my cradle, as my mother later recounted, I was a supersensualist: I spurned the breast of my sturdy nurse and had to be fed on goat's milk. As a little boy I was inexplicably shy with women" (Sacher-Masoch 173). The transformation continues its perpetual motion as Severin becomes drawn to women who wear furs and are willing to dominate him. When his chosen partner, Wanda, (having never agreed to marry Severin as he wished) ends up requesting her new lover to punish Severin, he associates his masochism with Dominance by a rival man:

the dark, curly head of the Greek appeared behind the curtains of the four-poster bed. I was speechless and paralyzed. My situation was dreadfully comic and I should have laughed at it myself had it not also been so desperately humiliating. It surpassed anything I had imagined; [...] the sight of his athletic build sent a shudder down my spine [...] "Pleasure alone makes life worthwhile;" [Wanda replied fiercely] "whoever suffers or lives in privation greets death as friend, but whoever surrenders to pleasure does not easily part with life. The pleasure-seeker must take life joyfully, in the manner of the ancients. He should not be afraid of indulging himself at the expense of others; he must never feel pity [...] He must use them for his own pleasure, without any trace of remorse" [...] Wanda's words brought me back to my senses. "Untie me!" I cried (Sacher-Masoch 266 – 67).

At this point, Severin's perceptions of what femininity means are shattered by Wanda's transcendent gender expression. She has assumed a masculine role while simultaneously demanding The Greek, who fits ideal masculine stereotypes, Dominate Severin-Gregor. The gender fluidity in the scene characterizes the purpose of perversion as a quest for knowledge. Severin becomes "cured" of his masochistic tendencies and reveals to the narrator the moral of his personal story:

"That I was a fool!" [Severin] exclaimed, without turning around, as though embarrassed. "If only I had whipped her instead! [...] The moral is that woman, as Nature created her and as a man up to now has found her attractive, is man's enemy; she can be his slave or his mistress but never his companion. This she can only be when she has the same rights as he and is his equal in education and work. For the time being there is only one alternative: to be the hammer or the anvil" (Sacher-Masoch 271).

Severin's transformation in *Venus in Furs* illustrates the perpetual motion of the individual's quest for knowledge. By engaging in sexual perversity through his masochism and ideological perversity in terms of his religious characterization of fur-wearing women (or the deification of women in general before Wanda epitomized

sadistic cruelty), Severin's character serves as a symbol of the perverse quest for knowledge in Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's most famous work. The narrative of *Venus in Furs* symbolizes the resilience and perpetual motion of the individual throughout their quest for knowledge. Severin goes through three major periods of change and at the end of the narrative, he appears "cured" of his self-imposed torment.

– BEATEN TO HIS SENSES: *Venus in Furs* –

You may think you're seated comfortably, or perhaps lying curled up in bed, but that's just your body. In your mind there is only one posture for reading – a posture of submission. When you read you are always on your knees, humbly accepting your lessons from the writer god. Every reader is a zombie, a slave, a robot who wants to be programmed and controlled. You set aside your own thoughts for mine. Do it. Now [...] You want to know that [Sacher-Masoch's] fetish appears in many of his works and that *Venus in Furs* was modelled on the author's experience serving as the slave of a woman named Fanny von Pistor. You want to know that Krafft-Ebing was inspired by the work and personality of Sacher-Masoch to coin the term *masochism* [...] The important thing here is my pleasure. The writer is the master in the literary relationship. The reader is the slave. If I want to tell you about *Venus in Furs*, you'll listen. If I don't, you'll listen anyway. You have no choice. I'm the voice around here. You're the ear. Get used to it (Supervert, *Sadistic*).

Supervert's introduction to *Venus in Furs* perfectly illustrates the separation between the Dominant and their submissive that is characterized throughout the novel. Symbolically, Severin fills the role of the reader and Wanda that of the Writer.²¹ Severin is reading his book as Wanda writes it and gleaned an education in terms of his own sense of Self; this is how the individual differentiates the Self from the Other whilst simultaneously depending on the Other to direct it. Supervert's tone mirrors the degree of Dominance that Wanda manifests towards the end of *Venus in Furs* and the godlike aura described by Bonnie Shullenberger above when she compares spirituality to the Kink community and the popular dynamic between a Dominant and their submissive. Further, the fact that Sacher-Masoch's narrative is based off his own sexual experiences with Fanny von Pistor illustrates the idea that perverse literature is used as a tool for the author to elevate their own individuality to a fictional realm in order to analyze and learn from the self-reflexive Self. For the purpose of perverse fluidity of the individual, Sacher-Masoch creates a Master/slave dichotomy in the text that does not properly characterize

²¹ I have capitalized "Writer" here to illustrate the similarities between Supervert's introduction and the division between Dominant and submissive that is analyzed in Bonnie Shullenberger's "Much Affliction and Anguish of Heart: 'Story of O' and Spirituality".

masochism as we know it today. Deleuze's description of masochism as a prevalence of dominant submission (in the way that the masochist dominantly seeks their sadist) rather than an exclusive urge to be owned by a Dominant more accurately describes the layered ambiguity inherent in perverse sexualities.

According to Supervert, Sacher-Masoch fails to define masochism because he

oversimplifies (you have to be master or slave) [...] He contradicts himself. [...] He considers it not masochism, which didn't exist as a clinical entity, but supersensuality. [...] He takes a concept with roots in Platonism – the supersensual as a realm literally above the senses – and declares it the root of his desire to undergo the most excruciating sexual experiences. It makes so little sense that it can only be a stratagem to involve you in his fantasies of punishment. If his ideas are all wrong, it is because Sacher-Masoch wants to be not correct, but corrected (Supervert, *Sadistic*).

Sacher-Masoch's incorrect classification of masochism illustrates a myriad of options. He either illustrates a misunderstanding of his own affliction (which would beg the reason of pursuing an understanding through a quest for knowledge) or fully understands the predisposition to be Dominated. “[Sacher-Masoch] wants to be punished, and the way to punish a writer is to gag him” (Supervert, *Sadistic*). So he sets *Venus in Furs* up as a call to be corrected, which Supervert (and others) has answered. The saturation of masochistic tendencies within the text mirrors ambiguous interpretations of the Gothic in that there are so many fragments of the Whole that it is not likely to ever be fully understood, even in the current era.

The quest for knowledge presented in *Venus in Furs* provides an interesting alternative to the characterization of masochism as a sexual perversion. Similarly to how I believe perversion is a combination of biology, environment, reason, and ideas, Deleuze believes that “in the language of Masoch's folklore, history, politics, mysticism, eroticism, nationalism, and perversion are closely intermingled, forming a nebula around the scenes of flagellation” (Deleuze 10). The “nebula” (or web) of Self knowledge is created by a combination of everything that the individual uses to define its own existence within the Whole. Further, Deleuze differentiates between eroticism and perversion, which continues to create a layered fluidity on the topics. There are several scenes in *Venus in Furs* that feature sadomasochism and few that narrate what could be characterized as “actual” sexual encounters. I am apprehensive in dictating what acts define “actual” sex as I am in providing a concise definition of perversity – I believe sex and perversity are the responsibility of the Self to define as per their own experiences and

preferences and because of this, the definitions will remain as fluid as the existence of sexual encounters are in the first place. Perversion is inherently located in the absence of (or deliberate avoidance of) a sexual or political freedom.

The narration of Severin's journal reveals that Severin wishes to have a sadistic female lover that simultaneously embodies popular stereotypes of femininity, in that despite her sadistic tendencies, she must also submit to his wishes and embody his impression of what women should be and are in his world. In this way, Wanda (quite literally) beats Severin to his senses not only by her erotic force, but through her reason:

“But you see, my child, women can only live up to these ideals in special cases; they can be neither as purely sensual nor as spiritually free as men; their love is always a mixture of the sensual and the intellectual. Woman's heart desires to enchain man permanently while she herself is subject to change, with the result that discord, lying and deceitfulness invade her life, usually against her will, and her whole character is affected” (Sacher-Masoch 191).

Subverting Freud and Krafft-Ebing's theories of female masochism, this passage suggests that it is women who carry dominant personality traits and men who subconsciously wish to please their every command, which Severin does throughout the text. At the end of *Venus in Furs* when Severin admits to the narrator that he has been cured by Wanda's cruelty, he essentially expresses a return to the accepted gender dichotomy which places men in a dominant social position, although he knows better (as he has experienced). In *Coldness and Cruelty*, Deleuze evokes Reik's psychoanalysis of masochism as a behaviour that is distinguished by four basic characteristics:

1. The “**special significance of fantasy**,” that is the form of the fantasy (the fantasy experienced for its own sake, or the scene which is dreamed, dramatized, ritualized and which is an indispensable element of masochism).
2. The “**suspense factor**” (the waiting, the delay, expressing the way in which anxiety affects sexual tension and inhibits its discharge).
3. The “**demonstrative**” or, more accurately, the persuasive feature (the particular way in which the masochist exhibits his suffering, embarrassment and humiliation).
4. The “**provocative fear**” (the masochist aggressively demands punishment since it resolves anxiety and allows [them] to enjoy the forbidden pleasure) (Deleuze 75).

I am inclined to add a fifth item to the above list: **the use of a contract or list of safe rules**. All five of these characteristics are utilized in *Venus in Furs* and further symbolize the inherent fluidity in Sacher-Masoch's understanding of masochism; Wanda and Severin both embody the items on the list and suggest that they both harbour sadomasochistic

personality traits. Severin fantasizes about a woman in furs who dominates him (without that, there would be no text) and Wanda ends up creating her own sadistic fantasies, such as forcing Severin to live as her butler under the name Gregor; Severin lives in suspense (and terror) regarding what Wanda has planned next, especially while he is waiting to hear from her after a period of silence while Wanda simultaneously delays her sadistic tendencies as well as inhibits her role based on fear that it will change her (as women are meant to do as she mentioned above); Severin suffers to be recognized by Wanda's emotions as well as humiliation when Wanda's lover whips him and Wanda is embarrassed by Severin's "femininity" as well as repeatedly shames Severin for not appreciating the pain he asked her to wreak on him; and finally, Severin begs Wanda to Dominate him within the narrative and Wanda begs Severin to leave her so that she may return to "normal" and marry The Greek.

According to Deleuze, the above manifestation of fluid masochism in Wanda and Severin, through Sacher-Masoch, illustrate an irony in the fact that Sacher-Masoch is seeking to subvert the norms of masochism while simultaneously depending on it.

In modern thought, irony and humour take on a new form: they are now directed at a subversion of the law. This leads us back to Sade and Masoch, who represent the two main attempts at subversion, at turning the law upside down. Irony is still in the process or movement which bypasses the law as a merely secondary power and aims at transcending it toward a higher principle. [The principle represents] the rule of secondary nature which is always geared to the demands of conservation (Deleuze 86).

Thus, principles that govern sexual appropriateness exist to conserve the male/female gender dichotomy that helps to dictate the same institutional control systems of class that place the upper class in dominance of lower classes. The perverse quest for knowledge in *Venus in Furs* exists in the way that both protagonists purposely subvert their expected gender norms in order to experience the Other. Eventually, Wanda and Severin decide that they prefer their previous state and return. Similar to Ann Radcliffe's prose, this return may appear to illustrate the presence of fear or preference of ignorance, but the fact is that when the individual returns to their past, they do so using the knowledge they have purposely gained in their quest.

Despite Wanda explicitly stating her interpretation of the role of women to Severin, he does not take her seriously. Though this would usually illustrate the supposedly male trait of viewing women as a subordinate gender, perversion in *Venus in Furs* is further illustrated in the way that Wanda subverts Severin's ignorance to serve her

Dominant role. Her complete Domination of Severin would not have been all-encompassing had he not taken her nature for granted. Wanda's power comes from her self-education regardless of whether or not Severin introduced her to the path; the trope echoes the familiar Libertine literary trope of a more experienced Pervert ushering an inexperienced individual onto the path. The role of the female voice in *Venus in Furs* illustrates the depth of the gender fluidity in the text. Not only is Wanda provided with most of the power throughout, but Severin's melodrama further embodies the "female" voice. Gender as well as sexual deviance is subverted and points to a manifestation of perversity as a quest for individual knowledge.

– ENTER WANDA: The Female Voice –

In David Biale's *Masochism and Philosemitism: The Strange Case of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch*, he states "life is a brutal struggle for power and possession at the origin of which lies woman's dominance of man [...] cruel nature dictates this relationship between men and women. Human institutions which Sacher-Masoch regarded as perverted [...] were all consequences of women's demands upon men" (Biale 317). The perverse quest for knowledge in *Venus in Furs* is accompanied by the mutual efforts of Wanda and Severin to gain power over the other and of the Self. Including work and the state in his description of women's demands upon men, we are reminded of the comparisons between Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* and of *Venus in Furs*: Gregor Samsa and Severin-Gregor are both humiliated by the social responsibility projected upon men (by institutional authorities) to work and provide for women. Their role as statesmen and being granted powers to control those below them is also (apparently) humiliating. Perhaps the humiliation lies in a perverse differentiation between the protagonists created by real men (such as Kafka and Sacher-Masoch, respectively) to illustrate their individual identification with their environment. Perhaps their individual definition fits moreso with the "feminine" part of social gender dichotomy and they would rather be cared for.

The female voice in *Venus in Furs* characterizes the perverse struggle between the Self and the Othered society in which it lives. During the text, both Severin and Wanda embody the feminine traits, but it is Wanda's character that inherently embodies the female *voice*. Predominantly within pornographic literature, female characters are created by men (who have the forum to do so freely) and the legitimacy of the female voice is

therefore perverted; yet, such narratives provide characterization of femininity and knowledge of how men identify with women around (as well as within) them.

In 1906, Wanda von Sacher-Masoch wrote an autobiography as a counter-text to her husband, Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's works – specifically *Venus in Furs*. Her tale, *The Confessions of Wanda von Sacher-Masoch*, introduces female subject positions that pervert the heterosexual paradigms narrated in her husband's most famous work. It is rumoured that her *Confessions* may be ghost-written by Sacher-Masoch himself. Although this cannot be necessarily proven, the possibility provides an interesting parallel to the narrative of *Venus in Furs*.²² Katharina Gerstenberger believes that Wanda's confession "represents anarchical female Self whose identity is inscribed across the very boundaries of sexual difference that the turn-of-the-century culture sought to enforce" (Gerstenberger 81). She continues to argue that

the strategies [Wanda von Sacher-Masoch] employed to assert female subjectivity and self-representation within and against [Leopold's] textual/sexual parameters and the gendered politics of authorship [served as a] contribution to the understanding of female autobiography as a particularly rich nodal point in which notions of sexuality, writing, and gender intersect and diverge (Gerstenberger 82).

Thus, whether or not pornographic narratives are almost exclusively part of the socially "male" domain, it is evident that the female body (and voice) is essential to the understandings of intersectional humanity; all aspects of the individual diverge to create a Doubled/fragmented understanding of the individual.

Female agency tends to be characterized as a massive threat to sociocultural norms just as Sacher-Masoch's female protagonist ends up being a contractual threat to Severin's life. Without a social norm based on hierarchal oppression, the individual is left to govern its own body and becomes free from static control. Similarly to how the real Wanda's book was denounced as a "poisonous book" by literary critic Theodore Lessing. Gerstenberger critiques Lessing's condemnation stating that although he felt Wanda's *Confessions* were a particularly "unsavoury example of the artistic cult of decadence", he

²² In "Sadistic Introduction to a Masochistic Book", Supervert cites the rumour as being first mentioned in the *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis*. As mentioned, although this rumour cannot be definitively confirmed (or denied), the added narratives to gender identity are extensive: if the rumour is indeed fact, the idea of Sacher-Masoch ghost-writing tales as a female-identified Double of himself is exhilarating and further illustrates how the female voice is obscured in pornographic literature. If the rumour is indeed a rumour, the fact that psychoanalysis sought to silence a male masochist's narrative speaks volumes of the tendency (and need) of institutionalized society to ascribe static norms to otherwise fluid genders that benefits in a society in which masochism is exclusive to women.

did not, however, “take offence of the description of female sexuality [narrated through *Venus in Furs*], nor did he direct his repugnance against male masochistic sexual practice” (Gerstenberger 83). Lessing’s criticism identifies “the relationship between the female- and male-authored texts as a space in which the struggle over gender and genre hierarchies is carried out” (Gerstenberger 83). Wanda’s *Confessions of Wanda von Sacher-Masoch* relinquishes the female voice from Sacher-Masoch’s protagonist to the muse’s own lips. Lessing’s attempts to censor Wanda von Sacher-Masoch’s voice because she challenged the hierarchal structure of male-dominated pornographic narratives illustrate the perverse quest for knowledge and the hierarchal attempts to stop it; although these texts aimed to illustrate the importance of individual freedom and often characterized liberated women (such as Wanda’s Dominance over her submissive Severin), pornographic literary figures ultimately used the bodies and voices of women to further their political arguments. In her narrative, Wanda von Sacher-Masoch

reversed the process of objectification and became author and subject of her story. In *Confessions*, the narrator joins her desire for self-representation with her desire for the other woman, “reappropriating the mirror” by juxtaposing male models of sexuality and writing with female homoeroticism and female self representation (Gerstenberger 90).

Here, Wanda von Sacher-Masoch embodies the individual’s perverse quest for knowledge and the urge to differentiate from the Whole. By narrating her own experiences and fantasies separate from the narratives of her husband, Wanda is mimetically using pornographic literature to liberate the forum to include women’s perverse sexuality much like Leopold von Sacher-Masoch challenged the same hierarchy to narrate the perverse quest of his male masochist.

The possible truth behind Wanda’s *Confessions* echoes the control that Wanda demands control over Severin in Leopold von Sacher-Masoch’s work. “Women’s demands upon men” and the inherent humiliation behind the control they (apparently) hold over them is symbolized in the contract that Wanda draws for Severin to sign. Epitomizing the strength behind the female voice in *Venus in Furs*, the contract states:

Mr. Severin von Kuziemski ceases from this date to be the fiancé of Mrs. Wanda von Dunajew and renounces all rights pertaining to this state; in return he undertakes, on his word as a man and a gentleman, to be the slave of this lady, until such time as she sets him at liberty. As the slave of Mrs. von Dunajew, he will take the name of Gregor, and will undertake to satisfy all the wishes of his mistress [...] She will also have the right to

maltreat him according to her humour or even simply to amuse herself. She is also entitled to kill him if she so wishes (Sacher-Masoch 220).

Although Wanda is inherently a dream image in *Venus in Furs* and an extension of male sexual fantasy (and therefore loyal to the proscribed gender hierarchy between 1740 and 1895), she echoes a sense of control that illustrates truth behind Wanda von Sacher-Masoch's *Confessions*. With the drafting of the contract that she has Severin sign, Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's version of Wanda symbolizes a subverted hierarchy that places the woman in control of man, something that holds a lot more political clout than simply a behind-closed-doors sexual relationship. Wanda's control suggests an entirely flipped hierarchy that forces the redefinition of culture as a Whole. According to the interpretation of Sabine Wilke and Geoffrey Cox, "Severin did not intend to have Wanda take seriously the masochistic contract and the resulting power, but with increasing zeal, she steps out of the field of projection and predetermined dealings and becomes a sovereign woman" (Wilke 250). The symbolism behind the contract means, for the female voice in *Venus in Furs*, that control now belongs to the female, despite the fact that Severin was initially in power by suggesting that Wanda Dominate him to begin with; he wanted to be Dominated, but with the caveat that he still be socially dominant. This is why Wanda's contract is pivotal in *Venus in Furs* to illustrate the female voice in the text as the ultimate manifestation of the (successful) perverse quest for knowledge. The "cruel woman [symbolism] with respect to social relations consists in [Wanda's] mimesis of patriarchy, the violence of which is made acute through this mimetic process" (Wilke 254). The mimesis inherent in Wanda's cruelty echoes possible reasoning behind Theodore Lessing's criticism of *Confessions of Wanda von Sacher-Masoch* as a "fabric of dangerous pathological lies" that would by extension, through mimesis, characterize the violence inherent in the patriarchal hierarchy (Gerstenberger 81).

The female voice in *Venus in Furs* represents how the individual engages with perversity during their quest for knowledge in the way that Leopold von Sacher-Masoch uses the voice of Wanda to narrate her own journey throughout the narrative of the book. Despite the fact that the text is narrated by an external party, it appears that Wanda is talking for herself (although Sacher-Masoch is talking for her) just as she does in Wanda von Sacher-Masoch's *Confessions*. After Wanda's character runs away with The Greek, she sends Severin a final letter. In it, she shares with Severin that she "found the strong man [she] needed and was as happy with him as it is possible to be on this funny ball of clay. But [her] happiness, like all things in this world, was short-lived: about a year ago

he was killed in a duel, and since then I have been living in Paris” (Sacher-Masoch 270). So, despite all her efforts to be a Dominant, Wanda reasoned that she preferred to have a partner to Dominate her; yet, she still engages with masculine reason in the wording of her letter. She is briefly engaging with the material world around her and providing Severin with her individually-learned answers to Life. Her letter to Severin continues, “Your life will surely not lack sunshine if your imagination has ceased to govern you and those other qualities that first attracted me to you have gained the upper hand [...] I hope that my whip has cured you, that the treatment, cruel though it was, has proved effective” (Sacher-Masoch 270). Despite the fact that Wanda no longer holds physical Dominance over Severin, her letter illustrates that she is still in control. She hints that Severin has hopefully “gained the upper hand” and learned how to be masculine (read: dominant) again and that her Domination has cured him.

Wanda’s character in *Venus in Furs* mimetically echoes the oppressive patriarchal hierarchy by curing Severin so that he returns to masculinity. The female voice prevails at the end of *Venus in Furs* as well as in Wanda von Sacher-Masoch’s *Confessions of Wanda von Sacher-Masoch*. Sacher-Masoch provides a perverse alternative to repressing forbidden personality traits (sexual as well as intellectual) by embodying and engaging with them. The Gothic often utilizes melodrama, horror, and suggestiveness to characterize repression and the effect it has on the individual as a part of humanity (which is by default also repressed). The female voice is a useful trope in illustrating the difference and similarities of the male/female gender dichotomy in Leopold von Sacher-Masoch’s prose as well as within Edgar Allan Poe’s work. Sacher-Masoch engages with ambiguous gender roles by utilizing sadomasochism as a perverse form of therapy to force Wanda and Severin to return to their socially-preferred gender roles. Edgar Allan Poe engages with ambiguity by creating suggestive narratives that feature bursts of passionate violence when his narrators snap under the pressure of oppression.

**Edgar Allan Poe: Repression, Passion, and Homoerotic Suggestiveness
– REPRESSING THE FORBIDDEN –**

Poe’s work characterizes the prevalence of repressing the forbidden (or perverse) in his life. To avoid punishment by repressing deviant behaviours labelled as such by social norms created by institutions to unify society under a controlled Whole, Edgar Allan Poe utilized the Gothic and Dark Romantic genres (as well as the power of

suggestion) to examine forbidden perversions in a safe literary medium.²³ One of Edgar Allan Poe's most popular conventions is the prevalence of unreliable narrators. According to Rachel McCoppin, these narrators are "self-tortured" because they are "at first misdirected [after becoming] obsessed with seemingly unrelated objects [...] These objects serve as clues to the reader, and eventually to the narrator, of the narrator's unconscious, though the majority of the narration is devoted to the narrator's desperate attempts to flee or fight against these clues" (McCoppin 105 – 06). They are forced to come face to face with the "invented culprit of [their] obsessions [so that the] truth about the inner Self of the narrator and the reality of the situation is illuminated" (McCoppin 106). Poe's narrators are self-tortured because of the suggestive likelihood that they are symbols for repressed fragments of the Self (such as homoerotic tendencies that will be addressed later). Creating a comparison between melodrama, the Gothic, and self-masochism, the idea that Romantics suffer willingly in their own thoughts (and obsessions) before being forced into realization brings about the actuality that Poe creates his narrators to be aware of their own truths and doing everything in their power to repress them.

Poe illustrates how repressing the forbidden or perverse aspects of the Self leads to the shattering realization that "finally drives [his narrators] to do something, usually something violent, as a form of escape from facing their true [perverse] identity. Ironically, Poe allows this action of attempting to escape their unconscious obsession to be the event that brings the truth of who they are to the forefront of their perception" (McCoppin 106). The idea being that repressing vice is its own catalyst, the narrator's realization of the intrinsic presence of perversion within the Self is what forces them into a violent fit of passion revealing that "their obsession is their own internal desire to face their true identity. [Edgar Allan Poe's] narrators succumb to their unconscious, making the process of self-discovery sometimes self-destructive", such as the alcoholic narrator of Poe's "The Black Cat" (McCoppin 106). Essentially, Poe's narrators escape the Self through obsession with the Other.

²³ In regard to punishment for perversity in Poe's life, one only has to compare the author to Oscar Wilde (1854 – 1900) and how although both authors dealt with the perverse fragments of the individual Self, only the latter was publicly shamed for engaging in "deviant" sexual interests. Before Poe, Marquis de Sade (and others) blatantly characterized perversion as a pursuit of radical individualism and were incarcerated. Thus, perversity between 1740 and 1895 was utilized in literature as a means to examine the individual and its quest for knowledge. Poe's prose, plays, essays, poetry, and lone novel were unique in several ways in the examination of perversity, especially through his use of literary suggestion which will be fully discussed in the next section.

Poe's use of the obsessed and unreliable narrator symbolises the presence of the fragmented/Double Self within society as well as the importance of ambiguity in the Gothic to illustrate this fluidity. McCoppin continues that

the misdirected obsession [of Poe's narrators] becomes the necessary agent of unconscious revelation [... that] one's perception of life is only that, a perceived view of what one believes is true, despite the reality of the situation [...] The fine line that Poe walks between warning readers of the perversity of overly intense self-actualization and the need for scrutiny of Self [...] acknowledges that self-reflection is a complicated and difficult process, [...] that is necessary for emotional, mental, and even societal well-being (McCoppin 116).

In this way, Edgar Allan Poe presents a prevalence of undercurrent and indefinite meanings in regards to the purpose of the Self and of radical individualism. Through Poe's work, the manifestation of forbidden knowledge characterizes perversion as an outlet for the individual quest for knowledge. Edgar Allan Poe's unreliable narrators are often accompanied by metaphors for forbidden knowledge and lack of control.

In his paper on Poe's theme of forbidden knowledge, Jules Zanger discusses the relation between Poe's use of whirlpools (such as within "The Descent into the Maelstrom") and sexual metaphor. Distinguishing between these two symbols, Zanger cites the biblical Garden myth as a link between ideas of sin and punishment.²⁴ Poe's work often features explicit metaphors of forbidden knowledge (such as in "Manuscript Found in a Bottle" where the ignored narrator creates a manuscript that he resolves to throw into the sea to be discovered). Zanger suggests that these explicit metaphors create significance to Poe in terms of his implicit sexual metaphors. To clarify the relation between explicit and implicit,

it might be useful to distinguish between the forbidden knowledge metaphor and the whirlpool metaphor. The first is primarily allusive: without explicitly stating them, it refers us to a cluster of familiar ideas and images. By reminding us of the Garden myth, it links the sexual metaphor to ideas of sin and punishment and, specifically, to ideas of pain and mortality [...] The Garden, we recall, contained not only the Tree of Forbidden Knowledge but also the Tree of Life; and it is explicitly to deny access to the Tree of Life that Adam and Eve are exiled into the world

²⁴ The "Garden myth" that Zanger is referring to is the biblical narrative of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Living without shame or guilt in Eden, Adam and Eve are free to live as they wish in the Garden with the only rule being that they do not eat from the Tree of Forbidden Knowledge. They succumb to temptation and are overcome with embarrassment when they become aware of their nudity. The relation between sexuality and the pursuit of forbidden knowledge in Poe's work is accompanied with metaphors of helpless terror. The whirlpool metaphor represents melodramatic feeling of powerlessness and depersonalization.

after eventually eating from the Tree of Forbidden Knowledge (Zanger 540). Accompanying his metaphors of forbidden knowledge with whirlpool symbology, Edgar Allan Poe creates a relationship between the forbidden quest for knowledge and the emotional reaction of the individual. During the knowledge quest, the individual transitions as they become aware of their own fragmentation. Thus, the whirlpool metaphor represents the individual reaction to the realization of forbidden knowledge. The whirlpool metaphor, Zanger continues, “refers us to a cluster of dramatized states of feeling – powerlessness, confusion, lack of control, and depersonalization. [The whirlpool] intrudes without warning and [...] delivers [the individual] into a powerful current which propels them into a great whirlpool, by which they are engulfed” much like the Self is engulfed by the stress of repressing forbidden knowledge (or behaviours) from the public sphere (Zanger 540).

Relating to the relationship between the whirlpool trope and the implicit forbidden knowledge in Poe’s work that inspires the creation of his unreliable narrators, Gerald Kennedy cites Jeffrey Meyers in the explanation of Poe’s “paradoxical character” as being created from “the conflict between [their] rational mind and “irrational apprehension [that is] expressed [through a] conflict with authority [that welcomes] personal disaster and sad compulsion to destroy [their] own life” rather than succumb to static norms that project a social need to repress the forbidden (Kennedy 540). The ambiguity surrounding the characterization of repressing the forbidden illustrates the intrinsic fragments of the individual as well as the ambiguity surrounding the explanation of what exactly *is* perverse and the reasons (if any) for engaging in perversity. Poe’s narrators represent vice as a necessary behaviour to the quest for knowledge as well as an action that is done specifically because of the freedom to do so. The individual freedom to engage in vice suggests an absence of static definition within a society that strives to create one. The melancholy that manifests within the individual’s self-imposed repression of “forbidden” acts is a symbol of the failure of institutional explanations of the mind as a definitive *thing* rather than a fluid manifestation of the individual’s environment, biology, reason, and ideas that transcends control-based understanding. Although radical individuals seek to undo these controls, they do so to prove that their perversity is inherent in the self rather than a manifestation of moral inferiority. In creating his unreliable narrators to repress forbidden behaviours, Poe forces the reader to consistently question narrators and therefore continuously attempt to resolve what the narrator is

actually trying to illustrate. Poe places great importance in suggestive aspects of each text and forcing the reader to “er lasst sich nicht lesen” – or, to read what does not permit itself to be read because of its perverse or otherwise socially dangerous attributes.²⁵

– POE’S WORK AND THE POWER OF SUGGESTION –

Edgar Allan Poe’s reliance on literary suggestion serves as another medium to examine how human perversity is inherent in the quest for. Similar to how Poe elevates sociocultural criticism to the supernatural realm as mentioned above, suggestion prevents institution from definitively characterizing Edgar Allan Poe’s prose and poetry as perverse. Evoking the plot of “The Purloined Letter”, Barbara Johnson writes that “it is though any attempt to follow the path of the purloined letter that is automatically purloined from itself” (Johnson 458). This analysis relates to perverse suggestion in the way that it symbolises the inability for perversity or the individual quest for knowledge to be defined by anyone but the individual. This is why in terms of Poe’s literary suggestion (such as the suggestion of homoerotic subtext) it is merely a *suggestion* that, although backed up by literary scholarship, cannot be definitively claimed because “the letter’s destination is thus *wherever it is read*” (Johnson 502). Poe’s work stands by itself for its own sake despite the fact that each reader finds their own meanings within it, just as the individual defines perversity in their own terms.

According to Krishna Rayan, “Poe’s use of the terms ‘suggestive’ and ‘imaginative’ are so intimately related as to be interchangeable” (Rayan 75). This explicitly proves the significant importance behind Edgar Allan Poe’s use of suggestiveness to illustrate a hidden/forbidden undercurrent in his prose that would essentially feed the individual quest for knowledge. “The consistent and self-conscious, if a little immature and ebullient, use of the word ‘suggestion’ in Poe’s incidental theorizing [established it] as a technical term in criticism and invest[ed] it with the following major significations: (a) The presenting of Ideal Beauty; (b) Undertones of meaning; [and] (c) Indefiniteness” (Rayan 76). This illustrates the ineffability of humanity as a truly mysterious species (hence Poe’s utilization of supernatural Gothic tropes). The individual fascination with defining itself as well as the Whole in which it is part “suggests more than it utters, to call up by [implicating] rather than by [expressing] those thoughts which

²⁵ “Er lasst sich nicht lesen” is the overall plot point of Poe’s “The Man of the Crowd”, a text that features socially forbidden homoerotic relations that are suggested throughout the text. These will be discussed later.

refuse to be embodied in language, and to hint at something [...] mysterious of which the mind can attain but partial glimpses” (Rayan 77). Alongside suggestiveness, Edgar Allan Poe utilizes homoerotic tropes to examine the unknown (or repressed) Self in order to use fictional narratives to analyze society in a sphere that permits perversity and the individual freedom to engage in vice for its own sake. In this way, suggestiveness and homoerotic tropes illustrate the unknown (or repressed) Self and are essential in the perverse quest.

In his “The Philosophy of Composition”, Edgar Allan Poe states:

Two things are invariably required – first, some amount of complexity, or more properly, adaptation; and, secondly, some amount of suggestiveness – some under-current, however indefinite, of meaning. It is this latter, in especial, which imparts to a work of art so much of that *richness* (to borrow from colloquy a forcible term) which we are too fond of confounding with *the ideal*. (Poe, *Philosophy* 113).

So, the presence of the *possibility* of perverse suggestiveness in Poe’s work is enough to offer complex discourse in terms of the literary study of Edgar Allan Poe. The fact that perversity can exist within Poe’s work as an undercurrent (or over-current) is essential to the characterization of multi-tiered levels within his literary suggestiveness. Poe’s use of suggestiveness ultimately reverses the hegemony present in static characterization of humanity. Continuing to refer to “The Purloined Letter”, Johnson relays the reversal of hegemonic hierarchy illustrated in the suggestive plot and the way Poe utilizes individual perception to illustrate how each individual (conditioned by their own environment, biology, reason, and ideas) views an item, in this case, the stolen letter. “The first glance that sees nothing: the King and the police” represents the willingly ignorant controlling class who relies on hierarchy to keep institutional power; “the second, a glance which sees that the first sees nothing and deludes itself as to the secrecy of what it hides” symbolizes the middle class deluding themselves to believe that hierarchal control does not *actually* control them; and finally, “the third sees that two glances leave what should be hidden exposed to whomever would seize it” and represents the lower and oppressed class (Johnson 463). Poe’s detective, C. Auguste Dupin, was originally wealthy but was made poor by circumstances that are never revealed. By discovering that the purloined letter is actually in plain sight (representing the third glance along with the Minister), Dupin uses reason and his experience of multiple environments (the upper and lower classes) to discover the hidden truth through suggestion. In deliberately avoiding to reveal to the reader what the letter contains, Edgar Allan Poe suggests that the contents are irrelevant;

it is the fact that the letter exists (and is discussed by characters) that is important to the plot of “The Purloined Letter”. The presence of the letter symbolises the prevalence of forbidden/hidden knowledge in humanity that can only be internally reflected upon in order to avoid punishment. By neglecting to provide details of the letter, Poe ultimately avoids a static characterization of the letter and its importance to the reader.

Dennis Pahl believes that Edgar Allan Poe’s aesthetic method emphasizes a “kind of poetic suggestiveness that would range beyond the limits of direct speech” (Pahl 1 – 2). He continues to analyze Poe’s use of suggestiveness as a tool in order to create a relation to the hidden layers of Poe’s work for each reader. For example, similar to the role of literary suggestion, “Poe’s women [...] seem to take on the abstract, non-speculative form of a commodity, holding little more than exchange value for the man. As Luce Irigaray notes about women’s social position in general: ‘woman has value on the market by virtue of one single quality’ [...] They all have the same phantom-like reality” (Pahl 19). In this way, each reader has an opportunity to find truth within Poe’s work, unlike the inability to do so within a society divided into hierarchal spheres. Women who study Poe are able to find a critique of the state of women in pathological society and men are, obviously, able to find permission to continue the commoditization of female bodies. Pahl continues his analysis of Poe’s aesthetics with a suggestion that this separation of gendered spheres creates what Leland Person calls a “subversive” or “subjectified” Double which is essential in illustrating the intrinsic fluidity of humanity. “For if Poe’s writing seems to reveal a phallogentric attempt to draw distinct boundaries between the active male writer and the passive, fetishized woman – between the one who carries the pen(is) and the one who is penned (penetrated) – the differences or undercurrents within [Poe’s work] would suggest an attempt *at the same time* to do quite the opposite” (Pahl 19). In this way, it appears that although “distinct boundaries” between the genders are a culturally constructed practice that is adhered to, the boundaries are literally still boundaries – guidelines that permit the individual to pervert them as they see fit, because they have the freedom to do so. The prevalence of the Double throughout Edgar Allan Poe’s work ultimately suggests that everything is not as humanity initially views it to be, that there are several other layers and ways that it can be engaged with.

– FRAGMENTATION AND THE QUEER SELF –

Repressing forbidden (or perverse) aspects of the individual to avoid public shame and punishment forces the necessarily complete individual to separate the Self into private and public fragments: in a sense, to lead a Double life. These survivalist fragments suggest how the individual is inherently queered from widely-accepted social norms.²⁶ By engaging with literary criticism of the following prose and poetry as well as the works themselves, I will illustrate how Edgar Allan Poe symbolizes queered fragments of the self in “The Tell-Tale Heart”, “The Colloquy of Monos and Una”, “Alone”, and “The Man of the Crowd” to illustrate how repression and separation of the individual leads to passionate fits of violence and social alienation of the Self from the Whole/Other.

Despite the gendering of Poe’s narrators by literary critics, a lot of his narrators are deliberately never explicitly named, let alone gendered. In “What Can ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’ Tell about Gender”, Mary Couzelis discusses an adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe’s work entitled *Nevermore* by Jeremy Slater and Alice Duke and how their adaptation of “The Tell-Tale Heart” does not replicate Poe’s tale verbatim, but “instead, they make alterations [that draw] attention to the lack of gendered pronouns in Poe’s tale [since] Poe’s work often depicts women victimized by patriarchal repression [and] accentuates the notion of women’s well-being deteriorating under the pressure of the patriarchal gaze” (Couzelis 217). Further contributing to the literary suggestiveness in Poe’s work, the lack of gendered pronouns in several of his works (and especially within “The Tell-Tale Heart”) may not exclusively refer to women oppressed by patriarchal repression, but as well, men who independently relate to socially-described “feminine” traits such as Romantic melodramatics. The deliberate exclusion of gendered pronouns illustrates the presence of homophobia in the public sphere of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. If individual fragmentation and repression lead to the quest for knowledge and the subsequent burst of passionate emotion, violence, or downward spiral of the individual, it is easy to understand how Edgar Allan Poe’s repressed protagonists would be led to

²⁶ The use of the terms “queer” and “queered” in this thesis are important to qualify. Despite their modern creation, they are essential in illustrating the differences inherent in humanity. I do not mean to claim that modern queerness pervades culture between 1740 and 1895 but instead that humanity is separate from social norms that were expected then as well as now. I mean to use “queer/ed” to discuss the essence of perversity from expectation as essential to the individual quest for knowledge that relies on experiencing socially queer/strange events; I deliberately use the term “queer/ed” throughout this thesis because of the perverse perceptions attached to the term as a social signifier of purposeful deviance from culturally-constructed norms.

murdering their oppressors. Evoking the male gaze, Couzelis continues that “in many older Gothic texts, including Poe’s, a main focus is the extent to which women’s fears are warranted and derive from pathologized cultural arrangements [...] The patriarchal gaze often constructs and scrutinizes women’s lives, [eventually leading to the woman] becoming unhinged by the patriarchal gaze” and utilizing vice (such as murder) to free the Self from institutional oppression (Couzelis 219).

If we read the murderous narrator of “The Tell-Tale Heart” as a woman, than the Old Man’s “vulture eye” that haunts the narrator would symbolize the prevalence of the male gaze in hierarchal society. Although criticism cannot honestly draw conclusions from texts that are not literally provided by the author, Poe’s penchant for suggestiveness allows the reader to question why he deliberately omitted the narrator’s gender. Similar to Barbara Johnson’s reading of “The Purloined Letter” and how she believed the middle class tricks itself into believing it is not oppressed (and therefore controlled) by the upper class, the individual realization of the existence of the male gaze is inherently queered from social expectation of oppressed classes; it is awareness of gendered violence that protects the individual from it, but the awareness is gleaned from perverting (and subverting) the control of patriarchal institutions. According to Couzelis, “The Gothic, especially in femicidal narratives, uses paranoia as an aspect of self-defense. Judith Halberstam contends, ‘[I]t is precisely the fear of being watched, the consciousness that we may be being watched, that saves the woman and allows her to look back’” (Couzelis 222). By retaining the complete individual, the Self is entirely freed from institutional authority bent on separating and controlling it. “One of the most dangerous aspects of the Gothic is when women internalize their fears and the cultural misogyny. Women become a danger to themselves and others when they ignore or dismiss their fears” and it is in this way that paranoia becomes a tool for self-defense and seizing control of the individual for the Self (Couzelis 223). If Poe is indeed suggesting that the narrator of “The Tell-Tale Heart” is a woman, he is deliberately queering (or perverting) the socially-accepted pathological norm of women being frail and inherently masochistic; one would argue that strangling the Old Man with a mattress before draining the blood from the corpse, dismembering it, and placing it under the floorboards is particularly dominant and sadistic. A woman murdering a man (who is wealthy and therefore socially dominant which is shown by Poe’s mention of the Old Man’s untouched jewels) jars the reader in the same way that the individual, through the quest for knowledge, pushes themselves out of paranoia and into rebellion against social control.

Alternatively, “The Tell-Tale Heart” is rife with suggestive homoeroticism. In many of Edgar Allan Poe’s essays on composition and the importance of plot, he states that every part of a short story is essential in illustrating the overall plot. If Poe did not intend for the reader to gather a hint of homoerotic affection, he would have perhaps avoided creating sexual imagery in one of his most famous works: “[...] and then I thrust in my head. Oh, you would have laughed to see how cunningly I thrust it in! I moved it slowly – very, very slowly, so that I might not disturb the old man’s sleep” (Poe, *Tell-Tale* 527).²⁷ It is suggested that Poe’s ambiguous narrator is a homosexual who, in his quest for knowledge, engages in secret queer sex acts to avoid detection and public ridicule. The narrator resolves to murder the Old Man who (obviously) knows his secret in order to avoid public punishment for engaging in sodomy (and later, murder). The interplay of eroticism and death is apparent in “The Tell-Tale Heart” in the way that the reader knows that the Old Man’s death is near as much as they are aware of the narrator’s possible homoerotic tendencies. The guilt and alienation that is associated with the fragmentation of the queer Self (as with the realization of an oppressive male gaze for a female narrator) illustrates the lifting of the veil that forces the individual to make a drastic change. In the case of “The Tell-Tale Heart”, that change is murder. Edgar Allan Poe identifies perversity as an “innate and primitive principle” in “The Imp of the Perverse” that we act on for the explicit reason that we should *not*. (Poe, *Imp* 204). Leland Person believes that engaging in perversity means “reading against cultural and legal norms that police and limit our imaginations. It means interrogating each narrator and asking, ‘What [are they] up to?’, [...] ‘What desires [do they] put in play?’, [...] ‘What [are they] doing in my bedroom?’” (Person 10).

It is through this interrogation that the reader becomes aware of the fragmentation inherent in the individual and its need to characterize itself using social norms that do not account for the fragmentation. Gothic horror is inspired by the simple action of the narrator being in the “other man’s bedroom [and how that] may cause this extraordinary, essentially homophobic reaction. That is, the violent repression of desire, which renders the body numb and icy, causes an *objectless* horror precisely because the other man’s body suggests the possible arousal of desire in the [possibly] male subject” (Person 15).

²⁷ In perverse literature between 1740 and 1895 (especially in the works of the Marquis de Sade), rape or attempts at rape are frequently utilized by authors to discuss the essential engagement of perversity/vice in the individual quest for knowledge. It is vital to mention that this thesis is not an apologist attempt at excusing literary rape as a trope in perverse literature; I am suggesting that in order to illustrate the prevalence of perversity, authors attempted to force its manifestation in society upon institutional controls by illustrating metaphorical forced sexual encounters without literally endorsing rape.

The relationship between the narrator and the Old Man is similar to the one which represents the perverse quest for knowledge in Libertine literature – an older figure lifting the veil on the younger individual through sexual awakening and realization. In terms of the fragmentation of the queer Self and the way it forces the individual into violent passion, Person believes that “if homoerotic desire operates at the center of Poe’s intimate male relationships, then, it takes the form of resistance and denial” that often follows the realization of a perverse Self (Person 20). Person continues to painstakingly illustrate how homoerotic desire in “The Tell-Tale Heart” results in resistance and denial:

The narrator sneaks not once but for eight nights in a row into another man’s bedroom. Gazing obsessively at the old man in bed, he waits excruciatingly for the right moment to jump in with him. In the meantime, he prolongs his pleasure – a form of sadistic foreplay – anticipating the violent climax of asphyxiation and dismemberment that will eventually come. “Oh, you would have laughed to see how cunningly I thrust it in!” he exclaims, referring (apparently) to the head that he thrusts in the doorway, “I moved it slowly – very, very slowly, so that I might not disturb the old man’s sleep. It took me an hour to place my whole head within the opening so far that I could see him as he lay upon his bed”. [The narrator] insists: “Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the Old Man”. He goes out of his way, in other words, to block the potential circuit of subject-object relations – and the potential link between love and passion – in order to intellectualize his plan to “take the life of the Old Man”. [...] “Object there was none”? There is an object – and thus a subject in relation to that object. “Passion there was none?” There is passion, if only a passionate disavowal of passion. And then there is the gaze – the male gaze that has the power to turn the narrator into an object, even an object of passion [...] This is a cold-blooded murder designed to prevent blood from getting hot, a prophylactic interception of the male gaze before it can implicate its object (Person 20 – 21, Poe, *Tell-Tale* 527).

The terror of Poe’s narrator is projected not upon being illustrated as a mere object, but in being *eroticized* as one that forced the female version of the narrator of “The Tell-Tale Heart” to murder the symbolized embodiment of the male gaze.

The male fear of essentially becoming an eroticized object like women oppressed under the male gaze is also illustrated during “The Man of the Crowd”. Similarly to “The Tell-Tale Heart”, the text features two (suggestively) male protagonists with one as the homoerotic aggressor and the other as the target of the gaze. Relating to Poe’s penchant for literary suggestion, the plot of “The Man of the Crowd” relies on what “does not permit itself to be read” and “secrets which do not permit themselves to be told”, but they *do* permit themselves to be hinted about and discussed in the private sphere (Poe, *Man* 277). Perhaps the reason that these “secrets” do not permit themselves to be told is that they are socially unacceptable and therefore repressed by the fragmented individual. The

narrative of “The Man of the Crowd” follows the narrator through winding and busy city streets as he stalks a man he is inexplicably drawn to. “I followed him in the wildest amazement, resolute not to abandon a scrutiny in which I now felt an interest all-absorbing [...] Stopping fully in front of the wanderer, [I] gazed at him steadfastly in the face. He noticed me not but resumed his solemn walk [...] He refuses to be alone. *He is the man of the crowd* [...] it is but one of the great mysteries of God that ‘er lasst sich nicht lesen’” (Poe, *Man* 282). Despite obviously noticing the narrator who stared him “steadfastly” in the face, the target of the narrator’s gaze does not return the gaze and therefore refuses to acknowledge being a target of the gaze. Interestingly enough, the reader is never made aware of what exactly happened between the two men except that which does not permit itself to be read. This purposeful ambiguity represents the role of queered fragmentation of the Self in the individual quest for knowledge. According to Person, “the narrator’s pursuit of another man through the streets of London, observing without being observed, epitomizes male efforts to make other men objects of the male gaze without implicating the Self in a reciprocal circuit of gaze and desire [...] ‘The Man of the Crowd’ could logically culminate in a sexual encounter between the narrator and the stranger” (Person 11). In this way, the text derives its plot from the “provocation of male desire” and therefore suggests that “something significant happens by virtue of nothing’s happening in so surprising, so striking, a manner [...] The climax is an anticlimax – a refusal of climax, a case I think of homosexual panic or paralysis” that is inspired by society’s demonization of perverse/queer individuals in the public sphere (Person 13).

Another text that symbolizes the fragmented individual as well as the interplay between virtue and vice (which is why Poe’s narrators frequently repress internal vice in favour of external virtue) is “The Colloquy of Monos and Una”. Poe suggestively places the narrators on an equal plane creating a Double of two characters whose names etymologically refer to “one” (in Greek and Latin, respectively). By placing them together in his text, Edgar Allan Poe suggests a unity between two fragments uses the colloquy as a discussion between two parts of a single Whole. Monos reasons that “there were periods in each of the five or six centuries immediately preceding our dissolution, when arose some vigorous intellect, boldly contenting for those principles whose truth appears now, to our disenfranchised reason, so utterly obvious – principles which would have taught our race to submit to the guidance of the natural laws, rather than attempt their control” (Poe, *Colloquy* 83). The philosophic air of “The Colloquy of Monos and

Una” symbolizes how Poe’s work elevates real social commentary into the fictional realm to be analyzed. In terms of the fragmentation of the queer self, the above passage discusses how the repression of humanity’s inherent fluidity stems from centuries of active repression and the hierarchal need to create static groups to be controlled. To add to this, Monos continues: “A year passed. Their consciousness of *being* had grown hourly more indistinct, and that of mere *locality* had, in great measure, usurped its position. The idea of entity was becoming merged in that of *place*. The narrow space immediately surrounding what had been the body was now growing to be the body itself [...] and now again all was void” (Poe, *Colloquy* 87). Thus, Monos and Una reflect on the transition through Time and Space of society and its creation and dissemination of controlled and institutionalized norms. The “consciousness of being” is now dictated by reason rather than instinct and controlled by locality of authority; the idea of the individual as a separate entity is now defined as a part of the Whole/place. Essentially, the complete individual is now dominated by a fragmented void that demands repression, alienation, and the eventual passionate burst that was illustrated in “The Tell-Tale Heart” and “The Man of the Crowd”.

It is this repression and alienation of the fragmented queer Self that would likely inspire Edgar Allan Poe to pen his autobiographical poem, “Alone”.

From Childhood’s hour I have not been
As others were; I have not seen
As others saw; I could not bring
My passions from a common spring.
From the same source I have not taken
My sorrow; I could not awaken
My heart to joy at the same tone;
And all I loved, I loved alone.
Then – in my childhood, in the dawn
Of a most stormy life – was drawn
From ev’ry depth of good and ill
The mystery which binds me still:
From the torrent, or the fountain,
From the red cliff of the mountain,
From the sun that round me rolled
In its autumn tint of gold,
From the lighting in the sky
As it passed me flying by,
From the thunder and the storm,
And the cloud that took the form
(When the rest of Heaven was blue)
Of a demon in my view
(Poe, *Alone* 718).

Written two years after Poe enlisted in West Point Military Academy, “Alone” suggests how as Edgar Allan Poe grew up, he always felt alienated from his peers because he was intrinsically different from them. The poem illustrates the author’s need to make mysterious aspects of himself known (“the mystery which binds me still”) before offering four lines of phallic imagery to the reader. Further, Poe illustrates how the rest of Heaven (suggesting life without alienation) was blue while he was exposed to a demon which, due to the phallic imagery in the second half of the poem, can be a symbol of latent homosexuality/perversity within the author. “Alone” illustrates how the individual, upon the realization of deviance from socially constructed norms, is thrust into an uncertain outlook – “a most stormy life”. Since Poe’s difference stems from childhood, he suggests that the queer self is latent in the individual from the very beginning and hints that nothing exists that is not already within the world: specifically, perversion, or the tendency to deviate from static norms. The tendency of the realization of perversity’s manifestation within the Self (and the ushering in of the inspiration for a quest for individual knowledge) “from the depths of good and ill” is illustrated by humanity’s freedom to engage in vice simply because of the temptation to engage in it (like with the Garden myth). For the sake of vice, radical individualism becomes a tool to separate the fragmented and queered Self from the static Whole – to purposefully flirt with the “demon in [your] view”.

– FOR THE SAKE OF VICE –

The existence of perversity for its own sake (just like art for art’s sake in Romantic criticism) suggests that in order for there to be a definition outside of the mere existence of perversion (or art), each individual, as a Whole, would have to relate to it in the exact same way as those that came before (and after). Through analyzing “The Black Cat”, “The Imp of the Perverse”, and “The Masque of the Red Death” I, like Poe, intend to recognize that since perversity simply exists is enough to recognize its sociocultural manifestations as part of the individual quest for knowledge. In “The Black Cat”, Edgar Allan Poe illustrates the spirit (or Imp) of the perverse as an unknown “phantasm” that is without definition. “Hereafter, perhaps, some intellect may be found which will reduce my phantasm to the commonplace – some intellect more calm, more logical, and far less excitable than my own, which will perceive, in the circumstances I detail with awe, nothing more than an ordinary succession of very natural causes and effects” (Poe, *Black*

48). In “The Black Cat”, the narrator fights their overwhelming urge to be perverse by drowning the spirit in alcohol. While severely intoxicated, the narrator removes the eye of his cat, Pluto, with a pen-knife and subsequently blames the spirit of perversion:

I had so much of my old heart left [...] but this feeling soon gave place to irritation. And then came, as if to my final and irrevocable overthrow, the spirit of *perverseness*. Of this spirit philosophy takes no account. Yet I am not more sure that my soul lives, than I am that perverseness is one of the primary impulses of the human heart – one of the indivisible primary faculties, or sentiments, which give direction in the character of Man. Who has not, a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or a silly action, for no other reason than because he knows he should *not*? Have we not a perpetual inclination, in the teeth of our best judgement, to violate that which is *law*, merely because we understand it to be such? (Poe, *Black* 49).

Thus, humanity, according to the narrator of “The Black Cat”, is bent on deviating, perverting, diverting, and subverting from law simply because it is meant to; the perpetual motion of the quest for knowledge within the individual transcends the institutional control of the Whole. The narrator exercises radical (albeit ghastly) individualism in order to escape and differentiate from the Whole. Similarly to how the narrator of “The Tell-Tale Heart” dismembers a corpse and hides it under the floor to hide their repressed crimes, the narrator of “The Black Cat” relies on alcohol to cover his own unacceptable behaviours, like mutilating his beloved pet. Comparing again to “The Tell-Tale Heart”, Pluto symbolizes the only character who knows the alcoholic narrator’s secret. Although the narrator is married in “The Black Cat” (before murdering the wife and burying her within a wall), she is widely absent in the text, distancing from the perverse narrator. Despite the cat’s mutilation, Pluto still follows its aggressor throughout the narrative, representing the latent spirit of perversity ever-creeping behind the Pervert. Pluto disappears for a period of time (the cat is ultimately hiding, alive, in the wall that the narrator’s wife is buried behind) and the narrator believes he is freed from the oppressive air. “The second and the third day passed, and still my tormentor came not. Once again I breathed as a free-man. The monster, in terror, had fled the premises forever! [...] My happiness was supreme! [...] I looked upon my future felicity as secured” (Poe, *Black* 53). After the murder and believed disappearance of the only witness, the narrator of “The Black Cat” believes they are safe from punishment. However, if the individual is inherently free, as seen in the fact that it has the freedom to engage in perversity as it pleases, would not the mutilation of Pluto and the murder of the narrator’s wife be unnecessary? According to Superververt, this is precisely the point of the perverse spirit:

“Perversity is always free – too free, *de trop*, a superfluity that occurs where the opposite of compulsion is not just liberty but gratuitousness. The perverse act need not have happened. That is what the victims always say: why me? What did I do to deserve this? Well, you did nothing to deserve it, and that’s precisely the point. [...] Perversity spills out of the frame, like a baroque painting” (Supervert 55). In this way, there are literally too many variables and inspirations of perversity for a motive to be found because it exists entirely within the Self and for the Self. Society and the victims of perverse acts (and outward thoughts) are objects to the Pervert transfixed on the quest.

The temptation to commit perversity (again echoing the prevalence of the Garden myth in Poe’s work) and the obsession to continue suppressing its hold on the Pervert often involves substances in Edgar Allan Poe’s tales. In “The Imp of the Perverse”, the narrator relies on laudanum to keep the temptations at bay. It is likely that the need of Poe’s narrators to hinder (or inspire, depending how one looks at it) the mind has to do with the intellectual aspects of perversion. Supervert continues:

Perversity is when you understand the reasons for not doing a thing, and then you do it anyway. In “The Imp of the Perverse”, Edgar Allan Poe writes that through perversity’s “promptings we act without comprehensible object; or, if this shall be understood as a contradiction in terms, we may so far modify the proposition as to say, that through its promptings we act, for the reason that we should not”. It follows that perversity cannot occur in ignorance. It is, weirdly, a by-product of intellect. It happens not when you do wrong, but when you do wrong knowing full well that it’s wrong [...] a perverse decision begins as a reasoned one. Some circumstance or choice presents itself. You do not greet it with a knee-jerk reaction [...] You reflect. You think. You strive to understand (Supervert 30).

This offers an explanation as to why Poe’s narrators rely on substances to make up for the lack of understanding as to why perversity pervades a society bent on social propriety. As mentioned in the works above, the narrator of “The Imp of the Perverse” suggests that perversity has yet to be (at the time of its writing as well as currently) fully understood. “In the consideration of the faculties and impulses – of the *prima mobilia* of the human soul, the phrenologists have failed to make room for a propensity which, although obviously existing as a radical, primitive irreducible sentiment, as been equally overlooked by all the moralists who have preceded them [...] We have all overlooked” the cultural presence of perversity (Poe, *Imp* 203). As with each of the narrators examined above, there is a unanimous reflection on behalf of society that perversity has been actively ignored and repressed by society despite its (clearly) widespread prevalence. Paradoxically, it appears that the work of the institutions to repress perversion is perverse

in and of itself; authority is aware of the wrongness of suppressing natural human behaviour, yet it does so anyway for a reason *it* deems necessary. The narrator of “The Imp of the Perverse” suggests that the basis of humanity is of expectation and this, according to the narrator, is why perversion has never been accounted for in the public sphere.

If institutional authorities had openly engaged with the prevalence of perversity as an individual act for the purpose of the quest for knowledge, then the need for widespread authority would become obsolete. “I am not more certain that I breathe, than that the assurance of the wrong or error of any action is often the one unconquerable *force* which impels us, and alone impels us to its prosecution” (Poe, *Imp* 204). The desire, according to the narrator, is named *perverseness*. In “The Imp of the Perverse”, impulse becomes known as the desire to be perverse is essential in the individual quest for knowledge as it is an internally outward act compelled by the Self and not by other forces. Through perversity, the individual is impelled to act on behalf of the Self rather than the Whole; therefore, perversity is inherent in the deviation from expectation. According to Daniel Marder, the Imp “is certainly the agent of [the narrator’s] rebellious reaction to the materiality of living [...] it is the demon-dominated Poe who writes the tales of terror, the criticism and literary theory, and who mockingly imitates scientific rationalism” (Marder 176). Further linking Poe’s work to religious symbolism (and therefore the need to suppress sexually deviant behaviour), Marder compares demons to Poe’s Imp: despite the demon’s supposed evil, it is an intrinsic part of humanity just as virtue is and brings attention to the virtue/vice dichotomy on which perversity teeters.

One of Edgar Allan Poe’s most blatant celebrations of extremity, “The Masque of the Red Death” follows the narrative of a group of revellers, lead by Prince Prospero, to his secluded palace for a masquerade ball. According to the narrator,

It was a voluptuous scene, that masquerade. But first let me tell of the rooms in which it was held. There were seven – an imperial suite. In many palaces, however, such suites form a long and straight vista, while the folding doors slide back nearly to the walls on either hand, so that the view of the whole extent is scarcely impeded. Here the case was very different; as might have been expected from the duke’s love of the *bizarre* [...] there was a sharp turn at every twenty or thirty yards, and at each turn a novel effect (Poe, *Masque* 292).

The image of Prospero’s palace is unreal and suspended in an air of fantasy. Prospero lives in seclusion from “normal” society (much like the Libertines of Sade’s fiction). The cloistered palace symbolises seclusion and suggests that the purpose of the separation is

to hide something from public view. Further, the bizarre layout of the palace provides a supernatural feeling to the plot. When the Red Death shows up, it is described as a figure that is “tall and gaunt, and shrouded from head to foot in the habiliments of the grave. The mask which concealed the visage was made so nearly to resemble the countenance of a stiffened corpse [...] His vesture was dabbled in *blood*— and his broad brow, with all the features of the face, was besprinkled with the scarlet horror”. It is possible that the Red Death symbolizes the slow death suffered by those afflicted with tuberculosis, of which several of Poe’s loved ones suffered. However, Poe’s introduction of the character creates a perverse Double in the way that the Red Death stuns the revellers because he does not belong; he is an interloper in their secluded group; paradoxically, if the revellers that were invited to Propero’s palace showed their extremity in the public sphere, *they* would be viewed as interlopers. The multi-tiered symbolism of the colour red evokes imagery of crimes of passion, or even passionate sexuality. The costume of the Red Death evokes the dismemberment at the climax of “The Tell-Tale Heart”. Tuberculosis is also hardly a silent killer and is therefore not concealed by a mask; but carnal passions are. At the end of “The Masque of the Red Death”, the reader acknowledges “the presence of the Red Death [who] had come like a thief in the night” (Poe, *Masque* 295). It is also accepted that “Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all” because of their revelry in excess (Poe, *Masque* 295). The obsession with carnal excess and supernatural landscape is manifested in Edgar Allan Poe’s work and is also found in his works that are based on passionate and melodramatic attraction to unattainable women as well as the lifting of the veil by perverse knowledge.

– OBSESSION, LANDSCAPE, AND THE FEMALE BODY –

In order to understand how the female body is intertwined with the individual’s perverse quest for knowledge, I offer an analysis of Edgar Allan Poe’s “Ligeia” and “The Fall of the House of Usher”. Throughout the works, gender difference is elevated to the supernatural realm with an obsessive sense of ownership within a secluded and mysterious landscape. According to R. C. de Prospo, “Ligeia is dead to the narrator from the outset, before she actually dies [and the air of death is accentuated by her] strangeness, the quality that is by definition indefinable, and that the narrator makes redundantly [...] even stranger” by quoting little-known literary passages while obsessively attempting to relate to the unknown (de Prospo 58). In “Ligeia”, the title character is Othered by the

narrator who is obsessed with *knowing* her. Illustrating the Otherness between the narrator and Ligeia, even the “normal” characteristics of individuals are exaggerated which creates a detachment from the regular realm such as “the couple’s [...] super-intimacy, super-connubial twinship, hyper-propinquity, the very hyperbole of desire itself, [and a] relentlessness that is equal and opposite to the intensity of the narrator’s attentions” (de Prosopo 58). The narrator’s obsession characterizes aspects of the quest for individual knowledge that cannot necessarily be obtained; if a male individual seeks to know femininity, they by default lack foundational experience to define it.

Poe’s tendency to create unreliable narrators coincides with his use of obsession and the unknown in “Ligeia”. For example, the narrator is (again) reliant on substances to repress memories and events. Throughout the text, the narrator is unable to remember important clues that would develop the ambiguity of “Ligeia”, but rather discusses the “rapid change for the worse” from the “subsequent fall of the ruby-drops” that took place in the “disorder” of his new wife, Rowena, who looks almost identical to Ligeia. In many of Poe’s texts, there is a suggestion that the narrator’s obsession with the perfect images of femininity is rather a product of opium dreams manifesting in the place of repressed perversions. Whether the narrator’s lack of essential memories (“I cannot, for my soul, remember how, when, or even precisely where, I met the lady Ligeia”) is due to the narrator’s opium use, or the inherent objectification of the female body within the text (“I have *never known* the paternal name of her who was my friend and betrothed”), the narrator’s unreliability is telling in terms of the validity behind the apparent adoration and the equality between the narrator and Ligeia “who became the “partner [of the narrator’s] studies” (Poe, *Ligeia* 233). Further, the fact that Rowena’s image fades from the face of the narrator and transitions back into Ligeia renews the original object of female obsession. According to Katherine Henry’s interpretation of Simone de Beauvoir, “man has established woman as the Other through which he can achieve transcendence. But the project is doomed at the outset to failure, because to define woman as Other is to construct her as completely unknowable, as forever eluding man’s grasp and therefore frustrating his dream of possession” just as the narrator of “Ligeia” experiences when he witnesses Rowena fade (and disappear) into Ligeia, who has previously also disappeared (Henry 30). The inability for the male narrators (and in extension, male author) to relate to women and femininity creates a re-emergence of homoerotic subtext within most of Edgar Allan Poe’s work; perhaps the author is obsessed with relating to the status quo rather than flirting with the suppressed Imp within him.

Obsession and seclusion in Poe's prose and poetry is also a dominant trope in "The Fall of the House of Usher". Like Ann Radcliffe (who will be analyzed in the next section), Poe utilizes the trope of sublime landscape to illustrate the unexplained characteristics of Nature, as well as the perverse individual, who answers only to Nature and its whims. As the narrator comes to view of the House of Usher, they are overcome with a feeling akin only to coming down off of opium, "the hideous dropping of the veil" to the sober world as well as the realization of that sobriety.

I looked upon the scene before me – upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain – upon the bleak walls – upon the vacant eye-like windows – upon the rank sedges – and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees – with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no other earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveller upon opium – the bitter lapse of every day life – the hideous dropping of the veil. There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart – an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime. (Poe, *Usher* 146).

At the sight of the House of Usher, the narrator is overcome with melancholy at the realization that hints of what lies ahead. Returning to visit a childhood friend, Roderick Usher, after several years of absence, the narrator's gloom at both the sight of the House and of the realization of returning to their past evokes a sense of haunted superstition. The narrator's is aware of his "childish" superstition and this suggests that focus on superstition only serves to increase the presence of it. "I have said that the sole effect of my somewhat childish experiment – looking down within the tarn – had been to deepen the first singular impression. There can be no doubt that the consciousness of the rapid increase of my superstition – for why should I not so term it? – served mainly to accelerate the increase itself" (Poe, *Usher* 147). Thus, if the Self believes in terror as a basis of superstition, then the action of superstition (such as walking under a ladder) makes the individual responsible for the result of misfortune despite other reasons for manifestations of misfortune. Relating to "The Fall of the House of Usher", the narrator believes that, since he is inspired by the terror of the House, that it has a supernatural presence. According to Mark Steven, superstition, or "an irrational belief that that the dead may return to haunt the living is part of 'the uncanny', a psychical phenomenon whose theory Sigmund Freud adapts (from Ernst Jentsch) to describe 'the perceptible reanimation of something familiar that has been repressed'" such as meeting an old friend with whom a history may have existed (Steven, 5).

As with Ann Radcliffe, the reason for a superstitious feeling is confirmed by the narrator when he realizes the presence of an incestuous relationship between Roderick and his captive sister, Madeline. Roderick is afflicted with a mysterious illness that is eventually revealed as melancholia from repressing the incestuous relationship in the text.

To an anomalous species of terror I found him a bounden slave. "I shall perish", said he, "I *must* perish in this deplorable folly. Thus, thus, and not otherwise, I shall be lost. I dread the events of the future, not in themselves, but in their results [...] I have, indeed, no abhorrence of danger, except in its absolute effect – in terror. In this unnerved – in this pitiable condition – I feel that the period will sooner or later arrive when I must abandon life and reason together, in some struggle with the grim phantasm, FEAR." (Poe, *Usher* 149)

Roderick Usher is afraid (melodramatically so) that the narrator will discover the secret (and forced) relationship between Roderick and Madeline. Just as in "The Tell-Tale Heart", Roderick is aware of his perversions and the need to suppress them. The fact that the House of Usher is disintegrating into the tarn suggests that Roderick depends on the cloister (and never leaves it to perform maintenance) in order to preserve his perverse secret; with the presence of the narrator, the secret is in great danger of being discovered and therefore Roderick is forced to plan a reaction to the consequent realization.

Roderick Usher has been unable to murder the sister he is infatuated with, so he resolves to bury her alive in order to deny Madeline's existence. When the narrator discovers what has occurred in the House of Usher, and the veil has been lifted so to speak, he flees "aghast" from the mansion. The moment concludes Roderick's worries that his perversion would be revealed as well as the narrator's initial superstitions upon arrival. The supernatural air of "The Fall of the House of Usher" remains to the end of the story as the narrator watches the house and its contained perversions crumble into the tarn: "While I gazed, this fissure rapidly widened – there came a fierce breath of the whirlwind [...] my brain reeled as I saw the mighty walls rushing asunder – there was a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters – and the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the *House of Usher*" (Poe, *Usher* 157). Placing Nature and superstition together within "The Fall of the House of Usher" as well as the Gothic trope of lifting of the veil, Edgar Allan Poe relates to the prose of Ann Radcliffe as a perfect medium to elevate the mysterious aspects of the individual quest for knowledge above reality. Ann Radcliffe offers a non-objectified female voice to the Gothic as well as the perverse quest for knowledge between 1740 and

1895. From her place in the Gothic genre, she adds a conservative take to its tropes and inherently perverts the genre from within it. Utilizing mystery, the cloister, duality, and the quest for truth through the lifting of the veil, Ann Radcliffe embodies the quest.

**Ann Radcliffe: Lifting the Veil of the [super]Natural
– THE CONSERVATIVE GOTHIC AND PERVERTING A GENRE –**

The individual quest for knowledge in the Gothic is often accompanied by blatantly suggestive sexual imagery. Through her conservative analysis, Radcliffe distances herself from male objectification and perverts the Gothic. By analyzing the female body as part of the discourse between male versus female Gothic, Ann Radcliffe's conservative interpretation of humanity's perpetual motion is inherently perverse because she subverts dependence on the male voice and seizes space for the female voice. Further, Gothic reliance on the supernatural to explain the unknown is abandoned in Radcliffe's conservative Gothic by lifting the veil and eventually rationalizing previously unknown events. Thus, Ann Radcliffe illustrates the importance of experience in characterizing the female perverse quest and inserts a suggestive criticism of hierarchal gender norms that rely on supernatural tropes to explain subordinate social groups.

David Durant argues that Radcliffe's novels "picture the strength of the irrational, but rather than viewing it as the needed corrective for an over-rationalistic age, she saw it as monstrous. She repeatedly describes situations in which hierarchy breaks down, leaving a world of individuals" to illustrate their own existence within hierarchal society (Durant 520). Ann Radcliffe's perversion from the Gothic genre illustrates how, for her,

the true gothic terrors were not the black veils and spooky passages for which she is famous, but the winds of change, dissolution, and chaos which they represented. [She demonstrates an] obsession with the single subject of the coming of age of the individual [that contrasts the] hierarchal, reasonable, loving world of the family with a chaotic, irrational, and perverse world of the isolated (Durant 520).

Radcliffe's version of the Gothic is summed up by an overarching suggestion that overcoming the tribulations of adult existence lies in returning to traditional values to preserve the Self. Interestingly, in endorsing a return to earlier values, Radcliffe forfeits the dominant power which she grants her female protagonists in her novels who would by default not have the individualized freedom to seize control from male figures.

Ann Radcliffe's values are inherently perverse because her morality endorses a reinstatement of the hierarchal gender roles that Radcliffe deliberately subverts in not only creating a female presence within a male-dominated genre, but in the creation of a separate subgenre from within it. Like the doubled layers within Poe's work, Radcliffe's return to tradition is accompanied with unique female dominance that suggests that even the retreat to conservative culture is conditionally fluid. According to Robert Miles, Radcliffe's perverse fluidity is less Gothic than her male counterparts because her explanation of the supernatural leaves narratives close-ended rather than ambiguously open like other Gothic texts (such as Poe's "The Man of the Crowd"). "Male Gothic texts have been deemed more transgressive, and therefore more 'Gothic' for a variety of reasons: they do not explain the supernatural, which leaves their texts open-ended and irresolute; they are frank, rather than coy, about sexual violence" (Miles 78). Alternatively to Miles, Ann Radcliffe's dominant place within the Gothic genre, despite her resolved plots, creates suggestively unresolved narratives in terms of gender roles with an untraditional mimicry of male hierarchy. Ann Radcliffe's criticism on traditional gender hierarchy is also evident in Miles' analysis of how male Gothic authors are "frank, rather than coy" surrounding literary (and in extension, cultural) sexual violence (Miles 78). Perhaps Radcliffe is intentionally coy with narratives of sexual violence because of female gendered experience; regardless of whether or not Ann Radcliffe personally experienced sexual violence in her lifetime, the permeation of the reality of sexual violence against women influences the gendered experience *en masse*.

Throughout her Gothic, Ann Radcliffe embodies perversion by illustrating a return to traditional conservatism (which symbolizes individual horror at the moment the veil lifts and the fear of the unknown future) and simultaneously creating a space for women at the top of the gender hierarchy in the name of the individual. By depending on duality, desire, and sublime landscapes, Ann Radcliffe represents the individual quest for knowledge as well as the fear that accompanies it. Through her dominant deviation from female gender norms, Radcliffe renders women as real individuals rather than male literary speculation and characterizes the struggle of the individual.

– DESIRE, DUALITY, AND LANDSCAPE –

Just as Ann Radcliffe creates a sense of duality surrounding the place of women in the Gothic genre, she attributes gender dichotomies to both sides of the gender hierarchy to continue the perpetual flow of fluidity. Radcliffe's subversion of dichotomy models projects onto men the same falsities that female gender dichotomies do and therefore perverts the hierarchal social structure built on gendered norms. According to Cynthia Wolff, Radcliffe further illustrates her dominance as a female voice in a male-dominated genre by creating a mimetic male gender dichotomy that compares to the well-known virgin/whore dichotomy.

If women (either in real life or in fiction) seem to perceive the world as inhabited by two types of relatively active men – one embodying “safe” asexual love and the other embodying “dangerous” sexuality – with women playing the part of more or less passive spectators, investigators and commentators have assumed that such is the “real” state of women [...] A devil/priest syndrome exists which an analogue in women to the virgin/whore syndrome in fantasies that suggest that women's passions are potent – indeed so powerful that women, like men, often feel the need to handle these “dangerous” feelings by the device of projection (Wolff 99).

This shifting illustrates the complex web of human intricacies and the interplay that gender has on the pre-Gothic hierarchal structure. So, rather than suggesting that society returns entirely to traditional conservatism, Radcliffe is suggesting, through her Gothic, that humans are intrinsically fluid and that the individual is a product of desire-driven duality.

Ann Radcliffe's use of gendered dichotomies in her prose illustrates how the divided Self is inspired by gendered hierarchies outside of Radcliffe's interpretation of the Gothic. The dual Self is a product of women being trapped “between the demands of two sorts of men – a ‘chaste’ lover and a ‘demon’ lover – each of whom is really a reflection of one portion of her own longing. Her rite of passage takes the form of (1) proclaiming her right to preside as mistress over the Gothic structure and (2) deciding *which* man (which form of “love”) may penetrate its recesses”(Wolff 103).

Relating to Radcliffe's duality as well as her use of supernatural-turned-natural landscape, the desire of humanity is intimately wound up within the environment around it. Specifically discussing geographical framework, Julie Cupples' analysis of the place of women during geographical fieldwork is comparable to Radcliffe's use of literary

landscape in that both gendered positionings “are not based solely on stereotypical notions of who we are but also depend on the form of interaction which takes place. Moreover, they are not static but can shift, in response to how our subjectivities shift” during the course of the individual quest for knowledge (Cupples 383). Like narratives of female sexuality widely written by male Gothic figures, “sex and sexuality [in geographical fieldwork] are important sites in which other peoples and places tend to be exoticized. While sexual relationships in fieldwork [or predatory/obsessive sexual relations in literature] can be seen as bridging social or cultural distance, it is just as likely that they occur because of this distance” (Cupples 384). Ann Radcliffe’s preference for traditional norms places women back in the private sphere and therefore protected from public humiliation and dangers caused by the individual quest for knowledge (such as the way in which Montoni continuously targets his cruelty towards Emily and her ambitions in figuring out the answer to the family truth in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*). Further, the Othering of unknown individuals and landscapes (such as the initially supernatural music coming from the woods in *The Romance of the Forest*) accompanies desire in the way that the Other is automatically exoticized by the individual who seeks to understand it. Desire in Radcliffe’s prose is not always characterized as a sexual attraction, but also as an individual drive to learn the truth. Desiring truth and an answer to seemingly supernatural mysteries differs from the male quest (in literature as well as society) to conquer women to exercise hierarchal control over their bodies. In Radcliffe’s prose, her women protagonists subvert their gender roles and conquer male control in order to get to their personal truths and lifting the veil imposed on them by institutional hierarchy in the first place.

The duality behind the lifting of the veil (such as how its lifting represents not only deviation from traditional ignorance but also female adoption of masculine control over the individual) includes the inherent symbolism of virginity behind lifting the veil. The fluid symbolism mentioned above surrounding Gothic and Romantic literary tropes is seen also in the comparison of gaining knowledge and losing virginity. According to Eve Sedgwick, the Gothic veil is “suffused with sexuality. This is true partly because of the other, apparently opposite set of meanings it hides: the veil that conceals and inhibits sexuality comes by the same gesture to represent it, both as a metonym of the thing covered and as a metaphor for the system of prohibitions by which sexual desire is enhanced and specified” (Sedgwick 256). Landscape is intertwined with the lifting of the veil in Radcliffe’s works (specifically *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Romance of*

the Forest which will be analyzed later) in the way that Radcliffe presents the perpetual motion of Nature alongside the cycle of day and night. For Radcliffe, twilight is intertwined with the symbolism of the lifting of the veil.

In those insistent, lovely, influential Radcliffe landscapes, which all seem to tell the same story but which interrupt the narrative as eagerly as if they all braided together into a suspenseful subplot, the deliquescence and withdrawal of color in favour of outline are the main action. Twilight is the favourite hour, and “dubious light” or “dubious tint” the favourite condition, not because of the growing indistinctness of the view – indeed the main lineaments dominate – but because of the fascination of that moment when the different colors of a scene (as opposed to the shape) first become one, then disappear (Sedgewick 264).

So, for the brief moment of twilight, Nature appears as one before returning to its perpetual (and natural) mysteriousness. The symbolism of twilight matches the metaphors of sexual encounters that narrate partners “becoming one” during sex before separating again into individual fragments after the act.

The interplay between desire, duality, and landscape is important in analyzing the function of horror within the cloisters that are featured in the mentioned works. Terror manifests itself in through the fear of the unknown in both a supernatural sense as well as the apprehension surrounding the future of humanity and the individual. In Radcliffe’s prose, Gothic horror represents the subconscious and unknown Self just as much as it does in Edgar Allan Poe’s Gothic. Gender dichotomies represent the manifestation of human duality and the presence of desire within it. Further subverting “regular” Gothic, Ann Radcliffe relies on the sublimity of landscape for her analysis of the perverse aspects of humanity in an elevated sphere separate from itself. Unlike other Gothic genres that intertwine desire, duality, and the supernatural, Ann Radcliffe’s Gothic intertwines desire, duality, and landscape to characterize the transition of the individual through the perverse Gothic quest that is rife with terror.

– THE FUNCTION OF TERROR AND THE CLOISTER –

In Ann Radcliffe’s novels, terror symbolizes individual reaction to repression and seclusion of the Pervert from pathologized society by the actions of the Pervert themselves. Terror in most of the Gothic is represented by the presence of mystery and the unknown through the use of the supernatural. As Ann Radcliffe’s presence within the Gothic genre necessarily perverts it from within, so too does her use of explained

supernatural as a manifestation of horror. Ann Radcliffe's voice within a male-dominated genre is unique and lends an interesting parallel to her function of revealing the natural behind the supernatural. Male Gothic authors frequently illustrate the female body in a mysterious light because they lack the understanding of its intricacies. In this way, Radcliffe deliberately reveals the answers behind her constructed secrets because she has the necessary gendered experience to do so; horror presents itself previously to the revelation of secrets and the finding of truth.

The deliberate explanation of mystery accompanied by terror within Ann Radcliffe's work as intertwined with lived feminine experience is further characterized by Elizabeth Harlan. She views women's virtue and the "attempt to control her sexuality (and therefore her property) are far more frightening than anything Otherworldly; thus for Radcliffe's women, the most fundamental anxiety [is] fear of physical violation [...] The threat of sexual assault is far more dangerous than a supernatural manifestation" (Harlan 106 – 07). In placing more importance on reality and lived experience than on supernatural obsession, Radcliffe projects lived female experience as a warning to her readers to "remain undistracted by supernatural effects and to stay focused on the dangers of the natural world" (Harlan 109). Thus, rather than utilizing horror to create supernatural narrative within her texts (like her male counterparts), Ann Radcliffe uses it as an analysis of cultural norms.

The Mysteries of Udolpho and *The Romance of the Forest* both feature a secluded cloister rife with terrifying mysteries. D.L. Macdonald compares Radcliffe's utilization of terror to the uncanny in both tropes produce "hesitation or uncertainty [...] in the reader (and sometimes in the characters) as the reality of supernatural phenomena" is discovered (Macdonald 197). Throughout her novels, Ann Radcliffe positions the manifestation of terror experienced towards unknown events (or people) to be unnecessary in the way that "the fantastic events [in her work] are eventually all explained away as merely uncanny" – sometimes things cannot be definitively characterized, and that is okay. (Macdonald 197). For example, in *Udolpho*, the terror Emily feels towards the seemingly supernatural presence of eerie music and "the voice which twice interrupts Montoni all turn out to be produced by the imprisoned Monsieur Du Pont, singing to while away the time, walking on the battlements [...] and speaking from secret passages to confound his captors" (Macdonald 198).

Terror in Radcliffe's novels is also used as a signifier for the unspeakable. In her novels specifically, the unspeakable is characterized as family secrets or discovering the

true identity of individuals; socioculturally, terror is the institutional reaction to the presence of sexual or political perversion. Both manifestations of terror are comparable in the way that they represent how the individual is not always as they appear (or are advised to appear). Radcliffe deliberately combines the manifestation of horror with the lifting of the veil.

The unspeakable is also involved in the two major mysteries of [*Udolpho*]. On his deathbed, St. Aubert asks his daughter to burn some of his papers without examining them; taking them from their hiding-place, however, she absent-mindedly glances over them and reads “a sentence of dreadful import”. Even the narrator never says what it is, but it is enough to make Emily wonder (though momentarily) whether she should investigate further at the cost of disobeying her father’s solemn injunction [...] and her own solemn promise. At *Udolpho*, Emily is intrigued by the mystery of the picture behind the black veil, which even the loquacious Annette finds “almost unspeakable”. Emily lifts the veil, finds “that what it had concealed was no picture” and faints (Macdonald 201).

Ultimately, the latter mystery is solved, but not for over four hundred pages. The dreadful sentence alludes to “not only a sexual secret, but the secret of Emily’s own conception” (Macdonald 202). The mystery of the veil becomes a symbol of Radcliffe’s explanations of the supernatural as well as an illustration of the primal intricacies of sexuality and death. *Udolpho* “abundantly illustrates the substitution of death for sex and also provides a meaning for such a substitution: the child stumbling on the primal scene typically mistakes it for a scene of violence” (Macdonald 202). The innocent misunderstanding of the veiled child compares to Emily’s initial mistaking the figure of the waxwork behind the curtain as Signora Laurentini when it is in fact the Marquis of Udolpho. The summation of Ann Radcliffe’s use of terror is to state that nothing is as it initially seems; there are deeper levels and intricacies to everything we are led to believe.

Ann Radcliffe creates a distinction between terror and horror in her novels. Similarly to Edgar Allan Poe’s work, terror represents uncertainty and obscurity. According to Kelly Hurley, Radcliffe uses literary landscape to illustrate the “majestic obscurity” that creates terror from “the uncertain outlines of an immense and overpowering landscape and the uncertainties of a mind in turmoil” (Hurley 46). Just as landscape and desire are intertwined, a duality is created between them as well as terror and horror, a grouping that creates a deliberate textual indefiniteness of the expansion of the human soul just as perversity subverts definition.

The interplay between Radcliffe’s voice, the cloister, and the manifestation of horror is illustrated by the use of seclusion to preserve cultural norms and keep the

female body under male-dominated control (the use of horror and the cloister is most vividly illustrated through the Marquis de Sade and the way that he places all of his women in the secluded control of male Libertines). According to Gillian Beer, “women’s words are not credited. Only men are heard. Women are taught to be silent and not to exercise [...] their minds, imagination, and judgement. Worst of all, their [literary] habit of imprisonment has put them in thrall to love. [The purpose of women in literature] shifts from intellectual capacity to the physical and sexual body” and it is in this way that Radcliffe deliberately shifts the female purpose back to their intellect (and the unwavering ability to make sense of the supernatural in a way that male Gothic authors have failed to do) (Beer 135). The separation between mentality and physicality in literature inspires horror within Radcliffe’s cloistered women. Her “heroines externalize passion and refuse to recognize it as a part of themselves: it returns therefore in uncontrollably threatening forms [...] Passion is both internalized and externalized; the figurations of landscape and event correspond with claustrophobic exactness to symbol and feeling” that mirrors the horror and the inability to align the individual with the sublime (Beer 151). The horror originating in the trauma of prohibiting female autonomy in Ann Radcliffe’s Gothic mirrors the society in which she lived as well as the one she created in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* that follows the narrative of Emily St. Aubert as she pursues the truth behind her family secrets while simultaneously avoiding the danger that hangs over her head at the hands of Signor Montoni while cloistered within Udolpho.

– MYSTERIOUSLY SUPER NATURAL: *The Mysteries of Udolpho* –

Ann Radcliffe’s deliberate revealing of the natural answers behind Gothic supernatural superstitions illustrates the perverse quest for knowledge and the importance of the lifted veil during the explanation. According to Mary Laughlin Fawcett, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is made up of a “repetitive series of revelations, veils (or curtains) pulled aside, and beds, especially death beds, questioned for meaning. The bedroom is the novel’s dreamlike center [and] the scenery often reinforces the sense of sexual duality: [Emily St. Aubert] sees mountains on one side and fruited plains on the other or a rampart walk on the left and sun-illuminated hills on the right” (Fawcett 483 – 84). The duality in *Udolpho* illustrates the intrinsic perversity present within human beings and the supernatural reaction to the individual’s inability to position themselves alongside static norms and dichotomies. Radcliffe’s Gothic scenery paints an ineffable image of Nature

that encompasses her characters while suggesting how humanity relates to its own supposed ambiguity by positing itself alongside the picturesque and therefore creating a dichotomy between humans and their supposed governess, Nature.

Emily could not restrain her transport as she looked over the pine forests of the mountains upon the vast plains, that, enriched with woods, towns, blushing vines, and plantations of almonds, palms and olives, stretched along, till their various colours melted in distance into one harmonious hue, that seemed to unite earth with heaven [...] the ruggedness of the unfrequented road often obliged the wanderers to alight from their little carriage, but they thought themselves amply repaid for this inconvenience by the grandeur of scenes (Radcliffe 28).

Despite her travellers' inability to identify the fragmented link between themselves and Nature, Ann Radcliffe illustrates how "earth and heaven" (humanity and the supernatural) are separate yet combined in order to create a union not unlike the carnality suggested in the remainder of the text.²⁸ Thus, Emily represents a mirrored image between herself and Nature in the way that the latter is (by default) natural despite the former characterizing it as supernatural. The dichotomy created between Nature and humanity illustrates culture's inability to identify with its inherent perverse fluidity that creates a terror-inducing need to sublimate to cultural norms or dichotomies (such as the constructed separation between Nature and humanity).

The quest for knowledge that accompanies the deviation from sublimation is effectively illustrated by the Libertine trope that features an older (and socially aware) figure educating a younger (and naïve) figure. Also found in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Emily's relationship with Valancourt represents the human need to identify its own fluidity through the knowledge quest. "St. Aubert, as he sometimes lingered to examine the wild plants in his path, often looked forward with pleasure to Emily and Valancourt, as they strolled on together; he, with a countenance of animated delight, pointing to her attention some grand feature of the scene; and she, listening and observing with a look of tender seriousness, that spoke of the elevation of her mind" (Radcliffe 49) The exchanges between Valancourt and Emily represent the tiered quest for individual knowledge as something necessarily dependent on an Other (in this case, Valancourt) and how its teachings equate (or separate) from the perceptions of the individual (Emily).

²⁸ Surely if Ann Radcliffe's characters *could* immediately identify the intrinsic link between themselves and Nature, she would not need to spend nearly seven hundred pages narrating the gruelling and melancholy process of lifting the veil; the realization of the individual truth through the perverse quest for knowledge positions Radcliffe's characters as initially ignorant before coming to terms with their own sublimation and the subsequent terror of the realization.

Valancourt's understanding of the "grand features" around him are dependent on his alienation from other landscapes ("They appeared like two lovers who had never strayed beyond these their native mountains; whose situation had secluded them from the frivolities of common life") which has resulted in a detailed study of his own environment that is pivotal in the perverse quest (Radcliffe 49). Valancourt's symbolism as the catalyst for the quest for knowledge is further illustrated in the way that Emily associates sublime emotions inspired by Nature's vast intricacies with Valancourt's (albeit limited) knowledge of the landscape around him, even after the couple become separated from each other.

The sun, soon after, sinking into the lower world, the shadow of the earth stole gradually over the waves, and then up the towering sides of the mountains of Friuli, till it extinguished even the last upward beams that had lingered on their summits, and the melancholy purple of evening drew over them, like a thin veil. How deep, how beautiful was the tranquility that wrapped the scene! All nature seemed to repose; the finest emotions of the soul were alone awake [...] Ah! thought Emily, as she sighed and remembered Valancourt, those strains come from the heart! (Radcliffe 175)

The "thin veil" created by the setting sun into the "lower world" represents the ever-present and precarious balance between light and dark, virtue and vice. According to David Durant, citing material from *Udolpho*, the perpetual motion of night and day and the symbolic balance between the two represents how good and evil clash.

"*Udolpho* insists that 'though the vicious can sometimes pour affliction upon the good, their power is transient and their punishment is certain; and that innocence, though oppressed by injustice, shall, supported by patience, finally triumph over misfortune!' But this triumph of providence does not prove the world of the adult liveable, since it comes only through regression to the lost family home, which 'became, once more, the retreat of goodness [...] For Radcliffe, there are absolute forces of good and which pit innocence against experience [and there is nothing] to be learned in the Gothic underworld' symbolized by the mysterious night time (Durant 526).

Thus, Ann Radcliffe simultaneously illustrates the importance of the veil of ignorance being lifted at the same time as she illustrates the sociocultural shortcomings of the lifted veil and the individual uncertainty that occurs during the perverse quest.

The lifting of the veil and the subsequent terror upon the realization of the individual's sublime traits (such as sexual fragmentation from sociocultural norms) of which Radcliffe suggests a conditional return to conservative traditionalism to remedy, creates what Fawcett refers to as a "paradox of the seeker who looks *out* only to find

what is inside” (Fawcett 492). The paradox illustrates the dependence of the Self on the Other to characterize its independent experiences with the world.

In [*The Mysteries of Udolpho*], the fresh, virginal young woman repeatedly finds wounded and rotting corpses. Emily is especially prone to that “love, so natural to the human mind, or whatever is able to distend its faculties with wonder and astonishment”. “Distend” has an unpleasantly full sound here, reminding us of a kind of pregnancy of mind, following a desire to be filled, to take in sights, to have knowledge. The suggestion of multiplicity, of openness, againness, and repetition is muted but present in this passage, too. The *idle* terror is void, empty, insubstantial, and needs to be filled. The experience which Emily [...] undergoes throughout is an opening, a filling, almost a cramming. The narrator explains [the human need to acquire knowledge] in more attractive language, when describing why Emily draws the veil to see the “picture” of Laurentini, even though the prospect terrifies her: “But a terror of this nature, as it occupies and expands the mind, and elevates it to high expectation, is purely sublime, and leads us, by a kind of fascination, to seek even the object from which we appear to shrink” (Fawcett 492).

During her quest for knowledge, Emily has deliberately approached situations in which she felt a rising danger. In this way she has acquired the answer to the family secret which she promised her father she would never pursue after his death. The separation between Emily before and after the veil was lifted remains part of her overall identity, but it is the spectrum between the two poles that illustrates fragmentation. In purposely seeking that which inspires terror, the individual is pursuing the unknown with the purpose of making it known – explicitly what Radcliffe also sets out to do by creating supernatural narratives specifically to be explained away (just as Edgar Allan Poe wrote Gothic detective mysteries explicitly to be solved).

The return to the past that is preferred by Radcliffe over continuing towards post-Romanticism and Modernism symbolises an end of the individual knowledge quest and the suppression of the knowledge already gained. This return would inspire a doubled melancholy that is fuelled by the suppression of perverse fragmentation as well as the sociocultural repression experienced by pre-Romantic norms and dichotomies (such as women occupying only the private sphere). The fear resulting in returning mirrors that of continuing with the quest and into the unknown. When St. Aubert asks Emily to return to the family home and destroy papers that reveal the family secret, she is overcome with a doubled grief. On one hand, she is asked to return to her family home because of her father’s dying wish. On the other, the home represents everything that she experienced on their quest to Udolpho in the narrative thus far and the fact that she has to temporarily turn back.

“Do not afflict me with this excess of grief; rather teach me by your example to bear my own”. He stopped again, and Emily, the more she endeavoured to restrain her emotion, found it the less possible to do so. St. Aubert, who now spoke with pain, resumed the subject. “That closet, my dear, – when you return home, go to it; and beneath the board I have described, you will find a packet of written papers. Attend to me now, for the promise you have given particularly relates to what I shall direct. These papers you must burn – and, solemnly I command you, *without examining them*” (Radcliffe 77 – 78).

Neglecting to answer her question as to why she cannot read the papers, St. Aubert entrusts Emily to destroy them; only, they fall from the packet while she picks them up to be destroyed. Emily accidentally glances at them and realizes that her father had an affair and that she may be the product of the affair. As mentioned above, the lifting of the veil in this instance represents the human reaction to reach deliberately for that which is labelled as unreachable.

Radcliffe’s intentional supernatural plot constructions usually accompany a horrific answer (such as St. Aubert’s affair and the waxwork behind the curtain). By providing sought after answers to her characters (and readers), she is assuming the role of the male (who cannot be trusted to tell the truth, such as St. Aubert and his infidelity) in educating the women. However, “in the evening, the Count, with all his family, except the Countess and Mademoiselle Bearn, went to the woods to witness the festivity of the peasants”; it is revealed that the ghostly music Emily heard during the night originated from a world separate from her own (Radcliffe 500). The contrast between malevolent and benevolent realizations creates a balanced analysis of the quest for knowledge that suggests the *conditional* (rather than static) transition back to tradition believed to have been preferred by Radcliffe.

The Mysteries of Udolpho narrates the perverse quest for knowledge and the fragmentation of humanity as something that can remain benevolent as long as it is equally balanced between passion and reason. Sister Agnes warns Emily: “You are young – you are innocent! I mean you are yet innocent of any great crime! – But now you have passions in your heart, – scorpions; they sleep now – beware how you awaken them! – They will sting you, even unto death!” (Radcliffe 574). As Emily neglects to completely give in to the “prosperities of vice” (as Sade would say) or to return entirely to a life of virtue, the narrative ends with her superstitions becoming rationalized as well as regaining her family properties and the love of Valancourt. In this way, Emily effectively symbolizes a perfectly fragmented knowledge quest without giving in to the romance of mystery.

– KNOWN UNKNOWN: *The Romance of the Forest* –

Ann Radcliffe also explains the seemingly unexplainable in *The Romance of the Forest*. By providing her characters with the answers to their supernatural queries, Radcliffe renders the quest towards the future obsolete and effectively reinstates the educational hierarchy as mentioned above. As in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the female protagonist of *Romance* is unaware of the dark histories of the places she inhabits and even within her family. When Adeline comes upon a destroyed abbey, she is overcome by its sublime beauty and is unaware of the libidinous Marquis in charge of its care and the dangers that hover around the yet-unexplored corners. The fear of the unknown and the terror upon the lifting of the veil is discussed by Chloe Chard in the introduction to *The Romance of the Forest*. Citing Adeline's discovery of a manuscript that tells of the horrors of the abbey, Chard states:

In describing the process by which Adeline reads the manuscript, *The Romance of the Forest* underlines the promise of horror and terror on which its own narrative structure is based. Like all works of Gothic fiction, the novel constantly raises the expectation of future horrors, suggesting that dreadful secrets are soon to be revealed, and threatening the eruption of extreme – though often unspecified – forms of violence. The passage just quoted (“Adeline shuddered. She feared to read the coming sentence, yet curiosity prompted her to proceed. Still she paused: an unaccountable dread came over her. ‘Some horrid deed has been done here,’ said she; ‘the reports of the peasants are true. Murder has been committed.’ The idea thrilled her with horror.”) affirms very strongly the power of a narrative mystery and impending violence to produce such moments of horror and terror: in anticipating imminent confirmation of her suspicion that ‘murder has been committed,’ Adeline is so overcome with horror that she is prevented – for a while – from reading further (Chard 7).

In this way, Chard illustrates how Radcliffe creates supernatural feelings to surround the individual realization of knowledge and the lifting of the veil similar to the air that surrounds the Self before the lifting of the veil occurs. Similar to Poe's use of suggestiveness throughout his work, Ann Radcliffe utilizes the supernatural to illustrate the ever-present fear of the individual as they remain ignorant or choose to pervert their prescribed norms to acquire individual knowledge. In any situation, the individual is overcome with a supernatural sense of difference whether they are intentionally barred from gaining what they are aware lies beyond traditional norms or if they choose to pursue the unknown and become terrified while experiencing life from *within* the unknown. In fact, the very “romance” of the forest is that most of Her recesses and

inhabitants are unknown and are left up to humanity to discover, or alternatively, allow to remain unchanged and secret.

In terms of returning to the traditional, Ann Radcliffe utilizes the Gothic ruins trope to characterize the wish to return to the previous majesty of the newly erected structure of both the building as well as humanity. “He approached, and perceived the Gothic remains of an abbey: it stood on a kind of rude lawn, overshadowed by high and spreading trees, which seemed coeval with the building, and diffused a romantic gloom around. The greater part of the pile appeared to be sinking into the ruins, and that, which had withstood the ravages of time shewed the remaining features of the fabric more awful in decay” (Radcliffe 15). This passage illustrates how time destroys and therefore the progression into future thought only serves to decay the individual (or majestic buildings). However a building would not be erected (such as an abbey) if an individual did not have the ambition to engineer a monument by illustrating how their architectural knowledge assists them in pushing boundaries to create beautiful man-made art (for example, the Gothic stone-scape of the Notre-Dame Cathedral). In this way, the balance between tradition and innovation becomes as fragile as the balance between virtue and vice that Emily St. Aubert illustrated in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.

In *The Romance of the Forest*, Radcliffe illustrates parallels between humanity and landscape, as well as our understandings of them. For example, she compares the picturesque and fragmented understandings of Nature to those that institutional controls use to dictate society. Ruins are represented as fragmented from their original existence, yet they are new in the way that the deconstruction of form creates a new purpose. The thick trees around the abbey symbolize this new form and the veil of missing information and what has been left behind. “As these thoughts passed rapidly over her mind, she raised her innocent looks to heaven, and breathed a silent prayer. With trembling steps she proceeded over fragments of the ruin, looking anxiously around, and often starting as the breeze rustled among the trees, mistaking it for the whisperings of men” (Radcliffe 64). Humanity is equated to Nature in terms of shared mystery and the fact that humans are overcome with the need to engage that which we cannot explain and that which inspires mystery or terror. This equation creates a reason as to why static norms of tradition and gendered hierarchy became commonplace and takes precedence over living an undefined, fragmented, and wholly human experience. The juxtaposition and coexistence between cruelty and tenderness within nature and humanity creates a fragmented Whole from fluid parts that is crucial to Radcliffe’s Gothic text.

The doubled or fragmented narrative in *Romance* continues as emotional pain is often equated with physical sensation. Theodore is apprehended by the Marquis' men and is overcome with melodrama that relates to physical torture at the idea that he has been separated from Emily.

Theodore, indeed, did suffer all that a virtuous mind, labouring under oppression so severe, could feel; but he was, at least, free from those inveterate and malignant passions which tore the bosom of the Marquis, and which inflict upon the possessor a punishment more severe than any they can prompt him to imagine for another. What indignation he might feel towards the Marquis, was at this time secondary to his anxiety for Adeline. His captivity was painful, as it prevented his seeking a just and honourable revenge; but it was dreadful, as it withheld him from attempting the rescue of her whom he loved more than life. (Radcliffe 201).

Thus, emotions are compared to the physical and vice versa. Theodore is overcome with melodramatic emotion because not only is he separated from Adeline, "whom he loved more than life", but also because she must also be terrified at her abduction. There are several layers at work in the illustration of emotion and the physicality of its power. On top of the grief from his separation, Theodore is overcome with the need to imagine the Marquis being punished "more severe[ly] than any they can prompt him to imagine", illustrating the link between human emotion and the sublime beauty of Nature that encompasses it. Neither are able to be completely explained (is Theodore's physical pain the product of grief? Anger? Both?) alongside static norms because they are not static. The mysteries present here are specifically what causes human curiosity to pursue an answer that does not exist.

Towards the end of *The Romance of the Forest*, M. Verneuil's discourse characterizes how the unknown is necessarily a combination of what is known as well as the realization that parts of an event cannot be defined by pre-existing knowledge. Similarly to the above use of "indivi[dual]ism" to illustrate the innate duality in the solitary individual, I am inclined to place the prefix of "unknown" in squared brackets to create "[un]known".²⁹ Along with Radcliffe's opinions that humanity will be spared if they return to traditional sense and avoid the perverse quest for knowledge, it appears that

²⁹ Refer to page 18 where "indivi[dual]ism" is used to illustrate how the individual is a combination of both the Self and the Whole in order to create a fragmented existence; this is done through how the Self explains its own existence alongside the dictated norms of their culture. "[Un]known" works in much the same way with how the squared brackets characterize how the answer of Ann Radcliffe's specifically created mysteries lies in the unlearning of the known, or in refusing to fully explain the mysterious due to the futility of trying to concretely understand the depth of human fluidity.

the “return” in question is moreso about including the past in the ambitions of the future rather than blindly leaving it behind. According to Verneuil,

“To think well of his nature,” said he, “is necessary to the dignity and the happiness of man. There is a decent pride which becomes every mind, and is congenial to virtue. That consciousness of innate dignity, which shews him of the glory of his nature, will be his best protection from the meanness of vice. Where this consciousness is wanting,” continued M. Verneuil, “there can be no sense of moral honour, and consequently none of the higher principles of action. What can be expected of him who says it is his nature to be mean and selfish? Or who can doubt that he who thinks thus, thinks from the experience of his own heart, from the tendency of his own inclinations?” (Radcliffe 270)

M. Verneuil’s discourse suggests that engaging the individual’s glory of sublime Nature will create a “dignity and happiness” that is “congenial to virtue”. In this way, virtue represents innate dignity while vice represents innate indecency which the Self must be protected against. In discussing a static dichotomy between virtue and vice, Verneuil is necessarily embodying the opinions that Ann Radcliffe illustrates throughout her perversion of the Gothic genre. The “experience of his own heart” and the “tendency of his own inclinations” is to pursue the quest for knowledge to define the Self as a fragmented existence within a Whole. If the individual who fears vice cuts themselves off from the “glory of nature” in order to prevent its manifestation, they are deliberately (albeit by sociocultural standards) pursuing knowledge of the “appropriate” Self while repressing the side which identifies with behaviours labelled as deviant, such as seeking revenge that “cannot be imagined for another” on an authority figure who abducts a lover. Despite Verneuil’s alignment with virtue, and the apparent protection from vice by heading the glory of one’s Nature, Radcliffe is willingly projecting that the inherently perverse Self must repress their natural inclinations towards perversion in order to live a dignified life. She is embodying the politics of institutional control and ignoring that in the individual quest for knowledge, perversion and vice are necessary to truly understand virtue in the first place.

The text follows Ann Radcliffe’s formula of returning to the traditional sphere after a narrative rife with danger and misfortune. At the end of *The Romance of the Forest*, Adeline and Theodore are reunited and marry, as expected. “Adeline, in the society of friends so beloved, lost the impression of that melancholy which the fate of her parent had occasioned; she recovered all her natural vivacity; and when she threw off the mourning habit which filial piety had required her to assume, she gave her hand to

Theodore” (Radcliffe 357). As mentioned above, this traditional return is a conditional one. Although she returns to her past in the sense that she is governed, by marriage contract, by her now husband, she does so after “she recovered all her natural vivacity” and stopped the mourning that was “required” of her. So, Adeline has intentionally shewed herself of the expected norms she deems unrealistic to her new-found Self, and adopted the ones that she feels will help her on the continuing quest for knowledge. The text ends with Radcliffe posing an open-ended question to her readers of whether or not living an all-encompassing virtuous life in the name of tradition is worth the struggle if the naïve individual unknowingly places themselves in danger since Nature (like humanity) is both virtuous and salacious: “Contemning the splendour of false happiness, and possessing the pure and rational delights of a love refined into the most tender friendship [...] visited by a select and enlightened society” (Radcliffe 363). Through the marriage of Theodore and Adeline, she symbolises the importance of gender equality (“love refined into the most tender friendship”) rather than a hierarchal relationship that places the male above the woman in terms of marriage responsibilities. Their marriage is accompanied by friends who are “enlightened” which further celebrates the quest for knowledge and wishes for a balance between virtue and vice over resting on either side of the spectrum.

However, just as political and sexual perversion is necessarily caught up in hegemonic notions of what is appropriate and what is inappropriate in order to have a point from which to deviate, the virtue and vice dichotomy (and the preference for either side) is dependant on institutional explanation of fluid behaviour. The Marquis de Sade recognizes the inherent link between authoritative control and a “balanced” life and therefore advocates the complete abandonment of social norms in favour of a radical individualistic life. His prose is dominated by the complete disavowal of any established norms and demonizes those who hold power titles dependent on the norms.

THE MARQUIS DE SADE: Perpetual Motion and Revolutionary Rejection –Terror and Human Fluidity –

The individual reaction to repression as experiencing terror is illustrated throughout the prose of the Marquis de Sade, but in a sense that differs from Sacher-Masoch, Poe, and Radcliffe. Sade’s illustrations of terror are projected away from his protagonists and instead onto their victims. By illustrating terror within victims rather

than the Perverts themselves, Sade posits terror as an external product of repression created by institutional controls that, in the life of libertinage, does not affect the sexually free individual. In the case of Justine, though she is both a protagonist and victim, Sade's detached terror still applies in the sense that Justine is a product of static society who, despite her suffering, refuses to abandon virtue until she is ultimately killed by the god she unwaveringly worships. Sade also rejects the inward projection of emotional terror caused by current and past norms and projects it outwards onto the bodies (and minds) of the literary victims characterized in several of his texts, including: *Justine: The Misfortunes of Virtue*, *Juliette: The Prosperities of Vice*, and *The 120 Days of Sodom*. Sade's use of terror inspired by repression (and oppression) and his use of extreme violence symbolizes according to Angela Carter, how violence "has always been the method by which institutions demonstrate their superiority. It can become too vicious a reminder of the mutilations our society inflicts upon women and the guilt that exacerbates this savagery. It suggests, furthermore, that male political dominance might be less of a matter of moral superiority than of crude brute force" (Carter 25 – 26). Literary erotic violence reminds the reader of sociocultural manifestations of female terror and torture. In fact, Sade's most frequently illustrated victims are women or feminized men. This creates a paradox of femininity in that, while women are abused more heavily and entirely objectified, the feminized male victims (especially in Sodom) are celebrated and placed above the women on a hierarchal scale. The co-opting of female identity illustrates the hierarchal control that Angela Carter is referring to above and poses a question of what makes femininity inherently "female" if it is able to be used to gain status at the same time as it can forfeit it; terror resurfaces here in the way that humanity is forced to choose between repressing natural inclinations that are culturally illustrated as "female" to avoid physical punishment.

Similarly to the way in which Sade creates a sense of fluid feminine identity, he also utilizes an ambiguous gender hierarchy. His female libertines (such as Madame de Verquin in "Florville and Courval") subvert femininity by holding positions of power and even adopting the usually male role of serving as a sexual educator for young and naïve women and committing sexual violence against them. "Sade describes the condition of women in the genre of pornography of sexual violence but believed it would only be through the medium of sexual violence that women might heal themselves of their socially inflicted scars, in praxis of destruction and sacrilege. He cites the flesh as existential verification in itself, in a rewriting of the Cartesian cogito: I fuck therefore I

am” (Carter 29). It is ambiguous whether or not the terror inspired by (rather towards) Sade’s women libertines is a product of the male voice illustrating conditional female freedom, or if their power is meant to create a fictional elevation of the status of women in his literature via their ability to commit sexual violence against those who would target them in reality. The protagonist of *Juliette* embodies Carter’s suggestion that Sadeian sexual violence acts as an outlet of healing in the way that Juliette’s narrative illustrates a complete subversion of her sister’s as she takes her victimization and projects it on others to regain her previously stolen autonomy. Marcel Hénaff characterizes Libertine use of terror in relation to repression and the subversion of institutional hierarchy in the way that it “becomes the noun that designates not only a moment of Revolution, but also any kind of political behaviour founded on systematic, unlimited violence relative to the opposition, or those believed to be part of the opposition” such as those who sought (and seek) to demonize perverse sex as a tool of social destruction rather than of individual quest for knowledge (Hénaff 6). Further, Sade’s use of literary sexual violence illustrates how the “terror [created by the violence] seeks to stabilize [humanity] in order to liberate the forces of nature or history [as well as] eliminating social or political obstacles” such as the way in which institutional norms demonize perversion rather than analyse it as a natural manifestation of humanity’s inherent fluidity (Hénaff 18). Sade’s experiences within Revolutionary France illustrate his preference for violence as a tool for creating cultural change. In his work, Sade uses violence to differentiate free humanity from morally bound society and the ambiguity found throughout Nature as well as human perversity. In Sade’s world, violence is a tool against institutional control rather than a product of individual projection into the Self as a way to repress innate perverse urges.

The terror that was later characterized in the Gothic as an emotional reaction to the unknown future or the inability to identify the fluid individual alongside static institutional norms is discussed by Georges Bataille in relation to Sade. “Sade – or his ideas – generally horrifies even those who affect to admire him and have not realized through their own experience this tormenting fact: the urge towards love pushed to its limit, is an urge toward death”, which would explain why Sade uses rape and murder as dominant tropes in his narratives in order to illustrate the melodramatic hysteria of male sexual attraction (consensually sought by women, or not) as well as to offer his women an equal playing field in terms of sexual autonomy and power (Bataille 41). In utilizing sexual perversions to symbolize the institutional hierarchy in the eighteenth century, Sadeian terror illustrates the sociocultural reality that

the kind of sexuality [Sade] has in mind runs counter to the desires of other people (of almost all others, that is); they are to be victims, not partners. Sade makes his heroes uniquely self-centred; the partners are denied any rights at all: this is the key to his system. If eroticism leads to harmony between the partners its essential principle of violence and death is invalidated. Sexual union is fundamentally a compromise [...] between life and death (Bataille 167).

Sade's work illustrates hierarchal society and the way that the oppressed are denied any *real* rights. One could argue that Dworkin would agree with Sade's criticism of static norms, but the fact that his criticism relies on horrific and detailed sexual violence (committed by priests, aristocrats, and lawyers as a satirical illustration of hypocrisy) causes Sade to be misinterpreted and placed in the same static sphere that he criticises.

Sade's libertinism creates a fluid sense of reality in that he constantly subverts reality in order to illustrate the hypocrisy of the churches, courts, and the upper class that demonize perversion only to be the most guilty figures of vice (Sade, one of the most perverse thinkers, was himself an aristocrat). According to Pierre Klossowski, "the uneasy conscience of the debauched libertine represents a transitional state of mind between the conscience of social [humanity] and the atheistic conscience of the philosopher of Nature" (Klossowski, *Nature* 65); the perpetual motion of the world is inspired by Nature rather than the religious doctrines that Sade combated. Sade "was a monster as the word used to be defined: something unnaturally marvellous [...] His violation of sexual and social boundaries, in his writings and in his life, is seen as inherently revolutionary. The antisocial character of his sexuality is seen as a radical challenge to a society deadly in its repressive sexual conventions" (Dworkin, *Pornography* 116). In this way, "The Sadeian conscious reproduces in its own operations the perpetual motion of Nature which creates, but [...] in creating, sets up obstacles" (Klossowski, *Nature* 86). Sadeian terror encompasses many levels of thought that stem from the quest for knowledge and includes criticism of institutional hypocrisy, as well as the static dichotomies insisted upon by the church, and the aristocracy of which Sade was a part. His (although limited) freedom to engage in libertinage and political criticism was necessarily granted by his own sociocultural privilege and illustrates how Sade's freedom to claim unadulterated individual freedom to engage in the perverse quest is dependent on the freedom granted to the privileged classes of the eighteenth century aristocracy.

– Ambiguous Privilege –

The Marquis de Sade's privilege as an aristocrat was integral in his freedom to live, and later write, as a libertine. Although "the eighteenth century was the century of the systematizing of sexual pleasures and pursuits [that encompassed] all classes of people", according to Iwan Bloch, Sade's upbringing and access to his uncle's pornographic library would ensure that The Divine Marquis flourished in a cultural revolution based on egoism (Bloch 3 – 4). According to Pierre Klossowski,

The Marquis de Sade grew up in a society that was aware that it rested on arbitrariness. The moral malaise of this society, which had everything to fear from the extreme cynicism of some of its representatives [such as the church and state, the latter of which Sade was part,] is what is at the origin of Sade's philosophical preoccupations [...] If the court trials and condemnations, his repeated incarcerations [and] finally his long detention by *lettre de cachet* instigated by his mother-in-law – if all this arbitrary repression necessarily makes him, the apologist of the arbitrary, rise in revolt against every institution, every law "human or divine", are we to see that in anything but the outward projection of is inward trial, that which his own conscience conducts against him? Perhaps the iniquitous punishment his conscience brings upon him is necessary to him, in order to win acquittal in his inward trial (Klossowski, *Sade* 70) .

Thus, we see the interplay between sadism and masochism, as well as the terror (both inward and outward, as seen in Sade's texts) that repression wreaks upon the individual. As Klossowski argues, Sade is a product of his time who is overcome by his place within a system that seeks to oppress him and his misunderstood inclinations to the perverse.

In Iwan Bloch's late-nineteenth century study on the life of the Marquis de Sade, he suggests that in order to truly understand the culture of Revolutionary society, Sade must be analyzed in entirety – life *and* works. By combining philosophy and sexuality (the former of which his aristocratic privilege allowed Sade's exposure to at a young age), Sade fought for political, religious, and moral freedom by viciously attacking the church, and the State through a literary "investigation of individual relations in state, church, literature, and public life" (Bloch 6). Bloch's reasoning behind Sade's unrelenting attacks on institutional controls is a product of the environment in which he was reared; a combination of Sade's environment, biology, reason, and ideas caused him to believe (and fight for the belief) that the individual is the only god and that everything the Self does should be done only to further itself: This realization explains why there is no consensual submission in Sade's prose; there is only a Dominant pursuit of the perverse quest.

Of course, the Marquis' libertine right to pursue his sexual freedom is owed to the fact that he was raised in an aristocratic household and had little to no responsibility compared to the lower class and their children. Rather than helping keep a home before having to work for meagre wages, Sade was instead permitted to study at his leisure and later in life was frequently forgiven for committing violent acts.³⁰ Although Sade was indeed privileged, he appeared to utilize his privilege (albeit selfishly) as a tool to combat sexual control held by the very class to which he belonged. In this way, Sade's pornography also encompasses a distinct sense of sexual politics. Further, Sade's pornography encompasses the presence of fluidity within the perverse quest in a paradoxical sense: "it wants, that is, both to learn from pornography's message and also to avoid learning from it; if the political force of pornography lies in its capacity to offend against proprieties, then a society acculturated to pornography will be simultaneously informed by its account of proprieties and immune to its attack" (Ferguson 3). Relating Sade to the work of Blanchot, Bataille, de Beauvoir, and Leo Bersani, Ferguson sees

pornography as politically significant in setting a limit to politics – if by politics one means anything that has to do with interchange or exchange between persons. This second position treats Sadeian pornography as pointing to an outrage as ineradicable beyond mere affect – namely, that sexuality remains so private as to constitute a barrier to inter-subjective communication [...] between persons and, indeed, within persons (Ferguson 4).

This creates an interesting parallel between Sade's literary and sexual politics: if Sade is fighting for a separation between the Self and the State through abolishing political control over the body politic, how is he then able to create an extreme separation between the Dominant and submissive in his works? The Marquis de Sade's privilege appears to muddy widespread adoration of his figure not because of its mere existence, but because it causes him to ignore the fundamental reality that to further his own sexual freedom, he ignores that of everyone else and allows his protagonists to rape and torture as they please for their own enjoyment and enlightenment. There is virtually no consent in Sade. Through the radical individualism in Sade's prose, he seeks to annihilate existing political hierarchies to create another which places him, and only him, at the top to Dominate and destroy as he pleases. Pierre Klossowski suggests that Sade's writing "is

³⁰ The Marquis de Sade frequently behaved as he pleased and was rarely punished. Several biographical sources (including that by Iwan Bloch) cite Sade's preference for secluded orgies and affairs, as well as mistreating Revolution-era sex workers. He was frequently forgiven until two particular events were impossible to be ignored (refer to footnote 14 above) and when his mother-in-law demanded he be arrested by a *lettre de cachet*.

not purely descriptive (objective) but interpretative [and this] will make it possible to move beyond [an] intermediary state of mind and arrive at the atheist and asocial philosophy of Nature, the morality of perpetual motion” (Klossowski, *Sade* 17, 74) . According to Sha, a successful interpretation of Sade’s works, separating the man from the author, would be to read them aesthetically and in terms of “purposiveness rather than crude purpose”. He suggests that

with such an approach for example, Sade’s revolutionary manifesto that is embedded within his *Philosophy of the Bedroom* no longer seems ancillary to his graphic [...] sexuality. Sade writes, “Men are incapable of obtaining the notions of a being who does not make its influence felt on one of our senses”, and this same hostility to abstraction underwrites both Sade’s pornography and his hostility toward monarchy. Moreover, it is man’s immorality that keeps him in a state of revolutionary unrest, the necessary insurrection in which the republican must always keep the government of which he is a member [and] demonstrates that sex is both a creative and destructive power (Sha 179).

The purposiveness and fluidity of sexuality that Sha refers to is most famously illustrated in the comparisons and contrasts of his two most famous protagonists: Juliette and Justine.

– TO KNOW VIRTUE, KNOW VICE: *Justine and Juliette* –

Comparable to Carter’s re-imagining of Descartes’ cogito, “I fuck, therefore I am”, the Sadeian credo “to know virtue, one must first know vice” illustrates Sade’s philosophy that one cannot possibly live a life based on propriety if they have not experienced depravity. In both *Justine: The Misfortunes of Virtue* and *Juliette: The Prosperities of Vice*, Sade combines philosophy and eroticism to illustrate the shortcomings of virtuous ignorance and the convenience of living life with the sole purpose of subverting institutional expectation. The use of the cloister creates an alternative society in which the libertines and their sexual objects embody the narrative of vice in a paradoxical sense to analyze the purpose of virtue. Similarly to how Sacher-Masoch utilized Severin’s journal as well as Poe and Radcliffe’s use of the supernatural, the Marquis de Sade uses the cloister and extreme (as well as physically unlikely) sexual feats to elevate the theme of human sexuality and the individual quest for knowledge above the social realm to a sphere in which it can be analyzed through fiction.

The first edition of *Justine* conceived in 1778 opens with an address to the reader that states: “Only fools will take offence. True virtue fears not the pictures of vice. She

finds only a firmer conviction than before. Perhaps some people will cry out against this work. But what people? [...] Even Virtue, though she tremble a moment, should forget her tears in her pride that [*Justine* is] bound with the strongest and boldest system of immoral and atheistic ideas” (Bloch 97 – 98). Justine is the sister of Sade’s later protagonist, Juliette; the sanguine relations between the Sadeian sisters create a doubled image of humanity suggesting that the individual lives a fragmented existence between virtue and vice. “Juliette, the older, lively, frivolous, malicious, wanton, and very pretty, was jubilant at her golden freedom. Justine, the younger, was naïve and more interesting than her sister, a tender nature, inclined to melancholy [as goes hand in hand with repression], who bewailed her unfortunate state” (Bloch 98). Differentiating his own philosophy and morality from the institutional norm, Sade, from the beginning of *Justine*, assures the reader (who in turn continues reading in a subconscious action towards the quest for individual knowledge) that the work subverts everything previously known.

The work about to be presented is unique. In other novels you will find Virtue triumphant over Vice; Good rewarded, Evil punished. Here you will find Vice the victor, Virtue the vanquished; you will observe as a wretched and helpless young woman, though steeped in Virtue, is made the plaything of the most barbarous villains, the victim of their most monstrous caprices; you will see the moral axioms of the ages besmirched with the most patent sophistries; you will, in short, witness life turned inside out, black having become white, up having become down, right having become wrong – and all this presented in the most blatant manner. Why? Because only by contrasting Good to Evil can we fully appreciate either (Sade, *Justine* 49 – 50).

Immediately, the reader is aware that eroticism and morality is one intertwined to the point that they become one. According to Angela Carter, Sade’s disdain for virtue lies in Justine’s reasoning behind her virtue. She is not virtuous because that is where her quest landed her as with Radcliffe’s protagonist, but she is such because that is what is expected of her. “Nowhere is [Justine] safe from abuse [...] the passive virtue of a good woman ensures she can never escape because the essence of her virtue is doing what she is told” (Carter 53). Paradoxically, Justine’s “denial of her own sexuality is what makes her important to herself. Her passionately held conviction that her morality is intimately connected with her genitalia makes it become so” (Carter 55). Justine’s morality is conditionally limited by the fact that she has come to her conclusions by indoctrination instead of the individual quest.

Sade’s philosophical attack on religion is narrated through his libertine characters. After Justine has been repeatedly raped and tortured by the people who lured her along

her journey from the convent, she is wrongly accused of theft by one of her rapists, Hairpin, and sentenced to death for the crime. She is liberated from prison by Miss Dubois and her band of libertines. Before Justine escapes the band after the cycle of abuse is repeated, Dubois' attempts to instil atheistic reason into her: "You speak of God, my pretty child – but the God you describe as the author of your principles must either be a tyrant or an ass, for surely no just God would permit unlimited luxury for some and unmitigated suffering for others without offering a means to remedy the situation – and not to remedy it in some spiritual afterlife, but in the material present-day life" (Sade *Justine*, 79). According to Pierre Klossowski, Sade's use of atheism in his literary libertines (as well as within himself) to illustrate Reason lies his belief that atheism "declares that from the notion of God, which is arbitrary in itself, all arbitrary, perverse and monstrous behaviour derives. If atheism can prevail as a decision of autonomous reason, it is because this autonomy claims that it itself alone maintains the norms of the species" (Klossowski, *Sade* 15). Amidst the complexity of Georges Bataille's study of eroticism and sexuality, he reflects that one of the the prevailing norms of the species is to reproduce. Sade provides a subversion of this norm, favouring the discontinuity of humanity through the mouth of his libertine, Ironheart:

Escape with me and I promise that your esteemed orifice shall go untouched. However, let me ask that you, in turn, accept a compromise solution: the creatures of Venus, after all, may worship Her in many different temples; let me therefore bypass that altar the idleness of which you deem so important, and instead burn my incense in the neighbouring one; if it is pregnancy you fear, fear no more, for it cannot be brought about in this manner [...] Your treasured maidenhead will remain intact. The anal altar is a delightful place – and it would probably surprise you to know that a great many confessors have gratified themselves in this locus with penitents, the offence never being known to husband or father (Sade, *Justine* 89).

Not only does Sade re-route the flow of sex into discontinuity, but he provides an alternative spirituality (albeit based on sexual worship) that allows for fluidity and sexual perversion entirely opposite to Christian morality. When Justine protests to Ironheart that her god disdains anal sex even moreso than premarital vaginal intercourse because it "spills the seed of humanity", he retorts, "if the seed were put in man solely for the purpose of reproduction, then I would grant you that the spilling of it is an offence. But Nature, Herself, causes it to spill, involuntarily, in the form of nocturnal emission [...] Likewise, Nature gives man the ability to provoke such emission by manual manipulation" (Sade, *Justine* 89 – 90). Again placing the indulgent impulsivity of Nature

and Her reason ahead of religious dogma, Sade continues in the narrative of *Justine* to illustrate the interplay between eroticism, philosophy, and humanity. Similarly to when Justine first entered the company of Dubois and was subjected to terrible physical violence rather than penetrative sex, to quell Ironheart's sexual attraction to her, the Marquis de Sade characterizes the intrinsic fluidity of sexuality during *Justine* by accompanying narratives of sexual deviance with philosophical comparisons between "the creatures of Venus" and the adherents to Christianity.

Sade goes even so far as to claim Christianity is a manifestation of human perversion in and of itself. When Justine saves Roland's life towards the end of her narrative, she asks him to show pity on her rather than subject her to yet more sexual violence. Roland completely rejects Justine's mercy:

You saw me in the field and you had two choices: rescuing me, or continuing on your way. Why did you choose the former? To satisfy an impulse, of course, to give yourself the pleasure of considering yourself a merciful woman; am I not right? I put it to you thusly: if I were lying at the roadside bleeding to death and you could only rescue me by violating the laws of your Church – and the peril, of course, of your soul –, would you do it? I should say not. But your Church encourages the comforting of the downtrodden; indeed, it holds out spiritual rewards [...] So here we have the crux of the matter: you rescued me not for my welfare, but for your own profit – now how in the name of rationality can you berate me for not rewarding you for making me the instrument of your investment in your soul's future?! [...] I'll show you what gratitude is; you're nowhere near the end of your miseries: the worst is yet to come – and you'll be astounded at how bad it can be (Sade, *Justine* 183).

Sade positions Christianity as a pleasure as selfish as libertine vice. Justine meets her end at the hands of the very God which she refused to abandon after she is struck by lightning that goes right through her body, and thus penetrating her without her consent just as the lubricious libertines had in her narrative. Suggesting that sexuality is as fluid as individual theistic (or atheistic) reason creates a sense of ambiguity that matches Sade's sexual metaphors; there are infinite options to engage with spirituality, even within a single belief system. According to Angela Carter, "Sade's sexual metaphor is always ambiguous. Linguistically, he mystifies the sexual attributes of the female body; it is described in sacred terms, even in terms of sacred architecture, as though it were a holy place. The female orifice is a shrine, a place of worship" (Carter 82). Sade's ambiguity suggests that female sexuality appears to always be sacred whether it is consensually granted by a Whore or guarded by a Virgin. According to Sade, rape or consensual orgasm becomes worship of the female temple just as forced belief in the Church (such as

through Inquisition) is essentially the same as willing dedication to deity. It is in this way that the other Sadeian sister, Juliette, symbolizes a sense of salacious worship that mirrors Justine and her aggressors alike while further adding to the complex web of perversity and knowledge that Sade champions in his prose.

Juliette's narrative is delivered much the same as Justine's but differs in the way that along Juliette's journey, she uses the predators she comes across to her own advantage. Sade continues to illustrate the hypocrisy and shortcomings of the Christian faith by placing a sacrilegious nun, Mother Delbéne, in the role of Head Mistress at the convent in which she is raised and ultimately setting Juliette on the perverse quest towards individual knowledge.

“Fuck religion class,” said Mother Delbéne. “What is religion but the word of Christ? And, if he knew his ass from his elbow, do you think he would have got himself crucified? No, my child, put aside all the precepts which you have been taught in religion class. Let this” – here she gripped her crotch – “be your only religion. Believe in it; follow its dictates: you'll never go wrong”. [...] “I want only you to deflower me,” I cried. “Only you, darling Mother; only you.” The lubricious nun tenderly stroked my buttocks. “You shall have your wish, sweet Juliette” (Sade, *Juliette* 23).

Not only is Sade entirely blaspheming the image of the Church, but he is placing women in control of their own autonomy in a way that the belief system does not allow. This creates a Poe-like sense of suggestiveness that Delbéne has chosen the life of a nun only to corrupt other young women, or perhaps, to fulfill her lesbian sexuality from within the cloister and away from the public sphere that would disdain such perverse “deviance”; from behind the mask of Christianity, Delbéne is suggesting that Juliette worship her own body as a god in the name of her sexual quest for knowledge. In regards to social convention, the abbess exclaims: “Oh, fuck convention! [...] Listen, my pet: if convention doesn't further the individual's happiness – if it doesn't gratify his innermost desires – then it is useless. I say, long live the girl who submits to her pure instincts! [...] The more she gives of herself, the more loveable she is; the more happiness she distributes; the more she contributes to a happy, stable society” (Sade, *Juliette* 23). Kathryn Norberg elaborates on Mother Delbéne's attack on the institution of which she is part (similarly to Sade's attack of the aristocracy in which he belongs). Embodied by Delbéne and Juliette, Norberg defines how the Libertine Whore is entirely in charge of her autonomy and not victimized by the clients that provide their living, unlike Juliette's sister, Justine. “The Libertine Whore is a creature of the rococo, of an age enamoured of materialist

philosophy and comfortable with sensual pleasure, especially “varied” pleasure [...] She knows nothing of woman’s supposedly inherent modesty and cares little for her role in the family [...] She belongs to the passions, to the sexual and to sexually explicit literature” (Norberg 228). Although this suggests the pursuit of the quest for knowledge through libertinism is a sociocultural privilege that relies on the funds to be able to afford (monetarily as well as physically to be) a Libertine Whore, the Sadeian trope still subverts expected gender norms just as Delbène’s character subverts the image of living under the nun’s habit.

During her perverse quest, Juliette comes to her own conclusions in terms of virtue and vice that are ultimately a combination of her environment (the cloister in which she was raised and first experienced vice) and how this inspired her own ideas and reason. She resolves to leave Saint Fond after he reveals a plan to her that would see two-thirds of France starve to death (again revealing Sade’s preference to depopulation in much the same effect that anal sex would have) and realizes that her “relapse into virtue”, in a letter from Noircueil, almost cost Juliette her life. She runs “head over heels” from Saint Fond’s house and, according to Bloch’s translation of *Juliette*, bewails “O, damnable virtue! Again for a moment you have deceived me! [...] Virtue only destroys people. And the greatest misfortune that can happen to anyone in this wholly corrupt world is to desire to protect oneself from the general corruption” (Bloch 107). According to Sade, through Juliette, corruption is as much a part of life as the social suggestion to avoid vice.

Juliette has really ceased to be a whore, even a libertine one: she has become instead the embodiment of Sade’s materialist philosophy. Through she eventually transcends her original destiny, Juliette in the early part of the novel, still shares a great deal with the libertine whore [...] Her gender is only relevant in that it makes Sade’s “moral” all the more pungent. As the virtuous Justine’s sister, [Juliette] demonstrates more fully the irrelevance of sexual difference and the lie of virtue, and in doing so, she joins her antecedents, the libertine whores of the mid-eighteenth century (Norberg 248, 251).

In his prose, Sade’s purpose is to entirely reject, and in doing so subvert, the norms and expectations of the society in which he lived. Despite being part of the ruling class, Sade equates the French aristocracy to the god that Mother Delbène blasphemes. If the social hierarchy was effective, it would not explain the sociocultural differences between the ruling class and the peasants; just as Delbène’s god is essentially a false idol of virtue, the power of the French aristocracy, according to Sade, has no *real* power over its subjects.

As Justine meets her end after continuously placing her trust in the virtuous ignorance instilled in her, Juliette lives happily ever after in pursuit of her own individual knowledge. Paralleled to her virtuous sister, Juliette stays true to herself until the end of the narrative when, being brought to Pope Pius VI, she “delivered a bold lecture on the prejudices of the church and the immorality of the pope, which was received with great applause by Pope Pius VI, who was himself described as a horrible atheist and a sexual monster” (Bloch 110). Juliette is shown through the Vatican grounds and even permitted to attend a sexual orgy and Black Mass orated by the Pope himself. Staying as true to his politicosexual purposes as his protagonists to their individual morality, the Marquis de Sade relies on extremity of every kind to illustrate his distaste for religion and the hypocrisy of any system that seeks to amalgamate the individual into a static Whole. According to Juliette herself, it is through extremity and impulse that happiness originates: “I have lived as I have chosen; I face death unashamed and unafraid: I leave you with these thoughts and with my best wishes for a happy life of your own” (Sade, *Juliette* 164).

– EXTREMITY AND MOCKERY: *The 120 Days of Sodom* –

Sade mocks authorities and the way that their hypocrisy, according to him, knows no bounds; this is especially illustrated within the massive narrative of *The 120 Days of Sodom* that features four libertines in a position of cultural authority that often projects static and virtuous norms, who engage in the most salacious sexual vices known to literature. Angela Carter believes that, for the Marquis de Sade, “all tenderness is false, a deceit, a trap; all pleasure contains within itself the seeds of atrocities, all beds are minefields [...] In the perpetual solitude [in Silling Castle] of their continually refined perversions, in an absolute egoism, Sade’s libertines regulate and maintain a society external to them, where the institutions of which they are the embodiment are also perversions” (Carter 29). In this way, Sade succinctly (and deliberately) illustrates the degree of hypocrisy within hierarchal society as well as how perversion is a social manifestation of individual knowledge that evades expectations and norms. In being forced to repress and limit their perversities within the cloistered walls in *Sodom*, “these libertines have the tragic style and the infernal loquacity of the damned; and they have no inner life, no introspection. Their actions sum them up completely. They are in exile from the world in their abominable privilege, at the same time as they control the world”

(Carter 29). In order to illustrate the overall thesis of his literary work, Sade “from time to time, leaves off satire” of power symbols to introduce his individualistic philosophy that “posits a world in which nobody need bleed” save for the violent revolution to bring about the transition (Carter 29).

Sade’s philosophy is most tersely offered in his dedication at the beginning of *Philosophy in the Bedroom*: “To Libertines of all ages, and of every sex, and of every inclination; it is you to whom I dedicate this work. Your passions, which the cold and dreary moralists tell you to fear, are nothing more than the means by which Nature seeks to exhort you to do Her work; surrender to these passions, therefore, and let the principles enumerated herein nourish you” (Sade, *Philosophy* 208) . Sade, along with the other authors examined in this thesis, focuses on the power and mysteries embodied by Nature as a metaphysical being that dictates human impulse; like Poe’s perverse Imp, the inclination to subvert and deviate from expectation and virtue is a behaviour (or spirit) inherent in the very core of all humanity, regardless of social class. Sade goes so far as to blatantly criticize modesty as an archaic principle whose purpose is only to repress an individual’s full potential. “Modesty is a remnant of the Middle Ages; it is a trait which long ago would have been abandoned by society. We have too little time on this earth to deny ourselves the only true pleasures. Nature has made us passionate beings for a purpose” that, in the remainder of *Philosophy* and other Sadeian narratives, is to pursue knowledge of the Self through carnal education and radical individualistic politics; to further the qualities of the individual that would, in turn, further the worth of the society in which it lives (Sade, *Philosophy* 220). The Marquis de Sade’s belief in the intrinsic role that perversity has in the development of individual knowledge is illustrated at the beginning of *The 120 Days of Sodom* when Bangis delivers his plan for the “School of Libertinage” to his libertine friends – the school will later form the majority of the narrative, becoming the one hundred twenty days cloistered in Silling to realize the extremity of sexual deviance and philosophical perversity.

I cannot help but feel that, if we were to isolate ourselves under circumstances most conducive to lewdness, if we were to extend our every effort to the expansion of lubricity’s horizons – if we were to do such, I say, then I have no doubt that we would acquire these new thirsts, recognize these new desires... What I propose, therefore, gentlemen, is the establishment of a School of Libertinage. Envision this: a castle high in the Alps, inaccessible save by foot; gathered therein, a complement of the most provocative creatures one can find, splendid specimens of sexuality whose very presence is enough to stir the blood of the most jaded rake [...] Envision yourselves, I say, locked up in a castle with a

coterie like that; devoting not just an occasional evening to debauch, but – gad, what a prospect! – every waking hour (Sade, *Sodom* 172 – 73).

The purpose of the salacious seclusion is to “extend [their] every effort to the expansion of lubricity’s horizons” and therefore pursue individual impulse to its extreme; in the narrative of *Sodom*, it is evident that Sade fully intended to take the individual mind to its extremes as the text, to this day, is still heavily censored all over the world. The fact that Blangis’ “School of Libertinage” would inspire “new thirsts” in the libertines illustrates how their ambition towards discovering new fantasies is indicative of humanity’s ever-present need to gain knowledge and transform the Self alongside the cycle of perpetual motion that humanity (and Nature) dictate. According to Lewis Corey, “Sade’s perversions belong to the literature of the psychopathology of sex, but his influence on culture and politics is a significant domain of the psychopathology of ideas [...] Sadism has given life to aesthetic, moral, and political ideas which are incomprehensible unless considered in relation to the psychopathological personalities of their creators” (Corey 17). Sade’s written works represent a crucial need to reflect on the existence of the individual within the Whole and to render systematic mass control, which ignores the presence of perpetual difference, obsolete.

Sade’s belief that sexuality (and personal philosophy) is as fluid as the individual goes as deep as his disdain for aristocratic hypocrisy. His reasoning behind narrating “six hundred [perversities], that is a very large, determinate number” symbolizes the magnitude of sexual fluidity (Cryle, *Taking* 94). Although there is an extremely high limit, there is still a limit in Sade’s perversities. However, to avoid his own ironic hypocrisy, Sade deliberately narrated as many perversions as possible in order to prevent himself from excusing some while ignoring (and subsequently demonizing) others. The narrator of *Sodom* apprises the readers of the magnitude of perversion in humanity:

Many of the extravagances which you are about to witness will no doubt displease you; but there are a few among them which will warm you to the point of shooting your nut, and that, dear reader, is all we seek. We do not fancy ourselves mind readers; we cannot guess what suits you best: it is up to you to take what pleases you and to leave the rest alone; another reader will do likewise and another reader still, and so forth until everyone is satisfied.
(Sade, *Sodom* 187).

In arguing in favour of radical individualism, Sade protests on behalf of the united Whole in which the Self belongs. His preference that the individual be allowed to pursue an

individual sexual knowledge suggests, according to Josué Harari, that “desire alone can lead us to truth. Desire is a spontaneous impulse which brushes aside the constraints and cultural inhibitions masquerading as morality, religion, and law, [and] those obstacles to the profound verities of men and things” that are created and projected by institutions as a widespread sociocultural norm (Harari 1213) Going further into Sade’s philosophy of desire and truth, Harari suggests that Sade’s prose

declares that thought is far removed from truth. It is desire, [Sade] claims, which is drawn towards truth as to a lodestone. The aim [of *Sodom*] then becomes to jostle the reader out of [their] customary patterns of thought, and so attune [them] to [their] desires that they regain the dominion usurped by reason. In Western intellectual history, de Sade was first to address himself to the notion that desire and knowledge, far from being mutually exclusive, are indissolubly linked; for him, there cannot be any real knowledge without desire [and the impulse to pursue it]. Thus, for de Sade, *truth* is a meaningless notion since it is based entirely on historical and geographical contingencies; he holds our system of thought to be little else than a cultural illusion

in the same sense that Queer studies aims to deconstruct so-called truths that create static definitions of gender and sexuality (Harari 1214 – 15).

The transgressions throughout *120 Days of Sodom* transition from a detailed narrative in the first of four books to a point-form list of the murderous passions in the fourth. The first book, narrated by Duclos encompasses “The Simple Passions”. Duclos tells the libertines that she first came into the world of vice in the convent and was told, by her sister (just as Juliette attempted to lure Justine) to seek out Father Laurent whose passion is to ejaculate on the faces of young girls. Alongside her depraved narrative, Duclos introduces her own philosophies on vice in the familiar Sadeian convention. After her sister inspires Duclos’ curiosity about Father Laurent, she admits to the libertines:

You may well imagine, sirs, that I not only did not flee Father Laurent, but actually sought him out; at that age the voice of modesty is a whisper at best, and its silence until the time one has left the tutelage of Nature is certain proof, is it not, that this facetious sentiment is far less the product of the original mother’s training than it is the fruit of faulty education? Well, as I was saying, I flew instantly to the church and, as I was crossing a little court between the entrance of the churchyard and the convent, into whom should I bump but Father Laurent, himself (Sade, *Sodom* 199).

From the beginning of *Sodom*, Sade subverts everything that the reader thinks they understand. Specifically, Duclos immediately illustrates how, rather than being innocent and seeking protection from her guardians, she willingly seeks danger and the secret

knowledge that Laurent's deviance represents. Not only does Duclos' initial foray into vice represent an undoing of her previous state, but a rejection of parental education as well as the indoctrination of childhood innocence and modesty based on sociocultural norms. The beginning of Duclos' narrative suggests that children are able to pursue their own quest for knowledge from the beginning without depending on the safety of the family home and the "faulty education" within it. Sade's use of the word "original" illustrates the individual's awakening into the world of perversion by separating themselves from their birth mother (and her generational teachings of virtue) and returning to the Original Mother, associated with Nature. This is embodied by the trope where an older libertine educates a younger and ignorant individual in ways that the first parent neglects, thus taking the parent role from the birth family.

Sade's massive tome continues in much the same way as Duclos' narrative does, but differs in the way that each of the following three women offers less detail surrounding sexual acts than the previous, until the fourth book, "The Murderous Passions" concludes with the machine torture and violent murders of all but sixteen characters, including three cooks. Aside from the four main male protagonists, Sade's women libertines, Duclos, Champville, Martaine, and Desgranges are the foremost objects of focus in *Sodom*; in this way, Sade creates a perverse sense of equality between genders as well as sexual preferences. By including several hundred sexual passions in varying degrees of detail, Sade also suggests that although they are increasingly depraved, they still fall under the spectrum of perverse sexuality and therefore must be included in the philosophy of sex for the purpose of knowledge. "We must therefore interpret Sadeian transgression [...] as an attempt to demystify and demythicize our cultural foundations, an effort to liberate – by means of the illicit act – the many modalities of desire" (Harari 1217). Further, as with the Death Instinct discussed above, Sade's work, especially *The 120 Days of Sodom*, illustrates the link between death, desire, and violence – whether it manifests in outward physical violence or inward emotional violence.

The interplay between desire and violence illustrates "a demonstrative function which participates, doubles, generates, and indefinitely regenerates violence" (Harari 1218). Sade's aim is to demonstrate that desire, violence, and discourse are identical. We have always known that sexuality went hand in hand with violence. "the novelty of de Sade's work lies in its giving the same significance to discourse; Sadeian discourse goes hand in hand with violence – it is itself violence" indicative of the perpetual cycle of the

knowledge quest (Harari 1218). *The 120 Days of Sodom*, in its entirety, could be delivered in point form save for Sade's philosophical passages, just as the final book is, and it would still create discourse on the importance of sexual perversity in humanity and what its manifestation means for the remainder of society and what we believe we knew before reading what is, arguably, Sade's most famous (and depraved) work. *Sodom* concludes with a final address by the Marquis de Sade:

Would you scorn our libertines for practicing this or that vice? Well, they likewise scorn you for practicing this or that virtue. In the last analysis, it matters not a jot to anyone – least of all Nature, who, in supplying us with our tastes, could not fail to realize that we would act upon them. Does this shock you, or virtuous people?! Does this burn those ears of yours which, from infancy, have been assailed with the fables of the Church? Well, go in peace: if those absurdities which you have been taught are true; if, as you have been told, there is a hell wherein shall be punished the perpetrators of vice, then, no doubt, we shall burn there; but, as Blangis might have put it, a hell inhabited by those of our stripe, is, all its tortures notwithstanding, infinitely preferable to a heaven occupied by the monotonous creatures whom we find held up as virtuous. (Sade, *Sodom* 301).

At the very least, the ending of *Sodom* suggests a parallel between two ideas of “heaven”: one which is home to the virtuous and the reward for living a moral and Christian life and the other which encompasses the intellectually (and physically) free individuals who identify as separate entities from those labelled as “normal” by mainstream social values.

According to Supervert, “perversity is a resistance to form where only formlessness exists [...] what is a crime here is often a virtue several hundred leagues hence, and the virtues of another hemisphere might well reverse themselves into crimes of our own” (Supervert, *Perversity* 58). This resonates in *The 120 Days of Sodom* as well as in the ability of the Marquis de Sade to critique and undo the work of sociocultural institutions. Sade's work embodies perversity – in sexuality as well as reasoning – as a quest for individual knowledge through the manipulation of the mind and body in another version of Descartes' cogito: “I think *too much*, therefore I am *perverse*” (Supervert, *Perversity* 2).

– CONCLUSION: THE PERVERSE QUEST AND IDENTITY –

Perversity is an impulse throughout humanity indicative of fluidity and the urge to pursue transition, knowledge, and perpetual motion. Deviation from what is deemed appropriate by sociocultural institutions is defined as *perverse*. But, as Poe and Sade have

asked: is not perversity proof of something deeper within humanity that suggests an inability to become static? Just as Nature changes during the year in Her perpetual cycle of the seasons and just as She is intrinsically linked to the creation and end of life, so too is humanity drawn to impulse in Nature's image. Sacher-Masoch's Wanda, Poe's women, Radcliffe's Emily and Adeline, and Sade's libertines all testify to the likeness between Nature and her subjects. Despite the efforts of church, state, and class, the individual has yet to be harnessed by static norms without a revolution or melodramatic melancholy. Although Severin was ultimately "cured" from his own sexual transgressions and returns to his initial identity, he, like Radcliffe's protagonists, has done so after a trying personal journey towards individual knowledge.

Individual embodiments of the perverse symbolize the perpetual transition of the Self that has become aware of its own intricacies and complexities and how these do not equate with sociocultural ideas of what is normal. Not only does this realization burden the individual, but it implicates the culture that ignores the individual voice and pushes the Self into a life of melancholy repression. As the narrator in "The Tell-Tale Heart" caves under the pressure of secluded secrecy, the individual must burst forth into the world with a passionate anger that can inspire the most violent impulses, such as those narrated in *The 120 Days of Sodom*. Perversity encompasses the aspects of the Self that cannot be explained, or are far too complex to be defined by the limited understandings that we, even now, hold of the purpose of humanity; although there are several fragmented aspects of perversion, the pursuit of knowledge is at the root. Thus, I have deliberately avoided seeking to define perversity in much the same way that the Marquis de Sade neglected to place a limit on his narratives of vice. If society as a Whole has yet to definitively characterize itself as a perpetually changing unit made up of even further fragmented individuals with their own fluid understandings based on biology, environment, reason, and ideas, then how is one individual able to take up arms and attempt to explain something that humanity as a whole cannot fully grasp? As Superverter hoped to do with *Perversity Think Tank*, I have aimed to inspire further dialogue on widespread definitions of perversion that are as misunderstood as the individuals it seeks to pathologize. Just as I have attempted to do with this thesis, Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, Edgar Allan Poe, Ann Radcliffe, and the Marquis de Sade have all attempted to illustrate the fluid (and ultimately perverse) aspects of the societies in which they lived.

Leopold von Sacher-Masoch defined perversity as a male preference to be Dominated by an otherwise submissive woman wearing furs. When Wanda's personality

transitions from an urge to please her lover to an urge to please only herself, Severin finds it difficult to live with himself (and Wanda) before she leaves him for The Greek – who fits society’s ideal of a proper masculine man. In this way, Sacher-Masoch illustrates the intricacies of masochism and the way in which the psychopathology of sexual deviance is even more fluid than Leopold von Krafft-Ebing would have his readers believe. Severin defines masochism as a vice that allows him to subvert norms of masculinity in a secretive environment; Wanda defines her role as a Dominant over the masochist to entirely control him and to even be in charge of the submissive’s very life should she choose to end it for her pleasure. In modern day Kink discourse, masochism is often defined as “Topping from the bottom” as the masochist ultimately decides what happens to them and has the power to revoke the Dominant’s power – but even this definition is rejected within some Kink communities.

In a period when masochism was thought to be a part of the biological makeup of a woman’s personality, in the sense that she is predisposed to be subservient to men and inclined to domestic duties, Leopold von Sacher-Masoch pushed the envelope with his literary suggestion that this theory was incorrect. *Venus in Furs* calls for the redefinition of masochism and suggests that even something previously thought to be mildly understood and pathologized was not. Being perverse is as simple as taking every “truth” and asking, *why?* Sacher-Masoch also utilized male masochism as a trope to examine the effect that rapidly industrializing culture had on the Self that previously experienced life within the rural countryside – the perpetual motion of Nature and the inward projection of uncertainty on a Self that is constantly forced to redefine what it thought it knew. In *Venus in Furs*, Sacher-Masoch subverts and reverts the male/female gender dichotomy and creates a hovering sense of ambiguity while utilizing sadomasochism as a perverse therapy to cause Severin and Wanda to return to their social roles as educated individuals who are aware of the fluidity of the human experience and what humanity is capable of if pushed hard enough.

Violent crimes of passion as an active response to repression and inward emotional violence upon the Self are a manifestation of the intrinsic perversity in humanity that is illustrated in Edgar Allan Poe’s works. The ever-present literary suggestiveness and supernatural elevation of struggles in his work represent the degree to which the individual will go to conceal the truth from others within the public sphere as well as the Self. Severin’s inward violence toward his own perversion is magnified within Poe’s narrators who are driven to murder objects of homoerotic lust or to perform acts of

perverse violence such as those within “The Tell-Tale Heart” and “The Black Cat”. The action in the non-action represented at the end of “The Man in the Crowd” suggests that the reader (and by extension the individual in their own life) must read what does not permit itself to be read – to always search for an alternative answer to what one is told to be correct. No one truly knows what happened between the narrator and the mysterious man when they made eye contact, but I am sure that *everyone* has *some* idea.

Poe’s perverse Imp lives within humanity and urges it to do things that we would not usually do. As the narrator steadfastly believes in “The Imp of the Perverse”, the urge to do wrong (especially when sobriety is questioned) comes from an “unconquerable force which impels us” to pursue our latent desires for the purpose of gaining knowledge. Edgar Allan Poe’s literary suggestiveness lends itself to the theme of forbidden knowledge. When his narrators commit murder or willingly engage in substance abuse, it is to silence something (or someone) from knowing (or announcing) the truth to anyone else (or to themselves); truth is separate yet permanently intertwined with desire in the way that there is no “One Truth”. Desire deliberately ignores the aspect of truth while constantly being afraid of it. Poe’s forbidden knowledge and suggestiveness tell the readers that if they can find something within his works, it is likely there. Poe intentionally left his prose open-ended to allow for a range of reader conclusions. In order to avoid public shame, the use of supernatural tropes further separates from institutional controls by reading what does not permit itself to be (openly) read.

The use of the supernatural as an examination of the individual perverse quest is Ann Radcliffe’s primary trope. Alongside the intellectual quest of her protagonists is a geographical quest to uncover secrets and explain the previously unexplained. Though Radcliffe’s protagonists return to their pasts, they do so after exhausting physical and intellectual quests and are therefore educated in their decisions rather than making them because their morality permits them to do so.

Perversion as a quest for knowledge is represented in Ann Radcliffe’s prose in the way that she entirely changes the Gothic from within the genre itself. Radcliffe’s Gothic forces the genre canon to redefine what it means to be a woman within the genre. Offering a woman’s voice in a genre that largely had relied on the male voice to narrate female experience, Ann Radcliffe suggests that things are not as they once seemed just as Sacher-Masoch did with the creation of his male masochist protagonist. Radcliffe’s reliance on Nature and Her unwavering unreliability further illustrates how humanity is overcome with melodramatic emotion when placed in a position to witness the magnitude

of Her ineffable glory such as the way in which Valancourt frequently seeks to woo Emily with his knowledge of the landscape around them on their travels to Udolpho. By creating a subgenre of the Gothic (like Poe and the Dark Romantic) as well as suggesting that men are capable of hysterical emotion, Ann Radcliffe adds to the discourse of gender and to the similarities between men and women.

The Marquis de Sade placed control in the hands of his libertines regardless of gender. Throughout his prose, sexuality is a one-sided pursuit of carnal and intellectual knowledge that does not have room to allow for the sexual victim to have autonomy; it is in this way that Sade elevates humanity to the unreal – think of this as a Sadeian version of the supernatural. *Justine: The Misfortunes of Virtue*, *Juliette: The Prosperities of Vice*, and *The 120 Days of Sodom* encompass perversion as the only means of individual freedom and deviation from institutional control. Depending on magnificently violent narratives to illustrate the aristocratic and religious hypocrisy of his time, Sade placed nobility and clergy in the role of sexual criminal and filled his expertly-constructed narratives with extensive atheistic philosophy. His familiar credo, “to know virtue, know vice” illustrates the inadequacies of a completely virtuous life and the dangerous ignorance this inspires in the individual. Like Sacher-Masoch, Poe, and Radcliffe, Sade also relies on the unreliable whims of Nature to describe the perverse Imp that lives within the Whole of humanity.

Sade is unique in the examination of perversity in the way that, unlike the rest of the authors focused on here, he pushes the individual violence of repression outwards onto the Sadeian victims rather than onto the libertines themselves. In targeting the Other, the Marquis de Sade deliberately takes the blame off the Self for being intrinsically perverse (since this is apparently the *only* thing we can guarantee, *en masse*, about humanity) and projects it onto the powers that be for demonizing the perverse in the first place. The interplay between sexuality, philosophy, life, and death in Sade illustrates the ever-present cycle of life and the pursuit of knowledge between birth and death; the ending of *The 120 Days of Sodom*, Sade’s philosophical summation suggests that there is something out there for everyone (especially in today’s world with the advent of the internet) and it is quite literally nobody’s business what another person’s sexual preferences are if the preferences do not involve the person passing judgement.

Finally, as illustrated in literature written by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, Edgar Allan Poe, Ann Radcliffe, and the Marquis de Sade, perversity is at the root of the quest for individual knowledge then (as well as now) in the way that we can look back between

1740 and 1895 to the present and see how far Western gender discourse has come. Queer Studies has and will continue to champion the option for the individual to identify themselves however they see fit. Although transgender, inter-sex, gender-variant, Queers, lesbians, gays, cross-dressers, and other wonderful Perverts have existed before written language, they have not necessarily enjoyed public sphere exposure in the ways that they do today. Similarly to how the above used their literary work to push the envelope and demand an answer to the question of *Why*, current academic discourse on perversion is continuing the pursuit. We may be no closer to concretely defining perversity, but we *are* closer to understanding that sometimes, not everything needs to have an explanation; that sometimes, *because* is a perfect answer. At the very end of the day, the chances are that nothing is what it initially seems and we must permit ourselves to read what does not permit itself to be read.

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