

BLACK CATS AND PUMA WOMEN: MARGINALIZED BODIES AND VIOLENCE
IN GOTHIC LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

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American and British Gothic literature has an extensive history of addressing social issues crucial to nineteenth-century discussions, with subjects of particular interest including race and gender. In the Gothic mode of literature, people of color and women are overtly represented as marginalized bodies. While scholarship recognizes this process, there are few studies that use an intersectional approach in their examination of marginalized bodies in Gothic literature. This study examines the intersectionality of violence against women and violence against people of color in nineteenth-century Gothic literature.

Additionally, in nineteenth-century American and British Gothic literature, there is a prevalence of authors depicting marginalized bodies via animal characters. The codification of marginalized bodies as animal figures allowed authors to comment on contemporary social issues without directly interacting with these controversial subjects. While this process is particularly notable in Poe's "The Black Cat," other authors similarly applied these motifs to their work. Using Poe's titular black cat as a narrative template, Stoker and Wells employ their own variations of the black cat archetype in their texts. This continuous application of an animal archetype conveys the prevalence of hybridized figures characterized by both their femininity and blackness. Moreover, these authors' overlapping depictions of gendered and racialized violence emphasizes the prevalence of abuse that these vulnerable populations faced. This study intends to

examine three authors' literary portrayals of violence against marginalized bodies and their correlations with historical conceptualizations of race and gender.

KEY WORDS: Gothic literature, Nineteenth-century literature, Marginalized bodies, Gendered violence, Racialized violence, Edgar Allan Poe, Bram Stoker, H. G. Wells.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Authors of the western literary canon have used the Gothic genre as a mode for social and political commentary since its origin in the eighteenth century. Among various Gothic conventions, otherness and the Other¹ are notable phenomena that occur in Gothic literature when authors represent marginalized groups of people—viewed as threatening to the dominant society—as monstrous “others.” These problematic representations convey societal attitudes about race, gender, and sexuality that serve to further alienate already vulnerable populations. Accordingly, scholars have historically approached the Gothic genre by applying race theory and postcolonial studies to effectively contextualize these texts. For the purposes of my analysis, I will examine representations of race in three pieces of Gothic fiction, including Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Black Cat” (1843), Bram Stoker’s “The Squaw” (1893), and H. G. [Herbert George] Wells’ *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896).

My primary argument is that these three authors, regardless of geographical location and national origin, use Gothic othering as a means of exploring race relations in the United States and Great Britain during the nineteenth century. Poe and Stoker use their narratives to critically examine racial issues in the United States such as slavery and the brutalities committed against American Indians, while Wells represents a genetically hybrid, animalistic group characterized by their blackness. Additionally, these authors use carefully crafted animalistic depictions to “other” these ethnic groups in their works,

¹ My use of the terms “otherness” and “the Other” refer to Edward Said’s work on Orientalism and the Western view of the non-Western Other. I further discuss my use of the terms otherness and the Other in my study.

allowing the authors to comment on race while simultaneously distancing themselves from contemporary discussions, such as the abolition of slavery, reconstruction, and the prevalence of racial violence. Finally, I will argue that Stoker and Wells, both of whom were undoubtedly familiar with Poe's work, use "The Black Cat" as a basis for creating their own versions of the tale to further explore changing race relations in their own places and times.

The Gothic and Race

Before examining the authors and their stories, however, it is necessary to discuss the complicated relationship between race and Gothic literature. In the now-classic *Love and Death in the American Novel*, first published in 1960, Leslie Fiedler discusses the divergence of American Gothic from its British predecessor, identifying the shift in focus from the fantastic to "the exaggerated and the grotesque, which impose themselves on us, not as they are verifiable in any external landscape or sociological observation of manners and men, but as they correspond in quality to our deepest fears and guilts as projected in our dreams or lived through in 'extreme situations'" (142). That is not to say that British Gothic literature refrains from addressing racial concerns; rather, it generally discusses issues of race in subtler terms than the American gothic. Western Gothic literature has an extensive history of conveying racialized others and representing monstrosity via "bodies pieced together out of the fabric of race, class, gender, and sexuality" (Halberstam 3). To better understand this concept, consider two of the most renowned pieces of Gothic literature to appear in the nineteenth century: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Both of these novels incorporate themes of race, class, gender, and sexuality and associate these subjects with otherness to comment

on race in the 1800s. Because the nineteenth century was rife with discussions of race and racism, it is not surprising that these topics infiltrated Western literature and were represented in the Gothic genre.

Additionally, the Gothic literary genre became increasingly prominent in Britain and the United States in the latter half of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century. Indeed, Gothic literature was particularly popular in the antebellum United States. As Eugenia DeLamotte indicates, “the rise and flowering of the Gothic novel in Britain and the U.S. between 1765 and 1855 coincides with the emergence and codification of modern conceptions of “race” as a biological division of humans into separate groups characterized by distinctive, non-overlapping physical, moral, intellectual, and emotional attributes” (18). However, unlike other literary genres of the time period, the Gothic mode provided authors with a nuanced way of interacting with race in their work, with writers often addressing the subject with subtlety. As H. L. Malchow suggests, the Gothic

offered a language that could be appropriated, consciously or not, by racists in a powerful and obsessively reiterated evocation of terror, disgust, and alienation. But the gothic literary sensibility itself also evoked in the context of an expanding experience of cultural conflict, of the brutal progress of European nationalism and imperialism, and was in part a construct of that phenomenon. (3)

To clarify Malchow’s argument, the inclusion of race and racial issues is essential to nineteenth-century Gothic literature, whether authors constructed representations of race purposely or incidentally. Furthermore, as Said argues, at this time in history, the

majority of Westerners were “racist...imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric” in their conceptualizations of race (204). Thus, my argument does not dwell on whether Poe, Stoker, and Well were racist men; instead, I examine their rhetoric and their representations of race that are indicative of a larger trend in Gothic literature both preceding and following the nineteenth century.

If these Gothic tropes of terror and alienation were to be summarized in briefer terms, it would likely be otherness and the other. For the purposes of my study, I apply Said’s usage of the other; however, rather than using Said’s definition to refer exclusively to the Orient, I argue that for the United States and Europe, Black and indigenous peoples act as representations of the “deepest and most recurring images of the Other” (1). In my discussion of otherness, I also apply Toni Morrison’s discussion of the “Africanist presence” as the other (6), since two of my literary selections portray overtly Black subjects. Additionally, as Ruth Bienstock Anolik suggests, “writers from many canons and cultures are attracted to the always anxious and transgressive Gothic as a ready medium for expression of racial and social anxieties, and are drawn to the horrifying and monstrous figure of the Gothic Other as a ready code for the figuration of these anxieties” (2). The fiction I have selected for my analysis conveys the complex themes of fear and alienation of the Other in relation to racialized portrayals of animal figures, such as Poe’s black cat and the general emphasis on blackness in Gothic literature.

In addition to the Other, another crucial Gothic motif is Freud’s concept of the “*unheimlich*,” or the uncanny. Freud defines the uncanny as “that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar” (85). In other words, the uncanny particularly disturbs individuals because it juxtaposes the familiar

with the unfamiliar. Additionally, Freud identifies the uncanny in the figure of the double, a classic Gothic trope that also employs juxtaposition. In the Gothic literature I examine, the authors use the figure of the double to examine the humanity of animals and the animality inherent in humans. As Carrie Rohman indicates, it is no surprise that there are clear connections between Freudian psychoanalysis and Gothic literature, which both, she argues, directly interacted with Darwin's theory of evolution and broader discussions of animality. She writes:

The concept of the unconscious in Freudian psychoanalysis operates as a modernist codification of the problem of animality in the human person. Freud himself hazards an explanation of humanity's rise from its animal heritage and theorizes that our repression of organicism simultaneously deanimalizes us and makes us human. Animality is consequently equated with neurosis in psychoanalytic terms since one must repress it in order to become, and remain, human. (*Stalking* 63)

Indeed, due to the increasing prevalence of psychological and biological examinations of humanity and animality as well as the general popularity of Gothic literature, these subjects were bound to overlap and influence the advancement of each other. Because of this, the uncanny is crucial to examinations of Gothic literature and its depictions of the animal versus the human.

It is no accident that the authors of these stories convey race and gender through the use of animal characters, particularly feline figures. As Kathleen Kene indicates in her study *The Beast in the Boudoir: Pet-Keeping in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, the female cat is closely associated with sexuality and promiscuity. In Poe's story, the second black

cat's biological sex is not described; however, the black cat figures in Stoker's and Wells' narratives are female and capable of reproduction, making them increasingly threatening to the white male narrators. Poe, Stoker, and Wells depict animalized, female characters who have acts of extreme violence committed against them. While these female figures are victims of abuse, they also commit retributive acts of aggression, defying gender norms and traditional portrayals of female characters in nineteenth-century literature. Accordingly, while my study examines the role of race in Gothic fiction, it also considers gender and intersecting modes of oppression.

By creating racialized depictions of animals in their work, Poe, Stoker, and Wells further exemplify the perceived differences between white American or European characters and beings with darker complexions who were perceived as animalistic. Moreover, the Gothic themes of darkness, perhaps better termed blackness in this context, the supernatural, and revenge are intricately connected to these animal figures, further emphasizing their racial and ethnic implications. These literary depictions of racialized figures are crucial for further examination of historical attitudes toward and representations of people of color in literature.

Poe's "The Black Cat"

The first chapter of my thesis will cover Poe's story "The Black Cat" and its connections to slavery and racism in the United States. In this story, the narrator, a drunkard, grows increasingly aggressive toward his pet cat Pluto, whom he claims, early on in the narrative, to love dearly. When the black cat bites him in self-defense, the narrator graphically and, importantly, "deliberately cut[s] one of its eyes from the socket" (*Writings* 350). This unnecessarily violent, cruel behavior culminates in the narrator

hanging the cat from a tree. When a similar black cat, having only one eye and a mark on its neck that looks like a noose, returns to the narrator's household, the narrator is again driven to madness and attempts to kill the cat, instead mortally wounding his wife. To conceal her corpse, he walls her up in the cellar while unknowingly trapping the live black cat in the wall along with his deceased wife. When the police arrive to investigate, the narrator remains calm and nonchalant, going so far as to boldly rap on the wall that conceals his wife's corpse. Suddenly, the cat emits a "long, loud, and continuous scream, utterly anomalous and inhuman" (355). Ultimately, it is the black cat's banshee-like scream that reveals the corpse's hiding place and leads to the narrator's arrest, as the black cat enacts revenge upon the narrator for his past atrocities.

Scholars have interpreted this story in a myriad of ways, but for the purposes of my argument, I will be using Lesley Ginsberg's article "Slavery and the Gothic Horror of Poe's 'The Black Cat'" as my starting point. Ginsberg links the domesticity in "The Black Cat" with master-slave relations in the antebellum South, presenting a compelling argument that connects Poe's story with larger discussions of chattel slavery. While Ginsberg's argument is further strengthened by Poe's title, which emphasizes the blackness of the cat, significantly, she does not identify crucial textual details that exemplify the cat's blackness and racialization. This includes the narrator's unnecessarily violent choice to murder a black animal by hanging, or lynching, it from a tree. The then-contemporary and modern associations with lynching Black bodies link Poe's story with slavery and the history of atrocities committed against African Americans in the United States. Moreover, scholars have also connected the second cat's appearance to issues of

race, associating the white spot on the cat's chest with vitiligo² and perceptions of racial mixing (Person 218). The racial elements of "The Black Cat" are stark and can no longer be considered mere undertones in a decidedly racialized narrative.

Similarly, the connection between animal cruelty and violence against women has been overlooked in Poe's story. While Ginsberg links the theme of animal cruelty with slavery, indicating that slaves and household pets were connected in literary traditions, she does not consider the relationship between the narrator's cruelty toward animals and his violent behavior toward his wife that culminates in her premature death. Traditionally, housecats were considered women's companions and were closely associated with the female sex (Kete 126). Although Ginsberg broaches this element of the text, discussing historic portrayals of women and their pets that mimic representations of masters and slaves in literature, the glaring aspect of violence against women is ultimately overlooked and will be covered further in my analysis.

In addition to initiating discussions of representations of race and gender, "The Black Cat" has also introduced conversations surrounding psychological studies, especially in regards to the narrator's psyche. Fred Madden has linked the discomfiting, eerie tone of the story with the uncanny, arguing that the cats that are characterized by their blackness evoke the uncanny and disturb Poe's narrator. Similarly, Sean J. Kelly connects Poe's use of the perverse, illustrated in the author's short story "The Imp of the Perverse," with Kantian discussions of perversion and the dualities of the rational and the irrational as well as the animal and the human (81). As I will emphasize, Poe's use of the uncanny and the perverse correlate with racial anxieties in antebellum America.

² Vitiligo is a skin condition in which patches of the skin lose pigmentation and appear paler in comparison to other skin.

Stoker's "The Squaw"

In my second chapter, I will discuss Bram Stoker's "The Squaw" and the portrayal of American racial anxieties through an Irish author's perspective. However, before discussing Stoker's story, it is imperative to address his national origins and their significance. Stoker was born in Dublin in 1847 to a mother who had survived the cholera epidemic during her own childhood in Sligo (Hopkins 23). It is suggested that Stoker's mother's habit of storytelling inspired his desire to write fiction (23). In 1876, Stoker became acquainted with the playwright Henry Irving, and the two became close friends; scholar Jeffrey Richards suggests that after Stoker's father's death earlier that year, Irving acted as a paternal figure for Stoker (Richards 144). Indeed, Irving's influence on Stoker can be observed in Stoker's mention of Irving at the beginning of "The Squaw", in which the author writes, "Nurnberg at the time was not so much exploited as it has been since then. Irving had not been playing *Faust*" (Stoker 37). Two years later, Stoker would leave Dublin for London (Hopkins 89), where he would write his most renowned text, *Dracula*.

Creating a cross-cultural narrative that parallels his own encounters with different nations and cultures, Stoker begins his tale by introducing the presumably British narrator and his newly wedded wife on their honeymoon in Nuremberg where they meet the American Elias P. Hutcheson. When walking by what once was the wall of a moat, the group spies a "great black cat" with her kitten at the bottom of the pit (Stoker 38). Hutcheson throws a rock down the moat hoping to startle the two cats, but instead brains the kitten. The mother cat becomes enraged and Hutcheson compares her hatred to an Apache squaw whom he had killed, noting the "blind unreasoning fury" in her eyes (Stoker 41). Hutcheson relates to the narrator that the Apache squaw stalked his

acquaintance Splinters, a “half-breed”³ who had violently killed the squaw’s baby (40). Stoker reveals that Splinters killed the infant as vengeance for the violent death of his own mother, who had been killed by Apaches. Consequently, the childless squaw carefully stalks Splinters over three years before killing him slowly and agonizingly. The frame narrative ends here, with Hutcheson proudly declaring that he “wiped her out” (42), continuing the cycle of violence.

However, this pattern of cyclical violence does not end there. Like the Apache squaw who stalked Splinters, the mother cat stalks the group as they wander through a torture chamber.⁴ With bravado, Hutcheson insists on being trapped inside the infamous Iron Virgin⁵. While the custodian maintains control over the torture device by pulling a rope that opens it, keeping the device from closing completely on the American, this semblance of control is quickly eliminated when the cat springs upon the custodian. By brutally attacking him, the cat causes the custodian to release the rope that holds the Iron Virgin open, culminating in the heavy door closing on Hutcheson and fatally impaling him. The grisly tale ends with the black cat having successfully avenged the death of her kitten, like the squaw from Hutcheson’s internal narrative.

Stoker’s use of an animal other is more overt than Poe’s, especially with the parallels he draws between the black cat and the Apache squaw. He immediately anthropomorphizes the cat, giving her the human traits of fury and hatred as well as the

³ The pejorative term “half-breed” refers to an individual of mixed race. H. L. Malchow further examines the relation between racialization and the gothic in his chapter, “The Half-Breed as Gothic Unnatural.”

⁴ This likely refers to the torture chamber located in Nuremberg Castle during the Middle Ages. Today, the chamber remains open to the public and available for tours.

⁵ The Iron Virgin (or iron maiden) is a medieval torture device composed of a hollow cabinet with a spiked interior that was intended to impale victims. The Nuremberg Iron Virgin is considered the most notorious of these devices.

motive of avenging the death of her child. Scholars have suggested that the cat is the actual embodiment of the squaw, successfully killing her aggressor at the end of the story (Sutherland 606). Significantly, Stoker uses the antagonist, Hutcheson, to criticize the treatment of American Indians in the United States during the nineteenth century. In his creation of Hutcheson, Stoker may have had a certain individual in mind. Louis S. Warren suggests that in addition to criticizing American attitudes toward Native Americans, Stoker bases Hutcheson's character on William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody since the two met while Stoker was visiting the United States with Henry Irving. In any case, Stoker's portrayals of the Apache squaw and Hutcheson complicate traditional literary depictions of interactions between American Indians and frontiersmen. Stoker's story, like Poe's, concludes with a black cat enacting revenge on a man for his abhorrent actions.

In order to examine the correlation between the two stories, it is imperative to examine the similarities and differences in Poe's and Stoker's narratives. While both stories incorporate racialized, animalistic others, Poe's cat represents the terrorized Black slave while Stoker's cat parallels his depictions of a tormented Apache woman. Importantly, Fiedler identifies these exact figures as crucial subjects of American gothic, noting "not the aristocrat but the Indian, not the dandified courtier but the savage colored man is postulated as the embodiment of villainy" (148). Although the majority of Stoker's narrative takes place outdoors, it nevertheless integrates the domestic by representing a newlywed couple on their honeymoon that greatly contrasts Hutcheson's status as a bachelor. The narrator's wife signifies stereotypical feminine reactions to horrific scenarios, including swooning and fainting multiple times. Stoker's exaggerated

depictions of femininity and masculinity parallel Poe's own hyperbolic representations of gender.

Significantly, both narratives involve extreme violence toward women, although the abuse that the titular Apache squaw experiences has already occurred by the time the main storyline takes place. In both narratives, the black cat figure takes revenge upon their male aggressor, but in Stoker's version, the black cat's retributive violence ends when the narrator kills her. Although the narrator claims to kill the cat in self-defense, he only continues the cycle of violence that is addressed numerous times throughout the story. While there has been previous scholarship tying Poe's and Stoker's stories together, there has been less discussion of the intersecting violence and racial coding that Stoker uses in his narrative. However, Stoker's portrayal of American imperialistic cruelty is compelling and should be examined further. Additionally, Stoker's unique position as an Irish author portraying American and British imperialistic attitudes is worthy of further study.

Despite their similarities, few scholars have connected Poe's and Stoker's tales; indeed, "The Squaw" has remained largely unexplored in scholarship. While Kevin Corstorphine connects the two stories based on their correlating plotlines and elements, he does not address the monstrous other that both authors use in their portrayals of racialized, animalistic figures. Similarly, Maisha L. Wester notes that "The Squaw" is "Stoker's own version of Poe's black cat" (159) but does not address the racialized others that appear in both stories. Indeed, while "The Squaw" was influenced by Poe's original story, as evinced by Stoker's inclusion of corresponding plot elements like the black cat, murder, and revenge, it also depicts a racialized, Gothic Other who is more than capable

of committing monstrosities. Moreover, Stoker provides a unique perspective on American imperialism and colonialism by writing as an Irish individual in Britain that should not be ignored in critical discussions of representations of race in Gothic literature.

Wells' *The Island of Doctor Moreau*

The third chapter of my thesis will address Herbert George Wells' novel *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. While this novel has traditionally been categorized within the science fiction genre, its inclusion of the uncanny and Otherness place it within Gothic literature. In Wells' narrative, the protagonist Edward Prendick is the victim of an unfortunate shipwreck and is rescued by men working for Doctor Moreau, a mysterious man who has been rumored to dabble in the abhorrent science of vivisection. Many of Moreau's men unnerve Prendick, as they appear oddly humanlike yet inhuman, having animalistic features such as jaws that project forward and large teeth that create grotesque appearances. Shortly after the group arrives at the island, Moreau begins experimenting on a female puma that his crew have brought to him. After discussing the scientist's work in detail with him, Prendick learns that Moreau has been working tirelessly to create humanlike beings from animal bodies. Believing that many of the beings he has thus encountered are animal-human hybrids, Prendick is horrified and flees into the forest, fearing that he will serve as the next experiment for Moreau. However, as he later explains to Prendick, Moreau does not intend to experiment on humans but instead, only on animals. While Prendick is safe from Moreau's repugnant work, animals like the puma are not. Eventually, the puma escapes from Moreau's laboratory into the forest, where Moreau pursues her and the two ultimately kill one another in a struggle. Before

dying, the puma successfully enacts revenge on her aggressor for his violence toward her and the other animals.

Significantly, the puma and the other Beast Folk, or Moreau's other animal hybrid creations, are characterized by their blackness and their uncanny appearances. Until Prendick learns his name, one of Moreau's men, M'ling, is tellingly referred to as either the "black-faced creature" or the "black-faced man" (Wells 13-17). If the correlation between race and animality was not already overt to the reader, Wells employs racialized language when describing the Beast Folk, including the Ape Man who is a "fair specimen of the negroid type" (76). While many scholars have examined the animality of Wells' Beast Folk, few have examined the interactions between animality and race in the text. For instance, Carrie Rohman has argued that, "while Wells's account of this [human-animal] confrontation is partly racialized...it is most directly a study of humanity's animal nature rather than its racial nature" (*Stalking* 64). However, in my analysis, I argue that Wells' racialization of the Beast Folk is overt and cannot be overlooked.

Similarly, the intersections between race and gender in the text can no longer be ignored. The female puma is characterized by her blackness and exoticism, which makes her an intriguing specimen for Moreau. Moreover, the pain which the puma experiences from Dr. Moreau's experimentations is overtly described, with Prendick constantly hearing her cries and screams of agony, concluding, "it was as if all the pain in the world had found a voice" (38). In other words, Wells focuses on the suffering of Black, feminine bodies to further his commentary on race. Despite her oppression, this racialized female character manages to escape and retaliates against her antagonist. Although the puma ultimately dies, her murder of Moreau is justified when compared to the senseless

torment and anguish he has caused her and her peers. Like Poe's and Stoker's black cats, the puma woman takes revenge on her aggressor by enacting lethal violence against him.

Conclusion

I have chosen to critically examine these three narratives by Poe, Stoker, and Wells by examining the authors' depictions of Gothic Others and monstrosity in their portrayals of varying racial and ethnic groups. In addition, I argue, these texts convey recurring content, themes, and symbolism, relating to racialized and gendered depictions. In their respective story and novella, Stoker and Wells reimagine Poe's tale and recreate the narrative to reflect British anxieties regarding race and gender. My intent in analyzing these stories is to highlight the racialized othering that is characteristic of the Gothic genre, to further explore the popularity of the Gothic genre in nineteenth-century literature, and to better understand the racial implications of Gothic literature in Western culture.

CHAPTER II

“My Hatred of the Beast”: Violence in Poe’s “The Black Cat”

When discussing the complexities and nuances of Gothic literature, few authors have crafted their narratives as carefully as Poe. Along with elements of the supernatural, many of Poe’s works are characterized by their resonant depictions of race, gender, and violence. While scholars have previously examined portrayals of race and slavery in “The Black Cat,” I have taken an intersectional approach and analyze Poe’s depictions of violence toward both people of color and women. For the purposes of my analysis, I first examine the setting of the domestic, its relevance to Poe’s depictions of gender, and the violence inherent in nineteenth-century gender norms. I next include a brief historical analysis of the significance of cats in nineteenth-century American and European society and the prevalence of violence committed against these animals. Finally, elaborating on Lesley Ginsberg and Toni Morrison’s work, I discuss the black cat as an allegorical figure and its literary and historical connections to slavery and violence. As I have found, Poe’s story emphasizes the prevalence of violence against marginalized bodies, including people of color and women, in the United States during the nineteenth century.

The Setting of the Domestic

In the first sentence of “The Black Cat,” Poe’s narrator describes his tale as a “most wild, yet most homely narrative” (*Writings* 348). Later, in the same paragraph, he labels the story he is about to tell as a “series of mere household events” (349). This phrasing is immediately off-putting, as the words “wild” and “homely” are not often located concurrently with one another. However, even if the narrator’s introduction may not initially appear to be odd or out of place, readers will soon find themselves caught off

guard by the juxtaposition of these casual comments and the abhorrent violence found within the narrative. Indeed, as Heidi Hanrahan notes, this story is a “decidedly different ‘homely narrative’” (42), an account that diverges from other nineteenth-century narratives. However, it is no coincidence that the majority of Poe’s story occurs inside the home; rather, Poe is completely aware that the homestead is the epitome of the domestic space and uses this setting to reinforce the gender dynamics he portrays in his narrative.

While nineteenth-century American household structures differed among the north and south, an idealized portrait of the American home came to cement itself in society. As historian Ann G. Richter explains, “beginning in the 1820s, the home emerged as a sentimental and celebrated space apart from the public world of commerce and politics, competition and corruption” (1). Moreover, “the emergence of the new domestic ideal was itself inseparable from changing economic relations and the rise of the urban middle class” (1-2). Although the home was intended to be a private space, separate from the rest of society, it nevertheless remained a social and political space. The social structure of the family informed the education of masculinity and femininity in young children and reinforced gender norms. In nineteenth-century America, the household also became the ideal feminine space, with wives and mothers caring for family members in the home. However, “even as home came to be celebrated as a woman’s space, men continued to exert authority over it” (Richter 12). Men were the sole homeowners and held command over their wives and children, while the latter were expected to be seen and not heard. Although Poe’s story initially portrays the idyllic American home, he shows how quickly and easily this domestic space can be corrupted.

However, as Poe alludes in “The Black Cat” and elsewhere, the domestic space can be corrupted in multiple ways. While the wife suffers the narrator’s abuse before the animals, it appears that the inclusion of the animals in the home exacerbates his violence. More specifically, the black cat agitates the narrator, and, he claims, provokes him into committing increasingly violent acts against the household pets and his wife. As Hanrahan suggests, like the system of chattel slavery, the system of domesticity, “set up to control uncontrollable impulses, brings violence out of the *master* instead of the animal” (49; emphasis in original). It is notable that the term master has duality, referring to the homeowner or landowner as well as the slaveowner. As we will see, relationships between marginalized bodies and their oppressors were more often than not marked by extreme violence.

Early on in Poe’s narrative, the narrator describes himself as a sensitive youth who seemingly respects the sanctity of life in humans and animals. However, after the narrator marries young and procures multiple household pets, he becomes an alcoholic who grows increasingly more abusive toward his wife and animals. While some scholars such as Hanrahan have suggested that the narrator is initially violent toward the animals before turning on his wife, the text suggests the opposite. The narrator first discusses the verbal and physical abuse he directs at his wife before addressing his violence toward the animals, and lastly states that “even Pluto began to experience the effects of my ill temper” (*Writings* 350), as if his cat Pluto⁶, as the favored pet, had not experienced the narrator’s cruelty beforehand. This violence escalates to the point that the narrator

⁶ For clarity, I will refer to the first cat in Poe’s story as Pluto, the name that the narrator gives him. The second, unnamed cat will be referred to as such, since it is unclear whether the second cat is a reincarnation of Pluto or another cat entirely.

“grasped the poor beast by the throat, and deliberately cut one of its eyes from the socket” (350). Later, the narrator kills the cat by hanging it from a tree for seemingly no other reason than knowing that doing so is morally wrong on many accounts. The narrator’s increasingly violent acts “indicate a resistance to the promises of domesticity: the calming and wholesome effects of a healthy, happy home” (Hanrahan 40). By turning the traditionally blissful domestic setting into a Gothic one, Poe comments on the possibility for the idyllic American household to become a perversion of domesticity.

Significantly, the night after Poe’s narrator kills Pluto, the homestead is physically and irreparably affected by a fire, lying in “ruins” (*Writings* 351). While house fires were a legitimate concern and highly plausible in nineteenth-century America, the expeditiousness of the fire after Pluto’s murder implies the cause and effect of the housefire. Additionally, Poe’s descriptions of the fire evoke the Miltonian imagery of hell. The “cry of fire” rouses the narrator from sleep, and, to his horror, “the curtains of my bed were in flames. The whole house was blazing” (351). Furthermore, it is difficult not to interpret the incident as a direct consequence of the narrator’s actions, particularly when he notes the bas-relief in the shape of the cat that is left upon the wall above where his bed once stood. Moreover, the engraved image frightens the narrator, and he tellingly refers to the image as an “apparition” (351), suggesting that the creature has returned from the grave. After murdering his once beloved pet cat, the narrator has created a fiery hell on earth for himself. Significantly, shortly after Pluto’s death and the fire, a second cat appears; however, it is unclear whether this cat is, as the narrator claims, an apparition, a reincarnation of Pluto, or another cat entirely. By turning the heavenly home into a fiery inferno, Hanrahan writes, Poe “merges the gothic and the domestic and thus

implicitly raises questions about domesticity's potential for containing our darker desires and impulses" (40). In other words, Poe combines the supernatural elements of the Gothic genre with the domestic setting of the household, noting the potential for extraordinary horror and violence in the everyday. Having been destroyed by fire, the household is now literally and irrevocably a fallen home, foreshadowing the entirely failed home that is soon to follow.

Poe's portrait of the fallen home is complete when the narrator, in his attempt to kill the second cat, kills his wife instead. While the narrator felt immense sorrow over Pluto's death, he is seemingly apathetic after his wife's murder. The narrator's murder of Pluto evokes "the bitterest remorse" within him, and he with tears streaming down his face as he hangs him (*Writings* 351). Yet when the narrator kills his wife, his reaction is entirely methodical as he ponders the disposal of her corpse; he considers "cutting the corpse into minute fragments, and destroying them by fire," digging "a grave for *it* in the floor of the cellar," or "casting *it* in the well in the yard" (354; emphasis mine). Tellingly, the narrator refers to his wife's corpse as an object rather than as her remains, signifying his detachment. Kate Ferguson Ellis has explained "it is the failed home that appears on [Gothic] pages, the place from which some (usually 'fallen' men) are locked out, and others (usually 'innocent' women) are locked in" (ix). In his usual hyperbolic style, Poe takes this process a step further by not only locking the wife in, but literally walling her in, or entombing her, in the home forever. Even in death, she cannot escape the house that has become her prison. As Leland S. Person aptly expresses, "Poe transforms this particular domestic 'angel' into an uncomplaining victim and then, finally, into a corpse. The Angel in the House becomes the Dead Wife in the Basement" ("Gender" 134). By

illustrating a grim portrait of domesticity, Poe criticizes nineteenth-century gender constructs and norms in America.

Depictions of Gender

Poe's depictions of nineteenth-century femininity and masculinity are hyperbolic to the degree that it can be difficult to take them seriously, especially when one considers the protagonist is an unreliable narrator. For instance, Poe conveys the subordinate, silent wife in his writing, with his narrator relating some of the wife's commentary without directly quoting her or even allowing her to speak for herself. While the narrator is permitted to speak in his own retelling of the events, and indeed speaks aloud toward the end of the narrative, the wife remains silent and passive. Unlike Poe's other female characters, she is not even given a name; apparently, Pluto has more autonomy than the sole female character in the story. On the other hand, Poe's narrator is such a violent, crazed man that he appears more like a caricature than a fully fleshed out character. Indeed, Poe's nearly cartoonish portrayal of masculinity ultimately overpowers femininity, with the narrator ending his wife's life by his own hand. By intentionally overexaggerating these characters, Poe criticizes American representations of gender norms instead of strengthening these traditional roles. The narrator's overt masculinity is contrasted with his wife's excessive docility, further clarifying the perceived gender differences in American society. Rather than reinforcing harmful gender norms, however, Poe hyperbolizes nineteenth-century ideals of masculinity and femininity to highlight their absurdity.

Many scholars have worked to determine exactly why, in this particular narrative, Poe's depictions of gender roles are overstated. Ann V. Bliss makes the compelling

argument that as a young man, the narrator is more closely associated with the feminine than the masculine, based on his adoration for animals and his relatively quiet nature. The narrator explains that as a child, “I was especially fond of animals, and was indulged by my parents with a great variety of pets. With these I spent most of my time, and never was so happy as when feeding and caressing them” (*Writings* 349). However, after he is married and has adopted his own animals, the narrator becomes an angry and violent drunkard who abuses the animals he claims to have once loved dearly. Perhaps, after perceiving his wife’s docility and deference to her husband and the household pets, the narrator recognizes his own relative femininity and seeks to reject it outright. However, in doing so, the narrator summons what Cyndy Hendershot has termed the “animal within,” which “threatened to usurp masculine rationality and return man to a state of irrational chaos” (*Animal Within* 97). The narrator’s status as a fallen man only exacerbates his alcoholism, his violence toward his wife and pets, and his irrationality.

The narrator himself concludes that his ultimate undoing is alcoholism, and yet this may not be entirely true. As T. J. Matheson indicates, while the narrator uses his addiction as a scapegoat, in reality, he commits his cruelest actions while he is sober (77). For example, when the narrator murders Pluto, he does so “in cool blood” and is fully aware that he is “committing a sin” (*Writings* 351). Moreover, when the narrator kills his wife, he makes no mention of alcohol and seemingly feels no remorse for murdering her, unlike Pluto’s murder. Instead, it appears that the narrator’s capacity for violence and cruelty is existent long before he becomes a drunkard. While Poe includes numerous reasons for the narrator’s relatively sudden tendency toward violence, his explanation that is perhaps the most persuasive is what he terms “the spirit of perverseness” (350).

Poe's concept of perverseness allows for the reasoning behind a character's motive to be a lack of reasoning altogether. This permits the narrator in "The Black Cat" to commit atrocious crimes for seemingly no logical reason, as he himself explains:

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 judgment, to violate that which is *Law*, merely because we understand it to be such? This spirit of perverseness, I say, came to my final overthrow. It was this unfathomable longing of the soul *to vex itself*—to offer violence to its own nature—to do wrong for the wrong's sake only—that urged me to continue and finally to consummate the injury I had inflicted upon the offending brute. (*Writings* 350; emphasis in original)

As Poe indicates, the narrator offers violence not only to others, but unto his very soul. This suggests a combination of sadistic and masochistic behavior present in the narrator's psyche.⁷ In other words, the narrator makes the decision to kill Pluto exactly because he knows that it is morally wrong. Compellingly, Poe's narrator argues that "perverseness is one of the primitive impulses of the human heart—one of the indivisible primary faculties, or sentiments, which give direction to the character of Man" (350). This lack of reasoning is further illustrated in Poe's story "The Imp of the Perverse," in which a similar narrator commits a crime because he is cognitively aware that it is the wrong action to take. Poe explains that when overcome by the spirit of perverseness, "we act for the reason that we should *not*. In theory, no reason can be more unreasonable, but

⁷ This examination of the narrator does not include a complete psychological analysis of the narrator, as this is an extensive study that would require additional research.

in reality there is none so strong. With certain minds, under certain circumstances, it becomes absolutely irresistible” (403; emphasis in original). This discussion of “certain minds, under certain circumstances” is intriguing, as Poe implies that some people are more likely to be affected by perverseness than others. Perhaps, in this brief passage, Poe suggests that men are more likely to be influenced by the spirit of perverseness than women, due to their overt and toxic masculinity.

By writing unreliable and illogical male narrators in his stories, Poe claims that these narrators’ innate violence and cruelty are based in flawed reasoning that is exacerbated by their overt masculinity. Indeed, as Gero Bauer explains, “Gothic fiction not only criticises the objectification of women, and their exposure to potential psychological and physical violence at the hands of patriarchal tyranny, but also constructs masculinity, in terms of patriarchal-homosocial power (economical, sexual, epistemological), as inherently paranoid and flawed” (25). Bauer’s discussion of an overwhelmingly paranoid and flawed masculinity once again relates to Poe’s concept of perverseness. Poe’s male narrators, characterized by their innate perverseness, convey a toxic masculinity that is harmful to those that must live with them. As is shown, the narrator’s wife and his pets are increasingly endangered by his ferocity and brutality.

On the other hand, Poe’s exaggerated depictions of femininity are also supported by Bauer’s extensive scholarship on masculinity in the Gothic novel. As Bauer clarifies, “the Gothic novel juxtaposes ideals of the ‘feminine home’ as a safe haven...with the fact that this home can be a stifling prison” (24). Indeed, Poe ups the ante by portraying the home as not only a prison but a death sentence for the narrator’s wife. Lesley Ginsberg offers additional perspective into Poe’s narrator, explaining that “the unspoken family

politics behind the story reveals a tyrant who enjoys...full privileges...while his dependent wife bears the brunt of his growing addiction to domestic power” (107). The narrator’s wife remains silent and subservient despite her husband’s increase in violence and control over her, which culminates in her violent death. While many of the various household pets suffer the narrator’s abuse, his wife is the one who is the ultimate victim of violence. When she prevents the narrator from harming the second cat, she instead is fatally wounded. Bauer explains that historically, “in a continuum of sex and gender relations, men used to measure their ‘manliness’ according to their virility and physical power over other men and women” (15). The narrator’s fatal blow to his wife embodies this physical power over his spouse and the conquest of masculinity over femininity. However, Poe portrays this masculinity as fragile and flawed, as is seen in the story’s climax.

After the narrator has walled off his wife’s corpse in the cellar, he feels practically invincible. Even when the police arrive a mere four days after the murder, he feels overconfident in convincing the officers of his innocence. In fact, it is the narrator’s overwhelming pride and arrogance that lead him to rap upon the wall in which his wife is entombed while accompanied by the officers. The sound causes the second cat, whom he unknowingly interred along with his wife, to react by screaming from within the wall, exposing the corpse’s location. Although the narrator blames the cat for revealing his secret, he has, in fact, done so himself. By boldly knocking on the wall with his cane, itself an act of extreme disrespect and violence on his wife’s grave, he reveals the location of her corpse. It is the narrator’s toxic masculinity and arrogance that ultimately unveils his crime and seals his fate; in other words, the narrator is certain of his security

and innocence. Poe is fully aware of his narrator's explicit masculinity and allows his narrator to temporarily believe he has triumphed over femininity by killing his wife. However, like many of Poe's female characters, she has a presence from beyond the grave, signifying the enduring existence of gender roles in nineteenth-century American society.

The Historical Significance of Cats

Along with its poignant portrayals of domesticity and gender roles, "The Black Cat" highlights the growing importance of the cat, a household pet that came to prominence in the 1800s, and its relationship to domesticity. As Hanrahan notes, Poe's narrative portrays "inexplicable violence directed toward the domestic cat, an innocent and loved creature that, in the nineteenth century, increasingly came to serve as a marker of domestic bliss and success" (42). However, this was not always the case, and societal attitudes toward cats were historically much less kind. Historian Kathleen Kete indicates that for some time, the cat "was the anti-pet of nineteenth-century bourgeois life, associated with sexuality and marginality, qualities the cat inherited from medieval and early modern times when cats were sometimes burned as witches" (Kete 115). Although Pluto is not burned in the housefire, his image is revealed in the bas-relief, and the fire occurs shortly after his death. Similarly, the second cat appears shortly after the fire, associating the feline characters with fire and burning. Furthermore, the narrator acknowledges the link between cats and superstition by referencing his wife's commentary on the matter, in which she "made frequent allusion to the ancient popular notion, which regarded all black cats as witches in disguise" (*Writings* 349). While the

narrator describes this notion as ancient, it is nevertheless popular as well as crucial to Poe's link between the cat and the supernatural, as is soon illustrated in his story.

In addition to being associated with witchcraft and the supernatural, cats have historically been associated with femininity and sexuality. According to the eighteenth-century French naturalist Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, female cats are more sexually driven than males, to the extreme of "the female [forcing] herself on an often reluctant male" (Kete 118-119).⁸ Indeed, the cat was viewed as "sexually charged, independent, dangerous, egotistical, and cruel" (116), all of which would have been extremely dangerous traits for nineteenth-century women to have. These women would have been perceived as deviant and would have likely been targets of violence. However, Poe's narrator's wife is the exact opposite of this description, as she is seemingly sexually dormant, dependent on her husband, and kind toward him even after he has begun abusing her. Instead, the narrator's wife is intended to be a foil for the figure of the two cats, who ultimately have more agency and freedom to roam than the confined wife. Because of these connections between cats, witchcraft, and hypersexuality, there is an extensive history of violence toward felines, with the animals being ritualistically murdered as late as the twentieth century (119). However, societal attitudes at large began to shift during the nineteenth century, when cats began to be viewed with more leniency and compassion (116-117).

By the latter half of the nineteenth century, the housecat was seen as "feminine, philosophical, or both" (Kete 126). In other words, the cat became the ideal companion for women of the household and was also the signifier of the intellectually elite. As Kete

⁸ In her work on animals in the nineteenth century, Kete has translated Buffon's work from the original French to English, so I have accordingly cited her as the source for this quotation.

explains, “the companionship of a like-minded animal became a trope of intellectuals, the cat a sign for the literary life” (124). Moreover, Hanrahan adds, “Poe wrote his story at a pivotal moment in the American tradition of animal care, when pets increasingly enjoyed prominent places in households of all classes, but especially those of middle and upper classes or those aspiring to join those classes” (47). As such, many nineteenth-century authors’ homes were inhabited by feline companions and the cat quickly became the epitome of the household pet, particularly for writers such as Poe and Hawthorne. For instance, in his journal, Hawthorne noted that “only two things could make his home even more blissful: ‘a more convenient water supply and a kitten’” (Hanrahan 43-44). Similarly, Poe’s wife Virginia’s pet cat kept her company while she was terminally ill (Quinn 524). It is unclear whether or not this cat is the same pet that Poe refers to in his essay, “Impulse vs Reason—A Black Cat,” in which he discusses his pet cat’s intelligence. In this essay, Poe describes the cat’s ability to open doors independently:

She first springs from the ground to the guard of the latch (which resembles the guard over a gun-trigger,) and through this she thrusts her left arm to hold on with. She now, with her right hand, presses the thumb-latch until it yields, and here several attempts are frequently requisite. Having forced it down, however, she seems to be aware that her task is but half accomplished, since, if the door is not pushed open before she lets go, the latch will again fall into its socket. She, therefore, screws her body round so as to bring her hind feet immediately beneath the latch, while she leaps with all her strength from the door — the impetus of the spring forcing it open,

and her hind feet sustaining the latch until this impetus is fairly given.

(paragraph 3)

Interestingly, Poe describes the cat's intelligence as proudly and repeatedly as a parent highlighting their young child's abilities. Indeed, Poe's admiration for his pet makes her seem more like a daughter or beloved member of the family rather than a mere housecat. Many authors began examining animal intelligence and emotion in their work, and, as Hanrahan indicates, the "house cat often occupied a key position in these inquiries into the domestic" (43). Clearly, the cat played an important role in nineteenth-century familial structures and domestic settings.

However, as humans and animals began to coexist more peacefully within the home, the line between human and animal became even more blurred. Hanrahan adds that Poe's discussion of animals being "more like humans than we might think...carries an implicit corollary: people are more like animals than they might like to admit, and the very boundaries that distinguish humanity and reason from animality and impulse are murkier than they may appear" (48). Additionally, Charles Darwin's groundbreaking study *On the Origin of Species* was published in 1859, introducing the concept of evolution and forever changing humanity's understanding of animal processes (Berra 66). As Deborah Denenholz Morse and Martin A. Danahay explain, "the effect of Darwin's ideas was both to make the human more animal and the animal more human, destabilizing boundaries in both directions" (2). This concept of the human becoming more animal and vice versa can be located across nineteenth-century Western literature.

Importantly, "The Black Cat" is by no means Poe's only story to examine the intersections of humanity and animality. For instance, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue"

addresses an animal killer, an orangutan, whose “nonhuman form challenges the very principle of accountability” (Peterson 153). Similarly, in “Hop-Frog,” the eponymous character enacts revenge upon his antagonists by dressing them as orangutans before killing them in retribution for their abuse. As human and animal relations became increasingly more significant in the domestic sphere, authors like Poe began to examine the thin line delineating human and non-human. “The Black Cat” in particular showcases a human narrator who increasingly appears more inhuman and bestial than the black cat itself.

The Black Cat as Allegory

At a time when much nineteenth-century literature was racially coded, it is significant that the titular character of Poe’s story, the cat, is characterized by its blackness. The narrator describes the cat as a “remarkably large and beautiful animal, entirely black, and sagacious to an astonishing degree” (*Writings* 349), apparently enraptured by its blackness. Moreover, Poe’s narrator refers to the cat by a variety of pejorative names, including “brute,” “beast,” “creature,” and “monster” (350-355).⁹ Although the narrator names the cat Pluto, after the lord of Hell or the underworld (Thompson 349), the cat is referred to as these various terms just as much if not more than its given name, highlighting the importance of this rhetoric. On numerous occasions, the narrator explains that he acts violently toward Pluto not necessarily because the cat has provoked him, but because he can, clearly outlining the power that the narrator holds over the animal. When the second cat appears, the narrator immediately feels intimidated by it, and wishes to harm it while simultaneously being afraid of it. Ultimately, Pluto is hanged,

⁹ These terms are also used throughout Mary Shelley’s novel *Frankenstein* (1818), a foundational work of Gothic literature with which Poe would undoubtedly have been familiar.

or lynched, from a tree in cold blooded murder. In many ways, Poe's story and the black cat character have clear ties to slavery in an antebellum United States.

When discussing literary allusions to slavery, it is crucial to address what Toni Morrison terms an "Africanist presence" in American literature. In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Morrison examines how textual portrayals of whiteness are often accompanied by blackness:

These images of impenetrable whiteness need contextualizing to explain their extraordinary power, pattern, and consistency. Because they appear almost always in conjunction with representations of black or Africanist people who are dead, impotent, or under complete control, these images of blinding whiteness seem to function as both antidote for and meditation on the shadow that is companion to this whiteness—a dark and abiding presence that moves the hearts and texts of American literature with fear and longing. This haunting, a darkness from which our early literature seemed unable to extricate itself, suggests the complex and contradictory situation in which American writers found themselves during the formative years of the nation's literature. (33)

Significantly, Morrison writes, "for both black and white American writers, in a wholly racialized society, there is no escape from racially inflected language, and the work writers do to unhobble the imagination from the demands of that language is complicated, interesting, and definitive" (12-13). In other words, Morrison indicates that whether intentional or not, American authors included discussions of race and slavery in their literature. Moreover, she emphasizes that "no early American writer is more important to

the concept of American Africanism than Poe” (32). While Morrison focuses on Poe’s novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, published in 1838, for the sake of her argument, her idea of the Africanist presence can be located throughout Poe’s literature.

In addition to her discussion of American Africanism, Morrison has also done extensive work on representations of Black bodies in American literature. Expanding on James A. Snead’s scholarship, Morrison discusses common rhetoric American authors have used in their portrayals of people of color. One of these modes, metonymic displacement, employs “color coding and physical traits” to signify race (Morrison 68). Another, metaphysical condensation, refers to “collapsing persons into animals,” which, in turn, “prevents human contact and exchange” (68). Poe uses both of these linguistic strategies, signifying blackness through the figure of the cat. Additionally, Poe’s portrayal of slavery through an animal figure allows him to enter into a discourse that addresses race without doing so directly. Nineteenth-century writers, whether intentionally or not, recorded crucial racial components in their literature, and Poe’s short fiction is one of the most compelling examples of this process.

While some scholars have analyzed the connections between Poe’s story and slavery, there is still much work to be done in examining Poe’s literature as a whole and its allusions to slavery and marginalized people. Additionally, scholarship on “The Black Cat” has inadvertently omitted important details from studies. In addition to Morrison’s scholarship, Lesley Ginsberg’s article “Slavery and the Gothic Horror of Poe’s ‘The Black Cat’” is poignant and serves as the preeminent examination of Poe’s story and its ties to slavery. Importantly, she writes that “The Black Cat” includes “resounding echoes

of antebellum slavery discourses” as well as “an investigation into the peculiar psychopolitics of the master/slave relationship, a bond whose sentimentalized image was at the heart of the South’s proslavery rhetoric” (99). However, Ginsberg misses important plot elements that are crucial to the discussion of the narrative, particularly its connections to lynching and violence directed toward both marginalized and female characters, which I have examined more closely in my analysis.

In my discussion of an animal character, it is crucial to mention Steve Baker’s work and its importance in animal studies. Baker’s “denial of the animal” argument involves a textual animal character being “treated as the transparent signifier of something quite different,” and he argues that this ideology disregards “one whole area of potential meanings by assuming that whatever else they may have to do with, the meanings prompted by these representations are *not* to do with animals” (136-138; emphasis in original). Ivan Kreilkamp agrees, claiming that “animal characters are fundamentally minor” in Gothic literature (17). However, as Ruth Heholt and Melissa Edmundson poignantly respond, “Gothic texts complicate this notion because animals frequently become living embodiments of troubled memory, trauma, and violence. The narrative action is often centered on the animal, making them not ‘fundamentally minor’ but instead pivotal to the text’s overall sociocultural message” (8). Therefore, while Morrison’s, Ginsberg’s, and Baker’s ideologies may seem mutually exclusive, I intend to qualify them in noting that Poe’s black cat is a complicated figure, signifying a Gothic Other that portrays a Black body as well as an animal character. By carefully crafting this feline figure, Poe comments on many social issues, including slavery, animal abuse, and violence toward women and people of color.

In Poe's story, the theme of revenge, a common element of Gothic literature, refers to a marginalized individual triumphing over their oppressor. After the narrator has killed his wife and cannot find the black cat, the narrator describes how "once again I breathed as a freeman" (*Writings* 354). While this wording could also be interpreted as the narrator's freedom from marriage, having forcibly returned himself to bachelorhood, it more closely links the narrative with slavery. Though brief, this is a significant detail; although the black cat acts as the slave figure, the narrator identifies himself as being freed from the confines of marriage, claiming that he has been a slave to domesticity. However, the narrator's so-called freedom is short-lived, as the cat ultimately alerts the police and reveals the hiding place of his wife's corpse. Rather than assuming responsibility for his own actions, the narrator once again blames the cat, describing it as "the hideous beast whose craft had seduced me into murder, and whose informing voice had consigned me to the hangman" (355). As Ginsberg explains, the South's "control over the discourse of slavery was being challenged by the voices of those who were traditionally mute: women, children, slaves, and, by extension, animals" (103). Although typically silent, the literary animal figure, acting as a marginalized individual, is ultimately given a voice by Poe and identifies their oppressor and his crimes. It appears that the narrator, having previously hanged (or lynched) his cat Pluto from a tree, will meet the same fate as his once beloved friend. Although it is unclear whether the second cat is a supernatural embodiment of Pluto, it is nevertheless significant that the figures characterized by their blackness triumph over their aggressor. As we shall see, nonhuman, animal figures became legitimate studies in contemporary social issues in nineteenth-century Western literature.

Connections Between Animals, Slavery, and Violence

As stated previously, Ginsberg's foundational work on Poe's narrative highlights the connections between violence toward slaves and animal abuse. On numerous occasions, the narrator discusses his intentions to harm the cat, despite a lack of provocation. At a critical point in the narrative, the narrator describes his brutal attack directed at Pluto: "I seized him; when, in his fright at my violence, he inflicted a slight wound upon my hand with his teeth" (*Writings* 350). While Pluto quite literally bites the hand that feeds him, he does not attack until he is provoked. After he is bitten, the narrator viciously removes Pluto's eye and even derives perverse pleasure from doing so, stating that "I blush, I burn, I shudder, while I pen the damnable atrocity" (350). Moreover, the narrator appears surprised, even insulted, when, after this horrific event has occurred, the cat is afraid of him and fearfully leaves a room whenever he enters it. This rhetoric and imagery, however, is not unique to "The Black Cat"; it also appears in discussions of slavery contemporary to Poe's time.

Perhaps not surprisingly, pro-slavery individuals struggled to justify why slaves chose to rebel and run away. As the *Enquirer* reported on the notorious Nat Turner rebellion, there was no "cause or provocation, that could be assigned" for Turner's actions (Tragle 43-44). As Ginsberg aptly describes, "if southern ideology rested heavily on the supposed animal-like nature of black people, proslavery rhetoric was quick to sentimentalize the relationship of master and slave by repeated allusions to the cloying imagery of the bonds between humans and domesticated animals, especially pets" (104). Leland S. Person also discusses the similarities between "the narrator's attitude toward the cat and the attitudes of many slaveholders" ("Philosophy" 215-216). Indeed,

proslavery rhetoric has an extensive history of questioning why slaves allegedly turned against their masters. Poe's simultaneous portrayals of a master committing violence against a racially coded figure and the same master enacting violence against animals suggest that these forms of abuse were often connected, both in literature and history.

In addition to Ginsberg, psychologist Robert Guthrie, in his examination of historical attitudes toward slaves, has compellingly indicated that slaves and house pets were commonly associated with one another. As Guthrie discovered, nineteenth-century physician Samuel Cartwright connected the "unnatural" behavior of rebellious slaves with the mental disorder drapetomania, "which he said was common to Blacks and to cats" (116). Drapetomania was an entirely pseudoscientific disease that, as Cartwright claimed, caused slaves to act out and run away from their masters (Willoughby 579). Of course, rather than suffering from mental illness or psychosis, it is more likely that, tired of being abused and maltreated, slaves acted upon their own agency and wanted freedom from their oppressors. In his lack of scientific evidence for his proposition, Cartwright was perhaps hinting at this ideology in his comparison of Black slaves and cats. More likely, however, the perceived correlation between slaves and cats had nothing to do with mental illness and, instead, was intended to reinforce racist rhetoric aligning slaves with animals.

In a similar vein, antislavery narratives have traditionally connected violence toward slaves with violence against animals. As Hanrahan indicates, in abolitionist literature written by Harriet Beecher Stowe and Maria Susanna Cummins, the depravity of slaveowners is related through not only the brutality they inflict on their slaves, but also the violence they commit toward animals. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe signifies a

morally corrupt slaveowner by showing his abuse toward his slave George Harris and then increasing said violence by depicting the slaveowner kill Carlo, George's dog (14-15). This escalation of violence mimics Poe's portrayal of violence in "The Black Cat," with the narrator directing violence at his wife before moving on to abusing the animals. Significantly, this process of escalating violence suggests that violence toward slaves, as well as women, would have been considered less severe than violence directed at animals, particularly house pets. Moreover, Ginsberg indicates that antislavery literature by Lydia Maria Child and Theodore Dwight Weld address experiences of "eye gouging as well as outright murder" (106), suggesting that Poe's narrator's blatant act of violence is a form of art imitating life, with Poe being aware of such violence. Undoubtedly, Poe and his literary peers would have been cognizant of the correlation of violence toward slaves and violence toward animals, as can be seen in his fiction.

Conclusion

As Toni Morrison has poignantly stated, "whatever their personal and formally political responses to the inherent contradiction of a free republic deeply committed to slavery, nineteenth-century writers were mindful of the presence of black people" (49-50). This Africanist presence is particularly notable in Poe's fiction, and in "The Black Cat," the racially coded character is initially antagonized by its aggressor before it enacts revenge upon him. However, blackness as a thematic concept is not only present in Poe's literature; as Morrison emphasizes, conceptualizations of whiteness and blackness can be located throughout nineteenth-century American literature. Moreover, fictional narratives such as Poe's story and proslavery accounts highlight the heightening anxieties of slaveowners as authors began to allow historically silent characters to speak for

themselves through both dialogue and actions. With race and slavery being such crucial talking points in antebellum America, it is understandable that authors were unable to avoid the topics in literature, even in Gothic fiction that included supernatural elements.

However, as Poe's work suggests, the Gothic genre allowed authors to approach historically taboo subjects that otherwise would have been omitted from nineteenth-century writings. By signifying the slave through the seemingly simple character of the black cat, Poe engages in discussing complex subjects such as race, slavery, gender, and domesticity in the 1800s. As scholars have indicated, few nineteenth-century American writers have approached these topics with the same care and craft as did Poe. Indeed, as I have noted, Poe's narrative highlights the prevalence of violence against marginalized bodies in nineteenth-century America, including people of color, women, and even animals. Furthermore, the literary animal figure allowed authors to engage in conversations concerning slaves and women without explicitly revealing the characters as such. Nevertheless, as we will see, Poe's stories are merely parts of a whole that signify a literary phenomenon not only inherent to American literature but to Western literature altogether. Indeed, before the century came to a close, an Irish author writing in London would reproduce his own version of the "black cat" narrative.

CHAPTER III

Reimagining Poe's Black Cat: Stoker's "The Squaw"

American Gothic offers a unique perspective into historical attitudes toward race and gender in the antebellum United States. However, both American and British Gothic literature allows authors to “articulate the ways in which these racialized discourses are not just about the presence, horror, and transgression of the racial other in a predominantly white world, but also about anxieties over the potential that the other brings for the cultural and racial degeneration of British and American citizens” (Wester 157). Many scholars have noted how Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* poignantly depicts “British cultural angst over the racial other's successful infiltration of society” (159). Because Stoker published other pieces of his work before *Dracula* was released, this phenomenon can be observed in his other fiction, particularly his short story, “The Squaw.” This story, I argue, sets the precedent for Stoker's later novel in its extensive portrayals of racial otherness and British imperialism.¹⁰

In my analysis of Stoker's story “The Squaw,” I expand on Maisha Wester's claim that the narrative is “Stoker's own version of Poe's black cat” (159). While Wester focuses on race in her analysis, I take an intersectional approach and examine the themes of imperialism, race, and gender and their relevance to one another. Additionally, I examine Stoker's use of the term “half-breed” to signify the presence of characters of mixed race, or, to use Homi Bhabha's terminology, hybrid or hyphenated figures. In my discussion of hybrid figures, I examine the black cat as a potentially mixed-race figure

¹⁰ “The Squaw” was first published in *Holly Leaves*, the Christmas edition of *The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, in London in 1893 (Williams 132). *Dracula*, on the other hand, was published in 1897, only four years after “The Squaw” was originally published (Luckhurst xi).

characterized by her monstrous femininity. Finally, I discuss Stoker's extensive representations of revenge and cycles of violence¹¹ as well as his portrayals of violence toward marginalized bodies and their oppressors. Stoker's portrayals of violence poignantly correlate with his depictions of racialized and sexualized characters.

Stoker's Settings: Historical Sites of Violence

Stoker's story begins with the narrator describing his and his wife's honeymoon in Nurnberg, a fictional German town that closely mirrors the city Nuremberg. Not only are the names comparable visibly, they are also audibly similar. In his description of the town, Stoker writes, "Nurnberg has been happy in that it was never sacked; had it been it would certainly not be so spick [*sic*] and span perfect as it is at present" ("The Squaw" 38). Importantly, Stoker immediately draws connections between Nuremberg, Germany, and its extensive history of conquest. Moreover, the narrator and his wife show great enthusiasm in their intentions to visit the German Torture Tower and its sites of suffering. As the narrator excitedly explains, "For centuries the tradition of the Iron Virgin of Nurnberg has been handed down as an instance of the horrors of cruelty of which man is capable; we had long looked forward to seeing it; and here at last was its home" (38). Like Poe's descriptions of a "most wild, yet most homely narrative" (*Writings* 348), Stoker's juxtaposition of the brutality of humanity accompanied with the narrator's eagerness for seeing evidence of such brutality is eerie and disturbing. Similarly, this passage foreshadows the violence that is located throughout the narrative, particularly in

¹¹ My use of the phrase "cycles of violence" refers to Stoker's extensive portrayals of retributive violence and revenge in the story. These acts of violence, he suggests, only cause additional senseless brutality rather than resolving previous conflicts. I will further examine this subject in my section titled, "Cycles of Violence: Murder, Revenge, and Consequences."

relation to the German torture chamber and its notorious medieval torture device, the Iron Virgin.

While the couple are fascinated by various aspects of the torture tower, the Iron Virgin proves the most intriguing element of their tour. The maleficence of the device is soon revealed: “Here were several long spikes, square and massive, broad at the base and sharp at the points, placed in such a position that when the door should close the upper ones would pierce the eyes of the victim, and the lower ones his heart and vitals” (“The Squaw” 45). As Stoker explains, the device was historically used to impale victims, resulting in excruciating death. Significantly, the device is not only human-shaped, but is a “rudely-shaped figure of a woman” and “on the forehead [was fashioned] a rude semblance of a woman’s face” (44). While brief, this passage signifies Stoker’s correlation between violence and female bodies. The violence of the Iron Virgin is heightened when Hutcheson physically enters it out of both sadistic and masochistic desires.

When attempting to convince the custodian to let him enter the medieval torture device, Hutcheson bribes him with money and tells him in his awkward dialect, “Take it, pard! it’s your pot; and don’t be skeer’d. This ain’t no necktie party that you’re asked to assist in!” (“The Squaw” 46). In other words, Hutcheson tries to soothe the custodian’s anxiety by assuring him that he’s not taking part in a lynching. Like Poe’s reference to lynching, with his unreliable narrator hanging a black cat from a tree, Stoker’s reference, though brief, clearly ties the American character to the extensive history of violence against Black people in the United States. Later, Hutcheson says, “I guess I’ve not had enjoyment like this since I left Noo York. Bar a scrap with a French sailor at Wapping –

an' that warn't much of a picnic neither – I've not had a show fur real pleasure in this dod-rotted Continent" (47). Importantly, Wapping was a site for hanging pirates and other seafaring convicts in Britain (Hebblethwaite 385).¹² While these details may seem inconsequential at first, significantly, Stoker includes dual references to hangings that both American and British readers would understand, linking the two countries and their extensive histories of violence. Ultimately, Stoker criticizes both the United States' and Britain's histories of violence, linking the two and foreshadowing additional brutalities by using these geographical locations as settings.

As scholars have argued about his novel *Dracula*, it is unclear whether Stoker visited the sites he describes, despite depicting them in great detail (Murray 153). For instance, there is no clear answer as to whether or not Stoker had actually visited Nuremberg before writing his story. Murray suggests that Stoker likely did not visit Nuremberg but "probably used his ability to describe places he had never actually visited, so ably demonstrated in *Dracula*, to paint a convincing picture of the medieval German city" (153). Moreover, an iron maiden made in the Nuremberg Maiden's likeness was shown off at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, mere months before Stoker published "The Squaw" (Corstorphine 55). Considering Stoker's numerous ventures to the United States,¹³ the writer would likely have been more familiar with the copy and the accompanying exhibit at the World's Fair than the original in its German location.

¹² For more information on Wapping, see Kate Hebblethwaite's note: "Located on the north bank of the Thames, to the east of London, it was the site of 'Execution Dock', where pirates and other water-borne criminals faced execution by hanging from a gibbet constructed close to the low water mark. Bodies were left hanging until they had been submerged three times by the tide" (385).

¹³ Stoker visited the United States on multiple occasions while working with the playwright Henry Irving. Detailed accounts of Stoker's trips to the United States and the Wild West Show can be found in Louis S. Warren's article: "Buffalo Bill Meets Dracula: William F. Cody, Bram Stoker, and the Frontiers of Decay."

Nevertheless, after encountering his short story, it quickly becomes apparent the extent to which the Nuremberg Iron Maiden and its representation of imperialism affected Stoker and his writings.

Shortly after introducing the setting of Nurnberg, the narrator describes his acquaintance with the American, Elias P. Hutcheson, who is from Isthmian City, Nebraska, a part of the area termed Bleeding Gulch.¹⁴ While this name seems inherently violent, it also has psychoanalytical overtones that convey a womblike place of origin. Importantly, this name signifies the themes of motherhood and female otherness in the narrative and foreshadows how Hutcheson will meet his end in another womblike place. Moreover, Stoker connects Hutcheson's place of origin to the violent history of westward expansion, as is clarified by his characterization of Hutcheson. Indeed, the American is depicted as subtly malicious in his extreme disregard for human and animal life. Hutcheson nonchalantly discusses the violent acts he has both witnessed and committed against American Indians,¹⁵ with a casualness that does not match the brutalities he describes.

In his portrayal of Hutcheson, Stoker used his knowledge of the United States after visiting the American Midwest in his attendance of William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody's Wild West shows (Warren 1136). Moreover, Stoker's portrayal of Hutcheson as an insipid and violent American aligns with Britain's anxieties in regards to the United States as a world power. Indeed, as historian Louis S. Warren has explained, "amid all

¹⁴ Both Isthmian City and Bleeding Gulch appear to be fictional regions.

¹⁵ For the purposes of my analysis, I refer to the Apaches and other indigenous peoples of the American Midwest as American Indians or indigenous Americans. After extensive research, my understanding is that this terminology is generally preferred by indigenous peoples to refer to themselves and other tribesmen (see Russell Means' autobiography *Where White Men Fear to Tread* as well as statements made by the National Museum of the American Indian located in Washington, DC and New York, NY.)

the English enthusiasm for the Wild West show's regenerative promise of frontier warfare glimmered a specter of reverse colonization by racially powerful frontier warriors, the Americans, which observers seemed unable to escape completely" (1129). Lillian Nayder adds, "although the ostensive subject of Stoker's story is the hostility between white pioneers and native Americans [*sic*] in the west, its primary though largely unspoken concern is the threat posed to British hegemony by American expansion toward the end of the nineteenth century" (76). In other words, British audiences, enthralled by the Wild West Show, were both fascinated and terrified by the concept of Westward expansion and America's growing power as a nation. Stoker, in turn, captivated by the Wild West Show and Britain's responses to it, worked to include this phenomenon in his writing which depicts complicated interactions between American and British characters.

Throughout the story, Stoker depicts numerous geographical settings that are either described in great detail or briefly stated; whether he elaborates on the area or mentions it in passing, Stoker highlights the importance of these places to the narrative. More notably, the settings all have clear connections to imperialism and conquest, inferring the violence that is inherent in the very setting(s) of the story and alluding to the extreme violence that lies therein. Stoker's choice of setting is remarkable, as his "prolonged portrayal of German torture chambers and devices suggests that what confronts the British Europeans is not so much an issue of cultural contamination but the reality that they are violent and degenerate themselves" (Wester 165). Indeed, Stoker's position as an Irish émigré writing about British attitudes toward a German city's history of imperialism offers a nuanced perspective on Britain's own history of colonization. As Alison Milbank points out, one of the crucial events that led to great strife between

Ireland and Britain was the Act of Union of 1801, in which “Dublin lost its parliament and became subject to direct rule from London” (13). Milbank further elaborates on Stoker’s perspective of the relationship between Ireland and Britain, explaining “to assert the suitability of Ireland as a Gothic...site was a means of re-establishing its difference and integrity from Britain” (13). Stoker’s depictions of his settings as historical sites of brutality indicate that the violence in this narrative is multi-layered and transcends culture, with Americans and Europeans both committing various atrocities. However, as I argue, Stoker both subverts and reinforces societal norms in his criticism of British colonialism.

Depictions of Gender and Maternal Figures

Like Poe, Stoker includes hyperbolic depictions of gender roles in his literature, as can be seen in the characters of the narrator, his wife, and Hutcheson in “The Squaw.” Indeed, after encountering his overly exaggerated portrayals of the main characters, it quickly becomes apparent that the author is criticizing traditional roles of masculinity and femininity. The narrator’s wife, Amelia, is overly cautious and fearful, while the men appear unreasonably strong and careless in comparison. Even more so than the narrator, Hutcheson is cavalier and acts as if he is invincible. After the group finds themselves at the top of what once was a medieval moat, Hutcheson drops a rock down by a cat and her kitten. Significantly, Amelia implores him, “Oh, be careful...you might hit the dear little thing!” (“The Squaw” 39). Unfortunately, the rock hits the kitten on its head, killing it instantly. Amelia’s vigilance over the cats’ safety is similar to the narrator’s wife in “The Black Cat” stepping in front of the second cat to protect it from her husband’s deadly

blow. By recalling Poe's hyperbolic depictions of gender, Stoker highlights the drastic differences between his male and female characters.

To better understand Stoker's views on British ideals of femininity, the reader need only examine Amelia, the narrator's wife. Unlike Poe's female character in "The Black Cat," this wife is named and speaks for herself; however, this is not as impressive as it first appears, as Amelia has little dialogue. Moreover, Amelia is an easily frightened woman, nearly falling into a faint on two occasions¹⁶ and actually fainting twice in the story, needing to be revived by her husband. Importantly, Stoker also criticizes the institution of marriage as a whole. The narrator describes bickering with his wife over petty matters before they meet and befriend Hutcheson, who calms these arguments. The narrator goes on to explain, "instead of quarreling, as we had been doing, we found that the restraining influence of a third party was such that we now took every opportunity of spooning¹⁷ in odd corners" ("The Squaw" 37). Stoker highlights that the narrator and his wife's honeymoon, while intended to be one of the most romantic elements of a marriage, is rife with bickering and arguing, suggesting that their marriage is not necessarily as blissful as the institution of matrimony had typically been depicted in nineteenth-century literature. Additionally, the detail that the couple intends to see the notorious Iron Virgin on their honeymoon is notable, as in Victorian times, virginity ended after a couple was wed. The figure of the Iron Virgin connects the institution of marriage with violence and juxtaposes the perceived sacredness of virginity with bloodshed. The couple's

¹⁶ In "The Squaw," Amelia "turn[s] quite faint" when the kitten is killed (Stoker 39) and grows "quite pale" but "fortunately did not faint" after she first sees the Iron Virgin (44). She faints completely after seeing the spikes in the interior of the Iron Virgin (45) and does so once more when she sees the cat enter the torture chamber in the climactic scene (48).

¹⁷ In this instance, "spooning" refers to "courting or love-making of a sentimental kind" ("Spoonings").

relationship is further complicated by the detail that they are inclined to be physically intimate in a German torture tower of all places, signifying a somewhat perverse sexuality. In his odd portrayal of the married couple, Stoker suggests that there are other, more sinister sides to marriage than were typically depicted in Victorian fiction.

Though easily overlooked, one of the most significant details about Amelia is her fertility and ability to conceive during the first few weeks of her marriage. Of course, only women can birth children, with this biological ability having historically been viewed as a feminine power from which men have been excluded. After Amelia sees the Iron Virgin and faints in horror, the narrator describes that the impact of the device on his wife was “shown by the fact that my eldest son bears to this day a rude birthmark on his breast, which has...been accepted as representing the Nurnberg Virgin” (45). While this is a brief detail, it implies that Amelia has already become pregnant during her honeymoon, since the effect that the Iron Virgin has on her is physically portrayed on the body of her first child. As Sara Williams elaborates, Stoker “engage[s] with the belief that the pregnant mother’s sensory experiences, especially what she sees, could physically impact upon her unborn child’s body. This belief betrayed a masculine medical anxiety about the power of the unquantifiable womb and evidenced the enduring influence of superstitions and old wives’ tales” (119). In other words, Stoker suggests that a child can be physically marked by their mother’s trauma, which remained a commonly held belief during the nineteenth century despite a lack of scientific evidence. Amelia’s femininity is enhanced by her fertility, the implications of her pregnancy, and her ability to imprint her trauma upon her child.

As the narrative progresses, Amelia's femininity is emphasized when compared with the overt masculinity of the two male characters. Certainly, the narrator and Huteson appear to be closer partners than the narrator and his wife, despite the marital bond between the couple. Because Amelia is depicted as a weak woman likely to faint at any instance, Huteson is a more dependable companion for the narrator. The narrator and Huteson seem to be fairly close allies, with the narrator refraining from interfering with Huteson's cruel and manipulative actions. Lillian Nayder indicates that Stoker allies "American and English men against the threatening female other" (76). While Amelia herself is not an intimidating woman, her femininity threatens the narrative that is otherwise dominated by masculinity. The conflict between femininity and masculinity becomes ostensible as the story progresses and the theme of female otherness is strengthened. In Stoker's texts, male and female characters deviate from each other drastically, further indicating the author's severe criticism of American and British gender norms.

While the narrator and Huteson are overtly masculine figures, the narrator remains tied to the domestic and his masculinity lies relatively dormant; instead, as Stoker highlights, Huteson's masculinity quickly becomes toxic. As the narrator claims, "Huteson was a kind-hearted man – my wife and I had both noticed little acts of kindness to animals as well as to persons" ("The Squaw" 40). Regardless of this detail, Huteson indeed harms an animal by carelessly throwing a rock from a great height. Although this act is inherently less violent than Poe's narrator's mutilation of Pluto, it implies a disrespect for life and general carelessness for others. More disturbingly, when Amelia asks Huteson to refrain from dropping the rock by the mother cat and her

kitten, he responds, “I wouldn’t hurt the poor...little critter more’n I’d scalp a baby” (“The Squaw” 39). This nonchalant answer is troubling, as it implies an extreme act of violence committed against an innocent child. Indeed, the fact that the thought of committing such violence even enters Hutcheson’s head has perverse implications. Moreover, Hutcheson’s statement is contradicted by the fact that he succeeds in harming, indeed killing, an animal. Furthermore, shortly after this scene, Hutcheson casually describes committing extreme acts of violence against the Apache people, suggesting that he has in fact committed atrocities against innocent people, including scalping. While scalping has historically been associated with violence committed by American Indians, as historian Dee Brown points out, the practice was more likely implemented by Western settlers (24-25). By portraying an American character in this fashion, Stoker suggests that the American frontiersman, generally depicted as a survivor of war and brutality, is, in fact, an aggressor and victimizer.

In his portrayal of a toxically masculine American, Stoker likely had a certain American frontiersman in mind. As Louis S. Warren has argued, the character Elias P. Hutcheson was primarily based on William F. “Buffalo Bill” Cody, an overtly masculine figure who also hailed from Nebraska (1150). Indeed, Stoker was so fascinated by the Wild West showman that he also included a caricature of him in his most famous work. In *Dracula*, the Texan Quincey Morris is the sole American among the group of Europeans who ultimately defeat the eponymous villain. However, as Warren points out, “of the three young male protagonists who chase Dracula down and dispose of him, Morris is disturbingly incompetent. His eagerness to use his gun and his poor aim endanger his friends, he fails in simple assignments to follow the vampire, and, in the

attempted capture of Dracula in London, the count escapes when Morris bungles” (1129). Clearly, Stoker’s fascination with American masculinity is not necessarily blind admiration, since the Irish author critiques American ideals of masculinity and its toxicity.

Moreover, Stoker signifies the overt masculinity of his male American characters in details such as the weapons they carry. As Roland Finger points out, in *Dracula*, Quincey Morris wields “a phallic Bowie knife and Winchester repeater rifle” (71). Similarly, in “The Squaw,” Hutcheson carries a pistol, threatening to shoot the mother cat if she tries to attack him. He goes on to say, in an attempt to comfort Amelia, “Why sooner’n have you worried, I’ll shoot the critter, right here, an’ risk the police interferin’ with a citizen of the United States for carryin’ arms contrairy to reg’lations!” (“The Squaw” 42). Hutcheson himself states that he is unlawfully carrying a handgun while traveling in Germany but still claims that the police would “interfere” with his vacation. While Stoker previously alludes to Hutcheson’s lack of respect for both human and animal life, here he highlights the character’s blatant disregard for the law. Moreover, in *Dracula*, the protagonist Jonathan Harker makes the poignant observation about Quincey Morris: “If America can go on breeding men like that, she will be a power in the world indeed” (162). Although brief, this comment signifies Stoker’s awareness of the United States as a growing political power and Britain’s consequential heightening anxiety regarding the nation. However, Stoker’s depiction of American men as overambitious amateurs suggests that while other nations became aware of the United States’ rise in global power, they did not necessarily take the country seriously. While Warren argues that Stoker’s character Quincey Morris is “practically malevolent” in his consistent foils

of apprehending Dracula (1149), as we will see, Huteson is clearly malicious and asserts his power over vulnerable bodies, including women and people of color.

On the other hand, however, Stoker's depiction of the female cat drastically differs from his portrayal of Amelia. While the narrator's wife is overly wary and careful, the mother cat becomes an aggressive mother figure after her kitten is killed. Rather than merely accepting her kitten's death, she begins actively pursuing Huteson with the clear intent of harming him. However, Stoker suggests, Huteson seems to believe this anger is unjustified, as he "seemed concerned at the state of fury to which the cat had wrought herself" ("The Squaw" 40). Significantly, Huteson states the enraged cat reminds him of an encounter he had with an Apache woman, or "squaw," years before.¹⁸ This passage, in which Huteson relates his story of the Apache woman, addresses extreme acts of violence committed against marginalized bodies, including children and people of color. Furthermore, Huteson's discussion of the Apache woman reveals harmful stereotypes and misconceptions of women of color, and the titular Apache "squaw" becomes a victim of violence. As we will see, in his depictions of American frontiersmen and American Indians, Stoker's narrative conveys nineteenth-century conceptualizations of race and anxieties regarding racial mixing, particularly in regards to women.

¹⁸ For reference, the word "squaw" is an "Algonquian term used crudely in English to mean any Indian woman" (Corstorphine 60). The term is no longer used in polite society due to its sexist and racist overtones. It is now considered "a depreciative or disparaging term of abuse or contempt" and is "generally considered offensive" ("Squaw").

American Indians and the Figure of the “Half-Breed”

After witnessing the cat’s fury and her attempts to run up the sides of the moat at him, Hutcheson relates a story about a previous encounter with a horrific mother figure. He calmly explains:

‘Wall, I guess that air the savagest beast I ever see – ‘cept once when an Apache squaw had an edge on a half-breed what they nicknamed “Splinters” ‘cos of the way he fixed up her papoose which he stole on a raid just to show that he appreciated the way they had given his mother the fire torture. She got that kinder look so set on her face that it jest seemed to grow there. She followed Splinters more’n three year till at lest the braves got him and handed him over to her. They did say that no man, white or Injun, had ever been so long a-dying under the tortures of the Apaches. The only time I ever see her smile was when I wiped her out.’ (“The Squaw” 40)

This frame narrative relates the first act of retaliatory violence that Stoker depicts as an ongoing process throughout the story. A “half-breed,” Splinters is given his nickname after he murders an Apache woman’s baby.¹⁹ He does this “just to show that he appreciated the way they had given [Splinters’] mother the fire torture” (40). Presumably, “they” refers to the Apache peoples as a whole, with Splinters directing his vengeful violence at an entire group of marginalized people rather than the individual aggressors. Moreover, Stoker implies that rather than having an indigenous mother and a white father, Splinters is the child of an indigenous father and white mother, as the Apaches have subjected his mother to the excruciating “fire torture” (40). Here, it appears that

¹⁹ While Stoker does not elaborate on this detail, he seems to imply that, like Hutcheson at the end of the story, the baby is brutally killed by impalement.

Stoker has adopted the sensationalist captivity narrative of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century American literature that involved, as Roland Finger so aptly describes, “innocent [white] women brutalized by tyrannical Natives” (72). Conveniently, these narratives, like Mary Rowlandson’s *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, appealed to American readers and further demonized American Indians. They also implied the assumption that white women would be drawn to and seduced by the indigenous man and his sexuality. However, as mentioned earlier, indigenous women’s bodies were more often than not sites of sexual violence, with said violence being committed by white men. While Stoker’s depictions of violence become more complicated as he portrays cycles of violence and their implications, the one-sided narrative that Hutcheson presents is doubtful and signifies racial stereotypes ingrained in Victorian society.

As Toni Morrison has written, “the imaginative and historical terrain upon which early American writers journeyed is in large measure shaped by the presence of the racial other” (46). While Stoker was not an American himself, he was likely influenced by American authors such as Poe as evidenced by his fiction. Moreover, race was such a prevalent social issue of the nineteenth century that no writer could refrain from somehow incorporating the subject into their body of work. Furthermore, as Warren points out, “race was much more than color in the late nineteenth century. For thinkers of the time, the word invariably implied cultural as well as physical attributes, and was demarcated by more subtle variations than mere skin pigment” (1127). Indeed, nineteenth-century interpretations of race encompassed ethnic origins as well as cultural practices and beliefs. As Malchow writes:

Gothicized *racial* representation drew from and reinforced other areas of prejudice and fear. In Britain at least, the fear of transgressing racial boundaries, of race-mixing as pollution, and of the danger and instability of the half-breed, saturated the whole system by which the unfamiliar and threatening—whether pauper, criminal, madman, feminist, or homosexual—was represented in late-nineteenth-century literature. (232; emphasis in original)

These interpretations of race, particularly anxieties regarding race-mixing, inform Stoker's beliefs and are reflected in his work.

As I have discussed previously in my analysis, Gothic literature has an extensive history of Othering racial minority groups. While American authors were likely to include portraits of Black slaves and American Indians in their interpretations of the Gothic, both British and, as we see, Irish authors often included similar depictions in their fiction. In particular, as Kevin Corstorphine explains, “contemporary literature often relished in a lurid Gothic mode of storytelling regarding alleged Indian practices” (57). Indeed, Western literature has traditionally portrayed outlandish caricatures of American Indians rather than factual representations; it has also misrepresented religious beliefs and customs as peculiar practices, aligning indigenous people with savagery. Additionally, authors and researchers have recorded false information and assumptions about American Indians that have led to discrimination and extreme violence committed against tribespeople. For instance, in their encounters with frontiersmen, “the Navahos [sic]

could not believe that Kit Carson²⁰ condoned scalping, which they considered a barbaric custom introduced by the Spaniards” (Brown 24-25). Notably, as Brown indicates, it is unclear whether practices that have historically been associated with American Indians, including scalping, were implemented by American Indians or by European colonists. Significantly, Stoker alludes to this ambiguity by having Hutcheson make numerous references to scalping, casting him as a victimizer rather than a victim of the frontier. Stoker further interrogates the concepts of the aggressor and the victimized in his portrayal of the “half-breed.”

Since racial minority groups were the targets of discrimination and violence in the nineteenth century, one can imagine how unfavorably individuals of mixed race, often called “half-breeds,” were treated by society. The term “half-breed” correlated biracial individuals with animal husbandry, associating “mixed-race humanity, the progeny of slaves, with the world of beasts rather than mankind” (Malchow 179). In his work, Malchow examines the figure of the half-breed in Gothic literature. He notes that in nineteenth-century Victorian society, “half-breeds signified, not rationality, but its reverse—[a] loss of (white) self-control. The half-breed child was the product of an act of passion, a perpetual witness against the weak or dissolute natures that created them” (177). To put it more blatantly, the half-breed was often a child born as a result of sexual violence, which often occurred when white men sexually assaulted and raped Black and indigenous women. Moreover, “the half-breed man...was often represented as somehow feminine in his emotional/biological instability” (183). In other words, the mixed-race

²⁰ Significantly, Kit Carson, like Buffalo Bill Cody, was a frontiersman of the Wild West who has been memorialized in Western film and literature. Like Cody, the unfavorable parts of his life have been omitted from study until fairly recently.

man was often more closely associated with his Black or indigenous mother than with his white father. However, as we will see, Stoker's interpretation of the "half-breed" deviates from Victorian conceptualizations of the mixed-race individual, as Stoker implies that the character Splinters is the adult child of a white, colonial woman and an Apache man.

Significantly, through his depiction of the Apache peoples murdering Splinters' mother, Stoker presents American Indians as the group that incites violence against white settlers, rather than the opposite. Lillian Nayder explains that, "despite his feelings of alienation as an Irishman living in England, and despite his veiled critique of British imperialism in *Dracula*, Stoker explicitly subscribes to the imperial ideology of his day" (82). Although Stoker offers nuanced perspectives on imperialism and violence in both American and British history, his portrayal of American Indians is questionable and troubling. Stoker's depiction of American Indians reveals a distinctly Western anxiety regarding conquest and sustaining power over indigenous peoples, particularly indigenous women. Moreover, as Nayder compellingly argues, Stoker "suggests that gender relations are analogous to imperial relations" (76). Indeed, Stoker implies that women's bodies and geographical locations can both be sites of violence over which men assert their power and force, though, as he indicates, women resisted this violence to the extent that they were able. Stoker's connection between gender relations and imperial relations is perhaps most apparent in "The Squaw," where gendered violence and imperialism bleed together in portrayals of the titular character.

The Black Cat as a Hybrid Figure

At first glance, “The Squaw” may appear to be a gothic tale of “seemingly accidental cat murder and subsequent ironic revenge” (Corstorphine 54). However, I argue, the tale is more complicated than that in its extensive analysis of imperialism, race, and gender. While John Sutherland reads the story as an “ingenious tale of a persistent Red Indian spirit, reincarnated as a cat, who pursues a plainsman enemy” (Sutherland 605), I examine the narrative more thoroughly by reading the cat as a hybrid figure, defined by its monstrous femininity and racial otherness. Moreover, like Poe’s black cat, Stoker portrays a humanized animal figure capable of emotion, intelligence, and reasoning that challenges more conventional depictions of animals in literature.

Stoker’s introduction of the mother cat hearkens back to Poe’s descriptions of Pluto and the second black cat, with the feline being a “great black cat lying stretched in the sun” (“The Squaw” 38). However, Stoker includes an element that differs from Poe’s preceding story; this cat is a mother cat, whose “tiny black kitten” plays around her while she rests (38). Significantly, this cat and her kitten are not doing anything that would bother or harm the narrator, his wife, and Hutcheson, nor are they even near the party. Instead, the cats are at the bottom of what once was a moat, with the party standing above them and looking down upon them. Indeed, Stoker literally elevates the humans above the feline characters. Despite the cats not bothering the party, Hutcheson, “in order to help the play,” purportedly, drops a rock from the top of the cliff (38). While it is unclear whether or not Hutcheson intends to harm the cats, his carelessness culminates in the stone hitting the kitten on the head, killing it instantly.

More notable than the kitten's death, however, is the mother cat's intensely emotional reaction. Before examining her kitten, the cat first "cast a swift upward glance...with eyes like green fire fixed an instant on Elias P. Hutcheson" (39). After looking upon her aggressor, Stoker writes, "with a muffled cry, such as a human being might give, she bent over the kitten, licking its wound and moaning" (39) before fully realizing her kitten is dead. The mother cat mourns her kitten's death in a manner similar to that of an adult woman grieving the loss of her child. As Corstorphine points out, while this instance of animal cruelty is startling to modern readers in both its suddenness and magnitude, "Stoker's description seems to transcend the level of horror we are supposed to feel at the death of an animal" (56). Indeed, Stoker humanizes the cat and even depicts her as quickly experiencing multiple stages of grief, for she reacts first with disbelief before swiftly becoming enraged. By portraying her as such, Stoker presents an intriguing duality and metamorphosis from the genteel mother into the monstrous female.

Noting the cat's remarkable anger, the narrator states, "she looked the perfect incarnation of hate. Her green eyes blazed with lurid fire, and the white, sharp teeth seemed to almost shine through the blood which dabbled her mouth and whiskers. She gnashed her teeth, and her claws stood out stark and at full length on every paw" ("The Squaw" 39). While, previously, the cat appeared relaxed with her kitten, she now appears exceptionally predatory, with Stoker emphasizing her teeth and claws. Moreover, the blood on her muzzle is that of her kitten after she attempts to clean it. In her rage, she runs at the wall to try to reach Hutcheson, but falls on her kitten, which, the narrator points out, "further added to her horrible appearance" as "her black fur [becomes] smeared with its brains and blood" (39). As Nayder indicates, "the nurturing mother is

transformed into a cannibalistic one” (87). Significantly, the cat’s motherhood becomes polluted by her cannibalistic behavior as she morphs into the monstrous female.

Not only does the mother cat appear cannibalistic, she also seems vampiric with her muzzle covered in blood after she licks her kitten’s wounds. In Gothic literature, the vampire is a hybrid figure who transcends the boundaries of race, class, gender, and ethnic origin without fully belonging to any singular group. While the cat is not a human vampire, she nonetheless appears to set a precedent for Stoker’s female vampires who are depicted as monstrously feminine and particularly dangerous. As Malchow explains, “both [the] vampire and half-breed are creatures who transgress boundaries and are caught between two worlds. Both are hidden threats—disguised presences bringing pollution of the blood. Both may be able to ‘pass’ among the unsuspecting, although both bear hidden signs of their difference, which the wary may read” (168). It is this monstrous vision of the cat that reminds Hutcheson of another monstrous female he previously encountered: an Apache woman.

After seeing the cat try to climb the steep wall to attack him, Hutcheson comments that the cat reminds him of an Apache squaw. Significantly, the Apache woman, unlike American or British women, has authority and control over Splinters and his fate. This agency, Stoker suggests, only increases her monstrous femininity. Moreover, Hutcheson explains, “The only time I ever see [*sic*] her smile was when I wiped her out” (“The Squaw” 40). The Apache woman’s monstrous femininity is further highlighted by the fact that Hutcheson only sees her smile as he kills her. While this mother, unlike the black cat, is not portrayed as cannibalistic or vampiric, she too is unnatural. As Nayder points out, “Looking ahead to the monstrous women in *Dracula*,

who drink the blood of children rather than nursing them, the unnatural mothers in ‘The Squaw’ behave in a way that justifies their oppression” (92). Indeed, the black cat ultimately meets a similar fate to the Apache woman, with Stoker implying that these female characters’ monstrous femininity justifies their violent deaths.

In addition to her monstrous femininity, the mother cat herself appears to represent a mixed-race individual or “half-breed.” Like Poe’s black cats, she is characterized by her blackness which, as I have previously discussed, has a significant thematic presence in nineteenth-century literature. Not only does the cat’s blackness link her with Poe’s black cats, it also connects her with the extensive history of violence against Black slaves in the antebellum United States. On the other hand, Hutcheson aligns the mother cat with the Apache squaw he encountered, associating her more closely with American Indians than with Black slaves. However, as scholars have pointed out, “since the beginning of the American experiment, various writers had speculated that Americans were racially degraded by historic and often familial ties to Indians and Africans, relations that were themselves symptomatic of licentious back-country freedom and North America’s remoteness from European sources of whiteness” (Warren 1154). Indeed, Stoker examines the concept of interraciality throughout his literature, as I will discuss further. Ultimately, both Stoker’s black cat and his Apache squaw are characterized by their racial otherness and monstrous femininity.

Stoker was fascinated with the concept of interraciality, as can be seen throughout his work. In *Dracula*, the titular character is strengthened after drinking the blood of numerous victims of various ethnic origins. As Corstorphine points out, “this race-mixing,” which originates “from the comingling of the blood of different races,” benefits

the otherworldly villain “as it is the very source of his power” (52). Clearly, Stoker, like his contemporaries, looked down upon the concepts of race-mixing and miscegenation. As Malchow elaborates, “*miscegenation* (an American neologism of 1864, appropriate to the post-Darwinian racial discourse) suggested through its pseudo-scientific resonance that the act of engendering such creatures was itself not merely individually culpable and shameful but a biological confusion, an error that set in train the process of racial degeneration” (184; emphasis in original). Stoker’s literature warns against the implications and consequences of interracial mixing via blood, whether familial or intravenously. Furthermore, he implies that women of color, despite being the victims of physical and sexual violence, are accountable for this racial mixing, as they are responsible for childbirth and childrearing. These harmful attitudes toward women of color are reflected in historical accounts of American Indian women.

Historical Interpretations of Indigenous Women as Animals

While American Indians have historically (and incorrectly, to their great detriment) been associated with savagery, indigenous women have traditionally been particularly associated with primitive practices and behaviors. This is likely because, as previously stated, women are considered biologically responsible for childbirth and morally accountable for raising children. As historian Sherry L. Smith has written,

Army officers admired Indian women’s vitality in childbirth and concluded, though with some hesitation, that the ‘Indian way’ of bringing children into the world was preferable to the ‘civilized’ way. Admiring their stamina, physical endurance, and capacity to continue working right up to, and then

almost immediately after, parturition, a few perceived native women's apparent ease with childbirth as animal-like. (67)

By examining the language used to describe American Indian women, it is clear that these women were more closely associated with the bestial than the human. Furthermore, like the literary and historical Madonna/whore archetype, a similar dichotomy distinguishes between the two perceived types of American Indian women: the princess and the squaw. Like the Madonna archetype, the princess represents the virginal and beautiful young woman (Smith 65-66). On the other hand, the squaw, like the whore archetype, represents the lesser, unclean woman, soiled by age and promiscuity (Smith 65-66). While the princess is considered pure and therefore sexually desirable, the squaw, as we will see, is stained by her motherhood and more closely associated with the animalistic.

Historical diaries kept by American army officers further reveal attitudes toward American Indian mothers and wives. Like Stoker's squaw, these documents reveal the thinly veiled perspective of the indigenous mother as the monstrously feminine. Smith elaborates, supplying historical documentation from Army Captain R. G. Carter to support her argument:

Once a Native woman became enraged, Capt. R. G. Carter explained, '[n]ot a gleam of pity entered her feminine breast. She was a cold-blooded, thirsty vulture, only intent upon her prey, as good as the warrior himself.' He acknowledged that love and fear for their children's safety motivated women to pick up arms, and that white mothers would certainly share this instinct. Yet, in an Indian woman, Carter insisted, maternal instinct partook

more of ‘savage devotion and instinctive traits of the wild animals. When cornered, she fought with all the strength of her savage nature, with the ‘desperation of a *tigress*.’ (Smith 68-69; emphasis mine)

Carter’s discussion illuminates the perceived correlations between American Indian women and the bestial, citing two different animals as examples of the indigenous woman’s cruelty. Not only is the American Indian woman a “vulture” who circles her dying prey before scavenging it, she is also a “tigress,” or predatory feline who, like Stoker’s titular squaw, stalks her prey for days before finally pouncing. These harmful conceptions of American Indian women as animals are perpetuated in Stoker’s story, particularly when the narrator notices the cat following the group. He makes the observation, “at this moment she looked like a triumphant demon. Her eyes blazed with ferocity, her hair bristled out till she seemed twice her normal size, and her tail lashed about as does a tiger’s when the quarry is before it” (“The Squaw” 48). Significantly, when Hutcheson notices the cat, he comments, “Darned if the squaw hain’t got on all her war paint!” (48). Clearly, Stoker understands the perceived correlations between indigenous women and predatory animals and preserves these beliefs in his story. Moreover, like Carter, Stoker distinguishes between the maternal white woman and the indigenous mother, whom, he argues, is innately more animalistic. Indeed, as Williams points out, Stoker “codifies the maternal as monstrous” (119). These historical and literary passages, conveying both actual and fictional events, are representative of Western views of American Indian women as a whole.

Stoker further reveals these harmful attitudes toward indigenous women in his story “The Squaw,” the very title of which emphasizes the ingrained societal perspectives

of these already marginalized women. After Hutcheson openly laughs at the mother cat's fury, she appears oddly mollified and returns to her dead kitten, having "beg[u]n to lick and fondle it as though it were alive" ("The Squaw" 41). The narrator comments, "See...the effect of a really strong man. Even that animal in the midst of her fury recognizes the voice of a master, and bows to him!" (41). Significantly, Hutcheson responds, "Like a squaw!" (41). This brief but crucial exchange depicts the extremely harmful views American and British men held of indigenous women. The narrator's use of the word "master" connects the subjugation of American Indian women with the enslavement of Black women in the United States, a detail that is further emphasized by the cat's blackness. "Master," in this context, signifies a mastery over not only animals, but over women, and, more specifically, women of color. As Nayder indicates, "Stoker's portrait of the mother cat, like the stereotype of the 'tigerish' Indian squaw upon which it is based, conforms to one of the most striking patterns of imperial literature and imperial ideology: stressing the primitivism of the female native and, more generally, of the female sex, it justifies the crimes perpetrated against her" (Nayder 87). Indeed, as Stoker emphasizes, the monstrous femininity of both the Apache woman and the black cat justify their own violent deaths at the hands of white men.

Cycles of Violence: Murder, Revenge, and Consequences

One of the most poignant aspects of Stoker's story is his examination of revenge and its ultimate failure in resolving previous conflict. While Stoker depicts two seemingly separate storylines characterized by their violence, the plotlines are connected by Hutcheson's involvement in the cruelty. For instance, while the previous cycle of violence is initiated by Splinters' mother's death, it ostensibly ends with Hutcheson

killing the Apache squaw. However, Hutcheson once again triggers a series of violent events when he carelessly drops the rock by the cats, killing the kitten. In other words, these seemingly disparate violent events both involve Hutcheson, who kills both the Apache woman and the kitten. If Hutcheson had not murdered the kitten, the mother cat would have no reason to experience the humanlike emotions of rage and fury. Therefore, it comes as no surprise to the reader when Hutcheson, like his victims, meets his untimely demise in a final act of revenge.

After the party has toured the torture tower, they come upon what the narrator argues is the most fascinating medieval torture device of them all: the Iron Virgin. Stoker carefully explains the device's ability to open and close, albeit not easily:

...a rope was fastened to a ring in the front of the figure, about where the waist should have been, and was drawn, through a pulley, fastened on the wooden pillar which sustained the flooring above. The custodian pulling this rope showed that a section of the front was hinged like a door at one side; we then saw that the engine was of considerable thickness, leaving just room enough inside for a man to be placed. The door was of equal thickness and of great weight, for it took the custodian all his strength, aided though he was by the contrivance of the pulley, to open it. This weight was partly due to the fact that the door was of manifest purpose hung so as to throw its weight downwards, so that it might shut of its own accord when the strain was released. ("The Squaw" 44-45)

In his description of the device, Stoker once again foreshadows the grisly events to come. Despite the obvious dangers, Hutcheson insists on entering the Virgin, explaining, "it

[would] be too hard to give up the very experience I've been pinin' and pantin' fur [*sic*]" (47). When the custodian hesitates, Hutcheson bribes him with a gold coin, and the custodian reluctantly opens the Virgin for him. Meanwhile, the mother cat, who has been stalking the party around the tower, has her own plan in mind. While the custodian assists Hutcheson in entering the device, the cat pounces on the custodian, attacking his face and eyes which forces him to let go of the pulley that holds the device open. This culminates in Hutcheson being impaled by the feminine instrument of torture and the mother cat having successfully avenged the death of her kitten. The narrator describes the gruesome scene, explaining that, "the spikes did their work. Happily the end was quick...he fell at full length with a sickly thud upon the floor, the face turning upward as he fell" (49). After committing various atrocities against humans and animals both, Hutcheson meets his demise at the hands, or paws, of a clever cat.

Like Poe's black cat, this mother cat seems to have triumphed over her oppressor. After the narrator carries his wife Amelia, who has fainted, from the room, he comes back and sees the cat "sitting on the head of the poor American...purring loudly as she licked the blood which trickled through the gashed socket of his eyes" (49). Stoker once again highlights the cat's vampiric tendencies in his description of the cat licking blood from both her kitten and Hutcheson. Rather than images of a female vampire, however, Stoker's scene brings to mind passages from Poe's story "The Black Cat." Poe's influence on Stoker's work is notable, since, like the black cat in Poe's eponymous tale, the cat sits on the head of the discovered corpse. Moreover, Stoker's story relates two accounts of eye-gouging, with Hutcheson's eyes being pierced by the spikes of the Iron Virgin and the custodian suffering severe wounds to his eyes from the cat mauling him.

The custodian's wounds are so severe, the narrator indicates, that after the attack, he sits, unable to move, "moaning in pain whilst he held his reddening handkerchief to his eyes" (49). Finally, it appears, the victim has triumphed over her oppressor and the extensive violence of this tale has come to an end.

However, Stoker does not let the reader off so easily. Instead, the last sentence of the story reads, "I think no one will call me cruel because I seized one of the old executioner's swords and shore [the cat] in two as she sat" (49). While this story reveals "an interesting return to the idea of women turning the tables on men" (Corstorphine 59-60), the female victim must ultimately be persecuted for her vengeful actions. After seeing his acquaintance be emasculated by the Iron Virgin, the narrator must exert his masculinity over the female cat. In other words, the black cat is not permitted to escape unscathed after her murderous act of revenge. Moreover, the narrator excuses himself from engaging in the cycle of violence by claiming, "I think no one will call me cruel" ("The Squaw" 49), as he is simply putting the female character in her rightful place, so to speak. While Corstorphine argues that the narrator's killing of the mother cat is "pseudo-merciful" (60), I argue that it is anything but benevolent. Rather than allowing the cat to escape, the narrator must punish her for her vengeful act of violence. This action only furthers the cycle of violence rather than ending it, as the narrator commits yet another act of retaliatory violence rather than refraining from engaging in said violence.

As scholarship has indicated, this climactic scene is rife with sexual imagery, particularly in regards to Hutcheson's grisly death by impalement. Many scholars have written that the Iron Virgin is a thinly veiled representation of the mythological vagina dentata, or the teathed vagina that can violently emasculate and castrate unassuming men.

Corstorphine elaborates that, “as with *Dracula*, Stoker shows his tendency to introduce strange sexual undercurrents to the horrific. This is all part of the imaginative appeal of the Iron Virgin in the first place: it enables a kind of perverse return to the womb followed, of course, by penetration of the victim” (59). On a similar note, Hutcheson’s motives for entering the Virgin recall Poe’s descriptions of the spirit of the perverse.²¹ More specifically, Hutcheson’s description of “pinin’ and pantin’” for the Virgin hearkens back to Poe’s narrator in “The Black Cat” “blush[ing]... burn[ing]... shudder[ing] while...pen[ning] the damnable atrocity” (*Writings* 350). Both male characters allude to an oddly sexual, or as Poe might say, perverse excitement when contemplating sadistic and masochistic acts of violence. By portraying their male characters as such, Stoker and Poe suggest that there is a distinctly masculine desire for violence targeted at the self as well as others. However, they argue, it is marginalized bodies such as women, people of color, and animals who suffer the most from said violence.

Conclusion

Like many scholars have discussed, “the Gothic is one of the main discursive genres in the United States...precisely because it is a genre loaded with ghostly ‘monsterizings’ of racial otherness” (Wester 157). Stoker’s literature provides a particularly poignant perspective of racial otherness, as he himself was an Irish émigré living and writing in London. As Maisha Wester points out, “the Scottish and Irish were depicted in fiction as entirely different races; compared to the British, they were outsiders whose immigration to London brought hungry and contaminating hordes that threatened the normative

²¹ Hutcheson’s motives also evoke the continual impulses, as seen in Poe’s fiction, of returning to unity with the maternal. I would like to thank Dr. Julie Hall for bringing this connection to my attention.

whiteness of the English race” (158). Considering that Stoker and his countrymen were often depicted as racial others in Western literature, readers may assume that Stoker himself provided more nuanced depictions of people of color in his work. However, this is not necessarily so; while Stoker subverted some traditional points of view in his writing, such as his criticism of American and British imperialistic trends, he reinforced others, specifically harmful attitudes toward American Indians and women.

Like many scholars have indicated, Stoker’s literature and, particularly, his short story “The Squaw” reflect Poe’s influence on him and his writing. As Corstorphine explains, “If Stoker was forward looking in his politics, he retained a habit of looking to the past in literature. Poe lurks in the background as a major figure of the literary Gothic in Stoker’s imagination, and perhaps a literary father figure from whose shadow he had not escaped before doing so spectacularly with his most famous novel, *Dracula*” (53). Only three years after Stoker’s story was published (and one year before *Dracula* would be released), another interpretation of Poe’s black cat would surface in Britain. However, this implementation of the black cat archetype would not only incorporate Poe’s eponymous story, but Stoker’s reimagining of the titular tale as well.

CHAPTER IV

“Black Faces” and Feline Figures: Wells’ Adaptation of Poe’s Black Cat

Unlike the other texts I have discussed, H. G. Wells’ works are often categorized as science fiction rather than Gothic literature. Indeed, as Mason Harris points out, Wells’ texts “as a rule...have only a partial affiliation with the [Gothic] genre. Wells’s usual strategy is to contain horror within a normative scientific vision which remains more or less intact throughout the story. Only *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, where science fails, belongs entirely to the Gothic genre” (99). While Wells’ novella involves extensive explorations of science, more specifically biology, evolution, and vivisection, its depictions of racialized, animalistic Others and themes of violence and revenge cement it in Gothic literature. Like Poe’s and Stoker’s narratives, Wells’ novella juxtaposes humanity with animality, conveying both the brutality of humankind and the humanity of animalistic figures. Moreover, Wells’ intersecting portrayals of race and gender, and particularly his focus on the Black female body, align his work with literature by authors such as Poe and Stoker. As I will argue, in his use of Gothic themes and motifs in *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, Wells was inspired by Poe’s previous work, particularly his story, “The Black Cat,” and Stoker’s story “The Squaw.”

In my analysis of Wells’ novella *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, I expand on previous scholarship concerning the author’s depictions of indigenous people and animals as well as his portrayal of the notorious scientific practice of vivisection. Additionally, I argue against Carrie Rohman’s claim that although “Wells’s account...is partly racialized,” it is instead “a study of humanity’s animal nature rather than its racial nature” (*Stalking* 64). Instead, I clarify, Wells’ novella is distinctly racialized in its discussions of

animal and human relations that were particularly relevant during the nineteenth century. In my exploration of the text, I have found that Wells' depictions of race are closely associated with the uncanny, or more specifically, what Cyndy Hendershot has termed "the animal within" (*Animal Within* 103). Moreover, Wells' Beast Folk are characterized by both their racial and animalistic features, suggesting harmful implications about nineteenth-century understandings of race and evolution. The violence in the narrative is markedly directed at racialized and female characters; indeed, as we will see, the bodies that suffer the most brutalities in the text belong to marginalized and feminine figures. In my discussion of Wells' novella, I will accompany my analysis with some detail of the narrative, as it may be less familiar to readers than Wells' other works.

Setting the Stage: Wells' Depictions of Shipwreck and Rescue at Sea

The first chapter of *Moreau* opens after a shipwreck has already occurred; the protagonist Edward Prendick is lost at sea after his ship, the *Lady Vain*, has been shipwrecked after colliding with another vessel. Only Prendick and two other men are able to escape on a dinghy, with a fourth attempting to join them but instead falling into the sea and never resurfacing. After the three remaining men run out of food and water, a crewmate, Helmar, gives "voice to the thing we all had in mind" (Wells 8) and suggests the least desirable outcome: one man must sacrifice himself and be cannibalized²² so that two men may survive. At first, Prendick refuses to draw lots to see who will be sacrificed, but he soon comes around when he realizes that his chances of survival are otherwise slim. However, the problem is avoided altogether; the unnamed third man draws the short straw, fights with Helmar, and the two men fall overboard as a result of the physical

²² Cannibalism was a topic of immense interest to nineteenth-century American and British society and discussions or portrayals of the subject were often included in adventure narratives.

struggle. Prendick realizes the irony of this outcome and explains, “I remember laughing at that and wondering why I laughed. The laugh caught me suddenly like a thing from without” (8-9). After drifting in the dinghy and gradually losing his grasp on reality, Prendick is rescued by a passing ship. The last thing he remembers before passing out is seeing two men’s faces, the latter of which is described as “a dark face with extraordinary eyes close to mine, but that I thought was a nightmare until I met it again” (9).

When Prendick awakens, he finds himself in a ship cabin with a man attending to him. Immediately, before he can speak to the man, Prendick hears “the low angry growling of some large animal” (10). The man explains Prendick’s situation to him, describing how he was found shipwrecked. He offers Prendick “a dose of some scarlet stuff, iced” that “tasted like blood” and makes Prendick feel “stronger” (10). As Prendick recovers, the man explains that they are aboard a trading ship named the *Ipecacuanha*.²³ Once again, Prendick hears sounds overhead, notably “a snarling growl and the voice of a human being together” (11). The man reveals that Prendick nearly died and he is lucky to have survived the shipwreck as well as his dehydration and starvation. Before responding, Prendick is distracted by additional animal noises, particularly “the yelping of a number of dogs” (11). Prendick then requests food, and the man explains that he is preparing mutton that should be ready shortly. The man states, with some suspicion, that he must hear how Prendick survived alone in the boat.²⁴ Suddenly, he shouts, “Damn that howling!” and leaves the cabin, presumably to investigate the animal noises (11).

²³ The name of this ship is derived from the scientific name of the South American plant *Cephaelis ipecacuanha* (“Ipecacuanha”). This plant has “emetic, diaphoretic, and purgative properties” that induce nausea and vomiting when consumed (“Ipecacuanha”). As Margaret Atwood clarifies, Prendick’s “break in consciousness is going to have a nasty physical side to it, of a possibly medical kind” (xix).

²⁴ This appears to be another subtle reference to cannibalism, as the man questions Prendick how he “came to be alone in the boat,” suggesting that there were others who had previously joined him (Wells 11).

When the man returns, he asks Prendick again to explain his circumstances. Prendick briefly describes his work in natural history and the man responds that he, too, has worked in science and biology. He asks Prendick again about the boat, and Prendick explains the dire situation to him. The man says that he must leave again to check on the mutton's cooking progress, and as he starts to go, Prendick hears the animal sounds once more. Indeed, "the growling overhead was renewed" and, he illustrates, "so suddenly and with so much savage anger that it startled me" (12). Prendick asks the other man about the noises, but he has already closed the door behind him. Shortly afterwards, the man returns with the boiled mutton and Prendick temporarily forgets the strange noises. After a day has passed, Prendick feels well enough to explore the ship. The man reveals that his name is Montgomery, and he loans Prendick some clean clothes. As Prendick dresses, Montgomery tells him that the captain of the ship, Davis, is "three parts drunk in his own cabin" (12). When Prendick is fully dressed, the two men leave the small cabin.

At sea, far away from the domesticity and order of nineteenth-century society, Prendick finds himself contemplating a return to inhuman, animalistic behaviors in order to survive. While Prendick does not directly engage in cannibalism, the threat of almost sacrificing himself or another man looms over him. As Carrie Rohman points out, "though Prendick's companions struggle with one another and roll overboard before anyone is eaten, human nature is already marked in the novel as fundamentally physical, instinctual, and even aggressive" (*Stalking* 66). Moreover, while Prendick refrains from consuming human flesh, Wells interrogates the consumption of non-human animal flesh and its ethical implications. While aboard the *Ipecacuanha*, Prendick vampirically drinks a blood-like substance that revives and strengthens him. This substance is never

identified and may indeed be human or animal blood. After drinking blood, Prendick smells and eats mutton while simultaneously hearing overwhelming animalistic noises above him. While “Prendick, unlike the other two men who are on a raft with him, is horrified by the proposal of cannibalism as a means of survival” (“Animal Without” 7), he has no qualms about consuming animal flesh and may or may not ingest human or animal blood. By creating these ambiguous depictions of consuming blood and meat, “Wells codes the eating of flesh as an animal practice” (*Stalking* 66-67). Earlier in the narrative, when Helmar and the other sailor fall overboard, Prendick finds himself laughing at the irony of the situation but catches himself, understanding that laughing in the face of others’ deaths reveals “a thing from without” himself (Wells 9), or an inhuman trait. As we will see, these passages reveal the growing anxieties regarding animal and human relations and foreshadow forthcoming interactions between animality and humanity.

The “Black-Faced” Man: Black Bodies in *Moreau*

Immediately after leaving the cabin, Prendick and Montgomery encounter a strange man who has bestial features and a dark complexion. This man is “misshapen...short, broad, and clumsy, with a crooked back, a hairy neck, and a head sunk between his shoulders” (Wells 13). Additionally, he has a “strange face,” with the lower part of his face “projected, forming something dimly suggestive of a muzzle” (13). From this point on, Prendick refers to this strange person as the “black-faced man” (13). As Prendick looks around the ship, he notices the deck is covered with food scraps and detritus. He also spots the source of the animal sounds: a group of hounds chained to the mast begin

barking at him. In addition to the dogs, there is a solitary puma²⁵ trapped in a small iron cage, multiple rabbits in their hutches, and a single llama aboard the ship. Prendick asks Montgomery about the animals and their purpose, and Montgomery dodges the question.

Their conversation is interrupted by a series of loud noises, and Prendick sees the “black-faced” man being chased by a “red-haired man” (15). The crewmate strikes the man and he falls beside the dogs. The dogs, fortunately, are muzzled, but they still leap at the man who howls in fear. He quickly gets up and the red-haired man who chased him laughs at him. Montgomery comments that the crew has “haze[d] the poor devil” since he came aboard, and the captain responds, “That’s just what he is – he’s a devil, an ugly devil” (16). The captain threatens physical harm to the Black man if he enters the front of the ship again, telling Montgomery, “I’ll cut his insides out, I tell you. Cut out his blasted insides!” (17). The captain also reveals that Montgomery is responsible for both the black man and the animals aboard, saying that he “bargained to take a man and his attendant to and from Arica²⁶ and bring back some animals” (17). After observing Montgomery and the captain arguing, Prendick tells the captain to be silent, preventing the altercation from becoming more violent.

As the men settle back in for the voyage, night falls and Montgomery and Prendick make small talk, discussing London and their lives there. However, Prendick grows increasingly curious about the animals, Montgomery’s role in transporting them,

²⁵ I argue that while Wells uses the term “puma,” he intended the large cat to be a black jaguar rather than a mountain lion, though both species are part of the genus *Panthera* (Stein 34). In the text, the puma, like the llama, is exported from South America, where, the black variant of the jaguar is indigenous. In the 1930 film adaptation of the novella, *Island of Lost Souls*, the vivisected puma is referred to as the Panther Woman, further highlighting the figure’s blackness in stark contrast with the white male characters.

²⁶ Arica is a port located in southern Chile (McLean 133). Like Stoker’s setting of Nurnberg, the name of this location is visibly comparable to Africa and the reader may mistake it as such upon encountering it.

and his suspicious silence regarding the subject. Prendick thanks Montgomery for saving his life, and Montgomery seems to be on the verge of revealing the purpose of the animals to Prendick. However, he hesitates, and Prendick assures him he may keep his secret. Soon after, Prendick spots Montgomery's attendant on deck, and when the man turns to look at him, Prendick notices his eyes shining with a "pale-green light" (20). Suddenly, the man appears monstrous to Prendick, who explains that the "black figure, with its eyes of fire, struck down through all my adult thoughts and feelings, and for a moment the forgotten horrors of childhood came back to my mind" (20). However, he quickly turns away before Prendick can examine him further. Montgomery suggests that the two men turn in for the night, and they do so, though Prendick experiences restless sleep and strange dreams.

Wells' portrayals of race are notable in their representations of nineteenth-century conceptualizations of the subject. The overwhelming blackness and starkly animalistic features of Montgomery's attendant, whom we later learn is named M'ling²⁷, cannot be overstated. Before his name is revealed later on in the novella, this character is first referred to as "the black-faced man" before Prendick simply labels him as Montgomery's attendant, signifying his status as a servant to a white man. As some scholars have indicated, M'ling's name alone indicates his otherness. For instance, J. R. Hammond argues that "M'ling' is clearly a pun on 'malign', a reinforcement of [Wells'] central assertion that man contains within his nature a powerful strand of evil which can be tempered but not eradicated by a process of civilisation" (37-38). However, Hendershot's analysis is more apt in her claim that M'ling "bears a Chinese-sounding name" when

²⁷ Notably, though Prendick first encounters M'ling in "Chapter Three: The Strange Face," he does not refer to him by name until ten chapters later, in "Chapter Thirteen: A Parley."

compared to the English names in the narrative (“Animal Without” 7). In addition to his name, M’ling’s physical appearance enhances his racial otherness.

M’ling’s physical features are not only accentuated but hyperbolized: he has “peculiarly thick coarse black hair” and a large mouth that “showed as big white teeth as I had ever seen in a human mouth” (13). In his depiction of Black bodies, Wells also employs the uncanny. In his utter revulsion for M’ling, Prendick explains:

I had never beheld such a repulsive and extraordinary face before, and yet – if the contradiction is credible – I experienced at the same time an odd feeling that in some way I *had* already encountered exactly the features and gestures that now amazed me. Afterwards it occurred to me that probably I had seen him as I was lifted aboard, and yet that scarcely satisfied my suspicion of a previous acquaintance. Yet how one could have set eyes on so singular a face and have forgotten the precise occasion passed my imagination. (Wells 14; emphasis in original)

Clearly, Prendick is discomfited by the fact that, while he is repulsed by the Black man, he also recognizes something familiar in him. While this passage represents the uncanny, it also reflects Morrison’s haunting Africanist presence. Prendick appears both repelled and compelled by M’ling’s blackness, and his dark complexion is reflected in Prendick’s dreams and recollections. In addition to his blackness, the combination of human and animal traits in M’ling disturbs Prendick. However, M’ling is not the only character in the novella to be associated with the bestial world; Wells explores the intersections of humanity and animality in many of his characters.

In his portrayals of humans and animals, Wells not only closely associates the two groups with one another but blurs them together so that the categories overlap entirely. For example, when the captain physically attacks M'ling, he quite literally throws him to the dogs. If these hounds had not been muzzled, they would likely have maimed or killed him. In addition to M'ling being among the hounds, this imagery evokes historical accounts of dogs being used to hunt runaway slaves and alludes to the prevalence of mutilation of Black bodies. Unlike the white men aboard the ship, M'ling fears being attacked by the hounds for his blackness and otherness. Furthermore, like Poe, Wells' use of terminology is notable, as he simultaneously refers to the dogs and the drunken captain as "brutes" (15-16). While the dogs are brutal in their ferocity toward M'ling, the captain's violent drunkenness makes him brutish.²⁸ However, M'ling is not referred to as a brute; instead, Prendick applies language that specifically others him when compared to the rest of the men. When Prendick notices M'ling's eerie green eyes, he refers to him as "it," "the creature," and "the thing," further associating him with inhuman animals (20).²⁹ In this text, as in the other works I have addressed, race and animality are interwoven and inseparable, suggesting harmful implications about Victorian understandings of race.

"The Evil-Looking Boatmen": Wells' Representations of Race

After Prendick experiences a night of restless sleep and nightmares, the ship approaches a nearby island. Prendick observes that the islanders are strange "brown men" and he feels uncomfortable and anxious in their presence (Wells 27). Prendick also spots a lone figure on the island, a man of "moderate size" with a "black negroid face" (28). In addition to

²⁸ Wells, like Poe, suggests that their male characters' potential to commit violence is inherent in their alcoholism.

²⁹ Drawing from Shelley's groundbreaking Gothic novel, Wells describes M'ling in a manner that mirrors Shelley's references to Frankenstein's creation, including the terms "the creature" and "the thing."

the islanders and the Black man, Prendick sees a white-haired man who welcomes him to the island, albeit reluctantly; the man tells Prendick, “Now you are our guest, we must make you comfortable – though you are uninvited, you know” (29). Montgomery requests Prendick’s assistance in releasing the rabbits onto the island, and some of the rabbits, about “fifteen or twenty of them,” are released on the beach (30). The rest of the rabbits are transported, along with the puma, to a small house.

As he does with M’ling, Wells spends a great deal of time describing the boatmen and their racial ambiguity. They are “strange brutish-looking fellows” who, like M’ling, cause Prendick to experience feelings of the uncanny (26). After looking closely at their faces, Prendick explains that “there was something in their faces – I knew not what – that gave me a spasm of disgust. I looked steadily at them, and the impression did not pass though I failed to see what had occasioned it” (27). By creating this scenario, Wells suggests that Prendick has previously encountered people of various races, though the racial ambiguity of M’ling and his fellow islanders is what truly disturbs Prendick. In comparison to M’ling, the islanders appear even more racially ambiguous, which only heightens Prendick’s anxiety. He explains:

They seemed to me then to be brown men, but their limbs were oddly swathed in some thin dirty white stuff down even to the fingers and feet. I have never seen men so wrapped up before, and women so only in the East. They wore turbans, too, and thereunder peered out their elfin faces at me, faces with protruding lower jaws and bright eyes. They had lank black hair almost like horse-hair, and seemed, as they sat, to exceed in stature any race of men I have seen. (Wells 27)

These men with dark complexions and turbans evoke distinct images of the East, or more specifically, what has historically been termed the Orient. They speak in what Prendick refers to as “odd, guttural tones” in a foreign language that Prendick vaguely recognizes, explaining, “somewhere I had heard such a voice before, and I could not think where” (Wells 28). Though Wells intentionally constructs the ethnicity of these men in a vague manner, Kelly Hurley suggests that these men “vaguely resembl[e] East Indians,” particularly in regard to their turbans (105). Wells’ descriptions of ambiguously Eastern peoples correlate with Edward Said’s discussions of Orientalism and Otherness. Said writes, “The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe’s greatest and richest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other” (1). Ultimately, Wells’ problematic depictions of Eastern peoples lean into historical conceptualizations of Orientalism and Otherness.

However, the Orient is not the only region that has a history of being colonized by Europe; historically, European countries have colonized smaller island nations. Not only do Wells’ boatmen align with traditional depictions of Eastern peoples, they are also men with distinctly “brown faces” who inhabit an island off the coast of South America (Wells 24). Darwinian theory implied that minority groups, such as “South American natives...were inherently degenerate when compared to British subjects. The lack of inherently masculine traits in non-European peoples made them biologically inferior and more animalistic than Europeans” (“Animal Without” 3-4). As Hendershot indicates, Wells likely had a certain group in mind when portraying the islanders. She writes:

The ‘real’ non-Europeans who appear in the text are the Kanakas,³⁰ who are briefly discussed in Moreau’s explanation of his experiments. Moreau’s use of the South Sea natives who were imported as laborers to Queensland in the 1860s to work on sugarcane plantations, and hence were historically exploited by Europeans much as Moreau exploits them, serves to illustrate that Moreau equates the Kanakas with his natives. (“Animal Without” 6)

Indeed, later in the narrative, Moreau reveals that the islanders are Kanakas (Wells 75). Importantly, most of these islanders are clothed in white, which is not only juxtaposed with their darker complexions but also indicates the prevalent control that whiteness holds over them. Wells’ racialized characters ostensibly represent “the primitivist, orientalist, and antisemitic stereotypes that dominated nineteenth-century race theory” (Armstrong 85). While the racial aspects of these men alone discomfit Prendick, it is their racial ambiguity and the possibility of racial mixing that terrifies him the most.

In my discussion of racial mixing, it is crucial to more closely examine Wells’ portrayal of M’ling and his depiction of what I have termed the hybrid, disabled servant figure. M’ling is described as the “black-faced cripple” whose body has odd proportions (Wells 26). These disproportionate features and deformities cause him to appear monstrous, further signifying his racial otherness. In his harmful representation of M’ling, Wells clearly draws from nineteenth-century conceptualizations of race and evolution. As Taneja indicates, by “exceeding multiple identity markers, M’ling is apparently neither a primitive black-faced man nor a modern civilized Englishman,

³⁰ The Kanakas, also pluralized as Kanaka, refers to indigenous peoples of the South Sea Islands (“Kanaka”). Like other indigenous groups discussed in this study, the Kanaka people have experienced extensive violence and oppression as a direct result of colonization (Muckle 4).

neither an animal nor a human, neither a man nor a demon, but, rather, is described as muddling all of these categories” (151-152). M’ling’s ambiguous identity makes him exceptionally threatening to Prendick. By portraying M’ling as a racialized disabled man, Wells indicates the components of the ideal servant or, more aptly, slave. M’ling is the epitome of the subservient slave who silently and gladly serves his master, and, in this instance, eventually dies protecting him. As Rohman points out, “M’ling serves as an obvious point of conflation between imperialist racism and Darwinian theories of evolutionary superiority” (*Stalking* 67). Indeed, Wells’ depictions of race correlate with his depictions of animality.

As I have indicated, in his portrayals of race and animality, Wells suggests that M’ling is more animal than human. For instance, M’ling is treated more like the animals aboard the ship, rather than the men. These animals, like Black bodies, are commodified, with Prendick referring to them as “packages,” “goods,” and “possessions” when they are delivered to the island (24). Payal Taneja notes this process in her examination of the novella and explains that “even before the animals are physically humanized by Moreau, they are first and foremost transformed into trade goods by specific market forces that have already penetrated tropical outposts of the Empire” (141). More specifically, the puma and the llama, native to South America, “function as spectacles of British mastery over exotic animals” (142). Similarly, Moreau’s mastery over these exotic animals indicates his desire to dominate lesser beings, whether they are animals or humans. As we will see, the scientist’s intent to exert control over the animals exceeds the simple practice of pet-keeping and instead becomes more sinister.

Animal Research in the Nineteenth Century: A Brief History of Vivisection

After the animals are unloaded from the boat, Montgomery mentions to the white-haired man that Prendick is a man of science³¹ and the man ambiguously tells Montgomery, “I’m itching to get to work again – with this new stuff” (Wells 31). Once Montgomery and the white-haired man leave Prendick to relax in his new private apartment, Montgomery calls to the other man, using the name Moreau to refer to him. After Prendick vaguely recalls having heard the name somewhere before, he remembers that he previously heard Moreau’s name in relation to a news scandal. A pamphlet, titled “the Moreau Horrors,” was published and provided Londoners with a detailed account of Moreau’s conduction of various scientific experiments. However, the experiments became increasingly unethical and dangerous, and after Moreau fled England, a journalist revealed their disturbing nature. Significantly, on the day the pamphlet was published, “a wretched dog, flayed and otherwise mutilated, escaped from Moreau’s house” (34). Prendick realizes that these two Moreaus have much in common, and that the animals aboard the ship are likely being used in Moreau’s experiments. However, Prendick notes, “especially to another scientific man, there was nothing so horrible in vivisection as to account for this secrecy” (35). Prendick recalls M’ling’s strange face and ponders the possible correlation between “a notorious vivisector, and these crippled and distorted men” (35).

³¹ Earlier in the narrative, Prendick tells Montgomery that he had previously “done some research in biology under Huxley” (Wells 29). This refers to the biologist T. H. Huxley under whom Wells himself studied while a biology student at the Normal School of Science from 1884-1887 (Smith 10). Before he began writing fiction, Wells published *The Text Book of Biology* [sic] in 1893 (Hammond 30).

While there are implications of strange phenomena earlier in the novella, this is the first passage that truly foreshadows the significance of Doctor Moreau's involvement in scientific research and experimentation. In his recollection of previous events, Prendick reveals Moreau's reputation as a notorious scientist operating in England. Indeed, he states, "the doctor was simply howled out of the country" (34), though, by using this rhetoric, Prendick implies he believes English society's treatment of Moreau was unjust. As Anne Stiles indicates, Wells bases the character of Moreau on the growing literature portraying unethical science in Victorian England. She writes, "the first draft of Moreau, with its deleted references to *Frankenstein* and its structural resemblance to *Jekyll and Hyde*, suggests that Wells self-consciously situated his novel within this emergent tradition of Gothic mad scientist fiction" (127). However, Prendick points out, Moreau's silence regarding his work is particularly mysterious as vivisection was a recognized science at this point in history. Prendick remains somewhat protective of Moreau in his status as a fellow scientist and, like the reader, does not yet understand the moral and ethical complications of Moreau's experimentations in vivisection.

Vivisection refers to the scientific practice of performing dissections and operations on living animals as a means of research ("Vivisection"). While it remained a legitimate area of scientific research in Victorian England, the practice was controversial, particularly after Darwin's theory of evolution emerged. As Rohman indicates, "Darwin's insistence that differences between humans and other animals are differences of degree rather than kind radically problematized the traditional humanist abjection of animality" (*Stalking* 65). From simple pet-keeping to the more complex practice of vivisection, the spectrum of human interactions with animals was complicated by newer understandings

of evolution. As a result, a substantial antivivisection movement formed to protest the practice of experimentation on live animals. In 1876, the Cruelty to Animals Act was established, requiring regulation and licensing for scientists practicing vivisection (French 143). However, as Richard D. French argues, “it was in the twenty years after passage of the Act that the [antivivisection] movement’s personalities, policies, and ideology emerged to general view” (159). Notably, Wells’ novella was published exactly twenty years after the Cruelty to Animals Act was passed, indicating the ongoing controversy of vivisection.

In the antivivisectionist movement, the majority of members were women, with approximately forty to sixty percent of the group being female (Ferguson 111). Frances Power Cobbe was considered the primary spokesperson for the movement after she established the Society for Protection of Animals Liable to Vivisection in 1875 (Stockstill 126). Cobbe and other female activists equated the control male scientists held over animal bodies with physical and sexual violence and argued that doctors “rendered women as helpless as guinea pigs” (Ferguson 106). Indeed, for Cobbe and other antivivisectionists, “the desire to protect animals aligned with a desire to protect female bodies” (Stockstill 128). A popular theory at this time was that the notorious murderer Jack the Ripper had been a scientist who conducted vivisectionist experiments on animals before he began shifting this physical violence toward female prostitutes, who became the targets of his brutal crimes (Armstrong 91). While much is still unknown about Jack the Ripper and there is insufficient evidence to support this theory, its prevalence indicates the correlation between the antivivisectionist and feminist movements as well as connections between violence against animals and violence against women.

Although vivisection refers explicitly to scientific experimentation on animals, as Cobbe and her peers pointed out, the practice had poignant social implications that cannot be overlooked. There is an extensive history of marginalized figures, particularly black, female bodies, being regulated and manipulated by British society. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said writes,

To be able to sustain a vision that incorporates and holds together life and quasi-living creatures (Indo-European, European culture) as well as quasi-monstrous, parallel inorganic phenomena (Semitic, Oriental culture) is precisely the achievement of the European scientist in his laboratory. He *constructs*, and the very act of construction is a sign of imperial power over recalcitrant phenomena, as well as a confirmation of the dominating culture and its ‘naturalization.’ (145-146; emphasis in original)

While Said does not refer explicitly to the practice of vivisection, his allegory of the scientist in his laboratory is notable, particularly since the mad scientist became a popular literary figure in England as well as the United States. Like Said’s scientist, the vivisectionist signifies imperial power over marginalized subjects, particularly animal and female bodies. As we will see, Moreau has a particular knack for dominating and manipulating female animal bodies.

“The Crying of the Puma”: Animals, Pain, and Emotion

Shortly after Prendick’s realization, Montgomery visits his apartment. Suddenly, the men are interrupted by a loud animal noise. Prendick describes the sound as “a sharp, hoarse cry of animal pain [that] came from the enclosure behind us. Its depth and volume testified to the puma” (Wells 37). The men return to their conversation, and Montgomery

calls M'ling "an ugly brute" who is "half-witted" (37). Prendick replies in kind, agreeing that M'ling is "unnatural" and has "a touch of the diabolical" (37). However, the men are once again interrupted by the puma, who "howled again, this time more painfully" (37). Prendick describes the animal as the "poor brute" who "gave vent to a series of short, sharp screams" (37). Attempting to ignore the noise, Prendick asks Montgomery of what race are the islanders. Once again, Montgomery dodges the question and the two eat their meal in silence, save for the cries of the puma. Prendick notices that Montgomery is "in a state of ill-concealed irritation at the noise of the vivisected puma" (38). After they finish eating, Montgomery leaves.

While the puma's cries disturb Prendick, his empathy soon turns to frustration. He explains, "I found myself that the cries were singularly irritating, and they grew in depth and intensity as the afternoon wore on. They were painful at first, but their constant resurgence at last altogether upset my balance" (38). Prendick physically reacts to the noise, clenching his fists, biting his lips, pacing the room, and even plugging his ears with his fingers (38). After he realizes he cannot take hearing the noise any longer, Prendick leaves his apartment. However, he notices, "the crying sounded even louder out of doors" (38). Significantly, he states, "it was as if all the pain in the world had found a voice" (38). Prendick rationalizes his irritation, explaining "had [the puma] been dumb," he "could have stood it well enough" (38). Wanting to get away from the overwhelming sounds of animal pain, Prendick walks away from the settlement and ventures further out onto the island.

Prendick's response to hearing the puma's pain is fascinating, particularly since his reaction shifts the longer he hears its cries. While he first feels empathy toward the

animal, he explains that “the emotional appeal of these yells grew upon me steadily, grew at last to such an exquisite expression of suffering that I could stand it in that confined room no longer” (38). Additionally, Prendick clarifies that had he not heard the noise, or if the puma was silent, he could have tolerated knowing a nearby animal was in pain. Indeed, he says, “It is when suffering finds a voice and sets our nerves quivering that this pity [be]comes [to] troubling us” (38). This description of suffering finding a voice mirrors Poe’s narrator’s observation that it is the black cat’s “voice” that “consign[s] [him] to the hangman” (*Writings* 355). Like Poe’s black cat, Wells provides the puma with a voice with which the animal may defend itself and speak for itself. Significantly, at this point, Prendick begins to challenge the ethicality of Moreau’s experiments. While Prendick has previously defended Moreau’s questionable research, here, he questions the morality of conducting overtly painful experiments on animals. As Rohman points out, Wells “provides a rare fictional representation of animal suffering in medical experimentation” (“Burning” 128) and a poignant illustration of the ethical implications of vivisection and animal pain.

Prendick’s consideration of the puma’s pain is highly relevant to nineteenth-century discussions of vivisection. A common argument against vivisection was that scientists refrained from using anesthesia when operating on animals (Harris 102). While ether had been introduced to medical science in 1847, not all vivisectionists adopted the anesthetic for the purposes of their research (French 40). Antivivisectionists contended that not only were these animals alive while they were being operated on, but that they were entirely conscious and fully able to experience extreme pain. However, in 1863, physiologist Sir Benjamin Ward Richardson contended that vivisection with anesthesia

must be permitted, maintaining that “without pain there could be no cruelty” (32). Even within the antivivisectionist movement, the subject of animal pain continued to be challenged. Prendick struggles with this question of animal suffering himself, deliberating what to do when he hears the puma’s screams of anguish. Rather than confronting Moreau at this point, however, Prendick simply leaves the animal howling in agony, indicating the puma’s relative insignificance to him. While he attempts to ignore the animal suffering occurring literally next door to him, as we will see, Prendick will be unable to avoid confronting the intersections of humanity and animality for much longer.

In addition, Wells’ portrayal of the puma’s pain is notable in that he emphasizes the suffering of a female figure characterized by her blackness. While this passage is disturbing to read, it highlights the abhorrent violence that a white male character inflicts on a Black female body. Rather than shying away from this cruelty, Wells accentuates it, signifying its importance to the narrative as well as its historical prevalence during the nineteenth century. The puma’s pain is particularly distressing because she appears overtly human, with Wells personifying her and giving her a voice with which to cry out. In his portrayal of animal pain, Wells juxtaposes the puma’s stark humanity with Moreau’s monstrosity, while Prendick’s indifference and inaction make him appear more animal than human.

Encounters with the Animal Without and the Animal Within

After leaving his apartment, Prendick begins exploring the luscious greenery of the island. Stopping by a stream, Prendick sits down and contemplates the meaning of the strange men he has encountered. He falls asleep and is wakened by rustling sounds near the water. Turning toward the sound, Prendick sees a strange creature whom he soon

realizes is a man, walking on all four limbs like an animal. Prendick refers to this creature as “the Thing in the Forest” (Wells 39).³² The man drinks from the stream and then wanders off back into the forest. Prendick continues walking and stumbles upon a dead rabbit. Noting that the rabbit’s head has been “torn off” (41), Prendick becomes afraid and tries to find his way back to his apartment. On his way back, Prendick finds three “grotesque human figures” (41). The three people are naked “save for swathings of scarlet cloth about their middles” and they talk to each other in a language Prendick cannot understand (41). Once he looks at the bodies more closely, Prendick becomes more afraid, explaining:

Suddenly, as I watched their grotesque and unaccountable gestures, I perceived clearly for the first time what it was that had offended me, what had given me the two inconsistent and conflicting impressions of utter strangeness and yet of the strangest familiarity. The three creatures engaged in this mysterious rite were human in shape, and yet human beings with the strangest air about them of some familiar animal. (Wells 42)

Overcome with fear, Prendick turns and moves away, walking back into the forest slowly before picking up his pace once he is safely away from the creatures.

After he escapes from the three creatures, Prendick reencounters the first being he met, though the man runs from him. Prendick follows him and confronts him, but the man vanishes into the trees. Night falls, and Prendick notes the “inky silhouette” and “formless blackness” of night (44). As he tries to make his way through the forest, Prendick both realizes he is lost and feels as if he is being watched. He notices that he is

³² While Prendick does not recognize him as such in the darkness, this being is one of the feline Beast People whom Prendick later refers to as the Leopard Man.

being followed and attempts to confront the would-be attacker. When he picks up a rock to use as a weapon, the being leaves him. Prendick eventually makes his way to the edge of the forest and heads for the beach, running and hearing someone else chasing him. He manages to escape and returns to the settlement, once again hearing “the pitiful moaning of the puma” (47). Shortly after Prendick returns, Montgomery confronts him, demanding to know where he has been. Prendick relates the encounters with the strange beings and Montgomery replies that he needs rest. Montgomery helps Prendick into a hammock and he falls asleep.

The next morning, Prendick awakens and tries to get out of the hammock, although he falls out and ends up “upon all-fours on the floor” (49). Montgomery arrives to check on Prendick, opening a door that leads toward an enclosure. However, after he leaves, Prendick notices that he neglects to relock the door. Soon afterwards, Prendick notices a strange sound that is “not the cry of the puma” (50). Instead, Prendick describes this sound as being undeniably human: “Though it was faint and low, it moved me more profoundly....There was no mistake this time in the quality of the dim broken sounds, no doubt at all of their source; for it was groaning, broken by sobs and gasps of anguish. It was no brute this time. It was a human being in torment!” (50). As soon as he realizes this, Prendick gets up and hurries to the door, opening it. While he cannot make out most of what he sees, he perceives “something bound painfully upon a framework, scarred, red, and bandaged” (50). He then sees Moreau, who forcefully removes Prendick from the room. Terrified by what he has seen, Prendick contemplates the possibility of Moreau conducting experiments regarding “the vivisection of men” rather than animals (51).

Fearing he will be Moreau's next research subject, Prendick escapes and runs back into the forest.

Like Prendick's previous encounters with M'ling and the islanders, these things in the forest evoke the uncanny and fear of the Other. It is the intersections of humanity and animality that cause these beings to appear threatening to Prendick. Significantly, after seeing the first creature, Prendick notes, "the man I had just seen had been clothed in bluish cloth, had not been naked as a savage would have been, and I tried to persuade myself from that fact that he was after all probably a peaceful character, that the dull ferocity of his countenance belied him" (40). While Prendick is still disturbed by this inhuman thing, the fact that it is animal, as opposed to racial, somewhat comforts him. Additionally, as Rohman writes, the unknown "Thing in the Forest" "serves as the animal-without who ignites anxiety about the animal-within" ("Burning" 126). Prendick's recognition of the humanness of the animalistic creatures evoke immense anxiety within him. Similarly, Prendick comprehends the animality within himself; after he encounters the creature walking on all of its limbs, Prendick too goes "upon all-fours" when he falls out of his hammock the next morning (Wells 49). Prendick's encounters with the mysterious creatures initiates his examinations of humanity and animality and the implications of their disturbing intersections.

While Prendick is repulsed by the things in the forest, he shows more empathy toward the being in Moreau's operating room. Indeed, Prendick explains, the vivisected creature is not a "brute" this time and is instead human (Wells 50). Although Prendick is willing to accept the practice of vivisection on animals as a scientific necessity, vivisection on human subjects is unthinkable. As Gretchen Braun points out, "the pain of

the animal Other discomfits not, principally, through conscious connection with another being's unique suffering, but rather through horrified recognition of the Self in capacity for pain that threatens rationality and, carried to the final extreme of death, extinguishes selfhood" (514-515). It is Prendick's realization that he may be Moreau's next victim that utterly terrifies him. Although Prendick's initial conclusions about Moreau's experimentations are incorrect, these passages portray the intersections of humanity and animality that are crucial to Wells' narrative.

Wells' Beast People: Connections Between Animals, Race, and Gender

After he escapes, Prendick nears the forest and sees a "simian creature" whom he recognizes as the dark figure on the beach (54). Significantly, Prendick explains, "I did not feel the same repugnance toward this creature that I had experienced in my encounters with the other Beast Men" (54). He learns that unlike the other creatures he encountered, this being can speak. He refers to the being with male pronouns and states "he was a man...at least, as much of a man as Montgomery's attendant [M'ling]" (55). The strange man comments that Prendick came to the island "in the boat" and marvels at his hands, counting his fingers and comparing them to his own (55). This being, whom Prendick calls the Ape Man, leads Prendick through a convoluted path to a small settlement of huts that belongs to other humanlike creatures, or Beast People (55). The Beast People welcome Prendick to their settlement and explain their laws to him, with some tenets discussing what Prendick describes as "the prohibition of what I thought then were the maddest, most impossible, and most indecent things one could well imagine"

(59).³³ The group is interrupted by the appearance of Moreau and Montgomery, who try to apprehend Prendick. Prendick threatens to kill himself rather than be tortured by Moreau. Perplexed, Moreau asks him why he would be tortured, and Prendick explains everything he has seen. Moreau says that he will explain everything once the men return to camp.

After the men have returned to the camp, Moreau shows Prendick the puma before the two men meet privately. Moreau asks Prendick if he will admit that what he believed to be a vivisected human is “only the puma” (70). Prendick qualifies that it is indeed the puma, “still alive, but cut and mutilated as I pray I may never see living flesh again” (70). Moreau interrupts him and states that he will explain the nature of his experiments to Prendick. Moreau reveals to Prendick that the beings he had seen “were not men, had never been men. They were animals – humanized animals – triumphs of vivisection” (70-71). He explains that his experiments have caused “secondary changes [such as] pigmentary disturbances” (71). Prendick points out that these Beast People can talk, and Moreau responds that “the great difference between man and monkey is in the larynx” (73), though Prendick disagrees with him. Additionally, Prendick demands to know what Moreau’s justification is for inflicting this pain on the animals. Moreau responds: “[I]t is just this question of pain that parts us. So long as visible or audible pain turns you sick, so long as your own pains drive you, so long as pain underlies your propositions about sin, so long, I tell you, you are an animal, thinking a little less obscurely what an animal feels” (73).

³³ This ambiguous reference to the “most indecent things one could well imagine” likely refers to sexuality and the traditional Victorian avoidance of the subject. I will discuss this idea further in a later section titled, “The Female Beast-Folk and Their ‘Reversion’ to Animality.”

Moreau continues to elaborate on his research methods, explaining to Prendick that he first experimented on sheep. However, after unsuccessfully vivisecting two sheep, Moreau realized that “these animals without courage, these fear-haunted pain-driving things...are no good for man-making” (75). Instead, Moreau recognizes, predatory animals provide more effectively vivisected experimentations than prey. Moreau describes how he used a gorilla for his next subject and that the experiment was successful, with Moreau considering the vivisected creature “a fair specimen of the negroid type” (76). Nevertheless, the creature remains “abject” in Moreau’s mind (76). Significantly, Moreau insists, “I will conquer yet. Each time I dip a living creature into the bath of burning pain, I say: this time I will burn out all the animal, this time I will make a rational creature of my own” (78). Moreau concedes that many of his creations have human habits, including living in huts together, gathering fruits and herbs, and marrying among themselves. However, he argues, “I can see through it all, see into their very souls, and see there nothing but the souls of beasts” (79). Moreau states that he is hopeful in his experimentations on the puma, explaining “I have worked hard at her head and brain” (79).³⁴ After providing Prendick with a clearer explanation of his research, Moreau leaves him for the night.

As readers may note, this section indicates the severity of Moreau’s dedication to scientific research as well as the various fallacies of his argument. First, Moreau’s assertion that “the great difference between man and monkey is in the larynx” is, as Prendick suggests, inherently flawed (73). Prendick’s experience in hearing the cries of

³⁴ This is the first point in the narrative in which the puma is revealed to be female. Even after Moreau discloses her biological sex to Prendick, the puma is again referred to as a genderless “brute” in later chapters.

the puma testifies against Moreau's claim, since, while animals cannot speak, they can indeed make sounds of pain. While the puma cannot speak, the sounds of her screams appeal to Prendick just as much as a human's voice would. Moreover, Prendick mistakes the puma's shouts of pain for a human being's voice, causing him to believe that Moreau has been experimenting on humans. Moreau's disregard for pain suggests that he refrains from using anesthesia in his experiments, a detail that echoes anti-vivisectionist rhetoric of the time. As Harris notes, "the near-human creatures that result from this process are intended to remember their torment because excruciating pain is part of the civilizing process by which an animal becomes human" (105). In addition to Moreau's disdain for animalistic pain, he argues that his animal creations lack humanity entirely, despite their human practices. However, he goes on to say that these animals have "souls," albeit "the souls of beasts" (Wells 79). Moreau's belief in the soul, and his discussion of the souls of animals, clashes with his otherwise objective views on his animal experiments. As Wells' narrative implies, "the character of Moreau...represents an extreme form of the Victorian pro-vivisection position" (Braun 509). Indeed, while Wells initially presents Moreau as a logical man of science, the vivisectionist's reasoning quickly comes apart at the seams, indicating his madness and inhumanness in contrast with his animal creations.

Wells' discussions of race in these sections are notable and convey implications regarding widespread nineteenth-century conceptualizations of the subject. For instance, Wells' portrayal of an overtly racialized Ape Man who, as Moreau indicates, is of the "negroid type," is certainly problematic (76). Prendick describes his "ape-like companion" with "his hands hanging down and his jaw thrust forward" as incapable, despite the fact that he rescues Prendick from danger (55). Additionally, Prendick argues

that “the creature was little better than an idiot,” (56) though, inexplicably, the being has the ability to speak and count. Prendick’s and Moreau’s descriptions of the Ape Man not only mimic Prendick’s earlier perceptions of M’ling, but also mirror harmful stereotypes of racial minorities in nineteenth-century Victorian England. As Rohman indicates, the Ape Man and the other “humanized animals...embody a Darwinian nightmare of the evolutionary continuum, in which animals become human and—more horrifically—humans become animals” (“Burning” 122). On Moreau’s operating table, the line between human and animal becomes more blurred as his experiments become more successful. As Braun indicates, “the Victorian vivisectionist—male, European, educated—must maintain awareness of his biological similarity with the animal on the table while simultaneously controlling any anxiety about the ethical implications of that similarity: not only for the moral problem of inflicting pain, but also for the stability of classed, raced, and gendered hierarchies” (504). In addition to maintaining a racial hierarchy among his creations, Moreau also works to preserve a gendered society among his Beast People. However, as we will see, the Beast People have developed their own constructions of gender.

The Leopard Man: Wells’ Introduction to His Feline Beast Folk

The next morning, Prendick meets with Montgomery to discuss what Moreau revealed to him the night before. Montgomery explains that both he and Moreau have tried to keep the most animalistic behaviors of the Beast Folk in check, particularly their carnivorous eating habits. However, Prendick learns, “the Law, especially among the feline Beast People, became oddly weakened about nightfall; that then the animal was at its strongest; a spirit of adventure sprang up in them at dusk, they would dare things they never seemed

to dream about by day. To that I owed my stalking by the Leopard Man on the night of my arrival” (Wells 81). Prendick admits that one of “the most formidable animal-men” is the Leopard Man (82). Nevertheless, he observes, Montgomery has become accustomed to the appearances of the Beast People and seems to regard the majority of them as humans, especially M’ling, whom he treats as a human servant. After noting that M’ling is one of the canine Beast Folk, Prendick describes his interactions with Montgomery, using the pronoun “it” to refer to the creature:

It treated Montgomery with a strange tenderness and devotion; sometimes he would notice it, pat it, call it half-mocking, half-jocular names, and so make it caper with extraordinary delight; sometimes he would ill-treat it, especially after he had been at the whisky, kicking it, beating it, pelting it with stones or lighted fusees.³⁵ But whether he treated it well or ill, it loved nothing so much as to be near him. (Wells 84)

Gradually, Prendick realizes that he too has become accustomed to the Beast People, though they still disturb him.

When Prendick and Montgomery go to explore the island, they notice a rabbit crying and soon find a dead rabbit, the body of which is “rent to pieces, [with] many of the ribs stripped white, and the backbone indisputably gnawed” (86). While Montgomery is surprised, Prendick recalls the dead rabbit he saw his first night on the island and suspects the likely culprit is the Leopard Man. The men return to the camp and explain the situation to Moreau, who also suspects the Leopard Man. The men confront the Leopard Man, who attacks Moreau before fleeing. However, Prendick sees him hiding in

³⁵ The term “fusees” refers to “large-headed matches” (McLean 138).

a thicket and explains that, “seeing the creature there in a perfectly animal attitude, with the light gleaming in its eyes, and its imperfectly human face distorted with terror, I realized again the fact of its humanity” (94). Wanting to put the creature out of its misery, Prendick draws his pistol and shoots it between the eyes. Moreau chides Prendick for shooting the Leopard Man rather than capturing him and a few of the other Beast People drag the dead creature to the beach. Prendick reflects on the Beast People, recognizing Moreau’s selfishness and carelessness for his creations. Prendick realizes these “things were thrown out to live a year or so, to struggle and blunder and suffer; at last to die painfully” (95). He notes that his fear of the Beast People subsides, and he instead feels sympathy and pity for the poor creatures.

Wells’ depictions of the feline Beast People contrast with his portrayals of the more subservient creatures, particularly the servant M’ling. As discussed previously, M’ling mirrors the idealized slave figure who remains docile and submissive even after he experiences extreme abuse and brutality. Wells writes that regardless of how Montgomery treats him, M’ling “loved nothing so much as to be near him” (84). Indeed, as Wells indicates, M’ling appears doglike in his need to please Montgomery. On the other hand, the Leopard Man and Puma Woman are rebellious and refuse to be controlled by Moreau and his rules. Although the Beast People are forbidden from eating meat and walking on all-fours, the Leopard Man breaks these statutes at various points in the narrative. Similarly, after experiencing extreme violence at the hands of Moreau, the Puma Woman escapes her prison and attacks him before fatally wounding him. It is notable that Wells constructs these Beast People as feline, since cats, notoriously, “rarely allowed themselves to be victims of vivisection” (Kete 125). Instead, the antivivisection

movement often portrayed dogs as the primary victims of vivisection, a rhetoric that was particularly persuasive to Victorian society (Stockstill 126). Moreover, as historians have pointed out, “in the nineteenth century big cats such as lions and tigers had been of special attraction to people interested in exotic species from the tropics” (Taneja 143). Wells’ emphasis on the feline Beast Folk highlights their exoticism and Otherness. As I will argue, like the other authors I have examined, Wells makes the distinct connection between the feminine and the animal, or, more specifically, the feline.

The Puma Woman as Allegory

After about six weeks have passed, in the early morning Prendick sees Moreau enter his laboratory to continue vivisecting the puma. Prendick notes, “I heard without a touch of emotion the puma victim begin another day of torture. It met its persecutor with a shriek almost exactly like that of an angry virago” (97-98).³⁶ Suddenly, Prendick explains, “I heard a sharp cry behind me, a fall, and turning, saw an awful face rushing upon me, not human, not animal, but hellish, brown, seamed with red branching scars, red drops starting out upon it, and the lidless eyes ablaze” (98). Prendick raises his arm to protect himself from the puma, and she breaks his arm in her flight from the laboratory. Prendick describes the puma as “the great monster, swathed in lint and with red-stained bandages fluttering about it” (98). Moreau hurries out of the lab and runs after the puma while Montgomery assists Prendick.

Prendick, Montgomery, and M’ling decide to look for Moreau together and eventually find Moreau and the puma, both dead. Prendick describes the appearance of the puma, with her “gnawed and mutilated body” and “shoulder-bone smashed by a

³⁶ The term virago refers to “a female warrior” or “a bold, impudent woman,” further associating the puma with femininity (“Virago”).

bullet” (105). However, he adds, “perhaps twenty yards further [we] found at last what we sought. He lay face downward...one hand was almost severed at the wrist, and his silvery hair was dabbled in blood. His head had been battered in by the fetters of the puma” (105). With the help of the Beast People, the party carries Moreau back to the camp and prepares a funeral pyre for his body. Afterward, Prendick and Montgomery enter Moreau’s laboratory and “put an end” to everything “living” there (105).

While scholars have examined Wells’ puma in a variety of manners, one of the most prevalent arguments for this character is Heather Schell’s claim that the puma, or Puma Woman, is an allegory for the New Woman. Another intriguing claim is Ellen J. Stockstill’s assertion that the Puma Woman represents the feminine antivivisectionist movement. Although these arguments are compelling, I argue that there is more to this complex figure. Instead, I argue, the Puma Woman represents the “darker-skinned,” racialized woman of the nineteenth century whose Black body and sexuality were perceived as degenerate by British Victorian society (Schell 23). In Wells’ novella, the Puma Woman is characterized by her blackness and exoticism, making her a prime target for Moreau’s experiments. While there are other female Beast People living on the island, the puma in particular is utterly fascinating to the vivisectionist, who works “hard at her head and brain” as well as the rest of her body (Wells 79). Like Poe’s and Stoker’s black cats, the Puma Woman triumphs over her oppressor; however, as in Stoker’s narrative, her rebellion does not go unpunished.

Even at the close of the nineteenth century, pseudoscientific conceptualizations of race remained prevalent and provided British society with harmful perceptions of minority groups. Historically, people of color were associated with savagery and

animalistic behaviors, with women assumed to be especially hypersexual and deviant. As Schell elaborates, “darker-skinned women, were, in the imperial imagination, unrestrained and possibly ruled by passion, as well as physically stronger than English women” (23). However, she adds, “the Empire was also home to creatures more dangerous than dusky temptresses: colonisers’ encounters with predatory cats abroad generated a clear-cut picture of the ‘man-eater’ for those back home” (23). In other words, as we have seen, Black and indigenous women were closely associated with predatory animals, particularly felines, in the popular imagination. In her analysis of nineteenth-century literature, Schell argues that authors gradually developed the archetype of the Cat-Woman. She writes, “in her similarity to a *tigress*, the Cat-Woman conveys the instability associated with life in the colonies, as well. She is not civilised, not white, and not human; as a predatory cat, she can be female yet more powerful than a man” (25; emphasis mine). To paraphrase Schell, this animal-human hybrid figure conveyed heightening anxieties regarding women of color and power in colonial Britain. Moreau’s struggle with his own Cat-Woman symbolizes a growing concern for maintaining power over Black female bodies.

Moreau’s experimentations on the Puma Woman also highlight his need to control marginalized bodies. Indeed, Wells codes this physical control as sexual assault, with Prendick describing the puma’s experience as “a fate more horrible than death, with torture, and after torture the most hideous degradation it was possible to conceive” (Wells 52). While this description of Moreau’s experimentations can be read as a metaphor for sexual assault, it also echoes the feminist criticism that vivisection was akin to rape. However, Moreau’s control over the Puma Woman’s body extends beyond the metaphor

for physical and sexual assault; additionally, by maintaining power over her body, the vivisectionist attempts to control the Puma Woman's sexuality and reproductive ability. As Hendershot points out, "the Western cultural association of the feline with sexuality also informs Moreau's experiment: by altering the puma, he hopes to conquer the animal within, a concept largely figured as sexuality in Victorian culture" ("Animal Without" 13). She adds, "by altering the Puma, Moreau feels he will conquer feminine nature and transform it into masculine civilization" (13). Not only does Moreau intend to drive the animal out of the puma, he also aims to eliminate her femininity, sexuality, and ability to reproduce altogether.

However, the Puma Woman rebels against her oppressor, escaping from her prison and eventually destroying her antagonist in a final act of revenge. Significantly, she kills Moreau by maiming him with the very bonds he used to control her. Moreover, the Puma Woman fatally wounds Moreau at the sites of his body he used to manipulate her, including his hands, one of which is "almost severed at the wrist" (Wells 105). Additionally, as Stockstill indicates, "the puma kills Moreau by smashing in his scientific, uncaring, rational brain with the fetters he used to contain her" (134). Like Stoker's black cat, the Puma Woman targets her antagonist's head as the site at which she attacks. As Schell argues, "the Cat-Woman violently opposes men's efforts to control her body. She expresses this opposition explicitly, with her mouth and teeth" (30). While the Puma Woman indeed opposes Moreau's attempts to control her and her body, Wells, like Stoker, realizes that she cannot get away with this act of violence. Rather than surviving, the Puma Woman is fatally wounded while in combat with her oppressor. Although Moreau does not survive his confrontation with this display of fierce femininity, neither

does the Puma Woman, who is ultimately doomed to oppression in the oblivion of death. While the Puma Woman is the first member of the female Beast Folk to be killed, the other female animals survive. However, as Wells indicates, it is the feminine Beast Folk who are the first group to return entirely to their animal selves.

The Female Beast-Folk and Their “Reversion” to Animality

After Moreau’s death, the fragile order of the island begins to fall apart. Montgomery and M’ling are involved in a struggle with one of the Beast Men, which culminates in M’ling’s death. Montgomery is fatally wounded and dies shortly thereafter. Realizing that he is the only man left, Prendick assumes control of the Beast People. He befriends one of the canine Beast People whom he names the Dog Man. Significantly, the Dog Man refers to Prendick as “Master,” and, at one point, tells him, “I am your slave, Master” (118). As more time passes, Prendick realizes that the Beast People are beginning to revert to animality entirely. He notes, “Some of [the Beast People] – the pioneers, I noticed with some surprise, were all females – began to disregard the injunction of decency – deliberately for the most part. Others even attempted public outrages upon the institution of monogamy. The tradition of the Law was clearly losing its force. I cannot pursue this disagreeable subject” (123). Even Prendick’s Dog Man loses his ability to speak and returns to walking as a quadrupedal rather than bipedal creature as the Beast People revert to “Beast Monsters” (125).

Prendick himself observes that he has somewhat reverted to animality. He explains, “I, too, must have undergone strange changes. My clothes hung about me in yellow rags, through whose rents glowed the tanned skin. My hair grew long, and became matted together. I am told even now my eyes have a strange brightness, a swift alertness

of movement” (124). Eventually, Prendick leaves the island in a salvaged boat and drifts for three days before being rescued. After telling his rescuers of his experiences, Prendick realizes he must sound mad and refrains from telling anyone else of the island and Doctor Moreau, hoping to return to human society as much as possible. However, Prendick remains alienated from other people, unable to forget his experiences with the Beast People.

As Prendick emphasizes, it is the female Beast Folk who catalyze the overall reversion to animality. While he explains that the female Beast Folk begin rejecting the institutions of decency and monogamy, Prendick does not elaborate further and instead states, “I cannot pursue this disagreeable subject” (123). This ambiguity mirrors Prendick’s previous aversion, in which he refrains from elaborating on the law of the Beast People and the prohibition of “the most indecent things” (59). As Armstrong points out, “the ‘disagreeable subject’ that Prendick’s prudishness forbids him from detailing is the same feral reproductive energy and fecundity that Frankenstein foresaw in his female creature” (95) that prevents him from completing her. Additionally, Hendershot writes, “the ‘disagreeable subject’ of non-European female sexuality (equated here with animal perversity) was a target for imperialist control and containment” (“Animal Without” 14). Like the Puma Woman, the sexuality of the other female animals is threatening to Prendick, who attempts to crush any discussion of the matter. However, Prendick and Moreau fail to stifle female sexuality; instead, “masculine civilization’s hopes are vanquished by feminine nature” (“Animal Without” 14). Although white men attempt to extinguish female Otherness, they ultimately fail.

As do Poe and Stoker, Wells relates subversive femininity to animality and, more specifically, to feline behavior. Importantly, there are two particular passages that associate femininity with feline sexuality. Earlier in the novella, when Prendick hears the puma crying, Montgomery remarks, “If this place is not as bad as Gower Street – with its cats” (49). While Mason Harris points out that Gower Street was the location of University College and its medical school, implying that Montgomery could be referring to cats that were vivisected by medical students (105), Montgomery could also be referring to prostitutes, who were also referred to as “cats” (“Cat”). Significantly, after Prendick returns to human society, he recalls nights when “prowling women would mew after me,” further associating femininity with prostitution and deviant sexuality (Wells 131). Clearly, like his contemporary writers, Wells understood that female sexuality was closely associated with animality and included this concept in his text. As such, Poe’s and Stoker’s influence on Wells can be seen in his interrogations of humanity and animality.

Conclusion

Like the other authors I have examined, Wells uses animal representations to signify race, gender, and otherness in his text. As Carrie Rohman indicates, “the displacement of animality onto marginalized others operates as an attempted repression of the animality that stalks Western subjectivity in the modernist age” (*Stalking* 63). The topic of marginalized others became increasingly relevant to nineteenth-century discussions as the socially constructed categories of race and gender were challenged. Because of this, authors such as Wells and his contemporaries could not help but include poignant depictions of these subjects in their work. However, in their depictions of the juxtaposition of humanity and animality, Poe, Stoker, and Wells all imply that animality

is inherent to humanity, or, as Rohman points out, that “the animal cannot be extracted from the human subject” (“Burning” 126). Indeed, as Armstrong argues, this mode of literature “challenges the human-animal hierarchy fundamental to modernity, and commits itself in a far-reaching way to the proposition that humans are animals, and that humanity is largely defined by denial of this proposition” (80). Instead, in these texts, the animal becomes human as the human becomes more violently animalistic.

Wells’ portrayals of blackness, gender, and their intersections highlight how pertinent these subjects remained in Victorian society, even as the century was coming to a close. In his depiction of a racialized, feline figure who overcomes her oppressor, Wells also indicates the continuous relevance of Poe’s black cat figure to nineteenth-century society. Although Poe’s original story was published over fifty years before Wells wrote his novella, Wells’ overt applications of Poe’s motifs and his return to the black cat archetype emphasize the significance of violence against marginalized bodies as a Gothic literary process as well as a predominant societal issue in Victorian England.

CHAPTER V

Conclusion

When examining Gothic literature of the nineteenth century, it is difficult to ignore the prevalence of violence, particularly when considering the relative conservatism of Victorian society. Significantly, the texts I have examined convey correlations between violence against people of color, violence against women, and animal abuse. While Poe emphasizes connections between violence directed at various marginalized groups, Stoker and Wells emphasize the prevalence of violence targeted at Black female bodies. This prevalence of violence against marginalized bodies in literature reflects the prominence of violence experienced by vulnerable populations in nineteenth-century America and Britain and the ongoing marginalization of vulnerable groups in modern society.

Similarly, the prevalence of racialized animal characters in nineteenth-century Gothic literature indicates a trend in racial coding in American and British literature. While writers included stereotypical and harmful portrayals of marginalized groups in their work, animal figures or archetypes allowed them to comment on controversial subjects without doing so directly or overtly. Additionally, the emphasis on animal abuse in nineteenth-century literature not only conveys changing attitudes toward animals and petkeeping in American and British households, it also indicates an increased focus on the subjects of humanity and animality as well as their intersections. In these selected works, authors like Poe, Stoker, and Wells have portrayed animal figures that appear more human than the male characters with which they are confronted. Instead, these

white male antagonists have proven that they are more inhumane and bestial than their animal counterparts.

As we have seen, the Gothic literary genre has an extensive history of depicting marginalized people as uncanny others. These marginalized people often appear as hybridized figures who are characterized by multiple aspects of their identities, such as race and gender. The connections between blackness, femininity, and otherness in nineteenth-century literature make these portrayals of hybridity particularly notable. Because of this, I have analyzed these works of Gothic literature with an intersectional approach, examining the interrelationships between the roles of both race and gender.

Portrayals of Black and indigenous people of color are not only prevalent in nineteenth-century literature, but particularly poignant in Gothic literature. This is because, unlike other literary modes, the Gothic allowed authors to enter discussions of controversial social issues without overtly addressing these subjects in their work. Nevertheless, because conceptualizations of race were crucial to nineteenth-century American and British society, authors addressed the subject unintentionally or subconsciously. Additionally, these portrayals of people of color, though intended to be subtle to nineteenth-century readers, appear overt to contemporary readers who comprehend the historic portrayals of these marginalized peoples. As such, race, racial mixing, and nineteenth-century conceptualizations of race remain crucial to studies in American and British Gothic literature.

However, these harmful literary portrayals of race and blackness reveal more about nineteenth-century conceptualizations of the subject than they may initially appear. While Gothic literature often connects race and blackness with otherness, this process

reveals Western society's growing anxiety regarding the fragility of race altogether. As Eugenia DeLamotte points out, "behind the fears of dark, racialized others on which the Gothic construction of whiteness hinges is the unspeakable Other of that construction: the fear that there is no such thing as whiteness, or even race" (17). In other words, lurking behind the anxiety of blackness is the fear that whiteness and even race altogether are nonexistent and, in fact, meaningless. This anxiety, which underlies the more obvious fear, can be observed in numerous nineteenth-century ideologies. For instance, the masculine and the feminine may be as feeble concepts as humanity and animality, a dualism which Wells argues is less distinct than his contemporaries believed. By interrogating these subjects, nineteenth-century writers revealed that these conceptualizations of race, gender, and animality are extremely flawed. Indeed, authors such as Poe, Stoker, and Wells challenge traditional perceptions of race and gender.

In addition to race, gender is a vital subject to Gothic literature and can no longer be overlooked in scholarship. While women's Gothic literature, often termed the female, feminine, or feminist Gothic, is a necessary research area, male authors' portrayals of women in Gothic literature are equally important. In order to better comprehend nineteenth-century conceptions of gender and Victorian gender norms, it is crucial to analyze both men and women's Gothic literature. Women's Gothic literature has indeed historically been overlooked and excluded from the literary canon, to the detriment of American and British women writers and their legacies. For the purposes of my research, however, I have chosen to examine American, Irish, and British male authors' depictions of women and gender in Gothic literature and the correlations between these various works. In their portrayals of violence against women, these male authors highlight the

extensive abuse women faced in the 1800s. By no means do I intend to present this abuse as spectacle, nor do I propose dismissing women's Gothic literature and instead focusing exclusively on Gothic literature written by men. Rather, I have noted a trend in American and British Gothic literature written by men that I aim to highlight, indicating these authors' connections between violence against women and violence against people of color that align with historical data. In order to better understand perceptions of gender and gender norms in the nineteenth century, it is crucial to explore a variety of Gothic literature written by both men and women.

Animal Archetypes in Gothic Literature

Significantly, the role of animals in Gothic literature has only recently become noted in scholarship. For instance, the groundbreaking volume *Gothic Animals: Uncanny Otherness and the Animal With-Out*, edited by Ruth Heholt and Melissa Edmundson, was released only a year prior to this study. However, while domestic animals like dogs and horses are closely examined, the articles in this collection neglect to analyze the role of housecats and feral felines in Gothic literature. This gap in scholarship indicates a potential for research in those studying Gothic and Victorian literature. My intent has been to acknowledge this previously overlooked motif and signify the importance of what I have termed the black cat archetype to Gothic literature.

Unlike other members of the animal kingdom, including both wild and domesticated creatures, the cat offered a literary template upon which nineteenth-century authors could interact with crucial social issues. As Kathleen Kete indicates, "Writers often drew unfavorable comparisons between the irascible autonomy of the cat and the fidelity, sociability, and malleability of the dog" (127). While the literary dog remained

man's best friend, the fictional feline gradually became a symbol that signified rebellion and revolution. This trend can be observed in various works of Gothic literature, in which a feline figure, often a black cat, refuses to be ruled by their oppressor. However, during a time in which race relations were defined by conflict, this cat figure does not merely represent animality. Rather, the black cat archetype signifies a distinctly racialized, often feminine figure who overcomes their oppressor. Examinations of this black cat archetype and representations of feline figures in Gothic literature must be explored further.

In my analysis of the black cat archetype, it is crucial to acknowledge that I have examined the black cat as a literary figure, rather than as an animal in and of itself. Proponents of animal studies may argue that this approach, to paraphrase Baker, denies the animal or looks past the animal and delves deeper than necessary into textual analysis. However, I argue, the racialization of these animal figures in Gothic literature cannot be overlooked. The inclusion of these animals is notable, and these feline figures convey the increased popularity of petkeeping in the nineteenth century. Additionally, however, the association between these feline characters and their blackness is overt and cannot be ignored. Rather than denying the role of the animal, I argue that the overt racialization of these animal figures signifies more than mere animality and instead interacts with nineteenth-century perceptions of race.

Areas for Further Research

Significantly, while the Gothic mode of literature has become increasingly important in literary analytical studies, examinations of the genre's interactions with social issues, particularly race and gender, have only recently become prominent in scholarship. Similarly, subjects such as mental illness and disability are beginning to be examined

more closely but are still largely overlooked in literary studies. For the purposes of this study, I chose to examine race and gender exclusively in Gothic literature, although there are opportunities to explore additional ways in which vulnerable populations are portrayed in this mode of literature. Because of this, it is crucial to further examine the intersecting roles of these social issues and othering in Gothic literature.

Additionally, there is the potential for further studies in Gothic literature that use an intersectional approach when examining various texts. However, in my discussion of intersectionality, I propose examining the intersections of various social categories, not only race and gender. For instance, analyzing the intersections of race and disability or race and mental illness in nineteenth-century literature will help contemporary scholars better understand the perceptions of these marginalized groups in society as well as the experiences of these individuals. In my study of Wells' novella, I discuss what I have termed the hybridized, disabled servant figure. This figure, or archetype, must be examined further in works by other British and American authors of the nineteenth century. By exploring historical portrayals of intersecting social categories, scholars can work toward better understanding the experiences of individuals as well as the collective struggles of marginalized groups.

Finally, by no means is this study exhaustive or final in its analysis of Gothic literature. While I have selected three texts that reflect, through the application of animal figures, the prevalence of violence against people of color and violence against women in the nineteenth century, these are not necessarily the only literary works which convey this phenomenon. Rather, these works merely highlight the narrative trend of portraying

racialized and gendered characters through nonhuman, animal figures. Ultimately, this motif can be observed throughout Gothic literature and its portrayals of otherness.

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