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Scenes of Subversion: How Monstrous Subjectivities Affect Futurity in Gothic Horror

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A Thesis
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In

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Seton Hall University
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APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF THE MASTERS THESIS

This Thesis, "**Scenes of Subversion: How Monstrous Subjectivities Affect Futurity in Gothic Horror**," by **Salvatore S. DiBono**, has been approved for submission for the Degree of Master of Arts in English (**Literature)** by:

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Abstract

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen begins his conclusory section of his influential essay "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)" stating, "Monsters are our children. They can be pushed to the farthest margins of geography and discourse, hidden away at the edges of the world and in the forbidden recesses of our mind, but they always return" (52). Yet, Lee Edelman in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* makes a statement which complicates the idea of the monster being "our child" when discussing that the normative (conservative) movement will "recurrently frame their political struggle…as a 'fight for our children—for our daughters and our sons," and thus as a fight for the future" (3). How can the monsters be "our children" yet we do not fight for them? What does that say for the future in texts that house the monstrous? I believe that Cohen's position that we are the parents that beget the monstrous gives to much credit to the normative culture seeking to destroy the monstrous, when the monstrous is so much more than the aberrant spawn of society and culture at large. Rather, the monstrous is a radical making of itself; a cell that performs asexual reproduction. Therefore, the monstrous has much more agency than merely the oppressed abject. The monstrous is a revolutionary *subject,* a "monstrous subject." Yet, how do we as readers identify what constitutes monstrous subjectivity and when does such a phenomenon occur? In this project I define the term "monstrous subjectivity" in conjunction with providing a metric which maps the exact point—or rather exact scene—where such a radical act occurs. This scene of radical self-birth of the monstrous subject is a term I call the "scene of subversion," which is where what was once meant to be made abject instead resists and rejects this act of hegemonic power this making *itself* a subject outside and in opposition to the normative structure. Yet, what does this have to do with futurity? Such a radical act occurring in the archive of the Gothic horror genre indicates that it is the monstrous that holds the power over the temporality of the text. The monster

can deny a futurity, reject a futurity, or assure a futurity—and this is not an exhaustive list, but rather the three I am focusing on. I identify these three variations of how the monstrous subject has an affect on futurity in Gothic horror through Edgar Allan Poe's tale, "The Fall of the House of Usher," Henry James's novella, *The Turn of the Screw*, and Toni Morrison's novel, *Beloved.* I investigate the intersections these texts lay out to find this point of self-birth I call the "scene of subversion" as well as underscore the ramifications of such a radical, monstrous act within the text—namely to the futurity of the text overall. These scenes of subversion are where the monster shows itself to be less a "child" of *our* making and more so of *its own* making therefore rejecting the concept of the monster as abject and instituting the monster as oppositional and radical subject.

Introduction: What does Horror have to do with the Future?

The American gothic imaginary is a continuum of monsters who are teaming with meaning and the capability to affect a narrative on a fundamental level able to deconstruct and oppose norms of American ideology. Discussion of the monstrous is centered on this concept of monster as demonstrator of the threat of abjection and the consequences of being abject. For instance, the robed monster of M. Night Shyamalan's *The Village* forever patrols the border between the civilization of the eponymous village and what lays beyond, only for us to learn that the monster is a disguise used to scare the village folk from traveling and seeing the modern civilization that lays beyond their borders. In his essay "Monster Culture (Seven Thesis)"—an essay wherein he works to define what constitutes a monster—Jeffrey Jerome Cohen posits that "the monster is difference made flesh, come to dwell among us. In its function as dialectical Other or third-term supplement, the monster is an incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond—of all those loci that are rhetorically placed as distant and distinct but originate Within" (7). This theoretical maxim of

Cohen's has led to a focus on the monstrous being viewed purely as something aberrant, as something abject to (and thus abjected from) the culture that created it. Cohen's approach to monstrosity aims to critique the dominant culture that has created and then cast away the monster.

However, this focus on the dominant hegemonic culture that creates the monstrous gives too much credit to the dominant culture. Such an exclusive focus offers us no real understanding of the complex functionality and positionality of the monstrous in relation to the hegemonic structure that created it and deemed it as abject. There is a form of subjectivity unique to the monstrous which situates the monstrous as being in opposition to the hegemony of the white, patriarchal, heterosexual, and capitalistic American ideology. This "monstrous subjectivity is not a valorization or fetishization of Otherness, but rather a reimagining of the subject positionality of those who are considered monstrous and a giving of power to the monstrous as a form of radical resistance to an oppressive hegemonic structure. Instead of viewing the monster as a disguise for ideology in order to keep its subjects in line, we should focus on how the monstrous also functions as a diametric resistance to dominant ideology, thus becoming a subjectivity that demands to be perceived in a context of its own making in response to the dominant culture.

In order to identify what constitutes a literary figure as possessing or claiming "monstrous subjectivity" it is important to first define this term. Most important to this understanding of "monstrous subjectivity" is the concept of hegemony originally developed by Antonio Gramsci but furthered by the Althusserian theory of ideological state apparatuses. Hegemony is defined as a "shorthand to describe the relatively dominant position of a particular set of ideas and their associated tendency to become commonsensical and intuitive, thereby inhibiting the dissemination or even the articulation of alternative ideas" (Rosemond, Brittanica.com). "Monstrous subjectivity" is the realization or the claiming of subjecthood outside of hegemonic—or, more

plainly, normative—conceptions of subjecthood. Subjectivity is the possession of a consciousness, perspective, experience, and agency, or in plainer terms being in control of one's own individuality. There is also a double move taking place when referring to the subject in the context of hegemony, where there is a perceived subjectivity as previously defined, but there is also the modality of being a subject. Subjecthood is the passive position of being subjugated or being under domination. Therefore, the typical mode of the subject is to be both in control of one's own individualism whilst also being dominated by a hegemonic force in fear of being made abject.

The concept of the monstrous subject is a reframing of the concept of the abject, a positionality Julia Kristeva in "Approaching Abjection" defines as "one of those violent, dark, revolts of being directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated" (95). Reframing the abject as an alternate subject then problematizes the position of the entity/structure/ideology that deemed the alternate subject as abject, which is where the function of the monstrous in the conceptualization of monstrous subjectivity comes into play. This reframing poses the following question: if there is a subjectivity outside the context of the dominant hegemony, is there still any power in the fear of abjection for those subject to hegemony? This question underscores how the notion of fear of the abject by the subject is a projection of the existential fear of loss of power of the hegemonic structure. Therefore, the monstrous subject possesses some form of psychic power of resistance in claiming their positionality outside the borders of hegemony. However, how does this concept of "monstrous subjectivity" affect ideas of futurity in a text? Horror being a subgenre of the wider genre of speculative fiction, the genre portrays various ramifications for the act looking towards the future: the future that *could have* existed after the text, and the future that was *denied*; and all of these different iterations of futurity

are affected by an external force and that external force is the monstrous. Well, if the monstrous does such a thing, then how, where, and when does the monstrous affect the futurity of the text? In addition to addressing these questions, I also look to identify a qualitative metric of horror literature that is key to realizing the how, when, and where such a radical, transformative act occurs, and I will call this metric the "scene of subversion." This is the point where the monstrous makes itself known as subject and interrupts any attempt or assumption of a "normative" futurity. This interruption fully rejects the usual logic of the abject/monstrous being thought of in *objective* terms and instead attributes a subjectivity to the monstrous positionality. These are no longer *objects* being gazed upon, but rather the *subjects* doing the gazing.

The project of defining and identifying "monstrous subjectivity" is understanding how such a subjectivity functions in enhancing a conceptualization of horror as a radically subversive literary genre. Identifying "scene of subversion" begins with a similar project in its goal but focuses on where such radical forms of resistance are located and point to a distinct intersection of various discourses of radical theoretical traditions of resistance. Louis Althusser's concept of ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) is imperative to understanding how power operates and how power seeks to assure its futurity by reproducing the means to reproduce itself and the process by which this takes place is interpollation. This concept of a futurity, or rather a reproductive futurity, is doubled down on in Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive,* in which Edelman defines queerness as an oppositional stance to the conservative ideological structure of reproductive futurity, such that "fighting for the children" as conservatives love to spew is an ideological conflation with children and an assured future. I will use Edelman's conceptualization of reproductive futurity in conversation with Althusser to frame my understanding of hegemonic power's goals and the resistance of said goals by the monstrous subject at the scene of subversion.

The concept and even the etymology of the term "scene of subversion" that I am coining is informed by Saidiya Hartman's concept of a "scene of subjection" that she coins and defines in her book *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* as "scenes in which terror can hardly be discerned…By defamiliarizing the familiar, [that] illuminate the terror of the mundane and quotidian rather than exploit the shocking spectacle… here is the diffusion of terror and the violence perpetuated under a rubric of pleasure, paternalism, and property. Consequently, the scenes of subjection examined here focus on the enactment of subjugation and the constitution of the subject" (4). However, my concept of a scene of subversion is realized by looking at what Hartman calls "the shocking spectacle" which erupts out of the mundane scenes of subjection that intersect with Fred Moten's idea of how "the history of blackness is testament to the fact that objects can and do resist" (1) in his book *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition.* When one is "in search of a subject" (Hartman, 14) at the point where "objects can and do resist" one gets the scene of subversion, where the object or abject becomes a radical subject, a monstrous subject.

Putting these theories in conversation with each other maps out an intersectional discourse and conceptualization of subversion, the monstrous, and subjectivity that is necessary in understanding the work in engaging with a discourse in how horror has been a subversive genre historically and continues to be so. However, when coming to a reckoning of these theories and conceptualizations, the concept of "monstrous subjectivity" seeks to bridge the gap between the notions of social death and hegemony while refraining from romanticization the position as oppressed and Othered. Rather, there is a recontextualization of power when understanding the ramifications of rejecting being Othered. A radical subject position surfaces that cannot exist within the systems of the oppressive structures, a subject position that is birthed out of the tension

of abjection and resistance that proliferates and matures within its own contexts, which is in direct opposition to the contexts that sought to oppress or destroy it, a radical subjectivity that the reader is forced to confront and reckon with. It is the point ideology seeks to erase, and the subject is confronted with a form of fun-house mirror of speculative subjectivity that is familiar yet alien, desirable yet repulsive. The questions that this act of reckoning with monstrous subjectivity seek to raise and attempt to answer are: how does monstrous subjectivity's function as an act of resistance/subversion seek to recontextualize or speculate on the recontextualization of the abject position? How does this function do the same act of recontextualizing or speculative recontextualizing in regard to positions of power? And if this recontextualizing takes place, what future can we as readers, scholars, and subjects then glean from that?

"The Last of the Usher Race": The Monstrous Feminine & a Futurity Denied

Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" was published in *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* in September 1839. This short tale by Poe is considered to be a classic of the American horror canon. The tale follows an unnamed narrator who is visiting his childhood friend, Rodrick Usher, after receiving a concerning letter about his deteriorating physical and mental state. Upon the narrator's arrival, Rodrick confides in his friend about the sorry state he and his family line are in. The days of the Usher race are numbered, with Rodrick's poor health catching up to him and the likewise declining health of his twin sister, Madeline, who suffers from an ailment reminiscent of narcolepsy. Although alive when the narrator comes to the home, Madeline's appearance is like that of a ghost. Within a few days of the narrator's arrival, however, she seemingly dies of her ailments and her brother Rodrick decides to entomb her in the cellar rather than burying her at a cemetery. As time passes, one stormy night, the pair hear loud noises

throughout the house, Rodrick reveals that he may have buried Madeline prematurely, and in a climactic crescendo of horror, Madeline appears, bloodied and screaming. She then falls dead, as does Rodrick, commencing the collapse of the House of Usher. As the narrator rushes out, the tarn swallows the house whole.

In his tale, however, the house and its residents do more than just die. This tale follows the key aesthetic formula of the Gothic horror genre with staples such as a haunting of sorts, the dilapidated pre-modern manor that is as much a character in the tale as the human—and/or formerly human—characters in the tale, and a morose landscape to pair with the manor house. This classic tale by Poe depicts a futurity that was interrupted and subsequently denied, the futurity in question being that of the Usher race. And who denies the Usher race their futurity? The one who denies the Ushers their entitled futurity is Madeline Usher. Throughout the text, Madeline is seen as simply a "mournful burden" (329), an object to be sequestered to the periphery; yet, by the end of the tale her screams are called "the death-cry of the dragon" (334). Here Madeline's screams are conflated with the dragon in the story of Ethelred that the narrator reads to Rodrick, which acts as a metaphor for this monstrous metamorphosis of Madeline Usher that changes her from peripheral object to radical subject capable of being the final punctuation mark of the Usher line.

"The Fall of the House of Usher" is a paradigmatic example of the Gothic narrative, and Madeline Usher is emblematic of Poe's Gothic oeuvre. Poe utilizes tropes reminiscent of David Punter and Elizabeth Bronfen's definition of the Gothic, which they outline in their essay "Gothic Violence, Trauma and the Ethical":

> [The] Gothic swerves away from that notion of the 'precise point'…it recognizes that in fact wherever one digs one will come across the bones of the dead… and that instead of such excavations proving a new historical security, a new sense of

> order and origin, they will merely produce an 'overhang,' an increasingly unstable superstructure as the foundations are progressively exposed. (12-16)

Punter and Bronfen's understanding of the Gothic in this quotation is discussing the subversive move with temporality that the Gothic makes as a genre. The genre's capability to "swerve away" from the "precise point" of time in the past being excavated in order to subvert the comfortable idea of "a new historical security" or "new sense of order" is key to understanding the Gothic as a genre that is ripe with subversion from a "norm." Poe's tale is no different in its functionality of subversion. However, the subversion of 'The Fall of the House of Usher" is at a "precise point," and this point, or scene, is the scene of subversion, where the normative "order of things" is undermined in a radical act of resistance. Now, that being said, it is important to understand that "The Fall of the House of Usher" does not "swerve away" from the conventions of the Gothic expressed here by Punter and Bronfen; rather, I am more focused on mapping the point where this Gothic text produces or unveils the "increasingly unstable superstructure as the foundations [is] progressively exposed" (16), and how that point affects the concept of a future in the text. For "The Fall of the House of Usher" a possibility of a future of the Usher race is interrupted and denied and it is done so at this scene of subversion I will identify and map out.

This function of the Gothic then coincides with thesis three of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's essay "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," aptly titled "The Monster is the Harbinger of Category Crisis." The genre of the Gothic functions as a "refusal to participate in the classificatory 'order of things'" (40), which renders the Gothic a monstrous landscape of ambiguity that is a ripe breeding ground for monstrous characters. Poe constructs his Gothic in the feminine form. According to Tracy Hayes in her article "Poe, Insanity, and Containing the Feminine Monstrous," Poe's portrayal of women is a "compounding [of] a morbid equation of beauty with mortality combined

with a monstrous betrayal by the feminine in both nature and nurture in his…aesthetic framework" (2). Madeline Usher in this tale therefore fit in with the trends of how Poe writes women, where "the monstrous [is] transferred onto the female object of devotion who seemingly perishes from a wasting disease only to return in an embodiment of Sigmund Freud's *unheimliche,* the 'unhomely' monstrous which should [remain] suppressed but reappears evoking fear and dread" (3). However, the evocation of an uncanny dread vis-à-vis the monstrous feminine reaches its zenith in the horrific resurfacing of a blood-soaked Madeline Usher, which is the scene of subversion of the hegemonic intersection of patriarchal and class-based power. Here, Madeline Usher embodies the monstrous feminine, which is defined as "a masculine projection of womanhood unrestrained by the duty of nature the male unsuccessfully repressed by their male counterparts and thus [returns] in a perverted act of monstrous consummation" (3). She resists her positionality as feminine object by embracing a monstrous feminine subjectivity. The nature of her subjectivity is positioned in an oppositional space, a queer space, that seemingly originates inside of the male-centric imaginary that her brother, Rodrick, and the narrator of the tale uphold in their view—or lack thereof—of Madeline. What I mean by a lack of view is the lack of focus on Madeline as one of the last members of "the Usher race." The true focus of the discourse in the tale frames Rodrick as the last of the Usher race, because when the concept of "the Usher race" is evoked, it is to imply the inherited patriarchal power of the aristocratic family dynamic. However, Madeline instead opposes this male gaze—or male blindness—and thus Madeline affects the male-imaginary in such a way that disrupts the possibility of a future within this patriarchal superstructure. By refusing her patriarchal categorization as a typical feminine object, subject, or abject. Madeline Usher displays a monstrous subjectivity that denies a futurity for the reproduction of the Usher line by castrating this space thus denying the reproduction of a male hegemonic power structure in Poe's Gothic tale.

To first understand Madeline Usher as monstrous subject resisting and her effect on the male-centric psychic space, it is imperative to first understand the psychic space in question in Poe's tale. The story is centered around the dynamic between the narrator of the tale and the patriarch of the House of Usher, Rodrick. The narrator comes to "the melancholy House of Usher" (317) after receiving a letter from Roderick that "spoke of acute bodily illness—of a mental disorder which oppressed him" (318). The narrator also describes the feeling that the House of Usher evokes "with the first glimpse of the building," stating, "a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit. I say insufferable; for the feeling was unrelieved by any of that half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment, with which the mind usually receives even in the sternest natural images of the desolate and terrible" (317). From the beginning of the story, the derelict and pestilent-filled manor house foreshadows the narrator's purpose for visiting this physical and psychic space of malady as symbolic of what David Blair, in his introduction to *Gothic Short Stories,* states as "the very Gothic idea of the degenerate legacy of a decaying European aristocracy" (xv). Understanding how the derelict state of the house reflects the decaying body politic as not just a trope of the Gothic, but also how this Gothic trope functions as this ambiguous breeding ground for the monstrous is imperative to properly identifying the scene of subversion that comes at the end of the tale. This breeding ground indicates an anticipation of the subversion, which is a process that Gothic horror is emblematic of. I use the term "breeding ground" both in its metaphoric term as being a space that creates something as well as literally a ground upon which breeding occurs.

In this context, "The Fall of the House of Usher" then displays an environment that is anticipating the subversion that occurs at the intersection of class and gender in this tale, which is implied through the description of the Usher family. The narrator states, "his [Rodrick's] very

ancient family had been noted, time out of mind, for a peculiar sensibility of temperament," adding that "the stem of the Usher race, all time-honored as it was, had put forth, at no period, any enduring branch, in other words, that the entire family lay in the direct line of decent, and had always, with very trifling and very temporary variation so lain" (318). These lines do more in implication than in overt description when alluding to the transgressions of the House of Usher, which underscores the House's "principal feature," its "excessive antiquity" (319). The implication, according to Nadal, "evokes an unspecified transgressional family trauma in which hints of historical change and aristocratic decay can be traced" (185). This "transgressional family trauma" could well be "hints of incest [and/or] a family curse" (186). The narrator alludes to an implied incestuous relationship between Rodrick and Madeline Usher and their family's "peculiar sensibility of temperament" (318). Another point where the narrator implies the possibility of Rodrick's incestuous obsession for his sister is when the narrator attempts to trace Rodrick's gloom "to a more natural and far more palpable origin—to the severe and long-continued illness—indeed to the evidently approaching dissolution—of a tenderly beloved sister—his sole companion for long years" (323). Therefore, the uncanny, the abject, and the monstrous all come out through the speculation of a supposed transgressive relationship. This trauma embodies itself as the maladies of the Usher twins, which have been considered "a family evil and one for which he despaired to find a remedy—a mere nervous affliction, he immediately added, which would undoubtably soon pass of" (322). Although there are afflictions that affect both Ushers, the focus of the story—or as the narrator states, "the object of my visit" (322)—is on the affliction of the sullen patriarch of the now dwindling Usher race. The narrator's focus on Rodrick is important to call attention to because the Usher line would continue through his supposed progeny, yet none have been produced and his foreshadowed death thus makes the fall of the Usher race imminent. This is where the concept

of futurity and queer oppositionality comes into play in this tale. When discussing the concept of reproductive futurity, Lee Edelman states that:

> For politics, however radical the means by which specific constituencies attempt to produce a more desirable social order, remains, at its core, conservative insofar as it works to *affirm* a structure, to *authenticate* social order, which it then intends to transmit to the future in the form of its inner Child. That Child remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmic beneficiary of every political intervention. Even proponents of abortion rights, while promoting the freedom of women to control their own bodies through reproductive choice, recurrently frame their political struggle, mirroring their anti-abortion foes, as a "fight for our children—for our daughters and our sons" and thus a fight of the future. (3)

Edelman identifies a key component to conservative ideology, which is the conflation of the Child with an assured future, Children—as we shall see when discussing *Turn of the Screw*—are emblematic of a future of reproduction, because they are both the product of reproduction and are assumed to reproduce in the future as adults. As I have previously implied, the Usher family partake in "transgressive relationships" and they do so in order to assure a reproductive futurity of the Usher race. Therefore, the House of Usher is indeed a "breeding ground" in both senses of the term. It is assumed that Rodrick and Madeline are supposed to continue their family traditions and assure the continuance of the Usher race. Yet, the implication of incest paired with the diseases and disabilities that Rodrick and Madeline proport to have also anticipate not just an interruption but an end of this family cycle, a subversion of the incestuous patriarchal structure.

The aforementioned immanent destruction of the House of Usher is emblematic of Madeline Usher's function in this text leading to the scene of subversion. As Hayes aptly states,

"Madeline Usher serves to act as both *monstrare* and *monare*—she is a portent of the moral and literal fall of the Usher line and its house" (4-5). In this quotation, Hayes is referring to the etymology of the term monster, which is to demonstrate (*monstrare*) and to warn (*monare*), and this is Madeline's monstrous function in the narrative. The tale first demonstrates Madeline's function when the narrator describes how Rodrick describes Madeline, which is as if she died before the narrator's arrival, stating, "Her disease…would leave me…the last of the ancient race of the Ushers" (323). Rodrick is speculating on the determined passing of Madeline Usher, and the peculiar timing of the next scene that takes place is a response to this speculation, as the narrator states, "while [Roderick] spoke, Madeline (for so she was called) passed slowly through the remote portion of the apartment, and, without having noticed my presence disappeared. I regarded her with utter astonishment not unmingled with dread…A sensation of stupor oppressed me, as my eyes followed her retreating steps" (323). The liminality of her physical presence thus evokes the psychic interruption and power that she has over the gaze of the narrator, who is in "utter astonishment not unmingled with dread" (323), which is a feeling that "oppresses" him. The narrator expresses an anxiety regarding Madeline's presence after hearing Rodrick state that she had passed. This spectral spectacle establishes the psychic effect Madeline Usher as monstrous has on the male-centric space, because "the monster's body is both corporeal and incorporeal" (Cohen 38-39). Here Madeline embodies the monstrous liminality of being both present, but also ethereal, which grants her a psychic power over the space that looks to make her abject. Hayes discusses this ambiguous and seemingly undead presence, which is akin to Cohen's point on the form of the vampire, when she states:

> This almost vampiric imagery is extended to Madeline, a narcoleptic and yet another beautiful young woman suffering from a wasting disease. Yet her presence,

> although she is only glimpsed (alive) on two occasions by the narrator, permeates the house. Her mysterious hold over her brother is such that after her initial 'death' Roderick insists on preserving her body in one of the many vaults beneath the mansion for 2 weeks prior to her official internment. (5)

The concept of Madeline's presence permeating the house is indicative of her psychic effect on the male-centric space. The possibility of her resurfacing from her internment is a central point of anxiety for the men of the story—more so Rodrick than the narrator. Viewing her in the context that vampiric imagery evokes an understanding that she is the embodiment of death and pestilence that floods the psychic and physical space of the House of Usher similar to the "pestilent and mystical vapor" (319) that surrounds the threshold of the Usher estate.

Besides Rodrick's seemingly incestuous obsession for his twin sister, he is also obsessed with keeping her concealed and, most importantly, contained. After this initial introduction to Madeline, in which she is cast as a ghostly, apparitional figure, the narrator states that "for several days ensuing, her name was unmentioned by either Usher or myself" (324), which is indictive of the orienting power she carries in evoking the anxiety of the male space. In this statement by the narrator, the attempt to conceal Madeline is commencing. Instead of reconciling with her liminal positionality at the threshold of being perceived and conceived as well as the threshold of materiality and ethereality, the narrator and Rodrick seek to erase Madeline by making her abject. The narrator clearly articulates this desire to make Madeline abject through Rodrick's act of concealing and containing Madeline when he states, "his intention of preserving her corpse for a fortnight (previously to its final internment) in one of the numerous vaults within the main walls of the building…The brother had been led to his resolution (so he told me) by consideration of the unusual character of the malady of the deceased" (328). The narrator uses the phase "a donjon

keep" (329) to describe this vault once depositing the corpse of Madeline, which implies that the temporary entombment of Madeline Usher's body is more of an internment. Now having articulated Rodrick's desire to conceal and intern Madeline, this act is contradictory to preserving the Usher race, because his anxiety of the monstrous feminine overpowers the patriarchal pressure of reproductive futurity. This overpowering of anxiety *seems* to be an act of Rodrick thus giving him the power, yet it is the monstrous feminine that is the impetus of such an anxiety therefore showing that it is the monstrous that is the center of the act of denying reproductive futurity. That being said, Hayes does aptly articulate Rodrick's intention of this internment, stating, "the larger notion of containing the feminine in order to control its monstrous threat to a particular patriarchal milieu. Rodrick needs to contain his sister in order to perpetuate the Usher line" (5). This intention of Madeline's internment is accurate to the pattern of behavior needed to keep the deteriorating hegemonic structure of aristocratic patriarchy going since Madeline is the warning of the destruction to come. Even the material of the vault is symbolic of Rodrick's desire to contain Madeline. The narrator describes the vault being "sheathed in copper [and] the door, of massive iron, had been, also, similarly protected" (329). Hayes elaborates on the significance of copper and iron in this encasement, stating, "copper was associated with eternal feminine youth, and iron was regularly used as a ward against ghost and spirits. This coupled with Rodrick's preferred reading material…signifies that Rodrick took steps to ensure that Madeline, and all she represents, was properly contained. However, the threat of the feminine monstrous maintains" (5). Therefore, the vault not only signifies the repression of the generational trauma in the psyche, but also the containment of the conduit of this trauma in the monstrous form of Madeline's corpse. The narrator describes Madeline Usher's body as having "the mockery of a faint blush upon the bosom and the face, and the suspiciously lingering smile upon the lip which is so terrible in death" (329), and the

statement of the "suspiciously lingering smile" points to the anxiety of the monstrous feminine being able to return. Due to this anxiety of a monstrous transformation of the feminine Usher, Rodrick seeks to preserve her femininity prior to death, a femininity informed by the hegemonic powers of patriarchy and their upper class. However, this internment and the abjection it perpetuates fails.

The patriarchy fails to contain the monstrous feminine in this text, which leads to the sanguineous crescendo of this Gothic tale. After the narrator and Rodrick have "deposited [their] mournful burden" (329), the narrator describes how when retiring to bed, he "experienced the full power of such feelings…[he] struggled to reason off the nervousness which had dominion over [him]" (330). Here the narrator displays how the monstrous feminine has a psychic effect on the male-centric space even when Madeline is concealed and contained, thus showing the failure of such a containment and the anticipation of her resurfacing. Her resurfacing and the subsequential effects that it has brought is what I would like to call the "scene of subversion." When Madeline Usher returns with "blood upon her white robes, and the evidence of some bitter struggle upon every portion of her emaciated frame" (335), the failure of the containment at the hands of the patriarchy physically manifests as this almost vampiric image of Madeline Usher who had broken out of her containment. This scene of subversion is a key moment of the monstrous that Cohen articulates as a "refusal to participate in the classificatory 'order of things' … [and these monsters] are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions" (40). The distinction that Madeline Usher's "form between forms" seeks to smash is the gender distinction. In breaking free of her premature tomb, she refuses to be caged by patriarchal hegemony and made abject to maintain the peace and comfort for the

oppressive power of the masculinist space. In this scene, the bloody Madeline Usher is this harbinger of destruction to the Usher house and line while also being an embodied reminder of menstruation—through the imagery of her clothes covered in blood—thus confronting the masculine space with the monstrous feminine form as an act of rejection from her oppression.

This confrontation with the monstrous feminine also resurfaces the repressed trauma of castration anxiety in the masculine space. Barbra Creed best articulates this function of the monstrous feminine in "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imagery of Abjection" when she states, "the concept of the monstrous-feminine, as constructed within/by a patriarchal and phallocentric ideology, is related intimately to the problem of sexual difference and castration…the *difference* of female sexuality as a difference that is grounded in monstrousness and that invokes castration anxiety in the male spectator" (212). Reading this scene of the monstrous feminine as a scene of subversion suggests that Madeline does not accept her given positionality as feminine object for men to gaze upon or speculate about. Rather than being viewed in these positionalities, Madeline Usher presents herself as monstrous subject; therefore, she claims her selfhood outside of the constraints of hegemony and thus destabilizes the norm thus bringing the story to its catastrophic end. At the end, the narrator describes, "the mighty walls rushing asunder—there was a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters—and the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of 'the House of Usher'" (335-336); it is here that the result of the monstrous subject's scene of subversion is fulfilled, where the phallic symbol of patriarchal hegemony, the Usher estate, comes crumbling due to the power of the monstrous feminine.

It is imperative to see Madeline Usher's rise into monstrous subjectivity vis-à-vis her scene of subversion as a function of the Gothic horror genre in order to develop the concept that the

Gothic horror genre as one of radical resistance. As Jack Halberstam states regarding Gothic horror as a genre in "Parasites and Perverts: An Introduction to Gothic Monstrosity":

> Gothic fiction is a technology of subjectivity, one which produces the deviant subjectivities opposite which the normal, the healthy, and the pure can be known. Gothic, within my analysis, may be loosely defined as the rhetorical style and narrative structure designed to produce fear and desire within the reader. The production of fear in a literary text…emanates from a vertiginous excess of meaning. Gothic, in a way, refers to an ornamental excess…a rhetorical extravagance that produces, quite simply too much…and part of the experience of horror comes from the realization that meaning itself runs riot. (149)

In this definition, Halberstam discusses how the Gothic is "a technology of subjectivity" and that the overstimulation of and meaning creates a narrative able to invoke horror, which "The Fall of the House of Usher" best represents in Madeline Usher's scene of subversion and subsequent monstrous subjectivity. As Madeline Usher displays in her claiming of her monstrous "deviant" subjectivity and denying any form of reproductive futurity of the Usher race, she does not define "the correct" subjectivity in the story, because her subjectivity by the end does not get "corrected" but rather is the tool of correction or deviant punishment. Her monstrous subjectivity strips the patriarchal subjectivity of its meaning and function, in effect castrating the male space. This power to strip hegemony of its meaning and function is the kernel that defines the Gothic horror genre as a genre of resistance. As Cohen states in his seventh thesis, "these monsters ask us how we perceive the world, and how we have misrepresented what we have attempted to place. They ask us to reevaluate our cultural assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, our perception of difference, our tolerance toward its expression" (52). Therefore, monstrous subjectivity is a technology of

resistance that produces the means of its own selfhood by freeing itself from the constraints of the oppressive hegemony looking to contain, conceal, or destroy the monstrous.

Queering the Screw: Subversive Performativity of Childhood & a Futurity Rejected

Henry James' Gothic horror novella, *The Turn of the Screw,* was originally published serially in *Collier's Weekly* from January 27- April 16, 1898. Then in October of the same year, James' widely popular ghostly tale was collected and published as part of *The Two Magics.* As David Bromwich and Phillip Horne state in their introduction to the 2011 Penguin Classics edition of the novella, "'The Turn of the Screw' holds a unique place in the canon of Henry James' fiction. Alongside 'Daisy Miller' (1878), and *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), it has proved the most lastingly popular of his works. Yet the prose is that of James' intricate later style, and the narration has the quality of a controlled experiment" (xiii). The concept of *The Turn of the Screw* being a "controlled experiment" using ambiguity as its stimuli is the narrative locus that lends well to the horror in this novella. This experiment is prefaced with a Christmas scene, where wealthy folk tell ghost tales around the hearth—a typical custom in Victorian society (see Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*). One gentleman in particular sends for a manuscript of a tale deemed "too horrible…for general uncanny ugliness, horror, and pain" (4). The manuscript in question was gifted to this gentleman by his sister's governess and this horror-filled narrative is her account of the events at her previous job at a country estate called Bly Manor. The narrative account depicts the Governess' decent into ambiguous dread over the potential corruption of her two wards, Miles and Flora, at the hands of two ghosts of former staff: Peter Quint, the master's old valet, and Miss Jessel, the governess before the narrator of this account. The governess's perception of the children starts out with her perceiving them as "Raphael's holy infants" (13), but as the ambiguity and horror begin

to settle in and the governess' dread incrementally increases, her perception of the children also begins to dwindle to "little wretches" (75). Her attempt at saving these children from their possible corruption leads to disastrous results, with Flora ill and leaving Bly, and Miles dead by the story's end. Bromwich and Horne's description of James' prose in this novella as a "controlled experiment" is accurate—especially when considering how "the story turns on a question that belongs to metaphysics and morals: to what extent can our knowledge of reality be separated from the psychology of the person we rely on for a faithful description?" (Bromwich & Horne, xiii). However, moving the focus from the reliability of the narration to the implications of power and identity that the narrative develops unveils the novella to also be an "experiment in control."

What I mean by an "experiment of control" of course comes from the focus on the roles that the characters of the Governess, Miles, Flora, Peter Quint, and Miss Jessel take on—and, in some cases, problematize or subvert, which reveals a narrative of the failure of hegemonic power. The primary intersection of hegemony the text represents is that of class and gender. The governess, with her "supreme authority" (8), acts as an Althusserian ideological state apparatus (ISA) who seeks to regulate the household and interpollate the two children as subjects of their gender and class in the novella. However, her attempt at regulation/interpollation fails and she consequently projects her failures onto the ghosts—Peter Quint and Miss Jessel—who embody a queering of gender norms, spirits who intend to "corrupt" the impressionable youths under the governess' care. Specifically, I will be focusing on Miles and his supposed "corruption" by the ghost of Peter Quint. Understanding the adversarial dynamics between the governess and Peter Quint and Miles is key to understanding Miles' queer performance of monstrous subjectivity, a subjectivity that knowingly rejects the hegemonic power seeking to interpollate the monstrous subject(s) into its "normative context."

In order to understand the subjectivity of Miles and Peter Quint as monstrous, it is important to first understand the Governess as this figure of power in the novella. The governess in this text (attempts to) fall under two categories of the Althusserian model of the ISA: the family ISA and the educational ISA. Althusser defines ISAs as "a certain number of realities, which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions" (96). Understanding the governess as an intersection between the domestic and the educational ISAs is imperative in grasping where she fails at interpollating Miles and the implications thereof. She is positioned in a role of "supreme authority" (8), as the preface states, and she embodies that authority from the instant she meets Flora when she states, "it was a comfort that there could be no uneasiness in a connexion with anything so beatific as the radiant image of my little girl" (12). Here, the governess uses the term "my little girl" in regard to Flora to indicate a form of ownership over her, a sentiment she also shares for Miles with statements such as "my children" (30). The governess displays a form of surrogate maternal ownership of the children, which is indicative of the Family ISA; here, the governess makes it known that she is in control of these children as a de facto mother figure—even the title, *govern*ess speaks to her controlling function at Bly. Thus, when stating such sentiments as "to watch, teach, 'form' little Flora would too evidentially be the making of a happy and useful life" (13), the governess displays her position as educational ISA. The governess then blurs the delineation between the domestic space and the educational space, thus making Bly just a purely ideological space where the governess simply seeks to "form" them. Throughout the text, the governess reminds the reader of her station and the implied (or projected) responsibilities thereof. One such moment takes place in the unfolding of a key scene in the text, the first sighting of the "devious" Peter Quint. When remarking on her unfamiliarity with the specter, the governess states, "I just bridled a little with the sense of how my office seemed to

require that there should be no such ignorance and no such person" (25). Here, the governess expresses how she as governess should know all persons who come and go at Bly, implying that she is *supposed* to be at the epistemological head of Bly's body politic, yet she falls short of knowing in this scene of being confronted by the monstrous. Also, in this instance she positions herself as an officer by calling her position "my office," thus indicating that her positioning as ISA in the framework of her narrative is a conscious one. Then, after deliberation with Ms. Grose, the maid whom the governess befriends, regarding Peter Quint's unwelcomed (re)appearance, the governess gives herself the role of "an expiatory victim" whose job it is to "guard the tranquility of the rest of the household," adding that it is "[t]he children in especial [she] should thus fence about and absolutely save" (38). The governess expresses her anxiety that these specters are after the children and it is therefore in her authority to "absolutely save" the children from this corrupting, uncanny Other that is invading her space of authority. The governess is setting up the psychological stage of what will be a queer performance of monstrous proportions.

The definition of queer that I seek to implement in regard to Quint and Miles is best articulated by Lee Edelman in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive,* when he states:

> To make the claim I examine here in this book the pervasive invocation of the Child as the emblem of futurity's unquestioned value and purpose against it the impossible project of a queer oppositionality that would oppose itself to the structural determinants of politics as such, which is also to say that would oppose itself to the logic of the opposition. This paradoxical formulation suggests a refusal—the appropriately perverse refusal that characterizes queer theory—of every substantialization of identity, which is always oppositionally defined, and, by extension, of history as a linear narrative (the poor man's teleology) in which

> meaning succeeds in revealing itself—*as itself*—through time. Far from partaking of this narrative moment toward a viable political future, far from perpetuating the fantasy of meaning's eventual realization, the queer comes to figure the bar to every realization of futurity, the resistance, internal to the social, to every social structure or form. (3-4)

This definition of queerness as always consciously oppositional and anti-futural is imperative to understanding Miles's and Quint's effects on the governess. Throughout the novella, Miles indicates a level of acute awareness of his position in the governess' "experiment of control." This awareness, however, is not one of nefarious intent as the governess projects. Rather, as Adam McCune states, "*The Turn of the Screw* is the story of the *children's* desires, how their desires are inhibited by the governess and how the children perform childhood and adulthood to get what they want…the children's desires are all perfectly ordinary and may be summed up by the desire to live for themselves rather than their governess" (952). McCune hits at a crucial detail regarding the desires of the children that intersects with Edelman's definition of queerness being oppositional to (normative) authority. The children's desires are by definition queer desires and the inclinations of nefariousness and corruption are projections on the part of the governess which all happen after receiving a lack of details as to why Miles has been expelled from school. Then throughout the novella, the governess constantly reflects on how Miles is "certainly quite unpunishable" (29), but at the same time she recounts how "if he had been wicked, he would have 'caught' it, and I should have caught it by the rebound—I should have found a trace, should have felt the wound and the dishonour" (29). In this instance—and many others like it—the governess engages in a form of Foucauldian panoptical surveillance with her gaze, seeking the "corruption" or, rather, seeking the queerness that got Miles expelled. The governess is always in constant anticipation of the moment

when Miles will reveal himself to be an "injury to the others" (17), but when being surveilled Miles is an "earthy beauty…[and has an] unnatural goodness" (70). The governess, however, reads this performance as "a game," "a policy and a fraud" (70), or even more simply, she reads it *as* a performance (as opposed to a "natural" childlike innocence). This deception on the part of Miles is due to his suspected consorting with the queer specter of Peter Quint, who the governess describes as having "a touch of the strange freedom…in the sign of familiarity of his wearing no hat" (25), as well as having "rather queer whiskers…He gives me a sort of sense of looking like an actor" (36). This is important to note, because the governess has already positioned Quint as a queer figure who is putting on a conscious performance of opposition to her position as ISA, which is the performance she also projects onto Miles. The governess' anxiety regarding Miles' seeming corruption and her consequential quest to protect him from it is, as Edelman puts it, "a fight for the future" (3), because "How could one take the *other* 'side,' when taking any side at all necessarily constrains one to take the side *of,* by virtue of taking a side *within*, a political order that returns to the Child as the image the future intends?" (3). To Edelman, "reproductive futurity" is that future that the Child embodies. Therefore, the governess is the side that is supposedly "fighting for the children" as opposed to the other side—the queer side—that consists "of those *not* 'fighting for the children,' the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism" (3). The governess positions these ghosts as not "fighting for the children" and therefore they must be looking to harm the children when she remarks on where she has seen them stating "'They're only seen across, as it were, and beyond—in strange places and on high places…They've only to keep to their suggestions of danger.' 'For the children to come?' 'And perish in the attempt!'" (71). These ghosts are (im)purely looking to harm these children in the eyes of the governess, and while the governess and Ms. Grose speculate and deliberate in close

proximity of the children, the children have the time and space to undermine the governess' controlling advances.

Miles subverts the governess because, in the words of the governess, "they *know*—it's too monstrous: they know, they know!" (44). And what is it that the children know? They "know what *we* [the governess and Mrs. Gross] know—and heaven knows what more besides!" (44). Miles displays his awareness and his intent as an anti-futural queer figure when he is one-on-one with the governess, which is when he makes such statements as, "Think me—for a change—*bad*!... When I'm bad I *am* bad!" (68). Here, Miles indicates an awareness of his own behavior and identifies with it. He also tells the governess how he and his sister arrange together when he is to be "bad," which later in a conversation with Mrs. Grose leads the governess to say, "They haven't been good—they've only been absent. It has been easy to live with them because they're simply leading a life of their own. They're not mine—they're not ours, They're his and they're hers" (70). This statement is key because the governess realizes that her "experiment of control" is failing and she projects that failure onto this monstrous corruption of Miles at the hand of the queer figures of the ghosts. Consequently, while Mrs. Grose and Bly's ISA have this rather loud conversation, the governess "demanded in a lower tone, while the children, having smiled and nodded and kissed hands to us, resumed their exhibition" (70). This scene is key to understanding that the children, especially Miles, are acutely aware of their being in this "experiment of control," which they enjoy subverting. In response, the governess thinks that she cannot call off this experiment otherwise she will not be able to save these children, but she is not sure if they are fully aware thus the need to keep up appearances which is a position the governess calls "the mockery of their advantage" (75).

Miles and Flora do coordinate a seemingly scene of subversion, an event that points to the phenomena of a character embodying a subjectivity of resistance from normative roles, and that

scene is when Miles is found outside of the manor at night and seemingly stares at the governess through a window but is actually staring above her. I intentionally look over that scene because the later moment where Miles tells the governess of his intentions is the *true* scene of subversion. In this scene the governess points out that "Miles' whole title to independence, the rights of his sex and situation, were so stamped upon him that if he had suddenly struck for freedom, I should have nothing to say…I call it a revolution because I now see how, with the word he spoke, the curtain rose on the last act of my dreadful drama and the catastrophe was precipitated" (78), and that is exactly what Miles does through his dialogue. When he addresses the governess stating, "Look here, my dear, you know…when in the world, please, am I going back to school" (78), Miles is mimicking the syntax of an adult. Calling the governess "my dear" as though they were newlyweds instead of a governess and her ward queers the dynamic by shifting the power in the dialogue. This queerness is akin to the Bakhtinian concept of the carnivalesque, where the power structures are flipped. This is the scene of subversion because Miles, in his oppositional queerness, takes the power from the ISA of the household, which Miles punctuates by stating his intent for leaving the house, stating, "to show you [the governess] I could! ... And I can again" (79-80). Here lies the monstrous subjectivity: Miles has the power to come and go as he pleases, but the governess is duty bound and cannot leave the constraints of Bly or she cannot keep "forming" the children. The governess is not only appalled by this freedom, but she also covets it. As Cohen states:

> The monster is continually linked to forbidden practices in order to normalize and to enforce. The monster also attracts. The same creatures who terrify and interdict can evoke potent escapist fantasies; the linking of monstrosity with the forbidden

> makes the monster all the more appealing as a temporary egress from constraint…
>
> we distrust and loathe the monster at the same time we envy its freedom…(49)

The governess displays this desire on multiple occasions, such as when she states, “I walked in a world of their invention—they had no occasion whatever to draw upon mine” (42). Constantly, she notes the disconnect between the perception of the children and her own and expresses her admiration and desire to see what they see. She also expresses that with Quint and his “strange freedom…and a familiarity” (25), when she sees him with no hat. She battles with a latent desire to see their world, a world deemed as by virtue of her normative “office.” The governess understands that her role is to stymie any behavior considered “out of place,” and at the same time she desires it. Miles in this scene of subversion is abnormally aware of that and he plays into it by always emphasizing his ability to seek freedom and disregarding the statements of the governess that try to interpellate him back into her hegemony. His performing chaos to her order is his queer, monstrous embodiment as deemed by the governess, instead of denying this positionality, Miles embraces it as a place of play—similar to Derridean “free-play.” As a result, the expectations of his gender and his class status become arbitrary.

Unlike Madeline Usher, Miles’ monstrous subjectivity does not lead to the collapse of Bly in a dramatic scene of calamity. Instead, his monstrous subjectivity leads to his own death. After Miles performs the “monstrous utterance of names,” shouting “Peter Quint—you devil” (124), in response to the governess’ interrogation, the governess in turn sees this as a victory because it is Miles who has unveiled his knowledge, but it is a victory at what cost? Miles’s death is the ultimate failure of the governess. The main point of her “office” was to protect the children, yet young Flora leaves Bly ill and Miles dies in her arms. The governess ultimately fails to maintain the household and to interpollate. She instead exemplifies the ruin that will take place when failing to interpollate

or rather when that attempt is met with resistance to interpolation. The ISA has no response to a rejection of ideology because it is in the function of the ISA to reject Others *from* ideology, thus making the abject. This conundrum leads this ISA to destroy what she cannot successfully contain or reject, but, as Cohen also states, “no monster tastes of death but once” (38-39); the monster always returns and bringing with it new criticisms of normative structures. In a context where the ghosts *are* real, who is to say that Miles seeks death to be like Quint, a queer specter, a “harbinger of category crisis” (Cohen, 40)? Or rather in death, Miles unveils the greatest failure of the normative structure to preserve the reproductive futurity of the Child, thus in turn making the governess, the ISA in the novella, a queer character herself by the end. The monstrous has reproduced itself in the thing seeking to oppress it, but which has also desired to become it. Therefore, Miles in his death indicates how “Monsters are our children. They can be pushed into the farthest margins of geography and discourse, hidden away at the edges of the world and in the forbidden recesses of our mind, but they will always return. They ask us to reevaluate our cultural assumptions… our tolerance toward its expression. They ask us why we have created them” (Cohen, 52). Miles may have embraced the monstrous and gained a monstrous subjectivity, a freedom from the structures that sought to hinder him, but, ultimately, the creation of Miles as monstrous is a construction of the governess. She must reconcile with the question of why she made him monstrous as do all upholders of hegemonic structures must reckon with the creation of their own monsters.

Monstrously Beloved: Black Radical Subjectivity & a Futurity Claimed

Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* is a novel about an escaped slave and mother, Sethe, who does the seemingly unthinkable, committing infanticide, when faced with the threat of being taken back

to enslavement on the farmstead ironically named Sweet Home. She attempts to kill all four of her children, two girls and two boys, but only succeeds in killing her older daughter, Beloved, and is consequently sent to jail still nursing her younger daughter, Denver. Throughout the novel, Sethe faces the ramifications from the community of Black folk in Ohio for committing such a societal taboo. Not only is she alienated from the community, but her home is also haunted by the specter of her murdered child. Ultimately, *Beloved* is a novel of haunted and non-normative temporality, where the past permeates the present and implies a futurity, specifically a radical Black female futurity—a futurity that enables a radical form of freedom, a freedom with a historicity that Morrison goes into detail describing in the forward to her novel:

> I think now it was the shock of liberation that drew my thoughts to what "free" could possibly mean to women. In the eighties, the debate was still roiling equal pay, equal treatment, access to professions, schools…and choice without stigma. To marry or not. To have children or not. Inevitably these thoughts led me to the different history of black women in this country—a history in which marriage was discouraged, impossible, or illegal; in which birthing children was required, but "having" them, being responsible for them—being, in other words, their parent—was as out of the question as freedom. Assertions of parenthood under conditions peculiar to the logic of institutional enslavement were criminal…The heroine would represent the unapologetic acceptance of shame and terror; assume the consequences of choosing infanticide; claim her own freedom. (xvi-xvii)

This sentiment and historicity that inform Morrison's lived experiences as well as the collective lived experiences of the Black womanhood she portrays in the novel is pervasive in the novel's totality. There are two concepts Morrison posits in this excerpt from the forward that I will focus

on, the first of which is the distinction between giving birth to children and "having" children, and how the act of "having" children is a radical act of Black female subjectivity. The second concept Morrison posits is viewing Sethe as "the heroine" who embraces and embodies the "shame and terror [and] assume[s] the consequences of choosing infanticide; claim[ing] her own freedom" (xvii). This concept points to the statement she makes about women's liberation being about "choice without stigma," yet she centers the idea of the stigma of Black motherhood, which supports her positing "the different history of black women." That stigma is difficult to near impossible to separate from the experience of being a Black woman in a white supremacist landscape. This sentiment is akin to Orlando Patterson's concept of social death: namely, how can someone not acknowledged as part of/subjected to the society that oppresses them also be held to the standards of that structure? Outside of chronology, I intentionally situate the discourse of this impasse at the intersection of Blackness and femininity in *Beloved* last. *Beloved* is the point at which the complex intersections of historically oppressed identities converge: the feminine, the queer, and, most prominently, Blackness.

The term of monstrous subjectivity that I work to define in this paper comes to its zenith in this nexus of oppressed positionality to which a discourse of subjectivity already exists, which is that of "Black radical subjectivity" as defined by bell hooks in her book *Yearning, Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. In this epigraph, hooks commences the work of defining this form of radical subjectivity by discussing resistance, struggle, and liberation, when she states:

> I often begin courses which focus on African-American literature, and sometimes specifically black women writers, with a declaration by Paulo Freire which had a profound liberatory effect on my thinking: "We cannot enter the struggle as objects in order to later become subjects." This statement compels reflection on how the

> dominated, the oppressed, the exploited make ourselves subject. How do we create an oppositional world view, a consciousness, an identity, a standpoint that exists not only as that struggle which also opposes dehumanization but as that movement which enables creative, expansive self-actualization? Opposition is not enough. (19)

In *Beloved,* Sethe displays and puts into action hooks' idea of the creation of an "oppositional world view" of "expansive self-actualization," which is centered on Black womanhood and the futurity of Black womanhood outside of the constraints of white patriarchy. Similar to Morrison in the forward, hooks is pointing to the impasse between hegemonic subjecthood and afropessemistic social death, but instead of asking "how," hooks is asking "why": why would one considered a non-person do the work of the struggle and resist their status as non-person to then be a subject of the oppressive hegemony? Reckoning with this question brings the concept of the futurity of Black womanhood into the forefront of the discourse. This futurity takes on a queerness as well akin to the queerness articulated by Edelman, but rather than queerness being situated as "the side of those *not* 'fighting for the children'" (3), this queerness *is* the side "fighting for the children," the side that is fighting for *Black* children. This side in the context of *Beloved* is still "the side outside the consensus, which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism" (3), but Sethe and Beloved do not embody the rejection of reproductive futurity in its totality. Instead, theirs is a rejection of the reproduction of the objects of white supremacy. It is a rejection of a reproductive futurity of the institution of slavery. This rejection of the futurity of white patriarchal supremacy and the centering of a queer, Black, feminine positionality is where the monstrous subjectivity of Black radical subjecthood positions itself.

Before moving to close reading of the novel and identifying these modes of the "oppositional world view" that is monstrous subjectivity, it is imperative to first identify another existing discourse that seeks to reconcile an impasse in Black American literature. This discourse of the Black radical tradition lies between Saidiya Hartman in her book *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-making in Nineteenth Century America* and Fred Moten's response to Hartman's epigraph in his work *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition.* This discourse regards what Hartman calls "the 'terrible spectacle'" (3) of the beating of Frederick Douglass's Aunt Hester, recounted by Douglass in his various slave narratives/autobiographies. Hartman rightfully calling this scene a "terrible spectacle" introduces a stance on the practice of invoking and reproducing violence inflicted on Black bodies as rehashing generational trauma, as Hartman states:

> The passage through the blood-stained gate is an inaugural moment in the formation of the enslaved. In this regard, it is a primal scene. By this I mean that the terrible spectacle dramatizes the origin of the subject and demonstrates that to be a slave is to be under the brutal power and authority of another…I have chosen not to reproduce Douglass's account of the beating of Aunt Hester in order to call attention to the ease with which such scenes are usually reiterated, the casualness with which they are circulated, and the consequences of this routine display of the slave's ravaged body. (3)

Hartman is hitting at a key issue in the discourse of literature recounting the trauma of the Black diaspora: that readers and scholars alike are too comfortable with retelling these "primal scenes" of Black pain. This is similar to the contemporary criticism of film and television displaying what is known as "Black torture porn," which is almost exclusively set in some distant past or obscure

national geography—like Quentin Tarantino's 2012 film *Django Unchained*—for the white gaze in order to invoke an illusory sense of comfortability that such violence is not perpetuated in the contemporary Black experience. If this is so, then why is a concept like Black futurity or subjectivity seen as "radical"? This concept of radical temporality and exposing the uncomfortable truth of such a comfortability of the white gaze is pervasive in *Beloved* as well. However, that does not diminish the issue of the graphic scenes of violence in the novel, which then posits these questions: Does the violence of the novel center the white gaze? Would providing the passages of infanticide from *Beloved* in this project undermine the stance taken by Hartman? How can one present such scenes of violence without reproducing the systemic violence that centers the white gaze? Before attempting to answer these questions, it is imperative to first understand Moten's response to Hartman.

Moten begins his response with a definition of Blackness as a movement and a definition of subjectivity stating:

> The history of blackness is testament to the fact that objects can and do resist. Blackness—the extended movement of a specific upheaval, an ongoing irruption that anarranges every line—is a strain that pressures the assumption of the equivalence of personhood and subjectivity. While subjectivity is defined by the subject's possession of itself and its objects, it is troubled by a dispossessive force objects exert such that the subject seems possessed by the object it possesses. (1)

The reason I begin by looking at his definition of objectivity and subjectivity is because from the first lines Moten is framing his response to the discourse opened by Hartman in her book. However, I would like to make it clear that I am not pitting these two against each other but rather presenting two texts in conversation with each other that making space for a more complex relationship

between object, subject, abject, and radical or oppositional positionalities and I say this before presenting Moten's direct address to Hartman's claim of not reproducing the scenes of Aunt Hester's beating. Moten addresses Hartman's claim, stating:

> The decision not to reproduce the account of Aunt Hester's beating is, in some sense, illusory. First, it is reproduced in her reference to and refusal of it; second, the beating is reproduced in every scene of subjection the book goes on to read—in both the ritual performances combining terror and enjoyment in slavery and the fashionings and assertions of citizenship and "free" subjectivity after emancipation…What are the politics of this unavoidably reproducible and reproductive performance? What is held in the ongoing disruption of its primality? …What does this disturbance of capture and genesis give to black performance? (4)

Moten's calling of such a refusal of reproduction "illusory" without undermining Hartman's "considerable, formidable, and rare brilliance" (4) is very important to how the scene of subversion develops in this project. Moten continues to unpack of Hartman by discussing "the space she leaves for the ongoing (re)production of that performance in all its guises and for a critical awareness of how each of those guises is always already present in and disruptive of the supposed originarity of that prial scene" (4), which is imperative to reconciling the disruptive and dispossessive resistance of the object with the mundane, ritualistic performances of pain, terror, and pleasure that defines "scenes of subjection." In reconciling these concepts the concept, I define in this project, the scene of subversion comes to fruition. It is at this intersection that I am interested in how the central primal scene of violence in *Beloved* is (re)produced in the mundane performances of Sethe vis-à-vis the alienation she experiences from her community in response to

the primal scene and the haunting of 124 Bluestone Road. It is a primal scene, that like Douglass's account of the whipping of his Aunt Hester, is a genesis, but not of the enslaved subject or of the resisting, dispossessing object, but of the monstrous subject. Sethe's *choice* to commit infanticide is a choice of subjection, it is an act of perverse maternal love—a type of love that is radical, a Black mother's love (even the concept of motherhood in the context of Blackness in this text is radical). And like the violence, gore, and trauma of childbirth, Sethe performs a monstrous self-birth which rejects the (re)productive futurity of the slave economy. For these reasons, it is imperative to present this violent scene of subversion and unpack its historicity in order to fully understand the radical movement of monstrous subjectivity, which is a key function necessary to commence a new radical practice of reading horror literature.

Now to actually examine this scene of subversion. I will not be looking precisely at the violence Sethe inflicts on the bodies of her children, but rather at the effect that violence has on the characters who witnessed such a spectacle and Sethe's own retelling of the scene in question. These two angles of the scene help us fully realize it as one of subversion from an oppressive context, and that is what this scene spawns are indeed a radical form of subjectivity. After witnessing the bloody, "primal" scene, the slaveowner from Sweet Home looking for Sethe, named the Schoolteacher, sees:

> That there was nothing there to claim. The three (now four—because she'd had the one coming when she cut) p____s they had hoped were alive and well enough to take back to Kentucky, take back and raise properly to do the work Sweet Home desperately needed, were not. Two were lying open-eyed in sawdust; a third pumped blood down the dress of the main one—the woman schoolteacher bragged about, the one he said made fine ink, damn good soup, pressed his collars the way

> he liked besides having at least ten breeding years left. But now she'd gone wild…beyond the point of education. (175-176)

In this excerpt, the concept of material value is escribed onto the bodies of Sethe and her children, which displays the objectivity of enslaved Black bodies. As Moten expresses, "The history of blackness is a testament to the fact that objects can and do resist" (1), and Sethe is that history, that testament made monstrous flesh. Her killing her child and seemingly killing the rest of her progeny classifies her as "wild" and "beyond the point of education" and her material value is nothing worth claiming in the eyes of the slave economy, because historically the reproductive qualities of enslaved women was of important value. As Angela Davis states in *Women, Race, and Class*:

> When the abolition of the international slave trade began to threaten the expansion of the young cotton-growing industry, the slaveholding class was forced to rely on natural reproduction as the surest method of replenishing and increasing the domestic slave population. Thus, a premium was placed on the slave woman's reproductive capacity…Ideological exaltation of motherhood—as popular as it was during the nineteenth-century—did not extend to slaves. In fact, in the eyes of the slaveholders, slave women were not mothers at all; they were simply instruments guaranteeing the growth of the slave labor force. They were "breeders"—animals, whose monetary value could be precisely calculated in terms of their ability to multiply their numbers. (6-7)

To Davis' point, Sethe was only seen as a slave girl "with at least ten breeding years left" (176); yet, in the act of *choosing* to commit infanticide, Sethe rejects and denies the futurity of the slave production complex. In Althusserian terms, Sethe disrupts "the ultimate condition of production [which is] the reproduction of the conditions of production" (85). The cycle of (re)production of

slavery Sethe denies is both a radical act of subjectivity, which is the transition from "a dispossessive force [that] objects exert such that the subject seems to be possessed…by the object" (Moten, 1), and "an oppositional world view, a consciousness, an identity, a standpoint that exists not only as that struggle which also opposes dehumanization but as that movement which enables creative, expansive self-actualization" (hooks, 19). Sethe does the radical act of taking her fate into her own hands and embodying a new radical form of motherhood, Black motherhood, and a new form of radical form of subjectivity, a monstrous Black radical subjectivity. It is a subjectivity that indicates a queer futurity, a Black futurity, that exists outside the confining (con)textualization of the plantation.

This concept of Sethe embodying a radical, Black, monstrous subjectivity is reified by her own retelling of the events. The narrator's retelling is significant because the narrator gives agency to Sethe in the telling of the narrative. This is one of many instances where Sethe is given ownership of her own narrative and out of this claiming, a unique phenomenon of temporality occurs. When recounting the event to a former slave from Sweet Home and her current lover, Paul D, the narrator states:

> What she wanted for her children was exactly what was missing in 124: safety. He thought he made it safe, had gotten rid of the danger; beat the shit out of it; run it off the place and showed it and everybody else the difference between the mule and the plow. And because she had not done it before he got there her own self, he thought it was because she could not do it. That she oved with 124 in helpless, apologetic resignation because she had no choice…he was wrong. This here Sethe was new…This here Sethe talked about love like any other woman, but what she meant could cleave bone. This here Sethe talked about safety with a hacksaw. This

> here Sethe didn't know where the world stopped and where she began…it scared him. (193)

This radical reframing of the scene of subversion is a (re)production of the scene of subversion which underscores Sethe's new power of choice and her new positionality as radical, Black, monstrous subject. She rejects the objectified positionality of "breeder" and instead performs a radical act of motherhood and has the ability to perform again, thus solidifying a sense of black futurity of Black motherhood. She rejects the futurity of the franchise of chattel slavery and reifies the futurity of the Black subject, a subject who occupies space outside of the constraints of white patriarchal hegemony. She shows the difference between giving birth and "having" children and the transformative and liberating power of such a delineation. Also, a detail that is significant to note in this scene is the imagery evoked by a blood soaked Sethe. Like Madeline Usher, Sethe embodies the form of the monstrous feminine with her clothes soaked in her child's blood in a form of monstrous birth. Out of the violence and pain of this scene comes "this here new Sethe" as well as the ghost of Beloved, a ghost whose own positionality as hauntingly present is also indicative of a queer Black futurity as well as historicity. As Kristen Lillvis states in *Posthuman Blackness and the Black Female Imagination*:

> Beloved's identity extends beyond this single time and this single child: she embodies the "Sixty Million and more" captive Africans who died before they reached the shores of America (Clemons 75), as well as those who survived the Middle Passage to join the generations of the enslaved (O'Reilly 87; Horwitz 157; Bouson 152). In the realm of Morrison's novel, Sethe's mother, a woman who died a violent death on the plantation where she was enslaved, must be included in this

> number, which means that Beloved represents not only the unnamed millions who suffered because of slavery but, for Sethe, both child and mother. (13-14)

Also, the reiteration and variation of the very first line of the novel, “124 was full of spite, [full] of a baby’s venom” (3), is indicative of Moten’s concept of the “on going (re)production of that performance in all its guises and for a critical awareness of how each of those guises is always already present in and disruptive of the supposed originarity of that prial scene” (4). All of these instances of the mundane performance and the normalization of Beloved’s haunting is essentially a reproduction of the primal scene which made her spectral to begin with, as well as the historical violence inflicted upon enslaved Black bodies, including Sethe’s own mother. Therefore, within Beloved, is the queer Black futurity and historicity that was only created out of Sethe’s act of radical, monstrous, motherly love.

Conclusion: What About Our Future?

The conceptualization and subsequent identification of monstrous subjectivity as a biproduct of the scene of subversion in the horror genre unveils a practice of reading that I believe to be key to any future discourse of the horror genre. The practice is one of radical, critical reading, a practice I have deployed in the investigation and identification of a radical, new form of subjectivity and queer futurity that is a key function of the monstrous in horror through the examples of Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher,” James’ *The Turn of the Screw,* and Morrison’s *Beloved*. Why is radical critical reading so important to the future of discourse of the horror genre? This practice is important because it points to a lack of understanding of the monstrous as we know it, because for too long the locus of the discourse of the monstrous has been dependent on hegemonic power: What are the implications of what we fear? What do our fears represent? How have societies made the monsters we see? This mode of questioning gives too much power back

to the oppressive structure. Instead, I believe it is more transformative and liberating to actually position the reader as the devil's advocate and see the monster for how revolutionary it is. This moves away from fetishizing the position of oppression as well as away from centering Power as the lens of critique. Viewing the monstrous from this positionality is a project of the ego and perpetuates the colonization of the body of the monster. This sentiment is also indicative of the intent behind my organization of texts from Poe to Morrison, because this progression is not only chronological, but it also becomes more intersectional and more indicative of what needs to be centered when analyzing such radical forms of subjectivity, concepts of liberation, and the voices necessary at the center of the discourse. In the words of Audre Lorde in "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," "Advocating the mere tolerance of difference…is the grossest reformism. It is a total denial of the creative function of difference in our lives. Difference must be not merely tolerated but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic. Only then does the necessity for interdependency become unthreatening" (111). The monster is less our "child" asking why we have created it and more so a creation of itself that is demanding radical epistemological change.

In the face of such a demand for radical epistemological change, it is only logical to then ask: what does this mean for our future? Well, if and when the master's house is dismantled, something new needs to be constructed in its place. Such ideological work is certainly supposed to be a unified effort, but not one that centers positionalities that were at the intersections of power in the master's house. This process of creating a new ideology, a possible reparative ideology, is a process of healing for those who, generationally, have had *their* futurity affected by oppression. As utopian as it sounds, whatever the work of liberation entails, what is certain is that the movement cannot center or be led by the oppressor. If that is the case, then why does the monster

demand such radical epistemological change only to receive the same oppression just slightly different in flavor? Radical work is a necessity in order to do restorative work, and in some cases, they are in tandem, which is the power of affecting futurity. By denying, rejecting, or assuring a reproductive futurity, be it ideological reproduction or sexual reproduction or both, the monstrous is able to configure the text and the understanding of the text. This move is both a political move and a move necessary for the impact of the monstrous to be substantial. There is nothing more terribly, beautifully, impactful to a sensibility that desires and projects an illusion of safety and comfort than utter destruction, haunting ambiguity, and graphic, violent resistance, all of which the horror genre has a wealth of in the archive and, with it, many more iterations and scenes of subversion waiting to be identified.

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