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Confined In (Patri)Architecture: How Gothic and Horror Literature Exposes Ongoing Violence and Oppression Against Women

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**CONFINED IN (PATRI)ARCHITECTURE:
HOW GOTHIC AND HORROR LITERATURE
EXPOSES ONGOING VIOLENCE AND
OPPRESSION AGAINST WOMEN**

By

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B.S., Black Hills State University, 2019

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of Masters of Arts

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The members of the Committee appointed to examine
the Thesis of Clara Ann MacIlravia Cañas
find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

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ABSTRACT

This project focuses on the intersections of space, power, gender, religion, and the architecture of institutions that confine and repress women. I argue that these texts focus on how patriarchal and domestic ideologies lock women into gendered expectations through oppressive gender politics.

Chapter one demonstrates how early gothic female writers used representations of physical structures, such as abbeys and castles, to expose the eighteenth-century woman's experiences of abuse and confinement by repressive patriarchal and monarchical rule. This chapter connects themes and arguments within Sophia Lee's *The Recess* (1783) and Ann Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance* (1790) to reveal the metaphors that represent socio-political constructs designed to keep women submissive to religious and patriarchal control.

Chapter two argues that Jac Jemc's use of architectural metaphors in *The Grip of It* (2017) signifies the confining nature of gendered, domestic expectations and the institution of marriage. Marriage often reduces women's roles to gendered roles and expectations and keeps women prisoner to their husbands through economic, social, professional, and societal expectations.

Chapter three argues that William Peter Blatty's *The Exorcist* (1971) works to reinforce religious and domestic ideologies by portraying women as conduits of evil by promoting religious, conservative values. When women resist the confines of oppressive domestic ideologies, the patriarchal order retaliates by initiating an aggressive and violent retaliation against women.

I conclude that these novels incorporate demons, and claustrophobic spaces to articulate the horrors that women often experience as prisoners of domestic ideologies and patriarchal power. I argue that this project broadens the understanding of how architecture and space work in gothic and horror novels to examine the public and private spaces that women and marginalized communities occupy and the socio-political ramifications that transpire when they defy the patriarchal order.



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Confined in (Patri)Architecture: How Gothic and Horror Literature
Exposes Ongoing Violence and Oppression Against Women

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Introduction

Many horror and gothic texts have been in intimate conversation with cultural fears and anxieties manifesting as monsters in literature. A monster, often depicted as an incomprehensible, malformed, horrifying creature, endangers humanity's precarious social and moral order and represents paranoia within society. Centuries of coded ideologies in various works of literature have depicted the female body as disgusting, monstrous, and abject creatures. According to Aristotle's theories, women are incomplete and mutilated beings, fostering the notion that men are the superior sex in ancient Greek philosophies. Women lustfully lead the world into the apocalypse holding a golden chalice bursting with abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality,¹ they style their curled locks of serpents that frame her glaring eyes and brazen claws,² and they are delighted in cruelty, blood, and death.³ The same myths that describe the tyrannical powers of women also describe them as subservient, meek, hormonal, and emotional beings. Women are somehow powerful forces to be reckoned with and simultaneously infantilized. This ideology influenced Freud's writing as he claims, "Probably no male human being is spared the fright of castration at the sight of a female genital" (Freud 154). For Freud, the female body is restricted by its fundamental lack; it is uncanny, strange, and unfinished.

Monstrous terms are not the only way the patriarchy manipulates language and power to propagate misogyny⁴. This project focuses on the architecture of patriarchy⁵ and the language the

¹ *Holy Bible*. New International Version, Zondervan Publishing House, 1984.

² Ovid. *Metamorphoses*, vol. 2, 8 AD. Translated by Frank Justus Miller, Harvard UP, 2012.

³ *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation*. Translated by Seamus Heaney. *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, W.W. Norton & Company, 2012.

⁴ Kate Manne identifies misogyny as the reinforcement of the patriarchal order, serving "as the 'law enforcement' branch, which has the overall function of policing and enforcing its governing norms and expectations" (Manne 78).

⁵ Manne's defines patriarchy as a socially constructed system that defines power and labor along gendered lines, lending men social power and requiring that women serve (33).

patriarchy uses to maintain absolute power in society. While I describe the physical architecture of convents, abbeys, suburban houses, and family homes in each chapter, my definition of architecture transcends the brick and mortar of these buildings. The women in each novel are confined and trapped within these edifices. However, these structures are metaphors for the patriarchy's strategies to oppress women and enact violence on them when they transgress socially normative behaviors based on gendered hierarchy.

My use of architectural terms describes the experiences of marginalized groups to represent the oppression and limiting factors that these communities face. We live in a society constructed and predominantly controlled by men, a social structure that has been in power for eras. The material world gives visual and physical expressions of power, and we must pay attention to where architecture ostracizes consumers of space. This project focuses on the intersections of space, power, gender, religion, and the architecture of institutions that confine women to maintain absolute, patriarchal power. The portrayal of women in horror and gothic literature illuminates how patriarchal systems have repressed, and continue to oppress, female sexuality, autonomy, and political freedoms. In *Dead Blondes and Bad Mothers* (2019), Sady Doyle writes that no woman is born outside of patriarchal confinement:

Women are placed under male control, penned in and intimidated by the interlocking forms of violence that constitute patriarchy, beginning when they are very young. Not a single woman gets out unscathed; there is not one woman who reaches the end of her life without being sexually assaulted ... harassed ... abused ... verbally demeaned and intimidated in public spaces. (Doyle 212)

Women are confined by figurative glass ceilings, closed doors, wallpapered attics, and dungeons. They have been excluded from literary, philosophical, medical, and political conversations by

the various institutions that helped establish and support patriarchal abuse. Not a single woman is free from the violent, oppressive agenda of the patriarchy. The organization of space and spatial design has the ability to empower women, but they inhibit women's social and professional abilities in favor for male control instead. Constructed spaces and society have been designed with men as the standard and put forth effort to place many economic, social, and personal barriers to keep women from wielding just as many rights and freedoms as men. It stands to reason that many female writers would reveal how architecture represents the construction and perpetuation of patriarchal ideologies.

Many theorists contribute to the discussion of gender and the consequences of deviating outside of gendered roles and expectations. Theorists such as Julia Kristeva, Simone De Beauvoir, Barbara Creed, and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen attempt to define the "Other," a state of alienation and existing outside of socially normative behavior. Women have been prohibited from operating within the same social and political domains as men for centuries. Instead, women were forced to participate in society by adopting specific roles, performing certain kinds of social labor, and adhering to social scripts enforced by the patriarchy to secure its existence. In a male-dominated society, gothic and horror representations of women depict their experiences of oppressive sexuality, limited autonomy, and political freedoms. A study of select horror and gothic writers reveal the political and socially constructed narratives about women that frame the fear of female power, patriarchal systems that repress women, and literature's cultural and social influences in gender discussion. This thesis examines women's confinement in psychological and physical spaces in four novels: Sophia Lee's *The Recess* (1783), Ann Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), William Peter Blatty's novel, *The Exorcist* (1971), and Jac Jemc's *The Grip of*

It (2017). I analyze patriarchal and sexist⁶ systems that consistently endanger and oppress the female heroines by using architecture as a vehicle to expose the abuse in each novel. The forms of architecture in each novel are encoded with social relations that reinforce a society in which men are at the top, and the ways that the construction of patriarchy tries to keep women confined in domesticity.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I explore the disorienting, labyrinthian descriptions of architecture in Sophia Lee's *The Recess* (1783) and Ann Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance* (1790) to investigate the various political and cultural fears affecting women in the eighteenth century. I assert that the female gothic writer uses architectural metaphors to reveal how eighteenth-century women suffered from abuse and confinement by oppressive patriarchal rule. I reposition the function of architecture in gothic literature from spectacle to literary metaphor that encapsulate women's frustrations and resistance against their confinement within the domestic sphere. The stone walls and towering turrets represent the sexual, political, and religious systems that confine women while simultaneously speaking to women's suffering underneath repressive patriarchal design. The female gothic writer uses architectural elements as a metaphor to expose women's entrapment within domestic ideologies that represent the various institutions that seek to confine women. This act is a form of resistance that urges women to rebel against these systems.

Both Sophia Lee and Ann Radcliffe use architectural metaphors to expose women's subjugation to patriarchal gender expectations and their resistance to the domestic sphere. The distinction between the male and female gothic originated with Ellen Moers, who used the term "female gothic" to describe the work and influence of women in the literary genre (90). The subgenre's classification and credibility have been contested by numerous literary theorists,

⁶ Manne explains that sexism and sexist ideology consist of the "assumptions, beliefs, theories and stereotypes that represent men and women as different in ways that support patriarchal arrangements" (9).

beginning with the notion that men primarily wrote gothic literature. The female gothic constructs a space within the male-dominated academic sphere to illuminate the repression and oppression women endure under patriarchal rule. As a result, the gothic mode appealed to women because they could explore the hidden dimensions of gendered politics and victimization by using architecture to imprison their heroine, representing women's subjugation to the domestic sphere.

Sophia Lee's *The Recess, or a Tale of Other Times* centers on the lives of Ellinor and Matilda, the fictional daughters of Queen Mary of Scots, and their necessary confinement within a subterranean recess to evade persecution from the Elizabethan Court, which would punish the girls if their matrilineal ties were revealed. Lee incorporates gothic architecture as a physical setting for the novel and a metaphor for hidden desires, entrapment, solitude, and freedom. Hidden passageways, trapdoors, and stone walls form an architectural metaphor representing the confinement, seclusion, and victimization created by eighteenth-century gender expectations and the domestic sphere that generationally represses and oppresses women. The architecture of the recess keeps the two women from safely returning to society as its labyrinthian architecture makes it difficult to escape. External forces, such as the Elizabethan Court, perpetuate their confinement as the recess protects the two girls and offers them sanctuary from forces that seek to punish them because of their mother. Ultimately, Lee uses the women's confinement to comment on the political and social unrest emanating from the British Enlightenment, women's anxieties regarding marital dynamics, and eighteenth-century religious and historical systems that repress women and enact violence on them.

In *A Sicilian Romance*, Ann Radcliffe employs gothic architecture to instill fear and terror in her audience with the description of menacing hallways and towers to covertly describe

the true terrors of the novel: women in abusive marriages and repressive gender roles. The heroines in the novel, Julia and Emilia Mazzini, reside in a secluded castle, much like Matilda and Ellinor's underground recess. Radcliffe explicitly comments on the threats to women's bodies in her novel because of patriarchal repression of women's desires and selves. Readers find similar themes of enforced entrapment in *The Recess* and *A Sicilian Romance* and explore the heroine's search for an identity separate from gender expectations and the domestic sphere. In *The Recess* and *A Sicilian Romance*, both authors use the psychology and architecture of the gothic to demonstrate how the female gender was confined within the politicized domestic sphere and women's gender expectations in the eighteenth century. The castle's architecture symbolically represents the repressive forces that confine eighteenth-century women within the domestic sphere and keep them from breaking free to establish themselves within society independently. Radcliffe uses gothic archetypes such as the supernatural and architecture to explore what confines, suppresses, and imprisons women in society and what happens if they resist their immurement.

In my second chapter, I use Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory of *Das Unheimlich*, or "unhomely," to explore defamiliarization and the uncanny nature of the home within the novel and the ways that Jac Jemc incorporates the uncanny in *The Grip of It* by employing classic gothic archetypes such as doppelgangers, women in distress, and architectural landscapes to reflect James and Julie's turbulent marriage. I examine the parallels between early and contemporary gothic literature, the metaphor of the house, and the patriarchal construction of the domestic sphere that keeps women confined to domesticity. I use Jemc's novel to examine gothic architecture and archetypes to demonstrate how eighteenth-century and contemporary gothic fiction make similar assertions regarding women's suffering from unequal marriage

dynamics, gendered responsibilities within the home, women's repression, and subsequent madness. Gothic prose creates a tense atmosphere that incites disillusionment and discomfort by using traditional gothic architecture and landscape. Jemc uses the architecture of the Khoury's home to allude to the deterioration of the aging house, representing James and Julie's increasingly decaying relationship. Ultimately, contemporary gothic literature highlights women's modern anxieties and fears regarding gender imbalance in relationships, the difficulty of maneuvering in society both financially and socially as a single woman, and the dismissal of women's fears and anxieties due to undiagnosed mental illnesses.

My third chapter focuses on William Peter Blatty's novel *The Exorcist* (1971) and the cultural, religious, and political aspects of Blatty's horror novel. This chapter symbolically connects the quiet, domestic home with the violence enacted on the female body as a political response to *Roe v. Wade* (1973), a landmark decision from the Supreme Court of the United States concerning women's choice to have an abortion free from government restriction. In "Movies and the Legacies of War and Corruption," Frances Gateward examines the 1973 decision's impact on *The Exorcist*'s film adaptation, which "ended with a horrific exhibition of a single woman and her child punished for their transgressions in challenging the social order of a nuclear family" (Gateward 96). The Supreme Court's decision on *Roe v. Wade* influenced Blatty to write *The Exorcist*, and as Gateward asserts, his novel "functions to reestablish the patriarchal order" (95). *The Exorcist* centers on twelve-year-old Regan MacNeil's demonic possession in a quiet Georgetown neighborhood and the desperate fight to save her life. Regan's mother, Chris MacNeil, is a successful actress and single mother. Because there is no man in the house to protect them, Regan and Chris are much more susceptible to external threats to their home, like demonic possessions.

Most of the novel takes place within the MacNeil home and the infiltration of demonic manifestations to torture and attack vulnerable women because of the absence of a protective male figure. Blatty, a devout Catholic and conservative, wrote *The Exorcist* in response to the Supreme Court's decision of *Roe vs. Wade* and the following cultural departure from the nuclear family and women's need to rely on men to be successful. When women resist the confines of oppressive gender roles and expectations, the patriarchal order retaliates by initiating an aggressive and violent attack against women. When Regan crosses the threshold between childhood and womanhood, she becomes locked into the gender expectations for women and is subject to patriarchal aggression. The Roman Catholic Church has been one of the world's most powerful institutions for thousands of years, so it would be a mistake to dismiss its impact on worldwide political and social systems. Cultural and political unrest are projected onto the victim's body as a way to promote and maintain patriarchal and religious agendas, and the victim becomes subject to hostility and violence to protect the fragile, sexist boundaries of the 1960s and 1970s and support the Catholic Church's patriarchal power.

My thesis seeks to expand the understanding of symbolic architecture in horror and gothic novels from physical structures to metaphors that examine the private and public spaces that women occupy and the socio-political consequences that follow when women transgress patriarchal and religious orders. This thesis converses with Donna Heiland, Betty Rizzo, and Fred Botting in defining and examining female authorship and gothic literature to illuminate the various forces that oppress and restrain women in early gothic fiction and contemporary horror literature. Each critic comments on at least one aspect of the gothic mode and how women establish themselves within the genre to expose women's subjugation within the domestic sphere and its lasting impact on gothic literature.

Architecture is frequently used in gothic literature to confine and repress the heroines before providing them with a means of escaping the domestic sphere in search of identity independent from patriarchal gender expectations. By comparing and contrasting eighteenth-century and contemporary gothic fiction, I identify the various confines that suppress and victimize women by deeming them monstrous and dangerous to society. Although women's roles and rights within society have evolved and progressed since the eighteenth century; I argue that women have and still suffer from male-controlled systems and misogynist abuse, and I articulate what we can learn about women's suffering from religious and patriarchal institutions through stories in historical and contemporary horror and gothic novels.

Chapter One: Reading Between the Scaffolds: The Architecture of Domesticity

In this chapter, I explore labyrinthian descriptions of architecture in Sophia Lee's *The Recess* (1783) and Ann Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance* (1790) to analyze the female gothic writer's use of architecture as symbols of entrapment. The heroines in each story are confined by architectural structures built and policed by religious and patriarchal organizations, but they are also confined by the symbolic architecture of political regulations of women's rights and autonomy. Though the heroines find themselves in seemingly impossible, claustrophobic conditions, Sophia Lee and Ann Radcliffe imply that women can assemble and unify their powers to escape from their oppressors through compulsory confinement in domestic spaces. Through this analysis, I examine the relationship between patriarchal systems and the subjugation of women to harmful domestic ideologies.

The British Enlightenment, also referred to as The Age of Reason, dominated Europe from the late eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century, and it overlapped with the architectural and political influence of the Gothic Revival. Gothic fiction became popular in the late eighteenth century to comment on the socio-political and economic unrest emerging with the rise of the British Enlightenment (O'Brien 1). The genre introduced the notion that "there is such a thing as society, that humans are principally intelligible as social beings, and that society itself is subject to change for both male and female writers of this period" (10). The gothic writer explored the social and cultural shifts stemming from the Enlightenment period and created what we understand as gothic archetypes. Archetypes include supernatural happenings, confined women, ghosts, and atmospheric gothic structures. These tropes allow the flexibility needed for the gothic writer to create exciting, spooky narratives while simultaneously reacting to Enlightenment philosophy and criticizing English political and monarchal powers.

Early gothic fiction reacted to the Enlightenment by emphasizing emotion and individual thought. Horace Walpole is accredited with the establishment of the gothic novel with his work *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and later influenced authors in the same genre, such as Sophia Lee and Ann Radcliffe (Botting 52). Gothic fiction was often set within gothic architecture to “allow a movement from and back to a rational present: more than a flight of nostalgic retrospection or an escape from the dullness of a present without chivalry, magic or adventure” (Botting 3). Writers created worlds of adventure within the walls of spectacular castles. Still, behind fantastical walls, writers embedded metaphors and symbolizations of a transforming society that disrupted and threatened the barriers of tradition and modernity. Botting writes that “the movement does not long for terrifying and arbitrary aristocratic power, religious superstition, or supernatural events but juxtaposes terrors of the negative with an order authorized by reason and mortality” (3). Castles, abbeys, and ruins took center stage in the Gothic novel to represent the dissolution of traditional, outdated powers of aristocracy, monarchy, and the church. These structures served as “places of defense, but also of incarceration and power, they are located in isolated spots, areas beyond reason, law and civilized authority, where there is no protection from terror or persecution and where, inside, creaking doors, dark corridors and dank dungeons stimulate irrational fancies and fears” (4). These structural spaces illustrated the confining, restrictive elements of the various political shifts in Europe regarding power, the monarchy, and the continued control of religious institutions.

These sites are often riddled with decay and deterioration to represent the institutions that constructed them and their hold in the present. Houses, castles, and mansions are affiliated with family status and physical property. Convents and abbeys generally exemplify religious

influence and power in society. Confinement and persecution are prevalent themes in *The Recess* and *A Sicilian Romance*. In *The Recess*, Ellinor and Matilda are isolated from society within the “ruins of a Monastery destroyed at the Reformation, and still was called by the name of St. Vincent. It had all the Gothic magnificence and elegance” (Lee 12). The abbey serves as a place of refuge from the Elizabethan Court that sought to persecute the fictional twin daughters of Mary, Queen of Scots. *A Sicilian Romance* features similar themes of persecution and oppressive institutions as Emilia and Julia fight to escape their authoritative father and the castle Mazzini, located on the northern shore of Sicily and surrounded by ruins. Gothic architecture conceals the heroines in both novels from the powers of patriarchy, monarchy, domestic ideologies, and religion, while simultaneously confining them within the same institutions. While these structures begin as places of refuge, they keep the heroines imprisoned and limit the heroine’s ability to establish individual autonomy and freedom away from the oppressive institutions that seek to confine them.

Sophia Lee's *The Recess* was largely successful in developing the historical and gothic novel and later influenced Ann Radcliffe, whose books, including *A Sicilian Romance*, contain many thematic similarities to Lee's works (Alliston xix-xx). Both women would be recognized for the establishment of the “female gothic,” with their inclusion of heroines that abide by “prescriptive notions for feminine behavior, but who are also portrayed as literally confined by them” (xiv). The female gothic articulated women’s experience and suffering under patriarchy and exposed the limitations of patriarchal representations of gender and sexuality (Botting 16). In Lee and Radcliffe’s works, architecture symbolizes the patriarchal powers that confine the gothic heroines. Additionally, the gothic ruins in both texts represent the Revival’s departure from antiquarianism, the monarchy, nationalism, and neoclassicism. The eighteenth century was a

period of contestation and shifting concepts of gender and a period in which work started to become divorced from the domestic realm slowly.

The use of the female gothic while examining the works of Sophia Lee and Ann Radcliffe allows for a broader understanding of women's roles in eighteenth-century British society, the problems they faced regarding harmful gender roles and ideologies, and how those issues are represented in literature written by women. The notion that single and married women struggled to obtain autonomy independently from their fathers or their husbands' factor into the themes of domesticity and confinement in *The Recess* and *A Sicilian Romance*. In "Women, Consumption, and Coverture in England, c. 1760-1860" (1996), Margot Finn demonstrates women's increasing relegation to a private, domestic sphere in the later eighteenth century that excludes women from public life and prevents them from establishing themselves economically. Finn analyzes the role of married women in eighteenth-century England and how society and the institution of marriage forced women into their confinement within assigned gender roles and expectations. She writes, "Here women who remained within the marital home could and did exert a degree of autonomy denied them by the practices of the common law—appearing in person to negotiate and contest debts for which their husbands were ultimately liable" (Finn 707). English law recognized women for their roles as wives and the domestic labor they were assigned, but that does not erase the fact that their image and role in society were not independent from their husbands. Architectural metaphors became the female gothic's method to reveal the ways that eighteenth-century women suffered from abuse by prescribed notions of domestic ideologies.

Looking at the connections between the British Enlightenment, the Gothic Revival, and the representation of women's confinement by patriarchal ideologies, an enlightened, feminist

voice emerges. Here, women must work within the confines of patriarchal control to unify the voices and experiences of other women who suffer from similar circumstances. This chapter examines the symbolic function of gothic architecture in Sophia Lee's *The Recess* and Ann Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance* and how they reveal women's frustration with and resistance to domestic ideologies of the eighteenth century. Values of the Gothic Revival and the British Enlightenment are embedded in both works and are symbolized by the liberation of the gothic heroines from the limitations of their confinement. The architectural structures represent the sexual, political, and religious systems that confine women within domestic ideologies and speak to women's collective suffering by patriarchal and societal design. By centering the analysis on Sophia Lee's *The Recess* and Ann Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance*, I argue that the female gothic writer uses architectural elements as a metaphor to expose women's entrapment within domestic ideologies and the abuse women encounter from repressive eighteenth-century patriarchal systems. The gothic enclosure represents the various institutions that seek to confine women and as a form of resistance that urges women to rebel against these systems.

1. British Enlightenment, Gothic Architecture, and the Female Gothic

The Enlightenment was a philosophical and intellectual movement in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that challenged the public's understanding of God, reason, nature, and humanity. The Enlightenment began as a philosophical idea before it became subject to historical investigation. In "What Is Enlightenment?" (1784), Immanuel Kant recommended "the use of reason in matters of religion, but he clearly intended that it be applied to any subject that could be of benefit to mankind" (Robertson 30). The Enlightenment was not anti-Christian, but it encouraged people to think critically regarding their reliance on biblical truths and the Church's authoritarian status in English society. It is often believed that the Enlightenment was hostile to

religion and the Church, and the movement thrived upon foundations of anti-Christianity. Instead, the Enlightenment signals a time when “religious observance became optional rather than a necessary dimension of social life” (36). However, Enlightenment thinking urged people to consider the institutions that structure society and politics. The use of reason was central to the Enlightenment movement as emerging philosophies led humans to question the human condition and work toward true knowledge, freedom, and happiness.

Enlightenment thinkers became interested in the origin of knowledge, communication, and language. The debate examined the “circumstances in which men and women would first have needed to communicate, what their primitive communications would naturally have consisted in, and how more sophisticated languages might subsequently have developed” (Robertson 84). Conjectural and naturalistic histories of language answered these questions. Still, it raised more questions, especially for those who insisted that language, and the vast variety of them, was God’s gift to man (84-5). Historians observed the importance of language in the evolution and civilization of societies and how a civilized society “would be distinguished by the sophistication of its language use, and by the good manners which it fostered” (85). In *Gothic and Gender: An Introduction* (2004), Donna Heiland writes that the era “privileged the powers of reason, experience, and the individual over superstition, an unquestioning adherence to the teachings of the ‘ancients,’ and willing submission to the dictates of authority. In terms of economic history, capitalism was on the rise, as was a middle class capable of challenging the authority of the ruling aristocracy” (Heiland 3). At the same time, family structures were beginning to shift as social and economic changes drew men to the workplace, and women were confined within the frames of their homes.

The Enlightenment period is characterized by the seismic shifts and instability of socio-political and cultural structures. It stands to reason that many authors would write about the economic, political, and religious changes by writing in the gothic mode, which, at its core, “is about transgressions of all sorts: across national boundaries, social boundaries, sexual boundaries, the boundaries of one’s own identity” (Heiland 3). Early gothic writers often associated the medieval buildings with a dark and terrifying period characterized by rituals, superstition, and strict laws enforced by torture. Gothic fiction usually takes place in the Middle or Dark Ages that illustrates “an absence of the light associated with sense security and knowledge ... characterizes the looks, moods, atmospheres, and connotations of the genre” (Botting 2). The genre generally includes aspects of the supernatural, alchemy, occult, mystery, and horror; however, “there is a paradox in the appeal to the past” (2). Although the gothic evokes associations with the medieval times and style of architecture, “the invocation occurs in the middle of an eighteenth-century in which the promotion of reason, science, commerce, and bourgeois values was in the ascendancy and in the process of transforming patterns of knowledge, production, social organization, and political power” (3). The architecture of the Gothic Revival was strongly affected by the cultural, social, and political shifts following the British Enlightenment. Gender roles and expectations for the sexes focus on the workings of patriarchal politics. Women were confined to patriarchal ideologies and prescribed domestic roles, while men dominated and created laws to enforce the submissiveness of women to male powers. The emergence of feminist literary scholarship in the 1970s changed the way critics analyzed gothic fiction and led to the term “female gothic” to characterize the works of the female writer in the gothic mode.

The female gothic is a highly contested term that describes women's participation in the gothic mode. Over the past several decades, several critics have weighed in to offer their definition of the female gothic and its function as an essential critical genre. In *Literary Women* (1976), Moers states the female gothic is "easily defined [by] the work that women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic" (90). Moers uses the term to describe women's work in the literary sphere during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the coded expressions within their work that expressed anxieties over domestic entrapment and female sexuality. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) worked to "legitimize the study of women's writing as a distinct subject, and to formulate ways of understanding it" (Heiland 182). Moers, Gilbert, and Gubar rendered essential ways to study gothic fiction. Moers, however, identifies the female gothic as a genre that articulates women's fears and anxieties regarding the familial shifts that subjugated women to the domestic sphere and the fear of themselves (182). *The Madwoman in the Attic* follows up on this anxiety with its focus on women's cultural experiences and the "female impulse to struggle free from social and literary confinement through strategic redefinitions of self, art, and society" (Gilbert and Gubar xii). A few years later, Juliann E. Fleenor published *The Female Gothic* (1983), which expands on the work of earlier definitions of the female gothic. Fleenor defines the female gothic as "women as writers writing within a patriarchal literary tradition and woman as a subject for analysis by male critics—feminist criticism maintains that literature is not value-free either in content or form" (Fleenor 8). Diane Long Hoeveler's *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender* (1998) argues that gothic novels "not so much reflect the experience of women as teach them how to become properly feminized" (Heiland 183). According to Hoeveler, the female gothic functions to teach young

women how to conduct themselves within society, not to expose women's subjugation and resistance against patriarchal oppression.

Many scholars have contributed to the characterization and the classification of the female gothic to understand the motivation and impact behind female writers composing narratives within the gothic genre. The answer can be identified by understanding the efforts of the female gothic in dissolving harmful rhetoric designed by patriarchal institutions. As a result, this thesis functions upon the definition of the female gothic as a description of the works of early female writers and how their literature reflects eighteenth-century political, cultural, and social shifts following the British Enlightenment and women's confinement within domestic ideologies and gender roles and expectations. The female gothic writer criticizes and exposes women's subjugation to domesticated spaces designed by patriarchal institutions, but not all early gothic texts were against the patriarchal systems. Early gothic novels, such as Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron* (1777), explored, defined, and defended the patriarchy (Heiland 8). Female gothic writers wrote these early texts within the gendered spaces and outlines assigned by the patriarchy. They featured women who abided by social rules rather than fight against them.

The Recess and *A Sicilian Romance* were two of the earliest gothic novels to challenge the endorsements of patriarchy. Reeve's and Walpole's novels adhered to the social hierarchy of patriarchal structures, perpetuating the notions of gendered roles and expectations between men and women. Lee's and Radcliffe's novels describe the physical entrapment of the heroines in architectural structures, but they associate that imprisonment to the confines of political, religious, and patriarchal control and regulation of women's freedom. Sophia Lee and Ann Radcliffe combine numerous characteristics of the female gothic to create an effective narrative

to portray these instances of confinement: “an overarching interest in the workings of a patriarchal society, the haunting of the present by the past, the entrapment of women, and an interest in the extent to which sensibility contributes to or alleviates that entrapment” (Rizzo 20). Both novels explored the patriarchy and other institutions that sought to oppress and repress women’s autonomy. Each heroine uses emotion and sensibility as a mechanism for their liberation from patriarchal figures rather than a weakness. The term “patriarchy” often lacks binding force as it can be allusive and impressionistic rather than describing any form of social structures run by men (Heiland 8). The affiliation between monarchy and its relationship to patriarchy or paternalism relates to God’s creation of Adam and biblical kings, which still holds power today. Heiland quotes Sir Robert Filmer’s *Patriarcha* (1680), arguing that “paternal and political power[s] were not merely analogous but identical” (qtd. in Heiland 9). Writers such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean Jacques Rousseau examined how socio-political and economic structures were constructed regarding paternal and political powers. According to Locke's claim that husbands naturally wield authority over their wives, women were valued as “vessels of birthing” in the domestic order “(10). Gothic fiction illustrates who represents patriarchy, patriarchal powers, what threatens the patriarchal institution, and what fuels its power. The endorsement of the institution that “demands the suppression—and sometimes the outright sacrifice—of women” is examined through gothic fiction to expose the oppressions that people faced by its social control (11). Religious connotations and symbols are prominent within *A Sicilian Romance* and *The Recess* to demonstrate the various ways the patriarchy attempts to keep women suppressed beneath their socio-political rule and how they tried to secure their power.

The female gothic illustrates what “haunts” women: the patriarchal systems that dictate women’s positions in society as birthing vessels, subservient wives to their husbands, and limiting gender roles and expectations. The damaging impact of patriarchal structures is perpetuated by centuries of religious power, which is physically and metaphorically present within Lee and Radcliffe’s works. *The Recess* and *A Sicilian Romance* serve as examples of the female gothic, as they criticize women's treatment and abuse under patriarchal control and provide an academic environment for women to examine their treatment in society. The conditions that plague the heroines include their “enclosure and deprivation-which might include incarceration, live or symbolic burial, coercion, isolation, the absence of light, and the absence of information, the loss of autonomy, the threat of incest or rape” (Rizzo 62). The representation of claustrophobic spaces that confine the heroines symbolizes the socio-political and religious oppression of women by socially and economically immobilizing them. The two novels encourage audiences to reevaluate institutions and political institutions to explore the systems that determine their roles as virtuous, autonomous women in society and their confinement within domestic ideologies. Lee and Radcliffe encouraged readers to find empowerment through sensibility and emotion. Female gothic writers consider the cultural and patriarchal influences that repress women, reflected by the architecture and landscape in *The Recess* and *A Sicilian Romance*. The architecture of the Recess, the Mazzini castle, the ruins, dark landscapes, and religious and monarchical undertones in each novel work to trap women, figuratively and metaphorically, within the harmful narratives and gendered roles following the British Enlightenment.

All of the women in both novels are physically, emotionally, and mentally confined by oppressive figures, represented by the physical structures in the story. Ellinor and Matilda suffer

from imprisonment within the Recess, a necessary refuge from the Elizabethan Court. A substantial portion of *A Sicilian Romance* is set in the Castle Mazzini, where Julia suffers at the hand of her father, a tyrannical patriarch, and his attempts to marry her off to the Duke de Luovo. Both Sophia Lee and Ann Radcliffe incorporate Enlightenment philosophy and reasoning into their works to implicitly critique England's cultural and religious shifts and describe women's mistreatment and abuse by rigid political, social, and cultural powers through their narratives. From this, an Enlightenment feminism emerges that challenges patriarchy by challenging that the public perceives as female weaknesses and strengths. The Enlightenment instigated a change in England's religious, cultural, and social traditions, illustrated in *The Recess* and *A Sicilian Romance* by newer, more progressive figures who succeeded oppressive, authoritative figures in power. Both criticize women's oppression by using architecture to symbolize the patriarchal, monarchical, and religious institutions that enforce women's confinement to domestic ideologies dictated by patriarchal rule.

2. The Recess

Gothic fiction was seen as a feminized mode as it incorporated many features of sensible and sentimental literature. For instance, sentimental literature seeks to morally enlighten the reader by focusing on the feelings and emotions between the characters and the readers. This form of literature functioned as a didactic model to teach people correct morals and reactions through the characters' actions in the novel. Both gothic and sentimental genres have been read as "the province of women" and became feminized forms of literature. Heiland writes that sensibility is a symptom of what society has repressed, and "what has been repressed is pleasure, desire, and the possibility of social change. Sensibility can point the way to the dissolution of the self (in male writers), to the restructuring of gender relations (in female writers), and to different

ways of being male and female (in both)” (12). Both Sophia Lee and Ann Radcliffe embrace the feminized, domestic literary sphere to criticize sexist and patriarchal divisions between men and women.

The Recess explores and challenges women’s confinement and oppression within literal and domestic spaces through a narrative rooted in the historical rivalry between Elizabeth I and Mary, Queen of Scots. The novel is based on the fictional premise that during her imprisonment by Elizabeth, Mary married the Duke of Norfolk and gave birth to twin daughters, Ellinor and Matilda. Mary remains imprisoned while her husband fights and dies during a battle against Elizabeth. Their infant daughters are sent to a recess, a secret, subterranean abbey in the ruins of a convent to protect them from the vengeful Elizabethan Court (Lee 22). The daughters grow up in the Recess and eventually learn their birth story; however, their mother’s claim to the throne means that they have one too, leading Queen Elizabeth I and her Court to attempt to contain Ellinor and Matilda’s threats to her reign. As a result, the sisters spend their formative years sequestered in the Recess. The enclosure is a refuge from the Elizabethan court, but it simultaneously serves as a prison that keeps them confined and isolated from the outside world. Lee illustrates the complexities of eighteenth-century gender politics by creating a narrative of two heroines bound by gender and using architectural metaphors to represent entrapment. The recess is a physical refuge to conceal Matilda and Ellinor’s identities from the Court of Elizabeth that would seek to find and capture the sisters if their relationship with their mother is publicly revealed.

The Recess as a Refuge

The novel begins with an epigraph from Shakespeare’s play *As You Like It* (1693) and foretells themes of confinement, isolation, and persecution that the heroines will encounter. The

epigraph speaks to Ellinor and Matilda's fond attachment to the Recess but prophesies the truth that will be revealed to them throughout the novel's plot. The epigraph states, "Are not these Woods / More free from peril than the envious Court? / Here feel we the penalty of Adam / The seasons' difference" (qtd. in Lee 4). The Shakespearean epigraph establishes the rural, pastoral setting of the novel and romanticizes Ellinor and Matilda's exile from society, both literally and figuratively. Matilda narrates that the recess is surrounded by "a long avenue of broken arches, intermingled with brambles and wild wall-flowers, in the paths of which the grass grew very high ... – nothing could more fully prove the unrequitedness of the spot," camouflages the location of the recess as the environment has no indicators of human inhabitation (Lee 37). The epigraph alludes to the story of Adam and Eve before they were banished from the Garden of Eden after committing the ultimate sin. Before Adam and Eve committed the ultimate evil, the Garden of Eden was in a perpetual summer. One of the consequences of their actions was the annual changing of seasons. The epigraph implies that Ellinor and Matilda do not experience the "season's difference," allowing readers to infer that while they live in a perpetual summer, their circumstance is far from idyllic.

The sisters' confinement within the Recess serves as a double-edged sword as it protects them from the Elizabethan Court while simultaneously imprisoning them inside the walls of the underground abbey and adjacent edifices. *The Recess* incorporates Gothic Revival-styled architecture as a physical setting and uses these gothic structures to represent women's hidden desires, entrapment, and solitude. Matilda and Ellinor are "shut away from the world" and confined to a recess (Lee 9). Sophia Lee uses gothic architecture to expose women's confinement within domesticity with descriptions of the abbey that encases them. Using these

metaphors and symbolizations, Lee reveals the various socio-political and cultural fears women had following the shifts instigated by the British Enlightenment.

Lee highlights the positive aspects of the Recess and how Ellinor and Matilda's confinement emphasizes the importance of female relationships in the novel. With the gothic genre becoming popularized as a space for women to address their concerns and sentiments regarding their daily lives, it became a unified space for female writers. Megan Lynn Isaac's essay "Sophia Lee and The Gothic of Female Community" describes how Sophia Lee uses the gothic genre to highlight the importance of female friendships and the necessity for female voices in historical writing. Isaac describes Lee's work as a demonstration of "the typical problems women encounter in society ... demonstrating not only the limitations faced by women operating under a patriarchal system but portraying as well how women cooperate with and participate in a system which diminishes and denies the feminine potential" (204). The abbey that confines Ellinor and Matilda is underground, surrounded by ruins, and in a private location. Women were separated from participating in male-dominated public spheres and designated to private, domestic spheres where they were prescribed specific roles for feminine behaviors. From Matilda's perspective, the dark and disorienting descriptions of architecture represent the futile conditions that confine her and Ellinor in the Recess while also speaking to the challenges women faced in the eighteenth century to establish autonomy in an oppressive society.

The Recess exposes women's abuse at the hands of the patriarchy and women's socio-political limitations of domesticity. Lee comments on women's subjugation to domestic ideologies through Ellinor and Matilda's confinement in the recess. Matilda admits that she and Ellinor were content with their confinement "through habit and ignorance" (Lee 8). Botting asserts that although the Recess offers the twins security and safety from the Elizabethan court,

“the novel suggests that there is no refuge in secrecy, hidden Recesses or domesticity itself...virtuous women continually confront suffering and persecution, their ideals leaving them powerless and unrewarded” (Botting 53). Women’s confinement within domesticity renders them powerless against patriarchal, religious, and monarchical control. Sophia Lee created a world within the gothic through her work in *The Recess*, representing the repression women face in society, expressed by Matilda and Ellinor and their suffering throughout the narrative. Isaac asserts that Lee's legacy influenced the gothic genre and the female gothic community with its inclusion of “rational pairings and parallels ... [and] comprehensive and complex picture of female powers, potentials, and, most importantly, problems within the patriarchal system” (204).

Though forced domesticity and confinement limit women’s freedoms, women find opportunities for community and empowerment through their shared experiences of oppression. It is important to note that while Lee used the gothic mode to expose women’s confinement, her work led toward the recognition of women’s literary and public works outside of prescribed notions of female societal functions. Lee's work suggests that “women can better use the resources that are frequently available within the patriarchy” (Isaac 204). Lee offers a narrative that campaigns toward the recognition of the potential of women outside of imposed notions of femininity. Isaac argues that female solidarity is necessary for women to escape their literal and figurative constraints. Through mutual understanding and knowledge of the world, women can achieve liberation from imprisonment. Ellinor and Matilda are denied worldly expertise to keep them hidden from the world's dangers. Instead, the sisters spend their days studying “music, drawing, poetry, geography, and every ornamental branch of education” (Lee 10). When they inquire about their retirement from their confinement, their requests are swept away. Lee emphasizes the importance of female relationships constructed between sisters, mothers, friends,

and female guardians. Lee advocates for recognizing the importance of female relationships to experience and understand their similar subjugations to domesticity and the circumstances in which they experience repressive, gendered English laws.

The female gothic provides a unified environment or women to exist within and express frustrations regarding their imposed imprisonment by domestic ideologies. Patriarchal gender politics assigned women within domestic ideologies, and the gothic genre served as a space for women to state their struggles in a repressive society. Lee demonstrates that secrecy can be destructive through Matilda and Ellinor's letters: "a young heart is frequently engrossed by a favorite idea, amid all the glare of the great world; nor is it then wonderful ours were thus possessed when entombed alive in such a narrow boundary" (Lee 10). Ellinor and Matilda's education and experiences in and of the world are limited to keep them safe and isolated in secrecy. Still, it hinders their understanding of their predicament and how the sisters can free themselves from confinement. The best way to avoid secrecy is to participate within female communities to exchange conversations regarding the patriarchal abuse they face and the power that women wield in society (141). Lee takes Ellinor and Matilda on a journey to criticize women's problems in a patriarchal system and highlight the female potential in severely limiting social constructs. The existence of the Recess is remote and hidden from potential and serves as a female, domesticated environment; however, the Recess quickly transitions from serving as an asylum from the Elizabethan Court to a prison that confines and suppresses Ellinor and Matilda's freedoms.

The Recess as a Prison

Matilda describes the recess at the novel's opening, likening the underground tunnels to a prison. Matilda describes the recess's architecture with similar features to religious structures

during the Gothic Revival: “This Recess could not be called a cave, because it was composed of various rooms, and the stones were obviously united by labor; yet every room was distinct, and divided from the rest by a vaulted passage with many stairs” (Lee 8). The recess used to be a monastery, and the dim, restrictive, and claustrophobic structure of the recess exemplifies religious influence and power in society. Lee uses the architecture of the former sanctuary to criticize the feudal institutions that oppressed and repressed women’s autonomy and mobility in eighteenth-century England. Additionally, Matilda notes that the recess has limited light that emits from the stained glass, again harkening back to the religious use of stained glass: “while our light proceeded from small encasements of painted glass, so infinitely above our reach that we could never seek a world beyond; and so dim, that the beams of the sun were almost a new object to us when we quitted this retirement” (8). Matilda admits that the network keeps her and Ellinor safe, even if it restricts their freedom both inside and in the outside world. Much like the Recess, domestic ideologies are social constructions that divide men and women into different social factors with separate responsibilities for their social participation.

Early into the novel, readers learn that only the female characters are obliged to dwell within the Recess’s walls, while the male characters in the story can enter and exit as they wish. These interactions demonstrate the confining elements of domesticity that eighteenth-century women experienced in contrast to male members of society. The limited structure of the recess sequesters Mrs. Marlow, Ellinor, and Matilda. Father Anthony, the girls’ teacher, and Mrs. Marlow’s brother are free to roam inside and outside the recess. Father Anthony constantly disappears, which was “a secret beyond [Matilda and Ellinor’s] comprehension,” suggesting that Father Anthony obtained the freedom to come and go as he pleased. At the same time, the female characters were required to stay within the recess for their protection (9). The subterranean

enclosure symbolizes the various religious and political systems that seek to suppress women's autonomy and keep them from invading the male-dominated social realms of literature and culture. The Recess itself was "once inhabited by the nuns of the order of St. Winifred, but deserted before the abolition of Convents," reinforcing the feminization of space and the religious influence of the architecture (Lee 22). Prominent political and religious positions were primarily dictated by men who opposed women's inclusion and participation within society.

The use of religious architecture in the novel as a setting for Matilda and Ellinor's captivity demonstrates the perpetuation of oppression against women that religious doctrines have enforced. Matilda and Ellinor struggle to free themselves from religious regulations as the patriarchy often uses scripture to secure their societal privilege and deem women inferior. The religious affiliation with the architecture symbolizes the institutions that sought to oppress and repress women's mobility within the community. Still, the descriptions of the ruins imply the deterioration of the archaic forces following the British Enlightenment. Eighteenth-century gender politics sought to restrict women's access to society, limiting them within domestic ideologies where they were assigned domestic duties and prescribed feminine behaviors. In *The Recess*, Lee's representation of architecture demonstrates the impossibilities of women escaping domesticity. The girls are detained within the recess and the surrounding environment but cannot venture and explore beyond the limitations of their remote location. The architecture of the recess exemplifies women's limited mobility beyond domesticity. Despite women's efforts, they cannot escape the religious and patriarchal institutions that oppress them. Sue Chaplain describes the architectural symbolism that Lee uses in *The Recess* and its connection to patriarchally-enforced gender roles. Chaplain explains that "these subterranean spaces symbolize the dangerous, confined and marginalized position occupied by women within patriarchal structures

of power—the place of [a] woman is hidden within or secreted beneath the 'Gothic castle' of paternal law” (Chaplain 140). The passages in *The Recess* signify eighteenth-century politics and the laws that keep women enclosed within gender roles and expectations with little mobility or opportunity to thrive in public society.

Not only are Matilda and Ellinor consistently haunted by the religious architecture and history of the Recess, but they are also reminded of expected submission to patriarchal powers through the patriarchal statues strewn around the Recess and adjacent edifices. Chaplain extends her research of eighteenth-century laws that assign gendered expectations for the sexes to demonstrate how Sophia Lee uses architecture and ruins to highlight the fragility of patriarchal and religious structures. She describes the religious influence on gender politics and Lee's critique of these patriarchal and religious systems that repress Matilda and Ellinor: “The physical location and origin of the Recess evokes this process of exile and haunting that both defines and disrupts paternal law. Matilda and Ellinor's identities as the daughters of Mary are concealed within the recess, signifying the religious and patriarchal laws that abject women from participating in society. The recess and the adjacent abbey are religious constructions designed to house members of the Church, which has historically excluded women from assuming positions of power. The sisters were allowed “the pleasure of a little novelty” with their brief jaunt outside the Recess. Upon exploring the surrounding environment, they came across a narrow passageway (Lee 37). Matilda's letters offer a detailed description of the recess and the patriarchal figures that guard the abbey: “On turning round, to observe how the entrance was hid, we perceived a high raised tomb, at each corner of which stood a gigantic statue of a man in armour, as if to guard it, two whom were now headless ... vast heaps of stones were fallen from

the building” (37). The physical and symbolic presence of the armed guards at the ruins points toward the religious and patriarchal influences that keep the twins trapped within the Recess.

The statue’s state of disintegration and ruin signifies that the strength of religious and patriarchal influences has started to diminish. Chaplain asserts that the location of the Recess “evokes this process of exile and haunting that both defines and disrupts paternal law” (140). Matilda's description of the ruins provides insight into the patriarchal and religious systems that signify the absence of feminine presence in the Church. Though nothing remains except the “dropping pillars” (38) and “ruined cloisters” (39), the forces that designate women to domesticity prevail; however, the ruins of the gothic structure signal a shift in power and tradition. The descriptions of the ruins in *The Recess* illustrate the weakening and dissolution of antiquated practices to represent women’s attempt to empower themselves in domestic spaces and to expose women’s limited social mobility by patriarchal rule. Matilda and Ellinor’s observance of the ruins of a once-authoritative monastery reveals the Enlightenment’s influence on social and cultural customs. The female gothic writer exposes women’s confinement in domestic spaces that patriarchal institutions enforce within society, which is demonstrated by the gothic heroines' desire to escape from the institutions that imprison them. Furthermore, Lee's use of architecture signals women's victimization by gendered expectations by placing her heroine into a seemingly impossible environment from which they must escape.

The Recess protects the sisters from the vindictive Queen Elizabeth; however, like English coverture and marriage laws in the eighteenth century, it also can repress and obliterate any sense of identity outside of the systematic socio-political and cultural enclosure within its wall. Ellinor and Matilda experience the outside world's reality, but the Recess's eventual destruction symbolizes their freedom from their necessary confinement. Despite their attempts to

evade the Elizabethan Court, both sisters face constant threats and even death: “Society and marriage offer only brief moments of happiness until the secret of their identity is disclosed. The disclosure leads to the death of one sister and the flight of the other, powerless against the political intrigues and violent passions of the Elizabethan world” (Botting 53). Though the Recess served as a place of love and security, there was no freedom or opportunities for establishing autonomy when their seclusion was necessary for their safety. The structure that once protected them from the dangers of the Elizabethan Court impeded their ability to explore the outside world. Though the destruction of the Recess does not lead to Matilda and Ellinor’s safety in society, it does mean that they can operate as two women capable of making decisions for themselves. Botting writes that *The Recess* demonstrates “the moral and social imperative to inculcate female virtues and domestic values conflicts with the fact that working in the world involves some transgression of the accepted role for women” (54). Sophia Lee locates the problems in the ideals of femininity and domestication. She designs a narrative critiquing the notion that women must transgress from normative behavior to be accepted as autonomous individuals in society.

The Recess and women’s domestic roles and expectations are constructions that confine and repress women with their enforcement from patriarchal, monarchical, and religious figures. Through the shared experiences of imprisonment by patriarchal powers in physical and symbolic architecture, *The Recess* stresses that “female solidarity is necessary for women to escape the literal and figurative constraints on their lives” (28). The architecture of the Recess serves as a vehicle for Sophia Lee to critique the restrictive barriers that eighteenth-century women endured in their attempts to escape domesticity and highlight the female potential in the communities created to oppress women but ultimately unites them. Lee's heroines fought against the

psychological and physical structures that entombed them, reflecting eighteenth-century women's attempts to push back against the systems that repress them and progress toward a system that valued women's work in the public and literary spheres. Like *The Recess*, Ann Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance* features two sisters enclosed within a structure and follows their attempts to escape their confinement and evade the patriarchal figures that seek to imprison them.

3. A Sicilian Romance

In *A Sicilian Romance*, Ann Radcliffe employs gothic architecture to covertly suggest the true terror of the novel: unchecked patriarchal tyranny, imbalanced gender relations, and confinement within domesticity. Julia and Emilia Mazzini reside in a secluded, ancient mansion, like Matilda and Ellinor's *Recess*. Radcliffe's description of landscape and architecture is revealed in the opening pages of the novel with “the magnificent remains of a castle, formerly belonging to the noble house of Mazzini,” and the ruins described as having “an air of ancient grandeur, which, contrasted with the present solitude with the scene” (1). As in *The Recess*, the landscape in *A Sicilian Romance* is described as an isolated location with a magnificent glow that introduces readers to the novel's historical setting. In *A Sicilian Romance*, readers find similar themes to Sophia Lee's *The Recess*, including the heroine's entrapment within a Gothic space and her attempts to escape oppressive patriarchal forces. Multiple women find themselves confined and trapped within architecture and oppressive views of women. Still, this analysis focuses on the main heroine, Julia, and her journey to liberate herself from her father's control.

Julia is pursued by her tyrannical father but is trapped within a castle, making it architecturally challenging to escape. The castle metaphorically represents gender roles and social responsibilities for women policed and enforced by patriarchal systems that abuse and

belittle women. This literal and metaphorical structure is difficult to escape due to the disorienting construction. Though gender roles and expectations were designed to separate men and women from operating in the same political, religious, and social systems, domesticity also unites women through similar experiences of oppression. In addition, Julia suffers from oppressive external conditions as she is temporarily imprisoned within the walls of the Mazzini castle at the command of her “arrogant and impetuous” father (Radcliffe 3). Julia’s experience and resistance to her father’s persecution mirror Matilda and Ellinor’s attempts to evade the persecution from the Elizabethan Court. The tyrannical, oppressive Marquis is replaced by Julia’s brother, Ferdinand, a kinder, more progressive figure who aids in Julia’s escape from her arranged marriage and the unrelenting control of the Marquis.

A Sicilian Romance resists patriarchal institutions that oppress women and explores the limiting, repressive responsibilities and social roles prescribed to eighteenth-century women. Donna Heiland explains that the options offered to women are often no better than living deaths, meaning that they “are instead the seemingly routine erasures of women from the public sphere that mark the experiences of so many women in Radcliffe’s novels” (Heiland 58). Often, eighteenth-century women were presented with two options: become a wife or become a nun. The roles of wife and nun are often given to women whose desires conflict with those in power that are “equivalent to death” (58). Women could accept or deny the options they are presented with, but they are often sentenced to death if they do not take either option.

Julia’s story in *A Sicilian Romance* illustrates the limited options and roles that women could assume in the eighteenth century and demonstrates the cyclic powers of patriarchal oppression to keep women inferior to men in society. Her father dictates that she become the wife of another oppressive and tyrannical figure, the Duke de Luovo. When Julia learns that she

is to be married to the Duke, she feels “the dart of death” and sits “motionless—stupified and deprived of the power of utterance” (Radcliffe 55). The Marquis orders Julia to overcome “the little feminine weakness” and accept the marriage, which Julia asserts is a fate “worse than death” (55). The Marquis seeks to reinforce Julia’s submission to male power by marrying her to a man who mirrors his power. By marrying the Duke, Julia would have limited options as her autonomy would be forced to submit to another patriarchal figure like her father.

Radcliffe uses the architecture of the Mazzini castle to illustrate confining domestic spaces that contain the heroines in the novel and describe the oppressive power of the Marquis and Duke. When the Duke is introduced, he is described as “a character very similar to that of the Marquis. The love of power was his ruling passion: --with him no gentle or generous sentiment meliorated the harshness of authority, or directed it to acts of beneficence. He delighted in simple undisguised tyranny” (57). Men see marriage as a means to an end, irrespective of the intended woman’s wishes or desires. The Marquis offers Julia two options: “accept the duke, or quit this castle for ever, and wander where you will” (Radcliffe 56). Julia retires to her room, where her sister and Madame de Manon attempt to console her.

Audiences find that Julia’s brother, Ferdinand, and their father have opposing perspectives regarding the treatment of women by patriarchal institutions. Instead of following in his father’s footsteps to secure the male hierarchy in the castle Mazzini, Ferdinand sympathizes with his sister and serves as the antithesis of his father. Ferdinand declares that the arranged marriage was “an act of cruel authority now dissolved the fairy dream of happiness which his fancy had formed, and destroyed the peace of those most dear to him” (57). The contrast between Ferdinand and his father represents Radcliffe’s call for a deviation from tradition. The Marquis upholds patriarchal, misogynistic values with his belief that women are inferior to men's power

and control. Ferdinand, however, represents a more progressive model for men that seeks to include women in the public sphere rather than completely cast them out. Ultimately, Julia finds herself with limited options as a marriage to the Duke would further reinforce her confinement in domesticity.

Julia understands that she would continue to suffer at the hands of an authoritarian, patriarchal figure and endure a life of abuse with no chance of escaping. Finally, with the Marquis's insistence on the marriage, Julia is forced to flee her home to escape a fate equivalent to death. Julia flees the castle of Mazzini in pursuit of a life without the oppressive control of her father or the Duke. With the help of her maid, Caterina, Julia finds refuge with Caterina's parents in their village, but she eventually leaves for the seemingly greater safety of the abbey of St. Augustin: "where she would find a secure retreat; because, even if her place of refuge were discovered, the superior authority of the church would protect her" (109). The abbey's description echoes the Gothic Revival's architectural style with the "lonely cloisters, and high-arched aisles, whose long perspectives retired in simple grandeur, diffusing a holy calm around" (113). The architectural beauty of the abbey serves as a refuge from the terrors that pursue Julia during her escape from the Marquis and the Duke. However, this refuge is only temporary as Julia is soon presented with two options available for women during the eighteenth century that kept women confined by religious and patriarchal institutions when she is given the options of either becoming a nun or returning to her oppressors.

Julia resists falling victim to any of her oppressors to liberate herself from the two options patriarchal laws provide her. The abbey was supposed to be a safe place to find refuge from patriarchal figures but ultimately became another form of imprisonment. Julia finds her fate at the hands of *Padre Abate*, the friar, who berates Julia for disobeying the lawful authority of

her father (131). The *Abate* seems to show allegiance to the Marquis rather than the support for Julia's freedom. The *Abate* offers Julia protection from her father on one condition: "that you renounce the world, and dedicate your days to God" (141). Julia's choices are again limited, dictated by two father figures, the Marquis and the *Abate*, reinforcing Julia's confinement and control by patriarchal forces. She can give up her autonomy to become a nun so that she can remain under the protection of the *Abate*, or she can return to her father, give up her independence, and marry the Duke. Unsatisfied with either option, Julia resolves to flee again to pursue freedom from control by patriarchal figures.

Radcliffe uses the reunification of Julia and her mother in the dungeon to represent how women find solidarity with other women in articulating their fears and anxieties regarding social confinement within patriarchal imprisonment and their assigned gender roles and expectations of women. After Julia flees from the abbey and *Padre Abate* and returns to Castle Mazzini, she narrowly escapes capture as the Marquis and the Duke continues to pursue her. Julia hears soldiers closing in on her and "shrunk involuntarily at the sound, and pursuing the windings of the cavern, fled into its innermost recesses" (172). Julia blindly runs through the tunnels until she finds a light, signaling an exit, and opens the door, revealing a "small room, which received feeble light from a window above, the pale and emaciated figure of a woman, seated, with half-closed eyes, in a kind of elbow-chair" (173). The passageways and rooms are claustrophobic, much like the architecture of the recess in Sophia Lee's novel. The architecture illustrates Julia's critical and challenging evasion from her oppressors to liberate herself from confinement. When Julia sees the woman in the room, she sees a haunting mirror of herself or an inevitable future for her if she cannot successfully escape from the Marquis and the Duke. Julia's sudden presence startles the mysterious woman, and "her features, which were worn by sorrow, still retained the

traces of beauty, and in her air was a mild dignity that excited in Julia an involuntary veneration” (174). Julia realizes that the woman in the room is her mother, Louisa, whom she thought to be dead, but was imprisoned by her husband, the Marquis, who grew to despise her throughout their marriage.

Isolated and secluded spaces often serve as domestic, feminine spaces in gothic fiction because they serve as hidden places away from patriarchal figures where women can bond through similar experiences with their oppressors. Sue Chaplain describes Louisa's cell as a feminine space that illustrates the “abuse of power perpetrated by her tyrannical father. Although the ultimate logic of paternal rule remains undisturbed here ... this novel introduces a theme that was to become central to Radcliffe's later fictions and the Female Gothic more generally: the centrality of female relationships and genealogies to the symbolic and thematic structure of women's Gothic fiction (141). Like *The Recess*, underground dwellings often symbolize feminine spaces and the unification of women within domestic ideologies. Julia's discovery of her mother in the small, cryptic room and the revelation of her father's abuse of power demonstrate the patriarchy's generational power over women and their attempts to keep them submissive by confining them within architectural structures and domestic ideologies. The domestic spaces that confine women also unite them, and Julia's reconnection with her mother signals a shift of power in the Mazzini household.

The reconciliation of Julia and her mother reveals how cyclical oppression affects generations of women and the necessity of liberation for women to escape from the patriarchal institution's domination of socio-political and economic power over women. Chaplain argues that the scene when Julia discovers her mother highlights the notion that “female experiences of trauma are thus mirrored back and forth across the generations, and women rely upon the support

of other women to narrate and expose these injustices” (142). Louisa explains how she came to be confined by the Marquis in the “recess of horror” (Radcliffe 176). Julia realizes that “the long and total desertion of this part of the fabric – the light that had appeared through the casement ... the midnight noises she had heard – were circumstances evidently dependent on the imprisonment of [Louisa]” (177). The landscape and labyrinthian architecture of Castle Mazzini successfully cloaked Louisa’s identity and existence from the public as the Marquis never intended to release her from confinement. When Julia and her mother finally reunite, they recognize the trauma both of them have endured at the hands of the tyrannical Marquis. Their reunion allows them an opportunity to heal and eventually escape with each other’s help. Akin to Lee's legacy with *The Recess*, Radcliffe calls attention to the importance of the female community and conversation within the gothic to critique patriarchal abuse and the forced confinement within domesticity.

The patriarchal institution of marriage represses women and keeps them confined within domesticity. Radcliffe reveals that the primary source of terror within *A Sicilian Romance* is the loss of identity with men's consolidation of women through the act of the covenant. When Julia sees her mother discouraged and alone, Julia catches a glimpse of her future if she married the Duke. The sympathetic connection between the gothic heroine and the female audience does not inculcate a call to action to overthrow the patriarchy; instead, it warns women of the potential disaster of the patriarchy: “Thus, although warning readers of the dangers of patriarchal systems, the Gothic avoids endorsing any truly revolutionary resistance to these systems” (Beinstock 37). Julia's fears of her identity becoming usurped by the Duke are confirmed upon the discovery of her mother. If she had married the Duke, Julia might have faced a similar fate as her mother. Heiland states that the succession of power from the marquis to Ferdinand and Hippolitus’s

genuine interest in Julia's wellbeing suggests "a rewriting of the rules of patriarchy – though by no means an abandonment of its structure – to accommodate and render visible the women who make it possible" (Heiland 60). Julia's commitment to gaining control over her fate is rewarded by her enlightened state at the novel's end. Radcliffe uses the female gothic mode to critique women's treatment by abusive patriarchal control, enforcing women's subjugation to domesticity. Additionally, Radcliffe demonstrates Enlightenment philosophy in *A Sicilian Romance* by crafting a narrative that values logic and reasoning to restructure oppressive institutions to make women's impact within the public and literary spheres evident.

4. Conclusion

The gothic heroine sought to expose the patriarchal systems that forced women into domesticity, a socially constructed space that confines women with the enforcement of gender expectations and policing by the patriarchy. The British Enlightenment was a philosophical and intellectual movement that opposed the Catholic Church and organized religion due to its dogmatism and insistence on being the only source of truth. The architecture of the Gothic inspired writers to incorporate elegant structures into their works to create a setting for the narrative and simultaneously comment on the political and social unrest following the Enlightenment. Women found solidarity with other women by sharing their experiences of oppressive gender expectations and patriarchal rule through what is classified as the female gothic. Gothic literature appealed to women as they could use the coded and political expressions of the mode to express female sexuality and the desire to escape domestic entrapment.

The female gothic became a subgenre that describes works written by women for other women to voice their united fears and anxieties regarding the patriarchal rule. Sophia Lee and Ann Radcliffe use gothic architecture to entrap their gothic heroines in a situation that is

exceedingly difficult to escape to expose women's subjugation to the patriarchal systems that designate them into prescribed notions of femininity and gendered roles and expectations. The disorienting recesses and the labyrinthian blueprint of the setting represents the sexual, political, and religious systems that confine women while simultaneously speaking to women's suffering underneath repressive patriarchal design. In *The Recess*, Matilda and Ellinor struggle to free themselves from their imprisonment and the political implications of their birthright. The destruction of the recess symbolizes the elimination of the danger and threats that have aggressively pursued the sisters and allows them the freedom to escape their oppression. Ann Radcliffe uses similar techniques in constructing the subterranean architecture of the castle of Mazzini to describe Julia's journey toward independence for the sake of agency over her decisions and life. Ultimately, both Lee and Radcliffe use the gothic form to explore what confines, suppresses, and imprisons women in society and what happens if they resist their immurement.

Chapter Two: *The Grip of It* and the Wed(Lock) of Domesticity

The Grip of It is a contemporary gothic novel that illustrates a deteriorating marriage and the inherent inequities of marriage dynamics reflected in a heterosexual relationship. The Khourys begin acclimating to their new home, but they quickly find that the house's structure starts to shift, and a supernatural phenomenon intensifies. Julie begins to develop strange bruises that mirror the stains on the walls and finds herself stuck within rooms that do not appear in the blueprints. The house starts to sprout new rooms and concealed rooms within those rooms, representing the trap of female gender expectations for women and marital structures that Julie must navigate throughout the novel. Somehow, the house seems alive and preys on Julie's anxieties and doubts regarding her marriage to James. The house's attempts to trap Julie within the architecture represent women's dilemmas between escaping their confinement and remaining complacent within their circumstances.

This chapter on Jac Jemc's *The Grip of It* (2017) examines the architecture of domesticity and the metaphor of the house to demonstrate the patriarchal institution of marriage that represses women economically and socially and keeps them dependent upon their husbands. James and Julie Khoury fulfill their dream of becoming homeowners; however, their move is prompted by James's gambling problem and inability to maintain a job. The lack of a steady income motivates the couple to move to a private house in the suburbs, but they find that their new home and town are not as welcoming as expected. I examine Jemc's use of gothic tropes and architectural metaphors to represent women's confinement by the inherently oppressive institution of marriage and domestic ideologies that dictate women's economic, social, professional, and personal societal roles.

Historically, marriage has been a contractual agreement between a man and a woman that restricts women's autonomy and agency. The patriarchal institution of marriage suggests that married women do not have a separate legal existence from their husbands. Simone de Beauvoir expands upon this ideology in her publication, *The Second Sex* (1949). Beauvoir asserts that women have historically been pressured to marry to obtain economic and social security in society, while men do not experience the same pressures. Jemc's use of architecture articulates the fears and anxieties women experience by prescribed, limiting gender roles and expectations assigned to women by patriarchal control for centuries. Early and contemporary female gothic writers have used the house's architecture to represent women's subjugation to domestic ideologies as it represents the wife's confinement within domesticity and marriage.

1. The Metaphor of the House

The house, particularly haunted houses, is a favored setting for uncanny disturbances in gothic literature as it represents domesticity and entrapment. In "The Architecture of the Uncanny: The Unhomely Houses of the Romantic Sublime," Anthony Vidler explores instances of architectural metaphors as they have developed in literature, philosophy, and psychology from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the present. He interprets gothic literature's use of architecture to create unsettling environments to represent social and individual estrangement, alienation, and exile. The haunted house has been a motif in Gothic literature since the early nineteenth century for its function as the locus of uncanny disturbances because of its "apparent domesticity, its residue of family history and nostalgia, its role as the last and most intimate shelter of private comfort sharpened by contrast the terror of invasion" (Vidler 7). At its foundation, *The Grip of It* is a haunted house novel that illustrates a portrait of a decaying marriage and the horrors of the home. By viewing the house as a metaphor for women's

psychological and physical entrapment, readers can begin to dissect the different institutions and factors that confine women within domestic spaces.

Female writers often use architecture and houses to create spaces to explore women's entrapment within domestic roles, gendered expectations, and the socio-economic elements, like marriage, that keep them confined in domesticity. The discourse regarding women's literature and the topics that women write about can first be observed by centering part of the conversation on early and contemporary criticism of the female gothic and their work that exposes women's subjugation to domesticity. Analyzing architectural metaphors in women's literature regarding women's subjection to gender norms, expectations, and patriarchal pressures helps readers understand Julie's feelings of inescapable confinement within her marriage and her new, haunted home. *The Grip of It* echoes themes seen in feminist literature that detail women's mental and emotional deterioration within domesticity and marriage. In the introduction to *Creating Your Own Space: The Metaphor of the House in Feminist Literature* (2021), Maria Davis describes the function of architecture in feminist literature and how houses represent the restrictive barriers women face when maneuvering in society. Davis asserts, "Many influential writers have used the space of the house to portray women's conflicts with the society of their time. On the one hand, houses can represent a place of physical, psychological, and moral restrictions. On the other, they often can serve as a metaphor for economic freedom and social acceptance" (Davis xi). She notes that early nineteenth and late-twentieth-century literature often exposes women's confinement by domesticity and explores those themes within the home and marriages.

Gothic literature articulates women's subjugation to domesticity and details the use of homely architecture as a metaphor for confinement by domestic roles and expectations. Diana Wallace states that "if a woman's place is allegedly in the home, the Gothic has been the mode

of writing which has perhaps most brilliantly articulated and symbolized the terrors of that domestic space. Possession, confinement, penetration, loss of identity are shadows that haunt the home for women, particularly those who inhabit – or fear inhabiting – the roles of housewife and mother” (Wallace 75). Most of Julie’s narrative takes place from inside the home, including her confinement within closed spaces, her inner doubts regarding the sustainability of her marriage, and the distress she experiences alone. The house becomes increasingly possessive the longer Julie remains in its grasp, and she begins to resent her role as a wife since she finds no support from James.

Confinement, claustrophobia, and entrapment within houses, attics, and basements are commonly observed in female gothic fiction representing the grip of domesticity and women’s social roles. The female gothic writer’s use of the architecture to symbolize women’s restrictions within domesticity demonstrates female entrapment by the patriarchal institution of marriage: “In this genre, where the subversive nature of the text appears uppermost, in its dark and prison-like images of feminine experience within domesticity, marriage threatens to become the ultimate prison” (Davidson 55). Julie’s physical and psychological suffering increases throughout the novel as she finds herself economically and socially limited in her marriage. The couple hastily purchased the house and drained their finances to relocate without thinking about their compatibility as a couple or the strength of the foundation of their marriage. Although Julie’s idea prompted the couple’s move, the purchase of the home initially seemed like an equal decision between her and James, the move benefited James more than it did Julie. Marriage shackles a husband and wife together contractually and economically. The metaphor of the house in women’s literature is present in *The Grip of It* as it “portrays the dichotomy in women’s desires for protection and the entrapment that the institution of marriage meant for them. Other

experts in female Gothic literature agree that the house in Gothic literature is the place from which some are locked out, and others are locked in” (Davis 10). The relocation provided James with new opportunities to escape his problems, but Julie suffers from the burden of supporting her husband emotionally and financially while keeping her distresses private.

Julie finds herself financially disadvantaged as she depleted her savings with the move, further restricting her mobility both in and outside domesticity. James admits to his transgressions and his responsibility for damaging his marriage. He describes how he got carried away with gambling and its result in his splintering marriage while reflecting on their new homeownership: “I wrote codes with duct tape. They triggered breaks elsewhere in the structure. I gambled with a similar flare. I made outlandish bets. Sometimes I took intentional losses because I got tired playing. The therapist said I tired out on the anticipation. He said gamblers play until they lose because they want to feel something, not necessarily a win” (Jemc 9). James describes that his negative impact on the marriage stemmed from his gambling problem and the loss of his job. Fractures in the foundation lead to inevitable damage, whether they are architectural fissures in the home or splinters in the groundwork of a marriage.

Julie’s fears and anxieties regarding her marriage begin to manifest as she becomes haunted by nightmares, which illustrates her desire to leave the house and her inability to do so. Julie begins experiencing night terrors that represent fragmentation and helplessness and she describes her dream, which include “...a body in the attic and it’s hard as diamonds ... The second body ... is a pile of soft bones and surprising shapes of teeth behind a panel in the basement ... I dream these bodies as answers and then wake and stir at how close these nightmares felt to reality” (Jemc 64). Julie’s dreams consist of disjointed and discarded human remains, signifying her anxieties regarding the stability of her marriage and her inexplicable

fears about the new house. They also symbolize her helplessness in dealing with a situation she cannot control. With her unexplained bruises and the swelling fear of the house, Julie questions if James feels similarly frightened or restless. When she brings up her desire to temporarily leave the house and take a vacation, James responds, “Wait, let me get this straight. Julie – the keeper of finances, the planner of the futures – wants to go on a vacation when we just bought a house? Even I know that’s a bad idea” (66). His response aggravates Julie since their move was because of James’s financial negligence. Julie retorts, “Well I have enough money to do both. I can’t help that you traded your future for some dumb wish. That’s what a bet is, right? A wish?” (67). James argues back, but to avoid an argument, Julie withdraws. Julie submits and apologizes for her remarks to alter the course of the conversation. She backpedals but recalls her dream about finding numerous dead bodies in the attic: “I think of the bodies in my dream and keep the deterioration to myself. We’re missing each other” (67). Her dreams speak to the deterioration of her mental state and her ability to decipher truth from fiction. Furthermore, Julie feels like she cannot tell James about her fears and anxieties. Whenever Julie comes close to advocating for herself and her desires, she abandons potential arguments to avoid further conflicts between her and James, even if the act keeps her confined by her frustrations regarding their financial predicament. Her desire to take a vacation away from the house is an escapist fantasy to avoid confronting the realities of her situation in her marriage and the paranormal experiences in the house. She represses her anger and frustrations concerning the reason for their move, which only facilitates her victimization and entrapment within her marriage and domesticity.

The Grip of It describes a woman's story confined by the fears and anxieties of trying to maintain a failing marriage and home and the feeling of confinement by her circumstances. Jemc illustrates Julie’s victimization and entrapment within domesticity by exploring the symbolic and

physical spaces that the pair occupy. Julie finds herself reduced to occupying the role of a wife. With James's dismissal of her fears and anxieties stemming from the paranormal phenomena occurring to her, Julie becomes increasingly isolated from her home, husband, and society. The novel creates a haunting atmosphere with the combination of uncanny architecture and threats from inside the house. The walls seem animated, almost as if something lives in the wallpaper: "The stain pulled itself wider. I ask Julie if she thinks so, too, and I immediately regret it. We stare. The spot seems to inhale a little, lungs expanding" (Jemc 12). Julie begins to discover strange bruises across her body that mirror the stains on the wall, forcing her to question the connection between the house and her own body. Julie observes as the wallpaper begins to animate and move on its own: "The wallpaper of the hallway undulates with a pattern I don't remember, and the floor pulses quietly beneath my feet, and the hair frays with blips at a frequency I can't hear, but I tell myself that is just my head pounding" (167). James becomes suspicious of Julie as if she is experiencing events within her imagination.

Julie's physical entrapment within a room that does not exist on the blueprints of their home symbolizes psychological isolation in the house and her marriage. Julie calls James in a panic, but "the room seems to pull in closer, and I panic, wondering if I'll be crushed, then suddenly the wall behind me slides to one side on its own, and light floods in and I am in our bedroom ... I examine how the wall works and slide it back ... but it clicks into place, and then I can't seem to budge it open again" (99). When Julie tries to show James where the room is located, it has somehow resealed itself and no longer exists. Often, the female character is the only one to experience the restrictive, possessive qualities of domestic spaces while her husband grows increasingly concerned for her wellbeing. The symbolization of women trapped in architectural structures can be seen in early and contemporary female gothic fiction and

represents the patriarchal entrapment of women by forcing them to fulfill limiting gendered roles. James experiences the uncanny properties of the house but does not find himself entrapped within mysterious rooms like Julie. Julie's literal entrapment within seemingly nonexistent rooms represents her feelings of isolation from her family and friends and her increasing alienation from James. Furthermore, Julie's body begins to mirror the home's flawed interior as bruises appear on her body, reflecting the growing stains on the walls.

Julie's mysterious bruises frighten James as neither understands their origins or cause. Julie goes to the doctor to find a solution for the bruises that keep spontaneously appearing on her body, and the doctor prescribes her various prescriptions to no avail. Julie narrates, "my inner thighs look as if they've been pummeled, so I stop going to the beach to walk or swim and start wearing sweatpants to work because everything hurts" (83). James expresses his growing concerns for his wife's mysterious bruises because they resemble the expanding stains on the walls, and he fears that others will think he abuses his wife. He begins to physically and mentally avoid Julie to separate himself from the phenomenon. In doing so, James abandons Julie and leaves her to solve the mysteries alone. Julie's friend, Connie, notices her disheveled appearance due to Julie's lack of sleep and self-maintenance. Connie offers to take Julie home from work to wash Julie, but as she glances at Julie's undressed body, Connie notices "the bruises newly formed near my ankles and along my armpit" (121). Connie concludes that James is abusing Julie, but Julie cannot figure out how to tell Connie the truth about the haunted house and her husband's impulse problems. Julie narrates, "I think of James's overdrawn account, of the slow suspicion that grew when I saw the ATM withdrawals from our joint checking, small sums ... how James had broken down and told me what happened, of how he had started visiting the OTB on his lunch hour, laying down cash on races" (121). Connie waits for an answer and tells Julie

that she does not need to say anything, but Julie suffers from inexplicable bruising. The bruises manifest on her arms, legs, torso, neck, and as the bruises expand and grow, so does Connie's concern for Julie. Connie is Julie's only friend in the novel, but Julie feels like she cannot explain the truth because she does not know the truth behind her home, bruises, and confinement. Julie physically, mentally, and emotionally deteriorates throughout the novel. Julie's inability to communicate with James or Connie leads to her isolation within the home and her confinement to her domestic expectations as a wife. Julie exhibits symptoms of physical assault, but because she hesitates to reveal her experiences concerning the doubts she has about James and the experiences she endures. Connie is left to draw conclusions that are not exclusively true. Julie refrains from confessing her prevailing fears and anxieties to sustain James's reputation and avoid further questions regarding her marriage. Her compartmentalization of suspicions, doubts, and unease is represented through the possessive nature of the architecture and the confining nature of the patriarchal institution of marriage.

3. The Grip of Domesticity

In *The Second Sex* (1949), Simone de Beauvoir analyzes the treatment of women throughout history and argues that men have treated women as an inferior sex in terms of reproductive, physiological, economic, and social context. Her second chapter, "The Married Woman," demonstrates the restricted state of the married woman by declaring that the failure of heterosexual marriage is the failure of the institution of marriage rather than the individual's fault. De Beauvoir asserts that "the destiny that society traditionally offers women is marriage. Marriage is the reference by which the single woman is defined, whether she is frustrated by, disgusted at, or even indifferent to this institution" (De Beauvoir 439). She determines that the marriage model keeps women subordinated within domesticity and that the biology of the female

sex binds them “to maintain the species and care for the home” (443). De Beauvoir states that women’s participation in the institution reinforces women’s subordination to patriarchal power. De Beauvoir concedes that the “economic evolution of marriage” disrupts the institution of marriage as women continue to gain more reproductive and personal autonomy. However, women continue to be mistreated in many ways (439). Though decades have passed since de Beauvoir’s initial publication of *The Second Sex*, her philosophy articulates the historical and societal repression of women in marriages by observing women’s use of architecture to describe women’s confinement in gendered roles and expectations.

Marriage does not foster interchange between a husband and a wife due to the embedded ideologies that place women in a separate social and economic category from men. Women are “given” in marriage by their fathers to their husbands, and marriage used to be a contract between the father-in-law and the son-in-law, not between the wife and her husband. Julie describes her relationship with James as a responsibility she must maintain rather than an opportunity for fulfillment and personal gain. While talking to Connie, Julie explains how she and James met on a blind date when he answered a personal ad she posted on Craigslist. Julie defends her choice to put up a Craigslist ad since it “was a time when your best bet was to put an ad up on Craigslist” and that all she included in her description was an innocent request to hang out with somebody (Jemc 20). Julie describes that she decided to keep dating James since she was the one man who kept calling her, and Connie notes, “that doesn’t sound like the Julie I knew before. You were so precise and rational about everything. I remember a spreadsheet evaluating the boys in the psychology department based on different metrics” (21). Julie does not tell Connie of James’s gambling problem or that he had recently lost his job and insists that James is her soulmate and that she cannot imagine life married to anybody else.

Julie's description of her relationship with James and her protectiveness of his reputation stems from women's marital expectation to support and serve their husbands because marriage was designed to be women's sole means of financial and social support and the justification for women's existence. De Beauvoir contends that the married man is already "a socially autonomous and complete individual ... his existence is justified by the work he provides for the group; we have already seen the reasons why the reproductive and domestic role to which woman is confined has not guaranteed her an equal dignity" (440). Men are automatically considered socially autonomous and complete due to their biological sex, work, and social function. Julie's depiction of her marriage to James demonstrates the benefits that marriage could offer her: a partner she can depend on to help fulfill her economic, financial, and personal needs. However, the truth behind James's gambling problem and inability to secure a job shows that their marriage does not fulfill Julie in the ways that she had expected. Society has pressured women to define themselves by their marriage and the domestic services to their husbands. As a result, women can never describe themselves as free, autonomous individuals in an oppressive, male-dominated society when confined within the patriarchal institution of marriage.

If a marriage provides both men and women equal opportunities to benefit from the union, it must be between two fully realized subjects. De Beauvoir posits that marriage does not provide equal opportunities as men are dependent upon the institution as "it is advantageous to unload some of the chores onto a woman; the man himself wishes to have a stable sexual life, he desires prosperity, and society requires him to contribute to its perpetuation" (440). James relies on Julie for emotional and financial support as he struggles to find a job after he drained their joint bank accounts: "I emptied everything I could find in the house. I worry Julie will identify this as a ripple of what I did with my bank account. I gambled enough away that the money still

remaining only reminded me of what I'd lost, and so I gambled that away too" (91). The imbalance results from their lack of emotional, physical, and economic exchange. Julie has no financial stability to escape her circumstances, and even if she had the means to move to a new location, a marriage contract to James still binds her. Furthermore, her lack of a support system beyond James renders her dependent on him to fulfill her wants, needs, and desires. She is forced to rely on James for economic and social security, solidifying her confinement in the marriage. Though divorce is no longer as stigmatized as it has been in the past, James and Julie never consider divorce or legal separation.

The inherently repressive nature of marriage transforms women into passive partners until they are no longer active, autonomous individuals in a marriage, therefore confining women in the claustrophobic space of forced domesticity. Julie's independence and sanity have been challenged and robbed through her experiences in the house and her attempt to mend her marriage. This situation leaves Julie financially vulnerable as she realistically has no way to escape her marriage and start a new, comfortable life away from James, despite her longing for a vacation. The union would only serve as an equal platform for James and Julie if they were two completely autonomous individuals deciding to marry. At the novel's beginning, Julie demonstrates authoritative decision-making as she convinces James to move to a new town to repair their marriage and remedy the problems that he created by gambling their money away. She uproots her life to accommodate her marriage and exhibits a solid propensity to assert autonomy over her life. However, as the novel progresses and she begins to suffer physically and mentally from the move, she becomes a passive partner through her submission to the possessive nature of the house and her surrender to her mental health. De Beauvoir states that through marriage:

The woman receives a piece of the world as property; legal guaranties protect her from man's caprices; but she becomes his vassal. He is economically the head of the community, and thus embodies it in society's eyes. Women are expected to take their husband's last names, join his religion, integrate into his class, his world, she belongs to his family, she becomes his other "half." (442)

Marriage is the destiny for women assigned to them at birth by society. However, women are not expected to fulfill an economic or social role to complete themselves as a fully realized subject as she is designated to find a partner and become a "half" in marriage. Since men are expected to produce and provide for their families and home, women are expected to perform domestic labor to maintain their family, home, and husband. According to de Beauvoir, "all human existence is transcendence and immanence at the same time," and she continues her analysis to demonstrate how the existence of the married woman is constricted and confined by the institution of marriage (443). While *The Grip of It* establishes Julie's ability to make clear, logical decisions, Julie's decisions serve James more than they suit her needs and interests. The institution of marriage automatically positions men at the forefront of social and economic advantage. Therefore, James's actions serve himself, and while he loves and cares about Julie, Julie is delegated with the obligation of maintaining and sustaining their marital union and her wellbeing.

James cannot uphold his equal role in the marriage and further splinters their marital dynamic by placing the burden of marriage maintenance onto Julie's shoulders because marriage locks women into a state of obedience to their husband's economic and social roles. Because of this, the weight of the marriage falls on Julie's shoulders, and not only does she feel the pressure of serving her husband, but she is now responsible for maintaining social and financial support

for him. Women bear the weight of domestic labor and expectations because, historically, men have been the governing sex: “Thus humanity is male, and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being” (Beauvoir 3). Men define themselves based on their perspective and experiences and operate in the world from their point of view. On the other hand, women are neither Self nor subject, as they do not define themselves; men do.

De Beauvoir argues that men fundamentally oppress women by characterizing them as second-class citizens, defined exclusively in opposition to men. This helps explain Julie's institutionalized, patriarchal pressures due to her status as a woman and a wife. De Beauvoir states that the fundamental characteristic of a woman is that she can never embody the Absolute Self who represents complete economic, political, and social freedoms (9). Centuries of patriarchal rhetoric have been embedded in social narratives that bolster the argument that women are inferior to men. De Beauvoir explains that transcendence means to have absolute free will and sovereignty over the mind and body, while immanence involves the maintenance of the Self and the integration of oneself in the past, present, and future (443). Men can achieve the synthesis of immanence and transcendence in a patriarchal society as “he experiences his dispersion through time and the universe; and when he tires of this wandering, he establishes a home, he settles down, he anchors himself in the world; in the evening he restores himself in the house, where his wife cares for the furniture and children and safeguards the past she keeps in store” (443). The expectation to maintain the house and complete domestic labor lies entirely on the woman to bear. According to de Beauvoir, “the wife has no other task save the one of maintaining and caring for life in its pure and identical generality; she perpetuates the immutable species, she ensures the even rhythm of the days and the permanence of the home she guards

with locked doors; she is given no direct grasp on the future, nor on the universe” (443).

Marriage provides the ideal opportunity for men to gain both immanence and transcendence, ultimately solidifying de Beauvoir’s description of married women’s inherent oppression and repression. However, this division of domestic labor is not entirely to blame on the husband, as de Beauvoir blames the institution of marriage and not the husband for the oppression and repression of the wife.

It is important to note that James is not entirely to blame for Julie’s suffering and confinement within the home. The patriarchal construction of gender roles and the division of domestic labor within the institution of marriage form the roles of husband and wife. Still, their marital union and incompatibility are the root cause for the disintegration of their marriage. James is haunted by his guilt after causing fractures in his marriage and observing strange phenomena occurring in the house. His fears and anxieties manifest: “In the mirror, a darker version of myself follows directly behind me. No matter which way I turn, it’s turning immediately before me. I feel a flurry of smoke spreading its way up my arms. I don’t let myself think. I return to our room. Julie shifts when I get back into bed. Shadows caw outside the window. I know what a shadow is” (Jemc 47). He cannot find a rational or logical way to explain his encounters, and he withholds this information from Julie in the same way that Julie keeps information from him. While James cannot be entirely to blame for the strain in the marriage, the institution of marriage is structured to support the husband and neglect the wife’s personal and economic needs.

According to Beauvoir, the way marriage is set up seems equal, but the construction of the rhetoric defines women’s roles in society. A woman is not fully formed; she cannot be viewed as a fully realized, autonomous individual as “one is not born, but rather becomes,

woman” (De Beauvoir 283). Biology does not determine gender or the roles and expectations of women, but a woman learns her role and position from men and other oppressive societal systems. Men are not interested in domesticity since they have access to the entire universe, and he finds autonomy in their works and projects. On the contrary, women are “locked into the conjugal community: she has to change this prison into a kingdom. Her attitude to her home is dictated by this same dialectic that generally defines her condition: she takes by becoming prey, she liberates herself by abdicating, by renouncing the world, [and] she means to conquer the world” (470). Julie demonstrates women’s attempts to make the most of her circumstances when she puts considerable time and effort into creating a home out of the house that traps her mentally, financially, emotionally, and physically: “I prefer to unpack quickly, eager to organize, insistent on accomplishing what I can so I’ll be ready for whatever other surprises need addressing. I don’t know how to relax with boxes around. My instinct is opposite of what James suggests: I want to revel in the milestone of homeownership and that requires settling ourselves in” (Jemc 14). Julie is primarily responsible for creating a home from the house she and James purchased, while James places that responsibility on her.

Julie unwittingly locks herself into domesticity and creates a kingdom from the prison of domesticity. Beauvoir states that this action makes the home the center of her world and becomes a refuge “against outside dangers: it is this confused exteriority that becomes unreal” (Beauvoir 471). James and Julie share a conversation considering the possibility of making a mistake with the move, and James narrates, “She’s quiet for a moment. I know our minds pause to shape themselves around that same possibility, of admitting mistake and moving on, but she spins that out of that current. ‘That’s how smart homeowners think, James. I’m an investor, not a gambler’” (Jemc 42-3). Though Julie briefly ponders over their decision, she decides to stick

with their decision to move into the house and focuses her attention on making it into a home for them. Beauvoir states that women are celebrated for their domestic responsibilities as homemakers, and Julie insists on establishing herself in the house despite its dangers.

Though De Beauvoir describes the inherently oppressive nature of marriage in a patriarchal society during the second half of the twentieth century, Sheila Jeffreys offers a contemporary point of view that supports De Beauvoir's assertion in *The Industrial Vagina: The Political Economy of The Global Sex Trade* (2009). Jeffreys argues that "the traditional elements of marriage have not completely disappeared in Western societies, even in the case of employed, highly educated women" (Jeffreys 43). She asserts that the institution of marriage is comparable to prostitution and contends that women trade sex for economic and social security. Where prostitutes trade sexual favors for money, a wife exchanges the same in exchange for a home and family. De Beauvoir admits that marriage, especially those in America, "is changing: but still constitutes oppression that both spouses feel in different ways. Considering the abstract rights they enjoy, they are almost equal; they choose each other more freely than before, [and] they can separate more easily" (De Beauvoir 521). Divorces are progressively more common, and husbands acknowledge their wife's autonomy and individuality beyond the union of marriage.

Though divorce would grant James and Julie the opportunity to leave their circumstances in the house and from their marriage, neither seriously considers it. Additionally, weddings still involve multiple aspects based on the oppressive nature of the patriarchal institution of marriage. Jeffreys claims that modern marriages do not liberate women from their confinement in domesticity as marriage perpetuates women's oppression (Jeffreys 44). However, the foundation of marriage maintains the division of gender roles between the sexes. It prevents women from achieving social equality by reinforcing that women exist to serve men. In *The Grip of It*, the

house represents the stability of James and Julie's marriage. The absence of communication and the distrust of each other's experiences creates a divide, and they become separated and fragmented from themselves.

4. The Borders of the Other Side

Married women have been classified as secondary citizens in relation to their husbands, reinforcing the division between men and women's societal roles. *The Grip of It* features multiple instances of fragmentation: Julie's psychological deterioration, the well-being of the Khoury's marriage, and the inexplicable architecture of the home, all of which work together to create a metaphor that speaks to women's subjugation to domesticity. Sigmund Freud's "The Uncanny" (1919) provides an avenue to investigate the deteriorating architecture of the house and the deterioration of Julie and her embodiment of De Beauvoir's definition of the "Other" as a term to describe women's oppression and subordination to the patriarchy. The uncanny element of alienation is crucial to the analysis of James and Julie's experiences in the home, Julie's physical and mental suffering, and their paralytic responses to situations in the house that limits their ability to communicate effectively.

The uncanny pinpoints the intersection between the familiar and the unfamiliar and consists of the fundamental anxieties about building space and boundaries. Freud interprets a definition of the uncanny with a study of the German "*Heimlich*," or "homely," and the "*unheimlich*," or "unhomely." The uncanny exists in multiple dimensions and transgresses the boundaries, and destabilizes the structures of signification; therefore, the construction of home, comfort, and safety are fundamentally rooted in the house, inspiring gothic writers to incorporate the uncanny into their works to create an environment of unease:

In general, we are reminded that the word *'heimlich'* is not unambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas, which, without being contradictory, are yet very different: on one hand, it means what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight ... everything is *unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light. (Freud 224-5)

The horror of the uncanny is caused by something familiar suddenly seeming, at the same time, unfamiliar. The Khoury's home alternates between feeling like a home and structure determined to trap its intended victims. The uncanny theory is used to reconsider women's experiences of home as a sanctuary and a prison, based on De Beauvoir's analysis of marriage and the female gothic writer's use of architectural metaphors to represent the trap of domesticity. The study of the uncanny, the gothic, and the Other exposes the consequences of women attempting to breach the borders of domesticity. In *Gothic* (2014), Fred Botting states that the gothic mode typically "gives way to terrors and horrors that are much closer to home, uncanny disruptions of the boundaries between inside and outside, reality and delusion, propriety and corruption, materialism and spirituality" (Botting 104). This approach helps explain Julie's suffering and the "hauntings," or paranormal experiences, she experiences in the house. Freud's theory opens with his definition of uncanny as "undoubtedly related to what is frightening – to what arouses dread and horror" (219). His study is based on the psychology of fear and how "uncanny experiences unsettle our sense of ourselves, destabilizing our sense of our own identity, and trapping us in paralysis and alienation" (Heiland 78).

Uncanny experiences and situations frequently manifest in gothic fiction that prompt both readers and the protagonists to question the validity of their realities. Often, the author's use of uncanny theory in their work engages with metaphors of house and home, which resonates with

experiences of displacement. Women's treatment as second-class citizens displaces them from participating in socio-political and professional roles as men. This phenomenon pushes women to assume the role of Other, becoming the epitome of uncanny. Donna Heiland states that "women are uncannily 'other.' One can discuss women and the uncanny in yet another way by considering their relation not to Freud but to each other" (Heiland 80). The couple hesitates to communicate their experiences to each other, so Julie believes she is the only one experiencing the phenomena in the house. As a result, she decides to withdraw to solve the mysteries of her increasingly haunted house on her own. James inadvertently creates a barricade between himself and Julie. Because of the stark divisions created by James's doubts about Julie's experiences and Julie's inability to reach James, the couple begins to mentally and emotionally separate from each other. James isolates himself from Julie to separate himself from her paranoia or the fact that their house may be haunted. Heiland explains that Freud saw women at the center of uncanny experiences: "He is attuned to the ways in which patriarchal societies have tended to efface women, and consciously builds on feminist criticism when he urges us to remember that this effacement effectively constitutes ... and unhomeliness at the heart of civil society" (130-1). Freud suggests that women are easier to control when they are not allowed to become whole and autonomous individuals in a patriarchal society; therefore, women are often described as incomplete or fragmented through the uncanny theory to illustrate their dependency on men to complete and support them. Centuries of patriarchal rhetoric have created a narrative in which women are overly emotional, inferior, and only suitable for domestic labor and male pleasure. Women have been historically compared to men for their roles and expectations. Still, women are not measured by what they contribute to the good of society but by what they lack professionally, politically, and sexually.

Beauvoir explains that women are disproportionately portrayed as “Other” based on men’s perception of women and centuries of prescribed notions of feminine behavior: “She is determined and differentiated in relation to man, while he is not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other” (6). The notion that women are categorized as “Other” leads to the theory that women’s domestic roles and social expectations are defined exclusively by men and their societal roles. “Woman” is a political and economic category that forces them to be relational to men rather than independent beings. Beauvoir explains that the categorization of women as “Other” leads to their abjection and subjugation to domesticity. Beauvoir argues that “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman,” meaning that women are socially conditioned to abide by gender constructs and roles over which they have no autonomy or control (35). Women’s “otherness” indicates a state of submission that women are born into and cannot escape, solidifying them within gendered roles and expectations the patriarchy sets. The patriarchy has created a system that necessitates women’s reliance on men due to categorizing women as “Other” and enforces their subordination to the patriarchy. While Julie is not confined to the home's physical location, she is bound by her marriage and domestic roles and expectations as a wife. Even though James does not achieve Absolute Status according to De Beauvoir’s definition, his hardship is not comparable to Julie’s. Their inability to communicate keeps them from working as a unit to solve the problems regarding the house; therefore, their marriage cannot support either of their needs or desires because neither of them achieves an Absolute status.

5. Conclusion

James and Julie’s troubled marriage becomes increasingly characterized by the strange occurrences within their house when the actual conflict stems from their relationship. Julie feels

frustrated with the lurking secrets between her and James: “I search for proof that the world is one way rather than another, but it doesn’t matter what is coming from inside or around us. Our brains allow it either way. We can lose ourselves behind a trapdoor, whether in our mind or in the house” (255). James and Julie compartmentalize their problems or fears regarding the Other and the house, symbolized by their new home’s strange architecture. Spontaneously appearing rooms and doppelgangers represent Julie and James’s marital and emotional turbulence and tension as they struggle to connect with the outside world. Finally, James and Julie resolve to quietly sell the house and avoid telling anyone of the horrors they faced in their home.

As they pack up their belongings in preparation to move away from their uncanny house in their uncanny town, both James and Julie continue to witness the uncanny nature of their home. James sees a face drawn in lipstick on the mirror, which neither James nor Julie drew, and he decides to keep this from Julie as he wipes it away (267). Neither comment regarding the shadows that follow them or the noises within the walls. As they prepare to leave, “we experience our fears privately. When I see an errant shadow, I tell myself it's nothing. When I notice a row of photos turned face down on the shelf, I right them” (268). The continued lack of communication between James and Julie demonstrates the barriers they erected between each other that keep them isolated from each other. Julie begins to see small withdrawals for small amounts of money from their shared account, implying that James has started to gamble again even though he has not found a new job yet. Rather than confront James about his gambling relapse, Julie chooses to ignore the situation, demonstrating her marriage's mental and emotional toll and the experience of living in the house.

The Grip of It portrays the story of James and Julie's house, representing the institution of marriage and as a symbol of Julie's entrapment by a patriarchal society. De Beauvoir explains

that modern marriages transition from the traditional institution as women have gained greater rights as individuals and as wives; however, women continue to be mistreated in many ways. Marriage remains unequal for women because it represents the only way to secure their place in society economically. Men do not need marriage to synthesize immanence and transcendence, even if it presents the perfect opportunity. De Beauvoir does not blame women for their desire to marry because she knows marriage offers women the most economic and social stability in an inherently unequal and oppressive society. While she does not blame women for pursuing the benefits that marriage can offer, the patriarchal institution of marriage is structured to benefit the husband and neglect the wives' personal, social, and economic needs.

Sigmund Freud's theory of the uncanny manifests in the architecture of the Khoury's home as it disorients and isolates James and Julie from each other. Julie suffers the most as she begins developing strange bruises on her body that mirror the spontaneous stains on the wall. The house starts to possess Julie physically and psychologically in hidden rooms, and the structure serves as a metaphor for Julie's entrapment. Jemc uses the architecture to allude to the deterioration of the aging house and represents James and Julie's increasingly decaying relationship. Contemporary gothic literature highlights women's modern anxieties and fears regarding gender imbalance in relationships, the difficulty of maneuvering in society financially and socially as a single woman, and the dismissal of women's fears and anxieties due to undiagnosed mental illnesses.

Chapter Three: Religious and Political Architectures of *The Exorcist*

William Peter Blatty's *The Exorcist* (1971) contains deeply ingrained religious and conservative politics in response to the shifts in social and cultural ideologies in the 1960s and '70s. The novel portrays women as demonic conduits of evil responsible for upsetting the patriarchal hierarchy of gender roles, the nuclear family, and women's confinement by domestic ideologies. Cinema and literature often depict monsters as inexplicable, abnormal, and disturbing creatures that threaten the border between natural and unnatural; however, the representation of monsters in the media reveals more about humans than one could argue. The metaphor of the monster populates myths that have helped societies define cultural boundaries and expose the real-life political, social, and contemporary issues of the time in which the monster was created. Sady Doyle investigates the presentation of female bodies in *Dead Blondes and Bad Mothers* (2019) and argues that monsters embody the patriarchal fear of women and illustrate the violence where men enforce traditionally feminine roles in horror literature and cinema. She explores the classification of women as monsters that produces a narrative that oppresses and represses women: "women have always been monsters, too, in the minds of great men; in philosophy, medicine, and psychology, the inherent freakishness of women has always been a baseline assumption" (Doyle xii). Female monstrosity has been woven into literary myths and legends, depicting them as beautiful creatures that lure men to gruesome deaths.

Each of the female monster's traits speaks to the characteristics that men find most threatening about women: intelligence, anger, beauty, ambition, and strength. A woman becomes a monster by way of double violation of the law and gender roles. The demonization of women enables the patriarchy to better control women. In religious and historical texts, women's demonization and monstrosity strengthen the idea that men are the superior sex. The strong

religious undertone of *The Exorcist* supports the notion that when women are deemed monstrous, they are easier to control by patriarchal systems, and their elimination is authorized by religious decree.

The Exorcist works to reinforce the patriarchal order by portraying women as conduits of demonic possession, but more realistic horrors lie beneath the religious, conservative agenda of Blatty's novel. The novel confronts women's violation of boundaries by showcasing the threats the female sex incites to undermine the patriarchal, religious, and social laws by punishing Regan, the novel's main character, by rendering her helpless to demonic possession. Here, I argue that although the novel predominantly takes place within the architecture of the MacNeil home, the architecture of patriarchal power is the actual setting of the horror. In my first chapter, I discussed the construction and inhabitation of architectural structures by the Catholic Church and the symbolization of these edifices to the story. Rather than analyzing physical architecture in relation to *The Exorcist*, I investigate the institutionalized structure of the Catholic Church that continues to dominate patriarchal and social narratives of women. The MacNeil home only serves as a metaphor to represent the patriarchal narratives that label women monstrous, immoral, and vile creatures when they defy the patriarchal order. The MacNeil household becomes subject to demonic possession due to the absence of a father figure to enforce the structures of the nuclear family and its gender roles. Regan becomes literally and figuratively demonized when she enters puberty around her twelfth birthday and departs from childhood to womanhood. Women are reduced to their fertility and reproductive systems, and gender serves as a social construction that locks women into arbitrary definitions of femininity.

When women deviate from the confines of domestic and patriarchal notions of femininity, the patriarchy responds with aggressive retaliation to restore its order. Women's

transgressions from gender norms and expectations empowers the patriarchy to lead violent attacks on women to keep women submissive to the social hierarchy. This is reflected in *The Exorcist* when Regan reaches the threshold between childhood and womanhood, and becomes locked into the roles and expectations for women, only to be punished for her natural development into a woman. Gender is a construction that produces bodies and identities and operates as an effective form of social control to keep women confined to domesticity when women transgress the patriarchal order. Regan must be exorcised of the demonic threat to restore peace to the MacNeil household. Still, the political and historical contexts of the novel hint toward a deeper meaning behind the exorcism of Regan MacNeil: the elimination of female power and freedom to sustain the patriarchy and the power of the Catholic Church to promote the ongoing oppression and abuse against women.

1. Constructing Violence Against Women

The portrayal of women in horror and gothic literature exposes centuries of patriarchal control that has repressed female sexuality, autonomy, and political freedoms. Traditional gender norms and expectations affirm that a woman should put her domestic roles as wife and mother ahead of herself to maintain the natural order and balance of the nuclear family and domesticity. The MacNeil home, where most events in *The Exorcist* occur, represents the roles and expectations within domestic spaces assigned to women by patriarchal religious systems. The house is the woman's domain, and the expectations of women to maintain the home reinforces gendered stereotypes, roles, expectations, and submission to the head of the household and society: male figures. Women are associated with maternity, subjectivity, emotion, and fantasy in a "man's" world. The discussion of space and the roles women are expected to perform in society leads to a conversation regarding gender roles and familial obligations of women in *The*

Exorcist. Women are punished when they do not subscribe to the positions that patriarchal and religious powers assign to them. Chris is a successful movie star and serves as the primary provider for the household as Howard, Regan's father, is not active in either of their lives.

As a result, because the MacNeil home lacks a paternal figure to ward off evil and outside dangers from the safety of the house, Chris and Regan are vulnerable to a demonic attack. *The Exorcist* implies that Regan's possession is the consequence of the deviation from the nuclear family due to the lack of a father figure to ward off threats to the home and a lack of religious faith to ward off demonic attacks. The novel depicts the social and spiritual consequences of a woman's decision to transgress from traditionally accepted gender roles for women as wives and mothers. Readers meet Chris MacNeil, Regan's mother, in the first chapter of *The Exorcist*. Chris assumes maternal and paternal roles in Regan's life as Regan's father is not actively involved in her life. Because of Chris's role as a single mother due to the absence of Regan's father, Chris deviates from the female domestic expectation of maintaining the home because she also provides for the family. Additionally, the novel touches on Chris's lack of faith: "Looking down at her daughter, Chris was silent. Puzzled. Disturbed. An atheist, she had never taught Regan religion. She thought it would have been dishonest" (Blatty 46). The lack of a present father figure, a religious structure, and the structure of the nuclear family call into question Chris's maternal competence as she fails to raise a child according to 1960s societal and domestic expectations for women. The lack of patriarchal representation leads to the reprimand of the women in the MacNeil home as Regan's body becomes the site for displays of vulgarity, sexual violence, abuse, and possession, and tests Chris's maternal competence. Ultimately, Regan is symbolic of the politically conservative and religious right's disgust and disdain for

women's reproductive and sexual freedoms and her body becomes a political playground to enact violence.

The Exorcist supports Simone de Beauvoir's analysis of the female condition and how the patriarchy seeks to control women and enforce gendered roles and responsibilities. The patriarchal order has been cemented in the data of biology. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir asserts that "the term 'female' is pejorative not because it roots woman in nature but because it confines her in her sex, and if this sex, even in an innocent animal, seems despicable and an enemy to man, it is obviously because of the disquieting hostility woman triggers in him" (21). Although women carry their child throughout pregnancy, the unborn fetus is not considered her child; it belongs to her husband or mate: "Within the advent of patriarchy, the male resolutely claimed his posterity; the mother had to be granted a role in procreation even though she merely carried and fattened the living seed: the father alone was the creator" (25). Aristotle believed that "the fetus was produced by the meeting of the sperm and the menses: in this symbiosis, woman just provided passive material, while the male principle is strength, activity, movement, and life" (25). Aristotle also believed that women were men whose biological development was arrested too early and posits that women are "mutilated males," and that women's genitalia were turned toward the inside of their bodies. The implication that women are incomplete because they lack male genitalia fosters the sexist notion that men are the superior gender. Under this ideology, women are inferior, and men must control women to keep the social order under patriarchal control.

The novel implies that female sexuality, reproductive rights, and political freedoms defy the roles and expectations assigned by the patriarchal institutions. This notion is enforced by the notion that God condemns young girls and women for fighting against the natural order and

deems them monstrous and dangerous to society. Society maintains a particular aversion for young girls entering puberties that contradicts from the treatment of young boys. Whereas boys become men, girls become monsters and become subject to violent, gendered persecution. The analysis of female monstrosity and the Other leads to an analysis of patriarchy and the violence it inflicts on women, specifically within *The Exorcist*. The Other is a monstrous “[woman that] inspires horror in man: the horror of his carnal contingency that he projects on her. The girl who has not yet gone through puberty does not pose a threat; she is not the object of any taboo and has no sacred characteristics” (Beauvoir 167). A young girl assumes the position of the Other when she matures into a woman. When Regan reaches puberty, she does not merely enter the realm of womanhood; she enters into the domain of Other, a dominion controlled and enforced by the patriarchy to secure its existence. Beauvoir discusses the social significance of menstruation and believes that the female condition has its roots in humans’ lack of fixed nature and their constant self-creation: “Woman is not a fixed reality but a becoming; she has to be compared with man in her becoming; that is, her possibilities have to be defined” (45). Menstruation is repulsive, according to Beauvoir, as it is associated with “the mysterious mana that is both life and death than anything else, blood, of course, is in itself a sacred element. But menstrual blood’s baleful powers are more particular. Menstrual blood embodies the essence of femininity, which is why its flow endangers woman herself, whose mana is thus materialized” (169).

Menstruation and Regan’s evolution into womanhood troubles the boundaries between the child and the maternal body, threatening the patriarchy’s symbolic order. In “Woman as Possessed Monster: *The Exorcist*,” Creed opens with a quotation from *Powers of Horror* to begin her analysis of women’s “pollution” by excremental and menstrual abjections: “Why does

corporeal waste, menstrual blood, and excrement, or everything that is assimilated to them, from nail-pairings to decay, represent – like a metaphor that would have to become incarnate – the objective fragility of symbolic order?” (qtd. in Creed 70). Connections between *The Exorcist*, feminine desire, sexuality, and abjection “suggest that more is at stake than a simple case of demonic possession. Possession becomes the excuse for legitimizing a display of aberrant feminine behavior which is depicted as depraved, monstrous, abject – and perversely appealing” (Creed 71). The MacNeil home is the locus of horror, a home managed by a divorced single mother. She enjoyed a close relationship with her daughter and signified a “related disintegration and transfiguration of the traditional American bourgeois family” (Sobchack 144). Women’s fertility and reproductive maturity are sources of power, but that power threatens the fragile state of the patriarchy. The natural process of menstruation turns a girl into a woman, which is the source of male fear and disgust.

The Exorcist suggests that menstruation is the maturation of women’s threat to the patriarchy and must either be suppressed or destroyed to protect the hierarchy of the sexes. Menstruation is a taboo that speaks to society’s management of female power and autonomy because it threatens the stability of the patriarchal order. On Regan’s birthday, her body becomes the locus of evil that symbolizes the threats women’s reproductivity and sexual desires pose to the patriarchal order. In connection to *The Exorcist*, Doyle states that the patriarchy’s control over women is inherently unstable: “it is not possible to own a resource that is located inside someone else’s body, which sex and reproduction always are. And if women realized how fragile male control is, everything might change” (Doyle xviii). Puberty marks the point where women become subject to violence and control and where it becomes crucial that they submit to male power. Regan’s degeneration into monstrosity represents men’s portrayal of women as monsters

in horror literature to keep them confined within the fragile boundaries of the patriarchal order: “by constructing patriarchy, men make monsters: the twisted, slimy, devouring, mutating, massively powerful images of female desire and sexuality and motherhood that take place outside of patriarchy” (xix). The patriarchy’s dread of women’s power and the threat they yield to the patriarchal order gives rise to women’s categorization as Other and their depiction as monsters in horror literature and cinema. Doyle explains that monsters are society’s creations of beings “that aren’t supposed to exist, the feral desires we’ve fought to repress and forget, the outsiders waiting at the edge of our social world to confront us, the primeval, female body that gives and takes life without permission” (xix). The monster allows for an examination of male dominance and female subordination as the monster lives outside of socially accepted roles and definitions that must be killed to restore the natural order of the patriarchy. Likewise, *the Exorcist* proposes that female sexuality, reproductive maturity, and desires are monstrous and must be condemned by patriarchal and religious authority.

The Exorcist functions to reinforce patriarchal and religious control over women’s bodies, and the novel’s language perpetuates the notion that female sexuality and fertility must be controlled to secure the natural order of the patriarchy. In the novel and the real world, women are trapped within the religious and patriarchal narrative structures that oppress and confine them to limiting gender constructions. In “When a Woman Looks,” Linda Williams explains that women have adopted these narratives that deem them monstrous because they threaten the patriarchal order. She alludes to Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” and argues that women have little to identify with in media because the woman exists only to be looked at (Williams 72). Female readers sympathize with Regan’s state and the fears and horrors that the female characters in *The Exorcist* face when an unholy attack infiltrates the safe space of

the home. Women in horror media are either the monsters or the victims, forcing women to bear “witness to her own powerlessness in the face of rape, mutilation, and murder” (72). When Father Merrin and Father Karras enter the picture to exorcise the demon, their presence implies that only patriarchal power can save women from violence and horror. The female spectator’s gaze at Regan’s possession represents an affinity between the monster and the woman. The monster and the spectator recognize their similar status within patriarchal structures of seeing.

When female readers of *The Exorcist* witness Regan’s possession, they are confronted with their destruction and the threats women’s power poses to the patriarchy. The monster and the woman are considered biological freaks and represent a threatening form of sexuality: “Clearly the monster’s power is one of sexual difference from the normal male. In this difference, he is remarkably like the woman in the eyes of the traumatized male: a biological freak with impossible and threatening appetites that suggest a frightening potency precisely where the normal male would perceive a lack” (74). In viewing the monster, the female spectator sympathizes and recognizes their similar statuses as potent threats to the fragility of the patriarchal symbolic order. Horror literature and cinema appeal to male spectators because the fears expressed in consuming horror media stem from the fear of the Other. The act of looking is masculine, and the gaze is associated with activity and control.

Women view the destruction of themselves as displaced onto the monster’s body and learn to fear and internalize their power to preserve their safety. They simultaneously learn how to escape from the monster and how to avoid becoming the monster. The monster’s on-screen and literary death is a symbolic exorcism of women’s sexuality and autonomy, the root of patriarchal fears. *The Exorcist* constructs the narrative that women are the primary threats to the patriarchal and natural order. Women are vulnerable and feeble without the presence of a patriarchal figure to

enforce their subordination to patriarchal ideologies. Blatty provides a resolution with the help of two patriarchal, religious figures to save the day: Father Merrin and Father Karras, two Jesuit priests. Femininity threatens the symbolic order, so in an attempt to suppress and eliminate the female threat, the patriarchy controls the social narrative to hyperbolize women's threat to the patriarchal order by classifying them as monsters. When women are stripped of their humanity, the patriarchy can step in, eliminate the danger to society, and continue to reinforce its power.

2. Weaponizing Religion and Politics on Reproductive Rights

The demonic possession of Regan MacNeil's body represents the religious and political commentary regarding the Supreme Court's decision in the *Roe v. Wade* movement that granted women the right to abortion free from government interference. Regan embodies the threat of female sexuality and desire that threatens the patriarchal symbolic order following the monumental Supreme Court decision regarding the *Roe v. Wade* movement in the late sixties and early seventies. As a devout Catholic and conservative, it stands to reason that William Peter Blatty wrote *The Exorcist* responds to the Supreme Court's decision of *Roe v. Wade* and the subsequent socio-political movements regarding women's reproductivity and the fragmentation of religious institutions. The late sixties and seventies witnessed a revolution in personal rights advocacy of women's rights, the departure from the nuclear family, and women's dependency on men and patriarchal institutions. The cultural and political shifts ignited a widespread fear regarding the dissolution of the patriarchal order, all projected onto the monster/woman's body and must be destroyed to restore social order.

William Peter Blatty illustrates the need for religious structure in American homes during cultural and political shifts to maintain the integrity of the ideal familial system. On April 8, 1966, *Time* magazine published one of its most famous cover stories by John Elson, "Is God

Dead?” The story offered a deep exploration of the state of religion in America at the time. The issue captivated audiences and offended many, but it set the stage for a rise in spiritually themed horror that confronted the basis of religion and its cultural influence. The United States witnessed cultural and social shifts with the rise of religious and scientific innovations. These shifts caused Americans to analyze their belief systems and the structure of religion: “If nothing else, the Christian atheists are waking the churches to the brutal reality that the basic premise of faith—the existence of a personal God, who created the world and sustains it with his love—is now subject to profound attack” (Elson). The story reports that 97% of Americans declared a belief in God, but only 27% considered themselves deeply religious (Elson). Even though statistics demonstrated the decline in Americans’ faith in God, the increasingly fragile religious institutions were threaded into socio-political and cultural movements. The shifts of American ideals following the sexual revolution and Americans’ wavering faith in religious institutions are embedded within *The Exorcist* as William Peter Blatty sought to exorcise the United States of its transgression from the 1960s gender roles and expectations.

The United States observed many cultural shifts alongside the wavering faith in religious institutions. The sixties and seventies also observed changes in industrial practices, corrupt political figures and scandals, and a rise in personal rights advocacy. The seismic shifts in American culture, politics, and society caused Americans to question their trust in traditional conventions and institutions. The United States’ sexual revolution defines the social movements that challenged standard codes of behavior regarding sexuality and interpersonal relationships throughout the sixties and eighties. The era is characterized by the normalization of contraception, public nudity, pornography, premarital sex, masturbation, alternate forms of sexuality and gender, and the legalization of abortion (Allyn 3). The American people “sought to

reorient gender relations ... and topple an edifice of federal and state laws that distinguished people by sex” (Berkowitz 133-4).

The Supreme Court’s ruling over the *Roe v. Wade* case sparked controversy among religious communities that opposed women’s rights to abortion. In *The Social Mission of The U.S. Catholic Church: A Theological Perspective*, Charles Curran outlines the historical and contemporary influence of the Catholic Church in the United States and its impact on the *Roe v. Wade* decision. Curran states that “abortion became the most significant issue for the Church following the *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision in 1973 and has remained so ever since” (Curran 101). The case of *Roe v. Wade* began when “Jan Roe, a single woman who was residing in Dallas County, Texas, instituted this federal action in March 1970 against the District Attorney of the county. She sought a declaratory judgment that the Texas criminal abortion statutes were unconstitutional on their face, and an injunction restraining the defendant from enforcing the statutes” (*Roe v. Wade* 113). The Catholic Church teaches and recognizes the theoretical doubt about when human life begins in the womb. However, in practice, “one must give human life every benefit of the doubt. Just as the hunter cannot shoot if what she sees is either a deer or a human being, so one cannot directly abort a fetus—note the word direct” (Curran 101). The role of the Catholic Church in the abortion debate, both generally and concerning *Roe v. Wade*, received substantial attention in American media. Before the Supreme Court’s decision in 1973, abortion was decided on a state-by-state basis and did not involve the country. The demonization and monstrosity of Regan in *The Exorcist* represent the social disruption attributed to the rise of feminist movements in the sixties and seventies, stirring patriarchal fears and anxieties. The feminist movement demanded that women control their bodies free from oppressive gender roles, government, and male opinion.

3. The Monstrous Feminine

Monstrosity and abjection often go hand in hand as they symbolize society's impulse to separate themselves from what frightens and disgusts them. The catalyst of demonic possession transforms young, innocent Regan into the embodiment of abjection. Kristeva states that "the abject has only one quality of the object and that is being opposed to I" (Kristeva 1). The abject does not represent the self or an object outside the self. Instead, it is a part that the self refuses to acknowledge. She defines the term "abject" as something that "disturbs identity, system, order" (Kristeva 4). Kristeva argues that humans first experience abjection at the point of separation or birth from the mother. Kristeva states that when a child is birthed, they leave the mother and enter into the symbolic realm or the law of the father. Regan experiences the first instance of abjection at her birth and enters into a hierarchal system of the symbolic realm. When she reaches the threshold to maturity on her twelfth birthday, she enters into the second phase of abjection as she enters a system of gendered roles and expectations for women. Adults confront the abject daily as humans simultaneously fear and identify with because it renders humans helpless by their very natures. Abjection refers to the reaction to a threatened breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of distinction between the subject and object or the self and the other. Regan loses the distinction between self and other as she becomes physically and mentally overwhelmed by demonic possession, and the demon begins to conquer her.

An analysis of Jeffery Jerome Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* and Regan's demonic possession in *The Exorcist* helps describe the symbolism behind the monster. In his work, Jeffery Jerome Cohen outlines seven theses that provide the key to understanding the roles that monsters play in literary and cinematic universes to analyze the culture that created them in the first place. The monster's presence in the cinematic and literary universes prompts observers

to reevaluate their cultural assumptions about race, gender, and our perception of difference. Cohen explains that the monsters used to be human in horror but quickly degenerate into monsters that are easier to destroy and banish from society, which is warranted and necessary to restore the social order. With the rise of personal rights advocacy and the cultural shifts in American culture, Regan serves as the culprit that must be contained and destroyed. In "Damsel in Distress: Analyzing Gender in Horror Movies from the 1960s and 1970s," Jenna Labbie differentiates between conservative and liberal feminists but concludes that "both camps agreed on main ideas, such as reproductive rights, access to childcare, identifying and discussing domestic violence, and creating equal opportunities for women in employment and in education" (3). The demand for sexual autonomy, entrance into the workforce, and equality disrupt the social, male-dominated structural order. The movement sought to free women from the age-old patriarchal control to achieve autonomy and success without relying on men, religious or governmental authority.

Regan embodies patriarchal fears of women's empowerment and the departure of female dependency on men. Cohen's fifth thesis, "The Monster Polices the Borders of The Possible," suggests that monsters usually stand as warnings to thwart the exploration outside of the domestic realm: "The monster prevents mobility (intellectual, geographic, or sexual), delimiting the social spaces through which private bodies may move. To step outside this official geography is to risk attack by some monstrous border patrol or (worse) to become monstrous oneself" (Cohen 12). Regan is punished for the female body's threat to the symbolic order. With women deemed monstrous, according to the patriarchy's definition, Regan's maturation into a woman marks her development into a monster. The monster, or Regan, also warns those who transgress 1960s gender roles and expectations. Cohen states, "primarily these borders are in place to

control the traffic in women, or more generally to establish strictly homosocial bonds, the ties between men that keep a patriarchal society functional” (13). The monstrous presence in *The Exorcist* represents cultural unease regarding the rise of feminism and the feminist demand for control over their bodies and freedom, violating the patriarchy's social supremacy. When the fears of female sexuality and desire are represented by a monstrous creature in horror literature and film, it becomes easier to justify the violent destruction of the threat. The monster is linked to forbidden desires and practices to normalize and enforce the cultural fears it represents. While the creature repels and violates the natural order, it also attracts: “We distrust and loathe the monster at the same time we envy its freedom, and perhaps its sublime despair” (17). Literature and cinema provide a safe space for audiences to observe the monster's existence from a safe place. When it is inevitably defeated, the defeat and destruction of the monster's threat act as a form of catharsis. As much as society attempts to repress the personified monster, like feminist movements, they will always return and remind society of the fears and anxieties they embody.

Both Father Merrin and Father Karras subvert this budding sexuality by forcing Regan back into the patriarchal and religious definition of what is considered righteous and pure. Regan serves as a representation of female transgressors in the 1960s who defied gender norms. These rebels could only be granted mercy if they submitted to gender ideologies or if patriarchal religious figures saved them. According to Cohen, “...the scapegoated monster is perhaps ritually destroyed in the course of some official narrative, purging the community by eliminating its sins. The monster's eradication functions as an exorcism and, when retold and promulgated, as a catechism” (18). The violence and suffering that Regan experiences from the possession are necessary to illustrate women's susceptibility to danger when they violate the natural order of the patriarchy and the defiance of their submission to patriarchal and domestic ideologies. The

monster, or Pazuzu-possessed Regan, terrifies surrounding characters and the readers, but her existence fascinates audiences. Elaine Lawless details the symbolic transference of abjection onto the female body so that patriarchal figures can purify her of her transgressions:

Females come to absorb and “believe” that they are “bad,” “evil,” and “deserving of punishment,” while males come to abhor the desire of their own uncontrollable bodies—the material, the corporeal, the semiotic—and try, in the end, to obliterate that which is perceived as not believed to be “clean and proper” by expunging evil out of woman, she who is defiled and defiles. (Lawless 246)

Regan is the physical embodiment of the patriarchy's fears of a female revolution that is defeated in a “safe” and controlled environment. The young, maturing female body serves as the sacrificial scapegoat and a vessel for the hyper-masculine demon, Pazuzu, to lure in whom the demon wants: Father Merrin. The demonic possession was targeted at Father Merrin and, by extension, the Catholic Church, using Regan as an unwitting scapegoat that was defiled and nearly killed. The patriarchy demonized and punished the female body to be saved and purified by Father Merrin and Father Karras to reestablish the patriarchal and religious repression of the symbolic order and the female body.

The monster can be pushed to the farthest margins of existence in a controlled environment and return to the public conscience. They bring a broader understanding of historical, cultural, and social events and an awareness of the human experience. Cohen explains that monsters bear human knowledge and exposes that “monsters ask us how we perceive the world, and how we have misrepresented what we have attempted to place” (20). The female body and the female gender threaten the fragile patriarchal order. Regan's body serves as a sacrificial scapegoat that reflects cultural anxieties attributed to sixties and seventies feminism

and is demolished in a controlled environment as a form of catharsis where the monster is dominated. Regan's body serves as a vessel which is then violently possessed by the male demon, Pazuzu, only to be saved by two Jesuit priests representing the fragile patriarchy, who purify the female body and soul to restore the natural order. The exorcism of the demon serves as a metaphor that represents the patriarchal need to remove the threats that women pose to the patriarchal order with the narrative. The novel suggests that the patriarchy can restore social order by exorcising transgressive women's disobedience to patriarchal law and reinforcing their subordination to the patriarchy. The patriarchy must maintain the narrative that women are inherently abject and must be controlled by the patriarchy to secure the strength and control of its power in society.

Women: Oozing, Leaking, Bloody Monsters

The horrors of *The Exorcist* come almost entirely from Regan's descent into abjection, which is described by her physical transformation and possession. Regan's physical transformation represents abjection and forces the readers to confront mortality. Furthermore, her transformation simultaneously forces people to confront the fragility of the patriarchal order and female power. Kristeva states that abjection forces people to reflect on their mortality and materiality brought on by impropriety or uncleanness. Kristeva asserts that the image of the human corpse "upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious change. A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death ... corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live ... There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being" (3). Other items can elicit the same reaction: open wounds, feces, sewage, and even the skin that forms on the surface of warm milk (2). The abject, or Other, marks a "primal repression" that precedes the subject's relation to objects of desire and

representation and the separation from human and animal. Kristeva describes that humans have a primal need to separate themselves from instances of abjection and those under the classification of Other: “by way of abjection, primitive societies have marked out a precise area of their culture in order to remove it from the threatening world of animals or animalism, which were imagined as representative of sex and murder” (12-13). Audiences are forced to confront the horrors and finality of mortality by witnessing Regan’s degeneration into an animated corpse. Regan vomits, urinates, bleeds, and her body begins to rot as Pazuzu gains power over her. This scene horrifies audiences and the characters in the novel, but they are also forced to witness death in such close proximity. The primal need to distance ourselves from death is violated as Regan begins to rot yet fights to survive. The living corpse is the ultimate abjection as it violates the natural and spiritual order by forcing audiences to witness its sinister abnormality.

Regan quickly transforms from a young, innocent child to a demonic woman that begins with minor behavioral issues to violent acts of terror. Early into the horrific events, Chris notices substantial changes in Regan’s behavior: “[Chris] had noticed a sudden and dramatic change in her daughter’s behavior and disposition. Insomnia, Quarrelsome, Fits of temper. Kicked things. Threw things. Screamed. Wouldn’t eat. In addition, her energy seemed abnormal. She was constantly moving, touching, turning; tapping; running, and jumping about. Doing poorly with school work ... Eccentric action-getting tactics” (Blatty 54). Regan begins to separate from the close bond she and her mother enjoyed at the novel's beginning and into a territory that neither of them fully understands yet. This scene illustrates Kristeva’s statement that humans experience abjection at the separation of the mother. Regan does both physically at birth and again at the beginning of her possession. Her possession marks the point in the novel when Regan can only be saved by the symbolic order of the patriarchy.

Forms of abjection must be expelled to restore a human's secure sense of self, just as the demonic presence must be exorcised from Regan's body to restore peace and order in the MacNeil home. Kristeva states that the abject is closely tied to religion and art, and she considers two ways to purify abjection. She says that "the various means of *purifying* the abject – the various catharses – make up the history of religions and end up with that catharsis par excellence called art, both on the far and near side of religion" (Kristeva 17). According to Kristeva, the best literature explores abjection, where boundaries deteriorate, and humans are confronted with the archaic, primal spaces before the linguistic binaries of self/other or subject/object. She writes, "on close inspection, all literature is probably a version of the apocalypse that seems to be rooted, no matter what its sociohistorical conditions might be, on the fragile border ... where identities ... do not exist or barely so – double, fuzzy, heterogeneous, anima, metamorphosed, altered, abject" (207). *The Exorcist* explores the abject, demonically possessed Regan, and the purification of her abjection, the exorcism of the demon by Father Merrin and Father Karras.

The Exorcist provides a lens to examine the shifting gender roles and expectations from a religious point of view in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s. While the conservative Catholic agenda is relatively apparent, a feminist reading of the novel reveals women's fears of forced domesticity and patriarchal violence. Gateward explains that because of Regan's age and the symbolization of her growth toward womanhood, "*The Exorcist* is considered to be a feminist backlash film, in which events punish both the mother for defying the nuclear family ideal by divorcing her husband, and Regan herself, on the cusp of coming into her power as a woman" (Creed 144). Regan's possession by a hypermasculine demonic entity demonstrates the patriarchy's need to possess and purge women's power. The ideology that women are monstrous and fundamentally different from men allows the patriarchy to control that narrative to oppress

generations of women. Creed explains that “the place of the abject is where meaning collapses, the place where I am not. The abject threatens life. It must be radically excluded from the place of the living subject, propelled away from the body and deposited on the other side of an imaginary border which separates the self from that which threatens the self” (Creed 65). Menstrual blood threatens the symbolic order because it marks a girl’s entrance into her sexuality and the beginning of her reproductive function. It symbolizes women’s initiation to feminine power, a threat that the patriarchy must control to secure its existence and power in society.

In *The Exorcist*, abjection is represented by rite defilement, biblical abominations, taboo, self-defilement, and the violation of maternal function. Creed describes the monstrous feminine phenomena that emphasize the fear of the biological, sexual differences between man and woman: “*difference* of female sexuality as a difference which is grounded in monstrosity, and which involves castration anxiety in the male spectator” (67). Creed analyzes the woman-as-monster to highlight how women’s bodies “represent the uncanny and dangerous in-betweens of a society’s strictly placed boundaries: what is both human and inhuman, man and beast, male and female, girl and woman” (Creed 67). Creed solidifies her definition and classification of abjection and states, “Particularly in relation to the following religious ‘abominations’: sexual immorality and perversion; corporeal alteration, decay, and death; human sacrifice; murder; the corpse; bodily wastes; the feminine body and incest” (69). Lawlessness points to the fragility of law and order, and Creed explains that “which threatens to destroy life also helps to define life,” so, in context of the female body, the need to destroy it through the horror lens also helps us understand the importance and necessity it serves within the confines of the patriarchy (69). Finally, Creed explains the fragility of the law and the existence of the symbolic order: “Thus, abject things are those which highlight the ‘fragility of the law’ and which exist on the other side

of the border which separates out the living subject from that which threatens its extinction” (70). The abject dissolves the natural order's secure state, generating an environment of fear and anxiety with its presence. Regan's body represents a much larger issue attributed to the female's “grotesque” sexual development and the abjection as she becomes possessed by the demon Pazuzu. It stands to reason that the patriarchy has constructed the narrative that female reproduction and fertility are unnatural and concludes that the female body is inherently abject. With this in mind, women can never be freed from abjection as Creed states that “abjection is not something of which the subject can ever feel free—it is always there, beckoning the self to take up its place, the place where meaning collapses” (70). Regan's degeneration into an abject also turns her into a monster that must be defeated and destroyed to restore the natural order.

Regan's first real threat to other characters occurs when she kills Burke Dennings, the director of Chris's movie. The novel implies that Chris and Burke were in a relationship when Regan asks if Chris loved him like she loved her father (Blatty 43). Pazuzu-possessed Regan kills Burke after breaking his neck and throwing him out of her bedroom window during a party at the MacNeil house. When his body is discovered, characters assume that “he had stumbled. He had fallen down the steep flight of steps beside the house to the bottom, where a passing pedestrian on M Street watched as he tumbled into night without end. A broken neck. This bloody, crumpled scene his last” (Blatty 53-4). Hours later, while partiers drink and reminisce about Burke, the group witness Regan “gliding spiderlike, rapidly, close behind Sharon, her body arched backward like a bow with her head almost touching her feet...her tongue flicking quickly in and out of her mouth while she sibilantly hissed and moved her head very slightly back and forth like a cobra” (Blatty 126). Shortly after that, the partygoers observe the “howling and the yelping and that hideous laughter; Regan oinking and grunting like a pig...neighing like a

horse... bedstead shaking and violently quivering from side to side as Regan's eyes rolled upward into their sockets and she wrenched up a keening shriek of terror torn raw and bloody from the base of her spine" (133). Regan's physical and mental state quickly decays, becoming inhuman, abject, and monstrous. Being around Regan is no longer safe unless she is tightly secured to the bed. Pazuzu's possession of Regan deprives her of her bodily autonomy and renders her utterly helpless to the demon's power.

As the novel develops and Regan's possession becomes overwhelmingly sinister, Regan loses her identity, and her body becomes a physical vessel. The fight over Regan's life becomes a war to save her soul from damnation. Her mother and the priests can no longer refer to Regan as a young, innocent girl, but as a monster threatening to kill her and anyone attempting to save her soul. Regan continues to degenerate due to the overwhelming power of possession to the point where Father Merrin, Father Karras, and even Chris separate Regan's identity from the demon, as Pazuzu has completely taken control of her body. They no longer refer to her body as Regan but as "the demon" (126). They witness a particularly horrifying scene when Regan, possessed by Pazuzu, attempts to castrate herself:

The demonic, loud laugh cackled joyously as from Regan's vagina her blood gushed onto white linen sheets, and then abruptly, which a shriek coming raw and clawing from her throat, Chris rushed at the bed, grasping blindly at the crucifix while, her features contorted infernally, Regan flared at her in her fury and, reaching out a hand... firmly pressed Chris's face against her vagina, smearing it with blood. (205)

The white linens on the bed represent Regan before the possession: clean, pure, and innocent, which is then desecrated by blood and filth. The use of a crucifix to defile and mutilate Regan's genitals represents a blatant contempt for the Christian faith. It shows that there is nothing more

disgusting and noxious than a woman's reproductive organs. Creed explains that the ultimate abjection is the corpse, and "within the biblical context, the corpse is also utterly abject. It signifies one of the most basic forms of pollution—the body without a soul. As a form of waste, it represents the opposite of the spiritual, the religious symbolic" (70). Regan enacts the rite of defilement, biblical abomination, taboo, self-defilement, and the violation of maternal function by using the crucifix as a masturbatory tool. Regan commits an additional act of violence and defiance of the symbolic, natural order when she initiates an act of incest: "[Regan] firmly pressed Chris's face against her vagina, smearing it with blood as Regan undulated her pelvis" (155). The abject highlights law and order's fragility, but Regan's abject, monstrous-feminine body in *The Exorcist* represents greater, more real-life horrors outside its literary and cinematic universes.

4. Conclusion

The Exorcist promotes Catholic and patriarchal gender norms and enforces women's subordination to the patriarchal and domestic ideologies of the sixties and seventies. In *Monster Theory*, Cohen states that the monster's body is a cultural body, born "at this metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment ... The monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy (ataractic or incendiary), giving them life and an uncanny independence" (Cohen 4). The monster is representative of the fears and anxieties that the culture as a collective has. When we examine the monster's existence and what it symbolizes, we can reveal the truth behind these fears. *The Exorcist* is representative of the collective concerns regarding America's fears of progression and moving away from gender roles and expectations set by the patriarchal order. It is easier to expel when these fears and anxieties manifest into a mortal being. Regan embodies this anxiety as she further succumbs to

demonic possession. She vomits, bleeds, defiles curses, murders, and symbolizes everything abject that must be purified or expelled from society to restore peace and the symbolic order. Regan is a construction and projection of the sexual revolution, deviation from religious faith, and political turmoil of the sixties and seventies. Still, she is predominately the expression of male fears regarding women's threat to the fragile borders of gender relations.

The oppressive and abusive nature of the patriarchy keeps women submissive to the patriarchal order. *The Exorcist* encompasses the political and social shifts occurring in the sixties and seventies as Americans deviated from the nuclear family structures and assigned gender roles. Furthermore, the novel illustrates religious and conservative politics by punishing transgressive women for violating gender norms and expectations appointed to them by patriarchal institutions. William Peter Blatty calls for the reestablishment of patriarchal order demonstrating the power of two religious and patriarchal figures' success in restoring peace. The MacNeil home becomes subject to demonic threats because it lacks a paternal figure to protect Chris and Regan from outside dangers. When women do not subscribe to the roles that patriarchal and religious powers have assigned to them, they are effectively punished for reestablishing patriarchal control over women.

Women's bodies are considered unnatural, abject, and Other to minimize the risk to the patriarchal order. Their categorization as monsters justifies their violent punishments, wicked depictions, and eventual destruction in horror literature and cinema. When women become dangerously close to breaching the borders of patriarchal gender roles, they must be eliminated by representative figures of patriarchal and religious control. Safety and peace are restored in *The Exorcist* only through the presence of the symbolic fathers, Father Merrin and Father Karras. They expel the demon from the home and revitalize the patriarchal hierarchy that renders women

submissive and dependent. The monster asks society to reevaluate our cultural assumptions regarding race, gender, and perceptions of difference. Their presence in the media forces society to question why the monster is created and what it represents. The female body and the feminist revolutions threaten the fragile patriarchal order. Regan's body serves as a sacrificial scapegoat that reflects cultural anxieties in the sixties and seventies and is demolished in a controlled environment as a form of catharsis where the monster is conquered. Her body serves as a vessel that is violently possessed by the male demon, Pazuzu, only to be saved by two Jesuit priests representing the fragile patriarchy, who purify the female body and soul to restore the natural order.

Conclusion

Throughout this project, I examine the use of architecture in Sophia Lee's *The Recess*, Ann Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance*, Jac Jemc's *The Grip of It*, and William Peter Blatty's *The Exorcist*. I argue that gothic and horror writers often use architectural elements as a metaphor to expose the subjugation of women to domestic ideologies. The female protagonists in each novel grapple with the patriarchy's prescribed roles and expectations for women regarding female sexuality, autonomy, and the political freedoms they are allowed to obtain in a historically male-dominated society. The transgressive acts at the center of horror and gothic novels center on the corruption of patriarchal structures and the violence they enact upon women when they violate the patriarchal order. These chapters analyze how the patriarchy locks women into domestic ideologies and how this power is enforced by oppressive gender politics, the commodification of women's bodies, patriarchal narratives of women's transgressions, and the institution of marriage. To conclude, I consider the emotional and political needs each of these novels meet for the authors and readers in response to the religious, political, and patriarchal institutions that actively seek to oppress and abuse marginalized communities.

In each chapter of this thesis, I analyze how the patriarchy confines women to domestic spaces and how it uses its power to tyrannize women. While these spaces represent safety and refuge from the outside world, domestic spaces are not safe for women because it subjects women to suffering, oppression, and powerlessness in a patriarchal society. For example, in chapter one, I argue that Sophia Lee's *The Recess* and Ann Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance* use the gothic genre to expose eighteenth-century women's experiences of abuse and confinement by repressive patriarchal rule. The heroines in each story find themselves confined by architectural structures that serve as metaphors to represent the political and social constructs designed to keep

women submissive to patriarchal control. In chapter two, I argue that *The Grip of It* uses architecture as a metaphor for the confining nature of gendered, domestic expectations and the patriarchal institution of marriage. Finally, in my third chapter, I argue that *The Exorcist* illustrates the union between religion and politics to control women's reproductive freedoms and preserve gender normative conduct. Each of these chapters demonstrates that the patriarchy abuses women by manipulating language and laws in their favor to keep women confined to domesticity and second-class personhood. When women fight back, the patriarchy responds with violence and brutality to restore patriarchal power by labeling women emotional, weak, and hysterical.

The walls that stand between the heroines discussed in this thesis are metaphors that speak to the barriers that obstruct women from achieving freedom and autonomy. These boundaries keep women locked into repressive roles and expectations for women and the violence that follows women's resistance against patriarchal powers. This project locates the intersections of patriarchy, power, space, religion, and feminism to illustrate the patriarchy's historical oppression and abuse of women. I seek to connect the symbolization of domestic spaces and the female body by discussing the social construction of gender and the ways that patriarchal power locks women into arbitrary definitions of feminine behavior. As a result, women are both contained and betrayed by their bodies and the patriarchal institutions that claim ownership of them.

The content in *The Recess*, *A Sicilian Romance*, *The Grip of It*, and *The Exorcist* is graphic, claustrophobic, and horrifying to women and marginalized communities—not only because of the uncanny doppelgangers, ghosts, haunted houses, or demonic attacks, but because of the real-life issues they embody. Let's read these novels as artifacts of past political, cultural,

religious, and social developments. They reflect women's demand for freedom and autonomy unshackled by patriarchal and domestic ideologies that have oppressed generations. However, it would be a mistake to consider the content in each novel as figments of the past. In the introduction to *Burn It Down: Feminist Manifestos for the Revolution*, Breanne Fahs argues that for many women and minority groups, politics, religion, and patriarchal beliefs continue to police and enforce their agendas on the bodies of oppressed peoples:

The reinvigoration of misogyny and racism as institutionalized practices has sounded new alarm bells. An eerily familiar set of conditions has now presented itself, dominated by financial precarity, tense gender relations, racialized violence, rampant homophobia, public and unapologetic victim blaming, rampant homophobia, public and unapologetic victim-blaming, and ever-worsening class inequalities. (Fahs 3)

An optimistic analysis of this project could imply that women are steadily on their way toward liberation from patriarchy to finally obtain freedoms over their bodies and reproductive systems; however, this is not the case. The alarm bells activated by early female gothic writers in response to the oppressions women faced in the eighteenth century still reverberate through contemporary cultural and political movements. Though modern-day life looks a lot different from the eighteenth century, the warnings remain constant: girls, women, and members of marginalized communities are still subject to violence under patriarchal power. According to Fahs, "we have met ourselves again on the starting line, once again up against the behemoths of greedy capitalism, selfish conservatism, anti-intellectual masculinity, and increasingly dire conditions for nearly all oppressed people" (3). Women's bodies are political landscapes that have been subject to control and abuse by individual men, patriarchal institutions, harmful religious

oppression, and political agendas. State policies, among other establishments, do not create space for women's agency or voices.

What I want readers to understand from this project is that what haunted feminist writers and audiences in the eighteenth century haunts us today. Politics, religion, and patriarchal powers continue to confine women in their ideologies across the globe. Trends demonstrate that the United States is undergoing a sharp decline in religious faith during an era of extreme political divide, cultural revolutions, international debate, and social movements. On June 24th, 2022, the Supreme Court ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson* overturned the right to an abortion established under *Roe v. Wade* in a 6-3 ruling, dismantling women's agency over their bodies and choice. Not only should we be upset that the Supreme Court ruled against reproductive autonomy, but we need to be angry and organize that fury. In "The Uses of Anger," Audre Lorde asserts that mainstream media and communications do not want women, particularly white women, to respond to racism or body politics:

So, we are working in a context of opposition and threat, the cause of which is certainly not the angers which lie between us, but rather that virulent hatred levels against all women, people of color, lesbians and gay men, poor people—against all of us who are seeking to examine the particulars of our lives as we resist our oppressions, moving toward coalition and effective action. (Lorde 8)

Mainstream communication wants women and members of marginalized communities to remain complacent and accept the terms and conditions of living in a patriarchal society. Any discussion regarding the oppression and repression of women must be discussed with the recognition and use of anger. If there's anything to be taken away from my project, it's that women need to continue demanding political and social freedoms and fight against the powers that confine them

to domestic and patriarchal ideologies. *The Recess* and *A Sicilian Romance* suggest women need to unify their efforts to help each other successfully escape their oppressors. *The Grip of It* demonstrates women's experiences in the limitations of traditional marriage and the pressures of sustaining domestic roles in subordination to patriarchal powers. Finally, *The Exorcist* illustrates the religious conservative's role in enacting violence onto women's bodies to preserve patriarchal dominance in society.

For far too long, women have been imprisoned by patriarchal, religious, and domestic ideologies. It is past time to break down and embody the monstrous feminism and use our anger as a tool for activism. Women and marginalized communities must identify the loci of our oppression, shamelessly operate as individuals and united bodies, express our anger, and fearlessly dismantle the social architectures that keep us confined.

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