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with a focus in character relationships in *Zofloya* and *The Romance of the Forest*

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Bachelor's thesis in Lector in English  
Supervisor: Yasemin Nurcan Hacıoglu  
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## Abstract

In gothic literature there often exists a queer layer to the texts. These queer layers have the common denominator that they both directly and indirectly reject heteronormativity. Some gothic literature from the eighteenth and nineteenth century explore different types of “queerness”, and it is some of these which this thesis will explore. Through an analysis of some of the character relationships between the main heroine in *Zofloya: or the Moor* by Charlotte Dacre and *The Romance of The Forest* by Ann Radcliffe, I will explore this queer layer, and look at the different types of queer identities that have been represented in the romantic age. These queer identities I explore include; genderfluidity and homoeroticism in *Zofloya*, and homoeroticism and a disinterest in the opposite gender in *The Romance of The Forest*.

## Queer representation in gothic literature from the romantic ages

The gothic genre has been a space to explore new and different perspectives and stories, including queer identities as critical reading of the last two decades has explored<sup>1</sup>. The gothic genre has also been a place of indulgence when it comes to exploring these different perspectives, stories, and ideas. These indulgences of both writing and reading something so out of the ordinary gives both the writer and the reader a form of thrill in the sense that this is wrong and very inappropriate. The writer will often then revert the story back to the normal by the end of the text<sup>2</sup>. However, by exploring these different narratives, the writer cannot fully revert to normal as this new perspective have already been shown. As Haggerty points out, “that is why gothic fiction remains as queer as it is, and it also suggests why and how gothic remains to challenge the status quo and at the same time expand its purview”<sup>3</sup>.

Some of the relationships between some of the characters can be read as something that’s not in line with a heteronormative narrative, creating a “queer layer” to the text<sup>4</sup>. Gothic novels are then not only restricted to same-sex relationship but can explore more complex sexualities<sup>5</sup>. Sexuality as we know it today differ far from what “sexuality” in the past was. During the eighteenth and nineteenth century, sexualities began to gradually emerge but was not yet fully identifiable<sup>6</sup>. As we shall see further in my thesis, some of these representations of a queer sexuality may be more subtle than other.

In my thesis I will look at the queer layer and the queer representation in two gothic literary works from the eighteenth century, focusing on the relationship the main heroines make. The first gothic literary work I will look at is *Zofloya* by Charlotte Dacre, and how the gender spectrum and the “female gothic” have been contested. Recent critical approaches also look to take a proto-trans reading of the text, reading the main heroine as a trans person (Zigarovich 2017, Crockett 2013). I will focus both on the relationship Victoria has with the two male love interests; Berenza and Henriques, and the relationship between Victoria and two of the female characters; Catau and Lilla. The second gothic literary work I will look at is *The Romance of the Forest* by Ann Radcliffe and look at the heroine Adeline as a queer identity

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<sup>1</sup> Zigarovich 2020

<sup>2</sup> Haggerty 2006, p 10

<sup>3</sup> Haggerty 2006, p. 10

<sup>4</sup> Critics such as Frank, M. (2008), Palmer (2012), Hughes & Smith (2012), Fincher (2007), Davison (2009) and Boe & Coykendall (2014) explore the queer layer in different gothic texts from the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

<sup>5</sup> Haggerty 2006, p. 19

<sup>6</sup> Zigarovich 2020, p. 382

and her relationship with the male main characters and her relationship with the female characters, mainly Clara.

### Gender fluidity and a contesting of the female gothic in *Zofloya*

The main character Victoria in *Zofloya: or the Moor* by Charlotte Dacre, contests the female gothic in a way not done before. Victoria behaves in an aggressive manner, with bold physical features. As Zigarovich points out: “*Zofloya* opposes distinct gender binaries in a blatant manner, most directly through *Zofloya* and Victoria”<sup>7</sup>. She continues; “it defies categorization as “female” or “male” gothic and thus can be describes as “queer”<sup>8</sup>. This is mainly what this analysis will focus on as well. The focal point will be the different character relationships Victoria develops throughout the novel, and how the other characters in turn view Victoria.

As Victoria is “clearly a gender variant”<sup>9</sup>, the relationships she forms with the other characters, both male and female, are interesting to look at. Later in the novel when Berenza and Henriques have been killed almost calmy, Lilla’s murder shows an excessive violence from Victoria. Lilla becomes an object of fascination to Victoria throughout the story, and as Haggerty points out, this is an “obsessive erotic fascination”<sup>10</sup> which Victoria shows. It is not only sexual aggressiveness she shows however, but also as Zigarovich points out: “male sexual aggressiveness and limitlessness”<sup>11</sup>, showcasing a masculine aspect with Victoria.

We get to know that Victoria excited “universal envy in one sex, and she likewise excited universal admiration in the other” (93). We never get to know explicitly which sex she envies and which she admires, but we do get to know that “the Venetian belles viewed her with an air of envy” but that the reason for this envy is not “the companion [Berenza] who sat beside her” (92). She is also “flattered by the attention she had excited” (93). We can therefore question which sex it is that she admires, and which she envies.

If we first look at Victoria’s relationship with some of the female characters, we can see an interest in the female gender. Firstly, with Catau, Signora di Modena’s servant. When Victoria escapes from the grounds of Signora di Modena, it is not without help from her faithful friend Catau. When Victoria is to leave Catau behind, Catau starts to sob. Victoria says to Catau “if you really love me, detain me no longer, and let me behold you on your return” (83). Catau

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<sup>7</sup> Zigarovich 2017: 80

<sup>8</sup> Zigarovich 2017: 80

<sup>9</sup> Zigarovich 2017: 81

<sup>10</sup> Haggerty 2006: 38

<sup>11</sup> Zigarovich 2017: 79

then, “seized the hand of Victoria, and impressed on it a kiss forcible in proportion to the affection it was meant to convey” (83). Victoria however, “felt not a shadow of regret at leaving her faithful companion” (83). This adds a queer layer to the text, as evident by Cataus affection for Victoria. Catau is not introduced to the story again after we leave her however, but the young Lilla comes into the story instead, invoking different feelings for Victoria.

Lilla is being described by Victoria as a “blooming fairy” (164), and this description as a “fairy” is repeated several times throughout the novel. Victoria’s jealousy is further apparent when she describes her as someone with “brilliance of her wit, attracted, as it was wont to do, the please admiration of all towards her” (164). The jealousy of Lilla is obvious from Victoria’s side, but the words she uses to describe Lilla indicate an almost homoerotic admiration for her. Later she describes Lilla as an “aerial spirit” (173), and when they together (Victoria, Henriques, and Lilla) go towards the castle “the tender Lilla with her right hand holding one of Victoria’s, and passing the left round her waist” (173), imploring affection once again in a one-sided relationship. Lilla is also described as one with “beauty”/being “beautiful” (170, 204). Before Victoria murders Lilla, she describes her as “a miniature semblance of the Medicean Venus” (218), which is a marble sculpture of Aphrodite, again indicating this homoerotic affection/admiration. Pleading, Lilla also tried to convince Victoria not to kill her on the basis that “we have been friends – I loved thee, nay even now I love thee (...), we have been companions, bedfellows” (219), further adding to the queer layer of the story. When Victoria does kill Lilla however, it is with extreme passion, supporting Haggerty’s point of the “obsessive erotic fascination” of Lilla, invoking strong feelings between the two women.

Contrary to the murder of Lilla, both Victoria’s husband Berenza and, Victoria’s new found obsession Henriques, die in a “calmy” manner. There is not as much passion in these two murders as there is in the murder of Lilla, showing us the difference in the relationship Victoria has with the different genders. Berenza further thinks of Victoria as being “imperfect” and having “strong features” (90). These features, Berenza would have to “modify” (90) to be able to fully love her, and he thinks he “could easily new model her character” (92). From Berenza’s view then, Victoria defies the gender norms of being hyper-feminine. Victoria later contemplates whether or not she actually loves Berenza, and concludes that “I prefer him to all men” (97), but “she was incapable of loving such a man” (97). Their relationship seems therefore ambivalent, as it is explicit that Victoria can never fully devote herself to Berenza. She later exclaims that she is “wedded to a wretch whom I abhor” (159).

Henriques have never showed any kind of affection towards Victoria, like he does towards Lilla. It is apparent that Henriques does not care for Victoria: “he had never viewed



her with sentiment of regard” (188), and regards her as “unpleasing in his sight” (188). Later he views Victoria with “absolute dislike” (196) and goes on to describe her with “strong though noble features, her dignified carriage, her authoritative tone, her boldness, her insensibility, her violence (...) so utterly opposite to the gentle Lilla” (196). Victoria’s masculine features then are nothing in comparison to Lilla’s extremely feminine features. Victoria confesses her love to Henriques, which we later called “shameless and dishonourable” (201) and compared it to Lilla’s “blushing sweetness” and “retiring modesty” (201). This again to showcase a complete opposite of masculine and feminine features. He constantly compares the two, and admits to Victoria that he would never have fancied her even if Lilla never existed because of the dissimilarity of the two women. Victoria herself even admits to having “bold masculine features” (211) where Lilla has a “baby face” (211), adding to the difference in the female and male gothic, and to the queer layer.

#### Female intimacy and the disinterest of the opposite sex in *The Romance of the Forest*

*The Romance of the Forest* by Ann Radcliffe has several elements which can add to the queer layer of the novel. The Gothic genre, as written by authors like Ann Radcliffe were written by women, for women<sup>12</sup>. The female sexuality depicted in these gothic novels often mirrored the feelings of the women reading these books.

Griffin Wolff (1979) describes the two types of men often found in Gothic novels: the demon lover and the chaste lover<sup>13</sup>. The demon lover is often the antagonist which exalt power and malevolent violence, in this case the Marquis the Montalt. The heroine will however shun the demon lover without necessarily a good reason as we shall see soon. The heroine’s feminine sexuality, however, is shown in relation with Clara as they together play the lute.

Throughout the book, the heroine Adeline, declines several highly esteemed men as they confess their love for her. The three men declaring their love for Adeline are Louis La Motte, Monsieur and Madame La Motte’s son, the Marquis the Montalt, the main antagonist of the book, and Theodore la Luc, which Adeline ends up marrying. The common denominator in Adeline’s response to the proposes of these men are all that she shows a disinterest of engaging in a relationship with either of them. None of the men are described either as anything special, again showing Adeline’s disinterest in the opposite sex.

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<sup>12</sup> Griffin Wolff 1979, p. 98

<sup>13</sup> Griffin Wolff 1979, p. 103

There are, however, a couple of times where she describes someone with an admiration, and when she does, that person is a woman. Elements of homoeroticism can then be found in some instances in the book, especially after Adeline has been captured the first time by the Marquis, and when she has fled to Leloncourt and sees Clara for the first time. I will now look closer to specific instances where Adeline declines these men, before I move on to her appreciation of the women in the book.

Monsieur La Motte, although he not necessarily declaring any admiration for Adeline, is the first man which she declines. La Motte had earlier “thanked her in a manner more earnest than was usual of him”, but Adeline had in turn “felt towards him the affection of a daughter” (44). Adeline’s boundaries towards La Motte have now become apparent and firm, and she does not anywhere else in the book state otherwise. She goes on to see him only as a protector, and almost a father up until the Marquis kidnaps her. La Motte does also not try to induce an intimate relationship with Adeline, and does not confess any type of love towards her as he is faithful to his wife Madame La Motte.

The second man Adeline rejects is Monsieur and Madame La Motte’s son Louis La Motte. Early on we get to know that for Louis; “she [Adeline] has won my admiration” (79) after just some weeks together in the Abbey which the La Motte family has taken refuge. Adeline, however, does not recognize his sentiments and “growing affection for Adeline” (85), and instead “treat them as passing civilities” (85). Later when Louis is to leave the abbey, he confesses his love for Adeline. Adeline of course rejects Louis, and answers that she hopes “time will teach you to reduce love within the limits of friendship” (105). Louis, in distress, hopes that Adeline will at least think of him from time to time, to which she replies with “I will think of you with the affection of a sister” (106). At the very end of the story, we also get to know that Adeline of Louis “pitied and esteemed, but could not love” (338). The relationship between Adeline and Louis then continues as a regular friendship throughout the novel, and shows a clear disinterest of men.

The “demon lover” of the story has now entered and entreaties to make Adeline his. The Marquis de Montalt is the owner of the Abbey of which the La Motte family is situated, and he immediately takes an interest in Adeline. After some time, he enquires to speak with Adeline alone, and confesses his love for her. Adeline, not interested in the Marquis, “thanked him for the offer of a distinction, which, with a modest, but determined air, she said she must refuse” (122). The Marquis presses further, but Adeline, determined, answers “I can not bestow my heart. You can not obtain more than my esteem (...)” (122). Later when she speaks with La Motte, she utters that “The Marquis I can never love, nor, to speak sincerely, ever esteem”

(126). Our heroine has until further, successfully rejected her demon lover, shunning him as such that he has to use further measurements to obtain Adeline. The Marquis tried one more time confessing his love for Adeline, but again she declines; “I cannot accept the honour you offer me” (130). Adeline further devotes to “never accept it [the proposal]” (130) and shows her dislike for the Marquis throughout the rest of the story.

Adeline ends up being kidnapped by the Marquis, and she is now in the Marquis power. As he makes this known to her, all she can manage to answer by is “by tears” (161). Adeline’s discontent with the Marquis is now obvious as she has stated numerous times earlier her dislike for him. Theodore now comes to her rescue, and together they flee towards his hometown. The Marquis finds them again however, and being captured once more by the Marquis, this time entrapped in the abbey with the La Motte family. In a conversation with La Motte Adeline utters once again “had the Marquis deserved my esteem, he would, probably, have possessed it” (216). Adeline’s relationship with the Marquis then develops as a hatred towards him, instead of in a more positive way as with Louis. Neither one of them does however, obtain her love.

Theodore, also known as the Marquis’ chevalier, showed up at the same time as the Marquis in the story. As the other men in the story, he too shows an interest in Adeline, however more modest in the beginning, without showing a kind of pining after Adeline. Rather than openly expressing his feeling until later, he shows kindness and interest when speaking with Adeline, and concerning her well-being. Before the Marquis kidnaps Adeline, Theodore finds out and tries to warn her. Alas he is needed elsewhere and is unable to assist Adeline in her attempted first escape. We get to know that when Adeline thinks of Theodore after he has tried to get to meet her to warn her, that she has “a latent hope that she was not indifferent to him” (103). Whether or not she would want to be *liked* by Theodore is ambiguous as it could mean only that she appreciated him as a friend and wants nothing more than a friendship.

When Theodore comes to the rescue “joy was her (Adeline’s) first emotion” (167), but then when she remembered how he had left her she became overwhelmed with “mistrust, apprehension, and disappointment” (167). Already being betrayed by her father earlier in her life, and later by La Motte, and kidnapped by the Marquis, it would be understandable to feel mistrust with another attractive man. Adeline, not knowing his true intentions for the rescue, feels ambivalent to her rescue. She does however go with Theodore, as nothing could be worse than the Marquis. Theodore does end up confessing that the reason behind the rescue “was love” (171), and his true feeling for her have thus been shown. Adeline, “trapped” in a carriage with Theodore, “was silent” (171) after his confession. She continues and “was still silent”

(171), as she was still not “acquainted with the timidity of love” (171), we can assume she still exhibit a disinterest of the male gender.

Theodore and Adeline make their way to an inn where the King’s men try to arrest Theodore for deserting his post, which ends in Theodore being injured. It is not until now that, after being rescued and having encountered danger and becoming injured for her, that Adeline’s feelings “heightened it into love” (178), and “the veil was removed from her heart, and she saw, for the first time, its genuine emotions” (179). She is thus only now starting to develop some feeling for Theodore, but again only after he has sacrificed so much for her (deserting his post, rescuing her, and then becoming injured). One could even argue that his injuries are Adeline’s fault, and therefore is the only reason she feels she must reciprocate some of his feelings for her.

Theodore, injured and threatened by the King’s men to be arrested, now makes a proposition for Adeline. His proposition would be to marry each other, so that they may not be separated again. Adeline, however “convinced” of Theodore’s proposition, “could not bring herself to consent thus hastily to a marriage with a man” (190). When he not long after once again proposes to a marriage between them, Adeline still refuses on the cause that they cannot know whether their marriage “will not be eternal” (191). Theodore, delirious and afraid of losing Adeline under such circumstances exclaim “if you mean to reject this, perhaps, the last proposal which I can ever make to you, cease, at least, to deceive yourself with an idea that you love me” (192). Adeline, however, does not feel the same as Theodore: “can you think so lightly of me, as to believe I would profess a regard, which I do not feel?”. As the Marquis discovers them and reclaims Adeline, she admits that she “had attached more closely to Theodore” and that he had shown himself “to be more worthy of her love” (199).

It is interesting to note how she looks at her own feelings in regard of Theodore. While she hoped she is not indifferent to him, she also admits to not be acquainted with the timidity of love. Throughout the rescue however, it can seem as if Theodore gain more and more of Adeline’s esteem, and she does acquire some undisclosed feelings for Theodore. Without Theodore continuously sacrificing himself for Adeline, she may not develop any romantic feelings towards him at all throughout the story, and their relationship may have stayed platonic.

In rejecting all these men throughout the entire story, with the exception for Theodore, she shows an almost disinterest in the opposite sex. There is never really any mention of the men in any romantic way except for towards the end. The women’s appearances are however describe as being “elegance and beauty” (158) and “interesting” (243). The first being after

Adeline's first capture by the Marquis when she wakes up in her room to two women entering, and when seeing them "her spirits gradually returned" (158), and she had never seen "so much elegance and beauty" (158). The next is again waking up to a woman, this time seeing Clara, Theodore's sister, for the first time and describing her as a "beautiful girl" (243), and "the most interesting female countenance she had ever seen" (243). We will now look more upon Adeline and Clara's relationship.

There is also the story of Clara's lute, which some critics have read as an autoerotic reading<sup>14</sup>. The lute, with erotic resonance in the eighteenth century, becomes a symbol for female intimacy and pleasure. Clara receives the lute from her father, and almost immediately is not able to put it down. She "played it again and again" (249) and ended up "neglecting her duties" (249). She even admits herself that she "cannot conquer the temptation" of the lute.

When Adeline arrives at Leloncourt with Peter, she becomes ill and ends up in the care of the La Luc family. As Clara first sees Adeline, she says that "there is something in her features that prejudices me in her favour" (256), and her aunt, Madame La Luc, answers back that, though she will not persuade her "to give up that romantic notion of judging people by their faces" (256), Adeline's condition is of much more importance than what her face looks like. Already we can see that Clara takes a bigger interest in Adeline than what would normally be for another person. During Adeline's recovery in the hands of the La Lucs, Clara develops a fondness over Adeline as "the sweetness of her behavior had entirely won the heart of Clara" (258).

Clara's shares her love for the lute with Adeline, and as Chow (2018) points out; "Adeline and Clara share an art-making practice that certainly segues into a particularly erotic relationship"<sup>15</sup>. Later when Adeline part ways with Clara and her father La Luc, she "parted from her friend with many tears, and much anxiety for her welfare, but under a hope of soon meeting again" (337). The affection shown between the two heroines of this story tells us that maybe they were closer than just friends.

It is also interesting to look at when Adeline meets Theodore again after parting ways; she first and foremost "receive him as the friend who, she was indebted for her preservation" and then as "the lover who deserved, and possessed, her tenderest affection" (355). In other words, Theodore is first her friend, then a lover, which he only is because he sacrifices so much for Adeline. The rejection and disinterest of the men in the story adds to the queer layer in the

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<sup>14</sup> Chow 2018

<sup>15</sup> Chow 2018: 198

same way that Adeline and Clara's lute playing does, because both parts somewhat reject heteronormativity.

## Conclusion

In this thesis I have explored a queer layer to two gothic fiction texts from the eighteenth century. The question of sexuality was not necessarily the same as it is today in 2022, but nevertheless some comparisons can be made.

In *Zofloya* we can see a contesting of the female gothic, as our main heroine does not employ a hyper-feminine persona. In this novel we see a changing of the gender spectrum, where Victoria possesses both female and male features, not fitting completely in neither the male or female gothic. The other characters around her have all strong opinions of her features, and they are a central part of how they interact with her. Some critics have read this novel as a gender fluid reading, while others, like Zigarovich, have read it as a full trans-approach. The relationship between the females in the novel can also be seen as homoerotic in some parts, as with Catau and Lilla in relationship with Victoria.

*The Romance of The Forest* also contests the female gothic in a way, as the main heroine Adeline, shows an extreme disinterest of the men in the story. Where others may fall for the demon lover or the chaste lover, Adeline at first falls for neither. The queer layer does not have to be explicit homosexual in any way, but rather just a rejection of heteronormativity. Adeline also shows more interest in the other women in the novel however, adding somewhat to the homoerotic part of the queer layer.

The relationship these two heroines, Victoria and Adeline, have with the other characters shows a rejection of heteronormativity, and thus adding this queer layer to the texts. The gothic genre was as said a testing ground to challenge the status quo in the society in which the texts were written. Without the gothic genre, queer books today might not even have a place in literature, and we have much to thank authors like Ann Radcliffe and Charlotte Dacre, for taking the first step.

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