

MYTHICAL CREATURES: THE GOTHIC/ROMANTIC EVOLUTION OF THE
PAINED FEMALE RAPE VICTIM

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Mythical Creatures: The Gothic/Romantic Evolution of the Pained Female Rape Victim

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Rape myths have almost always had a place in literature. Yet, Gothic/Romantic works depicted new and shocking images of the female rape victim, with a particular emphasis on pain. Works like Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* and Percy Shelley's *The Cenci* break the stereotypical myths written about rape victims in works like Henry Fielding's *Rape upon Rape* and Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*. The transition from 18th century literature into Gothic/Romantic literature marked an evolution in sensibility, which led the reader to feel a stronger sense of sympathy for women and the rape victim by focusing on pain. Works that represented rape as humorous or harmless may have been provoked by socioeconomic changes, while works that showed the myths about rape to be fallacious advanced those same socioeconomic changes.

In February 1730, Francis Charteris was sentenced to death for the rape of Ann Bond, his maidservant. Five months later, Henry Fielding made rape the subject of his comedy, *Rape upon Rape*, mocking a corrupt system in which men might be made to suffer because of the false accusations of women. It would have been impossible for audience members to miss this connection to contemporary society. Charteris was an aristocrat, infamously known for his sexually abusive relationships with women. His trial was quite scandalous and topical. This would be one of the few trials during this period where the rapist was convicted of his accused crime. Fielding's play satirizes this idea by portraying a corrupt Justice named Squeezum who bullies a woman into falsely accusing a politician of rape, for his own fraudulent means. The timing of *Rape upon Rape* allowed viewers to connect Fielding's story about a woman lying about rape to one of the few cases where a man was actually convicted of rape. It gave people the chance to scoff at the idea that Charteris could be guilty, and it added to the level of doubt people felt towards rape victims. Fielding's work perpetuated a literary tradition inspired by the myths people believed about rape and women. Romantic and Gothic authors would counter these ideas in extreme ways that would mark the end of the sadistic enjoyment of rape fiction.

This culture and counter-culture of rape fiction has been mostly ignored by critics, except for a few notable exceptions. Feminist authors frequently comment on the symbolism of patriarchal power found in rape fiction, but they tend to avoid looking at literal interpretations of rape in fiction or the direct connections rape had with the contemporary audiences of the 18th and early 19th centuries. They favor analyzing attempted rape in fiction and the symbolic value of attempted rape or symbolic values of representations of rape in a small number of works, such as those

like *Clarissa*. Critics like Kathryn Steele, Daniel Whitaker, Ewha Chung and Jessica Leiman discuss symbolic rape in *Clarissa*, while many authors, like Silvia Greenup, link the work to William Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece*, rather than issues in 18th century English society. Few authors write about the troubling nature of rape in Fielding's work,¹ while even fewer write about rape in Gothic and Romantic works like Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* and Percy Shelley's *The Cenci*. The problem with focusing mostly on symbolic rape and ignoring revolutionary texts' interpretations of rape is that historical context is overlooked. When one considers 18th century texts like Fielding's *Rape upon Rape* and Richardson's *Clarissa* in conversation with each other and the culture at large, then the real motives behind the shocking depictions of rape in the Gothic and Romantic works that succeeded them can be learned. Allowing the cultural context to influence one's interpretation of instances of rape in fiction leads to one seeing the myths about rape that were prevalent in this time period and the ways in which revolutionary authors fought against them. The decline in popularity of rape myths in fiction might suggest that they succeeded; however, it is more important that they tried, as their attempt reflects the acceptance of social changes occurring for women in society. Gothic and Romantic works, like *The Monk* and *The Cenci*, are revolutionary texts, which display the rape myths employed by Fielding and his kin, while also obliterating them by shining a light on their fallaciousness. By refuting commonly believed myths about rape, these authors depict that rape is unnatural and a real problem in society that should be fixed.

¹ As with other works about rape, critics focus more on the symbolic value of rape in Fielding's writing, which serves to portray corruption and hypocrisy. A search of secondary literature for criticism of Fielding on the subject of rape provides one with mostly articles like, "The Politics of Fielding's Coffee-House Politician," by Bertrand Goldgar, which specifically focus on the politics surrounding Fielding, while treating rape as a means for depicting politics, but not analyzing rape by itself.

Rape myths tend to resurge with renewed popularity in periods of social change. In Chaucer's era, the changing conditions of peasants along with the peasant revolts marked a major period of social change, as well as a popular tradition of mythically inspired rape narratives. The end of slavery in America was another period of change, reflected in the myth that African-American men want to rape Caucasian women. Even during the 1980s, particularly during the burgeoning women's rights movement, there was a renewed belief in myths about rape. The 18th and early 19th centuries were a period of changing socioeconomic roles, particularly for women. Masculine resentment at these changes is displaced onto women through perpetuating myths about rape that are not true. Rape as an action and societal symbol serves to reinforce masculine authority and therefore the status quo. The resurgence of popularity of rape myths in this period can be linked to the socioeconomic changes in society. The Gothic/Romantic counter-culture response to these rape myths occurs at the height of this socioeconomic change. These authors portray rape myths as faulty to represent those who were not happy with the status quo or the damaging myths about women's sexuality that developed as a result. Lewis and Shelley present myths about rape—as well as unreasonable masculine rage towards women—as erroneous beliefs formed on needless fear. As these myths even prove challenging today, it is clear that they have a strong hold on the human mind. Yet sudden fluctuations in these beliefs can reveal important things about social change and desires for social change. Humorous rape stories would be replaced with more sympathetic ones to generate empathy for women to allow for or to reflect the better acceptance of their subtly improving social conditions.

Fielding and the Culture of Rape

Fielding and his contemporaries operated on the foundation of basic erroneous myths about rape—ones that society took for granted to be true. One myth was the idea of the failed courtship. This myth suggests that women claim to be raped when they have given into their sexual desires while being courted. In this period, courtship was a game of flirting and denial; it was the woman's job to keep her suitor at bay until they were married. Occasionally, couples had sex before marriage, but it was not considered a failed courtship, unless they had sex and then did not fulfill their promises and marry. This myth suggested that women claim to be raped to hide the shame of their moral weakness and failed courtship. Another commonly believed myth about rape was the idea that a rape was the fault of the victim herself. It was accepted that if a woman was raped, she must have broken one or more of the social rules designed to keep her safe and therefore she deserved to be raped as punishment. This links to the next accepted myth—there was only safety in the home. It was believed that if a woman left the safety of her home, then she deserved what happened to her. This idea also allowed safety with a woman's family members, as this was a symbolic type of home. If a woman deliberately left her home or family, it was an accepted belief that she deserved whatever happened to her. This is because of yet another myth which suggests that rape is a natural occurrence in society. Sexual violence is treated as a devilish force created by God to punish women for breaking the rules of society and leaving the safety of their homes. Finally, popular myth also stated that rape was a death sentence. If a woman was raped, her good reputation was forever tarnished and she was no longer marriageable. As she was considered her

father's property, a raped woman would be considered dead because she could no longer serve her function as a woman of marriageable worth. This myth allowed the acceptability of sentencing convicted rapists to death, as they essentially robbed the girl's father of his goods, an offence meriting death. Fielding will invoke these myths as established truths. Richardson will also reference these myths in an attempt to make his readers feel sympathy for these circumstances; this attempt is destined to fail because it builds its argument by accepting these myths which people already believed. In contrast, Lewis and Shelley directly defy these myths and prove them faulty. It becomes clear that 18th century rape fiction started out operating on a system of problematic myths that the Gothic/Romantic would later destroy.

Fielding by no means invented rape myths, nor started the trend of their use in literature. He was actually writing after the end of a popular tradition of satirical rape in Restoration drama. Yet, his play, *Rape upon Rape*, once more brings these unsound myths to life on stage, as part of a resurgence in the popularity of rape myths.²

Fielding also links rape to corrupt, lying women; this concept would speak to men of this period who felt resentful of the cultural discussions, which would eventually lead to socioeconomic changes for women towards the end of the 18th century. *Rape upon Rape* would be one of the first of a new trend of humorous rape stories, not just in Fielding's own works, but in those of many of his contemporaries as well. Fielding would go on to write *Joseph Andrews* (1742), *Jonathan Wild* (1743) and *Tom Jones* (1749), which made light of rape attempts, regardless of whether they were portrayed as lies or not. Fielding's comical depictions of rape have been mostly ignored by

² When compared to Restoration drama, Fielding's interpretations of rape might seem more sentimentalized in some cases. This possibly suggests a subtle, morally improving change to the tradition of rape drama.

critics,³ save for their symbolic value of political corruption. These depictions have been clustered together by Simon Dickie in “Fielding’s Rape Jokes.” This article examines Fielding’s use of rape in fiction, as well as the literary tradition of comical rape, which became popular again during this period. He argues that even Fielding’s translation of Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria* was skewed towards his opinions about rape. Fielding treats rape humorously, potentially because he did not believe it was a serious problem, as he seemed to believe ‘genuine rape’ was very rare.⁴ However, context is also important in Fielding’s work. Although he frequently made light of rape in his stories, it was usually to serve a political purpose. Rape humor in *Rape upon Rape*, for example, depicted his passionate hatred for judicial corruption. Charteris was technically convicted of rape, but everyone knew he was only convicted because he had made too many enemies at that point, making him the perfect example for Fielding to represent judicial corruption. Similarly, by satirizing a woman who secretly desires to be raped, Fielding could also represent sexual hypocrisy, another concept that concerned him. Even when Fielding represents the threatened rape of a female character, Sophia, in *Tom Jones*, it is to depict corruption in the characters that planned the rape. This scene also uses an element of comedy, as Fielding’s satirical style demands, in order to mock concepts of which he does not approve.⁵ In this sense, Fielding may not view rape as a joke, but he is certainly willing to satirize it as a tool for repudiating political corruption and hypocrisy. In spite of this, Fielding’s use of rape jokes to represent hypocrisy in its many forms

³ Susan Staves, cited by Simon Dickie, is an exception to this rule.

⁴ See *The Correspondence of Henry and Sarah Fielding* for the 15 October 1748 letter where Fielding says that Clarissa is a one in a thousand case of a ‘genuine rape.’ This suggests that he does not believe rape was a common or serious problem. The implication is that for every one thousand accusations of rape, 999 are false.

⁵ See chapter seven of Maurice Johnson’s *Fielding’s Art of Fiction* (1961) for more detail.

would encourage the tradition of damaging rape stories, made popular by the socioeconomic tension between men and women.

Fielding's *Rape upon Rape* preceded a pattern of satirical rape depictions, including ballads, pantomimes, bawdy verses and a restaging of Nicholas Brady's *The Rape*. While this tradition did exist in Restoration drama, Fielding may have made it relevant again in the 18th century by linking it to politically related issues in his time period, as he would do throughout his work. While *Rape upon Rape* might not have been overly influential or Fielding's best known work, it would be one of the first in a series of comic depictions of rape in his writing. The stories following the Charteris case, including *Rape upon Rape*, were not wildly popular; however, they were a part of the critical discourse of this time period. Although one work might not have been overly popular, the works as a whole were well-received and topical enough to be consistently read and performed throughout the 18th century. As Dickie explains, these depictions of rape were humorous because "sexual violence was still a trivial matter in this culture" (574). As mentioned previously, it was believed that Charteris was only convicted because he made too many enemies. The culture as a whole did not feel sympathy for rape victims; instead, they found jokes about rape very humorous. When Fielding revised *Rape upon Rape*, he even added an epilogue directly mocking the women in his audience. He suggested that they came to the play upon the promise of multiple rape scenes, and that women would not be disappointed by the bawdy nature of the play—instead they would be disappointed that no instance of rape occurs on stage. This epilogue brings to light the popularity of rape in fiction, as the promise of a rape scene was enough to draw an audience. Yet, it also shows the very nature of humor in this period, that Fielding felt safe asking women to laugh at

themselves with regards to sexual violence which could easily be committed upon themselves.

In the 18th century, representations of rape in fiction encouraged a cathartic effect on the reader. Some works, like those by Fielding, encouraged the reader to laugh, while others alleviated guilt by portraying the prevention of sexual violence against innocent women. Melodramas in this period frequently portrayed scenes of attempted rape in favor of representations of rape. R. Branca's article, "Melodrama, Convention, and Rape," describes the pattern of the threatened rape scene in melodramas. Branca explains that these scenes were so popular that even if the scene was a minor part of the play, advertisements would depict it because an attempted rape in a play would draw an audience. Branca argues that the fascination with these plays was largely due to their cathartic effect. Male viewers could abject their feelings of guilt onto the rapist in these plays. This guilt could be based on their feelings of sexual desire, power or privilege over women. Melodramas could alleviate this guilt by allowing male viewers to project their positive feelings towards women onto the family member who saves the girl from attempted rape. In this way, men can alleviate guilt for their status in society and reinforce the status quo by feeling comforted in the knowledge that the system works. These plays prove that there is safety in the home, as represented in the protective family figure. This tradition of rape as entertainment works to dismiss rape as a serious problem, and as Branca argues, it succeeds in alleviating guilt and reinforcing traditional gender roles.

Comedy functions in the same way, as it has a similar cathartic effect on the reader. Philosopher Slavoj Žižek, in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, argues that entertainment is used to prevent social change; specifically, irony and laughter are

used to prevent the “ruling ideology” from being “taken seriously or literally” (28). In this sense, laughing at political and social conditions serves a cathartic purpose that alleviates a person’s desire to cause social change. If the problems of the ruling ideology are not taken seriously by the people, they will not see a reason to fight for change. Žižek suggests that, in this scenario, the most dangerous thing to those in power would be people taking their ideologies in a literal sense. This argument suggests that while Fielding may not have intended to dismiss rape as a social ill, it may have inadvertently occurred when he satirized rape. Even if the scene was initially serious (as with Sophia in *Tom Jones*) the use of comedy, according to Žižek, would have a cathartic effect on one exposed to it. This effect would allow one to dismiss rape as a problem, as the joking nature of the work suggests that it is not something to be taken seriously.

Fielding is tapping into this philosophy with his comical interpretation of rape—perhaps unintentionally. This type of laughter is not only encouraged in plays, but it is also invoked in 18th century joke books. In another article by Dickie, “Hilarity and Pitilessness in the Mid-Eighteenth Century: English Jestbook Humor,” he explains the prevalence of sadistic humor that made fun of the most disinherited: the poor, the disabled and women. Usually jokes about women were about them pretending to be raped when justifying an illegitimate child or attempting to receive child support. Similarly, Fielding’s jokes were about how women would flirt with accused rapists because they secretly hoped to be raped themselves, or how women would pretend to be raped to cover up their own moral weaknesses for giving into their sexual desires. Dickie argues that these jokes highlight what can be called a Hobbesian view, that men are sadistic and selfish creatures, without a strong sense of

sympathy.⁶ Sadistic humor allows people to subvert their sympathy and cathartically repress the acknowledgement of the necessity of change.

In order to properly understand what type of change is being repressed through rape humor or catharsis, one must consider the historical conditions about political, social and economic issues facing 18th century society. Sentimental fiction like Richardson's *Clarissa* attempts to break the tradition of rape humor by replacing humor with a sense of sympathy. Gothic and Romantic works, like *The Monk* and *The Cenci*, directly reject rape humor and Richardson's type of sympathy in favor of a much stronger sense of compassion, which is forceful and political in nature.

The Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries' Understanding of Sex and Corresponding Changing Societal Values

The omnipresence of works like Fielding's began to decline after the early 19th century. The late 18th and early 19th centuries were the height of the social change developing slowly during the 18th century. It is often argued that the Gothic aesthetic and the Romantic genre absorbed the politics of this period. Unfortunately, representations of rape in fiction are often not discussed in terms of rape itself, but more often in terms of either extreme debauchery, like in the case of Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* or patriarchal power, as is in the case of Percy Shelley's *The Cenci*. However, these works mark a change in how rape is represented in fiction, which might be indicative of society's changing views about women's sexuality.

⁶ Much of the 18th century was spent trying to disprove Thomas Hobbes's misanthropic vision of humanity. In one of his most famous works, *Leviathan*, Hobbes reflects on the nature of humor. He suggests that humor is a cruel thing used to point out inadequacies in others, in an effort to praise oneself.

Anna Clark, in “Female Sexuality,” describes women’s sexuality most aptly as, “both invisible and all too visible” (54). In the 18th and early 19th centuries there was a transition in beliefs about sexuality. Clark describes the changes that occurred in society once doctors began to believe that sexual pleasure was not linked to conception in women: “If women’s sexual pleasure was not necessary for conception, female desire would be downplayed” (56). Nancy Cott also suggests that “‘passionlessness’ could be quite useful to women, enabling them to assert moral superiority and rationality; by claiming sexlessness, they also had an excuse to say ‘no’ to their husbands and avoid unwanted pregnancies” (Clark 56). This also allowed room for rape victims to seem more sympathetic, as “[a] new image of the unmarried mother as a victim of male lust began to compete with the older image of the disorderly woman as the new institutions failed to control illegitimacy and prostitution” (55). Clark also proposes that while this was a time of increased sexual repression, it was also a period of intense debate about sexuality, which slightly complicates the issue:

Sexual attitudes of the eighteenth century are difficult to grasp, because sexual morality was so controversial and debated; no consensus could be reached. Popular attitudes towards sex contrasted with those of the authorities, who tried in vain to stem a growing tide of extramarital sex. Older ideas about female desire persisted and in fact were popularized while new medical knowledge challenged them. Sexual libertinism contributed to a revolutionary ferment, but a backlash lurked on the horizon. (59)

Clark argues that although sexuality was repressed more than it had been in the previous period, sex was now talked about more than ever before. Also, the prevalence of debate on the subject underscored the fact that no one knew anything for sure and that people believed sexuality was an issue up for debate. Clark also suggests that authorities on the subject argued against public opinion, in a constant effort to reduce sex outside of marriage. However, people did not simply give up their old ideas about sexuality; medical knowledge may have challenged those beliefs, but it could not eliminate them entirely. There were also constant polemics between liberal and conservative sexuality, according to Clark, which amounted to tug-of-war. The eventual “backlash” described was a religious call for more chastity and resulted in several attempts to ban prostitution in the mid 18th century. In spite of all of this increased discourse about women’s sexuality, it was still not respectable for women to join in this debate themselves, as Clark states that this was still too indelicate a subject.

Extramarital sex was an increasing problem in this period. Between 1750 and 1850 more people were having sex outside of marriage, leading to an increase in illegitimate children born. Edward Shorter’s “Illegitimacy, Sexual Revolution, and Social Change in Modern Europe” describes the temporary explosion of extramarital sex and illegitimate children in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Shorter stresses that even engaged couples were having premarital sex more than in previous periods. According to Clark, part of the problem was economic. Middle and working-class women were willing to have premarital sex with the promise of marriage. However, more and more men were backing out of proposals due to financial problems. This led to more illegitimate children born. Unfortunately, due to the number of

illegitimate children and the seemingly looser sexual values, there was also a fear that society was crumbling. This led to more thorough attempts to repress sexuality.

The publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), by Mary Wollstonecraft, further added to the concern that society was in a period of decline. Wollstonecraft's philosophical tract is an early call for more rights for women, which among other things, stresses equal education. The proposal for women's rights and the burgeoning development of feminism in this period provoked alarm, as did most social change. Barbara Taylor's book, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination*, describes the social impact of Wollstonecraft's work as a source for both change and fear thereof. According to Taylor, Wollstonecraft's work was so massively popular that libraries could not keep it in stock. Yet the constant dichotomy between repressive and liberal sexual politics is once more invoked with Wollstonecraft's tract. While it was wildly popular, it was also commonly scorned by critics: "The intellectual hubris which had given birth to Wollstonecraft's book was almost wholly discredited, and text and author both fiercely condemned" (27). This critical response is typical of the fear of changing social roles. It added to the fear of society's decline, as any type of change is considered bad. Wollstonecraft's tract was also considered an attack on male power (although more extreme feminists would argue that it did not attack male power enough), as any attempt to gain more rights for women was perceived as taking power from men. Most importantly, however, the publication of this political tract "marked a new stage in feminist advocacy, partly due to its radicalisation of women's claims, but also because of its symbolic stature" (55). It had a major social impact, inspiring a more heated debate about women's rights than ever before.

This tension was further increased by the beginning of the factory system in this period. Economic problems occurred for a number of reasons. In *Women's Silence*, Clark describes these hardships:

In the North of England, production moved out of the home and small workshops into large, alienating factories. The enclosure movement, agricultural depression, and capitalist farming methods impoverished labourers who previously had at least a small plot of land or were provided room and board by their employers. Depression and deskilling deprived London artisans of pride in their craft and their prosperous standard of living. Most of all, the Napoleonic Wars (1798-1815) and subsequent economic slumps caused cyclical unemployment, exacerbated by the cruelties of the New Poor Law after 1834. (13)

These economic problems led working men to marry less, due to financial constraints, leaving more women to support illegitimate children on their own, as mentioned previously. This uneasiness increased further when poor women competed with men in the job market: “The competition between low waged female workers and skilled craftsmen exacerbated sexual antagonism when weaving, tailoring, and shoe binding moved into sweatshops or factories” (13). Even though the number of women taking male jobs would have been very small, any number would leave an opening for men to blame women for all economical hardships they faced. Furthermore, with men marrying less, women were blamed for their amorality as unwed mothers and the symbol of the decrease in marriage. This led to even further resentment of women. This instability created a desire to reinforce the status quo.

These economic and social conditions are important because they generated cultural myths about rape that had a profound influence on literature, which absorbed this social tension. Clark argues, in *Women's Silence*, that men used myths about rape to scare women back into the home, where they were perceived as less of a threat. I argue that this fear generated an audience for rape fiction. Authors like Fielding would use this popularity to support rape myths, while authors like Richardson would try to displace them. Ultimately, both would reinforce these myths in the audiences' minds because they reflected a real social fear. Towards the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, works like *The Monk* and *The Cenci* would dramatically attack these myths by pointing out the faulty logic on which they are built; these works also use violence and harsh imagery to disprove such myths. This is suggestive of the dichotomy between accepting social change and the violent anger provoked against it. The tensions brewed by socioeconomic changes reached a critical point by the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century. Issues regarding women's sexuality and working status could no longer be laughed at or ignored. These issues either inspired anger or hope. The violence in the Gothic/Romantic texts reflects the violent feelings of resentment felt towards women. Characters like Shelley's Cenci and Lewis' Ambrosio represent this male rage towards women. However, the overall impression of both *The Cenci* and *The Monk* served to break this tension by presenting this rage as misplaced.

***Clarissa* and the Counter-Culture of Rape Fiction**

It is difficult to pinpoint when stories depicting sexual violence became popular in the 18th century. Technically, there has always been a level of popular demand for rape stories, going back as far as the Middle Ages. Geoffrey Chaucer, in

particular, favored stories about rape and it was clear these 14th century stories held audience attention as well. As mentioned previously, rape narratives seem to reach peak popularity in periods marked by social change, like that of Chaucer. As feminists critics often argue, rape is about masculine power more than sexuality; rape myths reinforce the dominant power structure in the face of social tension and fear of change. The 18th century marked a period with both an interest in stories about sexual violence and a proliferation of the myth that rape was an unstoppable force outside of the home. As discussed earlier, melodramas were infamous for profiting from the popularity of the threatened rape scene, where a female victim escapes being raped by the intervention of a third party—usually a family member. Representations of rape in fiction, as opposed to threats of rape, were rarer in this period. While Fielding would often make jokes about rape in fiction, he was not interested in portraying sexual violence in fiction. Fielding and his ilk were more interested in displaying commonly believed myths about rape than admitting to the reality of it as a social problem.

The epistolary novel *Clarissa* (1747-8), by Samuel Richardson, seems to be in direct conversation with Fielding's work.⁷ Richardson's story is unique in its portrayal of rape as something that really happens in the story; it is not simply a threat or joke. It also marks the involvement of the sensibility movement directly with rape. Richardson invokes sensibility as a direct response to Fielding's sadistic sense of humor on the subject.

The growing fashion for sensibility had a significant impact on the way rape was viewed in the 18th century, particularly in *Clarissa*. G. J. Barker-Benfield, in *The*

⁷ *Clarissa* might have been responding to the way Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* mocked Richardson's *Pamela*.

Culture of Sensibility, establishes that the sensibility movement had a major influence on the values portrayed in literature. He suggests that “proponents of the cultivation of sensibility came to invest it with spiritual and moral values” (xvii). Sensibility meant not only seeing a problem and feeling sympathy, but also causing someone to actively want to fix the problem. This could be either a character in a story or the reader responding to the story. It was believed that the nerves were actually affected by sensibility, causing an emotional reaction in a character, viewer or reader. This was particularly relevant to women, as they “dominated the writing and reading of this literature” (xvii). While Wollstonecraft was concerned that the connection sensibility had with women would make them seem weak, philosophers stressed the importance of this movement for everyone within the culture: “Environmental psychology argued that human selves were made, not born. Therefore, women could capitalize on the ‘potentialities for mankind’ stemming from this aspect of the scientific revolution” (xvii); “The corollary of Locke’s assumption that human minds were born as if they were blank sheets of paper was the unleashing of the power to shape their own lives” (2). This revolutionary idea allowed the possibility for change and growth, which opened up possibilities for the women’s movement. Sensibility was a part of the evolution of humanity that increased the potential for morality. Barker-Benfield argues that “sensibility became a culture” (215) that was tied into social and economic change.

The culture of sensibility was born at a time when women were considered an enemy presence in the male public sphere (as opposed to remaining in the female domestic sphere—the home). In one aspect, sensibility aided women in allowing them to show moral superiority, while in another it encouraged delicate behavior that

could be interpreted as weak.⁸ Men, in contrast, were socialized to have a much freer lifestyle. The image of the rake was very popular throughout the 17th century.

Although the rake continued into the 18th century as a symbol of masculine freedom, there was also a call for the reformation of male behavior. Sensibility became a quality desirable in a gentleman, almost in defiance of the rake symbol. The culture of sensibility also seemed to be responding to Hobbes' notion that men were inherently selfish and cruel. Richardson's *Clarissa* reacts to the sadistic humor in Fielding's work by using elements of sensibility to make Clarissa a pitiable character. Dickie notes that even Fielding himself resentfully admits to the sympathetic appeal of Clarissa. Richardson's novel marks the start of applying sensibility to cases of rape to inspire sympathy and attempt to change how rape is viewed.

Clarissa tells the story of a young girl's life and her relationship with men. Clarissa comes from a good family and is old enough to be married. Early on, she rejects the arranged marriage her family has planned for her because she finds her suitor, Mr. Solmes, ugly and unpleasant. This begins her correspondence with the unsavory character, Lovelace. Clarissa does not seem interested in getting married; she expresses several times that she would like to live in peace, without a husband. Once she even states, "I will live single with all my heart, if that will do" (139). Clarissa expresses her distaste for marrying a man she considers amoral. Overall, she is not interested in Lovelace as a suitor either. Even when she considers him the better alternative to Mr. Solmes, she still finds his morality reprehensible. It is particularly remarkable how, early in the novel, Clarissa attempts to convince Lovelace that she is

⁸ Wollstonecraft was particularly concerned by this issue, as she feared women were socialized to see themselves as delicate, weak and naturally inferior.

not interested in him: “I thought it best to convince him by the coolness and indifference with which I repulsed his forward hopes...that he was not considerable enough in my eyes to make me take over-ready offence at what he said, or how he looked: in other words, that I had not value enough for him to treat him with peculiarity either by smiles or frowns” (48). She discovered this method of expressing disinterest from Lovelace himself, who told her that in courtship men are encouraged by both pleasing a woman and making her angry. This scene highlights the problem of courtship in this period. Clarissa used her mind to think of a way to convince Lovelace that she was not interested in him romantically, because simply saying so or seeming upset would only encourage him further.

Many cases of sexual violence in the late 18th and early 19th centuries were committed in a failed courtship. In *Women's Silence*, Clark describes this problem in terms of the rape of middle-class and working-class women: “The majority of women who had been raped named men who courted them as their assailants. The confusion between rape and seduction thus reflected men’s behavior as well as middle-class discourses” (77). Like Lovelace, men courting women did not have a clear understanding of where seduction ended and sexual violence began. Clark stresses that when crimes of sexual violence are reported to an employer or to the police, women’s accounts are misinterpreted to mean that they were seduced, rather than raped, because women often used words like ‘taken advantage of’ to describe the assault (79). As women were not allowed to speak of rape or sexuality in more direct language, they were forced to use euphemisms like this. Men taking these reports chose to interpret the language to mean that the woman simply regretted giving in to a seductive man. The trouble Clarissa must go through to discourage Lovelace

represents the complexity of seduction in this time period. Clark also points out that because all that was needed was the promise of marriage for one to be considered married,⁹ many men would take advantage of this to have sex with women and then abandon them—denying their commitment. In these cases women could be blamed for giving into seduction, as it was not easy to prove that she had the promise of marriage. This further blurred the lines between rape and seduction within courtship by enforcing the belief in women's corruptibility when it came to sexuality. One of the many rape myths Clark describes is that women only claim to be raped to cover up for the moral weakness of giving in to seduction. The thought Clarissa puts into this problem illuminates it, while also depicting it as the woman's problem; *Clarissa* suggests that it is a woman's job to convince a man she is not interested, as Clarissa tries to do with Lovelace. Her failure could be seen as symbolic of the failure of this concept; however, Clarissa's indecision about marrying Lovelace would suggest that it is in fact Clarissa who is at fault for leading Lovelace on and not properly discouraging his behavior. She does not make herself clear about whether she wants to marry Lovelace or not. Clarissa claims to hate Lovelace, yet continues to correspond with him privately, something that would have stood out as very inappropriate to readers. In this way, Clarissa embraces Lovelace's model that suggests that 'no' really means 'yes,' as she contradicts herself in her affections for him. An 18th century reader could easily see this as legitimizing Clarissa's later rape. She is only able to redeem herself and her authenticity, in the eyes of the reader, by

⁹ Before the Marriage Act 1753, also known as Hardwick's Act, marriage did not legally require a formal ceremony. Hardwick's Act required a legal ceremony for a marriage to be binding, in order to stop problems like those outlined here. *Clarissa* was written in 1747-8, just before this act, when public discourse about the need for marriage reform would have been abundant.

dying in the end to prove her remorse and newfound sincerity. Thus, Richardson's novel can easily be interpreted as supporting the beliefs of the status quo because it relies on the myths of the failed courtship and blaming the victim.

Another myth Clark describes is the belief that a woman's virtue was only safe in her home. Whether it was her father's home or her husband's home, a woman could be considered culpable for a rape if she willingly left the safety of her home. In this sense, Clarissa's crucial mistake was leaving her house. Lovelace went to great lengths to lure Clarissa away from home, but if she had not taken the first step, he would have failed in his plans. Many stories like this support the myth that there is safety for women in the home. Clark suggests this myth exists to keep women from challenging their roles. Yet, Clark also challenges the validity of this myth by suggesting that many rapes occur in the home by suitors, acquaintances and relatives. For working-class or middle-class women, it could also happen in a home they worked at by a co-worker or employer.¹⁰ One of the most famous pictures in *Clarissa*, by Francis Hayman, depicts her abduction from home. In this picture, Clarissa is being led away by Lovelace, who appears to be gently coaxing her with an arm around her back. Clarissa, in turn, is looking back at her house nervously, like she is not sure she should go with him. This picture adds to the feeling of blaming the victim for leaving the safety of her home, by emphasizing Clarissa's indecision and Lovelace's temperance.

As the line between rape and seduction was often blurred, Clark suggests that rape could lead to marriage, often to save the dignity of both families. Men would

¹⁰ See appendix II in Anna Clark's *Women's Silence*, for charts. These charts only portray a rough estimate, as many rapes are never reported.

even rape women in order to force their compliance to a marriage, as marriage was the only thing that could save a raped woman's reputation. Lovelace represents this dilemma in his plan to rape Clarissa. He feels this rape will serve two purposes. First, it will give Clarissa no choice but to marry him. Second, it would give him a chance to test her morals, by seeing how well she could resist his advances. This represents the myths of women's morality resting in their ability to resist seduction, as well as the blurred line between seduction and rape.

In fiction, when a rape did not end in marriage, death was the inevitable result. This represents the reality of social death that would occur if a woman was raped. This concept forced women to treat their virginity as a commodity and to guard it as such. Working-class women were also beginning to be held at this standard, as increased literacy "exposed these women to middle-class moral standards" (Clark 79). If working-class women wanted to be employed in almost any job, they needed to maintain "a respectable character" (79). A woman's sexuality, and potentially her virginity, was directly connected to her financial situation through employment. Without this respectability, she could lose her means to support herself. In this sense, rape led to a type of death, as it could lead to the destruction of a woman's livelihood and life as she knew it. For middle- and upper-class women, rape could similarly ruin their reputation and any future marriage prospects. They would lose their social status; though they were still alive, they would be treated as if they were not. Clarissa's death at the end of the novel was the inevitable result of her rape.¹¹ This was also reflected in the laws about rape. If one was convicted of raping an honorable

¹¹ See Terry Eagleton's *The Rape of Clarissa*, for more on this metaphor, specifically with regards to Clarissa.

woman, he would be sentenced to death. The law considered rape a form of murder (or theft), which left the girl's father without a daughter.

Lovelace obviously did not care about death (social or otherwise) being a possible consequence of his violent actions and instead functions as a figure who stands clearly against sensibility. Barker-Benfield suggests that Lovelace directly rejects any sympathy he might be tempted to feel for Clarissa:

Clarissa was suspected by [her family] of feigning sickness as a form of resistance. Lovelace joined them in expressing the view that women's illness was to be dismissed as a counter in sexual warfare. Clarissa, 'like the rest of her sex, can be ill or well when she pleases.' Lovelace warned her with horrible prescience, 'fainting will not save you.' Clarissa was up against the real horror: not a man who read her signs of weakness as power and desisted and, moreover, was then converted by them to the fantasy of deferential, sentimental husbandhood. Instead, Lovelace enjoyed Clarissa's tears and her distraction, her symptoms of virtuous distress, before he drugged and raped her. The power of a woman's weakness was revealed as fantasy, in contrast, to the reality of a man's power. (34)

Lovelace sees Clarissa in pain, reflects that he could feel sympathy, but instead chooses not to because he sees her pitiful state as a type of power. He believes it is a woman's trick to save herself by inspiring sympathy in others.¹² The scenes, in which

¹² Clarissa's display of sensibility would eventually evolve into something more eroticized in Gothic works like Ann Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* (1791). Fainting fits are portrayed as sexually alluring to the male characters, in Gothic works, as if to highlight men's insensibility in the face of

Lovelace expresses this belief, represent his stance against sensibility, essentially by arguing how much power it could have for women. By rejecting sensibility, Lovelace is recognizing its power to change society—something he would not want as a man in a powerful position.

Clarissa's response to the rape is not what Lovelace expected. She is even less agreeable to marriage, now that in her mind she is convinced of his evil nature. Her distraught response diffuses the idea that marriage is a viable solution to rape. In letter 314, where Clarissa describes the rape to her friend Anna, she makes it very clear that Lovelace is repulsive to her, describing him as a "[h]ateful," "cruel," "savage seducer" (1006). The moment of the rape itself shows clear signs the reader is meant to feel sympathy for Clarissa, as she describes her emotions in a plea to the reader's sensibility: "He terrified me with his looks, and with his violent emotions as he gazed upon me" (1010). She goes on to describe Lovelace as "fierce and wild," and claimed he grabbed her "with a vehemence in his grasp that hurt" her (1010). From here, she declares his misuse of her as a sign of "masculine violence" and "his barbarity" (1011). She concludes her account by exclaiming: "[T]hus barbarously was I treated by this villainous man!" (1011). This depiction of rape evoke the sense that Lovelace is horribly mistreating Clarissa. In this scene, her fear is repeated to the reader several times, as if to stress her helplessness. These descriptions make it easier for the reader to accept Clarissa's newfound consistency in hatred towards Lovelace, although it would not entirely discourage readers from partially blaming her.

women's displays of sensibility. Displaying insensibility like this might be meant to encourage men to be more sympathetic.

It is clear Richardson is attempting to evoke sensibility in this scene; however, many readers take this in different ways. It is often debated whether Clarissa is the more sympathetic character or if Lovelace is instead. “The Clarissa Project and Clarissa’s Reception,” by Florian Stuber and Margaret Anne Doody, considers Richardson’s open dialogue with readers and how that affected him as a writer. Angus Ross’ introduction to *Clarissa* stresses Richardson’s concern that Lovelace might be considered sympathetic. Richardson was aware that readers interpreted Lovelace as a sympathetic character, because he expressed love for Clarissa and readers saw her rejection as harsh. Clarissa could easily be seen as leading Lovelace on and then rejecting him on a whim. Judith Wilt’s article, “He Could Go No Farther,” even suggests that one could question whether Lovelace actually raped Clarissa or not. Lovelace’s seemingly charming, rakish personality¹³ accidentally allowed readers to connect with his character. Alternatively, society was much more familiar with demonizing female characters and denying them sympathy for rape. Richardson tried to rectify this in future editions, particularly with the use of footnotes. It is hard to say if he was really able to further affect readers’ and critics’ views on Lovelace. The subtitle of *Clarissa* makes it clear that Richardson intended to address the problem of rape and marriage: “The distresses that may attend the misconduct both of parents and children, in relation to marriage.” In this period, some believed that forcing one’s daughter to marry someone was akin to rape and that both

¹³ See Penelope Bigges’ article, “Hunt, Conquest, Trial: Lovelace and the Metaphors of the Rake,” for more detail on the rake metaphor in *Clarissa*. Essentially, the rake was a symbol for freedom; a rakish man served the societal function of representing that freedom. In this way, rakes could be forgiven for crimes like rape, as they were simply expressing the desires that supposedly all men have, but must repress. See letter 209 for Lovelace’s own relation of his rakish talents.

parents and children should agree to the union for it to be honorable.¹⁴ Clarissa seemed to view her arranged marriage to Solmes as a type of rape. The subtitle clearly references this disputed belief, as it suggests that both parents and children can make mistakes with regards to marriage. While Richardson does not think Clarissa is completely innocent in what happened, he is interested in the transgressions of her parents as well. Unfortunately the story does not express this sensibility in a way to which many readers could relate, making its value based in whatever the reader chooses to believe. As a whole, the novel is anti-sensibility and whether it means to or not, it supports the status quo, by enforcing rape myths. While Clarissa's pitiful state is evocative of sympathy, it is also easy to blame her for causing her own downfall by deliberately conversing with and thereby encouraging Lovelace's advances, while also rejecting offers of marriage for what seemed like little cause.

Dickie, in "Fielding's Rape Jokes," argues that sympathy for rape victims represents a cultural battle between Fielding and Richardson. He suggests that Richardson was the ultimate winner in this battle, because he was able to move Fielding emotionally with *Clarissa*. In a letter to Richardson, Fielding even admitted to being driven to tears by Clarissa's case, calling it one of the rare instances of real rape (590). Richardson's sensibility was effective on some level. However, Fielding could not resist ending this letter with a joke about rape. Overall, like Lovelace, Fielding resented feeling sympathy for women; he found Richardson's demand for sympathy "almost abusive" (590). The rivalry between the men was too strong. Richardson's call for sensibility clashed too much with Fielding's desire to laugh away rape as a social problem: "[Fielding's] recurring rape scenes manifest a career-

¹⁴ Daniel Defoe was one of the advocates of this belief.

long and increasingly urgent determination to keep the issue within realm of comedy” (573). As Žižek argues, laughter is used to suppress change; Fielding is unwilling to resign his position of power, so he uses humor as a way to keep power structures within his comfort realm, while attacking ideologies he disagreed with. This is a part of why sensibility progressively lessened towards the end of the 18th century.

Although Richardson could make someone like Fielding feel sympathy, the emotions generated could be easily ignored. Both Fielding and Lovelace could see the potential power women could be granted with sensibility and they actively chose to refuse them it. Furthermore, Richardson built sensibility by using the same rape myths that regularly turned playwrights like Fielding a profit. Although the readers could feel sympathy for Clarissa, they could also easily blame her for allowing Lovelace to court her and for leaving her home. Readers sympathized more with Lovelace due to critical mistakes on Richardson’s part by evoking the rape myths that reminded readers of a Fielding-like theatrical romp. The main difference for readers would be that in *Clarissa* there is a sad ending and the fallen woman is given a chance to redeem herself by dying gracefully, thus admitting that she deserves to be dead in the eyes of society.

The Gothic/Romantic Response to Rape Fiction

Gothic and Romantic literature are directly responding to both the failure of sensibility in rape narratives like *Clarissa*, and the pessimistic worldview of the sadistic enjoyment of others’ suffering. These texts attack the myths surrounding rape in society and attempt to better assault a reader’s sensibility in order to inspire change.

The Monk (1796), by Matthew Lewis, is written towards the end of the popularity of the culture of sensibility. However, *The Monk* internalized concepts of sensibility and made them relevant in a post-sensibility society in its attack of rape myths. This novel directly confronts the reader with the problems inherent in these myths and depicts how they cannot hold truth. Furthermore, Lewis uses sensibility in a way meant to inspire a type of pain in the reader that encourages an intense type of sympathy. This story uses the Gothic aesthetic to create sympathy and respond to the myths contemporary society believed about rape. Percy Shelley's *The Cenci* (1819) is a much later Romantic text, written well after the peak of the sensibility movement. Although written as a play, *The Cenci* was never staged. Most of the action, including Beatrice's rape, Cenci's death and multiple characters' torture, happens off stage, as is traditional with theater in this period. Like other Romantic works, Shelley invokes pain sensibility more subtly by breaking down the divide between mental and physical torment. Similar to Gothic works, Romantic sensibility invokes pain—however it also more subtly attacks the readers' senses with its breakdown of the mental and physical. In this way, the reader can feel pain mentally, by watching characters deteriorate mentally in response to physical pain. By observing madness in the character responding to physical pain, the reader is meant to feel a type of mental torment as well. Like *The Monk*, *The Cenci* undercuts myths about rape by showing them to be false, while also inspiring a deeper type of sensibility in the reader. The late 18th and early 19th centuries brought with them new forms of sensibility in Gothic and Romantic works.

The Gothic/Romantic type of sensibility inspired in these novels is more direct than traditional sensibility. In *Gothic Bodies: The Politics of Pain in Romantic*

Fiction, Steven Bruhm argues that literature in this period was focused on feelings and that sympathy began to evolve from a sensibility of emotion towards a sensibility based on physical or mental pain. Bruhm suggests that “the problem Romantic fiction will inherit from the literature of sensibility seems to be a problem of the imagining self’s role in the intersubjective, communal sharing of the other’s pained body. While this body makes possible an interconnection of subject and object, it does so by inducing pain in the observer who wishes to unite with the pained subject” (18). This hints at the idea that pain could be shared not only between characters in a story, but from characters to readers. This explains the Gothic and Romantic interest in bodily pain. Like with sensibility, the reader is meant to see someone in pain, feel sympathy and be inspired to act on that person’s behalf. Yet, Bruhm goes so far as to argue that the reader is meant to feel the pain with the character—thus creating “the problem of the Gothic body, and the self that is both always involved and always removed” (xx), as the reader is both experiencing the pain, but is removed from it. In this sense, “[p]ain...becomes the ontologically significant focused experience which, even if it comes sympathetically from the outside, is incontestably present in the self that feels it” (xxi). This is such a strong sense of sensibility that it mimics pain in the reader in an attempt to more strongly influence him. Bruhm suggests that sympathetic pain is the culmination of the sensibility movement, as these texts “transition from the age of sensibility to Romanticism” (xxi).

Rape has a natural connection to this type of sensibility. Bruhm argues that “susceptibility to pleasure bespeaks their bodies’ susceptibility to pain” (xiv). Rape is a concept that connects pleasure and pain directly. Men feel pleasure at their victims’ pain; rape is a type of sadistic pain. Many Gothic and Romantic texts invoke this sort

of pain to better inspire change: “Romantic authors share with their Gothic cousins a fascination with physical pain, and much Romantic production concerns itself with the implications of physical pain on the transcendent consciousness” (xvi). The Gothic’s focus on the fixed and limitation ties directly into Romanticism’s desire for escape through transcendence in these works. Bruhm argues that “to read the Gothic and Romantic together is to set in high relief the Gothic delimitation of the Romantic body” (xvi). The Gothic is focused on physical pain, while the Romantic incorporates the mind and blurs the line between mental and physical pain. Pain sensibility is the place where the Gothic and Romantic meet with the goal of social change.

Gothic works, like *The Monk*, focus on physical pain, while Romantic works, like *The Cenci*, emphasize the mental pain that haunts one after seeing or feeling physical pain. Decades after the demise of the sensibility movement, revolutionary works like these demand readers feel sympathy for those who suffer from the social ills of this society. Historically, the late 18th and early 19th centuries captured the peak of the social change. These works are representative of the social body that demanded changes for women socially, while also capturing the resentment many felt about those changes. Typical rape fiction of the 18th century simply focuses on this resentment (a common reaction to socioeconomic change). However, these revolutionary works also emphasize the need for change, in spite of how scary it might seem, by showing the collapse of families like that of Lewis’ Antonia and the Cenci family, in Shelley’s work.

These Gothic/Romantic works also attempted to distance themselves from the stories of Fielding’s era that were purely for amusement value. During the 18th century, even “a trial for rape [was] an excellent pastime” (Clark 35). Dramatic

pictures would be used to advertise rape trials, as if they were plays. The melodramas of this period advertised in the same way, using pictures depicting a near rape, to draw an audience. Newspaper accounts and court records were other methods to indulge in rape as a means of entertainment. Transcripts from rape trials were even printed in play form (Branca 35). The more political works of the late 18th and early 19th centuries distanced themselves from this tradition in the ways they depicted rape. Antonia's rape in *The Monk* focuses solely on her pain and suffering, adding a layer of unnaturalness as she was surrounded by corpses. The unsettling nature of her rape diminished its sadistic entertainment value and replaced it with something that was still entertaining, yet inspired sympathy in place of perverse delight. *The Cenci* deliberately does not depict the rape directly to diminish its pure entertainment value. Even Shelley's wife, Mary Shelley, wrote the rape in *Proserpine* as happening off-stage. This leaves the reader to only feel sympathy for the after effects of rape, and denies them the potential to delight in the rape scene itself. Pain sensibility exists in these works because they are able to subvert the pure enjoyment and entertainment tradition of rape narratives in this period, while exposing false myths about rape.

The strongest tool employed by both Lewis and Shelley to attack these myths was the image of incest in both stories. Incest was the ultimate taboo, which makes it near impossible to suggest that either woman could want to be raped in the form of courtship or could be blamed for it for leaving the home, as will be discussed later. Both Antonia and Beatrice are raped by their oldest male relatives (although unknown at the time to Antonia), which suggests a level of depravity on the male's part, as well as a level of innocence on the female's part. Because incest is such an extreme taboo, these stories unsettle all myths about rape and lead the reader to question what he

knows about sexuality and the traditional relationships between men and women. Incest works on several levels to refute commonly believed myths about rape. It undermines the myths that rape could be a seduction, that there is safety in the home, that it is the victim's fault and that it is natural. Yet by itself the idea that these girls are both raped by an older male relative works holistically to contest rape myths and persuade readers to see it as a serious social problem. Additionally, it challenges the reader to question whether he would want to see his own sister or daughter raped. It leads readers to realize that their disgust at raping their own family members should be applied to all women. If incestuous rape is nauseating, these authors suggest that all forms of rape should be upsetting for the reader. This idea effectively undermines the tradition of rape myths in society.

Myth of the Failed Courtship

One of the first rape myths *The Monk* addresses is the failed courtship myth. This myth suggests that women claim to be raped, when they are seduced due to their own moral weakness, while being courted. When Ambrosio first decides to seduce Antonia, he believes he can corrupt her morality through debate: "He easily distinguished the emotions which were favourable to his designs, and seized every means with avidity of infusing corruption into Antonia's bosom" (221). However, in spite of Ambrosio's skill as an orator, an intellectual and a debater, corrupting Antonia proved "no easy matter" (221). Her pure logic would crush his most developed argument against morality: "By a few simple words she frequently overthrew the whole bulk of his sophistical arguments, and made him conscious how weak they were when opposed to virtue and truth" (221). Not only is Antonia resisting corruption in these moments, she is also trying to bring Ambrosio back from

his evil ways. Her arguments, in their simplicity, showed Ambrosio “how weak” his theories really were (221). Antonia was gifted with intense feelings that “his precepts must be faulty,” due to her “excellent morals” and “strong sense of what was right” (221). First, this scene addresses the part of this myth that suggests women’s morals are weaker and can be corrupted through seduction. Lewis attacks this myth by presenting a man who is actively trying to corrupt a woman’s morals and having him fail miserably; Antonia’s morality is presented as something that cannot be corrupted.

Next, this scene leads to three deliberate rape attempts by Ambrosio. There is nothing that can be misinterpreted as a seduction that has gone wrong in these scenes. When Ambrosio feels he has coerced Antonia after she misunderstands him and admits to loving him, Ambrosio grabs Antonia and kisses her: “Ambrosio no longer possessed himself: wild with desire, he clasped the blushing trembler in his arms. He fastened his lips greedily upon hers, sucked in her pure delicious breath, violated with his bold hand the treasures of her bosom, and wound around him her soft and yielding limbs” (225). It is Ambrosio who is described as being out of control in this scene, not Antonia. This initial assault is also described in violent, aggressive terms like “possessed,” “wild,” “clasped,” “fastened,” “greedily,” “sucked,” “violated,” and “bold,” that contrasts with innocent terms like, “blushing,” “trembler,” “pure,” “soft” and “yielding.” These words depict Ambrosio as a forceful aggressor of the innocent Antonia. As mentioned earlier, women’s sexuality was considered less important in this time period, as the female orgasm was no longer seen as important to conception. With this in mind, this description of Antonia presents her as the ideal woman, as she is rejecting the sexual advances of Ambrosio.

However, one cannot ignore that Antonia did feel a mysterious type of passion for Ambrosio at the start of the novel. When Antonia first meets Ambrosio, she “felt a pleasure in her bosom which till then had been unknown to her;” she was not able to explain or understand this feeling (20). As Antonia is a virgin, it seems obvious to the reader that this ‘unknown pleasure’ was of a sexual nature. Therefore, the reader knows that the desire between Antonia and Ambrosio was of a mutual nature, like what would exist within a courtship. However, his aggressive assault on her is so overpowering as to affect the reader’s senses. Antonia has just declared that she loves Ambrosio, in response to his verbal manipulation. In a more traditional rape narrative, the reader would blame Antonia for not clearly stating her intentions to Ambrosio and for essentially leading him on. However, because the reader sees Antonia as sexually innocent and Ambrosio as manipulative, it becomes clear that this is not Antonia’s fault. By clashing innocent words, with aggressively violent words, the reader is led to feel that Ambrosio is taking advantage of Antonia, who does not know any better. Even Antonia’s bible was edited by her mother so that she would not be exposed to “improper passages” about sex or the body (223). Antonia is praised for her innocence,¹⁵ but it also prevents her from defending herself. This points to yet another flaw in the failed courtship myth; society expects women to repel sexual advancements during courtship, yet they also expect women to be intellectually ignorant of sex. This scene forces one to question how Antonia could have repelled Ambrosio’s advances when she could not properly understand them. It also presents sexual innocence as a liability, which would eventually lead to Antonia’s rape.

¹⁵ Ambrosio similarly begins the novel as completely innocent, perhaps leading one to question the flawed value of silence with regards to sexual discourse.

Antonia physically resists Ambrosio's advances: "Startled, alarmed, and confused at his action, surprise at first deprived her of the power of resistance. At length recovering herself, she strove to escape from his embrace" (225). The reader is made aware of why she hesitates before resisting; the language in this passage allows the reader to feel sympathy for Antonia's hesitation by listing the emotions she was going through, as she was: "Startled, alarmed, and confused," as well as "surprise[d]." While this scene seems to support the traditional ideas about women's sexuality, it is only to make it easier to inspire sympathy within the reader. This type of sensibility is inspired by sensation. A major philosophy of sensibility argues that sensation is an important part of sensibility; this philosophy was supported by John Locke and Barker-Benfield aptly interprets this as a foundational belief of sensibility. This scene is attempting to invoke this type of sensibility with its use of sensation words, meant to make the reader relate to the emotions through which Antonia is going. It evokes senses the reader is familiar with to create feelings of compassion for Antonia. While Antonia does eventually struggle, thus evoking the belief that a woman was not truly raped unless she struggled, this traditional requirement makes it easier for the reader to feel sympathy for her and slowly make the connection between a woman's hesitation to struggle and the actual act of struggling itself. This scene allows a reader to understand that just because a woman is not physically struggling does not mean she is not doing so internally.

Sensibility is further invoked in this scene when Ambrosio ignores her struggles and pleads: "[T]he licentious monk heeded not her prayers: he persisted in his design, and proceeded to take still greater liberties" (225). Ambrosio is portrayed as villainous in this scene, as he lacks sympathy for a character that inspires it in the

reader. Furthermore, a monk ignoring the prayers of an innocent young girl is even more reprehensible for a reader. Antonia's final reactions further call for sympathy from the reader; "Antonia prayed, wept, and struggled: terrified to the extreme, though at what she knew not, she exerted all her strength to repulse the friar, and was on the point of shrieking for assistance, when the chamber-door was suddenly thrown open" (225). Once more, this scene uses sensations, like fear, to relate to the reader and inspire him with a sense of sympathetic fear for Antonia's seemingly hopeless situation.

Shelley's *The Cenci* is published over twenty years after *The Monk*, yet still invokes many of the same myths about rape. The myth of the failed courtship is unique, however, because Cenci is Beatrice's father. After Cenci has already raped Beatrice, he summons her to him again. It is clear that he plans to rape her again and he threatens to force her if she does not consent: "Go call my daughter, / And if she comes not tell her that I come. / What sufferings? I will drag her, step by step" (IV.i.78-80). There is no sense of subtle coercion here; Cenci is very clear that Beatrice has no choice in the matter. His actions are directly in conversation with the myth of the failed courtship. The lack of consent mocks the idea that women begin as willing participants in a seduction and only resist in jest or due to a belated sense of morality. Shelley takes away any doubts the reader might have in Beatrice's willingness. Cenci even threatens to curse Beatrice if she does not come: "[S]he shall die unshrived and unforgiven, / A rebel to her father and her God, / Her corpse shall be abandoned to the hounds" (IV.i.89-91). Cenci believes he has the power to curse his children. In this time period, the father had ultimate authority over his family, which Shelley compares to the power God has over mankind. This hints at the fact

that Cenci really is within his rights when he decides to rape Beatrice, as rape is not illegal when it is committed by the girl's father. As rape is seen in terms of property, the daughter's virtue belongs to her father and therefore cannot be stolen by him. In this sense, Cenci is right; Beatrice's rejection of him is akin to rebelling against God, as her father has ultimate authority over her. Shelley makes it clear that the idea of a failed courtship is unfeasible, as women do not have the power to say no in the face of male oppression. He compares the effort of a woman resisting to one resisting against God, a fruitless endeavor.

This scene is illustrative of Romantic pain sensibility. The reader is reminded here of the pain Beatrice endured during her rape and her resulting mental instability. When her father demands that she return to his presence, ostensibly for her to endure more sexual violence at his hands, the reader is meant to pity her for her lack of options. Cenci threatens to curse Beatrice; he does not just threaten to kill her, he threatens to kill her "unshrived." He is threatening to send Beatrice to hell, by not letting her confess and forcing her to die "unforgiven." He also says that he will not bury her and will instead let dogs defile her corpse. This is a vividly violent image that would have sharply assaulted the reader's senses. This leads one to fear for Beatrice's safety, as Cenci makes it clear there are more horrors planned for her: "For Beatrice worse terrors are in store / To bend her to my will" (IV.i.75-6). As is typical of Romantic pain sensibility, the pain is born of mental duress. The reader is meant to feel sympathetic pain for what is to come.

When Beatrice does not respond to Cenci's command, Cenci plans his assault on her: "It were safer / To come between the tiger and his prey" (IV.i.173-4). His metaphor hints that he plans to destroy her entirely, worse than a tiger would to his

prey. This metaphor also illustrates that it is Cenci who has the power here; Beatrice is simply his quarry. Once again, the reader is reminded that Beatrice is powerless; she is not coerced and she does not show moral weakness, nor does she give in to Cenci's demands. Through this unnatural relationship, the myth of the failed courtship is undone and proved to be faulty. One cannot expect Beatrice to resist the force of someone who has the power of a god over her; furthermore, the sympathy provoked in this scene forces the reader to question his own values in regards to sexual violence.

Both Joanna Baillie's *Orra* and Mary Shelley's *Proserpine* repeat this pattern in the Romantic tradition. In *Orra*, the title character is trapped in an allegedly haunted castle with Rudigere, who threatens her with ghosts and rape in the hopes of forcing her to marry him. This represents the failed courtship myth, as Rudigere attempts to force a marriage with the use of rape. It is not a matter of Orra giving into a seduction; it is coercion from someone who wants to own her person and worldly goods. Rudigere's threatening demeanor makes it clear that the myth of the failed courtship is false. When Orra spurns his romantic advances, Rudigere plays on the fears a young girl has when trapped alone with a persistent suitor: "Madam, beware lest scorn like this should change me / Ev'n to the baleful thing your fears have fancied" (III.ii.95-6). In this scene, Rudigere tells Orra he will not put up with her refusals much longer. He threatens her with rape and explains that, "He, who is mad with love and gall'd with scorn, / Dares any thing" (III.ii.98-9). Rudigere never says outright that he will rape Orra; instead he implies it strongly with a veiled threat. Although Rudigere does not rape Orra, this scene does set the stage for the implied rape at the end of the play. His cruelty shows that rape is the result of more than a

persistent suitor and moral weakness in a woman. Likewise, in *Proserpine*, the title character is not given a choice; she is snatched away from her place in nature and forced to become the queen of the underworld. Although Proserpine and her mother are heartbroken that she has been forcefully taken,¹⁶ there is nothing they can do about it; “If fate decrees, can we resist?” (30). The answer, of course, is no; Proserpine has no choice in her marriage to Pluto. These Romantic texts disprove the myth of the failed courtship by eliminating courtship and portraying coercion, which the women have little power to fight against.

Blaming the Victim

Not all female characters in Gothic fiction have perfect morality in the face of coercion, like Antonia. In Charlotte Dacre’s *Zofloya*, Laurina is corrupted by Ardolph and coerced into cheating on her husband. Ardolph carefully planned his seduction of Laurina and carried it out simply because of his desire to destroy happy marriages. He is only able to coerce Laurina into a relationship by convincing her that she has already sinned against her husband and that by remaining with him, she was making her crime worse: “[H]e represented to her, that it was in fact adding to her guilt, in a most flagrant and abominable degree, to remain under the roof of him she conceived herself to have so deeply injured – was it not adding treachery to dishonour?” (47). Laurina and Ardolph had not had sex at this point in the story. The only thing Laurina is actually guilty of is enjoying Ardolph’s company, as he flatters her pride. However, through this manipulation, Ardolph convinces Laurina that she has essentially cheated on her husband by enjoying his attention towards her. In this way, Ardolph coerces

¹⁶ This interpretation of rape is interesting in that it allows rape in marriage, as Proserpine did not consent to the marriage and everything that came with it.

her into leaving her husband and starting a relationship with him. For this action, committed under duress, Laurina is frequently blamed throughout the story.

Repeatedly both of her children blame their mother for any of their wrongdoings.

This represents the myth of blaming the victim, which is the false assumption that it is the woman's own fault for being raped.

In the end, her son is able to forgive her, but her daughter is not. Victoria seems pitiless, when she refuses to forgive her weak and dying mother. Although Laurina begs for her daughter's forgiveness, Victoria denies her: "[T]hat which I have been, my mother made me....thou who hast caused *my* ruin; on thy head, therefore, will all my sins be numbered" (246). This seems to be a harsh reaction on Victoria's part, but it reflects that of society. In *Women's Silence*, Clark explains that even charitable organizations would not forgive fallen women; nor would they distinguish between victims or women who made mistakes by giving into persistent men. The most these organizations or society would offer these women was pity. This was the most a coerced woman could hope for in this time period. This pity is represented in Leonardo's reaction to his mother's weakened state: "[H]e...stood beside the death-bed of his mother, though she knew him not; — he bent over her, and took her feeble hand, which had sunk again upon her miserable couch" (245). Leonardo represents those in society who were sympathetic to rape victims, even though these victims were all treated the same. It is meaningful that it is a female character that represents the part of society that did not pity women. Because women were frequently blamed for the rapes committed against them, other women did not feel sympathy for them, assuming victims should take the full blame on themselves (Clark 30-1). This striking nature of Victoria's rejection is meant to undo the validity of the myth that it is the

victim's fault for being raped. The reader feels sympathy for Laurina's fallen state, so it is jarring that Victoria does not; this reminds the reader why it does not make sense to blame the victim.

The Monk also addresses the general myth that it is the victim's fault for allowing herself to be raped. Ambrosio clearly believes this myth as he blames Antonia throughout the story for his desire to rape her. When Ambrosio first meets her, he considers the potential influence she could have on him: "Still her countenance was so sweet, so innocent, so heavenly, as might have charmed an heart less susceptible than that which panted in the abbot's breast" (207). Ambrosio feels that Antonia is so desirable that she would charm other men easily. This line hints that if anyone could charm Ambrosio into breaking his vows of celibacy, it would be her. After Ambrosio successfully rapes Antonia, he is filled with disgust towards her and blames her for his crime: "What seduced me into crimes, whose bare remembrance makes me shudder? Fatal witch! was it not thy beauty? Have you not plunged my soul into infamy?" (330). In light of the violent rape Ambrosio has just inflicted on Antonia, this scene is almost comical. He is angrily blaming Antonia, suggesting she has led him to sin by seducing him. The reader knows very intimately that Ambrosio carefully thought out and planned the rape of Antonia three different times. Therefore, when he finally succeeds, it does not ring true that it could possibly be Antonia's fault. This scene mocks the myth that the victim is to blame for the crime of sexual violence committed against her.

Shelley addresses the notion of blaming the victim repeatedly in *The Cenci*. Early in the play, the Pope shows unscrupulousness in his refusal to intervene between Cenci and his children, despite many attestations of Cenci's cruelty.

According to Camillo in Act II, Scene 2, the Pope pities Cenci and thinks that his children must have done something to deserve his scorn. Consistently, the Pope blames Cenci's children for anything done to them. In the Pope's mind, if they had been good children, then Cenci would not have had to respond like a tyrant. The Pope is consistent in his protection of paternal authority. Camillo says, "He holds it of most dangerous example / In aught to weaken the paternal power, / Being, as 'twere, the shadow of his own" (II.ii.54-6). As a father figure, the Pope associates any type of patriarchy with his own powers. In this sense, the Pope is comparing himself with the tyrannical Cenci. In the end of the play, Camillo begs the Pope for leniency on the Cenci family. However, the Pope sides with Cenci, citing the importance of patriarchy once again: "Parricide grows so rife / That soon, for some just cause no doubt, the young / Will strangle us all, dozing in our chairs. / Authority, and power, and hoary hair / Are grown crimes capital" (V.iv.19-24). The Pope's use of the words "no doubt" seem to imply he is being sarcastic and that he really believes there is no good reason to kill a sleeping family member. These lines also indicate that the Pope wants to punish the Cenci family to protect patriarchy and therefore his own interests. Selfishly, the Pope gives an order of execution in order to protect himself from an imagined threat. Although the Pope does not know the details of this particular case, he blames Beatrice for her own rape, in his defense of patriarchy. To the Pope, there is no good reason for parricide, not even incestuous rape. Instead, he blames the children for forcing Cenci to become a tyrant.

Cenci also sees himself as Beatrice's victim. He scolds Beatrice for the wrongs he feels she has done to him: "Why, yesternight you dared to look / With disobedient insolence upon me / Bending a stern and an inquiring brow / On what I

meant; whilst I then sought to hide” (II.i.106-9). In his mind Beatrice is deliberately provoking his hatred and violence. He feels that, as a result, she is forcing him to rape her, which is an action he acknowledges as too ominous to be spoken aloud. Even Beatrice’s face provokes Cenci’s rage, as he addresses her as the “loathed image of thy cursèd mother” (II.i.121). Cenci’s hatred here mocks the idea of blaming the victim, as he cites her face as a reason for his rage. The reader knows her face is something she cannot control; therefore it is comical that she is blamed for such a thing. Yet Cenci sees himself as a victim in spite of how ridiculous that seems, even believing that Beatrice and his family are conspiring against him. Shelley presents Cenci’s family as innocent victims throughout the play; this makes Cenci seem insane when he blames them, particularly Beatrice, for things they did not do or over which they had no control. The idea of blaming the victim is made ludicrous in this play.

Rape literature of the 18th century consistently blamed the victim for allowing herself to be raped. Even Richardson’s work, *Clarissa*, can be interpreted as blaming the victim, when Clarissa leaves her home and can be seen as leading on Lovelace. Gothic and Romanic works mock this concept by portraying situations where it could not possibly be the victim’s fault for being raped, in spite of what their rapists say.

Rape as a Natural Occurrence in Society

The most direct attack on the standard beliefs about rape is made when Lewis presents it as something unnatural. Rape is often described as either the inevitable result of a woman leaving the home, a woman’s amorality or simply as a natural

desire of men.¹⁷ Lewis attacks these beliefs by emphasizing the theme of rape as something unnatural. Ambrosio, as a monk, is supposed to be completely celibate. As he was raised within the confines of the church, Ambrosio was destined to spend his life as a virgin. However, with the infiltration of one girl, Matilda, into his religious order and daily life, Ambrosio's celibacy is undone. When Matilda yanks down her shirt and places a dagger to her chest, she invokes lust in Ambrosio for the first time: "[A] sensation till then unknown filled his heart with a mixture of anxiety and delight; a raging fire shot through every limb; the blood boiled in his veins, and a thousand wild wishes bewildered his imagination" (60). Such passionate sexual desire in a monk of Ambrosio's station would seem very unnatural to a reader. While a person might be willing to believe that a man has a natural, biological urge to rape women, it seems completely unnatural to apply the same logic to a religious figure. With the seemingly unnatural image a monk as a rapist, the reader is forced to reevaluate the idea that men have no control over their sexual passions, as they realize that Ambrosio should have had control over his desire.

Ambrosio's rape of Antonia is further made unnatural by the fact that they are siblings. Early in the novel, the loss of Elvira's son is mentioned in passing. She had to leave very quickly with her husband and they had no time to retrieve the child. By the end of the novel, after Ambrosio has raped Antonia, the devil tells him that she was his sister: "That Antonia whom you violated, was your sister!" (374). Incest, in this scene, adds an extra layer of unnaturalness to the rape.

¹⁷ Depictions of the rake figure in 18th century society allow less culpability for men. As figures of freedom, when a rake rapes a woman, it seems like the natural impulse and result of male desire. In this way, men can be less culpable for rape, as it can be seen as a natural biological urge.

When Ambrosio finally succeeds in raping Antonia, they are surrounded by death, adding a final layer of the unnatural to this scene. Ambrosio has kidnapped Antonia and trapped her in a tomb by making the world believe she is dead. While he is raping her, Antonia becomes further horrified and disoriented by the death surrounding them: “The aspect of the vault, the pale glimmering of the lamp, the surrounding obscurity, the sight of the tomb, and the objects of mortality which met her eyes on either side, were ill calculated to inspire her with those emotions by which the friar was agitated” (328). This line points out that even if Ambrosio had not been forcing Antonia to have sex, she could still not feel the passion he does because she is disgusted by the dead bodies surrounding them. Ambrosio does not understand this disgust; he tells Antonia that he finds the tomb romantic: “This sepulcher seems to me Love’s bower” (327). Ambrosio’s attitude, which easily connects sex and death, is one of the most unnatural moments of the novel.

The connection between rape and death is perhaps best represented in Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu’s short story, “Schalken the Painter” (1839), which portrays the later evolution of this metaphor, more than forty years after *The Monk*. In the story, Rose is forced by her uncle to marry a mysterious man named Vanderhausen. He is described as monstrously corpse-like:

[T]he flesh of the face was coloured with the bluish leaden hue...the eyes were enormous, and the white appeared both above and below the iris, which gave to them an expression of insanity, which was heightened by their glassy redness...the hue of the lips themselves bore the usual relation to that of the face, and was consequently nearly black. The character of the face was malignant, even satanic...such a

combination of horror could hardly be accounted for, except by supposing the corpse of some atrocious malefactor, which had ...at length become the habitation of a demon. (17)

This description makes the man Rose is forced to marry seem like a demonically animated corpse. As the rapist in this story, Vanderhausen is given a repulsive appearance which is meant to make rape seem unnatural. This representation is particularly interesting because it addresses the possibility of rape in marriage. As mentioned previously, popular discourse in this time period considered the possibility that forcing one's daughter or ward to marry was akin to rape. Rose's uncle begins the story believing Rose has some freewill, yet changes his mind after Vanderhausen's assessment that Rose is within his control: "[Y]ou are her guardian – she is your ward. She is mine if you like to make her so" (13). After this moment, Rose's uncle takes Vanderhausen's advice and sells her like property, thus supporting the idea that forced marriage was a distasteful act, comparable to rape.

After Rose marries Vanderhausen, her family does not hear from her for months. When they finally see her again, she is terrified and in desperate need for food and drink. She is also panicked and does not want to be left alone. It is not clear what has happened to her, but the reader knows that she is in fear of her husband. Eventually, a door slams and Rose is left alone; all that is heard is footsteps and screaming: "Shriek after shriek burst from the inner chamber, with all the piercing loudness of despairing terror" (24). This scene continues for what feels like a long time, as the reader fears what is happening to Rose in the bedroom: "There was no sound of struggling from within, but the screams seemed to increase in loudness, and at the same time they heard the bolts of the latticed window withdrawn, and the

window itself grated upon the sill as if thrown open” (24). It is clear here that Vanderhausen is entering the room. From here, the screams become more awful: “One last shriek, so long and piercing and agonized as to be scarcely human, swelled from the room, and suddenly there followed a death-like silence” (24). This corpse-like man sneaks into Rose’s room and does something to her that makes her screams become so “agonized” that they seem inhuman; silence follows. This scene is a gross parody of the wedding night, alluding to the painful loss of virginity of the female. Rose becomes scared when she sees her husband and more scared when he reaches her bed. It is symbolic that silence follows this moment, as silence is a woman’s only response to rape—particularly rape in marriage. In the end, Vanderhausen steals Rose away: “A light step was heard crossing the floor, as if from the bed to the window; and almost at the same instant the door gave way” (24). As if by magic, the door to the room opens and Rose is gone, only to be seen again one more time. This kidnapping is veiled in terms of the supernatural to show how unnatural rape is. This is further emphasized in the end when Schalken discovers Rose in a room, in the vaults where the church keeps dead bodies. He sees her artificially happy in a domestic sphere, surrounded by the dead. Once more, Le Fanu is relating rape to death in order to show the unnaturalness of it.

By showing rape as something unnatural, both Lewis and Le Fanu are attempting to prove that rape and rape laws are a problem in society. They are attempting to argue that this problem cannot be ignored or treated as the inevitable result of male sexuality and female moral failure. They mock the myth that rape is natural by depicting it in extremely unnatural terms. The reader feels an extreme

sense of sympathy with both Rose and Beatrice because of the disturbing nature of their rapes.

Rape is also portrayed as something unnatural in *The Cenci*. A father may have full authority over his daughter, but incest would still be considered unnatural. It was not illegal for a father to rape his daughter, but it was considered something that just was not done. Incest, whether consensual or not, was the ultimate taboo. It was a father's job to protect his daughter's chastity; Cenci does the opposite. If a woman that belonged to a prominent family had sex before marriage, the scandal would harm the family's reputation. Cenci destroys his own family's reputation by taking his daughter's virginity, which is a very unnatural act. Incest is the ultimate representation of the failure of the father. Cenci's crime is against his own good name, which is aberrant behavior.

Mary Shelley's *Proserpine*, thought to be written the same time as her husband's *The Cenci*, similarly addresses the theme of rape as an unnatural thing. In *Proserpine*, a daughter is separated from her mother because of Pluto's desires. Proserpine's mother, Ceres, is the goddess of agriculture and fertility in Greek mythology; she has the power to make sure crops can grow. Because of her marriage to Pluto, Proserpine is denied her mother's presence six months out of the year, resulting in winter and autumn, the barren seasons. In one sense, the creation of the seasons is the most natural thing in the world; yet in another it is the most unnatural. Winter and autumn are colder seasons, in which plants die and new plants do not grow. Although death is a natural part of life, it seems to be the opposite.

Furthermore, Proserpine marrying Pluto is also akin to marrying death, another unnatural concept, similar to Rose marrying the corpselike Vanderhausen .

When Ceres first notices that her daughter is missing, she exclaims, “I fear my child is lost” (23). Rachel Mann, in “Speaking Bodies,” argues that the word “child” is meant to emphasize Proserpine’s “innocence, not her sexuality” (83). This further makes her abduction and rape seem more unnatural, as the sexual violation of a child would have been considered unusually anomalous behavior. Mary Shelley uses such language to emphasize the abnormality of rape. The metaphor of the seasons is meant to strike the reader as not natural. Ceres declares that winter is a season of loss: “Winter in losing thee has lost its all” (32). She also describes Proserpine’s loss as her “six months tomb” (32). In this context, winter represents the unnaturalness of the loss or death of a child. This metaphor is in direct contradiction to the popular myth that rape is a natural part of society.

Romantic works like *The Cenci* and *Proserpine*,¹⁸ argue against the myth that rape is natural by portraying it in unnatural terms. Gothic and Romantic texts both do this by invoking the taboo of incest and the unnaturalness of death. These works invoke the family unit and make it perverted and twisted into something irregular. By doing so, these works encourage the reader to look at his own family and consider whether he would feel rape would have a natural place in his own home.

Myth of Safety in the Home

Ambrosio’s second attempt to rape Antonia uses the aid of a magical myrtle, provided by Matilda through her demonic servant. This myrtle allows Ambrosio entrance to Antonia’s home and puts her into a deathlike sleep. In this scene, Antonia is completely at Ambrosio’s mercy. This is emphasized by her state of undress

¹⁸ Although unpublished, it was believed that Mary Shelley wrote *Proserpine* at the same time as Percy Shelley’s *The Cenci* with the same intentions and themes as her husband. See Rachel Mann’s “Speaking Bodies” for more detail.

because of the warm weather. The reader's fear for Antonia's safety reaches its climax, when Ambrosio finally removes what little clothing she had on: "He resolved not to delay for one instant longer the accomplishment of his wishes, and hastily proceeded to tear off those garments which impeded the gratification of his lust" (260). Antonia's lack of clothes makes her seem more vulnerable to the reader, as the emphasis on lust, makes Ambrosio seem more out of control. This scene also makes it clear that there is no safety in the home in this novel. The myrtle unlocked every door and gave Ambrosio free reign of Antonia's house. Although, once more, Elvira was able to save her daughter, she also dies in the process. Before the event, Elvira even ponders on this hopeless situation: "She was convinced that Ambrosio had meditated her daughter's ruin; and when she reflected that her death would leave Antonia friendless and unprotected in a world so base, so perfidious and depraved, her heart swelled with the bitterness of apprehension" (243). This shows how unsafe their home really is, particularly considering that Antonia was still rejected by her blood relatives. Once her mother was gone, Antonia's home would provide her with little defense, as she had no family members left to protect her.

Very suddenly and surprisingly, Antonia's mother, Elvira, feels the need to check on Antonia. Because of this sudden impulse, she saves Antonia from being ravished. This event is reminiscent of the melodramas, in which a family member saves the girl just in time from her rapist. Antonia's attack, in this scene, is meant to respond to the myth that there is safety in the home and only serves to remind the reader that Antonia is not safe in her home. Elvira's interruption was unexpected, due to her failing health. The very fact that the reader was not expecting her to be well enough to leave her bed foreshadows to the reader that although she was able to save

Antonia this time, she will not always be around to protect her. The additional fact that Ambrosio had a magical tool that made locks moot, further adds to the danger of Antonia's situation. She was almost raped in her home; this mocks the idea that a woman is only safe from rape in her home. Even the symbolic home of a family member is thwarted here, as Ambrosio is Antonia's brother, and he is the cause of her danger, not the solution to it. Because this near-rape happens in Antonia's home, while she is in a state of undress, the reader feels more sympathy and fear for her. The location and condition of the event makes it more personal; it subverts the reader's beliefs by disproving a rape myth, while also invoking fear and concern.

The Cenci also negates the myth that there is safety in one's home. In the beginning of the play, Cenci asks Beatrice to meet him in her room: "Bid Beatrice attend me in her chamber / This evening:—no, at midnight and alone" (I.i.146-7). Not only is Beatrice not safe in her home, she is not safe in her own bedroom. Her father, who might also symbolically represent home to her, is also her assailant and not her protector, which further subverts the myth that there is safety in the home. Like with Antonia, the reader is inspired to feel sympathy for the invasion of Beatrice's private space. Beatrice had no place to go that was safe from her attacker. Cenci even said that if she did not come to him willingly, he would force her into his presence.

Beatrice was also not allowed to leave her home. At the start of the play, Camillo tries to convince Cenci that it is wrong for him to keep his daughter locked away from the rest of society (I.i.43-7). Cenci ignores his concerns and one is left with the realization that Beatrice is trapped. She cannot leave her home, so she is permanently tied to her rapist. This concept effectively mocks the idea that there is safety in the home. In this case, Beatrice would be safe if she could escape her home.

She even considers marriage to accomplish this, but ultimately she knows Cenci would never let her escape, even in marriage. The commonly believed myth was that a woman was only truly safe in the home; for Beatrice, the home was a prison which guaranteed danger for her and the outside world represented a safety about which she could only dream.

Rape as a Death Sentence

The death imagery tied to rape in *The Monk*, as well as Le Fanu's "Schalken the Painter," emphasizes that rape was a death sentence. After Antonia is raped and near death, she tells the man she loves, Lorenzo, that it is for the best: "She told him, that had she still been undefiled she might have lamented the loss of life; but that, deprived of honour and branded with shame, death was to her a blessing: she could not have been his wife; and that hope being denied her, she resigned herself to the grave without one sigh of regret" (335). No one contradicts Antonia's analysis here. The other characters all remain silent; in their silence they essentially agree that Antonia is fundamentally dead, even if she lived. This is further emphasized when Lorenzo marries Virginia at the end of the story. The name Virginia is a clear mocking of the myths surrounding women's sexuality and rape. Virginia references the word 'virgin.' This seems to suggest that Antonia died due to her lack of virginity and that Lorenzo would not have been able to marry her if she had lived. Instead, as a replacement, he marries the virginal Virginia. This would be highly unsatisfactory to the reader, who has grown attached to Antonia and the romance growing between her and Lorenzo. Seeing Antonia replaced—after her rape inspires the reader with such sympathy for her—is jarring and shows the reader the faulty logic inherent in rape myths.

The myth that a woman is functionally dead after she is raped exists because it makes her unworthy of a suitable marriage in society. The reason convicted rapists were sentenced to death in this period was because they were stealing a daughter from her father. This was both a crime of theft and murder; death would have been the punishment for both. In typical stories of this period, Antonia's blind acceptance of her death would have been a sign that she accepted the rules of society and agreed that she was functionally dead. This would have allowed readers to forgive her for her sexual transgression, regardless of the fact that she did not have a choice, like with Richardson's *Clarissa*. However, Antonia initially rejects this idea when she attempts to save her life. Originally, Ambrosio declares that he will keep Antonia in a tomb forever for his use. This references the idea that rape is permanent—like death. Antonia rejects this idea when she tries to escape: “[S]he heard Lorenzo’s name...and resolved to risk every thing to throw herself under his protection” (334). Even after she is raped, Antonia nurtures the hope that she might be able to save herself and have a relationship with Lorenzo. The next line is demonstrative of this hope: “The door was open” (334). These words inspire a feeling of hope in both Antonia and the reader. The image represents an opportunity for Antonia; she is quick to take it: “She mustered up her little remaining strength, rushed by the monk ere he perceived her design, and bent her course rapidly towards the voices” (334). It is significant that this line focuses on Antonia's strength; she has not given up and she is ready to fight for her life. When Antonia runs—literally for her life—Ambrosio chases her. She tries to run even faster and when he finally catches her, she continues to resist: “Antonia resisted with all her strength” (334). She did not give up and she even screamed for help. Ambrosio was frustrated that “Antonia still resisted” (334). She was not silently

accepting her fate; Ambrosio had to force her: “[H]e now enforced her silence by means the most horrible and inhuman” (334). Ambrosio stabbed Antonia and then pulled her back into her tomb. She was forcefully dragged to her death, as she resisted with everything she could. This scene is particularly interesting in that it focuses on her resistance after she was raped, rather than during. This symbolically represents the societal problem of the silence and passive acceptance of one’s emblematic death that traditionally follows rape cases.

Antonia’s resistance rejects the idea that women must quietly accept their fates, especially in regards to rape. The fact that Antonia almost escapes, in this scene, builds suspense and leads the reader to hope she will survive. The reader is led to fear for her when Ambrosio chases her; the tension of her near escape is meant to make the reader realize that he wants her to live. Even the drug Ambrosio uses to make Antonia seem dead is telling of this—it makes her seem dead to the world, when she is really alive. These images are meant to show the reader the erroneous nature of believing a myth that dictates that women are practically dead after being raped. By leading the reader to want Antonia to live, Lewis is showing readers the flaws in this myth. Replacing Antonia with Virginia further frustrates the reader and forces him to reevaluate his belief system that would call for such a replacement. This ending asks the readers to question why they would want women dead over something they could not control.

This myth is further attacked in *The Cenci* when Beatrice attempts to save herself after she is raped. She refuses to let Cenci rape her again, but he has effectively imprisoned her in her own home. Beatrice’s only option is to kill her father. She is not complacent; once she makes up her mind to kill Cenci, she is

dedicated. She tells her conspirators, “We must be brief and bold” (III.i.227). She also makes it clear that she does not consider it murder to kill Cenci: “[O]ur act / Will but dislodge a spirit of deep hell / Out of a human form” (IV.ii.6-8). Beatrice no longer sees Cenci as human; for her, killing her father is a godly act, as she is destroying someone who symbolizes evil to her. Beatrice further enforces this idea when she must convince her assassins, Olimpio and Marzio, to go through with the deed. Both men feel guilty about killing an old man in his sleep. Beatrice responds to their concerns with anger, calling them cowards, who will force her to kill him herself. She even threatens their lives: “[N]ever dream ye shall outlive him long!” (IV.iii.32). Her aggressive perusal of her father’s death is a sharp contrast to what is expected of a rape victim. Beatrice does not passively accept her situation; she does not accept that she is dead to the world. Instead, she prepares and executes a plan to murder Cenci and thereby save herself. Beatrice’s desire to better her situation and fight against the wrongs committed against her completely rebuffs the myth that rape is akin to death. Her passion suggests that her life is something worthy of being preserved.

Ultimately, Beatrice succeeds in killing Cenci, but still must forfeit her life. Although Camillo speaks in their defense, Cenci’s surviving family members are sentenced to death for his murder. Beatrice is horrified when she contemplates her coming death:

My God! Can it be possible I have
 To die so suddenly? So young to go
 Under the obscure, cold, rotting, wormy ground!
 To be nailed down into a narrow place;
 To see no more sweet sunshine; hear no more

.....
 How fearful! to be nothing! Or to be.... (V.iv.48-55)

Beatrice's genuine terror, when faced with her own mortality, is very affecting, with its detailed account of what will happen to her corpse after she is gone. This disturbing description is meant to horrify the reader and inspire sympathy within him. It reminds the reader that death is banishing a person to pain, loneliness and darkness. In this sense, dying is not noble, as the myth suggests; it is allowing the body to rot and be eaten by worms. This image is magnified by the fact that Beatrice is afraid and not ready, as it is happening "so suddenly." This passage also reminds the reader of the unfairness of Beatrice's situation. The only reason Cenci's family was caught killing him was because the Pope had sent officers to arrest Cenci. The Pope had issued an arrest order for Cenci for the crimes described in the beginning of the play. It is implied that if Cenci did not pay the amount the Pope demanded initially, then he would be put to death for his crimes. Thus, Cenci was sentenced to death already, making it ironic and unjust that the Cenci family could be punished for carrying out that sentence. This feeling of unfairness with regards to Beatrice's death breaks the myth that a woman is essentially dead when she is raped.

Mary Shelley's *Proserpine* ends with the title character fundamentally marrying death, as Pluto is the god of the underworld. Proserpine is metaphorically dead for six months of the year when she is with Pluto. However, it is significant that she is allowed to return to the world of the living, with her mother, for the other half of the year. This destabilizes the idea that rape is a death sentence for women. Proserpine's return to her mother is suggestive of the potential for people to change this myth and accept rape victims back into the world of the living.

Pain Sensibility in Revolutionary Texts

Gothic/Romantic works use a stronger type of sensibility to inspire sympathy in the reader, while also breaking commonly believed myths about rape. As Bruhm, in *Gothic Bodies*, argues, these texts also use a type of sensibility that capitalizes on the characters' pain, in an attempt to share it with the reader. Lewis experiments with pain sensibility through Ambrosio in *The Monk*. Ambrosio is sadistic in his enjoyment of Antonia's suffering as he rapes her: "[H]er alarm, her evident disgust, and incessant opposition, seemed only to inflame the monk's desires, and supply his brutality with additional strength" (328). This type of sadism is the complete opposite of sympathy. Ambrosio does not have compassion for Antonia; instead enjoys her suffering and even derives strength from it. Ambrosio draws the reader's attention to this with the phrase "sensibility of pleasure" (328), when he questions Antonia's lack of sexual interest. This phrase is a play on words; Ambrosio is saying that this rape is about pleasure, while the phrasing reminds the reader that sensibility has another meaning—one beyond Ambrosio's ability to comprehend. This double-meaning leads the reader to feel sympathy for Antonia's terror: "Even his caresses terrified her from their fury, and created no other sentiment than fear" (328). The reader understands the fear Antonia feels and feel it themselves as they worry over her safety. The story and the tradition of rape stories lead the reader to want and expect Lorenzo to come and save Antonia¹⁹ at the last minute. Antonia is terrified of Ambrosio and the reader is afraid Lorenzo will not make it in time. Lewis manipulates his readers into feeling what Antonia is feeling. When Ambrosio ignores Antonia's plea for pity, the reader is

¹⁹ As mentioned previously, this was the typical situation in a melodrama, which Lewis chooses to frustrate.

led to take it personally: “Convey me from hence, if you have the least sense of pity and humanity!” (327). This plea for sympathy also serves as a reminder that Ambrosio has no sensibility himself, making him seem even more villainous.

Bruhm suggests that pain sensibility in Gothic literature is inherently violent: “[T]he ‘Gothic body’ is that which is put on excessive display, and whose violent, vulnerable immediacy gives...Gothic fiction [its] beautiful barbarity, [and its] troublesome power” (xvii). *The Monk* follows this pattern with the violent deaths of both Antonia and Ambrosio. Antonia is killed by a dagger “plunged...twice in the bosom” (335). This action mimics sex, as the phallic dagger is thrust into Antonia’s chest. Even the word ‘plunged’ has a sexual connotation. This stabbing also occurs directly after Antonia’s rape: “Though aimed by an uncertain hand, the poniard had answered but too well the purpose of its employer” (335). Ambrosio’s purpose was rape and the poniard metaphorically repeats that purpose. This type of pain sensibility is meant to translate rape in a way that men can understand on a sensory level. The metaphor implied with stabbing here is that rape feels like being stabbed to death. It is a painful violation by a foreign object, like being stabbed with a dagger. Lewis is using pain sensibility to invoke an intense type of sympathy for Antonia. The audience is encouraged to commiserate with the type of pain she is feeling; through the metaphor of stabbing, male readers were given an idea of what the pain of rape was like. This allowed them to mentally relate to her pain and therefore make it easier for them to feel sympathy for her.

Dacre’s *Zofloya* follows this same pattern through the deaths of Henriquez and Lilla. With the use of a drug, provided by Zofloya, Victoria convinces Henriquez that she is his true love, Lilla, in order to get him to have sex with her. When

Henriquez wakes up the next day and realizes his mistake, he commits suicide by falling on his sword: “[H]e snatched a sword that hung on the opposite wall, and, dashing its hilt on the floor, threw himself, in desperate agony, upon its point!” (217). Again, the image of being stabbed to the hilt, mimics sexual intercourse; this is particularly striking, as Victoria had raped him the night before. This image is also interesting because it presents a raped man. Like with Lewis’ Antonia, the stabbing imagery is meant to represent the pain of rape. However, there is an added layer of empathy here in that the rape and stabbing happens to a man. It makes it even easier for a male reader to feel sympathy for rape, as it is compared to an understandable type of pain, stabbing, and it is happening to a man. Directly following this scene, Lilla dies in a similar way. Victoria stabs her several times. This scene is highly sexual, as the phallic dagger stabs Lilla in the bosom and “other parts,” which carry the connotation of sexual intercourse (220). After depicting male rape, it would be easy for the reader to feel sympathy for Lilla’s symbolic rape by Victoria. Stabbing imagery in Gothic works allow pain to be shared between the characters and the readers. In this period, rape was an abstract concept that was not really considered in close physical detail. This metaphor reminds the reader that rape is a physical act that is painful for a woman and can cause physical damage, like tearing or bleeding, much like stabbing. This visceral imagery also works to create a stronger sense of sympathy for these characters and the real victims they represented.

Ambrosio’s death, in *The Monk*, also carries similar pain imagery. The devil throws him off a cliff and he lands on rocks, where he is forced to suffer in anguish for six days before finally dying. Insects attack him and make his wounds worse, while he is dying of thirst and can hear a nearby river. Next, he has his eyes dug out:

“The eagles of the rock tore his flesh piecemeal, and dug out his eye-balls with their crooked beaks” (376). The image of the eagles tearing into his flesh and gouging out his eyes is very sickening. It is also a type of pain one can imagine experiencing, as it seems like one of the most painful types of death possible. A bird’s beak digging into Ambrosio’s eye socket is also metaphorical for rape, as it depicts a phallic object, the beak, invading a delicate, cylindrical space. Once again, the reader is forced to link an imaginable pain with rape, helping to create inner feelings of sympathy.

Pain sensibility in Romantic works is slightly different because it incorporates the idea of mental distress. These authors distance their works from bodily pain in order to more aptly portray mental pain. Bruhm argues that “the Romantics ran violence off the stage in order to consign it to the imagination where it could be controlled and worked upon” (91). In this sense, Shelley deliberately planned *The Cenci* so that none of the violence would be on stage. The idea was that if one is distanced from the pain of the body, one will be able to better understand it mentally. Cenci is described as a sadistic character; he is self-aware of this quality, even describing it: “All men enjoy revenge; and most exalt / Over the tortures they can never feel— / Flattering their secret peace with others’ pain. / But I delight in nothing else” (I.i.78-81). Cenci’s sole enjoyment comes from the suffering of others because it reminds him that he is not in pain himself. Bruhm suggests that it is possible to feel sympathy for Cenci because his crimes are not portrayed in the text, yet his crimes are clear in one’s imagination: “Shelley not only associates tyranny with privacy but...also sees gratuitous violent spectacle as a medium of despotic power” (87). Cenci has an interest in public pain; he throws a party to announce the death of his sons and when he wanted to punish Beatrice, he said he would make her face “public

scorn” (IV.i.83). His power comes from the fear this public violence creates. Shelley deliberately portrays pain in a private way to avoid this sadistic indulgence and to instead infect the imaginations of his audience.

Beatrice is physically abused by her father to the point where imagining the pain he might inflict becomes as real as the pain itself: “He has trampled me / Under his feet, and made the blood stream down / My pallid cheeks” (II.ii.64-6). From imagining the suffering that she knows might be in her future “her internal self comes to imitate his tyranny” (Bruhm 89). Bruhm argues that Beatrice’s eventual madness is generated from this confusion: “Her...madness...is a product both of the pain of rape and of an imagination that becomes unable to recognize a difference between external stimulation and internal, imaginative constructions” (89). Beatrice details the many diverse abuses Cenci has wrought upon her, in a fit of madness, after he raped her, while imagining it was not her to whom it happened: “I thought I was that wretched Beatrice / Men speak of, whom her father sometimes hales / From hall to hall by the entangled hair; / At others, pens up naked in damp cells” (III.i.43-6). In this scene, Beatrice is no longer conscious of her own identity; mentally, she has distanced herself from her bodily pain. Bruhm argues that “Beatrice can no longer distinguish between what is happening to her physically and what is conjured imaginatively” (89). In this state of mental uncertainty, Beatrice is an object of sympathy, as one can see her physical pain in her mental torment. She declares, “My brain is hurt; / My eyes are full of blood” (III.i.1-2). This line shows the breakdown between the division of her physical and mental pain. Her madness was caused by her rape, but she also believes that her madness has physical representation through blood, which she imagines pouring from her eyes. Bruhm suggests that “[b]y collapsing the distinction

between the imaginative inside and the spectacular outside, the play ultimately obscures the boundaries between privacy and publicity, between what we imagine ourselves to be and what others see us as being” (89). This is meant to breakdown the barrier between Beatrice and the audience, in order to create a stronger sense of sympathetic understanding between the two parties.

This mental and physical befuddlement is represented by Beatrice’s loosened hair, after she has been raped. Beatrice does not know how her hair came undone. Loosened hair is a symbol of unwanted sexual attention and indeed, Beatrice assures Lucretia that she “tied it fast,” suggesting it was undone against her will (III.i.8). The title character in Baillie’s *Orra* also experienced such circumstances, as the stage directions describe Orra as having disordered hair and dress, as well as “the appearance of wild distraction in her gait and countenance” at the end of the play when Orra is led from the cavern by Theobald (V.ii.47). This description is preceded by shrieks coming from the cave; together this imagery implies that Orra has been raped, yet there is no textual evidence to suggest who might have raped her. However, as she was threatened with rape early in the play by Rutigere, the audience is easily led to see this description in a sexual violent way, particularly since her hair is loosened, like Beatrice. The mental turmoil of Beatrice and Orra is represented by their disordered hair and dress; this image is meant to break down the divide between the reader and audience and create a sense of sympathy for their plights. These female characters did not have a language for their pain, as a respectable woman could not talk about rape without doing more damage to her reputation. Shelley and Baillie represent this by having the pain invade these characters’ imaginations, in the hopes of infecting the audiences’ imaginations as well and creating a feeling of empathy

through shared pain. It is significant that *Orra* ends with the title character grabbing hold of Hughobert and Theobald and “dragging them back with her;” these characters, like the audience, are literally being dragged into Orra’s world, to see things the way she does, which is a terrifying concept, as her mental pain has created a world where she is surrounded by the dead (V.ii.223). She shares this terror with the other characters and with her viewers.

Changing Values

Bruhm suggests that whenever a culture distances itself from “primal urges,” it is inevitable that “those urges return as various forms of discontent” (xiv).²⁰ As previously stated, the 18th century was a time of socioeconomic change, particularly for women. The height of this change spanned from the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The rape culture of the 18th century represented male discontent at this developing change, which they projected onto women. Because many of the social changes had to do with women, it was easy for men to displace their anger onto them. Although the number of jobs female factory workers might have taken from men would have been small and the rights women demanded were fairly minor, it would have seemed like a much greater impugnation in the masculine mindset. Minor progress for women’s rights would have felt like an aggressive attack on masculinity. The comedic rape culture of the 18th century represents this arbitrary male anger.

Ambrosio and Cenci are both figures for this inexplicable, displaced masculine rage towards women. After Ambrosio rapes Antonia, he is filled with anger and disgust towards her: “She, who so lately had been the object of his adoration, now raised no other sentiment in his heart than aversion and rage” (329).

²⁰ This argument is also supported by Freud.

Similarly, after Cenci raped Beatrice, he seems to develop a stronger sense of anger towards her, even though previously she was the only one he would occasionally smile upon. He curses her and says that “Her spirit shall approach the throne of God / Plague-spotted with my curses. I will make / Body and soul a monstrous lump of ruin” (IV.i.93-5). Both men’s hatred seems irrational and misplaced on the two women they have raped. Male rage towards women, portrayed in this light, is meant to seem unfounded and even self-damaging. As Ambrosio and Cenci are blood relations of their rape victims, their attacks on Antonia and Beatrice can be interpreted as a type of self-rape. Women were considered the property of their fathers, but their sexual corruption would be damaging to the reputation of the whole family. The self-rape portrayed in these works reflects the ways in which blaming women and enjoying their suffering was a type of societal self-rape. Women made up an important part of society; using them as a scapegoat in that sense was damaging to society as a whole. This also highlighted that rape was a societal problem, not just a woman’s problem.

Both *The Cenci* and *The Monk* were very political texts that were enjoyed mainly by a male readership. It seems telling that both male authors portrayed rape with an extreme type of sensibility to a demographic of mostly men. George Haggerty, in *Unnatural Affections*, argues that female writers and readers were interested in the Gothic genre because it represented their dissatisfaction with the status quo. Yet, Haggerty limits this argument to the female perspective and forgoes the argument that male writers and readers might also have a problem with the victimization of women within the status quo, which this argument suggests. Sensibility and the evolution of sensibility are interpreted by Haggerty to be

“symptoms that expose the underpinnings of the emerging bourgeois culture that embraced them” (54). Essentially, sensibility represented the developing desire for social change. These “symptoms” in Lewis’s and Shelley’s works—Gothic and Romantic texts—specifically address the issue of rape in society by conquering the myths that prevent rape from being taken seriously as a social ill. Furthermore, both men display their own interests in generating sympathy for women that was strong enough to share women’s suffering with their predominantly male readers, through pain sensibility. Rape myths and the culture of rape humor represented the male fear of the changing society; it is fitting that male writers like Lewis and Shelley would counteract these myths to their male readers. Their works marked the decline of the culture of sadistic enjoyment of rape and the popularity of jokes about rape, and the rise of stories that treated rape more compassionately.

Rape myths in the 18th century developed out of a culture partially enforced by authors like Fielding, which treated rape humorously, and as a nonexistent problem. These beliefs captured the masculine resentment towards changing socioeconomic conditions, which left men fearing for their traditional lifestyles. Women were easy targets for this rage, as they stood to partially gain from these changes. Through this tension, rape myths and the dismissal of rape as a serious problem grew to represent the masculine resistance to feminine encroachment. Stories that depicted women lying about rape for their own gain would have succinctly spoken to the feeling that women were deliberately attacking the male way of life for their own corrupt reasons. Richardson’s counter-culture of rape used sensibility to generate sympathy for women through works like *Clarissa*. Yet, this counter-culture was doomed to failure as it was built with the same myths that helped Fielding turn a

profit. The Gothic/Romantic response occurred during the peak of socioeconomic change, perhaps suggesting that authors like Lewis and Shelley were picking up on these social tensions and demands for change. Their works, among others, marked a change in representations of women in this period. The cruelest of jokes, particularly involving rape, declined, as society slowly grew used to the changing roles for women. It is difficult to say whether the shared suffering of Antonia and Beatrice gave way to these changes or simply represented a society unconscious of change, as views about women and sympathy were changing. However, it is significant that these works marked a refusal to accept myths about women, which were damaging to the changing needs of society as a whole. Rape laws and victims would not see many changes until the modern era; history did not change dramatically in this period. Yet, it did represent a flux of interpretations of women, which subtly led to overall better representations of women in literature and perhaps added to the slowly enhancing conditions for women. Rape entertainment and myths gave way to a political tradition of sympathetic rape narratives, which represented the conditions of real rape victims and symbolically represented the needs of real women.

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