

# Challenging Gender Roles and Heteronormativity in Selected Works of Fantastic Literature

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis looks into the questions of gender roles and gender performativity. It analyzes the representation of gender and how traditional performativity is being treated and/or challenged in the following works of fantastic literature: Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper", Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* and Becky Chambers' *Wayfarers* series. The theoretical framework, based mostly on the work of Judith Butler, provides insight into how feminism and queer theory contribute to the understanding of gender and heteronormativity, and how scholarly and scientific research further consolidates the separation of sex and gender. The thesis shows that even though gender and heteronormativity are challenged in most works of fantastic fiction (alongside showing the negative effects they have on individuals), they are still reestablished by the end of most traditional/older texts. It is only in recent works of science fiction that the status quo is challenged without reinforcing the traditional gender roles and heteronormativity.

Keywords: gender, performativity, feminism, domesticity, heteronormativity, fantastic literature.

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## Introduction

The focus of this thesis is gender performativity in selected works of fantastic literature. Each chapter focuses on a specific trait and specific subgenre of fantastic literature that can be seen as relevant for the representation of gender or gender roles.

The first chapter examines gender theory and its connection to feminism and queer theory. Gender and sex are defined, as well as heteronormativity and heterosexuality, as an institution. The attention is brought to the progress of feminism, starting with the first wave feminism and continuing to the present, and how it affected gender performativity and the perception of gender. Scholarly works of Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick are explored, alongside scientific works of Cordelia Fine and other scientists (such as Sarah Bargiela et al., Randy A. Sansone and Lori A. Sansone, and Marie Stadel et al.), which confirm the distinction between sex and gender, and the negative effects of imposing gender norms on individuals.

The second chapter looks into vampire stories and focuses on the character of the vampire. Most frequently, the vampire character is represented as a sexual predator in order to explore issues of gender and sexuality. Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872) introduces the first female vampire who is attracted by women and takes a more active, almost masculine role, only to be subsequently violently killed in order to reestablish the social and gender norms. Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) offers more complexity on the subject as not only the vampires' but also other characters' gender performativity is questioned: Jonathan and Mina Harker seem to defy traditional gender roles to a certain extent, but by the end of the novel, the order is reestablished. Additionally, Lucy Westenra, who shows defiant sexuality, is killed, like Carmilla, by men who fit into the traditional masculine roles.

The third chapter is concerned with the idea that sparked the second wave feminism: domestic containment and isolation of women. Two Gothic texts are analyzed: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) and Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959). Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" is a short story written during the period of first wave feminism and deals with the topic of a woman's entrapment within her own home where, without any possibility of self-realization, she is slowly driven mad. Jackson's haunted house story, published shortly before Betty Friedan's seminal feminist text *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), features a heroine who is entrapped both literally within the haunted house and more symbolically by the unfulfilling domestic life forced upon her by her controlling mother. The relationship the female protagonist has with another woman the novel is also

explored, as well as the role of a patriarchal father. These works look more closely into the negative psychological effects of forcing women into the role of a quiet (house)wife and a submissive caretaker, challenging this practice as detrimental to women's mental health.

The fourth chapter is concerned with science fiction. The first text to be analyzed is Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), a novel written in the midst of second wave feminism. It is a story set in a community where gender does not exist. Le Guin, led by the idea that gender is a social construct, created a world where there is no division of sexes and people are androgynous for the major part of their life. She removes gender from this social fabrication "to find out what was left" (Le Guin, "Is Gender Necessary?" 160) when there are no expected roles to fill and the joy and the burden of motherhood is likely to befall anyone. The chapter then looks at contemporary novels inspired by Le Guin's work, that is, the first two installments of *Wayfarers* series by Becky Chambers, *The Long Way to a Small Angry Planet* (2014) and *A Closed and Common Orbit* (2016). The novels are set in the near future where humans are integrated into the societies of the entire universe; there, they are met with vastly different species with their own complex cultures. Within these societies, gender and sex are represented in all sorts of combinations, such as in the form of gender-fluid aliens who change their sex depending on a monthly sexual cycle, and those whose gender is determined by the stage in life. In contrast to Le Guin, who puts a heterosexual cisgendered man into a society of agender people, Chambers explores these differences without an obvious conflict or juxtaposition, integrating them within the story where everyone is already familiar with different genders and sexualities and where these differences are accepted as a normal part of everyone's reality. The conclusion summarizes the observations of the previous chapters and explains the significance of positive representation of gender non-conforming people in literature.

## 1. Gender

“one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”

– Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (273)

“What is the first question we ask about a newborn baby?”(Le Guin 94), asks the investigator in *The Left Hand of Darkness* while talking about a peculiar Gethen society where people do not exist as men and women, but simply as people – with no gender. The question illustrates the importance that people give to the issue of sex and gender in their everyday life. Merriam Webster defines gender as: “the behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits typically associated with one sex” (“Gender - Definition of Gender”), sex being a biological character or quality determined by chromosomes, hormones, and external and internal genitalia, that is gonads (“Biological sex”). Indeed, from the moment people are born, they are defined by their sex and, by extension, their gender, since there exists a “presumption that biological sex, gender, and gender identity are aligned with one another” (Davis et al. 3). They are biologically based constructions which determine the way an individual identifies, acts, interacts with others and presents themselves. As Davis et al. point out:

Individuals expect to be held morally accountable for presenting themselves as a gendered individual. . . . Not only present themselves physically (manner of dress and other physical aspects) but also in their mannerisms, interaction style, and general behavior. And when individuals do not conform to what others think a woman or man should be, they are penalized. (3)

In Western societies, there exists the notion of the so-called opposite sexes – where female is at one end of the spectrum and male on the other – as well as the assumption that these two are stable and permanent, that “individuals live their lives at the poles of this continuum, a concept known as gender polarization” (Davis et al. 3). This concept is further supported by language itself, within which exists the division on “feminine” and “masculine” (Butler 19).

It is virtually impossible to separate gender from feminism and queer theory. The definition of gender as a defining human characteristic was challenged by the first wave feminism, when women started questioning the “gendered life, in which men seemed to hold all the power and privilege and women seemed unable to fulfill ambitions beyond the narrow sphere of ‘womanly’ pursuits” (Essed et al. 2). This trend continued well into the twentieth century and only gained more ground with the second wave feminism, when the attention was called to the distinction between sex and gender, where gender represented a socially constructed category which was “used historically as a force for the concentration of power upon the male side” (Essed et al. 5). The presumed connection between gender and sexuality,

and the “presumption of heterosexuality [that] is referred to as heterocentrism or heteronormativity” (Davis et al. 5) were also challenged.

The first wave feminism began in the nineteenth century and was mainly focused on political power. One of the most significant texts of this period was Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) which was “mainly concerned with the way society constructs femininity, especially through its inadequate, misdirected education of young girls” (Sanders 15). But even though she advocated a better education for girls, she did not claim that women should leave the domestic sphere of life. Another relevant feminist text at the time was William Thompson’s *Appeal of One-Half of the Human Race, Women, against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men* (1825). Thompson looked into different problems that women who are married, women who are still unmarried, and women who never married face, and came to the conclusion that “even women whom society treated as fortunate and settled were privately suffering from unacknowledged needs and repressive treatment from men” (Sanders 17). In 1869, John Stuart Mill published *The Subjection of Women* which argues for equality of sexes. In the essay that united his ideas with the ideas of his wife, Mill says:

I deny that any one knows, or can know, the nature of the two sexes, as long as they have only been seen in their present relation to one another. . . . What is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing—the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others. (39)

He points out that the differences between sexes are only defined as opposed to one another, attacks marriage laws, and claims, like Wollstonecraft did before him, that better education of women would benefit the society as a whole. However, Valerie Sanders argues that Mill’s text is too uncompromising, and points out that it does not concern unmarried women, claiming that “[h]is efforts seem more intently focused on improving the status quo, rather than suggesting any radical departure from it” (Sanders 18).

Most of the activism of the first wave was focused on bettering the education for women and finding alternatives that were not tied with the domestic sphere of life, marriage and motherhood. Both in the United Kingdom, and in the United States, feminism was closely tied with anti-slavery activism, the Suffrage Movement (demanding the women’s right to vote), and the struggle for better divorce laws and property rights for women. Therefore, the end of the first wave is usually marked by the winning of the women’s the right to vote.

The second wave started in the 1960s and was mostly concerned with gaining more equality for women in all spheres of life: domestic sphere, education, workplace, and so on.

The second wave feminism also drew attention to domestic violence as well as rape. One of the sparks that started the movement was Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) in which she exposed the despair women felt due to being contained into a singular role of a housewife, with no space for further enrichment of their lives. Her predecessor was the French writer Simone de Beauvoir, who wrote *The Second Sex* in 1949, which addresses the same issues of women's entrapment within housework and marriage, and the disappointment they feel after being forced into that life. Beauvoir also alludes to the distinction between sex and gender (273), where gender is seen as an aspect of identity, which is later used by Judith Butler to explain and consolidate her theory of gender performativity.

In addition to writing *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan established National Organization for Women (NOW), "as a direct result of the failure of America's Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to take seriously the issue of sex discrimination" (Thornham 25). The second wave recognized that "male power is exercised and reinforced through 'personal' institutions such as marriage, child-rearing and sexual practices" (Thornham 26), where women's rights and power are severely limited and they are forced to fit into the stereotypical social role of a happy mother and wife. The struggle for better education seemed to string from the first wave feminism, in addition to the request for sexual and bodily autonomy (in the form of birth control and abortion). In the second wave, the problem of racism and heterosexism is also addressed, in the sense that feminism was up to then mostly concerned with middle-class straight white women, whereas the rights of black women and lesbians were ignored. Black women and lesbians become thus the more radical feminist fighters. In this way, feminism became concerned with the overarching identity of women, and everything that such gendered identity might concern.

In the 1990s, queer theory started to emerge, and it "put to question all reigning schemes of gendered/sexual normativity" (Phoca 50), compulsory heterosexuality (that is, heteronormativity), and gender identification. Despite being somewhat removed from feminist theories by being more interested in dismantling the hetero-homo binary, the two ideologies agree on one: "gender and sexuality are social rather than natural phenomena" (Stevi Jackson 38), and there is an existing link between the two which is impossible to sever. As Stevi Jackson points out: "without gender categories we could not categorise sexual desires and identities along the axis of same-gender or other-gender relationships" (40). She goes on to claim that gender and sexuality intersect precisely in heterosexuality, which is defined as a social institution: "by definition, a gender relationship, governing relations between women and men, ordering not only sexual life but also domestic and extra domestic divisions of

labour and resources” (Stevi Jackson 44); in other words, it is an institutionalized form of gender, where gender signifies the hierarchical relationship between men and women. Feminists of the second wave argue that, within such institution, “gender is a product of men’s appropriation of women’s sexuality” (Stevi Jackson 46); they argued that the institution of heterosexuality as such keeps women subordinated. As previously mentioned, one of the triggers for the second wave feminism was precisely the domestic containment of women, where they were forced into the roles of housewives and mothers, and – faced with despair and lack of personal fulfilment – were being forced into believing that it is their naturally predisposed role within which they are to find contentment.

Additionally, women’s gender is perceived as more connected to sexuality – especially heterosexuality – than men’s gender: “A man can be a man by virtue of physical or mental prowess, courage, leadership abilities and so on”, Jackson argues, “whereas womanliness is almost always equated with (hetero)sexual attractiveness and (heterosexual) domesticity. . . . What confirms masculinity is being (hetero)sexually *active*; what confirms femininity is being sexually *attractive* to men” (54). The heterosexual norm serves as a standard, a prototype, and it promotes “traditional stereotypes about sex and gender that associate maleness and masculinity with assertiveness, aggressiveness, sexual adventurism, and emotional restraint, and femaleness and femininity with docility, passivity, sexual modesty, and emotional intimacy” (Siegel and Meunier 2). In her essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” Adrienne Rich defines compulsory heterosexuality as assumption that every romantic relationship is a heterosexual one and must conform to its norms in order to deny women’s sexuality and keep them submissive (Rich 633). Moreover, Christopher Craft points out that the heterosexual roles are imposed even on gay and lesbian couples: “The female ‘husband’ in such a relationship was understood to be dominant, appetitive, masculine, and ‘congenitally inverted’; the female ‘wife’ was understood to be quiescent, passive, only ‘latently’ homosexual” (120).

Moreover, heterosexuality as an institution enforces gender roles not only within the realm of intimacy (sexuality) but also in domestic and social sphere of life. Despite the struggle for equality in workforce, research shows that the burden of domestic chores and emotional labor is upon women far more than upon their male partners (Barr). If anything, the theory of heterosexuality as an institution shows that gender shows up in all areas of life, from private to public sphere. In 1990, Judith Butler wrote *Gender Trouble*, in which she introduces the concept of gender performativity. Gender is a cultural and social phenomenon, a product rather than a cause. Butler claims: “gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic,

sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out ‘gender’ from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained” (Butler 3). Simply put, by acting and interacting a certain way, one consolidates the construct of being one pole of the gender binary. Butler also brings up the distinction between sex and gender, wherein sex is biological and gender is what is formed culturally: “the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed gender . . . it does not follow that the construction of ‘men’ will accrue exclusively to the bodies of males or that ‘women’ will interpret only female bodies” (Butler 6). The two are mutually interchangeable; it is a theory proved and further complicated by existing individuals who do not conform to the traditional dichotomy of gender where it is presumed that sex and gender should match.

Another important contributor to both queer and gender theories was Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who wrote *Epistemology of the Closet* in the same year as Butler wrote *Gender Trouble*. In her work, Sedgwick argues that the institutionalizing of homo/heterosexuality did not begin until the late nineteenth century. She therefore deconstructed sexuality and gender, claiming that, despite seemingly shared categories which define them, there can be significant differences, especially so from individual to individual. She disputed the connection between the biological sex and socially constructed gender, and separated gender and sexuality: “although sexuality and gender are informed by one another, they must also exist as distinct from one another” (Phoca 52).

Since then, there has been a lot of research on the issues of gender and sex, on how the two concepts are different, how gender is created and how it influences behavior, supporting the claim that gender is a social construct. In her work titled *Delusions of Gender: How Our Minds, Society, and Neurosexism Create Difference* (2010), Cordelia Fine talks about the alleged brain differences between the two sexes and argues that they are actually just a product of the societal standards and cultural beliefs for each gender:

When the environment makes gender salient, there is a ripple effect on the mind. We start to think of ourselves in terms of our gender, and stereotypes and social expectations become more prominent in the mind. This can change self-perception, alter interests, debilitate or enhance ability, and trigger unintentional discrimination. In other words, the social context influences who you are, how you think and what you do. (xxvi)

There is also plenty of research on the effects that gendered norms have on the lives and health of individuals; in particular, the research points out the negative effects of gender

stereotypes on an individual's health. For example, autism is underdiagnosed in girls and women, because "their quiet and passive behaviours [are] seen as socially acceptable for girls" (Bargiela et al. 3286), while their emotional meltdowns are simply seen as rudeness instead of the inability to socialize. As a result of that, women are also more adept at "masking" their difficulties and learning socially acceptable behaviors in order to hide them (Bargiela et al. 3287). Similarly, border personality disorders (BPD) are often underdiagnosed in men because of similar stereotypes: aggressive outbursts in men are often treated as anger management problems and are more likely to land them in jail, and substance abuse (which is equally common in women with BPD as in men) tends to lead to treatment programs instead of mental health institution (Sansone and Sansone 17). Additionally, research shows that women cry more, and more frequently than men, and are more likely to show their pain and helplessness because that is socially accepted; due to gender stereotypes about men being more stoic and in control, men tend to cry less and "display less help-seeking behaviour in response to mental illness and suffering, which has been suggested to be linked to their higher suicide rates" (Stadel et al. 697).

Gender and gender practices are explored in literature as well as in science. The issues such as gender performativity and its consequences on individuals and society are alluded to through metaphors and allegories, the carefully constructed worlds within which gender either does not exist (as in the case of Le Guin's work) or is the haunting presence which chases women into madness or death (as in the case of Gilman's and Jackson's work). They question, as Butler puts it, "how such gender norms get established and policed and what the best way is to disrupt them and to overcome the police function" ("Judith Butler: Your Behavior Creates Your Gender" 00:02:23 - 00:02:31). Thus, the following chapters of this thesis will look into the selected works of fantastic literature (Gothic and Science Fiction) and analyze the representation of gender roles and their effect on the characters, as well as establish how the representation changes over time and in different genres.

## 2. The Vampire

Gothic fiction originated with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, published in 1764, which set the tone for the genre. It is usually concerned with fears and anxieties of its time, and it is rich with an atmosphere of terror and wonder. It usually uses elements of the supernatural as well as monsters in order to express this: "monsters function to define and construct the politics of the 'normal'. . . . Limits and boundaries can therefore be reinstated as



the monster is dispatched, good is distinguished from evil and self from other” (Punter and Byron 263). One of such monsters is often a vampire, and vampire stories represent an important subgenre of Gothic literature.

The vampire has existed for a very long time, even before the Gothic, in the context of folklore (Hobson and Anyiwo 2). It was a part of oral tradition of cultures all over the world, but the vampire within the Gothic is mostly based on Eastern Europe’s folklore, where it appears as a mindless monster; a creature, which used to be a simple peasant, comes from death to haunt and feed on their former family and friends (Punter and Byron 268). It was not until Romanticism and John Polidori’s “The Vampyre” (1819) that the vampire transformed into an intelligent creature and an aristocrat. At this point, the vampire also became associated with sexuality; as Hobson points out: “[t]he vampire is a pre-eminently sexualized predator, who alternately uses horrific violence and smooth seduction” (12). As the nineteenth century saw the struggle for the equality of genders – more precisely, for women’s rights – and the start of “the pathologising, institutionalizing, and classifying of homosexuals” (Phoca 51), the vampire became a site of representation of these new changes as monstrous and dangerous, “highlighting the notion of the dangerous non-normative sexuality and gender of the effeminate man. This approach served to further denigrate the cultural Other—the female and the homosexual” (Hobson and Anyiwo 3).

Sheridan Le Fanu wrote *Carmilla* in 1872, whose titular character is a female vampire who feeds on and seduces a young, naïve heroine. The novella’s plot deals with “the heroine’s confinement and escape” (Punter and Byron 137), which is especially typical for Female Gothic, a specific type of Gothic dealt with in more detail in the following chapter. The character of Carmilla is considered to be the first lesbian vampire villain; as Hobson suggests, “the seducing lesbian becomes the destroyer of other women and undermines heteronormative masculine power” ( 11). The female villain, however, did not become a trope or a prototype of the vampire villain. It was, in fact, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* that established the prototype of a modern vampire (Punter and Byron 230). It is a story focused on a male vampire from Transylvania who wishes to move to the Western world and corrupt the respectable, innocent English women. It criticizes the contemporary challenging of gender roles and re-establishes the traditional patriarchal cultural norm. Much like Carmilla, Dracula too is killed rather violently in order to save the innocent from his corruption.

It is not until the late twentieth century that the vampires “start to tell their own stories and consequently become more sympathetic, closer to the human and much less radically the ‘other’” (Punter and Byron 271). As Kristina Durocher points out, contemporary

representations of vampire men are no longer grotesque, but the vampires are seen as young, heterosexual, good-looking, romantic, and even human-loving (45). The modern vampires seek community and are motivated by very human needs; there are good vampires who refuse to drink blood and those who stand up for humanity. Some of the more prominent stories are those by Anne Rice written in the 1970s. As Richard S. Primuth explains, Rice's "vampires live among humans, have always lived among humans, and have a distinct, separate culture. This is analogous in a number of ways to homosexuality, with its wider acceptance, the realization that being gay is not a choice, and the existence of a separate and still largely hidden gay subculture" ("Vampires Are Us"). Furthermore, the 1990s as well as the early 2000s saw a rise in the popularity of vampire in popular fiction which resulted in its popularity in other media, as well; there were TV series, such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* or *True Blood* – a screen adaptation of Charlaine Harris' *The Southern Vampire Mysteries* series, and films, such as the *Twilight Saga*, a result of the adaptation of Stephenie Meyer's series of novels. The next chapters will discuss the representation of vampires in *Carmilla* and *Dracula* with the focus on the issues of gender.

## 2.1. *Carmilla*

*Carmilla* (1871-2) is a novella by the Irish author Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, first as a serial in a literary magazine, and then in a collection of Le Fanu's short stories titled *In a Glass Darkly* (1872). It is narrated by a teenage protagonist, Laura, who lives a solitary life with her father in Austria. When she was around six years old, Laura had an encounter with a beautiful young lady who apparently bit into Laura's breast and hid after Laura cried. She was later convinced that it was a nightmare, a product of her imagination, but the event haunted Laura for the rest of her life. Even though they believed it was a nightmare, Laura's father had a priest bless her room and ordered a nursery maid to sleep next to her. The story actually starts after Laura is informed that General Spielsdorf's niece Bertha – who was supposed to keep lonely Laura's company – is dead. Laura is saddened, since she longs for a companion, when suddenly there is a carriage accident, not far from Laura's home, in which a young woman Laura's age is hurt. The young woman's mother needs to continue her journey but asks for her daughter to stay with Laura and her father. The young woman's name is Carmilla and Laura recognizes her as the woman from her dream.

Laura and Carmilla become close, despite Carmilla's unusual behavior. Carmilla seems to sleep during most of the day, does not participate in prayers, and stays away from

religious rituals; she is often moody and secretive about her past. Meanwhile, in a town close to their home, young women start dying from an unknown disease. Additionally, Laura starts having a nightmare about a cat-like creature sneaking into her room at night and she becomes ill. After they consult a doctor who advises them not to leave Laura unattended, Laura and her father start on a journey to Karnstein. On their way there, they encounter General Spielsdorf who tells them the story of his niece's death. Bertha met a young woman named Millarca who became her companion. Bertha fell ill with the same symptoms as Laura. After consulting with a doctor who suggested Bertha was being attacked by a vampire, General Spielsdorf discovered that the vampire is Millarca. Unfortunately, Bertha died and General failed to capture Millarca, so now he is looking for her in order to kill her. Upon Carmilla's arrival, General recognizes her as the vampire who killed Bertha and they get into a physical fight from which Carmilla flees. Baron Vordenburg – a vampire hunter – joins them and locates Carmilla's tomb. Carmilla is killed rather violently, by a stake driven through her heart, after which her head is cut off and her body burned to ashes.

What is interesting about *Carmilla* is that its central character is a female vampire who “illustrates historically specific and continuing cultural fears about women's sexuality as well as the titillation of the sexually voracious, beautiful, but deadly seductresses” (Hobson 10). As Durocher points out, Carmilla is represented as “the seducing lesbian [who] becomes the destroyer of other women and undermines heteronormative masculine power” (11). According to Jill Lebian, women in literature were often portrayed as poles of “a crude sexual binary” (103); they were virgins or whores. Generally, the virgins were innocent – at times even naïve – submissive, virtuous young women and the highpoint of their lives was marrying an equally moral and honorable man. The whores, on the other hand, were rebellious women who disrespected societal norms; they were self-assured, and sexually aggressive women, who ended miserably – dead more often than not. This polarization of women is evident in *Carmilla*. Laura fits the role of the virgin; she is lonely, docile, and submissive to her father who takes the role of a typical patriarch, well-meaning and easily influenced. She ought to be protected from the moral and physical dangers equally and is described as frail and beautiful: “a beautiful young lady, with golden hair and large blue eyes” (Le Fanu 18). Her opposite is, of course, Carmilla – the bad influence who feeds on poor Laura and takes advantage of her naivety. She is a predatory evil who uses Laura for her impure ways. While also described as beautiful, there is nothing angelic about Carmilla:

She was above the middle height of women. . . . She was slender, and wonderfully graceful. Except that her movements were languid. . . . Her

complexion was rich and brilliant; her features were small and beautifully formed; her eyes large, dark, and lustrous; her hair was quite wonderful, I never saw hair so magnificently thick and long when it was down about her shoulders. . . It was exquisitely fine and soft, and in color a rich very dark brown, with something of gold. (Le Fanu 20)

Carmilla's behavior is also ambiguous. Even though she is beautiful and girlish, some of Carmilla's acts – which are most often the acts of seducing Laura – are almost masculine, to the point that Laura wonders whether she might actually be a young man in disguise: “What if a boyish lover had found his way into the house, and sought to prosecute his suit in masquerade, with the assistance of a clever old adventuress” (Le Fanu 24). Carmilla is undoubtedly queer-coded. Her affections are bestowed upon women and girls, and she is only ever shown feeding on them. Bertha, General Spielsdorf's niece who is not unlike Laura – naïve, pretty, well-intentioned – is revealed to be Carmilla's first victim. Carmilla feeds exclusively on girls, attacking only the peasant girls from the nearby village. But it seems that she has a special interest in Laura. While witnessing a funeral of Carmilla's most recent victim, Laura expresses grief, while Carmilla says: “I don't trouble my head about peasants. I don't know who she is” (Le Fanu 25). However, after she confesses to having seen Laura in her dream (actually recounting their first meeting), Carmilla describes Laura as unforgettable:

while I was still upon my knees, I saw you—most assuredly you—as I see you now; a beautiful young lady, with golden hair and large blue eyes, and lips—your lips—you as you are here. Your looks won me; I climbed on the bed and put my arms about you, and I think we both fell asleep. (Le Fanu 18)

What is interesting in this recounting is that this is the only instance in the story where Carmilla seems to be in an inferior position; she is literally on her knees in front of Laura and she seems to be mesmerized by Laura's beauty, especially so her lips, a sensual part of her body. Also, Carmilla seems to be sympathetic of Laura more than of anyone else: “Dearest, your little heart is wounded; think me not cruel because I obey the irresistible law of my strength and weakness; if your dear heart is wounded, my wild heart bleeds with yours” (Le Fanu 22). Furthermore, Carmilla seems to be aggressively possessive over Laura:

my strange and beautiful companion would take my hand and hold it with a fond pressure, renewed again and again; blushing softly, gazing in my face with languid and burning eyes, and breathing so fast that her dress rose and fell with the tumultuous respiration. It was like the ardor of a lover; it embarrassed me; it was hateful and yet over-powering; and with gloating eyes she drew me to her,

and her hot lips traveled along my cheek in kisses; and she would whisper, almost in sobs, “You are mine, you shall be mine, you and I are one for ever. (Le Fanu 23)

This is evidently not the way she feels about her other victims; certainly not about the peasant girls she seems to only use for food, and there is no proof she felt anything for Bertha, either, since she fled and never expressed regret over it.

Additionally, Carmilla seems to express her disdain over the fact that Laura will inevitably die. Carmilla is a dominant and aggressive person who is confident about her sexuality as well as her appeal. She seems to take what she wants, and she makes advances to Laura in a very straightforward and physical way: “She used to place her pretty arms about my neck, draw me to her, and laying her cheek to mine, murmur with her lips near my ear. . . And when she had spoken such a rhapsody, she would press me more closely in her trembling embrace, and her lips in soft kisses gently glow upon my cheek” (Le Fanu 23). Conversely, Laura is much subtler. Her feelings for Carmilla are conflicting, complicated, but the pull she feels towards Carmilla is undeniable:

I did feel, as she said, “drawn towards her,” but there was also something of repulsion. In this ambiguous feeling, however, the sense of attraction immensely prevailed. She interested and won me; she was so beautiful and so indescribably engaging. . . I was delighted with my companion; that is to say, in many respects. (Le Fanu 19)

Moreover, Laura is shy and does not know how to react to Carmilla’s flirtation. She is confused by her own feelings and she tries to rationalize them: “‘Are we related,’ I used to ask; ‘what can you mean by all this? I remind you perhaps of someone whom you love; but you must not, I hate it; I don’t know you—I don’t know myself when you look so and talk so’” (Le Fanu 23). Lukas Künnecke even suggests that due to her living relatively isolated and shielded from the rest of the world, Laura is “ignorant of the possibility of (tabooed) same-sex desire” (11).

It could be argued that Laura’s feelings are being manipulated by Carmilla’s vampiric powers and influences, or that they are simply a result of Laura being lonely for so long that her desire for company grew and she is taken in by Carmilla in an innocent way, such as a child may be. However, there is no denying that Laura’s descriptions of Carmilla are filled with adoration and attraction. Additionally, Laura expresses her fixation on Carmilla long after the vampire is dead, when there is no way that she is still under Carmilla’s influence, and Laura is far away in Italy with her father: “and to this hour the image of Carmilla returns to

memory with ambiguous alternations—sometimes the playful, languid, beautiful girl; sometimes the writhing fiend I saw in the ruined church; and often from a reverie I have started, fancying I heard the light step of Carmilla at the drawing room door” (Le Fanu 85).

However, while Laura’s life and virtue are saved from the threatening Carmilla set to destroy her morality, Carmilla herself is brutally killed by men in a very symbolic way: her heart is penetrated by a stake; her head is cut off her body, and she is burned to ashes. Carmilla is punished for her inappropriate dominance and cleverness by dominant, clever, masculine men. The world is free from a foul woman who dared not only to be independent from men but also to own her sexuality and direct it to another woman; she is “punished for [her] failure to conform” (Hobson 4). Interestingly enough, *Carmilla* served as an inspiration for a modern web-series titled *Carmilla* in which Laura and Carmilla become romantically involved. The series became so popular that a movie titled *The Carmilla Movie*, set after the events of the series, came out in 2016 (Spangler). The series won Canadian Screen Awards in 2016, in the category of Digital Media (*Canadian Screen Awards - Academy*) and was praised for its positive queer representation, it being available to a larger audience and catering to them (vanKampen).

## 2.2. *Dracula*

Bram Stoker’s novel *Dracula* was published in 1897 and, despite not being the first novel to use some of what are now vampire stereotypes, it became the prototype for the modern vampire characters. *Dracula* tackles many problems and anxieties of the Victorian age, gender roles included. According to David Punter and Glennis Byron, it displays a persistent anxiousness about the breakdown of gender roles which the Victorian middle-class tended to uphold very strictly. The boundaries of male and female were controlled rigorously, particularly in such a way as to limit women (231). Much like *Carmilla*, Stoker’s novel was written during the period of first wave feminism and little after the term “new woman,” used in the novel multiple times, was coined in order to describe independent, educated women who were asking for their societal and sexual autonomy (Buzwell). It was also a time of extreme prejudice against gay people; Oscar Wilde was famously accused and tried for homosexuality. Primuth points out: “[Stoker] began writing *Dracula* one month after Wilde was convicted of sodomy and sentenced to hard labor. . . . His friend of over twenty years was going to prison, and he began writing a novel about sexual repression and fear” (“Vampires Are Us”). The resulting fear of the destruction of the traditional gender roles and the

institutionalization of the so-called “sexual inversion” was only a part of what was seen as a decline of society and cultural corruption (Punter and Byron 232).

The story of *Dracula* starts with Jonathan Harker coming to visit Count Dracula in his castle in Transylvania in order to help him with the legal issues in a real estate transaction. Even though he is repeatedly warned by the locals not to go to the castle, Jonathan goes there and is at first welcomed by the Count, but soon realizes he is actually held captive. After he is attacked by three female vampires, from whom he is saved by Dracula, Jonathan realizes that Dracula is a vampire as well. After Dracula departs for England, Jonathan is left alone in the castle from which he barely escapes.

The point of view then switches to Jonathan’s fiancé, Mina, who is staying with her friend Lucy. Lucy receives three marriage proposals from Dr. John Seward, Quincey Morris, and Arthur Holmwood, accepting the latter. Lucy is then bitten by Dracula, and begins to suffer from sleepwalking. As her health deteriorates, Dr. Seward asks Abraham Van Helsing for help. He reveals she is suffering from blood loss and orders blood transfusions to which he contributes alongside all three men who proposed to Lucy. Unfortunately, Lucy dies and is buried. Soon after, they hear the news of an unknown beautiful woman who sucks the blood of children from nearby towns. Van Helsing tells the three suitors that Lucy has turned into a vampire. Together, they kill her by staking her heart and cutting off her head. Roughly at the same time, Mina marries Jonathan and the couple joins the men in their fight against the vampire.

Mina discovers that they can find Count Dracula through the clues found in their letters and journals. Jonathan finds the shipment of boxed earth that Dracula used to travel and the estates he purchased. Van Helsing and Dr. Seward analyze Seward’s patient Renfield, who is being influenced by Dracula, as well as explore folklore of various cultures in order to understand how Dracula could be killed. The men search for Dracula and, upon realizing this, Dracula attacks Mina. He forces Mina to drink his blood and the two form a telepathic connection. Via this connection, Mina manages to guide the men to Dracula, even though she asks them not to tell her their plan so as to prevent Dracula from reading her mind as well. While Van Helsing and Mina travel to Dracula’s castle, the rest of the men manage to track down Dracula and kill him. Mina is cured, but Quincey Morris dies from his wounds. The novel concludes with a note by Jonathan in which he states that he and Mina are happily married and have a son named Quincey.

As suggested earlier, the story is full of anxieties related to gender and sexuality, especially so the mixing of feminine and masculine gender roles. For example, Künnecke

argues that “[w]hile Mina embodies traditionally male connoted attributes such as diligence in these scenes – thus approaching the actively connoted male domain – her fiancé (and later husband) Jonathan Harker is relieved of some of his traditional male activeness” (9). Punter and Byron point out that: “[t]he confusion of gender categories, many critics have noted, is most clearly demonstrated by Jonathan’s feminine passivity in the scene where he is seduced by the three female vampires; here the conventions of sexual difference are inverted as the fluttering Jonathan awaits the moment of penetration” (232). Indeed, Jonathan is the most passive one of the men in the novel. He is absent when the suitors and Van Helsing kill the vampiric Lucy, as he is still recovering in Budapest from his near escape from the Count’s castle. Additionally, he remains passive and barely conscious while Dracula attacks Mina in their bedroom: “On the bed beside the window lay Jonathan Harker, his face flushed, and breathing heavily as though in a stupor” (Stoker 304). The Count quite literally invades the Harkers’ most intimate chambers, where he assaults Jonathan’s wife, symbolically emasculating Jonathan. Even when Van Helsing manages to awake him, Jonathan does not take direct action; he cries and asks the men to help his wife while he searches for the vampire, but he still remains with Mina while Quincey goes out to look for the monster.

However, as Punter and Byron point out, Jonathan’s feminine passivity is most obvious in the scene where the three female vampires try to seduce him. The vampires are beautiful and seductive; they are aggressive in their advances towards Jonathan: “I lay quiet, looking out under my eyelashes in an agony of delightful anticipation. The fair girl advanced and bent over me till I could feel the movement of her breath upon me” (Stoker 41). Not only is the vampire woman physically atop of Jonathan, holding him docile and submissive, she brings with her the promise of penetration – a traditionally masculine sexual role. Moreover, Jonathan seems to be enjoying it, despite initial fear: “I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips” (Stoker 41). Jonathan also makes no move to participate, either to escape from them or encourage them: “closed my eyes in a languorous ecstasy and waited—waited with beating heart” (Stoker 41). Jonathan is saved from this assault by Count Dracula himself. Dracula reacts violently, physically overpowering the vampires and claiming Jonathan for himself: “How dare you touch him, any of you? How dare you cast eyes on him when I had forbidden it? Back, I tell you all! This man belongs to me! Beware how you meddle with him, or you’ll have to deal with me” (Stoker 42). Jonathan, still lying passively, in this scene effectively becomes a damsel in distress saved by the hero, who is also the villain, in this twisted challenging of gender roles.



Furthermore, it is worth noting that the women vampires are an extension of Dracula himself; they are his creations, and thus under his control; more importantly, they reflect his desires. And there is no room to misinterpret Dracula's motives for saving Jonathan. When the vampires accuse Dracula of having never loved, he reminds them that this is not true: "Yes, I too can love; you yourselves can tell it from the past. Is it not so?" (Stoker 42). Dracula likely refers to the affection he feels for his victims – the women who are now vampires – and by that extension Jonathan himself. As Punter and Byron point out: "same-sex desire between men can be encoded only through women" (270); this is manifested through the mentioned scenes of the Count's vampire women biting Jonathan, and the Count assaulting Mina in an allusively sexual way while Jonathan lies in bed next to her. But it is further consolidated when Dracula threatens the Crew of Light saying: "Your girls that you all love are mine already; and through them you and others shall yet be mine" (Stoker 42). Craft suggests that "the sexual threat that this novel first evokes, manipulates, sustains, but never finally represents is that Dracula will seduce, penetrate, drain another male" (110); the threat is only represented as the monstrous heterosexuality of the vampire women and, later on, Lucy Westenra.

The three vampire women are described as very sexualized: "There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive, and as she arched her neck she actually licked her lips like an animal, till I could see in the moonlight the moisture shining on the scarlet lips and on the red tongue as it lapped the white sharp teeth" (Stoker 42). They act on their sexual instinct, and are almost animalistic in their actions. They do not sit and wait for their suitors; they find Jonathan despite Dracula's ban and are fully set on claiming Jonathan and taking what they want from him. They are also brash and cheeky; they mock Dracula and challenge him. By being neither shy nor passive, they defy societal behavioral norms for women. In this, they are "monstrous," that is, they exhibit a traditionally masculine rather than feminine behavior.

Mina Murray Harker is possibly the most complex female character in the novel. She enters the story as Jonathan's fiancée, but, instead of waiting at home, she goes all the way to Budapest to take care of him and marry him after he barely escapes the Count's castle alive. More significantly, her ambition regarding her education and work is shown early on in the novel; she works hard to "keep up with Jonathan's studies" and practices shorthand in order to be able to help Jonathan with his job (Stoker 59). Additionally, she works as an assistant schoolmistress (Stoker 59), meaning that she earns her own money and is probably financially independent to a certain extent. Mina is also mentally and emotionally strong; not only does

she share a connection with Dracula, but she is also able to use it for the good rather than let him control her. Mina is also a moral support for the men, and especially so for her husband. She is deeply empathetic and motherly:

I felt an infinite pity for [Lord Godalming], and opened my arms unthinkingly. With a sob he laid his head on my shoulder, and cried like a wearied child, whilst he shook with emotion. We women have something of the mother in us that makes us rise above smaller matters when the mother-spirit is invoked; I felt this big, sorrowing man's head resting on me, as though it were that of the baby that some day may lie on my bosom, and I stroked his hair as though he were my own child. (Stoker 247)

Even when Mina's life is threatened, "[s]he tried to school herself . . . and, manifestly for her husband's sake, tried to seem content" (Stoker 336). She even urges her husband to kill her if she is corrupted by Dracula, showing bravery and readiness for self-sacrifice which Jonathan is not shown to possess. Van Helsing describes her in the following way: "She has man's brain—a brain that a man should have were he much gifted—and woman's heart" (Stoker 253). Mina unites the men in their goal to stop Dracula as they refuse to allow another woman, especially such a virtuous and strong woman as Mina, fall victim to a monster, and functions as their leader and active assistant in his killing.

However, Mina's actions seem to be led by her feelings towards her husband. She is fiercely loyal to him. Unlike Lucy, who wants to marry all of her suitors, Mina has no other love interests but Jonathan. After she is assaulted by Dracula, Mina seems to take the blame onto herself; she is upset by this event, but then again, it seems like she is more worried about Jonathan's virtue than her own. She cries: "Unclean, unclean! I must touch him or kiss him no more" (Stoker 307). Additionally, Mina seems to be punished for Dracula's act inflicted upon her; when Van Helsing puts the Holy Wafer on Mina's forehead, it burns her (Stoker 321). Mina, too, becomes impure, infected by the monster, but she repents. Ironically, in order to be saved and restored to the traditional values of a pure, faithful wife, Mina has to actively work on saving herself. This participation – an opposition to the passivity a woman should manifest – is still undermined by the fact that Mina saves herself for Jonathan more than anything else. As previously mentioned, she is so afraid of going through the full transformation that she would rather be killed to save the traditional values, than to become transformed. Precisely because of that, Mina is the female character who survives until the end of the novel.

Ultimately quite different from Mina, Lucy Westenra also starts out as sweet, lovely, and compliant. Mina describes her as "looking sweetly pretty in her white lawn frock; she has

got a beautiful colour since she has been here. . . She is so sweet with old people; I think they all fell in love with her on the spot” (Stoker 70). Lucy is pleasant, polite and pretty; she fits seamlessly into the stereotypes of what a woman should be, and it is no wonder that three men propose to her. However, this is the moment when her sexuality comes into focus. Lucy cannot seem to decide between her suitors and wants them all for herself. She writes to Mina: “Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble?” (Stoker 65). Lucy, much like the vampire women, shows her insatiability and voluptuousness. Her desire not to have to choose between men comes true in a bizarre, yet symbolic way after she has been bitten by Dracula. To save her, Van Helsing suggests blood transfusion as a cure for Lucy’s mysterious illness, and all of her suitors – with the addition of Van Helsing himself – give Lucy their blood. After her funeral, Arthur, her true fiancé, expresses his grief but also his belief that they were still married “in the sight of God” (Stoker 187) when he gave her his blood. The rest of the men stay silent about their own part in the futile attempts to save Lucy, never disclosing that they, too, gave Lucy their blood. In that way, by Arthur’s logic, they too became married to Lucy, so in order to protect Arthur and preserve the image of Lucy as a chaste virgin instead of a woman involved with four men, they keep silent.

After her death, Lucy’s transformation becomes complete and her monstrosity comes fully to life. Her attractiveness remains, but now it is wicked and wrong, openly sexual in a way that is aggressive and scary: “The sweetness was turned to adamant, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness” (Stoker 226). Lucy is hungry and, as a vampire, she is hunting for blood. Furthermore, Lucy the vampire is carrying a child in her arms, but rather than taking care of the child, she is feasting on it. She even literally throws the child on the ground after she is finished, in “a rather obvious rejection of maternity” (Punter and Byron 231). Lucy is punished for her open sexuality and rejection of motherhood by the men, “her husbands,” who stake her in what Punter and Byron describe as “the most brutal enactment of the restoration of gendered boundaries” (233), and Craft as the “[v]iolence against the sexual woman [which] is intense, sensually imagined, ferocious in its detail” (122). Dracula, however, does not receive this “corrective penetration”; he is “destroyed not with a stake, which would suggest further transgression, but with the weapons of empire . . . with Jonathan’s kukri knife and Quincey’s bowie knife; he dies like a man” (Punter and Byron 233).

It should be pointed out that, despite being painted as the villain of the story, Dracula in fact saves women from their passivity. In the cases of vampire women and Lucy Westenra where their transformation into vampires is complete, these women are sexually liberated.

They are assertive, aggressive, and unafraid. They also possess a semblance of power over their victims, or rather, they use their sexuality as their weapon rather than repressing it. Mina is weaponized in another way: being granted the knowledge of Dracula's whereabouts, which combined with her own natural cleverness, plays the key role in the men's mission. Even though in danger, Mina is not a typical damsel in distress; she takes an active role in her own salvation. The traits they possess are masculine rather than feminine, which temporarily upturns the traditional Victorian gender dynamics. However, the "natural order" is restored through the Harkers. Jonathan reaffirms his masculine role by assisting in the killing of the monster and fathering a son, while "Mina, suitably punished for her momentary lapse when feeding at Dracula's breast by being branded with the sacred wafer, is ultimately restored to her proper role as nurturing mother" (Punter and Byron 233). The Harkers together form a nuclear family that fits within heteronormativity and traditional gender roles, safe in their knowledge that they have destroyed any possible attempt at disturbing the norm.

### 3. Domestic Containment of Women in Gothic Literature

The term "Female Gothic" was first coined by Ellen Moers in *Literary Women* (1976), who thought it would be easily defined as Gothic written by women. However, what Gothic truly means, Moers points out, is not easy to explain, "except that it has to do with fear" (Moers 90). Ellen Ledoux elaborates that Moers used the term "to describe how eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women novelists employ certain coded expressions to describe anxieties over domestic entrapment and female sexuality" (2). Punter and Byron argue that it is "more useful to think of it in terms of a psychological argument, to do with the ways in which otherwise repressed fears are represented in textual form" (xviii).

To express the fears and anxieties of its time, the Gothic resorts to the representation of the uncanny; ghosts, monsters, paranoia and the supernatural are often at the heart of a Gothic story. The central motif, however, is often a gloomy old castle. It is a feature of Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* and of many other subsequent Gothic works, such as Stoker's *Dracula*, Radcliffe's *Gaston de Blondeville* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and others. It is a place of ambiguity, where the protagonist is often haunted by the past (both the building's and their own); it is "a maze, a site of secrets. It is also, paradoxically, a site of domesticity, where ordinary life carries on even while accompanied by the most extraordinary and inexplicable of events" (Punter and Byron 261). The scenery of the American Gothic changes from a haunted castle to a decaying house. Additionally, "the house changes from

being a symbol of male privilege and protection conferred on the fortunate female of his choice, to an image of male power in its sinister aspect, threatening and oppressive” (Figs 74).

Female Gothic, in particular, is preoccupied with a family house: “the domestic resonant sphere, a symbolically loaded, psychically site associated with familial inheritance where most middle- and upper-class women of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries spent the majority of their lives” (Davison 53). It differs from the rest of the Gothic works that are focused on male protagonists because, as Davison points out, “women’s generally repressed fears and desires—Gothic’s twin fascinations—differ quite dramatically from those of their male counterparts” (50). Wallace and Smith define it as “a politically subversive genre articulating women’s dissatisfactions with patriarchal structures and offering a coded expression of their fears of entrapment within the domestic and the female body” (2). Similarly, Ledoux suggests that the tropes of Female Gothic include “a distressed heroine, domestic incarceration, threats of sexual violence, anxiety about monstrous or absent mothers” (2). In particular, Female Gothic focuses on the anxieties and fears of the female protagonists which stem from and are focused on a place of domesticity – the house.

In 1963, Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, a nonfiction book which allegedly helped spark the second wave feminism (Fox). In the book, Friedan writes about “a strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives as women and the image to which we were trying to conform” (39). She writes about the immense dissatisfaction and nonfulfillment that a large number of women felt being solely housewives and mothers. Friedan talks about the standards imposed on women that required them to retain their femininity and realize their fulfillment within their homes and families, while simultaneously denying them education and self-actualization through it, and making them feel that this sense of entrapment was solely individual:

The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night—she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question—“Is this all?” (44)

One of the culprits in promoting these ideas were, Friedan argues, women's magazines. They were promoting the idea that women should be naturally content with their only role as housewives, and they were made mostly by men, with a few exceptions of women editors. However, Friedan accuses these women editors of being more responsible for spreading these ideas; while these women found their fulfillment precisely in working for magazines and making their own money, they were simultaneously promoting ideas of themselves as "just housewives," retelling their domestic experiences through comedic anecdotes and idyllic stories, and denying their own hard work (82). Interestingly, Friedan sees Shirley Jackson, who was then a popular contributor to magazines such as *Good Housekeeping* and *Ladies' Home Journal*, as one of these women culprits (82). Despite her contribution to the women's magazines, Jackson's then less popular fiction dives into the very same problems of domestic isolation and dissatisfaction as Friedan's work. Even though more subtle, Jackson write about heroines who lack identity, are unable to find it within existing society and are, essentially, entrapped within their own homes: "Jackson's female characters feel that their potential is unfulfilled and long for change" (Sluis 5).

The idea of domestic containment of women is unfortunately not a new one. In the late nineteenth century, doctor Silas Weir Mitchell, a famous physician, began prescribing the so-called rest cure to women. It was a type of therapy for their alleged nervous diseases which consisted of confining an allegedly sick woman to bed, "forcing a woman to stifle the drives and emotions that had made her sick with frustration in the first place and depriving her of intellectual outlets for their expression" (Showalter 273), refusing her participation in social life as well as any physical exertion (K. Gilbert). After having been succumbed herself to this alleged cure, Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote "The Yellow Wallpaper" in 1892. She claimed she followed Dr. Mitchell's instruction for three months and she "came so near the borderline of utter mental ruin that [she] could see over" (Gilman, "Why I Wrote"). But Gilman was among rare women who managed to escape her domestic prison. She divorced her husband, left him their child, and went on to seek her fulfillment in other places (K. Gilbert). Unfortunately, many women were denied this opportunity even well after Gilman's time; it is not by accident that her work became popular again during the second wave feminism. It was 28 years after Gilman's death, and well after the women's suffrage movement, that Friedan wrote:

It also is time to stop giving lip service to the idea that there are no battles left to be fought for women in America, that women's rights have already been won. It is ridiculous to tell girls to keep quiet when they enter a new field, or an old one,

so the men will not notice they are there. In almost every professional field, in business and in the arts and sciences, women are still treated as second-class citizens. It would be a great service to tell girls who plan to work in society to expect this subtle, uncomfortable discrimination—tell them not to be quiet, and hope it will go away, but fight it. A girl should not expect special privileges because of her sex, but neither should she “adjust” to prejudice and discrimination. (392)

To further explore the issues of domestic containment, the next two chapters will look into Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” and Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House*.

### 3.1. “The Yellow Wallpaper”: The Isolated Wife

Dale Bailey describes “The Yellow Wallpaper” as “a parable of feminist escape from an oppressive patriarchy, an exploration of the clash between masculine and feminine discourse, a depiction of repressed sexuality, a critique of capitalism, and, yes, even a supernatural tale in the gothic tradition” (28). The story consists of an unnamed female narrator’s journal entries, which she writes in secret, since she is forbidden from writing or any kind of physical or intellectual work as a part of her therapy for “temporary nervous depression” (Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper” 1) – a diagnosis given to her by her husband. The journal entries follow the narrator’s slow descent into madness as she becomes more obsessed with the yellow wallpaper on the walls of their temporary bedroom, convinced that there is a woman trapped within the wallpaper. It is a work of Gothic; Davison describes the story as “Gilman’s incursions into what is largely, in American literature, . . . an established male tradition” (50). The story deals with traditionally Gothic topics of “confinement and rebellion, forbidden desire and “irrational” fear” as well as features its elements, such as “the distraught heroine, the forbidding mansion, and the powerfully repressive male antagonist” (Johnson).

In fact, the narrator compares the mansion she and her husband are staying in to a haunted house: “I will proudly declare that there is something queer about it” (Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper” 1). This introduction will set the tone for all other descriptions of their residence. It is a remote house: “standing back from the road, quite three miles from the village” (Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper” 2); it is an abandoned place, decaying, and fit for renovation, and there are mentions of a family feud. The room they are staying in is a nursery and the narrator does not like it. She would have preferred a room downstairs, but her

husband John decided against it. The narrator offers some really disturbing descriptions of the room, which she believes used to be a nursery and gymnasium: “the windows are barred for little children, and there are rings and things in the walls” (3), “the floor is scratched and gouged and splintered” (5), the bed is nailed to the floor and the “bedstead is fairly gnawed” (14). While naming the room a nursery might suggest the infantilization of the narrator (along with the tone in which her husband sometimes talks to her), the descriptions of the damage done to the furniture and the walls of the room are more suggestive of a former asylum or, at the very least, a room that once confined a mental patient. Gilbert and Gubar argue: “[t]he ‘rings and things,’ although reminiscent of children’s gymnastic equipment, are really the paraphernalia of confinement, like the gate at the head of the stairs, instruments that definitively indicate her imprisonment” (90).

But it is precisely the wallpaper of the nursery that upsets her the most. It is its repulsive yellow color that first starts to bother her: the color of all the “not beautiful [things] like buttercups, but old foul, bad yellow things” (Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper” 11). Early on, the narrator sees within the pattern “a broken neck and two bulbous eyes [that] stare at you upside down” (5), evoking the picture of hanging and the first allusion to suicide. The images within the pattern continue to progress as the narrator’s mental health declines. Ironically, the reason for the new family coming to the mansion is the narrator’s health; she is suffering from a “nervous condition” (2) and on the suggestion of her husband and her brother, both of them physicians, she is to rest, away from other people and unnecessary stimulation, to the point where she does not even take care of her own child. She is prescribed different medication and forbidden to work, but despite all that, her husband does not believe she really is sick. The narrator describes him as an extremely practical person: he “does know how much I suffer. He knows there is no *reason* to suffer, and that satisfies him” (3). He is not necessarily a bad husband – at moments he seems to be genuinely worried about her and convinced that the aforementioned therapy is really doing her good. However, he does not believe her when she tells him that “congenial work, with excitement and change” (1) would be better for her than remaining idle and isolated. John is the absolute authority in their marriage: he chooses the nursery; he forbids his wife from writing; he decides about every little thing. But in doing so, he actually condemns her to her tragic destiny: “[t]hus does the seemingly innocuous, enlightened paternalist physician assume the role of Gothic villain” (Davison 59).

There is another person in the house living with them: John’s sister Jennie. The narrator describes her as “a perfect and enthusiastic housekeeper” (Gilman, “The Yellow



Wallpaper” 5). Jennie serves not only as an extension of John’s authority (she takes care of his wife as well as restricts her activities and reports on her health to John) but also as an example of an ideal woman obediently loyal to a man and her family, who reached her potential as a perfect selfless wife and a mother. Jennie only strengthens the narrator’s belief that she is being unreasonable when she defies or doubts her husband, which echoes Friedan’s claim that the patriarchal system makes women believe that their dissatisfaction with the status quo is an individual anomaly (44). However, while Jennie’s mannerism gives an illusion of being the perfect woman, it is suggested that Jennie also might not be completely comfortable in her role of a housekeeper, for she also seems to be affected by the wallpaper. While John sees the wallpaper, Jennie seems to see *into* it, much like a narrator. She is caught reaching out to touch it, but once she realizes this, Jennie recoils and denies touching it. Additionally, she seems to be just as happy to leave the house as the narrator pretends to be.

Ridden with guilt, depression and ever-growing desire to escape the confinement of the house, as well as John’s restrictions of her activities, the narrator continues to project her emotions onto the wallpaper. Feeling trapped, she notices the bars within the pattern, and behind them the woman who creeps around and shakes the bars in an attempt to get out. The narrator is aware of her health deteriorating: “I cry at nothing, and cry most of the time” (Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper” 6), she writes into her journal and begs John to leave, but he remains deaf to her pleas. Unable to leave, the narrator even considers death as a means to escape: she wishes to burn the house down (11) and considers trying to jump out of a window (14).

Unable to break free in any other way, the narrator escapes into madness; unable to free herself, she frees the woman from the wallpaper. In a way, the narrator embraces her isolation, takes control of it by intentionally locking her husband John and his sister Jennie out of her room. Once John manages to get inside, he is so horrified by her creeping around that he faints, which is an uncharacteristically feminine reaction, whereas she crawls over him, putting herself above him in the literal sense. In the metaphorical sense, she proves him to be wrong by not trusting her and dismissing her mental struggles as insignificant. The story’s journal ends with a “complex and horrific vision of the senseless and crawling, infantile narrator in a posture that literalizes what she has implied is woman’s position in America” (Davison 66). The woman’s victory, ironically, comes with a bitter taste of losing herself.

### 3.2. *The Haunting of Hill House*: The Horror of Passivity

Stephen King called Shirley Jackson's novel *The Haunting of Hill House* "as nearly perfect a haunted-house tale as I have ever read" (163), while Darryl Hattenhauer describes it as her "most Gothic novel. It features her fullest development of the house as a metaphor for the disunified subject" (155). It is a novel rich with subtext and its prevalent theme is the one of loneliness and isolation. It focuses heavily on its characters, particularly so on the two female protagonists: "[t]he horror inherent in the novel does not lie in Hill House (monstrous though it is) or the events that take place within it, but in the unexplored recesses of its characters' . . . minds" (Missing). It begins with Dr. John Montague, a doctor of philosophy who investigates supernatural phenomena, inviting the other three protagonists to spend the summer in Hill House, and participate in his research project: Eleanor Vance, Theodora (just Theodora, who goes by Theo) and Luke Sanderson, a nephew of the owner of the house and its heir. Upon arriving at the house, the group is friendly and optimistic; Eleanor and Theo in particular form a strong bond right at the start, even sharing a bathroom which connects their respective bedrooms. It is on the second night of their stay that things start going wrong. While Luke and Dr. Montague are lured out by an unidentified animal, Eleanor and Theo are trapped in their rooms while someone or something is loudly banging on the doors; the women are horrified, feeling dreadfully cold, as they watch the doorknob turn, but whatever it is that tried to open the door gives up with a laugh when Luke and the doctor come back. After this incident, the events in the house escalate, with Eleanor becoming deeply affected by the house; Doctor, Luke and Theo make Eleanor leave, resulting in her committing suicide by driving her car into a tree.

Even though Shirley Jackson is nowadays mostly celebrated for her Gothic works, including the short story "The Lottery" and the novel *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, in the 1950s she was known for her autobiographical stories about her domestic, family life published in different women's magazines and later collected into memoirs under the titles *Life Among Savages* and *Raising Demons* (Bailey 25). Jackson found herself doubled between her role of a mother and a wife and her role of a writer, which resulted in many of her tales dealing with "the alienation of an ambitious woman torn between her loyalties to family and her personal dreams and imperatives in the circumscribed upper middleclass world of the 1940s and 1950s" (Bailey 25).

In *The Haunting of Hill House*, the central figure is Eleanor Vance. She is the first of Dr. Montague's test subjects who is properly introduced and the first person who arrives at

Hill House. She is often treated as the weakest link of the group and very quickly becomes affected by the house, more so than the others. Early on, Eleanor is described as a lonely and loveless person: “The only person in the world she genuinely hated, now that her mother was dead, was her sister. She disliked her brother-in-law and her five-year-old niece, and she had no friends. This was owing largely to the eleven years she had spent caring for her invalid mother” (Jackson 6). Eleanor dislikes her only remaining family (who are shown to reciprocate her feelings) and, having been isolated by her mother, she did not start a family of her own, so she does not have a husband, children, friends or anyone to love. She hated her mother before she died, and now her feelings are complicated, but hardly positive ones. Eleanor, essentially, has nothing to lose when she accepts Dr. Montague’s invitation.

The reason why Dr. Montague chose Eleanor for his company at Hill House is because of an incident which happened when Eleanor was twelve; not long after the death of Eleanor’s father, their home was hit by showers of stones. Even though the source of the showering stones is unfamiliar and possibly supernatural, it is implied that Eleanor was somehow the cause of it. The stone showers did not frighten Eleanor, and they stopped as soon as she and her sister left the house. It is implied that they were an expression of Eleanor’s grief and anger over her father’s death, perhaps even her inability to process it. But even if Eleanor was indeed the cause, it was not her conscious decision. She represses the memory and remembers the incident only when Dr. Montague brings it up.

When the Hill House experiment begins, Eleanor is still dealing with the consequences of her mother’s death. No matter how isolated and miserable Eleanor was while taking care of her mother, after her death, Eleanor finds herself with no purpose, and no property or personal belongings: “I sleep on a cot at my sister’s, in the baby’s room. . . . No home. Everything in all the world that belongs to me is in a carton in the back of my car” (Jackson 239). She even has to ask permission to use the car she half-owns with her older sister; her stealing the car after her sister refuses to give it to her is Eleanor’s first act of rebellion (and perhaps her first independent act at all). Eleanor is lost; her feelings are complicated, and her personality was so firmly tied to being her mother’s caretaker that she does not know who she truly is. Breaking free from her mother and her sister, Eleanor tries to build herself anew.

Stopping for lunch on her way to Hill House, she overhears a family with a little girl who refuses to drink milk out of just any glass, but demands her mug with stars at the bottom. Later, when Eleanor talks to Theo about her imaginary apartment, she says: “once I had a blue cup with stars painted on the inside. . . I want a cup like that” (Jackson 88). The other pieces of the non-existent apartment she describes – such as curtains, stone lions, mantel – are also

motifs picked up from other homes that she saw on her drive up. It is only when Eleanor takes that first step of rebellion by taking the car and coming to Hill House on her own that she can begin to imagine how her independent life might look. Furthermore, during the first night at Hill House, Theo, Luke and Eleanor turn their introduction into a game. They each tell outrageously false stories about themselves: Luke becomes a bullfighter, Theo becomes a lord's daughter, and Eleanor decides to be an artist's model who lives "a mad, abandoned life" (Jackson 62). Each of them is, of course, using this in order to escape their real lives, but through their fantasies they reveal even more about themselves. Eleanor's life, even in her fantasy, is still lonely.

Nevertheless, the memory of her dead mother still haunts Eleanor. When Theo asks her whether she should offer Eleanor her condolences, Eleanor answers: "No. She wasn't very happy. . . . And neither was I" (Jackson 87). Even though Eleanor repeatedly expresses her alleged lack of grief over her mother's death as well as her disdain for the life she had to live, she is continuously affected by her mother and feels intense guilt over her death. In a way, Eleanor is defined by her relationship with her; namely, she is shown again and again condemning things her mother would find contemptuous. For example, she worries whether or not her fingernails and feet are dirty, or when Theodora paints her toenails red, she sees it almost as an infraction: "It's *horrible*," she says to Theo when she looks at her feet, "it's *wicked*" (Jackson 117). Likewise, while unpacking two pairs of slacks she bought for the summer at Hill House, Eleanor thinks: "Mother would be *furious*" (Jackson 41). Her mother would find red color and wearing pants indecent. It is this deeply engraved shame and guilt that stop Eleanor from building her own identity. She can only go so far as to imagine what it may be like to have a cup of stars or red nails, but she can never make it a reality; she is "trapped between the past and a possible future" (Smith 157). For Eleanor, her mother is an unquestionable authority, even in her death.

Additionally, Eleanor blames herself for her mother's death. Eleanor voices her assumption explicitly: "She knocked on the wall and called me and called me and I never woke up. I ought to have brought her the medicine; I always did before. But this time she called me and I never woke up" (Jackson 212). Of course, there is no way Eleanor could have saved her. Her mother was sick and invalid, her death was inevitable, and Eleanor's guilt only stems from the fact that mother died under her care. However, if Eleanor really did hear her mother's calls and chose not to get up and help her, her feelings of guilt are well grounded; that would mean that Eleanor sped up her mother's death, and even though she is freed of having to care for her, she is still trapped by the immense guilt she feels over it. However,

given Eleanor's passivity, it is highly unlikely that her (in)action was intentional. Even though Eleanor knows her mother's death was unpreventable, she claims: "no matter when it happened it was going to be my fault" (Jackson 212), and the memory of her mother is going to haunt her even in her dreams. On the night of the first unexplained event – the loud thudding and knocking on the doors of Eleanor's and Theo's room – Eleanor wakes up saying: "Coming, mother, coming" (Jackson 127), and it takes her a moment to realize it is not her mother calling for her, but something else. Curiously, Eleanor seems almost relieved that the source of the knocking is something else, even if that something is perhaps more dangerous. She reacts almost childishly: "Not at all like my mother knocking on the wall; I was dreaming again. . . . "Bang," Eleanor said, and giggled" (Jackson 128).

Eleanor's behavior throughout the novel is often naïve and childish. She constantly seeks approval for her actions from everyone: her sister, Dr. Montague, and Theo. When stopping for coffee in the village of Hillsdale against Dr. Montague's advice, Eleanor is met with a dusty, empty diner and an unwelcoming waitress. Albeit unpleasant, it is not a dangerous or forbidden experience, yet Eleanor still chastises herself: "next time I will listen to Dr. Montague" (Jackson 24). Mere minutes after meeting Theodora, Theo gives an angry look to Mrs. Dudley and Eleanor's first thought is: "I hope she never looks at *me* like that" (Jackson 49), even though she has no reason to care about Theo's opinion at all since they are still virtual strangers.

Throughout the novel, Eleanor also keeps idealizing the trip to Hill House and the people she meets; "Journeys end in lovers meeting" (136) becomes her mantra. She keeps comparing her experiences to the elements of fairy tales: on her drive, she imagines herself entering fairyland, finding out she is the lost princess, being saved by a prince (Jackson 20). Instead of taking direct action to save herself from her tragic life, Eleanor imagines all her troubles being solved by means of magical solutions, princes and enchantment. However, she does not seem to know what exactly her "rescue" would mean. For a while, Eleanor applies her fantasies of Prince Charming to Luke. She likes him, trusts him, and it is obvious she hopes the two of them would end up lovers; Theo even goes so far as to make fun of her for that. Obviously, Eleanor hopes for domesticity. Having to care for her mother, Eleanor knows little else except being a caretaker and seeks to escape from one type of domesticity to another by means of marriage: "Forcibly bereft of the feminine identity imposed upon her by the patriarchy, Eleanor can imagine no other avenue to self-fulfillment" (Bailey 43). Even in her fantasies of being independent, Eleanor imagines herself sweeping and cleaning; Mrs. Dudley taking care of the house for them feels wrong to her: "I dislike Mrs. Dudley as much as any of

you, but my mother would *never* let me get up and leave a table looking like this until morning” (Jackson 122), Eleanor complains to the others after the dinner, trying to convince them to let her clean up. However, when given the opportunity to act upon her (imaginary or not) feelings for Luke, Eleanor abruptly realizes that she does not like him at all, at least not in a romantic way, and that her perception of him was unrealistic and fueled by her hopes and wishes. Sitting with Luke in an attempt of an intimate conversation, she thinks: “the only man I have ever sat and talked to alone, and I am impatient; he is simply not very interesting” (Jackson 167). She is disappointed by Luke: “All I want is to be cherished, she thought, and here I am talking gibberish with a selfish man” (167). Soon after this, Eleanor gets in a squabble with Theo about this very episode with Luke, and the confrontation affects their relationship.

Many interpretations of *The Haunting of Hill House*, among which is John G. Parks’ essay “Chambers of Yearning: Shirley Jackson’s Use of the Gothic” and Dale Bailey’s *American Nightmares*, recognize Theo as Eleanor’s double, her alter-ego (Parks 25; Bailey 38). Indeed, Theodora is so clearly Eleanor’s pure opposite. Where Eleanor is passive, seeking her escape in children’s tales and waiting for her rescue, Theo is active, seeking out her fulfillment and desires. She is independent, brash and unapologetic, “a beautiful and sexually ambiguous woman” (Bailey 37). Theo has a career as an artist, her own place, and a “friend with whom she shared an apartment” (Jackson 9). Even though it is never explicitly confirmed, only applied through details such as “Theodora’s loving, teasing inscription” (Jackson 9) in a gifted book, the “friend” in question is undoubtedly Theodora’s lover, and curiously enough, the gender of the “friend” is never stated. It only serves to further illustrate Theo’s sexual autonomy, in addition to her not being married to her lover, as a direct contrast to Eleanor who “conceives of sexuality only in terms of marriage – when she conceives of it at all” (Bailey 39). The doubling of the two women starts to culminate when they are forced to share a room and Eleanor’s clothes.

Theodora has no surname; she never uses it, not even when signing her art, and instead chooses to go by the more masculine nickname, Theo. Like Eleanor, she was chosen by Dr. Montague because she had a possibly supernatural experience. However, unlike Eleanor who witnessed the rain of stones falling on her house, Theo took an active part in a laboratory experiment where she managed to correctly guess the cards not shown to her, thus showing an apparent gift of clairvoyance. She decides to accept Dr. Montague’s invitation after getting into a serious fight with her “friend” and flees the very next day. She is the second person to arrive, right after Eleanor, and the two women immediately become close; in fact, Eleanor

comes “[i]n no more than half an hour to think of Theodora as close and vital” (Jackson 49). Exploring the house and its surroundings, Eleanor and Theo banter and talk about their families and jokingly come to the conclusion that they must be cousins. Even later when they are falsely introducing each other in the group, the two humorously pretend to have difficulties to tell the difference between themselves. With an addition of Mrs. Montague confusing Theo and Eleanor upon her arrival, this points to the duality of these women, that is, their being each other’s doubles.

Indeed, Theo is the one who encourages Eleanor’s independence. She compliments Eleanor’s red sweater and paints her nails red. And while Eleanor cannot let go of her learned prejudice, Theo wears the color with pride: “I love decorating myself,” she tells Eleanor while painting the nails, “I’d like to paint myself all over” (Jackson 116). Theo loves being the center of attention, and dislikes it when Eleanor ends up in the limelight after the ominous plea “HELP ELEANOR COME HOME” (Jackson 146) appears written in blood on the walls. She accuses Eleanor of doing it herself. In fact, it is their unwillingness to share that starts their animosity. For Theodora, it is sharing of the limelight, and for Eleanor it is the sharing of her personality: “There’s only one of me, and it’s all I’ve got. I hate seeing myself dissolve and slip and separate so that I’m living in one half, my mind, and I see the other half of me helpless and frantic and driven and I can’t stop it” (Jackson 160). Eleanor, who has been helpless her entire life, is threatened by Theo, who is loud, brash, and capable. Yet, Eleanor also wants her approval. She is completely mesmerized by her, so much so that she decides to come with Theo after the summer: “I never had anyone to care about” (Jackson 208), Eleanor says, in an attempt to explain why she wants to follow Theo home. However, Theo is her own person; for her, the Hill House experiment is nothing but a summer adventure, and she has her own full life waiting for her at home in the form of her art, her apartment, and her unnamed partner. She refuses Eleanor, gently at first, only to grow more agitated later on. Theo is very unwilling to lose her life and identity for anything. Unlike Eleanor, she has something (and someone) to come back to, and she does not plan to allow the Hill House adventure to follow her home.

As previously mentioned, soon after Eleanor’s unsatisfying conversation with Luke, her relationship with Theo shifts as well. With Theodora’s ambiguous sexuality and Eleanor’s sudden realization that she has no real romantic feelings for Luke, it is not difficult to see the potential for the development of romantic feelings between the two women. Theo teases Eleanor about Luke, and her jealousy is clear, but it is not clear of whom she is jealous. Luke certainly does not show any real interest in Eleanor either, and goading Eleanor has no effect

on bringing the attention back to Theo. They quarrel in privacy, outside the house while Luke and Dr. Montague remain inside. Eleanor accuses Theo of not caring for her: “I am sure that nothing I do is of any interest to you” (Jackson 173). For the second time since arriving, both of them seem to be equally afraid of what happens next:

Nothing irrevocable has yet been spoken, but there was only the barest margin of safety left them; each of them moving delicately along the outskirts of an open question, and, once spoken, such a question – as “Do you love me?” – could never be answered or forgotten. (Jackson 174)

Eleanor desperately wants Theo’s love and approval, but once again, she is too afraid to take the risk and become an active participant in her life. She would rather keep the status quo, in fear of destroying what she already has no matter how painful or unsatisfying, than to move on. As they continue their walk, Theodora takes Eleanor’s hand, and Eleanor thinks: “Now I am really afraid” (Jackson 175). Then, they walk into a simple picnic party: they hear parents talking, children laughing, and see “a checked tablecloth spread out, and, smiling, the mother leaned over to take up a plate of bright fruit” (Jackson 176). It is a perfectly “normal,” domestic scene. As with the knocking, there is nothing inherently supernatural about it. It certainly does not seem to have potential or intention to hurt them. However, both women are terrified: Theo screams, warning Eleanor not to look back, and they both run back to the house, holding hands. Stripping away the possibility of supernatural explanation and assuming that both Theodora and Eleanor see the same scene in front of them, the question raises itself: what is it about domesticity that upsets these women?

This scene is the most explicit depiction of the fear of domestic containment in the story, especially when considered in its full context. It takes place right after the two women come close to voicing their true feelings (whether they are romantic feelings towards each other or not is less important; there is an unavoidable undercurrent of jealousy and longing that is begging to be voiced out in Eleanor and Theo’s quarrel). Theo, who is not married to her partner and shows no intention to become married, ran away from an ongoing fight with her partner in an attempt to keep her complete independence and freedom. Eleanor is coming to a realization that marriage is no fairytale she wanted it to be, and that by marrying a man such as Luke she would be once again locked in the role of caretaker – the role she despised and barely escaped, but still feels immense guilt over. Both women seek autonomy; so, to be locked into domesticity, where they would be forced to take on the predetermined roles and within them lose their own identity, would be terrifying. Eleanor barely has any personality to begin with; she has no home and only a box full of her belongings. She has never had a



chance of starting her own life; with no family and no job, her life is so empty that she feels compelled to lie about it. Conversely, Theo is so fully formed, so abundant with attitude and desire to be the main character of her story that she could never reduce herself only to the role of caretaker and repress her own desires in favor of others'. While there is no explanation for the picnic scene they witness (whether supernatural or not), the feelings of dread and wrongness are so imminent and obvious; "the domestic security of the home becomes supplanted by feelings of danger and uncanniness" (Smith 155).

The novel is also critical of its male characters. The best example is Arthur, Mrs. Montague's friend. He "parodies another manifestation of the masculine personality: the testosterone-fueled stud who views sport as a substitute for the ultimate masculine test, warfare" (Bailey 37). Instead of being a dominant character, he follows Mrs. Montague's orders wordlessly and is decidedly not the brightest person in the room. For all his machoism, Arthur is next to useless when danger shows itself. He sleeps through the second instance of the terrible knocking; when Eleanor climbs the old, unsafe iron stairway, and needs help coming down, Arthur remains frozen at the foot of it. In fact, it is the self-pitying Luke, who voices his fear and concern for his own well-being explicitly and unashamedly, who acts in the face of danger almost unthinkingly. During the second knocking, Luke pulls Dr. Montague away from the door and makes jokes, "although his face was white and his voice trembled" (Jackson 200); it is the "cowardly" Luke who does not hesitate before running up the stairway to get Eleanor to safety. According to Bailey, "Luke is the sole character in the novel who deliberately exposes himself to danger for the sake of another human being" (38). While Jackson uses Arthur to ridicule the traditionally masculine characteristics, she uses the flawed but self-aware Luke to show how acting despite one's fear and weakness counts as genuine bravery.

While Hill House functions as a motherly figure, Jackson offers the readers two father figures in the shape of Doctor Montague and Hugh Crain. Doctor Montague serves as a well-natured father to the three unruly children: Theo, Luke, and Eleanor. He is the head of the group and the catalyst of the events, the one who gathers them all at the house, and appears to possess intimate knowledge of the house, both its layout and its past. He is described as a "a little man both knowledgeable and stubborn" (Jackson 60), honest and trustworthy, if a bit gullible: "he believes every silly thing he has ever heard" (Jackson 148). Parks describes him as "an intellectual voyeur, knowing very much, but really understanding very little" (25). Doctor even refers to the trio as "three willful, spoiled children who are prepared to nag me for your bedtime story" (Jackson 69). However, his reprimands are always in good faith and

he constantly seems to have everyone's well-being in mind. He even goes so far as to literally offer to read them a bedtime story should any of them have problems falling asleep (Jackson 90). And when he sends Eleanor home in the end, it is only with an intention to protect her from the influence of Hill House. Additionally, he cares about his wife deeply, if a bit shallowly, even though he does not take her seriously and even though she seemingly threatens his research. He is concerned about her safety even when she undermines his authority by bringing Arthur, a more masculine man of the two, and bossing him around. All in all, Dr. Montague is a perfect depiction of a good natured patriarch who cares about his family even if he makes mistakes.

On the other hand, there is Hugh Crain, who does not take part in the plot, but whose presence in the house is inescapable. Crain is the designer and the builder of Hill House, a massive, confusing entity, made in his image. Dr. Montague points out that he was a strange man: "Hugh Crain must have detested other people and their sensible squared-away houses, because he made his house to suit his mind" (Jackson 105). In a more literal sense, there is a huge statue of Crain himself in one of the rooms; Theodora describes it as a "tall, undraped – good heavens! – masculine" figure (Jackson 108). Crain had three wives, all of whom met an untimely end, and for a good period of time he had to raise his two daughters on his own. Crain, however, was an unbalanced and righteous patriarch and he "projected his wrenching spiritual crisis upon the vulnerable psyche of his young daughter" (Pascal 472). The best proof of Crain's disturbed psyche is the scrapbook he made for his daughter depicting deadly sins and the punishment she ought to receive if she does not follow his sacred rules, that is to say, if she does not fit societal standards of the ideal woman. Eleanor is a parallel image of his daughter; just like the two Crain sisters fight over the house and gold-rimmed dishes, so Eleanor fights with her sister over the car, and so is Eleanor's fate mirrored in the older Crain sister who gets the house but dies in it, alone and abandoned. The older Crain sister took a village girl as a companion; however, the girl was accused of letting Miss Crain die alone, and she subsequently hanged herself in the attic on top of the stairwell in the tower – the very same place where Eleanor runs to by the end of the story, seemingly possessed by Hill House itself. According to Sluis, Eleanor "cannot free herself from her upbringing to be the 'feminine woman' and adheres to Hugh Crain's teachings in the house to finally become part of his temple of virtue" (29).

Finally, the Hill House itself, with its dark history and eeriness, is the representation of the domestic containment and disturbed relationships within family. Parks points out that Jackson's novels feature house "not just as the focus of action or as atmosphere, but as a force

or influence upon character or a reflection of character” (21). Graham claims that the Hill House home is “first and foremost a structure of power — one invested in the myth that all happy families with dutiful children can raise happy, heterosexual adults who will go on to have perfect families of their own” (“The Real Horror at the Heart of ‘Haunting Of Hill House’”). The history of the Hill House is full of miserable women. Not only is it a source of the sisters’ quarrel and the place of suicide of a young woman, but even before, “Hill House was a sad house almost from the beginning” (Jackson 75). Hugh Crain’s first wife had been killed in an accident with a carriage even before she came to the house and she entered it “lifeless” (Jackson 75). Crain married two more times, but both of his wives met their untimely deaths. To Crain’s two orphaned girls, the house became a mother, but not a kind one. It is the motherless Luke who makes an explicit comparison: “It’s all so motherly. . . . Great embracing chairs and sofas which turn out to be hard and unwelcome when you sit down, and reject you at once” (Jackson 209). Hill House is a mother, much like Eleanor’s, who wants to keep its daughter close and tame with an illusion of security. The heart of the house, Dr. Montague claims, is the nursery, and it is cold:

the cold crossing the doorway was almost tangible, visible as a barrier which must be crossed in order to get out. . . . [I]nside, the room was dark and the line of nursery animals painted along the wall seemed somehow not at all jolly, but as though they were trapped. . . The nursery, larger than the other bedrooms, had an indefinable air of neglect found nowhere else in Hill House. (Jackson 119)

Over the nursery door there are two heads, turned facing each other, with joyless grins representing the parents: “terrible mother and terrible father jostling for possession of vulnerable child souls” (Pascal 473). But, again, they are cold and unforgiving; their faces are distorted, and their smiles are fake to the point of grotesque: “It doesn’t seem like an *impartial* cold,” Eleanor points out. “I felt it as *deliberate*” (Jackson 120). This is a similar cold that seems to radiate from the library in the tower, and it is the same cold Eleanor and Theo are being terrorized by during the periods of loud knocking on the doors. And yet, in every instance, Eleanor is reminded of her own mother. Much like the orphaned Crain sisters, Eleanor is taken in by Hill House itself. It certainly seems to respond to Eleanor and influence her the most, but it also seeks to isolate her the most. The first mysterious knocking seems to stop after Eleanor tells it that it cannot get in (Jackson 131), and the screams and laughter from Theo’s room stop when Eleanor tells them to.

The first time Eleanor is singled out from the rest of the group is by the writing on the wall that says “HELP ELEANOR COME HOME” (Jackson 146). Eleanor is terrified: “It

knows *my name*” (Jackson 146), she points out. The house is calling out to Eleanor; it is picking her out from the people residing there. While Theo suggests that Eleanor wrote the words herself, Eleanor firmly denies it, and is outraged at the suggestion; there is no evidence that she might be lying. However, when the same words show up for the second time, and this time written in what appears to be blood on the wall of Theo’s room, Eleanor remains calm. “It’s too silly” (Jackson 156), Eleanor explains when her reaction – or, rather, the lack of thereof – is questioned; she even giggles while referencing Theo’s red polish. The writing on the wall is heavily implied to be Eleanor’s work, either by Eleanor herself or through the house acting on her behalf. At the time it appears, she is still upset with Theo over their previous quarrel, and Theo’s red polish might have been an inspiration for such an act, considering that the writing appears on the wall of her room. Right after this incident, Eleanor is looking at Theo and thinking: “I would like to batter her with rocks” (Jackson 158). This is a reference to the incident mentioned at the beginning of the story, when the home of Eleanor’s family was showered with stones. Not only does this imply that the showers were Eleanor’s doing, through some form of psychic activity, but it also drives home the implication that the second writing was Eleanor’s as well – subconsciously or not. These violent acts are the only instances where Eleanor acts; they are outbursts that are result of being passive for too long.

After Theo rejects her completely by denying Eleanor’s plans to come home with her, Eleanor finally welcomes the embrace of the house; she is “seduced by Hill House and the patriarchal ideology it represents, [and] descends into madness and death” (Bailey 44). She calls the house “mother” (Jackson 228), and she imagines she feels everything that moves within it. Eleanor makes her first (probably unconscious) suicide attempt when she claims the stairway in the tower and tries to get to the attic – the place of the previously mentioned suicide of the older Crain sister’s companion. She is saved by Luke, but it is already too late; Eleanor is already taken in by the house: “I am home, I am home, she thought” (Jackson 232).

“Journeys end in lovers meeting” (Jackson 136) is Eleanor’s mantra throughout the novel, while she hopes for a romance and salvation. Eleanor, however, meets her parental lover, the Hill House, in her death (Pascal 451). The last moments of Eleanor’s life mirror the moments from the beginning of the story: Eleanor gets into the car she shares with her sister and as she prepares to commit her first act of defiance, she thinks: “I am really really really doing it by myself” (Jackson 245). However, “the suicide of the guilt-ridden Eleanor represents a moment of disempowerment which masquerades as a moment of apparent empowerment” (Smith 162). Eleanor might rebel against the members of her (makeshift)

family, but her decision is not her own – it is a decision of her house-mother. Significantly, Theo, who defies the patriarchal standards in every way, receives the happiest ending. She goes home to her “friend” who is happy to see her. Eleanor, unable to reclaim her identity, surrenders to the evil domesticity of Hill House which ends her life. The Hill House itself, the traditional mother, is left alone as well. The house, whose primary function was supposed to be to hold a family together, remains dark and empty: “and whatever walked there, walked alone” (Jackson 246), suggesting the permanent impossibility of domestic bliss.

Moving away from the Gothic, the final chapter will deal with contemporary SF. More specifically, the chapter looks into the ways in which gender issues are addressed by two contemporary female writers, Ursula K. Le Guin and Becky Chambers.

#### 4. Science Fiction: “A Modern Province”

In her introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Le Guin rejects the definition of science fiction as fiction that predicts the future and deals solely with technological and scientific themes. Instead, she claims that science fiction, as “a modern province” (Le Guin, “Science Fiction and Mrs. Brown” 104) of fantasy, deals with the problems people are facing today. It is not prophetic, and it does not seek one and only truth. Rather, it makes its readers look at today from a different perspective: “It does not look forward; neither does it look back. It looks sideways” (Le Guin, “Science Fiction and Mrs. Brown” 102). At the time when Le Guin published her first SF novel in the 1960s, America was changing. The civil rights movement was still under way and the second wave feminism had only just started; in 1969, the same year *The Left Hand* was published, the Stonewall Riots took place. In science fiction, the New Wave started: “a new generation of young writers emerged seeking to rebel against the conservative limitations imposed by pulp SF formulas” (Higgins 74), challenging the “unspoken cultural assumptions about sex, race, gender, and other social norms” (Higgins 75).

The ideas of second wave feminism helped women realize how underrepresented they were in science fiction, often portrayed as “objects to be desired, feared, rescued, or destroyed or to otherwise validate the masculinity and heterosexuality of male protagonists and readers” (Higgins 76). Women writers of SF therefore started to challenge gender stereotypes, and the imbalanced relationship of power between men and women. Among them is Le Guin, with *The Left Hand of Darkness*, a novel in which she poses the question of real differences between the two sexes, explores new gender identities, and the ways sexuality might function

without gendered categories. She explains: “I eliminated gender, to find out what was left. Whatever was left would be, presumably, simply human” (Le Guin, “Is Gender Necessary?” 160).

Luckily by the 1990s, “women had gained acceptance in the SF community as readers, writers, and editors” (Higgins 82), but science fiction continues in the same vein of questioning gender and sexualities, challenging the ideas of binary identities and heteronormativity. Additionally, sex-changes are also being explored with the surfacing of a new technology that “may enable new forms of sexual identity by changing the human body or by creating a hybrid of human” (Garrison 223). Likewise, with the introduction of new sentient alien species and the inter-species relationships that are formed, the possibilities for exploring these questions abound.

All these questions, and more, are also explored in Becky Chambers’ awarded *Wayfarers* series, set in a futuristic fictional universe, building on and drawing her inspiration from Le Guin as well as other predecessors. According to Pearson et al., “Science fiction notoriously reflects contemporary realities back to us through the lens of a particular type of imagination, one associated with the future, with the potentials of technology, and with the important idea that life does not remain static; what we know today may be entirely different tomorrow” (“Introduction: Queer Universes” 3), but what we may find reflected back might not be as foreign as we feared.

#### 4.1. *The Left Hand of Darkness*: “The king was pregnant”

Ursula K. Le Guin’s SF novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* is a part of the series of novels and short stories which are set in an imaginary universe, the Hainish or Ekumen universe. Despite having the same setting, the works are very loosely connected, as Le Guin herself explains: “They do not form a coherent history. There are some clear connections among them, yes, but also some extremely murky ones. And some great discontinuities” (“FAQ”). The novel follows Genly Ai, the male envoy of the Ekumen, the alliance of planets inhabited by humans, who is sent to the planet Gethen with the mission to convince Gethenians to join the Ekumen. Gethen is a harsh planet, ruled by snow and winter, and its inhabitants are unique even to the rest of the Hainish universe.

Even though they do possess technology such as radio, the Gethenians’ advancement is slow, as they are taking the time for adjustment and perfection of the products they develop. For Gethenians, the most important time is now. This is also reflected in their calendar, where

Year One is always the current year; they count backwards from that. But, most significantly, the people of Gethen are androgynous, ambisexual for most of their lives, and only become male or female during the peak of their sexual cycle. This part of the cycle is called kemmer. The investigator of Gethen explains: “When the individual finds partner in kemmer, hormonal secretion is further stimulated (most importantly by touch – secretion? scent?) until in one partner either a male or a female hormonal dominance is established” (Le Guin, *The Left Hand* 90). The other partner then takes up the opposite gender accordingly. There is no way to predetermine the sex of the individuals – every person has the same chances of becoming male as well as female in every new phase of kemmer; however, once it is established, the sex cannot change during the ongoing kemmer. If the female partner stays pregnant, hormonal activity continues for the duration of pregnancy. It is also worth noting that an individual in the first phase of kemmer needs to be in contact with another in the same state in order to shift from androgynous state to one of the sexes – if they are surrounded by individuals in some (sexually inactive phase), the shift is not going to happen. The duration of kemmer is significantly shorter, though: while the sexually inactive phase lasts for 21-22 days, kemmer lasts only four to six days, within which the process of establishing sexuality lasts up to twenty hours. Simply put: “The society of Gethen, in its daily functioning and in its continuity, is without sex” (Le Guin, *The Left Hand* 93).

The reason for this type of evolutionary development is never explicitly given since it serves no purpose in their environment (even though it is argued that the chance for conception is high, it is also pointed out that the birthrate is not), and the only suggested explanation is that they might be an experiment. In her essay “Is Gender Necessary?”, Le Guin claims: “they are questions, not answers” (159), moving on to explain that their purpose is to look closely at what the true differences between men and women are, as well as explore what is left when people are stripped of gender (160). The result of her experiment is a society that is both freer and more constrained than the one the reader and the protagonist of the novel are familiar with.

Gethen is a seemingly more peaceful world. While there are rivalries, fights and aggression between individuals, they are frequently not conflicts of physical nature, but rather bear social consequences. There is neither war on Gethen nor obvious institutional violence. While there is the so-called voluntary farm, a labor camp, in Orgoreyn (one of the two major nations) where people deemed criminals are sent, the only form of physical violence they are subjected to is the taking of the drugs that suppress kemmer. There is no reason for violence when their surroundings are extremely hostile. As Estraven points out: “They do not kill

people on their Farms: they let hunger and winter and despair do their murders for them” (Le Guin, *The Left Hand* 189). So perhaps this lack of mass violence is more due to the nature of the planet itself. Another significant instance of their lack of human-imposed cruelty is related to sexuality: there is no rape. In order to have sexual intercourse, both of the people involved need to consent to it. Without it, a Gethenian simply does not present any sex characteristics and coitus is physically impossible. This is exemplified when Estraven’s acquaintance Gaum tries to convince him to share kemmer with him as a part of the political game. Estraven, however, does not want anything to do with Gaum, and even though he is not taking reduction drugs, Estraven is repulsed by Gaum’s offer and he does not enter kemmer himself. He points out: “[Gaum] forgot that detestation is as good as any drug” (*The Left Hand* 154). This trait seems to be very important for Le Guin, who suggests that: “The Gethenians do not rape their world” (“Is Gender Necessary?” 164).

However, despite the fact that the Gethenians are stripped of sexuality for most of the time, it still plays a significant role in their culture. For them, however, sex is separated from all other aspects of their lives or, as Le Guin puts it: “the absence of sexuality ... [is] a continuous social factor” (“Is Gender Necessary?” 165). In other words, the society is not sexualized and when individuals wish to engage in sexual activities, they devote themselves only to that, stopping all other activities: “no one, whatever his position, is obliged or forced to work when in kemmer” (Le Guin, *The Left Hand* 93). Additionally, the restrictions on kemmering are rare. The only real prohibition is kemmering between a parent and a child; even incest between full siblings is permitted, as long as they do not “vow kemmering to each other,” which, in fact, means entering a “monogamous marriage” (Le Guin, *The Left Hand* 92). But there is also no real limit to the number of partners; even though pairs are the most common, it is not unusual for groups to form in the so-called kemmerhouses. Furthermore, while the novel establishes that kemmer-partners of the same sex are extremely rare (if they exist at all), Le Guin expressed regret over this decision, later elaborating: “It is a naively pragmatic view of sex that insists that sexual partners must be of opposite sex! In any kemmerhouse homosexual practice would, of course, be possible and acceptable and welcomed—but I never thought to explore this option; and the omission, alas, implies that sexuality is heterosexuality” (“Is Gender Necessary?” 169). Simply put, even if the same sex partners are rare, they would not be regarded as strange or wrong, but simply accepted as equals.

Taking this into consideration, as well as the general absence of rape and sexual violence, it follows that Gethenians are more sex-positive, that is, they “have less fear and



guilt about sex than we tend to have” (“Is Gender Necessary?” 167). There is also no shame, judgement or surprise connected to adopting male or female sex during kemmer. All Gethenians have the same potential of becoming either, every adult Gethenian could become pregnant at least once during their life, and the same adult is just as likely to be a father; there is also a very real possibility of one person being both at different points in their life. However, Gethenians are also shown to be judgmental of one aspect of sexuality, the so-called perversion. Genly Ai points this out very early on:

Karhidiers discuss sexual matters freely, and talk about kemmer with both reverence and gusto, but they are reticent about discussing perversion . . . Excessive prolongation of the kemmer period, with permanent hormonal imbalance toward the male or the female, causes what they call perversion; it is not rare; three or four percent of adults may be physiological perverts or abnormals – normal, by our standard. (Le Guin, *The Left Hand* 63)

As much as Gethenians are a source of wonder and curiosity for other humans, Genly Ai is equally a mystery for them. His constantly sexualized and gendered existence, or as they see it, his permanent state of kemmer is regarded with caution and sometimes repulsion; “A society of perverts” (Le Guin, *The Left Hand* 36) is how the king of Karhide (one of the two major nations) describes the rest of humanity. For Gethenians, having their sexuality affect other parts of the social life is unimaginable; it is impractical and even seen as a weakness.

In fact, after Genly Ai tries to explain the difference between men and women, Estraven points out the greatest drawback of the permanent state of kemmer by asking: “Equality is not the general rule, then?” (Le Guin, *The Left Hand* 234). Genly Ai is seen stumbling over his words, as he tries to argue that difference exists and is important. The sex and gender of a person is what largely predetermines an individual’s life, the way people act, the way they dress, what career choices they have, but even Ai comes to admit that it is “extremely hard to separate the innate differences from the learned ones” (Le Guin, *The Left Hand* 235). What it truly comes down to is that, outside of Gethen, women in are the only ones capable of bearing children, and therefore often the child’s prime nurturer. For the sexless Gethenians, this is a burden and a privilege that can and should be thrust upon everyone equally. There exists a subtle difference in regards whether a Gethenian fathers a child or gives birth to one; the ancestry is followed from the “mother,” that is, the “parent of the flesh” (Le Guin, *The Left Hand* 92). Furthermore, the parenting itself is a communal chore: “the clan looked after its own: nobody and everybody was responsible for [children]”

(Le Guin, *The Left Hand* 98). Even though Genly points out that parental instinct varies, it is solely dependent on one's personality rather than on their role of mother or father.

One of the aspects that is, however, not explored in detail in the novel, but still has a profound effect, is the usage of pronouns for Gethenians. Even though it is well established that Gethenians do not have gender and only present different sex characteristics during the few days of fertility, Genly Ai keeps referring to people of Gethen with the male pronoun, "he." Le Guin was criticized for this; it was suggested that the androgynous people in the novel still feel very much male, and the usage of the male pronoun is certainly a part of that. Pennington highlights Sarah Lefanu and Jewell Parker Rhodes as the critics who respect Le Guin's work but "denounce Le Guin's 'thought experiment' because she relies on traditional (primarily realistic) narrative conventions and rejects the possibility of creating a 'new language' to replace English sexist pronouns" (Pennington 351). Le Guin acknowledges this in her essay "Is Gender Necessary?" and offers the explanation for her decision, claiming that "he" is "the generic pronoun" and that she "utterly refuse[s] to mangle English by inventing a pronoun for 'he/she'" ("Is Gender Necessary?" 169). In the novel, Le Guin uses the Ekumenical female investigator to further explain and defend her decision on pronouns. Ong Tot Opong, who writes about the Gethenians' sex, acknowledges this problem explicitly:

Lacking the Karhidish "human pronoun" used for persons in somer, I must say "he," for the same reasons as we used the masculine pronoun in referring to a transcendent god: it is less defined, less specific, than the neuter or the feminine. But the very use of the pronoun in my thoughts leads me continually to forget that the Karhider I am with is not a man, but a manwoman. (Le Guin, *The Left Hand* 94)

The investigator will point out that, as much as it is impossible for humans of Ekumen to detach themselves from their respective genders, it is just as impossible for Gethenians to bind themselves to this narrow definition of gender. They do not understand the socially gendered stereotypes and, more importantly, these cannot be applied to Gethenians. On Gethen, "one is respected and judged only as a human being" (Le Guin, *The Left Hand* 95).

However, it is worth noting that in the 1988 revision of this essay Le Guin revisits this decision, claiming that she was feeling "defensive and resentful" ("Redux" 157) when writing the original "Is Gender Necessary?" in 1976. Rewriting the essay, Le Guin now expresses her disdain for "the so-called generic pronoun he/him/his, which does in fact exclude women from discourse" ("Redux" 169), adding the suggestion for using her newly invented neutral

pronouns *a/un/a's* (which are modelled on a British dialect). She also brings attention to the usage of singular “they” in colloquial speech as a gender neutral pronoun.

Whether “he” is used as the generic pronoun or not is overshadowed by Ai’s perspective of the Gethenians as virtually men, and it only adds to the general feeling of Gethenians with whom Ai interacts being perceived as males. This inability to recognize them for what they truly are, to think outside the binaries, will burden Ai throughout the novel and will, essentially, be the cause of his inability to trust and understand his ally, Estraven. And as long as Ai perceives these people as men, he interprets their actions, behavior and manners – which he sees as more feminine than masculine – as untruthful. Additionally, the gender stereotypes Ai believes in will soon prove to be futile in this androgynous society. He will be surprised and proved wrong repeatedly. While some of these instances are rather harmless, others bear more significance. One of the more benign examples of Ai’s imposing his gendered stereotypes is the fact that he keeps referring to his host as his landlady because he perceives the host’s looks and manners as strongly feminine: “he had fat buttocks that wagged as he walked, and a soft fat face, and a prying, spying, ignoble, kindly nature” (Le Guin, *The Left Hand* 48). Despite using the term “landlady,” Ai keeps using the default male pronoun when referring to his host. After inquiring “the landlady” about his children, Ai is shocked to discover that, while he does have four children, he never gave birth to any of them, meaning that during his kemmer “the landlady” always became male. While Ai will retain the gender stereotypes for a long time after this incident, it is perhaps the first time Ai is shown to be forced to reconcile the language he uses and his interpretation of gender with the reality of Gethenians as non-gendered people.

Interestingly, because of perceiving his host as female, Ai takes no offence in the advice about *shifgrethor*, an intricate system of Gethenians’ social rules, that the host offers to him; rather, Ai interprets it as a kind, almost motherly concern. When Estraven, however, tries to do the same for Ai, he is faced with Ai’s misunderstanding, which inevitably comes from the inability to safely recognize Estraven as either male or female and thereby recognize him as an honest person. Ai is but a human male, faced with an entirely new species and therefore an entirely new culture that is foreign to him, and what he cannot understand, he fears and mistrusts. As Pearson puts it: “the ways in which the Gethenians fail to do gender . . . makes them seem inhuman to the Terran narrator” (“Towards a Queer Genealogy of SF” 76). Ai’s and Estraven’s relationship is the central one of the novel. As previously mentioned, Ai will learn to trust him and, through him, accept the other Gethenians’ ambisexuality. However, in the beginning of the novel, their relationship is rocky at best. After having dinner with

Estraven for the first time, Ai regards Estraven's mannerism as feminine and is seemingly puzzled by it, for he never before thought of Estraven as a woman. However, when considering him a male, Ai once again feels "a sense of falseness" (Le Guin, *The Left Hand* 12). This, along with Ai's lack of comprehension of *shifgrethor*, results in Ai misinterpreting Estraven's intentions. When Estraven tells Ai he will no longer support Ai's cause with the king, Ai feels angry and betrayed. He does not understand Estraven's motives and Estraven does not give him a straight answer. Enraged by own inability to understand him, Ai again subjects to attributing feminine qualities to Estraven, describing his avoidance of a direct explanation as "effeminate deviousness" (Le Guin, *The Left Hand* 14). Genly Ai sees him as a stranger, alien, and as he grows more and more agitated about the situation he suddenly finds himself in, Genly Ai puts all the blame on Estraven, even when the Gethenian continues being kind to him.

Soon after this dinner, Estraven is exiled and Genly fails at his mission to convince the king of Karhide to join the Ekumen. Genly decides to try his luck with Orgoreyn, the second large nation of Gethen. On his arrival, Genly is welcomed and supported by the Orgota politicians. When he once again meets Estraven, who fled to Orgoreyn after his exile and started working with their politicians, Genly is suddenly struck by a realization that it was Estraven who brought him to Orgoreyn. Once again, Genly is upset by this. Perplexed by Estraven's actions and misinterpreting his intentions anew, he fails to understand what Estraven is telling him. This is also the time when Estraven comes to realize that: "he [Genly] must have misunderstood half and not understood the rest of what I told him . . . and when I thought myself most blunt and frank with him he may have found me most subtle and unclear. His obtuseness is ignorance" (Le Guin, *The Left Hand* 149). However, Estraven feels responsible for Ai and, when the man is taken to the Orgota labor camp, he goes to great lengths to save him from there. Escaping the camp, the two start their journey across a glacier in order to reach Karhide, and this is where their relationship finally takes turn for the better.

Upon learning of everything Estraven has done (and plans to do) for him, Ai carefully starts trusting him, but he still subconsciously sees Estraven as male and continues to describe his traits he finds unlikeable as feminine: "There was in [Estraven's] attitude something feminine, . . . a submissiveness to the given, which rather displeased me" (Le Guin, *The Left Hand* 212). This is, however, also the moment they begin to address each other by their names (Therem Harth and Ai) instead of formal titles, signifying the shift of their relationship towards a more personal one. Still, Ai and Estraven are both wary of each other, as they are unable to understand each other fully. Genly Ai tries to enforce his stereotypes and finds

himself irritated by Estraven taking care of him since he perceives him as weaker: “He was a head shorter than I, and built more like a woman than a man, more fat than muscle” (Le Guin, *The Left Hand* 219). But no matter how much Ai perceives himself to be masculine and physically stronger than his companion, Estraven for his part sees both this and the more vulnerable part of Genly: “He is all unprotected, exposed, vulnerable, even to his sexual organ, which he must carry always outside himself; but he is strong, unbelievably strong” (Le Guin, *The Left Hand* 227). Whereas Ai keeps failing at reconciling these two seemingly contrary parts of Estraven, Estraven sees Ai’s duality and it is impossible for him to separate it because Estraven has no concept of gender norms created in and imposed by Genly’s culture. Estraven expresses his confusion over many Genly’s feelings and actions, for example, he wonders why Genly Ai is ashamed of crying (Le Guin, *The Left Hand* 229). Genly will later explain that it was not shame, but fear, even though he will not offer an explanation as in fear of what, exactly. Perhaps fear of being openly vulnerable, or maybe fear of losing his learned identity of a stoic man.)

But, slowly, things between them start to actually shift once Estraven enters kemmer. At first, Estraven is afraid that Ai will mock him for that, but when Ai does not, Estraven realizes that after spending so much time alone, in the snow, working together and mutually caring for each other, they are finally equals: “After all he is no more an oddity, sexual freak, than I am; up here on the Ice each of us is singular, isolate... We are equals at last, equal, alien, alone” (Le Guin, *The Left Hand* 232). The two start talking about duality and Estraven asks what the real difference between men and women is, when Genly realizes that there is not one, really, or at least he cannot name it. This is when Ai acknowledges his own ignorance and finally understands Estraven, too: “And I saw then again, and for good, what I had always been afraid to see, and had pretended not to see in him: that he was a woman as well as a man” (Le Guin, *The Left Hand* 248). Ai acknowledges that, until now, he was afraid of what he could not understand, and therefore treated Estraven unfairly: “I had not wanted to give my trust, my friendship to a man who was a woman, a woman who was a man” (Le Guin, *The Left Hand* 249). It is only after they made peace with each other’s differences and after they found themselves isolated from the rest of the world that their relationship becomes more balanced and, subsequently, more profound. They found themselves dependent on each other in order to survive the harsh nature of Gethen and it is perhaps in this scenario where survival is the primary goal that the social concepts begin to lose ground. Genly Ai describes their relationship as “a friendship so much needed by us both in our exile, and already so well

proved in the days and nights of our bitter journey, that it might as well be called, now as later, love” (Le Guin, *The Left Hand* 249).

Another big step in their relationship is when Genly teaches Estraven to “mindspeak” – a form of telepathic communication through which it is impossible to lie. Not only is it intended to make their communication easier but it also essentially lays each other bare, with the inability to hide their thoughts and feelings. What is also significant is that when Estraven finally hears Genly mindspeak to him, it is in the voice of his deceased brother and lover, the only person Estraven truly loved. It is an emotional task which leaves Estraven feeling saddened and drained. After this, Genly’s affection for Estraven seems to be even more open. Such an example is when, distracted by snow and wind, Genly loses Estraven for a moment and panics so much he calls out for him in mindspeak.

However, what is prominent about their relationship is that they do not engage in a sexual relationship even when given the opportunity at the time when Estraven enters kemmer. This decision on Le Guin’s part was met with criticism as well, for never sexually exploring the relationship and the fact that despite Estraven being most commonly characterized as masculine – and considering his ambisexuality – it is implied that he would have become female, if he and Genly became sexually involved. Pearson mentions that Lamb and Veith accuse the novel of being homophobic in their essay “Again, The Left Hand of Darkness: Androgyny or Homophobia?” (“Postcolonialism/s, Gender/s, Sexuality/Ies” 193), and claims that “a sexual relationship between Estraven and Genly Ai. . . is forbidden by more than just the romantic tradition. It has the whole weight of centuries of institutional heteronormativity against it”, further pointing out how even because of mere allusion to queer relationship, Estraven is punished by death (“The Queer as Traitor” 82). As mentioned before, Le Guin explains this in “Redux,” saying that even though it never occurred to her, homosexual relationship would be equally as possible (169). However, if the two characters did have a sexual relationship, it would undermine the effect the events up to this point as well as Estraven himself had on Genly’s – and therefore the reader’s – understanding of Gethenian’s ambisexuality. Whether Estraven would become female or male in his kemmer is irrelevant when considering the fact that it would very possibly shift Genly’s perception of him again and render the work that went into both characters’ mutual understanding futile. At this point, Genly has already admitted that his understanding of women is lacking at best, that they became even stranger to him than non-gendered people of Gethen, so it is not wrong to conclude that, if Estraven would have turned into female, it would once again make him and Genly strangers. On the other hand, if Estraven would have turned into male, Genly would

probably revert back to his seeing Estraven as a man. As Pearson puts it: “both possibilities end up reifying gender: we can have only an encounter between a man and a woman or between two men. The third possibility, the encounter outside of gender, is unimaginable to Genly” (“Postcolonialism/s, Gender/s, Sexuality/Ies” 194).

This way, Genly finishes his story a changed man – for better or for worse. The fact they did not engage in sexual relationship is irrelevant since Genly’s feelings for Estraven and the effect he had on Genly are irrefutable. Ai’s perspective switches slowly, but undeniably so. It is evident in the way he perceives other people. In the beginning of the story, when Ai meets king Argaven for the first time, he feels uncomfortable, scared even, and is quick to succumb to his sexist stereotypes, describing the king’s negative characteristics as feminine: “He laughed shrilly like an angry woman pretending to be amused” (Le Guin, *The Left Hand* 31). In their second meeting, however, Genly is kinder, more sympathetic towards the king. His description of Argaven is also much less gendered: “He looked like a woman who has lost her baby, like a man who has lost his son” (Le Guin, *The Left Hand* 291). Even though he is not completely free of his stereotypes, Genly finally comes to see other Gethenians, as both female and male, and neither. Furthermore, when faced with his own crew, Genly suddenly feels uncomfortable: “they all looked strange to me, men and women, well as I knew them. Their voices sounded strange: too deep, too shrill. They were like a troupe of great, strange animals, of two different species” (Le Guin, *The Left Hand* 296). Suddenly, Genly feels alienated from them and experiences a reverse cultural shock. He hardly bears even the short interaction, and until the end of the story they are not mentioned again. Instead, Genly sets out on a journey to bring Estraven’s things back to his family – his parent and his child. Genly mourns Estraven, crying and struggling to come to terms with his death.

Whether or not their relationship was of romantic nature is irrelevant as the main fact remains: Genly Ai succeeds to find love in unlikely circumstances, not despite the absence of gender of his companion, but because of it. Estraven and Genly meet on equal grounds and only then their relationship blossoms. And despite their difficult situation, Genly describes their time together with surprising gentleness and honesty:

I am not trying to say that I was happy, during those weeks of hauling a sledge across an ice-sheet in the dead of winter. I was hungry, overstrained, and often anxious, and it all got worse the longer it went on. I certainly wasn’t happy. Happiness has to do with reason, and only reason earns it. What I was given was the thing you can’t earn, and can’t keep, and often don’t even recognize at the time; I mean joy. (Le Guin, *The Left Hand* 242)

#### 4.2. *Wayfarers* Series: Casual Queerness

*The Left Hand of Darkness*, as well as other works by Ursula K. Le Guin, served as an inspiration for many other works of science fiction. Among the authors who quote Le Guin's books as transformative is Becky Chambers ("R/Books - I'm Becky Chambers"). Chambers is a science fiction author whose works have been nominated for the Hugo Award, the Arthur C. Clarke Award, and the Bailey's Women's Prize for Fiction. Her series *Wayfarers* won Hugo Award for Best Series 2019 ("Becky Chambers").

The first novel in the *Wayfarers* series, *The Long Way to a Small, Angry Planet* is a "space opera novel" (Liptak) set in the Galactic Commons, a fictional universe of the future in which humans were forced to abandon Earth and have subsequently spread throughout the entire space, having been accepted in the covenant made by other alien species. While criticized for the lack of action and typical SF plot, the novel is also lauded for its world building and character development. It is a character-driven story, focused mostly on the crew of the spaceship *Wayfarer* (the *Star Trek* is an obvious influence too). This gave Chambers an opportunity to explore not only relationships between characters, but their own identities which are inevitably entangled with the fact that they belong to other species and, consequently, various cultures. Their differences are most obvious in their physical forms – from humans to Aandricks who basically take the form of giant lizards to AIs who often do not even have bodies as such – but are also evident in their morality and understanding of the world. The author did not miss the opportunity to explore gender and sexuality as well.

One of the main characters is a human woman named Rosemary, who is the last person to join the *Wayfarer* crew of nine and is introduced to them one by one. The character who stands out the most is Dr. Chef, and it is simply for the fact that Rosemary never encountered one of their species before. Dr. Chef takes no offence in that and is quick with the introduction: "I am a Grum, and I'm currently male" (Chambers, *The Long Way to a Small, Angry Planet* 35). Even though the state of someone being *currently* one sex (and therefore suggesting that at some other point they might be or have been a different sex) seems unusual, Rosemary's interest seems to stem from the simple curiosity of encountering a new species and not the fact that their gender is fluid. Dr. Chef explains it further with no fuss: "Biological sex is a transitional state of being for my species. We begin life as female, become male once our egg-laying years are over, then end our lives as something neither here nor there" (Chambers, *The Long Way* 35). This information is used as a means of conveying



other facts about the Grums. For his species, gender is tied both to their age and to biological reproduction. By knowing that Dr. Chef identifies as male, Rosemary finds out that he is an older adult, but not yet at an advanced age. Throughout the book, he keeps referring to the stages of his species' life through his gender. He explains that he joined the Wayfarers crew not long after he "started becoming male" (Chambers, *The Long Way* 210). Additionally, when expressing his grief over losing his children to the war, he again uses gender to explain just how young they all were: "None of my children ever mothered. None of them ever became male" (Chambers, *The Long Way* 209). This serves to further explain how gender alters Dr. Chef's view on parenting. After one of the crew jokingly calls him a father, Dr. Chef reacts confusedly and almost regretfully, not because he was never a parent, but because he "was only ever a mother" (Chambers, *The Long Way* 147).

Another species that defies binary gender are Aeluons. One of them, Pei, is introduced in the first instalment of the *Wayfarers* series, but is referred to solely with female pronouns. However, the complexity of their genders is explained further and more thoughtfully in *A Closed and Common Orbit*, the second novel in the same series. Aeluons' gender is closely intertwined with their reproductive system. In such terms, they recognize four genders: those who produce eggs, those who fertilize them, those who can shift between those two roles (the so-called shons), and those who cannot do either – neutrals (Chambers, *Orbit* 73). Evidently, when it comes to pronouns, things can get complicated. Even though Aeluons' clothing has no gender distinction, there exists a slight difference between the appearances of the first and second gender mentioned, and these individuals are to be referred to as "she" and "he" respectively. When it comes to neutral adults, the gender distinction in their appearances is described as almost non-existent, and even though they prefer the neutral pronouns, they do not "mind the assumption where gendered pronouns were concerned, but appreciated it when the correct terms were used" (Chambers, *Orbit* 73). The shons, however, are the gender-fluid people whose appearances, even though they are slight, do change with their gender, and therefore their pronouns change as well; calling a shon by neutral pronouns, like their neutral counterparts, is considered an insult. And even though shons' pronouns and appearances shift between what are essentially male and female genders, within their culture they are considered the third, separate gender.

The second novel deals with still other types of beings. The main character of the sequel is Sidra, an AI that was only recently installed in a body kit that bears the appearance of a human woman. Sidra's character could also be read as queer-coded, since throughout the novel she keeps insisting on making the distinction between her as a person and the body kit

she inhabits; even though the body is seemingly the same gender she identifies with, Sidra is not human and does not feel comfortable contained in this limiting form. In addition to this, her sole existence is considered illegal since AIs are not supposed to inhabit body kits. Along with her hosts, Sidra attends Shimmerquick, an Aeluons' fertility party, where Aeluons are marked according to their genders with colors. Later, Sidra meets Tak, an Aeluon woman working as a tattoo artist, who will become Sidra's closest friend alongside her hosts. Soon enough, it becomes obvious that Tak is a shon – she switches between female and male sex through phases of different length, so that on their second meeting Tak presents as male. Sidra switches to Tak's correct pronouns seamlessly, noticing the change straight away. She points out, though, that the change is not a big one: "He didn't look terribly different from the Aeluon woman Sidra had met at the Aurora. His face was instantly recognisable" (Chambers, *Orbit* 138). This is not very surprising, considering that in Aeluon society the differences between genders are insignificant. It is on their third encounter, when Tak is female again, that Tak explains to Sidra that their genders have always existed as a natural way of prolonging the species, but it is with their technology that the complete transition became possible. However, Tak presents in a purely positive light because without hormone implants, life would be extremely uncomfortable for shons: "you start to get sick. Your hormones don't know what to do" (Chambers, *Orbit* 212). Tak is going to continue to flow between the genders multiple times throughout the novel, but the transition between the used pronouns will remain smooth – there is not a single occasion where Sidra or any of the other main characters misgender Tak, purposefully or not.

Within the *Wayfarers* series there are other representations of different genders and gender differences. There is, for instance, Ohan, a Sianat member of the Wayfarer crew, who despite identifying as male prefers to go by "they" due to the tradition and nature of their species. There are Aandrisk, a species whose only difference between genders is that males are usually described as smaller (Chambers, *The Long Way*). But where Chambers really offers enviable representation are the subtle moments, that is, descriptions offered almost off-handedly; such is the usage of gender neutral pronouns.

Unlike Le Guin, who consistently uses the gendered pronoun "he" throughout *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Chambers switches between pronouns according to a certain character's gender(s) and introduces a new gender neutral pronoun, xe/xyr. Since the English language is gendered, it contributes to perceiving someone/something as masculine or feminine. As previously discussed, in Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Genly Ai continues to perceive the Gethenians as men despite them being genderless; one of the reasons for this is

the continuous usage of the masculine pronoun. Gustafsson Sendén et al. suggest that, in the similar way language is used to determine gender, it “also could be used as a tool for establishing gender-equality and to challenge gender perceptions” (1). In their research, they followed the impact of the newly introduced Swedish third person pronoun which is gender neutral; in other words, a pronoun which refers to a person whose gender is unknown or does not matter. Even though it initially started many arguments, this pronoun was further proved to evoke the least gender bias (Gustafsson Sendén et al. 3) and the negative attitudes towards the gender neutral language turned more towards positive (Gustafsson Sendén et al. 8). Similarly, the research from 2004 “indicates that students in some Baltimore-area schools used ‘yo’ as a gender-neutral third-person singular personal pronoun” (Elrod 19). The result of their research shows that gendered language is flawed and insufficient, and where this language fails, its speakers tend to seek a solution in newly created pronouns, whether intentionally or not. Furthermore, Sniezek and Jazwinski argue that “[g]eneric masculine language conventions not only reflect a history of male domination, they can actively encourage its perpetuation” (Sniezek and Jazwinski 643). They further argue that using the masculine pronoun as a generic one could lead to women’s erasure from the narratives due to the ambiguity of the masculine pronoun where it is more often interpreted as a sex specific (Sniezek and Jazwinski 643).

As a solution to this problem, Chambers continues to use the gender neutral pronoun xe/xyr. When the characters are unsure or unaware of the others’ gender and pronouns, they automatically switch to the neutral one. This is the pronoun Rosemary first uses when introduced to Ohan (even though she compliantly switches to “they” after being corrected by the ship captain) and this is the pronoun she even uses for the band of robbers who target their ship, because they remained masked. For the characters of this series, using correct pronouns is not only a matter of respect but also the imperative of basic human decency. Furthermore, there seems to be no distinction between traditionally male or female jobs; the jobs simply are given according to one’s skills and interests. Throughout the novels, no one is ever even slightly surprised that Pepper, a scrawny woman, is one of the most skillful technicians, or that Grum’s and Aeluo’s armies are filled with female soldiers. The third novel, *Record of a Spaceborn Few*, which takes place on the Exodus Fleet, explains that the members of the Fleet all do sanitation jobs according to a set schedule in order to keep equality among them. The members also go through a series of apprenticeships in order to find out what they want to do in the future. There is no distinction being made between men and women, nor between different classes of society.

In fact, throughout the series Chambers represents various sexualities seamlessly by referring to them in a matter-of-fact way: Kizzy, a member of the Wayfarer crew, mentions having two dads and liking cheap snacks, and it is only the latter that mildly appals the crew; Isabel, an archivist of the Fleet (a highly honorable position among them) is married to a woman and their children visit them regularly; Kip, an apprentice on the Fleet, is described as liking both girls and guys; Sidra does not seem to show any type of attraction towards anyone. None of the characters is judged based on their sexual preferences or their gender identity, but rather based on their actions.

To sum up, Chambers builds a universe abundant with possibilities, brimmed with colorful cultures, and within it, she succeeds to show why gender is important when it comes to personal identification of individuals, but irrelevant when it comes to relationships between people. It is a universe filled with moral complexities, but not a single one of them questions people's existence within their gender identities. In a place where there are countless differences, from the way people look to the way they communicate, there is no place for discrimination based on such things as sex and gender. It goes a long way to show that in a universe as rich as ours there should be no space for doubting love, as long as it is between consensual adults.

## Conclusion

The idea of gender, with the notion of its binary, of various definitions and significance, has a long history; it has been a subject of gender studies, feminism, and queer theory. The inequality women faced, the struggle they went through, and the fights they had to lead for any semblance of rights are irrefutable and there is still a long way to go. During the first wave feminism, Mary Wollstonecraft wrote about societal constructs of femininity and the need for better education of women (Sanders 15), while the suffragettes demanded the right to vote in elections. The second wave feminism brought up the issue of domestic containment (best shown in the works of Betty Friedan and Simone de Beauvoir), and so, during the 1960s, the gender in itself became a part of mainstream debate. During the 1990s the concept of gender performativity was introduced by Judith Butler who argues for the separation of sex and gender. Despite a solid amount of new research which brings to light the many negative sides of reinforcing gendered stereotypes upon people of all genders (such as the work of Stadel et al. on the benefits of crying in which they suggest that there is a link

between men's higher suicide rates and their reluctance to show emotions), the traditional idea of gender roles is still prevalent.

This paper focuses primarily on female literary characters – especially white women – and sexuality, but gender intersects with additional factors, such as race or class, which further complicates the struggle. Additionally, while there is plenty of research on how gender roles and patriarchy affect women, “there is still remarkably little on the ways in which men experience and use patriarchy” (Essed et al. 4), as well as the effect the same gender roles have on them. But, as Le Guin claims, “[s]cience isn't the hope business and never was” (Le Guin, “Science Fiction and Mrs. Brown” 114). Science can give facts and explanations, but a hope for better tomorrow is to be asked from the arts. It is in literature that readers are to seek the places where equality is true and uncompromising. The analysis presented shows both that (fantastic) literature tackles the controversial aspects of life since its beginnings and that contemporary authors offer more radical representations of sexuality and gender. On the one hand, they are unconstrained by the limitations of realist fiction (they can imagine things that do not exist), and on the other, their representations aim to further challenge limitations of social norms.

The nineteenth-century vampire women who dare to defy norms and express their sexuality are brutally killed or brought back into patriarchy. Le Fanu's *Carmilla* possesses masculine characteristics: she is self-assured, aggressive, sexual, possessive, but she is not emotional and shows affection only for Laura. *Carmilla* also defies heteronormativity by seducing only women. However, precisely because of her challenging gender roles in such extremity, *Carmilla* is punished by death. Furthermore, Lucy in Stoker's *Dracula* is punished in a similar way for her aggressive sexuality and refusal of motherhood. Contrastingly, while Mina is also portrayed as having certain non-feminine characteristics (such as independence and cleverness), by the end of the novel she reestablishes gender norms by being loyal to only one man, and becoming a wife and a mother, which is why she survives. By extension, the men in vampire novels, such as Van Helsing in *Dracula* or General Spielsdorf in *Carmilla*, are red-blooded heterosexuals whose virtue is an ideal and who eliminate the threat to the traditional values. Others either learn to adapt, like Jonathan Harker, or they, too, are brought to death, in only slightly more forgiving way than the monstrous women, like *Dracula*.

Similarly, both the nineteenth and the twentieth-century housewives are lost within their own homes, longing for their own lives and motivations, but their only means of escape are either death or insanity. In Gilman's “The Yellow Wallpaper,” the narrator's effort to follow her husband's instructions not to do any physical or intellectual work is proved futile

as she is slowly driven to madness. Even though she is aware of her deterioration, she is only met with her husband's disapproval and reinforcement of passivity. The narrator's escape from the confinement comes with the price of losing her sanity. Similarly, Shirley Jackson's Eleanor is unable to find fulfillment as a caretaker and a housewife. This role she had to fill during her mother's illness only leaves Eleanor empty and lost; she is unable to imagine herself in any other role, yet leaves her desiring something else. Finding herself lonely and trapped inside a haunted house, Eleanor's escape turns out to be suicide. Both of these works show the negative effects of domestic containment and of imposing the roles of housewives on women, but similarly to the vampire novels, the only result of challenging these roles is death or deterioration.

Science fiction continues the trend of challenging gender norms in various ways, most notably by depicting alien societies radically different from human ones. In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, the person who succeeds in changing a heterosexual man's perception of gender and gender roles is killed by their own people. Estraven is a genderless person of the planet Gethen who manages to establish a profound relationship with a male envoy Genly Ai, prompting him to reconsider everything he thought he knew about gendered differences between men and women. By the end of the novel, faced with the idea that gender might be a social construct, Genly is forced to reconcile his perspective of Gethenians, but Estraven who helped him overcome his prejudice is killed, and Genly is left mourning. Nevertheless, their sad outcomes prompted and motivated generations of readers to reconsider their values and points of view. The twenty-first century fiction took a step forward when it comes to this topic. Becky Chambers, for example, incorporates her representation of sexuality and gender almost seamlessly, leaving no room to doubt that all these people belong to the Universe of all beings – they exist and have equal rights. Rather than demanding outrage from the reader, such texts work toward a sense of equality by evoking acceptance.

This is significant because representation matters; *positive* representation is vital. According to Christia S. Brown, education about transgender and gender non-conforming people and their representation in various media, resulted in reducing transphobia and increase in support of trans rights (“Representation Matters”). Conversely, research about the relationships between self-esteem and exposure to media shows that “television exposure predicted a decrease in self-esteem for all children except White boys” (Martins and Harrison 351), due to media's portrayal and reinforcement of traditional gender roles and racial stereotypes. “The media comparisons made available for White boys, therefore, are quite positive in nature” (Martins and Harrison 351), while girls are shown as frail and sensitive.

However, as UCLA's Hollywood Diversity Report 2019 shows, women and people of color remain underrepresented in movies and TV shows, where women make up only 32.9% in film leads (McNary).<sup>1</sup>

As previously discussed, in the works of vampire fiction, women and queer-coded characters are punished for their deviancy by death, like Carmilla and Dracula are. Even in Female Gothic which focuses on women characters and their destinies, women do not end up happily. In both "The Yellow Wallpaper" and *The Haunting of Hill House*, female protagonists try to fit into the societal role of a good housewife, but they still get miserable ends. However, this pattern begins to shift in science fiction novels. Even though genderless Estraven in *The Left Hand of Darkness* is punished by death for his queerness, Genly Ai manages to learn a lesson and change his perspective on gender. Chambers' *Wayfarers* is the most recent and most hopeful series of SF novels which offer gender representation as just another aspect of alien cultures and create atmosphere of acceptance and equality. This testifies to literature's important role as people who read are healthier, happier, and better adapted to society ("Report"); in other words, "[a]s readers, we become different through the act of reading, of opening ourselves to the flow of possibilities, of new ideas, of new bodies" (Pearson, "Towards a Queer Genealogy of SF" 73).

As Pearson further explains: "It comes down to this: in a world where so many of us are unable to find a home, a place which is both materially and affectively livable, should we not all be able, at the very least, to find a home amongst the seemingly infinite planes of the imagination?" ("Towards a Queer Genealogy of SF" 72). The real world is vast and interesting enough, but as it is often slow to change and the fights for equality seem to be endless, it is not unreasonable to demand of the fictional universes where everything is possible – where monsters and heroes exist, the houses are alive, and humans travel through time and space – to extend the imagination that much further to offer a vision where all people are equally respected.

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<sup>1</sup> The situation in literature is no better. Plenty of statistics show that women writers are less likely to win prestigious literature awards; only 14 out of 114 Nobel prizes were won by women (Jarema). In her article about literary girls, McKinney argues: "There are no Jack Kerouacs or Holden Caulfields for girls. Literary girls don't take road-trips to find themselves" (McKinney). Books included in the Western canon, she argues, barely contain any female protagonists, much less so ones whose story does not revolve around men.

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