Maternal Femininity, Masquerade, and the Sacrificial Body in Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya, or The Moor*

Reema Barlaskar

Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya, or The Moor* (1806) is an unconventional tale about an aristocratic woman dominated by her sadistic tastes and desires. It appropriates topics of erotic violence, abandoned insatiability, and demonic love to engage a language of excess that eighteenth-century critics described as too 'shock[ing]' for the 'delicacy of a female pen [….] and mind'.[1] Such critical reviews, associating a female writer's 'pen' with the 'delicacy' of her mind, reflected a general rise in discourse about women's education, conduct, and manners that, in turn, shaped the moral rubric of contemporary novels.[2] As Dacre's critics objected, the text's display of excess modes of desire, and extensive focus on libidinal femininity, transgress the discursive boundaries prescribed to female reading and writing. Additionally, desire is not only reflected in female figures but also in 'rational' male characters. However, as this essay argues, when framed within earlier eighteenth-century representations of gender identity, the novel's display of provocative gender-bending suits the aesthetic practices of the eighteenth-century masquerade.

Dacre articulates gender as a cultural performance reflective of the aesthetic and discursive conventions produced by the masquerade, a public space providing individuals license to explore and challenge the construction of gender identity.[3] In the masquerade, according to Terry Castle, gender-related and social role reversals served as a popular mode of aesthetic

[1] The eighteenth-century periodical *The Annual Review*'s response to Dacre's novel can be found in the Broadview Press edition of the novel. See Charlotte Dacre, *Zofloya, or the Moor: A Romance of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by Adrianna Craciun (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1997), p. 10. All subsequent references to the main fictional text within this article will be cited via a page number in the body of the article.

[2] See Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) for a discussion on eighteenth-century conduct manuals, the rise of the novel, and feminisation of discourse; and Ann Mellor's *Romanticism and Gender* (London: Routledge, 1992) for an examination of political tracts and writings promoting a 'moral revolution in female manners' in response to the French Revolution (p. 10). For discussions on gothic fiction and domesticity, see Kate Ellis's *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), which analyses how Ann Radcliffe's gothic classics, *The Mystery of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), domesticate the sublime in revealing the oppressive structure of the home, rather than portraying the terror produced by nature, the focus of masculine gothic.

[3] Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnivalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986).

performance.[4] As such, role reversal and play are the most pronounced themes in the novel, featuring as it does sexually empowered female characters and their enfeebled male counterparts, and therefore require further exploration. Much of the conversation about the text focuses on the eponymous demonic villain, Zofloya, and his erotic relationship with the anti-heroine, Victoria. However, what remains unexamined are dialectical patterns of relations intersecting the desires of patriarchal and subversive figures. Dacre narrates the marriage plot between the gentleman of noble birth and the sexually fallen woman to demonstrate the ways in which domesticity, sexual politics, and the rhetoric of imperial conquest converge as discourses that reinforce and produce one another. Such discursive configurations are further articulated within violent scenes of desire that expose voyeuristic consumption of the maternal body. Essentially, masquerade aesthetics empower feminine transgression, transforming the heroine from fallen mistress into a venerable Madonna figure.

While masquerade aesthetics inform the language of excess in the novel, Dacre also borrows gothic tropes from contemporary male novelists. In the anti-heroine Victoria, she figures a protagonist similar to the anti-hero of the male-gothic tradition initiated by Matthew Lewis's novel, *The Monk* (1796). Adriana Carciun argues that *Zofloya* constitutes a 'significant departure from the more familiar tradition of women's Gothic writing', for in focusing on an exiled, rebellious, female protagonist, Dacre privileges the point of view of the anti-hero and reimagines the figure as woman.[5] Dacre's appropriation of an anti-hero figure and her affinity to Lewis is most evident in her adoption of the pseudonym 'Rosa Matilda' upon the publication of the novel, a title alluding to his awe-inspiring femme fatale, whose sexual appeal is connected to a religious figure. In *The Monk*, this femme fatale, Matilda, serves as a demonic force that inhabits a portrait of a Madonna, which the male protagonist, Ambrosio, worships in idolatrous excess. Ambrosio is a victim of Matilda's supernatural powers but also of his own desire to possess the virginal body.[6] By adopting the name Matilda, Dacre aligns herself with an aesthetic that appropriates the trope of the religiously coded body. However, what makes *Zofloya* markedly different from *The Monk* is the introduction of the eponymous character, a supernatural African servant of noble descent. Zofloya is both an object of the gaze and an author of its dismantling. He unveils the

[4] Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization*, p. 5-6.
[5] Craciun, Introduction, in *Zofloya*, pp. 9-32 (p. 12).
[6] Ambrosio spends much of the novel in an attempt to pursue and rape the delicate and innocent Antonia, a character later revealed to be his sister.

male gaze as masochistic and self-destructive, and channels Victoria's violent sexual rebellion, to expose male consumption of the maternal body, displaying the coterminous dysfunctionality of the home and empire.

While critics have focused on Zofloya and on his erotic relationship with Victoria, they have not explored the ways in which Dacre interweaves the subversive desires of Victoria, Zofloya, and her husband, Berenza, characters whose identities are interwoven and exaggerated by gender and racial categories.[7] This essay therefore examines how *Zofloya* destabilises cultural categories and gender codes by employing the masquerade aesthetic of role reversal in its depiction of these relationships. It furthermore engages sexual politics, feminine virtue, and transgressive modes of desire within the context of patriarchal imperialist attitudes. The text displays female consumption of the sexualised, raced body alongside male consumption of the maternal, religiously coded body, portraying the collision and collusion of patriarchal and colonial structures. It further interrogates the cultural ideal of the pure maternal body, simultaneously destabilising the Madonna/whore dichotomy and patriarchal imperialist notions of motherhood as bearer of home and empire. Victoria not only kills her husband by aligning with the devil, but her hypersexuality, as postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha claims of the colonised figure, 'problematizes the sign of racial and cultural priority'.[8] Essentially, the notion of the female body as bearer of culture and race collapses when mothers and their daughters sacrifice maternal and domestic virtues to gratify their sexual desires.

The first section of this article therefore shows how marriage and motherhood function as coterminous products of domestic ideology in the novel. It highlights a male misreading of female desire and the ways in which the sign of virtuous motherhood defines the terms by which patriarchal figures estimate feminine worth. I then move on to demonstrate how *Zofloya* mocks and parodies the patriarchal undertones of colonial authority in its attempt to regulate the body politic. As Zofloya helps Victoria don the image of sacrificial Madonna, the heroine exploits the

[7] Most critical works have focused on Victoria and Zofloya's miscegenistic and transgressive desire. These include Diane Long Hoeveler, 'Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya*: A Case Study in Miscegenation as Sexual and Racial Nausea', *European Romantic Review*, 8.2 (1997), 185-99; Ann Mellor, 'Interracial Sexual Desire in Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya*', *European Romantic Review*, 13.2 (2002), 169-73; George Haggerty, 'Female Gothic: Demonic Love', in *Unnatural Affections: Women and Fiction in the Later Eighteenth Century* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 171-78; and David Sigler, 'Masochism and Psychoanalysis in *Zofloya, or the Moor*', in *Sexual Enjoyment in British Romanticism: Gender and Psychoanlaysis, 1753-1835* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), pp. 151-80.

[8] Homi Bhabha. 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse', *October (Discipleship: A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis)*, 28 (Spring 1984), 125-33 (p. 128).

male gaze against itself. Patriarchy fails to control both raced and gendered bodies, and is enfeebled by its own ideology. The final section examines the ways in which Zofloya orchestrates and directs the sadomasochistic scene of desire between Victoria and Berenza, a scene destabilising patriarchal authority and the empire's claim over the body of the subjugated Other. His meticulous instructions demand the gradual administration of poison, which controls Victoria's violent drive to kill her husband. Zofloya's subversion of the domestic scene of rational masculinity and virtuous femininity exposes how the home and empire (figured in Victoria and Berenza's repressed desires and bodies) collapse upon themselves, thereby unveiling the violent sexual politics underwriting patriarchal imperialist structures.

The False Promise of Marriage and Maternal Femininity

Dacre was writing at a time when gender and social roles were becoming more explicit and corrective. The violent and destabilising effects of the French Revolution made the English more cautious toward transgressive acts of political expression.[9] Additionally, rebellion became a term denoting foreignness and the potential to be contaminated by outside influence.[10] English critics like Joseph Addison, who set the tone for definitions of high art and culture, advised their countrymen to remain wary of the French habit of overindulgence.[11] Disassociating oneself from the 'foreign' involved emphasising duty and responsibility in the home simultaneously. Thus, as Terry Castle affirms, 'the family and domestic space is typically both the starting point and the end point in the eighteenth-century narrative'.[12] Late eighteenth-century gothic fiction, for instance, begins and ends with the domestic space, reiterating cultural anxieties toward the foreign while commenting on nationalistic discourse. Ann Radcliffe's novels uphold this narrative structure and contrast the habits of the immoral continental borders of France or Italy with English values of modesty and domestic virtue. Her heroines, overemotional and sensitive young women, are exiled from their homes as orphans. However, this initial narrative emphasis

[9] The influential English critic and politician Edmund Burke opposed the French Revolution. He sought to differentiate Britain from France in cautioning citizens to uphold and preserve the nation's roots and identity rather than demolish longstanding class structures. See Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. by L. G. Mitchell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[10] Burke expressed concern that the revolution in France would incite a revolution at 'home': 'Whenever our neighbor's house is on fire, it cannot be amiss for the engines to play a little on our own' (p. 9).

[11] Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, 45 (21 April 1711) <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/12030/12030-h/12030-h/SV1/Spectator1.html#section45> [accessed 2 May 2020].

[12] Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization*, p. 116.

on immaturity and instability permits them to undergo trials in which their virtue is tested. Ultimately, they are rewarded for maintaining their virtue, and return to a harmonious domestic space supported by the cultural and social institution of marriage and lineage. This return to a harmonious domestic space produces a sense of respectable Englishness within the nation/home, while reinforcing the transgressive Otherness outside its borders.[13]

In this way, eighteenth-century gender and political discourse informs Radcliffe's writing, which devotes significant attention to the stability of the domestic space, as it is cultivated by feminine virtue, marriage, and duty. Furthermore, both eighteenth-century conduct manuals and political writings made duty an integral part of a young woman's moral education as the youth consumed more books.[14] In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Mary Wollstonecraft, one of the more prominent early feminists of the Enlightenment period, advocated for women's rights by calling for reform in marriage and education.[15] Though she promoted the coeducation of children, Wollstonecraft also placed a strong emphasis on women's roles as mother-educators.[16] In addition to political discourse, novels of the period, such Wollstonecraft's own *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman* (1798) and Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722), wrestled with and engaged themes of feminine duty and motherhood. While novels and pedagogical writing made their voices more prominent, domestic ideology limited the territory of women's writing and roles to the private sphere.[17] Feminine and masculine discourses were demarcated as male writers, for example, could appropriate the image of breast-feeding as an erotic subject while women writers focused on the mother's role as a moral guide.[18] Meanwhile, gothic fiction, such as Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Lewis's *The Monk*, and Radcliffe's novels featured the absence or effacement of the mother as a dominant motif in their narratives. As a good mother is a sign of order, she is abjected for the purpose of advancing a deviant plotline that permits evil male relatives to rape unprotected

[13] See Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, ed. by Jacqueline Howard (London, England: Penguin, 2001) and *Romance of the Forest*, ed. by Chloe Chard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
[14] Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England, 1780-1830* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007).
[15] Mary Wollstonecraft. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, ed. by Janet Todd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).
[16] Alan Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice 1780-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 167-203.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation*, pp. 65-85.

young women.[19] Mothers determine the stability of the domestic space, and bad mothers can be worse than missing ones. In *Zofloya*, Victoria's mother, Laurina, commits adultery, a sin that results in the death of her children.

Marriage and motherhood are conventions that Dacre's text explores as coterminous products of domestic ideology. As I argue in this article, *Zofloya* subverts the marriage plot presented in Samuel Richsardson's novel *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740), a popular eighteenth-century text. *Pamela* became a media event, attracting both positive and negative attention, and prompting parodies and spinoffs, like Henry Fielding's *Shamela* (1741) and *Joseph Andrews* (1742). In Richardson's novel, virtue and sexual restraint provide the heroine with cultural capital, emblematising the rise of a middle class that attempts to distinguish itself from the 'vulgar' classes below it and the 'depraved' classes above it.[20] Pamela wins the heart of the aristocrat Mr. B---, who she also tames and civilises. Her efforts to appeal to Mr. B---'s heart and reform him reiterate the points made in the pedagogical literature of the period. Men were required to learn the language and nature of the world, while women learned the language and nature of men's desires.[21] In *Zofloya*, Dacre inverts this gender code by demonstrating a failed reading of female desire, which leads to an unhappy marriage. Both gothic and domestic novels end with marriages, to signal a 'happy ending'. Novels by Walpole, Radcliffe, Frances Burney, and Jane Austen often conclude with such marriages. However, *Zofloya* does not progress toward an ending in which narrative events lead to marriage after a series of moral tests and trials. Rather, Victoria murders her husband after five unsatisfying years of marriage without children. In transgressing the moral rubric of the eighteenth-century novel, the text constructs a space for interrogating domestic and normative gender codes, for Victoria does not care to win Berenza's heart nor does she wish to make a home with him.

Critics have investigated Dacre's subversive portrayal of feminine subjectivity, highlighting her dynamic presentation of sexual politics and domesticity. Ann Mellor argues that Victoria permits 'female readers to explore a far wide range of sexual options, a more aggressive libidinal subjectivity.'[22] James Dunn claims that Dacre's 'characterizations' of depraved

[19] Ruth Anolik Bienstock, 'The Missing Mother: The Meanings of Maternal Absence in the Gothic Mode', *Modern Language Studies*, 33.1 (2003), 24-43 (p. 28).
[20] Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, pp. 59-96.
[21] Joe Bray, *The Female Reader in the English Novel: Burney to Austen* (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 8.
[22] Mellor, 'Interracial Sexual Desire in Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya*', *European Romantic Review*, 13.2 (2002), 169-73 (p. 173).

femininity cannot be taken at 'face value', for, in highlighting aggressive female desire, she 'make[s] women the subject rather than the object of a toxic erotic agony characterized by the movement of desire into violence'.[23] This section demonstrates how Dacre's gender politics involves highlighting a sexual rebellion against the false promise of marriage in which feminine worth is measured by the religious code of sacrifice. This is particularly evident in the novel's engagement with maternal femininity, and the ways in which the sign of virtuous motherhood defines the terms by which patriarchal figures estimate feminine worth.

Though Victoria is not a mother, she is tainted by her mother's sin of adultery. As a result, the presence of maternal sin marks the absence of the sign of virtue in progeny. The absence of women's ability to demonstrate maternal sacrifice (in this case, Victoria's mother failing to sacrifice her desire for her family and committing adultery) is presented as a sin with resounding consequences. The narrator often assigns the origin of Victoria's depravity to Laurina's lack of virtue. Victoria's father tells his wife, '"on *thy example* will the life and conduct of thy daughter *now* be formed"' (p. 120, emphasis in original), and later in the novel, when Victoria desires her husband's brother, Henriquez, the narrator states that 'the curse of Laurina were entailed upon her daughter' (p. 132). Laurina's affair with the German nobleman, Count Ardolph, disturbs a tranquil household. When Victoria's father dies in a duel with Ardolph, he marks Laurina as the source of 'contamination of bad example' (p. 20). Her inability to sacrifice her desire for her family propels her children towards infernal downfall, as her violation of virtuous motherhood unleashes horrific events, culminating in Victoria's sexual allegiance with the devil and Leonardo's transformation into the leader of a gang.

Following in her mother's footsteps, Victoria first becomes Berenza's mistress rather than his legitimate wife, a narrative trajectory that seems to support what her father predicted. The passing of moral sins from parents to children is a trope emphasised in one of the first English gothic novels, Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*. However, *Zofloya* complicates the notion of hereditary degeneration. While Laurina cannot return to a state of domestic purity and bliss, Victoria is provided an opportunity to become the wife of a prominent nobleman long before the narrative concludes. Crucially, however, it is not Victoria's virtue that redeems her status, for she is a fallen woman. Instead, male narcissism and the misreading of female desire

[23] James Dunn, 'Charlotte Dacre and the Feminization of Violence', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 53.3 (1998), 307-27 (p. 308).

allow her to reclaim her feminine worth. In a scene that demonstrates a failed reading of female desire, Berenza interprets Victoria's attempt at self-preservation as an act of sacrificial love (p. 27). Leonardo (who unknowingly tries to murder his sister under the influence of another power-hungry mistress) enters Victoria and Berenza's bedroom to kill Victoria, misses, and in effect, relieves her in her husband's eyes of her compromised status as a woman of questionable moral origins. Victoria raises her arm to shield herself from the dagger, but Berenza misreads it as an intention to save his life, and is thus prepared to marry her, concluding, '[w]hat could woman more, than voluntarily, nay eagerly, oppose her own life in defence of his […]. Longer to doubt the truth, the romantic ardour of her attachment, would, he [Berenza] esteemed, be sacrilege' (p. 125). Berenza's use of the religious term 'sacrilege' to characterise his response to Victoria's newly established 'proper' femininity invokes an image of the iconic Madonna, identified by her sacrificial virtue, and delineates the terms by which male figures evaluate feminine virtue in the novel. His narcissistic belief that Victoria is willing to sacrifice her life to save his elevates Victoria's status and restores her maternal femininity, a femininity previously effaced by her mother's sins. This pivotal scene is the point in which Victoria regains her worth, though inadvertently, and simultaneously experiences a loss of autonomy. Marriage to a nobleman permits Victoria to reclaim her aristocratic status, but male definitions of virtuous femininity require her to be bound to a restrictive contract in which she must remain docile and sacrificial. The false promise of marriage, as I later show, prompts Victoria's sexual rebellion and masquerade as a dutiful wife-mother.

The perpetrator of domestic ruin can therefore either be Victoria or Berenza. There has been critical contention about the patriarchal undertones of the text, and more specifically, whether Berenza fits the portrait of an oppressive patriarchal figure. Adrianna Craciun argues that Dacre deviates from the female-gothic tradition in representing the 'central institution of marriage' as a 'nightmare' and 'compact with the devil'.[24] Conversely, Carol Margaret Davison views marriage in the novel as an 'equal opportunity enslaver' and Berenza as a victim of Victoria's cruelty.[25] Though Berenza does not fit the portrait of the Radcliffian patriarchal villain, as he does not imprison or attempt to rape Victoria, he does not represent an image of

[24] Craciun, Introduction, in *Zofloya*, p. 11.
[25] Carol Margaret Davison, 'Getting Their Knickers in a Twist: Contesting the "Female Gothic" in Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya*', *Gothic Studies*, 11.1 (2009), 32-45 (p. 38).

mild and benevolent masculinity either.[26] On the contrary, he adopts the position of a domineering male figure whose willingness to relinquish status, in marriage to a woman of compromised sexual worth, remains dependent on her corresponding willingness to forgo autonomy. Berenza's acceptance of Victoria remains conditional on her ability to conform to a normative gender role, an identity that requires her to become docile, maternal, and sacrificial.

Early on in the novel, Berenza is introduced as an atypical Venetian aristocrat, an inquiring 'liberal philosopher' of 'peculiar sentiment', who cares little for 'amusement' and is more interested in 'analys[ing]' the 'inhabitants' of Monte Bello, a city full of 'mirth and folly' (pp. 26-27). Like a privileged foreigner visiting a scene of carnal desire, he tours Monte Bello to 'investigate character, and to increase his knowledge of the human heart' (p. 27). Finding Victoria irresistible, he believes 'he would have made her his wife upon speculation, and relied upon the power he believed himself to possess over the human mind for modelling her afterwards, so as perfectly to assimilate to his wishes' (p. 27). In these opening pages, Dacre highlights Berenza's patriarchal tendencies, as he assumes the role of a father who wishes to correct and 'check' Victoria's childish behaviour. That he courts Victoria when she is 'seventeen' and he is 'five and thirty' further highlights the imbalance of power and Victoria's vulnerability (p. 27). Berenza is 'instrumental in sinking [her] to that of lowest' (p. 128), serving as the only person 'who would afford her protection' (p. 134). Rather than marrying Victoria, he uses and possesses her as his mistress. As her mother runs off with her lover and her father dies, Victoria has no place to go, and Berenza takes advantage of her disadvantaged, orphaned status.

As the progeny of an adulterous mother, Victoria must, in the logic of the gothic mode, sacrifice her own blood to prove her worth. Though her virginal purity is compromised as Berenza's mistress, the spilling of blood and act of sacrifice redeems female virtue for both generations. Victoria's sense of worth, however, is wounded after learning that Berenza's offer of marriage is conditional: we are told that 'pride ha[d] always kept her from surmising the struggles of Berenza upon her subject, and that he had not till this period offered to become her *husband*, because till this period he had deemed her unworthy to become his *wife*' (p. 126 emphasis in original). *Zofloya* is a text that invites conflicting interpretations, constructing a space for critique while articulating conventional gender codes. Despite what is depicted as her

[26] Radcliffe's novels present villainous father figures who imprison heroines in dark castles in attempts to either rape them or steal their property. Alternatively, she presents benevolent forms of masculinity and nurturing fathers in contrast to villainous patriarchy.

misplaced pride, for she is a fallen woman, Victoria is nonetheless portrayed as a victim of patriarchal abuse, as she discovers her worth is conditional on her willingness to sacrifice her own life for his. Upon discovering Berenza's false love, Victoria finds that she is seen as possessing no intrinsic worth, and therefore, has no real sexual power. Rather, she becomes enslaved in marriage, as it is the only outlet in which she can be 'afford[ed] […] protection' (p. 134). Necessity dictates her decision to marry Berenza as a compromised woman, first marred by maternal sin and later dependent on patriarchal authority.

Berenza's conditional rather than intrinsic love, and the false promise of marriage, arouses Victoria's violent drives. In her discussion of gender in gothic texts, Michelle Massé considers the consequences of women's oppression, arguing that the false promise of marriage, in which marriage repeats the oppression of the father's home rather than releasing the heroine from societal strictures, produces a trauma of 'endless recollection and repetition […] that remains unknown to her [the heroine] while its effects shape her life'.[27] On learning of Berenza's false love, his refusal to accept her as she is and only for her sacrificial worth, Victoria refuses to remain passively confined within the bounds of marriage. In recollecting her relations with Berenza, she reflects that '"the sort of union into which he entered with me, and which vainly I preferred as proof of his love for me, was desired by him only as being least offensive to his dignity and pride'" (p. 127). Realising that he has taken advantage of her, she experiences a frenzy of emotions that are also calculated: 'Rapidly these ideas passed through the mind of Victoria; and, while secretly vowing the offense should never be forgotten, she again harmonized her features, and clothed them with smiles' (p. 127). For the five years they are married, Victoria 'clothe[s]' her 'smiles' and masks her desire for violence and revenge, validating the narcissistic male gaze in order to exploit it (p. 127).[28] As Victoria remains married to Berenza for five years, the narrator describes those years, not as a traumatic repetition of past horrors, but as providing enough time for Victoria to internalise her revenge to the point of then materialising it in the form of a destructive, demonic force – that is, Zofloya himself – who trains her in the art of masquerade.

[27] Michelle Massé, *In the Name of Love: Women, Masochism, and the Gothic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 36.

[28] See also Jennifer L. Airey, '"He Bears No Rival Near the Throne": Male Narcissism and Early Feminism in the Works of Charlotte Dacre', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 30.2 (2018), 223-41. This is one of the few texts that briefly analyses Berenza's position as narcissistic patriarchal critic.

While the first half of the narrative accounts Victoria and Berenza's illicit relations and failed marriage, then, the second half takes a supernatural turn, as Satan appears in the disguise of a Moor. Cloaked in the body of an African slave, Zofloya, as Satan, initiates a compact with Victoria to free her from marriage by helping her poison her husband and fulfil her desire for his younger brother, Henriquez. Victoria's Faustian compact results in her release from the social institution of marriage but consigns her in spiritual bondage to Satan. Her violent passions, which awaken and summon Satan in her dreams, complicate a tale of domestic ruin, for Zofloya is not only an African man of noble origins but also a refined companion. With the introduction of an African servant, the text engages a master/slave dialectic across gender and racial categories, interweaving the desires of three primary figures – Victoria, Berenza, and Zofloya.

Male Consumption of the Maternal Body

Victoria and Zofloya converse and meet in a dream-state, engaging in a dialectical exchange that allows trauma to unfold within what French West-Indian psychiatrist Frantz Fanon characterised as the 'psycho-affective' realm.[29] In his forward to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, Bhabha claims that '[t]he colonized, who are often devoid of a public voice, resort to dreaming, imagining, acting out, embedding the reactive vocabulary of violence and retributive justice in their bodies'.[30] When Zofloya, as Satan, appears in her dreams, Victoria is presented with a Faustian contract in which she gives her soul to Zofloya in exchange for killing Berenza. The following morning, Victoria meets Zofloya as a noble servant but shortly after, Zofloya disappears because another jealous servant, Latoni, kills him. Nine days later, to everyone's surprise, Zofloya reappears. From this point forward, Zofloya is depicted as a supernatural figure, and he and Victoria conduct a dialogue in a dream-like state in which, in Bhabha's terms, they enact a 'reactive vocabulary of violence and retributive justice' against patriarchy. Engaging in an erotic exchange based in a master/slave dialectic, Victoria finds herself in 'involuntary awe' of Zofloya's 'manner' as

> uncommon sensations filled her bosom, as she observed her proximity to the Moor. The dim twilight increasing to darkness, which now began to spread its sombre shadows around, threw a deeper tint over his figure, and his countenance was more strongly

[29] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Richard Philcox, with commentary by Jean-Paul Sartre and Homi K. Bhabha (New York: Grove Press, 1963), p. 149.
[30] Bhabha, 'Foreword: Framing Fanon', in *The Wretched of the Earth*, pp. vlii-xlii (p. xx).

> contrasted by the snow white turban which encircled his brows, and by the large bracelets of pearl upon his arms and legs. (p. 150)

In this scene, Victoria consumes the sexualised, raced body but is also an object of the male gaze – not only Berenza's, who estimates her value by her sacrificial maternity, but also Zofloya's. When persuading Victoria to reveal her dark desire to murder her husband, Zofloya exclaims, '"[d]oes the Signora believe, then, that the Moor Zofloya hath a heart dark as his countenance? Ah! Signora, judge ye not by appearances! but, if you desire relief, make me at once the depositary of your soul's conflicts"' (p. 151). Unlike Berenza, he values her less for her feminine and more for her spiritual worth, as he attempts to enslave her soul. Zofloya is an object of the gaze but also an author of its dismantling, for his supernatural powers expose the dysfunctionality of the home and empire.

Critics have given considerable attention to the enigmatic figure of Zofloya. Sara Schotland explores Zofloya's significance within the context of bourgeois ambivalence toward British imperialism.[31] Zofloya can also be viewed as a manifestation of Victoria's subconscious, for he appears in her dreams before he takes on an actively demonic and transgressive role in the narrative. David Sigler devotes a chapter to Zofloya, arguing that the text is not a 'consolidation of subjectivity, but, rather, about its dismantling'.[32] His book examines 'the scrupulous management of sexual enjoyment' in eighteenth-century discourse, and argues that 'Zofloya is a masochist, and he fashions Victoria into the picture of cruelty for the purposes of preserving her and filling her with perverse jouissance'.[33] George Haggerty, Craciun, and Mellor all focus on both Zofloya and Victoria, examining their interracial, transgressive desire and the ways in which Victoria becomes consumed by Zofloya's sublime presence. Nevertheless, despite these useful and varied interpretations, critics have not explored the ways in which Dacre interweaves the subversive desires of Victoria, Zofloya, and Berenza, characters whose identities are exaggerated by gender and racial categories.[34] Consequently, *Zofloya* portrays masquerade and disguise as an act of commodification, for while the raced body becomes an object of sublime pleasure, the maternal body becomes an object of male consumption. As Hoeveler claims,

[31] Sara Schotland, 'The Slave's Revenge: The Terror in Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya*', *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 33.2 (2009), 123-31.
[32] Sigler, 'Masochism and Psychoanalysis', p. 154.
[33] Sigler, pp. 4-6, 154.
[34] See note 8 above.

Victoria and Zofloya perform an act of revenge in poisoning Berenza, demonstrating the threat of the 'alliance' between 'dispossessed subject populations working together, recognizing their mutual alienation and objectification and banding as one in a maniacal and deadly pursuit of the great white father and his property'.[35] However, the text examines this violence and retributive justice in scenes of desire in which patriarchal dependency and narcissism are exposed, while monstrous femininity is empowered by the art of masquerade.

Castle argues that eighteenth-century masquerades permitted women of respectable classes 'sexual freedom' from social restraints, as it was one of the few public events they could attend 'unescorted'.[36] However, prostitutes were also notorious for attending masquerades, and often disguised themselves as virtuous maidens.[37] Anti-masquerade rhetoric therefore disparaged upper-class women for risking their virtue in potentially being confused with '"prostitute[s] in disguise" – at once hypersexualized, hypocritical, and an exploiter of innocent men'.[38] In *Zofloya*, Victoria engages in disguise in that she transforms from a fallen, libidinal woman to Madonna/nurturer, subverting gender binaries in the process. Castle continues by stating that the 'controlling figure' of the masquerade 'was the antithesis', as 'one was obliged to impersonate a being opposite […] to oneself'; in this way, the 'masquerade inversion' of identity served a 'metacritical function' and articulated a 'gay assault on cultural categories'.[39] *Zofloya* appropriates this masquerade aesthetic of role reversal and play. Victoria's disguise as a woman of sanctity serves as a weapon against patriarchy, as the elision of Madonna/whore dichotomy manifested through role reversal permits the heroine to exploit the male gaze against itself.

Berenza's assumption of women's feminine traits further allows Victoria to exploit the male gaze against itself. Upon witnessing what he interprets as Victoria's sacrifice when he believes she has risked her life to save his own, '[s]o complete and powerful a dominion had the act of Victoria obtained over his mind, that his proud and dignified attachment, softened into a doating and idolatrous love. He was no longer the refined, the calculating philosopher, but the yielding and devoted lover! Devoted to the excess of his passion' (p. 125). Berenza's transformation from 'calculating philosopher' to 'doating and idolatrous love[r]' is figured as a

[35] Hoeveler, 'Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya*', p. 191.
[36] Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization*, pp. 32-33.
[37] Castle, pp. 30-31.
[38] Castle, p. 33.
[39] Castle, p. 6.

self-indulgent 'passion'; he is overcome by an 'infatuat[ion]' (p. 171) with Victoria's apparent maternal femininity (p. 171). This role reversal and subversion of controlled masculinity, as Berenza succumbs to irrational indulgence and effeminacy, prefigures the introduction of the 'foreign' in the text, as enfeebled masculinity makes the domestic space vulnerable to foreign invasion/rebellion. In the same chapter, the narrative glosses over five years, to introduce Henriquez and his noble servant Zofloya. Zofloya initiates a Faustian contract with Victoria and procures a poison for her to administer to her credulous husband, in exchange for her soul. Against the voice of reason – for Henriquez begs Berenza to see a doctor – Berenza consumes her deathly cure (p. 169). Zofloya concocts a poison that makes Berenza ill and its gradual administration permits Victoria to don the image of a devoted wife, in masking the poison as a drink of domestic nourishment or 'lemonade' (p. 169). Essentially, Victoria performs the role of a nurturing mother-figure excessively devoted to alleviating her child/husband's illness. Berenza is enfeebled and transformed from a rational figure with patriarchal authority to a dependent, 'doating' child.

Male desire is also prefigured in voyeuristic terms. Insatiably thirsty for the lemonade that he will only drink from the maternal hand of his devoted wife, Berenza denies all conventional medical treatment and will only consume what is procured and prepared by Victoria. Henriquez, as an obstructive force of reason, witnesses Berenza's decline into deathly illness and questions Victoria's attempts at administering the cure of wifely devotion, 'entreat[ing] his *infatuated* brother to receive advice, to explain his sensations, to hear the opinion of a physician: no, he [Berenza] steadily refused; Victoria was all-sufficient, and on her tender care would he alone depend' (p. 171, emphasis added). Henriquez's scepticism functions as a substitute for the voice of rational paternity, but as he is the younger brother, it is subordinated to Berenza's insatiable desire. Ultimately, then, Berenza submits to Victoria: 'Whatever she willed, or otherwise, was law to the fond, and dying Berenza, who forgot in her present tenderness towards him and seeming devotion, all former coolness and discontent' (p. 171). Rational masculinity, as figured in Henriquez's insistence to retain valid medical treatment and Berenza's former 'power […] over the human mind' (p. 27), loses all potency and effect.

Berenza's insistence on only receiving care from his wife complements and gives free rein to the femme fatale's sadistic will. However, she achieves her end by enacting the role of sacrificial wife-mother, a vision of purity that Berenza consumes, like Lewis's monk's

consumption of the portrait of Madonna. Maternal femininity is, moreover, here subject to the male gaze, as Berenza pleads, "'[o]h my love, whether have you been? I have been wishing for my tender nurse to make me a glass of lemonade'" (p. 169). Though his body diminishes from illness caused by Zofloya's poison, the more nurturing attention Victoria provides, the more 'his appetite […] increase[s] even to ravenousness' (p. 171). Berenza's consumption of maternal femininity manifests a role reversal in which he becomes a victim of Victoria and Zofloya's agenda, degenerating from a rational figure to an enfeebled idolater.

Zofloya and the Sadomasochistic Spectacle

In relation to Zofloya's potency, Berenza's effeminacy and masculine dependency not only undermine patriarchal authority but also pose a threat to British imperial rule. Michele Cohen argues that effeminacy threatened the classical humanist philosophy of the period, by associating politeness with a reserved and disciplined masculinity. The discourse of politeness encouraged men to seek out women's company so as to acquire skills in wit and conversation.[40] At the same time, while politeness served to refine masculinity and manners, civic humanism associated reticence with strength and a more conventional form of masculinity. In the beginning of the novel, Berenza's restrained behaviour and corrective paternal attitude toward Victoria is represented as positive masculinity. As excess was associated with luxury, the effeminate gentleman threatened to undermine the nation's economic and military strength.[41] Thus, when Berenza degenerates and becomes slave to his desires, his excess not only emasculates patriarchal authority but also threatens the British imperialist agenda.

When Zofloya trains Victoria to murder her husband by administering poison through a carefully executed timeline, representations of sexual and colonial rebellion collude in an act of allegiance between oppressed Others.[42] Zofloya instructs Victoria in the mechanisms that permit the production of pleasure from pain. She pleads to Zofloya to 'advise' her in murdering her husband but he responds, '"I direct, Signora, not advise"' (p. 173). Whereas Berenza's masochism 'steadily refuses' (p. 171) medical treatment to prolong pleasure, Zofloya produces the scene of desire in concocting a poison that induces gradual pain. Henriquez is a potential

[40] Michele Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity: National Identity and Language in the Eighteenth Century* (Routledge: London, 1996), pp. 1-13.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Hoeveler, 'Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya*', p. 191.

force of interruption because he wants Victoria to stop nursing Berenza and seek valid medical treatment, but so is Victoria as she wants to murder Berenza immediately rather than gradually poison him. Thus, Zofloya must assert his supernatural authority to avert her premature wish to 'speedily and effectually' murder her husband (p. 166). He restrains her: 'your movements have already outstepped my directions […]. I warn you, that if my directions are in the smallest tittle infringed, you weaken the power by which I act, and destroy the effect which strict adherence to the rules laid down can alone produce' (p. 166). Zofloya's desire to discipline the body, via both the sadistic act of inflicting pain and gradually administering pain, serves as a profound attack on colonialism. An emphasis is placed on Berenza's degenerative masculinity as he is gradually enfeebled by the poison, revealing his insatiable and self-destructive desire for the maternal body. As director, Zofloya is less concerned with serving Victoria's appetite and more with the 'effect which strict adherence to the rules laid down can alone produce' (p. 166). 'The rules' subvert the narrative of imperial progress as it is represented in patriarchy authority, and heighten the scene that inverts racial categories of degenerate masculinity.

Zofloya performs the role of an artist strictly focused on the production of this carnal scene. In *The Sadeian Woman*, Angela Carter provides a feminist reading of the Marquis de Sade's novels, describing him as the 'terrorist of the imagination' who demystifies sex and lays bare the 'real conditions of the world in terms of sexual encounters'.[43] Craciun discusses de Sade's influence on Dacre in focusing on Victoria and her antithesis, Lilla (the emblem of feminine virtue and purity), as literary reproductions of de Sade's heroines in *Justine* (1791) and *Juliette* (1797).[44] Zofloya can also be read as a tribute to de Sade as the author of sadomasochistic scene of desire. He adopts the role of artist, or of de Sade himself, 'turn[ing] the unacknowledged truths of the counters of sexuality into a cruel festival'.[45] On the level of plot, Zofloya insists on inflicting a slow death to conceal Victoria's crime and stage it as an irrecoverable illness. However, timing remains a point of contention between Zofloya and Victoria, and the significance of the poison's effect, as immediate or slow, serves as more than a plot device. Rather, as Carter explains, it is the 'propaganda' that the artist 'consciously utilizes […] to express a view of the world […] which deviates from the notion that all this [sex] takes

[43] Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography* (Harpers and Row: New York, 1980), p. 21.
[44] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman*, p. 28.
[45] Carter, p. 22

place in a kindergarten of soiled innocence'.[46] *Zofloya* exposes the dysfunctionality of the home, as it is represented in male desire for the maternal body, and the empire, as it is figured in subjugated, gendered, and racial bodies, thereby illuminating the 'unacknowledged psychological mutilations' underwriting patriarchal imperialism.[47] The gradual administration of the poison reveals the ways in which patriarchy fails to subjugate gendered and raced bodies, and falls victim to its own mechanisms of control. Zofloya's meticulous directions then unveil Berenza's masochistic dependency on the maternal body, in addition to Victoria's subversive exploitation of patriarchal ideology, which transforms the act of maternal nourishment into an act of violent rebellion.

Victoria's hypersexuality, as Bhabha claims of the colonised figure, not only 'problematizes the sign of racial and cultural priority' (for the female body no longer serves as bearer of home and empire), but is self-destructive as well.[48] Rational masculinity fails by its own mechanisms but feminine rebellion also pays a price. Zofloya possesses Victoria's soul and pushes her into the depths of hell by the end of the narrative; the novel therefore ultimately positions her sexual rebellion as sacrificial. In having to choose between death and desire, Victoria perishes, and the domestic space is further impaired, thereby displaying the dysfunctionality of the nation/empire and its inevitable collapse upon itself. Dacre's character Zofloya therefore exposes the horrifying psychosocial effects of patriarchal colonialism, by becoming the author of a sadomasochistic scene of desire. His directions enable a spectacle that reveals male narcissistic and masochistic consumption of the maternal, sacrificial body, while subverting the ideology of sacrifice in enacting a sexual rebellion through the art of feminine masquerade. Dacre appropriates the tradition prepared by de Sade's subversive literary themes but contributes to Sadeian aesthetics, in demonstrating the ways in which the art of masquerade empowers a rebellion that exposes the collision and collusion of religious, colonial, and patriarchal structures.

[46] Carter, p. 21.
[47] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman*, p. 23.
[48] Bhabha 'Of Mimicry and Man', p. 128.