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Introduction:

*The Rocky Horror Picture Show*¹, directed by Jim Sharman, is widely acknowledged as a cult film, and has since its release in 1975 provoked many responses from both its audience, critics, and American culture in general.² Being a film that includes transexual aliens, sex, murder, cross-dressing, singing and dancing, it can, understandably, be seen as controversial, weird, and confusing.

Rocky Horror was released in the wake of the Stonewall riots in 1969, an event marked by Marc Stein as “a key moment in the mobilization of one of the most transformative social movements of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries”³ in LGBTQ history. Consequently, the film was released in a time where sexual liberation, LGBTQ rights, and gender norms were highly debated topics.

In this thesis, I will combine the approaches of plot structure, and genre studies, in particular the gothic, with queer narratology in order to look at how *Rocky Horror* plays with, and deconstructs, sexualities and gender, and the narrative conventions of marriage.

This thesis will engage with a structural approach. The plot structure in the film works against what Mary-Catherine Harrison has called “the marriage plot”, the conventional plot structure of novels and the narrative convention of “happy ever after”.⁴ The realist novel of the 18th- and 19th century ““naturalized” a deeply cultural institution and normalized a particular set of heterosexual gender roles”⁵ and the marriage plot can be found both there and in modern popular culture. It centers on the courtship and relationship between a hero and heroine, which ultimately concludes with a, projected to be happy, marriage.⁶ As argued by Kay Stone,

¹ Jim Sharman (director). (1975). Screenplay by Richard O’Brian & Jim Sharman. *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Twentieth Century Fox. First shown as a musical stage play in 1973, written by Richard O’Brian, (Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, *Reading Rocky Horror: The Rocky Horror Picture Show and Popular Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 3).

To give the film a more conventional movie-style ending, the song “Super Heroes” was excised altogether in the United States (Dave Thompson, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show FAQ: everything left to know about the campy cult classic* (Wisconsin: Applause Theater & Cinema Books, 2016)). This thesis will henceforth refer to this US edited version.

² Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, “Introduction: It’s Just a Jump to the left”, 1-13. Edited by J. A. Weinstock, *Reading Rocky Horror: The Rocky Horror Picture Show and Popular Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 2.

³ Marc Stein, *The Stonewall Riots: A Documentary History* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 2. This thesis will however have a textual focus, not a historical one.

⁴ Mary-Catherine Harrison, “Reading the Marriage Plot”, *Journal of Family Theory and Review* 6, 1 (2014): 113-114.

⁵ Harrison, “Reading the Marriage Plot”, 113.

⁶ Harrison, “Reading the Marriage Plot”, 113.

this unrealistic fairy tale trope of narrative closure in marriage has been popularized by Disney and the Grimms.⁷ As I will argue in chapter 1, the film's beginning, with its marriage and a courtship, sets certain expectations for the audience, and these are never fulfilled. The prominent theorist of queer and feminist narratology, Susan S. Lanser, argues that within the study of narrative, "the dismantling of categories of sexualities and gender, and any practice[s] that transgress or deconstructs categories or binaries" are two of the ways the term queer has been used.⁸ Lanser additionally argues with Robyn Warhol that narrative is referring to "the systematic study of how narrative forms make meaning".⁹ In *Rocky Horror* deconstruction of social categories, and notions of gender and sexualities are prominent, and makes the film's queer character clear. As I will argue in chapter 2, the break from the fairy tale love trope, and the non-normative gender representations, underline the film's queer narrative.

Additionally, the thesis will focus on a gothic genre to show how the genre contributes to further underlining the queering and deconstruction of heteronormative marriage. Haggerty argues that terror is "almost always sexual" in gothic writing,¹⁰ and that escapes are often "colored by exoticism of transgressive sexual aggression".¹¹ As I will argue in chapter 3, the characters' assertion of power, and transgressive relations both highlight the gothic genre. Lastly, this thesis will use a queer narratology approach in order to engage with the film's social transgressions. As argued by Teresa de Lauretis, queer literature is "a text of fiction – be it literary or audiovisual – that [...] works against narrativity, the generic pressure of all narrative toward closure and the fulfillment of meaning".¹² In contrast to the fairy tale narrative, Halberstam offers the concept of "queer time", appearing when the normative way of organizing time is deserted and "once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance".¹³ The film can arguably be said to conform with Halberstam's concept of queer time, which further highlights its queer

⁷ Kay Stone, "Things Walt Disney Never Told Us", *The Journal of American Folklore* 88, 347 (1975): 43.

⁸ Susan S. Lanser, "Gender and Narrative", *The Living Handbook of Narratology*. <https://www-archiv.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/node/86.html#Rohy>

⁹ Susan S. Lanser & Robyn Warhol, *Narrative Theory Unbound: Queer and Feminist Interventions* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2015), 2.

¹⁰ George E. Haggerty, *Queer Gothic* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 2.

¹¹ Haggerty, *Queer Gothic*, 2.

¹² Teresa de Lauretis, "Queer Texts, Bad Habits, and the Issue of a Future", *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 17, 2-3 (2011): 244.

¹³ Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 6.

narratology. As I will argue in chapter 4, this failure of fulfillment and conformance with “queer time” highlights the queer narrative.

All these social and literary transgressions work to dismantle the idea of marriage that is presented at the beginning of *Rocky Horror*. This thesis therefore argues that the conventional heteronormative marriage is queered and deconstructed through the film’s plot structure, gothic genre, and queer narrative.

Chapter 1: “The marriage plot” and expectations

In the opening scene, with a wedding and a proposal, the conservative and out of date conventions of marriage are presented through the characters and actions of Brad Majors and Janet Weiss, and certain genre expectations are set from this. They are “placed by forces beyond themselves into the position of next reproducing the institution of reproduction”¹⁴ as argued by Comparative Literature critic Amittai Aviram. This introduces Mary-Catherine Harrison’s “marriage plot”, heterosexual love and engagement that ends in a seemingly happy marriage that concludes the story.¹⁵ This chapter of the thesis will argue that Brad and Janet introduce, willingly and unwillingly, these marital expectations, and that there are also indications that these expectations will not be realized.

The scene opens at the steps of the Denton Episcopalian Church, where the happy bridal party appears. The party’s attire reflects that of a party from the 1950s more than the 1970s, when the story actually takes place. With glamorous and more modest dresses rather than the free hippie look of the ‘70’s, it’s an immediate indication that their lifestyle is outdated. Brad and Janet’s clothing express a highly conservative way of living. Brad, in his cummerbund and bowtie, is the epitome of a conservative, middle-class American teenager, while Janet embodies the suburban, modest, girl next door in her white hat and buttoned to the neck collar dress, both visible in figure 1.¹⁶ The “young, ordinary, healthy kids”¹⁷, as the Criminologist

¹⁴ Amittai F. Aviram, “Postmodern Gay Dionysus: Dr. Frank N. Furter”, *Journal of Popular Culture; Oxford* 26, 3 (1992): 186-187.

¹⁵ Harrison, “Reading the Marriage Plot”, 113.

¹⁶ Figure 1, (09:50), image from *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*.

¹⁷ Sharman, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, (10:58).

describes them, resemble a couple one could find in the movie *Grease*¹⁸, a musical about American teenagers in love in the 1950's.

As a consequence of the conservative lifestyle they portray, and of tradition, when Janet catches the bride's bouquet, the expectation of marriage is set, and it's expressed by Ralph when he nudges Brad and says "Hey big fella. Looks like it could be your turn next, eh?".¹⁹ This is the "institution of reproduction" that argues the Aviram couple is placed into, the societal expectation of marriage and kids by the simple action of catching a bouquet.



Figure 1

This scene hence explores how expectations deeply rooted in fixed, heteronormative societal conventions have been placed on them. When newlywed Mr. and Mrs. Haphschatt at last leave in their getaway car, Brad and Janet are left standing at the church steps. Wistfully, Janet talks about how wonderful the wedding was and how her friend just "an hour ago she was plain old Betty Monroe", and how "now, she's Mrs. Ralph Haphschatt", -ending with a gasp.²⁰ Her expression of regret that she is not married yet is visible in both her words and facial expressions. Arguably, this is shown to immediately trigger Brad into in an over the top, Hollywood parody of a marriage proposal to Janet. The musical inspired proposal contains a series of clichés like "the road was long, but I ran it"²¹, and ultimately ends in a duet and their mutual expression of love for each other. The hero proposing to the heroine introduces the canonical narrative structure Harrison calls "the marriage plot", heterosexual

¹⁸ Randal Kleiser (director). (1978). *Grease*. Paramount Pictures.

¹⁹ Sharman, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, (06:20).

²⁰ Sharman, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, (06:54-07:06).

²¹ Sharman, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, (08:17).

love and marriage concluding the story, which she argues normalized a deep cultural institution and a specific set of heterosexual gender roles.²² Hence, since the plot of a happy marriage has dominated in popular culture, readers picking up a romance novel, or seeing a romance film, will have an assumption and desire for that relationship and ending.²³ Although *Rocky Horror* does not claim to be a romance film, these expectations can still, with good reason, appear, due to the opening scene.

Despite Brad and Janet's display of affection and love, visual and auditory signs indicate that the social and literary expectations presented will not be fulfilled. Janet seems thrilled when she catches the bouquet, an excitement not reciprocated by Brad. Instead, he holds a contemplating look, appearing unsure about the opportunity presented to him, in contrast to the gleeful look one would expect on a man in love. One can arguably notice a significant gendered difference in their approach to marriage. Although the couple still appear blissfully affianced in their proposal number, some statements made in the song feel not so loving. "Dammit Janet" and "oh Brad, I'm mad"²⁴ sound sweet when followed by "I love you", but several times, just those words are voiced alone. It gives the impression that the "I love you"'s and other clichés work as convincement for the couple, convincing both themselves and the other that marriage is wanted, not just an expectation or obligation. The rushed proposal essentially feels more like "the fulfillment of rigid social norms"²⁵ than an act of love.

Lastly, and maybe the most obvious visual sign that this marriage story won't end well, is the location and hustle in the background of the proposal. This part engages with the gothic genre through the continuous warning signs presented, and the characters choosing to ignore, or not seeing them. Starting in a graveyard, with the couple surrounded by gravestones, and a "Denton, The Home of Happiness!" sign behind them, the bifurcated message displayed becomes ironic. Showing a picture of both the happiness connected to the conception of marriage, and the tragic fate of death, paints a conflicting image. During the proposal it also becomes apparent that the church workers are preparing for a funeral. The colorful flower arrangements at the entrance are turned around to show almost completely black flowers, and towards the end of the song, a coffin is carried out and placed right behind the couple, which

²² Harrison, "Reading the Marriage Plot", 113.

²³ Harrison, "Reading the Marriage Plot", 114.

²⁴ Sharman, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, (09:57).

²⁵ Aviram, "Postmodern Gay Dionysus", 187.

is visible in figure 1.²⁶ These signs might not be as obvious as the “ENTER AT YOUR OWN RISK!!” sign Brad and Janet both clearly see, but choose to ignore, when they arrive at “Frankenstein’s Place”.²⁷ These heavy-handed signs foreshadow a dooming faith for the conservative, heteronormative convention of marriage in *Rocky Horror*.

Both heteronormative traditions, and Harrison’s marriage plot²⁸ place Brad and Janet in the position of “next reproducing the institution of reproduction”.²⁹ There are visual and literary signs that place deeply rooted heteronormative social expectations of marriage upon them. Ultimately, their proposal feels more like convincement and “the fulfillment of rigid social norms”³⁰ than an act of love, and the gothic genre trope of the visual warning signs foreshadows that these expectations won’t be fulfilled.

Chapter 2: Pleasure vs. love in a queer marriage

Betty Robbins and Roger Myrick argue that it becomes significant how much Brad and Janet’s conservative lifestyle gets challenged, and how the concept of the conventional, non-erotic marriage gets dismantled, in the castle.³¹ The abuse of these institutions takes place, most notably, in Frank’N’Furter’s creation of, and marriage to, Rocky. Frank’N’Furter’s yearning for pleasure contradicts with what Karen E. Rowe calls “ladies fictions”, a heroine’s yearning for romantic love culminating in marriage.³² This scene additionally asserts transgressive gender representations. This chapter of the thesis argues that the marriage between Frank’N’Furter and Rocky is one made for pleasure, not one out of love. In this marriage the failed marriage plot becomes evident, and the film’s queer narratology is accentuated.

The moment Brad and Janet enter “Frankenstein’s Place”, it becomes obvious that they are on foreign ground. The guests and household of the castle being made aliens, underlines their

²⁶ Figure 1, (09:50), *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*.

²⁷ Sharman, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, (14:10).

²⁸ Harrison, “Reading the Marriage Plot”, 113-114.

²⁹ Aviram, “Postmodern Gay Dionysus”, 186-187.

³⁰ Aviram, “Postmodern Gay Dionysus”, 187.

³¹ Betty Robbins & Roger Myrick, “*The Function of the Fetish in The Rocky Horror Picture Show and Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*”, *Journal of Gender Studie* 9, 3 (2000): 277.

³² Karen E. Rowe, “Feminism and fairy tales”, *Women’s Studies* 6, 3 (1979): 238.

role as outcasts in Brad and Jante's society.³³ It quickly becomes obvious however, that this unconventionality is the "normative" in the queer castle society³⁴, and that Brad and Janet are now the outcasts. They meet their antithesis, Frank 'N' Furter, and their heteronormative values are mocked as they are "literally and figuratively"³⁵ stripped of their middle-class identities.

The character of Rocky, Frank 'N' Furter's "beautiful creation"³⁶, is created with "blond hair and a tan"³⁷, defined muscles, and wearing small golden shorts and boots. He is portrayed as super-masculine, with his conventional good looks and perfect muscles, and he stands in sharp contrast to the weakling Brad gets presented as, emphasizing the masculinity Brad won't ever possess. It appears that Janet picks up on this when they are asked by Frank 'N' Furter what they think of Rocky, after both Brad and Janet looked shocked at Rocky's physique when he was unveiled. Both before and after answering "Well I don't like men with too many muscles"³⁸, she looks concerned up at Brad, as if to protect Brad's sense of masculinity, and reassure him that Rocky is no threat. Not much later, however, she admits that she is "a muscle fan"³⁹, a statement Brad, understandably, appears shocked to hear. One can argue that this shows a change in Janet and demonstrates the great effect the castle community is starting to have on the couple.

Not being impressed with Janet's answer, Frank 'N' Furter fiercely exclaims that Rocky "carries the Charles Atlas seal of approval".⁴⁰ Charles Atlas was a body builder who played a huge role in the American physical cultural movement between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and transformed himself into "the world's most perfect" American man.⁴¹ He became widely known as one of the most recognized symbols of American masculinity. Associating Rocky with Charles Atlas, and claiming he carries his seal of approval, further underlines his masculinity, and, arguably, the reason he was made, for his looks and pleasure.

³³ Ben Hixon, "In Search of the Authentic Queer Epiphany: Normativity and Representations of the Queer and Disabled Body in *Rocky Horror*", 177-191. Edited by J. A. Weinstock, *Reading Rocky Horror: The Rocky Horror Picture Show and Popular Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 178.

³⁴ Queer castles are a hallmark of gothic fiction, and has been studied by several critics, such as Neil Matheson in "*Surrealism and the Gothic: Castles of the Interior*" (2020).

³⁵ Patrick T. Kinkade & Michael A. Katovich, "Toward a Sociology of Cult Films: Reading *Rocky Horror*", *The Sociological Quarterly* 33, 2 (1992): 200.

³⁶ Sharman, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, (33:18).

³⁷ Sharman, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, (26:42).

³⁸ Sharman, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, (39:31).

³⁹ Sharman, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, (47:10).

⁴⁰ Sharman, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, (39:41).

⁴¹ Jacqueline Reich, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man: Charles Atlas, Physical Culture, and the Inscription of American Masculinity", *Men and Masculinities* 12, 4 (2010): 445.

Frank’N’Furter’s obsession over Rocky’s looks demonstrates that he was made only to please his creator. Frank’N’Furter clearly, and somewhat rightfully, takes on the role of the Creator, as having created Rocky is an immense scientific achievement. He also claims he can make Rocky a man in “just seven days”⁴², drawing a link to Genesis and God, which could indicate that he suffers from something known as the Frankenstein complex.⁴³ This is the irresistible desire to play God and create life, inevitably leading to tragic ends. This plan Frank’N’Furter has to make Rocky a man includes a list of how he will work out and eat to gain muscle and become strong. Being “clean [...and] strong [...with] a deltoid, and a biceps, a hot groin, and a tricep”⁴⁴ makes Frank’N’Furter “shake” and is essentially what makes someone a man in his eyes. One could argue that Frank’N’Furter’s need for affirmation of Rocky, saying he has made a man “good for relieving [his] tension”⁴⁵, and Riff-Raff referring to Rocky as “the new playmate”⁴⁶ all imply that Rocky was made solely for pleasure. The conventional marriage Brad and Janet represent is more about virtue and being good, in opposition to Frank’N’Furter’s marriage, which is all about desire and lust. Frank’N’Furter did not make someone he could love, but someone who could satisfy his sexual needs. Hence, when Frank’N’Furter and Rocky get married at the end of the scene, it is, arguably, not a marriage out of love, but one made to content Frank’N’Furter. He does not love Rocky as an individual but perceives him as a means to fulfill his sexual urges, and it mocks the heteronormative marriage institution Brad and Janet represent.

Rowe argues that “chaster descendants of fairy tales, the “ladies fictions” [...] pass on homogenized redactions of romantic conventions. [...] They continue to glamorize a heroine’s traditional yearning for romantic love which culminates in marriage”.⁴⁷

Frank’N’Furter’s marriage, which is not based on love, hence rewrites this fairy tale trope.

With Frank’N’Furter coded as the feminine part in this relationship, the heroine doesn’t yearn for love, she yearns for pleasure. Basing a marriage on one character’s sexual desire and his

⁴² Sharman, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, (41:17).

⁴³ Sue Matheson, ““Drinking Those Moments When”: The Use (and Abuse) of Late-Night Double Feature Science Fiction and Hollywood Icons in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*”, 17-34. Edited by J. A. Weinstock, *Reading Rocky Horror: The Rocky Horror Picture Show and Popular Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 27.

⁴⁴ Sharman, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, (40:47-46:34).

⁴⁵ Sharman, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, (26:44).

⁴⁶ Sharman, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, (54:00).

⁴⁷ Karen E. Rowe, “Feminism and fairy tales”, 238.

power to fulfill it, is a transgression from the plot, which was made popular through fairy tales, as traditionally, they were “yearning for romantic love”⁴⁸, not sexual desire.

Even though the marriage upholds some traditions, like guests throwing confetti and “A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Op. 61: IX. Wedding March” playing in the background, which can be observed in both weddings⁴⁹, it also breaks some literary traditions. Some of them might be more striking, like the fact that the wedding has no reception or ceremony, only the tradition of the marriage suite.

One that is harder to notice is the literary structural place of the marriage. It breaks from Harrison’s marriage plot, where the marriage concludes the novel.⁵⁰ While this marriage clearly fits the marriage plot better than the marriage that introduced the film, it is still not close to what Harrison argues, and is not the marriage “promised” by the first scene. Firstly, it doesn’t conclude in a perceived happy ending, with both parts of the married couple going on to sleep with other people merely hours after the marriage. Secondly, while it is quite accurately in the middle of the story plot, it does not conclude it. It is arguably structurally better than the first marriage, but it is still a failed marriage plot⁵¹, as Harrison calls it. Failed marriage plots rely on distinctly different plot structures, with marriages predating the novel or happening early in the depicted events, and they introduce conflict and tension rather than resolving it⁵². As this marriage creates tension, sets expectations, and especially because of its structural place in the story, the scene underscores the failed marriage plot.

Additionally, underlining the queer narrative of the film is the gender representations in this scene. In the relationship and marriage between Frank’N’Furter and Rocky, Frank’N’Furter is coded as the feminine part and Rocky as the masculine. As stated earlier, Rocky is portrayed as the epitome of masculinity, but he is not very intelligent. He doesn’t speak and can’t seem to take the social cue of taking Frank’N’Furter’s hand.⁵³ On the other hand, the feminine coded part of the relationship is depicted to have extreme scientific knowledge and has made the great scientific discovery of life. This is mirrored in the bridal suite when the masculine Rocky is perceived as receptive in bed. Lanser argues that the term “queer” has been used in

⁴⁸ Rowe, “Feminism and fairy tales”, 238.

⁴⁹ Sharman, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, first wedding (05:03), second wedding (47:51).

⁵⁰ Harrison, *Reading the Marriage Plot*, 113-114.

⁵¹ Harrison, *Reading the Marriage Plot*, 114.

⁵² Harrison, *Reading the Marriage Plot*, 114.

⁵³ Sharman, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, (47:30).

“the dismantling of categories of sexuality and gender” within narrative studies.⁵⁴ The masculine being presented as receptive, and the feminine as dominant deconstructs the normative gender categories, and underlines Lanser and Warhol’s argument that feminist and queer theorists agree in “understanding gender difference to be a cultural construction, not a biological given”.⁵⁵ This thus emphasizes the film’s queer narratology.

This chapter demonstrates the queering of the marriage plot. In this foreign society, Brad and Janet’s lifestyles are severely challenged, and they meet their antithesis, which arguably influences them quite early. Frank’N’Furter’s yearning for pleasure, as opposed to love, in his marriage to Rocky contradicts Rowe’s argument of the fairy tale trope where the heroine yearns for romantic love. The non-normative gender representations that are stated through Frank’N’Furter and Rocky, and in their marriage, is one way queer is used in narrative studies as Lanser and Warhol argues, and combined with the yearning for pleasure, demonstrate the queering of the marriage plot.

Chapter 3: Desire, terror, and gender differences

Aviram argues that it is in the bedrooms of Frankenstein’s place that the most obvious assault on the institution of heterosexuality takes place.⁵⁶ Through the destruction of gender categories in Frank’N’Furter and Rocky’s bridal suite, this was argued in the previous chapter. Likewise, this assault takes place in the separate bedrooms Brad and Janet are shown to after that marriage. Their adultery breaks with the fairy tale tradition of a monogamous, heterosexual marriage,⁵⁷ and the “almost always sexual” terror, as Haggerty argues it is in gothic fiction, is clearly present in this scene.⁵⁸ Additionally is the desire in this scene expressed through the exercise of, or resistance to, power,⁵⁹ and it is “perverse, violent, [and] excessive”, as Jolene Zigarovich argues it is in gothic fiction.⁶⁰ This thesis chapter argues that

⁵⁴ Lanser, *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, 17.

⁵⁵ Lanser & Warhol, *Narrative Theory Unbound*, 7.

⁵⁶ Aviram, “Postmodern Gay Dionysus”, 187.

⁵⁷ Jeana Jorgensen, “Innocent Initiations: Female Agency in Eroticized Fairy Tales”, *Movels and Tales* 22, 1 (2008): 28.

⁵⁸ Haggerty, *Queer Gothic*, 2.

⁵⁹ Haggerty, *Queer Gothic*, 2.

⁶⁰ Jolene Zigarovich, “Gothic and the History of Sexuality”, 382-405. Edited by A. Wright & D. Townshend, *The Cambridge History of Gothic Volume 1: Gothic in the Long Eighteenth Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 387.

the persuasive and dominant actions and attitudes of Frank 'N' Furter towards Brad and Janet after they have been separated, dismantles the convention of heteronormative monogamous marriage and underscores the gothic genre.

Despite the fact that Frank 'N' Furter has just gotten married, he separately seduces both Brad and Janet, while aware that they are engaged, and thus plays a huge role in hindering the monogamous heterosexual relationship and marriage. His conscious choice to seduce Brad and Janet right after spending his wedding night with Rocky, demonstrates his transgressive sexuality, steering away from monogamy and heteronormativity. This breaks with the fairy tale tradition where the heroine ultimately chooses a monogamous, heterosexual marriage which conforms to patriarchal norms, as Jeana Jorgensen states.⁶¹ While his marriage to Rocky isn't a heterosexual marriage, the societal masculine and feminine gender roles are present and mocked in his adultery. Frank 'N' Furter therefore stands as a representation of destruction of societal marriage norms. The couple quickly shed their innocence through the corruptive rituals in this adultery, and the rapidity of it can arguably indicate the conservative culture's fragility.

Not only does Frank 'N' Furter physically break the societal marriage norms in his own marriage, but he also hinders, or at least tries to, the coming marriage between Brad and Janet. Fully aware that they are engaged, he still pushes on, even when he's called "beast" and "monster".⁶² One can therefore argue that Frank 'N' Furter intentionally tries to break the young couple up, or at least create tension between them, and through this, tries to stop the heterosexual conventional marriage. He is the embodiment of a threat against the heterosexual conservative society, as he flagrantly lives a sexually liberating, ambiguous and unbound lifestyle. Making him an alien further underlines how this is foreign to Brad and Janet and the world outside the castle. Brad and Janet both in some way state they are saving themselves for the other, but Frank still seduces them. That way he also takes away an extensive religious element from them and deconstructs a part of their religious faith. This demonstrates the great impact the castle is having on them, as they are both willing to give up their religious virtue in order to give in to pleasure.

When it comes to terror in gothic fiction Haggerty argues that it "is almost always sexual terror".⁶³ Being surrounded by a sexually different community, and involuntarily and

⁶¹ Jeana Jorgensen, "Innocent Initiations: Female Agency in Eroticized Fairy Tales", 28.

⁶² Sharman, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, (49:58).

⁶³ Haggerty, *Queer Gothic*, 2.

subconsciously made to change the view of their own sexuality, this is exactly what Brad and Janet are experiencing. They are forced far out of their own comfort zones and persuaded into doing things unthinkable before they entered the castle. The cheating Frank 'N' Furter makes them go through with demonstrates this, as they both show strong resentment and fear towards Frank 'N' Furter when they first realize what is going on. Frank 'N' Furter's extreme sexual desires evokes sexual fear and terror. Additionally, gothic fiction does not differentiate between homo- and heterosexual desire, but centers around the theme of the desire itself, which is often expressed through exercise of power, or the resistance to it.⁶⁴ Jolene Zigarovich additionally argues that the desire in gothic fiction is defined as being extreme, excessive, and often violent and perverse.⁶⁵ Frank 'N' Furter has egregious amounts of desire, and therefore holds extensive amounts of sexually charged power, which he takes good advantage of. His dominant and superior position allows him to exercise his desires over the new guests, and his sexual power controls the course of the film. This is especially visible when he seduces Brad and Janet, as this power is the sole reason he manages to persuade them. He only gets away with the sexual terror he raises in them because of his extreme power and ability to persuade. The sexual powerlessness of Brad and Janet serves a similar function as Frank 'N' Furter's power, and combined, this creates an odd sexual mood.⁶⁶ The sexual terror, extreme desire expressed through exercise of power, Brad and Janet's powerlessness and the odd sexual mood resulting from this all underscore the films gothic genre.

One could additionally argue that this scene asserts gender differences. While both Brad and Janet ultimately surrender to Frank 'N' Furter's sexuality, visual signs can arguably be said to demonstrate a difference in the sinfulness of their actions. As visible in figure 2⁶⁷ and figure 3⁶⁸, Brad and Janet's separate rooms, while otherwise identical, are lit in two different colors, Janet's being red and Brad's a light blue.

⁶⁴ Haggerty, *Queer Gothic*, 2.

⁶⁵ Jolene Zigarovich, "Gothic and the History of Sexuality", 387.

⁶⁶ Haggerty, *Queer Gothic*, 2.

⁶⁷ Figure 2, (50:12), image from *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, (1975).

⁶⁸ Figure 3, (52:57), image from *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, (1975).



Figure 2



Figure 3

Female desire has been seen as natural but sinful, and “constructed as monstrous and unnatural”, threatening the sexual dominance of the male, as argued by Caroline Gonda.⁶⁹ The gender differences illustrated through the color differences therefore present Janet’s actions as more sinful than Brad’s. Janet also expresses a double standard when she finds out Brad cheated. While showing signs of regret, her reaction to seeing Brad with Frank’N’Furter on the tv screen makes it appear that his crime is worse than hers. Stating “oh Brad, how could you?”⁷⁰ as if forgetting she just did the same, creates the sense that Janet feels her actions are justified, but not Brad’s, and demonstrate her double standards.

The adultery in this scene breaks from what Jorgensen argues is a fairy tale tradition, a monogamous, heterosexual marriage, and hence demonstrates the destruction of societal marriage norms and the conservative culture’s fragility. The sexual terror Haggerty argues is in gothic fiction, and the excessive and violent desire Zigarovich states, creates an odd gothic sexual mood, and underlines the film’s gothic genre. The scene also asserts some clear gender differences in the actions of Brad and Janet, as Janet’s are being perceived as more sinful.

⁶⁹ John C. Beynon & Caroline Gonda, *Lesbian Dames: Sapphism in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 5.

⁷⁰ Sharman, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, (55:17).

Chapter 4: Sexual liberation and escape

The film's final scene with the spectacular, burlesque floor show highlights "the coming together of multiple characters whose gender is irrelevant"⁷¹ as Robbins and Myrick argues. As the expectation of marriage is never fulfilled, de Lauretis' argument that queer literature works against narrativity and never fulfills expectations⁷² becomes clear. What Harrison calls the failed marriage plot, is also highlighted in the film through this scene. Here Halberstam offers the concept of "queer time", the desertion of "temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family".⁷³ Brad, Janet and Dr. Scott's final escape is additionally what Haggerty argues as a gothic escape, "colored by exoticism of transgressive sexual aggression".⁷⁴ This final chapter argues that the floor show is the sexual liberation of Brad and Janet, highlighting the queer narrative, and that their escape underlines the film's gothic genre.

In this scene, Brad, Janet, Rocky, and Columbia, all dressed up in burlesque clothing with corsets, stockings, heels, and feather boas, are set to participate in Frank'N'Furter's floor show. Singing "I feel released [...] my mind has been expanded"⁷⁵, Janet is experiencing her sexual liberation and is giving herself "over to absolute [the] pleasure"⁷⁶ Frank'N'Furter sings about. Brad on the other hand, isn't taking this experience as liberating, and appears to find it more frightening. While admitting to "feel[ing] sexy"⁷⁷, he also whimpers "It's beyond me. Help me Mommy"⁷⁸, expressing conflicting feelings of what is going on, perhaps not completely understanding what is happening to him. Entering the pool with Frank'N'Furter, all five emphasize the celebration of sexual liberation. They become visually indistinguishable from one another, as one can see in figure 4⁷⁹, they are all smiling, finding this liberation exiting. It is effectively erasing gender differences and subverting the heterosexual reproduction institution via "heavy makeup, burlesque brassieres, corsets, and fishnet stockings with garters and high heels".⁸⁰ Robbins and Myrick argue that this absolute

⁷¹ Robbins & Myrick, "The Function of the Fetish", 277.

⁷² de Lauretis, "Queer Texts, Bad Habits, and the Issue of a Future", 244.

⁷³ Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 6.

⁷⁴ Haggerty, *Queer Gothic*, 2.

⁷⁵ Sharman, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, (01:18:45).

⁷⁶ Sharman, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, (01:20:28).

⁷⁷ Sharman, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, (01:18:33).

⁷⁸ Sharman, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, (01:18:10).

⁷⁹ Figure 4, (01:22:16), from *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, (1975).

⁸⁰ Aviram, "Postmodern Gay Dionysus", 190.

pleasure refers to “the coming together of multiple characters whose genders is irrelevant”,⁸¹ which is exactly what is happening in the pool, they are giving themselves over to pleasure, not caring about the gender of anyone around them. It is also revealed that Dr. Scott wears high heels and fishnet stockings. While fully aware of the dangers this society can have on his mind, even Dr. Scott, a man of science, ultimately ends up surrendering to pleasure, demonstrating that everyone gets affected, and everyone changes, willingly or not.



Figure 4

The scene also highlights the film’s queering and abandonment of the marriage plot narrative. Ultimately ending in the castle ascending into space, the promise of a marriage established in the beginning is never fulfilled. As argued by Teresa de Lauretis, queer literature is “a text of fiction – be it literary or audiovisual – that [...] works against narrativity, the generic pressure of all narrative toward closure and the fulfillment of meaning”.⁸² The expectation is never met, the plot is never fulfilled, and it underscores the queer narrative of the film. As Harrison argues, failed marriage plots rely on different narrative structures, where marriages create tension rather than resolving it.⁸³ The marriage at the opening scene is arguably the reason Brad proposed, and therefore also the reason Brad and Janet ended up at Frankenstein’s Place, a space creating great tension between the two. Hence, the first marriage is ultimately the cause of the tension eventually appearing between Brad and Janet, and the film therefore follows what Harrison calls the failed marriage plot. The failed marriage plot also demonstrates how this normative organization of time is deserted, with a marriage relatively early in the depicted events rather than concluding them.

⁸¹ Robbins & Myrick, “The Function of the Fetish”, 277.

⁸² de Lauretis, “Queer Texts, Bad Habits, and the Issue of a Future”, 244.

⁸³ Harrison, “Reading the Marriage Plot”, 114.

In opposition to the fairy tale marriage plot narrative, gender and queer theorist Jack Halberstam's "queer time" works better with the narrative of *Rocky Horror*. The desertion of normative time organization and "temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family"⁸⁴ are evident in the film. The normative institution of heterosexual reproduction is abandoned, as Brad and Janet never fulfill that expectation of reproduction, further underlining the queer narrative. Hence, the film's queer narratology can arguably be said to be further highlighted through its conformance with Halberstam's concept of queer time.

The scene, and film, ends with Brad, Janet, and Dr. Scott escaping the castle just as it lifts off and returns to Transylvania. As Haggerty argues, gothic escapes are often "colored by exoticism of transgressive sexual aggression".⁸⁵ As the three are left crawling in the dirt after the lift off, the only reason they were able to survive Frank 'N' Furter and his lifestyle, and escape, was because they adapted to his world and sexual way of living and expressing oneself. Transgression and change are necessary to keep up and survive a changing world. While the castle society represents a drastically different society, it underlines the importance of being able to adapt in a changing society.

According to Aviram, one can hardly say that *status quo ante* has been restored completely after the lift off.⁸⁶ The castle and its inhabitants, norms, and society, disappears, and Brad, Janet, and Dr. Scott are "lost in time, and lost in space and meaning"⁸⁷, in the words of the Criminologist. They are left in a situation both frightening, liberating, and characterized by uncertainty. As Haggerty argues, gothic fiction rarely has a happy ending, or catastrophic close, if there even is an ending, but instead, leaves one with "a complex of emotional relations that can be understood usefully".⁸⁸ As the film ends, there is no real closure, while they do manage to escape, whether or not they take with them the experiences from the castle, or they choose to leave it behind, is never made clear. There is no happy ending with a marriage, and there is no clarity in how this has affected the couple after they escaped. The thing that is clear is that the constitution of heterosexual relations and reproduction have been subverted, and that the institution of marriage has been demolished.

⁸⁴ Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 6.

⁸⁵ Haggerty, *Queer Gothic*, 2.

⁸⁶ Aviram, "Postmodern Gay Dionysus", 190.

⁸⁷ Sharman, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, (01:35:14).

⁸⁸ Haggerty, *Queer Gothic*, 3.

The floor show in this final chapter represents Brad and Janet's sexual liberation, and the "coming together of multiple characters whose gender is irrelevant"⁸⁹ as Robbins and Myrick argues. They have given themselves into absolute pleasure, even Dr. Scott has been affected, demonstrating the great power Frank 'N' Furter and his society holds. The unfulfillment of marriage expectations underlines the queering of the marriage plot, a plot that is failed based on the arguments of Harrison, as the first marriage introduces tension rather than resolving it. Halberstam's concept of "queer time" conforms with the film's abandonment of heterosexual reproduction institutions. Their gothic escape underlines the importance of being able to adapt in a changing society, and the subversion of marriage and heterosexual reproduction institutions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the failed marriage plot in the film and its use of the gothic genre work together to underscore the film's queer narrative, and through this, queers and deconstructs the conventional heteronormative marriage.

As argued in chapter 1, Brad and Janet are placed, by forces beyond themselves, into "next reproducing the institution of reproduction",⁹⁰ and introduce Harrison's marriage plot⁹¹ through their proposal. This arguably sets a set of expectations, but several auditory and visual signs indicate that these will not be fulfilled. The church workers preparing for a funeral in the background of their musical proposal, and their weird expression of love, sends a dooming message to the convention of heteronormative marriage.

In chapter 2, the thesis argues that Frank 'N' Furter's marriage to Rocky is made out of pleasure rather than love, rewriting Rowe's "ladies fictions", where the heroine yearns for romantic love.⁹² Frank 'N' Furter's obsession over Rocky's look, comparing him with Charles Atlas, the "perfect American man",⁹³ and his well thought out plan to "make him a man"⁹⁴ who is "good for relieving [his] tension"⁹⁵, all demonstrate how he yearns for goods looks and

⁸⁹ Robbins & Myrick, "The Function of the Fetish", 277.

⁹⁰ Aviram, "Postmodern Gay Dionysus", 186.187.

⁹¹ Harrison, "Reading the Marriage Plot", 113.

⁹² Rowe, "Feminism and fairy tales", 238.

⁹³ Reich, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man", 445.

⁹⁴ Sharman, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, (41:19).

⁹⁵ Sharman, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, (26:44).

sexual pleasure in his marriage, not for romantic love. In addition to being in contrast to Row's "ladies fiction", this marriage mocks the heteronormative marriage institution Brad and Janet represent, and the non-normative gender representations that are stated. The masculine Rocky is perceived as receptive in bed, and feminine coded Frank'N'Furter is dominant and intellectual, conforming with the "dismantling of [...] sexuality and gender" categories which Lanser argues that the term "queer" is used in narrative studies.⁹⁶ This underlines the film's queer narrative, and the structural placement of the marriage, underlines the failed marriage plot, as it creates tension and does not conclude the story.⁹⁷

As argued in chapter 3, Frank'N'Furter holds an immense amount of sexually charged power, which he uses to control Brad and Janet, and the course of the film. Persuading them into adultery evokes sexual terror in them, which Haggerty argues is how terror is in gothic fiction.⁹⁸ Frank'N'Furter's desire controls him, and it's violent and extreme, conforming to Zigarovich's argument about gothic desire.⁹⁹ The gothic genre is prominent through the adultery, terror, and desire in this scene, and it breaks with the fairy tale tradition of a monogamous, heterosexual marriage.¹⁰⁰ Frank'N'Furter is the embodiment of a threat against the heterosexual conservative marriage, as he deliberately splits Brad and Janet up. This scene also asserts gender differences, as Janet's adultery is portrayed as more sinful than Brad's through the red lighting in her room.

The 4th and final chapter of the thesis argues for the sexual liberation of Brad and Janet, and that the abandonment of the marriage plot highlights the queer narrative. As the expectations of marriage are never met, de Lauretis' argument that queer literature "works against narrativity, the generic pressure of all narrative toward closure and the fulfillment of meaning"¹⁰¹ underscores how the queer narrative is made prominent through the failed marriage plot. This abandonment also conforms with Halberstam's "queer time" and the desertion of "temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family",¹⁰² as there is never a concluding marriage, further highlighting the film's queer narrative. The final escape is "colored by exoticism of transgressive sexual aggression" the way gothic escapes are, as

⁹⁶ Lanser, *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, 17.

⁹⁷ Harrison, *Reading the Marriage Plot*, 114.

⁹⁸ Haggerty, *Queer Gothic*, 2.

⁹⁹ Jolene Zigarovich, "Gothic and the History of Sexuality", 387.

¹⁰⁰ Jeana Jorgensen, "Innocent Initiations: Female Agency in Eroticized Fairy Tales", 28.

¹⁰¹ de Lauretis, "Queer Texts, Bad Habits, and the Issue of a Future", 244.

¹⁰² Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 6.

argued by Haggerty.¹⁰³ Without the happy ending, and with the sexual categories transgressed, the gothic genre works to underline the queer narrative.

The gothic genre and failed marriage plot work to highlight the film's queer narrative and queers and deconstructs the conventional heteronormative marriage plot narrative.

The topic of queering of marriages is very interesting, and should be looked further into from several angles, as a queer reading of a marriage could provide completely different readings of a text. For further research on the topic, I suggest looking at a queer reading of Ann Radcliffe, as Marcie Frank has done. She argues that the plots in Radcliffe's heteronormative marriages feel more melancholy than happy¹⁰⁴, on the same page as the marriage in *Rocky Horror* feels more like it's made for pleasure than out of love.

¹⁰³ Haggerty, *Queer Gothic*, 2.

¹⁰⁴ Marcie Frank, "Fairy Time from Shakespeare to Scott", 103-117. Edited by P. Sabor & P. Yachnin, *Shakespeare and the Eighteenth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

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