

# **Mothers, Daughters, and Vampires: The Female Sexual Dilemma in Eighteenth-Century Vampire Poetry**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Early vampiric poetry often included two female characters: a mother and a daughter. Despite the prevalence of the inclusion of a mother within these poems, scholarship on the literary vampire fails to give that inclusion proper attention. This paper examines how the mother's relationship with her daughter in these poems connects the liminal space of the vampire with a woman's involuntary position in a restrictive place between unrestrained sexual desire and the restrained social codes and conventions of eighteenth-century society, exposing the powerless position women are in when it comes to their identity construction in relation to sexuality. The interactions between the mother, daughter, and vampire in "Der Vampir" (by Heinrich August Ossenfelder) and "The Bride of Corinth" (by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe) highlight how female sexuality is chosen either by a mother for her daughter or by a vampire or vampiric nature. Exploring these poems encourages a conversation about the construction of female sexuality and the forces that exert influence over that development.*

Criticism surrounding vampire literature, specifically vampire poetry, consistently addresses the role given to female characters. In the majority of these poems, the female characters are depicted as the maiden victims of the vampire. However, early vampire poetry features another female character: the maiden victim's mother. Many of the scholarly works surrounding the literary vampire focus on the literary vampires from the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. Little can be found pertaining to the literary vampire from the eighteenth century, and, therefore, little can be found addressing the inclusion of the mother/daughter relationship present in early vampire poetry. The mother/daughter relationship is absent after the nineteenth century (Michelis 16), so to investigate its significance we must look at its inclusion in the poems "Der Vampir" and "The Bride of Corinth," both penned in the eighteenth century. The mother/daughter relationship in "Der Vampir" and "The Bride of Corinth" connects the vampire's occupation of the liminal space between life and death with the female's involuntary position within the liminal space between unrestrained sexual desire and the restraining social codes and conventions of eighteenth-century society, exposing women's powerless position when it comes to their own sexuality. Ultimately, this analysis will demonstrate that female sexuality, as seen in these poems, is developed either by a mother or by a vampire.

### **The Vampire from Myth to Literature**

It is easy to find criticism that mentions or discusses the countless tales about the vampire's ancestry. Indeed, even the word "vampire" has a contested origin. In popular culture, it is believed that the vampire itself and its name comes from Hungary or Transylvania. However, etymological and linguistic studies show that the word "vampire" in European languages "refer[s] to the Slavic superstitions," and "the wide dissemination of the term and its extensive use in the vernacular follows the outburst of vampirism in Serbia" (Wilson 583). Despite these studies, critics such as Jan L. Perkowski defend the idea that the vampire's origins (both linguistically and mythologically) cannot be determined. Even the Slavic explanation may have come from older ideas in the Middle East. The origin of the vampire is further complicated because vampire-like-creatures can be found in all cultures. Though it cannot be determined where the vampire originates or where the word "vampire" originates, "the earliest recorded uses of the word appear in French, English, and German literature" (Laycock 1).

The definition of the word "vampire" is also varied. Popular culture has us imagine the fictional Dracula as the outline of a vampire; an evil, sharp-toothed, shape-shifting, undead monster. The popular image of vampires similar to Dracula makes it difficult to imagine vampires that do not originate from the supernatural or

folklore beings; however, Bruce A. McClelland's *Slayers and Their Vampires: A Cultural History of Killing the Dead* argues that the Slavic word "vampir" had altogether different connotations when it was first used. In the eleventh century it was the "label for an individual who either belonged to a specific group or practiced a particular belief or ritual" (31). More specifically, vampir was used for certain people within the Slavic community who continued to practice certain pagan rituals (sacrificial rites and rituals associated with reincarnation) deemed unacceptable to Christians (79). Thus, Early vampires were either pagans or heretics who occupied a lower social position.

Throughout the years this definition of vampirism started to be connected with Satan and evil. Before the fourteenth century, vampirism was associated with real individuals who failed to convert properly to Christianity. The vampire as representative of a real individual started to change into the folkloric monster after the fourteenth century, at which time it began to represent all that was presumed to be unnaturally dangerous or anathematic (80-83). Many stories are told about the history of the vampire, but, as McClelland makes clear, the "true" history of the vampire cannot be attributed to one culture, especially when the definition of a vampire evolved over the years. McClelland does suggest that despite the ambiguity surrounding the history of the vampire, "failure to recognize the politico-religious roots of the term is a serious blind spot" (82), a statement that reveals the vampire's position between heathen religion and Christianity. This religious liminal space is exploited in vampire poetry, making it a vital element in the mother/daughter relationship found within "Der Vampir" and "The Bride of Corinth."

### **Female Sexuality**

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, male sexual desire and activity were seen as natural and innate. By contrast, female sexual desire and pleasure were seen as pathologically deviant, meaning women with a sexual desire and/or women who gained pleasure from sexual activity were believed to have diseased minds and bodies (Drawmer 39). As a result, women were expected to practice chastity, a behavior considered essential and natural to the female sex (Jones 30). Women were not meant to be sexual, but more importantly they also could not *want* to have sex. Instead, they needed to be suspicious and vigilant in maintaining their chastity, which could only be achieved through the avoidance of temptation. Since avoidance of temptation was integral to the practice of inherently feminine chastity, indiscretion was the woman's fault (Chico 178). A woman's sexual status was assigned to her according to her ability to regulate her own sexual desire through reinforcing her wish to remain chaste and compelling sexual restraint in their male suitors.

This obsession with the female sexual reputation led to the development of new social codes and conventions intended to make sexual purity highly visible. These new social codes and conventions pertained to dress, comportment, conversation, and even physical responses such as flushing or blushing (Kittredge 6). Flushing and blushing were often compared to mercury rising in a thermometer, indicating that the woman had fevered spirits, was sexually available, or had overall heightened sensibilities (Castle 26). If a woman dared to break these social codes and conventions, she was exposing herself to humiliation and such epithets as whining spinster, evil murderess, or decaying prostitute (Kittredge 1). While the eighteenth-century social codes and conventions insisted that a woman was supposed to remain chaste, they also insisted she was supposed to attract a male suitor, get married, and produce children. As it is not possible to remain chaste *and* birth children, the social codes and conventions were unattainable. However, conforming to them remained vitally necessary for a woman who did not want to be ostracized from society.

### **Mothers, Daughters, and Vampires**

#### *“The Vampire”*

Heinrich August Ossenfelder (1725-1801) has long been considered the first poet to introduce the vampire to readers of creative literature. Commissioned in 1748 by Christlob Mylius, the editor of the scientific journal *Der Naturforscher* ‘*The Natural Scientist*,’ Ossenfelder wrote a poem with a vampire theme to be published alongside an article being released concerning vampiric reports. Limited critical attention has been given to Ossenfelder and his poem “Der Vampir” (“The Vampire”) aside from a few negative reviews in 1887 and 1900 (Crawford 4). Currently, a few scholarly works exist that address Ossenfelder and his poem within the context of the overall history of the literary vampire. One such text, *The Vampire: A New History* (2018), suggests that “Der Vampir” had only a minuscule effect when it was first received by the literary community; however, it is gaining recognition hundreds of years later because of its unique presence in a scientific journal and its explicit avoidance of “scientific or medical debate and theological or philosophical dilemmas” (Groom 130). That Ossenfelder chose to create this literary figure in a time when its existence was under extreme scrutiny within the scientific, theological, and philosophical communities makes the poem of interest.

Ossenfelder presents the literary vampire in an anacreontic poem, linking the literary vampire with seduction and drinking. From what at first seems an unlikely pair emerges the defining qualities of this creature. One such quality, eroticism, is an element that had not been associated with the vampire of folklore, and Ossenfelder would have been well aware of his change in the mythology. His poem does draw on some influences,

most noticeably “directly from the Arnod Paole case, via the marquis d’Argens’ account of Johann Flückinger’s report, which had just been reprinted in Mylius’ journal” (Groom 130). Flückinger’s report stated that the Serbia Hajduks (peasant-soldiers) were exhuming bodies because they believed the corpses were returning from their graves at night to climb on people and kill them through an unknown twenty-four-hour illness. In order to stop these corpses, the Serbia Hajduks were driving wooden stakes through the bodies and then burning them to ash (Butler 27). Flückinger’s report, and others like it, do not involve any indications of sexual or erotic behavior being exhibited by the undead. By contrast, Ossenfelder creates the literary vampire that is seductive, sexual, and erotic, an image that is still prevalent in contemporary depictions of the literary vampire and deviates significantly from “real” reports of vampirism as seen in Flückinger’s report.

“Der Vampir,” narrated by a male vampire, chronicles a conversation between the vampire and a female victim. The narrator attempts to seduce this young woman through his words and a proposal of rape-like actions. Similar to some eighteenth-century seductive poetry, the female character does not respond to the vampire within the poem. Her response must be read between the lines, as the only information we are given about her is by the narrator. Despite Groom’s assertion that Ossenfelder avoided addressing theological dilemmas in “Der Vampir,” a strong religious presence makes itself known in the poem. This religious presence, combined with the erotic elements, creates a text in which the liminal space between unrestrained sexual desire and eighteenth-century restraints of social codes and conventions can be explored. Most noticeably, the female victim, Christiane, is pulled between unrestrained sexual desire (represented by the vampire) and the restraining social codes and conventions (represented by her mother and Christianity), essentially forcing her into a position in which she is unable to control her own sexuality.

### **The Restraining Social Codes and Conventions**

The poem begins with the vampire speaking about Christiane:

My dear young maiden believeth  
Unbending, fast and firm  
In all the furnished teachings  
Of her ever-pious mother;  
As people along the Tisza  
Believe staunchly and heyduck-like  
In vampires that bring death. (1-7)<sup>1</sup>

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1. The translation used is from Heide Crawford’s essay, “The Cultural-Historical Origins of the Literary Vampire in Germany.”

In these first lines of the poem, the vampire compares the daughter's belief in her mother's teachings to a belief in vampires held by a group of people who live along the Tisza, a river in Hungary. The vampire says the daughter's belief is "unbending, fast and firm" (2), indicating a stubborn temperament. Moreover, she believes in her "ever-pious" (4) mother's "furnished teachings" (3). The vampire's tone suggests that he is frustrated with the daughter's belief and the source of that belief: her mother. As the mother is "ever-pious," it seems appropriate to assume that the mother's teachings are those of religion and morality. It is unknown to the reader how the daughter feels about her mother's teachings, but as a character who is only defined by her religious faith, I would argue that readers are meant to surmise that the daughter adheres to the religious rules set forth by the older generation. The language used in the second line hints at her obedience through the word "unbending," which indicates that the daughter cannot be swayed from her beliefs. Furthermore, the use of the word "pious" to describe the mother forces an association between the daughter and the devoutly religious.

Additionally, through Christiane's religious name as well as the introduction of a metaphor between religious belief and superstitious belief, the narrator exposes his own position towards religion. The connection between the poem's victim and Christianity is strengthened through her name: "Just wait now, dear Christiane" (8). The name "Christiane" is plausibly derived from the Latin *christiana*, "which means 'of a Christian' and from *christiantias*, the Latin word for Christianity" (Crawford 6). Being the daughter of a devoutly religious woman, Christiane is literally from a Christian, and her Christian mother acts as the conduit leading Christiane into Christianity through her teachings. The vampire compares the daughter's strict obedience to and association with Christianity to the Hungarian peoples' belief in vampires. Christiane strongly believes in her mother's Christian moral principles like the Hungarian people "believe staunchly and heyduck-like / In vampires" (6-7). Believing staunchly suggests that the Hungarian people believe in a loyal, committed, and/or strong manner. In her essay, "The Cultural-Historical Origins of the Literary Vampire in Germany," Heide Crawford connects the Hungarian references ("Tisza," "heyduck-like," and "Tockay") to superstition. While this conclusion fits with the German confusion surrounding vampires, it seems strange for the vampire narrator to be referring to a belief in vampires as superstition; however, the belief in vampires was considered a superstition at the time the poem was written. Regardless of the reason that the narrator suggests that vampires are a superstition, the importance of his metaphor is that his comparison reveals his opinion that Christianity is just another superstitious belief. The metaphor also makes it evident that Christiane and the Hungarian people hold strongly to these superstitions and will not easily forsake them.

Christiane's strong connection and dedication to religion set her up to be (like her mother) a representative of the restraining social codes and conventions of society that prohibit unrestrained sexual desire. Therefore, it comes as no surprise when the narrator indicates that Christiane does not want to be involved with him. He tells her, "Just wait now, dear Christiane, / You do not wish to love me" (8-9). The significance of these lines can be found in Christiane's lack of voice and the narrator's familiarity with Christiane. The vampire's words "Just wait now" imply an action or response from Christiane. Considering that he follows the command for her to wait with the declaration that she does not want to love him, it is justifiable to presume that Christiane was either attempting to leave the narrator or she was speaking to him. The narrator's demand for Christiane to wait is the beginning of an interaction that does not allow Christiane to have a voice or to have control over her own body.

Christiane's lack of power is further complicated by the suggestion that the relationship between the narrator and Christiane was initiated prior to the poem. As Crawford notes, the vampire uses the German diminutive form of Christiane's name, *Christianchen* (6). The German diminutive form of a name communicates cuteness, informality, or affection. It is entirely possible that an emotional connection between the narrator and Christiane exists, which, along with Christiane's lack of love, suggests that the narrator is (or was) Christiane's unsuccessful suitor (Crawford 6). We are aware that Christiane is a chaste woman because the narrator refers to her as "my dear young maiden," indicating that Christiane is an unmarried virgin. As we are unable to know for certain why Christiane does not reciprocate the narrator's love, we must draw conclusions from the little we know about her from the poem. While it seems logical to assume that Christiane's decision to reject the narrator is an active choice that she is making, I would argue it is not. Crawford approaches Christiane's rejection as being the result of her religious faith, and, if we see Christiane as a product of her mother's teachings and the restrained social codes and conventions of society, we must also see that her religious chastity will not allow her to have a sexual nature or intent. Even though there is limited evidence to determine whether Christiane's rejection is entirely her own choice, we can conclude that Christiane's sublimation of her sexuality is in part determined by her religious faith and morality, which leaves Christiane denying the desires of the body in order to uplift the soul.

### **Unrestrained Sexual Desire**

If Christiane represents restrictive social codes and conventions, then the vampire represents unrestrained sexual desire. It is quite possible that his unrestrained sexual desire is the result of being an undead creature missing a soul. The suggestion that

a vampire is a creature without a soul is not a fresh concept. They have almost always been considered reanimated corpses (Fleischhack 63); therefore, writers and scholars have surmised that, when the body is reanimated after death, it is missing an essential element: the soul. Evidence within “Der Vampir” that suggests the soullessness of the vampire is sparse; however, the narrator’s proposed actions make it quite obvious that he has an overpowering and dangerous sexual desire for Christiane. The lust the narrator has for Christiane and his opinion that her religious beliefs are a superstition strongly suggest his position as a body without a soul; he can only think of and desire things of the flesh: Christiane, blood, and sex. Christiane’s rejection, prompted by her religious ideals and sexuality, anger the narrator, an anger that surfaces through rape-like actions the narrator plots to direct towards Christiane. The narrator tells Christiane,

On you I take revenge  
And in Tockay today  
Will drink you into a vampire.  
And when softly you are sleeping  
From your rosy cheeks  
Will I the color suck.  
Then will you be startled  
When I kiss you thus  
And as a vampire kiss:  
When you start to tremble  
And weakly, like one dying,  
Sink down into my arms... (10-21)

Christiane’s lack of romantic attention for the vampire leads him to “take revenge” on her, and his revenge is steeped in sexual language that implies rape and murder. It is clear that the narrator intends to turn Christiane into a vampire because he tells her that he “will drink [her] into a vampire” and suck the color from her cheeks. Unlike the folkloric vampire’s unerotic and animalistic feeding and/or creation of another vampire, the narrator’s feeding and creation is a sexual experience. Christiane will be sleeping during the initiation of this encounter, unquestionably unable to give consent. When Christiane awakens she will be startled; however, the narrator suggests that she will tremble and sink into his arms when he kisses her, indicating—to him—sexual enjoyment.<sup>2</sup>

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2. The narrator is ignoring the double meaning of Christiane’s trembling and sinking. Her weakened state could be the result of his vampiric attack rather than a sexual response.

While it is unsettling to contemplate Christiane enjoying a nonconsensual experience that stems from rejection, the poem does not display what is happening or what has happened. The poem is what the vampire tells Christiane *will* happen if she continues to reject his advances. We do not know whether or not Christiane will enjoy the erotic encounter with the vampire, but the narrator believes she will. Crawford argues that the narrator believes he will bring Christiane to orgasm (6). While Crawford's conclusion is only one possibility that can be drawn from the text, most critics agree that the narrator is not simply satisfying his own sexual desire, but rather, he is severing the chaste and pious relationship Christiane has with her mother and Christianity, forcing Christiane away from the unrestrained social codes and conventions by which she lives. The narrator believes that with his own erotic and sexual nature he will be able to make Christiane "resemble the man whose lust is so strong that it dehumanizes him and makes him act like a body without a soul" (Butler 64). Essentially, Christiane is being pulled from her pure chastity into unrestrained sexuality, going from one extreme to the other, an action that reveals the moral dilemma for all eighteenth-century women. In a society that upholds prohibited female sexuality, women can either abide by the societal codes and conventions or become ostracized women. Anything that falls outside of the social codes and conventions would be considered to be "unrestrained sexuality," thus women have no middle ground on which to stand.

### **Putting the Pieces Together**

The most interesting lines of "Der Vampir" are the last three because the narrator is still speaking in the future tense, but he exposes a dilemma that Christiane is already part of pertaining to her sexuality. After their sexual and lethal exchange, the narrator will "pose [his] question, / Are not [his] teachings better / Than those of [Christiane's] good mother?" (22-24). It is clear that the mother's teachings are those of Christianity and society, but what are the narrator's teachings? Crawford, who analyzes the poem through a cultural-historical lens, argues that the narrator represents destruction and death. He is a hostile threat to Christianity and the restrained social codes and conventions of society, and he intends to destroy or corrupt the Christian faith through seduction and draining its spirit. Crawford regards this poem as a juxtaposition of the "strict moral values of society, represented by the religious values of the mother and the daughter with the possibility of a destructive hedonistic lifestyle, represented by the vampire figure's planned seduction" (7). Thus, the vampire's teachings are those of hedonism. While I agree with Crawford's analysis, I want to take it a step further. The poem is not simply an interplay between religion and hedonism. Yes, religion and hedonism are present in the poem, but they are part of the umbrella or overarching themes. Hidden beneath the conflict between religion and hedonism is the battle over female sexuality.

Part of the mother's Christian teachings would naturally involve how a pious Christian woman should behave in relation to sexuality. As readers of the poem, we have many gaps in knowledge surrounding Christiane and her mother. We do not know how old Christiane is or whether or not she has other suitors. What we do know is that the narrator is or was a suitor and that Christiane is an unmarried virgin who has rejected the narrator. Her rejection might stem from a dislike of the narrator or from her sights being set on another suitor, but it is also possible that, as an unmarried virgin, Christiane was taught chastity or female virtue by her mother and society. Chastity or female virtue would lead Christiane to reject a suitor's advances, especially if those advances were sexual and not a simple courtship that would lead to marriage and only then procreative sexual intercourse. The narrator's strong emphasis on Christiane's religion and his desire to engage in a sexual relationship, despite being unmarried, suggests a conflict between Christiane's sexual teachings from her mother and the narrator's sexual desire. Christiane's mother taught her chastity, and the narrator will (or wants to) teach her carnality.

The last lines of the poem specifically ask Christiane how her mother's teachings compare to the narrator's teachings. The narrator's question pits unrestrained sexuality and the restrained social codes and conventions of society against one another. However, despite the narrator asking Christiane the question, she is not the one who gets to choose. Her mother chose Christianity for her and Christianity, along with the restrained societal codes and conventions of society, chose the sexuality she must follow (chastity and denying the flesh). The narrator apparently will also choose Christiane's sexuality for her. The narrator forces her to acknowledge and participate in erotic sexuality that will compel Christiane to embrace the desires of the flesh, consequently denouncing Christianity and societal codes and conventions. The unanswered question at the end of the poem is indicative of Christiane's position within the liminal space between unrestrained sexual desire and the restrained social codes and conventions of society, a space into which women were inevitably forced.

Similar to Christiane, women that lived in the eighteenth century who decided to marry and birth children were unable to stay chaste. However, they were also unable to express or seek out erotic sexuality. The only way for a woman to stay chaste would be for her to be unmarried, an "option" that again forces the woman into a sexuality that she may not want or choose for herself. As Barkhoff notes, "in the ascetic, anti-sensual, and misogynist world of Christendom independent female desire is not allowed to flourish, but is equally unable to die" (140). Women are stuck in a position where they are unable to choose their sexuality for themselves, but they are also somehow supposed to embody both chastity and unrestrained sexual desire.

*"The Bride of Corinth"*

Written by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in 1797 and published in 1798, "The Bride of Corinth"—or "Die Braut von Korinth"—is also a vampiric poem in which a mother stands as a barrier to a young couple's sexual union. Critics have referred to "The Bride of Corinth" as a pagan vampire poem that is based on the Greek myth of Philinnion. The myth of Philinnion involves a she-demon lover who returns from the dead to woo the young man Makhartes. The act of returning from the dead results in the she-demon's death through immolation by the townspeople (Groom 132). While the myth does not refer to the she-demon as a vampire, Goethe's revisioning of the myth in "The Bride of Corinth" is about a young woman who is turned into a vampire by her own mother. When the vampire daughter attempts to spend a night with her betrothed, the mother comes between them, denying her daughter for a second time. Like "Der Vampir," "The Bride of Corinth" explores the space between unrestrained sexuality and absolute chastity. However, unlike Christiane, the daughter in "The Bride of Corinth" is forced by the mother, and only the mother, into sexuality. Once again, a daughter is unable to choose her own sexuality.

### **The Death of a Daughter**

Goethe's ballad starts with a young man traveling to Corinth to meet and marry the bride who has been promised to him since childhood. Both the "youth from Athens" (1) and his "plighted spouse" (7) have been promised to each other at the behest of their fathers. The young man arrives at midnight when the "Father and daughters [are] all at rest" (17); therefore, the mother—who cannot sleep—"rises to receive the [youth]" (19). At the very beginning of the poem, the mother plays a large part in the action. It is not explained why the mother cannot sleep, but further in the poem, it becomes clear that the mother was involved in the daughter's death, as indicated by the line, "thou did'st doom thy child to die!" (169), suggesting that the mother might not be able to sleep as a result of her guilty conscience. It is clear by line 169 that the mother caused her daughter's death, but the way in which this happened is unclear.

Jürgen Barkhoff, in his essay "Female Vampires, Victimhood, and Vengeance in German Literature around 1800," suggests that "the mother, out of gratitude to God for her recovery from an illness, had pledged her daughter to become a virginal bride of Jesus, a nun" (138). However, Barkhoff fails to include textual evidence for this interpretation. I would argue instead that the text suggests that the mother unknowingly made a pagan pledge to have her daughter take her place in death. Other theorists have perceived the theme of paganism within this poem, with Butler referring to "The Bride of Corinth" as a poem confronting pagan sexuality (64), and Groom calling the poem a pagan vampire

poem (132). It is important to note that the difference between Barkhoff's interpretation and my own is most likely due to a difference in English translations of the German poem. Though the difference in interpretation may be due to issues of translation, it is a significant difference that begs to be explored. As vampirism has close ties to paganism, the juxtaposition between paganism and Christianity in the poem is key to the argument that the daughter is being pulled between two extremes.

The first evidence for my interpretation of the text is found in stanza 8. The mother has led the young man to a chamber and given him food and drink. After the mother leaves, the daughter to whom the young man is betrothed comes into the room. Not expecting to see someone in the chamber, the daughter is frightened and decides to leave. The young man, however, pleads with her to stay. When the young man tries to get nearer to the daughter she tells him,

Away—young man—stand far away,  
What pleasure is, I feel not now—  
Joy hath forever fled from me,  
Scar'd by a mother's gloomy vow:  
She fear'd to die,—my youthful bloom,  
My hopes of love—her stern decree  
Hath destin'd to a living tomb! (50-56)

Not only is this stanza the first clue to the daughter's position between life and death, but it is also the first indication of what transpired between the mother and the daughter. The daughter tells the young man that she is scarred by a vow that her mother made, a vow prompted by the mother's fear of dying. Her mother's vow—or stern decree—has destined her youthful bloom and hopes of love to a living tomb. Later in the poem, the daughter asks her mother, "And is it not enough that I / For thee in funeral pall should lie? / For thee in youth should fade and die?" (155-157). The daughter elaborates on the initial statement that the mother destined the daughter's youth and hopes of love to a tomb to reveal that she, in fact, took the mother's place in the funeral pall—or coffin. Essentially, the mother traded her daughter's life for her own.

The daughter continues with a statement about her condition:

Our ancient gods no longer deign  
In this dull mansion to reside—  
But one who dwells in heaven unseen,  
And one, upon the cross who died,  
Are worship'd with sad rite severe:  
No offering falls of lamb or steer;  
But human victims suffer here! (57-63)

She is telling the young man that the ancient—or pagan—gods are no longer worshiped in “this dull mansion”; instead, God and Jesus are being worshiped (57-58). It seems like Barkhoff’s assertion that the daughter has been promised to the church and sent to a convent relies on the interpretation that the dull mansion being spoken of is a Christian church or place of worship where the daughter would have resided after her mother’s vow. However, the daughter refers to the dull mansion as *this* dull mansion, meaning that the daughter and the young man are in the dull mansion the daughter is talking about; thus, the dull mansion is the home in which she lives/lived. Despite the daughter not actually being placed in a church or convent, her family has converted to Christianity. Therefore, the daughter would have been required to live by Christian morals and worship God.

The conflict between Christianity and Paganism is further complicated as the daughter continues to explain what her mother has done to her. The daughter judges her mother’s actions and suggests the incorporation of pagan aspects in the mother’s vow:

Me from my narrow silent bed,  
Hither a wondrous doom hath driven:  
Your priests their mummery-song have said,  
But, oh! it hath no weight in heaven!  
In vain your mystic spells ye prove! (158-162)

The daughter has come from her grave with a “wondrous doom”—or extraordinary judgment; this judgment declares that despite her mother having priests conduct a ceremony, their mummery-song (which the daughter is referring to as a ridiculous, hypocritical or pretentious ceremony) has no weight or importance in heaven. The reason the mother’s Christian religious actions have no weight in heaven can be explained within the daughter’s accusation on the last line of the 23rd stanza. The daughter says, “In vain your mystic spells ye prove!” (162). Breaking down the meaning of this line is not simple, and there can be multiple interpretations; however, I am interpreting the line to mean that in vain—or in a blasphemous manner—the mother conducted a mystic spell (some sort of petition to live), and this spell reveals the kind of person the mother truly is.

Despite the mother’s outward cloak of Christianity, she appealed to a different power in an attempt to live. This is further corroborated by the next stanza:

I was his doom’d and destin’d bride  
In days while Venus’ fane still stood,  
But ye your former vows belied,  
And seal’d your late learn’d creed in blood.  
Alas! No heavenly power stood by,  
When thou didst doom thy child to die! (164-169)

The daughter tells the mother that in days while Venus's temple still stood, the daughter and the young man were destined, by their fathers, to be married. Then the mother belied—or misrepresented her former vows and sealed a new creed in blood, meaning she broke the promise that had been made by the fathers and created a new commitment for the daughter. The element of the daughter's explanation that strongly connects the mother's actions to pagan ritual is the fact that no heavenly power stood by as the mother sealed this new creed in blood. And as already stated, this creed sealed in blood led to the daughter's death. Thus, the textual evidence suggests that the mother conducted a pagan blood ritual for life, in the guise of Christianity, and in doing so she doomed her daughter to die in her place. The mother also doomed her daughter to be a maiden forever, considering that the daughter has died before marriage and any sexual experience. By using a pagan ritual disguised as a Christian one to sustain her own life, the mother unintentionally established her daughter's status as a vampire who exhibits and exercises unrestrained sexuality.

### **The Daughter as the Vampire**

Unlike "Der Vampir," "The Bride of Corinth" features the male suitor as the victim and the female daughter as the vampire and also a victim. It is not obvious that the daughter is a vampire, and we do not explicitly find out the daughter's condition until stanza 25 when she actually calls herself a vampire. After the daughter reveals the circumstances surrounding her death, she explains her seemingly living appearance:

And hither from the grave I roam  
To seek the joys denied in life:  
Hither, to seek my spouse I come,  
To drain his veins—a vampyre wife! (170-173)

In her attempt to stay in the living realm, the mother killed her daughter and doomed her to a life as a vampire: a creature living between life and death, never quite existing in either realm. Therefore, the mother's pagan ritual for life led to the daughter becoming a vampire. This correlation between polytheism and the vampire derives from a theory (as proposed by McClelland) that postulates that the original vampires were people who did not conform to Christian theology and a Christian way of life.

In *Slayers and Their Vampires: A Cultural History of Killing the Dead*, McClelland discusses the origin and evolution of the vampire, emphasizing the fact that "the word vampir emerged in a context of religious conflict in the Balkans" (79).<sup>3</sup> The religious

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3. The Balkans refers to a geographical area usually characterized as comprising Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia.

conflict centered around Orthodox Christians and pagans who would not abandon their beliefs and rituals. McClelland goes so far as to suggest that the rituals the pagans would not relinquish were associated with a belief in reincarnation. From this conflict between Christians and pagans arose the “essential behavioral qualification of the first vampires,” which was unacceptable ritual practice (McClelland 79). Therefore, the mother’s pagan blood ritual to save herself and sacrifice her daughter automatically associates the mother and daughter to vampirism. However, the poem takes the folklore and history of the vampire and further complicates the struggles between polytheism and Christianity. The mother’s sacrifice of her daughter is a perversion of God’s sacrifice of Jesus. Where Jesus was sacrificed to save humanity, the daughter is sacrificed to save the mother. The sacrifice in the poem comes from a place of selfishness and fear of death. The daughter’s existence as a vampire after death is, once again, not a choice that she has made.

Being a vampire, the daughter in “The Bride of Corinth” is a perfect reflection of a woman’s forced position in the liminal space between unrestrained sexual desire and the restrained social codes and conventions of the eighteenth century. As a vampire, she “represents the ambiguous status of a woman who is neither quite human nor inhuman, neither mistress of her life nor slave of her master, who is both victim and victimizer” (Metzger 88). The vampire, being undead, has always existed as a creature that “appear[s] in...zones of liminality” (Barkhoff 139). In the role of a vampire, the daughter can now represent many in-betweens. Being stuck in these transitional spaces can create a sense of alienation and marginalization, especially when the liminal space was forced, not chosen. The daughter embodies this alienation and marginalization when it becomes apparent that she is an unwelcome insider.

The young man from Athens, despite his political and religious disparity with the daughter’s family, is given an honored place in the house. He is a welcome outsider, while the daughter is a displaced person. Upon finding the young man in the chamber she “exclaims, ‘Then I am nothing here! / Guests come and go and none tells me!’” (37-38). It seems as if the daughter does not exist in her own home. She is not told when guests are arriving, and she is considered to be nothing. Despite her status as an outsider, the vampire daughter is able to experience the young man’s love for her. The romantic exchange between the vampire and her betrothed seems to suggest a turn of events for the daughter, but once again she is not making her own choices.

The couple is not married, and we find out halfway through the poem “[the vampire’s] sister is [the young man’s] destin’d bride” (72). The daughter, as a vampire, now has an unrestrained sexual desire that she intends to fill with her former betrothed. The young vampire has a virginal appearance, but that appearance masks her true nature as a

lascivious vampire (Metzger 88). She tells the young man, “But in her arms, ah! think of me, / Who in my cell will think of thee: / Who pine and die with love of thee” (73-75), and he responds by telling her, “Be mine, my love, be mine to night” (82). The poem goes on to discreetly hint at a sexual relationship between the couple:

He speaks to her with words of love—

On love, on love alone, he thinks.  
.....

In tears upon the bed he sinks!  
.....

He strains her in his closing arm

With strength that youth and passion gave;  
.....

With frenzied clasp of wild desire

He strains her to his breast of fire. (99-100, 104, 110-111, 114-115)

The vampire’s mother chose for the daughter to die in chastity and miss out on the sexual pleasures of the world. Therefore, it comes as no surprise when the mother comes between the daughter and the young man.

The mother listens outside the chamber door to hear “voices like lovers’, low and light” (128), and a declaration that “to-morrow night thou wilt be mine” (135). Angered by what she hears, the mother bursts in to see “her own—her daughter” (143). Even though the mother comes in, she is not able to stop the daughter from determining to become a victimizer and turn the young man into a vampire, like herself. Her plans are “to drain his veins” (173). It might seem like the daughter will finally be able to make a choice that is her own, but she is only being persuaded by her vampiric nature; a nature that she had no choice in electing. As Butler notes, “the destruction [the vampire daughter] will wreak...stems not from her own wishes, but from the mortifying prohibitions imposed on the young by an older generation that has lived only to die in an odor of false sanctity” (65). The daughter is essentially both a victim (being killed and turned by her mother) and a victimizer (turning the young man).

### **Death as the Only Choice**

Similar to Christiane, the vampire daughter is exposed to unrestrained sexuality because she is a vampire and exposed to the restrictive social codes and conventions through her mother. Both women are stuck in a place where their choices are limited, but their choices are not their own. Unlike Christiane, though, the vampire daughter does voice the way out of her predicament, a way that will take her out of all zones of liminality. Her last request of her mother is to have her mother

build high...a funeral pile:  
...from that narrow cell releas'd,  
[Where the daughter's] spirit shall rejoicing smile;  
And when the embers fall way,  
And when the funeral flames arise,  
[The daughter and the young man will] journey to a home of rest. (182-187)

The only way for the daughter as a vampire to escape her dungeon of liminality, as Fleischhack suggests, is through a stake in the heart, beheading, and/or cremation (64). The daughter's only escape from the liminal space between unrestrained sexual desire and restrained social codes and conventions of society is through absolute death.

### **Conclusion**

"Der Vampir" and "The Bride of Corinth" depict women stuck in the liminal space between unrestrained sexual desire and restraining social codes and conventions of eighteenth-century society. Both Ossenfelder and Goethe explore this liminal space through poetry that complicates the relationship between a mother and daughter through the inclusion of vampiric characters. Their depictions, however, differ in their renderings of those characters. Ossenfelder presents a vampire who defies the mother by forcefully seducing the daughter into an act of unrestrained sexuality, while in Goethe's poem the daughter herself transforms into a vampire through the mother's false Christian ritual. Despite these differences, both authors uncovered the female lack of choice in sexuality. In the eighteenth century, women were expected to be pure and chaste, while also being sexual to attract a male suitor. Both "Der Vampir" and "The Bride of Corinth" expose this impossible situation that women face in terms of their sexuality by dramatizing this struggle through the metaphor of the vampire.

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