

**MARGINALIZED PHILOSOPHY: *ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW*
AND THE UNSEEN INFLUENCE**

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

Marginalized Philosophy: *Rocky Horror Picture Show* and the Unseen Influence

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Literature Review

Through the examination of original works such as referenced literature, psychology, and art, and of theories by Mikhail Bakhtin, Sigmund Freud, Friedrich Nietzsche, and others, I plan to analyze overarching themes and messages in *Rocky Horror Picture Show* in relation to the philosophical crisis of human instinct, character, purpose, and relation to the universe as well as the evolution of society in relation to the arts.

Thesis Statement

Rocky Horror Picture Show, a 1970s musical rejected and dismissed by the critics and viewers of its original screening, is often examined as a commentary of fluidity and conditioning of gender, but when it is seen in the context of twenty-first century culture, its meaning and message can be widened. Rather than a commentary on gender alone, I intend to demonstrate how the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* is a commentary upon 1970s society and culture in relation to the various meanings of nature, boundaries, liminality, and in communion with literary themes, philosophical issues concerning sin, and human nature.

Theoretical Framework

When watching the film, one technique and structure that is integral to the meaning of the film yet beyond the development of the characters themselves, is the strategic location of characters within a scene in relation to the background. With silent, implicit arguments situated within the background or shadows of the film, the foreground is contradicted, affirmed, or justified in relation to the scene beyond the spotlight. In other words, references to literature, art, and psychology demonstrate the relevance of a foundation and background of a created work as well as the eternality present through language in relation to the central event. The relevance, physically demonstrated in the cunning placement of symbols and order of allusions, shows the power of the arts, the everlasting conflict of the human, and the seeming de-evolution of society.

Project Description

Typically, when analyzed, *Rocky Horror Picture Show* becomes an advocate for gender equality, particularly for the LGBT+ communities, especially when discussed in parallel to works and articles from authors, such as Judith Butler, who examine the role of gender in modern, twenty-first century culture. Some, who see gender in only binary possibilities (such as either male or female,) see the movie as a product of chaos, the absurd, and cultish appeal. Still, some can acknowledge some literary references and allusions, but without a close examination of the film, or with the sole focalization of one aspect. The film does not appear to have a cohesive meaning, but rather a chaotic approach and an unfinished end rather than an existential question. Some critics agree that the film challenges and pushes sexual boundaries or perspectives and alludes to past works, but very few saw significant literary and aesthetic value in the film.

I, in opposition to these views, will be constructing a comprehensive analysis of the film to prove the importance of thorough research in my field as well as the underlying values in the film, dismissed and misinterpreted by popular critique.

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INTRODUCTION

Classical tradition has withstood the test of time. The ability of classic works to precisely convey themes and events allows works to not merely survive, but thrive and lead to the creation of new productions even as seemingly marginal as *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, a story of an alien transvestite scientist from Transsexual Transylvania. The ability of the classics to survive and act as guides for new works, proves the ability of literature to transcend through time and allow new works, even if dismissed as “otherness” or cultish, to possess transcendent values (stemming from ancient texts,) and appeal to a modern society and offer depth of meaning in an otherwise dismissed film.

Rocky Horror Picture Show is the 1975 Jim Sharman film starring a transvestite from Transsexual, Transylvania who tempts a virginal, innocent couple into having sexual relations before their wedding-night and attempts to create an outwardly flawless creature through scientific efforts. The cultural reaction to the 1960s sexual revolution, pushed boundaries, promoted promiscuity, homosexuality, and other marginal behavior according to the majority of 1970s societal perceptions. Such shock portrayed in the film propelled the film into mass repulsion “as it was ignored by pretty much everyone,” where only a small sector of society found value in its cultish appearance (Ebert). To clarify, the musical, seemingly a mere advocacy for gender fluidity, expression, and equality, was mainly rejected by a largely religious, conservative sector of 1975 society. However, despite the mass repulsion and cultish adaption, the film serves as a return to the classic tradition of literature and an intellectual

approach to societal discrepancies, such as the conflict between human desires and societal acceptance.

I, myself, dismissing of the value of the film due to its outward appearance, did not think the musical would appear interesting to me. As a result, I had not seen any viewing until November 2016. However, when watching the film for the first time, several artistic and classical references sparked an immediate interest. Beyond the advocacy for gender equality, I saw imbedded thematic value contrary to past discussion. I saw glimpses of a layered purpose, the reoccurrence of ancient themes and debates (specifically religious themes and commentary,) and allusions that deepened the reality of the film's new approach, which left me bewildered in my awe. The minute details, often hidden in the background of the scene, gave the entire production an alternative meaning. While some details reinforced themes already obvious to the viewer, others introduced an additional layer of thematic statements and social commentary that would not exist without the allusion to predating works. It was the shock of the film that retold that which was not shocking, which resulted in my carnival frenzy and obsession with the film that compelled my mind and lured me deep into analyzation. Scene after scene, I recognized several philosophical and theological frames, which strengthened the background allusions of the film and gave substance to the plot.

The first theory to spark my memory was Freud's "iceberg theory" also known as his theory of the subconscious. In short, the 1930s father of psychoanalysis asserts that a human's character is comprised of an "id," (which is a pleasure and primitive principle,) a "superego," (which is the drive to adhere to the standards and expectations of societal behavior,) and the "ego," (which is the rationalization and mediation between the id and superego in

conscious form.) His theory of repression, or the subliminal influences in art and literature (the seemingly unnoticed details of a work that speak directly to the subconscious,) reminded me of the influences in the film, specifically the decor and allusions in the background of the scenes, which added depth and value to the central, seemingly superficial scene. Like the unconscious influence of the superego, the background of the scene consisting of restraints that limit the rule and power of the central, like an id, is what creates the overall thematic conclusion, similar to an ego. To clarify, the background of *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, which contains allusions of restraint and approved societal behavior, serves as a superego, which is in contrast to the primary and primitive drive of the film, the central focus of frenzy, lust, and indulgence (or id,) which come together in the film with a balance and serve as equal influences to the conclusion of the film, such as the thematic statement, (also representative of the resulting conscious ego.)

The second theory, developed a decade earlier in the 1920s by Mikhail Bakhtin also points to the ability of carnivals, or sites for “otherness” and marginal behavior, to be accepted by society while condemned in any other setting, which he deemed “carnavalesque.” He explains that when someone attends or observes the carnival, one becomes included in the marginal behavior even simply through observation. Though the same individual might condemn the same observed behavior in society, the ability of the behavior to be contained and restrained to one controlled area, allows for the audience to indulge in frenzy or peculiar behavior while not suffering any societal repercussions. This ability to allow behavior polar to what is accepted by society (simply because it is in a controlled setting) allows for the pairing of humor and the grotesque or even the sacred and the profane, without the consequence of judgement. Similarly, in *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, one is able to watch the central behavior, still widely condemned

in 1970s society, while not betraying their beliefs or suffering punishment or alienation. So does the film itself take on this theory as it displays behavior “too extreme” for human society, but still finds success and acceptance with members of the same society (*Rocky Horror Picture Show*). Therefore, that which is accepted as “other” is tolerated, provided that it is controlled and restrained by containment.

Also speaking upon the ability of a story to host a dichotomy of views, Friedrich Nietzsche, beginning in the 1870s, explains how literature, specifically ancient Greek tragedies, reaches perfection and success through the balance of two forces: the Apollonian and the Dionysian. In other words, if a writer is able to balance forces associated with the god Apollo (ie: light, clarity, knowledge, sight, awareness, and restraint) as well as characteristics associated with the god Dionysius (ie: darkness, obscurity, primitive drives, frenzy, and indulgence,) the resulting play is able to reach a perfect balance and relate to the lives of the audience. Along those balances, so do the forces extend to other polar forces (such as man and woman, creator and creation, purity and transgression, abstinence and indulgence,) and seek to find balance and mediation. Therefore, just as the theory points out a virtue of tragedy and a key to the tragedy’s success, the film, also mimicking ancient Greek tragedy, seeks to explore polar forces, such as gender, life, and desires to bring those polar forces together to create one cohesive, tragic narrative.

The last and final theorists, Soren Kierkegaard and Harold Bloom, explore influences more existential in nature. By existential, I mean they seek to demonstrate and discuss the limitations of (and balance needed in) human life. Kierkegaard, in his journals in the 1830s, explains his theory of “existence spheres:” such as the “aesthetic” and the “ethical.” He asserts

that a life of only the aesthetic becomes quickly mundane, and a life of only the ethical is easily manipulated. Therefore, in order to successfully lead a purposeful and ideal life, one must be influenced by both spheres rather than loyalty to one over the other. So do the characters in *Rocky Horror* seek to draw from both spheres, while those who operate in only one sphere are quickly condemned.

Harold Bloom, similarly in his writings explains the limitation of multiplicity as well as the importance of mimicry in human, literary characters. He asserts that mimicking pre-existing works typically leads to limitations and yet, in his other works, he explains that in order for a character to find sympathy and believability with the audience, mimicking human life is key. Thus, with *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, I test his theories to see whether or not the film's multiplicity leads to its success or further dismissal from society.

Unlike most who view the film with twenty-first century perspectives, I, grounding myself in the original context of the 1970s and the supported influence of art, seek to examine the subliminal, rarely seen much less emphasized, multiplicity of the film. By exploring the polar influences in the film in the frames and structures of the above theories, I will analyze the movie evaluating the film's ability to compete with classical tradition in the form of allusions. Unlike my predecessors, I depart from the reading of gender and discuss the meaning and significance of subliminal influences of art and literature in the film, and demonstrate that *Rocky Horror Picture Show* is not only significant in readings of gender and counter-culture, but is applicable to the modern day as it demonstrates the ability of art and themes to transcend time and enhance even the most polar arguments and presentations.

It is the eccentricity of the film, which allows for multiple readings, revelations, and discussions for the audience as the multiplicity in the film creates tension and a dichotomy between the central focus and the background. In other words, it is the allusion to the pre-existing works that positions the background in juxtaposition and contrast to the surface of the scene and film. Through the analyzation of the background of *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, one learns the importance of evaluating creative work , such as art, film, literature, and other forms of that various nature.

CHAPTER I

LIMINAL CREATION

Literature, throughout history, has depicted the tendencies of human nature. Literature, as well as art, has strived to create life itself— or at the least, mimic reality and human life so well that it can be indistinguishable or undoubtedly considered true and realistic. As literature has the ability to reveal the human experience, viewers often become aware of their own faults or virtues, which in turn can affect and alter society. In classical Greece, this cultural alteration was achieved through tragedies. Even still in the modern day, societal commentary, advocacy, and debate is often attempted through books, film, and art. Though, as many artists return to the classics for inspiration and borrow from the old tradition to create new productions, issues arise according to critique that seem contrary to each other as well as perhaps too focal in assessment. In other words, the old tradition seems contrary to the new thematic message. The critique I refer to here is primarily commentary from Harold Bloom, and his two books entitled *Anxiety of Influence* and *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. In the first, Bloom discusses the failure and limitations of inspired works rather than original works. (In other words, he explains that when imitating a work, there is danger in never reaching the same mastery and precision achieved in the original work, whereas with original productions, one does not have a shadow of a work to overcome or create within limited boundaries of structure.) In his latter work, Bloom seemingly contradicts his theory, though only seemingly, and suggests that in order for a human (in literature) to seem authentic, real, and believable by the audience, the character must mimic a real human. To delineate, they must be complex, able to house desires contrary to their morals,

or perhaps indulge in vices polar to their efforts, but must always seek to resemble and mimic real humans. Regardless, despite the contrary views on mimicry, the purpose of literature defines what it is (and what it means) to be human. His commentary can be examined and tested with *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, a frankenstein of literary and creative works as well as original characters that still appear beyond reality of a typical 1975 American individual. Contrary to Bloom, literature can mimic works and still be original and challenge boundaries and limitations, and characters can be unrealistic to society and still relate to the audience and prompt them to examine their faults or vices.

The first and most obvious allusion to pre-existing works is the encapsulation of *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley. To the viewers, Dr. Frank N. Furter justifiably resembles Dr. Frankenstein, and *Rocky Horror* seems parallel to the creature, but without analyzation of the film's background, the similarities appear to end. Though, when more subtle and thematic allusions are taken into consideration, the similarities to Frankenstein appear more obvious. For instance, in her preface to her work, she explains how she borrowed elements from literature, even as famous as the colossal ghost in Hamlet, as well as themes such as those surrounding the albatross of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, to borrow from for her writing (Shelley 17). She explains that she, so like her protagonist, took sections of literature just as Dr. Frankenstein took members of various corpses, to create one unified story, or one life such as the creature. Through her borrowing and returning to famous literature for inspiration, Shelley is unlimited in task and creates a work rivaling the greats and certainly original, just as the movie creates an original production and plot by borrowing from works and gathering them together in a single production, much like *Frankenstein*.

One of the first and major discussions in the film, which originates in Shelley's *Frankenstein*, is the debate of a creator's responsibility towards his creation. Dr. Frankenstein, the creator of the Creature, in his first true interaction with him, watched as the creature's "jaws opened, and he muttered some articulate sounds," as a "grin wrinkled his cheeks" similar to an infant (Shelley 57). "One hand was stretched out" of the Creature's just as a child reaches out to their parent, but in his fear and taking in the creature's horrifying hideousness, (as "a mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous" as the creature,) Dr. Frankenstein sees his child-like outstretched arm as a violent attempt to harm him, an effort "to detain [him]," rather than one of an adoring child simply in need of love, and runs away in fear, leaving his creation behind and alone (Shelley 57). Dr. Frankenstein, in abandoning his creation, his child, demonstrates his fickle love, as his love for his creation is destroyed by the creature's outward appearance, which he suddenly finds horrific after assessing the god-like attributes of the creature. His lack of moral responsibility, as a scientist, father figure, and creator is what condemns Dr. Frankenstein to his horrific fate and suffering. Dr. Frank N. Furter in *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, therefore, also holds responsibility towards his creation. His creation, opposite of the creature (as Rocky is unintelligent, but accepted and loved by the world and society, which serves as a foil to Dr. Frank N. Furter, who is rejected by society based upon his outward appearance like the creature,) demonstrates a need to serve as either creator or companion to his creation, but not both. In other words, because Dr. Frank N. Furter creates Rocky Horror as his own mate, he deprives Rocky of his choice to choose his companion as well as the unconditional love and acceptance as a creator as Dr. Frank N. Furter condemns and manipulates Rocky by turning him to stone at the end of the movie in effort to control him and

keep Rocky away from Janet, his preferred mate. Dr. Frank N. Furter's abuse of natural order, (as considered by the majority of 1975 American society,) such as creating a creature for his own sexual vices of the same gender, is what allows for Dr. Frank N. Furter's failure as a creator and an incite of his hubris. As he sees himself as creator, Dr. Frank N. Furter, prompted by jealousy, kills the masculine, muscle-man Eddie who briefly is able to eclipse attention from Dr. Frank N. Furter, out of no other reason than narcissism. Dr. Frank N. Furter, through his hubris and narcissistic obsession, proves to be a failed scientist, father-figure, and creator for his creation.

Though the quest for knowledge is not condemned in the film, nor in Shelley's novel, the quest of a creation to overthrow the balances and limitations placed upon itself by nature, is condemned when responsibility is abandoned. Similar to stories in the Bible such as the Garden of Eden, the Tower of Babel (where the human creation tries to build a tower to Heaven,) the attempt of Satan in the battle in Heaven to overthrow God, and the limitations of Satan in his attempt to turn Job away from God and God's active ability to set, restrict, and limit the devil's harm, all depict limitations set upon nature and creation by the Creator and hubris of the human. Both *Frankenstein* and *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, in parallel to biblical stories, illustrate the struggle of the creation to abide within the boundaries placed upon life by the creator, as well as the relationship between the creator and the creation, and the hubris of a creation to aspire to attain the position as a creator. In parallel, when Dr. Frankenstein attempts to "play God" in the novel, he is met with criticism from the Creature who knows he is not God, but a created human. The Creature, who has learned great knowledge, remains blameless for his education, as he stands upright and strong, eloquent, and speaking in the Queen's English. His creator, Dr. Frankenstein, however, is condemned as the Creature says to him: "you, my creator, detest and

spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only dissolvable by the annihilation of one of us” (Shelley 89). Later, the creature tells Dr. Frankenstein that he failed even as a god-figure because Dr. Frank N. Furter abandoned him. Therefore, the creature is aware that he is hated by his creator, and yet he chastises the doctor, saying “how dare you sport thus with life” (Shelley 89). Though the Creature is aware that Dr. Frankenstein created him, he still recognizes the fact that Dr. Frankenstein is not God, and therefore does not possess the power to interfere with or take away life. He, like the characters of Magenta and Riff Raff at the conclusion of the film, is able to reason and condemn Dr. Frankenstein for his hubris of playing creator. Shelley’s Creature then pleads once more for a mate, saying that if he receives one, he will be virtuous and if not, he will seek to kill the remaining friends of his creator, Dr. Frankenstein. He, according to the passage, has become the superior creature and yet he “will not be tempted to set [himself] in opposition to [his creator]” (Shelley 90). Despite his physical and mental prowess, the Creature acknowledges the bounds placed upon him as a creation, and does not destroy or seek to overthrow his creator. His eloquent and logical speech which demonstrates restraint and control of character serves as evidence for the rest of his tale on how he suffers due to visual perception rather than his linguistic capability. His awareness of his hideousness also demonstrates his wisdom and awareness of his fault of ugliness as he talks to his creator, and “[places] his hated hands before [Dr. Frankenstein’s] eyes” and says, “thus I take from the a sight with you abhor” so that Dr. Frankenstein can listen to his argument rather than only judge his appearance and assume his character (Shelley 91). Thus, just as the Creature pleads with Dr. Frankenstein to listen to his speech rather than his appearance, the film also comments on the conflict between linguistic expression and visual perception as the film is

dismissed for its cultish and shocking appearance and therefore unevaluated for its true value: the thematic purpose and expert use of classic art.

Dr. Frankenstein and Dr. Frank N. Furter's hubris does not end with themselves. Their hubris, extending into narcissism, also condemns and affects those around them. Dr. Frankenstein, when destroying the mate he made for the Creature before the Creature's eyes, listens to the threat that of the Creature as he vows to meet Dr. Frankenstein on his wedding night to Elizabeth and exact revenge. The criminal reciprocity of the Creature, or his justification of "an eye for an eye" justice, escapes Dr. Frankenstein, who narcissistically assumes that the Creature will come for him, and therefore leaves Elizabeth vulnerable to die at the hands of the Creature. Similarly, as Dr. Frank N. Furter is unable to provide a suitable mate for Rocky Horror, it is Dr. Frank N. Furter's hubris that condemns him. He sees himself as an appropriate match for the idealized Rocky Horror, and yet Rocky chooses to seek another mate and sleeps with Janet. Dr. Frank N. Furter, in his anger and hubris then exacts revenge and control by manipulating and compelling Janet, Rocky, Brad, Columbia, and Dr. Everett V. Scott to his puppeteering at the conclusion of the film. It is his hubris that he has the authority to do so that leads to his death and condemnation by Riff Raff and Magenta at the end of the film. Just as nature has limits and creations must act within their boundaries, so does Dr. Frank N. Furter pay for attempting to destroy and assault the limitations of his existence as not a divinity with his life. His attempt to sway nature away from Apollonian influence into Dionysian indulgence cements the reality of his fate, like an ancient Greek tragedian character who is thusly punished for the choices he made.

In one of the last similarities to the novel, Dr. Frank N. Furter, like Dr. Frankenstein, seeks to tell his tale of suffering as he pleads with Riff Raff and Magenta at the end of the film for his life and worth and manipulates the other characters at the base of a radio tower, a medium for mass communication. Just as Dr. Frankenstein departs his tale upon Robert Walton, so does Dr. Frank N. Furter seek to live on, like Hamlet, through his linguistic expression and survive the threat of death.

To no surprise, it is ultimately Dr. Frank N. Furter's hubris of character that condemns him to an unrewarding liminality. As he strives to be more than a creation, but fails to be a perfect god, Dr. Frank N. Furter is condemned to exist in the gap between the two classifications, without a true purpose or vocation, too experimental to be a creation and too irresponsible and unworthy to be a deity. He therefore, like the devil, remains in the liminality between boundaries, pushing the constraints and expectations, too human to be a gothic plague from the east, and too dangerous to be in communion and fellowship with the human race or his creation, Rocky Horror.

Similarly in liminality, Dr. Frank N. Furter's character is liminal in regard to the theories and philosophy of Sigmund Freud, the early twentieth century father of psychoanalysis, discussed the concept of the id, ego, and the superego through his iceberg model for consciousness. He suggested that there are two main forces in constant competition, the id and the superego, similar to Nietzsche's Dionysian versus Apollonian theory. Freud asserted that the id, the unconscious (or repressed) primitive instincts, the author and harbinger of carnal desires, which gave humans their basic character and desire that was unseen from society and often counter to what society viewed as acceptable behavior. From the id stems various emotions and

desires, including the Oedipus complex. The superego, on the contrary, was the pre-conscious aspect, which was aware of the laws, limitations, and expectations of society that behavior needed to be modified to fit. The ego, the conscious and aware, is what reconciled the two polar drives and mediated between the carnal desires and the demands of behavior according to one's society.

In the film, the character of Dr. Everett V. Scott, an Austrian "rival scientist" to Dr. Frank N. Furter undoubtedly is cast to resemble Freud and Freud's beliefs. He, for the majority of the movie, represents the voice of restraint and reason, similar to the superego, while Dr. Frank N. Furter, his rival freely indulges in his carnal desires, acting solely as the id (*Rocky Horror Picture Show*). Scott offers various commentary throughout the film, nearly always uncorrupted by the id, but also drifts, like Freud, into psychoanalysis. He explains that his nephew, Eddie, murdered by Dr. Frank N. Furter, exhibited the Oedipus complex as he, after the death of his mother, sought nothing more than motorcycle porn and carnal desires of the world. Just as Freud borrowed from the classical tradition of tragedies to explain his theories, so does the movie take on a Freudian outline as it borrows from Greek tragedies to explain several points, as discussed later.

However, beyond the basic Freudian reference to Greek tragedies, the film adopts Mikhail Bakhtin's carnivalesque theory as well as Nietzsche's evaluation between Apollonian and Dionysian thought. Bakhtin, in his work explains that at the carnival (contained "otherness,") the unification of beauty and the grotesque meet with little consequence. So, similarly does Freud's theory of "fort and da" or "gone and back" apply to the film as one goes to the movies and is able to engage in carnivalesque behavior with lesser consequence then return back into the

real world and abide by societal guidelines for behavior without the constant desire to rebel. Nietzsche's theory of balance between Apollonian and Dionysian drives in tragedies is also similar to Freud and Bakhtin as he explains that through the unification of the two impulses, polar approaches, when balanced, offer the perfect equation for literary greatness. In other words, through the unification between logic and frenzy (known as "kunsttriebe" or "artistic impulses,") when achieving balances between influences such as man and woman, creator and creation, innocent and transgression, and abstinence and indulgence, a tragedy is able to achieve greatness and success in thematic purpose. Therefore, the need for Dr. Everett V. Scott, beyond the appearance of a Freudian character, is justified.

Dr. Everett V. Scott, beginning with even his name alone, is in opposition to Dr. Frank N. Furter. Just as Freud discussed the existence of phallic symbols, so do the two scientists each take on a gender with their names alone. Dr. Everett V. Scott, the "V" resembling the female reproductive organ, the vagina, takes on a female characteristic with his name while Dr. Frank N. Furter, the "Furter" alluding to the male reproductive organ, the penis, exists as the male counterpart, two polar gender forces. As the film goes on and Dr. Everett V. Scott continues to oppose Dr. Frank N. Furter, the polar pulls of the two, namely the pulls between the superego (Dr. Everett V. Scott) and the id (Dr. Frank N. Furter,) resonate with the audience and seek to find mediation through the chorus, who voices (on behalf of the audience) "I want to go... to the late night, double feature, picture show" (*Rocky Horror Picture Show*). In other words, the chorus, able to find a balance between the id and ego character, recognizes that they can satisfy the id desires by seeing the midnight movie picture show, apart from society, and then return to society purged of their carnal drives and able to abide by societal demands and expectations.

In further discussion of Freud, the appearance of medusa motifs thought the film demonstrates the needed balance between the polar drives of the female and male desires. For instance, the medusa lever, the machine that is able to turn people into stone like the Greek figure Medusa, is named after the female, but is designed as a penis, or male genitalia. The phallic symbol represents the reality that the Medusa, like Medea, possesses both male and female aspects. The strong women, both acting with the assertion and strength of men at the time, alludes to the undertones of gender debates as well as the ability of one person to possess both male and female tendencies. To Freud, though a person possessed both male and female tendencies, it was the domination of one over the other that defined the person's sex and behavior. Like the id and the superego, the two forces came together to affect a person's character or outward consciousness as the ego.

Dr. Everett V. Scott, a scientist like Dr. Frank N. Furter, offers clarity and provides the needed balance craved by Nietzsche and other readers that seek the same balance as executed in ancient Greek tragedian literature. However, those who strive to push one force over another, just as Dr. Frank N. Furter strives to be dominantly female and a creator rather than simply male and a creation, suffer in liminality, forever desiring something that is beyond the ability of the character to attain, leaving Dr. Frank N. Furter in the ultimate state of liminality.

CHAPTER II

TRANSCENDENCE IN MODERN DAY

Dr. Frank N. Furter is not only a liminal character in regards to similarities with Shelley's *Frankenstein*. In connection with fluidity of borders and the reality that not all characters have a distinguishable label, vocation, or classification (as Furter is liminal as a character, again, not alone a creator nor creation,) *Rocky Horror Picture Show* is filmed in a way that also explores liminality and the emphasis of the foreground in its relationship to the background. For instance, what occurs in the center of the scene, what is most emphasized in terms of the camera and focus is either supported or contradicted with the background behind the focus. Often, in simpler terms, the background is what defines the foreground. The background, possessing of subtle hints, thematic statements, and surrounding discussion in the forms of classical and traditional art, harnesses the ability to overrule the central theme. The brilliance of the background is that through traditional works, the opulent or "otherness" foreground takes on a new meaning, even if that meaning is contrary to itself. In order to prove the power of the background and the ability of cultish pieces to have just as much an influence as the classics, I will walk through the movie (in order of appearance) and discuss the art particularly situated in the background.

The first instance of subtext in the form of traditional art is the appearance of Grant Wood's *American Gothic*. The painting, seen at 5:27, features a typical wedding. The foreground appears relatively common as the wedding is joyous and simple. The bride and Groom, dressed in white, are in the focal center of the camera shot, surrounded by ten, smiling attendants. The background, however, is peculiar. Three figures stand behind the central

wedding scene without a smile. Their expression stirs a sense of condemnation, judgment, or even apathy. The first figure in the center and dressed in typical, black priest robes, remains the tallest; his colossal structure and prominence, easily draws the audience's eyes. Behind him, in haunting stoic expressions are two figures, a man and a woman, on either side, dressed in mimicry of Grant Wood's *American Gothic*. The painting, similar to the scene in *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, depicts the two central characters (a man and a woman,) who stand in the center of the scene before a church-like house and seem to protect their domain from the viewer. This feeling, described as a sense of "European Fascism," (as known by the definition of Miriam-Webster's dictionary: exhibiting an "authoritarian and nationalistic" system of beliefs, which is "intolerant of views or practices" contrary to its own) by many critics as the characters are known to serve as an "echo of anti-internationalism," seem to be ready to protect their living regardless of the cost (Khan Academy). The male figure, obvious in his masculinity, stands firm, facing the audience and physically separates himself from the audience with the barrier of the pitchfork, mirrored in the fabric of his clothing. The pitchfork, a physical barrier that manifests itself in his very clothing, leads the audience to conclude that the male character is not only barring the audience from his wife and home, but from himself and his own acceptance. The female figure stands subordinately to the left, behind the man's shoulder and false border of the pitchfork, avoiding eye contact with the audience and looking into the distance. She is quiet, passive, and her presence is minimal save her purpose to serve as a contrast to male masculinity and dominance. Her jaw is not well defined like the male figure's, and she does not exhibit the firm and defensive air which the male figure exudes. Rather, she, the (assumed) willing female, subordinates herself and becomes juxtaposed to the stoic male domination of the 1930s setting,

thereby reinforcing gender stereotypes and limitations of the early twentieth century. These stereotypes are introduced and affirmed in the background of the movie, which supports the traditionalism of marriage featured in the lower section of the scene. However, the reinforced gender roles are not concluded within this scene. This scene, rather, exists as a scene within a scene, displaying two events, which occur simultaneously.

While the foreground captures the traditional portrayal of marriage, between one man and one woman, the background questions gender fluidity and the line of distinction between the male and female genders. The two figures in the background who mirror the Wood's painting are positioned at either side of the male priest. With the knowledge of Tim Curry's later role in the film, the viewer realizes his position: he is in between the firm male and female figures, physically positioned in the gap between them, neither completely on the side of the man, nor completely on the side of the woman. If one shifts their gaze downward, Curry also lines up with the newlywed couple below: again, he is neither on the side of the man, nor completely on the side of the woman, but rather exists in between the couple. The physical liminality of the figure (Curry) dressed as a priest, possessing the stance of the male, and yet the gentle expression and the youth of the female, suggests that gender (or another entity) may not always conform to solely the pure influence of the male or the female sex, but rather as a balance between the polar tendencies. Presiding over the wedding, the liminal character (Curry) is also unable to be completely in the foreground, nor completely in the background. He is unable to completely align with the male and he is unable to completely align with the female. He is, therefore, existing in liminal space, contradictory of the firm genders set by the wedding and *American Gothic*, which seems to be a precedent and foreshadowing of the events to transpire.

A few minutes later at 19:21, the viewer sees the first framed instance of Wood's *American Gothic*. Hung on the wall, covered in cobwebs, the noticeably out of place painting captures the attention of Janet Weiss (Susan Sarandon) and Brad Majors (Barry Bostwick,) as the characters are drawn away from traditional gender roles and virginal values and directed to the next scene and instance of art: Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, included in the "Time Warp" section of the film.

Overseeing the background of the "Time Warp," a synchronized dance, which is "just a jump to the left and then a step to the right" (*Rocky Horror Picture Show*). Even the narrator, like the Transylvanian characters, is taken into a Dionysian frenzy. The background, surrounded with affirming sensuality, depicts da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, a painting known for the sensuality and mystery of the feminine smile, as it resides over the frenzy. Peculiarly, however, the painting is altered from its original form. Inverted from the original work, the painting is not in color, but is in black and white and the central character in the painting faces not to the left, but to the right as if the inversion of the painting criticizes the scene, which would have been supported had the painting not been inverted. The sfumato, the "smokey, haziness" of the painting emphasizes the lack of logical and moral clarity of the scene (Khan Academy). As the characters sing about "the pelvic thrust that really drives you insane" and how their state is "so dreamy" like a "fantasy" "like you're under sedation," the sensual *Mona Lisa* in the background reaffirms that the foreground is indeed true though perhaps not trustworthy as she is inverted in color and position (*Rocky Horror Picture Show*). To clarify, because of the alterations, the *Mona Lisa* exists to emphasize the effect of lust, the ability to experience clouded thought and the drug-like effect of love which can leave lovers in a haze to reality, time, and the outside world as is the case with the

“Time Warp”. In extension, similar to the painting, which is known for drawing viewers in (or capturing the attention of the viewer,) so does Riff Raff capture Janet and Brad and lure them deeper into the castle, and therefore deeper into the “haze” of otherness. This haze, though, new to Janet and Brad, pushes gender boundaries as well as expounds upon sensuality and sexuality, thereby asserting liminality to be promiscuity, which is not (in the 1970s widely accepted) in the rigid 1970s classification of love and purity before marriage.

These boundaries are re-addressed in the background of another scene, pictured at 47:32, suggests further disjunction between the foreground and the background. Featured in the room after the birth of Rocky, are two, mirroring sculptures of Michelangelo’s *David* with the additional adornment of lipstick and nail polish. The statues, which survey either side of the marriage bed, exist with gender ambiguity. Though David stands the same as the original statue by Michelangelo, in contrappasto, tense, looking into the distance, which gives the audience a “sense that David had just caught sight of his enemy,” which prompts the audience to search for his opposition (Khan Academy). With two David statues appearing, the figures are caught in an eternal gaze, seemingly fearful and wary of each other, perhaps wary and fearful of their sensuality rather than a distinctive, corporal enemy like the biblical Goliath. Though the foreground is celebratory and accepting of gender orientation as Dr. Frank N Furter and Rocky head towards their marriage bed, the statues in the background offer an air of ambiguity and a sense of disjunction. The same sense that something is wrong is further emphasized with the historical context of the statue. As Michelangelo’s *David* was a symbol to Florence in “opposition to the notion of tyranny” (Khan Academy). The fact that Dr. Frank N. Furter resides as a tyrannical ruler of the castle, able to murder and seduce whomever he pleases, suggests that

the fault lies not with Rocky Horror, but with Dr. Frank N. Furter himself, and that perhaps he is the root of disjunction or critique, recognized as “the enemy” by the David statues. For instance, if those statues had been Donatello’s *David*, known for his youth, sensuality, and seeming homosexuality as the feather from Goliath’s helmet ascends the inside of David’s thigh, the placement of Michelangelo’s *David* suggests a discord between the events of the foreground and the background. The director could have selected a sensual *David* to achieve the purpose of homosexual acceptance, but rather the placement of Michelangelo’s *David* stands in stark contrast to the foreground scene. Despite the potential for liberal gender orientation, as displayed by the painted nails and lips of the statues, the artwork’s connotation offers a counterpoint as the statue remains tense, un-altering, wary, and surveying the distance for an enemy rather than relaxed and engaged in (or even acquiesced to,) sexual deviation from the traditional form of marriage. The disjunct, again, between the foreground and the background offers depth to the narrative and suggests a miasma, something amiss, and foreshadows events to come.

Next to appear, at the dinner scene, is da Vinci’s *Last Supper*, a painting that depicts Jesus and his disciples eating the passover meal together, which is closely associated with the institution of communion, which appears in the film at a dinner scene. As the dinner scene in literature typically is reminiscent of communion, (and an interrupted or corrupted dinner scene represents the breaking of trust, hospitality, communion, or other influence,) the appearance of this painting in the movie is particularly crucial. At this dinner, Dr. Frank N. Furter betrays his obligation of hospitality to his guest, as well as inverts the Christian communion (which is the distribution of Christ’s body and blood for the forgiveness of sins,) as he serves his guests the recently murdered Eddie for dinner. Dr. Frank N. Furter’s obvious betrayal of his guests’ trusts

reveals the darkness of his character, the hubris of his character, as well as alludes to the myth of the House of Atreus and foreshadows the condemnation of Dr. Frank N. Furter due to his actions, as explained in a later section.

In the same scene, but further in at 1:07:33, the next instance of art is introduced as the Criminologist (Charles Gray) leans upon an open text, clearly displaying *Whistler's Mother*. The painting, set again in America in the 1930s, displays a mother in mourning after the death of her husband. The insertion of *Whistler's Mother* seems to validate and delineate upon the character of Everett V. Scott, the Freudian psychoanalyst figure as he describes his nephew, Eddie with the Oedipus complex. He claims, "from the day [his mother] was gone, all he wanted was Rock and Roll porn and a motorbike" (*Rocky Horror Picture Show*). Scott then makes a further assertion, pointing as Dr. Frank N. Furter in accusation and claims that "[Eddie] must have been drawn to something" that would lure him into marginal behavior (*Rocky Horror Picture Show*). Then, with his validity affirmed, Scott reads a note from Eddie that pleads, "[the Transylvanians] mustn't carry out their evil deeds" (*Rocky Horror Picture Show*). The use of Whistler's mother, a pious and religious woman, assumably moral and sexually monogamous to her late husband, suggests Eddie's devotion to his mother (and therefore typical sexual orientation according to Freud.) Furthermore, the extension between *Whistler's Mother* and Everett V. Scott suggests rather than discount his character or suggest anything awry with his psychoanalytic approach or accusation of Dr. Frank N. Furter for Eddie's downfall, he is reaffirmed as accurate through the insertion of *Whistler's Mother* in the background. Another aspect in support is that rather than celebrate or extend the "otherness," sexuality, homosexuality, or general lust of the film, (as seen by 1970s American society) the painting here counteracts those motifs through the piety and

reserve of the painting, known specifically as adherent to the reservation and minimalism of the Great Depression. The painting is not one of lust, of bloodshed, or of discord, but shows a faithful wife, mourning her late husband, who, bore an average son, though a pain, and still reaffirms not only the traditional nuclear family structure, but the institution of marriage and monogamy itself, in direct opposition, once again, to the Dr. Frank N. Furter.

The following, and concluding work of art to cameo in the film is Michelangelo's *Creation of the Adam*, which appears in one of the final events with Dr. Frank N. Furter. *The Creation of Adam* by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel portrays the nature of the Christian faith. Adam, on Earth, reclines with his face angled towards God, but his body is relaxed, without effort, and his hand rests upon his knee, in the direction of his Creator, as he takes no true exertion to reconnect with his God. In short, Adam is passive to God's approach. God the Father, on the other hand, descends from the Heavens and extends with his whole body towards Adam, actively exerting energy, seemingly straining his muscles in order to make the connection. Because sin is in between God and Adam, separating the Creator from his creation, Adam is unable to make any real effort towards seeking his Creator. Rather, the pure Creator reaches out towards his fallen creation in order to redeem and save Adam from condemnation. In the Bible, God sends his Son to redeem the Earth, and in the painting, God's purposeful actions are depicted as his outstretched arm reaching out for his fallen creation, Adam. Dr. Frank N. Furter, in his final scene of indulgence, appears floating in an inner-tube with outstretched arms similar to a Christ-figure pose. However, his positioning and the painting in the background could not place him further from the role of savior or even hero.

In opposition to Shaun Soman, Dr. Frank N. Furter does not play with a “God-Adam-Satan dynamic” when “Frank jumps into [the] pool,” I assert that Dr. Frank N. Furter adopts solely an impeding and liminal force between God and Adam, between Creator and creation, and serves as a barrier between the two figures. The barrier, according to the Bible, that separated God and man was sin. The author of sin, according to the Bible, is the devil. Therefore, due to the placement of Dr. Frank N. Furter in the pool, Dr. Frank N. Furter adopts the role of sin personified, the role of Satan. Although the release poster might “[decree] that Frank is the true ‘hero,’ definitively proving the film’s reverence for the ‘villain,’” to Shaun Soman. To call Dr. Frank N. Furter a “hero” is more harm than support to the LBGTQ+ community, which negates all possibility of Dr. Frank N. Furter being classified as a hero (Soman 3). Dr. Frank N. Furter, due to the insertion of this painting, is cemented as a marginal, murderous character, who lusts for blood, who breaks marriages, defiles virginal beings, is cast as Satan through this work, and is indeed, contrary to the foreground narrative, no hero. He, a lustful, murderous, defiler seeking to prey upon virginal beings, is no hero to the gay community and does nothing to promote equality or understanding. Dr. Frank N. Furter, at the end of the movie, is not accepted, is not welcomed, and is not a participant in society, but is condemned for his transgressions by his fellow Transylvanians, rejected by Dr. Everett V. Scott, the Freudian figure, and rebuked, opposed by the background art, and therefore no hero to the film or to the audience. Rather than a hero, Dr. Frank N. Furter is a vampire, the 1970s version of Dracula, a plague from the east, a danger to virginal beings with a murderous lust for blood. Dr. Frank N. Furter, once a proponent and possible icon for the LBGTQ+ community, is portrayed as a villain, and therefore places the film as a whole anti-sympathetic to freedom in gender orientation and selective gender expression.

Lastly, the reappearance of Wood's *American Gothic* at the conclusion of the movie, portrayed again by Riff Raff and Magenta, cast judgement upon Dr. Frank N. Furter, a fellow Transylvanian, and reject his self, and therefore his orientation or "otherness." Though Magenta seems to be slightly more empowered as she places a hand upon her hip in a power-stance and looks directly at Dr. Frank N. Furter with strength and fearlessness, traditional gender roles are once again enforced. As Riff Raff stands before her, assumably shielding Magenta from danger as he possesses the only weapon, a futuristic pitchfork, he takes the role as dominant, masculine force rather than one of equality to his female counterpart. Additionally, his assault towards (and condemnation of,) Dr. Frank N. Furter, suggests that he, circling back to the beginning of the film and Wood's painting, is unsympathetic to Dr. Frank N. Furter's sexual orientation and condemns the man for his crimes and assault against "natural," traditional sexual orientation.

The film, concluding in the downfall of re-affirmed, liminal, the homosexual leader (Dr. Frank N. Furter) signifies that the film is not supportive of the LBGTQ+ community, but is in opposition to liberating sexual orientation, equality between genders, and the alteration of traditional marriage. The background, to much surprise, becomes equally, if not more important than the foreground and the shallow portrayal of what is shown without knowledge of the art and allusions surrounding the scene. Therefore due to the insertion and critical meaning and influence of art in the background, even cultish films are proven to possess depth, stimulate critical thought, and portray thematic significance similar to the classical tradition and art.

CHAPTER III

RELIGION FOR THE NON-RELIGIOUS

One of the most prominent questions people find themselves reflecting upon is often of existential nature. Therefore, it is no surprise that existentialism seeps into literature and art. Kierkegaard, an existential philosopher who reflected upon the meaning of life, searched for “a truth which is true for [him], to find the idea for which [he] can live and die,” which he quotes in his 1835 journals. Kierkegaard thus searched for how a human life should be lived according to a human’s purpose: to find perfect balance between two spheres; an aesthetic and an ethical. Kierkegaard in his explanation argues that a human can lead a balanced life in equal loyalty to the aesthetic and the ethical, but will suffer in an unbalanced life even with preference to one of these honorable spheres. He warns, a life with only the aesthetic will be mundane, while a life of pure ethics can easily become manipulated and exploited. This balance, between ethical and aesthetic, he claims, demonstrates the human capability to produce art, originality, and complexity of thought beyond other animal species, which explains the human need for art an expression.

Harold Bloom, a more modern critic of art and literature, explains similarly to Kierkegaard how characters, like reality, must be complex, deep, passionate, and possess even conflicting drives. Just as humans can possess desires contrary to their beliefs in reality, so must characters in literature also exhibit complexity and depth. Such an “invention of the human” allows the characters to not only appear realistic to the audience, but relates to the audience and

evokes reflection upon one's own life and condition, similar to the uses of classical tradition and the ancient Greek tragedies.

Nietzsche, the third philosopher in a similar observance, suggests that no great work of literature since the ancient Greek classical tradition has been able to capture and convey with the same expert writing of tragedy. He explains that there must be a balance in literature, between the Apollonian (logic, clarity, and light) and Dionysian (frenzy, obscurity, and darkness) within a work of literature. One without the other becomes either be seen as boring or moral repelling. Thus, in order to be a great work and allow an audience to reflect upon their own character, one must instill a crucial balance between the two extremes of refrain and indulgence.

Both Kierkegaard, Bloom, and Nietzsche argue the capability of humans in their complexity as well as the demand for humans to reflect upon literature in relation to their own lives. Such reflection between a work of literature (or the aesthetic or Dionysian) and their lives, (exhibiting the ethical or Apollonian) can lead one to examine the conflicting desires between themselves (their morals) and their contrary desires (their transgressions.)

In our modern day and in our current society and perception, where religion seems not as common as it was half a century ago, we view past works, especially cultish works, differently than the society in which they appeared. In other words, today, what we see from our own perspective can betray how a work was viewed and seen in its original context. The betrayal of our own interpretation stems from an interpretation of nescience and even ignorance. Although, nescience and ignorance exists not only when works are from a period predating the time in which they are observed and analyzed, but also exist when they are seen without proper analyzation and are not evaluated for the purpose it offers. Such is the thought provoking reality

of the complexity and contrarily opposing messages in Jim Sharman's 1975 *Rocky Horror Picture Show*.

When the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* premiered, it was mocked, rebuked, and negated for any purpose beyond shock appeal. A large sector of the population, still beholding Christian, traditional beliefs, were among the front of the opposition as the protagonist is a transsexual male portrayed by Jim Curry. Beckman, in her analyzation of religion and the later half of the twentieth century, suggests that, "the 1960s 'revolution' has perhaps been exaggerated," as large sectors beyond upper class college students "remained as committed to old-time moral religious values as ever" (Beckman). With this in mind, that the majority of rebellion catalyzed and thrived with higher class college students, the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* can be seen in a different, perhaps more realistic and appropriate light. As the movie clearly appeals to the younger 1975 college-age population, exhibiting knowledge and references most apparent to the learned and schooled individual. Classical references are brought together in the film while still providing a movie with an interesting and appealing plot. This approach is able to capture the interest in the younger audience and push them in a direction of understanding. Rather than simply rebel, the evidence in the movie suggests that the younger generation should seek a balance between their desire for rebellion, revolution, and change, and their need to adhere to a society of traditional literature, religion, and ethical values. In this purpose, the movie quickly alters from a pure Dionysian appeal to a balance between the Apollonian and the Dionysian with the analyzation of religious themes. Rather than a movie about indulgence, the film becomes a parallel to the Biblical Genesis story of the fall of man and an allegory for restraint from sin and the sinful, human condition.

In Genesis, chapter three of the Bible, the way humans became fallen creatures is revealed. In the Garden of Eden, a serpent approached Eve, the first woman, and tempted her to go against God's commands and eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. He promised that "when [she eats] from [the tree her] eyes will be opened, and [she] will be like God, knowing good and evil" (NIV Genesis 3:5). The woman, tempted, ate from the tree, and then gave the fruit to her husband, Adam, to eat. God, knowing what they had disobeyed Him, asked Adam what had happened, and rather than taking ownership for his actions, he blamed Eve. When God turned to Eve, she blamed the serpent for deceiving her. In turn, God cursed the servant and foreshadowed the vicarious atonement (Jesus dying for the sin of the world upon the cross.) After that, He turned to the woman and cursed her, multiplying her pain in childbirth and making her submissive to her husband. To Adam, He cursed the ground and made him labor for his life and revealed that he is now mortal. After clothing His fallen creatures, He cast them out of the Garden so that man will not "take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever" in pain and sin (NIV Genesis 3:22).

The movie, like the fall of the human race in the Garden of Eden, also follows the fall of a virginal couple, (Janet and Brad, introduced as "a heroine" and "a hero" in the opening credits,) into sin from paradise and purity (*Rocky Horror Picture Show*). In the opening scene, Brad sings to Janet, his soon to be fiancé, and is positioned opposite her before the town sign. It reads, Denton: "The Home of Happiness" (*Rocky Horror Picture Show*). Denton, the origin and place of happiness represents the Garden of Eden, the original place of peace, purity, and living space for humans before the fall. Brad therefore becomes the equivalent of Adam, and Janet, therefore, Eve. Even Brad's attire reflects upon his mirrored character as the biblical Adam, which differs

from the rest of the wedding party. Rather than wearing a black coat under a white overcoat, Brad wears a white shirt, a red bow tie and cummerbund, under a black jacket. His subtle departure in wardrobe reflects the biblical Adam's origination of sinless purity (the white shirt) to his fall into sin (the black overcoat) and the only satisfactory payment for his sins: blood (the red accents in his wardrobe). As the song continues, Brad and Janet, parallels to Adam and Eve, make their way into the church where a funeral is about to transpire. Their physical movement from the Denton sign (the Garden of Eden) to the inside of a church, which is being prepared for a funeral and death (the fall of humankind into sin) foreshadows the downfall of the virginal couple in the "Frankenstein place," where they will lose their virginities and fall into sin, similar to Adam and Eve before they were cast out of the Garden of Eden into the world of sin and condemnation.

Later in the movie, they break the one command that they have tried to keep most as an engaged couple: to not have premarital sex. The first night they are in Dr. Frank N. Furter's castle, Dr. Frank N. Furter sneaks into Janet's bed and begins making love to her, taking her virginity and purity, and deceives her disguised as Brad. She, like Eve, blames Dr. Frank N. Furter, and says, "You tricked me! I wouldn't have. I've never, never..." as he continues to make love to her (*Rocky Horror Picture Show*). Like Eve, her first reaction is to realize she has been deceived. Her second reaction, after feeling more moments of weakness, is to look at Dr. Frank N. Furter and say, "It's your fault! You're to blame! I was saving myself" but it isn't until she gives in with Dr. Frank N. Furter's promise not to tell Brad of her fallen nature and weakness.

Then, immediately after, Dr. Frank N. Furter goes to Brad, disguised as Janet and says, "it's no good here! It'll destroy us!" (*Rocky Horror Picture Show*). With such a statement and

masked as Janet, Brad believes him and moments later they begin to start making love. Just as Janet did, and just as Adam did in the Bible, Brad gives in to sin and then also blames the serpent figure (Dr. Frank N. Furter,) not wanting to blame himself. He says, “It’s your fault! You’re to blame. I thought this was the real thing” (*Rocky Horror Picture Show*). Just as Janet (Eve) fell into sin, so does Brad, like Adam, fall into sin and then seek to blame another.

When the Janet and Brad are reunited, Janet realizes her sin and laments her actions. She says, “Brad, my darling, how could I have don't this to you? Oh, if only we hadn't made this journey” (*Rocky Horror Picture Show*). However, even with her realizing the weight of her actions, she still continues on in her sin as she, an Eve figure, is now condemned in her sinful condition. Moments later, the Criminologist explains the power of her emotions over her mind and declares “there seems little doubt that Janet was indeed [emotion’s] slave” (*Rocky Horror Picture Show*). Just as Janet is a slave to her emotions, so are humans, in their sinful states, “slaves to sin” (NIV Romans 6:6). She explains that because she has delved into sin, now she too, like a sinful human, is addicted to the lifestyle of sin and cannot overcome sin by herself, tempted by the metaphorical serpent, the concept of lust and pre-marital indulgence in sex. She, accompanied by the chorus, says, “I’ve tasted blood and I want more, more, more, more” (*Rocky Horror Picture Show*). She, like Adam and Eve, is cursed to lead a life of sin and suffer lack of trust in her breaking relationship with her fiancé.

The conclusion of the movie still ends as the Genesis story with the conclusion and fallen nature of the human race in darkness unable to overcome their situation without external aid. In this ending, they speak only to the human race who reject the promise of a Messiah, a hope, and of redemption for their sins. Therefore, the “noble mission” of Riff Raff and Magenta, which is

to spread sin into the world as the movie concludes with a section of the “Time Warp,” a lustful song that drives people into sin and frenzy, mirrors the hopelessness of the sinful, human race without God’s grace. The movie concludes with, “and our world will do the time warp again! And crawling on the planet’s face, some insects called the human race, lost in time and lost in space and meaning” (*Rocky Horror Picture Show*). In other words, a world ruled by sin and darkness will give into lust and live a life of condemnation and hopelessness as “the mind governed by the flesh is death” (NIV Romans 8:6).

The movie, from the onset, still reminds the audience that there is hope through an allegory of sin and the human’s need for redemption. At the very start of the actual movie, the singing lips in the opening that explain the dark nature of the movie, which later resemble the lips of Jim Curry, the transvestite protagonist in the movie, are faded into the opening view: a cross. The subtle opening transition between a faceless voice of lustful lips centered upon a cross, signifies the first instance where sin is explicitly paired with the need for redemption. Though, as a departure from the Genesis story, the movie hints at little hope, but like the Bible, then salvation must originate from a non-human entity. Therefore, just as “the wages of sin is death,” so do the lips center upon the cross reminding the audience that sin comes at a price (NIV Romans 6:23). To possess sin is to possess mortality, condemnation, and the need for a savior and redemption. Even the tombstone, an obvious symbol for death reads, “be just and fear not,” or if you are without sin, then you have no fear. However, if you do possess sin, then, according to the laws of logic as well as the Bible, you are condemned and in desperate need of redemption.

The revelation of the sinful human as in need of redemption is mirrored in the marriage scene. Those standing up in the wedding, including the groom, wear a black suit coat underneath the white robe, similar to the symbolic robes of a pastor. Metaphorically, they represent the sinful human being covered and cleansed by God through the vicarious atonement and therefore seen as blameless before their Creator. The marriage also abides to the Christian faith as traditional gender roles are applied as well as the assumed virginity of the couple as well as the location and centrality of the church as the setting.

The narrative of sin continues with the introduction of the Criminologist. After the opening scene, the plot pauses for a moment as the narrator reveals himself to be a type of character rather than a specific individual; he is a criminologist. In other words, rather than being a specific character with a personality, he represents a group of people: those affected by the events that transpired that night when Janet and Brad “took the wrong fork” in the road and ended up on a path they never intended (*Rocky Horror Picture Show*). The wrong fork, evidently symbolic for Eve and Adam’s choice to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, is what not only prompted the characters of Brad and Janet into sin and a fallen condition, but also prompted the affected Criminologist to study their crimes of sin (NIV, Genesis 2:15-17). The Criminologist, the narrator of the story, highlights the protagonist of the film, Dr. Frank N. Furter, as the center force for the events that transpired that evening, thus highlighting him as the main criminal and origination of crime, specifically of sin. As Dr. Frank N. Furter is classified as sin, the classification for Dr. Everett V. Scott becomes illuminated.

From the opening credits, Dr. Everett V. Scott is depicted as an opposing figure to Dr. Frank N. Furter. He is cast as “a rival scientist” to the protagonist, Dr. Frank N. Furter. As a

rival to one who tempts characters into sin, Dr. Everett V. Scott, a Freudian figure with a moral compass, is in direct confrontation with sin (Dr. Frank N. Furter,) which casts him into the position of a sinful human who is largely able to resist the temptations of sin and the devil. In his opposition, Dr. Everett V. Scott becomes the voice of morality throughout the film. Just as Brad and Janet were supposed to travel to Dr. Everett V. Scott that night (down the Apollonian path to the ethical and moral character,) they, manipulated by darkness and a storm, instead instead found themselves down the wrong side of the fork in a Dionysian entrapment (Dr. Frank N. Furter's castle.)

As the movie transpires, Brad and Janet make their way deeper into Dr. Frank N. Furter's castle where a party takes place. This party however, as explained by "The Time Warp" is a Dionysian affair of lust, frenzy, and gluttony. As the attendants sing and "pelvic thrust," lust becomes apparent in combination with the feast and decadent desserts, obvious forms of gluttony, which adopt Dionysian aspects of indulgence. This frenzy, however is universal. Upon the feast table, there are eighteen flags representing a minimum of eighteen countries who have citizens that are all partaking in the frenzied events of the night. The fact that there is not one ethnicity, race, or country that is partaking in these actions, but rather countries from all over the world show that what the characters engage in (as they engage in sin,) is universal. The threat of sin is not confined to the east or the west, but is rampant all over the world. Furthermore, as the attendants begin to sin and are lured into the frenzy of the song, even the narrator himself cannot help but indulge in the Dionysian "Time Warp" as he too begins to dance and sing along. The criminologist therefore is cemented in his purpose: he is not a biblical character nor even a

character of particular religious importance, but merely demonstrates that the crime he studies, sin, is highly infectious, alluring, tempting, and controlling.

The only other character left at this point without an obvious biblical or religious distinction is Dr. Frank N. Furter, who quickly reveals himself to be the origin of sin, the orchestrator of frenzy and indulgence, and the “criminal” under investigation by the narrator and the audience. In other words, Dr. Frank N. Furter quickly reveals himself to be a devil-like figure based on the evidence of the film. With that observation and distinction of Dr. Frank N. Furter as a Dionysian devil, the plot becomes more apparent. The castle, which is under the rule of Dr. Frank N. Furter, shows itself as a world and society under the rule of a character who stands for the embodiment of sin, the inability to become a true creator, and a fallen angel figure.

Dr. Frank N. Furter as he is first seen by the audience descends in an open and barred jail-like evaluator in heels, pantyhose, garters, black gloves, a white pearl necklace, and a black corset. His descent in a jail-like cage reminds the audience of the devil’s fall from heaven due to his opposition to God and attempt to triumph over God. On his right bicep, Dr. Frank N. Furter wears not a permanent or real tattoo, but makeup just below his shoulder that says “BOSS” and has a heart with a sword piercing the side and blood dripping from the wound. His tattoo, not permanent, parallels the devil’s temporary rule in the death and suffering of Jesus Christ, who upon the cross, was pierced with a sword (causing water and blood to pour out) signifying that he was truly and completely dead. However, just like the temporary tattoo, the devil’s momentary celebration and victory did not and could not last as God triumphed over him. Further cementing his position as a devil-like character, Dr. Frank N. Furter declares that he is from Transsexual, Transylvania, later revealed as another planet and galaxy, which reveals that like a devil, he too

is not human in species. Dr. Frank N. Furter's attempt then in a later scene, where he brings Rocky Horror, the creature, to life, reinforces Dr. Frank N. Furter's position as a devil-like character as he possesses the desire to be God and a creator (as he tells Rocky, "in just seven days / I can make you a man," mirroring God's creation of the Earth in seven days) and still reflects his inability to do so as at the end of the film, he "has lost his creature" (*Rocky Horror Picture Show*). Though he successfully animates Rocky Horror, Dr. Frank N. Furter fails to completely care for his creation by not allowing Rocky the suitable female mate he desires, which leaves Dr. Frank N. Furter in a place between Creator and creation, bringing him closer to a devil-like character.

In the following scenes, Dr. Frank N. Furter transforms the characters of Magenta, Janet, Brad, and Rocky into statues, which he then dresses as transvestites (just as himself) and then reanimates in his own image, in a shadowed form of a creator. Dr. Frank N. Furter's ability to manipulate and redirect the characters under his specific rule, similar to that of a puppet master, parallels the drive of a devil-like figure, be it humans or angels, under his rule. Dr. Everett V. Scott, however, the voice of reason, is momentarily separated from the occurring events and has a brief monologue of resisting temptation. He says, "We've got to get out of this trap before this decadence saps our wills. I've got to be strong and try to hold on, or else my mind may will snap, and my life will be lived for the thrill" (*Rocky Horror Picture Show*). He acknowledges the compelling and tempting nature of sin, the ability of devils (Dr. Frank N. Furter) to rule over the lives of humans, and the need to resist and be strong willed against temptation.

Though, Dr. Frank N. Furter, in his final scene, when he is being resisted by Riff Raff and Magenta, two who were previously under his rule and frenzy, reveals his purpose for his

behavior: the desire to be worshiped and loved. As he walks down the aisle of the small theater, he imagines a crowd of people greeting him, smiling, asking for his autograph. At the end of the aisle, however, is only two individuals (Riff Raff and Magenta) resisting him, threatening to kill him, and the destruction of himself. In other words, he never truly receives his station as ruler or god similar to the reality of a liminal devil.

In the end, Dr. Frank N. Furter dies, and his body falls into the pool, similar to how sin, as he is the embodiment of sin, dies in the waters of Baptism, just as humans who die in Christ will also live in him (NIV Romans 6:8). The rainbow in the conclusion of the scene, then serves as a subtle ray of hope in the dismal condemnation of sin as a reminder that those who are cleansed of sin, will never truly die.

CHAPTER IV

TRAGEDY IN DISGUISE

Just as the structure of the movie mirrors assimilation with ancient literature such as the Bible, it also mirrors the structure and form of an ancient Greek tragedian play. In Aristotle's poetics, Aristotle goes over the basic necessities in order for a work to be considered a tragedy. He narrows the criteria down to six basic parts, being: "plot, characters, diction, reasoning, spectacle and song" (Aristotle 93). *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, originally a Broadway musical, echoes its origin as a play and is aligned with Aristotle's philosophy, successfully mimicking the structure, and qualifies, through the basic principles, as a work of tragedy.

Aristotle begins his argument with the most important aspect of a tragedian play, the plot. He explains that the "plot is the origin as it were the soul of tragedy, and the characters are secondary" (Aristotle 93). In other words, before critics can even evaluate a character, they must first examine the structure and plot of the play. Aristotle then goes further and explains that structure is the most important because "tragedy is a representation not of human beings but of action and life. Happiness and unhappiness lie in action, and at the end [of life] is a sort of action, not a quality; people are of a certain sort according to their characters, but happy or the opposite according to their actions" (Aristotle 93). For a tragedy to be truly tragic, the character must find sympathy with the audience, and therefore, it is his actions that determine his life and happiness or unhappiness, rather than his character itself. In other words, the audience must be able to experience catharsis, or the emotions of pity and fear for the protagonist and themselves. Dr. Frank N. Furter, then, arguably the tragic character of *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, is

evaluated not for his character in relations to the ancient texts, but for his actions, starting from the origin of his appearance.

Still, even before Dr. Frank N. Furter's appearance in the film, a choral structure is depicted beginning with the opening, singing lips that hint, almost like an oracle, at the events to come. The lips sing, "Dr. X will build a creature," signifying that the protagonist, Dr. Frank N. Furter will build Rocky Horror, and "see androids fighting Brad and Janet," which suggests conflict concerning the dubbed "hero" and "heroine," Brad and Janet (*Rocky Horror Picture Show*). Similarly, through the captioning titles at the start of the film, Columbia is likewise characterized as "a groupie," similar to how one might view a chorus member as they are not beings but commentaries and part of a group rather than serving as individuals. Just as an oracle and a chorus, the lips denote the scene to come, preparing the audience for the events. Still, the lips do not end with mimicking a chorus and speaking of events that will transpire in the play, but also suggest to the audience that the film is a tragedy. By telling the audience what they are about to see is "terrible thrills like a science fiction double feature" while the "science fiction double feature" obviously refers to the film and therefore plot itself, suggests that the "terrible thrills" possess the ability to instill fear in the audience, much resembling a tragedian film (*Rocky Horror Picture Show*). Therefore, just as "tragedy is a representation of a serious, complete action... accomplishing by means of pity and terror the catharsis of such emotion," so is *Rocky Horror Picture Show* a terribly thrilling performance, which will depict the attempt of a scientist to create a picture with potential conflict between his guests, Brad and Janet (Aristotle 92).

Though, it is not until the Criminologist is introduced that the audience really begins to see the structure of a chorus. Like a chorus in an ancient Greek tragedy, and similar to

Columbia, the Criminologist is there to guide the audience through the tale as well as comment upon the events and actions of the story. The Criminologist begins, like the lips, setting up the story to the audience, prefacing the fact that Brad and Janet will undergo a change in the story and will remember that night for what seems to be indefinitely. The plot, however, is quickly revealed to be the downfall of the two characters, though as the story progresses, like Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the story does not seem to obviously revolve around Brad and Janet, the Adam and Eve figure at first, but rather the serpentine character, Dr. Frank N. Furter. Therefore, just as Aristotle explains, the "plot is not unified... if it concerns one single person. An indefinitely large number of things happen to one person, in some of which there is no unity. So too the actions of one person are many, but do not turn into a single action" (Aristotle 94). In other words, the plot must also affect people surrounding the main character rather than only one person, as well as the realization that the character must have several actions that define his future, rather than one decision that allows for his downfall. Therefore, as the film continues, the audience witnesses Dr. Frank N. Furter, the structural tragic hero, suffer in his hamartia, his hubris.

Throughout the film, Dr. Frank N. Furter, just as a tragic protagonist, demonstrates his tragic flaw of hubris. Through his character, as well as references to myths such as Atlas and the House of Atreus, Dr. Frank N. Furter abuses hospitality in the misconception that he is above reproach and consequences. He kills Eddie out of jealousy for his creation (Rocky,) which is the first incident of his true abuse of hospitality, the first softer abuse being Dr. Frank N. Furter allowing the fellow Transylvanians to strip Brad and Janet of their clothing in order to render them vulnerable and more likely to engage in their lustful desires. Later, when he takes Rocky to

bed, the stain glass work of Atlas holding up the world, references the myth of Perseus turning Atlas to stone because Atlas would not offer him hospitality, which foreshadows Dr. Frank N. Furter's breach of hospitality when he turns his guests, Brad and Janet, as well as Columbia, into stone. Similarly, through the dinner scene where he serves Eddie as food to Rocky, Brad, Janet, Columbia, and Dr. Everett V. Scott, he mirrors the origins of the curse of the House of Atreus.

The curse of the House of Atreus originated from Tantalus, king of Lydia, who was favored by gods, but in his spite and hubris towards the gods, believed he could invite them all to dinner and offer them hospitality without them noticing that he killed and prepared his son, Pelops, as their meal in sacrifice. His hubris and gruesome offering resulted in his eternal punishment of water fleeing him in the underworld when he tried to drink and food moving just out of his reach when he tried to eat. Similarly, in the film, Dr. Frank N. Furter, exhibiting hubris enough to think he can fool his guests, just as Tantalus tried to fool the gods by serving them his son, serves the murdered Eddie out of spite and conviction. By killing Eddie and serving Eddie to his uncle, similar to serving a human (a creation) to the gods (creators,) Dr. Frank N. Furter indulges in his hubris and exhibits obvious betrayals to the customary value of hospitality. As Dr. Frank N. Furter engages in hubris, his actions as a tragic protagonist are evaluated based upon his tragic flaw. As he exhibits hubris, he aligns with Aristotle's argument and becomes destined to fall due to his hubris as his excessive pride will cause his change "from good fortune to misfortune" rather than his quality of character as evaluated by the audience or others (Aristotle 98).

Beyond his hubris, Dr. Frank N. Furter also adopts the tragedian protagonist model as he experiences a reversal and recognition towards the end of the film, too late for him to atone for

his hubris and pride. Towards the end of the film, when Dr. Frank N. Furter stands on stage with Columbia, Brad, Janet, Rocky, and Dr. Scott all dressed as transvestites, Riff Raff and Magenta appear at the doors of the theater in gender neutral clothes and tell him, “it’s all over;” “[his] mission is a failure” and “[his] lifestyle’s too extreme” for the human race (*Rocky Horror Picture Show*). At this moment, Riff Raff reveals that he has taken charge and Dr. Frank N. Furter, the aspiring scientist craving to become a creator is abased to the level of a “prisoner” and must return to his home planet (*Rocky Horror Picture Show*). At this point, Dr. Frank N. Furter pleads for one last appeal to save himself, his position of power, and his reputation and sings of his long suffering, how he has been dealt “cards for sorrow, cards for pain,” but he finds solace in an audience and in worship, similar to a creator, as he imagines an audience before him, who say “bravo,” and accept him and praise him, again like a creator (*Rocky Horror Picture Show*).

However, as Dr. Frank N. Furter concludes his song, Riff Raff and Magenta (who conveniently faded away during his song of praise and worship,) reappear and bring Dr. Frank N. Furter back to bleak reality. Dr. Frank N. Furter meets his recognition: no one is worshipping him, he is not accepted, and he is able to die. The audience has disappeared and Dr. Frank N. Furter is left alone, unloved, unaccepted, and a failure has he tried to attain the status of a creator, but failed and is unable to be accepted by humans or creations. Along with Aristotle’s theory, the plot becomes complex with Dr. Frank N. Furter’s recognition as the film explains that his pride has lead to his downfall. It is his hubris, his assuming power and position as a creator that withheld love from others, as well as acceptance as he abused the power and vocation of a creator. For instance, rather than protect his creation, Rocky, he abandoned him. Like a creator can create life and take it away, so does Dr. Frank N. Furter take away the life of Eddie, but not in wisdom

and love as a creator, but in gruesome rage and then monstrosly serves him to his love, Columbia, his uncle, Dr. Frank N. Furter, and the rest of the group. Because he is not a true creator, but rather an imitation of a creator, he does not hold the authority to take away life, much less gruesomely murder others like Eddie. Therefore, when Brad, compelled and under the Dionysian-like influence of Dr. Frank N. Furter asks Riff Raff why “[he’s] going to kill him” and concludes by demanding to know Dr. Frank N. Furter’s “crime,” as he obviously does not view the murder of Eddie as monstrous because he has found sympathy with Dr. Frank N. Furter as a god who can take away life, Riff Raff replies immediately by saying “you saw what became of Eddie” and “society must be protected” from Dr. Frank N. Furter (*Rocky Horror Picture Show*). In other words, Riff Raff, in his clarity and Apollonian thought, reminds the characters that Dr. Frank N. Furter is far from possessing the authority of a god, killed a man in cold blood, and now must atone for his sin and crime against others. Therefore, just as a tragedian character’s action “is accompanied by a recognition, a reversal or both,” which “[arises] from the actual structure of the plot... by necessity or by probability as a result of the preceding events,” so does Dr. Frank N. Furter suffer death and eternal removal from a position of a god for his crimes of hubris (Aristotle 96).

Also, aligned with an ancient greek tragedy, so does the film conclude with an instance of “deus ex machina,” or “god out of the machine,” as Riff Raff and Magenta suddenly, and unexpectedly appear in the scene to resolve the issue of Dr. Frank N. Furter and conclude the plot. In this experience of deus ex machina, Dr. Frank N. Furter dies, the world is left with his “spirit,” and the human race is left to ponder their value in a state of mental confusion (“ the human race, lost in time, and lost in space, and meaning,”) but the characters that Dr. Frank N.

Furter had under his overwhelming frenzy (Brad, Janet, and Dr. Everett V. Scott, are freed to leave (*Rocky Horror Picture Show*). With the end of the film, as Brad explains that he has “tried to find the truth” and is left “bleeding,” and Janet explains that “super heroes” or those who present themselves as gods, though they are not (just as Dr. Frank N. Furter did) “come to the feast to take the flesh not let deceased” and that “the beast is feeding” the Criminologist concludes the film in darkness, still a representative for the human race, which he says are now “lost in time, and lost in space and meaning” (*Rocky Horror Picture Show*). The audience, affected by the depressing realization that “darkness has conquered Brad and Janet,” who were once innocents, and that “Frank has built and lost his creature” because he sought to reach for power beyond what was right and capable for him to possess, realize that whether they are innocent or ambitious, if they allow their Dionysian desires to consume them without Apollonian restraint, they are to be doomed like the characters in the film (*Rocky Horror Picture Show*). Thus, with that dismal realization, the audience is left in a state “that which is terrifying and pitiable” produced from the incidents of the plot themselves, known as “catharsis” (Aristotle 98). Therefore, together with the credits hauntingly similar to funeral depictions as the faces of the dead characters are paired with the actor’s names, the chorus, like an ancient greek tragedy concludes the movie with commentary upon the plot and the reality of the character’s fates. Thus, this “tragedy of suffering,” as Dr. Frank N. Furter is condemned to suffer and die due to his actions, hubris, and otherness, remains constant in plot to the purpose of tragedy (Aristotle 103).

CONCLUSION

Through theories from individuals such as Sigmund Freud, Mikhail Bakhtin, Friedrich Nietzsche, Soren Kierkegaard, and Harold Bloom, I assert the ability of the classical tradition to extend and influence modern-day productions, even those as seemingly marginal as *Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Even an initially failing midnight movie can possess eloquence and complexity that rivals ancient Greek tragedies and allow for the discussion of transcendent values to break through sectors of society where literature may not have had the opportunity to appear previously. It is the multiplicity of the film, the ability to take certain characteristics of several, various works to create one cohesive idea and production that allows *Rocky Horror Picture Show* to take on the structure of an ancient Greek tragedy while drawing from more recent creations such as *Frankenstein*, and even religious teachings such as the Bible to retell the fall of man in Genesis. Through references to pre-existing works, the film successfully retells the timeless conflict between linguistic expression and visual perception and captures past and present literary, cultural, and religious paradigms.

In the analyzation of *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, one can discover that the imbedded allusions hidden beyond the central focus, which prove that the background of literature should be analyzed with equal worth and potential as the central scene regardless of the creative work's visual perception.

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