

FAIR TRESSES DYED IN CRIMSON GORE:  
CHARLOTTE DACRE'S MANIPULATION OF  
PHYSIOGNOMIC CODES IN *ZOFLOYA*

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## CHAPTER I

### FAIR TRESSES DYED IN CRIMSON GORE: CHARLOTTE DACRE'S MANIPULATION OF PHYSIOGNOMIC CODES IN *ZOFLOYA*

When it was first published Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya* was received with a great deal of abhorrence, generating scathing reviews such as one published in *The Annual Review*: "[t]here is a voluptuousness of language and allusion, pervading these volumes, which we should have hoped, that the delicacy of the female pen would have refused to trace; and there is an exhibition of wantonness of harlotry, which we would have hoped, that the delicacy of the female mind, would have been shocked to imagine."<sup>1</sup> Despite and perhaps due to reviews such as this one, the first edition sold well, but the novel later fell out of print and has since been overshadowed by other works from the Gothic period. Dacre's novel, however, provides a wealth of information regarding conventional approaches to human difference and presents the reader with a narrative construct who challenges the accepted physiognomic principles of the period.

With this essay, I shall demonstrate that Dacre's use of physiognomic conventions relies upon the well-established tradition of physical traits as indicators of moral life, but she simultaneously undercuts such principles with a narrative construct who, while beautiful, exhibits just as much violence and brutality as her Gothic counterparts. Such a departure from convention identifies *Zofloya* as a unique and bold contribution to the Gothic mode.

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<sup>1</sup> Qtd. in Adriana Craciun's Fatal Women of Romanticism (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 113.

As support for this assertion, I shall illustrate the ways in which the well-established tradition of physiognomy contributed to Dacre's narrative strategies in *Zofloya* and informs the process by which *Zofloya*'s characters read and interpret one another. Because Dacre composed her novel in the context of the current cultural, scientific, and aesthetic debates, namely late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century discourse on human variety and physical difference, I shall begin by summarizing these debates and highlighting the more prominent arguments. Using these contentious discussions regarding human taxonomy and classification as a lens through which to examine Dacre's novel, I shall then situate Dacre's novel and her manipulation of the described codes within the context of the reception of female authors at the time.

An examination of the long and well-established history of physiognomy not only provides a context for its popularity in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, but also lends support to the argument that while some novelists were incorporating Lavaterian principles into their character portraits<sup>2</sup>, Dacre was twisting the same valued codes with *Zofloya*. The history of physiognomy as natural philosophy has roots in the ancient world with Aristotle's fourth-century BC *Physiognomica*, which explores the connection between the mind and the body. Aristotle grounded his conclusions in his observations of the natural world and found different categories of human affections in the animal kingdom, claiming that, "the physiognomist draws his data from movements, shapes and colours, and from habits as appearing in the face, from the growth of hair, from the smoothness of the skin, from voice, from the condition of the flesh, from parts of the body, and from the general character of the body."<sup>3</sup> Aristotle's connection between physical traits and character established a long tradition of interpreting corporeal cues as personality identifiers. Galen later approached physiognomy from the standpoint of the doctrine of the humors, which he developed out of the philosophical approaches of Hippocrates, Aristotle, and

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<sup>2</sup> The incorporation of Lavaterian principles can be found in a number of works in the Gothic mode. For key examples, see William Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, William Beckford's *Vathek*, Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*, Anne Radcliffe's *The Italian*, and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle, *Minor Works* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1936) 93.

his own studies. Galen's notion that an imbalance of the humors creates not just a shift of mood but one of appearance as well is one that appears in Gothic works, particularly in novels that feature non-English characters.<sup>4</sup> During the Renaissance, Bartolommeo della Rocca Cocles composed *A brief and most pleasaunlt epitomye of the whole art of phisiognomie*, in which he catalogues the physical signs of good and evil character in 1556. He indicates that, "eyes most cleare and smilyng: Declare that man t be mery, well mannered, and circumspecte in hys lyfe" [sic] and "the eyes moving to and fro: Declare a man to be sedicious, suspicious, and unfaythfull" [sic].<sup>5</sup> Shortly thereafter, in 1586, Giambattista della Porta composed *De Humana Physiognomia*. Della Porta followed the Aristotelian model, using woodcuts of animals to demonstrate human characteristics.

With della Rocca's and della Porta Cocles's writings providing a scientific approach to the study of human variety and difference, the field gained momentum in the Seventeenth Century as explorers returned to western Europe with stories of foreign lands and peoples. Research conducted on the rise of taxonomy and human classification in the Eighteenth Century indicates that, while Immanuel Kant first used the term "race" in the modern sense in 1775, notions of races, nations, and tribes were fluid and inconsistent concepts.<sup>6</sup> Certainly, though, writers and their audiences paid closer attention than ever to appearance and character, attributing observable differences to a variety of factors such as climate, lineage, relative "civilization," or psychological characteristics.

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<sup>4</sup> Writers in the Gothic period exploited the eighteenth and nineteenth century arguments regarding race, particularly those that described some races as more passionate or volatile while others (typically the English) were more even-tempered. For examples, see especially Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* and Anne Radcliffe's *The Italian*.

<sup>5</sup> Bartolommeo della Rocca Cocles, *A brief and most pleaseu[n]lt epitomye of the whole art of phisiognomie, gathered out of Aristotle, Rasis, Formica, Loxius, Phylemo[n], Consiliator, Morbeth the Cardinal and others many moe, by that learned chyrgian Cocles: and englished by Thomas Hyll Londoner* (EEBO, 1556).

<sup>6</sup> For more on the fluid nature of the terms "race," "nation," and "variety" in the Eighteenth Century, see Nicholas Hudson's article, "From 'Nation' to 'Race': The Origin of Racial Classification in Eighteenth-Century Thought," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29.3 (1996).

As writers such as Kant, Linnaeus, Buffon, and Blumenbach explored differences between races and species<sup>7</sup>, attempting to reconcile arguments for a national sense of identity, biology, and human variation amidst the political strain of the abolition of slavery, one facet of the debate lent itself to other applications, namely literature. With the development of the English novel during the Eighteenth Century, references to human difference became increasingly pronounced, and such references illustrate the influence of one treatise on physiognomy by Johann Kaspar Lavater. Lavater's *Essays on physiognomy, calculated to extend the knowledge and the love of mankind*, composed with the help of a young Goethe, was first published in Switzerland in 1772 and reprinted for a century in German, French, English, and Dutch with a total of 151 editions. Lavater describes physiognomy as "the science or knowledge of the correspondence between the external and internal man, the visible superficies and the invisible contents."<sup>8</sup>

Lavater reinforces Aristotle and Galen's premises, agreeing that a relationship exists between the soul and the body, the internal and the external. Further, such external elements become signifiers for internal qualities. He asserts that the subject's inner life is revealed by signs on the face, creating a kind of natural language, and that a direct connection exists between physical beauty and inner goodness, as well as between deformity and moral transgression:

The moral life of man, particularly, reveals itself in the lines, marks, and transitions of the countenance. His moral powers and desires, his irritability, sympathy, and antipathy; his facility of attracting or repelling the objects that surround him; these are all summed up in, and painted upon, his countenance, when at rest. When any passion is called into

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<sup>7</sup> These arguments are effectively presented in David Bindman's *Ape to Apollo* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> J.C. Lavater, *Essays on physiognomy; for the promotion of knowledge and the love of mankind; written in the German language by J.C. Lavater, abridged from Mr. Holcroft's translation* (ECCO, 2010) 19.

action, such passion is depicted by the motion of the muscles, and these motions are accompanied by a strong palpitation of the heart. If the countenance be tranquil, it always denotes tranquility in the region of the heart and breast.<sup>9</sup>

For Lavater, the physiognomist served as a transcendent being or guide to the subject's morality. The notion of a connection between outer appearance and moral worth may have also contributed to the initial acceptance of Lavater's treatise, in part, because it reconciled and reinforced scientific and religious beliefs simultaneously.<sup>10</sup>

It follows, then, that for Lavater's audience the validity of his ideas lay in their apparent ability to explain variations in appearance and character, and to justify them from the scientific standpoint of eighteenth-century notions of difference. The significance of *Zofloya*, then, lay in its ability to question such tremendous influence exerted by Lavater's work in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century novel. As explored in great depth by writers such as Graeme Tytler in *Physiognomy in the European Novel*, Lavater's work played a decisive role in character development in the novel, and Tytler goes so far as to assert the Lavater's *Fragmente* serves as a pivotal work in comparative literary studies; novels published shortly after the *Treatise* contain a great deal of evidence of Lavater's authority. The impact of such a work on the European novel at that particular time tells us much about the age in which the novels were written; as Lavater (and his contemporaries) professed the link between outer appearance and inner nature, they also represented the leading scientific and rational approach to the discipline at that time.

Lavater's principles were not without resistance to the limitations of classification and taxonomy, two of which are particularly relevant here. The Earl of Shaftesbury, a pupil of Locke, argued in 1711 that, "The beauty of another person exists in the perceiving mind, and in the recognition of mind in others. True female beauty as it might be recognized by a man of taste was

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<sup>9</sup> Lavater, 15-16.

<sup>10</sup> Bindman, 98.

not a matter of physical desire but a recognition of the way in which the mind of the woman creates the desire itself.”<sup>11</sup> With this observation, Shaftesbury draws a connection between physiognomy and the nature of the mind. Shaftesbury, however, adds that a “man of taste” should be able to correctly interpret physiognomic cues to evaluate the character within. Though this acknowledgement of the deceptive nature of appearances well predates Dacre’s novel, it serves as an early indication of the problematic reliance upon physical characteristics for imputing moral character, particularly by laymen or men not as cultured as Shaftesbury suggests. The outcome, too, of a man’s inability to correctly interpret physiognomic codes can be dangerous, particularly in *Zofloya*, and shall be addressed more thoroughly later.

Two central arguments against Lavater’s link between physical form and the soul were also put forth in the Eighteenth Century.<sup>12</sup> First, Lavater’s work identifies beauty as a lesser attribute of the physiognomy of the body. Secondly, and more importantly in the context of this examination of Charlotte Dacre and *Zofloya*, is “the time-honored one that beauty could deceive and be a veil for self-interest and moral turpitude, female beauty being the most dangerous trap for the male.”<sup>13</sup> Dacre uses this argument to the fullest advantage, and her tactics shall also be discussed more fully later in this essay.

With such a long and established history, the prominence of new studies dealing with variety in eighteenth-century culture, and the authority of Lavater, such significations were not likely questioned or examined in a meaningful way until novelists began playing against them. The importance of Aristotle’s and Lavater’s connections between outer appearance and inner character fully presents itself in the emerging Gothic mode, which effectively codified specific features and their links to a character’s interiority. Though writers such as Tytler explore

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<sup>11</sup> Qtd. in Bindman 47.

<sup>12</sup> These arguments are outlined in Bindman, 20.

<sup>13</sup> Bindman, 20.

evidence of Lavater's influence in "higher" literature<sup>14</sup>, its presence in Gothic works should not be slighted. On the contrary, I would argue that works outside the mainstream also provide insight into the era that gave rise to them and inform us as to the grounds for their popularity. The discussion that follows, then, provides clear and distinct examples of physiognomic principles, and the manipulation thereof, in *Zofloya*.

With *Zofloya* Charlotte Dacre puts forth a novel that, unlike its Gothic counterparts, exploits physiognomic cues by introducing a villain, and a female villain besides, with a carefully constructed interiority. The divided reviews that met the novel's publication and its falling out of print (even to this day) lend support to the notion of its existence as a violation of conventional roles and principles. During a time when aesthetic and moral judgment was traditionally ascribed to make characters, Dacre's Victoria manipulates the male characters in the novel in a manner marked by its lack of femininity. She convinces her love interest, Berenza, that she possesses the qualities he desires, particularly introspection and melancholy. She know the type of character men desire, and changes herself accordingly:

She saw only that it would be necessary and politic to answer his sincere and honourable love at least with an *appearance* equally ardent and sincere. The peculiar cast of Berenza's disposition was in reality melancholy; somber and reflective, though in society seeming gay and careless; she then must become melancholy, retired, and abstracted. Berenza would hence be induced to scrutinize the cause. Artifice on her side, and natural self-love on his, would easily make him attribute to the effects of a violent and concealed love; thus would an explanation be the result; and the reserve, the doubts, the hesitations of Berenza at an end.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Graeme Tytler, *Physiognomy in the European Novel* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1982).

<sup>15</sup> Charlotte Dacre, *Zofloya, or, The Moor* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997) 78.

Victoria is well aware that Berenza will read her, “as though in her air and in her eyes he would read every movement of her soul,”<sup>16</sup> and she is also aware that his self-love will lead him to read her physical signs to affirm his belief that she is irresistible. By characterizing Berenza in such a way, Dacre operates within the Gothic tradition of exploring the basis of aesthetic and moral judgment. Because Berenza considers himself to have a strong moral character, it naturally follows that he should also be an astute judge of not just the aesthetic appearance of others, but of their inner nature as well. By doing so, Dacre exploits the weakness of relying solely upon physical characteristics for insight into a subject’s inner life and builds upon the earlier writings of Shaftesbury, who warned that, “A beautiful plant may be poisonous, a noble animal dangerous, a beautiful woman treacherous and a handsome face, or house façade, might conceal a squalid interior.”<sup>17</sup> Fortunately for Shaftesbury, he suggests that a polite man of breeding would be able to make such aesthetic discriminations. Works in the Gothic mode depend on assumptions such as this, and if Shaftesbury’s argument is substantive, Berenza as a narrative construct would be no such man.

Dacre presents the reader with reasons they should anticipate a character’s actions based on their outward appearances but she also manipulates this reliance upon conventional connections between physiognomy and interiority. Dacre seems to find this voyeuristic stance problematic, and she takes advantage of readers’ eagerness to believe they do not possess the desires they recognize in the other. Doing so allows them to project their own hostility, frustration, or sexual deviance as controlling subjects, condemning Victoria, for example, while convinced they more closely resemble the physically desirable and morally pure Lilla.

Dacre’s strategy calls into question Lavater’s notion of physiognomy as a rational, scientific indicator of inner characteristics using two narrative constructs who exist not in a static

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<sup>16</sup> Dacre, 70.

<sup>17</sup> Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury, Characteristics of men, manners, opinions, times, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999) 136.

form with predictable characteristics, but who have a fluid corporeal identity.<sup>18</sup> Dacre challenges the predetermined standards of physical form, allowing both Victoria and Zofloya to change and evolve throughout the course of the novel. Instead of James Dunn's claim that Victoria encompasses both masculine and feminine features, and that "this signals alternative destinies available to women,"<sup>19</sup> the descriptions rather represent a distinct contrast with those of Dacre's characters who embody the Lavaterian principles of physiognomy, the stock characters of Lilla, Berenza, and Henriquez; they possess no development, self-consciousness, or transformation, either beneficial or transgressive. With this tactic, Dacre demonstrates knowledge of both the conventional view of physical characteristics while subverting such principles with characters capable of change.

For example, the narrator's physical description of Victoria undergoes a marked transformation throughout the course of the novel. Just as Victoria manipulates the codes of physiognomy and changes the manner in which she presents herself in the novel, the narrator's descriptions of her evolve as well. The initial descriptions of Victoria's beauty reveal an angelic form, and while dark, they do not have the overwhelming masculine qualities that characterize her later in the novel. In fact, the narrator's description of her dark eyes tempts the reader to assume she has dark hair and a dark complexion as well, but the actual revelation of her hair color comes late in the novel as Victoria grows increasingly masculine and demonic. Early in the novel the narrator describes Victoria thus:

Her smile was fascination itself; and in her large dark eyes, which sparkled with incomparable radiance, you read the traces of a strong and resolute mind, capable of attempting any thing undismayed by consequences; and well and truly did they speak.

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<sup>18</sup> Adriana Craciun suggests this in her article, "I hasten to be disembodied": Charlotte Dacre, the Demon Lover, and Representations of the Body," *European Romantic Review* 6.1 (1995).

<sup>19</sup> James Dunn, "Charlotte Dacre and the Feminization of Violence," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 53.3 (1998): 314.

Her figure, though above the middle height, was symmetry itself; she was as the tall and graceful antelope; her air was dignified and commanding, yet free from stiffness; she moved along with head erect, and with step firm and majestic; more was her carriage ever degraded by levity or affectation.<sup>20</sup>

This passage demonstrates Dacre's ability to anticipate the ways in which the reader will interpret Victoria's character based on her physical attributes. Dacre includes qualities regarded as desirable and therefore, indicative of strong moral character, such as sparkling eyes, a resolute mind, symmetry of form, and dignified grace. In doing so, she encourages the audience to read Victoria as a beautiful, resolute woman who could never be capable of the ferocity she demonstrates at the conclusion, without, as it happens, help from the Devil.

Like other Gothic novels, *Zofloya* builds upon the established codification in the novels that preceded it. *The Castle of Otranto*, published in 1764, serves as an early Gothic text that owes much to the tradition of the medieval romance. As described by Sir Walter Scott in his Introduction, Horace Walpole's work draws upon established, codified characters:

Feudal tyranny was, perhaps, never better exemplified, than in the character of Manfred. He has the courage the art, the duplicity, the ambition of a barbarous chieftain of the dark ages, yet with touches of remorse and natural feeling, which preserve some sympathy for him when his pride is quelled, and his race extinguished. The pious monk, and the patient Hippolota, are well contrasted with this selfish and tyrannical prince. Theodore is the juvenile hero of a romantic tale, and Matilda has more interesting sweetness than usually belongs to its heroine.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Dacre, 77.

<sup>21</sup> Bleiler, E.F., ed. *The Castle of Otranto, Vathek, & The Vampyre: Three Gothic Novels* (New York: Dover, 1966) 14.

While he works from the romantic tale, Walpole also incorporated features of the features of the developing Gothic mode that later became convention: the supernatural, exotic settings, castles, hidden passageways, curiosity, and suspense. A close examination of the text, however, reveals that Walpole's characters exist as stock characters but physical descriptions of them are sparse. As suggested by Bindman, it was not until later works and the popularity of Lavater's *Treatise* that novelists began to place more emphasis on the physical cues as indicators of behavioral traits.

Aware of the current connections between aesthetic judgment and subsequent assumptions of moral character, Dacre provides a distinct counterpoint to Victoria in Lilla. Lilla lacks the interior landscape imparted on Victoria, and exists merely as her rival, or as it has been suggested, a false feminine ideal.<sup>22</sup> I would argue that if Victoria is aware of this feminine ideal, it follows that Dacre possessed a similar knowledge, and perhaps, similar attitude toward this conventionalized idea of beauty, one that prompts the narrator to describe Lilla as "the pigmy, the immaterial speck, that she had deemed unworthy of a thought!"<sup>23</sup> Victoria's actions, though extreme, vent a frustration with the connection between exterior appearance and inner character that dates back to Aristotle and had become convention in the Eighteenth Century. Victoria's contempt and violent impulses are grounded in her awareness that, consistent with the traditionally male role of producing aesthetic judgments, Henriquez and Berenza interpret Lilla's qualities as signifiers of her inner moral character. The narrator, too, invites the reader to make the connection:

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<sup>22</sup> In his critical introduction to the 1997 Oxford printing of *Zofloya*, Kim Michasiw asserts that Victoria views Lilla as a threat to her sexual prowess, questioning Henriquez's ability to fall for the weak, fairy-like, and "miniaturized, 13-year old personification of infantile innocence" (xix). However, he also points out the lack of jealousy in Victoria, and highlights her extreme hatred for Lilla. To Victoria, Lilla is an "empty vessel," ineffectual, helpless, and, in short, everything that Victoria despises. Victoria's attack on Lilla may be viewed as "a symbolic intent to destroy this false feminine ideal" (314).

<sup>23</sup> Dacre, 196.

Pure, innocent, free even from the smallest taint of a corrupt though, was her mind; delicate, symmetrical, and of fairy-like beauty, her person so small, yet of so just proportion; sweet, expressing a seraphic serenity of soul, seemed her angelic countenance, slightly suffused with the palest hue of the virgin rose. Long flaxen hair floated over her shoulders: she might have personified (were the idea allowable) innocence in the days of her childhood.<sup>24</sup>

Because Dacre modeled her novel after Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*, published in 1796, a brief examination of that novel's incorporation of Lavater's principles provides insight into the similarities and variations regarding character descriptions in Dacre's work. From the start, Lewis's narrator introduces the heroine, Antonia, by providing established physical codes to which the reader could ascribe her innocence (and consequently, impending doom). Her lips are described as "of the most rosy freshness," and her hair as "fair and undulating."<sup>25</sup> Because she represents the stock heroine, she naturally has limbs "formed with the most perfect symmetry," and "mild blue eyes... seemed an heaven of sweetness, and the crystal in which they moved sparkled with all the brilliance of Diamonds."<sup>26</sup>

Lewis uses symmetry of form as an indication of femininity, moral character, and interior beauty, as well as a sparkling eye as a sign of intelligence and spirit. Such elements allow the reader to recognize that not only is Antonia beautiful, but according to contemporary physiognomic principles, that she is beautiful *because* she is morally pure. This follows closely Lavater's notions that, "Blue eyes are generally more significant of weakness, effeminacy, and yielding, than brown or black"<sup>27</sup> and that, "A beautiful countenance— is that in which, besides the proportion and position of the parts, harmony, uniformity, and mind, are visible; in which

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<sup>24</sup> Dacre, 133.

<sup>25</sup> Matthew Lewis, *The Monk* (Oxford, Oxford UP, 1998) 45.

<sup>26</sup> Lewis, 45.

<sup>27</sup> Lavater, 53.

nothing is superfluous, nothing deficient, nothing disproportionate, nothing superadded, but all is conformity and concord.”<sup>28</sup>

One year later, with *The Italian*, Ann Radcliffe provides a more socially acceptable version of *The Monk*, though she borrows many of the conventional images, motifs, and specifically, physical indicators or moral character. She, like Lewis, includes a heroine, Ellena, with codified beauty: “Her features were of the Grecian outline, and, though they expressed the tranquility of an elegant mind, her dark blue eyes sparkled with intelligence.”<sup>29</sup>

Gothic villains, however, tend not to fit so cleanly into established physiognomic codes. Instead, they tend to possess attractive features with Lavaterian indicators of deception and wickedness. William Beckford’s *Vathek*, for example, contains a number of physical descriptions and relied heavily on corporeal codes for implied character attributes. When Vathek meets the Giour, for example, the narrator portrays him thus:

The man, or rather monster, instead of making a reply, thrice rubbed his forehead which, as well as his body, was blacker than ebony; four times clapped his paunch, the projection of which was enormous; opened wide his huge eyes, which glowed like firebrands; began to laugh with a hideous noise, and discovered his long amber-coloured teeth, bestreaked with green.<sup>30</sup>

The Giour is hideous and strange, and the ritualistic action of clapping his belly, combined with the physical cues such as glowing eyes, black skin, and amber-green teeth signal to the reader a wickedness that may be anticipated. Only at the conclusion of the work, however, are the reader’s suspicions confirmed: the Giour is a messenger, sent from the palace of Eblis, to entice Vathek into Hell and eternal torture as fulfillment of his desire. As such, Beckford combines the Gothic

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<sup>28</sup> Lavater, 413.

<sup>29</sup> Anne Radcliffe, *The Italian*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) 6.

<sup>30</sup> William Beckford, *Vathek* (New York: Dover, 1966) 113.

intermixing of desire as frightening, disturbing, and alluring (set in motion by Walpole) with the physiognomic codes legitimized by Lavater.

In William Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, the grave and melancholy Falkland's "diametrical reverse" is revealed in his neighbor, Grimes. The narrator notes, "His complexion was scarcely human; his features were course, and strangely discordant and disjointed from each other. His lips were thick and the tone of his voice broad and unmodulated. His legs were of equal size from one end to the other, and his feet misshapen and clumsy."<sup>31</sup> Godwin's incorporation of crooked features reaffirms the problem of imbalance initially proposed by Galen and developed in Lavater's 1772 *Essays*. This description also allows the reader to observe an inner nature that is not provided, endowing Grimes with a prescribed psychological structure. As expected, the narrator later describes Grimes as "half-civilized," "obstinate," and having an "incapacity to conceive those finer feelings that make so large a part of the history of persons who are cast in a gentler mode."<sup>32</sup>

Matthew Lewis, too, describes his villain, Ambrosio, as such: "His stature was lofty, and his features uncommonly handsome. His Nose was aquiline, his eyes large black and sparkling, and his dark brows almost joined together."<sup>33</sup> This mix of elements, a lofty stature, Roman nose, eyes that indicate craftiness (according to Lavater), and brows that almost join together, "held so beautiful by the Arabs, and by the old physiognomists supposed to be the mark of craft"<sup>34</sup> function, like much of *The Monk*, to simultaneously evoke anxiety and attraction in those exposed to them. Similarly, Ann Radcliffe provides her reader with physical cues for her villain's personality traits, describing Schedoni using characteristics that suggest a shady, mysterious past. His physical form, then, suggests to the reader that he is not to be trusted, as "his limbs were large

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<sup>31</sup> William Godwin, *Caleb Williams* (London: Penguin, 2005) 50.

<sup>32</sup> Godwin, 50.

<sup>33</sup> Lewis, 18.

<sup>34</sup> Lavater, 59.

and uncouth,” and his cowl “threw a shade over the livid paleness of his face.” Schedoni also has a “large melancholy eye,” and the narrator observes that “his eyes were so piercing that they seemed to penetrate...into the hearts of men.”<sup>35</sup> Lavater’s writings resonate strongly in Radcliffe’s references. Schedoni’s dark and penetrating eyes indicates mischief, and his pale complexion also suggests illness which, if the reader approaches the novel from an Aristotelian perspective, corresponds with moral corruption.

Dacre’s descriptions of Zofloya initially follow the convention of villains who preceded him, though the narrator’s language evolves somewhat from portraying Zofloya as an intriguing, mystical, and even beautiful Moor to a terrifying (and yet still appealing) demon: “the form, the features, and, above all, the luminous eyes of Zofloya appeared more than human— they shone with a brilliant fire— resistless fascination dwelt about him.”<sup>36</sup>

Dacre underscored her affinity for *The Monk* with her choice of the alias, “Rosa Matilda,” by which she was more commonly known. Her selection of such an alias aligns her with Lewis’s demon, known both as Rosario and Matilda.<sup>37</sup> In addition to having an ambiguous identity as an author, Dacre has also been represented in portraiture as a Gothic heroine herself. In the Oxford edition of *Zofloya*, Dacre’s portrait indicates that she either shared more physical attributes with Victoria than with the frail Lilla, having noticeably dark hair and eyes, or intentionally had herself painted in such a way as to invite comparisons with Victoria. Further, Dacre’s intentional selection of a demonic alias, physical characteristics in her portrait, and the deliberate

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<sup>35</sup> Radcliffe 34-35.

<sup>36</sup> Dacre, 239.

<sup>37</sup> In her article, “I hasten to be disembodied”: Charlotte Dacre, *The Demon Lover*, and Representations of the Body,” Adriana Craciun points out the irony in Dacre’s selection of such a pen name, that Dacre’s “conscious and public alliance with Lewis’s demonic woman complicates any unproblematic reliance on the moralistic elements throughout her works, where she urges readers to follow sexually conservative and even misogynist prescriptions in order to avoid the dangers of sexual indiscretion” (111). With this statement, Craciun acknowledges the tension created between Dacre’s moral prescriptions at the start of the novel, and the dissonant chord her villainess strikes against them.

juxtaposition of morality and deviance in *Zofloya* all serve her purpose: manipulation of existing principles to subvert institutional aesthetics and undermine Lavater's influence on her Gothic counterparts.

Dacre's attitudes regarding these coded descriptions can only be speculated upon, of course, but the only existing portraits of Dacre suggest that she shared more physical characteristics with her villainess than with the ineffectual Lilla, and no doubt interacted with others who possessed a mindset similar to that of Henriquez:

... for his soul was enslaved by the simplicity and innocence of the youthful Lilla; all other women were detestable in his sight — her trembling delicacy, her gentle sweetness, her sylph-like fragile form, were to him incomparable, and being familiarized to the observance of such soft loveliness, the rest of her sex, when placed beside her, appeared, in his idea, like beings of a different order. But, above all, Victoria he viewed with almost absolute dislike; — her strong though noble features, her dignified carriage, her authoritative tone — her boldness, her insensibility, her violence, all struck him with instinctive horror; so utterly opposite to the gentle Lilla, that when, with an assumed softness she designed to caress her, he almost trembled for her tender life, and compared the picture in his mind, to the snowy dove fondled by the ravenous vulture.<sup>38</sup>

This passage reveals much about Henriquez, who represents the male standard with the ability to judge character as shaped by the very conventions that Dacre calls into question with *Zofloya*. Henriquez characterizes Victoria with image after image of traditionally masculine qualities, having “strong” features, an “authoritative tone,” “boldness,” and “insensibility.” Dacre deliberately casts these features against the decidedly feminine and comparatively submissive features of Lilla, complete with “sylph-like fragile form,” “delicacy,” and “soft loveliness.” In

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<sup>38</sup> Dacre, 194.

fact, in a skillful narrative strategy, Dacre juxtaposes “the snowy dove” and “ravenous vulture” in a manner that anticipates the macabre final scene in the novel.

While the men in Victoria’s life face more passive deaths, (Berenza by poisoning and Henriquez by suicide), Lilla faces the most gruesome fate, suffering from repeated stabbings and finally, being hurtled off a cliff and into the ocean below. The reader is thrust into the scene, forced to bear witness to Victoria’s rage:

Victoria, no longer mistress of her actions, nor desiring to be so, seized by her streaming tresses the fragile Lilla, and held her back.—With her poignard she stabbed her in the bosom, in the shoulder, and other parts:— the expiring Lilla sank upon her knees.— Victoria pursued her blows—she covered her fair body with innumerable wounds, then dashed her headlong over the edge of the steep.—Her fairy form bounded as it fell against the projecting crags of the mountain, diminishing to the sight of her cruel enemy, who followed it as far as her eye could reach.<sup>39</sup>

Dacre goes to the extent as to call attention to “those fair tresses dyed in crimson gore.”<sup>40</sup> By doing so, Dacre acknowledges the established codes of physiognomy. She is aware that her reader will assume Lilla’s tresses are fair, not just because she possesses outward beauty, but because she maintains an interiority of innocence. Further, in upholding such conventional femininity, Lilla becomes so one-dimensional that the reader comes to recognize (to a greater extent, perhaps, with her than with Victoria) Dacre’s subversion of the current sexual and novelistic conventions. Lilla’s fair tresses are juxtaposed with the spilling of her “crimson gore,” a symbol of Victoria’s inner landscape, one of darkness, brutality, and vengeance.

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<sup>39</sup> Dacre, 226.

<sup>40</sup> Dacre, 170.

While *Zofloya* has been partially revived in the criticism of late, typically in the realms of gender identity, political and domestic restrictions on female sexuality, and female authorship<sup>41</sup>, scholars have devoted relatively little study to physiognomic principles in the Gothic mode as opposed to higher literature, and more specifically in *Zofloya*. Dacre, I would argue, was able to conform to a particular role, both in the domestic and political realms, while she undercut the principles that governed that role. She displays knowledge of what was expected, in the delicately feminine but loathsome character of Lilla, and cleverly meets those expectations while conjuring a dark villainess. This argument for subversion is supported by Diane Long Hoeveler, for example, who explores the role of women writers of the period and focuses on the duality of their female characters. She asserts that their works both criminalized and deified women and that women attempted to expose and to conceal the opposing positions in which they found themselves and that they would try to subvert the power of the patriarchy.<sup>42</sup>

The genius of Victoria's character, then, lies in Dacre's ability to manipulate the conventional view of femininity that Hoeveler and Craciun discuss.<sup>43</sup> Dacre knows the typical reader will interpret Victoria's appearance as a connection to her inner character, and she uses this to her advantage. In fact, the narrator *invites* the reader to impute a specific character into Victoria. Similarly, when Victoria is imprisoned, the narrator observes that her appearance provides an index by which to read her emotional state:

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<sup>41</sup> See especially Craciun's *Fatal Women of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), Hoeveler's "Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya*: A Case Study in Miscengenation as Sexual and Racial Nausea," *European Romantic Review*, 8.2 (1997), and James Dunn's "Charlotte Dacre and the Feminization of Violence," *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 53.3 (1998).

<sup>42</sup> Hoeveler, 197.

<sup>43</sup> While Hoeveler asserts that the largely female audiences of Gothic novels were "experiencing a fictitious mastery" over oppression though what she calls "professional femininity" (xii), Craciun raises concerns about the existence of a "professional femininity;" that the isolation of women from novels and other "corrupting social influences" is the only way to manufacture this feminine ideal.

The perpetual ferment of her brain, and, above all, the violent restraint she imposed upon her feelings and natural disposition, scarcely ever suffering herself to be provoked, for an instant, from the cool and systematic conduct she prescribed herself, had began long since to have a visible effect upon her personal appearance: she had become thin and pallid; but her eyes still burnt with an ardent though melancholy luster that bespoke the *trammeled unsubdued* ferocity of her soul.<sup>44</sup>

Victoria also exhibits more than one dimension of manipulation. She influences her parents in an effort to obtain anything she wishes, as “to see their wayward children happy, their infantile and lovely faces undisfigured by tears or vexation, was a pleasure too great to be resigned, from the distant reflection of future evil possible to accrue from the indulgence.”<sup>45</sup> According to the narrator, an over-indulgent mother is the root of Victoria’s ferocity. However, not only does placing the blame for Victoria’s deviance on Laurina remove the narrator from accountability, but it also separates Dacre from it as well. If Laurina is at fault for Victoria’s ferociousness, Dacre, too, is not responsible for the “exhibition of wantonness of harlotry” that is *Zofloya*. Just as Victoria willfully makes decisions to undertake acts of violence, fully aware of the costs, Dacre deliberately assumed the penname Rosa Matilda, knowingly aligning herself with a demon. Though she includes moral prescriptions in the beginning of the novel in an effort to mask it as a cautionary tale, Dacre’s *Zofloya* indulges the desires of both reader and writer. These choices represent careful strategies designed by headstrong women, not the results of maternal influence.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Dacre, 55.

<sup>45</sup> Dacre, 4.

<sup>46</sup> Donna Heiland and Diane Hoeveler speculate regarding Laurina’s influence on Victoria. While Hoeveler reminds the reader that the narrator continually blames Laurina for the destruction of her family, Heiland also wonders if Dacre intends to relate the dangers of an uneducated mother. This argument is problematic and examined in the following paragraph. Similarly, in his article, “Mothers and Other Lovers: Gothic Fiction and the Erotics of Loss,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 16.2 (2002), George E. Haggerty also adopts the position of the narrator in *Zofloya*, blaming

Dacre likely experienced the pressure of conforming to particular standards of conservatism associated with the Tory party, but rather than place her political and social standing in jeopardy, as did some of her more liberal counterparts,<sup>47</sup> she understood the particular expectations of domesticity and sexual restraint associated with proper women. Thus she assumes a high-handed moral tone in *Zofloya*, consistent with the “delicacy of the female mind.”<sup>48</sup> Dacre is also able to manipulate the existing codes with her association with Matilda and her physical likeness to Victoria, suggesting a darker side to Dacre. She effortlessly assumes the role of the well-mannered, domestic woman, while with *Zofloya* she not-so-subtly undercuts the very principles on which this type of woman depends.

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Laurina for Victoria’s transgression. He claims that Victoria’s sexual deviance and violence toward Lilla is an act of frustration, a result of her earlier maternal loss. Dacre places immense emphasis on the formative relationship between mother and daughter, and, according to Haggerty, becomes the source of her subjectivity. Victoria herself notes, “that which I have been, my mother made me” (258).

<sup>47</sup> Craciun’s examination of Dacre’s past reveals that her writings could have assumed two separate stances. With her father’s radical politics, his abandonment of her mother, her alienation on account of her religion, and her relationship with a married man might lead her audience to expect liberal, even feminist tendencies. *The Passions* and her later poetry, however, indicate more of an alignment with conservative politics. However, Craciun adds, “Dacre’s rejection of liberal and reformist policies in the public sphere need not (and does not) coincide with an acceptance of the ideology of women’s domesticity and passionlessness” (113).

<sup>48</sup> Craciun highlights the tension between Dacre’s moral prescriptions in the opening of *Zofloya* and the scandalous content of the novel in *Fatal Women of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 110.

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Scope and Method of Study: The purpose of this study was to examine Charlotte Dacre's novel, *Zofloya* in the context of the current cultural, scientific, and aesthetic debates, namely late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century discourses on human variety and physical difference. The primary focus concerns the influence of Johann Kaspar Lavater's *Essays on Physiognomie* on the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novel, particularly in the Gothic mode, and the narrative strategies employed by Dacre that both exploit and manipulate the established codes of physiognomy.

Findings and Conclusions: Through a comprehensive study of the historical tradition of physiognomy, and the applications thereof in a variety of Gothic novels, this study demonstrates that while Dacre includes narrative constructs that closely follow Lavaterian connections between physical appearance and moral character, she also manipulates physiognomic cues by introducing a female villain with a carefully constructed interiority. By doing so, she calls into question Lavater's notion of physiognomy as a rational, scientific indicator of inner characteristics and demonstrates knowledge of the conventional view of physical codes while subverting such principles with a female villainess capable of change.

