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The Emergence of the "Final Girl" in Stephen King's *The Shining*

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Abstract

Female characters have a prominent role in Gothic literature as women tend to be the primary readers of this genre. In the beginning, Gothic literature nourished the literary tropes of the damsel in distress and the heroic persona, which was a role reserved exclusively for male protagonists. Moreover, not only were female characters consistently dependent on their male counterparts, who heroically liberated them from villains, but also the death of a male protagonist would entirely jeopardize the female character and frequently resulted in her enormous grief or tragic demise. Yet, following the emergence of modern Gothic literature, female characters have evolved into central characters and acquired the title of the "final girl," the term denoting a female character that survives despite all odds. This chapter discusses the emergence of the "final girl" trope in Stephen King's horror novel *The Shining* (1977).

Keywords: Wendy Torrance, the "final girl," Stephen King, *The Shining*

1. Introduction

The need for a more complex investigation into the role of female characters in literature stems from the fact that some genres, such as Gothic

literature, have a large female readership, which has increased female characters' significance and popularity. Despite this, traditional Gothic literature nourished stereotypical gender roles by generating the trope of the damsel in distress and that of the heroic persona, which was a role reserved exclusively for the male protagonist. In line with the traditional gender hierarchy, female characters existed as shadow characters, utterly dependent on male protagonists and their impeccable ability to overcome a villain. On the other hand, the advent of feminist criticism has brought about a change within the Gothic genre, marked by the rejection of traditional gender norms, openness towards feminism, sexuality, and gender equality, and the emergence of a dominant female character that withstands male tyranny. This character came to be known as the "final girl." At the core, the "final girl" is wise, independent, and able to "defeat the monster" all by herself, which makes her the center of the story. However, the role of the "final girl" character tends to be unobtrusive until the climax of the plot is reached, when she is confronted with utter havoc on one hand and salvation of herself and others on the other.

This chapter will analyze the importance of the "final girl" trope in contemporary Gothic literature on the example of Wendy Torrance, the character from Stephen King's novel *The Shining* (1977). The first part of the analysis will provide insight into the traditional and modern female roles in Gothic literature, whereas the second part will discuss Wendy's dual characterization—as both a traditional Gothic character and the "final girl." Alongside this, it will also trace Wendy's transition towards the "final girl" character and examine its impact on the other characters and the overall plot development.

2. The Female Role in Gothic Literature

Gothic literature presents a literary style that focuses on the exploration of terror and the sublime coupled with estranged emotions, deranged behavioral patterns, and eerie entities located in a relatively familiar and mundane territory (Punter 2–3). As such, the term Gothic literature can

be applied to any form of literature in which horror abounds, from the supernatural to the bizarre, or even violent, regardless of the specific historical period or architectural setting (Tombleson 83). Alongside this, Gothic literature is always based on "the other literary form from whose *grave* it arises" (Kligour qtd. in Gamer 9). In other words, it is woven into every genre, without necessarily being the center of any of them. From its origin, Gothic literature has dealt with the marginality of human existence and, as such, has been open to cultural transition and acceptance of queerness, femininity, and otherness. Ultimately, due to its topics of interest, the Gothic has ceaselessly drawn both praise and condemnation, subjecting itself to changes, inclusivity, and multiple interpretations of the characters and their world:

> But just as living organisms evolve, so do genres. When the cultural environment which produced the niche changes, the genre must change with it. . . . It is my hypothesis that this shifting of literary niches, including the birth of new genres out of old, cannot be explained in purely formal terms, as the opening and exhausting of structural possibilities. Such changes must have been at least partly the result of a complex interaction between producers and consumers, between authors on the one hand and audiences and publishers on the other. (Richter qtd. in Gamer 30)

The portrayal of female characters in Gothic literature evolved conjointly with the common understanding of the genre and its social acceptance. Firstly, the female characters were considered a trivial necessity—helpless, voiceless, and utterly dependent on their male counterparts. As the genre developed and secured its role as a medium of the oppressed and voiceless, it quickly captured the interest of various feminist critics and authors who helped place, reformulate, and reignite interest in the Gothic among the readership.[1] Female reformation of the traditional

[1] Gilbert and Gubar name Ann Radcliffe, Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, Charlotte Brontë, and Emily Dickinson as the most influential women in Gothic literature. Alongside this, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Sylvia Plath, Ellen Moers, and Simone de

Gothic genre was "concerned with expressing the inexpressible in female experience" (Gilbert and Gubar 59), more precisely, with women's involuntary subjugation in a male-oriented society and their inability to express their identities. In the following sub-chapters, the metamorphosis from a traditional female Gothic character to a fully independent modern Gothic heroine will be theoretically explored and explained.

2.1. Female Characters in Traditional Gothic Literature

Even though, due to its interest in the unknown depicted in a familiar setting, Horace Walpole's novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) excels as the first Gothic novel, it is believed that it was Ann Radcliffe who popularized the Gothic form of writing due to her revolutionary (de)construction of female characters. Robert Miles advocates that the crucial and fundamental drive of Radcliffe's literary expression is "the creation of imaginative space for her heroines" (111), who strive for individualism and equality in a male-centered society. Based on the distinction between Walpole's and Radcliffe's prototype, scholars have established two approaches to Gothic writing—the "male Gothic" and the "female Gothic." Both of these approaches revolve around the hero's and heroine's respective role in literature, their representation in plot development, and differentiation in Gothic works.

In order to understand the depth of portrayal of females in Gothic literature, one must consider its role in the male and the female Gothic writings. According to Miles, the male Gothic and the female Gothic served as a pseudonym attributed to works either created or profoundly inspired by the differing schools of Radcliffe and Lewis, respectively (95). In the male Gothic, which is believed to be traditional and "true Gothic" (Miles 183), a dominant male figure acquires the role of a hero, a selfless protector, and an embodiment of masculinity, whereas the female charac-

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Beauvoir are mentioned as representatives of modern feminist criticism (Gilbert and Gubar 83–92).

ter is seen as "captured, fettered, trapped, even buried alive" (Gilbert and Gubar 83). The formulaic approach found in the male Gothic suggests that the title of a "hero" can be attributed only to a character that is exclusively male, dominant, and able to "defeat the monster" and protect the heroine. Having this in mind, Nabi indicates that the male Gothic thrives on the negative representation of women, whereby female characters fluctuate between being unnatural and artificial, either the "predator" or the "victim," but are always negative and exclusively subjected to the patriarchal ideology in the end (73–75). Carroll elaborates on the codependency of male and female characters in the male Gothic by stating that the primordial need to save the heroine rises from the uncontrivable male dominance and sexual desire: "The abduction of women—often as a thinly veiled euphemism for rape—might be seen as the articulation of an enduring sexist warning that women should keep in line because they always are and ought to be at the mercy of males in patriarchal society" (196). On the other hand, Buckley maintains that horror writings, especially of male production, allow the "exploration of sexuality, perversity, monstrosity" (127), and extreme ideas about gender, which enables them "to critique the polarization of women through binary sexual categories such as virgin and whore, victim and monster" (Buckley 126).

The female Gothic arises as a response to the male Gothic and its worldview. Even though Ellen Moers coined the term "the female Gothic" to refer to "a genre written by women for women," Ann Radcliffe popularized the genre and remains noted as its most famous representative (Moers qtd. in Miles 96). As such, the female Gothic presents a change in the understanding of the role of women in all categories of their existence, including "individual and collective anxieties about women, their sexuality, and the structures of authority which manage them and in which they participate" (Gildersleeve 94). The Radcliffean paradigm of the female Gothic showcases heroines who commonly try to save themselves from a violent male figure. The female Gothic overturns the male Gothic characterization by substituting the protector hero type

with that of an antihero and homewrecker who is prone to violence and destruction (Buckley 128). Moreover, as Alison Milbank explains, the female Gothic ultimately revolves around "subjectivity of the endangered, aristocratic heroine as its hermeneutic, and charts her incarceration in castle or convent" (86). For example, the Radcliffean heroine is put on dangerous trials, where her body goes through mutilation, violation, and possibly death, but she ultimately "resists, succeeds in escaping the tyrant's power" (Milbank 86), and overshadows the male figures in the narrative.

In addition to male-female relationships in the female Gothic, one should also take into consideration problematic female-female relationships, particularly the fundamental mother-daughter relationship. Roberta Rubenstein argues that the female Gothic is wrongly associated with exclusively opposite-sex relationships as the only source of trauma. Moreover, she suggests, "traditional elements of the Gothic genre are elaborated in particular ways, notably through the central character's troubled identification with her good/bad/dead/mad mother . . . , and her imprisonment in a house that, mirroring her disturbed imaginings, expresses her ambivalent experience of entrapment and longing for protection" (Rubenstein 312). Ultimately, the creation of the modern Gothic heroine, known as the "final girl," indicates the quintessential role of the female Gothic in the portrayal of a young woman, torn between a psychotic lover and an unstable motherly figure.

2.2. Female Characters in Modern Gothic Literature

Modern Gothic literature of the twentieth century has introduced major changes in the understanding of traditional Gothic tropes. The urbanization of Gothic settings has impacted plot development and literary characters, changing their physical appearances, traits, and perception of danger. In an attempt to define the "final girl" trope, Catherine Spooner indicates that it revolves around a female protagonist who undergoes agonizing trials and possesses the characteristics of a traditional Gothic hero (99). In the same vein, Alexandria West maintains that the "final girl" is

either a literary or a cinematographic character "who survives the events . . . though usually at some great cost to her mental health or selfhood" (16). The arrival of the modern Gothic heroine indicates a cultural reset based on the image of "an angry woman" (Clover 17) who is simultaneously the victim and the hero (Clover 17). As such, the "final girl" trope disrupts the established gender roles, making women delicate and dangerous at the same time. This is in sharp contrast to the traditional gender dynamics. As Spooner contends, "'Girl Power' was a kind of oxymoron: girls are a social group consistently constructed as powerless" and as such were never expected to be equalized with men (100).

A more precise observation of female portrayal in the modern Gothic suggests that the "final girl" is "an embodiment of trauma" (West 16) from the beginning of the plot to its end. At the beginning of the plot, the female character is usually either naïve or in a state of domestic bliss, whereas, as the action progresses, the trauma from the past unravels, making the heroine susceptible to her repressed past, a tyrannical male figure, and the danger that she is exposed to. Despite the gender reset, the formulaic aspect of the Gothic plot—"the castle, the villain, the heroine's capture and escape" (Jones 168)—has remained the same in the modern Gothic. However, major changes can be observed in the portrayal of a modernized setting, which became known as "The Terrible Place."[2] Nowadays, the heroine carries the moral duty to save those in danger at the cost of her own life, which was rarely the case in male-oriented Gothic writings. As West notes, the heroine "alone looks death in the face, but she alone also finds the strength either to stay the killer long enough to be rescued (ending A) or to kill him herself (ending B)" (47–48). Even though the heroine can be rescued, she never passively spends her time in hiding. Usually, the heroine vocalizes the need for help, as she remains in combat or lures the monster, while other unharmed characters are sent for help. In the alternative ending, the heroine

[2] The "terrible place" is defined as "a psychical location such as a house or specific room where trauma lives" (Spooner 220).

single-handedly kills her adversary, which allows for a dual interpretation. At first, the killing is seen as a physical act in which the heroine gains victory in a fight to the death. On the other hand, a metaphorical analysis can suggest that the act of killing is an overthrow of patriarchy and a deconstruction of the Victorian "angel in the house" stereotype. Ultimately, it can be said that the "final girl" trope was created to promote female empowerment as well as to shed light on the importance of equality. Based on the premise that female characters "are not simply battling an unkillable killer, [but] are [also] fighting against societal norms and expectations" (Spooner 22), the role of Wendy Torrance as the "final girl" in Stephen King's *The Shining* will be analyzed in further sub-chapters.

3. Subversion of Female Character(s) in *The Shining*

Stephen King's *The Shining* is a novel with a limited number of characters, a singular setting, and a one-season time frame. According to Tony Magistrale, *The Shining* "presents a microcosmic view of postmodern America, providing the reader with a journey to the center of a post-Watergate heart of darkness" (16). Following the established pattern of disclosing recurring social problems and trauma, King sheds light on domestic violence, addiction, gender roles, and the socioeconomic status of his characters. From the opening sequences of the novel, he accentuates the marginality of the character types, setting them in an "overlooked" place known as the Overlook Hotel. A linguistic analysis of the noun "overlook" suggests that it is either something estranged and isolated, like the building itself, or something constantly overlooked, such as discrimination, marginality, and abuse. As Magistrale contends, "*The Shining* is . . . a scathing critique of patriarchal abuses. In the male-centered universe of the Overlook, women, children, and ethnic minorities are subsequently disenfranchised and marginalized" (101).

Despite a limited number of characters portrayed in the novel, King creates a dominantly male-oriented atmosphere in which the hunter (father) and the prey (son) are simultaneously a danger, endangered, and in

need of rescue. It can be argued that the Overlook itself is an embodiment of a predatory male as it exclusively tends and nourishes the male characters, overlooking the female ones and turning their male counterparts against them. Another key aspect in understanding the subversion in *The Shining* is the omnipresent isolation that is universal and individual. The male character, Jack Torrance, shares the trauma with the other white male inhabitants, predominantly the former caretaker, whereas the female character, Wendy Torrance, is a solitary character. It can be said that Jack subconsciously relates to the other former male inhabitants of the Overlook as he admires their masculinity and ambition, whereas Wendy, Hallorann, and Danny present the weaker, vulnerable, and dependent characters who do not chase the ideals of the American dream:

> Jack Torrance is attracted to the dead white males that inhabit the Overlook for exactly the reasons that Wendy, Hallorann, and Danny are not: his core definition of masculinity is exclusively aligned with status, career, and access to the trappings of privileged success—prestige, money, women, alcohol, and a reckless—particularly American sense of masculine independence. (Magistrale 227)

As stated before, *The Shining* does not host a great number of characters but, rather, it hosts prototypes of characters that are societally and timelessly recognizable. The description of male characters, precisely Jack and Danny, is almost utterly devoid of their physical characteristics, and emphasis is placed on their inwardness. On the other hand, Wendy is described as blond and beautiful with the worries typical of an average wife and mother: "She hung the dish towel over the bar by the sink and went downstairs, buttoning the top two buttons of her house dress" (King, *The Shining* 25). King indicates Wendy's voicelessness and submissiveness through her inability to openly oppose Jack's ideas. Even though she is concerned about the future, from the outside, she appears confident and conforms to Jack's ideas: "If it's what your father wants, it's what I want" (King, *The Shining* 29).

Even though Wendy is not the only female character in the novel, she is by far the most prominent one. Through Jack's investigation of the hotel's basement and the initial stories of the former caretaker and his family, the readers are introduced to the Grady family and learn that Delbert Grady, the father, murdered his daughters with a hatchet and his wife with a shotgun (King, *The Shining* 21). Yet, there is no additional information about these female characters except for the fact that they were too fragile to save themselves and survive in the Overlook, which correlates with the portrayal of Wendy's submissiveness and dependence from the beginning of the story: "All of em up in the west wing on the third floor, froze solid. Too bad about the little girls. Eight and six, they was. Cute as cut-buttons. Oh, that was a hell of a mess" (King, *The Shining* 38). The next sections of this chapter will explore Wendy as a paradigmatic female character in *The Shining*. The first sub-chapter will examine Wendy as a traditional Gothic (female) character, focusing on her submission to the male characters and adherence to the expected gender roles, whereas the second sub-chapter will shed light on Wendy as a modern Gothic character, commonly known as the "final girl."

3.1. Wendy Torrance as a Traditional Gothic Character

According to Punter and Byron, Female characters in traditional Gothic writings "represent and investigate women's fears about a restrictive and sometimes threatening domestic space" in which they are voiceless and subjected to their male counterparts (212). In the same vein, Colavito argues that the Gothic genre thrives on male writings in which female characters are always ignored, controlled, and repressed, which leads to their inevitable *madness* (137).

In the introductory chapter of *The Shining*, the readers witness a conversation between Mr. Ullman and Jack, in which to Ullman's question, "I asked if your wife fully understood what you would be takin on here" (King, *The Shining* 9), Jack swiftly replies, "Wendy is an extraordinary woman" (King, *The Shining* 9). In the following chapter, it is noted that

Wendy is not aware of their situation but rather conforms to Jack's idea, believing that he is ultimately always right about everything, including the Overlook. At the end of the chapter, Wendy's true feelings are revealed in solitude, indicating her inability to share her fears with anyone. All the male characters are tone-deaf to her struggle, which corresponds to Colavito's interpretation of female anxiety among male characters. Colavito suggests that in the traditional Gothic, the female characters' destiny is to be ignored and that a woman is controlled, repressed, and threatened by a man, who will consequently proclaim her mad (137). Wendy's agonies and fears for the future indicate her fragile role in the marriage with Jack and her unwilling dependency on him as he is the epitome of toxic masculinity in the novel: "The tears which had threatened all day now came in a cloudburst and she leaned into the fragrant, curling steam of the tea and wept. In grief and loss for the past, and terror of the future" (King, *The Shining* 30).

The indication that the Torrances are a patriarchal family becomes obvious when Wendy reveals her husband's propensity for domestic violence: "The handwriting on the wall was brutal but clear. Her husband was a lush. He had a bad temper; one he could no longer keep wholly under control now that he was drinking so heavily and his writing was going so badly" (King, *The Shining* 70).[3] In line with the traditional woman's role in a patriarchal family, Wendy Torrance remains obedient to her husband, even though he is prone to domestic violence: "Accidentally or not accidentally, he had broken Danny's arm" (King, *The Shining* 70). As a victim confronted with "trauma related stimuli that elicits fear and anxiety" (Barlow 66), Wendy ceaselessly produces excuses for Jack's behavior, even though she does not believe in them and holds both himself and herself accountable for past events: "Now she hesitated again. . . . 'Your

[3] According to Kelly Jones, with the rise of modern Gothic writings, places of torture, such as dungeons, dark passages, castles, and corridors have been abandoned and exchanged for more familiar sceneries. In the contemporary Gothic, domestic homes are shown as sites of disruption and deconstruction of harmony—scenes of narcotics abuse, violence, and open vulnerability and fear (171–72).

daddy . . . sometimes he does things he's sorry for later. Sometimes he doesn't think the way he should. That doesn't happen very often, but sometimes it does'" (King, *The Shining* 28). In response to Jack's violence, alcoholism, and abuse, Wendy considers divorce but never manages to vocalize it. It can be said that Wendy's inability to abandon Jack confirms her role of a subjected and dependent female character in the novel: "That memory was already faded, but the memory of the DIVORCE thoughts was clear and terrifying. It had been mostly around his mommy that time, and he had been in constant terror that she would pluck out the word from her brain and drag it out of her mouth, making it real" (King, *The Shining* 43). Wendy's inability to leave Jack presents a paradox in itself as the character tries not to break the union that is already broken. More precisely, the domestic harmony is broken from the moment Jack hit Danny, but somehow Wendy's concept of it is not altered. In a true traditional Gothic manner, the heroine is convinced that her act would be considered the breaking point, due to which she remains passive. In his analysis of the domestic atmosphere in *The Shining*, Magistrale suggests that the Torrance family mirrors the image of modern America, where "alcoholism and drug abuse suggest all the symptoms of social decay and all the modes of self-destruction" (93), which irrevocably distorts the family as a union.

In the chapter symbolically called *Night Thoughts*, Wendy's past becomes known to the reader. It is disclosed that Wendy's mother blames Wendy for the parents' divorce: ". . . her mother drove her from the house, told her never to come back, that if she wanted to go somewhere she could go to her father since she had been responsible for the divorce" (King, *The Shining* 68). In a sense, "divorce" is not only an intrusive word that frightens Danny the most, but it is also the word that impacts Wendy, as she bears the feelings of guilt for the divorce of her parents. Wendy's disturbed relationship with her mother haunts the present situation: "Even after the accident—if you could call it an accident—she had not been able to bring it all the way out, to admit that her marriage was a lop-

sided defeat" (King, *The Shining* 74). The complexity of the mother-daughter-gothic (anti)hero stems from the patriarchal framework, in which the mother figure may dislike the hero but still wishes for her daughter to conform to expected gender normativity, which corresponds to the (anti)hero's desires: "The Gothic hero-villain and the mother may be said to do the same work as both police the daughter's behavior according to patriarchal prescriptions. While the mother tends to police indirectly, the hero-villain does so more directly. Despite their different modus [sic] operandi, both threaten the protagonist's identity and autonomy" (Davidson 94–95). Moreover, the fact that Wendy's home is built on family secrets, familial violence, and domestic claustrophobia defines Wendy as a married woman who has "no separate legal, social, or economic identity apart from her husband's" (Heller 256).

Wendy's arrival and the events *before the danger* in the Overlook present the ultimate stage in which she can be characterized as a traditional Gothic character. According to Massé, female Gothic characters always dwell between the father's and the husband's house, making them subject to the male-oriented setting and trauma that stems from it: "In the 'real' world of the frame, the woman can exist only in relation to another—usually as a daughter in the beginning and as a bride at the end" (681). In the female Gothic, every house becomes haunted as it projects "the imprisonment and vulnerability of women within structures purportedly designed for or devoted to their safety, especially the family home" (Bailey 273). Anxiety concerning the Overlook increases as Wendy observes harmonious nature that is almost shattered by the view of pointy and sharp mountains: "They were beautiful mountains but they were hard. She did not think they would forgive many mistakes. An unhappy foreboding rose in her throat" (King, *The Shining* 87). It can be suggested that the harmonious nature equalizes domestic bliss from the outside, whereas the pointy mountains suggest a threat that lurks and is merciless, just as her husband is. Coupled with the fear of the unknown, be it in the Overlook or in her marriage, Wendy's arrival at the Overlook is presented with

swirling thoughts concerning Danny's safety: "But what would happen up here if Danny had one of his fainting spells and swallowed his tongue? . . . What if the place caught on fire?" (King, *The Shining* 103). The tensions start rising as Jack becomes subjected to the Overlook and hypersensitive to Wendy's concerns and questions: "At times she could be the stupidest bitch . . . 'Want some water?' she asked brightly. (No I just want you to GET THE FUCK OUT OF HERE!)" (King, *The Shining* 232).

As the action reaches its climax, Wendy Torrance becomes torn between what patriarchy expects from her and what she expects of herself. While a confrontation with Jack signalizes the disruption of an ostensibly stable family, passivity prolongs her agony and puts Danny at greater risk. It should be noted that Wendy is the only character in the novel that neither possesses special powers nor is subjected to the horrors in the Overlook. Following this, Wendy's role as a female character is equally meaningless in her paternal home, in her home with Jack, as it is in the Overlook, which King constructs as "the apotheosis of the Bad Place" (King, *Danse Macabre* 246–47), where "universal forces collide, and the inner weather mimics the outer weather" (King, *Danse Macabre* 260). It can be said that King's idea to set the novel in a place "where the residue of past evils exerts its potency upon the present" (Cardin 637) forces and reshapes the characters in order to prepare them for their ultimate confrontation. As such, Wendy Torrance's metamorphosis to the "final girl" metaphorically divides the novel into two parts: *before the danger* and *during/after the danger*.

3.2. Wendy Torrance as the "Final Girl"

Kyle Christensen defines the modern "final girl" as a not inherently feminist character who breaks the gender expectations of fragile femininity and stands for "female empowerment and determination" (24–25). The significance of the "final girl" in Gothic writings indicates a cultural reset in which female characters can overpower monsters and tyrannical men, who are often portrayed in a similarly predatory manner. An overly vio-

lent, merciless, and male-like behavior that defies the expected fragility and the angelic portrayal of women in literature suggests the ultimate response of the "final girl" trope to the inevitable female *madness*[4] in Gothic literature.

Wendy's psychological and physical transformation occurs in a progressive manner as Jack starts identifying himself with the Overlook. The echoing sentence "(This inhuman place makes human monsters. This inhuman place) . . . (makes human monsters)" (King, *The Shining* 190) stands as a warning to all characters, especially Wendy and Jack, who will soon be deprived of their humanlike traits and be transformed into the worst and merciless versions of themselves. Jack's agitation with the voiceless and almost characterless Wendy culminates when she starts disrupting his male-exclusive unity with the Overlook: "She was prying, just the way she had always pried and poked at him. . . . Where are you going, Jack? When will you be back? How much money do you have with you? . . . Will one of you stay sober? On and on. She had, pardon the expression, driven him to drink" (King, *The Shining* 231).

King's introduction to the final action in the novel starts with the chapter "Snowbound." The characters become deprived of the rest of the world and entirely dependent on themselves. Jack's delirium has gotten worse, as the Overlook whispers monstruous things to him: "—kill him. You have to kill him, Jacky, and her, too. . . . Because they'll always be conspiring against you, trying to hold you back and drag you down. . . . I'll go with you while you give him his medicine . . . You must kill him. You have to kill him, Jacky, and her, too" (King, *The Shining* 295). Even though Wendy does not hear the Overlook, she starts anxiously observing Jack's every move, unable to distinguish harm from accident: "'What? Wendy, what the hell are you t—'Don't you touch him [Danny]! I'll kill you if you lay your hands on him again!' 'Wendy—' 'You bastard!'" (King, *The Shining* 301). The ostensibly secure family dynamic degenerates

[4] According to Colavito, female *madness* is the inevitable nonconformist female character trait in male Gothic writings (137).

as Jack starts seeing his family as a threat to his happiness (see Cardin 909) and Wendy starts seeing Jack as a predatory man who is foremost a danger to her unprotected child. When Wendy is separated from Jack, she starts considering her options, and the readers get an extensive access into her mind for the first time through a monologue which opens *during the danger* epoch: "Jack had done this, she had no doubt of it. His denials meant nothing to her. . . . But what was she going to do about it? She couldn't stay locked in here forever. They would have to eat" (King, *The Shining* 302). From this point, Wendy abandons the formulaic role of a traditional female character and becomes as equally present and dynamic as her male counterpart and oppressor, Jack.

Jack's monologue after the peaceful night's sleep unravels the chain of unstoppable violent episodes as he itches "to pounce on her, seize her neck . . . and to throttle her, thumbs on windpipe, . . . jerking her head up and ramming it back down against the floorboards, again and again, whamming, whacking, smashing, crashing" (King, *The Shining* 348). It can be said that even though desire came "up from nowhere, naked and unadorned" (King, *The Shining* 348), it was rooted in the novel from the very beginning. Wendy's transformation to a monstruous hero[5] happens suddenly as the realization occurs that she either must find a way to defeat the source of her monstrosity (Clover 4) or embrace the death of her child: "(*If I have to, I'll take him farther up. If we're going to die I'd rather do it in the mountains.*) She had left the butcher knife, still wrapped in the towel, under the bed. She kept her hand close to it. They dozed off and on. The hotel creaked around them" (King, *The Shining* 421). According to Rusnak, the moment in which the "final girl" prepares or takes up her weapon and arms herself indicates her willingness to abdicate the fragility of womanhood and marks her becoming a worthy opponent to the mon-

[5] The monstrous hero, a term attributed to King's *Carrie*, refers to an oppressed female character who suddenly becomes monstruous for the sole purpose of protecting herself. This type of character is characterized by an unimaginable tendency towards violence that can make her almost demonic and merciless towards the antagonist(s) (Clover 4).

struous male (126). It should be noted that despite her willingness to kill Jack to save herself and Danny, Wendy does not hate him. Jack Torrance is the embodiment of constant duality in *The Shining* as his diametrically opposed behavior reflects the overall action and relations between the characters. Based on this, Wendy is in a constant state of panic, whereby her salvation depends on the ability to properly differentiate Jack's personality shifts from the danger that comes from them. Jack is, firstly, her beloved husband and, secondly, a monster from the Overlook. It is her intellectual superiority that allows her to separate Jack's two forms and decide that the first one must be sacrificed in order to escape the second one.

Before the final confrontation occurs, Wendy reminisces about her former life with Jack and Danny. Despite being aware that it is either her and Danny or Jack and the Overlook, Wendy doubts her role as the "final girl" since, notwithstanding the life-threatening situation in which she is forced to react, she still struggles with the idea that she will be the one who will ruin the family union for good: "Her hand found the handle of the knife and she began to go down. She had seen the end of her marriage many times, in divorce, in Jack's death at the scene of a drunken car. . . . But she had never envisioned herself prowling halls and staircases like a nervous felon, with a knife clasped in one hand to use against Jack" (King, *The Shining* 469). In light of this, one can note that in contrast to male Gothic characters, female characters in Gothic narratives do not strive to become heroes. Through Wendy's character, King demonstrates that female heroism comes imposed, without glorification and as the ultimate resource for salvation:

> What would she do if he came at her right now, she wondered. . . . Would she stand frozen with terror, or was there enough of the primal mother in her to fight him for her son until one of them was dead? She didn't know. The very thought made her sick—made her feel that her whole life had been a long and easy dream to lull her helplessly into this waking nightmare. She was soft. When trouble came, she slept. Her past was unremarkable. She

> had never been tried in fire. Now the trial was upon her, not fire but ice, and she would not be allowed to sleep through this. Her son was waiting for her upstairs. (King, *The Shining* 471)

During the final confrontation with Jack, Wendy takes two positions. At first, she is seen as a mediator that verbally tries to encourage Jack to leave the Overlook and save their child and marriage. As her attempt is met with agitation and violence, Wendy concludes: "He was going to kill her, and then he was going to kill Danny. Then maybe the hotel would be satisfied and allow him to kill himself. Just like that other caretaker" (King, *The Shining* 476). As Jack attacks Wendy, the remaining idea of the existing family is shattered for good. As Wendy alone looks death in the face (West 48), she temporarily overpowers the monster: "Sightlessly, with the last of her strength, she groped for the bottle's neck and found it, feeling the greasy beads of wax against her hand. . . . She brought it up and then down, praying for aim, knowing that if it only struck his shoulder or upper arm she was dead" (King, *The Shining* 478). Having this in mind, Magistrale sheds light on Wendy's role as a female in the male-oriented Hotel, indicating that her resourcefulness was undermined, as was her maternal strength (210). As the hunt continues, Wendy's neglected intelligence, alongside her inhuman strength, plays a crucial part in deflecting Jack's assault: "Wendy pushed the pantry door open with her knee, hardly noticing the pungent odor of dried fruit that wafted out. She picked up Jack's feet again and dragged him in" (King, *The Shining* 483). As the action reaches its climax, Wendy and Jack clash one last time. Even though Jack manages to strike Wendy multiple times with the mallet, she does not rest until her child is safe: "She heard the mallet whistle through the air and then agony exploded on her right side as the mallet-head took her just below the line of her breasts, breaking two ribs" (King, *The Shining* 513).[6]

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[6] King's vivid description of the unpunished domestic violence and his heroine's efforts to survive in an exclusively patriarchal and voiceless marriage shed light on this pertinent contemporary issue:

Ultimately, Hallorann's arrival indicates Wendy Torrance's final stage towards becoming the "final girl" as it demonstrates Wendy's willingness to accept outside help because she cannot contribute anymore to the oppressor's destruction. Moreover, the acceptance of the help does not weaken her character but, rather, suggests that she has managed to survive and hurt "the monster," keeping it contained, so that it cannot harm anyone else. Even though she does not always fit the "final girl" trope, Wendy's limitless motherly love and determination to survive despite an almost non-existent chance of survival place her in this category. This is also confirmed in the epilogue chapter, which reveals Wendy Torrance as a renewed character, entirely different from her former self:

> But the change was more than that. She looked older, and some of the laughter had gone out of her face. Now, as she sat reading her book, Hallorann saw a grave sort of beauty there that had been missing on the day he had first met her, some nine months ago. Then she had still been mostly girl. Now she was a woman, a human being who had been dragged around to the dark side of the moon and had come back able to put the pieces back together. But those pieces, Hallorann thought, they never fit just the same way again. Never in this world. (King, *The Shining* 573)

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, through her gradual transgression from an entirely traditional female character to its modern version, the "final girl," the character of Wendy Torrance from Stephen King's horror novel *The Shining* illuminates the evolution of the female role in Gothic literature. At first,

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> And as she caught sight of her own blood-smeared, horrified face in the medicine cabinet mirror, she was glad. She had never believed that children should be witness to the little quarrels of their parents. And perhaps the thing that was now raving through the bedroom, overturning things and smashing them, would finally collapse before it could go after her son. Perhaps, she thought, it might be possible for her to inflict even more damage on it . . . kill it, perhaps. (King, *The Shining* 529)

Wendy is portrayed as a selfless character entirely dependent on the life she has built with her abusive and alcoholic husband, Jack. Yet, once the Torrances have moved to the isolated Overlook, Wendy's disturbed relationships in her parental home as well as Jack's tendency towards violence and her concomitant trauma come to light. It is the exclusively male-oriented Overlook setting that triggers Wendy's metamorphosis into the "final girl." As the Torrances' stay at the Overlook brings about Jack's penchant for domestic violence and his patriarchal tendencies, Wendy abandons her former "angel in the house" traits and reinvents herself as a force-driven monstruous hero. In the ultimate conflict, Wendy—the "final girl"—with the help of an outsider destroys the physical and psychological "monster" and saves herself and her child but is never able to recover her former self.

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