

# **Desire and the Rake in Contemporary Historical Romance**

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# Abstract

This dissertation explores desire for the rake in the contemporary historical romance genre. By locating this figure in the context of its setting and the readerly desires of contemporary audiences, I conclude that the character of the rake always undergoes a transformation, either domesticated by marriage or undergoing some form of maturation. The reformation of the rake can be seen as a model plot in historical romance novels. The rake transformation plot often hinges on a particular narrative moment. The dissertation draws on the work of O'Connell, Mackie, Cooper and Shorts in this area, but is novel in its focus on transformation. It asks what the key components are that create this figure along with key influences that propel the rake's behaviour in these novels. It examines the performance of rakishness, and the ways in which 'unknowability' helps to ensnare female characters as it offers the possibility of a) peeling back the psychological layers of the character to find the man beneath and b) reforming the rake character. Each chapter focuses predominantly on one novel from this genre: *When He Was Wicked* (2004) by Julia Quinn, *Devil in Winter* (2006) by Lisa Kleypas and *Almost Heaven* (1990) by Judith McNaught. The dissertation demonstrates that this genre is a rich storehouse of information about gendered cultural desire, figurations of desirable masculinity, and the centring of male experience even in fiction understood as having a female audience.

## Introduction: The Rake and Romance

This dissertation explores the literary desire for the dark, dangerous, and brooding rake in historical romance fiction of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The ‘rake’, a term which is short for rakehell, was a ‘fashionable or stylish man of dissolute or promiscuous habits’ (OED). Heroes such as Mr Rochester from Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) and the Byronic hero inspired by Lord Byron (1788–1824) have laid the groundwork for such dark, cynical, and self-destructive males, and have become a recurring theme in contemporary romance fiction. I investigate the persistent attraction for this questionable hero that appears in contemporary historical novels. My project focuses on the works of Lisa Kleypas (from 2004 to 2008), Judith McNaught (from 1987 to 1989) and Julia Quinn (from 2000 to 2006), as well as adaptations, to locate, contextualise and interpret this character and the qualities he possesses which transform an enigmatic and callous attitude into a desirable anti-hero. The novels I explore are set between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the Regency and Victorian periods. From *Almost Heaven* (1990) by Judith McNaught to *Devil in Winter* (2006) by Lisa Kleypas, these novels describe the male lead directly as a ‘rake’.

The figure of the rake evolved from the ‘culturally mythic outlaw status he shares with other Restoration and eighteenth-century types such as the pirate and highwayman’ (Mackie, 2005, p. 35). The Restoration rake embodied characteristics of men who transgressed the norms of society: an outlaw. However, similar historical figures have been present as early as the eleventh century. One key motivation for this project is to demonstrate this genre as a rich storehouse of information about gendered cultural desire and figurations of desirable masculinity. Reading contemporary romance fiction in this way draws on and reasserts Fletcher’s conclusion that ‘love and romance are inherently citational’. These novels

offer readers ‘a performative understanding of the patterns of romance, the formation and reformation of the heterosexual romantic subject’. Like Fletcher’s work, this dissertation also considers ‘the difficult relationship between history and romance’ (Fletcher, 2008, p. 151).

The primary focus of this figure is to provide pleasure for the women they seduce, though this may be for a short period of time. This includes figures such as Lord Byron who had been notoriously described as ‘mad, bad and dangerous to know’ by his lover Lady Caroline Lamb (Pennavaria, 2004, p. 130). These descriptions of Byron have only increased his popularity, and the allure surrounding him is due to his scandalous nature and his unrepentant attitude towards his actions. He was bold and enigmatic from the way he dressed and carried himself to his many public affairs. His relationship with Lady Caroline Lamb ended after a few months and ‘not only did Byron use [a] letter to end the affair by informing Lamb that he had a new lover, but he wrote the letter on paper that bore that lover's heraldic crest’ (Tuite, 2007, p 66). Even his indiscretions were a performance, and the allure of this original bad boy are discussed further in the chapters, setting up Byron as an archetype for the rake in romance novels. His reputation was that of a celebrity; he had countless women vying for his attention. The women who wrote letters to him thought of him as a ‘fascinating individual with whom they had been able to connect on a subjective level. Writing to him was a way of continuing and intensifying that connection’ (Mole, 2008, p. 347). The enigma only made him more sought out by women and desirable. As I explore, contemporary romances include this type of ‘fascinating’ rake.

Despite his sexual appeal, the Byronic hero is socially ostracised; he is normally viewed as arrogant, attractive and emotionally conflicted. These are also typical traits that can be seen as influencing the character of the rake and where writers have drawn inspiration

from. This is ‘a man proud, moody, cynical, with defiance on his brow, and misery in his heart, a scorner of his kind, implacable in revenge, yet capable of deep and strong affection [...] the Byronic hero is not dissociated from earlier heroes but is rather a continuation of them’ (Palfy, 2016, p. 164). There are more anti-hero traits than heroic, however, and the desire for such a character is what fuels the popularity even to this day. The possibility of reformation of the rake outweighs the negative characteristics, and the rake can also be viewed as not disassociated from the Byronic hero but rather a continuation. Byron, much like Ian in McNaught’s *Almost Heaven*, held little regard for societal conventions: ‘Scandalous celebrity translates crime into transgression, notoriety into fame. Stendhal’s account of his meeting with Byron illuminates how this process works by dramatizing another key rite of scandalous celebrity: the modeling and adjudication of social transgression’ (Tuite, 2004, p. 61). Byron’s violent nature towards his wife should have made him a despised individual however, all his negative traits only added to the danger of knowing him. Furthermore, the desire for the rake and a sense of danger could be seen as the appeal for women and their repressed sexual desires: ‘Terry Castle has observed that the mythic figure of the transgressive male rake, of the man ruled by his desire for women, offered for some nineteenth-century women “a way ‘into’ their own transgressive desire: the one kind of sexual unorthodoxy sanctioned the other”’ (Cowgill, 1998, p. 63). This brush with danger and exploring the unknown is the attraction/fulfilment that both the characters in the text and the readers of the text are drawn to. This dissertation analyses this appeal, and also the ostensible and implicit moral teachings of the domestication of the rake. Apparently, ‘rakes must be tamed, libertines must be reclaimed, and the laws of society constructed to contain and control sexuality must triumph for the good of all’ (Cowgill, 1998, p. 55). Though the women are seemingly progressive and actively exploring their sexuality, these novels still constrict them in regard to heterosexuality/heteronormativity and marriage.

This dissertation explores, via three central novels, ideas about the rake as a husband; the narrative inevitability of the transformation of the rake; and whether such transformations are only available to male characters. This necessarily leads to consideration of the construction of female characters in contemporary historical romance fiction and the transformation of the female lead in tandem with the development of the character of the rake. The rake should be understood as a masculine character type that only finds meaning in relation to female characters, but he also organises the features of the characters orbiting around him. My research responds to Cooper and Shorts' work *The Female Figure in Contemporary Historical Romance* (2012). This investigates the importance of the female figure and desire within contemporary historical romance. It also considers contemporary audiences and their conception of sexual power in female characters living in the Regency and Victorian period. I apply this research to my selected novels to view the agency of female characters and their role in reforming the rake – both within the individual narratives and as a cultural figure. I look at how my selected novels explain the characters' desire for these dark and dangerous figures in determining what the 'pleasure of the rake' entails.

The dissertation also explores the female gaze in romance fiction and how the figure of the rake is fetishized through the descriptions of his body and through being sexualised by the female protagonist and reader. As Henderson notes such a gaze 'can be used by writers and readers to look at narratives from a perspective that sees women as subjects instead of objects. Applying a female gaze to discourses that have traditionally been male-dominated opens new avenues of interpretation that are empowering from a feminist perspective' (Henderson, 2018). The power that the female protagonist obtains contributes to her transformation of the rake which is a key aspect that will be discussed further. This

subversion of power offers a new perspective in the enjoyment of the text. Women are writing for female pleasure and constructing these male figures for their objectification.

Gender performativity is one of the underpinning theoretical approaches of this dissertation. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity is relevant to this research as the rake is an evolving, differential (rather than essential) character who undergoes a transformation during a pivotal moment in his relationship with the female figure. Though the figure of the rake is traditionally understood as an essentially masculine character with a wholly male frame of reference, there are moments where, for instance, Sebastian is seen exploring the female experience. This insight leads on to a discussion of masculinity and what this means to a modern-day readership. Diego Saglia's chapter in *Performing Masculinity* (2010) is an important influence on this aspect of the dissertation's analysis. He explores Lord Byron's sexuality and how he was perceived by society at the time. His body was not overtly masculine, and he also had homosexual relations which only added to his appeal and enigma.

Lisa O'Connell's exploration of the characteristics of the libertine, the rake and the dandy along with their personae is also significant to my research. This critical source discusses the fundamental characteristics of the rake as being notorious and gossiped about in society for his scandalous behaviour. O'Connell also discusses marriage as being the worst enemy of the rake which is of structural importance within the contemporary romance novels as marriage is what takes away the power of rake and domesticates his character. She analyses how this figure from the mid-eighteenth century undergoes a reformation in the narrative which ultimately brings the story to a close. This reiterates that marriage and



conforming to the rules of society is the ostensible moral of the story: this is what makes a happy ending.

In *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* (2003), Pamela Regis outlines elements frequently associated with this genre, and attempts to critically recuperate it. Regis explains that this popularity is due to a sense of intrigue and escapism; the readers of the romance novel often see themselves in the story and take the place of the female character. Regis explains how romance novel tropes such as ‘a happy ending’ and the linear development of love between the hero and heroine means that the reader ‘projects themselves into the story’ and ‘becomes the heroine’ (Regis, 2003, p. 22). This ‘projection’ is significant to the readers experience as it gives them an escape and they are able to undergo this in the safe haven of the past.

Goodreads is the largest site for readers to share and review books. It allows them to rate stories they have read and offer their opinions. When entering the term ‘rake’ in the Goodreads listing search engine, the contemporary popularity of the rake in contemporary historical romance novels can be immediately seen in listings titled ‘Best Rogue/Rake Romance Books,’ ‘Lords, Dukes, Rakes...Oh my!,’ and ‘Wicked Heroes Historical Romance’ (Rake Book Lists, 2022). The romance genre and its popularity has been widespread over the years and there are many elements that make this a success. These novels are relatable and hold elements of fantasy which has created a worldwide fanbase: ‘In the year 2000, 2,289 romances were released. In that same year, 55.9 percent of popular paperback fiction sold in North America was popular romance [...] as the twentieth century progressed the romance novel in its popular form eventually dominated the fiction market’ (Regis, 2003, p. 108). The popularity has only increased, and it can be understood that the

formulation of these narratives offers something to the reader that their daily lives are unable to fulfil.

Lauren Berlant discusses that the female protagonist of the novel plays a role in self-empowering the audience. She uses Janice Radway's research on the romance novel to explore how the genre itself is not just a frivolous story for consumption but has serious themes: 'From this she concludes that by reading romances women enter a discursive realm in which reading becomes not only source of pleasure and knowledge but also the real and potential catalyst for personal and political change' (Berlant, 1987, p. 347). Here reading romance novels can create a change and impact real lives in the process. She proceeds to argue that the needs of the reader require fulfilling and this genre has the components to make this happen. They provide an escape 'because they are unfulfilled in their daily lives. Because they are "emotionally needy," they need to escape: bills, bands, children, and the generic "pressures" of daily life' (Berlant, 1987, p. 347). The promise of a happy ending helps readers to receive fulfilment from their otherwise busy and tiresome lives.

There are many definitions of the romance novel and what this genre means. Fuchs argues that 'Romance is one of the modes that features a superior hero' (Fuchs, 2004, p. 5). This hero is the driving force of the narrative. I will explore how the rake and his reformation is what the narrative focuses on. She also explores the type of characters and their social status in the narrative. This concludes that 'romance generally involves aristocratic protagonists, or ones who are miraculously revealed as such after living a lower-class existence, in a kind of "blood will tell" move in which social status is ultimately disclosed (Fuchs, 2004, p. 6). This relates to the social status of the rake and how this impacts the way

he is perceived in the novel. When the rake has this power in society it only adds to his appeal and is a key characteristic of the rake.

Each of the novels in this dissertation follow the recognisable progression of the romance novel, as outlined by Wood: 'in novels with heterosexual women protagonists, the most common narrative revolves around a heroine's personal conflict over her attraction to a man' (Wood, 2014, p. 382). Wood also describes the 'model narrative formula' that mid-century popular fiction follows, which is applicable to these romances:

1. *New Scene*: The heroine is single and socially isolated, or, she feels alienated by a current relationship. She encounters a new social context.
2. *Encounters*: She encounters an attractive man.
3. *Heat and Smolder*: They are attracted to each other. The heroine resists and repels him, or, they are physically intimate.
4. *Cold Shoulder*: She retreats, but recognizes the attraction. Or, they mutually acknowledge attraction and remain separate out of obligation.
5. *Reaction*: She decides to secure his affection, sometimes after a display of tenderness by the hero.
6. *Violence and Turmoil*: One of the lovers professes love, but a violent event or turmoil mars their reunion.
7. *New Ground*: Her relationship status is ambiguous, but she is resolute. Or, the heroine and hero are reunited and the novel ends happily.

(Wood, 2014, p. 383)

Not only do these steps drive the progression of the relationship between the rake and the female protagonist, as this dissertation goes on to explore, they reveal why the rake is so important to the romance genre: he certainly provides the element of smoulder to this model, and his bad behaviour either manifests as him offering the cold shoulder or the female protagonist retreating. His reputation and behaviour provide the violence and turmoil, and the promise of ‘new ground’, of the rake’s rehabilitation, are what continue to draw readers to these mad, bad and dangerous characters.

The romance novel focuses on both the male and female experience. Though fiction is understood as having a female audience, these novels offer both genders importance so they can build their relationship and bring the novel to a resolution: ‘It is not a heroine-centered genre, as the male and female protagonist must occupy equal importance in the story. The popular romance is our living descendant of the tradition of amour courtois, courtly love, in that it considers romantic love an ennobling, transcendent force’ (Harzewski, 2011, p. 26). This dissertation explores the figuration of desirable masculinity and the male experience in the chosen texts. The rake will be explored in this context, as well as his development and transformation. Regis also discusses the development of the romance novel and ‘how the hero is much more in evidence, much more a part of the action’ (Regis, 2003, p. 111). The rake embodies a presence that holds both the power of the narrative and shows his journey in being domesticated. The structure of the romance novel is explored and how the happily ever after at the end of the novel is a crucial and defining moment in the couple’s relationship.

Elements such as danger and predatory behaviour adds to the appeal of the bad boy stereotype seen in twenty-first-century society such as Christian Gray of *Fifty Shades of Gray* (2012) by E.L. James and Hardin Scott from *After* (2014) by Anna Todd. Writers such as

Kristen Ashley and Lynda Chance have also been praised for their overtly ‘Alpha Male’ heroes. These novels tend to follow the similar tropes of a sexually experienced and irresistible hero falling in love with a shy and inexperienced heroine who ultimately domesticates him. It also displays that though women in contemporary romance do display the need for complete independence and liberation, a man who exudes power and control can also be seen as sexually appealing: ‘it may be that, for some, the more theatrical fantasies of sexual surrender offer a release, a vacation, an escape from the dreariness and hard work of equality’ (Levine, 2015, p. 16). In other words, even readers whose politics do not align with desire for a character like the rake can still submit to the fantasy, such is the power of the romance genre.

The first chapter analyses the rake, Michael Stirling, in *When He Was Wicked* (2004) by Julia Quinn, and his relationship with Francesca Bridgerton. In the second chapter, I examine the transformation of the rake in *Devil in Winter* by Lisa Kleypas (2006). The dissertation finally explores the character of Ian Thornton in *Almost Heaven* (1990) by Judith McNaught. Each chapter locates the figure of the rake in the context of their historical setting and explores the figure’s enduring appeal.

# Chapter 1: A ‘terrifying sinner’: the Colonial rake in *When He Was Wicked* by Julia Quinn

When Michael Stirling damns himself ‘to hell’ by declaring his love for his cousin’s wife in Julia Quinn’s *When He Was Wicked* (2004), he demonstrates the performance of rakishness, ‘waving one of his arms through the air like a showman’ (Quinn, 2004, p. 317). When he leans in close to Francesca during this performance, it is ‘uncomfortably close’. Even his smile is ‘terrifying’ as he asks her, ‘Are you scared yet?’ (Quinn, 2004, p. 317). Exciting but dangerous, passionate but terrifying: this is Quinn’s rake. This chapter discusses the figure of the rake in this novel, in particular, the character and context of Michael Stirling.

*When He Was Wicked* (2004) by Julia Quinn tells the story of the sixth Bridgerton sibling Francesca. This is Michael and Francesca’s love story. Francesca starts off married to Michael’s cousin John who is the Earl of Kilmartin. Michael is secretly in love with her, but she views him as nothing but a friend. Once John dies, both Francesca and Michael struggle to cope with this loss and consumed with guilt Michael moves to India. When he returns, he is notably different and his and Francesca’s story begins.

This chapter explores the idea about reforming the rake and the key moment that this transformation takes place. It discusses the expectations of gender in the Regency period and what this means for contemporary readers identifying with the Regency heroine. Also, whether the expectations are limiting and what this means for society today. It will discuss about the rake finding power and control in India and this being another kind of

transformation both emotionally and economically. I will explore what makes Michael explicitly a rake in the novel. This will be through his descriptions along with what society perceives him to be. The chapter will then look at the time period that the novel is set in and discuss the importance of virginity in the Regency period along with the differing expectations when it came to being a male or female. The next part will touch upon the significance of heterosexuality in these stories and what the implications of this are along with what gender norms are expected for men and women. The romance genre and what drives this narrative structure will be looked at in this novel. The chapter will also be discussing the transformation of the rake including his visit to India and what changes on his return. Finally, the chapter will look at the epistolary form the novel is written in and how this impacts the relationship between Michael and Francesca.

The reformation of the rake was seen to be some form of a challenge that women embarked upon as they wanted to be the one to make him marry for love, which was an unlikely endeavour. Thomas's account in *Ainsworth's Magazine* (1854) explains how the reformed rake would make the best husband and this passage is structured as a persuasive guide explaining what the benefits are for both the rake and the female who is trying to reform him. 'For when such a man, recovering from the fever of intemperance, which prostrated more completely than the malarian blight...when the tear of a poignant contrition rises in the abashed eye...he finds a pitying hand ready to dry that tear...' (Thomas, 1854, p. 332). This can be seen as encouraging the reformation of the rake, as once he is regretful for his actions, he will make a better and appreciative husband to the woman who has helped him in this journey to redemption.

Stirling is introduced in the novel as a 'sinner': he no longer attends church, believing that he has no chance at redemption and no prayers can salvage his soul (Quinn, 2014, p. 4).

Quinn portrays him as the ultimate flirt and seducer. However, while he is with various women, the novel reveals that he is, in fact, distracting himself from the woman he is really in love with: Francesca - betrothed to his cousin, John. He appeases himself with the knowledge that he has, at least, never seduced a virgin, and justifies his relations with married women because their husbands are 'rotters' (Quinn, 2014, p. 5). Virginity was reputationally important during the period of the novel's setting, with pre-marital sex 'a risky activity for women in Regency England. The reputation of women, though not of men, was lost among respectable society if their sexual activity outside of marriage became known' (Bailey, 2015, p. 3). Any indication of sex before marriage would cause a scandal, making it difficult for women to find a good match when it came to marriage. For men, on the other hand, this was no barrier. Men 'were not only excused from but expected to have premarital sex, and adultery was also normalized—so long as all of these pre- and extra- marital relations were with lower-class women' (Gevlin, 2020, p. 1060). The normalisation of this promiscuity by men with women who were lower class or prostitutes reinforced both gender and class hierarchies; sexual politics were social politics.

Francesca, who is the main female protagonist of the novel, describes Michael's smile as 'wicked and devilish', part of 'why half the *ton* - the female half, that was - fancied themselves in love with him, even with no fortune or title to his name' (Quinn, 2004, p. 24). These anti-heroic traits produce an enigmatic character who, in turn, contributes to the suspense of the narrative. The insistence that it is the 'female half' who feel desire for Stirling indicates the heteronormativity of the figure of the rake in romance fiction. In another of Quinn's novels, for instance, *The Viscount Who Loved Me* (2000), Anthony Bridgerton is an infamous rake who is paired with Kate Sheffield; she labours to keep him away from her sister due to his rakish tendencies. Not only do the novels anticipate female desire for the male rake – they assume that *all* women will find him irresistible: In Foucault's model 'the



compulsory pronouncement of heterosexuality as the natural, sane, and legal norm by society predetermined the existence of two complementary genders, masculine and feminine, as the expressions of human identities that guarantee and safeguard heterosexuality and with it the traditional family and procreation' (Emig et al., 2010, p. 4). Other novels discussed later in the dissertation make clear that heterosexual desire is the main driving force for the fascination of this figure.

In *When He Was Wicked*, Francesca's husband, John, is the Earl of Kilmartin, whereas Michael does not hold a title and is not financially secure. Though no woman, it seems, would deny her desire for this rake, the broader Regency society represented in the novel still emphasised the importance of marrying into a respectable family; desire for the rake thus brings the added danger of a fall in social standing – he is appealing for a short adventure or exploration, but not for marriage. Francesca is thus told by her family that 'it's one thing to marry an Earl of Kilmartin. It's quite another when it's his impoverished cousin' (Quinn, 2004, p. 39). Michael Stirling does eventually become the Earl of Kilmartin after the death of his cousin John and after his widow Francesca miscarries; the narrative treats Francesca somewhat cruelly to affect the central male character's rise to power in the context of primogeniture. The rake is more powerful once he takes the title and enters the marriage market of the season. Being powerful and dynamic are characteristics of the rake; however, when establishing a relationship with the female figure this power begins to dissipate which weakens his character. Both the rake and the female character weaken as they begin to mould into what society expects of them and this ultimately leads to marriage.

Quinn explores the differences between desire (as an impulse) and marriage (as an institution) in her novel, with the rake representing desire and, ultimately, its domestication. In the novel's period setting, desire was not the primary impetus in finding a match:

‘marriage in most cultures has been understood mainly as a social institution and a property relation rather than a personal commitment and an emotional relation’, corresponding ‘to the capacity for bonding rather than the capacity for infatuation’ (Shumway, 2003, p. 12). It is therefore notable that a contemporary audience looks to this period for romance – the institutionalisation of desire. When critics study “romance” and “novel” together ‘that is when they narrow their scrutiny to prose fiction love stories, they begin to focus on the elements most associated with the popular romance novel: love and the happy ending’ (Regis, 2003, p. 21). This structure is what forms the Romance novel, and the readers are looking for the sense of fulfilment or ‘happy ending’ that they are unable to experience in real life.

The active negotiation of individual desire and social expectation is the driving force for the romance plot. Marriage is the key event that enables the character of the rake to fit safely into society and disarms his charm. The marriage plot in such novels draws influence from ‘Richardson’s *Pamela*, Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* [;] most contemporary romances feature the perspective of the heroine and emphasize her path toward marriage; they also feature powerful, even forceful, male leads’ (Harrison, 2014, p. 127). The journey that both the rake and female figure undergo is of attraction and desire which is tamed by the legal and social binding of a marriage contract. The marriage plot also serves to ‘contain sexuality, at least in theory, within heterosexual marriage, a phenomenon that led to the “narrowing of the ethical scale”’ (Harrison, 2014, p. 118) This ‘narrowing’ creates an experience that does not represent everyone or provide a scope to explore same-sex desire. The text is confined to heterosexual desire and only explores the relationship between the rake and female characters. The novel is set in the past. However, it has been written and is being consumed by an audience in the twenty-first century. Desire and sexuality are being categorised here as heterosexual, which can create a limited perspective in this world that has been created by the author.

Quinn's narrative begins with a physical attraction between the rake and the female lead: 'for Michael Stirling, that moment came the first time he laid his eyes on Francesca Bridgerton'; marriage becomes the ultimate culmination of that desire. (Quinn, 2004, p. 3). Francesca and Michael explore their sexual desire for one another, which Quinn slowly builds to reflect the passion and elements of danger at being discovered. The novel navigates the social conventions of its setting and the audience's expectations about relationships today: Francesca is happy to have sex without feeling pressure to commit herself to marriage. Michael, on the other hand, reminds her that she could become pregnant with his child and, therefore, marriage would be a necessity. His urgency to marry Francesca and make her 'his' adds to the appeal of marriage for the reader. Marriage was seen as possession, with the wife becoming the property of her husband and being both financially and emotionally dependent on him as stated by Bailey: 'the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband; under whose wing, protection, and cover, she performs [...]' (Bailey, 2015, p. 2).

A power struggle between Michael and Francesca is further explored in the novel. The rake in the text is fighting for control, which he knows he is losing, as Francesca becomes more in control of their relationship. This is prevalent when Michael offers Francesca marriage and when she refuses him because of his rakeish tendencies. Furthermore, his feelings for Francesca begin to surface in public; rakeish reputation for the rake is of utmost importance and Michael struggles to maintain his scandalous image. Francesca has 'never seen anyone like this – wound so tightly with fury that he seemed he might snap into pieces.' She believes him to be out of control, but then realises that he is holding on to it 'like a vice' (Quinn, 2004, p. 204). This apparent gap between first perception and then what seems like a deeper reality, contributes both to the rake's unknowability (and therefore to female desire for him) and the promise of his redemption if

only the heroine can know and transform him. Marriage contains the rake and makes him submissive to his wife: 'Because if she wasn't happy... Well, that would kill him. He could live without her love, but not without her happiness' (Quinn, 2004, p. 356). These feelings of helplessness and utter devotion portrays how the happiness of the female is what motivates the rake. This could be depicted as a feminist re-writing of the rake, as the female protagonist is offered agency by the author to control the rake through her actions. This power offered to a woman in Regency society can be viewed as attractive to a contemporary audience who will be able to recognise themselves within the modern retelling of this genre. Readers enjoy a Regency woman with a twenty-first century agency:

'[...] depictions of the female figure in historical fiction often reveal far more about present-day attitudes and ideologies than those of the period they seek to represent is particularly evident in terms of the way in which she is positioned in narratives regarding sexuality, marriage and romance [...] Sex not only sells historical fiction but is also seen in the context of postfeminism as a vital tool for female empowerment' (Cooper and Short, 2012, p. 9).

This discussion regarding marriage and sexuality depicts that readers are looking for a sense of fulfilment when female characters from the Regency period are being represented. This ideology that Francesca is able to express her sexuality and the novel containing explicit sex scenes raises questions on present day attitudes to female empowerment. Though as discussed further on in this chapter this liberation is false, and the taming of the rake is actually restrictive. The erotic value of this novel is also restrictive in a way that aligns to critiques of postfeminism and its sexual politics: 'women's forthright desire for sex without emotional intimacy through confident written and verbal expression; a refusal to be drawn

into the sacrifices that women often make for men in the name of romantic love; the reduction of men to sexual objects; and a centralisation of male anatomical attributes' (Gwynne, 2011, p. 375). The male is centralised, and the novel has fetishized descriptions of the rake's anatomy as he is objectified. However, the female figure and her pleasure is also given significance. Francesca takes control when she explores herself sexually and Michael submits to her. The implication of this is that the power of the rake is unstable, and it can be deciphered that the female figure is reforming him. For Francesca, Michael is the object of desire, and she is using him to fulfil her passion. Michael is also allowing Francesca to take control and experience pleasure which is a significant change from his previous authoritative and controlling ways.

In the novel, class and titles are also a focal point in the transformation of the rake. Instead of taking responsibility for the title he acquires, Michael travels to India to run away from the guilt he feels for his cousin's death, looking to regain a sense of power and control in a colonial setting. In the biography *The Profligate Son: Or, a True Story of Family Conflict, Fashionable Vice, and Financial Ruin in Regency England* (2013), Phillips tells the story of William Jackson and his father. His father had worked with the East India Company and was ambitious, hoping for his son to be hard working and carry on his legacy. However, his son William, ends up in debt and is unable to take care of his responsibilities. He is referred to as the 'rake' and 'the rake's progress therefore functioned as a warning, steering Georgians away from vice and keeping them on the straight path to the good life' (McCormack, 2013, p. 859). William is unable to follow his father's footsteps and eventually dies due to his alcoholism, serving as a lesson to Georgian society regarding his inability to work in India and gain the status and command his father did. Michael's journey to India serves him purpose and he is able to return a changed man. The figure of the rake in Phillips'

biography is negative and unhinged, whereas in the three texts explored in this dissertation, the rake is transformed in a positive light with love and marriage being the primary goal. In all three novels, the female figure ends up in an advantageous marriage with a titled and domesticated husband. The themes in these contemporary romance novels can be compared to those novels by authors such as Jane Austen, whose 'novels can be read as guides to economic marital success if one focuses on the female protagonists and reads them in a specific way' (Kramp, 2018;2017, p. 138). This reiterates the satisfaction gained when the rake is reformed and transformed in the novel.

Michael's feeling of guilt stems from him being unable to face the reality of loving his cousin's wife. When he travels to India the novel elides the labour involved in such a trip; it was a massive undertaking in this period including the voyage: 'the incidence of fever continued, the greater problem of scurvy now raised the sick list and on 13 July it claimed the life of the cooper. With diminishing supplies, the beer finished and water rationed to three pints per man per day exclusive of thrice weekly punch [...] set round the dangerous southern cape' (Sutton, 2010, p. 23). Travelling held danger along the way as well as illnesses and difficulty navigating the sea due to the lack of accuracy when the sailors were trying to locate their positions. Michael's new context provides him with a renewed sense of control and responsibility which he did not have when his cousin held the title of Earldom, a control that rests not with the self but in the empire.

This voluntary trip made by Michael can almost be seen as a holiday to take his mind off his real life and enter an exotic and 'other' environment. His travel to India gives 'him a purpose, a place in life that went beyond the only two things at which he'd ever excelled soldiering and making merry. [...] Within a month he'd obtained a governmental post and

found himself making decisions that mattered, implementing laws and policies that actually shaped the lives of men' (Quinn, 2004, p. 65). Michael can be seen as an authoritative figure in India. People were travelling to India to extract resources and goods for British wealth, which is what Michael was partaking in. The way he is 'shaping the lives of men' is significant in displaying the power he had which enabled him to occupy and mould the settlers. Michael has little power to shape the lives of people around him in Britain nor to gain a sense of control over his attraction to Francesca. He is able to exert this control by maintaining this power over people in India. He can be seen as 'dependent' on Indian structures or 'sucked in' to Indian society in a way that is sometimes seen as leading to a 'collaborative' Anglo-Indian social order'' (Wilson, 2007, p. 958). There was a worry of indoctrination with people that were going to India from Britain. It is clear that Michael feels deserted by his own people when he re-enters society. His return to Britain, causes him to question his existence and feel a loss of belonging.

The identity crisis Michael undergoes is significant as this could be deemed as threatening to British society: 'living an extravagant life in India and then returning to Britain after making his fortune, became a pervasive stereotype in Britain, often perceived as posing a threat to British political and social stability' (De Silva, 2018, p. 6). Similarly, the progression of Michael as the colonial rake causes instability to his life and the people around him. His return makes Francesca's life unstable as she is not sure what her feelings are towards him. He is also the new and titled prospect for women in society. When he returns, he is unable to conceal his emotions towards Francesca and also feels jealous when she becomes a marriageable prospect. It also impacts his relationship with her as she begins to recognise the changes in his behaviour. Before his trip to India, he was able to conceal his emotions but, on his return, he is possessive of Francesca, for instance when she also decides

to find a husband.

On his return to England, Michael is back into society and has brought with him a part of his stay in India. His love towards Francesca causes friction between the two as Michael is unable to move past the guilt of feeling attracted to his cousin's wife and now widow. This part of the novel brings out the passion and emotional intensity he is feeling, transforming his character from being previously calm and collected. However, upon his return 'He'd changed' (Quinn, 2004, p. 71). His smile is 'tight' and his demeanour 'strained' (Quinn, 2004, p. 71). He is also tanned and 'scandalously so' portraying this preconceived idea that a person with a tan would be subjected to scandal and viewed as the 'other.' These physical changes make him the talk of the town. Michael acquires the title of Earldom upon his return and only by subjugating India. His stay in India allowed him to bring order and hold an authoritative position. Once he is able to experience this position, he relishes the power he holds which he is then able to exert as an Earl on his return.

Michael's journey and return from India creates a shift in dynamic, as he is now in a better position to take his place in society: 'It wasn't that he'd been irresponsible before. It was just that he'd been without responsibilities. And it hadn't really occurred to her how well he might rise to the occasion once he returned to England' (Quinn, 2004, p. 144). This analysis reveals that Michael has attained responsibilities on his return and has not just become a responsible man. At the same time, he has also become detached and wants to play the character of the indifferent rake: 'Damn it, he hadn't even considered that she might be in London. Not that it would have made any difference, but at least he'd have been prepared. He might have schooled his features into a saturnine smirk, or at the very least made sure that he was impeccably dressed and wholeheartedly immersed in his role as the unrecoverable rake'



(Quinn, 2004, p. 68). On his return he does not want Francesca to see his true self as he wants to be deemed as undisturbed by her presence. The persona of the rake is a coverup to hide his true feelings which is similar to Sebastian's character as discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation. The transformation of Michael is the discovery that this is all a façade and that he truly loves and cares for Francesca. This idea that he is 'immersed in his role' portrays the alternate self that he is battling with, the exaggerated actions and 'smirk' that hide a greater depth in the character of the rake. This will be explored in further detail in Chapter Three in relation to the Heathcliffian rake, Ian. Ian is also playing an overtly desirable but also destructive side to this figure.

While Michael is in India, he writes to Francesca and this form of letter writing within the novel bridges the narrative and continues their story while they are geographically distant. Epistolary exchanges facilitated 'distant intimacy' (Glovinsky, 2020, p. 94). He often writes letters which he then destroys, displaying the uncertainty of the rake in expressing his vulnerability. However, seeing these destroyed letters, the reader is – once again – offered the tantalising vision of a reformable rake. Through the text, the reader knows the rake in a way that goes beyond the character's social performance. Sutton discusses the impact of letter writing and that they 'were often written for the interest and amusement of their recipients, giving descriptions of places and people and relating incidents and anecdotes...But their letters also demonstrate a persistent anxiety created by the uncertainty, irregularity and unreliability of communication across distance and time' (Bell & Parfitt, 2016). The unfinished and fragmented letters that Francesca and Michael send one another are echoes of the uncertainty of their relationship. It reflects the anxiety of Michael's feelings towards his cousin's wife and his hatred towards himself for the illicit feelings he had for Francesca while his cousin John was alive. Michael's struggle with this guilt was evident after John's death

when he is unstable with his emotions: ‘I won’t take his place,’ he said, and he wasn’t shouting, but it sounded like maybe he wanted to [...] he’s grabbed her shoulders and hauled her to her feet. “I won’t do it,” he yelled, and he was shaking her, and then holding her still, and then shaking her again. “I can’t be him. I won’t be him”” (Quinn, 2004, p. 54). This feeling of guilt impacts his letter writing as he feels a sense of betrayal. The unsteady way he grabs Francesca and shakes her, reflects him assuring himself that he is unable to come to terms with the trauma of this death and has no intention of carrying John’s title.

At the start of each chapter, Quinn provides an excerpt of a letter correspondence, emphasising the feelings of Michael and Francesca towards one another. For instance, Francesca writes a series of letters which she decides not to send due to her overwhelming and unwarranted feelings towards him. She also writes to him and there is a line through the words she wished to write but then decided against it: ‘~~I miss you.~~’ (Quinn, 2004, p. 111). This is then noted to be a draft that she never sends. The epistolary novel form was popular in the eighteenth century and Quinn’s use of it displays a historically realistic approach towards the presentation of characters and information. The form also fills in the gaps and provides a ‘full and convincing representation of the ‘inner lives’ of its characters’ (Bray, 2003, p. 9). Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) both had epistolary sections, with Austen using this structure to develop the story and relationships between the characters. Bray discusses Locke’s theory regarding consciousness and the idea that “‘the same Man’ can have ‘distinct incommunicable consciousness at different times’, and thus have different ‘selves’” (Bray, 2003, p. 14). Michael’s letters when residing in India can be viewed as his alternate self. This alternate self is a reassured and composed Michael in India. He is able to conceal his anxiety through the brief communication he has with Francesca. While residing in India, his experiences begin to define him and this consciousness and the

letters he writes become a refuge for his emotional turmoil. His transformation as the colonial rake is evident when he returns, and his journey is documented through his letters to Francesca.

The hidden feelings and incomplete letters add fragments of the unrequited affection on Michael's part and the hidden desire Francesca feels. When Michael travels to India, he tells her that she, 'would enjoy it here. Not the heat, I should think; ... colors, the spices, the scent of the air-they can place one in a strange, sensuous haze that is at turns unsettling and intoxicating' (Quinn, 2004, p. 61). This approach allows the reader to become an onlooker to the personal accounts between both characters and learn more about the travels Michael undergoes. Quinn can be seen as using this to close the distance between Michael and Francesca and create a bond through this long-distance communication alongside driving the narrative.

Michael undergoes a reverse culture shock on his return from India. He compares every element to his time there and feels as though he is 'the odd man out, his senses buffeted by smells and sounds that shouldn't have felt so unfamiliar' (Quinn, 2004, p. 80). He transitions from a man with the power of the colonialist to one who feels like a powerless outsider. His power to shape people is lost once he returns to England and the sense of control is also non-existent. This is one kind of transformation of the rake – not the redemption of marriage but the experience of empire seemingly making a man of him. Michael feels like he has lost his Britishness on his return as he is unable to connect with his roots and has become an outsider to his own people: 'a stranger in his own land? It seemed almost bizarre, and yet, as he walked along the crowded streets of London's most exclusive shopping district, he couldn't help but think that he stood out, that anyone glancing upon him

must instantly know that he was different, removed from their very British existence (Quinn, 2004, p. 80-81). These inner feelings of not fitting in are a part of Michael's journey in finding himself and understanding the emotions that he had not dealt with at the time of his cousin's death. This isolation creates the colonial rake who brings with himself the embodiment of Indian habits. Michael can be considered a 'colonial rake', his transformation from his visit to India and losing a part of himself makes him into the person he is. On his return he is exoticised through his appearance. His sense of control is subdued, and he loses power almost instantly as he recognises that he has become an outsider in British society.

The transformation of his character to an Earl begins to age him along with the grief he has had to endure due to the death of his cousin. Quinn uses villainous language to describe Michael in the eyes of Francesca and thus the reader: 'He was terrifying, but he was also magnificent, and it shook her to her very core to realise that she'd never seen him thus' (Quinn, 2004, p. 203). During Michael's physical altercation with Sir Geoffrey, who tries to force Francesca to kiss him, Francesca is able to see Michael in a new light. She views him as her saviour but at the same time he is also 'terrifying.' This adds to the danger of the colonial rake which makes him intriguing and sought after. The terror that Michael shows when defending Francesca is surprising to her as she has never seen him showing such possession over her. In the same section 'Michael turned on her with a ferocity that nearly sent her reeling. "Don't apologize," he bit off' (Quinn, 2004, p. 203). His demeanour, language of savagery and barely contained fury portrays the archetype of the brooding and cold rake/anti-hero who Francesca is not afraid of but seemingly more attracted to. These changes in Michael's behaviour are what draw Francesca towards him, and it can be understood that the transformation he has undergone from his travels in India show a new side to him that she is keen to explore. This 'savage' and violent streak in Michael's character is attractive to

Francesca when he is defending her honour and impacts his journey to redemption from being a 'sinner.' This scene in the novel depicts Michael as the alpha male stereotype who is extremely possessive of Francesca. She evokes a weakness in Michael that he has developed through the trauma of his cousin's death and from being in India.

In Alex Hobbs's article *Masculinity Studies and Literature*, he discusses domestication of the male character and the image that violence creates in society:

'Broadly, female characters are absent or portrayed as malevolent forces, trapping male characters into sedate domestic lives [...] Rowland, Liggins and Uskalis note that the extreme aspects of masculinity that emerge from these scenarios would be reproached in a real man but are celebrated in some cultural forms:

"Whilst violent masculinity is then officially condemned and vilified in our society, its cultural representation often reveals an alternative vision where killers such as Rambo and Bill Sikes enjoy a certain glory. The fact that violence helps to shore up male identity is an aspect of modern culture which is difficult to assimilate'" (Hobbs, 2013, p. 392).

This can be viewed in relation to Francesca who is the 'malevolent force' in Michael's life. She makes him want to settle down and offers him a place in society through his reformation. The savagery Kleypas portrays, makes Michael represent a 'violent masculinity' which reflects through his actions. Though, ultimately these actions are what draws Francesca to him further reinforcing the trope of the machismo male identity in the eyes of the reader. This extreme masculinity is more prevalent on Michael's return from India and through the authoritative figure he represented while he was there. As discussed, he

returns titled and holds an air of authority which creates an enigmatic rake in the eyes of society.

Narratively, for Michael to truly recover from the grief of his cousin and finally be able to confront his feelings for Francesca, change is necessary. The tumultuous relationship between him and Francesca begins to take an emotional turn once he returns from India. The noticeable changes are not just physical but also mental as he was not able to grieve with his loved ones but felt regret and dread for his illicit feelings towards Francesca: 'She didn't know that he loved her, couldn't possibly understand how damned guilty he felt at assuming John's life' (Quinn, 2004, p. 75). Throughout this he quickly becomes the outsider: where he was once outspoken and witty, he suddenly becomes brooding and quiet. The reader knows more than Francesca (as we do with his destroyed letters) and this offers a glimpse of hidden depths, alluring unknowability, and the possibility of reform.

On the one hand Michael is the ultimate distraction for Francesca. He is charming and is able to make Francesca nervous: "“Did you leave me and wonder what I hadn't told you?” He leaned in, just so she'd feel his lips move whisper-light against her ear. “Did you want to know,” he whispered, “what I did when I was wicked?”” (Quinn, 2006, p. 251) Michael is aware of the effects his words will have on Francesca and is well versed in teasing her. His character changes from charming and fun to serious and closed off. This change occurs once his cousin dies, and he inherits the Earldom. His language can also be seen as more abrupt and dangerous. Michael resorts to seducing Francesca so that she agrees to marry him, he tempts her with his words and touch: 'His hand travelled up her arm until it reached her shoulder, and then one of his fingers traced a feather-light line down the side of her neck. His voice, when it came, was low and husky, and she felt it right in the very center of her being.

“Don’t you want another kiss?” (Quinn, 2006, p. 245-246). Michael is able to tempt Francesca and uses his body and words to appeal to her sexual desires.

Quinn begins to depict him as the perfect anti-hero which is a change from the initial sympathy readers would have felt for him after his cousin passed away. The element of danger in his voice captivates his frustrations due to his growing attraction to her. This speech portrays him as warding her off and making a villainous impression, which he seems to relish. He prefers to be viewed as the villain to cover and mask his true feelings towards her. His actions are flamboyant, and he is overcome with passion which is often how the figure of the rake is constructed. This danger is consistent with Michael’s body language and speech which only creates further attraction on Francesca’s part: ‘It’s too bad I promised not to ravish you this morning then,” he said dangerously, unable to resist a predatory smile’ (Quinn, 2004, p. 274). The danger that Michael promises is an attribute to his rakish qualities and creates an enigma that is difficult to resist. This anti-hero element of the rake can be associated with both the Byronic rake, Sebastian and the Heathcliffian rake, Ian. All three of these characters ward off the female character initially, by reminding them of the dangers that they represent. However, this is more of a reminder to themselves that their association with these female figures will ultimately bring an end to their rakeish ways.

The danger of being caught in a scandal with the cousin of her dead husband can be seen as exhilarating to Francesca which is why she is indifferent to what society thinks and follows her own aspirations. This is the tantalising danger and appeal that Francesca is feeling though she knows that she should not succumb to it. Only after spending this time with Michael, she is truly able to explore her inner desire, which in society she was closed off from, while being married to John. Many around her also offer her warnings which only seem

to tempt her further rather than deter her. Francesca herself is seen to be cautioning other women from approaching Michael, ““He could never remain faithful to one woman,” Francesca said, “and I doubt you’d be willing to put up with infidelities”” (Quinn, 2004, p. 157-158). Further on in the novel, Michael begins to feel exploited by Francesca because she is not willing to marry him after having sexual encounters with him.

Michael’s rakeish past plays against him when he does decide to settle and get married as Francesca refuses to marry him. She is unsure whether he’ll ‘make a good husband’ because of his ‘past behavior’, not at all the ‘model of Christian rectitude’ (Quinn, 2004, p. 294). Francesca is aware of the dangers that are present in being with Michael. She is also well aware of his ‘past behaviour’ but is still drawn to his appeal. Though it may concern Francesca that he has had sex with many women, this only adds to his appeal and her willingness to evoke his consciousness. The leverage is now with Francesca where she has the choice as to whether she would like to marry Michael or not, as he is keen for her to accept his proposal. Michael feels that Francesca has used ‘him for her own pleasure – and she had. Dear God, she had. She had assumed the lead, taken what she’d wanted, relinquishing control only when the flames between them spiraled into an inferno’ (Quinn, 2004, p. 295-296). Here Quinn is depicting the extent of power Francesca now holds over Michael and that she has forced him to reflect on his past exploits. This also emphasises the female triumph of taming the rake and making him bow to the pleasures female figure can offer. This solidifies the ideas that the rake can change to fit the ideal of the female, the desire to reform the villain enables the female to feel empowered. The nervousness Michael displays distances him from his rakish ways and allows a glimpse into his weak and emotional mental state. This reflects on the transformation of the rake from being the seducer to becoming the seduced.



The character of Francesca also undergoes a transformation - from wife to widow and then lover. While my focus here is the male rake, his transformation happens in relation to those around him; when they change, so must he. Widows in the eighteenth century had more freedom than married or single women: ‘under English law, a single woman was recognized as a person, and a married woman was not. If and when she became widowed, a woman was once again a single person, able to act on her own behalf’ (Mijares, 2017, p. 1). Francesca is similarly able to take control and handles the estate her husband once owned. This liberates her and allows her to take charge financially which empowers and assists her emotional growth later on in the novel: ‘She has been the countess for six years, and for four of them, she has had to be the earl as well’ (Quinn, 2006, p. 85) Her powerful widowhood is historically appropriate for the Regency setting: ‘No longer submissive to a husband, a widow could operate outside the patriarchal structure, and exert her own authority—a woman’s authority’ (Mijares, 2017, p. 2). Emotional fulfilment is the ostensible goal of romance narratives, but this is only possible, here, in the context of financial independence. Similarly, in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), Jane’s search for financial independence is pivotal to her character development. The novel, structured as a bildungsroman, is Jane’s journey in becoming self-aware and finding opportunities for herself, particularly during a time where women were dependent on their husbands/male guardians economically, mentally and physically.

Francesca begins to find a routine and a place, ‘grow[ing] into her widowhood and [...] a comfortable and contented pattern to her life’ (Quinn, 2004, p. 62). Cooper and Shorts identify that, ‘by sexualizing the women of the past [...], contemporary culture not only projects its own ideas of empowerment and female agency onto real life women...but also onto their fictionalized counterparts’ (Cooper and Short, 2012, p. 9-10). This is part of the

change in Francesca after Michael re-enters her life and she is able to feel passion again. Francesca takes the lead sexually and provocatively: ‘glorying in her power over’ Michael (Quinn, 2004, p. 282). Michael becomes the sexual fantasy/object, a reversal observed via the female gaze in the novel. This is explicit: ‘She let her eyes level onto his. “You answer to me Michael.” She said with soft authority. If you want me, you can have me. But I’m in charge”’ (Quinn, 2004, p. 282). Francesca’s ‘soft’ authoritative speech gives her commands a seductive undertone and conform to expectations of femininity. She is testing her power over Michael sexually and in a provocative fashion. Historical romance fiction uses ‘real and fictional heroines to challenge and subvert accepted norms of sexuality both in the present and the past’ (Cooper and Short, 2012, p. 10). Quinn uses the setting of the Regency to represent a woman with autonomy and sexual freedom, while preserving what we expect of the rake. Even with the increased female sexual power of contemporary writing, the rake still offers a brush of danger which society restricts. I contend that, while contemporary audiences enjoy the apparent subversion of both Regency and contemporary gendered sexual norms in historically-set romances, the persistent appeal of the dangerous rake gives male characters more sexual freedom at the same time as containing that sexuality through the promise of reform via marriage or maturation. In other words, while the rake may seem to symbolise wildness and freedom, in this genre he is actually a model for reinforcing gender norms and the social constraint of sexuality.

The novel’s temporary reversal of rakish power and sexuality may appeal to contemporary readers, but in the world of its Regency setting it is not accepted unproblematically; relationships are made public property via gossip, a form of communication that asserts and polices social norms and narrativises who knows what. In the Bridgerton series, Quinn creates a character called ‘Lady Whistledown’ who is a writer of

what would be an equivalent to a gossip column. The name ‘Whistledown’ implies seeds on the wind, disseminating knowledge. The power of the written word is displayed through her pamphlets, containing secrets of relationships and illicit affairs, though often some were not accurate but would still be seen as the truth. This speaks to the cultural anxieties around online gossip for the contemporary reader: ‘celebrity culture redefines the boundaries of what is public and what is private’ (McNealy & Mullis, 2019, p. 110). However, gossip columnists date back to the seventeenth century. One of the earlier columnists was ‘The Female Tatler, by Mrs. Crackenthorpe, a Lady that knows everything ‘and first appeared on July 8, 1709’ (Anderson, 1931, p. 354). In other words, romance novels featuring the rake find various means to limit and constrain relationships: via character, in the gendered figure of the rake; via narrative, in the promise of reform of the rake; and formally, via the gossip columnist.

In conclusion, the character of Michael Stirling can be categorised as a ‘colonial rake’. He undergoes a transformation when he travels to India and then takes the title of Earldom through which he established power in society. The female protagonist undergoes this transformation alongside the rake. Francesca domesticates the rake through marriage, and both conform to the norms of society. While contemporary audiences enjoy the apparent subversion of both Regency and contemporary gendered sexual norms in historically-set romances, the persistent appeal of the dangerous rake gives male characters more sexual freedom at the same time as containing that sexuality through the promise of reform via marriage or maturation. In other words, while the rake may seem to symbolise wildness and freedom, in this genre he is actually a model for reinforcing gender norms and the social constraint of sexuality. Not only do these novels anticipate female desire for the male rake – they assume that *all* women will find him irresistible. This apparent gap between first perception and then what seems like a deeper reality contributes both to the rake’s

unknowability (and therefore to female desire for him) and the promise of his redemption if only the heroine can know and transform him. This promise of reforming the rake is not actually very powerful for the female character and neither for the reader who identifies with the character. Michael's visit to India is him looking to regain a sense of power and control in a colonial setting. One kind of transformation of the rake is not the redemption of marriage but the experience of empire seemingly making a mature man of him.

## Chapter 2: A ‘dream lover’ and ‘exotic beauty’: the Byronic rake in *Devil In Winter* by Lisa Kleypas

In Lisa Kleypas’s *Devil in Winter* (2006), Sebastian, Lord St. Vincent, is, it seems, the ‘complete opposite’ of a ‘dream lover’, with ‘nothing kind, sensitive or remotely boyish about him’. In fact, he is ‘a predator who undoubtedly liked to toy with his prey before killing it’. Nevertheless, his physical attractiveness is presented as irresistible because it is eternal: tall and handsome, with hair ‘the *antique gold of a medieval icon*’, ‘pale blue eyes [that] glittered like rare diamonds from the necklace of an *ancient empress*’ and ‘skin gleaming like *bronze that had been patiently polished for hours*’ (emphasis added). He dazzles, superficially: ‘beautiful eyes that showed no emotion when he smiled’ and a ‘cynical mouth’ with flashing white teeth’ (Kleypas, 2006, p. 18). Immediately, the reader is invested, along with the female characters, in discovering what depths might lie beneath such surface beauty and confidence.

In this chapter, I will discuss the seductive language used by Sebastian as well as Biblical reference that Kleypas uses throughout the text and the significance of this. I will explore the use of series to create a multiverse while looking at the novel in which Sebastian’s character was introduced. The chapter will go on to discuss the performance of the rake and how Sebastian plays the perfect part of the wicked aristocrat, comparable to the persona of Lord Byron. This leads on to a discussion of the unravelling of this figure along with his transformation. Similar to my discussion of Michael in Chapter 1, I examine here the

subcategory of the rake that Sebastian belongs to and how his transformation influences the *type* of rake he is.

Set in London 1843, the novel opens in early Victorian society portraying the love story of Evangeline and Sebastian and the tribulations they face. Evie is a shy wallflower who is being oppressed by her uncles and cousins. They are after her family wealth, and she is unable to defend herself with her father also being on his deathbed. She turns to Sebastian for help and proposes marriage to obtain her freedom and offers this infamous rake stability and economic growth. This novel is book three in 'The Wallflowers' series and both Sebastian and Evangeline have been secondary characters introduced in the previous novels. This chapter takes up the previous chapter's interest in the transformation of the rake and applies it to the character of Sebastian and his transformation into a husband, in particular the pivotal point at which his rakish power is subverted. It examines the performance of rakishness, the enjoyment Sebastian gains from his reputation, and the way in which Evangeline hopes to find the real man underneath. It also categorises Sebastian in terms of the literary-cultural archetype he follows as the novel progresses.

Like Kleypas' other novels, there is a world created in which the characters intertwine with one another. Kleypas introduces Cam Rohan, who is of Romani descent, and his story is told within another series wrote called 'The Hathaways.' This world enables readers to have access to more of this genre and these characters, at Tarulli states: 'The majority of these titles are written by women, and they certainly don't lack in quality. The bedroom scenes and language tend to be more intense, and specific "series" tend to have more installments. The authors include many characters who are woven together so that they can re-introduce them in later books' (Tarulli, 2017, p. 247). In this novel Sebastian is married right away to

Evangeline but with the purpose to secure his finances. Evangeline is also in this marriage of convenience for her own reasons. This relationship and their running away to Gretna Green for a marriage license, is the brush of danger that Evie is experiencing. Without the permission of her family, she is doing something that society would shun her for.

The novel begins from Sebastian's point of view using free indirect discourse, building his character from *It Happened One Autumn* (2005), the second novel in the series. There is a wry and self-aware humour to his rakishness: 'Although kidnapping had not, until recently, been on Sebastian's long list of villainous acts, he really should have been more clever about it' (Kleypas, 2006). When Sebastian is introduced as a 'striking figure' in the previous novel, physical descriptions of him focus on his 'exotic beauty', 'light blue and catlike' eyes, 'shaded with dark lashes and surmounted by tawny brows' (Kleypas, 2005). On the one hand, his 'catlike' qualities imply graceful movement, but also a sly self-interestedness which foreshadows his behaviour in this subsequent novel. His 'plenitude of charm should have been illegal' (Kleypas, 2005); his good looks are dangerous. He plays the narrative role of the witty villain whose actions bring the novel to its denouement, the uniting of Lord Westcliff and Lillian. Though he is a rival to the hero, his charm means that the reader is often on his side, the 'promise of wicked enjoyment' is 'difficult to resist' for both characters and readers (Kleypas, 2005).

Sebastian is referred to as 'enigmatic' on multiple occasions due to his mysteriousness and Lillian's lack of clarity about his intentions—she is unsure if the devastating smile is offered to her as an enemy or friend. He offers her the opportunity to explore her sexual desires in a liberating way. For instance, some disarray in his clothing immediately makes her imagine that 'he had dressed with a bit too much haste after leaving a lover's bed—and meant

to return there soon' (Kleypas, 2005). The female gaze which constructs women as subjects rather than objects allows the female protagonist to fetishize the rake, allowing women to hold the power. Much like when Michael offers Francesca the choice to explore herself sexually and allowing her the liberation that society does not offer, especially before marriage. This is further explored through the sexualisation of the rake from his body to his clothes. The female characters are drawn to the pleasure the rake promises through his seductive presence. Lillian is drawn to Sebastian and his reputation; she is openly objectifying him and judging him due to his reputation in society. In this novel, the character of the rake contributes to the transformation of the female protagonist, as she begins to explore her sexuality and boundaries within society. Rakeish characteristics, such as being flirtatious and promiscuous, make Sebastian more appealing, as his reputation promises adventure. However, a woman displaying what in a man would be rakish characteristics is demeaned as a harlot: 'Rake and harlot, then, have an inverse relation to gender: as a harlot, a woman's femininity is diminished; whereas as a rake, a man's masculinity is enhanced' (Mackie, 2009, p. 131). It is clear that these attributes are attractive for a man and almost expected of him whereas, the femininity of the woman would be weakened, and she would not have the same charm and allure that the rake holds. This expectation that men will be experienced and need to explore their sexuality before marriage links back to societal norms: 'The notion that "Boys will be boys," where gender becomes the tautological explanation of its own (unruly) character ...if illicit behavior, sexual and otherwise, is irreducibly masculine, then so are even its female participants' (Mackie, 2009, p. 131). Sebastian is not frowned upon for his scandalous and promiscuous eruption, rather he is well known for it and praised for his appearance. When Evie marries him, she is the one that is criticised by her friends and family for marrying an infamous rake and is seen to be dismissed.



Sebastian's speech is often charming but, again, predatory where he inserts warnings which, instead of deterring women, brings them even closer to this exhilarating endangerment: 'I'm not kind, darling, he asserts. 'I'm only nice to people when I'm planning to take advantage of them' (Kleypas, 2005). His extreme honesty paradoxically makes the statement seem like it hides a greater depth, much like his glittering appearance. It is this enigma and ambiguity that seems to be the greatest draw to the women he engages with. Kleypas references Sebastian as a rake directly in the novel when Evangeline is 'alone in a carriage with a dangerous rake, racing madly to Gretna Green,' where couples who did not have their family's consent could elope (Kleypas, 2006, p. 36; Nelson, 2015). Evangeline turns to Sebastian, a notorious rake, for help from her scheming relatives who are wanting her to marry on of her cousin so that they can inherit her father's gaming club. In the previous novel, readers are aware that Sebastian was the villain who kidnapped and almost raped Evie's friend Lillian. She is then saved by Lord Westcliff who is the male protagonist. Though she is aware of the dangers she could face, she turns to him for help and views him as her only option to obtain freedom from the situation she is in. During the Regency period, the entitlement would go to the son, however as Evie is the only daughter her husband would be the owner of this wealth: 'the husband became entitled to his wife's property and income' (Bailey, 2015, p. 2). As ascertained in the previous chapter, Kleypas utilises power play to suspend the rake of his power and domesticate him as husband to Evie. To start with, Evangeline is not affected by the charm of Sebastian and seemingly reminds herself of his standing in society, that he is 'debauched, amoral and perversely proud of it.' Also, that he 'excelled at his chosen occupation - that of a degenerate seducer - and he has set a standard few rakes could aspire to' (Kleypas, 2006, p. 2). The more Evie reminds herself of what Sebastian is capable of and his past, the more she seems drawn to him sexually. Self-confidence is a key factor for the rake in containing power, he is aware of all the qualities that

he is able to subdue the female with and does not hesitate to manipulate these weaknesses to his benefit.

When Evie approaches Sebastian with this marriage proposition, he reminds her of all the terrible things he has done, unapologetically and unremorsefully: ‘You know what kind of man I am, Miss Jenner. Need I remind you that I tried to abduct and ravish one of your friends last week’ (Kleypas, 2006, p. 9). Sebastian is happy to be understood as dangerous; his rakishness is a performance. He also can be seen as deliberately trying to intimidate Evie in order to test her and whether she can match his remarks. It can also be displayed as a way for Sebastian to shock Evie, giving him the satisfaction of building this devilish persona and making everyone around him believe that he is just as bad, if not worse than the tales tell. ‘Because I know you for what you are – and I know what you’re capable of.’ “My dear...” he said almost tenderly, “you haven’t begun to learn the worst of me” (Kleypas, 2006, p. 27). The character of Evie is timid and shy; she also has a stammer which makes her seem more vulnerable. She has a sizable dowry which her uncle and cousin are trying to take advantage of. This makes her turn to Sebastian as she knows that he tried to seduce and kidnap her friend for marriage due to his father losing all the family fortune through gambling. Evie does not have the power to protect herself and therefore requires Sebastian’s protection which she would acquire after her marriage to him. This character is very different to Francesca’s who, as discussed in Chapter One, is a widow and able to hold onto the power that she is able to attain through being married to an Earl. Evie’s strong-willed interaction with Sebastian does not fit the script of rakish attraction: she has approached him for her own gain by manipulating his rakish reputation: ‘while many women seemed to find [his seduction] appealing, Evie was not one of them’ (Kleypas, 2006, p. 17). Sebastian’s reputation is such that ‘spending more than half a minute alone [with him] was sufficient to

ruin any girl' (Kleypas, 2006, p. 2). Evie manipulates the scandal that Sebastian promises so she can be viewed as 'ruined' by just being seen alone with him. The narrative, however, returns to the predictable rake script because she is ultimately unable to resist him.

Kleypas often uses language that is consistent with Biblical tradition. Sebastian is compared to Lucifer as a: 'fallen angel' and a 'dangerous male beauty that Lucifer could devise.' These descriptions once again are used to warn Evie about the dangers she is putting herself into and reminding her of the temptation of the forbidden fruit: 'Sebastian was sprawled in a heavy armchair with the relaxed confidence of Lucifer on his throne' (Kleypas, 2006, p. x). Using this satanic imagery to describe Sebastian exaggerates his bad reputation. Here, Evangeline's name can be viewed as a version of Eve's name, correlating with the Biblical story of when Eve was tempted in the Garden of Eden. Kleypas' language can be seen as overtly exaggerated here, as Sebastian's caring nature is brought to the surface early on in the novel when he begins to care for Evie. This devilish performance is a recurring theme in the novels explored in this dissertation. The figure of the rake is apparently an anti-hero. However, readers are invested in watching him change as he falls in love. The novel's title, *Devil in Winter*, constructs Sebastian in the devilish way described above. However, the 'Winter' of the title indicates the transformation of the rake and the real man under the performance. Sebastian and Evie undertake a cold and difficult journey to Gretna Green at the beginning of the novel. Though Sebastian remains unfazed, Evie is 'cold and aching and stiff' suffering 'biting temperatures and drizzling rain' (Kleypas, 2006, p. 29). Sebastian offers Evie warmth and tries to shield her from the cold: 'With each new relay, he managed to bring her a mug of tea or broth, and he reheated the brick in every available hearth' (Kleypas, 2006, p. 31-33). Evie is dependent on Sebastian for warmth during their journey; he provides her comfort, portraying another side to his apparently devilish nature. Sebastian

is constantly warning Evie that he is the epitome of danger though he is only showing kindness as soon as the novel begins. This glimmer of good nature is promising a reformation to the reader and emphasises the rakish performance that Sebastian continually portrays.

Sebastian is clever with marketing his reputation and prides himself for the person he is seen as. He holds no regrets and has enjoyed playing the character of the rake: ‘He gave an impatient snort. “Promiscuous, debauched – whatever you want to call it. I’ve had a hell of a good time, and I’ll be damned if I say I’m sorry for it [...]”’ (Kleypas, 2006, p. 175). Sebastian relishes the power society has given him, and he enjoys how he is perceived as a rake. His unapologetic nature makes him a flawed character who is at the same time in control of everything around him, including the way he is viewed - which is very important to him. There are certain ideals he follows to ensure he is the charming rake he is perceived to be: ‘I’ve never pretended to be a model of virtue. And I’ve done things in the past that would make the devil cringe. But there are certain things that even I can’t stoop to. Men of my position don’t stomp feet, knee the groin, or butt heads while they’re fighting.’ (Kleypas, 2006, p. 213) Sebastian is submissive to his position in society. Even though he is a scandalous rake, he finds certain actions uncivilised and ungentlemanly. This rake is image conscious and protective of his place in society. This coincides with Butler’s work on *Gender Performativity* where she discusses that: ‘This iterability implies that "performance" is not a singular "act" or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint [...]’ (Butler, 2014, p. 95). Sebastian is performing through the constraints of what is expected by him from society. He can break every other rule but not compromise the way he conducts himself in front of others. I will discuss the implications of this in further chapters.

The longevity of the rake figure suggests that such characters are unreformable – the bad boy trope persists. However, Pearce notes that the reformation of the male character is an important trope in romance novels. The genre might consistently return to the rake, but in each narrative the hope of taming him exists. Typically, there is a ‘heroine who is sexually inexperienced but develops a “natural” nurturing ability’ and ‘a hero who is initially “hard, angular and dark” but whose lust and aggression are transformed into love and tenderness by the heroine (Pearce, 2004, p. 526). In this case, Sebastian begins to fall in love with Evie; however, Evie stands her ground and wants him to *prove* that he is a changed man and can be a good husband to her, matching more of the archetypal ‘good husband’ she originally envisioned. She wants him to be worthy of her love, similar to when Francesca refuses to marry Michael as she is confused and unsure of his reputation. Here, Sebastian’s rakeish reputation is working against him rather than at his advantage. Evie is not alone in hoping to domesticate the rake: ‘Good God, Evie!’ Sebastian retorts. ‘Do you know how many women have tried to obtain such a promise from me?’ (Kleypas, 2006, p. 175). While the rake exudes sexuality, Evie demands three months of celibacy as a test.

Through the eyes of Evie, the reader is able to see Sebastian closely. ‘She had never been this close to him before...her senses were swiftly imprinted with the smell and feel of him...the subtle touch of expensive cologne, and clean skin covered with layers of fine linen and wool-blended broadcloth. He radiated health and virility... She was surprised by the realization of how large he was – his size wasn't appreciable until one stood very close’ (Kleypas, 2006, p. 20). The size of Sebastian’s body and the smell and feel of him allows the pleasure from the text to objectify his character along with being seen as a fetish object: ‘[...] St. Vincent took one of her hands in his and began to toy with her cold fingers. His hand was so warm, his fingertips velvety, the nails short and smoothly filed. A strong hand, but one that unquestionably belonged to a man of leisure’ (Kleypas, 2006, p. 35). He is the object of

desire and through Evie's eyes the reader is able to admire his features. His features are exoticised and he is described as an unattainable man. All three characters discussed in this dissertation hold vivid descriptions of their 'large' and toned bodies. These characters are for the enjoyment of the female readership as the readers are aware that such perfect men can only be found in contemporary romance novels.

The wall that Sebastian has built along with his reputation is important to him as it makes him who he is and adds to his strength. Though when he reveals his tormented past to Evie, she begins to understand the man behind this façade: 'She felt a stirring of pity for the little boy he had been. A mother and four doting sisters, all vanishing from his life. It would have been difficult for any adult to comprehend such loss, much less a child' (Kleypas, 2006, p. 36). Once Evie is aware of his weakness she can be seen as beginning to reform him as he becomes more protective and gentler with her. As she begins to understand and break down the barriers, she also undergoes a transformation where she is stronger and confident.

“Go on, then,” she challenged coolly. “Force me.” She saw the flicker of surprise in his eyes. His throat worked, but he remained silent. And then... she understood. “You can't,” she said in wonder. “You would never have raped Lillian. You were only bluffing. You could never force a woman.” A faint smile rose to her lips. “She was never in a moment's danger, was she? You're not nearly the villain you pretend to be” (Kleypas, 2006, p. 178).

Here, Evie openly challenges rakeishness itself and Sebastian's silence speaks more than his words. Both the reader and Evie recognise the magnitude of this silence, as Sebastian's weaknesses are being exposed. This moment in the novel is where Evie is only speaking, the once shy and timid Evie is communicating without a stutter or hesitation, as she

risers to power in their relationship. This means that Sebastian's power is disintegrating, and he is being reformed. Evie is more powerful at this stage as she is able to understand the impact she has on Sebastian and also find her own identity in the process. Similarly, Lord Byron also liked his reputation to exaggerate the truth: Byron liked arousing people's suspicions. In his diary Moore notes of another lady: 'Lord Byron did endeavour to make her think that he murdered someone ... This at first alarmed -, but when she came to know him better she saw through his acting' (Bradley, 2003, p. 76). The rake is able to embody power by making people think the worst of him, the danger and 'bad boy' persona is what draws women towards this enigmatic character. The unravelling of Sebastian's character occurs when Evie begins to recognise that he is outwardly creating a defence mechanism to keep people away and for them to assume he is an emotionless person. Evie feels empathy for him and begins to understand his difficult journey. With his mother passing away at childbirth and his sisters becoming victims of scarlet fever, he is left to nurture himself and toughen his exterior, allowing no emotions to show. This leads to his callous and often cold demeanour. The rake is depicted here as a tortured hero with a traumatic past, and the female protagonist feels the need to reform him and offer him the love and nurture he was not able to experience as a child.

The character of Sebastian holds influence from the literary figure of Lord Byron. With Byron being argued as one of the first literary celebrities, he relished in his portrayal in society and prided himself of his appearance. He was also glamorised and often hid behind a façade: Samuel Taylor Coleridge 'dare[d] predict that in less than a century' Byron's poems would 'lie on the same shelf of oblivion' as Scott's, and their author would not be 'remembered at all, except as a wicked lord who ... pretended to be ten times more wicked than he was' (Mole, 2008, p. 344). This pretence of being a wicked Lord is what Sebastian is,

a showman who is envisioned as a notorious rake but deep down has undergone a tumultuous past. Both are the epitome of the tortured hero. As discussed in the introduction, Lord Byron was notorious for his excessive drinking and affairs. He relished in the fame his personality offered him and was adored by many, receiving letters from countless women. The figure of the rake relishes in attention and can do anything to uphold this status in society.

Sebastian is desperate to keep hold of this reputation and is frustrated when people around him begin to recognise changes/his real self. Lord Westcliff, who was once his best friend until he kidnapped his love interest Lillian, notices these changes almost instantly as soon as he watches Sebastian and Evie interact with one another: ‘To receive an apology from a man who had never expressed a single regret about anything, and then to hear him practically beg for his wife’s protection, led to an inescapable conclusion. St. Vincent had, against all odds, learned to care more for someone else than he did for himself’ (Kleypas, 2006, p. 261). For someone who has known Sebastian his whole life, Westcliff is unable to believe the dramatic changes he is witnessing, he is also in disbelief that a timid woman like Evie was powerful enough to create this change: ‘The situation was extraordinary. How someone like Evangeline Jenner could have wrought such a change in St Vincent, the most worldly of men, was difficult to understand’ (Kleypas, 2006, p. 261). Here, Kleypas uses secondary characters to reiterate and emphasise the transformation of the rake and the power of the female protagonist. The journey of this reformation is due to Evie questioning Sebastian to the point where she can ascertain his personality.

As mentioned previously, Sebastian is wanting to grasp the rakeish personality traits he has created for himself and is afraid to show emotions to the point where he hides them away: ‘Sebastian had not wanted her to find out that he wore the ring beneath his clothes.



Agitated, he whispered, “Means nothing. Just...wanted to keep it safe – ” (Kleypas, 2006, p. 258). Sebastian is wearing their wedding ring underneath his clothes, shielding away any real feelings he holds towards Evie. For the rake, emotions are a weakness and keeping composed is the ultimate goal. Here Sebastian is trying to convince Evie that the ring ‘means nothing,’ he can also be seen as convincing *himself* that the reason he is wearing it, is so that he can keep it safe. Throughout the novel the figure of the rake is convincing himself that he does not hold emotions towards the female protagonist, however, is surprised to find that he does care and is affected. For instance, when Evie is affectionate towards Cam Rohan, who is a Romani she has grown up with, Sebastian is jealous: ‘Do as you please. But when you’re with Rohan or any other man, you had better keep in mind that you belong completely to me’ (Kleypas, 2006, p. 184). Like Michael Stirling, Sebastian is claiming Evie as ‘his.’ He is possessive and jealous which Evie recognises immediately: ‘Trying to interpret the comment, Evie stared at him with astonishment. “Are you...is it possible...you’re jealous?” Sudden bafflement flickered across his features. “Yes,” he said gruffly. “It would seem so.” And throwing Evie a glance of bewildered annoyance, he left the room’ (Kleypas, 2006, p. 184). The word ‘interpret’ depicts that the statement where he claims Evie as ‘his’ was due his jealousy towards Cam and Evie being together. His ‘bewildered annoyance’ portrays that this rake has not felt such an intense emotion before. He is surprised and perplexed as to why he is feeling so protective towards his wife and leaves the room as he does not want to confront these new emotions. Evie’s speech is broken up by ellipses displaying her shock, however she recognises the emotions Sebastian is showing and tells him how he feels, which he then agrees with. His ‘annoyance’ is with himself, as he is unable to contain these emotions and keep their marriage of convenience controlled. This is Sebastian’s rakeish performance in which he tries to hide his vulnerability and the façade helps him to keep up the wall that he has built around him.

Sebastian's feelings for Evie begin to grow and can be seen through his actions. When they consummate their marriage, the language Kleypas uses is usually associated with the female experience: 'Sebastian left the bed and went to the washstand on unsteady legs. He felt dazed, uncertain, as if he were the one who had just lost his virginity instead of Evangeline' (Kleypas, 2006, p. 68). Sebastian's 'loss of virginity' is the ultimate transformation of the rake as he experiences authentic intimacy for the first time. Though Evie is the one literally to lose her virginity, Sebastian is the one with 'unsteady legs'. His excessive masculine energy throughout the novel is being subverted here. This significant moment underpins what the popularity of this genre is all about. For readers, they are satisfied that Evie has made him softer and less of a machismo. This raises the question of what it is to be a man, in particular for readers today as well as in the time that these novels are set. In Todd W. Reeser's essay *Concepts of Masculinity and Masculinity Studies*, he discusses ideas on the male body and how men assume their maleness which he also links with Butler's findings: 'men are not acting masculine because of something in their genes or in their blood, but by virtue of the fact that their gendered acts implicitly refer to or cite innumerable actions that others have already undertaken – actions that provide authority, meaning, and stability for the current act. So the masculinity of a given cowboy in a film is supported and made possible by an entire host of links between masculinity and space, the frontier, guns, etc' (Horlacher et al., 2015, p. 31). This would question what makes the rake act masculine and how this impacts his character. For the figure of the rake this could be his reputation, social status, his clothes and his space. The historical setting of the novel also entices him to show this masculinity as this would be an expectation. Sebastian opposes this masculine energy when he is described as 'unsteady.' Evie has caused him to dispel this masculinity and show his weaknesses.

Men were not expected to remain chaste and though Sebastian was promiscuous, his sexual experience with Evie allows him the experience of a woman losing her virginity after marriage. Lord Byron was similarly eccentric and blurred the boundaries of masculine and feminine energy: 'his body was eccentric for contemporaries also in that it ran counter to notions of masculinity predicated on the 'domestication' of man, the growing importance of Evangelical values, and notions of virtue and productivity, promoted by conservative ideologues' (Saglia, 2010, p. 15). These conservative views held the domesticated male in a high regard however, Lord Byron was unconventional. He was 'both fat and thin' and 'covered yet in full view,' his identity was confusing and displaced in society making him all the more intriguing, 'the import of which continues to resonate well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' (Saglia, 2010, p. 15). Sebastian is experiencing these traits which are ironically being used to domesticate him. When he was the embodiment of the rake, he held his reputation and was unable to settle down.

Butler also discusses the boundaries of what being a man and woman are and how these distinctions can be problematic: 'Identifying with a gender under contemporary regimes of power involves identifying with a set of norms that are and are not realizable, and whose power and status precede the identifications by which they are insistently approximated. This "being a man" and this "being a woman" are internally unstable affairs' (Butler, 2014, p. 126-127). The societal norms are powerful and dictate these rigid categories. However, the Byronic rake is a lot more fluid than being contained in such a category. Butler's idea is that this identity is 'unstable' and that is not concrete but rather is constantly reconstructed. For Sebastian, reputation is everything which is why his identity is constructed based on the recognition he receives from others. Sebastian's character evolves through the novel and both his and Evie's characters are interchangeable.

Sebastian's feelings for Evie grow throughout the narrative: "I was wrong," Westcliff said. "Why are you so irate?" "I'm not-" Sebastian broke off as he realised that he was unravelling. He glanced at Evie and felt the startling reverse of their positions; she, the stammering wallflower, now serene and steady and he; always so cool and self-possessed, now reduced to an impassioned idiot" (Kleypas, 2006, p. 250-251). In this part of the novel Sebastian has transformed to a shy wallflower and now Evie has the upper hand in the relationship. Sebastian now has the stutter that Evie once had and is understanding the extent of his feelings towards her. The stutter displays the language failing and falling apart. The idea that the power of the rake is his language, here it is apparent that this power is diminishing and falling apart. This pivotal moment in the novel displays the fine balance that the rake requires for his transformation. When the female lead changes, so does he. It also depicts that he is losing his infamous power as he submits to the woman he loves. The rake's rakishness depends entirely on female desire and for the acceptance of those traits. The figure of the rake exists for the female and his actions and speech are for her pleasure. As discussed in the previous chapter, these novels explore heterosexual desire for this figure and the rake gains power from the desire he receives from women.

Sebastian allows Evie to step outside of her comfort zone and become a confident and outspoken person. He encourages her to think outside of the norms of society and for her to challenge herself: "You also had a taste for the devil" (Kleypas, 2006, p. 151). Sebastian wants Evie to understand that she also had a desire to disarm him and had a side to her that was repressed before she met him. The word 'devil' here once again adds to the Biblical connotation of when Eve is tempted in the Garden of Eden. This emphasises that readers of these novels also have a 'taste' for this character and the desire towards the rake is inevitable. Evie's character changes, she is more in control and Sebastian makes her aware of this.

““You enjoyed cornering me, an infamous rake, in my own home with an offer I couldn’t afford to refuse”” (Kleypas, 2006, p. 151). The figure of the rake is giving some of his power to the female character and championing her confidence in making his decisions for him. He calls himself ‘infamous’ and relishes in the fame that he has acquired. He treats her as an equal when telling her that she can live her life freely just like he has: ““Think about what you want,” he advised. ““There’s very little you can’t have so long as you dare to reach for it”” (Kleypas, 2006, p. 153). He gives her hopes to follow her dreams and tells her that she is able to achieve anything she likes: ‘why don’t you try pleasing yourself for a change? Why not live by your own rules? What has obeying the conventions ever gotten you?’ (Kleypas, 2006, p. 150). His non-stop questioning depicts how frustrated he is with ‘living by the rules’ and how he wants his wife to be free of this. The power he is offering her is simple, the key to being happy and pleasing herself. This portrays Sebastian as a doting husband who wants his wife to be truly happy and have the ability to question common ideals. He is also transferring the power over to her and invertedly losing this himself as she gains control of their relationship. Despite the rake’s apparent appeal being centred entirely on danger and risk, this also holds out the promise of reform and domestication. In the novel, this reform also demonstrates that language is the locus of his sexual power, because Sebastian becomes hesitant while Evie becomes more fluent.

In conclusion, Sebastian is portrayed as the enigmatic and charming rake who is reformed by the female protagonist. He is charming and seductive, the epitome of the Byronic Rake. He holds his reputation as a focal point to his existence in society and has a scandalous celebrity status. Marriage is a key factor in his transformation and works to domesticate him. The figure of the rake in the *Devil in Winter* is sarcastic and witty, redeemed in the eyes of the reader – becoming Kleypas’ most popular heroes. Kleypas

continues Sebastian and Evie's story through their children by writing books, about their daughter Phoebe in *Devil's Daughter* (2019) and *Devil in Spring* (2017) featuring their son Gabriel, Lord St. Vincent. She proceeds to write another novel *Devil in Disguise* (2021), based on Sebastian's illegitimate son. Kleypas claims in one of her interviews that her publisher did not believe she would be able to redeem his character after making him the villain in her novel *It Happened One Autumn* (2005). The redemption of a villainous rake allows his popularity to persist. Sebastian's rakishness is a performance and ultimately his reputation. Similar to Michael, he uses this rakishness to glamorise his appearance and hide his emotions. Language is the locus of his sexual power, because as Sebastian becomes more hesitant Evie becomes more fluent.

Sebastian's 'loss of virginity' is the ultimate transformation of the rake as he experiences authentic intimacy for the first time. This emotion is foreign to him as he is the master of seduction and usually the one in power. Following this transformation Sebastian's character begins to unravel, and he instantly becomes defensive when these emotions become evident in their relationship. The rake is in survival mode to maintain his rakishness. He also plays the tortured hero with a traumatic past, and the female protagonist feels the need to reform him and offer him the love and nurture he was not able to experience as a child.

## **Chapter 3 - A ‘predatory hawk’ amongst ‘tame, colorful peacocks’: the Brontëan rake in *Almost Heaven* by Judith McNaught**

As the previous two chapters have demonstrated, the rake is a standard figure in historical romance fiction. However, his attractiveness persistently takes the female protagonists of such novels by surprise. When Elizabeth Cameron meets Ian Thornton in *Almost Heaven* (1990) by Judith McNaught, ‘he was nothing like she expected him to be [...] – he was startlingly tall, more than six feet, with powerful shoulders and long, muscular legs.’ The familiar and fetishized hair with ‘the tendency to curl’ is once more present. Everything about his appearance is striking: ‘instead of wearing the customary bright satin coat and white breeches that the other men wore he was clad in raven black from head to foot, with the exception of his snowy shirt and neckcloth, which were so white they seemed to gleam against the stark black of his jacket and waistcoat’. This makes him seem ‘like a large, predatory hawk in the midst of a gathering of tame, colorful peacocks’ (McNaught, 1990, p. 41).

This novel tells the story of Ian and Elizabeth who meet and are instantly attracted to each other. Elizabeth saves Ian from a duel, and he is enamoured by her. However, due to misunderstandings both are caught in a questionable position which causes tension and Ian thinks that Elizabeth has tried to deceive him. Throughout the novel we learn more about Ian’s background and status as well as Elizabeth’s plan for her future. Ultimately, these misunderstandings are eventually cleared and the novel ends in matrimony.

This chapter argues that the character of Ian Thornton embodies characteristics of the dark, brooding and cynical rake. It will discuss key influences that have assisted in the creation of this character and also categorise this rake. He will also be identified in contemporary historical romance and the impacts of this genre will be explored. I will discuss the class and societal position of this rake and how this impacts his character. This will lead on to the transformation of the rake when he gains a title and the significance of this shift in dynamic. This chapter will explore Ian's connection with Heathcliff and the Brontës to learn more about the key historical figures influencing the character of the rake.

Ian Thornton is known to be a gambler and social outcast. In comparison to Sebastian and Michael in the first two chapters of this dissertation, he is a man with an unknown lineage and is looked down on in society due to his mysterious background as well as his scandalous affairs. He is 'wondrously handsome in a dark, frightening sort of way,' very much like Sebastian (McNaught, 1990, p. 70). Though Ian is scorned due to his social position, women are attracted to his enigma and his apparent unattainability. They look for the passion he can offer them and the exhilarating danger they feel in his presence. This female desire tends to objectify him as no woman is interested in marrying a man 'without background, breeding, or connections' (McNaught, 1990, p. 37). The danger and interest are short lived as women resort to finding a match with a man of social standing. This reiterates how society was constructed at the time, matches for marriages were arranged to be as advantageous as possible for the families involved. Ian's journey is similar to that of Michael's, where both have no title but then acquire this at a pivotal point of the novel and the dynamic of the rake is transformed. Aware of the danger, Elizabeth saves Ian from a deathly gamble which would have led to a duel of honour. Duels in the Regency and Victorian period would be carried out for a number of reasons. For instance, to restore and



retribute the honour of a woman amidst a scandal that has taken place: ‘Dueling was illegal, and in this instance the code of honor would dictate that Ian appear – which he’d already agreed to do in the greenhouse – and that Robert would delope – fire in the air’ (McNaught, 1990, p. 102). This portrays that men are the caretakers of a woman’s honour and are the only ones who can restore it. However, it can be argued that this patriarchal culture is just as harmful to the male character than it is for the female: ‘The culture of honor and the aristocratic patriarchal culture that inform it are presented and dissected through both courtship rituals and marital/familial politics, and though critics usually focus on how these structures impinge on female agency, the novel demonstrates the pitfalls of hereditary patriarchal power for the men themselves’ (Kramp, 2017, p. 81). Due to societal expectations and pressure of the patriarchy, the male is putting his life at risk to restore order. For Ian who is a man without a title, there is also the added risk of enmity with Elizabeth’s family who are well-known and established in society.

That night, she dreams of ‘wild storms, of strong arms reaching out to rescue her, drawing her forward, then pitching her into the storm tossed sea’ (McNaught, 1990, p. 74). She is unconsciously aware of the dangers that being involved with him meant but proceeds to meet him alone and unchaperoned. While on her way to see him, she doubts her decision, reinforcing his image of being a ‘gambler’ and ‘skilled flirt’ (McNaught, 1990, p. 79). The figure of the rake seduces the female, and the dangers are only making his company all the more exhilarating. Ian’s experience with women and the rumours about him create a dangerous image, Elizabeth is keen to learn more and have a taste of this danger for herself.

Like Sebastian, Ian Thornton also has a troubled past. His family had all died in a tragic fire. This traumatic past adds to Ian’s cold demeanour as his father was disowned due

to falling in love with ‘the sister of a poor Scottish vicar.’ Ian feels disdain towards his father’s family for what they put him through and the struggles he undergoes due to this. He becomes a gambler and a well-known one at that. This rake is famous in society for his gambling habits, ‘he was regarded as some sort of mythical king with a golden touch’ (McNaught, 1990, p. 144). Even without a lineage or title he is still a scandalous rake who is praised for his abilities. Though he is able to sustain a life through his successful gambling habits, unlike Sebastian he does not relish in his fame, but rather ‘it had cost him his right to privacy, and he resented that’ (McNaught, 1990, p. 144). This depicts how this aloof rake is not focused on maintaining his fame but is fixated in making something of himself and having access to the luxuries he deserves. Ian does manage to attain a title from his father’s side after his grandfather acknowledges him. After acquiring the title, Marquess of Kensington, Ian’s position as the rake instantly changes in society: ‘Amazing, is it not, what wealth and a title will do? [...] Six months ago word got out that he’s worth a fortune, and we started inviting him to our parties. Tonight he’s the heir to a dukedom, and we’ll be coveting invitations to *his* parties’ (McNaught, 1990, p. 306)

The figure of the rake obtains power and position in society making him invincible to his prior scrutiny, his relationship with Elizabeth is no longer seen as scandalous, but rather envied by onlookers. This is yet another type of transformation that is similar to Heathcliff when he returns as a wealthy man: ‘his countenance was much older in expression and decision of feature than Mr. Linton’s; it looked intelligent and retained no marks of former degradation. A half-civilised ferocity lurked yet in the depressed brows and eyes full of black fire, but it was subdued; and his manner was even dignified: quite divested of roughness, though too stern for grace!’ (Wuthering Heights, 1847/2009, p. 96) Ian also holds his previous charm though he has obtained a title: ‘he looked breathtakingly handsome in a coat

and waistcoat [...] and a cream silk shirt that emphasized the tan of his face and throat' (McNaught, 1990, p. 338) This tan is like that which Michael acquires on his visit to India. He is also described as having a 'bronzed back' (McNaught, 1990, p. 198). Though it is not explicit in the novel regarding any journey that Ian has undertaken, he is aware of a world outside of England: 'Their appearance and living habits depend upon their tribe,' Ian told her [...] "Some of the tribes are 'savage' by our standards, not theirs, and some of the tribes are peaceful by any standards..." (McNaught, 1990, p. 84). This suggests that Ian did travel abroad, and his appearance held significant changes due to this.

The language used to represent Ian as the rake, appeals to both female characters and to readers: the 'sheer male beauty of his wide, masculine shoulders, his broad back and narrow waist', for instance (McNaught, 1990, p. 80). Such descriptions set up masculine ideal which readers are expected to find attractive. Though, where the rake is placed impacts his appearance: 'He'd looked so right at Charise's party, so at ease in his beautifully tailored evening clothes [...] Besides his powerful physique there was a harsh vitality, an invulnerability about him that was perfectly suited to this untamed land' (McNaught, 1990, p. 198). His wildness is prevalent in his homeland, Scotland, much like Heathcliff's belonged in the untamed moors. The character of the rake is relational rather than essential. This is not just to the female character but also to the location. Butler discusses the myth of the essential and how gender/sexuality are constructed: 'I would suggest that performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed by a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject' (Butler, 2014, p. 95). Butler is reiterating how a person is constantly performing their gender identity and going through the performance of what it means to be a man or woman. This is under 'constrained repetition'

as there is no choice in the matter. Similarly, the figure of the rake is performing his gender and identity based on societal expectations of what it means to be a male.

Regis also explains as noted in the introduction, that the female readership is projecting themselves onto the female figure, and there is something about sexual desire today that makes these texts so popular. Readerly desire is explored in parallel with the female protagonists, also offering escape through its historical setting and thus the mitigation of the risk of desiring a dangerous rake figure. Setting these stories in the past essentially creates a safe place for the writers to explore character and gendered sexual convention. Cooper and Short also mention how this allows the reader to distance themselves from the text: ‘these narratives effectively manipulate an account of the past in order to interrogate the gender politics of the present in a way which would perhaps not be acceptable in a contemporary setting [...] allowing them more freedom to depict and to interrogate the socio-sexual norms and practices of the present’ (Copper and Short, 2012, p. 10). There is more to setting these texts in the past than just reading them for pleasure. The novels allow readers to explore gender and power and understanding why these characters are enjoyable. The women in the texts are breaking social codes that were prevalent at the time the novels are set, however as the novels are written today this would mean that they are not really deemed as progressive. Readers enjoy this apparent progressiveness where they are encouraged to forget today’s gender politics whilst also gaining pleasure from the politics in a historical setting. The reader is able to perceive that women do have the power to bring a weakness in their male counterpart and that these texts can be read for their enjoyment alone. The historical setting is part of the conservatism, as Cooper and Short note. The past acts as ‘a refuge’. The ‘focus on marriage and women within the home’, providing a counter-narrative to the social changes relating to gender, sexuality and marriage in the context of the text’s production

(Cooper and Short, 2012, p. 7). Both the setting and the apparently historically-appropriate figure of the rake work together to create a 'refuge' from the modern world.

As mentioned in previous chapters, these novels are restricted to heterosexual desires. Judith Butler discusses the impact this has on readership along with gender performativity: 'What best way to trouble the gender categories that support gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality? Consider the fate of "female trouble," that historical configuration of a nameless female indisposition, which thinly veiled the notion that being female is a natural indisposition' (Butler, 2006; 2011, p. 31). The contemporary romance fiction genre exhibits this 'compulsory heterosexuality' which is evident with the exploration of the three novels in this dissertation. There is no inclination other than heterosexuality, with Michael in Chapter One, Quinn is explicit in advising that the 'female half' are attracted to him. Ian is the classic brooding hero, from his clothes to his mannerisms, he oozes powerful masculine energy. Also, as indicated above 'female trouble' is also harmful to this as the premise of the story is often a damsel in distress that needs rescuing. Butler empathises how being a woman is almost like an illness and the idea that being a woman is intrinsic and therefore you would be intrinsically ill. Here, being a female is therefore a weakness which reiterates that a woman requires saving. Elizabeth has this innately engrained in her that she must take her place in society and marry for benefit rather than love. I will discuss her character in further depth in the chapter, as she does show signs of questioning her role and that of a male counterpart. Evie as discussed in the previous chapter, is in need of protection through marriage. She is an inconvenience to her family but does begin to find her voice as her confidence strengthens through the novel.

Brooding heroes of the past also serve as reference points and inspiration: Such as Ian Thornton's similarities with Heathcliff from Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), and it

is perhaps no coincidence that his surname is also the name of the Brontës' birthplace. Thornton's violently expressive feelings for Elizabeth demonstrate the Heathcliff connection: 'the harder you try, the harder I'll fight you. I'll haunt your dreams at night, exactly the way you have haunted mine every night I was away from you' (McNaught, 1990). This closely echoes Heathcliff's torment: 'Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest as long as I am living. You said I killed you – haunt me then' (Wuthering Heights, 1847/2009, p. 169). The close connection between love and death reinforces the dangerous attraction of men like Heathcliff and Thornton. Elizabeth is the Countess of Haverthorpe, being the only female heir, she is higher placed in society than Ian when they first encounter each other. Though she is often warning herself and warned by friends, she still feels drawn to Ian and is unable to resist him, her body seemingly acting independently of her conscious will, itself a definitive feature of desire for the rake: 'Elizabeth's entire body started to tremble as his lips began descending to hers and she sought to forestall what her heart knew was inevitable by reasoning with him'. This attraction is positioned as in opposition to socially acceptable marriage: "A gently bred Englishwoman," she shakily quoted Lucinda's lecture, "feels nothing stronger than affection. We do not fall in love" (McNaught, 1990, p. 87). Similar to both Evie and Francesca, Elizabeth is reminding herself of the danger and this warning is what has been engrained within her societal teachings. It also foreshadows the temptation of the rake and gives an insight to readers on the lessons young women would undergo to repress their sexuality. These warnings are futile as mentioned above, Evie knows this temptation is 'inevitable.' Once again, the dark and dangerous appeal of the rake is emphasised: "He is wondrously handsome in a dark, frightening sort of way," admitted Georgina in a whisper. "There's something – well – dangerous about him, too," she added with a delicate shiver of delight' (McNaught, 1990, p. 70). That 'shiver of delight' comes directly from the dangerous element that women recognise in Ian. The enigma behind his birth and family only adds to his appeal

as it makes him the 'other' in their eyes. Heathcliff is othered due to his unknown race and origins: 'He is the half-civilised Other that illustrates debates concerning fear of the unknown racial Other and serves as a complicated image of ethnic otherness, the incarnation of 'foreignness' in the eyes of the native British' (Hannon, 2018, p. 222-223). Ian is othered by society due to his unknown lineage, this raises questions regarding where he is from and why he has no title. His 'bronzed' look and unknown travels create a world of enigma around him, and his otherness only add to the appeal he offers.

Ian is someone who is a mystery or a puzzle that Elizabeth wants to piece together. Elizabeth makes it clear that she is afraid of him, but she still proceeds to visit him unchaperoned and without telling anyone. The relationship between fear and pleasure are interlinked, even though she is aware that being alone with him unchaperoned is a scandalous risk: 'Elizabeth was trapped, and she knew it. "The truth is," she said shakily, "that I am scared to death of being here."' She openly admits that she is worried about what this meeting would lead to however, she understands the repercussions: "'I know you are," he said sobering, "but I am the last person in the world you'll ever have to fear"' (McNaught, 1990, p. 83). Ian reassures Elizabeth that she has nothing to fear from him, but the situation they are in foreshadows the upcoming misunderstandings that are about to take place. The figure of the rake is appealing, allowing for danger to become the ultimate adventure. Elizabeth is unable to refuse his advances. Ian is the master of seductive language; he uses this to calm her down and make her feel more at ease about the situation.

Ian's comparison to 'a large, predatory hawk' forms yet another connection to the work of the Brontës, but this time *Jane Eyre* (1847). The danger that Ian represents coincides with 'Jane's and Rochester's threatening passion, which would consume and destroy Jane'

(Anderson and Lawrence, 2015, p. 244). Ian symbolises this ‘threatening passion’ as he is the epitome of danger. The continuous imagery of birds also foreshadow the chaotic relationship Ian and Elizabeth will form. Birds of prey were significant in the lives of the Brontës. Emily Bronte had a pet bird called Nero: ‘so named presumably because his wild ways (a bird of prey) evoked those of the tyrannical emperor’ (O’Callaghan, 2018, p. 106). She made a portrait of her pet bird and also linked him with human qualities, the repetition of bird imagery in reference to Ian also merges the predatory qualities of the animal with the human. These links suggest that McNaught may have been influenced by the Brontë’s and the character of Heathcliff from *Wuthering Heights* (1847). At the time that Emily wrote *Wuthering Heights*, the reviews and reception it had received were negative, as her characters and story were likened to being demonic and transgressive. Emily’s sister Charlotte herself gave an assessment of Heathcliff’s character: ‘Heathcliff, indeed, stand unredeemed; never once swerving in his arrow-straight course to perdition [...]’ (O’Callaghan, 2018, p. 44). Whether it is right or advisable to create things like Heathcliff, I do not know.’ The creation of Heathcliff was seen as shocking due to his nature and Charlotte defended her sister by advising it was not her intention to create him. The character of Ian Thornton holds similar traits however, he is domesticated and redeemed through his relationship with Elizabeth. Ian’s homeland in Scotland is described as ‘wild’ and ‘primitive’ (McNaught, 1990, p. 205). This similarity to the wild moors where *Wuthering Heights* is set, represents Ian’s otherness and separation from society. He lives isolated and embraces the wild setting as it is much like himself.

Ian’s predatory manner is repeated throughout the novel, especially when, for Elizabeth, being seduced feels like being hunted: ‘She did not know this man at all; she’d only met him hours ago; and yet even now he was watching her with a look that was much



too...personal. And possessive” (McNaught, 1990, p. 81). Ian is watching Elizabeth as though she is his ‘prey.’ He is openly observing her without any reservations and is confident in expressing himself without the worry of what people will think. The hawklike hunting rake is confident and powerful in asserting his passion, unafraid of society and dealing with the consequences. Ian is unforgiving and unremorseful when it comes to a person who has betrayed him. His grandfather had disowned his father for marrying of his own choice. Now that his grandfather is on his deathbed, he is being persuaded to visit him: ““You’re in the business of forgiveness.” Ian drawled with scathing sarcasm. “I’m not. I believe an eye for an eye”” (McNaught, 1990, p. 230) He is cold and reclusive similar to Heathcliff, when he returns for revenge for not being able to be with Cathy. He is unforgiving, in comparison to Elizabeth’s soft nature.

Similar to the previous chapter, Ian undergoes a reformation when he realises his love for Elizabeth and many of the misunderstandings between them are cleared. His cry for help is evident when he is asking her to forgive him, “and when you can't stand it anymore you'll come back to me and I'll be there waiting for you. I'll cry in your arms, and I'll tell you I'm sorry for everything I have done and you'll help me find a way to forgive myself” (McNaught, 1990, p. 501). She discovers Ian and wants to reform him, but this also demonstrates how conservative the script is and how the romance plot fails to emancipate female desire. It is once again the male that is put into focus with his outwardly display of grovelling. This depicts the importance of the woman in the rake’s journey to reformation. Without the woman he loves and feels so deeply connected with, he would be uncontrollable. The figure of the female can be seen as, in some ways, holding the power in bringing the rake to his knees, and with her love, change into a devoted husband. Nevertheless, the potential for reform apparently adds to the appeal of the rake. In an article written in 1893 for the *London*

*Journal*, there is a section on ‘How to Reform a Man’ with the old maximum: ‘A REFORMED rake makes the best of husband’ (Leslie, 1893, p. 25). This appears to have been an encouragement for women to strive in reforming the rake into a husband. This once again reaffirms that this was and is a narrowing of female power and is rather a way for women to be controlled in order to influence the behaviour of the male. However, the promise of reforming the rake is not powerful for the female character and nor the reader who identifies with the character. The female is being told that this reformation will provide a happy ending for her however, these qualities in the rake question who truly holds the power and is ‘exploiting’ this cry for help.

The character of Elizabeth is headstrong and defiant which are traits that Ian admires: “‘Don’t you dare play mind games with me!’” she said, her voice trembling with fury. Inwardly, Ian smiled with pride at her perspicacity; even in a state of shock, Elizabeth knew when she was being gulled’ (McNaught, 1990, p. 340). The rake admires the female protagonist and her tenacity in speaking her mind and standing up to him. Sebastian also offers Evie the chance to reach out for whatever she desires, the rake here is offering the female figure refuge from the tiring expectations that society has burdened them with. She is bold and knows her worth: “‘Why, you – arrogant, overbearing’” – She choked back the tears that were cutting off her voice [...] her body shaking with wrath’ (McNaught, 1990, p. 339). Elizabeth is angry with Ian as he has issued a contract for their marriage without asking her whether she would like to go ahead. She is in love with him at this point. However, she deems her worth as a woman to be asked permission, which in itself is defying the norms of marriage at the time. Her self-confidence and independence grow as the novel progresses, where she was always taught that marriage is the sole purpose of a woman, she soon begins to see the reality for what it is: “‘Don’t you dare suggest a man as the solution for my

troubles,” she cried. “You’re all the cause of them!”” (McNaught, 1990, p. 342). This links back to the previous discussion by Cooper and Shorts regarding lessons for readers within the contemporary fiction texts. Elizabeth recognises that marriage is not the solution to her issues and wants to have the agency to navigate her own life in the ways she deems fit. In romance novels and chick lit (popular fiction for younger women), protagonists’ have ‘ambiguous stands on romance and marriage. There are also ‘contradictory desires expressed by younger generations of women for both independence and security [...] a sometimes uneasy mix of romance and *bildungsroman*’ (Young, 2011, p. 105). McNaught has set the novel in both Elizabeth and Ian’s point of view giving readers an insight to both their journeys. However, the majority of the text offers the reader an understanding of the female figure and how her life changes impact her decisions. This reinforces how the novels are written for a female readership and also how the character of the rake is represented through the female lens. The figure of the rake is being both viewed and consumed by the female.

Throughout the novel Ian portrays his obsession towards Elizabeth through his displays of affection. The element of obsession in the name of love links back to Ian being depicted as a Heathcliffian rake. The overt obsession which blurs the line between good and evil is what makes Heathcliff such a toxic and misunderstood character. There is a saying which is well-known on Twitter and social media that ‘a hero would kill you to save the rest of the world however, a villain would tear the world apart to save you’ (2021). The appeal of the sensuality and desire that the anti-hero awakens contributes to the popularity of this figure.

In conclusion, Ian Thornton is the cold, brooding Heathcliffian Rake. He undergoes a transformation from a gambler to the owner of a Dukedom which not only changes his

position is society but makes him a more powerful rake. He maintains his power but ultimately succumbs to headstrong Elizabeth, with whom he falls in love with and after many misunderstandings and tribulations along the way, he ends up marrying. The rake here is predatory and is 'too...personal. And possessive' (McNaught, 1990, p. 81). Ian is a mixture between fear and pleasure. Similar to Michael he has a 'tan' and talks of experiences outside of England which adds to the rake's otherness. His reformation occurs in the novel when the misunderstandings between him and Elizabeth are cleared, and when he finds out the letters written to him were forged. Both Elizabeth and Ian end up meeting and getting caught together by her brother. It looks as though this is a scandal however, it was a friend of Elizabeth's who exchanges notes between them to arrange this encounter. The character of Elizabeth can be viewed as independent and strong willed. Though at the end she is expected by her family to make amends to her reputation and find a man to marry.

# Conclusion

The tropes associated with the figure of the rake can be seen as recurring but the inspirations behind them are drawn from the predecessors. The characteristics that attribute towards these figures determines their transformation and the pleasure of the rake. The setting also has an impact on these figures with the societal structure creating a fantasy world of escape. The rake is constructed in several ways based on the taxonomy he fits, Sebastian for instance has a scandalous reputation and can be seen as conforming to society by taking his place on the social ladder through his marriage to Evie. Though each rake has a rebellious nature which keeps them either isolated or against society, the novel ends in them marrying and settling down with their significant other.

Each of the rakes in this dissertation offer something new along with familiar traits. Michael Stirling is exciting and dangerous, his love for Francesca is nothing short of devotion. His travels to India set him apart from Sebastian and Ian, as his appearance and nature changes upon his return. This change becomes necessary as it allows Francesca to see him beyond her husband's cousin and she is finally able to admire him. Kleypas' rake, Sebastian, is sarcastic and witty. He is not shy of praising himself and relishes in his confidence as well as good looks. His character is reintroduced from the previous novel in the series, *It Happened One Autumn*, in which he was the villain of the story. Sebastian redeems himself through his devotion towards Evie though his witty nature remains prevalent in the series. The transformation in this instance is not just for masculine characters. Evie also undergoes this transformation, while Sebastian becomes more hesitant, Evie recovers from her stutter, becoming more fluent in her speech and actions. Finally, McNaught's Brontëan rake is a dark and brooding man with an unknown lineage. This rake is a 'predatory hawk'

who draws influence from Heathcliff with dialogue that often matches his passion and obsession.

The transformation of the rake and the female protagonist allows both characters to grow and for the romance novel to reach a resolution. Each of the texts have a turning point where the female figure transforms and domesticates the rake. For *Devil in Winter* this would be when Sebastian is wounded as he saves his wife Evangeline from harm. The narrative often brings a conflict which uncovers the feelings of the rake and their love towards the female figure. Ian realises his feelings for Elizabeth once their misunderstandings are cleared and he does everything he can to convince her to marry him. Similarly, Michael's feelings render him powerless, and he is persistent in persuading Francesca that he loves her and wants to marry her. Each novel follows the structure of the romance novel, beginning with an attraction between the male and female, tension and conflict, and then the ultimate resolve. As described by Wood, each novel has an encounter, smoulder, cold shoulder, reaction, violence and turmoil, and resolution.

The rake in this genre can still be viewed as progressive in some respects as he is ultimately domesticated by marriage and society causing him to give up his way of life. Female desire is given importance, particularly through the figure of the female in the text with the rake becoming an object of desire and seeking redemption by the end of the novel. The enigmatic personality of the rake is what draws readers, maintaining their persistent popularity as this is the unknown and a formidable challenge for the reader to unravel. There are many layers to the rake which have been explored through my chosen texts. The comparison of this figure to a predatory animal or associated with a bird of prey, the rake can be seen as ultimately displaying constant popularity due to the dangerous aura he emits along

with the desire of the female character to reform him. As stated in the three chapters, this desire is heterosexual, and the text is clear that the desire for the rake is for the sake of female desire. The implication of this is narrowing as it covers one aspect of desire and does not allow scope for homosexual desire. As discussed, using findings from Butler, heterosexuality is at the forefront and the only way deemed normal and necessary.

Sebastian and Michael play the part and their rakishness is a performance. As previously discussed, their rakish attributes are a way for them to hide their emotions and they relish in the reputation that this has created them. Ian's rakishness is both subdued and predatory. He is dangerous and his unknown lineage makes him more of a threat in society due to how unpredictable he is. Contemporary audiences enjoy this apparent subversion of contemporary and Regency/Victorian gendered sexual norms that are set in the past, the power that the rake has to enjoy his sexual freedom is constrained by society because his reform is ultimately through marriage. I utilise the finding from Butler's poststructuralist theory where she discusses the myth of the essential and how gender is a repeated construct which is determined by what society decrees. The rake conforms to societal norms by domestication. These novels emphasise the allure of the rake and that all women are enamoured by him. Their stories allow for a deeper understanding on the transformation they undergo and how the female protagonist can reform him. The reformation of the rake is not empowering for the heroine or the readers.

All three novels are part of a wider series of stories with characters interlinking with one another. The structure of these series allows for the rake to be introduced prior to his story such as when Sebastian is the villain in the previous novel. The rake is able to establish himself and become ready to be the main focus. Readers are able to feel a part of this fantasy

world where a whole society is created and promises for future appearances of these couples are offered as part of this package. The novel titles are extreme in their language, *Devil in Winter*, *When He Was Wicked* and *Almost Heaven*, all have connotations to Biblical words as well as rakeish undertones. The anti-hero language used in these titles are captivating to contemporary readers as they deliver the promise of reformation and taming of the ‘devil.’ It is the redemption of a villainous rake allows his popularity to persist. The journey of this redemption is exciting and the fact that a woman can bring this figure to his knees adds to the appeal of this task. It is also the grovelling of the rake for affection and nurturing that makes the reader and female lead believe that they are in control of his transformation.

As stated in previous chapters, Pearce notes that the reformation of the male character is an important trope in romance novels. The hope that the rake will be tamed is the final goal. While the rake may seem to symbolise wildness and freedom, in this genre he is actually a model for reinforcing gender norms and the social constraint of sexuality. Not only do these novels anticipate female desire for the male rake – they assume that *all* women will find him irresistible. This apparent gap between first perception and then what seems like a deeper reality contributes both to the rake’s unknowability (and therefore to female desire for him) and the promise of his redemption if only the heroine can know and transform him. This promise of reforming the rake is not actually very powerful for the female character and neither for the reader who identifies with the character. This is further strengthened by Hobbs’ claim that women are the malevolent force that transform the male figure and domesticate him. The women in these texts all end up in advantageous marriages which is the main goal.



Contemporary Historical Fiction draws on the literary history of the rake and exhibits key influences from these figures. The transformation of the rake is significant as he has a turning point in the novel where this occurs, and the story reaches a resolution. These novels centralise female desire however, the understanding of this is narrowed as it always ends in marriage and conforming to the norms of society.

I identify three types of rakes which are the Colonial rake, the Byronic rake and the Brontëan rake. A longer list can be identified with the study of more texts in this genre. The writers draw influences from such literary figures to portray the story. The implication of this is that there is no 'rake' in this genre, but subcategories of this stock character.

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