

Studies in Gothic Fiction

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As interest in Gothic studies grows exponentially, what is considered Gothic and how we define it continues to evolve. At this conference we will explore not only the origins of the Gothic, but the evolution of the genre.

Papers which explore any aspect of the Gothic in literature, film, and other media are encouraged.

Topics which could be explored include:

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- Romanticism and the Gothic
- Victorian Gothic
- Domestic Gothic
- Continental Gothic
- Gothic in the media
- Gothic spaces
- Neo-Gothic
- The Goth culture
- Selling the Gothic
- Gothic Film

Abstracts (350 words max.) for 20 minute papers may be submitted to Franz Potter: fpotter@nu.edu until November 1st, 2011.

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The Real Eleanor Sleath

Rebecca Czapinski and Eric C. Wheeler

Eleanor Sleath is an eighteenth century novelist best known for her 1798 gothic romance *The Orphan of the Rhine*. Until now details about the life of this author have been few and erroneous (as will be demonstrated). Our research has revealed that Sleath's life was as tempestuous as those of her heroines. Before examining the new biographical information about Eleanor Sleath, one first must deal with the conjecture of past scholars. One of the misconceptions about Sleath's life, that she was Catholic, was begun in 1927 in a paper presented to the English Association by Michael Sadleir, who discussed the Northanger Canon, novels mentioned in Jane Austen's Gothic parody, *Northanger Abbey*. These novels are *The Orphan of the Rhine* (Sleath), *The Castle of Wolfenbach* (Parsons), *Clermont* (Roche), *The Necromancer* (Kahlert), *The Midnight Bell* (Lathom), *Horrid Mysteries* (Grosse), *The Mysterious Warning* (Parsons), and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (Radcliffe).

Sadleir regretted he was unable to find even a single copy of *The Orphan of the Rhine* to read as part of his research. However, by the time his paper went to press, a copy of *The Orphan of the Rhine* had been found. Sadleir categorized the novel with Parson's *Clermont* because of its "affinity to the Radcliffean school of sensational landscape fiction staged abroad" (Sadleir 22). Sadleir surmised that Sleath must be a Catholic because "the monks and nuns of *The Orphan of the Rhine* are all wise and of a spiritual disposition" (22). The idea that one must be a Catholic to treat nuns and monks kindly seems a little strange today, but Eleanor Sleath was writing soon after a period in English history during which animosity existed between Protestants and Catholics, and she wrote in a genre that often used the perceived secrecy and medievalism of Catholic traditions to depict dark secrets and clandestine activity.

Devendra Varma perpetuates the idea of Sleath's Catholicism in his introduction to the 1972 Folio Press edition of *The Nocturnal Minstrel* (1810). Varma asserts, "Mrs. Sleath's ecclesiastical figures are all of noble and virtuous pattern, sane and wise and spiritually inclined. This indicates that Mrs. Sleath had strong leanings toward Roman Catholicism." However, our research reveals that her generosity and kindness toward monks and nuns stemmed from a kind spirit rather than a religious affiliation. Eleanor Sleath was the daughter of a gentleman (Joseph Spencer Cardale, 3D42/13/49, Record Office for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland¹), was raised as an Anglican, and, upon the death of her first husband, married an Anglican minister, Reverend John Dudley of Sileby, England.²

Varma is also the source of other mistaken information about Sleath. In his introduction to the 1968 Folio Press release of *The Orphan of the Rhine*, Varma recounts his investigation through interviews with people who supposedly knew someone who knew the author and archival work that, rather than simply a *nom-de-plume* for an anonymous writer, Eleanor Sleath was a real person. He did discover that Sleath was a Leicestershire name; in fact, Leicestershire was the county in which Eleanor Sleath spent much of her life. Varma erroneously concluded that Eleanor Sleath was Eleanor Martin who married Joseph Sleath of Leicestershire in 1784. However, recent archival evidence proves that this cannot be the correct woman or marriage because Eleanor Sleath, the novelist, was born in 1770 and died in 1847 at the age of 77.³ If Sleath was born in 1770, she could not be the woman mentioned by Professor Varma who stated, "Eleanor Sleath, at the time of her marriage in 1784, stood before the altar of the Church in Gilmorton, Leicestershire; she was a tall slender woman in her twenties" (Varma, "Introduction," *Orphan*). In 1784, Eleanor Sleath, the author, was only fourteen.

Fifty years after Varma wrote his introduction to *The Orphan of the Rhine*, the present researchers' research reveals details concerning the life of this interesting author. Eleanor Sleath was born Eleanor Carter and baptized

at Loughborough Parish Church on 15 October 1770. The youngest child of Thomas and Elizabeth Carter, Eleanor had four older siblings: John Edward (1753), Mary (1755), Judith (1757), and Ann (1766) (Cardale). As an upper-middle-class family of the minor gentry, the Carter Family moved from Hereford to Leicester during the seventeenth century (Cardale).

Eleanor's father, Thomas, was one of five surviving brothers; his siblings were John, Laurence, Isaac, and Henry. If one were not the eldest son who inherited and managed the estate, choice of professions of landed gentry at the time included only a few options, such as the clergy, law, and the military. John Carter became a cleric, while Thomas and Isaac entered the legal profession. Little is known of Thomas's early life until his marriage to Elizabeth Cousins at Wimeswould, Leicestershire, on 6 October 1752 (Cardale). The demands of a country attorney forced Thomas and his new family to move multiple times before they settled in the market town of Loughborough, where Eleanor was born in 1770 (Cardale). Thomas Carter died while away from home, more than likely unexpectedly because he died without a will. He was buried at Sibleby on 29 October 1773 (Eric C. Wheeler 83). Elizabeth, his widow, and his brother Isaac administered the estate until John Edward reached his majority. The family had land wealth to provide a living and to allow for the education of the children.

Although the details of Eleanor's upbringing are unknown, we can assume she was educated in social and practical skills involving managing a household to the standards of a young woman of her status. In the late eighteenth century, women were either tutored at home or sent to small local schools in someone's home. According to Barbara Swords, an accomplished woman of Sleath's time would be taught "drawing, dancing, penmanship, piano playing, grammar, spelling, elementary arithmetic" and often French. It is evident that Eleanor Sleath was an educated woman. By tracing the epigraphs of her first novel, *The Orphan of the Rhine* (1798), one can imagine some of the authors she had on her shelf: John Milton, Oliver Goldsmith, Robert Burns, William Mason, Alexander Pope, and, of course, William Shakespeare. She may have owned the popular collection of essays and poems called *Extracts: Elegant, Instructive and Entertaining* (1791). Or she could have owned *The Lady's Poetical Magazine* (1781) or *The Tea Table Miscellany* (1755), since both also contained several of the works she references. In addition to having the resources to select an apt epigraph, Sleath demonstrated a familiarity with conventional plotting and stock characters of the gothic romance novels so popular at the time.

On 14 September 1792, Eleanor Carter married Joseph Barnabas Sleath of Calverton, Buckinghamshire (Cardale). Details about Joseph are limited. He was summoned as an officer cadet "for the artillery of the Bengal Establishment" in 1783 but had found a substitute to go in his place by 1784 (V.C.P. Hodson, Part 1, 112). Whether or not he went to India is uncertain; however, he was connected to the military and was named a surgeon of the Leicestershire militia in 1794. It is possible that Eleanor met her husband through the Leicestershire militia with which her brother John Edward was also associated.

By the time of her marriage, Eleanor was twenty-one, a spinster well past the average age of marriage; Joseph was five years her senior and a bachelor. It is interesting to note that Eleanor's marriage, unlike those of all her siblings, took place outside of Leicestershire; she was married instead at Calverton, the home of Joseph Sleath. No member of the Carter family signed the Calverton parish register as witness to the marriage (*Calverton, Buckinghamshire. Parish Registers—Marriages 1559–1836*, 22). These seemingly minor details raise questions: Did her family frown on the marriage? Could she have been pregnant? Could she have been acting against the wishes of her family? The newlyweds settled in the large market town of Nuneaton, a distance from both of their families. Joseph established himself as a surgeon and apothecary with an early account referring to him as "Mr. Sleath Doctor" (3D42/13/66, ROLLR). Eleanor went about setting up her home, as is evidenced by the minute details provided in her surviving bills of expenditure: from buying curtains, carpets, tables, and the painting of the parlour, to the repair of her watch for two shillings (various accounts: 3D42/13/69, 3D42/13/74, 3D42/13/81 ROLLR). Eleanor soon gave birth to a son, Joseph Barnabas Sleath. Surviving records paint a picture of domestic bliss, hopes for the future, and new beginnings; however, that happiness was not to last.

The Leicestershire militia began to recruit more troops because of the threat of a French invasion. Joseph resigned from the military in 1794, the first in a chain of events that would shatter Eleanor's newfound happiness. In September Eleanor and Joseph lost their child, who was buried in Nuneaton parish churchyard on 4 September 1794.⁴ Four weeks later, Eleanor's husband died at the age of twenty-eight (St Nicholas, Nuneaton). Eleanor was left with mountains of debt, mostly household expenses and unpaid business accounts (various accounts:

3D42/13/65 – 71, 75 – 78, 84, ROLLR). No record exists of any money or property left to Eleanor by her husband, although she probably had income from previous Carter family legacies. Records do show that John Edward, Eleanor's brother, her mother Elizabeth, and her brother-in-law J. S. Cardale administered the debts of Joseph's estate. One by one the debts were discharged over the winter and spring of 1794 and 1795. In November, after returning to Leicester to care for her aging mother, Eleanor fell ill, no doubt from stress and grief (account of Thomas Teasdale, 13 November 1794, as cited in Cardale, 3D42/13/69, ROLLR).

From this period until the publication of *The Orphan of the Rhine* in 1798, little is known about Sleath's life. It is unclear whether her writing was a serious hobby, a career path, or a means of providing income to discharge her debts. Eleanor met frequently with a small group of intellectual and literary-minded neighbors who often shared their work and received critiques and support. One member of the group was Susanna Watts, a famous resident of Leicester. While Watts was a descendant from Sleath's great-grandfather's first marriage, her family suffered economic difficulties. She was self-educated and of a genteel nature. To help get by, according to Shirley Aucott, Watts published poetry and her own translations of French and Italian literary works (10), as well as the first guide for the town of Leicester: *A Walk Through Leicester* (1784). Watts' determination, her love of nature, and her persistent advocacy against social injustice, particularly slavery, earned her a place in history as a strong female leader in a time when women's roles were restricted. In addition to Watts, the group consisted of Eleanor Sleath and Reverend John Dudley, vicar of Humberstone, and perhaps a few others. Sleath completed and published at least one novel after *Orphan of the Rhine* while meeting with this group. *Who's the Murderer?* was published in 1802 while Eleanor was living in the small village of Scraftoft, four miles east of Leicester.

In 1801, John Edward Carter moved his family, including Eleanor and their mother, from Leicester to an estate he leased called Scraftoft Hall. Located a short distance from the busy city of Leicester, Scraftoft Hall with its gardens, grottos, and lush grounds provided a retreat for Carter (Lease between Edward Hartopp Wigley of Little Dalby, Esq. and John Edward Carter of Scraftoft, Gentleman, 3D42/13/507, ROLLR). The Carters mixed with the local gentry of the area, including the Wattses, the Coltmans, the Simons, the Heyricks, the Frewens of Cold Overton, and the Dudleys of nearby Humberstone. The Carters, Frewens, and Dudleys often called on each other for tea in order to catch up on local business and gossip. They also stayed at each other's homes. For example, in 1803 John Dudley notes that he stayed at Cold Overton Hall for seventeen days (John Dudley, *Diary*, Misc. 338, ROLLR); and Mary Frewen and Susanna Watts stayed with the Dudleys the same year (Mary Frewen, FRE 2314). The group of friends often traveled together. The correspondences between John Dudley and John Frewen indicated that they frequented the posh resort, Bath, where they attended balls, the theater, social functions, and other activities (John Dudley, "To Mary Frewen," FRE/2786 East Sussex Record Office;⁵ and FRE 1231 ESRO).⁶ In February 1804, a party including John Dudley, his wife Ann, and Mary Frewen set off for Bath, where they were joined by John Frewen as well as Ann Dudley's father and sister (Dudley, *Diary*). Later that year, John Dudley noted in his diary that "Mrs. Sleath set off with Mrs. Dudley and myself on a journey into North Wales." Later, they were joined by the Carters, two single women (sisters to one another) and their maid, and a Miss Lutwidge (Dudley, *Diary*). Eleanor Sleath moved in a close-knit circle of families affording her social and intellectual stimulation. Thrown into each other's company as a result of friendships and literary interests, Eleanor Sleath and John Dudley developed a platonic friendship. John Dudley tells John Frewen in a letter, "various literary occupations led me to frequent intercourse with Mrs. S and Miss Watts" (Dudley, "To John Frewen" 1). Mrs. John Dudley developed a resentment of their relationship when, in 1807, at a gathering of friends and family, Eleanor's sister-in-law, Mrs. John Carter (Elizabeth) commented sarcastically about the nature of the friendship between Eleanor and Rev. Dudley. The sarcastic remark sparked gossip inflaming a simmering jealousy in the heart of Mrs. Dudley, resulting in a slanderous scandal, a strained marriage, and shattered friendships. In a letter to John Frewen (1), Dudley complains that the "sarcasms of Mrs. Carter, which were very unfriendly, fostered by the Watts laid . . . the foundation of jealousy in the mind" of his wife (1). According to John Dudley, his wife hid her jealousy until she eventually "became hostile to Mrs. S. and injured her indiscreetly and secretly in various ways," all while maintaining a civil and friendly facade. Dudley naively chose to believe that his wife's "discontent" would diminish when she realized that his "acquaintance with Mrs. S produced no change in [his] behaviour or affection toward her" (1-2).

Despite his continued insistence that his relationship with Mrs. Sleath was purely platonic, Ann Dudley's

jealousy grew. Dudley believed that he had done nothing wrong and felt that he had to protect Eleanor's honor, which had been tarnished by gossip and rumors; however, that only increased his wife's anger. Dudley enlisted the help of John Edward Carter and his brother Isaac, but to no avail. Finally, Mr. Pochin, a mutual friend, suggested that Mrs. Dudley make peace with Eleanor. She agreed to do so, "but her very first step rendered the thing improbable. Her violence now was no longer controlled and the worst of language was too often used." (1–2). John Dudley finally gave up seeing Eleanor when his wife insisted that her health was failing; however, her ailment proved to be a ruse when she made a miraculous recovery.

The circle of friends became polarized, with Susanna Watts and Elizabeth Simms siding with Mrs. Dudley and fueling her resentment. Eventually Mrs. Dudley's machinations led to her undoing when she spread a rumor that Mrs. Sleath went to London with the Isaac Dudleys in order to have a child—the love child of her husband, John Dudley (2–3). Rumors began circulating around Leicester that Dudley fathered a bastard by Eleanor, and an anonymous letter was sent to Eleanor instructing her to forego the acquaintance of the Dudley family for the sake of Mrs. Dudley's "peace."

Frustrated and angry at the attacks upon both his and Eleanor's character and reputation, Dudley charged a Mrs. Simons with giving a "slandering report," and later he also filed a citation against her in ecclesiastic court for defamation. He also visited Susanna Watts, accusing her of authoring the anonymous letter and threatening her with a lawsuit. However, loss of friendship and a crumbling reputation were not his only troubles. In a letter to John Frewen, Dudley asserted that Mrs. Dudley "is now desperate and her only object is revenge which is chiefly directed against me. She rides about to defame me." He went on to explain that she was convinced he was about to sell everything and "run away with Mrs. S." Ann Dudley also told her sister-in-law, Mrs. Isaac Dudley, "that she [Mrs. Isaac Dudley] was hired to murder her." John Dudley accused his wife of feigning injuries so that she could accuse him of assault (3). Dudley decided to remove his wife from Humberstone, the center of the gossip, and moved to his other vicarage in the village of Sileby, seven miles north of Leicester. The move also allowed the Dudleys to live in separate houses, with Ann and the servants in the larger house and John in the smaller.

As a result of the scandal, acrimony, and separation, the Dudleys' social circle was diminished; as a result, the flow of letters stopped, diminishing the source of details about the lives of the Dudleys and Eleanor Sleath. We do know, however, that these years of upheaval were a very creative period for Sleath, with three books published between 1809 and 1811: *The Bristol Heiress* (1809); *The Nocturnal Minstrel* (1810), and *Pyrenean Banditti* (1811). John Dudley, too, published a poem, *The Metamorphosis of Sona: A Hindu Tale*, in 1810. The preface to his work hints at Eleanor's encouragement and again mentions her Indian novel, which he had alluded to in his diaries six years earlier: "The author of this work was induced to relate in verse, the following legendary tale from the Vayera Parana, at the suggestion of an ingenuous and esteemed friend; who, intending to write upon a subject connected with Hindusthan, imagined such a poem might be properly introduced in it." Sleath's novel of India, hinted at by Dudley, has yet to be discovered, nor has it been determined if it was written. Sleath's *Glenowen; Or The Fairy Palace* (1815) does contain Indian material; however, it is hardly "connected with Hindusthan." The preface to *The Metamorphosis of Sona* also implies that Dudley and Sleath were still working together.

Eleanor's life faced another upheaval in 1813 when her brother John Edward Carter died without issue, and his large estate was divided among his wife and his four sisters. Eleanor was bequeathed a house on High Street Leicester, and a quarter share in a small estate called Brickman Hill in Kirby Muxloe, which she would inherit after the death of Elizabeth Carter. She received a lump sum of £2000 to be paid out of the Barons Park Estate inherited by her sister Ann Carr, and £1000 from John Edward's personal estate. She earned interest on these bequests for two years after John Edward's death. Eleanor, along with her brothers-in-law George Carr and Joseph Spencer Cardale, were the executors of John Edward's estate, which granted them financial reward through a division of the residue of John's personal wealth and real estate after all bequests, debts, and funeral expenses were settled (Carter). Six months after her brother's death, Eleanor lost her mother.

Little is known about Eleanor's whereabouts between 1814 and 1816. Records place Eleanor in Loughborough, a market town based on coal trade, and later on hosiery and lace manufacturing. Eleanor remained in Loughborough for six years in a house on the Leicester Road, which she purchased for £500 on 19 December 1816 (*Conveyance: John Heathcote of Tiverton to Eleanor Sleath of Loughborough, widow*). It is interesting to note that Loughborough was the location of the Petty sessions court, where local magistrates, including John

Dudley, came to try cases. Also Loughborough is only 5 miles from Sileby, where Dudley continued to live alone after Ann moved to Leicester in 1811 following her obtaining a deed of separation (Deed of Separation: Ann and John Dudley).⁸ Although the details of Eleanor Sleath's life for the next six years are unknown, one can assume she lived a comfortable life as an independent widow with means of her own. Since John Dudley was separated from his wife, he was free to see Eleanor. When they received news of Ann Dudley's death in February of 1823, they became betrothed and married on 1 April 1823 at the Loughborough parish church (Loughborough All Saints: Marriages 1815–1826).⁹

Eleanor and John Dudley settled in Sileby. Eleanor would have been kept busy as a vicar's wife for two congregations, and a helpmeet in various clerical and civic duties. In 1847 Eleanor's health began to decline, and she died of liver disease at home at the Sileby vicarage on 5 May 1847 at the age of 77 (Eleanor Dudley, *Death Registered 8 May 1847*, 24).

Like the lives of her heroines, Eleanor Sleath's life included drama, scandal, and loss; like her heroines, Eleanor Sleath faced adversity headlong with a strong faith in God and the power of a loving family; and like her heroines, Eleanor Sleath achieved happiness and married the man she loved after many trials.

Chronology

- 1770 Eleanor Carter born in Loughborouh, Leicestershire
- 1792 Eleanor Carter marries Joseph Barnabas Sleath in Calverton, Buckinghamshire, and moves to Nuneaton, Leicestershire
- 1794 Joseph Banabas Sleath and the Sleaths' son both die; Eleanor then lives with brother John Edward Carter, Leicester
- 1798 *The Orphan of the Rhine* (Minerva Press)
- 1801 Eleanor moves with brother's family to Scraftoft Hall, Leicestershire, part of a literary group in the area including Susanna Watts and John Dudley
- 1802 *Who's the Murderer?* (Minerva Press)
- 1804 Travels to Wales with Ann and John Dudley; later joined by Sleath's brother John Edward Carter and his family
- 1808 Scandal erupts of illicit affair between Eleanor Sleath and John Dudley; John and Ann Dudley separate
- 1809 *The Bristol Heiress: or Errors in Education* (Minerva Press)
- 1810 *The Nocturnal Minstrel* (Minerva Press)
- 1811 *Pyrenean Banditti* (Minerva Press); John and Ann Dudley legally separate
- 1813 John Edward Carter dies; Eleanor Sleath inherits property and cash; Eleanor Sleath's mother Elizabeth dies at 83
- 1815 *Glenowen; or The Fairy Palace* (Black and Company)
- 1816 Eleanor Sleath purchases a house in Loughborough, Dec 19
- 1823 Ann Dudley dies; John Dudley and Eleanor Carter marry in Loughborough and live in Sileby
- 1833–4 High Street Bridge over Sileby Brook is dedicated to John and Eleanor Dudley
- 1847 Eleanor Dudley dies 5 May
- 1856 John Dudley dies

Notes

1 Hereafter referred to as ROLLR.

2 *Loughborough All Saints: Marriages 1815–1826*. “John Dudley of the Parish of Sileby & Eleanor Sleath of this Parish were married in this church by License 1 April 1823.”

3 Cardale, 3D42/13/49. Undated. ROLLR. Sleath’s birth records. Death Registered 8 May 1847: Eleanor Dudley 1847—Quarter 2, Barrow upon Soar District, Vol. 15, p. 24.

4 A birth or baptism date is not known. His existence is known from his burial record: St. Nicholas, Nuneaton. Parish Register Burials 1577–1812. 4 September 1794. DR 61/5 Warwickshire County Record Office.

5 Hereafter referred to as ESRO.

6 John Frewen, “From Hot Well, Bath, to Rev. Thomas Frewen.”

7 Letter from Susanna Watts to Mary Frewen dated 8 August 1808. p 3 FRE2817 ESRO.

8 Deed of Separation mentioned in the will of Ann Dudley, dated 2 October 1821, proved 3 May 1823 PROB 11/1670 National Archives.

9 “John Dudley of the Parish of Sileby & Eleanor Sleath of this Parish were married in this church by License 1 April 1823.”

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“The Dead Do Not Remember and Nothingness Is Not a Curse”: Necrophilia and the Transvaluation of Memory in the Literature of the American South

Linnie Blake

How surely are the dead beyond death. Death is what the living carry with them. A state of dread, like some uncanny foretaste of a bitter memory. But the dead do not remember and nothingness is not a curse. Far from it. (McCarthy, *Suttree* 153)

As one muses upon the meaning of existence through repeated and protracted depiction of sex with the dead (as a confluence of discourses relating to both the public space in which atrocities such as murder occur, the private space of libidinal fantasy, and the body as *topos* of individuated selfhood), it can be observed that the gothic fictions of the American South are intimately concerned with the temporal dimensions of human experience and the ways in which that experience is structured, controlled, and distorted by the meta-narratives of historical memory. The piece that follows will examine these dynamics as depicted in the works of three southern writers with a penchant for necrophilia as both narrative device and *leitmotif*—Edgar Allan Poe, William Faulkner, and Cormac McCarthy. Each of these, it will be argued, deploys necrophilia as a means of exploring the relationship between the living and the dead, between the narrative’s present moment and the history of the South, between the unspeakable desires of necrophiliacs and the strategies of control deployed by the communities that abhor them. But whereas necrophilia for Poe and Faulkner functions as a highly seductive means of fixing the instability and mobility of the present into an immovable certitude (sex with the dead becoming a form of death rather than conception), McCarthy’s necrophiliac aesthetic is rather different. Here it is neither a means of reanimating the corpse of the past and undertaking a perverse reaffirmation of its regionally specific pastoralist mythology (as in Poe) nor a means of liberation from the inevitable march of time, from the death it so purposefully entails, and from the authoritarian strategies of control deployed by those communities unable to move on from the traumatized past (as in Faulkner). For what the necrophiliac Lester Ballard of McCarthy’s *Child of God* attains, in his critically neglected rococo dalliances with the dead, is nothing less than a transvaluation of memory that mounts an unusual challenge to power/knowledge axis of post-enlightenment rationality. For while Ballard may indeed be “a crazed gymnast laboring over a cold corpse” (88), his grotesque activities allow for exploration of a range of distinctively gothic preoccupations: the relationship between the community and the individual and between strategies of social control and transgressive desire; this, in a short novel overweeningly preoccupied with the mythologizing facility of memory and the historical realities of being poor, rural, and white in the twentieth-century United States.

Prior to the Civil War, the American South was, of course, a slave owning society, a largely un-policed area, the agricultural economy of which rested upon surplus value extracted from a potentially rebellious population of enslaved African Americans who vastly outnumbered their masters. Stratified in terms of class and ethnicity, with a mercantile bourgeoisie mediating between the plantocracy, the poor white descendents of the original Scots-Irish settlers, and the legislatively subhuman African Americans, the diverse cultures of the South—which varied not just from state to state but from county to county—existed in an ongoing state of hybridization. As such, the South as a whole was a highly unstable entity with geographical mobility, ongoing land availability, and considerable social fluidity adding to the volatility of the mix. Strategies of control, of discipline and punishment, were thus essential in order to contain the fluxional unpredictability of this world. And in part, the South’s chosen method of stabilizing its potentially explosive elements was through the creation of a strongly paternalistic social over-class that transmitted power through dynasties while extending a brutal version of family discipline both

to the extended community of slaves and to the poorer white communities that lay outside their plantations. As Thomas Sutpen, the thwarted dynasty builder of William Faulkner's *Absalom Absalom!* (1936) put it, "You see, I had a design in my mind . . . to accomplish it I should require money, a house, a plantation, slaves, a family—incidentally, of course, a wife. I set out to acquire these things" (Faulkner, *Absalom* 217). Here was the feudal family as social, economic, and political alliance which, as Foucault has argued in *The History of Sexuality* and elsewhere, preserved only the useful functions of sexuality as a means of projecting power forward into the future. But as writers such as Truman Capote, Harry Crews, John Kennedy Toole and Katherine Ann Porter would aver, the result was a repression and concomitant fetishization of forms of sexuality that were themselves antithetical to such rationalist imperatives. From Harriet Beecher Stowe's highly gothic revelation of miscegenation in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) to the hysterical homosexuality of Tennessee Williams' plays; from Flannery O'Connor's erotics of amputation in "Good Country People" (1955) to Dorothy Allison's disturbing depiction of child sexual abuse in *Bastard Out of Carolina*" (1992), the plantation system's historic deformation of southern sexuality has provided writers with a highly engaging means of exploring the psychosocial ramifications of the region's history, as well as individuals' memories of their past—as did, of course, that culture's eroticization of patriarchal violence.

Crucially, the establishment and maintenance of the magnolia myth of southern life and southern identity required a willingness to assert the prerogatives of the plantocracy from the barrel of a gun. As the historian Bruce Collins has commented, "necessity bred a Southern type which sometimes became a self-parody . . . the need to play a part, to sustain a public image of authority and force . . . to take on the patriarchal role as part of the dramatic ritual of southern life." (140)

This public image of authority and force, dispensing what Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, would term monarchical punishments at will, did not of course spring fully formed into the consciousness of the antebellum southerner. It drew, in fact, on a range of discursive practices in longtime circulation in the South, being a peculiar synthesis of seventeenth century conceptualizations of the colonist as Adam surrounded by the splendors of nature as they existed before the Fall and of the eighteenth century's democratic idealization of the yeoman farmer. Tilling the fields of Virginia, then Maryland, the Carolinas, and Georgia, this figure was mythologized as the embodiment of the ancient virtues of independence, pride, love of freedom, generosity, and hospitality that were thought to be fast disappearing in the Old World. And this ideal would feed directly into the literature of the South. In common with numerous post-Jeffersonian pastoralists, for example, Edgar Allan Poe formulated his conceptions of southern identity in the light of the past, conceived of as a rural site of spiritual and social plenitude from which the nation had fallen into the cultural modernity of the present. As Poe's work would seem to intimate, the dramatic ritual of southern life in the antebellum period was not simply the assertion of patriarchal dynastic privilege by force; it also entailed the willful repudiation of the present moment, a will to turn back time, to deny the commercial imperatives of an urbanizing and industrializing century. And it is here that the distinctively southern *leitmotif* of necrophiliac desire comes into play.

In the 1846 essay "The Philosophy of Composition," Poe made a now infamous assertion: "the death of a beautiful woman is unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world—and equally it is beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such a topic are those of a bereaved lover" (165). Poe wrote four major poems and numerous short stories on this "most poetical" of subjects, the most notable characteristic of which is that Poe's women (with the sole exception of the eponymous heroine of the poem *Annabel Lee*) never actually die in an empirically verifiable manner. Certainly, they may sicken and attain the ethereal perfection of the classic consumptive. They may appear to pass over, to rigidify and to decay; but their death is never final. For unlike the eponymous M. Valdemar, held in a state of hypnotic life even as his body decomposes, Poe's dead heroines consistently subvert the natural order of things by refusing to stay dead, by shaking off the passivity of the tomb and taking on a life and a will of their own. Poe's necrophiliac love-objects can therefore be seen as existing not in chronological time (which as a spatially conceived construct should at least serve to keep them in the tomb) but in the realm of what Henri Bergson, the French philosopher so influential on an entire generation of experimental writers concerned with the temporal dimensions of human consciousness and experience, would call *la durée*, a durational flux wherein the present moment loses its static nature and constantly fades into the past and hence death constantly fades into life, or a simulacrum of that life (*Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data*

of *Consciousness*). In refusing to remain safely in the tomb of the narrator's past, Poe's living-dead heroines deny linear conceptions of temporality, puncturing and permeating the present moment with their insistent re-existence. And in so doing, they call into question the idea that the past is ever over and done with and that the everyday world as we experience it or conceive of it through history is the way things actually were or are, the way that things should be or the way things will remain.

The South as it is depicted in Poe's tales is a closed, self-regarding, and self-reflexive world where, as in *Masque of the Red Death* (1842) a doomed elite parties in the face of total annihilation or in numerous other tales encloses itself in labyrinthine castles to explore the meaning of its own existence through arcane study and forbidden ritual. In such a stifflingly retrospective milieu, it is unsurprising perhaps that numerous of Poe's narrator-protagonists have their capacity for rational thought and sensory perception, their very sense of individuated identity, challenged by the dead. In *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839) for example, the corpse of Madeleine Usher comes to fulfill the same narrative function as the *madeleine* eaten by the hero Swann in Proust's *A La Recherche du Temps Perdue* (1913–27). Each is the means by which involuntary memories overpower the reason or will of the individual to conjure up an alternative necrophiliac reality every bit as present as the contemporary moment. This is not, however, to imply that Poe, like Faulkner and McCarthy after him, is flagrant in his depiction of sex with the dead. He is not. The nearest anyone gets to a *de facto* act of sexual congress with a corpse occurs in "Annabel Lee" (1849) and then in highly ambiguous and metaphorical doggerel:

And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side
Of my darling, my darling, my life and my bride
In her sepulcher there by the sea—
In her tomb by the side of the sea. (l. 38–41)

As the *film noir* directors of the Hays Code 1940s knew all too well though, one does not need to depict an event graphically to evoke its horror. And the horror of the erotic undead is such a thematic constant in Poe's work that, however tangentially evoked, it becomes a powerful evocation of the retrogressive pastoral mythology to which Poe subscribed and a contiguous denial of the rationalist imperatives of an increasingly modernizing century. As such, the distinctively southern necrophiliac aesthetic pioneered by Poe can be seen to provide a grotesque illustration of the ways in which the dark forces of irrationality will inevitably break through the conscious controls that his narrators place upon their perceptions; moving those narrators into states of temporary (indeed temporal) insanity. And this is most often embodied in and enacted by the inflated rhetoric, triple iterations and labyrinthine syntax of the tales themselves:

We have put her living in the tomb! Said I not that my senses were acute? I now tell you that I heard her first feeble movements in the hollow coffin. I heard them—many, many days ago—yet I dared not—I dared not speak! And now—to-night—[. . .] Is she not hurrying to upbraid me for my haste? Have I not heard her footstep on the stair? Do I not distinguish that heavy and horrible beating of her heart? MADMAN! [. . .] MADMAN! I TELL YOU THAT SHE NOW STANDS WITHOUT THE DOOR! (Poe, *Usher* 6)

But for all such proclamations of disordered consciousness may be seen to reaffirm the implied rationality of the reader, their very sensationalism also illustrates how the corpse of the past proffers an essentially appealing challenge to the positivistic order of things. This is, of course, a highly gothic doubling of attraction and repulsion, pleasure and horror, actuality and memory's refashioning of that actuality. The act of sexual congress with the dead becomes, then, a point of durational stillness from which any kind of future simply cannot emerge. How ironic, that almost a century later precisely, such a vision of time, the self, and the South would itself re-emerge in the necrophiliac aesthetic of William Faulkner.

The narrators of many of Faulkner's greatest works are haunted by the dead—specifically, the corpses of the Confederacy and all that the Civil War entailed. Here characters like Quentin Compson of *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and Absalom, Absalom! or Gail Hightower of *Light in August* (1932) illustrate how in the period following the Civil War the mutual seduction of the living and the dead had melded with residual pastoralist discourses to

produce a concept of southern social life that was every bit as perverse as that of Poe. “A Rose for Emily” (1930), Faulkner’s most explicit treatment of the theme, thus opens with the death of the reclusive Miss Emily Grierson, the daughter of a long-dead Civil War hero whose classically gothic home is described as existing in a state of “stubborn and coquettish decay above the cotton wagons and the gasoline pumps” (119) that have now overrun her once fashionable street in downtown Jefferson, Yoknapatawpha County. Existing in a state of not-so-splendid isolation in a frame house that had once been white, she is the last Grierson, one of Faulkner’s existentially undefeated daughters of the antebellum plantocracy who, in his novel *Requiem for a Nun* (1951), march out of cinemas screening *Gone With the Wind* (1939, based on Margaret Mitchell’s 1936 novel), as an outlandish misrepresentation of southern femininity; and who, in Faulkner’s *The Unvanquished* (1938), are said to have never surrendered to the ways of the post-Civil War world but grown more and more indomitable with age.

Miss Grierson undoubtedly has something of the corpse about her. “She looked bloated,” the narrator tells us, “like a body long submerged in motionless water; and of that pallid hue” (Faulkner, “Rose” 121). This affinity with the dead is first apparent when she denies her father’s demise and prevents his burial for four hot and steamy southern days. What went on behind closed doors in the intervening hours is never expanded upon, but still the town is reluctant to label her insane, the choric narrator justifying her behavior with recourse to a collective memory of the past: “We remembered the young men her father had driven away, and we knew that with nothing left, she would have to cling to that which robbed her, as people will.” (Faulkner, “Rose” 124) For like many of Faulkner’s characters, clinging to that which robbed her is something Miss Emily does with a vengeance, scandalously keeping company with Homer Baron, the Yankee agent of modernity who has come “with niggers and mules and machinery” (Faulkner, “Rose” 124) to lay new pavements in the town. Homer Baron disappears, and shortly afterwards hideous smells begin to issue from Miss Grierson’s house until, under cover of darkness, the authorities secretly scatter her property with lime.

Over the years, of course, Miss Grierson ages, her hair finally attaining an even iron-gray color so that: “up until the day of her death at seventy-four it was still that vigorous iron-gray, like the hair of an active man” (128). And, like any active man of Faulkner’s South, she continues to resist the onward march of progress, refusing to let her house be numbered when a free postal-delivery system is instituted. And so “she passed from generation to generation—dear, inescapable, impervious, tranquil and perverse” (Faulkner, “Rose” 128). Very, very perverse in fact, as the town discovers when, upon her death, its members unseal at attic room ostensibly closed for forty years. Lying in the marital bed, in a chamber decked for a wedding night and in the attitude of an embrace, is the nigh mummified corpse of Homer Baron. He has become inextricable from the bed in which he lies; a bed in which a momentous union has been forged between the last of the Griersons and the Yankee Baron. And as Miss Emily’s iron grey hair upon the pillow testifies, it is fitting that up to the present day Homer Baron has remained the object of the South’s embrace.

The frustrated daughter who would not accept the death of her father and of her father’s South here stages a chilling *tableau mordant* in which all temporal progression is repudiated, in which the putrefaction of the flesh is seen as no bar to the delights of the conjugal bed in which, as Sartre observed of Faulkner’s novel *The Sound and the Fury*, all motion in time is arrested. Here, as in *The Sound and the Fury*, we see Faulkner asserting that “time is dead as long as it is being clicked off by little wheels; only when the clock stops does time come to life” (Faulkner, *Sound* 52). To grasp that living durational time, as Miss Emily perversely does here, we must discard all chronometrical devices that tick off the seconds until Doomsday. For such devices as the watch or the clock or even the organic beating of the still-living heart only measure what the present story calls the mathematical progression of linear temporality, a temporality which Miss Emily has escaped in favor of pure duration: where the past and the present embrace and deliquesce together, becoming the only future that can be conceived of. Such, it seems, is the nature of Faulkner’s necrophiliac moment, in the most necrophiliac county in the entire literary world.

And it is out of such ideas, memories, and dreams, but with a radical vision all its own, that Cormac McCarthy’s *Child of God* (1973) springs into being. Here is a novel that addresses itself directly to that heritage of Jeffersonian pastoralism that informs Poe’s vision of the South but focuses upon the problematic figure of the backwoodsman, a character intimately bound up with the will to national self-examination since the earliest days of the republic. Certainly, the United States has a long tradition of culturally valorizing individuals such

as Kit Carson, Davy Crockett, and Daniel Boone as the most authentic of Americans. Here were men of pithy sayings and medicinal, astronomical, and meteorological knowledge, men whose uncomplicated integrity was guaranteed by the purifying forces of nature itself and as such stood in authentic opposition to the cunning political machinations of the ostensibly civilized town. Nonetheless, as is clearly visible in the studies of national identity written by commentators such as William Byrd and Hector de Crèvecoeur in the period immediately following the Revolutionary War, this very figure simultaneously makes manifest the nation's innate distrust of those that occupied the hinterland of fugitives and outlaws that made up the backwoods of American nightmare. For here, "far beyond the reach of government" and closely aligned with the dark irrationality of his habitat, was the hillbilly. He had turned from peaceful and exhausting agriculture to a life of hunting in the game-rich forests, a practice which led to "drunkenness and idleness . . . contention, inactivity and wretchedness" (de Crèvecoeur 72), caused him to undergo a kind of socio-biological degeneration; a falling away not only from the democratic ideals of the new republic, but from humanity itself. For in contrast to the official image of the American people, poor rural whites became, as de Crèvecoeur put it, "a mongrel race, half civilized and half savage" (de Crèvecoeur, *Farmer* 77).

This is where McCarthy's backwoods necrophiliac Lester Ballard really comes into his own as synthesis of Poe and Faulkner's necrophiliac memorialization of the past and the backwoodsman's purposeful deconstruction of both identity discourses and the power/knowledge axis that underpins them. Fittingly, for a text that sets out to challenge the dream of Jeffersonian pastoralism, the novel begins with a dispossession, as the rifle-wielding Lester Ballard attempts to prevent the forcible auction of his family home and land. Cast out from his home, this latter-day frontiersman wanders through the "old stoves and water heaters . . . bicycle parts and corroded buckets" (McCarthy, *Child* 39) that now litter the countryside, detritus of the machine culture of the late twentieth century South. Unsurprisingly, he speaks in the form of curses: damning the community that has ostracized him, the unforgiving winter he must face without a home, and his subsistence diet of small animals killed with his own gun. And yet he remains "a child of God much like yourself perhaps" (McCarthy, *Child* 4). In this, of course, McCarthy is being bitterly ironic, for in his deviant hybridity, this diabolic figure is ideally suited to explore exactly what it is to be poor, southern and white. For although one anonymous narrator says of Lester's bloodline, "You can trace em back to Adam if you want and goddam if he don't outstrip em all" (McCarthy, *Child* 81), Lester Ballard is most certainly not the pastoral tradition's American Adam—builder of a democratic Eden in the new world. Indeed, he actively resists any form of cultural assimilation or communal control. As a mountain man, he refuses to be subject to human law and the linear temporality in which it is framed. As a necrophiliac, he refuses to subordinate the dark desires of his material body to the repressive imperatives of his cognitive self or the authoritarian rationality of his community. And it is this twin refusal, McCarthy seems to argue, that makes him free of the society that tells his story and in so doing condemns him.

At the beginning of the novel's second section, Lester discovers an asphyxiated courting couple dead in their car and embarks on his necrophiliac adventures. It is of course interesting that adulterous sex in automobiles should be the only kind of non-necrophiliac sexual activity represented in this book. For without the automobile and the road on which it travels, it is unlikely that Ballard would have entered into his subsequent unions with the dead. He is born neither murderer nor necrophiliac, but is driven to what he does by the modernizing imperatives of the present, here embodied in and symbolized by American automobile culture. For as Frederick Jackson Turner so persuasively argued in his seminal work "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893), it was the road that was instrumental in the taming of the wilderness, the creation of settlements, and the imposition of human culture upon the natural world. In the twentieth century, moreover, it was the dream of ostensible freedom offered by the car that brought about a mechanization of leisure, echoing the ongoing automation of the American workplace. Lester Ballard's first love object was killed by those selfsame forces of encroaching modernity vilified by both Poe's and Faulkner's necrophiliacs. And Lester's response is to light out, to cross frontier of his own by taking her to his log cabin and making her his corpse bride. From here on, a seemingly irreconcilable duality structures the novel. On the one hand, the narrative bombards us with a range of voices that themselves bespeak a communal internalization of repressive strategies of control. On the other, it repeatedly and dispassionately depicts Ballard's now murderous sensibilities and unapologetic sexual activity with the dead as a practice so transgressive as to deny the very existence of either societal or ethical norms:

He came in with an armload of firewood and got a fire going in the hearth and sat before it and rested. Then he turned to the girl. He took off all her clothes and looked at her, inspecting her body carefully, as if he would see how she were made. He went outside and looked through the window at her lying naked before the fire. When he came back in he unbuckled his trousers and stepped out of them and laid next to her. He pulled the blanket over them. (McCarthy, *Child* 91–92)

As was the case with the prose and poetry of Poe, the corpse of the past in female form is to be found throughout McCarthy's southern fiction. As early as 1959, in "A Wake for Susan," he had written of Wes, a young man wandering in autumnal woods who stumbles upon a rifle ball on the forest floor. This conjures up, in a very Proustian way, images of early pioneers and settlers who must have walked these woods—leading him to ponder the tragically transitory nature of human existence. Dazed by the ways in which his well-ordered present has been overrun by the ghosts of the past, Wes seeks out an old cemetery where he comes upon the grave of one Susan Ledbetter, who died in 1834 at the age of seventeen, the same age as he is now. Dreaming himself into her present, Wes weaves an erotic romance about them both, culminating in his own decidedly Faulknerian tears as he cries "for lost Susan, for all the lost Susans, for all the people; so beautiful, so pathetic, so lost and wasted and ungrieved" (McCarthy, "Wake" 6). It is not the case here, as was the case with Poe, that such tears bespeak an attempt to fix instability and mobility into a definite and immovable position. Neither is it the case, as in Poe, that the dead Susan is an allegory for the inevitable decay of the present moment into the past and any desire for her is itself a form of regionally inevitable death. In McCarthy's work, the necrophiliac aesthetic works rather differently. It is not a means of simply reanimating the past in order to explore its mythological pastoralist paradigms, but of freeing the individual from the ostensibly inevitable march of time, from the death it so purposefully entails, and from the authoritarian strategies of control deployed by those communities that ascribe to such morbid fatalism.

That said, McCarthy's picture of Sevier County in *Child of God* evokes Faulkner at every turn—most notably in the interpolation of a range of choric voices that weave first-person condemnations of Lester into the fabric of the narrative. In so writing, of course, McCarthy not only highlights the mythologizing faculty of southern memory in a most Faulknerian way, but he reveals how the community that rejects Lester Ballard is itself permeated and sustained by that culture of punitive, predestination-driven Protestantism that Faulkner had so condemned in *Light in August* and elsewhere. For Lester Ballard, like Joe Christmas before him, is a Calvinist isolate driven through time by a perceived Adamic curse, the meaning of which he can neither know nor guess. For this southern mountain man displaced into the modern world, it seems the role of the necrophile has become both an essential aspect of his identity and a means of unconsciously challenging the strategies of control deployed by the communities of the South. He does not know this, for all that he can know, by definition, is the mountain and the gun. It is the gun, and all its associations with the frontier and the frontiersman, the redemptive land, the republic of Jefferson, and the right to bear arms, that keeps him alive in the bitter climate of a Tennessee mountain winter. And emphasizing the complete dissolution of the Jeffersonian idyll in time is the transformation of the gun into a toy, useful only for winning stuffed animals in the shooting booth of a run-down country fair.

For all the poignancy of his cultural redundancy, it is notable that Ballard displays precisely those qualities of endurance and stoicism that Faulkner had previously located at the heart of his most memorable characters. Like Faulkner's Thomas Sutpen, Ballard also has a design in his mind. He wants his land back as fervently as Sutpen craved a plantation. He wants community as much as Sutpen wanted slaves. And like Sutpen, he wants both a family and a wife. In his own way, then, Lester Ballard sets out to acquire these things. His necrophilia, as such, is driven less by lust than by loneliness, the historic curse of the pioneer, exacerbated by his status as last of the breed. It is not the case, as in Faulkner, that Ballard's necrophilia is triggered by an obsessive need to revivify those informing myths of southern identity which provide him with the only community that he has ever known. It is something very different from that: a means of de-centering the myths of individual dignity, familial love, country hospitality and communal cooperation. And so our tongue-tied man of the mountain embarks on a very traditional wooing of his beloved: buying her gifts from a country store, returning home to brush her hair, paint her lips, dress her in a new frock and hold her. He would, we are told,

arrange her in different positions and go out and peer in the window at her. After a while he just

sat holding her, his hands feeling her body under the new clothes. He undressed her very slowly, talking to her. Then he pulled off his trousers and lay next to her. He spread her loose thighs. (McCarthy, *Child* 102–03)

This is the nearest Lester will ever come to a home life, and even here his alienation from the commonplace pleasures of the domestic sphere shows itself in his purposeful looking in through the window from the outside on the scene of his connubial bliss. He may, in Faulknerian mode, be seen to attain that moment of suspended animation in time quested by Quentin Compson and others; a moment in which the modern world can be held off and the pastoral prerogatives of republican individualism can be affirmed anew. But as McCarthy unflinchingly depicts, he does so by having sex with corpses: one of the last universal taboos. Such activity is clearly beyond the pale of rationality, and as such it can only be integrated into a community of Ballard's own making: the community of the dead he gathers in the caves of Frog Mountain and the community of madmen, misfits, and social rejects he joins in his incarceration at the asylum.

In the necrophiliac moment, it seems to me, the protagonists of Poe and Faulkner attain a perverse union with the past in which the present is denied and the future cannot be conceived of or born. But Lester Ballard's necrophilia is rather different, marking an unconscious refusal to surrender or submit to the norms of a society that has singularly failed to nurture him as a motherless child or provide for him as a dispossessed, displaced, and palpably dysfunctional adult. In Marcuse's words such sexual perversion is "an unconscious flight from pain and want. It is an expression of the eternal struggle against suffering and repression," a protest against the insufficiency of civilization, an implicit idealism, "another mode of being" (Marcuse, *Eros* 109). The necrophiliac moment, as McCarthy deploys it here, thus functions as a willful escape from linear temporality. It exposes, moreover, what Marcuse would term the "one dimensionality" of societies such as that of Sevier County which (for all its auto-mythologizing) is premised on what may be termed the transcendental norms of rationality, a world in which "the domination of nature has remained linked to the domination of man" (Marcuse, *Man* 166). In Lester's world of old stoves and water heaters, bicycle parts and corroded buckets, the accretions of pastoral myth encapsulated by the voices of the townspeople serve only to mask the false consciousness of Sevier County. Here, as in McCarthy's *Suttree* (1979), the discarded detritus of material culture becomes "the shabby shapeshow that masks the higher world of form" (McCarthy, *Suttree* 464). A key opposition is thus generated between the surface consciousness of everyday life and everyday people and the deeper consciousness of Lester's immediate, and potentially epiphanic, necrophiliac experience. The former (symbolized by the courthouse) is rational, mechanistic, socially oriented, transparent to sense, and linear. The latter (symbolized by Lester's necrophilia) is illogical, sensuous, individualistic, and durational. And just as the pastoral landscape replete with cows conceals the corpse-filled necropolis of Lester's cave, so does the surface consciousness of any "normal society" mask a culture of outcasts, outsiders, the exploited, the persecuted, the unemployed, and the unemployable. It is amongst such characters, as *Suttree* indicates, that one must search for a philosophy of life (and death) that is different from and oppositional to that of post-enlightenment rationality: "What if the whole fucking city was to cave in?" *Suttree*'s friend Gene Harrogate inquires; "That's the spirit," *Suttree* retorts (McCarthy, *Suttree* 259). In characters like Lester Ballard, and in Knoxville's community of

thieves, derelicts, miscreants, pariahs, poltroons, spalpeens, curmudgeons, clotpolls, murderers, gamblers, bawds, whores, trulls, brigands, toppers, tosspots, sons of archsots, lobcocks, smellsocks, runnagates, rakes and other folonious debauchees (McCarthy, *Suttree* 457)

we can see a potent challenge to what McCarthy calls the "mathematic of the Western world" (McCarthy, *Suttree* 458). For all the Sevier County gossips' dissemination of his story, for all the medical school's Hogarthian dissection of his flesh, unlike the corpses discovered in the caves beneath Frog Mountain, Lester Ballard is never really "Property of the State of Tennessee" (McCarthy, *Child* 196). He is only ever his own. He exists, as McCarthy says, due to "some halt in the way of things" (McCarthy, *Child* 156). It is his "haltedness" in time that is his "whatness," his *quidditas* in a Joycean sense.

Given the violent history of the American South, necrophilia is a particularly apposite and particularly

gruesome motif whereby a range of southern writers have attempted “controlling [. . .] ordering, [. . .] giving a shape and a significance” to what T. S. Eliot called “the immense paradox of futility and anarchy of contemporary history” (Eliot, *Ulysses* 177). But in McCarthy’s work it is rather more than that. Through a literary deployment of one of the last great universal taboos, a sexual encounter with the dead, McCarthy addresses himself implicitly to the false consciousness of his region, its mythologized conceptualizations of itself as a past-directed and decidedly pastoral refuge from the ills of an alien modern world; a thing, as Suttree ironically echoes, “against which time will not prevail” (McCarthy, *Suttree* 275). Under scrutiny here are ideas of regional identity, ideas of history and of myth. The social space of culture is here juxtaposed to a private world of libidinal desire wherein the body of the dear departed becomes a means of turning back the tides of change, of repudiating either the linear temporality of consensual reality or the fatalistic imperatives of a Calvinist God for whom the present and the future have been already written. To escape this predicament and deny its morbid certitude, McCarthy seems to intimate that it is necessary to reconceptualize our relationship to time, to space, and to all totalizing conceptions of selfhood. Particularly, it is necessary to transvalue our memory and the stories it tells us about the past. This, I believe, is what the necrophiliac moment in McCarthy is all about, being a Marcusan transvaluation of memory through a repudiation of time as it is normally and positivistically conceived. The past redeemed through the necrophiliac moment, the *recherche du temps perdu*, becomes the vehicle of future liberation from the snares of the past. It is also a stark rejection of repressive societies that attempt to direct, control, or contain the fluidity of both time and social formations, and the fortunes of human beings within them. Like the creator, Lester Ballard also has a plan. “Given charge,” McCarthy writes, “Ballard would have made things more orderly in the woods and in men’s souls” (McCarthy, *Child* 136). But his is not the positivistic order of the community that has excluded him. It is the fluxional order of pure duration, a Gnostic order if you will, akin to the absent eye of Doll Jones of *Suttree* “watching through time, through conjugations of space and matter to that still centre where the living and the dead are one” (McCarthy, *Child* 447).

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Supporting and Subverting: Conventional and Challenging Masculinities in M. E. Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*

Daniel Lewis

Simon Petch notes that “critical discussion of *Lady Audley's Secret* has recently shifted its focus from Lady Audley's madness to Robert Audley's masculinity” (1). Some critics, such as Richard Nemesvari, have taken a queer theory approach to the novel. Nemesvari argues that Braddon's portrayal of Robert's masculinity is founded upon the character's own repressed homosexual desires, exposing the “self-interested and self-protective denial which underlies Victorian patriarchal society” (516). Others, such as Lynda Hart, have claimed that Lady Audley is a necessary figure for Robert as she represents a focus for investigation to him so that he can take his place as a man of the law. However much attention has been focused on issues of masculinity in *Lady Audley's Secret*, little has been directed towards placing those issues of masculinity and homosocial desire in relation to the novel's sensation/gothic genre.¹

Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) capitalizes on the freedoms allowed by the sensation/gothic genre to simultaneously support and subvert hegemonic definitions of male gender identity in the Victorian era to call into question the supposed naturalness of gender. The novel focuses on the importance of physical and mental activity (specifically ratiocination), determination, hard work (mental and/or physical), and the stabilizing function of marriage and family for middle-class men. This depiction of an emerging middle-class masculine gender identity is fraught with problems. The difficulty and frustration expressed by the novel's characters, like Robert Audley, in attempting to construct and perform their supposedly “natural” masculine gender identity reveals just how unnatural gender identity can be. As with other novels in the sensation/gothic genre, *Lady Audley's Secret* often simultaneously contests social norms, and ultimately conforms to those original social restrictions. Yet, as much as the novel finally conforms to this notion of a dominant (and natural) middle-class representation of masculinity, there appear cracks through which Braddon suggests the unnaturalness of gender identity and the possibility of alternate masculinities to co-exist alongside these more conventional representations of male gender identity. Concerning her representations of mid-century Victorian middle-class masculinity, Braddon's novel presents the anxiety-producing un-masculine middle-class man who does not fit the conventional model of masculinity since he is often inactive, lazy, and unconcerned with work or marriage. Despite the difficulties, and regardless of how unnatural gender identity seems, *Lady Audley's Secret* traces the growth of these men into more conventional and socially acceptable conceptions of middle-class masculinity, providing a successful, happy ending to the book.

The critical reception received by most sensation/gothic novels largely dismissed the genre by using the epithet “popular fiction” to describe them. The domestic novels of the 1840s and '50s were quickly being replaced (in popularity, not in critical approval²) by the sensation/gothic novels of the 1860s. For women novelists especially, the popularity of the sensation genre allowed greater opportunity to earn a living through writing. Calling the 1850s the “heyday of English domestic fiction,” Monica Fryckstedt points out that by the 1860s aspiring women writers in England “were most likely to try their hand at sensation novels, imitating Miss Braddon and Mrs. Henry Wood” (21) rather than the industrial or social problem novels of the '40s and '50s. While Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1860) and Mrs. Henry Wood's *East Lynne* (1861) are often credited as the first examples of Victorian gothic/sensation novels, Braddon's novel differed slightly but importantly from other novels in this genre. As P. D. Edwards explains, Braddon's works “largely dispensed with both the Dickensian grotesqueries, ingenious

masquerades, and intricately convoluted story-lines favoured by Collins, and the melodramatic emotionalism, pietism and histrionics—also deriving from Dickens—of Mrs. Henry Wood” (vii). In contrast to these generic characteristics, Braddon’s novels focused more on realistic depictions of crime, deceit, and psychological issues.

Braddon’s ability to represent the more quotidian aspects of sensation fiction was noticed by Henry James, who, in an article published in *The Nation* in 1865, praised Braddon for representing “those most mysterious of mysteries, the mysteries which are at our own doors” (108).³ James’s argument illustrates one reason for the controversy caused by the sensation/gothic novels of the 1860s: these novels were able to domesticate and realistically represent current anxieties, mysteries, and fears. This was a characteristic that separated them from the eighteenth-century gothic novel as well as the Newgate novels of the 1830s⁴. Winifred Hughes argues that sensation/gothic novels from the ’60s functioned as a “pervasive mode of confronting and processing hidden fears, anxieties, and obsessions behind the dominant Victorian cultural institutions” (260), and it is these representations of current cultural and intimate psychological issues that allowed authors like Braddon to intervene in debates such as those concerning middle-class male gender identities. In this genre, Braddon could, for example, represent the anxieties expressed by Robert Audley as he struggles internally with the pressure he feels to think and act more like a man should in the midst of a plot concerning bigamy, murder, and secret identities.

Lady Audley’s Secret presents un-masculine men (of all social classes) who are not active and who do not focus their “energy” appropriately. Apparently in the novel is the necessity for certain men to transform—to change their behavior and their desires—so they may perform appropriate male gender identities and bring stability to the novel. However, as the novel argues for the necessity of change, it simultaneously questions the need for this transformation by showing how alternate male identities are lost or shunned. A crisis of masculinity presented in the novel focuses upon the need for men like Robert to redefine their masculine gender identity and reject the purposeless lives of the aristocracy.

The question then becomes: Is it possible for those men who do not fit hegemonic conceptions of masculinity to successfully function in the public sphere? Braddon’s response is to open the door to the possibility of alternate masculinities, only to re-establish and strengthen boundary lines by novel’s end. Braddon is simultaneously progressive and conservative, forwards and backwards looking in her depictions of masculinities. One common characteristic of Victorian sensation/gothic novels is their portrayal of boundary lines that are transgressed and categories that are in need of redefinition. This is another reason why Braddon, in writing in the sensation/gothic genre, had more freedom to explore issues of gender and subversively critique those social requirements that demanded men be active, heterosexual, and financial providers. Fred Botting argues that “gothic excesses [and] the fascination with transgression and the anxiety over cultural limits and boundaries continue to produce ambivalent emotions and meanings in their tales of darkness, desire and power” (2). Botting continues by noting the ways in which, in eighteenth-century gothic writing specifically, these excesses and transgressions are “less an unrestrained celebration of unsanctioned excesses and more an examination of the limits produced in the eighteenth century to distinguish good from evil, reason from passion,” (8) and so forth. However, while Gothic and sensation novels often represented transgression, they contradictorily strengthened hegemonic formations in the midst of questioning those conceptions; to use Botting’s phrase, they both “restore and contest” (8) boundaries. Especially in narratives that focus on a mystery in need of being solved, as is the case with *Lady Audley’s Secret*, the reestablishment of order from the chaos of mystery requires the reaffirmation of conventional standards and mores.

Patrick Brantlinger argues that, in terms of “divorce law reform and greater sexual freedom, sensation novels tend merely to exploit public interest in those issues” (6) rather than argue for any type of legislative and/or cultural reform. In *Lady Audley’s Secret*, accepted and acceptable gender roles for men are challenged; but despite whatever transgressions have taken place in the space of the text, those boundary lines for men are reaffirmed by novel’s end. This certainly does not make those transgressions irrelevant—in fact, their appearance in the novel is enough both to suggest the unnaturalness of gender identity and to question the violence done in order to conform one’s masculinity to socially accepted definitions—yet the ending of this novel works against those transgressions by suggesting that they are temporary bumps along the road but do not stop the inevitable progress towards conformity of gender identity.

However, because sensation/gothic novels often contest as well as restore, in order to provide an ending

that neither challenges conceptions of masculinity nor questions appropriate gender roles between men but also affirms the moral imperative that is heterosexual marriage for the Victorians, the ending of the novel “restores” Robert’s masculinity and achieves a happy conclusion through his entry into heterosexual marriage, made possible by his success at his career and his appropriately (i.e., heterosexually) channeled feelings for his friend George. Again, this “happy ending” is achieved through the repression of alternate masculinities, namely the suppression of homosexual desire, and, in Robert’s case specifically, an asexuality that is uninterested in heterosexual marriage or establishing a family. The importance of marriage and the establishment of a home and family for one’s masculinity in Victorian England cannot be overstated. For example, John Tosh argues that “[t]o form a household, to exercise authority over dependents, and to shoulder the responsibility of maintaining and protecting them—these things set the seal on a man’s gender identity” (108). *Lady Audley’s Secret* attempts to normalize Audley’s masculinity by providing him with a household, as well as an opportunity for him to provide for others through his labor.

However, before this “happy ending” is achieved, Braddon’s representation of Robert’s initial un-masculine masculine identity appears as a type of monster that does not fit aristocratic or middle-class conceptions of male gender identity. The transformation of Robert from this monstrous creature into successful middle-class masculinity enables the novel to have a happy ending, as the monster is finally contained and transformed into a nonthreatening man. In *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues that cultures create their monsters at specific historic and cultural moments. Thus the monster is a “construct and a projection” that contains that culture’s “fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy” (4). Victor Frankenstein’s creation is the most literal example of this, as it embodies the fear of technological and scientific advancements that may cause destruction and pain, the desire to be god-like in creating life, the anxiety produced by a man’s taking responsibility for the thing he has created, and the fantasy of a scientific breakthrough in which the dead can be re-animated. Another example would be the way Dracula (and the vampire in general) comes to represent the fear of sickness and disease spread through blood and other bodily fluids, as well as the threat of foreign (sometimes colonial) creatures invading the homeland.

Robert’s initial pre-transformation presence in the novel threatens to smash the clear distinctions between male and female, men and women, and masculine and feminine; distinctions that were then urgently being constructed for the growing middle classes. Initially, Braddon positions Robert as an indefinable un-masculine man, monstrous because of his inability to fit into any single category of masculine gender identity. In terms of his lazy attitude and aversion to work, he fulfills the stereotype of the ineffectual aristocratic man. Robert is situated amongst other working men in London, yet he avoids doing actual work and chooses to remain absent in the social sphere while he reads French novels all day in his chambers. According to Cohen, the monster cannot be easily categorized or defined. Monsters are “disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration,” and the monster is dangerous because it is a “form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions” (6). The monster appears, as Cohen argues, at a time of crisis in which a binary opposition is being constructed or contested. Often, the monster presents a third category, a hybrid combining the two oppositional categories into one ambiguous category. Robert appears at a moment in which the definitions of masculinity are changing for men of all economic classes, and he is, in a way, stuck between the old representations of manliness and the new. He is neither the new, strong, working Victorian man nor the old aristocratic conception of masculinity, and neither is he feminized enough to be labeled effeminate.

Braddon illustrates a shift in conceptions of masculinity most vividly through the novel’s depiction of aristocratic and middle-class men. The aristocratic man, represented by Robert’s uncle, Sir Michael Audley, is defined in terms of stasis, mental and physical relaxation, and a lack of purpose in life. Words like “sheltered” and “solitude,” and “still” (4) are used in describing Audley Court, thereby emphasizing its disconnect from the energy and progress of urban areas. Its grounds are “broken,” “dry,” and “overgrown” (1). Sir Michael is “tired” (4) and prone to drifting to sleep after short walks around Audley Court. The life of the aristocratic man is presented as a creed outworn. Braddon’s portrayals of aristocratic ways of living show them to be disappearing due to their ineffectualness and disconnect from current British society. The growing separation (ideologically if not geographically) between rural and urban areas, and the class distinctions made between the rural aristocracy and the urban middle class, was a cause of concern for some who valued the aristocratic conception of manliness.

Famously, in “Shooting Niagara: And After” (1867), Thomas Carlyle suggests that the best hope for England would be for the aristocracy to retreat to their estates in preparation for a battle against the vulgar life found in London and other major cities. What Carlyle saw as “cheap and nasty” (“Shooting” 40) in London was conversely represented as active, hard-working, self-made middle-class masculinity by other writers. Contributing to this more active and urban conception of masculinity, sensation/gothic novels regularly depicted the aristocracy as out of touch, lazy, and mostly ineffectual.

Replacing the lazy, purposeless, and geographically isolated aristocratic man is the more energetic, harder-working, city-dwelling middle-class man represented by Robert Audley and George Talboys⁵. Whether the novel is arguing that the two class-based definitions of masculinity are in conflict with one another, *Lady Audley's Secret* does present the waning of aristocratic manliness and the move towards middle-class masculinity. By end of the novel, even though the movement away from the outdated aristocratic definition of masculinity and towards the new active man is complete and “Audley Court is shut up” (446), Braddon does not depict this transition as being accomplished easily.

Robert's initial gender ambiguity is a product of changing definitions and categorical boundaries for male gender identity, but it is still a product that must be either normalized or shunned. Cohen argues that the “monster is difference made flesh” and that those differences which the monster makes real, makes tangible, are usually “cultural, political, racial, economic, [and] sexual” (7). The Victorian period was one in which categorization and ratiocination was highly important. Conceptions of the normal body, the normal sexual practices, the normal diet, the normal dress, the normal marriage, and the normal way to raise a child were of the utmost importance in the nineteenth century. Those of the abnormal body were to be gawked at in freak shows and circuses. Those with abnormal sexual practices were to be institutionalized and studied. The Victorian gothic monster is a product of this culture's fears and fantasies.

As the reader is introduced to Robert, his penchant for leisure—namely his love for reading French novels and smoking his cigars and pipe (not to mention his complete aversion to working)—place him uncomfortably outside the hegemonic conception of middle-class masculinity. Before moving ahead with my analysis of emergent middle-class masculinity in the novel, it is important to explain how Robert, with his aristocratic lineage, can be defined as a middle-class man. Due to the practice of primogeniture, Sir Michael's wealth would not be passed on to his nephew Robert (whose parents are not mentioned in the novel). Because of this, Robert would be left to establish his own wealth through entrepreneurship. Hence, Robert's employment as a barrister signals his entrance into middle-class standing, theoretically at least, until he can earn enough money to be absorbed back into the upper classes. The supposedly temporary movement of young aristocratic men into the ranks of the working middle class in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was meant to ensure the continuation of the gentry, but it also increased the numbers of middle class men. Robert is certainly a product of the aristocracy, yet he expresses two contradictory emotions concerning his aristocratic background that illustrate this change towards a middle-class conception of masculinity. Concerning his feelings of kinship with the aristocracy, Robert views Audley Court as his home. We are told that “[e]very changing outline in the landscape was familiar to him” and that his love for Sir Michael is “perhaps the strongest sentiment of Robert's heart” (213). Yet, Robert knows that the life led at Audley Court is coming to an end, and that “the day must come on which the oaken shutters would be closed” (214). Robert speculates that “had he lived in the time of Thomas à Kempis, he would very likely have built himself a narrow hermitage amid some forest loneliness, and spent his life in tranquil imitation of the reputed author of *The Imitation*” (214). Yet imitation of the aristocratic modes of living (or, as the reference to Thomas à Kempis suggests, an imitation of medieval life) is not an option made available to Robert. The way of life he may desire is now made impossible. Industrialization, and the creation of an active middle-class masculine gender identity, provides a reason for his lack of options. Upon finding the hard-to-locate village of Crescent Villas, Robert witnesses the end of one way of life and the beginning of the modern industrial life as the large old houses in the village “lay half embedded amongst the chaos of brick and mortar rising around them . . . new terraces, new streets, new squares led away into hopeless masses of stone and plaster on every side” (227). The only option left for Robert is to establish himself amongst the “chaos of brick and mortar” by working at a career.

While Robert's ancestry suggests that his position as a type of self-made man who earns his money through hard work is merely temporary, Braddon replaces aristocratic values with those of the middle-class man, promoting

them as the successful performance of hegemonic middle-class masculinity. Robert's success depends not upon his gaining elite status, but rather through his accepting a male gender identity that is defined by a desire to work hard, and to direct his energy into appropriate channels, such as his entrance into heterosexual marriage and eventual fatherhood. Therefore, Robert enters into middle-class standing in order to earn his fortune;. Yet the novel's ending suggests that the goal is not to reclaim his aristocratic lineage, but to exemplify and endorse middle-class masculinity while simultaneously lamenting the cost of this transformation, namely the exclusions of alternate masculinities and the literal and figurative violence done to women in the process of forming an acceptable middle-class masculinity.

Initially, Robert's identity is closely tied to the aristocratic model of masculinity, and can best be described in terms of wasted energy. He is "the most vacillating and unenergetic of men" (39) who is in direct contrast to "the most animated of men" (40). We can understand why this behavior places Robert in an ambiguous position concerning his masculine gender identity if we examine the Victorian conception of innate male energy, and the importance of controlling and focusing this force. According to Herbert Sussman, the "central problematic in the Victorian practice of masculinity" is "the proper regulation of an innate male energy" (3). The most important aspect of Victorian masculinity (middle-class masculinity especially) can be found in Sussman's use of the word "regulation." *Unrestricted* sexuality, aggressiveness, and intellectual curiosity are no more a sign of masculinity than is the total lack of these attributes. Lynda Nead has asserted that the Victorians expressed "a code of sexual mores which condones sexual activity in men as a sign of 'masculinity'" (6). Yet, as Sussman argues, Victorian masculinity was defined as a regulation of male energy, as well as an understanding of appropriate methods and times to express that power.⁶

Obviously then, one way of directing one's energy appropriately (and therefore to successfully perform this hegemonic masculine gender identity) is through hard work. Robert's energy, physical as well as mental, is both misused and depleted. His time wasted reading French novels and smoking his cigars and pipe misuses his male energy, which makes his transition to middle-class masculinity difficult, since he continually expresses a lethargic attitude.⁷ Robert's aversion to work is problematic, since the Victorian concept of working and middle-class masculinity was closely associated with the actual labor men did for a living. In *Past and Present* Carlyle writes that one should "know what thou canst work at; and work at it like a Hercules" and that "a man perfects himself by working" (54). If Carlyle's definition is applied, Robert's masculinity is definitely in question. Robert is described as having a "lymphatic nature" with a "lazy bent [to] his mind" (89). Sir Michael thinks of him as a "good-natured nonentity . . . whose brain had been somewhat overlooked in the distribution of intellectual gifts" (282). And when Lady Audley accuses him of being insane, Alicia rejects this accusation because she wonders "[h]ow should such a sluggish ditch-pond of an intellect as his ever work itself into a tempest?" (330). His mental and physical laziness are remnants of the dying-off aristocratic conception of masculinity, and those characteristics need to be replaced with a strong work ethic, coupled with the ability to think actively and rationally. Robert has become a barrister, his name "was inscribed in the law list," and "if these things can make a man a barrister, Robert Audley decidedly was one" (32). Even though Robert does not initially express a yearning to make this transition to the middle-class concept of masculinity outside of making a few shallow gestures,⁸ he does display a self-awareness of his un-masculine behavior. After "he had exhausted himself with the exertion of smoking his German pipe, and reading French novels,"⁹ he would often nap under a shady tree and "tell grave benchers that he had knocked himself up with overwork" (32). In contrast to men who are very physical active, and who direct their male energy into appropriate channels, Robert's awareness of his inappropriate behavior argues that this transition to a new, middle-class conception of masculinity is at least partially achieved through shame and embarrassment.

For Braddon, the unmasculine man does not present a counter-hegemonic conception of masculinity in the sense that it challenges conventional masculine gender identities, or that it is part of an organized intellectual movement, but instead it functions as a step in the process towards achieving a successful male gender identity. Braddon's use of the sensation/gothic genre allows her to present an outside figure in Robert, and her role as female author enables her to examine, and possibly endorse, aberrant masculinities more freely. However, his successful transformation by the end of the novel promotes the hegemonic conception of masculinity that insists on a man's having a clear "honest purpose" to his life, even if her depiction of a constructed and perform gender identity undercuts the strength and validity of that hegemony. For working and middle-class Victorians, labor was

not a desirable activity merely because one wanted to obtain more money and material goods. Rather, hard work became a moral virtue in and of itself: If economic gain was achieved, it was the icing on the cake rather than the cake itself. Sally Mitchell writes that the “values associated with evangelical religion helped promote the growth of business and the advance of middle class men” and that due to any feeling of job security it was important to Victorian men to “make themselves irreplaceable—and they were comforted by feeling that steady, hard work was morally excellent” (261). For working and middle-class men, a sense of importance and responsibility was strongly desired in order that they could feel useful to society. By doing their part in the increasingly interconnected urban world through physical or intellectual labor, the working or middle-class man was not only gaining economic benefits but a higher moral and ethical status as well. This is in direct contrast to the isolated aristocracy exemplified by Sir Michael, who seems to have no such purpose or responsibility to his society, and serves no obvious function in relation to others. We are told that Robert “had learned what it was to have an honest purpose since the disappearance of George Talboys” (144) and this “honest purpose” marks a difference between middle-class and aristocratic men, as well as masculine middle-class men and those who do not fit the hegemonic conception of masculinity. And though Robert continually questions his “honest purpose” (for example, asking himself, “How is it all to end?” (150), as he worries he is doing more harm than good by pursuing this mystery), he does not relinquish his responsibility brought about by this newfound purpose.

The difficulty in Robert’s growth from un-masculine outsider to a successful masculine gender identity is compounded by his initial lack of belief in the moral value of hard work. This implies that, at least for some men, a strong work ethic is not an innate or natural part of a man’s identity but is instead a learned trait. Robert’s role as un-masculine man appears threatening in the ways it points out the un-naturalness of the masculine ideals expressed in Carlyle’s writings. The notion that gender is learned and not inherent is a double-edged sword. This idea could allow gender identities that do not fit the conventional definition to be viewed as acceptable and appropriate, since they no longer can be defined as “unnatural”; but it could also show how important it is to normalize a person’s gender identity. If these traits can be learned—if normalizing one’s gender can be achieved—the power of literature such as *Lady Audley’s Secret* to shape deviant gender identities becomes apparent. Michael Foucault says that since the nineteenth-century “normalizing [. . .] has become one of the major functions of our society” and that “each individual, wherever he may find himself subject to [the universal reign of the normative] his body, his gestures, his behavior, his aptitudes, his achievements” (304). We are told that Robert had been persuaded by his friends to join the law profession, a decision that comes not out of his own desire to achieve economic gain, acquire moral superiority, or establish a good reputation in the working world, but instead as a result of his own inability (or unwillingness) to argue against his friends’ advice. Peer pressure worked to coerce Robert into obtaining a profession as

his friends had advised him to increase [his income] by being called to the bar; and as he found it, after due consideration, more trouble to oppose the wishes of these friends, than to eat so many dinners, and to take a set of chambers in the Temple, he adopted the latter course, and unblushingly called himself a barrister. (32)

Robert’s choice to become a barrister is significant, as it illustrates his more aristocratic standing in society as well as his apparent dislike of doing any more actual labor than is required of him.¹⁰ Mitchell also notes that the job of the barrister was not one that demanded great effort on the part of the man holding that title. It was not uncommon for “young men of good family to study law and live in shared chambers without ever intending to practice,” and that the position was a “good excuse” to “meet influential people who might help one obtain a government post” (67). We can see that Robert is not an aberration in his profession, although the pressure placed upon him from outside sources seems to be a critique of his laziness, or rather his unmotivated nature, as well as his isolation inside the confines of his home. Robert confines himself within his chambers, venturing outside only when the weather gets too warm. Carlyle writes that “[i]solation is the sum total of wretchedness to man” and “to be cut off, to be solitary” is “truly a work of the Evil one” (263). The gender-role distinctions between men and women at this time seems to dictate that Robert should be out of doors, working and earning money and moral capital instead of being the angel of his chambers. Just as Adrienne Rich writes about the ways patriarchal

societies have literally and figuratively confined women's movement (both in the home and in the workplace), Robert's self-confinement in his chambers works against that same patriarchal system by rejecting the idea that he should be outdoors during the day working.

While obtaining the profession of barrister is a small step towards normalizing Robert so that he can become an acceptably masculine middle-class man, his career does not go far enough to actually inspire in him a desire to work hard and be social. Vicki Pallo touches on Robert's un-masculine masculinity and its transformation over the course of the novel as she argues that it is the role of detective that represents new methods of rational thought that finally allows Robert to perform a socially acceptable masculine identity. In reading Robert as a character who "in many ways contradicts the established norms of society," Pallo argues that he eventually "becomes an agent of societal control, wielding his power in order to maintain the acceptable standards of law and discipline within his society" (470–71). Pallo suggests that this transformation stems from Robert's acceptance of methods of detection,¹¹ including surveillance, questioning subjects, and obtaining evidence.

Robert's embrace of rational, organized thought, which is tied to the endorsement of intellectual labor as a valid means of "work," is critical in his transformation. The establishment of intellectual labor as equal to physical "work" broadens the methods of performing one's masculine gender identity. Specifically, the novel focuses on rational thinking as means of labor. Inspired by the disappearance of George, Robert begins to feel a compulsion towards organizing his thoughts in order to solve the mystery. One way this is accomplished is through the creation of what he calls his "Journal of facts." The journal includes a tightly organized numbered series of tasks he must complete, thoughts concerning the disappearance of George, and speculations about the solution to this mysterious event. Robert's creation of the "Journal of facts" instantaneously changes his attitude towards his profession. He becomes "proud" of his journal and remarks to himself, "I ought to have pursued my profession instead of dawdling my life away as I have done" (100). Robert's appropriation of rational, organized thinking allows his own gender identity to be more easily organized and categorized. In seeking to avoid the gender and sexual anxiety produced by his ambiguous behavior, Robert finds that rational and organized thought provides a clear, direct, and simple way of understanding male gender identity. In addition, his sudden interest in organized, rational thought becomes obviously more phallic as he inserts his journal "in that very pigeon-hole into which he had thrust Alicia's letter—the pigeon-hole marked *important*" (101). Furthermore, he eventually secludes his "Journal of facts" behind lock and key, "carefully" unfolds it, and resumes "numbering the fresh paragraphs as carefully as he had numbered the old ones" (155), illustrating how important and detail-oriented his attraction to rational thought has become.

Intellectual activity, specifically ratiocination, becomes the method through which Robert can channel his male energy appropriately. Robert's labor does not require him to work with wood or steel, nor does he produce tangible, practical items. Intellectual labor requires the use of the intellect, and here Braddon begins positioning intellectual labor as at least equal to physical labor, or possibly more powerful than the work done in factories. Robert performs his intellectual labor in ways that are mainly domestic and in areas coded as feminine, such as Lady Audley's dressing room, and the perusal of women's letters and diaries. His intellect, which before had been consumed with leisure reading of French novels and avoiding actual labor, is now directed towards the solving of a supposed crime and the discovery of Lady Audley's secret. The focus remains solely on language, with Lady Audley's background being the prime interest of Robert's detective work. There is no murder weapon to discover, nor does Robert search for physical evidence to tie Lady Audley to the disappearance and possible murder of George. Instead, the focus of Robert's investigation is entirely on language, and specifically the words of women. He seeks out the truth of his friend's disappearance in letters and diaries, in newspaper announcements, and in spoken interviews. His entire search rests on his ability to logically organize these bits of language to form a complete and rationally thought-out narrative of Lady Audley's deceit and criminal activity.

While Robert's entry into domestic/female areas may mark him as feminine, his role as the solver of mysteries and the enforcer of law helps to establish his masculinity. The ability to take disparate pieces of information and organize them in a rational way enables masculine domination through the use of detection and law. Ronald Thomas claims that

the literary act of transferring the authority to tell the secret story of the individual suspect to a

designated professional expert is also a political act, one that corresponds historically to the reform of the English criminal code, the decline of aristocratic power, and the insistent rise of the modern professional police force in England. (177)

While Robert is not a professional detective, his use of detective methods, such as interviewing witnesses, researching documents, conducting surveillance, and contemplating motives, enables him to function as a *de facto* member of the police. Here we see how Braddon's role as a woman writer enables her to focus on the masculine world of detection, ratiocination, and law, and show how those elements of the social sphere are shaped by the domestic sphere and used to legitimize a masculine gender identity only as long as the person enters into those areas as the enforcer of masculine law. And as D. A. Miller suggests, policing moved from conventional law enforcement "into the closet [. . .] into the private and domestic sphere" (ix), and this is illustrated by Robert's entry into domestic/female areas during his detective work.

Next, Braddon places masculine rationality in direct contrast with its opposite: insanity. Specifically, Braddon equates insanity with femininity and rational thought with masculinity. Certainly there is a long literary history of equating femininity with insanity, and especially its use as a trope in sensation/gothic fiction. From Matthew "Monk" Lewis's poem "Crazy Jane" to Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*, female insanity became increasingly common in nineteenth-century fiction¹² at the same time it became more common in the culture as a whole. Elaine Showalter argues, in her landmark work *The Female Malady*, that

in a society that not only perceived women as childlike, irrational, and sexually unstable but also rendered them legally powerless and economically marginal, it is not surprising that they should have formed the greater part of the residual categories of deviance from which doctors drew a lucrative practice and the asylums much of their population. (73)

In Braddon's novel, this equation requires reading insanity specifically as a loss of intellectual control, and rational thought as the epitome of control and order,¹³ specifically for men. As a means of containing Robert and avoiding having her secret discovered, Lady Audley attempts to convince Sir Michael that his nephew has been driven insane following the disappearance of George. She claims that

Robert Audley is mad [. . .] What is one of the strongest diagnostics of madness—what is the first appalling sign of mental aberration? The mind becomes stationary; the brain stagnates; the even current of the mind is interrupted; the thinking power of the brain resolves itself into a monotone [. . .] the mind becomes turbid and corrupt through lack of action. (287)

Lady Audley's definition of insanity is the opposite of Ruskin's assertion that men are active beings.¹⁴ In further speculating on the cause of his supposed insanity, Lady Audley wonders if "[p]erhaps he reads too much, or smokes too much" (286). If middle-class masculinity is to be defined as having an active intellect and physical body, the stagnant and stationary mind is anything but masculine. In addition to equating insanity with femininity (or, getting away from the binary, it could be categorized as un-masculine), Braddon differentiates and hierarchizes middle-class masculinity from working-class masculinity by portraying the lower classes as equally out of control, and therefore potentially mad. Phoebe describes her husband Luke as being "scarcely ever sober after dark, and when he's drunk he gets almost wild, and doesn't seem to know what he does" (303).¹⁵ According to the novel, insanity is defined as a lack of an intellectual control that is necessary for middle-class men, in addition to a lack of physical control found common amongst the working classes¹⁶. We can see the power of middle-class men's regulation when Robert asserts his authority over the working-class locksmith (Mr. White), whom he calls to his chambers. Robert uses his intellectual and physical control to claim dominance over the man as he "looked straight into the man's dingy face [. . .] [as] Mr. White's eyelids dropped under the young barrister's calm scrutiny" (150). The power of Robert's gaze—conveying his class authority, as well as his intellectual superiority (not to mention his clean appearance in comparison to White's "dingy face")—is all that is needed for Robert to force White into submission. Again, as Sussman argues, the key to a successful middle-class masculine gender identity is regulation of both intellect and the body, not in its unchecked excess.

Missing from the construction of Robert's masculine gender identity is an interest in functioning as the provider to his family. In contrast, George, who is also a product of upper-class lineage (he describes his father as a "rich man" [18]), is the novel's more authentic representation of middle-class masculinity, since his entire being is defined by wanting to financially provide for his wife and child through his own labor. He leaves for Australia in order to strike it rich, and the note he leaves for his wife illustrates his belief that his role as husband and father is fundamentally tied to his ability to financially provide for them. He explains that

I never had loved her better than now when I seemed to desert her; that I was going to try my fortune in a new world; and that if I succeeded I should come back to bring her plenty and happiness, but that if I failed I should never look upon her face again. (21)

George's efforts to provide for his family allow the transition from aristocracy to middle-class masculinity to occur, and this change does not go unnoticed by him. He tells Miss Morley that while in Australia he "wondered whether that dashing, reckless, extravagant, luxurious, champagne-drinking dragoon could have really been the same man who sat on the damp ground gnawing a mouldy crust in the wilds of the new world" (21). This acceptance of financial responsibility, as well as his embrace of a strong work ethic, positions George in a superior role above his ambiguously gendered friend Robert, and allows George to claim patriarchal dividend.

Yet, however much George portrays the conventional attributes of the middle-class man in his endeavors to financially provide for his family, Braddon suggests that the authority attached to this successful gender performance is easily lost if the pursuit of masculinity is handled in less-than-admirable (i.e., less than socially acceptable) ways. George's endeavor to establish his masculine gender identity results in numerous complications, especially for Helen/Lucy and their child. By leaving England in order to become an authentic man, George relinquishes his masculine responsibility to be the authority figure in his home. While men left their homes in order to serve in the military, leaving one's wife and child to pursue a kind of get-rich-quick scheme was not as acceptable as serving Britain and representing the Empire overseas. This example shows again how an authentic masculine gender identity is achieved through performance, rather than it being a natural, inherent characteristic of males. Braddon's critique here is that a man's absence from the home for reasons that are even slightly suspect shows how tenuous their hold on authority is, as she illustrates how quickly they lose that control over their families once they are away.

Despite this criticism of get-rich-quick schemes vs. hard, honest labor, the novel insists that George's masculine gender identity is something to be admired. He has earned his masculine gender identity through a strong desire to be a providing husband and father, which is something—the family as well as the desire to provide for them—that Robert sorely lacks. Since George displays a desire to work hard, provide for his family, and to enter into heterosexual marriage (as well as to father children), George's masculinity is unthreatened even when he shows un-masculine characteristics. More so than Robert, George appears feminine. He is even described as having a "handsome brown eyes, with a feminine smile in them" (13). In addition to showing feminine characteristics, at one point George is associated with cowardice when he is described as "a sort of Bamfylde Moore Carew" (102), the vagabond, self-named "King of the Beggars" who, if his memoirs are to be believed, avoided responsibility and service to his country at every turn. Yet, despite this un-masculine description, the concept of patriarchal dividend—of the respect and sense of entitlement owed to him because of his masculinity—is seen when George reclaims his role of father when reunited with his son and places Robert in the role of mother/wife. Also, when discussing his grief over losing his wife, George, because of his earned masculinity, is allowed to compare himself with British soldiers who "were wounded in India" and "came home bringing bullets inside them" (49). This masculine authority over Robert—positioning himself as husband over Robert's wifely duties in taking care of him, and drawing allusions between himself and soldiers wounded in battle—also enables him to engage in seemingly un-masculine behavior without a threat to his masculinity. Because of his earned masculinity, George can spend his days lazily sitting indoors, smoking his cigars and pipe without the threat to his heterosexuality that Robert faces.

The attachment between Robert and George is more challenging because it transgresses the boundaries (as sensation/gothic fiction usually does) of a "normal" friendship and begins to move more towards a homosexual rather than a strictly homosocial (i.e., acceptable) relationship between the two men. Initially, we see that Robert

is inactive, unmotivated, and clearly uninterested in fulfilling the roles of the Victorian man, to be a physically strong worker and provider). George is described in nearly the opposite way. Overly determined to provide for his family and taking a great deal of pleasure in his work, George represents almost an exaggerated example of the Victorian ideal of masculinity. Yet it is when George suddenly goes missing that he and Robert's conventional friendship changes to one of desire, and Robert's un-masculine behavior and emotions threaten his heterosexual identity. Robert begins to describe his fondness for George in more elaborate terms as he recalls, tenderly and emotionally, his passionate love for him. While at times Robert describes his feelings for George in terms of a father/son relationship (as he does when he expresses the feeling that he is "a man who has an only son whose life has gone wrong" [86]), Robert more often behaves as George's romantic love interest. He pines so much for his missing friend that his entire identity in relation to others becomes that of a grieving widow. Specifically, Robert's sense of responsibility over George's son positions Robert as surrogate father/mother in a novel where most of the female parents are dead, unfeeling, or insane.¹⁷ Robert asserts that "it shall be [his] business to secure his safety" (162). His sense of responsibility over the young boy functions both as an example of Robert's very strong feelings for George and as a method of training for Robert as he begins to accept his adult-male responsibility of being a financial provider. These feelings towards his friend are not one-sided. After Robert has successfully solved the mystery of George's disappearance and George is brought back into the pages of the novel, he tells Robert that "I yearned for the strong grasp of your hand, Bob; the friendly touch of the hand which has guided me through the darkest passages of my life" (444). Yet statements such as these are made possible only once Robert and George's masculine gender identity has become valid through each man's desire to be a financial provider to their families, but most importantly due to their entry into heterosexual marriage.

Interestingly, while Robert's un-masculine/feminine nature and his homosocial relationship to George are in the process of transformation, Robert still remains largely uninterested in working, marriage, and creating a family. In the midst of investigating George's disappearance, he fantasizes about an idyllic world where men have very little exposure to or knowledge about women. In this passage Braddon capitalizes on the freedoms allowed by the sensation/gothic genre to create the possibility of a new type of masculinity. This new type of masculinity can be successfully masculine in its independence and authority, but, at the same time, is in direct contrast to hegemonic conceptions of male gender identity due to its rejection of sexuality of all forms, and its disinterest in being a husband or father. According to Robert's fantasy, the man "comes here, heart whole and happy, with no better experience of a woman than is to be learnt at a flower-show or in a ball-room" (247). This women-free life is remarkable for its embrace of pre-sexual masculinity. He wishes for a time where he had little knowledge of women in general, but little "experience of a woman" as well. And what little experience he may wish to have had with women, it would not have gone sexually past the minimal physicality of the ball-room. He continues to pine away for an existence where he has "no more familiar knowledge of the creature than he has of the far-away satellites of the remoter planets; with a vague notion that she is a whirling teetotum in pink or blue gauze, or a graceful automaton for the display of milliner's manufacture" (247). Robert's desire for women to be far away from him, and for them to be nothing more than a child's toy or a mannequin, recall his schooldays at Eton, a world with little, if any, exposure to women. He even goes as far as to seemingly blame all problems on women by remarking, "What a world it is, and how these women take life out of our hands. Helen Maldon, Lady Audley, Clara Talboys, and now Miss Tonks—all womenkind from beginning to end" (237). In contrast to his homoerotic desires for George, Robert's fantasy here seems to be pre-sexual, or even asexual in that, in this passage at least, he does not desire men but merely rejects any desire for women. In this fantasy Braddon presents a wholly unique form of Victorian middle-class masculinity that is not defined through its relation to women by situating the man in the role of son, lover, husband, or father, but a masculine gender identity that is defined regardless of women yet is also not defined by a desire for other men. This pre- or asexual adult masculinity is somewhat similar to the desire-less feminine gender identity of the angel of the house, in that it presents men as more innocent, virginal creatures. Yet, it is different from this conception of femininity because Robert's fantasy does not contain notions of sacrifice, submissiveness, or any particular conception of piety. The fantasy retains a sense of individuality and independence found in hegemonic conceptions of middle-class masculinity, while avoiding relations with women that are necessary for entry into heterosexual marriage and fatherhood.

Despite Robert's fantasy, Braddon shows the impossibility of Robert's asexual fantasy by depicting the

inevitability of Robert's entry into adult heterosexual masculinity. The world Braddon depicts will not allow a different form of masculinity that does not fit the conventional definition. Braddon's representation of Robert's fantasy is a creation of an alternative discourse, one that is in contrast to the "get a job, get a wife, have a kid" discourse of normative middle-class Victorian masculinity. However, as Braddon shows, this alternative discourse that presents the asexual man is also one that is denied authority and power, as well as denying that authority and power to women. Robert's fantasy remains a fantasy because it would deny him masculine authority, and thereby upset the conventional patriarchal system of gender relations. As Foucault argues, it would be erroneous to read a depiction like Braddon's of adult asexual masculinity as being repressed by Robert and the society he lives in, but instead it appears and is embraced as a category of sexuality to be studied and scrutinized as non-normative.

The final step in the construction and establishment of Robert's "normal" masculinity is the rejection of his former lifestyle and the adoption of a new, strictly heterosexual, way of life. This is accomplished through Robert's entry into heterosexual marriage/romance. Foucault argues that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the "marriage relation was the most intense focus of constraints; it was spoken of more than anything else [. . .] it was under constant surveillance" (37). The constraints put upon the married couple that Foucault refers to are related to the cultural belief in the transformative nature of the act of marriage. According to Helena Michie, "Whatever the reality of individual experiences, ideas about sexuality and marriage were linked to a culturally powerful discourse of climactic transformation in which men, and especially women, were thought to become different people" (420). Marriage, and the expected loss of virginity that would accompany it, was and still is seen as a pivotal moment of change in one's life. Moreso now with the loss of virginity than with marriage, the idea exists still in our culture that both physically and mentally one will transform instantly when, as Michie puts it, two bodies become one flesh. The transformation from individual to couple and from self-dependency to interdependency marks the final move in the progression towards normal heterosexual adulthood. For Robert it is the final move away from the ambiguous gender roles he exemplified from the beginning of the novel, and away from the image of him as a border creature living somewhere between masculinity and femininity and towards a fully acceptable and understandable categorization of his masculinity.

How then, does marriage finally change Robert into the acceptable Victorian man? After receiving his orders from Clara, as well as his commands from Clara and George's father to rescue George, Robert returns to Fig-Tree Court a "new man." This "new man" now sees the world and his place *in* the world differently. In a chapter appropriately titled "Restored," we are told that he is now a man with "new hopes, new cares, new prospects, new purposes" and that he sees the world so differently that he cannot understand how the world seemed so "neutral" and "tinted" to him before he began his transformation (441). The world is no longer "neutral" to Robert because the gender distinctions which blurred the boundary lines before have been almost firmly established. He begins to see more clearly his position in society, having now been restored to his "natural" (which Braddon has denaturalized through her depiction of his constructed gender performance) place as masculine Victorian man. "At Peace," the final chapter of the novel, is also appropriately titled. After Robert's masculinity has been "restored," he is at peace in the world as he is no longer a threatening monstrous creature that challenges Victorian norms of gender and sexuality. The reader is informed that the new Robert is a "rising man" who has "distinguished himself in the great breach of promise case of Hobbs v. Nobbs, and has convulsed the Court by his deliciously comic rendering of the faithless Nobbs's amatory correspondence" (445). Robert is now a success, distinguishing himself in his profession and well liked by his peers.

For Robert there still exists a sense of pleasure in leisurely sitting and smoking. Yet there are a few important differences between the novel's final images of Robert's relaxing, talking, and smoking and the first glimpses we were shown of him in his chambers. Previously, Robert had leisurely spent his days inside his home at Fig-Tree Court, yet now he spends "summer evenings" in his smoking room. His days are now spent working instead of reading and smoking, so that Robert partakes in this activity appropriately as the way to end a long hard day of work. Also, Robert's previous behavior was isolated and solitary, whereas now he and George are "summoned by Clara and Alicia to drink tea, and eat strawberries and cream upon the lawn" (446). The inclusion of women into Robert and George's activities provide a boundary line that prohibits any behavior on their part from being construed as homosexual. In addition, "Audley Court is shut up" (446), providing an example of the waning days

of the aristocracy, and an example of the end of the effeminate behavior of the aristocratic man.

Finally, we are told that “the meerschaums and the French novels have been presented to a young Templar, with whom Robert Audley had been friendly in his bachelor days” (446). The remnants of Robert’s un-masculine gender have been done away with, now that he has been fully transformed into a “normal” masculine man. He works diligently and has become successful in his profession. He has, through marriage, firmly established a boundary line in his relationship with George. And, again through his marriage, he has become a proper family man with a wife and child. The Robert who appeared threatening and unusual, who seemed to transgress categorizations of gender and sexuality at the beginning of the novel, has been shaped and constructed through social pressures into the happy heterosexual family man at novel’s end. What seems a pat and unsatisfying “happy” ending to Robert’s struggle with his masculine gender identity is the result of Braddon’s rejection of alternate masculinities.

- 1 As Matthew Sweet notes, the term “sensation” began to be used in describing literature in 1861, one year before the publication of *Lady Audley’s Secret*. It gained such popularity in usage that by 1864 the a critic in the *Edinburgh Review* asserted that “two or three years ago . . . nobody would have known what was meant by a sensation novel,” but that the term has become a “regular commercial name” (5).
- 2 See Brantlinger (1982) for examples of the largely negative critical reception received by the major sensation novels of the 1860s.
- 3 James also called Braddon the “founder of the sensation novel” but preferred Wilkie Collins, whom he argued deserved “a more respectable name” (593) than Braddon.
- 4 Sensation novels were accused of being almost *too* current. In 1863 Henry Mansel wrote in the *Quarterly Review* that all a sensation novelist had to do was “keep an eye on the criminal reports of the daily newspapers” and the novel would virtually write itself (1863, 501).
- 5 Greg Howard argues that the novel is less about conflict than it is about contrast, positioning Sir Michael as an “ineffectual aristocrat” in contrast to Robert who “represents the emergence of the self-sufficient progenitor of a new, industrialized economy” (34).
- 6 Jill Matus points out that, while Robert’s French novels are marked as un-masculine, they at least provide an acceptable moral framework that is not found in what Lady Audley reads. Matus argues that “while these French novels may sap his energy, they leave his morals intact. He is less susceptible therefore than Lady Audley, who is an avid and clearly corrupted reader of romances and yellow-papered novels, thought by their more vituperative critics to be dangerous to feminine health and moral well-being” (337).
- 7 Robert almost seems to display the symptoms of the (now-debunked) “disease” spermatorrhea, which was thought to be the result of excessive discharge of sperm, usually through masturbation. See Ellen Bayuk Rosenman (2003) for more on how the Victorians understood this “disease.”
- 8 Robert makes similar gestures, equally insincere, to appear masculine in aristocratic terms. Venturing to Essex during hunting season, he brings along “half a dozen French novels, a case of cigars, and three pounds of Turkish tobacco” (113), but nothing concerning hunting. Just like the working-class men, the “honest young country squires” see through his performance, surmising him as “a person utterly unworthy of any remark whatsoever” (113).
- 9 Robert’s penchant for foreign items (German pipes and French novels) also problematizes his masculine gender identity. Apart from the dangers of the foreign, a common concept in gothic/sensation fiction, Robert’s interest in these things suggests his lack of interest in a strong national British identity. That he gives these items away in the novel’s last chapter signals his complete transformation into British middle-class man. While Robert’s interest in French novels portrays him as something less than masculine, in Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Aurora Floyd* (1863), French men are described as aggressively sexual beings. Aurora’s unescorted trip from France to England causes anxiety for the Floyds’ housekeeper, who worries about Aurora “all alone amongst a pack of moustachioed Frenchmen!” (23).
- 10 The job of the barrister in the Victorian period was separate from the job of the solicitor. The solicitor did much of the grunt work; taking statements and affidavits, traveling around the country in order to track down witnesses and obtain documents, and dealing more directly with the plaintiffs and defendants in the particular legal case that they were working on; while barristers worked almost exclusively in London, doing the bulk of their work arguing in court before judges. Comparatively, as Mitchell points out, “barristers were the gentlemen of the legal profession” (66).
- 11 See Mary Seraly Cropp (1998) for further analysis of Braddon’s use of detective tropes.
- 12 In *Fashioning Gothic Bodies*, Catherine Spooner examines how this fascination with female insanity in nineteenth-century sensation/gothic fiction because commodified, with “Crazy Jane” hats and a plethora of merchandise stemming from *The Woman in White*.
- 13 Sussman argues that Robert Browning, Tennyson, and Carlyle also associated male insanity with loss of control (74).
- 14 John Ruskin, in “Of Queen’s Gardens,” wrote, “The man’s power is active, progressive, defensive. He is

eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest whenever war is just, whenever conquest necessary” (90).

15 Braddon also presents working-class men in *Lady Audley's Secret* as animal-like, in contrast to the more evolved middle and upper classes. Luke is “bull-necked,” “animal in expression,” and “not unlike one of the stout oxen grazing in the meadows round about the Court” (26). This continues in *Aurora Floyd*, where Softy is continually compared to animals.

16 For women, and specifically Lady Audley, her “insanity” is shown through her behaving much like a conventional middle-class man. She is active, mobile, and rational (her scheme is well thought out), and she seeks to become the enforcer of law by attempting to diagnose Robert as mentally ill. Lady Audley’s masculine-like behavior is a threat to male dominance, and thus her incarceration is necessary in order to ensure the authority of men like Robert.

17 See Matus (1993) for more on Braddon’s use of maternal insanity.

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The Orphan in the Abbey: *Eleanor Sleath's Influence on Jane Austen's Composition of Northanger Abbey*

Tenille Nowak

Originally written during the late 1790s, Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* is generally studied as a parody of the then-popular Gothic novel. According to Michael Sadleir, many elements of Austen's novel "make fun of the excesses of a prevailing *chic*" (3). However, there is more depth to *Northanger Abbey* than has been previously discussed by scholars. This early work of Austen's actually extends beyond a simple parody; it offers a unique insight regarding her development into a mature writer. Closely examining *Northanger Abbey* in conjunction with Eleanor Sleath's *The Orphan of the Rhine* (1798), one of the Gothic novels Austen specifically alludes to, unveils some of the heretofore elided intricacies involved in her construction of *Northanger Abbey* and demonstrates how her extensive knowledge of the popular literature of her time influenced her progression into an accomplished author.

By demonstrating how previously misinterpreted allusions and similar portrayals of Gothic scenery actually establish a concrete connection between the two novels, and showing the thematic links between Sleath's and Austen's works, a new depth is revealed in the young Jane Austen's relationship with the literary trends of her time. More importantly, the evidence offered here shows that Sleath and Austen shared several objectives, which included a desire to defend their chosen genre (novels) against detractors and a need to condemn the excessive sensibility and behaviors depicted in many characters of that genre. That Austen deliberately mirrored these particular themes chosen by Sleath in her own critique on the potentially negative attitudes and tendencies that the middle-class reader could ingest from reading clearly indicates that *Northanger Abbey* purposely acknowledges the diligent efforts of Eleanor Sleath and supports and reflects her atypical opinions. Thus, contemplating the constructional and thematic links between *Northanger Abbey* and *The Orphan of the Rhine* will encourage readers to discount the claim that Austen either randomly included *Orphan* in her novel or that she chose it simply because of its representational qualities of a particular Gothic niche.

First, however, it is necessary to place *The Orphan of the Rhine* in its proper generic context to allow a deeper understanding of Austen's selection of that particular novel out of the hundreds that were available. During the late 1700s, the Gothic genre comprised many divisions, of which the sensibility romance was the most popular. Having come into vogue during the Gothic heyday, the sensibility novel kindled, according to J. M. S. Tompkins, an "interest in romance—in the remote and unusual in time, place, incident and character" (19). Although sensibility romances were often associated with male authors such as Samuel Richardson and Laurence Sterne, whose works were usually classified as strictly sentimental, female writers of Gothic sensibility romances (eventually called "Radcliffean Romances") seized on this genre as a means of providing themselves a living without compromising their morals or modesty, as other professions might have required.¹ In their novels, according to Janet Todd, these women incorporated "sensitive heroines and sentimental ideals of semi-feudal communities and . . . deliver[ed] lectures on the dangers of excessive sensibility for women" (285) and in addition often "emphasized a sensitive response to the pathetic or affecting in life and art" (285). This combination of elements proved quite appealing to readers, as evidenced by the explosion of the sensibility romance's popularity.

Although Ann Radcliffe was not the first female Gothic author, she was perhaps the most popular during the Romantic period and later.² Her works had an undeniable influence on later writers, both Gothic and otherwise, and the young Jane Austen obviously recognized the subtle qualities of the Radcliffean Romance heavily concealed within its Gothic façade. She included several Radcliffean Romances as reading material for her own heroine in *Northanger Abbey*: Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian*, Regina Maria Roche's *Clermont*, and Eleanor Sleath's *The Orphan of the Rhine*. Tompkins indicates that these four novels encompass many Gothic

tropes inherent in sensibility romances, such as a “birth-mystery and the recovery of the missing heir,” at least one character’s “return from the dead,” “a persecuted family tak[ing] refuge in a ruined abbey” or some similar edifice, “mysterious music,” and many eerie “vaults and passages” which the heroine, alone and pursued, must navigate (117–18). Radcliffe’s novels include these elements in abundance, so this begs the question why Austen also included Eleanor Sleath’s *The Orphan of the Rhine*. It is unlikely that an author as deliberate as Austen would have randomly selected this novel from the vast array of titles available, without first being familiar with said novel’s content. Further, it is doubtful that Austen would “recommend” a novel to her heroine (and readers) without having at least some knowledge of its literary worth (i.e., its constructional qualities and thematic elements). The answer, therefore, is that Austen conceivably discerned some inherent values in *The Orphan of the Rhine* which she felt made that novel worthy of singling out.

Unlike Radcliffe, who had published at least four novels by the time *Northanger Abbey* was started in 1798, Sleath had only one or possibly two novels published by that time. For this reason, her work seems to be an unusual addition to the other, more popular Gothic novels that Austen included. Since Sleath was not nearly as well known as Radcliffe, Austen’s selection of this obscure author is even more noteworthy, as one can infer that, being a fairly new writer herself, she perhaps commiserated with the struggles of lesser-known authors.³ If this is accurate, then Austen’s catalog of Gothic novels was likely not comprised with the intent of garnering favorable impressions for her own work, since she was presumably unconcerned with whether her readers would care if she included both well-received and poorly reviewed books. Hence, Austen’s deliberate inclusion of *The Orphan of the Rhine* offers a subtle nod to Sleath’s stylistic talent, and also demonstrates the young Austen’s recognition of the underlying intrinsic value of Sleath’s work, specifically her gift for scenic description and her disapproval of the Gothic’s tendency to encourage its readers to view excessive behavior (particularly sensibility) as acceptable or worthy of emulation. By alluding to and echoing these elements in her own text, Austen utilized *Orphan* to further hone her own skills and to emphasize her condemnation of the excessive behaviors often championed by Gothic novels.

Austen’s presentation of *Northanger Abbey* as a parody allowed her “publicly to make fun of the excesses of a prevailing *chic*” (Sadleir 3), but her incorporation of Sleath’s text also permitted her to deftly recognize the intrinsic and often-overlooked merit of her contemporaries’ works. As such, Austen’s inclusion of *Orphan* should be interpreted as an affectionate nod to that novel’s entertainment value and as an acknowledgment of how Sleath’s stylistic technique influenced the young Austen’s own developing skill. In addition, Austen’s selection should be viewed as a recognition of how Sleath’s thematic elements facilitated Austen’s own carefully veiled commentary on the potentially destructive behaviors often championed by the typical Gothic novel, an issue which would become a concern if readers, as some eighteenth-century critics feared, disregarded the Gothic as fantasy and erroneously viewed it as a model for real life.

In *The Northanger Novels: A Footnote to Jane Austen*, Sadleir classified *The Orphan of the Rhine* as a sensibility romance because it showed many affinities with Radcliffe’s works. Nevertheless, this particular novel evidently supplied Austen with certain textual elements that Radcliffe’s works could not, elements which provided her middle-class readers with a subtle critique on the popular trends and behaviors often advocated by Romantic era novels. As one investigates *The Orphan of the Rhine*, its noticeable influence on the construction of *Northanger Abbey* and Austen’s employment of its thematic elements help elucidate the young author’s motivations for including Sleath’s text in *Northanger Novels*.

Because Sleath is relatively unknown today, arguing that her text was deliberately incorporated into *Northanger Abbey* may prove problematic to some. Throughout the years, scholars have been able to uncover at least some biographical information about popular eighteenth-century Gothic writers; Sleath, however, remains shrouded in mystery. Despite publishing four successful novels (*The Orphan of the Rhine* in 1798, *Who’s the Murderer? or The Mysteries of the Forest* in 1802, *The Bristol Heiress or The Errors of Education* in 1809, and *The Nocturnal Minstrel or The Spirit of the Wood* in 1810), little is known about the author herself. Nevertheless, one may formulate some logical conclusions based on her writing and its critical reception, thus allowing readers to become more familiar with this obscure author’s stylistic habits and thematic concerns, which were likely crucial elements in Austen’s decision to include Sleath’s novel.

One of the more striking speculations about this author's personal history centers on her religion rather than her writing, and clearly distinguishes her from many other Gothic novelists. When Sadleir finally had the opportunity to study a copy of *The Orphan of the Rhine*, he concluded that the "wise and spiritual disposition" of the numerous religious characters in Sleath's elusive novel⁴ "strongly suggests that the author herself was a Roman Catholic" (22), although no formal documentation has been unearthed to support this claim. Though an author's religious affiliation usually does not garner significant attention today, Sleath's portrayal of fictional nuns and monks as benevolent and caring individuals suggests that she consciously ignored the accepted conventions of her chosen field. Gothic fiction rarely showed Catholicism in a favorable light; its convents and abbeys were often the scenes of terror and oppression, and the secretive and barbaric practices of its Inquisition were frequently employed as metaphors for injustice and tyranny. Also, while the majority of late-eighteenth-century English citizens followed the Church of England, Kirstin Olsen wrote that the country did allow "minority religions, [but] . . . still imposed civil or financial penalties on Catholics, Jews, Moravians, Methodists, Quakers, and all other non-Anglicans; it merely stopped short of jailing, torturing, exiling, or executing them" as had been done in past centuries (279). Thus, in a mainly Protestant country, openly declaring support for a dissenting religion, particularly Catholicism, was not an action one took without consideration of the potential social (and, for writers, financial) consequences. Blatantly favoring a minority religion would, in essence, call into question the dominant religion's practices, an action that could result in offending the majority of one's potential audience. Sleath's positive depiction of her Catholic characters suggests that she did not view the Catholic religion as a malevolent entity and implies that she was unconcerned with the consequences of championing unpopular or dissenting causes. This stance hints at a strength of character that Jane Austen likely admired, even though she followed the Anglican Church herself.

Various periodicals of the time provide an additional glimpse into who Eleanor Sleath "the writer" may have been. John Louis Haney noted that *The Orphan of the Rhine* was referenced in both the *Anti-Jacobin Review* and the *Critical Review* of 1799 (446–47). Though the former grants the novel only a brief advertisement ("The Orphan of the Rhine," *Anti-Jacobin Review*, 603), the latter offers a slightly longer and overly harsh criticism. Dismissing Sleath's novel as being a "vapid and servile imitation" of Ann Radcliffe's "creative genius," the critic relegated the text to a deserved penance for those who so eagerly suffered themselves "to be seduced by the blandishments of elegant fiction" ("The Orphan of the Rhine," *Critical Review*, 356).

This bleak and unforgiving criticism does not recognize Sleath's subtle talents,⁵ namely her aptitude for composing a lushly graphic scene. Devendra P. Varma notes that "her love-episodes rival those of Mrs. [Regina] Roche, and her characterization, setting and décor are more artistically handled than those of Mrs. [Eliza] Parsons" (viii). In addition, Varma writes, her "scenes of complicated guilt and depravity are unfolded with considerable skill" (x), an aspect which the *Critical Review* completely ignored. However, Jane Austen's specific allusions to *Orphan* argue that, despite that author's relative obscurity, Austen was familiar with and appreciated Sleath's work, likely having read *Orphan* in Bath in 1799.⁶

Austen's reference to *The Orphan of the Rhine* is not limited to a brief allusion as reading material for *Northanger Abbey*'s heroine, Catherine Morland. Rather, the text of *Northanger Abbey* itself demonstrates Austen's familiarity with Sleath's novel, and suggests that she was reading it while working on her own story. The elements that connect *The Orphan of the Rhine* with *Northanger Abbey* are subtle and, perhaps due to the limited availability of Sleath's novel, have often been overlooked.⁷ Therefore, this discussion on *Orphan* should prompt readers to revisit several commonly held beliefs about *Northanger Abbey*, specifically the development of Austen's own writing technique and her relationship with the Gothic.

Most scholars acknowledge that Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* wielded the largest influence on the crafting of *Northanger Abbey*. That novel's prominence in Austen's text has prompted critics to attribute other Gothic elements in *Northanger Abbey* to Radcliffe as well. But arbitrarily assigning responsibility for all Gothic aspects to *Udolpho* limits one's understanding of *Northanger Abbey*'s intricacy and is injurious to a complete appreciation of its true depth and relationship with the Gothic.

Two obvious examples of the inclination to attribute all *Northanger Abbey*'s Gothic allusions to *Udolpho* occur when Catherine Morland "imposes Gothic scenarios onto the social worlds she is only just 'coming out' into" (Alan Richardson 399–400). Having to suspend her reading of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* at a crucial moment

in order to meet Isabella, Catherine begs her friend not to spoil the novel's surprise, stating that she suspects "it must be a skeleton [behind the mysterious veil], I am sure it is Laurentina's skeleton" (Austen 39–40). Later, Catherine laments the foul weather and wishes "that we had such weather here as they had at Udolpho, or at least in Tuscany and the South of France!—the night that poor St. Aubin died!" (Austen 83).

Almost without exception, editors and critics of *Northanger Abbey* have determined that "Laurentina" and "St. Aubin" are incorrect renderings of characters' names from Radcliffe's *Udolpho*. The editors of the Oxford World's Classics 2008 edition of *Northanger Abbey* state, "either Austen or Catherine misremembers Lady Laurentini's name" from Radcliffe's novel (Claudia Johnson 363). They also claim that "St. Aubin should be St. Aubert, the heroine Emily's father in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*" (Johnson 366). Since Catherine was currently reading *Udolpho* during the above scenes, these conclusions appear valid. However, "Laurentina" and "St. Aubin," rather than being "misremembered" from *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, are in fact actual names from Eleanor Sleath's *The Orphan of the Rhine*. "Laurentina" is a young, calculating, and manipulative Italian seductress with whom one of *Orphan's* heroes (the Conte della Croisse) indulges in a disastrous affair, an ongoing episode which covers a large portion of that novel. In addition, "St. Aubin" is the Italian estate owned by the Conte della Croisse's guardians and eventually by the story's villain, the Marchese de Montserrat. The Castello de St. Aubin is named for the Marchese's ancestors and is the setting of several important incidents in *Orphan* (Sleath 6, 10, 55, 56, 89, etc.).

How does one reconcile the pervasive belief that these names originated from *The Mysteries of Udolpho* when they are the exact names found in *The Orphan of the Rhine*? Without a written account from Austen herself, it is difficult to determine exactly why this transposition of names occurred. Three theories might explain this conundrum. The first explanation is that the confusion resulted from Austen's failing to recall the exact names that Radcliffe used. This conclusion suggests that, before or during the writing of *Northanger Abbey*, Austen had read both *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Orphan of the Rhine* (probably in close succession), mixed up the names when she was writing her own novel, and was simply unaware that her intended allusions to *Udolpho* were incorrect. This theory is problematic, however, because it does not accurately reflect Austen's usual writing style. She is often credited as being a deliberate, careful, and knowledgeable writer. A. Walton Litz notes, "Jane Austen was a supremely conscious writer" ("The Land of Fiction" 3), and other scholars agree with this designation. Therefore, such a careless mistake on her part would be inherently out of character. In addition, *Udolpho's* popularity would practically ensure that the discrepancies would be easily noticed had *Northanger Abbey* been published when Austen originally intended (around 1803); thus, it seems unlikely that a careful writer such as Austen would have failed to ascertain the accuracy of every part of her novel, including any allusions to other popular, contemporary works.

The second explanation is that, as suggested by the Oxford World's Classic editors, Austen intended her reader to believe that *Catherine* "misremembered" the names. Catherine's flightiness lends some credence to this theory; however, her obsession with Gothic novels is equally evident and makes it difficult to argue with any confidence that she would "misremember" the names of major characters in a novel she was currently reading and with which she was quite enthralled. In addition, one must wonder why Isabella, also a Gothic aficionado and ardent admirer of Radcliffe, would not have corrected Catherine's mistake regarding the names. Such an oversight on both girls' parts seems highly unlikely, given their obvious fascination with *Udolpho*. Therefore, a third explanation must be considered.

The most plausible explanation for the transposition of "Laurentini" and "St. Aubert" to "Laurentina" and "St. Aubin" is that it was a conscious decision by Austen, that she deliberately "misremembered" the names in a mischievous attempt to quiz her readers' familiarity with the popular novels of the time.⁸ Austen possessed a wry sense of humor, as demonstrated by her many letters to her sister Cassandra and the tone of her *Juvenilia*. "Quizzing" people or pointing out their foibles would not be out of character for her,⁹ and her "extraordinary grasp of current literary trends and opinions" would help her recognize the shift from intensive to extensive reading that occurred during the Gothic's heyday (Litz, "The Sympathetic Imagination" 60). Austen would perhaps have enjoyed slyly pointing out the increasing carelessness with which her unsuspecting audience devoured their reading materials. Had *Northanger Abbey* been published when it was originally intended (in 1803, according to Austen's "Advertisement" in *Northanger Abbey*), Sleath's *Orphan* would have been released only a few years earlier. An allusion to that title would still strike a chord with Gothic enthusiasts of the time, particularly since

Sleath's later novels increased her popularity. Had Austen's readers perused the available Gothic novels with anything remotely approaching the dedication and attention which was formerly devoted to their reading material, rather than rushing through them,¹⁰ then Austen's "misremembering" of the names and their erroneous connection with *Udolpho* should have given them pause. Unfortunately, it appears that her jest has gone unrecognized and unappreciated for centuries.

If Austen's audience did not recognize her deliberate misrendering of Laurentina/ Laurentini and St. Aubin/St. Aubert, their oversight likely increased the harmless amusement she would have found at her readers' unknowing expense. The overwhelming popularity of *Udolpho* would make her prank that much more entertaining (to Austen, at least). One can imagine her working on *Northanger Abbey* (then titled *Susan*), smiling inwardly and wondering which, if any, of her potential readers would actually notice that the names "Laurentina" and "St. Aubin," despite their close proximity to allusions to *Udolpho*, were actually incorrect. She might also have wondered whether any of her audience would have read *The Orphan of the Rhine* (which Austen cleverly mentioned only lines later in her text) carefully enough to recognize the "error" in the names. Her prank also provided her with a discreet means of taking a veiled jab at those readers who professed to be great aficionados of literature, yet did not read with the care that would enable them to detect her subtle jest. Her prank suggests Austen's astute recognition of the shift in people's approach to their reading materials and implies an expectation or desire for her readers to demonstrate the same observant and dedicated approach to novels that she and her family exhibited.

Had Austen not deliberately included Sleath's *The Orphan of the Rhine* in her list of Gothic novels, the erroneous belief that "Laurentina" and "St. Aubin" were allusions to *Udolpho* would quite logically persist for many years, especially since Sleath did not enjoy the same lasting popularity as Radcliffe. Compounding this misconception, *Orphan's* limited availability would not have allowed ready access to that novel for scholarly contemplation in conjunction with Austen's work. However, today *The Orphan of the Rhine* is available in various libraries, and the Dodo Press recently released a paperback copy (2008).

While the transposition of "Laurentina" and "St. Aubin" demonstrates Austen's familiarity with Sleath's work, another notable and heretofore unacknowledged connection between *Northanger Abbey* and *The Orphan of the Rhine* occurs in the parallel descriptions of specific Gothic scenes in each novel. Austen's conspicuous lack of spatial description has often been remarked on as a defining element of the young writer's style,¹¹ and encountering a phrase or paragraph giving explicit details regarding a house, a lane, or a room is a rare occurrence in her fiction. Therefore, the brief instances when she does include precise scenic descriptions certainly merit further investigation, as they are a clear departure from her established technique and likely served a specific purpose.

Austen wrote stories set during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, so it was unnecessary to "give much description of the houses [or towns] in her novels—all her contemporary readers would know what they were like, and many of them would indeed live in exactly such mansions," according to Deirdre Le Faye (131). The majority of Austen's attention was understandably directed towards developing her characters and the nuances of their relationships, and detailing the complexities of their society. Though John Dixon Hunt asserts "there are in the novels sufficient hints of interiors and exteriors" (6), he explains that Austen's lack of architectural and scenic description is unique, in that it enables the reader to "supply his own vision of place from authorial hints," and encourages him to "[commit] himself to an imaginative involvement with the work" (6). However, there are specific instances when providing minute detailing of a particular setting allows the reader to engage vicariously in the same psychological experiences as the characters. In Gothic fiction, where the setting often acts as an integral character itself, the author must provide tangible details if she wishes to create a particular mood and if the reader is to experience the same turbulent emotions as the protagonist. The terror of the subterranean passageway through which the heroine flees can be really appreciated only if the reader can imagine *exactly* what the young woman is seeing and experiencing. The bloody dagger and faded manuscript accidentally discovered in a cramped and stifling secret chamber will only inspire awe and fear, if described with enough detail that the reader can actually *see* them in his mind's eye.

Though not exclusively Gothic in nature, *Northanger Abbey's* plot contains numerous episodes that require enough descriptive details to enable Austen's readers to commiserate and grow with Catherine as she navigates the intricacies of her social world. Providing such specific detail clearly deviated from Austen's preferred approach;

however, Austen was a developing writer during *Northanger Abbey*'s initial composition, one who likely was still experimenting with various techniques as she formulated her own mature writing style; thus, she would naturally look to other authors for guidance. One of these authors was clearly Sleath.

Varma offers a speculation regarding Sleath's descriptive writing that strongly correlates with Austen's own authorial tendencies, noting that "Romantic novelists have always made unblushing use of travel-books to evoke local colour," but Varma believed that Sleath may have actually had a familial connection and personal experience with the German settings of her story (x). He traced a connection between one Eleanor Sleath (presumed to be the author of *The Orphan of the Rhine*) and that woman's niece, who married a German at the Court of George IV. Varma proposed that "if this [niece] happened to be the niece of Eleanor Sleath the novelist, then perhaps this German connection may link up with the German setting of some of her novels" (viii), implying Sleath had actually visited Germany and was relying on her own recollections of its scenery rather than utilizing the foreign descriptions provided in travel books, as did so many other Gothic novelists.

It was not unusual to borrow family members' or other writers' experiences as material for one's novels, and there are many examples of Austen's having done so herself. But as Varma points out, an author was not usually intimately familiar with the foreign settings of her novel, particularly during the period of conflict between England and France that raged during Austen's life. Later in her life, Austen advised her niece to write about landscapes with which she was familiar; and having never traveled out of England, Austen herself followed this mantra by limiting herself to an English landscape. Her scenic descriptions suggest that she recognized the authenticity of Sleath's descriptions of German landscapes and decided to blend these elements into her own *English* Gothic scenery. Though Austen's *Abbey* does not exactly mirror any particular edifice in *Orphan*, several key passages suggest that Austen borrowed Sleath's descriptive scenes, and sometimes even her actual phrasing.

The most notable descriptive similarity between *The Orphan of the Rhine* and *Northanger Abbey* occurs during Henry Tilney's well-known sketch of Catherine's first night at Northanger Abbey. He indicates that she will be

formally conducted by Dorothy the ancient housekeeper up a different staircase, and along many gloomy passages, into an apartment never used since some cousin or kin died in it about twenty years before . . . [she will be guided] with only the feeble rays of a single lamp . . . its [the chamber's] walls hung with tapestry. (Austen 158)

Though this description vaguely echoes many analogous Gothic rambles in decaying abbeys or castles, those readers who had perused *Orphan* intensively (rather than extensively) would note an uncanny and undeniable similarity to one of that novel's own heroine's experiences in Germany. Julie de Rubine (then known as Mme. Chamont) was also

conducted by . . . the old female domestic, to her room. As she passed along the hall, which was feebly enlightened with the expiring ray of a dim and solitary lamp, she shuddered involuntarily at the gloom of its appearance. . . . Having ascended the stairs, [she] passed through the corridor, into which opened several apartments . . . the wind howled in hollow murmurs round the turret, in which her chamber was situated, and sometimes hollow gusts agitated the decayed tapestry with which it was hung. (Sleath 25)

The similarities between the two scenes are unmistakable: the old female servant, the feeble rays of the single lamp, the gloomy passageway, and the tapestries hung in the heroine's chamber. Even the phrasing of the two episodes is almost identical. Henry's proposed adventure for Catherine upon her arrival at his family's residence so closely mirrors the actual experiences of Sleath's own heroine that he is practically quoting from her novel. The uncanny similarities in these phrasings indicate that Austen indeed borrowed extensively and specifically from Sleath's description. Another interesting correlation: Henry informed Catherine that the domestic who would lead her to her chamber would be named Dorothy. Similarly, the most prominent female domestic employed in Sleath's novel is also named Dorothée. Austen has Anglicized it, but her use of this particular name only strengthens the connection between the two novels.

Admittedly, one example is not sufficient to definitively state that Austen culled her Gothic scenery from Sleath's ample stockpile, despite the explicit similarities in the passages' wording. However, additional instances further prove Austen's appreciation for and borrowing of Sleath's descriptive techniques and well-turned phrases. Austen made it clear that Catherine is a voracious reader, thus the young heroine likely will have read all the Gothic novels on Isabella Thorpe's list, including *The Orphan of the Rhine*, by the time she leaves Bath. Therefore, after hearing Henry Tilney describe the Gothic-like reception she could expect at his home, Catherine's imagination thrills to the adventure. She expects "with solemn awe to afford a glimpse of its [Northanger Abbey's] massy walls of grey stone, rising amidst a grove of ancient oaks, with the last beams of the sun playing in beautiful splendour on its high Gothic windows" (Austen 161). This could be a standard description about any Gothic edifice, but the foundation for Catherine's expectations stems specifically from Sleath's *Orphan*. Not just one, but both of *Orphan's* heroines encounter buildings that are described in words remarkably similar to Austen's description of Catherine's anticipations for Northanger Abbey. When Sleath's Julie de Rubine sees her aunt's mansion, she "fixed her eyes upon the turrets of the chateau, which were gilded with the last rays of the retiring sun" (38). This particular experience is echoed later with *Orphan's* second heroine, Laurette, as she approaches the castle of Lunenburg. Her "heart sunk within her when the first turret was partially seen through the dark foliage of the woods with which it was surrounded" (Sleath 164). Austen blends the two "first encounter" scenes from *Orphan* into one, but doing so was a necessity as Catherine encounters only one abbey in her adventures. The combination of these two images seems to have provided Austen with the ingredients for her heroine's expectations for a "real-life" Gothic dwelling, though "turrets" have been exchanged for "windows" and "ancient oaks" possibly substituted for Sleath's "dark foliage." Again, the majority of the wording in Austen's scenes echoes Sleath's descriptions.

While these two examples suggest that Austen was indeed familiar with and borrowed from Sleath's text, the most concrete evidence that Austen gleaned her Gothic architectural scenery from Sleath's novel exists in the circumstances and layout of the novels' abbeys, both real and imaginary. Sleath's description of her actual abbey aligns very closely with Austen's description of Catherine Morland's (disappointed) anticipations for Northanger Abbey. Periodic references to Sleath's abbey indicate that her edifice reflected a "solitary grandeur," and was a

lonely ruin... impressive and sublime, whose interesting appearance was materially increased by the correspondent melancholy of the scenery. A clump of dark firs, on one side, cast an almost impenetrable shade, whilst the other opening upon an extensive heath, was exposed to the merciless beating of the not unfrequent storm. (212)

Interestingly, Catherine's implied hopes for Northanger Abbey (voiced by Henry Tilney when he teases Catherine on their way to his home) almost exactly mirror Sleath's description (Austen 158–60). Indeed, Sleath's abbey would undeniably appeal to Catherine's and the readers' expectations as "[t]he narrow Gothic windows, once filled with painted glass, that cast a dim and fading light, were now shattered and decayed; . . . the pavement leading to the entrance, which once resounded only to the foot of devotion, was now rude and grass-grown" (212–13).

For Catherine, Northanger Abbey's reality is far removed from the fantasy that her Gothic readings had conditioned her to expect. From the "lodges of a modern appearance" to "a smooth, level road of fine gravel, without obstacle, alarm, or solemnity of any kind," and from her observations of the "profusion and elegance of modern taste" that existed in the furnishings to the windows which, though "the form of them was Gothic—they might be even casements—but every pane was so large, so clear, so light! To an imagination which had hoped for . . . painted glass, dirt and cobwebs" (Austen 162), Austen's description of the Tilney residence's thorough modernization touches on the exact elements that are mentioned about Sleath's abbey. Once again Austen even used some of the same phrasing.

Unfortunately, the difference between Catherine's anticipations and Northanger Abbey's modern reality proved "very distressing" (Austen 161–62). Having been coached on what to expect, both Catherine and the readers suffer a keen disappointment. The real Northanger Abbey was quite devoid of Gothic features, and Austen seems to have used Catherine's expectation and disappointment as a counter to Sleath's very blatant Gothic

elements. In doing so, she subtly chastened her readers against harboring unrealistic expectations. (Would an affluent family like the Tilneys live in a decaying abbey without the modern conveniences that General Tilney's wealth could provide? Unlikely.)

Austen's description of the Tilneys' residence and Sleath's detailing of her abbey share an additional connection. Sleath's abbey was "originally built round a quadrangle, in the manner of a fortified castle, with spires instead of turrets" (212), while Austen's "whole building enclosed a large court; and two sides of the quadrangle, rich in Gothic ornaments, stood forward for admiration" (177). The similarities are evident, this time existing in both abbeys' architectural layout. This suggests that Austen was familiar with Sleath's descriptive elements and that she was using them, almost as a checklist, to formulate her own pseudo-Gothic scenes.

If Austen endeavored to affectionately parody the standard tropes of Gothic fiction in her novel, then she could not allow the actual Northanger Abbey to fulfill the expectations of her Gothic-novel-obsessed heroine. Catherine must be disillusioned if Northanger Abbey is to maintain its attitude of reality, yet Austen cleverly permits her heroine and her readers to "realize" their Gothic anticipations despite Northanger Abbey's modernization. Austen's portrayal of Catherine's expectations is not simply drawn out of thin air. Instead, it is borrowed directly, at times almost verbatim, from the work of the woman who Varma noted "gave [readers] a superior literary style set with glittering gems of descriptive power" (xi). By specifically naming *The Orphan of the Rhine* and using Sleath's Gothic architectural scenery as the foundation upon which she built her own Gothic surroundings, Austen actually imbued her parody with a subtle aura of Gothic authority.

Austen's transposition of the names "Laurentina" and "St. Aubin" and her blatant borrowing from Sleath's descriptions of Gothic buildings demonstrate that a strong correlation exists between *Northanger Abbey* and *The Orphan of the Rhine*. However, two final elements in both novels further support the theory that Austen not only admired Sleath's authorial techniques but also believed that her work possessed an intrinsic thematic quality above and beyond its entertainment value. First, both authors' texts express their strong appreciation for novels and love of novel-reading. Second, they each offer their readers a specific condemnation of the Gothic's tendency to encourage young readers (specifically ladies) to believe that an indulgence in excessive sensibility was an acceptable or admirable behavior. Unlike allusions or writing styles, the similarities of these aspects between *Orphan* and *Northanger Abbey* extend far beyond compositional technique; they are particularly notable because they suggest a more profound and personal connection between the authors' private beliefs.

Austen's love of novels is evidenced in one of *Northanger Abbey*'s most quoted scenes. She interrupts her plot to insert a small discourse on novel-reading which laments the Romantic period's conviction that novels were useless and potentially harmful to their female readers. Although her remarks are made tongue-in-cheek, Austen's short diatribe indicates that she felt quite strongly about authors who condescendingly dismissed their chosen genre as disreputable or trite. In a tone best described as ironic, she laments her fellow novelists' "scarcely ever permitting them [novels] to be read by their own heroine" and wonders, "if the heroine of one novel be not patronized by the heroine of another, from whom can she expect protection and regard?" (37).¹² Austen then argues that novels "have afforded more extensive and unaffected pleasure than those of any other literary corporation in the world, [but] no species of composition has been so much decried" (37). Despite the popular trend of novel "bashing" that arose during the late eighteenth century, or, as Austen notes, the tendency of "[r]eviewers to abuse such effusions of fancy . . . and over every new novel to talk in threadbare strains of the trash with which the press now groans" (37), Austen knew that novels could provide some benefit to their readers, the very least of which was "extensive and unaffected pleasure" (37). Her personal correspondence and her own works clearly acknowledge her own and her family's great love of novels (Austen, *Jane Austen's Letters* . . . , 26), and her heroines are often as fond of reading as she was. Margaret Anne Doody claims that "Catherine Morland's tastes appear to be a true caricature of her author's own, reflecting them as the reading habits of young Waverley mirror those of the young Walter Scott" (351). There are allusions throughout Austen's novels and letters that support Doody's theory. Whether she is discussing in her letters the latest literary works that have been released or referring to these texts in her own novels, Austen's familiarity with the current literary trends is undeniable.

Austen describes novels as "some work[s] in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language" (37). This quotation is prefaced

by a mention of Fanny Burney's *Cecilia* (1782) and *Camilla* (1796), and Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801), and provides readers with an interesting puzzle regarding Austen's purpose in mentioning these particular titles. Scholars have determined that Austen admired works by both women, though Edgeworth later claimed Austen's *Emma* was insipid and a "most stupid nonsensical fiction" (Roger Gard 62). But does Austen's inclusion of their titles indicate that she believed Burney and Edgeworth were the only authors capable of writing true masterpieces?

Because *Northanger Abbey* is, among other things, a novel about reading novels, it is only right that Austen fill her pages with allusions to other works and the names of other popular writers. In addition to works by Burney and Edgeworth (Austen 38), Radcliffe's works make a consistent appearance; and Richardson's, Fielding's, and Lewis's popular novels are briefly discussed (Austen 41, 48). Of course the *Northanger* novelists are also present. But if one looks at the broad scope of the novels and novelists that Austen included, as well as the other genres she briefly mentions—such as the History of England; plays by Shakespeare; poetry by Gray, Thompson, Milton, Pope, Prior, and others; and the essays of *The Mirror*, *The Rambler*, and *The Spectator*—it is evident that Austen managed to offer a sampling of all the literary genres available to the reading public.

Her selection of these particular examples does not mean that she admired all of them, but it does demonstrate her familiarity with the popular literature of her day. Did Austen believe that only *Cecilia*, *Camilla*, and *Belinda* were worthy of the lofty praise she offers them in *Northanger Abbey*? Doubtful. A more likely answer is that she listed these novels as a balance to the works mentioned in the same diatribe only lines earlier. These three popular and contemporary "society" novels, written by women who perhaps hoped to remain anonymous by concealing their names, provide a good balance to Austen's mention of the poetry by Milton, Pope, and Prior (37), all of whom lived and wrote during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century and had no qualms about attaching their names to their works. Austen's juxtaposition of these "schools of writing" could be intended as a reflection of the shift in reading material, namely its form, its content, and its authors' gender.

The most notable part of *Northanger Abbey*'s "defense of the novel" is Austen's attack on those novelists who, as mentioned earlier, endeavored to dismiss or disparage the very genre with which they had chosen to work. Despite Austen's quick transitions in tone from tongue-in-cheek to outright harangue, the point of her attack is eminently clear: authors, particularly female authors, should support each other and not contribute to the extensive censure to which the novel genre was already exposed. Austen was perfectly justified in her comments. The trend of "novel bashing" by novel writers was quite prominent, probably because it echoed popular conduct manuals by reassuring parents that these writers, despite writing (Gothic) novels, had the best interests of their young, impressionable, female relatives in mind.¹³ Many late eighteenth century novelists did indeed do just what Austen accused them of: they used their heroines' novel-reading as an indicator of a weak mind, corrupt morals, and an inability to accept reality.

Sleath, however, was not a member of these "traitorous" novelists that Austen deplored in her tirade. And it was perhaps Sleath's refusal to defer to this popular trend of "novel bashing" that most impressed Austen as it demonstrated Sleath's strength of character and independence of mind. Throughout *The Orphan of the Rhine*, Sleath offers continual evidence of her appreciation for novels and the myriad benefits they could provide for their readers. Turning the pages of *Orphan* reveals a continually staunch promotion of reading as a worthy occupation that could provide troubled minds with a respite from the difficulties and dangers with which they are faced (Sleath 89, 91, 92, 140, 173, 221, etc.). Both Mme. Chamont and Laurette frequently turn to reading when they need to pass the time, quiet their minds, or seek assistance and reassurance during difficult periods. Most importantly, Sleath bucks convention by subtly ensuring that her readers notice Mme. Chamont and Laurette are reading more than just classics and instructional works; instead, since "reading was a favourite occupation[, her heroines] did not neglect the selecting [of] such books for their perusal as were capable of conveying both instruction *and amusement, the reading of which might be considered not so much a task as recreation*" (Sleath 61, emphasis added). Even *Orphan*'s secondary characters support Sleath's advocacy of novel-reading. The lady Abbess who befriends Mme. Chamont reveals that during her youth, "books were her chief amusements, and these were never denied her. Those selected by her guardian for her instruction *and entertainment* were mostly of the learned kind, though *she was sometimes supplied with lighter works*" (Sleath 68, emphasis added). Obviously, Sleath believed that spending an hour or two turning over the pages of a favorite "light" tome was not to be deplored or criticized, but rather could supply one with much needed amusement and an escape from the rigors of daily life.

Austen's opinion regarding novels, clearly stated in *Northanger Abbey* (37–38) and in her personal letters, reflects Sleath's more subtly professed beliefs. This connection not only demonstrates the similarities in the two authors' approbation of their chosen genre but also lays the groundwork for a more profound association between them. Despite both works' being written when a "refined sensitiveness in emotion and taste . . . were especially admired . . . as a reaction against the stoicism and emphasis on self-interest of the 17th century" ("Sensibility"), both Austen and Sleath defied tradition by championing a somewhat irregular or atypical behavior in their heroines. Both authors address, and vilify, the Romantic period's penchant for supporting and encouraging an indulgence in excessive behavior, particularly sensibility. This is accomplished in *Northanger Abbey* and *Orphan* by the heroes and heroines' exhibiting a marked disdain for disproportionate displays of emotion and immoderate conduct. While each author argued that reading novels purely for entertainment was quite acceptable, they clearly also believed that one must distinguish fiction from reality and not view the overdramatic and excessive sensibility of Gothic novels' heroines as appropriate models for their daily conduct.

Though Austen and Sleath approved of novel-reading in general (as demonstrated by their characters' frequent indulgence in entertaining and enlightening texts), both authors ensured that their works did not inadvertently recommend or patronize the truly frivolous novels which celebrated "a sensitive response to the pathetic or affecting in life and art . . . [and] physical manifestations such as tears, blushes and palpitations [as] signs of virtuous sympathy" (Todd 285). One can find evidence in *Orphan* and *Northanger Abbey* that both Austen and Sleath found displays of overtly excessive behavior to be distasteful and impractical.

Despite her novel's being classified as a Radcliffean romance, Sleath's heroines avoid engaging in bouts of dainty tears, fits of repeated swooning, and disproportionate wonder at majestic scenery, unlike a large number of other Gothic heroines. In addition, Sleath offers various blatant warnings to her readers against such indulgences right in the text itself. She cautions early in the story that her heroine's "exquisite sensibility, which glowed upon her cheek, and spoke, in the fine language of her eye... she had cherished as a grace, without reflecting that, if indulged, it would degenerate into weakness, and cease to be a virtue" (Sleath 32). Later, Father Benedicta provides another warning as he delights in discovering that "when he expatiated upon the indispensable necessity of guarding against that intellectual weakness, which is sometimes dignified with the name of sensibility, . . . that [Mme. Chamont] listened to him not only with attention, but with gratitude" (Sleath 145). Also, as Mme. Chamont monitors Laurette's education, she "discountenanced in her young pupil that unlimited indulgence, in the passive feelings of sensibility, which inevitably unfits the mind for any undertaking that requires firm and vigorous exertion" and that "though Laurette, in the course of her reading, had met with some fictitious tales of distress, those abounding in tender description, and that irresistibly affect the fancy, were in some measure prohibited" (Sleath 147).

Sleath does not limit herself to offering her readers explicit verbal warnings against excessive sensibility, but also demonstrates the consequences of such behavior through her characters' actions. At one point Laurette, concerned about her adopted brother Enríco's safety, finds herself "tenderly alive to mournful impressions, which solitude and the native softness of her disposition rendered sometimes irresistible. . . . [T]hough she endeavoured to dissipate her fears . . . *her anguish was sometimes too keen to be subdued, and her life became a series of sufferance and exertion*" (Sleath 148, emphasis added). Laurette's difficulties arose only after she was unable to temper her emotions, implying that if she had not succumbed to excessive sensibility, her life would not have become "a series of sufferance and exertion" (Sleath 148).

However, Sleath does not continually "punish" her heroine for her momentary lapses, though her readers are aware of the dangers to which Laurette has exposed herself and her virtue. Circumstances soon force Laurette to overcome her brief indulgence and proceed with her customary strength and determination, actions she could not possibly have taken had she remained mired in the throes of sensibility. By inserting these episodes, Sleath juxtaposed Laurette's typically sound and intelligent conduct against her brief and ill-advised forays into the realm of excessive sensibility. Laurette's doing so demonstrates the desirability of maintaining a calm façade in the face of life's trials, and her story eventually concludes on a happy note, making it obvious that Sleath recognized the temptations that succumbing to sensibility wielded and felt it prudent to demonstrate the rewards of avoiding such excessive behavior.

Sleath's denunciation of the Gothic novel's indulgence in excessive behavior is echoed by Austen in

Northanger Abbey. Like Sleath's, Austen's protagonists generally do not indulge in the weeping, fainting, and "weaknesses" typically portrayed in the Gothic sensibility novels; instead, Austen's work is written with a sense of realism; the indulgences of her characters (particularly her secondary characters) must also necessarily be more realistic if they are to elicit any corresponding recognition or emotion in her readers. Like Sleath, Austen conveys her criticism of the excessive behavior championed in sensibility romances through her characters' distasteful indulgence in excessive, albeit more realistic, behaviors such as lying, manipulation, bragging, and exaggeration. Austen (quite like Sleath) shows her readers the vulgarity and egregiousness of such conduct through the actions and personalities of Isabella and John Thorpe, and later, ironically, through Catherine Morland herself.

Throughout *Northanger Abbey*, Isabella Thorpe is enamored with imitating the behavior of the heroines in the Gothic novels she has read; in her misguided attempt to cast herself as a "heroine," she continually infuses ordinary daily events with excessiveness and exaggeration whenever possible. Her overly dramatic tendencies are consistently presented throughout the novel. For example, she tells Catherine that she had been waiting for her "these ten ages at least," when Catherine has actually arrived for their appointment early; that she has "an hundred things to say to you" and then communicates only one frivolous thought; and that the dreary weather would have "thrown me into agonies!" when in reality she would not have let it deter her from her intentions at all (Austen 39). These hyperbolic overstatements clearly indicate the extent to which Isabella, in her own way, attempts to emulate the melodramatic heroines of Gothic novels.

Isabella's excessiveness is also demonstrated through her relationships with other people. She describes her friend, Miss Andrews, as "one of the sweetest creatures in the world . . . I wish you knew Miss Andrews, you would be delighted with her . . . I think her as beautiful as an angel" (Austen 40). She also states that "[t]here is nothing I would not do for those who are really my friends. I have no notion of loving people by halves, it is not my nature. My attachments are always excessively strong" (Austen 40). Ironically, her fickleness and falsity quickly override her emphatic avowals when she confides to Catherine minutes later that "you have so much animation, which is exactly what Miss Andrews wants, for I must confess there is something amazingly insipid about her" (Austen 41). Obviously, Isabella is fonder of appearing to possess excessive devotion to her friends than of actually demonstrating it.

Another example of Isabella's melodramatic and excessive behavior is demonstrated through her insatiable desire to be the center of male attention, which is, ironically, a marked difference from the heroines whom she is attempting to imitate. Despite her engagement to Catherine's brother James, Isabella aspires to garner the admiration of practically every man with whom she comes in contact. She insists to Catherine that she wishes to avoid male regard, but her actions belie her words. For instance, she tells Catherine that she would rather evade the "two odious young men who have been staring at me this half hour" only to quickly note that "[o]ne was a very good-looking young man" and that although she is "amazingly glad I have got rid of them," she immediately drags Catherine off to cross their path (Austen 43). Later, when she encounters the amorous attentions of Captain Frederick Tilney, she plays the coquette by pretending to discourage him and claiming she will not dance with him. However, she accepts his invitation to do so within only minutes (Austen 132–33). Still later, she voices a strong desire to avoid the Captain, but does so while searching quite eagerly for him (Austen 143). Isabella's conflicting words and actions result in Catherine and the reader's becoming disgusted with Isabella's improper behavior. Catherine notes that "[s]he wished Isabella . . . had not looked so well pleased at the sight of Captain Tilney" and, in her inability to think poorly of her friend, wonders "[h]ow strange that she should not perceive his admiration" (Austen 148). Eventually Isabella is observed "in public, admitting Captain Tilney's attentions as readily as they were offered, and allowing him almost an equal share with James in her notice and smiles" (Austen 149). This behavior is the proverbial "slap in the face" for both Catherine and the reader. As naïve Catherine becomes increasingly confused by her friend's behavior, the reader understands that Austen found such actions (from an engaged woman) to be unacceptable.

Time and again, Isabella's professions of loyalty are contrasted by her faithless actions. By depicting her heroine's best friend in this manner, Austen offers her readers a realistic portrayal of how undesirable indulging in excessive behavior can be. Isabella continues in the same vein throughout the novel, becoming more and more unlikable despite her so-obvious attempts to charm (deceive) those around her. Her constant exaggerations and immoderate flirtations quickly wear on readers and prompt them to wonder if Isabella is even capable of acting

without such effusion. In contrast, Catherine's surprised rejoinders to her friend's hyperbolic statements and her naïve suppositions about how people are supposed to behave when they are engaged provide a welcome respite from Isabella's over-the-top behavior. Catherine's reaction encourages the readers to empathize with the young heroine's confusion and vague frustration every time Isabella lapses into the melodramatic "role" she has created for herself and confirms in the readers' minds that Isabella's extreme conduct is deplorable.

Isabella's effusive actions clearly exemplify the wide variety of excessive behavior that the Gothic sensibility romances often championed (though such promiscuity is often, but not always, reserved for the male villain); likewise, her brother John's actions depict the appalling depths to which many Gothic novels' villains sink while pursuing the heroines. Throughout *Northanger Abbey*, John engages in excessive bragging and games of one-upmanship in his attempts to present himself as a socially, intellectually, and physically superior male. Whether he is boasting about his clever bargaining strategies (Austen 31), his horses and carriage (46–47), his "intellectual" pursuits and dismissal of frivolous activities like novel-reading (48), or his success in courting a wealthy young girl (244), or else lamenting his position as a cruelly deceived suitor (245), everything John Thorpe does offers a realistic echo of the behavior of Gothic villains and exceeds the bounds of good taste.

Readers could overlook or even dismiss much of John Thorpe's obnoxious behavior as that of a young man who fancies himself in love and is trying desperately to impress the woman of his affections had he not (perhaps inadvertently) ventured into the realms of Gothic villainy with his deliberate lying and abduction of Catherine (Austen 87). However, "his manners did not please Catherine" (Austen 50), and she concludes that "John Thorpe himself was quite disagreeable" (69). After spending time with the young man, Catherine finds him to be inexcusably rude and repulsive, a reaction which echoes that of Gothic heroines towards the villains. Since she is a realistic heroine and inherently likeable, readers naturally sympathize with her and also consider Thorpe's conduct to be vulgar and reprehensible. This allows Austen to further promote her disapproval of excessive behavior. Despite Thorpe's endeavors to appear gregarious and charming, he ultimately is nothing more than an irritating braggart who refuses to recognize the societal restraints of the late eighteenth century which an inherent sense of morality and prudence should have instilled in him. The fact that Austen closes Thorpe's role in *Northanger Abbey* with his becoming bitter, humiliated over Catherine's rejection, and friendless directly opposes the felicity rewarded to the amiable and loyal Henry Tilney. This contrast clearly evidences Austen's desire to demonstrate that Thorpe's excessive conduct was not to be condoned, tolerated, or imitated.

Finally, like Sleath, Austen uses her heroine to further her criticism on excessive behavior. Austen's entire novel revolves around Catherine's "dangerous" foray into sensibility and her eventual awakening from the "visions of romance" and "the extravagance of her late fancies" (Austen 199), but one episode in particular distinctly illustrates Austen's disapproval of excessive sensibility. One of the key elements of the Gothic sensibility novel was to present its characters as people who "reacted emotionally to the beauty inherent in natural settings" ("Sentimental Novel"). Unlike her depictions of the Thorpes' excessive behavior, Austen addresses this important trope through a humorous illustration of Catherine's lessons in landscape drawing from the Tilneys.

Catherine's abysmal artistic skills are noted early in *Northanger Abbey* as "[h]er taste for drawing was not superior" (Austen 14). Therefore, when she is in the presence of the artistically inclined Tilneys, she feels lost when they "were soon engaged in . . . viewing the country with the eyes of persons accustomed to drawing, and decided on its capability of being formed into pictures, with all the eagerness of real taste" (Austen 110). Although an appreciation for the artistry of nature is typically an indication of sensibility, Austen carefully depicts the Tilneys' interest as refined and purely aesthetic. Neither of them swoons over the grandeur of the view or feels inspired to compose lengthy poetry dedicated to its beauty. Catherine, aware that knowledge of landscape drawing was a prerequisite for being a Gothic heroine (Austen 14), tries to glean some artistic knowledge from the Tilneys' discussion, but she cannot understand their terminology or conclusions and "was heartily ashamed of her ignorance" (Austen 110). To rectify this, she asks Henry to explain the beauty of the scene before them. He does, and Catherine, so eager to please, and "so hopeful a scholar . . . voluntarily rejected the whole city of Bath, as unworthy to make part of a landscape" (Austen 111). In her enthusiasm, Catherine imprudently dismissed a landscape which countless others before her, including the Tilneys themselves, viewed as a remarkably picturesque setting, perfect for painting and drawing. That Henry and Eleanor managed to keep from chuckling over Catherine's obvious attempts to please Henry by pretending to have a "sensitive response to the pathetic or

affecting in life and art” (Todd 285) is a true mark of their genteel upbringing.

Their restraint separates them from the typical heroes and heroines of sensibility novels while it subtly emphasizes Catherine’s silliness in attempting to align herself with the excessively sensible heroines of Gothic novels. At the time, Catherine still believed that she must follow the tenants laid down by sensibility novels if she wished to be a true heroine. Since Catherine is so amiable, the reader has naturally developed a sort of emotional connection with her through her exploits; therefore, it is almost painful to witness such foolish behavior on her part. By using her inherently likable protagonist to demonstrate the embarrassment that often is the result of such excessive behavior, Austen subtly instills the same lesson in her readers.

Isabella and John Thorpe’s vulgar conduct, as well as Catherine Morland’s lamentable foray into romantic sensibility, clearly allies Austen with Sleath’s unconventional condemnation of the Gothic genre’s promotion of excessive behavior. Those characters in *The Orphan of the Rhine* and *Northanger Abbey* who display stereotypical Gothic tendencies are generally not depicted as intelligent or successful. Laurette is able to secure the hero’s affections only after she discontinues her indulgence in excessive sensibility. Likewise, only after Catherine abandons her notion of becoming a Gothic heroine does she succeed in securing Henry’s offer of marriage. Thus, Austen’s and Sleath’s works illustrate that it was not the Gothic sensibility novels as a whole to which they took exception but rather the misguided belief that the excessive behaviors demonstrated in those works were desirable traits for their readers to emulate.

This exploration of Eleanor Sleath’s *The Orphan of the Rhine* is intended to offer a new insight into the young Jane Austen’s approach to novels, their construction, and their influence on the development of the conduct and taste of the middle-class reader. To claim that *Orphan* was selected merely to round out the *Northanger Novels*’ representation of the Radcliffean school is to severely discredit Sleath; it denies her abilities and talents, a stance which both her contemporary and later critics unfortunately held, causing *The Orphan of the Rhine* to languish “as [a] tiny stitch in the immense tapestry of English literature” for too many years (Sadleir 2). The constructional and thematic connections between Austen’s work and Eleanor Sleath’s that have been demonstrated here reveal the depth of *Northanger Abbey* and the innate riches of *The Orphan of the Rhine*, ensuring that Sleath’s novel is no longer denied its rightful place in the annals of Gothic literature. But more importantly, understanding *Orphan*’s connections to *Northanger Abbey* should provoke a more profound appreciation regarding the complexity of Austen’s relationship with the Gothic sensibility novel and her marked concern with its influence on the development of the middle-class reader’s behavior. Scholars and readers alike should no longer dismiss Austen’s first full-length novel as one of her juvenile attempts at satiric literature, but should instead more fully appreciate *Northanger Abbey*’s depth, the remarkable intricacy of its construction, and the true extent of its writer’s talent.

Notes

- 1 This concept of “professional femininity” adopted by female writers in a previously male-dominated field of writing is addressed in depth by Diane Long Hoeveler in *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës*. She defines women’s approach to writing Gothic works as disguised as a “cultivated pose, a masquerade of docility, passivity, wise passiveness, and tightly controlled emotions” which allowed them to “popularize and promulgate a newly defined and increasingly powerful species of bourgeois female sensibility and subjectivity” (xv).
- 2 Credit for penning the earliest female Gothic novel should be given to Clara Reeve, whose *The Old English Baron* (1778) predates Radcliffe and others by about a decade.
- 3 See also Austen’s letters to her niece Anna Austen for evidence of Austen’s later interest in helping develop the skills of burgeoning writers (*Jane Austen’s Letters to Her Sister Cassandra and Others*, 266-269).
- 4 At his 1927 presentation of “The Northanger Novels: A Footnote to Jane Austen,” Michael Sadleir lamented that “long and determined efforts have failed to trace a single copy of the original edition, and the tale was not included in any of the collections of novels issued in cheap periodical form” (15). It was not until his pamphlet was in the process of publication that an original copy of *The Orphan of the Rhine* actually came to light. After reading Sleath’s work, Sadleir included a postscript to “A Footnote” in which he noted that the “prophecies previously made as to its [*Orphan’s*] quality and classification . . . —I am relieved to find—were rather true than otherwise” (22).
- 5 In William St. Clair’s *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, William Hazlitt noted that “a damning review could sometimes halt the sale of a successful book almost immediately” (188).
- 6 *British Fiction 1800–1829: A Database of Production, Circulation and Reception*, while not listing information for *The Orphan of the Rhine*, does contain information regarding several of Sleath’s later novels. This information includes a January 1810 review published in the *Critical Review* that “give[s] much praise” to Sleath’s *The Bristol Heiress*, indicating that she was eventually well received by her contemporary critics. In addition, *British Fiction* notes that Sleath’s novels (at least those listed on its website) were available at numerous circulating libraries, most notably Godwin’s Circulating Library in Bath.
- 7 Credit for this omission may be due to the fact that a majority of the scholarly attention that focuses on *Northanger Abbey* and its relationship to the Gothic generally addresses Austen’s presentation of her work as a parody, and has not considered with any depth its connections with novels other than Radcliffe’s.
- 8 Incidentally, to “quiz” an individual, as the term was used during Austen’s time (and in *Northanger Abbey*), meant “to make sport or fun of” (*OED*), not simply to test or examine. Either definition would fit with Austen’s sardonic sense of humor.
- 9 See letters dated Thursday 15 through Friday 16 September 1796, Saturday 27 through Sunday 28 October 1798, and Monday 24 through Wednesday 26 December 1798 for early examples of Austen’s often sarcastic sense of humor (9–11, 14–15, 23–25).
- 10 David H. Richter cites examples of this, the most notable being a “celebrated bluestocking going through fifty-five volumes of romance in the space of a month” (126).
- 11 Deirdre Le Faye notes that “Jane unobtrusively tells us as much as we need to know to understand the action, without wasting time or words on purple passages describing the landscape or the interior of every room of the house” (126). Similarly, Lloyd W. Brown observed that “it has traditionally been assumed that Jane Austen dislikes and avoids imagery” (52). Austen herself hints at her avoidance of description in a letter to her niece, Anna Austen: “you describe a sweet place, but your descriptions are often more minute than will be liked. You give too many particulars of right hand & left” (*Jane Austen’s Letters* 275). Finally, John Dixon Hunt states that “what descriptions she does provide are rarely circumstantially detailed” (5).
- 12 Michael Gamer also noted this tendency of Romantic writers in general to write in the very form towards which they (sometimes in that same work) voice a strong disapproval. In his study *Romanticism and the Gothic*, he remarks that “Romantic writers’ acts of appropriation, moreover, not only coincide chronologically with their most stringent public criticisms of gothic, but also show them often borrowing the very metaphors and techniques they are most critical about elsewhere” (28).
- 13 An example of this is evident in the “card” that Eliza Parsons included at the front of *The Mysterious Warning* (1796). She notes that “The Author of this Work is a *Parent*; as such, she has been strictly observant that her writings should never offend against delicacy or common sense.—She has never dictated one page, or gusted one

idea inimical to the precepts of virtue, or that should suffuse the cheek of innocence with a blush” (5).

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Somebody's Trying to Kill Me and I Think It's a She:

The Feminization of Fear in Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and Holt's *Mistress of Mellyn*

Brooke Willig

Introduction

The gothic tradition is no stranger to the critical stratification of “high” and “low” literature. The “female gothic,” for instance, has earned a significant place in both feminist and traditional literary canons while modern gothic romance, its sister sub-genre, is generally derided as popular trash lacking the depth of its antecedents. In particular, the romance’s archetypal subjection of a hapless heroine to a Byronic master in a malevolent manor house—earning them the moniker of the “Somebody’s Trying to Kill Me and I Think It’s My Husband” novel (Joanna Russ 31–56), a model hereafter referred to as STKM—serves as the locus of disparagement. Critics denounce this genre both for its conventional formula and its ostensible reinforcement of the very patriarchal conventions and subjugations the female gothic is renowned for undermining; they claim that modern gothic romance is not only distinct from, but in fact antithetical to, the female gothic tradition. However, an examination of two foundational works for each strain, Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Victoria Holt’s *Mistress of Mellyn* (1960), challenges such a division by revealing the novels’ parallel treatment of the experiences and origins of feminine fear—one which does not conform to the paradigm of male terrorization of women implied by the STKM convention. Rather, as shall be argued, both novels consistently refute or undermine their hero’s ability to frighten the heroine, locating the heroine’s fear instead entirely in the novel’s female actors. *Jane Eyre* and *Mistress of Mellyn* thus belie an anticipated correlation of masculine power and feminine fear by presenting women as agents of terror and, in so doing, suggest an equal investment in the female issues that characterize female gothic. In essence, one finds that the oft-discussed divide between female gothic and gothic romance can be diminished or at times even eradicated through demonstration of the genre’s shared concerns regarding female identity and power.

Ellen Moers first coined the term ‘female gothic’ in *Literary Women* (1976), asserting that the genre was “easily defined” as “the work that women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called ‘the Gothic’” (90). Though this categorization has proven far from easy, giving rise instead to a vast array of generic conceptions and critical disagreements, Moers’s distinction between the respective male and female gothic traditions of Lewis and Radcliffe has become a cornerstone of gothic studies. Where, as Moers detailed, Radcliffean or female gothic featured a heroine resisting male imprisonment, explanation of seemingly paranormal terrors, and romantic fulfillment, Lewis’s male gothic saw its protagonist actively engaging with dark, often taboo, supernatural horrors and exploring the limits of masculine power through extended scenes of violence, rape, and murder. The male gothic then made “a travesty of the familiar [female] Gothic” as it turned its heroine into “a defenseless victim, a... cowering little piece of propriety whose sufferings are the source of her erotic fascination” (Moers 137). In contrast, Moers highlighted the female gothic’s portrayal of active and mobile heroines, contending that Radcliffe’s glorification of “the traveling woman: the women who moves, who acts, who copes with vicissitude and adventure” expressed a feminist idea of female selfhood. By allowing its “central... courageous heroine” to “enjoy all the adventures and alarms that masculine heroes had long experienced,” female gothic thus served as “a device” that enabled women to “do what they could never do alone” and provided a unique space for female heroines and readers to experience and recognize unfeminine emotions, situations, and agency under the aegis of fiction (126).

In her emphasis on the distinctive female dynamism of the Radcliffean strain, Moers developed what would quickly be accepted as the defining features of female gothic. First, Moers construed the genre as a “coded expression of women’s fears of entrapment within the domestic and within the female body” (Andrew Smith and Diana Wallace 1). This exposure of the feminist subtext of the genre engendered a vast body of critical work examining female gothic texts as demonstrations of female opposition to patriarchal society, works which defiantly set a “subjective, individual, female vision . . . in contrast to the social one” to explore exclusively feminine concerns (Fleenor 10). Indeed, every essay in both Juliann Fleenor’s and Wallace and Smith’s anthologies assumes the major theme of female gothic to be that of the woman in and/or against society. Such an overwhelming concern for women’s struggle informs the second essential theme of female gothic: the conflict over female identity.¹ Fleenor suggests that while male gothic retains a traditional externalization of the battle between good and evil, “female Gothicists, beginning with Radcliffe, adapted this division, modifying it into a dichotomy not between the evil man and the good woman but between the good and evil woman” (10). Essentially internalizing its central and definitional conflict, female gothic thus provokes in the heroine (and reader) “feelings of self-disgust and self-fear rather than fear and disgust of something outside her” (10) and ultimately asks women to look within their gender (and their bodies) for the source of their anxieties.

Female gothic may then be seen as “a version of the Gothic created by women authors to explore formerly unspeakable, ‘monstrous,’ aspects of women’s lives” (Karen Stein, 126), focusing on internal female oppression rather than the oedipal or patriarchal struggles foregrounded in male gothic. In particular, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s reading of double figures in *The Madwoman in the Attic* introduced this emphasis into the critical tradition. By locating Jane Eyre’s central conflict in Jane’s confrontation, not with Rochester, but with her “dark double” Bertha, Gilbert and Gubar conceptualized the female gothic as “a secret dialogue of self and soul,” an articulation of woman’s struggle against “her own imprisoned ‘hunger, rebellion, and rage’” (339). The concept of the “monstrous double” thus not only gave a name and feminist slant to the “schizoid phenomenon” long considered a key element of the gothic (Fleenor 10),² but incorporated the genre’s dual concerns of female identity and woman’s social orientation. Representing forces both within patriarchal culture and within the heroine herself, the “monstrous double” serves simultaneously as a monitory victim of male tyranny and an ominous embodiment of latent female aggression and sexuality. While some critics ultimately see this double as reinforcing conventional gender roles rather than, as Gilbert and Gubar suggest, imbuing a “revolutionary” subtext, gothic scholars nevertheless maintain the importance of the double figure to the genre, with its implicit expression and exploration of such pointedly female anxieties. Whether arguing for its subversiveness or conservatism, critics thus find at the heart of female gothic an investment in issues of female entrapment, agency and internal struggle.

The sub-genre of modern gothic romance, as revitalized and popularized in the 1960s by writers like Victoria Holt, Mary Stewart, and Phyllis Whitney (e.g., *Thunder Heights* in 1960 and *Black Amber* in 1964), meets Moers’s basic classification of female gothic. Written by and for women, the romances use gothic conventions to follow a Radcliffean narrative of a “pursued heroine threatened by a tyrannical male figure . . . end[ing] in the closure of marriage” (Wallace and Smith 3). As Russ helpfully summarizes, in any modern gothic romance, a “latter-day Jane Eyre” must battle a “brooding House,” “mysterious Other Woman,” and “Buried Ominous Secret” to eventually win the love of a “brooding Super-Male” (44). Kay Mussell also provides a useful, if amusing, way of categorizing the novels through their covers: the novels are “immediately recognizable by the art on their covers: they depict a beautiful young woman, usually dressed in a flimsy gown, running away from a gloomy mansion. In an upper window, a single light shines” (58). Where, however, “critics . . . read the Female Gothic as a politically subversive genre articulating women’s dissatisfaction with patriarchal structures,” they see “the modern popular gothic as conservative, reinforcing the social roles of women” and fundamentally uninterested in the questions of female confinement emphasized by female gothic (Wallace 3). In essence, by portraying a “simple world [in which] women are women and men are men . . . [and] activities are clearly in consonance with social mythology” rather than exploiting the internal tensions of gender, Kay Mussell argues, gothic romances set themselves apart from their female gothic predecessors (65). This difference in focus is corroborated by Russ, who asserts that at the “emotional center” of the gothic romance “is that ‘handsome, magnetic suitor or husband who may or may not be a lunatic or murderer’” (44); in contrast, the heroine and her reflected/split self are central to female gothic.³

As will be argued, however, gothic romances need not be set apart from female gothic by their plots’

ostensible subjection of heroine to hero, nor need they depict a world as simple and patriarchal as Kay Mussell would hold it to be. Rather, like female gothic, modern gothic romances express anxieties about female power and showcase female concerns as well as male-female power dynamics. To demonstrate the ability of gothic romance to match female gothic's investment in female struggle, the novels' use of the key gothic element of fear will be traced. Moers considers fear as central to her definition of female gothic ("what I mean... by 'the Gothic' is not so easily stated except that it has to do with fear" [90]). Female gothic texts such as Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* portray fear as deriving ultimately from a female source; whether a fear of female sexuality, physiognomy, or authority, the heroine's fear of women creates the tension and gothic aura that defines the novel. Conversely, critics cite the seeming delegation of feminine fear to "tyrannical male figures" in gothic romance as revelatory of an absence of such concerns for internal female struggle and, consequently, the sign of its incompatibility with female gothic, despite other structural and stylistic similarities. To take part in a female gothic tradition, then, gothic romance must be seen to place fear—or, more precisely, the ability to arouse fear in its heroine—in the hands of women, and thereby express a thematic commitment to issues of female identity, power, and struggle.

Jane Eyre: "no fear of him, and but little shyness"

In contradistinction to its STKM descendants, *Jane Eyre* stresses its feminization of fear by repeatedly and explicitly denying its hero an ability to terrify its heroine. This denial is palpable at Jane and Rochester's meeting, where Bronte inflates the reader's expectation for the traditionally ominous first encounter of enigmatic hero and fearful heroine, only then to be deflated upon Rochester's entrance. As Pilot heralds Rochester's arrival, Jane walks in "utter solitude" under "the rising moon; pale yet as a cloud"—a tableau whose gothic foreshadowing seems realized when Jane hears a "din . . . on the causeway: a horse was coming; the windings of the lane yet hid it, but it approached . . . and as I watched for it to appear through the dusk, I remembered certain of Bessie's tales," fearing "all sorts of fancies bright and dark" (131–32), Jane's fear increases as through "the hazel stems glided . . . a lion-like creature with long hair and a huge head . . . [and] strange pretercanine eyes" (132) in "exactly one mask of Bessie's [nightmarish] Gytrash" (132), but an instant later "[t]he man, the human being, broke the spell at once" (133), for "I felt no fear of him, and but little shyness" (134). In this key narrative moment, Bronte not only renounces but also inverts the paradigm of the formidable hero, transforming Rochester from a possible source to active dispeller of Jane's sensations of fear. Rochester maintains this unexpectedly palliative role over the course of the novel, eclipsing Jane's alarm over the fire with his gratitude, so that "billows of trouble rolled under surges of joy [which led to] a shore, sweet as the hills of Beulah" (177). Later he likewise brings Jane such joy with his proposal that she "experienced no fear and little awe" (296) at the brutal storm which portentously devastates the estate.

Jane remains impervious even to Rochester's deliberate attempts at intimidation. After Rochester has tried to unnerve Jane in one of their first evenings together, both with arrogant demands for chatter and with veiled references to his "degenerate" and "cursed" (160) past, Jane explicitly counters Rochester's allegations that she must "fear" and be "afraid of [him]" (162) with the assertion that "though I am bewildered, I am certainly not afraid" (162) and pointedly distinguishes between the minor discomfort Rochester aims to produce and the true "fear" which he cannot. Jane notes that this ability to meet Rochester "in argument *without fear* or uneasy restraint [not only] suited both him and me" (183, emphasis added) but provided one of her "chief . . . delight[s]" (183). Rochester himself recognizes Jane's immunity to his intimidation and later cites it as a critical element of their romance, explaining that he first realized "the existence of sympathy between you and your grim and cross master, Jane; for . . . snarl as I would, you showed no surprise, fear, annoyance, or displeasure" (361). Even when presented with genuine cause for alarm in the form of Rochester's deceit and promises to "try violence" should Jane refuse to "hear reason" (349), Jane finds herself incapable of summoning fears of Rochester, detailing with curious calm and composure how "[a] movement of repulsion, flight, fear would have sealed my doom—and his. But I was not afraid: not in the least" (349). Jane's narratorial emphasis on her continuing lack of fear thus underscores the extent to which Bronte has divested Rochester of the gothic hero's purported menace.

Rather than a malevolent hero, the novel presents female characters who consistently engender Jane's experiences of fear. It is no coincidence that the novel's opening—and arguably most memorable—scenes climax

in a moment of terror induced by female agency rather than masculine aggression. While John's violence and Uncle Reed's ghost contribute to Jane's emotional volatility, it is her own reflection in a mirror which ultimately induces the traumatic psychological event, as, "turning a fascinated eye towards the dimly gleaming mirror" (20), Jane finds that "the strange little figure there gazing at me, with...glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had the effect of a real spirit" such that "[s]upersition was with me" (17–18) to make the threat of Uncle Reed's ghost potent and real. Jane (and accordingly the reader) then spends much of the novel erroneously but earnestly fearing yet another female, Grace Poole, to whom Jane attributes not only Bertha's malice but an almost supernatural evil. "Was that Grace Poole? and is she possessed with a devil?" (173), Jane asks with startling candor upon hearing what she believes to be "Grace Poole's own goblin ha! ha!" (241) outside her door. The mere sense of Grace's proximity is in fact so frightening that Jane finds it "[i]mpossible now to remain longer by myself" (173) and leaves to discover Rochester mysteriously surrounded by "tongues of flame" (174). Such an impression of Grace as the bearer of a malevolent and unnatural power recurs throughout the novel, as Jane finds herself preoccupied by "the enigmatical character of Grace Poole" (181) and worries that a "freak . . . has delivered [Rochester] into her power, and she now exercises over his actions a secret influence" (181), for "it was strange [that Rochester] seemed somehow in the power of one of the meanest of his dependants; so much in her power" (182) that his "life is hardly secure while she stays" (250). Before Bertha's revelation, then, Grace appears to Jane as the consummate villain and terrorizer, held responsible for all the "wickedness" (183), "mystery" (329), and "demon[hood]" (243) emanating from the house. As Jane notes, even with "night around me; a pale and bloody spectacle under my eyes and hands; a murderess hardly separated from me by a single door . . . the rest I could bear; but I shuddered at the thought of Grace Poole bursting out upon me" (242–43).

Ultimately, however, it is Brontë's "madwoman in the attic" who provides the narrative with its sense of gothic terror by engendering several incidents which Jane herself characterizes as frightening or terror-filled. Bertha, rather than Grace, produces the novel's most haunting motif, the recurrent "demonic laugh" (173) that makes Jane "superstitiously afraid" (127) and "chilled with fear" (173) and so places Jane's most direct terror at the hands of a woman. From its advent, the laugh is so unnerving as to take on an otherworldly and terrifying significance, such that Jane "really did not expect any Grace to answer; for the laugh was as tragic, as preternatural a laugh as any I ever heard; and . . . favoured fear" (126). Jane finds Bertha's laugh powerful enough to terrorize even her subconscious, for a "dream had scarcely approached [Jane's] ear, when it fled affrighted, scared by [Bertha's] marrow-freezing . . . goblin-laughter" (173).

As the mere sound of Bertha's voice instills in Jane a greater fear than all of Rochester's threats and eccentricities, it follows that Jane's most potent experience of terror should be occasioned not by any incident of male terrorization, but, true to female gothic expectations, by the shocking revelation of Bertha's female form. Bertha's nighttime visitation of Jane and its lead-up represent perhaps the greatest illustration of gothic storytelling in the novel, a conscious suspense-building initiated by the narratorial withholding Brontë deploys to keep the reader apprehensive: "I waited... to seek of him the enigma that perplexed me. Stay till he comes, reader; and, when I disclose my secret to him, you shall share the confidence" (318). We find Jane in a state of agitation heretofore unseen (at least in adulthood): "feverish" (317), "restless" (319), "strange and anxious" (318); Jane is "seized with hypochondriac foreboding" (320) and a pointedly unexplained "wild[ness]" that serves as a "warning of disaster" (320) to the reader. Brontë only heightens this sense of foreboding by delaying the narration of the traumatic event with Jane's retelling of ominous dreams, both increasing the reader's anticipation and connoting the affair as one tinged by irrational or supernatural elements. At last, Jane reveals the act of horror itself, which began "at that moment I saw the reflection of the visage and features quite distinctly in the dark oblong glass . . . fearful and ghastly to me" (327). Brontë thus announces the novel's most anxiously awaited horror as nothing other than the female form, the "savagely face" (327) which at first only "*seemed*, sir, a woman" (326, emphasis added)—a slur which draws attention both to Bertha's gender and her monstrous otherness. The horror finally climaxes as Jane faces this "monstrous" woman directly, without scrim of dream or mirror: finding Bertha's "lurid visage flam[ing] over mine" (327), Jane "for the second time in my life—only the second time— . . . became insensible from terror" (327). Both the clear causality of Bertha's appearance and Jane's collapse and the reference to Jane's female-induced horror in the Red Room remind us that women stand at the heart of Jane's (and the novel's) greatest moments of fear—moments in fact doubly feminized as they are engendered not merely

by a female actor but by the vision of the female form and of the monstrous female self.

One then finds the ability to frighten Jane, a skill which curiously eludes masterful Rochester, to be held by various women in the novel. This proliferation of exclusively female antagonists effectively serves to gender terrorization as Brontë gives to women collectively, yet to the exclusion of male characters, the power to induce fear in the heroine. Such a conception of the novel's categorical feminization of fear is reinforced by Jane's interaction with the gypsy. Jane displays a pointed lack of apprehension at seeing the ostensibly eerie figure, not only telling Sam to "return to the kitchen [for] I am not in the least afraid" (226) but insisting to the reader that "I felt now as composed as ever I did in my life: there was nothing indeed in the gypsy's appearance to trouble one's calm" (227). Brontë's emphasis on the gypsy's inability to alarm Jane can then be read as a covert signal to the reader that the gypsy is not a woman but is, in fact, the decidedly un-terrifying Mr. Rochester himself. It seems telling that the only moment of anxiety Brontë affords Jane in the scene occurs when the gypsy reveals her acquaintance with Grace, impelling Jane to "start to my feet when I heard the name" and only then decide that "there is diablerie in the business after all . . . !" (230). If Jane does experience any passing anxiety or strangeness, it is due to absent women rather than the cross-dressing man at hand: the whole time "my mind had been running on Grace Poole—that living enigma, that mystery of mysteries. . . I had never thought of Mr. Rochester" (235). By making women its sole instruments of narratorial fear, *Jane Eyre* consistently characterizes its most powerful and most terrifying forces as female forces and foregrounds issues of internal female struggle and of female evil, cementing its place in the female gothic canon.

Mistress of Mellyn: "a little afraid of the man" "for I was unsure of myself"

Holt's *Mistress of Mellyn*, the first and perhaps most archetypal work of modern gothic romance, seems separated from the female gothic tradition by its ostensible compliance with the STKM plot and corresponding portrayal of a heroine made to fear men rather than women. Narrated by the heroine, it follows plain Martha Leigh as she becomes governess at Mount Mellyn and falls in love with its eccentric master Connan, despite a lingering sense that Connan's dead wife Alice (or at least her spirit) remains in the house. Before marrying Connan, Martha must overcome the threats posed first by the beautiful Lady Treslyn, whom rumor holds Connan will marry as soon as her husband dies, and later by Celestine, who, made mad by the desire to marry Connan herself, attempts to kill Martha as she had previously killed Alice. From Connan's first entrance into Martha's life, however, he appears to unnerve Martha in just the way Jane denies being unnerved by Rochester: Martha notes that "I was a little afraid of the man although I could not say why" (57) and wonders what "Poor Alice . . . must have suffered, married to such a man" (120). Despite its otherwise strong echoes of *Jane Eyre*, the novel then seems divorced from the Brontëan gothic and its concerted feminization of fear.

As the plot develops, this lingering sense of Connan's fearsomeness remains. In particular, as the couple dances at the Mellyn ball, Martha rightly feels "a little frightened . . . of Connan's face in the moonlight" (137) just before he sweeps her out of the ballroom and brutally kisses her in the novel's most blatant demonstration of masculine aggression and control. Finally, even after falling in love with and agreeing to marry Connan, the sudden and suspicious death of Lady Treslyn's husband causes Martha to fear that Connan might have a part in such a "terrifying pattern" (303) of deaths, making her "desperately afraid" (304) and seemingly bringing *Mistress of Mellyn* neatly in line with the STKM paradigm.

A closer examination, however, reveals Holt's repeated challenges to the correlation of masculine power and feminine fear. Far from apprehensive, Martha declares herself "faintly disgusted" (49) and "antagonistic" (50) at the prospect of meeting Connan, whose derisive gaze makes her feel more "awkward and unattractive" (52) than fearful. Even when Connan discovers Martha "playing the part of mistress of the house" with a neighbor, a transgression surely meriting fearsome actions from a fearsome hero, Martha experiences only mild "embarrassment . . . [that she] had been caught" (87). Like Jane, Martha remains curiously unperturbed, even while provoking Connan's desires for physical violence, merely observing that "[t]here was a violent temper there, and I could see that he was fighting to control it" (72). Thus at the end of the novel, when Martha suspects Connan of involvement in Lord Treslyn's death—and, according to the STKM paradigm, should feel herself his frightened prey—she "long[s] to tell Connan of [just these] fears" (303) and "fe[els] tremendously happy"

(315) at the promise of his impending return. In essence, Connan continues to stand as an ally or aid, rather than antagonist, to Martha through to the novel's conclusion.

Instead, Martha, like Jane, finds in women the true source of her fear. In place of Bertha's laugh and visage, it is Alice's spirit that haunts Martha and Alice's seeming visitations that make Martha insensible with terror. Martha "shivered" (81), her "heart . . . leaping into [her] throat" (80) upon finding Alice's riding habit, just as she "could not sleep for a long time" (107) after seeing an ominous shadow in Alice's bedroom window, her "hands which gripped the window sill . . . trembling as [she] watched that figure silhouetted against the blind" (107). Further, the fearful kiss scene, with its gesture of male tyrannical power, notably ends with a depiction of far more viscerally and mentally disturbing female supernatural power: after fleeing Connan, Martha retreats to her room to slumber, only to awake "to see the dark shape of a woman. I knew it was Alice. She did not speak, yet she was telling me something" (141). By eclipsing the specter of Connan's brutishness with the vision of "what appeared to be the ghost of Alice [in] her riding habit" (141), Holt ties both terrors and suggests that an arguably deeper female anxiety underlies Martha's experiences of fear in the novel. Martha's sole outright attribution of fear to Connan can likewise be curiously tied to Alice's ghost, as Martha immediately follows up her acknowledgement that she "was a little afraid of the man" with the sudden realization that "I thought more of dead Alice than I had before" (57). Ultimately, then, as with Bertha, Alice's final physical appearance—as a corpse trapped in the chapel's crypt alongside Martha—impels the novel's most powerful moment of terror, driving Martha literally out of her mind with fear: "I was so frightened I did not know what to do. I heard my own voice sobbing out my terror, and it frightened me afresh because, for the moment, I did not recognize it as my own" (324).

Not only does this moment of terror stem from a female source, but, as in *Jane Eyre*, it takes the female gothic form of a crisis of female identity. As critics hold that Jane's fears stem from unwanted identification with her monstrous doppelganger Bertha, so does Martha's time in the crypt present her deepest fears' taking the form of identification with her ghostly terrorizer. Martha loses all sense of personhood or individual agency in the crypt, actively confusing herself with the imagined Alice as she "fancied Alice talked to me . . . But it was not Alice's voice I heard. It was my own" (324–25); indeed, Martha recounts explicitly that "[d]uring that time I spent in the dark and gruesome place I was not sure who I was"; she asks, in a hauntingly unanswered question, "Was I Martha? Was I Alice?" (324). Such an understanding of Martha's fears as in some way fears of her own, potentially ghastly, female self then can be seen to motivate much of her ostensible dread of Connan. The panic aroused in Martha by Connan's stolen kiss is quickly revealed to be more a reaction to her own behavior than to Connan's menace, as Martha admits that she "was horrified as much by [her] own emotions as by what was happening" (139). Accordingly, it is Martha's feelings of self-directed "anger" (139) and "shame" (138), rather than of fear, that constitute the "danger signals" (139) underlying her impulse to flee, as she feels "desperately unhappy" and "unsafe" ultimately due to the troubling realization that she "cared more deeply than . . . about anything else that he should regard [her] with contempt" (139). Martha's absurdly quick acceptance of Connan's apology and unmitigated elation at being able to stay reinforces this understanding of Martha's fear as more internal than external, as it suggests a lack of real anxiety for her physical (or moral) welfare: in response to Connan's casual proposal that they "draw a veil over that unpleasant little incident and go on as before," Martha announces that "I had a notion that he was mocking me, but I was suddenly so happy that I did not care. I was not going" (143). Martha all but explicitly acknowledges that her fears of Connan derive from fears of herself, as she explains that "he . . . frightened me a little, *for* I was unsure of *myself*, unsure of *my own* emotions" (269, emphasis added).

Just as Jane's fears of Bertha represent fears not simply of her self but, more specifically, of her latent "unfeminine" passions, Martha's fears of Alice can then be traced to a fear of her own uncontrollable passion. Where Jane disavows passion lest it engender the improper sexuality and aggression exhibited by Bertha, however, Martha dreads her passion for its converse arousal of excessive subservience. Martha worries that her burgeoning love for Connan will overwhelm her own desires and personality, turning her from a female subject to a feminine object who "care[s] more deeply [about Connan] than . . . about anything else." The centrality of this fear, both to the narrative trajectory and to Martha's psyche, can be seen in Martha's anxiety about her name: as she first leaves for Mellyn, Martha feels "sad and a little frightened . . ." by the "thought of [no one's] calling me Martha" and of being "cut off completely from 'Marty'" (9), a fear realized ultimately in the epilogue when

her passion drives her to marry Connan and thereby become the title's nameless "Mistress of Mellyn." Martha's compulsive apprehension regarding Alice likewise reveals the critical relationship between her potentially self-subordinating passion and her narrative fear. An otherwise curiously flat character defined only as "dead wife," Alice serves an essentially monitory function in the novel, appearing as an ominous specter of what Martha might become as "Mistress of Mellyn" to avert Martha's development into lifeless wife. By ultimately representing Martha's greatest terror as both a psychological transformation into Alice and a physical domestic imprisonment, Holt effectively literalizes the Bluebeard myth,⁴ locating both Martha's fear and danger in her willingness to choose passion over reason and wifedom over personhood. In so doing, Holt questions the very conventions feminist critics accuse the gothic romance of upholding (and praise the female gothic for repudiating)—namely, the objectification of the heroine, her subordination to the hero under the aegis of "love," and her entrapment into marriage and domesticity—and thereby explores the variety of complex and conflicting female roles a woman may (or perhaps must) at once inhabit.

Holt has thus expressed female gothic's investment in problems of female identity through the heroine's reflected and divided self; she demonstrates her engagement with female gothic's broader concerns for female evil and power by sustaining Brontë's feminization of fearsomeness, bestowing on an array of women the power to cause Martha fear. While Martha's first encounters with Connan provoke feelings of rage and disgust, the mere name of his daughter Alvean induces the archetypal gothic sensation, "a faint tingling which began at the base of my spine and seemed to creep up to my neck [in] what is known as making one's flesh creep" (13), and it is "[n]ot until [Martha] had come face to face with Alvean" that she first "accept[ed] the fact that [she] was a little frightened" (38). Similarly, it is only—and immediately—after Celestine interrupts Martha's interview with Connan that Martha abruptly asks to leave the room, feeling a sudden "great desire to get away from them" (54, emphasis added). Such a fear of Celestine is revisited in the novel's conclusion, where Celestine's confinement of Martha in the crypt causes her to "cr[y out] in terror" (322). For a long time, however, like Jane with Grace Poole, Martha mistakenly transfers her fear of Celestine's evil to Lady Treslyn, who, Martha believes, "was planning to remove me as she had removed [her precursor]" (314). Holt deliberately feminizes even the "whispering voices" (39) of the sea that seem to haunt Martha, describing them as murmuring "[j]ust like two old biddies having a good gossip" (46). Holt thereby emphasizes her adoption of Brontë's proliferation and gendering of female fear in opposition to the conventions of an STKM model and so reveals an equal investment in the concerns and themes definitional to (Brontëan) female gothic.

Complications and Conclusion

This is not to say, however, that works of female gothic must follow this exact paradigm or unconditional transposition of fear from men to women. Brontë's other famous female gothic, *Villette*, for instance, eschews such a regimented feminization of fear by effectively reversing the message of *Jane Eyre*'s gypsy scene and producing as Lucy's greatest terrorizer de Hamal, a man merely in female guise. The decision not to allow hidden gender to affect external fearsomeness (as in *Jane Eyre*) could be read as an endorsement of the greater fearsomeness of men. However, the earnestness and vehemence with which Lucy and, accordingly, the reader believe themselves to be frightened of a woman produces a lasting impression of the femaleness of the novel's terror, one undiminished by the late and offhand exposure of de Hamal's treachery (523). Even after the revelation of the nun's "gender," Ginevra curiously continues to refer to the visitor as a female ("I dressed *her* up: didn't I do it well? Did you shriek when you saw *her*?" [524, emphasis added]), underscoring the continuing importance of the nun's seeming femininity. It is also no coincidence that Brontë fashions the novel's most gruesome and compelling gothic moments around pointedly female symbols: the female-imprisoning convent "[where] ghastly white beds were turning into specters . . . [and where] dead dreams . . . lay frozen in their wide gaping eyeholes" (177) and, above all, the nun who "rous[es] fear and inflict[s] horror" (117) as she "glid[es] out from . . . the black recess haunted by the malefactor cloaks . . . [in the] ghostly chamber . . . [with a] head bandaged, veiled, white" (273) and whose representation of female sterility and supernatural evil brings Lucy a "mortal fear and faintness [which] made me deadly pale" (273). In effectively feminizing *Villette*'s gothic terrors, then, Brontë maintains her serious narrative commitment to these questions of female evil and identity—as further evidenced by Lucy's

notable feminizing of the abstract concepts that cause her fear and anguish. As Lucy repeatedly yields to “Reason” grudgingly and painfully, she comments that “[i]f I have obeyed *her* it has chiefly been with the obedience of fear” (256), just as she recounts bitterly that “Sleep never came! I err. *She* came once, but in anger” (176) and even refers to the concept of fear itself as a woman, noting that “[t]o see and know the worst is to take from Fear *her* main advantage” (514, emphases added). Thus, despite its inclusion of men in the process of terror, *Villette* showcases questions of internal female fear and conflict and so remains an exemplary female gothic novel.

Should, however, one count as gothic *Nine Coaches Waiting* (1959), another novel that eschews the Female Gothic feminization of fear? A contemporary of *Mistress of Mellyn* and equal leader in the gothic romantic revival, Mary Stewart’s novel truly and consistently places fear in the hands of a man. In *Nine Coaches Waiting*, orphaned Linda heads to the mysterious Chateau de Valmy to become governess to young Philippe, who, despite being nominal owner of the Chateau, lives under the care of his enigmatic, crippled uncle Leon and high-strung aunt Heloise. While avoiding the unnerving Leon and worrying about his wife, Linda falls in love with their son, Raoul, and refuses to hold him responsible for the dangerous “accidents” befalling Philippe. In the interests of ensuring Philippe’s safety, however, she and Philippe flee all the Valmys until a friend helps them expose Leon as mastermind of the evil deeds (and Heloise as the instrument) and allows Linda and Raoul to be reunited.

Leon alone then provides Linda with her gothic presentiments and anxieties, serving as both evildoer and fearmonger in the novel. “[O]ne moment a shadow, and the next moment silently there . . . Leon de Valmy . . . from his wheelchair managed without speaking” to “disconcert” Linda, even though “there was no earthly reason why I should feel suddenly nervous” (24–25). Leon continues to exude this seemingly intrinsic fearsomeness, as upon meeting Leon after Philippe’s first accident, Linda finds that “nervousness tightened my throat [though there] was [not] anything even slightly intimidating about him today” (118) and later “turned abruptly and ran upstairs” at the mere sight of Leon’s “Satanic eyebrows lift[ing], ever so slightly” (146). Though Linda at first attempts to disavow these unprovoked fears (“Damn the man, I wasn’t afraid of him . . . was I?” [179]), she eventually acknowledges that her “main fear was of . . . Leon de Valmy” (187) and recognizes as “the worst twenty seconds of my life [those in which] the terror, pressing closer, blew itself up into fantasy . . . [of] the Demon King . . . hunting us down from his wheelchair by some ghastly kind of radar . . .” (251). Even when several potential suspects for Philippe’s “accidents” exist, Linda immediately pinpoints Leon as the villain and instinctively recognizes that he, and he alone, is to be feared: she notably asserts that the “only possible plan that would make certain of Philippe’s safety [was for him] to be removed from *Leon de Valmy’s* reach” (222, emphasis added). Moreover, Linda pointedly never expresses fear of female characters (“Whatever my feelings toward the Demon King, I was not afraid of his wife” [225]), nor of any other male characters (maintaining that “it can’t be Raoul” (217) and using no expressions of fear to denote the experience of being tracked by Leon’s manservant save the one which imagines being “hunted” by the “Demon King”). Stewart thus concentrates the novel’s generation of fear solely in Leon and thereby focuses concerns for power, authority, and evil almost entirely on a male figure. In so doing, she reveals her exploration of the issues of female conflict and identity to be merely secondary—or at least far inferior to the investment of Bronte and Holt—and so distances her novel from the central features of Female Gothic.

However, while the treatment of fear and corresponding prioritization of masculine oppression in *Nine Coaches Waiting* may prevent its designation as female gothic, these qualities do not imply that the novel is entirely devoid of female gothic elements, nor that it follows a simple narrative of patriarchal oppression, as implied by many detractors of STKM novels. Rather, Stewart complicates her novel and draws it closer to, if not yet under the heading of, Female Gothic through her depiction of Heloise, Leon’s troubled wife. Though neither affirmatively evil nor fearsome, Heloise remains a disturbing figure throughout the course of the novel, unsettling rather terrorizing Linda. In an interesting variation of the fear paradigm, Heloise repeatedly figures in Linda’s (and the reader’s) anxieties, not because she inspires fear but because she seems herself inexplicably fearful: Linda’s very first impression of Heloise was that her “voice as she introduced us was too taut and high, like an overtight string” so that Linda “thought, watching her, she’s afraid” (25), and repeatedly finds in Heloise the “same queerly apprehensive quality that I had noticed on my first day at Valmy” (73), characterized by an “indefinable expression which might have been appraisal, or wariness, or—if it weren’t fantastic—fear” (74). At the close of the novel, it is intriguingly more Heloise’s misery than any act or response from Leon that inspires Linda’s anguish, as Linda remains an objective narrator of nearly all of the disclosure/blame scenes, but declares that when Heloise “put her

hands to her face and began to weep[, q]uite suddenly, the scene was unbearable” (311).

Stewart uses Heloise to draw the reader’s attention to female anxieties most powerfully in her nightmarish depiction of Heloise at the heart of the novel. First, Stewart reveals that Heloise is literally the woman of Philippe’s nightmares, in which someone “come[s] in in the night and touch[es] him” (193), her “eyes shadowy . . . remote, so unreachable” (195). Then, in perhaps the single most unnerving scene of the novel, Heloise becomes a latter-day Lady Macbeth, sleepwalking into Philippe’s room “as if she were a ghost on a moonlit stage” (226) and “put[ting] out a hand slowly, almost tentatively, to touch his face” in “one eerie moment” (226). Pushed to such unconscionable acts by Leon, Heloise cannot rationally contain her conflicting allegiances toward her husband and herself and so engages in the only form of response her situation and body will permit. Her madness can thus be read as a compelling, if lone, instance of Female Gothic tropes and themes, one underscored by Linda’s use of unusually gothic imagery to describe how “[w]ith her back to the moonlight, her face was a pale blur, her eyes dark and expressionless, but as I looked at her, bewildered and beginning once more to be frightened, I understood. The goosepimple cold slid, ghost-handed, over my skin” (226). Indeed, the ambiguity of the participial phrase, which leaves unclear whether Linda or Heloise is “bewildered and beginning . . . to be frightened,” can be seen as in some way bringing the two women together through fear, a tentative or understated gesture toward the questions of female identity and identification with the monstrous other central to Female Gothic. While *Nine Coaches Waiting* falls short of Female Gothic by keeping fear and gothic terror largely in the hands of men, Stewart’s portrayal of Heloise nevertheless shows the novel to be at least partly engaged with questions of female agency and power, touching upon the feminist concerns both Holt and Bronte explore in their thorough feminization of fear.

Both *Jane Eyre* and *Mistress of Mellyn* thus pointedly undermine an expected paradigm of male intimidation, as they repeatedly transfer the generation of the heroine’s fear from the hero to a variety of female sources and instead render women those ultimately responsible for the terrorization of other women. By portraying women as the simultaneous perpetrators and victims of the gothic’s definitional terror, Bronte and Holt make the impact of women on other women (including themselves) the central action of the novel, one far more significant than any form of masculine action. This mutual emphasis then helps to undermine the popular denigration of modern gothic romances by exposing in them a deep-seated concern for—and ability to address—the questions of purely female identity, conflict, and power definitional not only to Female Gothic but to a multitude of well-respected feminist works. Even in those gothic romances, like *Nine Coaches Waiting*, that ultimately elude the designation of Female Gothic, one finds some measure of concern for these female and feminist issues, suggesting that gothic romances, if not inevitably Female Gothic, offer more than mindless propagation of patriarchal values. Within both Female Gothic and gothic romance, one then finds a critical investment in the nature of female power and its interplay with the heroine’s psyche, rather than a superficial imposition of masculine aggression on a passive damsel. Whether or not the exposure of this continued concern can serve to elevate the “low” literary standing of those generally accepted to be STKM novels, it nevertheless helps to unify the gothic tradition and reveals the centrality of feminist issues to “the work that women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called ‘the Gothic’” (Moers 90).

Notes

- 1 As Fleenor says explicitly, “At the center of the Female Gothic is the conflict over female identity” (24).
- 2 This “schizophrenia” now became recognized as the “split psyche produced by the woman writer’s quest for self-definition.”
- 3 Some critics actively dichotomize Female Gothic and popular gothic romance under the guise of “horror-gothic and terror-gothic” (Fleenor 7), explaining that “horror-gothic [serves as] an expression of the author’s fear of ambiguity and patriarchal structures [portrayed through h]orror of the self, of female physiology” (7), whereas “terror-gothic is an expression of the heroine’s predicament in what proves ultimately to be a reasonable world, [found] particularly [in] the popular gothic” (7).
- 4 The legendary symbol of the dangers of marital submission. Bronte herself alludes to this emblematic story in a sort of prefiguring of Bertha’s situation, as Jane “lingered . . . in some Bluebeard’s castle . . . to hear in so still a region [her] laugh” (125).¹ As Fleenor says explicitly, “At the center of the Female Gothic is the conflict over female identity” (24).

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