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Optical Witcheries: Specters of Hawthorne's Magic Lantern

Anna Milione

The wizardry of Hawthorne's art was recognized early as his contemporaries, such as Oliver Wendell Holmes and Bronson Alcott, praised him as "The Essex Wizard" and "Magician deathless".¹ Ever since the earliest critical studies on Hawthorne's aesthetics and creative process, such as Bell's *Hawthorne's View of the Artist*, to the latest ones on his writing techniques, such as Coale's *Mesmerism and Hawthorne*, his art and imagination have been related to black and white magic, enchantment and witchcraft, possession and mesmerism, and to the image of the Faustian Magus.² Stemming from some of the shared critical assumptions on Hawthorne's view of art and magic, my interpretation of Hawthorne's metaphorical use of the mechanisms of the magic lantern related to his art theory and of the phantasmagoria as literary technique is offered as a further contribution to the study of Hawthorne's Gothic aesthetics. I will further claim that, in addition to mesmerism, the magic lantern and phantasmagoric shows constituted another important overlooked "influence on the very structure and texture" of Hawthorne's fiction (Coale 7).

Magic lantern and phantasmagoria shows, with their traveling showmen, their optical illusions and the projection of popular subjects—such as Gothic scenes of spirit visions, witches flying off on broomsticks, devils and flames of hell and scenes from Faust—were fashionable from around 1803 to 1825 also in Boston and the other American colonies.³ They animated the visual elements, the ghosts and wizards and the mechanical artifices of the Gothic novels and milieu.⁴ Rudimental magic lantern effects were already used to stage themes of illusion in theatre and, throughout Romantic literature the magic lantern appeared as a trope for the imagination.⁵

The appearance of the watchman's lamp, a primitive eighteenth century form of magic lantern,⁶ and the identification with eighteenth century showmen, "part story-tellers and part magicians" (Heard 8), in Hawthorne's stories reveal that his knowledge of the instrument and shows went even beyond his contemporary magic performances.

In addition to the Salem witchcraft papers, Hawthorne researched the natural explanations of occult phenomena in nineteenth-century scientific texts, some of which explained cases of spectral apparitions as effects of optical illusions. In particular, Brewster's *Letters on Natural Magic* also gave space to the description of the Magic Lantern and of phantasmagoric shows which, together with popular exhibitions by itinerant conjurers, supplied Hawthorne with a source for the aesthetic rendition of the Salem spectral apparitions as phantasmagoria. Show boxes, showmen, projections of pictorial images, pageantries, tableaux, spectral processions, lanterns and lantern-bearers, dark scenes illuminated by the moon, torches and lamps and phantasmagorical apparitions appear everywhere in Hawthorne's stories, together with the reflection on delusional human perceptions and on the writer's fictional manipulations analogous to magic lantern mechanisms. The manipulative potential of the Magic Lantern and of phantasmagoric exhibitions, with their combination of mirrors and lenses, also provides a fertile metaphor that hints at the projections and optical illusions produced by the Puritan conscience and at similar deformations of vision enacted by American democracy with its providential ideology of Manifest Destiny and its removal of past tyranny and of the "obstacles to the progress of liberty" (De Angelis 55).⁷

I will first of all show how the magic lantern was a trope for Hawthorne's complex art theory, hinting at the manipulative potential of texts able of deceptions of moral and ideological nature. I will then explain how Hawthorne's use of phantasmagoric effects for the aesthetic rendition of spectral appearances supplied him with a medium for describing delusional human perceptions, and for suggesting the manipulative implication of witchcraft texts and "stages." Problems of perception are again at the centre of Hawthorne's use of phantasmagoric effects in dealing with Jacksonian America and in engaging in a criticism of the ideological deformations of official historiography.

The Magic Lantern and Hawthorne's art theory

Hawthorne's figurations of the magic lantern are strictly intertwined with the writer's creative process: they reflect his complex attitudes towards art, his ideas and distinctions between fancy and imagination, and his struggle between Transcendental aesthetics and Romantic Gothicism. On the one hand he absorbed the Romantic and Transcendental view of the divinely inspired artist supplied with a nearly preternatural power to see behind the visible world through his creative imagination, of which a classical symbol was the image of the Lamp with his radiant source of illumination and vision.⁸ On the other hand however, and more often, the Magic Lantern becomes for Hawthorne the wizard-artist's medium of an illicit black art, the symbol of the necromantic Faustian search for forbidden knowledge. In such cases, the magic lantern and its associated figurations, such as magic moonshine, lanterns and lantern-bearers, torches and lamps, cease to be symbolic of the superior power of imagination and represent instead the inferior faculty of Fancy, a mere optical contrivance to please the eye and able to show what the external eye is tricked by, a diabolical, manipulative instrument able to enact deceptions and deformations of moral and ideological nature.

The magic lantern as symbol of the superior insight of imagination, able to show the spiritual truth of things, is for instance evoked by the image of the "magic moonshine" in "The Custom-House," which together with the image of the mirror, "the looking-glass," offers a "doorway into the spiritual world" (29).⁹ Yet the moonshine, like the light of the magic lantern, is also a clue to a territory of illusion, of the "illusive guests" of the "romance-writer" (29). The dark night or moonlight was also referred to by Brewster in his description of phantasmagoric shows and of the introduction of "direct shadows of living objects, which imitated...the appearance of... objects in a dark night or in moonlight" (82).¹⁰ It thus hinted at a power of deception that Hawthorne often muses on. In "Earth's Holocaust" lamps, lights and fire are traditionally associated to the creative power of imagination of great artists like Shakespeare. The more powerful are the works of genius which are burnt in the bonfire, the more brilliant and long-lasting is their combustion. Yet their supposed eternal truths are swallowed up together with all the creations of human fantasy by the general bonfire of the enlightened reformers. Meaningfully, "the illumination of the bonfire," a symbol of the Enlightenment, is presented as a "show" that "spectators might commodiously admire" (887),¹¹ reminding readers of a connection with magic lantern exhibitions.

In "Fancy's Show Box," the magic lantern actually appears, symbolizing the specters of human conscience as well as the writer's more degraded faculty of fancy. In the solitude and gloom of a crimson-curtained midnight chamber, a glass of wine becomes the brilliant medium through which an old gentleman of unspotted fame sees three imaginary figures representing Fancy, Memory and Conscience. Fancy has the "aspect of an itinerant showman, with a box of pictures on her back" and a "magnifying glass" (451), that makes "objects start out from the canvass with magical deception" (452). The exhibition shows misty scenes that seem to have been painted by a malicious "artist of wondrous power" (454), who knows the secret stains on the old man's guilty soul and projects his designed crimes that however have never been committed.

The main enquiry of this morality tale concerns the question of whether a man can be considered guilty for the "ghosts of . . . never perpetrated sins" (454), embodied by the magic lantern pictures. Hawthorne establishes an association between the show-box projections and the artist's creations by comparing those projected crimes to the evil deeds of a villain of romance created by a novel-writer or a dramatist. Thus the magic lantern exhibition is linked to the artist's degraded imaginative power, and the lingering questions deal with the problem of illicit writing and the sense of guilt for the artist's special gift of vision that Romantic theory celebrated.¹² It is also meaningful that while the radiant source of the Lamp was a symbol for the Romantic conception of the superior creative imagination, the magic lantern is here a mere symbol of fancy, that Hawthorne himself, like the Romantics, regarded as an inferior faculty. Thus the artist's creations are here compared to the contrivances of the projector that does not really possess the higher power of vision to see into the heart of things, but only an illusive power to show spectral appearances, ghosts that are not real. The artist in this tale reminds us of many of Hawthorne's other artists associated to the work of illicit black magic, and as such he has a power to simulate, deceive and manipulate like his most suitable optical instrument, the magic lantern.

For Hawthorne the artist's vision was involved with his vision of moral life.¹³ The Faustian inquiry into hidden matters was indeed "the unpardonable sin," the sin of pride condemned in much of his fiction. The artist should

instead be a man among men as he concludes, in “Fancy’s Show Box”: “Man must not disclaim his brotherhood, even with the guiltiest” (455). Like European Romantics who associated themselves with wizards and sorcerers,¹⁴ Hawthorne often played with the figure of the artist as magician, and he was certainly aware of the potential association between the projected visions of the magic lantern and the devil’s power to conjure illusions. Yet such “wondrous power and terrible acquaintance with the secret soul” (454), he ascribes to the painter of the scenes in “Fancy’s Show Box” are here as elsewhere related to a sense of guilt that in his whole work is linked to the ancestral curse inherited by his Puritan ancestors. Certainly this sense of guilt has also to do with the Puritan and Calvinistic proscription of the arts and of the mimetic representation of reality.¹⁵ Witchcraft and the Salem witch trials often furnish him a metaphor to express his complex relationship to his vocation. Art is witchcraft. The use of tropes of witchcraft, diabolical possession, magic, dream and enchantment in relation to literary imagination is reiterated in his work. Thus this complex view of art is also related to “stagecraft” as “magic,” “and the warnings against its illusions” (Warner 132). Since magic and witchcraft are for Hawthorne tropes for art of an illicit nature, the magic lantern is the wizard-artist’s medium of the suspected artist special gift of vision that Romantic theory celebrated. Not only does it have a power to manipulate vision, but in its implicit longing for extending the faculty of sight it can suggest another trope of Hawthorne’s for that forbidden Faustian inquiry into the invisible things condemned by Puritans like Cotton Mather as the worst of sins, and for the analogous pretences of modern science.

In “Ethan Brand” the element of fire, a surrogate of the Lamp, is associated to technology, to the scientific empiricism of the cold observer and the great sin of the Enlightenment, the unpardonable sin.¹⁶ It is after gazing too long into the fire that Brand becomes possessed by a compulsion to seize an absolute truth and undergoes a wondrous transformation, losing his hold of the magnetic chain of humanity. It is meaningful that after Brand gazes into the show-box of the German Jew traveling with a diorama, the Jew states: “I find it to be a heavy matter in my show-box—this Unpardonable Sin!” (1061). It is as if Brand recognizes the same Sin in the manipulations of forms enacted by the magnifying glasses and in the outrageous scratching exhibited. At that time the Wandering Jew was symbolic of the artist’s sense of guilt and isolation.¹⁷ In “The Birthmark” the optical phenomena projected on a screen, the airy figures and unsubstantial forms produced by another cold empirical observer, give Georgiana “the illusion . . . that her husband possessed sway over the spiritual world . . . the scenery and the figures of actual life were perfectly represented, but with that bewitching, yet indescribable difference, which always makes a picture, an image, or shadow, so much more attractive than the original” (771).

The phantasmagoria as literary technique

Not only was the magic lantern an image reflecting Hawthorne’s complex theory of art, but magic lanterns and phantasmagoric effects were used by Hawthorne for the aesthetic rendition of spectral appearances. The most remarkable *phantasmagoria* staged by our Salem wizard is conjured up in his most popular story on the 1692 Salem witchcraft delusion. Here the optical witcheries, the tricks of light and dark, and the visions of specters produced by the magic lantern provided Hawthorne with a mode to render aesthetically the nature of Brown’s technical case of “Specter Evidence.”

In the gloomy atmosphere of dreamlike and darkened roads young Brown fancies an unseen multitude of devilish Indians, until a disturbing appearance is discerned in the “deep dusk” (277), of the forest, the devil himself. He carries a “remarkable . . . staff” with the semblance of “a great black snake, so curiously wrought, that it might almost be seen to twist and wriggle itself, like a living serpent;” “this, of course,” the narrator comments, “must have been an ocular deception, assisted by the uncertain light” (277), alerting us that we are in the realm of ocular phenomena described by Brewster, who in his *Letters* literally treats of ocular “Deceptions arising from viewing Objects in a faint light” (Contents and Letter II). After insinuating the guilty conduct of Young Brown’s ancestors, which happens to be the same as Hawthorne’s, the devil goes on conjuring up other spectral projections with his magician’s staff. Proto-cinematic effects similar to those described by Brewster, remarkable distortions, appearances and disappearances and ocular deceptions, flying off on broomsticks, are performed. The climax of Hawthorne’s phantasmagoric show in the tale is the scene of the Sabbath constructed through accurate tricks of light and dark. In the middle of “the dark wall of the forest” rises “a pulpit:”

surrounded by four blazing pines, their tops aflame . . . like candles . . . The mass of foliage, that had overgrown the summit of the rock, was all on fire, blazing high into the night, and fitfully illuminating the whole field . . . As the red light arose and fell, a numerous congregation alternately shone forth, then disappeared in shadow. (284-285)

Various optical phenomena put into question Brown's perception, and Hawthorne's "visages of horror on the smoke-wreaths" (286) remind us of Brewster's description of magic lantern projections "received upon wreaths of smoke" (Brewster 79). Hawthorne employed various optical tricks, deceptions, distortions, appearances and dissolves, dark and light devices to convey the way the imagination is able to transform reality phantasmagorically. References to dreams and darkness also communicate such deceptive imaginative power. He also uses such connections to represent the devil's power to conjure visions, who in the tale is the main source of the optical witcheries: we know this was one of the most popular topics of the magic lanternists, and that the magic lantern was viewed as the devil's medium.¹⁸ It is then meaningful that in the story the main character, Brown, shares Hawthorne's own ancestors, because it suggests that the lingering question in "Young Goodman Brown" concerns whether the nature of his writing on witchcraft is illicit.¹⁹ Thus the power of the artist could be easily equated with the devil's and with magic lantern conjurers. Brown is searching for the most secret sins in others and in doing so he is in the same position of the artist who, with his illicit supernatural power of vision, is only capable of producing deceptive specters. The phantasmagoria projected by our Salem lantern-bearer conjures up one of the black masses so often described in confessions during the Salem witch trials. To explain them several of Hawthorne's 19th-century historical and scientific sources described the specters as products either of diabolical illusion, or more likely of dreams, nightmares and imagination, of superstitious beliefs, projections of fears and secret longings.²⁰ Phantasmagorical projections thus could be easily equated to Brown's projections of his unconscious obsessions, of his inner thoughts and fears.

The theatricality of the witch-trials, with their display of evidence, can also be easily related to the manipulative potential of magic lantern performances. Witch-trials transformed crime in entertainment, restoring hierarchy and order by staging witchcraft as a spectacle of otherness in an act of ideological manipulation of reality.²¹ Witchcraft was thus used to establish the judges' and ministers' position as interpreters of visual signs. The Salem trials offered the possibility of acting and repeating the same account of diabolical rendezvous, impious baptismal rites, compacts with the devil, flying off on broomsticks and spectral apparitions—and specters were used as evidence of guilt. Hawthorne is denouncing the manipulative power of the trials as "shows" and is employing a cultural performance metaphor, the magic lantern trope, to explain a process of cultural production. The attention to optics not only does explore the way the imagination forms objects, but it suggests the gaze of the empirical observer, the gaze through which Brown, as much as the Salem judges and ministers, tried to define themselves in opposition to what they hoped to avoid and repress in their societies. Moreover, the 19th-century empirical eye too exposed cases of witchcraft as fraudulent. Witchcraft and magical tricks now appeared only as spectacles of a popular culture no longer current. Somehow, the magic lantern exhibitions represented a display of enlightened science. Optics in the tale reveals that Hawthorne is engaging in the modern scientific debate.

Brown is also the product of those manipulated perceptions produced by the author of *Wonders of the Invisible World*, whose central theme is the compact with the devil and his temptations. Cotton Mather's own *Magnalia Christi Americana* furnished also an example of such a dreamy world. His writings, states Hawthorne in *Grandfather's Chair*, were so queer, spectral and fantastic, as his imaginative obsession of a world full of demons, that he believed the country was full of witches and wizards who had renounced heaven through a compact with the devil. His mind was able to transform a poor old hag like Martha Carrier into the "Rampant hag," "who had received the devil's promise to be Queen of hell" (286), when we re-encounter her in "Young Goodman Brown." Thus the *phantasmagoria* technique supplied Hawthorne with a most suitable means for describing such delusional human perceptions and for suggesting the manipulative import of witchcraft texts and "stages." The longing for extending the faculty of sight, symbolized by optical instruments like the magic lantern, is the Unpardonable Sin that art, science and Puritanism seem to share.

History as a *camera obscura*²²

History is presented as a show elsewhere, in Hawthorne's fiction. In "Main-street" it takes the shape of a "pictorial exhibition" projected in a "show-room" (1023), and suggests an association between the writer's manipulations and the mechanisms of the magic lantern. Reproducing past events implies a counterfeit operation by the historian-showman, the employment of devices that may render "a picture, an image, or a shadow, so much more attractive than the original" (771), as optical phenomena do in "The Birthmark". The sketch involves a criticism of the pictorial and dramatic techniques used by Romantic historiography to manipulate historical reality.²³

"My Kinsman, Major Molineux" is another of Hawthorne's tales framed as a *camera obscura*. To do so he sets its sinister scenes and figures among the dark misshapen streets during a single night journey through a little metropolis of a New England colony. Its ghostly and fiendish images, its "succession of crooked . . . streets" (70), queer houses and changing buildings are projected by the distorting medium of the moonlight, of moonbeams, lamps, torches and lanterns, which dazzle the young hero's optics. The story ends with the climatic pageantry of the fantastic shapes of a mob in procession, the apparition of the Kinsman's specter, and the presence of a lantern-bearer, who is "rubbing his eyes, and drowsily enjoying the lad's amazement" (85). The lantern concretely appears in the tale several times, together with the moonshine, establishing a connection with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and suggesting a seemingly enchanted world,²⁴ and a meditation on metamorphosis, illusion, and the power of imagination.²⁵ However, it is part of a nightmarish hostile world, rather than of a story of romance. The final spectacle of the tale is a "pageantry" (84), as Hawthorne himself suggests, a small theatrical exhibition lighted by a lamp, a "darkness visible" (Brewster 81), with a display of ghastly figures, a phantasmagoria, where Robin in the darkness finds himself in the middle of aerial pictures. The misshapen streets and changing buildings, the singular two-fold change undergone by the man Robin has formerly met at the inn, whose countenance is transformed into an infernal red and black visage grinning in Robin's face and suddenly disappearing, suggest similar singular changes and transformations exhibited by the combination of fluids, saline substances or the application of heat inside the magic lantern described by Brewster (80, 85).

Hawthorne's use of magic lantern effects serves in this tale to deal with the issues of Jacksonian democracy. The recognized historical background of the tale is that of the popular insurrections in New England that prepared the ground for the American Revolution. In particular, the multitude of torches advancing in procession in the final pageantry of "My Kinsman Major Molineux" are reminiscent of the bonfire kindled in Boston during the "Hutchinson mob" that Hawthorne also describes in *Grandfather's Chair*, together with the "evil aspect" of the people's faces, "which was made more terrible by the flickering blaze of the bonfire" (159). In the appendix of *Grandfather's Chair* Hawthorne reports Hutchinson's own graphic account of the destruction of his house. Hutchinson likens the inflamed crowd of the "mob at night" to a "hellish crew . . . with the rage of devils" (223), and labels them as "such demons" (225). Such description certainly inspired Hawthorne's spectral rendezvous in "My Kinsman" and the "infernal visage" (78) of the "horseman" (84) leading a procession that closely reminds us of Cotton Mather, "the fiend himself" (216), who on a horseback guides the procession of the witches to Gallows Hill in some of Hawthorne's other witchcraft stories.²⁶

It is thus not fortuitous that Hawthorne recurs to magic lantern effects to represent the revolutionary mob as phantasmagoria, associating it to the Salem "Specter Evidence," since for Hawthorne there are close connections between the frenzy and delusion of both episodes. The upward motion in the progressive view of American history celebrating Jacksonian America was a cultural production, an ideological manipulation enacted by the contrivances used by American historiography.²⁷ That Hawthorne was concerned with the removal of past tyranny is hinted at the beginning of "My Kinsman," when after giving a brief sketch of the political turmoil of the period he ironically states that "the reader, in order to avoid a long and dry detail of colonial affairs, is requested to dispense with an account of the train of circumstances, that had caused much temporary inflammation of the popular mind" (68), thus hinting at the "habits of perception" that removed disagreeable realities (Colacurcio 132).

In employing tropes of optical manipulation, such as magic lantern associations and phantasmagorical projections of images, Hawthorne stages the manipulative attempt to control the images of reality. The idea of the blindness of perception is hinted at by Hawthorne through the name of the young hero's kinsman, Molineux. Apart from being a leader of anti-Loyalist mobs in Boston, Molineux was also the name of the friend of John

Locke who once posed him the problem of whether a blind man, who had learned by touch, could recognize a cube or a sphere by sight if his sight were restored to him.²⁸ For historians like Hutchinson the Irish were under the same mistake of the people from New England concerning the nature of their subjugation. It was Hutchinson himself who manipulated the idea of the people misapprehending their subjugation by depicting them as devils in a letter Hawthorne defined as “graphic” (*Grandfather’s Chair* 165). However, Hutchison excuses his ancestors, and all through Hawthorne’s narration of the “Hutchinson mob” in *Grandfather’s Chair* he is depicted as “unsuspicious” (160) of evil, forgetful and dull: he does not understand the lesson, he does not perceive it. Though Robin’s last name associates him with the opponents of the loyalist parties, he seems to share the same mental illness of his puritan ancestors, and mentally reproduces such specters that make him see his opponents as devils. Such devils are on the one hand projected by the lantern-bearer, a symbol of the deceitful art of American historiography. On the other hand, the opponents of the British Crown are purposely “magnified” as demons by the artist-showman, the writer, Hawthorne himself, who thus underlines the recurrence of past tyranny, partly removed by American historiography, who stages in the end the ideological manipulative power of showing things from a certain point of view and under a certain “light,” which was known too well by the historians.

NOTES

- 1 Edwin H. Cady, "The Wizard Hand: Hawthorne, 1864-1900," in *Hawthorne Centenary Essays*, ed. Roy Harvey Pearce (Ohio State University Press, 1964), 318.
- 2 See also other early monographs such as Edgar A. Dryden, *Nathaniel Hawthorne. The Poetics of Enchantment*. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1977); and William Bysshe Stein, *Hawthorne's Faust. A Study of the Devil Archetype*. (USA: Archon Books, 1968).
- 3 See Marina Warner, *Phantasmagoria, Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-First Century*. (New York: Oxford University Press, (2006), 2008), 153; and Mervyn Heard, *Phantasmagoria. The Secret Life of the Magic Lantern*, (Hastings: The Projection Box, 2006), 271.
- 4 See Heard, 123-126.
- 5 See Warner, 132-135, 124.
- 6 Heard, 26.
- 7 Quoted from Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom*. (New York: Norton, 1988), 77-78.
- 8 See Millicent Bell, *Hawthorne's View of the Artist*. (NY: State University of New York, 1962), Chapters II-III. My original interpretation of Hawthorne's use of the magic lantern stems from Bell's discussion on Hawthorne's Romantic Aesthetics and his Anti-Romantic Patterns.
- 9 See also Bell, 63.
- 10 Brewster's *Letters on Natural Magic* are listed among the books Hawthorne retrieved at the Salem Athenaeum. In my doctoral dissertation, *Il Mago dell'Essex. Stregoneria e Magia Naturale in Nathaniel Hawthorne*, 2007 ("The Essex Wizard. Witchcraft and Natural Magic in Nathaniel Hawthorne") and in another paper for a Hawthorne Society's meeting, "Hawthorne and the New Witchcraft," 2008, I showed that Brewster's *Letters* are an important source for "Young Goodman Brown," especially for the scientific explanations of spectral appearances and Hawthorne almost quotes from Brewster.
- 11 Except for "The Custom-House" and quotes from *The Whole History of Grandfather's Chair* in "History as a camera obscura" of this paper, all references herein to Hawthorne's work come from the Library of America edition, *Tales and Sketches*.
- 12 See also Bell, 22.
- 13 Ibid., viii.
- 14 See Tobin Siebers, *The Romantic Fantastic*. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984).
- 15 See Daniel Hoffman, *Form and Fable in American Fiction*, (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 4.
- 16 See Leo Marx, "Ethan Brand", from *The Machine in the Garden*, In *Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tales*, ed. James McIntosh, (New York and London: Norton & Co., 1987), 432-439.
- 17 See Bell, 71.
- 18 See Warner.
- 19 See also J. W. Clark, "Hawthorne's Use of Evidence in "Young Goodman Brown," in *Essex Institute Historical Collections, Vol III*, 1975., ed. Bryant F. Tolles (Salem, MA/ Lineburg, Vermont: Printed at the Stinehour Press, 1975).
- 20 Examples of these scientific sources were: Ferriar, *Theory of Apparitions*(1813), Hibbert, *the Philosophy of Apparitions* (1825), Macnish, *The Philosophy of Sleep* (1830), W. Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (1830). All these books were at the Boston Athenaeum. Hawthorne might have known some of them as I explain in my dissertation, *Il Mago dell'Essex*.

- 21 See Dianne Purkiss, *The Witch in History. Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations*. (London & NY: Routledge, 2003).
- 22 “Camera Obscura” was also originally used as a synonym for the magic lantern. See Warner, 15, 137.
- 23 See De Angelis.
- 24 See Neal Frank, Doubleday, *Hawthorne’s Early Tales, A Critical Study*. (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University press, 1972), 231.
- 25 See Warner, 135.
- 26 i.e. “Alice Doane’s Appeal”, 216; “Main-street”, 1046; *The House of the Seven Gables*.
- 27 See De Angelis, 94.
- 28 See *Young Goodman Brown and Other Tales*, ed. Brian Harding, (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1998), 337, note 39.

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The Ghost of Communism Past: The Birth of Post-Communist Gothic Fiction?

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Although Romanian writers, especially the “founders” of the Romantic age, were heavily inspired by German letters and philosophy in the nineteenth century, Romanian literature has never really accommodated the Gothic mode in fiction. The scarcity of Gothic narratives in Romanian fiction and the public’s lack of enthusiasm for the genre contrast with the fact that the region has provided ample material for Western Gothic narratives (Romania, as is well known, was often presented as a land of dark castles and aristocrats, as the home of count Dracula, of vampires and menacing Transylvanian forests, of luring sexuality and primal impulses). The absence of a significant Gothic tradition does not necessarily mean that writers in this country did not share an interest in the dark, the mysterious and the unexplainable in everyday life, but simply that the latter were traditionally relegated to the realm of low culture. Late in the communist era, after several decades of state-imposed socialist realism, magic realism emerged as a fringe phenomenon. When not censored, the artifices of magic realism served both as an escape from the stylistic strait-jacket of socialist realism and as a medium for thickly veiled criticism of the communist system. For many young writers, magic realism remained a style of choice into the first decade of the post-communist period, frequently as a means of dealing with the communist past. However, at least in the case of one of the most successful and critically-acclaimed contemporary Romanian authors, magic realism has gradually but markedly shifted into what I will call below “post-communist Gothic”. This article focuses on the way in which Doina Ruști, the renowned Romanian author, employs Gothic paraphernalia to write about Romania under the communist rule. The first part of the paper will provide a brief overview of Romanian literature under the dictatorial regime and its development after the fall of communism. It is here that I will talk about the use of magic realism as a reaction to the socialist realism imposed by the totalitarian regime. I will then briefly introduce Doina Ruști, an arguably unique voice in post-communist Romanian literature. The third and final part of the article will enlarge on the way in which Ruști’s novel *The Ghost in the Mill* marks an interesting break with magic realism. In particular, I will focus on the way in which Ruști resorts to an arsenal of Gothic motifs to come to terms with the haunting spectre of communism.

Romanian literature demonstrates a relative paucity in the realm of the purely fictional, partly due to the reading public’s predilection for and inclination toward products of memory, such as letters, journals, memoirs, or memoirs presented as fiction. Romanians seem to have had a rather difficult time conceiving of literature as works emerging solely out of the imagination (Negrici 156-7). Some relatively minor writers in the nineteenth century tried to create fiction entirely based on imagination, in an attempt at synchronization with Western Romanticism, but the reading public’s excitement for the mysterious and the sensational, for demonic characters and dark pasts, was soon repudiated by critical circles as forms of low culture.

During the first years of communist rule, the only literature accepted officially and encouraged passionately, sometimes violently, was the literature of “propaganda and demonstration”, a concrete embodiment of the political doctrine of those times (Negrici 140). The ideology of “socialist realism”, as it was officially termed, urged writers to reflect in their productions as accurately as possible the spirit of the people and their national (socialist) realities. This attempt at levelling literary artefacts was part of a greater scheme, that of reinventing the nation, including its culture, along the lines imposed by the Stalinist regime (Crotty 151):

By 1952 Romania was subject to rigid totalitarian controls. No city resident was allowed to change his or her dwelling without permission, and all movement between towns was controlled by the communist militia. In the early 1950s an estimated 180.000 people had been thrown into labour camps, the most

notorious was the Danube-Black Sea canal project which claimed thousands of lives ... It took thirteen years for collectivisation to be accomplished after the campaign to end landed property ... started officially in 1949. Some 80.000 peasants were imprisoned for their opposition. Armed resistance in the mountains continued sporadically through the 1950s... (Gallagher 47-8)

Everything that was seen as deviating from the norm of “the spirit of the people” was branded “rotten and corrupted”. In the name of a “healthy” Romanian literature (this attribute made quite a career in the 1950s), literary innovations were attacked, as they did not go along the lines of the true “spirit of the people” (Negrici 134). In effect, they would only represent “literary soap that doesn’t clean anything” – a somewhat ironic reference, since towards the end of the communist regime soap was very rare and cherished by the very people writers had been called faithfully to represent.

Despite its simplistic, plain, repetitive and stereotypical character, socialist realism was seen as the last, supreme stage in the artistic development of humanity. In an attempt to make art accessible to everyone, it excluded from the start the accidental and the particular, the detailed and the subtle, and more generally anything that could stand out as peculiar (Negrici 142-3). The party frowned upon authors who would not use popular, accessible language, who would show even a minor inclination toward poetic intimacies, naturalism, or eroticism, or who pursued entertainment value in writing psychological, detective or adventure fiction (Negrici 243). There were authors who tried to write against the grain (Alexandru Ivasiuc, for example, in the 1960s and 1970s), by infusing their works with fantastic elements in an attempt to break away not necessarily from realism, which has constantly been very dear to Romanian authors, but from socialist realism specifically. No less significantly, some writers would resort to fantastic and allegorical fiction in order to escape censorship or total ban, especially when they hinted at the grim realities of the communist era. Nonetheless, the literary standard was that of the so-called “obsessive decade”, when writers were forced to contribute to propaganda through their literary creations.

After the fall of the communist regime in 1989, a lot of what had been written under the totalitarian rule was rejected, denied, and condemned, often vehemently. Radical negation and total denunciation seemed in order. The values – aesthetic and otherwise – promoted during the communist age were turned upside down as an anti-communist position was being crystallized. Condemnation became especially virulent when anti-communism was radicalized by the return to power of former second-rank communist apparatchiks. The first decade after the fall of the regime was marked by confusion and chaos, since none of the standards and ethics unanimously accepted before stood tall any longer. Nevertheless, in the period of confusion at the beginning of the 1990s, it became obvious that in breaking away from the “Siberia of the soul” (a metaphor used to describe realities in communist Romania), the Romanian people needed a new literature, one which would not carry over the blame of having served the old regime propaganda.

It is during this initial period after the fall of communism that the reading public manifested an interest for literature which stood witness to the atrocities and human suffering under the old regime. Once again, the ingrained predilection of the Romanian reading public for memoirs and confessions became manifest. Such works proved to be of great attraction – and if the author of the confessions or memoirs was not a professional writer, but rather an anti-communist activist or a victim under the communist rule, he or she was far more interesting and trustworthy. People now craved for the authentic, and many writers had lost credibility before the events in 1989. At first sight, it may seem counter-intuitive that people who had just managed to rid themselves of a totalitarian regime should yearn for literature laying bare their suffering. Nevertheless, the reconstruction of the past from the perspective of the present seemed like a vital necessity. After a decade of discovering and examining the wounds left by communism, the beginning of the new century ushered in an effervescence of fictional prose. New waves of young writers contributed decisively to the revival of experimental, fantastic fiction (Simuț), and the influence of Latin-American fiction particularly was obvious.

Magic realism is typically defined as a fictional mode employed by authors writing under totalitarian or dictatorial regimes, being common for works of fiction written from the perspective of the disempowered (Bowers 31). This style of writing realistic fiction, in which the unexpected occurs and tends to be treated as part of everyday life, has been usually seen as a way of breaking away from the constraints of linear time and hierarchical

thinking – in other words, as a way of escaping the authoritarian modes of writing which dominated post-colonial or post-communist countries. Magic realism offers the writers the opportunity to attack the definitions and assumptions which underlie totalitarian regimes, by attacking the very pillars of the latter (Bowers 4). The topics of absolute power, terrorist dictatorship, or circular time were of great inspiration for Romanian writers in the twentieth century. Some of the writers under communism used magic realism as a reaction to socialist realism and totalitarian rule, as a reaction to the homogeneity imposed by the former. And in its capacity to undermine the establishment, magic realism constituted a powerful tool. As Bowers argues,

Magical realist texts are subversive: their in-betweenness, their all at oneness encourages resistance to monological political and cultural structures, a feature that has made the mode particularly useful to writers in postcolonial cultures and, increasingly, to women. (Bowers 64)

In an attempt to subvert the totalitarian regime and to challenge the established literary norm, Alexandru Ivăsiuc approached dictatorship in his novel *The Crab*, published in 1976, an allegorical political dystopia, a study of cruelty and terror. Francisc Pacurariu also chose tyranny as theme for his *The Last Journey of Ulysses* (1976). However, this form of resistance against the dominant ideology was rather limited and occasional, because of the all-seeing censorship and the threat of a total ban on one's writings.

Magic realism was not revived immediately after the change of regime in 1989. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the new century magic realism became for many young Romanian writers not just a different form of literary expression, but a style of choice: Bogdan Suceavă's *He Came from An Off Key Time* (2004), Florin Manolescu's *The Mystery of the Locked Room* (2002), Cornel Nistea's *The Innocence of the Snake* (2000), or Bogdan Popescu's *Lost Transcience* (2002), to name but a few (Mărieș-Leș 226). In their fiction, these authors return to (in most of the cases) rural Romania under the totalitarian rule. A good example is Bogdan Suceavă's *He Came from An Off Key Time* (2004), a novel written as a parody of how people were recruited to offer information to the Securitate, of the opportunistic behaviour of political parties during the totalitarian regime, the complexes and suspicions of the Romanian Orthodox Church in relation to its Catholic "sister", and the illusions caused by messianic leaders who were easily substituted by new ones when times ask for it (Gheorghe). Florin Manolescu's volume of essays *The Mystery of the Locked Room* (2002) illustrates the will to go back in time in an attempt to rewrite history. For instance, in one of the essays, a character living in communist Bucharest (ironically depicted as a Balkanised site) wants to make a trip into the past, into the nineteenth century, more precisely, in order to fix a historical error. Another story is a comic account of conspiracy theory and the paranoia that comes with power (Marcu).

Writing her first novels in the first decade of the 21st century, Doina Ruști is a Romanian author with an obvious predisposition for fantastic fiction, which she blends with accurate depictions of Romanian realities. Her success with the literary critics was matched by her popularity with the general readership, which explains probably the relatively fast pace at which she has published over the past years. In what follows, I will argue that her novel *The Ghost in the Mill* represents an interesting break with the magic realism practiced by some prominent Romanian young authors at the start of the twenty-first century, and, further, that its Gothic mode serves the same purpose: a coming to terms with communism. I will therefore focus particularly on the way in which the paraphernalia of Gothic fiction is used for such a purpose.

Doina Ruști grew up in a village in the southern part of Romania, in a family of school teachers struggling to survive in the ruthless world of post-war totalitarian communism. At the age of eleven, she lost her father, who was murdered in mysterious circumstances which have, even to this day, not been elucidated. Her life as a child and teenager was marked by insecurity, trauma, oppression, and the absurd rules and laws of the dictatorial regime. At the same time, as the author herself confesses, the atrocities of the totalitarian regime blended with the folkloric background of her parents' village, ruled by tales of ghosts, supernatural forces, and mysterious, subterranean spirits. This folklore, rich in superstitions and magical elements, seems to have especially influenced the writing of Ruști's novel *The Ghost in the Mill*, which has brought her the coveted prize of the Romanian Writers' Union in 2008. Indeed, Ruști's self-portrait seems haunted by the dark, legendary, fantastic elements inherited in her upbringing: "Once, there was a place in Bucharest where wretches were hanged. When boredom struck the city, the prince took a couple of villains and put them in the noose to cheer the people up. And it worked. The square

would fill with people, who then left behind part of the trepidations of their blood upon the soil of death. Today, where the gallows stood, there is a crossroads where cars bump into one another. This is where I live, at the top of a concrete building overlooking the former gallows where life and death blend into each other. Out of the bitumen crust still emerge the dusty ghosts of the hanged and someday one of them will climb up to my place, as relaxed and happy as a branch in the summertime” (www.romanianwriters.ro). Doina Ruști’s publications also include short prose, reviews, and memoirs. As an academic expert in symbology, she has published many non-fictional works, such as *The Cultural Press*, *The Subliminal Message in Current Communications*, *An Encyclopedia of Humanist Culture*, and *A Dictionary of Symbols in the Work of Mircea Eliade*.

The publication of *The Ghost in the Mill* was preceded and in a way anticipated by two other novels which break away with realist conventions and which cultivate the experimental fiction that emerged around the turn of the century. Her first novel, *The Little Red Man*, which brought her an Award for Debut and a Prose Award in 2004, tells a story of internet, love, the hardships of intellectuals under communism, the importance of subliminal messages, and the role of the imagination for survival. In it, a little red man of mysterious origins becomes the companion of the main female character. Her subsequent novel, *Zogru* (2006), which has been recently translated into Bulgarian and Italian, displays an even more intense interest in extending the boundaries and transgressing the realm of the immediate and, ultimately, of the real. The novel is a story with Gothic roots, whose universe is populated by vampires, ghosts, the legendary Black Man¹ and Dracula himself as a special guest. In addition to containing classical figures of the Gothic, the world of the novel is seriously threatened by a killer virus, working its way in postmodern vein. The characters wander the world, from cemeteries to monasteries, forests, medieval castles, while *Zogru*, arguably a dark spirit who travels back and forth in time, offers the author the opportunity to let entire chapters from Romanian history play out before the reader’s eyes. As a mixture of historical novel, fantastic fiction and predominantly Gothic elements, *Zogru* can be read as a parody of vampire stories (which, let us not forget, did not originate in Romania or Eastern Europe, though Romania has been quite popular for its blood-thirsty count Dracula and for horror stories related to vampirism and blood drenching). In the novel, the ghost of Dracula is good-humoured, though equally menacing, and the legendary Black Man turns out to be just a frightened child who got lost from his parents.

Ruști has always admitted to the autobiographical rudiments which provide some of the basis for her novels. When asked in an interview for a Romanian magazine whether her writings are in any way connected with her biography, she answered convincingly that “everything is connected with the biography of the author” (Pop). Ruști confesses that, in *The Little Red Man*, she told the story of her father’s death, wrapping it up in layer after layer of narrative in an act of subliminal manipulation. In *Zogru*, some of the events narrated come from her own life or from the lives of people she knows. *The Ghost in the Mill* is written partly as a biography of her great-grandfather, a school teacher and disciple of Spiru Haret, the influential nineteenth-century thinker and the founder of the modern Romanian educational system. Ion Niculescu, the school teacher in the novel, is a re-creation of her great-grandfather. At the end of the volume, the teacher helplessly watches his entire book collection being burnt in his very own front yard, as a result of party orders.

Doina Ruști confesses that, in writing *The Ghost in the Mill*, she had always wanted to write in the tradition of the ghost story, yet to do it in such a way as to speak about her life experience under communism (Rotaru). Haunted by the ghost of the dictatorship, Ruști tries to exorcise it by translating the life of villagers in the southern part of Romania into a Gothic story of dark secrets, guilt, failed relationships and lost friendships, betrayal, murder, despair, and tyranny. The writer manages to construct an accurate image of countryside Romania under dictatorial rule by deploying Gothic literary convention even in the absence of a Gothic tradition in Romanian literature and, correspondingly, of a Gothic sensibility among Romanian readers. Her novel’s use of Gothic ingredients renders the text darker, but also livelier and, somewhat paradoxically, strongly authentic.

The Ghost in the Mill is made up of three seemingly unconnected stories, each bearing a suggestive title. The first, “The Secret Life of Adela Nicolescu”, is constructed as a meta-story and encompasses many autobiographical elements. The heroine, Adela, discovers in a library a book which seems to tell the story of her life, including secret details of which only she knew. She pursues an investigation on her own and finds out that the author of that book,

Florian Pavel, actually plagiarized the novel from one particular blog on the internet, suggestively named www.ghost.ro. This first part of the novel blends third-person with first-person modes of narration, as the text from the book morphs with Adela's thoughts, opinions, and visions, up to the point in which one cannot tell the difference between Adela's narrative and the story in the novel she bought.

The heroine in Pavel's novel is the young daughter of a primary school teacher (much like Doina Ruști herself), who lives in a village in the south of Romania. Her life is marked by her secret relationship with a ghost, whom she names Max, after a young boy (Maxu) who died in the village mill and whom she believes to have returned to haunt her. Even though, at the beginning, the ghost appears episodically, soon the image of Max becomes all pervasive and in Adela's eyes everyone in the village, from her family to the local authorities, seems to take on Max's physiognomy. The first part ends abruptly, with a return to the first-person narrator, when Adela discovers that in the novel and on the blog her life story is incomplete.

The second part is bulkier, at over two hundred pages, and is indeed the most extensive in the volume. Entitled "The Mill", it is an objective, omniscient, third-person account of life in the village of Adela's childhood a few days after the Chernobyl explosion of 1986. All the inhabitants of the village, including the members of the Securitate (the communist secret police), the militia, the school teacher, the secret-police informants, and the peasants believe that there is a ghost in the mill – the soul of a boy who was murdered there. The community has by now created an entire mythology around the troubled soul in the red mill, which they now regard with a mixture of fear and anxiety, but also with awe and respect.

Besides the ghost in the mill, which the entire community believed existed, the novel also employs several more personal ghosts. Each person in the community thinks they have a ghost of their own, a double which nobody else can see and which torments them for their wrongdoings. At the end of the second part, the mill is demolished on the orders of the local head of the secret police in an attempt to destroy the ghostly entity thought to inhabit it. The demolition of the mill is felt by each individual inhabitant, irrespective of where they were at the hour the place was razed. When the bulldozers penetrate the "flesh" of the mill, the soul of the building spreads in the atmosphere and takes refuge in the souls of the people with which it had long been connected.

The third story is called "Two Days," and presents two episodes in the life of Adela's father, Ion Nicolescu, the local school teacher. The first is a joyful, luminous day in 1910, a time of liberal rule in Romania. The other is set in 1953, roughly half a decade after the coming of communism, and it concerns the dreadful incident to which the first part of the novel had also referred. It is in the account of these two days that the origin of the ghost in the mill is revealed, so the third part connects with and provides the link between the other sections in the novel. It is also worth noting here that even though the novel apparently focuses on the story of Adela Nicolescu and her family, there is in fact no main protagonist. Moreover, a state of amorality or, perhaps more accurately, a sense of suspended moral judgment pervades the story: one cannot state that the characters are intrinsically good or bad, positive or negative, though each of them helps perpetuate in some way the common practices and thereby the prison camp that was Romania under communism.

Although several interpretations may be given to *The Ghost in the Mill* (it can be read as a novel about betrayal, guilt, survival, or the atrocities of communism), it has been argued that it is ultimately a novel about a single entity which haunts people and makes them wonder whether they have lost or won anything over the years – that is, a novel about memory (Axinte). The central ghost is a ubiquitous spectre which colonizes the minds of all individuals, stemming from their past deeds which now resurface in the shape of a troubling image. In so doing, it moves beyond the status of an individual haunting spectre and ultimately embodies the shadow of history, where the shadow can be understood as a state of mind or the emergence of a ghostly phantom from the depths of the historical psyche (Savoy 174). Even though originating in different places, the manifestations of this spectral entity stem from a common source: people's frustrations, doubts, guilt, despair, unanswered questions, dread, hidden secrets and undisclosed desires. They are undeniably brought about by the climate of terror, by people constantly having to look over their shoulders to make sure they are not being watched, although they very well know they are, at all times.

The central spirit that haunts everyone in the novel is, somewhat transparently, the shadow of communist

times. It is a spectre which everyone is aware of, which they all have and cannot escape. Everybody has grown accustomed to carrying it, they often crave for it and occasionally find relief in its manifestations. Individuals even find refuge in its takeover of their minds, to the point of being possessed by another consciousness, until the shadow of the dictatorial regime becomes the double of their existence. Even though it is despised and feared, the odd apparition gives individuals the impression that they are unique, and that they are part of a greater design than their individual lives and personal histories – as communism was often said to be. The spectral appearance is collective, and every member of the community has a ghostly presence following them everywhere. However, each individual has the feeling that their ghost is exceptional, that nobody else is aware of the shadow they carry, whether wrapped around their necks or noticeable on their brow, like guilt and failure. Just as events in the larger, actual history of a community are reflected in personal and group histories, so the shadow of communism haunts every individual and his or her family, friends and neighbours. Thus, the fears and megalomaniacal drives of each individual take the shape of a demon, a ghost who acts as a spiritual double to their concrete existences and represents remains of lost identities which haunt the individuals in key moments of their lives (Axinte).

The origin of this ghost, which soon manages to take possession of the entire village and to spread its gloominess over the entire community, is revealed in the final section of the novel. The eruption of the spectre is directly linked to the coming of communists to the village and to the beginning of the so-called “Systematization” – a 1980s plan which aimed at the systematic “replacement” of Romanian villages with rationally-designed socialist towns. The emergence of this process, aiming to destroy the last traces of traditional structures, the historical and spiritual patrimony of Romanians and of national minorities in this country, is identified in the novel with the haunting shadow which disrupts the quiet life of the community and imposes itself on them as an atrocity. Through “Systematization”, the communists targeted individuals’ last spaces of freedom and refuge, such as the family or local religious communities, which constituted obstacles for social homogenization, for creating the “unique working people” and the “new man” (Berindei 3). The novel refers explicitly to this event in the episode in which young communists come to the teacher’s house to burn his book collection. The teacher’s hopelessness and suffering transcend the immediate reality and are translated into what would soon become the shade of an era:

And then Ion Niculescu’s agony erupted like lava, soared to the sky through the corn tassels, white and hovering, like a ghost... Afterwards, like a floating spirit, it moved in the same feather-like rhythm, over the frozen road, then close to the women standing still in the end-of-autumn haze. Through the fig branches he could see his desperate soul, helpless and surrounded, a ball of bile, sneaking like liquid through the broken window pane, inside the red walls, in the belly of the live mill, to meet its other half, happy and warm, which had been waiting there for forty years.² (Ruști 423)

Moreover, the relationships between all members of the community are altered as a result of the violent way in which the new regime spread its tentacles over the village: the teacher has his book collection burnt by the two boys he had tried hard to help while they were in school, and Lucica, a local young teacher, is raped during a party by the very professor she cherished and respected while she was a student in the same school. All the while children are asked to tell on their parents to Securitate agents, and old friendships are destroyed because the survival instinct forced people to spy on their friends and neighbours. Slowly but implacably, the inhabitants of totalitarian regimes turn into accomplices of their own abusers and oppressors (Miroiu 210). From this moment on, the entire community becomes part of a collective history of suffering, remorse, hopelessness, abuse and fear, initiated by the spread of communism (“...our real decline started one night, when Ceaușescu visited Comoșteni” 114), paralleled by individual and group dramas.

Besides the haunting spectre of communism, there is another ghost, which comes to blend with the former, since they are both results of the atrocities perpetrated by the regime: Max, the ghost of Maxu, a young boy killed in the old mill in the village. Maxu’s murder is a mystery, even though apparently a murderer has been identified – but, as it turns out, the wrong one, a mere scapegoat meant to conceal the real killer, a very influential person who served the party. After Maxu was murdered, rumours were spread that the mill was haunted. It seems that the dark secret of Maxu’s death materializes into the spirit which apparently colonizes the old edifice. The spectral voice might be understood as an example of what Nicolas Abraham calls “the phantom”. He claims that the

departed who are most likely to haunt people are those who were “shamed during their lifetime or those who took unspeakable secrets to the grave”, in other words the individuals who have been abjected by their culture and their descendents. The phantom “is meant to objectify, even if under the guise of individual or collective hallucinations, the gap produced in us by the concealment of some part of a love object’s life ... what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others” (Abraham 171). A relatively similar theory defines the notion of the “crypt”. In Abraham and Torok’s opinion,

Inexpressible mourning erects a secret tomb inside the subject. Reconstituted from the memories of words, scenes and affects, the objectal correlative of the loss is buried alive in the crypt, as a full-fledged person, complete with its own topography. The crypt also includes the actual or supposed traumas that made introjection impracticable. (Abraham 130)

Maxu’s death acts as a disruptive element in the life of the rather small rural community and it provides the latter with a gap that can only be filled with stories of the imagination, feelings and memories, melted into the image of the threatening spirit which resides in the body of the mill.

As a traditional Gothic site, the mill holds some secrets from the past, which haunt the characters, psychologically, physically, or in any other way at the time the story takes place (Hogle 2). In Romanian literature, especially in the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, mills were not an uncommon appearance. In classics such as Gala Galaction’s “Călifăr’s Mill” (1903), for instance, the old building is a very controversial site, said to accommodate the Devil, which lures many young, brave men, who never go back to their homes. Another classic, Ioan Slavici’s *The Mill of Fortune* (1881), introduces a mill as a symbol of prosperity and love, which soon degenerates into a place of domestic violence, revenge and betrayal, eventually to be burnt to the ground. Just like most Gothic locations, the old mill at the heart of Ruști’s novel is at once alluring and threatening for the people in the village. It represents on the one hand a protective space, a space that offers refuge and privacy (preferred by casual lovers and a perfect playground for children, also providing a haven for illegal transactions). On the other hand, the mill also embodies a mysterious, magic, and supernatural space, a place of old secrets buried inside its walls and a scene of odd hauntings (everybody in the village believed that it was haunted by the ghost of Maxu, the young boy killed while playing in its perimeter). The mill thus becomes an uncanny site, an instance of a familiar, recognizable location turned threatening and alien as result of a dreadful event.

In the novel, the image of the mill, looming large and menacing, acting as a reminder of the horrible murder committed inside its walls but also providing refuge when it was needed, is strategically placed at the heart of the village – much like Hawthorne’s scaffold – so that it dominates the local landscape:

The mill stands tall in the middle of the village, an old building made of red brick. It is as tall as a two-storey block and at the end of it there are the stairs, like a winner’s podium, with three steps on the sides... On its façade there is one round window, then five large windows which look like black mouths, and on the top floor there is another small window, like an eyehole. If you look at it from the front, it resembles a giant cross, or a giant with a ragged hat. (173)

The mill’s central location confers it the aura of an axis mundi, and everything in the community seems organized around the enticing mill, to which everyone is eventually drawn, no matter how keen the initial resistance: “Only a few of them haven’t entered the mill yet, after being called, drawn or even forced to sneak in together with the fresh air, which comes in to give up its breath in outbursts born out of the minor histories hidden in the corners of this building standing at the heart of the village.” (174)

However uncanny, it is believed and accepted as a fact by everyone that the old building is inhabited by a ghost: “the mill was the most visited place, but also the most dreaded, as everyone knew it was the den of the spectre haunting the village and subjecting the souls of men” (174). Everyone looks for refuge and privacy inside the old building. But at the same time, because the place was known to offer shelter to people trying to sidestep the system, the mill is one of the places under constant surveillance. Hence, the freedom people sought under its roof was deceiving and illusory: “Within the red walls, under the spell of a ubiquitous ghost, no one could take the chance on freedom. ... Good and bad, without discrimination, they all cuddled satisfied under the same cover which carried the shrewd and shameless face of Max, a being as transient as all of them.” (171)

People's impressions about the old mill and its inhabitant are diverse:

Some people would mention a ghost or an angel in control of the red walls. Others were convinced that what was in there was a lethal force, whose horn pricked the belly of the world. There were also accounts of spectres or unbelievable metamorphoses. ... There were all kinds of stories, about people happy to feel the heart of the mill, but also about people frightened and confused as if under the constant threat of death. (303-5)

The common denominator, however, is people's feeling that, be it good or bad, angel or demon, superstition or real fact, the mysterious inhabitant of the red mill was akin to them and shared their destiny: "No one doubted that within the red walls lay a spirit akin to their spirit, born out of the bliss or misfortunes of several generations" (378). It becomes therefore obvious that what started as the young boy's haunting spectre soon merges with the collective shadow of the era and turns into a ubiquitous, all-encompassing spirit that troubles the entire community.

When the communists come to the village to unleash the "Systematization," the mill is demolished. For the villagers the world changes as everyone loses (and in some sense gains back) a tiny part of themselves:

the village was taken over by yellow bulldozers, followed by a swinging crane, and a couple of tractor trailers. ... It had taken more than a half hour for everyone to comprehend what was actually going on, until the iron claw of the bulldozer penetrated the red wall. ... People would come from everywhere, breathless and convinced that they were all witnesses of a crucial moment. Most of them were accompanied by their very own ghosts, and they could feel their hearts sinking with the shrinking heart of their ghost. (369-70)

The effects that bringing down the mill has on people is dramatic: "Nobody said a word, but they were all seized by a pain stuffed down their throats... Then the great transformation began." (373-4) Trapped in the mill for so long, the energy of unspoken suffering, which survived decades of communism in the shape of a spectre, is finally returning to the community from which it originated: "And then, one by one, everyone welcomed their ghost within the secret crevices of their souls. They received it happy and unperturbed, hidden away from the world..." (374-5). Villagers are shocked to see the enormous body of the old edifice taken down by bulldozers and some even interpret it as a punishment for their wrong-doings, in a fashion similar to the ways in which people interpret natural disasters. The young school teacher Lucica, for instance, believes it to be a consequence of her illegal abortion. Like most people under communism, she has become accustomed to living permanently with guilt, since, as Miroiu has argued, guilt played an important role in the annihilation of resistance to official politics (Miroiu 209). In fact, Lucica's case is more dramatic because she is a woman, a victim of rape, who becomes pregnant and who wants to discard the unborn child. This too was treated as a crime during the dictatorial rule. Under communism, women's oppression was twofold: they were subjugated by the state as well as by men. Their work-day was double: in state-assigned jobs and at home. Besides the fact that they had to obey the patriarchal rule of (communist) men, their rights over their own bodies were limited in a world in which abortion was seen as "intrauterine massacre," not only because it was a "perfidious enemy of the biological future of the people" and altered the "fulfilment of female destiny", but also because it allegedly undermined the independence of the nation, represented an abuse against the "mother country" and the "native land", and diminished the patrimony of the "father party" (Miroiu 209).

Writing *The Ghost in the Mill* in order to exorcise the haunting spectre of communist times, Doina Ruști marks an interesting break with the Romanian literary tradition. In tune with international trends, she follows the pattern of ghost stories to reactivate a dreadful past that would not be stifled or silenced. Through the intrusion of unexplainable spectres in the life of a rural community under dictatorial rule and through the central image of a threatening and luring old mill, Ruști manages to create a Gothic novel born out of a history of fear, secrets, betrayal, guilt and broken ties. In so doing, she moves beyond the magic realism to which many writers resorted in the late communist and early post-communist period in an attempt to escape the levelling pressure of socialist realism and the censorship that came along with it. Although her use of Gothic themes and motifs represents a deviation from both old and new Romanian literary norms, which have never really accommodated the genre, the

negotiation of the collective past with the tools provided by the Gothic ultimately proved successful, bringing the author high critical acclaim and international recognition. Ruști capitalizes on the genre's interest in individual trauma and unrest, in the shattered autonomy of the individual, in the loss of coherence, wholeness and in fragmented consciousnesses, in failed relationships, oppression and suffocating anxiety. She deftly adapts the seemingly unlikely Gothic toolbox to Romanian social realities before December 1989, making the most of the genre's tried and tested disquieting, disruptive potential.

NOTES

1 The Black Man is a darker, more frightening Romanian equivalent of the Bogeyman. The invocation of the Black Man is usually employed to scare little children who misbehave. The Black Man also has a lighter correspondent in Romanian culture (and elsewhere), the closer equivalent of the Western Bogeyman: the Bau-Bau.

2 All excerpts from Doina Ruști's *The Ghost in the Mill* are my translation.

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Raising Veils and other Bold Acts:
The Heroine's Agency in Female Gothic Novels

Kyra Kramer

Female Gothic novels that have been written in the last thirty or so years are often labeled and sold as «romances» or «romantic suspense» rather than as Gothics. This is certainly not to say that all romantic suspense novels are Female Gothics; only that Female Gothic novels are often categorized as romantic suspense. A central romantic relationship in a storyline makes a novel more likely to be categorized as romance by publishers and booksellers, even when the elements and themes of the novels are Gothic. Although the resurgence in

new Gothic romance dates to around 2001 when Dorchester publishing started its «Candleglow» Gothic series, the second series since the mid 1970s to follow closely the rules of the Gothic. [...] However, in a number of ways, the Gothic romance never did fully die out: many Gothic themes could be found in other popular romance lines, particularly «romantic suspense,» «paranormal romance,» and various types of historical romances, particularly those set in the Victorian and Medieval periods. (Lutz 82)

Romance appears to be a good home for the female Gothic genre. After all, a woman's "sexuality and its expression have been central preoccupations of the 'female' Gothic and its criticisms since the eighteenth century" (Munford 58). In earlier Gothic novels there is often a veil, which is "suffused with sexuality" as both an object and subject (Sedgwick 256). Although this veil is less prevalent in Gothic novels written in the last 60 years, the atmosphere and central relationship of the protagonists are often just as suffused with sexuality as the veil had been. Moreover, the plot of the female Gothic has traditionally followed that of "heterosexual romance, the only plot in which culture allows her a leading role", with the added twist that the historical socio-cultural ideal of female passivity within the heterosexual relationship is used as the vehicle of resistive agency for the heroine, so that her "helplessness becomes the means through which she achieves acknowledgment" (Masse 88). In the contemporary female Gothic or romantic suspense novel the heroine is usually no longer under the socialized burden of passivity, and her agency has increased dramatically due to feminist changes in the socio-cultural framework. Further entrenching the female Gothic into romantic suspense is the fact that in both historical and modern female Gothic novels the "heroine's virtue, in the form of her unshakable faith and fortitude, is usually rewarded by ... companionate marriage, a union that is figured as both practical and emotionally fulfilling" (Davison 51). The companionate marriage, or its equivalent, is crucial to the romance genre.

Novels of romantic suspense are centered on a conflict involving a female protagonist which places her in some form of personal danger. Likewise, Female Gothic novels are typically about women who are imperiled in some way, with the addition that the female protagonist is often trapped by either circumstances or a moldering castle, or both (DeLamotte). Both genres attempt to elicit terror/suspense centered on the endangerment of a woman, which begs the question: why are women so popular for creating an atmosphere of engrossing fear? Perhaps it is because a woman "shares with the monster the privilege of bringing out a unique blend of fascination and horror" (Braidotti 65). Women, on a socio-cultural level that is only slowly changing, subconsciously represent abnormality and uncertainty, the antithesis to the masculine ideal. Greek physicians and philosophers imagined that women were "mutilated males" and "monsters", believing that women were the end result of a normal process that had gone 'wrong' and failed to produce a male (Wilshire). Even when the belief in humoral medicine and the 'inside-out' understanding of women's bodies was eclipsed during the eighteenth century by the newly discovered information about the physiological processes and anatomy of the human body, women were still portrayed as

monsters, or abnormal beings that deviated from the normalcy of men (Thompson; Braidotti; Fausto-Sterling; Schiebinger; Urla and Terry). Even modern scientific discourse constructs women, and their biological processes, as abnormal because they are different from the biological processes of men (Fausto-Sterling; Urla and Terry). This monster/woman image has the deeper implication that women, simply by being not male, are anomalies which must be feared and restrained. In the Female Gothic the heroine/monster/protagonist is often trying to escape restraint, and the reader is encouraged to hope that escape will be possible. The charm of the Gothic genre to the female reader may lie in the fact that whether the heroine escapes physically, as Emily St Aubert does in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, or finds a wretched escape into madness, as the protagonist does in 'The Yellow Wallpaper,' it "is the triumph of the threatened woman, who gains control not only despite but through the terms of her subordination" (Masse 50). The monster wins, and the reader is glad of it.

Although women, at least in the West, are no longer subjected to the same level of patriarchal control as they have historically endured, there is still plenty of inequality that would make modern Female Gothic novels "particularly compelling fictions for the many women who read and write them because of their nightmarish figuration of feminine experience" (Heller 14). These nightmarish figurations are not really about the less physically threatening inequalities. There are few spine-tingling Gothic tales about the fact that even in the twenty-first century female "college graduates earn about 73% of what male college graduates earn" (Stone and McKee 67). However, physical and sexual violence against women remains lamentably prevalent in both the public and domestic arenas (Asencio). As an aggregate group women have learned that the threat of violence, from either strangers or domestic partners, is something that must be addressed, even if only as part of an individual's internal conceptualization of the larger social problem. Therefore the imperiled heroine of a Gothic novel is inherently familiar to the female reader. Her level of risk may be exacerbated and exaggerated, or be posed by supernatural dangers, but in essence she is a reflection of women's fear of potential violence. It is little wonder that this genre appeals to the female reader. The female reader intuitively connects the violence and inequity threatening women, problems that she must at least have knowledge of even if she herself has never been a victim, and the danger faced by the heroine of the female Gothic, "whether or not she [the female reader] acknowledges her uncomfortable affinity with the victim and her own risk" (Masse 40).

Seldom, if ever, does the heroine of the Female Gothic, in either its original form, or in its modern incarnations, passively submit to the dangers surrounding her. Instead the heroine utilizes her agency to promote her own interests and well-being and those of the people she loves. The term 'agency' is used here in its anthropological sense. Agency can be defined as the "socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (Ahearn 112), in other words, what a person can do within the framework of his or her social and cultural reality to resist or support aspects of that reality, either as an individual or as a member of a larger group. Although the concept of agency should not be erroneously conflated with either power or resistance, resistance is frequently the most pronounced aspect of the heroine's agency, mainly because "the female Gothic is animated to a large extent by an antiauthoritarian spirit" (Heller 15). Therefore, the agency of the heroine addressed in this essay will often be that agency which furthers her resistance to patriarchal ideology. Nevertheless, I do not wish to give the false impression that resistance is the heroine's only form of agency. The agency of the Female Gothic heroine is often a mixture of resistance to, and support of, the socio-cultural matrix, a common "characteristic of women's writing: a double voice of both rebellion and acquiescence to convention" (Heller 16). This double voice is clearly heard in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Emily St. Aubert advises her aunt, Madame Montoni, to placate her villainous husband, Signor Montoni:

'if you consult your own peace, you will try to conciliate Signore Montoni, rather than to irritate him by reproaches.'

◁Conciliate indeed! I tell you, niece, it is utterly impossible; I disdain to attempt it.▷

Emily was shocked to observe the perverted understanding and obstinate temper of Madame Montoni; but not less grieved for her sufferings she looked around for some alleviating circumstance to offer her, ◁Your situation is, perhaps, not so desperate, dear madam ... so long as you keep [your

property], you may look forward to it as a resource, at least that will afford you a competence, should the Signore's future conduct compel you to sue for separation.> (282-283)

Emily is clearly not advising that her aunt acquiesce to all Signore Montoni's demands, and even goes so far as to remind her aunt that the recourse of a legal separation was a valid option, but she also reinforces the patriarchy's control by suggesting her aunt try to soothe the Signore by being meek. Madame Montoni's right to be angry and to fight back against her husband's treatment is presented as unfeminine and less important than her wifely obligation to assuage his anger at her resistance. Thus, the heroine both resists and supports cultural dictates. Within Radcliffe's socio-cultural context, placating the patriarchal authority of one's husband was likely the best course of action for one's emotional and physical safety. Emily's agency in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* demonstrates that from the beginning the Female Gothic novel has been the "site of ideological conflict, a vehicle through which at once to criticize domesticity and to pose its values as a barrier against rebellion and social change" (Heller 37). Thus, it can be argued that the Female Gothic quickly evolved into "a coded system whereby female authors covertly communicated to other women ... their ambivalent rejection of and outward complicity with the dominate ... ideologies of their culture" (Hoeveler 5).

As cultural expectations and roles for women change, so too do the ways in which the heroine's agency is manifested, particularly in forms of resistance to the model of the passive women. The heroines of Female Gothic novels that were written in the later half of the twentieth century, even those that predate the Women's Liberation Movement, "are certainly not characterized in traditional submissive/dependent terms" (Ruggiero and Watson 296). These works largely reject the earlier Female Gothic novels' proclivities for "blaming women's woes not on a male-dominated familial system, but on those women who have imperfectly assumed their domestic duties" (Heller, 1992:21). In Victoria Holt's 1963 novel *Bride of Pendorrac* her heroine, Favel, is in love with her husband and wants him to be happy, but when she feels threatened and endangered she suspects him, without assuming that she has failed in her role as wife. From the first paragraph of the novel Favel tells the reader, "I had married a man who had seemed to me all that I wanted in a husband ... then suddenly it was as though I were married to a stranger"(1). Her husband is mysterious and becomes a source of "fear and terror" for the heroine (11). The hero, not some imagined lack in the heroine, is clearly the source of domestic unease.

Furthermore, the heroines in twentieth century Female Gothic novels are often pointedly contrasted to the more passive stereotype of women, wherein the "heroine is more likely to be characterized as playing a nontraditional sex-role, whereas the supporting or minor female actor is more likely to be characterized as playing a traditional sex-role" (Ruggiero and Weston 283). The heroine's non-traditional qualities, which may even be qualities culturally assigned to masculinity, such as determination, independence, and strong-will, are highlighted when her behavior is compared with the more passive actions of the non-heroine. Since the reader, usually a female, is encouraged to approve and admire the heroine's resistance, many of the later Female Gothics may be justly be credited with providing positive, even feminist, role models for female readers (Ruggiero and Watson). In Mary Stewart's 1955 novel, *Madam, Will You Talk?* the heroine still faints (114) in the style of Emily St. Aubert, but she has much more agency to fight back or resist the antagonist. The heroine tricks the antagonist and takes control of his convertible, and with her "hands on the wheel, [she] felt suddenly, beautifully, icily cool" (293), and when the villain, who is clinging to the car, tries to climb in, she attempts to sling him off by giving the "wheel a jerk that sent the car across the road in a sickening, screeching swerve" (293). Victoria Holt's 1962 novel *Kirkland Revels*, features a pregnant heroine who uses her intellect and logic to discover her husband's murderer. The heroine's agency is significant because it defies the cultural construction that pregnant women are unreasonable and too emotional, a cultural belief that had exceptional strength during the time when the novel was written. Clearly, the modern female Gothic novel frequently counters negative socio-cultural assumptions about women, presenting heroines who are active and rational instead of passive and controlled by their emotions.

In this essay I will analyze four contemporary romantic suspense novels that I believe are clearly Gothic in tone, in order to demonstrate how the agency of the heroine, especially her agency of resistance, has evolved within the genre of the Female Gothic/romantic suspense. All four novels are the work of Elizabeth Lowell. I chose

Lowell for several reasons. First, she has written novels, both with her husband and under various pseudonyms, in many different genres, including science fiction, romance, mystery, and historical fiction. Therefore, the Gothic elements of her romantic suspense are specific for those books, not a habitual writing style associated with her conceptualization of 'suspense'; several of her romantic suspense novels are not Gothic in nature. Secondly, she is a very successful author, with over 30 million books in print and several prestigious awards for her writing, including seven nominations for science fiction's Nebula Award and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Romance Writers of America. Finally, I chose these novels by Elizabeth Lowell because they had some of the clearest examples of Female Gothic influence in contemporary romantic suspense. The castles may have given way to major urban areas and villainous uncles may have been replaced with villainous international politics, but the heroine is still endangered and there are many veils that must still be lifted.

The chosen novels all feature siblings from the Donovan family in the role of either hero or heroine. As in the Gothic tradition, the heroines of the novels are all threatened by "mammoth social institutions whose power transcends the power of any individual", and although their fears are not necessarily centered on a supernatural occurrence, they are focused on "social forces so vast and impersonal that they seem to have supernatural strength" (DeLamotte 17). In the novels the social forces are those of competing international governments, including the United States. Although the heroines are citizens of the US, it is made very clear that the government, referred to only as Uncle, will sacrifice them in the name of international politics. All the heroines must use their own wits, bravery, and cunning to escape peril, and each is assisted by a hero whom she suspects might be a villain. Central to the mystery of each novel is the recovery of a jewel/artifact that has both socio-historical value and rumored supernatural properties. Furthermore, the setting of each novel emphasize the physical or social isolation of the heroine, often including an secluded home where the heroine is not safe. Although there are no castles or veils, the threatening Uncle who should protect the heroine but doesn't, physical isolation, dangerous situations, supernatural mystery, and hero/villain are all indubitably Gothic in nature.

Lowell heightens the Gothic ambiance of her novels by giving the reader information the hero and/or heroine does not have, so that when the heroine does something seemingly innocuous, like take a walk or open a door, the reader is filled with dread that the heroine is in grave danger. It functions very much like the soundtrack in a movie. The watcher/reader can heed the warning, but the heroine cannot. In analyzing Lowell's novels, I will be upfront with all the information germane to the storyline, even though the knowledge is scattered throughout the text, placed in a context that will warn the reader, but not the heroine, of the danger or betrayal facing her. Although my decision compresses Lowell's novels into a seemingly chronological synopsis, I believe the storyline needs to be explicit in order to demonstrate that it is Lowell's writing style and emphasis on fear that distinguishes her work as romantic suspense and/or Gothic rather than romantic adventure.

The first novel in the series is *Amber Beach* (1997). The heroine, Honor Donovan, is desperately trying to find her missing brother, Kyle. Her other brothers, including the eldest and most authoritative, Archer, are all in the former Soviet Union, where Kyle was last seen. Complicating matters is the fact that Kyle is wanted by both the Russian authorities and Uncle because he is suspected of having stolen a panel of the famed Amber Room. The Amber Room was a room paneled entirely with amber that was once located in the Catherine Palace in St. Petersburg, Russia. It was looted by the Nazis in World War II and disappeared, inspiring a treasure hunt for many who hoped that the amber had survived intact somewhere. Kyle may hold the key to the location of the Amber Room, which makes his whereabouts interesting to more than his family; the Russian government, Uncle, and members of a Russian crime syndicate all want the Amber Room and are trying to find Kyle as well.

Honor is living at Kyle's isolated cabin on the coast of the Pacific Northwest in an attempt to find out if her brother's boat holds any clues about his disappearance. She is a jewelry designer with no experience in private investigation, and is terrified that her brother desperately needs her help but she has no idea how to get to him. Her only possible lead, his boat, is worse than useless to her because she does not know how to operate the boat and she is petrified of small water craft. Honor's sense of helplessness and ineffectiveness is exacerbated by Archer, who dismissively tells her to "Pack up ... Go on back home and design gemmy little knickknacks" (p.12). But Honor,

like nearly all Gothic heroines, isn't about to passively go home and wait for men to bring her news. She resolves that it "would be a cold day in hell before she tamely packed her bags and left" (p.12). Instead, despite her fear, she advertises for a fishing guide and plans to learn how to operate her brother's boat.

The fishing guide she hires is Jake Mallory, the novel's hero/villain. Honor knew from the first time she saw Jake that he "was trouble" but "her instincts said that he was a better candidate for the job than the others" (1-2). She was right on both counts. Like many Gothic hero/villains Jake is virile and there is clearly a sexual attraction between him and Honor, yet there is a secret from his past that he is keeping from her. Although he is an accomplished mariner and fisherman, and can indeed teach her what she needs to know, that is not his intention. He was Kyle's friend and fellow mineralogist, but he is now convinced Kyle set him up to take the blame for the theft of the Amber Room panel. Jake plans on using Honor to find Kyle, and the missing Amber Room panel, in order to free himself from suspicion. He does not trust Honor, and refuses to let his attraction to her influence him. He assures himself that she "may look as sweet as a Girl Scout selling cookies, but when she advertised for a fishing guide, she had declared her entry into an international treasure hunt whose only rule was winner take all" (6).

In turn, Honor does not trust him, and refuses to let her attraction to him make her foolish or vulnerable. However, she cannot help but notice that he had a "wry, sexy curve to his mouth" (p.22). She is also drawn to his attributes that have been most culturally constructed as masculine qualities, such as control and physicality, admiring the way "his body was relaxed, confident, utterly at home on the unpredictable surface of the sea" (57). Yet she is also always aware there is something dangerous about him, frequently thinking of him as the Big Bad Wolf and herself as Little Red Riding Hood. Nevertheless, Honor does not respond to him with passivity or meekness, in the hopes he will use his masculinity to protect her. Instead she hires him, reminds him that he is only a paid guide if she feels he is being patronizing, responds to all his verbal sallies with a sharp wit, and in general stands up for herself firmly and with vigor.

Honor's brave front belies the fear she feels almost constantly. Not just fear for her brother, or her phobia of boats, but fear for her personal safety. She gets multiple phone calls that, when she picks up the receiver, have only silence on the other end. She feels "foolish for being uneasy" about the calls, but she cannot help "remembering one particular candidate for the job of fishing guide ... His eyes were greedy, shiny. Reptilian. The kind of man you never want to meet in fog-draped twilight" (83). The cabin itself is also a source of disquietude. It is remote and is surrounded by deep forest and frequent fogs. It has incongruous and expensive new locks on its door and windows that make her wonder who, or what, they are designed to keep out. She felt that "the newly installed locks taunted her with all that she didn't know about Kyle, missing amber, and questions Archer wouldn't answer" (104). But her misgivings about the cabin are not enough to drive her away; she is determined to find her brother.

Despite her lack of information, and her inability to utilize the boat by herself, Honor still has agency. She hires Jake to help her run the boat. She safeguards the boat from theft by taking the "rotor cap out of the distributor [so that the boat's] engine won't start" (102). She goes through Kyle's electronics, including the chart plotter, fish finder, and depth sounder on his boat, searching for clues to his whereabouts. When an intruder breaks into the cabin, Honor "wanted to pull the covers over her head [or] scream down the house", but she instead "went to the window ... shoved it upward with all her strength and then kicked through the bottom half of the opening, taking out the screen as she went through. She stumbled when she hit the ground, recovered, and ran" (186-187). It would have been foolish beyond belief to have confronted a possibly armed intruder. Fortunately, female Gothic heroines, no matter the level of agency they possess, are rarely stupid. They are "clever, independent women" who do not expect to be rescued or dominated by "a man who is stronger or more clever" (Ruggiero and Weston 296).

Once Honor realizes that all other avenues of search are failing her she decides to enlist Jake's aid, because she knows "her brother needed her help. She was certain of it. She just didn't know how to give it to him. With Jake along, she felt better about her chances of finding Kyle" (139). Exercising prudent caution, she does not immediately reveal all she knows to Jake. Although she must rely on Jake's superior strength and combat training

to help her rescue her brother, it is Honor who eventually discovers where Kyle was hidden. Manipulating the options on the boat's chart plotter and depth sounder, "Honor punched in Kyle's password, which could be rendered in numbers or as a word ... the picture on the chart plotter flickered, then went blank ... the screen flickered again, then called up a different chart" (346-347). Honor and Jake follow the newly revealed chart to a small atoll in the San Juan Islands, accessible only by boat.

When they reach the islet Honor wants to go to ashore to search for Kyle with Jake. When Jake explains that in this situation, with no combat experience and the possibility that he might mistake her for an enemy in a firefight, she would be much more of a hindrance than a help, Honor agrees to remain on the boat. However, she makes sure Jake understands that if she thinks he or "Kyle is hurt ... Then I'll do what I think is best, up to and including going ashore" (354-355). She is reasonable, but fully aware of her agency at all times. When her brother and Jake are cornered by the Russians who are also trying to find the Amber Room panel, Honor is trapped on the boat several feet from the beach where the men are threatened. There are two Russians pointing guns at Jake and Kyle, but during a brief moment of distraction, Honor "yanked her fishing rod out of the holder and sent the lure flying with every ounce of her strength. Eight ounces of lead and treble hook thudded into the back of [one Russian's] head" (372). This allows Jake to disarm his opponent while Kyle disarms the second Russian.

The novel ends happily with both Jake and Kyle cleared of all suspicion of wrongdoing, and the Russians are turned over to Uncle. The hero/villain is now clearly simply the hero, and the heroine's happiness is assured; she is rewarded for her fortitude and courage by both her brother's return and a companionate marriage. Without her use of her agency to solve mysteries and lift symbolic veils, all while in great personal danger, the happy ending would not have been possible.

The second book in the Donovan series is *Jade Island* (1998). The Donovan sibling in this novel is Kyle, and the heroine is Lianne Blakley. Lianne is a jade expert and the illegitimate daughter of a powerful and wealthy member of the Tang family, a group of Chinese-Canadian kindred who were originally from Hong Kong, and his white American mistress. The Tangs are famous for their jade collection and are rumored to have the Jade Emperor. This descriptive phrase is most often used to refer to one of the most important Taoist gods, but in the novel the term also refers to a suit of armor made of jade plaques, sewn together with gold spun into threadlike wires, that was rumored to have been found in the tomb of an ancient Chinese emperor. An incredibly wealthy, and incredibly crass, US magnate named Dick Farmer has reportedly purchased the Jade Emperor for roughly forty million dollars. Since it is an importance artifact of Chinese culture, China is "having an international hissy fit" and is threatening to "break off all relations with the US" (13). Uncle needs to find out if the armor Farmer owns is real. Kyle is a jade expert, and since "Uncle thinks the Tangs swiped the [Jade Emperor] and sold [it] to Farmer" (14), Kyle is instructed to get close to the Tang family, via Lianne. For her part, Lianne has been instructed by her father to introduce herself to Kyle Donovan, without telling her why. Lianne does not like being told to meet Kyle, fearful that she is being treated by her father as though she were a potential mistress for a powerful man with whom the Tangs wish to form a business alliance. However, since her father tells her it is important to the family, and Lianne is desperate to be loved and accepted by her father's family, she agrees. Lianne is bewildered by her father's request, and more bewildered still by the "chill, prickly certainty that she was being watched" (26). Worse, she discovers that her grandfather Tang's jade collection is being removed from his vaults piece by piece and is being replaced with similar items of inferior quality. One of the things stolen is the Jade Emperor, an artifact that no one outside the family should even know is real, let alone in the possession of the Tangs. To her dismay, she finds out some Tangs believe she is the most likely suspect for the thefts. Consistent with female Gothic novels, the heroine is given incomplete information, is in possible physical danger, has a mystery to solve, and has begun a relationship with a man she both desires and distrusts.

Lianne's agency is more limited than Honor's, in that she must negotiate familial tensions, clearing her name without casting blame on other members of the Tang lineage, while she also tries to integrate the disparate halves of her cultural heritage. The Tangs view Lianne as an inexplicable Westerner without any real connection to the family, since she is only the daughter of a mistress. Her half-brother refers to her as "little bastard girl" (158), and

the older members of her father's family have "no patience for Western women" (300). This view of Lianne is understood best in the cultural context of Hong Kong, where the negative aspects of the West are "disrespect for authority, family breakdown, and immorality" (Wong 271), a perspective which inspires the Tangs to see Lianne as possibly dangerous to the family hierarchy. In turn, Lianne sees the Tang's Eastern views of her as rooted in authoritarianism and misogyny. Further complicating Lianne's relationship with her paternal kin is the fact that the Tang family is a major client of hers, so a large chunk of her income as a jade consultant is dependent on their continued support. The bulk of her personal agency has been devoted to trying, with no success, to win the love of the Tangs, without completely compromising her more Western values of female independence. She learned to speak fluent Chinese, devoted her life to jade, and worked hard to catalog her grandfather's jade collection, all without reward. Lianne often pushes aside her own needs and concerns in an attempt to placate the Tang family. This is made clear from her attempt to deal with Chinese businessman Han Wu Seng:

Seng wanted her ... What worried Lianne was that [her grandfather Tang] was eager to form a liaison with Seng, hoping it would lead to the Tangs being viewed with more favor by the mainland Chinese. While she didn't care about Tang ambitions, for both personal and professional reasons she didn't want to anger her grandfather. (38)

Lianne does her best to exercise her agency without angering Seng, disappointing the Tangs, or pushing Kyle away. She asks Kyle to allow Seng to believe she and Kyle are dating; Seng's desire to do business with Kyle's family forces him to leave Lianne alone while she is with Kyle. The Tangs are not be angry with her because she has done what they have requested, met Kyle, without antagonizing Seng. Kyle very quickly becomes a convenient person to have on hand. Lianne's feeling that she is being watched increases, which makes Kyle's physical presence and combat experience reassuring. She and Kyle arrange to exchange favors; he will be her escort and she will teach him more about jade. Lianne makes sure Kyle understands that she is not proposing a sexual relationship when she tells him point blank, "all I'm scratching is your jade itch" (45). Although she would do quite a bit to make the Tangs happy she absolutely refuses to use her body to do so. Thus, she displays the usual female Gothic heroine's moral superiority.

Lianne spends much of the novel battling Tang assumptions that she will follow in her mother's footsteps and become a mistress. Part of the problem is that several of the Tang men, including Lianne's grandfather, are old enough to still embrace the traditional Chinese view of daughters. Until the mid twentieth century Chinese women "belonged to, rather than in their families. They could be legitimately sold because of poverty, to pay off gambling debts, to become a wife or concubine, [or] into a brothel" (Pearson 92). Bearing in mind that agency is both reinforcement of, and resistance to, one's culture, Lianne demonstrates agency both when she complies with some aspects of her family's needs and when she resists their directives. Lianne hopes to please her family, but never past the point where her autonomy or morals are compromised. Tang presuppositions and Lianne's agency are shown markedly when she takes Kyle to a party hosted by the Tangs:

Lianne stepped into the smokey room and scanned it quickly for familiar faces. Two things registered immediately. The first was that only Tang men had been included in the party. The second was the nature of the women who had been invited to serve the men. All were young, striking, and for hire ... Lianne wanted to start by turning around and heading back to the elevator, but it was too late. [Her father] was already heading across the foyer ... "I knew I could count on Lianne's sense of duty," [her father] said with a big smile ... He turned to Lianne and spoke in rapid Cantonese. "You did well ... After we make the necessary introductions ... help the others serve drinks" ... Lianne's eyelids flinched, the only outward sign of her sudden fury. "I think not, Mr. Tang. I am not a trained companion. Nor am I an untrained one." ... [Her father said] "You would do better to remember that you are here at the sufferance of the family of Tang" ... [Lianne replied] "I have an excellent memory .. It is my only value for the family of Tang. As for my manners, they are what one would expect from the daughter of an adulterer and his paramour." ... Johnny looked like a man who had just taken a slap across the face and was about to return the favor (111-113).

There is a long tradition in the Gothic genre of powerful male figures putting pressure on heroines to enter into unwelcome sexual relationships with other men, and Gothic heroines have almost always fought against that pressure. Emily St. Aubert, who is usually extremely mild mannered, strongly rejects Signore Montoni's attempts to pressure her into a union with Count Morano. Upon being told that he has all but accepted Morano's marriage proposal on her behalf, Emily replies that "If you have condescended to be my agent, it is an honor I did not solicit. I myself have constantly assured Count Morano, and you also, sir, that I never can accept the honor he offers me, and now I repeat the declaration." (199). Lianne, like Emily, will not give in to bullying on the essential point of who she will love, physically or emotionally. When Kyle insists that she be treated with respect, and not like any of the other hired women at the party, Lianne begins to feel emotionally, as well as physically, attracted to him. His essential respect for her makes him desirable.

Fear of forced sexual relations is also a relatively common theme in female Gothic. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Emily is accosted by Count Morano in her bedchamber, and only escapes sexual assault because the Count did not intend forcible violation. He instead begs her to flee with him, an act they both know will force her into marriage and the consequent physical intimacy she does not want. So great is Emily's desire to avoid a forced marriage that she rejects Morano's attempt to rescue her. She firmly tells him, "Allow me to thank you for the interest you express in my welfare, and to decide by my own choice. I shall remain under the protection of Signore Montoni" (263).

In common with Emily, Lianne is afraid of being raped by a would-be suitor. She is sent to Seng's private island to deliver jade goods from the Tangs. Seng makes it very clear he expects Lianne to service him sexually. She forces Seng away using karate, but she is outnumbered and is in very serious danger. Fortunately, she has Kyle with her, and he helps her escape. Lianne confronts her father with this information. Her father attempts to defend his patriarch. He believes that his father is not "a cruel man. He wouldn't have set up his granddaughter's rape" (304). He argues that "A liaison with Seng would have benefited Lianne greatly ... he is known to be generous with his women ... it never occurred to the Tangs that Lianne wouldn't be open to Seng's offer ... it's not as though she was a virgin" (304-305). Lianne is angry and challenges her father, "If Kyle hadn't been with me, how much choice would I have had about becoming one of Seng's women?" (305). Far from being passive, Lianne does not hesitate to confront the patriarchal authority of her family when she believes she has been treated wrongly.

Kyle, despite Lianne's worries that he is only using her to get to the Tang jade, rescues her in multiple situations where she has very little agency for resistance. For the first time she has someone she can count on to assist her. Although she tries very hard to rescue herself using her intelligence and karate skills, without Kyle's help she would have been raped by Seng, imprisoned by Uncle, and then murdered by a Chinese crime syndicate. It is very difficult for even the toughest heroine to prevail if the forces ranged against her are of sufficient strength to overwhelm her agency. Lianne's family, instead of helping her in any way, actively add to her danger. Her half-brother is aiding Uncle's prosecution of her for jade theft, her grandfather is carelessly giving Seng opportunities to rape her, and two of her uncles are behind the murder attempt. In this case her best source of agency is to ask for Kyle's help and the help of his powerful family. She is afraid that she is a "fool to believe in Kyle" (295) but she must take that risk.

Once Lianne has allies, her agency increases dramatically. She accompanies Archer, Kyle and their brother-in-law Jake as they attempt to steal back the Jade Emperor from Dick Farmer's private island, replace it with an inferior copy, and return the original to her grandfather. She uses courage and her jade expertise to make the substitution, something which the men could not have done successfully without her. When they are at most risk of being caught, it is Lianne's quick thinking and daring which saves them. The small plane on which they have loaded the Jade Emperor is prevented from taking off by two guards in a jeep who are blocking the runway. Lianne, with the help of a sharp knife, strips down to only bikini underpants in order to distract the guards and to offer a plausible reason why the plane was lingering at the end of the runway. She boarded the plane quickly, and while the men got away she convinced the guards that she was only on board so she and the pilot could have sex during the flight. Without Lianne's cunning, the plan would have failed. When given a chance at agency she proved herself as resourceful and tough as any other female Gothic heroine.

As benefits the happy ending of a female Gothic novel, Lianne is rewarded for her courage and virtue, not only

with a happy marriage, but also with the family bonds she craved. Kyle confronted the Tangs and vehemently told them, “She has a family ... Mine. There isn’t a Donovan who wouldn’t go to war for her. Pass the word ... Lianne isn’t alone anymore” (373). Additionally, she gains the acceptance of the Tang family. Her grandfather acknowledges their kinship and promises to give her and Kyle several pieces of valuable jade as a wedding present. Due to her own bravery and moral superiority, the heroine has gotten everything she wants.

The third Lowell novel I am analyzing is *Pearl Cove* (1999). The hero of this novel is the eldest Donovan brother, Archer. The heroine is Hannah, the young widow of his half-brother, Len. Archer is co-owner of Pearl Cove, the pearl farming operation Len and Hannah were running in Australia. Len was emotionally abusive to Hannah, but since she believed he had saved her life she felt honor-bound to stay with him. Moreover, Len had been left a paraplegic in a fight, and she felt she couldn’t leave him without risking what was left of his fragile mental health. Also affecting her decision to stay was the fact that she had no close friends or family so she did not see any way to leave him. Len’s only quest in life, and one he coerced Hannah to assist him with, was the creation of the Black Trinity, a perfect necklace of black rainbow pearls he insisted would, miraculously, heal him. He was murdered by someone attempting to learn the secret of how the black rainbows were cultured.

After Len’s death Hannah was in desperate danger as well. The Chinese government, a Chinese triad (a mafia-like crime syndicate), the Australian government, and Uncle all want the secret of the black rainbows. That secret could shift the balance of power in the world pearl market, which in turn could shift political power. She is nearly powerless in the face of such overwhelming forces. At the very least her agency is severely limited. She has only one ally, Archer Donovan. She knows he has dealt with international intrigue previously and that he has a powerful family and governmental connections, but she also fears him because she believes him to be as ruthless and cruel as Len had been. Nevertheless, her best option for her personal safety is to request his help. She calls him and asks him to come to Australia, without delay. She warns him that she is nearing her physical limits when she tells him, “Hurry, Archer. I’m getting ... sleepy” (31). She confesses to him that, “I don’t know the secret of producing the rainbow pearls ... And if the vultures circling around Pearl Cove discover my ignorance, I suspect that my life won’t be worth a handful of broken shell” (52).

The only way Hannah will be safe is to find the Black Trinity and sell it, allowing her to give her half of Pearl Cove to Archer and set herself up in a business not involved in pearl production. However, in order to find the Black Trinity, she and Archer “will have to find Len’s murderer. Whoever killed him took the pearls” (50). Disguised as rich tourists, Hannah and Archer begin to scour the pearl markets of Hong Kong and Seattle, looking for the missing necklace. Hannah has the most chance to display her agency in this setting. She quickly proves herself an able actress by skillfully performing whatever role is best suited to uncovering information from pearl merchants. She also exercises her agency by refusing Archer’s offer of marriage. Instead of collapsing gratefully into his arms, safe from further danger, she rejects his conjugal protection because she fears that he is as ferocious as her first husband. She tells Archer that “you’re like Len! Great smile, great body, and underneath it all as cold a bastard as ever walked the earth. That kind of ruthlessness makes love impossible” (214). Like Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, she would rather remain in danger than marry without love and affection on both sides. Hannah has not yet realized that Archer is the Valancourt of her story, not Morano.

Hannah’s agency takes a particularly brave form when she risks her life to save Archer. In an attempt to recover the Black Trinity, Archer arranges a meeting with a former Pearl Cove worker. Hannah comes too, although Archer tried very hard to stop her. It turns out to be a good thing that she is so determined. At the meeting, a “flicker of movement along the wall behind his (Archer’s) back caught her eye. Even as her brain registered the fact there was a gun barrel glinting through a narrow slit, she screamed and launched herself at Archer’s shoulders, knocking him over and out of harm’s way” (322).

The fear she felt when Archer’s life was in danger causes Hannah to reevaluate her feelings toward him. She realizes that Archer could be hurt, not just physically, but also emotionally. Hannah reasoned that “if he could hurt, he could love” (369). She admits to him that her refusal of his marriage offer was based on “fear and – and cowardice. I was so afraid to trust again ... I want you and I am so ruddy scared” (375-376). Although the mystery

of Len's murder was solved, the Black Trinity was recovered, and Pearl Cove was sold, the heroine's greatest accomplishment is her emotional recovery. A companionate marriage could only be hers after she displayed true bravery and fortitude, a dividend resulting from the courage to embrace emotion.

The final novel to date in the Donovan series is *Midnight in Ruby Bayou* (2000). The heroine in this novel is Faith Donovan, and the hero is Owen Walker, the bodyguard assigned to protect her after a suspicious break-in at her store. Faith travels to Savannah, GA to bring a close friend, Mel, a wedding present she designed using rubies sent by Mel's soon-to-be father-in-law, Davis Montegeau. What no one but Davis knows is that the rubies are part of an illegal shipment sent to him by a Russian crime syndicate, or mafia. Davis only recently learned that the shipment accidentally included the famed ruby Heart of Midnight, which the mafia boss must replace in the museum it was stolen from or his life will be forfeit. The Heart of Midnight is a ruby "bigger than a walnut and surrounded by tear shaped natural pearls" (329). Davis, knowing that the ruby has been stolen from his safe, tells the mafia that he sent the stone to Faith. He agrees to help the mafia retrieve the ruby, knowing Faith doesn't have it and hoping they will blame Faith for its disappearance. On Davis's suggestion, Mel innocently asks Faith and Walker to come and stay at Ruby Bayou, the Montegeau's crumbling ancestral plantation house.

Ruby Bayou can be accurately described as Gothic. Physically, Ruby Bayou doesn't look like the typical centerpiece of a Gothic novel. It is a "two-story white plantation house ... [with] double galleries supported by pillars around both stories of the house ... Though nothing looked dangerous, there was a definite sag along one side of the lower gallery ... both the grounds and the house need the kind of maintenance only money could bring. A lot of money" (198-199). However, the setting and legends surrounding the house place it firmly in the Gothic genre. The house is isolated deep in a low country swamp, with no other habitation in sight. As Faith and Walker near the house, "brackish water winked like alligator eyes in the scrub, marking the slow dissolving of land into marsh and marsh into sea ... live oaks bearing burdens of shrived resurrection ferns and silvery Spanish moss appeared Pools of black water became a slow creek coiling across the nearby flatland, imprisoned like an immense snake between banks of dense trees" (194).

Living at Ruby Bayou is Davis's sister, the gentle and insane Aunt Tiga. She was raped by her own father as a young girl and the baby she conceived as a result was either stillborn or killed by its grandmother at birth. Tiga takes one look at Faith and faints, convinced the heroine is the ghost/spirit of her dead daughter. Faith finds Tiga to be "fascinating, eerie, and frightening by turns. Her eyes were twilight gray, haunted by something unspeakably sad, unspeakably terrible" (216). Tiga believes she hears the voices of murdered souls, including the ghost of a teenage girl crying "like a bird, let-me-go, let-me-go, please-let-me, let-me-please" (292). Unliving at Ruby Bayou is the resident ghost, the Crying Girl. The ghost is believed to be either a daughter who was incestuously raped, like Tiga, or the baby resulting from that incest. The ghost, "walks the dark places at midnight, looking for her lost soul or the baby that was taken away from her at birth by her own mother and drowned in the marsh" (199). The heroine, who did not believe in ghosts, hears the "keening wail of a girl buried in grief", which causes cold chills to "prickle down Faith's arms and spine" (208-209). There is also a missing family treasure, the Blessing Chest. Mel told Faith that the lost Blessing Chest was a small silver casket into which "Every generation was supposed to add a special piece of ruby jewelry or a particularly fabulous lose ruby ... Kind of a tradition and superstition at once. The generations that fed the chest rubies and other goodies got rich. The ones that took without giving back got poor" (178). Tiga tries to explain to the others that the rubies in the Blessing Chest are really souls, and tells her nephew he must put rubies into the lost casket because "If enough rubies weep, your generation won't" (235). No one knows where the Blessing Chest is hidden, except possibly Tiga, who assures Faith that she "put something very special in the chest for you, for me. A soul to set us free" (235). However, with Tiga's insanity it is impossible to separate fact from her private fantasies.

Some of the things that are haunting Ruby bayou are much more mundane. A mafia hitman is watching the house, trying to find out where Faith has put the Heart of Midnight, unaware that she has no idea that such a ruby even exists. FBI agents are watching the house because they know Davis is in debt to the mob, and hope that when the mobsters "start breaking knees ... Davis will get scared enough to roll over" and testify in court (259). Unknown to the FBI agents, CIA agents are watching the house for the same reason as the hitman, wanting to

get the ruby back so they can keep the mafiya boss in Russia safe, since he is a double agent for Uncle. Faith is totally incognizant of this convoluted political storm swirling around her so she doesn't know why the "feeling of being watched had crept through her, overcoming the peace she had felt for a time. She was sure she was being watched" (289). It is easy for her to dismiss her feelings as paranoia, or nerves, because she does not have a frame of reference for understanding why she would be stalked. Walker is aware of much more, but he does not share his information with Faith because he is 'protecting' her from worry. However, in the female Gothic, "Too much innocence is hazardous ... to a heroine's health. She needs knowledge, not protection from the truth" (Ellis xiii).

Faith finds her frame of reference shortly after Davis and his son Jeff stage a robbery to make it look as though Faith's rubies have been stolen. But the rubies are already gone from the safe when Jeff opens it. Walker and Faith, acting on their suspicions, browbeat a confession from Jeff and Davis. Faith finally learns about the missing Heart of Midnight. She is livid when she figures out how much Walker already knew. "Anger seethed just beneath her calm. With every question Walker asked, he showed just how much he knew. And how little he had told her ... Walker simply didn't trust her to have enough sense to come in out of the rain" (322). It soon becomes apparent that the only way they can keep Faith out of danger is to find the ruby. Faced with a situation of, literally, life or death, she reconciles with Walker.

Now that Faith knows just what is going on around her, she can begin to manifest her agency. First, she refuses to be bundled back to Seattle for her own safety. She intends to help solve this mystery and defend herself. Secondly, she is the one who figures out that Tiga really knows where the Blessing Chest is hidden. She connects Tiga's rambling descriptions of 'a crown of thorns with blood at the tips' and other oblique descriptions with jewelery worn by women in old Montegeau portraits. When Tiga mentions a 'soul' encircled by "gems that are as white as blood is red. Angel tears" (350), Faith discerns she means a ruby ringed by pearls and realizes that Tiga has seen the Heart of Midnight, which she must have put it in the Blessing Chest. Faith and Walker bait a trap for Tiga, putting the ruby necklace Faith made for Mel into the Montegeau's safe. They wait for Tiga to take the necklace, then, using night vision goggles, they follow her into the swamp on a skiff. Tiga had hidden the Blessing Chest years before in one of the crab pots she fished with. Faith and Walker retrieved the ruby and headed back to the plantation house with it. Once there they were attacked by the mafiya hitman. Faith, aware she could not hope to fight the hitman with her hands, used the only agency she had at the time and left Walker alone to fight the Russian while she sprinted through the dark toward the house, where she knew a shotgun was kept. The shotgun turned out to be unnecessary, as Walker had dispatched his opponent and dumped him in the swamp by the time Faith returned. However, Faith had proved that her intelligence, courage and perseverance were up to the standards of the female Gothic heroine. Moreover, she displayed a deep kindness which reveals moral character. She figured out a way to soothe Tiga's unbalanced mind. She played along with Tiga's fantasies that she was Tiga's lost baby girl, and assured Tiga that she and her soul were united and she was not lost in the swamp. Tiga tells Faith, "Thank you for coming back ... Seeing you eased my mind ... you be sure to say good-bye to me before you go, so I won't be roaming the marsh and crying for you" (381). In the best tradition of the female Gothic heroine, Faith is not only brave, she is good-hearted. Accordingly, she secured a companionate marriage with Walker, and her happily-ever-after was assured.

Like Ann Radcliffe, and her later literary descendants, such as Victoria Holt, Lowell writes about principled heroines who are undaunted by jeopardous situations and implicit (or explicit) supernatural threats, women who persevere and are rewarded by the successful resolution of their conundrums and a companionate marriage. Their success and happiness is most often the result of their hard work, strong ethics, emotional courage, and their use of agency. Even when personal agency is limited by adverse cultural, social, and socio-economic circumstances, the Female Gothic heroine exerts herself to make the agency available to her as efficacious as possible. The heroines in this genre are neither passive nor easily dominated, even when they must assume an outward appearance of meekness. Although their agency often supports some socio-cultural aspects of what is 'normally' expected of women, such as a monogamous heterosexual union with children, it also frequently resists dominant stereotypes of women's needs. The Female Gothic heroine does not wish to rely on men to take care of her financially, physically or emotionally. Instead she seeks a partner who will assist her in her own dreams and growth, and

whom she may also assist. Even Emily St. Aubert, who seemingly embraced the ideology of pacific femininity, is motivated to defy Montoni by the need to secure her own financial situation, so that she might support Valancourt with her inheritance. She was “determined to preserve these estates, since they would afford that competency, by which she hoped to secure the comfort of their future lives ... Remembering then ... the papers relative to the estates in question, she determined to search for them, as soon as her interview with Montoni was over” (379). The female Gothic novel is less about a woman in danger than it is about a woman overcoming danger via her agency. The heroine earns, by struggling against adversity, her safety and happily-ever-after.

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Motivation and Perversion in Matthew Lewis' The Monk

Jan M. Stahl

Matthew Lewis' *The Monk*, published in 1796 explores the sexual activities of Ambrosio, the monk and anti-hero of the novel's title. Early in the novel, Ambrosio indulges in erotic fantasies and self stimulation while gazing at a painting of the Madonna. Ambrosio's subsequent pathological relations with living women radiate from his perverse desire for sexual gratification objectified in the Madonna. A perverse corporeality of the divine image has gripped hold of Ambrosio's imagination whereby contemplating the heavenly mother propels this sexual deviance. Ambrosio conflates the Madonna, as the embodiment of maternal womanhood and feminine chastity, into a carnal image of fleshly worship. The stage is set for Ambrosio's downward spiral into sexual perversity that includes rape, sadism, incest, and murder.¹

Scholars who have analyzed *The Monk* have demonstrated a long-standing interest in Ambrosio's sexual pathology and perverse behavior. *The Monk* was one of many works included in Mario Praz' classic study, *The Romantic Agony*, in which Praz argued that literature in the Gothic and Romantic tradition characteristically portrayed themes of sexual perversity, including sadism, incest, murder, necrophilia, and desecrations.² A number of critics have addressed Ambrosio's perverse relations with women by drawing upon Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex. Freud postulated that the male as a child experiences a stage in which he dramatically splits his allegiances, desiring his mother as love object and wishing to supplant the father. According to Freud, conflict in a person's adult relationships and manifestations of sexual perversions result from the person's inability to resolve tensions that occurred during childhood regarding desire for the mother (19: 26-29). In her psychoanalytic and feminist reading of *The Monk*, Anne Williams refers to Ambrosio as a "Gothic version of Oedipus" (120) who is enticed and entrapped by ominous and dangerous female presences, such as Matilda and the Mother Church, that exemplify patriarchal society's dread of ungoverned female sexuality (117). Wendy Jones argues that Ambrosio's sexual trajectory is motivated by his displaced desire for a maternal love object: "His unknowable and secret desire for his mother haunts him throughout his life" (134). Similarly, Ed Cameron observes that Ambrosio's model for a woman is the mother he possessed in infancy (188).

The use of Freudian theory has led to valuable interpretations of Ambrosio's sexual pathology. However, scholars have not utilized Freudian theory to analyze the developing phases of Ambrosio's relations with women. In addition to the Oedipus complex, Freud has an especially applicable theory to explain Ambrosio's motivation and behavior. Freud held that personality is a dynamic interaction of three structures: the id, which is the person's instincts and sexual drives, the superego, which is the person's sense of morality, and the ego, which is the person's conscious guide to making decisions and taking action (19: 16-26). The quality of a person's interplay among these determines a person's motivation. The interpretations mentioned above situate Ambrosio's oedipal desire as a singular motive. This renders such interpretations as monolithic.

My purpose here is to fill a gap in existing scholarship by identifying and analyzing a recurring threefold pattern of Ambrosio's relationships with women. I argue that Ambrosio's psychosexuality is driven by his desires to idealize, have sexual relations with, and activate aggression against a maternal love object. I will refer to these three motivational desires, which correspond each to one of Freud's three structures of personality, as adoration, sexualization, and activation. By exploring the threefold pattern of Ambrosio's relationships with women, I plan to focus extensively on the developing phases of emotions that drive his pathological desire for and behavior towards the women with whom he interacts, from the Madonna, who elicits his sexual yearnings at the novel's beginning, to Matilda, who seduces Ambrosio by manipulating his desire for the Madonna, to Antonia, his rape and murder victim at the novel's end. In addition, I want to consider how the pattern I am describing relates to two types of sexuality that Ambrosio displays: heterosexuality and homosexuality.

Mothers and Lovers

Ambrosio's obsession with a painting of the Madonna, the motivation for that obsession, and the behavior that accompanies it, set the stage for his relations with real-life women. When *The Monk* begins, the thirty-year-old Ambrosio, esteemed Abbot of the Capuchins, has lived cloistered in the monastery since his infancy. His spiritual relationship with the Madonna comprises his only current experience with women. Ambrosio has been devoted for the past two years to a picture of the Madonna on the wall of his room. The image of the Madonna projected in the picture has been "the object of his increasing wonder and adoration" (39). He is filled with delight and joy whenever he views the picture. Alone in his room, Ambrosio uses the picture of the Madonna as a vehicle of meditation. He reflects, "Never was mortal formed so perfect as this picture. . . What charms me, when ideal and considered as a superior being, would disgust me, become woman and tainted with all the failings of mortality" (39-40). Ambrosio adores the Madonna as an icon of womanly and spiritual perfection. Ambrosio worships and idolizes the Madonna precisely because her purity is not attainable by the typical earthly woman.

The Madonna appeals to Ambrosio's heightened sense of morality and sharply defined superego. At this point in the narrative, he maintains a strong moral high-ground. He is revered throughout Madrid for his moving orations and exemplary reputation for holiness. Ambrosio is aware of his public persona and retains an "air of conscious superiority" (38). According to Freud, feelings of pride are precisely the rewards that the superego seeks. Ambrosio momentarily expresses concern that in his new role as Abbot and confessor he will be tempted by beautiful women. He quickly dismisses the notion that he is subject to human frailty. He believes his uncommon virtue "is proof against temptation" (39) and only the Madonna, untainted by secularism and sex, and powerful and virtuous enough to mediate between man and God, can elicit his adoration.

Ambrosio's adoration of the Madonna has strong elements of sexualization. As he gazes at the Madonna's picture, Ambrosio feels a physical attraction. "Should I meet . . . some lovely female – lovely as you – Madona – ! . . . What beauty in that countenance!' he continued after a silence of some minutes" (39). Gazing at the Madonna's picture provides Ambrosio with a sensual experience. It appeals powerfully to his id. Considering Ambrosio's preoccupation with the Madonna's physical loveliness, I interpret the "silence" that Lewis mentions to be a respite in which Ambrosio engages in a masturbatory exercise. Lewis does not state this directly, possibly because even though Gothic fiction written for a mainstream audience allows for a wide range of explorations into perversity, masturbation was considered an extreme offense that was not an acceptable topic to be represented openly.³ Lewis instead uses titillating innuendoes to refer to Ambrosio's masturbatory activities. One hundred and sixty six pages later, Lewis discusses Ambrosio's upbringing at the monastery and hints that Ambrosio has indeed been inclined to fill his free hours with self-gratifying behavior: "spare diet, frequent watching, and severe penance cooled and repressed the natural warmth of his constitution: but no sooner did opportunity present itself . . . than religion's barriers were too feeble to resist the overwhelming torrent of his desires." (205)

A regimen of spare diet and penance was a standard treatment for masturbation in eighteenth century medical and moral pamphlets (148).⁴ Given this knowledge, Ambrosio's delight in the picture of the Madonna takes on new meaning. I contend that it is incumbent upon the critic to fill in the gap that occurs during the "silence of some minutes" in the earlier passage. Considering the context of Ambrosio's gaze, I interpret the information to mean that he engages in some masturbatory activities while he stares longingly at the picture of the Madonna. After this telling silence, Ambrosio further reflects upon the Madonna's physicality, and the autoerotic aspect of his adoration becomes more explicit: ". . . were I permitted to twine round my fingers those golden ringlets, and press with my lips the treasures of that snowy bosom" (39). For Ambrosio, during his lustful fantasies, the Madonna is no longer a static image in a painting, but a real life physical being that he yearns to fondle and kiss. Ambrosio's feelings for the Madonna begin with adoration, which rapidly turns to erotic sensuality, drawing him into some degree of genital stimulation, even if Lewis does not specifically indicate the monk's full awareness of his own behavior. The connection between fantasy and arousal has been brought to life.

In eighteenth century Protestant England, where anti-Catholic sentiment was passionately espoused, Ambrosio's physical preoccupation with the Madonna might have been viewed by Lewis' readership as a dirty joke

pointing to the humor inherent in idolatry. Lewis' depiction of the Madonna providing stimulation for Ambrosio's masturbatory activities is not merely an example of the anti-Catholicism common to gothic fiction, but is also pregnant with meaning.⁵ Having been abandoned by his mother as an infant and subsequently educated in a monastery, Ambrosio views the Madonna as surrogate mother and lover. Critics have recognized that Ambrosio's desire for his mother has been displaced onto the Madonna.⁶ However, critics do not take into account Ambrosio's probable masturbatory activities and fail to recognize the complete expanse of emotions motivating his pathological desire for and actions towards the Madonna and the other women with whom he engages.

To taint the image of the Virgin Mary with sexuality, to indulge in self-gratification while contemplating her picture would be a degradation of the Holiest of Mothers according to Roman Catholic doctrine. Ambrosio's defilement of the maternal love object comprises a third component of his interaction with women. This activation phase has a close affinity with Freud's concept of the ego, the aspect of the conscious personality that negotiates between the id and the superego and guides the person in reality. The ego is responsible for forming a plan of action. In Ambrosio's case, he employs aggression as an active means of problem solving. In the absence of a socially acceptable outlet to gratify his sexual desires, Ambrosio defiles the sanctity of the Madonna, which as a monk he should cherish. Ambrosio desecrates the image of the Holy Mother and seeks to trespass on the power of God the Father through his oedipal desire for the Madonna, who was sexually touched only by God. Ambrosio's perverse and erotic obsession with the Madonna has an aggressive element, but at this point in the narrative, his aggression is symbolic. Ambrosio's perversion hurts no living being. I view the activation phase that he exhibits through his obsession with the picture of the Madonna as an introductory stage which paves the way for the heightened aggression and sadistic tendencies that he will exhibit later in the novel.

Ambrosio's relationship with Matilda provides him with an outlet to transfer his obsession with the Madonna onto an earthly woman. When Matilda enters the convent disguised as a young novice monk, Rosario, Ambrosio forms a close friendship with him. After securing Ambrosio's friendship, Matilda discloses to him that she is in truth a wealthy woman who has entered the monastery out of love for him. However, by the novel's end, Lewis reveals that Matilda was really a demon in disguise sent by Satan to tempt the unsuspecting Ambrosio. Ambrosio readily falls prey to Matilda's manipulations. Matilda tells Ambrosio that after seeing him at church and hearing one of his moving sermons, she was hopelessly enthralled. Matilda's revelation is troublesome to Ambrosio who, as a monk devoted to religion, senses the "extreme impropriety" (57) of a woman's presence in the monastery. Nevertheless, Matilda's desire to relinquish worldly pleasures for the sake of remaining in Ambrosio's presence is "most satisfactory to his vanity" (60). He "felt a secret pleasure in reflecting that a young and seemingly lovely woman had for his sake abandoned the world, and sacrificed every other passion to that which he had inspired" (57). For Ambrosio, Matilda's façade of complete devotion and semblance of unselfish love for him replicates the unconditional love that the Madonna offers to her devotees. He is bitten by a serpent, and Matilda promptly sucks the poison from Ambrosio's wound, like a mother who would sacrifice her own life to save her offspring. To Ambrosio, Matilda is the Madonna on earth whose sole purpose in life is to please him. How can he not adore her?

Ambrosio's approach to Matilda is motivated by a fusion of adoration and lust. Before he sees her face which remains hidden behind her cowl, Ambrosio feels an unrestrained attraction: "his heart throbbed with desire, while his hand was pressed gently by Matilda's ivory fingers" (57). Ambrosio's lust increases when he glimpses Matilda's naked breast. Lewis writes, "his eye dwelt with insatiable avidity upon the beautiful orb . . . a raging fire shot through every limb" (60). The sight of Matilda's breast stimulates a powerful and vigorous erection. That same night, Ambrosio re-experiences his earlier excitement by dreaming that "Matilda stood before him . . . and his eyes again dwelt upon her naked breast; she repeated her protestations of eternal love" (61). Ambrosio's fascination with Matilda's breast reveals a yearning for his own lost mother, especially considering that, as Lawrence Stone claims, prevailing beliefs in the second half of the eighteenth century maintained that breast-feeding stimulated maternal affection while increasing a child's attachment to its mother (272-3).⁷ Ambrosio seeks and desires a mother in Matilda, a mother with whom he can enjoy sexual relations. This is further emphasized in Ambrosio's dream in which Matilda and the Madonna are interchangeable: "Sometimes his dreams presented the image of

his favourite Madona . . . he pressed his lips to hers, and found them warm: the animated form started from the canvas, embraced him affectionately, and his senses were unable to support delight so exquisite . . . he rioted in joys till then unknown to him.” (61)

In his nocturnal emission dreams, images of Matilda and the Madonna alternate and combine. There, the Madonna lives, and Ambrosio achieves an acknowledged climax.⁸ The dream reveals that Matilda is for Ambrosio a fusion of virgin mother and carnal earthly sensuality.

Ambrosio eventually discovers that Matilda’s face *is* the Madonna’s and that Matilda was the model for the portrait. Fantasy and reality merge:

What was his amazement at beholding the exact resemblance of his admired Madona! The same exquisite proportion of features, the same profusion of golden hair, the same rosy lips, heavenly eyes, and majesty of countenance adorned Matilda! Uttering an exclamation of surprise, Ambrosio sunk back upon his pillow, and doubted whether the object before him was mortal or divine. (73)

Seeing Matilda’s face increases Ambrosio’s lust for the Madonna and for Matilda. Matilda and the Madonna comprise one image for Ambrosio of an idealized and desirable-desiring mother who offers him absolute affection, love, and the possibility to satiate his lust. As Joseph Andriano observes, when Ambrosio has sex with Matilda, Ambrosio “thinks he has made love to the Madonna” (35). However, the salacious sex scene leaves no room for love or spirituality: “Drunk with desire, he pressed his lips to those which sought them; his kisses vied with Matilda’s in warmth and passion . . . he forgot his vows, his sanctity, and his fame; he remembered nothing but the pleasure and opportunity.” (81)

Ambrosio joyously revels in his unbridled lust for Matilda for several days, and then his passion weakens rapidly. With Matilda, Ambrosio could have had the opportunity to keep a mistress secretly and indefinitely. Instead “A week had scarcely elapsed, before he was wearied” (203) of her. Ambrosio has enjoyed sex with Matilda the virgin; however, a virgin is no longer a virgin after the act of penetration is complete. Ambrosio is not nearly as enticed by Matilda the desiring lover as he was by Matilda the virgin. Glutted with desire, Ambrosio’s feelings move into the third phase of the pattern. He feels anger and revulsion towards Matilda, blaming her for his waning desire. Ambrosio reflects that Matilda “apes the harlot, and glories in her prostitution. Disgusting! Did she know the inexpressible charm of modesty, how irresistibly it enthalls the heart of man . . . she never would have thrown it off” (209). As a woman who enjoys sex and gives her body freely to Ambrosio, Matilda is not morally perfect and Ambrosio cannot view her as a Madonna substitute. Therefore, she no longer appeals to Ambrosio, who initially adored and lusted after her precisely because he viewed her as a Madonna substitute. For the man permanently fixated in an oedipal complex, maintaining a long-term relationship with one woman is difficult, if not impossible. Ambrosio is unable to achieve any sort of mature relationship, not even an illicit one, because of his fixation on attaining the unattainable: a morally perfect woman with whom he can fulfill his sexual desires. Ambrosio continues the sexual relationship with Matilda, but “when the moment of passion was over, he quitted her with disgust” (203). As long as Ambrosio attached his desires to a non-living picture, he was able to maintain his emotional equilibrium. But flesh-and-blood women disenchant him and destabilize him. Rather than place the anger and aggression on himself, he displaces these feelings onto Matilda; it will always be the woman’s fault.

To view Ambrosio’s disgust for Matilda as aggressive clarifies a seeming inconsistency in the novel. At one point Lewis’ omniscient narrator expresses sympathy for Matilda as discarded lover: “Unfortunate Matilda! her paramour forgot, that for his sake alone she had forfeited her claim to virtue; and his only reason for despising her was, that she had loved him much too well” (210). Readers have commented that these lines appear ambiguous in light of the novel’s concluding revelation that Matilda was never a mortal woman, but a demon sent by Satan to entrap Ambrosio and send him on the pathway to damnation and hell.⁹ If Matilda is really a demon, then how can the narrator present her as a stereotypical abandoned woman? Yet this is exactly Lewis’ point: to confuse the tale of Matilda’s seduction of Ambrosio with the more conventional eighteenth century seduction and betrayal narrative, which commonly depicts woman as the victim of man’s desire.¹⁰ Lewis links Ambrosio’s rejection of Matilda with violence, at least on the metaphorical level. For example, in a frenzied screaming fit of anger, Ambrosio notices the portrait of the Madonna on the wall, and “with indignation . . . he threw it on the ground, and spurned it

from him with his foot” (210). Ambrosio’s violence enacted upon the picture symbolically destroys Matilda and the Madonna simultaneously. This violent and destructive aspect of Ambrosio’s desire for the Madonna is later replicated and further amplified in his interaction with Antonia, and Elvira. Ambrosio is irresistibly attracted to women that he can adore as idols of maternal perfection. His pattern of behavior is that his emotions gather momentum and transform into lust, which moves onward to active aggression.

Perversion Unbound

Unable to sustain a satisfying relationship with Matilda, Ambrosio redirects his adoration and sexual desire to Antonia. He encounters her when she visits him in his role as a confessor. Afflicted with sorrow over her mother’s illness, Antonia begs Ambrosio to remember her mother in his prayers and to visit the sick bed to hear her mother’s confession. Lewis writes that Antonia’s “countenance was so sweet, so innocent, so heavenly, as might have charmed an heart less susceptible than that which panted in the abbot’s breast” (207). Ambrosio readily complies with Antonia’s request. His infatuation with her is immediate and powerful. He “felt a thousand new emotions springing in his bosom” (208). Ambrosio fantasizes about sharing a life with Antonia in which he could “watch the emotions of her spotless heart! to encourage each dawning virtue . . . if there is perfect bliss on earth, ‘tis his lot alone who becomes that angel’s husband” (209). In this phase of adoration for Antonia, Ambrosio believes he has no sexual desire or lust for the young woman whom he perceives as angelic. According to Lewis, “On the contrary, what he now felt was a mingled sentiment of tenderness, admiration, and respect” (208). Ambrosio’s adoration for Antonia’s modesty and virginal purity satisfies the needs of his superego, at least temporarily.

In his state of adoration for Antonia, Ambrosio experiences sensually charged emotions that him discomfort and conflict. He reflects that, “to seduce such innocence . . . to work her ruin – Oh! it would be a crime, blacker than yet the world ever witnessed! Fear not, lovely girl!” (209). Although Ambrosio yearns to sexually possess Antonia, his conscience restrains him from jeopardizing her virginity, which he regards with high esteem. However, desire soon conquers his conscience; lust proves stronger than adoration. As Lewis writes, “Grown used to her modesty, it no longer commanded the same respect and awe: he still admired it, but it only made him more anxious to deprive her of that quality which formed her principal charm” (220).

Inflamed by the desire to gratify his lust, Ambrosio attempts to rape Antonia on two separate occasions. On the first occasion, Antonia and Ambrosio converse on a sofa in her bed-chamber. Too naïve to recognize the true nature of Ambrosio’s desire for her, Antonia proclaims that she loves Ambrosio as a friend and protector, and after hearing this avowal, “Ambrosio no longer possessed himself” (225). Driven wild by his ungoverned desire, he tries to rape Antonia. Elvira interrupts him. On the second occasion, Ambrosio uses a magic branch of myrtle to induce Antonia into death-like slumber. The sight of the inanimate Antonia thrills Ambrosio. For a man incapable of conducting relations with a living and desiring woman, raping an unconscious victim is a source of pleasure and control:

No sooner was the enchantment performed, than he considered her to be absolutely in his power, and his eyes flashed with impatience. He now ventured to cast a glance upon the sleeping beauty . . . He remained for some moments devouring those charms with his eyes, which soon were to be subjected to his ill-regulated passions. (260)

Ambrosio is on the verge of satisfying his desires with the vulnerable Antonia when Elvira intrudes upon the scene. After Ambrosio’s first attempted rape, Elvira was reluctant to raise public accusations against the highly revered monk. Instead, she attributed his behavior to human frailty and sent him from her home with a strongly implied message never to return. But with the second sexual attempt upon her daughter, Elvira’s indignation is raised to a fevered pitch. She threatens to expose Ambrosio’s crimes and hypocrisy. Mother of Antonia, and, although neither Elvira nor Ambrosio is aware of their true relationship, mother of Ambrosio, Elvira becomes the superego personified. She reproaches Ambrosio with the pangs of his own guilty conscience: “Pale and confused, the baffled culprit stood trembling before her. He would fain have extenuated his offence, but could find no apology for his conduct” (261).

With his guilt brought to the surface, Ambrosio feels compelled to preserve his reputation. He also experiences acute agitation from his unsatisfied desire for Antonia. In a state of extreme desperation and frustration, Ambrosio takes savage action against Elvira. He murders her in an explicitly violent scene charged with sexual fervor: “dashing her violently upon the ground, he dragged her towards the bed . . . pressing his knee upon her stomach [he] . . . endeavoured to put an end to her existence . . . The monk continued to kneel upon her breast, witnessed without mercy the convulsive trembling of her limbs beneath him.” (262-3)¹¹

The intensity of this passage underscores that Ambrosio’s frustrated desire with Antonia has assumed a new object in Elvira. Elvira’s “convulsive trembling limbs,” suggestive of orgasm, further sexualizes her. In their studies of violence against women in modern society, feminists have argued that to murder a woman *is* a sexual act for the male perpetrator.¹² Ambrosio’s act of pressing his knee upon Elvira’s stomach while kneeling upon her breast suggests the impulse to violate the very sources of maternal femininity – the womb and breast.

After Elvira’s death, Antonia falls under Ambrosio’s power and becomes the victim of his depraved lust. In the dark depths of the catacombs, surrounded by decaying bodies and damp air, Ambrosio rapes Antonia. Death and sex are juxtaposed in the rape scene, and Ambrosio’s desire has hints of necrophilia, already implied by his attempt to rape her when she was unconscious: “the gloom of the vault . . . seemed to give a fresh edge to his fierce and unbridled desires” (326). Ambrosio cruelly and sadistically violates the helpless Antonia, “with the rudeness of an unprincipled barbarian . . . in the violence of his lustful delirium, [he] wounded and bruised her tender limbs” (328). The rape of Antonia is the final example of Ambrosio’s attempt to gratify his sexuality with a maternal figure. As Elvira’s daughter, Antonia is, in Leslie Fiedler’s words, “first surrogate for the mother” (56). It is therefore appropriate that Ambrosio’s unbounded perversity occurs within the dank dark catacombs, a distorted and disgusting symbol of feminine fertility.

The act of defiling Antonia momentarily excites and empowers Ambrosio: “her alarm . . . and incessant opposition, seemed only to inflame the monk’s desires” (328). However, just as Ambrosio tired quickly of Matilda, he is only temporarily gratified by Antonia. The desire to conquer a virgin elicits Ambrosio’s unbridled passion. Once the conquest is over the desire subsides. Deprived of the virginity that Ambrosio found so desirable, Antonia is tainted as a Madonna figure and no longer excites Ambrosio’s adoration or his sexual passions. As Lewis writes, “She, who so lately had been the object of his adoration, now raised no other sentiment in his heart than aversion and rage” (329). Ambrosio cannot tolerate having sexually possessed the maternal love object. Additionally, Ambrosio feels troubled by the actions he has taken to gratify his uncontrollable lust: “a secret impulse made him feel how base and unmanly was the crime which he had just committed” (329). But the proud Ambrosio is too self-indulgent to direct his reproaches against himself; instead he directs his “looks of hate” (329) unto Antonia. Ambrosio has moved into the third phase of his pathological relations with women. For Ambrosio, the act of sexually penetrating a woman results in a drastic alteration of his perceptions. He blames the woman for this change and seeks to punish her. When Antonia tries to escape from Ambrosio, they engage in a struggle, and he plunges a dagger twice into her chest, fatally stabbing the woman he so recently adored. By stabbing Antonia, Ambrosio commits a pseudo-sexual act of penetration. He redirects his sexual energy into destructive and furious aggression as Antonia becomes the object of his phallic violence.

Perversion and Compulsory Heterosexuality

A compelling and incessant desire to sexualize an ideal woman motivates Ambrosio to commit acts that eighteenth century readers would consider perverse: masturbation, sadism, rape with overtones of necrophilia, incest, and matricide. Ambrosio’s sexual obsessions underscore his heterosexuality as a dangerous and ominous force. Several critics have viewed Ambrosio’s ungoverned and transgressive sexual desire as a reflection of Lewis’ anxieties as a homosexual in a homophobic culture.¹³ As George Haggerty claims, “Lewis’ repressed Monk becomes the pretext for both sexual fantasy and social retribution. Lewis too must be playing out the drama of his worst fears about himself and his place in society” (349). Randolph Trumbach specifically situates the end of the Restoration in England as the time in which heterosexuality and homosexuality were socially constructed as

distinct categories among men and male heterosexuality was enforced through a rise in homophobia.¹⁴ Eighteenth century attitudes maintained that heterosexuality is the norm; Ambrosio's sexual desire represents the norm pushed to perversity.

The theme of homoerotic desire assumes a place of prominence in Ambrosio's story. Having been abandoned by his mother and raised by monks who regarded him as a gift from Heaven, Ambrosio's desire for women results in a tumultuous quest for a mother, leading him to aggression and violence. Men, in contrast, represent a comfort zone in which affectionate relations might blossom. Matilda initially gained Ambrosio's trust and love by impersonating a young male, Rosario. The homoerotic aspect of Ambrosio's feelings for Rosario is evident: he is "attracted towards the youth" (41). Ambrosio tells Rosario, "From the moment in which I first beheld you, I perceived sensations in my bosom till then unknown to me" (53-4). Ambrosio's affection for Rosario is reinforced through the association of their relationship with the ancient Greek model of love between a paternal figure/instructor and a son/student figure. As Lewis writes, "Ambrosio was every day more charmed with the vivacity of [Rosario's] genius, the simplicity of his manners, and the rectitude of his heart: in short, he loved him with all the affection of a father. He could not help sometimes indulging a desire secretly to see the face of his pupil." (41)

Lewis emphasizes Ambrosio's love for Rosario as a father to a son and instructor to a novice. They engage in emotional hand pressing (53) while Ambrosio tells Rosario, "consider me as no other than your friend, your father. . . for never did parent watch over a child more fondly than I have watched over you" (54).

Love between men is quickly evaded, however. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has argued, in the eighteenth century sexuality between men was regarded as "unmentionable" and is reflected in the familiar Gothic trope of "the unspeakable" (94). Lewis teases the reader with the possibility of a homosexual relationship but does not allow that relationship to attain fruition. Lewis avoids "the unspeakable." Rosario reveals himself as Matilda, the embodiment of Ambrosio's beloved Madonna, and Ambrosio rapidly descends into heterosexual depravity. The protean Matilda has played a sexual cat-and-mouse game with Ambrosio, presenting herself first as a male to secure Ambrosio's friendship, affection, and love, and then presenting herself as a female to entice his desire. The implication is clear. For Lewis, the homoerotic relationship which his society deems as unspeakable has the potential to achieve a constructive and ennobling level of sexuality, but then he violently subverts that potential.

Lewis' strategy of writing homoerotic desire into his novel involves subterfuge. The narrative strays from homoerotic desire only to return to it by the novel's end. The novel's conclusion reveals the third layer of Rosario/Matilda's identity. After gaining Ambrosio's soul, Satan taunts Ambrosio with the deception that led him to damnation: "I observed your blind idolatry of the Madona's picture. I bade a subordinate but crafty spirit assume a similar form, and you eagerly yielded to the blandishments of Matilda" (375). Along with Ambrosio, the reader learns the bizarre truth – that the woman disguised as a young man was actually a demon disguised as a woman. Lewis' contemporary readers undoubtedly would have realized that as a demon, Matilda is no female. Nina Auerbach points out that in medieval and renaissance iconography, demons are commonly masculine, and even Milton's androgynous devils are "males with bisexual potential" (74). A demon in the shape of a woman, Matilda is a frightening figure that blurs gender boundaries. As Camille Paglia states regarding *The Monk's* conclusion: Matilda is a "triumphant drag queen . . . Our first and psychologically primary reading of the novel has been in complete error. The meltingly delicious sex between Ambrosio and

Matilda . . . has been homosexual and daemonic, not heterosexual" (266). Ironically, then, Lewis tricks the reader in much the same way that Satan deceives Ambrosio. Through depicting Ambrosio's intimacy with his drag queen demon lover, Lewis brings an eighteenth century cultural anxiety – homoerotic desire – out of the depths of repression to function in a narrative obsessed with perverse and pathological heterosexuality.

In this paper, I have shown a recurring three-phased pattern that drives Ambrosio's interaction with women. Ambrosio's pathological relations with women are driven by a compelling and compulsory need to idealize, sexualize, and activate aggression against a maternal love object. Through Ambrosio's psychopathology, which is a penumbra of Freud's id, ego, and superego, Lewis turns a supernatural horror story into a viable representation of the realistic portrayal of the motivation for perversity. Ambrosio is propelled into forbidden territory so taboo that in the eighteenth century Gothic fiction is the ideal medium to contain it.

NOTES

- 1 I use the term “sexual perversity” in the context of eighteenth century beliefs. According to Julie Peakman, even though definitions of sexual perversions had not sunk firmly into popular culture until the mid-twentieth-century, there nevertheless existed criterion for assessing perverse sexuality in the eighteenth-century (3-4). Peakman argues that “sexual perversion manifested itself both as a crime ‘against nature’ and religion” (43) and that “The unnaturalness of an act was based on the extent of how far it deviated from procreative sex between man and wife” (13). As Peakman states, “Any sexual act which evaded procreation was seen to be perverse and anything which might result in procreation was deemed to be acceptable” (41). Peakman notes that in the eighteenth-century the act of rape was not regarded as perverse because it could lead to pregnancy (43); however, the corruption of young virgins by priests would be seen as a form of perversion (31).
- 2 More recent scholars continue to affirm the view that Praz espouses. Fred Botting notes that Gothic plots portray “sexual desires beyond the prescriptions of law or familial duty” (3). Similarly, George Haggerty states that “Transgressive social-sexual relations are the most basic common denominator of gothic” (“The Horrors of Catholicism: Religion and Sexuality in Gothic Fiction,” 1).
- 3 Thomas W. Laqueur demonstrates that the anonymous pamphlet, *Onania*, published in 1712, and republished throughout the eighteenth century, described masturbation as a heinously sinful and perverse activity (25-52, 200-10). Masturbation, like sex between men, was regarded as a forbidden enterprise. According to Laqueur, “straight and narrow heterosexuality was bounded on one side by the avoidance of sodomy, the avoidance of masturbation lay on the other” (255). It is sensible to conclude that in Gothic fiction, which as Fred Botting notes, was intended for the general “middle-class readership that composed the increasingly large portion of the literary market in the eighteenth century” (4), themes dealing with masturbation would be implied rather than represented openly.
- 4 I owe this insight to Kate Ferguson Ellis (148). Ellis discusses Lewis’ reference to Ambrosio’s propensity for masturbation but she does not make the connection between this and Ambrosio’s contemplation of the picture of the Madonna.
- 5 Anne Williams discusses the representation in English Gothic fiction of the Roman Catholic faith as “the epitome of superstition and cupidity” (117). George Haggerty maintains that the use of Catholic motifs in English Gothic fiction allowed authors to explore various sexualities because prevailing English beliefs associated Catholic institutions with lurid sexual possibilities (“The Horrors of Catholicism,” 1-16).
- 6 For example, see Peter Brooks (258), William Patrick Day (122) Joseph Andriano (35), D.L. MacDonald (78), and Ed Cameron (188-191).
- 7 Wendy Jones also observes that “the part of woman’s anatomy that Ambrosio finds most irresistible is the breast, the universal synecdoche of the mother” (134).
- 8 The dream sequence is Lewis’ first direct reference to Ambrosio experiencing an orgasm through erotic fantasies of the Madonna. Earlier in the novel, as I have shown, Ambrosio masturbates while gazing longingly at the painting of the Madonna. Since this is implied rather than actually depicted, there is no overt reference to indicate whether or not his masturbatory activity leads to a climax.
- 9 See Peter Grudin (137), R.D. Stock (308), Joseph Andriano (35), and R.D. MacDonald (115).
- 10 For studies of the narrative of seduction and betrayal and the victimization of women in eighteenth century fiction, see Ros Ballaster’s *Seductive Forms: Women’s Amatory Fiction from 1684-1740*, Joseph Allen Boone’s *Tradition Counter Tradition: Love and the Form of Fiction*, John J. Richetti’s *Popular Fiction Before Richardson: Narrative Patterns-1739*, and Jane Spencer’s *The Rise of the Woman Novelist: From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen*.
- 11 George Haggerty views Ambrosio’s murder of Elvira as an act of “incestuous matricide” and views their struggle on the bed as “one of the most brutal scenes of eighteenth-century literature” (“Literature and Homosexuality in the Late Eighteenth Century,” 349).

12 In “The Sexual Politics of Murder,” Jane Caputi discusses this viewpoint.

13 See George Haggerty, “Literature and Homosexuality in the Late Eighteenth Century: Walpole, Beckford, and Lewis” (348-50); George Haggerty, “The Horrors of Catholicism: Religion and Sexuality in Gothic Fiction” (1-7); D.L. MacDonald, “Monk Lewis: A Critical Biography” (127); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (92); Lauren Fitzgerald, “The Sexuality of Authorship in *The Monk*” (1-2).

14 Trumbach discusses the social construction of heterosexuality and homosexuality in *Sex and the Gender Revolution*, Volume 1.

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