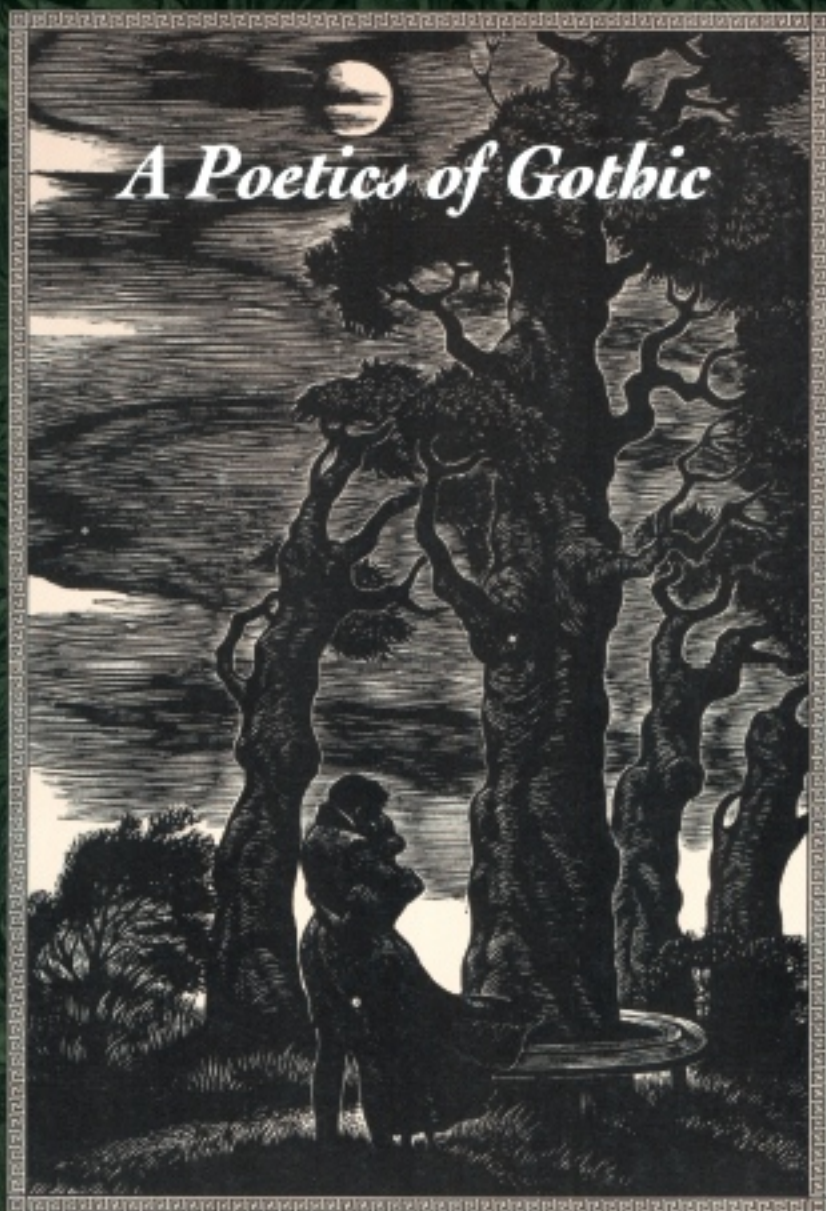


ART OF DARKNESS



ANNE WILLIAMS

Art of Darkness

ART OF
DARKNESS
A Poetics of Gothic



ANNE
WILLIAMS



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To My First Family:

C.B., GARY, AND CHARLES

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Appropriately, the main thesis of this book occurred to me around midnight while I was gazing at the full moon. I had already been planning a book on the Gothic for several years, but the project seemed to be going nowhere. That night, however, it suddenly occurred to me that the legend of the werewolf is really bizarre. Why should something so beautiful as moonlight turn a man into a beast? Almost before the question was formulated, an answer came to me: this legend, like the Gothic tradition as a whole, expresses the dangerous, the awe-full power of the "female." All Gothic trappings—ruins, graves, dark enclosures, madness, even the sublime—signify the presence of this "other."

I don't quite know whom or what to thank for this insight, but I am conscious of innumerable more mundane debts incurred during the nine years I worked on this book. The American Council of Learned Societies granted me a research fellowship in 1985, and a University of Georgia Humanities Center fellowship freed me from teaching duties in the winter quarter of 1989. The Georgia Research Foundation provided summer stipends in 1987 and 1990, as well as a laptop computer and a ticket to Italy. In 1990 I was fortunate to be invited to spend six weeks at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Center. During my stay at the Villa Serbelloni, I often felt like one of Ann Radcliffe's heroines. My room was located at the end of a long winding corridor and had a vista equal to any that Emily St. Aubert ever enjoyed. I regret to report, however, that the Villa is apparently not haunted.

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The dedication of *Art of Darkness* acknowledges my oldest and most enduring debt—that to my first family, my parents and brother. Given the generally villainous role that this patriarchal institution plays in my analysis, such a dedication might seem ironic. I am convinced, however, that these sinister effects were clear to me primarily because this family so emphatically does *not* belong in the Gothic tradition. As usual, I thank my husband, John D. Boyd, for his careful editing; this time I was especially happy to hear him laugh when he noticed that I had unconsciously typed the phrase “*threat* of castration” without the “h.” Finally, I want to acknowledge my companion (or perhaps familiar) who joined the family as I was beginning *Art of Darkness*: Pandora, a calico Persian and the best cat in the world.

❧INTRODUCTION❧

Gothic Fiction's Family Romances

This book proposes three ideas about the nature of Gothic. First, Gothic is a poetic tradition. Second, “Gothic” and “Romantic” are not two but one. Third, “Gothic” is not one but two; like the human race, it has a “male” and a “female” genre. These three principles contradict several major premises consciously or unconsciously established since professional criticism of Gothic began about a century ago. But a radical remapping of the territory is warranted; the familiar guides have not served us well. As long as we think of Gothic primarily as a form of prose fiction, as something relative and subordinate to its early contemporary, Romanticism, and as long as we fail to address the issue of “male” as well as “female” Gothic, we are trapped in a prison of our own devising. Let us begin by surveying the stories critics have told themselves about Gothic.

Twentieth-century keepers of the House of Fiction have always treated Gothic as a skeleton in the closet. F. R. Leavis, one of the most influential such keepers, named the novelists occupying the House’s grand public rooms “The Great Tradition” (1948); he traced their genealogy from Austen through Eliot, James, and Conrad. (Leavis at least mentions the “astonishing” *Wuthering Heights*, but attributes its power to its status as a mutant, “a sport.”¹) Although other influential Anglo-American critics such as Ian Watt and Wayne Booth were less inclined than Leavis to such a politics of exclusion, in practice they accepted the assumption that great fiction is Realistic fiction.² The index of Watt’s *Rise of the Novel* (1957) does not contain the term “Gothic”; and though Horace Walpole’s name appears, he is not evoked in his capacity as author of a Gothic novel. Ann Radcliffe is absent. Booth’s index to *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961; 2nd ed. 1983)

also fails to mention either the Gothic or Walpole, and Radcliffe is mentioned once, exemplifying a technique to be shunned.³

Realism has provided an explicit definition and an implicit standard of value even in those leisurely histories of “the novel” with no self-conscious theoretical bias. Therefore such surveys both minimize discussion of Gothic and shove it into the closet of a separate chapter.⁴ The occasional mainstream critic who mentions Gothic assumes that it is a curio, a relic of former ages.⁵ Gothic, the story goes, died during the 1820s, and *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) is the last important Gothic “novel.” For the apologists of Realism, this strategy is useful. A skeleton in the closet is long dead, an antique and macabre curiosity. Chroniclers of “the novel” may therefore feel confident that the form has outlived and lived down its scandalous forebears. Even the enthusiastic historians of Gothic tend humbly to accept the place accorded them in a Realism-centered criticism. Thus Montague Summers writes with the air of one who knows that his charming collection of snuff-boxes, those quaint frivolities of a bygone age, cannot compete for our attention with the solid mahogany Hepplewhite of a Fielding or even a Richardson.⁶

But regarding Gothic as an outmoded embarrassment fails to conceal one unmistakable fact: a form of fiction remarkably akin to that of Walpole and Radcliffe remains very much alive. If sales figures are evidence, much of the reading public still prefers a gallop on the back of the nightmare to Realism’s seemly trot—nowadays Stephen King perennially haunts the best-seller lists. Confronted with this reality, Realism-centered critics have two characteristic defenses. Sometimes they relegate later Gothic to the outer darkness of “popular fiction.” In an essay on *Otranto* published twenty years after *The Rise of the Novel*, Ian Watt writes, “We might say one branch of [Gothic] continues in an increasingly sub-literary and specialized tradition about vampires and werewolves, while the other brand continues to deepen the main moral perspectives of Gothic in works which in other respects come closer to the main tradition of the novel.”⁷ Or a Realism-centered critic may, less often, admit Gothic into the House of Fiction under a new name.

Out of long habit, the word “Gothic” seems most appropriately followed by the word “novel.” Not only have we been encouraged to think of “prose fiction” and “novel” as synonymous; it also seems that the really memorable “Gothics” *do* all seem to be in prose (though hardly prosaic—think of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, *The Monk*, *The Italian*). But Gothic prose narratives are flagrantly non-Realistic, and

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another established way of saying “non-Realistic prose fiction” is “romance.” Northrop Frye’s eloquent arguments in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) and *The Secular Scripture* (1976) did much to legitimate this mode, but apparently did not render it entirely respectable or respected. The misty, diffuse, intuitive romance seems “feminine” in contrast to the Realistic novel’s focus on manners, morals, society, and consciousness. (Frye points out that romance occupies the lowest rung of the critical ladder, and while he does not make the point explicit, this is the conventionally “feminine” position.)⁸

Frye nevertheless offered the genre-conscious Gothic enthusiast an escape from the closet of fiction’s nasty secrets. Calling the “Gothic novel” the “Gothic romance” allows this poor relation an introduction into the drawing room, even if she must remain on the margins—a neurasthenic cousin, or a Madeline Usher, always in the process of disappearing but never permanently buried. Gothic’s intermittent resurrection as “romance,” however, raises another set of problems and suggests another story altogether, for early Gothic “romance” is almost exactly contemporary with the literature we now call “Romantic.” Today’s Romanticists may have difficulty in declaring the Gothic inconsequential, for Ann Radcliffe and Monk Lewis were writing in the 1790s along with the first generation of Romantic poets, who knew their work well. Coleridge not only read but reviewed (with considerable approbation) *The Romance of the Forest*, *Udolpho*, *The Italian*, and *The Monk*. Wordsworth may have complained of the public’s “frantic” taste for “stupid and sickly German tragedies,” but his protest masks his own youthful predilection for Gothic themes and passions.⁹ Byron was acquainted with “Monk” Lewis, whose literary traces appear in *Manfred* and other of the poet’s works. Shelley began his literary career with a couple of Gothic novels, published while he was still at Eton. And Keats, describing “Isabella,” “The Eve of St. Agnes,” and “The Eve of St. Mark,” remarked on the “fine mother Radcliff” [sic] names he had chosen.¹⁰

Furthermore, the high Romantics’ affinity for Gothic is not always dismissable as a matter of youthful enthusiasm. There is no easy way to distinguish between early Gothic and several texts we count among the masterpieces of Romantic poetry. Indeed, the unbiased reader might assume that many famous works bespeak a close relation between “Gothic” and “Romantic”: Coleridge’s “Mystery Poems,” Keats’s “Belle Dame sans Merci,” “Lamia,” and “The Eve of St. Agnes,” Shelley’s *Alastor*, Wordsworth’s “Lucy” lyrics and the early “Salisbury

Plain"—all are replete with Gothic paraphernalia: fatal women, haunted castles, bleeding corpses, and mysterious warnings. From the Romanticist's perspective, therefore, the Gothic has been less a skeleton in the closet than the black sheep of the family, an illegitimate cousin who haunts the margins of "literature," pandering cheap and distressingly profitable thrills. From the high Romantic ground, disreputable Gothic appears shocking and subversive, delighting in the forbidden and trafficking in the unspeakable.

Thus Romanticists have sometimes behaved (albeit unconsciously) like Victorian biographers intent on a fiction of family respectability—even if it means burning some letters or expurgating a diary or two. Any unfortunate "family resemblance" between Gothic prose and Romantic poetry is to be politely ignored. Sometimes critics are not so polite: James D. Boulger protests that in writing *The Rime*, "Coleridge was not a fool writing a pot-boiler for an audience of 'gothic' sensibility."¹¹ Thus, despite the contemporaneity of Gothic and high Romantic poetry, no significant criticism of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* takes into account its obvious affinities with characters and situations in Lewis's *The Monk*.¹² Nor has anyone explored the connections between *The Rime* and *Frankenstein* which explicitly portrays Victor as a second Mariner, confessing to Walton as Wedding Guest. That Keats invoked Ann Radcliffe while composing "The Eve of St. Agnes" has been acknowledged at least; that Porphyro in Madeline's chamber echoes *The Monk*—Ambrosio's rape of Antonia—has not.¹³ The "illegitimacy" of Gothic is thus established on two grounds. The first is a function of assumptions about genre. Since "Gothic" has been so habitually linked with popular prose fiction while the works of the high Romantics are "great poetry," the student is not invited to consider the thematic affinities between Keats or Coleridge and this sometimes inept and lurid prose. Nor is one encouraged to notice that Gothic prose of the 1790s is in fact disturbingly "poetic." Not only are Radcliffe and Lewis capable of evocative descriptions, which read like prose poems, their texts repeatedly include actual verse: ballads, elegies, and sonnets that often have subtle relationships to the text in which they are embedded. It is easier to assume that Keats and Coleridge have somehow transmuted Gothic dross into poetic gold, "transcending" the base origins of their materials.

But philosophy has erected an even more impregnable wall between Gothic and Romantic. Twentieth-century criticism records an increasingly effective repression of the Romantic poets' kinship to the Gothic.

We forget that early literary scholarship, such as Beers's *History of English Romanticism in the Eighteenth Century* (1898), assumes that Gothic is an aspect of Romanticism, as does Eino Railo's massive study, *The Haunted Castle* (1927). (His subtitle is "A Study of the Elements of English Romanticism.") Following the scholarly fashion of the time, *The Haunted Castle* merely catalogues these "elements"; it has no critical (as opposed to scholarly) thesis about their interrelationships or collective significance. Bibliographies also contain numerous contributions to such journals as *Notes and Queries* in the 1920s and '30s, pointing out canonical Romantic writers' allusions to Radcliffe, Lewis, and others.¹⁴ But the question of the Gothic's relation to Romantic poetry almost never arises any more. By mid-century, Romanticists were busy defending their favored poets against the Modernist assaults of the 1920s. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have observed, the Modernist attitudes toward the nineteenth-century Romantic tradition barely concealed their hostile recognition of this literature as a culturally "feminine" phenomenon—a celebration of emotion, intuition, and the child.¹⁵

Perhaps a subliminal recognition of Romantic poetry's inherent "femininity" helped encourage the critic to seek refuge in Western culture's "master discourse," philosophy—that most abstract, and hence most "masculine" of humanistic cultural projects. (One might observe that this philosophic orientation supplanted the Victorian tendency to read Wordsworth and Coleridge as quasi-theology, as versions of the most "masterful" discourse of all.) The leaders in this mid-century reevaluation of Romanticism were M. H. Abrams, Geoffrey Hartman, Paul de Man, and Harold Bloom, all men of a philosophical bent who delved for ammunition in the mines of Fichte, Kant, Hegel, and Rousseau.¹⁶ And although Bloom imported the Viennese philosopher of unreason into his theory of poetic influence, his Freud speaks only to the spiritual struggles of fathers and sons; he has nothing to say about Keats's relation to his "Mother Radcliff."

It is therefore not surprising that Robert D. Hume's influential essay "Gothic versus Romantic: A Re-evaluation of the Gothic Novel" (1969) builds a case for the irrevocable difference between Gothic and Romantic on just such philosophical grounds. (In retrospect, his argument seems inevitable in the context of the mid-century reformation of Romantic studies; significantly, his first footnote calls Gothic the "illegitimate cousin" of Romantic poetry.) Hume argues that we can distinguish high Romantic poetry by its affirmation of the transcen-

dent Imagination, while the Gothic remains mired in an indeterminate realm of moral ambiguity:

The key characteristics of Gothic and romantic writers are concern with ultimate questions and lack of faith in the adequacy of reason or religious faith to make comprehensible the paradoxes of human existence. . . . The romantics turn to "imagination," which, according to Coleridge, recasts the objects of the exterior world into a new and more profoundly 'true' reality, giving the materials with which it chooses to work a unity and meaning which they do not possess in their original form. . . . The Gothic writers, though possessed by the same discontent with the everyday world, have no faith in the ability of man to transcend or transform it imaginatively. Their explorations lie strictly within the realm of this world and they are confined to the limits of reason. . . . The Gothic literary endeavor is not that of the transcendent romantic imagination; rather, in Coleridge's terms, Gothic writers are working with fancy, which is bound to the 'fixities and definites' of the rational world. (P. 289)

Hume's argument implicitly rests on reified concepts of "fancy" and "imagination," and accepts Coleridge's view of the two faculties and their differences.

Yet the notion of Gothic as black sheep of the family has also sometimes served apologists for this illegitimate cousin quite well. In the much-cited *Gothic Flame* (1957), Devendra P. Varma pleads for the value of Gothic as the inspiration of the high Romantics, and the collection of essays *The Gothic Imagination: Essays in Dark Romanticism* (1974) makes its case in part by appropriating the Romanticist's magic word, "Imagination." Robert Kiely successfully upset the usual fictional priorities in describing the "romantic novel." In *Romantic Contraries*, Peter Thorslev proposes that the Gothic offers a valid antidote to Wordsworthian optimism.¹⁷ Most recently, Marshall Brown has argued that Gothic is implicated in a Kantian "play with unreconciled antimonies."¹⁸ Gothic, it seems, may be admitted into the family circle after all if respectably dressed in philosophical garb.

Thus, although "Gothic" might reasonably claim kin with both the novel and Romanticism, its claims have usually been denied almost before the fact. To preserve the realistic novel as the High Prose Fiction tradition, critics have regarded the Gothic as long dead, or else (if alive) as irrational "feminine" popular romance. According to the Romanticist, this dim, shapeless, fiction lacks the unifying clarity of the Romantic Imagination as articulated by several great poets in their greatest poetry. But these fantasies of Gothic from either the Realist or

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high Romantic perspective are implicitly congruent: Realism's "other," the romance, and the Romantacist's definition of Gothic as immanent and material, coincide in at least one regard. Each aligns itself with the "female" as traditionally imaged by Western culture. (Hume's argument that "Gothic" reflects the lesser "fancy" is thus close to Cheryl Walker's observation that women poets would often "find themselves left to the realm of Fancy" by nineteenth-century critics.¹⁹) In the past two decades, however, feminist critics have emphasized and valorized Gothic as an inherently "female" tradition. This new emphasis has given birth to yet another critical narrative of Gothic.

The advent of feminist criticism in the early 1970s coincided with a decline of the '60s mass-market Gothic—a genre rigidly conventional in its female-centered narrative and on its insistence that the author of the formula be "a woman speaking to women." (Even if "Beatrice Parker" was a former high school English teacher from Fort Worth, Texas, named Tom Huff, no true *aficionada* of mass-market Gothic would have bought a book proclaiming this author's true name on the cover.²⁰) This convention, and the popularity of the mode for the female audience, could only distress a reader newly conscious of the image of women in literature. For these stories seemed to affirm—both explicitly and covertly—the patriarchal view that what women want is a good (wealthy) husband, that getting married is the story of a woman's life, and that women (like Gothic heroines) are essentially passive and prone to hysteria. The 1960s Gothic formula—admittedly a bit silly and predictable—challenged one's faith in female taste and intellect. (Surely no *intelligent* woman would want to read such stuff!) Hence early feminist readings tended to see mass-market Gothic as a sort of mild romantic opiate for the (female) masses—"drugstore Gothic" as literary Valium.²¹ What else could one say about the female audience's apparent relish for a formula that delighted in female distress and rehashed Cinderella's marriage plot with a dash of Jane Austen and *Jane Eyre*?

In 1973 Joanna Russ's answer was "Somebody's Trying to Kill Me, and I Think It's My Husband." That is to say, the successful Gothic formula of the 1960s, the Victoria Holts and Dorothy Edens and Phyllis A. Whitneys crowding the paperback shelves, addressed the terrors lurking for women within patriarchal social arrangements. (This point has subsequently been developed with increasing sophistication and subtlety by Tanya Modleski, Kate Ellis, and Michelle Massé.²²) In 1976, however, as feminist criticism moved from "images of women"

into what Elaine Showalter has called “gynocriticism,” the study of women’s writing as a female tradition, Ellen Moers placed the debate in a larger context: in a section of *Literary Women* called “Female Gothic,” she began to speak of the woman writer’s curious penchant for the monstrous throughout the nineteenth century. Three years later Gilbert and Gubar published their influential study of “Woman Writers and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination.” In Charlotte Brontë’s heart of darkness they found their metaphor for this history, which may serve as well for the feminist narrative of the Gothic: “the madwoman in the attic.”

This new *mythos* of Gothic moves from background to foreground the rejected “otherness” that the Realists and the Romanticists had defined their favored literary modes *against*: the supposedly irrational, the ambiguous, the unenlightened, the chaotic, the dark, the hidden, the secret. In contrast to the long-dead, dusty skeleton, the madwoman, though hidden and confined, is vitally dangerous. In contrast to Romanticism’s exiled Black Sheep, she dwells within the house itself. As the “mad woman” of Western culture (which has traditionally defined the angry woman as “insane” as well as “bad”) she seems fully capable of escaping her confinement and burning the house down. Not a bad object of feminist study, and a powerful grandmother for a female literary tradition. And so, in the past twenty years, a search for “female Gothic” has generated the most lively and sophisticated discussion to date.²³

The critical myths of the skeleton, the black sheep, and the madwoman are all images of Gothic as seen from the outside or the other side, though feminist criticism, itself on the margins of the academic establishment, has understandably come closest to complete sympathy with Gothic. There is another story, however. Throughout the twentieth century, study of the Gothic for its own sake has also been a productive, if slightly defensive, enterprise. This critical tradition proposes Gothic as a Surrealist or revolutionary nihilist, an eerily prescient prophet of psychoanalysis, deconstruction, and the miseries of the modern world.²⁴ Like most thriving cultures, it has been shaped by its own powerful myth of origins, the oft-told tale of Horace Walpole, Father and Great Original, a tale which is itself a full-fledged Gothic narrative. It goes something like this:

In the beginning, before there was Gothic, there was a man named Walpole, who was the most powerful man in the kingdom. His youngest son, Horace (who may not, some whispered, have been his son at all),

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had all the advantages that wealth may bring: education at Eton and Cambridge, a Grand Tour of the continent, and money to spend on the beautiful things that delighted him. Although Robert may have hoped that Horace would become a lawyer (and found him a seat in Parliament), Horace felt even more powerful vocations as *virtuoso* and writer. He wrote books about painting, landscape gardening, and history, and composed thousands upon thousands of letters to his friends. He spent decades transforming his country house, Strawberry Hill, into his fantasy of medieval architecture. It had turrets and battlements, stained-glass windows, long, dim corridors, and lofty rooms with groined ceilings, fretted roofs, and carved panels.

Then one morning, as Horace later wrote, he “awaked from a dream” that he was in “an ancient castle”; “on the uppermost bannister of a great staircase” he saw “a gigantic hand in armour.” That very day he sat down to write. In a few months he had completed a hundred pages of prose fiction that (posing as translator) he published as *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* (1764).

The book was immediately successful. Readers loved this romantic tale of family conflict and supernatural wonders in a distant Italian castle. Indeed, when the second edition was published, Horace confessed that in fact the story was his own creation. Within two decades the kind of fiction inspired by Horace’s dream—the “Gothic novel”—had become the most popular mode in the kingdom. In composing his tale, so the story goes, Walpole originated a new kind of literature, transforming English letters as effectively as he had changed Strawberry Hill. The Gothic brought “the romantic, the uncanny, and the bizarre to the literature of Western Europe.”²⁵

Few books about the Gothic fail to repeat this wonderfully appropriate story. It provides an aristocratic and vaguely “supernatural” lineage worthy of any Gothic hero. At the same time it is a fundamentally bourgeois fantasy; the Walpoles had not been born aristocrats, but elevated to the peerage within living memory, just as Strawberry Hill was made, not born, a Gothic “castle.” (Like those lords of great estates whose holdings contained no authentic ruins, Walpole had to build his own Gothic pile.) The Gothic’s conception in a dream both supplies the requisite dash of irrationality and establishes a paradigm for future inspiration: several later Gothic and Romantic works were equally indebted to nightmare—notably “Kubla Khan,” *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, and *Frankenstein*.²⁶ And like at least some Gothic fictions, this myth has a happy ending; the book became a best-seller and a model for future authors.

Unfortunately, Walpole’s claim to be the Gothic creator *ex nihilo* is

as dubious as Manfred's to the throne of Otranto. Like other myths of creation, this one both rationalizes and represses. The Gothicismists' creation myth serves, among other things, to establish the uniqueness of Gothic as a mode of fiction *sui generis*. In so doing, it imposes a kind of order on the chaos of Gothic, but also, like other such "stories," serves vested critical interests. The skeleton, the black sheep, and the madwoman all offer excuses for ignoring various aspects of Gothic. Specialists in the novel or the Romantics need not take the Gothic seriously as a manifestation of their favored genre; feminist critics may ignore the male Gothic authors' contributions to the tradition.²⁷ Each of these versions of Gothic has a blind spot; none of them offers us a perspective that includes both prose and poetry, canonical as well as popular literature, "male" as well as "female" narratives.

These ghostly hermeneutic fictions have recently begun to materialize because the critical ground has shifted so dramatically during the past thirty years. For Leavis and other influential mid-century critics of the novel, "Realism" seemed a relatively straightforward concept. But ironically in view of the Realism-centered critic's attitude toward Gothic, poststructuralist critics have suggested that Realism has scandals of its own. Any claims to a true "representation" of "reality" imply as much repressive folly and violence as any skeleton in the closet.²⁸ In addition, mid-century Romanticists' implicit faith in the transcendent Imagination has also come under attack or at least been rendered problematic. In 1969 Hume could take it for granted that distinctions based on the theory of Romantic "Imagination" were sound and stable; though Robert Platzner published a rejoinder taking issue with several aspects of Hume's argument in *PMLA*, he did not raise this point. But as Jerome McGann, for instance, has argued in *The Romantic Ideology* (1983), "Imagination" is a concept rooted in nineteenth-century culture and its philosophical and theological traditions; hence, the Romantics' transcendent "Imagination" is as much a fiction as any Belle Dame Sans Merci or Haunted Castle, a fiction of escape from the opacity and ambiguities of this world. Thus to accept its presence or absence as a mark of absolute distinction between Romantic and Gothic is dubious.

The feminist version of Gothic as the madwoman in the attic has awakened readers to possible affinities between women writers and a literature that specializes in fear and in monstrous domestic secrets. Yet feminist critics of the Gothic have not adequately examined Moers's assumption that "female Gothic" is *any* Gothic fiction produced by

women. Moers's definition of "Gothic" is also unsatisfyingly simplistic: she writes that the Gothic simply "has to do with fear."²⁹ But what about the "male Gothic" from which this "female Gothic" is implicitly distinguished? The "skeleton in the closet" and "black sheep" theories take it for granted that in serving as the "other" against which "Realism," "Romantic poetry," and "Serious Literature" define themselves, *all* Gothic is culturally "female." But could it be that "female Gothic" is the other of this other? The other's "other woman"? Or is it possible that in the Gothic otherworld, the *male* is the other's other? And since the female formula was so readily reproduced by male writers of formula fiction during the 1960s, does this mean that "female Gothic" entails some as yet undelineated fictional conventions?

As to the Myth of Walpole, it bears the mark of many a patriarchal creation story. The Gothic tradition ascribes to itself a "father" who made a world out of words. But this official story, like the lists of generations in the Old Testament, manifestly effaces the mother (which should be no more possible in history than in biology), an ironic genealogy for a mode so fascinated with the culturally female. In reality, the mother as *mater*, material, matrix, and the repression of that element by Western culture might well be regarded as the source of several notoriously "Gothic" emotions—horror and terror above all. The myth of Walpole has led to a serious error in regard to the medium or matter of Gothic: the assumption that it belongs to a prose fiction tradition that flourished and died in the space of fifty years.

Despite very different limitations and inadequacies, however, all these stories about Gothic have at least two things in common. First, they illustrate the ease with which we turn to fictions of "family" as a source of metaphors. To answer the question "What is the relation of X to Y?" we often use the most immediate and fundamental model of relationship available. Second, conceiving of abstract literary relations in familial terms spontaneously creates a variety of proto-"Gothic" narratives, suggesting that family stories, especially those involving exclusion and repression, are somehow intimately connected with "Gothic." (The skeleton in the closet might well signify ancestral guilt waiting to be disclosed. The black sheep is in some way "illegitimate," perhaps by birth, perhaps as a violator of family decorum, while the madwoman must surely be the wife or aunt who has not behaved according to expectation.) Though not always directly reflecting the Oedipal dynamics of what Freud called "the family romance," these myths about Gothic recall this supposedly common fantasy, which illustrates

the desire to escape the “reality” of family and the impossibility of doing so. The “escape fantasy” of the “family romance” remains itself organized by the structure one desires to escape—imaging a father who is a king, rather than no father at all. Finally, and perhaps most important, the family structure—at once cognitive model and material reality—incarnates the laws fundamental to our culture and our selves: laws that also govern our thinking about property, morality, social behavior, and even metaphysics.

These family “scandals” of Gothic criticism also rather melodramatically call attention to the importance of boundaries: the literal and figurative processes by which society organizes itself, “draws the line,” declaring this “legitimate,” that not; this “proper,” that not; this “sane,” that not, rules and divisions that structure all dimensions of human life. Such “lines” and “boundaries” may be real—the cold, hard stone of the castle and cathedral—or the almost equally adamant principles of the elaborate cultural system Lacan called “the Law of the Father.” Such lines and walls both create the possibility of transgression and suggest the proper punishment for those rebels who cross them, who “go too far”: to be immured, incarcerated, imprisoned, in the attics, dungeons, or secret chambers of the family or the state.

A desire to “draw the line” (or to trace one’s line of descent) appears to be a very basic human impulse—or at least a deeply ingrained cultural habit: the “natural” first step toward knowing.³⁰ The root of the infinitive “to define” reflects this very procedure. From the Latin *definire*, “to set bounds to,” the word denotes “the act of stating the precise meaning or significance”; “the statement of the meaning of a word, phrase, or term”; “the act of making clear and distinct”; “the state of being closely outlined or determined”; “a determining of outline, extent, or limits.” Definitions, in short, also build walls—separating, subdividing. And even more appropriately, the act of definition may inherently (and quite literally) incur *danger*. Like its cousin “dungeon,” the ancestor of “danger” is the Latin *dominum*, a use of force. As we have seen, the walls Establishment critics have built around (or within) Gothic have lately begun to fall into ruin. Let us now consider the dangers incurred by those in quest of a definition.

ON THE DANGERS OF DEFINING “GOTHIC”

The literary critic may regard “Gothic” as anything from an agglomeration of cheap tricks to a compelling problem of “literary history,” the

"novel," "romance," "genre," "mode," or "tradition." Yet even referring to "the" Gothic and choosing—or not—to capitalize the word opens some doors and assures that others will remain not only closed but invisible.³¹ A thoughtful analysis of "Gothic" should challenge the kind of literary history that organizes, delineates, and defines: a literary history that also confines us within some inherited literary concepts, particularly ideas about genre, that can be as confusing as Udolpho's amazing structures.

The lineage of Gothic, this literature itself so concerned with genealogy, is far from easy to determine. Some works were born Gothic—as when *The Castle of Otranto* sprang fully armed from Horace Walpole's dreaming brow in 1764. In calling his progeny "A Gothic Story," he gave later critics grounds for regarding him as progenitor of "the Gothic tradition," and for later generating widespread critical anxieties about the differences between modes of fiction. But other works seem to have *achieved* Gothic, to belong presently to the family although not born in the direct line—or born "B. W." ("Before Walpole"). The reader searching for "Gothic" in a novel (as well as "the novel" in Gothic) realizes that Walpole's inspiration derives not only from a few scenes in Smollett and Richardson, but also from a far-rago of poetry, drama, architecture, painting, landscape gardening, and antiquarian enthusiasm for the medieval (or rather for eighteenth-century fantasies of those "Dark Ages"). Whoever reads English literature with a concept of "Gothic" in mind may conclude that despite Gothic predilection for the flagrantly exotic, this is a most English, a most indigenous, phenomenon. Although earlier critics insisted on the importance of foreign—especially German—imports, many scenes and episodes in canonical literature belong to a kind of quasi-"Gothic" tradition that may be traced from *Beowulf* (the landscape of Grendel's mere) through several episodes of *The Faerie Queene*, certain scenes from Shakespeare, much of Jacobean drama, to Milton's "Il Penseroso," verse by Anne Finch, and Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard*. By the 1740s, the works of the "Graveyard School" suggest that what we now call "Gothic" appeared to be quintessentially "poetic."³²

And it is even true that works may have Gothic thrust upon them. Franco Zeffirelli's 1990 film of *Hamlet*, for instance, transmutes Shakespeare's Elsinore into a conventional haunted castle reminiscent of Otranto or Udolpho. The 1991 British television production of *Clarissa* imposes (or perhaps merely accentuates) the narrative's pervasive "Gothic" claustrophobia. "Gothic," therefore, may be inherent in

the subject—i.e., having “medieval” material, or simply *like* the works that called themselves Gothic, or being pushed in that direction by director or set designer. All these ways of seeming “Gothic,” however, apparently imply different aspects of this perplexing phenomenon.

But if “definitions” of Gothic tend to be problematic, the word nevertheless appears with some frequency in both scholarly and popular discourse. According to literary handbooks, Gothic is a matter of decor and mood—of haunted castle, and brooding, mysterious hero/villain, of beleaguered heroines, of ghosts (“real,” or only believed to be), of an ambiguously pleasurable terror, of the nostalgic melancholy of ruins and of remote times and places.³³ Reading this list of elements, one might surmise that Gothic is one of those rare genres (like the pastoral or the western) defined primarily by their settings. And yet some works may have a strong Gothic “flavor” while violating almost all the handbooks’ criteria—the trilogy of “Alien” films, for example. (See appendix A.) To complicate matters further, the Gothic has undoubtedly changed in the past two centuries; and unless one joins the substantial group of critics who have pronounced that “the Gothic” flourished from 1765 until about 1820 and then died, one must find a way to account for the changes that have occurred. Finally, since the mass-market Gothic revival of the 1960s, the word has escaped the literary historian altogether and entered publishers’ blurbs and the popular press; one reads of “Hollywood gothic,” “New England gothic,” “Lone Star gothic.”³⁴ The word’s omnipresence and imprecision may remind the reader of Justice Potter Stewart’s memorable standard for the obscene, which in effect stated: “I can’t define it, but I know it when I see it.”³⁵

This observation is more than fortuitously apt, for as we shall see in part 2, charges of obscenity have haunted one strain of Gothic for its entire history. Further, it is certainly true that any judgment of “Gothic” nowadays inevitably involves a dimension of “reader response”: *Beowulf* and Zeffirelli’s *Hamlet* seem “Gothic” because we remember *Otranto* or its innumerable progeny. (This effect, however, is always present in any considerations of genre.) But if Gothic may not be limited to certain conventions (what Eugenia C. DeLamotte has aptly called the “laundry list” approach), neither is it entirely in the eye of the beholder, as a strict construction of Justice Stewart’s principle would imply.

Of course Stewart was not arguing that pornography is entirely in

the eye of the beholder. The Court eventually evolved the principle of "community standards" as the rule to be applied in such cases, which implies that though there may be disagreement as to the absolute position of the line between the "obscene" and the "decent," there is a general category of "obscenity." Similarly, though one may have trouble drawing a precise line between "Gothic" and "not Gothic," there undoubtedly *is* such a thing as Gothic. Just as Western culture has tended to assume that obscenity more or less equals the explicitly sexual, so Gothic more or less corresponds with eighteenth-century fantasies of the "dark ages." This approach to either category has its limitations, however. It inadequately serves the feminist lawyer who wants to argue that violence against women is more damaging to the social fabric than representations of sexuality, or the literary critic who wants to talk about Faulkner as part of the Gothic tradition.

The attempt to define Gothic thus challenges almost everything we thought we knew about genre as a critical concept. Some recent discussions of Gothic have begun to recognize this problem. As David H. Richter pointed out in a review article in 1987, "genre concepts may refer to fundamentally different aspects of the text." These differing conceptions of genre, whether conscious or unconscious, encourage different histories of Gothic.³⁶ (He also noted the relatively old-fashioned habits of most Gothic critics; "It might as well be 1958 in the castle," he concludes wryly.) The problems of "Gothic" suggest a tentative conclusion. As long as we think of genre in terms of "drawing the line," of distinguishing things *inherently* Gothic from things that are not, we will be trapped. Not every castle is Gothic, and not every Gothic has a castle. Nor is every portrayal of the supernatural Gothic (consider *Paradise Lost*), nor are all Gothics concerned with "real" ghosts (consider Ann Radcliffe).

Whatever it is that constitutes Gothic, therefore, seems to be a matter of some kind of "internal" (or perhaps "latent" or "unconscious") principle that may not always be explicitly related to the "content" of the genre. In *Perils of the Night* (1990), Eugenia C. DeLamotte addresses this dilemma. Following the theory of Claudio Guillén, she argues that genres are organized by a "myth" that

involves a sense, 'independent of any particular work, of the theme as a whole.' . . . It is 'an essential situation or significant structure derived from the works themselves,' which consists of two groups: a first circle that deserves the name of the genre . . . and a second circle that belongs

in the broader sense, 'failing to include some characteristics of works in the inmost circle' but nonetheless exhibiting certain 'indispensable' traits. (P. 5)

According to Guillén, we recognize genres because we sense that a particular group of works shares, more or less completely, an implied organizing principle. Other works, manifesting some but not all of its elements, may properly be seen in relation to the myth. For instance, even though *Absalom, Absalom*, let's say, lacks a haunted castle, it may adhere to the myth and thus could be a "secondary," or "tertiary," member of the genre.³⁷

The quest for the "Gothic myth" is thus a highly promising strategy for discerning the genre's informing principles, and then "defining" it. But DeLamotte's suggested "myth" seems to me inadequate. She argues that it is the "question of the distinction between the me and the not-me" (p. 23), one that is necessarily different for men and women in a patriarchal culture, especially since the latter must identify with the "Other" of this world. At the level of theme, this description may be accurate. Gothic is so pervasively organized around anxieties about boundaries (and boundary transgressions) that the border between self and other might indeed characterize the "essential situation" of such works as *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and account for the "Gothic" feeling in works by Hawthorne and Melville. Furthermore, as two decades of feminist readings of Gothic demonstrate, this approach has indeed spoken to women as readers, and has also offered women a language to speak—or rather to write (a significant distinction, as we shall see). But DeLamotte's statement of the myth fails to address several other dimensions of Gothic that an adequate theory should include, such as literary form, the relation between Gothic and "high Romantic" or other canonical forms, the persistence of popular Gothic and its expansion into nonliterary media, and the power of Gothic to elicit certain responses from its audience.

I believe that these limitations inevitably result from DeLamotte's choosing to follow Maurice Lévy and other authorities' assumption that Gothic is centered in prose fiction and that its "primary" phase lasted about fifty years, from Walpole through Maturin. Such an approach provides no satisfactory way of justifying one's sense of the affinities between Poe's "Fall of the House of Usher" (1839)—and much of his poetry—McFannu's *Carmilla* (1865), Stoker's *Dracula*, (1897), du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938), and the works of Stephen King. This version of the Gothic myth, therefore, describes only one wing of

the haunted mansion. In representing the Gothic myth, we need to follow it through at least four dimensions, to construct a scale model rather than a floor plan.

As the first step in this process, let us step back from the premise that "genre" is a literary—or at most an aesthetic—question and consider it as one aspect of a larger concern: the concept of category as a cognitive structure. The recent work of cognitive linguists and philosophers such as George Lakoff, Mark Turner, and Mark Johnson has fascinating implications for both literary theory and practical criticism.³⁸ George Lakoff's argument in *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (1986) clarifies the literary category we call "genre," particularly one as large and diverse as Gothic.³⁹ The history of commentary of the Gothic suggests that from the beginning critics have unconsciously acknowledged its especially complex, problematic status as a category. Earlier critics tried repeatedly to resolve Gothic into satisfactory subdivisions. Montague Summers (1938) first proposed that there were significant varieties of Gothic, and some of these still influence critical thinking. (He spoke of "historical Gothic," "sentimental Gothic," and "terror Gothic.")⁴⁰ But this strategy is problematic because the concept resists classification; it appears that all attempted classifying systems are both inconsistent and incomplete and evade the problem of its historical development. Subsequent critics provided additional categories, which seemingly might be spawned *ad infinitum*: some have suggested "parody Gothic," "explained Gothic," and "Oriental Gothic"; why not add "Romantic Gothic," "Victorian Gothic," "Southern Gothic," "Hollywood Gothic," "New England Gothic," "Lone Star Gothic," and so on? More recently, some critics have addressed the problem by attempting to recategorize the entire entity as something else, usually an already familiar genre. William Patrick Day (1985) renames it "Gothic fantasy," George Haggerty (1989) argues that Gothic narratives are "tales," while Elizabeth Napier can announce *The Failure of Gothic* (1986) because she implicitly assumes that all Gothic fiction aspires to the condition of realism.

Some sense of Gothic's apparent chaos may be acquired by glancing through the motifs indexed by Ann B. Tracy in her instructive appendix to *The English Gothic, 1790–1830*. A sample includes "abduction," "blood," "cave," "dreams (prophetic and erotic)," "earthquake," "feeble-mindedness," "gaming," "harem," "Inquisition," "laudandum," "masking," "noble savage," "portrait (animated)," "reputa-

tion (lost),” “suicide,” “twins,” “usury,” “vengeance, vow of” and “wedding (aborted prior to ceremony, clandestine, counterfeit, forced, interrupted, by specter clergyman).” And these features represent Gothic only until 1830; Victorian Gothic would demand the addition of “the mad scientist” (such as Dr. Jekyll), while twentieth-century (post-Freudian) Gothic requires the term “demonic child.”⁴¹

According to Lakoff, however, such apparent disorder should be surprising only to those who hold to traditional, “classical” assumptions about categories. Most deceptive is the supposition that individual items necessarily “belong” in categories because they share some essence—or alternatively even a “family resemblance”—as Plato or Wittgenstein, respectively, argued. But this principle, Lakoff argues, is not borne out by investigation of cognitive processes.⁴² Instead, categories are developed through the use of several predictable principles. These include the notion of “centrality”: that some members of a category are “basic,” more authentically belonging to the group than others; that complex categories are organized by “chaining”—“central members are linked to other members, which are linked to other members, and so on” (p. 95). Moreover, these complex categories may be affected by basic domains of experience, which are often culture specific; and “idealized models” of the world, such as myths, may also characterize links in the chain. These principles, taken together, will predict the *structure* of a category, but not its specific content.⁴³

If we return to the exceedingly complex category “Gothic” with Lakoff’s argument in mind, some principles of order begin to appear. Most important, Gothic conventions represent the culture’s “then” and “there” (as opposed to its “here” and “now”); i.e., Gothic systematically represents “otherness,” which is, of course, always a relative term. This Gothic “other” is broadly consistent with some of the most ancient categories of otherness in Western culture. Consider, for instance, the following paradigm attributed to the Pythagoreans by Aristotle, who quoted it in his *Metaphysics*. According to this scheme, reality consists of the following ten pairs of opposites:

male	female
limited	unlimited
odd	even
one	many
right	left
square	oblong
at rest	moving

GOTHIC FICTION'S FAMILY ROMANCES

straight	curved
light	darkness
good	evil

These two columns, once commonly called “The line of good” and “the line of evil,” were familiar in intellectual discourse well into the Renaissance.⁴⁴ The list beginning with “female” and concluding with “evil” contains several elements now generally associated with a Gothic (or, indeed, a Romantic) aesthetic, whereas the first, “male,” “line of good” emphasizes those qualities privileged by “classicism” and to a lesser extent by the more modern concept of “Realism.” (The “line of evil” also contains many qualities eighteenth-century theorists assigned to the category of “the sublime.”⁴⁵) Aristotle’s lists suggest that the headings “male” and “female” may be what Lakoff would call “basic” members of the categories. And as feminist readings have emphasized, “the female” and “the Gothic” have a pronounced affinity—not surprising, since “the female” is the most powerful and persistent “other” of Western culture. As Hélène Cixous writes in *The Newly Born Woman*, the lists cited by Aristotle suggest many additional binary pairs indigenous to Western culture: “Activity/Passivity, Sun/Moon, Culture/Nature, Day/Night, Father/Mother, Head/Heart, Intelligible/Palpable, Logos/Pathos . . .” (Here, too, the second terms of Cixous’s extended list are all associated with Gothic.) Cixous speculates, “Is the fact that Logocentricism subjects thought—all concepts, codes and values—to a binary system, related to ‘the’ couple, man/woman?”⁴⁶

In the early stages of planning this book, I surmised that this association of Gothic with cultural notions of “the female” was the only key required; “Gothic” is an expression (in the Freudian “dream-work” mode) of the ambivalently attractive, “female,” unconscious “other” of eighteenth-century male-centered conscious “Reason.” Although this insight is useful, even fundamental, the task of defining Gothic is ultimately not so simple. For one thing, the heterogeneous (and always changing) set of Gothic conventions expresses many dimensions of “otherness.” (The “other” is culture specific, as indeed, the unconscious itself may be.⁴⁷) As various modes of poststructuralist analysis have shown, language, psychoanalytic conceptions of the self, and post-Enlightenment culture at large all depend upon some idea of the “other,” whether it be the “signified,” the “unconscious,” or the “Orient.”⁴⁸

Are there any ordering principles apparent in this Gothic category

of “otherness” superficially equivalent to the historical past? When Walpole subtitled *Otranto* “A Gothic Story,” he meant to say “medieval and barbarous”—that is, “the uncivilized ‘other’ of the urbane, civilized self that you and I, dear reader, personify.”⁴⁹ Gothic as a category thus exemplifies Lakoff’s principle of the “idealized model,” for as many critics have noticed, eighteenth-century “Gothic” represents a richly particular cultural fantasy of those “dark ages.”

In calling his early study of Gothic *The Haunted Castle*, Eino Railo implicitly recognized that this edifice is what Lakoff would call a “central term”—the (fantasy) epitome of that distant time and place, a vast, mysterious structure built at a time benighted as well as “beknighted,” when the population believed in ghosts and witches and superstitions of all kind. Or else, the ghosts haunting the castle may be reminders of the burden of past violence and past crimes hidden in its dark recesses. (Various “inconsistencies” of early Gothic—use of “Oriental” as well as “medieval” materials, for instance—are not incongruous at all, for they simply express a different mode of distance: less of time than of space.) Having chosen to portray a castle, the Gothic author implicitly obeys the principle of “chaining,” which suggests other things belonging in this locale or available for plotting. Castles have dungeons and battlements; they are inhabited by certain kinds of people. And for the eighteenth-century British author, medieval Roman Catholicism (another manifestation of otherness) offered its own chain of associations.

Lakoff’s theory of categories suggests a new way of thinking about the “surface” of Gothic that renders some long-standing critical problems less obscure, and his theory offers a way of discerning the evolutionary “rules” by which the category has changed during the past two centuries. But while helping us to see certain organizing principles, a theory of the category as a cognitive structure also clarifies various questions about the Gothic “myth” that this theory cannot itself address. In the simplest terms, why should haunted castles have suddenly seemed to represent the essence of ambivalently attractive otherness to Walpole and his contemporaries? Why did eighteenth-century readers feel this sudden, insatiable new hunger for uncanny horrors? For the pleasures of melancholy, the delights of terror, the thrill of fear, the joy—or perhaps the *jouissance*—of horror?⁵⁰ And why could this hunger be satisfied, it seems, only by tales of the distant but still supposedly *historical* past? The answers to these questions point straight to the Gothic myth more complex and comprehensive than DeLamotte suggests.

Tracing the vampire's evolution within the Gothic tradition may help to disclose the shadowy shape of the myth, for this creature moved from the margin to the center of the category during the nineteenth century. Tracy's "Index" contains only two references to vampires prior to 1830. One of these is Polidori's, lent prestige by its association with Byron; the other occurs in *Melmoth the Wanderer*. Byron had already alluded to the vampire in "The Giaour" (1812; ll. 755–86), where it appears as a bit of exotic local folklore, a curse on the Infidel (the "other"). Although Coleridge's *Christabel* was read at the Villa Diodati in 1816, the "fact" that Geraldine is a vampire (or a Lamia) may not have been stated anywhere until Nethercot's *The Road to Tryermaine* (1939). In the earlier years of Victoria's reign, *Varney the Vampire* was popular but very pulpy fiction, and LeFanu's "Carmilla" had a modest success. But only since Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) have vampires become stock Gothic characters. Like *Frankenstein*, *Dracula* quickly escaped the bonds of the printed page and began to inhabit the popular imagination. The difference between the pre-*Dracula*, proto-Gothic vampire and Stoker's interpretation may hide the secret principle for which we are searching, for with *Dracula*, the vampire moved from being a peripheral element within the category "Gothic" to a place near the center, and capable of generating its own now massive tradition.

Clearly, the vampire represents "the other." It is associated with the supernatural, medieval superstition, and distant lands. Its bloodsucking habits, its monstrously unnatural mode of reproduction, and, as "undead," its ontological ambiguity (in short, its systematic violation of boundaries) have powerful Gothic potential. One might argue, indeed, that the power of Stoker's vampire tale mainly derives from his literary skill. Certainly his narrative is technically more effective than Byron/Polidori's—though LeFanu's tale is also well told, and neither of these can match the power of Coleridge's verse. *Dracula* does seem more genuinely *horrible* than the earlier vampires. But "horror" is relative; as the history of Gothic itself demonstrates, what terrifies one generation may scarcely affect another.

I would propose that *Dracula* is so powerful because Stoker presented his vampire as a specifically sexual threat that could undermine Western culture itself. He deliberately aligned the conquest of *Dracula* ("dragon") with the legend of St. George; but inadvertently and unconsciously he told a story adumbrating the conflict that Freud would, in a few years, describe in *Totem and Taboo* (1912), the defeat

of the father by the sons for control of the women. Thus the superstitions concerning the vampire are grafted onto the most deep-rooted and powerful principles of cultural order. (That Freud would also tell the same tale in “scientific” discourse suggests the pervasiveness of such anxiety in the culture at large.) Most important, this order is specifically *patriarchal*; the culture at risk is the Aristotelian “line of good,” and it is threatened by “the line of evil.” Stoker’s narrative implies that “evil” is intimately connected with “the female,” and (uncannily, paradoxically) Dracula, the terrible father figure, *represents* the culturally “female” in blood, darkness, death, and monstrous, unspeakable, unsanctified reproduction. The vampire became unforgettable, it seems, only when Stoker tailored vampire lore to the dynamics of power that inheres in all dimensions of patriarchal culture: in the individual family, in law, in science, in religion, in language. And even in the human psyche, at least as described by Freud, who may serve to represent the most advanced views of the late nineteenth century.

Thus I shall argue that “the Gothic myth,” the *mythos* or structure informing this Gothic category of “otherness,” is the patriarchal family. This thesis has been widely intimated—for instance, in much discussion of “female Gothic.” And as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes, “certain features of the Oedipal are consistently foregrounded” in Gothic. But the power of the patriarchal family structure is far greater and more extensive—more *central*—than has been recognized.⁵¹ Assumptions about the family, what Lakoff would call an “idealized model,” organizes human experience at many levels. This model holds the disparate and unequal “male” and “female” forces in tension, in a balance that may be disturbed, in a distribution of powers that may be defied, and perhaps even invite defiance.

We might think of this informing family structure as analogous to the Freudian “latent content” of the dream or as the linguistic “deep structure.” In part 1 we will explore the haunted castle as an embodiment of this structure and its dynamics, hence its role as a “central” term of the category Gothic in the early days. “Gothic,” in contrast to other forms of romance (or any mode of literary expression), is determined—indeed “overdetermined”—by the rules of the family. Simultaneously, however, family structure also generates the plots that occur within Gothic, for it imposes a certain balance of power, both personal and political: power that may redound through the generations as surely as fortunes—or family curses—may be inherited. Literally and metaphorically, Gothic plots are family plots; Gothic romance is family

romance.⁵² Thus Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* and the BBC *Clarissa* seem "Gothic" partly because these productions align the conflicts arising from these essentially "family plots" with the dark enclosed spaces where these conflicts are experienced.

If *the* Gothic myth is the patriarchal family, it is doubly appropriate that "myth" comes from a Greek word that itself implies a dynamic: in Aristotle's *Poetics*, *mythos* means "plot." This word not only denotes "a series of events that constitute a narrative"; curiously, in English, plot may also mean "an area of ground" (and this is also the term used to denote one's space within a graveyard). This multiple meaning seems especially apt in relation to Gothic. For the "Gothic myth" also demonstrates that particular kinds of settings (settings that, I shall argue, reify family structure) generate particular kinds of actions *and* feelings (including those nefarious actions we call "plots"). Only certain kinds of stories can take place in haunted castles, and those stories conventionally evoke the pleasures of melancholy, the delights of terror.

A "definition" of "Gothic" thus outlines a large, irregularly shaped figure, an irregularity that implies the limitations of language—appropriate for the category containing this unspeakable "other." Although I began with the term "genre," so many refinements and ramifications must be added to the usual sense of that term that it becomes unsatisfactory, for "Gothic" is a "something" that goes beyond the merely literary. Similarly, it is more than a "mode" or a tradition, or a set of conventions. Perhaps like the Freudian concept of "unconscious," Gothic implies a phenomenon long present but until recently not described. If none of the usual nouns seem adequate for naming Gothic, it might be possible to adapt a new one.

What noun would "Gothic" appropriately modify, then? I would suggest the term "complex." According to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, this word (like "Gothic") may be both an adjective and a noun. As an adjective it means "consisting of interconnected or interwoven parts"; "involved or intricate, complicated"; and in grammar, "pertaining to or designating a sentence consisting of an independent clause and one or more dependent clauses." As a noun, it means "a whole composed of interconnected parts," or (from psychiatry) "a connected group of repressed ideas that compel characteristic or habitual patterns of thought, feeling, or action." Informally, it is used to mean "an exaggerated or obsessive concern or fear."

Also like Gothic, "complex" denotes an intersection of grammar,

architecture, and psychoanalysis. Like Gothic architecture and narrative, it denotes intricacy, “complexity,” and in different contexts it may refer to behavioral manifestations or to an unconscious structure that nevertheless has its “real,” that is, its material, effects.⁵³ Thus my purpose in this “poetics” of Gothic: to follow the signs of this ordering principle through two centuries and through its plots, settings, imagery, affects, effects, and literary forms. Not only does the presence of this structure distinguish Gothic romance from other forms of romance; it also differentiates Gothic drama from other drama, Gothic ballads from other ballads, and, yes, Gothic novels from other novels.

Perhaps Walpole himself intuitively sensed the characteristic order of Gothic when he spoke in his second preface (1765) of the “new” romance in contrast to the “old.” *Otranto*’s best claim to “novelty” (in several senses of the word) lies in Walpole’s grafting—or perhaps fusing—a dynastic, a family plot onto the Gothic atmosphere and setting already familiar in other modes. Perhaps equally important, he published it in the new private space that “the novel” offered its readers. Thus he generated the possibility of a narrative operating within the rules that govern the patriarchal family, and by extension, government and the Church, and yet at the same time threaten their destruction. Within the confining walls of those interlocking and interdependent structures, he invited his readers to contemplate the dark Others of their culture and of their very selves. Like all dreams—even nightmares—Gothic narratives enabled their audiences to confront and explore, and simultaneously to deny, a theme that marks the birth of the Romantic (and modern) sensibility: that “the Law of the Father” is a tyrannical *paterfamilias* and that we dwell in his ruins.

PART ONE



Riding Nightmares; *or,* *What's* *Novel about* *Gothic?*

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The Nightmare of History

Acting On and Acting Out

From no French model breathes the muse to-night;
The scene she draws is horrid, not polite.
She dips her pen in terror. Will ye shrink?
Shall foreign critics teach you how to think?
Had Shakespeare's magic dignified the stage,
If timid laws had school'd th'insipid age?
Had Hamlet's spectre trod the midnight round?
Or Banquo's issue been in vision crown'd?
Free as your country, Britons, be your scene!
Be Nature now, and now Invention queen!

—Horace Walpole
Prologue, *The Mysterious Mother*¹

Once upon a time there was a King who had one child, a daughter. Sons had been born to him and his wife, a foreign princess, but none of them had lived beyond infancy. The Queen was now beyond the age of childbearing, and the King began to wonder why God had not permitted any of these male heirs to survive. He was certain that leaving his kingdom to his daughter would lead to disaster; how could a Queen be strong enough to lead and to defend the realm? His own father had ascended the throne—some would say seized it—in a battle where the ruling monarch had been killed. (This combat had ended a century of wars fought over the question of legitimate succession.) And besides, a charming young lady (one of the Queen's own attendants) had caught the King's eye.

And so the King began to examine his conscience. He concluded that God must be punishing him for the sin of incest; his wife, the foreign princess, had first been married to the King's older brother. Although the Pope had granted him a dispensation on the grounds of

nonconsummation, the King now remembered palace gossip, witnesses who had heard the youthful, sickly prince brag about his wedding night. The King appealed for a divorce to the Pope. But this father of the church, speaking as God's vicar on earth, refused to grant his request. The King alternately pleaded and raged, but he refused to relent. (The Queen's nephew had considerable influence with this Pope.) At last, the King rebelled. He removed his kingdom's church from the institution of Rome. He made himself the head of the church, granted himself a divorce, declared his only daughter illegitimate, and married the charming lady-in-waiting.

But she too gave birth to a daughter. Soon the King began to suspect that his wife was guilty of adultery and possibly of witchcraft. When one's husband is the king, adultery is high treason, and death the just punishment for such crime. So the second Queen was beheaded and *her* daughter declared illegitimate. Then the King married again, and this wife bore him a sickly son, dying herself shortly after the birth. Now the king negotiated again for a foreign bride, but was so disgusted by the princess's less than prepossessing looks that shortly after she arrived, he granted himself another divorce. Now he married another charming young lady, a cousin of his second wife, whose family were so eager for the power and prestige of this marriage that they ignored the implications of the King's marital history.

And history repeated itself. Again the Queen was accused of adultery, convicted of treason, and beheaded. But he married once again—a widow disinclined to the treason of fleshly adultery. She, however, began to exhibit alarming tendencies toward a treason of the spirit: sympathy with the radical “heresies” that had flourished since the king had divorced himself from Rome. But this queen outlived the aging monarch worn out by decades of high living. She survived him, only to marry again and to die herself in childbirth. On his deathbed, the King made a will, announcing the order of succession. With the flick of a pen he “legitimated” his daughters, restoring them to the order of succession. The King was succeeded by the sickly son of his third marriage, an unfortunate child who literally embodied the sins of his father, being afflicted with a hereditary disease, possibly syphilis. This young King soon died, leaving the kingdom to his half-sisters. So each of the King's daughters became queen. The younger of these reigned for forty years; she died as an old and unmarried woman.

This tale is, of course, the story of England's Henry VIII. But to repeat his history in fairy-tale fashion highlights its affinities with the

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kinds of stories we usually call "Gothic." The earlier decades of Henry's life sound very much like the plot of *The Castle of Otranto*. Henry's son Edward, like Manfred's Conrad, is crushed by the weight of a past not his own. The giant helmet that crashes into the courtyard in the opening chapter of *Otranto* provides the heir with a quicker death than Edward's hereditary ailments, but each might serve as a symbol of "the sins of the fathers" and the continuing power of guilty past deeds to haunt the present. Like Manfred, Henry's desperate desire to conform to the rule of patriarchy—to be succeeded by a son—leads him to violence. Manfred murders his daughter Matilda with his own hand. Henry had the judicial murders of Anne Boleyn and Katherine Howard staged according to the "rules" of such affairs. The histories of both Henry and Manfred are also curiously haunted by patriarchy's unspeakable crime: incest. Manfred immediately tries to marry his son's fiancée, literally "pursuing" her through the corridors of Otranto. Henry insists upon interpreting his marriage to Katherine of Aragon as "incestuous," and the two wives he has beheaded are first cousins.

This exercise suggests that if the patriarchal family provides the organizing "myth" of the literature we now call Gothic, it is equally fundamental to the shape of English political history from the Wars of the Roses to the death of Charles the First. Patriarchy's rules of the family, of marriage, of the proper relation of male to female, of legitimate succession, and so on, are also the ruling principles of the human activities we think of as "historical": politics and economics. The Law of the Father was literally "realized" in the complex texture (and textuality) of the overlapping realms of church and state. All politics was sexual. In Henry's mind, incest was a crime that might well have political consequences, the lack of male heirs; adultery was treason against the person of the king. Transgressive females, the Anne Boleyns of this world, were justly punished by death. (Henry was simply a public version of Bluebeard, working within the system.) Transgressive ideas were similarly dealt with. Both Catholics and Protestants executed "heretics," and what constituted "heresy" was determined by whoever had the power to name their heresies.

Henry, like Walpole's Manfred, ultimately failed to keep his house in order. Like Manfred's line, that of the usurping Tudors lasted only three generations. We do not know how Manfred's "rightful heirs," Theodore and Isabella, fared in later life. But in the Gothic pages of English history, the supplanting Stuarts fared ill. In beheading Charles

I, the Roundheads also dealt a mortal blow to the patriarchy. Never again in England, at least, would “reality” be so intricately ordered by these ancient, overlapping, and mutually supportive structures. Before this last act in the tragedy, however, Henry’s worst fears were realized: a woman inherited the throne of England, and made herself a long-running and popular spectacle of female power.

Since “history” is a form of narrative, certain episodes of it may seem to invite the categories we use to talk about literature, including “Gothic” and “tragedy.” To some extent the use of these terms is metaphorical: a form of “seeing as,” or using literary categories to frame or order the chaos of perceptions that in fact constitute “history.” If the history of Tudor England has a Gothic flavor, however, it is not a “Gothic novel” but a “Gothic drama.” As Paula Backscheider demonstrates in *Spectacular Politics* (1993), the relation between politics and the theater in early modern England is complicated; successful rulers such as Elizabeth were successful partly because they “produced” themselves as such. Public rituals like coronations and progresses showed the monarch acting out the role of her position, and these rituals were also frequently accompanied with theatrical allegories of the ruler’s power. “Literature of all kinds,” she writes, “almost invariably contributes to the circulation and confirmation of the dominant ideology, but it touches responsive chords in its audience and simultaneously joins other discourses in contesting, subverting, or tranforming it” (pp. xv–xvi).

Backscheider traces the relationship between the public domain and mass culture, primarily the theater, through the eighteenth century, and concludes with a discussion of the Gothic drama that flourished around the time of the French Revolution. She examines the relationship between the politics and political anxieties of this era and its history, which included such troubling episodes as the Gordon Riots, the death of the French king, and the threat of invasion from abroad. All of these might find particularly apt expression on the Gothic stage.² I would propose, however, that “Gothic” impulses are inherent in the spectacular politics and political spectacles of a much earlier era, from the age of Shakespeare and the sensational scenes of Jacobean dramatists such as Webster and Tourneur.³

The relationship between eighteenth-century Gothic as it emerged in mass culture, particularly prose fiction, and Renaissance revenge tragedy has long been familiar in histories of the mode. Eino Railo, for instance, emphasized the debt Walpole and others owed to Shake-

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speare, particularly to *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. Late eighteenth-century Gothic writers constantly invoke Shakespeare in both their theory and practice. In the preface to the second edition of *Otranto*, Walpole proclaims Shakespeare as his model for his representation of “lower” social orders and levels of discourse (though it is hard to judge the tone of this mock-heroic excursion into “literary theory”). Ann Radcliffe frequently uses Shakespearean epigraphs, like this one from *Hamlet* for the second chapter of *Udolpho*: “I could a tale unfold / Whose lightest word would harrow up thy soul.” Radcliffe appears to take it for granted that Shakespeare’s sublime tragedies plumb the depths of human terror. But as Walpole’s prologue cited above shows, Shakespeare was also used to justify nationalistic rejection of rules espoused by authoritarian French critics. Shakespeare was on the side of “nature,” and “nature,” in Walpole’s eyes at least, also dictated an unflinching treatment of certain themes:

The tragic Greeks with nobler licence wrote
Nor veil’d the eye, but pluck’d away the mote.
Whatever passion prompted, was their game;
Not delicate, while chastisement their aim.
Electra now a parent’s blood demands;
Now parricide distains the Theban’s hands,
And love incestuous knots his nuptial band.
Such is our scene; from real life it rose;
Tremendous picture of domestic woes.
(Prologue to *The Mysterious Mother*)

Hamlet was, for obvious reasons, a favorite with eighteenth-century Gothic writers. It had everything: a far-distant but still apparently “historical” setting; a castle; a ghost; a madwoman; a family secret concerning a murder; plenty of violence; and incest, both actual and implicit—the first in the marriage of brother and sister-in-law, and the second in the relation between Hamlet and his mother. In the first scene of the play Hamlet confronts the ghost of his father, and spends the rest of the play trying to live up to the duty his father has demanded of him. Hamlet is a young man trying to become himself by coming to terms with his family’s past.

As Stephen Greenblatt argues in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*,

there is in the early modern period a change in the intellectual, social, psychological, and aesthetic structures that govern the generation of identities. This change is difficult to characterize in our usual ways because it is not only complex, but resolutely dialectical. If we say that

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there is a new stress on the executive power of the will, we must say that there is the most sustained and relentless assault upon the will; if we say that there is a new social mobility, *we must say that there is a new assertion of power by both family and state to determine all movement within society*.⁴ (Pp. 1–2; my emphasis)

A new assertion of power by the family (and by a state operating according to the implicit rules of patriarchy) in conflict with a new impulse toward “self-fashioning” is precisely the materials of which eighteenth-century Gothic is made. If Gothic romance is family romance, then we may begin to see why “Gothic” authors felt a kinship with Renaissance tragedy, especially Shakespeare’s, and, incidentally, why *Hamlet* has proved so amenable to Freudian analysis. From the eighteenth-century perspective, to claim Shakespeare as one’s father is a claim to legitimacy. But the relation is more complex.

If *Hamlet* concerns self-fashioning in Greenblatt’s sense (and I shall argue in part 2 that this is the theme of Male and Female Gothic), then “Shakespeare” (not merely the author but the cultural institution) plays a similar role in the formation both of a national identity and of the British sense of literary identity that was beginning to emerge in the eighteenth century.⁵ As we have seen, any definition requires an “other” or ground against which the borders may be discerned. In formulating a history of oneself either personal or public, for oneself or one’s country, that other is necessarily the “past.” By the eighteenth century, a conception of “Gothic” times, as vague, fantastic, and imprecise as it was, signified the attempt to construct just such a ground of being.

In an essay entitled “The Useful Myth of Gothic Ancestry,” Mark Madoff examines this use of “Gothic.” He writes that “established as popular belief, the idea of gothic ancestry offered a way of revising the features of the past in order to satisfy the needs of the present.”⁶ As Madoff reminds us, interest in “the Goths” derives from a concern for ancestry:

At issue was the source of cultural standards. The Italian humanists, for example, who sought to reconstruct a classical vocabulary of style, detested the gothic because it seemed a desecration of their true heritage. They argued that the imaginary Goths, like the real tribes of that name, had supplanted the legitimate ancestors, having no style of their own. (P. 338)

The negative connotation of “Gothic,” “barbarism,” emerges from an aesthetic concern with preserving “the line of good.” But Madoff also

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points out that a positive sense of Gothic evolved in seventeenth-century England as Parliament tried to assert its ancient prerogatives against the pretensions of the King (p. 340). This positive, political version of Gothicism confronts the negative, aesthetic one: "By the mid-eighteenth century, when the gothic taste was gaining a respectable following in England, the unruly character of the putative gothic ancestors could be turned into a reflection upon the new enthusiasts and upstart social movements in general" (p. 341).

Thus the "otherness" offered by Gothic provides a screen on which to project two contradictory versions of the past:

On the one side was an imaginary epoch that surpassed the eighteenth century in elegance of manners, chivalry, chastity, social stability, proper hierarchical relations, vivid pageantry, and faith. On the other side, the material insecurity, tyranny, superstition, and sudden violence of dim ancestral times were potent objects of fear and fascination. (P. 341)

The "Gothic" past as constructed by the eighteenth century was, then, a focus of ambivalence: good/bad, attractive/frightening, admirable/horrible. It could serve the present as a negative or positive source of energy and example. From our perspective, Gothic looks very much like the Freudian unconscious. And just as the unconscious is, according to Freud, the ground of individual identity, so Gothic furnished a supposedly historical ground for England's "present."

The eighteenth-century readings of Shakespeare implicitly place him also in the search for national identity. As the Earl of Shaftesbury comments in 1710:

[W]e have older Proofs of a right Disposition in our People towards the moral and instructive Way. Our old dramattick Poet, SHAKESPEAR, may witness for our good Ear and manly Relish. Notwithstanding his natural Rudeness, his unpolish'd style, his antiquated Phrase and Wit, his want of Method and Coherence . . . yet by the Justness of his MORAL, the Aptness of many of his *Descriptions*, and the plain and natural Turn of several of his *Characters*, he pleases his Audience, and often gains their Ear, without a single Bribe from Luxury or Vice.

Hamlet, Shaftesbury concludes, "appears to have most affected *English* Hearts, and has perhaps been oftenest acted of any which have come upon our Stage."⁷

Writing in 1769, Mrs. Montagu comments upon the way the play's presentation of the supernatural earns its uncanny effects: "There is something solemn and sublime in thus regulating the walking of the

spirit by the course of the star. It intimates a connection and correspondence between things beyond our ken *and above the diurnal sphere*.⁸ Shakespeare, in other words, also provides both model and authority for the “acting out” of Gothic effects and emotions. One might speculate that during the Renaissance, tragedy was to the culture at large as Hamlet’s play within a play is to the structure within which it is embedded: a symbolic representation of “history” that at once disguises and reveals important “facts” about that world—here, the murder of the king.

But there is another dimension of meaning in the kinds of tragedies eighteenth-century Gothic writers used as their models and authorities: an important aspect of the “otherness” organizing these dramas is the otherness of “the female.” Until only two decades ago, when feminist critics began to analyze the gender politics implicit in any Western conception of “otherness,” “the female” in *Hamlet*, for instance, was likely to be seen simply as the female characters, viewed through the lens of contemporary standards. “The Ghost’s not being seen by the Queen was very proper,” writes Sir Thomas Hanmer in 1736. “[W]e could hardly suppose a woman, and a guilty one especially, could be able to bear so terrible a sight without the loss of reason.”⁹ In 1817, Hazlitt is struck by the “femininity” of the characters:

Nothing can be more affecting than the Queen’s apostrophe to Ophelia on throwing flowers into the grave. Shakespeare was thoroughly a master of the mixed motives of the human character, and he here shows us the Queen, who was so criminal in some respects, not without sensibility and affection in other relations of life. Ophelia is a character almost too exquisitely touching to be dwelt upon. Oh rose of May! oh, flower too soon faded! Her love, her madness, her death, are described with the truest touches of tenderness and pathos.¹⁰

But a feminist analysis of *Hamlet* might also point out the ways in which the terms of Hamlet’s self-fashioning (and the national self-fashioning at work in Gothic) are dictated by cultural assumptions about the “masculine” and the “feminine.” Hamlet’s “madness” acts out the “feminine” role that Ophelia later plays out in reality, a role apparently linked with Hamlet’s effort to redefine her in terms of the stereotypical “whore.” The particular gruesomeness and violence that characterizes revenge tragedy, like Hamlet’s thematic imagery of rotteness, might also be understood in terms of Julia Kristeva’s theory of “the abject.” “Horror,” she writes, linking horror with the spontaneous process of “self-fashioning” that occurs as the “speaking subject”

enters the Symbolic order: a rejection of the gross materiality of the (m)other. (We will return to this theory shortly.)

One may also see the action of *Hamlet* as enacting the culture's strategies to confront and control the female "other." Jerrold E. Hogle describes the process thus: "The reconstitution of free-willed woman as victim before an audience becomes the 'seed' allowing man to assume the power of originating action. Hamlet at last becomes 'pregnant of his cause,' by subsuming woman's power to bring forth from within as woman dies away."¹¹ The action of *Hamlet* represents to its audiences the cultural "rules" about gender *and* genre: if the plot did not "act out" the gender politics of the culture, it would not be perceived as a satisfying plot. The notorious ambiguity of *Hamlet*, therefore, may signify the loosening of these patriarchal structures; in this sense, therefore, it is an appropriate play for a culture foregrounding the feminine in the person of Elizabeth, who has "but the body of a weak and feeble woman but the heart and stomach of a king, and a king of England, too."

Thus, if the Gothic conventions that emerged toward the end of the eighteenth century are crucially concerned with exploring the "rules" of patriarchy, such as the relative powers and qualities of the masculine and the feminine and the interrelated and mutually supportive social structures like the family, the monarchy, and the church, then the superficial affinities between Gothic conventions and English Renaissance drama, particularly revenge tragedy, appear in a new light. The drama "acts out" the historical "realities" of late medieval and early modern England, which are organized and directed by patriarchal principles. Henry VIII's frantic struggle to produce a strong male heir weakened these principles even as it enacted them. Perhaps this is why, as Greenblatt shows, language and literature became a stage for "self-fashioning." By the end of the eighteenth century, these same Renaissance texts, representatives of the Gothic past, had themselves taken on the role of "ancestors": Shakespeare has become a father figure.

Although one should not underestimate the importance of Gothic dramas staged in the late eighteenth century, it is nevertheless telling, I think, that the term "novel" bonded so firmly with the term "Gothic" during this period. Stage productions (at least until the invention of the movie camera) are by nature ephemeral. The effects of those long-ago performances are almost entirely lost, and reading the text of a play gives one a far less authentic sense of the performance than reading a novel does. Ann Radcliffe's spectacular success may be

related to her technique of scene painting, her lengthy, mood-creating landscapes that provide a backdrop for her characters, but also a ground for reaction. In describing the actions of her characters, she also places them on a richly detailed stage within the reader's mind. Of course we cannot read Radcliffe as her contemporaries did, but the nature of her texts at least gives us more abundant clues as to what that experience may have been like.

Walpole finally published *The Mysterious Mother*, even though, he writes, "I never flattered myself that they would be proper to appear on the stage. The subject is so horrid, that I thought it would shock, rather than give satisfaction to an audience" (p. 253). He goes on, however, to appeal both to the model of Greek tragedy (*Oedipus*) and to "nature": the events of this play, he says, are derived from an anecdote heard "when I was very young." A "gentlewoman, under uncommon agonies of mind, had waited on archbishop Tillotson, and besought his counsel." She confesses to a "bed-trick": she ordered the damsel with whom her son had an assignation to change places with her: "The fruit of this horrid artifice was a daughter . . . [who] proving very lovely, and being accidentally met by her father-brother . . . he had fallen in love with, and actually married her" (p. 254). After finishing his play, Walpole learns that the tale also appears "in the novels of the queen of Navarre" (p. 255).

To follow "Nature," it is clear, may lead one into some paths that public decorum and propriety could never condone. Walpole's final lines of *The Mysterious Mother* are spoken by the unfortunate son Edmund, who has learned that his beloved is the child of his mother and himself. His mother has killed herself, and the sister-daughter sent off to a convent: "Say, twas my mother's will she take the veil. / I never must behold her!—never more / Review this theatre of monstrous guilt!" (5.6; p. 256). If Gothic conventions invited the disclosure of unspeakable crimes inherent in the structures of culture and the self, the private mode of novel reading may have seemed more appropriate to this endeavor. (The Romantic fondness for "closet drama" may spring from a related impulse, though Shelley, for one, thought that *The Cenci* might actually be produced, and had even cast "Miss O'Neill" in the role of Beatrice.)

The history of Gothic conventions demonstrates, among other things, that the literary critic's conventional categories such as the distinction between drama, fiction, lyric poetry, and "high" or "canonical" and "low" or "popular" forms are not necessarily useful. The

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Gothic also calls into question the even more fundamental distinctions between “history” and “literature” or “life” and “art,” because these all manifest the same patriarchal principles of order and thus of inherent conflict. Let us now turn to a close reading of those principles: how the Law of the Father and the patriarchal family are “realized” and subverted in texts not usually called “Gothic.”

❧ TWO ❧

The House of Bluebeard

Gothic Engineering

The first and simplest emotion which we
discover in the human mind is, Curiosity. By curiosity,
I mean whatever desire for or whatever
pleasure we take in, novelty.

Edmund Burke
The Sublime and the Beautiful (p. 31)¹

George Colman the younger's Gothic drama *Blue-Beard; or Female Curiosity* was produced in London at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, in January of 1798.² It adapted for public spectacle Perrault's tale of "Bluebeard," which had been published in 1697. This tale exemplifies what I have called "achieved" Gothic; for Colman it was obviously a mine waiting to be exploited at the height of the Gothic fashion. For this story appears to *be* Gothic although not part of "the tradition." Jane Eyre thinks of Bluebeard as she explores Thornfield Hall (chap. 11), but she—or rather her author—was a much experienced reader of the English Gothic. Thus "Bluebeard" as non-Gothic, or a Gothic "B. W.," offers an extraordinary opportunity to discover some of the principles of Gothic "structure," in both story and setting.

At first it might seem that the "Gothic" elements of the tale are both simple and obvious. Perrault provides a virtual catalogue of conventions familiar in Gothic narratives from Walpole to the present: a vulnerable and curious heroine; a wealthy, arbitrary, and enigmatic hero/villain; and a grand, mysterious dwelling concealing the violent, implicitly sexual secrets of this *homme fatal*. And the setting—Bluebeard's house with its secret room—seems the most important of these, the element that transmutes the others unmistakably into

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Gothic. (All the other conventions are familiar in non-Gothic works; one might even argue that *Othello* is “Bluebeard” in a heroic rather than a domestic mode.)

The imposing house with a terrible secret is surely one—possibly *the*—“central” characteristic of the category “Gothic” in its early years. Eino Railo’s *The Haunted Castle* (1927) points to this fact. In *The Gothic Quest* (1938) Montague Summers exclaimed that the castles were the real protagonists of the early Gothics (pp. 410–11), while more recently Maurice Lévy has emphasized the definitive function of the castle in Gothic, a position which leads him to argue that Gothic is limited to the late eighteenth century: “L’imaginaire, dans ces romans, c’est toujours *logé*.”³ Paradoxically, however, while the castle is sometimes sufficient to organize a Gothic narrative, it is clearly not necessary.

But how can the haunted house be both “central” and unnecessary to Gothic? The lively development of a Gothic tradition in America (where Hawthorne and others recognized a general lack of ancestral mansions) also supports this paradox. If American Gothic does not simply belong to the “outer circle” of the genre on that account (as DeLamotte argues it does in *Perils of the Night*), then it points to a crucial insight. The latent “Gothic myth” may be expressed in any number of alternate symbols, just as, for Freud, very different dream images may express virtually identical dream thoughts. This idea becomes most explicit in the numerous guides to the formula published during the “mass-market Gothic” craze in the 1960s. In *Writing Popular Fiction* (1973), Dean R. Koontz advised would-be authors about settings. While asserting that “the ancient mansion permeated with evil should be as much a character in your story as any people in it,” he also suggests that

Variations on the house might be: a steamboat used as a dwelling, archaeological diggings in a strange country, or a ship crossing the Atlantic Ocean in the 18th Century. Anything used in place of the old house should have the same qualities of it: isolation, gloominess, an air of mystery, lots of dark places, eerie corridors, and musty rooms. (P. 126)

Koontz’s advice is practical: he wants to teach his reader how to write marketable Gothics. And from this perspective, specific decor is not so important as the setting’s power to evoke certain responses in the characters (and in the reader): claustrophobia, loneliness, a sense of antiq-

uity, recognition that this is a place of secrets. Such a setting activates the “Gothic” dynamic between image and affect, as well, presumably, as the use of particular kinds of plots, excites curiosity.

Let us consider “Bluebeard,” this simple and straightforward tale, and see if we can discern the nature of the Gothic dynamic. According to Perrault, Bluebeard was immensely wealthy, though “so unlucky as to have a blue beard, which made him so frightfully ugly that all the women and girls ran away from him.”⁴ He had a sinister reputation, “having already been married to several wives, and nobody ever knew what became of them.” Nevertheless, this single man in possession of a good fortune is perennially in want of a wife. He approaches an unnamed widow with two beautiful daughters (also unnamed) and proposes to marry whichever one of them is willing. At first they are understandably cautious. But by means of a series of parties, where “nobody went to bed, but all passed the night in rallying and joking with each other,” Bluebeard manages to convince the younger daughter that his “beard [was] not so very blue, and that he was a mighty civil gentleman.”

After a month of marriage the bridegroom departs “to take a country journey . . . about affairs of great consequence,” leaving his wife with the keys to every door, and a strict prohibition that forbids only one of them to her: he tells her that if she uses the key to that door he will punish her in terrible but unspecified ways. Despite this stern injunction, however, his wife cannot resist the temptation to explore all her husband’s possessions and to learn what secret he wishes to conceal from her; she opens the door and discovers the bodies of Bluebeard’s murdered wives. Using the key permanently stains it with blood, so that upon his return Bluebeard knows what has happened. With a Desdemona-like plea to lengthen her life by only a few minutes, the wife manages to fend off Bluebeard until her brothers arrive and kill him. Bluebeard’s wife inherits his fortune, which she spends “wisely,” according to the narrator—to marry her sister Anne to a young gentleman who had loved her a long while, to buy captains’ commissions for her brothers, and “to marry herself to a very worthy gentleman, who made her forget the ill time she had passed with Bluebeard.”

According to legend, Bluebeard’s historical prototype is Gilles de Rais, who certainly had some terrible secrets to hide, though they concerned hundreds of murdered children rather than a few murdered wives. (This erstwhile lieutenant of Jeanne d’Arc was eventually con-

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victed of sodomy and sorcery.⁵) This tale type is familiar to folklorists, though Perrault's version is apparently the most familiar in Western Europe. In *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976), Bruno Bettelheim reads the story as a cautionary tale about the dangers of adult sexuality from the child's point of view.

At first glance, Bettelheim's reading has much to recommend it. Emphasis on the husband/villain's beard, sign of his gender, implies that his deeds are somehow linked with male sexuality, while its being "blue" implies perversity; beards may be almost every other color in the spectrum (black, white, red, yellow, etc.) but not *naturally* blue.⁶ Old-fashioned Freudians might easily construe Bluebeard's key as a phallic symbol. But Bettelheim's reading, like the Freudian psychoanalysis upon which it is founded, takes as "nature" what from other perspectives might be regarded as "culture": patriarchy, "the Law of the Father," as the basis and structure of "reality." Bettelheim's reading, like the tale itself, takes for granted a culture in which sex is the most likely candidate for the dirty secret; it is a world in which men have money and hence power. The business of a woman's life is to find a suitable husband and to obey him (even as the tale implies that such obedience is unlikely, given female curiosity and intransigence). Implicitly, serial wife murder is as dramatically *unnatural* as a blue beard, but in Bluebeard's world such murder is also not altogether implausible. And this, I suspect, is the reason the tale has made such an impression on our imaginations. As "monsters" often do, the "unnatural" Bluebeard is the exception that proves the rule within that "unnatural" state we call culture. Bluebeard's secret is the foundation upon which patriarchal culture rests: control of the subversively curious "female," personified in his wives.

Therefore, this house with its secret room is not merely background, a source of incidental details that serve to convey a latent psychological "reality." Instead, it "realizes," makes concrete, the structure of power that engenders the action within this social world. Crucial to supporting this structure are certain assumptions concerning gender itself. According to the tale, Bluebeard is indeed "a man of property"—both in his blue beard (which defines and names him) and his enormous wealth: "fine houses, both in town and country, a great deal of silver and gold plate, embroidered furniture, and coaches gilded all over with gold." This property gives him the power to buy the series of wives who might otherwise have shunned him; if his strategy with the last was typical, he seduced them all with promises of the pleasure

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as well as the security that wealth brings. Property also enables Bluebeard to pursue his sadistic career of wife-temptation and murder. The nameless last woman, who moved from the category of "younger daughter" to that of "Bluebeard's wife," finds herself in patriarchy's double bind: a bourgeois Pandora or Eve.

According to these founding myths, the male in power arranges things so that the supposedly irresistible force of "female" curiosity comes in direct conflict with the immovable object of his own law. In this scheme, woman—the "other"—is definitively, "naturally," "curious." This quality has traditionally been denigrated through its habitual association with cats and undisciplined wives; and yet in other contexts—the Faust myth, for instance—the wish to know may be interpreted as the intellectual desire fueling all human learning, exploration, and creation. As a questing desire for knowledge, men have lauded "the feminine" in the abstract as the muse or as a means of imaginative transcendence (as in Goethe's *Ewig-Weibliche* or Jung's concept of the anima). But in the flesh, as a literal woman in a specific narrative, the curious female must learn her terrible lesson.

In slipping from the concept of intellectual desire as metaphorically "female" to a concretely embodied female curiosity, tales like "Bluebeard" provide a complex strategy for blaming the woman: if the yearning felt as "other" is personified as "woman," *she* can be blamed for the results of the desire to know. The narrator of "Bluebeard" even hints that the wife was unduly swayed by the prospect of pleasure and material wealth; it is the younger daughter who allows Bluebeard to overcome her better judgment. Once married to Bluebeard, this woman, acting as her (male-defined) "nature" demands, breaks his rule, thus bringing upon herself the threatened punishment. Like Eve and Pandora, she then may be held responsible for any ill that ensues.

The tale of Bluebeard's wife, unlike that in Genesis, takes a comic turn in the end.⁷ But in all these narratives, masculine power, both material and ethical, is the first principle of the fictional world. In giving her the keys and forbidding the use of only one, Bluebeard offers his wife a carefully limited share of that power: "Open them all; go into all and every one of them, except that little closet, which I forbid you, in such a manner that, if you happen to open it, there's nothing but what you may expect from my just anger and resentment." His language contains more than a hint of anticipated self-righteous pleasure in exacting the punishment for which his law provides. And in addition to satisfaction in the severity of this law, Bluebeard also *wants* his wife

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to explore the length of his house, his rooms with gold and silver furniture, the extravagant mirrors "where you can see yourself from head to foot"; he *wants* her to realize the extent of his wealth and power and to see her (reflected) place in it. In forbidding his wife only one room, however, Bluebeard both limits her freedom and most extravagantly dramatizes his own, superior position. And so he forbids her the room in order to be sure that she will open the door, for the contents of the room represent patriarchy's secret, founding "truth" about the female: women as mortal, expendable matter/*matèr*. Sexual "difference" is indeed the "key" to the secrets of the patriarchal power structure.

Perrault retells the patriarchal tale of female curiosity not as religious myth but as a social—if somewhat remote—"reality." The stories of Eve and Pandora have vague pastoral settings; "Bluebeard," however, takes place within Bluebeard's house, in "culture" rather than "nature," thus implying the degree to which the boundaries, the forbidden, are cultural, an expression of the powers that be—Bluebeard's "property." Although the knowledge resulting from both Eve's and Pandora's violation also concerns the burden patriarchy lays upon "the female"—the sufferings of mortality—the character of the secret is quite explicit here, as if moving the drama indoors had lent it clarity and intensity. When she opens the closet, Bluebeard's wife learns what happens to the women of his house: he beheads them, a punishment emblematic of the separation between mind and body that transforms them into the patriarchal definition of "the female" with a vengeance—dead flesh, soulless matter. And we see as well a motive in Bluebeard's plot; he arranges an opportunity to express his "just wrath and resentment." Bluebeard's rules rationalize his punishment of his wife, implying his unconscious loathing of the female.

Bluebeard's arrangement of his castle, however, depends upon certain cultural laws so familiar that they seem "natural." Bluebeard's strategy insures that "woman" equals "the material," as she must according to the patriarchal scheme of things. If she acts according to what he unconsciously knows is true about her, that she is a human subject stirred by intellectual desire, she is trapped, confronted with his definition of her as unruly matter, *deservedly* punished, the dirty secret in the house of culture.

I suggest, then, that Bluebeard's castle—and by extension the characteristically Gothic setting—represents several things at once. It is a figure for Bluebeard himself—his "property" is coextensive with his "properties." (This is the reading proposed by Bartók in his one-act

opera, *Bluebeard's Castle* [1911], and the notion of the psyche as house is familiar in the psychoanalytic literature of dream interpretation—for instance in Jung's famous dream about exploring a house which led both to his definitive break with Freud and to his theory of archetypes.)⁸ Julian Jaynes's provocative theory of consciousness itself as an "analogue space" that evolved in early recorded history may also be relevant here.⁹ But at the same time, the castle also represents man's culture, the arrangement of spaces in which this "Gothic" action unfolds and the distribution of power that generates the plot.

Building walls and declaring boundaries in all these dimensions creates both the possibility—and the desire—to transgress any or all of them. That is, since men in this culture hold virtually all the wealth and power, which they use to control the women, the culture in itself facilitates an impulse toward subversion among the subordinate gender. Furthermore, just as Bluebeard's name (his position within culture) is identical with his perversity, so the fact of a horrible secret, and even the nature of that secret, is also inherent in the culture itself. A house makes secrets in merely being itself, for its function is to enclose spaces. And the larger, older, and more complex the structure becomes, the more likely it is to have secret or forgotten rooms. Moreover, given the premises and history of patriarchy, such rooms contain the most appropriate possible secret—the bloody bodies of murdered wives that represent the "truth" around which patriarchy is organized.

The wife's sojourn in the castle is a version of the archetypal heroic journey to the otherworld, for if the female is the "other" of "male" culture, so must culture—the house—be "other" to her, even though it simultaneously allows a heroine to confront the "maternal."¹⁰ The Gothic version of the archetype, however, accents the cultural determinants of this adventure. Unlike Hades, or those caves and natural fissures into which so many heroes plunge, a castle is a *man*-made thing, a cultural artifact linked with the name of a particular family. This structure has a private and a public aspect; its walls, towers, ramparts suggest external identity, the "corridors of power," consciousness; whereas its dungeons, attics, secret rooms, and dark hidden passages connote the culturally female, the sexual, the maternal, the unconscious. It is a public identity enfolding (and organizing) the private, the law enclosing, controlling, dark "female" otherness. The walls of the house both defend it from the outside world ("A man's home is his castle") and hide the secrets it thereby creates. The structure embodies the principles of cultural order.

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Most important, this structure is marked, haunted by “history”—the events of its own development. The ghosts—whether real or imaginary—derive from the past passions, past deeds, past crimes of the family identified with this structure. The psychic as well as the physical space of the castle bears its marks. Hence the familiar prominence in Gothic of family history in the decor: the portraits in the gallery, the Elizabethan wing put up by the third Earl, the Palladian addition of the eighth, and so on. That the house embodies the family history reminds us that the word “house” has two meanings relevant to Gothic fictions—it refers both to the building itself and to the family line. The conclusion of *Otranto* announces this identification when Manfred’s castle, concrete manifestation of his usurped name as Prince of Otranto, collapses into ruins. In “The Fall of the House of Usher” Poe also makes this connection explicit, and the virtually conventional conflagration occurring in such familiar novels as *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca* similarly imply this concept of “house.”

The latent pun on “house” as “structure” and as “family line” is a crucial link between Gothic conventions of setting and those of plot. Occurring in spaces associated with particular families, Gothic plots are also structured according to the ramifications of the family tree. Resolution of the conventional Gothic mystery coincides with the revelation of a particular family secret, usually a hitherto unrecognized aspect of family relationship: that Emily’s aunt has been murdered by Laurentini di Udolpho; that Manfred’s claim to the throne is illegitimate; that Jane is not only an Eyre but an heir. Indeed, despite the length and narrative complexity of many early Gothics, they yield surprisingly precise information about the family trees of the characters involved, information that is not trivial, given the importance of the family as basic organizing principle in the narratives. (See appendix B.)

The tale of Bluebeard thus elucidates the function of the conventional Gothic setting, the enclosed and haunted space most often represented by an ancient, mysterious house. It is not entirely true, as Jean Roudaut writes, that “to enter into the castle is to elude all justice, to become vulnerable to the arbitrary wishes of one person, to be placed where neither external social controls nor even divinity itself is in control.”¹¹ True, it may *seem* that the Gothic protagonist enters a dream world; but in this dream actual rules of the “real” world are horribly “realized.” Thus the Gothic also literalizes Freud’s point of departure regarding the uncanny: the *Unheimlich* as a presentation of the utterly familiar as strange. The German term declares such things “un-home-

like”; English has adopted the term “uncanny” to speak of this familiarly “unfamiliar,” the “un-family-like.” In other words the nightmarish haunted house as Gothic setting puts into play the anxieties, tensions, and imbalances inherent in family structures. But the reader may “safely” assume, “This is nothing like my family.” The dreadful pleasures these tales evoke declare that it is.

Furthermore, this family structure is congruent with other organizing principles of patriarchal culture. In the “dark ages” both government and the church were specifically patterned on the “divinely ordained” model of the patriarchal family. Thus the dynamics of the family may be manifest as politics (hence the inherent affinity between stories set in the past and Gothic). And these family dynamics are equally inherent in the structure of the Roman Catholic Church, where monks and nuns are “brothers” and “sisters,” where priests are called “father” and abbesses “mother.” The various communities live in religious “houses.” (A frequent convention of the mass-market Gothic was a family house built from the ruins of a religious house—Victoria Holt’s *Kirkland Revels* [1962], for instance.) The early Gothic’s conventional insistence on the historicity of these narratives may thus signal what Freud called a “compromise formation” in the dream work; to say that this culture and these events are enormously distant and yet absolutely authentic, historically true, satisfies the dreamer’s need both to deny and to confront a troubling reality.

But this organizing structure, at once literal and symbolic, that may be “realized” as a medieval abbey or an ancestral mansion expresses our culture in other ways more intangible yet all-encompassing. The Gothic castle also concretely represents what many poststructuralist critics, following Lacan, refer to as “the Symbolic”—“*le nom du père*,” the Law of the Father. (His “name” is also his “no.”) It is founded on the distinction between male and female, on the repression of the mother specifically and “the female” in general—in associating the always deferred “signified” with the forbidden body of the mother. Bluebeard’s prohibition, therefore, might also be seen as an expression of the Law.

The Law shapes literary form as well. In “Bluebeard” narrative techniques subtly but unmistakably side with Bluebeard—not with his habit of murder, to be sure, but with the unquestioned “reality” of the male power that makes such murder possible, sometimes even “necessary.” The “once upon a time” beginning may lead the reader to expect mainly fantastic events, but aside from the magic key and the brothers’

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marvelously timed arrival, the story primarily deals in cultural “reality”—the psychology of the wife in confronting her situation. As one might expect in a late seventeenth-century narrative, the fictional techniques in “Bluebeard” are quite conservative, which colors our assumptions about the implied social and sexual politics of the tale, its “reality.” Just as the financial, marital, and ethical premises are unquestioned, so the omniscient narrator is matter-of-fact, authoritative, impersonal. We are not invited to ask how he knows so much, or for a moment to consider whether he could be in any way unreliable. He assumes that the women’s marriages are the only possible happy ending for them and just as clearly assumes that his audience will concur. As Bluebeard’s capacity to engineer the whole situation merely takes advantage of or “realizes” the premises of his culture, so the narrator bolsters the culture in a different way: like most male voices in a patriarchal culture, he speaks with a smooth and comfortable authority.

The tale of “Bluebeard” thus suggests how a “central term” of Gothic, the “haunted castle,” may be read as a complex metaphor for the structures of cultural power (whether private or public, sexual, political, or religious) and for the gender arrangements such institutions both found and mirror. These may not always be congruent (indeed, their dissonances may in part generate the plots) but they are interlocking and overlapping, affirming both the premises of sexual difference and the inferiority or “otherness” of “the female,” whether manifested in a particular woman, a female character, or metaphorically as darkness, materiality, or any other of those qualities belonging to “the line of evil.”

Assumptions founded on the difference between “male” and “female” (and their associated qualities) mark other textual dimensions of Gothic fiction as well. “Point of view,” for instance: what if “Bluebeard” had been narrated by Bluebeard’s wife? By sister Anne? By one (or all) of the dead wives? At the very least, these alternative voices would disturb that balance of secret-generating power unquestioned in the tale as it stands.¹² Like any house with its necessarily enclosed spaces, the Symbolic also has its darkness, its repressed “other”—certain “spaces” (unknown, unspeakable “signifieds”) that are akin to Bluebeard’s secret room: their very existence incites the desire to explore.

Ultimately, the characteristic Gothic edifice is haunted by the secrets of its engendering (in several senses of that word). The Law of the Father is ubiquitous, overdetermined in this structure. Thus any num-

ber of different physical (or textual) details may represent this Law; for this reason the British castle is no more centrally “Gothic” than Emily Grierson’s run-down mansion.¹³ In at once reifying, affirming, and exploring the Law of the Father, the Gothic is at once profoundly conservative (as numerous critics have argued)—an affirmation of the cultural status quo as “reality.” Yet as we have seen, even as the structure encloses its secrets and shadows, it also appears to encourage their disclosure. Though threatening to punish the curious heroine, the system, like Bluebeard, invites her to open the door. Thus Gothic may also be revolutionary, patriarchy’s nightmare of decline and fall. (Bluebeard’s *ancien régime* is supplanted by a new one supposedly founded on Reason and Justice; but like the French Revolution, it leaves in place—in the demand for new husbands—an opportunity for new tyrants.)

In the next section we shall examine a text that “achieves” Gothic by a different path, in giving voice to Bluebeard’s wife, as it were, a voice that speaks, or rather, a hand that writes. In *Eloisa to Abelard* Pope forges the letter of an enclosed female “other.” This poem, long acknowledged as an antecedent of Gothic decor and ambiance, has much to teach about the implications of the patriarchal dynamic that inheres in language itself.

THREE

Pope as Gothic “Novelist” *Eloisa to Abelard*

There would begin in her a work of reproduction which once more brought up before her eyes the scenes of the illness and death. . . . Every day she would go through each impression once more, would weep over it and console herself—at her leisure, one might say.

Freud and Breuer
Studies on Hysteria (p. 1)

In a way, feminine writing never stops reverberating from the wrench that the acquisition of speech, speaking out loud, is for her—“acquisition” that is experienced more as a tearing away, dizzying flight and flinging oneself, diving. . . . She vitally defends the “logic” of her discourse with her body; her flesh speaks true. She exposes herself. Really she makes what she thinks materialize carnally, she conveys meaning with her body. She inscribes what she is saying because she does not deny unconscious drives the unmanageable role they play in speech.

Hélène Cixous
The Newly Born Woman (p. 92)

I have suggested that scholars of Gothic tend to imagine the creation of *Otranto* as a parthenogenesis. Walpole conceived and gave birth in a quasi-miraculous *venue à l'écriture* and then he wrote down his dream, placing it within a narrative context. Such a “translation” of the “primary process” necessarily involves, according to Freud, “secondary revision”: a filling in of gaps, an attributing of cause and effect and other qualities we associate with “reality” to the dream’s jumble of images. (Bemused readers of *Otranto* may feel that some of these secondary links are not particularly convincing.) Like other patriarchal

birth myths, this one appears to efface the mother, the “material cause.”¹ As writing, Walpole’s creation cannot entirely deny its material dimension, but *Otranto* also owes a substantial, and indeed peculiarly material debt to a prior text. In a quite literal way, Pope’s *Eloisa to Abelard* (1717) is the “mother” of *Otranto*. Though Montague Summers mentions Walpole’s material debt to *Eloisa* in *The Gothic Quest*, the implications of this debt have not been analyzed.

During the years that Strawberry Hill was taking shape, Walpole wrote to his friend Sir Horace Mann:

My house is so monastic, that I have a little hall decked with long saints in lean arched windows and with taper columns, which we call the Paraclete, in memory of Eloise’s cloister. . . . Under two gloomy arches, you come to the hall and staircase . . . the most particular and chief beauty of the castle. Imagine the walls covered . . . [with] Gothic fretwork: the lightest Gothic balustrade to the staircase, adorned with antelopes (our supporters) bearing shields. (June 12, 1753)²

Walpole’s conceit in designing his hallway as an allusion to *Eloisa* is charming, reminiscent of strategies already familiar in garden design—of manipulating audience response through arrangement of the landscape. The “allusion” to *Eloisa* is less architectural than affective: this portion of the house evokes the same feeling as Pope’s poem does—a delicious melancholy. As a stage in the genealogy of Gothic, however, it is curious. In Walpole’s house Pope’s words became wood and stone (and antelopes bearing shields!); this house in turn inspired the famous nightmare, a dream which “materialized” once more as *The Castle of Otranto*. Since Walpole sometimes referred to his house as “my son Strawberry” (*Gothic Quest*, p. 180), the pedigree of his child *Otranto* is as complicated a case of incest as that in *The Mysterious Mother*.

True, in translating his dream house into words as a result of his house dream, Walpole might seem to be appropriating the transcendent, or at least the quasi-permanent authority of language. But in the eighteenth century, words might achieve such authority only by means of ink on paper: these also are the “mater” of *Otranto*. Information about the origin, provenance, and physical condition of the text figures prominently in Walpole’s “translator’s introduction” to the first edition. This disingenuousness, indeed reflexivity, has several functions; for the moment, however, I want to consider Walpole’s stress on the material dimensions of the text.

Traditionally critics have ignored the importance of this material aspect of writing; in the past two decades, however, French theorists

following Derrida have especially debated notions of *l'écriture*. These ideas include recognition of the text as "an open infinite *process* that is both meaning-generating and meaning-subverting" as well as recognition of the linguistic and psychoanalytic principles that things previously dismissed as "error" or "nonsense" (such as dreams or slips of the tongue) are "readable." In fact the "materiality, silence, space, and conflicts" in texts have meaning, most often encoding patterns of cultural dominance.³ A theory of *l'écriture* places the mother/*mater* of the text (in Aristotle's sense, the various "material causes") within the realm of analysis.

Eloisa to Abelard purports to be a letter (a text as object) generated by the author and subject's particular situation. The nature of Eloisa's writing is inseparable from her situation as a writer. Eloisa is as much a victim of patriarchy's coercive power as Bluebeard's wife. Like Scott's Bride of Lammermoor, she has been forcibly married to a bridegroom other than the one she loves and desires; and now she is confined in a house aptly named "the Paraclete"—the "Holy Ghost."⁴ But *Eloisa* is most important to this discussion because the text shows that in writing as a woman so imprisoned, Pope wrote "in Gothic."

Pope's subject as well as his generic model invited him to create a language of "the other." His heroine is Gothic in the eighteenth-century sense of "medieval"; as Pope noted in his "Argument," "Eloisa and Abelard flourished in the twelfth century." And in imitating the heroic epistle, a classical genre purporting to be a letter written by an abandoned woman to her lost love, Pope provided himself with a poetic license to bypass the order, decorum, and grammar (in various senses) of "civilized" discourse. Being a sensitive translator as well, he knew that an adequate rendering suggests not only the letter but the spirit of the original. Thus the interiors and landscapes by which Pope supplements his representation of the female mind in torment are doubly fascinating: in reflecting Eloisa's passions they not only suggest that the boundaries of the female self are unstable; they also reveal his—and his culture's—fantasy of what it is to be a woman in distress. (One supposes that Pope's remarkable success with readers confirms that the fantasy was widely shared.)

In "Bluebeard," female subjectivity only appears in the limited—and subversive—role of the wife's curiosity and fear; in *Eloisa* the heroine's self and the text, throughout, are one and the same. This experience of "otherness" created in Eloisa's alternately bitter, despairing, and passionate words is, nevertheless, broadly defined by patriarchal

conventions of “the feminine.” If she seems like a moving portrait of “an abandoned woman,” that response necessarily springs from our cultural expectations about abandoned women. According to Lawrence Lipking this voice typifies female poetic expression in the West; but the notion of such a character as the most authentically “poetic” of all female voices is quintessentially patriarchal—one of those “fictions of feminine desire” that arise when the masters of language try to imagine the desire of the other.⁵

As in “Bluebeard,” the enclosed space is not only a disorderly darkness, it teems with erotic secrets (for “the female” and “the sexual” share “otherness” within the structure of the patriarchal Symbolic).⁶ Rebellious and passionate, Eloisa is inconsistent and irrational—in fact, sometimes “hysterical,” subject to fantasies of an almost psychotic intensity—such as her vision of “Black Melancholy.” She sees ghosts, she hears voices, and her envisionings of Abelard bring him almost as much before our eyes as he seems to be before hers. Gillian Beer has shown that *Eloisa*’s gloomy landscapes are reminiscent of those in Ovid’s heroic epistles; this similarity supports my argument. To Ovid as to Pope, certain kinds of scenery are an inevitable cultural resource to represent the passionate female psyche.⁷

But if *Eloisa* implies that what we recognize as characteristic “Gothic” decor is a patriarchal fantasia on the culturally “female,” it equally shows that the fantasy is implicitly controlled by those same cultural structures—the Symbolic’s shadowy, fateful grammar of the possible and the forbidden. From the opening lines Pope blurs the distinction between the speaker and her physical enclosure:

In these deep solitudes and awful cells,
Where heavenly pensive contemplation dwells,
And ever-musing melancholy reigns,
What means this tumult in a vestal’s veins?
Why rove my thoughts beyond their last retreat?
(ll. 1–5)

“Deep solitudes and awful cells” is indeterminately literal *and* metaphorical. Eloisa refers to herself in both the first and third person, and the personification of “contemplation” and “melancholy” makes it difficult to determine whether she speaks of her convent or herself. Like the cloister, she is an enclosed space—dark, mysterious, secretive, complex. Hence it is appropriate that Pope imagines the Paraclete in the shadowy, intricate, Gothic style of Chartres or Notre Dame (which

would emerge a century later), rather than placing his Eloisa within the plain twelfth-century Romanesque architecture of the historical Héloïse's time.

Thus, immured in "the convent's solitary gloom" (l. 38), Eloisa is equally confined within her culture's notions of "nature and grace, virtue and passion." The structure that encloses her, however, is doubly strong: it has been ordered ("arranged," "commanded," "required") by Abelard (l. 133) according to his sense of the divine will. In Eloisa's world these two authorities are congruent and reinforce each other; that she confuses God with Abelard implies not only her heretical, "feminine" confusion of two lovers, but also the cultural reality that man as priest or husband represents the word of God on earth. According to the "house rules" of the Paraclete, the highest purpose of language is prayer, love belongs to God, and private, spontaneous passions must be strictly regulated. The "blameless vestal" is happily resigned to "Labor and rest, that equal periods keep; / 'Obedient slumbers that can wake and weep'" (ll. 211–12).

Knowledge that Pope was imitating the heroic epistle has distracted critics from recognizing the many particulars of his linguistic "female impersonation"—the ways in which his poetry accommodates his novel subject position. His accomplishment calls to mind the French feminist debate about a hypothetical *l'écriture féminine*, about the possibilities of "women's writing" and "writing as a woman." French theorists, notably Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Monique Wittig, and Julia Kristeva, have from differing perspectives considered the effects the writing female subject might have on a system organized around the "masculine" (qualities consciously and unconsciously privileged by the male-dominated Symbolic order: reason, logic, the law of cause and effect, the repression of the "other"). Cixous emphatically denies that such "female writing" is necessarily produced by women, listing Shakespeare, Kleist, and Genet among the preeminent (and presumably inadvertent) authors who produced *l'écriture féminine*. Thus the theory allows that Pope might also have written such a text in his effort to create a poetic universe from the female perspective.⁸

If *Eloisa* has affinities with *l'écriture féminine*, we see why so many twentieth-century critics have found the poem puzzling in light of Pope's work and "neoclassical" poetry as a whole. One might also note that despite being male, Pope's personal circumstances placed him in a "feminine" position. Small, weak, and sickly (indeed, suffering from frequent headaches), he was physically inferior to the masculine ideal;

as a Roman Catholic he belonged to a group both religiously and politically "other." Thus his (or his persona's) explicit identification with Eloisa at the end of the poem may have unconscious resonances beyond the coy expression of hopeless love for Lady Mary that biographers generally note. In fact, to be strictly accurate, it is *Eloisa* who imagines *him*, her "future bard," as her final creative act.

Pope's sensitivity to the linguistic implications of his project appears in the self-consciousness about language (especially writing) that he attributes to Eloisa. For instance, the "name" of Abelard has an almost magical power over her: she "must kiss the name" (l. 8). That "dear fatal name" (l. 9) leads an ambiguous secret existence within her, but irresistibly wells up: "O write it not, my hand—the name appears / Already written—wash it out my tears" (ll. 13–14). The name "awakens all [her] woes" (l. 30). Despite this enslavement to a word, however, Eloisa expresses her faith in the power of "letters" (as both signs and physical objects) to bestow life (ll. 51–58); "They live, they speak, they breathe what love inspires" (l. 53). Still, throughout her own misadventure, Eloisa also frets about linguistic limitations; she finds no adequate term for her relationship to Abelard: "If there be yet another name more free, / More fond than mistress, make me that to thee!" (ll. 89–90). In summoning Abelard she runs through a list of names, as if in frustration or in the hope finding a term to supersede them: "Come thou, my father, brother, husband, friend! / Ah let thy handmaid, sister, daughter move, / And all those tender names in one, thy love!" (ll. 152–55).⁹

Eloisa seems to write from *between* the binary opposites that delimit Western culture and thus her cognitive space—not only nature and grace, virtue and passion, but sleep and waking, dream and reality, public and private, past and present, cold and heat, love and fame, memory and oblivion, motion and stasis, Heaven and Hell, ideal and real—and numerous others. In this text, the motif of the binary is obsessive. Even Pope's brilliant use of the conventional heroic couplet felicitously embodies the binary principle in the verse, a pattern as rigidly constricting as Abelard's word or his theology.

Another mode of duality also appears in the idea of "resignation," the impossible ideal toward which Eloisa struggles throughout her letter. The term epitomizes the demands of Abelard and the religious life: to give up past memories and present desires; to accept the conditions of this life—in which only such renunciation makes prayers acceptable. (The "spotless mind" of the ideal nun knows "each prayer accepted

and each wish resigned" [l. 210].) But Eloisa's persistent frustrations with language manifest her desire for a more radical mode of "resignation"—not only "to give over or submit (oneself), to force (oneself), to acquiesce, to give up, to quit, to relinquish"—but also to demonstrate in the etymological, root sense of the Latin *resignare*—"to unseal, to resign": to re-sign. To find (or to invent) new words (signs) for her own "illegitimate" and "unspeakable" subjective realities.

Throughout the poem this struggle to "resign" continually turns into a "re-signing"—a rewriting of herself and Abelard into different roles reflecting the conflict between her passion and the culture that imprisons her. The conclusion is the most important such "re-signation." She prays, "May one kind grave unite each hapless name / And graft my love immortal on thy fame" (ll. 343–44). Love and fame epitomize her conflict. "Love" represents the unruly passion that rebels against the Symbolic as manifested in law and theology; "fame" (to have one's *name* remembered) is the earthly mode of the Symbolic eternal (Heaven is its metaphysical dimension). "Graft" is a horticultural metaphor, but its roots also lie in the notion of writing; the word derives from the Old French *grafe*, a pencil, because the stems to be grafted resemble a writing implement.

Eloisa's concluding lines both resign and re-sign herself to a final resting place that accommodates both love and fame: in the tomb, fame (which she associates with Abelard) is forever united with love (embodied by herself). Her idea of a union of the two appears to have the power to supersede the confines of Eloisa's Symbolic prison. The "pale marble" itself may be read "ages hence" by other lovers, who have their own somber interpretation of its meaning, quite contradictory to Eloisa's own: "Ah may we never love as these have loved" (l. 352). And it generates another kind of message in the song of the "future bard" who affirms Eloisa's theory of representation, "He best can paint 'em, who shall feel 'em most" (l. 366).

Her searing experience of loss, of the absence of the beloved, itself refines Eloisa's self-consciousness about the resources and limitations of the written word. For writing is as paradoxical as her own situation. As writing communicates "meaning," it also reminds the reader of its limitations—both its inability to restore what has been lost and its slippery hold upon meaning, for words do not really have the monopoly on signification that they may seem to have. As the conclusion of Eloisa's letter suggests, extralinguistic communication supplies a soothing, indeed redeeming, supplement to mere words.

Chapter Three

In writing her letter, Eloisa shows another kind of language consciousness: she often reminds us of the material dimensions of her text. Sometimes, her writing is virtually automatic:

O write it not, my hand—the name appears
Already written—wash it out, my tears!
In vain lost Eloisa weeps and prays,
Her heart still dictates, and her hand obeys.
(ll. 13–16)

Eloisa's flowing tears have become a conventional sign of sentimentality, but here they carry an additional (perhaps prior) meaning. Tears are "feminine," but not only because they have traditionally been read as signs of the "second" sex's supposed emotionality and weakness; fluid, they represent whatever can blur borders and soften categories, dissolving and melting. They are also a troubling bodily sign of female subjectivity—the possibility so threatening to Symbolic order that the female other is indeed a self with needs and desires equal to the male's. To weep is to reveal the selfhood that Eloisa tries to communicate to Abelard throughout her letter. She is not stone, as she emphatically declares (l. 24); indeed, in the feminine disorder of her cloistered world, not merely women, but the very statues also weep (l. 22). Clearly for Eloisa borders between inner and outer (the inside and outside, the body and the mind) are by no means fixed.

Thus, tears, or a tear-stained page, suggest a simple, *literal* way to accomplish what both Cixous and Irigaray have discussed, *l'écriture féminine* as "writing the body." Eloisa's text also expresses the rhythms and the impulses of her desires; it obeys a logic of passion, not of the rational intellect. Like Cixous's concept of "feminine writing" cited above, Eloisa's letter "does not deny unconscious drives the unmanageable role they play in speech." Her "argument" is closer to the psychoanalytic technique of "free association" than to the formal rhetoric she would have learned under Abelard's tutelage. It frankly experiences the fantasies and dreams that constitute much of Eloisa's "reality." Of those dimensions of self to which the Symbolic allots "reality" (her present role as Abbess and spiritual mother, her past as wife and actual mother) we know virtually nothing.

The case of *Eloisa* as *l'écriture féminine*—like that of Shakespeare and Genet as producers of such writing—is perhaps clearer in light of Julia Kristeva's argument that the "feminine" is a *position* within the Symbolic: the space of "the other," not a state of being. Various expo-

nents of *l'écriture féminine* (especially Cixous and Irigaray) have been accused of "essentialism." (Do they unconsciously imply, at least sometimes, that there is such a thing as "the feminine"?) Given the essentializing, reifying tendencies built into language itself, this stance is extremely hard to avoid. Kristeva's concept of "the Semiotic" offers another context for explaining how *Eloisa's* text might reveal the presence of the body, the female "material."

Beginning with *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974; trans. 1984), Kristeva develops a theory of the process by which the "speaking subject" is formed and maintained. Building on Lacan's assumptions about the linguistic/cultural structure in and through which the subject is created at the Oedipal crisis, she assumes that subjectivity emerges as the infant (meaning "incapable of speech") acquires language, the use of the "I." Kristeva reimagines Lacan's concept of the Imaginary as the "Semiotic," the preverbal, pre-Oedipal experience the infant has of the mother, as the necessary ground of signification. Only through separation from the mother does the speaking subject gain access to the Symbolic and its inherent structure of substitution. Kristeva also links the Symbolic with "temporal order" and "the paternal order of genealogy."¹⁰ But the "speaking subject," though achieved, is never fixed; it is always *en procès* (in process/on trial)—subject to disruptions. As translator Leon Roudiez comments, "While this division [between semiotic and symbolic] is not identical with that of unconscious/conscious, id/superego, or nature/culture, there are analogies there that could usefully be kept in mind. . . . Such a dialectic comprises drives and impulses on the one hand, the family and society structures on the other."¹¹ In this view, language is the nexus of culture and the self, and for Kristeva residual signs of the power of the repressed maternal Semiotic constitute the "poetic." It makes its presence known within the Symbolic in the *materiality* of the text—the foregrounding of certain sounds, letters, or puns, anything that subverts the sign's pretenses as a transparent "bearer" of meaning.

In linking the Semiotic with the repressed, maternal, feminine "other" of signification and the Symbolic with the "paternal" order of language, logic, chronology, and genealogy, Kristeva's analysis is extremely suggestive for a poetics of Gothic. And since *Eloisa* purports to be a text produced from the "female" perspective in language (from the "edge" of the Symbolic) the poem exemplifies the dynamic, the tensions, created by manifestations of the Semiotic, which, I shall argue, are at the heart of Gothic. *Eloisa* is very much a speaker *en procès*

in both senses of the term. First, the text portrays process more than progress, becoming more than being. At the end it does not so much conclude, as *include*, opening itself to other times, other minds, other texts, other readings. As Eloisa paces back and forth within her physical and conceptual confines, she expresses a whole repertoire of different selves (the introspective, the self-pitying, the impulsive, the philosophical, the depressive, the seductive, the hysterical). The poem also portrays Eloisa “on trial.” She is tried (subjected to great strain and stress) and at the same time “on trial” before Abelard—and ultimately posterity. Her letter puts her case before this invisible and silent judge to whom she pleads. As a living paradox, Eloisa virtually embodies this trope that suggests a gap in the Symbolic; paradox is a figure expressing what is at once true and not true—like Eloisa’s status as a bride of Christ.

Gillian Beer characterizes the speaker of the heroic epistle as a woman who has “fallen into language,” who must accept the letter as a substitute for the body of the absent lover.¹² But in contrast to those other women whom the heroic epistle has served, Eloisa’s history oddly—almost uncannily—anticipates later psychoanalytic narratives about the relation between language and primal, definitive loss. Following Freud, Lacan posited that at the Oedipal crisis the father intervenes between mother and child; this “*nom du père*” represents the threat of castration to the child (son). Although the Symbolic offers a substitute for the mother (in the always deferred “signified”) the system is phallogentric; the son inherits the blessings of the father’s law, including his secure and gratifying position as the linguistic and conceptual norm, the unmarked term (“male” rather than “*female*”), the center of the system. But the speaking subject pays a price, enacts a kind of Faustian bargain—exchanging power (through access to the Symbolic) and consciousness for his prior, blissful symbiosis with the mother (a paradise always about to be regained in the deferred “other” of the “signified”).

Eloisa’s history curiously “realizes” Lacan’s Freudian myth of the unconscious family psychodrama. But in her version the characters are shifted about. Her story involves the literal castration of an adult man, ordered by Eloisa’s guardian, her father surrogate, that marks their separation. It disturbs a symbiosis not of mother and son, but of lover and beloved. This coincidence between history and the psychoanalyst’s hermeneutic narrative is accidental; but it may be that our enduring

fascination with this story of separated lovers implies that—like the myth of Oedipus—it resonates in the Western unconscious. (Who but the scholar remembers those other heroines—Sappho, Rosamund, Ariadne—whose plights are less implicated in the psychosexual dynamics of the patriarchal Symbolic?¹³)

As feminist critics have pointed out, Freud was blind to the ways in which patriarchal social arrangements are cultural rather than "natural." He assumed the priority of fathers, which led him to regard the Oedipal crisis as the definitive developmental moment. As a result, mothers and daughters are not easily accommodated as subjects (rather than as objects of a male perspective) in his system. In patriarchy the female is by definition already "castrated"—defective, lacking. She is thus not vulnerable to the Oedipal threat of losing what she does not have. Any girl in a patriarchal culture is, in any case, always already castrated in effect, since for her the development of consciousness involves the recognition that she is "cut off" from many sources of gratification: status, power, and even to a degree language, especially writing, through lack of education. There is only one way in which a male in patriarchal culture can *literally* cease to be a man; but a woman confronts her lack in innumerable ways. Not only must she separate from her mother; she must also come to terms with her culture's idea of the female as weak, limited, inferior, "other."

Thus Eloisa's writing her own text from her own position upsets this patriarchal alignment of language and power. In contrast to most women of twelfth-century France, the historical Héloïse had remarkable access to culture and to language. She could read and write—in Latin, and even Greek, as well as French; she knew how to "dispute" in the technical sense, having been trained in philosophy. She thus had power denied to other women, power derived from access to the Symbolic. Indeed, one might imagine that Abelard eventually came to view her as embodying that modern cliché for strong women, the "castrating bitch." Eloisa is distressed to read in his *Historia Calamitatum*, "I tremble too, where'er my [name] I find, / Some dire misfortune follows close behind" (ll. 33–34). Through her education, furthermore, Eloisa has partially assimilated the laws of the Symbolic. Abelard may have been emasculated, but the Word he represents is still potent. Poignantly, Eloisa has learned that Abelard mistaught her: "Too soon they [his lips] taught me twas no sin to love" (l. 68), and now must endure her incarceration within the system that classifies that same love

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as “sin.” She may still write, but her words appear to be impotent in relation to Abelard himself. She may have redefined herself so as to be as far as possible from the patriarchal category “woman” by becoming a nun, but she knows herself to be a nun flawed and inadequate. In short, she confronts the paradox that any woman within patriarchy must face: the system provides no completely adequate signs for woman as subject.

Eloisa exclaims that in the world the terms “wife” and “mistress” were in fact inadequate to name her relation to Abelard; and in the cloister she recognizes that she is not a “blameless vestal,” a bride of Christ subsumed into the non-story of the symbolic paradise’s eternal present tense. Most suggestively, however, Pope follows romantic legend in repressing Eloisa’s motherhood—the other, most potent significance patriarchy accords the female. The historical Eloisa bore a son to Abelard, and as Abbess of the Paraclete, she became the spiritual mother to numerous daughters. According to patriarchal logic, to be the mother of sons gives the woman the greatest importance; and though the Abbess’s administrative authority and responsibility give her far more actual power than that of the typical wife and mother, the church symbolically limits that power as Symbolic mother by insuring that all her children will be daughters. But Eloisa is completely silent about either of these dimensions of her experience.

From a feminist perspective, the Freudian Oedipal scheme neatly serves not only to limit the influence of mothers over their sons, but also to obscure the mother’s unique creative power. According to Freud, the baby serves as a substitute for the penis she lacks and desires. This omission of Eloisa’s motherhood, at the narrative or conscious level, suggests a cultural anxiety about the threat of female power in the patriarchal imagination and thus represents another form of female “castration.” But a closer look at the poem suggests that in Eloisa’s text the (m)other is not so much absent as unconscious, and yet—most important—overdetermined in the narrative. This overdetermination enables us to see what Pope ultimately accomplished in writing as Eloisa. In impersonating a woman who doubly experiences the consequences of the definitive masculine loss, Pope opened up a hitherto unnoticed space within the Symbolic; his text subverts and challenges Western “phallocentrism” and even begins to suggest a history of the female subject within its gaps and spaces. In imitating Pope’s “discourse of the other,” later writers may have supposed they were merely copying him or elaborating upon his decor; but in fact

they were unconsciously exploring the cracks and fissures, the intricate fretwork, the secret chambers within the Symbolic (which include the female self).

The tendency of Eloisa's language to veer toward the Semiotic constitutes one dimension of "maternal" or "feminine" power within the text. Another dimension appears when we consider the skewed dynamics of the Oedipal crisis from Eloisa's perspective. One notices, for instance, that from this angle the physical fact of Abelard's castration is not so central, so definitive, as patriarchal culture would assume it should be. It is only one of a number of losses that constitute their separation and Eloisa's sense of loss: among those losses are their residence in "their several convents" and the absence of letters or of any kind of recognition from Abelard. "Give all thou canst—and let me dream the rest," she implores (l. 124). She also asks for letters (ll. 49ff.), for Abelard's pastoral supervision of her flock (ll. 129ff.), for his administration of the last rites (ll. 321ff.), and that they be buried together (ll. 343ff.). Eloisa prays for some restoration of the lost connections between them, and she does not feel that their separation is necessarily irreversible (as Abelard's silence appears to imply). Thus her relation to the language-generating primal loss adumbrates not the Freudian system organized around the threat of castration, but a revised definition of this loss: the primal separation from the mother as the subject's point of origin. According to Madelon Sprengnether, this implied redefinition of "castration" began to suggest itself to Freud later in his career, as he in effect began to acknowledge, however peripherally, the feminine, the maternal, "haunting" his theoretical system organized around the Law of the Father.¹⁴ That Pope's "writing as a woman" uncovers a similar pattern merely confirms the interconnections of language, culture, and psyche.

In keeping with these intimations of maternal power, Eloisa remembers the lost paradise of her love for Abelard in language evoking not only the Semiotic but the specifically maternal:

All then is full, possessing and possessed,
 No craving void let aching in the breast;
 Even thought meets thought ere from the lips it part,
 And each warm wish springs mutual from the heart.
 This sure is bliss (if bliss on earth there be)
 And once the lot of Abelard and me.

(Ll. 93–98)

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The words “full,” “craving,” “aching,” “breast,” “warm,” and “lips” all subtly connote the lost experience of plentitude and of wordless communion and communication—the happy condition in which language is unnecessary to bridge the gap between subject and object because there is no clear boundary between them. Consistent with these connotations, Eloisa’s fantasy of paradise regained casts herself in the role of infant: “Still on that breast enamored let me lie, / Still drink delicious poison from thy eye” (ll. 121–22). In fact, she seems to imagine that any mutually nurturing love involves drinking: “O’er the pale marble shall they join their heads, / And drink the falling tears each other sheds” (ll. 349–50). And satisfying communication between lovers consists of song more than words—such as Abelard’s early teaching (“heav’n listened while you sung / And truths divine came mended from that tongue” [ll. 65–66]) or her concluding vision of communion with the “future bard”—“Those well-sung woes will soothe my pen-sive ghost” (l. 365). The songs and lullabies that soothe the infant communicate through not entirely meaningful “words” that are blurred, blended together, distorted into a pleasing sound that lulls the listener back into sleep, into unconsciousness. Song allows the sound—the material dimension of the word—to supersede the Symbolic function it ordinarily serves.

That Eloisa associates mutually satisfying erotic love with the speaking subject’s pre-Oedipal fantasy of the mother is also manifest in her intense, persistent, nostalgic melancholia. The descriptive language that Pope gives her, adapted from Milton’s “Il Penseroso” and bent toward the negative, the depressive, evokes the pains of melancholy. (Milton’s poem is an invocation of the goddess of this mood, a “pen-sive nun devout and pure.”)¹⁵ Eloisa’s vision of “Black Melancholy” is one of the most vivid descriptions in the poem:

But o’er the twilight groves and dusky caves,
Long-sounding isles, and intermingled graves,
Black Melancholy sits, and round her throws
A death-like silence, and a dread repose.
(Ll. 163–66)

Here we return to Gothic decor. It appears, significantly, that not only does a Gothic setting suggest the Symbolic’s “female” spaces; its characteristic melancholy is intimately related to the mind’s unconscious associations with the mother lost through entry into that culture. In Eloisa’s mind, Melancholy generates “gloom,” shade, “sad-

ness," "horror," and transmutes the world into "death-like silence, and a dread repose." She threatens to transform everything, in other words, into the condition Eloisa most fears: to "forget herself to stone," to be, in short, dead. (It is easy to misread "dread" as "dead" in line 66.) Death is Mother Nature's most terrible manifestation. The symptoms of melancholy coincide with conventional Gothic paraphernalia—consider the original first two stanzas of Keats's "Ode on Melancholy," which run through a list of the clichés: a raft of bones, a sail of sighs, a rosary of yew berries, the "downy owl." Melancholy represents the possibility that being may—must—lapse into non-being, speech into silence. And yet as the lost, desirable "mother" who is a representation of materiality, also death, she evokes, according to the grammar of the Symbolic, a feeling of nostalgia, an attraction, even a fascination—as eighteenth-century fashions for the Gothic and the Graveyard School amply demonstrate.

As the most dramatic symptom of Eloisa's loss of Abelard, this figure of Melancholy is consistent with Kristeva's argument that this condition arises from a problematic relation to the maternal, both as representative of the death that follows any birth and as failed or inadequate access to the Symbolic (a self that fails to separate adequately from the mother and thus lacks full participation in language).¹⁶ Eloisa's Melancholy threatens each of these: "death-like silence," implying separation from the Symbolic, and "dread repose" (death). And yet, in and through a writing that is, although "feminine," yet still writing, Eloisa ultimately triumphs, escaping from the paradoxes in which her earthly life is trapped, into a paradise regained.

Eloisa's letter, then, appropriately enacts the process of the "work of mourning" Freud describes, by which "each single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hypercathected, and detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect of it" (p. 255).¹⁷ Thus Eloisa's writing could be seen as therapeutic for her, *literally* self-creating, as well as subversive of the system. She recalls all her memories and she detaches from them and from "mother"/Abelard. She reproduces these memories as written text, freeing herself by finding a substitute for them, the text itself.¹⁸ This begins to suggest a female mode of the Symbolic that revises the Freudian Oedipal plot and its economy of absolutes—"either/or," this or that, a drama of the single momentous event of separation, of being *cut off* from the sources of gratification. Eloisa's imagery suggests that "paradise" is not merely the infantile symbiosis

with the mother, nor is it an infinitely distant and abstract other world achieved after death. Death is not frightening; she apparently feels no need to transcend the material—she never finds satisfaction in imagining herself in Heaven. Instead, paradise is a peaceful sojourn in the tomb. A comforting kind of eternity inheres in her written word, which is where her tomb exists, and in the subsequent “reproductions” evident in all subsequent “readings” of her texts. Womb and tomb are gratifyingly, rather than horribly, similar.

Theorists of *écriture* speak of the *jouissance* inherent in writing. The term is literally relevant in *Eloisa to Abelard*, as sexual meaning is more specifically signified in the poem than many critics of Pope have wanted to admit. Having registered the inescapably erotic undertones in Eloisa’s language, more than one critic has denied that such meaning could be really pertinent. (Brendan O’Hehir, for instance, carefully points out that the lines, “Suck my last breath, and catch my flying soul!” are “not erotic only”; Gillian Beer remarks on the “sexual sense” of Eloisa’s repeated “come” and “I come,” insisting that “the secondary sexual sense of the word in English remains always secondary.”¹⁹) In “literalizing” (turning into letters) Eloisa’s semiconscious desires, such puns, like other instances of the Semiotic, begin to suggest the possibilities of a Symbolic order that also accommodates the female perspective, the revisions that might ensue from acknowledging language’s materiality.

But Eloisa’s pleasure in the text comprehends more than *jouissance* in the narrow sense. As translator Betsy Wing notes in her glossary of *The Newly Born Woman*, the term “is a word . . . with *simultaneously* sexual, economic, and political overtones. Total access, total participation, as well as total ecstasy are implied.” Eloisa’s pleasure in writing, in expressing her forbidden passion, is also the *jouissance* of access and participation. As Wing writes, the word itself may be heard in French as *j’ouïs sens* (“I hear meaning”). Parallel to the pun on “resign/resign,” this double sense linking pleasure and meaning suggests a way out of the structures in which Eloisa is imprisoned: in defiance, through her writing, Eloisa finds meaning where the patriarchal Word has declared only absence and vacancy—non-meaning.

Eloisa’s tomb is associated with “the unfruitful urn,” a fitting image of her earthly life as controlled and constrained by her culture. But in writing, she not only detaches herself from her hopeless passion for Abelard, an “unfruitful *yearn*,” but she is also finally “fruitful.” At the end she gives birth to an imaginary “future bard.” In writing, Eloisa

not only introduces a new articulation of experience into discourse; she generates for herself an immortality like that the father enjoys in the sons and grandsons who carry on his name: a sign that he has existed. Death may be "all-eloquent" (l. 335), but "only" proves "What dust we dote on when tis man we love." That "only" may be read several ways—as meaning "you, Death, alone," or as "you only sustain the pious, outworn cliché about the vanity of earthly love," or, perhaps, punning on the relation of "prove" as "feel" the statement becomes an almost condescending dismissal of Death, whose only function is negation and non-feeling—a state that Eloisa transcends in her letter and the poem to come from the "future bard."

Pope's experiment in writing as Eloisa was sanctioned by a long, if relatively minor classical tradition. As we have seen, the Gothic ambience of the poem was achieved by his obeying the imperatives inherent in his culture and linguistic resources that go back to ancient Greece. To write from the position of the other, rather than speaking from the position of authority, is as subversive as Bluebeard's wife using her key. Each opens up spaces that heretofore have been kept secret by the very nature of the cultural structure and the powers that have ordained it. But rather than exposing the sinister secret of patriarchal culture at large, Pope's text begins to illuminate the system at the most basic level—in the structure of the language (and thus the thought) that supports (and is supported by) that culture. In revealing the dark, secret spaces of this "other" it discloses not only horrors, but also "novelties"—new ways of writing, which in turn facilitate new ways of thinking and feeling. In later decades these would be "Symbolized" as "Gothic."

FOUR

Symbolization and Its Discontents¹

When a figure of speech now falls from the sky with a weight that crushes one of the characters, it is small wonder that André Breton claimed Walpole for the surrealists.

David B. Morris
“Gothic Sublimity”²

As narratives of an “otherness” distant in time and space, Gothic fictions necessarily emphasize writing rather than speech; and as we have seen, to recognize the materiality of the text (in several senses) opens up an awareness of its deceptiveness and instability, even as it also takes on an almost uncanny power to fix and “materialize” the speaking subject. Thus Gothic texts consistently reveal the uneasy compromise made (or imposed) by the Law of the Father on the material conditions of meaning. Writing is inherently a sign of absence, even as it records the signs of a past presence. The paradoxes inherent in a theory of *écriture* are precisely those manifest in Gothic conventions of plot and narrative technique, for language both mediates the unspeakable “other” and shows the impossibility of that mediation. Thus the familiar Gothic trappings of darkness, the supernatural, the haunted castle, and so on, all express, in their various ways, the tension between the Symbolic and the inexpressible other—the female, the “maternal,” the “Semiotic.” Gothic is a discourse that shows the cracks in the system that constitutes consciousness, “reality.” Gothic, therefore, is a “poetic” tradition in Kristeva’s sense of language disrupted by the Semiotic. It is language that signals a revolution within the established system. It reveals a kind of fault line within the imagination that may open up in prose or in verse, in lyric or drama or narrative, in popular or “serious” art.³

In *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*,⁴ Eve Sedgwick discusses “the unspeakable” as a motif in Gothic fictions. But I would empha-

size that anxieties about this notion permeate Gothic at all levels. Gothic narrative conventions (frame and embedded tales, "found" or "translated" manuscripts, many narrators) dramatize both the materiality of writing and its implicit inadequacies: its discontinuities, ambiguities, unreliabilities, silences. Many a Gothic plot emphasizes the will, a written text that conveys the "will" of its writer from beyond the grave, where (particularly interesting in light of discussions of *écriture*) the author of the words is necessarily absent. Wills are unique in that they become meaningful only after the writer's death. In "realizing" the desires of the dead, they affirm the Symbolic's investment in its own perpetuation and literalize "the Law of the Father."

Information about the provenance and condition of the Gothic text is conventional, as in Walpole's claim that *Otranto* purports to be the *translation* of a manuscript "found in the library of an ancient Catholic family in the north of England." In *Melmoth the Wanderer*, John Melmoth peruses the manuscript he has inherited, which breaks off abruptly from time to time, having been damaged by fire. *Frankenstein* is constituted as a complex compilation of narratives, the whole being contained in Walton's journal, whereas *Dracula* is a patchwork of documents purportedly arranged by Mina (who has "a man's brain" as well as "a woman's heart"). And from *Jane Eyre* (1847) onward, "female" Gothic narratives usually purport to be autobiographies, a discourse of the self composed to preserve and authenticate the authority of the speaking subject.

But narrative strategies are only one class of Gothic conventions that imply a fascination with the problem of language, with possible fissures in the system of the Symbolic as a whole. Most—perhaps *all*—Gothic conventions express some anxiety about "meaning." In Gothic, fragments of language often serve ambiguously to further the plot—in letters (lost, stolen, buried); in mysterious warnings, prophecies, oaths, and curses; in lost wills and lost marriage lines. Such fragments may be misinterpreted (often because they are removed from the original context), and frequently deceive or betray the interpreter. The prophecy in Walpole's story, "that the Castle and Lordship of Otranto should pass from the present family whenever the real owner should have grown too large to inhabit it" is at last irrationally and horribly "realized." Often what makes no sense in the system of ordinary experience turns out to be all too real in another system, the "supernatural," one that suddenly intrudes into the former.

In Gothic, language is multifarious, duplicitous, and paradoxical.

Words may be both supremely significant and horribly “literal,” as in *Otranto*, hence the harbinger or minion of Fate—the inexorable Law of the Father; or they may be hideously, uncannily powerful, as in Raymond de la Cisternas’s inadvertent vow to the Bleeding Nun in *The Monk*. Gothic plots tend to be organized around anxieties and uncertainties generated by those examples of language that mark the intersections of “nature” and “culture”: wedding vows, wills, and the laws regulating the family, such as the principles of “legitimate” succession and inheritance. Problems with such codes often (especially in early Gothic) lead the characters to confront the broader surrounding context of “natural” law, particularly the incest taboo.

It is logical, then, that the wedding vow should be especially prominent in Gothic fictions, for it is the ritual that *creates* the family order in and through language. Tracy’s “Index to Motifs” lists one hundred and eight examples under “wedding,” making it the most prominent plot device. It outnumbers even such Gothic staples as “storm,” “female fainting,” “corpse,” and “extralegal confinement.”⁵ Wedding vows have two different linguistic aspects—in the clergyman’s “performative” speech act at the ceremony and in the “marriage lines” written in the parish register. Either of these is subject to uncertainty; records may be forged, clergymen may be fraudulent, and bridegrooms may deceive, as Mr. Rochester attempts to do. Jane Eyre’s interrupted wedding may be the most memorable such occasion in English fiction, but it is also one of the most conventional Gothic elements in Brontë’s book.

Tracy subdivides “weddings” into “aborted,” “interrupted,” “clandestine,” “counterfeit,” and “forced,” and even includes references to two conducted by specter clergymen.⁶ She might also have included a category such as “self-administered” or “accidental,” for surely one of the most memorable of Gothic “weddings,” mentioned above, occurs in *The Monk*. Raymond de la Cisternas’s horrifying narrative of the Bleeding Nun epitomizes the general Gothic fascination with the power of language. Raymond is in love with Agnes, whose cruel and greedy aunt insists that she fulfill the vow of her dead mother by taking the veil. (She also wants the girl’s fortune.) Raymond and Agnes contrive an elopement exploiting the local legend that once every five years at the stroke of midnight on May 5, the ghost of a nun emerges from the castle. The servants, being superstitious, leave the gates open for her.

When the time arrives, Raymond waits for his beloved Agnes to

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appear in her disguise. When the nun materializes, he helps her into his carriage and repeats a vow:

Agnes, Agnes, thou art mine;

Agnes, Agnes, I am thine.

(Vol. II, chap. 1)

She replies, "Raymond, Raymond, I am thine," etc. As a terrible storm comes up, the carriage careens out of control. Thrown out and injured, Raymond awakes to find that "Agnes" has disappeared. But to his horror he eventually discovers that he has accidentally sworn allegiance not to Agnes, but to the ghost herself, the "Bleeding Nun." Although he did not *intend* to wed himself to this specter bride, his mistakenly sworn words have an uncanny power that supersedes mere human intention. Having accidentally "tied the knot" with her, he confronts the difference—a chasm—between "meaning" as "intention" and "meaning" as "significance." This "marriage" involves Raymond in a grotesque romantic triangle. The "other woman" is indeed "the other"—not only female, but a ghost, a revenant. Through the duplicity inherent in the term "meaning" he glimpses the "Terrible (M)other" who subverts the Law of the Father. And these words once spoken are not easily retracted. After much suffering, he finally effects an "annulment" through the intervention of the Wandering Jew, who is able to communicate with the ghost and discovers her true desire—an appropriate burial for her bones in the family plot (she had been born Beatrice de la Cisternas). The remedy for misdirected language lies only in certain other words, a supplementary system, through a translator who "speaks the same language." This wanderer figure (a masculine self personifying pure consciousness within the Law of the Father) often supplies the necessary antidote, patriarchy's "cure" for the various disorders associated with female power.

Thus in Gothic, plots are often generated by words radically misunderstood or escaping the speaker's control altogether and chaining him (interestingly, it is almost always "him") in a horrible confinement. Or they may seem disconcertingly disconnected from any speaker at all, as the convention of the "mysterious voice" suggests. (Tracy lists forty-six occurrences, and some of the most evocative early titles point to this theme: *The Mysterious Warning*, *The Midnight Bell*, even *The Midnight Groan*.) Similarly, speakers may become "incoherent," the "nonsense" they utter derived not only from violations of the linguistic rules but also from the speaker's own breakdown in madness or hysteria; sixty-

eight examples of “lunacy” occur in Tracy’s Index. Although she does not list “hysteria,” it might well have been included if one considers the Freudian sense of the term as an “embodiment” of “meaning”—the symptom “literalizes” the unconscious feeling, one which, Freud discovered, could be alleviated by the “talking cure”—another mode of “translation” in effect.

This physical expression of intense emotion in Gothic personages appears in the massive presence of “fainting,” both male (fifty-six occasions) and female (one hundred and four); in “emotionally induced death” (ninety-nine examples—twelve of which are significantly “prenuptial”); and in “emotionally induced illness” (sixty-eight examples).⁷ Lewis’s Wandering Jew, who interprets the Nun’s wishes to Raymond, is also an embodied sign; he bears on his forehead a mark signifying his condition as alien and outcast wanderer—exiled from human society and the Law of the Father for having mocked Christianity’s central signifier, Christ on the Cross—who also, perhaps not incidentally, manifests a fusion of “signifier” and “signified,” man and God, human and divine, physical and metaphysical.

In Gothic narratives, an object not ordinarily a signifier also may be transformed into a sign functioning in a sinister quasi-language. When Emily St. Aubert sees her father tearfully contemplating the miniature portrait of a beautiful lady not her mother, she is bewildered and troubled, not knowing the meaning of this behavior. Later in *Udolpho*, when she finds a track of blood on the stairs, she takes this sign as evidence that her aunt has been murdered (a mistaken inference, as it turns out). On the other hand, in *The Monk* Raymond de la Cisternas correctly reads the bloodstained sheets Marguerite points out to him, recognizing that they mean her husband is a bandit and a murderer. Incidentally, in this episode Raymond is pretending to be “Don Alphonso d’Alvarada”; disguise is another prominent Gothic motif that may be understood in this context (one signifier pretends to be a different one). Tracy lists forty-two examples of “masking,” forty-two examples of “cross-gender dressing,” and twelve examples of “shape-changing.”

Even the most typically Gothic manifestations of the supernatural, such as ghosts (whether these turn out to be “real” or imagined), bleeding portraits, and animated statues and skeletons manifest this pattern of anxiety about the Symbolic: whatever their other functions in terms of plot or theme, such phenomena suggest the fragility of our usual systems of making sense of the world. Spirits that should be dead

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(or departed for another world) return; the non-material, or the “disembodied” suddenly materializes. Or, conversely, the material but inanimate object suddenly takes on the characteristics of the living—it moves, bleeds, or even speaks.

In short, an extraordinary number of Gothic conventions, including certain narrative techniques, plots, and characters, imply disorder in the relations of signifiers and signifieds that are taken for granted in our ordinary conception of “reality.”⁸ Given this vortex of linguistic confusion, the prominence of the dream in Gothic is understandable, not only as an appropriate source of authorial inspiration, but as itself the most characteristic “Gothic text.” As a peculiar kind of “language,” the dream occupies an ambiguous position along the border between the conscious mind with its Symbolic resources and the unconscious or subliminal significations of the “Semiotic,” where words may be nonsense and images meaningful. The intense but often seemingly inappropriate feelings that the dream evokes may convince the dreamer of the “significance” of dream absurdities. Dreams offer us strange pictures, and such language as appears often seems “nonsense,” unintelligible or else entirely removed from the appropriate context. Thus I would suggest that Gothic texts are not merely “dream-like” as a whole; rather, specific Gothic conventions express violations of “reality,” as it is constituted and organized by the Symbolic, in much the same ways that dreams do. The difference may be one of medium rather than of kind; “real life” dreams disrupt and defamiliarize Symbolic systems—primarily language—in the dreaming mind’s private cinema; for most of its history Gothic has been primarily expressed in the printed text of the *public* dream.⁹

In considering various modes of Gothic “defamiliarization,” I have argued that the prototypical Gothic setting, the haunted castle, literally makes family structure “strange,” that what is sometimes called a Gothic “ambiance” might be understood as a foregrounding of the “female” spaces within the Symbolic and thus as an expansion of that system to accommodate the Semiotic. Gothic conventions of plot and character also represent various modes of disruption within the Symbolic. Indeed, Gothic conventions facilitate the “defamiliarization” that the Russian formalists saw as the function of all literature; or in other terms, they facilitate the high Romantic aim of “fresh” vision, of seeing with an eye not dulled by habit or custom.¹⁰ “Strangeness of vision” is as characteristic of the Romantics as is that social estrangement or alienation characterizing such vision, personified in the arche-

typal figure of the Wanderer. But it is one thing to escape the dulling effects of habit, to achieve a fresh vision by seeing the world "as it is" (that is, through whatever lens governs the culture's current view of "reality"). It is a different (and more disturbing) matter to experience our very ways of making sense—the entire patriarchal Symbolic order—as "strange."

According to Freud, this experience of defamiliarization is the source of "the uncanny." He begins with a proposition about the uncanny as the "defamiliarized familiar" already proposed by E. Jentsch: "that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar."¹¹ After a lengthy detour through the etymology of the word in various European languages, Freud ultimately concludes that the uncanny is a kind of disruption of signifiers, similar, indeed, to the kind that we have been considering: "An uncanny experience occurs either when repressed infantile complexes have been revived by some impression, or when the primitive beliefs we have surmounted seem once more to be confirmed." As "repressed infantile complexes," Freud has in mind "the castration complex, womb-fantasies, etc." He remarks that these "are not of very frequent occurrence in real life." By "the primitive beliefs we think we have surmounted" he means "the omnipotence of thought, instantaneous wish-fulfillments, secret power to do harm and the return of the dead"—an animistic and superstitious view of the universe characteristic of the primary process, the pre-Oedipal, and the ancient world.¹² Repression, and the consequent division between "the real" of consciousness and the "not real" of the unconscious, analogous in structure to that of signifier and signified, is thus a precondition for the uncanny. One might say that "the uncanny" is like the radioactive energy given off when the atom of signifier and signified is split.

In defamiliarizing the Symbolic, Gothic narrative and plot devices bring us to its "edge," back toward Kristeva's "Semiotic," the pre-Oedipal otherland of infancy, the borderland where language begins to show signs of stress, of the pressures exerted by the unconscious energies ordinarily repressed. It is extremely important, therefore, that horror and terror, traditionally regarded as the most potent of Gothic affects, may also be associated with early "symbolization"—the infant's gradual acquisition of language, the constitution of the self as "speaking subject." Horror and terror concern two complementary modes of the "unspeakable." "Horror" is associated with the pre-Oedipal separation from the mother/material that both predates and impels the

construction of the speaking subject. "Terror," on the other hand, is our experience of a self conscious of the ultimate failure of the Symbolic, the point where the system breaks down—when "words fail," where the idea of infinity forces the subject again to confront the literally unspeakable—and where, if the self exists *as* a speaking subject, it potentially or momentarily ceases to exist. As Harold Bloom notes, "The Uncanny" is Freud's theory of the sublime.

Critical discussion of horror and terror as "Gothic" emotions and the significant differences between the two may be traced back to Ann Radcliffe's posthumously published essay "On the Supernatural in Poetry" (1826). Radcliffe wrote:

Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them. I apprehend, that neither Shakespeare nor Milton by their fictions, nor Mr. Burke by his reasoning, anywhere looked to positive horror as a source of the sublime, though they all agree that terror is a very high one. But where lies the great difference between horror and terror but in the uncertainty and obscurity that accompany the first, respecting the dreaded evil?¹³

Radcliffe associated horror with physical symptoms—contraction, freezing, a threat that the faculties will be annihilated. She elevates terror, on the other hand, by associating it with the Burkean sublime. To illustrate the contrary effects of the two in concrete terms, let us compare two virtually contemporary treatments of that intensely Gothic phenomenon, the sight of a worm-eaten corpse.

Readers of *Udolpho* notoriously regarded the scene where Emily lifts the black veil and promptly faints as a delightful example of "terror" in the Radcliffe mode. Also typical, of course, is the fact that Radcliffe makes us wait several hundred pages before discovering that what lay behind the veil was not something "horrible," strictly speaking. (Austen's Catherine Morland was first convinced that it was Laurentini's skeleton). Instead, we are finally told, almost as an afterthought, that the sight causing Emily to faint was her own misreading of an artifact, a waxwork *memento mori* used in the devotions of some earlier Udolpho. The power of Radcliffe's strategy lies in her "expanding" the reader's imaginative powers in suspense and speculation. (As Alfred Hitchcock knew very well, what is implied but not shown is often far more disturbing than what the audience may actually see, no matter how expert the special effects.)

In contrast, the worm-eaten corpse Lewis describes is all too real. It

appears in the subplot concerning Agnes, who has unwillingly taken the veil, becoming in effect a *nouvelle* Eloisa.¹⁴ She continues to meet her lover secretly, however, and, breaking her vows of chastity, becomes pregnant. When this lapse is discovered, the cruel Abbess of St. Clare causes her to be imprisoned in a dungeon where she gives birth to an infant who dies almost immediately. Crazy with grief, the unhappy nun cradles the maggot-infested corpse, which, Lewis remarks in a telling aside, would be loathsome to any eye “but a Mother’s.”¹⁵

Critics of the Gothic have persistently returned to Radcliffe’s distinction. Montague Summers used “terror Gothic” as one of his categories, but immediately ran into the difficulties inherent in such projects of classification, since *Udolpho* for instance, which depends absolutely upon the effects of terror, belongs equally plausibly in several other categories such as “sentimental,” “historical,” or “explained Gothic,” that is, where the ghosts turn out not to be real. Traditionally, critics have tended to distinguish horror and terror in terms of their “source” in external objects; some things are “horrible,” others “terrible.” But this effort also encounters difficulties, since it is possible that both effects can be evoked by a single object. In *The Delights of Terror* (1987), Terry Heller takes this distinction seriously, arguing that “Terror is the fear that harm will come to oneself. Horror is the emotion one feels in anticipating and witnessing harm coming to others for whom one cares” (p. 19). Again, the distinction does not seem entirely adequate, though the shift in focus from object to subject is in keeping with Radcliffe’s distinction between their contrasting effects on “the soul” or “the faculties” and the body. Terror “expands” and “awakens” the psyche while horror threatens “annihilation” in feelings that express themselves as physical symptoms. While terror centers in the mind, the imagination, horror additionally evokes physical responses. But Radcliffe’s intuitive grasp of qualitative differences between horror and terror is supported by psychoanalytic investigations of these two feelings.

In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (English translation, 1982), Kristeva suggests that horror is a function of the earliest stirring of the pre-self’s separation from the mother. Before the speaking subject organizes itself around the split between itself and other objects, it experiences the “abject” (the “cast off”) as a sort of “pre-object”: “The abject might then appear as the most *fragile* . . . the most *archaic* . . .

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sublimation of an 'object' still inseparable from drives" (*Powers*, p. 12). As Toril Moi, editor of *The Kristeva Reader*, explains:

The abject represents the first effort of the future subject to separate itself from the pre-Oedipal mother. Nausea, distaste, horror: these are the signs of a radical revulsion (or *expulsion*) which serves to situate the "I", or more accurate to *create* a first, fragile sense of "I" where before there was only emptiness. (Moi, p. 238)

Again we encounter the significance of borders within the borderlands of significance: for the speaking subject exists only in its distinction between "I" and "not-I," and concomitantly, what is "inside" and what is "outside." The border of the self, like the structure of the word, necessitates the repression of the material.

According to Kristeva, the things we experience as "horrible" evoke that early anxiety about materiality and the borders of the self: between "me" and the "improper/unclean" (in French the word *propre* means both "one's own" and "clean" as well as the extended "propriety"). The horror of this process is later signified, she argues, by things that remind us of that early, abject materiality:

Loathing an item of food, a piece of filth, waste, or dung. The spasms and vomiting that protect me. The repugnance, the retching that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage, and muck. The shame of compromise, of being in the middle of treachery. The fascinated start that leads me toward and separates me from them. (*Powers*, p. 2)

Thus the conventional sources of Gothic "horror" (such as blood and decaying or newly murdered corpses) echo the "abject." Kristeva's theory suggests why the accidental discovery of a corpse is so potent and so familiar a source of horror. Not only does it serve as a sign of violence and murderous passions; but the dead body is also, as Kristeva remarks, the most dramatic example of abjection, of the "cast off," of waste. (And as the murder mystery demonstrates, the victim's body is a mine of ambiguous signifiers). Tracy's index suggests a virtual obsession with corpses in early Gothic: eighty-four references to bodies discovered in various conditions and circumstances. One also finds the related topics of "body snatching," "child or infant, dead," "pulp, bloody," or "putrefaction."

Horror marks a threat to the bodily integrity of the "I"—its very existence in the Symbolic. It stirs dim anxieties about our inexorable

materiality, a fact that, according to Kristeva, must be repressed so that we may enter the Symbolic, establishing the boundaries between "I" and "not-I," our "insides" and "outsides." Thus the corpse uncannily becomes a sign disrupting that process. This once living body is now dead; its bleeding sickeningly violates the boundaries between inner and outer. Radcliffe's statement that horror "freezes" or "contracts" the perceiver is therefore apt, for these terms imply both a feeling of repulsion and that reassertion of selfhood, the necessary securing of boundaries that the horrible has obscurely disturbed.

Terror or the sublime, in contrast, disconcerts the speaking subject in a different way. Like horror, it is implicated in our sense of selfhood: Burke argues that "the sublime is an idea belonging to self-preservation" (p. 86). Anything that threatens our existence is capable of evoking terror and hence the sublime. But in contrast to "abjection," a process buried in the archaic processes of the not-yet-self, the sublime is a function of consciousness. Unlike horror, which threatens corporeal integrity—one's being as a body—the sublime overwhelms the self with the *idea* of an overwhelming power.

In the past two decades, such works as Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence* (1973) and *Ruin the Sacred Truths* (1989), Thomas Weiskel's *The Romantic Sublime* (1976), Neil Hertz's *The End of the Line* (1985), a special issue of *Studies in Romanticism* (1987), Peter De Bolla's *The Discourse of the Sublime* (1989), and Frances Ferguson's *Solitude and the Sublime* (1992) signal a renewed interest in the sublime, especially in relation to Romanticism. This new tradition marks a departure from the historical focus of previous criticism such as S. H. Monk's landmark study *The Sublime* (1935). Although no consensus has emerged from the recent debate, these critics have addressed the sublime as a linguistic, psychoanalytic, philosophical, and cultural phenomenon. The sublime is less a matter of external phenomena than a function of the structures that order subjectivity itself. It appears that the sublime involves the subject's experience with the *nom du père* as theorized by Lacan, echoing, elaborating the structure of the Oedipus complex. The subject's experience of its limits and its fragility calls into question its previous conceptual boundaries. Again, Radcliffe was right; terror "expands" the soul.

Kristeva observes that abjection and the sublime are related phenomena: "The abject is edged with the sublime. It is not the same moment on the journey, but the same subject and speech that brings them into being" (*Powers*, p. 11):

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For the sublime has no object either. When the starry sky, a vista of open seas or a stained glass window shedding purple beams fascinate me, there is a cluster of meaning, of colors, of words, of caresses, that are light touches, scents, signs, cadences that arise, shroud me, carry me away, and sweep me beyond the things that I see, hear, or think. The "sublime" object dissolves in the raptures of a bottomless memory. . . . I then forget the point of departure and find myself removed to a secondary universe, set off from the one where "I" am—delight and loss. Not at all short of but always with and through perception and words, the sublime is a *something added* that expands us, overstrains us, and causes us to be both *here*, as dejects, and *there*, as others and sparkling. (*Powers*, p. 12)

The sublime operates at the "far edge" of the Symbolic, expanding the possibility of "meaning" infinitely, so that meaning itself becomes meaningless. The word "sublime" comes from the Latin for "under the threshold" (another metaphor of language and the self as a building). In chemistry, "to sublime" means to change state, for a solid to become a gas, for instance, without first becoming a liquid. According to Laplanche and Pontalis's *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, the concept of "sublimation" is relatively little developed by Freud (pp. 431–32), but the term denotes the redirection of the energies of the id into socially acceptable expressions. In the context of Gothic, however, one might add another dimension to "the sublime": it too reveals the sexual politics of the Symbolic.¹⁶

One might generalize that within the Symbolic, mothers (*mater/mater*) are "horrible" and fathers are "terrible." Burke's theory of the sublime is not only conceived within the binary opposition of "masculine" and "feminine" that orders the Symbolic; his association of the sublime with the masculine and the beautiful with the feminine is virtually explicit. Burke links the sublime with the attributes of God the Father according to Christian theology, notably power, infinity, wrath, justice, wisdom. Nothing is more sublime, he writes, than the wrath of an angry God. Human fathers also properly evoke awe, according to Burke, but love (evoked by beauty) is the mother's province. Indeed, he himself uses the metaphor of family to illustrate his point about these two contrasting responses:

The authority of a father, so useful to our well-being, and so justly venerable upon all accounts, hinders us from having that entire love for him that we have for our mothers, where the parental authority is almost melted down into the mother's fondness and indulgence. But we generally have a great love for our grandfathers, in whom this authority is

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removed a degree from us, and where the weakness of age mellows it into something of a feminine partiality. (P. 111)

Like Freud's late theory of the pleasure principle and the death instinct, love and fear—the beautiful and the sublime—function in Burke's *Enquiry* as the two contrary passions of the human soul.

But in the given culturewide structures of the Symbolic that we have been considering, there is something quite odd about the sublime as theorized in the eighteenth century: although Burke clearly associates it with the “line of good” (with *idea*, with the paternal, with divinity), most of the sources of the sublime that he names belong to “the line of evil.” In other words, the *sources* of the sublime primarily reside within the culturally “female,” the other. The “sublime” is, perhaps, a “sublimation” of the culturally female. Paradoxically, the “maternal” qualities of darkness, infinity, irregularity enter the Symbolic “under the threshold,” so to speak, disguised as a manifestation of the “fatherly,” of ideal power and greatness.¹⁷

Second, the sublime, in effect, “feminizes” the subject perceiving it. The sublime, as Burke repeatedly asserts, springs from terror in the face of superior strength, power, authority. The “natural” response to such power, according to Burke, is “timidity” (p. 67), and here, interestingly, he uses the word in the context of a discussion about social and political power. Besides timidity, the subject experiencing the sublime recognizes his own relative weakness in the face of an infinitely greater force; his very existence feels threatened, and he knows terror to the degree that, Burke says, “our imagination is finally lost” (p. 70). I use the pronoun “he” deliberately here, for I want to emphasize that in articulating the aesthetic of the sublime the implicitly male subject traditionally posited by Western culture vicariously experiences the “female” subject position. He knows what it is to be “filled” (p. 57) by a great, hardly known, and threatening power, an experience that echoes through every dimension of this “speaking subject.” In discussing the relation of power to the sublime, Burke's imagery implies how inextricable from thought processes are cultural assumptions about gender:

Strength, violence, pain and terror, are ideas that rush in the mind together. Look at a man, or any other animal of prodigious strength, and what is your idea before reflection? . . . The emotion you feel is, lest this enormous strength should be employed to the purposes of *rapine* and destruction. (P. 65, my emphasis)

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Once we recognize this “sexual politics” of the sublime, then distinctions between the “natural” and “rhetorical” sublime, or between the “Romantic sublime” and other kinds are not necessary or even particularly useful. For instance, David B. Morris has argued that the Gothic author’s use of the sublime cannot be entirely explained in terms of Burke—the most frequent critical strategy. In light of the “Romantic sublime,” it appears that Walpole’s “engine of terror” also implies the linguistic and psychoanalytic dimensions explored by Thomas Weiskel and others. Morris is still concerned, however, with discerning a *difference* between Gothic and Romantic practice. He writes that “the sublime in effect recaptures for the Gothic novel the same emotional intensities and narrative freedoms which belonged to poetry and to the poetic province of romance.”¹⁸ (What he means by “poetry” and “the poetic province of romance” remains uncertain.) Morris also notes the proximity of the sublime to the uncanny, citing Bloom’s observation that the uncanny is Freud’s theory of the sublime.

But if we consider the varieties of sublimity (in nature, in language, in unconscious psychic dynamics), we may see one steady current running through all of them: the “sublimation” of the culturally female, a smuggling into the Symbolic of the repressed maternal. The most daring of sublimation was the importation of “Mother Nature” herself into the Symbolic. Long held by theologians to be a second Scripture, in the eighteenth-century rereading the Book of Nature turned out to have some distinctly Gothic pages.

❧ FIVE ❧

The Nature of Gothic

Of forests and enchantments drear,
Where more is meant than meets the ear.

John Milton

“Il Penseroso” (119–20)

In looking at objects of Nature while I am thinking, as at yonder moon dim-glimmering thro’ the dewy window-pane, I seem rather to be seeking, as it were *asking*, a symbolical language for something within me that already and forever exists, than observing anything new.

S. T. Coleridge

Collected Notebooks 2: 2546

—I love all waste
And solitary places; where we taste
The pleasure of believing what we see
Is boundless, as we wish our souls to be.

P. B. Shelley

“Julian and Maddalo”

How often does nature thus become an involuntary interpreter between us and our feelings! . . . Alas! how deceitful and inadequate we feel the language of man, after love and grief have made us acquainted with that of nature!—the only one, perhaps, capable of a corresponding sign for those emotions, under which all human expression faints. What a difference between *words without meaning* and that *meaning without words*, which the sublime phenomena of nature, the rocks and the ocean, the moon and the twilight, convey to those who have
“ears to hear.”

Charles Maturin

Melmoth the Wanderer (chap. 28)

Whether spontaneous critics like Milton's "Penseroso" or professional ones like Northrop Frye, readers have noticed that nature in romance seems fraught with meaning where no meaning should be. Like all romantics, the *Penseroso* is a connoisseur of "otherness"—darkness, mystery, moonlight, fantasy, and literary romances. His wonderfully evocative description points to the specific qualities that we have been considering in relation to Gothic: the uncanniness of "meaning." Milton's lines leave us wondering who the grammatical subject of this "meaning" is, while also recognizing the strangeness and diversity of the apparent signifiers—a world where "forests" and "enchantments" (yoked by the adjective "drear") are equally significant.

In *The Secular Scripture* Frye comments upon this tendency of romance narratives to hint at other meanings. Milton's phrase, he writes,

expresses the haunting sense of what is often called allegory in romance, but it seems to me that the word allegory here is misleading: I should prefer some such phrase as "symbolic spread," the sense that a work of literature is expanding into insights and experiences beyond itself. . . . The symbolic spread of a romance tends . . . to go into its literary context, to other romances that are most like it in the conventions adopted. The sense that more is meant than meets the ear in romance comes very largely from the reverberations that its familiar conventions set up within our literary experience, like a shell that contains the sound of the sea. (P. 59)

Certainly "allegory" is the wrong term here. But I find Frye's solution to this problem unsatisfactory. The aura of "other meaning" attaching itself to romance landscapes involves more than "intertextuality." In English the relation of romance to allegory is complicated by *The Faerie Queene*, where Spenser "kidnapped" romance (as Frye puts it) to serve his allegory. But one might argue that allegory and romance occupy the opposite ends of a spectrum in regard to meaning. In a sense, allegory is the most patriarchal of poetic modes, for it repeats the model of creation in Genesis—the poet calls a world into existence through speech, words that conform to a prior idea. In allegory, the reader is aware, conscious, of reading a text designed to embody, to incarnate, an abstraction (an idea, a concept, or even a theology or a history). The pleasure of the text in part lies in our perception of that "embodied" meaning. Allegory inherently affirms (and, in effect, enacts) the hierarchy of meaning inherent in the Law of the Father. The allegorist personifies the speaking subject as totalitarian overlord

of language who directs and manipulates his world according to a priori thoughts.

Thus the allegorist runs the risk of creating a work long on soul and short on body. (Coleridge's famous remarks about the disgusting abstraction of allegory seem to register this objection.) "Feminine" romance, in contrast, may seem to be all body, and (as misogynists have sometimes feared of woman) to have no soul—no "meaning"—at all. It undoubtedly lacks the kind of soul that Aristotle attributed to plot, the unified and coherent structure of a beginning, a middle, and an end.

Romance, however, is the opposite of allegory in its relation to the Symbolic. Allegory affirms the rules of the system (the reader comes to see the ultimate meaning and purpose of this poetic world), while romance conventions suspend or question those rules. Like the Freudian uncanny, the conventions of romance reinstate primitive, pre-Symbolic modes of significance. They place us in a world where coincidence is no accident, where magic substitutes for causality, and where (because the wish is as strong as the deed), the very boundaries between mind and nature become doubtful. In this world of seeming timelessness and endless "error," sequence, chronological order, and assumptions of cause and effect (the "grammar" of the Symbolic) lack the power they have in consciousness.¹ The conventions of romance are thus literally "unrealistic," because they ignore the principles that constitute "reality." In psychoanalytic terms, romance regresses us toward the moment at which the infant emerges from the pulsions of the Semiotic into its *procès* as speaking subject—the realm of the Kristevan "poetic."

Thus everything in romance *seems* potentially meaningful because its conventions evoke that stage of development where everything *is* perhaps meaningful. One recognizes (re-cognizes) that moment in the speaking subject's history when one knows that "meaning" exists, but has not yet fully internalized the Symbolic order's "rules" about which things signify and which do not. Therefore it is appropriate that cognitive recognition of various sorts so often constitutes a climax in romance—the discovery of a long-lost relative, of one's true name and true identity, or even of having one's worst fears "realized."

If the conventions of romance in general tend to destabilize the Symbolic rules within which consciousness operates, it is easy to see why Gothic has so powerful an affinity for prose romance and why nature in Gothic should be so prominent. Indeed, nature serves two

simultaneous and contradictory functions: accommodated to the Symbolic through its status as "The Book of the Creatures" in Protestant theology, and at the same time remaining "Mother Nature"—whose lap is the proper starting point for the not-yet-self's intimations of worlds not yet realized.

During the Renaissance, theology, aesthetics, science, and philosophy jointly created a new discourse of nature far more complex than had ever been known before. The scope and range of this new learning is far too vast and complicated to summarize here. But as a result, the physical world was "realized" for the first time in Western culture; nature was beginning to be "comprehended" as well as to be "actualized"—taken seriously as an object of study, recognized as a powerful and yet scientifically predictable influence on human beings. Most important to Gothic romance, as to Romanticism, was the idea that nature is *significant*. And yet its new mode of signification was different. In contrast to the medieval habit of reading, for instance, an allegory of the Trinity in the three-part structure of a certain flower, the Protestant mode of exegesis found the attributes of divinity in our *response* to nature. Certain kinds of scenes created certain feelings in the perceiver. In the presence of the sublime, Burke argues, we may know the wrath of an angry God; natural beauty allows us to experience the complementary opposite—divine love. By the seventeenth century, the grounds of Wordsworth's "theodicy of the landscape" were already in place. This Protestant exegesis of nature, however, inadvertently disturbed the hegemony of the Symbolic. To "read" a landscape (real or imagined) was to take a step back toward what Lacan calls "the imaginary." This aesthetic experience constituted a kind of "waking dream" and indeed foreshadowed the psychoanalytical principle that "meaning" resides in the link between image and feeling.

This vocabulary of images (fated to become as trite and hackneyed as any linguistic cliché) created a new discourse; it entered the Symbolic order as a mode of meaning and encouraged the development of new refinements of perception and feeling. One of the genuine "novelties" of the period in which Gothic sprang up is the sudden "discovery" of its characteristic feelings: horror, terror, melancholy. (Or the related "Love, Mystery, Misery," which furnish the title of an early Gothic and which Coral Ann Howells uses as the title of her own study.) Critics have tended to think of the puzzling aspect of the new, late-eighteenth-century fashion for Gothic as a sudden yearning for these emotions. I would argue for an opposite explanation: the cul-

ture's recently achieved "realization" of nature, its accommodation into the Symbolic, created the conditions that would encourage Gothic emotions, for they are already inherent in the patriarchal Symbolic. The patterns of the "family romance" (still unnamed but present in the cultural institutions) are projected onto the landscape, where they continue unconsciously to shape the aesthetic experience of nature—its Symbolic dimension.

We have already noted how Burke's concept of "the sublime" confused or blurred the traditional binary opposition of male versus female, "good" versus "evil." Through the concept of the sublime, "Maternal" nature was reassigned most vigorously and explicitly (though unconsciously) to the Father. At the same time, however, Burke reassigns beauty to the feminine. Traditionally, beauty had been assumed to spring from divine order, harmony, proportion (beauty as conceived within the "line of good"). Burke considers it a softer, subordinate, "feminine" quality, though still as a manifestation of creation to be read as a sign of God the Father. This revision also changed the status of change, loss, and death, those properties of matter/*mater* that once unequivocally belonged to "the line of evil," an arrangement rationalized in the doctrine of the Decay of Nature. (Medieval exegetes argued that the sufferings of mortality, including death, were a direct effect of Man's Fall—for which Mother Eve bore the ultimate responsibility.) But if nature is an appropriate source of sublimity, a sign of the Father, then the order and harmony of the Symbolic itself is disturbed. What was once implicitly "mother" is now also implicitly "father"—and vice versa.

Thus in Ann Radcliffe's characteristic landscapes in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* we see Mother Nature performing this double parental duty. Like the young Wordsworth, Radcliffe's Emily St. Aubert was "fostered alike by beauty and by fear"; her sensibilities were educated through experience with nature's complementary qualities of beauty and sublimity, of "maternal" affection and "paternal" power. Radcliffe describes the St. Auberts' habitual family picnics: "They wandered away among the most romantic and magnificent scenes, nor suffered the charms of Nature's lowly children to abstract them from the observance of her stupendous works" (p. 3). She describes "those green recesses

which so beautifully adorn the bosom of these mountains, where, under the shade of the leafy larch, or cedar, they enjoyed their simple repast, made sweeter by the waters of the cool stream, that crept along the turf,

THE NATURE OF GOTHIC

and by the breath of wild flowers and aromatic plants, that fringed the rocks and inlaid the grass. (P. 3)

Nature here is a mother; "Bosom," "sweeter," "crept," and "breath" impart a Wordsworthian ambience to nature as "foster mother" (in several senses of the word "foster"). But it is equally and alternately a text that tells of God the Father:

The ruggedness of the unfrequented road often obliged the wanderers to alight from their little carriage, but they thought themselves amply repaid for this inconvenience by the grandeur of the scenes. . . . The travellers had leisure to linger amid the solitudes, and to indulge the sublime reflections, which soften, while they elevate, the heart, and fill it with the certainty of a present God! (P. 28)

The Book of Nature is *P'écriture féminine* indeed—the most *material* of possible texts, and one that demonstrates, perhaps, the point at which "representation" breaks down, the "text" that lapses most readily into "nonsense." As Wordsworth so repeatedly asserts, unless one sees with the eye of Imagination, unless one has "*a heart* that watches and receives" there is no meaning in the landscape, one is a Peter Bell for whom "a primrose by the river's brim, / A yellow primrose was to him / And it was nothing more." Thus there is a logic in the convention that the Gothic heroine is inordinately sensitive, that, as Northrop Frye remarks, she is a kind of medium interpreting the landscape.

In part 2 we will consider why landscape tends to be more prominent in the Female Gothic tradition. But for the moment I want to consider the consequences of assuming that "female" nature was implicitly reassigned to the "line of good," the male/father. If Mother Nature is deserving of respect as a manifestation of God the Father, then we may see that the new prominence of certain "Gothic" moods makes sense. It is not merely that the desire for certain feelings emerged and found an objective correlative in Gothic conventions. Rather it would seem that the reordering—the "realizing" of a new world that included nature as part of a "meaningful" system—excited those feelings which other discourses authenticated as being themselves significant. If "feminine" natural beauty could be a sign of motherly *or* fatherly love, then "masculine" natural sublimity, in bringing the "*maternal*" into the realm of the speakable or the "real," loosed a greater variety of emotions. The variety of objects and feelings we associate with Gothic landscape are the symptoms of this new (albeit unwitting) Symbolization of the "maternal."

I suggest that the aesthetics regulating responses to nature had an implicitly regressive effect. Not only is the subject experiencing sublimity “feminized”; he is “infantilized” as well—being “re-placed” at least momentarily in the position of the helpless infant on the lap of an immensely powerful “mother” only partly known or understood. Thus we should not be surprised to see that the Gothic landscape evokes the feelings that according to psychoanalysis derive from early separation from the mother. As a helpless, vulnerable infant on the lap of the seemingly divine mother, the subject both loves and fears this “other”; at the same time, however, sublimity frequently shades into melancholy (and vice versa). According to Kristeva, melancholy is an “unsymbolized” sadness on the border of Semiotic and Symbolic, an inadequate or imperfect separation from the mother.²

We have already examined the ways that the house with its built-in darkneses embodies the structures of patriarchal order. Aspects of nature characteristically associated with Gothic—night, the moon, the moors, storms and all sorts of violence and disorder—signify the unruly female principle. The imagery of the graveyard school in particular suggests the greatest terror associated with “the female,” death itself, and shows the attempt to bring it within the Law of the Father. The characteristic structure of these meditations among the tombs is a description of the gruesome trappings of mortality followed by a comforting reminder that death serves the Father’s purposes, and that it will, furthermore, be transcended when that Law is *definitively* asserted: on the Day of Judgment. Although Walter Kendrick, among others, has argued that Gothic simply provides a “safe” space within which to come to terms with death, the equation is not, I think, so simple.³ The entire configuration of Gothic conventions signifies a receding of the patriarchal Symbolic. For the first time since the days of those long-lost and partly hypothetical Goddess-worshipping cultures, “Mother Nature” begins to seem as real and as powerful—and as ambiguous—as God the Father.

❧SIX❧

Family Plots

In part I we have looked at various ways in which Gothic conventions reflect the patriarchal family, at once epitome and microcosm of the Symbolic system as a whole. The traces of this family as an organizing structure appear everywhere: in the architecture of the haunted castle or house, in the experience of horror and terror, in the sublime and beautiful landscape, and in the specifically literary conventions most characteristic of Gothic, the dynamic of the “male” signifier and the “female” signified.

As Aristotle’s paradigm shows, this structure rests on the principles of difference and of hierarchy, principles transcending even the specific content of the categories of difference and inferiority that they create.¹ A hierarchical paradigm that affects every dimension of human experience, particularly one founded on sexual difference, is bound to be fraught with tensions; after all, one half of the population is born either to rule or to be ruled. Thus we should not be surprised that the family structure establishing the cultural priorities of power and subordination—the have’s and have-not’s—should be particularly sensitive to various stresses and to the distribution of energies. In this final section of part I, therefore, I want to introduce three further, and very different, modes of analysis that also explore the function of “family” as an ordering principle. All are relevant to various dimensions of Gothic, and all serve to reinforce my thesis that the Gothic myth itself is the patriarchal family.

As various historians have argued, the family saw considerable change as a social structure during the eighteenth century.² But here I am less concerned with economic and social entities than with the more ineffable dimensions of their psychological effects. The first of

these has to do with Mark Turner's analysis of "family" as a privileged or "basic conceptual metaphor." This approach to metaphor is related to Lakoff's argument about the structure of categories discussed in my introduction. Elsewhere Lakoff and Turner (and others) emphasize that metaphors are not verbal ornaments (mere "flowers of fancy") but patterns fundamental to thought. A metaphor, they explain, is a pattern derived from the "source domain" (common experience) traditionally and mostly unconsciously used to "map" a "target domain" (a dimension or experience often abstract and intangible, such as "life," "death," "love" etc.). In *Death is the mother of beauty*, Mark Turner presents the basis of this argument in the following way:

Imagination is thus not unfettered; it is governed by principles. These principles are automatic and below the level of consciousness. . . . The so-called free play of imagination is not, strictly speaking, free, though it is infinite. It is constrained by our knowledge, our experience, and our modes of cognition. (P. 16)

These "modes of cognition," among them "basic conceptual metaphors," are rather like the MS DOS system in a personal computer. Just as when we learn to speak a language its particular grammar encourages some structures and forbids others, our minds also draw upon cultural experience in imagining or conceiving what is not immediate and concrete. The "basic conceptual metaphors" we inherit unconsciously but powerfully determine, to a great extent, what we know and how we think, feel, and judge.

Turner demonstrates that "family" is a source domain both basic to cognition and particularly privileged in Western culture. To think about any subject, we are likely to use metaphors of kinship, so that our thinking about the subject is inevitably shaped by what we assume is and should be. (Indeed, the ancient assumption Lakoff argues against in *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*—members of a category necessarily share an "essence" or a "family resemblance"—itself demonstrates the power of the family as source domain.)

Of course, any notion of "family" is a function of a particular culture; it is an "idealized model" that varies from culture to culture and evolves within each particular culture, even though at any given time each assumes that its own version is inevitable, an expression of "nature." Given the cognitive power of this "basic conceptual metaphor," one might predict that important social changes would also disrupt the culture's Symbolic system, its collective "imagina-

tion." So in light of Turner's argument, we might speculate that at a fundamental cognitive level, the sudden generation of hundreds of stories about families *in extremis* suggests widespread anxiety about basic cultural structures. Thus not only may Gothic conventions fit easily into historical fictions (or a nation's "family history"), they may equally express anxiety about sociopolitical upheavals. The widely remarked relation between Gothic and the upheavals of the French Revolution thus is quite congruent with this theory.³ Published stories about bizarre and disturbing family behavior may serve to displace anxieties generated by a world that is changing in the most unsettling ways.

This point brings us to another way in which notions of family regulate our experience: not only in cognitive processes, but in the psychodynamics of feeling that may well affect human behavior far beyond the realm of the individual self. For instance, the critics' "myths" about Gothic that I discussed earlier (the skeleton in the closet, the black sheep, the madwoman in the attic, and the Tale of the Creator Walpole) might all be read as variations on what Freud called the "family romance." In 1917 Freud described a fantasy common in children and neurotic adults—that one is adopted, that one's true family is somehow elsewhere and other. Freud speculates that the need for this fantasy arises out of the stress attending the development of the reality principle—including the gradual recognition that one's parents are not the omnipotent beings they seemed when one was extremely young, but flawed, real, and perfectly ordinary human beings. Thus the child will imagine, "This is not my mother and father; my true father is a king, my mother a queen. I am a foundling child worthy of higher things." This story of the foundling child is certainly a familiar convention in romances both old and new. (Walpole for instance appropriates these archetypes wholesale when Theodore recounts his history—kidnapped by pirates, washed up on the shore of a strange land, and finally identified by the telling birthmark, a "bloody arrow.") But this transposition of "here" to "there," of "this" to "that," of "now" to "then" does not escape the familial configuration that is necessarily the context of this common anxiety. The "escape fantasy" merely projects the family structure into a different order of reality. The child flees into an alternate "better," yet fundamentally comparable structure. Such fictions, however, allow one to come to terms with the real world through stories about the past—about the origins and history of self and community.

Thus the “family romance” maintains something of the nature of the “uncanny,” a point that may in fact be inherent in the term “romance.” As Peter Gay points out, Freud’s word—the German *Roman*—should be translated as “novel,” since the plot Freud is speaking of is so mundane, so everyday, so “realistic.” As projections, however, these fantasies are, as *narrative* phenomena, closer to what in English is called “romance,” the mode Frye has aptly called the realm of wish fulfillment (though the Gothic also raises the problem that some dreams are nightmares). Furthermore, the word’s modern colloquial meaning denotes something that Freud apparently did not intend but which is also appropriate, particularly in the context of his own psychoanalysis: “romance” as “love story.” The rationalizations that, according to Freud, follow from the fantasy that one’s father is really a king generally sound like very “Gothic” transgressions against the Law of the Father—perhaps one’s mother had an affair, for instance. And Freud’s theory of the repression of incestuous passions demanded by the Oedipus complex are staples of the Gothic tradition—especially early Gothic. As Tracy’s Index reveals, however, actual cases of incest are outnumbered by “false alarms,” “foiled attempts,” “threats,” and “unconsummated incestuous passion” six to forty-eight (p. 201); perhaps this proportion supports Freud’s contention that incestuous wishes are mostly repressed.

We have seen that the extraordinary power and pervasiveness of the family as an organizing structure in Gothic is plausible, given that “family” functions as an important cognitive structure and is also at the center of children’s fantasies used to deal with certain difficulties of accepting “reality.” These two functions work within different but complementary aspects of experience (at least within the patriarchal Symbolic): thought and feeling. Thus one might speculate that the overdetermination of “family” in Gothic registers changes and anxieties affecting both the mind and the heart. Further, all these tales about the power of the past (especially the deeds of one’s ancestors) to affect the present symbolically foreshadow (and express within the Symbolic) the basic psychoanalytic principle that the present self is shaped within the structures of the past.⁴

One still might ask, however, why Gothic should have appeared in the eighteenth century; after all, the family is a very old basic conceptual metaphor, and most of the fantasies Freud associates with the family romance, such as that concerning the foundling child, are as old as literature itself. If the appearance of Gothic suggests anything, it is

some historical factor in this literary development, something which made the family a cultural pressure point. And as I mentioned earlier, the notion that Gothic springs directly from historical circumstances in this "Age of Revolutions" is familiar.

But while history, as cause, undoubtedly accounts for some of the features of Gothic, it cannot account for them all. Nevertheless, Michel Foucault's discussion in *The History of Sexuality* (vol. 1) is suggestive for the theorist of Gothic. This late work continues his exploration of the all-pervasive Enlightenment project of crystalizing Western cultural concepts and its institutional consequences: of making distinctions between the mad and the sane, the ill and the well, the criminal and the innocent, and of building walls (physical and symbolic) to insure that the division is respected. In *The History of Sexuality* Foucault argues that in contrast to the familiar assumption that sexuality was long free until repressed by the Victorians, it had paradoxically been *created* during the previous two centuries. "Sexuality," seemingly the most "natural" expression of the human personality, is another cultural artifact.⁵

Eastern cultures, Foucault maintains, had a traditional *ars erotica*, a body of knowledge concerning the private pleasures of the body. But in the West, he suggests, such a discourse might be heard only in the development of the Confession—a religious ritual that grew in importance from the Renaissance onward, particularly in the post-Reformation. Confession, he argues, was the West's first "scheme for transforming sex into discourse," and it "had been devised long before in a monastic and ascetic setting" (p. 20). It gradually changed from being a rare (perhaps yearly) confession of "acts contravening the law" into a discourse of "mastery and detachment," which ultimately yielded "multiple effects of displacement, intensification, reorientation, and modification of desire itself" (p. 23). Not only did this process create a resource (and a demand) for a language of private pleasure, this language would—like all discourse according to Foucault—be deeply implicated in the distribution of power throughout the culture. The West's later evolving a *scientia sexualis*, a body of "knowledge" about sexuality, both expanded our sense of the realm of bodily experience and discovered new territories to be controlled:

Rather than the uniform concern to hide sex, rather than a general prudishness of language, what distinguishes these last three centuries is the variety, the wide dispersion of devices that were invented for speaking about it, for having it spoken about, for inducing it to speak of itself, for

Chapter Six

listening, recording, transcribing, and redistributing what is said about it: around sex, a whole network of varying, specific, and coercive transpositions into discourse. (P. 34)

Foucault's definition of "sexuality" is both broader and more specialized than the colloquial meaning of the word; sexuality as a "discourse" is the cultural manifestation of "sex," prescribing what we may "know" (or fantasize) about this supposedly "natural" function. The new importance of this discourse therefore implies a new sense of the self in society, and a different mode of cultural organization. Foucault thus argues that the period which saw the creation of "sexuality" in cultural discourse is crucial to the birth of the modern world: "From the eighteenth century onward, Western societies created and deployed a new apparatus which was superimposed on the previous one, and which, while never completely supplanting the latter, helped to reduce its importance" (p. 106). The earlier apparatus he calls "the deployment of alliance," the later, "the deployment of sexuality."

Both these systems manifest themselves in society's control of "marriage, of fixation and development of kinship ties, of transmission of names and possessions" (p. 106). But the two are very different. The deployment of alliance, he writes, "is built up around a system of rules . . . the licit and the illicit." It seeks to reproduce and maintain its own system. It is concerned with "the link between partners and definite statutes" and is linked to the economy through "the role it can play in the transmission and circulation of wealth" (p. 106). The new deployment of sexuality, on the other hand, "operates according to the mobile, polymorphous, and contingent techniques of power" instead of according to a fixed system of rules. Rather than seeking to maintain the status quo, the deployment of sexuality "engenders a continual extension of areas and forms of control." Unlike alliance's concern with the relation of the individual to the law, sexuality is concerned with "the sensations of the body . . . the nature of impressions, however tenuous they may be." And the economic manifestation of sexuality in Foucault's terms is concern for the body that "produces and consumes" (pp. 106-7). The deployment of sexuality encourages "transgression" of the older system's "rules," as it necessarily foregrounds the distinction between right and wrong, permitted and forbidden, desire and prohibition.

In light of Aristotle's paradigm, I would add that Foucault's notion of the system of "alliance" echoes the "male" "line of good," whereas "the deployment of sexuality" takes its place in the "female" "line of

evil." "Alliance" and "good" subsume our ideas about neoclassicism while "the deployment of sexuality" and the female "line of evil" are aligned with what we now think of as Romanticism. The first is concerned with order and its maintenance, a respect for the authority of law, protection of hereditary wealth; the second, with encouraging change and expansion, and favoring the private perspective of the individual, sentient being. The first is "conservative," the second "revolutionary."

Foucault also makes some points extremely suggestive in regard to the Gothic. He argues that the attempted deployment of sexuality did not obliterate the earlier deployment of alliance: "sexuality" was superimposed upon "alliance," creating a situation in which the demands of family, property, social order, and tradition conflict with the new idea that the desires of the private self should constitute the fundamental basis of private behavior, and even of institutional order. Pope's Eloisa embodies this conflict. She finds herself within a world structured according to the Law of the Father, with constrictions that she experiences in many ways—in language as much as in her social and sexual situation. Her letter, however, struggles to express her "sexuality" in both our familiar sense of the term and in Foucault's. Appropriately, predictably, her discourse is "confessional."

Foucault also argues that the "deployment of sexuality" over the traditional "deployment of alliance" places enormous pressure on the family. During this early modern period the family becomes "the interchange of sexuality and alliance: it conveys the law and the juridical dimension in the deployment of sexuality; and it conveys the economy of pleasure and the intensity of sensations in the regime of alliance" (p. 108). The new system demands that the family create and reconcile these contradictory social impulses: a structure that is ordered according to the "deployment of alliance"—a structure ordered according to the hierarchical principles designed, among other things, to name and control the female must also nurture sexual beings, who know and act according to their own desires.

It follows, according to Foucault, that such an arrangement would regard incest, the paradoxical "law" of forbidden love, as the horror of horrors, the unspeakable crime. As he points out, subsequent scholars and theorists have been remarkably inclined to see incest as the "universal" taboo; Freud, for instance, (in *Totem and Taboo*) assumed it to be the foundation on which culture is based. Foucault argues, moreover, that this discourse of sexuality served another function that

sounds familiar in the present discussion. The aim of this discourse, he insists, was the “aim of inciting people to speak of sex so that it is made to mirror, at the outer limit of every actual discourse, something akin to a secret whose discovery is imperative, a thing abusively reduced to silence, and at the same time difficult and necessary, dangerous and precious to divulge” (pp. 34–35). “What is peculiar to modern societies,” he writes, “is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum* while exploiting it as *the* secret” (p. 35). Like Bluebeard’s secret, part of the nature of this discourse is to invite disclosure. And also like Bluebeard’s secret, it is inherently “feminine”; according to a strict patriarchal division, all feeling and sexual passion are a function of “female” matter. (Hence the horrors of sexuality in the minds of the Church Fathers).

Twentieth-century critics of the Gothic have repeatedly returned to two ideas that confer importance upon their favored literary tradition: that the Gothic “discovered the unconscious,” and that its conventions dis-cover the “natural” sexuality—especially female sexuality—repressed by a coercive society.⁶ These claims both indict the “Age of Reason” (thus accounting also for the various kinds of rebelliousness encoded in Gothic) and share an implicit if somewhat haphazard Freudianism. Certainly the Gothic does seem preoccupied with a dynamics of unconscious sexuality; for this reason most Gothic texts lend themselves to analysis through a Freudian hermeneutic. But Foucault’s analysis of “the deployment of sexuality” raises again the issue of power and coercion that we have encountered before.

The social functions of “sexuality” as Foucault describes it are rather like the procedures of the Inquisition, also a stock Gothic plot device. Not only must the subject confess the truth, but “truth” must reside in an already determined range of “facts”: the “secrets” to be revealed are always private sexual secrets. The same rule might be said to govern the Freudian analysand. I shall argue in the Epilogue that critics have succeeded in uncovering Freudian psychosexual “meanings” in Gothic because Freudian theory and Gothic narratives are “homologous” realms of discourse. Consequently, to explain the Gothic in terms of Freud offers a fundamentally circular explanation. Foucault’s argument about a “discourse of sexuality” suggests both why the forbidden “something” locked behind the door is so compelling and why the crucial secrets should so often be sexual secrets. Generating the attendant thrills and horror may well be the latest and the last effective gesture of the patriarchal Symbolic.

FAMILY PLOTS

We have now come full circle, back to the tale of Bluebeard, which might also be read as a parable of Foucault's argument. If Bluebeard's castle represents the "deployment of alliance"—the system of laws, the apportionment of power, already in place and unquestioned, then his plot-generating prohibition to his wife tacitly acknowledges the "deployment of sexuality"—the wife is assumed to be curious, a desiring self who must be gratified in exploring, in knowing. The prohibition necessitates the discovery; Bluebeard really uses his power to incite rebellion and thus creates the opportunity to demonstrate even greater power, his control over his wife's very life. It is inevitable that the secret she uncovers should be a sexual one; within the "deployment of sexuality" sex is always the ultimate secret, indeed, the only possible secret.

Thus we can more fully describe the basic principles that underlie Gothic. It is a narrative built over a cultural fault line—the point of conjunction between the discourses of alliance and sexuality, in Foucault's sense of those terms. In the earlier world "identity" came from the family one belongs to, a structure that both manifests and reinforces the concepts and hierarchies supposedly reiterated in every order throughout the universe, whether social, political, theological, or physical. In the newer and contradictory discourse, "identity" evolves in and through the desiring self's exploration of the world, in the dynamic established between self and other, in a difficult negotiation between the pull of inner desire and outer "reality." This last formulation, of course, is close to Freud's argument that the ego and superego are socially created within the family and then caught in the tug of war between the pleasure principle and the reality principle. (One might also observe that Freud's founding assumption concerning the power and omnipresence of "sexuality" seems less eccentric in light of Foucault's analysis.)

Thus, as Foucault remarks, the family becomes a conflicted structure, a pressure point in the conflict between these two competing systems of social order. On the one hand, it represents the ancient structure of alliance; on the other, it increasingly creates and nurtures those beings that it also confines and encloses. As a manifestation and instrument of culture, it opposes itself, by necessity, to unregulated desires. To be part of culture is not to behave "naturally"; but once this distinction exists, and culture has also generated the premise that the civilized self is not static (that, in fact, culture exists to lead us away from a "state of nature"), then the subversive "other" is very much present

enclosed, contained, waiting to be discovered when the door is opened.

So what *is* novel about Gothic? If by “novel” one means “prose fiction,” I would answer, “Nothing at all.” Though the rise of Gothic in England coincided with the rise of the novel as the most popular form of literature, and even though Walpole’s “Gothic Story” happened to be a prose narrative, a fixation upon “the Gothic novel” has proved more distracting than revealing for critics. Seen in a wider context, Gothic conventions may all be seen as disruptions within the Symbolic order that become prominent as early as the Renaissance and first find expression in drama, especially revenge tragedy; they express the new desire to explore the dark spaces hitherto overlooked or repressed (even as they were created) by the old structure. Thus Gothic may indeed be aligned with the “poetic” in Kristeva’s sense of the term. It permits the return of the repressed—the maternal principle, the “female,” in all the modes in which it may be recognized: in heroines, in feelings, in the landscape, in death, in *l’écriture*.

In these ways the Gothic is also “novel” indeed. Its fascination with the ancient but still historical past bespeaks a reformulation, a recasting of the rules, a reimagining of the self-in-the-world—a reimagining that would appear in “scientific” discourse a century later, in Freudian psychoanalysis. Thus Gothic “escape fictions” in fact provided a virtual reality, an experimental world in which the repressed—especially the “female” in all its guises—might be “realized.” The Gothic nightmare is very much a “nightmère.” To “realize” her power is revolutionary indeed. If the house of Western culture was falling into ruins, the selves who lived in the house must adapt or move out. In part 2 we turn to another kind of evidence suggesting that something as fundamental as the nature of the “speaking subject” is at stake in Gothic: its *two* traditions. The Gothic tradition has two plots, two sets of narrative conventions, two tales to tell about the desires and fears of the self in the world—tales determined by the gender of that self.

PART TWO



Reading
Nightmères;
or,
The Two
Gothic
Traditions

SEVEN

Nightmère's Milk

The Male and Female Formulas

In part I I argued that Gothic conventions reveal a dissonance or disequilibrium in patriarchy's fundamental principle: the assumption that "male" and "female" are crucial distinctions and that "male" is the central and superior term. This ancient premise has (among many others) aesthetic, psychological, and linguistic manifestations. Further, since the dynamics of "male" and "female" in all realms of experience were imagined in terms of the patriarchal family, the disorders of the system tend, in literature, to express themselves in familial terms. During the eighteenth century, then, through the cracks and fissures in the Law of the Father, this "other" gendered "female" became newly visible, powerful, and fascinating. Gothic conventions expressed the public nightmare in which the "nightmère" began to be "realized."

To summarize this argument, we may arrange a new set of terms on the model of Aristotle's paradigm:

(male)	(female)
Father	Mother
house	secret room
univocal speech	written text
signifier	signified
Symbolic	Semiotic
conscious	unconscious
horror	terror
culture	nature
deployment of alliance	deployment of sexuality

So far, we have focused primarily on language, some aspects of narrative technique, and setting, whether in nature or culture—the sublime landscape or the haunted house. Now we turn to plot. As Freud

himself unwittingly acknowledged, in patriarchal culture the male subject and the female subject necessarily have a different experience; each lives in a somewhat different world. Patriarchy assumes that the male self is normative, “universal,” and transcendent—representative of “mankind.” Gothic, however, reveals both the cost such an ideal imposes on the male and the very different tale the female subject has to tell. Since 1976, feminist critics have recognized that gender is crucial in Gothic, for that was when Ellen Moers first used the term “female Gothic.” Recently, Kate Ferguson Ellis (1989) and Eugenia DeLamotte (1990) have considered the distinctions between the “masculine” and “feminine” modes.

In *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology*, Ellis argues that

in the feminine Gothic the heroine exposes the villain’s usurpation and thus reclaims an enclosed space that should have been a refuge from evil but has become the very opposite, a prison. The masculine Gothic gives the perspective of an exile from the refuge of home, now the special province of women. (P. xiii)

Eugenia DeLamotte’s thesis (discussed in the Introduction) concerns the differences between the male and the female subject’s experience of self in patriarchal culture. Though not explicitly drawing on psychological contexts, DeLamotte’s thesis could also be supported by the work of Nancy Chodorow and Carol Gilligan, who have argued that men and women conceive of themselves and their relations to others in different ways. The male, they argue, experiences his psychological boundaries as fixed and distinct, while the female’s feel more permeable, indeterminate, and problematic.

While I agree with Ellis that these differences are rooted in historical conditions and with DeLamotte that they concern the “boundaries” of the gendered self, my thesis is both more radical and more specific than either of theirs. I shall argue that the “Male” and “Female” traditions employ two distinct sets of literary conventions. Both may find expression in drama, lyric, or narrative, in verse or in prose, in canonical high Romantic works, in serious “novels,” or in popular formula fiction from the eighteenth century to the present. Furthermore, from the 1790s onward, these conventions offer the author a matrix of creative innovation: a chance to write “the unspeakable” in “Gothic.”

The male and female narratives and their differences become most

explicit in twentieth-century mass-market Gothics. The latest Gothic revival began in 1960, with the publication of Victoria Holt's *Mistress of Mellyn*, a perfectly conventional example of the female plot. During the subsequent dozen or so years, mass-market paperback "Gothics" crowded the drugstore and supermarket paperback shelves. These books asked to be judged by their covers, which invariably depicted the heroine and an imposing, ancient edifice set in a wild landscape. Usually it was night, dimly illuminated by a moon half-hidden in clouds. The heroine was always fleeing the house (dark except for one lighted window high in a tower); she wore a look of terror and a diaphanous garment that might be either ball gown or nightgown. The books' titles typically linked the place of the heroine's trials with her eventual triumph; we were reassured that despite her present difficulties she was fated to become the *Mistress of Mellyn* or the *Lady of Mallow*. And these novels' authors always purported to be women with elegant, even aristocratic names, obviously the kind of people who might speak with authority of English country housekeeping and Victorian mores.

This iconic cover illustration signaled a rigidly formulaic plot. The text told the heroine's story from her own point of view. Alone in the world and poor, she usually finds employment as a governess in the mansion of a wealthy family with a long and dubious history. The owner of this house is distant, mysterious, and yet ambiguously attractive and frightening. Our heroine is intimidated by both his wealth and his forbidding manner, but finds herself increasingly attracted—after all, she has never known anyone like him before. The longer she remains here, the more conscious she becomes of apparently supernatural threats emanating from this history-haunted space. She begins to fear that someone is trying to kill her, and that the master is most likely guilty in some way. But she remains, held by ties of love and loyalty to the child she has been hired to care for. Usually the threat turns out to be related primarily to a female force (the other woman, the sinister housekeeper, the madwoman in the attic, the master's dead wife). In the end, however, the heroine learns that this danger can be overcome, that the "supernatural" is merely the result of some human deception, and that the master loves her and her alone. Her worst fears arose from the terrors of an overactive imagination. Thus the denouement also implies a lesson about self-confidence and the nature of reality. She and the master of the house are married and live happily ever after.

As a result of the paperback boom in the female formula during the 1960s, the term "Gothic" became familiar again in publishers' blurbs

and in advertising; and rightly so, since its roots go back to the early Gothic novels of the late eighteenth century, especially those of Ann Radcliffe and her imitators. Nor had this plot—available in precisely this form since *Jane Eyre* (1847)—ever entirely disappeared from the popular tradition. Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*, a bestseller in the 1930s, had demonstrated its continuing appeal. When the success of Holt and her imitators made "the Gothic" a hot property again, there were plenty of writers to be rediscovered, or who enjoyed new success. Some successful producers of the formula such as Dorothy Daniels had contracts to write a dozen books a year.¹ Even such long-forgotten curiosities as Lady Caroline Lamb's *Glenarvon* (1816) became available in paperback reprint.² Gothic dominance of mass-market paperback sales ended after 1974, with the publication of Kathleen Woodiwiss's *The Flame and the Flower* and Rosemary Rogers's *Sweet Savage Love*; Gothic romance was supplanted by a revival of historical romance also known as the "bodice-ripper."³

Readers of the '60s mass-market Gothic were almost always female. And yet, while this heroine-centered tradition dominated the market, another mode of Gothic also reemerged in best-selling popular fiction. In 1965 Ira Levin published the enormously successful *Rosemary's Baby*, which inspired numerous other adventures in the demonic such as Fred Mustard Stewart's *The Mephisto Waltz* (1968) and books about supposedly authentic "demonic possessions" or "hauntings" such as *The Exorcist* (1971) or *The Amityville Horror* (1977). But Stephen King's *Carrie* (published in 1974, the same year as *The Flame and the Flower*) most emphatically marked the revival of a contrasting set of Gothic conventions. Like the female formula, this one has a lengthy history that extends from Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* through M. G. Lewis and Bram Stoker.

Male Gothic differs from the female formula in narrative technique, in its assumptions about the supernatural, and in plot. Male authors do not conventionally conceal their gender behind the mask of a female pseudonym, nor indeed, do women appear to write many tales in this tradition.⁴ The female Gothic generates suspense through the limitations imposed by the chosen point of view; we share both the heroine's often mistaken perceptions and her ignorance. Male Gothic derives its most powerful effects from the dramatic irony created by multiple points of view. In *Carrie*, for instance—a novel purportedly heroine-centered, around a dark "Cinderella"—other modes of discourse supplement and interrupt the main plot events leading up to Carrie's night

at the prom. These include material from scholarly books on telekinesis, the official report of a commission investigating the disaster at the prom, and the memoir of one of the few surviving students. The narrator observes Carrie rather than allowing us to share her perspective, and any sympathy we might feel is also mitigated by these other voices that speak of Carrie as a psychological curiosity, as a mystery or a monster. Further, our assumption that the author is male subtly increases our sense of distance from the female protagonist (at least in female readers); although the narrator offers us some psychological and sociological insights concerning the etiology of Carrie's frenzy, the poor child remains something of a laboratory specimen (an implication reinforced by the "scientific" analysis of the other voices).

Second, whereas the female tradition of Gothic explains the ghosts, the male formula simply posits the supernatural as a "reality," a premise of this fictional world: telekinesis *is* an authentic and potentially apocalyptic power; vampires *do* exist; Satan *could* impregnate a young woman living in contemporary New York. In their attitude toward the supernatural, the male and female formulas parallel the two complementary positions adopted by Wordsworth and Coleridge in writing the *Lyrical Ballads*. Wordsworth was to portray the natural in such a way as to highlight the seemingly supernatural powers of the human imagination in response to its environment—analogueous to the Gothic heroine's terror of hauntings that arise from her life in the mysterious house. Coleridge, on the other hand, was to tell stories of worlds in which the supernatural is a reality one simply must accept in "that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment that constitutes poetic faith."⁵

Third, the Male Gothic has a tragic plot. The female formula demands a happy ending, the conventional marriage of Western comedy. This plot is affirmative, and in the terms we examined in part 1, affirmative of the power of the Symbolic. It celebrates (as Wordsworth would have said) a marriage of mind and nature, though from the female perspective, the successful "marriage" is a wedding to culture. The Male Gothic protagonist, however, fails and dies. The hero/villain is an isolated overreacher punished for his hubris, his violation of the Law. He destroys himself, whether in losing his kingdom, like Manfred of Otranto, or his very life, like Lewis's Monk Ambrosio.

The Female Gothic heroine experiences a rebirth. She is awakened to a world in which love is not only possible but available; she acquires in marriage a new name and, most important, a new identity. Indeed,

she is often almost literally reborn, rescued at the climax from the life-threatening danger of being locked up, walled in, or otherwise made to disappear from the world.⁶ But the best that even the survivors of the Male Gothic plot can expect is a kind of spiritual inoculation. They emerge from the concluding apocalyptic orgy of violence with lowered expectations, permanently marked by what they have suffered. At the end of *Otranto*, Theodore and Isabella prepare to spend their remaining days in a state of shared melancholy, while in *The Monk*, “the remaining years of Raymond and Agnes, Lorenzo and Virginia, were happy as can be those allotted to Mortals, born to be the prey of grief, the sport of disappointment” (p. 420).

Narrative closure in Male Gothic is uncertain. Carrie may be dead, but in the last pages, her author shows us that another just like her is already growing up in Tennessee. At the end of *Dracula*, the King of the Vampires is dead, but others of his undoubtedly numerous progeny are conveniently forgotten (as is the vampire blood that presumably still courses through the veins of Mina and the son she eventually bears).⁷ Even more explicitly, Rosemary’s maternal instinct causes her to rationalize any residual qualms she may feel about her infant’s tiny claws and cat-like yellow eyes. She accepts her baby, this son of Satan, foolishly rationalizing: “He couldn’t be *all* bad, he just *couldn’t*. Even if he was half Satan, wasn’t he half *her* as well, half decent, ordinary, sensible human being? If she worked *against* them, exerted a good influence to counteract their bad one . . .” (pp. 260–61).⁸

Finally, whereas Female Gothic is organized around the resources of terror, of an imagined threat and the process by which that threat is dispelled, Male Gothic specializes in horror—the bloody shroud, the wormy corpse. It frequently lapses into what Stephen King sometimes calls “revulsion” (and sometimes “the gross-out,” implying that “reality” is nauseating, horrible beyond belief).⁹ In Male Gothic one character often serves as a chorus or Cassandra, trying to convince the others of the real and present danger embodied in the “unnatural,” “supernatural” threat. In *Dracula* Dr. Van Helsing has to overcome his scientific and rationalist colleagues’ skepticism about the very existence of vampires; in *Rosemary’s Baby*, Rosemary’s friend Hutch warns about the reputation of the Bramford and its coven of witches.

Male Gothic plot and narrative conventions also focus on female suffering, positioning the audience as voyeurs who, though sympathetic, may take pleasure in female victimization. Such situations are intimately related to its delight in sexual frankness and perversity, its

proximity to the "pornographic." In early Gothic this usually takes the form of female virtue threatened and often violated, echoing Bluebeard's strategy for implicitly blaming the victim. After all, "virtue" is a patriarchal standard: the etymology of the word declares that a good woman is as much like a man (Latin, *vir*) as possible. Thus the Male Gothic plot takes it for granted that a woman's virtue is her most valuable asset and then places her in a situation where it will be threatened or destroyed. Ultimately she may be (must be?) punished as a "fallen woman." In *The Monk* the unfortunate Antonia's beauty—the mere sight of her—incites Ambrosio to rape her (while she is unconscious), to abduct her, and finally to stab her to death. In a way, *Rosemary's Baby* represents the *ne plus ultra* of this strategy of horrified fascination with female suffering. As a pregnant woman, Rosemary's "otherness" (especially from the narrator's tacitly male perspective) is intensified by the reader's knowledge that the fetus is *indeed* other, the child of Satan. Her symptoms are grotesquely ominous; instead of conventional cravings—pickles with strawberry ice cream—Rosemary gets up in the middle of the night to gorge on raw chicken livers. Levin's narrative technique exploits Rosemary's body just as her husband Guy does in his bargain with Satan, trading the use of her for his own professional success as an actor.¹⁰ In contrast, the female formula adheres to terror and an almost Victorian prudery; the heroine may be shocked by the hero's kiss midway through the narrative, but she is and remains a virgin—despite threats, she retains her "integrity."

The Male Gothic heroine is, like Bluebeard's wife, caught in the ideology of a culture that reifies her "female nature" as curious, inconstant, disobedient, weak, and that places her in a situation where those qualities will lead her into danger. The "key" to this pattern is clear: her role is inseparable from her identity as a sexual being, either as subject or object. Bluebeard gives his wife the key to the secret room after "the honeymoon": "About a month [after the marriage was concluded], Bluebeard told his wife that he was obliged to take a country journey." When Antonia unveils herself in the cathedral at Madrid, she attracts both the eye of Lorenzo, a noble lover, and that of Ambrosio, the Monk, finally effecting both his destruction and her own. Rosemary's stated ambition to conceive a child both arouses the coven's interest in her and makes the Devil's task easy, since she knows exactly the time she will be most fertile. Carrie's psychokinetic powers appear with her first period.¹¹ As a whole, Male Gothic conventions imply that the focus of horror is not merely "the female" in general, but more specif-

ically, her most mysterious and powerful manifestation as mother or potential mother. In light of Kristeva's analysis of horror, therefore, we can see that Male Gothic conventionally echoes that primitive anxiety about "the female," specifically the mother. The gruesome physical materiality of Male Gothic horror expresses the "abject," the otherness of the *mater*/mother who threatens to swallow or engulf the speaking subject.

This identity of horror and "the female" suggests why Male Gothic has affinities with pornography. *The Monk* did not appear in an unexpurgated edition from 1797 to 1950. The novels of Lewis's noted admirer, the Marquis de Sade, owe an obvious generic debt to Gothic conventions. His *Justine* and *Juliette* concern the trials of heroines within remote country houses—as does their twentieth-century descendent, *The Story of O*. Admittedly, the scenes that offended as well as horrified readers in 1796 may seem tame to sensibilities honed on *Naked Lunch* or *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. But the line between Male Gothic and pornography is not easy to draw.

"Pornography" is—like "Gothic"—notoriously difficult to define. As I suggested in the Introduction, both terms express categories relative to a particular cultural moment: the category changes as the culture changes. Gothic "otherness" first consisted of "the medieval"; pornographic "otherness" appears to consist of "the sexual," or perhaps a realm where desires are "free" of repressive social control. Like the concept of "Gothic," the idea of "pornography" emerged in discourse during the eighteenth century.¹² But just as the "medieval" surface of "Gothic" masks a deeper structure, the dynamics of the patriarchal family, so the "unfettered desire" of "pornography" also disguises a hidden "myth," a rather different organizing principle.

The pornographer's unconscious secret is the same as Bluebeard's: fear and loathing of the female. In this house of pornography, female flesh is absolutely subjected to male control, sacrificed to male violence. That is what its "sexuality" comes down to. At the worst, pornographic violence is eroticized and the "erotic" is necessarily violent.¹³ Eighteenth-century reactions to *The Monk* support this hypothesis: the most heavily expurgated passages were not its ornate descriptions of the luscious Matilda—e.g. "Two coral lips were visible, ripe, fresh, and melting, and a Chin in whose dimples seemed to lurk a thousand Cupids" (p. 78). Instead, objections to the book's "indecent" and "blasphemy" cluster around those elements exposing the structure and nature of patriarchal authority. Coleridge, for one, was offended by

Ambrosio's salacious surprise that Antonia is allowed to read the Bible unexpurgated. Lewis's concluding description of Ambrosio's slow, terrible death (torture inflicted by God, in effect) was consistently expurgated. After all, what else do notions of "indecent" and "blasphemy" seek to protect?

Male Gothic confirms Susan Griffin's thesis in *Pornography and Silence: Culture's Revenge against Nature*. As the subtitle declares, the premise that culture is "male" and nature "female" engenders through the Oedipal crisis a privileged adult male subject who bears in his unconscious the lost, seemingly all-powerful mother. This terrible, desirable figure—so early forbidden by the Law of the Father—excites both yearning and hatred. And whatever is culturally feminine, including women and nature, may bear the burden of this obscure will to revenge, serving as an object to the controlled, violated, desecrated. Other analyses of such Oedipal consequences, Dorothy Dinnerstein's *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* and Philip Slater's *The Glory of Hera* reach similar conclusions. Although Dinnerstein is concerned with contemporary Western society and Slater with ancient Greece, they both trace the power of Oedipal premises in social behavior and patterns of thought. The very etymology of the word "pornography" is inextricable from patriarchal structures; to classify "writing about prostitutes" as "indecent" (as literature's "other") already takes for granted certain assumptions about female sexuality—primarily that when partly removed from male control, it is beyond the pale, indecent, and, if not "unspeakable," not to be spoken.

This overview of Male and Female Gothic conventions leads to the conclusion that their differences arise from the male's and female's different cultural positions: it is all in the "I." In English the first-person pronoun and the word for the organ of sight sound the same—an accident, but one that conveniently serves to repress speculation that all I's/eyes might *not* be the same. The existence of Male and Female Gothic narratives, however, demonstrates that they are not. Male Gothic is a dark mirror reflecting patriarchy's nightmère, recalling a perilous, violent, and early separation from the mother/*mater* denigrated as "female." "Female Gothic" creates a Looking-Glass World where ancient assumptions about the "male" and the "female," the "Line of Good" and the "Line of Evil," are suspended or so transformed as to reveal an entirely different world, exposing the perils lurking in the father's corridors of power.

❧EIGHT❧

Male Gothic

Si(g)ns of the Fathers

She looked at them watching her, and knife in
hand screamed at them, "*What have you done to his eyes?*"

They stirred and looked at Roman.

"He has His Father's eyes," he said.

Ira Levin

Rosemary's Baby (p. 252)

Heroes and hero/villains with piercing, penetrating eyes stalk through the worlds of both Male and Female Gothic. Such eyes belong to Radcliffe's Montoni and Schedoni, to Lewis's Ambrosio, to Byron's Giaour and Lara and Conrad and Manfred, to the Brontës' Rochester and Heathcliff. Coleridge's Mariner has a hypnotic eye that fixes the wedding guest, transforming him into a "three-year's child." And so, in fact, does his witch or Lamia Geraldine, who has a similar effect on the hapless Christabel.¹ The list could be extended indefinitely. Lacan is only the most recent of theorists to emphasize the power and importance of the gaze as a sign of identity. His metaphor of the "mirror stage" represents the formation of a self inevitably divided. While the mirror reflects a subject that is apparently unified and whole, the image is already split from the subject perceiving its own image: to be a self is to be an alien and alienated.

But the gaze so constituted is implicitly male, implicitly patriarchal.² Freud's theory of the "I" also privileges sight, for the Oedipal crisis is precipitated by the perception of absence, creating therefore the basic categories of the "male/me" and the "not-male/not-me." This first great cognitive division thus splits the world into two unequal categories, "I" and "other." As Luce Irigaray points out in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, the male gaze cannot really see anything genuinely other; in order to be "seen," the other must be interpreted as relevant

to the male "reality": in order to reason about the development of female sexuality in light of the Oedipus complex, Freud thinks of the little girl as a "little boy" (p. 48). (Thus one may begin to see why the female archetypes in the male imagination—crone and fairy princess alike—are all relative to *him*.)

But these psychoanalytic stories of developing identity, or rather of the male "I" and the male gaze, merely reiterate much older patriarchal myths about the nature of things. The later theory may "explain" the meaning of the gaze, but these earlier versions describe the cultural assumptions out of which this compelling gaze developed, the context in which it assumes power, and also the reason why the Male Gothic "I" perceives a world of cruelty, violence, and supernatural horrors grounded in "the female." In *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love*, R. Howard Bloch argues that the doctrine of courtly love, which seems to elevate and idealize "femininity," is based upon the philosophical misogyny of early churchmen. Patristic treatises on virginity reveal the same basic premises about "the female" which are still implied in nineteenth-century ideologies of the feminine, including Freud's. These theologians assumed that matter is "female," and that desire is located in the gaze, a theory encouraged by such texts as Matthew 5:28—"Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery." It follows, therefore, that

since desire is engendered by, and indeed consists in, a look, a virgin seen is no longer a virgin. . . . Cyprian argues that no amount of soap and water can cleanse the body sullied by being seen. . . . According to Tertullian, "marriage . . . as fornication is transacted by gaze and mind. . . . A virgin in short, is a woman who has never been *seen* by a man." (P. 100)

A virgin, he continues, "ceases to be a virgin from the time it becomes possible for her *not* to be one" (p. 101), that is, when she *can be seen* by another. The logical implication of these premises, writes Bloch, "leads syllogistically to the conclusion that the only real virgin—that is, the only true virgin—is a dead virgin" (p. 108).

Conversely, the possessor of the gaze, a man who sees a woman, is in the position of power. From the patriarchal point of view (and "point of view" is everything), any woman who becomes an object of the male gaze, may never be anything else but an object, and a focus of unconscious resentments against the feminine. As Bloch writes,

The founding thinking of the problem of desire in the first four centuries of the Christian era establishes a profound link, which will surface

Chapter Eight

occulted in the twelfth century to dominate the Western love tradition, between the distortion implicit to the gaze and erotic desire. (P. 100)

Thus all conventions of Male Gothic are already implicit in patristic theses concerning the material and the “female.”

As we saw in “Bluebeard” and *Eloisa to Abelard*, the “accidentally” Gothic text may offer ideal circumstances for isolating aspects of the genre as it later developed. Another such text, an episode from Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* (3.11, 12), not only reminds us of later Gothics in setting and situation; it is also an allegory that exists to demonstrate the connections between spectacle, violence, and a loathing of the female inherent in the most fundamental cultural structures. Indeed, Spenser was already engaged in a project that might be called “Gothic” in several respects. A Renaissance poet, he was writing about a fairyland lost in the depths of the past. And eighteenth-century critics sometimes praised Spenser’s masterpiece as a “Gothic” work; as Warton argued, this vast poem’s apparent “barbarity”—its lack of classical order—nevertheless had an order, and hence beauty, of its own. The episode I shall examine is also Gothic in the narrower sense of the term. It describes the adventures of a young woman who finds herself on a dark and stormy night in a castle belonging to a powerful and mysterious man—a castle, she discovers, that hides a terrible secret.

Our heroine Britomart (the Knight of Chastity, a woman disguised as a man) learned from Sir Scudamore that his lost love Amoret has been imprisoned by Busyrane, an evil magician. This wicked villain holds the gentle lady “cruelly pend”

In dolefull darkenesse from the vew of day
Whilest deadly torments do her chaste brest rend
And the sharpe steele doth riue her hart in tway.
(3.11.11.1–4)

Britomart offers to rescue her. Bravely clasping her shield and sword, she walks through the magic fire surrounding the castle. Inside, she finds a monument to the “cruell Elfe” Cupid; rich tapestries that portray his “cruell Battels, which he whilome fought / Gainst all the Gods, to make his empire great” (3.11.29.5–7). Spenser spends nine stanzas cataloging Jove’s many amours (Helle, Europa, Danae, Leda, Semele, Alcmene, etc.) and those of lesser gods. This Cupid shoots his poisoned darts into his own mother, and sometimes even into himself: “Ne did he spare sometime to pricke himselfe, / That he might tast the sweet consuming woe, / Which he had wrought to many others moe”

(3.11.14.3-5). The room with the tapestries also contains a golden altar with a statue of the god wearing a blindfold and carrying a bow and "arrowes keene," dedicated to "the Victor of the Gods."

Like generations of later Gothic heroines, the curious Britomart spends some time exploring the castle's various rooms, seeing only evidence of Cupid's power and riddling and enigmatic bits of language, inscriptions exhorting her to "Be bold," and one that says, "Be not too bold" (3.11.54). When night falls, covering "faire heauen with an vniuersall cloud" (3.12.1.1-2), the weather becomes threatening and tumultuous: "an hidous storme of winde arose, / With dreadfull thunder and lightning atwixt" (3.12.2.1-2). This wind has its effect even inside the castle, clapping the doors and causing an iron wicket to fly open. Before her eyes appears the Masque of Cupid, a ritual procession beginning with "Minstrals, making goodly merriment, / With wanton Bardes and Rymers impudent" (3.12.5.4-5). These are succeeded by a series of figures representing the progress of love. The last two, "Despight" and "Cruelty" lead "a most faire Dame" whose naked breast sustains a terrible wound. Her heart has been removed and "in siluer basin layd"; "Her forward still with torture did constraine, / And euermore encreased her consuming paine" (3.12.21.2, 8-9). This lady, Amoret, is followed in the procession by the "winged God himselfe" mounted on a ravenous Lion; he has removed his blindfold so that he may see and rejoice in his victim's suffering. Last come another series of even more dire figures, concluded by "*Death* with infamie" (3.12.25.9). Spenser tells us that after marching around the room three times, the pageant disappears, "Into the inner roome, from whence they first did rise" (3.12.26.9).

The next evening when the door flies open, Britomart walks through and finds Amoret, bound to a pillar with iron bands. Before her, "the vile Enchanter" uses her own blood to write magic characters that he hopes will force her to love him. Seeing a "knight," Busyrane draws his knife and tries to kill his victim. But Britomart stops him. As she is about to kill him, Amoret pleads that he should live in order to reverse the spells. Busyrane begins to read "Full dreadfull things out of that balefull book" and "horror gan the virgins hart to perse, / And her faire locks vp stared stiffe on end" (3.12.36.3, 5-6). As he reads, however, the spells are broken and Amoret restored to health and beauty. As they leave the castle, they see its "glory quite decayd." The flames that once burned so brightly have now died down as well, for these flames of passion have lost their source of fuel, the body of Amoret.

Chapter Eight

Like Bluebeard's castle, the House of Busyrane hides patriarchy's secret, woman as the system's uncontrollable "other." But whereas "Bluebeard" is organized around the laws of marriage, the House of Busyrane discloses the structure of courtly or romantic love; this episode "realizes" the structure of male desire.³ In each tale, the man in power demands one thing from the woman—submission to his will—and directs all his resources toward achieving that end. Each man turns the resources of culture to his purposes. Each woman is imprisoned in his "house," and each man uses language to manipulate the victim. Spenser's villain appears to find an even more explicit and sinister pleasure in such manipulation than does Bluebeard—he has in fact elevated it into an art. He quite literally "makes a spectacle"—a play, a masque—of his power and Amoret's suffering. Busyrane's "dark spells" and magic writing even more explicitly than Bluebeard's spoken word imply male cultural authority to break the female spirit. One might guess that the magician's books contain Petrarchan love poetry, songs, and sonnets conjuring the "cruel fair," the "merciless beauty," to submit.⁴

Busyrane's masque portrays Eros as "Cupid." This term for the God of Love connotes (as in the word "cupidity") not merely erotic desire but "excessive desire, especially for wealth," thus reinforcing the connections we observed in "Bluebeard" between sexuality, property, and power. As the "cruel," rejecting object of love, Amoret is punished, eviscerated for refusing to be possessed. Her rejecting heart becomes a fetish. Just as the secret of the chamber objectifies the blame springing from his need to punish "female" intransigence, so the Masque of Cupid blames the victim even as it makes her into an object. The love represented in the pageant is cruel, un pitying, manipulative—sadistic and masochistic at once. (Cupid even wounds himself sometimes in order to enjoy the pangs of love.) The Masque as "spectacle" is a means of punishment and control: although Amoret refuses to "give her heart to him" (and that he cannot force her to do) she cannot prevent him from cutting it out and having her paraded before him every night.

Furthermore, Spenser's "accidental" Gothic episode almost undoubtedly inspired at least one later Gothic writer in the Male tradition. A curiously similar scene occurs in Lewis's *The Monk*. Here Lorenzo watches a night-time procession of the nuns of St. Clare, hoping for some sign of his sister Agnes, who has been imprisoned in the convent. With "the full swell of the organ accompanied by a chorus of

female voices," all the nuns and novices of the convent emerge. Some of them are dressed to represent saints:

To them succeeded a young and lovely Girl, who represented St. Lucia. She held a golden bason in which were two eyes: Her own were covered by a velvet bandage. . . . Next came the reliques of St. Clare, inclosed in vases equally precious for their materials and workmanship: But they attracted not Lorenzo's attention. The Nun who bore the heart occupied him entirely. . . . Now appeared [the procession's] most brilliant ornament. It was a Machine fashioned like a throne. . . . The summit was covered with silver clouds, upon which reclined the most beautiful form that eyes ever witnessed. It was a Damsel representing St. Clare. . . . As She advanced, a murmur of delight ran through the Crowd. Even Lorenzo confessed secretly, that He never beheld more perfect beauty, and had not his heart been Antonia's, it must have fallen a sacrifice to this enchanting Girl. As it was, He considered her only as a fine Statue. (Pp. 347-48)

These two episodes offer the sacred and profane pageants of the patriarchal gaze. The Masque of Cupid (the god of love) features a mutilated female "martyr" (in the sense of both "witness" and "victim"). Amoret's heart is borne in a basin before her. The procession of St. Clare honors a different "God of Love," but his emblems are surprisingly similar—the dismembered bodies of female saints. These "masques" imply that either kind of love as imagined by patriarchy is associated with acute physical suffering. The passive body of the female exists to signify that "truth." Significantly, because Lorenzo loves Antonia, here he regards Virginia, who represents St. Clare, only as a beautiful object, "a fine statue." (He is destined, however, to marry her eventually.)

But Lewis allows the procession to go one stage further in revealing the implications of this display. Whereas Britomart (a woman) intervenes and rescues Amoret, the procession in *The Monk* concludes in an orgy of hatred excited by female power: one of the most disgustingly violent scenes in a book filled with disgusting violence. The cruel deeds of the Prioress (also tellingly called "the Domina") are revealed; she has sentenced Agnes to death by slow starvation in the vaults to punish her infidelity. The celebration turns into a riot:

They showed her every sort of insult, loaded her with mud and filth, and called her by the most opprobrious appellations. . . . They stifled with howls and execrations her shrill cries for mercy. . . . She sank upon the

ground bathed in blood, and in a few minutes terminated her miserable existence. Yet though She no longer felt the insults, the Rioters still exercised their impotent rage upon her lifeless body. They beat it, trod upon it, and ill-used it, till it became no more than a mass of flesh, unsightly, shapeless, and disgusting. (P. 356)

Lewis's riot makes explicit what is only implicit in Spenser: the fundamental kinship between the patriarchal gaze and the fear of female power as well as the relation between the spectacle of the female and the desire for control and revenge.

Like the House of Bluebeard, the House of Busyrane is engineered around a desire to blame the female who has some will of her own and refuses to give it up, and to horrify the female (Britomart or Bluebeard's wife) with this spectacle of superior strength. Both Spenser and Lewis in their different ways suggest that such "spectacle" is a function of patriarchal "speculation" (itself in turn a function of the patriarchal "I"). This eye's spectacle and speculation also accommodates the spectral—in Male Gothic, the ghosts are not explained. I have already repeated the psychoanalytic explanation for this phenomenon, the notion that it expresses a self experiencing an early and abrupt separation from the mother who remains in the unconscious as she was experienced by the pre-Oedipal infant—as a "supernatural," "magical," "spectral" image of good or evil or both at once. The power of the spectral, however, is also directly a function of the "I"/Eye as organizing principle, as center. When the speaking subject is created in the Oedipal crisis, the imaginary, what has been "seen" (the "spectral") becomes "ghostly" ("spectral"). For the Symbolic does not accommodate this imaginary dimension. "Spectral" means "capable of seeing spectres," "having the aspect of a spectre or phantom," "ghostly, unsubstantial, unreal," or even "produced merely by the action of light on the eye or on a sensitive medium" (*OED*). The "spectral" haunts the Symbolic in Semiotic disruptions, the uncanny moments when the repressed reappears through tears in the veil of "reality." Male Gothic thus repeatedly enacts the occurrence of such disruptions and the process through which consciousness and its Symbolic resources reassert control. The way in which patriarchal order figures this disruptive "it" or "other" and the way that it controls it are consistent throughout Male Gothic. *The Monk* shows how horror of the female drives and shapes the narrative in the male tradition.

❧NINE❧

Demon Lovers

The Monk

Matthew Gregory Lewis wrote his precocious, sensational novel at the age of nineteen. It somehow manages to remain interesting and even powerful. Its anxieties are, not surprisingly, characteristic of the male adolescent (and one who, as at least a latent homosexual, perhaps feels particular anxieties about his own identity).¹ From the moment of publication, *The Monk* scandalized readers with its sexual explicitness and its scenes of virtue violated. Coleridge was profoundly offended by the book, perhaps because he also found so much to praise: an underplot “skilfully and closely connected with the main story”; the “truly terrific” tale of the bleeding nun; the “happy conception” of the burning cross on the forehead of the Wandering Jew; and above all, “the character of Matilda.” Coleridge calls her “the author’s master-piece,” “exquisitely imagined and as exquisitely supported.” After a page and a half of high praise, he enumerates the book’s faults for six more—a prolixity in itself suspicious. Why elaborate at such length?² The Marquis de Sade felt apparently unalloyed admiration for this work: in this age of “revolutionary shocks,” he wrote, “to compose works of interest, one had to call upon the aid of hell itself, and to find in the world of make-believe things wherewith one was fully familiar merely by delving into man’s daily life in this age of iron.”³

The Monk allows us to test the validity of this thesis concerning the nature of horror in Male Gothic; although Lewis’s images of female degradation are still far from the hard-core pornographer’s, his most powerful effects spring from an unconscious and uncanny dread of the culturally “female” in all her manifestations. As in “Bluebeard,” the novel’s plot, decor, structure, and characterization are founded on patriarchal premises about the nature of the female. And like most

pornographic narratives, *The Monk* takes place in a world where sexuality, whether experienced as love or lust or as a desire to escape its shameful consequences, is the prime motive for all action. Though Ambrosio's story is, in the broadest sense, an Oedipal plot of the son's rebellion against the Law of the Father, his temptation and fall are so reconstituted in the terms of sexual passion that the moral issue in Genesis—obedience—is almost irrelevant. The Monk, like the stereotypical female of medieval theology, is weak, irrational, carnal. Ambrosio is also explicitly presented as a male Eve who acts entirely out of lust. In the garden of the monastery, he is tempted not by a wily serpent, but by Matilda, who entraps him by manipulating a “female” tendency toward compassion and a susceptibility to flattery, as well as an irresistible sensuality. He is *bitten* by the serpent, which gives Matilda the opportunity to undermine his principles further as she appears to save his life in an ideally “feminine” gesture of self-sacrifice.

Ambrosio's fall is echoed in that of Agnes, who yields to her lover in the garden of *her* convent, an event that is both crucial to Lewis's horror (it is she who will cradle the maggot-infested corpse of her infant), and yet appears curiously casual, almost absentminded, in no way suggesting a rational or moral dimension. She says, “We met nightly in the gardens of St. Clare, and in an unguarded moment I violated my vows of chastity. I shall soon become a mother” (p. 71). Female characters in the book without exception illustrate traditional patriarchal views of women, whether intended as comic (as in the early appearance of Antonia's guardian Leonella, who is stupid, garrulous, vain, and very much in want of masculine admiration) or tragic (exemplified by the innocent Antonia, who exists, it seems, merely to excite the Monk to ungovernable lust and to die as the victim of his rapacious passion). Like *Clarissa*, *The Monk* implies that a good woman is entirely defined by sexual honor, so that she must literally die when that honor is reft from her—a fate, of course, entirely consistent with medieval discussions of virginity. Appropriately, Antonia dies of stab wounds inflicted by the Monk. If a woman in this world has any power, the “domina” of the convent of St. Clare, for instance, she is inevitably cruel, arbitrary, deceptive, a servant of superstition and irrationality. The “good” and relatively sympathetic Elvira, on the other hand, is also fatally ineffectual: she fails to protect her daughter Antonia, and dies at Ambrosio's hand. Afterward he learns that she was his mother. Her fate may therefore suggest an unconscious revenge fantasy. Elvira had casually and carelessly left her infant son behind when she fled with his father.

In this book female characters also manifest that instability, that refusal to be *one thing*, that is so troubling to patriarchal order. This perceived instability may be an uncanny echo of the pre-Oedipal son's relationship with his mother; lacking a sense of self as one, he experiences the mother's body as merely a set of various sensations, and the mother herself (with her several and sometimes contradictory behaviors) as nevertheless omnipotent. The danger of this female power and unpredictability is personified by Matilda, who first arouses Ambrosio's interest while disguised as the (male) novice Rosario. She then reveals herself as Matilda, a maiden dying for his love, and arouses his desire. Having seduced him, she puts her newly confessed magic arts at his service, furnishing him with the means to seduce Antonia. Finally we learn that she is a demon sent by Satan to seduce and destroy the Monk. Most shocking of all, Matilda presents herself as a twin of Ambrosio's portrait of the Madonna. She knows that in worshipping *her* he has also adored her beauty, not as spirit but as flesh. Thus Matilda exploits the Monk's weakness for the feminine through his own "feminine" side, his inherent carnality. Superficially this detail may offer a Protestant critique of papist idolatry; more deeply, it expresses patriarchal anxiety about the fundamental danger and duplicity of *anything* female: even the Blessed Virgin, supposedly the one exception to the rule of nature, is also dangerous.

The most ominous, pervasive, and inescapable female presence in the novel is Mother Church. The Roman Catholic faith had long figured in the imagination of Protestant England as the epitome of superstition and cupidity, a cruel and sinister hypocrite, a kind of institutional Terrible Mother. Good characters in *The Monk* as in many Gothic tales (whether in the Male or Female tradition) inveigh against the "superstition" of true believers—though nominally Catholic themselves—as when Lorenzo is described as one who "had long observed with disapprobation and contempt the superstition which governed Madrid's inhabitants. His good sense had pointed out to him the artifices of the monks and the gross absurdity of their miracles, wonders and suppositious reliques" (p. 334). Ironically, the Church is decried for enforcing an "unnatural" vow of chastity on unwilling young girls and displaying them as quasi-idolatrous objects.

To the Church also belong the subterranean passages, the crypts, the prisons of the Inquisition, which provide settings for the most horrible episodes of the novel. Moreover, as an institution the Church affirms and validates the supernatural, hence those cruel, relentless

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powers that surround and shadow all the characters in the novel. But the episode of “the Bleeding Nun” most clearly exemplifies the implicit identity of “the female” and “horror” in the Male Gothic world. We have already seen how linguistic intention and meaning are uncannily dissociated in this incident. In offering his “word” to this terrible other, Raymond implicitly invites her participation in the Symbolic (much like the invitations inadvertently offered vampires to enter the house, or Christabel’s carrying Geraldine over the paternal threshold). In addition, May 5 (the night of elopement) is “St. George’s Eve”—also the occasion of Jonathan Harker’s arrival in Transylvania. This was an ancient fertility festival sacred to the Great Mother, hence a night when the female principle is (unconsciously) felt to be in ascendance.

Agnes tells Raymond that *she* will escape by dressing as the nun and walk freely out of the castle at midnight. When the night arrives, all seems to go as planned. At the stroke of midnight the nun appears, “habited exactly . . . [with] a chaplet of beads . . . her head enveloped in a long white veil; her nun’s dress stained with blood.” Raymond flies to meet her, clasps her in his arms, and in an ecstasy of happiness repeats the unfortunate words, pledging himself to her and saying,

In my veins while blood shall roll,
Thou art mine!
I am thine!
Thine my body! thine my soul!
(P. 156)

They get into the carriage he has waiting and go off on a wild ride through a frightful tempest, which ends with the carriage wrecked, Raymond knocked unconscious, and the nun vanished.

But this specter bride clarifies several points about the horror of the female that haunts this novel and Male Gothic in general. Sexual desire makes Raymond vulnerable; if he had not been in love with Agnes, the pure virgin, he would never have embraced the figure of “the Bleeding Nun” (a confusion that repeats the motif of female instability and deceptiveness). Even more dreadful, Agnes’s later condition reenacts Beatrice’s history: each nun breaks her vow of chastity, though instead of murdering her lover as Beatrice had done, Agnes allows her infant to die because she doesn’t know how to nurse it. This unconvincing “failure” (how much specialized knowledge or even common sense does nursing demand?) dramatizes the uncanny but dangerously unreliable power of motherhood that echoes through the novel.

DEMON LOVERS

Second, the figure of the "Bleeding Nun" is a kind of visual oxymoron, on the one hand a woman dressed in the habit signifying her transcendence of female identity: she has become a Bride of Christ, and thus a sort of honorary man. She has renounced the flesh, swearing to remain dedicated to the Law of the Father. But blood, sign of life and death, and of the female capacity to give both, stains her garments—a countersign, a troubling revision. Later, we learn that the nun is one of those types familiar in the Gothic tradition, who like Laurentini di Udolpho or Bertha Mason, the madwoman in Mr. Rochester's attic, have gone mad through yielding to unbridled sensuality. Or to put it another way, she has recognized her own desires and acted upon them. The Bleeding Nun is an uncontrollable female embodying the same paradox that we observed in Pope's *Eloisa*, torn between masculine spirit and the desires of the female flesh.⁴ But Lewis's nun Beatrice (her very name is ironic) not only broke her vows and escaped her convent; she murdered her lover as well. Thus she is a guilty spirit who can find no rest even in death. But her status as specter is appropriate: how else may the possibility of female desire be represented within the Symbolic, which acknowledges no sign for her? She too represents the unspeakable, an uncanny disruption of signifier and signified.

What Beatrice desires, ironically, is that her bones be given honorable burial in the family plot—after a century, she has in effect renounced her rebellion. This denouement seems distinctly anticlimactic, in the mode of Radcliffe's black veil. And yet this desire might also serve as a metaphor for the horror she evokes from Raymond and later from generations of readers. She is a specter indeed, the female principle haunting the patriarchal Symbolic order: the baffling woman at once pure and bloody; chaste and violent; infinitely desirable, yet once attained, horrible beyond measure; the *belle dame sans merci*. This imaging of "horror" and "evil" visibly congruent with the mother—or more precisely with "abjection," symptom of escape from the mother—characterizes the Male Gothic even to the present day. We have already noted the links between Rosemary and Satanic incarnation. And Stephen King's *Carrie* not only sees horror in the heroine's becoming a woman; all her troubles spring from cultural efforts to control or domesticate "the female," including her mother's inculcation of the view that sex is sinful (she teaches Carrie her own peculiar version of the Fall) and the humiliating high-school ritual of choosing a prom queen, rewarding girls for conforming to "feminine" ideals. The revenge effected by Chris and Tommy (drenching Carrie in the

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bucket of pig's blood) symbolically identifies her with the most primitive, abject, horrible aspects of the female, and unleashes her apocalyptic wrath and destruction. One wonders why Stephen King specified pig's blood: was it to evoke that creature's mythological associations with the great Mother Goddess.⁵ *Carrie*, we can see, delineates the patriarchal double bind we saw in "Bluebeard": the female's "nature" set on a collision course with the demands of patriarchal culture.

As Hélène Cixous writes, in patriarchal culture women "are allied with what is regular, according to the rules, since they are wives and mothers, and allied as well with those natural disturbances, their regular periods, which are the epitome of paradox, order and disorder" (*The Newly Born Woman*, p. 8). Perhaps in this paradox we may understand the ironical orderliness of supernatural forces in the Male Gothic: the bleeding nun predictably emerges from her tower room at the same moment every five years, the vampire always fears garlic and sunlight; these "rules" even suggest a ritualistic or neurotic expression of "repetition compulsion," a symptom of the male subject's primitive, superstitious attempts to accommodate disorder within a pattern of order.

Ambrosio's tragedy, a Gothic version of Oedipus, shows how necessary is the repression of the female to the Law of the Father. Ambrosio's tragedy derives from a capacity patriarchal culture had for eons attributed to the "female." His own "feminine" side is his carnality, first aroused by Matilda, who is a demon and an instrument of Satan.⁶ Thus he falls. The structure and organization of Lewis's horror story reveals that as in Aristotle's paradigm, "evil" still consorts with "the female." *Dracula*, perhaps the most powerful of Male Gothic villains, makes that latent identification virtually explicit, but also reveals the lengths to which our culture may go to conceal this identity.

Why Are Vampires Afraid of Garlic?

Dracula

But man only asks (himself) questions he can already answer using the supply of instruments he has available to assimilate even the disasters in his history. . . . The really urgent task is the colonization of this new “field,” to force it, not without splintering, into the production of the same discourse. . . . The forms of the arrangement may vary, but they will all bear the paradox of forcing into the same representation—the representation of the self/same—that which insists upon its heterogeneity, its otherness.

Luce Irigaray
Speculum of the Other Woman (p. 137)

Since the publication of *Dracula* in 1897, millions of people who have never read the novel have become acquainted with the “nature” and “habits” of the vampire. *Dracula*, as everyone seems to know, is a black-caped creature of the night who lives by sucking the blood of the living. Vampires sleep in their coffins all day and at night may transform themselves into bats or wolves. They have no reflection in a mirror. They abhor sunshine, garlic, and the cross. At death, the vampire’s prey (usually a beautiful young woman) becomes one of these “Un-Dead.” Only the fatal wooden stake driven through the heart deprives the vampire of eternal life.¹ *Dracula* lives on as well in the Un-Death of scholarly discourse. Commentary on Stoker’s novel, now voluminous and diverse, speculates upon its historical, psychoanalytic, and social dimensions, as well as on its relation to myth, folklore, theology, and politics.²

Only the vampire hunter’s odd, heterogeneous tools have not been much explicated. Stoker’s Van Helsing mentions a plethora of possible vampire preventatives, including the rosary, a branch of the flowering wild rose, and the Host, as well as the three which have survived in the popular myth. Garlic, the crucifix, and the stake are indelible compo-

nents of popular vampire lore, yet the few explanations offered for their power have been unsatisfying, even circular. James Twitchell, an influential reader of the novel, writes that garlic is effective because it is a common folklore preventative against vampires, and that the cross is powerful because Dracula is "an elaborate allegory for the transubstantiation of evil."³ In *The Living and the Undead*, Gregory A. Waller recognizes the importance of the weapons and notes that they include "a natural herb, a talisman, and a forged weapon,"⁴ but even this classification is not very illuminating, for it remains within the terms of Stoker's fiction and his metaphysics. What is implied by the vampire's aversion to these objects? I suggest that it is intimately related to the place of the vampire in the Male Gothic tradition. The vampire hunter's tools are "signs of the fathers," symbols of patriarchal culture and its founding, forgotten terror—fear of Mother Nature, red in tooth and claw.

In the past two decades, Freud has become the indispensable authority for reading *Dracula*, a violent and sexual fantasy.⁵ "This is a story of incest, of the primal horde, and of the establishment of social and sexual taboos," writes Twitchell, articulating the widely accepted view that *Dracula* is an Oedipal drama of the sons' struggle with their father for control of the women.⁶ Following Freud, the critics also argue that such conflict is the foundation of culture itself. Waller writes that the life-and-death struggle between human and vampire always concerns "the necessity for collective actions, and the possibility that the living can create a new community."⁷ The death of the patriarchal Dracula, Waller declares, is a necessary and creative violence: "What is at stake is nothing less than the social, sexual, and spiritual future of mankind. . . . From the dust of the King-Vampire and the blood of the primal tyrant comes the restoration or the creation of a new patriarchy based on the family and on God the Father."⁸ Freudians have also emphasized the symbolic identity of blood and semen in understanding the vampire. Pursuing the implications of this premise, Christopher Craft argues that the exchange of blood, particularly the serial transfusions, reveals unconscious homosexual desire: "Men touching women touch each other, and desire discovers itself to be more fluid than the Crew of Light would consciously allow."⁹

The Freudian reading of *Dracula* is undeniably powerful, a convincing account of the novel's structure and manifest ideology. And yet Dracula is not only a powerful Father. Dracula is the "other" of the horror plot, the monster that must be destroyed. He is Transylvanian,

not English; aristocratic, not bourgeois; Un-Dead, not living. In contrast to Van Helsing and his band of enlightened scientific rationalists, Dracula is a creature of the dark, of madness, and of ancient superstition. Most surprisingly, however, he is also associated with that most powerful and persistent "Other," the female.

In an unemphatic but undeniable pattern of allusions, Stoker himself links the monster with examples of female power and perversity. Dracula arrives in England on a ship called the "Demeter" and departs on one called the "Czarina Catherine." His most horrific manifestations occur in the light of the full moon—archetypally female—and like the moon goddess Artemis, Lady of the Wild Things, he wields control over beasts and may raise a storm at will. The vampire Lucy's brow is compared to "the coils of Medusa's snakes" (chap. 16), and Devendra P. Varma notes that Dracula shares many attributes of Kali, the Hindu Terrible Mother who drinks the blood of her victims.¹⁰

This affinity between Dracula and "the female" has also been widely commented upon. In *Dracula Was a Woman: In Search of the Blood Countess of Transylvania*, Raymond MacNally describes the career of Elizabeth Bathory (who bathed in blood to preserve her beauty), and includes a chapter detailing the cultural affinities between the vampire and the "female."¹¹ This point is also noted by Penelope Shuttle and Peter Redgrove, who argue that the horror of the vampire is an unconscious expression of a pervasive cultural horror of menstrual blood.¹² Phyllis Roth, who accepts the Freudian reading of *Dracula* as Oedipal struggle, comments that "the duplication of characters and structure . . . betrays an identification with Dracula and a fantasy of matricide underlying the more obvious patricidal wishes."¹³ And numerous readers have read *Dracula* as a manifestation of Victorian ideology concerning women and mothers.¹⁴

Thus some of the critical literature proposes a paradoxical reading of Dracula as monster. His power is "masculine," but it is power wielded on behalf of the "female"—darkness, madness, blood. Craft argues that this ambivalence signals that the text's deepest anxiety is a fear of "gender dissolution." At the level of plot Craft's reading is persuasive, and I would not deny that the male enterprise of vampire conquest implies "gender and inversion." I propose, however, that in the context of the Dracula "myth" (the elements of Stoker's story that reappear in other versions), the confusion of "male" and "female" has a different meaning.

If *Dracula* were a dream instead of a romance, the analyst might

conclude with some confidence that "Dracula," manifestly the father, latently represents the female as imaged by Western patriarchy. (In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud writes that "reversal"—the appearance of a female as a male entity, for example—is one of the most common functions of the dream work.¹⁵) We shall probably never discover whether Stoker was aware of his monster's female dimensions, and if he was, what he made of them.¹⁶ But the source of his creature's uncanny power lies in this disguise of the female by the male, and the satisfaction of the novel's resolution is the conquest of this Terrible Other. *Dracula* recapitulates in the Gothic mode one of patriarchy's favorite stories. It is inherent in the legend of St. George, undoubtedly Stoker's conscious paradigm, and it is hidden as well in the Freudian Oedipal plot that has provided so compelling a model for critics.

Evidence that *Dracula* represents the female principle masked by a Terrible Father is manifest in "his" effect on other characters. Proximity to the vampire exaggerates and intensifies any character's "female" potential. Male characters often revert to "feminine" helplessness while female ones become predatory—a subversion of those "natural" sex roles on which patriarchal society is founded. Renfield is intermittently afflicted with hysterical madness, that "female malady," while Jonathan in Castle Dracula is ironically placed in the feminine role of Male Gothic heroine (which includes his conventional journal-keeping behavior). The language describing his near seduction by the female vampires would be appropriate in a "bodice-ripper": "I lay quiet, looking out under my eyelashes in delightful anticipation. . . . I closed my eyes in languorous ecstasy and waited—waited with a beating heart" (chap. 3). As a vampire, the already feminine Lucy becomes an aggressive femme fatale. She speaks in a "soft, voluptuous voice, such as I [Seward] had never heard from her lips—'Arthur! Oh, my love, I am so glad you have come! Kiss me! Kiss me!'" (chap. 12).

Men, however, escape vampire predations relatively lightly, which implies that being male in itself provides a degree of immunity. Jonathan succumbs to a brain fever after his ordeal, as if his masculine reason were temporarily disordered by the experience. Renfield, emblem of "consuming passion," is finally killed by Dracula, but apparently does not join the Un-Dead, while Lucy, whose sleepwalking implies that the "female," the irrational, is most powerful in her, pays for "salvation" with her life. The virtuous Mina of the "man's brain" is an uncooperative, but ultimately helpless victim. Of her first encounter with Dracula, she says, "I lay still and endured, that was all."

WHY ARE VAMPIRES AFRAID OF GARLIC?

(This formulation irresistibly recalls the Victorian mother's advice to her daughter on her wedding night, "Lie still and think of England.") But even she cannot free herself from the vampire without the aid of five men, which hints at the anxious inequity of the conflict.

The destruction of the vampire Lucy (far more difficult and traumatic than that of Dracula himself) implies that the conquest is, unconsciously at least, the imposition of a masculine "truth" whose signs are also the sins of rape and murder. Ironically, Van Helsing understood Lucy's vampire condition at her death, but failed to do what was necessary before burial, to "cut off her head and take out her heart" (chap. 13). Because of his failure to perform such preventive mutilation, the men must rescue her from her "fate worse than death" (which is Un-Death, apparently). In Van Helsing's mind, her destruction is clearly a metaphorical consummation of marriage, for he insists that Lucy's fiancé Arthur drive the stake. Placing the point "over the white flesh," he begins to hammer:

The thing in the coffin writhed, and a hideous, blood-curdling screech came from the opened red lips. The body shook and quivered and twisted in wild contortions; the sharp white teeth champed together till the lips were cut and the mouth was smeared with crimson foam. But Arthur never faltered. He looked like a figure of Thor . . . driving deeper the mercy-bearing stake. His face was set, and high duty seemed to shine through it. . . .

And then the writhing and quivering became less. . . . Finally it lay still. (Chap. 16)

Afterwards, Arthur "reeled and would have fallen. . . . The great drops of sweat sprang from his forehead, and his breath came in broken gasps." Dracula's final defeat is in marked contrast to the bloody detail of the earlier episode: "On the instant came the sweep and flash of Jonathan's great knife. I [Mina] shrieked as I saw it shear through the throat; whilst at the same moment Mr. Morris's bowie knife plunged into the heart" (chap. 27). Although Arthur's act of "love" with the "mercy-bearing stake" is at least as suggestive of brutal rape as of marital consummation, its final result is significantly rewarding. At last the body resumes the appearance of "Lucy as we had seen her in life. True that there were . . . traces of care and pain and waste; but these were dear to us, for they marked her truth to *what we knew*" (my emphasis). Better that a woman be a pure, dead virgin, better that she lose her head and her heart than to remain a seductive, "voluptuous wanton," a "foul thing for all eternity."

Chapter Ten

The greatest danger of the vampire, Van Helsing says, is not a matter of “mere life and death. It is that we become as him” (chap. 28). The unpleasant implication here is that in the pursuit of masculine “high duty,” any consequence for the woman is justified. The men take it for granted that the female is an “other” to be possessed, protected, rescued—and destroyed, if need be—in marriage. As Lucy’s fate suggests, these men are fighting not to rescue the particular woman so much as to impose their ideal of what a woman should be—“virtuous,” that is, submissive to a higher, “male” principle. Thus *Dracula* confirms, almost two thousand years later, the patristic opinion that the only “true” virgin is a dead virgin.

Lucy, the novel assures us, is better off dead. And Mina’s salvation is affirmed in life when she gives birth to a baby, who quasi-miraculously replaces Quincey Morris, sacrificed in the struggle. (The child is not, of course, a daughter.) This is the book’s final sign that it was all worthwhile. Yet motherhood, praised and affirmed by the novel’s manifest structure and statement, is also most ambiguously linked with impurity, death, and vampire “evil.”

Incongruous and puzzling allusions to motherhood abound in the novel. When an old woman offers Jonathan Harker a rosary before he leaves for Castle Dracula, she insists that he take it “for your mother’s sake.” The female vampires in Castle Dracula are content to leave Jonathan in exchange for the child that Dracula brings them. Lucy associates the light gleaming on the windows of St. Mary’s Church with Dracula’s “red eyes.” Curiously indeed, Lucy’s mother, although well-meaning, disastrously causes her daughter’s death. Lucy is asleep wreathed in the garlic flowers Van Helsing has arranged, like Ophelia’s “virgin crants and maiden strewments,” as she herself remarks (chap. 11). Oddly, the flowers are efficacious here, not the bulbs of garlic used in vampire movies. Mrs. Westenra, dying of “heart trouble,” removes them. The next morning, Van Helsing exclaims:

This poor mother, all unknowing and all for the good as she think does such thing as lose her daughter body and soul [sic]. . . . Oh, how we are beset! How are all the powers of the devils against us! (Chap. 11)

As a very young vampire, Lucy enacts a dreadful parody of motherhood; Seward and Van Helsing glimpse her carrying a child in her arms, children now being her only prey.

This last incident might merely imply (as Gail Griffin argues) that

the female vampire's tendency to prey upon children is Stoker's deliberate example of egregious depravity; such a choice is consistent with Victorian idealizing of motherhood as the highest female role. But this theory does not account for all the allusions to motherhood. Some suggest that the presence of Dracula has a disturbing effect on maternal behavior (as when Mrs. Westenra "de-flowers" her own daughter). Others are more obscure. Although the rosary, symbol of the Holy Mother, is a logical vampire deterrent, the gleam of red, whether it comes from Dracula's eyes or St. Mary's church window, is to Lucy disturbingly the same. (Indeed, we are not told whether the saint is the Madonna or Mary Magdalene.) Two other incidents in which Mina assumes a maternal role extend and elaborate these ambiguities.

Early in the novel Mina goes out at midnight to rescue the sleepwalking Lucy and bring her home. She wraps the girl in a shawl and gives her her own shoes. Lucy takes them "with the obedience of a child": "When we got to the churchyard [Mina says] where there was a puddle of water . . . I daubed my feet with mud . . . so that as we went home, no one, in case we should meet anyone, should notice my bare feet" (chap. 10). This rather labored statement is remarkable in several ways. First, it is Mina acting as a mother who is "soiled" by the experience, whom we see has "feet of clay"; it would seem more fitting that Lucy, now already in Dracula's power, should be so marked. We are supposed to admire Mina's motherly conscientiousness; yet as a result of playing the "highest," "best" female part, she becomes "dirty." Metaphorically, the passage declares the proximity of the human mother and Mother Earth.

But there is an additional complication. Mina's muddy feet are a direct result of her internalized concern with respectability, with being "proper." Most interesting of all, she finds the mud readily available in the churchyard. Or consider another significant instance when Mina plays mother. After Lucy's death, she comforts the forlorn Arthur. Attempting to speak of his dead fiancée, he begins to weep. Mina says, "I suppose there is something in a woman's nature that makes a man free to break down before her and express his feelings on the tender or emotional side without feeling it derogatory to his manhood." As she speaks kindly to him, "he grew quite hysterical, and raising his open hands, beat his palms together in a perfect agony of grief. I felt an infinite pity for him and opened my arms unthinkingly. With a sob he laid his head on my shoulder and cried like a wearied child." Mina then

comments, "We women have something of the mother in us that makes us rise above smaller matters when the mother spirit is invoked. . . . I never thought . . . how strange it was" (chap. 17).

On each of these occasions, the maternal impulse leads the conventional Mina to violate social expectations—walking barefoot in the moonlight, embracing her dead friend's husband-to-be. In these instances, the concrete level of the narrative seems most at odds with the novel's manifest ethos. Mina's "feet of clay" are incongruent with Van Helsing's rhetoric, his description of her as "one of God's women, fashioned to show us . . . that there is a heaven we can enter, and that its light can be here on earth" (chap. 14). In the incident with Arthur Holmwood, maternal power uneasily accompanies masculine disintegration—Arthur "breaks down" into "hysterical" (womanish) and "child-like" sobbing. The power of the mother is thus analogous to the vampire's; each diverts the "civilized" human being away from the "proper" mode of behavior. The vampire as a symptom of Kristeva's abjection thus has exactly the effect that would be expected: it disturbs the boundaries of the *propre* (the "clean and proper self").

Evidently, then, motherhood is an anomalous condition (like the vampire's "Un-Death"), a state not accounted for by the patriarchal definition of women as either "virgins" or "whores" according to their sexual experience. Giving birth is the one female function which society cannot entirely sublimate or deny, though patriarchies have traditionally repressed this truth by strict regulation of the conditions under which women have access to maternity. "Good" women become mothers only within a patriarchal marriage, but their power, *Dracula* seems to say, remains disturbing and potentially subversive. Society's restrictions of the mother are legitimated by appeal to Christian metaphysics; at the unconscious level, however, an irreconcilable conflict remains, for any human motherhood is dubiously mired in materiality. (This seems to be the emblematic significance of Mina's muddy feet; and the fact that the mud comes from the churchyard unconsciously expresses the source of this judgment.) If "mother" equals "female" equals "nature," then the mother remains suspect because she participates in the power of nature, that nonrational and omnipotent "other" that no culture can fully order or control.

An episode in chapter 20, sometimes called the book's "primal scene," confirms this equation. Seward describes the horrifying sight of Dracula forcing Mina to drink his blood while Jonathan sleeps on the bed beside them:

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With his left hand he held both Mrs. Harker's hands, keeping them away with her arms at full tension: his right hand gripped her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down in his bosom. Her white night-dress was smeared with blood, and a thin stream trickled down the man's bare chest which was shown by his torn-open dress. The attitude of the two had a terrible resemblance to a child forcing a kitten's nose into a saucer of milk to compel it to drink.

This is the only occasion when Dracula is directly observed as predator. It reverses several expectations about vampires created by Stoker himself, as if to suggest that reversal is the hermeneutic key to the narrative. Here the patriarch of the vampires appears as a bloody Madonna (with "torn-open dress"), forcing the adult woman to "nurse." Ordinarily, vampires suck the blood of *their* victims. Yet in either instance, the vampire reproduces himself—the victim becomes his "child," herself a potential vampire. The association of mother's milk with blood is ancient, even archetypal, and the narrator's simile about the kitten implies that the connection is not far from Stoker's mind.¹⁷ And that the scene occurs in the presence of the helpless, unconscious husband merely accentuates the nightmare truth of patriarchal impotence.

Thus the narrative implies that Van Helsing and his band of four-and-one-half men (the half being Mina's rational self) are struggling against the most powerful "other" of all—mindless, soulless "nature red in tooth and claw," the archetypal "Terrible Mother." What they are fighting *for* is, ironically, also what they are fighting *against*, because even the most "virtuous" of human women can betray the cause, either seduced, like Lucy, or forced, like Mina. But this is the system's flaw: if the maiden is to be worth rescuing, she must become a mother; but when she becomes a mother, she invites the enemy Death into the house of culture. In this context, the notion of "control of the women" takes on another meaning. *Dracula* hints that women must be controlled because they represent and embody the energy, power, and life of nature which it is culture's paradoxical necessity to control.

Stoker's assumption that garlic flowers repel the vampire is emblematic of this paradox. In nature, flowers are sexual; in culture they are symbols of feminine purity, fragility, and mortality. According to Bram Dijkstra, the dead (or mad) woman surrounded by flowers was a favorite icon in nineteenth-century painting; apparently the female as natural victim, "a cut flower among the flowers," was peculiarly popular. Stoker's image of the dead Lucy in her coffin among "a

wilderness of beautiful white flowers" (chap. 13) is thus conventional, a visual cliché.¹⁸

In *Dracula*, the struggle between man and vampire is temporarily successful, partly because the real purpose of the battle remains unconscious. Culture's only recourse is ideological manipulation and limited, specific action: according to a poignant aside, Van Helsing's mad wife is permanently kept in an asylum (chap. 13). The death of Lucy is a tragic and finite victory. Mina's restoration to "virtue" effaces her disturbing propensities. Dracula succumbs to the stake, but like the natural generative forces which he represents, he lies in an unquiet grave.

The vampire in Stoker's novel is perfectly consistent with patriarchal dualism, its dialectic of spirit and matter, male and female, life and death. Materiality binds mankind to matter and hence to death; in giving birth, the mother also inevitably confers death, becomes in a sense the vampire of her own child. The term "Un-Death" is therefore necessary to describe vampire existence without the positive connotations of "life." Vampire "life" is a physical state unhallowed by any infusion of spirit or soul, hence the vampire's lack of a reflection in a mirror.¹⁹ We see also why Dracula should be so bound to his coffins of earth, and why he "materializes" from dust and is transformed to dust if destroyed. We see why the cross, the rosary, and Host repel the vampire, for they symbolize the transcendence of natural generation. And we see why blood is so potent and so complex a symbol in this myth, at once literal and metaphorical, sacred and profane.

Earlier, I suggested that a persuasive interpretation of the *Dracula* myth should account for all the narrative functions. If we conclude that the conflict between human and vampire is tacitly a struggle between a reigning patriarchal culture and an ancient female nature, then the weapons effective against the vampire should be signs of the fathers. And so they are. The phallic significance of the stake is clear in this context, while the requirement that it be wooden may suggest a form of homeopathic magic. The cross, supreme sign of Christian patriarchy, is most powerful because it symbolizes the possibility of a birth transcending the life/death cycles of the natural order—the horizontal, female "earth" plane is transfixes by the "celestial" male vertical. Significantly, in Stoker's novel, these weapons are wielded by Abraham Van Helsing, whose first name means "father of many" and who is assisted by Arthur Holmwood, *Lord Godalming*. In addition, the Host, which Van Helsing uses on occasion to "sterilise" the coffins of earth, is the wafer consecrated according to the Roman Catholic ritual, thus

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embodying the “real presence” of the Son and symbolizing the possibility that spirit may redeem matter/*mater*.

And garlic? The smell of garlic is, of course, notoriously unerotic, and some critics have speculated that the herb’s reputation in folk medicine as a “blood thinner” might account for its effectiveness against the vampire. But there are other, more immediate associations in the context of my reading. In ancient times garlic was widely believed to be displeasing to the Mother Goddess. The word “garlic” is derived from two Indo-European roots meaning “spear-leek”—hence it is, like the stake, phallic. According to *The Woman’s Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*, “Garlic and garlic-eaters were taboo in Greco-Roman temples of the Mother of the Gods,” and according to Pliny, garlic “keeps off serpents . . . by its smell.”²⁰ Folklore records traditions of using garlic to placate the Death Goddess, or to protect oneself from her. Garlic was once left at the crossroads overnight to provide a “supper for Hecate,” whom Neumann describes as “the snake-entwined goddess of ghosts and the dead.”²¹ It was also considered efficacious against the Neriades, destructive siren-like creatures who worshiped a snake god.²² The most famous example, however, occurs in *The Odyssey*, book 10, on the island of Circe, whose wine turned men into swine, also a kind of “Un-Death.” The god Hermes tells Odysseus how to defend himself against this fatal woman. He plucks a “magic plant”—“a molü in the language of the gods.” (The natural, as opposed to mythical, identity of Molü or moly is wild garlic, according to the *OED*.)²³ Hermes tells Odysseus to approach Circe holding the plant before him: “This great herb with holy force / Will keep your mind and senses clear.”

He also instructs Odysseus to draw his sword before her, which will “make her cower and yield her bed—a pleasure you must not decline.” By means of “her own lust,” then, the hero conquers the witch and male order is imposed. Once she submits, Circe’s power over those she has transformed ends, just as killing the vampire releases his victims. In fact, the episode of Odysseus and Circe is fundamentally parallel to that between Arthur and Lucy in the tomb. In Homer, the man controls the woman by means of the phallic symbol/weapon, the sword, and sexual intercourse. In Stoker, the two means of control are conflated into one—driving the phallic stake is metaphorically a sexual conquest. In each the “lustful” female is defeated supposedly on her own terms, within the realm of sexuality, where she must yield to superior masculine power . . . or violence.

But why should the Terrible Mother be experienced as an evil, threatening Father? Although a biographical critic would have much to say about the way Stoker's own psyche may have facilitated this arrangement, such analysis is not my purpose here. We need not search for personal neuroses, for this conquest of the disguised mother is one of patriarchy's favorite stories; it is hidden in the legend of St. George and in the myth of Oedipus as well.²⁴ The serpent, symbol of wisdom and rebirth, was revered in pre-patriarchal religions as a female force, a pervasive symbol of the Mother Goddess. (This association suggests a reinterpretation of Pliny's declaration about the efficacy of garlic against serpents.) In worshipping the three aspects of the Goddess as virgin, mother, and crone (or waxing, full, and waning moon), these religions accepted death as well as birth as a manifestation of the divine—hence the worship of death goddesses like Hecate and Lamia.

According to scholars Joseph Campbell and Merlin Stone, the rise of patriarchal religions is marked by tales of heroes associated with sunlight conquering serpents or dragons of darkness. Indeed, the serpent in Eden is a similar revision, "diabolic" because it is a creature of the supplanted Mother.²⁵ From the anxious perspective of a patriarchal and spirit-centered theology, death (the end of consciousness) is the greatest "evil," a reality to be denied at all costs. Thus, when the hero "rescues" the maiden from the dragon, he separates the virginal, and hence least "female," aspect of the female from the "monstrous" implications of her own nature, the terrifying dragon of death. He separates the potential mother, necessary for the survival of his culture, from the death which inevitably follows any birth. Like *Dracula*, such myths declare that by means of male intervention the tragedy of female nature may be "re-pressed" into a divine comedy of the father's triumph.

The myth of Oedipus, so powerful to Freud (and, as Peter Rudnytsky has argued, to the nineteenth century at large), also tells of the encounter between a mortal man and a female serpent-like creature, the Sphinx. The scholar J. J. Bachofen, author of *Mutterrecht*, writes that the Sphinx is "an embodiment of tellurian motherhood, the feminine right of the earth in its dark aspect as the inexorable law of death." He concludes that in causing her death, Oedipus made possible a new, dignified role for women in marriage and is thus worthy of reverence as "her benefactor, her redeemer."²⁶ But in making this myth a central metaphor for his theories about the self, or about civilization in *Totem and Taboo*, Freud ignored (repressed?) the role of the

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mother in this story. He remarks that he does not know how the myths of the mother goddess are relevant to his scheme.²⁷

Feminist readers of Freud have commented on this repression, or blindness. The mother's absence is evident in Freud's individual analyses, such as the Dora case, and in his pronouncements about that "dark continent," female sexuality. He takes at face value Dora's rejection of her mother, who was obviously a problematic element in his patient's life. As the authors of an essay published in 1983 ask,

Is there not a structural parallel between Freud's complacency on this point and the eclipsing of the mother in the theory of the Oedipus complex . . . Freud found aggressive wishes directed toward the father intolerable; in fact, he viewed parricide as the necessary evil upon which civilization was founded. But did he not find intolerable the very notion of aggressive wishes toward the mother? . . . Is it not . . . useful to see this blindness in so astute an analyst as the manifestation in him of a perversion—the repression of the mother—which lies at the root of Western civilization itself? ²⁸

In a short book on this repression of the mother, *Le corps-à-corps avec la mère*, Luce Irigaray writes that "When Freud described and theorized, notably in *Totem and Taboo*, the murder of the father as foundation of the primal horde, he forgot a more archaic murder, that of the woman/mother, necessitated by the establishment of a certain order in the *cit  *." This murder, she argues, is represented in the story of Clytemnestra, for whose murder Orestes, though pursued by the Furies, ultimately escapes punishment and female madness. In a passage particularly relevant to *Dracula*, she comments that this murder "pays off in the impunity of sons, in the burial of women's madness—or the burial of madness in women—and in our access to the image of the virgin goddess who obeys the law of the father."²⁹ Thus one is not very surprised to hear that Freud conceived of his role as psychoanalyst in terms of a rescue fantasy; he thought of himself as the "liberator" of women imprisoned by hysteria, defeated by life.³⁰

The habit of interpreting *Dracula* in light of Freud's Oedipal theory (as a story about conflict between fathers and sons) might be seen as exemplifying a kind of literary "countertransference." According to Freud, this phenomenon occurs when, owing to his own unconscious assumptions, the analyst fails to see (and hence to interpret) some part of the analytic material. The legend of St. George, the tale of *Dracula*, and Freudian Oedipal theory are parallel in taking for granted certain patriarchal premises. They all assume that heroic activity is the province

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of men, that the work of culture is a male enterprise, a violent struggle against an (always monstrous) "other," and that important conflicts occur between fathers and sons, or at least between male entities. Thus they are equally blind to intimations of maternal, rather than paternal, power. But as we have seen, when readers no longer entirely share this patriarchal perspective, the stories begin to suggest other, yet similar, unconscious meanings: the dragon is also the Mother Goddess; fear of the father masks fear of the mother; Dracula has uncanny affinities with a bloody, threatening Mother Nature.

Thus, I agree that *Dracula* is about the origins of culture, as the traditional Freudian critics have argued; but as it confirms the patriarchal myth of culture it also undermines it, revealing the anxieties—even terrors—that follow from specifically patriarchal premises about the relation of culture and nature. Patriarchy values symmetry very highly indeed; a desire for symmetry (that "I" should be equal to "other") may be one of its deepest desires. However painful and threatening the Oedipal situation may be, it is nevertheless reassuring in its symmetry, its implied equality between combatants. The conflict of male antagonists (son and father, St. George and dragon, Van Helsing and Dracula) is comfortingly unambiguous in contrast to that with the undisguised (m)other—the worrisome combat with a hydra-headed monster, or else merely, "confused alarms of struggle and flight / Where ignorant armies clash by night." By the end of the nineteenth century, patriarchy was in crisis, a crisis visible in the changes in women's political and social status, in the fear of change, in the waning of faith in Progress, and in the dreadful suspicion—encouraged by Darwin—that nature does not bear the signs of God the Father after all. The horror of Dracula is the horror of man confronting a universe that no longer confirms or conforms to the patriarchal structure of reality.

❧ELEVEN❧

The Female Plot of Gothic Fiction

In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf wrote that in the eighteenth century something happened that was more significant to her than “the Crusades or the Wars of the Roses”: “the middle-class woman began to write.”¹ Being primarily concerned with Realism (the House of Fiction’s public rooms), Woolf has little to say about the most popular writing produced by these eighteenth-century women.² In terms of sales and readership, they were strikingly successful as authors of romances, especially Gothic romances. Until recently most of them—novelists and romancers alike—were largely forgotten. Fanny Burney survived on the periphery of literary history as one of the two writers Jane Austen had most admired. Ann Radcliffe, “the great enchantress of that generation” according to De Quincey, was enshrined in the scholarly footnotes to *Northanger Abbey* as the object of Austen’s affectionate satire.³ And while Radcliffe’s contribution to the Gothic tradition was important to students of Gothic, Gothic itself was assumed to be marginal.

But if Woolf is correct about the significance of this new female subject, then even the most fantastic of Gothic romances might also tell us much about this new voice from a new perspective. I have been arguing that Male Gothic expresses the horrors inherent in the premises of Western patriarchy—that “the female” (the mother) is “other,” forbidden, and dreadfully, uncannily powerful, a monster that the nascent self must escape at the cost of whatever violence seems necessary. If Female Gothic has different conventions, this in itself suggests that the change of “I” was as important as Woolf believed.

In the past two decades feminist criticism has established certain orthodoxies about “Female Gothic.” Although the critics vary in

methodology and emphasis, they tend to agree that the affinity between the gender and the genre expresses the terror and rage that women experience within patriarchal social arrangements, especially marriage. According to Tanya Modleski, for instance, "Gothics, like Harlequins, perform the function of giving expression to women's hostility towards men while simultaneously allowing them to repudiate it" (p. 66). Kate Ellis declares that the Gothic novel creates, "in a segment of culture directed toward women, a resistance to an ideology that imprisons them even as it posits a sphere of safety for them" (p. x). Michelle Massé argues that "the husband who was originally defined by his opposition to the unjust father figure slowly merges with that figure. The heroine again finds herself mute, paralyzed, enclosed" (p. 20). Most recently, Kari Winter has examined the parallels between American slave narratives and a female Gothic. She notes that "Gothic heroines . . . search for ways to preserve their dignity while also finding sexual and emotional fulfillment, but the novels are not optimistic about the possibilities" (p. 67). In short, as Patricia Meyer Spacks writes, "the Radcliffian maiden may act courageously . . . but finally she, too, reveals woman's socially enforced weakness" (p. 158).

Some Gothics undoubtedly support these readings; but in failing to distinguish the real differences between Male and Female Gothic, feminist critics have also missed some important aspects of the female narrative. Ellis asserts, for instance, that Male Gothic "is a reaction to the feminine" (p. xvi). The historical prominence of certain "Male Gothic" conventions that antedate *all* Gothic would seem to contradict this statement, although certain works by men may express specific literary reactions (*The Monk* is partly inspired by *Udolpho* while *The Italian* answers *The Monk*). Further, failing to recognize the differences between the two narratives distracts one from noticing that the most oppressive antifeminism is encoded in Male Gothic, organized around a "female" "other" both victimized and demonized. Thus, ironically, the experiences most often accented by feminist critics (the heroine who is inexorably trapped, abused, and hopelessly confined) are most characteristic of Male Gothic.

The inadequacies of feminist readings of Gothic spring from two sources. One is related to their characteristic use of psychoanalysis. A theory of repression and the unconscious, a hermeneutics of unreason, is extremely useful for the feminist critic, and especially for the critic of Gothic, since these texts are so close to fantasy. Furthermore, certain Freudian concepts have so altered the way we think about human

behavior that they may appear in discussions otherwise not particularly dependent on psychoanalysis. On the whole, however, feminist critics have used psychoanalysis more as a means of social *diagnosis* than as a model of *interpretation*. They draw on Freudian concepts to name the effects of patriarchal repression—noticing the “masochism,” “paranoia,” “repetition compulsions” that the Gothic heroine suffers or that the plot imposes upon her. They speak of “the uncanny” and “hysteria.” But this kind of Freudianism always flirts with being reductive: having named the neurosis, what else can one say? Generally, the author turns back to the historical context, short-circuiting textual analysis. This use of psychoanalysis probably expresses the critic’s underlying realist bias, the assumption that narratives reflect material reality in a fairly straightforward way. The place of the heroine’s trials may be a castle, but it is really only “the home”; the heroine’s improbable and much-desired marriage is interpreted only in light of marriage as a contemporary social institution.

But Freud’s interpretive methods, taken seriously, do not encourage such quick and easy readings. Certainly, neither author nor audience is available to furnish the associations needed in the dream interpretation of classical psychoanalysis; but a good deal more subtle reading could be done if we grant that these dream-like texts manifest in unexpected ways the expected principles of the dream work, such as overdetermination, condensation, displacement. We may not have either the authors’ or the audiences’ personal associations, but we do have a great many associations of another kind, the literary threads from which these texts were woven. The public dream—the published work—belongs to the public web of “intertextuality.” Northrop Frye’s use of the term “displacement” to describe one mode of the relationships among fictions was not intended in the technical Freudian sense. And yet, the two are analogous, for both recognize metonymy as a meaningful principle of relation. The main difference is that Freud applies the principle to the negotiations between conscious and unconscious mind while Frye is concerned only with textual interrelations. The insights and connections uncovered by the latter principle may be almost as unanticipated as those perceived by the former. (Appendix C illustrates the “displacements” of the female plot from myth through mass-market Gothic.)

The second problem in feminist commentary is thus closely related to the first one: these critics have tended to ignore the more strictly “literary” dimensions of Female Gothic. Although Gothic tradition has

a great deal to tell us about culture and society, one should not ignore its medium, literary language, which deploys codes having a history and context of their own. The theme of marriage, for instance, so prominent in the Female Gothic conclusion, cannot within a strictly realist context be read as a "happy ending." We all know of some evils which marriage entailed for woman two hundred years ago: the loss of her civil identity and of her property, present and future. But when we are dealing with romance, or with dreams, the relations of the fiction to social circumstances are complicated, far from offering a simple and direct reflection of historical conditions. Failing to recognize this problem risks misunderstanding the reflection if not the conditions themselves. One should at least consider the status of "marriage" as a *literary* phenomenon; after all, marriage is one of our oldest metaphors, and a figure that the High Romantics brought to new prominence.⁴ To focus on marriage only as a social phenomenon, therefore, is ironically to acquiesce in the patriarchal denigration of romance as a "feminine," lesser mode that yields only dark, fuzzy shadows of "reality." Undoubtedly, the long-standing popularity of Gothic for a female audience evokes a certain embarrassment in feminist critics. Janice Radway, an astute and sympathetic reader of women's popular romance, has nevertheless concluded that such texts, Gothic or otherwise, cannot really express "feminist protest" because they so manifestly side with the status quo. Instead, she argues, such romances help to reconcile female readers to patriarchy by reassuring them that it is not so bad after all.⁵ (The opiate of the misses, in effect.)

For all these reasons, most feminist readings (lively and interesting as they are) have been virtually blind to the most crucial aspect of the Female Gothic plot: its constructive and empowering function for its female readers. Its comic plot, its emphasis on terror rather than horror, and its insistence on the possibilities of female "reason" (implied by, among other things, its convention of explaining the ghosts) not only affirm the possibilities of "feminine" strength; they also sketch in the outlines of a female self that is more than the "other" as purely archetypal or stereotypical. The Female Gothic narrative is thus genuinely and profoundly novel. But one could go even further; it is revolutionary.⁶ There is a good reason why the female plot has appealed to generations of female readers; it does not merely protest the conditions and assumptions of patriarchal culture, it unconsciously and spontaneously rewrites them. The self portrayed there offers a more fully human version of a self gendered female; it offers an alternative to

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the "universal" pattern of the Oedipal structure, the myth that psychoanalysis has privileged as the creator of speaking subjects.

The enthusiasm with which the Female Gothic has been produced and consumed for two centuries implies that its readers grasped something of its affective, unconscious implications. Literary snobs and even feminist critics may (and do) dismiss the female reader's affection for this formula as evidence of a poorly educated or oppressed class's bad taste. I shall argue, however, that this plot's true implications are so remote from the cultural frame of even feminist critics that its very originality makes it difficult to see. The skeptic could respond that this view of Female Gothic is naively and misguidedly optimistic. Her evidence is familiar and apparently compelling. The Female Gothic heroine is passive and helpless; doesn't every one of them have to be rescued at least once before the end of the story? And by the hero? (How humiliating!) Surely, it would seem, the Gothic narrative's real reason for being is to provide its record of suffering—the pain of a lonely, vulnerable, isolated young woman. And most damning of all, the concluding marriage can be no "happy ending," especially since the heroine's husband has usually shown himself enigmatic if not downright duplicitous (and sometimes even cruel) in the course of the story.

These objections all take it for granted that passivity and dependence on others are invariably bad things, a sign of weakness. But perhaps they seem so only to a culture assuming that independence and conquest are the supreme signs of accomplishment. If the Female Gothic plot in fact presents an alternative to the Oedipal crisis in the formation of the speaking subject, then it portrays a subject with different desires, who sees the world with a different eye/I. Since the "female" gaze has *not* been created through conflict, division, and abrupt separation, she has a different relation to her own mother and to that cultural (m)other repressed in her access to the Symbolic. She also may have a different experience of "Mother" Nature. Therefore—and this conclusion has important ramifications for Romanticism—the self nurtured outside the conflict of fathers and sons is much better prepared to see a world free of specters (though not necessarily free of wonders).

I have referred to this subject as "she," but there is nothing essentially or biologically "female" about it; rather, it is nurtured within the "female" position in a patriarchal culture. Therefore it is most likely to emerge through the writing of women, but it is not necessarily limited to them, any more than a female subject automatically escapes the

Oedipal structure. The unfortunate stereotypes and patriarchally coercive resolutions that even sympathetic critics have found in Female Gothic are thus subject to examination through different readings. The hero's ambiguity or apparent duality, the heroine's passivity and intermittent helplessness, and the dubious satisfactions of a plot resolved in marriage, all have a different significance from this new perspective, a meaning perhaps all the more powerful in being occult, hidden, an unconscious secret shared between female writers and readers. The female plot is a plot in all senses of the word. Not merely a narrative structure, it also schemes and maps alternatives to the Father's Law. Though subtle and not immediately visible, it does have one overt sign: the role of the hero in Female Gothic.

❧TWELVE❧

The Male as “Other”

A narrative organized around the female perspective, Female Gothic necessarily views the male as “other.” This innovation is genuinely novel; moreover, as we shall see, the typical characters of the female narrative do not merely mirror or reverse those of the male tradition. Male archetypes of the female, those relative creatures, are familiar through centuries of male imaginings—the princess given as prize for heroic action, the *femme fatale*, the witch, the Good Mother and the Bad. The male archetypes in the Western tradition are similarly relevant to the male subject—Good and Bad Father, the loyal friend, the implacable enemy, the trickster or devil. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, a new male archetype, “the Byronic hero,” had emerged. Mario Praz was probably the first to call him the *homme fatal*, though Praz also characteristically ignored his function in female narratives.¹ Historians have affiliated the Female Gothic hero with this Byronic fatal man, and though the relation is more complicated than has generally been recognized, he may serve as a starting point for discussion.

During the 1960s, experienced readers of the mass-market female formula quickly learned to identify the heroine’s future husband the moment she first saw him—always an occasion given some emphasis. Victoria Holt’s Connan Tremellyn exemplifies the type:

His voice was strong—arrogant, I called it even before I set eyes on him.

He was standing with his back to the fireplace and I was immediately conscious of his great height. . . . His hair was black, but his eyes were light. . . . There was an air of careless elegance about him as though he cared nothing for his clothes but couldn’t help looking well in them.

He gave an impression of both strength and cruelty. There was sensuality in that face, I decided—that came through, and there was much

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that was hidden. Even in that moment when I first saw him I knew that there were two men in that body—two distinct personalities—the [one] who faced the world and the [one] who remained hidden. (P. 36)

According to conventional literary history, we should recognize Connan Tremellyn as the great-grandson of Charlotte Brontë's Mr. Rochester or possibly of his "cousin" Heathcliff. Their father was the Byronic hero, son of those notorious Gothic "others," Radcliffe's Montoni or Schedoni, and they, in turn, may claim Milton's Satan as their own progenitor and as founder of the family.²

Certainly, what little we know of Satan's family life is decidedly in the Gothic mode; according to Milton, his one child was Death, offspring of an incestuous affair with his only daughter, Sin. It is also undoubtedly true that certain family traits, first notable in Satan, seem to appear in every generation. Here is how Milton describes the heroic Satan of Book I:

He, above the rest
In shape and gesture proudly eminent,
Stood like a tower. His form had not yet lost
All her original brightness, nor appeared
Less than Archangel ruined, and the excess
Of glory obscured . . .
. . . Darkened so, yet shone
Above them all the archangel; but his face
Deep scars of thunder had intrenched, and care
Sat on his faded cheek, but under brows
Of dauntless courage, and considerate pride
Waiting revenge. Cruel his eye, but cast
Signs of remorse and passion, to behold
The fellows of his crime, the followers rather
(Far other once beheld in bliss), condemned
Forever now to have their lot in pain. . . .
(*P.L.* I, 589 ff.)

Here is Ann Radcliffe's Italian hero/villain Schedoni:

There lived in the Dominican convent of the Spirito Santo at Naples, a man called Father Schedoni, an Italian, as his name imported, but whose family was unknown, and from some circumstances, it appeared, that he wished to throw an impenetrable veil over his origin. For whatever reason, he was never heard to mention a relative, or the place of his nativity. . . . There were circumstances, however, which appeared to indicate him to be a man of birth, and of fallen fortune; his spirit, as it had sometimes looked forth from under the disguise of his manners, seemed

THE MALE AS "OTHER"

lofty; it showed not, however, the aspirings of a generous mind, but rather the gloomy pride of a disappointed one. Some few persons in the convent, who had been interested by his appearance, believed that the peculiarities of his manners, his severe reserve, and unconquerable silence, his solitary habits and frequent penances, were the effect of misfortune preying upon a haughty and disordered spirit while others conjectured them the consequences of some hideous crime gnawing upon an awakened conscience. (*The Italian*, p. 34)

And finally, Byron writes of Lara:

In him inexplicably mix'd appear'd
Much to be loved and hated, sought and fear'd;
Opinion varying o'er his hidden lot,
In praise or railing ne'er his name forgot;
His silence form'd a theme for others' prate—
They guess'd, they gazed, they fain would know his
fate.

.....
[His] smile might reach his lip, but pass'd not by,
None e'er could trace its laughter to his eye:
Yet there was softness too in his regard,
At times, a heart as not by nature hard,
But once perceived, his spirit seem'd to chide
Such weakness as unworthy of its pride
And steel'd itself, as scorning to redeem
One doubt from others' half-withheld esteem;
In self-inflicted penance of a breast
Which tenderness might once have wrung from rest;
In vigilance of grief that would compel
The soul to hate for having loved too well.

.....
He stood, a stranger in this breathing world,
An erring spirit from another hurl'd. . . .
("Lara," 290ff.)

The details of this character's appearance are consistent from one example to the next. He seems "fallen," though of apparently noble origins. He is tall and imposingly masculine—Milton compares Satan to a tower. His eye is always piercing, penetrating. (One remembers the conventional Female Gothic cover illustration—the house with one lighted window, often in a tower.) Most insistent, however, is this figure's duality—the perceived incongruity of inner and outer, present and past, his paradoxical, deceptively mixed nature. His masculine strength, even harshness, masks a conventionally "feminine" capacity

for intense feeling: Satan's eye "cast[s] / Signs of remorse and passion" that is implicitly *compassion* for his followers; the Byronic hero is driven by erotic love, however fatal. Indeed, a capacity for feeling in the conventional man of action is this character's most potent source of mystery. As is frequently true of the female "other," he is mysterious, even otherworldly, and given to enigmatic pronouncements and to silence. In fact he embodies that duality the Western tradition has always allotted to the female as the imperfect or lesser term. As we saw in Aristotle's paradigm, unity is associated with the male, duality or multiplicity with the female. Such duality is typical of the female "other" in patriarchal myth; consider Spenser's Duessa, for instance, or those sirens, mermaids, Circes, and other belles dames sans merci who seduce and destroy men by means of the loveliness that masks a wicked nature.

Male villains also tend to be double, dual, insincere, two-faced, hypocritical. Though Milton scholars argue that Satan's duality is also hypocrisy—his compassion and remorse are insincere—one could add that his doubleness might also be read as another symptom of his sinful, flawed, inconsistent nature. A medieval theologian might have explained the Satanic/Byronic hero's recurrence in centuries of female fantasy by reminding us that women are "weak-minded" and "attracted to evil." Though few these days would advance this hypothesis (asserted in the *Malleus Maleficarum*), the feminist critics' reading of the Gothic hero has a curious affinity with it; if marriage marks the heroine's capitulation to a fundamentally coercive social order, then the union might be seen as an alliance with the devil himself.

But in Female Gothic this masculine duality has a different meaning, one related to the character's virtually unprecedented role as "other" and necessary to his function in the comic ending. In contrast to the Male Gothic's female "other," whose deception may lead the hero into danger or death, the Female Gothic heroine's confusion about the hero as "other" facilitates the happy conclusion. Learning to read (or rather, not to *misread*) appearances, is one of her most important lessons. She can be happy only when she realizes that she did not see this ambiguous, paradoxical figure accurately at first. In her eyes, he is eventually *transformed*, his true nature "realized."

Moreover, the Female Gothic heroine always comes to see that this mysterious "other" whom she loves, loves her also. Martha Leigh, heroine of *Mistress of Mellyn* realizes that Connan Tremellyn loves *her*, the governess, instead of the aristocratic (but sluttish and possibly mur-

derous) Lady Treslyn, who has been flirting so outrageously with him. Jane Eyre discovers that Mr. Rochester does not love the beautiful, haughty Blanche Ingram after all. The second Mrs. DeWinter (whose first name, significantly, we never hear) learns the even more startling news that Maxim did not love, but loathed his first wife Rebecca.³ The "other" may seem a monster (either physically threatening or merely rude, abrupt, hard to fathom), but he will eventually become a loving husband, transformed, in fact, *by* love. The Female Gothic plot is a version of "Beauty and the Beast."

Earlier we considered the relation of the Male Gothic hero/villain's gaze to his identity and to a necessarily guilty desire, a transgression against the divine principle that flesh, especially female flesh, is a snare and a delusion. In Male Gothic the gaze is another aspect of those omnipresent boundary violations that lead, eventually, to punishment—looks may *literally* "kill." In the context of Female Gothic, however, to gaze becomes a creative rather than a destructive act. In "realizing" things or persons other than herself the heroine literally "makes them real." Her perception enlarges her world, opens up the possibility of discovering good, and of finding what she seeks.

For the Gothic heroine, this object is chiefly love. Marriage, wealth, and a secure place in a society also invariably follow, but these should no more be read as a reflection of social "realities" than the Beast's transformation into a Prince should be understood as a biological possibility. Most important is that the heroine comes to see things "as they are." Unlike the male plot, which demands our acceptance of a supernatural realm far beyond us (the Super-Law of the Super-Father who exacts terrible punishments), the female plot validates the experience of the heroine's senses and their power to "make sense" of the world. By the end the heroine "masters," in effect, what Freud calls the reality principle.⁴ Her conventional marriage to the "master" of the house expresses this idea symbolically. It is easy to see, therefore, why Female Gothic conventions tend to be associated with the development of female consciousness, why they have so often appeared in the female *Bildungsroman*.

The duality of Milton's Satan predicts his decline, a fall from the barely ruined to the totally lost and evil. In Female Gothic, the male other's duality prompts the heroine's affirmation through education; thus he is first threatening, then reassuring. I propose, therefore, that to align the Female Gothic's hero with Satan in *Paradise Lost* is both mistaken and misguided. Connan Tremellyn, Mr. Rochester, and the

others can claim a different father: their progenitor is not Milton's Satan but the god Eros in the myth of Psyche. *Paradise Lost* is an Oedipal plot about the rebellion of two weaker sons (Satan and Adam) against their omnipotent Father. Like the Male Gothic, it ends in loss, and in considerably muted expectations concerning life in the "real world." But the Female Gothic, following the myth of Psyche, tells of paradise gained.

This story is recorded in Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*. Though subsequently influential, it has no written antecedents and is that rarest of Western stories, a heroine-centered narrative. Versions of the plot subsequently appear in the tale of "Patient Griselda" and in Britomart's adventures in *The Faerie Queene*. According to folklorists, the "animal groom" tales, including "Beauty and the Beast," are derived from this myth.⁵ Psyche (whose name may mean either "soul" or "mind") was a girl so beautiful that men began to worship her as "the new Aphrodite." This jealous goddess demanded that the girl be led to a rock by the ocean to become the bride of a terrible monster. Weeping and mourning, Psyche's family leads her to the place of sacrifice. But Eros, Aphrodite's son, sees Psyche and falls in love with her. He transports her to his castle, where she lives in luxury, served by disembodied voices who bring her "wine and many a delicious dish," and music. She is alone, however, except for the nights, when Eros visits her and makes love to her in the dark. She knows only one restriction: she may not look on Eros. After a while, Psyche invites her sisters to visit, and they, jealous of her happiness, encourage her to fear that she is married to a monster.

Finally driven by unbearable curiosity, Psyche lights her lamp one night after Eros falls asleep and gazes upon him for the first time. He is not a terrible snake, as her sisters had suggested and made her fear; he is Love itself. Entranced with this beautiful young man, Psyche inadvertently drops hot oil from her lamp on his shoulder, awakening and wounding him. She too is injured by one of his arrows as he flies away in wrath, but more grievously hurt by his disappearance. Now the furious Aphrodite intervenes again, setting Psyche to work at four seemingly impossible tasks. First, she must sort a roomful of seeds into their various kinds before the day is over. Psyche, miserable for having lost her beloved and her former happiness, and now pregnant with his child, sinks into despair. But the ants, creatures of the earth, offer to help her, and together accomplish this enormous task.

Then Aphrodite demands that Psyche gather some golden wool

from the fierce rams of the sun. Again in despair over the impossibility of accomplishing this task (for the rams are terribly dangerous), Psyche is about to throw herself into the river when a reed whispers that she must wait until after the rams have come to drink and gather the wool caught on the thornbushes.

Her third task is to collect water from a high waterfall; this time an eagle, eager to repay his debt to mortals for having stolen Ganymede, carries her flask in his beak and fills it for her. Her fourth and last assigned task is to descend into Hades and return with a box of Persephone's beauty ointment. Again she mourns her weakness; again she is helped. A tower tells Psyche how to proceed; she must take coins to pay Charon to ferry her over the Styx and cakes to feed Cerberus the fierce, three-headed guard dog. Following these instructions, Psyche brings the box safely back to earth. Tired, and remembering all her suffering, she fears that she will no longer appear beautiful to Eros should he ever see her again. So she opens the box, rubs on the ointment, and falls into a deep sleep. But now Eros finds her and rescues her. Having recovered from his wounds and flown away from his mother, Aphrodite, he removes the ointment from Psyche's face and closes it up again in the box. He persuades his father Zeus to make Psyche immortal. They are married on Olympus, and there among the gods, Psyche gives birth to a daughter, named "Pleasure" (*Voluptas*).

For centuries "Psyche" was read as a symbol of *man's* soul; Erich Neumann was perhaps the first to take the myth seriously as an expression of specifically "feminine" nature. But according to the presuppositions of his Jungian psychology, the "feminine" can only be secondary, other, weak. He declares that Psyche must "fail" because she is feminine, and it follows that her final rescue by Eros is the surest sign of her necessarily subordinate, if delightful, femininity.⁶ In the past two decades, this myth has elicited a good deal of commentary from female critics, rescuing Neumann's phallocentric reading for use as a model offering feminist insight into literary heroines.⁷

It is true that Psyche's experiences fail to meet several conventional expectations about the nature of "heroic" action. If judged by male standards, her adventures are very odd: Psyche's labors offer a series of lessons not in individual power but in accomplishment through cooperation. The various "others" she encounters give her ingenious solutions to the problems she faces. She does not kill anything. Instead of using a magic sword to cut off the heads of Cerberus, she feeds him. Though always fearing and even expecting failure, though often

tempted to despair and even to suicide, she endures and triumphs. A weak, helpless being subject to the demands of nature (personified by her "Terrible Mother-in-Law," Aphrodite), her greatest assets are nevertheless inherent in her *own* nature—her beauty, her patience, and her willingness to accept advice and help. She accomplishes the first three tasks because she acknowledges the power and wisdom of others. Of course, the consequences of the fourth labor are the most problematic for feminists; Eros's rescue of Psyche at last most strongly supports Neumann's insistence that "the feminine" implies weakness. The Female Gothic heroine is also invariably rescued from mortal danger (usually by her future husband), thus also appearing to show that these narratives confirm "feminine helplessness."

But Eros's rescue may be read another way. Folklorists classify "Psyche" and its related tales as "the search for the lost husband." I assume that "husband" is a synecdoche for "intimate, important, and *definitive* relationship," since in patriarchy the term "husband" confers the wife's identity—her name and her social position. Throughout her labors, Psyche seeks "Eros"—love, relationship with the "other" that has been interrupted. That she *is* finally rescued by this lost, desired other simply "realizes" the success of her quest. In the male heroic "monomyth," marriage to the princess is generally the reward for heroism, the outward and visible sign of inward and singular prowess. Be *yourself* strong enough, great enough (this myth implies) and the relationships will follow as your due, your "property." The Psyche myth, however, proposes a different idea about the nature and function of ties to others, culminating in Eros. Such ties are necessary, not merely to survival, but to reaching the highest, best condition of human existence. Psyche might have lived on in her coma-like sleep, but only when awakened by Eros does she experience her final transformation from mortality to "divinity" and complete her final "labor," giving birth to Pleasure. Eros's rescue dramatizes this principle. The myth of Psyche, therefore, more than merely implying a definition of "the feminine," offers an alternative to the male monomyth of individuation through violence, conquest, and the establishment of a hierarchy with the conquering hero at the top.

THIRTEEN

The Fiction of Feminine Desires

Not the Mirror but the Lamp

In *The Monk* we observed how Rosario/Matilda's disconcerting ability to change her identity is associated with Ambrosio's downfall. Lewis's plot expresses the horrifying instability of the female "other" seen in the male gaze. But in the myth of Psyche, duality and transformation have different connotations. The female gaze recognizes that appearances may deceive and that the identity of the other is complex: the world is not a case of either "pure and simple" or else corrupt and duplicitous. The heroine's perception of this ambiguity, or of an initial deception, does lead to difficulty, danger, and trials that must be endured. But it does not—as for her male counterpart—inevitably lead to betrayal and death. On the contrary, in Psyche and in the Female Gothic plot, duality or multiplicity *replaces* "unity" or "oneness" as the assumed (and privileged) condition of the other and of the heroine herself.

At no time during her quest is Psyche merely "one," nor could she be, for she is pregnant during all her "labors." Her four tasks (two times two) are all accomplished through cooperation with others, culminating in the intervention of Eros himself. She achieves her final triumph, indeed, only by herself becoming even more emphatically double, "Psyche-*with*-Eros." So the real protagonist of the myth is a duality—"Psyche-and-Eros." (Like "Romeo and Juliet" or "Tristan and Iseult," the story concerns a couple, not a single hero.) Furthermore, in the end Psyche finds her reward as the member of an immortal community, the gods who dwell on Olympus. The "crowning" event of her journey is the birth of her daughter, "Pleasure." Thus the dyad becomes a triad, the couple a family: "Psyche/Eros/Pleasure."

As Tolstoy observed, "Happy families are all alike." They do not

often generate (give birth to) stories. The silence following the birth of Psyche's daughter means that there is simply nothing further to be said of her, thus it is an index of peace and happiness, as it is for Jane Eyre, for Emily St. Aubert, for any of those heroines whose marriages conclude the Female Gothic plot. But it need not signify a sinister patriarchal erasure of her identity. In the logic implied throughout the preceding narrative, marriage means fulfillment, the goal of the quest, the establishment of the self that can exist only in relation to others. True, the silence of the male plot's conclusion connotes death (the end of the questing heroic consciousness) or the mute melancholy of the surviving secondary characters. But as I have noted, this silence promises to be interrupted by the necessity of fighting the monster all over again. The understanding that silence is death is, furthermore, an Oedipal premise. If the subject *must* imagine the relation between mind and nature as conflict, nature will always win. That heroic consciousness won with such struggle and violent effort is fated to extinction.

In *Reading for the Plot* Peter Brooks argues that Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* offers both a pattern of narrative desire and the pattern of desire in narrative, "a model of the function of psychic apparatus on the functioning of the text." His chapter entitled "Freud's Masterplot" is a provocative demonstration of how Freud's own quest for knowledge, a quest that culminates in his hypothesis of the death instinct, may also be read as a narrative about "the narratable." Like the Male Gothic plot, Brooks's theory of narrative poises the implicitly male consciousness before an inexorable natural law which decrees inevitable death. The "pleasure of the text," narrative desire, may accomplish only what Freud posited as that temporary accommodation of Eros and the death instinct in which we live: "Between these two moments of quiescence [the end and the beginning], plot itself stands as a kind of divergence or deviance, a postponement of the discharge which leads back to the inanimate. . . . This detour gives the right death" (p. 103). Plot (like survival) is "mastery."

Any doubt that Brooks's theory is as unconsciously phallogocentric as Freud's evaporates in light of his statement that "narrative desire [is] the arousal that creates the narratable as a condition of *tumescence*, appetency, ambition, quest, and gives narrative a forward-looking intention" (p. 103; my emphasis). And though this description may suit the male plot, it does not describe the desire that keeps the "female" subject moving forward. This subject is driven by a need to

fill in the lack perceived almost as soon as perception is possible. Exterior circumstances demand that the heroine act even as she recognizes the conditions (usually her own inadequacies) that make action difficult. For Psyche it is the impossibility of sorting the seeds, of gathering the wool, collecting the water, journeying to Hades; for the Female Gothic heroine it is her lack of family, money, (sometimes) beauty, and a home—"support" in all senses. The "female" self is one that begins by knowing loss as a regular and always intensifying rhythm of life, but who after a long search finds recompense for that loss in a new mode of experience. Psyche's marriage to Eros on Olympus is not the same as their earlier relation in the magic castle; it is in fact better, for now Psyche and Eros are equal as immortals and there Psyche gives birth.

Her final happiness is represented by the birth of Pleasure. But she bore this growing child within her during the four labors demanded by Aphrodite. Thus I want to suggest a further point: not only does this myth suggest an alternative to the Oedipal path; it is also a "discourse of motherhood." To privilege the Oedipal, argues Madelon Sprengnether, makes the mother a ghost haunting the house of Freud, and by implication, menacing the Law of the Father. Psyche is no such ghost, however. Instead, this myth might be read as a narrative of the maternal subject that Kristeva speculates about in "Stabat Mater." Such a discourse, therefore, is apparently not so much "unspeakable" as "unreadable." "Psyche" represents the reproduction of feminine *jouissance* in and through the desire of the mother and the daughter's labors to reconcile herself to that power, to wrest the mother's son "Eros" from her so that Psyche may become a mother herself. Evidence of the unreadability of this narrative appears in the way the version of Psyche fundamental to Female Gothic has been misread. Traditional (patriarchal) readers have characteristically dismissed this plot as both "unreal" and "unworthy." *Jane Eyre*, as one of Joanna Russ's male colleagues once informed her, is "a lousy book, just a lot of female erotic fantasies."¹ Precisely! In a patriarchal culture, the female and "the erotic" are by definition marginal and fantastic; and so stories that contradict the dominant myth about reality, specifically the nature of the self's way of being in the world, are bound to seem "unrealistic."

Let us return to Psyche's story and consider what it implies about the issues of concern to psychoanalytic interpreters of Oedipus: separation from the mother; the power and nature of desire; the formation of the speaking subject through access to the Law of the Father. "Psyche and Eros" takes place in a world where power is centered in

Aphrodite, the Mother Goddess, and the goddess mother of Eros. It is her jealousy that must be appeased, her demands that must be met. It is she who requires that Psyche be exposed on the rock to await her fate, her "marriage to death." It is she who sets Psyche the seemingly impossible tasks that take her through a world of increasing danger and scope. And being the mother of "Eros," whom Psyche labors to recover, Aphrodite can reconcile herself to Psyche as daughter-in-law only when she becomes her equal, a goddess in her own right.

Interpreted as the human mind or soul, Psyche does not represent the female gender, but rather the potential subject in a situation where mind occupies the "female" position: a fragile entity perilously nurtured by the vast and terrifying Mother Nature. Read in this way, the tale represents the infant's experience of separation from the mother as provoking a search to find in other relationships the pleasures lost with the dawning of consciousness and its inescapable knowledge of isolation and loneliness. Aphrodite's order that Psyche be exposed on the rock, wed to death, paradoxically suggests birth itself, since Mother Aphrodite decrees it. (As in *Dracula*, the monster who threatens to swallow the maiden is a figure for mortality.) Much has been said of birth as coeval with death for the self just born; Aphrodite's "jealousy" of this "new Aphrodite" hints at the opposite—the infant as a paradoxical reminder of the *mother's* impermanence. But Psyche is rescued by Eros, desire, who is the mother's love—her "son"—that intervenes and cares for this incipient "other." Already at this stage—and this is one of the crucial differences between Psyche and Oedipus as patterns of individuation—the desire of the mother is felt as "other"; "he" is intimately related to her, her son, but male, "other" to her, as he is to Psyche. If the first separation is birth (which is, finally, being offered up to death), then the helpless Psyche wafted by Zephyrs to Eros's magic castle represents the stage of infancy. Here she experiences perfect gratification of the senses of touch, taste, hearing, and smell. (The number of times Psyche is "wafted" by breezes itself evokes the sensation of the infant in arms.)

This palace of pleasure, this place of waftings, of sensuous bliss, of disembodied voices that sense and satisfy Psyche's needs, is ruled by a "Law of the Mother": one may not *see*. Or rather, one may not see *objects*, other selves. Psyche is not blind, but her sense of sight remains secondary. One might interpret this law as the principle that consciousness, the realm of the eye and the "I," is inimical to this dark paradise of sensation, and will later erase it. Seeing an other truly *as*

"other," and as an object, initiates the difficult journey toward becoming a subject. Psyche's eventual violation of the taboo, however, springs from motives more complex, and more centered *in* the incipient subject, than in the analogous Freudian Oedipal crisis, where an external and ominously greater power—the father—sunders the bonds of mother and infant. Ironically, the curiosity that drives Psyche to light her lamp, to violate the taboo, concerns a kind of "seeing" that has nothing to do with objects per se. Encouraged by her sisters, she has *imagined* the horror that may lie beside her. In wondering whether this being who has given her so much pleasure is after all a hideous monster, she knows ambivalence. She lights her lamp out of fear *and* desire—a very satisfactory definition of "curiosity."

Psyche moves into a new stage, therefore, when one kind of apprehension leads to another—fear drives her to gaze upon her beloved, to learn to see as well as to feel and hear and taste. Most significant, however, the "other" revealed by her lamp is beautiful, desirable. Symbolically, her first experience of subjectivity is a revelation of unanticipated pleasure; the eye confirms what the other senses have already taught her. And though both Psyche and Eros are wounded as a result of her action, the damage each suffers is eventually repaired (when they are "re-paired"). Psyche's antagonist, Aphrodite, represents "the female" in various aspects of human experience: the infant's own mother, "Mother Nature," the material circumstances of life within, against, and through which the "psychological" element is slowly forming itself. Four, the number of Psyche's labors, is the archetypal number of nature—four seasons, four elements, four points of the compass. And yet, though these tasks involve a confrontation with nature, they are not impossible; they may be accomplished. Although Psyche feels terribly alone and isolated after she lights the lamp and Eros flies away, through the tasks she learns to use the resources that are also available from "lower" forms of life (the ants, the reeds, the eagle) that "educate" ("lead out") certain capacities within Psyche herself.

The series of tasks imply a not-yet-self's experiences of a world increasingly complex and multidimensional. The tasks also show Psyche acting more and more decisively and boldly with each labor. The first task involves a restricted range of vision, a room full of seeds and tiny earthbound creatures, and here the ants do all the work. The next moves her into a pastoral landscape of river, reeds, and grazing sheep, and although the reed tells her what to do, she gathers the wool herself. The third emphasizes the vertical dimension, the high waterfall

and the eagle, a creature of the air who extends Psyche's awareness upward. This task is quite literally "beyond her reach"; she must trust the eagle to help her. The last, the journey to Hades, as a *downward* vertical, shows recognition of a world increasingly complex (it has a surface and an "inside,") and a metaphysics as well. Mythical journeys to the underworld connote, for many psychological critics, an exploration of the unconscious; thus it is appropriate that Psyche emerges from this journey with specific, personal "apprehensions," with self-consciousness, in fact. (In the earlier stages, her desire to be reunited with Eros had been punctuated only by such relatively simple emotional responses as fear of failure and the temptation to give up, to commit suicide.)

In a parallel development, the "others" who come to her aid become increasingly large and anthropomorphic. They progress up the chain of being, less and less tied to the earth, increasingly capable of consciousness—just as her tasks demand greater ingenuity, greater daring, greater leaps of "imagination" because the spaces she must cross become wider. If one reads Eros's rescue as I have suggested, as a concrete "realizing" of relatedness as a definitive principle of identity, he is also the first other *self* to whom Psyche relates both as object and as equal. Furthermore, these "others" also have increasingly apparent desires of their own. The ants and the reeds merely pity her, but the eagle wishes to redress an old injury done to "mankind" in general, not to Psyche in particular. The tower belongs not to nature but to culture, and may serve as a figure *for* culture, being constructed from preexisting "natural" materials according to the pattern of human intention. It (he?) gives her the subtlest and most complex instructions yet (called "prophecy" by Apuleius, in fact). And perhaps most important, Psyche successfully accomplishes her journey because she recognizes the desires in others: Charon's expectation of proper payment; Cerberus's hunger.

Psyche's anxiety about her appearance after her last labor recalls Lacan's definition of the gaze as both mark of identity and source of alienation: the recognition that one not only sees, but also is seen, that "I," the subject, am also an object. But whereas Lacan's Oedipal premises place the accent on gaps and absences "realized," Psyche "realizes" herself only in terms of her *relation* to others, or an other, Eros. She has no "mirror stage"; she has a "lamp stage." Her first experience of eye as "I" occurs when she lights her lamp and "realizes" the existence of Eros, who immediately disappears. This new recognition

of absence parallels the "discovery of castration" that according to Freud jolts the Oedipal subject into consciousness. For Psyche, however, selfhood is a much more gradual process.

Psyche's tasks might also be read as symbolic of psychological capacities that comprise the fully human consciousness. Separating the seeds suggests the basic cognitive ability to make distinctions, to recognize likeness, to create categories. She does this "naturally," however, with the aid of the ants. Her further tasks emphasize collection or acquisition, and move from simple ingenuity (gathering the wool) to a quite complex involvement with rules and principles that are cultural as well as "natural." She learns about payment for services rendered (Charon) and gaining the cooperation of others by meeting their needs.² The wool, the water, and the box are sought on the demand of the mother; but the last two events, the return of Eros and the birth of Pleasure, concern others belonging with her.

After Eros awakens Psyche, he introduces her into the world of the gods. Drinking ambrosia, she becomes immortal. I interpret Psyche's transformation into a goddess as a metaphor for her access to the Symbolic. She finally reaches the realm of the Father, Zeus, and it is here that she gives birth. The *name* of her daughter marks the conclusion of Psyche's story, and that name is highly suggestive. The Latin *Voluptas* is translated into English as "pleasure"—though its overtones of sensuality appear only in the somewhat more negative, alternative translation, "voluptuousness." In reading the myth of Psyche as a journey into the Symbolic, "*jouissance*" gives a clearer indication of what has been at stake for her—not only pleasure, but full access to and participation in consciousness and culture, the world of humankind. Goelzer's *Dictionnaire Latin-Français* translates "*voluptas*" as "*jouissance de l'âme ou du corps*," but French versions of the myth seem to leave the word *voluptas* untranslated.³ Psyche finds a place in a system more permanent than her own mortal self, but in finding that place becomes herself immortal. And like the erotic objects of so many Renaissance love lyrics, Psyche as subject may live on in the eternity of language.

The psychoanalytic reading of the Oedipal crisis emphasizes the barriers created by the passage to consciousness. The mother and all that she connotes are forbidden by the father's threatened punishment. The "erotic," the sexual, seems to be out of reach in the forbidden and unconscious realm of the mother, creating yet another binary pair forever in conflict in the psyche of the male subject. According to Lacan,

the speaking subject is driven by an unconscious desire, never to be satisfied, for the lost, forbidden mother (who, in Goethe's phrase, "draws us ever upward"). In the Psyche myth, however, the mother's desires not only are recognized but are the continuing force which Psyche labors to propitiate. True, Psyche also moves forward out of a desire to recover what has been lost. But from the very beginning what is felt, experienced as "the lost"—pleasure later recognized as "Eros"—is not the mother's body but her metonymy: her *son*, a personification of her love, which surrounds the fortunate infant in the early stages of development.

That the earliest, most primitive experience of "eros"—desire—is already figured as "other" in relation to the mother has important implications. It eliminates the problem Freud puzzled over: the baroque (or perhaps "Gothic") complexity of the daughter's Oedipal process, in which she must detach herself from her mother, shun and despise this once-loved figure and come to feel erotic attachment to the male. "Psyche," however, implies that this roundabout path is not the only possibility. From the beginning the feelings that express compensation for loss of the mother are present as "other" than "mother." Furthermore, she "bears within" the seed of that pleasure which will eventually emerge. This myth of the self, of the creation of the speaking subject, proposes that our losses begin with birth; it seems to confirm the alternate definition of the self that Freud speculated about in "The Ego and the Id": the ego as "a precipitate of abandoned object cathexes . . . that contains the history of those object-choices." In the imagery of the myth, this "precipitate" is Psyche's series of tasks, the objects collected and left behind.

Let us return for a moment to the Female Gothic hero. As numerous writers have pointed out, "women's romance" (including Female Gothic), proposes a definition of sexuality, of eroticism, quite different from that featured in male-centered narrative. Some have argued that this is simply "pornography for women." But if one accepts Griffin's argument that "pornography" is an economy of power, establishing dominance and sometimes inflicting pain in the name of sexual desire, then this argument collapses. Instead, the erotic fantasy organized around the Female Gothic hero reveals the structure of the Psyche myth. His love promises to restore in a different mode, the early, lost paradise of infancy. As Alison Assiter remarks (in a context highly critical of women's romance), women's erotic fantasies tend to focus on the power, and the powerful embraces, of the romantic hero, on his

caresses, on signs of gentleness and sensitivity in one whose appearance would not lead one to expect it. Women are concerned more with this kind of sexual fantasy than with "real" (i.e. genital) sex. The formulaic descriptions emphasize the sensation of "being swept off one's feet," of losing control, but in a context where such loss is "safe" because of the benevolence of this greater power. If the fictional mode of romance tends to evoke the stage of partial knowing, partial independence (what the orthodox Freudian calls the "pre-Oedipal"), then it is understandable that the fantasy "other" should also revive that early experience of the mother (pp. 117-23). Romantic love offers a situation where the subject may safely rely on the object and seems merged with that object.

For Assiter and others such as Ann Douglas and Ann Snitow, such "pornography for women" is as problematic as that for men, and equally concerned with domination (from this viewpoint, the perverse desire of the woman to *be* dominated). A patriarchal perspective, on the other hand, is likely to dismiss such fantasy as "immature" or "regressive"; hence the familiar accusation that women's romance is "unrealistic"—"reality" presumably conforming to the Oedipal version. Oedipal theory assumes that the forbidden maternal/feminine is an object to be possessed; if Oedipus was fated to "marry his mother," from his (and Freud's) perspective that relationship connotes *possession* of the other. The implied definition of the ideal erotic relationship in "Psyche and Eros," however, never subordinates the "other" as object or a possession. Instead, it celebrates the mutually transforming power of the relationship. The hero reveals that underneath his sinister, rude, abrupt, generally "bestly" early behavior is a loving partner full of "*kindness*"; but he nevertheless retains his identity as "other." (Hence the significance of that other's piercing eye in the Female Gothic plot.) Nor does the heroine "lose herself" in marriage; rather, her self is metaphorically "realized" by her transposition into the Symbolic. She "becomes a goddess." Jane Eyre's statement, "Reader, *I* married *him*" (my emphasis) neatly implies that the conventional comic marriage of Female Gothic should be understood as affirmation rather than obliteration.

Earlier I suggested that a patriarchal culture would logically imagine the mind as "female" in relation to nature, that is, weak and subordinate. Furthermore, the strengths and virtues by which Psyche survives and triumphs (patience, flexibility, perhaps Wordsworth's "wise passiveness") are also likely to be considered "female"—the lesser

Chapter Thirteen

virtues of the weak. But Psyche's femaleness also offers a metaphor for accomplishment, a mode of self-creation, that the male hero does not have: the power to give birth.

In contrast to the male hero who changes the world, Psyche is herself transformed, though at the same time, in giving birth, she also changes the world by bringing "Pleasure" into it. In contrast to the myth of Oedipus, organized around the law of laws—the incest taboo—and its inevitable violation, in Psyche erotic love serves as a metaphor for maternal love, and vice versa: birth is a metaphor for erotic gratification, for *jouissance* in all its senses. Thus Psyche's child is not a reward analogous to the hero's princess bride, but literally and materially her own creation through relationship ("Eros"). The Myth of Psyche thus offers an entirely different configuration of family romance, a different conception of law, and especially a different attitude toward the maternal, including "Mother" nature. Separation and transformation replace taboo and alienation as the prominent experiences impelling growth. And although I have insisted that the emerging consciousness this tale implies is essentially neither male nor female, "Psyche" also establishes an alternative model for the female self's access to the Symbolic.

For imagining mind as "female" creates a new metaphor, a new "map" of mind. Pure spirit is no longer different from and superior to nature. It develops through the slow process of separation that is also dawning self-consciousness. It negotiates reconciliations to these various losses through substitutions. Furthermore, if Psyche's pregnant female body is a figure for the *human* psyche, this metaphor or "map" of the mind also implies a theory of the *unconscious*, a dimension of self that is not formed according to the cultural structure of Law that divides and forbids; instead, past experience, especially pleasure, is a seed planted within, spontaneously growing and developing in the dark, an unknowable but nevertheless real "something" that eventually comes to light in a way and at a time not under conscious control. Conception, pregnancy, and birth, the *process* of becoming a mother, offers the only human mode of understanding or "conceiving" of this process. What human experience other than pregnancy may provide an equally apt metaphor for the developing not-yet-self as potentially human? A metaphor, too, for a kind of humanity that is neither mind *nor* body, essence *nor* substance, nature *nor* culture, male *nor* female, but a mixture, a creation of them all?

❧FOURTEEN❧

The Eighteenth-Century Psyche

The Mysteries of Udolpho

“O! do not go in there, ma’amselle,” said Annette, “you will only lose yourself further.”

“Bring the light forward,” said Emily, “we may possibly find our way through these rooms.”

Annette stood at the door, in an attitude of hesitation, with the light held up to show the chamber, but the feeble rays spread through not half of it. “Why do you hesitate?” said Emily, “let me see whither this room leads.”

The Mysteries of Udolpho (p. 232)

This exchange occurs early in Emily’s sojourn at Udolpho. Like Psyche exposed upon the rock, Emily, an orphan and a dependent, must go with her aunt, now married to Montoni, to his mysterious castle in the Apennines. Her servant Annette, credulous and fanciful, plays the role of Psyche’s sisters, feeding her mind with imaginary fears. But unlike them, Annette discourages the transgression of boundaries. For the moment, she persuades Emily to seek the relative safety of her chamber: a room with a door that may be locked from the outside, but not from within. A few pages later, however, Emily will again take her lamp, again seek out the mysterious chamber, and finally lift the infamous black veil.

If Emily embodies an eighteenth-century version of Psyche, however, this paradigmatic Female Gothic heroine is also, momentarily, barely distinguishable from Bluebeard’s wife. Driven by curiosity, each chooses to gaze upon the forbidden. Each confronts the heart of patriarchal darkness. But as Radcliffe’s own distinction between “horror” and “terror” suggests, there is a difference between a dead body, such as the wife finds, and the waxwork representation of a corpse, however

"realistic." Furthermore, the wife violates an explicit, a conscious, rule laid down by her husband, whereas Emily's explorations of her culture's implicit rules constitute a "feminine" rather than a "masculine" mode of subversion: a desire to comprehend the other rather than to mount an implacable rebellion against it. And in contrast to the experience of the fairy-tale heroine, Emily's curiosity discloses a "reality" that is shocking only at first sight. When she takes the lamp and enters the shadowy chamber, she is enacting a process of "enlightenment" that may remind us of Keats's figure for life itself: "a mansion of many apartments." The wife's experience, like the tale of Bluebeard, implies that the human psyche is regulated by an order of the forbidden and the permitted. Such a self is Oedipal, following the pattern described by Freud; it is grounded on a forbidden "other." The *other* psyche, however, resembles the mythical Psyche as we have seen her: a self that is a "precipitate of lost ego-cathexes," built up, like sandstone, from the slow layering of accumulated perceptions. The patriarchal imagination conceives of Bluebeard's wife as the embodiment of a categorically "female" curiosity; Emily St. Aubert is more complex. Though, like all Female Gothic heroines, she sometimes feels compelled to explore dark corridors, and sometimes discovers frightening secrets, she is a part of *all* that she has felt, not only curiosity but love and fear, the sublime and the beautiful. In some sense, Emily's psyche is coextensive with the world of her perceptions.

Thus the Female Gothic narrative confirms Anne Mellor's observation that "feminine" Romanticism explores the possibilities of female Reason.¹ I shall argue that Radcliffe's romance conventions, which generate the Female Gothic tradition, embody the myth of Psyche and an alternative to Oedipus. I do not mean to suggest that Ann Radcliffe or any other producer of Female Gothic deliberately imitated the Psyche myth. Nothing so simple. Anna Barbauld, in her "Prefaces, Biographical and Critical" to her edition of British novelists, did mention the tale of Psyche among the antecedents of the modern romance.² Certainly, the mass-market female formula of the 1960s imitated a set of conventions in place with the publication of *Jane Eyre*, which was undoubtedly a conscious model for many of these authors.³ *Jane Eyre* itself bears more than a passing resemblance to the myth of Psyche (as does *Wuthering Heights*).⁴ But it is really far more interesting—and more appropriate, given the implications of the myth—that there should not have been any direct influence in the usual sense. Perhaps this tradition of authorial mothers and daughters even implies an alter-

native to Bloom's Oedipal theory of literary influence: a model not founded on conflict but on accretion.

Julian Jaynes speculates that the appearance of writing as a cultural force was directly related to the birth of consciousness as we know it. This consciousness—although Jaynes does not make the connection—is patriarchal consciousness, preoccupied with law, authority, hierarchy, and intent upon organizing the world according to these principles.⁵ We have examined some of the relations between Gothic conventions and the disruptions of the patriarchal Symbolic hypothesized as *l'écriture féminine*. Why should such female revisions not extend to the plot as well? As Robert May argues in *Sex and Fantasy* (1980), clinical evidence suggests that the characteristic structure of fantasies may be related to gender; he discovered in his subjects the male's tendency to the (tragic) pattern of "Pride" while female fantasies follow the (comic) pattern of "Caring."⁶

The possible relation of Psyche and *soma* is outside the scope of this book.⁷ Given the presence of the Female Gothic plot, however, I would speculate that when "the middle-class woman began to write" for a female audience that as consumers had power to encourage certain narratives, the Psyche plot—the story of the female self making her way in an essentially patriarchal social order—reemerged. This story admits (in both senses of the word) the power of the female and the maternal. It shows such a self growing up in a world organized by the same basic assumptions about male and female that control the world of Oedipus, but such knowledge would derive from a daughter's experience. Psyche and Emily St. Aubert share similar weak (though *not* helpless) positions in a world where cultural authority belongs to the male. A genuinely new paradigm of human development could occur only in a conceptual universe where the mother was not associated exclusively with nature/matter, and the father with culture/spirit, or where "male" and "female" were not basic categories; but such a world is purely hypothetical, though explored in the realm of a daughter of Gothic, "science fiction."⁸ But it is not coincidental that this Gothic heroine's plot turns out to create a new discourse of the *human* psyche as well, for it posits a new relation of matter and spirit, of the mind to the mother.

If those Female Gothic heroines born in the eighteenth century are all versions of Psyche, they are a distinctly "post-Enlightenment" edition. In view of M. H. Abrams's thesis about the difference between the neoclassical and Romantic theories of art (the mirror and the lamp), it

is appropriate that this heroine should reappear toward the end of the eighteenth century. *The Mysteries of Udolpho*—Radcliffe's most female-centered Female Gothic—is extraordinarily attentive to the "female" dimensions of experience and extraordinarily concerned with "reality." If we read it as a version of *Psyche*, we may begin to understand the function of several of Radcliffe's idiosyncratic conventions: her super-sensitive heroine so inclined to poetry, song, and sketching, her leisurely narrative pace, her ceaseless attention to natural description, and her insistence on explaining the ghosts. And as the "lamp stage" of feminine fiction, Radcliffe is closer to the myth's version of the male "other" than are the post-Brontë fusion of hero and villain.

The Mysteries of Udolpho is long—672 pages in the Oxford World Classics edition. The heroine Emily loses both her parents early: her mother dies at the end of chapter 1, her father dies in chapter 7. Before his untimely death, however, St. Aubert voices his approval of a very attractive young man named Valancourt. But Emily goes to live with her vulgar and ostentatious aunt and now guardian, Madame Cheron, a widow who disapproves of Valancourt. So Emily and Valancourt are separated. Madame Cheron remarries, and her husband, the mysterious Italian Montoni, takes the two of them to Udolpho, his ruined fortress in the Apennines. There Montoni tries to force her marriage to Count Morano and tricks Emily into signing a paper that will give him control of her property. He also separates her from her aunt, causing Emily to fear that he has murdered her. In exploring the castle Emily discovers all kinds of threatening, frightening, and unintelligible clues which lead her to much terrified speculation about the fate of Laurentini di Udolpho, a mysterious woman who had once lived here. She hears strange music several times. She learns that a young man is imprisoned in the castle, a youth whom she increasingly expects to be Valancourt, but when they finally meet, she discovers that he is a man named Du Pont. Eventually her aunt dies, and Emily manages to escape with her maid Annette and her betrothed.

The party make their way back to the South of France, to Châteauble-Blanc, where they are welcomed by the de Villefort family (who have inherited it from Emily's uncle by marriage, the Marquis de Villeroi). The Château has a secret chamber that is reputedly haunted, but the mysterious noises in the secret room turn out to be caused by the operation of pirates. Meanwhile Emily hears that Valancourt has pursued a disgraceful career in Paris, gambling and becoming involved with a "well-known Parisian Countess."⁹ Emily is forced to confront the real-

ity that the Valancourt who returns to her "is not the Valancourt I have been accustomed to love" (p. 516). He is "ruined," financially and morally, but feels intense remorse and confesses his shortcomings to Emily. Du Pont proposes to her, but she refuses. Temporarily withdrawing to the neighboring convent, she learns the story of "Sister Agnes"—who turns out to be Laurentini di Udolpho, who had been in love with the Marquis de Villeroi and thus murdered his wife, Emily's aunt (her father's other sister). She had yielded to her passions and ruined her own and many other lives. Eventually, all the mysteries are solved. Emily is reconciled with Valancourt, who has turned away from his wild career. Because his family is pleased with the marriage, they give the couple considerable property. Emily also inherits Udolpho, but gives it away, and they live happily ever after in Emily's childhood home of La Vallée.

This narrative has the same structure as the Psyche myth. Emily is Psyche, alone in the world, who early meets and then is separated from her beloved. There are two Valancourts, just as there are two Eroses, a "before" and "after," for each is missing from the middle of the story and reappears having been transformed by a process of experience apart from the heroine. This "other" is no sooner recognized by the heroine as lovable than he disappears. Like Psyche, Emily is impelled forward by forces beyond her control; her trials involve confronting the demands of cruel circumstances both natural and cultural. In the course of the action, Emily is separated from her parents, her home, her country, and her suitor Valancourt. Even when she is reunited with him, she must struggle with the fear that he has been corrupted by the wickedness of Paris, transformed into another Valancourt than the one she had loved. In the darkness of Udolpho she is even separated from herself, by being made to doubt her own reason, and in moments of crisis, by losing consciousness altogether. (Emily faints ten times during the course of the narrative.)

Radcliffe's version both depersonifies some aspects of the myth and psychologizes others. The female principle is personified in the tale of Psyche as Aphrodite, who represents the individual mother, Mother Nature, and all that is associated with the culturally female, including irrational passions such as jealousy and anger. In *Udolpho*, the dangers of the female are split into various aspects of Emily's experience: into natural dangers such as storms and perilous mountains; into human mortality; into embodiments of disruptive passion such as Laurentini di Udolpho, who murders her lover's wife and then goes mad; and into

Emily's own tendency to collapse into excessive "sensibility," which Radcliffe explicitly defines as a kind of pride and hence a temptation. As her father warns her on his deathbed, "Do not indulge in the pride of fine feeling, the romantic error of amiable minds":

Those, who really possess sensibility, ought early to be taught, that it is a dangerous quality, which is continually extracting the excess of misery, or delight, from every surrounding circumstance. And, since, in our passage through this world, painful circumstances occur more frequently than pleasing ones, and since our sense of evil is, I fear, more acute than our sense of good, we become the victims of our feelings, unless we can in some degree command them. (Pp. 79–80)

According to St. Aubert, "Happiness arises in a state of peace, not of tumult" (p. 80). But before Emily finally sees "the prospect of rational happiness" (p. 672), she must experience again and again and again that regulating or tempering of the sensibility that her father warned her about. Psychologically, Emily's task is to escape the *dangers* of sensibility, of feeling that threatens to engulf or overwhelm the mind, just as the dungeons and dark rooms of Udolpho threaten to swallow her up. The conventions of Female Gothic, like those of the male tradition, express a point of view about reality that derives from its assumptions about "the female." I would argue that "rational happiness" is possible for the heroine within this world precisely because that coming to terms with the "female" (including nature, unbearable sensibility, madness) which is the process of self-formation *is* a process rather than an abrupt event or conquest. Emily's happy marriage to Valancourt, which brings with it wealth and a return to the happy home of her childhood, is that "access," the place within the Symbolic that the myth figures as Psyche's access to Olympus.

What Emily bears within her during her journey of trials are the principles inculcated by her father's education, the seeds of "rational happiness." If Emily has a task analogous to Psyche's of sorting the seeds, it is her repeated need to distinguish the real from the imaginary, to see the truth behind the various ambiguous signals of nature and imagination. Like Psyche as well, Emily is placed in situations that seem to be literally a matter of life and death. Her adventures provide her with a metaphorical exploration of the nature and culture around her, by constantly threatening her survival in each realm. Sometimes she fears for her life, the end of her existence in nature. And she fears the loss of her chastity (the "fate *worse* than death"), which would be equally fatal to her social identity.

For this Enlightenment Psyche is implicitly in quest of "reason."¹⁰ Not only is reason an ideal taught Emily by her father and an explicit theme in the novel; "reason" is overdetermined throughout its structure and conventions. Like the myth of Psyche, Radcliffe's Female Gothic turns upon the relation between apprehension as "fear" and apprehension as "learning." According to the *OED*, "reason" is derived from the Latin word meaning "to think, to reckon." It is "a fact or circumstance forming, or alleged to form, a ground or motive leading, or sufficient to lead, a person to reject or adopt some course of action, procedure, belief." All of these appear in some dimension of Radcliffe's Female Gothic formula, where the plot enacts the transformation of apprehension from fear into learning, of anxiety about the unknown into a recognition of realities.

The first of these modes of reason, the power to distinguish real from apparent—appears in Emily's continuing need to make valid discriminations, to "realize" the validity of her perceptions, a theme reminiscent of Psyche's first task. The two realms of nature and culture that the heroine explores are confusing and ambiguous. In the shadowy Gothic world, things are frequently not as they seem. Both nature, represented by the landscape, and culture, represented by the castle, have dual aspects. Nature may be sublime or beautiful, nurturing or destructive. Emily's sensitivity to natural scenery (which remains part of the Gothic formula) is thus a function of literary theme as well as a familiar symptom of eighteenth-century taste. The howling storm may intensify the heroine's terrors, or nature may afford peace: "The deep repose of the scene . . . soothed and gradually elevated [Emily's] mind to that sublime complacency, which renders the vexations of this world so insignificant and mean in our eyes" (p. 114). This sensitivity to nature also contributes to the plot, since it makes the heroine especially vulnerable; she is, in a sense, the ideal Wordsworthian reader, who "builds up greatest things / From least suggestions," who "need[s] not extraordinary calls to rouse [her]" (*The Prelude* 14:101–2, 103–4).

But in contrast to the traditional male heroic narrative, Radcliffe's plot confronts the heroine with a universe where one must not only *know* good from bad, but must also learn to perceive the often ambiguous distinctions between them—and further to perceive that one's survival and salvation depends upon *not* depending upon appearances. (Radcliffe's mode of suspense as a dramatization of this principle could be an essay in itself.) Thus it also follows that the natural location of any particular house in Female Gothic narrative signifies its suitability

for comic resolution. Emily's childhood home to which she returns with Valancourt is situated in a beautiful landscape and is named "La Vallée" (which may remind us of Dr. Johnson's Edenic happy valley in *Rasselas*). Udolpho, hostile and brooding, was built in the midst of mountains. It is thematically appropriate that after Emily has escaped Udolpho and learned most of its secrets, she inherits the castle and then gives it away, for it is "foreign" to her in more ways than one.

In *Udolpho*, as in subsequent Female Gothic plots, the heroine's problem of distinguishing the good from the bad is most crucially centered in her relationship with the male "other." In describing the Female Gothic plot, I have treated the hero who emerged in Brontë's *Jane Eyre* as the norm: the ambiguously threatening and attractive Mr. Rochester whose "kindliness" becomes apparent only at the end of the story, an aspect of its resolution. For psychological reasons, this convention is undoubtedly potent, and is indeed, true to its mythic origins. But in Radcliffe—as in Emily Brontë—the "hero" and the "villain" appear as separate characters, for in some versions of Female Gothic, the Beast and Prince Charming need not occupy the same body.¹¹ In part 1 I suggested that the romance mode represents the highly "poetic" realm on the border of the Symbolic, and that its conventions frequently expose the relation of cognition and *recognition*. Thus romance characters may intimate expressions of the pre-Symbolic, and thus by definition the "unreal." Psychoanalysts have long contended that the preponderance of Wicked Stepmothers in folktales manifests the infant's experience of "good" and "bad" mother, the one who gratifies her wishes and the one who does not. As Bettelheim points out, this Wicked Stepmother is frequently associated with food; she may, as in "Snow White," offer poisoned food, or food may simply be lacking, as in "Hansel and Gretel." *Really* Wicked Stepmothers are cannibals, like the witch in the latter story.¹²

A Gingerbread House inhabited by a hungry witch might be seen as the infantile, food-centered version of that omnipresent archetype of the male imagination: the *femme fatale*, whose superficial sexual allure also shelters danger and death. Praz's term, the *homme fatal*, coined to account for the Byronic hero and the Gothic villain, is a simple reversal of the female archetype. These characters, like their female counterpart, primarily address "natural" threats to the human psyche, the affinity of sex and death. I have suggested, however, that the male "other" in Female Gothic represents both nature *and* culture to the female self always already defined as "other" by that culture.

As we have seen in Male Gothic, the symptoms of "natural" otherness tend to be "abject" in Kristeva's sense; the gross materiality of blood, corpses, decay. But abjection also has its moral dimension. Kristeva aligns the abject with "what does not respect borders, position, rules," including such characters as "the traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience" (*Powers*, p. 4). Thus in either Gothic tradition, hero/villains tend to be outcasts, priests who have broken their vows to God, bandits, pirates, and outlaws of every kind. From this perspective, Satan is the archetype of the abject, being cast down from heaven into hell, a realm created to manifest his moral condition. Furthermore, according to the logic of the Symbolic, his otherworld is figured by the "feminine"; Milton's hell, that "universe of death," concretely embodies "the line of evil." And Satan himself is "feminized" by his fall, carrying with him "signs of remorse and passion" for his fellow fallen angels, feelings which fuel his continuing desire to subvert the Law of the Father.

But in the looking-glass world of Female Gothic, the culturally feminine, the "natural" may not be so neatly categorized as "other" and "evil." *Some* aspects of "the feminine" are felt as good; the mother-child relation, what May calls "the pattern of caring," is nonhierarchical, which is not to say that the two parties involved in a particular relationship have equal power; Demeter as mother/goddess has more power than Persephone; Eros as a god has inherently more power than the human Psyche; and so on. What is striking, however, is that this power is used not to control and to punish, but to succor and to protect.

By the time Radcliffe began to publish in the 1790s, the "man of feeling" was a familiar character in popular fiction. Though one might tend to assume that in terms of gender codes he is a "feminized male," it is more useful to seem him as a "masculinized female": that is, a projection of female definitions of the self into the realm of masculine endeavor. This hero is attractive (and reassuring) because he shares feminine ways of seeing the world. The heroine is reassured that he will be a good husband because he is of her "kind." The marker of such a character in Radcliffe (as in other writers of the time) is taste and sensitivity to nature. M. St. Aubert is saddened to see his status-conscious brother-in-law cut down the old elms that spoil the vista (according to certain preconceived notions of the picturesque). Valancourt is a reader of poetry and connoisseur of the sublime. Montoni, of course, is not.

And yet, merely by virtue of being male, any male, however sensitive, has access to a kind of power and identity that the female does not. In the myth of Psyche, this power is figured as “divinity,” supernatural and immortal. In Radcliffe’s “low mimetic” mode, power is represented by economic and social status: bourgeois aspect of *jouissance*. “Abject” others like Montoni or Ambrosio characteristically manipulate the heroine as “object”—of their lust, greed, or desire for power. Heroes of “affect,” like Valancourt—or Eros—may also cause her suffering. But rather than trying to control her, they cause suffering by their own absence, a separation adumbrating that between the heroine and the maternal principle. And furthermore, this hero may, like Valancourt, be troubling to the heroine by seeming to have traded in his “affection” for “abjection”—to have become a manipulator. (Hence the function of gambling, Montoni’s favorite vice, and one that Valancourt takes up during his sojourn in Paris.) Each male type also has his characteristic mystery. The abject hero has Bluebeard-like secrets hidden in his house. (Montoni’s vaguely adumbrated “business” has to do with political, military, and monetary schemes: hence his desire to control Emily and her fortune.) Emily’s father, a hero of affect, hides the mysterious portrait of “a lady not [Emily’s] mother.” Valancourt’s “sins” are also sins of affection: his liaison with the Parisian *comtesse*.¹³

The suitor/antagonist functions may be divided into different characters, but the characteristic ambivalence remains evident in their names. Emily’s suitor and eventual husband is M. de la Valancourt (we never learn his first name). The first part sounds like the name of her home “La Vallée,” while the second, “court,” suggests both public and legal aspects of experience. In fact, in volume 1, as Mme Cheron is scolding Emily for her interest in Valancourt, she makes a “Freudian slip” that points to just such an identity:

I did not think you capable of so much duplicity, niece; when you pleaded this excuse for remaining here, I foolishly believed it to be a just one, nor expected to have found with you so agreeable a companion as this M. de la Val—, I forget his name. (P. 110)

“Montoni,” the Italian villain, has a name that suggests “mountains” in his own language. Emily’s second suitor is most appropriately named “Du Pont,” for he bridges the gap between mountain and valley for Emily. In proposing marriage he both reassures her that Valancourt is not unique in finding her lovable and provides information exonerating Valancourt, thus clearing the way for the happy conclu-

sion. Like all Female Gothic heroes—though less dramatically than later ones—Valancourt undergoes a transformation in the eyes of the heroine. Before he and Emily can live happily ever after, she must see that he is not the *roué* corrupted by Paris—a kind of cultural beast—but rather the ideal husband.

The night before Emily departs unwillingly but dutifully for the distant castle of Udolpho, she sleeps badly. Radcliffe writes, “Her unquiet mind had, during the night, presented her with *terrific images* and *obscure circumstances* concerning her affection and her future life” (p. 161; my emphasis). This statement occurs in chapter 1 of volume 2, the part of the novel that explores Udolpho, a place of “real” terror and “actual” darkness (though for the reader they offer *virtual* terror and darkness). The subsequent narrative “realizes” her nightmare; that is, the imagined is experienced in literal, concrete terms.¹⁴

Emily’s trials test the principles of her education. Much of the suspense involves her uncertainty as to whether “first impressions” *can* be trusted, and this suspense is resolved when she learns, again and again, that they are *not* reliable. The music she hears at midnight *seems* to be of ghostly origin; the track of blood on the stairs of Udolpho *seems* to say that her aunt has been murdered; the terrible object behind the black veil *seems* to be a worm-eaten corpse. But none of these fearful impressions turns out to be accurate.

Since Emily’s experiences affirm the value of reason, it is appropriate that her antagonists personify unreasonable passion. Montoni embodies pride and greed and power arbitrarily used. Laurentini di Udolpho, Radcliffe explicitly tells us, was *not* taught by a loving father to “strengthen her mind.” She is to Emily as the demented Bertha Mason is to Jane Eyre, a dark double representing all that the heroine must reject—passion, madness, violence, extremity in everything. After having jealously poisoned her lover’s wife, Laurentini becomes a nun, literally veiling or repressing passionate propensities—an alternative which Radcliffe rejects as an unacceptable alternative to “the real world.” She is also implicitly rejecting her culture’s definition of “the female,” and not merely in being a “good girl” who conforms to patriarchal standards of proper behavior. She is not rewarded for being rational; instead, her reward is a direct result of her rationality.

Thus like *Psyche*’s tasks which confront her with increasingly complex and difficult tests, *Udolpho* places Emily in a series of increasingly threatening situations. Early on, she faces slight mysteries such as the matter of the sonnet in the fishing house; later she experiences the far

greater mysteries of Udolpho; the last test is the problem of Valancourt: dare she follow her heart and trust herself to this man she once loved? Through the series of tasks and tests, however, Emily like *Psyche* finally perceives an orderly world—one that is “sensible,” both because one may trust the senses to give accurate information about it and because it “makes sense.” It is then thematically necessary that the ghosts always have a rational explanation.

Another sense of “reason” is equally manifest in the female plot: reason as “cause.” The Female Gothic exemplifies (to a degree *creates*) what would later be called a “mystery” plot; it is propelled by our—and Emily’s—desire to learn certain secrets. Emily does not know who left the sonnets in the fishing house; she does not know why her father wept over the portrait of the beautiful lady not her mother. She does not know why Montoni has chosen to imprison her in Udolpho or what he plans for her next. At the same time her anxiety is intensified by the problem of reading the signs correctly. Upon his deathbed her father requests that she retrieve some papers from a secret hiding place and burn them unread. Ever the dutiful daughter, Emily follows his instructions. But as she is about to burn them, “her eyes involuntarily settled on the writing of some loose sheets, which lay open; and she was unconscious that she was transgressing her father strict injunction, till a sentence of dreadful import awakened her attention and her memory altogether” (p. 103).

In short, the various forms of “reason” constitute an informing principle of the Female Gothic plot, even as they construct this faculty as one threatened by its “other”—dark passions, madness. Both the shape of the narrative and the nature of the characters are manifestations or transformations of the familiar meanings of the term: reason as motive, reason as power to discriminate real from imaginary, reason as sanity.

This overdetermination of “reason” in the female plot is perhaps surprising because Western culture has generally insisted that “reason” is not a feminine strength. During the Enlightenment, the age-old debate about what it was, exactly, that women *lacked*, focused on their supposed incapacity for this “highest” and most definitive human capacity.¹⁵ But whereas patriarchal philosophy has often tended to conceive of “reason” as a metaphysical or transcendent entity, and thus removed from the “female” and material, the eighteenth-century *Psyche* tends to replace it in the “real world,” a principle “realized” in the

human experience and evident in conscious experience. Mellor's *Romanticism and Gender* documents the appearance of "female reason" in many different forms in the late eighteenth century. Though it may seem ironic that women were claiming "reason" for themselves in their writing as the male Romantics were discovering "feeling" in theirs, the Lacanian view of the Symbolic offers insight into this paradox. The user of language by definition gains access to the Symbolic, the Law of the Father. Perhaps the sheer novelty of the terrain would account for this feminine exploration of Reason's possibilities, even as the male writer would be turning to the other possibilities of an *écriture féminine*. But further, this empirical version of "reason" and the "other" against which it is defined roughly corresponds to what Freud would call "consciousness" a century later.

The plot of *Udolpho* (and the Female Gothic plot in general) is a narrative of disclosure and reparation: the fiction of "psychoanalysis." Like that of the Freudian analysand, the heroine's "hysterical misery" may be alleviated by exploring the dark corridors, opening the closed doors, lifting the black veil. She experiences the weight of the past as a reality that may be escaped only when its secrets are brought to light through this process of discovering connections between past and present, herself and others. This accounts in part for the great emphasis the Gothic plot places on the importance of the family tree. A diagram of Emily's family ties, or of Jane Eyre's, or of the Lintons and the Earnshaws in *Wuthering Heights* graphically illustrates the intricacy—yet the inevitability—of the sometimes apparently coincidental *denouement*. Thus family ties, like the heroine's aesthetic sensitivity, her spiritual affinity for landscape and for the feelings of others, her characteristic intuitiveness, manifest the theme as well as serving the plot.¹⁶ The prevalence of coincidence and accident in the tradition, no mere awkward plotting, is a thematic assertion that human experience creates a web of intricate connections, partly known, partly hidden (though no less powerful). The past impinges upon the present in the form of family history, and happiness is possible only when those hidden ties are brought to light. In Radcliffe, the past functions in the narrative as the unconscious affects the ego, according to Freud. But the Female Gothic asserts that happiness is possible. As Radcliffe exclaims at the end of *Udolpho*: "O! . . . though the vicious can sometimes pour affliction upon the good, their power is transient and their punishment certain; and . . . innocence, though oppressed by injus-

tice, shall, supported by patience, finally triumph over misfortune!" (p. 672). This is a summary of the *Psyche* plot and of the Female Plot of Gothic Fiction.

The implications of Female Gothic are as revolutionary as any Woolf discerned when "the middle-class woman began to write" during the eighteenth century. It claims "reason" for the female, it affirms the reality principle, and it claims that a young woman should not marry a man who does not offer her the prospect of "rational happiness." The Female Gothic plot validates the perspective of what Foucault calls "the deployment of sexuality"; although the heroine may be trapped within the ancient structures of the Oedipal complex, the walls built in "the deployment of alliance," she escapes them. And they were partly ruined anyway.

Ironically, it is "Male Gothic" that has usually been associated by critics with "revolution." The Marquis de Sade saw *The Monk* as a direct expression of the turmoil incited by the French Revolution; and as a whole, certainly, the Male Gothic's eroticized obsession with transgression, with violating taboos, might on the surface seem "revolutionary." But as Stephen King astutely remarks in *Danse Macabre*, his treatise on horror fiction, "The writer of horror fiction is neither more nor less than an agent of the status quo" (p. 51). In trying to define the appeal of monstrosity, he suggests that "it is a reaffirmation of the order which we all crave as human beings. . . . It is not the physical or mental aberration in itself which horrifies us, but rather the lack of order which these aberrations seem to imply" (p. 50). Exactly. But I would point out that as is so often true, that category "we as human beings" in fact represents only the masculine gender.

A "revolution" does not merely cross forbidden boundaries; etymologically the word means to "turn around." If we remember this meaning, Female Gothic is the more revolutionary of the two traditions. In writing as "other" it does not simply break the rules, it creates a new game with different rules altogether.

PART THREE



Writing
in Gothic;
or,
*Changing
the Subject*

❧ FIFTEEN ❧

Dispelling the Name of the Father

This analysis of Gothic began with three premises: that Gothic is fundamentally “poetic,” that Gothic consists of not one but two parallel traditions, and that Gothic and Romantic express a single literary impulse. What I mean by “poetic” should by now be clear: the Gothic “complex” expresses disruptions in the Law of the Father, the revolutionary poetic effects of Semiotic energies within the Symbolic. In part 1 I argued that Gothic conventions not only “realize” the Law of the Father, they also expose its fissures and explore its secret chambers. Just as a house necessarily creates enclosures, so sexual difference and hierarchy, founding principles of the patriarchal Symbolic, wall in and wall out the “others” they acknowledge in defining themselves—whether designated “the female,” the dark, the dream world, or “the unspeakable.” In part 2, I suggested that the specific conventions of Male and Female Gothic narratives are clear and significant. Within the rules of the Law, within these structures shaped and haunted by its past, the “I” gendered male and the “I” gendered female have different dreams and different fears; they express different perceptions of the structure itself. Thus we plotted the two paths explored by these different “I”s through this ancient, vast, and complex edifice: the plots of Male Gothic and Female Gothic.

Gothic conventions simultaneously express the nightmare of patriarchal decline and the wish-fulfillment fantasy of the newly powerful “female” principle; they are the dream works of a cultural revolution. Male Gothic expresses femininity as subversion within—the madwoman locked in the attic who eventually escapes and burns the house down. In writing from the position of otherness, Female Gothic offers the possibility of expressing a speaking subject shaped at least partly outside the Law of the Father.

Now in part 3 we turn to the most controversial of my three propositions: that “Gothic and Romantic are not two, but one.” Ever since Lovejoy’s classic essay (1924), and not long after the concept of “Romanticism” itself emerged, the difficulties of defining “Romantic” have been recognized.¹ Certainly there is no single “Romantic” quality or essence shared by all the works produced in England from the 1790s to the 1830s. But the hypothesis of Romanticism that until very recently organized anthologies and influenced our readings of even the canonical poets implied that there is a mode of literature—mostly poetry—that transcended its “lower” contemporaries. In a way, Gothic has been useful to this view because it provides the ground against which the “high Romantic” can be figured. I propose, however, to approach Romanticism *through* Gothic, for Gothic suggests, by obvious means, a central theme that I shall argue is also central to canonical Romantic poetry: the Fall of the House of the Father.

A feminist rereading of the Romantic canon that might demonstrate this thesis in detail has barely begun. Those philosophical ramparts erected around this exclusively male pantheon in the early twentieth century have been extraordinarily effective. But we are now on the verge of a feminist revolution in Romantic studies.² The origin of this revolution, however, the first crack in the wall, may be traced to the one long-acknowledged intersection of Gothic and Romantic, the one female author with a claim to being Romantic (if only by marriage): the *second* Shelley.

In 1965 the editors at New American Library asked Harold Bloom (who had recently published an essay on Mary Shelley’s novel³) to write an afterword for the Signet edition of *Frankenstein*.⁴ That the first Signet edition had appeared in 1963 itself suggests the effects of at least two different cultural currents: the contemporary mass-market Gothic revival and a developing academic interest in popular culture, including film. Bloom’s somewhat condescending appraisal apparently lent *Frankenstein* a new respectability. Frank’s *Guide to the Gothic* (1984), though incomplete, is highly suggestive: only twenty-nine of the one hundred and sixty-seven items on Mary Shelley appeared before 1965. And many of these are not discussions of the book at all; they include brief journalistic essays marking the novel’s centenary, discussions of its stage history, and biographies of Mary Shelley.

Bloom writes that *Frankenstein* is “only a strong, flawed novel with frequent clumsiness in its narrative and characterization” (p. 215). But he nevertheless asserts that this work (which hitherto had been

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regarded as a curiosity in the Shelleys' family romance) justifies Mary's place in the family of Romantics: "What makes *Frankenstein* an important book . . . is that it contains one of the most vivid versions we have of the Romantic mythology of the self, one that resembles Blake's *Book of Urizen*, Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, and Byron's *Manfred* among others" (p. 215). Like the Keepers of the House of Fiction, Bloom assumes that the book aspires to the condition of Realism. He also takes the canon as normative, the myths of Blake, Percy Shelley, and Byron as providing the pattern toward which *Frankenstein* strives. While this strategy acknowledges the book's power in an unprecedented way, it also establishes Mary Shelley as a kind of Romantic, though (in the time-honored tradition of such definitions) of a "defective," "female" sort.

But shortly after Bloom encouraged a reading of Mary Shelley as a female Romantic, *Frankenstein* became the object of two powerful and influential early feminist readings: Ellen Moers's discussion of Female Gothic in *Literary Women* and Gilbert and Gubar's argument that this is Shelley's "strong (mis)reading" of *Paradise Lost* in *The Madwoman in the Attic*. These two essays established Shelley as the originator of a myth whose "female" identity expressed not defective masculinity but a hitherto unspeakable maternity. Since then, critics have shown that Shelley's complex narrative rewards analysis from a great many different angles: historical, biographical, psychoanalytic. It raises questions about the woman writer and her relation to literary fathers and mothers, about women's fiction and women's autobiography, and about the social pressures peculiarly felt by the woman writer in the nineteenth century.⁵

The most significant result of this new attention to *Frankenstein*, however, has been the consensus that this is not merely a "woman's story"; it is a "mother's story." It is, in Ellen Moers's words, "a birth myth."⁶ Feminist theory now makes clear what was not at all apparent in 1965: that the "Romantic mythology of the self" Bloom has in mind is both gendered male and a male critics' preoccupation. As Anne Mellor has recently argued, there are "masculine" and "feminine" modes of Romanticism, and they most emphatically diverge in their conceptions of the self.⁷ It follows, therefore, that having learned to read *Frankenstein* as a female text, we may now read it more accurately as a Romantic text. This exercise has a curious and unexpected result: if we reread *The Book of Urizen* and *Prometheus Unbound* and *Manfred* and all the rest with *Frankenstein* in mind, they appear rather different.

Here I want to focus on just one aspect of that difference: the high Romantic fascination with creativity, which in the context of *Frankenstein* now appears as the last-ditch stand of patriarchy's repression of the material and the maternal.

By "writing in Gothic" Shelley dis-covers the mother on whose repression patriarchy is structured, whose appearance constitutes a volcanic disruption that reverberates throughout the Law of the Father. *Frankenstein* materializes creativity. It deconstructs the Biblical myth of creation, in which God the Father creates the world by speaking. Victor's "conception" is instantaneous, private, and secret, as are all intellectual experiences. He simply "sees the light"—and immediately feels a gratifying self-satisfaction: "From the midst of this darkness a sudden light broke in upon me—a light so brilliant and so wondrous, yet so simple, that while I became dizzy with the immensity of the prospect which it illustrated, I was surprised that among so many men of genius who had directed their inquiries toward the same science, that I alone should be reserved to discover so astonishing a secret" (chap. 4). But contrary to Genesis, "to realize" a concept and "to realize" that idea in physical terms are different things. Frankenstein "labors" for two years to bring his creature to life. Like the Babylonian hero Marduk, who kills the mother/dragon Tiamat and shapes the world from her body, his labor is messy and violent. In his "workshop of filthy creation," the role of *mater* is all too evident.

Since the separation of matter and spirit, the repression of the mother, is so essential to the patriarchal Symbolic, one may begin to understand why Shelley succeeded so well in her stated ambition to tell a tale that "would speak to the mysterious fears of our nature and awaken thrilling horror" (p. ix). Frankenstein's "child" represents, among other things, the (m)other constructed by repression in the patriarchal Symbolic. The fantasy of a body composed of disparate parts, like Frankenstein's creature, is a pre-Oedipal fantasy, as Lacan and others have observed. Hence it is indeed appropriate that Victor's chief response to his "child" is horror; the creature's loathsome materiality is abject in Kristeva's sense, and Victor abjects him, enacting the process of repression by sinking into a long, delirious fever—but too late. His actions throughout the rest of the plot constitute his efforts to force what he has "realized" into the predetermined pattern. The materiality of the creature may seem "monstrous," and Victor's efforts to deny what he has created ("realized") transform this "fiend in need" (of recognition, care, love) into a "fiend in deed." Once introduced

into the Symbolic, the "real world," this re-presentation of the maternal/maternal predictably disrupts all dimensions of the system. He destroys the allegorically named servant Justine, Victor's friends, his relatives, and his bride; in the high Gothic tradition he interrupts a wedding, and finally leads both his "father" and himself to destruction.

Frankenstein is not merely, as Bloom asserts, a "vivid version" of "the Romantic myth of the self." In supplying the repressed context of that myth it shows that the myth is a "male reading" of Prometheus. Shelley's novel simultaneously shows that the myth has not a cosmic but an earthly cause: the repression of the mother.⁸ And yet, while the presence of *Frankenstein* may clarify certain patterns in the old Romantic canon, it does not merely provide an "other" against which to redefine these works. Though it highlights the Romantic poets' pervasive, unprecedented fascination with the culturally female, it also reveals the complexity of this confrontation. The transcendent Imagination is less prevalent and less definitive of the Romantic ethos than most histories would have us believe. To take *Frankenstein* seriously is to recognize in Gothic the symptoms of disturbances within the Symbolic order (including its metaphysics of transcendence). It follows that the appearance of Gothic conventions in many Romantic texts signals not a lapse into the "popular" and the "sensational," but the high Romantic struggle to accommodate the power of the mother. The "spirit of the age" is also an impulse to "dispel" the Name of the Father.

"Spell" is itself a Duessa of a word. On the one hand it serves and embodies the very idea of a Symbolic Law. One group of its meanings clusters around notions of order and clarity and correctness: "to name or write in order the letters constituting (a word or part of a word); to be the letters of; form (a word); to make perfectly clear ("spell out"); to read slowly, letter by letter; to puzzle out; comprehend by study." "Spelling" and "spelling out" are both devoted to notions of "right" and "wrong" and posited on the assumptions that such laws exist. The word is derived from the Middle English *spell*, "discourse," and from the Old English *spel(l)*, "story, fable." The *American Heritage Dictionary*, from which I quote, refers the reader to its "Appendix of Indo-European Roots," which defines *spel* as "to say aloud." "To spell out" the meaning "dispels" darkness, bewilderment—thus enacting the process of "clarification," of "making sense" of the difficult or incomprehensible.

And yet, "spell" has a darker—one might say "Gothic"—significance. A "spell" is also "an incantational word or formula; compelling

attraction, fascination; a bewitched state, trance; to put under a spell." At the same time the word hints at the uncanny power that lies at or below the roots of language, and also at a dynamic of power implicit in the system. "Spelling," this most humble, *literal* law in the Law of the Father, the order of the letters, also masks the uncanny. To sum up, the etymology of "spell" implies that words, especially as "story," are at their roots quite simply magic. To speak is to have access to power, to be a magician.⁹ And "to say aloud," to tell a story, to bewitch, may also supersede the Law: in short, foment a revolution in poetic language. But the Romantic poets knew this very well—the creator-poet has an uncanny way with words: "he on honey-dew hath fed / And drunk the milk of paradise."

In high Romantic practice, this nurturing, inspiring "milk of paradise" comes—explicitly or implicitly—from the *nightmère*, the dark otherness represented as lurking within the Symbolic by "Gothic" conventions. To "write in Gothic" was not only to find new subjects, themes, and literary models, a change revolutionary in itself, and one Wordsworth, for instance, was clearly conscious of effecting. It was also to subvert and reshape, indeed rebuild "that dome in air," to "re-order" the garden of Kubla Khan's "decree." The poem describes a cyclical re-formation of the Law of the Father: the garden expresses Kubla's "decree" (in a kind of *écriture féminine*), which the poet, hearing it described in the song of the Abyssinian Maid, then translates into a hysterically embodied meaning (he becomes his message). This movement is echoed in the history of the poem itself according to Coleridge, who wrote that in the original experience "words rose up before him *as things*" (my emphasis). This wandering of message from medium to medium may also recall the genealogy of Walpole's dream that became *The Castle of Otranto*.

If Gothic offers a "language" that (in ways not entirely conscious to those who used it) expressed the energies belonging to the mother, the female, the other, then to use these conventions is, like Bluebeard's wife, to open the door and expose the secrets of the patriarch. But as the Female Gothic tradition suggests, it also opens the possibility of writing "other-wise," of spelling out another law altogether. In the following pages I shall trace one aspect of Gothic through four canonical Romantic poems, where its conventions signal the process of dispelling the name of the father and inscribing, if not the names of the mother (unlike the Father, she is not a single name), at least the signs of her being and power.

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Evidence of this process appears in all six of the “major” Romantics’ poetry; I originally intended to discuss all of them, but concluded that this project would engender a text of monstrous proportions. Instead, I shall look closely at four very familiar works: two by Coleridge and two by Keats. They represent the two generations of British Romanticism, and they also show each poet’s use of both Male and Female Gothic. By writing Male Gothic narratives in *The Rime* and “La Belle Dame sans Merci,” Coleridge and Keats both “dispel,” that is, demystify, the Law of the Father. And when writing in Female Gothic, they cast an entirely new and different spell; “Frost at Midnight” and “The Eve of St. Agnes” expand and reshape the Symbolic. Such writing indeed changes the subject.

❧SIXTEEN❧

An “I” for an Eye

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner

Here . . . consciousness has not assumed its rights and transformed into signifiers those fluid demarcations of yet unstable territories where an “I” that is taking shape is ceaselessly straying.

Julia Kristeva

Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection (p. 11)

Coleridge’s definition of Imagination, though notoriously obscure, is clear in affirming that the “esemplastic power” “struggles to idealize and to unify.”¹ It follows (according to chapter 14 of *Biographia Literaria*) that the true poem is “a graceful and intelligent *whole*” (my emphasis).² With these statements and the declaration that *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is “a poem of pure imagination,” Coleridge inspired a critical search for this work’s inherent unity.

This quest impels Robert Penn Warren to view *The Rime*, in his canonical reading, as a narrative of the “one life” and of the “sacramental unity” of the creative imagination.³ Jerome McGann’s essay “*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*: The Meaning of the Meanings” has been hailed as a definitive escape from Warren.⁴ A refreshing demystifier of musty critical metaphysics, McGann argues that Coleridge’s faith in symbolism is itself “epochal,” founded on a “Romantic ideology”; hence the poet’s “much-discussed symbolic method is nothing more (or less) than rhetorical machinery for producing . . . interpretive results.”⁵ In recognizing the poem’s “ideology,” he concludes, one may reclaim it as a “human—a social and historical—resource” (p. 172). Even McGann, however, presupposes a Coleridgean ideology: the “meanings” have one “meaning.”

Yet *The Rime* seems extravagantly *disunified*, composed of interruptions, disruptions, and irruptions. Split between gloss and ballad, prose and verse, the two-column poem partitions commentary and

narrative, philosophical and emotive languages. A disjointed, seven-part story, the ballad concerns an interrupted wedding and describes abrupt appearances and vanishings, intense, unmotivated passions. Even the divisions between gloss, frame, and tale are interrupted: the Wedding Guest twice stops the Mariner, and in the pivotal gloss about the "journeying moon" (ll. 263–71), poetry intrudes into the prose. The work's generic affinities represent another kind of boundary violation—Coleridge's appropriation of popular Gothic conventions to "serious" poetic purpose.

Thus the Mariner's cognitive conclusion—"He prayeth best who loveth best" (l. 614)—concludes nothing. He is doomed to repeat forever the "struggle to idealize and to unify." (As many readers have noted, the Mariner suffers from a "repetition compulsion.") Moreover, it seems that the Mariner has jumped to his conclusion, for his spiritual moral curiously elides the material horrors of his experience. *The Rime* is like a figure/ground paradox—the rabbit/duck drawing, for instance. In describing his "spectral persecution," as Wordsworth called it, and then asserting its lesson of Fatherly love, the Mariner delineates a rabbit and then declares it is a duck.⁶ Yet the poem's coherence resides in the interdependence of "meaning" and its experiential basis. I propose, therefore, that *The Rime* enacts the process by which the speaking subject—the user of language, the teller of tales—is constituted. The poem concerns not the Creative Imagination so much as the creation of Imagination. There may be less frightful roads to language, to the Symbolic, but for Coleridge's Mariner, the creation of the I in the perception of the eye is a spectral flight from unspeakable horrors.

Coleridge's narrative (including frame and gloss) may be read as a representation of Semiotic intrusion into the Symbolic universe.⁷ The Mariner appears as if from "nowhere" (the nonworld of the unspeakable) and when he leaves, the guest is "like one that hath been stunned . . . sadder and . . . wiser" (ll. 622, 624), realizing new, though unspeakable and unspoken, dimensions of reality. Not only does the Mariner express the hitherto unimaginable; he also, peculiarly, represents the mother. He is an archetype (i.e. culture-wide symbol), the wise old man, whose hypnotic "glittering eye" implies that Lacanian phallic "gaze" of simultaneous identity and alienation. But the text also repeatedly links him with the conventionally "female" in Western culture: the sea, irrationality, motherhood, and nature—"spontaneous" energies that challenge and disrupt Symbolic order. The guest calls him a "gray-beard loon" (l. 11); when the Mariner moves his lips, the pilot

shrieks and “fell down in a fit,” while the pilot’s boy “doth crazy go” (ll. 560–61, 565). The Mariner’s purpose in life is to instruct the young, a role traditionally relegated to mothers: the wedding guest is like a “three-years child” (l. 15) compelled to listen to a nightmare nanny’s terrible bedtime story. The Mariner chooses his listeners with “feminine” intuitiveness, and he describes the repeated reproduction of his tale in terms suggesting the onset of birth:

[T]his frame of mine was wrenched
With a woeful agony,
Which forced me to begin my tale;
And then it left me free.

Since then at an uncertain hour,
The agony returns. . . .”
(ll. 578–83)

This unwilling bearer of the word is associated with Mother Nature’s cyclical rhythms: he is “long, and lank and brown / As is the ribbed sea-sand” (ll. 226–27); he says, “I pass, like night, from land to land” (l. 586). His ship reminds the hermit of nature’s brutality, the season when “The owlet whoops to the wolf below / That eats the she-wolf’s young” (ll. 536–37). His “strange power of speech” (l. 587), though more intelligible than that of Keats’s Belle Dame, is one of those messages from “the beyond” that Romantic poets usually hear in a female voice.

This fusion of female with male both represents poetic discourse and also may exemplify how I believe this text “means.” This mariner-mother ignores the Symbolic law of identity (which dictates that a mariner is only a mariner and a mother only a mother); yet the figure is still readable if other Symbolic connections are attended to. As a whole, the Mariner’s tale ignores the Symbolic law of cause and effect, but his vivid images link with other powerful but usually tacit ways of making sense. These alternatives include assumptions about what is male and what female—fundamental and virtually unconscious ordering principles—and perceptual and cognitive “maps” that George Lakoff and Mark Turner call “basic metaphors,” whose use is “conventional, unconscious, automatic, and typically unnoticed” (p. 80): “life is a journey,” for instance, or “freedom is up” (pp. 221–22).

As a speaking subject the Mariner exists within the Symbolic; but he disrupts its present order in and through his tale, which so disturbs the wedding guest. And in affirming the love of an absent, distant, ideal

father, his words, like his person, imply that the other of which he speaks remains incommensurate, unassimilated, and powerful. Thus it is appropriate that in conclusion the Mariner describes the model community, family members who in praying to their invisible "great Father" are related by spirit, not blood. He insists that life's greatest "sweetness" is "To walk together to the Kirk / And all together pray" / Old men, and babes, and loving friends / And youths and maidens gay! (ll. 601–9). And yet no married women and mothers appear in his congregation (not surprising in one who keeps young men from weddings). In compulsively speaking of love as ideal, universal, asexual, and fatherly, he ignores its concrete, erotic, and social dimensions culturally linked with the mother: *agape* represses *eros*. Though he has left the ocean for the land, he must wander eternally from one surrogate "child" to another, telling and retelling his story. In his strangeness, his marginality, he is the exception that proves the rule (or the neurosis that discloses the unconscious structure). He is a "speaking subject" whose subject is his own subjectivity; he exists only as a subject manifestly and eternally *en procès*.

A wedding is an appropriate occasion for this revolutionary disruption of the Law of the Father, for this is patriarchy's central ritual for regulating the female—the bride takes her husband's name and her place in the culture. The Mariner's dreamlike tale, though told and heard, is virtually nonsensical, almost failing to mesh with the structures that impart "meaning" to experience. But only such a tale *could* represent the Semiotic—a series of disjointed, emotionally charged images evoking the eye's oceanic voyage toward the "I"-land of self-consciousness. After the Mariner emerges from the water, his first act is a speech act, a response to the hermit's question, "What manner of man art thou?" (l. 577).

Coleridge's seven parts imply what the story relates: that this process is no smooth, overtly purposeful voyage, but a series of violent, often apparently random motions punctuated with periods of stasis and stagnation. The tale begins with an unquestionable first premise: "There was a ship" (l. 10). The vessel (basic metaphor for the body) sets out on its journey (basic metaphor for life). The ship's movements follow the "pulsions" and rhythms of fluid pre-Oedipal drives, of the process Kristeva calls "the semiotic *chora*," "this rhythmic space, which has no thesis and no position, the process by which signifi-ance is constituted" (*Revolution*, p. 26). As Wordsworth observed, the Mariner is extraordinarily passive.⁸ In part I this passivity appears not only in the

narrator's grammar, characterized by passive voice and intransitive verbs: "The ship was cheered . . ."; "Merrily did we drop . . ." (ll. 21–22). Coleridge's language here also tends to decenter the subject position; the narrator uses the first-person plural, barely distinguishes chronological sequence, and lacks both a precise perspective on the action and a firm sense of cause and effect.

At first, the mariners perceive only a rhythm of natural variation—the rising and the setting of the sun. They already associate this elemental cyclicity, however, with a rudimentary sense of spaciality, of right and left. The rhythm is disturbed by the "Storm-blast," which drives the vessel into the frozen Antarctic. These early stanzas contain no speculation, as opposed to observation, no sense of sequence or cause—only recognition of events: "And now the STORM-BLAST came . . ."; "And now there came both mist and snow . . ." (ll. 41, 51). These experiences, pleasant and unpleasant, evoke intense though general sensations (violent motion, loud noises, bright color, the ice "green as emerald" [l. 54]).

Most important, these natural phenomena are always already gendered. The sun and the storm are masculine "he," while the moon is "she." Warren rightly emphasizes the contrasting and complementary functions of sun and moon in *The Rime*. But his contention that they represent "reason" and "imagination" is, as many have noted, debatable. I propose that their function is simpler, more concrete: in the mariner's evolving sense of reality, the sun, like the wind, is associated with father and the male, and the moon, like the water, is related to mother and the female.⁹

The masculine and feminine are each linked, however, with both pleasant *and* unpleasant sensations. The father sun first implies comforting regularity, something to wonder at (l. 26) and to depend on—at least until hidden by storm clouds. But the storm blast, also male, is experienced as an abusive father who "Was tyrannous and strong; / He struck with his o'ertaking wings, / And chased us south along (ll. 42–44). The epic simile describing the ship's response evokes a cowering child who can only flee:

As who pursued with yell and blow
Still treads the shadow of his foe,
And forward bends his head,
The ship drove fast, loud roared the blast,
And southward aye we fled.

(ll. 46–50)

This "paternal" violence drives the vessel into the cold. A familiar metaphor for rejection, ice is an apt figure for the transformation of good mother into bad: the tropically warm, liquid medium hitherto supporting the ship turns hard and frigid, frustrating (e)motion.

When the albatross appears, both of these external and gendered forces have already caused suffering: the warm father sun has disappeared and the father wind has rained down hostile blows; the mother ocean has turned to ice. The albatross, however, connotes "mother" and "father" in both "good" and "bad" aspects. A creature of sea and air, it is associated both with "mist and snow" and with the beneficent moonshine. Winged like the masculine storm blast, it also seems to bring "the good south wind." The bird, however, is consistently called an "it." In making the albatross a pet (sharing the childish activities of "food or play"), the sailors establish a quasifamilial relationship with this external object that is almost, though not quite, a person ("As *if* it had been a Christian soul" [l. 65; my emphasis]). The bird also evokes the mariners' first purposeful articulation. ("Hail" and "hollo" are emotive rather than denotative, but more focused than the poem's previous noises, the "loud roar" of the blast, the "crack," "growl," "roar," and "howl" of the ice.) The whole episode is indeterminate, however, shrouded in "mist," "cloud," "fog-smoke," and "moon-shine" (ll. 41-78).

As the closest thing to a personal object yet encountered, the albatross appears to draw the hostility aroused in the Mariner by the forces harrying the vessel; the creature affords him the first opportunity for self-expression (and hence for selfhood), a virtually automatic imitation of blows already experienced, implying a psychic physics in which every psychic action is answered by an equal and opposite reaction. Shooting the albatross, the Mariner destroys the mistily pleasurable community of sailors and bird—a relation of not-yet-self and not-quite-"other."¹⁰

From the symbolic retrospect of language, the shooting symbolizes an experience inevitable in the attainment of selfhood and subjectivity: separation from matter and from *mater*. This experience inaugurates what Kristeva calls the thetic stage—the crucial, inexorable emergence of a sense of self and not-self—beginning with the mirror stage and the discovery of castration (*Revolution*, p. 46). From this perspective, the most familiar, bewildering question about the poem—why the Mariner shoots the albatross—appears *utterly* irrelevant. Notions of cause and effect (or of psychological motivation) are created by the Symbolic

order: not effects, but *affects* are relevant to the pre-Oedipal. The Mariner's tale is disturbing and original because it shows pre-Oedipal affects coalescing and transforming into symbolic faith in effects. The painful intensity of this first experience of self-recognition, the Mariner's mirror stage, is represented as an act of violence. A striking detail of grammar confirms that this "shooting" is significant precisely as a *first* deed, a self-creating act: here the Mariner uses the pronoun "I" for the first time—"I shot the ALBATROSS" (l. 82).

Part 2 chronicles the mariners' resulting recognition of absence. The familiar natural rhythms continue, but the missing bird excites the sailors' first speculation (of a double kind: they scrutinize their surroundings and they construct a hypothesis). In this early attempt at "reading," they try out the possibility that contingency and causation are the same. Since the good breeze followed the bird's arrival, they expect that the breeze will vanish with the killing. Initially inclined to think that the deed was "hellish" (the "sweet bird" has vanished) they subsequently see the rising of the "glorious Sun" as affirmation that the killing is "right" (ll. 87–102).¹¹

Increasingly specific perceptions accompany these tentative gestures. Other modes of absence intrude on the senses of the mariners, who notice silence and in the lack of wind feel the lack of motion. Matter seems to shrink away, like the boards of the ship. And though it may have been "right" to slay the albatross, this emptiness is painful. The Mariner reports that they "speak" in order "to break" the silence (l. 109), though his narrative contains as yet no direct discourse. But horror—physical revulsion—is their most salient response:

The very deep did rot, O Christ!
That ever this should be!
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
Upon the slimy sea.

(ll. 123–26)

Such a response is predicted by Kristeva's theory of abjection, in which horror is the symptom the fragile not-yet-self exhibits when about to separate from the mother: "The abject confronts us . . . with our earliest attempts to release the hold of *maternal* entity even before existing outside of her, thanks to the autonomy of language. It is a violent, clumsy breaking away" (*Powers of Horror*, p. 15). Abjection is a response to corporeality—the subject's necessary recognition of its dependence upon materiality. As Kristeva notes, "Food loathing is per-

haps the most elementary and archaic form of abjection" (*Powers of Horror*, p. 2). The mariners experience the waters of the sea, of the "mother" of life, as undrinkable; hence its "slimy" surface teems with "rot," or the opposite of nourishment.

The intensifying stress of part 2 ends with the poem's second explicit action. Having begun with the mariners' attempt to see "meaning" in the albatross's death, it concludes with a quasisymbolic gesture: "Instead of the cross, the Albatross / About my neck was hung" (ll. 142-43). The gloss declares, "The shipmates, in their sore distress, would fain throw the whole guilt on the ancient Mariner: in sign whereof they hang the dead sea-bird round his neck." But in the poem, the passive voice again masks the subject; the Mariner merely records the sensation that the bird was put there, as a clumsy replacement intended to alleviate the symptoms of losing the living albatross. In *Powers of Horror* Kristeva argues that as waste is a source of abjection, the corpse manifests the condition most potently (p. 18). The carcass of the albatross represents the abject becoming the object. The difference here between gloss and Mariner's narrative is significant in showing that separation and the attempt to mark or mask the gap created with a substitute is coeval with guilt.¹² In establishing a link between "cause" and *affect*, however, the dead bird is not yet a symbol. The mariners grope toward the Symbolic, the conventional substitution of one thing for an absent other, but the "abject" corpse of the Albatross serves to represent its own death. The sign of the Albatross's death is the dead Albatross. The concept of substitution has appeared, but the signifier virtually *is* the signified.

Nevertheless, this event marks a second stage of the Mariner's voyage. The Warren tradition read this curious phrase, "instead of the cross," as support for a Christian interpretation of the text. What is fundamental, *crucial*, in both the Warren reading and mine is the role of substitution in constituting the Symbolic. Christian atonement is effected when innocent Christ replaces guilty humanity. The mariners' action thus discloses a link between the structure of the Symbolic, the theological concept of redemptive sacrifice, and an idea of the sacred. In *The Rime* the death of the "harmless Albatross" (l. 401) gives rise to the notion of "guilt" as "deed" *and* as "crime," a notion that motivates the idea of symbolic substitution. The Mariner's existence as a speaking subject, his "salvation," coincides with his escape from oceanic isolation, capable of telling his tale. Only then, when the albatross's death is mediated through speech, a system itself dependent on

substitution, does it become possible to interpret the killing as redemptive. Indeed, only at this point *is* the death a sacrifice; only then does this creature that impels the transition from nonself to I become sacred. (For until there is a speaking subject, there is no meaning, sacred or otherwise; and, conversely, as Kristeva comments, “sacrifice reminds us that the symbolic emerges out of material continuity, through a violent and unmotivated leap” [*Revolution*, p. 77].) The uncanny resonance of the albatross’s death, I suspect, thus springs from the bird’s symbolic dissonance within the ballad. The death fails to conform to the symbolic rules of “sacrifice” even as it exposes the fundamental principle of those rules—the notion of substitution as a reparation for loss, lack, absence.

In part 3 the horror of the persons on board the “spectre-bark” shocks the Mariner into a new stage of development. After appearing at the climax of part 1, the pronoun “I” alternates with “we” in part 2. In part 3, though “we” still appears occasionally, the narrative voice increasingly shares the Mariner’s perspective, as if his vision were becoming more focused, giving another signal of emerging selfhood. He describes the approaching ship with increasing specificity, seeing first a “something,” then “a speck,” “a mist,” “a shape,” and finally “a sail!” (148–61). At this recognition he utters the first direct discourse of the narrative—words spoken out of a need so terrible that he sucks his own blood to do so. (This blood is the first hint that the Mariner *has* an inner dimension; this “autovampirism” may suggest the presence of a kind of literal inner resource, as well as connoting the sublimation of the abject.)¹³ He expresses a devout, enthusiastic faith that “she” comes “[h]ither to work us weal” (l. 168). Yet the first spoken words name and summon not the nourishing mother but the “spectre-bark”: his first denotative use of language is ambiguous. The Mariner’s developing negative experience of the maternal as ice and as rot is now “realized” in the person of the “Night-mare Life-in-Death.”

This vessel’s passengers offer considerable insight into the Mariner’s avoidance of weddings. He asks a series of questions that lead toward certainty:

And is that Woman all her crew?
Is that a DEATH? and are there two?
Is DEATH that woman’s mate?

Her lips were red, her looks were free,

AN "I" FOR AN EYE

Her locks were yellow as gold:
Her skin was white as leprosy,
The Night-mare LIFE-IN-DEATH was she,
Who thicks man's blood with cold.

(ll. 187-94)

Here are Eros and Thanatos in the same boat, as it were, and one remarkably like the Mariner's own, as we learn from the hermit's later description (ll. 529-37).

Classical Freudian theory would interpret this grouping as an Oedipal triangle, but the configuration is bizarrely skewed in a decidedly unclassical way. The woman has the gold hair, red lips, white skin of many a ballad heroine, but her erotic beauty implies danger and disease—no temptations to incest here. The climax of the passage occurs when the Mariner names her in terms of her function, to "thick man's blood with cold"—a sign that represents her is still virtually metonymic, contingent. The father figure here is Death himself, instrument of the last and greatest "castration." This mother comes hither not "to work us weal," but to gamble with Death. Indeed, this Night-mare appears to confirm Madelon Sprengnether's argument in *The Spectral Mother* that maternal desire is the one thing that patriarchy cannot accommodate: what is most horrible here is the implication that the figure is powerful, free, and indifferent to the nascent subject. The Mariner, like the protagonists in all Gothic romance, holds a family secret in his heart of darkness. These apparitions are his "parents," their legacy the knowledge that he belongs—randomly and temporarily—to mother, the fatal woman, the slimy sea, rotting *mater*, darkness.

As Life-in-Death claims victory, the sun sets, darkness falls, and the spectre bark vanishes. The mariners now experience motionlessness as suspense, while, for a terrible moment, they wait: "We listened and looked sideways up! / Fear at *my* heart, as at a cup, / *My* life blood seemed to sip!" (ll. 203-5; my emphases). The Mariner and his shipmates outwardly behave alike, though the actual blood the Mariner drank in summoning the bark is now echoed figuratively by his simile, as if feeding the private fear that sets him apart, and marking his progress toward the Symbolic. In responding to the absence of the bark, displaying anxiety about the nonmaterial, about the future, he implies an incipient capacity for imagination.

The suspense resolves itself by the rising of "The hornéd Moon, with one bright star / Within the nether tip" (ll. 210-11). The vessel that had materialized out of the sun vanishes like the sun over the hori-

zon, seemingly beneath the ocean's surface. In a movement emblematic of primal repression, the Madonna-like moon appears in place of the bark. Intolerably erotic, personified horror disappears, and its opposite—distant rather than near, moving gently and predictably, summoning rather than being summoned—rises from the depths of the ocean. The moon reappears with "*one* bright star / Within the nether tip"; won by Life-in-Death, the Mariner is one indeed. Hence the shipmates die as the moon rises, a development that realizes his condition. The identity or agency hitherto diffused among the group now entirely coalesces into an agonizing self-consciousness: the mariners become the Mariner.

Now he must relive, and more intensely, the miseries following the death of the albatross. Part 4 recounts the pains of "I-solation," of one man as an island in the "wide, wide sea" (l. 233). This section repeats the pronoun "I" fifteen times, and the long *i* is almost obsessively echoed in rhyme and patterns of assonance. The very sounds of the words point to the source of the Mariner's anxiety. He is an "I"—one and alone—and yet he shares "I-ness," "life," with everything around him. He experiences such life as horrible because it suggests the indeterminacy, the fragility, of his own "I." Painfully aware of himself, he also perceives the horrible materiality of the *is* out there: "A thousand, thousand slimy things / Lived on, and so did I" (ll. 238–39).

Furthermore, the Mariner recognizes the others' death as an unambiguously personal reproach, for the stronger his identity as an agent, the stronger his capacity for guilt:

An orphan's curse would drag to hell
A spirit from on high;
But oh! more horrible than that
Is the curse in a dead man's eye!
(ll. 257–60)

The Mariner's I is confirmed by his guilty sense that he is being *looked at*—the gaze that, according to Lacan, effects alienation. Of course, the Mariner *is* responsible, the agent of the others' deaths, for that was the consequence of his emerging I. And like the albatross, the corpses remain as signs of the abject, the cast-off, horrible reminders of the self's painful, violent birth through separation and isolation.

At this point, the Mariner is an orphan: his father and mother have vanished, his "brother" sailors are dead. His feeling of lack (which is partly a relief given the horror of the parental figures) explains his even-

tual allegiance to the family of God the Father. As Freud writes in "Family Romances," imagining oneself the child of a nobleman or king enables the neurotic to deal with intolerable familial circumstances. This, I suggest, is the Mariner's situation just before he blesses the watersnakes: he is a child terrified and abandoned, afloat on the loathsome, slimy bosom of a terrible Mother Nature.¹⁴ Dawning self-consciousness is coeval with guilt. Where can he go but up? He denies the family of nature and humankind by sublimating the abject—by leaping into a "true" and satisfying spiritual membership in the family of God the Father, by crossing the threshold of the Symbolic.

Through part 4 the Mariner's account of his experiences portrays the world through the eyes of an I in formation. As materiality forces itself upon the mariners' notice and a sense of spatiality begins to emerge, the world becomes increasingly complex. To this point, his vessel has been voyaging on the surface of the ocean, but what might be underneath simply belongs to a "beyond" of which he has no concept. The Mariner apparently never sleeps, though "others" reportedly dream (ll. 131–32). The mariners' psychic stirrings, their primitive attempts to find meaning in events, have also been focused on the horizontal plane, and have been fundamentally metonymic—"meaning" arises from contiguity (as in using the albatross as a sign of its own death.)

When the moon displaces the spectre-bark in part 3, however, the Mariner's world begins to reorganize itself along the vertical plane: displacement, a metonymic primary process hitherto dominant, is replaced by the metaphoric function of condensation. The disappearance of the bark and the reappearance of the moon not only "cause" the death of the other mariners; the events also imply that the ocean's depths effect some transforming magic. In terms of Freudian depth psychology, this substitution is called a "compromise formation": the horror of the figures on the spectre bark becomes tolerable when contemplated as the moon, a maternal presence now distant in the fatherly mode. But such a compromise does not entirely allay anxiety. The moon becomes desirable when it creates the *possibility* of desire by becoming unreachable.

The same moon, now risen much higher, presides over the Mariner's blessing of the watersnakes. The detail of a "star or two beside" gives the moon a maternal quality (l. 266), reinforced by reference to an "orphan's curse." The relationship between orphan child and mother moon is still metonymic, but barely so, since the chief

effect of the conjunction is to contrast a low realm (of orphans, curses, guilt, vile ocean, repellent life, stasis), occupied by the Mariner, with a high one (of mother and child, "softness," movement). Thus the moon, though unreachable, at least displays to the Mariner an alternative to his miserable state. The power of the affect is demonstrated by the glossist, who waxes poetic for the first and only time. His annotative simile of celestial homecoming parallels and affirms the Mariner's displacement upward. What happens can be expressed only by using home as a metaphor for the lost bliss of pure nonselfhood.

Then the Mariner looks again at the snakes, those ambiguously phallic creatures of the mother that epitomize the horrors of materiality. When he sees the snakes *in light of* the moon, his eye effects an affirmative transformation, a comic re-vision of nature, a repression of the "object": "Her beams bemoaned the sultry main / Like April hoarfrost spread," he says (ll. 267–68). "Beams," referring to "irradiation," connotes "smiles," while "bemoaned" means "laughed at," and the simile, "Like April hoarfrost spread," is comically incongruous, a natural joke, for frost in April is transient and delusive. The moonlight on the "sultry" waves makes them *appear* as the opposite of what the senses report—cool rather than hot, light rather than dark, attractive rather than repellent.

The Mariner's response to this transformation expresses his first recognition:

O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gushed from my heart
And I blessed them unaware.
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
And I blessed them unaware.

(Ll. 282–87)

In naming the sea creatures, he escapes into the Symbolic, where love, life, and beauty are aspects of a single, unified whole. This re-vision is the Mariner's first, empowering experience of the eye-I's capacity to dominate and organize perception, a revision that frees him from *mater*/matter. Most telling, this liberating love (and its adequate expression) presupposes the *unknowable* and the *unspeakable* in the repression of the maternal and the material. "Spring," "love," and "gushed" all figuratively represent the fluid, feminine "other" that now "belongs" to the unconscious (personified as an implicitly maternal "kind saint").¹⁵ The other functions both as a sign of this new organi-

zation of the eye-I and as a necessary source of vital energy from beyond.¹⁶ At last the Mariner's words rise up to heaven. Prayer is surely language at its most Symbolic, communication directed "upward" toward an unseen and invisible other. The albatross falls "[l]ike lead into the sea" (l. 291). The ocean, now functioning as the unconscious, mercifully hides the body, abject reminder of self-creating guilt.

The Mariner's journey homeward is undoubtedly less compelling than his outward voyage. Between his blessing and his confession to the hermit—the Mariner's first experience as a "speaking subject"¹⁷—the tale confirms the Symbolically ordered structure of the I. Yet the supernatural machinery lacks the uncanny materiality of the earlier spectres as well as their vivid hues.¹⁸ In blessing the snakes, the Mariner enacts and at the same time participates in the system founded on a recognized distinction between self and other, of matter and spirit, speakable and unspeakable, conscious and unconscious. His subsequent experiences confirm these boundaries and divisions. Having known consciousness for the first time, he finally sleeps. His dreams reiterate the new primacy of spirit: "I dreamt that they [the buckets] were filled with dew; / And when I awoke, it rained" (ll. 299–300). His mind now feels separate from his body—he feels liberated from matter altogether—as if he "were a blessed ghost" (l. 308).

The wind returns in a sublime mode reminiscent of the Pentecostal wind, and the rainstorm comes on. (Perhaps Coleridge's phrase "upper air" [l. 313] echoes the "upper room" where the apostles received the gift of tongues.) But now natural forces are neither male nor female. Moon and windstorm are magnificent but utterly remote celestial events. The reanimation of the dead sailors further affirms the power of spirit. As cast-off (abject) parts of the Mariner himself, their bodies neither "reek nor rot" (l. 254), but the revival of the sailors through spiritual intervention suggests that they continue to inhabit the Mariner's unconscious. Their language is now the sweet music of bird-song, the echolalia of the Semiotic.¹⁹

Parts 5 and 6 describe the appearance of the superego, unconscious parental voice of "right" and "wrong." Having fainted from a sudden rush of blood to his head, the Mariner hears two voices that attribute a spiritual cause to the albatross's death: a "spirit" "loved the bird that loved the man / Who shot him with his bow" (ll. 404–5). Experienced within the structure of the patriarchal Symbolic, the voices belong to spiritual beings assimilated to the masculine, yet the one identified as "he" who calls the other "brother" has a voice as "soft as honey-dew."

They speak authoritatively about moral and physical cause and effect (though their explanation of the ship's motion is dubious). But the Mariner, while unconscious, *also overhears* the notion of expiation: "The man hath penance done / And penance more will do" (ll. 402–20).

Warren assumes that the moral law the Mariner overhears is the Christian paradigm of "crime and punishment and reconciliation" (p. 233), finding in this reading affirmation of Coleridge's "sacramental unity." But in fact it seems closer to the "love, guilt, and reparation" that Melanie Klein has argued is the main theme of pre-Oedipal experience. Since infantile connections with the mother cannot be literally reestablished, they are recreated in Symbolic modes. Thus ideas of "penance" or expiation discover a principle of cause and effect in the ideal or psychological realm as well as in the physical one. Freud's observation of his grandson's "*fort-da*" game is also relevant. The child invented the ritual of throwing away and retrieving the spool, Freud remarks, to relieve hostility at his mother's departure: "At the outset he was in a *passive* situation—he was overpowered by the experience; but, by repeating it, unpleasurable though it was, as a game, he took on an *active* part" (*Pleasure Principle*, pp. 15–16). Significantly Freud tells this anecdote in the course of trying to account for repetition compulsion, the Mariner's permanent neurosis. The principle of moral reparation, established in the Mariner's unconscious, offers a panacea for guilt—the curse is finally snapped, and he can move forward once again.

Even after the Mariner reaches land, his identity as a speaking subject is fragile, for the *procès* of his creation returns intermittently to consciousness. Indeed, even as the curse is broken, his language declares the tentativeness of its repression. He says,

Once more
I viewed the ocean green,
And looked far forth, yet little saw
Of what had else been seen.

(Ll. 442–45)

This passage curiously unites active and passive voices; the I dimly intuits the pre-Symbolic experience, but can barely express it, and does so in the passive construction of his earlier, Semiotic phase.

Though the Mariner now barely perceives the horrors before him, he retains a sense of spectral persecution: he is

AN "I" FOR AN EYE

Like one, that on a lonely road
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having once turned round walks on,
And turns no more his head;
Because he knows, a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread.

(Ll. 446–51)

Like the earlier simile describing the ship's flight before the storm, this image concerns pursuit. But in contrast to the former's frantic forward motion, the movement here is deliberate. Alone, the subject refuses to look back at what he knows is there—knows because he has *seen*. What is seen is connected to what is ghostly through "spectral," for the word's meanings have included "capable of seeing spectres," "having the aspect of a spectre or phantom," "ghostly, unsubstantial, unreal," or even "produced merely by the action of light on the eye or on a sensitive medium" (*OED*). The "spectral" thus is now both past (repressed) and eternally present. Turned "spectral" himself (as the pilot's boy confirms) the Mariner leaves the ocean forever, for his ship follows the albatross into the depths. When the infant (the root *infans* means "incapable of speech") becomes a compulsive talker, it will never forget how to speak. The spectres of the Mariner's past continue to pursue him, and always will, for they are intrinsic to his very being. His I consists of what his eye has seen and has defined itself in trying to escape.

If *The Rime* expresses, within the resources of the Symbolic, the Semiotic prehistory of a speaking subject, it follows that this narrative also provides a genealogy of the Coleridgean Imagination. As I read the poem, it traces the means by which meaning is constructed out of separation, need, fear, guilt, and a need to repair the primal break. The fragile I, to mend the break its birth necessitates, imagines a higher realm where no such gap exists. Entry into the Symbolic is a creative act, for the self is thereby constituted. Though Coleridge was Romantic in taking this process as his subject, he discovers an ideology not merely Romantic, as McGann claims it was, but also patriarchal in its horrified repression of the female. In this context, Coleridge's famous definition of Imagination and his comments on the symbol appear somewhat less enigmatic. In regard to Imagination, he writes:

The IMAGINATION then I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and a repetition in the finite mind of the

eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former. . . . It struggles to *idealize* and to *unify* [my emphases]. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (*as* objects) are essentially fixed and dead. (P. 304)

Imagination is an active power, an agent whose perception gives its knowledge of its own identity—of its experience of “I am,” in contrast to the otherness of the fixed and dead. Cut off by definition from the material world, the “shaping spirit of Imagination” idealizes and unifies, re-creating the world in its own image (Coleridge, *Dejection Ode*, l. 86). The Mariner’s most horrible experience is his isolation, his oneness. Perhaps Imaginative unity is most important to the Mariner in serving his desire to make everything one with him, to reestablish the pre-Oedipal world, where there were no boundaries, where everything shared one life—which was of course his own.

Thus Imagination is defensive; the Mariner’s leap into the Symbolic is a reaction against the horrifying vacancy inherent in separation from the maternal and material. Coleridge’s obsessive use of abstractions repeats this leap—indeed, could his fondness for philosophy and theology be a similar flight? Such a reaction also informs his definition of the symbol and underlies his privileging of the Symbolic. Coleridge writes in *The Statesman’s Manual* that the symbol is “the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal. It always partakes of the reality it renders intelligible.”²⁰ This definition takes on new and ironic resonance in light of this reading of *The Rime*, as does the meditation Coleridge recorded in 1804: “In looking at objects of Nature while I am thinking, as at yonder moon dim-glimmering thro’ the dewy window-pane, I seem rather to be seeking, as it were *asking*, a symbolical language for something within me that already and forever exists, than observing anything new.”²¹

The intuition that the symbol is somehow always already constituted within the subject is congruent with Kristeva’s notion of the Semiotic within the Symbolic. Coleridgean Imagination seems to be fatally weakened: it exists only insofar as it is separated from what in fact is its life. This “shaping spirit” sustains itself through its self-conscious experience of its difference from the “natural,” spontaneous, “feminine” force in the beyond. To the extent that Imagination is self-confident and self-absorbed, it may vanish altogether. It is thus strongest at its borders (as in the Mariner’s moment of beatific vision) or in writing elegies for itself (like the *Dejection Ode*).

The Rime's great power—and our urge to interpret it—lies in its discovery of intense, primitive anxieties fundamental to our very selves. Coleridge's reply to Mrs. Barbauld, who complained that *The Rime* "lacked a moral," reveals his unconscious sense of this fact. He replied to her that the work's "only, or chief fault . . . was the obtrusion of the moral sentiment so openly on the reader as a principle or cause of action in a work of pure imagination":

It ought to have had no more moral than the *Arabian Nights'* tale of the merchant's sitting down to eat dates by the side of a well and throwing the shells aside, and lo! a genie starts up and says he *must* kill the afore-said merchant *because* one of the date shells had, it seems, put out the eye of the genie's son. (II:155–56)

These comments affirm that both this anecdote and *The Rime* are concerned with the making of morals—with how the concept of crime and punishment rushes in as a way of affirming order in the universe. The merchant has simply been going about his business—eating dates (i.e., passing the time?)—when the avenging father appears (out of a body of water) and announces a law: the Old Testament equity of "an eye for an eye," or rather "an 'I' for an eye," since the genie demands the Merchant's very existence in repayment. As Humphry House points out, in the *Arabian Nights* story the date shell had actually killed the genie's son (pp. 90–92). Norman Fruman suggests that this change may indicate Coleridge's wish to "establish the *irrationality* of the *Arabian Nights* story" (p. 545). In the context of my reading, however, the change signals *The Rime's* link between vision and death, the spectres of speculation. Perhaps most horrible to Coleridge is the unconscious implication of this parable; that morality is a response to "meaningless" change and loss. "Imagination" defends us against this knowledge. Small wonder, then, that Coleridge could not produce the discursive analysis an extended definition of Imagination would have demanded; the Gothic horror of *The Rime* was as close as he could come to imagining the unspeakable.

SEVENTEEN

"Frost at Midnight"

(M)others and Other Strangers

Early in the voyage, the Mariner's vessel enters a region of ice: "the ice, mast-high, came floating by / As green as emerald" (ll. 53–54). Eventually trapped, the ship is subjected to horrible, inarticulate noises made by the ice that "crashed, and growled, and roared, and howled" (l. 61). Only in conjunction with the quasi-object, the Albatross, does it eventually break free. In my reading of *The Rime*, ice represents both the strongly felt absence of mother and the resistance of matter that propels the incipient subject toward the Symbolic (a kind of "non de la mère" prior to the Law of the Father). Furthermore, the Mariner's access to the Symbolic is also associated with ice, signified by his capacity for "seeing as": "Her beams bemocked the sultry main / Like April hoarfrost spread." To be a speaking subject is to have the power to see hot as cold. In this linguistic sleight of hand (or "I") matter becomes secondary to the power of the Word.

As Luce Irigaray points out in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, ice as figure for the repressed matter/mother is a convention of the patriarchal imagination. "Matter" itself is "*une mère de glace*"—a mother (or ocean) of ice (mirror).¹ Irigaray "reads" the Neoplatonist Plotinus by directly quoting substantial sections of his *Enneads* (a text proclaiming the nonexistence of the material, and one that Coleridge knew well). Irigaray's text in this chapter exemplifies her definition of the female subject's position within patriarchy—she is a mimic, reproducing patriarchal discourse and (like the material world itself) serving as a mirror that passively reflects another's "reality."²

In a notebook entry dated December 1803, Coleridge makes explicit his association between ice and the female breast:

O then what visions have I had, what dreams—the Bark, the Sea, all the shapes & sounds & adventures made up of the stuff of Sleep & Dreams,

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& yet my Reason at the rudder: O what visions, (*μαστοι*) as if my Cheek
& Temple were lying on me gale o'mast on—Seele Meines Lebens! —&
I sink down the waters, thro Seas & Seas—yet warm, yet a Spirit.
(I:1718)

Afterwards Coleridge adds, "Pillow=mast high" and the Greek *oi* in parentheses. Apparently he pronounced the phrase "mast-high" approximately like the Greek word for "breasts"; and as Kathleen Coburn points out, in the phrase "me gale o'mast on" Coleridge is punning on the Greek for "large-breasted." This wish-fulfillment fantasy of ship, voyage, and "mast high" echoes *The Rime*. In the poem's nightmare world, however, what is "mast-high" is not pillows (*or* breasts) but icebergs, intimating a maternal frigidity later "realized" in the person of the "Night-mare Life-in-Death" "*who thicks man's blood with cold*" (l. 194; italics added).³ This internal and psychological freezing, like the vessel's early paralysis in the ice, links the cold "female" with the unpleasant and sometimes horrifying condition of immobility—perhaps impotence.

The Rime's content is undoubtedly original, but its conceptual universe is all too familiar: matter is "female," spirit is "male." And although Coleridge's myth of subject-formation accords less power to the father than Freud would have predicted, it appears to confirm the Lacanian premise that the speaking subject emerges when matter/*mater* is successfully repressed. Language affords both a refuge from her horrors and a compensatory fiction of power: words make things appear and disappear, not least mother/ice herself. Therefore, even if the difference between "male" and "female" is not "essential" or "real," this semantic problem is, in practical terms, irrelevant—for "meaning" may exist only where the female functions as the passive ground against which significance is figured. Furthermore, "cold," "ice," and "frost" represent authentic, inevitable dangers, real suffering. How else could it be? If "mother" is not at some point "cold," why would the potential subject ever separate from her? And how could anything but a "patriarchal" speaking subject ever be formed?

In part 2 I argued that the existence of a Female Gothic narrative implies that the transcendent ego long taken for granted in Western patriarchy is not the only possibility. The chief difference between the Male and Female narratives lies in their attitudes toward the "other," the "female," the mother. In the myth of Psyche, the subject/heroine propitiates the female principle (her Terrible "Mother-in-Law" Aphrodite) by accomplishing various increasingly complex and arduous

tasks. The popular Female Gothic narratives that introduced (or perhaps reintroduced) this plot to the reading public were produced by female authors. In Coleridge's imagination, however, ice is a complex and multivalent symbol, having a private as well as an archetypal, culture-wide resonance. And in "Frost at Midnight," he questions and revises his first (traditional) premise, that matter/*mater's* bosom is icy—or rather, he recognizes that ice may be seen as something other than a condition of deprivation and lack. Written in February 1798, while Coleridge was still working on the first version of *The Rime*, it offers, in contrast to the longer poem's Male Gothic, a version of Female Gothic.⁴

At first it might seem dubious to associate this most affirmative and "Wordsworthian" of Coleridge's works with any sort of "Gothic"; but when one begins to look, the generic signals are unmistakable. The poem's very name has Gothic undertones; "midnight" (a word evocative of ghostly visitations) was the conventional time for climactic Gothic encounters from the Graveyard school onward, and the word appeared in a number of early Gothic titles (including *The Midnight Bell*, *The Midnight Groan*, and, especially apt here, *Midnight Weddings*). As Arden Reed points out, Coleridge's title also echoes the opening line of *Christabel* ("Tis the *middle* of the *night*"), and also uses the earlier phrase "hark, again!" to emphasize eerie nocturnal phenomena.⁵ Alone, and in a state of preternatural wakefulness, the speaker is disquieted by a silence so intense that even the "owlet's" voice seems loud. For Coleridge, however, the owlet's cry connotes something more than Gothic cliché. This phrase also appears in *The Rime*, as the hermit tries to describe the horrific otherness of the Mariner and his ship; he says it reminds him of wintry leaves, when "the ivy-tod is heavy with snow, / And the owlet whoops to the wolf below / That eats the she-wolf's young" (ll. 535-37). The cry, like frost itself, implicitly signifies a threatening otherness.

Moreover, this anxious "I" occupies the subject position of a Female Gothic heroine, at the mercy of an acute sensibility, troubled by intimations of mysterious powers that lie beyond the walls, the workings of a dark unknown. And not only is this speaker as sensitive to minutiae as any Radcliffe heroine. He has also, in keeping watch over his sleeping infant, inadvertently assumed the role of nurse or mother. As if in the spirit of this role, he is half-willingly distracted from those "abstruser musings" (theology and philosophy no doubt) for which he has sought out this silence and solitude.

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That these Gothic trappings of midnight, dark, cold, and owl imply the (literally) unspeakable workings of a mysterious *female* energy is also evident throughout the first verse paragraph. As if the secret ministry of frost were analogous to the Kristevan Semiotic, a sense of the uncanny is the most significant symptom of this intuited, unseen presence-in-absence—a defamiliarization, a sense of unreality. The opening statement ("The Frost performs its secret ministry / Unhelped by any wind") is, though calm and measured, subtly sinister: frost or "cold"—the synonym Coleridge clearly had in mind—is not only a synecdoche for matter/*mater* as absence or rejection.⁶ Equally disquieting, this frost is felt to work despite the absence of "fatherly," spiritual "wind." The alive seem dead while the dead—or inanimate—seem alive. The speaker finds himself at the border of meaning and non-meaning, of consciousness and the unconscious. In a silence where it is "so quiet you can hear yourself think," this is precisely what the speaker begins to do: to contemplate the workings of his own mind and thus be led to acknowledge the presence of the "stranger."

Though serving as a focus and "echo or mirror" of his own consciousness, this "stranger" further confuses the boundaries that ordinarily govern "reality": those between self and other, past and present, rational thought and superstitious fantasies like the lore of "the stranger." Uncannily, this film of soot is both the external one now "fluttering on the grate" and the internal, past, remembered—and hence even stranger "stranger"—that further estranges the speaker. In drawing the speaker of the poem into the vortex of memory (the present dissolving into the past as surely as the village has melted into a dreamlike silence) the stranger emerges as a signifier for "the signifier." Sooner or later, now or then, it always points to an "other" felt and desired but never recognized, never seen face to face.

Allowing thought to become a "toy," the speaker himself becomes the plaything of language's usually repressed undercurrents (a situation similar to the poet's fantasy recounted above), hurrying impetuously through reality, dream, and memory, through past, present, and future. Coleridge's invented genre, the "conversation poem," here evolves into a tracking of the process of free association Freud later posited as the basis of psychoanalysis. Coleridge first devised these experiments with a more colloquial than Miltonic blank verse in 1795. The earlier examples of these always one-sided "conversations," are almost always directed toward an interlocutor who is, if silent or even absent, nevertheless another adult consciousness. In "Frost at Mid-

night," however, this role is played by Hartley, who as "cradled infant" remains as resolutely silent as the classical Freudian analyst.

As psychoanalytic theory predicts, in the course of this uncensored free association the speaker experiences a transference, projecting onto the blank screen of the silent "other" his own unconscious desires. Indeed, by the end of the poem, he has apparently accomplished a "talking cure." Although there are, notoriously, other reasons than complete success for "terminating analysis," the poem ends in such profound peace and acceptance that virtually all readers have concurred that something healing has arrived in the course of this meditation; the speaker, it seems, has finally seen (or recognized) "the stranger's face." But the stranger's identity, who or what he/she/it is, remains unanalyzed. (Despite the psychoanalytic features of the text, it lacks the discursive analysis of the wise Freudian voice who interprets the material brought to consciousness.) This, too, is a kind of "Mystery poem," one that, like the "mystery story" which evolved from the Radcliffe tradition, concerns a problem of identity.

The clues to this identity remain ambiguous. Implicitly, the stranger is at last identified with the concluding vision of nature, when "all seasons shall be sweet to thee" and ending with the description of "eave-drops" frozen into "silent icicles, / Quietly shining to the quiet Moon" (ll. 73–74). Our conventions of interpretation demand a name for this vision, however, and the ones that have been suggested are "memory," "Imagination," "God," and even "mother."⁷ And yet, although none of these is precisely wrong, assigning such a name violates the poem's spirit; such naming returns us to the realm of those "abstruser musings" which the speaker left behind in the opening verse paragraph. The "silent icicles, / Quietly shining to the quiet Moon" represent the celestial, the sublime, the beautiful, *and* the maternal all at once; this vision "realizes" harmony and reciprocity "beyond words"—and that is precisely why it is therapeutic. And we may recognize in this cold lunar scene that the "stranger," the absent other, is "the (m)other," a term coined by psychoanalytic feminists to express the maternal other repressed by the Law of the Father as the price of access to the Symbolic.

It is clear that in *The Rime* and *Dejection*, Coleridge associates Imagination's creative energy—his "genial spirits"—with "feminine" images, including springs and fountains of water and the moon. In these two poems, ice appears as Irigaray would predict, as a figure for the negativity of matter, its harsh and hostile otherness. But in "Frost

at Midnight" the speaker's process of unimpeded "free association" leads him to reconfigure, to "re-vise" this matter—which is the problem of matter itself. Nevertheless, in imagining a world in which "all seasons shall be sweet," he also inadvertently rewrites the Law of the Father; *jouissance* is available in "realizing" the power of matter/*mater*, and such recognition also finds a way around the old binary and hierarchical structures, finds an alternative to repression as the chief psychic defense, and creates, in fact, a different kind of speaking subject.

I have already suggested that in the opening paragraph the speaker is both agitated by dim anxieties about boundaries and at the same time implicitly violating them in various ways. On the one hand he responds to his sense of strange forces on the other side of the cottage walls, which both shelter and confine; on the other hand, in his "mothering" role he has already moved slightly outside the usual boundaries of patriarchal subjectivity. He is in a position to see things from a "novel" perspective—that of Female Gothic. The first symptom of this is in his willingness to let his thoughts wander undirected; consciousness relinquishes its usual position of authority and control. "Free association" suspends to some extent the Symbolic laws that impart meaning to language; the normally repressed connections between thoughts and words, such as those suggested by sounds or images, are recognized. Thus the sovereign principles of unity, of identity, of chronology, and of causality lose their power, and this has an effect not only on speech but on the speaking subject.

But in another way, Coleridge's meditation might be read as an elaboration of several key terms: the two most important are "reflect" and "sublimate." The first is the more obvious of the two. To reflect is "to bend or throw back from a surface (such as a mirror)"; "to form an image of," "to mirror"; "to manifest as a result of one's actions"; and also "to think or consider seriously." All of these meanings appear in various dimensions of the poem. The poem's *raison d'être* is thought, thought that leads the speaker back through his past. It is also a quest *for* reflection, defined as the mind's characteristic impulse to find an "echo or mirror of itself." The concluding vision of nature (imagined as the infant's experience of nature) is full of reflections: the waters that reflect the mountains, clouds that reflect the land, icicles that "quietly shine to the quiet Moon." The principle of reflection appears even in the syntax ("himself in all, and all things in himself"). And the concluding description of nature itself manifests the eye that perceives it.

"Sublimation" is equally complex and perhaps even more important. The concluding vision perceives nature, the material principle, as "sublime" by the end of the poem; frost is no longer vaguely threatening, but *literally* "affirmative"—creating icicles out of eavesdrops. The movement of the poem as a whole manifests the psychoanalytic sense of "sublimation" as well; the speaker's private and personal anxiety is transmuted into poetic energy, a process culminating in the concluding vision of a sublime nature. In a parallel movement, the "stern preceptor" of his unhappy schooltime has been sublimed into the loving God reflected in nature. Last, the heart of this final poetic vision of a nature sublimed and sanctified contains an image of physical "sublimation" (the transformation of solid ice into gas without the intermediate liquid state). Such "sublimation" is the focus of one of the poem's most vivid images: "While the nigh thatch smokes in the sun thaw" (ll. 69–70). In this ideal and idealizing vision, ice melts into air, not water (additional assurance of the "One Life" animating "mother" and "father," nature and God).

The poem demonstrates the speaker's movement from confinement to freedom, from anxiety to *jouissance*. Although Romanticists have taken Wordsworth and Coleridge's own favored metaphor to describe the desired relationship with nature as a "marriage," one might argue that (consistent with the speaker's implicitly "maternal" position in the beginning) the concluding re-vision of nature is more nearly like giving birth. He brings into being (by writing) a true child of nature who compensates for his own experience of absence and loss. That such imaginative participation in the life of an other is gratifying itself suggests a different conception of selfhood. It is one that anticipates Freud's late speculation, in fact, about an ego formed as a "precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes," of supplements or compensations for the experience of loss, of absence. It is a process of development that acknowledges the primal power of the mother, and recognizes that an accommodation to one's inevitable separation from her is the chief impetus of development.

Toward the end of the first verse paragraph, Coleridge toys with two alternative metaphors for the relationship of self and other when he describes the mind as "echo or mirror seeking of itself" (l. 22). Echo and mirror both figure in the myth of Narcissus, who ignored the nymph Echo (who loved him) because he was so entranced with his own image reflected in the mirror of the pool. Narcissus was Freud's chosen metaphor for all selfhood; but this myth is clearly most relevant

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to the patriarchal self that, as Irigaray writes, sees matter itself as a *mère de glace*. And though the mythic Narcissus's self-absorption turned Echo herself into a mere echo (creating a parody of true "conversation"), still buried in the story, in the prehistory of narcissism, is the lost possibility of genuine relationship. In "Frost at Midnight" Coleridge at least temporarily imagines the possibilities of an other who is not (m)other. A stranger indeed.

❧EIGHTEEN❧

Keats and the Names of the Mother

When it happens that a person has to give up a sexual object, there quite often ensues an alteration of his ego which can only be described as a setting up of the object inside the ego. . . . The process, especially in the early phases of development, is a very frequent one, and it makes it possible to suppose that the character of the ego is a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes and that it contains the history of those object-choices.

Freud
*The Ego and the Id*¹

The New Critical monument to Keats is impressive, and the Keats it celebrates is a monument (as the poet himself would have wished) to the Great Tradition of Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton. Recently, however, a desire to “historicize” Keats has challenged the canonical poet we thought we knew. For instance, in *Keats’s Life of Allegory: The Origins of a Style* (1988)², Marjorie Levinson asserts that the famous Keatsian style is often “bad,” “embarrassing,” “monstrous,” the language of an aspiring poet doomed by his social position as an outsider: “The triumph of the great poetry is not its capacious, virile, humane authenticity but its subversion of those authoritarian values, effects which it could not in any case, and for the strongest social reasons, realize” (p. 5).

Ironically, in acknowledging that the values of the humanist tradition are “authoritarian,” Levinson still implicitly reproaches Keats for social climbing, for having tried and failed to achieve the “mastery” that supposedly marks this high poetic tradition of his social betters. Levinson’s elaborate and ingenious readings may exasperate and even shock Keats’s admirers—though one suspects that Levinson is not sorry to “épater le bourgeois,” that is, primarily, the New Critical tradition. She founds her argument on the attacks published by Keats’s reviewers and the remarks of others, notably Byron. This hostility frequently and characteristically took the form of sexual innuendo:

Time and again, the poetry is labelled 'profligate', 'puerile', 'unclean', 'disgusting', 'recklessly luxuriant and wasteful', 'unhealthy', 'abstracted', and 'insane'. More specifically, it is graphed as a stylistically self-indulgent verse: prolix, repetitive, metrically and lexically licentious, overwrought. The diatribes culminate in the epithet 'nonsense'. (P. 3)

From this perspective, "La Belle Dame" becomes, according to Levinson, a masturbatory fantasy ("something one does to avoid growing up-and-into the system, without becoming possessed on the other side. . . . It is waiting liberated from its object: determinacy without the death which is fulfilled desire" [p. 88]). "The Eve of St. Agnes," on the other hand, portrays an unhealthy narcissism. Madeline is for Porphyro merely an "internalized representational object" (p. 171); "We might glimpse in this narcissistic economy (where, by loving the ego-ideal, one becomes and possesses simultaneously) a passive, feminized way to compete. A way to work and love without losing one's generative tension" (p. 173). But Levinson's reading of Keats—complex, ingenious, and internally consistent—finally seems like the Ptolemaic description of the universe, its very complexity generated by unquestioned basic assumptions that are in fact doubtful. Not only does she accept contemporary attacks on Keats as valid (ignoring these readers' conscious or unconscious motives for attacking the young poet), but Levinson's interpretative contexts are also debatable. Using psychoanalysis to evaluate charges against Keats, she reads only the orthodox, relentlessly phallogentric Freud. Thus Porphyro is a deluded narcissist and "fulfilled desire" may be unequivocally equated with "death."

Undoubtedly, the responses of Keats's early reviewers are important, but should we take them so literally? And why should one use Freudian psychoanalysis today without acknowledging the many revisions and challenges to his theories? One reason—conscious or unconscious—may be that the French Freud or, especially, the feminists' Freud, would not show Keats as Levinson wants to portray him: the gifted poet made monstrous by his lower-middle-class origins. Reread in a somewhat different psychoanalytic context, however, the early critics' sexual hostility toward this poetry may become a symptom of Keats's genuine originality. Certainly "gender" is at least as relevant as "class" to a poststructuralist reading of Keats. Not only is sexual difference the most familiar metonymy for "difference" in our culture; it also operates powerfully within language itself, especially "poetic" language.

As Levinson rightly argues, Keats was a man whose formal education was as limited as his means, and these had a profound effect upon his writing. And yet, though Keats's social class and relative poverty barred him from an education offering ready access to the classical tradition, it did not entirely exclude him; instead, it placed him in the "female" position. He read the texts available to him eagerly and thoughtfully: those in English (Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth) as well as Homer and Dante and Virgil in translation. He also read the masses of popular, noncanonical works, including many by women such as Ann Radcliffe. In fact, Keats was the first poet who became canonical without the benefits of a classical education, for whom the mother tongue was the only tongue. Thus he occupied the same status relative to "culture" as would a middle- or upper-class woman who loved to read and wanted to write.

Attacks on the "unsexed" women who dared to "attempt the pen" have been massively documented in the past twenty years; thus it is not surprising to see anxieties about Keats's social class, a parallel "anomaly," find a similar mode of expression. Having the same relation to the tradition as the female author (though for a different reason), he was subject to the same criticisms. All of the attacks cited above align this upstart with the Aristotelian "line of evil"—the culturally female—which includes passivity, materiality, unregulated sexuality, even "insanity." Furthermore, assumptions founded on gender, a cultural category that is relative and unstable, tend to be experienced by members of the culture as "natural" and fundamental. Thus, perceived violations of gender boundaries cause deep and irrational disturbances in the perceiver.

I believe that feminist theory is one perspective essential to a rereading of Keats that moves outside the premises and methods of New Criticism, and such a reading has begun. Keats and "the feminine" has already attracted considerable discussion. Adrienne Rich and Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi were perhaps the first to point out that Keats's dictum "a poet has no identity" (cited by Levinson as the climax of her reading of "St. Agnes") coincides with the "permeable," "empathetic," "feminine" self. Margaret Homans examines Keats's complex conscious attitudes toward his female readership and his own fascination with "feminine" romance. Most recently, Susan Wolfson has documented the extensive tradition of associating Keats with "the feminine," and Anne Mellor has argued that Keats exemplifies a "feminine Romanticism" (in contrast to Emily Brontë's "male Romanticism").³

So far, however, this feminist approach has had less to say about the poems than about Keats's statements in letters, both the familiar ones about his art and his less often cited but frequent anxieties concerning female writers and the largely female audience for romance. Mellor writes, for instance, that "because I want to contest the traditional academic assumption that poetry and fiction are superior genres of literary discourse . . . I have focused in this discussion of Keats's gender ideology as much on his letters as on his poetry."⁴ Mellor describes Keats's position as "ideological cross-dressing." Homans examines Keats's own statements about women and reading, while Wolfson uses the history of discussing Keats as feminine as a means of talking about larger cultural issues. I suggest, however, that the poetry also reveals Keats's most complex and revealing confrontation with those paradoxes of gender and genre. The letters show that he was at least partly conscious of these issues; but in his poetry (quite possibly *unconsciously*) Keats does not so much resolve the paradoxes as escape them, taking with him the materials he desires. When Keats writes in Gothic, he is not merely representing the nightmares and nightmères haunting the ruins of patriarchy. Though the concept of the Male and Female Gothic traditions offers an illuminating context for reading Keats, it also shows that he finds in these Gothic plots a path to realms hitherto unexplored.

I would agree with Harold Bloom's thesis that a poet's "originality" emerges out of a concern with origins, out of strategies to create by means of writing a self in the shadow of his precursors. The roots of what makes Keats "Keats" are also to be found in some such developmental process. But Bloom's Oedipal model is inadequate for him, and for much the same reasons that Freud had little insight into the psychological development of daughters. Like those of a woman writer (or the female self in patriarchy), Keats's energies are engaged in the "female" task of (literally) articulating a self separate from the *mother*, that is, the aspects of culture experienced as "female" rather than as "male": the "matrix" of the "syren" romance, as he calls this mode in his sonnet on *King Lear*, or the numerous women romancers Keats read and personified as "Old Mother Radcliff."⁵

English was Keats's "mother tongue," a "vernacular" that was to Latin and Greek (the languages of patriarchal authority) as "mother" to "father": complementary but inferior. And yet, as the existence of popular romance in this vernacular also demonstrates, this "mother tongue" itself contains both "mothers" and "fathers." To complicate

matters further, Gothic romance, as we have seen, has its Male and Female modes, and at least two of Keats's poetic "fathers" have culturally feminine connotations: Spenser as an exemplar of a "Gothick" past and Shakespeare as the "natural" poet, whom Milton called "fancy's child / Warbl[ing] his native woodnotes wild" ("L'Allegro," ll. 134-45). Therefore the trace of both Male and Female Gothic in Keats reveals his process of literary growth. "Writing in Gothic" Keats both acquires the mother's tongue and becomes himself, "Keats the poet." Paradoxically, what Levinson decries as Keats's "passive, feminized way to compete" becomes his source of powerful originality.

If Bloom's Oedipal model of father-son conflict is inappropriate here, what myths might be more suitable? Patriarchal myths of mother-son relationships also seem to be fraught with violence: for instance, the story of Marduk and Tiamat, the hero who slays the mother/dragon and creates anew from the material of her body. As I argued earlier in regard to *Dracula*, however, this story affirms patriarchal order in a quite un-Keatsian way, the hero's violent imposition of male mind over female matter. At the opposite extreme there is, of course, the myth of Psyche, so useful to the Female Gothic. Clearly, Keats had thought long and deeply about this story, which he knew through the poem of a female contemporary, Mary Tighe. In invoking Psyche as his muse in the first of the Great Odes, Keats expresses a Bloomian sense of belatedness, and a kinship with the "latest born and loveliest" of "Olympus' faded hierarchy" (ll. 24–25). And yet, there is no particular sense of anxiety here, but rather satisfaction that he may celebrate this goddess, a mortal made sublime through experience:

I see, and sing, by my own eyes inspired.
So let me be thy choir, and make a moan
Upon the midnight hours:
Thy voice, thy lute, thy pipe, thy incense sweet
From swinged censer teeming:
Thy shrine, thy grove, thy oracle, thy heat
Of pale-mouth's prophet dreaming.

Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane
 In some untrodden region of my mind. . . .
 (Ll. 44-51)

Keats's two most familiar metaphors for life also have analogies in the Psyche myth: "Life is a mansion of many apartments" suggests the heroine's sojourn in Eros's castle; life as a "vale of soul-making," indi-

cates the notion of selfhood as a process similar to Psyche's labors. All of Keats's mature poetry is concerned with seeing, the moment when Psyche lights her lamp and awakens to the reality of her situation. And yet, Keats does not use the myth in the way Radcliffe, for instance, has done. He does not identify with the female heroine; though the speaker in "Ode to Psyche" experiences a moment of illumination, he sees not Eros, but Psyche with Eros. And Psyche is the focus of the epiphany: "The winged boy I knew," he says. He *identifies* Psyche, but he *identifies with* Eros.

Eros (like the other Romantic favorite, Prometheus) demonstrates that conquest is not the only way to get what one wants, even in a patriarchal culture that honors achievement through mastery: one may also steal. Byron and Shelley were both fascinated with the form of rebellion against the father exemplified by the Titan who steals Zeus's sacred fire for the benefit of mankind. The canonical readings of the myth, most explicitly Byron's, see the Titan as abject, a disturbance of the Law: "Thy Godlike crime was to be kind" ("Prometheus," l. 35). This paradox recognizes that what appears as an unlawful theft from one perspective is a courageous act of liberation from another. One man's "theft" is another man's "rescue."

Acting against his mother's wishes, Eros first takes Psyche to his castle, then rescues her out of a deep sleep, marries her, and finally introduces her into a better world, the realm of the gods. During this process, Eros both rebels against the maternal and paternal principles and negotiates with them. He must achieve separation from the jealous mother and permission from the father to marry his beloved, who is transformed into a goddess in order that the marriage may be sanctioned; Psyche must be "translated," as it were, from one order of being into another. ("Translate" not only means "to express in another language"; in theology, it means to "convey to heaven without a natural death," and *The American Heritage Dictionary* also notes an archaic meaning as "to transport; enrapture.")

Eros's rescue of Psyche may serve as a model for Keats's relation to his poetic precursors. His poems negotiate the demands of both "mothers" and "fathers," and in so doing "rescue" the beloved by "translating" her into the order of the Law. This beloved, the Psyche figure, is many things, almost all of them traditionally belonging to "the line of evil": the feminine, the sensuous, the material. In terms of the strictly literary, the list includes romance, folklore, the ballad, and the host of writers represented by "Old Mother Radcliff." The

"fathers" with whom Keats negotiates are the familiar trinity of Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton. Psyche, one remembers, was believed to be a "new Aphrodite," thus exciting the goddess's jealousy and setting in motion the train of events leading to her union with Eros. Thus Eros awakens and marries a woman who is analogous to his mother, or worthy to be his mother. Keats's poetry, I suggest, similarly translates the "maternal" romance into the Law of the Father. "Mother Radcliff" is rescued at the same time that Madeline escapes with Porphyro.

Keats's two most "Gothic" works were composed in the early months of 1819—"The Eve of St. Agnes" in January and February, "La Belle Dame sans Merci" somewhat later. (The latter is first mentioned when he copies it into his letter to George and Georgiana dated April 21 or 28.⁶) Both poems were thus finished about the time he began the sequence of Great Odes; the "Ode to Psyche," according to Jack Stillinger, was "probably the earliest to be written" and "probably written toward the end of April 1819" (pp. 465, 466). As "Gothics," "La Belle Dame" belongs more nearly to the Male and "The Eve" to the Female Gothic traditions (though neither is completely conventional). "La Belle Dame" describes a hero afflicted with supernatural forces and apparently doomed to an early, tragic death. "The Eve" eschews the supernatural and espouses the possibility of earthly happiness. But in using these two traditions—these models of subjectivity—Keats also revises them; "La Belle Dame," a Gothic "lyrical ballad," exposes its own cultural premises, while "The Eve" luxuriates in the materiality of a language that partially dispels the Law of the Father.⁷

"Writing in Gothic," Keats goes straight to the heart of the matter: to inscribe the name of the mother. To name is "to realize," to admit into the Symbolic the existence of a body and a self. But the body of the mother is what the "*nom du père*" forbids and represses. "The Eve" and "La Belle Dame" name, as a "subject" both thematic and grammatical, a trace of the repressed mother occupying the periphery of the Symbolic. Within the texts the name appears as a kind of "macaronic pun" in the words *belle dame* and "beldame." The first, exotically French and foreign, supplies both the title of the ballad and its climax, the name that "dispels" the Lady—the magic words that apparently cause her to disappear. Within "St. Agnes" this phrase appears as the name of the song Porphyro sings to Madeline as part of the ritual (l. 292). In this poem the word "beldame," a crone or hag, occurs twice,

both times to describe Angela—Madeline's nurse and Porphyro's "fairy godmother" (ll. 90, 139).⁸

In Modern English, a "beldame" is an old woman, especially one who is "loathsome or ugly." According to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, the syllable "bel" is an Old French prefix indicating respect, related to "belle," or "beautiful." The *OED*, however, specifically cautions that "beldame" is *not* derived from "belle dame" (however ironic and appropriate—indeed attractive—that identification might be). In fact, just as "bel" is a marker of respect rather than an indicator of beauty, "dame" means not "lady" but "mother," as in the Modern English "dam." (In Middle English, "beldame" means "grandmother.") In Modern French, "bel" remains as an alternative to "beau," the masculine form of the adjective "beautiful," and a word which, unlike most French adjectives, comes before the noun it modifies. If, as Freud asserts in "The Uncanny," the prefix "un" is the mark of repression, one might speculate that the masculine "bel" when placed before "dame" implies a "de-feminizing" of the word; the "beldame," as crone or death aspect of the feminine principle (the last phase of the moon), has been implicitly granted masculine power, echoing the pre-Oedipal fantasy of the phallic mother. Or this "preface indicating respect" could hint at a superstitious desire for magical deception or propitiation. ("Respect" may spring from love *or* fear.)

This coincidence of "belle dame" and "beldame" in Keats's Gothic (like the troubling similarity in *The Monk* of Agnes and the Bleeding Nun who haunts and horrifies Raymond de la Cisternas) might seem to suggest that the female principle is the familiar "other" of Male Gothic, the good/bad, beautiful/terrible, seductive/frightening, bride/mother/crone whom Robert Graves calls "The White Goddess," "lady of death and inspiration." Graves discusses "La Belle Dame," along with Coleridge's Night-mare Life-in-Death, as examples of the uniquely authentic muse. Feminist readings of the poem have generally taken this identification for granted. In an essay entitled "Harassing the Muse," for instance, Karen Swann has argued that the Knight at Arms is the all-too-familiar patriarchal subject, projecting his own "meaning" on his experience of this "other," this "fairy's child."

Paraphrasing Swann, Anne Mellor describes this act as "appropriating and silencing her actions."⁹ This reading, however, rests on the assumption that the belle dame is a "mortal woman and that she has, however ambivalently and ambiguously, offered the Knight or wretched wight the chance to experience a reciprocated love."¹⁰ But

surely this is a large and debatable assumption? Lurking behind it is a version of the Realist bias and its concomitant premises about poetic language. Why should we take it for granted that this poem concerns “reality”—that is, the world of consciousness and its objects—however disguised or “romanticized”? Certainly the poem may be read as Swann and Mellor do, as a familiar expression of misogyny; in fact, the Symbolic *encourages* us to read it in that way. I want to argue, however, that the poem also exposes the harsh repressions of the Symbolic, and the consequent inadequacies of language to express the unspeakable: a discovery genuinely uncanny.

The ambiguities of “La Belle Dame sans Merci” are infamous: Who is the interlocutor? Is the Knight indeed dying? Why did the lady “weep and sigh full sore”? Why did the Knight close her eyes with “kisses four”? Why does she disappear when the Knight dreams that he hears her name? Was she in fact a “fairy’s child”? Did she poison him with “honey wild and manna dew”? Who are the “kings and princes,” and why are they all “death-pale”? Why do they speak first in French and then in English? Why is this narrative so haunting?

The Knight’s story is at least partly a dream, and it may be that the dream awakening him “On the cold hill’s side” was a dream within a dream, and the larger story he relates a dream as well; as the Knight struggles to articulate his experience in retrospect, this puzzling, fragmented narrative certainly seems like a dream. Dreamlike, too, are the links between the poem and its biographical contexts, such as Keats’s presumed unconscious feelings, which probably included frustration over his unconsummated passion for Fanny and over his own vulnerability to consumption. Nor can one see clear connections between the poem’s literary contexts, which are both complex and impossible to specify. As Stillinger notes in his edition,

scholars have proposed a considerable array of sources in Spenser, Shakespeare, Burton, and other Renaissance writers, H. F. Cary’s translation of Dante, several specific ballads (e.g., *Thomas the Rymer*) as well as the ballad tradition in general, and a number of contemporary writers. *The Faerie Queene* is the work most often cited. (P. 463)

To acknowledge that Keats was “writing in Gothic,” however, suggests that “reading” does not demand answers to all these questions; it may be that the chief significance of the questions lies in their very proliferation. The ambiguities and gaps in the Knight’s story can suggest not his desire to force a phallocentric Symbolic “meaning”

onto the experience, but rather the inadequacies of language (now his only resource) to describe the indescribable. He finds himself "bewildered" in a strange world defined by absence (spring, warmth, birds, and the Lady have all vanished). Life itself seems to be waning. The Knight's richly ambiguous and inconclusive story hints at the very opposite of what Mellor calls his "defining the *belle dame* as cold, cruel, lacking in compassion—in modern parlance a 'bitch'" so that he may "tell his story."¹¹ His tale signifies a resistance to that definition in which he has been instructed: his unwillingness to be absorbed into the "Name of the Father." That is why he "loiters" (according to the interlocutor), or (as he puts it) "sojourns" here, at the point of separation between the two realms—those of dream and waking, of the lady and the fathers, of unmediated sensation and of words.

Like *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, a precursor "lyrical ballad," "La Belle Dame" uses Gothic to narrate the prehistory of a speaking subject within the patriarchal Symbolic. Keats's use of narrative frames is as subtle, if less elaborate, than Coleridge's. The unnamed interlocutor who asks the opening questions occupies a position similar to the wedding guest's, as he apparently belongs to an ordinary, everyday, "commonsense" world in which the ailing do not linger outside in the cold when "the sedge is withered from the lake, / And no birds sing." The Knight, like the Mariner, "embodies" meaning in the feminine, "hysterical" mode: his brow and cheek, as "lily" and "rose," indeterminate partake of nature, and these flowers, furthermore, are the tropes conventional for ballad *heroines*. Like the Mariner who paradoxically represents the repressed maternal, the Knight (night?) is also an envoy or legate of the other: of darkness, mystery, death.

The narrative frame also implies a Symbolic "frame of reference"; the first speaker assumes that conditions have causes, that behavior has reasons; he demands that the Knight account for his situation. But the Knight could also be merely talking to himself, the first speaker representing a barely formed self-consciousness, the alienation of the speaking subject that is concerned with how this self appears to other selves. The questioner may thus be the Knight's own "voice of reason" in several senses of that word. If so, the disjunctions between teller and tale, speaker and listener, express a struggle to accommodate that most characteristic rule of the Symbolic, the principle of causality. The Knight answers the questions, however, not by explaining (by describing a pattern of cause and effect), but by telling a story. And like the Mariner's, his tale is baffling, disconcerting. Although we know more

about him when the story is done, we have difficulty "making sense" of what he has said.

Like the Mariner's "There was a ship," the Knight's story begins quite abruptly, with a first premise: "I met a lady in the meads." Then we read a sequence resembling a narrative, but having no internal indications of *causality*, either external or internal: "I made a garland . . ."; "She look'd at me as she did love"; "I set her on my pacing steed"; "She found me roots of relish sweet"; "She took me to her elfin grot"; "There I shut her wild wild eyes"; "There she lulled me asleep."

These events not only lack a clear pattern of cause and effect; the series also (almost designedly) seems to frustrate the reader's tentative efforts to construct a more familiar, "sensible," kind of narrative from these materials. Significantly, the two characters, the "I" and the Lady, are alternately active and passive, confusing our attempts to intuit motives for their behavior. The earlier stanzas are fairly evenly divided between the Knight's "I met" and "she was"; "I made," "She look'd at me . . . and made sweet moan"; "I set her on my pacing steed." But having done these things, the Knight insinuates a causal relation to the loss of consciousness that follows her song. In the next two stanzas the Lady becomes increasingly specific in her activities, and his descriptive language more concrete. "She found me roots . . ."; "Sure in language strange she said"; "She took me to her elfin grot, / And there she wept and sigh'd full sore." This activity is juxtaposed with the Knight's own increasingly complex agency ("I shut her wild wild eyes"), and the Lady responds by lulling him to sleep, as he explicitly says, an event that echoes (and perhaps elucidates) her earlier "Fairy's song." Awakening from the dream that this sleep brings, the Knight finds that the Lady has disappeared. Now the poem shifts to the relation between the insistently repeated "I" (six times in the remaining sixteen lines) and "they," this "death-pale" community of princes, kings, and warriors.

The first two stanzas of the Knight's story contain no references to language or even to sound. They describe gestures, garlands, and their perfume associated with a female body ("fragrant zone").¹² Like *The Rime*, the Knight's story also intimates the process of movement toward language and consciousness. Beginning with an unmotivated, unexplained, and more-or-less unlocated encounter with the lady (he simply becomes aware of her), the narrative recounts a sequence of events that may imply the disorganized experience of an inchoate subject. The Lady's first action ("She looked at me as she did love / And made sweet moan") suggests the pre-Oedipal infant's experience of the

mother's gaze, which is combined with a first consciousness of sound. That the moan is "sweet," however, is obviously metonymic, derived from his sensuous experience of "fragrance" and the soothing onomatopoeia of the word "moan." In the next stanza, the "moan" becomes a "fairy's song," which causes him to lose consciousness: he "nothing else saw all day long." (His "pacing steed" is very much like a rocking horse.)

Next the Knight associates the Lady with food, food which echoes her earlier qualities of "sweetness" and "wildness": "roots of relish sweet, / And honey wild and manna dew." This "baby food" is pleasant, if a trifle bland, indeterminately solid and liquid. (One might also guess that the word "manna" barely escapes being "mama"—that is, "manna dew" is "mother's milk" and in retrospect "meads" may hint at the inebriating beverage made from honey as well as flowery meadows.) This experience of the actually oral, eating, is accompanied by the Knight's first allusion to language: "And sure in language strange she said / I love thee true." Here we reach the area so fascinating to male Romantic poets, the fantasy of wordless communication. The concept of "language" and the notion that these articulate sounds "mean" something has emerged in the not-yet-subject's perceptions. In describing the Lady's language, the "I" is at the border between "feeling" as physical sensation and "feeling" as emotion. But her language is not yet his (and indeed, her language *never* will be his). Yet his faith in the Lady's goodness and love seem to have emerged by a kind of associative logic: he has experienced only pleasant physical sensations in her presence so far. Though feminist critics in particular have emphasized the bad faith implicit in that word "sure" as a sign of the Knight's wilful blindness to the other's desires, one may equally read it as a poignant reassurance to himself of the authenticity of his memory, now made dubious by the language of the kings and princes. ("Could a being *named* 'La Belle Dame sans Merci' *really* have loved me?" *Surely* in her strange language she said, "I love thee true!")

In the "elfin grot" the Lady's behavior becomes even more conventionally maternal—she "lulled him to sleep"; and there he "dreams." Again as in *The Rime*, the ability to dream implies that the self is being organized into its "mature" structure of conscious and unconscious. When the Lady sang, the speaker merely lost touch with external sensations. But now he dreams, and in dreams he first hears meaningful language. That the first words of the "pale kings and princes" are French imitates the experience of growing linguistic com-

petence. French is a “language strange” to one whose mother tongue is English, just as any language is “foreign” before one can speak it. His dream makes it clear that the “mother tongue” is really the “father tongue.” They speak one sentence; they *sentence* him to death. The grammatical subject of this sentence is in French, foreign, but meaningful, and extremely mellifluous language. “Mellifluous” is appropriate, because it comes from the Latin *mel*, “honey,” and *fluere*, to flow, the linguistic equivalent of the Lady’s “honey wild and manna dew.” The second line, the predicate, of the fathers’ sentence appears as an appropriately archaic and hissing sibilant English: “Hath thee in thrall.” This strategy suggests what the passage from the Semiotic to the Symbolic must be like: from the experience of language as sound and then as meaningful sound. Recognizing the archaic mode of the English portion of the sentence also raises another question: should the Middle English significance of “dame” as “mother” also be heard in the phrase “belle dame”?

At any rate, to spell out the lady’s identity dispels her; upon hearing a meaningful sentence, the Knight awakens to a world of absence, silence, cold, and death, and the belle dame (or beldame) has vanished: the *material* has been repressed. And yet, while the Knight’s story also shows that while words heard and understood as words cause the Lady to disappear, this event is the climax of a subtle process of separation already in progress. For instance, the Knight’s behavior in the elfin grot already implies a movement toward separation. When the Lady “weeps and sighs full sore,” he shuts her “wild wild eyes / With kisses four.” This action might be construed as an attempt to comfort her. But comforting may be secondary to an impulse simply to shut her out (or up). Since eyes and seeing so often are a metaphor for selfhood or subjectivity, his shutting *her* eyes suggests, among other things, his desire to establish a boundary between these two whose borders have hitherto been so confused. Feminine tears are both threateningly fluid and also imply the maternal subjectivity that threatens masculine identity. Although Keats joked in his letter to George and Georgiana that “four” is an even number and a modestly restrained one (he could have said “a score”), it is also the archetypal number of “Mother” Nature: four seasons, four elements, four points of the compass. The Knight’s action, therefore, hints that in beginning to distinguish between self and “other,” other “I”s—and perhaps especially the mother’s “wild wild eyes”—must be shut off, up, and out.

This gentle and affectionate—almost elegiac—gesture, is, however,

violently reinforced by the word of the fathers. The name of the mother, "La Belle Dame sans Merci," is a *coup de grâce*: at once a killing blow, and from the perspective of the kings and princes, a merciful one, a necessary warning to the Knight. The name the Knight hears is also frighteningly associated with their ghastly faces: "I saw pale kings and princes too / Pale warriors, death pale were they all"; "I saw their starv'd lips in the gloam / With horrid warning gaped wide." The Knight now perceives lips, the organs of speech, rather than eyes, in the faces of others—now many rather than one. They are the picture of suffering through absence. In conjunction with this horrifying picture (the only hint of "the object" in this narrative) the Lady's half-foreign, half-understood name shocks the Knight "awake"—into consciousness, subjectivity; "And I awoke and found *me* here / On the cold hill's side" (emphasis added).

The language also reveals something like a Kristevan sign of the "poetic": the prominence of the long "i." This is frequently a rhyme sound (e.g., "child/wild") and is underlined by the repetition of the adjective "wild," the pronoun "I," and the noun "eye." According to Kristeva, calling attention to the materiality of language signifies the presence of the Semiotic, or the genotext. The Knight's story (and "knight" contains another long "i") concerns at one level the emergence of the "I"—the creation of the speaking subject. Thus, the famously ambiguous line "I shut her wild wild eyes" almost obsessively foregrounds the sound of the "I," as if to imply that the sign is emerging out of the matrix of the Semiotic into the Symbolic.

In this context, the word "pale," which echoes through the poem, is also extraordinarily rich in connotations. "Pale" means "whitish, pallid," "feeble, weak"; it may also mean "a stake or pointed stick, picket—i.e., that which can create an enclosure or fence; the lost Lady is now "beyond the pale." Finally, the word is a variant of "paleo," meaning "ancient, prehistoric, early, primitive." The Knight's story is his own prehistory, haltingly articulated—*his* first performance as a speaking subject.

I have emphasized this poem's similarities to *The Rime*. But the differences between the two are equally significant. Each poem belongs to what I have called "Male Gothic" because the narrating "I" emerges into the Symbolic with a damning name for the female, the "(m)other": "the Night-Mare Life-in-Death," "La Belle Dame sans Merci." But *The Rime* suggests that while the horror of the experience propels the Mariner into an endlessly unsatisfied quest to tell his story

definitively, the fundamental dynamic of the patriarchal Symbolic itself remains unquestioned. The Knight's history, however, implicitly exposes the "archetype" of the "fatal woman." It shows that in the speaker's *experience* she was good and pleasant; it is not the Lady herself but losing her that is painful, and that loss is effected by the "*nom du père*"—the name that the warriors, kings, and princes impose. These types also represent the patriarchal principles of class hierarchy—"kings and princes"—and the heroism of conflict: "pale warriors." Most important, the Knight does not himself name the lady "*la belle dame sans merci*"; in trying to answer the question, he simply repeats what he has been told by those who have the power to name. The "pale kings and princes," not the Knight, insist that she is "*La Belle Dame sans Merci*," a different matter altogether.

The poem's familiar ambiguities mark the partial failure of repression. Paradoxically, however, Keats's poetic "rescue" occurs in and through that failure, which is the record embodied in the text. In telling his story, the Knight does his best to render the unspeakable, a process that is ordinarily forgotten, in language not designed to accommodate it. Thus "*La Belle Dame sans Merci*" builds a monument to the experience of bliss with the feminine, bliss forbidden and effaced by the Law of the Fathers. At the same time, the text is only partially successful, and also enacts the power of that Law, for readers tend to hear what they have been trained to hear, expect to hear: "Here's another *femme fatale*." In part 1 I argued that romance conventions evoke that state just prior to the acquisition of language, where Symbolic structures have arisen but do not yet control experience entirely. Therefore it is appropriate that the Knight's experiences should be expressed in romance, ballad, and Gothic—"overlapping" genres evoking Semiotic pressures on the Symbolic. Both this poem and *The Rime* portray characters who exist only insofar as they speak; their subjectivity *is* the text, the text their subjectivity. Further, both of these works express nothing more than their protagonists' remembered experiences of what is usually repressed. These experiences consist of (in Freud's words) "an alteration of his ego which can only be described as a setting up of the object inside the ego." As a linguistic *artifact*, the poem not only reproduces Gothic romance in ballad form: it is also Spenserian and Shakespearean, as if in "setting up his object" the speaker has exploited the resources of the fathers to confer a literal authority upon the real "mother tongue."

As Stillingner observes, critics have found a multiplicity of allusions

to other texts in Keats's brief narrative. It is impossible to see here any other single poem or even poet as a definitive "source" or "influence" in "La Belle Dame." But two concrete examples of the kind of "rescue" I've been talking about may illustrate this relationship of source to poem. One concerns the lyric "I," the other, the behavior of the belle dame. Though the relationship has not been much analyzed, Keats's "landscape of the self" in this poem owes a good deal to Shakespeare's poignant Sonnet 73, "That time of year thou may'st in me behold." This sonnet consists of three quatrains elaborating three metaphors for approaching death: the speaker compares himself to late autumn, to the minutes after the sun has set, and finally to a coal resting on a bed of ashes, "Consumed with that which it was nourished by" (l. 12).

In contrast to the tentative, bewildered condition of Keats's speaker, Shakespeare's lyric "I" is strong—almost imperial—even as it contemplates its approaching extinction. The sonnet moves from concrete description to abstract, philosophical language. The conventional final couplet not only moves from self to the other implied from the beginning ("That time of year *thou* may'st in me behold"), but also determines the conclusion to be drawn: the listener's or reader's response to the condition he has described: "This thou perceiv'st that makes thy love more strong / To love that well which thou must leave ere long." This lyric speaker is in control of language and uses language to control others, including that of his readers. He appropriates nature to the purposes of self-presentation.

After comparing himself to an autumnal landscape of almost palpable absence, of visible silence ("boughs which shake against the cold, / Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang"), Shakespeare's speaker concludes the third quatrain with the most abstract, complex, and paradoxical (the most characteristically "Symbolic") line of the poem. He compares himself to a coal dying on its bed of ashes, "Consumed with that which it was nourished by."

"La Belle Dame" "realizes" this latter phrase of Shakespeare's, which is a terrible paradox for life itself. The Knight could well embody the speaker of the sonnet as he appears to the silent listener ("thou"); and he is "consumed" ("obsessed with," "being destroyed by") that which nourished him—the Lady. Keats's ballad "realizes" the lyric self that speaks Shakespeare's sonnet: it is not *like* the autumn landscape, it *is* that landscape. It also unfolds the poem's chief paradox: it shows us what it is to be "consumed with that which it was nourished by." "La

Chapter Eighteen

Belle Dame” contains a buried multiple pun on “consumption” as disease, as a psychological and a physical condition.

The most puzzling detail of the Lady’s behavior, her weeping, similarly constitutes a reading of another precursor, *The Faerie Queene*. Here Spenser describes Acrasia and her lover in their own “elfin grot,” the Bower of Bliss (book 2, canto 12):

And oft inclining downe with kisses light,
For feare of waking him, his lips bedewed,
And through his humid eyes did sucke his spright,
Quite molten into lust and pleasure lewd;
Wherewith she sighed soft, as if his case she rewd.
(2.12.74, ll. 5–9)

This passage describes a typical “belle dame sans merci,” the Circe-like Acrasia who seduces her victims and then turns them into pigs. We see her through the eyes of Guyon and the Palmer, who find her in her bower with her latest companion. Keats’s description of the “elfin grot” both echoes and reverses this situation. In Spenser, the lady is awake, kissing the eyes of the sleeping knight. She sighs and weeps, though softly.

Oddly, Acrasia’s demeanor here is also subtly, unsettlingly maternal. She watches over her sleeping victim with a care, a tenderness, usually associated with mothers. In a parody of the mother/child relation, however, she is the one taking nourishment, a vampirelike sucking (through his eyes) of her lover’s “spright” which has melted into lust through her powers.¹³ This situation may also remind one of *Dracula*, when Van Helsing and his helpers open Mina’s bedroom door to find her sucking Dracula’s blood. Although the observers here, as in *Dracula*, represent the principle of light, law, and masculine “right,” Spenser dares to imply the possibility that Acrasia feels pity for her victim (“as if his case she rewd”). True, the idea is displaced into a “speculative” simile, but it is stated. Whatever Acrasia’s feelings, Spenser makes it clear that the young man, named “Verdant,” is unmanned by this relationship: “His warlike armes, the idle instruments / Of sleeping praise were hong upon a tree . . .”; “[I]n lewd loues and wastfull luxuree, / His dayes, his goods, his bodie he did spend” (2.12.80, ll. 1–2; 7–8). Like the interlocutor of “La Belle Dame,” Spenser’s narrator apparently subscribes to the work ethic; fatal women are fatal because they distract men from the real business of life, war and profit.

But this moment of luxurious suspense is the last in book 2; having glimpsed this primal scene, Guyon sets to work, capturing Acrasia, releasing her victims, and razing the Bower to the ground with a horrifying, "pittiless" efficiency. Verdant is instructed in the error of his ways by an enlivening dose of "counsell sage" (2.12.82, l. 9). Critics of *The Faerie Queene* have puzzled over this decidedly intemperate action performed by the Knight of Temperance. No doubt various doctrinal matters have an important influence on events at this point. But the episode also expresses a familiar reaction of the patriarchal psyche. (One might consider "Puritanism" as an institutional symptom of patriarchal anxiety, as well.) Guyon's actions typify the patriarchal need for absolutes—above all, control of the mother's body and desires. He seems to agree with the "pale kings and princes" that "la belle dame" must be, if not destroyed, at least made to disappear.

Guyon and the Palmer personify a kind of Freudian superego—or conscience—whereas the Knight's interlocutor, even if an aspect of himself, is merely the ego: a "consciousness" who overhears the fathers name the mother. The Knight's narrative, in rearranging the situation and the characters in this family romance, exposes and revises that Law. The part of himself observing (in the role of Guyon and the Palmer) remembers rather than judges; hence the lady cannot be made to disappear so utterly. Instead, she remains as the subject of his narrative, the necessary other or object of his self-creating speech about this process. (Although the beginnings of the Mariner's story and Keats's tale are similar in their abruptness, the Mariner begins with a sense of isolation; the Knight with an experience of relation.) Her weeping and sighing move from a kind of speculative simile ("*as if* his fate she rewd") to an action implying that she has feelings, and demanding interpretation (indeed, I first typed "sighing" as "signing"). These changes in the pattern make it impossible to interpret Lady, Knight, and Law so neatly. This time, she cannot be banished, labeled with a damning name.

In Keats's poem, the Knight could not keep the Belle Dame from disappearing, but he does refuse to let her go entirely. He replaces the questioner's term "loiter" with "sojourn"—suggesting that among other things he is learning the power of words to control reality. His clearest sign of resistance to his loss, however, is the poem itself, a monument he creates out of the very language that is the root of his loss. Furthermore, he builds this "monument" (this "precipitate of [a] lost ego-cathexis") from a combination of materials—the maternal Gothic

and the paternal words of the high tradition. Among other things, this structure illustrates both the flexibility and the duplicity of the Symbolic. The Knight resists, rebels, by speaking the name of the mother, even though he will, almost inevitably, be misunderstood, coerced by the fathers into confirming their Law.

As Jungian critics have observed, "La Belle Dame" is rich in archetypes; it concerns a journey to the underworld and a dangerous trafficking with the otherworld, the realm of faerie. More specifically, however, it recalls the myth of Persephone (and especially Persephone as remembered by Milton, who describes Eve as gathering flowers in the field, "herself a fairer flower"). It is Persephone's box of beauty ointment that Psyche is sent to find in her last, most difficult labor. In part 2 I argued that this task marks Psyche's final preparation for consciousness, because upon returning to earth, she begins to imagine how she will now appear to Eros, as an "other" to another. The questions posed to (or by) the Knight at the beginning of "La Belle Dame" (upon emerging from the "elfin grot") represent a similar stage of development. Like Psyche he finds himself back on earth with proof of his journey, but instead of a box of beauty ointment, he has brought back a name, that of "La Belle Dame sans Merci," and also a whole series of memories that call that name into question.

Finally, one may discern a third, shadowy myth presiding over the text of "La Belle Dame"—that of Orpheus. This archetypal lyric poet's beloved Eurydice was also gathering flowers in a field when fatally bitten by a serpent. Orpheus follows her into the underworld and by the power of his singing persuades the king of darkness to release her. He does not succeed in restoring her to earth, but his heroic endeavor keeps her memory alive. Writing in Gothic, Keats makes a heroic attempt to name the mother—to bring back the Lady, the (m)other—even though, like Eurydice, she is irretrievably lost. His poetic language, however, marks the place where she disappeared.

"THE EVE OF ST. AGNES": ROMANCE AND RAPTURE

In "The Eve of St. Agnes" themes only latent in "La Belle Dame" are manifest. The poem describes the rescue of the maiden from her monstrous prison. Ever since Jack Stillinger published his powerful and influential reading of the poem in 1961, critics have argued about the nature of this rescue. Stillinger urges us to read "realistically," to see Porphyro as engaged in a highly dubious "stragem" which includes

some unpleasantly voyeuristic moments as well as something uncomfortably close to rape. Madeline and Porphyro, he argues, are as much antagonists as Belinda and the Baron (in Pope's *Rape of the Lock*). Poor Madeline, he suggests, is one of Keats's tragically awakened dreamers, who might have been better off if left in peace by the almost Satanic Porphyro. Thus it is rather ironic that in the most extensive reading of the text ever published—a poststructuralist affirmation of Stillinger's skepticism—Marjorie Levinson castigates Keats for the narcissistic and regressive nature of his fantasy.¹⁴

But both these readings, provocative as they are, are founded, it seems to me, on a mistaken premise: that the "reality" against which the poem must be measured is the familiar, traditional, and phallogocentric version of Western culture. Stillinger tends to assume that Madeline and Porphyro must be engaged in the familiar battle of the sexes, while Levinson assumes that the Freudian conception of sexuality applies to Porphyro (and his creator). I want to try to read the poem from the opposite perspective: to see the ways in which it subverts those assumptions about "reality" so deeply implicated at all levels of culture. If, as I have argued, Gothic conventions represent disturbances in the Symbolic, the "Law of the Father," tracing Keats's debts to the tradition may provide the vantage point for such a reading.

Given Keats's acknowledgment of Ann Radcliffe as he writes "The Eve," it is surprising to see that his story has strong affinities with *The Monk*. These go beyond similarities of situation: for instance, Ambrosio, the Monk, who has fallen in love with Antonia, gains access to the maiden with help from the demonic Matilda. Her bough of silver myrtle causes locked doors to fly open and insures that Antonia will not waken while Ambrosio has his way with her. That night, Ambrosio takes the bough and goes to Antonia's house. As he is contemplating the beautiful girl asleep, Elvira, her mother, enters the room. The Monk, frantic with fear that he will be discovered, kills her. Several days later, Matilda instructs him to steal a soporific draught from the convent of St. Clare, to administer it to Antonia, and to carry her away to the vaults, where he may enjoy his victim at his leisure. All is done as Matilda advises; when the terrified Antonia awakens the Monk's lust is heightened, and he rapes her. As rescuers arrive, he stabs her fatally. Antonia dies in her beloved Lorenzo's arms, indicating that "since she was deprived of honour and branded with shame, Death was to her a blessing: She could not have been his Wife, and that hope being denied

her, She resigned herself to the Grave without one sigh of regret" (vol. 3, chap. 4).

These parallels might seem too vague (or perhaps merely too conventional as Gothic events) to be particularly significant. But Lewis's narrative contains a series of verbal echoes suggesting that as Keats composed, he was remembering *The Monk*. The following narrative is a patchwork of such citations:

He ascended the steps leading to [Antonia's] House. No sooner did he touch the door with the silver Myrtle, than it flew open. . . . He entered, and the door closed after him of its own accord. Guided by the moon-beams, He proceeded up the staircase with slow and cautious steps. He looked round him every moment. . . . He reached the door of Antonia's chamber. He stopped, and listened. All was hushed within. . . . The Ravisher stepped on, and found himself in the chamber, where slept the innocent Girl, unconscious how dangerous a Visitor was drawing near her Couch. The door closed after him, and the Bolt shot again into its fastening. Ambrosio advanced with precaution. He took care that not a board should creak under his foot (p. 299). . . . He breathed thrice upon the silver Myrtle, pronounced over it Antonia's name, and laid it upon her pillow. . . . No sooner was the enchantment performed than He considered her to be absolutely in his power. . . .

He now ventured to cast a glance upon the sleeping Beauty. A single Lamp, burning before the Statue of St. Rosolia, shed a faint light through the room, and permitted him to examine the lovely Object before him (p. 300). . . . He resolved not to delay for one instant longer the accomplishment of his wishes, and hastily proceeded to tear off those garments, which impeded the gratification of his lust. [Antonia's mother Elvira enters the room] "It is no dream!" She cried; "it is really Ambrosio, who stands before me!" (p. 301). . . . "This slumber cannot be natural!" cried the amazed Elvira. "Hear me for one moment, Lady!" cried the Monk . . . "By all that is sacred and holy, I swear that your Daughter's honor is still unviolated" (p. 302). . . . [He strangles Elvira.] The blood was chilled in her veins; Her heart had forgotten to beat, and her hands were stiff and frozen. Ambrosio beheld before him that once noble and majestic form, now become a Corse, cold, senseless, and disgusting (p. 304). . . .

He almost fancied that He beheld Elvira's visionary form reclining upon the Bed (p. 338). . . . [He administers the soporific to Antonia and takes her to the vaults of St. Clare.] Gradually He felt the bosom which rested against his, glow with returning warmth. . . . At length She opened her eyes, but still oppressed and bewildered by the effects of the strong opiate, She closed them again immediately. . . . He caught her in rapture to his bosom, and closely pressed his lips to hers. . . . "Where am I?" She said abruptly. "How came I here? Where is my Mother? Methought, I saw her! Oh! a dream, a dreadful dreadful dream told me.

. . . But where am I?" (p. 381). The Ravisher threw himself by her side; He clasped her to his bosom almost lifeless with terror, and faint from struggling. . . . He gradually made himself Master of her person, and desisted not from his prey, till He had accomplished his crime and the dishonor of Antonia (pp. 383–84). . . .

"What would you more?" She said with timidity: "Is not my ruin compleated? Am I not undone, undone for ever? Let me depart." . . . "What? [the Monk replied] That you may denounce me to the world. . . . Wretched girl, you must stay here with me!" (pp. 384–85).

The narrative of the Monk's rape of Antonia eerily foreshadows Keats's very different tale. The Monk's is a rape in two senses, for the word is derived from the Latin *rapere*, which means "to steal." Ambrosio steals her away from home and through his sexual attack steals her honor. This story makes sense only within the familiar patriarchal framework involving notions of women as property, and sexual honor as a synecdoche for her value. In this context, "The Eve" is clearly a very different kind of story. Keats's version of this plot material is framed in such a way as to rewrite "rape" as "rapture" and to explore the spaces between the "belle dame" and the "beldame." If "The Eve" is emphatically not in the Male Gothic tradition, however, neither is it a Female, or Radcliffean, Gothic.

As we have seen, the "frame narrative" of "La Belle Dame" subtly implies the problem of "framing" in many ways. It is the nature of the Symbolic, of language, to have and need "frames" in the sense of structures as a verb; "to construct by putting together the various parts of," "to conceive or design," or "to put into words." Thus any narrative involves many kinds of "framing," whether the author dramatizes that fact by using a narrative frame or not. But "La Belle Dame" implies that the Knight has been "framed" in the colloquial sense as well. Not only is the evidence "rigged" to imply that he has done something he has not—that is, declare that the Lady is "La Belle Dame sans Merci." It may be also that the "pale Kings and princes" have framed the Lady by naming her as they do—in effect declaring that since Mother Nature is not always nurturing, she is cruel and pitiless.

The complexity of such framing is also crucial in "The Eve of St. Agnes." But whereas in "La Belle Dame" the frames are at last successful in constraining and destroying, in this poem Keats does just the opposite: he constantly reminds us of them only to discard or avoid them. Such "frames," which function at all levels of language, and are particularly dense in literary language, may be discerned in "The Eve" in Keats's narrative technique, and in his evocation of various genres.

These frames he highlights in order to discard, sometimes quite ostentatiously. In his use of the simile, of puns, and of synesthesia, he suggests the possibility of new “frames” within which to see the material he portrays. And by certain other techniques which have no names, he still further “frames” language itself; it becomes “Keatsian.”

The Beadsman marks the most comprehensive and most familiar of these framing techniques. He is the first human figure introduced (in the first stanza) and he disappears early, after the first line of the fourth. He reappears in the last stanza, in the two last, ambiguous lines. Depending on one’s reading of the word “slept” (as literal or metaphorical), the narrator may tell us that the Beadsman slept that night, or that he died while the lovers escaped. He is associated with dark, cold, ashes, asceticism—and prayer, speech directed toward an absent and unseen father who never replies. In the context of the Gothic, he calls attention to the similarities between Madeline’s castle and the connotations of the castle in this tradition as a metaphor for the Law of the Father.¹⁵

The Beadsman’s presence in the first stanza, however, complicates another process of “framing” already initiated in the reader’s mind: that almost unconscious response to signals that the reader feels in beginning a new work—the sense of genre, of asking oneself, “What kind of work is this?” The poem begins, “St. Agnes Eve—Ah, bitter chill it was!” The pause after the first three words restating the title (with its medieval, folkloric connotations) and then the “Ah” suggest that the speaker is not so much telling a known story as conjuring it from thin air before our very eyes. The rest of the stanza (like much of the poem, at least until the appearance of Porphyro) moves seemingly by metonymic associations; one thing leads to another: St. Agnes Eve to cold to owl/hare/flock to numb fingers (cold) to Beadsman to rosary to chapel to castle to ballroom, and so on.

The particular generic frame within which we choose to read a work encourages us to see some of its aspects and to ignore others. The opening of “The Eve,” however, makes that choice quite complex. The Beadsman, denizen of the “dark ages,” would seem to belong with the title, and its connotations of Gothic romance.¹⁶ Yet recognition that the poem is written in Spenserian stanzas further complicates our judgment by evoking the world of high serious, as well as of popular, romance. Yet the first stanza’s concrete, tactile imagery sends a countersignal; this is a world of real cold and real suffering. In the narrative that ensues, evidence supporting all these generic hypotheses moves

from foreground to background and forward again. Sometimes the narrator reminds us of his power to conjure with such gestures as the dismissal of the guests: "These let us wish away, / And turn, sole-thoughted, to one Lady there" (ll. 41–42). Sometimes the descriptive details are so vivid that their "reality" seems scarcely an illusion: "He follow'd through a lowly arched way, / Brushing the cobwebs with his lofty plume" (ll. 109–10); "Out went the taper as she hurried in; / Its little smoke, in pallid moonshine, died" (ll. 199–200).

This problem of mixed or ambiguous generic signals also reappears in other modes throughout the text. Not only does the narrator modulate from realism to romance (of an indeterminate mode) as he begins his tale; in the course of the narrative he habitually raises other expectations grounded in genre and then ignores or escapes them. For instance, when Porphyro awakens Madeline, he says, "Awake, my love, arise." This phrase echoes the aubade tradition (to which Shakespeare also alludes in *Romeo and Juliet* when the lark signals that they must part after their one night together). The aubade conventionally implies a coming separation, however. The night has passed, day has come, and lovers must part. This is the outcome Madeline clearly fears when she is finally awake. But that is not what happens. Instead, Madeline and Porphyro leave together, perhaps to live happily ever after. Though Porphyro invokes Madeline in the language of Petrarchan conceit, he has an uncharacteristic, intensely practical attitude toward his love; he carries her away with him, simply removes her from the circumstances that prevent their being together, as if Romeo had taken Juliet with him into exile. Similarly, though in a slightly different mode of revision, the scene where Porphyro makes love to Madeline is, in patriarchal imagery, the scene of her "deflowering," or loss of virginity. Significantly, however, in Keats's description it is a *flowering*: "Into her dream he melted, as the rose / Blendeth its odour with the violet."

Both aubade and Petrarchan conceit are also minor forms associated with the romance (as "love story") that also shadows this tale: *Romeo and Juliet*. "The Eve"'s affinities with this tragedy are obvious and familiar. One might also observe that *The Monk* presents a dimension of the play Keats omits: Friar Lawrence's plot to give Juliet the potion that will make her appear dead, and the final scene in the tomb. The allusion has also led some to argue on the basis of Shakespeare that Madeline and Porphyro must die in the storm. But again, the function of the allusion is not simple, and must be read in the context of the abrupt change of tone with which Keats concludes his poem.

The last stanza constitutes the clearest example of the poem's characteristic generic instability or manipulation. According to Richard Woodhouse, Keats said that he was aiming for "a change of sentiment." But the change comes not only through content ("bringing Old Angela in . . . only dead, still & ugly"); it is more profoundly effected by the reframing that occurs. If readers have been wavering between the conviction that they are reading a romantic piece of realism or a realistic sort of romance, they are suddenly told that the narrative is even more remote: a kind of fairy tale. "Ay, ages long ago, / These lovers fled away into the storm" is very much a "Once upon a time," and one that further disconcerts the question of comedy and tragedy. Even if Madeline and Porphyro did survive that night and reached his home o'er the southern moors, still if it all took place so long ago then they are now long since dead. Keats reminds us that all *comedies* are eventually ended by a death as well, a reality the "frame" of comedy keeps us from seeing.

Since "interpretation" also involves a kind of fixing or framing, the interpreter constantly runs the risk of falling into such traps; but these are not necessarily the result of Keats's conscious attempt (deliberate, that is, in the mode of Henry James, who said he constructed another famously ambiguous Gothic, *The Turn of the Screw*, as "an amusette to trap the unwary"). It would be more accurate, I think, to say that the traps are created by Keats's allowing his poetic language to begin to follow somewhat novel rules. This text does not so much violate the familiar grammar of the Symbolic as ignore it. In "The Eve" other possibilities, usually repressed, become principles of order. The poem is not merely a kind of *écriture féminine* that subverts the old rules from within; rather, it begins to suggest alternative ones.

The first signals that some such process is at work appear in the various means by which the text seems self-consciously artificial. Not only does the narrator of "The Eve" direct our attention to the arbitrary nature of his own power; his characters also echo and reflect lesser versions of this "magic." The strength of Porphyro's desire leads Angela (of the "ivory-headed wand") to declare, "It shall be as thou wishest" (l. 172). The courage of Porphyro (whose name barely escapes being "Prospero" as well as echoing "Romeo") leads Angela to exclaim that he must be a magician himself— "Thou must hold water in a witch's sieve, / And be liege-lord of all the Elves and Fays, / 'To venture so" (ll. 120–22). And it is the strength of Madeline's desire (ultimately "realized") that is the motive force of the whole story. (In what other

canonical work is female desire so powerful, effective, and benign?) As Angela says, "My lady fair the conjuror plays" (l. 124). Other spells that are oddly echoed or evoked imply the power of language to transform, or indeed create, "reality," including the curses of Madeline's guardians who wish ill to Porphyro and his family, the various oaths sworn by Angela and Porphyro, and even the puzzling allusion to Merlin and "his demon" (presumably Vivien, who cast a spell that imprisoned the conjuror himself).

Certainly much good poetry "foregrounds the medium"—language. But in "The Eve" this technique becomes a theme; earlier I suggested that this poem luxuriates in the "materiality" of language. I would add that this "material" is quite literal. The narrative is not only *like* a tapestry, an observation which has long been a cliché in the criticism; Keats's narrative constantly points to its warp and its woof—the "text" as "textile."

For instance, a pattern of references to weaving runs throughout the poem. The first direct one occurs in Porphyro's exclamation: "O tell me, Angela, by the holy loom / Which none but the secret sisterhood may see, / When they St. Agnes' wool are weaving piously" (ll. 115–17). Later, trying to "redeem" the "steadfast spell" (of sleep) from his lady's eyes, Porphyro "mus'd awhile, entoil'd in woofed phantasies" (ll. 286–88). "Toil" ("something that binds or entangles") is etymologically related to "toile," web. Associated with these figurative uses of weaving is another pattern of allusions to actual textiles: "silk" and "silken"; "linen"; Madeline's "empty dress" (l. 245); the tablecloth of "woven crimson, gold, and jet" (l. 256); "The arras, rich with horseman, hawk, and hound" (l. 357); "the long carpets" that "rose along the gusty floor" (l. 360). Having noticed this cluster of associations, we find then even more remote details that appear to have affinities with this "thread" of associations: Keats's repetition of "frayed" and "affrayed," for instance, or the silent, "woolly" sheep of the opening stanza.

Many of these seem at first to exemplify the isolated, concrete detail that Keats uses so effectively to lend authenticity to a particular narrative moment. And some of them stand out as irrelevant, even peculiar: what, for instance, is the purpose of the detail about the weaving of wool on St. Agnes Eve? It seems to exist primarily for a fairly unfamiliar poetic purpose—to call attention to the principle of design at the expense of "meaning," to favor metonymy rather than metaphor. Not only does the narrator seem to create the setting and situation by an

associative process, as noted earlier; this effect is also supported by more subtle techniques.

The first of these is simply alliteration. In the first three stanzas, for instance, as Keats introduces us into the castle by means of the Beadsman, a sense of relationships within the text is also created by the repetition of *f*, *b*, and *p*. Within the space of twenty-seven lines, we hear thirteen words including an *f*, seven *bs*, and thirteen *ps*. They usually appear as the first sound, but occasionally in a later syllable ("barefoot" "reprieve"), suggesting the colored thread of an irregular tweed. The effect of this alliteration, furthermore, increases by means of Keats's favored mode of transition in the poem, the habit of repeating a key word from the previous stanza early in the next: "while his prayer he saith" (l. 9) and "His prayer he saith, this patient holy man" (l. 10); "Follow me, child . . ." (l. 108) and "He follow'd through a lowly arched way" (l. 109); "When they St. Agnes' wool are weaving piously" (l. 117) and "St. Agnes! Ah! it is St. Agnes' Eve" (l. 118) and so on.

And there are larger patterns of association woven throughout the text. Sometimes these take the form of repeated words that appear in different contexts, and as different parts of speech. For instance, the word "pious": in the first stanza, the Beadsman's breath is "like pious incense from a censer old" (l. 7); it reappears in stanza 13 as an adverb, "Where they St. Agnes' wool are weaving piously" (l. 117); in stanza 16, Angela uses a "negative transformation" of the word which also effects a change in its pronunciation, "A cruel man and impious thou art" (l. 140); finally, in stanza 23, Madeline leads Angela downstairs "with pious care" (l. 193). These examples are too far apart to be noticed as unifying principles on casual reading. But they create in the reader subliminal threads interconnecting all the characters.

By far the most complicated such chain of associations is the multitudinous series of references to speech of various kinds. There is the curious insistence on whispering that Marjorie Levinson remarked. Many other verbs denoting speech appear and reappear, including "told," "prayer," "said and sung," "chide," "declare," "implore," "speak," "execrations," "swear," "quoth," and so on. In general, this pattern emphasizes the theme of language as a means of affecting "reality," from the poet-narrator's creation of this world, which he then erases at the end, to Porphyro's declaration that the storm is "of haggard seeming but a boon indeed," to Old Lord Maurice's apparently ineffectual curses.

Similar patterns could be traced involving references to angels, cold, the word "sweet," and "silk" (which also participates in the even larger "textile" motif). I want to linger, however, for a moment over another of the most important threads—the word "rose," which appears and reappears in many guises. It makes an entrance in disguise, as it were, with "rosary" in stanza 1. It edges into the discourse as a simile in stanza 16 when Porphyro conceives his plan: "Sudden a thought came like a full-blown rose" (l. 136). In stanza 22, it is a verb ("St. Agnes' charmed maid, / Rose, like a missioned spirit" (ll. 193–94); as Made-line prays, "Rose-bloom fell on her hands" (l. 220); and as she sleeps, "Blinded alike from sunshine and from rain, / As though a rose should shut" (ll. 242–43). In the climactic stanza 36 it appears twice: "At these voluptuous accents he arose" (l. 317), and "as the rose / Blendeth its odour with the violet" (l. 320). And it reappears in stanzas 40 and 41, both times as a verb: "the long carpets rose along the gusty floor" (l. 360), and "The wakeful bloodhound rose" (l. 365).

The grammar of the Symbolic encourages us to ignore the similarities of "rose" as noun and "rose" as verb. Ordinarily when we hear the word as a verb for the motion of rising, we do not think of the flower or its color (permitted only when the word appears as noun or adjective). But Keats's technique here loosens the power of the "rules" to insure the richer effect. The word "rose" of course also belongs to a larger principle of order within the poem—canonized in a footnote in the Norton anthology—"in which the strong contrasts of heat and cold, crimson and silver, youth and age, revelry and austere penance, sensuality and chastity, life and death, hell and heaven, assume symbolic value."¹⁷ "Rose" is associated with the other synonyms for "crimson" ("gules," "vermeil") and so might seem to participate in the pervasive binary principle that appears to delimit this world.

But in fact, the "rose" pattern serves to undermine it, to dissolve the binary poles (or "melt" them—another word with an interesting history in the poem). M. H. Abrams's footnote to the Norton, quoted above, is acknowledging the characteristic of romance I discussed in part 1, the feeling it imparts that this is a world "where more is meant than meets the ear." I proposed that romance conventions tend to echo our experience of the world just prior to our full creation as speaking subjects, a world where everything is potentially meaningful, where the Law of the Father has not yet accomplished its work of ordering and of repression. So I suggest that in its dense artful poetry, "The Eve" accomplishes this effect not only by adopting diverse narrative

conventions or by placing us in a Gothic world (where, we understand, the usual rules are warped or suspended). We may sense the presence of the (virtual) “opposites,” crimson and silver, but we also see these terms multiply into a wealth, a plenitude, of near-synonyms and far-flung associations. We see one thing become its opposite, the concrete become abstract, the abstract concrete. Without denying the existence of opposites, the text implies that their “oppositeness” is not their only, or perhaps even their most significant property. This technique has the effect of replacing the middle suppressed by our emphasis on binary opposites.

Freeing certain possibilities of language ordinarily repressed by Symbolic rules of order allows it to become “playful”—to “have pun.” The pun is a noteworthy device in this text, one that has been mostly ignored, partly a long-standing habit of associating the pun with Renaissance wit, not Romantic sincerity, and partly, perhaps, owing to Dr. Johnson’s infamous prejudice against them. They have again become both respectable and interesting in poststructuralist and psychoanalytic criticism because they so effectively undermine linguistic pretenses to univocal meaning and to the fixed, centered self. The pun—a single word with several meanings—reproduces in a small but potent way this playful working with “frames” that I have traced throughout the poem.

One might write an entire essay on the presence and function of puns in Keats, or perhaps even in “The Eve” alone. Both Marjorie Levinson and Wendy Steiner comment on the pun of “freize/freeze/frees.” And I have already considered some of them in another context—for instance, “rose” (as noun, adjective, verb); and “told” (said, counted, informed), which several times appears in contexts where we may hear “toll’d”—the ringing of the death-bell. Keats’s description of the Beadsman’s breath, “like pious incense from a censor old,” may a second time be heard as “insense” (“insensitivity,” “insight,” or perhaps “indignation”?) while “censor” may become “censor,” “sensor” or perhaps even “censure.” The carved “bunches of knot grass” around Madeline’s casement are also, as stone representations of a living plant, “bunches of *not* grass.” And there is the repeated word “fray’d,” “affrayed,” which links motifs of fear, hunting, and partially unwoven fabric.

This fluidity, this instability, this refusal to conform to a familiar linguistic pattern is both the poem’s most ubiquitous strategy and its most important theme. (It is not, of course, a theme at all according to

our usual sense of what constitutes literary "meaning.") The St. Agnes ritual is the enactment of a paradox—to allow the maiden to have all the pleasure of the wedding feast and wedding night without having to face the consequences. These consequences are, of course, the punishment patriarchy required of any woman who sought *jouissance* outside the Law of the Father—thus becoming "ruined," "fallen," a "Magdalen," for whom tears are the only recompense. Madeline (whose name is an anglicized spelling of "Magdalen" in French—"Madeleine") becomes herself a kind of embodied pun: "a weeping Madeline" who is, nevertheless, *not* the "weeping Magdalen" the ritual sought to avoid (as Keats put it in a canceled stanza). She is not a "bride" in the Symbolic sense (her father has given neither his daughter nor his permission to this "marriage"), and yet her "marriage" has been consummated, and "bride" is what Porphyro calls her (l. 334). For the familiar Gothic convention of the "interrupted wedding," Keats substitutes a disruption of the notion of the "wedding" itself as a controlling cultural principle. (In Foucault's terms, "the deployment of sexuality" wholly suppresses the "deployment of alliance.")

The plot of "The Eve," like its poetic language, explores the possibility of other modes of relation between "male" and "female," "word" and "flesh," and all the innumerable categories and institutions embodying the assumption that these pairs are separate, different, unequal. Steiner notes that the word "eve" may also be a pun—not only evening, but mother "Eve" whose sin, according to Genesis, is the root of all our woe. The story of Eden justifies the suppression of the female and authorizes the power of fathers.

I see "The Eve of St. Agnes" as Keats's most impressive and important expression of the rescue fantasy. In terms of his private history as a poet, it represents the rescue of his most fruitful matrix, romance, from the outer darkness of critical neglect, or even contempt. On the model of the Psyche myth, Keats effects this rescue through negotiations with his poetic fathers, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton. Porphyro is Eros, rescuing Madeline from her dark castle of unknowing; he is also Britomart, rescuing Amoret from the House of Busyrane, and the ancient spells of courtly love. Spenser provides the form (the Spenserian stanza), Shakespeare the plot (*Romeo and Juliet*), and Milton the theme (*Paradise Lost*). None of these materials emerge from Keats's hands the same as their great originators first dictated; they are, instead, *transformed*. The poem suggests that human beings have the power to escape the prisonhouse of these old ideas, old "realities,"

through the quasimagical manipulation of language. As the lovers prepare to depart, Porphyro declares the storm "Of haggard *seeming* but a boon indeed" (l. 344; my emphasis). The text of "La Belle Dame" shows that to Keats "haggard" is a word loaded with the weight of mortality, a mortality quite conventionally associated with the feminine: the Knight is called "so haggard and so woe-begone" (l. 6). The various meanings of "haggard" themselves reveal these feminine associations. Beneath the current senses of "thin and worn" and "emaciated" lie the obsolete ones of "wild-eyed," "wanton," "unchaste," "intractable," "willful." And "hag," the syllable buried in the word, is a harpy or witch, a female demon, a nightmare. In declaring that the haggard only "seems," Porphyro dispels the old, demonized female principle, the *nightmère* "other" of the Gothic tradition.

"The Eve of St. Agnes" begins to suggest the possibility of a female principle not dangerous and destructive but creative, beautiful, and benign. With the help of the beldame Angela and the belle dame Madeline herself, Porphyro rescues the daughter from the power of fathers—the threatening castle and its drunken, dreaming, dying residents. We could not possibly imagine what happens to them on the other side of the threshold—though it is apparently (appropriately) "sublime." Their destiny, in any event, is something not to be written in Gothic.

❧EPILOGUE❧

The Mysteries of Enlightenment; or Dr. Freud's Gothic Novel

Literary histories, including histories of Gothic, usually follow the genealogical model: they give us a "family tree." In this book, I have used the term "poetics" because I wanted to resist as much as possible the seductions of "family" as a basic conceptual metaphor, particularly since the metaphor was also a theme of this investigation. And yet, this poetics of Gothic has also, inevitably, created an alternative genealogy; it suggests some unexpected ancestors, it divides the family into two lines, and so on. Thus at the end one feels impelled to comment on that quintessentially Gothic issue, legitimate descent and rightful inheritance. Gothic narratives often conclude with a revelation of the "true heir." Convention also demands that this heir be unexpected, and yet, once revealed, unmistakably authentic and incontestable.

If early Gothic expresses a spontaneous and intuitive response to the complex "change of mind" that was occurring in post-Renaissance Europe, we should not be surprised that "Gothic" has survived, while moving away from the center of "high culture." The problems and conflicts it expresses have not entirely been solved, but they have become less immediate. As James Twitchell has noted, nowadays the primary consumers of Gothic horror (primarily in the form of the "horror movie") are adolescents. In the late eighteenth century Gothic offered writers like Coleridge and Shelley a language expressing problems urgently felt: if I am right about Gothic, these were anxieties about the patriarchal forms of culture at all levels. Today, the tottering of patriarchy may well influence (often unconsciously) some very pressing social problems (the question of abortion, for instance), but the

Gothic no longer speaks a language compelling to those trying to re-imagine culture; if any literary model occurs to them, it is the terms of science fiction that they are much more likely to deploy.¹

In the great tradition of Gothic denouement, therefore, I close this work with the proposal that the true heir of Walpole and Radcliffe, the most profoundly Gothic creator of narrative in our century, is Sigmund Freud. His collected works (twenty-four volumes in the Standard Edition) tacitly constitute a Gothic story; let's call it *The Mysteries of Enlightenment*.

Undoubtedly some of the "episodes" in this vast cycle of writings overtly *sound* "Gothic": the history of the "Wolf-Man" for instance. The naive reader might turn to this case hoping to hear about a werewolf. Of course this patient, one of Freud's most famous and intractable cases, was no such thing: he merely dreamed of wolves. But perhaps he may be seen as the post-Enlightenment, "scientific," "psychological" edition of this legendary figure of horror. After all, Freud's theory of the unconscious acknowledges the wild beast concealed within all of us, waiting to be uncaged—a picture of "reality" not so different from "Bluebeard" on the surface. In fact, there are also unexpected and profound affinities between Bluebeard, the werewolf, and the Wolf-Man.

Early in this Poetics we explored Bluebeard's Castle as a paradigm of the Gothic relation of gender and genre. If Bluebeard had had no house, he would not have had a story—certainly not *this* story—and because he has *this* house, it hides *this* secret. As surely as his wives open the forbidden door, so the rules ordering his world lurk behind the declared non-reality of the story's "once upon a time." In exploiting and exploring patriarchy's definition of the female, "Bluebeard" belongs to the Male Gothic tradition. Thus it is satisfying to discover that Bluebeard's very name contains a secret of its own, the deepest, darkest secret of the Father's Law: the arbitrariness, instability, and deceptiveness of words themselves. In an essay entitled "Qui était Barbe Bleue?" Jean-Louis G. Picherit argues that the name "Barbe Bleue" derives from the Old French term "*barben*"—in modern French, "*loup-garou*," a "werewolf."²

If etymology constitutes a kind of "unconscious" within the Symbolic, then the time-honored association between Bluebeard and Gilles de Rais suggests a historical rationalization or secondary revision masking a fundamental anxiety: how can a "monster" like Gilles be properly named "a man"? That so many European languages have a term for

"werewolf" suggests that this is not merely a local problem.³ The tale of Bluebeard ("Barbe Bleue") reveals patriarchal culture's response to the problem of "the female"; the myth of the werewolf ("barbeu") expresses the Gothic dilemma in its most primal form: the problem of naming, the point where "nature" becomes "culture" and vice versa. The werewolf both is and is not a man, is and is not a wolf. Furthermore, the energy that generates this problem of definition—causing the "man's" transformation into a "wolf"—is predictably feminine: the moon that regularly waxes to fullness, stirring his animal blood, driving him to abandon consciousness and culture, his very identity as "man." And yet: doesn't this paradox, the name "werewolf," really imply a problem with the system that struggles to define/confine him? (Naming the creature "werewolf" is the first step toward the silver bullet.)

As the Romantic poets knew, "seeing" (or "seeing as") and "naming" are virtually inseparable; but in the tiny space between them lies the faint origin of the Male and Female Gothic plots. In the Male Gothic a man, the hero/villain, is revealed as a beast; in the Female plot, the apparent beast is transformed into a man. In the dream-language of Gothic, "transformation" represents that power of the eye/I. "Seeing as" constitutes a redefinition and hence a re-naming. Psyche lights her lamp and sees what is really there. It is a function of "enlightenment."

Thus if Gothic in literature is broader than genre, deeper than plot, and wider than a single tradition, we should not be surprised to see that it transgresses other cultural boundaries. Thus my claim that Freud writes in Gothic: the true heir of Walpole and Radcliffe is not an imitator such as Stephen King or Victoria Holt (who reproduce early Gothic plots and ambiance with only superficial changes). Freud's descriptions of "human nature," his portrait of the mind's secret "structures" and dynamics, conform to the patriarchal version of "reality"—the Symbolic—even as he questions it (sometimes unconsciously).

The precise relation of Freud and Gothic is complex. Some of its aspects are long familiar. Throughout the twentieth century critics have noted that Freud and Gothic have something in common. For decades some scholars have invoked the authority of Freudian psychoanalysis as a way of lending respectability to Gothic; by the mid-twentieth century, the idea that the Gothic novelists had "discovered the unconscious" had become nearly a critical commonplace. Equally familiar was a "diagnosis" of Gothic origins, consisting of the notion

that the eighteenth century's taste for Gothic shows the frustrations of too much emphasis on Reason. Feminist critics have more recently accepted the truism that the Gothic heroine confronts repressed sexual dangers. Thus Gothic narratives might seem to manifest a "return of the repressed." As Goya inscribed on his famous etching, "The Sleep of Reason Breeds Monsters." Indeed, it now takes a considerable conscious effort to *avoid* psychoanalytic insights in reading Gothic fiction, so seemingly "Freudian" for us are the familial conflicts, the uncanny spaces, the dark, secret dungeons that these novels explore.⁴

But to read Gothic as a proto-Freudianism has not been particularly useful. For as other critics wary of psychoanalysis rightly point out, Freudian readings of Gothic (or of any other fictions) tend to be reductive. All those dark closets, winding stairways, and dank dungeons invariably hide the same psychosexual secret: the dangers of the irrational desires within the "other." This problem of reductionism has also been complicated and partly disguised by the fact that until very recently—within the past fifteen years, perhaps—psychoanalytic readings of the Gothic have tended to be fairly unsophisticated. Too often these critical essays resemble a kind of Freudian Easter Egg Hunt—where the critic scurries through the text, discovering the lurking Oedipal complex, the paranoid delusion, labels them as such, and stops. It does not take much psychoanalytic acumen to notice that Walpole's plot in *The Castle of Otranto* suggests anxiety about the power and authority of fathers. And when Manfred, the about-to-be-deposed Prince, who is trying to arrange an incestuous marriage to his own dead son's betrothed, stabs his daughter Matilda, it is hard to avoid remembering what Freud had to say about incest and the family romance.

As a context for reading Gothic fiction, then, Freudian psychoanalysis paradoxically teases the critic with a compelling and provocative hermeneutic model, but readings based on the model often yield disappointing results. Instead of enriching the literary text, this method merely decodes it into a predictable, even inescapable set of "truths" or "realities." The orthodox Freudian would reply, of course, that the Gothic merely confirms the master's claims that his theory uncovers the "universal" principles of human nature. Feminist critiques of Freud and psychoanalysis have successfully challenged that claim; while certain psychoanalytic concepts remain crucial to a feminist analysis, the cultural structures Freud took for granted need to be reexamined. But this circularity, this short-circuiting, this teasing, almost uncanny affinity between Freud and Gothic, suggests that per-

haps we have it backward. Instead of using Freud to read Gothic, we should use Gothic to read Freud. We can begin with their common cultural matrix.

In *Freud: A Life for Our Time* (1988) Peter Gay⁵ writes that the father of psychoanalysis had "an indelible debt" to the "thought of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, its critical spirit and its hope for humanity, both as he directly experienced that thought through his reading of Diderot or Voltaire and as filtered through its nineteenth-century heirs" (p. 167). Freud saw himself as a destroyer of illusions, participating in the "triumphant spread of light and reason across a world deeply shadowed by superstition and persecution" (p. 167).⁶ Always aiming to transform "hysterical misery into common unhappiness," Freud, like *Psyche* and the *Female Gothic*, asserts the power of the reality principle.

But even if Freud wrote in the spirit of Enlightenment, and also wrote of matters as violent and sensational as any Gothic novelist, why should we collapse the distinction between "fiction" and "nonfiction"? Superficially, Freud's discourse would appear to be unproblematic as nonfiction—mere "description" of psychological phenomena and their function in human behavior. A "man of science," his quest was nothing less than to discover the way the human mind works. There are, however, several ways in which his writings as much as his ideas raise questions about fiction and nonfiction, metaphor and rational thought, that have become familiar in recent criticism. We must keep in mind that *any* writing involves a "making" or "shaping." It is impossible, even in writing nonfiction such as history, not to select, focus, arrange, and judge the material. And Freud's favored genre, the case history, is almost as blatantly fictional in this sense as *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Furthermore, Freud was quite frank about the fictional devices he employs; not only does he disguise the names of his patients, he admits suppressing certain details and altering others. In addition, a first-person narrator in the character of "Doctor Freud" presides over these histories, a narrator who constantly has his eye on the audience, who relates his story in as self-conscious a fashion as Trollope or Thackeray. In the case of *Dora*, for instance, this narrator alternately warns, instructs, confesses to his readers. If we read on, he tells us, we may hear him discuss things that may seem quite inappropriate for a young girl to hear. But in the service of science, he declares, he names names and conceals nothing: "*J'appelle un chat un chat*," he declares—an evasion worthy of Henry James.

According to Gay, Freud sometimes read mystery stories, including those by Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers. And there is a clear affinity between his own case histories and the structure of the classic detective story: the analyst/detective observes the visible phenomena and interprets and reinterprets them in light of a causal pattern as it slowly emerges. Faced with a mass of heterogeneous, often deceptive, and apparently disconnected evidence, the detective eventually constructs a story that accounts for all these facts, by organizing them into a meaningful and coherent whole. Hercule Poirot or Lord Peter Wimsey spends much of the narrative repeatedly revising his own narrative of the crime, adjusting the draft-in-progress to accommodate new clues, or old clues reread in a new light. This is precisely the structure of the Freudian case history, such as the Wolf Man's.

Second, Freud did not deny the importance of literature proper to his scientific project of describing the dynamics of the human mind. He declared that "the poets" had discovered the unconscious before him; late in life, he was still urging that answers to that persistent question about the nature of femininity and female desire might still be found in poetry as well. Again and again he turned to literature not only as a subject for analysis ("The Theme of the Three Caskets," "Gradiva") but as a source of models and metaphors. In the Freudian *oeuvre*, therefore, characters of classical myth received a new incarnation: Oedipus, Narcissus, Eros. Some of his narratives are by his frank admission modes of "speculative" fiction; he himself referred to *Totem and Taboo* as a "scientific fantasy." And he did, indeed, receive the Goethe Prize for literature. But to read him not only as a creator of fictions but specifically as a Gothic "novelist" (both as an "innovator" and as a "writer of fictions") illuminates some of the fundamental principles we have been exploring throughout this poetics of Gothic.

For Freud is most "Gothic" at the level of metaphor—the implied "basic conceptual metaphors" that inform his definition of the self. Not only did he write of the Wolf Man and the Rat Man, of hysteria and obsessions, of nightmares and daydreams, of Eros and Thanatos—all part of the paraphernalia of Gothic; his entire theory of mind, developed through the multitudinous pages of his collected works, conceives of the self as a structure, a "house" haunted by history, by past deeds—both one's own and those of one's ancestors. Freud consistently uses architectural and archeological metaphors for his science of psychoanalysis. For instance, he spoke of the infant's pre-Oedipal relation with the mother as the "discovery of the Minoan-Mycenean cul-

ture behind the Greek." And he once told the Wolf Man that "the Psychoanalyst, like the archeologist in his excavations, must uncover layer after layer of the patient's psyche, before coming to the deepest, most valuable treasures." This house of the psyche, moreover, has secret chambers—spaces obscure and forgotten because long ago locked ("repressed"). The whole psychic edifice is fortified—"defended," in Freud's terms—by a variety of strategies that mediate between the inner drives and desires and an external "reality" principle, the demands of the outside world. Like Bluebeard's castle, the metaphorical house of Freud also reifies the rules of patriarchy; Freud always conceives of psychic energies, of development and individual growth, within the dynamics of the patriarchal family, a structure he assumed to be "natural." And as in Bluebeard's house, the secrets locked away in the Freudian self invariably concern sex and violence, the violence of sexuality. The larger civilization itself could not exist without such secret rooms. The price of civilization is a certain discontent within.

In view of all this, one might assume that Freud's *Mysteries of Enlightenment* belongs to the tradition of Male Gothic. And on first reading it seems to. It is, of course, the work of a male author. Freud's theory proposes a new variation on the old binary themes. In various episodes the female plays the role familiar in Male Gothic: the role of "otherness"—dark, unknowable, infinitely mysterious in the abstract, passive, defective, always potentially hysterical in person. The "hero" of Freud's narrative is the indomitable (male) ego who wins a provisional battle against the forces of darkness, who (temporarily) snatches consciousness from the Sphinx-like jaws of Death (also known as Thanatos or insensate matter). The triumph of the therapeutic, in Freud's own words, is to "transform hysterical misery into common unhappiness"—distinctly evoking the Male Gothic ethos in which the surviving characters live on in a state of lowered expectations. Furthermore, Freud's characteristic rhetorical stance casts the doctor/narrator as a Dr. Van Helsing, convincing his skeptical audience, who ignore at their mortal peril the reality of the power he proclaims (though Freud proclaims the improbable reality of the unconscious, not of the vampire). In fact, the unconscious as formulated by Freud has more than a passing resemblance to Dracula: it is dark, ancient, primitive, a repository of lawless desires and "feminine" chaos.

And yet, Freud's emphatic reassertion of these age-old cultural principles has a profoundly subversive subtext. As we have seen, the Male Gothic (and patriarchy in general) invites, even demands, that the

female act according to the definition that has been imposed upon her. Eve is predestined to eat the fruit and persuade Adam to share it, Pandora must open the box, Bluebeard's wife must unlock the door. But in the context of "Enlightenment," the spirit of scientific inquiry feeds upon that very "feminine" curiosity; Freud's exploration of those dark corners of the self unwittingly leads to the disclosure, perhaps the collapse, of the structure. As Peter Gay reports, Freud was fond of saying that he had shown that "man is not master in his own house." He also frequently emphasized his own position as an embattled revolutionary, one who had revised the definition of man himself (and I use the term "man" pointedly).

And yet, oddly, the process of psychoanalysis—with its exploration of forgotten hallways, its discovering of secret rooms (with a promise of full enlightenment at the end) also echoes the plot of Female Gothic with its faith in the rule of the reality principle. Readers of Freud have often noted the irony that the Father of Psychoanalysis founded his patriarchal theories on observation of female patients. But the process he pioneered is reminiscent of the ritual that Foucault associates with the creation in the West of a discourse of "sexuality": confession. And as the case of Dora so vividly demonstrates, Freud insists that his patients confess only to certain "truths." During this confessional process, in the creation of this ultimate "discourse of sexuality," Freud unexpectedly discloses some secrets that undermine the very structure of the house, just as the Female Gothic plot implies the possibility of a different kind of speaking subject. As his feminist readers have recognized, one most interesting and powerful aspect of his writings is the way his theory of the unconscious de-centers patriarchal ideology. Thus, his redefinition of the self in terms of conscious and unconscious reaffirms the ancient binary structure. (Indeed, one might see it as the last concerted attempt to maintain that basic structure.) And yet it simultaneously makes it impossible to believe in the rational, stable self, in any clear principle of psychic hierarchy, and, above all, in the basic distinction between "male" and "female." We are all originally, unconsciously bisexual, Freud declares.

But perhaps even more important is the way that Freudian theory expands and de-centers meaning itself. If Freud evokes the Male Gothic plot in insisting on the reality and the implacable force of some power that is counter-intuitive, then accepting that reality has the paradoxical effect of undermining the very authority with which one asserts this principle. This theory of the invisible expands language: it under-

mines the hegemony of the Word as sole repository of "meaning." According to Freud, not only do dreams have meaning, but also there is more truth in the "nonsense" of the parapraxis, the accidental, *unintended* word. Freudian meaning does not obey the laws of logic, the rules of the Symbolic: the law of identity, of causality, the grammar of intention. It reinstates the picture of the patently unreal as prior to the word of consciousness. Meaning may be *embodied*, as in the hysteric's paralysis that announces what she cannot say. To Freud, bodies speak louder than words. Meaning emerges from patterns repeated, through "free association," not from logical discourse. "Reason" (God's "viceroys" in man, according to Donne) is dethroned.

But if Freud's theory expands the classes of signifiers, of what can have "meaning," his actual writing exposes the limitations of the written word. For instance, Freud would have objected strenuously to the common habit of referring to what he called "unconscious" as "subconscious," for that constricts or belies the theory with a spatial analogue. And although he understood perfectly well that the notion of "unconscious wishes" is a paradox, and that the "entities" of id, super-ego, and ego are fundamentally metaphorical, one finds it extremely difficult to resist the tendency that is built into language to reify: name it and it becomes a "thing." Give it a function and it becomes a person, an actor in the psychodrama (the closet drama?) of the private self. It becomes very hard to remember that "the Oedipus complex" is a figure of speech.

Freud's "discovery" of the unconscious, his hermeneutic of dreams, his redefinition of "Man," at once announces and stimulates the decline and fall of patriarchy. Like Marx and Darwin, the other two thinkers Freud often linked with himself as transformers of man's self-definition, Freud's theory dealt mortal blows to the system by admitting the power of "the female." Marx declared the crucial power of material conditions in culture (social and political structures were not divinely ordained but a product of human choice); Darwin showed the power of nature as an "other" not necessarily subject to the Law of the Father. Freud acknowledged the reality and the power of those "female" forces that Western culture had always excluded: sexuality, nonlinguistic modes of meaning, madness, dreams.

Thus the plot of *The Mysteries of Enlightenment* is complex indeed. Freud proposes a new basic metaphor for the self as a house—as a structured thing, a cultural artifact—though Freud himself appears not to have noticed all the implications of this figure. He reinterprets the

nature of “the other”—this time as the unconscious, thus reiterating the Western habit of binary thought. And from this follows a deed that only the reader of Gothic can really appreciate. He admits that the female belongs within the house. The dark secrets are necessary; unless the id is repressed, the ego may not live and flourish. So he recognizes “the female” (unreason, unregulated desire) as a dweller inside this house of the self. True, she must be kept as much as possible in the attic or the cellar—but she must be admitted. In creating his discourse of mind, psychoanalysis, Freud played the role of Bluebeard’s wife, who opened doors, discovered secrets, and disclosed scandals, the skeletons in patriarchy’s closets—the unlawful desires which paradoxically generate all human accomplishment. Thus I posit that the similarities between the Freudian model of the psyche and the conventions of Gothic fiction are best understood as parallel expressions of an Enlightenment frame of mind, which is both the last phase of patriarchy and the first of something else not yet articulated. The very word “Enlightenment” creates a necessity for darkness; to celebrate, even to recognize, the known implies that there must be mysteries also. As Michel Foucault has repeatedly shown, Enlightenment thought characteristically ordered and organized by creating institutions to enforce distinctions between society and its other, whether it resides in madness, illness, criminality, or sexuality. Like the haunted Gothic castle, the Freudian discourse of the self *creates* the haunted, dark, mysterious space even as it attempts to organize or control it.

The function of the Gothic house seems to me emblematic of Freud’s own relation to that intellectual tradition that he thought of himself as continuing and defending. I believe that one of the several reasons Freud has evoked such hostility is that his critics recognize—in his terms, unconsciously—that his theory of human nature admits (even while carefully guarding) the female into the house of Western culture. His model of the psyche acknowledges that unreason and sexuality belong within the house even if they occupy locked rooms. The Gothic tradition shows what such madwomen may eventually do; they escape and burn the house down. But we should not neglect the other possibility Gothic reveals. If not reviled and demonized as “other,” the female may not merely assist in redecorating the ancient house, but effect a major structural renovation. She might, indeed, make the house a home.

APPENDIX A

Inner and Outer Spaces The Alien Trilogy

The three *Alien* films (1979; *Aliens*, 1986; *Alien³*, 1992) offer an opportunity to test the hypothesis argued in this book: that Gothic is created when a narrative is organized by the implied latent structure of the patriarchal family—and its related symbolic manifestations. Despite these films' superficial allegiance to science fiction, they are best understood as a variety of Male Gothic.

These three films are set on distant planets in the distant future, when the reach of patriarchal hegemony has extended into space in order to explore, to colonize, and to exploit the natural resources of these new worlds. Despite this futuristic setting, however, the first film conforms to the other rules of Gothic. The crew of the spaceship "Nostromo" is a small group, a "family," whose daily lives are guided (if not entirely controlled) by the computer familiarly called "Mother," which, at the beginning of the film, awakens them from "hypersleep" and summons them to duty. In deep space "she" has picked up an unrecognizable signal; "she" is programmed to demand investigation of such things by the authority known only as "the Company."

Outside the ship, some members of the "family" explore an enormous and apparently ancient wreck that could be a Gothic-style building or the skeleton of a vast, primordial creature. Venturing deep inside, one is attacked by an amorphous thing that attaches itself to his helmet. Thus the "alien" is (like the vampire) invited into the closed society of the ship by the unwitting action of a member of the human group. It escapes, and gradually the creature's habits of survival and breeding become horribly apparent. It incubates inside living bodies, and then bursts outward through the walls of the chest in a sickening parody of mammalian birth. Except for their parasitic need for living

things, these creatures have virtually no points of similarity with life as we know it. They have acid for blood and about all they fear is fire. They are thus embodiments of the other (the "alien") and "abject" in Kristevan terms. But they may not be "abjected"; they are "introjected" and then destroy the host organism.

The fight against this creature is greatly hampered by human error and perfidy; indeed, it turns out that one of the "crew" is an android, an elaborate computer designed to appear completely human. This "alien" has also been programmed by the Company to bring back any unknown life forms for possible profit, and so does what he can to undermine the efforts of the crew. The heroine Ripley is thus cast in the conventional role of plucky Gothic heroine, directing efforts to defeat the alien. Like many such heroines she plays a quasimaternal role, here in her behavior toward the ship's cat, "Jonesy," who is forever wandering off into the dark corners of this impossibly elaborate spaceship.

The crew are isolated in space, where survival depends upon the shelter of the controlled environment; this situation creates the necessary Gothic configuration of "inside" and "outside," of "us" and "them," and the subsequent anxiety resulting from the inevitable boundary violations. Hence this is predictably a Male or "horror" Gothic. The alien represents the abject uncontrollable other that can cross various lines of demarcation seemingly at will. It can hide within the ship and the human body; its blood is a form of acid that can burn in seconds through several layers of the ship, thus threatening annihilation to the entire crew if the outer hull is breached. At the end, Ripley manages to sweep it from the ship by appeal to the highest power in this universe, the laws of physics: she opens the hatches and the vacuum pulls it inexorably into space—a kind of high-tech housekeeping.

The sequel *Aliens* brings certain issues of sexual politics implied in the first narrative to the forefront of the plot. When sent as guide and "specialist" in *Aliens* to the distant colony, Ripley is set apart by her "masculine" knowledge and maternal softness. The quasimaternal role she played in protecting Jonesy becomes more explicit in her care for the little girl "Newt," the only living person remaining in the colony. At the conclusion of the film, this already tough woman, transmuted into a kind of superwoman by the armor of a power-driven mechanical loading device she "wears," confronts the chief alien in a final battle between "Supermoms"—the human Ripley fighting for Newt, the Alien for her brood of eggs.

In the final film, *Alien*³, Ripley's ship, returning to earth after the previous apocalypse, crash lands on a prison planet inhabited by the most violent prisoners, mostly guilty of murdering and raping women. They live in the extremely patriarchal and authoritarian structure of a prison, and as converts to a fundamentalist Christianity they have doubly submitted themselves to the Law of the Father. Hence the clever title. These prisoners are aliens and outcasts of human society; in this community of violent men, Ripley herself is "alien," and, of course, the monster alien has hitched a ride on her spaceship, invading this planet as well. The three kinds of alienness thus interact not arithmetically, but exponentially. In this film the inherent misogyny of the Male Gothic becomes evident. The abject "alien" is an invader that in its power to ignore borders (of bodies, of ships) destroys culture and life itself.

Significantly, despite the trilogy's focus on monstrous "reproduction" the only human sex act of the three films occurs toward the beginning when Ripley sleeps with the colony's doctor. He is almost immediately devoured by the Alien. Because this planet is so plagued with lice, Ripley is told, her head must be shaved, thus rendering her androgynous-looking. But this act also symbolically recalls the punishment traditionally meted out to women believed to have consorted with the enemy. (Here, implicitly, by engaging in sexual behavior, in acting on the impulses of her "female" nature, Ripley has declared her allegiance to the "female" otherness of the "alien" and its horrible replicability.) Hence it is symbolically appropriate that shortly afterward Ripley discovers that one of the Aliens is incubating in her own body, a metaphorical "pregnancy" following the sexual encounter. It seems that she was able to conquer the alien at the end of the previous film because her "motherhood" remained figurative. Indeed like the Arthurian Galahad, whose "strength was as the strength of ten / Because his heart was pure," her heroinism appears to be magically linked with at least apparent virginity. (In keeping with the motif of her androgyny, Ripley is destroyed after she has—like Samson—been shorn of her locks.)

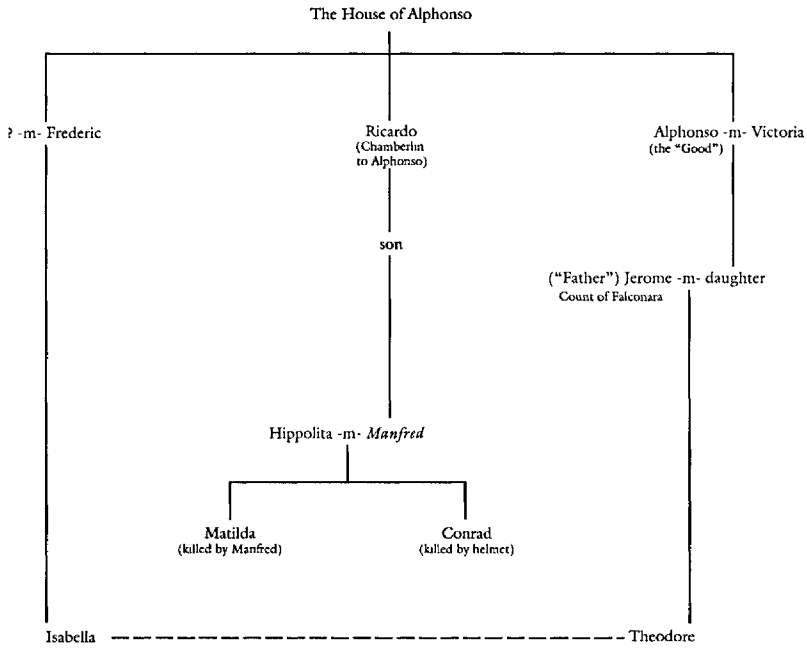
Being a "good woman" who wants to do "the right thing," Ripley sets about arranging for her own destruction, requesting that one of the remaining inmates of the prison kill her. Thus she is reminiscent of Bram Stoker's Mina Harker (admirably described by Dr. Van Helsing as having "a man's brain and a woman's heart"), who is infected by Dracula and struggles to aid in the monster's destruction, even though it may mean her own death. Throughout the series Ripley also has a

“man’s brain”—and courage, and forcefulness, and virtually a man’s body, since Sigourney Weaver, who plays her, is six feet tall. Ironically, we learn that Ripley’s first name is “Eileen” only in this last film as well, the conventional feminine name also modifying the surname “Ripley.” At the conclusion of this exceedingly dark film, she plunges of her own volition into the sea of molten lead (down into a Miltonic lake of burning marl, as it were, back into hell). As her cruciform figure floats downward, the Alien emerges from her chest, but in nobly destroying herself she purges the world of “aliens.”

Although the horror of otherness exemplified by the “aliens” seems to be organized around their abjection and especially their bizarre reproductive methods (a perversion of the human female process), the trilogy confirms the pattern apparent in the Male Gothic tradition as a whole: that the horrible, the abject, is identical with “the female,” the alien energy that poses a dreadful danger to man, society, and the Law of the Father. (This is true no matter how corrupt these entities may be—such as “The Company,” a phrase familiar in other genres of popular fiction as a term for the C.I.A.) Appropriately, therefore, the human female must be sacrificed to destroy the “aliens,” which are, in fact, a figure for herself as woman in a patriarchal culture.

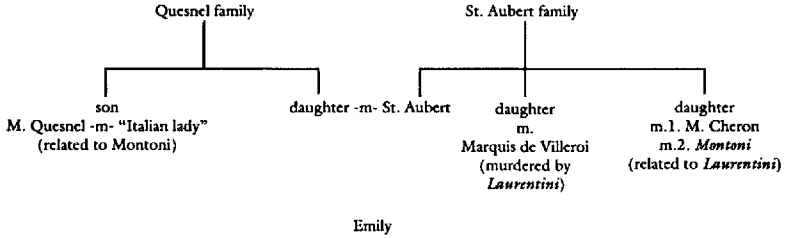
APPENDIX B

Gothic Families

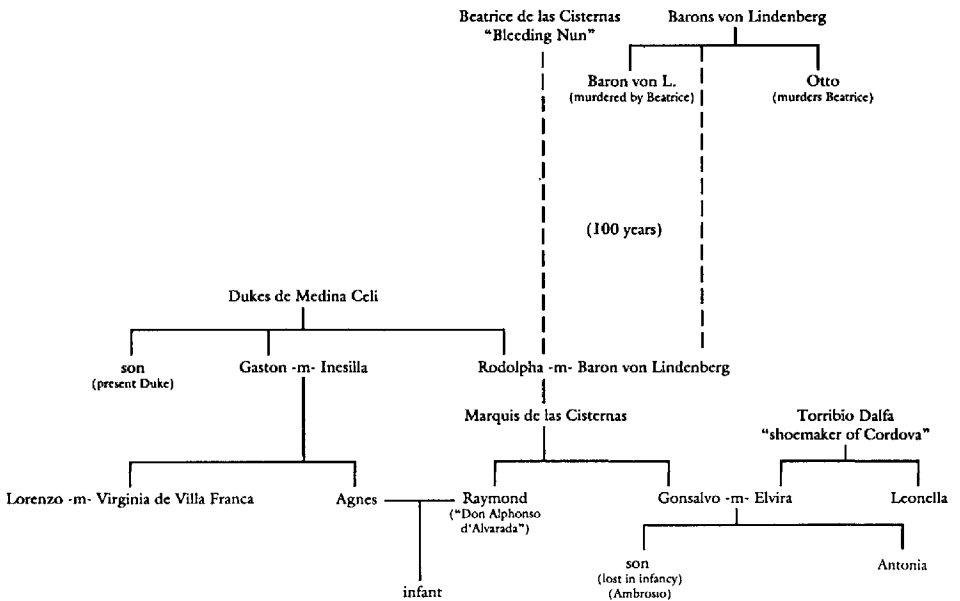


The Castle of Oranto (1764)

Appendix B

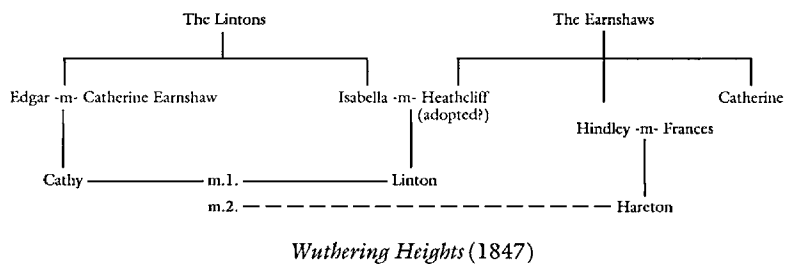
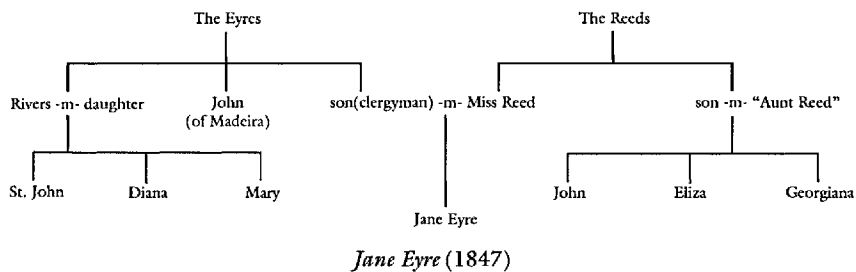


The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794)



The Monk (1796)

GOTHIC FAMILIES



APPENDIX C

The Female Plot of Gothic Fiction

Title	Heroine	Home of Initiation	Happily Ever After In. . .	Responsibility	Suitor	Second Suitor	Male Antagonist	Female Antagonist	Confidante
"Psyche and Eros"	Psyche	Eros's Castle	Olympus	unborn child	Eros		Rams Cerberus Charon	Aphrodite	Ants Reeds Eagle Tower
"Beauty and the Beast"	Beauty	Beast's Castle	Beast's Castle	duty to father	Beast		Beast	wicked fairy sisters	magic mirror, ring
<i>Mysteries of Udolpho</i> (1794)	Emily St. Aubert	Udolpho Château de Blanc	La Vallée	Mme Cheron	Valancourt	Du Pont	Montoni	Laurentini du Udolpho	Annette
<i>Jane Eyre</i> (1847)	Jane Eyre	Thornfield Hall	Ferndean	Adèle Varens	Rochester	St. John Rivers	John Reed Brocklehurst Rochester St. John Rivers	Bertha Mason	Bessie Helen Burns Miss Temple Diana and Mary Rivers
<i>Wuthering Heights</i> (1847)	Cathy 1 _____ Cathy 2	Thrushcross Grange Wuthering Heights	Wuthering Heights Thrushcross Grange	_____ Linton Heathcliff	Heathcliff _____ Hareton	Edgar Linton _____ Linton Heathcliff	Edgar Linton _____ Heathcliff	Nelly? _____ Nelly	Nelly _____ Nelly
<i>Rebecca</i> (1938)	?	Manderley	?	role as wife	Max de Winter		Jack Favett	(Rebecca) Mrs. Danvers	Frank Crawley
<i>Nine Coches Waiting</i> (1958)	Linda Martin	Valmy	Bellevigne	Philippe de Valmy	Raoul de Valmy	William Blake	Léon de Valmy	Hélène de Valmy	Mrs. Seddon Berthe William
<i>Missus of Mellyn</i>	Martha Leigh	Mount Mellyn	Mount Mellyn	Alvean Gilly	Connan Tremellyn	Peter Nansellook	Connan Tremellyn	(Alice) Celeste	Mrs. Polgrave

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad*, 1960. Reprint, London: Chatto J. Windus, 1973. Twenty years later in 1968, Q. D. Leavis argued that the fairy tale elements (the opening of Nelly's narrative, for instance) are traces of an "immature draft." She further implies that even Heathcliff really belongs to the same pattern of immaturity (*Lectures in America* [New York: Pantheon Books, 1969], p. 90).

2. Novelists in the Great Tradition, Leavis argued, "not only change the possibilities of the art for practitioners and readers, but . . . are significant in terms of the human awareness they promote; awareness of the possibilities of life" (p. 2). Like George Eliot, they should create "an original psychological notation corresponding to the fineness of [their] psychology and insight" (p. 15). In the following discussion I shall capitalize the word "realism" when I wish the term to have this specific connotation.

3. Booth mentions Radcliffe as a negative example in a discussion of techniques for "heightening the significance of events" (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971; pp. 196-97): "In *Manon Lescaut* (1733), for example, although the Chevalier's anticipatory lamentations may seem inept, a burst of gothic omens like the rumblings of old Vesuvius in Mrs. Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1797) would be worse" (p. 197). Michael McKeon's revisionist *Origins of the English Novel* (1987) begins by questioning the assumptions of Watt in particular and explores the problem of "the novel" at length. But he too fails to mention "Gothic." McKeon's study, however, ends in 1740, a date that precludes attention to Gothic as usually conceived (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

4. Ernest A. Baker, *A History of the English Novel*, vol. 5 (London: H. F. & G. Witherby, 1934), pp. 175-227; Edward Wagenknecht, *Cavalcade of the English Novel* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1943), pp. 110-33; Walter Allen, *The English Novel* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1954), gives the Gothic four pages. Even J. M. S. Tompkins's *The Popular Novel in England*

1770–1800, which focuses on noncanonical fiction, considers Gothic a separate category. (1932; reprint, Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska Press, 1961).

5. Hence Judith Wilt's title for her study of the Realistic tradition's debt, *Ghosts of the Gothic: Austen, Eliot, and Lawrence* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980).

6. Summers writes, "The gothic novel with its romantic unrealities, its strange beauties, its very extravagances—if you will—was to a great extent the Novel of Escape from the troubles and carking cares of everyday life" (*The Gothic Quest: A History of the Gothic Novel* [London: Fortune Press, 1938; New York: Russell and Russell, 1964], p. 2).

7. Ian P. Watt, "Time and Family in the Gothic Novel: *The Castle of Otranto*," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 10, no. 3 (October 1986): p. 168.

8. Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 23. In *Women and Romance* Laurie Langbauer discusses the relation of novel and romance, and how the novel "needs" romance (p. 3) as an (ultimately ineffectual) scapegoat (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

9. Wordsworth decries the public taste for "stupid and sickly German tragedies" in the "Preface" to the *Lyrical Ballads*. Yet the "ministry of fear" episodes in *The Prelude*, book I, are Gothic in the Radcliffe mode; he also uses Gothic diction in *Tintern Abbey* to describe his early relationship with nature ("The sounding cataract / Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock, / The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood, / . . . were then to me / An appetite. . . . [ll. 76–80]). Coleridge's reviews are reprinted in *Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism*, edited by T. M. Raysor (London: Constable & Co., Ltd., 1936), pp. 370–76.

10. To George and Georgiana Keats (14 February 1819). *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), vol. 2, p. 62. To Reynolds the previous March, Keats wrote: "I am going among Scenery whence I intend to tip you the Damosel Radcliffe—I'll cavern you, and grotto you, and waterfall you, and wood you, and water you, and immense-rock you, and tremendous sound you, and solitude you. I'll make a logement on your galcis by a row of Pines, and storm your covered way with bramble Bushes" (vol 1, p. 245).

11. James D. Boulger, ed., *Twentieth-Century Views of Coleridge's 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner'* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 14.

12. In *The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination* (1927; reprint, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1964), Lowes notes that *The Monk* may have influenced what he calls "the most profoundly symbolic [act] in the poem" (p. 237): "Instead of the cross the Albatross / About my neck was hung." Lewis describes the Wandering Jew as bearing the mark of a burning cross on his forehead. On the whole, however, Lowes seems more interested in the German antecedents of the Wandering Jew. He also remarks on Coleridge's obvious debt to the Bleeding Nun in his Nightmare Life-in-Death, but dismisses the parallels: "And every reader of the tales that thrilled our for-

bears will recognize at once, in the two stanzas I have quoted, the familiar charnel horrors of the genre” (p. 255; see also note 77 for further information on Coleridge and the “Gothic cult”).

13. In *Sexual Personae* Camille Paglia does remark in passing, “Surely Keats has normalized Lewis’s carnal scene for *The Eve of St. Agnes* with its bedchamber show of lush sweetmeats.” She does not develop the analogy, however. ([New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990], p. 266.)

14. In Frank’s *Guide to the Gothic: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism* (Metuchen, N.J., and London: Scarecrow Press, 1984), “Gothicism and the Romantic Poets” is listed as a “special subject” containing a mere seventy-five items (out of 2,508).

15. See, for instance, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man’s Land: The War of the Words* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 125–62; and their essay, “That Deep Romantic Chasm: Engendering Romanticism,” *Kenyon Review*, ns. 8, no. 3 (Summer 1991): pp. 74–81.

16. Oddly, that Romantic scholarship was a symposium of male authorities reflects more than just the state of the profession; though always in a minority, women were much more influential in other fields of literature. In Renaissance studies, for instance, Rosamund Tuve and Helen Gardner were forces to be reckoned with. The growing schism between Gothic and Romantic was undoubtedly influenced by the fact that these great Romanticists were all men who probably did not read *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca* as teenagers, charmed to learn of the books’ Gothic and “romantic” antecedents.

17. Peter Thorslev, *Romantic Contraries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), pp. 126–41.

18. Marshall Brown, “A Philosophical View of the Gothic Novel,” *Studies in Romanticism* 26 (Summer 1987): pp. 275–301. Page 300. Brown argues that like Kant’s “Ideal of Pure Reason,” *Melmoth* “tests the limits of these ideals [the “necessary, unprovable beliefs—God, Freedom, and immortality”] by means of their perversion. It likewise tests the central concept of the *Critique of Practical Judgment*, the so-called categorical imperative. . . . Like the ‘Critique of Esthetic Judgment’ it tests the relationships between the sublime and the beautiful and between the mathematical and the dynamic sublime . . .” (pp. 298–99).

19. *The Nightingale’s Burden: Women Poets and American Culture before 1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 39. Thanks to Tricia Lootens for pointing out this parallel.

20. Dean R. Koontz, *Writing Popular Fiction* (Cincinnati: Writer’s Digest, 1973). When the publication of Rosemary Rogers’s *The Flame and the Flower* in 1974 marked the end of the 50s Gothic craze and the ascendancy of the “bodice-ripper,” Mr. Huff moved on to produce this formula under the pseudonym of “Jennifer Wilde.”

21. Joanna Russ, “Somebody’s Trying to Kill Me and I Think It’s My Husband,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 6 (1973): pp. 666–91; Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976), pp. 131–67.

22. Tanya Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1982); Kate Ellis, *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Michelle Massé, *In the Name of Love: Women, Masochism, and the Gothic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

23. This tradition includes Kay Mussell, *Women's Gothic and Romantic Fiction: A Reference Guide* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981); Juliann E. Fleenor, ed., *The Female Gothic* (Montreal and London: Eden Press, 1983); Kate Ellis, *The Contested Castle*; Eugenia DeLamotte, *Perils of the Night* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

24. For instance, French Surrealists such as Louis Aragon, André Breton, and Paul Eluard were enthusiastic about the Gothic as a foreshadowing of their own preoccupations (an enthusiasm that shocked Montague Summers because he regarded them as "Communists" [*The Gothic Quest*, pp. 411–12]).

25. The quoted words come from the publishers' blurb on the cover of the 1968 Collier Books' paperback of *The Castle of Otranto*, its fifth edition since 1963. After composing my "myth of Walpole," I discovered David H. Richter's review essay that begins with a similar tale ("Gothic Fantasia: The Monsters and the Myths, A Review-Article," *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 28, no. 2 [Spring, 1987], pp. 149–70.)

26. The conventionality of such a "natural" source is demonstrated by the apparently unfounded but persistent rumors that *Dracula* was similarly inspired. The putative origin of *Dracula* in Stoker's nightmare after eating dressed crab cannot be confirmed; that the story has been so often repeated, however, merely confirms the power of the convention. If the novel did not originate in a dream, it should have. Phyllis A. Roth makes the argument in *Bram Stoker* (Boston: Twayne Pub., 1982), p. 12.

27. Of recent books on Female Gothic (Modleski, Fleenor, Ellis, DeLamotte, and Massé), Ellis discusses such works by men as *Otranto* and *The Monk*, and she tends to regard them as responses to the ideology being constructed in the "feminine" mode. DeLamotte also considers Maturin.

28. See, for instance, Alice Jardine, *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); Shoshana Felman's "Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy," *Diacritics* 5, no. 4 (Winter 1975): pp. 2–10; or the collection of essays *The Violence of Representation*, ed. Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse (New York: Routledge, 1989).

29. Moers, *Literary Women*, p. 138.

30. One might also note that the Gothicism's procedure in promulgating the Tale of Walpole serves a parallel but different cognitive function. These critics who focus approvingly on the Gothic tradition are engaged in a kind of empire building, and like any culture, this must have its myth of origins.

31. I have chosen to capitalize the word because I intend to demonstrate that Gothic denotes literary conventions organized around a specific structure.

32. Although early histories of Gothic tended to assume that the German influence was crucial, this theory is given much less credence now. In fact, it

may be that this theory had a dual origin: in the German-centered philological tradition of early scholarly training in the humanities and in the habit of early authors in attributing their tale to some exotic foreign source, lending the tale an additional *frisson* of authenticity. I would suggest, however, that the tradition is largely homegrown.

33. M. H. Abrams, ed., *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 5th ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1986), pp. 74–75; C. Hugh Holman, ed., *A Handbook to Literature*, 4th ed. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1980), pp. 204–5.

34. In a review of Barbara Leaming's biography of Bette Davis, Jay Carr writes, "The account of Davis' sad last days, when she mostly sat with paid companions, drinking too much, waiting for the phone to ring, is classic Hollywood gothic." ("Davis—again—proves too much for her biographer," *The Boston Globe*, Monday, May 25, 1992, p. 29). From the same newspaper, Tuesday, May 26, 1992, "Postcards from the solitary life of writer Annie Proulx": "In 'Postcards,' Proulx gives the reader a powerful sense of the gothic soul of New England through her family, the Bloods, rural Vermont farmers who are scared by poverty and the exhaustion of working unyielding soil" (p. 48). "Lone Star Gothic" is the title of Richard Corliss's review of Lyle Lovett's "Joshua Judges Ruth" (*Time*, June 15, 1992, p. 71). In *Newsweek* for August 24, 1992, Eleanor Clift writes that "a Bush-Quayle strategist calls the vocal minority [opposing all abortions] 'Gothic Republicans'" (p. 38). "Gothic" is also a current slang term among college students. Chris Larson, a senior at the University of California, Davis, is quoted as saying of the audience of a rock concert, "It's not very often you see Crips and a bunch of gothics in the same stadium" (*U. The National College Magazine*, September 1992, p. 35). Thanks to Kasee Clifton Laster for bringing these last two items to my attention.

35. Jacobellis vs. Ohio (1964). As we shall see, there are also connections between the Gothic and the pornographic. Stewart actually wrote, "I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description; and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. But I know it when I see it, and the motion picture involved in this case is not that."

36. David H. Richter, "Gothic Fantasia," pp. 150–52. He distinguishes the "preconstructional" (including its origins, sources, and analogues), the "post-constructional" (where the genre is established in diametrical opposition to other genres or modes), and the "constructional" (its effect upon the audience). For a collection of essays that begin to read Gothic in light of more recent literary theories, see Kenneth W. Graham, ed., *Gothic Fictions: Prohibition/Transgression* (New York: A M S Press, 1989).

37. This idea of "secondary" and "tertiary" members of the genre is argued by Alistair Fowler in *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 149–69.

38. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (1980); Lakoff

and Mark Turner, *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (1987); Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind* (1987); Mark Turner, *Death Is the Mother of Beauty: Metaphor, Mind, Criticism* (1987). All are published by the University of Chicago Press.

39. George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

40. Montague Summers, *The Gothic Quest*, pp. 17–56.

41. As James Twitchell rightly points out in *Dreadful Pleasures: An Anatomy of Modern Horror* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), the demonic or possessed child has become a stock character of mid-twentieth-century horror: books include *Rosemary's Baby* (1965) and *Carrie* (1974); both were made into movies, and other films such as "The Exorcist" (1973), "The Omen" (197), and their numerous sequels, pursue this new focus of anxiety.

42. Although Guillén's practice suggests that he intuitively grasps this problem, his references to "essential situations" imply that he clings to the familiar way of defining categories. (Of course, this tendency may be inherent in language: the unavoidable verb "to be" encourages such "essentialist" thoughts.)

43. Lakoff illustrates these principles of category formation by examples from Dyrbal, an aboriginal language that divides all nouns into four groups, indicated by four different prefixes. In the Dyrbal system "men" and "women" head the first two categories, while the other two are categories of "all edible fruit" and "parts of the body." The category "*bayi*" includes "men, kangaroos, possums, bats, most snakes, most fishes, some birds, most insects, the moon, storms, rainbows, etc." (p. 92). Here the power of culture-specific idealized models appears in Dyrbal's assuming that the moon belongs to the category "men," in contrast to the Western notion that it is feminine. (Dyrbal culture has a myth describing the moon as the husband of the sun, which thus belongs in the category with "woman.") The category "*balan*" includes "women, bandicoots, dogs, platypus, echidna, some snakes, some fishes, most birds, fireflies, scorpions, crickets, the hairy mary grub, anything connected with water or fire, sun and stars, shields, some spears, some trees, etc." (p. 93).

44. Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 13.

45. For instance, among the qualities Burke lists as sources of the sublime are obscurity, infinity, darkness, and suddenness.

46. Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 63. Influenced by Derrida, Cixous and Irigaray, among others, have asked the feminist question implicit in the critique of Western metaphysics. As Shoshana Felman writes in "Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy," "The metaphysical logic of dichotomous oppositions which dominates philosophical thought (Presence/Absence, Being/Nothingness, Truth/Error, Same/Other, Identity/Difference, etc.) is, in fact, a subtle mechanism of hierarchization which assures the unique valorization of the 'positive' pole . . . and, consequently, the repressive subordination of all 'negativity,' the mastery of difference as such."

47. Both Juliet Mitchell and Nancy Chodorow make this suggestion.

48. As Alice Jardine notes in *Gynesis*, "The Other has been a major preoccupation of French thought for the past fifty years" (105). Edward Said's *Orientalism* analyzes the study of the East as a discourse of the other.

49. For a detailed survey of the evolution of the word Gothic, see Susie I. Tucker, *Protean Shape: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Vocabulary and Usage* (London: Athlone Press, 1967), pp. 149–55.

50. Several of these oxymorons or paradoxes have served as titles for works on the Gothic: Addison's series of essays on the "pleasures of melancholy" are generally regarded as a forerunner of Gothic criticism; *The Delights of Terror* is Terry Heller's title; *The Thrill of Fear* is Walter Kendrick's.

51. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 91.

52. Ian Watt makes a similar point in relation to a considerably more constricted claim about Gothic in his essay "Time and Family in the Gothic Novel" (p. 167).

53. A complex sentence has one or more dependent clauses, just as Gothic plots tend to have several "dependent" narratives. In *The Language of Psycho-Analysis* (translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith; New York: W. W. Norton, 1973), Laplanche and Pontalis point out that Freud progressively abandoned the term "complex," which has become so commonplace in ordinary usage. He strongly resisted the way that the term was often used, as a kind of "psychological typing" —e. g., "a failure complex," which "runs the double risk of concealing the specificity of individual cases and of passing off a statement of the problem as an explanation of it" (p. 73). Nevertheless, the term's possible meanings offer some interesting analogies with the phenomenon of "Gothic." The original psychoanalytic sense of the term is "a relatively stable arrangement of chains of association." A more general use is "a collection of personal characteristics—including the best integrated ones—which is organized to a greater or lesser degree, the emphasis here being on emotional reactions. At this level the existence of the complex is inferred chiefly from the fact that new situations are unconsciously identified with infantile ones; behavior thus appears to be shaped by a latent, unchanging structure." Third, "the stricter sense which is embodied in the expression of 'Oedipus complex,' and which Freud never relinquished: a basic structure of interpersonal relationships and the way in which the individual finds and appropriates his place in it" (p. 73).

CHAPTER ONE

1. Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto and The Mysterious Mother*, edited by Montague Summers (Great Britain: at the Chiswick Press for Houghton Mifflin and Constable, 1925), p. 261.

2. Paula Backscheider, *Spectacular Politics: Theatrical Power and Mass Culture in Early Modern England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993). Pages 149–223 analyze Gothic drama as "hegemonic apparatus." The subject of Gothic drama has been relatively neglected. For a survey see

Bertrand Evans, *Gothic Drama from Walpole to Shelley* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1947).

3. This notion has evoked some critical comment, but none of the critics address the question of "influence" in a particularly sophisticated way. See, for instance, E. L. Burney, "Shakespeare in *Otranto*," *Manchester Review* 12 (1972): pp. 61–64; Leigh A. Ehlers, "The Gothic World as Stage: Providence and Character in *The Castle of Otranto*," *Wascana Review* 14, no. 2 (1980): pp. 17–30; Paul Lewis, "*The Atheist's Tragedy* and *The Castle of Otranto*: Expressions of the Gothic Vision," *Notes and Queries* 24 (1978): pp. 52–54; Jess M. Stein, "Horace Walpole and Shakespeare," *Studies in Philology* 31 (1934): pp. 51–68.

4. Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From Moore to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

5. For a survey of the "institution" of Shakespeare, see Gary Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

6. Mark Madoff, "The Useful Myth of Gothic Ancestry," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 8 (1979): pp. 337.

7. Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics. Advice to an Author*, vol. 1, p. 275. Fifth edition, 1732. Cited in Furness, *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare: Hamlet*, vol. 2, 1877 (reprint, New York: Dover, 1963), p. 143.

8. *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare*, p. 163; cited in Furness, *A New Variorum Edition . . . Hamlet*, p. 146.

9. Sir Thomas Hanmer, *Some Remarks on the Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* (London: 1736): p. 42. Cited in Furness, *A New Variorum Edition . . . Hamlet*, p. 144.

10. William Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* (London: 1817), p. 104; cited in Furness, *A New Variorum Edition . . . Hamlet*, pp. 156–57.

11. Jerrold E. Hogle, "Teaching the Politics of Gender in Literature," p. 114, in Susan Hardy Aiken et al., eds., *Changing Our Minds: Transformations of Knowledge* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 98–133.

CHAPTER TWO

1. Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1759; reprint, New York: Garland Press, 1971).

2. Peter A. Tasch, ed., *The Plays of George Colman the Younger*, vol. 2 (New York: Garland Press, 1981).

3. Maurice Lévy, *Le roman 'gothique' anglais, 1764–1824* (Toulouse, France: Association des Publications de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines de Toulouse, 1968), p. vii.

4. "Blue Beard," in Andrew Lang, ed., *The Blue Fairy Book, 1889* (reprint, New York: Dover, 1965; all quotations come from this edition).

5. See Leonard Wolf, *Bluebeard: The Life and Crimes of Gilles de Rais* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1980); and Georges Bataille, *The Trial of Gilles de Rais*, trans. Richard Robinson (Los Angeles: Amok Books, 1991).

6. William Gass's meditation on the color blue, *On Being Blue: A Philo-*

sophical Inquiry (Boston: David Godine, 1976), points out the range of meanings associated with this term, including its association with perverse sexuality. A “blue” movie is a pornographic movie.

7. Even the doctrine of the Fortunate Fall transmutes the female-induced tragedy into a comedy on a cosmic scale. (Eve is later supplanted by the Virgin Mary, who gives birth without sex and is herself free of original sin.)

8. Carl Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Random House, 1963), pp. 158–59.

9. Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (1976; 2nd ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1990).

10. See, for instance, Claire Kahane, “The Gothic Mirror,” in Shirley Garner et al., eds., *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Psychoanalytic Feminist Interpretation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 334–51. In “Gothic Possibilities” Norman N. Holland and Leona F. Sherman emphasize the complexity of the castle as symbolic setting. They fail to distinguish the possibility of different plots, however, a point that I believe is important. (“Gothic Possibilities” appears in Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocínio P. Schweickart, eds., *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986], pp. 215–33).

11. Jean Roudaut, “Les Demeures dans le roman noir,” *Critique* (August–September 1959), p. 723 (my translation).

12. Margaret Atwood and Donald Barthelme have both experimented with variants inspired by this problem (respectively, “Bluebeard’s Egg” [1986] and “Bluebeard” [1987]).

13. This principle would also explain why two regions of the United States have seemed to have a particular affinity for Gothic: New England and the South. Patriarchy was notably more influential in the history of these areas than it was in that of other areas.

CHAPTER THREE

1. In *The Generations of Animals* Aristotle declares that the father contributes the soul (and thus provides the “formal cause”) whereas the mother provides the material substance of the offspring. (From this extreme patriarchal version of reproduction comes Athena’s judgment in *The Furies* that murdering one’s mother is not so grave a crime as murdering one’s father.)

2. Montague Summers, *The Gothic Quest: A History of the Gothic Novel* (London: Fortune Press, 1938; New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), p. 180. Summers’s quotation from Walpole is slightly inaccurate. (See *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole’s Correspondence*, ed. W. S. Lewis, vol. 20 [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960], p. 381.)

3. Barbara Johnson, “Writing,” in Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, eds., *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 39–49.

4. Several critics have remarked that Eloisa’s letter is “operatic,” and one might pursue the analogies between her utterance and the mad scene of

Donizetti's Lucia at some length, though the parallels demonstrated by this exercise primarily suggest the consistency of cultural assumptions about women and madness. On the other hand, opera, in blending words, music, and spectacle, might be seen as pushing the Symbolic toward the bounds of the Semiotic. And this is what Eloisa does.

5. Lawrence Lipking, *Abandoned Women and Poetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). See also Peggy Kamuf, *Fictions of Feminine Desire: Disclosures of Héloïse* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982).

6. See, for instance, Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring inside Her* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), for a survey of this cultural tradition.

7. Gillian Beer, "Our Unnatural No-Voice": The Heroic Epistle, Pope, and Women's Gothic," reprinted in Leopold Damrosch, Jr., ed., *Modern Essays in Eighteenth-Century Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 379–411.

8. From a political perspective, of course, this notion of male producers of such writing compels ambivalence: on the one hand that men might produce "feminine writing" is evidence against the existence of a feminine essence; on the other hand, their production threatens to supplant that of women, given the political realities of patriarchal culture.

9. Eloisa is also alluding to the erotic poetry of the Canticles, but the allusion contributes as well to the larger pattern of a version of *l'écriture féminine*.

10. Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women* (trans. Sean Hand), in Toril Moi, ed., *The Kristeva Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), pp. 139–59.

11. Leon Roudiez, Introduction to Kristeva's *Revolution in Poetic Language* (trans. Margaret Waller; New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 4.

12. Beer, "Our Unnatural No-Voice," p. 409.

13. Beer lists many other such heroines. Certainly other factors than the unconscious one I have suggested make Héloïse and Abelard memorable. In the English tradition the fact that she was taken up by a canonical poet, Pope, has contributed to her fame (even though the poem has seemed to many readers only on the margins of the Pope canon). Eloisa and Abelard also sustain Denis de Rougemont's thesis in *Love in the Western World* that memorable love is adulterous: but one might argue that this tradition itself concerns the conflict between Semiotic and Symbolic, or what Foucault calls the deployment of alliance versus the deployment of sexuality.

14. Madelon Sprengnether, *The Spectral Mother: Freud, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990). For a description of the argument, see the Preface, pp. 1–10.

15. For an extended discussion of these allusions see Anne Williams, *Prophetic Strain: The Greater Lyric in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 24–37.

16. Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (translated by Leon S. Roudiez; New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), esp. pp. 3–68.

17. Freud, *Mourning and Melancholia*, *Standard Edition* (Hogarth 1974; reprint 1986), vol. 14, pp. 327–58.

18. In the first chapter of *The English Elegy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), Peter Sacks gives a compelling psychoanalytic reading of the literary elegy as a manifestation of this process.

19. “Virtue and Passion: The Dialectic of *Eloisa to Abelard*,” reprinted in Maynard Mack, ed., *Essential Articles for the Study of Pope*, rev. ed. (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1968), p. 343. In a startlingly literal example of critical phallogentrism, Henry Pettit, who otherwise argues for the “erotic” motive in *Eloisa*’s speech, calls the conclusion of the poem (from line 289 onward) “an anticlimax of detumescent passion” (“Pope’s *Eloisa to Abelard*: An Interpretation,” in Mack, ed., *Essential Articles*, p. 327). See also Beer, “Our Unnatural No-Voice,” p. 186. In fact, *Eloisa* seems to me as replete with sexual puns as any love lyric by Donne. In addition to *Eloisa*’s often repeated “come,” one might note that the word “die” has for her the same significance it has in “The Canonization” both consciously (in her description of the “blameless vestal,” l. 221) and unconsciously in her final acceptance of death.

CHAPTER FOUR

1. I owe this irresistibly appropriate pun to Marjorie Durham’s essay “The (M)other Tongue: *Christabel* and the Language of Love,” in Garner et al., eds., *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Psychoanalytic Feminist Interpretation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 172.

2. David B. Morris, “Gothic Sublimity,” *New Literary History* 16 (1984–85), p. 303.

3. In chapter 4 of *Isak Dinesen and the Engendering of Narrative*, Susan Hardy Aikin proposes a theory of Gothic similarly indebted to Kristeva and French Feminist theories of language ([Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990], pp. 67–83). I was unaware of this discussion while composing my own theory. I want to thank Jerrold Hogle for bringing it to my attention.

4. Eve Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (1976; rev. ed. New York: Arno Press, 1980), pp. 97–139.

5. Although if one considers male and female fainting as one category, it outnumbers the wedding.

6. In Charles Robert Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) and Mary Ann Radcliffe’s *Manfroné, or the One-Handed Monk* (1809).

7. For a discussion of Freudian hysteria as “embodied meaning,” see Dianne Hunter, “Hysteria, Psychoanalysis, Feminism: The Case of Anna O.,” in Garner et al., eds., *The (M)other Tongue*, pp. 89–115. Thus it is perfectly consistent that “Anna O.,” Breuer’s patient who coined the phrase “talking cure,” was afflicted with a progressive linguistic incapacity: she first lost her native German, then her fluent French, then her less fluent English and so on.

8. If this is an inherent organizing principle of Gothic as a whole, it clarifies some themes in Poe's work and suggests why a writer capable of producing such Gothic classics as "The Fall of the House of Usher" was also a pioneer of the detective story. "The Purloined Letter" on the surface seems to belong more with his tales of detection than with the unmistakably Gothic; it is, in Lacanian explication, an allegory of meaning within the Symbolic.

9. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* begins to explore the linguistic implications of Gothic conventions in her chapter on "Language as Live Burial: Thomas De Quincey" (1976; New York: Metheun, 1980).

10. For a survey of this theme in the Romantics see M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971), pp. 373–85.

11. "The 'Uncanny,'" *Standard Edition* (Hogarth 1974; reprint 1986), vol. 17, pp. 248–49.

12. Freud argues that the uncanny of the second type in literature can only emerge when the setting is "one of physical reality"; on the surface, this might seem to complicate the case of Gothic, which continually insists upon the manifest "otherness" of its settings and narrative situations. But two "realistic" aspects of Gothic are relevant here: one is the fiction of historicity upon which Gothic fictions tend to insist, in contrast to the "old romance," which takes place in a never-never land or Golden World. Second is the fact that these narratives present barely disguised quotidian realities; as many readers have noticed, the manners and morals of the Gothic world are in fact those of the late-eighteenth-century middle class. (The fiction of historicity thus might be seen to function like the prefix *un* in *unheimlich*: as a "token of repression.")

13. Ann Radcliffe, "On the Supernatural in Poetry," *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*, n.s. 16 (1826).

14. Lewis's text in fact echoes Pope occasionally, as in the description of Lorenzo's dream-vision, pp. 27–28.

15. M. G. Lewis, *The Monk*, Oxford English Novels (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 412.

16. Anne Mellor's *Romanticism and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1993), which appeared after I had completed this section of my argument, contends that one may distinguish between a "masculine" and a "feminine" Romanticism in the two modes' attitude toward the sublime, that the "feminine" "domesticated the sublime." I agree that there are two modes of Romanticism, but no one to my knowledge has remarked on the particular twist of sexual politics here—that what Mellor calls the "masculine" mode of the sublime unconsciously foregrounds the culturally "female."

17. The "silent form" of Keats's Grecian Urn (itself an interesting problem in tangled signifiers and signifieds) is ultimately sublime: it "dost tease us out of thought / As doth eternity" (ll. 44–45). The sublimity of the Urn (which in strictly Burkean terms might aspire to beauty, but not sublimity) offers a useful lesson in the sexual politics of the sublime. The Urn is both feminine (a ves-

sel, a “bride”) and yet also masculine—a “Sylvan historian” who can outpoet the poet, a philosopher, a “friend to man” who utters gnomic wisdom about “Beauty” and “Truth.”

18. Morris, “Gothic Sublimity,” p. 301.

CHAPTER FIVE

1. As Patricia Parker points out in *Inescapable Romance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), the mode portrays a realm of cyclical timelessness, where the narrative climax is always temporary rather than finite. Indeed, one might posit that romance is to realism as the Semiotic is to the Symbolic. The romance narrative, with its theoretically unending series of climaxes, seems also closer to the “feminine.”

2. Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (translated by Leon S. Roudiez; New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), pp. 22–27.

3. Walter Kendrick, *The Thrill of Fear: 250 Years of Scary Entertainment* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991), pp. 3–33.

CHAPTER SIX

1. Many early critics of Gothic, and some more recent ones, have affirmed this last point—some of them arguing for the Gothic having a kind of theological prestige. These include Joel Porte, “In the Hands of an Angry God: Religious Terror in Gothic Fiction,” in *The Gothic Imagination: Essays in Dark Romanticism* (edited by G. R. Thompson; Olympia: Washington State University Press, 1974), pp. 42–64. Elizabeth MacAndrew argues (in *The Gothic Tradition in Fiction* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1979]) that Gothic’s originality lies in its confronting evil psychologized—“evil within.”

2. For instance, Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500–1800* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977); Randolph Trumbach, *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family* (New York: Academic Press, 1977); Lenore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

3. See, for example, Ronald Paulson, “Gothic Fiction and the French Revolution,” *ELH* 48 (1981): pp. 532–54.

4. While Freud focused on the history of the analysand’s direct (if unconscious) experiences of his or her family, Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok have described a mode of transgenerational influence he tellingly calls “*le fantôme*,” observing situations where a son or daughter may express the symptoms of the parent’s neurosis “encrypted” in the analysand as a sort of hidden non-object (“A Poetics of Psychoanalysis: ‘The Lost Object—Me,’” *Substance* 43 [1984]: pp. 3–18). In a more practical vein, psychiatric social workers use the “genogram” as a diagnostic tool in marriage counseling. There are often strikingly similar patterns of behavior in the families of couples, sometimes several generations back, or even unknown to the individuals (perhaps each one has a grandparent who eloped at the age of seventeen, for instance). Such “coincidences” often are related to the present couple’s unconscious expectations and

modes of behavior (See Maggie Scarf, *Intimate Partners: Patterns in Love and Marriage* [New York: Random House, 1987], pp. 10–33).

5. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1990).

6. For instance, Lowry Nelson, Jr., "Night Thoughts on the Gothic Novel," *Yale Review* 52 (1963): pp. 236–57; Peter Quennell, "The Moon Stood Still on Strawberry Hill," *Horizon Magazine* 11 (1969): pp. 113–19; Cynthia Griffin Wolff, "The Radcliffean Gothic Model: A Form for Feminine Sexuality," *Modern Language Studies* 9, no. 3 (1979): pp. 98–113. The latter was reprinted in Juliann E. Fleenor, ed., *The Female Gothic* (Montreal: Eden Press, 1983), pp. 207–23.

CHAPTER SEVEN

1. Dean R. Koontz, *Writing Popular Fiction* (Cincinnati: Writer's Digest, 1973), p. 119.

2. The quest for "Gothics" led to some strange discoveries. I once noticed a copy of Ibsen's *Ghosts* among the Gothics in a bookstore in Brownwood, Texas; but whether this generic misdirection was the result of booksellerly wile or of ignorance, I don't know.

3. This history is told in much greater detail by Janice Radway in *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

4. Male writers of formula fiction frequently produced the female formula during its heyday in the 1960s. Koontz, who wrote several himself, asserted in 1973 that "half the gothics published today are by men" (*Writing Popular Fiction*, p. 117). Female authors of Male Gothic are not under the same implicit constraint to disguise their gender, although few of them seem to be attracted to the genre. Two quite successful exceptions to the female author's characteristic tendency to explain the supernatural are Barbara Michaels and Anne Rice. Aside from expecting her readers to accept the reality of her ghosts, however, Michaels's usually comic plots tend to be otherwise conventionally "female," focusing on domestic detail and her characters' personal relationships. Rice assumes the reality of vampires but (like Shelley in *Frankenstein*) treats them sympathetically and gives them a voice. Since she evolved into a Male Gothic author, it is interesting that Rice began her career by writing pornography under a pseudonym.

5. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (edited by James Engell and W. Jackson Bate; Princeton University Press, 1983), chap. 14 (vol 7, part 2, pp. 6–7 of *The Collected Works*).

6. Holt's Martha Leigh (*Mistress of Mellyn*) is locked up in a priest hole to die. Most of Holt's Gothic heroines are incarcerated, buried, or walled in toward the end of the story. The nameless heroine of *Rebecca* is figuratively rescued through Max's revelation that he had never loved Rebecca, while Jane Eyre is rescued by Rochester's calling to her just as she is about to agree to the self-immolation of a marriage to St. John Rivers.

7. See, for instance, Mark M. Henneley, Jr., “*Dracula*: The Gnostic Quest and the Victorian Wasteland,” *English Literature in Transition: 1880–1900* 20 (1977): pp. 13–25.

8. The conclusion of *Dracula* is a variation on this theme; perhaps it merely conventionalizes the sense of the “eternity” of certain human propensities. If this proud tyrant has been destroyed, there will undoubtedly be others, and the work will have to be done over again.

9. Stephen King, *Danse Macabre* (New York: Berkeley Books, 1982), pp. 36, 186.

10. Levin intensifies this effect with clever foreshadowings in minor narrative details. Guy uses “Red Devil” paint and has had minor parts in the plays *Luther* and *Nobody Loves an Albatross*. Rosemary’s friend Hutch, dying of a coma, leaves a book and a message for her: “The name is an anagram.” Rosemary assumes he means the title of the book, *All of them Witches*, and gets out the Scrabble game to decode it. She rearranges the title into several other portentously relevant phrases (even though it turns out that the “name” in question is “Adrian Mercado”): “Comes with the fall”; “How is hell fact met”; “Who shall meet it”; “We that choose ill”; and “If he shall come.”

11. In *Danse Macabre* King writes that he was aware of *Carrie* as playing on the fears aroused by the new Women’s Liberation movement: “The book is, in its more adult implications, an uneasy shrinking from a future of female equality,” pp. 169–70.

12. For a history of this concept, see Walter M. Kendrick, *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture* (New York: Viking, 1987).

13. As film critics frequently observe, in American popular culture extreme violence is far more acceptable than overt sexuality. Nudity—especially male nudity—is much more likely to be censored than the most outrageous killings and mutilations. But if pornography is violence pretending to be sexuality, the thrill of violence may be fundamentally “sexual.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

1. Polidori’s anecdote about Shelley’s reaction to “Christabel” is obviously related to this theme of the gaze. According to Mary, “poor Polidori” conceived of a tale related to the Lady Godiva tradition of someone’s breaking the taboo of looking.

2. Thus I disagree with the fundamental premise in Susan Wolstenholme’s *Gothic (Re)Visions: Writing Women and Readers* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993): “Like the uncanny, a ‘Gothic moment’ is a moment of (mis)recognition, where hiding from sight and revealing become indistinguishable from each other. Reflexively, it meditates on the problem of representation in terms especially appropriate for suggesting the double role of a woman writer. . . . And the absence at the center of such texts may be discerned as maternal, in part because it conjures those mother texts which it re-sees” (pp. 12–13). As I shall argue below, I believe this is true of Male but *not* Female Gothic, which in fact sees the mother and thus re-visions the world.

3. For instance, A. C. Hamilton argues that Amoret was bound by womanly fears of masculine “maisterie” in *The Structure of Allegory in the Faerie Queene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 182; Harry Berger, Jr., “Busirane and the War between the Sexes: An Interpretation of *The Faerie Queene* III.xi–xii,” *ELR* 1 (1971): p. 100.

4. Bloch’s analysis of the relation between courtly love and medieval misogyny has interesting implications for a reading of “Petrarchan” conventions of Renaissance love poetry.

CHAPTER NINE

1. See, for instance, George E. Haggerty, “Literature and Homosexuality in the Late Eighteenth Century,” *Studies in the Novel* 18, no. 4 (Winter 1986), pp. 341–52.

2. *Coleridge’s Miscellaneous Criticism*, edited by T. M. Raysor (London: Constable & Co., Ltd., 1936), pp. 370–71.

3. Marquis de Sade, “Reflections on the Novel,” in *The 120 Days of Sodom and Other Writings* (New York: Grove Press, 1966), p. 109.

4. Lorenzo’s prophetic dream in the cathedral that occurs early in the narrative echoes *Eloisa* unmistakably.

5. See, for instance, Robert Graves, *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1966), p. 222.

6. One may also note the irony that Ambrosio is set on the road to ruin by a woman disguised as a boy, the novice Rosario; it is the sympathies (and attractions?) aroused by this “boy”—the supposedly orthodox affection of the “father” for the “son” condoned by monastic rule—that facilitate all the other far less sanctioned passions. As is common in Male Gothic, a transformation occurs. But unlike the transformation from monster to prince (characteristic of Female Gothic), here the illusion of a “safe” masculinity is transformed into the dangerous (and monstrous) female reality.

CHAPTER TEN

1. I “collected” this version of the Dracula tale in an entirely unscientific survey of three graduate students in English, fifteen English majors enrolled in summer school, nineteen freshmen taking English 101, and six English faculty members. Of my informants, three had actually read *Dracula*.

2. Clive Leatherdale’s *Dracula: The Novel and the Legend* (Wellingborough, Engl.: Aquarian Press, 1985) offers a comprehensive survey of these topics. James Twitchell’s *The Living Dead* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1981) and *Dreadful Pleasures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) also contain significant information about the vampire in literature and popular culture. Radu Florescu and Raymond McNally’s *In Search of Dracula* (Greenwich, Conn.: N. Y. Graphic Society, 1972) gives an account of Vlad Tepes, Stoker’s historical model. Margaret Carter’s *Dracula: The Vampire and the Critics* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988) collects major recent essays.

3. Twitchell, *Dreadful Pleasures*, p. 108.

4. Gregory A. Waller, *The Living and the Undead: From Stoker's "Dracula" to Romero's "Dawn of the Dead"* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), p. 3.
5. Major contributors to the tradition include Ernest Jones, *On the Nightmare* (1931; reprint, New York: Liveright, 1971); C. F. Bentley, "The Monster in the Bedroom: Sexual Symbolism in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," *Literature and Psychology* 22 (1972): pp. 27–34; Joseph Bierman, "Dracula: Prolonged Childhood Illness and the Oral Triad," *American Imago* 29 (1972): pp. 186–98; Richard Astle, "Dracula as Totemic Monster: Lacan, Freud, Oedipus and History," *Substance* 25 (1980): pp. 98–105.
6. Twitchell, *Dreadful Pleasures*, p. 127.
7. Waller, *The Living and the Undead*, p. 15.
8. Waller, *The Living and the Undead*, p. 66.
9. Christopher Craft, "'Kiss Me with Those Red Lips': Gender and Inversion in Stoker's *Dracula*," *Representations* 8 (Fall 1984): p. 128.
10. Devendra P. Varma, Introduction to *Varney the Vampyre: or, The Feast of Blood*, by Thomas Peckett Prest (New York: Arno, 1972), p. xv.
11. Raymond McNally, *Dracula Was a Woman: In Search of the Blood Countess of Transylvania* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983).
12. Penelope Shuttle and Peter Redgrove, *The Wise Wound: Eve's Curse and Everywoman* (New York: Richard Marek, 1978).
13. Roth, *Bram Stoker* (Boston: Twayne Pub., 1982), p. 115.
14. See, for instance, Stephanie Demetrakopoulos, "Feminism, Sex Role Exchanges, and Other Subliminal Fantasies in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 2, no. 3 (1977): pp. 104–13; Carol Senf, "Dracula: Stoker's Response to the New Woman," *Victorian Studies* 26, no. 1 (Autumn 1982), pp. 33–49.
15. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams, Standard Edition* (Hogarth 1974, reprint 1986), vol. 4, p. 327.
16. We do have some information pertinent to the author's choices regarding his vampire's sexual identity. Stoker's two most immediate literary models in English, Coleridge's Geraldine and LeFanu's Carmilla, were both female vampires. Stoker drafted an episode in which Harker encounters a female vampire before reaching Transylvania, but chose to publish it separately as the story "Dracula's Guest." Both of these examples suggest a desire to disassociate the vampire from the female. Yet Stoker also chose the name "Demeter" for Dracula's ship, changing the actual ship's name "Dimitry." Meanwhile, Stoker also read about the historical tyrant Vlad Tepes, whose cognomen Drakula (dragon) perhaps inevitably suggested, as a structural model, the legend of St. George, England's national hero.
17. Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, trans. Ralph Manheim, Bollingen Series 47 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1955), p. 46.
18. Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 43.

19. In *Speculum of the Other Woman* (translated by Gillian C. Gill; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), Irigaray comments on the Neoplatonic tradition that regards matter as “most plausibly called a non-being.” Matter is *une mère de glace* (a sea/mother of ice/mirror). If real being is spirit, matter/*mater* is nothing; hence, the vampire, as figure for nature, has no reflection in the mirror.

20. Leonard Wolf, *The Annotated Dracula* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1975), p. 123; Barbara G. Walker, *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), p. 337.

21. Neumann, *The Great Mother*, p. 43.

22. Lloyd Harris, *The Book of Garlic* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974), p. 22.

23. “Moly” is both a mythical herb with black roots and white leaves and wild garlic (liliaceous genus *Allium*), according to the *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, ed. C. T. Onions et al. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979). In his note on garlic in *The Annotated Dracula*, Leonard Wolf lists a number of examples from the ancient world linking garlic either with the sacred (“The Egyptians had so high a regard for garlic that they employed it when taking an oath”) or with evil (it was widely regarded as a protection against witches)—an ambiguity which quite suits with its associations with a forgotten Mother Goddess.

24. Others include the Babylonian sun-hero Marduk, who slew the serpent Tiamat; the Canaanite Baal and the serpent Lotan; Indra and the Goddess Danu; Zeus and Typhon; Apollo and Pytho (son of Gaia, Earth); Hercules and the serpent Ladon, also a son of Gaia. The legend of St. Patrick's driving the serpents from Ireland may record another mythic parallel, according to Merlin Stone, *When God Was a Woman* (New York: Dial Press, 1976), pp. 67–68.

25. Joseph Campbell, *Primitive Mythology*, vol. 1 of *The Masks of God* (New York: Viking, 1955–68), p. 70; and Stone, *When God Was a Woman*.

26. Quoted in Peter Rudnytsky, *Freud and Oedipus* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 189.

27. Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo, Standard Edition*, vol. 13, p. 149.

28. Jerre Collins et al., “Questioning the Unconscious: The Dora Archive,” in Bernheimer and Kahane, eds., *In Dora's Case* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 250–51.

29. Luce Irigaray, *Le corps-à-corps avec la mère* (Montreal: Editions de la pleine lune, 1981), p. 35.

30. Toril Moi, “Representations of Patriarchy: Sexuality and Epistemology in Freud's Dora,” in Bernheimer and Kahane, *In Dora's Case* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 192.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

1. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929; New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1957), p. 68.

2. Woolf published a review of Edith Birkhead's *The Tale of Terror* (1931),

which includes a few remarks on Gothic romance. She dismisses the Radcliffe mode as an antiquated form and remarks that one woman screaming and fainting is very much like another. Woolf also reviewed Dorothy Scarborough's *The Supernatural in Fiction* (1917). These reviews, collected in *Granite and Rainbow* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1958) contain some amusing remarks about Ann Radcliffe and other writers of Gothic fiction. And of course she also wrote essays about Jane Eyre and Charlotte Brontë.

3. De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1973), p. 170.

4. See M. H. Abrams's *Natural Supernaturalism* (New York: Norton, 1971) for a survey of the marriage metaphor in Romantic literature (pp. 17–70).

5. Janice Radway, "The Utopian Impulse in Popular Literature: Gothic Romances and 'Feminist' Protest," *American Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 140–62.

6. Indeed, the two decades when Gothic was most popular were the 1790s and the 1960s, both eras of revolution that saw the birth of two different stages of feminism. Although I would not want to suggest a simple relation of cause and effect, there is surely a connection.

CHAPTER TWELVE

1. Praz in fact surveys the subsequent history of what I have called "Male Gothic." His (no doubt unconscious) bias is most clearly manifest in the opening of his chapter on the "Belle Dame sans Merci": "There have always existed Fatal Women both in mythology and in literature, since mythology and literature are imaginative reflections of real life, and real life has always provided more or less complete examples of arrogant and cruel female characters" (*The Romantic Agony*, ed. and trans. Angus Davidson (New York: World Publishing Co., Meridian Books, 1956, p. 189).

2. See, for instance, Peter J. Thorslev, Jr., *The Byronic Hero* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962).

3. This is one of the most commonly misunderstood of Female Gothic conventions. Feminist readers often assume that the hero's first appearance is authentic and the heroine's change of mind evidence of her own weakness or vulnerability to cultural domination. Alison Assiter argues that "the initial revulsion makes things respectable for the reader. 'Nice' women don't fall in love with powerful, unscrupulous macho men" (*Pornography, Feminism, and the Individual* [Winchester, Mass.: Pluto Press, 1989], p. 113).

4. We must keep in mind, however, that her "reality" operates relative to her romance world of the past and distance, a reality primarily *psychological*, not historical.

5. The *ur*-Psyche is probably the myth of Ceres and Persephone (the mother searching for her daughter lost to Hades).

6. Erich Neumann, *Amor and Psyche: the Psychological Development of the*

Feminine, trans. Ralph Mannheim, Bollingen Series 54 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).

7. See, for instance, Lee R. Edwards, *Psyche as Hero: Female Heroism and Fictional Form* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1984) and Rosemary Franklin, "The Awakening and the Failure of Psyche," *American Literature* 56 (1984): pp. 510–26.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

1. Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), p. 46.

2. It would be interesting to contrast in detail Psyche's process of negotiation with reality with the *fort/da* game described by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

3. Goelzer's *Dictionnaire Latin-Français* defines *voluptas* as "jouissance de l'âme ou du corps. . . . Plaisir, penchant aux plaisirs sensuels, envie, désir." French translations of Apuleius choose *volupté* rather than *plaisir*. "Et quand le terme fut arrivé, il leur naquit une fille, que nous nommons la Volupté. [And when it was time, a daughter was born to them, whom we call 'Volupté.']" (Apulée, *Les Métamorphoses*, liber VI, xxiv: Les Belles Lettres [Paris, 1969], p. 93). Another version translates the statement with a reminder that it's not *that* kind of "volupté": "Elle met au monde une fille de chair qui portera le nom de Volupté, alors que la volupté dont il est question à propos de Lucius est d'un autre ordre: c'est le plaisir purement spirituel de la contemplation d'Isis." ("She brought into the world a daughter of flesh who bears the name of Volupté, although the "volupté" in question here is according to Lucius of another order: it is the purely spiritual pleasure of the contemplation of Isis.")

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

1. Anne Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1993), especially pp. 40–64.

2. "The pastoral romance of Longus is also extant in the Greek language. It is esteemed elegant, but it would be impossible to chastise it into decency. The Latins, who had less invention, had no writings of this kind, except the *Golden Ass* of Apuleius may be reckoned such. In it is found the beautiful episode of Cupid and Psyche, which has been elegantly modernized by Fontenelle" ("On the Origins and Progress of Novel-Writing" [London, 1810], pp. 6–7). I want to thank Elizabeth Kraft for bringing this essay to my attention.

3. The heroine of Mary Stewart's *Nine Coaches Waiting* (published in 1956, but frequently reprinted during the 1960s) is very conscious of her role

as a latter-day Jane Eyre who shuns black bombazine in favor of Italian silk when it is available.

4. Victoria Schwartz, “‘The Soul Made of Fire’: *Jane Eyre* and the Legend of Eros and Psyche,” *DAI* 49, no. 5: p. 1154A, Temple University, November 1988.

5. *The Origin of Consciousness*, especially pp. 176–254. The changes described by Gerda Lerner (*The Creation of Patriarchy* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1986]) and Riane Eisler (*The Chalice and the Blade* [San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987]) are congruent with the process Jaynes describes. Lerner does not refer to Jaynes’s hypothesis. Eisler discusses it briefly and rejects it (pp. 74–75). Her comments suggest to me, however, that she does not entirely grasp the argument.

6. Robert May, *Sex and Fantasy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1980).

7. One might note, however, that Brooks’s theory of plot (*Reading for the Plot* [New York: Knopf, 1984]) attempts to “plot” the interaction of body and mind, as does Freud’s theory of the death drive in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

8. Some female writers of science fiction have experimented with just such alternative sets of principles, such as Ursula K. LeGuin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness*.

9. Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Oxford World Classics (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 507. Further citations will be made in the text.

10. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, pp. 40–64.

11. As Joanna Russ points out in her essay “Somebody’s Trying to Kill Me and I Think It’s My Husband” (*Journal of Popular Culture* 6 [1973]), the often attractive (and frequently blond) male often turns out to be a villain in mass-market Gothics of the 1960s. I have argued this point in regard to Emily Brontë in “Natural Supernaturalism in *Wuthering Heights*,” *Studies in Philology* 82, no. 1 (Winter 1985): pp. 104–27.

12. Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment* (New York: Knopf, 1976), pp. 159–66.

13. In Radcliffe’s early female Gothic, these two types appear as separate characters. But observing them and their implicit thematic functions helps us to understand how brilliant was Charlotte Brontë’s fusion of the two. To embody them in one, to show Rochester’s transformation, is effective because it condenses the “problem of masculinity.” Rochester appears to be a Montoni: he manipulates Jane (through her feelings, not her property—she has none, of course). His “sins” are sins of affiliation—the past mistresses. Even his Bluebeard-like secret—a living wife, not a dead one, locked away in the secret room—while a Montoni-like sin of property is still a very “feminine” error of illusion; he is deceived by those in power.

14. Thus *Udolpho* also supports the thesis in Margaret Homans’s *Bearing the Word*, which argues that the language of women’s narratives often tends to “concretize” or “realize” abstract figurations. Homans argues that this tech-

nique implies women's different relationship to the Symbolic in a patriarchal culture. (*Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986].)

15. See Eva Figes, *Patriarchal Attitudes: Women in Society* (1970; reprinted New York: Persea Books, 1978) for a brief, witty survey of this history.

16. The Female Gothic heroine's power of empathy is often dramatized metaphorically in the occasional appearance of paranormal or "psychic" phenomena, as when Jane Eyre hears Mr. Rochester calling her from a long journey's distance just as she is about to agree to marry St. John Rivers.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

1. A. O. Lovejoy, "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms," *Essays in the History of Ideas* (1924; reprinted Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1948), pp. 228–53.

2. See, for instance, the collection of essays edited by Anne Mellor, *Romanticism and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988) and her book *Romanticism and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Marlon B. Ross, *The Contours of Masculine Desire: Romanticism and the Rise of Women's Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, *Shelley's Goddess: Maternity, Language, Subjectivity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Julie Ellison, *Delicate Subjects: Romanticism, Gender, and the Ethics of Understanding* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

3. New York: New American Library, 1963.

4. Harold Bloom, "Frankenstein: or, The New Prometheus," *Partisan Review* 32 (1965): 611–18; reprinted in *Ringers in the Tower: Studies in the Romantic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 119–29.

5. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, "Horror's Twin: Mary Shelley's Monstrous Eve," in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 213–47; Barbara Johnson, "My Monster/My Self," *Diacritics* 12, no. 2 (Summer 1982), pp. 3–10; Mary Poovey, "My Hideous Progeny: The Lady and the Monster," from *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 114–42; Margaret Homans, "Bearing Demons: Frankenstein's Circumvention of the Maternal," from *Bearing the Word* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 100–119.

6. Moers, *Literary Women* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976), p. 140.

7. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, pp. 17–29; 144–169.

8. The myth of Prometheus as two aspects: a "male" transgression and a "female" motive. Readings may emphasize Prometheus's overreaching—his violation of the Father's Law and consequent punishment in eternal, conscious suffering. But his motive was "female"; he pitied human suffering.

9. A third meaning, "to relieve (someone) from work for a time" or "to rest for a time from some activity," apparently comes from another root entirely,

the Old English *spelian*, “to substitute,” which may remotely point to the notion of substitution at the roots of language.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

1. *Biographia Literaria; or, Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), vol. 1, pp. 295, 304.

2. *Biographia Literaria*, vol. 2, p. 18.

3. Robert Penn Warren, “A Poem of Pure Imagination: An Experiment in Reading,” in *Selected Essays of Robert Penn Warren* (New York: Vintage-Random, 1956), pp. 222, 214.

4. Max Schulz comments that McGann’s essay “provides a theoretical model for reopening the poem to critical analysis.” “Samuel Taylor Coleridge,” in Frank Jordan, ed., *The English Romantic Poets: A Review of Research and Criticism*, 4th ed. (New York: MLA, 1985), p. 390.

5. Jerome McGann, *The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in Historical Method and Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 152.

6. Wordsworth commented to Isabella Fenwick, “Certain parts I myself suggested:—for example, some crime was to be committed which should bring upon the old navigator, as Coleridge afterwards delighted to call him, the spectral persecution, as consequence of that crime, and his own wanderings.” *Poetical Works*, vol. 1, pp. 360–61.

7. Coleridge’s addition of the glosses in 1817 itself implies an effort to assimilate the Semiotic to the Symbolic. Like Kristeva’s essay “*Stabat Mater*,” the annotated poem juxtaposes the two modes and hence exemplifies their incompatibility.

8. *Poetical Works*, vol. 1, p. 361.

9. I do not imply that anything is *essentially* masculine or feminine. Instead, these figures already express a metonymic association derived from the earliest infantile sensations. In a patriarchal family, the infant associates the maternal and feminine with a nurturing proximity, a materiality, that the father can simply never match. The father or the masculine principle will therefore connote the nonmaterial, abstract, ideal.

10. Thus the deed also suggests the pre-Oedipal function of the Freudian death drive as “a need to restore an earlier state of things” (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Standard Edition* (Hogarth 1974, reprint 1986), vol. 18, p. 59). Kristeva argues that within the Semiotic chora the death drive “is transversal to identity and tends to disperse ‘narcissisms’ whose constitution ensures the link between structures and, by extension, life. But at the same time and conversely, narcissism and pleasure are only temporary positions from which the death drive blazes new paths” (*Revolution in Poetic Language* [translated by Margaret Waller; New York: Columbia University Press, 1984]), p. 241, note 23). The large structure of conscious identity emerges through a process of destruction and reformation of earlier, inchoate narcissisms.

11. The sun previously came up on the “right” (l. 83). The association of

sun, light, and right may illustrate a metonymy in which patriarchy justifies itself. If the sun is linked with the paternal (a connection established by masculine characterizations of energy and light and in this passage in *The Rime*, by the Mariner's likening the newly risen sun to "God's own head" [l. 97]), then when the dawn banishes the mist, the paternal pushes the traditionally feminine and maternal toward otherness. The incontestable benefits of solar warmth and light give this result the stamp of rightness. And certainly, "light," "right," and "male" belong to Aristotle's "line of good."

12. According to the *OED*, "guilt" entered English as a synonym for "responsibility" (a meaning current from 1048 to 1671); the placement of the Albatross marks the Mariner's "agency," he is "singled out." (The glossist uses "guilt" in the more familiar sense of "offense, crime, sin," an extension of the first, assuming subjectivity in mariners and Mariner alike since "crime" presupposes "responsibility.")

13. In *The Living Dead* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1981), James Twitchell argues that *The Rime* is in fact a vampire story. More relevant, it seems to me, are the cultural connotations of the vampire as Terrible Mother. Thus the Mariner's self-vampirism both shows a kind of exploiting of inner resources that implies the development of the self (there's something inside to exploit) and indicates the self-tortured peculiarity of the Mariner's development. For him, selfhood is coeval with guilt. In order to speak he must drink blood.

14. In *Sexual Personae* ([New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990], pp. 323–27) Camille Paglia argues that the Mariner is a "male heroine" who is appalled by the horrors of female nature. According to Kristeva's theory of abjection, however, horror springs from the fact of separation rather than being inherent in nature—"the female," as Paglia seems to assume.

15. Numerous critics have assumed that the Mariner unambiguously states that the blessing comes from "my kind saint." He actually says, "*Sure* my kind saint took pity on me"—in other words, he is speculating, guessing.

16. The Mariner's experience here appears to confirm Kristeva's assertion that, in contrast to Klein and Winnicott's emphasis on the centrality of the pre-Oedipal mother, "the father of personal pre-history" affects the child's capacity for *Agape* or love as metaphoric identification, as "movement toward the discernible, a journey toward the visible" (Toril Moi, *The Kristeva Reader* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1987], p. 247). The infant responds to a triangular configuration that includes itself, the mother, and "phallus of the father"—that is, the mother's desire for something other than the child. The Mariner's "salvation" involves such a triangle—his I/eye, the phallic/feminine water snakes, and the moon—that also incorporates qualities associated with the "masculine" (motion and distance). Explicit—though metaphorical—recognition of the moon's "desire" (and the emergence of desire in the Mariner) is displaced into the famously "poetic" gloss: "In his loneliness and fixedness he yearneth toward the journeying Moon." Significantly, he reads in the heavenly bodies a story about the "homcoming" of "lords."

17. Though the reader might object that the Mariner must have spoken with his fellow sailors before they died, the poem records no *speech* (though there is apparently “communication”)—indeed a rather odd situation. Even the “vespers” of part 1 are sung prayers (and thus more Semiotic than Symbolic). Thus this argument demonstrates the power of the symbolic to create expectations about experience in narrative.

18. The major exception is “crimson” (ll. 483, 485), describing the “shadows” rising from the moonlit bay. The gloss identifies them with the seraphs’ “forms of light” (ll. 483ff.). These may be linked with the “still and awful red” of the ship’s shadow, just before the blessing of the water snakes. The reappearance of crimson shadows from the depths reminds us of the animating life force of the lost Mother repressed into the unconscious. Coleridge associates “red” with the female: the bride is “red as a rose,” as are Life-in-Death’s vampiric lips.

19. This music is connected with that “sweet bird,” the Albatross. Tracing the word “sweet” through the poem appropriately reveals that a quality beginning in sensuous experience emerges as a concept: “No sweet bird did follow” (l. 88); “Sweet sounds rose slowly through their mouths” (l. 352); “Around, around, flew each sweet sound” (l. 354); “With their sweet jargoning” (l. 362); “How loudly his [the Hermit’s] sweet voice he rears!” (l. 516); “O sweeter than the marriage-feast / ’Tis sweeter far to me, / To walk together to the kirk” (ll. 601–2).

20. *Lay Sermons*, edited by R. J. White (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972, pp. 3–112. No. 6 of *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*.

21. *Collected Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, edited by Kathleen Coburn. 3 vols. Bollingen Series, no. 50 (New York: Bollinger Foundation, Pantheon Books, 1957–73). Entry no. 2456.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

1. In *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley’s reading of *The Rime* implicitly critiques Coleridge’s judgment of matter/*mater* as cold and intractable. Here, the ambitious “father” is a “mother” whose behavior enacts the patriarchal disdain of materiality; he is disgusted by the ugliness, the otherness of this creature he has shaped. He is not “beautiful,” as the maker rather carelessly intended (vaguely intending to create a narcissistic reflection of human “beauty”). But the creature is authentically “other”; thus it is appropriate that Frankenstein hear his creature’s story on the *mer de glace* aside Mont Blanc. This setting realizes the masculine desire both to conquer matter and to deny (as does Plotinus) that it even exists—a motif echoed in the frame narrative describing Walton’s ambition to find a realm of eternal sunlight in the arctic region of ice.

2. *Speculum of the Other Woman* (translated by Gillian C. Gill; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 168–79.

3. Coleridge’s fantasy here may remind us of the sestet of Keats’s “Bright

Star”: “Pillow’d on my fair love’s ripening breast, / To feel forever its soft fall and swell, / Awake forever in a sweet unrest” (ll. 10–12). In both, the height of sensuous luxury is a minimal, paradoxical consciousness juxtaposing a potentially engulfing materiality: “Still, still to hear her tender taken breath, / And thus live ever or else swoon to death,” writes Keats; “Reason at the Rudder” and “yet warm, yet a Spirit,” writes Coleridge.

4. This is the last of the “conversation poems,” Coleridge’s experiments in adapting blank verse to everyday events. As an immediate precursor of *Tintern Abbey* the poem’s “Wordsworthian” qualities have often been remarked, and have deflected consideration away from its “Gothic” affinities. But to read this poem in light of the Gothic tradition suggests another insight: that the mode of psychological development I have called “Female” is in fact the Wordsworthian myth of selfhood—not without horror, not without fear of the mother. The younger Wordsworth was “haunted” “like a passion” by “the deep and gloomy wood” (ll. 77, 78). His early consciousness of nature was “an appetite, a feeling and a love / That had no need of a remoter charm / By thought supplied” (ll. 80–82).

5. “Frost at Midnight” in Harold Bloom, ed., *Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Modern Critical Views* (New York: Chelsea House, 1986), p. 191. (Reprint of “The Wedding Garment and the Shroud,” *Romantic Weather: The Climates of Coleridge and Baudelaire* (Providence, R.I.: Brown University Press of New England, 1983).

6. Coleridge’s original conclusion stated, “or if the secret ministry of cold, / Shall hang them up in shining icicles / Quietly shining to the quiet Moon.” In changing “cold” to “frost” he emphasized the symmetry, but weakened the force of his paradox.

7. For instance, Harold Bloom writes that “The secret ministry of Frost is analogous to the secret ministry of memory, for both bind together apparently disparate phenomena in an imaginative unity” (*Visionary Company* [Garden City, N.J.: Anchor Books, 1961], p. 216). Barbara Schapiro, in contrast, assumes that desire for the stranger is fueled by Coleridge’s personal experience with his mother (*The Romantic Mother* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983]).

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

1. *Standard Edition* (Hogarth 1974, reprint 1986), vol. 20, p. 29.
2. Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell.
3. “Three Conversations,” in Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Albert Gelpi, eds., *Adrienne Rich’s Poetry* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975), pp. 114–55; Susan Wolfson, “Feminizing Keats,” in Hermione de Almeida, ed., *Critical Essays on John Keats* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1990), pp. 317–56; Margaret Homans, “Reading Women Reading Keats,” *Studies in Romanticism* 29 (1990): 341–70; Anne Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 171–86.
4. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p. 186.

5. According to Mellor in *Romanticism and Gender*, others include Felicia Hemans, Charlotte Smith, Mary “Perdita” Robinson, Anna Seward, Joanna Baillie, Anna Lætitia Barbauld, Hannah Cowley, Hannah More, Mary Tighe, and Helen Maria Williams (p. 179). Mary Tighe was the author of a widely read poem retelling the Psyche myth.

6. Jack Stillinger, ed., *John Keats: Complete Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Belknap Press, Harvard University, 1982). Further references will be cited in the text.

7. Keats probably knew the Psyche myth primarily through Mary Tighe’s popular version. In *Pictures of Romance: Form against Context in Painting and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), Wendy Steiner has suggested that “The Eve” could be read as a prelude to the “Ode to Psyche.”

8. The extent to which these two terms constitute a pun of course depends on pronunciation. They would sound exactly alike only if one anglicizes the French phrase or gives “beldame” a broader “a” than usual. But their kinship is more visual than auditory. The French phrase, with its extra “l” and “e” and the space between, *looks* more “feminine.”

9. Karen Swann, “Harassing the Muse,” in Anne Mellor, ed., *Romanticism and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 81–92; Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p. 184.

10. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p. 184.

11. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p. 184.

12. If one reads this story as a history of the speaking subject, the terms “knight at arms” and “fairy’s child,” usually tacitly regarded as fixed or stable terms determined by Keats’s romance genre, carry other implications. “Knight at arms” is a phrase structurally parallel to “babe in arms”; his associating the Lady with the word “child” may exemplify the characteristic reversal of “dream language,” or “primary process.” And his description of her as a “fairy” is also consistent with the fantasy of parental figures as “supernatural,” given their power relative to the infant. Her power over him seems immense, total. Furthermore, one cannot determine whether the phrase “fairy’s child” is literal or metaphorical. One might even venture that the episode of the “pacing steed” evokes the infant’s experience of being rocked to sleep in the mother’s arms. (Consider, for instance, the familiar nursery rhyme, “Ride a cock horse / To Banbury Cross / To see a fine Lady / Upon a white horse,” which seems to play upon a similar sensation.) And this lady has “bells on her toes,” a detail repeated in the ballad source, where the Queen of Elfland who abducts Thomas the Rhymer is decked with silver bells.

13. That “la belle dame” may be a vampire or lamia has been suggested, for instance, by James Twitchell (*The Living Dead* [Durham: Duke University Press, 1981], pp. 55–58).

14. “The Hoodwinking of Madeline: Skepticism in *The Eve of St. Agnes*,” *Studies in Philology* 58 (1961): 533–55.

15. In 1921 Martha Shackford Hale published an essay arguing the (generally ignored) position that “The Eve” shows that Keats had learned from

Radcliffe. "The Eve of St. Agnes and The Mysteries of Udolpho," *PMLA* 36 (1921): pp. 104–18.

16. Incidentally, a check of Tracy's "Index of Titles" (including 208 early Gothic novels; in *The Gothic Novel, 1790–1830* [Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1981]) does not list a single name that points to a *time*. The titles of Gothics seem to have been most frequently derived from characters' names (*The Monk*) or mysterious phenomena (*The Mysterious Warning*, *The Spectre of Lanmare Abbey*). Though many of them link character and phenomena to a *place* (*The Ghosts of the Forest*, and of course *The Mysteries of Udolpho*) almost none merely names a place.

17. M. H. Abrams, ed., *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 5th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1986), vol 2, p. 805.

EPILOGUE

1. For instance, Aldous Huxley, George Orwell, Doris Lessing, Anthony Burgess, Margaret Atwood.

2. Jean-Louis B. Picherit, "Qui était Barbe Bleue?" *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 89, no. 3 (1988): pp. 374–77.

3. German, "Werewolf"; Italian, "lupo manaro"; Welsh, "dyn a drowyd un flaid"; Greek, "lukanthropos." Thanks to Ben Teague for seeking this information on a translators' electronic network.

4. William Patrick Day, *In the Circles of Fear and Desire* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 177–90.

5. New York: W. W. Norton.

6. Indeed, Freud's spiritual kinship with the Enlightenment may also be supported by the fact that Peter Gay himself, who began as a historian of the this earlier period, later turned to Freud as an equally congenial subject.

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 Wordsworth, William, 3, 5, 82, 83, 84, 85, 151, 157, 165, 180, 183, 185, 202, 206, 210, 229n6, 282n4. Works: *Peter Bell*, 85; *Lyrical Ballads*, 103, 258n9; *The Prelude*, 165, 258n9; “*Tintern Abbey*,” 258n9
 writing. See *l’écriture*
- Zeffirelli, Franco, 13–14, 23
 Zeus, 147, 155

Art of Darkness is an ambitious attempt to describe the principles governing Gothic literature. Ranging across five centuries and including tales as diverse as Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard*, Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, the "plots" of Sigmund Freud, and the recent *Alien* films, Anne Williams proposes three new premises: that Gothic is "poetic," not novelistic, in nature; that there are two parallel Gothic traditions, Male and Female; and that the Gothic and the Romantic represent a single literary tradition.

Building on the psychoanalytic and feminist theory of Julia Kristeva, Williams argues that Gothic conventions such as the haunted castle and the family curse signify the fall of the patriarchal family. She then identifies distinct Male and Female Gothic traditions: in the Male plot, the protagonist faces a cruel, violent, and supernatural world, without hope of salvation. The Female plot, by contrast, asserts the power of the mind to comprehend a world that, though mysterious, is ultimately sensible. By showing how Coleridge and Keats used both Male and Female Gothic, Williams challenges accepted notions about gender and authorship among the Romantics. Lucidly and gracefully written, *Art of Darkness* alters our understanding of the Gothic tradition, of Romanticism, and of the relations between gender and genre in literary history.

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