

Appropriations of the Gothic by Romantic-era Women Writers

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

In this study, I set out to examine the multifarious ways in which Romantic-era women writers appropriated the Gothic for genres other than the novel, and to explore the implications of these appropriations. I look at different manifestations of the Gothic written by women in non-novelistic texts — such as drama, autobiography, poetry, and chapbooks — and I contend that the relationship of women writers to gothic writing is more complex and ambivalent than has been shown in earlier studies, revealing the special and intricate relationships of Gothic with genre and gender.

In the first chapter, I compare two plays that are based on a well-known highland legend, Joanna Baillie's *The Family Legend* and Thomas Holcroft's *The Lady of the Rock*. I elucidate the role played by genre and gender in formulating two adaptations that bear, each in its own way, on themes of liberation, tyranny and domestic violence. One of the main issues addressed by this chapter is how Baillie appropriates gothic tropes and adapts a legend to suit her gender specific literary and political purposes.

In the second chapter, I refer to Diane Hoeveler's concept of "gothic feminism" and use it to read Mary Robinson's *Perdita: The Memoirs of Mary Robinson* and "Golfre: A Gothic Swiss Tale", a long narrative poem. I consider these texts as instances of an ideological appropriation of varieties of the Gothic that victimizes women, and thus reveals their vulnerability in order, paradoxically, to make a case for their rights and to expose hegemonic patriarchal constructs.

In the third chapter I look at the poetic works of the little known Anne Bannerman whose utilization of the Gothic has centred on the deformed body, in this way obliquely revealing her own definition of and experience with disability.

The fourth chapter examines yet another minor women writer, Sarah Wilkinson, who lived in almost total obscurity, yet wrote numerous gothic chapbooks. I study her appropriation of the didactic modes of Gothic that are found in chap-literature, and in this way I highlight a new strand of the Gothic that weaves gothic trappings with elements of both popular literature and middle-class morality.

In the fifth and final chapter I return to Joanna Baillie in order to study *Orra* which I believe to be one of her most unusual plays in that it uses gothic conventions to offer a critique on these very conventions. I use Elizabeth Fay's definition of the "radical critique gothic" to illuminate my reading.

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INTRODUCTION

When we establish a considered classification [...] what is the ground on which we are able to establish the validity of this classification with complete certainty? (Foucault, *The Order of Things* xxi)

Before going about putting a certain example to the test, I shall attempt to formulate, in a manner as elliptical, economical, and formal as possible, what I shall call the law of the law of genre. It is precisely a principle of contamination, a law of impurity, a parasitical economy. In the code of set theories, if I may use it at least figuratively, I would speak of a sort of participation without belonging — a taking part in without being part of, without having membership in a set. With the inevitable dividing of the trait that marks membership, the boundary of the set comes to form, by invagination, an internal pocket larger than the whole; and the outcome of this division and of this abounding remains as singular as it is limitless. (Derrida 59)

The Gothic, like any genre, depends on a system of classification, and because genres, as Derrida argues, are never pure, and systems of classification, according to Foucault, cannot be verified, one is pressed to investigate and contest the validity of the definitions and conceptions typically attributed to the term “Gothic”, a kind of writing that is evidently heterogeneous and impure. For instance, contemporaries of the Gothic never called it “Gothic”, which brings into question many of the problems that arise in the subsequent application of the literary classification. Readers in the Romantic period

also made clear demarcations among groups of texts that we now regard as part of the Gothic tradition: Ann Radcliffe's work was praised and respected whereas Matthew Lewis's was criticized and condemned. The contemporary demarcation between the works of Radcliffe and Lewis is evidence of an early form of classification that aimed to distinguish between safe and dangerous texts, a necessary move during a time of political contention and war. Another contemporary reaction worthy of note is the connection that was increasingly being made between the gothic novel and women.

Women were usually regarded as the main writers and readers of the gothic novel, a connection that was not always viewed in positive terms, and was perceived indeed as a possibly pernicious combination. In fact, many of the contemporary attacks on the gothic novel were made in sexist terms that criticise both female readers and writers. Women writers who indulged in the supernatural excesses of the gothic novel were accused of committing a kind of "LITERARY PROSTITUTION" (Curties 308). They were also accused of being subject in actuality to their own fictional mad trances:

She looks like madness or her child...

She goes with look enthusiastic

To yonder edifice fantastic,

Where fancy speaking from its trances

Gives inspiration of romances. ("The Age; A Poem" 4-8)

And were encouraged instead to return to their domestic duties, epitomized by needlework:

Ye female scribes! Who write without a blot,

"Mysterious Warnings" of — the Lord knows what;

O quit this trade, exert your proper skill,

Resume the needle, and lay down the quill.

(*Aberdeen Magazine* qtd. in Norton 280)

Warnings were also given about the intoxicating effect reading such material might have on female readers, thus diverting them from their domestic obligations:

It is urged by the “ante-novelists” [*sic*] that romances and novels serve only to estrange the minds of youth (specially of females) from their own affairs, and transmit them to those which they read: so that while totally absorbed in lamenting and condoling with the melancholy situation of a Julia, an Emily, or a Matilda, or lost in the admiration of the glorious deeds of some *all-perfect* novel hero, they neglect both their own interests, and the several duties which they owe to parent, friend, or brother. (Rimelli 309-10)

Perhaps because of this contemporary lopsided and narrow view of the Gothic output and its consumption, many critics, like contemporary detractors of gothic novels, limit their discussion of the Gothic to the novel, giving the impression that women writers of the Gothic channelled their literary efforts only into this genre and that the Gothic is not present in other genres. For instance, a quick search in the MLA database on the research conducted on the works of Mary Shelley will yield 752 hits for *Frankenstein* and less than four hits for her later gothic short stories, such as “The Transformation”. A similar case is to be found with male writers of the Gothic. For example, eighty studies have been made of the first gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto*, and only thirteen on the first gothic play, *The Mysterious Mother*, although both were by the same writer — Horace Walpole. Matthew Lewis’s novel *The Monk* tallies at 150 studies whereas his

equally popular¹ and controversial gothic drama, *The Castle Spectre*, at eight studies only. This narrow view of the history of the Gothic that separates the gothic novel from its non-novelistic counterparts and gothic novels from other gothic works by the same writer may partly be attributed to the ambivalence of the term “Gothic” itself, and partly to the Romantic ideology that dominated the Romantic canon for a considerable part of the twentieth century.²

“Gothic/gothic”: the term

The term “gothic” has undergone many metamorphoses. Connotations have been ascribed to and dropped from it in the course of its development. What the “Gothic” denotes during its mass popularity at the end of the eighteenth century is completely different from what it traditionally meant earlier, and from what it came to mean in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, where the Gothic continues to flourish. Punter gives an etymology of the term and notes that it was during the late eighteenth century that the “Gothic” acquired a positive meaning due to “a shift in cultural values” (*The Literature of Terror* 5). Punter writes:

For while the word “Gothic” retained this stock of meanings, the value placed upon them began to alter radically. It is not possible to put a precise date on this change, but it was one of huge dimensions which affected whole areas of eighteenth-century culture — architectural, artistic

1 On the popularity of *The Castle Spectre*, Nigel Leask says: “Before the first three months of its run were over, it was said to have brought £18,000 into the Drury Lane treasury. It was presented over a dozen times over the next two seasons and became a reliable stock piece for years. Lewis’s publisher Bell, who brought out the first printed edition in 1798, had published ten more by 1803” (“Lewis, Matthew Gregory”).

2 Throughout this dissertation I use the capital “Gothic” to signal the noun and lower case “gothic” the adjective.

and literary; for what happened was that the medieval, the primitive, the wild, became invested with positive value in and for itself. (5)

Perhaps one way of reading the cultural perception of the term “Gothic” is to take into consideration Foucault’s approach in his reading of madness across history. The Gothic simply resists definition by virtue of the multiplicity of the meanings ascribed to it.

Initially the term “gothic” was used with reference to the Germanic tribes, and it later came to be used as the architectural term denoting the medieval style of building characterised by the pointed arch. With the advent of the eighteenth century and its insistence on neoclassical models and ideals, a counter-reaction to this dominant and fixed taste came in a form of an increasing interest in the tastes and literatures of medieval times. This rekindled interest in the gothic style has added a new connotation to the term “gothic”. It is no longer associated with barbarism and crude taste and is linked instead with notions of feudalism, chivalry and the antique. The term was first used in conjunction with literature in 1765 when Horace Walpole called his novel *The Castle of Otranto* a gothic story or romance, since it combined features of the modern novel with the setting of the medieval romance. This coinage of a literary category did not gain immediate currency but the features introduced by Walpole — gothic castle, Catholic feudal society, damsel in distress, tyrannical patriarchal figure, labyrinthine and subterranean passages, live burials, doubles or *doppelgangers*, threats to an ancestral line, incest, guilt, dreams, and apparitions — became immensely useful and were appropriated and deployed in multifarious ways by many writers. This new kind of writing reached its peak in the 1790s, a key moment in the history of the Gothic when, as a term, it came to be viewed differently.

In the aftermath of the French Revolution, the term “gothic” was used in discussions of the French Revolution by different parties to denote different meanings. To Burke it was the ideal world of chivalry and discipline,¹ to Wollstonecraft it was the tyrannical past of the Dark Ages.² However, contemporary critics did not make a direct correlation between this popular kind of writing being produced at this critical time and the term “gothic”. The conflation of the term “gothic” with popularized horror was an arbitrary association that was subsequently developed by scholars of the novel.

Gothic: the literature

The 1790s witnessed the bestselling novels of Ann Radcliffe, the turbulent events in Revolutionary France, the increase of translations of texts from the German literary movement *Sturm und Drang*,³ such as Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther*

1 Burke wrote: “So tenacious are we of the old ecclesiastical modes and fashions of institution that very little alteration has been made in them since the fourteenth or fifteenth century; adhering in this particular, as in all things else, to our old settled maxim, never entirely nor at once to depart from antiquity. We found these old institutions, on the whole, favorable to morality and discipline, and we thought they were susceptible of amendment without altering the ground. We thought that they were capable of receiving and meliorating, and above all of preserving, the accessions of science and literature, as the order of Providence should successively produce them. And after all, with this Gothic and monkish education (for such it is in the groundwork) we may put in our claim to as ample and as early a share in all the improvements in science, in arts, and in literature which have illuminated and adorned the modern world, as any other nation in Europe. We think one main cause of this improvement was our not despising the patrimony of knowledge which was left us by our forefathers” (*Reflections on the Revolution in France* 85)

2 Wollstonecraft wrote: “mere gothic grandeur, something like the barbarous useless parade of having sentinels on horseback at Whitehall, which I could never view without a mixture of contempt and indignation” (*Vindication of the Rights of Women* 147; ch. 9), and she later adds: “If love have made some women wretched—how many more has the cold unmeaning intercourse of gallantry rendered vain and useless! yet this heartless attention to the sex is reckoned so manly, so polite, that till society is very differently organized, I fear, this vestige of gothic manners will not be done away by a more reasonable and affectionate mode of conduct” (97; ch. 5; sec. 3).

3 *Sturm und Drang* (meaning “Storm and stress”) was the name given to what came to be characterised as a literary movement, appearing in Germany roughly between 1760 and 1780. The movement emphasised extreme emotions and subjectivity, and just like the literary categories Romanticism and Gothic, the scope of *Sturm und Drang* remains under much debate.

(1774),¹ Schiller's *Die Räuber* (1781),² and Gottfried August Bürger's "Lenore" (1774),³ the rise of radical politics, the treason trials in England, and the appearance of Matthew Lewis's works, *The Monk* in print and *The Castle Spectre* on stage. All these events linked this type of writing with sensationalism, political contention, and licentiousness. And it is most likely that these derogatory associations prompted Ann Radcliffe in the 1820s to distinguish between two strands of the gothic novel, the school of terror and the school of horror, in order to distance herself and her works from that of Lewis and his imitators,⁴ most notably Charlotte Dacre who presented a decadent gothic heroine in *Zofloya* and traced her descent into evil to her eventual destruction as a result of her cooperation with a moor-turned-devil.

Scholars of novel history have taken their cue from Walpole and appropriated the term "gothic" for the popular novels that dominated the 1790s, and because this move has focused primarily on the novel, it has resulted in the neglect of a large quantity of gothic literature that appeared in kinds other than the novel. The association of the Gothic with women writers has intensified this neglect since it was for some time the tendency in twentieth-century studies of Romanticism to focus primarily on the poetical output of six male poets: Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats. In the past few decades, however, there has been a significant change in critical

1 Goethe's novella was translated several times into English, first in 1779 from a French translation.

2 Schiller's drama was performed in 1782 and translated into English in 1792 by Francis Tytler from a French translation.

3 Bürger's ballad was inspired by Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765), and it was translated into English in 1766 by Sir Walter Scott and William Taylor, and illustrated by William Blake who altered the ending.

4 In her essay "On the Supernatural in Poetry", Radcliffe makes several distinctions between the school of terror and the school of horror. The school of horror is based on sudden transient impressions that cannot result in the more refined and superior feelings of the sublime. In sharp contrast, the school of terror "expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life" (145-152).

direction and more attention is now given to works that fall outside the fixed category of the “Big six”. The rise of feminist and new-historicist-oriented approaches to the literature of the Romantic period has contributed to this readjustment of the critical lens, directing it towards works which had been previously undervalued, such as a wider range of gothic literature and texts by women writers.

Genre and Gender in Romanticism

Several critics have explored the relationship between Romanticism and genre, discussing how this relationship is underpinned by implications about gender. Anne Mellor asks: “What are the gender implications inherent in this academic definition of poetry as the canonical Romantic genre?” (*Romanticism and Gender* 4) In fact, many women writers, for example Charlotte Smith and Mary Robinson, wrote poetry that reshaped the literary landscape so one cannot assign the poetic output of the period to male poets alone. But Mellor suggests that it was the ideological potential of the novel that encouraged many women writers to turn to fiction as they were “anxious to define the correct relationship between knowledge, romance, sexuality, familial obedience, and the constraints of both property and propriety” (5). But, although many women sought to write novels, their general literary output is not reducible to long fiction. In fact, women writers have explored other kinds to voice their concerns, and consequently, as Mellor puts it, “a ‘feminine’ discourse was present in all the literary genres in the Romantic period. Any attempt to preserve a firm gender barrier between genres in the Romantic period breaks down in the face of statistical evidence” (7). Additionally, the revolution that occurred in the poetic practices of the Romantic period is also present in other forms of cultural production.

The language of the common man and woman is found not in the poems of Wordsworth but in the tracts, ballads, broadsides, and penny-dreadfuls of the street, a vernacular discourse that literary critics of the Romantic period have until very recently ignored. (Introduction 8)

In other words, although a new cultural climate does seem to have emerged at this historical moment, poetry is not the only representative of this major shift. Thus it is important to take into account the closet dramas of Joanna Baillie and the staged dramas of Elizabeth Inchbald, the tracts of Hannah More and the vindications of Mary Wollstonecraft, the chapbooks of Sarah Wilkinson and the sonnets of Charlotte Smith, the memoirs of Mary Robinson and the letters of Helen Maria Williams — all works written by real women in a language directed to real men and women.

Stuart Curran joins Mellor in this revisionist project, making a related case in his highly influential article “The I Altered”, which surveys the poetry produced by Romantic-era women writers. Arguing for the centrality of the works of women writers in ushering in the Romantic period, Curran turns to the forms and genres that dominated the period:

But to look with attention and historical discrimination is to realize that some of the genres we associate most closely with British Romanticism, notable the revival of the sonnet and the creation of the metrical tale, were themselves strongly impelled by women poets; that some of the distinctive preoccupations of women poets eventually color the landscape we think of as Romantic; and that others are so decidedly different as to suggest terra incognita beneath our very feet. (189)

Women writers often anticipated vogues in literary production, rediscovered neglected genres, popularized new ones, and utilized them as vehicles for the expression of their unique voices and pressing concerns.

Mellor's implication that the exclusion of Romantic-era women writers has led to the exclusion of some Romantic-era forms together with Curran's insightful remarks about how the literary output of some women writers actually determined the forms and genres that did come to predominate in the period, paved the way for other critics to explore this "terra incognita". Taking their cue from Mellor's and Curran's calls for canon-revision, critics have attempted to resurrect and explore texts by women writers which have for many decades been suppressed by a strict view of the canon.

As part of the ongoing project of making visible writing by women which has been excluded from the Romantic canon, Mary Favret chooses to focus on an undervalued section of the cultural history of women's writing:

I propose another look at the letter, one which takes into account its shifting politics from within Romanticism, and the ideological drapery which has obscured those politics and that history with the fiction of the sentimental woman and her love story. (*Romantic Correspondence* 11)

In her study, Favret explores the activity of letter-writing, an occupation that took up a considerable amount of a polite woman's time, as well, of course, as providing the narrative method of many novels by men and women. Favret discusses the letters of Helen Maria Williams from revolutionary France and of Mary Wollstonecraft from her travels. She also looks at Jane Austen's utilization of the letter in her novels. "The careful negotiation of public and private expression," Favret adds "so critical in letter-writing, becomes a primary concern for these women" (37). Favret's study stresses the

cultural significance of the letter as a literary form and shows how it has been used by women writers to articulate their personal emotions and experiences.

In 1994 Favret and Nicola Watson edited a collection of essays on texts, authors, and genres that had been consigned to the peripheries of Romantic studies. Favret and Watson argue that the field of Romantic studies has suffered from a “chronic split vision” (Introduction 2), which neglected works written in the non-poetic tradition as well as texts by women writers. The goal of the collection, *At the Limits of Romanticism*, therefore, is to

Recognize the mutual dependence of other seemingly opposed figures in the romantic critical tradition: the theoretical and the material, men and women writers, radicals and reactionaries, lyrical poetry and prose novels, the popular and the literary. This is the sort of dialogue we imagine at the limits of romanticism. (2)

With this adjustment in the critical perception of the literature of the period the editors predict a new kind of romanticism composed of

multiple (and currently shifting) tectonic plates, alternative generic territories, whose relation to each other is determined by their different modes of negotiating the same historical, political, and cultural anxieties particular to the period 1789 to 1832. (12)

Emerging from these alternative generic territories are works by women writers who adapted existing literary forms, for example the “legitimate,” (Italian) and “illegitimate,” (English) types of sonnets, to voice their concerns and anxieties over the historical, political and cultural events that were dominating and shaping the age.

The issues of genre for Romantic-era women writers are further investigated in *Re-Visioning Romanticism* (1994). The essays in this collection explore a revised Romanticism that is shaped by the recovery of long-neglected texts by women writers, and it invites us “to rethink — indeed to *re-vision* — Romanticism” (Wilson and Haefner 7). The editors call upon us to reassess our assumptions about the period in the light of their new emphases on reading and writing practices; they stress the importance of women writers and the new diversity of genres:

Today, with society and the academy more aware of the historical exclusion of women and minorities from the dominant discourse, scholars are re-examining the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to find what is missing from traditional literary histories: modes of literary production and consumption, the role of radical dissent, diversity of genres, women writers and their works. (1-2)

The reinstatement of women writers in the canon has, then, completely transformed how we see the literary and critical landscape, and many assumptions about Romanticism that had for some time been taken for granted are now being scrutinised and reassessed. One of these is the assumption that poetry is the dominant Romantic literary genre and that its poetic forms (the epic, the narrative poem, the sonnet, the ballad, and the ode) have taken centre stage. But even in poetry as this book and recent scholarship attempt to reveal, the contributions made by women writers played a central role in popularizing the poetic forms that we now associate with Romanticism. Mary Tighe wrote *Psyche* an allegorical poem of epic proportions, Charlotte Smith wrote the *Elegiac Sonnets* that influenced many subsequent Romantic sonneteers, most notably Wordsworth, Mary Robinson wrote several odes: “Ode to Melancholy”, “Ode to the Nightingale”, and

“Ode to the Muse”, and many women writers explored the ballad, including Joanna Baillie and Anne Bannerman. Women’s poetic contributions should, then, be viewed along with their work in drama, fiction and non-fiction. In other words, women were involved in all areas of writing during the period.

As a result of scholarly enquiry leading to the reclamation of territory for Romanticism, studies building on these findings are appearing, new questions regarding our conceptualization of Romanticism are being raised, and new pedagogic methodologies are proposed to overcome the shortcomings resulting from previous exclusions. Of the recent books that deal with the teaching of a new poetic canon that take into account the works of women poets, two are worth mentioning: Bygrave’s *Romantic Writings* and Behrendt and Linkin’s *Approaches to Teaching British Women Poets of the Romantic Period*, published in 1996 and 1997 respectively. This re-admittance of the works of women writers has forced scholars to review their preconceptions about the field, and to pose urgent questions about some of its typical assumptions. Anne Mellor, for instance, asks whether the works of women writers of the Romantic period can be described as “romantic” at all especially since our conceptualization of the term “romantic” has been based primarily on the works of the six male poets. Her question goes beyond the call to re-evaluate the canon to interrogate the efficacy of the term “romantic” as a categorization of a period (“Were Women Writers ‘Romantics?’” 393-405). A similar move for the Gothic is made by Kate Ellis who asks whether feminist critics are ready to reclaim the gothic heroine who has, she claims, long been a source of critical embarrassment because of her submission to the pressures of patriarchal aggression and her representation as an erotic object for the consumption of the masculine gaze (“Can You Forgive Her?” 257-268). These are some

of the many questions, concessions and re-evaluations that critics are making to come to terms with the turning wheel of critical revolution.

The latest issue of the *Keats-Shelley Journal* (2006) gives the most recent reassessment of the field in the aftermath of this critical revolution:

This revolution in scholarly manners has affected all forms of literary labor: theory and history, interpretation and textual scholarship. Newly recovered works marked by the altered “I” of the woman writer and the female subject have encouraged us to re-think Romanticism generally by re-conceptualizing our received aesthetic standards and revising our critical practice. (“Editor’s Introduction” 41)

Gothic criticism has undergone considerable reassessment, revision and re-conceptualization because of the rehabilitation of the female writer in Romantic studies. As a kind of writing favored and explored by women writers, the Gothic offers critics the opportunity to study the impact of female readership on the tastes of the publishing market, the emergence of a distinct feminine discourse in the public sphere, and most importantly, the intricate relationships which exist between Gothic and gender.

Gothic and Gender

The earliest stages of the critical study of the Gothic engaged with gender issues: as Robert Miles recently put it, “Gender, one may say, is the law of the Gothic genre” (Introduction 134). In the first place, at the heart of the gothic plot is the endangered heroine, beset by the tyranny of a patriarchal figure; in literary history the gothic novel has been associated with women writers and female readership; but paradoxically as a

consequence of the dominance of a Romantic ideology the non-novelistic varieties of Gothic produced by writers other than the six male poets have been sidelined.

Mario Praz makes one of the earliest connections between the Gothic and gender. He notes that the Gothic became popular because of its inherently feminine character and that the increasing dominance of feminine delicacy in the eighteenth century paved the way for its popularity:

An aesthetic of the Horrid and the Terrible had gradually developed in the course of the eighteenth century, but why in the most polite and effeminate of centuries, in the century of *bergeries* and *fêtes galantes* and idyllic conversation pieces, the century of Watteau and Boucher and Zoffany, should people have begun to feel the horrible fascination of dark forests and lugubrious caverns, and cemeteries and thunderstorms? The answer is: just because of its feminine character. In no other century was woman such a dominating figure, the very essence of rococo being a feminine delicacy — just because of this the eighteenth century had *les nerfs à fleur de peau*. They discovered the *mal de vivre*, and the *vapeurs*.
 (“Introductory Essay” 9)

The Gothic then is a consequence of the emergence of the cult of sensibility with the excessive stress on extreme passions and sentimentality that gave rise to feminized male protagonists, such as Henry Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling*. This excessive sentimentality translates in many cases into physiological symptoms like illness and fainting.

Ellen Moers also pays a particular attention to the Gothic's relationship with physiological expression. Being the first critic to coin the term "Female Gothic", she simply defines it as gothic writing by women who opted for terrifying the reader:

What I mean by Female Gothic is easily defined: the work that women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic. But what I mean — or anyone else means — by "the Gothic" is not so easily stated except that it has to do with fear. In gothic writings fantasy predominates over reality, the strange over the commonplace, and the supernatural over the natural, with one definite auctorial intent: to scare. Not, that is, to reach down into the depths of the soul and purge it with pity and terror (as we say tragedy does), but to get to the body itself, its glands, muscles, epidermis, and circulatory system, quickly arousing and quickly allaying the physiological reactions to fear.

(90)

Ellen Moers takes a straightforward view of Female Gothic as simply works in the mode written by women but the mode itself is more difficult to pin down. Moers reads the Gothic in terms of authorial intention and reader-reception: it is written with the intentional purpose of arousing and instilling fear; its aesthetic may best be described as fear for fear's sake. But it is important that reactions to the Gothic are physical. The body is at the centre of the Gothic.

Moers's study of gothic literature by women is seminal and significant: she is even at this early stage aware of the generic transmutations of the Gothic. She not only studies gothic novels by Mary Shelley and the Brontës, but also moves to poems written by women writers in the gothic mode. She reads for instance Christina Rossetti's

Goblin Market and Sylvia Plath's poetry, although she fails to mention any gothic poems by women writers from the Romantic period.

The Female Gothic, a collection of essays edited by Juliann Fleenor and published in 1983 is underpinned by a similar objective. It presents studies of gothic texts by women writers such as Radcliffe, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Margaret Atwood and shows how these gothic works are predominantly and closely connected to feminine experiences although they were not written at the same time. What these gothic works share is an insistence on female sexuality, identity and bodily experiences. Speaking of the Gothic's initial reception as a feminine form, Fleenor says:

From the first [the Gothic] has been seen as a "feminine" form, outside mainstream of literature. Its authors have been criticised as dealing in trivialities or as being too emotional, charges frequently characterised as feminine. Since the Gothic has been and continues to be written by both women and men, both sexes have been accused of these Gothic excesses.

(8)

Fleenor connects, therefore, the peripheral status of the Gothic in literary studies to the feminine attributes it has been associated with — sentimentality and excess. This kind of female Gothic is not defined by the sex of the writer or the age in which the work was written.

As part of the project of re-conceiving the Romantic canon, Anne Mellor's study *Romanticism and Gender*, 1993, considers the gothic novel as a reaction to or appropriation of the Burkean gendered dichotomy of the sublime and the beautiful. Mellor associates this reaction with her argument for a feminine romanticism opposed

to the dominant masculine romanticism, where the female gothic falls under the rubric of the “feminine romanticism”.

The representation of the sublime in feminine Romanticism takes two distinct, but related forms. One group of writers, those familiar to us as the authors of Gothic fiction, accepts the identification of the sublime with the experience of masculine empowerment. But they explicitly equate this masculine sublime with patriarchal tyranny. Their novels expose the dark underside of the doctrine of separate spheres, the sexual division of labor, and the domestic ideology of patriarchal capitalism.
(90-1)

The problem arising from such a stance lies in the problematic definitions of the “female Gothic” and “feminine romanticism”. Female Gothic does not come only in the novel, and it does not necessarily participate in an attack on patriarchal tyranny. Furthermore, Mellor acknowledges the existence of “feminine romanticism” in the works of male romantic writers, as in the case of Keats, and terms it as “ideological cross-dressing”, but fails to make a similar concession for the Gothic, where we encounter “ideological cross-dressers” from both sides, male and female.

Gothic Feminism by Diane Hoeveler deals with the female gothic that constitutes “a rival female-created fantasy — gothic feminism — a version of ‘victim feminism,’ an ideology of female power through pretended and staged weakness” (7). Hence the Gothic seems to be part of the patriarchal discourse that perpetuated and aimed to accentuate the feminine and masculine as distinct and polarized categories. It is also complicit in rendering women as sexual objects to be consumed by the male gaze:

I contend, however, that white, bourgeois women writers have not simply been the passive victims of male-created constructions but rather have constructed themselves as victims in their own literature, and that they have frequently depicted themselves, as have men, as manipulative, passive-aggressive, masochist, and sadistic. (4)

Hoeveler goes further to outline the basic common denominator of gothic feminism which brings to mind Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*. Pamela is imprisoned by her master, but because of her determined chastity, she manages to convert him from a potential rapist to a loving husband, that is, in gothic terms retrospectively, from a "gothic villain" to a "gothic hero". On the potential strength of feminine weakness, Hoeveler says: "Gothic feminism taught women that pretended weakness was strength, and that the pose, the masquerade of innocent victim, would lead ultimately to possessing the master's goods and property" (246).

The success of these critical attempts to distinguish and define a distinctly feminine variety of Gothicism varies. However, it is important to give a survey of these attempts to see how the Gothic, even if it cannot be persuasively proved to be a feminine kind of writing, is linked to the rise of female readership and women writers. These attempts also illustrate how the heterogeneity of the Gothic produced by women has always posed a problem in reaching a satisfactory definition that renders its intricacies, and so attempting to define it is still challenging.

Gothic and Genre

Many critics have pointed out the heterogeneity of the Gothic. This heterogeneity is evident from the different genres the Gothic traversed, the different

ends for which it was utilized, and the various discourses from which it borrowed some of its elements. This heterogeneity is one of the things which render any attempt to define the Gothic, whether written by women or not, a complex, if not impossible, project. The Gothic since its inception has been a kind of writing that resists definition, categorisation or classification, which poses a challenge to any critical attempt to contain it. But on the question of “What is Gothic?”, Robert Miles says:

Nevertheless the question is worth asking. For a start, asking it reminds us that it is a literary historical solecism to equate the Gothic only with fiction. During its initial phase (1750-1820) Gothic writing also encompassed drama and poetry, and before it was any of these Gothic was a taste, an “aesthetic”. (*Gothic Writing* 1)

Miles looks at the problematic definition of the Gothic from a historical perspective that takes into account the different usages of the term in other discourses which have infiltrated gothic writing. Assimilating the Gothic to the novel has resulted in obscuring its parameters rather than defining them.

In *Contesting the Gothic* Watt goes even further when he notes that even a survey of the gothic novel reveals a high degree of heterogeneity which proves problematic for literary categorization. He explains:

[A]ny categorization of the Gothic as a continuous tradition, with a generic significance, is unable to do justice to the diversity of the romances which are now accommodated under the “Gothic” label, and liable to overlook the often antagonistic relations that existed between different works or writers. (1)

And so, lumping all gothic novels together under one heading lacks critical subtlety since textual evidence reveals many instances of gothic novels which, though they meet the typical features we term “gothic”, are in every other way dissimilar. For instance one of the early gothic novels written by a woman is Clara Reeve’s *The Old English Baron*. The novel is deliberately written in imitation of Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, it even adds the sub-title “A Gothic Story” and claims in the preface to be its “literary offspring” (Preface 2). Reeve complains, however, that Walpole has relied too heavily on the gothic trappings he has invented, saying that “the machinery is so violent, that it destroys the effect it is intended to excite” (3), meaning not that Walpole’s extreme measures fail to attract the reader’s attention, but rather that they destroy their effect by exciting laughter (3). Reeve tries to avoid the defects she outlines, and in this way offers one of the earliest revisions of her model that both follows and deviates from it. It is such subtle intricacies that may be at stake when a general term is applied for the sake of literary categorization. The revisions, contestations, and rewritings of the Gothic both highlight some elements by propagating them and repress others by overwriting them. In her act of literary revision, Reeve is simultaneously asserting and contesting the Gothic presented by Walpole.¹

Markmen Ellis also insists on the Gothic’s heterogeneity but from a different perspective. Looking at the Gothic’s relationship with other disciplines, Ellis insists on an intimate relationship between gothic fiction and history. He argues in *The History of Gothic Fiction* that gothic fiction adopts history and recycles it in an attempt to posit a theory of history by presenting a fictive narrative as a kind of history (11). This blend of

1 For further exploration of Reeve’s revision of Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* see the introduction by James Watt in the Oxford edition of *The Old English Baron* and Temma F. Berg’s essay “Engendering the Gothic: Clara Reeve Redecorates *The Castle of Otranto*.” *Reader: Essays in Reader-Oriented Theory, Criticism and Pedagogy* 44 (2001): 53-78.

history and fiction testifies to the hybrid nature of the gothic narrative, which, in drawing from two disparate fields, achieves a mediating perspective that complicates the intricate relationship between the Gothic and history and in effect subverts the rigidity of inter-disciplinary demarcations. The Gothic since the emergence of its foundational text, *The Castle of Otranto*, has proved to be a kind of writing that eludes strict categorization and defies generic formulations. It also introduces a new level of intertextuality that partakes of elements from other disciplines thus further enriching its stock of elements.

There are many factors that lie behind this heterogeneity and some critics have attempted to explain them. Marilyn Butler is the first to point to the variety of political messages present in the Gothic. The contents of any gothic novel are likely to be determined by the political convictions of the writer and these are in turn likely to be shaped by the age in which she/he lived: “No form is confined to a single political message. Everything turns on how it is used, and how the public at a given time is ready to read it” (160).

More specifically from the gender angle and in a study of the Gothic produced by women writers, *Gothic (Re)visions Writing Women as Readers*, Wolstenholme tackles a number of questions regarding women’s appropriation of the Gothic, illustrating how gothic works by women writers can be best viewed “as re-writings that are re-readings” (xiv):

How and why do Gothic conventions insert themselves into such writers’ textual practices in the first place? Is there anything specific to Gothic narrative that makes it particularly appropriate for dealing with gender

issues, especially issues related to women's relationship to representation? (xi)

The Gothic in the work of women writers seems to provide an appropriate site for the interrogation and contestation of gender issues. In addition, women writers' re-visitations and appropriations of the Gothic are not only symptomatic of the sexual tension articulated through gothic works but also indicate the malleable nature of the Gothic that makes such articulations possible. As a kind of writing, the Gothic is characterised by a high level of flexibility that has enabled writers from different backgrounds, sexes, and periods to use its tropes in presenting their different views and convictions. This brings into question the impact of authorial intention in the diversification of the Gothic.

Then, moving away from historical and gender-oriented studies of literary appropriation, it is worth considering the impact of authorial intention. In a general overview of the nature of literary experimentation that marks the Romantic age, Curran talks about how the writer is bound to appropriate any organizing system: "wherever the human mind conceives a system for organizing reality, the artist is bound to appropriate it, sometimes certainly as a principle of belief, almost always as a realm for conceptual play" (*Poetic Form and British Romanticism* 4). Curran's discussion of the poetic practices of the Romantic period takes into account the possibility of writers' attempts at literary experimentation. A writer, who wishes to capitalize on, or to distinguish his /her work from popular modes of production, appropriates these common modes and in effect rewrites them.

Whatever the reasons for the diversity and heterogeneity of the Gothic, critics have continued to attempt to circumvent its resistance to definition and categorization

by offering new descriptions that extend its parameters beyond the novel. Robert Miles for instance returns to the roots of the Gothic insisting on its existence as an aesthetic before it evolves into a literary phenomenon

“What is ‘Gothic’?” My short answer is that the Gothic is a discursive site, a carnivalesque mode for representations of the fragmented subject. Both the generic multiplicity of the Gothic, and what one might call its discursive primacy, effectively detach the Gothic from the tidy simplicity of thinking of it as so many predictable, fictional conventions. This may end up making “Gothic” a more ambiguous, shifting term, but then the textual phenomena to which it points are shifting and ambiguous.

(*Gothic Writing* 4)

In viewing the Gothic as a discursive site, Miles is deploying a Foucauldian approach to the Gothic that situates it within its historical context to derive a “genealogy” of Gothic writing. He argues that the Gothic is a “discursive site” traversing different genres, and he rejects evolutionary models as explanations of its pre-eminence. He notes that previous studies have used Foucauldian methods, but none in a “systematic fashion” (ix). He points out that one of the debatable areas concerning the adoption of Foucault’s terms is in the application of the notion of “discursive” power to the relationship between author and character. The imaginative nature of this relationship undermines the bases upon which a discursive situation is normally established. Foucault aimed to expose the operation of discursive power in real life and not in the realm of the imaginary. Nevertheless, the relationship between the author and the reader can be described as discursive. I need to add here, however, that in the case of gothic drama, the relationship of the author to the actors playing his characters, on the one hand, and

the struggle with censorship on the other is more akin to discursive power relations, where the author mediates between the performer's cultural image, the restrictions of censorship, the demands of the box office, and the expectations of the audience. It is true that the relationship between the author and his characters is imaginative, but the critics of the day insisted that what the imagination may create for the novel is different from what it may produce for the stage. Perhaps the reception of Lewis's ghost in *The Castle Spectre* attests to that, since critics argued that what may be acceptable in a novel cannot be tolerated on stage.¹

Other proposals for the best way to view the Gothic and its diversity are presented by Watt and Gamer. Watt explains the diversity of the Gothic by viewing it as a "domain" which was open for contestation among different writers and resulted in works with antagonist elements (6). This view is also shared by Michael Gamer who agrees with Robert Miles that it is a misconception to assume that the Gothic is confined to fiction or the narrative mode, instead, the Gothic is "a discursive site crossing the genres" (*Romanticism and the Gothic* 3). Therefore, it is best to describe the Gothic as an aesthetic that was never constant. This shifting aspect of the Gothic was despised by contemporary critics who found the Gothic's ability to move from genre to genre threatening since it disrupted emerging demarcations between high and low literature (1-26).

Attempts to reach a better understanding of the scope of the Gothic have also coincided with more critical attention being given to gothic works that fall outside the limits of fiction. In addition to Michael Gamer's study of the relationship of the Gothic

1 In response to his detractors, Matthew Lewis writes: "Against *my Spectre* many objections have been urged: one of them I think rather curious. She ought not to appear, because the belief in Ghosts no longer exists! In my opinion, this is the very reason why she *may* be produced without danger" ("Postscript to *The Castle Spectre*" 198).

with high Romanticism and gothic drama, critical works by other scholars followed. Work by Anne Williams, E. J. Clery, Gary Kelly and Ellen Brinks, among others, has sought to bridge this critical gap in gothic criticism and contributed to this new critical perception of the Gothic as a literary phenomenon that is represented in different genres.

In *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*, Anne Williams acknowledges the centrality of the Gothic to Romantic poetry whose representative works are replete with scenes of murder, death and revenge, and she notes: “There is no easy way to distinguish between early Gothic and several texts we count among the masterpieces of Romantic poetry” (3). Williams also believes that the Gothic should be viewed as a kind of poetics that is bifurcated into two species, male and female, each with its own set of characteristics.

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.

(1)

Clery pays particular attention to texts which have long been marginalized from gothic criticism such as paratexts, epigraphs, poetic compositions within gothic novels, short stories and drama to illustrate how the Gothic “was part of a trans-generic resurgence of tragedy” (Clery, *Women’s Gothic* 23). In studying the case-histories of six women writers who wrote in different genres — Clara Reeve, Sophia Lee, Ann Radcliffe, Joanna Baillie, Charlotte Dacre, Mary Shelley — Clery gives a sketch of how the Gothic that is written by women can be discussed beyond the confines of the novel (23-4).

As the general editor of the Pickering and Chatto six-volume edition of *Varieties of Female Gothic*, Gary Kelly offers a selection of gothic works by women writers. Dividing the volumes into Enlightenment and Terror Gothic, Street Gothic, Erotic Gothic, Historical Gothic and Orientalist Gothic, the set brings into print texts enjoyed by readers of the Gothic in its heyday. One of the aims of this edition is to complement other editions of gothic works “in ways that will enable further development, broadening, diversification and challenging of lines of research and criticism pursued since the 1970s into what has come to be called the ‘female Gothic’” (1:xi).

Brinks studies texts that are not traditionally included in the gothic canon though they contain some gothic elements. She discusses Hegel’s preface to *The Phenomenology*, Keats’s *Hyperion*, Byron’s *Oriental Tales*, Coleridge’s *Christabel*, and Freud’s letters and hysteria case studies. In studying these works as if within the gothic canon, Brinks extends the range of the Gothic to include works from other genres, like poetry and letter-writing, and from other disciplines, like psychology and philosophy in a move which shows how the Gothic cannot be delimited by genre or even confined by discipline.

All these reappraisals of non-novelistic Gothic have deepened our critical perception of its cultural scope, revealed its appearance in other genres like poetry and drama, clarified its connection with works of the canonical Romantic poets, and uncovered its relationship to gender, popular culture, and other disciplines. These reappraisals have also opened up a new phase in gothic criticism that promises new explorations and examinations: all this makes the field anything but dull.

This dissertation builds upon these recent and valuable reassessments of the canon and extends the study of the Gothic to incorporate works other than the novel.

My main objective is to examine the different ways in which women writers in the Romantic period have appropriated the Gothic for genres other than the novel, and the different ends for which these appropriations were made. In studying women writers' appropriations of the Gothic in drama, autobiography, poetry, and chapbooks, I build on the argument that the Gothic cannot be read adequately by studying the novel exclusively. I also argue that women writers in their appropriation of the Gothic have rewritten its tropes to suit their interests. These appropriations also illustrate how women writers' relationships with the Gothic are complex and ambivalent, and that these relationships reveal the special intricacies of the Gothic's negotiations with genre and gender.

Given the centrality of the female body in the Gothic and works by women, I focus my discussion on the way Romantic-era women writers represent the female body in their gothic works. In the following chapters, I will attempt to illustrate how the female body appears in women's gothic: as an abject other, as a performance of victimization, as an articulation of discriminations based on physical differences, as a site of sexual economy, and as victim of enforced heterosexual norms. My readings will be informed, therefore, by recent theories of body and gender from various different theoretical approaches in order to explore and understand the social, cultural, and ideological implications that underpin the representation of the female body in the selected gothic works by women.

In the first chapter, I compare Joanna Baillie's *The Family Legend* and Thomas Holcroft's *The Lady of the Rock*, two plays that are based on a highland tale, which survived in the Scottish oral tradition and in accounts that chronicle the history of Clan Maclean. The tale recounts how the Chieftain of the Maclean clan marooned his wife on

a rock in the middle of the sea to have her drowned by the rising tide. Joanna Baillie based her play on the oral rendition of a female friend, while Holcroft followed the written records of the tale. In basing their dramas on different sources of a common tale, Baillie and Holcroft came up with different adaptations. Both have focused on freeing Lady Mclean from her sea-prison, yet each has bestowed a different meaning on her predicament. The aim of this chapter is to read the two adaptations against each other in terms of the gender of their writers, their political affiliations, and their choice of dramatic genre to adapt the tale. Holcroft's play is a melodrama, while Baillie's shares affinities with her gothic dramas. These dramatizations also shared the same political backdrop — they were both written during the ongoing Napoleonic Wars. My examination of these two plays provides an excellent opportunity to explore the process of adaptation, and how this process is regulated by many factors such as gender, generic conventions, and historical context. Originally, the story of Lady Mclean is a story of violence exerted on the female body, and in examining different dramatizations of this story one can clearly see how this violence came to be construed differently.

In the second chapter, I attempt to read Mary Robinson's *Perdita: The Memoirs of Mary Robinson* and "Golfre: a Gothic Swiss Tale" as instances of what Diane Hoeveler has termed "gothic feminism". Diane Hoeveler introduces the term in her study of Gothic fiction, *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës*, and defines it as an ideological form of writing that victimizes women in order to make a case for their rights (2). In other words, nineteenth-century women writers placed their heroines in precarious situations caused by patriarchal tyranny in order to expose the very mechanisms that enabled this tyranny to take place. Mary Robinson saw her personal afflictions as part of the general

subordination of women caused and perpetuated by patriarchal hegemony, which she sought to expose in her own vindication titled *An Essay on the Subordination of Women*, in *Perdita: The Memoirs of Mary Robinson*, and in many poems that tackled the injustices committed against her sex.

I dedicate the third chapter to the study of the poetic works of a minor women poet, Anne Bannerman. In using theories of disability, particularly as proposed by Susan Wendell, I show how Bannerman has utilized the Gothic to articulate aspects of the deformed body, and how in doing so, she reveals her own experience and definition of disability.

In the fourth chapter I turn to yet another minor woman writer, Sarah Wilkinson, a prolific writer of the commercialised Gothic who wrote gothic novels, chapbooks, and short stories. This chapter focuses mainly on her chapbooks to show how her appropriation of the Gothic follows the didactic mode that is commonly found in chap-literature, especially in the works produced by the conservative reformer Hannah More. This chapter gives a new insight into a kind of gothic that aims to confirm rather than contest strict cultural definitions of gender roles, and thus foregrounds a chapter in the Gothic that weaves gothic paraphernalia with elements of popular literature and middle-class morality.

In the fifth chapter of this dissertation I return to Joanna Baillie, focusing this time on one of her later gothic plays *Orra*. This play is of crucial interest to scholars of the Gothic since in its appropriation of gothic conventions it offers an implicit critique of these very conventions. The play, however, does not present itself as a parody but rather as a version of what Elizabeth Fay calls “radical critical gothic” (107-148).

CHAPTER ONE:

Gothic Drama: Joanna Baillie's *The Family Legend* and
 Thomas Holcroft's *The Lady of the Rock*: Rewriting a Highland Legend

For woman is traditionally a use-value for man, an exchange value among men; in other words, a commodity. As such she remains the guardian of material substance, whose price will be established, in terms of the standard of their work and of their need/desire, by "subjects": workers, merchants, consumers. Women are marked phallicly by their fathers, husbands, procurers. And this branding determines their value in sexual commerce. Woman is never anything but the locus of a more or less competitive exchange between two men, including the competition for the possession of mother earth. (Irigaray 255)

Adaptation is frequently involved in offering commentary on a source text. This is achieved most often by offering a revised point of view from the "original", adding hypothetical motivation, or voicing the silenced and marginalized. (Sanders 18-19)

In the *Historical and Genealogical Account of the Clan Maclean*, the clan historian gives a detailed narrative that recounts an interesting oral legend regarding "the only worthless" chieftain of the Macleans. This chieftain, called Lachlan Cattanach, fell helplessly in love with the daughter of Maclean of Treshnish. However, the major obstacle to his love affair happened to be his wife of two years the Lady

Elizabeth Campbell. Like any obstacle to amorous bliss, Lady Elizabeth had to be conveniently removed, and it was her lot to be marooned by her husband on a rock in the middle of the sea. When she was rescued and his plan disclosed to the Campbells, Lady Elizabeth pled on Cattanach's behalf. He was left unharmed with the proviso that if he was spotted again by her brother he would be killed instantly. Which actually happened years later when Lachlan Cattanach was an elderly man sleeping in his bed: he received the fatal blow from his once brother-in-law, Campbell of Achallader, who did not find the lapse of the years a good excuse for forgetting the insult. The narrator closes this unfortunate chapter of the clan's history with the note: "Lachlan Cattanach does not appear to have possessed one single redeeming quality. I do not find that he even possessed the negative virtue of being a brave tyrant" (31). In fact this "worthless" Maclean chieftain did prove to be useful after all. His story was a source of inspiration to several Romantic-era writers.

This story was appropriated and adapted in different ways by several writers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Thomas Campbell wrote a very popular ballad about the estranged couple,¹ Joanna Baillie based one of her gothic plays on an oral rendition of the story, and Thomas Holcroft wrote a melodrama according to Sarah Murray Aust's account of the story in her *Guide to the Beauties of Scotland*. This transfer of the legend from one genre to another is of crucial interest, for it uniquely

¹ According the editor of Thomas Campbell's poetical works, J. Logie Robertson, Campbell heard of the story first in 1797. Campbell's ballad ends with these lines:

"I dreamt of my lady, I dreamt of her grief
I dreamt that her lord was barbarous chief:
On a rock of the ocean fair Ellen did seem;
Glenara! Glenara! now read my dream!"

In dust low the traitor has knelt to the ground,
And the desert revealed where his lady was found;
From a rock of the ocean that beauty is borne —
Now joy to the house of fair Ellen of Lorne! (168)

exemplifies the process of adaptation, and the different kinds of emphases, eliminations, traces and silences such a process entails in the target text. As the epigram by Sanders that opens this chapter suggests, adaptations are rewritings of the source-text that incorporate new material and introduce new voices, characters and many elements that could either deviate from or reinforce what has been received from the source-text. These alterations, however, should not be perceived in isolation from the context in which the adaptation is being made, since they are underscored by authorial convictions and cultural pressures that infiltrate the target text.

The aim of this chapter is to focus on two dramatic adaptations of the story by two Romantic-era writers, Joanna Baillie and Thomas Holcroft, and to read the adaptations against each other in terms of the gender of their writers, their political affiliations, and their choice of the dramatic genre to which the tale is adapted; Holcroft's play is a melodrama, while Baillie's has close affinities to her gothic dramas. Their different renderings of the legend also reveal the different political agendas of each writer, in spite of the fact that their dramatizations share the same political backdrop — they both were written during the ongoing Napoleonic Wars. Baillie is concerned with the situation of Scotland in Britain and its role in the invention of a new nation that is expanding its empire and is challenged by the rising power of France. As a radical writer accused of treason in the tumultuous aftermath of the French revolution, Holcroft tries to show how jealousy, spying and false accusations create an atmosphere of suspicion that jeopardizes the familial institution. Thus, the examination of these two plays offers an excellent opportunity to explore the process of adaptation, and how this process is regulated by many factors such as gender, generic conventions, and historical context. Originally, the story of the “lady of the rock” is a story of violence perpetrated

on the female body, and in examining different dramatizations of this story one can clearly see how this violence came to be variously construed. First I wish to examine the way Baillie's play employs the Maclean-Campbell political marriage in highlighting issues of nationalism, inheritance, and the place of Scotland in the Union. In this section I will use Robert Miles's reading of Kristeva's concept of the abject in connection with the Gothic ("Abjection, Nationalism and the Gothic") to highlight the political tension between the two clans. Then I will read Holcroft's melodrama in the light of his trial for treason, paying close attention to his concerns for social reform in a society fraught with contention, suspicion, and paranoia because of the rapid and tumultuous changes taking place in the social and political scenes.

Baillie's *The Family Legend*:

Although most of the scholarly attention given to Baillie's work has centred on *De Monfort*,¹ her other reasonably widely performed play, *The Family Legend*, has increasingly started to attract more critical investigation, most of which has stressed the play's distinct Scottish tenor and commented on the explicit patriotic note it conveys. In her study of Scottish women playwrights, Scullion claims that *The Family Legend* offers a nascent kind of writing that blends a "heroically Ossianic tone" with "the patriotic mood of Edinburgh" (161). Friedman-Romell also highlights the patriotic tendency of the play, observing that the "*The Family Legend* allowed the audience to participate in a national family drama in which barbaric fratricide ultimately is overcome by the uniting and civilising forces of womanhood, reason and Protestant Christianity" (44). Bennett reads *The Family Legend* from the perspective of the genre-

1 Ken A. Bugajski lists more than thirty secondary works on *De Monfort* (276-296).

gender conventions of the time and in view of Baillie's contestation of received notions of tragedy that succeeds in bringing "a gender and ethnic specificity to the genre" (220), and she further explains: "*The Family Legend* works against the agenda for universality claimed by and for the genre of tragedy and instead posits an identity that is very much about the particularities of social circumstances" (221). Bardsley examines Baillie's Scottish plays and her dramaturgy to see how she perceived the historical relationship between Scotland and England. In the case of *The Family Legend*, Bardsley notices how Baillie "reinforces rather than undermines her evident commitment to Union" (141), and she elaborates:

Rejecting the violence associated with a stereotypical Highlands for a pacific model of Union, the play celebrates Britishness while painting a heroic picture of Scottish history — and it was received accordingly, Baillie consequently claiming kin with English and Scottish audiences alike. (142)

Having a closer look at the political situation of the audience, Jeffrey Cox contends that the play gives the Scottish audience a sugar-coated version of their relationship with England that is customarily characterized by tension and evokes instead their nationalistic feelings to counter the radicalism of France:

This "Highland Play" allowed its audience to delight in a myth of the Highlands while ignoring the destruction of the actual Highlands that they and the government they supported were undertaking. Whatever the power of the play's text, in context it was put to the service of the Edinburgh Tories, and that finally means that any nationalism evoked

here be directed to the United Kingdom and against England's enemy, Revolutionary France.

(“Baillie, Siddons, Larpent: Gender Power, and Politics” 33)

Turning to the overt nationalism that is evident in Baillie's work, Michael Gamer reads her drama in the context of the gothic drama being produced on-stage. To their contemporaries, Joanna Baillie and Matthew Lewis were writing from different traditions and their works were consequently viewed as two polarized strands of gothic drama (*Romanticism and the Gothic* 130). This demarcation is similar to the one Radcliffe made between her work and Lewis's, the school of terror and the school of horror. But the differentiation between Baillie's and Lewis's works was not entirely based on the excessive use of the supernatural, but on the origin of the supernatural being invoked. Baillie is clearly writing in the tradition of Shakespeare whereas Lewis is imitating the German dramas being imported to the English stage. Baillie's insistence on national tradition is further demonstrated in *The Family Legend*, a play that draws its story from Scottish tradition and uses the image of the highlander to suit national interests:

Baillie's *Family Legend* focuses itself on explicitly national subject matter while reinventing the figure of the highlander as the prototypical British military warrior: brave, enlightened, fearless, and honourable [...] As Baillie's own productions from this same decade indicate, however, her “national” ambitions are far more British than Scottish. (152)

But Baillie's “ambitions” — whether Scottish or British — have not always gone smoothly with the audience as Dorothy McMillan has noted. McMillan emphasizes how Baillie's conception of Scotland's “Britishness” has undergone many shifts throughout

her career and demonstrates how *The Family Legend* revisits a well-known highland story with the objective of depicting clan cruelty without giving the Scottish audience a too divisive presentation of their ancestors. McMillan notes that the subject matter of the play proved to be problematic, nevertheless, during the preparation of the Edinburgh performance. Baillie admits:

[S]ome of the problems that have to be overcome to achieve a suitably romantic and heroic vision of the country for present denizen and exile alike. For it has proved, she admits, very difficult to provide a version of the character of the chieftain of the Mcleans that would be at all acceptable, and although she defends her dramatic practice, she feels that the character may not have been “very skilfully executed”.

(“Unromantic Caledon” 76)

Gilroy and Hanley point to how Baillie’s rewriting of the story Holcroft already adapted reflects her interests regarding “dramatic tension between domestic ties of royalty and the public demands of the state, possibly connected with anxieties of female dependency” (xxvi). They also note that the role Baillie has played in Walter Scott’s “grand project of Scottish literary nationalism” was central in creating a kind of Scottish nationalism that is less threatening and “would not be labelled Jacobite” (xxvi-xxvii).

In a recent edition of Baillie’s gothic dramas that includes *The Family Legend*, Colón speaks of how the play connects the violence that is exerted on women to the violence nations commit against each other:

As in *Orra*, Baillie uses the Gothic to reveal the dangerous violence that lurks below the façade of civility in society, but with *The Family Legend*

Baillie takes the story one step further, showing how it endangers not only powerless women but also entire nations. (Introduction xxxi)

All these invaluable critical studies have succeeded in highlighting *The Family Legend's* unique position as a play that comments upon the relationship between Scottish and English nations, a play that is caught between valorising the Union and highlighting Scotland's contribution to it. This valorising of the Union is construed in different ways: escapist, anti-barbaric, anti-French, and patriotic. They also strengthen the status of *The Family Legend* as a play that has much to offer to our understanding of Joanna Baillie's work, not only as an instance of gothic drama, but also as a drama written by a Scottish woman in England. These studies have also underscored the mixed reception the play has received from its target audience. Bennett's discussion of the play's implications concerning gendered genres is particularly useful in channelling the discussion towards an examination of how gender can in many ways rewrite genre, and in turn, how Baillie's contestation of typical gender roles rewrites the gothic drama. Gamer's study of the tendency of Baillie's gothic drama to reify a nationalistic tradition in the face of a literary invasion of European literatures of transgression is also useful in perceiving Baillie's involvement with gothic drama in terms of her views and conceptions about literary trends of the time and in connection with the contemporary rise of nationalism. My aim is to focus on *The Family Legend* as an adaptation of a highland legend, a dimension that has not been fully explored yet, and to illustrate how this adaptation adopts a nationalistic discourse that reinforces the generative power of the female body, revealing in this way Baillie's own conceptions about genre and gender.

Later in life, when Joanna Baillie wrote her memoirs, she recollected her first entry into the public sphere in words that express her awareness of her uneasy position as an eighteenth-century gentlewoman writing and publishing drama:

So passed away the earlier and brightest part of my career, till the feeble success of de Monfort on the stage and the discovery of the hitherto concealed dramatist not being a man of letters but a private Gentlewoman of no mark or likelihood, turned the tide of public favour, and the influential critics and Reviewers from all quarters North and South, attacked the intention of the work as delineating in each of the Dramas only one passion, and therefore quite unnatural and absurd. (“Memoirs” 103)

Joanna Baillie’s remarks about how her true identity as a middle-class Scotswoman has overshadowed the initial encouraging reception of her *A Series of Plays: In Which it is Attempted to Delineate the Stronger Passions of the Mind — Each Passion Being the Subject of a Tragedy and a Comedy*, betray her dismay over the sexist and misogynist conceptions that were prevalent in the North and the South, i.e., Scotland and England. Upon the first anonymous publication of her *A Series of Plays* in 1798, many readers and reviewers assumed Baillie was a man, since it was inconceivable at the time to imagine a woman capable of assuming the role of a literary critic, giving assertive remarks on drama, dramatic history, and dramaturgy, or even writing highly accomplished dramas of outstanding quality, refined language, and poetic rigour. The favourable reviews in the *New Monthly Magazine* and *The Critical Review* assumed that the author had to be a man, and went as far as suggesting that it was no other than Sir Walter Scott (Clery, *Women’s Gothic* 85). Even many years after the authorship of *A*

Series of Plays was revealed, Lord Byron wondered at Baillie's achievements in a genre that is more pertinent to masculine endeavours: "When Voltaire was asked why no woman has every written even a tolerable tragedy? 'A (Said the Patriarch) the composition of a tragedy requires testicles.' — If this be true, Lord knows what Joanna Baillie does — I suppose she borrows them" (*Letters and Journals* 5: 203) .¹ But the initial rapturous receptions soon subsided once Baillie's identity was disclosed and *De Monfort* failed to remain onstage more than a fortnight. As Carhart notes, "The excitement was great, and the disappointment commensurate. The audience yawned in spite of themselves, in spite of the exquisite poetry, the vigorous passion, and the transcendent acting of John Kemble and Mrs. Siddons" (18). But most unfortunately, Baillie attracted the attention of one of the most harsh and formidable reviewers of the age, Francis Jeffrey.

It is very likely that in writing these words in her memoirs, Joanna Baillie was thinking of the extremely harsh reviews written by Francis Jeffrey, a fellow Scotsman whom she usually referred to as the "great Northern Critic" (*Collected Letters* 303). In 1803, Jeffrey criticized her method of delineating a central passion in each play, saying that in making a drama revolve around the inner life of the leading character Baillie "has degraded all the other requisites of a perfect drama to the rank of a very weak and unprofitable auxiliaries" ("Review" 269), and he reiterated his harsh remarks in 1812 upon the publication of the third volume of her plays stating: "Miss Baillie, we think, has set the example of plays as poor in incident and character, and as sluggish in their

¹ On the other hand, women writers did not hesitate in attributing *The Series of Plays* to a female writer. Hester Piozzi immediately guessed the author must be a woman since the age range of the female characters was markedly higher than what she usually encountered in writings by men (qtd. in Carhart 15). Mary Berry also managed to figure out the gender of the writer of *A Series of Plays* from the way the female characters are depicted: "I say *she*, because and *only* because no man could or *would* draw such noble, such dignified representations of the female mind as the Countess Albin and Jane De Monfort. They often make us clever, captivating, heroic, but never rationally superior" (15).

pace, as any that languish on the Continental stage, without their grandeur, their elegance, or their interest” (“*A Series of Plays, etc.*” 265-66). His only favourable remarks came in 1811 after the reasonable success of *The Family Legend*:¹ “Southey, and Wordsworth, and Coleridge, and Miss Baillie have all of them copied the manner of our old poets; and, along with this indication of good taste, have given great proofs of original genius” (qtd. in *Memoirs of William Wordsworth* 2:48-9). It is difficult to measure the damaging effects of Jeffrey’s review over Baillie’s literary career and book sales figures, but she firmly believed that his reviews had detrimental effects on her readership and contributed in turning the tide of favour against her.² What becomes evident from the history of Jeffrey’s reviews of Baillie is that *The Family Legend* succeeded in occupying a special position in Scotland’s cultural scene and attracted some applause even from most unlikely parties, at least to Baillie.

According to Baillie’s preface to the first edition of *The Family Legend* (which, despite her reluctance, was published within months of the premier) the story was part of the maternal oral tradition within the Campbell family. One of her acquaintances, Mrs. Damer, whose mother was a Campbell, provided Baillie with the story.

1 *The Family Legend* was performed in 1810 in Edinburgh, and in the following year in Newcastle and Bath. It was first performed in London on 29th May 1815; Baillie attended the performance with Lord Byron, Sir Walter Scott and his wife (Carhart 142-153).

2 More than once Baillie wrote in her letters about her dismay with Jeffrey’s reviews and how she felt at some point too disheartened to continue to write:

But think you there is spirit at all in me now to write Plays of any kind, after all that our great Northern Critic hath said of the deplorable dullness & want of interest in those I have already written? I must try what I can do, even under this great gloom of his discountenance; and as I mean to try speedily too, you will not be very long of receiving a packet from me. Indeed this last review of Jeffrey [*sic*] is more severe than I expected, but fortunately for me, it is of a kind which I greatly prefer to others that might have been given. One of more ability & discrimination, and somewhat less severe would have teased me a great deal more. However, I don’t mean at all to dispise [*sic*] it; it will do me, I doubt not, considerable mischief as far as the present circulation of the work is concerned; if it do more than this, his criticism must be just; and, in that case, any credit may have acquired, it would very soon have lost in the natural course of things, without his interference. (*Collected Letters* 303)

The story, from which I have taken the plot, was put into my hands in the year 1805, by the Hon. Mrs. Damer, as a legend long preserved in the family of her maternal ancestors, which appeared to her well fitted to produce strong effect on the stage. Upon reading it, I thought so too: it was, besides, a story of my native land; and being at the time in quest of some subject for the drama, I seized upon it eagerly, and was glad to be permitted to make use of it. As my reader may probably wish to know how far in the following scenes I have strictly adhered to mine authority, I shall, with his leave, relate the substance of the story, a copy of which I have now upon my table. (*The Family Legend* 127)

It is difficult to tell whether Mrs. Damer's version of the legend was written down by her, dictated to Baillie, or recollected by Baillie only to be dramatized at a later date. In any of the above cases, the female succession of narrators of the legend is interesting to note, as Scullion remarks: "*The Family Legend*, then, is a story about a woman passed down through generations of women and finally made public through the pen of another woman" (Scullion 167). This successive line of female narrators has left its mark on the legend, and this mark is evident in the emphasis on motherhood in the Maclean-Campbell union. The play also demonstrates how the process of the evolution of this legend from an oral text to a written text to a performed text can transform the narrative in unexpected ways. It is additionally significant that the legend is dramatized by a writer like Joanna Baillie who is interested in harmony between Scotland and England but also in harmony within Scotland itself after a troubled century; she has moreover, already contested conventional constructions of gender in her work. And she also reshapes the story to accommodate contemporary concerns about the political scene,

and the role that women can assume to heal schisms and domestic and political prejudices and disputes. Having the production supervised by Sir Walter Scott, who shares Baillie's preoccupation with the integration of the Scottish people as a whole in the union, without the eradication of distinctive Scottish characteristics, further reinforced the importance of unity to a nation that is confronted with immediate and more serious threats from across the channel.

In her dramatization, Baillie highlights the feud between the Macleans and the Campbells. Although it was initially settled by a political marriage where the daughter of the Campbell chieftain is wed to the chieftain of the Macleans, the animosities did not subside, and this endangered the lives of Helen, the Lady of Maclean, and her infant son. In focusing on the fates of Helen and her baby, Baillie attempts to demonstrate how women are dangerously bartered in political transactions. But Baillie remains optimistic and believes in the empowering nature of motherhood to survive acts of violence, and to arouse the support of sympathetic men. It seems that there is hope of transcending all differences and tensions after all and this is where the role of the infant Mclean comes in the play. Baillie also adds an Englishman, De Grey, who acts as a possible suitor to Helen once her husband is eliminated by her brother.

Baillie's portrayal of Sir Hubert de Grey gives a clear indication of how Baillie foresees his relationship with Helen, and how this relationship is an articulation of her vision of the relationship between the Scottish and English nations. He is a lord from the south, who is in love with Helen but the political marriage puts an abrupt end to their romantic attachment. De Grey, who is not Maclean's executioner, has a politically tactful function which alludes to the strengthening connection between the Scots and the English without its being predicated on the death of a Scot. In the play, we see De Grey

joining Helen's brother, John of Lorne, in visiting her clandestinely to see how she is faring among the Macleans. It is also he who saves Helen's infant from the hands of the Macleans after their murderous threat; whereas the downfall of Maclean is brought about by John of Lorne. In closing the play with Maclean's deserved death and his repentance, the return of Helen's child with De Grey's help, and the hints of the existing tender affections between Helen and De Grey, it does not greatly stretch the imagination to expect a union between the two. This union is both a symbolic reaffirmation of the Union of Scotland and England, and a historical reference to the contemporary cross-border marriages taking place at the time. Linda Colley remarks in her *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* that

The fusing of the English and Celtic elites was increasingly cemented in marriage. Between 1750 and 1800, there were more than twice as many marriages between daughters of the Scottish peerage and Englishmen than there had been in the first half of the century. And by the nineteenth century, women of this type were more likely to opt for English husbands than marry fellow Scots. (159)

These cross-border marriages paved the way for the Scottish penetration of high official posts in the expanding empire, and resulted in an unprecedented merger of elite households of England and Scotland especially in matters of inheritance. This newly acquired land and power "helped to consolidate a new unitary ruling class in place of those separate and specific landed establishments that had characterized England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland in the Tudor and Stuart eras" (161). Perhaps the return of Helen's son, hence the Maclean estate, at the hands of De Grey is most revealing about these newly forged alliances, alliances that signal that an older system is about to

become extinct and be part of the past, and at the same time establish a new one for the future. In order to understand how these newly forged connections operated, one has to read the performance of the play within its context, and observe how this performance was tailored towards the invention of a tradition, which is distinct, and plays a central role in the united kingdom of Britain and contributes to the expansionist enterprise.

The Reinvention of the Highland Tradition:

On 29th January 1810, crowds flocked to the Theatre Royal in Edinburgh to watch a dramatization of a “favourite Scots tradition” (Carhart 145). The performance was organized and choreographed in such a way as to make the whole experience Scottish through and through. The legend of “the lady of the rock” was dramatized by the most celebrated Scottish female playwright of her time, Joanna Baillie. Two Scottish literary giants wrote the prologue and the epilogue, namely Walter Scott and Henry Mackenzie, the “man of feeling”. Plaids and “philibegs”¹ were the essential props deployed in the performance to distinguish the rival clans of the Macleans and the Campbells. The Highland recruiting party of Sir Walter Scott’s brother was cast as extras in some of the scenes. Joanna Baillie did not call *The Family Legend* her “Highland legend” for nothing.

The performance was rendered a Scottish experience par excellence mainly because it was meant to be regarded as such, given the political determinants of the time. During the early nineteenth century it was important that the nation seemed unified in the face of the French threat but at the same time a Scottish identity emerged which insisted on difference, although not divisively so. Scott aimed to inculcate this

1 Short plaids or kilts.

Scottish identity in the audience through his supervision of the performance, “so the piece, being entirely of Scotch manufacture, has, independent of its own merit, every chance of succeeding before a national audience” (*Familial Letters* 166). The play was performed during the closing years of the Napoleonic Wars, in which patriotic sentiments were expressed and fortified on every possible occasion. Thus, faced with the need to assert the Scottish character and the need to express sympathy towards the nation’s major cause, *The Family Legend* is an important text which manifests this double-edged anxiety. As Beth H. Friedman-Romell puts it, the play “aroused Scottish patriotism while at the same time it encouraged that audience to experience British national solidarity” (25). In other words, *The Family Legend* played an active part in moulding a Scottish identity that is distinct in the whole kingdom, and in forging a unified kingdom to face a common enemy.

A distinct Scottish identity has been formed, shattered and reformed constantly since the 1707 Union: its development was multifaceted and involved several fronts. Scottish history had to be rewritten in a way that emphasized its distinctiveness since pre-historic times from its Irish, Welsh, and English counterparts. In addition, the rewriting of this history had to be re-enacted by modern manifestations of it. Finally, these manifestations were repeated frequently to make the history seem real and accurate. This process of historicizing resulted in the image of noble highlanders wearing kilts and playing the bagpipes as an emblem of Scottish identity. This image is a “retrospective invention” (Trevor-Roper 15) as is the much disputed Macpherson’s *Ossian*.

Sir Walter Scott played an active part in creating and disseminating this highland image. Trevor-Roper notes that in his 1805 review of Macpherson’s *Ossian*,

Scott was the first to assert that wearing the tartan philibeg is an ancient Scottish custom (18). Scott also presided over the Highland Society in Edinburgh which specialized in encouraging highlanders to adopt the kilt as their national dress.

The revival of the kilt has an interesting history. Originally it was the dress of the lower classes in the highlands, and was later banned after the Rebellion in 1745 since it invoked the barbarian past which has to be replaced by the civilized present. It only became an acceptable form of dress with the formation of the highland regiments which were employed in the imperial enterprise and served as a distraction from a possible Jacobite rebellion. As a consequence of these regiments, the kilt became not only an assertion of a distinct Scottish identity rooted in the past, but also of the Scottish participation in the imperial expansion in the present; consequently, the kilt signifies both the Scottish past, and the imperial future shared with the English in which all participants will reap the fruits of the Empire.

Scott insisted, then, on having the actors in *The Family Legend* dressed in tartan kilts. And so, when the actors appear on stage wearing the kilt, trying to settle their feuds, talking nostalgically of the past, and in this way bringing it to life, inferences about the Scottish identity are bound to be made. What triggers the Maclean violence against the wife of their chief is a sense of threat and fear for the identity of the clan. This fear can be easily understood by an audience which has just survived a century of internal and external strife and is currently in the throes of a bitter war with a foreign enemy. The Macleans' fear is also mingled with a sense of loss, the loss of the ancient war code under which a group of people would rise together to fight against a distinct foe, and in their rising, their differences would be eroded, and their identity fortified. This sense of loss is apparent in the first scene of the play, where we see Benlora

expressing his longing for the heroic past, in which war companionship was of paramount importance, and stronger than any other bond, whether familial or political:

Go ye, who will, and crowd the chieftain's hall,
 And deal the feast, and nod your grizzled heads
 To martial pibrochs, play'd, in better days,
 To those who conquer'd, not those who woo'd their foes;
 My soul abhors it. On the sea-beaten rock,
 Removed from ev'ry form and sound of man;
 In proud communion with the fitful winds
 Which speak, with many tongues, the fancied words
 Of those who long in silent dust have slept;
 While eagles scream, and sullen surges roar —
 The boding sounds of ill; — I'll hold my feast, —
 My moody revelry. (1.1.112-123)

The Scottish spectators would quickly pick up the implications and relate to the anxieties and concerns expressed by Benlora and the Macleans. They would be ambivalent about romanticizing a past that had been extremely bloody and they would be aware that their present offered a more pressing danger for which internal differences needed to be transcended. Here the function of the kilt is twofold: it is a reminder of a Scottish history which needs to be preserved, but they would also be aware that the bloody feuds associated with this history must be set aside to forge the Scottish people who had a distinctive place to play in a beleaguered Britain.

Since the kilt was also worn by the extras from Scott's brother John's "Highland recruiting part [...] and as they mustered beneath the porch of the castle, and seemed to

fill the court-yard behind, the combat scene had really the appearance of reality” (Carhart 149). They must have presented a comforting sign in the light of the Napoleonic threat. The regiment’s engagement in the play is a tacit call to combine efforts in order to curtail the advances of the foreign enemy. Any partial differences between clans or between Scotland and England seem trivial in comparison to the common cause. To stress this point, Argyll’s concluding speech encourages the setting aside of “petty broils” not only for the sake of the present, but also for the sake of the future. A future in which the Scottish nation, metonymically represented by the “warlike pipe” and the “plaided bands”, plays a leading role in the defence of the “native land”. The past will be part of history, a history shared by descendants of all parties

O that men

In blood so near, in country, and in valour,
 Should spend in petty broils their manly strength,
 That might, united for the public weal,
 On foreign foes such noble service do!
 O that the day were come when gazing southron,
 Whilst these our mountain warriors, marshalled forth
 To meet in foreign climes their country’s foes,
 Along their crowded cities slowly march,
 To sound of warlike pipe, their plaided bands,
 Shall say, with eager fingers pointing thus,
 “Behold those men! — their sunn’d but thoughtful brows:
 Their sinewy limbs; their broad and portly chests,

Lapp'd in their native vestments, rude but graceful! —
 Those be our hardy brothers of the north; —
 The bold and generous race, who have, beneath
 The frozen circle and the burning line,
 The rights and freedom of our native land
 Undauntedly maintain'd.”

That day will come,
 When in the grave this hoary head of mine,
 And many after heads, in death are laid;
 And happier men, our sons, shall live to see it.
 O may they prize it too with grateful hearts!
 And, looking back on these our stormy days
 Of other years, pity, admire, and pardon
 The fierce, contentious, ill-directed valour
 Of gallant fathers, born in darker times. (5.4.134-160)

This invocation of a common past is part of the process of the formation of the nation, which, in order to justify its existence, creates a shared heritage that is invoked in moments of crisis. It is this shared heritage that enables the nation to adopt a futuristic discourse which foretells the general good everybody will share. Renan remarks that to the formation of a nation what actually counts is “the fact of sharing” and he elaborates:

More valuable by far than common customs posts and frontiers conforming to strategic ideas is the fact of sharing, in the past, a glorious heritage and regrets, and of having, in the future, [a shared] programme

to put into effect, or the fact of having suffered, enjoyed and hoped together [...] A nation is therefore a larger-scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make in the future. It presupposes a past; it is summarized, however, in the present by a tangible fact, namely, consent, the clearly expressed desire to continue a common life. (19)

Hence, what Joanna Baillie is keen to demonstrate in Argyll's final speech is that the "stormy days" the two families have witnessed, the days when clanship rivalry, national partisanship, and discrimination dominated their daily lives are but a reflection of "darker times" which will soon subside for a future to be established "beneath/ The frozen circle and the burning line". This future whose borders extend to frozen and burning lands alike cannot be read as other than the new borders of the British Empire.

Central to the legend of the lady of the rock is the ancient and persisting custom of settling feuds and political disputes by a marriage settlement that binds the rival families together. As Irigaray makes clear in the epigraph to this chapter, a woman's body has traditionally been exploited as "an exchange value" and "a commodity" (225). This relegation of the status of woman is predicated on the elevation of those who barter her body, the father and the husband. Her individual identity is therefore eroded by phallic power which she is forced to signify. Such attempts to control, erode, barter and subordinate women are not always separate from competition over land, which brings into question issues of inheritance and familial loyalties — issues that Baillie is evidently deeply aware of.

Baillie writes the play in a way that underlines the disastrous consequences of such customs in which the female body becomes the focal point in the peace transaction

upon which a political settlement is executed, contested, and disrupted. In the play, Helen's body is treated both as a text akin to a peace treaty and as a physical body. This politicization of her body is in itself an act of violence which did not put an end to the feud as much as transform her into its battlefield. Thus, in using the female body as a peace-settlement, Baillie shows how this act of political violence triggers more violence that endangers the wellbeing of the political and the domestic sphere. But although Baillie is implicitly critical of this custom, she is not totally blind to the potential it could bring about once the bloodlines of the two feuding families are united. And in this respect, she reinforces the generative power of the female body by making Helen give birth to a son. Thus, though the initial political transaction denies the materiality of the female body, the united bloodline confirms its power. The power of the female body does not only bridge feudal animosities but becomes both an emblem of peace and harmony, and a means by which peace is secured by blending two bloodlines in a common progeny.

Throughout the play, Helen is hardly seen as anything other than a politicized entity. We do, however, see her differently in the climatic scene when she is left on the rock to die. In this scene, Helen is far from the father who used her to secure a non-lasting peace, from the husband who cannot choose her above his kin, from the suitor she had to give up on her marriage, and from her son, whose very existence prompted the Macleans to pressure their chief to place her on the rock — Helen's body for the first time is free from any prejudice, politicization, objectification or any signification that dehumanized her. Her character manages to engage the audience's sympathy in this scene because of her state of liminality, she belongs to both the Campbells and the

Macleans and to neither. It is Helen's "in-between-ness" that is stressed in this scene.

As Bardsley elaborates:

After all, the central drama consists of Helen's stranding, a literalization of her political and social position. Evidently to be in neither her husband's nor her father's place is to be in no place. When the tide shifts, the place is gone, leaving only an in-between-ness, a space — at once uninhabitable and unstable. (142)

It is true that Helen does not belong to either place but her descendants certainly will belong to both, and the danger she is in is, in a sense, the responsibility of both. This shady space of "in-between-ness" can be further elaborated in terms of Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject.

Robert Miles argues that both horror and nationalism represented in the Gothic are articulations of xenophobic feelings which can be explained in terms of Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject. Miles asserts that "The abject occupies a border zone between desire and the super-ego (or Symbolic) and is ambiguous in the sense that it partakes of both 'enjoyment' and 'disgust'" and he elaborates "it is through this vocation for the liminal that abjection realizes itself as a literary modality, one central to the Gothic and nationalism ("Abjection, Nationalism and the Gothic" 51). He also suggests that Slavoj Žižek's notion of the "Other", and its necessary existence as a projection of the self's desires, may prove to be equally effective for coming to a full understanding of the nature of the Gothic and its nationalistic overtones. It should, however, be noted that Kristeva's abject is a consequence of the "othering" of the mother. Miles does not expand on Kristeva's insistence on the female body in discussing the abject, and focuses instead on the feelings of impurity and disgust

invoked by the realization that the self and the other are closely and inextricably linked and uses this to explain the formulation of nationalist feelings.

A substantial part of Kristeva's corpus is preoccupied with issues concerning motherhood and maternity. To examine how such uniquely feminine experiences operate within the patriarchal order, she introduces two key terms "chora" and the "abject". Chora refers to the phase in which the distinction between mother and child is not clearly outlined, and it is this phase that precedes the symbolic order. What ushers the child into the symbolic order is the "abject", through which the demarcation between child and mother is defined. The abject experience involves any feelings of disgust or revulsion that arise from a threat of being subsumed, or as Kristeva puts it, "pulverized" by the mother. It is in experiencing the threat of the maternal body, that is, in experiencing the abject, that the child acquires a distinct autonomy, a subject, that is different from the (m)other.

However, the abject is not strictly experienced by the child, and it is not necessarily confined within the realms of motherhood. It generally applies to any threat posited by any certainty that maintains and perpetuates the status quo, whether it be the patriarchal order, the dominant episteme, or the old regime. "To Kristeva the discourse of maternity is a discourse of an identity in crisis, of a subject-in-process" (Oliver 49). Hence, the abject may be a collective phobia shared by a society that wishes to see its borders remain intact without any trespassers who might jeopardize its autonomous state. In the event of trespass, feelings of the abject are strongly invoked to keep the trespasser at bay, and the society intact. Thus, the abject subject is necessary for the self or the society to identify itself as a distinct entity. Oliver further elucidates Kristeva's point:

Although every society is founded on the abject — constructing boundaries and jettisoning the anti-social — every society may have its own abject. In all cases, the abject threatens the unity/identity of both society and the subject. It calls into questions the boundaries upon which they are constructed [...] Just as waste is expelled from the healthy body, the abject is expelled from the healthy society. There comes a point where the body itself becomes waste, the corpse, and society becomes barbaric, genocide. Our rituals, violent in themselves, are flimsy protections against disintegration. (56-8)

In other words, abjection is the horror of being subsumed by the Other, where the demarcating boundaries between self and other are completely eroded. What the maternal body of Helen Campbell achieves in *The Family Legend* is the eradication of the differences between the Campbells and the Macleans through her offspring, and such a thought of being tied to the other in a blood relation is abhorrent and a source of abjection to members of the Maclean.

BENLORA:

Ay, and this wedding; when in form of honour

Conferr'd upon us, Helen of Argyll

Our sov'reign dame was made, — a bosom worm,

Nursed in that viper's nest, to infuse its venom

Through all our after race. (1.1.85-89)

Simultaneously, this abhorrence can be seen in terms of desire. The Macleans hate Helen not only because she is a Campbell but because they desire her as well.

Glenfadden and Lochtarish describe Helen in erotic terms as she approaches them with her husband:

GLENFADDEN.

Ah, the goodly creature!

How fair she is! how winning! — See that form;

Those limbs beneath their foldly vestments moving,

As though in mountain clouds they robed were,

And music of the air their motion measur'd.

LOCHTARISH.

Ay, shrewd and crafty earl! 'tis not for nought

Thou hither sent'st this jewel of thy race.

A host of Campbells, each a chosen man,

Could not enthral us, as, too soon I fear,

This single Campbell will. Shrewd crafty foe! (1.2.65-74)

This Campbell “jewel” is particularly threatening, not only because she is from a rival clan, but also because of the erotic feelings she triggers in her opponents. Such erotic feelings erode the difference which the Macleans aim to maintain between themselves and the Campbells. In addition, the fact that Helen has borne Maclean a child is a step towards her integration into the Maclean clan. Even Helen herself, describes her relationship to the Macleans in terms of her status as the mother of a Maclean and hopes that such a relationship will in the end make her accepted among the Macleans:

And laying on his plaided shoulder, thus,

A mother's hand, say proudly, “This is mine!”

I shall not then a lonely stranger be

'Mid those who bless me not. (1.2.187-190)

Here Helen, just like Argyll, foresees a future where the difference between a Campbell and a Maclean no longer exists. This future can only be actualized when partial differences are transcended, and when the bloody history is relegated to the status of a shared heritage.

To conclude this section, I need to stress that *The Family Legend* demonstrates the abandonment of atavistic heroism in favor of modern diplomacy, the evolution from clanship to the nation-state, the emergence of imaginary boundaries which give rise to states of “in-between-ness” and liminality. At the same time, the play is underpinned by a sense of a nostalgic longing for the past, for clan loyalties and affiliations, and an awareness of the frailty of demarcating boundaries. *The Family Legend* is not merely about asserting the importance of a harmonious Scotland in a unified Britain during the concurrent struggle with France, but also about not losing one’s connection with the past altogether. What is given up for the sake of unity can always contribute to a common heritage cherished by all parties. Thus, the project of celebrating Scottish identity in *The Family Legend* can also be viewed as an attempt to establish a bridge from the present to the past by exploring the ramifications of familial politics, and their impact on the present. Moreover, Baillie’s particular feminist touch is manifested in the emphasis on motherhood in the Maclean-Campbell union; this touch is of interest since it highlights the demarcation between the self and the other, and the shaky basis upon which this demarcation is grounded. In addition, motherhood becomes the overarching rubric under which a united national character can thrive. By comparing Baillie’s treatment of the legend to Holcroft’s in his *The Lady of the Rock*, I will further elucidate how gender differences have contributed to the different treatments of the legend.

Holcroft's Melodrama:

In contrast to Baillie, Holcroft wrote his adaptation from a different perspective, although it obviously shares the same political backdrop as *The Family Legend* in the Napoleonic Wars, and like Baillie, he dismisses infertility or desire for another woman as Maclean's motive for abandoning his wife on the rock. Holcroft uses jealousy as Maclean's motive in *The Lady of the Rock*, a flaw, which proves, however, to have detrimental effects on the welfare of the family as a whole, it does not result in the destruction of Mclean, for he is reunited with his wife in the end. In addition, we see Maclean use his young daughter to spy on her mother and tell him about anything that might incriminate her.

Holcroft's dramatic career, and his literary output as a whole, aimed to educate the people regarding their rights, and to express his revolutionary ideas and dreams for reform. In his attempts to express his Jacobin sentiments, he experimented with different forms. His literary output boasts an impressive array of forms ranging from elegies, novels, and journalistic reports to travel accounts, translations and dramatic writings. His writings attracted many accusations of explicit Jacobinism, and especially, his choosing to translate German dramas, and in particular by one of the most controversial dramatists for late eighteenth century critics — Kotzebue.¹ Towards the end of his life, he decided to record his prolific literary career in his *Memoirs*, which

¹ August von Kotzebue (1761-1819) was one of the most prolific and popular German dramatists in the late eighteenth-century. His plays are characterized by excessive sensationalism and convoluted plots. His immense popularity extended beyond Germany and many of his plays were translated into various European languages, including English. In 1800, he was arrested in Russia as a suspected Jacobin sympathizer – a suspicion that contemporary English reviewers shared. One of his plays, *Das Kind der Liebe*, was translated into English by Elizabeth Inchbald under the title *Lover's Vows*. It is, of course, the play that causes so much trouble in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*. *Lover's Vows* is the play the young Bertrams and Crawfords prepare for a private performance, and when Sir Thomas Bertram arrives suddenly the whole project is aborted.

document the ordeal of his trial for treason. The memoirs were left unfinished at his death and were subsequently completed by William Hazlitt.

As a dramatist, Holcroft is notable for playing an active role in popularizing the melodrama on the English stage. Or as Hoeveler argues he is “the man who wrote — or more accurately stole — the first British melodrama from France” (“The Temple of Morality” 49). The play usually cited, however, as the earliest example of melodrama is Matthew Lewis’s *The Castle Spectre*, which links the gothic tradition to the development of melodrama on the English stage. In her *Spectacular Politics*, Bakscheider asserts that “gothic drama drew primarily upon the conventions of post-1670s English tragedy with its strong elements of melodrama” (155). In addition to demonstrating the common features of the gothic, such as polarized good and evil, stock characters, and spectacular effects, the melodrama employs music coordinating with the action to accentuate critical moments in the play. Matthew Lewis actively employed background music in *The Castle Spectre* and his monodrama, “The Captive” to impress his audience. Similarly, Holcroft’s *The Lady of the Rock*, which is markedly less poetic than Baillie’s treatment, uses music composed by his daughter to stress key moments in the play. And he uses traditional music to distinguish the two rival clans: “the Pibrach, or warlike Music, appertaining to each Clan, is played, as they separately march in Procession” (2.7). Nevertheless, the political overtones of Holcroft’s work, especially in the theatre where the effect of drama over audience is more immediate, cannot be missed.

To improve his income and revive his dramatic career which had been damaged by his indictment for treason, Holcroft moved to the Continent. He travelled to Germany, France and the Netherlands where he conversed with European writers,

established his short-lived *European Repository*, and upon discovering his name was linked to the French secret service in the English papers, he returned to England. There he published his *Travels from Hamburg through Westphalia, Holland, and the Netherlands* in 1804 and had two successive successes onstage, *Hear Both Sides* (1803) and *The Lady of the Rock* (1805).

Holcroft's bitter experience with the treason trials and constant accusations of espionage left a clear mark on his work. During his detention at Newgate, Holcroft constantly asked what crime he was accused of and what the evidence was. The evidence proved nearly non-existent, for it appeared that the informer who overheard Holcroft's chat with a detained friend had misconstrued Holcroft's meaning. Given this shaky evidence, Holcroft was released to face the reputation of an "acquitted felon". However, as Hazlitt notes: "It was a conviction which he could not get from his mind, that his accusers had never any intention of producing evidence against him" (Holcroft and Hazlitt *Memoirs* 181). The question of evidence, and its crucial importance in proving innocence is highlighted in *The Lady of the Rock*. In the play, Maclean questions his daughter about her mother's behaviour and encourages her to spy on her mother. His brother, Dugald, who is in love with Lady Campbell and aspires to the chieftainship acts as an Iago figure and maliciously encourages Maclean to follow his doubts. Holcroft tries to show how the "evidence", innocently provided by the daughter, and given to the father whose mind is inclined towards proving his wife's guilt, proves to be almost fatal not only to the wife, but also to the familial institution. In other words, Holcroft proves that what constitutes evidence to an authority (father) may not have been verified properly and may in truth be nothing but malicious slander against an innocent subject (the mother). For him, being misunderstood and misjudged is a

situation to which anyone is susceptible. As he said in one of his letters to his daughter regarding the accusation of his treason: “Remember the most virtuous of men are liable to be misunderstood, and falsely accused. But the virtuous man has no need to fear” (*Memoirs* 158). In addition, such acts of misjudgement can be committed by anyone, and in making Mclean, the head of the clan, rely on his doubts and not his reason or tangible and conclusive evidence, Holcroft is implying that the state can commit similar acts of misjudgement, if it gets carried away by fears that verge on paranoia. When the child in the play sees her mother conversing with her brother, Lord Campbell, who is in disguise, she innocently reports that to Maclean. With this piece of information, and his brother’s encouragement, Maclean decides to cast his wife on the rock. However, Maclean is aware that the means by which he has extracted the evidence are not just and wonders whether he is actually committing murder:

LORD MACLEAN:

Am I at last a murderer — And where’s

My proof?— A brother’s suspicions — a child—

Ha! Decoy the child to betray the mother!

Insidious villainy! — The rock? Oh detested act!

Infernal jealousy! (2.2)

This sudden awakening does not save Lady Campbell from the dreadful plot against her life designed by her husband. Once she is left on the rock, the Fisherman, a Maclean who is aware of the plan, sails to rescue her. Holcroft gives a crucial dramatic function to the Fisherman in a way that sheds light on his sympathy for the lower orders, who despite their struggle for a living, maintain a high ethical code which is not corrupted by material needs. Thus, in stressing the Fisherman’s good conduct and sound conscience,

Holcroft illustrates that virtue and good judgement are not confined to one class. When Maclean reaches the decision to kill his wife, and his brother attempts to bribe the Fisherman to do the job, the latter declines the bribe and refuses to commit murder. He goes so far as to risk his life by sailing in a stormy night to save Lady Campbell from death. At the end of the play, the Fisherman's courage and fortitude are rewarded by Maclean, who once reconciled with his wife, announces that the Fisherman and his family will join them in the castle:

LORD MACLEAN:

Ay,

To my heart! Nobler than the noble, thou art

Indeed my saviour! Thou and all thy family

Shall for ever live with us at the castle. (2.7)

The "noble" Fisherman is represented as a foil to Dugald, and in proving to be "Nobler than the noble" he outshines the upper classes in his strict ethical code. Holcroft has constantly tried to convey this message to his audience. "Repeatedly the titled characters in Holcroft's plays are portrayed negatively and either are foiled by commoners or require the assistance of commoners to save them" (Rosenblum xvii). Hence, in maximizing the dramatic function of a commoner and in stressing the importance of handling evidence delicately, Holcroft actively draws from his private life situations that best exemplify the message he wishes to pass to his audience.

There is an interesting note by Genest about the performance of *The Lady of the Rock* and its utilization of the rescue scene: "it appears from his advertisement, that the Machinist of Drury Lane had invented a finer sea storm than had ever been exhibited on the stage" (8: 647). It is evident then that spectacular effects were employed to enhance

the melodramatic aspect of the play. It was common at the time to capitalize on such scenes in the script since they can potentially arrest the audience's sympathies and manifest the skills of the artificer:

In no scene was the human predicament more acute than in the representation of storms at sea. The helplessness of mankind in the face of catastrophe was magnified by the size of the waves and their sheer destructiveness as they drove ships onto a rocky coastline to disintegrate in flotsam. The subject found expression so frequently in painting that it developed its own characteristics as a genre and the popularity of Turner's storm-ridden seascapes may be calculated from the numbers of mezzotints that derived from his composition. Shakespeare, in *The Twelfth Night* and *The Tempest*, had established the convention of opening the play with a storm, at which point Charles Maturin placed the scene in his drama *Bertram*. The tempest was viewed through a large gothic window in the Convent St. Anslem. The audience was entertained with the expected appurtenances of thunder, lightning, rain and wind as information was conveyed by one of the brethren. (Ranger 32)

Holcroft's capitalization on his private experiences is appropriately conveyed through the melodramatic mode, which in contrast to gothic drama that highlights nationalistic elements, uses the private and the domestic which occupies the focal point of the reformist project.

Adaptations, Gothic Dramas and Melodramas

It was a common practice in the Romantic period to adapt material that was familiar to the audience, and the sources dramatists consulted for their adaptations came from very different literary genres. Ballads, stories, folktales, novels and other mediums of expression proved to be a cornucopia to feed the imagination of the spectators and meet the financial expectations of stage managers. As Bertrand Evans puts it:

Playwrights dramatized almost anything, in almost any style. Wherever novelists and poets, indeed wherever essayists went, the dramatists kept pace [...] Striving to find something, anything, to catch the public fancy, they rehashed the themes and attempted the dramatic fashions of every age [...] The result of hurling together clashing materials, motifs, styles, and themes in complete disregard of history or geography was often an incredible *mélange*: a play set in Anglo Saxon times, for example, with its scene laid in the great gabled hall, but with warriors who should have been gulping mead and gnawing beef declaiming instead, in late eighteenth century diction, of patriotism and liberty; with ladies of sensibility asserting their virtue by citing familiar precepts; and, finally, with the whole business tied together by comments on the action from an Aeschylean chorus. (13-14)

But despite the variety of sources being used and the setting in which the original story occurred, dramatists did not hesitate to insert elements that related to the concerns of the contemporary audience. These additions also obliquely reveal the author's commentary on the original story, and the context from which it emerged.

There was nothing novel about the storyline of *The Family Legend* to many highlanders who would have been familiar with the different variations of the legend in circulation. And a wider public might have encountered one of the variations such as the ballad “Glenara” by Thomas Campbell. Nevertheless, it seems that such prior knowledge of the story neither hindered dramatists from adapting well-known narratives nor spectators from attending and enjoying such adaptations. In fact, Philip Cox emphasizes the general predominance of adaptation as a dramatic practice: “From the late eighteenth century through to the present day, the theatre has demonstrated an interest in reworking narratives from other genres, particularly the novel, for stage (re)presentation” (*Reading Adaptations* 1). Cox stresses the dominance of the novel as a major source for adaptations; however, many adaptations were mere capitalizations on the popularity of a novel without strict adherence to its narrative. Titles of popular gothic novels were used as marketing tags. In describing Henry Siddons’s adaptation of Ann Radcliffe’s *A Sicilian Romance*, Evans notes the marked difference between the novel and the dramatic adaptation:

Except for the title and the name of one character, Siddons was not specifically indebted to Mrs. Radcliffe. His is virtually an original play. The atmosphere is reminiscent of Mrs. Radcliffe’s, but of no particular novel. The plot is related to *A Sicilian Romance* only as any Gothic play is related to every other [...] It is interesting to note that the work was first submitted to the censor, two months before it was acted, under the title of *The Castle of Otranto*; that application was made by Stephen Kemble, who may have believed that the name of Walpole’s novel would attract the larger audience. The change of title hereafter may have

been made on the same grounds, with a reversal of opinion. The fact that titles could be thus exchanged to reap the harvest of the latest infatuation among the novel-reading public indicates how little an adapter really owed to a specific source, and how much to the common property of Gothicists. (103-104)

It is important to remember that adapting for the stage, besides being a profitable practice, provides an opportunity to achieve objectives which might be difficult to attain by invented stories. Cox borrows John Ellis's notion of "prolonging pleasure", which serves as the starting point for cinematic adaptations from literature, and suggests that it is a possible objective behind stage adaptations:

Adaptation into another medium becomes a means of prolonging pleasure of the original representation, and repeating the production of a memory. The process of adaptation should thus be seen as a massive investment (financial and psychic) in the desire to repeat particular acts of consumption within a form of representation that discourages such a repetition. From this point of view there is no difference between the filming of a preexistent novel or the novelisation of a pre-existent film. (Ellis 4-5)

Many stories, then, which have proved to be a source of pleasure to the audience, have the potential to be recycled and used again. The legend of the lady of the rock is a good example, partly because of the sensational part of the legend in which the lady is left to perish on a rock. But popular stories can also be adapted for other reasons. In *The Lady of the Rock* Holcroft uses the tension in the domestic sphere to make claims for the public sphere, emphasising that the terror excited by paranoia can easily throw

everything in disorder. His adaptation is critical of the lack of wise judgement in the political scene of the time. He also does not miss the chance to emphasise the role played by the lower classes in restoring order that has been shattered by distrust. Joanna Baillie too is concerned about domestic disputes, not those arising from the fear of foreign threats and overseas wars, but those characterised by violence against women and by divisiveness between Scotland and England. It needs to be noted that Baillie, whose source is a female oral tradition, has added a legitimate male heir to the political match, and not a daughter as Holcroft did. The focal point of interest here is not whether the legend contained a male heir or not, nor whether Baillie and Holcroft have adhered to it, but rather the surfacing of this issue of inheritance, by either emphasis (Baillie) or elimination (Holcroft). This marked difference between Baillie's and Holcroft's renderings of the legend, reveals the different political agendas of each and their attempts to embody them in their plays. Baillie is concerned with the role of Scotland in an expanding Britain that is being challenged by other powers: she needs, therefore, to emphasise the disastrous effects of factional loyalties and the place of women in healing divisions. Whereas, it mattered little to Holcroft who was accused of treason, tried and acquitted, whether the lady of the rock is given a boy or a girl since his main objective is to show how is it possible to twist a piece of information by using it out of context to incriminate an innocent person. In addition, the different treatments of the legend resulted in the exploration of two related, yet different, forms of drama: the gothic drama and the melodrama.

Hoeveler has highlighted an important difference between the two dramatic forms "Gothic dramas contain historical and nationalistic elements that melodramas do not", and she goes on to claim that "the two genres — like bookends — reveal the

public and historical (Gothic) and private and domestic (melodrama) faces of the culture” (“The Temple of Morality” 54). This distinction is particularly useful in reading the two adaptations, and it informs our understanding of where the two plays meet generically, and differ thematically. As she did in previous plays, Joanna Baillie contributes to the gothic mode in her *The Family Legend*, which offers an implicit and gendered take on the contemporary political scene. As for Holcroft’s *Lady of the Rock*, it reflects his reformist agenda by tackling the issue of unsubstantiated indictments, such as he had suffered in his trial for treason, as he shows how they threaten the welfare of the family. He also deals with the issue of class in having the Maclean family saved from a dismal outcome by one of their loyal servants.

The climactic point of the legend in which the lady is left to perish on a rock is interpreted by the dramatists in ways that highlight the difference between melodrama and gothic drama. Holcroft takes advantage of the scene’s potential for deploying spectacular effects. Joanna Baillie, on the other hand, uses the same scene to bolster patriotic feelings in a time of war and to stress the generative power of the female body in creating a united nation. And so the legend succeeds in generating two strikingly different adaptations that, when read against each other, highlight how writers’ treatments are shaped by the politics of gender and war.

CHAPTER TWO:

Gothic Autobiography: Mary Robinson's *Memoirs*
and the Social Condition of Women

The little Arts she adopted, the Vanity she displayed, to acquire
Popularity, is inconceivable.

(M. H. R., *Letters from Perdita to a Certain Israelite* 14)

What is personal is completely a function of what is perceived as personal. And what is perceived as personal by men, or rather, what is gripping, significant, “juicy”, is different from what is felt to be that way by women. For what we are really talking about is not the personal as such, what we are talking about is what is important, answers one's needs, strikes one as immediately interesting. For women, the personal is such a category. (Tompkins 134)

In reading the works of Mary Robinson, a recently recovered literary figure in the Romantic canon, one can identify an interesting pattern of experimentation with the Gothic, especially in the works Robinson wrote shortly before her death – her memoirs and *Lyrical Tales*, 1800. I will argue that these works display effects which are characterisable as gothic, but at the same time they should be read in the context of her attempt to advocate reform in the institutions and gender relations that subordinate and oppress women. After the ruin of her reputation as a result of her liaison with the Prince

of Wales (later George IV), Robinson attempted to appropriate the Gothic for multiple ends, some personal and some political. She writes her memoirs like a Gothic romance, a romance that in some ways resembles the poem, published in her *Lyrical Tales*, “Golfre: a Gothic Swiss Tale”. In this way Robinson represents her life as a kind of Gothic narrative in which she attributes her personal afflictions and mishaps to adverse factors, including her own acute sensibility and financial difficulties, over which she has insufficient control. As a woman both threatened and sensitive, she constructs herself as a Gothic heroine, and dwells on that image in her poetic and narrative works. But since Robinson’s corpus dwells more than once on the subjugation of women, it becomes apparent that Robinson shapes this image of the gothic heroine to expose the cultural constructs that allowed this subjugation to take place.

It is best, then, to read Robinson’s representation of herself and her gothic heroines in terms of “gothic feminism”. Diane Hoeveler introduces the term in her study of Gothic fiction, *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës*, and defines it as an ideological form of writing that victimizes women in order to make a case for their rights (2). In other words, nineteenth-century women writers placed their heroines in precarious situations caused by patriarchal tyranny in order to expose the very mechanisms that enabled this tyranny to take place. Also, in adopting gothic conventions that portrayed women as weak and in need of protection, women writers assumed the position of the masculine gaze, that is, they themselves inhabited the space and assumed the position from which they had been repeatedly objectified. Hoeveler describes this move as the “professionalization or masquerade of femininity” (5), which gives a veneer of conformity to patriarchal

constructions of femininity, yet subverts these constructions by mimicking them and by exposing their hegemonic operations.

As a beautiful actress and one of the Prince of Wales's mistresses, Mary Robinson was constantly preyed upon by the powerful male gaze in its different manifestations. She was both the object of cartoonists' merciless ridicule and the admired subject of Thomas Gainsborough, Sir Joshua Reynolds and other prestigious painters of the time. She was also targeted by malicious accounts of her love-life, including among many, a pseudo-autobiography titled *Letters from Perdita to a certain Israelite, and his answers to them*. Robinson also suffered from the results of an imprudent marriage encouraged, ironically enough, by her mother. Her husband, who proved to be a gambler and incorrigible womanizer, ended up in debtor's prison where she joined him for a while with her newborn daughter. After her release from prison and her stage debut, she caught the eye of the Prince of Wales while performing the role of Perdita in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. Their courtship ended in a high-profile, yet short-term, affair which Robinson came to regret and suffer from the rest of her life. Later she became the mistress of Colonel Banastre Tarleton, who abandoned her fourteen years later for a convenient marriage. Throughout her life Robinson was haunted by gambling debts incurred first by her husband, and then by Tarleton. Her short-lived, prolific, and quite lucrative literary career was caught between the financial demands she had to meet, and the tarnished reputation she wanted to dispel. With such circumstances it is hardly surprising that Mary Robinson was preoccupied with the general sufferings of women caused by men and perpetuated by patriarchal hegemony. She penned her own vindication titled *An Essay on the Subordination of Women*, and wrote several poems that tackled the injustices committed against her sex. She also

populated her poems and novels with afflicted women from different social strata and racial groups, showing that the persecution of women is not constrained by class or race. To Robinson, all women need protection, and none is immune from exploitation by male companions. Her *Lyrical Tales* is also part of her project to expose the oppression of women. It tackles issues of domestic hegemony, incest, racial prejudice and other forms of oppression women were subjected to. Just like Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads*, Robinson's *Lyrical Tales* contains poems that display gothic tropes and characteristics, and contribute to the call for social reform.

Mary Robinson and the Gothic

Robinson's employment of the gothic in her poems has attracted scholarly attention recently. Curran compares Robinson's work to Coleridge's poetical exploration of the Gothic, noticing that:

What truly makes "The Savage of Aveyron" and, to a lesser extent, "The Haunted Beach" like "Kubla Khan" or "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is not their metrics, but their attempt through poetic effect to create a parallel universe that seems to be akin to ours but to operate by laws to which our norms are alien. This is what separates these poems from the ambience of 1790s Gothicism, with which otherwise they might have much in common. ("Mary Robinson and the New Lyric" 12)

Jacqueline Labbe has also noted the different kind of Gothic that Robinson has carefully aimed to portray. In her study of Robinson's experimentation with the Gothic in her poetry, Labbe contends that "For Robinson, genre works against itself: she infiltrates her romances with a tactical use of obfuscation, imaged through horrific dreams,

narrative delay, or banality in place of climax” (137). Labbe reads “Golfre: A Gothic Swiss Tale” as a gothic story of violence that does not offer a satisfactory ending to the sensational build-up of the poem (146). Labbe also objects to the moralistic ending note of the poem, claiming that it is awkwardly invoked. It is my contention, however, that the returning ghost of the mother, her benevolent will, and the heavy Christian imagery present in the poem all contribute to foreshadowing the moralistic note of the end. This moral note, then, though it may seem awkward and abrupt, is by no means unprepared for. In any case, Labbe argues most persuasively, that Robinson critiques idealized notions of love represented in and popularized by romance.

In her “Golfre” Robinson strips the story of a conventional happy-ending and gives instead a bleak and starkly pessimistic finale that corresponds to what she has explicitly said in her memoirs – life is not a romance even if it manifests the veneer of one. The critical reworking of the Gothic is imbricated in Mary Robinson’s liberal politics, and her usage of the word “Gothic” is a clear indicator of that. But it is important to examine Robinson’s first incorporation of the Gothic in her poetry.

Robinson’s first exploitation of gothic conventions came as early as the 1790s in her “A Fragment: Supposed to be written near the temple, at Paris, on the night before the execution of Louis XVI”. In this portrayal of the overthrow of the French monarchy, Robinson shows how the political scene in France became a gothic nightmare in which

The OWL shrieks from the tottering TOW’R,

Dread *watch-bird* of the *witching hour*!

Spectres, from their charnel cells,

Cleave the air with hideous yells!

Not a GLOW-WORM ventures forth

To *gild* his little *speck* of earth!

In wild despair Creation seems to wait,

While HORROR stalks abroad, to deal the shafts of FATE! (5-12)

Robinson's sympathy for the king and queen of France did not, however, deter her from criticizing the aristocracy in her second gothic novel, *Vancenza*. Her last clearly gothic novel, *Hubert de Sevrac*, published in 1796 (the year that witnessed the publication of her sonnet cycle *Sappho and Phaon*), visits the aftermath of the French Revolution and uses it as a backdrop to a flesh market in which the female body is demanded in exchange for freedom¹ (Ty 302-3).

When read in its revolutionary context, it becomes apparent that Robinson's gothic output was shaped by the manner in which gothic novels depicted the French Revolution. Also the way her contemporaries employed the word "gothic" in their political debates over the Revolution left its traces on the implications of the word. "The 1790s saw a process whereby, as Gothic fiction moved towards the political, politics moved towards a Gothic aesthetic" (Clery, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* 172). Consequently, towards the end of the century, what modern scholarship came to term gothic novels, started to receive cautionary and even harsh reviews. These novels were often accused of harbouring Jacobin sentiments, and of popularizing vulgar sensationalism, and this drastic turn in their reception resulted in an equally extreme politicization of gothic tropes and metaphors. As Paulson explains, "The Gothic did in fact serve as a metaphor with which some contemporaries in England tried to come to terms with what was happening across the Channel in the 1790s" ("Gothic Fiction" 2: 271), and he goes on to say:

¹ Although this novel was generally not applauded by the critics, the severest critique came from Robinson's camp. This harsh reviewer was no other than Robinson's friend and co-feminist, Mary Wollstonecraft.

[W]e are talking about a particular development in the 1790s, a particular plot which was either at hand for writers to use in the light of the French Revolution, or was in some sense projected by the Revolution and borrowed by writers who may or may not have wished to express anything specifically about the troubles of France [...] the castle, prison, tyrant, and sensitive young girl could no longer be presented naively; they had all been sophisticated by the events in France. (2: 273-4)

The publication of Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* in 1797 exacerbated the disparaging reception of the gothic, culminating in the application of the derogatory label "the school of horror" to works that exploited obscenity and supernaturalism in a similar fashion. It seems that to write a gothic novel in these troubled years was to risk being aligned with Jacobinism and impropriety. But despite this connection, the number of gothic novels published continued to rise constituting "up to two-thirds of those published in a year" (Clery, "The Politics" 70) until it reached a peak in 1800 (Miles "The 1790s: the Effulgence of Gothic." fig.1, 43).

Also affected by the French Revolution was the word "gothic". Initially it meant anything pertaining to the medieval past, and it was synonymous with barbarism, superstition, and anarchy, and it is in this sense that both Horace Walpole and Clara Reeve used it in the subtitles of their novels. It was not until the publication of Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* that the "gothic" acquired a new shade of meaning. Burke discussed in his *Reflections* the decline of chivalry as a code of conduct, and his detractors picked on this line of thought and the word "gothic" to accuse him of reverting to outlandish medieval ideals. Caught in a heated political dispute, the "gothic" is no longer a neutral or merely descriptive term.

Among the women writers who were quick to pick up this highly charged word and apply it to the cause of women in their gothic fictions were Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Robinson. In her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft cautions against the invocation of the beguiling code of chivalry since it encumbers women's mental progress:

If love have made some women wretched — how many more has the cold unmeaning intercourse of gallantry rendered vain and useless! yet this heartless attention to the sex is reckoned so manly, so polite that, till society is very differently organized, I fear, this vestige of *gothic* manners will not be done away by a more reasonable and affectionate mode of conduct. (my italics 97)

Mary Robinson used the word “gothic” twice, once in her novel *Walsingham, or The Pupil of Nature. A Domestic Story* (1797), and as subtitle to her poem “Golffre” the last poem in her *Lyrical Tales*. As a regular contributor to several literary magazines, and a shrewd reader of new patterns and fashions, she could not possibly have overlooked the new notions affixed to the “gothic”, and, therefore, must have been aware of its newly-acquired political implications. An incident in *Walsingham* supports this hypothesis:

“Give me one of his works; I shall want something to-amuse me in the bath to-morrow morning.”

“Your ladyship has already selected one; ‘*Liberal Opinions*.’”

“O! *Gothic*! out of date as much as though it had been printed before the flood! Who will pretend to recommend such antediluvian things as liberal opinions?”

“The Tutor of Truth.”

“Worse! — a thousand times worse! I would not read such pages to be crowned with wreathes of myrtle. Has he written nothing more suited to the fashionable world?”

“*Family Secrets.*” (337) ¹

Mary Robinson’s second usage of the term in her “Golfre: a Gothic Swiss Tale” is more calculated. It gives a narrative that exposes the oppressive nature of patriarchal power and shows how it is confronted by feminine mercy and forgiveness.

Golfre: A Gothic Swiss Tale

Divided like a drama into five parts and written in a version of the ballad form, “Golfre” narrates the story of Baron Golfre who resides in a Gothic castle, where his life of seclusion is interrupted by his unexplained emotional fits. In a cottage nearby, Zorietto lives with her father, the Goatherd. Her father tells her a horrible tale regarding a Lady locked in a tower by her cruel husband. It is there that she “pin’d and died” (l.83) after giving birth to an infant. This infant was exchanged for the still-born baby of a peasant woman who befriended the Lady. The precise significance of the story is left open at this point. One day a wounded man enters their cottage, and it appears that he is Golfre. As Zorietto attends to his wounds, he follows her with his gaze. Once recovered, Golfre reluctantly sets out for home and realizes that he is enamoured of Zorietto. When his people celebrate his safe return in the chapel, only he, “prostrate there” does not thank heaven for his return.

Three days later, he goes back to the cottage, laden with “treasures”, to ask for Zorietto’s hand in marriage. He arrives while Zorietto is singing vespers near the wood

¹ *Liberal Opinions* and *Family Secrets* were written by Samuel J. Pratt.

beside a little cross which had “long stood” there. Zorietto returns to discover the baron and his men guarding the cottage and its wicket gate. As the baron begins his suit, swearing by the holy cross, a mysterious, apparently immaterial, cross “of ruby glare” enters through the wicket in a seemingly supernatural event. And inside the cottage, a disembodied “snowy” hand is seen carrying round the room a clasp of pearl fixed to a “zone”, a belt of amber. A series of unexplained supernatural events occur, culminating in “Such horrors as attend the dead”. The baron, apparently undaunted makes his declaration — but the Goatherd says that he will not permit it. He objects vehemently and reminds Golfre of his maltreatment of his late Lady, the very Lady whose story he has narrated to Zorietto. In an attempt to make Golfre confront his misdeeds, the peasant recounts how the Lady left a will that assigned “a sack of gold” (3.293) for the maintenance of three lamps burning forever in the Holy Virgin’s shrine. She also asked for prayers to be recited to save her husband’s tormented soul, and for Christmas masses in which twelve barefoot monks would sing around her grave. Golfre silently listens to the peasant’s detailed account of his treatment of his wife and his failure to uphold her will. This account reveals his cruelty and disregard for his wife and explains the possible reason behind his inner turmoil and feelings of guilt. Zorietto, who is in any case already in love with another, hears this more detailed account of the Lady’s story and refuses Golfre’s suit. He threatens to kill her father if she does not comply with his wishes, and to spare the old man, Zorietto offers herself as a sacrifice in marriage to Golfre. The wedding day is fixed and the Baron eagerly awaits it.

Meanwhile Zorietto leaves the cottage early in the morning, disregarding the snow, to see her lover, only to discover that he has been killed. The baron had been

informed about the lovers' assignation by a spy and had murdered Zorietto's lover in a jealous passion:

The BARON, by a Spy appriz'd,
 Was there before his Bride;
 He seiz'd the Youth, and madly strew'd
 The white Cliff, with his steaming blood,
 Then hurl'd him down its side. (4.41-45)

Zorietto accepts the story that he has been killed by wolves and only towards the end of the poem does she realize that Golfre is the murderer. As Zorietto reluctantly walks down the aisle, once more apparently supernatural and portentous warnings culminate in blood flowing from a pearl clasp on her breast. Zorietto sinks down and the pearl clasp "self-bursting" reveals her side: Golfre's eyes fall upon a birthmark on her side. At this point he realises from this mark which she shares with her dead mother that she is his long lost daughter. By the end of the wedding day, Zorietto sees in a vision the spirits of her mother and lover hovering and praying at the little cross where she had herself prayed earlier. They assume angelic forms. The cross which at first has a golden hue, then turns purple, then black. A sudden, clearly symbolic, storm arises, and two angel's wings appear to be spreading over the battlements of the castle:

The Prison Tow'r was silver white,
 And radiant as the morning;
 Two angels' wings were spreading wide,
 The battlements, from side to side —

And lofty roof adorning. (5. 21-25)

In the midst of the terrifying thunder and lightning Zorietto expresses her fear of the wolf who has killed her lover.

“What do you fear?” The BARON cried —

For ZORIETTO trembled —

“A WOLF,” she sigh’d with whisper low,

“Hark how the angry whirlwinds blow

Like Demons dark assembled.

That WOLF! Which did my Lover slay!”

The BARON wildly started.

“That WOLF accurs’d!” she madly cried —

“Whose fangs, by human gore were died,

Who dragg’d him down the mountain’s side,

And left me — broken hearted!”

Now GOLFRE shook in ev’ry joint,

He grasp’d her arm, and mutter’d;

Hell seemed to yawn, on ev’ry side,

“Hear me!” the frantic tyrant cried —

“Hear me!” a faint voice utter’d.

“I hear thee ! yes, I hear thee well”

Cried GOLFRE “I’ll content thee.

I see thy vengeful eye-balls roll —

Thou com’st to claim my guilty soul —

The FIENDS — the FIENDS have sent thee!” (5. 36-56)

Golfre can no longer hide his guilt; he confesses that he himself is the murderous wolf. He shrieks and dies. The morning sees his corpse black and mutilated, whether by the vengeful peasants or marauding wolves is unclear. But it is presumably the people who hang his mangled limbs on the gibbet with which he had threatened Zorietto’s father. Thus, Zorietto is freed from an incestuous marriage and her true parentage is revealed as a mixture of good and evil. She is regularly seen praying in the Chapel where three lamps burn as twelve monks sing the mass, just as her mother wished.

This could have been a more or less straightforward narrative of horror and revenge, but Robinson writes it in a rather obscure manner leaving some events hazy or unexplained. For instance, the manner in which Golfre dies remains obscure, for the reader is left unsure whether he is struck by a thunderbolt that causes the blackening of his body, whether some supernatural happening has brought about his destruction or whether he has some kind of apoplectic fit. The scene in which Golfre meets his fate is dramatically but vaguely described:

And now he writh’d in ev’ry limb,

And big his heart was swelling;
 Fresh peals of thunder echoed strong,
 With famished Wolves the peaks among
 Their dismal chorus yelling!

 "O Jesu Save me!" GOLFRE shriek'd —
 But GOLFRE shriek'd no more!
 The rosy dawn's returning light
 Displayed his corse, — a dreadful sight,
 Black wither'd, smeared with gore!

 High on a gibbet, near the wood —
 His mangled limbs were hung;
 Yet ZORINETTO oft was seen
 Prostrate the Chapel aisles between —
 When holy mass was sung. (5. 82-96)

The way in which Golfre's body is dismembered and displayed on the gibbet signifies that his death is not a private matter, but a public spectacle. A spectacle that is perhaps indicative of the presence of an observing crowd that may or may not have participated in the mutilation of Golfre's body. This gives a more political dimension to the story since it may hint to an uprising by the people against the tyrant, leading to this bloody

ending. However, this portrayal of Golfre's destruction also represents the overarching power of feminine vengeance, and in reading these lines closely, a better understanding of the nature of his death may be achieved. Golfre's confession of his guilt is probably the first confession he has ever made of his numerous sins, and this confession is brought about by Zorietto's insistence on knowing what happened to her lover. Next, we are told that the wolves, which are linked with Golfre throughout the poem, are "famished", meaning that they no longer have prey to feed on and seem to have lost their power. As Golfre's prey, Zorietto manages to break away from his tyrannical and, as it turns out, incestuous obsession with her at the very moment in which she confronts him with her fear of the wolves, the supposed killers of her lover. The manner of her escape is, however, worth remarking. She cries, trembles, confesses her fears to Golfre, and like any stereotypically sensitive gothic heroine, she faints at the crucial moment. Her passivity and weakness both highlight her precarious situation, permitting the "masculine gaze" that renders her, and women in general, as objects of desire that cannot fend off predators. The scene, like the marriage scene which exposes her side, exploits the "masculine gaze", but it does so as a preliminary to showing how patriarchal order is challenged, and in the end replaced by feminine mercy. This feminine mercy is represented by the fulfilment of the wronged Lady's will in having twelve monks conducting mass, and by Zorietto's dedication to her prayers. These masses and prayers aim to "quiet the murd'rer's soul" (l. 542) and to express pity for Golfre's victims

FOR CHARITY and PITY kind,

To gentle souls are given;

And MERCY is the sainted pow'r,
 Which beams thro' mis'ry's darkest hour,
 And lights the way to — HEAVEN! (5. 102-106)

This feminine mercy is in sharp contrast to Golfre's tyranny, a tyranny that has brought about his destruction. We constantly see Golfre suffering from pangs of guilt and haunting shadows reminding him of his crimes. And one of the final blows to his mental wellbeing is the birthmark Zorietto has inherited from her mother, which stands as such a powerful reminder of the wife he has wronged, that it shakes him to the core and shatters him. This birthmark the Lady has passed to her daughter is emblematic of the strong mother-daughter bond overthrowing the patriarchal tyranny Golfre stands for. Thus, the Lady as a gothic mother represents a fantasized disruption of patriarchal order, a disruption brought about from the grave of a dead mother to restore peace and harmony. Hoeverler notices the insistence on the dead mother figure in the works of middle-class women writers who, in their gothic novels, aimed to

Explore within it their fantasized overthrow of the public realm, figured as a series of ideologically constructed masculine "spaces", in favor of the creation of a new privatized feminized world. As an example [...] the female gothic participates in the paradoxical enterprise of both criminalizing and deifying women, and thus we are presented over and over with the gothic anti-heroine and the dead/undead gothic mother.
(Gothic Feminism 4)

The deification of the mother figure is stressed and reiterated several times and in different parts of the poem. The manner in which the spirit of the Lady hovers

protectively around her daughter shows the extent to which the power of motherhood extends beyond the boundaries of life and death. In addition, the will she has left behind indicates a pious soul that is full of mercy and forgiveness towards her tormentor, and elevates her to the level of sainthood. Her repeated call “Hear me” (l. 156, 268 and 493), which Golfre fails to hear until the end of the poem, signifies her keen interest in the welfare of her little family that has been jeopardized by her husband’s malicious acts. The Lady stands for the benign feminine spirit that opts to amend the disastrous effects of patriarchal transgression. It is in the Lady’s attempts to make Golfre repent the acts of domestic violence he has committed against her and to prevent an incestuous match between the father and his daughter, that we find a sharp departure from the gothic image of feminine passivity and submission in the face of violence. Mary Robinson elsewhere tackles this issue of female passivity against patriarchal violence and argues for woman’s right to resort to extreme measures in order to protect herself:

Why may not a woman resent and punish? Because the long established laws of custom, have decreed her *passive*! Because she is by nature organized to feel every wrong more acutely, and yet, by a barbarous policy, denied the power to assert the first of Nature’s rights, self-preservation. (*Letter to the Women of England* 125)

Perhaps the haunting spirit of the Lady serves as a form of punishment of Golfre who has wronged her twice, once by abusing her, and again by disregarding her will. Also, when he is about to commit, unknowingly, another hideous crime, the Lady’s efforts to protect her daughter become more apparent and incessant. Thus, the way in which Mary Robinson invested more power in the prominent feminine figure in the poem articulates her conviction that women do not only have the right to be protected from their

domestic tyrants, but also to be allowed to protect themselves from domestic violence, incest, and any other transgressions committed against their sex.

The two key issues in the poem, domestic violence and incest, have been exhausted in the gothic, especially by women writers who aim to uncover and critique the patriarchal mechanisms leading to their oppression. In portraying these mechanisms in their most extreme form, women writers highlight their sufferings by pointing out how partial laws and customs lead to violence against women, and minimal remorse from the offenders. Mary Robinson herself wondered about the extent to which a man can inflict suffering and get away with it, while women are supposed to suffer in silence:

Man may enjoy the convivial board, indulge the caprices of his nature;
 he may desert his home, violate his marriage vows, scoff at the moral
 laws that unite society, and set even religion at defiance, by oppressing
 the defenceless; while woman is condemned to bear the drudgery of
 domestic life, to vegetate in obscurity, to *love* where she abhors, to
honour where she despises, and to obey, while she shudders at
 subordination. Why? Let the most cunning sophist, answer me, WHY?
 (*A Letter to the Women of England* 45)

Here Robinson reflects that society endorses a strict moral code for women and not men, and notes that men rarely pay as dearly as women for the offences they commit. She believes that we have to bear responsibility for our actions and errors regardless of sex, and she sums up her argument by asking a simple question: “Has vice then a sex?” (44) — clearly not to Robinson. To understand fully her fervent call for social reform

and for the protection of wronged women from the violence and abuse of their men, one needs to turn to her memoirs.

The Memoirs of Mary Robinson

Perdita: The Memoirs left by Robinson have also been of central interest to scholars attempting to understand more about her life as an actress, writer and a scandalous celebrity. This scholarly interest has yielded many readings of *Perdita: The Memoirs* that highlight the apparent generic complexity of the autobiography and that analyze Robinson's presentation of herself and how this representation was received by her contemporaries and later generations. Remarking that Robinson's memoirs is "a historically pivotal and generically significant text" ("Becoming an Author" 36), Peterson suggests that Mary Robinson has attempted to present herself as "an authentic Romantic artist" (36), participating, therefore, in Romantic constructions of authorship. Peterson later rereads the memoirs as an instance/ variety of the *chroniques scandaleuses* ("Women Writers and Self Writing" 209), that is, memoirs written by women of dubious characters. Tracing two plotlines in the memoirs, Peterson differentiates between the mistress/actress role presented by Robinson and the loving mother role reinforced by Robinson's daughter who completed the *Memoirs* after her mother's death. The daughter's amplification of Robinson's motherly image, Peterson notes, gives a highly domesticated image of a notorious courtesan, a move that anticipates that Victorian emphasis on the domestically-oriented female author (214). Chris Cullens reads Robinson's memoirs against her gothic novel *Walsingham* and the historical context in which she became one of the staple images of its popular culture by attempting to look at:

[H]ow the novel “discourses” masquerade, maternity, and what Butler has explored as the “melancholia of gender” by which both female and male subjectivities are bodily “inscribed” and achieve, or fail to achieve, textual representation via language — a medium that, for Robinson, itself seems marked by an ordinary melancholia. (268)

Equally interested in the connection between Robinson’s cultural image and her memoirs, Anne Mellor reads *Perdita: The Memoirs* as “a self-conscious artistic creation” (“Making an Exhibition of Herself” 294) and shows how Robinson in her self-representation gives different versions of herself and assumes different social roles to encourage the contemporary craving for her image: “In her career as a writer, Mary Robinson deliberately exploited this cultural construction of the female poetess as one who has loved, suffered, lost, yet lived to tell the tale in notes of melancholic sweetness” (292). Laura Runge situates Robinson’s *Memoirs* in the context of contemporary discourses on adultery, which attacked her as an emblem of adultery during her liaison with the Prince of Wales, and notes that the *Memoirs* is a fascinating text because of its narrative shifts: “Always engaging, the *Memoirs* shifts among a variety of narrative modes, from sentimental domesticity to poetic melancholy, from gothic terror and gloom to worldly *bon vivance* or moral censure” (563-4). Brant sees the *Memoirs* simply as an attempt “to convert licentiousness into literariness” (290). A recent anthology on Romantic print culture includes excerpts from Mary Robinson’s *Memoirs* and pinpoints the book’s gothic aspect:

Robinson’s emphasis on these struggles helps to present her as a morally proper and victimized woman in a world of “duplicity and sorrow”. The book’s gothic tone emphasized the gendered nature of her struggle to

contend with the perseverance of sorrow that characterized her life.

Robinson turned to literature as a cathartic outlet for her own sufferings.

(Keen 41)

Anne Close's study "Mary Robinson and the Gothic" engages more directly with the gothicity of Robinson's *Memoirs*. Close believes that Robinson's main objective in framing her *Memoirs* in the gothic mode was to ameliorate her tarnished reputation and to justify her outrageous public behaviour. Close compares Robinson's *Memoirs* to her gothic novels, illustrating their close affinities and pointing out how Robinson carefully constructs herself as a gothic heroine in her autobiography (172-173). Several of these studies, then, explore the motives behind Robinson's appropriation of gothic tropes in her *Memoirs*. I argue further that this appropriation is linked to the increasing politicization of gothic novels and that Robinson's *Memoirs* is an intervention in this politicization.

Undoubtedly personal motives prompted Robinson to write her memoirs, and to this personal end the gothic was employed. Having said that, however, it is difficult to separate Robinson's memoirs from the socio-political implications evident in her whole corpus, or from the works of the coterie of female radicals to which she belonged in her last years: the most prominent of these, Mary Wollstonecraft, actively borrowed and incorporated gothic tropes and conventions in her writings to further her feminist claims for social reform. In addition, by the end of the eighteenth century, the Gothic as a kind of writing was completely politicized and in resorting to a politically charged repertoire Mary Robinson makes a deliberate political move that speaks of her concern over the social status of women and their economic dependence. Robinson's poem, "Golfre" is a

good example of this politicisation of the gothic, and how this politicization bears on women's daily lives.

Mary Robinson attempted to give a narrative of her life that was different from the stories that circulated in popular culture.¹ Her account was markedly proto-feminist in the sense that she tried to revise her image, which was either ridiculed or consumed by the masculine gaze in popular writings and caricatures, and in this way to give herself a voice. This voice aimed to justify her moral slips by focusing on the wrongs she endured throughout her life. In her *Perdita: The Memoirs*, we hear the voice of a wronged woman and this wronged woman is central to the narrative. In other words, these memoirs:

[S]erve as a means by which to create images of “self” through the writing act, a way by which to find “voice” — whether private or public — through which to express that which cannot be expressed in other forms. (Benstock 5-6)

Unlike a number of contemporary memoirs or contemporary autobiographies, Mary Robinson's *Perdita: The Memoirs* does not promise to disclose any events or incidents that her readers were not familiar with already; on the contrary, it rests and capitalizes on the public's knowledge of her private life in order to provide the pretext for her own take on her story, and to link her oppression to that of all women of her age. An account of the current practices in autobiographical writing will provide the necessary context for Robinson's memoirs at the time she decided to write her own.

Perhaps, the most influential autobiographical account of the eighteenth century, for both its approach and content, is Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*. In his

¹ For a detailed account of how Mary Robinson was perceived by her contemporaries and her different public profiles see Anne Mellor's "Making an Exhibition of Her Self: Mary 'Perdita' Robinson and Nineteenth-Century Scripts of Female Sexuality".

Confessions, Rousseau claims to present an account of a life he believes to be different from anyone else's, "I am not made like any that I have seen; I venture to believe that I was not made like any that exist. If I am not deserving, at least I am different" (5). In such an approach, he was neither taking common experiences shared by all mankind as a starting point for his self-narrative, nor was he proposing a moral justification for offering his account; instead, being "different" is represented as sufficient reason for telling the story of his life. This story, he claims, is a full and truthful account that does not exclude any mortifying or socially objectionable details, "Here is what I have done, what I have thought, what I was. I have told the good and the bad with equal frankness. I have concealed nothing that was ill, added nothing that was good" (5). In adopting this tell-all approach "Rousseau, instead of following previous spiritual models, was ushering in, through his prodigiously sustained, even obsessional self-writing, a new model of secular autobiography for the Romantic era" (Anderson 43). This model is predicated on the assumption that since he is unique so is everyone else and so it is possible for anyone to tell his/her story, as Marilyn Butler has carefully remarked about autobiographical writing in Rousseau's time:

Writing directly about the self seems to invite self-expression, yet Gibbon's decorous *Autobiography* (1796) represents the taste of the period as fairly as Rousseau's daring experimental *Confessions* (written 1765-70); but even Rousseau conveys the sense (as De Quincey in his *Confessions* of 1821 does not) that his growth to manhood might be anyone's, mankind's rather than Jean-Jacques'. (30)

This model, which purports to give a true and authentic representation of the self, is undermined by the performative language it adopts. This language does not simply

narrate what has happened, it goes further to re-enact the event in a way that allows excuses to be made. In outlining de Man's argument on the performative aspect of autobiographical language, Anderson explains:

The performative, according to de Man, will always be in excess of the cognitive dimension of autobiography. The textual 'I' seeks out excuses to perform itself; it creates dramas in order to stage the 'real' drama of the 'self'. What it clearly does not want to do is explain itself away through cognition. If everything could be understood, there would be nothing left to excuse and there would be no text, no justification or excuse for autobiography. (51)

This autobiographical 'I', as we shall see in the case of Mary Robinson, has uses additional to that of performing the self.

Perhaps a more direct influence on Mary Robinson's memoirs was William Godwin's work. Godwin firmly believed that people should make public confessions in contrast to private ones made to a priest, because such confession might prevent a much more vicious vice, religious tyranny. He says in his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*:

Did every man impose this law upon himself, he would be obliged to consider before he decided upon the commission of an equivocal action, whether he chose to be his own historian, to be the future narrator of the scene in which he was engaging. It has been justly observed that the popish practice of auricular confession has been attended with some salutary effects. How much better would it be, if, instead of a practice thus ambiguous, and which may be converted into so dangerous an

engine of ecclesiastical despotism, every man would make the world his confessional, and the human species the keeper of his conscience?

(Political and Philosophical Writings 3: 136)

In this way he endorses the notion that confession is an agent of truth but that if this is the case, then, it should be heard by all. It is because of this solid conviction in the significance of the public confession to the cultivation of truth that Godwin encouraged Mary Hays to incorporate her personal letters in her fictions, and especially in the *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*. Godwin also published *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798) in which he discloses the private life of his late wife Mary Wollstonecraft with unfortunate results for her reputation.

It is believed that Mary Robinson started writing her memoirs as early as 1798, with the provisional title *Anecdotes of Distinguished Personages and Observations on Society and Manners*, and the reception of Wollstonecraft's biography may have impelled her to put the script aside; in 1800 she resumed her project and changed the title (Levy ix). Godwin's biography of his late wife, Mary Wollstonecraft, caused an uproar and was rebuked by both their friends and detractors. It exposed to the public Wollstonecraft's affairs, illegitimate pregnancies and suicide attempts. A few, however, have sensed that these controversial *Memoirs* of Wollstonecraft do give her justice since they expose Imlay as the villain who misused and wronged her. As Anne Seward puts it in a letter "To reveal the motives on which she had acted; — to paint the strength of her basely betrayed attachment to that villain Imlay, was surely not injury but justice to the memory of a deceased wife" ("Letter XI").

It was perhaps this reading that encouraged Mary Robinson to write her own autobiography since no one better than herself could showcase her life in a way that

might engage people's sympathies. In addition, she may have thought that an autobiography would enable her to confront and contest her infamous public image. As a mode of writing, autobiography allows her to present events from her perspective, and, in the end, to counteract the censure of the public by securing its sympathies. She wrote: "Indeed the world has mistaken the character of my mind; I have ever been the reverse of volatile and dissipated. I mean not to write my own eulogy, though with the candid and sensitive mind I shall, I trust, succeed in my vindication" (*Perdita: The Memoirs* 46). Interestingly, Robinson calls her memoirs a "vindication" invoking Wollstonecraft's seminal critique of the subjugation of women, and thus aligning her memoirs with the surging feminist call for women's rights.

Mary Robinson opens her memoirs with a very interesting move: she describes the surroundings of her place of birth in a manner that highlights its "gothic" aspect:

Adjoining to the consecrated hill, whose antique tower resists the ravages of time, once stood a monastery of monks of the order of St. Augustine. This building formed a part of the spacious boundaries which fell before the attacks of the enemy, and became a part of the ruin, which never was repaired or re-raised to its former Gothic splendours. (17)

She continues to narrate the occasion of her birth, accompanied by tumultuous storms which she represents as seeming to foreshadow the miserable life she is going to have:

In this awe-inspiring habitation, which I shall henceforth denominate the Minster House, during a tempestuous night, on the 27th of November, 1758, I first opened my eyes to this world of duplicity and sorrow. I have often heard my mother say that a more stormy hour she never remembered. The wind whistled round the dark pinnacles of the minster

tower, and the rain beat in torrents against the casements of her chamber. Through life the tempest has followed my footsteps, and I have in vain looked for a short interval of repose from the perseverance of sorrow. (18)

Then, to seal her account with a perfect stamp of doom, she laments how her acute sensibility was developed at an early age, encouraged by her reading of classic works of sensibility:

The early propensities of my life were tinged with romantic and singular characteristics; some of which I shall here mention, as proofs that the mind is never to be diverted from its original bent, and that every event of my life has more or less been marked by the progressive evils of a too acute sensibility [...] A story of melancholy import never failed to excite my attention; and before I was seven years old I could correctly repeat Pope's "Lines to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady"; Mason's "Elegy on the Death of the beautiful Countess of Coventry," and many smaller poems on similar subjects. (21-2)

What Mary Robinson tries to achieve here is the construction of herself as a gothic heroine, a gothic heroine who is surrounded by gothic edifices, born in a moment of turmoil in the natural world, cultivated by the poetry of sensibility, and destined from birth for a life of hardship. With such an opening, a gothic novel would proceed to unfold the gothic villain who will make the heroine's life a living hell, and a happy ending with a meek or at least civilised hero. But although readers of the Gothic novel might expect a more or less happy ending, Mary Robinson's readers are already aware that there is no happy ending, and to fill the position of the gothic villain, Robinson

gives her readers an array of villains to choose from: Mr. Robinson, the Prince of Wales (later George IV), Angelo Albanesi, Lord Lyttelton and Banastre Tarleton. But what lies at the heart of Robinson's memoirs is her determination to show what it means to be a woman living in the late eighteenth century, deprived of protection, preyed upon by men who desire her, and most importantly, helpless to deflect any such advances heading in her direction.

Shortly after their marriage, her husband took her to London. There he left her at the mercy of his decadent friends who accosted her with indecent advances while he was busy gambling his money away or spending it on his mistresses. Lord Lyttelton, one of "the most accomplished libertines that any age or country has produced" (54), further encouraged Robinson in his indecent pursuits, and for a specific aim. He wanted Robinson to spend less time with his wife so he would have the chance to meet her in seclusion, whereas George Robert Fitzgerald plotted and attempted to kidnap her to keep her for himself (62-3). Soon, Mr. Robinson had incurred enough debt to send him to prison, where Mary joined him with their infant daughter. Her sorrows did not end there — while she compiled her poems for publication, Angelo Albanesi, one of her husband's cellmates, suggests prostitution as an additional source of income:

[Albanesi] constantly made the world of gallantry the subject of his conversation. Whole evenings has he sitten in our apartment telling long stories of intrigue, praising the liberality of one nobleman, the romantic chivalry of another, the sacrifice which a third had made to an adored object, and the splendid income which a fourth would bestow on any young lady of education and mental endowments who would accept his protection and be the partner of his fortune. I always smiled at Albanesi's

innuendoes [...] Were I to describe one-half of what I suffered during fifteen months' captivity, the world would consider it as the invention of a novel. (83-4)

In fact, Robinson is describing her misfortunes and afflictions in a manner similar to a novel. Though the accuracy of her account cannot be verified, she certainly has one objective in mind, that is, to illustrate how her descent into infamy was not a matter of choice as much as a affliction caused by men who placed her in a situation where she had few choices.

Robinson's narrates her stage debut in an equally compelling manner. After her husband was released from prison, he was unable to assume his clerical duties since he never completed his studies. Robinson contemplated a writing career to save her little family from destitution. At just the right moment, Richard Brinsley Sheridan offered her the opportunity to play the role of Juliet in Shakespeare's tragedy, a role which proved to be a turning point in her life:

The theatre was crowded with fashionable spectators [...] my monumental suit, for the last scene, was white satin and completely plain, excepting that I wore a veil of the most transparent gauze, which fell quite to my feet from the back of my head, and a string of beads round my waist, to which was suspended a cross appropriately fashioned. When I approached the side wing my heart throbbed convulsively; I then began to fear that my resolution would fail, and I leaned upon the Nurse's arm, almost fainting. Mr. Sheridan and several other friends encouraged me to proceed; and at length, with trembling limbs and fearful apprehension, I approached the audience. (87-8)

What is remarkable about this recollection of her debut, is that the dress and her reactions correspond to some extent to those of Zorietto at her wedding. Zorietto wore “round her lovely waist” an “amber zone” which is partially reprised in the “string of beads” Robinson wears round her waist; and both wear a cross, Zorietto’s of “Rubies — richly glowing” (4.389-391). Fainting fits that have been predominant in gothic novels whenever the heroine encounters an inescapable horror are also employed in the poem and *Perdita: The Memoirs*. In depicting herself as a gothic heroine ravished by the male gaze, Robinson invokes a gothic dimension which she hopes will engage the sympathies of her readers.

In exposing the maltreatment of a woman by her relatives and acquaintances, in calling her memoirs a “vindication”, and in casting her life in the gothic mode, Robinson is clearly not merely giving a straightforward account of her life. She goes beyond simple account to situate her narrative in the manner already begun by Mary Wollstonecraft who mingled fact and fiction in a narrative ornamented with gothic trappings. If the work was not presented as an autobiographical account by a high-profile public figure like Robinson, *Perdita: The Memoirs* could have easily passed as one of Wollstonecraft’s reformist novels, or one of Mary Hays’s life-fictions, such as the *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*. It may be helpful to turn to Alastair Fowler’s definitions of generic transformations to describe more precisely the type of work produced by Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays and Mary Robinson.

Inserting facts into fiction, by which I mean the direct incorporation in a work of fiction of real incidents and apparently unaltered personal letters as in the case of Mary Hays, is an instance of “combination” in which different repertoires (personal letters and epistolary novel) are blended to formulate a new distinct repertoire (Fowler 171).

This new repertoire is best defined as an “autonarration”, which is a form of writing which renders personal experience in a fictional form. This term coined by Rajan describes a “distinctively romantic ‘inter-genre’ [...] that draws upon personal experience as part of its rhetoric, so as to position experience within textuality and relate textuality to experience” (149).

On the other hand, Mary Robinson’s memoirs represent another type of “combination”, a reverse form of “autonarration”, so to speak. It is an autobiography furnished with recognizable literary tropes of another distinct genre — the gothic novel. Robinson summoned all the forms she had mastered throughout her writing career, the gothic novel, the cult of sensibility, and the political tract, to write down her personal “vindication”. It is this very hybridity of autobiography that Paul de Man claims as a hindrance to clear-cut generic definition:

Empirically as well as theoretically, autobiography lends itself poorly to generic definition; each specific instance seems to be an exception to the norm; the works themselves always seem to shade off into neighbouring or even incompatible genres and, perhaps most revealing of all, generic discussions which can have such powerful heuristic value in the case of tragedy or of the novel, remain distressingly sterile when autobiography is at stake. (920)

In claiming that Mary Robinson’s *Memoirs* is an instance of a reversed autonarration I am not proposing that autobiography, or any other genre for that matter, can always be easily defined and classified within fixed prescriptions of form. For it is in the very nature of literary writing to challenge fixed rules, rendering any attempt to outline and define them a time-consuming, even endless process. However, my aim is to show that

new experiences demand new forms and alter existing ones, and in highlighting the contextual underpinnings, not only of the life experience being depicted, but also of the forms being appropriated, our understanding both of life-writing and of generic transmutations is sharpened.

Needless to say the forces that compelled Mary Hays, Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Robinson and others to play with generic hybrids and inter-genres around the turn of the century derive from the way they were perceived as women by their society. Mary Robinson sought, in both her poems and memoirs, to show how there is no guarantee that life with all its predicaments, misfortunes, and afflictions, is likely to take a turning point, as it is so often the case in gothic novels, to produce a happy ending. Hence, her appropriation of the gothic is both a literary and a social critique. She refuses to accept that there are fictions that are more horrific than real life, and she rejects the object-position she was assigned as a woman. And by writing her own story, her own body, she is presenting a different heroine, a heroine who performs more than one function, has more than one face:

The autobiographical texts of heroines [...] are of a testamentary essence. Each of the body-texts embedded in their respective narratives is literally a “dead letter”, each carried the death, exhausts the life of its object and its subject. But the insignia of the conjunction of femininity, death and the aesthetic, consists in a significant conflation — the subject is also her own object, her disembodied text is also her textualized body.
(Bronfen 145)

In conflating subject and object, self and text, fact and fiction, Mary Robinson attempts to achieve more than one end. She presents herself as a victim of the people who fail to

protect and support her. She also casts her sufferings in a marketable mode in the hope of gaining people's sympathy. And she links her suffering to the general suffering of women, illustrating that it is not the case of one woman. It is in connecting her private sufferings with the general sufferings of women, and in rewriting this connection in the gothic form that we find Robinson at her best in exposing the hegemonic system that allows men to dominate and denies women any consistent form of support.

It is important to view Mary Robinson's *Memoirs* in relation to her poetry in *Lyrical Tales*, her *Letter to the Women of England on the Injustice of Mental Subordination*, Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Women and Memoirs*, and Helen Maria Williams's *Letters Written in France*. From this comparison it becomes evident that Robinson in constructing herself as a gothic heroine (as Anne Close has most persuasively argued) was attempting to vindicate not only herself, but also her sex in general. In applying to herself the image of the wronged woman that was already in circulation in the aftermath of the French Revolution, Robinson assumes a political discourse that has been gendered to make political claims about the injustices inflicted on her sex. In other words, she takes the politically sexualized female body to comment upon the political, social and cultural restrictions imposed on women. It is important then to contextualize Robinson's autobiography and her work to grasp fully the implications of her appropriation of the gothic. It is equally important to remember that, in the 1790s, the Gothic was not only chastised for its literary mediocrity but also for its radical and dissentious tendencies: the gothic was written to comment upon the souring political strife, and women writers hoped that their intervention might bring about change and social reform. In this sense, I think Diane Hoeveler's definition of gothic feminism is a useful concept that aids in understanding the political ramifications of

Robinson's work, which sought to expose the hegemonic and unjust operations of patriarchal thought. It is very difficult to separate Robinson's private sufferings as a working woman from the general suffering of women, and for this reason, one cannot be satisfied with a reading that is entirely focused on Robinson's personal musings over her contemporary reputation and posthumous memory.

Finally, I wish to turn to one of the remarks made by Peterson regarding the posthumous reception of Robinson and her work. Peterson has noted that although Robinson aimed to present herself to her contemporaries and female successors as an epitome of accomplished female authorship, "they rejected Robinson as their literary mother and also her autobiographical mode of self-presentation" (36-7). There is much truth in Peterson's statement, for Robinson and her work sunk into oblivion shortly after her death, only to resurface in the late-twentieth century because of the efforts of the many feminists and literary historians who became interested in her work. I wish to conclude with these lines written after Robinson's death from a poem titled "To the Shade of Mary Robinson" (1805) by one of her contemporaries that most tellingly speak of the impact Robinson has left on one of her female readers:

How sadly I morn, lovely seraph, while thinking
 That now, in the cold gloomy night of the tomb,
 Thou know'st not one heart for thy sorrows is sinking,
 One heart that bemoans, with regret, thy sad doom.
 How oft, too, I mourn that an heart form'd to love thee —
 An heart which responsive had beat to thine own,
 Can from thy cell narrow now never remove thee,
 Where tranquil thou liest, unconscious and lone.

[...]

Oh, thou! whose high virtues, angelic, yet glorious,

At once more my wonder, my pride, and my tears,

Still, still in the grave dost thou triumph victorious,

Thy fame sounding loud in thine *enemies'* ears! (5-28)

The writer of these lines is Charlotte Dacre, a gothic writer who also became notorious for her representation of the heroine of *Zofloya*. Scholarship on Mary Robinson is still in its early stages, and as more of her literary relationships and influences are uncovered and outlined, our understanding of this remarkable writer and of her literary appropriations and strategies will surely increase.

CHAPTER THREE:

Gothic Ballad: Anne Bannerman's *Tales of Superstition and Chivalry* and the
Deformed Body

Even physical suffering would take my mind off my misfortunes rather than adding to them. Perhaps the cries of pain would save me the groans of unhappiness, and the laceration of my body would prevent that of my heart. (Rousseau, *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* 29)

Of *feeling*, little more can be said than that the idea of bodily pain, in all the modes and degrees of labour, pain, anguish, torment, is productive of the sublime; and nothing else in this sense can produce it.

(Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry* 79)

Physical pain has been regarded by writers as either an incentive to or a distraction from using one's imaginative powers. Rousseau, who is one of the writers most explicit in expounding feelings of personal suffering, writes about how physical suffering may be a distraction from mental anguish. Here Rousseau speculates on the effects of actual physical pain on the mind. Burke, on the other hand, looks at this physical experience from an aesthetic perspective and sees physical pain as another fruitful source of the sublime. These two different views on physical pain reflect the difference between the experience of pain as an oppressive and challenging corporal reality (Rousseau) and witnessing pain as an object of the gaze, as an idea rather than an experience (Burke).

In her book, *The Body in Pain*, Scarry further complicates the differences of the two experiences, remarking that “to have great pain is to have certainty; to hear that another person has pain is to have doubt” (7). She further stresses the difficulty of attempting to articulate the experience of pain because of the lack of an adequate vocabulary to fully describe such experience. Quoting Virginia Woolf’s frustration with the apparent lack of a vocabulary of pain in the English language, Scarry notes that the experience of pain resists vivid linguistic representation: “Whatever pain achieves, it achieves in part through its unsharability through its resistance to language” (4). She further explains that though it is one of humankind’s conscious experiences like love and ambivalence, “physical pain — unlike any other state of consciousness — has no referential content. It is not *of* or *for* anything. It is precisely because it takes no object that it, more than any other phenomenon, resists objectification in language” (5). Nevertheless, many attempts to describe pain have been made by people who have experienced pain, people who have witnessed their loved ones in pain, personnel in the medical field who have treated patients suffering from pain, people in the judicial system who have deliberated the case of a physically injured person, and by artists and writers who have written about the experience (6-10). When the description of physical pain appears in a literary text it is no longer a private matter for it has entered the public sphere and become part of general public discourse: literature “enables pain to enter into a realm of shared discourse that is wider, more social, than that which characterises the relatively intimate conversation of patient and physician” (9). With Scarry’s remarks in mind, Burke and Rousseau’s descriptions of pain, whether it is experienced or witnessed, exemplify the attempt to make the body in pain public, shared and, therefore, open for discussion.

This interest in the body in pain plays an integral part in the discourse of Romanticism. Yet Steven Bruhm offers one of the few studies that discusses the representation of physical pain in the Romantic period, connecting it to the gothic novel in his *Gothic Bodies: the Politics of Pain in Romantic Fiction*. Bruhm notes that many romantic authors were interested in physical pain, the sensations it produced, and the meanings it came to convey in literary depictions of it. Writers like Blake and Wordsworth have expressed their increasing anxiety over the violence being exerted on the body in the aftermath of political revolutions. Byron and Coleridge, on the other hand, were concerned with physical pain because they “were constantly plagued by their own physical pain, which became both a catalyst and a deterrent to literary production” (xvi). This heightened interest in physical pain should not be viewed in isolation from the rise of Gothic fiction being produced at the time, as Bruhm argues:

I believe, in Romantic fiction as well — that essential limitation is the body, a body whose pain and vulnerability repeatedly signal its return from the repressions of the transcendent Romantic consciousness. Thus to read the Gothic and Romantic together is to set in high relief the Gothic delimitation of the Romantic body. (xvi)

Therefore, the body, and in particular the body in pain, becomes one of the prominent features of literary production in the Romantic period, especially in gothic fiction. Since gothic fiction revolves around and expresses repressed desires and fears, the body in pain and the fears arising from its representation are one of the focal points of the narrative:

The Gothic, and the Gothic elements of Romanticism, invite the repressed to return; they bring us on stage with pain, and force us to see

what fascinates us at the same time that it disgusts us. Thus what I am calling the “Gothic body” is that which is put on excessive display, and whose violent, vulnerable immediacy gives both the Delacroix painting and Gothic fiction their beautiful barbarity, their troublesome power.
(xvii)

As Bruhm has indicated, the reaction to the gothic body in pain is strong and carries contradictory feelings. When the body in pain is on display, it triggers the imagination to ask why this body is undergoing such suffering, and it also provokes feelings of disgust because of its macabre and chillingly abhorrent corporeality. The gothic body is a body that showcases its pain which is not always separate from its deformity.

In his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Burke investigates the various sources of the sublime and the beautiful, including pain and deformity. In comparing deformity to beauty, Burke makes several distinctions: 1) that beauty does not always conform to norms of proportion, 2) that beauty is not the opposite of deformity, 3) that deformity is the opposite of wholeness, 4) that beautiful objects are generally characterized by wholeness, and finally 5) that both deformity and beauty are unique in the sense that they attract attention and are located outside the parameters of proportion. In other words, deformity, just like beauty, does attract the objectifying gaze but not for the same good reasons since deformity lacks wholeness, and therefore, cannot be beautiful: “The beautiful strikes us as much as by its novelty as the deformed itself” (93). Deformity is not directly opposed to beauty because its removal will not make something/one beautiful, but simply whole as in the norm. This means that deformity can have no place in the general aesthetic theory of the beautiful, and, of course creates a different binary opposition that elevates what we

customarily regard as wholeness over deformity. Deformity is relegated to a peripheral position in Burke's aesthetic theory as a whole, and is regarded as subsidiary to the notion of wholeness to which it is compared. Deformity shares with beauty the ability to surprise with its novelty but where the surprise of beauty is pleasurable, the surprise of deformity is likely to be disgusting since it is negatively outside the common.

In her critical essay "An Enquiry into Those Kinds of Distress Which excite Agreeable Sensations", Anna Barbauld argues that depicting protagonists as deformed people risks losing the reader's interest in the story:

Deformity is always disgusting, and the imagination cannot reconcile it with the idea of a favourite character; therefore the poet and romance-writer are fully justified in giving a larger share of beauty to their principal figures than is usually met with in common life. (201)

In other words, protagonists are allowed to be exceptionally beautiful, which is a rarity in real life, but never deformed. In a stance that is similar to Burke's, Barbauld situates deformity on the periphery, and she further denies deformity the exceptions she concedes to beauty. Her rejection of deformed protagonists further testifies to the implicit cultural ideologies at work that define what is beautiful, ugly and readerly acceptable.

What is the ramification of this subordination of deformity and physical mutilation in the general conception of aesthetic experiences? What does this subordination tell us about the nature of the relationship between deformity and aesthetic appreciation? And what is the effect of the repeated invocation of mutilations, deformities, and bodily disfigurements in gothic works? This chapter aims to examine the position of "deformity" in Anne Bannerman's poetry. This examination will reveal

how Bannerman is extremely preoccupied with visual perceptions of the body: how it appears to others, how it is veiled, deformed, dismembered, transformed, and most importantly, how the body's appearance shapes one's perceptions of oneself. This preoccupation may be derived from Bannerman's own experience with her body, for as Wendell puts it, "awareness of the body is often awareness of pain, discomfort, or physical disability" ("Feminism, Disability, and the Transcendence of the Body" 326). Thus, to understand Bannerman's concentration on the contours and ramifications of the deformed body, it is productive to read her own body in the light of recent theories of the disability.¹

A necessary caveat needs to be made here before proceeding any further. For the purpose of this study, I may use "disability" and "deformity" interchangeably though I am aware that the two terms cannot be conflated easily to denote the same phenomena. Thus, some demarcation between the two may dispel any misunderstanding arising from blurred terminology. Many disabilities do not carry any manifest physical symptoms, and likewise, many deformities do not lead to disabilities that cripple the patient. However, there are many physical difficulties that are both debilitating and physically different. This point at which deformity and disability come together constitutes the basis of my approach to Bannerman's work. In other words, I use "disability" and "deformity" to denote a manifest physical challenge that does not conform to culturally constructed notions of a normal physique.

Studies that centre on the body have argued — most persuasively — for its "constructedness" and have explored the dimensions of the body as a coded social text,

¹ The term "disability" was coined in the nineteenth century. What I mean by disability in this chapter is the physical and bodily challenges that are perceived by a given society to be hindrances to leading what this society deems a "normal" life.

which carries its culture's assumptions about race, gender, and class. Yet, Susan Wendell and Lennard Davis argue that there is an additional element missing from this formula, the construction of normalcy.¹ That is, the body — in addition to being a site upon which constructions of gender, class and race are projected — is also a site in which notions of what constitutes a normal physique are transcribed, reinforced, and perpetuated. Hence, “disability studies aims to challenge the received in its most simple form — the body — and in its most complex form — the construction of the body” (Davis, Introduction 5).

A body suffering a deformity or a disability is interpreted differently in different ages and cultures. It can be read as an omen, a curse, a reflection of inner evil, or even a test of human endurance. Disability is also connected to other fixed notions of the body: to Aristotle “woman” is nothing but a deformed man, to the nineteenth-century public the “Hottentot Venus” was an epitome of the deformity of the racial “other” (Bordo 9), and to the upper classes the lower class has sometimes been constructed as the “swinish multitude” (Burke, *Reflections* 68). Wendell claims that “experiences of disability and the social oppression of the disabled interact with sexism, racism, and class oppression” (“Toward a Feminist Theory” 261) and this interaction takes place in the medium that holds together all culturally constructed notions — the body. Physical deformities may also elicit feelings of sorrow and pity since they may represent incurable symptoms of past or chronic illnesses. But unlike tuberculosis which Susan Sontag argues was romanticized in nineteenth-century culture (29-30), illnesses that distort and disfigure the body tend to evoke feelings of horror and pity. For example, the “grotesque” came in the nineteenth century to be represented by physical aberrations of the body in a way

1 By normalcy I mean culturally constructed notions of what constitutes a normal body in a society. For a full discussion of the construction of “normalcy” see Lennard Davis’s “Constructing Normalcy: The Bell Curve, and the Invention of the Disabled Body in the Nineteenth Century”.

that conflated feelings of horror and revulsion at deformity with feelings of sorrow and pity for suffering, as it is the case with Quasimodo the central figure in Victor Hugo's¹ *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*.

People with physical challenges have written about their experiences with their bodies, and their writings inform us about both the corporeal and the cultural worlds of the disabled body. Texts speaking of physical challenges are unique in the sense that they express more acutely the human body's susceptibility to pain and suffering. They also offer insight into how a disabled body is received in a given culture and how the sufferer works with all associations linked to the disabled body in that culture. Such writings struggle to connect the corporeal experiences of the body with its culturally constructed aspects. Bearing this in mind, we need to establish a method for reading these texts. Many questions spring to mind. How far does our awareness of the general state of a writer's physical health affect our readings of his/her work? How does the acknowledgment of an association between the writing subject and the disabled body inform our reading of a literary text? How can we read a text written specifically by a woman who suffered from both physical and cultural oppression? And most importantly, how can an "en-abled" body (that is, a body that is free from physical impairments or deformities) read and be engaged in the issues raised by the work of a physically challenged writer? Anne Bannerman's work provides an excellent opportunity to explore some of these questions, for she is a woman writer in the early

¹ Victor Hugo (1802-1885) is a prominent figure in the literary scene of nineteenth-century France. He is the author of *Les Misérables* and of many essays and plays. His "Preface to Cromwell" is regarded as the manifesto of Romanticism in French literature, in which he looks at aesthetically negative elements such as the ugly, grotesque and deformity from a different perspective that no longer holds classical ideals of symmetry, conformity, harmony and perfection as the ultimate objective of art. Deformity, therefore, plays an integral part in Hugo's aesthetic theory: for him it functions as a useful contrast that defines its antithesis, highlights its inherent features, and ultimately, gives a more refreshing perspective from an aesthetic standpoint: "The sublime is enriched by all forms of the grotesque" (304).

nineteenth century who had to struggle with limitations imposed on her sex, and to cope with her physical sufferings. Her eventual fall into obscurity may, in the end, be a consequence of these very limitations and sufferings. In addition, she did not enjoy the notoriety of Mary Robinson, who despite her paralyzing illness, managed to capitalize on, write out of and profit from her images as former actress, defamed mistress, and neglected wife. Nor did she enjoy the savvy of Charlotte Smith who managed to package and market her domestic and physical sufferings in the mode of sensibility.

Recent studies have examined Bannerman's work and explored the reasons behind her relatively unsuccessful venture into the literary world. Craciun has attributed Bannerman's failure to biases against her class and gender ("Romantic Spinstrelsy" 220), and to the obscure nature of her writings ("In Seraph Strains" 156). On the other hand, Elfenbein has concentrated on what he perceives as Bannerman's covert homoeroticism in her unorthodox representations of gender, as a possible hindrance to her literary career (143). Ashley Miller writes about how "Bannerman's obscure poetics asks epistemological questions about sense perception, about bodily affect, and about readability itself" which were evidently not picked up by her contemporary readers. I wish to build on these valuable contributions by focusing my reading on her representation of the body in its multi-faceted forms. I will argue that Bannerman, in her obsession with the appearance of the body, and in her appropriation of gothic tropes pertaining to the appearance of the body, is preoccupied with the deformed body that does not meet notions of physical norms. First, I begin my study by considering references to Bannerman's faltering health, references found both in her work and in her contemporaries' writing. In this section, I will discuss in detail her "Ode to Pain", which speaks explicitly of her physical sufferings and illustrates her efforts to cope with them.

In the second section, I shift my discussion to Bannerman's emphasis on the image of the veiled body which derives from her appropriation of the grotesque representations of the body common in gothic writings. Bannerman's appropriation of the gothic veiled body may stem from her obsession with what constitutes a perfect human form and from ideals of physical beauty.

Anne Bannerman and Pain

We know little about Anne Bannerman's life, but in what we do have, there are a few references by her contemporaries to her physical state. Elfenbein quotes Dr. Sydney Smith who "refers to her cruelly as a 'crooked poetess' characterized by 'ugliness and deformity'" (132). Another of Bannerman's close associates, Robert Anderson, noted in 1803 that:

Her health is at all times uncertain and so ill-prepared to stand such shock as it has been exposed to, that my fears are great; but when to her uncertain health, add the feverish inability of her mind, heightened by constitutional causes, — her total inability, from health and inclination, to pursue the ordinary means by which those of her sex are usually enabled to secure a livelihood. (Nichols 123)

From these remarks we can partly infer the condition of Anne Bannerman's physical health and its effect on her life. Her health was a matter of concern to those around her and its deterioration was an evident matter; that is, it was likely that it was physically apparent. It is also evident that her health impeded her pursuit of a career, for Anderson's remarks on Bannerman's inability to lead a normal life like other members of her sex and "secure a livelihood" is a clear indication that even the available methods

(and in truth they were not many) by which late eighteenth-century women secured an income were denied to Bannerman. But what were these methods through which women managed to respectably earn an income? In the late eighteenth century, women who remained single and did not enjoy the comforts of a sufficient inheritance had limited options. It was possible for them to work as governesses, school teachers, or writers — all of which were professions that required a level of education that exceeded the one customarily allowed to women. In the case of a writing career in particular, the large number of women writers entering the publishing market created fierce competition, and with the exceptions of Ann Radcliffe, Frances Burney, and Felicia Hemans, most women writers found it difficult to ward off penury by their pens. Thus, what Anderson seems to imply in his letter is that, because of her health, Bannerman could not possibly work as a governess, school teacher, or even a writer. Oddly enough Anderson urged Bannerman later on to quit her poetic endeavours and work as a governess instead, which is what she did in 1807. Of this conclusion to her poetic career, Craciun notes: “Both her gender and her class [...] severely limited Anne Bannerman’s professional opportunities, but only the former was incompatible with the serious poetic vocation in the eyes of her patrons” (“Romantic Spinstresly” 220); from this I conjecture that her patrons must have assumed her physically and/or mentally incapable of pursuing a professional literary career, and considered the familial environment provided by a post as governess to be more suitable in her case. There is little information about Bannerman once she stopped writing to take up work as a governess, but by the time her literary career came to an end, she had already published *Poems* (1800), *Tales of Superstition and Chivalry* (1802) and a subscription volume of

both books in 1807. She spent the remainder of her life in total obscurity and poverty and died in 1829.

In her work, one can detect Anne Bannerman's references to her own health. It is most explicitly mentioned in one of the odes that appeared in her first publication, *Poems* in 1800. In "Ode to Pain" the speaker addresses pain "Whose harsh controul each nerve obeys!" in a series of questions that anthropomorphize or personify pain in a way that explains the speaker's attitude to her tormentor, the nature of the physical torment, and the way this torment shapes the relationship between pain and its subject. In the first stanza, the speaker asks "Pain", if it ever feels compassion for her suffering body:

Hail fiercest herald of a power,
 Whose harsh controul each nerve obeys!
 I call thee, at this fearful hour;
 To thee my feeble voice I raise.
 Say, does compassion never glow
 Within thy soul, and bid thee know
 The pangs, with which thou fir'st the breast?
 Or dost thou never, never mourn,
 To plant so deep the hidden thorn,
 Forbidding aid, and blasting rest? (1-10)

In describing pain as the "herald of a power" that has a strong grip on the speaker's body, a complex relationship is established between the two in which "Pain" represents both the cause of suffering and the experience of it. In other words "Pain" holds the double position of a power, a tyrant that demands obedience from the speaker and of the

suffering, the “herald” of that power, to which the speaker surrenders in the end. Pain also commands the speaker’s attention and drives her away from earthly vanities, and thus: “no earthly joys can bind the sufferer”. Initially, the speaker laments the loss of these pleasures and asks “Pain” if it can allow room for “Pity”. Later, she comes to the realization that spiritual belief, that can never be crushed by pain, is what she is looking for in her experience, and in the end it will assuage her sufferings, making them bearable.

Right from the beginning, the speaker is caught in the grip of “Pain”. Their relationship is determined by a hierarchy through which “Pain” strikes in a “fearful hour” rendering the speaker weak and feeble. It is a relationship in which “Pain” is personified as a ruthless tyrant who plants thorns in the speaker’s breast. As a vulnerable being, all the speaker can do is raise her “feeble voice” and urge “Pain” to feel some compassion, and she wonders at its failure to understand the intensity of the corporeal suffering it is inflicting. What lies at the heart of this relationship is that “Pain” is immune to any of its symptoms because of its very non-corporeality, a matter that underscores the speaker’s position as a body that feels the stings of pain and longs for rest. Thus, the poem opens with a speaker who is immersed in the materiality of the body, its physical existence, and its corporeal matter. This speaker is facing a power, which though immaterial, manifests its presence by physical suffering.

It is in the second stanza that we become aware that the speaker is a woman; at least since her “fickle mind” is gendered female, it seems reasonable to suppose so:

Think’st thou my wavering fickle mind
 Requires so much, to break her chain?
 Alas what earthly joys can bind

The wretch, who sees thy figure, Pain!
 For ever fleet before his eyes;
 For him, no glories gild the skies;
 No beauties shine in nature's bound,
 In vain with verdure glows the spring,
 If, from within, thy gnawing sting
 Bid only demons scowl around. (11-20)

But this fickle-mindedness is not attributed to her sex, instead it is linked to the earthly pleasures that would normally distract and amuse. The speaker asks “Pain” if it assumes that any restlessness aroused by earthly pleasures will enable her to escape and transcend her agonizing existence. Here Bannerman adds a religious dimension to her portrayal of physical pain by illustrating how the speaker’s struggle with “Pain” places her on the path of a spiritual experience. Earthly pleasures — such as glories, beauties, and spring — have always entrapped the speaker’s “fickle mind”. But when pain is involved, these distractions are no longer effective and start to disintegrate, as their transient nature becomes more apparent. The glories of the external world are not strong enough to combat the pain within. When in pain, the speaker sees only “demons scowl around” invoked by Pain. And so it seems that physical pain will always be successful in drawing its sufferers away from all pleasures, since no one can enjoy life or beauty while being subjected to physical torments.

In the third stanza, the speaker asks if there is any room for pity or hope for rest:

Too sure, I feel, in every vein,
 With thee soft Pity ne'er can dwell.
 Shall pleasure never smile again

Or health thro' every channel swell?
 Yes tho' thy hand hath crush'd the rose
 Before its prime, another blows,
 Whose blooms thy breath can ne'er destroy;
 Say, can thy keen and cruel chains
 Corrode, where bliss seraphic reigns,
 Where all is peace, and all is joy. (21-30)

Here "Pain" is anthropomorphized again. It refuses to allow Pity to share its occupation of the speaker's body. These closely clustered images offer a set of contradictions, or to be more precise, a reversal of roles and positions given to the personae earlier in the poem. Until this point, the speaker is suffering helplessly under the pangs of "Pain". However, it is in this stanza that a form of resistance appears from the speaker's side. Indeed this is a climactic moment, for the speaker attempts to resist her tormentor by focussing on "blooms thy breath [Pain's] can ne'er destroy", and the stanza closes on a note of hope as the speaker thinks of beauties that cannot be destroyed by Pain, beauties which can only be spiritual. The speaker clearly comes to the realization that the rose which represents spiritual peace and joy can survive the blight of Pain's breath and the corrosion of its chains. In this way she comes to see herself as both body (the rose blighted by Pain) and spirit (the other rose whose blooms are indestructable), which is the site from which resistance emerges.

The final stanza presents a turning point in which the speaker stops addressing "Pain" with her questions, and starts questioning herself instead. Previously, all the questions she has posed register her helplessness against the pangs of the pain she endures, and in posing them she attempts to figure a way in which she can come to

terms with her physical difficulties. The three previous stanzas also record the speaker's complaints about the debilitating power of pain: it stops her from enjoying the beauties of spring, it arrests the mind forcing it to a standstill, and it steals the tiny pleasures. Her struggle with pain is an endless struggle with an overwhelming physicality that supersedes other perceptions of her existence, and she hopes to end this struggle in peaceful resolution. But by the fourth and final stanza, the speaker finally comes to terms with her pains, and learns how to co-exist with them:

Then, wherefore sighs my fearful heart,

And trembles thus my tottering frame?

Alas I feel thy deadly dart,

More potent far than fancy's flame:

I bend, grim tyrant! at thy throne;

But spare, ah! spare that sullen frown,

Relax the horrors of thy brow!

O lead me, with a softer hand,

And lo! I come at thy command,

And, unrepining, follow through. (31-40)

For once, the speaker wonders at her fears and how they have dominated her relationship with her pains. As "Pain" increases its severity with its "deadly dart", the speaker learns how to endure it by simply accepting its existence. She needs to look at her predicament from a different perspective. When she stops picturing herself as a target of pain, by imagining the "bliss seraphic" that awaits her instead, the whole

experience becomes more tolerable, and all she needs is a “softer hand” to guide her through, and she is willing to follow without complaint. This ending may give the impression that the speaker has surrendered silently to her physical tyrant. But what we are truly left with at the end of the poem is a sufferer who is no longer living in pain and pursued by it, instead, it is a sufferer whose new understanding of the whole experience has reshaped her relationship with everything that has defined her life so far: her pleasures, her pains and her self, so that she is no longer an impatient moaner about her physical affliction. Thus, the relationship between the speaker and its pain has reached a different level not experienced in the previous stanzas. It is a level that is defined by silent acceptance, yet the whole poem revolves around and testifies to the resentment and outcry that preceded this acceptance.

In order to fully comprehend the different levels through which the relationship between pain and its sufferer travel in this poem, Susan Wendell’s “Feminism, Disability, and the Transcendence of the Body” provides a useful paradigm by means of which we may understand the ramifications of having a body in pain. Wendell describes a form of aesthetics of pain that the sufferer of a chronic illness cultivates to cope with physical challenges. Wendell argues that because chronic pain is not expected to end or recede, the body finds the acts of resisting pain or pretending its non-existence are futile and even become a source of discomfort. Instead, in focusing on the body, pain is often transformed into something one “would not describe as pain or even discomfort” (“Feminism, Disability” 327), and she further elaborates,

With chronic pain, I must remind myself over and over again that the pain is meaningless, that there is nothing to fear or resist, that resistance only creates tension, which makes it worse. When I simply notice and

accept the pain, my mind is often freed to pay attention to something else
 [...] I have found it important to cultivate an “observer’s” attitude to
 many bodily sensations and even depressive moods caused by my illness.
 (328-9)

But it is hard to conceive of pain as meaningless within a religious framework and although Bannerman’s tropes are pagan, the ethos of the poem is Christian. And so in her “Ode to Pain”, Bannerman does not imagine pain to be meaningless, in fact the whole poem is an attempt to make pain meaningful, to understand its rationale, and to acknowledge that her sufferings will be rewarded with blissful peace; however, she does employ “strategies of disengagement” (328) to reach this conclusion. After endless suffering and debilitation, the speaker learns how to co-exist with her pains instead of resisting them in a manner that elicits tension, and thus makes the whole situation unbearable. It is clear that she forges a new relationship under terms that are different from what has previously dictated her relationship with pain. This new relationship is based on a new self, or a new identity, that is created to deal with chronic pain. As Wendell puts it, for “many of us who became ill or disabled adults, reconstructing our lives depended upon forging a new identity [...] This could also be described as learning to identify with a new body, as well as, for most of us, a new social role” (331). But such strategies do not stop at this point, for they can become forms of transcendence, a transcendence that does not rely on the body as a point of departure, instead, it is a transcendence with, and not without, the body, for it never leaves the body behind,

The onset of illness, disability, or pain destroys the “absence” of the
 body to consciousness [...] and forces us to find conscious responses to

new, often acute, awareness of our bodies. Thus, the body itself takes us into and then beyond its sufferings and limitations. (332)

This notion of transcendence-with-the-body helps in understanding the physical experiences of the speaker of “Ode to Pain” and the processes and levels she has to go through in order to learn how to live with a body suffering from chronic pain. In this ode, Bannerman explains how it is possible to free oneself from bodily afflictions and from the limitations imposed by such afflictions in order to move to a different plane that — while it does not offer an end to one’s sufferings — allows the human body to coexist with the challenges created by its own corporeal existence.

Veiling the Body

In her second publication, *Tales of Superstition and Chivalry*, Bannerman repeatedly uses a typical gothic trope, the veil. It appears in five poems: “The Dark Ladie”, “The Prophetess of the Oracle of Seām”, “The Perjured Nun”, “The Penitent’s Confession”, and “The Festival of St. Magnus the Martyr”. One way of understanding Bannerman’s emphasis on the veil is to see how it is connected to her perceptions of the physically challenged body. But first I will offer an overview of studies on the veil in gothic writings. Most of these studies deal primarily with gothic fiction, and thus may offer definitions of the veil that are not always appropriate for my purposes, but they all provide useful insights into the trope’s generic implications and historical specificities.

Broadwell outlines Radcliffe’s use of the veil in her novels and discusses in detail its implications in *The Italian*, noting that, “In a psychological sense, then, the veil may be thought of as the line between the conscious and the unconscious minds”

(79). In their discussion of “The Lifted Veil”, one of George Eliot’s rare gothic works, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar make a similar remark on the veil, it “separates two distinct spheres: the phenomenal and the noumenal; culture and nature; two consciousnesses; life and death; public appearance and private reality; conscious and unconscious impulses; past and present; present and future” (469). They further distinguish between the attitudes of male and female writers towards the veil: it is associated “in male minds with that repository of mysterious otherness, the female” (471) and “Whether she is beautiful or hideous, the veil reflects male dread of women” (472). As for women writers, the veil is “an image of confinement different from, yet related to the imagery of enclosure that constantly threatens to stifle the heroines of women’s fictions” (468). Understandably, they claim, women writers became preoccupied with lifting the veil to reveal the feminine space that lies behind it, thus “the recording of what exists behind the veil is distinctively female because it is the woman who exists behind the veil in patriarchal society, inhabiting a private sphere invisible to public view” (474).

In her study of the stock conventions of the gothic, Eve Sedgwick reads the veil in gothic novels as a motif that carries multiple layers of meaning some of which may imply much that runs counter to what a veil usually conveys. In gothic novels, the veil that culturally stands for chastity and innocence may inversely indicate evil, lasciviousness and unrelenting sexual appetite. Sedgwick also emphasizes “the thematic attention to surfaces” (Sedgwick 154) in the gothic and argues that images of the veil carry metonymic meanings, linking it to other related themes, such as virginity, active sexuality, and blood. She goes further to criticise critics like Broadwell who read the veil “as a cloak for something deeper and thus more primal” (155), a borderline between

the conscious and the unconscious mind, and instead she maintains that the veil particularly in the gothic novel is “suffused with sexuality” (155). The veil stresses chastity and abstinence, and it places an equal stress on renouncing it to enter a marriage union, as represented by the gothic heroine who gives up her vows, or is saved from taking the vows, to get married. Thus a veil that represents the repression of sexual desire becomes, by metonymic correlation, an emblem of this desire:

The veil that conceals and inhibits sexuality comes by the same gesture to represent it, both as a metonym of the thing covered as a metaphor for the system of prohibitions by which sexual desire is enhanced and specified. Like virginity, the veil that symbolizes virginity in a girl or a nun has a strong erotic savor of its own, and characters in gothic novels fall in love as much with women’s veils as with women. (Sedgwick 155)

Here Sedgwick departs from traditional readings of the veil that have customarily sought to uncover subliminal depths and modes of repression. Instead, she proposes a spatial reading of gothic conventions that perceives the veil as an articulation of levels of layering: what lies inside, what lies outside, and what lies in between as a boundary. That is, gothic texts are not to be read as forms of psychic repression, but as spatial constructions of the self, the other, and what lies between the self and the other.

Catherine Spooner joins Sedgwick in her criticism of the tendency to read gothic trappings, including veiling, simply as an articulation of the return of the repressed. She claims in her book, *Fashioning Gothic Bodies*, that “the Gothic novel is historically linked to fashion” (1) and this link needs to be historically contextualised in order to understand how fashion trends and gothic novels have shaped each other:

Gothic garments articulate the body in terms of a range of characteristic Gothic themes: sensibility, imprisonment, spectrality, haunting, madness, monstrosity, the grotesque. They fashion the body as Gothic subject. As such, however, they fashion the body as a historically specific subject, a subject whose garments are “Gothicised” versions of what people were wearing at the time of writing. (5)

Thus, veils in gothic novels reinforce predominant themes and motifs, among which physical deformities, monstrosities and grotesqueness figure prominently. Still gothic veils are not wholly detached from their historical context, for they have their roots in the contemporary costumes of the time, and they also carry associations ascribed to them by their culture. For instance, with the eruption of the French Revolution, the image of the veil and its visual manoeuvres of revelation and concealment were frequently drawn upon in the discussion of the body of Marie Antoinette (31). Later in the Victorian age, the veil in Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* “becomes a device not for concealment, but for marking the existence of a secret” (46), in this case the existence of Rochester’s wife. In the end, Spooner concludes that in the case of gothic writings, while writers “consistently raise the same themes, they do not always suggest identical readings” (200); in other words, though they used a trope like the veil in their writings, they used it to convey different meanings and to trigger different reactions in their readers.

Maggie Kilgour has also remarked how Gothic writers vary in their treatment of the veil as a trope. In *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*, she traces how the trope of the veil was picked up by gothic novelists and used to convey different views on politics, religion, and gender relations. Mathew Lewis uses the veil as “a figure for hypocrisy, as

the coverings of the Church and another form of deceit” (147), whereas in Ann Radcliffe’s *The Italian* it is further complicated by appearing to be “ambiguous, as it represents both reassuring protection and a sinister concealment of purpose” (169). And in the gothic works of William Godwin, the veil is rendered “as a figure for mystification and oppression, associated with the superstition of Catholicism and the repression imposed by even well-meaning parental authority” (149). Hence, the veil in the gothic writings of the Romantic age resists attempts to assign it to any fixed connotations or associations. The treatment of the veil in these works also speaks of the different ways in which the body as a text was handled and read in these troubled times. The veil may signify gender differences in the attitudes towards the concealed female body (Gilbert and Gubar), imply much about views of the sexuality of the female body (Sedgwick), refer to historically specific bodies (Spooner), or even reflect different attitudes towards the body in general (Kilgour).

In employing images of veiled bodies, bodies that are either grotesquely deformed or physically different, Bannerman highlights cultural attitudes that reject bodies with physical deformities or consider them as a threat because of the veil they don. These afflicted bodies are treated as deviations from aesthetic notions of physical beauty, or aberrations of nature, and as emblems of inner evil. In her poems from *Tales of Superstition and Chivalry*: “The Dark Ladie”, “The Prophetess of the Oracle of Seäm”, “The Perjured Nun”, “The Penitent’s Confession”, and “The Festival of St. Magnus the Martyr”, the narratives usually revolve around a character who wears a veil.

“The Dark Ladie” opens with the return of Sir Guyon and his Knights to his castle after their victory in the Crusades. The Knights notice Sir Guyon’s distress and how he keeps gazing at the clock most of the time. At the banquet, a strange woman

wearing a white dress and covered by a black veil from head to toe appears and sits on the upper seat (The Dark Ladie is depicted in an interesting, and even baffling, paradox where she is wearing a dress that remains ghastly white despite the black veil that covers it — “A Ladie, clad in ghastly white,/ And veiled to the feet:/ ... For thro’ the foldings of her veil,/ Her long black veil that swept the ground” (25-32). Adding to this image of eeriness the Dark Ladie remains silent, and the Knights keep gazing at her. They notice a light darting from eyes that “mortal never own’d” (34); meanwhile, Sir Guyon’s agitation increases. They remain paralyzed with fear until the clock strikes midnight, when the Ladie takes a shell cup, fills it with wine, and proposes a toast. Upon hearing her frightful voice, the Knights start trembling and suddenly, she disappears. Sir Guyon and his Knights retire to sleep, but the Dark Ladie haunts their dreams. She torments them with her fearful gaze and her fearful voice. Next morning, all the Knights sit together and talk about the recent events except for Huart who remains silent. Huart breaks his silence to reveal the story of the Dark Ladie they met last night. She fell in love with Sir Guyon, for whom she deserted her husband and son. Ever since, she lives in torment, wears this veil, and despite Sir Guyon’s attempts to see her face, her veil is never removed, and her eyes keep shining in a horrifying manner. No one knows where she came from, how she produces these fearful tones, why her eyes shine in this way, or why the veil cannot be removed.

“But where Sir Guyon took her then,
 Ah! none could ever hear or know,
 Or, why, beneath that long black veil,
 Her wild eyes sparkle so.

“Or whence those deep unearthly tones,
 That human bosom never own’d;
 Or why, it cannot be remov’d,
 That folded veil that sweeps the ground?” (153-160)

Her psychological suffering springs mainly from feelings of guilt and is translated into abnormal physical symptoms: her glaring eyes and her fearful voice. In the end it is difficult to tell if the Dark Ladie is a living being or a wandering spirit since Bannerman gives no indication regarding her true essence, leaving this matter obscure and thus open to different interpretations to be supplied by the reader.

In “The Prophetess of the Oracle of Seäm”, a ship sails near the island of Seäm. The sailors check from their mast if there is a lighted beacon but can see none in the over-whelming darkness. When it is time to change the watch, they hear a loud shriek. Father Paul asks them to join him in prayer and once they are done, he begins to tell them the story of the Prophetess and the Oracle. He talks of terrors and lifeless caves whenever the winds are still. He tells them about sacrifices that are made “In the gloomy vaults beneath” (43). Then he relates the story of a priest from St. Thomas’s tower, who never bowed to a cross till he came close to death. On his deathbed, this priest talked of the caves he saw in Seäm when the tides receded, of the “sleepless nights of thirty months” (52) he spent listening to a “shriek of woe” (53). Then on a cold night, a hand that he could not see dragged him, and a voice called his name. As the priest was about to talk of what he saw in the cave and the sacrifices that were committed, his agony increased and he died before finishing his story. There were rumours that the cross he wore protected him from the Oracle, yet there were other rumours that he worshipped at the Oracle and for this blasphemy he coiled in agony

whenever he saw the crucifix. The sailors listen to this story in gloom. Later, the ship sinks and Father Paul is the only survivor. He prays for his shipmates who have perished, and on the eve of his second night, the shriek he has heard before reverberates again and it is much closer this time. It is the voice of the Oracle calling his name. Soon an invisible hand drags him to the inner cave where he finds himself by the Oracle. There he sees the Oracle surrounded by an iron flame and the Prophetess watching the flames from behind the curtains. She stretches her hand from under the veil and points to him to leave his cross in the empty space. He hesitates for her finger “was like death” (154).

One hand she stretch'd without that veil,
 And pointed to the inner space;
 And she beckon'd him to lay the cross
 On that unhallow'd place:

He felt it heave upon his heart,
 And he press'd it in the blessed name!
 For that moving finger was like death,
 And that unquenched flame! (148-155)

He believes that he will be sacrificed and thinks of raising his eyes to see the Prophetess. Then he remembers the agony of St. Thomas's priest who has seen the Prophetess and the Oracle, and doubts the rumour that the priest worshipped the Oracle.

He knew not yet the sight to come,
 Before his heart could rest on this,

When he thought his eyes, unmov'd, could look
Upon the Prophetess!

Like a dream it flitted o'er his brain,
That miserable hour!
When the father died, in agony,
In the cell of St. Thomas' tower;

For he had said the veil was drawn
That hid the sacrifice within;
That his eyes had seen the Prophetess
At that uncover'd shrine;

But whether his knee had bended there
Was buried with him in the grave: ...
He felt that doubt more terrible
Than the terrors of the cave. ... (160-175)

For forty years Father Paul is missing and thought to be among the dead. Then on the altar of the church at Einsidlin, a priest sees a praying monk. The monk appears to be Father Paul who was thought to be dead. The priest stands in awe, and when Father Paul leaves the aisle, all the lights dim except for those on the high altar. The priest stands still at the altar till the dawn breaks; it is the day of Pentecost, the feast which celebrates the descent of the Holy Spirit fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus (*King James Bible*, Acts.2.1-4).

The veil does not appear explicitly in “The Perjured Nun” but it can be inferred from the nun’s habit. The poem starts with a dialogue between Lord Henrie and his wife Geraldine. Geraldine urges Lord Henrie to let someone do the watch of the eastern tower in his place, or let her join him in the watch, for there is a rumour that the tower is haunted by a perjured nun. Lord Henrie turns pale upon hearing this and insists on keeping the watch alone. He tells his wife that she can see the candlelight in the eastern tower through the window brim. As long as the light is blazing then he is alive, once it fades this means that he is probably dead. He warns her not to seek him and predicts that he will certainly be dead by four o’clock in the morning. The late hours pass and Geraldine is alone in her room and her heart is beating fast. The clock strikes two in the morning, and the lamps turn blue. Her husband’s fatal hour arrives as he has predicted. The lights start dimming and Geraldine leaves her room. She stops at the stairway when she hears a “low and measur’d sound” (76). She also hears footsteps approaching her but she can scarcely stir from her place out of fear. Finally, she gathers her courage and heads to the eastern tower. In her way, she encounters the ghost of the perjured nun. The ghost tells Geraldine not to look for Lord Henrie for he is gone forever. For him the nun once forsook God and her vows, and because of that she suffers from feelings of guilt and will make sure that Lord Henrie will never be blessed. The ghost warns Geraldine against proceeding to the eastern tower “For dark and dread is the haunt of the dead/ The haunt of the Perjur’d Nun!” (111-112)

“The Penitent’s Confession” gives another image of the veil that is associated with guilt. It is the eve of St. Peter’s day and mass is being held for someone who recently passed away. For five years, no one has come to confess, and it is on the eve of St. Peter that the priest finds a penitent groaning. The penitent tells his story of his

experience with Ellinor who is dead. He attended a funeral and on his way home a ghost stopped him on the bridge. It was the ghost of Ellinor. She joins him in his ride and rests on his arm. She leaves him at the beach and forty years have passed since that incident. The penitent has never confessed this story before and reveals to the priest the arm on which Ellinor rested. The arm is dried withered bone. The priest, horrified by the story covers himself in a veil, retires and spends the rest of his years in seclusion.

The last poem in the selection in which a veil figures, is “The Festival of St. Magnus the Martyr”. Sir Ewaine leaves for hunting trip and does not come back. His wife, Ladie Ellenor worries about him and one of her servants, Josceline tells her that Sir Ewaine was seen in the Martyr’s tomb of St. Magnus and he is ready to wait for her there to show her the place. She goes there but there is no trace of Josceline. So she enters and notices how the first step of the stairway is moist. So she picks one of the bricks of the steps and finds bloodstains under it. When Josceline comes, he looks around for Ladie Ellenor but he cannot find her anywhere. As the service at St. Magnus comes to an end a nun shrieks. The veiled nun appears to be Ladie Ellenor herself. She raises the brick of the steps to show the blood stains beneath. Then she extinguishes her lamp and goes inside the chancel. Since then, whenever “blood for blood” (126) is chanted in St. Magnus’ festival, a shriek is heard.

These brief summaries give a general idea of how Bannerman uses the veil in her poems and illustrate how gothic works tend to operate at different connotative levels, contrary to what Sedgwick has suggested. The unspeakable veiling and covering in Bannerman’s poems confer an air of obscurity that does not stop at implying death, sexual promiscuity, or supernatural powers, it goes further to underscore what a culture tends to reject and cover in the human body — a deformity, a physical ailment, an

aberration, a departure from the physical norm as constructed in the culture she lived in. Thus, another dichotomy is to be added to the set of dichotomies usually highlighted in the discussion of the veil: the “normate and deviant” (Thomson 9).

The question of the author’s gender and the treatment of the veil also needs to be revisited in our reading of Bannerman’s poems. Gilbert and Gubar have argued that the veil is represented differently by male and female writers. To male writers the veil refers to otherness, extremes of ugliness or conversely beauty — everything that stands for male dread of women. Whereas women writers are more concerned in uncovering what the veil conceals and prefer to probe the feminine place residing behind it. Bannerman is obviously interested in both: what the veil means to patriarchal authority, and the meanings it conveys in women’s writing. She rewrites Coleridge’s “Introduction to the Ballad of the Dark Ladie” (alternatively titled “Love”) to critique masculine stereotypes of the feminine. Craciun argues that Bannerman uses the figure of the *femme fatale* to criticize male-dominated Romantic Idealism that depicts women in an angelic and idealized light (“In seraphs strains” 159). Thus in depicting the Dark Ladie in the guise of a *femme fatale*, whose overpowering presence is daunting, threatening and even baffling to the courtiers, Bannerman invokes male feelings of dread towards the female body.

There is, however, an element of contagion in this dread that signifies disease and physical suffering. Guilt, as it is translated physically in this poem into feelings of horror and insomnia, seems to transmit contagiously from the Dark Ladie and Sir Guyon to the courtiers. Sir Guyon appears not only the cause but also the instigator of the Dark Ladie’s desertion of her family, and his suffering springs from his dual crime: breaking the sanctity of the family order and breaking the chivalric code. As a medieval

knight, Sir Guyon is expected to abide by the chivalric code that entails protecting women from any harm, but in seducing the Dark Ladie and encouraging her to desert her husband and child, Sir Guyon commits a serious breach of this code. The Dark Ladie also crosses the boundaries prescribed by her society for her role as a wife and a mother. She falls in love with Sir Guyon, commits adultery with him (we must presume), and deserts her family for her love. If one is to compare her situation to that of other female characters, her fate resembles that of Guinevere, who is urged to take the veil after her liaison with Lancelot is exposed. Bearing this comparison in mind, the Dark Ladie's veil becomes a reminder of how women are punished by their society for their transgressions. The veil, in this sense, stands for the cultural and social conventions that aim to curb a woman's desires and to isolate her from her social milieu once she succumbs to these desires. Her transgression is not only treated as a threat to the sanctity of the familial establishment but also as a malady that could spread and infect the social framework as a whole. As Sedgwick points out, "the veil that conceals and inhibits sexuality comes by the same gesture to represent it" (155); in other words, the veil that stands for the repression of a woman's sexual desire becomes a warning against this desire. A warning to women of the fate they will have to endure if they follow their unsanctified desires and a warning to men to stay away from women who indulge these desires. In the end this veil, operates as a society's indication of a woman who is carrying what it regards as a social ill. The effect and terror caused by the Dark Ladie's veiled appearance in court may perhaps be compared to that caused by other literary figures of fear, for example the masked figure who infects the court with the plague in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death", published much later in the nineteenth century. Like the intrusive masked figure, the Dark Ladie seems to

portend death or at least her presence induces a death-like trance in all the court's inhabitants:

And to the' alarmed guests she turn'd,
 No breath was heard, no voice, no sound,
 And in a tone, so deadly deep,
 She pledg'd them all around,
 That in their hearts, and thro' their limbs,
 No pulses could be found. (51-56)

And their dreams continue to be haunted by her veiled figure.

As a woman victimized by her society and lover, the Dark Ladie returns, wearing the veil that signifies her downfall and suffering, to avenge herself by acting as a continuing *memento mori* to all the courtiers in Sir Guyon's castle. The Dark Ladie has a physical and a psychological effect and she herself seems to suffer from physical and spiritual malaise: she has glaring eyes, a voice with abnormal tones, and physical disabilities that suggest a state between life and death:

And how her sinking heart recoil'd,
 And how her throbbing bosom beat,
 And how sensation almost left
 Her cold convulsed feet: (145-148)

Furthermore, Bannerman's choice of character names in this ballad suggests a telling allusion. Sir Guyon is presumably named after the knight in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and, therefore, invokes the better-known stories of that poem and the use of the Darke Ladie invites comparison with the anti-heroines of Spenser's poems. Guyon is the hero of Book II of the poem, like the Redcrosse Knight in the service of

Gloriana, Queene of Faerie Land. He appears, therefore, after the unveiling, or exposure of Duessa by Arthur in Book I. Duessa is, of course, a deformed witch who, aided by her magical powers to transform her appearance and become a beautiful maiden, has succeeded in deceiving even the virtuous Redcrosse Knight. She is exposed at Una's behest:

So as she bad, that witch they disaraid,
 And robd of royall robes, and purple pall,
 And ornaments that richly were displaid;
 Ne spared they to strip her naked all.
 Then when they had despoild her tire and call,
 Such as she was, their eyes might her behold,
 That her misshaped parts did them appall,
 A loathly, wrinckled hag, ill faouered, old,
 Whose secret filth good manners biddeth not be told.

Her craftie head was altogether bald,
 And as in hate of honorable eld,
 Was ouergrowne with scurfe and filthy scald;
 Her teeth out of her rotten gummes were feld,
 And her sowre breath abhominably smeld;
 Her dried dugs, like bladders lacking wind,
 Hong downe, and filthy matter from them weld;
 Her wrizled skin as rough, as maple rind,
 So scabby was, that would haue loathd all womankind.

Her neather parts, the shame of all her kind,
 My chaster Muse for shame doth blush to write;
 But at her rompe she growing had behind
 A foxes taile, with dong all fowly dight;
 And eke her feete most monstrous were in sight;
 For one of them was like an Eagles claw,
 With griping talaunts armd to greedy fight,
 The other like a Beares vneuen paw:
 More vgly shape yet neuer liuing creature saw. (1.8.46-48)

Duessa is exposed, stripped naked and sent off in shame. She reappears in Book V to be judged and sentenced. Spenser here uses physical ugliness to signify inner ugliness but it is hard not to feel that the method betrays real prejudice against physical ugliness and deformity: it is a problem of the method but it has cultural implications.

Unlike Spenser's Guyon who achieves temperance and who pitilessly destroys the sensual pleasures of Acrasia's Bowre of Bliss to which he had, of course, almost succumbed, Bannerman's Guyon is an adulterer. And his Darke Ladie is unchaste, has left husband and family for her lover. Unlike Duessa she is not unmasked but her shame is instead signalled by her veil which also, however, gives her awful but undefinable power. Her true identity is never revealed and remains a matter of speculation, her veil can never be removed, "And many a time, he said, he tried/That ne'er-uncover'd face to see:/At eve and more, at noon and night;/ But still it could not be!" She continues to live what seems to be a kind of life in death and to torment and terrify those around her, most significantly Sir Guyon who is both her betrayer and her victim.

At first it may seem as though, contrary to Gilbert and Gubar's claim, Bannerman is not simply preoccupied with lifting the veil and exposing the feminine place, as much as she is with describing male reactions to it and highlighting any physical horrors, deformities, or illnesses its presence seems to imply. Yet, the veil is lifted in two of her poems: "The Penitent's Confession" and "The Festival of St. Magnus the Martyr". Once the penitent finishes telling his story to the priest and his encounter with the ghost of his beloved Ellinor, he unveils his arm to show him the physical deformity he has incurred and endured in silence for twenty years. Ladie Ellenor in "The Festival of St. Magnus the Martyr" disguises herself as a nun, removes her veil, and points at the bloodstained steps in an attempt to uncover a mysterious murder, possibly the murder of her husband, Sir Ewaine. Her reactions, starting from her husband's absence and culminating in her exasperated attempt to reveal the murder evidence, is more prone to interpretation as a form of hysteria, a mental illness caused by her husband's absence. As for the poems in which the veil is never lifted, "The Dark Ladie" and "The Prophetess of the Oracle of Seäm", removing the veil becomes the preoccupation of the courtiers and the monk and it is tied to a fear of facing deformity with all its horrifying hideousness.

This preoccupation with retaining or lifting the veil is as significant, as important as the veil itself. The acts of veiling/unveiling reinforce the sense of the body which lies behind the veil, and it is these acts that trigger the sense of horror: the horror of encountering a witch ("The Prophetess of the Oracle of Seam"), the horror of facing a body that is half-human half-dead ("The Dark Ladie"), and the horror of meeting a physical deformity ("The Penitent's Confession") — all these horrors are in effect articulations of the fear of dealing with a body that is different. It is a fear of the body

that lacks beauty, which suffers a deformity, that is not whole, and that deviates from our conceptions of the ideal human body. In fact, it is a fear that derives from the vulnerability of our bodies, or even, the fear of admitting this vulnerability.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Gothic Chapbooks: Sarah Wilkinson and the Didactic Gothic

A husband might die, or some disaster overtake the family. Hundreds of women began as the eighteenth century drew on to add to their pin money, or to come to the rescue of their families by making translations or writing the innumerable bad novels which have ceased to be recorded even in text-books, but are to be picked up in the fourpenny boxes in the Charing Cross Road. (Woolf 59)

Authors are, proverbially, poor; and therefore under the necessity of racking their wits for a bare subsistence. Perhaps, this is my case, and knowing how eager the fair sex are for something *new* and *romantic*, I determined on an attempt to *please* my fair sisterhood, hoping to *profit* myself thereby. If the following volumes tend to that effect, I shall be gratified; but if they meet with a rapid sale, and fill my pockets, I shall be elated. (Wilkinson, Preface 20)

In the late eighteenth century, many women writers from different backgrounds, with different ideological convictions and varying degrees of talent started to write for different reasons. Frances Burney began to write because she could scarcely help it: “I cannot express the pleasure that I have in writing down my thoughts, at the very moment — my opinion of people when I first see them, and *how* I alter, or *how* I

confirm myself in it” (*Journals and Letters* 3), Hannah More was an equally precocious writer but soon became interested in the intellectual and moral improvement of her readers, and Mary Wollstonecraft began to write for a living and her association with the radical publisher Johnson soon channelled her effort into championing women’s rights. Yet in most cases, it was the hope of securing a stable income and improving a precarious financial status that motivated women to write and publish their work. Some women were successful in establishing a writing career and becoming well-known figures in the cultural landscape, like Hannah More and Frances Burney, but for many others literary success and financial stability proved elusive. Sarah Wilkinson was one of these writers. A writer of gothic novels and gothic chapbooks, Wilkinson desperately tried throughout her life to make a living by her pen, and despite her several attempts and her long writing career which spanned twenty-eight years, she died in 1831 in abject poverty, probably of breast cancer (*The Spectre of Lanmere Abbey* 322). Wilkinson wrote five novels, *The Thatched Cottage, or The Sorrows of Eugenia* (1806), *The Fugitive Countess, or The Convent of St. Ursula* (1807), *The Child of Mystery* (1808), *The Convent of the Grey Penitent or The Apostate Nun* (1810), and *The Spectre of Lanmere Abbey, or The Mystery of the Blue and Silver Bag*, (1820), and many chapbooks published by well-known chapbook publishers such as Ann Lemoine, Dean and Munday, and Thomas Kaygill. Her repeated appeals to the Royal Literary Fund for sufficient allowance to enable her to raise her “fatherless” daughter¹ further demonstrate her financial predicament (*The Spectre of Lanmere Abbey* 322). In life and after her

¹ According to Potter, Wilkinson bore a daughter, Amelia Scadgell, in 1808, and there is no clear indication of whether she was married to a Mr. Scadgell at the time. However, she did start using a variation of the name, Scudgell, as a middle name. “There is no proof that the misspelling of her name, however, was an attempt to use a pseudonym. Many of her works which appear with Scudgell are published by Dean & Munday; other publishers did not adopt the middle name” (Introduction *The Spectre of Lanmere Abbey* 11). For a full record of Wilkinson’s letters to the Royal Literary Fund see Appendix A in *The Spectre of Lanmere Abbey and The Child of Mystery*, edited by Potter.

death, her unsuccessful career never granted her the long-lasting fame she must have hoped for when she started her writing career. In short, her writing career failed to “add to her pin money” or to have her “recorded even in texts-books” — to use Virginia Woolf’s words.

Copeland has noted that “Gothic terror in women’s fiction is unremittingly economic” (36), meaning that it revolves primarily around economic issues and the financial standing of the heroine. Many gothic novels depict the gothic heroine deprived of her rightful inheritance, left penniless after seduction, or, in happier cases, receiving an inheritance that enables her financial and social independence. This preoccupation with women’s wealth and its circulation is not confined to the gothic novel, for it extends to other forms of the Gothic such as the gothic chapbooks written by Sarah Wilkinson, who not only suffered from financial insecurity all her life, but also wrote chapbooks for a class of readers who were probably just as underprivileged as herself. To Wilkinson, poverty was not fiction but a reality, a reality that she did not try to hide from her readers in her preface to *The Spectre of Lanmere Abbey*, or to perceive separately from her identity as a writer.

Also, the preface to *The Spectre of Lanmere Abbey* strongly suggests that Wilkinson assumed her readers mainly to be women, and this assumption has clearly dictated the way Wilkinson wrote her gothic fictions. The didactic remarks uttered by Wilkinson’s characters are clearly directed to her female readers:

I fear you have been to the prohibited shelf in the upper library, and perused some romances; and these, as I expressed to you before, I do not wish you to do, till your character is formed, and your mind more matured. The pages of elegant fiction will then be a source of amusement

for a vacant hour, but now they might have an evil tendency, by softening the heart, and inflaming the imagination.

(The Spectre of Lanmere Abbey 77-78)

Wilkinson makes similar remarks in her chapbooks. She warns her female readers against believing the fictions they read, against succumbing to their romantic dreams, and against surrendering themselves to men from the upper classes, thinking that this might lead to an advantageous marriage. This overt didacticism outlines the sexual politics of the time, showing the vulnerable position of women in a masculine-orientated system that privileges men over women. Wilkinson's didacticism is also underscored by a preoccupation with strict class divisions that put the poor at a disadvantage. This, of course, makes poor women suffer from a double disadvantage from the politics of class and gender. If this double disadvantage is coupled with irrational expectations, women will certainly face dire consequences and have miserable ends in Wilkinson's chapbooks. Wilkinson states that virtue is the only protection women have from whatever life throws in their direction, but apart from this shield of high ethics, Wilkinson has little to say about how a single poor woman can sustain herself and lead a decent life, and considering Wilkinson's faltering career as a writer — and the careers of many women who followed the same path for that matter — her silence is hardly surprising.

The explicit didacticism and the appropriation of gothic tropes are two aspects in Wilkinson's work that I intend to investigate in this chapter. I will first give a general overview of chap literature to situate my discussion of Wilkinson's chapbooks in its historical context and to illustrate the affinities of her work with chapbooks being produced by her contemporaries, most notably Hannah More, who also shared with

Wilkinson a reformist agenda regarding women's education and who adopted the same didactic and patronizing voice in her work. The didactic impulse is also, of course, to be found in a good deal of gothic writing by women.

My discussion moves finally to some of Sarah Wilkinson's chapbooks to illustrate the kind of didactic gothic she wrote. Wilkinson appropriates gothic tropes and borrows from popular gothic works, most notably from Matthew Lewis, to rewrite them for didactic ends in a tone that does not differ from that of Hannah More. Also, Wilkinson's gothic chapbooks have much to reveal about the politics of gender, the demands of the marketplace, and contemporary concerns about women's reading of gothic fiction.

Chapbooks

Penny histories, penny dreadfuls, and bluebooks all belong to a class of popular ephemera called chapbooks. Deriving their name from the Anglo-Saxon "chap", meaning cheap, chapbooks were distributed by means of peddlers or hawkers, called chapmen. These chapmen, who typically provided remote villages and isolated farms with "pins, needles, ribbons, thread, and the many other small items which would be required from time to time in every household" (Neuburg 4), would also carry these little publications along with the latest news from the metropolis, thus serving as a major link between the city and the countryside. Equipped with distinctive almanacs that define the routes they are to follow, such as *City and Country Chapman's Almanack* and *The Chapman's and the Traveller's Almanack*, chapmen journeyed from one location to another, selling chapbooks on their way. Their stock came mainly from the 250 printers based in London. By the end of the eighteenth century, more print

houses were established in the provinces, enabling chapmen to purchase all the chapbooks they wanted to sell during the course of their journey without the need to return to the capital for more stock (Neuburg 32-3). It is perhaps because they were constantly on the move that, for many people, chapmen were “regarded as vagabonds and associated with the criminal underworld” (Kelly 2:ix). Nevertheless, many of these chapbooks were used to teach children how to read and write, thus creating a generation of readers who remembered them tenderly, and even took the trouble, as Walter Scott did, to collect and bind them in volumes. It is because of their huge mass readership that chapbooks constitute an integral part of the cultural repertoire of the British nation from the Middle Ages till the end of the nineteenth century.

These tiny publications measured six by four inches and grew even smaller in the nineteenth century. The reverse can be said about the number of pages. Initially chapbooks were eight to sixteen pages long; starting from the late eighteenth century onwards, the number of pages increased to between twelve and thirty-six (Neuburg 6). The small size of the chapbook and its fixed number of pages to some extent determined its contents. The empty pages left after the completion of the main story were filled with songs, verses, illustrations and even advertisements for other titles by the same publisher. The cover would typically list the title (sometimes long enough to divulge the whole plot), the publisher, the date of publication, and an illustration, which might or might not correspond to the contents of the chapbook. Most of the chapbooks were anonymous and only in rare cases did the name of the author of the chapbook appear on the title-page.

Chapbooks covered a variety of topics recycled from oral, popular and mainstream literatures. They contained tales of a didactic nature, redactions of gothic

novels, abridgments of popular works, summaries of classic works, retellings of historical events, selections from travel accounts, translations from continental literatures, omens and prophecies, prescriptions for certain diseases, and almanacs highlighting important dates. The titles “Guy of Warwick”, “The Wandering Jew”, “The Story of Faust”, “Robinson Crusoe”, “The Rights of Man”, “Robin Hood’s Garlands”, “Jack the Giant Killer”, “Gallows Literature”, “The Spectres”, “Simple Simon”, “Fortunatus”, and “The Pilgrims Progress” demonstrate how diverse the subject matter of chapbooks can be.

Pederson notes that despite the wide variety of topics that these chapbooks covered, in the late eighteenth century they were “for the most part, irreligious” (104) and this irreligious aspect has served to a certain extent as a unifying element. She further explains:

As a whole, then, chapbook literature encompassed a great variety of forms and subjects. Nevertheless, as a genre, it is not without coherence. If it is diverse in topic, it is unified in tone: the vast proportion is profoundly irreverent and often amoral. It is equally skeptical of natural laws, social order, and religious duty. Often chapbooks present either a fantasy landscape or a world turned upside down: a world of giants and witches, of poor but valorous heroes, of scheming wives and successful crooks. Above all, they are hostile to respectability: to industry, chastity, piety, and other bourgeois virtues. (Pederson 103)

In addition to this perceived lack of morality in cheap print, the latter part of the eighteenth century brought further developments in the history of chapbooks. Victor Neuburg notes that the lower classes started to turn away from traditional cheap

histories preferring political pamphlets, for they felt that traditional chapbooks did not relate to their real lives and thus impeded their instruction and betterment. They were no longer interested in reading about what the Earl of Warwick did or who Jack killed, and opted instead for the latest news from revolutionary France and works that spoke for their causes and rights, like Paine's *Rights of Man* (62). Likewise, the middle and upper classes, who had customarily used chapbooks as children's books, started to prefer works like *The Parent's Assistant*, a children's book by Maria Edgeworth that is mainly written for educational purposes, for fear of the unorthodox ideology their children might pick up from reading the increasingly seditious and politically charged lower-class literature (Kelly 2:x-xi). Also gothic chapbooks, or so-called bluebooks because of their blue covers, like gothic novels became increasingly popular. Because of the literary affinity between the two forms of writing — Gothic chapbooks were adaptations, plagiarisms, redactions or abridgements of gothic novels — and because of the politically seditious streak gothic novels started to acquire in the 1790s, gothic chapbooks seemed to carry the same potential for pernicious effect alleged of the novels. All these developments which testify to the increasing hostility to "bourgeois virtues" (103) — as Pederson has termed it — following the events in France, prompted diligent middle-class reformers, such as Hannah More and members of the *Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge*, to counter what they regarded as the pernicious and corrupting effect of chap-literature; as a result, the *Cheap Repository Tracts* came into being.

It was the existence of a chap-literature audience among the lower orders and the anxiety over the difficult times of the 1790s that prompted middle-class reformers, led by Hannah More, to devise this ambitious publishing project in the first place. For

although the audience for chap-literature “did not confine itself to any one economic or status population” (Wein 158), it was mainly written for the consumption of lower and lower-middle class readers, the same social groups whose seditious sentiments portended a possible revolt. As Kelly explains

Many groups of the consumers of cheap print were classed among the “mob”, or more accurately, the drifting and unstable social groups who were for centuries, and in the absence of an established police force or militia, always ready for riot and rebellion. (2:ix-x)

The fear of rebellion erupting among the lower orders made social reformers and political activists anxious to supply the lower classes with the reading material they needed to improve their writing and reading skills without the contents that would undermine bourgeois authority. Thus, the main objective of the *Cheap Repository Tracts* was to replace unorthodox reading matter with moral tales that would buttress Christian faith, reinforce bourgeois ideology, and bolster national unity — all that radicalism seemed to destroy.

Along with this increase in the publication of didactic and religious tracts, which aimed to confront the revolutionary tide coming from France, was the general rise in popularity of the Gothic. The popularity of novels by Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis, and Charlotte Smith encouraged publishers to capitalize on these literary successes and to commission marginal writers to write chapbooks with similar contents. These commissions resulted in the production of many chapbooks which contained various elements commonly found in gothic novels, a phenomenon that has caused much dispute among scholars regarding the degree of originality that can be allowed to gothic chapbooks.

On the subject of the originality of gothic chapbooks, Franz Potter distinguishes two critical strands. One that sees gothic bluebooks as plagiarized texts that derive their events, plots and characters from existing fully-fledged novels. The other considers the characteristics of the Gothic as too clichéd and common to make a clear demarcation between an original source and a similar rendition of it (*History of Gothic Publishing* 40). This disagreement has arisen primarily because of the generally derivative nature of gothic chapbooks. They all fall under the rubric of appropriation in the sense that they involve the borrowing of certain elements belonging to another author, work, or a literary vogue in the writing of a new text. Some appropriations entail an element of adaptation since they are conversions of a work from one medium to another. There is also the abridgment, which is the condensing or shortening of a given work, and the redaction, often involving the purification of a work by the removal of any objectionable content. A chapbook may employ more than one of these forms of appropriation. At the same time there clearly was an ongoing symbiotic and reciprocal relationship between the gothic chapbook and the gothic novel. Just as gothic novels served as a source for gothic chapbooks, some chapbooks have contributed to the popularity of gothic novels by representing them in shortened form and thus prolonging their circulation in the market. It is in examining the career of Sarah Wilkinson that we can see the intricate, hybrid nature of the relationship between the gothic chapbook and the general output of the Gothic.

Hannah More

Throughout her writing Hannah More gives repeated warnings about the pernicious effect of reading modern novels. Her contributions to the *Cheap Repository*

Tracts provide stories and anecdotes that reflect this view and illustrate the consequences of reading works that are morally unsound. For example, a didactic ballad, “Sinful Sally”, relates the story of a farm girl who deserts her family to be the mistress of her upper-class seducer, Sir William:

Vanish’d now from Cottage lowly,
 My poor parents’ heart I break;
 Enter on a state unholy,
 Turn a Mistress to a Rake. (“Sinful Sally” l.53-56)

Although Sally hears the ringing of Church bells, reminding her of the possibility of salvation and the opportunity to repent her sins and reform, she continues on the corrupt path that she has chosen, and here More provides us with Sally’s reading list, which, unsurprisingly includes “impious” books and “filthy novels”, to which More pointedly attributes Sally’s downfall:

Now I lay my Bible by,
 Chuse that impious book so new;
 Love the bold blaspheming lie,
 And that filthy novel too. (“Sinful Sally” l.65-68)

Sally leads a joyous, luxurious, yet empty life that is troubled by feelings of remorse and fear of inevitable damnation: “Pleasure now — Damnation after” (“Sinful Sally” l.91). Once she loses her bloom and is cast aside by her lover, she roams the streets, where her descent continues:

See me next with front so daring
 Band of ruffian Rogues among;
 Fighting, cheating, drinking and swearing,

And the vilest of the throng. (“Sinful Sally” l.121-124)

After leading a degenerate and corrupt life, Sally receives her punishment from God. She is struck with a fatal disease, possibly a venereal disease that brings mutilation and unbearable suffering. More presents this ballad as “a Warning to all young Women both in Town and Country” (70), and as a reminder of the dire consequences of sin that is encouraged by indiscriminate reading.

Another story from the *Cheap Repository Tracts*, “Mr. Bragwell and His Two Daughters”, more explicitly condemns the habit of reading trashy novels. Bragwell, a farmer, has earned a considerable fortune that has enabled him to send his two daughters to school to receive an education befitting young ladies of fashion. Years later, the girls return and shock their parents with their vanity and disdain for their parents’ rustic way of life, and their complete disregard for their domestic duties as daughters of an ailing man. Instead of helping their parents, they spend “the morning in bed, the noon in dressing, the evening at the Spinnet, and the night in reading Novels” (More, “Mr. Bragwell” 81). Then the narrative sets out to demonstrate how the girls’ insatiable love for novels has clouded their judgment and distorted their perceptions of life. They entrust Jack, an illiterate plow-boy, with the task of fetching “the most wretched trash the little neighbouring book shop could furnish” (“Mr. Bragwell” 81). Mr. Bragwell visits his friend, Mr. Worthy, complaining about his daughters’ vanity, irresponsibility, and their complete lack of respect for their parents. They soon start discussing the novels Mr. Bragwell’s daughters read and their detrimental effect on the girls’ outlook on life:

Worthy. You have found out, Mr. Bragwell, that many of these books are ridiculous, I will go further, and say that to me they appear wicked also.

And I should account the reading of them a great mischief, especially to people in middling and low life, if I only took into the account the great loss of time such reading causes, and the aversion it leaves behind for what is more serious and solid. But this, though a bad part, is not the worst. These books give false views of human life. They teach a contempt for humble and domestic duties; for industry, frugality, and retirement. Want of youth and beauty is considered as ridiculous. Plain people like you and me, are objects of contempt. Parental authority is set at nought. Nay plots and contrivances against parents and guardians, fill half the volumes. They make love as the great business of human life, and even teach that it is impossible to be regulated or restrained and to the indulgence of this passion, every duty is therefore sacrificed.

(“Mr. Bragwell” 86)

This is one of the strongest, most stringent critiques of the damaging effects of reading modern novels that Hannah More offers in the tracts. In this view, reading novels strips women of their ability to think rationally, causes lack of respect for their parents, makes them forget their duties for the sake of unrealistic notions about love. More also sounds the cautionary note that such novels should never be read by the middle and lower classes, because such novels are a complete waste of time and money, two things that these classes are not in a position to spare. Later in the story, More demonstrates how reading of such novels brings about the ruin of Polly, Mr. Bragwell’s daughter. She leaves her family, to marry a gentleman with the fancy name of Augustus Frederick Theodosius, who has disguised himself as an actor for his own diversion. She soon discovers that she has actually married a Timothy Ingle who is “a strolling player” (96)

plunged in serious debts, which he hopes to settle by marriage to the daughter of a wealthy farmer. Polly's rash marriage and subsequent ruin prove the point Hannah More is trying to make, that novel reading for middle- and lower-class women leads to destruction "more than almost any other cause". Hannah More reiterates the point in her *Strictures on Female Education* published in 1799 shortly after her *Cheap Repository Tracts*.

Hannah More's explicit warnings about the female habit of reading novels gives us, as modern readers, a reminder of what is at stake. To late eighteenth-century social reformers, novels that do not resemble real life in any way cultivate unrealistic expectations in their readers, and the impossibility of achieving these expectations will ultimately translate into desperation and rebellion, two things that social reformers did not want to see in the lower classes. Thus, these novels were not perceived as forms of escapist literature but an active agent in the mobilization of a rebellious lower class. Additionally, these novels do not seem to offer anything that might benefit the lower classes, or improve their impoverished conditions, which further adds to their pernicious effects. And so it was believed that novels contributed to the disintegration of the family by encouraging women to desert their families and disregard their duties to follow unattainable dreams. But, of course, what these general outcries emanating from social reformers like Hannah More reveal is an insistence on conventional female roles on stereotypical notions of femininity, which were being attacked and debunked in contemporary novels. Hannah More was truly concerned to see the image of the quintessential female, which she had always endorsed, being shattered, and by fiction.

More's *Cheap Repository Tracts* were extremely popular, reaching the astounding figure of two million copies in the first year of publication, a point upon

which Altick notes: “Tom Paine and Hannah More between them had opened the book to the common English reader” (qtd in Myers 267), and according to Myers, “Victorian scholars suggest that she was the most influential British writer of fiction of her day” (267). Also, the publication of an imitation of her *Cheap Repository* in 1819 that had the similar objective of pacifying the lower classes and preventing them from rioting, is another testament to her longstanding influence.

Sarah Wilkinson

With her name only turning up in bibliographies of gothic and crime fiction, in references to her abridged renditions of well-known gothic novels, or in sparse studies of chap literature, Sarah Wilkinson suffers almost complete obscurity in Romantic studies. This obscurity may be attributed primarily to the marginality of the gothic chapbook itself and to the perceived mediocrity of her work (Potter, *History of Gothic Publishing* 119). In addition, that Sarah Wilkinson has dedicated a large part of her career to literary appropriation by converting other people’s work into chapbook form brings into question the extent of the originality of her work. This question of originality is not only an issue for Wilkinson’s work, of course. As I have suggested earlier in this chapter, there have been many speculations about the originality of bluebooks in general. But in the case of Sarah Wilkinson, Angela Koch, surveying the bluebook collection of the Corvey Library, notes that, “two-thirds of the titles could not be traced back to original novels, tales or plays and many of them, such as those by Sarah Wilkinson, will never be” (“Gothic Bluebooks”). This difficulty in tracing the sources of chapbooks is caused by the common tropes and formulas used in gothic novels which make many gothic novels and chapbooks look the same. In fact, Wilkinson herself is

aware of the available stock features of the Gothic and how they can be appropriated and recycled, as the playful Amelia in *The Spectre of Lanmere Abbey* notes:

A castle, a turret, a winding staircase, an assassin, a suicide, a spectre, an imprisoned damsel, and a variant knight; surely these are the ingredients enough, and I want nothing but the pen of Mrs. Radcliffe to give it a descriptive effect. (141)

In surveying Wilkinson's chapbooks that have been traced to a literary ancestor, one notes the diversity of her sources. Wilkinson converted several plays into gothic chapbooks: Matthew Lewis's *The Castle Spectre*, Amelia Opie's *The Ruffian Boy*, James Haynes's *Conscience; or, the Bridal Night*, and Charles Dibdin's *The Water Spectre*. She also appropriated Matthew Lewis's notorious *The Monk*, eliminating some of the highly erotic scenes to make it a more acceptable read. Moreover, she did not confine herself to gothic works in English: she also translated a few works of continental gothic, her *Therese; or, the Orphan of Geneva ; an Interesting Romance* is a translation of a work by Victor Ducange,¹ and her *The White Pilgrim; or, Castle of Orival* is a translation of a French drama by René de Pixérécourt² entitled, *Le Pèlerin Blanc*. Wilkinson has also written completely original gothic novels and chapbooks. This interesting range of production displays the various sources of gothic chapbooks, and it also gives insight into the nature of the chapbook industry, which is based on an intricate web of intersections between popular and high literature.

1 Victor Henri Joseph Brahain Ducange (1783-1833) was a French dramatist and novelist. His father worked as a secretary to the French Embassy in Holland. Victor was an outspoken member of the liberal party who was fined and imprisoned several times during his life because of the immoral nature of his writings and of his attack on the *Ancien Regime*.

2 Rene Charles Guilbert de Pixérécourt (1773-1844) was a successful and prolific French dramatist who wrote more than one hundred plays in the melodramatic mode. He also wrote two critical works on melodrama, the genre he is mostly associated with, *Le Mélodrame* and *Dernières réflexions sur le melodrama*.

But to venture to pull Sarah Wilkinson out from the position of a footnote item to which she has been relegated, one needs to explain further why it is important to study her work. It is my contention that Sarah Wilkinson's chapbooks can be best read as cultural artefacts that have much to say about ideologically constructed gender roles, the radical sentiments that reject prejudices based on class, and conservative calls to regulate women's readings. Wilkinson's writing career also exemplifies how difficult it was for a female writer at the beginning of the nineteenth century to live by her pen.

Wilkinson's work contains many conflicting elements that indicate a clash between the discourse she chooses for her writing, that is the Gothic, and the conservative call, which she seems to endorse, warning women against reading indiscriminately and uncritically and against succumbing to their fanciful dreams — actions that will ultimately dictate their own doom. It is because Wilkinson is a writer who uses the Gothic to warn her female readers not to believe the fictions they read, that I find her interesting. Through her didactic and moral fictions, Wilkinson writes against the gothic but from within.

In warning women of their susceptibility to seduction, especially if they have nurtured a sentimental frame of mind by reading, Wilkinson expresses dominant ideological conceptions of the fickleness of the female mind and how it can easily be contoured and defined by reading, a notion that has been forcibly argued for by female reformers, like Hannah More.

Sarah Wilkinson shares Hannah More's opinion that once a lady's mind is preoccupied by the kind of ideals of romantic love that are only found in fiction, a moral slip will shortly follow. As I have indicated, this insistence on the impressionability of the female mind, which may result in moral degeneration and social ruin, not only

illustrates a concern for social reform, but it also depends on ideological renderings of the emotional female, who is typically depicted as weak, unprotected and self-deluded. Sarah Wilkinson seems to follow the same line of thought, although her didacticism does not seem to emanate from an explicit agenda like Hannah More's. Her early works were published by Ann Lemoine, a publisher of gothic chapbooks who insisted, nevertheless, that she was presenting moral and, therefore, appropriate reading material to her public. Addressing the readers in a compilation of gothic bluebooks, titled *Wild Roses; or Cottage Tales*, Ann Lemoine describes the kind of gothic she is publishing:

If the Roses contained in the following Pages be Wild Roses, as our Title expresses that they will be, it will still be the peculiar Care of the Editor to prune from them every Luxuriance which might justly offend the Beast of Morality, or to be regarded as a Foe to the Heart of Innocence. If our Roses have any Thorns, they shall be found directed against such evil-disposed Minds as merit the Pungency of Correction; but they shall not be drawn with sufficient Asperity to offend the Purity of the most chaste and virtuous Heart. This work is intended to form an Assemblage of Sweets, from which every noisome Weed shall be excluded; the sovereign Rose of which shall be Morality, and the uniting Bond of Heart's Ease! (qtd. in Potter *The History* 41-2)

The imagery that Ann Lemoine uses to describe morality and the contents of the chapbook compilation is too interesting to overlook. Morality is both a "Beast" and a "sovereign Rose", two terms that may seem to be paradoxical but are both aimed at underpinning the overpowering social presence of morality and its status as an attractive feature expected from women. The stories contained in the book, on the other hand, are

an “Assemblage of sweets”, and their thorns will provide the “Pungency of Correction” when “directed against [...] evil-disposed Minds”. It is apparent that Anne Lemoine is stressing that her stories, or thorny roses as she called them, and propriety are working hand in hand to fend off the moral corruption that is elsewhere contained in and encouraged by works of “Luxuriance”, that is, fantastical elements that excite the mind. Lemoine tries to offer a formula that caters for both the imagination and the moral health of her readers.

Sarah Wilkinson follows a similar plan in her work. She presents stories that contain many elements that excite the imagination and are characteristic of the Gothic: supernatural occurrences, unrelenting villains, incarcerated heroines, gothic castles, ghosts, and portraits coming to life. But no matter how adventurous or fantastic her stories turn out to be, they are always moderated by didactic conclusions, and occasionally the narrator interrupts the narrative to comment or offer some moral advice.

This blending of the gothic and the didactic is not an unusual practice or a form of writing that Sarah Wilkinson invented, for there were other writers who advocated this didactic mode and employed similar strategies, most notably, Clara Reeve and Charlotte Dacre. Clara Reeve rewrote Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* with the aim of attracting the reader’s attention and “to direct it to a useful, or at least innocent, end” (Preface 3). In her *Zofloya*, Dacre had used the strategy of interrupting the narrative with didactic commentary. *Zofloya* begins by asserting a serious purpose:

The historian who would wish his lessons to sink deep into the heart, thereby essaying to render mankind virtuous and more happy, must not content himself with simply detailing a series of events — he must

ascertain causes, and follow progressively their effects, he must draw deductions from incidents as they arise, and ever revert to the actuating principle. (4)

And from this didactic standpoint the narrator recounts the history of the moral descent of Victoria di Loredani whose corruption, lust and deceit puts her in the path of Satan, disguised as Zofloya the Moor.

“The Castle of Montabino”

Sarah Wilkinson’s “The Castle of Montabino, or, The Orphan Sisters: An Original Romance” is a good example of how didactic gothic blends moral advice with gothic tropes and settings. The “Castle of Montabino” opens with two orphaned sisters, Emilia and Theresa, who have recently lost their aunt, the Countess Montabino. Looking through the window, the girls see a boat approaching along the Arno river. The boat is conveying three gentlemen and a lady covered in a deep veil. A transparent sign is displayed, with a torch placed behind it to make the message visible, it reads, “We hope you have prepared the promised answer — and will accept our protection — dangers thicken — haste, lest delay should overwhelm you, and you both fall victims to the horrors unjustly preparing for you” (Wilkinson, “The Castle of Montabino” 4). The sisters lower their answer in a basket, which is fetched by a dog accompanying the gentlemen, and then start packing in preparation for their escape. It becomes apparent that their aunt’s husband, the Count of Montabino, is planning to murder them in order to get hold of their inheritance from their mother which was guarded by their deceased aunt. The girls know that the Count is capable of committing such crimes since he is “cruel, morose, and revengeful; to his dependants and domestics every revolving day

shewed some instances of his tyranny” (19). To get out of the castle, the girls have to go through labyrinthine passages. They encounter a moving figure which they assume to be one of the castle’s ghosts. They also pass the Count’s trusted servant, Cosmo, who to facilitate their escape pretends not to see them. And in one of the chambers they overhear two other servants, Hugo and Gusmond, discussing the secret burial of a child. The girls slip by unnoticed by the servants, and manage to leave the castle through a secret door covered by foliage, with Theresa noting that “There is some strange mystery about this castle” (9). The girls find three gentlemen and a lady called Beatrice waiting for them in a coach that will escort them to safety. After a long journey they reach an elegant villa where they meet their aunt, the Countess of Montabino, whom they had assumed dead. The Countess then tells the girls the story of her life, recounting the miseries she endured with the Count. She explains that she was administered a sleeping potion concocted by Cosmo, who was revolted by his master’s cruelty towards the Countess. She was then pronounced dead, and Cosmo arranged for her removal from the burial chamber after the burial ceremony and for her safe escort to her friends. Shortly after this the Countess arranged for her nieces to be removed from the Castle of Montabino to save their lives. Meanwhile, the Count of Montabino discovers that the sisters have escaped and in a fit of rage stabs Cosmo to death. Cosmo confesses that the Countess is still alive and the Count’s punishment is imminent. Horrified by this disclosure, the Count commits suicide, and at last, the Countess and her nieces are free to enjoy their lives in peace. When they return to the castle, they make a most unusual discovery. They find a young lady imprisoned in one of its vaults. She turns out to be Hermina, the Count’s mistress who then proceeds to tell her story. Hermina is the daughter of a respectable jeweller, who insisted upon her being given a good education

so that she could help her parents and assist in the education of her siblings. Although in this way she had received an education suited to her station, she has become corrupted by reading novels:

Through bribing one of the maids at the seminary from the fidelity she owed the lady that employed her, the scholars procured romances and novels. And for want of a person able to select them, they read indiscriminately the good and the bad; and unfortunately, many that had a pernicious tendency. (28)

This cheap literature nurtured in Hermina the idea that that one day she might encounter a wealthy admirer who would marry her and provide her with lifelong luxury and happiness. Constructing herself thus as a heroine, she eloped from a life that she compares to “abject slavery” (28). This begins the story of her “pursuit of adventures” (29) which ultimately results in her moral downfall. She travelled, she says, to a distance where she was sure her parents could not follow her because they would not afford the expense. Then she rented an apartment, claimed to be an orphan whose father died in debt and sought work as a governess, with the aim of being spotted by an eligible bachelor and offered a marriage proposal. Soon she realized that:

To her amazement she did not succeed — no invitations to visit the neighbouring gentry — no admirers! — no young men of fortune, ready to sacrifice friends and family, to cast themselves at her feet — In short, nothing like what her romantic studies and more romantic mind had lead her to expect. Some on hearing the tale she had invented, pitied her, others seemed to doubt her veracity, and plainly hinted their suspicions, that she was a young adventurer; others judged still worse; — but none

like to employ a young person in their house, who was to fill a superior station, and have the guidance of young people, to whom any mystery was attached [...] and want began to make its unwelcome approaches towards our self-deluded heroine. (29-30)

After failing to find a position or an admirer, and because she had spent all her money, she decided to return home. On her way she was attacked by robbers who stole the remainder of her money and clothes. She walked till she reached an inn, where she fainted on the doorstep. There one of the Count's servants, Fernando, who was on a business trip outside town, took pity on the girl and conveyed her to her home on his way back to the castle. The Count heard of her story and her beauty from Fernando and decided to seduce her, so he rented a place near her parents' cottage and pretended to be the heir of a wealthy uncle. He asked Hermina's father to make some jewels for him, and used the time of his stay to persuade Hermina to elope with him. He succeeded in persuading her to elope and live with him unmarried until his wealthy uncle should die, for he had promised his uncle never to marry in his lifetime. Thus Hermina became the Count's mistress for four years, during which time she bore him three children. Hermina then hired a governess, who upon seeing the Count recognized him immediately. This discovery shocked Hermina who fainted:

Upon her recovery she was soon convinced of the deception : — all her hopes of future grandeur was vanished like a dream — she was the mistress of a married man! — she had virtue enough to look on such a situation with horror. (35)

Hermina was distraught, and she confronted the Count, informing him that she intended to leave with her children. Her plans of escape were intercepted and she was kept locked

in the turret with her children, two of whom perished in captivity. With this sad conclusion of her tale, Hermina asks to be placed with her daughter in a convent. In the end, the Marquis Revedo marries the Countess, his son marries Theresa and Segnor Rupino marries Emillia, and Wilkinson closes this narrative with the following, “Their lives [Theresa and Emillia] were exemplary, and their story shews that virtue will meet its reward, and vice a punishment” (36) a note that highlights the moral point behind the story.

The moral tale offered by Hermina’s narrative is in direct contrast to the frame in which it is embedded. The major plot centring around the two sisters with all its stock gothic tropes is highly fantastic and improbable, whereas, the embedded narrative of Hermina, although it showcases some gothic tropes (e.g. locking Hermina and her children in a turret) is a more realistic tale that includes contemporary concerns about female virtue, the corrupting power of novel reading, and filial disobedience. Furthermore, the narrative of Hermina is a moral tale set to counter any effects the main narrative might have on its gullible readers. It serves as a kind of warning to the readers that they should not exclusively believe the main narrative, and thus it draws a line between fiction and reality. Hermina’s narrative, then, sounds a cautionary note about the effects of the suspension of reason in the act of reading a work of fiction. In that respect, Hermina joins Austen’s Catherine Morland and Joanna Baillie’s Orra as an example of what might happen to a woman when she starts believing what she reads. All these heroines show what a woman is likely to lose in the dangerous act of reading: Orra loses her sanity, Catherine Morland almost loses Henry Tilney’s trust, and Hermina loses her virtue and her family. Sanity, love, and domestic happiness all seem to depend on a woman’s ability to exercise her reason and to differentiate between real

life and a work of fiction. This moral aspect of the tale thus resonates with the warnings that Hannah More repeatedly voiced regarding female reading and education: that the act of reading determines a woman's fate, and that the reading of novels, without guidance, reason or exercising personal censure is closely linked to a woman's degeneration.

The most interesting aspect of this chapbook, however, is the gothic villain, Count Montabino. Count Montabino functions as a link that connects the two disparate narratives. He is the tyrannical patriarch in the major narrative and the unscrupulous seducer in the minor one. This double function correlates the gothic villain women readers find in works of fiction with the potential crooks and seducers they might encounter in real life, indicating that there can be a modern version of the gothic tyrant. Also, this overlapping of gothic villain/real seducer further stresses the precarious situation of women who are always in danger of being abused by patriarchal power.

“Albert of Werdendorff”

The story of “Albert of Werdendorff, or The Midnight Embrace” is another gothic chapbook by Wilkinson that exposes the cruelty and injustice of masculine seduction. It features the vengeful ghost of Josephine, a victim of seduction, who kills her former seducer, Albert, by a kiss. This acts as a warning to such male seducers but the tale's moral warns young ladies in a didactic tone against succumbing gullibly to sexual seduction. According to Franz Potter, “Albert of Werdendorff” is an adaptation of a popular ballad by Matthew Lewis, “Alonzo the Brave and Fair Imogine”.¹ The

1 The ballad first appeared in Lewis's *The Monk* in 1796, and due to its popularity, it appeared in many magazines and poem collections, including Lewis's *Tales of Wonder* (1801). The ballad was adapted by Thomas John Dibdin for the stage in 1796. Wilkinson redacted *The Monk* in chapbook form and repeatedly resorted to Lewis's work as a source for her chapbook adaptations and gothic trappings, so she must have been familiar with the poem.

ballad tells the story of the gallant knight Alonzo and his betrothed Imogine. Imogine promises Alonzo that she will never be a wife to anyone but him and he leaves to fight in the holy lands. Twelve months later Imogine marries a rich Baron, forgetting her promise to Alonzo. At the wedding feast, the ghost of Alonzo comes to claim Imogine as his bride. He takes her to his grave and she is never seen again. The ghosts of Alonzo and Imogine, however, are frequently seen haunting the grounds. Potter reads “Albert of Werdendorff” as an adaptation of Lewis’s ballad that revisits the “theme of betrayal and deception” (Introduction 7) in a way that:

Emphasises the female perspective, as one who was seduced from virtue’s path, rather than the male. Wilkinson is often inclined to strengthen the female position. The supernatural ending, as retained by Wilkinson, again strengthens the readers’ conviction that for seducers, though they may often escape earthly justice, “heaven’s vengeance” is inevitable. (7)

But there is another ballad by Joanna Baillie that has a similar plot; yet it was not as well-known as Lewis’s, especially since she was better-known for her dramatic works rather than her poetry. Baillie’s ballad, “The Storm-Beat Maid”, is about a young woman who travels long distances and in harsh weather to attend the wedding of her lover, who, upon seeing her miserable and ghost-like state, regrets deserting her and announces that he will not leave her again and that “Nor friends, nor wealth, nor dizen'd bride,/ Shall ever stand between” them (147-148). It is unclear whether Wilkinson was familiar with Baillie’s “The Storm-Beat Maid”, although it assumes the same “female position” Potter has talked about and has some affinity with Wilkinson’s chapbook,

such as showcasing a jilted girl haunting the man who deserted her on his wedding night.

“Albert of Werdendorff” is the story of the lord of the castle of Werdendorff whose heart is “prone to deceit”, and who pays “very little attention to the fulfilling of either religious or moral duties” (13). Not far away from his castle, lives an orphan Josephine who is beautiful and innocent, and is trying, after the death of both her parents, to make a living from her embroidery. In one of his morning rides, Albert sees Josephine and is attracted to her. He decides to seduce her: “to seduce the unsuspecting victim of his deceptions” (16) Albert plans to use his “superior rank, fortune, and connections”. After showering Josephine with undivided attention he tells her that he cannot marry her during his father’s lifetime but promises to do so once his father is dead. Naively Josephine believes his story and his promise and is “seduced by the wily serpent” (17). Soon the affair starts to trouble Josephine and she becomes the subject of “Regret, remorse and apprehension” (17). Here Wilkinson interrupts the narrative by remarking, “Ah, ill fated maid! too soon will you experience the dire truth, that men betray, and that vows can be broken; and that illicit love, though at first ardent, will soon decay, and leave nought but wretchedness behind” (18). Albert tires of Josephine and stops visiting her. After a while Josephine notices celebratory processions in the direction of the castle. She inquires the reason for the celebrations and a passer-by tells her that Albert of Werdendorff is marrying Guimilda, the daughter of a neighbouring baron. Not believing the story, Josephine “partially disguising herself in a long mantle, and a thick white veil,” goes “at twilight to the castle” (20). Seeing the truth with her own eyes, Josephine returns to her cottage despondent and heartbroken. Soon Albert appears at her doorstep with food and drink to explain to her that it is his father’s wish

that he should marry Guimilda but that he will remain steadfast in his love for Josephine. He also expresses his intention of moving her to a better home that is more suitable and pleasant. Believing him again, Josephine drinks the wine Albert has brought and he returns to the castle promising that he will return at midnight to have her in his arms again. It turns out that Guimilda, having discovered that Albert has a mistress, has asked him to kill Josephine, vowing that she will never “admit Lord Albert to her bed, till her horrific demand was complied with” (24), and his sudden return to Josephine is for the purpose of poisoning her. It is clear that Guimilda’s main motive is jealousy, but Wilkinson asserts that she is after all “a fiend in female form” (24). Hours pass and Albert is “clouded with horror” (24) and he keeps repeating the last promise made to Josephine — that he will embrace her by midnight. At midnight a huge storm with roaring thunder starts and lightning breaks the walls of the hall where the wedding reception is held. The ghost of Josephine appears and demands from Albert the midnight embrace he has promised her. She pulls him towards her and gives him the kiss that kills him. The thunder continues to roar and the castle collapses in ruins. Guimilda manages to escape and seeks refuge in a convent in which she spends the rest of her life in repentance. Many years later, on the anniversary of the wedding night the whole scene is re-enacted by the ghosts of the three characters. Wilkinson concludes the narrative by saying:

From the preceding tale we may extract this moral, that, had the lovely maiden preserved her virtue from the snares of a seducer, she had still been happy: or even had she repulsed him, as she ought, when conscious of his being married to Guimilda, she had escaped the death to which her haughty rival decreed her. Thus virtue is a female’s protector. (29)

It is significant that Wilkinson centres her didactic point on the female protagonist, the victim in the story, and says nothing at this point about the two other central characters, Albert and Guimilda, who are equally implicated in bringing about Josephine's destruction. It is true that both Albert and Guimilda are punished in the end, but Wilkinson makes it clear in her narrative that Albert and Guimilda come from a higher social class and are initially more corrupt, he is "prone to deceit" (13) and she is "a fiend in female form" (24), so kindness to the lower orders and high ethical codes are not expected from them. This social division that is based on wealth and class should have alerted Josephine to the impossibility of her match and this explains Wilkinson's insistence on Josephine's responsibility for her own downfall. Wilkinson contends that because Josephine has succumbed to seduction twice, ignoring occasional feelings of guilt and failing to recognise the social gap that separates her from Albert, she has effectively invited her destruction. Wilkinson also links the success of Albert's seduction to his wealth and rank, "superior rank, fortune, and connections", implying that Josephine's motives could partly have derived from her interest in financial gain, especially since, when Albert returns to her after his marriage, she agrees to remain his mistress in exchange for a better dwelling. Clearly, the tragedy in "Albert of Werdendorff" is primarily the result of the prejudices of wealth and class and the moral laxity of the female protagonist.

"The Tragical History of Jane Arnold"

"The Tragical History of Jane Arnold Commonly Called Crazy Jane and Mr. Henry Percival, Giving an Account of their Birth, Parentage, Courtship, and Melancholy End" is one of Wilkinson's most successful and frequently published

chapbooks. According to the subtitle, the chapbook is based on facts and it is about Jane Arnold who is “This unfortunate beauty, whose wanderings of imagination through an ill-fated attachment, had gained her the appellation of *Crazy Jane*” (3), but it is actually based on a very popular ballad published by Matthew Lewis in 1812. On the origin of the story and its appropriation by different writers, Macdonald writes:

On one of his trips to Inveraray, according to Baron-Wilson, Lewis and Campbell, out on a walk, met an insane young woman, who inspired Lewis to write his poem “Crazy Jane,” which he included in his 1812 *Poems*. Ole Munch-Pederson has established the astonishing popularity of this poem: it was republished in broadsides and song chapbooks for about seventy-five years; it inspired two sequels (“The Death of Crazy Jane” and “The Ghost of Crazy Jane”), a ballet, a melodrama by Charles A. Somerset, and a fashion in hats. A chapbook by Sarah Wilkinson, purporting to give the facts behind the poem, went through at least ten editions. The poem seems to have been especially popular in Ireland; Munch-Pederson considers it possible that Yeats drew on this tradition for his cycle of Crazy Jane poems, but the evidence is inconclusive.

(224)

The chapbook version tells the story of Jane, the daughter of a farmer named Arnold and his wife Margaret. Jane has three siblings: Lubin, Lucy and Annette. Nearby lives Perceval, a retired woollen draper, in a small neat mansion in Rosewood with his only daughter, Rosetta. Rosetta and Jane are best friends. They often talk about Henry, Rosetta's brother, who works as a head clerk for an affluent distant relative and refuses to join his father and sister in the country. One morning, Rosetta shows Jane a letter

from Henry in which he announces that he will visit them the following Monday. His employer has decided to leave for the West Indies, and because Henry does not wish to join him there, he decides to return to Rosewood until he works out a new settlement for himself. On her way to Rosewood on the following Monday, Jane meets a young gentleman who asks directions to Perceval's house. It appears to be Henry himself, and the two young people head together to Rosewood. Everybody is excited in Rosewood about Henry's return, and soon festivities begin. Lubin dances with Rosetta, while Henry dances with Jane. Later at night, Henry volunteers to escort Jane and her brother safely home. There he meets their parents who cordially invite him to visit them in their farm, an invitation that Henry accepts most willingly. Soon Henry and Jane become very attached to one another, but Henry has no intention of marrying her because he is hoping for a more advantageous marriage. Wilkinson explains that Henry's attachment to Jane, "instead of inspiring him with the wish of calling her his own by indissoluble ties, and sharing with her the inestimable blessing of domestic felicity" has "only prompted him to proceed in a base design he had formed against her honour" (7); she explains that he intends:

Never to marry unless he could meet some woman with an independent fortune in her own hands [...] The beauty of the interesting Jane, and the dispositions of herself and family, who virtuous and benevolent in themselves, suspected no guile in others, appeared to this monster of deceit, as a fair opportunity of accomplishing his designs [and], by luring her from a peaceful home. (8)

Henry tells Jane that his father would never consent to their marriage because Jane has no income or fortune. This of course is far from the truth, for Perceval has always loved

Jane and her family, and would give his consent most readily if his son asked. On the basis of this lie, Henry urges Jane to meet him secretly at night in the grove. Wilkinson describes the affair in a didactic tone that warns women in general about the consequences of surrendering to their affections, departing, therefore, from the proper behaviour that is expected of them:

For some months did the dear delusion last, and the breast of Jane was the abode of love, innocence and hope, till one fatal hour when the guardian angel of virtue slept, and the demon of vice reigned triumphant, the ill-fated Jane surrendered her virtue to the importunities of the deceitful Henry, and bade adieu to peace for ever — till she sunk to the narrow confines of the grave. — Ah! Ye fair daughters of earth! Nature's choicest work, did you rightly consider the pre-eminence of virtue, and your own conscious dignity, how few, if any, would depart from the path pointed out by rectitude, religion, and honour! (8-9)

Henry returns to London after promising Jane that he will try to find a job and a suitable house so that they can marry. Soon Rosetta receives an advantageous proposal which prompts Lubin to ask for her hand from Perceval. Perceval, who cares for the happiness of his daughter more than the wealth she could acquire through marriage, asks Rosetta to make her choice, and she decides to marry Lubin whom she loves deeply. Nuptials are announced and the wedding date is set. The two families agree that Rosetta is to live with Lubin in the farm, and Lucy will take care of the domestic matters for Perceval. Upon seeing these changes, Jane grows miserable because of her uncertain affair with Henry. At the wedding, she seeks the opportunity to discuss the matter with Henry and to convince him that his fears of his father's objection are no longer substantiable in the

light of the new match. Jane's argument renders Henry speechless and he does his best to comfort her. Her worries subside and they agree to meet the next day. At night Jane is troubled by a disturbing nightmare. In the nightmare, she sees Henry standing on the deck of a ship, suffering from a self-inflicted wound. She flies towards him and a violent storm erupts. Henry dies in her arms as the ship is engulfed by the waves. She wakes up horrified and fatigued, and remains in bed all day. In the evening she gets up to meet Henry. In the grove, Henry tells her that he has received a letter from London informing him of a promising job offer which he intends to accept in order to be independent of his father and thus be able to marry her. He says their marriage will hopefully take place in three weeks if all turns out well. As it turns out, she is never to see him again. Time passes and Jane grows pale and ill, and more disturbing news follows in a letter from Henry addressed to his father. He has left for the West Indies to join his former employer. As a result of the distressing news, Jane suffers a miscarriage that makes her parents aware of the scandal:

Violent hysterics seized on her fragile form: an abortion succeeded. In frantic accents she confessed her guilt. What were the feelings of Arnold and his aged Margareta! They tore their hair, and wept with bitterness of soul. But they did not upbraid their hapless daughter. (14)

Jane remains ill in bed and her sister-in-law Rosetta takes care of her every night. One day, Rosetta wakes to find the bed empty and with Lubin begins a search for Jane. They find her in the grove lying on the ground moaning and lamenting her loss. They try to calm her down, but discover that Jane cannot comprehend their attempts to conciliate her for she has gone mad:

Alas! Their gentle cares were vain, Reason had fled her brain; a melancholy despondence reigned there; and an oblivion of every transaction but the source of her own irremediable woes. In vain were the physicians, and all their medical attendants summoned; human skill was vain. Jane was doomed to linger out her existence a hapless maniac. She was perfectly harmless and tractable; and for whole days would wander in those places where she had been used to walk with Henry. She would sing the most plaintive airs, and converse with those who addressed her about him. From the villagers she gained the appellation of Crazy Jane; and this title soon became familiar to her own ears. (15)

Jane remains in this mental state for two years, until one day, she unexpectedly joins her family at breakfast. After the meal she hugs her mother and Rosetta. The family is excited at this marked improvement and prays for a complete recovery. Once everyone has gone off to their daily chores Jane leaves the house. In the evening they notice her absence and Lubin goes to the grove, hoping to find her there, but soon a group of villagers comes carrying Jane's body. In her hand, they find a locket containing Henry's hair. Jane's death distresses her family and even Henry's father, Perceval, who is appalled by Henry's behaviour and writes him repeatedly urging him to come back. Perceval explains to Jane's family that he has no objections at all to her marrying Henry and that, had Henry asked for his consent, he would have given it most readily.

A few days later, the funeral takes place and the whole village is in mourning. Wilkinson describes the procession and explains how Jane's story has become to the villagers a lesson to be given to both young men and women who are driven irrationally by their desires:

The deep-tolling knell was accompanied by sighs and heart-felt groans; while the aged parents, as the funeral passed their doors, bid their sons beware of the fatal crime of seducing credulous innocence; and their daughters avoid the fate of broken-hearted Jane, by scorning the villain who would dare to make them a dishonourable proposal. (17)

The grave of “Crazy Jane” has the following epitaph:

Traveller, stop! Whoe'er thou art,
 Shed a tear ere thou depart;
 For here releas'd from care and pain,
 Lies love's sad victim, CRAZY JANE. (17-18)

A few weeks later, Jane's mother dies, followed by Perceval, who disinherits his son Henry and bestows his fortune on Rosetta and Jane's father, Arnold. To everyone's surprise, Henry returns to the village. He looks pale and ill, and it appears that the news of Jane and his father's deaths has distressed him immensely. He goes to Arnold's house and drops at Arnold's feet asking for forgiveness. Arnold forgives him, and Henry relates what has happened to him in the Indies.

In the Indies, Henry became successful and financially independent of his family's wealth, and this made him decide to estrange himself from his family. This explains why he never opened any of his father's letters. But in the end he felt guilty and feelings of remorse made him take a ship to England to marry Jane and set things right. On his journey home, a ghost resembling Jane visited him on deck and called his name “in awe-inspiring voice; he started and looked around; the figure stood at some distance from him. It was Jane! Again she repeated his name, and, with a heavy sigh,

vanished from his view!”(19). It is believed that the apparition appeared to him the very moment Jane died.

Henry is not concerned about losing his inheritance and declines Arnold’s and Lubin’s offers to give him some of the money. With the wealth he has accumulated in the Indies, Henry rents a cottage in Rosewood and lives the remainder of his life as a hermit. He is often seen wandering around Jane’s grave conversing with her ghost, until one day, he commits suicide over Jane’s grave, stabbing through his heart. He is declared a maniac by the Jury and is buried with Jane under the yew tree. As usual Wilkinson ends the chapbook with the following didactic note:

Behold the melancholy end of this once innocent happy pair! Who could have anticipated a sorrowful conclusion to the joyous and affected attachment formed at Rosewood? None. But this may principally ascribed to the ambitious views and depraved character of Henry; and partly to the fond credulity of the fair but unfortunate Jane. It is sincerely hoped, that all into whose hands this very interesting and affecting pamphlet may come, especially the youthful generation of both sexes, may take warning from the untimely and miserable fate of this unhappy couple and avoid the dangerous rocks on which they split; for assuredly the same causes will naturally lead to the same bad, or even worse ends.

(20)

One of the interesting aspects of this didactic note is that it does not place the blame chiefly on the girl, as Wilkinson usually tends to do in other chapbooks (blaming Josephine and Hermina for their downfalls). It does, however, reiterate some of the views on class divisions and economic ambition, and thus retains the position Wilkinson

usually takes in her chapbooks about poverty, marriage, and class mobility. Wilkinson explicitly criticizes Henry's reluctance to marry Jane and points to his ambition for an advantageous match as the cause of the tragedy. Wilkinson is also critical of Henry's motives in the affair, and while it is apparent that he is not as entirely evil as a gothic villain, his character is flawed by his ambitious dreams of financial betterment. What he shares with gothic villains, therefore, is his greed and his seduction of a woman he does not intend to marry. Jane is blamed mainly for a "fond credulity" that makes her misconstrue Henry's motives, thus misjudging the whole situation.

Clearly, Wilkinson is critical of the tendency to reduce marriage to a financial bargain in which the partners weigh their gains and losses, and this critical stance is not always directed at one sex, but rather at both men and women. In showing how her characters meet tragic ends because they seduce or are seduced as a result of their financial ambition, Wilkinson attempts to show that when class and money intervene in matters of the heart, crimes are committed, families are ruined, reputations are tarnished, and the fate of all involved is tragic: Henry seduces Jane instead of marrying her because he wants to marry to better himself and he ends up committing suicide out of remorse, Albert seduces Josephine and marries Guimilda who shares his social and economic standing and he meets his death. As for Hermina, in her attempt to find a wealthy and powerful husband she is seduced, incarcerated, and her children starve. Although these fictions are wrapped in gothic trappings, medieval settings and supernatural occurrences, what they represent in the real world are modern moral concerns in a developing capitalist world. They show how gender relations are menaced because of the society's preoccupation with social mobility and financial gain.

In examining the relationship between the Gothic and didacticism through the work of one of the early 19th century's most prolific writers, Sarah Wilkinson, it becomes apparent that Wilkinson's work is representative of the ways in which a number of women writers of this period manipulated didactic strategies and gothic conventions to assert and bolster conservative conventional views of gender roles. This didacticism clearly does not further feminist aims, as in Wollstonecraft's work for instance, aims such as the right to have an adequate education that might prepare women for a useful and lucrative activity, rather it focuses on instructing poor women how to fend off sexual seduction which might increase both financial and social sufferings. In reading Wilkinson's work in relation to chap literature and the Gothic, it becomes evident that Wilkinson appropriates and revises the Gothic to tap into the subjects of women's education, the politics of class, and conservative views of gender roles. Wilkinson's chapbooks enact the same discursive strategies as More's didactic texts in their appropriation of conservative discourses on gender. In this chapter I have situated Wilkinson's didactic gothic in relation to the didactic texts and traditions that shaped popular literature, arguing that Wilkinson appropriates these texts in order to bolster a conservative approach to gender roles. The very different way in which Wilkinson reworks these traditions, manifests a new kind of the Gothic, and this further testifies to the different ways in which the Gothic has been used.

CHAPTER 5:

The Gothic on the “Gothic”: Joanna Baillie’s *Orra*

The woman is “madness” to the extent that she is other, different from man. (Felman 128)

Ghost stories had a good deal to do in arousing my imagination, which my Sister and I delighted in and received from servants [...] We paid dearly, however, for this fearful delight; for we could not be left in the dark alone without dread, nor even go upstairs alone in the twilight; and there was a garret room in the house, where tradition said a man once hung himself, which we durst not enter alone even at mid-day. My Father and Mother were never aware of the state of our minds in this respect, for we durst not acknowledge it lest we be obliged to be alone in the dark to get the better of our timidity.

(Baillie, “Recollections of Joanna Baillie” 96)

Imagination may carry one in various and unusual directions. But when this imagination is excited by fear, the consequences — as the epigraph from Joanna Baillie’s “Recollections” illustrates — may be disturbing, even overwhelming. This interesting passage indicates not only the writer’s earliest encounters with and budding interest in ghost stories, the Gothic and the eerie, but it also highlights the role of imagination in fulfilling this pleasure — or “fearful delight” as Baillie calls it — and the consequences of attempting to fulfil this pleasure, such as unjustified or irrational fears:

“we durst not enter alone even at mid-day” (96). We may assume that Joanna Baillie overcame her childhood fears since she is able to write amusingly about them, but it is perhaps more than a coincidence that she grew to become a dramatist who, not only wrote gothic poems and plays that explored the eerie and the uncanny, but also had a particular interest in the passion of fear, its relationship to mental stability, and how it is understood in terms of gender. Her play *Orra* centres on the utilization of gothic mechanisms, fear of the supernatural, and madness in an oppressed woman. Like Baillie and her sister, Orra, the gothic heroine, enjoys experiencing the terror excited by ghost stories, a weakness that is manipulated by other male characters who aim to usurp her body and property by marriage. The fierce battle over Orra has disastrous consequences: towards the end of the play, Orra is pressured to marry her cousin, incarcerated in a gothic castle to extract her consent, and threatened by another suitor’s sexual advances. When her true rescuer appears, masquerading benignly but disastrously as a ghost haunting the castle, Orra is thrown into a state of complete terror that results in the loss of her sanity.

The aim of this chapter is to read Joanna Baillie’s *Orra* paying close attention to the relationship of madness to fear, to the interrogation of gender issues, to literary representation and the Gothic. Since the supernatural is used by male characters both to threaten and to rescue Orra, the play carries a subtext critical of the gothic conventions being used. To highlight this aspect of the play I will utilize Elizabeth Fay’s definition of the “radical critique Gothic” (112) to inform my reading. Fay defines the “radical critique Gothic” as a combination of the “inner explorations of the abject with the political implications of social critique” (117) and cites Wollstonecraft’s *Maria or, The Wrongs of Woman* and Baillie’s *Witchcraft* as examples of texts that read the Gothic

critically in order to probe the cultural conceptions it instates and to explore the psychological drama it uncovers. I consider the “radical critique Gothic” a useful term that provides the necessary theoretical framework through which the psychological exploration of madness and the proto-feminist critique of oppressive gender ideology in *Orra* can be highlighted. Baillie presents a highly sophisticated view of madness that traces its origin to both extrinsic/ social and intrinsic/ psychological factors. Additionally, she targets in her critique the cultural and social pressures imposed on single women to marry, as an intrusive and potentially brutal act with inevitably detrimental outcomes. To explain fully the kind of pressures Baillie’s heroine is subjected to I will resort to Adrienne Rich’s definition of “compulsory heterosexuality”, a concept that reveals the different mechanisms played by Western cultures to enforce fixed gender roles on women.

Following the original plan, outlined in her “Introductory Discourse”, in which each play centres on the contours and effects of a powerful passion, Baillie states in her preface to *A Series of Plays* (1812) that the central passion in *Orra* is fear. This particular passion poses a challenge since, as Baillie notes, it “has been supposed to be less adapted to dramatic purposes” (“To the Reader” 37), since it is difficult to make the audience sympathize with a protagonist entirely driven by such an unattractive passion. Still Baillie proceeds with her plan insisting that fear is “a universal passion (for our very admiration of Courage rests upon this idea), is capable of being made in the tragic drama, as it is often is in real life, very interesting and consequently not abject” (371). Then Baillie explains her decision to present to her readers two tragedies on the passion of fear with their protagonists representing both sexes. She remarks that she was “unwilling to appropriate this passion in a serious form to my own sex entirely” (371),

thus revealing her progressive and proto-feminist view on common gender stereotypes that tend to make fearfulness a feminine characteristic. Baillie contends that fear is a universal passion and that everyone, man and woman, is subject to its tremors and trepidations if circumstances arise to provoke it. To support her claim, Baillie does two things.

First, she imagines a modern man who, despite holding firm beliefs that deny the existence of supernatural occurrences, may still be susceptible to the effects of superstitious fear:

A brave and wise man of the 19th century, were he lodged for the night in a lone apartment where murder has been committed, would not so easily believe, as a brave and wise man of the 14th century, that the restless spirit from its grave might stalk round his bed and open his curtains in the stillness of midnight: but should circumstances arise to impress him with such a belief, he would feel the emotions of Fear as intensely, though firmly persuaded that such beings have no power to injure him.
(370)

In her example, Baillie admits that a modern man may not succumb to superstitious fear as easily as a “man of the fourteenth century”; however, this fear can be provoked in a man from the nineteenth century by concomitant circumstances, indicating that even an enlightened mind is not exempt from superstitious fear. This example equates a nineteenth-century man with Orra and thus indicates that fear is a passion that is extrinsic to one’s sex and is mainly triggered by an eerie atmosphere. Then, Baillie goes on to state emphatically that a man who is not afraid of communicating with what he believes to be a ghost should be regarded as an instance of “mental monstrosity” (371).

This point is a reiteration of a position Baillie had previously made in her “Introductory Discourse”, in which she stated that

Amongst the many trials to which the human mind is subjected, that of holding intercourse, real or imaginary, with the world of spirits: of finding itself alone with a being terrific and awful, whose nature and power are unknown, has been justly considered as one of the most severe. The workings of nature in this situation, we all know, have ever been the object of our most eager enquiry. No man wishes to see the Ghost himself, which would certainly procure him the best information on the subject, but every man wishes to see one who believes that he sees it, in all the agitation and wildness of that species of terror. To gratify this curiosity how many people have dressed up hideous apparitions to frighten the timid and superstitious! and [*sic*] have done it at the risk of destroying their happiness or understanding for ever. For the instances of intellect being destroyed by this kind of trial are more numerous, perhaps, in proportion to the few who have undergone it, than by any other. (3)

Thus, the utilization of ghosts and supernatural appearances serves as a testing ground for the passion of fear. Baillie suggests that even rational beings who do not believe in the existence of ghosts are susceptible under certain circumstances, and therefore impressionable people, like Orra, are doubly susceptible. Delight in superstition, although seemingly innocent in itself, makes one an easy target, as Orra becomes, for others who attempt to probe this weakness.

Second, Baillie provides a sister play to *Orra* — *The Dream* — in which a male protagonist is engulfed by fears of death. The true implication of this move can only be understood in view of one of the remarks Baillie has made in the “Introductory Discourse” regarding the literary representation of women in her work:

I believe there is no man that ever lived, who has behaved in a certain manner, on a certain occasion, who has not had amongst women some corresponding spirit, who on the like occasion, and every way similarly circumstanced, would have behaved in the like manner. With some degree of softening and refinement, each class of the tragic heroes I have mentioned has its corresponding one amongst the heroines. (9)

With a firm belief that no passion is confined to one sex to the exclusion of the other, Baillie expresses a proto-feminist sentiment that does not view the nature of men and women from an essentialist viewpoint. These examples illustrate Baillie’s progressive views and illuminate how they are translated into her drama on fear that deals with coercing women into marriage, and therefore, into fixed gender roles.

Orra revolves around the superstitious fear of a single wealthy heroine, Orra, whose rejection of the marriage proposals made to her, prompts her suitors to resort to extreme plans and even coercion to extract her consent. Her uncle Hughobert, the Count of Aldenberg, wishes her to marry his son, Glottenbal, in order to keep her fortune in the family. Meanwhile, Rudigere, a knight and a bastard of a branch of Aldenberg, wishes to marry her to legitimize his status. Theobald, an impoverished nobleman, is another suitor. Theobald, although he loves Orra sincerely, is hesitant about making his offer because of his poor financial standing and proposes to be her defending knight instead. Rudigere devises a plan with Hughobert to extract Orra’s consent to marry

Glottenbal. Learning from Cathrina, a lady in waiting, of Orra's unreasonable superstitious fears, Rudigere proposes having Orra sent to a distant gothic castle where the eerie atmosphere, coupled with her innate susceptibility to ghost stories, will impress her with fear and make her agree to the match just to escape the place. Rudigere is actually devising this plan for ulterior motives of his own — he wants to move Orra away from the care of her uncle in order to make advances to her. To execute the plan, Hughobert issues an ultimatum requesting Orra's immediate consent to marry Glottenbal or she will face banishment; meanwhile, she is being advised by Urston, the priest, to feign consent just to escape dire consequences. Orra is emphatic, stubborn, and resolute about her refusal. So Hughobert sends her immediately to a distant castle in a forest frequented by banditti with Rudigere as her escort. In the castle, Cathrina tells Orra the story of an avenging ghost who seeks the destruction of the Aldenbergs; Rudigere makes his advances; and Theobald attempts to save Orra by masquerading as the ghost who frequents the castle. All these circumstances and Orra's acute superstitious fear result in her descent into madness. Rudigere and Glottenbal kill each other in combat and all Theobald's attempts to restore Orra to her right mind fail. The destruction of the Aldenbergs as predicted by the curse is realized, but not because of the anticipated ghost, whose appearance has a rational explanation, but because of their drives, interests and inner weaknesses.

Orra stands out as one of Baillie's most remarkable and distinct plays and a number of scholarly assessments have explored its implications regarding the Gothic, and how it expresses Baillie's views on gender. In one of the earliest and foundational studies of gothic drama, *Gothic Drama from Walpole to Shelley*, Evans singles out *Orra* in his discussion of Baillie's contribution to this dramatic genre. Evans reads *Orra* as a

play that is “typical of the author’s relation to Gothic drama and outstanding among her tragedies for its exploitation of Gothic elements and its achievement of Gothic atmosphere” (208). Evans clearly sees the self-reflexive aspect of the play’s treatment of the Gothic, remarking that “Orra seems at once a typical Gothic heroine and a deliberate analysis of the type” (208). In a more recent take on the play’s commentary on the Gothic, Diane Hoeveler reads the play as a bleak rereading of the gothic narrative: “*Orra* is not an optimistic female Gothic. It concludes as a gender and class struggle tragedy, with a society in shambles and a young nubile woman staring blankly into the stinking tomb of life” (“Joanna Baillie and the Gothic Body” 125). Hoeveler goes further to emphasize that the play can be read as a parody of the Radcliffean gothic novel that always contains a concomitant plot of a love story, which unfolds happily in the end: “Radcliffe would not, nay could not, have written a piece as starkly bleak and angry as *Orra*, a work that finally reads as a parody of Radcliffe’s naïve optimism” (126). In her biography of Joanna Baillie, Judith Slagle comments on Baillie’s concern about gender equality in marriage: “*Orra* focuses on the emotional trepidations of marriage and reinforces her [Baillie’s] consistent message that gender equality seldom exists in such contract” (146). Most recently, William D. Brewer has commented in a conference paper on how the play manifests the process by which a dystopian masculine world replaces Orra’s utopian world (“The Liberating and Debilitating Imagination in Joanna Baillie’s *Orra* and *The Dream*”). All these critical studies of the play underscore the highly sophisticated way in which Baillie has dealt with gothic conventions and the stereotypical gender types these conventions seem to convey and perpetuate. In picking up this discussion thread on *Orra*, my aim is to illustrate how she appropriates these conventions in order to rewrite the gothic narrative, to critique the

ideological assumptions surrounding gender roles, and to present a psychologically realistic depiction of madness.

Compulsory Heterosexuality in *Orra*

Rich explores the different ways in which male power exerts what she terms “compulsory heterosexuality” on women. To Rich, compulsory heterosexuality is both a phenomenon and an ideology, and its methods, by which “male power is manifested and maintained”, (349) come in different forms, and include: denying women their individual sexuality whether by psychological intimidation or physical mutilation, forcing male sexuality on them whether by rape, incarceration, or forced marriage, and depriving them of all the things that could empower them or enrich their lives such as their children, freedom, creativity, and education (348-349).

Rich argues that one way of combating this system of compulsory heterosexuality that sanctions male tyranny is to embrace the “lesbian continuum”. Rich warns that the lesbian continuum is not to be defined strictly by sexual orientation; she uses it as a broad term that covers all feminine experience under the duress of compulsory heterosexuality. To make her point more clearly, Rich differentiates between the lesbian continuum and what she calls lesbian experience. Lesbian experience is defined as “the fact of the historical existence of lesbians throughout history” (349). In contrast, the lesbian continuum is a concept that encompasses a wider shared experience among women: subjection under and resistance to male domination. Rich defines the lesbian continuum as: “a range — through each woman’s life and throughout history — of women-identified experience, not simply the fact a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman” (349).

This concept of lesbian continuum extends, therefore, beyond sexual definition to include female friendship, camaraderie, and bonding. It also identifies male authority as a tyrannical force that has dominated women throughout history, and that women have been subjugated by men because of their sex and regardless of their sexual preference. Rich acknowledges that female homosexuality has been oppressed and repressed throughout history, but this oppression should not be viewed separately from the general oppression of women. In view of this heterosexual oppression, therefore, all women exist in a lesbian continuum.

Rich singles out marriage resistance as one of the struggles with which all women can identify since it is an experience many women from different periods, backgrounds and sexualities have shared. In exploring the lives of exceptional women, such as Emily Dickinson, who chose not to marry, and to commit themselves rather to their work and selfhood, women can come to a full understanding of female identity, history and psychology, and may in addition better comprehend the nature of the tyranny that perceives women's reluctance to commit to a heterosexual relationship as "deviant, as pathological, or as emotionally and sexually deprived" (350).

Western societies do not only presuppose but impose the heterosexual system as the ultimate refuge and satisfaction for women. It expects "that women *need* men as social and economic protectors, for adult sexuality, and for psychological completion" (sic 353), and women who voluntarily choose not to comply with this system, for one reason or another, are "condemned to an even more devastating outsiderhood than their outsiderhood as women" (353).

Rich's thoughts on compulsory heterosexuality are useful in understanding the predicament of Orra. One way of reading the pressure being exerted on Orra to marry is

to see it as an instance of compulsory heterosexuality at work. Orra does not favour any of her suitors and does not express any wish or desire to marry at any given moment in the play, yet the social context in which she lives, and the demands of the class she belongs to, expect her to submit to such heterosexual norms. The incarceration of Orra, the rebuke she receives and all the attempts being made to seize her are further manifestations of compulsory heterosexuality that aims to control her and sustain male power over her body and property. The repercussions of Orra's defiant resistance to marrying her cousin also show how women can be condemned as outsiders once they resist heterosexual customs.

The pressure to force Orra to marry begins by the exploitation of her reaction to ghost stories. Although Orra is afraid of ghosts, she enjoys being terrified by ghost stories and tales of horror narrated by her lady-in-waiting. She finds ghost stories too compelling to resist, and on more than one occasion, she implores her lady-in-waiting to nourish her craving for more, justifying her love for a blood-curdling story by saying that "there is a pleasure in it" (2.1.168). She further explains her reactions to a horror story:

Yea, when the cold blood shoots through every vein:

When every pore upon my shrunken skin

A knotted knoll becomes, and to mine ears

Strange inward sounds awake, and to mine eyes

Rush stranger tears, there is a joy in fear. (2.1.170-174)

Orra finds these stories irresistible because of the way they unleash certain feelings, reactions, and sensations that do not appear under ordinary circumstances. Her reference to 'Strange inward sounds' betrays the inward psychological workings that come to the

surface when she hears these stories. Orra's reaction to the Gothic is not very much different from that of many readers of the Gothic, fictional like Catherine Morland or real like Joanna Baillie in her childhood. It is a reading practice characterized by consumption, craving, ecstasy, and most prominently fear.

At the beginning of the play, Rudigere, seeks confirmation from Cathrina, Orra's lady attendant that Orra asks for ghost stories:

Has Orra oft of late requested thee
 To tell her stories of the restless dead;
 Of spectres rising at the midnight watch
 By the lone trav'ler's bed? (1.2.29-32)

Cathrina initially refuses to give any information, but on being threatened by Rudigere with having an unnamed indiscretion exposed, she seems to have given him an affirmative answer offstage since we see him in the next scene with Hughobert, Orra's uncle and guardian, planning to extract Orra's consent to marry Glottenbal by playing on her fear of the supernatural:

Rud. I know it well; and therefore powerful means,
 And of quick operation, must be sought.

Hugh. Speak plainly to me.

Rud. I've watch'd her long.
 I've seen her cheek, flush'd with the rosy glow
 Of jocund spirits, deadly pale become
 At tale of nightly sprite or apparition,
 Such as all hear, 'tis true, with greedy ears,
 Saying, "Saints save us!" but forget as quickly.

I've marked her long; she has with all her shrewdness
 And playful merriment, a gloomy fancy,
 That broods within itself on fearful things.

Hugh. And what doth this avail us?

Rud. Hear me out.

Your ancient castle in the Suabian forest
 Hath, as too well you know, belonging to it,
 Or false or true, frightful reports. There hold her
 Strictly confin'd in sombre banishment;
 And doubt not but she will, ere long, full gladly
 Her freedom purchase at the price you name. (1.3.145-162)

Rudigere here urges Hughobert to take advantage of Orra's inherent weakness — her “gloomy fancy/ That broods within itself on fearful things” — by banishing her to a castle that is full of hauntings and “frightful reports”, thus imposing on her a gothic atmosphere that will trigger her dark imagination to the extent that she will be willing to forfeit her independence in order to be freed from her gothic prison. Rudigere further warns that if Hughobert does not act quickly then Orra might consider marrying Theobald, an impoverished Count whom, Rudigere assumes, Orra favours. Hughobert reluctantly agrees to this plan which he describes as “good, but cruel” (1.3.173) in order to secure to his family the lands Orra has inherited, thus preventing them falling into the hands of Theobald, the “poor and paltry Count” (1.3.168). This scene offers a preview of the gothic nightmare that is being prepared for Orra to appropriate her property, curtail her independence and thwart any personal marriage choices she might make.

When Orra refuses to marry her cousin, incurring Hughobert's wrath, she is escorted by Rudigere to Brunier castle, where he makes another proposal of marriage hoping thus to gain the legitimacy which would enable him to "break forth/ Like the unclouded sun, by all acknowledged/ As ranking with the highest in the land" (3.2.126-127). Orra finds herself, then, in a predicament that can only be resolved if she agrees to marry. Her consent to marriage would save her, and her estate, from this fierce strife coming from two branches of the family — her cousin Glottenbal, the legitimate Aldenberg, and Rudigere, the illegitimate Aldenberg. Both suitors can provide her with the protection she needs, but Orra's independent spirit prevents her from making a decision, or even being forced into one. Nor does Orra seem to wish to settle with Theobald who has sworn to be her defender. Orra has chosen not to marry and is punished for it by being placed in an eerie atmosphere. And the plan seems to be working since, left alone, Orra cries in fear that she so dreads spirits from the tomb that "I would close couch me to my deadliest foe/Rather than for a moment bear alone/The horrors of the sight" (3.2.150-152).

Typically, when a gothic heroine is beset by the strategies of the gothic villain, whether the unwelcome advances of a lover or the economic pressures of a patriarchal figure she has recourse to various methods of resistance: escaping through subterranean passages, fainting and seeking shelter in a religious establishment. Once the ordeal is over, the gothic heroine is reunited with her hero. But the narrative takes a different course in *Orra* mainly because of the character of its heroine. Orra fiercely prefers independence to the extent of rejecting marriage altogether, and her defiance prompts three men to perform the role of the gothic villain in an attempt to stop her: her uncle banishes her, Glottenbal imposes himself in marriage and Rudigere recommends

transporting Orra to a haunted castle. Even Theobald in his attempt to rescue her resorts to gothic conventions by masquerading as a ghost. The result of these extreme positions proves to be destructive to all: Orra becomes mad, and Glottenbal and Rudigere are killed, bringing their familial line to an end. This play illustrates how the extreme insistence on conventional gender roles may have appalling consequences.

Orra's resistance to marriage implies a rejection, and therefore, a subversion of, the patriarchal/ heterosexual ideology that defines femininity by total and passive submission to its tenets and customs. In voluntarily choosing not to marry, Orra places herself outside this orthodox pattern. But this rejection and subversion of heterosexual norms comes with a heavy price — Orra is pressured, persecuted, forcibly removed from her home and incarcerated in a gothic castle by other male characters who want her to conform to strict definitions of gender that perceive femininity in humility and submission. As an heiress, Orra is expected to marry and to hand over both her body and her property to a man who is to act as her legal guardian and representative. What is interesting though about this heterosexual pressure is that as it increases in severity and force, Orra becomes more determined not to succumb. When the rescue scene takes place, culminating in Theobald's masquerade as a ghost haunting the castle, Orra turns mad.

The lesbian continuum as defined by Rich is also manifested in several ways through Orra's experience. Her rejection of marriage aligns her with many women who have committed a similar act of resistance to compulsory heterosexuality. Her dream of a feminine polity, an estate that is ruled and governed according to her terms, is an expression of female independence unhindered by male power. The reaction of Eleanora to the treatment Orra receives also underlies a sense of female camaraderie among

female characters in the play. Eleanora stands against the authority of her husband and the interests of her son to support Orra in defiance of the general male tyranny she is confronted with. Although her entreaties are ineffectual, it is obvious that she has decided to fight on Orra's front.

Act two opens with a scene which characterises Orra's idealistic dreams of social harmony: her desires are at the least impractical, if not downright utopian. In this scene Orra meets Theobold and his friend Hartman. Theobold is secretly in love with Orra but finds it difficult to express this love because of his penurious state. Orra first laments her state as a woman who must surrender all her property upon marriage to her husband, "That poor and good-for-nothing, helpless being./ Woman yclept, I must consign myself/ With all my lands and rights into the hands/ Of some proud man"(2.1. 1-7), and then she talks about her reformist agenda to improve the low conditions of her peasants (2.1.25). Her ultimate dream is to see an end to all misery and strife:

all feuds, all strife forbear,

All military rivalship, all lust

Of added power, and live in steady quietness,

A mild and fost'ring lord. Know you of one

That would so share my task? (2.1.51-55)

Theobold points out the impossibility of such a dream since by nature, men are driven by lust for arms:

No;

None such exist: we are all fierce, contentious,

Restless and proud, and prone to vengeful feuds;

The very distant sound of war excites us,

Like the curb'd courser list'ning to the chase,

Who paws, and frets, and bites the rein. (2.1.60-65)

Orra asks if any man is fit to be her partner in a philanthropic enterprise. Theobald says that men are inclined to fight and thus her dream of an ideal state with no strife does not guarantee ultimate peace. Being aware of the precarious state Orra is putting herself in, Theobald offers to be her champion and protector. Orra accepts and expresses her wish to be viewed with Theobald as “two co-burghers” (2.1.88), that is, as equal partners with equal power and authority. Orra does not seem to particularly favour Theobald here, or explicitly state her love for him, and she is clearly expressing an independent spirit that is not common among women. Her ideals and ambitions do not echo the typical aspirations associated with women, aspirations which would normally include assuming the roles of wife and mother. She also shows a well-developed sense of the injustices caused by class discrimination. Her plans, however, of bettering the conditions of her farmers and of living in a pastoral world may equally mean that she is out of touch with reality.

In the next scene, Orra elaborates to her ladies in waiting on this utopian world, which is in stark contrast to the gothic horror being prepared for her by Rudigere and Hughobert. Wishing to live in “ancient splendour” (2.1.104), Orra meticulously outlines her ideal life in most vivid detail. Her castle will be a “merry house” (2.1.108) where friends, neighbours, travellers and even wandering knights can come to rest and enjoy the music and dancing. Preparing such a haven for wandering knights, for “worn-out men of arms” substitutes a polity of care for the existing polity of strife, and would optimistically put an end to future bloodshed. This “domestic court” (2.1.142), as Orra describes it, offers a cheerful and harmonious outlook on how things would be, if the

court were presided over by a woman. It is clear that this court will be established upon the notion of freedom and festivity enjoyed by all, and especially the women:

Orra. Solemn, and grave, and cloister'd, and demure

We shall not be. Will this content ye, damsels?

Alice. O passing well! 'twill be a pleasant life;

Free from all stern subjection; blithe and fanciful;

We'll do whate'er we list. (2.1.124-128)

Orra here depicts a court that has been domesticated and freed from the competition and rivalry that would normally dominate a worldly court. It is a feminized version of a medieval castle in contrast to the horrors of a gothic castle haunted by masculine desire and vengeance. While Orra amuses herself with these idealistic visions, Rudigere and Hughobert are perfecting the plan to have her transported to Brunier castle, where Rudigere plans to force or terrify her into submission. And meanwhile Cathrina, against the advice of the simple, pleasure-loving Alice, tells Orra the story of the ghost of the hunter-knight of Brunier castle. Count Hugo, an ancestor of the Aldenbergs, murdered a hunter-knight in one of the castle chambers on Michael's Eve, and ever since, the ghost of the hunter-knight is seen in neighbouring grounds. He sounds his horn three times, enters Brunier castle, and seeks the chamber in which the murder occurred to call upon his murderer or one of his descendants to free his spirit from torment by giving his corpse, which lies unblest in an unknown grave, a decent burial.

Orra responds to this story with a "sickly faintness" (2.1.213) and she is in this susceptible state when her confessor, Urston, comes to warn her about her uncle's intention. He advises her to affect consent for the time being, yet Orra is too proud to make pretence saying that she "with an unshorn crown/ Must hold the truth in plain

simplicity” (2.1.265-266). Although she unbends when Urston reproaches her, it is clear that Orra is only vulnerable to imagined threats: she is steadfast and aristocratically aware of her own worth when subject to material pressures. In the following scene Orra is called upon by her uncle to marry his son, Glottenbal, without further delay or face banishment. The constant presence of Theobald in his court has served as an incentive to his decision. The character that most strongly objects to Hughobert’s decision is his wife Eleanora.

This horrible blackmail of Orra seems to be Baillie’s way of articulating her protest against male pressure on women. Baillie implicitly joins the increasing contemporary call for women to be given legal, social and economic independence from male supervision and control. The precarious economic situation of women was being widely debated in and out of fiction. Threat to the welfare and happiness of young women is, of course, the bedrock of gothic fiction: it was repeatedly employed in gothic works, beginning with Walpole, whose *Castle of Otranto* tackles the intertwined issues of legitimacy, marriage, and coercion. Later, women writers picked up the Gothic introduced by Walpole to highlight the precarious situation of women in a society that does not allow their economic independence or respect their personal choices and imposes instead the familial institution as their designated place. Orra seems to be the consequence of Baillie’s own reflection on the discourses expounded by the Gothic, and she sets forth to test the strength of male oppression and female resistance in an extreme situation.

Orra is a young woman who ideally seeks independence, self-rule and the ability to use her power in a charitable manner. It is plausible to imagine that left in peace she might have been able to establish her little feminine polity. But she is oppressed by the

restrictive social demands that expect her to marry and allow her fortune to be used to support a male polity of power and competition. The play examines the extremes to which male power resorts in order to enforce strict cultural definitions of gender roles. It would appear that the extremes are indeed extreme, for Orra is literally driven mad. Of course, Baillie has the problem of also having to give Orra extreme sensibilities but she is careful to establish that Orra is not naturally gloomy: given freedom, uncomplicated support and love there is evidence that she would not have become distracted as she does. Thus, Baillie examines two forces that typically clash in the gothic: women seeking their independence and male figures — the gothic villains, both father figures and false lovers — who prevent her achieving autonomy by resorting to forms of persecution. Baillie pushes her scenario to the extreme in order to stress the heterosexual ideology that underlies the narrative practices of the Gothic.

An etymological explication of the name “Orra” will fully reveal Baillie’s emphasis on her heroine’s position as a single woman and the assumptions of a heterosexual culture made about such a position. As a name “Orra” has no historical precedents and few literary usages,¹ but in all likelihood Baillie derived the name from

1 Orra appeared first as a character name in James Cross’s drama entitled *Blackbeard, or the Captive Princess* in which the name was given to Blackbeard’s wife. The play was first performed at Royal Circus in 1798 and remained on stage for over one hundred nights. There is also a ballad published by Charles Dibdin in 1814 which features a woman with the name “Orra”,

I
 Orra no talk, no say fine word,
 No dress him, no look gay;
 Vay little sing you hear von bird,
 Him mate be gone away.

Orra tell true, she have no grace
 Of lady for him part,
 Dare beauty all be in him face,
 But Orra in him heart.

II.
 Orra do little, all she do;
 Forgive, for she no gall,
 To ev’ry ting she promise true,

the many connotations of the word “orra” in Scots.² *The Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue from the Twelfth Century to the End of the Seventeenth* lists under the entry “orra” the following meaning: “Unattached, without attachment or fixed employment. Most commonly of women: Not attached, either as a married woman is to her husband or a servant to her employer; disengaged” (Craigie 134). Picking up from the beginning of the eighteenth century, to cover Scottish words which have been in use since 1700, *The Scottish National Dictionary* defines “orra” as:

1. Spare, additional to what one requires, extra, supernumerary, odd, superfluous...
2. Occasional, coming at irregular or infrequent intervals, appearing here and there...
3. Miscellaneous, sundry, nondescript...
4. Strange, uncommon, peculiar, not normal...
5. Of persons or things: worthless, rejected, shabby, dirty, slatternly, low, course unseemly, disreputable. (Grant 6:492-494)

All these meanings combine to contribute something of what Baillie must have wished to suggest in christening her heroine “Orra”. Since Orra is a single woman who is subjected to different sources of male domination that incarcerate, persecute and abuse her to extract her consent to marriage, her name in a sense foreshadows the fate she will ultimately face. Additionally in several scenes in the play, Orra is represented as a

Love Yanko, and dat all.
But Orra, &c. (*The Songs of Charles Dibdin* 123)

2 Diane Hoeveler has traced the origin of the name Orra to Spanish meaning “gold”, and to the English “aura” meaning a halo (“Joanna Baillie and the Gothic Body”120). As a non-speaker of Spanish it is highly unlikely that Baillie picked the word from Spanish, but since Baillie is conversant in French she might have had in mind the French equivalent. As for ‘aura’, though its phonetic correlation may indicate a possible semantic link, there is no etymological evidence that confirms it.

heroine with excessive sensibility. The invocation of the abnormal, the strange, the eerie, and the weird is underscored by scenes and stage directions that exhibit Orra's erratic behaviour, and by other characters' reactions to it. Baillie has cleverly given her heroine a name that links the treatment she receives at the hands of her male relatives to her social standing as an unmarried woman, thus implying the social stigma that follows a woman who voluntarily chooses not to marry: she is to be considered an oddity and a rebel against heterosexual customs that expect her to marry. Thus, "Orra" is an aptly selected word that reflects the cultural connection between spinsterhood and abnormality and underpins the heterosexual norms that this connection assumes.

As the meaning of her name indicates, Orra is destined to remain single and an outsider. Her rejection of heterosexual demands is replaced by her madness which excludes her from heterosexual norms altogether since, mad women generally do not, and are not expected to, marry. One may argue that Orra's madness does not remove her from the position she has initially and voluntarily chosen — to remain single. By the end of the play, therefore, she continues to inhabit the liminal space she has already appeared to occupy at the beginning of the play. The play starts with her as an outsider, and ends with her as an outsider. She does not become mad as much as madness becomes her, in other words, to return to the epigraph that opens this chapter, "The woman is 'madness' to the extent that she is other, different from man" (Felman 128).

Madness in Drama

Alan Richardson argues that the Romantic poets wrote a new kind of drama that is different from what dominated the theatre at the time. Building on eighteenth-century studies of Shakespearean characters and the preoccupation of gothic drama with

eccentric mental states, Romantic poets have developed what Richardson calls “mental theatre” that is concerned with depicting the inner mental world to the reader. Alan Richardson writes:

The Gothic emphasis on extreme or morbid mental states and eighteenth-century studies of Shakespeare’s characters similarly helped establish a climate for Romantic drama without anticipating its dynamic portrayal of consciousness. Poets working directly from such trends, whether for the stage like Keats (in *Otho the Great*) or for the Closet like Joanna Baillie, failed to move beyond the stable and static characterizations of neoclassical drama. Baillie’s *De Monfort* [...] manifests the same sleepless agony as the protagonist of mental theatre, but we see only its symptoms, not its genesis or its implication in a social context; *De Monfort*’s unhappy consciousness is, as Baillie herself put it, “seemingly unprovoked by outward circumstances.” (5)

There are interesting points raised in this passage about Gothic drama, and in particular, about Baillie. While it is justifiable to say that *De Monfort* dramatizes the passion of hatred and presents its consequences without explicating its origin, a similar concession to *Orra* would overlook the sharper turn Joanna Baillie takes in her psychological treatment of the passion of fear. Although *Orra* appears too sensitive to fearful stories, she does not become mad till the end of the play, and then it is largely as a result of the terrors imposed by the social context she inhabits. Contrary to Burwick’s contention that “in *Orra* madness comes suddenly” (63), *Orra*’s madness is a gradual development that is both psychologically determined and socially conditioned. Some of Baillie’s tragic characters may be characterized in Richardson’s words as “stable and static” (5)

in the sense that they do not undergo a tangible psychological development as a result of their interaction with their social context, but Orra stands out as an exception to the rule.

Richardson's remarks, however, on the origins of Romantic drama in the rise of Shakespearean criticism and gothic drama's preoccupation with morbid mental states deserve more detailed treatment. The Gothic's interest in mental disorders should not be perceived in isolation from the rising interest in Shakespearean drama since both developments overlap in the works of Walpole, the writer of the first gothic novel and the first gothic drama. Walpole presents in *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Mysterious Mother* protagonists who are driven obsessively by desires that verge on the abnormal: Manfred seeks to marry the bride of his deceased son and the Countess of Narbonne commits incest with her son. When he initiates the new literary taste that tackles mental disturbances, which we now term Gothic, Walpole is partly inspired by his reading of Shakespeare.

Horace Walpole explains that his attempt to concoct a new kind of romance, which combines elements from the ancient romance and the modern novel, is influenced by his observation of the dramatic works of Shakespeare. In his second preface to *The Castle of Otranto*, Walpole defends Shakespeare against Voltaire's attacks, writing that Shakespeare is his model:

The very impatience which a reader feels while delayed by the coarse pleasantries of vulgar actors from arriving at the knowledge of the important catastrophe he expects, perhaps heightens, certainly proves, that he has been artfully interested in the depending event. But I had higher authority than my own opinion for this conduct. That great master of nature, Shakespeare, was the model I copied [...] Voltaire is a genius

— but not of Shakespeare’s magnitude [...] The result of all I have said, is to shelter my own daring under the cannon of the brightest genius this country, at least, has produced. (Preface to the Second Edition 10-13)

Walpole further insists that “My rule was nature” (10), arguing that Shakespeare the “great master of nature” has committed generic transgressions similar to his own — a practice which had been noted and criticized by Voltaire who thought that “this mixture of buffoonery and solemnity [...] intolerable” (11). Here Walpole adds a tint of national prejudice to justify literary innovations that transgress generic types: “to shelter my own daring under the cannon of the brightest genius this country, at least, has produced” (13).

Walpole makes another reference to Shakespeare in his other gothic work, *The Mysterious Mother*. In the prologue, Walpole repeats his repudiation of neoclassical French dramas in favour of the national and less rigid model he sees in Shakespeare’s work:

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 has 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! (Prologue 1-10)

Although Walpole claims to have followed nature and Shakespeare's representation of it in his play, the subject matter of *The Mysterious Mother* deals with an unnatural sexual act that reprises the Oedipal tragedy. The Countess of Narbonne lives reclusively in a castle with her ward Adeliza and refuses to receive her son whom she has not seen in sixteen years after the death of her husband. Her son, Edmund, contrives to enter the castle and makes Adeliza fall in love with him. They marry and when they inform the Countess of their marriage she reveals the secret that she has kept for sixteen years: upon receiving the news of the death of her husband, the Countess was consumed with grief. Since her son Edmund bore an uncanny resemblance to her late husband, she put herself in the place of a young woman who was supposed to bed him that night. Adeliza is the offspring of this incestuous liaison. Edmund, who is shocked to hear that he has slept with his mother and married his sister-daughter, draws his dagger but the Countess seizes it and stabs herself to death. The play ends with Edmund's decision to seek death on the battlefield and have Adeliza take the veil.

Not surprisingly, the play never reached the stage because its subject matter was too transgressive for the standards of eighteenth-century culture. But an interesting note is made by Walpole about how he viewed the representation of his gothic heroine, the Countess of Narbonne, a note that sheds some light on his views on the dramatization of madness. In a postscript to *The Mysterious Mother*, Walpole valorises earlier representations of madness by Shakespeare because they are more successful in arresting the audience's sympathies:

When madness has taken possession of a person, such character ceases to be fit for the stage, or at least should appear there but for a short time; it being the business of the theatre to exhibit passions, not distempers. The

finest picture ever drawn of a head discomposed by misfortune is that of *King Lear*. His thoughts dwell on the ingratitude of his daughters, and every sentence that falls from his wildness excites reflections and pity. Had phrenzy entirely seized him, our compassion would abate; we should conclude that he no longer felt unhappiness. (Postscript 254)

Walpole makes a telling comment on the representation of madness on the stage. He states that the depiction of total madness is not fit for the stage unless the protagonist still in some sense comprehends the personal misfortune he has suffered. Walpole's insistence on the representation of passions and not distempers strikes a familiar note since it is echoed in the "Introductory Discourse" that outlines the central plan underlying Joanna Baillie's dramatic corpus. Walpole's other remark on the shape in which madness is to be presented onstage insists on the importance of having a meaningful speech given by the madman, instead of isolated gibberish given in a state of complete mental disarray. This meaningful speech is more powerful since it unveils the character's innermost feelings and invokes the audience's pity. Baillie, who also admires Shakespeare's realistic depiction of human tragedy, gives a representation of madness in *Orra* that closely resembles the thoughts Walpole expresses in this postscript about how it should be depicted onstage. *Orra* is a tragedy that exhibits the passion of fear and carefully portrays how it evolves into excess as a result of patriarchal pressures. When Orra's mental breakdown takes place her utterances do not amount to meaningless frenzy but instead confess the epistemological conundrum, regarding the demarcating line that divides the dead and the living, in which Orra is trapped.

Baillie never stated that she read Walpole's play or his remarks on Shakespeare's depiction of madness, nevertheless, there is some evidence that she may have known the play despite its limited circulation. Fifty copies of the play were printed in 1768 in Walpole's printing house and some copies were sent to his close friends. Walpole's awareness of the riskiness of the theme of incest may have prevented him from disseminating the play more widely. The play was later made available in editions prepared and published by Baillie's friends. It was included in the 1789 collected edition of *The Works of Horatio Walpole* by Mary Berry and in Sir Walter Scott's collection of plays *The Modern British Drama*. In addition, Baillie's friendship with both Mary Berry¹ and Anne Damer,² who both enjoyed close friendship with Horace Walpole, must have given her access to Walpole's work. As part of the theatrical performances of Strawberry Hill, a performance of *The Fashionable Friends*³ took place in November 1801. The prologue and epilogue were written by Joanna Baillie, and in them she makes direct reference to Horace Walpole and to the impact of his gothic edifice, Strawberry Hill, on the genesis of *The Castle of Otranto*, an effect he himself points out in his letters.

But in these walls, a once well-known retreat

1 Mary Berry was also a favourite of Horace Walpole, who used to call her and her sister Agnes his "wives". On his death, Walpole left the Berry sisters Little Strawberry Hill (not to be confused with Strawberry Hill) and the huge sum of four thousand pounds each. He also bequeathed his printed works and manuscripts to the Berry family. Mary Berry's 1798 edition of five volumes of Walpole's work is based on these prints and manuscripts (Melville, *Berry Papers* 198).

2 As a child Anne Damer was left in the care of Horace Walpole during her parents' frequent travels and long absences (Noble viii), and she participated in the theatricals performed at Strawberry Hill, the gothic villa built by Walpole. Walpole left her the life rent of the villa (Melville 198).

3 The authorship of *The Fashionable Friends* is a matter of dispute among literary historians. In *Anne Seymour Damer: Art and Fashion 1748-1828*, Percy Noble notes that the play is an adaptation from a French play *L'Homme du jour* by Boissy which was found among Walpole's papers (169). In *The Berry Papers* however, Lewis Melville credits the play to Mary Berry, and claims that following public censure of its "lax morality", Berry denied its authorship and attributed it to Horace Walpole in the advertisement of the published edition (208). The play was performed at Drury Lane in 1802 and was published the following year.

Where Taste and Learning kept a favorite seat,
 Where Gothic arches, with a solemn shade,
 Should o'er the thoughtful mind their influence spread,
 Where pictures, vases, busts, and precious things,
 Still speak of sages, poets, heroes, kings,
 On which the stranger looks with pensive gaze,
 And thinks upon the worth of other days,——

(“Epilogue to the Theatrical Representation at Strawberry Hill” 794)

Baillie here alludes to Walpole’s famous claim that his gothic novel was generated by a dream he had while his project of transforming the architecture of Strawberry Hill into the gothic style was underway. After dreaming of supernatural and fantastic happenings taking place in Strawberry Hill, Walpole incorporated some elements of this wild dream in *The Castle of Otranto* (“Letter” 259). Baillie, of course, is acutely aware of the impact of an eerie atmosphere on the imagination, of how it excites its faculties. Her interest in the effects of the eerie and the supernatural on the mind is evident in her casting of Orra as a gothic heroine who is extremely sensitive to such surroundings, and is abused by being forcibly subjected to them. Her madness figures as a warning of the mysterious psychological operations that can shroud the mind and as a testimony to the violence of male power that enforces women to succumb to their authority. The play’s double focus on psychological unrest and social critique of oppressive definitions of gender can be best described as belonging to what Elizabeth Fay calls “radical critique Gothic” (112).

Orra and Madness

Much has been written about madness and about its curious and inextricable relationship with silence. Foucault insists that the language of psychiatry is nothing but a “monologue of reason about madness” (*Madness and Civilization* xii) in which madness is relegated to a subject position, the antithesis of reason, hence inferior, different and silent. But this demarcation between madness and reason rests primarily on the silence that is constructed by the modern medical gaze that objectifies the patient, stripping her of her agency. Shoshana Felman also looks at the relationship between madness and silence, and how this relationship is translated in terms of gender. Giving special attention to one of Balzac's short stories that depicts the journey of a woman through love, war, despair, madness and death, Felman illustrates how mad women are silenced in literature and how literary criticism has tended to overlook this simple and obvious fact (120-4).

What is particularly interesting about the depiction of madness in *Orra* is that it is not predicated on the silence of the female protagonist. Although Orra is seen as a victim of brutal attempts to seize her, and in effect, her property by male characters, she is a very outspoken young woman who has a clear vision of what she wants to do with her property and how she wishes to lead her life. Furthermore, the play ends with a speech given by her, which is not a meaningless ramble as much as an explication of how her imagination is fixated on the supernatural. Her madness, therefore, does not silence her as much as speak of the inter-connectedness of life and death — a nearness that is too terrifying:

Orra (running up to him [Hughobert]).

Ha! dost thou groan, old man? art thou in trouble?

Out on it! though they lay him in the mould,

He's near thee still. — I'll tell thee how it is:
 A hideous burst hath been: the damn'd and holy,
 The living and the dead, together are
 In horrid neighbourhood — 'Tis but thin vapour,
 Floating around thee, makes the wav'ring bound.
 Pooh! blow it off, and see th' uncurtain'd reach.
 See! from all points they come; earth casts them up!
 In grave-clothes swath'd are those but new in death;
 And there be some half bone, half cased in shreds
 Of that which flesh hath been; and there be some
 With wicker'd ribs, through which the darkness scowls.
 Back, back! — They close upon us.— Oh! the void
 Of hollow unball'd sockets staring grimly,
 And lipless jaws that move and clatter round us
 In mockery of speech! — Back, back, I say!
 Back, back!

*[Catching hold of Hughobert and Theobald, and dragging them back
 with her in all the wild strength of frantic horror, whilst the curtain
 drops]. (5.2.205-222)*

This tragic end with Orra's speech that emphasizes the near proximity of the world of the dead to the world of the living, dramatises her conflation of the real and the supernatural, and is a warning against the fearful consequences of trying to intimidate others through their fears. And in a complex way, Orra's madness here functions not

only as an attack against the male powers that intimidated her, but also as a criticism of the very mechanisms being used in her intimidation, the Gothic.

Elizabeth Fay pays particular attention to works that utilize gothic conventions to criticise these conventions. She dedicates a whole chapter in her *A Feminist Introduction to Romanticism* to the Gothic produced by women writers in the Romantic period (107-148). Fay expresses her reservations about the gender-orientated categorization of the Gothic that demarcates the feminine Gothic, characterized by the centrality of the love-plot, from the masculine Gothic that revolves around the failed hero model. This categorization in Fay's opinion "is a simplistic view of the genre" (111) since there are well-known exceptions. She cites Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as an example of a novel by a woman writer that deals with a failed hero model who, in a Promethean attempt to supersede divine creation, creates a monster, deserts him, and pays the consequences of his unrestrained and irresponsible ambition.

To this obvious example I wish to add two noteworthy works by Baillie that present male protagonists who are disturbed by psychological turmoil, and trace the steps they take that lead to their own destruction. *De Montfort* showcases a protagonist who is torn between his excessive love for his sister and an unjustified hatred of a male acquaintance, and these extreme sentiments lead him to murder and his ultimate death. *The Dream* presents Osterloo, the central figure of the play who is tormented by his guilt for a murder committed in the past and is sentenced to death for it. His death comes about before the execution takes place as a result of his feelings of fear and guilt. The failed hero model, then, is not only produced by male writers. Joanna Baillie is one of the women writers who has explored the different narrative patterns presented by the Gothic, rewriting them to give her own views on gender equality and psychological

disturbances, providing, in other words, a social critique and a psychologically realistic depiction — two crucial strategies in Fay’s understanding of the Gothic.

Fay attempts to evade the simplistic and rigid feminine-masculine classification of the Gothic by replacing it with her own classification, based on external and internal aspects of the Gothic. Fay offers three groups that can be used to classify the Gothic: the external Gothic that offers social critique, the inner Gothic that details a psychological drama, and a hybridization of both internal and external, which she calls the radical critique Gothic. She explains:

When a writer combines the inner explorations of the abject with the political implications of social critique — not so much with its promises of women’s connections to the sublime, but with its promises of romance and of a utopian resolution for the heroine — then we have the radical critique Gothic. Such works exploit both the idealism of the social critique Gothic and the nightmare vision of the psychological drama in order to point out how real life can and does contain elements of both these extremes. (117)

Fay goes further to consider the radical critique Gothic as a particularly “feminist blend of external and internal” Gothic (112). Women writers, and in particular Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays, have employed gothic conventions to critique the romantic love-plot that is prevalent in gothic novels, exposing, therefore, the unreliability of gothic fictions:

The radical critique Gothic often begins as a domestic romance, but uses Gothic elements to critique either the romance as a genre inappropriate for depicting real-life experience, or the Gothic as a vehicle inadequate

for interpreting real-life experience. Either way, the radical critique provides a tool for disillusioning readers who take their fiction too seriously. (137)

But this feminist blend is not used only by radical women writers. A male writer like Scott and a conservative writer like Baillie have also provided similar treatments of the Gothic in their works. Elizabeth Fay discusses Baillie's *Witchcraft* as an instance of a radical critique Gothic that explores people's beliefs in witchcraft, and how such beliefs can be manipulated by some unscrupulous characters to achieve their personal aims (143-144).

In *Orra*, the situation of Baillie's heroine resonates with contemporary issues regarding women. *Orra* is a social critique directed against coercing women into marriage but it also carries an implicit rejection of the gothic romance as an adequate way of depicting such a real-life experience. Not all women seek romance and the happily-ever-after scenario and many are interested instead in the emerging call for their social, legal, and financial independence. *Orra* shows how attempts to curtail a woman's preference for independence can have disastrous consequences.

Baillie is also concerned with rational explanations of the supernatural and in the motivations of those who manipulate other's beliefs in the supernatural to achieve their interests. The contrived supernatural in *Orra* is used to shed light both on Rudigere's ambition, an ambition that drives him to use superstition to subjugate Orra, and on the origins of madness.

What is truly remarkable about the play is that it showcases the process by which Orra's madness is caused by internal and external factors, giving a more sophisticated — and quite modern — reading of the nature of madness. The play shows

that madness is not precipitated either by a predetermined mental abnormality or by a direct reaction to psychological abuse. As a member of a highly professional and successful medical family, and as a woman writer who is critical of stereotypical representations of women in literature, Joanna Baillie writes a play that examines the process by which madness is triggered in a woman and how this process is a product of both social pressures and susceptible dispositions. Baillie does not give her readers a clear answer to whether madness is caused by innate psychological disturbances or because of harsh circumstances, whether Orra goes mad or is driven mad. The preface to the play states that Orra is a sensitive character, with excessive, almost abnormal, fear of the supernatural. In addition, there are several instances from the play that support and reinforce Orra's susceptibility — her fainting at hearing ghost stories for one. Likewise, the action of the play centres on the plot being devised by several characters to terrorize Orra to submission, and this plot, therefore, triggers Orra's madness. It is equally plausible, however, to suppose that, had the pressure and violence to Orra never taken place, she would never have become mad, and had she not been predisposed because of her irrational fears, she would not have collapsed as easily.

There are some crucial points that need to be elucidated to explicate all the ramifications of Orra's madness, a consequence that is perhaps illuminated by Freud's exploration of madness and the uncanny in Hoffman's *The Sandman*.¹ Although Orra is oppressed by male tyranny in its multifarious forms, her madness occurs because of her inability to rationalise her fears. And so the appearance of what she thinks of the ghost of her ancestor's victim is not the main cause of her insanity. Orra's insanity is also

¹ Freud illustrates what he means by the uncanny through Hoffman's *The Sandman*, a short story that depicts the protagonist's descent into madness because of his inability to rationalize and fear of a recurring image. Freud, of course, reads these fears in terms of the male fear of castration, but the insistence on repetition and horror as the roots of madness is an interesting observation.

precipitated by her acute susceptibility to supernatural effects which ultimately lead to her inability to distinguish between the dead and the living. In other words, what causes Orra's tragic madness is not the Gothic she has witnessed, but rather her inability to process rationally the trappings of the Gothic, and although Theobald's masquerade is an attempt to help Orra, it actually exacerbates the situation. In this way Baillie shows what is potentially dangerous even in the apparently benign employment of the Gothic: Theobald, like the practitioners of the Gothic, is meddling in areas that he does not fully understand and is dabbling in arts that will in the end confound Orra and hence himself. Baillie, thus, uses the trappings of the Gothic to delve into a deeper psychological world, exposing the impact of inner weaknesses and strengths in facing threats presented by an actually *and* an apparently hostile world. Psychologically speaking, Orra does not collapse suddenly. Her mental state is a matter for speculation by other characters throughout the play. Rudigere is aware of her irrational fears, Theobald notes her unrealistic idealism, and even her uncle Hughobert tells her: "Thou seem'st beside thyself with such wild gestures/ And strangely-flashing eyes. Repress these fancies,/ And to plain reason listen" (2.2.91-93). All these instances illustrate Orra's increasing detachment from the real world: her fear of ghosts, her inability to control her imagination, and her belief in the importance of eradicating human rivalry. It is also clear from the stage directions and descriptions given by other characters that upon listening to ghost stories Orra's facial expressions indicate unusual reactions. She behaves as if she is with the living and not with the living, on earth and not on earth, there and not there. Clearly, then, Orra is complicit with, indeed anxiously embraces, those beliefs based on the very conventions that threaten her. Thus, both direct threats to female well-being and the indirect threats of literary conventions that are based on

female oppression come together to destroy Orra.

Certainly the madness suffered by Orra is in part a consequence of an excessive fear that cannot be explained rationally but can be exploited by the rational: and so the circumstances that congregate to trigger it have much to say about the relationships between the sexes. Triggered by patriarchal tyranny and coercion, this madness is a clear manifestation of the violence directed against the female body. Orra is a woman with ideas that are in many ways enlightened and progressive: she cherishes her own economic and personal autonomy and wishes to use that for the good of others. Baillie's refusal of the normal Gothic or, indeed, of the typical love story is quite startling. Had Orra simply refused to marry Rudigere or Glottenbal because she was in love with Theobald, then the story might have been more conventional, even if Orra suffered from the same fate. Instead Baillie gives us a heroine who has not given her heart away. This is modern and progressive but it goes along with a sensibility that is still moved by superstitious fears. Thus Orra's enlightened/ progressive female thought is positioned in direct conflict with her own gothic fears and with the gothic "reality" that the male characters are trying to impose on her: the uncle imposing his son in marriage, Rudigere imposing himself sexually, and Theobald imposing a conventional stereotype of the chivalric hero who is ready to defend, protect and save in a shining armour — literally speaking. Instead, Orra would prefer to lead an ideal life, having her own court to control, attending to the needs of the poor and improving their economic status — all without the need to resort to a male guardian for permission. But she cannot be permitted by male rule to do so and she is also vulnerable because she cannot wholly free herself from the ghosts of a violent, feuding past, or put the ghost to rest, as it were.

Hence, Orra's ultimate madness is a consequence of her status as a woman marginalized because of her progressive thought that does not correspond to typical definitions of gender roles. But she is self-imprisoned, too, because she cannot stop believing that there might be some truth in the fictions that conventionally supported these gender roles. It is a madness that exposes masculine violence while still warning women that they have enough to do to contend against the visible forces of oppression without succumbing to the invisible ones that may come out of a superstitious past but also worryingly support a repressive present.

Joanna Baillie and her sister's love for ghost stories that started in childhood remained with them and continued to their later years. In a letter to Mary Somerville Joanna Baillie writes of her sister's latest venture with ghost stories: "My sister was much disappointed the other day when, in expectation of a ghost story from Mr. Dickens, she only got a grotesque moral allegory; now, as she delights in ghost and hates an allegory, this was very provoking" (*Queen of Science* 213-214). Likewise, the Gothic continues to garner interest from readers and writers who wish to explore this fearful delight. The experience of fear can be in itself a harmless way of passing one's time but once it is allowed to engross the self to the degree of obsession, it brings about difference, oddness, and the uncanny: in other words, it brings about the "orra" in us.

CONCLUSION

All readings, are also mis-readings, re-readings, partial readings, imposed readings, and imagined readings of a text that is originally and finally never simply there. (Haraway 124)

Dreams can beget reality, as they often do in the Gothic, but they can also begin responsibility — that of women for their own psyches and bodies. (Massé 6)

Many dissertations start with the aim of answering a specific set of questions, and as the discussion proceeds, questions are answered, replaced by others, give rise to more, and some continue to elude a satisfyingly definite and conclusive answer. As I have contended in the Introduction, the main objective of this dissertation is to examine the different ways in which Romantic-era women writers have appropriated the Gothic in non-novelistic forms and at the same time to uncover the different ends for which these appropriations were made. By looking at the Gothic produced by women in drama, autobiography, poetry, and chapbooks, I have demonstrated that the Gothic should not be viewed as a literary trend that has only manifested itself in a significant way in the novel: I have argued that Romantic-era women writers have appropriated and rewritten the Gothic to suit their different interests. Romantic-era women writers' appropriations of the Gothic offer complex and ambivalent readings of Gothic, readings that negotiate, contest, interrogate, and even affirm cultural views regarding gender and the female body.

In the first chapter I have shown how the interpretations of the same Highland legend by Thomas Holcroft and Joanna Baillie have resulted in adaptations that are markedly different generically and thematically. Holcroft's melodrama seeks to criticise the impact of politics on the domestic life, whereas Baillie's gothic drama takes the abjected female body as a focal point and proceeds from it to reinforce patriotism and a common national identity. In the second chapter I have used Diane Hoeveler's definition of gothic feminism to show how Robinson's representation of herself as a gothic heroine is not separate from her political agenda, an agenda that uncovers the sufferings of contemporary women. I have also argued that in conflating her self image with the image of the wronged woman that circulated in the aftermath of the French Revolution, Robinson devised a gendered political discourse to express her political convictions and to make claims for the rights of women. The politically sexualized female body, therefore, becomes central to her argument which tackles the political, social and cultural injustices committed against women. Equipped with recent theories of disability, I have focused in the third chapter on Anne Bannerman's preoccupation with veiling and unveiling in a way that reinforces the horror of encountering the deformed body whose physical appearance does not conform to notions of ideal beauty. In the fourth chapter, I have examined Wilkinson's work to illustrate how she manipulated didactic strategies and gothic conventions in a way that affirms and reinforces conservative views of gender roles. Wilkinson utilizes gothic tropes in her chapbooks to demonstrate how sexual exploitation is interconnected with financial and social sufferings. And she insists on the importance of female virtue as the only likely protection against exploitation. In the fifth and final chapter of my dissertation I have returned to the work of Joanna Baillie, focussing on *Orra* which utilizes gothic tropes to

interrogate the Gothic. I have used the concepts of “radical critique gothic” and “compulsory heterosexuality”, presented by Elizabeth Fay and Adrienne Rich respectively, to demonstrate how *Orra* is a text that criticises the forceful implementation of heterosexual norms; it also provides an example of the kind of radical critique gothic that adds a psychological dimension to its social critique of gender roles, by its tracing of the development of the madness in its heroine.

As Massé, quoted in my second epigraph, points out, imaginative constructions like the Gothic not only reflect reality but also “begin responsibility — that of women for their own psyches and bodies” (6). Gothic fictions have made women readers more aware of how established customs often run counter to the advantage of women. Gothic fictions enabled women writers to examine these customs, testing and contesting the justifications that supported them. In their engagement with the Gothic, women writers and readers became aware that much was at stake in the fictions they read, and that women’s psyches and bodies had become the central preoccupation of these fictions. The objectification of Helen’s body as a sexual and political threat maroons her as the abjected other, Mary Robinson’s publicized sexual body comes in handy in exposing the injustices committed against all women, the veiled and deformed bodies that populate Bannerman’s poetry reflect the anxiety regarding idealized perceptions of the beautiful body, the bodies of Wilkinson’s heroines lose their social currency partly because of their surrender to seduction, and *Orra*’s body becomes the site of male competition, oppressive heterosexuality, and gothic mechanisms.

This examination of the female body in women’s appropriations of the Gothic reveals that although women writers did not necessarily share the same political inclinations, cultural fame, literary interests, worldviews, and backgrounds, they all

meet in their general attempt to affect change through their pen, and in their resorting to the same gothic reservoir of stock features to make their voices heard and send their messages. As is clear from their gothic works, their voices were not always in tune. But these differences and even polarisations should not deter us from examining this interesting assemblage of literary output by women for fear that it may dispel the notions of female connection and solidarity which many feminist critics allege they have found.

Feminist readings of the Gothic — from Ellen Moers's influential *Literary Women*, 1976, to recent special issues, dedicated to the Female Gothic, of *Women's Writing*, 1994, and *Gothic Studies*, 2004 — have re-examined this literary vogue in a more nuanced manner that, not only explored the Gothic's potential as a kind of writing available to Romantic-era women writers, but also deepened our understanding of the Gothic from thematic, generic, and contextual perspectives. The Female Gothic is no longer perceived in an essentialist gender manner — as work written by women, or in generically reductive terms — as a kind of writing written predominantly in the novel form. Instead, it is understood as a literature of multiplicity, heterogeneity, and cross-dressing that interrogates fixed conceptions of gender. It is also perceived as a trans-generic literary trend that is not restricted by the novel. It might seem that the Female Gothic is no longer a sub-genre within the gothic novel, but as some critics have argued, a literary category that stands in its own right (Miles "Introduction" 131). But this position is subject to revision since "the term 'Female Gothic' is still a flexible and recognisable term for an area which is if anything gaining in vigour and complexity" (Smith and Wallace 6). Many issues are still being raised about the definition of the Female Gothic and as to how the term should be applied. Clery complains in her recent

review of *Varieties of Female Gothic*, that the term Female Gothic seems to be used for convenience to support the excavation and reappraisal of long-overlooked works by women writers, with little attention being paid to the apparent poor quality of these works, a tendency, Clery claims, that might resurrect the notion which many scholars of the Gothic have laboriously aimed to dispel, that the Gothic is of little literary merit (Rev. of *Varieties of Female Gothic* 467).

One of the most challenging tasks that I have faced in the process of writing this dissertation has been finding adequate terminology to describe the Gothic in ways that acknowledge its generic mutations and its reappraisals or dismissals of contemporary fixed views and convictions. The various examples of Gothic writings that I have tackled in this dissertation are finally too different and distinct to be grouped together in a cohesive and unified subcategory of Female Gothic. I have also utilized some of the different definitions and readings of the Gothic being suggested by other critics not only to show the different ways in which the Gothic can be read, but also to demonstrate the different ways in which it has been understood and used by the women writers who read and appropriate it.

Many critics have remarked the difficulty of reaching a satisfactory and adequate definition of the Gothic increases commensurately with the understanding of its various transmutations. Lisa Vargo surveys the problems of such critics and underlines their increased awareness of the heterogeneity that characterises Gothic writing, “Critical approaches emphasize indeterminacy, fragmentation, and a carnivalesque nature, as well as such forces as Protestant middle-class values, the French Revolution, notions of British national identity, and the body” (234). Maggie Kilgour notes that the Gothic is “as difficult to define as any gothic ghost” (3-4). David

Punter emphasizes the complex transmutations of the Gothic, remarking that with the second generation of romantics:

By the time we reach Mary Shelley, the question of whether the “original Gothic” has already fallen apart, become transmuted into different forms, left only traces to be picked up and re-utilised by later writers — for perhaps quite different purposes and often perhaps anxiously — is already a vexed one. (Introduction viii)

Michael Gamer has noticed this increasing uneasiness among critics about defining the Gothic. He points out that its historical development and reception should be the central focus of scholarly work on the Gothic:

This prevailing — and warranted — nervousness over defining gothic in anything but the most open-ended terms, I believe, points to even more pressing reasons for historicizing gothic’s development and reception: that, as gothic no longer is what it once was, we must stop trying to define it as having a static identity, and instead try to understand the historical changes and generic transformations that led it to embody its various forms. We must begin not by defining gothic’s essence but by tracking its cultural status. (*Romanticism and the Gothic* 9-10)

To Gamer, then, it is more important to reach a better understanding of the different factors, whether historical or generic, that resulted in the heterogeneity that we perceive to be one of Gothic’s defining characteristics.

Any attempt to define female Gothic, therefore, encounters examples of writing that testify to the diverse and often contradictory nature of the Gothic produced by women. Of course, definitions can be proposed, applied, contested, and revised, but

what truly needs to be tackled here is whether gothic literature produced by women is susceptible to definition. In interdisciplinary studies and cultural studies that aim to contest and dismantle barriers between texts, genres, and disciplines and to look sceptically at received narratives and definitions, it has become customary to question fixed categories rather than establishing new ones. Consequently, one of the pressing questions in literary studies is not whether a group of texts that share common features can be assigned a definition, but rather, what are the texts that would be excluded if such a definition is applied? To return to Foucault's question with which I started this dissertation: "When we establish a considered classification [...] what is the ground on which we are able to establish the validity of this classification with complete certainty?" (*The Order of Things* xxi) Whenever a classification is established exclusions are inevitable.

As I have indicated previously in the introduction, the problems of defining Female Gothic originate with the history of Gothic as a literary term which the twentieth century has used to refer to a kind of writing that was dominant in the literature of the Romantic period. But it has never clearly been decided whether or not the Gothic is historically specific and what is taken to be Gothic has tended to depend on the reader and the reader's context as much as that of the writer. Therefore, all definitions of the Gothic which have been proposed are, to use Haraway's words, re-readings of texts that are "originally and finally never simply there" (124), that is, re-readings that do not represent the texts but rather express the viewpoints from which they have been read. New definitions will be new readings that do not override previous readings, prevent new ones, or reach an ultimate representation of what is being defined. This understanding of what is involved in the attempt to define the Gothic may help us

achieve ways of reading the Gothic that extend beyond categorization, terminology, and rigid taxonomies.

As for the practice of studying women writers from the Romantic period, I feel that important pieces of the large picture are being assembled and put together in a way that must continue to improve our conception of the literary landscape of the time. Since many critics believe that women writers were the bastions of the novel, but less significant in other genres, this study insists that many women did venture beyond the novel and wrote in many forms and kinds and for various reasons. Also, contrary to the critical view that claims the Female Gothic to be women writers' reaction to Male Gothic, there is no monolithic Female Gothic, nor are the works of the women I discuss merely or indeed, principally reactive. The women I have looked at are characterised by some shared strategies and motifs but they are marked as much by their difference from each other as by their similarities. Therefore, it is important to distinguish not only Female Gothic from Male Gothic, but also mark the different types of Female Gothic that women writers produced.

Since I have dealt primarily with gothic works by women writers, few gothic works by male writers have featured. This absence, I hope, will not be construed as an affirmation of the homogeneity of the Gothic produced by male writers. It is worth noting here that Male Gothic is as heterogeneous and diversified in its generic scope and thematic construction as the Female Gothic. Since this dissertation aspires to be part of the effort to reappraise and reaffirm the status of women writers in our understanding of the literature of the Romantic period, the general argument has focused primarily on the work of women. But many of the questions being asked in this dissertation can be asked more widely of the Gothic as subject, theme and method. The diversity and

heterogeneity of Gothic will, I believe continue to exercise the imagination and provoke the analysis of critics, theorists and the general reader.

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