

**THE HAUNTED BEDROOM:
FEMALE SEXUAL IDENTITY IN
GOTHIC LITERATURE, 1790-1820**

THESIS

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ANGELA LYNN RAE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the relationship between the Female Gothic novel of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century and the social context of women at that time. In the examination of the primary works of Ann Radcliffe, Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley, this study investigates how these female writers work within the Gothic genre to explore issues related to the role of women in their society, in particular those concerned with sexual identity. It is contended that the Gothic genre provides these authors with the ideal vehicle through which to critique the patriarchal definition of the female, a definition which confines and marginalizes women, denying the female any sexual autonomy.

The Introduction defines the scope of the thesis by delineating the differences between the Female Gothic and the Male Gothic. Arguing that the Female Gothic shuns the voyeuristic victimisation of women which characterizes much of the Male Gothic, it is contended that the Female Gothic is defined by its interest in, and exploration of, issues which concern the status of women in a patriarchy. It is asserted that it is this concern with female gender roles that connects the overtly radical work of Mary Wollstonecraft with the oblique critique evident in her contemporary, Ann Radcliffe's, novels. It is these concerns too, which haunt Mary Shelley's texts, published two decades later.

Chapter One outlines the status of women in the patriarchal society of the late eighteenth century, a period marked by political and social upheaval. This period saw the increasing division of men and women into the "separate spheres" of the public and domestic worlds, and the consequent birth of the ideal of "Angel in the House" which became entrenched in the nineteenth century. The chapter examines how women writers were influenced by this social context and what effect it had on the presentation of female characters in their work, in particular in terms of their depiction of motherhood.

Working from the premise that, in order to fully understand the portrayal of female sexuality in the texts, the depiction of the male must be examined, Chapter Two analyses the male characters in terms of their relationship to the heroines and/or the concept of the "feminine". Although the male characters differ from text to text and author to author, it is argued that in their portrayal of "heroes and villains" the authors were providing a critique of the patriarchal system. While some of the texts depict male characters that challenge traditional stereotypes concerning masculinity, others outline the disastrous and sometimes fatal consequences for both men and women of the rigid gender divisions which disallow the male

access to the emotional realm restricted by social prescriptions to the private, domestic world of the female. It is contended that, as such, all of the texts assert the necessity for male and female, masculine and feminine to be united on equal terms.

Chapter Three interprets the heroine's journey through sublime landscapes and mysterious buildings as a journey from childhood innocence to sexual maturity, illustrating the intrinsic link that exists between the settings of Gothic novels and female sexuality. The chapter first examines the authors' use of the Burkean concept of the sublime and contends that the texts offer a significant revision of the concept. In contrast to Burke's overtly masculinist definition of the sublime, the texts assert that the female can and does have access to it, and that this access can be used to overcome patriarchal oppression. Secondly, an analysis of the image of the castle and related structures reveals that they can symbolise both the patriarchy and the feminine body. Contending that the heroine's experiences within these structures enable her to move from innocence to experience, it is asserted that the knowledge that she gains, during her journeys, of herself and of society allows her to assert her independence as a sexually adult woman.

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ABBREVIATIONS

In addition to standard abbreviations recommended by the MLA, the following abbreviations are used in this thesis in order to indicate book titles:

<u>Forest</u>	<u>The Romance of the Forest</u>
<u>Sicilian</u>	<u>A Sicilian Romance</u>
<u>Udolpho</u>	<u>The Mysteries of Udolpho. A Romance</u>
<u>Italian</u>	<u>The Italian, or The Confessional of the Black Penitents. A Romance</u>
<u>Maria</u>	<u>The Wrongs of Woman: or, Maria.</u>

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INTRODUCTION

The Growth of the Female Gothic

In 1977 Ellen Moers coined the term “Female Gothic” initiating the critical analysis of the Gothic genre as a mode of addressing issues of particular relevance to women. In her seminal discussion of the Gothic genre in Literary Women, she states that the “Female Gothic” can be “easily defined” as “the work that women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic” (90). Moers’s notion of the Female Gothic can be seen as an evolution of Robert Hume’s earlier division of the genre into “horror-Gothic” and “terror-Gothic” (285), the first exemplified by the work of M.G. Lewis and the latter by Radcliffe’s texts. Hume’s discussion was, however, focused on the masculine “horror-Gothic”, distinguishing it as “more serious and more profound” (285) than that exemplified by Radcliffe. Moers’s reconception of the “terror-Gothic” as the “Female Gothic”, thus initiated the first serious re-examination of this genre. It is a re-examination which has resulted in a flood of critical attention, so much so Judith Wilt could argue, that the Gothic as a whole is a form “that has acquired in many people’s minds the modifier ‘female’ not only because of its main writers and readers, but because of its deep revelations about gender, ego and power” (3).

An overview of the critical analysis of the genre demonstrates that many critics since Moers have found the definition of the Female Gothic more problematic than she did. As a result varying and often competing definitions are available. Most critics do, however, confirm the distinction between male/masculine Gothic and female/feminine Gothic. This gendered division of the genre arose originally from Hume’s positioning of Radcliffe and Lewis as the two poles around which Gothic texts could be grouped. Some critics have, thus, applied the distinctions between male Gothic and female Gothic strictly in terms of the

biological sex of the author, a practice which provides a very superficial interpretation of the gendered nature of the texts. However, although I disagree with this biologically determined analysis, it will be argued in this thesis that patriarchal structures have forced women and men to inhabit different spheres and consequently have different experiences and expectations. Thus it is contended that the experiences of the female authors of the texts examined in this study, as women writing and living within a patriarchy, would have influenced their work in significant ways. This study does not, therefore, classify the texts which are examined in it as exemplifying the female Gothic merely because their authors are women, but rather because of the way in which the position of women within a patriarchy is explored within them. This conception of the female Gothic can best be elucidated by distinguishing between it and the male Gothic.

Critics of the Gothic have observed a number of significant differences between the female and male Gothic. Anne Williams, for example, contends that they vary in narrative strategies, in their attitude towards the supernatural, and in their endings: the male having a “tragic plot” while the female formula “demands a happy ending, the conventional marriage of Western comedy” (103). The main exemplars of the two divisions of the Gothic, Radcliffe and Lewis, were, in fact, reacting directly to each other’s works. The Mysteries of Udolpho was in part the inspiration for Lewis’s The Monk - he wrote in a letter to his mother after reading it that it was: “one of the most interesting Books that ever have been published” (Kilgour 142). When Radcliffe became aware that his diabolical plot of The Monk had been inspired by her novel, she retorted by revising and retelling Lewis’s tale in her last novel, The Italian¹. However, although these works were drawing directly on each other, an examination of the

¹ Radcliffe makes the distinction between her tales of “terror” and those of “horror” quite clear in her article published posthumously “On the Supernatural in Poetry”. She argues that “[t]error and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them” (150). Terror is thus “liberating and life-affirming, while horror is paralysing and deadly” (Winter 54).

depiction of the female characters in the texts clearly reveals the differences between them.

Kari Winter argues that in the female Gothic:

. . . innocent heroines are usually guided by the authors into an understanding of human evil, a knowledge that in many cases empowers them to survive and to escape from the severe forms of victimisation that male Gothicists delight in depicting. (78)

The depiction of women in the female Gothic reveals the “patriarchal order as malignant and in need of replacement” (Milbank, Daughters of the House 11), with the heroines Radcliffe’s novels portrayed as actively attempting to break free of tyrannical male authority, often symbolised by the imprisoning structure of his castle/chateau/monastery. In contrast, the female characters in The Monk are routinely raped, tortured, and killed. It is no coincidence that the male Gothic was the genre employed by the Marquis de Sade to express his libertine philosophies. With its depiction of the objectified female victim, at the complete mercy of male tyrant, the male Gothic plot and narrative conventions:

. . . focus on female suffering, positioning the audience as voyeurs who, though sympathetic, may take pleasure in female victimization. Such situations are intimately related to its delight in sexual frankness and perversity, its proximity to the “pornographic”. In early Gothic this usually takes the form of female virtue threatened and often violated. (Williams 104-105)

Alison Milbank corroborates this point arguing that while the heroines of the female Gothic resist and attempt to escape male tyranny, the male Gothic is characterised by the attempt of the male protagonists to penetrate “the privacy of the domestic female interior” (Daughters of the House 12). Although at times the portrayal of the female characters may be psychologically complex, the male Gothic in no way explores and questions the hierarchical relationship between the sexes as the female Gothic does.

At the heart of the female Gothic lies the exploration of female identity within a society that systematically marginalises and oppresses women. Williams observes that while the feminist critics of the genre vary in methodology and emphasis, “they tend to agree that the

affinity between the gender and the genre expresses the terror and rage that women experience within patriarchal social arrangements, especially marriage” (136). The central concern of the female authors examined in this thesis is the woman and her struggle to survive in a patriarchal culture.

The question arises as to why female authors were drawn to this genre in the first place? Firstly, the anti-rationalist, symbolic nature of the genre allowed the women writers who used it to both reflect and critique the patriarchal society in which they lived. As Botting notes, the excesses of the Gothic “transgressed the proper limits of aesthetic as well as social order in the overflow of emotions that undermined boundaries of life and fiction, fantasy and reality”(Gothic 4). The fact that the audience of these texts was largely female motivated censure of the genre:

Attacked throughout the second half of the eighteenth century for encouraging excessive emotions and invigorating unlicensed passions, Gothic texts were also seen to be subverting the mores and manners on which good social behaviour rested. The feminisation of reading practices and markets, linked to concerns about romances throughout the century, were seen to upset domestic sensibilities as well as sexual propriety. (Botting, Gothic 4)

Defined negatively during the 1760’s and 1770’s by critics as “feminine” because of its lack of realism, “its feminine privacy, excluded from the masculine and political concerns of public life, and in its fantastic opposition to that public reality” (Guest 120), the genre had opened up a space in which female authors could explore female issues. Thus the Gothic conventions that emerged toward the end of the eighteenth century “are crucially concerned with exploring the ‘rules’ of patriarchy, such as the relative powers and qualities of the masculine and the feminine and the interrelated and mutually supportive social structures like the family, the monarchy, and the church”. (Williams 35)

It was also the first genre which allowed the psychological interior of the characters to be symbolically expressed as the external reality in which they lived. With regards to this

aspect Kenneth Graham notes that the Gothic “was as rebellious in letters as its contemporary parallel in France was in politics. It challenged fundamental notions of aesthetics and psychology” (260). The subjective vision of the heroine thus becomes the reality of the novel. This was of crucial importance to the Gothic representation of the everyday life of women within a culture which repressed female identity. Fleenor observes that the Gothic has “generally been accepted as a psychological form whose ‘subjective vision is the crucial event’” (10).

In terms of feminist theory, on which this thesis draws, the Gothic has been explored as “part of a wider feminist critical movement that recovers suppressed or marginalised writing by women and addresses issues of female experience, sexual oppression and difference” (Botting, Gothic 19). This critical reassessment challenges the patriarchal assumptions which have determined and defined the literary canon, allowing the work of authors who were previously ignored or disparaged to be heard. As will be made clear in the first chapter of this thesis, which discusses the development of the Gothic, it is a genre which, up until recently, has been met with critical dismissal by the male literary establishment, a dismissal particularly directed towards female writers. As a genre written largely by and for women - with an estimated seventy per cent of the authors being female - it thus provides fertile ground for a feminist reappraisal. An analysis of the female Gothic thus affords us the opportunity to ask “what is literature when written and consistently read by women” (Fleenor 7).

The three women writers who are examined in this thesis wrote between 1790 and 1820 and all chose to do so within the Gothic genre. I define their texts as female Gothic because they demonstrate an awareness of the oppressive nature of the conception of female sexuality by the patriarchal ideology and seek to explore and challenge this conception. The ways in which they do this are not, however, exactly the same. Ann Radcliffe’s critique of the patriarchy is more oblique than Mary Wollstonecraft’s overt challenge of it. Radcliffe was not

the revolutionary feminist that Wollstonecraft was. By all accounts she lived a very quiet, conventional life and actively avoided publicity even though she was the most widely read female author of her time. As Janet Todd observes, in her later years “she was so secluded that many contemporaries thought she had died long before she had or that she was confined in a lunatic asylum, driven mad by her own terrors” (254). Nevertheless, her texts point to a perceptive understanding of the social structures which shaped the world she lived in, and offer a critique of the feminine ideal promulgated by the patriarchy. Her novels depict heroines who learn from the histories of women characters who have suffered appallingly, and thus actively resist patriarchal tyranny and shape their own destinies. The texts conclude positively with sexually and financially independent women.

Wollstonecraft, in contrast, views the position of women in a society which prohibited women from having any truly independent existence in a far more negative way. Her own unconventional life had exposed her to much of the hardships endured by women and her Gothic novel, Maria, provides a damning view of the suffering of women of all classes under a patriarchal system. Her heroine does not find love and wealth at the end of the novel, but is instead left contemplating suicide.

The influence of the progressive writings of her mother and her own experiences as a woman in a patriarchy are clear in Mary Shelley’s first novel, Frankenstein. The depiction of female characters who die as a result of their adherence to a feminine ideal of innocence and passivity, as well as the portrayal of a Monster who, like women, suffers because he is positioned as “Other” by the patriarchal society, provides a sharp critique of the ideology of separate spheres. Her second Gothic text, the novella Mathilda, reinforces this critique by exposing the danger inherent in usurping women’s control over their own sexual identity and placing it in the hands of the patriarchy. Like the women in Wollstonecraft’s Maria, her female characters are irreparably damaged by the patriarchal system - they are either dead or

close to death by the end of the texts. In this lies her most severe critique of an ideology which denies women any right to an autonomous identity.

The fact these texts do not always offer a way out or an alternative to the dominant hegemony has, to a large extent, been seen as a weakness by some feminist critics. It becomes clear from a critical overview that the feminist critique of the Gothic is not one characterised by critical unity or consensus. While some critics have interpreted the genre as subversive, others have argued that it is conservative and reinforces the patriarchal structures, indoctrinating women in the dominant hegemony². Fleenor contends that the Gothic genre must be seen as ultimately “conservative not revolutionary” (24) as it “does not establish any new definitions of female sexuality, though they are sadly needed” (15). Maggie Kilgour provides an extensive analysis of the defining characteristics of both the male and female Gothic, and comes to the conclusion that while the male form is radical, following “a revolutionary aesthetic, often associated with romantic art which defamiliarises and alienates reality in order to make us see it anew” (38), the female Gothic is ultimately conservative:

In the female gothic, the private world is turned temporarily into a house of horrors; the domestic realm appears in distorted nightmare forms in the images of the prison, the castle, in which men imprison helpless passive females . . . But this transformation cannot serve as an exposé of the fundamental reality that the bourgeois home is a gothic prison for women, for at the end of the text life returns to a normality that is ratified by its difference from the nightmare counterpart. The gothic forms of domesticity evaporate, enabling the heroine to return to the real version . . . so that women’s continuing incarceration in the home that is always the man’s castle is assured. (38)

Appraising the feminist critique of the female Gothic, Williams observes that many feminist critics are embarrassed by the “popular” nature of the female Gothic novel, with

² Entering the arena of feminist criticism of the Gothic is very much like entering the labyrinthine depths of the castles which are scattered across the landscapes of the texts. As in any area of feminist critique it is characterised by its diversity. There exist multiple feminist readings of each work, all of which claim ideological validity. I would argue, however, that it is this critical pluralism which makes the arena dynamic and exciting. The multiple viewpoints are to a large extent a means of avoiding the oppression of a singular perspective of women that has characterised patriarchal ideology.

critics such as Janice Radway concluding that popular romances, Gothic or otherwise, “cannot really express ‘feminist protest’ because they so manifestly side with the status quo” (Williams 138). Both Kilgour and Radway argue that the texts actually reconcile women to the patriarchy by “allowing us to indulge our imagination safely because preaching the joys of ultimate conformity” (Kilgour 38). Williams, however, disagrees with these conservative readings contending that:

. . . most feminist readings (lively and interesting as they are) have been virtually blind to the most crucial aspect of the Female Gothic plot: its constructive and empowering function for its female readers. Its comic plot, its emphasis on terror rather than horror, and its insistence on the possibilities of female “reason” (implied by, among other things, its convention of explaining the ghosts) not only affirm the possibilities of “feminine” strength, they also sketch the outlines of a female that is more than the ‘other’ as purely archetypal or stereotypical. (138)

As will become clear in this study, I agree with this reading of the female Gothic. I will argue that the genre does not reconcile women to the status quo but rather exposes the patriarchal society as oppressive and destructive, offering an insistent critique of the ideology of separate spheres. The nightmare world of the Gothic *is* the real world as experienced by women in a patriarchy, as Doody notes “[i]t is in the Gothic novel that women writers could first accuse the ‘real world’ of falsehood and deep disorder” (560).

A Note on Methodology

By locating the authors and their texts within their historical period, this thesis examines how specific issues of female identity and gender relations are presented in selected novels written by three women writers - Ann Radcliffe, Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley - between 1790 and 1820. Although in the case of Shelley and Radcliffe, I have examined more than one novel by the same author, this thesis does not attempt an in-depth chronological analysis of any of the writers. Rather, the texts are analysed in order to reveal common themes and techniques, thereby establishing what the central concerns of these authors are and why they

chose the Gothic genre to express them. This thesis focuses on the issue of female sexual identity during a specific era but I wish to emphasise that it does not attempt to analyse female sexuality except as it is presented in these works, nor does it seek to provide a broad historical study of the period. Drawing on feminist critical theory, it examines how and why women writers used the Gothic genre to explore and react to the patriarchal society in which they lived and wrote.

CHAPTER ONE

Angels and Monsters: The Exploration of the Feminine Ideal

Thus towards the end of the eighteenth century a change came about which, if I were rewriting history, I should describe more fully and think of greater importance than the Crusades or the Wars of the Roses. The middle-class woman began to write.

Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT - BIRTH OF THE ANGEL IN THE HOUSE

“It is not singular that, as the daughter of two persons of distinguished literary celebrity, I should very early in life have thought of writing. As a child I scribbled; and my favourite pastime during the hours given me for recreation was to ‘write stories’. . . . After this my life became busier, and reality stood in the place of fiction.” (Mary Shelley, “Author’s Introduction” to 1831 edition of Frankenstein, 192-93)

Mary Shelley’s reflections in the 1831 “Author’s Introduction” to the revised edition of Frankenstein on the significant role of writing in her life provide a telling insight into the situation of the woman writer during this period, stressing the intrinsic connection between female sexuality and female writing. Shelley describes her love of writing as a child and adolescent, and then notes “[a]fter this my life became busier, and reality stood in the place of fiction”. The “reality” she refers to is her elopement with Percy Shelley at the age of sixteen, quickly followed by a number of pregnancies. It was a reality in which “[t]ravelling, and the cares of a family, occupied [her] time” (193). Leaving behind the childhood domain which allowed her the freedom and the time to write, she had entered the realm of sexual adulthood which, almost exclusively for a woman, meant motherhood. Her identity was redefined as a “mother”, a role which included not only the physical constraints on her body and her time,

but the social constraints of the patriarchal definition of “woman” and “mother”.³ To be a sexual, adult female had enormous implications for anyone who at the same time wanted to be an author.

Shelley’s situation was one faced by all female authors. The idea of “authorship” was one which stood in almost direct opposition to the developing ideal of “womanhood”. The main contributions of middle-class women - the major producers and consumers of the Gothic novel - to society, centered on raising their children and caring for their husbands. As such their identity was defined along the lines of the mother-figure - caring, passive, selfless, and sexless.

This vision of “womanhood” was relatively new, and only developed from about the middle of the eighteenth century. Whereas before this women had been defined as either morally weak and vulnerable to temptation, or the evil temptresses themselves, they were now seen as innately pure and temptation proof. This new definition was grounded on the ideal of the nurturing “mother” and, as Nancy Cott notes, it embraced an ideal of “passionlessness”, with the result that:

. . . a traditionally dominant Anglo-American definition of women as especially sexual . . . was reversed and transformed between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries into a view that women (although still primarily identified by their female gender) were less carnal and lustful than men. (162)

It was a consequence of the ideology of separate spheres, which confined women to the home and domestic and familial duties, while men entered the public realm of intellectual, economic and political action. In her examination of the change in childbirth and rearing practices in Britain between 1760 and 1860, Judith Lewis finds that over the century “the primary function of motherhood shifted from . . . the biological function of childbearing to . . . the nurturant

³ It must be noted that the term “mother” used here includes both the “narrow” definition of bearing and raising children, as well as the broader definition applicable to the ideal of women in society and their approved of vocation i.e. that of selfless caregivers and nurturers.

function of childrearing” (62). Women came to be seen as the embodiment of all that was pure and good, a perception that would culminate in the nineteenth century phenomenon of “the angel in the house”. This cultural deification of women is clear in contemporary accounts of their “value”. William Buchan, a popular advice writer, asserts:

The more I reflect on the situation of a mother, the more I am struck with the extent of her powers, and the inestimable value of her services. In the language of love, women are called angels; but this is a weak and silly compliment; they approach nearer to our idea of the Deity: they not only create, but sustain their creation, and hold its future destiny in their hands: every man is what his mother has made him . . . (507)

But they were “deities” without any power, perhaps the perfect antithesis of an “all-powerful” and “all-knowing” god. Any “power” they had was severely curtailed by the sphere they were allowed to operate within, and their “knowledge” or education only went as far as to make them model wives and mothers⁴. A perfect example of the ideology behind this ideal of womanhood can be found in Thomas Gisborne's An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex, published in 1797 as a companion volume to An Enquiry into the Duties of Men in the Higher and Middle Classes of Society in Great Britain Resulting from Their Respective Situations, Positions, and Employment. In it he provides a summary of the qualities upon which the male and female spheres were divided. “God in His Wisdom” had given to men:

the science of legislation, of jurisprudence, of political economy; the conduct of erudition, the inexhaustible depths of philosophy; the knowledge indispensable in the wide field of commercial enterprise; the arts of defense and of attack

These activities:

demand the effort of a mind endued with close and comprehensive reasoning, and of intense and continued application, in a degree which they are not requisite for discharge of the customary office of female duty.

⁴ I am, of course, offering a generalised account of female education - there were always exceptions to the rule, as William Godwin proved in the enlightened upbringing of his own daughters. But it must be noted that even if a woman was lucky enough to receive a better education than the rest of her sex, she still had very little chance of making good use of it as a result of the severe societal restrictions on “acceptable” female occupations. Also, as in the case of Mary Shelley, her liberal education served to make her more acutely and miserably aware of the restrictive role of “motherhood”.

The special virtues of women, on the other hand, were manifest in the following ways:

First, in contributing daily to the comfort of husbands, of parents, of brothers and sisters, and of other relations, connections, and friends, in the intercourse of domestic life, under every vicissitude of sickness and health, of joy and affliction.

Secondly, in forming and improving the general manners, disposition, and conduct of the other sex, by society and example.

Thirdly, in modeling the human mind during the early stages of its growth, and fixing, while it is yet ductile, its growing principles of action. (12-13)

Thus the development and immense popularity of the Gothic novel towards the end of the eighteenth century is particularly interesting when it is considered that the authors and the readers of these works were mostly female (Stone 284), writing and reading during a period of increasing debate over women's place in society. This debate was in part a consequence of the profound effects of the French Revolution on English politics and society. Initial excitement amongst politicians and intellectuals about events in France had quickly been followed by a conservative backlash as the Revolution became more radical and violent. As a result, Mary Wollstonecraft's revolutionary A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792), written at the height of radical euphoria, was countered by works such as Thomas Gisborne's aforementioned An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex (1797) in which the divine right of husbands was restated, and Hannah More's conservative Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education (1799).

It was, of course, the independent, intellectual woman who suffered the most under this restrictive ideology, criticised according to assumptions concerning the "proper" and "natural" role of women. This comment about a well-known female activist is typical of the prevailing attitude towards women who in any way questioned the status quo:

This woman had utterly thrown off her sex; when nature recalled it to her, she felt only distaste and tedium; sentimental love and its sweet emotions came nowhere near the heart of a woman with pretensions to learning, wit, free

thought, politics, who has a passion for philosophy and longs for public acclaim. Kind and decent men do not like women of this sort.⁵ (Behrendt 74)

Thus Robert Southey's caution to Charlotte Brontë that "literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and ought not to be ... the more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure she will have for it, even as an accomplishment and a recreation" (Gaskell 175) provides a very apt summary of the prevailing attitude to female authors. Women found themselves in a situation in which any success as authors would necessarily result in their moving beyond the bounds of the conventional and repressive definition of "femininity". This questioning of the "natural" position of women would inevitably result in some inner conflict, as Eugenia DeLamotte has found in her exploration of the gothic genre:

Sentimental views of women's capacity for spiritual purity could not but involve a certain moral and psychological schizophrenia, especially in women writers. Twentieth century women writers have testified to the lingering influence of these sentimental views. Whenever a woman sits down to write, Virginia Woolf said, the "Angel in the House" looks over her shoulder and does her best to interfere. "Above all, be pure," she warns ("Professions for Women" 285). Only recently, Fay Weldon began a discussion of her own work by citing this passage and concluding that the first requirement that liberates a woman to write is an ability to say, "I am bad, too". Many women Gothicists seem to have been unable to say this directly, and yet indirectly their romances pose the question Milton posed with Eve's dream. How did such evil things get into an unfallen woman's mind? Or, in Gothic mode, how does it happen that the purest woman's bedchamber has a door opening on the darkest subterranean depths? (109)

Not only could this move arouse potential inner conflict, it was one which often resulted in the criticism of the predominantly male literary establishment. As Kate Ferguson Ellis notes:

Women writers, whose personal morality was as much on trial as the talents and faculties they shared with male writers, and whose privileged domain was the strengthening of young minds in habits of virtue, were especially vulnerable to criticism of the morals of their characters, and especially their female characters. (84)

Unlike their male counterparts, not only were their abilities as writers under careful scrutiny, but their texts had to conform to the moral and social expectations of the female

⁵ The woman is Charlotte Corday; the account from a Jacobin newspaper of the time.

ideal. As Stephen Behrendt observes, "[t]he woman author is "read" within a system of culturally encoded patriarchal authority over which she has virtually no control but within which she is expected to express herself" (85). For although women writers abounded, especially in the Gothic genre, their access to the male-dominated industries of publishing and criticism was much more restricted than for men. The Gothic novel in particular fell foul of the critics, condemned both for its contents and its effect on readers. This makes the unwavering demand from the female middle-class for this genre very intriguing. Maggie Kilgour notes in The Rise of the Gothic Novel:

With its cast of extreme characters, unnatural settings and perverse plots, the gothic played a significant part in late eighteenth century debates over the moral dangers of reading. . . . there was a mistrust of the reader's ability to handle the heavy responsibility, and a wariness of the potentially pernicious influence of literature on a broad but naive market. The spread of literacy, the growth of a largely female and middle-class readership and of the power of the press, increased fears that literature could be a socially subversive influence. (6)

Nevertheless, the numbers of women writers grew during the latter part of the eighteenth century. Cheryl Turner's analysis of women's output of fiction between 1696 and 1796 shows a gradual increase over the second half of the century "culminating in a dramatic, unparalleled surge in the 1780's which incorporated not only an increase in the number of authors but also, proportionally, a rise in their rate of production" (Turner. 39). This increase was so extensive that, by the end of the century, women accounted for well over half the novels written during the century. As previously noted, it was the Gothic genre which attracted women, both as authors and readers. By the 1790s novels with a Gothic theme accounted for up to two-thirds of those published in any one year and over seventy per cent of both the readership and authors were female.

Recent criticism has viewed the Gothic genre as embodying a "female" reaction to the Romantic movement which is distinguished as being overtly masculine. Thus the importance of examining these texts as offering a female literary perception of the period is expressed by

Curran who asserts: “[the fact] that all the major genres tend to shift their grounds when women begin writing in them so as to reflect the problematic condition of women within family and social structures, accentuates the importance of textual recovery and historical reconception for the age” (183). Thus the Gothic genre can be seen as the medium through which many women found a way to express themselves as authors, such expression drawing just as many women as readers. In terms of the severe social restrictions on women, which have been discussed, this expression must be seen as of particular importance. For, as DeLamotte notes, then as now, the female voice is one which has always struggled to find articulation:

Feminist critical theory suggests that the problem of “saying ‘I’ ” is important both thematically and formally in literature by women, for whom finding and using a voice has been fraught with special difficulties ranging from unequal educational opportunities to social strictures against appearing before the public as an author and moral strictures against the egotism implied in literary self-expression. . . . one of the most important questions about the genre is why so many women writers from the 1780s to 1820 and after found their voice by speaking the gothic nightmare. (150)

What these authors seemed to be saying through the use of the Gothic genre is that the “real” world was not as it might appear through the eyes of a masculine social order and, “in symbolic form Gothic interiors *were* the daylight world, apprehended as nightmare. Their disorder and illogic was the logic of the social order as women experienced it.” (DeLamotte 151). It was in the Gothic novel that female authors could express their perceptions of an ideology which repressed, confined and negated women.

The analogy between writing and childbirth is one of which most modern readers are well aware. However, as has been made clear, female authors were a new phenomenon in the late eighteenth century and, as a result of the hitherto male domination of the literary arena, the “pen” was a very phallic symbol. The idea of writing as analogous to the female experience of childbirth was one that only emerged during this period. This analogy works on

a number of levels, the first being the basic biological fact that all women had to face: in an era without reliable or available contraception, motherhood was an almost inevitable consequence for any woman engaging in a sexual relationship with a man. The profound ideological implications of the concept of “motherhood” within this society have already been explored.

The metaphorical connection between producing a text, and “authoring” a child is one which Jessamyn Jackson traces in her article “Why Novels Make Bad Mothers”. She notes that this connection was “stressed by an analogy with profound implications for both terms: John Locke’s seminal representation of the newborn’s mind as ‘white Paper, void of all Characters’⁶, recurs frequently in the writings of preceptors anxious to impress on mothers the critical importance of their performance” (163). The following excerpt from a contemporary conduct book, The Female Monitor, Consisting of a Series of Letters to Married Women on the Nursing and the Management of Children, provides a perfect illustration of this:

The human mind, in its infant opening, has justly been compared to a blank sheet of paper, susceptible of every impression: whence it may be supposed, children receive their prejudices and inclinations from the dispositions of those persons to whose care they are entrusted, in like manner as these letters convey the sentiments of the author. (Smith 145)

This connection between motherhood and female authorship is clear in Hannah More’s statement regarding the immense growth in female literary production:

Who are those ever-multiplying authors, that with unparalleled fecundity are overstocking the world with their quick-succeeding progeny? They are novel writers; the easiness of whose productions is at once the cause of their own fruitfulness, and of the almost infinitely numerous race of imitators to whom they give birth ... The gluttoned imagination (of the novel reading Miss) soon overflows with the redundance of cheap sentiment and plentiful incident, and by a sort of arithmetical proportion, is enabled by the perusal of any three novels to produce a fourth . . . (2:169-70)⁷

Jackson notes that:

⁶ Locke, John. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding Ed. Peter H. Nidditch. Oxford: Clarendon, 1975. 104.

⁷ Quoted in Jackson, 171.

The horror of the monstrous maternity that female authorship constitutes in More's account is not just that its "fecundity" is out of control, but also that it is beyond patriarchal control: novels and female writers engage in a mutual mothering, a process of reproduction from which fathers are eliminated. (171)

It becomes clear from contemporary critiques of novels written by women, that female authors were expected to fulfill the same morally faultless nurturing role that mothers were expected to. As already mentioned, their characters, particularly the female characters, were judged according to the moral values they exhibited rather than in terms of any literary merit. Even in the realm of authorship, women were expected to remain the "mothers" of society.

SHELLEY AND THE DEAD MOTHER

And so we return to Mary Shelley, and the famous question she recalls was "so frequently asked me - 'How I then, a young girl, came to think of and to dilate upon so very hideous an idea?'" (Author's Introduction, 193). In answer to this it can be argued that she was simply reacting to her situation. Shelley, in particular, was plagued by the problems of the woman writer. As the daughter of two well-known intellectuals and the wife of one of the leaders of the Romantic movement, the expectations for her to produce work of literary acclaim were very high. As she notes:

It is not singular that, as the daughter of two persons of distinguished literary celebrity, I should very early in life have thought of writing . . . After this my life became busier, and reality stood in place of fiction. *My husband, however, was from the first, very anxious that I should prove myself worthy of my parentage, and enrol myself on the page of fame.* He was for ever inciting me to obtain literary reputation, which even on my own part I cared for then, though since I have become infinitely indifferent to it. (emphasis added)
(‘Author's Introduction’ to Frankenstein, 1831, 192-93)

However, these literary expectations stood in direct opposition to what was expected of her as a woman, wife and mother. Persistently prompted by Percy to "prove myself worthy of my parentage", Shelley at the same time had to deal almost single-handedly with the rigours of

pregnancy, childbirth and child rearing from a very young age. Percy does not seem to have been the most attentive husband and father. Between 1815 and 1819 she would give birth to, and lose, the first three of her four children and, as Marilyn Butler notes, Percy:

. . . resembled her father in offering support that was intellectually superb, emotionally inadequate; unintentionally he even contributed to the death of her second daughter, another Clara, in September 1818, by ordering Mary to travel across Italy with the sick child in the Italian summer heat.” (Introduction xiii)

Thus while the Romantic movement advocated, and was defined by, the male poet's individualism and personal endeavour, Shelley was expected to be the core of the family - the selfless, nurturing mother. It becomes clear from her letters and journals that motherhood immediately served to separate her from the companion to whom she had formerly been an equal. This must have been particularly difficult for a woman who, as a result of the liberal education she received from her father, and the significant influence of the writings of her dead mother, would not have accepted the intellectual separation between women and men that was the rule in her society.

Thus, the eighteen year old girl writing Frankenstein was acutely aware of the potentially disastrous consequences of pregnancy and childbirth for women. At the time of the conception of the novel, June 1816, she had borne two illegitimate children: the first, a premature girl, died after a few days in March 1815, the second, a boy named William, was five months old. She had fallen pregnant with him barely a month after the death of her daughter and, by December of that year when she was finishing the fourth chapter of the novel, she was pregnant again. December 1816 also saw the suicide of Percy's wife, Harriet, whom he had deserted for Mary. She was pregnant by another man when she drowned herself in the Serpentine. Two months previous to this, Shelley's half-sister, Fanny Imlay, also drowned herself after discovering that she was her mother's (Wollstonecraft) illegitimate child by Gilbert Imlay. And Claire Clairmont, the daughter of the second Mrs Godwin, who had run

away to live with the Shelleys in Italy, was illegitimately pregnant by Byron. Of course, Shelley's perceptions of childbirth must have been clouded from the very beginning, her own birth resulting in the death of her mother. Like her Monster, she caused the death of her creator.

It is therefore no wonder that many critics, starting with Ellen Moers and her influential 1977 article "The Female Gothic", have traced the connections between Frankenstein, motherhood and authorship. It is a connection that Shelley almost seems to suggest herself in her Author's Introduction, concluding: "And now, once again, I bid my hideous progeny go forth and prosper. I have affection for it, for it was the offspring of happy days" (197). Moers opened up a feminist line of inquiry into the novel by suggesting that it is a "birth myth", that the horror expressed by Frankenstein towards his creation is Shelley's horror at her own depressing experience of childbirth, and the destructive consequences of giving birth (or pregnancy itself) for many women she knew. Moers argues that it expresses the female "revulsion against newborn life, and the drama of guilt, dread and flight surrounding birth and its consequences" (142).

One might argue that Shelley has very little to say about the position of women in the novel as the women in Frankenstein have very little to say themselves. In the novel women are conspicuously absent from the main action - they are significantly displaced (Agatha de Lacey, Safie) or entirely eliminated (Justine, Elizabeth, and the Monster's partially constructed mate). The only woman truly present in the tale is paradoxically not there at all: the unseen, silent auditor/reader Margaret Walton Saville (MWS), who exists only in Walton's letters.

Elizabeth, Caroline and Justine are all characterised as "house-bound" angels, never venturing out of the domestic sphere of home and family. Thus Elizabeth is confined to the

safety of the home while Victor enters the public world of intellectual action and adventure.⁸

The reader comes to realize that the qualities these women must embody to fulfill this idealized role have fatal consequences. Elizabeth, like the other passive, selfless women, is dead by the end of the novel. The women are killed by their very conformity to the role prescribed for them by the patriarchal society, which robs them of any ability to save themselves, vividly illustrated when Caroline Frankenstein's exercise of the virtue of self-sacrifice results in her death after nursing Elizabeth's fever. As Anne Mellor notes, it becomes clear that women, as a result of this confinement to the home, "cannot function effectively in the public realm" (Mary Shelley 116). Feminine virtues such as "self-sacrifice" to the needs of others, often culminate in the sacrifice of the woman's life, while female "purity" and "innocence" lead to complete defenselessness when confronted with a world that is neither pure nor innocent. The fact that women suffer no matter how well they conform to their domestic roles seems unjust, and in this lies Shelley's critique of the feminine ideal. The roles that are positioned as "natural" within this ideology are ones that result in death. The attention is thus turned on the institutions of society which have the power to define women as "angels" or "monsters" (Botting, Making Monstrous 108).

It becomes clear, therefore, that there is a profound similarity between the position of women and that of the Monster. They are both marginalised in this society, and the Monster

⁸ It is interesting to note that while the women never voice any dissatisfaction about their position, in the 1831 edition Shelley removes the following passage which had appeared in the first edition:

It was in the latter end of August that I departed, to pass two years of exile. Elizabeth approved of the reasons of my departure, and only regretted that she had not the same opportunities of enlarging her experience, and cultivating her understanding. (127)

Just previous to this passage, Victor has told his family that he wishes to "travel and see the world before I sat down for life within the walls of my native town." (126). He is of course referring to settling down in marriage to Elizabeth to whom he is betrothed, and Elizabeth's words in the chosen extract, seem to indicate that she would enjoy the same opportunity of experiencing life and broadening her knowledge. However, in the 1831 edition, Shelley changes the passage to read:

It was in the latter end of August that I again quitted my native country. My journey had been my own suggestion, and Elizabeth, therefore, acquiesced: but she was filled with disquiet at the idea of my suffering, away from her, the inroads of misery and grief. (224-25)

can be seen as symbolic of women's helplessness and repression in a patriarchy. Both are reliant on how that society views them, often for their very survival. The arbitrary nature of this vision is depicted in the trial and execution of Justine Moritz for a crime of which she is innocent. She moves from being seen as an angel, "the most amiable and benevolent of human creatures" (64) to being judged a murderess, a "monster" in the eyes of the society that condemns her and the justice system that executes her. She emphasizes this connection herself, saying to Elizabeth: "[e]ver since I was condemned, my confessor has besieged me; he threatened and menaced, until I almost began to think that I was the monster he said I was" (66). But Elizabeth cannot save her, nor can she save herself on her wedding night. This connection between women and the Monster is emphasized in Frankenstein's nightmare which follows the animation of the Monster:

I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her; but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel. I started from my sleep with horror; a cold dew covered my forehead, my teeth chattered, and every limb became convulsed; when by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window shutters, I beheld the wretch - the miserable monster whom I created. (39)

His nightmare highlights the associations in Frankenstein's subconsciousness between femininity, sexuality and death. Elizabeth represents all the feminine aspects from which Frankenstein has divorced himself and which he has repressed. His fear of the danger of female sexuality is expressed by the fact that once he kisses Elizabeth, that is, acknowledges her as a sexual being, she dies - creating an implicit connection between sexuality and death. Her "dream" death can be seen as a death in Frankenstein's mind of all that he associates with the ideal woman. Elizabeth is killed as a result of the awakening of her sexuality, an aspect

In this passage Elizabeth is conforming entirely to the social expectations of her: she is worried about Victor's suffering, giving no thought to her own needs. The earlier Elizabeth, with desires of her own, has disappeared.

completely alien and monstrous to that ideal. His kiss also recalls the “kiss of life” he gives the monster - in both cases awakening something that threatens the dominant male order - the “otherness” embodied in female sexuality and the Monster. The fact that he opens his eyes to see the Monster underlines this connection.

The connection between female sexuality and death is again stressed on Frankenstein's and Elizabeth's wedding night - the night of her murder. The scene of the murder is based on Henry Fuseli's painting "The Nightmare" - Elizabeth's posture on the wedding-bed after she has been murdered by the Monster reflects Fuseli's image of “female erotic desire, both lusting for and frightened of the incubus . . . that rides upon her, brought to her bed chamber by the stallion that leers at her from the foot of her bed. . . . Invoking this image, Shelley alerts us to what Victor fears most: his bride's sexuality” (Mellor, Mary Shelley 121). Elizabeth would never have been murdered if Frankenstein had not left her alone in the bedroom, alone on their wedding-night while he was in search of his Monster. Significantly she dies on what would have been the night of her sexual awakening, just as Frankenstein's kiss turned her into a corpse in his nightmare. Frankenstein has yet again rejected/repressed the feminine in favour of his own "all-male" creation.

Following Moers, both Barbara Johnson and Anne Mellor have examined the troubled relationship of mothering, female authorship, and autobiography in Frankenstein, revealing some of the ways Mary Shelley “associated authorship with monstrousness, and the products of authorship with the violent and unpredictable Creature” (Behrendt, 70). According to Johnson, Frankenstein:

. . . can be read as the story of the experience of writing Frankenstein. What is at stake in Mary's introduction as well as in the novel is the description of a primal scene of creation. Frankenstein combines a monstrous answer to two of the most fundamental questions one can ask: where do babies come from? and where do stories come from? (7)

A strong connection can be drawn between Shelley's lonely, frustrated creature and the situation of the woman writer (or any intelligent, educated woman). Both are intellectually marginalised not because of any lack in ability but because of their physical "otherness". The monster regrets having the capacity for intelligence, for his "sorrow only increased with knowledge" (96). He tells Frankenstein that, "I wished sometimes to shake off all thought and feeling; but I learned that there was but one means to overcome the sensation of pain, and that was death" (96). The monster realizes that he suffers because he has the capacities to think and feel, but lives in a world that prevents him from using them. A society based on an ideology which represses and marginalizes women because of their sex, because of their "otherness", has as little toleration for an intelligent, sensitive monster as it has for an independent, thinking woman.

In the novella which William Godwin forbade her to publish for fear that it would be read as autobiographical, Mathilda, Shelley explores the incestuous relationship between a girl and her father, a relationship once again marked by the absence of the mother. Like Shelley's own mother, Mathilda's mother dies after giving birth to her. It seems significant that Shelley names this absent mother Diana, alluding to the armed goddess of chastity and protector of women, as it is this female protection that Mathilda lacks, when she is confronted at the age of sixteen with her father's sexual obsession with her.

Diana is described as "beautiful, but her beauty was only an addition to her other qualities - her understanding was clear and strong and her disposition angelically gentle" (178). More intelligent than her husband, she becomes the focal point in his life:

She had lost her mother when very young, but her father had devoted himself to the care of her education . . . although she appeared to be less initiated in the mysteries of life and society than he [Mathilda's father], her knowledge was of a deeper kind and laid on firmer foundations; and if even her beauty and sweetness had not fascinated him, her understanding would ever have held his in thrall . . . He loved her for her beauty and for her amiable disposition but he seemed to love her more for what he considered her superior wisdom. They

studied, they rode together; they were never separate and seldom admitted a third to their society. (179-80)

But then disaster strikes, and Mathilda tells how “[f]ifteen months after their marriage I was born, and my mother died a few days after my birth” (180). Her father is almost destroyed by grief and abandons his infant daughter. Orphaned at birth by her mother’s death and her father’s desertion, Mathilda is raised in an emotional vacuum by a frigid maiden aunt. However, on her sixteenth birthday he announces his return and for the first time she experiences emotional interaction and intellectual stimulation.

It soon becomes clear that the daughter fills her mother’s place in his life. She remembers that when referring to the first time he saw her, “my father has often told me that I looked more like a spirit than a human maid” (187). And indeed to him she was a “spirit” returning from the dead, the ghost of Diana. This connection is evident when, as with her parents who “seldom admitted a third to their society” (180), Mathilda notes that her relationship with her father was so intensely exclusive that “[i]t was a subject of regret to me whenever we were joined by a third person” (190). When her father becomes aware of the extent of his incestuous love for Mathilda, he returns to the estate where he and his wife had lived after their marriage in an attempt to evoke Diana’s memory against his feelings for their daughter, but to no avail. When Mathilda joins him on the estate he says to her, “[w]hen I was last here your mother read Dante to me; *you shall go on where she left off*” (emphasis added) (195). In the letter he writes to her after admitting his incestuous passion and just before throwing himself off a cliff, he says:

I have been miserably mistaken in imagining that I could conquer my love for you; I never can. The sight of this house, these fields and woods which my first love inhabited seems to have encreased it: in my madness I dared say to myself - Diana died to give her birth; her mother’s spirit was transferred into her frame, and she ought to be as Diana to me. (209-210)

After her father's confession, Mathilda hopes that an extended period away from her will rid him of his feelings, saying:

Let him spend another sixteen years of desolate wandering: let him once more utter his wild complaints to the vast woods and the tremendous cataracts of another clime: let him again undergo fearful danger and soul-quelling hardships: let the hot sun of the south again burn his passion worn cheeks and the cold night rains fall on him and chill his blood. (204)

These lines imply a similarity between the purging of her father's grief at Diana's death and the obliterating of his incestuous passion for his daughter, thereby once again drawing a connection between mother and daughter. But his suicide destroys any possibility of reestablishing a "normal" relationship between father and daughter, and as a result obliterates Mathilda's will to live. She sees herself as responsible for both inciting his incestuous passion - "this guilty love more unnatural than hate" - and causing his suicide, and from this point on defines herself as "monstrous" (210), linking Mathilda to Shelley's earlier novel.

This short novella reiterates a number of themes that Frankenstein explored. The father utterly destroys his creation by not providing the proper parental love and nurturing - like Victor Frankenstein he initially refuses to be in the same room with his infant daughter, and the "love" which he offers later is utterly corrupt. The mother is dead and the daughter is expected to fill her place, just as Caroline depends on Elizabeth to fill her place when she dies, saying, "Elizabeth, my love, you must supply my place to your younger cousins" (26). As in Frankenstein, all the young, vibrant sexual women die early - Diana, Elinor and finally Mathilda. The only woman allowed to survive into old age is the emotionally frigid maiden aunt who raises Mathilda. Diana dies as a result of childbirth, Elinor from a fever just two months before her intended marriage to Woodville - that is, a few days before her own sexual awakening, and Mathilda as a result of the psychological devastation her father's sexual obsession has wreaked on her. Anne Mellor argues that the novella can be read as Shelley's most radical text:

Mary Shelley's Mathilda shows us that a culture in which women can play no role but that of daughter, even in their marriages, denies its females the capacity for meaningful growth, since a woman's future self - even her daughter - can only replicate her present self. . . . Mathilda can be read as her most critical examination of . . . an ideology that offers women no social role outside the father's house and psychosexual domination. (Mary Shelley 200)

Shelley seems to be suggesting, as she does in Frankenstein, that female sexuality can only lead to death in a world structured by a patriarchal ideology, a world in which women and their sexuality will always be the potentially subversive, and therefore repressed, "Other".

WOLLSTONECRAFT AND THE MOTHER AS AUTHOR

Shelley's vision of the fate of women within a patriarchy echoes her mother's. The connections between motherhood, female imprisonment and female writing are distinctly drawn in Mary Wollstonecraft's unfinished novel Maria. The opening pages of the text introduce a woman, Maria, imprisoned in a madhouse by her husband in order for him to gain possession of her estate, possession that has been jeopardised by the birth of their daughter. The fact that Maria is confined after giving birth can be read as a metaphor for the literal "confinement" many women suffered as a result of becoming mothers. The heroine is "literally a prisoner of sex" (Kelly xvii) who comes to the conclusion, "[w]as not the world a vast prison, and women born slaves?" (79). Again and again during the novel she depicts female characters who specifically recount the horrors of married life at all levels of society, and generally the horrors of life in a patriarchal society.

Although she rages against the injustice of her husband's actions, it is her separation from her young daughter that Maria agonizes over. During her imprisonment in the madhouse, she therefore writes her story in the hope that her child will one day read it, for it "might perhaps instruct her daughter, and shield her from the misery, the tyranny, her mother knew not how to avoid" (82). This narrative describes Maria's own painful road to experience, a

movement away from a very naive “romantic” (128) perspective on life and love. As

Langbauer notes, maternity and writing thus become intimately related:

For Wollstonecraft, maternity is crucially linked to women’s sexual experience - maternity is especially sexuality’s sign, what makes it manifest: the sexually experienced Maria is definitely a mother, though Mary never is.⁹ And Maria’s (sexual) experience, which leads to her maternity, collapses into it, and becomes what enables her writing. Maria is a much more experienced and accomplished writer than Mary (she can give us a complete narrative rather than just Mary’s fragments) partly because she is a mother. Maria’s maternity provides the ability and occasion for writing: she writes to pass along her experience. But she also writes to maintain her very identity as a mother: she dedicates her narrative to her daughter, apostrophizing her in it, as an attempt to secure her (for that daughter may actually be dead, and Maria no longer a mother). Motherhood is not only the emblem of the woman writer in Wollstonecraft; Maria may only be a mother while she is writing. (212)

The story she writes is of her marriage, the appalling experience which has resulted in much of her suffering. Maria’s marriage to George Venables presented an opportunity for her to escape from an unhappy home life resulting from her father’s remarriage. She writes:

It is true, that George was by no means so great a favourite of mine . . . [I] thought more of obtaining my freedom, than of my lover. But, when George, seemingly anxious for my happiness, pressed me to quit my present painful situation, my heart swelled with gratitude - I knew not that my uncle had promised him five thousand pounds. (138)

However, his performance of one kind act in giving her money for the poor resulted in her fancy finding “a basis to erect its model of perfection on; and quickly went to work, with all the happy credulity of youth, to consider that heart as devoted to virtue, which had only obeyed a virtuous impulse” (135). She realises in retrospect “how difficult it was for women to avoid growing romantic, who have no active duties or pursuits” (87). This statement is a direct criticism of an ideology which confined women to the house with very little to do. Most middle-class women would have had servants to take care of all of the domestic duties including the one sacred to “womankind”, that of motherhood. It also resulted in many women being left almost destitute and unable to find any independent means to make money:

. . . though boys may be reckoned the pillars of the house without doors, girls are often the only comfort within. They but too frequently waste their health and spirits attending a dying parent, who leaves them in comparative poverty. After closing, with filial piety, a father's eyes, they are chased from the paternal roof, to make room for the first-born, the son, who is to carry the empty family-name down to posterity" (135-36)

Much like Radcliffe's mother-figures, her imprisonment in the madhouse is a metaphor for the limitations of domestic life:

. . . the want of occupation became even more painful than the actual pressure or apprehension of sorrow; and the confinement that froze her into a nook of existence, with an unvaried prospect before her, the most insupportable of evils. The lamp of life seemed to be spending itself to chase the vapours of a dungeon which no art could dissipate.- And to what purpose did she rally all her energy? - Was not the world a vast prison, and women born slaves? (79)

The destructive effect of the separate lives prescribed for men and women was blatantly obvious in Maria's marriage:

While circumstances were ripening my faculties, and cultivating my taste, commerce and gross relaxations were shutting his against any possibility of improvement, till, by stifling every spark of virtue in himself, he began to imagine that it no where existed. . . . To such a degree, in fact, did his cold, reserved manner affect me, that, after spending some days with him alone, I have imagined my self the most stupid creature in the world. (144-45)

Thus her initial romantic dreams soon disappeared. George had primarily married her for the money with which her uncle provided her, and he is not the shining knight Maria had supposed him to be. Once Maria discovered the truth and refused to ask her uncle to bail him out of trouble, he became "her tyrant - her husband" (76). He no longer showed any interest in her and she realised she "had been caught in a trap, caged for life" (144), and notes "[m]arriage had bastilled me for life" (154-55). Wollstonecraft reserves special condemnation for the notion of "conjugal rights" within a marriage such as Maria experiences:

He now seldom dined at home, and continually returned at a late hour, drunk, to bed. I retired to another apartment; I was glad, I own, to escape from his;

⁹ Wollstonecraft's Mary, A Fiction. (1788).

for personal intimacy without affection, seemed, to me the most degrading, as well as the most painful state in which a woman of any taste, not to speak of the peculiar delicacy of fostered sensibility, could be placed. But my husband's fondness for women was of the grossest kind, and imagination was so wholly out of the question, as to render his indulgences of this sort entirely promiscuous, and of the most brutal nature. My health suffered, before my heart was entirely estranged by the loathsome information; could I then have returned to his sullied arms, but as a victim to the prejudices of mankind, who have made women the property of their husbands? . . . His intimacy with profligate women, and his habits of thinking, gave him a contempt for female endowments; and he would repeat, when wine had loosed his tongue, most of the common-place sarcasms levelled at them, by men who do not allow them to have minds, because mind would be an impediment to gross enjoyment. Men who are inferior to their fellow men, are always most anxious to establish their superiority over women. (146-47)

Maria's horrible situation is not the exception, and indeed Wollstonecraft suggests that it is the rule. A "lovely maniac" is brought into the madhouse, and, on questioning Jemima about her, Maria is told:

She had been married, against her inclination, to a rich old man, extremely jealous (no wonder, for she was a charming creature); and that in consequence of his treatment, or something which hung on her mind, she had, during her first lying-in, lost her senses. (88)

Maria remembers that in her own childhood home her father "was to be instantaneously obeyed, especially by my mother, whom he very benevolently married for love; but took care to remind her of the obligation, when she dared, in the slightest instance, to question his absolute authority" (125). In this household, patriarchy was paramount, and the children were treated accordingly. Of the "deputy tyrant", her eldest brother, Maria says:

Extreme indulgence had rendered him so selfish, that he thought only of himself; and from tormenting insects and animals, he became the despot of his brothers, and still more of his sisters. . . . what was called spirit and wit in him, was cruelly repressed as forwardness in me. (125-6)

Darnford too, has unpleasant memories of his parent's marriage, telling Maria: "My father and mother had a visible dislike to each other, continually displayed" (94).

However, when Maria tries legally to dissolve her marriage, after her husband has tried to sell her to a friend of his and then imprisoned her when she resists this attempted

“transaction” and leaves him, she receives no support from the legal system, but rather the complete opposite. After hearing her story, the judge says in his ruling against her: “What virtuous woman thought of her feelings? - It was her duty to love and obey the man chosen by her parents and relations, who were qualified by their experience to judge better for her, than she could for herself” (199). The only man whom Maria can respect, besides Darnford, is her unmarried uncle:

He inculcated, with great warmth, self-respect, and a lofty consciousness of acting right, independent of the censure or applause of the world; nay, he almost taught me to be brave, and even despise its censure, when convinced of the rectitude of my own intentions. (128)

And what of Darnford? Does he represent any way around or out of this destructive patriarchal ideology? Unfortunately the answer must be no. Although his relationship with Maria thrives while they are both imprisoned in the madhouse, Wollstonecraft’s unfinished notes indicate that she envisaged it disintegrating once they escape and are again faced with the realities of life in this society. Paradoxically it seems that only in the madhouse can the lovers find the refuge from the very society which imprisoned them, and enjoy a relationship as equals. It is also in the madhouse that they are both *equally* victims of the system - the system that elsewhere differentiates between them on the basis of gender.

Maria, therefore, ends up relying on another woman, another victim of the patriarchy, Jemima, her prison guard, who helps her escape. Kelly notes in his ‘Introduction’ to the novel that:

Maria is a woman of the middle class, torn between sense and sensibility, and her sufferings have made her so susceptible to “romantic wishes” that “she frequently appeared, like a large proportion of her sex, only born to feel.”... Maria’s experience has made her feel too much, but that of her warder Jemima has made her try to feel nothing, and act on “prudence” and self-interest alone. Both responses are distortions of character caused by male control of “things as they are”, and if Maria’s fate reveals that men control the laws, Jemima’s shows that they also control the economic system. (xviii)

Jemima was born of an illicit relationship, and her mother dies a few days after her birth. After a particularly cruel upbringing by her father and stepmother, she leaves home and is raped by her employer who throws her out when she falls pregnant. Persecuted by the Poor Laws, she is forced into prostitution out of economic necessity. She finally gives up this life, but is unable to find any other employment besides that in the madhouse even though she has managed to educate herself for something much better than this. She has, by this time, hardened herself against all emotion, but Maria succeeds in re-awakening her “feminine” sympathy by telling Jemima of the child from whom she has been torn. As Kelly notes:

Jemima’s “conversion” reveals . . . the novel’s radical philosophy of revolution through those very qualities which have enslaved women since time began. Feeling, spread by example, is the gentle force that will open madhouse and prison and destroy the moral bastille built by man. (xviii)

Motherhood seems to be the only possible reason Wollstonecraft can discover for women to carry on living within this unjust society. But even this has its special tortures, as Maria realises in the opening pages: “Still she mourned for her child, lamented she was a daughter, and anticipated the aggravated ills of life that her sex rendered almost inevitable, even while dreading she was no more” (75-76).

Thus, in what can be read as a fictional presentation of the arguments set out in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, Wollstonecraft’s Maria illustrates how the ideology of “separate spheres” is institutionalized through marriage. She states in her ‘Author’s Preface’ to the novel that she wishes to address “the misery and oppression, peculiar to women, that arise out of the partial laws and customs of society” (73). Although Wollstonecraft does, as the title implies, give a comprehensive overview of many (if not all) the “wrongs” that women are forced to suffer in this society, marriage in particular is singled out as an institution which gives rise to much female misery, experienced at the hands of both their husbands and the legal system which supports the ideology. As Wollstonecraft notes:

For my part, I cannot suppose any situation more distressing, than for a woman of sensibility, with an improving mind, to be bound to such a man as I have described [George] for life; obliged to renounce all the humanizing affections, and to avoid cultivating her taste, lest her perception of grace and refinement of sentiment, should sharpen to agony the pangs of disappointment. Love, in which the imagination mingles its bewitching colouring, must be fostered by delicacy. I should despise, or rather call her an ordinary woman, who could endure such a husband as I have sketched.

These appear to me (matrimonial despotism of heart and conduct) to be the peculiar Wrongs of Woman, because they degrade the mind. ('Author's Preface' to Maria, 73-74)

Because Wollstonecraft died before completing it, the ending of the novel remains in doubt.

Initially the notes seem to indicate that Maria intends to escape from all the abuses she has suffered in this society through the oblivion of death, but then, all of a sudden, Jemima reappears with Maria's child who was thought dead. Maria quickly vomits up the poison she had imbibed and cries: "The conflict is over! - I will live for my child!" (203).

Whilst still imprisoned in the madhouse, Maria has promised Jemima that if she helps her to escape, she will teach her daughter to regard Jemima as "her second mother" as a testimony of Maria's "esteem, as well as of [her] gratitude" (121). The ending in which Jemima recovers Maria's "dead" child could, therefore, be argued to be a confirmation of this promise, indicating that Wollstonecraft sees some hope for the growth of a community of women which nurtures the female, prefiguring the "feminist solidarity it would take later generations to realize fully" (Johnson 68). This possible "community of women" contrasts to the disastrous heterosexual relationships depicted in the course of the novel, in which the woman always suffers terribly. As noted previously, even the relationship between Maria and Darnford dissolves once they re-enter the patriarchal community. Johnson argues that the seeds of this disintegration are already apparent in the madhouse, Maria blinded by his "republican ideology" (65) and her "love for him recapitulat[ing] the error she made with Venables" (64). The following description of their relationship, occurring before the

concluding notes which point to its disintegration, indicates the narrator's doubts about the validity of Darnford's feelings:

With Darnford she did not taste uninterrupted felicity; there was a volatility in his manner which often distressed her; but love gladdened the scene; besides, he was the most tender, sympathizing creature in the world. A fondness for the sex often gives an appearance of humanity to the behaviour of men, who have small pretensions to the reality; and they seem to love others, when they are only pursuing their own gratification. (192)

Kari Winter contends that “despite her passionate defense of women's right to love, Wollstonecraft's writing constantly expresses skepticism about the possibility of egalitarian heterosexual relationships” (143).

However, perhaps because this story of a “community of women” is only hinted at and never told, the overwhelming suffering that Maria has endured does seem to hold more weight at the end, and I feel that, in the light of the rest of the novel, Maria's suicide is perhaps a more probable conclusion. Wollstonecraft herself twice attempted suicide, and her view of death is made very clear in Letters from Norway. While contemplating the barren Scandinavian landscape with its “aged pines” and its “sapling[s] struggling for existence” she remarks: “I cannot tell why - but death, under every form, appears to me like something getting free - to expand in I know not what element” (132). For her heroine Maria, death was indeed a way to finally “get free”.

RADCLIFFE AND THE ABSENT MOTHER

Many recent feminist readings of Ann Radcliffe's novels concerning the significance of the mother-figure and other female characters, have been based on a purely psychoanalytical interpretation.¹⁰ One of the foremost of these critics is Claire Kahane, with her notable 1985

¹⁰ As Maggie Kilgour notes, much of this feminist interpretation draws on the work of Nancy Chodorow who suggests that the differences between male and female sexual identity can be understood in terms of a “modern capitalist society” which places the mother in the home as the primary caretaker of the children:

article “The Gothic Mirror”¹¹ inspiring many recent publications.¹² She argues that her analysis is a turning point in that it moves the focus away from the conflict between the father and the daughter, to concentrate instead on the complex relationship between mother and daughter:

Most interpretations of Gothic fiction, written primarily by male critics, attribute the terror that the Gothic by definition arouses to the motif of incest within an oedipal plot. From this perspective, the latent configuration of the Gothic paradigm seems to be that of a helpless daughter confronting the erotic power of a father or brother, with the mother noticeably absent. . . . Indeed, from my perspective the oedipal plot seems more a surface convention than a latent fantasy exerting force, more a framework that houses another mode of confrontation even more disquieting. What I see repeatedly locked into the forbidden center of the Gothic which draws me inward is the spectral presence of a dead-undead mother, archaic and all-encompassing, a ghost signifying the problematics of femininity which the heroine must confront. (335-36)

Following Julia Kristeva’s work on the infant’s first, “pre-oedipal” relationship with the mother, defined almost exclusively in terms of her physical presence, Kahane goes on to argue that, unlike the male child, “the female child, who shares the female body and its symbolic place in our culture, remains locked in a more tenuous and fundamentally ambivalent struggle for a separate identity [from the mother]” (337). Kahane defines the mother negatively as an all-encompassing figure: “the body, awesome and powerful, which is both our habitat and our prison” (336-37). Thus for Kahane the ultimate “mystery” at the center of the gothic novel, is the mystery of the mother-figure. She concludes:

While both the male and female child’s first relationship is thus with a woman, the male child is forced to repudiate his first identification, to set himself off as different from the mother, as he develops; for the female child, however, development may be even more problematic, as sexual identity is achieved by the continuation of the original identification with the mother. The asymmetry Chodorow notes thus supports antithetical gender roles: masculine identity is defined by difference, the rebellion against the identification, female is defined by sameness, and submissive obedience. The stereotypical male has too rigid a sense of his own isolation; the female, too little sense of her own difference from others. (Kilgour 232n).

¹¹ This essay is a revised edition of “Gothic Mirrors and Feminine Identity”, which first appeared in *Centennial Review* 24 (1980): 43-64.

¹² See for example: Susan Greenfield. “Veiled Desire: Mother-Daughter Love and Sexual Imagery in Ann Radcliffe’s *The Italian*.” *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 33 (1992): 73-89. George Haggerty. “Sensibility and Sexuality in *The Romance of the Forest*.” *The Critical Response to Ann Radcliffe*. Ed. Deborah Rogers. London: Glenwood Press, 1994. Alison Milbank. Introduction. *A Sicilian Romance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

I discover - or recreate - in the Gothic center the mystery of female identity, teeming with archaic fantasies of power and vulnerability, which a patriarchal society encourages by its cultural divisions. . . . There, however, a spectral mother, the original Other, *reveals herself as the antagonist in our common struggle to locate a self*. (emphasis added) (350-51)

This interpretation is also explored by Juliann Fleenor, who notes:

. . . the conflict at the heart of the Female Gothic, is the conflict with the all-powerful, devouring mother. This maternal figure is also a double, a twin perhaps, to the woman herself. For the mother represents what the woman will become if she heeds her sexual self, if she heeds the self who seeks the power that comes with acting as the mother, and if she becomes pregnant. . . . The drama of pregnancy . . . leads to constriction not freedom, madness not sanity, and monsters not symmetry. Because this conflict is central to most if not all women's lives - through their own mother's pregnancy and their subsequent birth, if not their own pregnancy - the popularity of the Gothic for women writers and readers appears to exist not because it allows escape but because it expresses this confrontation with one of the central enigmas of female existence, the relationship of mother and daughter. And that confrontation, finally, is with the mother, not the father, with the female self, and not the male. (16)

Although these readings are very valuable in providing a new "feminine" focus for Gothic criticism, I would argue that, much like the "oedipal" readings Kahane wishes to counter, an exclusive focus on the mother-figure parallels their oversimplification. In order to avoid this the interpretation of the mother-figure and the heroine's relationship to her needs to be firmly placed within the socio-historical context. For it seems to me that the heroine is exploring her relationships with both parental figures. Her emerging sexual identity is inextricably linked to both of them, the father figure because he embodies the strictures of the patriarchal society she lives in, and the mother because she illustrates the potential dangers that this society possesses for women. I would also disagree with the interpretation of the mother-figure as an "antagonist" in the heroine's struggle to "locate a self". Although the position of the mother (dead, imprisoned) does to a large extent symbolize the dangers the heroine must face as an adult female in a patriarchal society, the true mother is always represented positively. I would argue that the "antagonist" is not the mother-figure herself, but

the patriarchal definition of what a “mother” is - a definition which entails repression and marginalisation and is the true horror which the heroine has to confront and/or escape or subvert. Thus it can be argued that she is not attempting to escape from the frightening, “all-encompassing” mother-figure, but instead reacting to the male domination of this female body. My reading of these works is thus firmly grounded on the precept that in order to reach a complete understanding, one has to consider the social, cultural and political context surrounding their production, and this entails looking at both the female and male figures.

Many readers of Radcliffe's novels have been disappointed by what could be seen as a lack of character development, particularly in terms of the heroine. However, as critical attention has recently begun to show, the heroine's character cannot be seen in isolation, but rather as Andrea Henderson explains:

In fact the (gothic) novel produces identities through two separate processes: the display of personal qualities and merits through speech or action and the relational display of character that we see, for instance, in the structural paralleling of two characters - with the emphasis on the latter. (233)

Thus, although the heroine herself may at times come across as being one dimensional, one must realise that, to a certain extent, her character is structured allegorically, with alternative components being represented as other characters, that is, as her doppelgänger. In Radcliffe these alternatives are embodied in two forms, as the heroine's mother and as other female characters.¹³ The fact that the heroine can only be understood in relation to the other characters also highlights the significance of social identity or worth in these novels.¹⁴ For, as

¹³ It must be noted that these female characters often also represent mother-figures.

¹⁴ As Maggie Kilgour notes, this is particularly interesting in terms of modern psychoanalytic understanding of female identity formation:

The male hero achieves what is commonly seen as the goal of male development: autonomy; the female heroine what is commonly seen as her lot: relationship. Thus male identity is created through rivalry, and oedipal conflict with precursors, and female through identification with precursors, particularly the mother. Each extreme is achieved, however, at a price, as autonomy turns out to be incompatible with relationships, and produces total isolation, while relationships seem to preclude autonomy: the fact that the heroines of Radcliffe and her followers seem totally interchangeable suggests that individuality is denied

Henderson notes, “[a]s a general rule, neither we nor those in the novel have doubts about a character’s “personality” - the problem is not, for example, that Vivaldi mistakes Schedoni for a good guy - the confusion and the threat reside in relational identity: what does it say about Ellena if Schedoni is her father?” (234).

Much like Mary Shelley, one of the most important aspects of Radcliffe’s novels is signified by their “lack”, that is, the absent mother. In all of the four novels analyzed, the mother is either dead or missing and presumed dead by her daughter. Thus the heroine’s quest is usually marked by her (often unconscious) search for her mother’s true story, a search which is inevitably linked with the discovery of her own identity as a sexually mature woman. And it is one fraught with terrors which are for once very real indeed - the fate of the dead or missing mother is the very same one which threatens the heroine, and seems to threaten all women existing in this society. The fact that death, imprisonment or merely “absence” are the signifiers which mark the position of the mother, signals to the heroine, and the readers, that entering the sexual realm of womanhood is an experience which has very real parallels to being imprisoned and forgotten about, be it in an underground chamber, a nunnery or a madhouse. For Eugenia DeLamotte “the story of women’s burial is not just about domestic entrapment but also about women’s forced concealment of the suffering it occasioned” (153). A quick catalogue of the mothers in Radcliffe’s novels reveals the following: in A Sicilian Romance the mother, presumed dead, has actually been imprisoned by her husband in the caverns beneath her own home; in The Romance of the Forest the heroine’s mother dies shortly after giving birth to her; in The Mysteries of Udolpho the mother dies in the opening chapter, but her identity is brought into question and the heroine spends the rest of the novel attempting to discover her true mother; and in The Italian, the mother, whom the heroine thought was dead,

the properly socialised female. The first implies that individuality makes society impossible . . . , the second that society makes individuality impossible.” (Kilgour 38)

is found hidden in a convent, living in fear of her life. It goes without saying that a clear pattern emerges.

Radcliffe's second novel, A Sicilian Romance, has up until very recently received little critical attention. It is only since feminist critics have turned their attention to the Gothic, and in particular the Gothic mother, that interest has been shown in a novel in which the "dead" mother is discovered imprisoned in a labyrinthine cavern beneath the family household. The heroine, Julia, and her brother and sister have always believed that their mother, Louisa, died while they were very young. Louisa was "a lady yet more distinguished for the sweetness of her manners and the gentleness of her disposition, than for her beauty" (3). Soon after giving birth to her children, she "dies", as the "arrogant and impetuous character of the marquis operated powerfully upon the mild and susceptible nature of his lady: and it was by many persons believed, that his unkindness and neglect put a period to her life" (3). The daughters are therefore raised by a childhood friend of their mother's in the secluded family home, while the father and his new wife live in the city. It is not until they have grown into beautiful young women that he returns, and soon has plans to marry Julia off to the rich, old Duke de Luovo in order to increase his own financial and social standing. The intended bridegroom is characterised by his delight "in simple undisguised tyranny. He had been twice married, and the unfortunate women subjected to his power, had fallen victims to the slow but corroding hand of sorrow" (57). When Julia turns down this proposal, her father is furious, saying:

'What - when wealth, honour, and distinction, are laid at my feet, shall they be refused, because a foolish girl - a very baby, who knows not good from evil, cries, and says she cannot love! Let me not think of it - My just anger may, perhaps, out-run discretion, and tempt me to chastise your folly. - Attend to what I say - accept the duke, or quit this castle for ever, and wander where you will.' (56)

Julia has fallen in love with the young hero, Hippolitus, and in order to avoid this forced marriage, flees her tyrannical father's castle. During another desperate flight later in the

novel, she unknowingly re-enters the castle's underground passageways and discovers her "dead" mother alive, imprisoned for fifteen years by her husband beneath her own home. The mysterious groans coming from the abandoned chambers that terrified Julia and her brother at the beginning of the novel, are now revealed to have been the sounds of their own mother's grief. Although Julia and her sister had lived for fifteen years in the same house as their imprisoned mother, her groans are only heard for the first time when Julia enters sexual adulthood - marked by her attraction to Hippolitus and the proposal from the Duke. Thus the story can be seen as a literal account of how a daughter, crossing the threshold of adult knowledge, enters the world of female repression symbolised by her own mother's unknown and unheard suffering, emphasized in Julia's reflections:

When she considered the long and dreadful sufferings of her mother, and that she had for many years lived so near her, ignorant of her misery, and even of her existence - she was lost in astonishment and pity. (177)

DeLamotte notes that a husband's right to confine his wife in his house was not challenged legally until 1891, and the Gothic villain's imprisonment of his wife can therefore be seen as illustrating both the metaphorical and the real potential of the laws regarding married women's status (156). A contemporary account of these laws is evidence of this:

By marriage the very being or legal existence of a woman is suspended, or at least it is incorporated or consolidated into that of the husband, under whose wing, protection and cover she performs everything, and she is therefore called in our law a *feme covert* [sic].¹⁵

Louisa's secret imprisonment in her own home can therefore be seen as a metaphor for the invalidation of her identity that she experiences in her marriage. As Madame de Menon explains to Louisa's daughters, "though the mildness of her disposition made her tamely submit to the unfeeling authority of her husband, his behaviour sunk deep in her heart, and she pined in secret" (33). Julia's discovery of her mother's "true story", the secret suffering which

¹⁵ Sir William Blackstone, Commentary on the Laws of England. 1765. Quoted in DeLamotte, 157.

she had spent her entire life so near to yet ignorant of, underlines how these laws served to negate the very existence of the wife as a person, invalidating her misery. It is this state of non-being that threatens the girl entering womanhood.

The heroine of The Italian, Ellena Rosalba, is introduced at the opening of the novel as an orphan who had never known her mother “having lost her while she was an infant” (9). However, during her ensuing adventures, resulting directly from her attachment to Vincentio di Vivaldi, she takes refuge in a convent and there discovers her “dead” mother, Olivia, alive and well. She has taken the veil and secreted herself in this secluded convent in order to escape the tyranny of her second husband, Schedoni, the brother and murderer of Ellena’s father. Schedoni describes to his confessor how he planned his brother’s murder in order to gain his estates and, more importantly, his wife:

‘I contrived’ said he, ‘that my brother should die at a distance from home, and I so conducted the affair, that his widow never suspected the cause of his death. It was not till long after the usual time of mourning had expired, that I ventured to solicit her hand: but she had not yet forgotten my brother, and she rejected me. My passion would no longer be trifled with. I caused her to be carried from her house, and she was afterwards willing to retrieve her honour by the marriage vow. I had sacrificed my conscience, without having found happiness; - she did not even condescend to conceal her disdain.’ (340)

It is thus clear that Olivia only consented to marry Schedoni after he had raped her. The fact that she bears his daughter (a child who dies in infancy, but whom Schedoni initially believes is Ellena) indicates that impending pregnancy and birth also influenced her decision. However, although he managed to dominate her body, her mind remained free and she actively displayed her disgust towards him. Olivia eventually escaped his tyranny, but only by faking her own death after he had attempted to murder her with a dagger in a jealous rage:

The wound, as appears, was not mortal. But the atrocity of the intent determined her to seize the opportunity thus offered by the absence of Schedoni, and her own peculiar circumstances, to release herself from his tyranny . . . (381)

She chooses the oblivion of “death” over the torments of marriage to a tyrant, and enters an exclusively female world - the convent. The connection between Ellena and Olivia becomes clear when this story is uncovered, as the reader realises that Olivia’s tormentor was the very same man who kidnapped and planned to kill Ellena with a dagger, in a scene with many overtones of rape. The daughter is thus once again faced with the same fate as the mother. She, however, manages to escape it, and in doing so eventually uncovers her mother’s story, bringing to justice their persecutor. But while Ellena can move on to a marriage with her chosen suitor, one fought for against both parental and ecclesiastical power, Olivia remains in the nunnery, perhaps indicating that she has been too damaged by the patriarchal society to ever be able to rejoin it.

As becomes clear from the above discussion, the daughter’s discovery of and identification with the mother bears much thematic significance in Radcliffe’s novels. Both women symbolize the potential suffering and oppression women can experience in a patriarchal society. However, the daughter’s uncovering of her mother’s true story plays a crucial role in disabling these oppressive structures - embodied to a large extent in the villain, allowing the daughter a chance at a different future. The discovery of her mother and/or her maternal history also serves to verify her own identity, allowing her to claim her rightful inheritance.

The Mysteries of Udolpho reiterates this theme, but expands it at the same time. The heroine, Emily St Aubert, is introduced in the opening pages as having had an exceedingly happy childhood, spent with both parents on their idyllic estate in France, La Vallée. However she is orphaned very early in the novel. Indeed, her mother is sick and ailing from the outset and is dead by the end of the first chapter, quickly followed by her father a few chapters later. Soon after this Emily becomes aware of a mystery involving her father and another woman, whose miniature she strongly resembles. This leads her to doubt whether the woman who had

raised her was in fact her true mother, and she therefore spends much of the rest of the novel attempting to discover/uncover her mother's true identity. In her travels she is confronted with a number of possible mothers, all of whom mirror her in some way.

One of these doppelgängers is Laurentini Di Udolpho, the rightful owner of the castle of Udolpho, in which Emily is imprisoned by Montoni. The disappearance and subsequent fate of Laurentini provides one of the novel's central mysteries, one particularly intriguing to the reader as Radcliffe suggests a connection between this event and the secret horror that Emily discovers behind a veil in a deserted room in the castle. Laurentini is described as:

. . . fond of company, delighted with admiration, yet disdainful of the opinion of the world, when it happened to contradict her inclinations; had a gay and brilliant wit, and was mistress of all the arts of fascination. Her conduct was such as might have been expected, from the weakness of her principles and the strength of her passions. (655-56)

Radcliffe indicates that her dissolute character is largely a result of her parents, who "ought to have restrained her strong passions, and mildly instructed her in the art of governing them, [but] nurtured them by early indulgence" (655).

It is not until the closing pages that we are informed that the missing Laurentini is in fact the mad nun Agnes whose songs have haunted the novel. Her story is one of passion thwarted by the codes of society, which brand any woman engaging in sexual relations before her nuptials as a dishonour to any man who marries her. Thus when Laurentini's betrothed, the Marquis de Villeroi, becomes suspicious of her reputation and makes "[a] minuter enquiry than he had before thought it necessary to make", he is convinced "that he had been deceived in her character, and she, whom he had designed for his wife, afterwards became his mistress" (656).

Laurentini, unaware of her transformation from bride-to-be to "mistress", is distraught when he eventually leaves her and marries an "unblemished" woman, who happens to be Emily's paternal aunt and forms her second doppelgänger. Radcliffe makes it clear that the Marquis'

decision has been influenced by social strictures rather than by his own feelings. He realizes this when he sees Laurentini again:

. . . all the energy, with which he had first loved, returned, for his passion had been resisted by prudence, rather than overcome by indifference; and, since the honour of his family would not permit him to marry her, he had endeavoured to subdue his love, and had so far succeeded, as to select the then Marchioness for his wife, whom he loved at first with a tempered and rational affection. (657)

The Marchioness has also married in order to please her father and in opposition to her own feelings for another. Her “indifference” has become apparent to the Marquis “notwithstanding her efforts to conceal it”, and as a result he suspects that “her affections were engaged by another person” (657-58). As Kari Winter notes, these female characters are trapped in a hopeless situation as: “[o]n the one hand, the Marquis poisons his wife because she is not sufficiently passionate to suit his taste. On the other hand, he originally chose not to marry Laurentini because she was too passionate, a quality enjoyable in a lover but unacceptable in a wife” (100).

Laurentini soon manages to convince him that his wife is unfaithful, and his behaviour towards his wife alters accordingly, even though he is at the time conducting an illicit relationship himself. The innocent Marchioness:

. . . observed, with extreme grief, the alteration in her husband’s manners. He became reserved and thoughtful in her presence; his conduct was austere, and sometimes even rude; and he left her, for many hours together, to weep for his unkindness, and to form plans for the recovery of his affection. His conduct afflicted her the more, because, in obedience to the command of her father, she had accepted his hand, though her affections were engaged to another, whose amiable disposition, she had reason to believe, would have ensured her happiness. (658)

Laurentini eventually persuades the Marquis to poison his wife, but her death awakens in him feelings of remorse, particularly when he realizes that she was “blameless” (659). The Marquis therefore deserts Laurentini again, seeing her only once to “curse her as the instigator of his crime, and to say, that he spared her life only on condition, that she passed the rest of

her days in prayer and penance” (659). Completely devastated by the words of the man “for whose sake she had not scrupled to stain her conscience with human blood” (659), she retires to a convent, becoming the mad nun, Sister Agnes, who perceives in Emily a “sister”:

. . . Emily, who, looking up perceived the eyes of Agnes fixed on hers, after which the sister rose, took her hand, gazed earnestly upon her countenance, for some moments, in silence, and then said,
 ‘You are young - you are innocent! I mean you are yet innocent of any great crime! - But you have passions in your heart, - scorpions; they sleep now - beware how you awaken them! - they will sting you, even unto death!’
 Emily, affected by these words and by the solemnity, with which they were delivered, could not suppress her tears.
 ‘Ah! is it so?’ exclaimed Agnes, her countenance softening from its sternness -
 ‘so young, and so unfortunate! We are sisters, then indeed. (574-75)

This encounter with Laurentini disturbs Emily deeply. The reader is therefore forced to question whether Laurentini’s innuendoes hold any truth, or are merely the ramblings of an insane nun. The comparison Laurentini draws between herself and Emily hints at the heroine’s potential for sexual transgression. Emily does indeed have “passions” in her heart, passions strong enough to cause her to refuse the orders of her guardian, Montoni, regarding her marriage partner. However, as becomes clear towards the end of the novel, she is able to overcome these emotions when she suspects that Valancourt has compromised his morals and her faith in him while living in Paris. She breaks off their relationship even though it causes her great distress. Therefore in contrast to Laurentini, her capacity for reason can outweigh her passions when necessary. Radcliffe is thus implicitly undermining the belief that women, unlike men, were ruled by their emotions and had little ability to act rationally.

In Emily’s second encounter with the nun, Laurentini asserts the similarity between Emily and the dead Marchioness that others have remarked on before. At first she believes Emily to be the dead woman’s ghost come back to haunt her, but recovers her senses saying “you need only look in that mirror, and you will behold her; you surely are her daughter: such

striking resemblance is never found but among near relations” (645). This comparison also causes Emily much disquiet, as it suggests that her parentage is not what she believed it to be:

Her faith in St Aubert’s principles would scarcely allow her to suspect that he had acted dishonourably; and she felt such reluctance to believe herself the daughter of any other, than her, whom she had always considered and loved as a mother, that she would hardly admit such a circumstance to be possible; yet the likeness, which it had frequently been affirmed she bore to the late Marchioness, the former behaviour of Dorothée the old housekeeper, the assertion of Laurentini, and the mysterious attachment, which St. Aubert had discovered, awakened doubts, as to his connection with the Marchioness, which her reason could neither vanquish, or confirm. (663)

Laurentini’s identification of Emily as both the Marchioness and her (the Marchioness’s) daughter, is a mistake echoed in an earlier scene in which the Marchioness’s housekeeper remarks on the resemblance and drapes Emily in one of the dead woman’s veils. Emily “shudder[s]” to find it “wrapped around her” (534) and immediately throws it off. This action suggests Emily’s metaphorical refusal of the identification. Unlike the Marchioness, Emily will not follow orders concerning whom to choose for her husband, the action which ultimately led to the Marchioness’s death. Her virtue is not passive and she therefore avoids becoming the victim of desire. Her refusal of this identity is supported by the text, which eventually reveals that Emily is not the Marchioness’s daughter but her niece, and her parents are in fact the people she always believed them to be.

Nina da Vinci Nichols has argued that these doppelgängers represent a cautionary moral lesson for the young heroines. She notes that the heroines “learn, vicariously, that the wages of passion are madness, disease and death and so conquer the inner self by repression and sublimation” (190). This appears to be a very conservative reading of the portrayal of female sexuality in these novels. Laurentini does suffer as a result of her uncontrolled passions, but Radcliffe makes it clear that had she received the correct education she could have learned when and how to control them. It is also apparent that the social strictures concerning a sexually “marked” woman and her position in society play a very large part in

Laurentini's ruination. If Radcliffe is condemning uncontrolled sexuality, then she is also criticizing a society that completely ostracizes any woman who is sexually active outside of marriage. Laurentini can be seen as representing one end of the scale in her complete lack of control over her passions, while the other end is the Marchioness. Unwilling to go against her father's orders even though she believes the man she loves "would have ensured her happiness" (658), she marries the Marquis, a step that results in her death. In following the dictates of society, symbolized by her father, she becomes the victim of her passive virtue, and suffers nearly as much from the slow poisoning at the hands of her husband, as Laurentini does from the guilt which drives her insane.

A similar interpretation to that of Nichols is made by Eugenia DeLamotte in her discussion of the role of female characters in Gothic fiction. She traces the motif of the "Good Other Woman" and the "Evil Other Woman" in Gothic fiction, noting:

[L]ike the Good Other Woman, the Evil Other Woman often spends much of her life hidden away in the castle, secret room or whatever, a fact suggesting that even a virtuous woman's lot is the same she would have merited had she been the worst of criminals. The heroine's discovery of such Other Women is in the one case an encounter with women's oppression - their confinement as wives, mothers, and daughters - and in the other with a related repression: the confinement of a Hidden Woman inside those genteel writers and readers who, in the idealization of the heroine's virtues, displace their own rebellious feelings with filial piety, their anger with fortitude, and their sexuality with sensibility. Both discoveries reveal complementary aspects of women's subordination: their immurement in domestic spaces as sisters, wives, and daughters and the immurement inside themselves of an angry, rebellious, sexual Other Woman that conventional morality taught them to reject. (153-54).

Radcliffe's novels do indeed reveal that the fate of the "Good Other Woman", symbolised by the Marchioness and the absent mother-figures discussed earlier, is the same as that of the "Bad Other Woman", such as Laurentini. However, while these "good" women do illustrate female repression and confinement in a patriarchal society, I would disagree with DeLamotte that Radcliffe and the other "genteel writers" use the "idealization of the heroine's virtues" to suppress both their own and their readers' feelings of unhappiness. The polarities suggested by

the “Good Other Woman” and “Bad Other Woman”, are the very ones suggested by a patriarchal ideology that positions women either as unblemished “angels” or fallen temptresses. The heroine’s refusal of the identifications offered by these two positions, suggests that the texts, rather than supporting this ideology, are advocating a different position for women to act from, one firmly based on both their emotional and intellectual value. I would argue therefore, that while both these women do represent examples that Emily must learn from, she does not learn to “conquer the inner self by repression and sublimation” (Nichols, 190). Rather it becomes evident that in order to be happy *she* must have complete control over her sexuality, both in terms of governing it when necessary and in recognizing its vital significance when choosing the correct partner. What Radcliffe does seem to be attempting to “conquer” are the devastating effects social constructs concerning sexuality can have on women.

CONCLUSION

Radcliffe’s final vision of the position female sexuality within a patriarchy is much more positive than the conclusions reached by Shelley and Wollstonecraft. The ambiguous ending of Wollstonecraft’s novel does, however, provide a fitting metaphor for the issues confronted by these writers through their female characters. The two choices Maria is faced with, death or motherhood, highlight the issues that these writers confront through their female characters. The relationship between the feminine ideal, symbolically represented by “motherhood”, and “death”, or the negation of female identity, is one which runs through all of the novels. For Wollstonecraft, the only real choices available in a society which prohibits women any truly independent existence are between a complete immersion in the role of “mother” or suicide. The fate of Shelley’s female characters seems to suggest that for them there is no choice - a spiritual or physical death is the only possibility. Characters like

Elizabeth, Caroline and Justine, who seem to adhere perfectly to the feminine ideal, succumb because this ideal prevents them from being able to protect themselves in any way - they either die as a result of self-sacrifice or are killed when faced with a world outside of the domestic realm. Like Justine and Mathilda, the risk of women being defined as “monstrous” is just as real as being the “angel” - the only positions available to women within this patriarchal ideology are these polar opposites. To accept the symbolic position of “mother”, to attempt to fulfill the female ideal, can only result in death - the sole outcome of an ideology which negates female existence. For Radcliffe, the outlook is more optimistic. Although her novels are peopled with women who have suffered appallingly, her young heroines learn from the histories of the other female characters, and the novels end with them marrying the men of their choice.

* * * * *

Although this thesis aims to demonstrate that the main concern of the “Female Gothic” is the exploration of the idea(1) of the female and the feminine - paying particular attention to the portrayal of female sexuality - it is essential to analyse the role of the male characters in the novels and their relationship with the heroine in order to reach a complete understanding of the nature of the female/feminine that is being examined. The following chapter will thus investigate the presentation of male characters in the Female Gothic.

CHAPTER TWO

Heroes and Villains: Visions of Patriarchy in the Female Gothic

'Fly, said he, from the authority of a father who abuses his power, and assert the liberty of choice, which nature assigned you

Ann Radcliffe, A Sicilian Romance

In the Gothic novels, heroes and heroines share the nightmare - and the nightmare is real.

Margaret Anne Doody, *Deserts, Ruins and Troubled Waters*

VISIONS OF PATRIARCHY

The institution of the patriarchal family provided the social and psychological foundation for most of the injustice and cruelty described in female Gothic novels. Seen within the socio-historical context, it is clear that the novels provide a female perspective on a society which was showing increasing signs of a separation of spheres, an ideology which would become rigidly entrenched as the years passed. This system saw women confined to the home and defined by all the "feminine" ideals connected to it, and men limited to the public world of action and economic and intellectual endeavour¹⁶. Within this society, women's lives and identities were, therefore, socially determined, firstly, by their fathers and thereafter by their husbands. This thesis contends that the novels examined criticise this system not only for its limitation of women, but for the attendant constraints it placed on men by structuring their identity solely around the notion of masculinity, particularly in terms of detaching them from an emotional existence¹⁷.

By structuring the novels around the consciousness of the heroine, the authors are

¹⁶ This definition of women is with relevance to middle and upper class women, the women who were the overwhelming producers and consumers of Gothic fiction during this period.

¹⁷ It must be noted that these novels are not direct moral tracts that manifestly denounce the patriarchal system, but rather work at a metaphorical level, and, especially in terms of Ann Radcliffe, present an oblique criticism of the ideology.

insisting upon the validity of the female experience within (or rather from without) a male world¹⁸, and are thus also providing a female perspective of society. As Alison Milbank notes:

. . . in Radcliffean Gothic the patriarchal order is revealed as malignant and in need of replacement. Moreover, its heroines do not merely break out of the tyrant's control, but . . . look back into the past to establish a true history which the patriarch had sought to falsify. Emily St Aubert, for example, is able to use the portrait and documents entrusted to her by her father to rewrite family history, and reveal injustices in the past. (Daughters of the House 11)

Thus when analysing the male characters in these novels and their function in terms of their relationship with the heroine, it must be kept in mind that they often act on a symbolic level as aspects of the patriarchal system and the destruction it wreaks on both men and women. However, by creating characters that do not always conform to gender stereotypes - the men are not all exclusively "masculine" nor are the women entirely "feminine" in terms of social ideals - the authors undermine the rigid definitions of the society, providing alternative views on sexuality: Ann Radcliffe's "heroes" are often very feminine, and Mary Wollstonecraft's Maria and Jemima exhibit many "masculine" characteristics. This revision of gender stereotypes is especially true of Mary Shelley's *Monster*, who although biologically male, experiences life as the marginalised "Other" in a society.

ELIMINATING THE FEMALE

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* both reflects and criticises the ideology of the society in which she lived and wrote, outlining the dangers of the repression of the feminine, in the female as well as the male. As argued in the previous chapter, the female characters are depicted as "housebound-angels" restricted to the private, domestic world. In contrast, the men - in particular Victor Frankenstein and Robert Walton - occupy the public realm of

¹⁸ The only exception to this narrative strategy is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* which provides a number of male narrative viewpoints. However, the *Monster's* story, located at the center of the novel, can be seen as exemplifying many of the horrors women are faced with as the "outsiders" in a patriarchy.

intellectual action and adventure. This strict gender division in the novel, which reflects the social structure of a patriarchy, results in a separation between the emotional and intellectual, as the emotional sphere is connected exclusively to the feminine, the domestic, the private, while the intellectual is restricted to the public and masculine. Frankenstein demonstrates the disastrous consequences of this division.

Victor Frankenstein leaves home and embarks on his career as a scientist just after the death of his mother. Maggie Kilgour argues that:

[d]etached from a female past, he is able to create himself as a scientist. Yet the scientist is both the opposite of the mother and a parodic version of her. As critics have noted, Victor's usurpation of divine powers of creation is also a male appropriation of the female ability to give birth. He thus breaks from a female past to recreate it in grotesque forms. (206)

While carrying out his scientific research in dissecting rooms, slaughter houses and cemeteries, Victor enters a dreamlike, obsessive state, and does not contact his family for two years. This depiction of the overachieving scientist who follows his own aspirations at the expense of all emotional and domestic ties, can be interpreted as a critique of the particular type of Romantic egotism displayed in Percy Shelley's lack of emotional interaction with his family¹⁹. Mary Poovey has argued that "as the object of desire of an imaginative overreacher very like Percy Shelley himself, the demon substitutes for the fruitful interchange of family life the fruitlessness of self love, for what Frankenstein loves is an image of himself" ("Ideology" 384)²⁰. Victor thus chooses to create a male rather than a female²¹. Margaret Homans suggests that the sex of the Monster:

¹⁹ A number of critics have seen Victor Frankenstein as, to a large extent, being directly modelled on Percy Shelley, not only in terms of character but also biographical details, for example: Mellor, Anne. Mary Shelley.; Veeder, William. Mary Shelley & Frankenstein - The Fate of Androgyny. Veeder pp92-5, 112-23 and Mellor (Mary Shelley) pp 72-7.

²⁰ It is worth noting that just as Frankenstein's desire is for a male demon, Walton too yearns, not for a bride, but for "the company of a man who could sympathise with me, whose eyes would reply to mine" (8).

²¹ It is ironic, therefore, that - as has been argued in the previous chapter - a strong connection can be drawn between the position of the Monster and that of women. Both are positioned as "Other" within the patriarchal society.

constitutes part of Shelley's exposure of the male romantic economy that would substitute for real and therefore powerful female others a being imagined on the model of the male poet's own self. By making the demon masculine, Shelley suggests that romantic desire seeks to do away, not only with the mother, but also with all females so as to live finally in a world of mirrors that reflect a comforting illusion of the male self's independent wholeness. (385)

Indeed, the embodiment of these individualised desires - the Monster he creates in singular, male reproduction - is the instrument which destroys his entire family and ultimately Frankenstein himself. As a result of the exclusion of the emotional from his work and the repression of the feminine in himself, he has no empathy for his monster, both during its creation and once it is brought to life. Thus in giving life to a creature by himself, Frankenstein is denying the feminine and sexual aspects that are essential in natural creation, and is therefore unable and unwilling to give his creation the nurturing it requires. In the usurpation of the natural reproductive power of both Nature (which is defined as feminine) and the female, Frankenstein's creation can be interpreted as an attempt to exclude and abolish women completely. He believes he can produce a higher form of species if he eliminates both the sexual and female, an elimination, in fact, of the "sexual female". However, unnatural reproduction can only result in an unnatural creation - and the result is the hideous Monster.

The Monster's monstrousness is a mark and consequence of Frankenstein's severance from femininity. And as a result of this monstrousness Frankenstein rejects his creature, just as he has rejected the feminine, the domestic and the emotional. Frankenstein thus becomes the embodiment of the patriarchal society which creates and destroys but is unable to nurture, and rejects and represses anything regarded as Other, anything which presents a danger to the status quo by virtue of its "otherness". It is this rejection which results in the Monster's murderous rage. However, whereas Victor divorces himself from his family and community in order to fulfill his egotistical ambitions of creation, the solitary Monster is driven by the need to develop relationships with others:

[Victor's] emotional isolation leads him to create the murderer of everyone he "loves". In contrast to his creature, whose violence affirms life insofar as it springs from a desperate need to be connected to other people, Victor is truly necrophilic - pathologically obsessed with corpses, decay, and filth. (Winter 72)

The Monster is forced by Victor's abandonment of him and his own hideousness to conceal himself, and become a voyeur of the communal life he cannot be a part of. Describing his acquisition of knowledge by watching the De Lacey family, the Monster recalls:

I heard of the difference of sexes; of the birth and growth of children; how the father doated on the smiles of the infant, and the lively sallies of the older child; how all the life and cares of the mother were wrapt up in the precious charge; how the mind of youth expanded and gained knowledge; of brother, sister, and all the various relationships which bind one human being to another in mutual bonds.

But where were my friends and relations? (97)

He implores Victor to create a female monster to share his suffering and alleviate his isolation, arguing:

If I have no ties and no affections, hatred and vice must be my portion; the love of another will destroy the cause of my crimes, and I shall become a thing, of whose existence every one will be ignorant. My vices are the children of a forced solitude that I abhor; and my virtues will necessarily arise when I live in communion with an equal. I shall feel the affections of a sensitive being, and become linked to the chain of existence and events, from which I am now excluded. (121)

Like Victor, his corruption is identified with isolation. However, unlike his creator, he has not chosen his isolation, and believes that if he is part of a community he will be "virtuous":

"Every where I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous" (77-78).

Persuaded by the Monster's argument that once he has a mate he will stop his bloodshed, Frankenstein agrees to create a female monster. But once he has begun the actual construction he begins to consider what the results might be for his society, the rigidly defined patriarchy:

she [the female monster] might become ten thousand times more malignant than her mate, and delight, for its own sake, in murder and wretchedness. He

had sworn to quit the neighbourhood of man, and hide himself in deserts; but she had not; and she, who in all probability was to become a thinking and reasoning animal, might refuse to comply with a compact made before her creation. They might even hate each other; the creature who already lived loathed his deformity, and might he not conceive a greater abhorrence for it when it came before his eyes in the female form? She also might turn with disgust from him to the superior beauty of man. . . . One of the first results of those sympathies for which the dæmon thirsted would be children, and a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth. (138)

So Frankenstein “tears to pieces” the nearly completed female. He destroys what he is afraid of, a female who might assert her own will, a female who might not be afraid of and obedient to the male, who may resist contracts made by the patriarchal society before her birth, contracts which would govern her very existence, as they govern and destroy Caroline, Justine and Elizabeth. He is also afraid of her ability to produce offspring and therefore once again negates female reproductive power by mutilating and destroying the passive female body. As Anne Mellor notes:

What Victor Frankenstein truly fears is female sexuality as such. A woman who is sexually liberated, free to choose her own life, her own sexual partner, and to propagate at will, can only appear monstrously ugly to Victor Frankenstein, for she defies that sexist aesthetic that insists that women be small, delicate, modest, passive and sexually pleasing. (Mary Shelley 120)

So what alternative, if any, does Shelley offer to the destructive power of the rigid gender divisions of a patriarchal society? It could be argued that the framing narrative of the novel, the story of Robert Walton’s sea quest, offers a narrative in which relations triumph over egotistical aspirations. Walton is frequently seen as simply a double of Frankenstein, but a closer analysis will reveal that the relation between the two men’s stories is left unresolved. They meet during Walton’s attempted polar exploration and Victor’s final pursuit of the Monster, and Victor proceeds to tell Walton his story. The aim of this narrative is, however, ambiguous. At times it seems to be a moral cautionary tale, allowing Walton to learn from Victor’s experiences and mistakes. However, Victor’s final words indicate that he himself has

learned nothing from his experience, and his last sentence seems to encourage Walton along the disastrous, and ultimately fatal, path that he followed:

Farewell, Walton! Seek happiness in tranquillity, and avoid ambition, even if it be only the apparently innocent one of distinguishing yourself in science and discoveries. Yet why do I say this? I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed. (186)

What is Walton, and indeed, what are we the reader, meant to understand by Victor's tale? Unlike his doppelgänger's Walton's is the story of exile and return. He is forced by the needs of the community, represented by his crew, to be responsible despite his own desires and he returns home, his quest unfulfilled. Does this indicate that he has learned from Victor's experiences? Winter asks:

Are they opposites, in which Walton is a redeemed version of Victor who turns back from his doomed quest, albeit against his will, to the world of relations before it is too late? Or is the relationship sequential, one of inheritance, in which Walton, having learned nothing from the story save the confirmation of his already established romantic ideals, will carry on Victor's task elsewhere? (215)

I would argue that the fact that Walton has to be forced to return, with the threat of mutiny hanging over his head, indicates that he has in fact learned nothing from Victor's story. We do not see his homecoming, and it seems fair to assume that as soon as he could Walton would again be following his egotistical desires.

Shelley does depict another alternative social structure in the novel, a vision of social order based on justice, gender equality and mutual affection: the De Lacey family. The tale told by the Monster of this family includes the story of Safie or Wisdom, who displays female resistance to the existing order by running away from her treacherous and tyrannical father to search for her true love, Felix or Happiness. Once she has found him, she is taught to read and write French in a household in which all work is shared equally. In her escape from the tyranny of patriarchal society Safie has applied the teachings of her mother "to aspire to higher powers of intellect, and an independence of spirit" (99), and finds happiness as a result thereby

vindicating women's capacity for activity and autonomy. But the De Laceys do not remain before us, running away in fear when the Monster reveals himself to them.

It could be asserted that the De Laceys' reaction to the monster is an indictment of them, undermining their way of life. However, I would argue that the qualities that the De Lacey family represents cannot survive in a society built on division and repression. When they are brought face to face with the hideousness of this monster, symbolic of the destructiveness of the rigid gender divisions in patriarchal society (as has been argued, his very monstrosity is the direct result of the repression and exclusion of the feminine), they are repulsed and disappear. Frankenstein can thus be read as a critique of the patriarchal system, outlining the horrors that result from an institutionalised separation of the masculine from the feminine.

THE SPECTRE OF INCEST

It is apparent from the socio-historical context that the father figure in these novels is very significant in terms of the overwhelming influence he would have had in the lives of both his daughter(s) and wife. Women were almost literally passed on from the father to the husband, who would then assume the exact same determining role for his wife as her father had before him - including now of course a hitherto unrealised sexual component. This latent sexuality was, however, of paramount importance during the marriage negotiations, a principal determinant of the social "value" of the woman and consequently one of the main "bargaining" points in the transaction by which the woman changed hands. Thus in the novels, the father figure is often not a loving nurturing one, but rather someone who tries to use his daughter/niece/ward for his own purposes, choosing her husband to suit his economic and/or social designs and banishing her to the nearest convent if she does not meekly acquiesce. The father-figure is, therefore, often the "villain" from whom the heroine must escape in order to forge her own destiny. Even in the case of Shelley's Mathilda, in which the father is not a

stereotypical villain, he nevertheless utterly destroys his daughter when his desire to “own” her completely includes sexual possession. Unlike Radcliffe’s heroines, Mathilda is unable to escape the identity her father has forced on her, and her only way out is the oblivion of death. This haunting phantom of incest, is one which seems to lurk around every gothic corner, and is visible in almost all of the texts examined in this thesis.

In Mathilda incest does not “lurk” at all, the overtly incestuous desires providing the basis for the plot of the novella. In Frankenstein, Victor marries his adopted sister, and dreams of kissing his dead mother. In A Sicilian Romance, the relationship between brother and sister is an extremely passionate one which often seems to override all other concerns, and it is Ferdinand who first “penetrates” the hidden recesses in Julia’s bedroom. In The Romance of the Forest, Adeline is threatened with rape by a man whom she later believes to be her father but in fact turns out to be her uncle, and in The Italian, Schedoni discovers his miniature portrait around his “daughter’s” neck while uncovering her breast in order to “stab” her while she sleeps.

Metaphorically the threat of incest seems to represent the overwhelming power held by the male relative (usually the father figure) in determining how the woman’s sexuality would be defined and expressed, the father also being the person who had to approve, and often choose, his daughter’s future lover. If the father figure is seen as symbolic of the patriarchal society, it becomes clear that the fear of incest expresses the power of the patriarchy to define, and confine, female sexuality, incest thus representing the ultimate penetration and destruction of any control the woman might have over her sexuality.

The most overtly sexually destructive father encountered in these novels is the father in Mary Shelley’s Mathilda. Mathilda herself is the narrator, writing her “tragic history” during her last days. “Oedipus is about to die” (175) she writes, her imminent death finally allowing her to tell her story, a story which she hopes will enable her only friend, Woodville, to at last

understand her hitherto impenetrable silence and yearning for death. But although she feels she writes her story for his benefit it becomes clear that it also forms her own attempt to make sense of it.

Mathilda is emotionally neglected from birth - a birth that, as in Mary Shelley's own case, resulted in her mother, Diana's, death. Her father - who remains nameless throughout, thereby assuming the role of an archetypal "Father", is characterized as spoilt and extremely self-centered. In her description of the father, Mathilda notes that, while her father "earnestly occupied himself about the wants of others his own desires were gratified to their fullest extent", pointing out that, while her father was not a selfish man, his desires had never "been put in competition with those of others" (177).

Shelley makes it very clear that these characteristics are a direct result of his upbringing by his "weak", indulgent mother who gratified his every whim. Although he does have some good qualities, he is above all ruled by his intensely passionate nature. He is therefore utterly devastated by the death of his wife, and reacts by removing himself from society and traveling the world. During his travels, his intense grief prevents him from being able to have any sort of emotional interaction with the people he encounters. Once this overwhelming grief dissipates, he begins to idealise the concept of the daughter he abandoned: "If I grieved it was for your mother, if I loved it was your image" (208). Only through interacting with this image of Mathilda can he experience any emotion. Besides the obsession he develops with his image of his unknown daughter, another result of his travels is his forming a moral code of his own as a consequence of his exposure to the varied moral codes of the different cultures he experiences:

... he was impatient of any censure except that of his own mind. He had seen so many customs and witnessed so great a variety of moral creeds that he had been obliged to form an independent one for himself which had no relation to the peculiar notions of any one country. (188)

Raised by a maiden aunt who is extremely cold towards her, Mathilda creates a very idealised image of the father she has never known: “the idea of my unhappy, wandering father was the idol of my imagination. I bestowed on him all my affections” (185). She continually imagines their first meeting, and her father’s first words being: ““My daughter, I love thee!”” (185). Little does she realize the fatal consequences these very words will have! Ranita Chatterjee argues that Mathilda’s fantasy of the reunion with her father indicates that “the seeds of seduction are already planted in the daughter’s unconscious desires, encouraged by a patriarchal system in which the mother is insignificant, or in Mathilda’s case, always absent” (139).

As noted in the previous chapter, the letter she receives from her father on her sixteenth birthday and his return a few days later mark the beginning of the happiest period in her life, as for the first time she is part of an emotionally fulfilling relationship with another person. Her father educates her and broadens her mind in ways she has never even dreamed of, and it does indeed seem a paradisaical existence for both of them. But it is one doomed to fail, as Mathilda says:

I lament now, I must ever lament, those few short months of Paradisaical [sic] bliss; I disobeyed no command, I ate no apple, and yet I was ruthlessly driven from it. Alas! my companion did, and I was precipitated in his fall. (189)

Initially her father seems unaware of the full nature of his love for his daughter, but as soon as a potential suitor makes his appearance, his obsession is fueled and he becomes completely dominated by his sexual passion for her. For the next few months he is overwhelmed by grief and inner turmoil, which deeply disturbs the unknowing Mathilda. Since the day of his return her entire existence has become founded on him, and thus this change in him threatens her whole world. Her father seems to blame her both for her mother’s death and for his incestuous desire, accusing her of being “the sole, the agonizing cause of all I suffer, of all I must suffer until I die” (200). She eventually forces a confession from him, a

step that results in their mutual destruction: “I gained his secret and we were both lost forever” (187).

As I have argued in the previous chapter, Mathilda’s father expects her to fill the place of her dead mother. In the letter he writes to Mathilda, attempting to explain his “guilty love more unnatural than hate”, her father rationalizes his actions by drawing a connection between Mathilda and her mother, Diana, arguing: “in my madness I dared say to myself - Diana died to give her birth; her mother’s spirit was transferred into her frame, and she ought to be as Diana to me” (210). Chatterjee contends that “his sense of the interchangeability of the two women implies that each woman is only a receptacle for his desires, signifiers of erotic pleasure in a libidinal economy based on the traffic of women” (141).

Once he has confessed his desire, and the horrified Mathilda has rejected him, he throws himself over a cliff just before she can stop him. She is thus left with an intense guilt over the passion she has inspired and its horrific results:

I believed myself to be polluted by the unnatural love I had inspired, and that I was a creature cursed and set apart by nature. I thought that like another Cain, I had a mark set on my fore-head to shew mankind that there was a barrier between me and them. (238)

One may wonder whether she was complicitous in this forbidden passion. It seems, however, that as a result of her idolization of her father she would do anything for him and, although she recoils in horror when he confesses his love, once she realises his plan to kill himself, she cries:

Oh! God help me! Let him be alive! It is all dark; in my abject misery I demand no more: no hope, no good: only passion, and guilt, and horror; but alive!
(212)

She is willing to risk her own eternal damnation in order to save him, even though her love for him has always been innocent, if obsessive. Emotionally neglected since birth, she has little self-regard or confidence and blames herself for her father’s desire, believing that her

“monstrousness” is visible to all. Unwilling and unable to rejoin society, she fakes her own death and goes to live on a barren, solitary heath, adopting a nun-like habit and spending her days submerged in grief. Her only wish is for death where she can again rejoin her father:

In truth I am in love with death; no maiden ever took more pleasure in the contemplation of her bridal attire than I in fancying my limbs already enrapt in their shroud: is it not my marriage dress? Alone it will unite me to my father when in an eternal mental union we shall never part. (244)

Her father had been her life, and so, too, is he her death. She does not want to live without him, and refuses to try and overcome her pain and rejoin society. Even when she begins to long for company, for a friend, and meets Woodville - who is perhaps *the* most perfect companion imaginable - she refuses to see this as a possible sign of recovery. In Woodville, Shelley provides contrast to both Mathilda and her father by embodying in him an alternative, positive portrayal of grief and acceptance. Like her father (and Mathilda herself), he has lost the love of his life, his fiancée Elinor, and has decided to retreat from society in order to deal with his grief. It is during this period of retreat that Mathilda meets him. He is described as having “surpassing beauty”, a “transcendent” genius, and above all the heart of a “Poet”:

He was a Poet. That name has so often been degraded that it will not convey the idea of all that he was. He was like a poet of old whom the muses had crowned in his cradle, and on whose lips bees had fed. As he walked among other men he seemed encompassed with a heavenly halo that divided him from and lifted him above them. It was his surpassing beauty, the dazzling fire of his eyes, and his words whose rich accents wrapt the listener in mute an extatic wonder, that made him transcend all others so that before him they appeared only formed to minister to his superior excellence. (223-24)

If this description seems exaggerated, one can only say that is exactly what Shelley wanted. She appears to be saying, if not even *Woodville* can save Mathilda, she is irredeemable. Yet Mathilda refuses to be swayed by his comforting words and arguments for a renewal of hope and life, and tries instead to persuade him to die with her, something he will not do. Mathilda has been too deeply betrayed by the very fabric of her society, the destructive patriarchal

ideology embodied by her father, to be able to re-enter it. Her only act of self-affirmation is her final one - writing her story before dying.

Embodying the selfless woman propounded by the patriarchal society, she accepts all the guilt for inspiring this unlawful sexual passion - she sees herself, rather than her father, as corrupt and monstrous. Anne Mellor has pointed out that Mathilda can only express “her repressed desire to punish her father” unconsciously in her dreams:

The daughter who dedicates herself to pleasing and obeying her father and husband often feels an anger she is unable to express at the man who satisfies his own emotional needs at the expense of hers. In Mathilda this female anger surfaces in Mathilda’s dream following her father’s declaration of erotic love, a dream in which she pursues her father to his death. (Mary Shelley 201)

Her identity becomes completely defined around her father’s incestuous love, and her self-image is utterly corrupted:

Why when fate drove me to become this outcast from human feeling; this monster with whom none might mingle in converse and love; why had she not from that fatal and most accursed moment, shrouded me in thick mists and placed real darkness between me and my fellows so that I might never more be seen; and as I passed, like a murky cloud loaded with blight, they might only perceive me by the cold chill I should cast upon them; telling them, how truly, that something unholy was near? Then I should have lived upon this dreary heath unvisited, and blasting none by my unhallowed gaze... so horrible to my own solitary thoughts did this form, this voice, and all this wretched self appear; for had it not been the source of guilt that wants a name? (239)

The above description recalls Frankenstein’s Monster, and, as in Frankenstein, once again the (male) creator has neglected his creation, firstly by abandonment and secondly by placing the “mark” of corrupted sexuality on her, which forever separates her from society. The mother is absent - as in Frankenstein - and once again all the young, sexual women die early - Diana, Elinor, Mathilda. The only female allowed to grow old is the cold, frigid maiden aunt. Shelley seems to be suggesting, as she does in her earlier novel, that female sexuality can only lead to death in a world dominated by a patriarchal ideology, a world in which women and their sexuality will always be the potentially subversive and therefore repressed “Other”.

Mathilda can be seen as a critique of a social structure which relies on the self-abnegation of an independent female sexual identity in favour of the desires of the father or the husband who takes his place, symbolically transforming all sexual relations between men and women into father-daughter incest.

In Ann Radcliffe's The Romance of the Forest we encounter another overtly incestuous father-figure, the Marquis de Montalt. Montalt and Theodore - the "hero" - arrive at the ruined abbey where Adeline and the La Mottes are living. Both men are immediately sexually attracted to her, and, at this early point in the plot, both are therefore potential suitors. Adeline is not sexually attracted to the wealthy Montalt, but rather to the more mysterious Theodore whom she has briefly met earlier in the forest. In order to attain the object of his desire, Montalt makes use of his superior economic and social power and, unaware of his own familial relationship to Adeline, tries to "buy" her from her guardian La Motte. In exchange he promises not to reveal La Motte's whereabouts to the authorities. It is made very clear that Montalt is not emotionally attached to Adeline as he shows no interest in marrying her - he only wants to acquire sexual control of her. She soon becomes aware that her sexuality is a pawn in the power game between Montalt and La Motte, and attempts to escape, hiding in a monk's tomb. This tomb can be interpreted as a metaphor for the idea of "negative virtue", a concept that Radcliffe criticises throughout her novels. In this instance the tomb's symbolic function is made clear by Louis La Motte's description of it:

In advancing, he perceived the ruins of a small building, which, from the traces that remained, appeared to have been a tomb. As he gazed upon it, "Here," said he, "are probably deposited the ashes of some ancient monk, once an inhabitant of the abbey; perhaps, of the founder, who, after having spent a life of abstinence and prayer, sought in heaven the reward of his forbearance upon earth. Peace be to his soul! but did he think a life of mere negative virtue deserved an eternal reward? Mistaken man! reason, had you trusted to its dictates, would have informed you, that the active virtues, the adherence to the golden rule, "do as you would be done unto," could alone deserve the favour of a Deity, whose glory is benevolence. (73)

Echoing this idea later in the novel, La Luc, the epitome of a loving and nurturing father, says of his own daughter: “[l]et experience teach her her error .. precept seldom brings conviction to young minds”(249).

Adeline’s attempt to find a way of escape in the monk’s tomb is thwarted, suggesting that she cannot run away from sexual trials, but must face them and test her virtue. She is therefore captured and imprisoned in Montalt’s “palace of pleasure”, where she faces a number of material and sensual temptations. When she refuses to give in he threatens to rape her, but she again escapes and is rescued by the opportune appearance of Theodore with a carriage in tow. Metaphorically it can be argued that she has escaped the patriarchal valuation of female sexuality, symbolised by Montalt, and is rescued by following a sexual identity or choice of her own, symbolised by Theodore.

It might seem odd therefore, that Theodore observes that his love for Adeline was encouraged by the fact that she was friendless and in danger, the stereotypical “damsel in distress”:

A knowledge of her destitute condition, and of the dangers with which she was environed, had awakened in his heart the tenderest touch of pity, and assisted the change of admiration into love. (172-73)

This portrayal of Adeline as being more beautiful and sexually attractive when in danger and distress is one which occurs throughout the novel and has caused much negative critical comment.²² It can, however, be argued that these perspectives of her are all from a masculine point of view - particularly that of La Motte and Montalt. It is the gaze typical of the patriarchal society which sees women as more desirable when they are helpless and therefore pose no threat. Adeline continually attempts to avoid and evade this male gaze under which she feels distressed. She is always concerned with propriety, and tries to act in terms of this

²² See Deborah D. Rogers *passim*.

even when she is tempted otherwise, for example by Theodore's marriage proposal to her when she is alone and in imminent danger:

. . . though she had little to oppose to the arguments and pleadings of Theodore; though she had no friends to control, and no contrariety of interests to perplex her, she could not bring herself to consent thus hastily to a marriage with a man, of whom she had little knowledge, and to whose family and connections she had no sort of introduction. (190)

However, if Theodore is representative of Adeline's reclamation of female sexuality, how can he also exhibit this "patriarchal gaze"? The essential point here is that Adeline, too, only realises her love for Theodore when his life is in danger and he is helpless and reliant on her:

Theodore's present danger, together with the attendant circumstances, awakened all her tenderness, and discovered to her the true state of her affections. (178)

She is the one who, going against the advice of the doctor, procures a new physician who saves Theodore's life. They are therefore equally in one another's debt.

George Haggerty cites a number of similar occasions where Adeline's emotions are heightened by imagining "Theodore in chains, Theodore bleeding, Theodore suffering untold torments" (11), for example:

. . . [Adeline] would have been happy as she was thankful, had not unceasing anxiety for the fate of Theodore, of whom in this solitude she was less likely than ever to hear, corroded her heart, and embittered every moment of reflection. Even when sleep obliterated for a while the memory of the past, his image frequently arose to her fancy, accompanied by all the exaggerations of terror. She saw him in chains, and struggling in the grasp of ruffians, or saw him led amidst the dreadful preparations for execution, into the field: she saw the agony of his look and heard him repeat her name in frantic accents, till the horrors of the scene overcame her, and she awoke. (259)

Haggerty argues that Adeline "challenges the assumptions of patriarchy by finding this ineffectual and indeed emasculated hero a desirable alternative to the stern and powerful Marquis de Montalt" (11). Adeline and Theodore are equally at the mercy of Montalt's irrational passions. Thus the many trials Theodore undergoes at the hands of Montalt, the

representative of the patriarchy, allow Radcliffe to present an alternative to the stereotypical hero, and thus an alternative relationship between the sexes. As Haggerty notes, “Theodore plays on Adeline’s emotions precisely to the degree that he is restrained, controlled, victimized and emasculated. To the degree, that is, that Theodore becomes *like a woman*, he is attractive to the heroine” (14).

When Montalt re-captures the lovers, he separates them and vows vengeance in order to appease his injured pride. Adeline is returned to the abbey and confined by La Motte, in anticipation of the arrival of Montalt, who was wounded by Theodore during their capture and is recovering. When he does arrive it is with the intention of having Adeline murdered as he has now discovered what he thinks is the true nature of their relationship - that he is her uncle and she is the true heir to the estates he killed her father (his brother) for.

Isolated and awaiting the arrival of her tormentor of whose intentions she is only too aware, Adeline comes to believe that death would be preferable to rape: “she saw herself condemned to await in passive silence the impending destiny, infinitely more dreadful to her imagination than death itself” (228). This belief indicates the overwhelming importance of sexual autonomy for Adeline - she would rather die than lose the ability to choose her own sexual identity, an ability continually threatened by patriarchal domination. Discussing the “series of paternal nemeses” that Adeline encounters during her adventures, Haggerty argues that:

[m]ore than suggesting a simple deep attraction to this figure, Radcliffe insists that these seemingly helpful and potentially threatening figures are everywhere in a world shaped by male desire. . . . The world, in other words, is a sexual wilderness for Adeline, and masculine ascendancy assures that she is almost always a potential rape victim, that every potential rapist is also potentially a father. (9)

But she again escapes this threat, and the novel ends with her reunited with Theodore and with her father’s rightful estates restored to her. She has thus become both economically and

sexually independent, highlighting the intimate connection between female sexuality and money that is found throughout this genre.

SEX AND MONEY

The connection between female sexuality and money was an inescapable one in a society characterised by a “libidinal economy based on the traffic of women” (Chatterjee 141). Female sexuality was bargained with between father and suitor, or, in the case of Wollstonecraft’s presentation of this sexual economy in Maria, between husband and admirer. It thus assumed a social and economic value, completely independent of the woman’s control, that could be lost if she was seen as sexually corrupted in the eyes of society. The sexual threat faced by the heroines of the novels can therefore also be examined in economic terms.

Janet Todd observes:

Adeline was to be seduced or raped when she was innocent, but killed when she might be rich; Emily is pursued by Montoni for her money not her body, and even the would-be rapist in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is a man “of ruined fortunes” who craves Emily’s estates as well as her virginity. Sexual energy turns quickly into capitalist energy, the individualistic enterprising desire of the entrepreneur of sex and money. (262)

Montoni, in his ruthless self-interest, is the epitome of this ideology. He is described as being governed solely by passionate self-interest:

. . . his soul was little susceptible of light pleasures. He delighted in the energies of the passions; the difficulties and tempests of life, which wreck the happiness of others, roused and strengthened all the powers of his mind, and afforded him the highest enjoyments, of which his nature was capable. . . . He had, of course, many and bitter enemies; but the rancour of their hatred proved the degree of his power; and, as power was his chief aim, he gloried more in such hatred, than it was possible he could in being esteemed. A feeling so tempered as that of esteem, he despised, and would have despised himself also had he thought himself capable of being flattered by it. (Udolpho 182)

His marriage to Emily’s aunt disintegrates into violent arguments once Madame Montoni realises that he has only married her for the property which she refuses to cede to him. When it becomes clear that she is not going to change her mind, he orders her to be

imprisoned in one of the castle's turrets, adding: "there, perhaps, you may understand the danger of offending a man, who has unlimited power over you" (305). This power extends not only to his wife, but over his niece and Emily expresses the fear she feels "in the castle, and the power of a man, to whom, only a few preceding months, she was an entire stranger; who had already exercised an usurped authority over her, and whose character she now regarded, with a degree of terror" (240). These words express the very real situation experienced by women in a patriarchy, a system which backed the father's choice of husband for his daughters over their own desires, often resulting in a marriage to "an entire stranger" who had "unlimited power" over their assets, their bodies, their identities.

The end result of Madame Montoni's imprisonment is her death, and the transference of Montoni's financial ambitions to Emily. He sees Emily as a valuable commodity which he can use to recover his financial status. Not only can he auction her off on the marriage market, but she is an imminent heiress, standing to inherit a number of valuable estates upon coming of age. Emily is shocked to learn the truth from Count Morano, her would-be purchaser: " 'You hear, that Montoni is a villain,' exclaimed Morano with vehemence, - 'a villain who would have sold you to my love! . . . Emily! . . . he has no principle, when interest, or ambition leads' ." To which Emily replies: "And is he less, who would have bought me?" (262). This encounter clearly illustrates the economic power games played between men in a patriarchal society with women's sexuality as the stakes, a society that nevertheless would not allow women, actively or independently, to play any significant part in the public financial world:

In a society in which a single woman's value is intimately tied to both sexual purity and endowed property, the consequences of sexual and economic exploitation are effectively identical: either would curtail Emily's chance of attaining social identity through the only avenue open to her - marriage. (Poovey, "Ideology" 323)

Montoni's plans to marry Emily off to the "wealthy" Count Morano are abandoned when he discovers that the Count is in fact in financial straits. He thus moves his attention to acquiring her inheritance and, when she refuses his demands for her to sign over her estates, he advises her "to spare himself and her the trouble of useless contest, in an affair, where his will was justice, and where she should find it law" (380). Like Madame Montoni, Emily learns that people with power are capable of great injustice, and this knowledge "roused all the latent powers of her fortitude into action; and the property, which she would willingly have resigned to secure the peace of her aunt, she resolved, that no common sufferings of her own should ever compel her to give to Montoni" (379).

Emily's resistance to Montoni is, however, contrasted to that of her aunt's. Madame Montoni refuses to yield her estates to her husband because of her own pride and hunger for power, her disposition characterised by a delight "in contradiction, and which taught her, when unpleasant circumstances were offered to her understanding, not to enquire into their truth, but to seek for arguments, by which she might make them appear false" (310). She remains unmoved in her determination even when she is imprisoned by her husband, and eventually dies of neglect. In contrast, Emily yields her inheritance when it becomes clear that it is the only way to protect her life and her "virtue" in a castle occupied by drunken mercenaries. She does this even with the knowledge that she is giving up her only means of securing a comfortable future with Valancourt. She thus sacrifices economic independence in order to retain sexual autonomy. This action is validated later in the novel once she has escaped from Montoni's control and is assured that any contract she signed under such duress will not stand up in court. By the end of the novel, she has regained control over all of her estates, as well as those bequeathed to her by Laurentini, the rightful owner of Udolpho. Kari Winter argues that:

[a]s Radcliffe presents it . . . Montoni's power is inherently illegitimate because it is founded on his appropriation of a female cousin's estates. If this cousin (Laurentini) were to appear, he would lose all claim to Udolpho. He is safe only because she is buried alive in a convent. In other words, the power operating in the castle of Udolpho derives from repressing a woman's rights, and the resurrection of this woman could lead to the collapse of the entire estate. (128)

With the help of Emily, Laurentini is, indeed, "resurrected", as Emily acts as a catalyst that allows Laurentini to reveal her story. The illegitimacy of Montoni's position is thus revealed, and he is prevented from repeating this usurpation of female economic rights with regards to Emily. This turn of events, placing Emily in a far more powerful position, both socially and economically, than her oppressor, justifies both her initial resistance to Montoni and the relinquishment of her inheritance which allows her to maintain control over her sexuality.

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

In The Mysteries of Udolpho a clear contrast is drawn between Montoni and St Aubert, the two father-figures in the novel. The complete opposite of Montoni, Emily's father is a sensitive man of feeling who has withdrawn from public life, as this extract makes clear:

M. St Aubert loved to wander, with his wife and daughter, on the margin of the Garonne, and to listen to the music that floated on its waves. He had known life in other forms than those of pastoral simplicity, having mingled in the gay and in the busy scenes of the world; but the flattering portrait of mankind, which his heart had delineated in early youth, his experience had too sorrowfully corrected. Yet, amidst the changing visions of life, his principles remained unshaken, his benevolence unchilled; and he retired from the multitude "more in pity than in anger," to scenes of simple nature, to the pure delights of literature, and to the exercise of domestic virtues. (1)

His two sons having died in infancy, he has taken a special interest in Emily's education, and the lasting influence of this education marks it as St Aubert's most important function in the novel. In accordance with his principle that "[a] well-informed mind...is the best security against the contagion of folly and of vice", he cultivates "her understanding with the most scrupulous care", providing her with "a general view of the sciences, and an exact

acquaintance with every part of elegant literature” (6). St Aubert is also quick to try and curb what he feels is an excessive “sensibility” in Emily’s character:

She [Emily] had discovered in her early years uncommon delicacy of mind, warm affections, and ready benevolence; but with these was observable a degree of susceptibility too exquisite to admit of lasting peace. As she advanced in youth, this sensibility gave a pensive tone to her spirits, and a softness to her manner, which added grace to beauty, and rendered her a very interesting object to persons of a congenial disposition. But St Aubert had too much good sense to prefer a charm to a virtue; and had penetration enough to see, that this charm was too dangerous to its possessor to be allowed the character of a blessing. He endeavoured, therefore, to strengthen her mind; to enure her to habits of self command; to teach her to reject the first impulse of her feelings, and to look, with cool examination, upon the disappointments he sometimes threw in her way. While he instructed her to resist first impressions, and to acquire that steady dignity of mind, that can alone counter-balance the passions, and bear us, as far as is compatible with our nature, above the reach of circumstances, he taught himself a lesson of fortitude; for he was often obliged to witness, with seeming indifference, the tears and struggles which his caution occasioned her. (5)

Recognising that “virtue” of sensibility extolled in the patriarchal vision of women as a “charm” which is “too dangerous to its possessor to be allowed the character of a blessing”, he advocates the importance of combining sense and sensibility:

I have endeavoured to teach you, from your earliest youth, the duty of self command; I have pointed out to you the great importance of it through life, not only as it preserves us in the various and dangerous temptations that call us from rectitude and virtue, but as it limits the indulgences which are termed virtuous, yet which, extended beyond a certain boundary, are vicious, for their consequence is evil. All excess is vicious; even that sorrow, which is amiable in its origin, becomes a selfish and unjust passion, if indulged at the expence of our duties - by our duties I mean what we owe to ourselves, as well as to others. . . I would not annihilate your feelings, my child, I would only teach you to command them; for whatever may be the evils resulting from a too susceptible heart, nothing can be hoped from an insensible one; that, on the other hand, is all vice. . . (20)

St Aubert is ailing from the outset and is dead before the end of the first volume. The only power St Aubert has for most of the novel is, thus, indirect, through the enduring influence of the academic and moral education of Emily which he directed. With both her parents dead she is exiled from her idyllic childhood home and Montoni becomes the most

powerful male in Emily's life. In contrast to St Aubert's advocacy of self-government, when Montoni orders Emily to "control" herself he means that she should learn to accept his rule without resisting. As Kilgour notes, this is a "gothic" inversion of St Aubert's teachings :

His [Montoni's] vision of female maturity is that of total acquiescence to male authority; in his terms, self-control means complete abdication of female control and will to male sublime power. The rational self-government advocated by St Aubert is perverted by Montoni into stoic submission, seen as the only possible fate for a woman in a world controlled by men. (120)

Initially Emily struggles to follow her father's precepts and maintain control over her excessive sensibility but, it becomes clear as the novel progresses, that one of the results of her journey to adulthood is her acquisition of the ability to leaven her sensibility with sense. The importance of St Aubert's teachings is borne out by her experiences which would have left a person governed only by sensibility completely incapacitated. For, as St Aubert warns Emily on his death-bed:

Those, who really possess sensibility, ought early to be taught, that it is a dangerous quality, which is continually extracting the excess of misery, or delight, from every surrounding circumstance. (79-80)

Even though Emily is at times overcome by her emotions - often fainting as a result, she nevertheless manages to control her passions and act with sense when necessary. This is clear in the episode discussed above, in which she gives in to Montoni's demands for her inheritance in order to protect her life and "virtue" from drunken mercenaries, even though it appears this means the loss of any future with Valancourt. The danger inherent in allowing the passions free reign is exhibited in Laurentini's violent history, a history which contains valuable lessons for Emily.

However, while the dangers of indulging in "the pride of fine feeling, the romantic error of amiable minds" (79) are made very clear, the evils of "insensibility" are also illustrated. Cold, calculating characters, such as Montoni, may temporarily be in command, but they are shown to be miserable and full of "vice", as St Aubert predicts. Montoni seems to

embody a “denial of feeling” (Poovey, “Ideology” 324), and is insensible even to the sublimity of the natural world around him:

Delighting in the tumult and in the struggles of life, he was equally a stranger to pity and to fear; his very courage was a sort of animal ferocity; not the noble impulse of a principle, such as inspirits the mind against the oppressor, in the cause of the oppressed; but a constitutional hardness of nerve, that cannot feel, and that, therefore, cannot fear. (Udolpho 358)

Thus while excessive sensibility is *dangerous*, the repression of emotion is *evil*.

In the characterisation of Emily’s chosen lover, Valancourt, Radcliffe makes it clear that sensibility is not exclusively a feminine trait, as the patriarchal ideology asserts.

Valancourt’s sensitive nature echoes that of St Aubert, and his sensibility is one of the characteristics that Emily finds most attractive. As such he provides a direct contrast to Montoni, a position assumed by all of Radcliffe’s young heroes with respect to the villains.

Cynthia Griffin Wolff has argued that the hero embodies the female desire for “ ‘safe’ asexual love”, while the villain represents “ ‘dangerous’ sexuality” (208). According to her:

[t]he pairing of “villain” and “hero” in the eighteenth-century Gothic is quite overt, achieving a kind of Augustan balance. The antagonists play strangely similar roles to the heroine, each embodying one sort of “authority”: the demon lover is a figure of considerable power who would exert a malevolent influence; the hero (a considerably less potent figure throughout much of the novel) is a force for order and benevolent control. (213)

She focuses on the sexual potency of the villain, the “demon-lover”, on to which the heroine projects all her “sexual inclinations”:

In Gothic romances, the sexual inclinations that rightly belong to women are projected onto men; these men take an active role in the drama while the women are relatively passive. (Wolff 218)

In this interpretation the villain manifests all the aspects of the heroine's sexuality that she has repressed, and the hero and heroine are rendered asexual. I will, however, argue that rather than “unsexing” her protagonists, Radcliffe creates “feminized” heroes who provide

alternatives not only for the hitherto traditional masculine “hero” and passive heroine, but for the relationship between the lovers.

The relationship between the hero and heroine follows a similar pattern in all of Radcliffe’s novels examined. The heroine meets the hero early in the novel and they quickly fall in love as a result of shared interests, ideals and virtues. They are then separated by the villain and remain so for most of the novel, reuniting at the end in marriage. Because the lovers are divided either by huge expanses of land, or by force (and sometimes by both), there is rarely any aggressive encounter between the hero and villain, and the heroine largely manages to extricate herself from her ordeals. This is a shift away from the traditional relationship between hero and heroine, as she is no longer positioned as a “damsel in distress” passively awaiting rescue, but rather as an independent woman who takes charge of her own sexual destiny and can, therefore, enter a relationship with the lover of her choice, as an equal.

The hero seems to have two main thematic functions. Firstly, he acts as a catalyst in the heroine’s move towards a definition of female sexuality independent from the patriarchal order, as is clear in the discussion of Theodore and Adeline. Secondly, he operates as a symbolic aspect of the author’s critique of the ideology of separate spheres which allowed men no traits characterised as “feminine”. Although Radcliffe focuses mainly on the experience of the heroine in all of the novels except The Italian, it becomes clear that the hero also undergoes some sort of psychological journey, often very similar to that of the heroine.

In her seminal article examining the development of the Gothic genre, Margaret Doody observes that:

. . . the eighteenth-century novel could not go beyond a certain point in developing the consciousness of human beings as long as it maintained very rigid notions of the strength of the male sex and subscribed to very limiting beliefs about superior rational consciousness and about the orderliness of the real world - notions and beliefs which inhibited any apprehension of deep disorders and fears. (570)

She goes on to argue that one of the most important aspects of the genre is that for the first time male characters are portrayed as having “a full consciousness”:

It was the Gothic novel, in all its implication, that saved men from being seen as the sex without a full consciousness. The Gothic novel gave them the freedom to have - and live in - nightmares. (572)

No longer bound by the rational eighteenth century expectations of masculinity, the Gothic heroes can experience weakness, fear, uncertainty and failure. This is perhaps most apparent in Radcliffe’s final novel The Italian.

In The Italian, the text is equally divided between the parallel experiences of the hero and heroine, Vivaldi and Ellena. Their relationship is opposed from the outset, as Vivaldi’s parents do not see the impoverished, untitled Ellena as a fit match for their son. Vivaldi, described as being both “noble and generous” and having “fiery passions” (8), is quick to resist the attempted manipulations of his parents when it comes to his sexual independence:

. . . though he maintained the independence of a man, he was equally anxious to preserve the duties of a son. But unfortunately the Marchese and Vivaldi differed in opinion concerning the limits of these duties; the first extending them to passive obedience, and the latter conceiving them to conclude at a point, wherein the happiness of an individual is so deeply concerned as in marriage. (31)

When his father commands him to break off the relationship, after he has been informed that Ellena’s character is “stained” by depravity, Vivaldi defies his domestic tyranny. This is made clear in the following exchange:

‘Where is the principle,’ said the Marchese, impatiently, ‘which shall teach you to disobey a father; where is the virtue which shall instruct you to degrade your family?’

‘There can be no degradation, my Lord, where there is no vice,’ replied Vivaldi; ‘and there are instances, pardon me, my Lord, there are some few instances in which it is virtuous to disobey.’ (30)

As a result of the machinations of Vivaldi’s mother and Schedoni, the lovers are separated and imprisoned, and face the possibility of being murdered. Vivaldi’s experiences in the gloomy dungeons of the Inquisition are particularly chilling. Doody comments that:

. . . the tribunal is full of father figures, masculine justice is presented as it appears in the historical institution whose nature is to create guilt . . . The Inquisition is given the fearful reality of the local habitation and the earthly name. It is capable of shocking the mind with the dread of what is fearfully unreasonable and painful in consciousness, from which one cannot be dismissed by awakening, while at the same time conveying the fact that the public world is inescapably harsh, crushing both masculine and feminine sexual identity and inner existence into guilt. (569-70)

Vivaldi's experiences of fear and uncertainty within the labyrinths of the Inquisition are very similar to those of Ellena when she is kept prisoner by Schedoni. Both are at the mercy of the patriarchal order in the form of the gothic "father figure/s" of Schedoni and the Inquisition. Vivaldi, in particular, struggles to separate his dreams from reality during his imprisonment, illustrating Doody's observation that "within the environment of nightmare man as well as woman is the victim, and dream and reality are indistinguishable" (570).

The hero of The Mysteries of Udolpho, while occupying much less space in the text than Vivaldi, also exhibits hitherto exclusively female attributes. When we first meet Valancourt, he is described by St Aubert as having:

. . . a frank and generous nature, full of ardour, highly susceptible of whatever is grand and beautiful, but impetuous, wild, and somewhat romantic. Valancourt had known but little of the world. His perceptions were clear, and his feelings just; his indignation of an unworthy, or his admiration of a generous action, were expressed in terms of equal vehemence. St. Aubert sometimes smiled at his warmth, but seldom checked it, and often repeated to himself, "This young man has never been at Paris." A sigh sometimes followed this silent ejaculation. (41)

Valancourt's sensibility is one of the qualities that Emily finds most attractive in him, a "feminine" quality that she too possesses. The Valancourt we meet at the outset of the novel is, however, one who is very innocent in the ways of the world - as St Aubert says, he has "never been at Paris". During the course of the novel Valancourt does, indeed, find his way to Paris while he is separated from Emily, and it is here that his character is put to the test:

. . . he was set down in the midst of Paris, in the pride of youth, with an open, unsuspecting temper and ardent affections, without one friend, to warn him of the dangers, to which he was exposed. Emily, who, had she been present,

would have saved him from these evils by awakening his heart, and engaging him in worthy pursuits, now only increased his danger; - it was to lose the grief, which the remembrance of her occasioned, that he first sought amusement; and for this end he pursued it, till habit made it an object of abstract interest. (294)

Faced with the vices of a cosmopolitan city, he succumbs and eventually lands in prison as a result of unpaid gambling debts. Maggie Kilgour argues that: “[h]is redemption is achieved through a purgatorial time in prison. Confined, made helpless and passive, he - like Wollstonecraft’s Darnford - has undergone an experience analogous to that of the typical female of the time” (136). His imprisonment echoes Emily’s confinement in Udolpho, and he too gains maturity as a result of this experience. When Emily sees him again she notices that his “countenance” has changed: “There was all its wonted intelligence and fire; but it had lost much of the simplicity, and somewhat of the open benevolence, that used to characterise it” (502). In other words, Valancourt is no longer the innocent she met at the beginning of her journey. However, rather than being corrupted by his exposure to vice, he realises that: “[e]xperience had taught him to understand the full value of the qualities, which he had before admired, but which the contrasted characters he had seen in the world made him now adore” (653). And if Valancourt is no longer innocent, Emily too has gained valuable experience and lost her naivety. Kilgour contends that:

[b]ecause of the separation of the lovers, their experiences become parallel lines that in the end converge, bringing the separate spheres, normally totally isolated in terms of education and experience together. Male and female, private and public, La Vallée and Paris, past and present, separate antithetical spheres that, cut off from each other seem sterile and self-destructive, unite in the final marriage. (136)

In Radcliffe’s second novel, A Sicilian Romance, the heroine’s life is transformed by the entrance of her brother, Ferdinand, and his friend, Hippolitus, into the exclusively female world where she has spent her childhood - her father’s castle. Julia’s life has, until this stage, been a tranquil existence within the secluded walls of her father’s castle, her only company being that of her sister and governess. Catching sight of “the graceful figure” of Hippolitus for

the first time, Julia “trembled with apprehension, and for a few moments wished the castle was in its former state” (15). It is, however, impossible to return to the innocence of childhood, not only because of her own awakening sexuality but because of her father’s intentions to use her to further his own social and economic ambitions.

He intends to marry her to the Duke de Luovo, a man “of a character very similar to that of the marquis . . . He delighted in simple undisguised tyranny” (56-7). When she voices her unwillingness, and her enraged father states that “a foolish girl - a very baby, who knows not good from evil” will not deprive him of the “wealth, honor, and distinction . . . laid at [his] feet” (56). The marriage is arranged and Julia’s only hope is to escape the castle with Hippolitus, who urges her to “[f]ly . . . from the authority of a father who abuses his power, and assert the liberty of choice, which nature assigned you” (61). Unsure of the propriety of this proposed flight with a man she hardly knows, she consults her brother who reiterates Hippolitus’s sentiments, arguing:

Do not suffer the prejudices of education to render you miserable. Believe me, that a choice which involves the happiness or misery of your whole life, ought to be decided only by yourself. (62-63)

It thus becomes very clear that the characters and attitudes of the two young men are contrasted to those of the Marquis and the Duke de Luovo. Both urge Julia to actively resist the patriarchal ideology which positions the female as an object of exchange in a male economy. Hippolitus states that “the liberty of choice” is something natural, a right that all have access to, while Ferdinand argues that she should not let her “education”, which extols the virtues of propriety and “the purity of reputation” (62) above all else, prevent her from asserting her right to control over her sexual identity.

Unfortunately their plan is discovered and their escape prevented. Hippolitus is seriously wounded by Julia’s father, she is confined to a turret to await her betrothal, and Ferdinand is confined in a dungeon by order of his father. This is not the first time the

Marquis has imprisoned a member of his family. Julia and Ferdinand's mother, whom they believe to be dead, has been confined in the dungeons beneath the house for fifteen years by Julia's father, in order for him to substitute his lover in her place. As has been argued in the previous chapter, the imprisonment of the mother is symbolic of the negation of the identity of the sexually adult female by the patriarchal ideology. The fact that Ferdinand is placed in a similar position when he dares to defy his father, connects him to this female experience.

Whilst in the dungeon, Ferdinand realises that "[f]rom the resentment of the marquis, whose passions were wild and terrible, and whose rank gave him an unlimited power of life and death in his own territories, [he] had much to fear" (69). Like his mother, he, too, is at the mercy of a tyrannical patriarch who has "unlimited power" and, as is later discovered, her cell "communicated with the dungeon in which Ferdinand had been confined" (195). His rebellion against his father and the precepts of patriarchy by advocating his sister's right to sexual independence, has aligned him with the female "Other", and like this "Other" he is repressed and marginalised. It is thus very fitting that, while in the dungeon, Ferdinand hears his mother's distant lamentations, and replies to them. When she is eventually discovered by Julia, she recalls this incident, saying: "Oh! never can I forget what I felt, when I heard a distant voice answered to my moan!" (180). Ferdinand can answer his mother's moan because in his resistance to the dominant hegemony and the subsequent repression he suffers, he has gained access to the female experience.

The novel ends with the death of the Marquis and his mistress, who poisons him and then kills herself. Ferdinand has escaped his prison, Hippolitus has recovered and is reunited with Julia. As Kate Ellis observes, the death of the Marquis and his mistress "transform the castle from a multileveled prison into a home, an Eden where sexuality is no longer connected to the abuses of power" (105). It is, however, an "Eden" that can only be achieved through

the active resistance of both brother and sister to a social structure which negates and oppresses the feminine, a repression they have both gained personal knowledge of:

The late-Renaissance conventions of masculine control in an orderly universe within which men regulate events - these are swept aside. . . . In the Gothic novels, heroes and heroines share the nightmare - and the nightmare is real. (Doody 571)

Many critics have, however, been reluctant to accept the validity of the “Edenic” marriage with which Radcliffe always ends her novels. This ending has been seen as undermining the experiences that the heroine undergoes, experiences which often seem to question the dominant hegemony and, with that, the institution of marriage. The “conventional” closure of her texts is, therefore, seen as marking Radcliffe as ultimately conservative. A perfect example of these hyperbolically happy endings which have caused so much negative critical comment can be found in The Mysteries of Udolpho:

O! how joyful it is to tell of happiness, such as that of Valancourt and Emily; to relate, that, after suffering under the oppression of the vicious and the disdain of the weak, they were, at length, restored to each other - to the beloved landscapes of their native country, - to the securest felicity of this life, that of aspiring to moral and labouring for intellectual improvement - to the pleasures of an enlightened society, and to the exercise of the benevolence, which had always animated their hearts; while the bowers of La Vallée became, once more, the retreat of goodness, wisdom and domestic blessedness! (672)

In “Ideology and The Mysteries of Udolpho”, Mary Poovey argues that:

The aura of fantasy that enchants this final arrangement suggests that it does not constitute a convincing solution to the problem of how virtue is to be protected from internal or external threats. Radcliffe dramatizes no “enlightened society” to offset the power of Montoni’s tyranny, she has emphatically shown this harmony not to be “secure,” and the retreat to the domestic comforts of La Vallée hardly illuminates the darkness of the castle Emily has left behind. (328)

Although it is true that Radcliffe was offering a formulaic closure to her novels, one that her readers would recognise and understand as such, it can also be argued that the marriage between the heroine and the “feminine” hero has more meaningful implications. As has been argued above, the heroes that Radcliffe creates undermine the traditional

expectations of masculinity, and thus offer an alternative type of relationship to the heroines. As a result of the “feminine” characteristics of the heroes, and the parallel experiences of hero and heroine, the heroines can enter into these relationships as equals.

As can be seen by the analysis of the male characters and their relationship to the heroines, the authors of these novels are criticising the patriarchal system, sometimes overtly, and sometimes on a more metaphorical level. While Ann Radcliffe seems to see her feminine heroes as a way of providing a critique of, and a challenge to, this ideology, Shelley has a much more negative view, with most of her female characters dying as a result of some abuse suffered under the patriarchal system. She depicts the repression and exclusion of the female and the feminine from public life as having disastrous and fatal consequences for both men and women, thus affirming, as does Radcliffe, the necessity of the inclusion of the feminine in all aspects of life as well as the necessity of women escaping the confines of the “castle” or home and becoming an integral part of the "masculine" public realm.

* * * * *

The final chapter will explore the importance of these “castles” in the text, examining the relationship between female sexuality and setting.

CHAPTER THREE

Journeys of Discovery: Female Sexuality and Gothic Settings

It is good to have an end to journey towards, but it is the journey that matters in the end.

Ursula LeGuin The Left Hand of Darkness

THINGS SHIFT AND BLUR

Mysterious, gloomy interiors and expansive, awe-inspiring landscapes are perhaps the characteristics which most define the nature of the Gothic novel in the public mind. These settings, which originate in the early Gothic novels discussed in this thesis, continue to survive in their modern descendants. Kay Mussel²³ notes of the contemporary Gothic romance: “Gothic novels are immediately recognizable by the art on their covers: they depict a beautiful young woman, usually dressed in a flimsy gown, running away from a gloomy mansion. In an upper window, a single light shines” (58). As becomes clear from this description, the connection between the setting and female sexuality - symbolized by the flimsy nightgown - is made patently obvious on these covers. What this chapter will hope to demonstrate is that this interrelationship between sexuality and setting is just as manifest *within* the covers of the founders of the Gothic tradition.

The Gothic “world” is primarily distinguished by the fact that it often seems to be the exact opposite of the rationally understandable “real” world. As Masoa Miyasho notes, it is a place in which “[c]lear borderlines of things shift and blur” (12). Nothing and no-one is quite

²³ Mussel makes an interesting factual point regarding the current usage of the term ‘Gothic’: “Although the term, ‘Gothic novel’ defies precise definition, the paper-back Gothic romance in contemporary English-speaking countries is easily identified. ‘Gothic’ in this context is a publisher’s label, reportedly coined by Gerald Gross, an editor at Ace Books in the early 1960’s. He used the word to describe a series of reprints of feminine romantic mystery novels, deriving the term from the ‘gloomy, arched and towered architecture so often described in the stories’ (58).

what they seem to be and, in the case of the heroine, whom they think they are. Eugenia

DeLamotte remarks:

In the world of Gothic romance, the physical and metaphorical boundaries that one ordinarily depends on prove unstable, elusive, ineffective, nonexistent. A secret panel opens in the solid wall; the bed curtains move; a door gives way; the dead come to life; portraits leave their frames; a brother murders his sister; events that should have an end seem endless. At the same time other boundaries appear unexpectedly. A door slams shut behind the timid explorer, the path of escape ends abruptly at a locked gate; the victim in flight comes to the edge of a precipice. (22)

In her seminal paper entitled “Deserts, Ruins and Troubled Waters: Female Dreams in Fiction and the Development of the Gothic Novel”, Margaret Doody explores the precursors of the Gothic genre. She finds that the Gothic makes extensive use of images previously only found in the dreams of female characters in the eighteenth century novel, noting:

It was left to later (I certainly do not say superior) novelists to deal extensively with fear, desire and repression in terms of the nightmare images used by earlier novelists only occasionally to provide momentary glimpses into the perturbed depths of the feminine psyche. That is, the occasionally-glimpsed landscape of feminine dream was to become the entire setting in another, non-realistic, type of novel. . . . The writers of the Gothic novel could give their full attention to the world of dream and nightmare - indeed, the “real world” for characters in a Gothic novel is one of nightmare. There is no longer a common-sense order against which the dream briefly flickers; rather, the world of rational order briefly flickers in and out of the dreamlike. There is no ordinary world to wake up in. (552-53)

Even the specifics of the imagery which has now become exclusively associated with the Gothic could originally be found in the fictional dreams of women:

. . . mountain, forest, desert, cavern, lake, troubled waters, ruined building with tottering roof, subterranean cavern, sea, “howling and conflicting winds,” snowy wastes, the bleeding lover, orange grove, corpse, iron instruments, invisible voices and dread tribunals - and, with these, sudden changes of place, preternatural speed, irresistible forces. (554)

Thus the subconscious life of women was a source which the writers of Gothic fiction drew on extensively and, while certainly employed for dramatic effect, the use of these feminine dreamscapes can be interpreted as having far more significant permutations. The

illusory world of dream and nightmare becomes the “real” world in the Gothic novel, thereby vindicating the feminine subconscious and all its fears and mysteries as being a valid representation of the female experience of the world:

The private protests of feminine dreams have become public, rational, schematic objections to institutions and traditions clearly seen and defined. It is not surprising that the English Gothic novel, with its roots in the dreams of women, should become, along one line of its evolution, the novel of feminine radical protest. (Doody 562)

NATURE AND THE SUBLIME

Central to the significance of these “dreamscapes” and “nightmare images” which provide the settings for the Gothic novel, is the relationship between the characters and the natural landscape - whether it be the majesty of awe-inspiring mountains in Radcliffe, the sterility of Mathilda’s endless heath, or the desolate vastness of the Arctic in Frankenstein. While the patriarchal ideology has traditionally defined Nature as a “temperamental woman” (Winter 131) who can (and should) be forcefully penetrated, examined and explored - the ultimate goal being to gain mastery over her - the Female Gothic:

. . . typically represent[s] nature not as a dumb object to be conquered but as a transcendental force above and beyond the might of men. Humanity is represented as merely one small part of nature; the authors emphasize that nature is much larger and more enduring than human constructs. Time and again the protagonists of Gothic novels and slave narratives seek refuge in the parts of nature that are not controlled by men, such as forests and swamps. (Winter 131)

The writers of the Female Gothic thus seek to emphasize the “enduring” “transcendental” power of the natural world, while at the same time maintaining the link between nature and the feminine. This link can be analysed in terms of the experience that eighteenth century philosophers termed the sublime.

The most influential writer concerned with the representation of nature and the sublime during the eighteenth century was Edmund Burke²⁴. In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1759), he defines the sublime in overtly masculinist terms, founded on “whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror” and associated with the “sublime” virtues of “fortitude, justice, wisdom, and the like” (101-11). He positions the sublime in contrast to the “beautiful”, a feminine quality associated with the “softer virtues” of affection, tenderness and love and founded on “pleasure” rather than sublime “terror”. Burke’s concept of the sublime is thus completely separated from the feminine, disallowing women any access to it if they wished to remain associated with the virtues that their society upheld as innately female. As Mary Poovey notes:

When Edmund Burke discusses the “softer virtues” (“easiness of temper, compassion, kindness and liberality”), he makes it clear that these qualities, though more “amiable,” are “inferior in dignity” to the “sublime” virtues such as “fortitude, justice, wisdom, and the like.” It is also clear from Burke’s entire discussion of the “beautiful” that he associates these charming but decidedly inferior virtues with women and womanly behaviour. (“Ideology” 315)

How did the authors of the Female Gothic respond to this engendering of the sublime as an exclusively masculine domain of empowerment, superior to, and separate from, feminine qualities associated with the “beautiful”? Wollstonecraft, for one, was incensed at the way in which Burke positioned women in relation to the sublime, deftly denying them access to any of the moral “masculine” virtues by his definition of it. Her reaction is clear in this sarcastic retort:

You may have convinced them that littleness and weakness are the very essence of beauty; and that the Supreme Being, in giving women beauty in the most supereminent degree, seemed to command them, by the powerful voice of

²⁴ The discussion of Burke’s conception of the sublime is indebted to the analysis thereof provided by Mary Poovey, Kari Winter, and Anne Mellor.

Nature, not to cultivate the moral virtues that might chance to excite respect, and interfere with the pleasing sensations they were created to inspire . . . [I]f virtue has any other foundation than worldly utility, you have clearly proved that one half of the human species, at least, have not souls; and that Nature, by making women little, smooth, delicate, fair creatures, never designed that they should exercise their reason to acquire the virtues that produce opposite, if not contradictory, feelings. The affection they excite, to be uniform and perfect, should not be tintured with the respect which moral virtues inspire, lest pain should be blended with pleasure, and admiration disturb the soft intimacy of love. (Rights of Men 112-14)

It is clear that the writers do make extensive use of the sublime in their texts but critics have interpreted these applications as having a variety of differing significances. Anne Mellor argues that the authors accept “the identification of the sublime with the experience of masculine empowerment. But they explicitly equate this masculine sublime with patriarchal tyranny”:

The father, whether as patriarch or priest, is unmasked as the author of violence against women, as the perpetrator of sadistic tortures and even incest, and thus as the violator of the very bonds of affection and responsibility that constitute the bourgeois family. His crimes always occur among Alpine landscapes or ruined Gothic towers, the loci of the masculine sublime. By moving the exercise of sublime power into the household, the female Gothic domesticates the sublime as paternal transgression - represented as father-daughter incest - that is everywhere most monstrous and most ordinary. (Romantics and Gender 91)

David Morris contends that the Gothic genre “pursues a version of the sublime utterly without transcendence”:

It is a vertiginous and plunging - not a soaring - sublime, which takes us deep within rather than far beyond the human sphere. The eighteenth-century sublime always implied (but managed to restrain) the threat of lost control. Gothic sublimity - by releasing into fiction images and desires long suppressed, deeply hidden, forced into silence - greatly intensifies the dangers of an uncontrollable release from restraint. . . . In its excessive violations of excess sense, Gothic sublimity demonstrates the possibilities of terror in opening the mind to its own hidden and irrational powers. (306)

I would however concur with Kari Winter’s more positive interpretation of the use of the sublime in the Gothic. She asserts that:

In keeping with the spirit of Romanticism, Gothic heroines often regenerate themselves emotionally by contemplating sublime landscapes. Years before Wordsworth, Ann Radcliffe celebrated the liberating power of sublime nature in evocative poetic language. . . . Overall Radcliffe suggests that sensitivity to nature is essential for human beings' moral survival. In her representations of nature, Radcliffe uses the aesthetic of the sublime that Edmund Burke articulates in A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1759), but she revises his aesthetic in one important way. . . . In contrast to Burke, Radcliffe represents the sublime "as a medium for liberation from evil" and aligns its force with feminist aspirations. (131-32)

Although all of her heroines exhibit an innate responsiveness to sublime landscapes²⁵, it is through Ellena, the heroine of The Italian, that Radcliffe's conception of the sublime and its relationship to the female becomes most apparent. In order to establish this, it is useful to quote at length a passage which describes both the landscape and Ellena's reaction to it:

Fainting under [the heat's] oppression, Ellena entreated that the windows might be open, when the men, in compliance with their own necessity rather than with her request, lowered the blinds, and she had a glimpse of the lofty region of the mountains, but of no object that could direct her conjecture concerning where she was. She saw only pinnacles and vast precipices of various-tinted marbles, intermingled with scanty vegetation, such as stunted pinasters, dwarf oak and holly, which gave dark touches to the many-coloured cliffs, and sometimes stretched in shadowy masses to the deep vallies, that, winding into obscurity, seemed to invite curiosity to explore the scenes beyond. Below these bold precipices extended the gloomy region of olive-trees, and lower still other rocky steeps sunk towards the plains, bearing terraces crowned with vines, and where often the artificial soil was propped by thickets of juniper, pomegranate and oleander.

Ellena, after having been so long shut in darkness, and brooding over her own alarming circumstances, found temporary, though feeble, relief in once more looking upon the face of nature; till, her spirits being gradually revived and elevated by the grandeur of the images around her, she said to herself, "If I am condemned to misery, surely I could endure it with more fortitude in scenes like these, than amidst the tamer landscapes of nature! Here, the objects seem to impart somewhat of their own force, their own sublimity, to the soul. It is scarcely possible to yield to the pressure of misfortune while we walk, as with the Deity, amidst his most stupendous works!" (62-63)

This passage occurs almost immediately after Ellena has been kidnapped by masked men who refuse to answer any of her questions about their intentions. She is still able, nevertheless, to

²⁵ This sensitivity to and appreciation of nature is an aspect of the heroines' sensibility, which is discussed in Chapter 2.

appreciate the landscape over which she journeys, and to draw strength from its majestic sublimity. As Kari Winter maintains:

When the protagonists of female Gothic novels and slave narratives are exhausted by their fight against oppression, they look to a higher power for respite. Sometimes the texts label that higher power “God” . . . More often, they name it “nature”. (130)

It becomes clear from the heroines’ responses to the landscape, that, in contrast to Burke, Radcliffe’s construction of the sublime is not founded on the “terror” connected to the idea of “pain and danger”, but is rather achieved through the characters’ recognition and appreciation of transcendental nature of the natural world and their own place in it :

Whereas Burke had insisted that the experience of the sublime originates in the fear for one’s life, aroused by the instinct for self-preservation, and then mounts a platonic or aesthetic ladder from astonishment to a recognition of divine power, Radcliffe anticipates Coleridge and Wordsworth in suggesting that one can reach this consciousness of the power and glory of divine creation without fear and trembling. (Mellor, Romantics and Gender 94)²⁶

The “morality” of Radcliffe’s characters can be gauged according to their response to nature. This is made clear in St Aubert’s response to the “wonderful sublimity” of the French countryside:

[he] sighed . . . to think, that nature and simplicity were so little known to the world, as that their pleasures were thought romantic.

‘The world,’ said he, pursuing this train of thought, ‘ridicules a passion which it seldom feels; its scenes, and its interests, distract the mind, deprave the taste, corrupt the heart, and love cannot exist in a heart that has lost the meek dignity of innocence. *Virtue and taste are nearly the same*, for virtue is little more than active taste, and the most delicate affections of each combine in real love’. (emphasis added) (Udolpho 49-50)

Although the villain may himself have something of sublimity about him, he is impervious to natural beauty and to the religious awe with which it is associated. For the heroines, the

²⁶ It must be noted that, like Burke, Coleridge and Wordsworth were also positing an essentially masculine conception of the sublime. Mellor notes that “[i]n both [Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s] masculine Romantic conceptions of the sublime, a male poet speaks of, for and in the place of a nature originally gendered as female” (Romantics and Gender 90), adding that, for Coleridge and Wordsworth, “the joy of the sublime experience is dependent upon the annihilation of Otherness, upon the erasure of the female” (Romantics and Gender 96).

transcendent state reached by a contemplation of the sublime is intrinsically associated with a consciousness of virtue and a sense of self-worth. This mental freedom, in turn, allows the heroine to dissociate herself from her oppressors, from the tyrannies of men and women who are now reduced to impotent insignificance. It also allows those that are alike in “virtue and taste”, to experience this transcendence together, encouraging a relationship grounded in “individual integrity, self-esteem, and mutual respect” (Mellor, Romantics and Gender 96), rather than in dominance and submission. Thus the love between Emily and Valancourt is initially founded on their mutual admiration of the awe-inspiring mountainous regions through which they travel. It inspires a reciprocal esteem for each others’ intelligent sensitivity and virtue, and a union based on equality.

This conception of the sublime as directly accessible and beneficial to women is once again illustrated in The Italian when Ellena, reaching the end of her first mysterious journey, is imprisoned in a convent and faced with the choice of either taking the veil or marrying a man she has never met. This marriage and her kidnapping have both been engineered by the mother of the man she is in love with, Vivaldi, in order to prevent their union. Ellena’s only refuge during this time is provided by the view from a turret near to her room:

To Ellena, whose mind was capable of being highly elevated, or sweetly soothed, by scenes of nature, the discovery of this little turret was an important circumstance. Hither she could come, and her soul, refreshed by the views it afforded, would acquire strength to bear her, with equanimity, thro’ the persecutions that might await her. Here, gazing upon the stupendous imagery around her, looking, as it were, beyond the awful veil which obscures the features of the Deity, and conceals Him from the eyes of his creatures, dwelling as with a present God in the midst of his sublime works; *with a mind thus elevated, how insignificant would appear to her the transactions, and the sufferings of this world!* How poor the boasted power of man, when the fall of a single cliff from these mountains would with ease destroy thousands of his race assembled on the plains below! How would it avail them, that they were accoutred for battle, armed with all the instruments of destruction that human invention ever fashioned? Thus man, the giant who now held her in captivity, would shrink to the diminutiveness of a fairy; and she would experience, that his utmost force was unable to enchain her soul, or compel her to fear him, while he was destitute of virtue. (emphasis added) (Italian 90-91)

DeLamotte argues that this “transcendence” is very limited, and the genre’s use of the sublime thus undermined, by the fact that the heroine’s experience of it is always “inward”, that is, she never acts on the mental and emotional stimulation she experiences:

. . . the escape through the sublime remains, in essence, the heroine’s secret - an inner flight of which the villain is not aware and of which he himself is not capable. Such silent and secret escapes change nothing but the heroine’s own mind, the only realm over which women could attain power. (182)

DeLamotte asserts that the sublime experience is thus ultimately conservative as it, “reinforces the heroine’s ability to ‘bear’ her suffering ‘with equanimity’ rather than giving her strength or inspiration to end it” (182).

It can, however, be contended that, although she is unable to free herself physically at this stage, Ellena’s experience of the sublime allows an essential psychological escape, placing her oppressors in a perspective that reveals their powerlessness in the larger scheme of things:

In this passage, “man, the giant” who holds Ellena “in captivity” is not an individual tyrant but an entire system. By contemplating the power of nature, Radcliffe’s heroines are inspired to dream revolutionary dreams to envision a force capable of destroying the “power of man”. In the process, they are emotionally reconstituted and empowered . . . For Radcliffe’s heroines the contemplation of sublime nature is an essential, soul-renewing pleasure. (Winter 132)

The most important aspect of this mental transcendence, is that the heroine is able to derive an emotional strength that is pivotal to her ability to withstand the persecutions of her oppressors and eventually overcome them.

Mary Shelley, too, makes extensive use of sublime natural landscapes in her work.

Frankenstein has long been read as, at one level, offering a critique of the violation and

destruction of nature in the name of scientific endeavour. This is vividly illustrated in Victor Frankenstein's violent exploration of a "nature" construed as being essentially feminine²⁷:

One secret which I alone possessed was the hope to which I dedicated myself; and the moon gazed on my midnight labours, while, with unrelaxed and breathless eagerness, I pursued nature to her secret hiding places. Who shall conceive the horrors of my secret toil, as I dabbled among the unhallowed damps of the grave, or tortured the living animal to animate the lifeless clay? My limbs now tremble, and my eyes swim with the remembrance; but then a resistless, and almost frantic impulse, urged me forward; I seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit. (36)

This violent penetration of nature's "secret hiding places" has only one end - to discover and usurp the reproductive power of both nature and women, thereby negating their existence.

His "ardent and eager" (32) single-minded pursuit, results in a complete severance from the natural environment and the feminine:

The summer months passed while I was thus engaged, heart and soul, in one pursuit. It was a most beautiful season; never did the fields bestow a more plentiful harvest, or the vines yield a more luxuriant vintage: but my eyes were insensible to the charms of nature. And the same feelings which made me neglect the scenes around me caused me also to forget those friends who were so many miles absent, and whom I had not seen for so long a time. (37)

His egotistical desire, couched in the terms of scientific progress, is presented in the novel as unnatural and essentially self-destructive. For, as Mellor notes, nature is not the passive, inert, or "dead" matter that Frankenstein imagines her to be, but both resists and revenges herself upon his attempts at violation:

²⁷ The almighty Alps, in particular Mont Blanc, are represented as female, as an image of omnipotent fertility. In his article, "[Frankenstein](#), Feminism, and the Intertextuality of Mountains" Fred Randel suggests that Shelley's use of decidedly feminine mountain imagery, indicates a significant new direction in an area that had hitherto been dominated both by male writers and a masculine characterization of mountains. Drawing on a comparison between Shelley's depiction of Mont Blanc and Jane Harrison's work, he notes that:

Harrison regarded [mountains] as a symbolic field in which the rival perspectives of male and female dominance struggled near the dawn of western culture and struggle still. By weaving into her studies of ancient Greek religion a contrast between the familiar version of mythology attached to Mount Olympus and an earlier and in some respects superior way of thinking attached to the Mountain-Mother, she placed mountains within a revealing context of social differentiation and conflict. Olympianism is, for Harrison, the invention of a patriarchal society; it exalts a Father-God, a rational worship, and a monogamous marriage, and it reduces the female to subservience. The Mountain-Mother, by contrast, is the product

. . . nature pursues Victor Frankenstein with the very electricity he has stolen. Lightning, thunder, and rain rage around him. . . . The atmospheric effects of the novel, which most readers have dismissed as little more than the traditional trappings of Gothic fiction, in fact manifest the power of nature to punish those who transgress her boundaries. The elemental forces that Victor has released pursue him to his hiding places, raging round him like avenging Furies. . . . Nature's revenge is absolute: he who violates her sacred hiding places is destroyed. (Mary Shelley 123-24)

Victor's violent relationship with the natural world is contrasted to that of his best friend Clerval, who "was a being formed in the 'very poetry of nature'" (130). Unlike Victor, whose only real passion is his egotistical pursuit, Clerval "loved with ardour" "[t]he scenery of external nature, which others regard only with admiration" (130). Much like Radcliffe's heroes, Clerval is presented as having many traditionally feminine qualities, one being his sensitivity which allows him to respond to natural sublimity. In this he is connected to Elizabeth, whose relationship to the natural world provides another contrast to Victor's. Victor remembers that:

[s]he busied herself with following the aerial creations of the poets; and in the majestic and wondrous scenes which surrounded our Swiss home - the sublime shapes of the mountains; the changes of the seasons; tempest and calm; the silence of winter, and the life and turbulence of our Alpine summers, - she found ample scope for admiration and delight. While my companion contemplated with a serious and satisfied spirit the magnificent appearances of things, I delighted in investigating their causes. The world was to me a secret which I desired to divine. Curiosity, earnest research to learn the hidden laws of nature, gladness akin to rapture, as they were unfolded to me, are among the earliest sensations I can remember.²⁸

While Elizabeth has an innate appreciation of the sublimity of nature, the contemplation of which satisfies her soul, Victor only sees the natural landscape as something to be "investigated". The death of both Clerval and Elizabeth at the hands of the Monster is a direct result of Victor's violation of nature and provides an explicit criticism thereof.

of a matriarchal society; it exalts a female fertility-goddess, treats males as subordinate deities or worshippers, and emphasizes 'mystical and orgiastic' practices. (515)

²⁸ Frankenstein: 1818 Text. Appendix B, 207-208. This passage only appears in the revised addition of 1831.

The Monster himself can be associated with the Burkean sublime. Physically huge and rugged and subject to the extremities of emotion, he is, throughout the novel, placed in settings which illustrate Burke's description of sublime landscapes²⁹. These awe-inspiring scenes, such as the majestic Alpine mountains and Arctic snowscapes, serve as a mirror to reflect the Monster's inner desolation. It was argued in the first chapter of this thesis that a strong connection exists between the position of the Monster and that of women. It is therefore appropriate in terms of contentions made in this chapter concerning the Female Gothic's conception of the sublime as accessible to women that the Monster is depicted as intrinsically connected to the sublime landscapes. Comparing Shelley's depiction of the Monster with Radcliffe's use of the sublime, Winter notes that:

[L]ike Radcliffe's sublime . . . Shelley's creature is aligned not with masculine power but rather natural forces that frustrate masculine ambition. He is the "other", a mysterious entity who has no place in the patriarchal order and who represents the frightening sexuality that could destroy the father's world. Symbolically, the "monster" constructed by Frankenstein is the same creature as the "woman" constructed by patriarchy. (132)

The heroine of Mathilda also has a profound relationship with a natural landscape that is characterised by its sublimity - the "wild scenery" (184) of the isolated estate on the shores of Loch Lomond in Scotland where she grows up, the "tempestuous" (213) night of her father's death, the desolate heath where she secludes herself and ultimately dies. Orphaned at birth by the death of her mother and her father's desertion, from her early childhood she uses the natural world to fill the emotional gap left by them. She writes that "I bore an individual attachment to every tree in our park; every animal that inhabited it knew me and I loved them"

²⁹ "A sublime landscape is one that seems to threaten the viewer's life. Burke defined the typical qualities of a sublime landscape as greatness of dimension (especially as contrasted with the finite limits of the human body) which gives rise to an idea of infinity; obscurity (which blurs the definition of boundaries); profound darkness or intense light; and sudden sharp angles. Confronted with such overwhelming objects as towering mountains, huge dark caves, gloomy architectural ruins, or sudden blinding light, the human mind first experiences terror or fear and then, as the instinct of self-preservation is gradually relaxed, astonishment ("that state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended with some degree of horror"), admiration, reverence, and respect. For one

(183). But, although she is so intimately in tune with the landscape, on the day of her father's return after an absence of sixteen years, Mathilda becomes lost in the woods while waiting for him:

My father was expected at noon but when I wished to return to meet him I found that I had lost my way: it seemed that in every attempt to find it I only became more involved in the intricacies of the woods, and the trees hid all trace by which I might be guided. (186-87)

It is as if the natural world is trying to prevent this meeting which will ultimately result in the destruction of both daughter and father. It could be argued that, as such, the landscape becomes the embodiment of her dead mother Diana, aptly named after the goddess of nature and protectress of women. Unfortunately, this attempt to prevent the fateful encounter is not successful, as Mathilda eventually finds her way home, into the waiting arms of her father.

Her intimate relationship with nature is again stressed when she is once more trying desperately to reach her father - in this case to prevent him from committing suicide:

Once, overcome by fatigue, I sunk on the wet earth; about two hundred yards distant, alone in a large meadow stood a magnificent oak; the lightnings shewd its myriad boughs torn by the storm. A strange idea seized me; a person must have felt all the agonies of doubt concerning the life and death of one who is the whole world to them before they can enter into my feelings - for in that state, the mind working unrestrained by the will makes strange and fanciful combinations with outward circumstances and weaves the chances and changes of nature into an immediate connexion with the event they dread. It was with this feeling that I turned to the old steward who stood pale and trembling beside me; "Mark, Gaspar, if the next flash of lightning rend not that oak my father will be alive."

I had scarcely uttered these words than a flash instantly followed by a tremendous peal of thunder descended on it; and when my eyes recovered their sight after the dazzling light, the oak no longer stood in the meadow. (213)

Nature thus is presented as an entity that has an intrinsic connection to Mathilda's inner spirit, both reflecting her turmoil and divining her future. This bond is most clear in a passage in which Shelley draws on Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner":

thus receives, according to Burke, a sensible impression of the Deity by whose power these overwhelming scenes are created". (Mellor, Mary Shelley 131).

The few weeks that I spent in London were the most miserable of my life: a great city is a frightful habitation to one sorrowing. The sunset and the gentle moon, the blessed motion of the leaves and the murmuring of waters are all sweet physicians to a distempered mind. The soul is expanded and drinks in quiet, a lulling medicine [sic]- to me it was as the sight of the lovely water snakes to the bewitched mariner - in loving and blessing Nature I unawares, called down a blessing on my own soul³⁰. (218)

Like the mariner, it is in the contemplation of the natural landscape that Mathilda finds her only solace and, as soon as she is able, she escapes the city to live out the rest of her life on a “solitary, wide heath”. But even the comfort of nature cannot remedy her affliction, for in her eyes she is “blighted fruit”, “a solitary spot among mountains shut in on all sides by steep black precipices; where no ray of heat could penetrate; and from which there was no outlet to sunnier fields” (223). Thus, when the reader meets her in her final hours as she writes her story, it is fitting that the landscape echoes her inner barrenness. Her opening description of the landscape could be a description of her ruined youth:

It is only four o’clock; but it is winter and the sun has already set: there are no clouds in the clear, frosty sky to reflect its slant beams, but the air itself is tinged with a slight roseate colour which is again reflected on the snow that covers the ground. I live in a lone cottage on a solitary, wide heath: no voice of life reaches me. I see the desolate plain covered with white, save a few black patches that the noonday sun has made at the top of those sharp pointed hillocks from which the snow, sliding as it fell, lay thinner than on the plain ground: a few birds are pecking at the hard ice that covers the pools - for the frost has been of long continuance. (175)

Mathilda’s only enduring relationship is thus with the sublime landscapes of nature, remaining constant until her death. During her dying hours her only consolation is that nature, “who art called our Universal Mother” (243), will continue when she is gone, untouched by the vagaries of human existence:

Thou wilt ever be the same. Receive then the grateful farewell of a fleeting shadow who is about to disappear, who joyfully leaves thee, yet with a last look of affectionate thankfulness. . . . Bless thy child even in death, as I bless thee; and let me sleep at peace in my quiet grave. (244)

³⁰ “Rime of the Ancient Mariner.” II. 272-87.

As in Frankenstein and in Radcliffe's novels, the sublimity of the natural world is presented as directly accessible to women, especially in their times of need. Unfortunately, Shelley's Mathilda has been too utterly destroyed by her father to find a lasting remedy in the comfort provided by the natural world, but it nevertheless provides her only relief during her last days. For Radcliffe's heroines however, the sublime aspects of nature become an essential and sustaining force during their hazardous journey to sexual adulthood, allowing them to remain steadfast in their opposition to patriarchal tyranny, which they can, thus, eventually overcome.

JOURNEYS

In The Contested Castle, Kate Ferguson Ellis demonstrates that eighteenth and nineteenth century Gothic novelists were, in the characterisation of their heroines, reacting to the emerging social conventions that defined women as innately pure. This construction of the female demanded that women be confined within the domestic sphere in order to "keep them ignorant of corruption, immorality and violence. In effect, women were being told to reverse the events of the fall, to give up knowledge in return for safety" (11). Thus, in terms of this definition, a "true woman" was one who "sees, hears, and therefore does no evil" (11). The writers of the Female Gothic, however, consistently dramatized the danger of this innocence to their heroines, showing that "innocence that is an ignorance of evil, however defined, was by its very definition defenseless against what it did not know" (15). This view is echoed by Kari J. Winter in her examination of the distinctions between Gothic novels defined as "female" and "male". As she notes:

[i]n Gothic novels written by men, such as The Castle of Otranto, The Monk, and Melmoth the Wanderer, innocent heroines are routinely raped, tortured, and killed. In Gothic novels written by women, innocent heroines are usually guided by the authors into an understanding of human evil, a knowledge that in

many cases empowers them to survive and to escape from the severer forms of victimization that male Gothic novelists delight in depicting. (78)

The underlying thematic structure of much of the Female Gothic, can thus be defined in similar terms to that of the traditional quest novel. The questing hero is, of course, replaced by the heroine, but she too must undergo a journey of some kind in order to acquire self-knowledge and achieve a fully realised adult identity. The journey, usually motivated by the heroine's compulsion to uncover a mystery which is intrinsically connected to her own identity, is mirrored in the various landscapes that she travels through. .

The settings and associated imagery function on two symbolic levels with regards to female sexuality. Firstly, they can be seen to represent the "real" world as experienced by women, the "[f]rightening images, 'gloomy representations' are the necessary and appropriate symbols of the consciousness of unhappy women - imprisoned by social conventions, threatened by slavery, and plagued by loneliness" (Doody 538-39). On another level they can be seen to symbolize the female body and mind itself. For example, as the first chapter of this thesis contends, a clear relationship can be drawn between the idea of motherhood within a patriarchy and the depiction of female imprisonment in the novels. Speaking of this image of confinement and its relation to women's literature, Juliann Fleenor argues that:

[s]exuality, female physiology, and female processes are frequently suggested with the image of interior space, not because of any innate comparison to female wombs but because of the fact that women's sexuality has frequently been denied, even to women themselves. (13)

Setting, therefore, functions not only in terms of situating the plot, but is an essential aspect of the thematic concerns of the novel. The inner mystery that the heroine needs to solve in terms of her emerging sexual identity is embodied externally in the mysterious buildings and sublime landscapes of foreign countries.

This "quest" structure is particularly evident in Radcliffe's novels. Through the journey of her heroines from the naive innocence of childhood to the sexual knowledge of an adult

woman, she offers a critique of the idea of negative virtue: virtue can only be truly praised as such if it has stood the test of experience. This is a belief that Wollstonecraft reiterates time and again in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. She argues that women are “for ever under the bondage of ignorance” by the “severe restraint” imposed by so-called virtues such as “propriety - blind propriety” (262). According to Wollstonecraft, experience is the only true parent of virtue as virtues “which are supported by ignorance must ever be wavering - the house built on sand could not endure a storm” (319).

Radcliffe illustrates this conviction on a number of occasions in The Romance of the Forest. Firstly, when Louis La Motte comments on the life of a monk spent in “abstinence and prayer”:

‘Here,’ said he, ‘are probably deposited the ashes of some ancient monk, once an inhabitant of the abbey; perhaps, of the founder, who, after having spent a life of abstinence and prayer, sought in heaven the reward of his forbearance upon earth. Peace be to his soul! but did he think a life of mere negative virtue deserved an eternal reward? Mistaken man! reason, had you trusted to its dictates, would have informed you, that the active virtues, the adherence to the golden rule, “Do as you would be done unto,” could alone deserve the favour of a Deity, whose glory is benevolence.’ (73)

This view is echoed later in the words of La Luc, when he discusses his daughter, Clara’s, lack of attention to her domestic duties:

‘Let experience teach her her error,’ said he; ‘precept seldom brings conviction to young minds.’
Madame objected that experience was a slow teacher. ‘It is a sure one,’ replied La Luc, ‘and is not unfrequently the quickest of all teachers: when it cannot lead us into serious evil, it is well to trust to it.’ (249-50)

Radcliffe appears to have drawn on John Milton’s masque Comus in her dramatization of this concept of negative virtue, described elsewhere by Milton as a “a fugitive and cloistered virtue”(Areopagitica 590)³¹. The reference is clear in Adeline’s attempted seduction

³¹ Milton argues that: “I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and fear. Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather; that

by the Marquis in his decadent “pleasure palace”. Upon arrival there Adeline is surprised by the luxurious appearance of the place she is to be imprisoned in, and is immediately suspicious:

The whole seemed the works of enchantment, and rather resembled the palace of a fairy than any thing of human conformation.

Adeline was astonished, and inquired where she was, but the man refused to answer her questions, and, having desired her to take some refreshment, left her. She walked to the windows, from which a gleam of moon-light discovered to her an extensive garden, where groves and lawns, and water glittering in the moon-beam, composed a scenery of varied and romantic beauty. ‘What can this mean!’ said she: ‘Is this a charm to lure me to destruction?’ (156-157)

Like Milton’s young Lady in Comus, Adeline is steadfast in her virtue and abstains from the sensual temptations offered to her, and even manages to fend off the fervent embraces of the Marquis with a look “on which was impressed the firm dignity of virtue” (163)³². The Marquis is taken completely off-guard:

Conscious of a superiority, which he was ashamed to acknowledge, and endeavouring to despise the influence which he could not resist, he stood for a moment the slave of virtue, though the votary of vice. (163)

Emily St Aubert’s experiences in The Mysteries of Udolpho reinforce this criticism of negative virtue. The novel opens with her living in the edenic La Vallée with her parents, on the verge of entering sexual adulthood: an unknown suitor has made romantic overtures to her in the form of music and poetry. But this idyllic life is short-lived as, within the opening chapters, both her parents die, leaving her orphaned and exiled from her childhood home.

‘This lovely scene! - how often shall I remember and regret it, when I am far away. Alas! what events may occur before I see it again! O, peaceful, happy shades! - scenes of my infant delights, of parental tenderness now lost for ever! - why must I leave ye! - In your retreats I should still find safety and repose. Sweet hours of my childhood - I am now to leave even your last memorials!’
(114)

which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary. That virtue therefore which is but a youngling in the contemplation of evil, and knows not the utmost that vice promises to her followers, and rejects it, is but a blank virtue, not a pure; her whiteness is but an excremental whiteness” (Areopagitica 590).

³² The scene of the Lady’s temptation is described as “a stately palace, set out with all manner of deliciousness: soft music, tables spread with all dainties”. (81) To this attempted seduction by Comus the Lady replies: “Hence with thy brewed enchantments, foul deceiver/...would’st thou seek again to trap me here/ With liquorish baits, fit to ensnare a brute? (lines 696, 699-700).

Symbolically, her sexual awakening necessitates a complete break with this world of naive innocence, embodied in La Vallée, and compels her to undertake a journey of self-discovery. Although her lover, Valancourt, is introduced early in Volume One, their marriage is postponed until the closing pages of the novel. This allows Emily to make essential discoveries about the nature of the world “outside” from which she has been completely shielded by her well-meaning father, while at the same time providing the opportunity for her to test her ability to survive and triumph within it without relying on others.

Emily’s initial “innocence” with regards to the world at large is as a result of being raised by a father who believes that social life holds only “selfishness, dissipation, and insincerity” (50). In keeping with this attempt to shield her from anything which may disturb her innocence, he, on his deathbed, asks Emily to burn some of his papers without reading them, thus simultaneously piquing her curiosity and refusing to satisfy it. These papers contain the tragic history of his sister who, forced into a loveless marriage, was murdered by her husband and his lover. Her aunt’s true story is one of the secrets that Emily must uncover during her journey, a story that she will learn valuable lessons from.

Her travels take her through the sublime landscapes of France and Italy, to château, to castle, to monastery, finally ending back in La Vallée. Each setting holds some secret concerning her and/or her dead parents, secrets which threaten to undermine any past, present or future sense of identity she might attain unless she uncovers them. To illustrate the psychological distance Emily travels, “images of her childhood home, La Vallée, recur and contrast with the chanciness of the open road, the vagaries of wayside inns, the hazards of convents, and the violence of grim castles” (Nichols, 189). Mary Poovey argues that Emily’s adventures can be seen as a “last jaunt” before settling down to the humdrum of married life in her “proper sphere”:

Udolpho obviously poses unexpected psychological complexities for Emily, but it also offers her this chance to exercise an ingenuity which the rules of propriety will soon deny her. ("Ideology" 329)

This seems a rather conservative reading of the value of the heroine's journey, and I would argue that the significance lies rather in the "unexpected psychological complexities" that Udolpho exposes Emily to. Overcoming her fear of the unknown, she explores the labyrinthine corridors, penetrates secret passageways, and lifts veils that hide secrets which terrify the rest of the household. Her curiosity and explorations have a dual function: firstly they expose her to "evil" for the first time, and secondly they allow the growth of an inner insight, thereby strengthening her personal convictions. Emily is thus ultimately able to stand up to the Montoni who previously only filled her with debilitating terror. When she refuses to cede her inheritance to him and he threatens her with imprisonment she answers:

You may find, perhaps, Signor,' said Emily, with mild dignity, 'that the strength of my mind is equal to the justice of my cause; and that I can endure with fortitude, when it is in resistance of oppression.'

'You speak like a heroine,' said Montoni, contemptuously; 'we shall see whether you can suffer like one.' (381)

Although for a brief period Montoni does illegally gain the estates and inheritance he desires, by the end of her journey Emily is the owner not only of her beloved La Vallée, but of the great Udolpho itself - via Laurentini's bequeathment³³. Many critics have argued, however, that her circular journey back to her idyllic childhood home is an indication of Radcliffe's ultimate conservatism. Ann Ronald, for example, contends that :

. . . the outcome of those journeys, the outcome of the novel, is startling. Emily is rewarded, not by a mature adult relationship, but by a promise of fairy-tale sex that titillates rather than fulfills. Radcliffe waves her magic wand in the final pages of the book and rekindles the love of Emily and Valancourt "by the

³³ A close reading of the final paragraphs of *Udolpho* reveals that this "bequeathment" of Laurentini's is slightly ambiguous - it is not completely clear whether the castle passes to Emily who then gives it to the Bonnacs along with the rest of Laurentini's legacy, or if it passes directly to the Bonnacs as Laurentini's only surviving relatives. However, critics such as Kate Ferguson Ellis have understood the legacy of Udolpho passing first to Emily and then to the Bonnacs: "Emily inherits not only Udolpho (usurped by Montoni from Laurentini, who wills it to Emily, who in turn gives it away) and the "chateau" of her childhood, La Vallée" (123-24).

spell of a fairy.” Such is the ending of any children’s story where the fairy godmother unites the princess and prince, and such is the ending of the formula most popular among adult women readers. One gets no sense of maturity, no suggestion of a heroine tempered by experience. Udolpho, filled with banditti and villains, could have been the setting for a number of initiation rites, especially since Radcliffe obliquely prepares her readers for certain activities by using sexual imagery to describe the castle. But sex never quite happens, impropriety never even takes shape, and experience never touches Emily’s mind or body. (Ronald, 180)

I would argue, however, that this kind of reading ignores a number of essential aspects of the novel. Ronald contends that the reason Emily is not “tempered by experience” is because Radcliffe avoids making use of the potential of “initiation rites” within Udolpho. It is, however, made very clear in the text that the only sexual “initiation” the heroine has access to within the castle is that of rape, something she actively resists. She does this by exploring the unknown, gaining vital knowledge of both her surroundings and herself, and overcoming the stereotype of the passive victim. When she eventually manages to escape the castle it is without help from the absent hero, once again asserting the female ability to take control of her destiny.

While in Udolpho Emily thus learns to take control of her emerging sexual identity, actively resisting the attempts of the men that surround her to usurp her sexual autonomy. As noted previously, by the end of the novel Emily is the owner of both La Vallée and Udolpho. In metaphorical terms she is thus the mistress of both her childhood experiences and those encountered on her journey of sexual awakening. Her return to her childhood home is not an attempt to return to naive innocence, but rather an expression of the heroine’s ability to assert her independent choice and the happiness and fulfillment achieved in doing so. Her return to La Vallée is on her own terms, as a financially and sexually independent woman, united with the lover of her choice. Ultimately Radcliffe shows that, if her heroines are to survive in the world beyond the realms of childhood, they must learn to recognize evil when they encounter it, for “[i]gnorance of the existence of evil in the world mystifies and strengthens tyranny,

whereas recognition of injustice enables people to resist it, at least internally” (Winter 79).

The most serious threat that the heroines face during their journeys towards sexual adulthood is the attempted negation of their independent identity through their imprisonment by a powerful tyrant.

IMPRISONMENT

“Is not the world a vast prison, and all women born slaves?” (Wollstonecraft, Maria 79)

The theme of female imprisonment³⁴ is one which runs throughout the genre and can be interpreted as the physical and psychological repression women encountered in a society that confined, marginalised and defined them as “other” merely because of their physical difference. In a patriarchal culture, women are thus “imprisoned” by their bodies. Castles, convents, monasteries, madhouses, subterranean caves - all serve equally well as the imprisoning structures in which a woman can be shut away from the rest of the world and (hopefully) forgotten. As these structures all work in similar ways, this section will concentrate on examining the one which has become almost exclusively associated with the Gothic genre: the ancient, gloomy, foreboding castle.

With novels such as The Mysteries of Udolpho and The Castle of Otranto taking their well-known titles from the imposing structures which dominate their texts, it is clear that the image of the castle or castle-like structure is of key importance to any understanding of the genre. In their interesting discussion of the gender-related appeal of the Gothic genre, Norman Holland and Leona Sherman both highlight the castle as a pivotal image, arguing that:

[t]he castle delineates a physical space which will accept many different projections of unconscious material. De Sade makes this receptive function of the castle quite terrifyingly explicit: its chief attribute is an isolation in which the heroine is completely controlled by someone else while separated from the

³⁴ As has been noted in Chapter 1 of this thesis, this was a very real fear for women living in a patriarchal society, with the law allowing a husband physically to confine his wife to the home only being revoked in 1879.

one she loves. The castle threatens shame, agony, annihilation - and desire.
(282)

The image of the castle is thus one which is open to a number of interpretations. I am interested in how it comes to represent the imprisoning structure of the patriarchal hegemony, while at the same time certain aspects of it, in particular the heroine's bedchamber, seem to symbolize the woman's body itself.

CASTLES AND THE STRUCTURE OF PATRIARCHY

The imprisonment of the heroine places her at the mercy of a tyrannical patriarch, who attempts to use this threat of confinement in order to satisfy his own desires, be they sexual, social or financial³⁵. In a world in which most women were passed on from the control of their fathers to that of their husbands - this transaction often including an overtly financial aspect - and, at all stages, confined to the home and defined only as daughters, wives or mothers, the authors' use of the image of the castle can be interpreted as the gothic (sub)version of the idealised domesticity of the home. As Holland and Sherman note, through the use of the Gothic castle:

. . . the gothic novel provides a polarizing of inside and outside with which an adult woman, particularly in a sexist society, might symbolize a common psychosocial experience: an invaded life within her mind, her body, her home, bounded by a social structure that marks off economic and political life as "outside". (288)

The castle can thus be interpreted as representing the imprisoning structure of the patriarchal culture, embodied in the form of the tyrannical, all-powerful father. Some critics

³⁵ For example: In Udolpho, Montoni initially wishes to sell Emily to the highest bidder, but later uses imprisonment to force her to sign over her inheritance; in Forest, the Marquis kidnaps and confines Adeline with the intention of raping her; in Sicilian, Julia is locked up when she refuses the suitor her father has chosen for his wealth and social status; and in Maria, the heroine is interred in a madhouse when she refuses to acquiesce when her husband not only demands her inheritance but that she prostitute herself for money.

have, however, also seen it as symbolic of the maternal body³⁶. Holland and Sherman find that both the father and the mother are represented by the Gothic structure:

Castles are not universal, yet the two of us have been able to find in them: a body, a head, a mind, unchanging hardness, undifferentiated parents, parents differentiated into hard father and yielding mother, or sexual father and idealized mother. . . . The castle has an immense structure of - possibility. (289)

For Claire Kahane, however, the castle comes *exclusively* to represent the maternal body, “awesome and powerful, which is both our habitat and our prison” (336-37). She argues:

Ultimately what I confront are the mysteries of identity and the temptation to lose it by merging with a mother imago who threatens all boundaries between self and other.

To this confrontation the characteristic response of the gothic heroine is escape; as Holland and Sherman put it, “I will not let the castle force itself into me. I will put myself outside it.” But for women this is no easy task. Putting herself outside it, the conventional Gothic heroine puts herself outside female desire and aggressivity. In thus excluding a vital aspect of self, she is left on the margin both of identity and society. (340)

Kahane interprets the castle as symbolizing an “all-encompassing” maternal figure, representing a “female desire and aggressivity” which the heroine sees as threatening and thus wishes to escape. As will become clear during this chapter, I am also interested in how aspects of the castle come to represent the female body, but my interpretation differs from Kahane’s in a number of ways. Firstly, I do not see the imprisoning structure of the castle in its entirety as a “threatening” mother-figure, but rather as the threat the patriarchy holds for women. As I have argued in the first chapter, the antagonist is not the mother-figure but the patriarchal definition of what a mother is - a definition which attempts to confine and repress women, as the castle does the heroine. Secondly, my analysis of the parallels that exist between the castle and the female body is restricted to certain aspects of the building, in particular the heroine’s bedchamber.

³⁶ These readings obviously draw on Julia Kristeva’s conception of the Pre-Oedipal stage in the period of early infancy in which the child does not differentiate its own subjectivity from that of the all-powerful maternal body.

Thus in terms of Kahane's argument above, I would contend that the heroine's escape from the imprisoning structure does not marginalise her but can rather be seen as an affirmation of her identity. If the imprisoning castle is interpreted as being symbolic of the repressive patriarchal structure, then by asserting her right to determine her own destiny outside the walls which threaten to negate her identity, she is actively demonstrating "female desire and aggressivity" and not "[p]utting herself outside" it.

Nowhere is the image of the castle more prevalent than in Radcliffe's novels. The Mysteries of Udolpho takes its title from the ominous castle that occupies its central chapters, and often seems to acquire a life of its own. Udolpho is the Gothic version of the idyllic La Vallée. Like La Vallée it is separated from society, but its isolation is a sign of the total power of its ruler who, far from social restraints, is able to exercise his own will. Its boundaries threaten imprisonment and oppression rather than protection, and it is the home of violence and vice rather than virtue. The first description of the ancient ruined structure - significantly also Emily's first view of it - emphasizes its awe-inspiring power:

Emily gazed with melancholy awe upon the castle, which she understood to be Montoni's; for, though it was now lighted up by the setting sun, the gothic greatness of its features, and its mouldering walls of dark grey stone, rendered it a gloomy and sublime object. ... The gateway before her, leading into the courts, was of gigantic size, and was defended by two round towers, crowned by over-hanging turrets, embattled, where, instead of banners, now waved long grass and wild plants, that had taken root among the mouldering stones, and which seemed to sigh, as the breeze rolled past, over the desolation around them. The towers were united by a curtain, pierced and embattled also, below which appeared the pointed arch of an huge portcullis, surmounting the gates: from these, the walls of the ramparts extended to other towers, overlooking the precipice, whose shattered outline, appearing on a gleam, that lingered in the west, told of the ravages of war. - Beyond these all was lost in the obscurity of evening.

While Emily gazed with awe upon the scene, footsteps were heard within the gates, and the undrawing of bolts; after which an ancient servant of the castle appeared, forcing back the huge folds of the portal, to admit his lord. As the carriage-wheels rolled heavily under the portcullis, Emily's heart sunk, and she seemed, as if she was going into her prison; the gloomy court, into which she passed, served to confirm this idea, and her imagination, ever awake to

circumstance, suggested even more terrors, than her reason could justify. (226-28)

And indeed, Udolpho does serve as her prison for a while, but it is a period during which she gains essential knowledge about the world from which she has until now been protected. For a heroine who is on the threshold of sexual maturity, the overtly sexual images apparent in this first description of the castle must hold some significance:

As if from a child's perspective on this giant house, moving first from eye level upward and then downward, Radcliffe focuses attention on the castle's body parts in terms that allude to defense, penetration, and entrapment. From "the gateway ... of gigantic size" the eye sweeps up to "two round towers ... united by a curtain pierced and embattled" and then down again to "the pointed arch of a huge porticullis surmounting the gates". (Kahane, 338)

She has left the innocent, asexual world of La Vallée, and entered an environment in which sexuality and the manipulations thereof are foregrounded. Udolpho contains secrets and lessons about sex and love which Emily must discover and learn from: the secrets of Laurentini's murderous passion; the disastrous results of her aunt's marriage to Montoni which was not based on love but on personal gain; and Montoni's attempted manipulations of her sexuality. The connection between Udolpho and her own emerging sexuality is stressed by the fact that, imprisoned within the ruined walls, she discovers her secret admirer, Du Pont. Her discovery of his love poems at La Vallée, signaled the end of her childhood innocence. Once she has learned all she needs to in the castle it is with him that she manages to escape.

The terror that the castle's gloomy aspect evokes in Emily is well justified: once within its walls Emily is subject to Montoni's tyrannical authority:

As she looked on the massy walls of the edifice, her melancholy spirits represented it to be her prison; and she started as at a new suggestion, when she considered how far distant she was from her native country, from her little peaceful home, and from her only friend. (251)

But she soon manages to overcome this terror and spends much of her time in Udolpho investigating its labyrinthine interior, a space which may imprison her body but allows her imagination to run wild:

Like many women novelists of this period, Radcliffe is using the spectral arena of the Gothic castle to dramatize the eruption of the psychic material ordinarily controlled by the inhibitions of bourgeois society. It is revealing that Radcliffe explicitly links this “energy” with “passion,” for Emily’s response, like those of her numerous sisters, enacts what we now think of as the see-saw of liberated desire and repression. Vacillating between curiosity and fear, Emily is bold enough to explore the castle’s darkest recesses, but when she imagines a corpse “crimsoned with human blood,” she retreats from the confrontation by fainting. Again, she boldly lifts the forbidding veil of an ominous painting, but falls senseless to the floor before she can identify its contents. With Udolpho, desire wrestles with dread, even though the heroine is too discreet to recognize the sexual component of her energy. (Poovey, “Ideology” 320-21)

While it is true that Emily is at times unable fully to confront the secrets she uncovers, this active exploration of her surroundings serves to demystify the castle and its inhabitants and, when she returns to Udolpho for the second time, it is with much less apprehension:

The road winding round the base of a mountain, they now came within view of the castle, which was shewn in the perspective of the valley by a gleam of moon-shine, and then vanished in shade; while even a transient view of it had awakened the poignancy of Emily’s feelings. Its massy and gloomy walls gave her terrible ideas of imprisonment and suffering: yet, as she advanced, some degree of hope mingled with her terror; for, though this was certainly the residence of Montoni, it was possibly, also, that of Valancourt, and she could not approach a place, where he might be, without experiencing somewhat of the joy of hope. (424)

Although her belief that Valancourt may be also be confined within the castle is mistaken, symbolically it can be inferred that the knowledge she has gained inside Udolpho concerning both sexuality and her own adult identity, has served to eliminate much of the original terror she felt upon seeing Udolpho for the first time. Of course, by the end of the novel, she has inherited the castle which filled her with such dread. As Maggie Kilgour notes:

the question of the ownership of the castle is central to the mystery of the narrative it dominates. Udolpho is Montoni’s property, but like the other spaces Emily will spend time in, it is also associated with a woman - in this case, the original and rightful owner whose place Montoni has perhaps

wrongfully assumed. . . . What is unusual, too, is that the suggested dispossession and perhaps murder is of a female by a male. Is this a subversive myth of the usurpation of female property by a patriarchal order? Does, the fortress, then, like Wollstonecraft's madhouse, represent the confines that men impose upon women to deprive them of their rightful powers? (121)

I would argue that Emily's possession of the castle at the end of the novel *does* symbolically indicate a reclaiming of an area of sexuality which the patriarchal definition of the innately "pure" female had robbed women of. This can, however, only be achieved through her experiences within the castle, and one of the most important of these is her encounter with the threat of intrusion.

THE HIDDEN DOOR IN THE HAUNTED CHAMBER

"What if some of these ruffians,' said she, 'should find out the private stair-case, and in the darkness of night steal into my chamber!" (Udolpho, 319)

This is the fear that haunts Emily every night during her stay in Udolpho upon discovering that her chamber is not as secure as she might have hoped, and that it possesses a secret door that can only be locked from the outside. She thus has absolutely no control over any determined "ruffian's" attempt to enter her chamber. It is scarcely necessary to emphasize the specifically sexual component that is latent in such scenes.

Although Radcliffe is credited with popularizing the bedroom door that has a bolt on the outside only, Cynthia Griffin Wolff notes that this detail is an embellishment on a component introduced into the genre by Clara Reeves:

One necessary element in the Radcliffean Gothic was, in fact, introduced by Clara Reeves, who wrote The Old English Baron. In it, Reeves postulated the "haunted apartment." Often when we think of a haunted house, we assume that the fearful presence has more or less full rein throughout (such had been the case earlier in Walpole's The Castle of Otranto); however, the terrors of Gothic mansions tended to be confined after the fictions of Clara Reeves to only one or several frightful chambers. (209)

The chambers in Radcliffe's novels are, however, not haunted by wandering ghosts, but rather by the very real threat of intrusion and physical violation. Eugenia DeLamotte argues that fear of intrusion can be interpreted as an "anxiety about boundaries":

. . . those that shut the protagonist in, and those that separate the individual self from something that is Other. . . . The two doors to [Emily's] chamber suggest the threat of intrusion. These boundaries and barriers are the focus for her anxieties and fears, which derive their force both from the terrors of separateness and the terrors of unity: the fear of being shut in, cut off, alone; the fear of being intruded upon. (19)

Thus, while the heroine is threatened with imprisonment, at the same time she has to deal with the threat of intrusion - and she has little or no control over either of these situations. If the external threat of confinement can be interpreted as the physical and psychological repression of women by a patriarchal culture (as has been argued above), the fear of violation of the private space can be read as the patriarchal usurpation of control over female sexuality. Thus while the castle represents the imprisoning structure of the patriarchal hegemony, the bedchamber - including all the dark passageways, hidden doors and secret staircases connected to it - that is located within the castle, can be seen as symbolising the woman's body itself.

Cynthia Griffin Wolff has also connected the "inner spaces" within the castle with female sexuality, contending that these "devices" become "a way of identifying a woman's body . . . when she is undergoing the siege of conflict over sexual stimulation or arousal" (210). She, however, equates this "inner space", that is the sexualized female body, with a "danger" that the heroine attempts to avoid, rather than explore: "[sexual] danger is palpably equated in these fictions with a specialized form of "inner space", and if the heroine can manage to stay away from the treacherous cave - tunnel, basement, secret room - she will usually be safe" (Wolff 209).

Although it can be argued that the heroines are often confused or afraid of their emerging sexuality, the "danger" the heroine faces lies in the fact that within this patriarchal

environment she has almost no control over who enters her chamber. I would argue that what Radcliffe's novels are suggesting is that the only way to change this, the only way she will ever be "safe", is not by attempting to "stay away" from the threat, but rather by overcoming her fear and actively exploring the secrets of the hidden door. In this way the heroine symbolically regains control over her own sexuality.

This choice of the heroine is examined and ultimately validated by Radcliffe's explorations of the possibilities of "staying away" from the "threat" of sexuality by seeking refuge in an asexual environment - the ever-present convent. During her journey the heroine more often than not spends a period of time within the walls of a religious institution. Sometimes she is there willingly, seeking solace in seclusion, or protection from her oppressors, on other occasions she has been forcibly imprisoned. If, as it has been argued, the heroine's adventures can be interpreted as the journey of sexual awakening, the ubiquitous presence of these ancient religious buildings must be of significant thematic importance.

A close reading of the presentation of convents in Radcliffe's novels reveals that, thematically, they are very ambiguous symbols. On the one hand they seem to embody the threat of not being able successfully to enter the life of a sexually adult woman. Again and again heroines and secondary female characters are threatened with the confines of the convent if they refuse the marriage partner chosen for them. On the other hand, convents do offer a desirable refuge from the turmoil experienced by the heroines, and can be interpreted as the exploration of a possible alternative to life within a patriarchal system - that of a community of women.

The danger of not being allowed to become a sexually active adult woman is effectively dramatised by the use of the image of the convent/monastery. In The Italian, for example, Ellena is imprisoned in a convent when her relationship with Vivaldi is deemed inappropriate by his mother. In order to escape, she must overcome the dictates of the

propriety she guards so fiercely by fleeing unaccompanied with her lover - it is the only alternative to her being forced into entering the convent, marrying the unknown man chosen for her by Vivaldi's mother, or death. For as Olivia tells Ellena, in San Stefano nuns who displease the abbess are starved to death:

Within the deepest recesses of our convent, is a stone chamber, secured by doors of iron, to which such of the sisterhood as have been guilty of any heinous offence have, from time to time, been consigned. This condemnation admits no reprieve; the unfortunate captive is left to languish in chains and darkness, receiving only an allowance of bread and water just sufficient to prolong her sufferings, till nature, at length, sinking under their intolerable pressure, obtains refuge in death. (126)

Once she has escaped, the lovers decide to marry secretly so that "oppression can part [them] no more" (182), but their wedding is prevented at the last minute by the accusation brought against Ellena that she is violating the nun's vow of chastity. Ellena faces these accusations and the consequent separation from her lover because she has asserted her independent will with regards to her sexuality, refusing to spend her life as a nun or with the stranger chosen for her by the Marchesa, declaring that:

. . . I will never accept either; that force may send me to the altar, but that it never shall compel me to utter vows which my heart abhors; and if I am constrained to appear there, it shall be only to protest against her tyranny, and against the form intended to sanction it. (92)

Her claim to sexual autonomy is a resistance to the demands of a society which demands female sexual passivity, and she is therefore punished with separation from her partner of choice and the threat of life-long chastity.

For most women during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries marriage provided the only viable way of leading an active sexual life. It was also essential for economic stability - within the patriarchal economic system the alternatives to depending on a father or husband for support were neither abundant nor financially attractive. As Wollstonecraft points out in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*: "[t]he few employments

open to women, so far, from being liberal, are menial” (267)³⁷. Interpreting the image of the convent in terms of this social context, DeLamotte argues that:

[a]t the most basic level, the convent represents the terrors of poverty, chastity, and obedience: the difficulty single women had in supporting themselves, the emotional and sexual deprivations of the single life, and the subjections it entailed. (161)

These fears are clearly apparent in Adeline’s explanation as to why she refused to obey her father and enter the convent she had grown up in:

You, my dear Madam, can form little idea of the wretchedness of my situation, condemned to perpetual imprisonment, and imprisonment of the most dreadful kind, or to the vengeance of a father, from whom I had no appeal. My resolution relaxed - for some time I paused upon the choice of evils - but at length the horrors of the monastic life rose so fully to my view, that fortitude gave way before them. Excluded from the cheerful intercourse of society - from the pleasant view of nature - almost from the light of day - condemned to silence - rigid formality - abstinence and penance - condemned to forego the delights of a world, which imagination painted in the gayest and most alluring colours, and whose hues were, perhaps, not the less captivating because they were only ideal: - such was the state, to which I was destined. (Forest 36-37)

However, while the convents can be seen as symbolically representative of all of the hazards and deprivations of single life as a woman under a patriarchy, life within the convents can also be interpreted as an exploration of the potentialities of “communities of women”³⁸. In The Italian, a contrast is set up between the two convents the heroine spends time in. The first is the Convent of San Stefano in which Ellena is imprisoned on the orders of the mother of her lover, Vivaldi. It is a “horrific mirror of the patriarchal society: in it, women are imprisoned and terrorized by power-hungry female agents of the patriarchy” (Winter 109). The nuns of

³⁷ As DeLamotte notes Wollstonecraft “herself in fact exhausted all those considered appropriate to her class: schoolteacher, governess, companion. The life of her friend Caroline Blood illustrated two other options for a single woman of no means: destitute and unable to support herself, she finally chose the workhouse as a last alternative to prostitution” (161).

³⁸ DeLamotte contends that, in terms of the situation of women in the eighteenth century, the convent can be seen as a lost “object of desire”:

To some, the convent must have seemed an attractive, and sadly lost, alternative for single Protestant women in eighteenth-century England. It was a place of refuge, where women with no means of financial support could at least have been assured of not falling prey to prostitution or the workhouse. (162)

San Stefano are a parody of the moral evils associated with women: “wretched vanity” (88) “an absence of decorum” (94), cattiness, petty jealousy, obsession with trivialities, and there exists absolutely no feeling of female solidarity between them. When Ellena realizes the extent of the corruption in the convent she proclaims that: “[t]he sanctuary is prophaned . . . it is become a prison” (84). However, in a world where women are often violently oppressed, any institution governed by women can provide some refuge for female victims of masculine violence. Thus Ellena Rosalba’s mother, Olivia, chooses incarceration in San Stefano, where, as noted previously, nuns who displease the abbess are imprisoned and slowly starved to death, over life with her abusive husband. This, if nothing else, demonstrates how truly horrible married life within the patriarchal system can be.

In opposition to this nightmarish depiction, the Convent of Santa della Pieta is a “beautiful haven of female love, companionship, and nurturance, governed justly by a benign matriarch” (Winter 109). This Abbess is symbolic of the success that might be achieved by women if allowed positions of authority, and the convent is a safe refuge and a place of female solidarity. As Kari Winter argues, “[d]uring their moments of greatest desperation, Radcliffe’s heroines see convents as refuges of relative peace and safety” (109), an escape from the terrors of being a sexually adult woman under a patriarchy. Shelley’s Mathilda, too, seems to view the convent not as a place of religious devotion but as a place of escape - after discovering her father’s incestuous love for her she says:

Ever after this, I thought, I would live in the most dreary seclusion. I would retire to the Continent and become a nun; not for religion’s sake, for I was not a Catholic, but that I might be ever shut out from the world. I should there find solitude where I might weep, and the voices of life might never reach me. (204)

This episode occurs a few hours after her father has confessed to his “unlawful and monstrous passion” (207). Upon hearing this she runs away from him, locking herself in her chamber which “was in a retired part of the house, and looked upon the garden so that no sound of the

other inhabitants could reach it” (203). Like Radcliffe’s heroines she, too, is faced with the possibility of her secluded bedroom being penetrated by an unwanted suitor - in this case her own father. Unable to sleep, she is preparing to write a letter to her father when she hears footsteps:

On a sudden I heard a gentle step ascending the stairs; I paused breathless, and as it approached glided into an obscure corner of the room; the steps paused at my door, but after a few moments they again receded, descended the stairs and I heard no more.

This slight incident gave rise in me to the most painful reflections; nor do I now dare express the emotions I felt. That he should be restless I understood; that he should wander as an unlaid ghost and find no quiet from the burning hell that consumed his heart. *But why approach my chamber? Was not that sacred?* I felt almost ready to faint while he had stood there, but I had not betrayed my wakefulness by the slightest motion, although I had heard my own heart beat with violent fear. He had withdrawn. (emphasis added) (204-205)

The answer to her question, of course, is that her chamber is not sacred. Her father has already proved this beyond a doubt by his incestuous passion which violates every boundary that should exist between father and daughter. As has been argued in Chapter Two, the incestuous father represents the patriarchal power to define and confine female sexuality, incest being the ultimate penetration and destruction of any control the woman might have over her sexuality. Mathilda’s silence saves her from this confrontation with her father, as her father notes in his letter to her that he “ha[d] been at the door of your chamber: every thing is silent. You sleep. Do you indeed sleep, Mathilda?” (210)

Although she changes her mind about entering a convent after her father’s suicide, it can be argued that the only way she can avoid another attempt by the patriarchy to intrude on the “sacred” is to create her own symbolic convent. She thus chooses to adopt a “fanciful nun-like dress” (219) while living as a hermit on the desolate heath - arguably thereby symbolically fulfilling her original intention.

Unlike Mathilda, however, the refuge found in the convent is temporary for Radcliffe's heroines who, ultimately, choose the possibilities of life in the world at large over the safe but restricted life in a convent. Thus, while Ellena's mother in The Italian remains within the cloister, arguably too seriously damaged by her experiences under the patriarchy ever to be able to rejoin society, Ellena chooses life within society, ultimately marrying the man of her choice. Offered the chaste life in a community of women during her journey of sexual awakening, she instead embraces her emerging sexuality.

The heroines' active explorations of the secrets of their bedchambers is thus validated in the novel by their decision not to join the asexual safety offered by the convents. In The Mysteries of Udolpho, Emily soon discovers that space appointed as her bedroom is controlled not from within but from without:

To call off her attention from subjects, that pressed heavily upon her spirits, she rose and again examined her room and its furniture. As she walked round it, she passed a door, that was not quite shut, and, perceiving, that it was not the one, through which she entered, she brought the light forward to discover whither it led. She opened it, and, going forward, had nearly fallen down a steep, narrow staircase that wound from it, between two stone walls. She wished to know to what it led, and was the more anxious, since it communicated so immediately with her apartment; but, in the present state of her spirits, she wanted courage to venture into the darkness alone. *Closing the door, therefore, she endeavoured to fasten it, but, upon further examination, perceived, that it had no bolts on the chamber side, though it had two on the other.* By placing a heavy chair against it, she in some measure remedied the defect; yet she was still alarmed at the thought of sleeping in this remote room alone, with a door opening she knew not whither, and which could not be perfectly fastened on the inside. Sometimes she wished to entreat of Madame Montoni, that Annette might have leave to remain with her all night, but was deterred by an apprehension of betraying what would be thought childish fears. (emphasis added) (235-36)

In this suggestive representation of female space, the door of her room has "no bolts on the chamber side, though it had two on the other" (235). Mary Laughlin Fawcett argues that this inner, female space is occupied by a symbol that becomes central to the novel, the bed:

The bedroom is the novel's dreamlike center. Whatever chateau or palazzo Emily enters, we readers soon find ourselves in some bedroom, usually dark, with heavy furniture and ancient hangings. ... A reader of this novel will easily remember, or confuse, ramparts, walls, galleries, turrets, wings, passages, and staircases surrounding the crucial bedroom with its veiled recess. Emily spends nights not sleeping, but wondering, in anxious and wakeful anticipation of something as yet unknown. The bed is thus a locus of questioning anxiety, as well as a thing to be searched out and seen; it is a powerful central symbol. (483-84)

It is interesting that Emily fears her apprehension will be derided as being "childish", as on a symbolic level it is her "childish" fear of her own sexuality that she has to overcome, by exploring it. And that is precisely what she attempts to do the following morning, only to discover, to her horror, that the door has been bolted while she slept:

Her surprise cannot easily be imagined, when, in the next minute, she perceived that the door was fastened. - She felt, as if she had seen an apparition. The door of the corridor was locked as she had left it, but this door, which could be secured only on the outside, must have been bolted, during the night. She became seriously uneasy at the thought of sleeping again in a chamber, thus liable to intrusion, so remote, too, as it was from the family, and she determined to mention the circumstance to Madame Montoni, and to request a change. (242)

Her request is, as she feared, seen as the result of childish fears and denied. Although she attempts to overcome her alarms concerning her vulnerability, her terrors are only increased upon realising that there is a good chance that the door leads to the chamber containing the mysterious horror behind the black veil:

The door of the stair-case was, perhaps, a subject of more reasonable alarm, and she now began to apprehend, such was the aptitude of her fears, that this stair-case had some private communication with the apartment, which she shuddered even to remember. Determined not to undress, she lay down to sleep in her clothes, with her late father's dog, the faithful Manchon, at the foot of the bed, whom she considered as a kind of guard. (260)

As the reader only learns at the end of the novel, the veil hides a wax effigy which Emily has believed to be the worm-ridden body of the missing Laurentini de Udolpho. It has been argued in the previous chapter that Laurentini symbolizes the fate of women who become slaves to their passions, the worm-ridden body perhaps representing her ultimate corruption of

mind and soul. If the bedchamber - including all the dark passageways, hidden doors and secret staircases connected to it - is interpreted as the awakening sexuality of the female body and the mysteries and dangers that this journey contains in a male dominated society, then it is very fitting that one possible destination of the dark passage-way is female death and madness resulting from passions which have been allowed to thrive ungoverned by any "reason". This lack of the ability to use "reason" effectively can be seen as a direct consequence of patriarchal culture which allowed women little chance to develop this capacity - which women were thus, of course, believed to be incapable of developing.

The fact that Emily chooses to go to sleep fully dressed stresses her fear of sexual vulnerability, and, that same night, her fears are realised:

A return of the noise again disturbed her; it seemed to come from that part of the room, which communicated with the private staircase, and she instantly remembered the odd circumstance of the door having been fastened, during the preceding night, by some unknown hand. Her late alarming suspicion, concerning its communication, also occurred to her. ... While Emily kept her eyes fixed on the spot, she saw the door move, and then slowly open, and perceived something enter the room, but the extreme duskiness prevented her distinguishing what it was. (260-61)

At first she fears the figure is that of a ghost - the ghost of Laurentini. It turns out, however, to be Count Morano, the suitor she has turned down, who, professing his undying love, attempts to kidnap her. Thus, while one possibility of the mysterious door is its opening up to female madness, it can also admit the patriarchal attempt to violently usurp control over female sexuality. Although Emily avoids kidnap and probable rape when Montoni timeously intervenes, she is forced to continue sleeping in the chamber and once again is faced with the possibility of physical violation:

[Emily] was retiring to rest, when she was alarmed by a strange and loud knocking at her chamber door, and then a heavy weight fell against it, that almost burst it open. She called to know who was there, and receiving no answer, repeated the call; but a chilling silence followed. It occurred to her - for, at this moment, she could not reason on the probability of circumstances - that some one of the strangers, lately arrived at the castle, had discovered her

apartment, and was come with such intent, as their looks rendered too possible - to rob, perhaps to murder, her. The moment she admitted this possibility, terror supplied the place of conviction, and a kind of instinctive remembrance of her remote situation from the family heightened it to a degree, that almost overcame her senses. She looked at the door, which led to the staircase, expecting to see it open, and listening, in fearful silence, for a return of the noise, till she began to think it had proceeded from this door, and a wish of escaping through the opposite one rushed upon her mind. She went to the gallery door, and then, fearing to open it, lest some person might be silently lurking for her without, she stopped, but with her eyes fixed in expectation upon the opposite door of the stair-case. As thus she stood, she heard a faint breathing near her, and became convinced, that some person was on the other side of the door, which was already locked. She sought for other fastening, but there was none.

While she yet listened, the breathing was distinctly heard, and her terror was not soothed, when, looking round her wide and lonely chamber, she again considered her remote situation. As she stood hesitating whether to call for assistance, the continuance of the stillness surprised her; and her spirits would have revived, had she not continued to hear the faint breathing, that convinced her, the person, whoever it was, had not quitted the door.

At length, worn out with anxiety, she determined to call loudly for assistance from her casement, and was advancing to it, when, whether the terror or her mind gave her ideal sounds, or that real ones did come, she thought footsteps were ascending the private stair-case; and, expecting to see its door unclose, she forgot all other cause of alarm, and retreated towards the corridor. (299-300)

This impending intrusion turns out to be a false alarm but, when Montoni moves his band of banditti into the castle, Emily is soon in real danger. Rationally fearful that “some of these ruffians . . . should find out the private staircase, and in the darkness of night steal into [her] chamber!” (319), she asks for Montoni’s protection which he only offers in return for transferring her inheritance to him. Once she has done this he imprisons her in her chamber, saying “[i]t was necessary to deceive you . . . there was no other way of making you act reasonably” (436). DeLamotte argues that:

The Gothic villain always has control of the physical barriers between himself and the woman he pursues. The castle is his; the key is his; the strength is his; he knows the secret door. . . . As Radcliffe delicately hints through Emily’s anxiety about her bedroom doors . . . the best of heroines ultimately has no physical power against a determined villain. (32)

While it is certainly true that the heroine is no match for the villain in terms of physical power, and her own bed-chamber is always “liable to intrusion” (242) by threatening male figures who attempt to control her environment, she herself aggressively explores and intrudes into the secret chambers of the castle. As Kahane notes:

in spite of her vulnerable situation, or rather, and this is the important fact, because of it, she must explore and penetrate the mysteries of Udolpho, locate and tap its secret center of that knowledge which is power. (338-39)

Her explorations of the castle, and her encounters with the “dark” side of life that she was always protected from, arm her with the necessary knowledge to overcome her “childish fears” and take control of her destiny as a sexual, adult woman. Fittingly, it is through the door that originally resulted in so much anxiety, that Emily finally manages to escape Udolpho.

A brief examination of the heroine of Radcliffe’s earlier novel, The Romance of the Forest, highlights the similarity between her experiences and the situations encountered by Emily in Udolpho. Adeline, too, is continually faced with the threat of intrusion and physical violation. Removed from the convent in which she has spent her childhood but which she refuses to enter, by the man she believes to be her father, Adeline is taken to a “desolate” (40) house, and locked in her bed chamber:

Night at length came, and such a night! Darkness brought new terrors: I looked round the chamber for some means of fastening my door on the inside, but could perceive none; at last I contrived to place the back of a chair in an oblique direction, so as to render it secure. . . . [t]hus passed the hours till midnight, when all became still. I had laid for some time in a state between fear and hope, when I heard the lock of my door gently moved backward and forward; I started up, and listened; for a moment it was still, then the noise returned, and I heard a whispering without; my spirits died away, but I was yet sensible. Presently an effort was made at the door, as if to force it; I shrieked aloud, and immediately heard the voices of the men I had seen at my father’s table: they called loudly for the door to be opened . . . They remained some time at the door, then they quitted it . . . suddenly I heard a noise in a different part of the room, and, on looking round, I perceived the door of a small closet open, and two men enter the chamber. (42-43)

The similarities between this scene and the ones faced by Emily are obvious. Adeline manages to avoid the physical violation of rape or murder (or both) that seems imminent, but faces this threat again later in the novel. While she is living with La Motte and his wife in a ruined monastery, she discovers that her new bed-chamber also has a secret door:

As she sat musing, her eyes fixed on the opposite wall, she perceived the arras, with which the room was hung, wave backwards and forwards; she continued to observe it for some minutes, and then rose to examine it farther. It was moved by the wind; and she blushed at the momentary fear it had excited: but she observed that the tapestry was more strongly agitated in one particular place than elsewhere, and a noise that seemed something more than that of the wind issued thence. The old bedstead, which La Motte had found in this apartment, had been removed to accommodate Adeline, and it was behind the place where this had stood, that the wind seemed to rush with particular force: curiosity prompted her to examine still farther; she felt about the tapestry, and perceiving the wall behind shake under her hand, she lifted the arras, and discovered a small door, whose loosened hinges admitted the wind, and occasioned the noise she had heard.

The door was held only by a bolt, having undrawn which, and brought the light, she descended by a few steps into another chamber: she instantly remembered her dreams. The chamber was not much like that in which she had seen the dying Chevalier, and afterwards the bier; but it gave her a confused remembrance of the one through which she had passed. Holding up the light to examine it more fully, she was convinced by its structure that it was part of the ancient foundation. A shattered casement, placed high from the floor, seemed to be the only opening to admit light. She observed a door on the opposite side of the apartment; and after some moments of hesitation, gained courage, and determined to pursue the inquiry. *A mystery seems to hang over these chambers, said she, which it is, perhaps, my lot to develop; I will, at least, see to what that door leads.* (emphasis added) (114-15)

And so, like Emily and many other Gothic heroines, she opens the door and begins an exploration of the “mystery” which, at the same time, becomes an exploration of her own emerging sexual identity as an adult woman.

CONCLUSION

By the end of the novel, the heroine has reached the end of her journey. This journey has been mirrored by the settings that she moves through - for Emily from edenic La Vallée, to foreboding Udolpho, and back again. Many critics have argued that this circular journey,

which culminates in the marriage of the heroine, indicates an ultimate submission to the dominant patriarchal hegemony, signifying a return to paternalistic rule. Maggie Kilgour, for example argues that:

[i]n the female gothic, the private world is turned temporarily into a house of horrors; the domestic realm appears in distorted nightmare forms in the images of the prison, the castle, in which men imprison helpless passive females, angels in the house, whose spirituality may be pushed, as in the case of Walpole's *Matilda*, to an extreme. But this transformation cannot serve as an exposé of the fundamental reality that the bourgeois home is a gothic prison for women, for at the end of the text life returns to a normality that is ratified by its difference from the nightmare counterpart. The gothic forms of domesticity evaporate, enabling the heroine to return to the real version, now purified of its contaminated forms, so that women's continuing incarceration in the home that is always the man's castle is assured. (39)

The conclusions reached by Eugenia DeLamotte in her "Feminist Study of Nineteenth-century Gothic" are similar:

Thus, although at one level marriage is the immanence against which heroines struggle symbolically - a life of repetition, confinement, sexual domination, economic powerlessness, seclusion, ignorance - the protest implicit in this symbolic struggle is undercut by the final identification of escape with domestic enclosure, itself the very source of the suffering the escape is supposed to alleviate. (185)

And again, Mary Poovey asserts that it is only within *Udolpho* that Emily shows any true resistance to oppression:

Radcliffe allows Emily such extraordinary power only within *Udolpho*. After her escape Emily returns to a more typical position of dependence, ward first of du Pont, then of the father-surrogate Count de Villefort, then of the exonerated Valancourt. In the realm of bandetti [sic] and political intrigue outside the castle men once more take the initiative, and the tension and complexity of the narrative diminish proportionately. Like Emily, Radcliffe is only willing to elaborate within definite bounds; only the extremity of *Udolpho*'s oppression sanctions such unorthodox fantasies of resistance become heroism. ("Ideology" 329-30)

I would argue, however, that the essential point is that, by the end of the novel, Emily has become her own mistress, both financially and sexually. She owns La Vallée and *Udolpho* (even though she chooses to give it away) and has thus become mistress of both symbolic

aspects of her sexuality and is free to choose her partner and her abode. As Milbank contends, the heroine's experiences within, and escape from, the structures which embody the patriarchy are essential to the "happy ending":

Sexual difference inside the castle is determined by the phallic, which, in its omnivorous desire to annihilate or violate, shows an equally excessive need to "inscribe" the feminine other. In her flight, however, the heroine confirms the positive (non-subjected) value of her femininity, which can then allow an equal union with a feminised hero. (Daughters of the House 199)

By the end of The Mysteries of Udolpho, the friendless orphan has become the most powerful character in the novel in terms of both her financial assets and her social position. This is also true of Ellena, Julia and Adeline. All have attained positions of power which is significant in terms of the freedom it brings, and this position has only been achieved as a result of their journey through the mysterious and often dangerous spaces.

In order to achieve her happy ending the heroine has had to explore her emerging sexual identity, confronting the dangers faced by sexually adult women in a patriarchal society, dangers which are symbolised by the Gothic setting. For Radcliffe's heroines these confrontations during their journeys result in them moving from a naive untested "negative" virtue to a position of knowledge of both the external world and themselves and, as a result, they learn to assert their rights as independent women:

* * * * *

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